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**Star Wars: Legacy of the Chosen One**

by [jp2187](http://archiveofourown.org/users/jp2187)

**Summary**

***Jump in at Ch 19 for the Reylo-tastic climax and happy ending if you are looking for a shorter fic. (See tags for chapter descriptions).***

If your wish list for IX STILL includes more from Kylo’s perspective, Leia AND Ben surviving, Ben Solo’s backstory, more Knights of Ren and Kylo vs. Hux, Mustafar, Anakin playing a role in Ben’s redemption, and a very Reylo kiss of life, wedding, baby, and happily ever after (including for Anakin), then come aboard and enjoy the ride.

This has nothing to do with TROS (no spoilers), which I am happily pretending does not
STAR WARS: LEGACY OF THE CHOSEN ONE

The First Order and Resistance have both suffered serious losses. With much of the First Order fleet destroyed, Supreme Leader Kylo Ren is forced to regroup and delay his plans for galactic domination. With the remnant of the Resistance aboard the Millennium Falcon, General Leia Organa seeks a new base from which to rally her allies and form a New Rebel Alliance to stop her son.

It is a race to reload . . .
Chapter 1: First Reordering

From the bridge of the Star Destroyer *Silencer*, General Armitage Hux gazed out the viewport, his face wearing the deep scowl that had become a permanent fixture over the last few months.

The disastrous loss of Starkiller Base had been followed closely by the even greater fiasco of the death of Supreme Leader Snoke, and the destruction of the *Supremacy* and its accompanying fleet. The First Order, which had been poised to roll through the galaxy and take control of all the major star systems, had been subsequently forced to halt its advance and regroup.

Unlike most of the escorting Star Destroyers, the *Supremacy* was thankfully not beyond repair. As the First Order’s mobile capital, weapons manufacturing plant, and troop training facility, rebuilding the Mega Star Destroyer had not been optional. However, the process of restoring the huge ship to full functioning, which was begun immediately after returning from Crait, had been a time consuming mess.

The thought of the brief battle on Crait only deepened Hux’s scowl.
Ren, who for some reason had been a distracted, illogical, emotional mess, had as usual of late let his personal feelings get in the way of their objective. Although Hux had privately enjoyed Ren’s recent crash and burn down to the realm of fallible mortals, he did not enjoy it when Ren losing meant he Hux and the rest of the First Order had to share in Ren’s humiliating defeat.

On Crait, Ren had insisted on having a show down with his old Jedi Master, who, Hux learnt when he came to from Ren smashing him into a wall for trying to keep him on task, had *not actually even been there*. The whole thing had allowed the remnant of the Resistance to escape.

Hux was disgusted.

Searching the abandoned base, Hux had come across Ren kneeling, head bowed, with his back turned. Hux would have made another attempt at a See change then and there if he had thought it would work. He knew better than that, however, and chose instead to bide his time.

The Resistance having officially slipped through his fingers, Ren seemed to finally pull himself together from his tactical meltdown. He had word sent to the entire First Order network of spies to locate the *Millennium Falcon*, prioritizing all known Resistance allies, and including any place with known ties to the old Rebel Alliance. Ren even made sure the search for the *Falcon* was extended to Kashyyk, knowing there was a Wookiee on board.

It was a reasonable plan. The distinctive Corillian YT model freighter was not, after all, that hard to identify. But months of searching had not yielded a single sighting or the slightest hint of where the Resistance had holed up.

Mercifully, Ren had not neglected everything else that needed to be done while he waited.

As soon as they returned from Crait, he ordered the search and rescue of any surviving crewers of the destroyed fleet, which turned out to be a larger number than expected given the scale of the devastation. The survivors had been moved to the *Supremacy*, with large sections of its life support systems still intact, and were tasked with beginning repairs.

The obnoxiously tedious operation had been as organized as it possibly could be under the atrocious circumstances.
In searching for something concerning Ren with which to find fault, the only thing Hux had settled on objecting to was Ren wasting time repairing his mask, which he was again wearing, and retrieving his chard, deformed, and downright creepy Vader relic.

The unfortunately limited available reinforcements had been called for, and arrived to help guard the *Supremacy*. A small detachment had also taken Ren and Hux to the First Order facilities in the Unknown Region so they could figure out how best to reload the First Order war machine.

Once in the Unknown Regions the situation did not look as bleak. The First Order’s secondary shipyard was producing on schedule, and had just completed a new Resurgent-class Star Destroyer. With Starkiller Base completed, albeit just briefly before being destroyed, the technicians had turned their attention to resurrecting more of the First Order’s collection of Imperial ships and weapons. The late Captain Phasma’s most recent group of trained stormtroopers was also ready to be commissioned.

With the Republic Fleet gone and the Resistance in shambles, even their diminished force would be enough to take over the core and mid-rim systems once the *Supremacy* was again ready to fly.

Hux, who was never happy without a weapon of mass destruction at his disposal, had insisted on a new one. Knowing Hux’s love for Death Star tech and the First Order having somehow procured one of the Empire’s stashes of stolen kyber crystals, Hux was prevailed upon to accept a miniaturized Death Star superweapon.

It was not as powerful or magnificent as the now lost Starkiller Base, but it could be installed onto the *Supremacy* in the time it took to complete overall repairs, and would still disintegrate enemy capital ships and punch through planetary shields. With some convincing, Hux came to see it would do nicely in terrorizing any population that considered resisting the rule of the First Order.

Ren’s Force sensitive band of thugs, who had been off doing who knows what since before Starkiller was destroyed, had finally rejoined him. Hux, who individually hated them only slightly less than he did Ren and hated them most as a group, was relieved when Ren immediately sent them out on another errand.

Ren had sent Hux back to oversee repairs to the *Supremacy* and the construction of his Death Star weapon of mass destruction. The self-appointed new Supreme Leader was pursuing some other goal about which, in spite of Hux’s best efforts, the General still did not have the slightest information.
Busy, however, with their own apparently non-conflicting pursuits, the two of them were at a very temporary truce.

Although even then Ren still managed to get under Hux’s skin. With both of them expecting the Resistance and whatever band of Rebels they managed to cobble together to eventually come out of hiding to try to attack the *Supremacy*, Ren had still taken all the Resurgent-class Star Destroyers for his own purposes leaving Hux with the older, smaller Imperial-class Star Destroyers.

It was not that the force left at Hux’s disposal was inadequate to protect the *Supremacy* . . . but it was the principal to which he objected.

Even more infuriatingly, Ren had also left strict orders, along with agents to enforce them, that the *Supremacy*’s main computer be left offline until the ship was once again fully operational to disguise from Rebel spies the status of repairs.

Although perfectly reasonable and likely to work, Hux suspected this move was also directed at him. While Ren had his unnatural powers, Hux’s superpowers came from technology—specifically *Supremacy*’s supercomputer and its processing speed.

And Hux had other reasons for wanting to get back into his computer.

Since unlike Hux, Ren usually did not bother lying, when Hux had come upon his rival in Snoke’s throne room he had automatically believed what Ren said when he woke up a few seconds too soon. The more Hux thought about Ren’s account of Snoke’s death and the scene of mass carnage he had come upon, however, the less sense it made.

He knew the girl Ren was fingering for Snoke’s death had beaten Ren on Starkiller Base as Hux himself had had to rescue him. Ren’s story, however, that all by herself the girl had again beaten him, the entire Pretorian Guard, murdered Supreme Leader Snoke, and then left Ren alive stretched the bounds of credulity in the extreme. There unfortunately were no security cameras in Snoke’s throne room. There were, however, ones in the throne room’s private turbolift.

Hux was interested in seeing the security footage from that turbolift . . . very interested indeed.
Thanks so much for reading! (First two chapters are mainly to set the stage).

------------------------

Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

LOTS Podcast: Episode IX Leaked Concept Art Discussion
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=___RkvMtXcFl&t=1s

LOTS Podcast: Mended Mask for Kylo, Rey and Kylo battle, and more spoilers for Episode IX
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsWh41Xt2Zs

SWC: Renperor vs. Benperor:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGqLQRIPZ2M

Artwork: The Last Jedi production photo.
Loss and Rebirth

Chapter Notes

If you have never seen them before or if it has been a while, I recommend taking a few minutes to watch the probably shouldn’t have been deleted scenes from Attack of the Clones of Anakin and Padmé visiting her family on Naboo (starting at 4:08 through 13:32):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDPM7a1UYo

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 2: Loss and Rebirth

As Rey walked along the now familiar cobblestone streets, the thought crossed her mind for the umpteen time that if she flew to every planet in the galaxy she would be hard pressed to find one more unlike Jakku than this one.

It was just as green as the lush wilderness of Takodana, but with a refined peaceful elegance.

Elegant, sophisticated, cultured, lavish—those were the words that best described the home world
and the people themselves who were harboring the remnant of the Resistance. The beautiful buildings, streets, the waterfalls—the entire landscape was something out of a painting, which was something else they had here that Rey had never seen before.

Once they were far enough away from the First Order to be out of immediate danger, and Chewbacca had banned Threepio and his incessant predictions of doom from his presence, Leia had come into the cockpit of the *Falcon* and announced to Rey, Chewie, Poe, Kaydel Connix, and Artoo the destination she had chosen.

“Naboo?” Poe as usual was the first to voice everyone’s unspoken confusion. “Why Naboo?”

“Because it has no ties to the Resistance, was never part of the Rebel Alliance, and my—” Leia corrected herself, “the First Order will not think to look for us there.”

It was a testament to Poe’s growth as a leader over the last few days, along with his unconditional trust in Leia, that he did not insist on understanding on the spot why in the galaxy they were going there if Naboo had no ties to the Resistance or the Rebel Alliance.

For some reason Artoo had the coordinates to Naboo on hand so readily that a search of the *Falcon’s* navigational database had not been necessary, and Rey and Chewie had unquestioningly plotted out their course.

The Naboo space control had let Rey land the *Falcon* without obstruction. Escorted by Poe, Rey, and Threepio, Leia had walked down the gangplank and announced that she was General Leia Organa, Leader of the Resistance, former senator of the New Republic, Princess of Alderaan . . . and natural daughter of Padmé Amidala Naberrie.

That last title surprised both the Naboo and Poe, who knew Leia quite well, and got them an audience with the reigning democratically elected Queen. In her official regalia, which included an elaborate dress, hairstyle, and face paint, the Queen of the Naboo graciously welcomed the daughter of her predecessor, and attentively heard Leia’s plea for asylum.

Born into an influential family of Naboo, Sheev Palpatine, secretly the Sith Lord Darth Sidious, had used his position as Naboo’s representative in the Republic Senate to launch his power play and rise to Galactic Emperor. His familiarity with his homeworld had rendered the planet useless as
an ally or hideout for the original Rebel Alliance. Having served its purpose in his nefarious plan, the Emperor had been content to leave the tiny system alone during the height of the Empire.

Darth Vader too had left the inhabitants unmolested, although the Sith Lord had visited the Naboo once early in the rise of the planet’s most infamous son to everyone’s utter terror. But Vader’s visit had been brief, and consisted in an unaccompanied visit to the hastily evacuated region of the Naboo peoples’ tombs reserved for past queens.

Naboo had, therefore, been spared the devastation and hardship experienced by so many systems at the hands of the Imperials.

It remained much as it had been at the time of the former Republic, the populace living in harmony with the Gungans—a tiny bedrock of albeit strictly local democracy amidst the tidal wave of totalitarianism that had swept across the galaxy.

It was Naboo’s former uselessness as an ally to the old Rebel Alliance that rendered it both unknown to the First Order and consequently of vital significance to Leia.

The Queen spoke to Leia of the deep seeded guilt of not only the Naboo’s leadership but also much of the populace for their role as pawn in Palpatine’s rise, and their frustration in their inability to help defeat him in a meaningful way. Grateful to finally be able to be of real service to the cause of justice and peace in the galaxy, the Queen and the governing counsel agreed to shelter the Resistance, and allow them to use Naboo as a base of operations as they worked to build a New Rebel Alliance to stand against the First Order.

The Falcon’s passengers were escorted to the wing of the palace the Queen was placing at their disposal, with the still unconscious Rose, accompanied by Finn, being transferred directly to the Naboo’s medical facility. The Falcon and its distinctive ship’s signature was moved to a deeper level of the spaceport.

Once everyone was settled in the palace Rey headed back to the Falcon where Chewie had remained. As on Ahch-To, he declared his intention to remain on board, and continue to work on the years worth of maintenance and repairs that the Falcon had accumulated while rotting on Jakku in Unkar Plutt’s negligent care.

Seeing that the Naboo spaceport crew was giving Chewie whatever parts and assistance he needed, Rey headed back to the palace.
Rey was a bit surprised to look back and find Artoo rolling after her.

When he had not initially come with them Rey assumed he had decided to stay and help Chewie with the *Falcon*. She was even more surprised when he turned off the road back towards the palace, and with a swivel of his domed head seemed to be waiting for her to follow him.

Rey sighed and headed off after the little droid in silence—having decided to follow him she felt no inclination to berate and second guess him the whole way as Threepio was want to do.

Artoo seemed to have a specific destination in mind, although Rey had no idea how that could be. He led them down a series of streets with stone archways until Rey was thoroughly lost. They came to a modest but elegant house—there were not any other kind here from what Rey could see—and stopped. Artoo swiveled his head toward Rey expectantly.

Rey had no idea what the droid wanted her to do and was just about ask him, when several of the house’s occupants came out of a door and onto the steep stone stairs.

One of them was a woman who appeared to be a few years older than Leia. When she saw Artoo she exclaimed, “Oh I remember you!” The woman came down the stairs and introduced herself as Ryoo. “Forgive me, this droid just reminds me of one who came here with my Aunt Padmé when I was a child.”

Hearing the name *Padmé* along with Artoo’s confirming beeps, Rey relayed that Artoo was in fact the same droid the older woman remembered, and told Ryoo about Leia. Whatever their prior plans had been they were quickly abandoned as Ryoo became dead set on immediately meeting her cousin.

With Artoo in the lead, Rey set out back towards the palace, Ryoo and her entire clan in tow, to tell Leia the little droid had found her family.

For Leia, who had grown up knowing she was an adopted orphan, it was strange and wonderful to find family with whom she shared the same bloodline. She had lost her entire adopted family when Alderaan was destroyed, and she, Luke, and Han had all been orphans. The concept of extended family was a foreign but welcome reality after so many recent losses.
Although several generations of girls had grown and married into different families, the old family home currently occupied by Leia’s cousin Ryoo and her family was still referred to as the Naberrie House, and Leia soon became a very frequent visitor.

That her mother’s sister Sola, a quite elderly but still very much alive woman, could tell her about her mother Padmé was a blessing of which Leia could not have conceived a hope. In hearing of Leia’s life, which had carried on Padmé’s fight against the rising tide that turned into the Empire, Aunt Sola told Leia her mother would have been very proud of her. Her aunt’s words soothed an ache and satisfied a need in her heart that Leia had not been aware was even there.

Leia’s happiness and Resistance’s peaceful respite from the coming war, however, soon came to an abrupt end when Leia’s health again began to fail. In discussing the timing of events, Leia and Rey agreed that Leia’s previous miraculous recovery appeared to coincide with Luke’s decision to stop cutting himself off from the Force.

With Luke having passed on, the natural consequences of Leia being on the bridge of the *Raddus* when the First Order blew it up and her time in the vacuum of space appeared to be returning as well. Leia eventually fell back into a coma, which was a devastating blow to the remnant of the Resistance.

Rey recalled Leia’s words to her on the *Falcon* when she had wondered aloud how they were to rebuild the Rebellion from such meager resources.

“We have everything that we need,” Leia told her, comfortingly squeezing Rey’s hand that held one half the broken Skywalker legacy lightsaber.

Rey remembered the words with renewed clarity . . . particularly when they no longer appeared to be true.

The remnant of the Resistance was about to find out, however, that although their situation seemed bleak it was not the end.

The Rebellion symbol of a phoenix now served the Resistance, and the symbol was a prophetic one.
Whereas Luke’s dying act of returning to be a legend had set off a spark of new hope, the news of Leia’s illness and presumed imminent death sparked new resolve and action among her allies. Even as the leader and embodiment of the Resistance lay dying, out of the ashes of the Resistance the New Rebel Alliance was born.

Poe suddenly found himself flying all over the galaxy meeting with allies and organizing their collective forces to face the coming storm of the regrouping First Order. More often than not he took Finn along with him.

Finn was different than the Finn Rey remembered.

When Rey had first met him on Jakku all he had wanted to do was get as far away from the First Order as quickly as possible. The last time she had expected to ever see him was on Takodana. He was saying goodbye to her before fleeing to the Outer Rim . . . right after they had had a very similar argument to the one Rey would later have with someone else.

Both she and Finn had tried to convince the other to join their side, Rey asking Finn to stay and fight for the Resistance, and Finn inviting her to run away with him. At an impasse they had parted ways—forever she thought—after his final words to her, “Take care of yourself . . . please.”

It had been a complete shock on Starkiller Base to find Finn had come back for her and her alone—something her parents had never done—an act which had solidified their bond as family.

Rey had come to from where Kylo Ren had knocked her out again, just in time to see him slice Finn’s back open with his red lightsaber, for all she knew at the time killing her friend. This was one of the many things Rey had swept to one side of her mind in her hasty overconfidence to save Ben Solo.

The last time Rey had seen Finn he was thankfully still alive and lying unconscious in the Resistance medical bay, before she headed off to find Luke. She had kissed his forehead and said as much to herself as to him, “We’ll see each other again. I can feel it.”

Rey was thankful her words had come true, but they had both changed a lot—she probably more than Finn realized.

If Maz looked into Finn’s eyes again, Rey had a feeling she would no longer see the eyes of a man
who wanted to run, but eyes full of courage and loyalty to the Resistance. Finn was now flying around with Poe as the New Rebel Alliance poster boy delivering a rally cry to stand up and fight the First Order.

Even before Rose finally woke up and recovered from the injuries she had sustained while saving Finn on Crait, Rey was already sure the difference in Finn was due in large part to Rose’s influence. When Rey finally met the other woman it only validated her belief that Finn had joined the Resistance because of Rose and the quest they had embarked on together.

Rey on the other hand did not seem capable of inspiring anyone to join the Resistance.

She had not told anyone about her interactions with now Supreme Leader Kylo Ren or her time aboard the Supremacy. Somehow, however, Leia seemed to know hers was not the only heart that loved her son.

The last time Rey saw Leia conscious the older woman had given Rey her beautiful ring. It was from Alderaan, and with its twin blue stones seemed to remind Leia of her twin brother no matter how far away he might be.

“I know it’s not practical for a Jedi, but I want you to have it,” Leia said as she closed the ring in Rey’s hand. “Maybe you can turn it into a pendant.”

Leia had kept her tone light, but Rey knew that in gifting her ring Leia had just added to Rey’s growing collection of Skywalker and Solo family heirlooms. One of the others was parked in the lower level of the spaceport under the care of a Wookiee who seemed to have adopted her as well, and the other one was in her room and at the time was still broken in two.

Rose, who was quite skilled at working with metal, had turned Leia’s ring into a pendant for Rey, and it now hung around her neck on a cord in similar style to the one Rose herself wore.

When she first woke up and Finn had introduced them, Rose has been fairly wary of Rey. Rey had a feeling Finn had talked about her a great deal to Rose, who had subsequently gotten the wrong idea about them. Rey had gone out of her way to set Rose’s mind as ease as far as she and Finn were concerned, and the two of them had become fast friends.
And today Rey found herself accompanied on the familiar route by Finn, Rose, Artoo, Threepio, and BB-8 for their daily visit to the unconscious Leia, who was being care for at the Naberrie House.

They reached the entrance, and Rey again marveled at BB-8 deploying his grappling cords and making his way up the stairs. After greeting the family they all made their way to Leia’s room.

There they found Poe where he could often be found when he was on planet . . . in vigil beside Leia’s bed, head in in his hand, with Connix standing silently beside him with one comforting hand on his shoulder.

Poe looked up expectantly as Rey entered the room, the question on his mind having been asked so many times it no longer needed to be spoken. “She’s still here,” Rey confirmed feeling Leia’s presence in the Force.

Leia was hanging on.

Rey had the sense the older woman was waiting for something . . . or more likely, Rey knew, someone.

“Poe, we need to come up with a plan,” Finn said, drawing Poe, who as Leia’s successor was now the leader of the New Rebel Alliance, back to the larger task at hand.

“I know,” Poe said, sounding deeply weary. “Based on the report from Snap’s last reconnaissance mission, if we don’t take a run at hitting the Supremacy within the next two weeks we will have likely missed our window. But with their main computer still down it’s hard to tell. Personally, I think we don’t even have that much time.”

“Do we have enough ships to move up the attack?” Finn asked.

“With the three additional Mon Calamari cruisers we were just promised, yes,” Poe said. “And even if it wasn’t I think we’re out of time. We’re all meeting at the rendezvous point in four days, and supposed to regroup and plan for a few more. I’m not making it official until we’re all together to make sure as best we can that the First Order doesn’t get wind of it through their spy network— but as soon as we’re together I’m moving up the attack.”
The conversation turned to the First Order itself and Rey wandered out of the room, wishing to avoid any mention of “Kylo Ren” and her feelings of sadness that always accompanied hearing his name.

She passed a large sitting room and someone called out to her. Turning Rey saw it was Leia’s Aunt Sola, and at the old woman’s invitation Rey joined her on the beautifully embroidered couch. The room was one of Rey’s favorites in the house, although she had only been in it a few times. With holos adorning the walls, the presence of the family that had lived here for so many generations was palpable and rich.

“How did you find Leia today?” Sola asked.

“How about the same, still fighting,” Rey answered.

“I think all the visitors have helped. We try to spend as much time with her as possible when someone else isn’t here. We don’t like for her to be alone,” Sola said.

“She is blessed to be part of such a wonderful family,” Rey tried to keep the note of sadness out of her voice.

For a few moments they sat without speaking in comfortable companionship.

“My dear, this may seem an odd question,” Sola finally broke the silence, “but would you happen to be a Jedi?”

Rey was surprised and a bit taken aback. “Yes, actually. Well sort of. Why do you ask?”

“The way you carry yourself just reminds me of . . . someone who was here a long time ago,” Sola trailed off, her mind’s eye appearing to no longer be in the present.

“Leia’s father?” Rey asked.
“Yes.” Old woman seemed surprised, but also pleased to be free of the burden of a long held and painful secret.

“Padmé’s Jedi, as I used to think of him. He had an iron will that matched hers,” Sola smiled wryly. “We all liked him. Even my father, who was notoriously hard to please.” She sighed. “We didn’t really understand what it meant for her to become involved with a Jedi. We just saw that he loved her, and had for a long time.”

Her bright face became worn as she continued. “A few years later she came back and swore me to secrecy that they had gotten married, and she was pregnant. But they had to keep it all a secret or he would be expelled from the Jedi Order.” Sola continued, “I should have been shocked, but with as sister like Padmé I’d already been used to her doing whatever she wanted.”

“But then she died in childbirth, and I had to tell my parents what I knew.” From the expression on her face Rey could see the decades had not dulled the pain of that memory for the older woman. “And Anakin going mad and everything that happened afterwards in many ways was even worse. In the end it was just easier to think of him as having died too,” Sola said, a haunted look coming into her eyes.

“My parents asked the man who brought us Padmé’s body what had become of the child. He told us the child had died—and even if it had lived would have to be kept hidden from its father. At her funeral they even made Padmé still appear pregnant. We never knew whether or not the baby lived—now I know she had twins of all things—but back then all we knew was either way Padmé’s child was dead to us. The whole thing literally killed my mother.”

The usually bright spirited woman now appeared to feel the full weight of her advanced years.

“In the end Anakin was redeemed,” Rey told the older woman. “He left the Emperor’s service and the dark side to save his son. He returned to the Light before he died on Endor.”

“I heard tell of that a few years back,” Sola said. “I wanted to believe it, but it seemed more than I could hope for that it was true.”

“I know your nephew Luke,” Rey said with conviction, “It’s true.”

“I am glad to know that,” Sola said, some of the burden of the long carried family secret appearing to lift off her. “It’s a comfort to know even someone who had fallen so far wasn’t really gone.”
“Yes,” Rey said, her heart briefly tightening in her chest. “It is.”

Chapter End Notes

With Reylo being the Anidala redo, I thought it was important to return to the “beginning” and go back to Naboo. It is where Padmé (and Palpatine) are from, it was an important place for Anakin & Padmé’s relationship (where they got married), is the home of Padmé’s family, and is where Padmé is buried.

I also love the fact that at Maz’s castle in TFA, Rey failed to convince Finn to stay and join the Resistance in what ends up being essentially the SAME conversation she later has with Kylo, even with the whole argument of two people trying to convince the other to go their way ending with “please.”

Thanks so much for reading.
Next chapter is all Kylo.

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Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

LOTS Podcast: Reylo vs. Anidala - Couple Contrasts in Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdnZHIff2-A&t=3s

LOTS Podcast: Rey and Reylo: Psychology of the Characterization
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rP0NTRi4fB8&t=3480s

Wayward Jedi: Rey and Ben - The Resurrected Heroes (Part 1 & 2) The One Big Story of Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkoY5MJ2pxY&t=5s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xqnQtl13CQ

Wayward Jedi: Love is the Balance - A Rey and Kylo Ren Story
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEYCYL_9jl8&t=165s

Artwork: Art of the Phantom Menace, page 98.
Supreme Leader

Chapter Summary

Kylo . . .

Chapter Notes

Bonus points to anyone who can find all the times something Lee said made it verbatim into this chapter (full disclosure: I lost count).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 3: Supreme Leader

In his current quarters aboard the new Resurgent-class Star Destroyer *Vindicator*, Supreme Leader Kylo Ren rose from the miserable restlessness that constituted sleep for him these days, and began preparing for another day. He washed his face with the coldest water available, and as he dried it he took a longer look than usual at his reflection in the mirror.
Dark circles had formed under his eyes and his eyes themselves had a haggard look after so many
nights without real rest. What caught his attention next—what always caught his attention—was
his scar. It ran across his chest, along his neck, slashed up his cheek, narrowly missed his eye, and
stopped midway up his forehead. It was hard to remember it had not been there a few months ago.
It was so indelible a mark that it often seemed it had always been there—or more accurately the
deep mark the author of that gash had made on his life felt like it had been there forever. The
reason he usually avoided lingering on his reflection was all his scar made him think about was
her.

*Rey.*

In hindsight his promise to Snoke that he would not be seduced by the Light could not have been
more ironically timed or a stronger foreshadowing of events that would occur in short order. From
the first moment he heard about Rey she began to draw his attention away from his single-minded
purpose like a moth to a flame, and he also sensed she had something to do with the awakening in
the Force he had recently felt.

Kylo had come upon her in the lush green forest of Takodana, and had immediately been captivate
by her. She had been shooting at him at the time—she was always shooting at him back then. He
had been forced to put her into a Force bind to end her barrage, and was then able to get his first
good look at her. She was fairly ordinary at first pass, and her dress was even less impressive.
Being from Jakku that meant she was likely a scavenger or something equally menial. But she
practically glowed in the Force, and there was an alluring brightness in her eyes. There was also
something else about her—he could not quit put his finger on it—that was far from ordinary.

In the end Kylo realized with some surprise he found her quite lovely.

He had of course still had to go through the motions of doing his job—the blasted droid and the
long searched for map were after all the reason he was on Takodana. With each passing minute he
was around her, however, that had grown more steadily into a pretense. What Kylo should have
done—would have done with anyone else—was extract the map on the spot by whatever means
necessary, and head off to complete Snoke’s insistent command and his own long burning desire to
find and kill Luke Skywalker.

But that would have required really hurting her. For some reason that was something he was by this
point uncharacteristically loath to do. Believing that in her he had everything he needed, Kylo had
abandoned the droid with the actual map, and made the snap decision to just take her with him. The
possibility of getting the map without going to extreme measures was by far the most appealing of
his options . . . and he would also get to see her again.
Of course once he had her back at Starkiller Base Kylo had other problems to work out.

She was not only an enemy of the First Order, having helped the droid and the traitor stormtrooper escape capture, but was also one with vital information and as such she had to be interrogated. She continued to have a strangely humanizing effect on him, however, and Kylo found that not only did he not want to hurt her, but he also did not want to scare her.

That in and of itself was also unusual. For Kylo's entire time with the First Order he had carefully crafted his image so everyone would be afraid of his powers and of him. By that point his interaction with other people had been distilled down to two types. Everyone from stormtroopers to Hux he threatened and terrorized with his unpredictable temper and considerable Force powers into giving him whatever he wanted. The other had been Snoke dominating or manipulating him to the same end.

But the girl, as he thought of her then, he did not want to scare, and he scaled back his usual interrogation tactics. There had been no softening up by stormtroopers, who he refused to even consider letting touch her. He had not even passed her off to them after capturing her in the forest. Knowing the safest place for her unconscious body in the middle of a battle zone was in his arms, Kylo carried her aboard his command shuttle himself.

Of course there had been no similar danger once they were back at Starkiller, but he had still insisted on getting her off the ship himself as well. Whatever the stormtroopers themselves thought of this deviation from normal operating procedure they had kept it to themselves to avoid incurring his wrath.

While he still had to restrain her to the interrogation table, Kylo had forgone his usual ploy of towering over a prisoner in the dark, choosing instead to leave the lights on and crouch submissively at her feet while watching her sleep. At what he cringed at in hindsight, Kylo had indeed managed not to be terrifying, instead merely coming across as deeply creepy.

Initially she had still wanted to shoot and kill him, seeing him as a warlord and “creature in a mask.” That was usually exactly how Kylo wanted people to see him, but for some reason with her it bothered him. So after a brief hesitation he did what he never did for anyone and unmasked for her.

And that had been much better.
Her brave defiance had been interrupted by her beautiful eyes involuntarily sweeping him from head to toe with an admiring appraisal, followed by a series of quick glances in his direction.

After that it had been time to get down to business, as Kylo really had needed her to give him the map. He tried just asking her for it, but succeeded only in embarrassing her with a somewhat tactless and snobby remark.

Kylo knew at that point just asking was not going to work, and resignedly reminded her, “You know I can take whatever I want.”

With unprecedented care he pushed into her mind. The map had not readily been there, and Kylo had instead found himself distractedly drifting off into looking at Rey—that was her name. She was profoundly lonely, maybe even as lonely has he was. However, bringing up Rey’s painful memories caused her distress, and he shifted to something more neutral—an image of island in the middle of an ocean.

Then he found Rey memories of his father. That caused him distress, and Kylo could not help but give her a somewhat snide and bitter remark.

At that point Rey ordered him out of her mind.

Kylo realized then he was unfortunately going to have to use more force. He made one last attempt to talk Rey into relaxing and just letting him take the map, somewhat ludicrously telling her, “Don’t be afraid.”

In what he would come to know later as typical Rey, she bluntly told him, “I’m not giving you anything.”

And then Kylo found out exactly what it was he had sensed in the forest.

Under exertion, Rey's own raw and shockingly strong Force abilities had flared to life. Kylo suddenly found himself locked a full Force battle with her, a back and forth struggle that ended to his horror with Rey ending up in his mind, and seeing everything down to his deepest fear—that he would never be as strong as his grandfather, Darth Vader.
Kylo broke their connection, and in a mixture of shock and exhilaration fled the room.

He then of course had to endure telling Snoke he could not get the map from Rey. Hux being Hux had shown up, caught Kylo without his mask on, and parlayed the Force user’s lack of success into permission to blow up more planets.

Kylo tried to justify himself by explaining Rey’s tremendous strength with the Force. Snoke, who seemed to have a better understanding of what was happening to him than he himself did, merely pointed to Kylo's desire to not hurt her—his compassion for her—as the cause of the Kylo's failure.

The Supreme Leader then ordered that Rey be brought to him . . . with the full implications that since Kylo was not going to do what was necessary to get the map, then Snoke would do it himself. Then Snoke would either kill her or acquire a new apprentice, the later Kylo knew all too well was likely the worse fate.

He had denied it to Snoke, but walking back to the interrogation room Kylo realized it was true. Rey reminded him of himself in many ways back when his Force abilities first exploded into his life, and he remembered how hard it had been to try and navigate them by himself. Kylo did have compassion for her.

And he very much did not want to bring Rey to Snoke.

The second he walked back into the interrogation room Kylo knew he presently had much bigger problems. Not only had he unwittingly awoken her Force powers, but it was now apparent that his deepest most private fears were not the only thing Rey had seen in his mind. Kylo had a sinking feeling that some of his own training and skill in using the Force had been transferred from his mind and been implanted into hers.

And Rey was loose in the base and trying to escape. Kylo did not even want to think about how furious Snoke would be if that happened.

He could not let her get away from him.
Kylo finally caught up with Rey and her would be rescuer in the snowy forest outside the base. Having already found the *Falcon* and with her growing power in the Force making her easier to track, Kylo easily cut off their path. His sole task at the point had been to recapture her and obey his master’s order to bring him the girl. To that end he had rapidly compartmentalized and contained what had happened with his father, as he had simultaneously used the Force to contain the damage from the bowcaster bolt that had ripped into his side.

Even now as Kylo looked at himself in the mirror the last memory of his father was carefully sealed elsewhere.

“We’re not done yet . . . It’s just us now, Han Solo can’t save you,” Kylo had said as much to himself as to Rey.

Rey had looked at him with rage and hate, called him a monster, and drew her blaster to yet again fire on him. In that moment, with everything that had just happened, he had been tired of her shooting at him. Killing two birds with one stone he had Force blasted her against a tree, not hard enough to kill her but enough to both disarm her and render her unconscious, which at that point he knew was the only way in the galaxy he was going to get her back inside the base and aboard a ship.

Her companion of course had rushed to her side.

FN2187.

The traitor stormtrooper who had orchestrated the escape of Poe Dameron—the Resistance pilot it had only taken a cursory mind probe to confirm was his mother’s replacement son. FN2187, who had been mentioned in every report regarding the blasted droid as he had continued to help it evade capture. FN2187, who had been nothing but an obstacle to obtaining the map Kylo needed so badly get the revenge for which he yearned. FN2187, for whom part of Kylo burned with secret jealousy as the *stormtrooper* who had somehow managed to get away from the First Order, something he, Kylo Ren, with all his Force powers had not managed to do. FN2187, who was cradling the unconscious Rey’s head in his hands, having come to take her away from him.

“TRAITOR!” Kylo screamed in challenge.
The other man, added insult to injury by producing from somewhere what Kylo recognized instantly from his Imperial archives research as his grandfather’s—rightfully his—lightsaber.

And Kylo had had no intention of letting the traitorous stormtrooper have anything that belonged to him.

When FN2187 ignited the—*his*—legacy lightsaber and told him to “come get it,” Kylo had been only too happy to oblige.

Though a trained soldier, the traitor had been no match for him. Kylo had enjoyed alternating from brutally asserting his dominance to toying with the other man, right up until FN2187 had gotten in a lucky shot. It had not been significant enough to leave a scar, but the fun had been over and Kylo was done. He disarmed FN2187 in one smooth motion, decked him for good measure, and sliced the other man’s back open with the tip of his red lightsaber. Kylo had planned to collect his grandfather’s saber from the snow along with the unconscious Rey, and then correct his mistake he had made on Jakku when he had given the stormtrooper a pass for not killing anyone by leaving the other man in the snow to die.

The deactivated legacy lightsaber was stuck in the snow where it landed when Kylo disarmed the traitor.

Kylo stretched out his hand and called it.

It did not budge.

He tried again.

All of a sudden the saber came loose and flew past his face—rejecting his call in favor of another. Kylo turned to see he had knocked Rey out with less force than he realized. She stood fully awake, his legacy saber held in her outstretched hand.

Snoke had warned Kylo that as he grew stronger in the dark side of the Force, his equal in the Light would rise. Both master and apprentice had assumed it would be his Jedi Master uncle. But in that moment Kylo had known Snoke had been wrong.
The one he was waiting for was not Luke—it was her.

As Rey ignited the blue blade and chosen to reengaged him, Kylo again had been more than happy to ignite his red one and oblige, glad for an excuse to delay his task of recapturing her and bringing her to Snoke.

Forgoing his usual brutality in favor of mirroring Rey’s slashes with finesse, Kylo had chased her with unhurried pace until he had pinned her to the edge of a cliff.

Anyone else in such a vulnerable position Kylo would have dispatched over the side without a second thought. But to Rey he made an offer heavily undercut with his own lustful ulterior motives.

“You need a teacher . . . I can show you the ways of the Force.”

The mention of the Force had recalled Rey to the source of her power and where she could find more.

Rey had tried, she really had, but with their sabers locked and his face inches away from hers Kylo could tell she was not actually going to succeed in finding the Force. He let her try for another few heartbeats before pushing some of his own dark energy onto her to help her power up.

He then waited expectantly.

As her eyes flew open, part of him had wondered if he had maybe overdone it. Intellectually he had accepted Snoke’s warning that he would eventually encounter his equal in the Light, but accustomed to having no true equal he had unconsciously still been unconvinced. Even as he encouraged Rey to take several increasingly hard shots on him, Kylo had not been planning to actually let her win.

By the time Kylo realized he had lost control of the situation, however, it was far too late to get it back.

Rey proceeded to overpower him, jam his lightsaber into the snow, disarm him, slash a deep gash
into his chest and face, before leaving him lying helplessly on his back in defeat.

As he lay in the snow, in pain from his wound and his ego more than a little bruised that his impromptu lightsaber lesson had not ended on his terms, Kylo had begrudgingly admitted to himself that in that moment he was even more infatuated with her than before. His jealous, lustful possessiveness were not worthy of her, and Rey had given him something no one else had ever really given him before.

Exactly what he deserved.

As he watched Rey run away, still clutching his grandfather's lightsaber, back to his father’s ship and likely a consoling hug from his mother—back to his life that he had almost chosen to reclaim—Kylo had realized he was completely smitten.

At the time his scar had been a reminder that such a woman existed—strong with the Force and his equal in every way that was important. What Kylo realized now as he looked in the mirror was he should have seen his scar as a warning of just how badly she could hurt him.

Having to be rescued by Hux before Starkiller Base blew up had been humiliating. What Snoke had in store for him was worse. As Kylo entered the Supreme Leader’s throne room, the smug smile Hux flashed him on his way out had warned Kylo that Hux had somehow managed to stay in favor, and that he was about to get the full brunt of their master’s particularly foul tempered wrath.

Snoke had started out slow, confiding to him his use for Hux in a way that always made Kylo wonder what Snoke said to Hux about him behind his back.

Then a question of false concern about his wound.

With mastery and skill Snoke proceeded to simultaneously build Kylo up with his grand vision for his potential as his grandfather’s equal and rightful heir, and tear him down with ruthless critiques of his inadequacies and incompetence.
“The mighty Kylo Ren. When I found you I saw what all masters live to see—raw, untamed power. And beyond that, something truly special . . . the potential of your bloodline . . . A New Vader . . .” Snoke’s voice crescendoed before continuing in a disappointed tone, “Now I fear I was mistaken.”

“I’ve given everything I have to you—to the dark side,” was Kylo’s honest but rather pitiful answer.

Snoke’s only reply was to order Kylo to remove his mask, “Take that ridiculous thing off,” before mockingly continuing to Kylo’s exposed face, “Yes, there it is. You have too much of your father’s heart in you, Young Solo.”

As usual Snoke was never satisfied, berating Kylo for not killing his father with enough detachment, and in stripping him of his mask had intentionally weakened his connection to the last male in his family for whom Kylo had any respect.

The Supreme Leader also continued to accurately perceive that Kylo's defeat had little to do with Rey’s powers and everything to do with Kylo’s choice to mess around with her instead of staying on the task. On that point Snoke had had a new level on which to cut him. After running one reptilian finger along his cheek—a repulsive mockery of tenderness—Snoke had incited Kylo’s uncontrollable rage by throwing his failure with Rey in his face, and deepening the gash with his assessment that Kylo was not yet a man.

“Alas, you’re no Vader. You’re just a child in a mask.”

In the aftermath, Kylo had stood alone in the turbolift—an enraged, humiliated, emotional mess.

He briefly contemplated his mask before smashing it to bits with all his Force enhanced strength.

The weakness Snoke was using in him as a sharp tool, he knew, was his out of control temper. He could see it coming ahead of time, knew exactly what would happen, and yet was powerless to stop Snoke from masterfully whipping him into a frenzy before setting him loose on the enemies of the First Order. That time had been no different, and Kylo had charged out with his formidable piloting skills, singled handedly delivered a devastating blow to the Resistance, and had nearly chosen to kill his mother.
Kylo had not, however, had even an inkling of what was yet to come.

The first time the Force connected him and Rey, Kylo had been still licking his wounds from his most recent encounter with his master. Getting the last work done on the slash Rey had given him, Kylo was somewhat morosely thinking he would likely never see her again, and feeling grateful for the one silver lining in this mess that at least he had not had to bring Rey to Snoke.

Suddenly, he sensed Rey’s presence in the Force, and then—incredibly—she was there.

For moment they just stared at each other.

Abruptly Rey picked up the blaster she was forever using against him and fired off an angry shot. Kylo instinctively braced himself for the pain that would accompany the bolt, but it never came, and looking down he realized he was unharmed.

When he looked back up she was gone, and he practically ran out into the hallway to find her again, sliding across the floor in his haste. She was there looking as confused by all this as he was.

Kylo had attempted to compel Rey through the Force to bring him Luke, which would have solved both his problems in one fell swoop. After standing there for several seconds with nothing happening, however, he had started feeling foolish, and dropping his arm Kylo had refocused his attention on figuring out how this was happening.

“You’re not doing this, the effort would kill you,” he observed to Rey before asking, “Can you see my surroundings? I can’t see yours . . . Just you.”

Rey had been more interested in being angry with him for killing his—in her mind their father—and for, well, everything else.

She abruptly turned, her attention caught by something he could not see. Kylo had felt a rush of old emotions knowing his uncle was nearby, accompanied by a new feeling of unease for Rey’s wellbeing as she disappeared.
The second time the Force connected them she had still been uninterested in helping him figure out how in the galaxy this was happening, preferring to gloat that she had beaten him to Luke—partly he sensed in overcompensation for her unmet expectations of the teacher she had hoped to find.

“Murderous snake. You’re too late. You lost. I found Skywalker.”

She was also even madder at him than she had been before, if that was possible.

Since he was now a snake as well as a murderer Kylo had a pretty good idea what that was about. She had convinced Luke to start training her, and had already gotten some version of his uncle’s “just say no” dark side and forbidden fruit for Jedi human attachment talk Kylo still remembered as being vague and of no practical help.

Whether the result of getting crap from Luke or her own conscious, Rey now felt he had somehow corrupted and contaminated her—and was absolutely furious. Well Kylo could not do anything about it at that point, and he had known that if Luke was training her there were a lot more pressing issues at hand and warnings he needed to give her.

Kylo asked if Luke had told her what had happened that night, interested to hear how his uncle would spin or bend the truth on that one. He saw, however, that Rey had already made up her mind she was not going to listen to anything he had to say.

“I know everything I need to know about you,” she told him with vehemence.

“You do?” Kylo said stepping closer to her to get a better look at her face, “Ah, you do. You have that look in your eyes from the forest—when you call me a monster.”

“You are a monster,” Rey again called him to his face with the deepest loathing.

Well he was a monster—a monster who had just killed his father—and Kylo had no interest in lying to her or denying it. Not backing down he had taken another few steps towards her, his eyes fully meeting hers.

“Yes I am,” Kylo told her.
As the connection ended he could see that his honest acknowledgement had not given Rey anywhere to go with that fact.

Kylo had known it was raining where she was by the droplets of water on her face. He was surprised, however, that while inside the Supremacy there seemed to be moisture on his face too. He reached one hand up to wipe his mouth, and briefly watched the drops stream across his glove before balling his hand into a fist and dropping it out of his sight. Kylo remembered fervently wishing that his growing feelings for Rey, the deep complications they were causing in his life, and this whole messy situation could be as easily set aside.

The third time the Force connected them Kylo had been in the middle of undressing and was shirtless. He had not minded in the least Rey being thrown off balance by the reminder that he was actually a human being, and Kylo ignored her mildly panicked request for him to cover up.

The exposing self-disclosure and vulnerability that would accompany the conversation they needed to have, however, was a far more unpleasant prospect. Kylo did, however, genuinely care about her—no matter how imperfectly and whatever Rey thought of him. And since Rey appeared hell-bent on following down the same path and making all the same mistakes he had, Kylo felt compelled to try again to warn her. So he steered the conversation in a direction of uncomfortable truths, hoping to penetrate the blind optimism she operated out of before it got her into real trouble.

“Why did you hate your father? Give me an honest answer,” Rey had started out calmly but by the end of her questions was screaming at him with tears streaming down her face, “You had a father who loved you, who gave a damn about you!”

“I didn't hate him,” Kylo had replied with more composure in his voice than he felt.

“Then why?” Rey choked out.


“Why did you . . . why did you kill him? I don't understand,” she said, continuing to cry.

“No? Your parents threw you like garbage-” Kylo said.
“They didn’t!” Rey vehemently denied his words.

Kylo’s reply was equally emphatic. “They did . . . but you can’t stop needing them. It’s your greatest weakness. Looking for them everywhere. In Han Solo. Now in Skywalker . . .” he said, his voice turning ominous at the last.

Rey’s obsessive need for parents was something Kylo remembered all too well. Like him, after she had been thrown away she was desperately searching for a replacement. By this point Kylo, himself was done with parents, having run through the fathers she seemed determined to try, and having been trapped with the worst one for many years.

Before she ended up like him, Kylo felt compelled to warn her of just how badly his uncle had failed him . . . and that if Rey was not careful Luke would fail her too.

Kylo asked her again if Luke had told her what happened that night.

Although Rey said yes, Kylo knew whatever his uncle had told her was not the full truth.

So he told her.

“He sensed my power—as he senses yours—and he feared it,” Kylo explained.

He told her of waking up to find his uncle standing over him with his lightsaber ignited and a crazed look in his eyes, and that he barely managing to block the kill stroke and get away alive.

Although Rey reflexively rejected his version to protect herself from the disillusioning implications, Kylo could see in Rey’s eyes she knew he had told her the truth.

He had then closed the remaining distance between them, and seized the opportunity to impart to her the hard lesson he had learned—the past, including parents and family attachments, was a
weakness that would only hold them both back from reaching their full potential and destiny.

“Let the past die. Kill it if you have to. That’s the only way to become what you were meant to be.”

The connection ended, but a short time later Rey had been back. That time, however, it had not been the Force randomly throwing them together in conversation.

Kylo had felt her reaching out, looking for him, and he reached back and they had found each other.

Rey looked half drowned. With her damp hair cascading down her back and her clothes sopping wet, she was down to a base layer as she huddled by a fire under a blanket trying to get warm.

Kylo could see her usually bright eyes had dulled, and her normally fiery spirit itself had seemed in danger of going out.

He listened to Rey’s story without interruption—the one she chose to share with him and not the vaulted Jedi Master. She told him that after their last conversation she had gone straight to the dark side cave, something Kylo surmised that Luke had probably explicitly told her not to do. Rey told him about her surreal experience with the cave mirror, her fervent hope for answers about her past that would make sense of her life and her place in the galaxy—hopes that had been devastatingly dashed, leaving her in her current state of misery and loneliness.

“You’re not alone,” Kylo had told her with sincerity, conveying that for what it was worth he was with her and she had his support.

To his surprise, that seemed for once to be exactly the right thing to say.

Instead of anger and hate, Rey’s eyes were suddenly of compassion and trust.

Looking at him in a way no one else ever had, Rey replied, “Neither are you . . . It isn’t too late.”
In that moment Kylo believed her.

Rey then reached one hand out to him.

With the exception of his father’s dying caress, it has been many, many years since Kylo had come in physical contact with another human being. For that matter the vast majority of the First Order personnel had never seen even an inch of his skin.

But with their ability to connect through the Force Kylo knew Rey was offering him much more than a simple touch. What she had resisted and refused to give him when he had previously approached her and grabbed with selfish possessiveness, she was now offering him completely as a gift.

Kylo hesitated only a moment before removing one glove, and finding himself somehow in the same room with her, he reached his own briefly trembling hand out to her.

As their eyes locked and the tips of their fingers met, Rey inhaled sharply and they suddenly knew each other on the deepest possible level. Gone was the antagonism of their previous encounters, replaced by a profound tenderness and intimacy that left them both deeply affected.

The moment had been considerably briefer than Kylo would have liked.

With his impeccable bad timing Luke had unfortunately chosen that night to stop cutting himself off from the Force, and sensing his nephew’s presence had barged in to rescue Rey from his bad dark side influence.

Kylo was not up for a confrontation with his uncle and retreated back to his quarters on the Supremacy, somewhat cowardly leaving Rey to deal with the irate Jedi Master alone. Having himself already dealt with an angry Rey, however, Kylo had a suspicion that after lying to her and blowing up her bedroom his uncle had been about to get more than he bargained for.

He was once again alone on the Supremacy, but from what he had seen and by that point knew
about her, Kylo knew Rey was coming.

In her mind she had likely envisioned storming the *Supremacy* and rescuing him, which was a very Rey way of looking at things.

Of more concrete significance, however, her presence would set events in motion that would bring things to a head one way or another. Staring out the reinforced transparasteel that lined the bridge while awaiting her arrival, Kylo prepared to take a leap of faith—trusting that they would be together and that one way or another everything would work out.

Rey finally arrived, and Kylo ordered TIE fighters to escort the *Falcon’s* coffin-like escape pod into the main hanger. He wished he could greet her with the kiss she seemed to be half expecting instead of a pair handcuffs and a pair of stormtroopers, but this situation was already dicier than she realized.

The long put off task of bringing Rey to Snoke was at that point unavoidable.

As he marched Rey towards Snoke’s private turbolift Kylo could tell that things were not going how she was expecting them to and she was getting worried. Once they were alone and ascending toward the throne room Rey made her unnecessary pitch to win him over from Snoke’s influence.

Rey had kept her hair down and was wearing an out fit he had not seen before. She looked beautiful, but Kylo expected Rey would look beautiful in just about anything she wore. She had called him “Ben,” which he usually hated, but rolling off her tongue he did not minded the sound of his discarded given name at all.

Each time the Force had connected them the distance between them seemed to have vanished by the end of their conversation. But that paled in comparison to having her physically right in front of him.

Rey had drawn near to him and looked up into his face, confident in the vision she had seen of his future—one full of light. Kylo looked into her eyes shining with hope, remembering the last time he had been this close to her was on the cliff, which felt like a lifetime ago. When she leaned even closer to him to whisper encouragement in a last ditch effort to change his mind, all he could do was whisper back cryptic assurances that he knew she would understand later.
Kylo found her presence intoxicating, and as usual she had driven him to distraction. But for once he managed to maintain focus and prepare for Snoke’s scrutiny when the tubolift doors opened. Rey had no concept of the degree of danger into which they were walking. Kylo did of course, and he drew strength and courage from his grandfather’s lightsaber, which he gripped in his hand after confiscating it from Rey.

Kylo knew he would do it.

He would get out from under Snoke’s thumb. He knew what he could not do for himself, even when his father had come for him, he could do for Rey. He did not yet know how, but he knew he would.

As he gripped Rey’s arm and walked her down the long aisle to present her to Snoke, Kylo could feel her mounting concern that things were by that point really not going the way she thought they would—that she had been wrong to trust him and wrong to come.

All Kylo could do in that moment was take a knee and submissively bow his head.

Snoke quickly snatched his grandfather’s lightsaber from out of Kylo’s grasp, even while manipulatively lavishing him with the praise Snoke knew Kylo craved in spite of himself, “Well done, my good and faithful apprentice. My faith in you, is restored.” Snoke was always snatching his grandfather away and any connection Kylo had to him—like his mask—even while lifting Vader up as who Kylo should be like and was destined to become. So Kylo was not surprised that Snoke had snatched away his legacy lightsaber.

And there it lay.

Right beside Snoke.

The way to save Rey and himself, and finally be free.

Kylo knew he had to wait for the right movement or Snoke would catch on and stop him. Enduring
Snoke testing him while waiting for his chance was the hardest thing Kylo had ever done. But for Rey he finally manned up and kept a firm grip on his temper.

Rey was brave and Kylo loved her for it, but her defiant resistance was no match for Snoke’s power and perverse pleasure in cruelty.

Kylo could barely watch as Snoke drew her close and raised one inhuman clawed to touch her face, knowing from experience the repulsiveness of Snoke’s touch.

Snoke’s revelation that he had been the author of the Force bond, that the special connection Kylo shared with Rey was just another manipulation of his emotions as part of Snoke’s evil plan to lure and entrap Rey, had been too much to bear.

Kylo could not watch at all as Snoke followed through on doing himself what Kylo had refused to do on Starkiller. Rey’s screams as she writhed in agony tore into him like knives as Snoke violently violated her mind and ripped out Luke’s location before dropping her to the floor, all the while laughing.

There followed the heart stopping moment when Rey, spirit unbroken, rose with hand outstretched and called the legacy saber. But Snoke had merely whacked her in the head with it and thankfully returned it to his side, and Kylo began to breath again.

Delighting in the scene unfolding before him, Snoke continued to toy with Rey by next showing her the doomed Resistance transports.

Even in the face of such a hopeless situation Rey refused to be crushed. She fought on, grabbing Kylo’s red lightsaber off his belt with the Force—calling to her defense the weapons he remembered her finding so intimidating when he freaked her out on Takodana—and took a running charge at Snoke.

With a lazy wave of one finger Snoke had sent her sprawling across the floor.

Kylo’s red lightsaber flew out of her had, shut down, and had come to a spinning stop at Kylo’s feet.

As Snoke spoke Rey’s death warrant, Kylo had already known what Snoke had in mind as the
“cruelest stroke” by which the Supreme Leader had already promised to kill her. Done flinging her body around, Snoke contorted her in into a position for execution and presented her to Kylo.

“My worthy apprentice, son of darkness, heir apparent to Lord Vader. Where there was conflict I now sense resolve. Where there was weakness, strength. Complete your training, and fulfill your destiny!”

Kylo remembered Snoke’s command exactly, because they were some of the last poisonous words he would ever have to hear from the sadistic voice that had tormented him his entire life.

As he stood, unlit red lightsaber in hand, Kylo knew he had managed to pass Snoke’s test. Confident in his faithfulness, his master intended him to be the instrument of Snoke’s final lesson to Rey—how thoroughly she had lost the battle for Kylo’s allegiance. From the look of defeat on Rey’s face, and the shock and sorrow in her eyes, Kylo knew that she too was convinced that he had betrayed her. Although knowing her false belief was helping to maintain the illusion for Snoke and gaining strength from looking into her eyes, Kylo was still grateful that he only had to endure the pain of her looking at him that way for another few seconds.

His chance had come.

Having no intention of wasting it, Kylo used turning his red lightsaber onto Rey with one hand as cover for reaching out through the Force with the other to turn the his legacy lightsaber onto Snoke.

Although misreading his intent, Snoke had correctly read his resolve. There had been two things in that moment about which Kylo felt no conflict whatsoever. His feelings for Rey. And the truth that finally broken through years of Snoke’s deception—that while he was his grandfather’s heir, he did not need Snoke to fulfill his destiny.

With a flick of his fingers, Kylo had ignited his grandfather's lightsaber, and fatally speared Snoke with the blade.

And for once in his life Kylo had not worried that he would never be as strong as Darth Vader.
Understanding nothing of the power of love and the human heart, Snoke had miscalculated and his gamble had led to his destruction. The Supreme Leader had looked down, comprehension dawning that it was Rey who had spoken truth, and that he had indeed underestimated both Rey and Kylo. It was the last thought that passed through Snoke’s evil mind, as with one sure stroke of his fingers Kylo had called the legacy saber and completed the job of slicing his master in half.

Kylo had left the blue blade ignited, and from the ground where she had fallen after being released from Snoke’s Force grip, Rey reached a hand up and caught the lightsaber out of the air. As she rose to her feet their eyes had locked in renewed understanding for a few precious heartbeats. Kylo had ignited his red saber, and he and Rey turned to face Snoke’s Praetorian Guard that had come upon them to avenge their master’s death.

There were four pairs of red armored guardsmen, and Kylo knew they were just extensions of Snoke. The eight bodyguards had tormented Kylo on more than one occasion, and been witness to things Kylo wished to forget. With Snoke and his blue lightning gone Kylo was finally free to meet their attack with unbridled wrath.

Back to back and finally in sync with each other, he and Rey were again connected in the Force as they fought for their lives.

Without looking at her Kylo was aware of Rey’s movements—her successfully fending off the guards’ initial and repeated attacks, and her killing blow that dropped their adversaries down to seven.

At one point they collided, and Kylo felt Rey’s hand on his thigh as she balanced herself on his back before he launched her back into the fray.

Kylo dropped another guard before the remaining six managed to physically if not in the Force separate him from Rey. Thankfully that only two guardsmen went after her, Kylo began the methodic process of picking off the other four one by one as they fought together against him.

During a brief stand off between his remaining assailants, Kylo risked a glance at Rey and visually confirmed what he already knew—that she was holding her own, had somehow managed to avoid being double teamed, and was down to one guardsman. Watching her arm get cut open had caused him to momentarily panic, but he had quickly regained focus in the face of the coordinated attack of his three remaining guardsmen.
Kylo had taken out two of them and was down to his final attacker before he found himself in real trouble. Narrowly avoiding a vicious swing he dropped his red lightsaber, and found himself in an unbreakable chokehold.

Across the room, Rey was in trouble but less so. Spots began to for form in Kylo's vision when he heard Rey call his name.

“Ben!”

He managed to look in her direction and see that she had finished off her last guardsman and was free.

Rey threw the legacy saber to him, and Kylo caught it and ignited it in one fluid motion—blasting a hole through the last guard’s red mask to end their fight.

Time seemed to stand still for a moment as silence replaced the recent chaos. The climax of their battle over and the entire unit of Snoke’s Praetorian Guard finished off, he and Rey stood in the burning throne room trying to catch their breath.

In hindsight, the fact Rey had turned her attention to the Resistance before either of their heart rates returned to normal should have warned him they were not on the same page. At the time, however, Kylo had been so overwhelmed with the magnitude of what had happened as he looked at Snoke’s severed body, that her request for him to save the Resistance transports had barely registered.

With his deep seeded fears of inadequacy and abandonment Kylo would have never asked Rey to join him if he had not already been confident of her answer—and at the time he had been assured by both the vision he had seen of their future and his knowledge of her past.


Kylo turned away from Snoke’s body and walked towards her.
“Rey, I want you to join me. We can rule together and bring a new order to the galaxy,” Kylo declared, extending his hand to her in invitation.

The fact that Rey did not immediately say yes, and instead pleaded with him not to ask her —“Don’t do this Ben. Please don’t go this way”—was a complete shock and slap in the face. Their prior roles abruptly reversed, and Kylo became the one getting worried that things were not going how he thought they would.

“No, no. You’re still holding on! Let go!” Kylo said, his composure rapidly deteriorating.

Unsuccessfully attempting to tamp down his rising sense of panic, Kylo had tried again to make Rey understand that the belonging she craved was not with her parents who had thrown her away, but with him. That he was offering her a chance to move forward into the future no longer tied to the past. Make her understand that no matter how overlooked and discarded she had been her entire life, how special she was to him and how desperately he was in love with her.

“You have no place in this story. You come from nothing, you’re nothing . . . But not to me.”

Kylo’s second attempt had been honest and heartfelt, but the words had come out unpolished and completely wrong. They had been heavy handed and condescending, and even worse ended up sounding like a version of the line Snoke had fed him for years.

But while his words were awful they had not been the real problem.

When they had touched hands, both had seen a vision of their future—the same vision Kylo would now never know. But even if it had been, they had each overlaid it with their own hopes, desires, and assumptions.

With her blind optimism Rey assumed that in choosing her he would automatically switch sides to the light and the Resistance—that he would change.

Kylo believed she would unconditionally stay with him and he would not have to.

By that point Kylo was truly desperate, and setting aside his pride flat out begged her.
“Join me . . . please,” he whispered, his voice filled with emotion as he again reached his hand towards her.

As on Ahch-To, Rey again reached out her hand, and Kylo could tell she was seriously thinking about taking his. At the last second, however, she reached out and made a grab for the legacy saber instead.

Suddenly their outstretched hands were not reaching for each other but for the weapon between them—the legacy saber that did not take sides that time.

With that their alliance was at an end, and they were back to being complicated adversaries. For Rey, he was again someone to fear and no longer trust, against whom she needed a weapon to protect herself. In hindsight, Kylo could not honestly say he would have let her walk out of there graciously. The last thing Kylo remembered of their fight was a flash of light before he was knocked unconscious by the force of what he would later learn was the Resistance cruiser jumping to light speed through the *Supremacy* and the First Order fleet.

Kylo had awoken to find not Rey but Hux standing over him in the wreckage of the throne room.

Hux, who had always idol worshiped and perversely adored Snoke, seemed genuinely heartbroken by their master’s death. Kylo’s lie to his rival that it had been Rey who killed Snoke had come out automatically, as he stood and tried to process what must have occurred.

When Hux told him that Rey had taken Snoke’s escape shuttle, reality began to sink in.

Rey had run off with his grandfather’s lightsaber and left him lying on the ground.

Again.

Left him unconscious on the floor where, Kylo quickly realized, he had almost been killed in his sleep.
When Rey had left him lying in the snow with a sliced up face Kylo had completely deserved it. But for her to abandon him unconscious and vulnerable after his honest declaration and sincere offer—leaving him to wake up to a sliced up heart—that Kylo still did not see how he deserved.

He could not remember ever having been quite so upset. In that movement Kylo wanted nothing more than to burn down the whole galaxy, starting with the Resistance that all the people he cared about kept choosing over him. And since after a very brief power struggle with Hux Kylo was the leader of a powerful war machine, he really could start burning down the galaxy.

Kylo did not remember much about the battle on Crait. He mostly remembered blinding, uncontrollable rage that escalated with the appearance of his father’s ship, and out of which had come a string of poor tactical decisions. Hux of all people had tried to keep him on task, but Kylo had refused to listen to reason, particularly from Hux. The sudden appearance of his long sought for uncle had only poured salt in his wound, and Kylo had come completely unhinged. He had stopped the advance, been goaded into a fight he could not win, and in his distraction the remnant of the Resistance had slipped through his fingers.

His rage subsided as Kylo knelt down and picked up his father’s dice that his mother had clearly left for him in the abandoned base, and a hollow pit formed in his stomach.

The Force had then connected him and Rey one more time.

He could tell she was on the Falcon, shepherding aboard her friends she was rescuing from him. Kylo had looked up at her in desperate hope one more time. Rey’s response was to renew her irrevocable rejection of him and his offer to be together. The sound of her closing the door of the Falcon in his face Kylo had felt as a physical blow. He looked down again at the golden dice—part of Luke’s illusion—watching as they had disappeared in his hand, like everyone he had ever loved.

“And how would that have worked out?” another voice chimed into his internal conversation.

If Rey had stayed with him as his dark side princess, how long would it have taken for her to completely lose herself? For the light and everything else about her Kylo had fallen in love with to be completely gone? How long until he found a way to blame her for that too?
“She was right to leave you,” he told his reflection.

It was a horrible, tortuous thought, and in the depths of his heart Kylo knew it was true.

Rey had told him that looking at her reflection in the cave mirror on Ahch-To she had never felt so alone. Now looking at his own reflection Kylo realized that he had never actually been more alone. Everyone in his family was dead or soon would be. His father was dead by his own hand. His mother was near death from the shot he had set up and been too slow to call back. His mother who he had sensed still loved and missed him, she too would soon be gone. His uncle had also met his earthly end, but not in the way Kylo wanted.

Rey was also gone and Kylo knew what he had told his uncle in anger was true—he would destroy her. He would have destroyed her if she had stayed with him, and away from him she would refuse to stay out of his crosshairs in what needed to be done.

The Force had not connected them again, and for that Kylo was grateful. He simultaneously missed her terribly and never wanted to see her again.

Kylo had all the power and finally all the freedom anyone could ever dream of, but he was absolutely miserable.

He was more alone now than he had ever thought possible . . . and he always would be.

A voice deep inside him screamed in agony. That briefest glimpse with Rey of what the alternative was like making his return to isolation that much more excruciating.

Kylo sighed.

And this was why he did not usually stare at his reflection in the mirror.

Emotions had turned him into an incompetent, irrational, distracted mess. What Kylo needed to make sure of moving forward more than anything else was that this never happened to him again. He directed the most cruel and biting words Snoke had ingrained in him at the weak part of himself—the part that needed people—until it was cowed into a subdued whimper.
It was time for him to get it together and get back on track. He was finally free from his abusive master and was at last able to fulfill his destiny. He had a vindictive general to stay one step ahead of and ultimately replace. And a promise to keep to his grandfather, to finish what he started and bring peace, justice, and order to the galaxy . . . if necessary by force.

It was going to be a busy day.

Chapter End Notes

Not sure if you'd agree or not, but Wayward Jedi had good argument that at it's core the main Star Wars arc is a coming of age story about how to love someone properly. In that vein I think the ST, with the assistance of the Force and some very skilled filmmakers, have managed to explore puberty and sexual awakening in a pretty extensive way that will still go over kids' heads. This is something everyone SWC and LOTS Podcast have pointed out really well in many of their discussion (see below for specifically cited episodes).

As others have very eloquently pointed out, TFA put Kylo's experience in the forefront ("There's been an awakening . . . have you felt it?" "Yes . . . by the grace of your training I will not be seduced" . . . 10 minutes later chasing maiden through the woods and carrying her off bridal style back to his ship and base). It may have already been done and I missed it, but I'm also still waiting for someone to change the Freud meme to "lightsabers . . . lightsabers everywhere."

Additionally, one of the many things I appreciate about the ST, particularly in our culture that often demonizes masculine sexuality, is that Kylo’s attraction to Rey seems to have a humanizing effect on him, and is portrayed as a normal and good thing. Furthermore, as part of the redemption arc he seems to walking, all facets of his attraction, including sexual attraction and romantic love, for Rey appear poised to play a major (and likely the decisive) role in his leaving the dark side, as it did in his finally breaking free from Snoke.

Thanks again so much for reading! Your comments and kudos are much appreciated.

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Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

SWC: Villainous Crush Trope and Reylo
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_y4U8UalWI0&t=3s

SWC: Visual Story Telling in the Force Awakens, parts 1 & 2
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lnjzWf84yo
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RKjOHOs1e0

SWC: Visual Story Telling in the Last Jedi
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W07uKC9ufUA&t=2960s

SWC: The Last Jedi Initial Impressions
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ybke60jGE7Y

SWC: Rey and Kylo Ren in The Last Jedi
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuL8hYkTBrE

SWC: Reylo in the Last Jedi: Broken Apart
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IL5piQO34EY

LOTS Podcast: Reylo is Endgame, parts 1 & 2
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uvk3GSLJYjQ
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_5XRiYNqh0

LOTS Podcast: Psychology of the Characterization: Kylo Ren
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsdViE8mse4

Artwork: Art of the Last Jedi, page 72
A New Luke

Chapter Summary

Luke and Rey compare notes on their Vaders.

Chapter Notes

A heads up that this chapter contains a section of Luke telling Rey about his experience in Palpatine's thrown room. I've gotten feedback that for those who (unlike me) grew up on the OT, it can be a bit of a drag. It is a straight up retelling of the ROTJ throne room scene (I myself needed to see it from Luke's perspective one more time before I start jumping into others POV), and if you know the OT like the back of your hand and are finding it is not holding your attention feel free to mentally insert "And then Luke told Rey what happened in Palpatine's throne room when he saved Vader," and skim over it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Thanks.” Rey smiled at him, the blue white light of Anakin Skywalker’s rebuilt lightsaber reflecting off her face.

Luke had first appeared to her shortly after Leia had fallen back into a coma, finding Rey alone in her room despondently cradling the two broken pieces of Anakin’s saber in her hands. She had been quite startled to look up and see him walk through a wall, his now translucent form giving off a faintly blue glow. He had asked if he could come in, and receiving her ascent began answering her unspoken question of how it was that he was there—that those strong with the Force were able to delay crossing over to what lay beyond death to help the next generation.

“I have a confession to make,” Rey said as she pulled open a drawer to reveal a stack of ancient books. “I took the Jedi texts with me when I left the island.”


“I’m sorry,” Rey said with remorse.

“No, don’t be. I’m glad you have them.”

Luke had then inquired how Rey’s repairs to his first lightsaber—his father’s lightsaber—were going, deliberately not pressing her for details on how it had broken.

“Not very well,” she had told him. Rey had been devastated to find the kyber crystal at the heart of the weapon had cleanly broken in two. But Luke’s encouragement that half a crystal might work by itself had given her hope, and under his guidance she had set to work.

With her knack for fixing things and innate mechanical talent, Rey’s imagination had quickly moved beyond Luke’s basic design instructions. Even with her rapidly growing lightsaber skills
she still preferred her quaterstaff. She also remembered the weapon of one of the Praetorian
Guardsmen she had fought in Snoke’s throne room—a longer weapon that split in two for close
combat. Her finished lightsaber was an elegantly designed double-bladed saberstaff that split into
two traditional lightsabers.

Rey activated the old training sphere she had found aboard the Falcon, and practiced arching the
ignited saberstaff to meet the bolts that emerged from the training module. In a seamless motion
she split the weapon apart into two spinning blades, and then joined them back together again. As
he had on Ahch-To, Luke noted her skill, as not a single stun bolt got past her.

For his part, Luke, who had thrown his own green lightsaber into the sea next to his X-wing, was
finally learning the lesson Master Yoda had been trying to teach him all along. He frequently
thought back to their conversation when Yoda had found him on Ahch-To—devastated, distraught,
and so convinced that it was time for the Jedi to end that he was ready to burn down his world.

“Young Skywalker . . .” Yoda said, his voice calm and full of compassion. “Still looking to the
horizon. Never here! Now!” He wacked Luke on the nose with his staff, “The need in front of your
nose!”

“I was weak . . . unwise,” Luke answered his old mentor. Rey again had held out his father’s
lightsaber, and he had continued to be unable to accept it or her call to action. He had felt
demoralized and sick at heart after watching Rey fly off to certain doom.

“Lost Ben Solo, you did. Lose Rey, we must not,” Yoda said with conviction.

“I can't be what she needs me to be,” was Luke’s impassioned reply. He recalled Rey telling him
he had not failed his nephew, that it had been Kylo who had failed Luke, and that she would not—
back before Rey had known the truth about that night, and that he was even at that moment failing
her.

Luke had missed the “we” in Yoda’s words, and still feeling alone was full of frustration with
himself and the Jedi Master who continued to not understand.

“Heeded my words not, did you,” Yoda had continued unfazed. “Pass on what you have learned.
Strength . . . mastery . . . but weakness . . . folly . . . failure, also. Yes, failure most of all. The
greatest teacher, failure is.”
Yoda’s words finally penetrated through Luke’s floundering self-pity. It was the first time Luke had realized that Master Yoda had not simply been born wise, but that he like all other beings had had to deal with his share of disappointments, devastating losses, and failure. Yoda’s greatness was not in his never having made mistakes, but in his facing the even catastrophic consequences of his missteps with humility and acceptance—in learning from his failures instead of letting them paralyze him for the rest of his life.

“Luke . . . we are what they grow beyond. That is the true burden of all masters.”

They had sat in silence watching the ancient tree burn in what was one of the most poignant moments of Luke’s life. It had helped him finally move on from his paralysis over the traumatizing loss of Leia’s precious son to the dark side, and accept the ways he was still needed.

Yoda’s words had galvanized Luke to return to the fight, and be the spark of hope Leia and the galaxy needed—to receive from Artoo Leia’s old message and be the “New Obi-Wan” who was her only hope in her most desperate hour. Staying focused on the immediate task at hand, he had finally listened to Rey and embraced being a legend, stared down the whole First Order with a laser sword, and helped the Resistance escape. He had also found the strength to confront his own guilt, and then his nephew—in a way that would allow Luke to apologize but avoid Ben falling further to the dark side by cutting Luke down in anger.

But that was not the only change his mentor’s words had wrought. Yoda’s lesson that it was the job of teachers to help students come into their own—even if the apprentice ended up surpassing and differing from the master—gave Luke a new perspective on his own Jedi training. He now realized it was okay for him to grow beyond in his own role as a Jedi and instructor—that he should pass on what he, Luke, had learned even when it differed from what his first mentor Obi-Wan and Master Yoda had believed.

Luke also realized that much of the problems of his ill-fated Jedi training temple stemmed from his efforts to resurrect the Jedi Order in as close a form to the original as he could from his research. His rigid imposition of the Jedi Code exactly as it had been during different times and circumstances had been an abysmal failure with his nephew, and again with Rey on Ahch-To.

Even while accepting the blame for his efforts at teaching ending in disaster, Luke also could not help but feel that he had put his trust in the Code of the Jedi Order, and that the Jedi of the past had failed him in some way. By the time Rey had shown up on Ahch-To Luke’s disillusionment with the Jedi had grown considerably.
“Now that they are extinct, the Jedi are romanticized, deified. But if you strip away the myth and look at their deeds the legacy of the Jedi is failure . . . hypocrisy . . . hubris,” Luke had told Rey with bitterness. “At the height of their power, they allowed Darth Sidious to rise, create the Empire and wipe them out,” he had continued, countering her automatic denial. “It was a Jedi Master who was responsible for the training and creation of Darth Vader.” And, he added to himself, a Jedi Master who was responsible for the training and creation of Kylo Ren. The weight his own failure had brought tears to his eyes.

In moments of clearer reflection Luke realized he had not been completely wrong in his critique of the Jedi’s failures and limitations. Parts of the Code where not particularly healthy, and some things did indeed need to end. First on the list was likely the Jedi’s utopian taboo baring all interpersonal attachments. True, personal attachments were messy, unpredictable, and chaotic. Without them life was certainly cleaner and simpler in many ways. All the Jedi had to do to prove their point on the havoc personal attachments could wreak when things went wrong was to point to Anakin Skywalker’s transformation into Darth Vader. But Luke, who had never stopped valuing his relationship his family, knew that the Jedi also had no personal knowledge of the tremendous power of deep and self-giving love—which was in a real sense the purest and most powerful form of the Light.

Discerning which parts of the Code were truly essential to serving the living Force and what had merely seemed essential in a time long gone where the Jedi acted as peace keeping soldiers, however, would be a task for the next generation of Jedi. Embracing the importance of families as the building blocks of society and in that sense the Jedi, would likely be a necessary step. Additionally, more respect for free will was needed, including allowing Force sensitive beings to reach an age of maturity before asking for the kind of extreme commitment previously required—if indeed that choice had to be so black and white.

But Luke was getting ahead of himself again. Unable to do anything for Leia, the current need in front of his nose this side of the afterlife was helping Rey—the first of this new generation of Jedi—figure out the path down which the Force was guiding her. And this time to not impose on her his own presumptions of what direction that path would take.

The first time around, Rey had come looking for Luke Skywalker and found a jaded, and mortally wounded in spirit curmudgeon. “You think what?” Luke asked her. “That I’m going to walk out with a laser sword and face down the whole First Order. What did you think was going to happen hear? You think that I came to the most unfindable place in the galaxy for no reason at all? . . . Go away,” Luke had then told her, flatly refusing to help.

He had eventually agreed to train her, but his half-assed efforts had succeeded in mainly passing onto her his jaded outlook. In his final “lesson” to her he had tricked her into believing the
Caretakers were in trouble and told her, “Do you know what a true Jedi Knight would do right now? Nothing . . . That anger inside you, the books in the Jedi Library say to ignore that. Only act when you can maintain balance—even if people get hurt.”

He still remembered Rey’s just reprove for his cynical lesson about the futility of trusting a “husk of an old religion.” When she had learned of his deception, she had also blasted him for his continued refusal to help the Resistance, “Across the galaxy our real friends are really dying . . . that old legend of Luke Skywalker that you hate so much, I believed in it. I was wrong.”

Unlike his nephew, Rey had accepted his apology and forgiven him for the disaster of her first round of training. Having let go of his own anger towards the Jedi and his rigid preconceptions of how a Jedi Master should act and what training in the ways of the Force should look like, Luke had simply set at Rey’s disposal what he had learned—including that which differed from what his own mentors had taught him.

Over the last few months he had walked Rey through all the basics of training in the ways of the Force as best he could, helping her learn to hone her concentration and let the strength of the Force flow through her. Not commenting on or speculating how she had come to be in possession of what appeared to be very advanced training in the ways of the Force, he had just unquestioningly helped her build upon it.

Rey giving him a second chance to help her was profoundly healing to the wound he had incurred during his failed first venture into teaching. She was quite similar to Luke as a younger man, and she recalled Luke to his true self—hopeful, optimistic, and confident in the power of goodness and the Light—the traits that had inspired him to try and save his father, and which had later led him to try to teach and help his nephew in the first place.

It was also not just him that Rey seemed to have helped. From what Luke had inferred from her account of events, Rey had also inspired Han to return to the fight and start acting like Han Solo again. To Leia she had provided a badly needed ally and reason for hope. This mysterious girl with her bright spirit had shown up and seemed to be filling the void left by Ben’s loss in all three of their lives. Rey, with her talent for fixing broken things along with her unfading optimism and hope, seemed to not only have fixed the Skywalker legacy lightsaber, but by her very presence was somehow healing their family as well.

Luke, furthermore, no longer felt the need or the right impose on her the sweeping Jedi edict against romantic attachments just because she happened to be strong with the Force and had shown up on his doorstep. During the months Luke had helped her train, neither of them had once mentioned his nephew. The more he had come to know Rey, however, the more Luke realized that she was exactly the kind of girl he would have wanted for the isolated, socially withdrawn, and
sometimes pessimistic Ben . . . if such a desire had not run counter to his original iron clad plans for his nephew’s future.

Rey not only had a strength about her, that of a warrior and a survivor, but she was also incredibly kind hearted and optimistic, often to a fault. For his part, Ben had always been a wealth of common sense and practicality. If Rey was as similar to himself as Luke suspected, Ben would probably have grounded her in reality when her optimism teetered on avoiding things she did not want to face. They would have balanced each other quit well, Luke realized. That was of course before Snoke had woven his spell and transformed Ben into a beast not fit for the companionship of anyone. While the Jedi Master was, therefore, certainly not going to fan the flame between Rey and his nephew, who was poised to crush much of the galaxy under his boot, the new Luke was also done going out of his way with his deliberate attempts to extinguish it.

Done with her practice session, Rey deactivated both the lightsaber and the hovering sphere. She smiled as Luke again admired her handiwork.

“So,” Luke said, a noticeable shift in his tone, “Do you want to tell me what happened?”

For a moment Rey hesitated, deciding whether or not she wanted to have this conversation. But she had been carrying what happened on the Supremacy without breathing a word of it to anyone for so long that it was getting too heavy to bear alone. Luke had also taken the time to earn back her trust before asking, and she found she was ready to tell him.

“You were right. That’s what happened,” she said, a shadow crossing her usually bright face.

She told Luke the story in more detail than she originally intended of what happened after she left him on Ahch-To—events that had gone nowhere near how she thought they would.

Along with waiting and seeing hidden value in broken things, Rey’s other great talent was rescuing people.

Recently this included rescuing BB-8 from Teedo, flying Finn and BB-8 away from the First Order stormtroopers and TIE fighters on Jakku, saving Han from the space gangs, and rescuing Finn from a Rathtar. Of course like Han, himself, Rey was not prone to getting particularly attached to someone just because she happened to rescue them—as BB-8 discovered when he had to beg to be
allowed to follow her home, and everyone else quickly found out when Rey was unwavering in her plan to leave them and go back to Jakku even after all they had been through together.

Furthermore, never before had Rey gotten herself into a situation where she could not rescue herself.

Born of the fact that, on Jakku she grew up believing if she did not take care of herself no one else would, Rey had grown in confidence in her ability to handle any situation that came her way. One way or another she had always managed to get herself out of whatever tight spot into which she landed.

Her recent time on Starkiller Base had been no different. Rey had fended off the advances and interrogation of her abductor, gotten herself free, and had set about the task of stealing a ship when Han, Finn, and Chewbacca had shown up and made that unnecessary. Confronting her enemy again she had miraculously defeated him, and with Chewie’s help had gotten herself and Finn back to the Falcon, and safely away a step before the planet blew up.

It had, therefore, come as a complete shock to realize that once she was ensnared in Snoke’s clutches she was really and truly in trouble.

She had been fairly vague on the details of her plan when she rushed off the Supremacy to save Ben. But she had firmly believed from the glimpse she had gotten of the future that if she took a leap of faith and went to him that he would leave the First Order and the dark side, and come away with her.

From the start her rescue mission went completely awry. Ben had greeted her with cold reserve, immediately had a pair of stormtroopers take her into custody, and begun escorting her towards a meeting with his master. Firmly believing Ben would absolutely not bring her to Snoke, her concern and confusion had begun to escalate.

Alone with Ben in the turbolift she had felt his conflict wash over her, including a churning of his emotions where she was concerned—something Rey thought had been fairly settled already. She had made a last ditch effort to change his mind. As they stood inches apart and stared into each other’s eyes, she thought she had reached him. But his answer about her turning and standing with him, and his knowing who her parents were—none of it had made any sense.

When the turbolift doors opened, Ben grabbed her firmly by the upper arm, and side by side in a parody of a wedding march, he had walked Rey forward to present her to his master.
“Young Rey,” the golden robed humanoid said in a voice that raised the hair on the back of her neck, “Welcome.”

It was then that Rey realized she had made terrible mistake.

Ben had submissively taken a knee, consenting to everything that would happen next. Rey had clung fast to her hopeful defiance, confidently boasting to Snoke that he had underestimated Luke, Ben, and her, declaring “it will be your downfall.” In that moment her words had sounded hollow, but she clung to them anyway.

Luke listened with empathy as Rey described being toyed with and tortured by Snoke, including him showing her the doomed Resistance transports. Worst of all from Rey’s perspective, in her naiveté she had given Snoke access to Ahch-To’s location and unwittingly betrayed Luke—which was what Snoke really wanted from her anyway.

Having failed in her attempt to call her blue lightsaber from Snoke’s side, she grabbed Ben’s red one off his belt, ignited it, and charged at Snoke with unbroken spirit and ineffective fury. Snoke had easily disarmed her and positioned her in front of Ben for the final round of their duel.

Ben had picked up his red lightsaber where it had fallen at his feet, and risen to tower over her. He was eerily calm, and for once she could feel no conflict radiating from him. The look in his eyes as he stared down at her and calmly announced, “I know what I have to do,” had sent a chill through her. Rey had made a last desperate plea, but Ben’s expression and sense had not change in the slightest.

Behind her Snoke gloated that she had “taken the bait,” and believed Ben Solo cared for her—betrayed by a childish fantasy and doomed to die by hand of her supposed lover.

“You think you can turn him? Pathetic child,” Snoke cackled. “I cannot be betrayed. I cannot be beaten. I see his mind . . . his every intent.” Her rival in the twisted contest for Ben’s loyalty drew his words out in way that made Rey physically ill. “Yes . . . I see him turning the lightsaber to strike true . . . and now . . . foolish child . . . he ignites it . . . and kills his true enemy!”

There was then nothing else she could do but braced herself for the blow that would kill her.
She heard the lightsaber ignite and cried out as she felt the impact—until she realized the jolt to her body was not from being pierced with a lightsaber like Han, but was from her being dropped to the floor.

Luke raised his eyebrows as Rey described looking back and seeing it was Snoke who Ben had betrayed and pierced with a blade.

In hindsight Rey realized Ben had been planning to rescue her all along. He was just more pragmatic and had chosen a course of action that would actually work. Unable to save herself, Ben had shown up for her when Rey had really needed him.

Grabbing the ignited lightsaber out of the air as Ben recalled it, Rey had risen from the ground and turned to face him. They had briefly exchanged looks—hers of relief and his somewhat apologetic for having had to leave her in the dark. With renewed understanding they had turned, and back to back teamed up to take out Snoke’s guards.

The fight successfully completed, however, their mutual understanding had immediately begun to fall apart. They were in complete agreement they would be together, but each had assumed the other would switch to their side of the Force and the war. She had expected that he would simply leave the First Order and seamlessly come with her to the Resistance. In hindsight, especially after already dealing with Finn’s commitment not automatically extending to beyond herself, she should have known better. Ben too had had his own assumptions and unrealistic expectations.

With effort Luke refrained from raising his eyebrows as Rey told him of the much different temptation to the dark side that she had withstood than the one he had personally faced.

Though tempted to accept the easier more immediate path to be together that Ben had offered her, Rey had known deep down that the Dark would corrupt any genuine love they had begun to feel for each other, and if she fell to the dark side they would both be lost.

With Rey’s rejection of Ben’s proposal, they had found themselves in an impassioned standoff they were all too capable of getting into, during which they had actually broke Anakin’s lightsaber in half. Their battle of opposing wills had only ended when the Resistance flagship had jumped to hyperspace through the Supremacy, and knocked them both unconscious.

Rey had come to first. It had killed her to leave him lying there, but she knew once he woke up their fight would pick up where it left off, and this was her only chance to get away cleanly before something happened they would both regret.
“I couldn’t stay,” Rey said. As it had been in the throne room, her face was a reflection of her deep heartbreak.

“And he couldn’t leave,” Luke finished, his eye softening in sympathy.

“In the end I failed,” Rey said, her expression crestfallen.

She did not share with Luke how much she had longed to brush Ben’s hair from his face before she left, but instinctively knowing what her abandoning him like that was going to do to him when he woke up, she had known she was not worthy. The heartbroken look in his eyes the last time the Force had connected them had shown her she did not know even the half of it. There was passionately desperate pleading in his eyes as he knelt before her, and Rey could tell his offer still stood. But the terms had not changed, and she still could not accept.

As she renewed her “no” by closing the door of the *Falcon*, she fervently hoped that someday circumstances would allow her to reopen it and give him a different answer.

On the one hand a lot had changed for the better, but on the other Rey had known even before she left him unconscious in the throne room that there would be a major fallout from her impetuously rushing to him but then having to leave. She also knew she bore some significant responsibility for everything that had already happened on and since Crait, and whatever would happen in the future.

“Well failure can often be a valuable teacher,” Luke said, recalling her to the present moment. “And I think you failed less than you think you did. You didn’t get killed or turned to the dark side, which is what I was worried would happen.” He could tell his words were mollifying her as her expression became increasingly less despondent. “I don’t think I was giving either of you enough credit.”

“Look Rey,” Luke continued, as he sat down beside her, “When I told you not to go to Ben and that it wouldn’t go the way you thought it would, I was speaking from personal experience.”

He proceeded to tell her of his own quest for a teacher back when his Force gift was newly manifesting and strange, of finding a Jedi Master to instruct him, and of all the subsequent events. He told her details of the story that he had not shared with anyone else—details full of his own
youthful folly that had definitely not made it into the legend of Luke Skywalker.

Luke’s experience in his search for a teacher was simultaneously exactly the same and completely different from Rey’s. He had landed on Dagobah looking for a great warrior, and found the deceptively diminutive looking Master Yoda. He had initially thought little of the two-foot tall, green skinned creature with large ears, dressed only in rags.

“I am wondering, why are you here?” The creature asked after sneaking up on him.


“Looking?! Found someone you have I would say. Humm,” the creature replied, before cackling at his own joke. “Help you I can . . . yes.”


“Oh . . . great warrior,” the creature laughed and walked closer. His future mentor then delivered his first lesson—which in Luke’s annoyance had gone straight over his head.

“Wars not make one great.”

Yoda for his part had enjoyed playing to Luke’s view of him as a nuisance. Yoda’s test of Luke’s humility and how he would treat a being he considered lesser than himself was a test Luke had failed quite miserably. Finding himself eating stew in the little green creature’s hut instead of being taken to the great Jedi Master he sought, Luke had completely lost his temper. “Oh, I don't even know what I'm doing here! We're wasting our time!”

Yoda had turned away from him, and with new aura of poise and gravitas suddenly coming over him, he spoke to someone Luke could not see. “I cannot teach him. The boy has no patience.”

To Luke’s utter astonishment the voice of his deceased Jedi mentor Obi-Wan suddenly filled the room, “He will learn patience.”
To his growing list of reasons why he would not teach Luke, Yoda then added Luke not being ready, Luke being too old, Luke having much anger in him like his father—and likely Luke’s previously given answer of the reason he wanted to become a Jedi in the first place was because of his father. Obi-Wan patiently answered all Yoda’s objections, with Luke periodically chiming in with protests and professions of his readiness that seemed only to add weight to Yoda’s position.

“Ready, are you?” Yoda had finally addressed Luke, his tone full of annoyance. “What know you of ready? For eight hundred years have I trained Jedi. My own counsel will I keep on who is to be trained!” Yoda exclaimed with passion. This subject appeared to render him rather touchy. “This one a long time have I watched. All his life has he looked away to the future, to the horizon. Never his mind on where he was . . . What he was doing.” Yoda had poked him with his walking stick, and continued with what Luke had known was a valid criticism, “You are reckless!”

Luke was angry and had been for a long time, and Yoda’s mention of his father touched a deep nerve. All his life Luke had felt he was supposed to be somewhere else—that his destiny was out in the stars he looked up at night and not on Tatooine. His uncle had been determined to squash it out of him, and turn Luke into a moisture farmer if it killed them both. All Luke knew about his father was he had been a navigator on a spice freighter, and Luke had been left on Tatooine under the guardianship of Uncle Owen Lars and Aunt Beru . . . and that was all he knew.

As he entered the normal rebelliousness of adolescence “left” soon became “dumped” in his mind. All of Luke’s questions to his aunt or uncle about his parents or where he came from were automatically answered by his uncle emphatically stating “I told you to drop it,” or something equally vehement. Even his increasingly urgent requests to be allowed to leave and enter the flight academy where continually put off—if his uncle had his way indefinitely. Unlike at the end of his life when the feeling of peace and fulfilled purpose had filled him as he watched the twin suns slip beneath the Ahch-To sea, on Tatooine Luke had stood on a sandy bluff and gazed out at the binary sunset—back before his life had really begun and he felt it never would—and all he felt was trapped and full of despair.

The only one who seemed to understand Luke’s restlessness was Ben Kenobi—who Luke would one day learn was the Jedi Knight Obi-Wan Kenobi, and after whom Luke’s nephew would be named. He was an old hermit who lived in the hills and used to visit Luke from time to time. His uncle always told Luke that Obi-Wan was “just a crazy old man,” and Obi-Wan wisely chose times when Luke was alone to approach him.

On Dagobah it was Obi-Wan who fought for Luke to be trained as a Jedi like Luke’s father.

Sitting in Yoda’s tiny hut, Luke set aside the rather disconcerting thought that Yoda had been watching him through the Force his whole life, and continued to plead with the Jedi Master in his desperate need for help, “But I’ve learned so much.” To Yoda’s question to Obi-Wan as to whether Luke would finish what he started, Luke added emphatically, “I won't fail you.”
The Jedi Master had looked down and sighed deeply, appearing to let go of the idea that denying Luke training in the ways of the Force would somehow correct some past mistaken yes. Yoda had eventually accepted the inevitable conclusion that Obi-Wan and even Yoda himself had known all along. Luke had to be trained, and Yoda had to do it. Because if Yoda refused, there were other . . . less ideal masters aggressively seeking the job.

So Yoda had begun Luke’s training in earnest. Luke recalled long days of running through the dense swampland, periodically jumping, flipping through the air, and swinging from vines—all with the Jedi Master on his back. Luke learned to let the Force flow through him and draw his strength from it. Lessons in concentrating and focusing his mind in the Force usually involved standing on one hand, Master Yoda balanced on one of his feet, using the Force to move objects, sometime more than one at a time.

The most dramatic lesson of course had been when the Jedi Master had pulled Luke’s submerged X-wing out of the swamp. Luke had been devastated by the sight of his fully submerged ship, but Master Yoda had calmly told him to lift it out with the Force, and scoffed at Luke’s laments it was impossible.

“So certain are you. Always with you it cannot be done. Hear you nothing that I say?” Yoda said, shaking his head.

“All right, I'll give it a try,” Luke had replied with resignation.

“No!” Yoda said with passion, “Try not. Do or do not. There is no try.”

Luke tried to lift the X-wing as he had the stones. It got part way up out of the water but went not farther, and then sank back beneath the surface. “I can't,” Luke said, trying to regain his breath, “It's too big.”

“Size matters not,” chided Yoda. “Look at me. Judge me by my size, do you?”

Luke shook his head.

“And well you should not. For my ally is the Force—and a powerful ally it is.”
Something about the way Master Yoda spoke about the Force had made a deep impression on Luke . . . which was made still deeper by the Jedi Master lifting Luke’s X-wing out of the water with a simple hand gesture and a demonstration of the intense concentration Yoda was always trying to get Luke to master.

Then of course there had been the cave.

As Luke had already pointed out to Artoo, all of Dagobah seemed like something out of a dream. The cave itself, however, had had a particularly strong quality of lucid dreaming. It was hidden beneath a large, gnarled tree that was black with death, and surrounded at its base by mist and a few feet of water. What Luke had noticed even before seeing the tree was the deep and deathly chill, and the sense of something being not quite right.

“That place . . . is strong with the dark side of the Force,” Yoda had looked up from where he had been stirring the dirt at his feet with his staff, an indefinable expression on his face. He pointed to the tree. “A domain of evil it is . . . in you must go.”

“Wait a minute,” Rey interrupted. “He told you to go in as part of your training?” She was surprised and more than a little confused.

“Instead of making me feel that I had to go in behind his back, and face whatever I found inside all alone?” Luke said, another subtle but sincere apology for what had happened on Ahch-To. He felt her accept his olive branch and continued with his story.


“Only what you take with you,” was Yoda’s cryptic answer.

Master Yoda told him he would not need his lightsaber, and Luke had ignored him and taken it anyway. He had lowered himself through the cave’s opening into the earthy cavern was full of vines, snakes, and lizards. To say the dimly lit chamber full of strange reptilian sounds was unsettling was a gross understatement. It was the last thing he wanted to do, but Luke forced his
feet to walk further in.

In a still darker part of the cave he heard the sound of heavy footsteps . . . then mechanical breathing. He was startled and horrified to see Darth Vader striding towards him out of the shadows. Luke had ignited his father’s blue saber and engaged his advisory. Vader drew his own saber and the red blade classed with Luke’s until Luke finally decapitated him. The black clad body had collapsed, with the severed head of Vader rolling to a stop near Luke before the mask abruptly exploded. Looking down as if into a mirror, Luke saw to his horror his own face revealed beneath the mask.

Luke had not understood until much later that what he had taken into the cave and also found there was the darkness inside himself—a darkness that dwelt to some degree in all fallen beings—and his vulnerability to falling to the dark side and becoming a New Vader.

“Rey,” Luke said, again briefly breaking from his narrative, “I know you wanted to see something else in the cave on Ahch-To, but I have to say, I don’t think you realize how significant it was that what you saw in that mirror was yourself as you are.” Rey had not thought of it that way before, and it was something she would have to consider.

Luke continued to tell her about Master Yoda’s warning regarding the dark side of the Force. “Anger . . . fear . . . aggression. The dark side of the Force are they. Easily they flow, quick to join you in a fight. If once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny-”

“But do you really believe that’s true?” Rey again interrupted.

Luke had never talked about these things in depth with anyone before. Rey was challenging his memory of past events, and his assumptions that anything Obi-Wan and Master Yoda said were automatically completely correct.

“I believe as long as someone stays on the dark side that’s true,” Luke said after thinking for a moment. “But do I think it means someone can’t come back from the dark side, and if they do will it still cloud everything . . . No, I don’t.” Even as he articulated his real opinion, it seemed to surprise him a little. He was also now sorry he had blindly included that line just because they were Master Yoda’s words in his lessons on the dark side to his students . . . an audience which had included his nephew.
But was that really true either? Luke now wondered to himself. More likely it was only partly true. Crimes had consequences, and it was more likely that they had to be atoned for in some way in order for someone to really be free from the resultant dark side influence. Atoned for by the individual repentantly leaving the dark side . . . or someone else.

Anakin had been redeemed before he died, but the more Luke thought about it the more he realized his father’s crimes as Vader had not been atoned for. If the darkness Anakin had accumulated over a lifetime on the dark side had not just disappeared or stayed with him upon his death, then where had it gone? Was is passed onto the Imperials? Or more likely the darkness and consequences that did not die with Vader had gotten passed down through the Skywalker bloodline . . . to manifest in unexpected and very negative ways.

If it was true that the consequences for Vader’s unatoned crimes ran in his family, to Luke’s mind that would explain some of the problems that ran in his family too. It would also shine a new light on the predicament of his nephew. In true Han and Leia style, they had gotten married immediately after the Battle of Endor, and Ben had been conceived mere months after the Rebel’s victory . . . and Anakin’s death. Furthermore, Ben had been born on the very day the Battle of Jakku had ended, when the Empire itself had died, and Ben’s life had been intrinsically connected with those galactic events from the start.

For the umpteenth time but especially in that moment, Luke wished he had spent more time talking to and simply being present to his nephew. Wished he had spent more time focusing on how the events of recent history had impacted Ben specifically, and been less narrowly focused on the Jedi Order in general.

If he had he likely would have come to a different conclusion the night he looked inside his nephew and saw all that darkness. His automatic assumption had been that the darkness belonged to Ben. But what if the darkness he saw had not originated from Ben . . . but was darkness he had inherited along with his Force abilities as part of the Skywalker bloodline.

Luke remembered the rainy night on Acho-To, when Rey had stood over him, ironically with briefly ignited lightsaber in hand, and demanded the truth about that night.

“I saw darkness,” Luke had said, not able to meet her eyes. “I’d sensed it building in him. I’d seen it in moment during his training. But then I looked inside, and it was beyond what I ever imagined,” Luke had been sickened by what he saw in his nephew’s mind. “Snoke had already turned his heart. He who would bring destruction, and pain, death and the end of everything I love because of what he will become . . . and for the briefest moment of pure instinct I thought could stop it.” Luke had reflexively pulled his lightsaber off his belt and ignited it to slay his nephew as
he slept. “It pasted like a fleeting shadow. And I was left with shame . . . and with consequence.”

The last thing Luke remembered seeing, as Ben woke up and saw him sanding over him with a drawn lightsaber, was not a monster—but the eyes of a frightened boy looking at one.

Luke had avoided falling to the dark side for so long and under some extreme circumstances. But caught off guard, that was the night he had come the closest to following his father—who had entered the Jedi Temple and slain all the Padawans and Youngling—down the path to becoming a New Vader.

It was a fate Luke had narrowly missed. But as he sidestepped that dark shot, he left his nephew open to being hit instead. Luke had not killed any Padawans that night, but came to from Ben crashing his hut down to find that his nephew in fact had. Luke’s impulse to kill Ben to prevent the rise of a monster and the death destruction and pain he would bring, had accomplished the very thing Luke was hoping to avoid, and was the critical moment in the New Vader’s origin story.

Snoke had understood, but Luke had not. Maybe if Luke had thought more about what it meant for Ben to carry Skywalker blood he would have known how to actually help his nephew, instead of creating the disastrous situation with which the entire galaxy was now grappling. But even now Luke did not really know what to do. However, as he looked at the situation from this side of the afterlife—looked at Rey—he knew the Force was still with his family. And he was starting to believe that just maybe the Light had set in motion it own plan to try and save Ben.

Setting aside his musings Luke got back to telling Rey his story, and how his training had come to an abrupt halt after seeing his first Force vision: Han and Leia in trouble in a city in the clouds—Han tortured, both in pain.

“It is the future you see,” Yoda had told him.

“Future? Will they die?!” Luke was alarmed.

With head bowed and eyes closed Yoda replied, “Difficult to see. Always in motion is the future.”

“I've got to go to them,” Luke said, spurred into action by the possibility he was not too late to help his dearest friends.
“Decide you must how to serve them best. If you leave now, help them you could. But you would destroy all for which they have fought and suffered,” Yoda coolly replied.

Luke had no idea what Yoda was talking about, and immediately began prepping his X-wing. His gear was hastily packed and Artoo loaded into his socket, and by nightfall Luke was ready to take off.


Obi-Wan as a Force spirit had then appeared to back up Yoda and try to convince Luke not to leave.

Luke’s impatience and frustration spilled out, “But I can help them! I feel the Force!”

“But you cannot control it,” Obi-Wan said. “This is a dangerous time for you, when you will be tempted by the dark side of the Force,” he added rather vaguely. “It is you and your abilities the Emperor wants. That is why your friends are made to suffer.” The glowing Force spirit had gotten a little closer to the matter at hand, but still skirted the real issue.

Yoda added, “Only a fully trained Jedi Knight with the Force as his ally will conquer Vader and his Emperor. If you end your training now, if you choose the quick and easy path, as Vader did, you will become an agent of evil.”

Luke heard the words, but was oblivious to the cast of characters who had been facing off for decades, and did not understand he was the new focal point of their fight. All he could think of was to stay meant abandoning his friends.

“And sacrifice Han and Leia?!” Luke angrily countered his mentors.

“If you honor what they fight for . . . yes,” Yoda said.
It was the worst possible thing Yoda could have said.

It served to reinforce in Luke’s mind that Master Yoda and Obi-Wan did not care that his real friends could be really dying. For their part, Yoda and Obi-Wan had danced around the issue from all angles, but had continually neglected to disclose the rather major detail Luke was missing. A detail that would have definitely caught his attention, and helped him understand what they were really worried about—and possibly even changed his mind about rushing off. But in the end they left the truth unspoken, and Luke would have it supplied to him by another.

At their wits end the two exasperated Jedi had shouted imparting words of wisdom including “Don't give in to hate—that leads to the dark side,” and “Mind what you have learned. Save you it can,” to Luke’s back as he climbed into his X-wing. As the canopy dropped over his head, Luke had promised that he would be back soon to complete his Jedi training, and then rushed off to Cloud City to rescue Han and Leia from Darth Vader.

For the first time, the much older Luke had a new perspective on what it must have been like for Master Yoda and Obi-Wan to watch him fly away to be either killed or turned to the dark side—confident that their worst most traumatizing failure was about to happen all over again.

In his X-wing bound for Cloud City, Luke had remembered the first time he had heard the name of Vader, the man who had killed his father, Anakin Skywalker, and robbed Luke of growing up knowing him. He had been sitting in Obi-Wan’s hut on Tatooine learning the truth about Anakin that his uncle had deliberately concealed from him.

Like Obi-Wan, his father had been a Jedi Knight, a guardian of peace and justice in the Old Republic.

“He was the best starpilot in the galaxy and a cunning warrior,” Obi-Wan’s voice was full of admiration and affection. “And he was a good friend.”

The older man had risen and walked toward a wooden chest. “Which reminds me, I have something here for you. Your father wanted you to have this when you were old enough.” From inside he removed what looked like a silver tube and handed it to Luke. “It's your father's lightsaber,” Obi-Wan said. Luke ignited the humming blue blade for the first time, and looked on in fascination as he sliced it through the air. “This is the weapon of a Jedi Knight,” Obi-Wan explained.
Luke deactivated the saber, and had then asked the question that burned most strongly in his heart. “How did my father die?”

Obi-Wan sighed. “A young Jedi named Darth Vader, who was a pupil of mine until he turned to evil, helped the Empire hunt down and destroy the Jedi Knights. He betrayed and murdered your father,” Obi-Wan told Luke. “Now the Jedi are all but extinct. Vader was seduced by the dark side of the Force.”

In this strange new world of Jedi and Force powers, Luke was quick to get his bearings. The Jedi were good and on the light side of the Force. The dark side of the Force was evil, and Vader, the man who killed his father along with the rest of the noble Jedi, was one of the most evil men in existence. This view of things was only solidified on the Death Star as Luke watched in horror as Vader cut down Obi-Wan, robbing Luke of the new father he had just found and needed so badly.

Luke had arrived on Cloud City, and found the corridors strangely deserted. He saw stormtroopers and what looked to be a bounty hunter of some kind escorting a flat metal panel, which Luke would later realize was Han frozen in carbonite. He saw more stormtroopers escorting Leia, Chewie with Threepio in pieces on his back, and another man through a door. Leia saw him and screamed to him that it was a trap. Undeterred Luke followed them through the door, determined to find and save his friends. He found himself locked in a turbolift car, which dumped him out into a strange and darkly lit chamber, filled with machinery, steam . . . and the presence of Vader.

“The Force is with you, young Skywalker,” Vader’s mechanical voice eerily filled the room. “But you are not a Jedi yet.”

Holstering his blaster, Luke held his lightsaber, and confidently headed up a set of stairs to engage his enemy. Luke ignited his father’s blue white lightsaber and Vader answered by igniting his red one. With effort Luke blocked and parried both Vader’s lightsaber slashes and his verbal assaults.

“You have learned much, young one,” Vader said.

“You'll find I'm full of surprises,” Luke replied his voice full of defiance.

Vader disarmed Luke, who lost his balance and rolled down the stairs to land sprawled on the grated metal floor. In one giant leap Vader flew like a raptor to land beside him, forcing Luke to
roll towards the center of the room and the carbonite freezing chamber Luke did not know was there.

“Your destiny lies with me, Skywalker. Obi-Wan knew this to be true,” Vader said, as he herded Luke towards the trap.

“No!” Luke screamed, who had come prepared to repel any invitation to the dark side.

Vader proceeded to Force blast him into carbonite freezing chamber. Luke leapt from inside, and having narrowly missed Han’s fate, he hung to the tubing on the ceiling. Vader looked up at him. “Impressive . . . most impressive,” he said as he attempted to cut Luke down by slashing through the tubing, which released more fog. “Obi-Wan has taught you well. You have controlled your fear . . . now release your anger,” Vader continued to goad him towards the dark side. “Only your hatred can destroy me.”

Luke flipped down off the ceiling, directed the gas pouring out of one the tubes into Vader’s face, and reached out to recall his lightsaber. Their duel resumed. Luke caught Vader off balance and sent him falling to the level below. Unable to see Vader, Luke jumped down after him. Moving through a series of tunnels, Luke found himself in the city’s reactor room in front of a giant bay window. Vader emerged from the shadows and renewed their fight. But in addition to blocking slashes from Vader’s lightsaber, Luke found himself having to duck large objects that Vader ripped from the wall and hurled at him through the Force. One large piece of machinery missed Luke and smashed straight through the window, and suddenly the room was filled with rushing wind. Luke was suck out into the reactor shaft and began to free-fall.

Luke only just stopped himself from falling further by clinging to the edge of a catwalk, and was able to pull himself onto the suspended metal. Vader followed him down. As their lightsabers repeatedly clashed, the black clad monster slowly pushed Luke towards the end of the line.

“You are beaten. It is useless to resist. Don't let yourself be destroyed as Obi-Wan did,” Vader said, as he took another swing. Still defiant Luke rolled out of the way, nicked Vader in the shoulder with the blade of his saber, and jumped to the other side of the gantry’s railing. Their dueling continued, and Vader slashed away part of the metal work.

Then came the moment when Vader disarmed Luke and cut off his right hand. Luke screamed in agony as his severed hand and Anakin’s lightsaber fell into the depths of the shaft.

“Luke, you do not yet realize your importance,” Vader said, as Luke tucked his handless arm under his armpit and scooted away from him to the extreme end of the gantry. “You have only begun to
discover your power. Join me and I will complete your training.” Vader’s voice took on a note of pleading, “With our combined strength, we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to the galaxy.”


“If you only knew the power of the dark side,” Vader said with conviction.

As Vader continued, Luke had detected a distinct change in the tone of his enemy’s voice. “Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father.”

“He told me enough! He told me you killed him,” Luke said, looking at Vader with the deepest possibly loathing.

“No,” Vader said, before uttering the words that turned Luke’s world on its head. “I am your father.”


“Search your feelings. You know it to be true,” Vader answered him.

And as Vader’s words sunk in, Luke found to his horror that he did.

“Luke,” there was a new urgency in Vader’s voice, “You can destroy the Emperor. He has foreseen this. It is your destiny. Join me, and together we can rule the galaxy as father and son.” Vader reached out one black-gloved hand to Luke in insistent invitation. “Come with me. It is the only way.”

It was the only sane way. But all Luke wanted to do in that moment was get as far away from
Vader as possible. Filled with a new calm, he gave Vader one last look before dropping over the edge to follow his severed hand and Vader’s old lightsaber into the open shaft.

Luke had found himself dangling by his legs and one arm to a weathervane on the very bottom of Cloud City. Initially, he had reflexively called out to Obi-Wan through the Force—Obi-Wan who had told Luke he either could not or would not help him if he chose to confront Vader. Obi-Wan who had lied to him.

For some inexplicable reason he had called out to Leia instead . . . and equally inexplicably had known she had heard him. A few minutes later the Falcon roared into view, and a few minutes after that Luke was safely aboard and hooked up to the Falcon's med bay.

As the Falcon and its occupants tried desperately to get away from Vader and his Super Star Destroyer, Luke again felt his adversary calling to him through the Force.

“Luke,” Vader had reached out to his son, a new tone of affection in his voice.


Sensing the door was not quite closed Vader tried again, “Son, come with me.” Luke could hear the pleading in his father’s voice. “Luke . . . it is your destiny.”

Completely overwhelmed, all Luke could do was cry out to Obi-Wan out of the depths of his pain and confusion, “Why didn’t you tell me?” And again, “Why didn’t you tell me?” But as when he was stuck under Cloud City, Luke again received no answer from Obi-Wan as the Falcon jumped into the safety of hyperspace.

It was then, Luke told Rey, that his world had been turned completely upside down. Vader was no longer a monster Luke could just simply hate, but his own longed-for father. Furthermore, the mentors who had lied to him, Luke could no longer blindly trust. Recovering from the initial shock of Vader’s revelations Luke had begun to adjust to the truth.

As he reflected on his encounter with his father, Luke began to notice there had been something else in Vader’s sense: Light. It was dim, but it was there—there was still good in his father.
As she listened to Luke, Rey too remembered the simplicity of hating Kylo Ren. Whether facing off against him for real or shadow boxing with an ill-fated Ahch-To rock as a stand in, she had burned with it. He had murdered Han, the father she had just found and needed so badly. He had then almost murdered Finn—the family she had just found and needed so badly.

He had also abducted her on Takodana. Grabbed her and carried her off to Starkiller Base—dramatically stopping her from ignoring everyone’s counsel and going back to Jakku to waste the rest of her life.

Although she would never say it out loud to Luke or anyone else, she had hated him even more for the inexplicable and uncontrollable attraction she felt towards him. When he removed his mask to reveal not the hideous creature of her imagination, but a regally handsome young man she could not stop herself from staring at—something other than her Force powers had woken up, something which startled and scared her just as badly. He seemed to go out of his still uncouth way to avoid causing her serious harm, and Rey knew he was dangerous to her in a way very different from the way he was dangerous to her friends and everyone else. She had not been purely motivated by a desire to get away from him or avenge Han and Finn when she chose to fight him in the forest . . . something of which he had seemed all to aware.

But as with Luke and Vader things had gotten considerably more complicated. Unlike the Luke she had met on Ahch-To, one thing Ben had never done was lie to her. He told her the truth about what had happened to him, related to her out of his desire to in some way protect and support her. It was then that her solid footing of loathing had crumbled under her feet. She had begun to feel compassion for him—and eventually something more.

Luke proceeded to tell her it had taken the better part of a year to rescue Han from Jabba the Hut on Tatooine. During that time Obi-Wan, whose voice Luke had previously heard regularly with guidance and encouragement, remained silent. With the mission successfully completed, Luke and his artificial right hand had flown back to Dagobah to fulfill his promise to finish his training—only to find Master Yoda was dying.

Luke had felt a rising sense of panic that he was about to lose yet another mentor. “Master Yoda, you can't die,” he pleaded with the now frail Jedi.

“Strong am I with the Force . . . but not that strong,” Yoda said, his breath beginning to become
labored. “Twilight is upon me and soon night must fall. That is the way of things . . . the way of the Force.”

“Master Yoda . . . is Darth Vader my father?” Luke asked, his heart burned with the truth, but he still held out hope that this was all some cosmic joke or giant misunderstanding. Yoda did not answer and changed the subject. When Yoda rolled away from him Luke asked again with more insistence, “Yoda, I must know.”

“Your father he is,” Yoda sighed. “Told you, did he?” he said with regret and resignation. “Unexpected this is, and unfortunate . . .”

“Unfortunate that I know the truth?” Luke was indignant.

“No. Unfortunate that you rushed to face him . . . that incomplete was your training. Not ready for the burden were you.”

“But I’ve come back to complete the training.”

“No more training do you require. Already know you that which you need,” Yoda said, acknowledging the work Luke had continued to do on his own to develop his Force abilities over the past year.

“One thing remains: Vader. You must confront Vader. Then, only then, a Jedi will you be. And confront him you will.” Yoda was briefly racked by coughing, but gathering his strength he added insistently, “Do not underestimate the powers of the Emperor, or suffer your father's fate, you will.”

With his dying breath Yoda had told Luke he was now the last Jedi but not the last Skywalker . . . and then passed into the Force.

Grief-stricken and demoralized, Luke had walked back to Artoo waiting by his X-wing—dejectedly confiding to the little droid that he had no idea what to do next, and the prospect of going on alone was completely overwhelming.
“Yoda will always be with you,” said Obi-Wan, who himself had not been with Luke in quite some time.

Luke looked up to see the translucent form of Obi-Wan striding into the clearing.

“Obi-Wan. Why didn’t you tell me?!” Luke tried to stay calm, but his voice conveyed how upset he was that his mentor had lied to him. “You told me Vader betrayed and murdered my father!”

“Your father was seduced by the dark side of the Force. He ceased to be Anakin Skywalker and became Darth Vader. When that happened the good man who was your father was destroyed,” Obi-Wan said, laying out his self-serving logic as to why his previous rendition of events was not a lie. “So what I told you was true . . . from a certain point of view.”

“A certain point of view?” Luke said, his voice dripping resentful incredulity.

“Luke, you’re going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view,” Obi-Wan said sagely.

Rey did not interrupt his narrative, but Luke could tell by her internal scoffing and the look on her face that she was buying the validity of Obi-Wan’s disregard for the existence of objective truth out of personal convenience even less than Luke had at the time.

“Anakin was a good friend. When I first knew him your father was already a great pilot, but I was amazed how strongly the Force was with him. I took it upon myself to train him as a Jedi. I thought that I could instruct him just as well as Yoda. I was wrong,” Obi-Wan said, his voice full of regret.

“There is still good in him,” Luke argued.

“He’s more machine now than man . . . twisted and evil,” Obi-Wan said sadly. The glowing Jedi rejected Luke’s impassioned declaration that there was still light in Anakin, unbeknownst to Luke, having already discounted the same assertions from Luke’s mother years ago.
“I can't do it,” Luke said.

“You cannot escape your destiny. You must face Darth Vader again,” Obi-Wan was firm.

“I can't kill my own father,” Luke said again with deeper conviction.

“Then the Emperor has already won. You were our only hope.” Obi-Wan looked away, emanating disappointment in Luke.

Luke paused as he remembered being told the only hope for the galaxy was his committing patricide. For her part Rey finally understood the origin of Luke’s—to her mind unfathomable—impulse to kill his own nephew as a noble act of duty to protect the galaxy. Luke had initially rejected the command to kill Darth Vader, his own father, which Obi-Wan had been given by Yoda and now passed down to Luke. But the instructions had remained and lain dormant in Luke. Decades later when as a new teacher Luke had sought to model himself after his own mentors, Obi-Wan’s destructive edict had reared its ugly head . . . this time with devastating consequence.

On Dagobah, the young Luke had known he did indeed need to face Vader again—not to follow Obi-Wan and Master Yoda’s murderous mandate—but to try and bring his father back to the Light.

On Endor he had told as much to Leia—the other Skywalker. He had figured out while talking to Obi-Wan on Dagobah that Leia was his twin sister. His sister, who the Jedi had justified separating from him out of the felt need to hide them both from their father and the Emperor. His sister with whom he had been reunited by the Force.

Leia had been horrified by the revelation that Darth Vader was their father, and terrified of Luke’s plan to confront him instead of running away.

“There is good in him. I've felt it,” he told Leia. “He won't turn me over to the Emperor. I can save him. I can turn him back to the good side . . . I have to try,” Luke said with conviction—his words and beliefs strikingly similar to the ones Rey’s would one day convey to him—before he rushed off to face Vader again.
As on Cloud City, from the start Luke’s rescue mission had not gone anywhere near the way he thought it would.

Luke had surrendered himself to the garrison guarding the shield generator on Endor, and the Imperials had confiscated his recently constructed lightsaber and taken him into custody. Vader’s Lamda shuttle had arrived from the new Death Star, and a short while later Luke was again standing alone in front of his father.

“The Emperor has been expecting you,” Vader said.


“So, you have accepted the truth.”

“I’ve accepted the truth that you were once Anakin Skywalker, my father,” Luke clarified.

Vader was suddenly no longer calm, “That name no longer has any meaning for me!”

“It is the name of your true self. You've only forgotten,” Luke said, his voice filling with passion. “I know there is good in you. The Emperor hasn't driven it from you fully.” Luke turned his back to Vader and gazed out at the forest as he played all his cards, “That was why you couldn't destroy me. That's why you won't bring me to your Emperor now.”

From behind him Luke heard the disconcerting sound of his lightsaber being ignited. “I see you have constructed a new lightsaber. Your skills are complete. Indeed you are powerful, as the Emperor has foreseen,” Vader said, his tone once again calm and intimidating.

“Come with me,” Luke turned back to face his father and tried again pleadingly.

“Obi-Wan once thought as you do. You don't know the power of the dark side,” Vader’s voice once again reverberated with intensity, before adding more softly and with a hint of regret, “I must obey my master.”

Luke remembered Yoda’s words and caution against underestimating the Emperor, and he was
starting to realize he may have made a mistake.

“I will not turn . . . and you'll be forced to kill me,” Luke tried yet again to elicit an emotional response from Vader.

“If that is your destiny . . .” was all Vader said in reply.

“Search your feelings, Father. You can't do this!” Luke pleaded, “I feel the conflict within you. Let go of your hate!”

“It is too late for me, Son,” his father had told Luke, for the first time his voice was filled with great sadness. “The Emperor will show you the true nature of the Force. He is your master now.”

Vader motioned and two storm troopers appeared.

“That my father is truly dead,” Luke said with bitterness as he let himself be escorted onto the turbolift that led to Vader’s shuttle. His eyes locked on Vader until the door closed and his father was cut off from view.

What followed was a short flight to the Death Star, a long but silent turbolift car ride with Vader to the Emperor’s throne room, and a walk up to Palpatine himself that felt like an eternity.

Seated on his throne, the Emperor has slowly turned to face the pair before addressing Luke.

“Welcome, young Skywalker,” Palpatine said in a grating voice that chilled Luke to the bone. “I have been expecting you . . . I'm looking forward to completing your training.” The Emperor smiled evilly. “In time, you will call me master.”

“You're gravely mistaken,” Luke said clinging to his resolve with bravado, “You won't convert me as you did my father.”

“Oh no, my young Jedi . . .” Palpatine rose and walked towards him. He peered into Luke’s face, giving Luke a better look under his hood at his withered and frightening countenance. “You will find that it is you who are mistaken . . . about a great many things. By now you must know your
father can never be turned from the dark side. So will it be with you.”

Vader handed the Emperor Luke’s lightsaber, and Palpatine returned to his throne, setting the lightsaber beside him. Palpatine then methodically stripped away Luke’s confident resolve—laying before Luke the details of the trap he had set for his friends, and making him stand at a viewport and watch as the Rebel fleet began to be pounded by the superior forces of the Imperials that had lain in wait to ensnare them.

Luke had felt hatred for the evil man swell within him, but that seemed to only play into the Emperor’s twisted plans for him. Finally Luke could contain his rage no longer, and taking back his lightsaber through the Force, he ignited it and swung at Palpatine with all his strength.

Palpatine had of course had no intention of letting Luke kill him, no matter what he said.

Luke had found himself again dueling with the father he had come to save—the father everyone else wanted him to kill. Obi-Wan and Master Yoda, who Luke realized did not fully understand the family bond between a father and a son, wanted Luke to kill Vader for good of the galaxy. The Emperor understood exactly what killing Vader would do to Luke—turn him to the dark side and enslave him in the Emperor’s service. Even Vader, for some unfathomable reason Luke did not understand, seemed to want his son to strike him down.

Palpatine was taking a perverse enjoyment in watching father and son fight, although it was his periodic words of encouragement to Luke to give in to the his hate and aggression that recalled Luke to himself more than once. Luke had then disengaged, flatly told his father he would not fight him, and tried to hide instead.

It was only when Vader learned about Leia from reading Luke’s thoughts that Luke was again goaded into fighting. Gripped with fear and furious with himself for betraying Leia, Luke was enraged with their father for threatening her and charged Vader with unbridled fury.

In a reversal of their first duel on Cloud City, Luke drove Vader out onto a catwalk above an open shaft. Finding an opening Luke cut off his father’s sword hand, and this time it was Vader’s red lightsaber and mechanical right hand that fell into the depths of the Death Star. Luke stared down at his father, who was suddenly completely at his mercy.

The Emperor had been delighted. He ordered Luke give in to his anger, deliver the killing blow, and succeed Vader as his apprentice. Palpatine’s words again recalled Luke to his right mind. He looked down at the blade of his green lightsaber, which he held in his right hand—before focusing this full attention on the hand itself. The hand that Vader had taken from Luke on Cloud City . . .
that was now Luke’s own mechanical hand like the one he had just cut off his father. He remembered Master Yoda’s warning and his vision in the dark side cave that he now understood.

Fully in possession of his reason, Luke made his decision. He threw his own lightsaber away and permanently ended the duel in a draw—refusing to commit patricide and turn to the dark side.

The Emperor had not been amused.

No longer smiling or laughing, Palpatine had begun sending jolts of blue lighting into Luke. With Luke writhing on the ground in pain the Emperor finally address him, “Young fool. Only now, at the end do you understand. Your feeble skills are no match for the power of the dark side.”

Luke screamed in agony as Palpatine sent wave after wave of lightning into him. Luke cried out, begging his father to help him . . . but Vader stood motionless and the lightning kept coming. Luke could feel the internal conflict radiating from Vader, but his father chose to stand passively as his master’s side.

Luke realized this was how his mission was going to end—with his father watching the Emperor kill him. The end was approaching, Luke realized as he continued to scream in pain.

All of a sudden the conflict in Vader had ceased along with the bolts of blue lightning searing into Luke. Luke watched as his father picked up Palpatine and hurled him down the open shaft—at the last refusing to let his master kill his son.

Vader had then collapsed. Recovering somewhat from being tortured by Palpatine, Luke had made his way to his father, and rested his father’s helmeted head against his own shoulder as Vader slide to the floor.

Vader’s loyalty was not the Emperor’s only miscalculation. Han, Leia, and the Endor taskforce had succeeded in getting the shields down, and the Rebel fleet was starting to hold their own in the battle. Luke realized he and his father were still going to die on the Death Star if he could not get them out of there.

With Luke supporting his father’s weight they made their way back towards Vader’s shuttle. When
his father could no longer walk Luke dragged him through the growing chaos of panicked
Imperials, who were trying desperately to get the battle back under control.

Luke had managed to drag his father to the ramp of the shuttle when his father stopped him with a
request.

“Luke . . . help me take this mask off.”

“But you'll die.”

“Nothing . . . can stop that now,” Vader said, his breathing becoming more labored. “Just for once .
. . let me look on you with my own eyes.

Luke obeyed, carefully removing Vader’s helmet and mask, before looking for the first and last
time into the eyes of his father Anakin.

“How go, my son. Leave me,” Anakin said in his own voice.

“No. You're coming with me,” Luke said with desperate insistence. “I'm not leaving you here! I've
got to save you!”

“You already have, Luke.” Anakin said with gratitude and pride. “You were right . . . You were
right about me. Tell your sister you were right . . .”

His father had smiled at him, and then closed his eyes. A second later Luke felt through the Force
that he was gone. Amidst the sirens and sounds of battle that raged around him, Luke felt the wave
of grief that wash over him mingle with his joy at his father’s redemption. It turned the moment
bittersweet.

Luke had then dragged Anakin’s body aboard the shuttle and took off away from the Death Star,
just making it out of the blast radius when the Millennium Falcon and the rest of the Rebel fighters
managed to blow it up. On Endor he had replaced the mask and burned his father’s body on a
funeral pier, as all around him and throughout the galaxy beings celebrated the death of the
Emperor and the end of his tyrannical reign.
After burying his father, he reunited with Leia, Han, Chewie, and the droids—his family. Off to the side he saw that the Force spirits of Obi-Wan and Master Yoda had been joined by one of a young man that Luke knew was his father Anakin. All three looked at him with pride, and Luke realized his joy outweighed his sorrow.

After that Luke had become a legend.

Reveling in his success in redeeming his father, Luke remained full of hope and retained his blindly optimistic worldview, which Rey herself understood all too well—until of course his nephew had given him a jarring and traumatizing dose of reality.

Anakin had destroyed the institution that raised him and fallen to the dark side. Luke had narrowly managed to avoid the path of killing and succeeding his father. That was not enough, as it turned out, to eliminate the spirit of patricide in the Skywalker bloodline. The young Luke was the redeemer and incorruptible champion of the Light. As an older man, however, he was responsible for driving his nephew to the dark side and creating a patricidal New Vader. In the later part of Luke’s earthly life and even beyond its end, it was sorrow that took the preeminent place.

In listening to Luke’s version of legendary events, Rey realized she, like everyone else, took the outcome for granted. She doubted most people understood just how real a possibility it had been for Luke to have ended up running around doing the Emperor’s bidding as the next Vader. Her first impression of the legendary Jedi Master Luke Skywalker had been disappointing. The more she got to know him this time around, however, Rey realized her initial impression was thankfully wrong. In spite of his inevitable blind spots, shortcomings, and human fallibility, Luke was really a remarkable man.

She also could not help but compare Luke’s mission to save Vader with her own failed attempt to rescue Vader’s grandson. Luke’s situation had been much dicier than hers she realized. Vader had apparently only decided to turn from the dark side to save his son at the last second. In hindsight, Ben had been planning to betray Snoke and save her the whole time. Snoke had also not been trying to turn her to the dark side as the Emperor had been with Luke. The Supreme Leader seemed to only want use her to finally obtain Luke’s location, and—even disturbingly—deepen Ben’s commitment to the dark side and Snoke personally.

No, it was Ben who tried to turn her to the dark side. His attempt had also highlighted to Rey that Ben had moved beyond thinking of Light and Dark as good and evil. His belief that he was right combined with his relativistic worldview, through which he justified all the First Order’s deplorable actions, put her at a loss for how to reach him.
Recalling Mater Yoda’s words to Luke, Rey wondered if there was anything she should have done differently that would have resulted in a different outcome.

“Do you think if you were a fully trained Jedi you would have been more prepared to face Vader?” Rey asked. “Do think that was true?”

“No, not really,” Luke said, reflecting on another of Rey’s poignant questions. “I think the only thing that saved me was my choice to love my father, even if he was a monster and even if it killed me. I think in the end sacrificial love, particularly in the context of family bonds, is the purest form of the Light. My love for my father kept me anchored no matter what the Emperor and Vader did to try and turn me.”

“So when you took the bait for Vader’s trap and went to Cloud City was it right? Or was it wrong?” Rey asked, and Luke could tell she was trying to get a sense of how to gauge her own recent actions. “If you hadn’t rushed off you would not have found out Vader was your father, and wouldn’t have tried to save him. With the Emperor and Vader both been still alive that could have changed the outcome of the Battle of Endor. The Alliance could have been crushed, and the dark side would have won. If you hadn’t ignored your mentors and gone to Cloud City that could have changed the whole course of history!” Rey was confused, “I don’t understand the right way to think about all this or what it means.”

There really was not a clear-cut easy answer to such a complicated question, and Luke took a moment before replying. “I think it means even the wisest of mentors aren’t omniscient or infallible. I also think it’s not beyond the Force to makes adjustments and contingency plans.”

“In other words what’s done is done. I should stop second guessing what happened, and let the Force fix whatever mistakes I made,” Rey said, finally letting go of her perceived failure.


Luke remembered her words to him about his nephew back on Ahch-To right before she took off in the **Falcon** on her own rescue mission. “You failed him by thinking his choice was made. It wasn’t. There’s still conflict in him. If he would turn from the dark side that could shift the tide. This could be how we win!” She had had so much hope in her eyes and conviction in her voice, and had refused to let him throw cold water on it. “If I go to him Ben Solo will turn,” she had
continued. And when he had refused the outstretched lightsaber she offered him as an alternative, she had added, “Then he’s our last hope.”

Luke could tell that even after everything that had happened Rey still believed her original assessment had been correct—that getting Ben back from the dark side and having him as an ally was the best way to help the New Rebel Alliance beat the First Order, and bring balance to the Force. He also knew she would still be on this course if saving Ben Solo for his own sake was the only goal. But the new Luke, who was trying to be much more sensitive to the already heartbroken young woman’s feelings, did not press the issue.

“What do I do now?” Rey asked.

“Continue your training,” Luke said, “and wait for the Force to make the next move.”

Chapter End Notes

I know TLJ Luke was very controversial, but I personally liked that they found a way for Luke to be a dynamic character. With regard to Luke briefly contemplating killing Ben, I think the fact that Master Yoda and Obi-Wan both ordered Luke to commit patricide for the good of the galaxy is something that often gets glossed over. Although Luke was able to reject it with regard to Vader, I think it is believable that that command was dormant in him and briefly flared up toward the kid everyone (especially his mother) was worried would become the “New Vader”—with self-fulfilling and tragic consequences.

I also remember reading a study looking at a certain profession that found individuals who were very idealistic and driving were the most vulnerable to burning out and becoming disillusioned. I find it believable that Luke was so traumatized and disillusioned with what happened with Ben that he shut down. I enjoyed his journey to move beyond that in TLJ, and expect him to be more himself in IX.

Thank you very much for reading, and for the comments and kudos. They are much appreciated and motivating!

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Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:
SWC: Villainous Crush Trope and Reylo
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_y4U8UalWI0&t=3s

SWC: Visual Story Telling in the Last Jedi
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W07uKC9ufUA&t=2960s

SWC: The Last Jedi Initial Impressions
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ybke60jGE7Y

SWC: Rey and Kylo Ren in The Last Jedi
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuL8hYkTBrE

SWC: Reylo in the Last Jedi: Broken Apart
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IL5piQO34EY

LOTS Podcast: Reylo is Endgame, parts 1 & 2
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uvk3GSLJyjQ
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_5XRiYNqh0

LOTS Podcast: Psychology of the Characterization: Kylo Ren
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsdVie8mse4

LOTS Podcast: Reylo vs. Anidala - Couple Contrasts in Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdnZHfFl2-A&t=3s

LOTS Podcast: Rey and Reylo: Psychology of the Characterization
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rP0NTri4fB8&t=3480s

Artwork: Art of the Last Jedi, page 29
Ben Solo

Chapter Summary

First part of Ben's back story, childhood on Hosnian Prime.

Chapter Notes

So here the first part of Ben’s backstory. I know a lot of other people have depicted him as a rebellious teen and bad seed difficult child, who was largely responsible for what happened to him. But that is not how I see him at all.

I really liked how in "Kylo Ren and the Portrayal of Masculinity in Star Wars" it was pointed out that Kylo actually never whines or complains about anything.

I think Ben is actually the least responsible for what happened to him, and that the fact that Anakin did not get to raise his children had lasting effects that impacted Ben. I think Ben was essentially raised by orphans who all had terrible parenting skills (and did not tell him Luke was his uncle or Vader was his grandfather), and he ended up feeling like an orphan, which strengthened his compassion for and resonance with Rey.

I tried to keep to the general plot line of the Bloodline novel, but did change some things, specifically I changed that Ben was always away with Luke (which I think was a plot device to keep him a mystery box) to sometimes away with Luke. I would also argue that by the time of the events of Bloodline, Leia is not a reliable narrator when it comes to what is actually going on with her kid.

He's also supposed to be Star Wars Mr. Darcy--really good guy with impeccable character who the servants all love, but who can't talk, and "has all the goodness while others have all the appearance of it."

I also wondered what it would be like to have a father who had trouble with human connections and could not stay in one place for very long. And even more interesting to my mind, I wondered what it would be like to have a mother who was the youngest Senator in the history of the Imperial Senate, was a leader in the Rebel Alliance as a teenager, and who likely "wore the pants" so to speak in the family even though her husband was 13 years older than her.

I tried to keep all that in mind and here is what I got. I thought he turned out pretty likable, and it was actually really hard to turn him to the dark side and cast him into the hands of Snoke.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter 5: Ben Solo

“Did you get it?” There was an edge to Kylo’s voice as he addressed the nightmarish figures that comprised the Knights of Ren. Although he remembered a brief time at his uncle’s ill-fated Jedi training temple when he had hoped they would be . . . they were not his friends.

As Ben Solo, son of Rebellion heroes Han Solo and Leia Organa, he had never really had any friends among his peers on Hosnian Prime. Having two famous parents had made that impossible. Sure there had been those interested in getting close to him to bask in the reflected glow from his famous family, but all for reasons that had absolutely nothing to do with Ben himself.

By the time Ben was in middle school, both of his parents’ careers had begun to really take off. His father had added a successful spaceship racing career and mobile flight academy to his shipping business. Unable to stay in one place for long, Han was also increasingly away from home, much to Ben’s disappointment. His mother’s duties in the New Republic Senate seemed to mount by the month, and even when she was on planet she seemed to live more at her office than with Ben in their penthouse apartment.
Both orphans without much of an example of parenting to follow themselves, his parents seemed to subscribe to the opinion that once Ben was old enough to get himself to school and keep himself alive on food that was left for him, Ben was also old enough to be fine in their absence. As he grew older it became increasingly hard for Ben to not take that personally.

With his parents progressively spending more time away from home, Ben was often left alone to the competent but fairly indifferent care of one of his mother’s aids. His relationship with his parents also steadily moved online as they began to chiefly communicate by exchanging holonet messages. Getting to talk to one of his parents in real time was a pleasant surprise. Having one of them actually home was a rare treat. Having both his father and mother home at the same time was a cosmic event and brief taste of heaven.

As the years went by and their communication became increasingly superficial, Ben felt a chasm opening up between him and his parents. Even as there were some rather important things that his parents never not gotten around to telling him—as he would one day learn—it did not seem to occur to them there might be things that Ben too did not feel comfortable sharing remotely.

To make matters worse, his father and mother were both pretty volatile people who wore their emotions on their sleeves. It did not enter their minds that just because their son never lost his temper and was not a whiny, rebellious teenager that Ben was not struggling. His mother could often sense his inner turmoil when she was around him, but his mother was never home. Expressing his feeling, which his parents ignored and taught him to do likewise, was therefore something Ben did not learn to do while growing up. Throughout his adolescence it remained an unpracticed and woefully underdeveloped skill, and in the end Ben found it was easier to just stuff his feelings deep down and pretend they were not there.

The other important adult in Ben’s life was Uncle Luke. Jedi Knight and eventually Jedi Master, Luke Skywalker had fought along side his parents during the Galactic Civil War, and was a very close family friend. As a child Ben loved to listen to Uncle Luke’s stories from the days of the Rebel Alliance, especially his retelling of events that were filled with details his father downplayed. Han was actually fairly self-deprecating, and growing up idolizing his father Ben had loved to get the unvarnished version of his father’s brave and daring deeds that helped free the galaxy from the evil Empire.

At the same time nothing really beat his father’s bedtime stories from when Ben was little and his father was still home. His father had told him about growing up as a free spirit under the oppressive Imperial regime, and all the scrapes he and Uncle Chewie—the Wookie who Ben grew up considering to be a hairy jungle gym—would get into and then out of with the assistance of the legendary Solo Luck. Although likely including some details his mother would have preferred Ben not hear, his father’s stories filled Ben’s heart with a desire to do good, and a love for reckless
adventure and doing the right thing.

And falling asleep in his father’s arms made Ben feel safe . . . that for a few minutes the harsh and critical voice in his mind could not get him.

No matter whose version he was listening to, Ben’s favorite story by far was the time his father, Uncle Chewie, and Uncle Luke had rescued his mother from the Death Star right out from under Darth Vader’s nose. Darth Vader had turned out to be Uncle Luke’s father, and Luke vaguely told Ben that Vader had turned back to the Light before he died. Luke was pretty short on details when it came to Vader— it was too hard to explain now—but he would tell Ben more when he was older. As a result, most of what Ben knew about Darth Vader—the most evil man in the galaxy—was from school. At times when his parents had let him down in some particularly painful way, Ben often consoled himself by thinking of Uncle Luke, the Son of Vader, and remembering that it could always be worse.

Ben, however, never did get more details from Uncle Luke about Vader. Around the time his parents left, Luke too became increasingly caught up in researching the now extinct thanks to Vader Jedi of the Old Republic. Destroyer of the Death Star, Hero of the Rebellion, and to many a demigod as the last Jedi, Luke soon had quite a following. In his quests to scour the galaxy for information about the Jedi of old—the holy grail of course being finding the site of the first Jedi Temple—Master Luke was always accompanied by his devoted acolytes. Ben thought of them more as Luke’s groupies.

Uncle Luke had also told Ben from an early age that he too would be strong with the Force one day—although Ben had had no idea why beyond the fact that his mother was somewhat Force sensitive as well. Even before Ben’s powers began to manifest, the strength of his Force sensitivity and the tremendous Force abilities they foreshadowed had been much talked of particularly by the Jedi Master and his mother. Leia, however, also possessed a deep uneasiness about Ben’s anticipated strength with the Force, something her perceptive son had quickly picked up on from an early age. Ben began to suspect that his mother sensed the dark shadow that he sometimes felt inside himself.

Han, who resented the special connection Ben’s anticipated Force gift created between Ben, Leia, and Luke, but not him, had always been fairly blasé about his son’s possibly Force abilities. As a child, his father’s dismissive attitude had hurt Ben . . . a lot.

In the end, Ben assumed Uncle Luke’s plan for Ben to follow in his footsteps was like his parent’s plans for him. His pilot father wanted his son to become a pilot. His senator mother wanted him to go into politics. And Jedi Master Luke Skywalker wanted him to be a Jedi. Little consideration was
given to what Ben himself might want to do with his life, and he began to feel increasingly torn in
different directions.

Everyone’s wishes and plans for him, however, were not equal. Ben was not sure how things
worked in other families, but for all his father’s bluster Ben knew that if his mother really wanted
something that is what was happening. What Leia Organa wanted for her son was a fancy Hosnian
Prime education. In practice what that meant for Ben was as the rest of his family was increasingly
off planet, he himself was stuck there when school was in session.

How Ben spent his breaks from school soon became another source of contention. What Ben
wanted was to spend time with both his parents—the three of them together as a family. That was
not going to happen so he settled for one of them . . . if he was lucky. His mother was usually
putting out and endless series of fires in the government and did not have substantial chunks of time
to spend with him even when he was not in school, so Ben preferred to spend his vacations visiting
his father. As long Ben came to him wherever in the galaxy Han happened to be on the racing
circuit, his father made time to see him, took him flying, and as seamlessly as possible included his
son in his life.

An additional bonus of being with his father was he usually got to spend time with his father’s
other close friend, Lando Calrissian. “Just Lando,” as he insisted Ben call him, was a successful
businessman who seemed to have investments in a wide array of industries throughout the galaxy,
and which included Han’s shipping company. Lando frequently showed up to wherever Han
happened to be racing to “check up on my investment, you old pirate.” Ben knew Lando just
wanted to drop in and see his old friend.

The Falcon, which Han had won from Lando in a game of sabacc always came up within the first
five minutes of Lando’s visit. “You stole my ship,” Lando would say accusingly. “I won her fair
and square,” Han would answer in an affronted tone. The argument, Ben knew would never have a
resolution, but after several decades both parties’ words lacked bite.

His father was charismatic in a not trying, smuggler way, which his mother referred to as his
endearing “scruffy, nerf herding, scoundrel charm.” It was one of his parents many coded phrases.
As a child Ben learned pretty quickly that his mother calling his father a “nerf herder,” or him
calling her “your worshipfulness” was their way of picking a fake fight with each other. While Ben
secretly found it reassuring and stabilizing that his parents were still in love, he also knew those
phrases were his cue to leave the room if he did not want to endure the excruciatingly embarrassing
sight of his parents passionately kissing. Their other private phrases, for which Ben did not know
the back story, included “discussing things in committee,” and their favorite “I love you . . . I
know.”

While Lando was equally charismatic it was in a way that was completely different from Han.
Lando was by far the most suave and sophisticated person Ben had ever met. He was always
immaculately dress, a lengthy cape topping off his polished ensemble. Ben did not know how many capes Lando owned, but he never saw him wear the same one twice. Not particularly into capes, Ben could never picture himself wearing one, but like everything else the older man did Lando pulled it off with style and flair.

On race days Han was usually pretty busy, and Ben would not get to see him much before or immediately after the race. Lando, who seemed to go out of his way to time a visit for when Ben would have been otherwise left alone to watch his father race, would take his friend’s son up to one of the suites—not the one designated for families but a high-end luxury suite—so they could watch the race together. The time Lando spent with Ben, however, was not limited to just during the race. Race days with Lando were an all day affair that lasted from the minute Han had to leave to go prep until after he was done with his media responsibilities as the race’s usual victor.

Lando would start by ordering both of them some rare vintage of a drink Ben had never heard of that was likely ridiculously expensive. Over the years Ben began to be able to take sips without coughing and actually began to enjoy some of them. Then of course Lando would break out the sabacc deck. After Lando refreshed Ben’s memory of how to play, the bulk of the day would be spent working through innumerable hands, which were paused only long enough to watch Han race. The game would not stop when Han eventually joined them. Usually Ben lost a lot, but there was one time that he had a pure sabacc. He played it cool and cleaned his father and Lando out in one fell swoop. His father had grinned at him with pride and slapped him on the back, and a beaming Lando had said, “Well played, kid.”

It was also shockingly easy for Ben to talk to Lando—not due to any skill on Ben’s part, but because Lando was just that good of a conversationalist. And Ben loved to watch Lando talk. He was pretty sure Lando had flirted with many a serving girl in his day, but sensitive to the growing age difference and not wanting to make anyone feel uncomfortable, he instead easily engaging them in conversation with his gentlemanly poise. The man oozed refinement and charm from his pores, and everyone he talked to—server to fellow wealthy businessman—parted with a smile after the pleasure of conversing with a master.

Ben learned a lot about talking from watching Lando do it. He could never quite manage to translate it into social situations himself, but in later years of school his ability to effectively steer a committee meeting or negotiate something was due largely to Ben learning to channel his “inner Lando.”

If it had been up to Ben, he would have left Hosnian Prime and lived with his father permanently. Unfortunately Ben did not have that power of choice regarding his living arrangements. He also did not have total say on how he spent his school vacation either, and his mother often wanted him to spend part of it with Uncle Luke. If it had been just the two of them Ben would not have minded spending time with Luke. As a child Ben had always thought Uncle Luke was cool, and between the two of them existed genuine mutual affection. But it was never just the two of them.
Adding to Vader and Palpatine’s efforts to wipe out all information concerning the Jedi of the Old Republic, the Imperials who survived the Battle of Endor had destroyed much of the remaining records of the Old Republic as they retreated. In an effort to piece together history, the New Republic turned to eyewitnesses who had survive the dangerous reign of the Emperor to help fill in the gaps. As a pre-Empire explorer, Lor San Tekka became and invaluable ally to Leia Organa and the rest of the New Republic leadership.

Additionally, San Tekka had first hand knowledge of the Jedi of the Old Republic, and vehemently rejected the idea promoted by the Imperials that the Jedi had betrayed the Republic, and had been wiped out only after an attempted coup. Although not Force sensitive themselves, Lor San Tekka and the rest of the Church of the Force had kept up the old religion even under the prohibition of the Empire. The older man was a safeguard of all things related to the Jedi of old, and was Luke’s principal ally in finding Force relics.

Although a close ally to both his mother and Uncle Luke, Ben’s relationship with the old explore left much to be desired. For starters, the old man and his followers were the reason Ben never had any time alone with Uncle Luke. San Tekka also never passed up an opportunity to tell Ben how wonderful his family was and that he hoped Ben appreciated them—although his critical and condescending tone conveyed his belief that Ben probably did not. In addition, Luke’s Church of the Force acolytes had taken an immediate dislike to Ben, and the feeling quickly became mutual.

Spending time with Uncle Luke and the Church of the Force also cut down on the amount of time Ben could spend with his father, which neither Han nor Ben liked and only fueled his father’s resentment towards Ben’s anticipated Force powers. Ben wished his father would just settle the issue by moving back home and spending more time with him on a regular basis, instead of racing all over the galaxy and teaching other people’s kids how to fly. However, it never seemed to occur to the adults in his life that maybe it was they who needed for once think about what was best for Ben and their family, and prioritize that beyond their individual pursuits.

With much of his formative years spent alone, Ben soon began to realized that as he grew into his own person his family did not know him very well. It was also increasingly taken for granted that he uncomplainingly studied whatever his mother wanted him to, and accepted his less than ideal circumstances of having to fly all over the place to visit the adults in his family who were too busy to come to him.

Not everyone, however, took Ben for granted. To the staff he interacted with on a daily basis—many of whom had known him since he was a toddler when the family moved to Hosnian Prime from Chandrilla—the polite, somewhat shy, delightful boy was a breath of fresh air. While accepting their different societal roles, Ben treated everyone with his usual kindness, thoughtfulness, and generosity. Even among those who enjoyed collecting gossip and swapping
horror stories about life serving the elite, no one ever had anything bad to say about Ben Solo.

At school Ben’s instructors found him just as refreshing and a pleasure to teach. Long used to dealing with students from privilege, they were often struck by his lack of arrogance—particularly since the combination of his exceptional natural gifts and excellent work ethic resulted in Ben being light-years better at just about everything than his peers. They often remarked to each other that Han and Leia must be wonderful parents to raise such an impressive and humble son. In truth it was actually the opposite. Ben was not arrogant because he genuinely believed none of his talents or accomplishments really mattered, as none of it earned him any additional praise or attention from his parents.

He grew up believing he was nothing special . . . something the negative voice in his mind was always quick to emphasize.

While the non-familial adults in his life adored him, dealing with his peers was an entirely different story. Ben was fine in class when discussing or debating something practical such as politics or history, which was his favorite subject. But ask him to make small talk or engage in basic socializing—particularly when it had even the slightest hint to do with emotions—and forget it.

Ben knew “doing talking”—yes that phrase had once actually come out of his mouth—was a learned skill, and he would probably be a lot better if he practiced. But he was often alone at home, and did not have other people with whom he could safely practice conversing on a regular basis. His parents were home so rarely that when they were it was special event, and he did not want to ruin it by saying the wrong thing. Among his peers, he frequently stuck his foot in his mouth and was told he was a jerk. Ben tried to avoid that by rarely speaking at all, but then learned of his new reputation for being aloof and proud. Feeling like he could not win, Ben eventually stopped trying.

Ben’s only true friend growing up was Artoo.

Uncle Luke had brought his astromech droid with him to dinner one night when Ben was fairly young, and Ben had enjoyed talking to the little droid—R2D2 as he had introduced himself to the boy. The fact that Ben could readily understand the droid’s series of beeps seemed to mean something to the Jedi Master.

Artoo was also old friends with his mother’s protocol and translator droid. To Ben, who shared his father’s opinion of Threepio, the only time the golden droid’s nervous prissy voice was not completely annoying was when Artoo and Threepio engaged in their favorite pastime of bickering like an old married couple. With Threepio often away with his mother, he and Artoo were frequently left to keep each other company. Or more accurately, the little droid seemed to
understand in a way none of the adults in his life did that it was not good for Ben to be so alone.

Ben had been all too happy to have a companion, particularly an astromech that could help him refine both his skills as a pilot and mechanic. Artoo was also in many ways kinder and more humane than the people Ben was around. Ben was comfortable talking to Artoo, who gave him the benefit of the doubt and knew what he meant even when Ben’s words did not come out quite right.

Flying lessons from his father had started when Ben was seven. They had both deliberately neglected to mention them to his mother—although Ben suspected she had guessed what they were up to and resigned herself. By age ten he could pilot the *Falcon* solo with the engines in sublight mode. But in later years with his father off racing, Ben had been increasingly left to Artoo’s expert tutelage. Although not generous with their time, his parents were—probably on some level out of guilt—generous with their money, and Ben and Artoo had steadily pushed the limits of his parents’ generosity and credit line with used ships and parts.

In all of Ben’s free time from school, Artoo would teach him how to fix up whatever broken down model they had found, and help Ben get it back in the air. They would fly it to the limit until they were bored, which usually meant the next ship they had put back together was ready to fly. The ship they were done with would be sold, with the profits going to towards upgrading their next reconstruction project to a higher ship class. In addition to being interesting and fun, Ben was also immensely grateful to Artoo because progressing in his piloting and ship maintenance skills was the best way to receive notice and praise from his father.

Whether on Honsian Prime or off planet, Uncle Luke was usually busy being Luke Skywalker, and Ben did not get to see him much particularly when his parents were not home. Sensing Ben’s was the greater need, Artoo began to increasingly decline Luke’s request to join him on trips off world. Since Luke had never had Artoo’s memory wiped, the droid had by that time turned the computer on Luke’s X-wing into a droid counterpart, and it would not talk to another droid or maintenance computer. As a result, when Artoo stayed behind the fighter had to stay too. Since it was peacetime and other ships had room for his acolytes and more amenities than an X-wing, Luke had made other transportation arrangements without argument.

And there the X-wing would sit while Luke was off world. Off to the side and out of the way in one of the storage hangers at the spaceport . . .

The first time Ben flew Uncle Luke’s X-wing, he had not really planned to. Finished working on their latest project for the day, he and Artoo had begun to walk home but somehow found
themselves in the nearby hanger... standing by the ship. Artoo had loaded himself in and beeped an invitation, and that had been all the encouragement Ben had needed to leap into the cockpit. Artoo got them official clearance to fly, and while the few ground crew in the vicinity had smiled knowingly, they were well aware Artoo could fly the X-wing by himself if need be, and had given the joyriders a pass.

Uncle Luke was practically family, and as such probably would not have minded letting Ben fly his ship. But the Jedi Master was a bit of stickler for rules, and would have insisted on getting permission from his parents. If it had just been a matter of asking his father, Ben would have had less qualms. But Uncle Luke would have insisted on also running it past his mother, who would not have wanted her fourteen-year-old flying a starfighter. So Ben took a page out of his father’s book and did not bother telling anyone.

Truth be told, Ben felt safer in the X-wing than he had in some of his other ships, knowing the starfighter was in good working condition and Artoo could easily bail him out of any jam into which he might get himself. With some of their early projects there had been some close shaves, something his father had found hilarious and which Ben had carefully not mentioned to his mother.

It was his first time flying a real starfighter, and Ben was instantly hooked.

His favorite ship in the whole galaxy was the *Falcon*. Someday he hoped to inherit it from his father. But while his father lived, Han Solo’s most prized possession would stay with him. And Ben was happy in his confidence that no matter what crazy stunt Han pulled, the legendary Solo Luck would keep his father alive for a very long time. Ben, therefore, was content to fly the *Falcon* whenever his father had time to take him.

In the meantime his dream ship became an X-wing, and he flew Uncle Luke’s every chance he got. Artoo told him that some of the newer ships were painted with black sensor-scattering paint, although that model was a bit high maintenance—whatever that meant.

A black X-wing.

That was hands down the coolest ship Ben had ever heard of, and he promised himself one day he would fly one. He had wanted to be a pilot like his father since childhood. Now he wanted to be a fighter pilot.

Luke’s X-wing was also the first ship since the *Falcon* that Ben had had access to with a hyperdrive. Not as reckless has he sometimes pretended to be, his father had drawn the line in Ben’s underage flying lessons that hyperspace jumps into deep space was something Ben would
have to wait for until he was older. By the time they had access to the X-wing, Artoo decided Ben was old enough.

As Ben also discovered, Artoo had quite a rogue streak, particularly for a droid. Sharing Ben’s opinion on Luke’s likely reaction to their flying lessons, Artoo routinely deleted the evidence of their latest jaunt from the both the X-wing and spaceport computers.

Ben was at the spaceport so much that the ground crew jokingly told him he was “another Poe Dameron.” Ben learned that Poe was one of the top X-wing fighter pilots in the New Republic Defense Fleet, and could reportedly fly anything. Ben hoped to meet him someday. It would be great to have someone else to talk to about ships and flying. He wondered if Poe would think it was weird that he secretly wanted to fly a TIE fighter just once to see what it was like . . . although Ben had feeling his mother would not like that.

In Luke’s borrowed X-wing, Artoo took Ben to different places to develop his piloting skills. Their most memorable trip was the time Artoo had Ben practice his combat skills at the edge of an asteroid field. The lesson had nearly gone very badly, and required Artoo to erase a repairs report in addition to his usual data scrub. Most of their flights, however, were less eventful, and with the assistance of what Ben later understood to be his Force enhanced combat sense heightening his reflexes, Artoo gradually built him and his skills up into being an outstanding fighter pilot.

A maintenance crewer once light heartedly asked Artoo how Ben was doing. “An ace, huh,” the crewer replied to Artoo’s series of beeps, and exchanged amused looks with his fellow groundsmen. All of them believed the little droid was exaggerating, and no seventeen-year-old deserved such a distinction. Ben, however, who knew that Artoo did not exaggerate and furthermore had flow with Luke and some of the best pilots around during the war, felt the full weight of the astromech’s compliment. No matter what insecurities and inadequacies Ben felt about himself in literally every other aspect of his life, thanks to Artoo he always had confidence in his immense piloting skills.

As high school ended and his university studies began, Ben chose to continue living at home rather than deal with the extra security that came with someone of his rank living on campus with his peers. While it kept him closer to the spaceport, staying home only increased Ben’s social isolation, and kept him shy and socially withdrawn.

Ben found that different parts of himself were starting to severely outpace each other developmentally, resulting in him feeling increasingly off balance and plagued by insecurities and self doubt. While his piloting skills gave him an anchor, Ben still did not appreciate just how good he was, and his potential to succeed his father as the best pilot in the galaxy. His talent and
potential in governmental leadership also did not register. Ben continued to considered himself of little worth, something the neglect of his family and the increasingly loud, harsh and critical voice in his head only steadily fueled.

Dealing with the opposite sex was yet another task in life Ben felt ill equipped to tackle. Listening to the wannabe flyboys among his classmates boast of their piloting prowess to impress girls, Ben often smiled to himself, knowing he could fly circles around them and could—and in some cases one day would—blow them out of the sky. While Ben had the far superior piloting skills, however, others had all the appearance of it. When it came to talking to and attracting women, Ben knew the wannabe aces had him completely beat.

Ben had not bothered to approach a girl in years, learning early in adolescence that girls expected him to be his charming father, and found Ben himself a great disappointment. He also carefully avoided the cadre of increasingly beautiful women who really did not care what came out of his mouth, and eyed him solely as a prestigious conquest because of his family’s high status. Ben knew that indulging in the offers of any of the women who threw themselves at him with increasing frequency would be a flash pan counterfeit of what he really wanted. In prudence beyond his years, he furthermore knew such choices would open him up to the kind of consequences and trouble he had no interest in inviting into his life for a myriad of reasons—starting with his mother would kill him.

What exactly it was he was looking for was something he could not articulate beyond that he would—and eventually did—know it when he saw it. As it was no one really caught his eye for whom it was worth risking looking foolish or who superseded a black X-wing in his dreams. At a bare minimum Ben was only open to getting involved with someone who was interested in him for his own sake. Finding none among the uppity Hosnian Prime girls that possessed that quality, Ben shelved his desire for love—which his peers seemed to have far less difficulty finding—along with the rest of his unmet emotional needs, and stayed unattached.

Flying Luke’s X-wing was the extent of Ben’s adolescent rebellion. Unlike other senators’ and celebrities’ children, he did not run wild with exploits that ended up all over the holonet—although with the profound lack of supervision his parents provided he easily could have. Furthermore, while his parents did not appreciate or acknowledge it, Ben deliberately chose to be a very good kid and dutiful son, and he never did anything that could possibly embarrass or reflected poorly on their family.

Unconsciously Ben told himself if he was good enough his parents would spend more time with him . . . although it never ending up working out that way.

Over the years little changed in Ben’s routine. He went to school, and diligently studying all the government and leadership training his mother wanted him to, which he secretly hoped he would never have to use. After school Ben listened to whatever messages his parents had left for him and
sent ones back, before blasting through his homework. Whatever time remained was spent either working on a ship or flying with Artoo. Not perfect without his parents around, life had still been manageable.

And then his Force powers woke up.

As Ben entered his twenties, to all outward appearances he was doing quite well.

Finally at the end of the graduate level political science and governmental leadership training his mother had insisted on after his normal university studies, he had been looking forward to doing something else . . . until his mother set up an internship for him in the Senate.

For years Ben had been planning to tell her that this was it and he was going to be a fighter pilot, but the right time had never presented itself. Every time she was home she was usually distracted with something else, and he did not want to drop that bomb on her via holonet or spoil the precious time when he actually had her attention. Ben knew, however, that for his own sanity he could not put off the conversation much longer.

It was clear to his instructors that Ben had inherited much of his mother’s talents. He possessed both a creative and practical approach to government, and the capacity to provide stable leadership. Adding to his sharp mind his genuinely not caring about his political image or advancing his career beyond sitting in the cockpit of a starfighter, Ben had also began to catch the attention of the political elite. He was considered a rising star on track for an extremely high position in the New Republic leadership. Many actually had Ben earmarked as a future New Republic Chancellor—or whatever they ended up calling the position to distance it for Palpatine.

This was idea that Ben privately found horrifying when he learned of it. To his mind, Chancellor of the New Republic seemed like the worst job he could possibly imagine. Could he do it? Sure he could do it. All the education and training he had endured to please his mother had more than prepared him. Did he want to? Absolutely not. Ben knew that being head of the intergalactic government would make him completely miserable, and he felt safe in his conviction that ruling the galaxy was something he would never want to do.
Socially things began changing for him as well. As he came into contact with more people from other planets, Ben’s circle of acquaintances began to include individuals who were both capable of actually being his friend and interested in getting to know him better. Additionally, as Ben’s previously lanky frame began to fill out he began to increasingly turn heads in his own right. With his combination of looks, high social status, and reputation for good character Ben’s eligibility began to steadily skyrocket.

Ben, however, was completely oblivious to all of this. He had other things to worry about . . . like holding it together.

Something inside of him that had always been there was waking up. He guessed it had to do with his long expected Force powers, but he did not know what to do with it or how to control it, and he was afraid. What frightened him even more was that the darkness he felt inside of him also seemed to no long be dormant . . . and the critical voice fueling his insecurities also dramatically kicked up a notch.

Ben began to realize the voice was not his—that there was someone else inside his mind.

Although everyone but Artoo bought his mask of composure, emotionally and mentally he felt himself spinning out of control. Afraid of how his parents might react, Ben somehow managed to suppress and hide it all for several years until the event that rocked him to the core made that completely impossible.

With his internship starting soon, Ben and Artoo were traveling back to Hosnian Prime after another miserable trip to visit Uncle Luke and his followers. Knowing he really needed a teacher, Ben had hoped to get Uncle Luke alone to finally tell him about what had been happening and get his help—but as usual he did not get the chance.

Ben and Artoo had arrived to find Lor San Tekka had discovered a new Force relic that put the group a major step closer to finding the first Jedi Temple, and that was completely absorbing all of Luke’s and everyone else’s attention. Ben did not really care about the location of first Jedi
Temple, and wished he was with his father.

One day of course Ben would care . . . for a very different reason.

Uncle Luke had been sorry to see Ben go at such an exciting time, but knew better than to mess with Leia’s plans. He waved to Ben as his X-wing lifted off and climbed towards deep space, following the decade long arrangement of “Artoo flying Ben out” in Luke’s X-wing since no one had time to come pick him up or take him home. Han had rolled his eyes at that idea, understanding a year later than was actually true that Ben could fly himself.

The long flight in what Ben was starting to unconsciously consider his X-wing was usually the only part of a trip to visit Uncle Luke that Ben really enjoyed . . . but not this time. Dropping out of hyperspace to do a nav check, Ben had tapped into the holonet to see if his parents had left him any messages. It was then that a headline scrolled across the newsfeed on his screen that changed his life forever.

“Darth Vader revealed as Senator Leia Organa’s father.”

It was like a bomb went off inside the cockpit and in Ben’s heart. He quickly scanned the article, and then went to other news sources in the hope it was an idle report of a ridiculous smear campaign by his mother’s political enemies. Whatever it was it was everywhere. His nav check complete, Ben quickly shot the X-wing back into hyperspace and hurtling towards home, frustrated that he still had many more hours of flight time remaining for his thoughts to run wild with limited information.

It wasn’t true. It couldn’t be.

Ben refused to believe it if for no other reason than he did not want to believe his family would have kept him in the dark about something so important—and left him to be so devastatingly blindsided.
All Ben had ever heard about Darth Vader in school was the Sith Lord was one of the most hated men the galaxy had ever seen. He had ruthlessly slaughtered the noble Jedi, and overseen the enslavement and subjugation of all the known star systems for the Empire. Vader had brutally imposed the Emperor’s will with an iron fist, his unimaginably strong Force powers, and his legendary and lethal temper.

Ben had always hated Vader, especially for what he had done to his much beloved mother . . . torturing her and making her watch the destruction of her home planet. And if the report was true—although Ben held out hope that it was all a lie—Vader had done all of that to his own daughter.

If it was true then Ben himself was the grandson of Vader.

With that thought that was too horrible for words buzzing through his mind, Ben finally arrived back on Hosnian Prime just as he felt he could not take one more minute of being stuck in hyperspace and out of touch with what was going on.

The fall out that met him once he disembarked, however, made Ben wish that he was still enroute.

The bombshell that his grandfather had been Darth Vader had quickly moved his family from being famous to infamous. While Ben had not really noticed the respect and admiration he was slowly earning, he could hardly miss the abrupt change to being treated with distrust and suspicion. Suddenly everyone was looking at him differently. Vader had been a monster, and people were looking at Ben like he was one too.

By the time Ben got home he found that his mother was off world dealing with some crisis, but she had left him a message. He quickly opened it with hope, but as he watched it his heart sank. The admission it contained was heartfelt and completely inadequate. It reeked of damage control and a desire to assuage her own guilt rather than be of any real help to her son—at that point what could she really say.

After listening to it, however, Ben resigned himself to the truth . . . Darth Vader was his grandfather.

The only one around to yell at was Artoo, and Ben could not help but do so. “Did you know about
“This?” he asked the droid accusingly. Artoo’s only reply was a mournful beep, and Ben let it drop. It really did not matter if Artoo had known or not. This one was squarely on his parents.

Maybe they thought they would just put off telling him until he was older—or they were less busy—but to Ben it felt like they were hoping and planning for him to never find out about this at all. And no matter how Ben knew they would try to justify themselves or how Ben tried to spin it in his mind to lessen the blow, the fact remained that his parents had kept all this from him and let him find out about it the worst possible way.

Of all the things they had done to him through their neglect over the years, this was by far the worst, and Ben did not know how he was ever going to forgive them.

Luke Skywalker the known Son of Vader, who apparently as his mother’s twin brother and really was Ben’s uncle Luke, came out with a statement reiterating what he had told Ben as a child: that in the end Vader was redeemed. Even to Ben’s ears that longed to hear something different, Luke sounded like a brother trying to minimize the damage to his twin sister’s political career. And all Ben had for evidence of Vader’s supposed redemption was the word a man who had broken Ben’s trust by lying to him his whole life.

Although his mother was not there, her political career and his by association was in a complete tailspin. His internship was gone. Not sure what he was supposed to do and wanting to be away from people and their hostile looks as much as possible, Ben spent a lot of time working on X-wing maintenance with Artoo.

A reoccurring nightmare also began to plague his sleep, full of terrifying images of destruction, pain, and death. And it always ended the same way: the cave.

Ben found himself in an earthy cavern full of vines, snakes, and lizards. The damp misty air chilled him to the bone with an indescribable cold. The dimly lit chamber reverberated with unsettling sounds that filled him with dread. Then out of a darker part of the cave Ben heard the sound of heavy footsteps, then mechanical breathing, and to his horror he saw Darth Vader striding towards him out of the shadows. Ben screamed and turned to flee, desperately trying to reach the opening above him by climbing the earthy walls and only ending up with fists full of dirt. He was still screaming when he woke up. Artoo tried to comfort him, but he was not able to fall back asleep.
And that is how it went night after night as Ben waited to see what would become of his life.

His parents knew they had really screwed up this time. So after his mother was done saving the New Republic from some imminent threat and his father had saved her, and after she had resigned from the Senate and founded the Resistance, both his parents had made time to come home. To Ben’s mind their apologies had not lasted nearly long enough before they switched gears to figuring out what they were going to do with him.

In founding the Resistance Leia Organa had become a political pariah. Ben wondered if it had even crossed his mother’s mind that her actions were permanently killing his political career too.

Probably not.

With his unwanted political career over before it had begun, Ben had acquired new insight into why he had uncomplainingly studied and done whatever his mother wanted him to all these years, and why he had never gotten around to telling her he was going to be a starfighter pilot. Ben had gone along with his mother’s political aspirations for him unconsciously knowing that the end game was getting to work along side her in the Senate—to finally spend the time with her that he craved so badly.

And just as the prize of her increased presence in his life that he had worked towards for years and years was finally about to be in his grasp, she had snatched it away by blowing up both of their careers without a second thought.

As angry and betrayed as he felt, Ben tried to stay levelheaded. What he really wanted and needed, particularly as he was mentally spinning out of control, was to spend more time around his mother. With his father he felt safe, but his mother had a calming, stabilizing effect on him that no one else had. His goal was still attainable, Ben realized. All he had to do was follow her and join the Resistance. Actually this would work out even better. Ben could be around his mother and be a starfighter pilot—he might even get to fly a black X-wing! For one shining moment Ben Solo was all about the Resistance.

That moment was brief.

The newly minted General Leia Organa had not see before her the young ace just coming into his
prime, who would automatically be the best starfighter pilot in the Resistance—all she saw was her little boy. She declared Ben was too young to join the Resistance, and that he would be staying out of danger and away from the fighting, preferably at home where it was safe.

Ben knew this was absolutely ridiculous, well aware his mother had been far younger than he was when she had joined the original Rebel Alliance. No, what his mother really wanted was to permanently keep him away from any and all conflict in the galaxy, even if it meant keeping him away from her too. With that insight Ben knew he would never be old enough to join the Resistance—a new rival for his mother’s attention to which he was destined to lose badly, and which he quickly came to hate.

It was then that Ben had truly lost it.

But before he could verbally lay into his parent with everything they had had coming for years, Ben’s careful and rigid control over his growing force powers abruptly evaporated. Three vases exploded into thousands of pieces and there was suddenly a huge crack in one of the walls. For a moment all three of them stood in stunned silence surveying the damage. When his gaze finally met those of his parents Ben was horrified to see fear in their eyes. He turned and fled from their penthouse apartment, ignoring his parent as they called after him.

Artoo found him in the cockpit of Luke’s X-wing with tears streaming down his face. As soon as the droid had loaded himself aboard, Ben had taken off and flown straight into the privacy and darkness of space. It was there that he began to sob uncontrollably, and Artoo’s consoling beeps did little to comfort him. Eventually his sobs subsided, not because he felt any better, but because he simply had no more tears to shed.

In that moment Ben seriously thought about running away.

Although he was technically old enough to leave home, Ben knew he was in no way ready to make his own way in the galaxy, and even if he had someplace to go he would not be heading towards somewhere but fleeing from what he left behind. Ben did not know how long he had been out there or how long he would have remained, but the voice in his mind had eventually suggested a possible destination to which he could run, which scared Ben into going home.
Ben arrived home to find his parents fighting. They were in their bedroom with the door closed but their voices were so loud he could still hear everything they were saying. It was not their usual arguing that Ben remembered from his childhood, which ended with them taking off by themselves in the Falcon for a few hours and when they came home everything was fine.

This was a real fight . . . and it was about him.

Ben slunk back to his bedroom with Artoo, and locked the door behind him. He could still hear his parents shouting as he covered his ears with a pillow and cried himself to sleep.

He woke the next morning to find his parents were still fighting. And over the next two weeks they continued to fight . . . a lot. No matter how busy his mother was with the Resistance or how many things his father had waiting for him in his life on the road, his parents were carving out time so they could argue about his powers.

Ben’s Force sensitivity—he—was now nothing but a source of conflict in his family. “Too much Vader in him,” was his father’s often-used phrase behind closed doors where his parents thought he could not hear them.

With the stable ground of his life disintegrating under his feet, Ben found that his Force powers—which had already grow well beyond what should have been his capacity to fully suppress them before all this happened—were now exploding out of control under such high stress.

The situation only escalated as the tension mounted. The more his parents fought the more upset and scared Ben became . . . and the more things broke and the more cracks appeared in the walls without Ben meaning for them too. Everyone, including Ben began to worry he was going to bring the whole building down.

Usually it was his parent who did the leaving, while Ben stayed home with a modicum of stability. But his parents were becoming afraid of him and his growing powers. Even his father, which should have been the biggest warning. They were talking about sending him away.

In a last ditch effort to get his mother to understand how badly he needed to be around her right now, Ben finally told her about the voice in his mind. Her alarmed reaction was everything he had
been afraid of when he had not previously told her.

Ben awoke the next morning to learn that was the day his parents had decided that he and his powers were too dangerous for them to handle—that he was too dangerous to be part of their family anymore. The boy with “too much Vader in him” found himself abruptly packed off to his uncle’s hastily set up Jedi training temple.

His parents brought him outside to tell him, and the large crack that had formed in the ground at Ben’s feet was an indication that that had been a good idea. His father had offered to fly him in Falcon. In anger Ben had refused, and felt his father’s sense of relief like a physical blow.

Ben had not gone back into the apartment, which he was still afraid he might actually destroy. With literally nothing but the clothes on his back and without saying good-bye to his parents, Ben set off towards the spaceport. Artoo had apparently seen this coming that morning, and was already waiting for him in the prepped X-wing. Ben jumped in and shot them off through the atmosphere toward the darkness of space.

Before jumping to hyperspace, Ben turned the X-wing back to take one last lingering look at the planet below. Even then he had had a premonition that he would never be going home again.

Chapter End Notes

With Ben is Star Wars Darcy, someone sagely pointed out this makes Luke Lady Catherine, which has led to some fairly epic tumblr posts:

https://lordsofthesithpodcast.tumblr.com/post/183084131534/roxannepolice-monsterleadmehome

Thanks so much for reading!

Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

SWC: Kylo Ren and the Portrayal of Masculinity in Star Wars
LOTS Podcast: Psychology of the Characterization: Kylo Ren
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsdViE8mse4

LOTS Podcast: Why Kylo is the Protagonist of The Last Jedi
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=381i4H7nA0M&t=2014s

Artwork:
Bloodline Cover Art: https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/princess-leias-force-awakens-backstory-205818610.htmlChapter 6
Chapter Summary

At the Jedi training temple Luke's non-existent parenting skills do not mesh well with Ben's belated adolescent rebellion, and end with the tragedy of THAT night.

Chapter Notes

This is a fairly sad chapter, and I think the most tragic aspect of Ben Solo's fall to the dark side is it is the result of what I believe is mainly a massive misunderstanding between him and his family.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Yavin 4 was the fourth moon of the gas giant Yavin, and from an aerial view of landmasses covered in dense jungle and rain forests it did not appear to be particularly noteworthy. However, as a former Rebel Alliance base, and most importantly as the site of the Battle of Yavin—the battle where Luke Skywalker and a small band of Rebel fighters had done the impossible and blown up the Empire’s mighty Death Star superweapon to liberate the galaxy from its reign of terror—Yavin 4 was actually one of the most famous planets in the galaxy.

Ben vaguely remembered learning in school it had also been home to the ancient Massassi race, who before being enslaved and eventually wiped out by the Sith a few thousand years ago, had built the temple the Rebels had used as a base. More recently after the end of the Galactic Civil War a colony had been established nearby. Poe Dameron had grown up on Yavin 4, although by that point he was flying an X-wing for the New Republic Defense Fleet. Still hoping to meet the idolized older pilot someday, Ben admittedly knew a bit too much about Poe Dameron.

Yavin 4 was also home to the shoot of some Force sensitive tree, which Ben did not understand or particularly care about, but which likely had something to do with his uncle selecting the moon as the site of the new Jedi training temple.

Under different circumstances Ben would have found a visit to Yavin 4 very interesting—not only given its galactic importance, but more specifically because of its significance in regard to his family. Still reeling from his parents throwing him away like toxic garbage, however, Ben was not in an appreciative mood or state of mind.

As he hurtled through hyperspace towards the moon, Ben toyed with the idea of going someplace other than to his uncle, whom he was still just as mad at as his parents for not telling him about Vader or the true nature of their relationship. But that would not solve his problem of not being able to control his Force powers.

_Maybe if he could control them his parents would let him come home._

From the look on their faces as they parted . . . probably not. If that had been an option his parents would have said so and maybe even had Luke come to Hosnian Prime to help Ben not destroy their family’s home. Ben’s internal debate ended only when the voice in his mind again offered an alternative destination.

After that Ben flew straight to the training temple.
When Ben reached Yavin 4, Luke greeted his nephew warmly. Close to his goal of finding the first Jedi Temple, Luke had still dropped his quest and quickly set up a school to train the next generation of Jedi when a desperate Leia had called and told him they needed his help with Ben immediately.

Ben, who did not want to be there, or anywhere around Luke for that matter, was not predisposed to share in his parents’ gratitude. The day Ben had found out that Luke was really his uncle—that instead of being more to Ben than he had to be by obligation of blood ties, that all these years the Jedi Master had instead been less—was the last day Ben had called him Uncle Luke. The fact that Luke offered him no apology or explanation, but simply glossed over the fact he had been lying to his nephew his entire life—and like Han and Leia had left Ben to be blindsided by his lineage—did not help the situation in the slightest.

Furthermore, ignorant of the havoc Ben had unintentionally wreaked on his home and the terrified look in his parent’s eyes, Luke thought the fact that Ben’s powers were finally manifesting was fantastic. In what would become a reoccurring theme over the next year, Luke’s overly cheerful disposition and enthusiasm grated on Ben’s darkening mood, as it demonstrated Luke’s insensitivity to how traumatizing Ben’s powers already were to him.

Still recoiling from being abruptly kicked out of his home and finding that his uncle, with whom he was already extremely angry, was also infuriatingly irritating, Ben had in spite of himself still held out hope. His uncle was a Jedi Master. Ben tried to calm himself by recalling the stories from his childhood of his uncle’s heroic exploits—back when he thought Luke was cool.

Ben continued to repeatedly remind himself that Luke could teach him how to control his powers . . . and then maybe then his parent would let him back into their family. Perhaps Luke could also help Ben cross that elusive threshold into manhood for which his father never seemed to have time. Maybe his uncle could protect him from the evil presence that was stalking him and the cruel voice inside his mind.

Ben found that like his father, Jedi Master Luke Skywalker was destined to disappoint him . . . and then some.
In his desperate attempt to look on the bright side Ben also reminded himself there would be other students with the same abilities, peers who might become the friends he craved. It did not take long for him to be disillusioned of that hope too.

It soon became apparent that the other students had been selected from an unvetted list of potential Force users that his uncle had been compiling over the years. Invitations were extended based on potential strength with the Force alone, with little regard to character. While his uncle was at least superficially revered to downright idol worshiped by the other potential Jedi, Ben soon found that when it came to himself most of the other students fell into one of two groups: those who were openly jealous and hostile to his face, and those who on the surface held him on a pedestal in superficial adulation but were jealous behind his back.

On top of an already bad situation, Lor San Tekka and the Church of the Force, had also taken up residence on Yavin 4. Believing there could be no balance in the Force without the Jedi, they had come to help Luke set up the training temple and take care of everyone’s day to day needs so Luke could focus on training the long awaited new generation of Jedi.

Luke’s acolytes, who to their bitter disappointment were not Force sensitive, were even more jealous of Ben than the majority of the other students. They quickly found ways to subtly take out their animosity towards him behind his uncle’s back, and Ben found he always got the worst portion of food, rarely had clean clothes, and had to endure a constant barrage of nasty comments from them on a daily basis.

Luke was not very detail oriented, and preferring to focus on the big picture frequently only seemed to have one foot in the present. Ben had always found him even more inadequate than his parents in guiding him or providing for his emotional needs or wellbeing, and the current situation was no different—except now Ben’s time under Luke’s incompetent care was no longer limited to a few weeks at a time but would instead be lasting indefinitely.

Beyond that was a far more wounding blow. Ben eventually had to accept that the training temple had been hastily thrown together without the much forethought in key areas for the simple reason that his mother and father had needed some place to quickly dump him.

Busy with their own pursuits, neither of his parents had checked up on him directly. Nothing, Ben knew, could consume his mother’s attention like a new cause. His father, who had never wanted Ben to become a Jedi in the first place, certainly was not swinging by. Either blindly trusting in his uncle’s non-existent caretaking skills or deliberately distancing themselves from their dangerous son, neither of them had made any effort to leave even so much as a message for Ben. Even if his parents had asked after him, Ben knew Luke would likely tell them their son was doing great.
Although forced to on some level accept his uncle’s shortcomings, this did not stop Ben from lamenting his uncle’s lack of practical considerations. Ben had only learned about the glorious Jedi of the Old Republic in pretty broad strokes at school, but he did recall that Jedi training had quickly progressed to a model of one on one mentorship. While their personalities by that point naturally clashed fairly badly, Ben still seriously wished he could have had that with his uncle, and knew things would have been a lot better that way. But his uncle was always a step ahead of himself, and Jedi Master Luke Skywalker was taking this opportunity to realize his dream of launching the New Jedi Order.

Even with the current group training setup, however, Ben’s powers still got all of his uncle’s attention. Master Skywalker had run them all through the basics of concentrating and reaching out to let the Force flow through them. Ben’s Force abilities had grown exponentially and he quickly outpaced the other students. As good as his piloting skills were that made it likely he would succeed his father as best pilot in the galaxy, and possessing political talents that lead some to have him pegged for the top job in the intergalactic government some day, when it came to his strength with the Force Ben was truly a prodigy.

All of Luke’s attention made his devotees even more deeply resentful of Ben. Ben himself understood since even though Master Skywalker lavished his star Padawan’s Force abilities with attention, Ben himself got none—his uncle did not seem to even understand there was a difference.

While his powers were flourishing, therefore, Ben himself was not.

As with many things in his life, just because Ben was good at something did not mean that he liked it. Relieved to not have his powers be on the verge of exploding out of his control, Ben was also annoyed. Luke could have taught him how to control his powers enough to not bring his apartment building down in about five minutes—maybe even coached him over via holonet—instead of dragging him all the way out to Yavin 4.

Ben hated training and deliberately did not try very hard, but ironically still managed to rapidly progress in his skills lightyears ahead of Luke’s other students. Under less toxic circumstance Ben could have found meaning in helping them, but they did not want to learn anything from him and he had no interest in being their teacher.

The young Jedi, moreover, did not consider his unasked for Force abilities to be a gift, and frequently wished he could give them to one of the other people around the training temple who desperately wanted them, or just get rid of them in some way.
To worsen the already dismal situation even further, it was at his uncle’s training temple that Ben learned about the Jedi Code and what else what he now considered to be his Force-curse was taking away from him. Apparently it was a good thing he had not previously fallen in love, because yet another thing his parents and uncle had failed to mention to him was as a future Jedi he would not have been allow to marry anyway. He had grown up literally starved of connections with other people, and according to the Jedi Code against interpersonal attachments that level of soul sucking depravation was evidently going to be more or less a permanent state.

Ben had once pulled his uncle aside—son of Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker—and as tactfully as possible inquired exactly how he was supposed to reconcile their family lineage with the Jedi Code. Ben was by that point not in the least bit surprised that his uncle did not have a good answer for him, and seemed to have neatly compartmentalized that trivial detail and his Jedi Order revival plans into two different parts of his brain that did not talk to each other. Not appreciating being confronted with the reality of an inconvenient truth, his uncle had gotten defensive and told Ben to just drop it and join him in obediently following the Code.

If Ben had to choose between the no longer available option of being Chancellor of the New Republic or life as a Jedi, he was ready to admit feeling a deep nostalgia for previously disliked politics. Furthermore, the presence of Luke’s X-wing at the training temple was a constant source of temptation, and Ben fantasized about taking off with Artoo to enlist in the New Republic Defense Fleet. However, that was not a real option anymore either, as no matter how good a pilot he was no one would want Vaderspawn as a comrade in arms to die with in six years when Starkiller destroyed the Honsian sector.

Ben’s more fervent wish was still that his mother would remember he was her son too and not just a liability as Darth Vader’s grandson—and that she would finally let him join the Resistance and help her fight the First Order. If that ever became a real possibility, Ben was prepared to forgive the group his deep grievance and fly even a B-wing or a bulk freighter for the cause . . . if only someone would get him away from the New Jedi Order.

In the end, Ben as usual did as he was told and stayed on Yavin 4.

In hindsight Ben was not sure why he thought his strategy would work this time when it had never worked throughout his entire life—other than it was the only course of action that fit his personality and values. But Ben clung to the hope that if he continued to survive his uncle’s Jedi training and was a dutiful obedient son, that some day his parents would take him back.

Ben’s love for his family only made his relationship with his much despised Force powers more complicated. Recent and current events had reinforced in Ben’s mind the message he had gotten
loud and clear from his parents and uncle: his personal qualities, his good choices, Ben himself did not matter. His inherited strength with the Force—which had wrecked his own plans for his future, destroyed his relationship with his parents, would eventually end their marriage, and which had ruined his family and his life—was the only thing about Ben that was special.

Falling back on his tried and true dysfunctional coping mechanism, Ben stuffed his growing conflict and continued to say nothing, and life at the training temple continued on predictably. Jedi Master Luke Skywalker was enthralled with Ben’s powers and strength with the Force. The Church of the Force acolytes and the other students were jealous.

Ben himself, whose conviction was growing daily that he was going to be the most uncommitted and conflicted Jedi Knight that had every lived, was absolutely miserable.

Sinking further into jaded disillusionment, Ben had no desire to hang around the superficial kiss-ups who hero-worshipped his uncle and resented him for his superior Force abilities. When he was not training he stayed in his small hut with Artoo.

In his growing depression and resentment, however, Ben became ripe for recruitment to the other option for socialization that existed at the training temple of the New Jedi Order . . .

The Knights.

They were not set on being Jedi Knights. What kind of knights they would become would depend greatly on their own self-interest. In spite of all being quite talented Force users, they were content to train unobtrusively in the background while the other student jockeyed to get as close as possible to Luke.

The Knights were not on the dark side per say. They did, however, share in Ben’s rapidly plummeting respect for Luke’s authority. At the same time they kept evidence of this, along with their brash arrogance, well hidden behind masks of politeness that belied their true natures and
double lives.

Sniper, Monk, Heavy, Amory, and Rogue.

They all had other given names of course. But just as Ben Solo slowly gave way to Kylo Ren, their birth names had ceased to be their relevant ones long before they all joined the First Order.

In maintaining his untarnished, if unappreciated by his parents, squeaky-clean reputation for over a decade, Ben could smell trouble among his peers a mile away and had initially kept his distance. His resolve, however, began to erode as the voice in his mind repeatedly pointed out “Why bother anymore? What’s the point? Being good didn’t stop your parents from abandoning you.” Ben found his new nihilistic worldview steadily eclipsing his cautious vigilance until one day it was completely gone.

Late one night Rogue approached Ben’s hut and invited him to hang out. The enigmatic Force user had chosen his moment well. After enduring a day where his uncle’s acolytes had been particularly nasty to him behind the Jedi Master’s back, Ben accepted the first of what became nightly invitations.

Although Ben initially engaged in the bare minimum of experimentation required for inclusion in the group, the Knights were not a good influence on either each other or him. Heavy and Armory had an endless supply of alcohol they managed to get from somewhere. Rouge also had a stock of what were supposed to be Force power enhancing psychedelics he had brought with him from wherever he was prior to coming to the training temple. Ben only tried Rouge’s drugs once, finding they increased the evil presence stalking him’s access to his mind. He did, however, drink quite heavily.

Ben found himself pretending to be a dutiful Padawan by day with nights filled with drunken lightsaber duels with the other Knights. He was not sure anymore for which group he was wearing a mask to hide his true self.

By virtue of his superior Force powers, Ben was made de facto head of the Knights. Rogue, however, was the neck, and would frequently turn the group in directions Ben would not have otherwise chosen.
There had always been something a little off about Rogue—nothing glaringly obvious, but definitely off. And it was always Rogue’s idea when the Knights did anything weird—like sealing their brotherhood with a blood pact.

It was a ritual that crossed a line that even in his foggy disillusionment filled Ben with apprehension. The Jedi Code having already robbed him of the possibility of normal healthy intimacy with another person and to a large extent even authentic friendship, however, Ben in his state of emotional starvation took what was available. He slashed his forearm open and let his “mighty Skywalker blood” that his uncle was so in love with mingle with each of the other Knights in turn as they bonded in the Force.

Connected in a cultish intimacy, each of his brother Knights lay open before Ben like a book he did not want to read. Ben, himself quickly set up mental barriers to keep hidden his fears and insecurities . . . and the deeper secret that at his core Ben was nothing like them. Some day he would fully unmask for Rey and let her see his true self, but from the Knights he kept knowledge of his remaining goodness safely hidden away.

Rogue too had secrets, and either like Ben had figured out how to set up a mental barrier himself . . . or someone else had taught him.

The whole situation only deepened Ben inner conflict.

He settled on the compromise of hanging with the bad boys while still making increasing less successful efforts to not be one. Had his mother actual met the sketchy gang he was now running with, Ben wondered if she would still have felt the need to send him away.

Ben also marveled at the supposedly wise and omniscient Jedi Mater Luke Skywalker’s ignorant naïveté at what went on after hours at his training temple. He began to play a cynical game to see just how hung over during training he would have to be for his uncle to notice. Luke’s sunny, idealistic outlook combined with Ben’s raw talent making training ridiculously easy for him resulted in his uncle never noticing at all.

In the end it boiled down to outright negligence, and only served to fuel Ben’s resentment at his uncle’s incompetence as a parental figure. But even as Ben increasingly engaged in self-destructive behavior, he held out hope his uncle would stop being a terrible guardian, and show up in his room one night to set him straight.
That one day Luke would care enough about him as his uncle to discipline him.

As the months dragged on Ben’s lack of true effort remained apparent to him alone—and the underlying reason remained a secret that increasingly gnawed at him. For what held Ben back during training was the reality that the stronger he grew overall with the Force the stronger the darkness that was rising within him also became. Ben was careful not to use it, but it was getting harder.

Ben could not help but contemplate that the Force powers he had been cursed with had been inherited from the most evil man in the galaxy. As his anger and growing aggression only fueled the darkness, Ben also began to wonder with growing trepidation if he had he inherited his grandfather’s evil and propensity for violence as well.

He did not want to admit it, but Ben knew the answer to that question, owing largely to now also having an explanation for his mother’s apprehension regarding his Force abilities. Leia Organa had hated her father, and on some level feared—to Ben’s mind knew—she would one day also hate her son.

As his power with the Force increased the voice in his mind also really began to dig into him—although it had switched from being critical to being seductively soothing.

The voice told Ben there was no need for him to fight the darkness. It would be so much easier to just give in. There was real power on the dark side. Power that could protect him from the people who hated him, and thought he was a monster for being Darth Vader’s grandson.

And being Vader’s grandson was an honor not something to fear.

No one really understood that or understood Ben . . . only the voice in his mind. Certainly not his uncle, or his parents who neglected him so badly. But in reality Ben was remarkably special. More special than he could possibly imagine . . .

“You don’t understand your importance,” the voice frequently crooned.
Still Ben fought the darkness. He suppressed it and hid it from his Jedi Master uncle. But the darkness was getting stronger, and Ben knew during training it was starting to occasionally leak out.

There were moments when it was all becoming too much, and Ben wanted to cut his wrists open and drain out all his Vader infected blood. Artoo, who watched over Ben while he slept, however, would protect Ben from any danger as best he could including from Ben himself, and Ben knew the droid would never let him bleed out. So he learnt to live with the thought his family and the galaxy would be better off if he was dead, and did not act on it.

It was a comfort to have Artoo with him at the training temple, but Ben’s problems were no longer something they could fix together by swapping out the right ship part. As usual, however, Artoo seemed to have a better grasp on things than most humans including Luke.

Artoo also seemed to know more than he should about the Force and Jedi powers for a being that operated outside of it. Furthermore, some of his questions and remarks to Ben made it seem like the little droid had seen this holovid before. Not for the first time the question of just how old Artoo and his likely unwiped memory was passed through Ben’s mind.

The fact that Ben was sometimes going by another name seemed to genuinely alarm the little droid. As the only one cognizant of Ben’s rapidly progressing downward spiral, Artoo had tried to straighten him out. One night he even rolled into the middle of one of the Knight’s drunken routs before Ben yelled at him to leave. That had made Ben feel worse than ever, and in the end he had just avoided the droid along with his conscious.

Like Ben, Artoo also seemed to be waiting for Luke to intervene. Ben never knew for sure but would not have been surprised if, unlike him, the droid had gotten tired of waiting for the Jedi Master to wake up to the long brewing crisis, and actually said something to Luke to alert him that his nephew needed his attention.

Ben was confident, however, that both of them were equally unprepared for what would happen when Luke finally chose to act.

For what happened *that* night.
Throughout his time at the Jedi training temple, Ben often wished his hut had a real door with a lock on it. Artoo still watched over him at night, which allowed him to sleep at all. But Ben knew he would sleep much more soundly knowing his safety was secured by more than just a coarsely woven tapestry.

On the night he and Artoo had been waiting for for so long, Ben actually turned fairly early—having a premonition that tonight was going to be the night his uncle finally confronted him and straightened him out. Ben was already asleep when Luke finally arrived. Artoo, who still stood guard outside Ben’s hut even after Ben had yelled at him, had let Luke pass.

Ben had been in the middle of his reoccurring nightmare—the part with more destruction, pain, and death than he could really stomach—when something abruptly yanked him out of deep sleep. He awoke on his side and opened his eyes to a faint green glow.

Looking over his shoulder Ben saw his uncle with a crazed look in his eyes—lightsaber ignited and held in his artificial right hand. Luke’s left hand rose to the handle, and with a two handed grip his uncle raised the green blade over Ben.

In the split second before his uncle brought his lightsaber down to cut him in two, Ben was only just able to call and ignite his own lightsaber to meet Luke’s as it crashed down with all of his uncle’s strength. Lying vulnerably on his back it took all Ben’s strength to block Luke’s kill stroke with a one handed grip. Ben knew it was not going to last, and with his free hand he reached out to pull the roof down on top of them, screaming to the Force for help in a last ditch effort to save his life.

Ben came to and was somehow able to cut himself out of the wreckage of his hut. Although bruised and scraped, he was for the most part miraculously unharmed—and more importantly still alive. He was in no state to be able to tell with complete accuracy whether Luke was dead or alive but unconscious, but he could not readily sense the older man, and guessed his uncle was likely dead.

Artoo had been standing outside the now demolished hut, and with beeps filled with alarm asked
Ben what had happened.

“He tried to kill me, Artoo,” Ben said, his voice beginning to choke up. “He was going to cut me down in my sleep. I woke up and he was standing over me with his lightsaber drawn. He hurled it down on me as soon as he saw I was awake. I barely managed to get out a live.” Ben barely managed to finish before he began to sob openly. Artoo gave off a series of confused and horrified beeps that mirrored Ben’s own feelings.

The other students and the acolytes currently on Yavin 4 were roused by the commotion, and came to investigate. The Knights, who had not yet gone to sleep, also appeared and quickly made their way towards Ben.

Although his eyes were still red, Ben collected himself enough to get the story out. The other students and the acolytes did not believe him. Ben was not surprised. No one would believe him—that the vaulted and noble Jedi Master Luke Skywalker would do something so unthinkable and unforgivable as kill his own nephew in his sleep.

Believing Luke was dead, and Ben was the one who had committed the atrocity of killing his own uncle and concocting a ridiculous story to cover it up, the other students ignited their lightsabers and prepared to avenge their beloved master. Regardless of whether or not Ben was telling the truth, the Knights automatically had his back as the other students charged him.

It was not a close contest.

Like everything else that had to do with using the Force, Ben’s skill with a lightsaber far surpassed that of the other students. Thanks to all their late night swordplay, the other Knights were almost as equally skilled. Collectively no match for the rest of the students, the Knights quickly disarmed their outmatched opponents—in the case of those fighting Rogue and Monk quite literally. The defeated students and Luke’s devotees suddenly found themselves at the Knight’s mercy.

On that night they found none.

“They’re just an extension of him, Ren. As long as they’re alive you’ll never be safe,” Rogue said, himself extinguishing his lightsaber.
Ben stood towering above the kneeling figures of their defeated adversaries, his lightsaber alone remaining ignited. They were now unarmed, and aggression towards them was well beyond the justification of self-defense.

“They hate you. They’ve hate you for years,” Rogue reminded him of the truth. “You can’t leave them alive. You’ll never be safe.”

Believing he had just killed his uncle—after his uncle had tried to murder him—Ben was an emotional wreck. For a moment Ben raised his lightsaber above the head of the student who had tormented him the most during the past year. In his eyes Ben now saw only fear.

Ben hesitated.

“Do it Ren! Kill them!” Rogue goaded. “You don’t have a choice!”

With the reminder of his uncle’s last and most indelible lesson, something inside of Ben snapped. He let go of all his pent up rage and emotions kept under careful check his whole life. In that moment he finally gave in, and cut down Luke’s other students and acolytes.

Killing would get a lot easier in the years to come. But that night it was raw and horrible. It was the night he earned the Vadersque moniker “Jedi Killer,” and was the true beginning of him becoming a monster.

Only San Tekka and a group of the Church of the Force, who were off world still pursing the quest for the first Jedi Temple escaped the slaughter . . . although their reprieve proved to only be temporary as they fled to a remote village on Jakku.

By the time everyone but the Knights lay dead—their blood soaking the ground from the slashes of Ben’s lightsaber—Sniper and Armory had set the training temple ablaze.
Ben was in a daze and ignored the other Knight reveling in the wanton destruction. He only placed one limit on them. Ben did not let them hurt Artoo or destroy his uncle’s X-wing, which was the droid’s only way to get off the planet and back home.

The Knights themselves were leaving in his uncle’s other ship. Ben was the last to board. Part way up the gangplank Ben looked back. Artoo was beeping mournfully by the X-wing they had flown together with so much joy . . . behind him was the burning temple and a pile of bodies. Ben knew that a significant part of Ben Solo had also died that night, and for the first time Kylo Ren was more than just another name he sometimes used.

And unlike Artoo, who he would likely never see again, Ben knew he could never go home and would never be allowed back into his family ever again.

Seeking only to put as much distance between the Knights and the burning temple and corpses as possible, Ben flew the ship away from Yavin 4 without a destination in mind. The truth was he had no idea where in the galaxy they could go.

If he had been thinking clearly, Ben would have realized his best option at that point was to part ways with the Knights at the first spaceport, and hire himself out as pilot. He father has survived just fine in that life.

But the voice in his mind he would soon learn was Snoke’s had been mentally grooming him for this moment for a long time—this chance to finally draw him in and entrap him. Snoke seized the opportunity to reinforce to Ben that he could not make it on his own, and as his uncle had just dramatically taught him—he had no real choices.

“Your parents have disowned you,” Snoke said, before angrily continuing, “And your uncle feared you growing power so much that he tried to murder his own nephew in cold blood.”

Ben knew it was true.

His parents had made it clear that Ben would not be allowed to follow his father in the path he wanted. No, his destiny was written in stone through his maternal Skywalker lineage—and it absolutely terrified him. He had learned much during his time at the training temple, but his uncle’s last and most indelible lesson to Ben was that giving in to the darkness within him was not a choice—it was a path as fixed and unavoidable as his bloodline.
His parents had washed their hands of their Vaderspawn offspring, believing him to be a bad seed and lost cause. His uncle had chosen a more proactive intervention. No, his family was done with him . . . and in that moment Ben was done with his family.

“Not just your family, but everyone . . . you’ve seen the hate in their eyes,” Snoke added.

“No one will help the grandson of Vader. They will only seek to kill you,” Snoke fed Ben’s deep insecurities and feeling of isolation. “You’re nothing. Worse than nothing—you’re a monster to be feared and destroyed.” Snoke’s voice crescendoed in anger before abruptly softening.

“. . . but not to me.”

To Snoke alone being Darth Vader’s grandson was something to be proud of not something to fear . . .

Snoke continued soothingly, “To me you are truly special. Your raw, untamed power is what all true masters live to see.” Snoke’s voice swelled with passion and promise, “Come to me. I will help you follow in your grandfather’s footsteps, and fulfill your destiny as his rightful heir.”

For a third time Snoke offered Ben an alternative destination.

Again Ben hesitated.

He had resisted Snoke for so long. An emotional mess, however, Ben ate up Snoke’s poisonous words, and his resolve crumbled.

Unlike Luke facing a similar temptation decades before, Ben was not aboard the Falcon with his friends about to jump to lightspeed after Artoo fixed the hyperdrive, and heading toward the welcoming arms of the Rebel Alliance.
Ben was alone and vulnerable, believing his parents had thrown him away and his uncle had just tried to kill him. Convinced he was out of other options, Ben at last succumbed and entered the coordinates the voice had provided into the ship’s navigational computer.

The Knights of Ren
Chapter End Notes

I think it is significant that Artoo is also at the training temple (as evidenced by Rey's
Force vision). Although I sadly don’t think they will have time to do much with him in episode IX, I actually think Artoo is one of the most important characters in the whole Skywalker saga. He is the only character who was actually present and has an intact memory of the events of all three generations of Skywalker men. He was close to Anakin and Luke, and I think it makes sense (and otherwise would be a missed opportunity) that he would also be close to Ben.

I also think another way to conceptualize Ben/Kylo Ren is his situation is analogous to what would have happened if Bruce Wayne/Batman had stayed allied with the League of Shadows. And in that analogy, for me Artoo would have totally been Alfred.

Thank you very much for reading, and for the comments and kudos. They are much appreciated!

Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

SWC: Kylo Ren and the Portrayal of Masculinity in Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5nGoYklHu8

LOTS Podcast: Psychology of the Characterization: Kylo Ren
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsdViE8mse4

LOTS Podcast: How Will Kylo Redeem Himself?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBo--5T9Qmk&t=1640s

Artwork: Art of the Last Jedi, page 83
Knights of Ren Artwork: Art of The Force Awakens, page 212, 223
Chapter Summary

The corruption and brainwashing of Ben Solo, and the rise of Kylo Ren.

Chapter Notes

Like Starkiller base, I think Kylo’s red lightsaber has some interesting parallels to his fall to the dark side, and relationship with Snoke.

According to Wookiepedia here is where red kyber crystals come from:

“Kyber crystals were inherently attuned to the light side of the Force, and resisted any effort by dark-side practitioners to use them in lightsabers. To this end, a Sith or other dark-sider could use a kyber crystal only by using the Force to dominate the crystal, bending it to their will. This process caused the crystal to "bleed," as if it were a living organism, resulting in the distinctive crimson-bladed lightsabers synonymous with the Sith. It was possible to "heal" a corrupted kyber crystal . . . [in which case] the crystals turned white.”

I find the symbolism of the coded as Eve and a captured princess, genderbent Kylo ending up with a cracked red (like apples, pomegranates, and blood) kyber crystal kicking up his relationship with Snoke to a whole new level of ick.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter 7: The Dark Knight

Over the course of Supreme Leader Snoke’s millennia-long life, the ancient serpentine humanoid had witnessed much and learnt great deal.

He watched the rise and fall of both the Jedi and the Sith. He witnessed the slow decay of the Republic, Emperor Palpatine’s carefully crafted rise to power, and the resulting Galactic Civil War. He watched with increasing interest the collapse of the Empire and the New Republic’s failure to integrate the remaining Imperials into their new society—leaving them ripe for Snoke’s picking.

And over the last several decades—from the earliest moments of life—Snoke had closely watched Ben Solo.

Palpatine had been wise to not only want Anakin Skywalker as a powerful apprentice, but in
securing his allegiance the Sith Lord had also removed the possibility of having the young Jedi as a formidable foe.

As Snoke seized control of the remnants of the Imperials and fashioned them more fully into the First Order, he was not surprised that Vader’s demigod children were his main adversaries. The Supreme Leader also had no interest in adding Vader’s grandson to his list of enemies.

Palpatine’s downfall was underestimating the strength of family ties, and it had cost him his empire and his life. It was not a mistake Snoke planned to repeat.

Even if nobody else understood at the time, Snoke knew the potential strength with the Force the boy’s Skywalker bloodline foreshadowed meant that as he grew into his Force gift Ben Solo would personally shift the balance of power to whichever side held his allegiance. Fully aware of the boy’s existence even in his mother’s womb, Snoke had begun stalking and exerting his insidious influence over Ben’s mind and development from before he was even born.

Had Ben had a more attentive family, Snoke knew his plan likely would have been much more difficult to execute or possibly not worked at all. Thankfully the boy’s family was spectacularly neglectful, and poisoning Ben’s relationship with his parents and uncle had not been particularly difficult. His family had so ill prepared him for the truth about his lineage that Snoke knew from his vantage point inside of Ben’s mind that the boy justifiably considered withholding the truth about Vader to be a lie.

Even after the victory of such a damaging betrayal, however, there still came the dangerous moment when Ben wished to follow his mother and fight the First Order. Snoke knew that if Ben Solo had joined the Resistance all the Supreme Leader’s efforts would have been for naught, and the boy would have likely been lost to him for good. Visions of Ben Solo and Poe Dameron flying tandem circles around Hux’s forces was not something Snoke liked to think about, nor thankfully did he have to.

Leia Organa had played her part beautifully in Snoke’s plan. The stupid woman thought she could keep her son safely out of the fight, and only succeeded in widening the gap between the boy and his family. The final nail in the coffin had been ironically delivered by Skywalker himself. To Snoke’s great delight, it was the redeemer of Vader who had been the catalyst to finally allow Snoke to lure Ben Solo away from his family for his own twisted purposes.

At long last Ben Solo was his . . .
Of all the children Snoke had snatched from throughout the galaxy, stealing the massively talented crown prince of the New Republic out from under his parents and Jedi Master uncle’s noses was one of the Supreme Leader’s greatest achievements. Furthermore, the Skywalker twins were both a thorn in Snoke’s side, and he took great pleasure in hurting their family in such a personal way.

Although he kept his true opinion carefully hidden from the boy—keeping Ben’s self-esteem as low as possible was after all essential to keeping him controllable and preventing him from becoming a threat to Snoke himself—Ben had turned out to be stronger with the Force and to have more potential than Snoke could have ever hoped.

Even with Ben Solo safely aboard the *Supremacy*, however, Snoke knew the boy still needed to be handled with great care.

Ben had resisted Snoke for his entire life. Although he was full of the darkness he had inherited from Vader, his own light had risen up within him to meet and balance it. No matter how much anger Ben had, and no matter how much Snoke got inside his head, messed with his emotions, and tried to cultivate the darkness in him, Ben had consistently chosen not to use it, and clung to the light. Ben also had his father’s good heart, and chosen to be a good person and live a life of diligent virtue, even with very little encouragement or outside reinforcement.

The other Knights had needed no convincing, and Snoke had outfitted them for his service immediately. But Snoke knew even though he was in physical possession of Ben Solo, he would not be able gain the boy’s allegiance or cooperation with promises of power, wealth, glory, or any of the other things that usually worked to draw young men away from the light—and was even now working with the rest of the Ben’s companions.

No, the only thing that would work to turn Ben Solo’s heart was the one thing he craved so desperately: family.

Although Kylo Ren would on day believe his fatal flaw was his carefully cultivated out of control temper, it was Ben Solo’s need for parental approval and family connections that was his greatest weakness. Fairly impressively it was at that point Ben’s only major weakness that Snoke could exploit, but Snoke was more than up to the task.
It also tied in perfectly to the Supreme Leader’s plans for Ben anyway. Well aware of the power of symbols, Snoke sought to provide the First Order with as many reminders as possible of the Empire from which it descended—and there was no more powerful visual representation of Imperial heritage than Vader.

Privately Snoke viewed the Sith Lord as the glorified lackey and enforcer that he had been, whom in the Emperor’s arrogance and overconfidence Palpatine had fatally mismanaged. Publicly, however, Snoke sought out every possible Vader relic he could find—even pulling the chard and deformed mask off Vader’s funeral pyre on Endor.

In acquiring the grandson of Vader, Snoke possessed the ultimate Vader relic and trophy—the living embodiment of the Dark Lord.

A New Vader.

With their own Vader circumventing normal military command and terrorizing everyone, the First Order would finally look like the Heir to the Empire that it was. Snoke would also have his own gifted apprentice and enforcer as well—one he would do a much better job of keeping on a leash than the ill-fated Palpatine.

The first time he came face to face with Supreme Leader Snoke, Ben knew he was in serious trouble.

Ben’s fears were calmed, however, by the thought he could escape the First Order anytime he wanted. He could fly anything, and benefiting from both his father and Artoo believing that hotwiring spaceships was an essential life skill, he could also easily steal a ship.

The Supreme Leader had also been lavish with his welcome and hospitality in the beginning—never once trying to keep Ben with him by physical force, and carefully weaving his spell so the young man would not bolt—which further lulled Ben into inaction.
Besides which Ben literally had nowhere else to go . . . something of which Snoke regularly reminded him.

Snoke did not rush Ben, even going so far as to give him a degree of mental space. Knowing too that the only way to truly win over the young man was through his grandfather, Snoke also provided Ben with full access to the Imperial archives the First Order had acquired and into which they had sliced.

History had always been Ben’s favorite subject in school, and as he worked his way through the records of the Empire he got a startlingly different viewpoint on all the events he thought he knew so well. In any conflict it is the privilege of the victors write history, and Ben was immersing himself in the version of events he would have learnt if the Battle of Endor or the final battle over Jakku had ended differently.

Ben was also getting a very different perspective of his grandfather, the Lord Darth Vader.

Anakin Skywalker had rescued Chancellor Palpatine when he had been kidnapped during the Clone Wars, and again save his life when the Jedi tried to assassinate him. Then his grandfather had also stood by the Republic and stopped the Jedi when they tried to overthrow the government.

Ben also learnt that his grandfather wore the mask and body armor that struck fear in the hearts of his enemies only after his close mentor, Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi, sought to avenge the Jedi by cutting off all Vader’s limbs and leaving him to die on the fiery slopes of Mustafar.

Ben suddenly began to wonder about many things.

Did anyone else have the records into which the First Order had slice? And where had the version of events Ben had learnt in school come from regarding Vader and the Jedi, anyway?

With regard to the Jedi, Ben knew the answer was simple: Lor San Tekka.

Ben knew for a fact that the old explorer’s blind devotion had glossed over a great many inconvenient truths about the Jedi of the Old Republic. How was anyone to know whether or not that included San Tekka’s assertions that the Jedi were innocent victims rather than aggressors who had been justly fended off? With a convincing alternative available, Ben no longer felt compelled to swallow everything San Tekka fed him about the Jedi like his mother and everyone else did.
Ben now asked himself a question no one had ever bothered to ask him before: what did he personally think of the Jedi of the Old Republic? After being forced to live by the Jedi Code for a whole year, that was easy—Ben thought the Jedi were crazy.

And what of Vader?

Belief that Vader had renounced his allegiance to the Galactic Empire and been “redeemed” from the dark side before his death rested on the testimony of the sole remaining eyewitness, Luke Skywalker . . . Ben’s uncle who had tried to murder him like Obi-Wan had tried to murder Vader.

Psychologically Ben was, therefore, left with a choice regarding his grandfather: his uncle had believed the most evil man in the history of galaxy was not beyond redemption but his nephew who had not committed any major crimes was not, or the man who had tried to murder his nephew in his sleep had lied to get his twin sister out of a sticky political situation, and Vader had been a martyr of the Empire. In the end Ben ended up accepting both on some level, but consciously told himself he believed the latter.

Furthermore, having grown up around the chaos of the New Republic Senate that his mother had spent his entire childhood trying to wrangle into some semblance of a manageable government, Ben found that the ideals of the Galactic Empire—order, structure, peace—were ones with which he agreed. And these were the principals on which the First Order was founded . . .

That night Ben found himself in his usual recurring nightmare, standing in the dimly light cave. Out of a darker part of the cavern Ben heard the sound of heavy footsteps, then mechanical breathing, and Darth Vader strode towards him out of the shadows. For the first time Ben did not scream or try to flee. Ben stood still and looked at his grandfather . . . as Vader reached one black-gloved hand out to him in invitation. Ben took a step towards him and reached out his own hand in answer, and as his fingers touched the black glove that covered his grandfather’s mechanical hand Ben abruptly woke up.

For the first time in over a year he did not wake up screaming.

The night before he had gone to sleep still Ben Solo. The morning after the dream he woke up accepting the darkness within him, and thinking of himself as Kylo Ren.
Following weeks of immersing himself in the Imperial archives, Kylo emerged personally aligned with his grandfather’s side, the heir of which was the First Order.

Whether on the dark side or the light, good and evil had also become concepts relative to one’s own point of view. Imbued with this new worldview, Ben came to an acceptance that there was no such thing as objective truth, and any action was justifiable in pursuit of noble goals.

To that end Kylo was ready to take up the role in the First Order that Snoke had been carefully grooming him for throughout his entire life.

To become strong with dark side of the Force like his grandfather was his destiny—Kylo accepted that. But he also knew it was something he could not accomplish alone. He needed someone to show him his place in all this. He needed a teacher.

Supreme Leader Snoke—the only one in the galaxy who could help Kylo become a New Vader—graciously accepted Kylo as his apprentice, and assumed the responsibility for housing, outfitting, and training the gifted Force-user.

In anticipation of the inevitable, Kylo’s quarters on the Supremacy were already prepared by the time he had need of them. Styled in black and chrome metal they were multi-roomed and quite spacious for being aboard ship.

Laid out on his new bed, Kylo also found the attire that had been prepared for him to fully bring to life the persona of Kylo Ren. Soon Kylo found himself clad head to toe in black leather pants, long sleeved shirt, high boots, and gloves. Over that was the regalia of a knight of old, to which was added a cape and cowl.

Then of course there was the mask.

Although an echo, Kylo’s new mask was not a duplicate of Vader’s. It was styled in black metal, eyeless, with chrome accents that reflected the light.
It was beautiful.

Kylo had been figuratively wearing a mask for a while, and putting on his new physical one made him feel better concealed and more powerful.

In addition to a mask of his own, Snoke had also entrusted to Kylo his most precious article: the recovered mask of the Lord Darth Vader—although Snoke would not tell Kylo from where it had been obtained. Both masks made Kylo feel powerfully allied with his grandfather, now the only male in his family for whom he had any respect.

As a New Vader he would of course also need to construct a new lightsaber, which according to Snoke meant a new kyber crystal. Living fruit of the Force, kyber crystals were rare. A crystal that had been subjugated by a Sith until it bled red was even rarer. Snoke had such a red crystal.

While Vader had corrupted his own kyber crystal to fashion his new red saber, Snoke had simply given Kylo one that was already red. The blood colored crystal was cracked and corrupted by impurities that resulted in the red blade possessing a jagged angry edge. The saber of Kylo Ren also gave off a spitting sound and crackled with power when ignited.

It could not have been more different from the lightsaber Ben Solo had constructed for himself—one of traditional design, with a strongly bright blue white blade possessing a sleek clean edge and a pure sound. Snoke had made Kylo destroy his old lightsaber with his new one the second the red saber was constructed.

Kylo had also included cross guards in his new design. Principally, they acted as a release valve for the excess power that was emitted from the new saber. Although initially conceived of as an additional layer of protection for himself, Kylo occasionally ended up using the guards to inflict damage on his opponents.

The young ace, who was now the property of the First Order, also soon found out what it was like to fly a TIE fighter. While TIEs could really move and were quite maneuverable, Kylo found he still preferred an X-wing. Opportunity to compare the two models did not last long, however, as Snoke soon presented Kylo with his own starfighter—a TIE Silencer—the latest prototype of what had been Vader’s ship. In addition to superior weapons and flight controls to a regular TIE fighter, the Silencer was also customized to Kylo’s preferences and specifications.
Both Kylo’s new saber and starfighter conveyed raw power and hyperaggression, foreshadowing the destruction he would inflict throughout the galaxy upon the enemies of the First Order. Kylo soon found he had need for such outlets for his growing anger and hostility particularly after Snoke began his dark side training in earnest . . . and Kylo began to learn the true cost of all the gifts Snoke was lavishing upon him.

At the Jedi training temple, Luke had never appreciated just how easy the skills he was teaching were for his nephew, who skated by on talent, wowed with half-assed attempts, and left training sessions unchallenged and bored. Snoke, however, refused to tolerate anything less than maximum effort from his new apprentice. Kylo soon found himself unimaginably powerful in the Force, and shocked by what he could do—like stop a blaster bolt in midair.

Kylo’s new master also regularly reminded him that if he was to be a New Vader he had to act like it—that his destiny was not merely to grow strong with the Force, but strong with the dark side. To that end, Kylo gradually found himself learning to control people both mentally and physically through the Force.

Corrupting Ben Solo was a delicate process, and Snoke was patient—to a point. In the beginning if he had ordered Kylo to torture someone with the mindprobe Kylo would have refused and let Snoke kill him with blue lightning before changing his mind. Snoke, however, did not immediately attempt to coerce his apprentice into misuses of the Force that were squarely on the dark side. Instead Snoke fed Kylo a steady diet of Vader, and reinforced the worldview where good and evil were relative, and anything was justified for the sake of their good cause to which Kylo had previously been brainwashed.

Under Snoke’s ministrations, Kylo gradually became skilled in performing the mindprobe to learn other’s secrets—along with inflicting further punishments—and routinely committed other atrocities and acts of violence. Unlike learning to fly with Artoo or even his initial miserable training in the Force with his uncle, Kylo never felt good about learning to use the dark side of the Force. It made him feel empty and dead inside.

Snoke was also hypercritical and exacting in his expectations. Kylo often found himself receiving a chest full of blue lightning if he failed to meet them, or managed to incurred his master’s wrath in some other way. Furthermore, the training method his master employed to develop his dark side skills usually involved Snoke first performing them on his young apprentice, and then forcing Kylo to practice on the unfortunate individuals the Supreme Leader had designated for the task.

But as Snoke repeatedly pointed out to Kylo, any harshness on his part was Kylo’s own fault due to his poor work ethic during training, or the young Force user’s failure to live up to his potential—something to which Snoke was graciously dedicating his time and wisdom to help Kylo achieve.
Kylo knew Snoke was turning him into a weapon. He also knew from the Imperial archives that that was what his grandfather had been for the Empire. Accepting and eventually embracing that role in the First Order, Kylo became a beast that Snoke unleashed on his enemies and victims.

Unlike Leia, Snoke also had no problems using Kylo’s considerable piloting skills in the service of the First Order. The TIE Silencer was not Kylo’s dream black X-wing, but it was just as sleek and even more deadly. Far and away the best fighter pilot in the First Order, Kylo soon added scores of his childhood dream ships to his kill list.

Quickly bored with traditional fighter combat, Kylo soon left enemy starfighters to the rank and file TIE pilots, instead turning his sights to bigger prey: capital ships.

His favorite trick was evading a ship’s own weaponry, infiltrating the hanger—preferably containing unlaunched starfighters—and delivering a devastating salvo of missiles into vulnerable belly of the enemy. His other was finding the weak points in a ship’s shields, which if they were fleeing Hux and the First Order capital ships often meant the bridge was left vulnerable to Kylo.

And if the capital ship in questions was the flagship? Well, that usually meant the battle itself would soon be over, as when Kylo had effectively cut off their head, the rest of the leaderless opposition’s forces were quickly neutralized.

He had soon built up such a reputation that the mere sight of his starfighter incited fear in the enemy that he could feel through the Force.

Kylo’s deployment was not limited to space combat, however, and he frequently lent his destructive skillset to ground assault as well. In that endeavor he was join by the companions with which he had arrived—now formally designated as the Knights of Ren.

Snoke had also outfitted the other Knights for their new role, and Kylo found the rest of the group was already ready to go when he finally chose to rejoin them. Although the Knights of Ren bore more resemblance to a speeder bike or swoop gang than an elite unit of the First Order, the thought of them being set loose to lay waste to the countryside still incited terror in the community and planetary leaders Snoke was trying to either steal from or subdue.
For those foolish enough to resist the might of the First Order, Kylo’s command shuttle would descend among the TIE fighter air cover like a raptor, the ramp would lower, and the Knights would stride out into the fray. They would then roll through the opposition, doling out death by lightsaber, destruction, and mayhem.

Although they now bore his name, Kylo knew he was still not really the their master. As long as he occasionally led them into opportunity for mayhem and violence, however, they were content to have him for their leader and for the most part do his bidding.

Whether inciting bedlam on the ground with the other Knights of Ren or in space with his TIE Silencer, Kylo quickly became the First Order’s most effective first strike weapon. Without him slicing through their enemies the First Order would have never been able seize control of so many star systems at such great speed.

Fear of his destructive potential was not limited to those outside the First Order. Patterning himself after Vader, who used his lethal temper to motivate the troops, Kylo practiced imitation of his grandfather until his calculated loss of control became almost equally effectively. That usually meant terrorizing poor Lieutenant Mitaka. Kylo knew the junior officers drew straws when there was bad news to be delivered to him—or any news at all that required standing in his presence. Privately Kylo thought Mitaka had the worst luck of which he had ever heard.

The persona of Kylo Ren was also the antithesis of Ben Solo. Ben was polite, kind, and considerate. Possessing an almost endless supply of patience, which frequently veered off into a dysfunctional degree of passivity, he routinely choose to suppress his feelings rather than let them be visible to others.

Kylo Ren was everything everyone conveyed to Ben they expected someone with Vader’s darkness to inevitably be. He was an arrogant jerk, who treated others horribly, was terrifying and dangerous, and was worthy of all the looks he had gotten on Hosnian Prime as Vader’s grandson. With his grandfather’s explosive temper as the expected model for how to deal with emotions—the only acceptable one being anger—Kylo ceased to suppress his, instead converting his sadness into aggression, and using it to fuel his rapidly growing dark side powers.

Being a Vader, however, did not come naturally to Kylo. Even with all his hard work to maintain his proper image, his true self would still occasionally slip through a crack. Unlike his grandfather, Kylo frequently chose to leave most of the individuals who experienced his chastisement alive, which he justified to himself as his desire to swell the ranks of those who had received a lesson. Far from damaging his reputation among the rank and file, however, Kylo’s occasional bouts of mercy—as stormtrooper FN 2187 would one day experience in a small village on Jakku—made him even
more unsettlingly unpredictable and only increased the fear in which he was held.

Resultantly, while Kylo choked many an underling and destroyed a great deal of electronic equipment, his actual body count among military personnel was nowhere near that of his grandfather or even Hux.

Upon officially joining the First Order, Kylo had unsurprisingly also immediately become one of Snoke’s top three lieutenants, along with Captain Phasma and General Armitage Hux.

Phasma’s role in the First Order was turning the children Snoke stole from across the galaxy into the legions of stormtroopers, who collectively would bring peace and order to the galaxy under the First Order’s rule. Started by Hux’s father, Brendol Hux, the First Order’s program for transforming children into trained soldiers was modeled after the Jedi Order of the Old Republic.

Kylo thought her job was insane, but Phasma herself was good at it. The captain of the stormtroopers also understood where she fell in the pecking order in relation to him, and Kylo never had any trouble coexisting alongside her.

Hux was an entirely different story.

The bastard son of one of the founding officers of the First Order, Armitage Hux had risen through nepotism instead of experience or merit. Kylo, who had always valued competence, efficiency, and honesty, had no respect for Hux, whose skills appeared limited to taking credit for other people’s work, igniting his temper until it matched his flaming red hair—which to Kylo was merely Hux whining at high volume—and scheming to dispatch anyone who stood as an obstacle in his rise to power.

Kylo did not understand how Snoke could entrust an incompetent rabid cur with such a position of power, particularly when there were other officers available. Captain Moden Canady was an old school Imperial and experienced Star Destroyer captain. If Kylo had had a say in whom to put in charge of the First Order fleet his first choice would have been Canady. Unfortunately by the time he was in control of such decisions Canady’s prediction that Hux was the “idiot who is going to get us all killed,” had already come true for the old veteran.
Kylo’s second choice, Edrison Peavey was also a veteran of the Galactic Civil War and a founding member of the First Order. His ability to patiently feign respect in Hux’s presence while subtly steering his younger superior in the least inept direction had quickly caught Kylo’s eye. It had more than once struck Kylo that Peavey was the kind of man who could have ended up in several different occupations—but the times and circumstances in which he was born made a military career all but inevitable—and captaining a Star Destroyer and its accompanying forces was really the only thing the senior officer knew how to do.

Furthermore, Kylo and Hux could not have professionally been more different.

The ginger haired General of the First Order generally spent his time screaming orders and stomping around the bridge of whatever Star Destroyer he happened to be on, oblivious to the carefully concealed looks senior officers gave each other behind his back. Hux also loved excessive carnage and destruction, while Kylo at least initially approached war from a vantage point of restraint.

To his own mild surprise, Kylo himself turned out to be a cunning warrior and excellent overall tactician—crossing into the realm of genius when it came to starfighter combat.

Flying wing for the Silencer was a privilege reserved for only the top TIE fighter pilots, who still knew Ren would always be the best. Their jobs consisted mainly in following his lead, covering him, and taking the shots for which he skillfully set them up.

Trained from an early age for leadership, Kylo found he was also comfortable giving orders and deploying troops allocated for his use in a level headed manner. He was also not above pulling his division, calling off an attack, or making other adjustments on the rare occasion a battle was not going his way.

Kylo’s overall philosophy was one of restraint and efficiently, with a goal to subdue the opposition with the least amount of life lost on both sides. Although possessing a personal preference for acting mainly in self-defense, when Kylo needed to send a message it was done on his part with the goal of deferring further bloodshed in the future . . . although his tolerance for violence and mental justification for it grew over time.

While the lives of stormtroopers and fleet personnel were cheap to Vader, who had never made the mental shift from commanding clones back to individual people, his grandson differed greatly. While still holding Kylo in terror, the smarter troops of the First Order privately knew their lives were much safer in Kylo’s hands than in Hux’s. Furthermore, unlike Hux who gave orders from the safety of a Star Destroyer bridge somewhere far away from the fighting, Kylo was usually on
the ground fighting along side them. While he remained outside the normal chain of military command, the “sir” Kylo was addressed with was nonetheless an earned title of genuine respect.

When it came to ground combat Kylo, the rest of the Knights of Ren, and the stormtroopers assigned to him handled everything that did not require heavy weaponry. Not that they were incapable, but Kylo quickly learned that Hux would become so insufferably annoying if he did not get to periodically play with his war toys, that the Force user stayed alert for opportunities to let the other man occasionally have his own way.

An additional difference between Hux and his older more qualified subordinates, was Hux’s deep commitment to advanced technology, a trait that would have been a great asset in a competent officer who also embraced the wisdom of the past. To Hux’s mind, computers—particularly the supercomputer on the *Supremacy* which incorporated hyperdrive tech to speed up processing to light speed—were vastly more important than Phasma’s expendable troops.

Not that he had a hand in developing any of the technology he loved so much. But Hux *appreciated* it.

Hux was extremely proud of the technological marvels and advanced weaponry others had created under his watchful eye, and he, furthermore, deeply resent it being upstaged by Kylo Ren and his *unnatural* powers.

Kylo sliced through the opposition with surgical precision, typically leaving the glorious forces of the First Order war machine with nothing to contribute but to mop up after him. After wreaking havoc on the leadership of the opposition, Kylo would return to the flagship, and saunter onto the bridge for a brief debriefing. With Kylo’s own work having been completed, when it came time for the tedious and thankless job of post battle clean up more often than not Kylo would simply tell Hux “I leave that to you” and—to Hux’s mind—cockily strut back to the Knights or to his quarters.

Worst of all, after having spent years overseeing the construction of Starkiller Base, Hux was livid that Kylo showed up out of the blue one day and suddenly became the First Order’s top super weapon. With Kylo around, Snoke seemed to be taking Hux and the technology, for which Hux contributed to in a supervisory capacity, increasingly for granted, including the nearly complete Starkiller Base.

Hux was not one to take the intolerable situation lying down, and although they were technically on the same side, he was constantly on the look out for ways to undermine his Force wielding
The most memorable was perhaps the time Hux had subtly but deliberately pulled the First Order forces back so they were out of range to cover Kylo’s fighter.

“Ren, the enemy has pulled out of range. We can’t cover you at this distance. Return to the fleet,” Hux had informed Kylo.

At the time it had required Kylo to return his Silencer to the hanger leaving Hux to the enjoyable task of pounding away at the enemy with a barrage from the Star Destroyer’s turbolasers—but his Force sensitive rival had known exactly what Hux had done. Kylo had been mad, Snoke had been madder, and that had put an end to that ploy.

On a personal level, Kylo and Hux absolutely loathed one another, and over the years they were constantly at odds and at each other’s throats—sometimes quite literally.

Hux unreservedly worshiped Snoke. Unlike Kylo, Hux felt not the slightest tinge of inner conflict, instead resembling a vicious animal in love with a master more evil than himself. Beyond his furry towards Kylo for upstaging his weaponry, Hux was also deeply jealous and resentful that Kylo was clearly Snoke’s favorite, and upon whom Snoke lavished more attention.

In the early days of their rivalry, before Hux better understood Kylo’s powers, Hux had tried having Kylo’s food poisoned. Kylo had immediately felt the disturbance in the Force, and with ease had uncovered the plot. It was not an incident that Kylo could ignore for his own future self-preservation, and it pushed him beyond his normal voluntary uses of his powers.

Vader would have summarily executed the entire kitchen staff. Kylo took the time to mindprobe them all and identify the guilty party. In front of Hux and their innocent counterparts on Starkiller Base, Kylo had systematically executed the members of the conspiracy by crushing their windpipes one by one, with a look at Hux that clearly communicated that no matter what his rank if he ever tried anything like that again Kylo would kill him too.

Snoke had been more to the point, himself inflicting enough physical punishment on Hux to appease Kylo’s rage over the incident. As much as Snoke enjoyed pitting the two of them against each other, the Supreme Leader made abundantly clear what Kylo had already sensed: as long as Snoke lived he would not tolerate—even by accident—the two lieutenants killing each other.
Privately, Snoke had been quit pleased by the incident as Kylo had been forced to take matters into
his own hands—performing the mindprobe of his own initiative, and executing the guilty as a
necessary deterrent towards future attempt on his life. To Kylo the incident also emphasized
Snoke’s mindset that while his master could do anything he wanted to his apprentice, no one else
was allowed to touch Kylo.

Kylo thought Hux was ridiculously incompetent, and contemptuously viewed him with a complete
lack of respect. He would, however, have gladly traded places with him when it came to his
relationship with Snoke.

His master gave him all the personal attention he could possibly want. . . and much Kylo did not.

All his fears and insecurities were still there, something Snoke knew all about and exploited to the
fullest. But on the outside—covered head to toe and styled to resemble Vader—Kylo now masked
his inadequacies over with unbridled rage, aggression, and arrogance that failed to slipped into
overconfidence solely because his Force powers and piloting skills were so immense.

Everyone both without and within the First Order remained in awed terror of the Dark Knight, Kylo
Ren. With any hint of weakness, vulnerability, or his true feelings hidden beneath his mask and
multiple layers of clothing, from the outside he appeared invincible and to be in complete
command.

And Kylo was grateful that the shameful truth of what was happening to him remained a secret.

Dark side training with Snoke was a living nightmare. Snoke had quickly striped away all his
mental barriers, and Kylo found himself laid bare for his master’s critique and criticism. But Snoke
repeatedly point out that it was only right—an apprentice should have no secrets from his master.

The best Kylo could do was push things he did not want Snoke to see off to the periphery in hopes
his master would over look them, but Snoke took a perverse pleasure in finding whatever it was
Kylo was trying to keep private. Kylo kept practicing, however, knowing deep down that one day
his life would depend on his ability to even temporarily hide something from Snoke.
Kylo eventually found himself giving—or more accurately letting Snoke take—everything his master wanted and everything Kylo had.

And what Snoke wanted was power.

Kylo discovered that a sizeable portion of his master’s motivation for training him and cultivating his power with the Force was so Snoke could leach it from him. Resultantly, spending any time connected to Snoke in the Force left Kylo feeling drained and profoundly used. Worst of all, the look of ecstasy on Snoke’s face and the tone of his voice as he drained off some of the young Force user’s energy made Kylo feel physically filthy.

He fervently wished he could go back and refuse everything Snoke bestowed upon him as he was groomed for life in the First Order—the refuge after his uncle tried to kill him, the Silencer, the high position in the First Order and everything that went with it—everything that was supposed to make what Snoke was taking from him a fair and palatable exchange.

Because it wasn’t.

By that point, however, Kylo felt powerless to get away. He realized the monstrous weapon of mass destruction the First Order was building was an apt metaphor for what was happening to him. Starkiller Base harnessed the energy of the sun—until the sun was completely gone—before using that energy to obliterate not merely single planets but entire star systems.

How long would it be until Snoke sucked him completely dry? And what would become of him when he had been drained of all his power?

Those questions weighed heavily on Kylo’s mind as gazed out of the Finalizer and watched the maiden launch of Starkiller.
His mother had stood with her dark father and watched the Death Star destroy Alderaan. There was no warlord and captured princess on the bridge of the Star Destroyer to watch Starkiller’s destruction of the Hosnian system, just Kylo—who himself was an embodiment of both. He stood alone and watched his homeworld die, along with his childish dream of someday returning home.

In his heart Kylo felt nothing but the profoundest depth of despair.
Thank you very much for reading, and for the comments and kudos. They are much appreciated! Also feel free to come say hi on Tumblr, https://jp2187.tumblr.com/

One of the things I am enjoying about the ST is how many different kinds of love triangles it has.

I think "Ben, Rey, and Snoke" is the main (incredibly creepy) love triangle we've seen so far.

Then we have "Rey, Ben, and Finn." Which in my mind can pretty much be summarized as, Finn: "Back off my sister." Ben & Rey: "No."

The maternal "Leia, Ben, and Poe (stand in for the Resistance in general)," is one I find quite interesting, and am sorry they won't likely be able to do anything with the passing of Carrie Fisher :( . . . but I am resolving it, dang it!

And then of course the totally messed up "Snoke, Kylo, Hux" rivalry triangle. I love Hux and Kylo fighting so much.

Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

SWC: Snoke in the TFA parts 1 & 2
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQK8QkqogEw&t=81s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFr-vQvHYsc&t=64s

SWC: Kylo Ren and the Portrayal of Masculinity in Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5nGoYkIHu8

LOTS Podcast: Psychology of the Characterization: Kylo Ren
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsdViE8mse4

SWC: Rey and Kylo as Adam and Eve parts 1 & 2
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MnYSctj1RM
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyEUSId-aa0

SWC: Rey’s Origins: Snoke is the Key
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SC6W2_Br26g

Wayward Jedi: Supreme Leader Snoke - A Mythic Case Study
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLDs7mtg9g4&t=285s

How Darth Vader Turned His Lightsaber RED (CANON) - Star Wars Explained
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwd2cEt14_U

Artwork: Art of The Force Awakens, page 13
“Let the Past Die—Kill It if You Have To”

Chapter Summary

This is the last chapter in Ben’s back story, and covers the events leading up to killing Han and confronting Luke from Ben’s point of view. It also covers Snoke’s agenda, and explores the parallels in the twisted relationship between Snoke/Kylo and Palpatine/Vader.

This is a psychology heavy chapter, and based largely on LOTS Podcast: Psychology of the Characterization: Kylo Ren, and SWC: Kylo Ren and the Portrayal of Masculinity in Star Wars, which I highly recommend checking out. (See Notes for summary).

Also, thank you to Blackeyedlily for your comment that helped a lot in writing about Luke and Ben’s relationship.

Thanks again for reading!

Chapter Notes

BRIEF SUMMARY OF LOTS/SWC PODCAST HIGHLIGHTS:

1. Son/Sun analogy: Starkiller Base, which absorbs the energy of the sun is an analogy for what Snoke is doing to Kylo, and destroying the Oscillator parallels everyone's efforts to destroy Snoke’s control over Kylo (Han not successful, Rey successful).

2. In terms of story telling symbols, Kylo is also the captured royal (princess who needs to be rescued).

PSYCHOLOGY HIGHLIGHTS:

1. SWC: Kylo Ren and the Portrayal of Masculinity in Star Wars

Kylo is trying to kill Ben Solo (weak, foolish, and good part of himself) when he kills Han. Thinks it will make him stronger, actually makes him weaker.

Freud: Castration Fear of boys. Subconsciously fear father will kill you, so imitate him / ally with him.

Kylo killing Han, ultimate failed resolution of castration fear. (Also of note, father figure Luke did actually try to kill Ben).

2. Heinz Kohut's self psychology model (LOTS Podcast: Psychology of the
Characterization: Kylo Ren

Narcissistic Traits (NOT Narcissistic Personality Disorder)

I believe I have a core flaw that is unbearable (does not have to be true but I believe it is).

In response I build a hard outer shell (narcissistic projection) that is magnificent (outward exaggerated self worth) to conceal what I perceived is the flaw. I don’t want anyone to know about the flaw, and I myself don’t want to consciously know about it.

When I experience a slight that is confirming to me my biggest fear and perceive my flaw will be “found out” (by others or brought to my conscious’ attention) this causes me anxiety and a great deal of distress, resulting in a rageful outburst.

Anger is more acceptable than being sad, and is also how I communicate my needs are not being met.

My core need is for validation and love.

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BEN (narcissistic projection --> KYLO REN)

TRAUMA: Neglect, parental (emotional) abandonment, uncle tried to murder him.

CORE BELIEF (perceived “flaw”): Ben believes he is unlovable, weak (“never be as strong as Darth Vader), and nothing (“You’re nothing”).

EVIDENCE of “flaw/weakness” (leads actively trying to avoid being “found out,” by other and own conscious awareness. In Ben’s case fueled heavily by Snoke):
Goodness, good heart (“weak and foolish like his father . . . you have your father’s heart”), attraction to the Light, his remaining inner light. (of note: opposite of Vader).

NARCISSISTIC INJURY: Unable tolerate reminders of his family’s rejection / rejection / reminders of his weakness and nothingness without lashing out.

- Reminder of his family (San Tekka) --> kills San Tekka
- Evidence of attraction to the Light, goodness in his heart, failure with Rey, weak “child in a mask” (Snoke in throne room) --> Smashes mask in turbolift, jumps in starfighter to blow things up.
- Rey’s rejection (throne room): Battle of Crait meltdown

DEFENSIVE CONSTRUCT: While I fervently hope Kylo goes to Vader’s Castle as a warped place of refuge and safety, I think Kylo’s own defensive construct is actually the Knights of Ren. I don’t know if they will be used that way in IX, but I can definitely see the Knights trying to kill Rey to “protect” Kylo.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter 8: “Let the Past Die—Kill It if You Have To”

Although Snoke alone was privy to the irony, the First Order was misleadingly named . . . because the Supreme Leader's ultimate objective had nothing to do with order.

Unlike Palpatine, whose ambition was personal power and aggrandizement, Snoke’s true aim was a victory of the Dark for its own sake. The reward for his service was immortality—after a fashion—or at least the knowledge of how to endlessly cheat death.

Although few could comprehend the depravity of his true nature, the serpentine humanoid was a malevolent force of chaos, who wove his illusions under the cover of night, and delighted in fostering fear and inner sickness in the young . . . while he fed off their life-force.

He had lost count of how many apprentices he had run through over the centuries, although he admittedly went through them faster the further he distanced himself from what should have been the natural end of his mortal life.
He originally attributed Palpatine having Vader as the same apprentice for two decades additional evidence of the Emperor's inferior powers with the dark side. Once Snoke had his hands on Vader’s grandson, however, he realized that was only partially true. The strength of the power Snoke siphoned off Kylo was raw and intoxicating—and while the boy certainly was not going to last as long in his apprentice role as his grandfather had—for the first time in recent memory Snoke felt himself growing stronger and more powerful, and not simply staving off death.

Consequently, the Supreme Leader had no interest in his current relationship with the young Force user being disrupted.

Snoke had spent millennia in the service of the Dark, and at the present time in history only one thing could stop him from continuing his diabolical pursuits: the rise of the New Jedi and the rebalancing of the Force.

Preventing the refounding of the Jedi, therefore, quickly became Snoke’s obsession. His successful entrapment of Ben Solo—after the boy had destroyed Skywalker’s fledgling Jedi training temple no less—had gone a long way to safeguarding all his evil efforts.

But Snoke was well aware that his victories were not yet permanent—one only needed a passing knowledge of the late Emperor Palpatine’s rise and abrupt fall to understand that—and the Supreme Leader’s heightened vigilance to any threat corresponded to his fear.

And Snoke was afraid.

Although he believed himself far superior to Palpatine in every way, Snoke was, nevertheless, maligned by the same fears that secretly gripped the hearts of all tyrants—that some unforeseen nobody would rise out of nowhere and negate all that he had labored for so long to accomplish.

Underestimated nobodies, however, were the least of Snoke’s concerns at the moment—because powerful known enemies were still at large.

_Skywalker._
The last of the Jedi was the logical choice for the long anticipated Champion of the Light, and Snoke had no interest in waiting around for Skywalker to reappear and undo the fruits of his considerable labors.

“If Skywalker returns, the New Jedi will rise,” Snoke pounded into Kylo for the umpteenth time.

The Supreme Leader had done everything in his power to press upon his apprentice the primacy of making sure Skywalker never returned. First and foremost by ensuring the Resistance did not locate the Jedi Master, but then more definitively by having Kylo finish the purge that his Jedi Killer grandfather had started . . . by finding Skywalker and killing him.

Kylo, however, was destined to repeatedly fail Snoke in this, as he had first done so by not actually killing his old mentor before leaving the training temple. The Supreme Leader reserved his most vicious tongue-lashings for such occasions, which were accompanied by jolts of blue lighting straight to the young Force user’s chest.

“Skywalker lives! The seed of the Jedi Order lives! As long as he does hope lives in the galaxy!” Snoke would one day scream at Kylo for again failing him in this most vital of matters.

The Supreme Leader always kept explanations of his logic regarding the last Jedi intentionally vague to hide his principal reasons for wanting Skywalker dead . . . and the truth that Skywalker was not actually the Seed of the New Jedi Order or the Hope.

No, those titles belonged to the Heir of the Chosen One—the Heir of Anakin Skywalker.

Snoke was, therefore, certainly not going to disclose his concerns of exactly how the New Jedi would rise if Skywalker returned to anyone—particularly not to his apprentice who himself was in fact that heir.

The young Force user was the linchpin in the present conflict, and in this round of the epic struggle between the Light of the living Force and the Dark. Either the New Vader Kylo Ren would continue to secure victories for Dark and provide the power Snoke was currently enjoying to fend off death, or Ben Solo would shift the tide in favor of the Light and rebalance the Force.
There was no middle ground.

As much as the Supreme Leader ranted and raved about Luke Skywalker, therefore, it was Ben Solo who ultimately remained Snoke’s greatest adversary, and who posed the greatest threat—and Snoke kept the boy closer than he would have had he been purely his ally.

Using his apprentice as the unwitting agent to snuff out all avenues of hope for his own redemption added an additionally twisted layer to the present situation—but it was the kind of ironic scenario in which Snoke took delight.

To all outward appearances Snoke had succeeded in his goal of not having Vader’s grandson as his enemy. But that is all it really was—an appearance of victory.

Although he had inherited Vader’s darkness, within himself Ben Solo’s own light had risen to meet and balance it.

Furthermore, as strong as the dark side was in Ben Solo so too was the Light—which was additionally strengthened by the exercise of his free will. Ben Solo had remained incorruptible for so long by virtue of his consistent choice towards the Light, which Snoke himself had unwittingly and ironically increased in Ben as fighting against everything Snoke threw at him throughout his life had further strengthened Ben’s resolve.

Therefore, while copious amounts of work and opportunistic manipulation of circumstance that had gone into seducing Ben Solo to the dark side, Snoke knew it would not take as much effort to flip him back to his originally chosen path on the Light.

Snoke resultantly took every opportunity to beat the boy over the head with the lie that he did not have any real choices.

Furthermore, while Kylo remained on the dark side, maintaining control over him was still a delicate process. Snoke wanted him to increase his power in the dark side so Snoke could siphoned it—but not to become too strong or apprentice would become an imminent threat to master.

Like the oscillator on the Starkiller weapon, Snoke knew he had to keep careful control over Kylo’s
mind for the boy’s power in the Force to continue to be compressed into an exploitable tool for keeping the Supreme Leader alive. Just as a failed oscillator would result in a supernova engulfing Starkiller, so to Kylo’s power would blow up in Snoke’s face if the Supreme Leader failed to maintain his dominance.

In spite of Snoke’s vigilance, preserving his influence over his apprentice was a dicey affair.

While stormtrooper FN 2187’s act of high treason would come without warning, Kylo repeatedly showed signs of non-conformity with his programming, and he required infuriatingly endless rounds of reconditioning. Furthermore, although trying his best to adopt his grandfather’s Vaderisms, it went against his nature, and a furious Snoke could tell Kylo’s heart was not fully in it.

In particular, his apprentice’s bouts of mercy and compassion drove Snoke absolutely crazy. They were evidence that Ben Solo was still not quite gone. Until he was there was still hope that the boy could be turned and all of Snoke’s efforts could be undone. Kylo was also not half a man confined to a living coffin as his grandfather had been—if he turned there was still the possibility of Anakin’s original destiny being fulfilled.

And no matter what Snoke did, Ben Solo refused to die.

Ben knew he was running out of time. Soon the words he would one day tell his father would actually be true, and like the sun used to fuel Starkiller Base, Ben Solo would be really gone. But until that happened the part of him that was still Ben, who had been fighting Snoke his entire life and had developed a high degree of resiliency, was not going down without a fight no matter how many rounds he had lost over the last several years. Like a caged animal, even when the bars got increasingly thick, he never stopped searching for a way out or waiting for his jailer to make a mistake.

Snoke knew that the Force too would not give Ben Solo up to the dark side without a fight. The Light was obnoxiously determined, and Snoke had long waited for its Champion—Kylo’s equal in the light—to show up and try to take back Ben Solo. Likely it was Skwalker—who due to Palpatine’s stupidity and miscalculation had become the Redeemer of Vader.
Snoke would be damned if he would let his own Vader be redeemed.

The Supreme Leader planned to permanently end that possibility by having Kylo kill the Champion of the Light, thereby eliminating the possibility of Ben Solo being turned, and which would solidify the young Force user’s place in the dark side. To his credit, Snoke had avoided Palpatine’s mistake, and not underestimating family ties had more than prepared Kylo to kill his uncle.

But Skywalker was not the Light’s chosen Champion.

The serpentine humanoid had to laugh when in time he realized the Champion of the Light was not the last Jedi but a gullible maiden, barely trained in the ways of the Force. Skywalker of course would still have to be killed lest after the girl was dead the Light chose to send him instead—the Light of the living Force was maddeningly persistent as Snoke had learned over the millennia.

Rather than heeding the warning that his apprentice was strongly taken with this current embodiment of the Light, however, Snoke was relieved, and believed he could manipulate Kylo’s emotions in this new way as Palpatine—master manipulator of human sentiment—had done with Anakin.

In the end, however, Snoke succumbed to the fate of all tyrants.

The fully human Palpatine had made manipulating Anakin’s love for Padme look easy. The serpentine humanoid would one day learn that in the arena of romantic love he was not Palapine . . . and Kylo was not his grandfather.

In a fatal miscalculation of his own, Snoke died on the edge of Anakin’s lightsaber blade wielded by Ben Solo—truly his greatest enemy.

But that day had not yet come, and with Starkiller Base nearing completion, Snoke was content to scream at Kylo to find and kill Luke Skywalker.
Kylo had been with the First Order almost five years, and being trapped in an environment that was not conducive to sanity was taking a cumulative toll. It was no longer difficult to summon the anger to throw a Vader-like temper tantrum.

There was also nothing about which Kylo did not feel conflicted. He felt like he was literally being torn apart.

After watching his mother’s life be consumed by the bickering inefficiencies of the New Republic Senate, Kylo did not disagree with the principals of the First Order. If it was not for Snoke, Hux, and their weapons of mass destruction, Kylo would feel confident in presently being on the right side of history. The part of him that now believed everything was relative and justifiable for the noble end game did not care one-way or the other. The diminishing part of him that still believed in the concept of right and wrong, however, was resentful that being good had not stopped him from being kicked out of his family.

In the end he cast aside his moral compass in favor of a more nihilistic attitude.

With his memories making them ever present, the role his parents continued to play in Kylo’s life caused similar conflict. Furthermore, just as even after his parents had thrown him away like garbage he still loved them, Kylo simultaneously hated Snoke but could not stop needing him. He remembered the Supreme Leader’s words that had convinced him to come and pledge himself to his teachings, but could no longer remember how in the galaxy they had worked.

Kylo desperately wished he had never come to Snoke, but he lacked the strength to stand on his own, and he felt powerless to get out from under his master’s control and leave the First Order. Part of his future proposition on Starkiller to be Rey’s teacher was a genuine offer to teach her the ways of the Force in the hopes that if they were both strong enough then together they could defeat Snoke—Snoke who was happy to keep Kylo in conflict and neutralized as a threat to the Supreme Leader’s life and authority.

But even if Kylo did leave the First Order he still did not know where he would go and what he would do.
He heard through the rumor mill that his father had left his mother... and then lost the *Falcon*. Even if his parents would somehow take him back, his family physically no longer existed to which him could return.

Without Artoo Kylo also found a new depth to his loneliness. Superior to even the highest-ranking officers, he was not eating in the officer’s mess. Kylo also certainly was not dinning with Hux. He, furthermore, did not actually enjoy the Knight’s company, and when he had a choice—as he usually did—Kylo preferred to eat alone in his quarters as he had for most of his life.

Left alone, he talked a great deal to his grandfather’s mask, which Snoke had given him but repeatedly refused to tell him where it had been found. Kylo felt his grandfather was his only confidant and aid, and to Vader’s mask he poured out his heart—even if his grandfather never spoke back.

Kylo was lonely and miserable, but was too afraid to leave.

Adding to his already heavy burden, the humiliating weakness and vulnerability that he had experienced on the night his uncle had tried to kill him, Kylo now experience on a regular basis at the hands of his new master. It was a psychologically unbearable situation, and Kylo searched with increasing desperation for a way to escape.

Taking his anger and aggression out on others by destructively flashing his lighsaber around provided only temporary relief. Nor was this a problem Kylo could solve by jumping into his Silencer and blowing things up.

Kylo initially hoped that growing stronger in the dark side of the Force and becoming the New Vader Snoke wanted him to become would bring an end to the conflict and humiliation. However, after years in the service of First Order, part of Kylo knew deep down that Snoke was never going to help him reach his full potential, and it remained elusively out of reach. Kylo also came to realize that allying himself with Snoke would not prevent him from being routinely emasculated—and he began to contemplate other solutions to his problem.

Even if Kylo could find him, Master Skywalker was certainly never going to help him. His uncle after all had feared his power and tried to kill him.
His father had not made Kylo feel emasculated while he was growing up, but his father was also never around—and the rejection of his son Han’s neglect conveyed had done its own damage. Han Solo was also not Force sensitive, and his son had eventually figured out he was not strong enough to protect him from Snoke—no one was. His father was weak, foolish, and did not have any degree of strength with the Force. Kylo came to realized that in idolizing and emulating his father, Ben Solo had been just as inept.

No, in this situation no one was going to help Kylo become a man and fulfill his destiny. As usual he was going to have to rescue and raise himself.

For guidance all Kylo had left was the example of his grandfather . . . Vader who had destroyed the institution that raised him.

Looking into the mirror one night, Kylo finally spoke out loud to his reflection the solution to his predicament. “Let the past die—kill it if you have to. It’s the only way to become who you were meant to be.” In the reflection of his eyes, Kylo saw deep belief and conviction that his words were true.

To fulfill his destiny Kylo had to let his past and liberate himself from the influence of his parental figures—if necessary by killing them.

With Vader’s example the next leap in logic soon followed: it was necessary, and was the only way forward . . . he had to kill his fathers.

With Kylo’s lack of mental privacy from Snoke, master soon learnt of the apprentice’s plan. To Kylo’s surprise Snoke fully validated Kylo’s belief in the necessity of killing his fathers—as usual manipulating Kylo’s motivations for the Supreme Leader’s own endgame to push Kylo further into the Dark, and fulfill Snoke’s order to kill the elusive Jedi Master.

And when it was down to just Snoke and Kylo . . .

Well, Snoke with his superior Force power, blue lightning, and Praetorian guard was confident he could survive crossing that bridge when they came to it.
Kylo, meanwhile, began to seriously contemplate his plan and steel his resolve.

Finding motivation to kill his master was not a problem—Kylo hated Snoke and always had. He formerly loved his uncle, which made his current hatred burn all the more intensely. No the problem was Han Solo—his father whom he still loved.

As he embarked on this path, it occurred to Kylo that maybe he would not have to kill his father to accomplish crossing the threshold into manhood. Maybe killing his uncle would be enough. So Kylo threw himself into accomplishing the goal in which both master and apprentice were united: finding and killing Luke Skywalker.

In this task Kylo was not without leads. Luke had likely continued his search for and found the first Jedi Temple. His uncle may believe he had found an unfindable place to hole up and wallow in his failure, but Kylo had no intention of letting the Jedi Master die of natural causes.

He intensified his search.

Long in possession of the First Order’s slice codes for the Imperial archives, Kylo was by then quite adept at making his way around the records, and found the Empire’s copy of a partial map to the first Jedi Temple. If anyone had already found the rest of the map and had a likely hand in the Jedi Master’s vanishing act, Kylo knew it would be his uncle’s old friend and associate the Force relic hunter Lor San Tekka.

Tracking down the old explorer and the rest of the Church of the Force, who had not been on Yavin 4 when their companions met their end on the edge of Kylo’s lightsaber blade, was difficult but not impossible. Soon in possession of several leads, the warlord of the First Order sent the other Knights of Ren to various parts of the galaxy, with the strict instructions to keep San Tekka alive until Kylo arrived should they be the one to find him.

Kylo, however, kept the most promising lead for himself—a small village on Jakku. He had acquired the village’s probably location just as the First Order had intercepted a message from San Tekka to his mother offering her the map. With the a vital piece of the puzzle to locate Skywalker within his grasp, Kylo and his task force, which unfortunately included Hux, had streaked off to Jakku.
To all outward appearance Jakku was a nothing desert planet in the Western Reaches.

But its desolate appearance was deceptive.

As with Yavin 4, to history and to the Force Jakku was a place of some significance. The Battle of Jakku was waged in the sky above the desolate planet, and that was where the Empire and finally died.

The Force was also strangely dampened, something which Kylo had noticed immediately as the task force entered the atmosphere. The Force dampening became even stronger as his raptor-like command shuttle descended into the primitive village and he disembarked.

The strike team he had sent on ahead had already pacified the villager’s resistance, and Kylo marched down the shuttle’s gangplank and into the center of the encampment where he came face to face with his quarry.

“Look how old you've become,” Kylo said, renewing his acquaintance with one of his least favorite people in the galaxy.

“Something far worse has happened to you,” San Tekka replied.

“You know what I've come for.”

“I know where you come from. Before you called yourself Kylo Ren.”

Not wishing to get sucked into a discussion of the past, Kylo cut to the chase, “The map to Skywalker. We know you've found it, and now you're going to give it to the First Order.”

“The First Order rose from the dark side . . . you did not,” San Tekka said, clearly unable to help himself from launching into one of his usual lectures.
“I’ll show you the dark side,” Kylo warned.

“You may try, but you can not deny the truth that is your family,” San Tekka condescendingly replied.

The arrogant outsider who believed he knew everything there was to know about his family—a family that San Tekka seemingly forgot included Vader—had always infuriated him, and Kylo decided the old man had struck that nerve for the last time.

“You're so right.”

Sensing he had arrived second but that the map was still nearby, Kylo ignited his red lightsaber above both of their heads and cut the old man down—silencing him from expressing further patronizing words, which Kylo had already put up with for far too long.

The next step of finding whomever his mother had sent to get the map from the now thankfully silent San Tekka proved to not take long.

Kylo felt the disturbance in the Force a split second before the blaster bolt left the rifle’s muzzle, and with an outstretched hand Kylo froze it in midair . . . along with the body of the unwise shooter. A pair of stormtroopers roughly grabbed the man and tossed him at Kylo’s feet.

As Kylo crouched down, he finally found himself face to face with the famous Poe Dameron.

“So who talks first? You talk first?” Poe said with brash defiance, immediately living up to his reputation.

Kylo confirmed by cursory mindprobe what he already knew—that San Tekka had given the map to Poe—and ordered stormtroopers to search the X-wing pilot.

All the while Poe demonstrated his lack of fear by making a crack about Kylo’s mask. “It's just very hard to understand you with all the . . . apparatus.”
Kylo knew Vader would have never stood for such insolence. But killing Poe outright would complicate finding the map, and Kylo remained patient. If Poe’s initial brashness was anything to judge by, the interrogation process would naturally progress to Kylo making Poe pay dearly for the remark and any other crimes he had recently committed.

He contented himself, therefore, with ordering the Resistance pilot be taken into custody aboard his command shuttle. Poe’s own ship was soon searched, and found to not contain the map.

It was with great satisfaction that Kylo watched Poe’s black X-wing explode into a fireball out of the corner of his eye.

Phasma had then asked him what to do with the Church of the Force villagers. His emotions raw and enraged after too many mentions of his family for one day, and remembering their many unkindnesses to him while he was growing up, Kylo had reflexively given the order to kill them all—although wished he could recall the words the second they were out of his mouth. In the end he had to settle for not turning in the stormtrooper who had not carried out the orders he wished he had not given, as he released Poe’s blaster bolt and strode back aboard his command shuttle.

Aboard the Finalizer, Poe’s interrogation proceeded exactly as Kylo expected. He remains defiantly silent as the stormtroopers assigned to soften him up delivered their blows. Kylo knew from his research of the archives of the Empire that an Interrogation droid could have extracted more information—there would also not be much of Poe left after the droid was done. The description of a full Imperial interrogation was something that Kylo had not been able to stomach, which was why the First Order did not use the droids—even if that often left the dirtiest work for him to do himself.

Soon it was Kylo’s turn to interrogate Poe Dameron.

The room was in darkness, except for the case that displayed instruments of torture, and a dim spotlight on the reclined interrogation table to which Poe was secured. The appearance of Poe’s dashing and overly attractive face was only slightly marred by the gashes and dried blood from the stormtroopers’ blows. The pilot looked somewhat peaceful as he slept, and Kylo had no interest in letting Poe go on sleeping.

The Poe came too at the sound of the deep mechanical voice. The hooded figure of Kylo Ren slowly approached his prisoner through the shadows before the warlord stopped a few feet away to tower over the best pilot in the Ben Solo-less Resistance.
“I’m impressed,” Kylo said menacingly, “No one has been able to get out of you what you did with the map.”

“Might wanna rethink your technique,” Poe replied, still full of defiant bravado.

Kylo raised a hand towards the pilot’s head and obligingly complied with Poe’s foolish request.

Poe began to flinch with pain, and his breaths became labored as he attempted to resist Kylo’s mindprobe. Kylo usually avoided performing full mindprobes whenever possible, which he disliked doing immensely. Poe, however, was cocky and arrogant, and as Kylo slammed his head against the interrogation table and entered Poe’s mind, he realized he hated doing it less than usual.

Once inside, Kylo found everything as he had expected. Poe was the embodiment of everything he hated and could not compete with about the Resistance. He was quickly flooded by Poe’s memories of his mother. Lots and lots of memories, from all the time Poe had spent around her as her protégé and surrogate son. At the same time Kylo also saw that Poe was brash, irresponsible, and had a disobedient streak. Poe had, and likely would again, gotten the Resistance into trouble that Ben Solo never would have. Yet this was the man his mother preferred as her son over her own flesh and blood. Maybe Poe reminded her of Han more than her dutiful and uncomplainingly obedient actual son had. Kylo did not know, and the train of thought was making him increasingly upset and angry on top of San Tekka’s verbal barbs.

What was not readily available in Poe’s mind, however, was the location of the map.

“Where is it?” Kylo asked again.

“The Resistance will not be intimidated by you,” Poe clung to his defiance even amidst the pain.

“Where . . . is it?” Kylo hissed. The increased intensity of his voice matching the increase in power he was now using on the Resistance pilot.

Poe continued to resist in a way that Kylo knew was absolutely excruciating. The brash pilot was strong willed, but was ultimately no match for Kylo’s powers with the Force. Poe gave out a long drawn-out scream of agony as Kylo smashed through the deepest of his mental barriers, and gained access to Poe’s most closely guarded secrets.
His mother and the rest of the Resistance were holed up on D'Qar in the Ileenium system.

Snoke would eventually find it in his mind, Kylo knew that, but until then Kylo kept what he found to himself. There were many crimes he routinely committed of which he previously thought himself incapable. But there were still limits, and voluntarily giving up his mother to Snoke and Hux was something he simply would not do.

Thankfully finding the map to Skywalker took priority over locating the Resistance base. The map that was . . . in an orange and white BB model astromech droid, which Poe had left back on Jakku.

Having finally found the information he needed, Kylo was happy to be leaving Poe’s mind and all of the reminders that Poe had lived the life Ben Solo had wanted and was denied.

With Kylo’s exit from his mind, Poe immediately blacked out from the pain. Kylo for his part strode out of the interrogation chamber without giving the other man a second glance.

Hux was waiting just outside the interrogation suite, and Kylo immediately ran into him as he strode out of the room.

“It’s in a droid. A BB unit,” Kylo informed Hux.

“Well then. If it's on Jakku we’ll soon have it,” Hux said with smug confidence.

Kylo, however, did not want to go back to strangely Force dampened planet. Having spent too long without the company of Artoo, Kylo convinced himself that acquiring one little droid rolling around in the sand was a task even Hux could not screw up.

“I leave that to you,” Kylo delegated to the general, before heading back to his quarters.
It did not take long for him to regret that decision as subsequent events soon proved Kylo was gravely mistaken when it came to the depths of Hux’s incompetence.

In his quarters Kylo was making an unsuccessful attempt to calm down after his recent encounters and the unpleasant reminders of his family, when he felt a sudden seismic disturbance in the Force. He emerged to fine the Star Destroy in a flurry of chaotic activity, and hastily made his way to the bridge. With a sinking feeling Kylo knew before he arrived that all the commotion could only mean one thing: Poe Dameron.

“General Hux. Is it the Resistance pilot?” Kylo asked Hux as he entered the bridge, already knowing what the answer would be.

“Yes, and he had help—from one of our own. We're checking the registers now to identify which Stormtrooper it was,” Hux confirmed, appearing to be surprisingly calm under the circumstances.

“The one from the village . . . FN-2187,” Kylo said, deep frustration beginning to boil in him that sparing the stormtrooper's life had led to this fiasco.

With Lieutenant Mitaka’s assurances that the ventral cannons were on line, Hux gave the order to blow the escapee’s rogue TIE out of the sky. The Finalizer’s gunners managed a partial hit, resulting in what was left of the starfighter crashing into the desert. Hux ordered a squadron of stormtroopers sent to the wreckage to savage whatever they could find.

Kylo did not particularly care if the traitor stormtrooper and escaped pilot survived the crash or not. He did, however, still care a great about the droid, and knew that a task as important as recovering the mechanical sphere he really should have overseen it himself. Kylo by that point deeply regretted his momentary lapse in judgment in delegating the job to Hux . . . who was not giving control back to Kylo.

And whenever possible, Hux preferred to handle things the easy way, especially when he got to blow things up.

“How capable are your soldiers, General?” Kylo said, his attempt at a civil debate rapidly
becoming futile.

“I won't have you question my methods,” Hux snapped.

“They're obviously skilled at committing high treason. Perhaps Leader Snoke should consider using a clone army.”

The ginger haired General had a wide array of easily poked nerves, and this was one of them.

“My men are *exceptionally trained, programmed from birth*—”

“Then they should have no problem retrieving the droid—unharmed.”

“Careful, Ren. That your ‘personal interests’ not interfere with orders from Leader Snoke,” Hux calmly switched tacks.

“I want that map,” Kylo responded, towering threateningly over Hux and getting into his face, “For your sake, I suggest you get it.”

Kylo did not care what Snoke had said. If Hux destroyed the map to Skywalker Kylo was going to kill him. Kylo felt Hux sending daggers of hatred into his back as he stormed off the bridge, unable to bear one more second in Hux’s presence.

Having relinquished command of the operation, Kylo was left alone to await news.

It was then that he felt it—a sudden awakening in the Force. As if a Force sensitive who had previously been hidden, likely by the Force dampening effect he himself had experienced on Jakku, had abruptly left that protection and immediately reached his awareness . . . and likely also his master’s.

He was trying to make sense of what had just occurred when Lieutenant Mitaka—of course it was
Mitaka—approached with the latest report. Kylo knew before the sweating subordinate even opened his mouth the news was not good.

“Sir, we were unable to acquire the droid on Jakku.” Threw numerous rounds of their present dance, Mitaka had learnt it was best to just spite out whatever he had come to relay. “It escaped capture aboard a stolen Corellian YT model freighter.”

No, it couldn’t be . . .

“The droid . . . stole a freighter?” Kylo answered in his most incredulous and unamused tone.

“Not exactly, sir. It had help.” Kylo turned to fully face the squirming officer, who finished his report in a rush his voice no longer steady, “We have no confirmation, but we believe FN-2187 may have helped in the escape-”

Accustomed to the end of one of his bad reports being interrupted by the sound of Kylo igniting his lightsaber, Mitaka shut his eyes tight and began to wince a split second before Kylo laid into the console behind him. Even then the young officer could not help himself from periodically opening his eyes to be mesmerized by the horrible sight and sound of the lightsaber ripping deep gashes into the electronics, before again shutting them and cowering away from the shower of sparks.

Kylo was furious.

He was furious with Hux. He was furious with the traitor stormtrooper. He was furious with Poe Dameron, San Tekka, his mother, and the little astromech droid with the map. Most of all he was furious with himself for failing to remember that in this most vital of matters if wanted something done right he had to do it himself.

Well, at least Hux’s incompetence had extended to failing to destroy the droid as well as capture it.

Kylo extinguished his lightsaber, and turning again to Mitaka inquired with an unnerving degree of calm, “Anything else?”

Still terrified, Mitaka had no choice but to blurt out, “The two were accompanied by a girl.”
The girl.

With a sudden violent motion Kylo dragged Mitaka towards him with the Force, the tips of the officer’s shoes dragging on the ground, until Mitaka’s throat met the black glove of his outstretched hand.

“What girl?” Kylo demanded.

Mitaka annoyingly but not unsurprisingly had no further information, and Kylo released him and allowed him to flee his presence. He watched Mitaka scurry away in his usual mixture of haste and dignity befitting an officer of the First Order, away to soothe his fried nerves, but as usual free of injuries that required medical attention.

The droid having slipped through their collective fingers and the network of First Order spies put on the alert, there was nothing left to do but return to Starkiller Base and await news.

Somehow Kylo managed to mercifully not spend a single second in Hux’s presence the entire trip back to base.

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Upon arriving back at Starkiller, Kylo and Hux had been immediately summoned to an audience with Snoke. The Supreme Leader was aboard the *Supremacy* and the First Order lieutenants found themselves interacting with a twenty-five foot hologram rather than Snoke in the flesh. Kylo often thought the fact that Snoke had a twenty-five foot hologram of himself built into the communications suite of Starkiller said an awful lot about the Supreme Leader.

With the droid likely enroute to the Resistance, Snoke was, to put is mildly, not happy.
In a disingenuous display of leadership accountability, Hux—who did not really care about the map in the first place—had taken “full responsibility” for the droid’s escape. Ignoring the fact that he was in fact genuinely at fault, Hux’s admission was part of his calculated plan for a much bigger prize: permission to use the at last complete Starkiller superweapon.

With a feeling of cold dread settling in his heart, Kylo listened to Snoke grant Hux permission to destroy the entire Hosnian system that housed the Republic—and Kylo’s home.

And with Snoke having bestowed his perverse blessing, there was nothing Kylo could do but turn and meet Hux’s gaze—bitterly promising himself the paltry consolation that someday he would make Hux pay for destroying his homeworld.

With Hux’s cocksure departure, Snoke had turned his full attention to Kylo.

“There's been an awakening. Have you felt it?” Snoke asked.

“Yes,” Kylo answered his master.

“There's something more,” Snoke continued with news that was new to Kylo, “The droid we seek is aboard the Millennium Falcon. In the hands of your father, Han Solo.”

Kylo felt his heart seize with panic, sensing his plan to find and kill his uncle before crossing paths with his father beginning to disintegrate.

“He means nothing to me,” Kylo answered Snoke. Both of them knew it was not true, but Kylo wished fervently that saying the words would make it so.

So began a series of previously uncharacteristic lies to himself and others.
As Kylo marched towards the *Finalizer*, skipping whatever insane speech Hux would give at Starkiller’s inauguration to resume his suddenly more desperate and complicated hunt for the map. Once aboard, Kylo began contemplating the rapidly shifting landscape set in motion by recent events.

Something was happening.

The *Falcon* had been found . . . and was again in his father’s possession.

As was the droid with the map to Skywalker—crucial to Kylo’s plans to find and kill his uncle before crossing paths with his father.

On top of all that, the awakening in the Force he had felt above Jakku—that explosion of Light—was affecting Kylo more than he wanted to admit.

Kylo’s nerves were fraying and his head was spinning. The mounting tension continued to be ratcheted up to a previously unknown degree. Although Kylo’s distress tolerance was usually quite substantial, the current stressors were quickly outpacing his coping mechanisms.

He soon found himself back in his quarters on the *Finalizer*, again pouring his heart out to his grandfather’s mask.

“Forgive me. I feel it again. The pull to the light,” Kylo confessed.

The young Force user had always had a complicated relationship with his powers. But Kylo was now confronted with memories of a time when using his abilities had felt so much cleaner than they did now after year of steadily sliding further onto the dark side.

Although he was too far-gone to ever go back, Kylo had not been prepared for how startlingly alluring he still found the Light, and how much it would further increased his already unbearable inner conflict.
“Supreme Leader senses it,” Kylo continued a touch of apprehension and fear creeping into his voice. “Show me again, the power of the darkness, and I will let nothing stand in our way,” Kylo pled with urgency and desperation, “Show me . . . Grandfather . . . and I will finish what you started.”

As usual, the mask remained silent as it stared back at him.

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Done entrusting to others the task of capturing the droid with the map, Kylo was back on the hunt.

The tension he felt mounted exponentially when Hux activated Starkiller Base and blew up Kylo’s homeworld—emphasizing to Kylo he could not return to his childhood and that he was finally being irrevocably pushed towards the threshold into adulthood whether he liked it or not.

The threshold that required him to commit patricide to cross.

With some legendary Solo luck that was hopefully hereditary, Kylo clung to the possibility that he could get the droid and the map away from his father and still somehow avoid a confrontation.

This goal at the forefront of his mind, Kylo joined the rest of his task force converging on the Takokana castle tavern—equal parts of himself hoping his father and the droid would and would not still be there.

Although Han Solo was not Force sensitive, likely because he was his father Kylo could still sense Han through the Force, and even before he disembarked his command shuttle Kylo was assaulted by presence of his father.

Kylo found the fact that both the droid and the girl had taken off into the forest in completely the opposite direction from Han Solo to be extremely convenient, and set off after them. Even then, however, tamping down his anxiety grew steadily more difficult the more time Kylo spent in this close a proximity to the wayward smuggler.
Under more normal circumstances Kylo would have authorized the requested air support when the Resistance showed up. In contemplating new ground assault tactics, Kylo had also been wondering if he could bring down a starfighter with just his lightsaber, and this would have been the perfect opportunity to try. He would have then taken both girl and the droid into custody.

The longer Kylo stayed on Takodana, however, the greater to likelihood of the confrontation he unconsciously wished to avoid at all cost. Furthermore, a prickling sensation in the back of his mind alerted Kylo that, although she was not among the initial Resistance strike force, his mother was also on her way.

Although he had spent his entire childhood longing to be around both his parents at the same time, in that movement all Kylo wanted was to be nowhere near his father or his mother, let alone both of them together. To his conscious self, however, Kylo steadfastly fanned the flame of denial that his father’s presence—soon to be joined by his mother’s—had anything to do with his snap decision to grab Rey and rush away.

At one point he passed so near to Han Solo that if he turn his head he would have had a clear view of his father. Kylo did not look, but quickened his step back to his command shuttle—the unconscious Rey in his arms—and took off at full tilt back to base and away from his parents.

Back on Starkiller his plan to simply get the map from Rey had not gone well, but he consoled himself with what turned out to be false assurances that he had at least safely avoided his father.

He was in the middle of a frantic search for the escaped Rey when he again felt his father’s presence on the planet. A security alert soon followed for a ship that had crashed near the base itself.

How the Falcon had gotten past the planetary shield Kylo had no idea. He was confident, however, that his father had probably done something insane like making the approach at lightspeed—trying something like that and actually pulling it off would be very Han Solo.

Leaving others to continue the search for Rey, Kylo lead a team out to the crashed ship, and soon found himself boarding the Millennium Falcon.

His father was long gone, but being in the cockpit brought back a flood of memories. Even the golden dice Kylo had played with as a child were hung in their proper place.
At that point Kylo pulled his team to head back inside the base. The *Falcon* he had left intact and undisturbed—not being able to bring himself to damage or disable the ship he had once loved so much.

It was also the best way to ensure his father would leave . . . something Kylo desperately wanted Han Solo to immediately do.

Outside of the *Falcon* Kylo had looked up to see that his father had succeeded in doing another the very Han Solo thing of disabling the planetary shield, and now the base was under attack.

A swarm of X-wings filled sky above the Oscillator—a strategically key target if the Resistance wanted to liberate the sun’s energy from the First Order’s control. Kylo wished Poe Dameron and the rest of the Resistance fighters luck, knowing there was no way they were going to penetrate the Oscillator from the outside with anything smaller than a capital ship, and that they would likely soon be overwhelmed by First Order TIEs.

The larger battle, however, held little more than a passing interest for Kylo. His job at present was to bring Rey to Snoke, and returning to the base he got back to it.

Kylo’s search for Rey eventually led him to the interior of the Oscillator. He could tell she was close by . . . but so was his father.

His father who was there to get Rey out and inflict his usual level of mayhem.

His father who was no doubt setting detonators to blow up the facility from the inside since the fighters outside were having so little success—another very Han Solo move.

As long as he was not still on it when the planet exploded, Kylo genuinely did not care if his father blew up all of Starkiller Base—particularly when its next target was his mother—and said nothing to anyone inside the base. Kylo could not, however, let Rey get away. The legendary Han Solo may somehow manage to blow up the new Death Star, but his father was not going to be rescuing the princess this time.

The one blessing of her Force powers increasing exponentially by the minute was Kylo could by
that point track her, and he could tell that Rey was outside and somewhere above.

With even more accuracy than with Rey, Kylo had also known exactly where his father was inside the Oscillator, at one point only a few feet away . . . and Kylo had deliberately walked in the other direction.

When faced with the moment, Kylo knew he simply could not do this. He could not confront his father.

But Han Solo had seen his son, and had other ideas.

“BEN!” Han’s voice echoed loudly in the large chamber.

Kylo was halfway across the catwalk when his father had called out to him, freezing him in his tracks. It was something out of his wildest dreams. In that moment Kylo knew that Han Solo was not just there for Rey or to help the Resistance, and the part of him that was still Ben Solo leapt for joy.

His father had come to rescue him.

After several heartbeats, Kylo turned around, fists tightly clenched as he tried unsuccessfully to stay calm.

“Han Solo. I've been waiting for this day for a long time,” Kylo lied.

As on Cloud City and the second Death Star, a father and son faced off on a catwalk over a seemingly endless drop. Somewhere above a blast door opened and a beam of fading sunlight
shone down onto the two figures.

Han slowly walked forward, as if approaching an animal he did not want to spook, and cut the distance to his son in half before again stopping. It took every ounce of strength Kylo had to not turn and flee.

“Take off that mask. You don't need it,” Han barked.

“What do you think you'll see if I do?” Kylo replied, his voice sounding more mechanical than usual to his ears.

“The face of my son,” Han said.

Kylo could not remember ever hearing his father’s voice filled with so much emotion, and he hesitated. But as with Rey, after a moment he slowly raised his hands and unmasked for his father.

It had been a long time since they had stood across from each other, and for a few moments father and son just stared at the other’s face. For the first time in years Kylo looked upon his father with his own eyes. His father had aged a lot from the Han Solo of Kylo’s memories. Across from Kylo, Han’s breath quickened as he looked upon his son, at once the same face of the child he remembered and also much grown since the last time Han had laid eyes on him.

“Young son is gone,” Kylo said, his own voice sounding pathetic to his ears in contrast to the one filtered through his mask, “He was weak and foolish, like his father. So I destroyed him.”

Han slowly continued forward as he spoke, “That's what Snoke wants you to believe, but it's not true. My son is alive,” Han said, his voice filled with conviction.

“No. The Supreme Leader is wise.” Kylo answered. Even to his own ears he sounded brainwashed.

Han spoke again, as he took the last few steps to join his son in the center of the catwalk. As his father neared him Kylo reflexively flinched away. At that point he did not like anyone touching him.
“Snoke is using you for your power,” Han continued vehemently, “When he gets what he wants, he'll crush you—you know it's true.”

In the depth of his heart Kylo did.

“It's too late,” Kylo choked out, his voice full of his unvarnished pain and despair.

“No it's not. Leave here with me. Come home,” Han demanded with his usual gruffness, before adding with a note of tenderness, “We miss you.”

As Han spoke, the level of conflict inside of Kylo was ratcheted up to a truly excruciating level. His father’s words—that his parents loved and missed him—opened up a new possibility in Kylo’s mind: that everything that had happened between him and his family was all a giant misunderstanding.

*That is wasn’t too late and he could still go home.*

Two diametrically opposed options stood before him.

The part of him that was still Ben Solo wanted to believe his father, to grab onto the lifeline he was being thrown, escape from Snoke’s clutches and leave the First Order—to stop being Kylo Ren, leave the insanity of what he had been reduced to, and reclaim his life.

From the outside that choice seemed simple—to just reach out, take his father’s hand, and let Han Solo rescue him as he had rescued his mother from the Death Star all those years ago.

But the prison he was trapped in had never been made out of steel. While Ben Solo wanted to believe his father and leave, Kylo Ren was still set on the patricidal path forward to freedom he had set for himself while looking in the mirror. To complicate matters, another deep and primitive part of psyche also unconsciously believed that in killing his real father standing before him, he could also kill his false and abusive father Snoke, and his uncle who had tried to kill him.
Unconsciously he also believed that the death of Han Solo likely could also bring about what Snoke had not been able to accomplish: the death of Ben Solo. With Ben Solo gone there would finally just be Kylo Ren. He would be finally free of the conflict that was cleaving him in two. He would finally have peace.

In that crucial moment the dark path that promised a quick end to his pain won out.

“I'm being torn apart. I want to be free of this pain,” Kylo confessed, his voice suddenly filled with vulnerability as tears stung his eyes.

He was what he had accused his father of being—weak, foolish, and crying. In great and tragic irony, Kylo also realized he really could not do this without his father’s help.

“I know what I have to do, but I don't know if I have the strength to do it. Will you help me?”

“Yes—anything,” Han promised, drawing even closer to his son.

Kylo dropped his mask, and it sounded loudly as it hit the metal of catwalk. He then unclipped his red lightsaber and held the handle out to his father.

Han Solo gripped the offer handle firmly, unknowingly holding the weapons steadily in place as his son’s hands trembled—Kylo gripping the saber so tightly he thought he might snap it in two. For several heartbeats father and son gazed intensely into each other’s eyes.

Suddenly the sunlight vanished, as Starkiller finished harvesting the now obliterated sun.

Without warning Kylo abruptly ignited his lightsaber—the red blade piercing the chest of his beloved father.
Kylo continued to stare into his father’s eye—eyes that were suddenly filled with shock.

“Thank you,” Kylo said in relief, letting the perverse words fall from his lips before roughly withdrawing the blade from his father’s chest.

The part of him that was Ben Solo screamed just as loudly as Rey when the red blade pierced his father’s chest. Ben was furious and absolutely beside himself.

Kylo also knew in that instant he had made a terrible, and irrevocable mistake.

Fueled by his displaced anger towards Snoke, Luke and himself, and still under Snoke’s spell, Kylo had believed killing his father would make him stronger. In reality his unforgivable act had only made him weaker . . . and deepened his despair.

In that darkest of moments, however, Light suddenly shone.

To Kylo’s utter shock, Han used the last moment of his life to look at his son with love and caress his face. Kylo saw in Han’s eyes that his father was forgiving him the unforgivable. Beyond that his father was actually accepting Kylo’s choice—that if his son really needed this, then Han chose it too.

As his father’s lifeless body fell into the abyss below, Kylo was completely stunned.

In spite of his famous “heart of gold,” Han Solo had led a remarkably selfish life. Unsurprising given his background, protecting his own interest was always his first impulse. While Chewbacca and the Falcon counted as part of himself—on a day-to-day basis his family did not. On some level Han too believed himself of little worth and most of the time unneeded by everyone including his wife and son. He resultantly chose to show up only when it was clear his presence was unquestionably required to avert galactic disaster—and wanted.

The story of Han Solo—who showed up to rescue the princess from mortal danger, before immediately taking off with his reward money, and who only returned to help save the day when it
was again a matter of life or death—was perhaps the best way to sum up the smuggler turned reluctant hero, whose bravado masked the wounds and insecurities of an orphan.

True to type, however, Han Solo showed up for his son in his most desperate hour, and provided Kylo with an answer to his burning question.

Han showed his son a previously unseen path forward across the threshold into manhood. It was not a path Han had been able to walk or provide a personal example of to his son . . . except in his very last act.

The other path forward to becoming a man was a life of self-sacrifice.

This new path was certainly not quick, easy, or for the faint of heart. It would require Kylo become Ben Solo again, and to lay down all of his strength, his talents, and his power with the Force in the services of others. It was also a path that just might lead him out of the Dark and back into the Light.

In pondering the idea later, Kylo found it intriguing and somewhat attractive. He continued to believe, however, while it may be an option for others, it was not an available choice for him.

His uncle of course bore a great deal of responsibility for that . . . and for ruining his nephew’s life.

Luke had failed to protect him from Snoke, and failed to guide him in the complexities navigating his Force abilities and burden of their family legacy.

The Jedi Master had taught his nephew the futility of fighting the darkness—that giving into it was inevitable. And in the end felt Ben Solo’s powers were such a threat that Luke was justified in murdering his own nephew in his sleep.

That night had made Kylo vulnerable to finally going to Snoke, which was the worst mistake of his
life—a mistake his father had later paid for with his. Kylo too had been paying for it ever since, and was still paying even after he killed Snoke to protect Rey.

Yes, all of this to a large degree was Luke Skywalker’s fault.

Kylo had not really wanted to kill his father, and was still deeply heartbroken he had. Killing his false father Snoke had actually been the right thing to do. But Kylo had one more father to kill in his quest to no longer need one—until the past was dead—and he burned for his uncle’s death with the white hot fire of revenge.

The young Force user had long sought out the Luke Skywalker with plans to exact vengeance. The long anticipated confrontation, however, was completely on the Jedi Master’s terms and ironically caught Kylo completely off guard.

On Crait, Kylo had been reeling. He had taken a huge risk with Rey and it has blown up in his face. Rey’s rejection had raised the reality of his unlovability to his conscious awareness—something he usually avoided at all costs—and in his pain he felt a rage that for once was all his own and not in imitation of Vader.

And in that very moment, who should appear but Luke Skywalker—his uncle who had given Kylo his most poignant lesson on just how unlovable he truly was.

Bathed in the glow of Crait’s late afternoon sunlight, Master Skywalker dramatically walked out of the flaming gash that the First Order cannon had punched into the Rebel Base’s shield door, and stared down the imposing sight of a dozen AT-M6 gorilla walkers with nothing but a lightsaber.

Although the older man was long the subject of Kylo’s futile searches, actually being in his uncle’s presence immediately triggered a flashback of Luke standing over him with a drawn lightsaber.

While outwardly he retained the appearance of control, his petulant furry was abruptly mingled with fear, and internally Kylo felt his heart rate abruptly spike.
Kylo consciously reminded himself he was no longer the weak youth, lying vulnerably on his back, his only defense against the Jedi Master’s attack a one-handed grip on his own lightsaber. He was the Supreme Leader of a powerful war machine.

“I want every gun we have to fire on that man . . . Do it,” Kylo ordered, his calm tone belying that internally he was anything but.

The first walker opened fire on the long figure, and was quickly followed by rest. As he lost sight of his uncle amidst wave after wave of blaster fire, Kylo felt his fear give way to unbridled rage.

“More!” Kylo screamed, clenching his hands into fists. “MORE!”

Sensing they would run out of tibanna gas long before Kylo gave the order to ceasefire, Hux finally stepped in. “That's enough,” he quietly told Kylo. Receiving no indication his words had even been heard, the General turned to his troops. “That's enough!” he screamed before condescendingly again addressing Kylo, “Do you think you got him?”

Ignoring Hux, Kylo slumped into his seat, ragged breaths catching his throat, as a rush of cathartic relief washed over him.

_It was finally over . . . until it suddenly wasn’t._

“Sir?” One of the officers recalled the Supreme Leader’s attention to the scene outside.

The gigantic plum of debris was settling—clearing to reveal the impossible and horrible sight of Luke Skywalker striding placidly forward, alive and completely unharmed.

The Jedi Master looked straight through the viewport of the command shuttle, intending, Kylo knew, to look straight into the eyes of his old padawan, and raising one hand he gave his shoulder a single mocking brush.

Kylo let a humorless breath fall from his lips at the challenge being clearly leveled at him by the
older man.

“Bring me down to him,” he ordered.

Hux, who had already been an obstacle far to many times in the Force user’s quest for vengeance, had protested. Without bothering to look at him Kylo slammed Hux into a wall with the Force. After that the command shuttle’s crew quickly obeyed.

As Kylo strode down the gangplank, took a firm grip on his fear. He was no longer a helpless padawan learner, and Luke Skywalker was no longer his master.

Events were coming full circle, and the two men at last met again in the long awaited confrontation.

Adopting a facade of exaggerated confidence he did not feel and keeping a firm grip on his rising sense of panic and terror, Kylo strode out onto the windy salt plain of Crait to face off with his elusive enemy.

Kylo fully expected his uncle would make a self-righteous attempt at an intervention to turn him back to the light, and when that failed the Jedi Master would have a justification to again try to end Kylo’s life for the good of the galaxy.

“Did you come back to say you forgive me? To save my soul?” Kylo said, cutting to the chase of Luke’s expected plan.


With flare and machismo Kylo shrugged off his cape, grabbed his lightsaber off of his belt, and stepped into a combat stance as he ignited it. The blue blade of Luke’s saber flared to life in answer. Kylo pointed his saber at Luke and stared down the crackling blade at the Jedi Master.

For several heartbeats the two regarded each other.
Kylo twisted his saber in his hand.

Master Skywalker’s lip curved into a small smile, which was more than enough to set Kylo off. He charged forward to attack Luke with a pair of vicious slashes. Luke sidestepped both of them without their saber blades meeting.

Kylo shifted his grip and tried again. Luke again spun out of his reach, continuing to rely somewhat surprisingly on purely defensive moves.

“For now,” Kylo thought.

Their duel, however, suddenly took a stunning turn. For what Kylo absolutely did not expect in that moment was for his uncle to apologize.

“I failed you, Ben. I'm sorry,” Luke said, with a surprising amount of sincerity and remorse in his voice.

“I'm sure you are!” Kylo spat saltily, reflexively rejecting Luke’s apology. “The Resistance is dead . . . The war is over . . . And when I kill you I will have killed the last Jedi!”

“Amazing. Every word of what you just said was wrong,” Luke replied in an infuriatingly patronizing tone. “The Rebellion is reborn today . . . The war is just beginning . . . And I will not be the last Jedi.”

Later, Kylo would have to admit the truth in Luke’s words.

Kylo had just blasted the Rebel base shield door open with the First Order’s Death Star canon, fully embracing the role of a tyrannical dictator—a form of power that inevitably inspired an uprising. In the same way Vader had spawned the Rebel Alliance, Kylo had in a mythic sense managed to father the New Rebellion, even as Rey—who was not exactly an innocent party in this situation—was birthing it by rescuing the remnant of the Resistance through a back cave opening, and snatching them out of from right under his nose.

In the heat of the moment, however, all Kylo had was an angry retort.
“I’ll destroy her . . . and you . . . and all of it!” Kylo snarled, wishing he could put actual venom into his words as he launched them at Luke.

To Kylo’s utter shock, Luke responded by shutting down his lightsaber.

He then stood and looked at his nephew with love.

“No . . . Strike me down in anger and I’ll always be with you . . . Just like your father.”

Unlike with his father, however, there was no conflict in Kylo about killing his uncle. He tightened his grip on his lightsaber, charged forward as fast as his legs would carry him, and with a primal scream of rage sliced Jedi Master Luke Skywalker in half.

The deed done, Kylo slid to a stop, his feet creating a streak of red as they displaced the white top salt. Briefly looking down at his red lightsaber, Kylo took several deep breaths, feeling again a cathartic rush of relief.

Until he yet again continued to feel Luke’s presence in the Force.

Kylo suddenly realized there was something off about Luke’s Force signature, a detail that he had been too out of it to notice until that very moment.

With a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach, Kylo turned around to see an intact and very much alive Jedi Master turning to face him.

The awful truth dawning on him, Kylo slowly walked forward, lightsaber pointed at the figure in front of him. The Force projection of Luke stood still and unharmed as Kylo ineffectively pierced his chest with the saber.

“No,” Kylo said in stunned disbelief.
“See you around, kid,” was Luke’s only reply.

And with those parting words that were akin to something Han Solo would say, Force projection Luke disappeared.

A few seconds after that Kylo suddenly realized Luke was not the only one who had disappeared.

The remnant of the Resistance was no longer in the mine.

“NO!” Kylo screamed, fully comprehending the extent of his defeat.

Inwardly completely deflated, Kylo returned to the command shuttle. Hux had regained consciousness and was staring daggers into him in a way made all the more intolerable by the fact Kylo knew for once Hux was in the right.

As he led his of troops in a search of the now empty base, Kylo had time to think over the startling turn of events of the last few minutes.

Having apparently let go of their self-centeredness, his parents and uncle continued to throw their impressive collective efforts into their latest attempt to reach him.

His mother, clearly in on the brilliant twist of his uncle’s intervention, had left him his father’s golden dice—his mother who still loved him—clearly seconding his uncle’s unexpected message.

Luke had not come to confront him as Jedi Master Skywalker intent on protecting the galaxy from the New Vader—but as Ben Solo’s uncle.

He was years late, but Luke had finally stepped up to be a surrogate father, and was no longer shirking his responsibility to provide the correction his nephew had previously craved so badly from him.
Luke knew this time he was not the one who could redeem the New Vader and save Ben Solo. He had come, however, to finally discipline his nephew, and had set limits on the destructiveness of Kylo’s jilted lover temper tantrum.

But mainly—shockingly—Luke had come to apologize.

To look at his nephew with love and convey that no matter how Ben had been made to feel while growing up, and no matter his current efforts to burn it down, Ben would always be an important member of the Skywalker family tree.

To tell his nephew he had been wrong. Not only for contemplating murdering him in his sleep, but about the very circumstances that had led him to consider such a crime.

To apologize for his large role in ruining his nephew’s life—for believing and making Ben believe his path was set—but beyond that to convey that Ben’s life was not permanently ruined and that he still did have a choice.

Even after his demise, however, Snoke’s poisoning of the young Force user’s mind lingered on . . . and while Kylo could honestly admit that he hated his life and what he had become, he was still plagued by the belief that he had no other choices.

That it was too late.

Sharing his family’s current belief to the contrary, Rey too thought he could change—and expected him to.

She had also refused to join the First Order and enable him in his self-destructiveness.

Although the nuances had been beyond him in the heat of the moment, Kylo understood now what had happened in the throne room. In a display of her own black and white thinking, Rey had wanted Ben Solo and not the Vader persona of Ben stripped of everything except his powers that was Kylo Ren.
Rey had not been rejecting him, but rejecting loving and accepting him in the narrow box everyone else had shoved him into, out of a desire to fully love him in the way he had always longed to be loved. Rey had seen him completely and wanted to loved him completely—as Ben Solo—and not just for his powers. It was something he had always longed for but by the time he met her he thought was impossible. It also was something still incomprehensibly to Ben who still felt himself to be unlovable.

As much as he longed to change and let her do just that, Kylo was plagued by his own concrete thinking, insecurities, and mental blocks that made it the task seem impossible. Knowing the truth that he was in too deep to get out on his own, Rey had offered to help him.

Rey—who seemed to somehow be actually living Ben Solo’s life.

While Poe had been his original replacement in his mother’s life, things had shifted quickly and dramatically when Rey came onto the scene. Rey now appeared to be a magnet for all his family heirlooms, to have taken his place to everyone not just his mother. It was not deliberate, and what Rey had wanted, he knew, was not to keep his life for herself but share it with him.

She had echoed his father’s words and his uncle and mother’s sentiments that it was not too late.

But her offer had come with major strings attached regarding the Resistance, which he could not wrap his mind around so abruptly. To be fair she probably had not understood what she was asking of him.

By the time he left Crait Kylo had calmed down somewhat from the reflexive pain and rage of her rejection. He decided, whatever the cost, he should have taken her up on her offer. Except it had already expired—and the door of the *Falcon* had been slammed in his face.

Kylo found he was once again left to move forward alone. But move forward how?

All of his fathers were dead and it had not worked—as when he started down this insane path, Kylo still did not have clear path into manhood. Killing Han Solo, furthermore, had only left Kylo even weaker than before.
Patricide having failed, and Kylo was now left to choose from two antithetical options.

Han had sacrificed himself to try and rescue his son. Luke had not only reminded his nephew of Han’s sacrifice, but had also made a sacrifice of his own as the exertion of Force projecting across the galaxy had eventually ended his life. As with his father, Kylo realized that his uncle was leaving him a lesson not only on how to die but more importantly how to live.

That the path to authentic manhood was again a life of self-sacrifice and service.

The life of a true Jedi.

In reflecting on his stand off with his uncle, Kylo found the full implications of Luke’s words were clear. Just as he was not the last Jedi, Luke Skywalker was also not the future of the Jedi either.

No, the seed of the New Jedi Order was Ben Solo and Rey—together.

For Luke, his nephew’s true destiny was alongside Rey to help found the New Jedi—to find peace and balance in himself, and through that help the galaxy find peace and rebalance the Force.

His uncle clearly believed that was still a possible future for him.

To Kylo, however, that seemed impossible.

Accepting the possibility of the future his uncle proposed required Kylo to first accept Luke’s apology. But accepting his uncle’s apology would require forgiving the unforgiveable—something Kylo could not and would not do.

Kylo had learnt all to well that along with hate, anger, aggression, jealousy—in a special way unforgivness was also a path to the dark side. As the poster boy from unforgiveness, it had both drawn Kylo to the dark side and was now keeping him stuck there.
Consumed with the shame of what was done to him along with the guilt for what he had by that point done, Kylo could not bring himself to forgive his uncle, his parents, or himself.

His father had forgiven him the unforgivable, and chosen his son’s terrible choice as his own if it was what was needed to get his son back. There was a lesson in there. But it was a lesson Kylo was not capable of receiving, and he superficially brushed forgiving off as a weakness.

On one level Kylo was also still furious Luke was dead, which meant he could not kill him in revenge for that unforgivable night. Another part of him recognized that echoing his father’s example, Luke too had sacrificed himself in an attempt to make things right. The Jedi Master had let go of his paralyzing guilt, and had come to apologize and seek forgiveness—and finally forgive himself for his unspeakable wrong. With that accomplished there was nothing holding him back from passing into the Force—full of a peace and purpose Kylo had never known.

Luke too had left his nephew an example of how to overcome the darkness within himself, and offered Kylo a chance to absorb and put into practice his father’s dying lesson and forgive.

The path back into the Light was so alluring, so tempting. But Kylo found he could not do it, he could not embrace forgiveness.

It was just too hard.

Kylo knew, however, that he also could not stay as he was being ripped apart by conflict.

That left only one path left—following his grandfather further down the easier road into darkness in the hope it would provide him with some relief from the turmoil. His heart whispered that it would not, but Kylo continued to believe he had no other choices.

And the path following after Vader had led him to the present moment—staring at the Knights of Ren.
The Knights had all been out on their own assignments in the intense search for Skywalker, and had missed the series of succinct and dramatic events that had culminated in the First Order See change.

Kylo was glad—he would not have wanted them anywhere around Rey.

Having not been singled out for any of Snokes special attention, most of the Knight had not much cared one way or the other who lead the First Order—as long as it was not Hux—and were unfazed at returning to find Snoke dead and Kylo in charge.

Except Rouge.

In Rouge there had been a twitch. Almost imperceptible, but enough to raise Kylo’s old suspicions that had had to be relegate to the back of his mind as paranoia due to a complete lack of even circumstantial evidence—a suspicion that now resurfaced that Snoke had somehow planted Rouge at Luke’s training temple as part of the plan to entrap him.

Presently, however, there were more pressing matter with which to attend.

“Did you get it?” There was an edge to Kylo’s voice as he addressed the nightmarish figures that comprised the Knights of Ren.

“Yes,” Monk said, handing him a datastick, “The copy of the Imperial archives on Yaga Minor was intact enough, and it was there when we finally able to slice in.”

Kylo stared down at the datastick in his hand, feeling his heart rate quicken.

After all this time, all his searches, a long last . . .

Mustafar.
Snoke had deliberately kept the coordinates of the fiery planet and location of Vader’s Castle from him, using it as a tantalizing reward of which Kylo was forever just quite not worthy.

Kylo remembered telling Snoke in one of their last conversations that he had given everything he had to him and the dark side. But Kylo had been wrong. Snoke had indeed taken everything he had. But Kylo had not in fact given everything to the dark side. Nor had Snoke wanted him to. There was power there, real power that he had yet to experience. The kind his grandfather had harnessed. The kind Snoke had never wanted him to have, content to keep him as a manipulatable child, who’s out of control temper and other weaknesses he could hone into a “sharp edge tool.”

“Give this to Captain Peavey,” Kylo ordered, giving the datastick with the coordinates back to Monk, “And inform him we’re leaving. Now.”

Kylo was free now. Free to fulfill his destiny as the New Vader, to finish what his grandfather had started, and bring peace, order, justice to the galaxy.

Free to pursue the full power of the darkness.

Because, while Snoke could never fully turn Ben Solo to the dark side . . . Kylo himself could.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you very much for reading, and for the comments and kudos. They are much appreciated!

Although I know different very valid interpretations are out there (see LOTS response https://jp2187.tumblr.com/post/182260286603/psychology-of-ben-vs-anakin) this is how I conceptualize Ben’s characterization as influenced by Anakin.

PSYCHOLOGY OF BEN VS. ANAKIN

I would argue that Ben Solo likely has the opposite temperament and emotional problems from Anakin.
ANAKIN (narcissistic projection --> VADER)

TRAUMA: Death of his mother and then his wife (mother replacement). Cannot grieve in a healthy way as to the Jedi emotions are unacceptable (fear, anger, grief --> weaknesses/bad)

CORE BELIEF (perceived “flaw”): Anakin believes he is an incompetent failure.

EVIDENCE of “flaw/weakness” (leads actively trying to avoid being “found out,” by other and own conscious awareness): Anakin’s feeling and emotions (fear, anger, grief), and the “darkness” he and others sense in him.

NARCISSISTIC INJURY: Unable tolerate failure in himself (failure to save mother/wife) or in subordinates (as their failure reflects on him). Results in rageful outburst --> kills Tuscan raider, chokes the life breath out of subordinates unconsciously expressing that he does not deserve to be alive himself (as Vader kept alive and breathing by an iron lung).

DEFENSIVE CONSTRUCT: Vader’s Castle. The vainglorious monstrosity and shrine to his power, which Vader built by hand using the power of the dark side on the site of his greatest defeat (lost lightsaber duel with Obi-Wan who left him to die limbless after taking his lightsaber) and where he lost Padme. A place of misery and isolation, it still serves to protect Anakin from the incompetence he feels over failing to beat Obi-Wan and save his wife/mother replacement.

Anakin emotionally suppresses nothing (temperamentally much more in line with the Sith), and gets his emotional needs met behind the Jedi’s back.

Ben likely started out suppresses everything. (Ironically Ben would have made a model of emotionally repressed obedient Jedi).

For Kylo, Vader is a (terrible) model of how to behave, and how to actually express emotions (all of which are distilled down to rage).

Most of Kylo’s outburst, therefore, are just mimicking Vader (not all narcissistic injury driven, and a case can be made he has more depression than narcissistic traits). While ALL of Vader’s outbursts are narcissistic injury driven.

Which adds another layer of complexity to the Ferrari of a fictional character that is Ben Solo/Kylo Ren.

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Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

LOTS Podcast: Psychology of the Characterization: Kylo Ren
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsdViE8mse4

SWC: Kylo Ren and the Portrayal of Masculinity in Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5nGoYklHu8
SWC: Rey and Kylo as Adam and Eve parts 1 & 2
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MnYSctj1RM
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyEUSId-aa0

SWC: Snoke in the TFA parts 1 & 2
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQK8QkqogEw&t=81s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFr-vQvHYsc&t=64s

SWC: Rey’s Origins: Snoke is the Key
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SC6W2_Br26g

Wayward Jedi: Supreme Leader Snoke - A Mythic Case Study
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLDs7mtg9g4&t=285s

Artwork: Art of The Force Awakens, page 221
Star-Crossed Lovers

Chapter Summary

Rey visits Padme’s grave, and Kylo reaches Vader’s Castle on Mustafar.

Chapter Notes

I am so sorry it took me so long to get this posted. This chapter took forever to write.

This chapter is better than it otherwise would have been, however, as LOTS podcast dropped multiple discussions while I was working on it, including Psychology of Rey’s Characterization, a Reylo vs. Anidala discussion, and commentary about the recent costume leaks (if you have been with me for a while I went back and changed Kylo’s “spare mask” to “repaired mask” after the leaks came out).

clairen45 also posted a Bridges Tropes in Star Wars meta that was so brilliant that I realized I needed to go back and add a bunch of bridges.


https://clairen45.tumblr.com/post/183289143738/addendum-on-my-sw-bridge-trope-meta

All I can say is that I made sure I finished this chapter before doing my taxes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter 9: Star-Crossed Lovers

The blue sky was clear save for a decorative smattering of fluffy white clouds, and the afternoon was pleasantly temperate as Rey stomped out of Theen in search of less manicured foliage.

The day, like most of her days on Naboo, had fallen into a predictable rhythm. After touching base with Chewie and spending a few precious minutes helping him work on the Falcon, it had been time for Rey’s daily visit to Leia. Rey had found the older woman’s condition unchanged—unconscious but her life force still strongly present as Rey reached out to her through the Force.

After that the rest of Rey’s typical day was spent training, which under Luke’s tutelage consisted in a great deal of running and jumping while letting the Force flow through her. Some days Rey also found herself balancing on one hand or foot while lifting objects into the air to hone her concentration.

While Rey normally practiced under Luke’s watchful eye, he would sometimes leave her to figure things out on her own. Sensing her truly foul mood, the Jedi Master had wisely chosen today as one of the days to leave Rey to herself.
Finally reaching the edge of the forest, Rey ignited her lightsaber and activated the training module she had found on the *Falcon* before charging off into the trees.

Since completing her repairs to Anakin’s saber, sparring practice had constituted the bulk of her Force training, and Rey’s skill with a lightsaber had grown exponentially. She had quickly figured out how to turn on the more advanced settings of the training module, and it now zoomed through the trees to deliver a salvo of shots from different directions.

Today, Rey had been especially looking forward to engaging with the metal sphere, hoping for a mental break and opportunity to burn off some of her mounting frustration. She was disappointed to realize, therefore, that the highest level on the training module was becoming too easy for her, and blocking and parrying the stun bolts no longer took her full concentration.

As a result, Rey found her mind beginning to wander even as she sparred her way through the woods.

The Naboo had been gracious in their hospitality, providing the remnant of the Resistance with clothes, food, housing, and the rest of the day-to-day necessities they needed as they labored to build the New Rebel Alliance. Without the help of the Naboo the task would have been impossible, particularly in the time frame available to launch an attack on the *Supremacy* while it was still undergoing repairs.

The New Rebel Alliance was deeply in the Naboo’s debt, and Poe and the rest of the New Rebels were deeply grateful. Rey shared everyone’s gratitude, but often found her thankfulness overshadowed by another sentiment.

Rey absolutely hated it here.

The other Rebels had seamlessly adopted the traditional regal attire their Naboo hosts had provided for day to day life on planet. The clothes of the Naboo did not differ significantly in essence from those of Alderaan, and Leia had looked like herself in the elegant dresses. Poe—dashing and handsome in anything he put on—wore the ornate garments with flare. Finn had an innate regalness about him, and the Naboo garb suited him well. Rose, Connix, and everyone else had also
managed to pull off the new look.

Everyone except Rey.

Rey had tried the elegant clothing on once. Clashing horribly with her personality, to her eye they looked awkward and felt uncomfortable to her skin. After that Rey had rejected the Naboo garb in favor of her own familiar coarse homespun outfits.

Even among her own clothes, however, Rey was a bit selective.

Her first venture into wearing darker toned clothes and letting her hair down had not ended well, and Rey did not return to the outfit she had worn aboard the 

*Supremacy.* She was not displeased, furthermore, that the white material she found to construct new tops and pants was even whiter than her childhood clothes in which she had left Jakku. Her hair too was back up in an albeit more stylized version of her usual three buns.

But even sewing herself new shirts had turned into an unexpected source of inner conflict. No longer in the sweltering Jakku heat, Rey could afford to add more cover particularly for her arms. She was very tempted, but in the end Rey rejected that idea in favor sticking with less restrictive for Jedi training short sleeves.

That, however, left her new scar exposed.

Even after her upper arm had fully healed from being sliced open during her and Ben’s throne room fight with Snoke’s Pretorian guard, the scar was still highly visible.

In the aftermath of their escape from Crait everyone was riding an adrenaline high or tending to their own injuries—or in Finn’s case completely focused on the unconscious Rose—and paid no attention to Rey’s appearance. There were only a handful of people who would recognize any change in her anyway.

If Leia noticed she had not said anything. Moreover, the older woman oozed maternal support as far as the younger one was concerned, and Rey would not have cared one way or another if Leia noticed her scar.
Luke had started visiting Rey while it was still healing, and had definitely noticed the wound that had not been present when Rey had left Ahch-To. The Jedi Master, however, was done with his attempts to shame Rey about her attraction to his nephew and her subsequent choices. Along the lines of his complete reversal in attitude, Luke made not the slightest comment about Rey’s new scar.

The Rebellion in general and Finn in particular were another story. Finn would definitely notice Rey’s new acquisition, and Rey had opted to cover it with an upper armband she made out of a piece of brown leather before it became an issue. Finn chalked her armband up to a personal fashion choice, for which Rey was thankful as she had absolutely no interest discussing with Finn or anyone else the company she had been keeping when she had gotten that particular injury.

Her armband securely in place, Rey found her own clothes and style overall comfortable and grounding after her recent ordeal. They did, however, frequently illicit the stares of the locals.

Living on Naboo was, furthermore, Rey’s first experience of real mirrors—and the new unbidden insecurity about her appearance they brought into her life.

On Jakku, Rey did not have much of an awareness of what she looked like and had not particularly cared. It was simply not relevant to survival, which was all that really mattered in the cutthroat life of the harsh desert. Life on Naboo was different, however, and Rey soon found herself plagued by both the mirrors in the palace and the looks she got from the elegant Naboo—which were another kind of mirror.

Rey was a wild desert rose, who would give anyone who tried her hurt her a handful of thorns, but with her own gentle brilliance and beauty when left in her own environment. But she was a long way from the desert, and compared to the refined adornment and polished elegance that was considered beautiful in this sophisticated society, Rey felt plain and more consciously aware of being an insignificant nobody from nowhere than she ever had before.

Even while clinging to her own clothes, Rey found she could not stop herself from comparing her appearance to everyone around her. The holos of Padmé at the Naberrie House with her glorious long hair and refined beauty did not help Rey’s failing efforts to not find her own looks lacking in the slightest.

Rey had a pretty good idea without asking Luke, with whom she was absolutely not discussing this, which side of the Force such comparisons came from. But Rey still found herself powerless to
stop making them—particularly when everyone she passed in the halls of the palace or on the street appeared to be making them for her.

Moreover, her inability to adapt to life on Naboo was not limited to her appearance, as Rey also soon found out.

The room Rey had been assigned in the palace was twice as big as her AT-AT on Jakku. It was richly furnished with elegant tapestries and furniture including a luxuriously soft four-poster bed, and had a huge bay window overlooking the beautiful palace gardens. The first time Rey had set eyes on it she had been overwhelmed with the beauty of the room, and was in shock that the Naboo were assigning it to her for own private use.

Rey quickly became less enamored with the room, however, as the realities of living in it quickly set in. The bed she discovered was so soft that it hurt her back. In the middle of her first night on Naboo, Rey had pulled off a blanket and pillow and resettled herself on the floor—much to the shock of the maid whose job it apparently was to make Rey’s bed in the morning.

Longing to relocate herself back aboard the *Falcon* with Chewie, Rey nevertheless found that she was stuck in the palace out of fear of appearing ungrateful for all the Naboo had done and giving offense.

Rey also found the decadent local food, although in welcome abundance, often turned her stomach that was accustomed to much simpler fare in small quantities. The looks she received from the servers as they regularly cleared away plates full of only partially eaten food, made Rey aware she was causing offense in the kitchen as well to rest of the palace staff.

Paintings, waterfalls, gardens, and mirrors were not the only things on Naboo new to Rey. Etiquette and social graces were also a strange concept to the young scavenger from Jakku, whose prior social interactions had boiled down to fighting with the other inhabitants for scarce essential resources, and with negotiations being conducted with her bowstaff as much as with words.

On Naboo, Rey found herself playing a game with rules that remained incomprehensible to her even after months surrounding by it. All she could really tell was she was losing badly. No one told her she was a low-class backwater hick without the slightest sense of culture or fine manners—they were all far too well-bred—but Rey could tell much of the time that is exactly what the Naboo were thinking.
Being here was messing with Rey’s head—something else she had to carefully conceal from their gracious hosts and even her fellow Rebels. The Rebels were used to being adaptive. Many of them, like Poe, had grown up in New Republic society anyway. Even Finn, so dead-set against joining the Resistance, was now fully embracing all the aspects of his new life.

None of them would understand.

On the surface Rey remained closely allied to the cause that she had been trying to get everyone around her to join since leaving Jakku. She was also still held in high esteem by the remnant of the Resistance, which had automatically translated into a high position in the New Rebel Alliance.

But Rey sensed the Force was leading her on a path different from the Rebellion, which made her feel even more isolated and disconnected from everyone around her.

Feeling she had been here way too long, Rey desperately wanted to move on from Naboo. For now, however, she was stuck, and as much as she understood the rationale, having the Falcon grounded was driving her crazy.

Luke had counseled patience, and told her to wait for the Force to make the next move.

Rey wished the Force would hurry up.

With that cheery thought passing through her mind Rey took a particularly vicious swing at a stun bolt, and the glowing blue blade of her saber nicked a nearby tree.

“Ben would understand,” Rey thought to herself, a little surprised it had taken her mind this long to wander in his direction.

Ben actually had understood Rey’s current predicament before it actually occurred, anticipating how she would be perceived on a posh Core world—as a nobody from nowhere, who was rather plain and nothing special. That was exactly what had happened, and Rey found that a deep part of the little girl who had been abandoned on Jakku had always believed it.
Despite now being the Rebellion’s and, therefore, technically Rey’s archenemy, Ben had been instrumental in her growing to where she was today. Rey, moreover, found the way he looked at her to be grounding and empowering.

Ben looked at her like no else ever had—and certainly as no one on Naboo or even any of the Rebels did. Furthermore, he had seen something in her even before her strength in the Force had manifested. Having grown up in Hosnian Prime high society, Rey could only guess Ben had been in the company of countless beautiful women. So what in the galaxy had he seen in her back then?

To be fair Ben was pretty unpolished when it came to anything resembling social graces even if he had grown up in privilege. Was it because she was different from everyone he had grown up around? Was it because they were both fairly wild and untamed?

Whatever Ben saw, Rey knew now that from the very beginning he considered her to be incredibly special.

He had of course managed to tell her that in the most insultingly snobbish way possible, “You come from nothing, you’re nothing . . . but not to me.”

Rey, however, was realizing that was just typical Ben. With increasing frequency since arriving on Naboo, Rey had begun consoling and reassuring herself with Ben’s horrible words and the heartfelt feelings he had meant them to convey.

With his predilection for jarring bluntness Ben continued to find ways to protect her. Which contrary to outward appearances and the expectations of their differing childhoods, protection that in hindsight Rey had enjoyed a considerable amount . . . and Ben had not.

As she continued to dance among the trees and the training module stun bolts, Rey reflected that the mind was a strange place.

Ben was born into privilege, was a member of one of the most prestigious family lineages in the galaxy, was raised in the upper crust of the New Republic’s capital, and possessed gifts and talents beyond most people’s wildest imagination. He belonged to the elite of the elite. His family loved him, felt his absence deeply, and—his father and uncle having already sacrificed their lives in the attempt—would do anything to get him back. And yet, Rey knew, Ben somehow had managed to end up with inconceivably low self-esteem, and considered himself to be worthless and unlovable.
Rey, on the other hand, in spite of being a nobody from nowhere had made it through childhood with her self-worth intact. She may have been an indentured laborer, little more than a slave, from a Western Reaches desert junkyard, but among the scavengers she was the best—something that definitely meant something on Jakku. Sold off and abandoned, she had deluded herself into believing her family wanted her and was coming back for her. Rey had kept the truth and any insecurities she had far away from her conscious mind, and had never felt like or consciously thought of herself as a nobody.

Until of course Rey came to Naboo. Finding herself totally out of place, she could no longer relegate the truth of her insignificance to her unconscious awareness.

Occupants of the Nabberrie House excepted, Rey found she did not care for the Naboo and their fashionable society. While the Naboo professed a love for harmony, it was all a bit superficial. Rey often found herself remembering that these were the people who had not only produced Padmé Amidala, champion of democracy and peace among diverse peoples . . . but Emperor Palpatine as well.

On Naboo Rey hung onto Ben’s awful words. Because if Ben Solo, the New Republic prince who had managed to convince himself he was a nothing somehow believed she was special—well that was actually quite something.

Rey had also grown in more positive ways during her months on Naboo. Her understanding of the ways of the Force had grown exponentially since leaving the Jakku desert, and gone were the days when anything to do with lightsabers and Force powers would ubiquitously freak her out.

Along with Rey’s newly acquired knowledge, particularly in the workings of lightsabers, came a very different perspective on recent events—and the conclusion that Ben Solo was not nearly the monster Rey had thought he was when she first met him.

As Rey sliced her way through the Naboo trees she thought again of a similar forest on Takodana . . . except this time it was Vader who stalked her. Vader who reflected the first blaster blot she shot at him back to her, and as she lay immobilized in pain from where it had torn into her, Vader ripped Luke’s location from her mind, as Snoke had later done, before leaving her to die among moss covered rocks.
Ben, however, had forgone this more efficient option at his disposal for taking her down and getting the map. His mask hiding the face that was now dearest to Rey in the galaxy, Ben had instead defensively deflected all her blaster fire harmlessly away from both of them, and spent time he did not have with the Resistance joining the battle to chase her through the forest.

Furthermore, Ben had had numerous additional opportunities after Takodana to kill Rey or hurt her very badly . . . but had repeatedly chosen not to. Unaware that bringing a blaster to a lightsaber duel was equivalent to bringing a vibroblade to a blaster fight, and throwing everything she had at him with the “shoot first ask questions later” mentality she had acquired on Jakku, Rey had continued to ineffectively shoot at him every chance she got—and he continued to avoid the most effective—and destructive—way neutralize her attacks in in favor of ones that would cause her minimal harm.

And what of the map to Luke everyone wanted so badly?

In spite of Ben’s creepy threat that he could take whatever he wanted from her, which was truer than Rey had realized at the time . . . Ben had not actually done so. Having survived her audience with Snoke and hearing Poe recount his time aboard the Finalizer, Rey realized in hindsight that she had had far too much power during her time as a prisoner on Starkiller. She was now more keenly aware that whatever had happened between her and Ben during her time in captivity barely resembled an actual interrogation.

Rey’s vastly different opinion of Ben was, moreover, not based solely on his treatment of her.

Although Rey usually avoided such discussions like a rotting lugabeast carcass, she had recently gotten trapped at dinner in one of Poe and Finn’s Kylo Ren bashing sessions. They had tried to get her to join in, but Rey kept her mouth firmly shut. Although misinterpreting her motives, her friends had thankfully accepted that she did not want to talk about him.

Rey resolvedly kept silent, knowing any attempt on her part to defend Ben would open up suspicion and a line of questioning in which Rey had no interest in engaging. She was fully aware of the scandal it would cause among the Rebellion should her . . . interactions . . . with the enemy become known. Rey, therefore, held her tongue and later sat on her hands when she was suddenly seized with an intense desire to punch Poe in his overly pretty face.

She did not, therefore, share with Poe that her current reaction to being shot at—according to Luke all Jedi’s reaction to being shot at—was to easily block the blaster bolt with the most basic of
lightsaber skills, with the further option to turn defense into offense by deflecting the shot straight back on her assailant.

According to Poe, however, Ben’s instinctual reaction had been to defensively freeze a blaster bolt in midair.

Additionally, every time Poe and Finn congratulated themselves on “getting out alive,” Rey wanted to point out that they were alive because Ben had left them so and uninjured enough to escape—which given all the trouble they had caused, was something the First Order likely regarded as a serious misstep.

Even Ben slicing Finn’s back open on Starkiller Rey now saw with new eyes. It was no longer escaping Rey that Ben had not killed Finn instantly—and that a less skilled swordsman would have simply cut Finn in half. Rey was not sure too many were in possession of surgical precision and dexterity with a lightsaber it had taken to inflict a wound that would have eventually killed Finn, but one he had survived and walked away from fully healed after medical treatment.

Although an unconscious decision, the act was still a deliberate choice on Ben’s part—one that reflected the knife-edge on which he lived—and revealed that Ben Solo’s own temperament still leaked through the persona of Kylo Ren.

On Rey’s closer examination there were aspects of his Vader-like façade that were visibly awkward and an unconvincing fit, now that Rey knew Ben better and could appreciate such nuances.

Ultimately, Rey realized in hindsight that it was what he had not done that said an awful lot about the man everyone around her was determined to hate.

From Rey’s current vantage point, however, a new picture of Ben Solo was forming in her mind—particularly his preference for defensive tactics, his patience, and his restraint over his power in the Force. It seemed to require a special degree of provocation to motivate Ben into taking action, which stood in contrast to Rey’s own inclination to quickly identify and engage her enemy.

At his core, Ben was a far cry from the violent Vaderesque warlord Snoke had driven him to be, with their massive black clade frames, scary masks, intimidating red lightsabers, and unimaginable strength with the Force being where much of the true similarities ended between Vader and his grandson.
Of course initially Ben had still been a pushy, grabby jerk. But Rey no longer saw him as a vicious beast from the wilderness, whom she needed to slay out of self-preservation.

Done with her training session for the day, Rey reached out through the Force and deactivated the training module before extinguishing the lightsaber’s blue blade.

As she caught her breath, Rey’s eyes lingered on the handle of the lightsaber that she had painstakingly reconstructed—the saber that was her one constant in this ever shifting adventure into which she had been called.

The lightsaber that in many ways had gotten her into this mess.

As a child on Jakku Rey had dreamt of adventure, to which her starfighter pilot helmet and doll, along with her other childhood treasures could attest.

And adventure had indeed called.

It started with a small act of kindness to BB-8, which turned into a series of acts of kindness to the droid, who became her first real friend. In short order that had led her to Finn, a harrowing escape from First Order TIE Fighters aboard what turned out to be the Millennium Falcon itself. If that was not enough, Rey soon found herself rescuing Finn from Rathtars, and temporary copilot to legendary smuggler Han Solo on a trip to a planet that was greener than anything she could ever have imagined.

It had been a grand taste of adventure—something Rey could remember fondly when she was back on Jakku waiting for her family.

Little did Rey know then that she would not be allowed to only have a taste.
Her real summons to adventure had occurred in Maz’s castle on Takodana when Anakin Skywalker’s lightsaber had called out to her through the Force. No sooner had Rey touched her hand to the metal than she was caught up in a Force vision of the family tragedy surrounding its sole heir and the saber’s true master.

In the vision Rey had seen Luke weeping with his artificial right hand on Artoo’s domed head, watching his training temple burn. Next she saw Kylo Ren with a band of thugs slaughtering his way across the galaxy, who upon noticing her presence looked straight into her eyes and took an aggressive step towards her. Then came a vision of herself as a child screaming at a ship to come back. Desert abruptly became snowy forest, and Rey heard someone calling her name . . . before Kylo Ren, red lightsaber ablaze, stepped out from behind a rock.

After that the call to adventure had no longer been fun, but rather was intimidating and terrifying.

He was intimidating and terrifying.

As her gaze continued to linger on the Skywalker family’s legacy lightsaber, Rey remembered somewhat ruefully her words to Maz that she was “never touching that thing again” and she “wanted no part of this.”

Done with the adventure she had been called to, Rey had taken off at a dead run into the Takodana forest in the direction of Jakku and her childhood. As a result she had ironically had a perfect view of Ben’s command shuttle as it cruised around the ruins of Maz’s castle.

A few minutes after that was her fateful first meeting with Ben himself—whom she found even more intimidating in person than in her Force vision.

In encountering him, Rey had been swept up in completely the opposite direction from her intended destination, and irrevocably carried over the threshold to adventure whether she liked it or not.

Its initial call rejected, Anakin’s saber had, however, followed her to Starkiller Base.
Stuck in the snow, it again called to Rey.

Under new dicey circumstances Rey had answered the call with a call of her own. To Rey’s amazement the saber had bypassed its rightful owner and flown into her outstretched hand.

Rey could not point to the exact moment when she began thinking of it as her lightsaber, but since landing in her hand in the snowy forest Anakin’s saber had been her staunch ally and defense as she was steadily pulled into the strange world of Force powers and galactic conflicts.

It had been jarring to Rey just how different using the legacy saber was to wielding Kylo Ren’s red lightsaber, when she had briefly grabbed it off his belt and charged Snoke. It was one of the many lessons she had learnt during her multilayered loss of innocence in the Supreme Leader’s throne room.

Anakin’s saber itself seemed to have decided that at present Rey would be a better custodian than the dysfunctional family from which it originated.

After watching Luke chuck it over his shoulder nearly into the Ahch-To sea, Rey had had to agree.

On Starkiller Ben had wanted it, but Rey got the sense it would end up unused as part of his shrine to Darth Vader. On the Supremacy, however, Rey had been happy to let Ben take it, sensing the connection with his past and family having a grounding effect in the midst of his every present inner conflict.

And it had been right that Ben had killed Snoke with his grandfather’s lightsaber.

Beyond that, Rey and Ben had handed it off to each other multiple times after her arrival on the Supremacy, and both had needed it at some point in their fight with Snoke’s Praetorian Guard.

At that point it had become their lightsaber.

Right up until the awful moment Rey knew under the circumstances he was offering she could not
stay with him. Then in a moment not born of fear but impassioned, righteous fury Rey had sought to take it back.

The Skywalker legacy saber rightfully belonged to her and Ben Solo—and Kylo Ren could not keep it.

They had both dug in their heals and fought for the saber, which this time did not take a side—and like the conflict inside of Ben, they had literally torn it in half.

Rey had spent countless hours carefully repairing and reconstructing it. Newly rebuilt it was again in her hand, and she looked down at it as the afternoon sunlight filtered through the trees.

Guardian of Anakin’s lightsaber, Rey sometimes felt she had been charged with safeguarding Anakin’s family as well.

Although she had originally professed wanting no part of the Skywalker family melodrama, she had inevitably ended up in some way helping to put the family back together one member at a time. In many ways and with the exception of Leia, Rey seemed to care more about this family to which she did not belong than the broken men who were a part of it. Thankfully that had changed for Han and Luke before their deaths.

The last of the Skywalkers was of course was another story, and whether or not Anakin’s bloodline—currently on course to be just as broken as his lightsaber had been—could also be given new life was yet to be seen.

Although their interactions had sadly been brief, Rey had been amazed to watch Leia with her extended family—like a mighty shoot being graphed onto one of the trees with deep roots that fascinated Rey as she spent time in the forest.

For as far back as Rey could remember she had yearned to discover her own roots, find her own family, and learn her place in the galaxy.

Rey had to admit to herself, however, that finding her family of origin would no longer be sufficient to satisfy her longing. As she looked at the multiple generations depicted in the family holos adorning Aunt Sola’s sitting room, Rey knew she did not want to be part of just any family—even her own.
She wanted to be part of this family.

Resuming her walk through the forest, Rey continued to be lost in thought.

After being hauled off by the last of the Skywalkers, Rey had had to come to terms with being unable to return to Jakku and remain in girlhood. One of the many questions she arrived on Acho-To with, therefore, was how exactly she was supposed to be a woman.

In her time of discernment, Rey had been presented with options for two very different paths.

Everything on the island that housed the first Jedi Temple, from the instructions of the legendary Luke Skywalker to the nun-like Caretakers, pointed Rey towards conforming herself to the Code of the Jedi—a path not terribly dissimilar in outcome to how Rey would have lived had she spent her life on Jakku.

On the surface her choice seemed clear.

Master Skywalker, for whom the “dark side” was indistinguishable from the actual dark side, was abundantly clear which path was the correct one for Rey to take. Although having burned all his own bridges and professing himself to be deeply jaded against the Jedi of old, Luke had nonetheless attempted to impose on Rey the Jedi Code against attachments. Specifically romantic attachment to his nephew—an interested in only one thing seductive bad boy, who would corrupt her and lead her astray. The Jedi Master had blasted and shamed Rey in many subtle and not so subtle ways for even considering the possibility, until in the middle of their duel he had flat out scolded her for opening herself up to the dark side “for a pair of pretty eye.”

Advocating for the opposite direction was Ben. Having physically blocked her from running back to a barren future in the desert, the owner of the pretty eyes had expressed an equally strong opinion that Rey should take the other more commonly trod path of womanhood—along with a staunch stance concerning with whom she should walk it. Despite hating him at the time, Ben’s offer was something Rey had nonetheless found confusingly attractive.

Rey’s choice should have been simple—resist Ben and his attempts to tempt and lure her away from the Light and the noble way of the Jedi. On a deeper level, however, Rey found her choice
was complicated by the fact that all was not as it seemed.

Although Luke had agreed to teach her, in the end it had been Ben who had nurtured her, and helped her grow into a better version of herself. This was due largely to the fact that Ben was the first person Rey could consistently rely on to tell her the truth.

It was a foreign concept to Rey, who had learnt growing up on Jakku to expect everyone to lie to her. Maybe that was why she had not been more scandalized when Finn lied to her about being part of the Resistance when he was really an escaped stormtrooper. In the beginning Luke too had lied to her. Rey expected lies and was not overly disturbed when even those closest to her were less than honest.

Deeply wounded by two generations of his family’s lies, however, Ben told Rey the truth, and convinced her it was something she should be able to expect from people—including herself. He also taught her the importance of living in the truth no matter what the consequences, and accepting it no matter how difficult it might be for Rey to face.

The truth about her parents, the truth about the Jedi, and the truth that she should not contort herself to the Jedi Code just to please her latest surrogate father figure.

The truth about herself and what she wanted out of life.

The truth that wanting a relationship and her own family were perfectly good and reasonable things for Rey to want.

The Jedi with their Code were wrong—things were not so black and white. A choice to love and be loved did not automatically equate to a choice for the dark side. Even all these months later Rey continued to know that in this she was right.

While Ben was a positive influence on her, Rey also seemed to be good for Ben in return. His feelings for and attraction to her appeared to have a humanizing effect on him—and on occasion had been strong enough to draw him back toward the Light and out of being stuck in the dark where even his father had not been able to reach him.

Snoke may have sadistically taken credit for creating the bridge between her and Ben, and Rey would not have put it past him to have done something. But their bond across space and time had
survived Snoke’s death, even if it had not happened in a while. Rey knew on a deeper level that it was the Force that was ultimately responsible for connecting her and Ben in such a profound way.

Additionally, from the other side of the afterlife, an apologetic Luke had not mentioned one syllable about the Jedi Code. Even the Ahch-To Caretakers had not ended up being mateless—as Rey had discovered when Luke tricked her into barging in on their festivities in honor of their black-clad menfolk being home from sea.

In the end Rey had made her choice as to which path to womanhood she wanted to follow, and she had chosen Ben.

But even that had not ended up being a simple choice.

Because no matter how emphatic he was that Rey deserved to be guided by truth and live in the Light, that was not a conviction that Ben extended to himself.

No, Ben had succumbed to the lure of power and the illusion of safety it would bring him. And after emphatically insisting Rey live in the truth, Ben had extended his hand and asked her to join him in living the lie he was determined to believe.

While a relationship with him was not automatically bad, Rey was then struck with the reality that, just as it mattered what lightsaber he chose to use and what kind of man he chose to be, the way they came together mattered—and a misstep could still send her tumbling after Kylo Ren onto the dark side.

In her desperation to not be alone, the Rey who left Jakku would have stayed with him anyway, believing she could change him and everything would still be fine. But after being repeatedly challenged by Ben about her tendency to ignore painful truths and live in her happy delusions, Rey was no longer that girl.
Rey was confident, however, that Ben had not expected Rey's first act of making a healthier reality based decision to be turning him down . . .

Ben was not happy about it—not happy at all. But it did not matter how upset he was with her. Rey was not going back and was also not enabling Ben to wallow in his own dysfunctional choices anymore than he had left her to hers. Maybe someday Rey could return the favor and help Ben see that he deserved to live in the light of the truth too.

But for now, Rey had already learnt the hard way that while she could help him, inspire him, and encourage him—she could not change him.

At the end of the day only Ben could change and save himself.

With that thought on her mind, Rey stepped out of the forest to a by now familiar sight.

It had only taken Rey a few days of exploring to find Padmé’s tomb. The site now frequently served as the destination for her training route through the forest, particularly on days Rey was alone.

From the countenance of her face to the cascades of hair that had been chiseled into the stone, the death mask was a faithful rendition of the Padmé Rey had seen holos of in Aunt Sola’s sitting room. Rey could also see the likeness between Padmé and her daughter Leia. Sometimes Rey thought she could also see the family resemblance between grandmother and grandson. But, missing him terribly, that was likely just Rey’s own wishful thinking.

Padmé Amidala Naberrie secretly Skywalker.

With the majority of the attention directed at Anakin turned Vader, Padmé was the forgotten—and
to many across the galaxy the unknown—party in past events. Rey knew, however, that Luke and Leia’s mother must have played a significant role in the affairs of the family with which the young Force user had become embroiled.

Rey sensed Padmé had possessed great strength. In living among her people and her family, Rey also found the former Queen of Naboo was still held in great esteem.

Unfortunately, the details of how this strong and beautiful woman had lost herself in her dysfunctional marriage, her husband’s madness, and his fall to the dark side had been lost to history.

Even so, in her own strikingly similar predicament, Rey wished she could in some way elicit the help of this woman from a generation long past. This woman who truly knew what it was to be in love with a monster.

Rey wondered too how Anakin—the Jedi Knight who had somehow made the same decision to reject the Jedi Code and be open to love that Rey herself had recently made—had gone from being the young man Padme’s family had all liked to the most hated man in the galaxy.

Chewie and her Alliance friends had tried to fill in the gaps of Rey’s knowledge of the Galactic Civil War and subsequent events. But even Threepio’s detailed accounts—which if he was feeling particularly verbose included sound effects—failed to satisfy Rey’s desire for more information about Anakin and Padmé.

Rey thought about asking Artoo, but although she could understand him surprisingly well, his beeps were not conducive to long narratives. Rey also reasoned that the little droid was unlikely to be able to contribute anything new to what Threepio could tell her in any of his over six million forms of communication.

In the end Rey had had to accept that in spite of her fervent wish to know more about them, the answer to her burning question of what in the galaxy had happened to Anakin and Padmé Skywalker had also been lost to the past.

In her desire to learn from the past, Rey knew she was, unfortunately, alone. Ben—and for that matter the Luke she had met on Ahch-To—had both come to the same conclusion, and decided the only way forward was to reject the past, burn everything down, and start over.
To Rey both nephew and uncle’s thinking was way off, and she unequivocally disagreed with both of them. As the rescued collection Jedi texts could attest, Rey wanted to build upon the past instead rejecting it.

Maybe then they could all stop repeating it.

The sun had set and the light was quickly fading, and Rey knew it was time to walk back across the bridge that was used for Padmé’s funeral procession, and head back to the palace.

Ending her time with Padmé as she usually did, Rey reached out to squeeze the statue’s hand that clutched a replica of a trinket—the real one with which Rey assumed Padmé had been buried.

This time, however, as her hand met the cold stone Rey suddenly found herself swept up in a Force vision.

Padmé lay on her back as a baby cried nearby, her hair was slick with sweat and tears ran down her face. “Anakin, help me,” she cried, the physical pain of childbirth eclipsed by her emotional agony.

“Obi-Wan . . . there’s good in him,” Padmé said, her breath still labored. “I know . . . I know there’s still—” Padmé’s final thought was left unfinished, however, as her head fell to the side and she gave up her life spirit.

The scene shifted, and Rey saw herself standing on a familiar rocky cliff gazing at the desert beyond Niima Outpost, the sun having just set over the Jakku horizon. Rey saw that Anakin’s rebuilt lightsaber was in her hand. Something caught vision Rey’s attention and she looked to the right, but when Rey also turned the vision abruptly changed.

Rey now saw Poe flying his X-wing in the heat of battle—a battle that was not going well. As TIE fighters converged on him, suddenly Poe realized he was out of moves. The brash pilot had managed to escape certain doom so many times, but this was where it would all end. Poe steeled
himself, and Rey watched in horror as the X-wing’s cockpit exploded into a fireball.

Rey was pulled through the flames and onto the bridge of a Starcruiser where the mood was equally grim and pandemonium reigned. Finn, Rose, and Connix were all near by, but an older dark skinned man Rey had never met was at the helm desperately calling out orders—until everything was engulfed in a flash of green light.

Rey blinked and green was replaced by orange. A lone figure stood on the edge of a black metal precipice that looked out upon rivers of fire cutting through the black landscape below.

Even with his back turned, Rey recognized him immediately. Abruptly Ben turned to face her and their eye’s immediately locked. But his had a yellow tinge that had not been there before.

“Ben!” Rey instinctively called out to him.

As he had in the throne room, Ben raised one hand to her.

Rey took a step towards him . . . but realized this time his hand was not extended in invitation a split second before he roughly pushed her away from him with the Force.

Caught off-guard Rey lost her balance, and as with the end of her first Force vision, she found herself on the ground.

Rey took a ragged breath and put a hand on the stone tomb to steady herself.

Replaying the Force vision in her mind, Rey had to tamp down her instinctual desire to rush off in all directions and rescue everyone.

The young Force user, however, had learnt her lesson about chasing after Force vision in the wake of rushing off to Ben onboard the Supreme, and it was a lesson which had been reinforced by Luke’s recount of his disastrous rescue mission to Cloud City.
Besides—Finn, Poe, Rose, and the rest of the Alliance leaders were still on Naboo.

_Should she tell them about her vision?_

_Or would that be the same as rushing off and messing everything up?_

Unsure of what she was supposed to do, Rey reached out through the Force for Luke.

A moment later, the glowing form of her mentor appeared at her side.

Luke briefly shot an affectionate glance towards his mother’s stone likeness, before giving Rey his full attention and listening intently to the details of her Force vision.

Rey waited silently as Luke closed his eyes and mulled the situation over in his mind—it was a problem he had not exactly come up with the right answer to during his own earthly life.

“I think—” Luke opened his eyes and took a deep breath, “the important part of the vision is where you saw yourself.”

Rey worried her lip as she considered his words, and took a deep breath of her own before answering him.

“Then I need to go back to Jakku.”

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“Sir, you asked to be informed when we arrived in the Mustafar system,” Peavey’s voice crackled
over the com.

“Thank you, Captain,” Kylo acknowledged before setting his comlink down and running a black gloved hand over his face.

Although now Supreme Leader, his new quarters aboard the Vindicator were the same as they had been on the Finalizer. Also unchanged throughout his time with the First Order was how Kylo spent his time during hyperspace—sitting in a chair across from the chard remains of his grandfather’s mask.

“Well, we’re here,” Kylo said.

As usual, Vader’s mask made no reply.

Kylo’s recent venture into removing his own mask and opening himself up to another person had not ended well, and he was now back to wearing it.

Kylo turned to look down at his mask that was perched on one arm of his chair.

The mask he had smashed to bits in a fit of humiliated rage after Snoke had stripped him of it along with Kylo’s self worth. Even now his abusive master’s words still rang in this ears, “You’re no Vader—just a child in a mask.”

The mask that he had voluntarily removed for Rey and then his father.

The mask he had painstakingly reconstructed after Rey slammed the Falcon’s door in his face on Crait.

Kylo had done a good job.

Except for lines of binding crystal that glowed red in the cracks, everything else was repaired or
replaced to the mask’s original condition. It again served to keep his facial expressions and emotions safely hidden and himself closed off from everyone around him.

Except Kylo found in hindsight it had been somewhat liberating to not be trapped in its confines, and he quickly discovered that wearing it was no longer comfortable. For one thing it severely restricted his ability to see clearly.

The first thing Kylo did whenever he was safely alone, therefore, was remove it and take a deep breath.

But now he had arrived at his destination and it was time to put it back on.

Taking a ragged breath, Kylo did so.

The unpleasant task accomplished, Kylo then carefully transferred Vader’s mask to a protective box, which he secured in a satchel that he slung over his shoulder.

Kylo donned his new more Vader-like cape, reflexively checked to make sure his red lightsaber was clipped to his belt, and strode from the room to make his way down to the main hanger.

The black Upsilon class shuttle was parked in the center of the hanger. Its massive wings standing straight up in the air, it towered over the other ships.

Kylo approached the lowered gangplank where the other Knights of Ren silently waited for him. He did not greet them as he strode aboard the ship. The Knights too said nothing, and wordlessly picking up their bags of supplies they followed Kylo up the ramp.

Normally the command shuttle required at least two pilots. Kylo, however, had no intention of bringing along a crew, and flew the ship alone by manipulating controls with the Force that were out of his physical reach. At his touch the shuttle rose off the ground, its wings tilting outwards until the ship took on its raptor-like appearance in flight. Kylo steered it carefully out of the hanger.
“Captain, we’re clear. Stay alert to any incoming threats,” Kylo relayed his parting instructions.

“Yes, sir. A safe journey, sir,” Captain Peavey replied from bridge of the *Vindicator*.

Although he did not know it yet, Captain Peavey would soon be Admiral Peavey—at the rapidly approaching point in time when Kylo removed Hux from power.

As a powerful Force user, it had not been difficult for Kylo to pick out which officers and crewers preferred him—or literally anyone—over Hux as the First Order’s new Supreme Leader. He assigned most of them to the task force accompanying him to Mustafar, confident in their loyalty when it came to safeguarding their coordinates from Hux. The rest, like an unhappy Mitaka, Kylo had left aboard the *Supremacy* to keep an eye on his conniving adversary. Kylo hoped it was enough to keep Hux out of serious trouble until he returned.

With the *Vindicator* and the other Star Destroyers guarding the sky and the Knights along to cover his back, Kylo flew the ship down towards the fire and brimstone planet below.

According to the Imperial archives, it was the constant gravitational pull of two nearby gas giants that created Mustafar’s signature volcanic volatility. The Outer Rim planet’s lava was apparently quite rich in rare minerals needed to build starships, and with the help of the native Mustafarians the challenging operation of mining had carried on through the end of the Clone Wars and into the rise of the Empire.

The gravitational pull also created a state of constant electromagnetic fluctuation that rendered long range scans of the planet useless. Mustafar, therefore, was also an ideal location for secret meetings. It was long the favorite hangout of a variety of pre-Empire evildoers, most notably the Black Sun crime syndicate—before Vader moved in.

Kylo knew that after the Jedi had betrayed the Republic and had subsequently been destroyed, Mustafar was the site of the lightsaber duel between his grandfather and Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi—who had mentored both his grandfather and his uncle. It was the injuries Vader sustained at Obi-Wan’s hand that had led to the Sith Lord’s confinement in his signature life support body armor and iconic mask.

From space Mustafar appeared as a black sphere, which like Kylo’s own repaired mask, was
cracked with glowing red streaks. As the Upsilon shuttle enter the atmosphere, however, the lava fields came into more detailed relief. Although technically still day, the entire landscape was shrouded in the gloom of vog that made the lava appear to glow more brightly.

Kylo flew on in search of his more specific destination, and off in the distance a massive structure soon loomed above the horizon.

Vader’s Castle.

From what Kylo had gleaned from the Imperial archives, it was not only due to his personal history on Mustafar that Vader had chosen to build his fortress here. According to the lore surrounding the lava planet, Mustafar housed at its core a nexus for the dark side of the Force. Sensing the dark side energy growing stronger the closer the shuttle flew to the planet, Kylo agreed that was likely true.

Vader’s Castle sat on a cliff at the edge of a large lava field. Acting like a damn it appeared to harness the rage of the fiery river of molten rock for energy, before allowing the lava to pass over the cliff in a single narrow stream.

As the shuttle approached, the passengers began to get a sense of just how large the fortress was. It was only when Kylo set the ship down on the landing platform and they all disembarked, however, that its truly massive scale could be appreciated.

With its twin spires towering over the landscape the citadel of stark brutalist design, by Kylo’s estimation, rivaled any skyscraper on Hosnian Prime or any other planet. Even then as he looked up at it, Vader’s Castle dwarfed any building Kylo had ever seen in sheer presence. The main tower was tuning fork in appearance, and seemed to pulse with further concentrated dark side energy.

Legend held that Vader had built his castle over an ancient Sith cave and on the site of the Dark Lord’s greatest defeat—by hand—with the sheer power of the dark side of the Force.

No matter how Vader had actually constructed it, the edifice stood as both an embodiment and attestation to the Sith Lord’s might.
As Kylo stood looking up at Vader’s Castle, he suddenly had a bad feeling about all of this.

He could sense this was not only a place of great power, but also of great isolation and misery. For a moment Kylo hesitated—part of him wanting to turn around, get back on his ship, and hightail it off Mustafar like a scalded Mynock.

It was also, however, a place of safety for him—which by that point was of paramount importance to Kylo.

Snoke had offered Kylo protection. But Snoke was a manipulative liar and Kylo told himself he was done listening to him.

No, the only one who was going to protect Kylo was himself.

Finally free from his abusive master, protecting himself was something Kylo could actually do—but for that he needed power.

As when he had looked down on Snoke’s newly severed body, the allure of power and the safety it would bring—something Kylo had never truly know while Snoke lived—was too much of a temptation for him to not reach out and grab.

Kylo was the New Vader.

He had Vader’s blood, his powers, his mask, and now Vader’s Castle.
And soon Kylo would have the full power of the dark side of the Force.

Tamping down his reservations, Kylo marched straight ahead along the wide path that lead from the landing platform into the citadel. The Knights followed silently after him.

The interior of the fortress was as intimidating as the exterior. The walls were lined with obsidian, its recognizable geometric pattern of black volcanic glass shimmering in the dim light. Gigantic stone carvings of macabre Sith religious reliefs also lined the walkways, and added to the deeply disturbing ambience.

Kylo imagined that anyone summoned here—even the most high-ranking Imperial officers—would have been quickly put in their place and sufficiently unsettled by the insanely uninviting fortress long before the Avatar of Evil himself had assaulted his guest with his presence.

The entry passage led to an audience chamber, which consisted in a metal catwalk suspended above the glowing river of lava. Most of the permlights that lined the walkway still glowed, and the room was eerily bottom lit by the glow from the lava below.

Kylo reached out through the Force, and eventually found the right control to raise the two huge metal shields doors and allow more light into the room. The large bay window to the side overlooked the bleak Mustafar landscape. The other one was directly opposite the chamber’s entrance door, and Kylo and the other Knights suddenly found themselves looking directly into the sun.

One side of his mouth turned up, as Kylo pictured Vader making a dramatic entrance—back lit by the sun, the shadow of his terrifying profile preceding him as steam swirled up from below.

The group moved on to the rest of the fortress, lightsabers in hand and alert to any threat. As the Knights went from room to room, however, they continued to find the castle deserted, and the only sound was that of the roiling lava outside periodically drowned out by metal doors sliding open to let them pass.

Midway up the tower, the turbolift opened onto what was clearly the castle’s command center. Constructed on a massive suspension bridge, the large platform hung in the center of the room, and
filled most of the large chamber. A series of short catwalks connected the outer walkway circling the inside wall of the tower with the main area, like spokes of a wheel. There were no windows to open on this level, and the main light source was the lava below, which bottom lit the huge chamber and cast a red glow on the walls.

What appeared to be much of the communications equipment from a Star Destroyer lined the outer rim of the platform, while the middle of the command center had strangely been left open.

At the far end of the bridge a raised command chair overlooked it all.

Kylo strode across the first catwalk, onto the platform, and without hesitation ascended the dais to take a seat on the throne-like command chair.

An exploration of the chairs built-in controls revealed why the majority of the room was left uncluttered and dimly lit, as with a touch of a button a holomap of the galaxy suddenly filled the center of the platform.

Spanning twenty meters across the hologram floated in the semidarkness. More precise than any map Kylo had ever seen or even heard of, it was as much an exquisite work of art as it was a tool. If his lieutenant had had such a map at his fingertips, Emperor Palpatine had undoubtedly had one like this with which to oversee his domain.

Sculpted in an extraordinary level of detail, a single accurately positioned spot of light shone for each of the galaxy’s hundred billion stars. The major political regions including the Core systems, the Outer Rim Territories, Wild Space, the Unknown Regions were each delineated by subtle encirclements of color. From the command chair the image could also be manipulated to highlight a particular sector, or be used to track a military campaign.

Even with his helmet limiting his vision, a detail of the map quickly caught Kylo’s attention—a location in the galaxy burned into his memory long ago.

Alderaan was still present on Vader’s map.
Either Vader had not come back here after the Battle of Yavin—or for some reason the Dark Lord had not deleted that small point of light to reflect the post-Death Star reality of the galaxy.

It was an intriguing questions that did not have a ready answer, and Kylo turned off the map and rose from the chair, intent on finishing his exploration of the castle.

He made a mental note, however, to return and study the map more closely.

The rest of the rooms were for housing servants or storage, and were of little significance . . . except for one near the top.

It was clearly Vader’s inner sanctum. The alcoves for guardsmen that lined the edges of the room were expected. The Bacta tank Kylo found instead of a bed was not. It was located in the center of the Sith Lord’s dark haven with suspension cords and chains dangling over a single cylinder, which was still partially filled with the cloudy fluid of long corrupted Bacta.

There was something deeply disquieting about Vader choosing this tumultuous purgatory full of despair as his place of rejuvenation.

Kylo was struck with the dawning realization that there was a significant difference between knowing a great deal of information about Vader, and actually knowing his grandfather and what his life had been like. In spite of the heat from the surrounding lava, the implications of what he was learning sent a chill up Kylo’s spine.

It was not enough, however, to sway him from his dark purpose.

There was one more level to visit, but that one Kylo wanted to visit alone. As an excuse to end their group exploration, Kylo sent the Knights back to the shuttle to get their gear and supply of ration bars and water.
Kylo, himself, already carried the bag with the precious cargo of Vader’s mask.

The tower’s turbolift extended down into the rock of the fiery planet, lower even than the castle’s grisly dungeons. Kylo rode the turbolift car all the way to the bottom, and as the doors opened he was suddenly surrounded with pulsating red light.

From the Imperial archives, Kylo knew what he would find here—an ancient Sith cave. As with the castle itself, however, knowing what he would find and being confronted with the reality were two entirely different things.

The first part of the cave revealed where the disturbing Sith artwork in the castle’s corridors had come from, as some remained that had not been cut away and moved upstairs.

Kylo continued on into a far deeper part of the cave, and entering another chamber found the source of the red light—a pit that opened up to the inferno and the dark side nexus at planet’s core. Surrounding the pit was a ring of jagged stalagmites and stalactites, along with a flat rock that was clearly meant for meditation.

Again tamping down his misgivings about the advisability of pursuing this path, Kylo took a seat.

Ignoring the stifling heat that rose from the molten hell and the steam that swirled around him, Kylo left his mask, cape, and gloves on. He removed Vader’s mask from the protective case, and enshrined it on the stone beside him.

Closing his eyes, Kylo reached out to the dark side of the Force.

Dark energy washed over him in pulsating waves. For the first time Kylo experienced what Snoke had never wanted him to—the full power of the dark side.

Despite roiling with anger, hate, fear, and misery, Kylo found it raw and intoxicating.
The dark side was indeed powerful.

Powerful enough to protect him from future attacks on his life and all physical harm.

Powerful enough to protect him from the emotional abandonment and rejection of those he loved.

Powerful enough to protect him from the finality of the hopelessness and disappointment that filled his heart.

Powerful enough to protect him from the truth that he was unlovable.

All the pain, rejection, humiliation, and violence he had endured throughout his life would not matter. He would be so mighty and powerful that no one would ever be able to hurt him again.

Kylo inhaled several deep breaths.

From the dark side’s well-repudiated impact on Vader, Kylo was surprised when he was filled not with rage but a coldness and hardening of his heart—and a deepening of his unforgiveness.

Beyond that, as he opened himself up fully to the Dark, a clear path opened up in his mind for what to do with the galaxy out to destroy him.

Opening his eyes, Kylo found his vision now swam in yellow.

Spurred by a sense it was time for action, Kylo rose, collected Vader’s mask, and return to the castle with new conviction.
The Knights had not yet returned, and Kylo was alone in the command center of the fortress. The holoprojector and the rest of communications equipment had been built to last, and even in an environment so hostile to electronics everything still worked all these decades later.

Sitting in Vader’s throne-like command chair, Kylo once again called up the map. Being alone Kylo removed his mask to see better, and made short work of figuring out the holoprojector’s controls. He then set to work updating the map, altering the shading that delineated the territory of the long dead Empire, and laying the initial groundwork for his upcoming galaxy-wide campaign. He planned to seize control of all the star systems one by one. To finish what his grandfather had started and bring order, peace, and in particular safety to all the peoples of the galaxy—most especially himself.

While updating the map his hand briefly hovered over Alderaan. But just as he had not been able to fire with his sights trained on the bridge of the Raddus where his mother stood, Kylo found he could not make his finger pressed the command to delete.

As Vader had before him, Kylo left the speck of light representing Alderaan inaccurately in its proper place.

With his companions still leaving him to his productive solitude, Kylo was making good progress on the first phase of his military campaign—when all at once he felt a familiar sensation come over him.

All ambient noise suddenly disappeared.

A pit formed in Kylo’s stomach knowing what came next.

His chest constricted and he could barely breathe. It had been so long. And he thought no one could reach him here—that he was safely holed up in the stronghold of Vader’s Castle surrounded by his Knights.
Yet here was Rey, standing smack in the middle of his virtual plans for galactic domination.

In shock at her sudden appearance, Kylo’s yellow washed vision abruptly cleared.

Kylo’s heart clenched violently in his chest as he looked at Rey—in her current clothes a vision in white.

“Ben!” Rey’s voice was full of emotion.

In a reversal of their previous Force bond conversations, she took a step towards him.

And once again Kylo felt himself being torn apart.

Part of him wanted to fling himself at her feet and beg her to take him back.

But that part of him—the weak part—was easy to ignore in this place that was steeped with the dark side.

Kylo looked Rey straight in the eye and methodically put his mask back on.

Somehow the sound of it locking in place managed to sound just as loud as the clang of the Falcon’s door closing in his face on Crait.

As he had then, Rey seemed to feel him remasking as a physical blow, and part of Kylo was satisfied with her pained expression.

The other part of him was dying in a far greater agony than Rey, herself, was experiencing.
“Ben Solo is dead,” he pressed on, his voice now the mechanical voice of Kylo Ren. “This is your last warning. If you get in my way, I will destroy you.”

Neither spoke for the few more heartbeats before the connection was mercifully broken.

When he was once again alone Kylo, quickly took off his mask, and exhaled the breath he had been holding.

He fervently hoped Rey had not sensed how much he still loved her.

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In her guestroom on Naboo, Rey felt as though she had been kicked in the chest.

It was hard to imagining things getting much worse.

“Rey?”

Startled, Rey turned around and saw Finn, whom she had asked to come by so she could tell him about Jakku, standing in her doorway.

“What were you talking to? Who is Ben?” Finn asked, a note of urgency in his voice.

Suddenly, Rey knew she had been wrong—things were about to get a lot worse.
It was as if Finn was pulling on a loose thread with his series of questions, and like an unraveling garment the part of her recent adventures that Rey had kept to herself slowly came out.

Finn’s reaction was everything Rey had hoped to avoid when she had not told him in the first place.

“How could you go to him, Rey?! Are you insane?!” Finn said, his anger rapidly escalated as he proceeded to list off only a partial list of Kylo’s most recent crimes.

“He’s an absolute beast!” Finn added as an impassioned conclusion, “And you’re acting like you’re in love with him!”

Rey’s only answer was a miserable expression.

“I don’t believe this! This is not happening!” Finn briefly planted both palms on his face before he resumed pacing about the room.

“The reason I ask you to come by was to tell you I think I need to go back to Jakku,” Rey said. Her heart already bruised from the recent Force connection with Ben, she felt it was well past time to change the subject.

“Does this have something to do with him?!” Finn asked aggressively.

“No,” Rey quickly answered, “I need to try one more time to find answers about where I come from. I can’t explain it. It’s . . .” she searched for the right words but they would not come.

“Jedi stuff,” Finn finished for her, his anger finally starting to dissipate.

“Yes.”
“Do you want me to come with you?” was all Finn said, his voice again calm and full of its usual concern and support.

A knot deep inside of Rey that she had not been consciously aware existed uncoiled at Finn’s words.

Although vehemently disagreeing with her, Finn—her family—was not abandoning her even after learning of her less than perfect choices. It was solid footing that Rey had never known. It meant even though her path might again be diverging from Finn’s and the rest of the Rebellion’s, she was not loosing anything. In some way she could, therefore, both follow this latest call to adventure and keep her secure home base to which to return.

Tears welled up in Rey’s eyes with gratitude and relief at his offer. “I would like nothing better . . . but I think this is something I need to do alone.”

Finn nodded.

“I’ll try to be back in time for the attack, and meet you all at the rendezvous point,” Rey said.

Finn nodded again. “I’ll tell Poe,” he added.

They were both keenly aware, however, that there was also a lot Finn would not be telling Poe or any of the rest of their friends in the Rebellion.

“And let me at least help you load the Falcon.”

Rey gratefully accepted his help.

With the Falcon brought out of deep storage and loaded, the two of them held each other in a long embrace before saying their final farewell. As Rey looked back at Finn once more from inside the ship, this time as they parted she had a terrible feeling she would never see him again. There was nothing to do, however, other than take her seat besides Chewie in the prepped Falcon, and take off in a steep climb towards the comforting blackness of space.
It had been somewhat of a surprise to take off and find Artoo had very deliberately come along.

Although like Finn, BB-8 had been one of Rey’s first friends, the orange and white mechanical sphere was very much Poe’s astromech droid. As Rey’s path began to increasing deviate from that of the Rebels, she found herself less off in the company of Poe, Finn, and the little droid that had drawn her into this fight. While BB-8 was often away with Poe, Finn, and Rose, the droid with whom Rey now had the most contact was Artoo, and she had gotten to know him much better.

He was far older than BB-8, and had a seasoned wisdom and caginess about him. Rey had watched Artoo on more than one occasion use being overlooked as a droid and unintelligible to most people to his calculated advantage.

Beyond that he was incredibly good hearted.

When Artoo was not around to hear the history lessons he gave Rey, Threepio had absolutely gushed over Artoo and their adventures together during the Galactic Civil War. Rey had not realized what an integral role the golden protocol droid and his counterpart blue astromech droid had played in the original Rebel Alliance.

Threepio told her about everything from escaping Vader’s raiding party with the Death Star plans in an escape pod. Walking miles in the harsh Tatooine desert. Finding Master Luke, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and the crew of the *Millennium Falcon*, which had unfortunately lead to more space travel. Rescuing Princess Leia and everyone from an Imperial trash compactor and certain doom. Artoo helping Master Luke blow up the Death Star. Freezing their joints solid on Hoth. Threepio impersonating a maintenance droid in an attempt to help fix the *Falcon*’s broken hyperdrive. Being shot to bits by stormtroopers on Cloud City. Another horrible trip back to the sands of Tatooine, during which Master Luke *gave him and Artoo as a gift to Jabba the Hut* while they were rescuing Captain Solo. This was followed by an equally horrible trip to Endor, where the golden protocol droid endured the mortifying experiences of a bunch of Ewoks parading him around as a deity. And finally the battle for the Endor shield generator where Artoo had suffered great injury, but which had ended with his successful repair and the victory of the Rebellion over the Evil Empire.

Rey was a little surprised at how often both of the droids had been shot up or ripped apart, but refrained from commenting as this seemed to be one of the many subjects about which Threepio was quite touché.

Artoo and Threepio had also been around for the rise and fall of the New Republic, along with the
rise of the First Order and the Resistance—and the tragedy that had befallen their family. Threepio had said his counterpart had shut down in grief after Luke had left, and Rey remembered Artoo had been there in her vision of the night Ben had burned down the Jedi training temple.

But as with so much about Artoo, Rey wondered if there was more to the story.

Whatever his reasons for shutting down, Artoo seemed to have somehow caught up on the events he had missed while in low power mode. The little droid was also remarkably good at putting together the pieces, and somehow in his quiet way seemed to understand exactly what was going on to a far greater extent than most people.

Rey had understood when Artoo had come with her and Chewie to find Luke. That had made sense to Rey as Artoo had been Luke’s astromech droid and companion throughout the Civil War, and for years afterward. Although neither had said anything to her, Rey was beginning to wonder if Artoo had had some part in Luke abruptly changing his mind about teaching her.

After Luke had passed on, who to Rey’s knowledge had been Artoo’s most recent master, Rey thought Artoo would prefer to stay with Threepio. She was getting the sense, however, that the little droid had a vested interest in her journeys that extended well beyond finding Luke.

Exactly what, Rey had no idea.

Whatever his motivation, the little droid—like everything else that had once belonged to a Skywalker or Solo—had apparently decided to be hers.

Already regretting turning down Finn’s offer to come to Jakku, Rey found she was happy to be surrounded by all the friends she could muster.

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Night had fallen on Mustafar.
Although the other Knights were camped out in the command room, Kylo wanted to be alone, and had installed himself in one of the servant’s chambers.

He certainly was not going back into Vader’s abode with the Bacta tank.

There were no mirrors in the entire castle, but Kylo had a feeling that he likely looked awful. He washed his face, and prepared to try and sleep. With the addition of the heat to his already chronic insomnia, Kylo was not anticipating being successful.

He sighed.

A New Vader—Snoke and everyone else had called him that for a long time. Kylo was now free to fully finish what his grandfather started, and fulfill both their destinies.

He could not shake the feeling, however, he was missing something important.

Kylo had beseeched his grandfather many times to show him the power of the dark side, a prayer that had consistently gone unanswered. Overwhelmed by this place and his encounter with Rey, all that came out of his mouth in that movement where the heartfelt words, “I wish you were here to help me.”

From behind him Kylo suddenly heard the eerie sound of mechanical breathing.

He quickly spun around—but to his disappointment found he continued to be alone.

That night, however, he did sleep.

That was the night of the dream . . .
Chapter End Notes

Thank you as always for reading. Comments and kudos are much appreciated.

The holomap of the galaxy is taken from The Last Command (last book in the Thrawn Trilogy) by Timothy Zahn. In the EU both Palpatine and Thrawn have one of the special holomaps, and it would make sense to me if Vader had one too.

I love the symbolism of Ben spending all his free time repairing his Kylo Ren mask, and Rey spending all her free time repairing the Skywalker legacy lightsaber.

If anyone is interested, here is something I posted about why I am happy with Rey’s characterization and arc so far in both TFA and TLJ.


Next chapter is all Anakin!

And now I’m off to do my taxes . . .

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Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

From GREEN Jedi World to MOLTEN Dark Side Planet - Mustafar History Explained - Star Wars Planets by MetaNerdz Lore https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zsZbgU72ts

LOTS Podcast: Why Kylo is the Protagonist of The Last Jedi
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=381i4H7nA0M&t=2014s

LOTS Podcast: How Will Kylo Redeem Himself?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBo--5T9Qmk&t=1640s

LOTS Podcast: Psychology of the Characterization: Kylo Ren
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsdViE8mse4&t=2s

LOTS Podcast: Reylo vs. Anidala - Couple Contrasts in Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdnZHfFl2-A&t=3s

LOTS Podcast: Rey and Reylo: Psychology of the Characterization
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rP0NTri4fB8&t=3480s

LOTS Podcast: Mended Mask for Kylo, Rey and Kylo battle, and more spoilers for Episode IX
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsWh41Xt2Zs

LOTS Podcast: Episode IX Leaked Concept Art Discussion
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__RkvMtXcFl&t=2s

6°KR Podcast: Mask of the Red Death PSA
https://archiveofourown.org/works/16060415/chapters/37497101#workskin

6°KR Podcast: That's a Wrap! Star Wars Episode IX Costume Leak and Wrap Photo
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6s2a3af9cuU&t=52s

Artwork: Art of Rogue One, page 172, movie still from Revenge of the Sith
Anakin Skywalker

Chapter Summary

Here he is in all of his glorious Padme crushing, sand hating, adolescent ridiculousness! (Trying not to excessively fangirl and failing miserably).

Aka the tale of Anakin Skywalker covering TPM and AOTC including deleted scenes.

Chapter Notes

Again I am so sorry it took me so long to get this posted. I realized I really could not do Anakin’s character justice without including Clone Wars Anakin (stay tuned for the next chapter . . .), and I had to drop everything and quickly binge watch as much of the Clone Wars as I could before it got pulled off Netflix.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
A beautiful girl sat in the tall grass. Her form fitting gossamer dress, the perfect shade of yellow, spilled over her legs and covered all but her feet. Part of her impossibly long hair was up in buns, with the rest cascading down her back. A few loose strands escaped to frame her face as she smiled up at him.

Her image shifted to an array of other outfits and hair styles, including his favorite—her hair hanging loose over her bare shoulders.

Every variation of her appearance was accompanied by the same sense of overwhelming adoration and love.

He had been struck by her otherworldly beauty from the first moment he saw her.

She clearly did not belong in the harsh Tatooine desert, and in his child’s logic he thought she was some celestial being in what turned out to be one of her simplest outfits.

“Are you an angel? They’re the most beautiful creatures in the galaxy,” he asked her.

“You’re a funny little boy,” she replied before asking, “How long have you been here?”

He answered her without hesitation, “Since I was very little. Three I think. My mom and I were sold.”

She was taken aback, “You’re a slave?”

He was not used to feeling embarrassed about his social status, but something about the ways she said that rubbed him the wrong way. He had replied with at the time uncharacteristic defensiveness, “I’m a person, and my name is Anakin.”

She smoothed things over with a polished answer, but the truth was, that raised in the posh and
privileged society of a Republic Core World, Padmé was always a bit of a snob.

Later aboard a starship hurtling away from his home in the Outer Rim and his mother, however, Padmé found Anakin shivering as he experienced the cold of space for the first time, and she wrapped him in a blanket and consoled him. Anakin took the opportunity to give her the small japor snippet carving he had made for her. It was an insignificant token, but as a boy Anakin felt compelled to give her something so she would remember him.

“It’s beautiful,” Padmé pretended graciously, “But I don’t need this to remember you by. Many things will change when we reach the Capital, Ani. But my caring for you will remain.”

He held onto those words every day for ten years.

Until the day Jedi Knight Obi-Wan Kenobi and his padawan Anakin Skywalker had out of the blue been assigned to protect now Senator Padmé Amidala after an assassination attempt.

To Anakin the thought of actually seeing Padmé again was both exhilarating and terrifying.

Obi-Wan of course did not understand. Lacking any actually helpful advice all he had to say was, “You’re sweating. Relax. Take a deep breaths.”

Anakin tried taking deep breaths as he readjusting his cloak for the umpteenth time.

It did not help.

He had been dreaming about seeing Padmé again for an entire decade. Compared to all the scenarios that ran through Anakin’s mind as the turbolift ascended towards her suite, their actual reunion was a severe disappointment.

Although a slave and fairly young boy, Anakin had still managed to rescue then Queen Amidala
from her dire predicament when Naboo was invaded and she was stranded on Tatooine while fleeing to Coruscant. Later he, Artoo, and a Naboo starfighter had also done more than their part to help Padmé defeat the droid army invading her home world. Anakin hoped she would remember that.

*She didn’t.*

“Ani?! My goodness you’ve grown,” Padmé said, dropping the respectful tone with which she addressed Obi-Wan, and sounding a little shocked.

In the first of what would be many times Anakin succeeded only in coming on too strong, sticking his foot in his mouth, and generally creeping her out, he tried to pay her a compliment.

“So have you. Grown more beautiful, I mean. Well for a Senator I mean—”

It came out completely wrong, and only made things awkward.

Padmé defused the situation by throwing cold water on his hopes, “Ani, you’ll always be that little boy I knew on Tatooine.”

Even then Anakin could not take his eyes off her. Not really listening to anyone else, he unthinkingly promised Padmé whatever she wanted, to the contradiction of what Obi-Wan apparently just said. The result was another awkward scene—a public rehashing of the Jedi and his padawan’s old argument about Anakin overstepping his role and not following his master’s lead, which ended with Obi-Wan putting Anakin in his place in front of Padmé.

Barely past the trials to become a Jedi Knight himself when he took Anakin as his apprentice, Obi-Wan had done his best to fulfill his own master’s dying wish that Anakin be trained as a Jedi. In the rigidity of youth and not fully prepared to be a master, however, Obi-Wan seemed to take a page out of Master Windu’s book, and his idea of good training was being overly critical, authoritative, and unreasonable.
Furthermore, when it came to managing emotions Obi-Wan often seemed unable to give Anakin any concrete practical help beyond stating the obvious and giving vague instructions, including Anakin’s personal favorite, “You’re focusing on the negative, Anakin. Be mindful of your thoughts.”

A good master would have helped Anakin develop into his own person, even if it meant Anakin grew beyond his mentor’s capabilities. Obi-Wan, insecure in his teaching role and concerned that if he was not the superior Force user on some level he would no longer have anything to teach Anakin, held Anakin back in the subservient role of a student and took every opportunity to put Anakin in his place—even public.

Obi-Wan’s put downs, however, had the opposite effect from the one the Jedi intended as they drove Anakin to push back, and grow in defensive pride and arrogance.

At its core their dynamic was more one of bickering brothers rather than master and padawan learner.

Obi-Wan was like a brother to him, but what Anakin really needed was a father.

Both Anakin and Obi-Wan knew that if he had still been alive Qui-Gon would have been in charge of Anakin’s training. Qui-Gon’s death during his fight with Darth Maul on Naboo during the invasion had had a lasting impact on Anakin’s fate. Anakin often wondered how differently his life would have been if the older and wiser man was instructing him.

Qui-Gon was not afraid to defy the Jedi leadership and the Code to follow his conscience—at the cost of a seat on the Council. The older man, furthermore, had been so sure that Anakin was the fabled Chosen One, sent to bring balance to the Force, that he had flat out demanded Anakin be trained as a Jedi.

Anakin still did not know how he felt about the prophecy. Most of the time he just felt conflicted and torn between believing in his life of service with the Jedi and deep homesickness. He was also not sure how he was supposed to balance the Force when he himself was becoming increasingly off kilter, and felt frustrated with Obi-Wan’s best effort but still insufficient teaching.

Although the older man believed he was the Chosen One, Anakin had a feeling Qui-Gon might
have pulled the plug on his training when he saw how unbalanced Anakin was becoming. Perhaps the Jedi Master would even have sent Anakin back to his mother, who Anakin was not supposed to miss or regret leaving, but whom he did so with every fiber of his being.

With the final say on all decisions of the Council, the responsibility and blame for the situation ultimately rested on the shoulders of Master Yoda. Anakin often wished the Jedi Master would do a better job of following the old Jedi proverb of “do, or do not, there is no try,” where Anakin’s formation as a Jedi was concerned.

Master Yoda had known Anakin’s training was going to be tricky from the beginning because of his age. Qui-Gon could have done it, but Qui-Gon was dead. And instead of either refusing to let Anakin be trained, entrusting him to one of the experienced Jedi Masters—or best yet doing it himself—Master Yoda had pick the middle road of letting the young and completely inexperienced Obi-Wan be Anakin’s teacher. It was the worst of the available options, and Anakin and Obi-Wan had been making the best of a less than ideal situation ever since.

Left with Obi-Wan as his main and insufficient father figure, Anakin found himself drifting towards the other person whom had come into his life along with Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan, and Padmé. Chancellor Palpatine was liberal with the encouragement Anakin needed, and which Obi-Wan and the Jedi Council would not give him.

Upon telling the Chancellor of his new assignment to escort Padmé home to Naboo and protect her after another assassination attempt, Palpatine had been enthusiastic in his excitement for the young Force user.

“And so . . . they’ve finally given you an assignment! Your patience has paid off.”

Anakin attempted to maintain the proper humility and gratitude befitting a Jedi and replied, “Your guidance more than my patience.”

Palpatine only scoffed at that, “You don’t need guidance, Anakin. In time you will learn to trust your feelings. Then you will be invincible. I have said it many times: you are the most gifted Jedi I have ever met. I see you becoming the greatest of all the Jedi . . . even more powerful than Master Yoda.”

Anakin sometimes felt something was a bit off in the Chancellor’s grandiose praise, but without anything else to compare it to and starving for validation he let his mild concern pass to the back of
his mind.

Chancellor Palpatine after all was a good man.

It was a strange and murky time for the Jedi. They felt the dark side rising to obscure their vision in the Force, and impede their efforts to unravel mystery of an elusive Sith Lord that had recently emerged. In an atmosphere where all seemed to be shadowy smoke and mirrors, it was hard for Anakin to tell what was going on, and notice if his actions were his own or if he was being unwittingly pushed in a specific direction to benefit an unseen dark hand.

Anakin could also not shake the vague sense that somehow he was being watched—and had been throughout his training—or the whisper in the back of his mind that there were unseen snares being set in a trap directed specifically at him.

He also felt deeply conflicted about his new assignment. On the one hand he was ecstatic to finally be given one on his own, and enthralled by the intoxicating prospect of spending more time with Padmé. On the other, he knew that sending him off alone with her and expecting him to follow the Jedi Code against attachments was too much to ask of him.

Qui-Gon would have immediately seen the danger and not allowed Anakin to be put in such a position. Even Obi-Wan knew it was a bad idea. But Master Yoda and the rest of the Jedi Council who signed off on the mission were not as wise as Qui-Gon would have been. They ignored Anakin’s feelings and Obi-Wan’s warning about the temptation into which they were thrusting the young Force user.

The Sith Lord, who was now stalking Anakin and who had set off the series of events that resulted in the young padawan being assigned as Padmé’s sole bodyguard, was not ignoring Anakin’s emotions . . . but expertly manipulating them.

Master Yoda and the rest of the Jedi Master’s had made up their mind, however, and under orders from the Jedi Council and with Artoo as insufficient chaperone, Anakin and Padmé were packed off to Naboo.

Padmé herself was not happy with the arrangement. Already infuriated about having to run away
and hide when the Military Creation Act bill she had fought so long and hard against was nearing a vote, Padmé was also less than thrilled to be stuck with Anakin and his often unwanted attention.

She had initially attempted to handle the situation as she had at their initial reunion. While hastily packing in her official residence and listening to Anakin’s complaints that Obi-Wan was deliberately holding him back, Padmé remarked, “Anakin, don’t try to grow up too fast,” in another attempt to continue to cast him as the little boy she had met on Tatooine.

“But I am grown,” Anakin stood to tower over her. He then looked deeply into her eyes—a move which rendered her efforts less successful this time.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Padmé switched to more direct tactics.

“Why not?” Anakin said, more than a little miffed.

“It makes me feel uncomfortable,” was her blunt reply, before she turned and walked out of the room.

As they parted ways with her attaché, however, Anakin was pleased to hear Padmé assuage her handmaid’s fears about her attackers following her to Naboo by stating, “Well then my Jedi protector will have to prove how good he is.”

The smile she flashed him as she said it, moreover, set his all inappropriate hopes full sail once again.

The journey also gave Anakin the opportunity to practice conversing with Padmé without sticking his foot in his mouth . . . well less often anyway.

Over dinner on the public transport they were taking back to Naboo, Padmé commented, “It must be difficult having sworn your life to the Jedi. Not being able to visit the places you like, or do the things you like.”

“Like I’m still a slave,” Anakin thought.
He did not, however, voice the words that periodically rose to the back of his mind, but instead seized the opening to the conversation he would rather have.

“Or be with the people that I love?” Anakin said, again looking intensely into her eyes.

“Are you allowed to love? I thought that was forbidden for a Jedi,” Padmé asked, demonstrating her accurate knowledge of the Jedi Code.

“Attachment is forbidden. Possession is forbidden. Compassion, which I would define as unconditional love, is central to a Jedi’s life. So you might say we are encouraged to love,” Anakin replied—demonstrating in his skewed logic that for a non-politician he was still remarkably skilled at the art of spin.

“You’ve changed so much,” Padmé continued.

“You haven’t changed a bit,” Anakin replied before unfortunately adding, “You’re exactly the way I remember you in my dreams.”

He was, on the other hand, not very good at flirting.

Anakin’s confidence was steadied, however, by the fact that no matter what stupid words came out of his mouth, by decree of the Jedi Council Padmé could not send him away. By the time they reached Naboo he found he could hold a normal conversation with her.

Padmé seemed to be actually enjoying his company as they walked among the beautiful buildings of Theed towards the palace and nearby waterfalls.

Anakin confided in Padmé how homesick and lonely he was when he started training with the Jedi, “but I’d always feel better when I thought about the palace.”
“And you,” Anakin added to himself, at last managing to stop a thought from leaving his mouth that would turn their conversation awkward.

Padmé reciprocated with a memory of her own, “When I first saw the capital I was very young, and I’d never seen a waterfall before. I thought they were so beautiful. I’d never dreamed that one day I’d be living in the palace.”

“Tell me . . . did you dream of power and politics when you were a little girl?” Anakin asked.

“No, that was the last thing I thought of!” Padmé answered, her voice light and full of mirth, before again turning serious. “I wasn’t the youngest Queen ever elected, but now that I think back on it I’m not sure I was old enough. I’m not sure I was ready,” she reflected on being elected to lead her people at the age of fourteen.

“The people you served thought you did a good job. I heard they even tried to amend the constitution so you could stay in office,” Anakin countered.

“Popular rule is not democracy, Ani. It gives the people what they want, not what they need,” she chided before continuing.

“I was relieved when my two terms were up. So were my parents. They were very worried about me during the blockade—they couldn’t wait for it all to be over. Actually, I’d hope to have a family of my own by now. My sister has the most amazing, wonderful kids,” Padmé continued, turning their conversation surprisingly personal. “But when the Queen asked me to serve as Senator I could not refuse her.”

“I agree with her. I think the Republic needs you. I’m glad that you choose to serve,” Anakin replied, motivated in no small part by the fact that her job in the Senate had apparently stopped her from settling down with someone else.

At last they reached the palace, and Anakin found himself standing silent guard behind Padmé as she discussed the current situation in the Senate with the ornately decorated current Queen and the Naboo governing council. Padmé expressed her concern that if the Senate created an army it would push the Republic into a civil war.

“It’s unthinkable,” one of the Council members replied, “There hasn’t been a full scale war since
the formation of the Republic.”

“Do you see any way through negotiations to bring the Separatists back into the Republic?” the Queen asked Padmé.

“Not if they feel threatened,” Padmé replied, “My guess is they will turn to the Trade Federation or the Commerce Guild for help.”

This elicited a new round of outrage from the Council that after numerous trials the leaders of the Trade Federation who were responsible for invading Naboo ten years ago were still in power and remained unpunished.

“I fear the Senate is powerless to resolve this crisis,” a Councilman said, voicing the opinion of many of his colleagues.

“We must keep our faith in the Republic,” the Queen countered, “The day we stop believing democracy can work is the day we lose it.”

Anakin could not help himself from internally scoffing at her words.

The conversation then turned to Padmé’s safety.

“What is your suggestion, Master Jedi?” one of the older Council members asked Anakin.

“Oh, Anakin’s not a Jedi yet,” Padmé interjected, “He’s just a padawan learner. But I was thinking-”

“Hold on a minute-” Anakin protested.

“Excuse me,” Padmé interrupted him before again addressing the Queen, “I was thinking I would stay in the Lake Country. There are some places up there that are very isolated-”
“Excuse me, I’m in charge of security here, milady,” Anakin himself interrupted, quickly becoming incensed by her dismissive attitude.

“And this is my home. I know it very well. That is why we are here. I think it would be wise if you took advantage of my knowledge in this instance,” Padmé insisted in an extremely patronizing tone.

Taking a deep breath, Anakin bit his tongue, plastered a cordial smile on his face and said, “Sorry milady.”

Obi-Wan would be proud of him.

Although she had assumed the official name of Amidala when she was elected Queen, Padmé’s family name was Naberrie. As they left the palace it was to the Naberrie family home that Padmé next led Anakin and Artoo so she could collect more things she would need for her time in hiding.

As they walked, Anakin had time to reflect on the woman he had idealized and put on a pedestal for the last ten years.

No longer wearing the elaborate regalia and face paint of “Queen Amidala,” Padmé appeared to still wear a mask of office. Anakin was finding that arguing with Senator Amidala in her official capacity, particularly when there was an audience, was a fast way to get himself put in his place. In private, however, Padmé Naberrie was still the warm and caring woman he had fallen in love with all those years ago. Anakin found, moreover, that the more time they spent together the more of a glimpse under her mask and into Padmé’s very personal private life he got to see.

She led them down a series of streets with stone archways until Anakin was thoroughly lost. They came to a modest but elegant house—there were not any other kind here from what Anakin could see—and stopped.

“This is my house,” Padmé announced with a happy smile.
Two laughing little girls suddenly tumbled out of a door and clambered down the steep stone stairs.

“Ryoo! Pooja!” Padmé exclaimed, before stooping to embrace them.

Watching Padmé greet her nieces, Anakin smiled.

The little girls’ attention was soon captured by Artoo, who they found fascinating. Still laughing they ran around the droid, who obligingly chased them in circles.

Once inside Padmé introduced Anakin to her parents, Ruwee and Jobal, and to her sister Sola. Her family was welcoming and seemed to like him, for which Anakin was grateful. Anakin also came to the realization that Padmé came from a more modest background than he had previously thought.

They had arrived just in time for dinner. Anakin could not remember the last family dinner to which he had been. Actually he could—his last night with his mother on Tatooine.

Padmé had been at that one too.

“Did you know Anakin you’re the first boyfriend my sister has ever brought home,” Solo warmly engaged him in conversation.

Anakin was delighted to here Padmé had not brought anyone else to meet her family. The speed with which she corrected her family’s misconception and clarified that he too was not her boyfriend, however, was a bit off putting—even if she did acknowledge they had personal ties.

“He’s not my boyfriend. Anakin’s a friend, we’ve know each other for years,” Padmé told her family, before nonchalantly adding, “He’s a Jedi assigned to me by the Senate to protect me.”

This was apparently news to the Naberries.

“A bodyguard! Oh Padmé, they didn’t tell us it was that serious,” her mother Jobal exclaimed.
“It’s not, I promise. I’m not in any danger, Mom,” Padmé soothingly replied.

Padmé’s family, however, was well acquainted with Padmé’s tendency to minimize and ignore inconvenient truths, and had no intention of taking her view of the situation at face value.

“Is she?” Padmé’s father asked Anakin.

“Yes, I’m afraid she is,” Anakin replied with blunt honesty.

The mood after that was somber, and everyone quickly finished eating.

While Padmé joined her mother and sister in clearing the table, her father asked Anakin to join him for a walk in the garden. Anakin knew Ruwee was likely looking for an opportunity to get Anakin’s unvarnished assessment of the situation regarding his daughter, and after making small talk for a few minutes the older man finally got to the burning question on his mind.

“So tell me son, how serious is this thing. How much danger is my daughter really in?”

“There have been two attempts on her life. Chances are there will be more,” Anakin answered.

“I don’t want anything to happen to her,” Ruwee was visibly worried.

“I don’t either,” Anakin replied.

The fact that Padmé’s father valued Anakin’s opinion and seemed steadied by his presence to protect his daughter meant a lot to Anakin.

That Anakin could feel Padmé’s gaze on him from a nearby window was also extremely welcome.
Later Anakin found that talking with Padmé in her childhood bedroom was night and day from the last conversation they had had while she was packing.

“So you still live at home,” Anakin commented while looking at the holos on her wall.

“I move around so much I’ve never had a place of my own. Official residences have no warmth. I feel good here. I feel at home,” Padmé replied.

“I’ve never really had a home. Home was always where my mom was,” Anakin said, his heart briefly constricting in pain as it did whenever he thought of his mother.

Padmé joined him when he reached a holo of her playing with some alien children, who had been relocated after their planet died.

“They were never able to adapt and live off their native planet,” Padmé said sadly.

“*Kind of like me,*” Anakin thought.

Soon Padmé was packed, and after saying goodbye to her parents and sister, Anakin and Padmé headed off to the Naboo Lake Country. They both seemed acutely aware, however, that something had shifted between them after Padmé took him home to meet her family.

As insensitive to his predicament as the Jedi Council had been, Anakin also soon found that Padmé was far worse.

While her chosen destination was as promised remote and safely isolated—the beautiful villa surrounded by lush foliage was also incredibly romantic. Padmé too seemed to get a lot prettier, and while it was likely a trick of the Naboo light, Anakin could not recall her wearing that shade of lipstick on Coruscant. He also discovered that Padmé’s clothing choices were very different from those of Senator Amidala—in the Senate she would never have dreamed showing that much skin.
It was all too much for Anakin, who was not able to keep his hands and his lips off her for even one day.

He somehow managed to turn his comparison between the coarseness of sand and the smooth softness of everything on Naboo into an excuse to caress her bare shoulder.

And then kiss her.

For a few glorious seconds Padmé kissed him back—before abruptly pulling away and telling him she should not have kissed him, much to Anakin’s disappointment.

His fears that she would push him away for crossing the line were quickly abated, however, as the next day Anakin found himself joining Padmé for a romantic picnic in a field of tall grass surrounded by waterfalls.

They talked of a myriad of things—including first loves and first kisses, which was unfair since she was his only love and his first kiss had been with her the day before.

Their conversation also briefly turned to politics—and the first of many disagreements over the best system of government they would have over the years.

“I don't think the system works,” Anakin said.

“How would you have it work?” Padmé asked.

Being able to express a deeply held opinion that was likely different from hers was a big step for Anakin, and it seemed to increase her opinion of him. Anakin also appreciated that, unlike Obi-Wan, Padmé was genuinely interested in what he thought.

“We need a system where the politicians sit down and discuss the problem, agree what's in the best interest of all the people, and then do it,” Anakin said matter-of-factly.

“That's exactly what we do. The trouble is that people don't always agree,” Padmé countered.
“Well, then they should be made to,” Anakin argued.

“By whom? Who's going to make them?” Padmé was incredulous.

“I don't know. Someone,” Anakin replied.

“You?” Padmé asked.

“Of course not me,” Anakin replied, his tone making it clear he thought that was preposterous.

“But someone,” Padmé continued.

“Someone wise,” Anakin said.

“Sounds an awful lot like a dictatorship to me,” Padmé responded.

“Well . . . if it works . . .” Anakin stated with a small smile.

For a moment there was a new tension between them—which Padmé defused by choosing to believe that Anakin was joking.

Then she was back to shamelessly flirting with him, and their afternoon ended with a tumble through the tall grass, and her landing on top of him.

After that Padmé’s maddening mixed messages only escalated.

“Ani” was no longer meant as a put down to remind him he was just a boy, but a welcome term of
endearment. All their meals turned into meals for two, where Anakin frequently charmed her with parlor trick versions of his Force powers.

In unwisely sending him here, the Jedi Council had been merely oblivious to his feelings. Anakin began to realize, however, that Padmé knew exactly what she was doing, and in spite of her earlier protestations, on some level his attention was no longer unwanted.

Finding himself in a room lit only by firelight again alone with Padmé, who sat near to him on a couch wearing yet another dress made of yards and yards of fabric but which still barely managed to cover her—Anakin was done.

He told Padmé he could not go on this way. He professed his long abiding love, which turned being around her into the most agonizing of tortures. Anakin promised Padmé with deep conviction that he would be scarred for life from the kiss she had cut short—a life that would not be lasting much longer anyway as the mere thought of not being with her was causing him to die of asphyxiation.

Anakin laid it on extremely thick, and he sensed he was finally getting under Padmé’s skin.

“If you are suffering as much as I am, please tell me,” he entreated.

“I can’t. We can’t. It’s just not possible,” Padmé said in a tone of genuine regret.

“Anything is possible, Padmé. Listen to me,” Anakin said imploringly, again inching and leaning closer to her as he had been throughout their entire conversation.

Finally out of room on the couch to back away from him, Padmé stood and walked to the other side of the room. She proceeded to angrily list all the practical reasons why they could not go down this path—specifically that he was a Jedi and she was a Senator—“regardless of the way we feel about each other.”

All Anakin heard was his feelings for her were reciprocated, and he rose and crossed to Padmé’s side.
“Believe me, I wish I could just wish away my feelings, but I can’t,” Anakin said bitterly.

“I will not give into this,” Padmé said, again renewing her resolve.

Sensing the door closing, Anakin changed tactics and uttered the fateful words that would someday impact not only their lives but also the entire galaxy.

“Well you know it wouldn’t have to be that way . . . we could keep it a secret.”

“We’d be living a lie!” Padmé was horrified, “One we couldn’t keep even if we wanted to. I couldn’t do that. Could you Anakin? Could you live like that?”

His real answer was yes—yes he could.

If it meant getting to be with her, Anakin could absolutely live like that. But having those words come out of his mouth only to have her say no anyway was not the way he wanted to end this already frustrating conversation.

In the end Anakin told Padmé what she wanted to hear and left the room.

Anakin did not, however, have time to dwell on his disappointment with Padmé. The reoccurring nightmares he had been having about his mother for the last month were getting more terrifying, and the sense accompanying them became steadily more urgent.

Obi-Wan had told him the dreams would pass. Padmé, however, was more sympathetic. Although not thrilled at the time to be stuck on a public transport with Anakin heading back to Naboo, when confronted with his distress she had easily slipped back into the maternal role she had assumed
during their first space flight together.

After waking him, she gently said, “You seem to be having a nightmare.”

“Yeah,” Anakin acknowledged, still coming back to his senses.

“You were dreaming about your mother, weren’t you,” Padmé pointedly said.

His mother was a precious topic he usually kept safely hidden, but Anakin felt he could freely confide in Padmé.

“I left Tatoonie so long ago that . . . my memory of her is fading. And I don’t want to lose it,” Anakin admitted before adding, “Recently I’ve been seeing her in my dreams . . . scary dreams. I worry about her.”

On Naboo his dreams had only intensified. Even after their awkward conversation the night before, Padmé still approached Anakin in the early morning light and confronted him about them.

“You had another nightmare last night,” Padmé said.

“Jedi don’t have nightmares,” Anakin replied without looking at her.

“I heard you,” Padmé countered.

No longer able to deny the truth, Anakin finally came clean admitted he could no longer bare the nightmares—of his mother screaming for his help—and told Padmé he had to leave and go to Tatooine.

Anakin also realized then that, with Qui-Gon dead, Padmé was the only other person in his life off Tatooine that had actually met his mother, and that she might understand.
“I know I’m disobeying my mandate to protect you Senator, but I have to go. I have to help her,” Anakin pleaded.

Padmé did understand, an without protest or requests for further explanation simply said, “I’ll go with you.”

Anakin was truly shocked that she would do this for him—to ignore the danger she was in and selflessly stand by him in his need—thereby allowing him to help his mother without breaking his assignment to stay with her.

Ignoring that literally the last thing Obi-Wan had said to Anakin before he and Padmé left for Naboo was “Anakin, don’t do anything without first consulting either myself or the Council,” both quickly packed up and left the safety of the Lake Country.

They returned to the spaceport in Theed, boarded Padmé’s sleek sliver shuttle, and took off for Tatooine. Soon they were walking through the sandy streets of Anakin’s childhood home of Mos Espa among the scavengers, indigenous creatures, and off-worlders who did not want to be found.

The pair finally came to a small junk shop and found a leathery blue Toydarian sitting in front. With flies buzzing all around, both shop and owner had clearly seen better days.

“Chut-chut, Watto,” Anakin greeted his former master in Huttese.

Anakin then picked up the droid part Watto was struggling with and began to fix it.

The Toydarian was confused. Although upon seeing Anakin’s lightsaber clipped to his belt, he began protesting his innocence of some crime Anakin knew nothing about of which Watto was likely guilty.

When Anakin said he was looking for Shmi Skywalker, however, Watto suddenly took a second look at the young Jedi before him.

“Ani? Little Ani?” Watto switched to basic, his tone now incredulous. But as Anakin wordlessly set the now fixed droid part in front of him, he excitedly exclaimed, “You are Ani! It is you! And a
Jedi! Whattaya know!”

Quickly returning to thoughts of his bottom line, which was all the Toydarian really cared about, he added conspiratorially, “Hey, maybe you could help with some deadbeats who owe me a lot of money.”

“My mother,” Anakin said, visibly displeased as he refocused Watto.

“Oh yeah, Shmi. She’s not mine—a no more. I sold her,” Watto said.

“You sold her?” Anakin replied.

“Years ago. Yeah, I sold her to a moisture farmer named Lars. Believe it or not, I heard he freed her and married her! Can ya beat that, eh?” Watto said.

Pinning down the verbose but vague Toydarian on specifics was always a difficult task, but Anakin finally ascertained that his mother now lived with her husband in the absolute middle of nowhere on the far side of Mos Eisley.

As he and Padmé returned to the ship and began flying in search of the Lars moisture farm, Anakin had time to think and remember.

Walking through the dusty town in which he grew up brought back memories of the events that led to him leaving.

As a boy he had come upon the fascinating offworlders that had just left Watto’s junk shop—Qui-Gon, Padmé, Artoo, and the Gungan Jar Jar Binks—on his way home. Anakin had intervened when Jar Jar had of course gotten into trouble by running a foul of Sebulba, who was a particularly nasty Dug.

“If you weren’t a slave, I’d squash you now,” Sebulba snarled at Anakin.
“Yeah, it would be a pity if you had to pay for me,” Anakin answered calmly, knowing he had won that round.

All heading in the same direction, Anakin chatted with the offworlders as they walked along. Learning their ship was too far away for them to get back to with a sandstorm coming up, Anakin had been happy to take them home to his mother—particularly after a glimpse of Qui-Gon’s lightsaber clipped to his built left Anakin even more intrigued.

Shmi Skywalker was by that point accustomed to Anakin bringing home all manner of people. Continuing her efforts to raise a son who knew nothing of greed, Shmi was happy for every opportunity to reinforce to Anakin the importance of generosity and hospitality, and always greeted everyone warmly and invited them to stay—no matter how little food she and Anakin might have that day.

While Qui-Gon spoke to Shmi, Anakin was happy to show Padmé his room and especially Threepio, the protocol droid he was building to help his mother.

“Isn’t he great!?!” Anakin proudly exclaimed to Padmé.

“He’s wonderful!” Padmé indulged his child’s pride and excitement.

Anakin turned Threepio on, and the droid had immediately bonded with Artoo, who had followed the two organics into Anakin’s room.

Shmi soon called them to dinner, and Anakin was grateful there was enough to go around that day.

Their conversation soon turned to Anakin and Shmi’s status as slaves—with bombs hidden somewhere in their bodies to stop them from running away. Padmé was flabbergasted slavery still existed in the galaxy, and Shmi had to patiently disillusion the younger woman that the laws of the Republic did not extend to the Outer Rim.

Anakin abruptly changed the subject.

“You’re a Jedi Knight, aren’t you,” Anakin abruptly asked Qui-Gon, “I saw your laser sword. Only Jedi carry that kind of weapon.”
Qui-Gon’s reply was vague but did not contain a denial, so Anakin took that as a confirmation of the older man’s identity.

“I had a dream I was a Jedi,” Anakin told Qui-Gon. “I came back here and freed all the slaves. Have you come to free us?” he asked the Jedi.

“No,” Qui-Gon said. The Jedi then laid out their desperate situation—that Naboo had been invaded and they absolutely had to get the Queen to Coruscant, but were stranded on Tatooine until they could repair their ship. Qui-Gon had barely finished speaking before Anakin offered to fix the ship—which he likely could actually do. The Jedi, however, told Anakin that the real issues was not having the parts they needed—and with Republic credits being useless on Hutt controlled Tatooine they were really and truly stuck.

Still determined to help, Anakin switched gears to focus on how to get the ship parts from the junk dealers. Without any thought of reward, Anakin quickly concocted a plan for Qui Gon to pretend to own the racing pod Anakin had built, and talk Watto into letting Anakin race it in an upcoming podrace. Then the winnings could be used to buy the needed parts.

His mother was not happy with Anakin’s plan.

“I don’t want you to race. I die every time Watto makes you do it,” Shmi protested.

“Mom, you say the biggest problem in this galaxy is nobody helps each other,” Anakin reminded her.

Her son’s words softened and eventually melted Shmi’s opposition, even as Qui-Gon and Padmé tried to brainstorm other solutions to their serious problem.

“No, there is no other way,” Shmi said with resignation, “I may not like it, but he can help you.”
And help Anakin did—winning the race and saving the day.

Padmé knelt down and embraced him, “We owe you everything, Ani.”

Then his beaming mother kissed his cheek and brushed his hair from his forehead. “It’s so wonderful, Ani! You have brought hope to those who have none! I’m so very proud of you,” Shmi exclaimed.

It was then that Anakin learnt of the side bet that Qui-Gon had made with Watto—and that with his victory Anakin was free.

“Now you can make your dreams come true, Ani. Your free!” his mother said after Qui-Gon announced the good news.

Believing the Jedi could offer her son a better life than she could, Shmi asked Qui-Gon, “Will you take him with you? Is he to become a Jedi?”

“Yes,” Qui-Gon told her, before kneeling down in front of her son. “Anakin, training to become a Jedi is not an easy challenge. And even if you succeed it’s a hard life.”

“But I want to go! It’s what I’ve always dreamed of doing!” Anakin exclaimed before turning to his mother and asking, “Can I go mom?”

“Anakin, this path has been placed before you. The choice is yours alone,” Shmi told him. To Anakin, however, it was obvious what choice both his mother and Qui-Gon wanted him to make.

“I want to do it!” Anakin said after only a moment’s hesitation, and Qui-Gon told him to pack his things.

He was almost out of the room before a terrible thought finally occurred to Anakin, “What about mom? Is she free too?”
Qui-Gon apologetically told Anakin what Shmi already knew, that Watto would not let both of them go.

Anakin’s decision abruptly got much harder.

His mother, however, really wanted her son to have the better life she imagined for him as a Jedi.

“Son, my place is here, my future is here. It’s time for you to let go,” Shmi said before caressing Anakin’s face.

“I love you,” she whispered as she embraced him.

At his mother’s encouragement Anakin ran off to his room to pack his meager bag. As he did so he said his goodbyes to Threepio—apologizing to the confused and indignant droid that he could not finish him and that he would make sure his mother did not sell him—before quickly returning to Qui-Gon and his mother.

He soon walked out the door of his home for the last time and followed after Qui-Gon into the dusty street.

Anakin only made it a few paces, however, before he abruptly stopped, turned, and raced back to his mother.

“I can’t do it, Mom. I just can’t do it,” Anakin told her.

“Ani . . .” Shmi said, a note of imploring entering her voice.

“Will I ever see you again?” Anakin asked tearfully.

“What does your heart tell you?” Shmi asked gently.

“I hope so . . . Yes,” Anakin said.
“Then we will see each other again,” Shmi said encouragingly.

“I will come back and free you, Mom. I promise,” Anakin told her with great conviction.

“Now, be brave,” Shmi told Anakin, again caressing her son’s face, “And don’t look back . . . don’t look back.”

With one last parting look of love, she firmly turned Anakin around, and he continued on after Qui-Gon.

As a boy Anakin had never been anything but perfectly obedient to his loving and kind mother, but over the years he struggled to obey her parting command.

Anakin had always thought his mother was the gentlest, kindest, most loving person in the whole galaxy. During the last ten years off Tatooine Anakin’s assessment of his mother had not changed, but his appreciation of just how special she was had risen exponentially.

Used to his tender mother, Anakin’s education that his new Jedi caregivers were not so warm and kind was jarring.

Taken from their families at the usual young age, none of the other Jedi could remember their mothers, and Anakin’s deep homesickness was not met with compassion or understanding. While many decades later his grandson would be a model of emotional repression befitting a Jedi—Anakin was not. He was teased mercilessly by the other younglings for his sensitivity and shamed for his emotions by his instructors.

To survive Anakin learnt to harden his kind and generous heart, and only let his emotions show when he was alone—which usually meant crying himself to sleep.

During those dark times, Anakin consoled himself with memories of the angelic girl who had comforted him on his first space flight, and understandingly told him it was okay to miss his mother.
And if he was not dreaming of his mother he was dreaming of her.

On Tatooine Anakin had dreamt of becoming a Jedi and freeing all the slaves. Once he began his training, however, he soon acquired a new dream—in it he told Qui-Gon “no.” As miserable as he was with the Jedi, however, Anakin stayed over the years for the reason he left in the first place—so one day he could return to Tatooine a Jedi and free his mother.

Now Anakin had returned, accompanied by the same angelic girl—only to find someone else had already freed Shmi.

As he flew on towards Mos Eisley, something now struck Anakin that had not occurred to him when he was a boy.

Watto would have never willing let him go.

At the time being freed after winning the podrace had seemed like a miracle. But thinking back on the event with older and more jaded eyes, Anakin knew it was no miracle . . . Qui-Gon had done something.

“I’m sorry Ani. I tried to free your mother but Watto wouldn’t have it,” Qui-Gon had told him.

“No, that wasn’t true,” Anakin thought.

In their side bet the greedy Toydarian would have tried to trade a slave for Qui-Gon’s broken ship—but that slave would have been Shmi not Anakin.

However, as everything on Tatooine revolved around gambling, Watto would have let his weighted chance cubes determine the outcome.
An outcome that Qui-Gon had deliberately changed to make sure it was Anakin who was freed.

And now an alternative outcome to the podrace victory formed in Anakin’s mind.

One where Qui-Gon had not altered the chance cube, and his mother had been freed instead of Anakin. Shmi would have never left her son, and life would have continued on much as it always had—until she met a moisture farmer who fell in love with her and married her.

It would not have been his mother who needed to be freed but Anakin—and out of love for Shmi her husband would have paid for Anakin’s freedom. Anakin would have been very expensive—much more so than his mother—but this man likely would have done it.

Because that is what real families did . . . they made sacrifices for each other.

And then Anakin would have grown up in an intact loving family.

Anakin knew in a special way that the Force was his father. Not having an earthly father had not been a problem when he was growing up with his loving mother, but in later years it had eventually become one. Had this been the Force’s plan to provide for Anakin in his need?

As Anakin’s mind ran wild with speculation, Qui-Gon suddenly did not seem so wise in deliberately altering Anakin’s fate. The young Force user now wondered how far the Jedi’s will for him differed from the will of the Light.

In spite of their loud protestations about his older age, Anakin had never known the Jedi to come across a Force sensitive child they did not feel entitled to take from their family for the good of the Order. They even kept a list of all the Force sensitive children that existed throughout the galaxy, whom they watched until it was time.

Somehow, in spite of all his strength with the Force, Anakin had been overlooked, and had never been on that list. Resultantly he had not been taking from his mother at the usual young age.
It was almost as if the Light had hidden Anakin on Force dampened Tatooine, and it was unlikely the Jedi would have ever found him if it had not been for the events that the mysterious Sith Lord Darth Sidious had set in motion.

Had the Force even wanted the Jedi to find him?

It was a question that now swirled in Anakin’s mind as they neared their destination.

Anakin, Padmé, and Artoo finally arrived in the middle of nowhere, and Anakin set the ship down near the Lars moisture farm. Padmé told Artoo to stay with the ship, and she and Anakin headed towards the homestead.

The only sentient being in view was a humanoid droid awkwardly working on a piece of machinery. As the pair approached the droid looked up.

“Oh! Hello,” the droid said, managing to sound startled and prissy at the same time, “How might I be of service? I am C-”

“Oh, um,” the protocol droid briefly stuttered before recognition suddenly came. “Oh, the Maker! Master Ani! I knew you would return! I knew it! And Miss Padmé! Oh my!” Threepio exclaimed.

True to the promise her nine-year-old son had extracted from her before leaving home, Shmi had not sold the droid. Someone had done a decent job of completing the droid by giving Threepio coverings—although Anakin of course could have done better.

“I’ve come to see my mother,” Anakin told the droid.

“Oh, um. I think perhaps we better go indoor,” Threepio replied before quickly shuffling off
towards the entrance to the homestead.

Accompanied by Padmé, Anakin followed behind—a sense of foreboding steadily growing in his heart.

Once inside they ran into a couple around their age.

“Master Owen, might I present two most important visitors,” Threepio began the introductions.

“I'm Anakin Skywalker,” Anakin said.

“Owen Lars. This is my girlfriend, Beru,” Owen said.

Beru greeted them, and Padmé also introduced herself.

“I guess I'm your stepbrother. I had a feeling you might show up someday,” Owen admitted.

Owen Lars was welcoming but was clearly wary of his stepbrother, with his much flashier clothes, female companion, and life. Anakin suspected the other young man would be impressed by his mechanical abilities, which were extremely valuable on a place like Tatooine, but that was not why he was here.

“Is my mother here?” Anakin asked.

“No, she's not,” an older, deeper voice said from behind him.

Anakin turned and came face to face with the man who should have been his father.

“Cliegg Lars,” the older man said, extending his hand to Anakin, who shook it. “Shmi is my wife. We should go inside. We have a lot to talk about.”
Cliegg was in a hoverchair, and appeared to have been recently injured. As Anakin followed him inside the homestead the foreboding in his heart shifted into barely contained panic.

“It was just before dawn,” Cliegg said as they all sat around the family’s dining table. “They came out of nowhere. A hunting party of Tusken Raiders. Your mother had gone out early, like she always did . . . to pick mushrooms that grow on the vaporators. From the tracks she was about halfway home . . . when they took her.”

Anakin did not look at his stepfather while he spoke, instead looking straight ahead—flashbacks of his nightmares that he now knew were likely not just dreams swimming before his eyes.

“Those Tuskens walk like men . . . but they're vicious, mindless monsters. Thirty of us went out after her. Four of us came back. I'd be out there with them, but after I lost my leg . . . I just couldn’t ride anymore un—until I heal. I don't want to give up on her . . . but she’s been gone a month. There's little hope she’s lasted this long.”

Anakin’s only response was to wordlessly rise from the table.

“Where are you going?” Owen asked.

“To find my mother,” Anakin replied.

“Your mother's dead, son. Accept it,” Cliegg tried to reason with him.

*Like hell he would.*

Anakin strode back outside and for a moment just gazed at the familiar twin suns setting over the horizon.

He sensed Padmé had followed him, and he turned to face her.
“You're going have to stay here,” Anakin told her, “These are good people, Padmé. You'll be safe.”

“Anakin-” Padmé said, her voice full of emotion.

Padmé reached up and embraced him, and Anakin held her close and buried his face into her neck. In that moment they both felt something again shift between them.

“I won't be long,” he told her as he pulled away.

Anakin briefly looked back at her before throwing a leg over what he assumed was his stepbrother’s speederbike, and took off towards the setting suns.

Heading in what he sensed was the right direction, Anakin left the flatlands and soon found himself surrounded by huge rock formations. He came upon a troop of Jawas scavenging the desert in a gigantic Sandcrawler with massive treads. One of the short creatures looked out from under his hood with glowing yellow eyes, and pointed in response to Anakin’s request for the whereabouts of the sandpeople.

Anakin continued on in that direction until he sensed he was closing in on the Tusken camp, at which point he parked the speederbike and covered the remaining distance silently on foot. Soon he reached the edge of a cliff.

Night had fallen, and by the moonlight Anakin saw a cluster of primitive huts, each with its own fire, as he looked down into the valley below. Anakin easily made the long drop down, and kept to the shadows as he entered the camp. Most of the sandpeople were inside the huts, but a few sat around fires and watched a pair of vicious looking dogs fight over a bone.

Reaching out through the Force, Anakin located his mother’s sense—she was still alive and alone in one of the huts near the perimeter. With the hum drowned out by the snarling dogs, Anakin ignited his lightsaber and cut a hole in the hut’s wall that was still shrouded under the cover of night.
Inside he was met with the horrific sight of his mother bound by her wrists to a crude rack. From the glow of a nearby fire, every visible part of Shmi’s skin was bruised and cut up. From the blood stains that soaked through her clothes Anakin could tell even parts of her that were currently covered had been viciously slashed.

Appalled and overcome with emotion, Anakin quickly unbound his mother’s wrists and carefully lowered her off the rack. He cradled her against his chest with one arm, and held her hand with his other.

“M-mom, Mom . . .” Anakin whispered, barely able to contain his tears.

Anakin had long hoped to see his mother again—but not like this. He would have gladly given up reuniting with her if it meant sparing his mother from the agony of her present captivity.

Roused from her semiconscious state by being jostled, Shmi opened her eyes at the sound of Anakin’s voice and gazed upon her son.

“Ani?” Shmi asked, clearly believing she was hallucinating, “Ani? Is it you?”

“I'm here, Mom. You're safe,” Anakin told her, trying to stay calm for her sake.

“Ani? Ani?” Shmi still could not believe her eyes, “Oh, you look so handsome.”

His mother reached a hand up to caress his face, and he turned to kiss her palm.

“My son. Oh, my grown-up son,” Shmi said, her voice full of the love and warmth Anakin remembered so vividly, “I'm so proud of you, Ani.”

“I missed you,” Anakin replied, barely able to get the words out.

“Now I am complete,” Shmi said with tone of deep peace, and Anakin managed to smile lovingly down at her, as her hand continued to rest on his face.
“I love y-” Shmi whispered.

It had been so long since Anakin had heard those words.

He sensed, however, that his mother’s spirit was beginning to weaken.

“Stay with me, Mom. Everything-” Anakin said unable to finish as he fought against the sense of panic that was quickly rising in him.

“I love-” Shmi whispered, herself unable to finish. She tried again with the last of her strength, “I . . . I love-”

As Anakin held his mother, a long exhaled breath left her lips, followed by her hand dropping away from his face and her head falling back.

She was gone.

For the first few moments of stunned disbelief Anakin could not comprehend that he was alone.

This could not be happening.

Eventually he collected himself enough to reach up close his mother’s lifeless eyes. As his hand drifted down to stroke her neck—still warm in a parody of life—a memory rose in Anakin’s mind—the first time he had the misfortune to meet the Jedi Council.

Desperate for their approval and acceptance, nine-year-old Anakin had tried his hardest on all their various tests of his Force abilities, and waited nervously to see if he passed.
Finally Master Yoda spoke, “How feel you?”

“Cold, sir,” Anakin softly replied.

“Afraid are you?” Yoda pressed him.

“No, sir,” Anakin said, making sure to infuse more confidence into his voice this time.

“See through you we can,” Master Yoda told him ominously.


“Your thoughts dwell on your mother,” Master Mundi continued their invasive interrogation.

“I miss her,” Anakin stated what to his mind was obvious.

“Afraid to lose her I think, hm?” Yoda said.

“What’s that got to do with anything,” Anakin replied, by this point having completely dropping his respectful demeanor.

“Everything! Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering,” Yoda said, hammering into Anakin his first lesson on the core philosophy of the Jedi.

“I sense much fear in you,” Yoda told Anakin with great disapproval.

The realization of Anakin’s worst fear, and his current pain at the trauma of his mother’s death was so profound that it caused a massive disturbance in the Force. It was so strong that Master Yoda and others powerful in the Force could sense it back on Coruscant.

Over the last ten years of indoctrination, the Jedi had kept the young Force user emotionally
stunted and unprepared for this moment as he confronted his overwhelming grief. Anakin’s response, therefore, was that of a small child. And not the sweet and kind boy his mother raised, but the angry jaded one the Jedi had turned him into.

Only he was not a small child—but a highly skilled and lethal Jedi.

Moreover, it became apparent that increased strength in the Force was not the only thing that Anakin had acquired during his Jedi training. Roused by the unbearable loss of his family and an accompanying feeling powerlessness, something dark rose up from deep inside of Anakin and reared its ugly head for the first time.

And with his mother’s stabilizing presence gone, Anakin’s control over his anger evaporated.

Igniting his lightsaber, Anakin strode out into the firelight—and cut down all the Tuskens and even their livestock until every living creature in the whole camp was as dead as his beloved mother.

His grisly task complete Anakin slumped to the ground by one of the fires. For the rest of the night he made no attempt to move, and remained as motionless as the bodies by which he was surrounded.

Eventually the fires burned themselves out and dawn broke—beginning a new day that Anakin did not want to face.

Several more hours passed before he was finally able to force himself to move by the reality that his mother needed to be properly buried. Getting shakily to his feet, Anakin stood and returned to where he had left her body. It was cold to his touch—so cold—as he transferred his mother’s earthly remains to a course Tusken blanket he found, and carefully wrapped and secured it with strips of cloth. Anakin then picked up his mother’s body, and in the growing heat of the day carried her all the way back to the abandoned speederbike.
The drive back to the Lars homestead was a blur, and Anakin was so lost in thought it was a miracle he did not get lost.

The Force had warned him for a month—the entire length of her torture and imprisonment—of his mother’s need for his help. But where had he been? Busy with Jedi business. If Padmé had not been understanding and helped him get to Tatooine, he would never have seen his mother alive again.

But he had been too late to save her.

While Anakin had dreamt of becoming a Jedi so he could return and free his mother, Shmi had dreamt of a better life for Anakin—but away from her that had not happened.

And the dreams of both mother and son would now be forever left unfulfilled.

His mother using her dying breath to tell him that she loved him replayed on an endless loop in his mind, and hammered in the magnitude of his loss.

And Anakin knew he would never hear those words ever again.

He would never have a home again.

Because the only person who had every loved him—whom he should never have left—was gone.

The sound of the speederbike announced that Anakin had finally returned, and Cliegg, Owen, Beru, Padmé, and Threepio rushed out to meet him. Anakin exchanged grim looks with his stepfamily as he wordlessly carried his mother’s body inside.

After laying his precious burden down, Anakin retreated to the homestead’s workshop. He
remained their mindlessly tinkering until Padmé eventually came looking for him.

“I brought you something. Are you hungry?” Padmé carefully asked.

Anakin did not answer her or look up, but continuing his work simply said, “The shifter broke. Life seems so much simpler when you're fixing things. I'm good at fixing things. Always was. But I couldn't—”

With his mother’s death Anakin had regressed to a much younger age, and appeared much more the boy Padmé had met the last time they were on Tatooine than the Jedi assigned to protect her.

“Why'd she have to die?” Anakin asked, finally looking up to meet Padmé’s eyes, “Why couldn't I save her? I know I could have!”

“Sometimes there are things no one can fix,” Padmé answered again slipping back into her maternal role in the face of his child’s logic, “You're not all-powerful, Ani.”

“Well, I should be! Someday I will be. I will be the most powerful Jedi ever! I promise you. I will even learn to stop people from dying!” Anakin screamed.

On the surface his ravings were that of a grief stricken slave boy who had never known anything but powerlessness as one master after another wielded increasingly invasive control over his life. As the Force user long heralded as the fabled “Chosen One” with the potential to surpass even Master Yoda’s power in the Force, however, Anakin sensed that his words were not the utter nonsense as they would be for someone else—but contained a dangerous grain of truth.

Padmé was not strong with the Force, but she was good at reading people—Anakin in particular—and as Anakin launched into a tearful rant about his Jedi overlords she sensed this was about much more than his devastation at the loss of his mother.

“What's wrong, Ani?” Padmé asked.
“I—killed them. I killed them all. They're dead. Every single one of them,” Anakin said, finally turning to face her, and in that moment showing not the slightest bit of remorse. “And not just the men . . . but the women . . . and the children too. They're like animals, and I slaughtered them like animals! I HATE THEM!” Anakin told her, by the end screaming with rage as tears ran down his face.

But then regret finally flooded in, and Anakin sank to the floor and began to cry harder.

Padmé tried to remain calm in the face of such an admission, and find something helpful to say.

“To be angry is to be human,” she said, as she sat down next to him.

“I'm a Jedi. I know I'm better than this,” Anakin replied, before beginning to weep in earnest.

Padmé was not sure what exactly he meant by that, but it spoke to his belief that as a Jedi he should have been better able to repress his emotions. Years later it was a moment she looked back on as her warning—that the man she loved had developed a very unhealthy relationship with his emotions during his time with the Jedi.

And what could happen when he lost control.

In that moment, however, all she could think to do was comfortingly run her fingers through his hair as he sobbed.

For Anakin, no one touched him like that or bothered to comfort him except his now deceased mother, and he found Padmé’s caresses deeply soothing.

Neither of them knew how long they stayed like that, but eventually Owen found them and said everything was ready for Shmi’s funeral.
Anakin was not up for digging his mother’s grave, and was grateful that his step-family had taken care of it. They had left the task of carrying his mother’s body to its final resting place for Anakin, for which Shmi’s son was thankful.

Shmi was buried next to Cliegg’s first wife, and after her body was covered, her family stood together in silence staring at her tombstone.

“I know wherever you are it’s become a better place,” Cliegg said. “You were the most loving partner a man could ever have. Good-bye, my darling wife. And thank you.”

After Cliegg had finished speaking, Anakin slowly walked closer to the gravesite. Falling to his knees in front of his mother’s tombstone, he reached down and took a handful of the Tatooine sand he hated so much.

“I wasn't strong enough to save you, Mom. I wasn't strong enough,” Anakin said in a voice barely above a whispered but ringing with conviction, “But I promise I won't fail again.”

Rising to his feet again, he released the sand he had been gripping. It fell back onto his mother’s grave along with his promise.

“I miss you . . . so much,” Anakin added, again becoming so overwhelmed with grief he could barely get the words out.

It was unclear to anyone how long Anakin would have stood there, but Shmi’s funeral suddenly came to an abrupt end when Artoo rolled into their midst with an urgent message from Obi-Wan. It seemed like a very long time since he had seen his master, but Anakin realized that in reality it had only been a few days.

Anakin and Padmé said a hasty farewell to the Lars family, and with Threepio in tow followed Artoo back to the ship. Before boarding, however, Anakin looked back at his step-family one last time. With his mother dead there was nothing left to tie them together—and Anakin knew he would never see them again.

In the cockpit Anakin found Padmé already calling up Obi-Wan’s message.
“Anakin, my long-range transmitter has been knocked out. Retransmit this message to Coruscant,” the hologram of Obi-Wan instructed.

With the push of another button the message played simultaneously for them on Tatooine and also for the Jedi leadership back in the Republic’s capital.

Obi-Wan reported that he had managed to track the bounty hunter who had tried to kill Padmé to Geonosis, only to find that the same Trade Federation that had previously invaded Naboo was now behind the recent assassination attempts . . . and was on the planet to take possession of a new droid army. Furthermore, the Commerce Guild and the Corporate Alliance were joining them in pledging their armies to the Jedi turned Sith Lord Count Dooku—to wage war against the Republic as a unified Separatists Alliance.

As sobering has his news was, it was the next part of Obi-Wan’s message that caused Anakin’s heart to jump into his throat.

“Wait . . . wait,” Obi-Wan said as his attention was suddenly caught by something out of the holovid’s range. Obi-Wan abruptly ignited his lightsaber a split second before he was suddenly fending off a barrage of blaster fire from some unknown assailant.

Unknown until a droideka—one of the most lethal destroyer droids—strode into the frame next to Obi-Wan.

And then the message was abruptly cut off.

Ignoring how concerned Anakin must be about Obi-Wan, all Master Windu said was, “Anakin, we will deal with Count Dooku. The most important thing for you is to stay where you are. Protect the Senator at all costs. That is your first priority.”

“Understood, Master,” Anakin replied obediently before the link to Coruscant was cut off.

“They’ll never get there in time to save him. They have to come halfway across the galaxy,” Padmé
said before calling up a map on the ship’s nav computer, “Look. Geonosis is less than a parsec away.

“If he's still alive,” Anakin responded testily as he began to pace.

“Ani, are you just going to sit here and let him die? He's your friend, your mentor. He's-”

“He's like my father!” Anakin angrily corrected her, “But you heard Master Windu. He gave me strict orders to stay here!”

“He gave you strict orders to protect me . . . and I'm going to help Obi-Wan,” Padmé said as she calmly fired up the main engines, “If you plan to protect me, you'll just have to come along.”

Anakin knew that once again Padmé was doing this for him.

While her coming with him to Tatooine was an act of kindness associated with relatively low risk, her now rushing straight towards the people trying to kill her was utter recklessness. It, furthermore, demonstrated Padmé’s capacity from the beginning to enable Anakin to ignore the orders of the Jedi Counsel and the Code when she thought she was right.

Anakin knew he should stop her. Knew that beyond doing his job, what he should be most concerned with was protecting Padmé. But both he and Padmé knew that, no matter how much he butted heads with Obi-Wan, Anakin could not handle losing any more parental figures today. So he just smiled at her and sat down in the copilot’s seat—impressed that despite being a pampered politician she could pilot her ship herself.

And so Anakin, Padmé, and the droids rushed off to Geonosis to rescue Obi-Wan.

After sneaking into the enemy base and briefly running around the Separatist’s droid foundry, however, they were rather quickly captured.
Anakin and Padmé soon found themselves standing side by side on a hovercart waiting to be taken out into an arena where Anakin would receive a lecture from Obi-Wan followed by all three of them dying a grisly death for the entertainment of the Geonosians.

For a moment, however, the pair remained in the dark arena tunnel.

“Don’t be afraid,” Anakin told Padmé somewhat ludicrously.

“I'm not afraid to die,” Padmé told him, “I've been dying a little bit each day since you came back into my life.”

“What are you talking about?” Anakin asked, confused by the intensity with which she was looking at him.

“I love you,” Padmé simply said.

“You love me?” Anakin replied in complete shock. After his mother died he thought he would never hear those words ever again—let alone from Padmé the day after his mother’s funeral.

He quickly checked himself, however, remembering they had already had this conversation.

“I thought that we had decided not to fall in love,” Anakin said, paraphrasing to Padmé all of her prior objections, “that we would be forced to live a lie, and that it would destroy our lives.”

“I think our lives are about to be destroyed anyway,” Padmé countered, “I truly . . . deeply love you . . . and before we die, I want you to know.”

This time it was Padmé who leaned in to kiss Anakin—a kiss that ended only when the hovercart was finally pulled out into the arena.

But they did not die on Geonosis.
Although neither of them left the planet unscathed. Padmé had her back and upper arm slashed open by the creature that was meant to eat her. Anakin fared much worse during a lightsaber duel with the leader of the Separatists, Count Dooku, losing his right hand and much of his sword arm. With the reinforcements the rest of the Jedi arrived with, however, their injuries were quickly attended to, and Anakin was fitted with a biomedical right arm and hand.

Moreover, to the young lovers’ delight the sufficiently healed Anakin was then assigned by the Jedi to escort Padmé back to Naboo.

With Padmé’s resolve against being together gone and Anakin’s never having existed in the first place, they found their passion for each other sweeping them away from caution and all rational thought.

In a secret wedding in the Naboo Lake Country witnessed only by Artoo, Threepio, and the minister Padmé had scrounged up, Anakin and Padmé joined hands, hearts, and lives. After a brief honeymoon at the villa they had stayed at the last time they were on Naboo, the couple headed back to Coruscant and blissfully started their secret marriage and double life.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you as always for reading. Comments and kudos are much appreciated.

Next chapter Clone Wars Anidala, Obikin, and Ahsoka!

Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

LOTS Podcast: Reylo vs. Anidala - Couple Contrasts in Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdnZHiFt2-A&t=3s

Wayward Jedi: Rey and Ben - The Resurrected Heroes (Part 1 & 2) The One Big Story of Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkoY5MJ2pxY&t=5s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xqnQtl13CQ

Wayward Jedi: Love is the Balance - A Rey and Kylo Ren Story
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEYCYL_9jl8&t=165s

Popculture Detective: The Case Against The Jedi Order
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUPD1w78D5I
The Jedi General & The Senator

Chapter Summary

Ignoring the Jedi Code that says he should not want one, Anakin surrounds himself with a make shift family comprised of his senator wife—who ironically is the first in their family to wear a mask, Obi-Wan with whom his relationship has vastly improved, his padawan Ahsoka, and his faithful droids.

In training Ahsoka a new layer is also revealed in the tragedy of the future Darth Vader:

Anakin would have made a really good Dad.

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry this took so long to update! This summer has been so much busier than I expected.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Although now married to Padmé, Anakin returned to Coruscant still wracked with grief at the loss of his mother.

The young Jedi also sensed that Master Yoda somehow knew that something terrible had recently happened to him, and that Anakin continued to suffer in considerable distress.

But as usual Master Yoda did nothing.

“For the Jedi there is no emotion, only peace.” That mantra had been repeatedly drilled into Anakin over the years.

By that point in his training, however, Anakin realized that it was a complete pile of Rancor dung.

He did have emotions, and was not at peace. The only time he remembered really having peace was when he was with his mother. His mother had not ignored his feelings, but listened with compassion, helped him deal with them in the present moment, and move on. And then he had peace.

Even from a distance Shmi had had a stabilizing effect on her son, and Anakin privately wondered how he would manage with her gone. He soon discovered, however, that a deep connection shared with a spouse was an adequate substitute.

No matter what crazy mission the Jedi sent Anakin out on in service to the Republic, he was grounded by having a wife to which to return. As much has he still missed his mother and as hard as it was to keep their marriage a secret, wherever Padmé was felt like home.

Anakin was soon happier and felt more balanced than he had in years, and overall life was manageable.
The small carving Anakin had given Padmé as a boy reappeared—not on its original coarse cord but on a dainty silver chain—and Anakin realized he was not as forgotten as he had previously thought. It was only in plain view when they were alone, but Anakin knew that Padmé wore it under her clothes everywhere else in lieu of a wedding ring.

Padmé also accepted Anakin as he was—anger at his mother’s death, artificial hand, and all. She had taken the biomedical replacement as they recited their wedding vows, and with it now encased in a black leather glove she never shirked away from his touch.

Anakin was not sure what his choice would have been if Padmé had agreed to be with him but not in secret. Likely he would have chosen her and left the Jedi. As messy as it would have gotten, and in the end it would have still been the right decision.

But Padmé did not make him choose, so Anakin chose not to.

Anakin loved helping people, and as a Jedi he was very good at it. The battle on Geonosis had also ended up being the first of the Clone Wars, and even as Anakin and Padmé were coming together the galaxy was ripping itself apart.

The peace keeping Jedi soon found themselves generals of the Grand Army of the Republic, and in command of all the Clones that fought wave after wave of Separatist battle droids sweeping across the star systems with impunity. With the Republic in the middle of a war, Anakin knew he was needed as a Jedi.

And so he stayed, all the while disobeying the Code.

His resentment in having to keep the true nature of his relationship with Padmé hidden, however, grew along with his conviction that being married was actually making him a better Jedi Knight. The rest of the Jedi—taken from families they would never know and raised to do one thing—would not understand.

Padmé too was needed in the Senate, and in the end it was just easier to live a lie than come clean and deal with the consequences and fall out from the truth.
In hindsight, Anakin did not know how in the galaxy he thought he was capable of keeping a secret as gigantic as a forbidden marriage. A reckless, arrogant hot head he may be, but he was a quite frankly a terrible liar. He wore his emotions on his sleeve and could not keep his mouth shut even to avoid getting in trouble with Obi-Wan or the Jedi Council.

Marrying in secret may have originally been Anakin’s idea, but Padmé was the one who enabled them to actually pull it off. Padmé was older than Anakin, and as a longtime politician was much more experienced in ways of the world of deception.

It was an aspect of Padmé that Anakin had originally not wanted to acknowledge or see.

“Don't forget she's a politician, and they're not to be trusted,” Obi-Wan had warned Anakin when Padmé reappeared into their lives.

“She's not like the others in the Senate, Master,” Anakin had argued, demonstrating that once he put someone on a pedestal—be it the Jedi, Chancellor Palpatine, or Padmé—there they stayed until they did enough to warrant being kicked off. So far only the Jedi were teetering.

Champion of democracy, justice, and compassion for the downtrodden of the galaxy she may be, but Padmé still knew how to play the game. In truth, it had been that way the entire time Anakin had known her.

As a boy, Anakin had met Padmé—a lowly handmaiden to the grand Queen of the Naboo—when she accompanied Qui-Gon into Mos Espa on Tatooine. Later on Coruscant, Anakin had stopped by the Naboo suite to say goodbye to the girl he had befriended. He was met not by Padmé but Queen Amidala, who in her mask of face paint, elaborate headdress, and regal robes Anakin found quite intimidating.

“I sent Padmé on an errand,” the Queen informed him in a strangely formal voice. She promised to pass along Anakin’s farewell, however, and added, “be assured her heart goes with you.”

As a guileless nine-year-old, Anakin had been completely shocked by Padmé’s eventual reveal that she and Queen Amidala were one and the same.

As a Senator fighting corruption and the slow decay of the Republic, Padmé proved to be a cunning adversary to her enemies. When reunited after an attempt on her life, Padmé had easily
talked Anakin into using her as bait to catch whoever was trying to assassinate her. Furthermore, the slight of hand she still routinely employed with her bodyguard handmaids was on more than one occasion the only reason she stayed alive.

With Padmé as his teacher in the art of subterfuge, Anakin was a quick study. In the end the only way their marriage stayed a secret was because Padmé enabled Anakin to continue disobeying the Jedi Code by equipping him with the skill set necessary to get away with it.

Still, lying to the Jedi was no small feet.

Every time Anakin let slip a “Padmé” that should have been a “Senator Amidala” or committed some other misstep that was glaring in his eyes, he was sure the house of cards he and Padmé had built their relationship on was about to come tumbling down.

If anyone was going to catch him, Anakin knew it would likely be Obi-Wan. His master, however, was too by the book to suspect Anakin capable of rising to the level of disobedience of having a secret wife. Consequently, Obi-Wan’s awareness of Anakin’s strong preference for Padmé only resulted in him giving Anakin “The Talk.”

“Anakin, I understand to a degree what’s going on. You’ve met Satine. You know I once . . . harbored feeling for her,” Obi-Wan recalled the Mandalorian Duchess for whom he had once held quite a torch—the woman with whom Anakin knew Obi-Wan was still head over heals in love.

“I live by the Jedi Code,” Obi-Wan said.

“Oh course, as Master Yoda says, ‘A Jedi must not form attachments,’” Anakin parroted the teaching he had summarily rejected.

“Yes, but he usually leaves out the undercurrent of remorse,” Obi-Wan confided. “It’s not that we’re not allowed to have these feelings. It’s natural.”

“Senator Amidala and I are simply friends,” Anakin vehemently lied.

“And friends you must remain. As a Jedi, it is essential you make the right choice, Anakin—for the
Order,” Obi-Wan reminded him.

“I understand my responsibilities,” Anakin had angrily replied, eager to be done with this conversation.

Obi-Wan had let the matter drop, blissfully unaware that his words were long past the point of having any relevance to the younger man’s life.

Anakin found, however, that in his near misses he was assisted by the powerful force that was denial.

It was unfathomable to any of the Jedi that even Anakin was capable of being that disobedient to the Code. It was a scandal no one wanted to believe possible . . . so no one did.

In the end, Anakin found it quite shocking what could be hidden in plain sight right under the Jedi’s nose.

Anakin also grew increasingly close to the Chancellor as the Clone Wars escalated. Although Anakin held back the secret of his marriage, Palpatine became even more of a trusted confidant for the emotions Anakin was not supposed to be feeling as a Jedi, and the incidents that occurred when they exploded out of Anakin’s control—like the slaughter of an entire village of sandpeople in Anakin’s rage over his mother’s death.

It could also legitimately be asked what in the galaxy an influential twenty-four-year old Senator had seen in a nineteen-year-old Jedi padawan that made her want to bond herself to him for the rest of her life.

Groomed for all consuming careers from an early age, emotional development lagged behind other areas in both of their lives. Socially and emotionally, therefore, they found themselves around the same stage of life—which for both was quite a bit younger than nineteen. Padmé also found Anakin’s considerable issues with authority unconcerning—likely because she had quite a defiant streak herself.
Furthermore, although Padmé had a decade long head start on him in building a career, Anakin quickly began to catch-up as his vast potential soon began to shift into reality. Charming and handsome, Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker was a rising superstar in the ranks of the Jedi, and one of the most successful generals in the Grand Army of the Republic’s war against the Separatists—albeit with brash boldness and rebelliousness still firmly intact.

As Anakin entered his twenties, therefore, the imbalance in their careers and ages became negligible, and Padmé’s choice made a lot more sense.

As two strong willed people they had their inevitable share of spats, and still regularly disagreed about politics. A first class negotiator, Padmé was deeply committed to finding diplomatic solutions to everything including the war—well past the point where Anakin, who spent much of his time on the front line, was ready to roll his eyes. They had a lot more in common than first met the eye, however, with both routinely thinking outside the box as creative and influential leaders in their own sphere. Although unconventional to say the least, Anakin and Padmé found that overall they were a good match. They were quite the Republic power couple, even if only they and unbeknownst to them the ever-discrete Chancellor Palpatine knew of it.

Another change that happened after their marriage was Anakin and Padmé taking increasing ownership of each other’s droids.

Threepio had continued in their company, as Anakin, Padmé, and Artoo bounced from Tatooine, Geonosis, Naboo, and finally returned to Coruscant—complaining loudly about his abhorrence for space travel at every opportunity.

As a child Anakin had shoved every language package and discarded protocol software he could find into his creation, and to say Threepio was eccentric was being generous.

Once back on Coruscant, Anakin upgraded Threepio’s coverings to ones more befitting a Core World protocol droid. Threepio simultaneously gushed over finally being properly finished—approving of Anakin’s choice of gold over the traditional silver—and loudly voicing his displeasure at the length of time he had had to wait for his masker to complete his construction.

Although Anakin had real affection for Threepio, he sometimes wondered how he had come to create such a whiny, melodramatic droid. Remembering what he had been like in adolescence—
what he could still be like if he was being honest with himself—Anakin did not stay on that train of thought for very long.

He had built Threepio to assist his mother, and Anakin was happy that Threepio quickly became a great help to Padmé in her work in the Senate. The droid himself appeared to be content to have more purpose in life than working on a moisture farm.

Anakin, however, had no confidence in Threepio’s ability to keep his secret. While completing his upgrades, Anakin took the opportunity to specially program Threepio not to let anything slip about his maker’s marriage to Padmé.

Anakin in turn took increasing ownership of Artoo, whose independent discretion regarding Padmé could be confidently relied upon. Having undergone some special upgrades to serve the Naboo Queen, Artoo was much more reliable, brave, and quick thinking than any of the other available astromechs. Anakin soon refused to fly with any other droid. Artoo also had a bit of a rogue streak, and loved to fly just as fast and close to the edge of recklessness as Anakin did. With Anakin announcing “This is where the fun begins” and Artoo answering with beeps of agreement, the two friends frequently had entirely too much fun getting into close shaves.

In spite of the other man’s adequate skill, it never ceased to amaze Anakin how much Obi-Wan hated flying. Part of his and Artoos adventures, therefore, always seemed to involve rescuing the older Jedi and his unfortunate astromech droid, which was usually not long for this world.

When the issue periodically came up of why Anakin blatantly ignored the most basic of security protocols and refused to wipe Artoo’s memory, Anakin cited the droid’s memory as an invaluable resource for his missions as a Jedi.

While that sounded good and was actually true, Anakin’s primary motivation was his preference for Artoo’s existing personality and how well the droid had adapted himself in the service of his young master. Anakin was positive that in analyzing all their missions together, at some point Artoo had rewritten his programing to note that the general rules and probabilities of risk did not seem to apply to Anakin. Resultantly, Artoo gave him no push back when Anakin wanted to try something crazy—just the way Anakin liked it.

Artoo was also a stalwart and loyal companion. Anakin was quite fond of him, and was happy to extend his blatantly ignoring the Jedi edict against personal attachment when it came to the brave little droid.
Another unexpected turn in his life occurred when Master Yoda by some unfathomable logic decided it was a good idea to give Anakin his own padawan.

At the time a padawan was absolutely the last thing Anakin wanted.

Obi-Wan had previously tried to change his mind. “You should put in a request for one. You’d make a good teacher,” Obi-Wan said before turning a compliment into a lecture as only Obi-Wan could, “Anakin, teaching is a privilege, and it’s part of a Jedi’s responsibility to train the next generation.”

“A padawan would just slow me down,” was Anakin’s emphatic and final answer.

But one day the gangplank of a supply ship lowered and there she was.

They had originally thought she was Obi-Wan’s new padawan—Obi-Wan, who actually wanted one. Appearing to be more the age of a youngling than a padawan, the Togruta introduced herself as “Ahsoka Tano,” and informed the two Jedi she had actually been assigned to Anakin.

“What! No, no, NO!” Anakin exclaimed.

In a display of professionalism befitting a Jedi Knight he moved so Obi-Wan stood between him and Ahsoka before continuing to loudly insist, “He’s the one who wanted a padawan.”

Ahsoka was unfazed, “No! Master Yoda was very specific! I am assigned to Anakin Skywalker, and he is to supervise my Jedi training.”

They were currently in the middle of a battle, and there was no time to argue further. Obi-Wan made Anakin take Ahsoka with him, deeply amused that the old Jedi “blessing” of “may you have a padawan exactly like you” was coming true for his handful of a former charge.
The Clone troopers under Anakin’s command had their own thoughts on the matter.

“Sir, I thought you said you’d never have a padawan,” Captain Rex, Clone commander of the 501st, reminded his general.

“There’s been a mix up. The youngling isn’t with me,” Anakin replied placatingly.

Ahsoka, however, refused to let Anakin brush her off.

“Stop calling me that!” she told him indignantly, before irreverently adding, “You’re stuck with me Skyguy.”

Although Rex began to laugh heartily, Anakin was less than amused.

“What did you just call me?! Don’t get snippy with me, little one! You know I don’t think you’re even old enough to be a padawan,” Anakin told her testily, his argumentativeness making a strong case that he was not old enough to have one.

“And maybe I’m not. But Master Yoda thinks I am,” Ahsoka definitively countered.

The two of them continued to bicker throughout the entire battle more than Obi-Wan and Anakin ever had, and by the end of the day were inseparable.

“You’re reckless little one. You never would have made it as Obi-Wan’s padawan,” Anakin informed her as the dust settled, “But you might make it as mine.”

The smiles they exchanged were been small, but Anakin could tell Ahsoka was delighted that he was keeping her.
It turned out that Obi-Wan—who Anakin suspected was behind the whole thing—was right. Anakin was an excellent teacher.

Under his guidance Ahsoka became a skilled Force user who could think on her feet, a talented swordswoman, and a first class pilot. Learning how to become a Jedi—traditionally a keeper of the peace—while the Order was in the middle of commanding a war was no easy task. Ahsoka navigated the situation well, and Anakin trusted her with his life, and on occasion even Padmé’s.

For his part, Anakin found that taking on the responsibility of teaching Ahsoka was actually good for him, and helped him develop some much needed maturity. His “Snips” became not just his padawan but his little sister, and Anakin lavished on her all the praise and encouragement he wished he had gotten when he was a padawan.

“You did a fantastic job today, Snips,” Anakin told her for the umpteenth time after one particularly dicey mission.

“All thanks to your training, Master,” Ahsoka replied with the humility befitting a Jedi.

“Yeah, you’re right. I probably do deserve most of the credit,” Anakin joked, briefly adopting a self-satisfied stance, before giving her a warm smile.

Anakin also kept careful watch over her, even as he helped her grow. When they were doing something genuinely tricky Ahsoka found her master closely monitoring her progress with a frequent “You hanging in there, Snips?”

Ahsoka regularly thanked the Force she was Anakin’s padawan—and knew he had spoken truth when he said she would not have made it with another master.

Her “Skyguy” was kind and patient. He also had a way of making training fun, and even turned the war into a game. Anytime they had to scale a wall or rock formation—especially if they were being shot at—Anakin turned it into a race.

And then of course there was the never-ending attempt to outdo each other in droid kills.
“How many droids have you shot down so far?” Anakin as usual asked Ahsoka in the heat of battle.

“Twenty-five,” Ahsoka replied through her deep concentration.

“Ah, you’re falling behind!” Anakin told her with glee.

It was a game—but one Anakin had no intention of ever letting her win.

Which made it all the sweeter when-

“So Master, what was your total?” Ahsoka asked after one particularly taxing battle.

“Fifty-five. And you?” Anakin replied.

Ahsoka stopped in her tracks and smiled.

“Sixty,” Ahsoka told him, not bothering to keep the note of gloating out of her voice, “Looks like I won.”

Anakin too abruptly stopped walking, and turned around to face her with a comical look of horror on his face.

“Yeah . . . But I called in the airstrike. Tie!” Anakin declared, refusing to acknowledge the loss—or as he preferred the more palatable “non-win.”

“You’re impossible,” Ahsoka told him with a laugh in her voice.

On the surface it appeared that Anakin turned everything into a game simply because he liked to win—which was very true. On a deeper level, however, Anakin never forgot that his padawan was still quite young—just fourteen when she arrived under his charge—and all of his games were his
attempt to psychologically protect Ahsoka from the harsh realities of war.

Anakin vehemently disagreed with the Jedi philosophy of taking young children from their families to turn into peacekeeping child soldiers. And he definitely did not agree with bringing them into the command structure of the Grand Army of the Republic in the middle of the war.

But what Anakin thought did not matter to the Jedi Council.

However, as far as his sphere of influence extended—limited mainly Ahsoka’s training—Anakin chose to value the innocence of childhood and protect Ahsoka’s as much as possible.

And when she was unavoidably confronted with gut wrenching losses and the more jading aspects of life, her kind and encouraging master was there to comfort her.

After her first time commanding a starfighter squadron ended in disaster, Anakin found his padawan sitting despondently by her fighter and close to tears.

“I failed,” Ahsoka said, refusing to look at him.

“It was a trap, Snips. It wasn’t your fault,” Anakin told her, putting a comforting hand on her shoulder and leaning in so his kind eyes filled her vision when she finally looked up.

“I lost so many of my pilots,” she replied, her own eyes filled with sadness.

“Take heart little one. That’s the reality of command,” Anakin told her comfortingly.

As Obi-Wan pointed out more than once, master and padawan were strikingly similar in temperament. But under Anakin’s care Ahsoka managed to avoid internalizing the harsh perfectionism Anakin imposed on himself and his tendency to be consumed by guilt and self-loathing at the slightest failure.
Of course they shared other similarities as well.

“Did you train her not to follow orders?!” Admiral Yularen once testily asked Anakin.

His reflexive and unself-aware answer was “Of course not”—and Anakin was livid when she ignored his commands. But he also never bothered to check her disobedience particularly when she was ignoring orders he himself was brushing off.

Rankling at Anakin’s tendency towards overprotectiveness in the face of her growing desire for more independence, however, Ahsoka’s Skywalkeresque disobedient streak could quickly turn into a problem.

“Ahsoka, I’m sorry I didn’t tell you earlier, but you won’t be coming along on this one,” Anakin told her before a particularly dangerous mission.

“Not coming!?” Ahsoka was indignant, before continuing with a whine, “You’re just being protective again. That’s not fair!”

Anakin was glad Obi-Wan was not present to reminisce about whining teenage Anakin in front of whining teenage Ahsoka.

“How am I supposed to learn if you won’t let me share the risk? You’re picking and choosing which assignments I can be a part of!” Ahsoka argued, before sagely adding with the wisdom of a fifteen-year-old, “It’s not for you to decide when and how I should put my life in danger!”

Anakin for once refused to get into a screaming match with her and clarify that, as her master, her welfare was his responsibility, and therefore, it was in fact precisely his decision. And no matter how blasé he was with his life and safety, he was not reckless with hers.

“This isn’t a mission for learning. You either do or die. And that’s not a risk I’m willing to share,” Anakin told her as calmly as possible, before turning and embarking on the mission.
Only to find upon arrival that Ahsoka had stowed away on the shuttle.

She fed him some line about getting orders from Master Plo Koon to come along. From her sense and phrasing, Anakin was pretty sure she was lying—and he would know.

“Well I gave you a specific order not to come,” Anakin told her angrily.

“If there’s one thing I’ve learned form you, Master, it’s that following direct orders isn’t always the best way to solve a problem,” Ahsoka calmly told him.

Obi-Wan was unfortunately within earshot this time and quickly interjected, “I see Anakin’s new teaching method is to ‘do as I say, and not as I do.’”

Anakin wanted to ring both of their necks—in no small part because Obi-Wan was right.

As supportive as he could be most of the time, the older Jedi loved every minute of watching Anakin’s misadventures in parenting his “mini-me.” Where Ahsoka’s training was concerned Obi-Wan seemed to have added back seat piloting to his list of favorite pastimes, and alternated between chiding Anakin about his teaching methods, amusedly standing by and watching Anakin struggle with Ahsoka’s innate rebelliousness, and taking every opportunity to solicit sympathy for all he had suffered during the decade Anakin was his padawan.

Most of the time, however, Ahsoka listened to her master more than anyone else, and took her cues from him whom else to listen to and whom to ignore. Anakin was usually happy, furthermore, to have someone to join him in circumventing the Jedi Council in the interest of mission speed. They were both pretty reckless and one of the many things Anakin taught Ahsoka was how to better get away with being so—something Anakin had not learnt from Obi-Wan and likely was not what Master Yoda had intended Anakin to pass on. Given his ongoing flagrant disregard for authority Padmé, herself, more than once told Anakin she could not believe the Jedi were letting him teach.

In addition to his unorthodox teaching style, Anakin also actively avoided cultivating the detachment of the other masters as they prepared to one day let their students go—for which he was routinely criticized by his Jedi Master colleagues.

Anakin, however, refused leave her fate to others, or to sacrifice his padawan as an expendable soldier, even when it caused significant problems they had to clean up. Furthermore, he many
times demonstrated his unthinking willingness to sacrifice his welfare and even his life to protect her—leaving Ahsoka to pull his unconscious body to safety with her heart in her throat.

Anakin cared deeply for Ahsoka, and was incredibly proud of her. Knowing how much his padawan meant to him, Padmé always went out of her way to be kind to the girl, for which Anakin was profoundly grateful. Ahsoka, herself, was steadied by the knowledge that no matter what trouble she ran into and where she got herself trapped Anakin would never leave her behind or stop looking for her.

It was not something ever spoken of amongst the Jedi—even between masters and padawans—but Ahsoka knew in her heart that Anakin loved her.

Anakin’s relationship with his own master also greatly improved after Anakin passed the trials to become a Jedi Knight. Obi-Wan’s verbal barbs lacked sting now that he was no longer responsible for Anakin’s training, and Anakin stopped taking them personally. Their bickering, therefore, shifted to banter over the years.

They still routinely fought, however, even throughout clandestine missions.

“Oh it’s you,” Anakin said, sounding a little disappointed, when Obi-Wan arrived to free Anakin from the brig of an enemy ship.

“This is how you thank me from rescuing you? Pounce on me from the ceiling?” Obi-Wan breezily upbraided Anakin.

“Kind of difficult without a lightsaber-” Anakin said a split second before Obi-Wan passed Anakin’s to him, and Anakin briefly broke character to respond with a sincere, “-Thanks.”

As they left the cell and began making their way through the deserted corridors, however, their argument picked back where it left off.

“Did you manage to locate Dooku before landing in jail?” Obi-Wan inquired after the whereabouts
of the Sith Lord leader of the Separatists they were chasing.

“Well I know he’s on board,” Anakin replied before adding, “I might have been able to do something about it if I’d had my weapon.”

“It was important for you to arrive without it so your capture would be convincing,” Obi-Wan replied to Anakin’s usual complaints that the first part of one of their standard infiltration plans required Anakin to get captured without his lightsaber.

“Oh they were convinced all right,” Anakin said, “But how come I’m the one getting caught all the time! It doesn’t look good,” Anakin protested indignantly.

“When you’re a Jedi Master, you can make the plan,” Obi-Wan told him jovially.

“That’s just it! How can I become a Jedi Master if I’m always getting caught!” Anakin argued.

“At least you’re a master . . . at getting caught!” Obi-Wan returned volley for the point.

“Very funny,” Anakin muttered without bite.

They soon caught up with the illusive Count, and after being double-crossed by the ambitiously enterprising pirates that had managed to capture him and now them—found themselves chained to their adversary in another prison cell.

In the awkward position of having to all work together to escape, Count Dooku quickly learnt that the two Jedi forwent their verbal barbs towards each other when they had a more appealing target against whom they could team up.

The only authority figure to ever receive obedience or cooperation without backtalk from Anakin Skywalker was his mother, and the young Jedi was certainly not curbing his mouthiness for the adversary who had cut off his sword arm.
Trying to release the cell lock, Dooku’s patience with Anakin finally came to an end.

“Master Kenobi,” the Sith Lord bit out, “Do control your protégé’s insolence so I can concentrate.”

“Anakin,” Obi-Wan immediately obliged, “Control your insolence. The Count is concentrating.”

Anakin and Obi-Wan exchanged wicked smiles, behind Dooku’s back—and the pair continued to verbally lay into him.

Later, Anakin was able to return the courtesy by exhorting his master to be more patient when Obi-Wan wanted Dooku to walk faster, “You should be more patient, Master. After all, the Count is an elderly gentleman, and doesn’t move like he used to.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Obi-Wan agreed.

By that point the irate Sith Lord was ready to murder them. “I would kill you both right now if I did not have to drag your bodies,” was all he had to say before they finally managed to escape and part ways.

Although their temperaments remained oil and water, Anakin and Obi-Wan managed to successfully renegotiated their relationship to one of peers rather than strictly master and apprentice, and resultantly the duo of Kenobi and Skywalker became an even more potent team. Beyond that, neither had a better friend among the Jedi, and to both they were truly brothers.

A mission to Mandalore was also particularly illuminating to Anakin that perhaps his stickler for rules former master was not so devoid of understanding and impossible to relate to as Anakin had thought as a teenager.

After a civil war decimated Mandalore, Duchess Satine Kryze took on the difficult task of rebuilding her world alone. With so many of her people dead by violence, the Duchess was a committed pacifist, and had insisted that Mandalore remain neutral in the Clone Wars currently ripping through so much of the galaxy.
Allegations had arisen, however, that Mandalore was joining Count Dooku’s Separatist, and Obi-Wan was sent to investigate. While Duchess Satine reiterated her intention for Mandalore to remain neutral, both she and Obi-Wan had discovered a warmongering terrorist organization known as Death Watch was aligned with the Separatists, and planning to destabilize and overthrow her government through a series of attacks.

The most obvious course of action was for the Republic to send a military presence to safeguard Mandalore from the insurgents and the Separatists alike. This would, however, end Mandalore’s neutrality, and Duchess Satine insisted on traveling to Coruscant to plead her case to the Senate that Mandalore could defeat Death Watch without external aid and should be allowed to remain out of the Clone Wars.

With both Death Watch and the Separatists gunning for the Mandalorian leader, getting the Duchess safely to Coruscant was no small feat. Anakin arrived on Mandalore and boarded the Coronette—the Duchess’ flying skyscraper of a ship—to help Obi-Wan keep her alive during the voyage.

In a turbolift heading for an audience with Satine, Anakin could not help but notice the nervous energy roiling off his master.

“I sense some anxiety about the Duchess. She couldn’t be in safer hands,” Anakin tried to allay Obi-Wan’s fears.

“Yes, I know,” Obi-Wan replied calmly.


“Nevermind! It’s all in the past,” Obi-Wan replied a little less calmly.

“Oh-,” Anakin said, more than a little surprised, “So you’re close to her?”

“I knew her . . . a long time ago,” Obi-Wan corrected, calm completely gone from his demeanor.

Given that it was usually the younger Jedi who had trouble reigning in his emotions while the older
was a model of stoic detachment, Anakin found that his curiosity had definitely been piqued as the pair entered the Duchess’ audience chamber.

“War is intolerable! We have been deceived into thinking that we must be a part of it!” Duchess Satine exclaimed passionately, in the middle of expounding on her pacifist ideals as the two Jedi entered the room. “I say the moment we committed to fighting, we already lost.”

“Excuse me, Your Grace,” Senator Tal Merrik asked in a high-pitched oily voice, “Are you suggesting we oppose the war on humanitarian grounds?”

“I’m going to oppose it as an affront to life itself! As the designated regent of fifteen hundred systems, I speak for thousands of worlds that have urged me to allow them to stay neutral in this war,” the Duchess proclaimed from where she reclined on her dais of office.

“And yet some might argue that the strongest defense is a swift and decisive offense,” Obi-Wan countered as he strode into the room, briefly inclining his head in a bow to the Duchess.

“You are quite the general now, aren’t you Master Kenobi?” Satine replied haughtily.

“Forgive me for interrupting, Your Highness. I meant no disrespect,” Obi-Wan replied in a tone of voice Anakin had never heard before.

“Really?” Satine responded incredulously before continuing, “Senators, I presume you are acquainted with the collection of half-truths and hyperbole known as Obi-Wan Kenobi?”

“Your Highness is too kind,” Obi-Wan said, deliberately ignoring her back handed compliment.

“Your right. I am,” Satine agreed.

By this point Anakin was not merely mildly curious but truly intrigued.
“Allow me to introduce my fellow Jedi, Anakin Skywalker,” Obi-Wan said, formally presenting the younger Knight.

“Your servant, My Lady,” Anakin said, as he stepped forward and gave the Duchess a slight bow.

“I remember a time when Jedi were not generals, but peacekeepers,” the Duchess remarked, not bothering to acknowledge him.

“We are protectors, Highness—yours at the moment—we fight for peace,” Anakin responded with uncharacteristically calm gallantry.

“What an amusing contradiction,” the Duchess noted, as she accepted a drink from a serving droid.

“What Master Skywalker means is that we are acting at the behest of Your Highness to protect you from the Death Watch and the Separatists who don’t share your neutral point of view,” Obi-Wan argued, stepping forward to resume control of the conversation with the Duchess.

“I asked for no such thing!” Satine exclaimed indignantly.

“That may be so, but a majority of your court did,” Obi-Wan countered.

“I do not remember you as one to hide behind excuses,” Satine snapped.

“I do not remember you as one to shrink from responsibilities!” Obi-Wan bit back.

“I am certain we all agree. Duchess Satine and General Kenobi have proven there are two sides to every dilemma,” interjected Senator Orn Free Taa, the spectacularly obese representative from the Twi'lek homeworld of Ryloth. In a diplomatic attempt to defuse the situation, he changed the subject, “Now, in regard to the Senate vote, we think-”

“I think a multitude makes discord, not good counsel,” the Duchess told the gigantic blue Twi'lek.

“Right again, My Lady,” Orn Free Taa admitted begrudgingly.
Obi-Wan meanwhile turned to Anakin, and in a whisper still loud enough for Satine to hear remarked, “There may be two sides to every dilemma, but the Duchess only favors hers.”

“A Republic military presence is the only sure defense against the Separatists,” he turned to again directly addressed the Duchess as he walked towards her.

“Even extremists can be reasoned with!” Satine replied, herself rising and descending from her dais towards the approaching Jedi.

“No they can’t! That’s why they’re called extremists!” Obi-Wan argued as he came ever closer.

“The sarcasm of a soldier!” Satine herself replied sarcastically.

“The delusion of a dreamer!” Obi-Wan countered.

With their argument starting to really heat up, their faces were now only inches apart.

“Duchess. Master Jedi. It’s been a long trip. I think we could all use a little rest and refreshment—” Merrik interjected.

“Hear, hear! Now, let us put politics aside until after dinner,” Orn Free Taa seconded, his four chins a testament to the importance of the upcoming meal.

“Fine!” Obi-Wan and Satine angrily replied in unison, before Satine roughly pushed past him and stormed out of the room.

Unlike the two senators, Anakin had made no attempt to intervene. Enjoying himself thoroughly, he instead took a few sips of the cocktail a serving droid placed in his hand, and watched the engrossing spectacle of Obi-Wan and the Duchess screaming at each other like they were the only two people in the galaxy.
“You and Satine have a history,” Anakin said to Obi-Wan as they left the audience chamber and walked down a corridor.

“An extended mission when I was younger,” Obi-Wan told him, “Master Qui-Gon and I spent a year on Mandalore protecting the Duchess from insurgents who had threatened her world.”

The two Jedi boarded a turbolift, and as the doors closed Obi-Wan continued somberly, “They sent bounty hunters after us. We were always on the run . . . living hand-to-mouth . . . never sure what the next day would bring.”

“Sounds romantic,” Anakin commented glibly—happy to be on the other side of the awkward conversations about women they seemed to always have in turbolifts.

Obi-Wan’s only response was a withering glare.

Their uncomfortable for Obi-Wan conversation was interrupted by the ping of his comlink, and Obi-Wan raised it to his mouth and said, “Yes Captain.”

Commander Cody’s report from the cargo hold was not good. “General, something’s wrong with Skywalker’s astromech. Scared him real good, sir. I’ve also lost contact with two of my men.”

“I’ll go, Master,” Anakin interjected, “If there’s something dangerous down there the Clones and I can handle it.”

Sending Obi-Wan off to dinner with the Duchess, Anakin made his way down to the cargo hold.

“All right men, what’s the problem, I’m missing dinner,” Anakin announced in a single breath as he stepped off the turbolift.

“We’re not sure yet, sir,” Cody told him, “There’s still no sign of Mixer and Redeye.”
Artoo began to twitter, and Anakin raised his hand to pause the Clone’s report so the little droid could be heard.

Leaning down and giving Artoo his full attention, Anakin said, “What’s the matter, buddy?”

Artoo continued to anxiously relay that something down here was very wrong.

“I know, I know, but I’m here now,” Anakin soothed the little droid’s frayed nerves before adding, “Use your scanners and see if something is out of place.”

They soon discovered that the something out of place was a set of giant spiderlike assassin droids, which had been smuggled aboard by a turncoat senator. One of the giant monstrosities made it to the turbolift shaft, and Anakin was only just able to warn Obi-Wan before it burst in on the dining senators.

After dispatching the creepy droids, the two Jedi discovered at around the same time that once the mother was destroyed a swarm of baby spider assassin droids was then released, creating a whole new set of problems.

In the dining room, Senator Orn Free Taa gave a loud shriek that set his quadruple chin a quiver, and most of the other senators quickly joined him in cowering in a corner. Obi-Wan ordered any capable beings in the room to “stand and fight,” before adding to Satine, “or in your case just stand.”

Satine, however, pulled a small weapon out from somewhere, and standing back to back with Obi-Wan began helping him take out the swarming droids.

“Do you always carry a deactivator with you?!” Obi-Wan said accusingly.

“Just because I’m a pacifist doesn’t mean I won’t defend myself!” Satine replied indignantly, all the while displaying her excellent aim.
“Now you sound like a Jedi,” Obi-Wan told her, a note of amusement creeping into his voice before adding, “This is just like that swarm of venom-mites on Draboon, remember?”

“How could I forget? I still have the scar,” Satine replied.

“Begging your pardon, Duchess. I distinctly remember carrying you to safety,” Obi-Wan countered.

“I meant the scar I got after you fell and dropped me,” Satine reminded him.

“Oh. Yes,” Obi-Wan said, somewhat chagrined.

Soon the first round of assassin droids was destroyed. Obi-Wan ordered Anakin to return to the hold and eliminate any survivors, while he figured out which senator was in league with the Separatists.

While in the middle of sneaking around the dark cargo hold stalking the last killer droid, Anakin’s comlink suddenly pinged.

“Anakin! Tal Merrik is the traitor, and he’s taken Satine hostage!” Obi-Wan said frantically.

Anakin was not particularly surprised the simpering weasel of a man was the culprit.

“Copy that, but I’ve got problems of my own right now,” Anakin growled back in a whisper.

With the help of Artoo, Rex, and Cody they eventually located and destroyed the last mechanical spider, and Anakin raced back to the upper decks to help Obi-Wan.

He caught up with the older Jedi in a deserted corridor.

“Did you find them?” Obi-Wan asked, anxiety near the point of panic roiling off of him.
“No, but I’ve stationed troopers at every escape pod,” Anakin replied.

“Merrik will try to signal his allies for help. We have to find him!” Obi-Wan said as the pair raced to the turbolift.

As the doors closed and they ascended upwards, Anakin could not help himself.

“This may not be the time to ask, but were you and Satine every . . .”

“I don’t see how that has any bearing on the situation at hand!” Obi-Wan replied testily.

Anakin could not recall Obi-Wan ever being so defensive.

He took that to mean the answer was “yes.”

Merrik had apparently managed to call for reinforcements, and when the turbolift door opened the two Jedi were greeted by a chaotic scene of Clone troopers and Separatist battle droids running around the corridors to blaring alarms and blaster fire.

“I’ll take care of this, Obi-Wan,” Anakin told him, “You—go find your girlfriend.”

“Right,” Obi-Wan said before registering Anakin’s words and yelling after him, “Uh, no, Anakin! She’s not my-”

Anakin, however, was long gone, and Obi-Wan resignedly turned around to continue his pursuit of the kidnapped Duchess.
It turned out there were not that many battle droids aboard the Coronette, and Anakin, his men, and
the remaining Mandalorian security team made quick work of destroying them. With the droids
neutralized, Anakin sprinted back down the hall to again help Obi-Wan.

The lights were out in the section of corridor where he finally caught up with Merrik, who was still
holding Satine hostage with Obi-Wan in hot pursuit.

“Release the Duchess!” Obi-Wan ordered.

“Hmm,” Merrik survey him before reply, “I took the precaution of wiring the ship’s engine to
explode. I press this remote and we all die.”

“Obi, if you have any respect for me, you will not take such risks with so many people’s live at
stake!” Satine pleaded.

“Satine-” Obi-Wan replied, his voice filled with emotion.

Not wanting to interrupt Obi-Wan and Satine’s heartfelt exchange with a premature rescue, Anakin
hung back in the shadows.

“Say farewell, Duchess,” Merrik ordered mockingly.

“Obi-Wan, it looks like I may never see you again. I don’t know quite how to say this but . . . I’ve
loved you since the moment you came to my aid, all those years ago,” Satine declared with deep
feeling.

“I don’t believe this,” Merrik said with exasperated disgust.

“Satine this is hardly the time or place for-” Obi-Wan pointed out before abruptly dropping his
tone of rationality for one that matched hers, “Alright . . . had you said the word I would have left
the Jedi Order.”
“That is touching, truly it is,” Merrik interjected with mock sincerity before adding, “But it’s making me sick, and we really must be going.”

“You have the romantic soul of a slug . . . Merrik!” Satine exclaimed, before following up her impassioned outcry with an impressive move.

Suddenly the Duchess stood free in all her innate regalness, confidently pointing Merrik’s own blaster at him.

“Interesting turnabout,” Merrik said, unfazed, “But even if I do not deliver the Duchess alive to the Separatists, I still win. The second I’m away I’ll trigger the remote and blow the Coronette to bits.”

“I will not allow that!” Satine passionately declared.

“What will you do?” Merrik laughed, “If you shoot me you prove yourself a hypocrite to every pacifist ideal you hold dear.”

“And you, Kenobi,” he said turning to Obi-Wan, “You are no stranger to violence. You’d be hailed as a hero by everyone on this ship . . . almost everyone,” Merrik finished with a sinister giggle as he looked back at Satine.

With the situation rapidly shifting from romantic to ridiculous, Anakin snuck up behind Merrik, and as the traitorous senator dramatically taunted, “Come on then. Who will strike first and brand themselves a cold . . . blooded . . . killer,” Anakin provided an answer by igniting his lightsaber through Merrik’s chest, and deftly catching the remote trigger as the other man’s body slid to the floor.

“Anakin . . .” Obi-Wan said in his most chiding tone.

“What? He was going to blow up the ship,” Anakin replied, deactivating his lightsaber and flipping it into the air before catching it without looking.

Although the danger was averted, Obi-Wan and Satine’s dying declarations still hung in the air, and they now stood awkwardly before each other.
The alive and unkidnapped Duchess defused the situation by informing the Jedi, “I must return to the business of diplomacy.”

However, as the Coronette finally arrived on Coruscant and all the grateful to be alive passengers disembarked, Satine hung back to have another word with Obi-Wan.

“How ironic to meet again, only to find we’re on opposing sides,” she told him, a note of sadness in her voice.

“The needs of your people are all that matter. They couldn’t be in better hands with you to guide their future,” Obi-Wan told her with sincerity.

“Kind words indeed from a mindful and committed Jedi,” Satine replied. “And yet . . .” she continued, reaching up to touch his face, “I’m still not sure about the beard.”

“Why? What’s wrong with it?” Obi-Wan asked with mild embarrassment.

“It hides too much of your handsome face,” Satine told him affectionately.

With a parting smile to Obi-Wan, she turned and headed off after her delegation.

“Very remarkable woman,” Anakin said, placing a hand on Obi-Wan’s shoulder as they watched the Duchess board a transport with the other senators.

“She is indeed,” Obi-Wan said, with not the slightest defensiveness detectable in his voice.

To Anakin, Obi-Wan’s admiration for the Duchess was very understandable. The younger Jedi saw that Satine was clearly cut from the same cloth as Padmé, and found her to be quite impressive.
Everyone on Coruscant soon learnt as well that the leader of Mandalore was a force to be reckoned with. Many worlds had been dragged into the conflict when concerns for Separatist collusion resulted in Republic occupation—at least until the war was over. Duchess Satine, however, somehow managed to out duel the warmongers, and secured a Senate vote that allowed Mandalore to remain neutral.

The stunning victory handed the architect of the Clone Wars one of his rare setbacks, second only to the time Senators Padmé Amidala, Bail Organa, and Mon Mothma convinced the Senate not to purchase more Clones and thereby avoid an escalation in the fighting.

For Anakin the events had a humanizing effect on the young Jedi’s view of his former master. While Obi-Wan would still be livid and beside himself with Anakin if he learnt of his former padawan’s secret marriage—and that Anakin and Padmé had handled their situation in a decidedly less honest and honorable way than he and Satine—Anakin suspected after meeting the Mandalorian Duchess that the Jedi Master would at least have the capacity to understand how something like that could happen.

His mother had instilled in Anakin both the importance of helping others and the reality that to truly do so required actually caring about them and forming real connections with other people. It was a lesson Anakin had learnt well, and a value he never lost no matter how hard the Jedi tried to squash it out of him.

Therefore, while Anakin’s loyalty to the Jedi Order was insipid at best, his commitment to individual people was strong.

He cared about the troops in his unit. While others saw only disposable Clones bred to die for the Republic, Anakin valued Captain Rex and the rest of his men in the 501st. As their general he did not take their lives lightly, and fought out in front with them where—to Anakin’s mind—a leader belonged.

Padmé, Obi-Wan, Ahsoka, and the two droids, furthermore, were family. Ignoring the rule that as a Jedi he should not want one, Anakin embraced his deep devotion to them all.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much to everyone who is still with me!

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Artwork: Still shots from the Clone Wars (2008)
Chapter Summary

Anakin and Padmé face the nasty consequences of marrying in secret, which also have incalculable future ramifications.

a.k.a. Relive some of the “I can’t believe they put that into a children’s TV show” moments from the Clones Wars.

(Although not included is Anakin waking up on the Zygerrian Slaver Queen’s bed to her telling him if he doesn’t agree to be her “servant” she will kill all his friends, and then hands him back his lightsaber since he will need it to be her “bodyguard,” which is likely at the top of the list).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes
Although the Jedi Code said otherwise, Anakin continued to believe that his marriage to Padmé and his desire for a home and family was a good and perfectly reasonable thing for him to want. Over the years, however, the way he and Padmé had come together in secret put a lot of strain on their relationship, and left them with more problems and less support than other couples when things inevitably went sideways.

Beyond that, both of them grew increasingly frustrated that with their all-consuming careers neither of them could truly make their relationship a priority.

Anakin, furthermore, was not allowed to have any sort of boundaries with the Jedi Council. Believing that the young Knight had nothing better to do they could and frequently would have Obi-Wan call him in at a moment’s notice on the increasingly rare occasions that Anakin was on Coruscant and actually home.

Padmé’s situation was not really any better, as she and a few allies were constantly fighting off the warmongering that perpetually swept through the Senate.

Their schedules, moreover, rarely lined up.

On one of his clandestine visits to his wife’s office, Anakin tried to somewhat rectify the situation.

“Hey, I’m supposed to be on a meditative retreat,” Anakin said. Ignoring the fact that a meditative retreat would be something from which he would greatly benefit, he continued, “We should go away together. I know a place far away from here where no one would recognize us. It will be like we’re actually husband and wife, instead of Senator and Jedi.”

“I can’t, Ani,” Padmé said, sparing him only a quick glance as she continued to type something on her computer.

“What do you mean you can’t! Oh, it’s only two weeks. We’ll be back before anyone even notices we’re gone,” Anakin complained.

“I have to bring this bill before the Senate. It’s important.”
“Huh. More important than the way you feel about me?” Anakin asked, the tone of his voice changing from whinny to sultry as he walked closer to her.

“Not more important, but important,” Padmé replied, at least now finally looking up from her screen to meet his gaze. “The work I do—the work we both do—is in service to the Republic. To protect those who would otherwise be powerless to protect themselves.”

Although agreeing with her in principal, Anakin was not in the mood for her idealistic rhetoric, “Of course, but those are ideals. Isn’t our love more important to you?”

“But I-” Padmé started.

“No, no but!” Anakin vehemently interrupted.

Ignoring that his timing was profoundly selfish and manipulative—and hoping Padmé would too—Anakin continued with his declaration, “To me there’s nothing more important than the way that I feel about you. Nothing.”

Padmé finally stopped working, and rose from her chair to give him the attention he wanted.

“Anakin, don’t be so-”

“Oh, you don’t believe me-”

“I didn’t say-”

“I’ll prove it. Just watch,” Anakin said.

Unclipping his lightsaber from his belt, he continued, “When I finished constructing my lightsaber, Obi-Wan said to me ‘Anakin this weapon is your life.’ This weapon is my life.”

Anakin held his lightsaber out to Padmé.
“No, Anakin, I can’t. A Jedi lightsaber is-” Padmé protested.

Again not letting her finish, Anakin took her hand and placed his lightsaber in it.

“Wow, it’s heavier than I thought.”

“It’s yours. Believe me now?” Anakin asked.

Anakin knew he should absolutely not be giving Padmé his lightsaber. But just like his heart and the rest of himself he gave it to her anyway.

In spite of her initial protestations, Padmé took it.

And as Anakin cupped her face and leaned in, she met him half way for a kiss.

Anakin desperately wanted the words coming out of his mouth to be true, just as he wished the imbalance in their strength in Force could be altered by him simply handing her his lightsaber. But as he had previously contorted the Jedi’s teaching on compassion into an encouragement for him to love, both he and Padmé knew he was again bending the truth to the point of breaking.

The real truth was that as long as he was a Jedi, Anakin was not allowed to put their marriage first.

This fact was emphasized only a few minutes later when Anakin found himself abruptly shifting from passionately kissing his wife to obeying her command to hide under her desk, when Senator Bail Organa barged into Padmé’s office to get her immediate assistance in standing against of all things a “Privacy Invasion” bill.

Knowing it would greatly diminish his grand gesture—and his chances of talking her into blowing off her responsibilities in favor of a romantic getaway that was convenient for him but not her—Anakin, furthermore, did not share with Padmé that the innate recklessness with which he treated every aspect of his person, from his heart and emotions, which had led him to jump into their secret marriage in the first place, down to his physical safety and his very life, also extended to his
It was true that Obi-Wan had said, “Anakin, this lightsaber is your life.” It was also true that his master had repeated that phrase to Anakin many, many times, usually in a chiding disappointed tone of voice after Anakin lost or broke it . . . again.

Given the damage Anakin’s lightsaber had incurred over the years, the fact he was always able to fix it without starting over from scratch was a testament to his mechanical genius. That the kyber crystal at the heart of the weapon remained intact defied explanation. Beyond that, although it appeared to be permanently lost on multiple occasions, by some miracle of the Force Anakin’s lightsaber was never really gone.

For her part, when the Sabacc chips were down Padmé ranked nothing above her husband’s life—even the interests of the Republic.

When the Gungans of all people managed to capture Separatist General Grievous on Naboo, it put victory within the Republic’s grasp. The Sith Lord mastermind behind the war, however, instructed Count Dooku to capture Anakin and offer a prisoner exchange with Senator Amidala.

Dooku obeyed, and then called Padmé on Anakin’s private comlink channel—making sure Anakin’s racked up body was visible in the background.

“One thing to say again,” Dooku said, before ominous adding, “I must regretfully inform you that young Skywalker as been detained.”

“What have you done with Anakin?” Padmé asked, cold fury in her voice.

“Now, now Senator. Let’s not become emotional,” Dooku replied.

As Dooku laid out the proposed prisoner exchange, Padmé had initially refused—fully aware she did not have the authority to make such a monumental decision that would impact the entire Republic.
Anakin, however, began screaming behind Dooku the second she said no, and Padmé angry told her adversary, “Stop! You cannot torture a prisoner!”

“Torture? I don’t know what you mean,” Dooku replied, with Anakin cries still filling her ears in the background.

The life of even a Jedi was not worth trading away a swift end of the Clone Wars, but Padmé did it —quickly and without consulting anyone else in the Republic hierarchy. Chancellor Palpatine would be supportive, but Padmé knew what the overall answer would be, and she refused to accept it.

Felled by the electrostaff’s of four Magna Guard droids and bolts of blue lightning from Dooku himself, Anakin had initially been unconscious when the Separatist droids dumped his body in the dirt at Padmé’s feet, tossed Anakin’s lightsaber onto his back, and took back possession of General Grievous. In the end, the Naboo and the Gungans kept the whole incident to themselves, and even Anakin was not aware of the full extent of what Padmé had done for him.

On an average day, however, “Duty comes first especially in wartime,” was something of which they frequently reminded the each other. It did nothing to lessen the sting of disappointment every time their time together had to be cut short or canceled entirely.

As the war dragged on both Anakin and Padmé found themselves embroiled in one mission to stop the Separatists latest attack or scheme after another. The precious moments they carved out for a personal life became even more scarce, and their marriage increasingly consisted in passionate reunions after long separations.

Plagued by fear of discovery, both Anakin and Padmé found that most of their focus when they were together was directed at hiding their relationship from everyone else. It did not leave much time or room left for growing in their marriage, and while Anakin and Padmé were madly in love, they often had trouble understanding each other.

Although both Anakin and Padmé had known to a degree what they were signing up for by marrying in secret, their hidden relationship had additional unforeseen consequences that ranged from unpleasant to downright nasty. For Anakin, by far the ugliest effect of keeping their marriage a secret was having to deal with other men pursing the to outward appearances still single Padmé.
The simplest and most effective solution to this problem of Anakin’s own creation would of course be to claim the truth of their marriage—that Padmé definitively belonged to him, and other men needed to back the hell off his wife. Anakin, however, could not simultaneously call truth to his aid while continuing to enlist deception as his ally. He was, therefore, left to suffer and seethe in silence.

One of Padmé’s still very interested former suitors was particularly problematic.

Rush Clovis of Scipio was a fellow Senator and a long time associate of Padmé’s. On paper he was the kind of man with whom Padmé should have ended up. He was also suspected of being in league with the Separatists, and the Jedi Council wanted someone to spy on him.

They brought Anakin in late one night to discuss the matter. It was Anakin’s first night back on Coruscant in weeks, and Padmé was royally ticked that their quiet evening at home had been ruined by the Jedi calling him away.

When Anakin finally arrived at the Temple, the Council announced they had chosen Padmé for the job because of her past . . . association with her fellow Senator. But Padmé had already refused Master Yoda’s request for her to spy on Clovis, and the Council wanted Anakin to change her mind.

“Trust you she does, Skywalker. That is why convince her you must,” Master Yoda said.

Anakin could not decided if he was more deeply aggravated that the Council had ruined his night with Padmé to tell him of an ex-boyfriend she had neglected to previously mention, or by their request that he use Padmé’s trust in him to manipulate her.

For a dutiful Jedi, however, there was only one correct response.

“Yes Master,” Anakin said with a bow to his superior—having no intention whatsoever of actually talking his wife into being a honey trap.

He also had no intention of letting the matter of Padmé’s past with Clovis drop. It was too late for him to leave the Jedi Temple again that night without raising suspicion, but Anakin was
determined to confront her about it at the first available moment.

“Senator Amidala,” Anakin sidled up to her as she left the Senate Chamber the next day.

“General Skywalker. You finally found some time for me,” Padmé’s voice oozed artificial sweetness.

“You’re not still mad about last night,” Anakin whispered, dropping the volume of his voice as well as his act of formality.

“Why would I be mad? I’m not mad,” Padmé replied.

Ignoring the fact she was clearly still fuming, Anakin laid into her, “Good. Now tell me about your dealings with Senator Clovis.”

“So, you’re here on Jedi business,” Padmé said, no longer pretending she was not still annoyed. “I already told Master Yoda I don’t want to spy on a colleague . . . and an old friend.”

“Old friend?! How well do you know Clovis?” Anakin demanded.

“Why does that matter? That was before we were together,” Padmé replied dismissively.

Stepping back into Senate Chamber so they could talk more privately, the growing tension between them was palpable.

“I’m just trying to get a sense of who this guy is. I’ll need to brief anyone who does end up spying on him,” Anakin changed tacks.

“Oh, I thought you were here to talk me into become and agent for the Jedi,” Padmé said.

While she was annoyed with her husband, Padmé was actually most angry with the Jedi Council for ruining their reunion for the sole purpose of ordering Anakin to talk her into a mission she had already declined.
Sensing that there was nothing he could say at the present moment that would not deepen her aggravation, Anakin knew he should quit while he was ahead. He was not good at doing that, however, and plowed on.

“That is not a job for you. I don’t agree with the Council on this. If Clovis is involved in a Separatist conspiracy the last place you should be is anywhere near him,” Anakin said emphatically.

“Clovis is conspiring with the Separatist?! Yoda didn’t tell me that. I can’t believe Clovis would do that. This is terrible. I never expected that from him,” Padmé replied, suddenly no longer annoyed with or focused on Anakin.

“Someone has to find out the truth,” Padmé declared with renewed conviction.

“Someone does, just not you,” Anakin replied evenly.

“Why not me?” Padme asked defensively.

“Because it’s going to be dangerous. Whoever takes this mission will be putting their life at risk,” Anakin shot back, not liking the direction this conversation was heading one bit.

“I’ve been in many tough situations before. It never seemed to bother you. I never stopped you from facing danger. You’re constantly getting shot at!” Padmé was now yelling at him.

In hindsight Anakin realized that at that point they were no longer talking about the mission, but how consumed with worry for his safety she was all the time he was on the front lines. In real time, however, he unfortunately missed her cue to the deep seeded issue that he needed to address, and brushed off her fears.

“I’ve been trained for that. It’s very different than spying on a traitor,” Anakin yelled back.

“You mean, I can’t handle the mission,” Padmé replied icily.
“I mean I’m not going to let you do it,” Anakin unwisely said.

“You’re not going to let me?” Padmé replied, a defiant incredulous tone coming into her voice that Anakin had learnt long ago meant he was in trouble. “It’s not your decision to make. It’s mine.”

For as much as he had matured over the last few years, there where times when Anakin still could not stop himself for sticking his foot in his mouth.

“Lucky for us you’ve already decided to refuse,” he said in the condescending tone of voice that always drove Padmé crazy.

“Actually, I just changed my mind. You’ve convinced me that its vital to learn what Clovis is doing. I accept the mission to spy on him,” Padmé announced.

“Even though I’m telling you not to?” Anakin replied.

“Don’t take it personally, Anakin. Duty comes first, especially in wartime,” Padmé said, getting the last words in their argument by coolly throwing his own from the previous night back in his face.

Anakin was left to marvel at how spectacularly the situation had backfired on him, and wonder why he continued to delude himself that he could win a war of words with his senator wife.

Contrary to Padmé’s claims of duty, both of them knew she had changed her mind to spite him—largely in retaliation for him blowing off and belittling her concerns for his safety. Whatever her reasons for agreeing to the mission, however, Padmé now had to actually follow through with it.

Which meant enduring what Anakin suspected was quite possibly the most awkward mission briefing that had ever occurred in the history of the Jedi Temple.

“First, I’ll need get back in touch with him. Clovis and I haven’t spoken in a long time,” Padmé told the Council.
“A surprise that is, given your past,” Master Yoda commented.

“What does that mean, Senator?” Anakin asked in his most naïve tone of voice.

He was playing with fire, he knew, but Anakin was still mad and as usual did not care.

“At one point Clovis and I were . . . close. It was my choice to return things to a strictly professional level. Clovis didn’t take it well,” Padmé answered.

“Do you think you will be able to rekindle your . . . friendship with him?” Master Windu cut to the chase—as tactfully as possible inquiring if Padmé could still seduce her ex-boyfriend after she dumped him, and get the information the Jedi wanted.

Anakin at that point stepped in and changed the subject, again expressing concerns for Padmé’s safety. Padmé, however, ignored him and assured the Jedi that she could reestablish her former connection with Clovis.

“Good,” Obi-Wan said, “The closer you can get to him the better.”

Anakin could not decide which he wanted more: to strangle Obi-Wan or punch him in the face.

“I understand. I’ll do whatever is necessary to succeed in my mission,” Padmé told the Council.

And with those words hanging in the air, Anakin avowed to keep her safe throughout this whole sordid affair, and stormed out after her.

Get back in touch with Clovis Padmé did, and Anakin soon found himself listening in to her open com channel while serving as back up during her dinner date.

“It’s been good to see you again, Clovis. I didn’t realize how lonely I was until tonight,” Padmé said.
“Perhaps I can do more to ease your loneliness when I get back from Cato Neimoidia,” Clovis replied in a voice that made Anakin’s skin crawl.

In a startling coincidence, Padmé also happened to have a pressing need to meet with Clovis’ contacts on Cato Neimoidia. This led to Clovis’ brilliant idea that she should accompany him on his upcoming trip.

“Are you asking me for political reasons . . . or because you want us to be friends again?” Padmé inquired, and Anakin swore he could actually hear her eyelashes fluttering.

“Both of course . . . although I’m far more interested in your friendship than your politics,” Clovis replied.

“In that case I’ll be happy to go with you,” Padmé said happily, “It’ll be like . . . old times.”

“On the contrary, I hope it will be much better than old times,” Clovis purred.

Anakin though he was going to be physically ill.

However, the only thing worse than having to listen to this was being kept in the dark on any detail of Padmé’s dealings with Clovis. Anakin, therefore, refrained from ripping out his earpiece and smashing it to bits. He knew all too well that Padmé was very capable of playing this game, and the fact that it was all fake did little to quell his desire to hit something—or someone—very specific.

Actually, Anakin amended with a pang, that part about her being lonely was probably true. It was a frustrating reality that made him want to physically lash out all the more.

With his virtually indescribable artificial hand he could get away with it unscathed, but punching a hole into a stone wall was a good way to raise Obi-Wan’s suspicions that Anakin was emotionally compromised and for the Jedi Council to pull him off this mission. That would be the most intolerable thing to happen in this already insufferable situation, and Anakin held it together—barely.
The dinner from the bowels of a rotting rancor carcass finally ended, and Anakin met back up with his wife.

Padmé remained silent as Anakin escorted her to the Jedi Temple for a debriefing and then home. She was likely remembering all the reasons she had originally told Master Yoda she would not do this—before she had gotten mad at Anakin and made one of her many impulsive decisions where he was concerned.

“Are you staying?” she asked when they reached the apartment, speaking to him for the first time all evening.

Anakin actually could stay, but for once he was tempted to not do so anyway. Knowing, however, that would be a very bad precedent to set, he told her “yes” and followed her inside.

Padmé unsurprisingly headed straight for the freshener. Anakin also really wanted a shower, but tonight not with her. Instead he lay down in their bed and forced himself to go to sleep before she was done.

The next morning found the pair of them standing on the landing platform next to Padmé’s ship, which she was graciously offering use of for the trip.

Anakin was accompanying her as her bodyguard posing as her pilot. And as her husband, who was not letting his wife go off alone with her handsy ex, posing as her bodyguard.

Clovis finally—to Anakin’s mind unfortunately—arrived.

“Padmé, you look exquisite,” Clovis greeted her.

She was dressed in one of her bare midriff “Padmé” outfits that she now only wore around their suite—for Anakin.

As Clovis swept Padmé into an embrace and kissed her on both cheeks, Anakin caught her eye and glared at her.
Once aboard ship, Anakin “accidently” broke the harness on the middle seat, preventing Clovis from sitting next to Padmé so she could “rest her head on his shoulder if she got tired.”

Still fuming, Anakin lifted the ship off the landing pad and took off. Throughout the flight he spared just enough attention to where they were going to not crash into anything—while spending the bulk of his time monitoring what was going on in the passenger area to better know when he needed to bank the plane sharply to physically keep Clovis away from Padmé.

After Anakin landed them safely but a bit jostled on Cato Neimoidia, Padmé made quick work of discovering that Clovis was indeed in league with the Separatists to rebuild the droid factory on Geonosis—the same factory the Jedi had suffered great losses to destroy the first time—and stole a holodisc as proof of Clovis’ treachery. Anakin had never actually doubted Clovis’ guilt or Padmé’s clandestine abilities to find evidence of it—which to him was still completely beside the point—and caught the disc with the Force as Padmé dropped it to him.

Anakin left the holodisc with Artoo with the instructions take it back to Coruscant if he was not back in five minutes, before returning to collect Padmé so they could at last get out of there and go home.

Once inside, however, Anakin found that his wife had been fatally poisoned by Clovis’ associates.

Before slipping out of consciousness, Padmé had apparently come clean to Clovis about her true motives—likely, Anakin knew, self-righteously berating Clovis for his treasonous behavior as only Padmé could.

Finally figuring out that Anakin was not the lowly pilot he appeared to be—although still not knowing the half of it—Clovis told Anakin what Padmé had done and laid out his terms.

“She’s stolen a very valuable disc from me, return it and I’ll get the antidote from Lott Dod,” Clovis said.

“I’d prefer to negotiate with Lott Dod in person,” Anakin said of the slimy Trade Federation Senator that had been involved in the blockade of Naboo, and who tried to kill Padmé on a regular basis.

“No! He cannot be told-” Clovis replied frantically.
“What? That you lost the disc? I’m sure he would be very interested in hearing all about this,” Anakin replied smoothly.

“He might kill me if he finds out. But still . . . it’s her life that I worry about. She must be saved . . . because I love her!” Clovis declared nobly.

“In that case, I suggest you help us back to the Senator’s ship before Lott Dod finds anything out,” Anakin countered as he scooped Padmé into his arms, proving to Clovis that he too was very good at playing this game.

Backed into a corner by his apparent love for Padmé, Clovis agreed. He also ended up getting the antidote from Lott Dod at blasterpoint when they inevitably ran into the Neimoidian, and then naively passed it off to Threepio.

Anakin rushed ahead back to the ship, and as soon as the golden protocol droid was aboard, Anakin began raising the gangplank.

“Wait! Now give me back my disc!” Clovis yelled up at Anakin as the ship’s door continued to close.

“Don’t worry, Clovis. It’s good to know you have a heart,” Anakin said to the other man, unsuccessful in his minimal efforts to keep a tone of gloating out of his voice, adding just as the door finished closing, “I wish I could give you the disc . . . but I have a lot of faith in your survival skills.”

As soon as they were aboard Artoo, who had known all along Anakin was going to need more than five minutes, took off.

Anakin carefully put Padmé down, and getting the antidote from Threepio quickly gave it to her. To Anakin’s great relief, Padmé soon opened her eyes and looked up at him.

“I’m sorry,” she said, her voice still weak.

“What for,” Anakin said looking at her warmly and accepting her apology, “We got away and we
have the hologram. Your mission was a success.”

“But I made you doubt me,” Padmé said, sorrow filling her eyes.

“Never,” Anakin promised her tenderly.

After dropping the holodisc off at the Jedi Temple, Anakin took Padmé home. He held her as she slept off the effects of the poison, contemplating that if he had overestimated Clovis’ survival skills he would not be particularly sorry.

At the time Anakin thought that would be the last of their dealings with Rush Clovis.

A year later, however, the disgraced former senator came back into their lives in the worst possible way, when he showed up on Coruscant with verifiably allegations of corruption in the InterGalactic Banking Clan.

Since if true the whole economy of the Republic could be destabilize, Clovis’ accusations immediately caused a stir in the highest circles of power. This time it was not the Jedi, but Chancellor Palpatine—who was usually a lot more sensitive to Anakin’s feelings—who asked Padmé to work closely with Clovis to root out the corrupt officials and save the banks.

And to Anakin’s horror, Padmé agreed.

As they all left the Chancellor’s office, Anakin grabbed Padmé’s arm and made her hang back.

“Why didn’t you just say no,” Anakin angrily whispered.

Anakin could not believe she was really asking him that.

“I don’t want you working with Clovis,” he told her emphatically.

“You don’t want me working with him?” Padmé asked.

“A serpent can she its skin, but it is still a serpent,” Anakin told her, incredulous to how dense she was being after what had previously occurred.

“Well you are just going to have to trust my judgment here,” she replied, before turning away to end their conversation.

Anakin’s artificial right hand shot to her shoulder to stop her from walking away from him.

“Like the last time, hum? When you almost ended up dead?” Anakin countered, anger steadily growing as she continued to blow off his legitimate concerns.

“The Chancellor has asked me to do this, Anakin,” Padmé said, turning back around to face and plead with him.

“But I’m asking you to say no,” Anakin vehemently told her, “As your husband I demand that you tell the Chancellor you are stepping down.”

If he did not have to still whisper, Anakin would have by this point been yelling. He could not believe he was even having to ask this of her—that she had not automatically refused from the start, if not out of propriety then out of prudence given everything that had happened the last time Clovis came into their lives. But anything Padmé did where Clovis was concerned continued to be “for the Republic.”

“Demand?! We’ve been over this before. I’m not foolish enough to allow myself to be deceived twice, Anakin! My sole intensions are to defend the Republic. If you can’t trust me-

At that point they were interrupted by a cough.
They both turned to find Clovis had come in search of Padmé — and whatever amount of their argument he had overheard both knew it was too much.

“Excuse the interruption. Padmé, shall we begin?” Clovis asked smoothly.

“Of course,” Padmé replied, once again a mask of calm professionalism.

“General Skywalker,” Clovis bid Anakin adieu.

The young Jedi did not respond, but watched silently as his wife walk away after one of the least trustworthy men in the galaxy.

Anakin stayed away the rest of the afternoon, but as evening fell he could stand it no longer. He arrived home to find Padmé dressed in her most revealing evening gown and having dinner with Clovis.

Who, ignoring Padmé’s refusal, was a single second away from kissing her — and who knew what else.

“Get away from her!” Anakin snarled.

Anakin reached out in his rage and choked Clovis through the Force. He then lifted Clovis off the ground and hurled him into a support pillar. Igniting his lightsaber and ignoring Padmé’s screams for him to stop, he stalked slowly towards his fallen adversary.

“Why don’t you try fighting like a man without your Jedi tricks,” Clovis taunted.

“Oh it would be my pleasure,” Anakin replied, shutting down his lightsaber and throwing it aside.

Anakin landed the first several punches of their ensuing fistfight, and pinning Clovis to the ground had no intention of slowing down.
“Both of you stop this!” Padmé screamed.

Anakin paused fighting long enough to angrily answer her, “You don’t have a say in this!”

The brief respite was enough of an opening for Clovis to kick Anakin off him before himself turning to Padmé, “I thought you said he didn’t have feeling for you?”

It was a lie both of them had perpetuated for years, but as their eyes briefly met both Anakin and Padmé knew that somehow this time it was different.

Then Clovis and Anakin resumed trading punches. Anakin, however, had the advantage of his mechanical hand and it was not a fair fight.

As Anakin sent Clovis crashing into furniture, the former Senator shot back with words, “You should accept that the Senator has other interests than you.”

Anakin responded by again lifting Clovis off the ground with the Force and sending him crashing into a wall. He then picked him up like a ragdoll and flung him back to the ground.

“Skywalker, you fool,” Clovis told him, before Anakin was again on top of him swinging punch after punch with abandon.

By this point Anakin had completely lost control.

Deaf to Padmé’s screams until the very end, he came within a single punch of beating the other man to death.

Returning to his senses in the nick of time, Anakin looked down at his hands, before offering Padmé a feeble apology as he stood and backed away from Clovis.

Hearing a commotion, Padmé’s security team soon entered the suite at her behest.
Clovis was fully aware he was not an innocent party in their fight, and lied to Padme’s guards about what had transpired when they finally rushed in. Anakin was still in shock at what he had almost done, and was happy to second Clovis’ fabrication.

“A medic droid is on its way,” Captain Typho said.

“Please, help Clovis into the bedroom,” Padmé said, clearly beside herself.

Anakin by that point was filled with remorse. Once they were alone he approached her, “Padmé, I-”

“Stay away from me,” Padmé said, a tone of finality in her voice that Anakin found deeply frightening.

He did stay away from her, but did not get farther than the steps of the suite’s landing pad. Padmé eventually reemerged and he rose to face her.

“How is he?” Anakin asked.

“Nothing that won’t heal,” Padmé replied bitterly.

“I’m so sorry, Padmé. I don’t know what came over me,” Anakin continued with genuine regret.

“What’s done is done,” she replied coldly.

“It’s just when I saw him about to kiss you-” Anakin said, trying to explain himself to her.

“And I regret that,” Padmé said, finally turning to face him, “But it is not what you thought.”

Under other circumstances Anakin would have countered that actually it had been exactly what he thought—Clovis about to force himself onto Anakin’s wife.
But after losing control during his fight with the other man, Anakin knew he was in no position to argue with her.

“You must know I don’t care for Clovis,” Padmé said, missing the point. “I’ve told you why I’m doing this. But still you refuse to accept it,” Padmé said, before adding, “You could have killed him, Anakin!”

Seated on the couch next to her, Anakin could not look her in the eye. Instead he looked down at his artificial hand as he flex it into a fist.

“I know,” Anakin’s reply was so soft it could barely be heard.

“This marriage is not a marriage, Anakin, if there isn’t any trust,” Padmé continued, “We said at the beginning that this could be a terrible mistake.”

“What exactly are you saying?” Anakin asked, his heart abruptly beating faster as anxiety rose in his chest.

“That other people who are married have everything that we don’t! Everything that we won’t!” Padmé said, her voice breaking at the last. “We live in secret, Anakin. Like it or not, our relationship is built on lies and deception. No relationship can survive that,” Padmé said as she rose and walked away from him.

“I know I went too far, it just . . . something inside me just snapped,” Anakin tried again to explain himself, a note of pleading coming into his voice as he saw were this conversation was headed.

“I don’t know who’s in there sometimes. I just know that I’m not happy anymore. I don’t feel safe,” Padmé told him.

“But Padmé-” Anakin pleaded, himself now standing.

“I think it’s best if we don’t see each other anymore . . . at least not for a while. I’m sorry Anakin,” Padmé told him before she again turned and finished walking away from him.
His artificial right hand might be indestructible, but his heart was shattering into a million pieces.

“’I’m sorry too,” was all Anakin could say into the empty room.

With Clovis recuperating in his bed, Anakin returned to his room at the Jedi Temple. He used it mainly as a storage unit for whatever mechanical device he was currently tinkering with, and it was devoid of personal items of sentimental value.

His room was a model of austere detachment befitting a Jedi mainly because Anakin did not actually live there—until now.

The night had been a disaster on so many levels that it was hard to wrap his mind around it. As he reflected on what Padmé had said, the words that hurt the most were the ones that had nothing to do with Clovis.

To Anakin what they had was better than nothing, which was the only other option for him. But it was not the case for Padmé. Padmé who was not happy and who did not feel safe with him anymore. Padmé who wanted the normal marriage she should have had that he could not give her.

Padmé for whom that was still an available alternative.

All she had to do to get the life she wanted was to leave Anakin for Clovis or any of the other men who would line up to be with her—and no one but Padmé and Anakin would ever be the wiser.

In spite of desperately clinging to the “at least not for a while” part of Padmé’s pronouncement—and the hope that she could still reopen the door that she had so firmly shut in his face tonight—Anakin found himself swallowed up by a tidal wave of depression and despair.

His mood did not lighten in the coming days after Padmé kicked him out.
Clovis was no longer staying with Padmé, but she was supportively at his side to give him a full endorsement as the Senate voted him the new head of the InterGalactic Banking Clan—despite his known Separatist ties.

The last Anakin heard was she had flown off to Scipio with him to oversee the bank’s transfer of power, which only served to enflame Anakin’s growing fear and conviction that Padmé was getting involved with a man who would eventually get her killed.

Sure enough with Clovis in charge of the banks, the Separatists moved to take them over and financially cripple the Republic. The Clone troops at the Republic garrison on Scipio were slaughtered and Padmé was taken prisoner.

Anakin had been in the Chancellor’s office when Padmé called in to report the attack.

“Surly you can get to a ship,” Anakin told her, tamping down his rapidly exploding anxiety.

“General Skywalker, I’m afraid I’m trapped,” Padmé told him . . . before a Commando droid entered the holo’s frame and grabbed her.

Agreeing that Anakin’s concerns about Clovis’ trustworthiness had been correct from the start, Chancellor Palpatine took pity on his young protégé.

“I feel it is only right that you should handle this, my boy,” Palpatine said, before finally sending Anakin after Padmé with a full task force.

They arrived guns blazing to find the Separatists mounting a full-scale invasion of the planet. While the Clone troopers engaged the Separatist battle droids, Anakin found Padmé, thankfully still alive in Clovis’ office.

As soon as he barged in, however, Clovis grabbed Padmé, and while holding her at gunpoint as a human shield begged Anakin to believe him that Count Dooku had set him up. Anakin could easily believe that Clovis had gotten played, but with a blaster pointed at his wife’s head he did not much care.
Their standoff eventually came to an abrupt end when a Separatist fighter crashed through the window and sent the whole building falling sideways.

Anakin suddenly found himself holding onto Padmé with one hand and Clovis with the other over a thousand foot drop.

“I can’t hold both of you,” Anakin said through gritted teeth.

Anakin was not going to let Padmé fall—nor would Clovis want him to.

“Let me go,” Clovis said.

“No! Anakin don’t!” Padmé pleaded.

But as Padmé continued to slip through his fingers both Anakin and Clovis knew that Anakin was preparing to drop the other man.

Clovis, however, preferred to die on his own terms, and bidding Padmé a final apology and farewell, let go of his own accord.

Anakin was then finally able to pull Padmé to safety and draw her away from the edge.

“It’s okay. You’re okay,” he told her.

“I’m sorry, Anakin! I’m sorry!” Padmé said through tears.

She leaned into his side, and Anakin tightened his arms around her.

“It’s over now. It’s all over now,” Anakin reassured her.

The fiasco at large was also soon over. With Clovis dead and the Separatists in full retreat, the
Republic armada began the task of destroying the remaining battle droids and mopping up. As Supreme Chancellor, Palpatine had handled the political fall out by stepping in and temporarily taking over the banks to protect the financial stability of the Republic.

As he had known he would from the beginning in this rapidly deteriorating situation, Anakin had had to swoop in and rescue Padmé—but had very nearly not been able to.

Laying in the rubble recovering from the near miss, they had held each other tightly and silently agreed to move past the whole ugly affair. Anakin forgave her for her profound lapse in judgment and boundaries. Padmé forgave him his violent outburst. Anakin came back home, and on the surface that was the end of it.

However, it was the closest Anakin had ever come to losing Padmé—in more ways than one—and it shook him to the core.

Frequently sent on even longer missions far from Coruscant as the war raged on, Anakin was now plagued by the dark whisper in the back of his mind that the distance between Padmé’s willingness to hide a relationship with him and a willingness to hide a relationship from him were far too close for comfort.

Although Anakin chose to trust that his wife would not betray him, the seed had been planted, and actively stopping it from germinating only added to his mental strain. The situation, moreover, only fueled Anakin’s possessiveness of Padmé, and his long standing worry that his wife did love him as much as he adored her.

As the months went by, Anakin found his enjoyment of having a family and not being alone becoming increasingly tainted by a sense of powerlessness and a fear of losing everything he had.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading, and for all the comments and kudos. They mean a lot.

If you’ve made it this far feel free to drop a comment and let me know what parts you liked best and what your favorite moments from Star Wars are.

Artwork:
Art of The Revenge of the Sith, page 56
Still shots from the Clone Wars (2008)
Anakin’s trust in the Jedi further erodes when the Council cruelly manipulate his emotions while faking Obi-Wan’s death, and after their abysmal handling of a situation that almost get Ahsoka killed . . . and which still ends in Anakin losing his beloved padawan.

Chapter Notes

In TLJ Master Yoda tells Luke, "We are what they grow beyond, that is the true burden of all masters." Unlike, Yoda, Obi-Wan, the rest of the Jedi, and even Luke, a case can be made that Anakin is the best master and the only one who help his student "grow beyond" himself.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Anakin had initially held out some hope that that would change when Obi-Wan was promoted to Jedi Master and given a seat on the Council. Unfortunately, what happened instead was the reverse. As the Council increasingly made Obi-Wan their go-between with Anakin, it put serious strain on the relationship between master and former padawan.

The disconnect between the teachings of the Order and reality of life as a Jedi was another source of Anakin’s growing disillusionment.

“A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defense,” Anakin remembered learning from Master Yoda as a child. As he advanced in his training, however, Anakin began to realize that was not quite true.

For all their talk about remaining on the Light and shunning the dark side, Anakin soon found himself being trained in tactics like mind control—including the Jedi mindtrick Obi-Wan was particularly good at—reading other being’s thoughts even without their permission, and other skills of manipulation. They were valuable tools in the Jedi’s pursuit of maintaining peace in the galaxy, but were not exactly above board.

It did not seem to occur to the Council or any of the other Jedi so stuck in their ways that being against the dark side of the Force on principal did not necessarily mean the Jedi were operating fully in the Light.

The situation got even more complicated with the onset of the Clone Wars, and the peacekeeping Jedi suddenly found themselves in charge of fighting a war.

Anakin had once simplistically explained the Clone Wars to Ahsoka as “the Separatists believe the Republic is corrupt, but they’re wrong . . . and we have to restore order.” It was how most of the Jedi viewed the conflict, and how the Order as a whole justified their leadership role in the Grand Army of the Republic.

Their endless skirmishes with the atrocity committing Separatist battle droids so consumed the Jedi’s focus that they failed to differentiate the Separatists worlds from their Count Dooku and General Grevious led army.

Furthermore, the Jedi were so busy with the immediate battle at hand that they had never entertained the possibility that perhaps the worlds that wanted out of the Republic had a valid point, and that there might not be a right side to this war—let alone that if there was the Jedi might
While the Separatists used vicious droids to fight their battles, the Republic fought with Clone troopers of unclear origins. All the Jedi had been able to ascertain was that an order for a Clone army had been mysteriously placed with the Cloners on Kamino ten years previously, and had been ready precisely when the Republic had need of legions of soldiers.

Master Yoda, himself, had picked them up on behalf of the Senate, and the Jedi had accepted the Clone soldiers without argument—unaware it was a gift from their Sith Lord enemy, and the Jedi Generals were commanding what would one day be the instrument of their destruction.

Consumed with the war, furthermore, neither anyone in the Jedi or Republic leadership raised concerns over the dubious ethics of cloning human beings. In spite of the Jedi’s periodic and over the years waning assertions that each Clone was a unique and valuable life, it did not change the fact they were grown for the sole purpose to fight and die for the Republic—which they did in droves, unmourned and often unburied.

But the Jedi and the Republic leaders believed they were on the right side of history, which in their minds justified their use of a Clone army and all of their other actions during the long war.

Beyond that, the corruption of the Jedi was so slow and insidious that the Order became inoculated against the reality that they were losing themselves and their way. Not even the increasingly frequent war protests outside of the Temple were enough to sufficiently rouse them to the dangerous path they had embarked upon.

How dark no one fully understood until it was far too late.

Anakin’s own issues with the Jedi Code and his never-ending disagreements with the Counsel continued unabated, and he persisted in getting his emotional needs met behind the Jedi’s back from his secret wife. Even though their marriage was far from perfect, Padmé’s presence picked up stabilizing Anakin where his mother’s left off, and being married had a balancing effect on the young Jedi.

The situation was still far from ideal, and Anakin, started every morning with the question passing through his mind if today would be his last as a Jedi. After a brief internal argument, however, he
would inevitably decide to pursue on his present course: he would stay until at least the end of the war—then he could seriously think about leaving. Anakin resultantly showed up for work and continued to throw himself into the war effort with every fiber of his being.

This became increasingly difficult, however, as the years went by and the Clone Wars dragged on with no end in sight.

Anakin grew evermore weary of coming back from a tour in the middle of the night to find his wife dressed in one of his old tunics with her fact buried in his pillow. On the front line he did not have a similar token of her to fend off the loneliness.

Beyond the toll his long absences were taking on his relationship, his growing mental strain was another sign that Anakin should get out.

Although Anakin was a good soldier and cunning warrior, it became increasingly hard for him to ignore nagging concerns in the back of his mind, and not feel torn apart with conflicting feelings. But still he stayed over the years, even as his confidence in Jedi deteriorated along with the Galaxy as a whole’s faith in the Order.

A series of incidents, however, further weakened Anakin’s relationship with the Jedi Council and brought it to the point of breaking.

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The first incident involved Obi-Wan, and occurred when the Council got wind of a Separatist plot to kidnap Chancellor Palpatine.

Ignoring how close Anakin was to both men, they chose to keep the young Jedi in the dark when they faked Obi-Wan’s death, and sent the Jedi Master undercover to help foil the plot.

Anakin did, however, have a crucial role in the mission. Disregarding the psychological impact on the young Jedi, who had already been deeply traumatized by the violent death of one parent, the Council was counting on Anakin to unwittingly “sell” Obi-Wan’s death to Count Dooku and the
it would still take more than a blaster bolt to the shoulder and a fall off a roof to take out his former master, Anakin let Ahsoka take care of the fallen Jedi and gave chase.

Quickly losing the assassin in a smoke bomb, however, Anakin returned . . . to find Ahsoka cradling the Jedi Master’s head in her arms.

As a terrible dread seized Anakin’s heart.

“How is he?” Anakin asked.

Ahsoka’s answering look of sadness through eyes filling with tears confirmed one of Anakin’s worst fears.

He quickly crouched down and began shaking the body of his beloved friend, brother, and still the closest person Anakin had to a father—willing him to wake up.
“Obi-Wan. Obi-Wan! OBI-WAN!” Anakin screamed, as the shock and pain of such an unbearable loss ripped through him.

But thanks to the vital sign suppressors Obi-Wan had taken earlier, the Jedi Master remained motionless.

If Obi-Wan had comprehended the plan’s true impact on Anakin he would have never gone through with it—although whether Master Yoda and Master Windu would have been so moved was questionable. But it was a path the Council had chosen to walk, and the young Jedi was suffering greatly as an intentional consequence.

Anakin had sworn on his mother’s grave he would never let this happen again. But on his watch, Obi-Wan had died feet away from him—and there was nothing he could do about it.

But for Obi-Wan, Anakin did his best to be a good Jedi, and kept all his feeling bottled up.

The Jedi Master’s fake funeral was a quiet affair, with only the sound of Duchess Satine’s sobs filling the large chamber. Anakin did not say a word as what he thought was Obi-Wan’s body was lowered into the crypt in the Jedi Temple, and Master Yoda said a few words that were of no comfort.

Assaulted by flashbacks of the trauma of his mother’s funeral, Anakin raised the hood of his robes as guilt coursed through him and remained silent.

He knew Ahsoka was worried about him, but Anakin could offer her no reassurances.

Anakin did not speak for days after Obi-Wan’s apparent death, fearing once he opened his mouth he would not stop screaming and weeping in rage and grief—and that he would lose control like when his mother died.
Instead of spending his time after the funeral helping to keep the Chancellor safe, moreover, Anakin was left to lessen his grief by running around with Ahsoka hunting Obi-Wan’s “killer.”

Knight and padawan caught up with the apparent assassin in the back room of a bar, to Anakin’s disgust completely drunk.

Unaware of what happened when Anakin lost his mother, the Jedi were playing a much more dangerous game than they realized with Obi-Wan’s life by having him pose as the would be assassin in question, the bounty hunter Rako Hardeen.

“Get up you filth,” Anakin slammed the disguised Obi-Wan into a wall.

“If it was up to me I’d kill you right here,” Anakin snarled with barely controlled rage, “But lucky for you the man you murdered would rather see you rot in jail.”

Anakin managed to keep it together in front of Ahsoka, and unwittingly dragged the disguised Obi-Wan off to jail—which was of course the Jedi Council’s plan all along to infiltrate the kidnapping ring.

However, when Anakin learnt that the murder had escaped—along with some bounty hunter kidnappers—his restraint evaporated.

The Chancellor’s office was one of the few places Anakin could freely express his emotions, and Anakin finally let out his anger and grief.

“How can they expect me to just sit here and do nothing with Obi-Wan’s murderer on the loose!” Anakin raged.

“It is possible they do not trust you to control your feelings,” Palpatine replied sagely.

“Hardeen killed my master—MY BEST FRIEND—and now he’s on the loose and the Jedi Council won’t do anything about it!” Anakin screamed.
“You cannot deny your feelings, Anakin. They are what make you special,” Palpatine repeated his usual validation, before adding, “I have it from a reliable source that the fugitives were last seen heading towards Nal Hutta.”

Palpatine, himself, knew well that Anakin had slaughtered the Tuscan Raiders after they killed his mother, and was fully aware of what Anakin would likely do. He was perfectly happy, however, to maintain his usual façade, and express more apparent compassion in the face of Anakin’s pain and suffering than the Council.

The Chancellor also never passed up an opportunity to convey his confidence and trust in Anakin—unlike the Jedi Council—and revealed the kidnapping plot of which the Jedi had kept Anakin in intentional ignorance.

“If you believe that you can stop this plot against me, then I trust you,” Palpatine added.

“Thank you, Chancellor. You won’t regret this,” Anakin said, gratefully accepting the tip he needed to seek revenge—along with the private mission from Palpatine outside of the Jedi chain of command.

As Anakin walked from the room, Palpatine replied under his breath, “No. I won’t.”

After all, unlike Padmé, Palpatine’s plans for Anakin did not require Obi-Wan to be alive.

In fact the Chancellor would greatly prefer the opposite . . .

Anakin himself soon came to regret going after Hardeen, however, as he came within spitting distance of himself unwittingly killing Obi-Wan.

And when he came too from where Obi-Wan had choked him into unconsciousness and whispered into his ear, “Anakin, don’t follow me,” Anakin rose and returned to the Jedi Temple to confront Master Yoda.
Anakin arrived back on Coruscant to find Yoda himself was looking for him.

“You summoned me, Master?” Anakin entered Yoda’s chamber.

“Wrong it to deceive you it was, but much at stake there is,” Yoda said.

“So I was right! Obi-Wan is still alive!” Anakin fumed.

Anakin would never know if Master Yoda was planning to tell him the overdue truth or not. Since Anakin figured it out for himself first, Yoda’s admission somehow did not count.

“Skywalker, a powerful Jedi you are. Yet unpredictable you are, and dangerous you can be to both your friends and enemies,” Yoda replied.

Anakin, however, would have to disagree. He had been pretty predictable to the Jedi Council during this whole affair—and the knowledge of the Jedi’s calculated manipulations transformed his grief into rage.

With the Chancellor’s safety still apparently on the line, there was not time for Anakin to dwell on this latest souring in his relationship with the Council. Forced by the changing circumstance to trust him, the Jedi Council finally brought Anakin in on their plans to keep the Chancellor unkidnapped.

The young Jedi Knight soon found himself accompanying Palpatine to Naboo so the leader of the Republic and native son could preside over the planet’s Festival of Light.

Padmé was part of the Naboo welcome committee, and greeted Anakin and Ahsoka warmly as the Chancellor headed off with the Queen.

“Anakin. Ahsoka. Welcome to the Festival of Light!” Padmé said, before asking Anakin, “Are you certain that an attack is imminent?”
“I’m afraid so. Which is why I’m making Ahsoka your personal bodyguard,” Anakin informed her.

He was happy to see the two most important women in his life exchange smiles.

“At your service milady,” Ahsoka told Padmé.

“If there’s trouble, Ahsoka will get you, the Queen, and the rest of your staff to safety,” Anakin informed Padmé.

“What about you?” Padmé asked.

“Hopefully, I’ll be where I always am,” Anakin replied cockily.

“He means saving the day,” Ahsoka translated with a laugh in her voice.

“Of course he does,” Padmé said with resigned knowing.

In the end it was a very close call.

Despite the Jedi’s advanced warning, the Separatists had access to the latest intel from a very reliable source, and the kidnapping plot still went off without a hitch. If it was not for Obi-Wan’s inside information about the coordinates for the rendezvous point, Anakin and Master Windu would not have been able to arrive in time to help Obi-Wan recover the Chancellor before he was smuggled off planet.

Thankfully, however, they were.

And that was that.
The next morning, Palpatine—well-known for his deep loathing of oppressive excess security—ordered most of the security force back to Coruscant.

“Now that the threat has past, I think Anakin is all the security I need,” Palpatine put his foot down to a protesting Master Windu.

As they oversaw the troops being loaded onto transports, Anakin finally confronted Obi-Wan.

“If I’d known what was going on I could have helped you!” Anakin said angrily, before bitterly adding, “Too bad the Council didn’t trust me.”

“Anakin, it was my decision to keep the truth from you,” Obi-Wan said with regret, as he put a hand on Anakin’s shoulder, “I knew if you were convinced I was dead, Dooku would as well.”

“Your decision?” Anakin replied sharply.

“I know I did some questionable things, but I did what I had to do. I hope you can understand that,” Obi-Wan said almost tentatively.

Anakin was having none of it, and refused to accept Obi-Wan’s insufficient apology.

“You lied to me! How many other lies have I been told by the Council?!” Anakin yelled, and pointing a fingers from his artificial hand into his mentor’s face added, “And how do you even know that you have the whole truth?!”

In their present situation the Jedi did not in fact have the whole truth, and Anakin ended up being called upon to save the day after all.

“I must say, the lengths the Jedi will go to is nothing short of incredible,” Palpatine commented as he and Anakin walked along the deserted palace corridors towards the Naboo’s surprise farewell banquet, “I assume the brilliant plan to disguise Obi-Wan Kenobi was yours?”
“No, it wasn’t, Sir,” Anakin said, unable to keep the bitterness out of his voice, “I was in the dark as much as you were.”

“Really? Interesting. I was under the impression the Jedi always worked as a team,” Palpatine replied.

A biting response was on the tip of Anakin’s tongue, when he opened the banquet hall door to find only Count Dooku inside with a pair of droids.

“My gracious! It’s a trap!” Palpatine exclaimed.

“Chancellor, stay back!” Anakin yelled as a pair of Magna Guard droids stepped from the shadows, brandishing their lightsaber deflecting electrostaffs.

Turning to his adversary, Anakin then yelled, “You should have quit while you were still alive, Dooku!”

“Fighting off the entire Jedi security force would have been difficult. But now that they are gone defeating you alone with be an easy task.”

Anakin and Dooku then squared off in their next round of confrontation.

As Palpatine had observed, however, the Jedi did in fact work as a team. Anakin soon found Obi-Wan had returned after everyone else had gone, and was now fighting by his side.

Between the two of them Anakin and Obi-Wan just managed to recover the Chancellor from Dooku’s ship before it took off.

From the open gangplank Dooku addressed them, “Well done Master Kenobi, you are a worthy adversary. I cannot say the same about your young apprentice.”
With the Chancellor safe, Anakin cared little about the Sith’s parting barb.

Dooku was still the superior swordsman. But Anakin could feel the day was approaching when that would no longer be true.

The other pair of eyes that had appraisingly watched the duel agreed.

Although the fighters were both unaware the whole kidnapping plot was nothing more than a dress rehearsal for a plan to upgrade his apprentice, the Sith Lord who mastermind the altercation eagerly awaited the day when Anakin would surpass Dooku for his own dark purpose.

As the Separatist Leader’s ship rose into space, Padmé rushed out with a unit of palace guards.

“Chancellor! Are you alright?” she exclaimed.

“Yes, thanks again to the heroics of the Jedi,” Palpatine said, his polished composure fully returned.

“As long as I live no harm will ever come to you, Your Excellency,” Anakin vowed.

“Well, here’s to your long and prosperous life, Anakin,” Palpatine replied.

The Chancellor placed a fatherly hand on the younger man’s shoulder, before adding, “One shudders to think where the galaxy would be without the Jedi.”

Although initially riding high on adrenaline and success, in the aftermath Anakin had to face the disillusioning truth.
The Council had lied to him.

While Anakin was lying to them too, getting his emotional needs met behind the Jedi’s back was hardly comparable to their cruel manipulations.

Forgiving Obi-Wan—who bothered to apologize and was full of remorse—Anakin somehow managed.

Forgiving Master Yoda, Master Windu and the rest of the Council who had literally stood by and watched Anakin bury Obi-Wan and suffer so deeply was a more difficult task that did not actually happen.

Anakin had been told from his earliest years at the Temple that “for the Jedi there was no emotion”—something the Council and all the rest of his instructors had continually pounded into him. As a result Anakin had struggled with his emotions on a daily basis up to that very moment.

Unlike the Chancellor, who was supportive and accepting of his feelings, the Council—when they were not shaming him for his emotions and telling him they were unbecoming a Jedi—were apparently now content to use his emotions to their calculated advantage.

Although accustomed to their belittlement and neglect, the hypocrisy of the Council’s new tactic was glaring to Anakin and struck a deep nerve.

Padmé had once said no relationship could survive a lack of trust. Anakin’s trust in the Council had been crumbling for years even before this serious blow—and he certainly did not seek to cultivate confidence in the Jedi as he did with his wife.

After the crisis on Naboo, Anakin began to question more deeply not only his relationship with the Jedi, but also if there really was such a thing as right and wrong, or merely wrong and wrong.

He wondered if perhaps Obi-Wan was correct and that everything depended on looking at things “from a certain point of view”—that there was no such thing as objective truth, and everything just a matter of perspective.
This relativistic worldview was challenged, however, by how increasingly guilty Anakin felt about lying to his padawan about his secret marriage.

Thus far Anakin had managed to successfully hide the true nature of his relationship with Padmé from Ahsoka. He was confident that she had long sensed that his “friendship” with Padmé far exceeded the level of friendly acquaintance that was appropriate for a Jedi. For now, however, his secret was protected by her young age, and Ahsoka still appeared to lumped his affinity for Padmé in with Anakin’s other inappropriate attachments that included things like being overly protective of her and refusing to wipe Artoo’s memory.

With the close bond that formed between masters and padawans, however, Anakin had a sinking feeling it was just a matter of time before the truth became evident, and he would now bet on Ahsoka figuring it out before Obi-Wan.

But as usual, Anakin decided would fly through that sector when he got to it.

Diligently attempting to raise a girl who was more balanced than he was, Anakin was careful to shield Ahsoka from his problems. He concealed any hint of the pervasive despondency that had long been with him, and to her he was always the fun loving and kind master, wildly successful general, and nearly invincible Jedi.

His real smile continued to be reserved for quiet moments alone with Padmé. But while his wife occasionally got glimpses, Padmé too was unaware of the true depths of Anakin’s unhappiness, and the fear of loss and failure that lay deep in his heart.

The anger and fear over his mother’s violent death remained with the young Jedi, but as Count Dooku would one day observe, Anakin strove to not use the darkness inside of him to fuel his Force powers.

As the Clone Wars dragged on, however, Anakin became increasingly less successful in this task—and his padawan began to notice.

While Ahsoka was unaware that Anakin had once nearly Force-choked a prisoner to death during an interrogation when it was the only way to save her life, in later years a darker nastier side of her
master began to come out when Anakin was particularly upset—like when they were dealing with slavers, or anything related to Obi-Wan or Senator Amidala. It was an unsettling shadow that Ahsoka found frightening, particularly as she had to increasingly recall Anakin to himself before he crossed the line.

For Anakin, moreover, it was an incident involving his beloved padawan that would deliver one of the most decisive and lasting blows between him and the Jedi, with incalculable future ramifications.

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It all started when Master Yoda abruptly called the pair back from the front lines with the news that a bomb at gone off in a terrorist attack on the Jedi Temple.

“How could the Separatists infiltrate the Temple?” Anakin asked the Council when they arrived back on Coruscant.

“How worse than that, it is,” Master Yoda told him.

“What could be worse, Master Yoda?” Ahsoka replied.

The Masters exchanged uncomfortable looks, and for a moment no one answered.

Master Windu finally broke the silence, “We have to look at the possibility that it could have been anyone in the Temple—even a Jedi. We’d like for you to lead the investigation. We can’t trust anyone who was here.”

“We’ll do everything we can,” Anakin promised.

Soon master and padawan were walking through the eerie wreckage of the bombed out hanger.
“I can still hear the screams,” Anakin said with a resigned sigh.

“Do you believe what they said, Master? That a Jedi could do this?” Ahsoka asked.

“Not every Jedi agrees with this war, Ahsoka. There are many political idealists among us,” Anakin soberingly told her.

“But a traitor?” Ahsoka replied, truly horrified by the idea.

“I’m afraid one can eventually become the other. Remember that’s how Count Dooku started,” Anakin countered.

Their investigation soon pointed to one of the maintenance crewers who worked in the bombed hanger—a munitions expert named Jackar Bowmani.

Unfortunately he appeared to have vanished, and everyone in the Temple was on high alert to find him.

Anakin made his way to the Temple entrance to make sure the Jedi on guard had gotten the message.

The crowd of protesters that could routinely be found outside of the Jedi Temple at this point in the war was much larger than usual today—unsurprising since the family members of the workers who had been killed or injured in the attack were added to the usual throng.

“No more Clones! Stop the violence! End the war!” they screamed in unison.

Anakin had just called up the holo of Jackar to show to his fellow Jedi when a woman in the crowd suddenly cried out, “That is Jackar!”

“You know this man?” Anakin asked her.
“He is my husband. I’ve been trying to reach him since I heard of an explosion. Where is he?!” she replied.

“I need you to come with me,” Anakin told her.

Her name was Letta Turmond. She did not have any information about the whereabouts of her husband, and was quite incised that, although Jedi, Anakin and his fellow Knights could not find him either.

“Letta, do you think Jackar could do something like this—blow up the Temple?” Anakin asked.

“Do you have any idea what someone has to go through to work in the Jedi Temple, hmm?” Letta replied, her voice filled with icy anger. “Jackar dedicated his life to serving the Jedi. It had been his dream. Not just anyone can walk into your precious Temple. He passed all the entry tests that were needed!”

“Okay, I had to ask,” Anakin said, backing off.

“Jackar would never do anything like this . . . Please, find him,” Letta begged.

Pressure to find Jackar was also mounting from the Jedi Council, which was becoming increasingly concerned about rumors that the Senate was meeting to decide whether military police should take over the investigation, given that Clones had also died.

Finally, the massive search effort was successful—after a fashion.

All that remained of Jackar Bowmani was his hand.

It was covered in nanodroids—microscopic droids of a highly volatile nature—indicating that he had not merely planted the bomb . . . but was the bomb.
With that grisly discovery, Anakin and Ahsoka made their way to Bowmani’s home in search of more evidence. Traveling down to a sublevel far away from the surface and the sun, they found themselves in a slum.

“This is not the nicest place,” Anakin said.

“I would have thought working for the Jedi paid better,” Ahsoka commented.

Anakin did not voice his opinion that he was somehow not particularly surprised.

Letta did not answer their knock, and the pair entered the eerily dark apartment in search of more nanodroids.

“Be careful,” Anakin reminded Ahsoka, “Remember he was a munitions expert. I’d rather not set off another explosion today.”

Ahsoka soon discovered traces in the disposal—meaning the nanodroids had been in Jackar’s food.

“Well, I guess the question now is did he eat them willingly, or did someone feed them to him?” Anakin asked.

With that question hanging in the air, master and padawan turned to the sound of Letta returning home.

She was shocked to find them there, yet initially agreed to return to the Temple with them.

As soon as they were out on the street, however, she bolted away.
“Letta stop!” Ahsoka shouted as she finally managed to block the woman’s path forward, “Running means you know more than you’re telling us.”

“Let me go!” Letta protested finding Anakin and Ahsoka had caught up with her and boxed her in, “Jackar is dead. And now you’re trying to blame his murder on me!”

“Nobody ever said he was dead,” Anakin replied from behind, before towering over her and demanding, “Did you feed the nanodroids to Jackar? You will answer me! . . . NOW!”

Having been caught in an incriminating lie, Letta came clean, “I did feed the nanodroids to Jackar.”

“You set up your own husband to die?” Ahsoka was outraged.

“You’re dealing with things you don’t understand,” Letta told her patronizingly. “There are some citizens of the Republic, like myself, who believe the Jedi Order is not what it used to be. The Jedi have become warmongers. They’ve become military weapons. And they’re killing when they should be keeping the peace!”

Anakin and Ahsoka had heard enough, and placing Letta under arrest they took her back to a holding cell in the Temple.

“Did this woman say what her reasons were for attacking us?” Master Windu asked, after Anakin and Ahsoka made their report to the Council.

The pair exchanged looks.

“I think we can guess her motives easily enough,” Master Windu replied not waiting for an actual answer, “Public opinion is swaying against the Jedi—that is becoming clear. This war is becoming less and less popular every day.”

On that ominous note, Anakin and Ahsoka were dismissed.
As they walked along the high-ceilinged corridor, Ahsoka finally said, “Master, I’ve relieved we solved this case, but—”

“What if it had been a Jedi?” Anakin finished her question.

“Yes,” Ahsoka told him before admitting, “I don’t know how I would have felt if a Jedi was really behind this.”

“There are going to be Jedi who disappoint us, Ahsoka,” Anakin replied, before sharing with her how he had come to mentally deal with his longstanding disillusionment, “But as long as we know there are good Jedi who fight for what’s right, it makes it all worthwhile.”

Ahsoka accepted his words, and they walked on in companionable silence—unaware of the rapidly approaching time when neither master nor padawan would believe them anymore.

Although the tragic event seemed to be concluded, it quickly became a flashpoint in the growing power struggle between the Jedi and Republic military leadership. From a political standpoint, therefore, the incident was far from over.

“So what happens to Letta now?” Ahsoka asked Admiral Tarkin as they all filed out of the fallen Jedi’s funeral.

“The bomber has been moved,” Tarkin informed her.

“Move? Where? Why should she be moved?” Ahsoka asked.

“The Republic military has taken her into custody,” Tarkin replied.

“But why? This is a Jedi matter, isn’t it?” Ahsoka asked argumentatively.
“Clones were killed, which makes this terrorist attack a military matter,” Tarkin answered her coldly.

While Anakin did not usually check his padawan’s tendency to challenges her superiors, Tarkin was not a man with whom Ahsoka should be picking a fight.

Stepping in he told her, “Admiral Tarkin is right. Letta isn’t a Jedi. It’s not for us to be judge and jury over a citizen of the Republic.”

There was no stopping an upset Ahsoka, however, and she did not take the hint.

“If Letta’s guilty, she’s guilty, and she should be dealt with,” Ahsoka countered, actually stepping in front of Tarkin and blocking his path to the turbolift.

“Calm down, Ahsoka,” Anakin said gently by firmly as he guided her away from Tarkin, “Remember, revenge is not the Jedi way.”

Tarkin continued forward while haughtily adding, “The Chancellor feels very strongly that the Jedi be removed from as many military matters as possible.” Once he reached the turbolift he turned back to face the two Jedi and waggle a scolding finger at them, “You yourselves said that you’re peacekeepers—not soldiers.”

“I hope Chancellor Palpatine knows what he’s doing,” Ahsoka unwisely said.

“I assure you that he rarely does anything without a strategy,” Tarkin countered, and Anakin could tell that beneath his cool exterior the Admiral was getting really angry.

Anakin sent Ahsoka off with her friend Barriss, and boarded the turbolift with Tarkin.

Before the doors closed, however, Anakin caught a fragment of the two padawans’ conversation.

“Every time I think about this I feel conflicted. It’s hard not to let feelings turn into attachment and
pain,” Ahsoka said.

“Ahsoka, have you ever wondered if it was right to ignore your emotions?” Barriss asked.

“My master would say, ‘Our struggle as Jedi is to move past them’.” Anakin heard Ahsoka repeat
the line he had told her because he had to tell her something. The same line he did not really
believe no matter how many times he repeated it to himself in the freshner mirror.

Turning to the Admiral, Anakin made an attempt at damage control.

“In ways, she is still very young,” Anakin said.

“Indeed,” Tarkin agreed, partially accepting Anakin’s apology.

The two men were fairly recent acquaintances—and their mutual dislike had been strong and
instantaneous. The icy officer loved rigid structure, favored shock and awe war tactics, and was a
proponent of maximum penalties for enemies of the Republic. Anakin’s animosity towards the
rapidly rising military superstar extending far beyond their considerable differences in
temperament and personality, however, as the young Jedi found Tarkin’s lack of capacity for
compassion, gratitude, or anything resembling moderation to be disturbing.

The Jedi and the Admiral had eventually found common ground in their mutual respect for the
Chancellor, and had come to a tentative truce.

Even so, Anakin hoped it would be a while before they saw Tarkin again—and was not pleased
when the admiral’s holographic image appeared alongside Obi-Wan’s to interrupt the Jedi’s report
from the war front.

“Excuse me Master Jedi,” Tarkin cut in, “Commander Tano, your presence is requested by prisoner
Letta Turmond.”

“Why is she asking for Ahsoka?” Anakin asked, a sense of unease coming over him.
“Not exactly sure,” Tarkin replied, “But Commander Tano is the only person the prisoner will speak to.”

“I’ll report back with whatever I find out,” Ahsoka told Anakin and the other Jedi in the room.

Anakin’s disquiet continued to escalate, and he opened his mouth to tell her to wait and they would go together, but she had already slipped out of the room. The minute Obi-Wan’s briefing was done, however, Anakin set out for the military base after Ahsoka.

He arrived to be informed that Letta was dead, Ahsoka was under military arrest—and Anakin was not allowed to see her.

“I said, my padawan is in there. Now step aside,” Anakin told the facility’s commander, his voice quickly taking on a very dangerous tone.

“General Skywalker,” Commander Wolffe remained impressively calm, “Admiral Tarkin has ordered that no one be allowed in there.”

“I don’t care what she’s accused of!” Anakin yelled, one hand clenching ominously into a fist, “Let . . . me . . . IN.”

Anakin punctuated his last word by slamming a commanding hand at Wolf through the security glass. The Clone finally flinched, and his comrades fired up their electrostaffs and approached Anakin—warning the Jedi to back off.

“Sorry, sir,” Commander Wolffe told him, once again a model of composure, “The Admiral’s orders stand. This is now a military operation and under his jurisdiction.”

Anakin gave the Clone a scowl he would not forget anytime soon, but knowing that neutralizing the guards and breaking into a military facility would not ultimately help Ahsoka out of this mess, he allowed the troopers to continue in their false sense of security that they could subdue him if necessary.

They were after all just following orders.
Tarkin’s orders.

Orders that Anakin knew carried no small amount of narcissistic vindictiveness.

Anakin left the compound and went to find his own unit commander, reasoning that having Rex with him to speak to Fox would hopefully render Anakin’s next attempt to see Ahsoka more successful. General and Clone Captain quickly returned only to find the facility where Ahsoka was being held lit up with blaring sirens and in a complete uproar.

“Alert! Alert! The Jedi prisoner has escaped!” A Clone voice echoed loudly through Rex’s com.

Between Rex’s presence and the dramatic change in circumstances, this time the Clone troopers were only too happy to let Anakin in and returned to unquestioningly following his commands.

The situation, however, was rapidly deteriorating.

Anakin and Rex finally caught up with Fox kneeling over the bodies of several Clones—who had been killed by lightsabers.

“The suspect has killed three Clones,” Fox said into his com, “Code red! If you see the target, shoot to kill.”

“Belay that order, Commander Fox!” Anakin shouted as he raced towards him.

“She’s killed troopers,” Fox argued.
“I know Commander Tano,” Rex said quietly, “She would never do something like this!”

“Then who did?” countered Fox.

“Quiet!” Anakin barked to the Clones, before calling out, “Ahsoka! It’s me, Anakin. Stop running!”

“You can’t help me, Master,” Ahsoka’s voice echoed from a corridor Anakin could not pinpoint, “Someone’s setting me up!”

“I believe you, Ahsoka,” Anakin said sincerely.

“But no one else will,” she answered him.

The sound of her voice was replaced by the sound of her retreating footsteps that soon were gone.

“Keep searching until we find her,” Anakin said resignedly before turning to his captain, “Rex call security. Tell them we need to search the entire base. Now!”

Anakin took off down the hall, and heard Rex’s alert came over the com.

“General Skywalker has just issued an all-points bulletin on Commander Ahsoka Tano. She’s killed three Clones and should be considered armed and dangerous,” Rex said, the heaviness in his heart coming across in his voice.

Anakin was not particularly surprised when Ahsoka made it outside the compound unapprehended, and raced out into the courtyard to the sickening sound of heavy blaster fire.

“Set weapons to stun, I want her alive!” Anakin shouted.

Ahsoka was making for the industrial pipeline that lead out of the base. As a pair of troop carriers
flew over head in her direction, Anakin screamed into his com, “Do not shoot to kill! Do not shoot to
kill! Try to box her in. Don’t let her escape.”

With a growing sense of panic, Anakin knew they needed to catch Ahsoka now, before Tarkin—who
would not share Anakin’s commitments to non-lethal measures—showed up and relieved the
Jedi of command.

The troopers finally appeared to have her cornered, and as Anakin caught up with them his eyes
briefly locked with those of his padawan—before she escaped the tightening net by taking a flying
leap onto one of the main pipelines.

“Ahsoka!” Anakin cried.

She did not listen to him, but instead cut her way into the pipe with her lightsaber—which she had
mysteriously recovered after breaking out—and dropped out of sight into the pipeline.

Anakin and the troopers dropped in after her and gave chase. Within the mazelike network of pipes,
however, the Clones’ chances of finding her were rapidly dwindling.

Ahsoka’s Force-sensitive master, however, was not without resources to find his lost padawan.
Breaking off from the troopers, Anakin followed her Force signature.

He finally caught up with Ahsoka at the very end of the pipeline where it opened up into one of the
huge skytunnels that connected the lower levels of the city with the surface.

He stopped several meters away from her in an attempt not to spook her further.

“Ahsoka... what are you doing?” Anakin asked as calmly as possible.

“You didn’t even try to come and help me!” Ahsoka told him accusingly.

“They wouldn’t let me in to talk to you!” Anakin angrily replied.
“You could have if you tried!” she shouted back.

“How would that look, Ahsoka, huh?” Anakin said as he slowly made his way towards her, “Forcing my way in would’ve made you look even more guilty.”

“I’m not guilty!” Ahsoka cried.

“Then we have to prove you’re innocent,” Anakin calmly told her, “The only way we can do that is by going back.”

“I don’t know who to trust!” she said in a voice that broke his heart.

“Listen, I would never let anyone hurt you, Ahsoka—never. But you need to come back and make your case to the Council,” Anakin pleaded.

“No. I’m not going to take the fall for something I didn’t do!” Ahsoka said emphatically.

“I am ordering you to put down your lightsaber and come with me—now!” Anakin said, desperate to stop this situation from spinning any further out of control, “Trust me!”

“I do trust you. But you know as well as I do that no one else will believe me,” Ahsoka said, backing closer to the pipe opening, “Anakin, you have to trust me now.”

“Ashoka, I do trust you!” Anakin cried, taking several steps closer to her before she put up her hand.

“I know you do . . . Wish me luck,” Ahsoka told him.

She then dropped over the edge into the skytunnel.
Anakin rushed forward, and watched her land on the roof of a descending transport. Their eyes locked again until she was too far away.

Ahsoka was full of hope and the spunk of youth as she headed off to somehow clear her name alone. Anakin’s heart was full of sadness and fear for his beloved padawan . . . and a growing conviction that this was all going to end very badly.

With Ahsoka gone there was nothing left for Anakin to do but return to the Temple. He arrived just in time for the start of the emergency meeting the leadership of the Jedi had called.

To Anakin’s mind the thunderstorm that raged outside perfectly reflected the mood in the Council chamber. Not having a seat among the Jedi Masters, Anakin leaned against his usual pillar as he listened to Admiral Tarkin’s report.

“After further investigation, there can be little doubt that the Clone officers murdered in the escape were killed by none other than Ahsoka Tano herself,” Tarkin said, before adding, “She used a Jedi mind trick to convince the Clone to open the door, and then proceeded to cut him down along with five other Clones along the way.”

“I do not believe that Ahsoka could have fallen so far,” Master Plo was the first to speak up.

“The beliefs of the Jedi Council are irrelevant,” Tarkin countered, “We deal strictly in facts and evidence, and the evidence point to Padawan Tano being guilty of the attack on the Temple, and the murder of the Republic officers . . . This is sedition!”

The Admiral’s holographic image finally disappeared. His last words, however, set the whole Council on edge, and a current of fear suddenly coursed through the room.

“Skywalker, was there no way to stop your padawan before she escaped?” Master Mundi asked what the other Jedi Masters were thinking.

“No, Master Mundi,” Anakin replied.

Finding himself now on trial along with Ahsoka, Anakin strode to the center of the camber.
“The Council believes that Ahsoka may be guilty of the crime. Still believe they are wrong, do you? Hmm?” Master Yoda was the next to launch into him.

“I believe she didn’t kill the Clone troopers or the woman who used the nano-droids to blow up the Temple—that’s why she’s running—to prove her innocence,” Anakin replied, attempting to keep as much defensiveness out of his voice as possible.

“Now she’s in the lower depths,” Master Windu chimed in, “With her skills, she will be hard to find.”

“Two teams we will send. Master Skywalker and Master Plo Koon, with Clones you will go,” the Jedi Grandmaster announced.

“I think it would be best if Skywalker stayed here,” Master Windu argued, “Having you involved may actually make things worse.”

Anakin’s heart leapt into his throat, but somehow he managed to keep it together enough to not start screaming at his superior.

“Master Windu, with all due respect—she is my padawan,” Anakin replied.

“The reason for you not to go . . .” Master Windu said, refusing to let up.

Anakin kept his arm crossed tightly across his chest, and did not immediately respond—unsure he could say anything at the moment that would not only strengthen the older man’s arguments.

Obi-Wan, however, quickly came to Anakin’s aid.

“I think we’re being foolish if we take Anakin off this mission. Who knows her better?” Obi-Wan’s staticky holographic image countered.

Anakin wished very much that Obi-Wan was actually on Coruscant instead of enroute back from
there is no need to let the matter drop.

“He’s emotionally tied to her. Probably too emotional to do what needs to be done,” Master Windu stated, renewing the insinuation that Anakin had intentionally let Ahsoka escape.

“I’d rather capture Ahsoka and find out the truth then let her run because of a lie,” Anakin replied vehemently.

“You must prove to us that you will stay focused. Can you?” Master Yoda asked Anakin.

By now Anakin was used to the Council turning any circumstance whatsoever into a test of his trustworthiness, and as calmly as possible he replied, “I’ve already alerted security on the lower levels to be on the lookout for Ahsoka.”

“Go swiftly then, Skywalker, and bring back this lost child . . . before it is too late,” Master Yoda said, proceeding with his original plan over Master Windu’s continued objections.

Anakin let out a breath he had been unconsciously holding.

“Yes, Master,” he said, before turning and leaving the room.

Coruscant was a planet located roughly in the center of the known galaxy. Resultantly it was the strategic end of many major trade routes, and while it was believed to be the original homeworld of the human race, it quickly became inhabited by beings from every species across the galaxy.

Having long been the center of galactic culture, finance, technology, and of course politics, the planet had served as the intergalactic capital since the time of the Old Republic.

To accommodate the planet’s every growing population, Coruscant’s cityscape had been built up over thousands of years into one massive ecumenopolis, with Galactic City covering the entire planet. Quickly out of planetary surface devoid of urban sprawl, the city developers began expanding upwards. Modern Coruscant was comprised of 5127 levels, and was home to a
population of nearly a trillion citizens.

Palpatine had once told Anakin that the most precious commodity in Galactic City was sky. Living in one of the skyscrapers on the surface was for the elite of the elite, while penthouses—like Padmé’s official residence—were for demigods.

Conversely, the lower the city level was away from the sky the worse the air quality and living conditions. All natural habitats on Coruscant had long been destroyed, and the planet’s surface and first few levels were occupied by monster and other strange creatures. The lowest level that was considered habitable by sentient beings was Level 5.

The mid and upper levels housed businesses and the upper-middle class, and were supplied with filtered air. The lower levels on the other hand progressively deteriorated into slum districts filled with poverty and organized crime.

Anakin knew Ahsoka could handle herself against whatever monsters or gangsters she ran into on the lower levels. He sensed, however, that a very powerful dark hand was going after his padawan—and as he frantically searched for her, Anakin was filled with dread.

A dread that only increased when she was finally apprehended.

After taking out security officers and Clones left and right—without killing anyone—Ahsoka was finally cornered in an abandoned munitions warehouse on level 1315.

Felled by a stun bolt from Wolffe’s blaster, she lay motionless on her side. Although he could sense her life force was still strong and she was only unconscious, Anakin still reached out a hand to caress Ahsoka’s forearm, and was steadied by the feel of her strong pulse.

In that moment, however, Anakin’s worst fears that his beloved padawan would only fall more securely into the traps set by the unseen hand were realized when he saw they had found her surrounded by crates of the very same line of nano-droids used to blow up the Jedi Temple.

Anakin did not believe for a second that Ahsoka had committed any of the atrocities she was being charged with, and was firmly convinced that someone was setting her up—and doing a very good job of it.
“I think there’s more going on than we know,” Anakin argued, when he called to report Ahsoka’s successful capture to the Council.

“By Ahsoka or against her?” Master Windu asked.

“That remains to be seen,” Master Plo Koon replied, the heaviness in his voice reflecting the sadness in his heart.

“We’re bringing her back to the Temple,” Anakin said.

“Let’s just hope we can keep her here,” Master Windu said in and ominous tone that Anakin did not like one bit.

Anakin’s anxiety only mounted as he waited to be called to the Chamber of Judgment with his now awake padawan, and he could not stop himself from pacing the room.

“You’re not helping,” Ahsoka said of his pacing.

“I’m sorry, Snips,” Anakin said, ceasing his walking and sitting down beside her, “I just—I just don’t know what to do!”

“It’s okay,” she replied soothingly, “I don’t either.”

At last they were summoned, and escorted by two Jedi guards, they came before the Council.

The Chamber of Judgment was arranged as Anakin had come to expect of the Order, with the seated Council towering over the accused, who was raised part way up on a small platform until they were floating in the middle of the cylindrical room.
It was not a place of mercy, but according to the Jedi Code it was a place of fairness. No matter what Tarkin had said about facts, the evidence against Ahsoka was strictly circumstantial, and ignored many things—including that the reason Anakin and Ahsoka had been assigned to the investigation in the first place was they had been on the other side of the galaxy when the bomb went off. Anakin trusted that the Council would give Ahsoka a fair hearing and ultimately come to that conclusion.

Both master and padawan’s trust in the Jedi, however, was about to be greatly damaged.

“Padawan Tano, serious charges have been levied against you. How plead you?” Master Yoda opened the proceedings.

“Not guilty, Master,” Ahsoka vehemently said, “I would never take the lives of innocents. The values of the Jedi are sacred to me.”

Anakin knew she was not just giving a pretty speech—Ahsoka believed with great conviction every word that was coming out of her mouth.

“There is evidence to the contrary,” Master Mundi countered, “You were alone with Letta Turmond when she died. Can you explain this?”

“Someone used the Force against her,” Ahsoka said.

The skeptical Council then quickly turned the line of questioning to the nano-droids found in her possession.

“I was set up and deceived,” she pleaded, “As you are being deceived now!”

“The question is, Padawan Tano, who is deceiving us?” Master Windu interjected, “You or someone else?”

“I am not deceiving you!” Ahsoka exclaimed, but she was at a loss to explain the situation further,
“My sense is clouded—”

“-Clouded by the dark side these things are, Padawan Tano,” Master Yoda interrupted, “Dangerously clouded. But not just surrounding you, surrounding many things in these time.”

It was then that Anakin realized the horrible truth.

“You’ve already made your decision, haven’t you?” Anakin shouted, “This meeting is just a formality!”

“Reached a decision we have, although not in total agreement are we,” Master Yoda said with resignation.

“It is the Council’s opinion,” Master Windu took over pronouncing Ahsoka’s sentence, “that Padawan Tano has committed sedition against the Republic. And thus, she will be expelled from the Jedi Order.”

Through the Force Anakin could feel Ahsoka’s shock.

“You can’t do this!” Anakin screamed, moving forward until the Jedi guards had to physically restrain him.

“You will be turned over to the Republic courts to await your trial, and whatever punishment they will set for you,” Master Mundi added, “Henceforth, you are barred from the Jedi Order.”

Although he had not been in the room, Anakin, nevertheless, knew exactly what had happened—and Obi-Wan’s refusal to meet his eye was all the confirmation that the younger Jedi needed to validate his suspicions.

Someone—likely Tarkin—had threatened the Council. In their fear, they deemed it better to
sacrifice one padawan than risk the whole Order being considered to be in sedition against the Senate.

The Council had caved in to Tarkin’s demand that Ahsoka be kicked out of the Order so she could be tried by the Republic military courts instead. But denying Ahsoka a fair trial and abandoning her was more a cowardly act of appeasement than a true conviction of her guilt.

Ahsoka had given her entire life to the Jedi Order.

And in return the Council was throwing her away like garbage—all to protect the Order’s own interests and influence.

As expected, the military tribunal charged Ahsoka with sedition against the Republic—which during wartime carried a penalty of death.

Anakin was alone in his continued support of his padawan.

Well not quite alone—Padmé had immediately dropped everything and stepped in to represent Ahsoka as defense council.

Because that is what real families did . . . they stood by each other.

Padmé would buy Anakin all the time she could, but he knew both the Jedi Council and the Senate needed a scapegoat. Someone was going to be found guilty—and if Anakin could not find the real culprit Ahsoka was going to die.

With little to go on in his race against time, nevertheless, the Force was with him.
Anakin discovered that the real murder and saboteur was none other than Barriss—a fellow padawan whom Ahsoka considered a close friend.

“Ahsoka trusted you, and you betrayed her!” Anakin screamed at Barriss.

“I’ve learnt that trust is overrated. The only thing the Jedi Council believes in is violence,” Barriss declared self-righteously.

The fallen Jedi put up a tremendous fight, but in the end was no match for Anakin’s swordsmanship.

Anakin took her into custody, and dragged her in front of the Senate court just as Palpatine was reading Ahsoka’s sentence.

“Chancellor!” Anakin interrupted Palpatine.

“I hope you have a reason for bursting into our proceedings, Master Skywalker,” Palpatine said.

“I’m here with evidence and a confession from the person responsible for all the crimes Ahsoka has been accused of,” Anakin declared, “Barriss Offee, member of the Jedi Order—and traitor.”

Everyone was in shock—Ahsoka most of all.

“Barriss, is that true?” Ahsoka asked in a voice that broke Anakin’s heart.

Barriss did not even acknowledge Ahsoka or say anything, and Anakin finally commanded, “Tell them the truth!”

It was her moment—and would be her last one in this life—and Barriss stepped forward and seized it.
“I did it—because I’ve come to realize what many people in the Republic have come to realize—that the Jedi are the ones responsible for this war!” Barriss declared.

“That we’ve so lost our way that we have become villains in this conflict, that we are the ones that should be put on trial! All of us! And my attack on the Temple was an attack on what the Jedi have become—an army fighting for the dark side! Fallen from the Light that we once held so dear! This Republic is failing! . . . It’s only a matter of time.”

As Barriss was taken away, Anakin could not help but realize that the voice in the back of his mind—the voice that was becoming increasingly hard not to listen to—did not actually disagree with anything Barriss had said.

But her methods—protesting violence with an act of terrorism, and betraying Ahsoka who had been her dearest friend for years—completely overshadowed any legitimate concerns Barriss had expressed.

With Ahsoka’s life no longer in danger, Anakin was also able to mentally take a step back in considering recent events.

While she was clearly the mastermind behind the attack on the Temple, Anakin quickly realized there was no way Barriss had been able to frame Ahsoka so effectively on her own.

Too many details of Ahsoka’s escape from the military compound did not make sense, and whether or not Barriss knew it, someone had helped her.

Not allowing his gaze to travel farther up to the dais where the Chancellor sat, Anakin’s eyes fell on Admiral Tarkin.

Tarkin had reacted to Barriss’ confession and the news that he would not be executing Anakin’s seventeen-year-old padawan for high treason with a sense of . . . disappointment.

With that the fragile truce between Jedi and Admiral was over.
Anakin would never forget this—and his hostility and bitterness towards Tarkin would remain profuse and unabated by the fact they were technically on the same side of the war.

Although Ahsoka had been cleared, the fallout from the Council’s abysmal handling of the situation for far from over.

Ultimately, it was not Ahsoka who had been on trial but the Jedi.

And they had not passed the test.

Anakin soon found himself back in the Council chamber, watching the Jedi masters preparing to offer their awkward groveling and apologies to Ahsoka.

Unsurprisingly, however, it did not cross any of their minds—because when it came to the young Jedi it never did—that they also owed Anakin a rather large apology as well.

The Council’s refusal to listen to Anakin was nothing new, and they had disregarded Anakin’s impassioned defense of his padawan.

The Jedi had instead believed that Ahsoka had fallen to the dark side and committed a horrendous act of terrorism—all while Anakin’s student.

With the further implication that Anakin’s innate untrustworthiness had only deepened.

That black mark now belonged to Barriss’ instructor, Master Luminara, who Anakin remembered had once scolded him for being too attached to Ahsoka. It was she who was now joining Master Yoda—who had been Count Dooku’s master when he was still a Jedi—as having the distinction of losing an apprentice to the dark side.
Anakin knew, however, that it would not reflect on her in the eyes of the Council to the degree they would have held it against him.

Used to being treated unfairly and with mistrust, Anakin was not expecting an apology, and instead focused all of his attention on his padawan.

The Council was not accustomed to eating crow and they were not very good at it. In the end it was Anakin who kicked off the proceedings when they had all returned to the Jedi Temple.

“Ahsoka, I am so sorry . . . about everything,” Anakin told her, more because she deserved an apology rather than because he personally owed her one.

She gave him a small nod of acceptance.

“You have our most humble apologies, little ‘Soka,” Master Plo Koon was next to speak, and did so with great sincerity, “The Council was wrong to accuse you.”

From there things went steadily downhill, as the rest of the Council offered sanctimonious non-apology apologies that belied their extreme desire to brush the whole affair aside as quickly as possible.

“You have such great strength and resilience in your struggle to prove your innocence,” Master Tiin said, blatantly ignoring she had been struggling to prove her innocence to them.

“This is the true sign of a Jedi Knight,” Master Mundi added, in a clear attempt at appeasement and damage control more than anything else.

“This was actually your great trial. Now we see that,” Master Windu said awkwardly, before attempting to put a positive spin on her ordeal, “We understand that the Force works in mysterious ways, and because of this trial you have become a greater Jedi than you would have otherwise.”

With narrowed eyes, Ahsoka crossed her arms at his attempt to shift responsibility away from the
“Back into the Order you may come,” Master Yoda concluded.

The Grandmaster word’s belied his belief that such an offer somehow carried with it an automatic apology, and highlighted, at least to Anakin’s mind, Master Yoda’s profound arrogance when it came to the Jedi Order.

It was awful and woefully insufficient, but Anakin knew it was the best the Council could do, and he quickly drew Ahsoka’s attention back onto himself.

“Their asking you back, Ahsoka . . . I’m asking you back.”

Extending a blacked gloved hand toward Ahsoka in invitation, Anakin had no doubt she would rejoin the Order—rejoin him.

But Ahsoka hesitated.

A sense of unease suddenly coming over him, Anakin extended his hand a little farther—an implicit “please” in his gesture and in his eyes.

As Ahsoka reached out her hand, Anakin could tell she seriously thought about taking his. At the last second, however, she reached out and gently folded his empty hand closed instead.

“I’m sorry, Master. But I’m not coming back,” Ahsoka told him.

Leaving Anakin in utter shock and without another word or even a look towards the stunned Jedi Council, Ahsoka turned and walked out of the room.

Anakin’s head dropped as the door closed behind her.
Finally coming to his senses, Anakin sprinted after her.

He caught up to Ahsoka in the courtyard just outside the Temple proper—her determination outweighing her sorrow and driving her feet methodically forward in the light of the setting sun.

“Ahsoka, wait!” Anakin called, but she showed no sign of slowing.

“Ahsoka, I need to talk to you!” he yelled louder, and finally she halted.

She turned to face him as Anakin finally reached her.

“Why are you doing this?” Anakin said, visibly beside himself.

“The Council didn’t trust me, so how can I trust myself?” Ahsoka told him.

“What about me? I believe in you! I stood by you!” Anakin angrily countered.

“I know you believe in me, Anakin—and I’m grateful for that,” she told him with deep sincerity, before adding, “But this isn’t about you. I can’t stay here any longer . . . not now.”

Anakin refused to accept her decision, and continued in his impassioned efforts to change her mind, “The Jedi Order is your life. You can’t just throw it away like this! Ahsoka, you are making a mistake!”

“Maybe . . . but I have to sort this out on my own . . . without the Council . . . and without you,” Ahsoka replied, at the last turning away from him.

Mirroring he stance, Anakin himself turned away.
Master and padawan continued their battle of wills with their backs to each other—fittingly as they had never before been so out of sync.

“I understand . . . more than you realize, I understand wanting to walk away from the Order,” Anakin told her.

“I know,” Ahsoka said, much to Anakin’s surprise.

With his heart breaking, Anakin watched Ahsoka walk down the steps of the Temple for the last time.

Tears streaming down her face but her head held high, she did not look back.

Anakin had promised Ahsoka he would never let anyone hurt her. But the Jedi Council, Tarkin, and Barriss had turned that into one of Anakin’s many lies that he had desperately wanted to be the truth.

He had done the impossible and saved her life . . . but in the end it was not enough, and he had ultimately failed her. Failed to protect her from this happening in the first place. Failed to help her grow into someone the Council would respect, and never treat so horribly.

Anakin, however, could not give her what he himself did not have.

For all his strength in the Force as a Jedi and his success in battle, in that moment Anakin had never felt so powerless since the day his mother died in his arms.

In tragic irony, that moment of profound loss was also arguably one the greatest successes of Anakin’s life.

It was a master’s job to help an apprentice grow beyond—and by that measure Anakin was a
successful master.

He had raised a girl who had grown beyond him—not in her strength in the Force, few if any could accomplish that—but in capacity for mental freedom.

Ahsoka knew what unconditional love and support looked like . . . because she got it from Anakin. In taking her from her family and telling her she was one of them, Ahsoka expected the same from the Jedi. And when everyone else in the Order she thought she was a part of abandoned her, she understood she was never going to get it from them.

In a move that displayed her greater integrity and inner strength than that of her master, Ahsoka had done what Anakin could not . . .

Leave.

The part of Anakin that was her master was proud of her.

The rapidly growing part of him that had become so unbalanced that he needed his padawan more than she needed him was in agony, however, and his pride in Ahsoka’s achievements was overshadowed by his grief. Losing Ahsoka was utterly devastating for Anakin—second only to his mother’s death.

It would not be the last time Anakin saw her, and Ahsoka would do more than her part during Maul’s siege of Mandalore . . . but things would never be the same.

Anakin never fully recovered, and it only fueled his fear of further losses.

While his never-ending disagreements with the Jedi Council, keeping his marriage to Padmé a secret, and the war all increasingly brought out the worst in him—teaching and taking care of Ahsoka was the one thing in his life that made him grow and mature in a positive way.
And now she was gone.

It was yet another thing for which Anakin would have trouble ever forgiving the Jedi. Adding that to his deepening disillusionment and mistrust of the Council—who treated him horribly, took him for granted, and who did not listen to him, trust him, or respect him—Anakin’s relationship with the Jedi Order was hanging by a thread.

Anakin knew he really should follow Ahsoka’s example and leave.

But no matter how much the Council treated him like garbage, Anakin could not stop needing them.

Whether still craving their parental approval, or trapped in the slave mindset that he did not truly have any choices in life—actually walking away remained a step too far for Anakin to wrap his mind around.

And in the end, Anakin did not break with the Jedi soon enough to avert disaster for everyone.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading, and for all the comments and kudos. They mean a lot.

Artwork:
Still shots from the Clone Wars (2008)
The Point of Balance Before Being Torn Apart

Chapter Summary

Anakin becomes a father, and his relationships with Padmé and the Jedi are irrevocably changed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 14: The Point of Balance Before Being Torn Apart

Over the years, the Clone Wars dragged on and on.

Away from home on the front lines for his longest tour of duty to date, Anakin could see no end either to his deployment or the war. On the contrary, everything was going from bad to worse.
First, the Jedi had their hands full with the siege of Mandalore, when Maul decided invade.

The major offensive was soon overshadowed, however, by the unparalleled disaster of the Separatists brazenly attacking Coruscant . . . and taking Chancellor Palpatine hostage.

Ahsoka had recently rejoined the 501st to help deal with the crisis on Mandalore, and Anakin and Obi-Wan tasked her and Rex with completing the job of kicking Maul off the planet as the two Jedi raced home.

The pair had been in countless space skirmishes between the Grand Army of the Republic and the Separatists—but the Battle of Coruscant being waged over the very heart of the Republic had much more gravity than usual.

The Jedi had learnt that the Chancellor was being held prisoner aboard General Grievous’ command ship, and ordered Anakin and Obi-Wan to rescue the leader of the Republic at all costs.

Navigating through a squadron of Vulture Droids, a swam of Buzz Droids that took out Obi-Wan’s starfighter—and nearly Obi-Wan himself—the two Jedi made it aboard the Separatists flagship and located the Chancellor.

Things were looking up when the Jedi managed to finally defeat Count Dooku and free Palpatine—until the ship began to break apart, and General Grievous simultaneously abandoned ship and launched all the escape pods.

Which was how Anakin found himself attempting to crash land half a Separatist cruiser without killing them all or taking out a huge section of the overpopulated city below.

Strapped into a seat behind the pilot, Palpatine briefly grimaced. The thought crossed his calculating mind that perhaps he had finally put too much blind trust in Anakin and his remarkable abilities.

Anakin, however, was in his element when it came to crash landing ships. His mind briefly recalled the argument he and Ahsoka had had on innumerable occasions.
“How come every time you fly, we crash?!” she loved to complain.

“It’s not my fault—it’s the ship!” Anakin would respond with indignation.

“You always blame the ship!” she would counter, right about the time they hit the ground and began skidding to a halt.

This time, however, even Ahsoka would have agreed that it really was the ship.

Although it caught fire while entering Coruscant’s atmosphere, Anakin miraculously managed to bring down the burning half of the Separatists cruiser on the actual landing strip and not wipe out a bunch of skyscrapers.

It was by far the most spectacular crash landing Anakin had ever made, and for Palpatine validated all of his plans for the young Jedi.

Soon planet authorities extricated them from the wreckage and transported the Chancellor, the two Jedi, and Artoo back to the Senate Office building.

“Are you coming, Master?” Anakin asked Obi-Wan as Palpatine walked towards the delegation the Senate and Jedi had sent to welcome the rescued leader.

Obi-Wan, however, was going no farther.

“No, I’m not brave enough for politics. I have to report to the Council,” Obi-Wan replied with a smile, before adding, “Besides, someone needs to be the poster boy.”

“Hold on. This whole operation was your idea,” Anakin argued.

“Let us not forget, Anakin, that you rescued me from the Buzz Droids. And you killed Count Dooku. And you rescued the Chancellor . . . carrying me unconscious on your back,” Obi-Wan
replied with uncharacteristic criticism free praise.

“All because of your training,” Anakin replied with equally uncharacteristic humility befitting a Jedi.

“Anakin, let's be fair. Today you were the hero . . . and you deserve your glorious day with the politicians,” Obi-Wan countered.

“All right. But you owe me one, and not for saving your skin for the tenth time,” Anakin said.

“Ninth time. That business on Cato Neimoidia doesn't count,” Obi-Wan argued in half jest.

As the two friends parted, Anakin was well aware that no matter what compliments Obi-Wan had just heaped upon him, the Jedi Master’s underlying motivation to excuse himself was really his longstanding dislike of politician—despite what Anakin would argue was Obi-Wan’s more than adequate skill in that area.

As he walked away from the transport, Anakin watched as the delegation began greeting the Chancellor.

“Chancellor Palpatine, are you all right?” Master Windu asked.

“Yes. Thanks to your two Jedi knights. They killed Count Dooku,” Palpatine replied with a smile, before continuing somberly, “But General Grievous has escaped once again.”

“General Grievous will run and hide, as he always does. He's a coward,” Master Windu said with disgust.

“But with Count Dooku dead, he is the leader of the droid army,” Palpatine pointed out, “And I assure you Senate will vote to continue the war as long as Grievous is alive.”

“Then the Jedi Council will make finding Grievous our highest priority,” Master Windu
Trailing behind the really important people, Anakin found himself walking next to one of Padmé’s closest collaborators, Senator Bail Organa of Alderaan.

“The Republic cannot praise you enough,” Senator Organa told the young Jedi, before voicing a hope for the end of the war with Count Dooku defeated.

“Thank you, Senator Organa,” Anakin replied, before adding with resignation, “But the fighting will continue until General Grievous is spare parts.”

“I will do everything I can in the Senate,” Senator Organa responded.

By that point, however, Anakin had caught a glimpse of the only politician he had any interest spending time with waiting for him in the shadow of one of the building’s gigantic support pillars.

“Excuse me,” Anakin told the Alderaanian Senator.

“Certainly,” Senator Organa replied graciously, as he parted ways with Anakin and continued on after the main group.

Anakin tried to keep his gait nonchalant as he casually walked towards Padmé—but could not stop himself from running the last few steps. Finally home in her arms after months on the front lines, Anakin picked up his wife as she flung her around him, and spun her around before setting her back on her feet and kissing her.

“Oh Anakin,” Padmé said with longing as she caressed his face.

Anakin did not immediately reply, but again drew her close and buried his face into her neck as she concluded.
held him tightly. Padmé ran a hand through his hair and sighed in relief.

“I've missed you, Padmé,” he whispered.

“There were whispers that you’d been killed,” Padmé said.

As she pulled away to look him in the eye Anakin could see anxiety written all over her face.

“I’m alright,” Anakin told her as he reassuringly caressed her cheek, “It feels like we've been apart for a lifetime. And it might have been if the Chancellor hadn't been kidnapped. I don't think they would have ever brought us back from the Outer Rim sieges.”

Anakin began kissing his wife in earnest, but she quickly pulled away.


“Yes, here. I'm tired of all this deception,” Anakin whispered as he again leaned in, “I don't care if they know we're married.”

Unlike him, Padmé was not ready to throw caution to the wind.

“Anakin, don't say things like that,” she chided.
Forgoing the kiss he wanted, Anakin compromised by pulling her more fully into his arms. It was then, however, that he noticed Padmé was shaking.

“Are you all right? You're trembling. What's going on?” Anakin asked as he again drew back so he could look her in the eye.

A look came over Padmé’s face along with a sense in the Force that Anakin had neither seen nor felt before.

“Something wonderful has happened,” she said.

Taking a deep breath Padmé continued, “Ani . . . I'm pregnant.”

With her face full of anxiety and her eyes scanning his for a reaction, Anakin suppressed his own feelings of terror at her words and gave her the correct response.

“That’s . . . That's wonderful,” he said forcing a smile onto his face.

Padmé was still worried, “What are we going do?”

Anakin caressed her face as he reassured her, “We're not going to worry about anything right now. All right?”

Speaking to himself as much as he was to Padmé, Anakin recovered from his initial shock, and for once found the words coming out of his mouth were actually the truth.
“This is a happy moment—the happiest moment of my life,” Anakin said, before again drawing her close as they embraced and kissed again.

Both temporarily free of professional obligations, he escorted her back to the privacy of her official residence—their home—where they could properly celebrate the end of their long separation and the news about their child.

The “glorious day with the politicians” that Obi-Wan had promised Anakin was really a glorious rest of the day off.

It was well past sunset by the time Anakin and Padmé finally emerged from their bedroom to get something to eat. Out of habit more than anything, Anakin redressed in his Jedi robes as he usually did when home and actually wearing clothes—just in case he needed to leave quickly or come up with a reason for his presence being “Jedi business.”

Padmé, however, stayed in her nightgown and never bothered to put her hair back up. Anakin did not mind in the slightest—having long ago mentally ranked all her elaborate “Senator Amidala” hairstyles by how quickly they could be dismantled, and finding even simplest one still took too long.

She now stood on the balcony and was backlit by lights of the Coruscant skyline. Anakin leaned against the doorframe and watched her adoringly as she brushed her long hair.

“Ani, I want to have our baby back home on Naboo,” Padmé said before adding, “I doubt the Queen will continue to allow me to serve in the Senate. I can go early and fix up the baby’s room. I know the perfect spot—right by the gardens.”

Anakin of course would agree to whatever she wanted. He noted that Padmé had said the last with a huge smile, and seemed happier than he had ever seen her before.
Politics were Padmé’s life, however, and Anakin was more than a little surprised that she seemed so at peace with the idea of her career ending. For despite her protestations that the Naboo Queen would not let her stay on as Senator, both of them knew that was not really true.

Many if not most of Padmé’s colleagues in the Senate had children, so Padmé herself having a baby certainly was not going to automatically terminate her career.

Actually, by that point Senator Amidala was so influential that she was considered by many to be next in line for Chancellor when Palpatine eventually stepped down. While the top job would likely go to someone else due to the Senators probably not wanting back to back Chancellors from Naboo, if Padmé was passed over it would not be due to her lack of importance. Anakin also knew her career could likely withstand even the scandal of their marriage becoming public.

So when Padmé said that the Queen would insist on her stepping down, what she really meant was that was what she, Padmé, wanted to happen. Since the end of her abbreviated childhood, Padmé had dedicated her life to public service for the last two decades, and Anakin could see she was excited about doing something else.

Furthermore, unlike her impulsive husband, Padmé always had a reason for what she did—if it was an unconscious one—and even her seemingly problematic choices where typically part of a plan.

And a plan to leave politics had been brewing in the back of Padmé mind for many years.

It was doubtful that she would admit it to herself, let alone to anyone else, but the truth was that Padmé had known all along that having a baby would finally be the excuse she needed to step down from the Senate—and the part of her that had been long ready to get out of politics had been hoping that is exactly what would happen when she married Anakin.

“Actually, I’d hoped to have a family of my own by now,” she had mentioned to Anakin as they walked along the streets of Theed all those years ago. “My sister has the most amazing, wonderful kids. But when the Queen asked me to serve as Senator I couldn’t refuse her.”
Because that was the story of Padmé’s life—her desire for a family perpetually offered up on the altar of duty to the Republic.

Which was fresh on her mind as she and Anakin arrived at her parent’s house—and to her mother and sister grilling her about her companion.

“Why haven’t you told us about him?” Sola launched in to her sister the minute the three Naberrie women were alone in the kitchen.

“What’s there to talk about . . . he’s just a boy,” Padmé answered a bit too nonchalantly.

“Have you seen the way he looks at you?” Sola continued conspiratorially, as she and Padmé surreptitiously watched Anakin and their father walking in the garden.

Yes, Padmé had—much to her annoyance—and her sister’s prodding was not helping.

“Sola, stop it!” Padmé told her.

“It’s obvious he has feelings for you,” Sola countered.

Yes, it was obvious. But unlike to Padmé and everyone else on Coruscant it was strangely not obvious to Sola that this was a rather large problem.

“Anakin and I are . . . friends,” Padmé told her mother and sister a bit lamely.
That was not really true, but Padmé found herself at a loss to define her relationship with the young Jedi, who was undeniably more than just her bodyguard but was also absolutely not a romantic interest. She finally settled on “Our relationship is strictly professional.”

Her mother only responded with a knowing smile.

Between being home reminding her of how badly she still wanted a family, and her mother and sister’s enthusiasm, Padmé found her perspective abruptly shifting.

And it was then that Padmé took another look out of the window at Anakin.

She thought back to the kindhearted and generous to a fault boy she had met on Tatooine all those years ago. Over the last ten years, Anakin had become strikingly handsome, and would, she knew, only get more so over the next few years. Sure he was butting heads with Obi-Wan and in full adolescent rebellion, but Padmé was confident he would eventually grow out of it—although in hindsight her assessment had been questionable in its accuracy.

Standing in her family’s kitchen, Padmé also reflected that her prospects for finding a good husband among the Senators and the Coruscant elite were not good—a pointed that had been hammered home by briefly dating Rush Clovis.

In that moment Padmé was struck by the realization that not only could she do a lot worse, but that she would also be hard pressed to ever do better than Anakin Skywalker.

Resultantly, as she continued to stare out of the kitchen window at him, Padmé decided that perhaps Anakin intensely gazing at her with the bluest eyes she had ever seen and his raging crush on her were not so unwelcome after all.

After that Anakin abruptly found himself assisted in his awkward attempts to woo her—and blatantly encouraged—by Padmé Naberrie herself. Together they wore down the duty conscious Senator Amidala.
As Anakin wandered around her childhood bedroom looking at the photographs on the walls while she packed, Padmé deliberately avoided analyzing the growing contents of her suitcase, of which Senator Amidala would most definitely not approve. Eventually her bag was filled with her more “social” make-up that included dark eyeliner and a shade of lipstick that she would never wear in the Senate, along with all of her most unprofessional dresses made of yards of fabric but which somehow barely managed to cover her.

Padmé did pause when she came to an outrageously inappropriate, extremely low cut, tight, black leather evening gown she was not sure how she even owned—but at the last second tossed it in as well.

Her bag packed, Padmé handed it to Anakin. She then dragged him off to the romantic Naboo lake country where Senator Amidala would definitely be safe from bounty hunters.

Before they reached their destination, Padmé styled her hair into a fashionable updo, and changed into one of her prettier dresses made of flowy multicolored fabric—and which covered not an inch of her shoulders or back.

Anakin wasted no time in accepting her unsubtle invitation to put his hands all over her, and his lips were not far behind.

Senator Amidala, however, ruined their first kiss.

Over the next few days the internal battle between the pragmatic Senator Amidala and Padmé Naberrie only escalated, with the young Jedi at the center of the war growing increasingly frustrated at being stuck in a crossfire of mixed messages.

Anakin was already completely fed up by the time the conflict peaked with Padmé forcefully
rejecting his proposal to be together—while the scandalous black leather dress she was wearing conveyed the exact opposite sentiment.

As clueless as he could be sometimes, as a powerful Force-user Anakin was also profoundly perceptive, especially when it came to getting something he wanted. Sensing there was a way out of this ridiculous situation that Padmé would actually accept, he pitched a secret relationship.

And Anakin was right—for on a deep level Padmé felt she was not allowed romantic attachments anymore than he was.

Queen and now Senator Amidala was a shining symbol of hope, a champion of the downtrodden, and an icon of pure dedication and duty to the Republic—and the distraction of family life was for others but not for her.

No one seemed to care that what Padmé Naberrie wanted was to get married and have a bunch of kids like her sister.

Regardless of her initial protestations, therefore, Padmé did not marry Anakin in spite of their need to keep their relationship hidden—but because of it. And that aspect of his proposal had ultimately been what sealed the deal for her.

For she too had to grab the family she wanted in secret—along with her exit strategy. Padmé would get married and start a family. Eventually it would be the excuse she needed to ungraciously leave politics, which was the only way she was getting out. People would be shocked and horrified—but it would be too late.

The closest any of this ever got to reaching her conscious mind, however, was Padmé realizing that all of her anxiety had really been due to worrying that her husband was dead. With Anakin home safe, Padmé found she was actually blissfully happy about finally becoming a mother and moving on from the Senate.
In her joy Padmé was absolutely glowing, and to Anakin it made her even more stunning.

“You are so . . . beautiful,” he told her adoringly.

“It's only because I'm so in love,” Padmé replied.

“No, it's because, I'm so in love with you,” Anakin countered.

“So love has blinded you?” she responded with mock confusion.

“That's not exactly what I meant,” Anakin said with a chuckle.

“But it's probably true,” Padmé concluded.

It was true.

Both of them in fact had been blinded by love. Not true love for each other, however, but love for what each other represented. It was a truth that had taken a heavy toll on their so far less than successful marriage.

Their was a marriage of convenience. Anakin had attached himself to her as a boy who missed—and needed to replace—his mother. As he got older his attachment had morphed into an obsessive crush. Padmé had wanted to get married. Her best prospect was the boy she was fond of, who had grown into a handsome young man. He looked at her adoringly as Padmé while others only saw Senator Amidala.

At the beginning Anakin had told Padmé he would do anything she asked of him—and in hindsight Padmé wished she had asked for different things.
She wished they had gotten to know each other better, and been a little older and more mature in their relationship before jumping into a marriage.

She wished they had not gotten married at the beginning of a long war.

And she definitely wished they had not built their marriage on lies and deception.

Their secret relationship had turned them both into liars, and often brought out the worst in each other.

Long a champion of peace, justice, and democracy, Padmé ignored the impact living a lie in her private life would have on her ability to authentically fight for the causes she had always believed in. Like the Jedi—guardians of the peace who were now leading a war—Padmé had in a sense also lost her way.

Avoiding all the lies would, of course, have required Padmé asking Anakin to leave the Jedi.

It would have long been what was best for him. Anakin was unhappy with the Jedi—that Padmé could on some level tell even then. She failed to understand, however, that he could not get out on his own, and his unconscious escape plan to get away was her asking him to leave.

Padmé, however, had not asked Anakin to leave the Jedi Order before their wedding, because on a selfish level marrying in secret suited her own situation.

She deeply regretted that now, along with the other things to which she had turned a blind eye.

Having already talked herself into falling for Anakin, Padmé brushed aside warning signs that over the last ten years under the Jedi’s care, the sweet boy had developed a vulnerability to some serious emotional problems that came out when he was pushed too far.

In many ways it felt too late now. Anakin parting ways with the Jedi was going to be a mess, and Padmé decided to let him handle it.
As he looked at her framed by the Coruscant skyline, Anakin knew Padmé saw their baby as a fresh start. Her long deferred dream of having children of her own finally becoming a reality was a chance for her to get back to her true self.

As she smiled happily at him with love in her eyes, Anakin could tell she was hoping this was a chance for them to start over too.

It was a hope Anakin welcomed and shared.

With her husband alive and home, Padmé’s anxiety began to melt away as she no longer had to deal with everything by herself. That night she curled up with her head on Anakin’s chest and was asleep before he finished wrapping his arms around her.

Padmé fell into a deep sleep, in what Anakin realized was likely the first restful sleep she had gotten in months. Anakin, however, found himself wide-awake and confronted with the sobering reality of the unintentionally poor care he had taken of his wife.

Unlike Padmé, Anakin was not known for long-term planning. On the contrary he was known best for his “improvised plans,” which often involved falling and were so improvised that Master Windu more than once had questioned if they actually qualified as “plans” at all.

Anakin’s ability to think on his feet, come up with a usually crazy scheme to solve seemingly any problem and then “make it work,” had served him well as a General of the Grand Army of the Republic. After all, how could droids predict what he would do next, when everyone else including Anakin himself was not entirely sure.

Busy with the war, having a baby was not on the forefront of Anakin’s radar until it was unavoidably in his face and superseding all the other things that required his immediate attention.

Moreover, for the entirety of their marriage—really the entire time he had known her—the only serious thing that Padmé needed from him was to periodically rescue her and save her life. Given that that was typically a part of his job as a Jedi anyway, if Padmé needed help someone would
usually tell him—or if she needed to ask him herself, no one would think it strange or outside the purview of their “friendship.”

But this was something else entirely. It was of such a personal nature that Padmé could not breath a word of it to him over official channels. The young Jedi now realized that his failure to come up with any personal communication procedures or safeguards for the needs of his family had left his wife in a complete lurch for many months.

Padmé was pretty far along, and Anakin knew if the Chancellor had been kidnapped much later he would have arrived home not to his wife telling him she was pregnant, but to her handing him a baby.

It was not as if Padmé’s news was unwelcome or for that matter particularly surprising. In hindsight the most unexpected thing about this whole situation was that it had taken this long for it to happen. For Anakin, the fact that it had taken them three years to start a family was a testament to him spending too much time on the front line and not enough time at home.

Furthermore, although it was truly wonderful that they were finally having a baby, Anakin found the way it was happening left a lot to be desired.

By now Padmé was showing, which meant the Coruscant gossip mill was likely in full swing not only with shock that Senator Amidala was abruptly pregnant, but also speculating on who the father could possibly be. Having lied for so many years, Anakin was by now used to the unpleasant consequences that had to be tolerated. That Padmé was likely being subjected to that, however, hit Anakin on a whole new level.

Padmé did not do casual flings—something for which Anakin was grateful. When they were first reunited he would have taken whatever little she gave him, including a one night stand—and been emotionally destroyed when she broke it off. But Padmé would not let him be with her without marrying her first, something beyond Anakin’s wildest dreams and with which he took not the slightest issue.

The news about the Senator who married a Jedi was going to be an insane scandal—but one that would likely be eclipsed by the scandal of the Jedi who got married. At the very least, Anakin knew, he would then be able to share in the fall out.
At least then it would actually be the truth.

Furthermore, Padmé had been left to deal with being pregnant all alone with absolutely no support, apparently with rumors of his death swirling around.

As blasé as he was about his safety, such a rumor was more likely to be true than Anakin generally considered. The many near misses of the past few months suddenly sprang to his mind—he as usual had certainly taken enough risks.

And if he had died he would have left Padmé alone to raise their child with absolutely nothing—including no rights to know what had official happened to him.

Anakin and Padmé’s long running argument about which forms of government were acceptable had many facets, but at its core it was always the same. Anakin and Padmé had wildly different perspectives on the value of his life. Anakin was stuck in the slave mindset that he needed to be useful all cost, and he was fine with a dictatorship because he had always had one master or another controlling his life.

To Anakin, Padmé was the one whose life was important—not his. He took insane risks with his safety, because at a deep level he believed he had little to lose. Anakin, however, was finally getting a vague sense that his life did matter somewhat, and his recklessness was hurting his family.

And that was not the only way he was hurting his family.

Arriving home already tired of all the deception, Anakin asked Padmé if they were having a boy or a girl. She told him she did not know because she was avoiding prenatal care to not draw attention to her condition.

Anakin received that news as a blow to the chest.

Laying awake holding Padmé as she slept, Anakin knew in that moment he was done with all of
this. His wife and child were suffering consequences from his lack of public acknowledgement in ways that Anakin found completely unacceptable, and he was done.

As that thought passed through his mind, Anakin finished growing up at lightspeed.

He was determined that he was going to be a better father than he had thus far been a husband. Unfortunately he did not know exactly what that entailed, but hoped that like teaching Ahsoka some things would come naturally from following his more nurturing un-Jedi instincts.

Hoping his actions had not already caused irrevocable harm, Anakin rested his intact left hand on Padmé’s growing stomach and reached out through the Force to caress his unborn child.

He was startled when his son—they were having a boy!—reached back.

Anakin felt a brief twinge of disappointment. After Ahsoka he had been hoping for a girl. Additionally, his relationship with the Jedi Council was so complicated and dysfunctional that he found he greatly preferred the company of women, and felt he did not have enough of them in his life. Although at the same time he was pretty sure a daughter would turn him into a complete marshmallow.

He quickly brushed his minor regret aside, however, in the wonderment of interacting with his son.

For Padmé the internal prohibition against motherhood was fabricated and imposed on her, and having decided to disentangle herself from public service, she was able to walk away relatively unencumbered.

Anakin’s situation, however, was a lot more complicated.

Although his unconscious exit plan had been for Padmé to ask him to leave the Jedi, Anakin suddenly realized he no longer needed her to. For his child he could find the strength to finally mentally break away and get out—and Anakin resolved to leave the Jedi in the morning.
Padmé shifted in her sleep, and laid one of her hands on top of his. Embracing his family as he finally drifted off to sleep, Anakin was filled with deep contentment.

That night his son was a bright light of new hope.

By morning, however, the speck of a storm cloud that was brewing on the horizon of Anakin’s mind had completely enveloped him.

Waking early, Anakin carefully extricated himself from Padmé’s embrace and dressed quietly. As he walked out onto the balcony and looked out over Coruscant in the predawn light, the reality of the situation crashed down upon him and soured his mood.

Padmé had told him from the beginning that she wanted a family. When Anakin had proposed marrying in secret he had been confident they could keep their future children a secret too.

What the lovesick teenager had not taken into consideration, however, was the heritability of Force powers.

After interacting with his unborn child, Anakin had to concede that his son was likely going to be extremely strong in the Force.

Which meant the Council was inevitably going to find out about this.

But getting kicked out of the Jedi Order, which Anakin had long contemplated leaving on a daily basis anyway, was suddenly no longer the worst thing that could happen.

Far worse was the Jedi would register his son on their list of Force sensitive children—the future Jedi whom the Order in its hubris took from families from all across the galaxy. Anakin had watched them do it countless times, and he knew his son would be no different.
Anakin unclipped his lightsaber from his belt, and for several long heartbeats stared down at the in his hand.

The lightsaber he *never* wanted his son to have.

Even in her limited time with him, his mother had done an infinitely better job than the Jedi, and Anakin knew he would have been better off and grown into a better person if he had stayed with her. If he had to go back and do it all over again Anakin would not have let the Jedi finish raising him.

The Jedi themselves had initially not wanted to do it, and if Anakin had not been ‘The Choosen One’ his age would have ensured his safety.

And why had Anakin been considered too old to start his training?

Because he was old enough to remember his family.

It boiled down to being as simple as that.

Anakin already knew the importance of attachments, family bonds, and relationships with other people—beliefs that ran completely counter to the Jedi’s dysfunctional Code.

It was an ugly truth of which most of the galaxy was unaware. The Order took children from parents, who like Shmi Skywalker believed the Jedi could give their children a better life. The Jedi Masters, who themselves could not remember their parents thought they were doing a good job. Only Anakin, with his rare, possibly unique vantage point of being able to compare being raised by...
his mother and a childhood with the Jedi, knew better.

And he sure as hell did not want the Jedi anywhere near his children.

But would he really be able to stop them?

It would be presented as a choice. But knowing the Jedi’s sense of entitlement when it came to Force sensitive children, Anakin knew there would only be one possible outcome. Seizing the opportunity to upgrade to a younger ‘Chosen One,’ who was more emotionally balanced and did not miss his mother, the Jedi would take his son.

The Council would also not make the same mistake they had made with Anakin. They would take his son at the usual early age—so he would not remember either of his parents.

Furthermore, the Jedi would not let Anakin stay in the Order and watch over his child. The second the Council found out about this they would kick him out—maybe on the same day they ripped his boy out of Padmé’s arms.

They would expel him and take his son, but the Jedi would not stop there.

Anakin did not know if all of his children would be Force sensitive, but if they were that was exactly how many the Jedi would take. In that moment the young Force user knew he was facing the grim prospect of his family being reduced to nothing more than a breeding program for the Jedi Order.

He was, moreover, absolutely not sharing any of this with Padmé. She had enough to worry about, and Anakin did not want to upset her or do anything that might hurt their baby.

Padmé would also not really understand the stark reality they were facing.
Anakin, however, had been born a slave to a slave mother and spent the first nine years of his life with a bomb inside his body least he try to escape. He understood slavery in a way Padmé could not even begin to comprehend to the point that it colored his entire worldview—and he saw the current situation for what it was.

With his thoughts racing, Anakin’s mind then turned to the problem of how he could possibly to protect his family.

In the end there was nothing else for it—they were going to have to run. But Anakin knew they had to be very careful or they would not be able to truly disappear. It would be best if the Jedi never found out about his son’s existence in the first place.

Padmé wanted to have the baby on Naboo, but that was a Core world. They needed to go someplace farther away—some Force damped planet where they could hide. Tatooine was the obvious choice—the Force had tried to conceal Anakin there after all.

But the Jedi would look for Anakin on his home world. He needed somewhere more remote. Anakin racked his brain for other Force dampened planets, but all he could come up with were inhospitable places like Jakku and others that were equally horrible.

No, they would have to go back to Tatooine. Padmé would never forgive him for not being able to see her family again. She would also be furious at having to wear the equivalent of the bland burlap sack for the rest of her life in order to blend in, but he knew she would do it. They would also have to live very quietly—probably with his stepfamily who were really out in the middle of nowhere. Even then, however, they would be constantly looking over their shoulder.

Anakin stopped his thoughts that were desperately searching for a solution, and asked himself if he really thought this plan would work. In truth, Anakin had to say no—not even if he did something truly insane and tried to hide his family on a planet like Jakku. There was nowhere in the galaxy Anakin felt he could truly hide.

The Jedi would find them—and steal all of his children.
A slave to the Hutts and now a slave to the Jedi, at Anakin’s core was a deep seeded feeling of powerlessness and fear that he usually covered over with a thick mask of bravado. As it had when he watched his mother die in his arms and Ahsoka walk away, however, Anakin now felt genuine helplessness and terror flare past his defenses and seize his heart.

In the face of this new most serious of threats, Anakin abandoned his plan to leave the Jedi that morning. Instead he dutifully showed up at the Temple—desperately hoping to buy enough time for a more permanent solution to present itself.

“You’ve missed the report on the Outer Rim sieges,” Obi-Wan chided as the younger Jedi rushed into the room.

“I'm sorry. I was held up,” Anakin said before his newfound maturity prompted him to amend, “I have no excuse.”

“In short, they are going very well,” Obi-Wan filled him in.

“What's wrong, then?” Anakin asked.

“The Senate is expected to vote more executive powers to the Chancellor today,” Obi-Wan replied in a carefully neutral tone.

“That can only mean less deliberating and more action. Is that bad? It'll make it easier for us to end this war,” Anakin countered.

“Be careful of your friend Palpatine,” the older Jedi warned.

“Be careful of what?” Anakin replied, genuinely baffled.
“He has requested your presence,” Obi-Wan told him.

“What for?” Anakin asked, his confusion growing.

“He would not say,” Obi-Wan responded.

“He didn't inform the Council. That's unusual, isn't it?” Anakin asked.

“All of this is unusual, and it's making me feel uneasy,” Obi-Wan replied emphatically.

Anakin did not share Obi-Wan’s unease regarding the Chancellor, and knowing there was only one way to find out why the leader of the Republic wanted to see him, he headed off to the familiarity of Palpatine’s office.

“I hope you trust me, Anakin,” the Chancellor said.

“Of course,” Anakin replied sincerely.

“I need your help, son. I'm depending on you,” Palpatine continued with a note of pleading in his voice.


“To be the eyes, ears, and voice of the Republic—Anakin, I'm appointing you to be my personal representative on the Jedi Council,” Palpatine announced.

“Me? A master? I'm overwhelmed, sir,” Anakin said, overcome with emotion.
Anakin was overwhelmed—to the point of not absorbing the full implications of what Palpatine was subtly asking of him.

“But the Council elects its own members. They'll never accept this,” Anakin argued.

“I think they will. They need you . . . more than you know,” Palpatine concluded confidently.

In spite of Palpatine’s assurances, the reaction to his appointment was everything Anakin expected.

The Jedi Council was not happy.

“Allow this appointment lightly the Council does not. Disturbing is this move by Chancellor Palpatine,” Master Yoda noted gravely.

“I understand,” Anakin replied calmly, even as he tamped down his excitement.

“You are on this Council-” Master Windu said.

Maybe they would finally truly accept and trust him, Anakin thought. Maybe now they would respect him enough to listen to him. Maybe he would somehow not have to hide his son after all-

“But we do not grant you the rank of master,” Master Windu declared in conclusion.
“What?” Anakin asked, absolutely stunned as he looked around the room at the expressionless faces of Jedi Masters.

His shock at the Council’s ability to find new ways to cut him down and deeply wound him quickly gave way to anger.

“How can you do this? This is outrageous. It's unfair. How can you be on the Council and not be a master?” Anakin countered furiously.

“Take a seat, young Skywalker,” Master Windu snapped, as the other masters exchanged disapproving looks.

Knowing any further outburst on his part would not help his cause, Anakin managed to pull it together.

“Forgive me, Master,” Anakin addressed Master Windu with faux calm, before bowing respectfully to his superior and sitting down.

The Council quickly moved on to details of the war effort. Anakin, however, followed none of it as humiliation and resentment raged through him.

The second he and Obi-Wan left the Council chamber, however, Anakin exploded.

“What kind of nonsense is this?! Put me on the Council and not make me a master?! It's never been done in the history of the Jedi. It's insulting.” Anakin seethed.
“Calm down, Anakin. You have been given a great honor. To be on the Council at your age . . . it's never happened before,” Obi-Wan tried to reason with his irate former padawan.

For Anakin it was an honor that as usual the Council had managed to wreck.

“The fact of the matter is you are too close to the Chancellor. The Council doesn't like it when he interferes in Jedi affairs,” Obi-Wan continued.

“I swear to you, I didn't ask to be put on the Council,” Anakin replied vehemently.

“But it's what you wanted,” Obi-Wan replied pointedly.

Of course it was what Anakin wanted. It was what he had been taught to want ever since he first set foot in the Jedi Temple when he was nine-years-old.

“Your friendship with Chancellor Palpatine seems to have paid off,” Obi-Wan chided.

“That has nothing to do with this,” Anakin snapped back.

“The only reason the Council has approved your appointment . . . is because the Chancellor trusts you,” Obi-Wan replied.

“And?” Anakin asked, having a sinking feeling that as bad as things already were they were about to get much worse.

“Anakin, I am on your side. I didn't want to put you in this situation,” Obi-Wan said a note of pleading creeping into his voice.
“What situation?” Anakin demanded.

“The Council wants you to report on all the Chancellor's dealings. They want to know what he's up to . . .” Obi-Wan replied.

Anakin was truly shocked.

“They want me to spy on the Chancellor?! But that's treason,” he argued.

“We are at war, Anakin,” Obi-Wan countered.

At war with the Separatists, yes. But the *Jedi* were not at war with the *Senate*.

“Why didn't the Council give me this assignment when we were in session?” Anakin asked.

“This assignment is not to be on record,” Obi-Wan responded.

In reply, Anakin launched into a defense of his friend and mentor, “The Chancellor is not a bad man, Obi-Wan. He befriended me. He's watched out for me ever since I arrived here-”

“That is why you must help us. Anakin, our allegiance is to the Senate, not to its leader, who has managed to stay in office long after his term has expired,” Obi-Wan replied.

“The Senate demanded that he stay longer,” Anakin countered.

“Yes, but use your feelings, Anakin. Something is out of place!” Obi-Wan forcefully responded.
Use his feelings?! Obi-Wan had to be joking. That was the very thing the Jedi had spent everyday for over a decade telling Anakin not to do.

The only one who actually care about his feeling was very man the Council was now asking him to betray.

“You're asking me to do something against the Jedi Code. Against the Republic. Against a mentor and a friend. That's what's out of place here. Why are you asking this of me?” Anakin replied vehemently.

“The Council is asking you,” Obi-Wan responded carefully. Because for the umpteenth time he was once again awkwardly stuck in the middle between Anakin and the Council.

Anakin did not dignify the illicit request with an answer. Giving Obi-Wan a final glare, he stormed off.

Typical . . . so completely typical.

The Jedi had not accepted him onto the Council because they finally trusted him and believed he deserved to be there.

No—they had accepted his appointment so they could use him.

The Jedi masters, however, were not as subtle and politic in asking Anakin to spy on the Chancellor as Palpatine had been when asking Anakin to spy on them. Their request was not well received by the young Jedi, who fumed all the way home.
Anakin arrived home to find Padmé was thankfully there. As they sat close to each other, all
Anakin wanted was for her to comfort him in some way after his disastrous day.

Alas, it was not to be.

“Sometimes I wonder what's happening to the Jedi Order,” he confided, “I think this war is
destroying the principles of the Republic.”

“Have you ever considered that we may be on the wrong side?” Padmé asked carefully.

“What do you mean?” Anakin replied, more than a little taken aback.

“What if the democracy we thought we were serving no longer exists . . . and the Republic has
become the very evil we've been fighting to destroy?” Padmé expounded.

“I don't believe that—and you're sounding like a Separatist,” Anakin countered accusingly.

“This war represents a failure to listen,” Padmé continued before adding, “Now you're closer to the
Chancellor than anyone. Please, ask him to stop the fighting and let diplomacy resume-”

“-Don't ask me to do that,” Anakin snapped as he rose and walked away from her, “Make a motion
in the Senate, where that kind of a request belongs.”

If Padmé had had any inkling of what was happening to her husband, she never would have never
added her own weight to his already heavy burden. But she did not and she had.

“What is it?” Padmé asked.

“Nothing,” he replied.
Rising herself, Padmé walked to him and pleaded, “Don't do this. Don't shut me out. Let me help you.”

Anakin, however, had already shut down, and Padmé realized she needed to immediately switch tacts.

“Hold me. Like you did by the lake on Naboo,” she said, stepping close to Anakin, “So long ago, when there was nothing but our love. No politics, no plotting, no war.”

It was a request he could never refuse her, and Padmé leaned into him as Anakin wrapped his arms around her and rested his chin on the top of her head.

It was a moment of peace—but when they inevitably had to separate the peace was gone.

And for Anakin came a return of the feeling that he was teetering on the point of balance—right before being torn apart.

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It was under those circumstances that were already not conducive to sanity that Anakin began having nightmares of Padmé dying in childbirth.

“Anakin, help me! . . . Please!” Padmé cried before letting out bloodcurdling scream.
Anakin awoke in a cold sweat. Turning his head he saw the comforting sight of Padmé sleeping peacefully beside him. The moment of reassurance, however, was brief . . . for Anakin knew this had been no ordinary dream.

It was a nightmare that resembled the ones he had had of his mother dying brutally at the hands of the Tuscan raiders—an event that had horrifyingly come true.

No, the terrifying visions of his mother’s abduction and these new ones of Padmé were not dreams . . . but foreshadowings.

And these new visions were of Padmé dying in childbirth.

Equally disturbing to Anakin was in his dream Obi-Wan was there with Padmé . . . but he was not.

The Force was warning him of something, that Anakin had no doubt. But whether or not the warning extended beyond the obvious he was not sure.

Sensing a wrong move would lead to utter disaster, Anakin swallowed his pride and sought counsel from the being who knew more about the Force than anyone else Anakin knew.

“Premonitions? Premonitions. These visions you have-” Master Yoda contemplated.

“They're of pain, suffering . . . death,” Anakin answered his unspoken question.

“You yourself you speak of, or someone you know?” Master Yoda asked.

“Someone,” Anakin replied carefully.

“Close to you?” Master Yoda pressed on.
Anakin swallowed hard.

“Yes,” he admitted.

“Careful you must be when sensing the future, Anakin! The fear of loss is a path to the dark side,” the Jedi Grandmaster chided as he verbally wagered his gnarled finger in the young man’s face.

“I won’t let these visions come true, Master Yoda,” Anakin replied emphatically.

“Death is a natural part of life. Rejoice for those around you who transform into the Force. Mourn them, do not. Miss them, do not. Attachment leads to jealousy. The shadow of greed that is,” Master Yoda countered.

“What must I do?” Anakin asked.

“Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose,” the Jedi Grandmaster concluded wisely.

It was the worst possible thing Yoda could have said.

It served to reinforce in Anakin’s mind that Master Yoda and the rest of the Jedi would never care that his family could be really dying.

As he left the Temple, Anakin felt something inside of him snap—and knew his relationship with the Jedi was finally broken beyond repair.

Eventually, Padmé could not help but notice how poorly he was sleeping, or that he got up and left her in the middle of the night. Rising and following after him, she found her husband in the living room, sitting alone in the dark and staring at nothing.
“What’s bothering you?” she asked, raising hand to run her fingers through the hair at the nape of his neck.

“Nothing,” Anakin lied before changing the subject.

Picking up the carving she wore as a necklace in lieu of a wedding ring, he commented warmly, “I remember when I gave this to you.”

Padmé, however, was in no mood for his game of avoidance.

“How long is it going to take for us to be honest with each other?” she lamented.

That indeed was the questions.

“It was a dream,” Anakin told her flatly, as he returned to looking off at nothing.

“Bad?” she asked.

“Like the ones I used to have about my mother, just before she died,” Anakin admitted.

“And?” Padmé prodded, soothingly rubbing his back.

Anakin finally looked back at her, with eyes that were full of intensity and sadness.
“And . . . it was about you,” Anakin told her.

“Tell me,” she insisted.

“It was only a dream,” Anakin replied, as he rose and walked away from her.

Both of them knew that was not true. Steeling himself with a few deep breaths, Anakin turned back to his wife and gave her a real answer.

“You die in childbirth,” he said, making no further attempt to conceal his growing distress.

“And the baby?” Padmé asked.

Anakin could sense her growing anxiety and wished he had not said anything.

“I don’t know,” he somberly told her.

With no other available solution to this serious new problem at hand, Padmé fell back on her standard coping mechanism of brushing it aside.

“It was only a dream,” she told him, as she stepped closer.

“I won’t let this one become real,” Anakin vehemently told her.
He had sworn—on his mother’s grave—that he would not let this happen again. For if Padmé died he would not just lose his wife . . . no, to lose Padmé would be like losing his mother all over again.

“This baby will change our lives,” Padmé said, before continuing in a more panicked tone, “If the Council discovers you're the father, you'll be expelled-”

“I know. I know,” Anakin attempted to calm his wife—who was arriving rather late to that party.

“Do you think Obi-Wan might be able to help us?” Padmé asked tentatively.

“We don't need his help,” Anakin told her emphatically, before continuing with a consoling smile as he wrapped her in an embrace, “Our baby is a blessing.”

For once Anakin was grateful that Padmé was not Force sensitive . . . so she could not tell that he was once again lying to her.

Finally in way over his head, Anakin was fully aware he needed help. His first choice from whom to seek it would absolutely be Obi-Wan.

Obi-Wan his best friend, brother, and the closest person he had to a father would give Anakin the lecture he so thoroughly deserved that would last the rest of his life, but he would try to help his former padawan—particularly after the Dutchess Satine had died in Obi-Wan’s arms after Maul fatally stabbed her right in front of him.

Obi-Wan the sitting member of the Jedi Council, however, would leave Anakin to the full consequences of his actions unaided—and make sure his son’s name was added to the Jedi’s list of Force sensitive children before Anakin could hide him.

After what happened with the plot to kidnap the Chancellor on Naboo, and later with Ahsoka,
Anakin was afraid he knew which Obi-Wan he would ultimately get.

Anakin again shared none of this with Padmé, however, as he ushered her back to bed. Soon she was slumbering deeply. He, however, could not fall back asleep.

As he lay awake—Padmé asleep in his arms their unborn child within her—desperate to find a way to avert the coming disaster, Anakin could feel the hatred of the Jedi that was planted the day his mother died begin to grow in his heart.

The Jedi—for who he had left his mother, to who he had given everything he had for years, who asked him to risk his life saving everyone else—Anakin knew would instantly cast him out if they knew his secret. They would refuse to help him save the forbidden wife he loved more than anything in the galaxy and the family he was not supposed to have.

Which as usual left only one person from whom Anakin could seek assistance in his growing desperation.

As if reading his thoughts, Anakin’s com pinged with a summons.

Leaving Padmé asleep, Anakin rose and dressed. Raising the hood of his cloak over his head, Anakin left home and walked out into the night in search of his friend the Chancellor.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone is interested here is the link to my "Anakin Happy Ending AU" that I wrote so I could write about Anakin falling to the dark side without being consumed by utter despondency. https://archiveofourown.org/series/1462576
Thank you as always for reading. Your comments and kudos are much appreciated.

I don’t think the fact the Jedi were eventually going to take Luke is given enough consideration when considering the factors that led to Anakin falling to the dark side and wiping out the Jedi Order.

Would love to hear your thoughts.

Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

Scene of Anakin interacting with unborn Luke based on the scene of Leia interacting with unborn Ben from “Star Wars: Aftermath” by Chuck Wendig.

LOTS Podcast: Reylo vs. Anidala - Couple Contrasts in Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdnZHfFf2-A&t=3s

Wayward Jedi: Rey and Ben - The Resurrected Heroes (Part 1 & 2) The One Big Story of Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkoY5MJ2pxY&t=5s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xqnQtI3CQ

Wayward Jedi: Love is the Balance - A Rey and Kylo Ren Story
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEYCYL_9jl8&t=165s

Popculture Detective: The Case Against The Jedi Order
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUPD1w78D5I

Artwork: Art of The Revenge of the Sith, page 84
The Fall of Skywalker

Chapter Summary

The fall Anakin Skywalker and the rise of Vader.

Covers the second half of the ROTS, and includes a scene from Rebels S2E22 Twilight of the Apprentice.

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry it took so long to update (I had to move to a new city and the process was a bit overwhelming). Thank you for your patience!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 15: The Fall of Skywalker

As Anakin walked out into the night in search of the Chancellor, he reflected that he was fortunate
that Palpatine was still around from whom to seek assistance.

It had after all only been a short time since the Separatists had managed to kidnap the leader of the Republic, and Anakin and Obi-Wan had been sent to rescue him.

After a daring raid the two Jedi managed to board the Separatists’ flagship and made their way to the tower where Palpatine was being held, and as they approached the blast doors opened to reveal the ship’s large observation platform.

Although the battle outside the huge transperasteel windows still raged, the chamber itself was eerily quiet and at first pass appeared to be empty.

However, a large throne-like command chair near the center window slowly turned to reveal Palpatine. He sat with regal serenity—the restraints binding his wrists to the chair the only indication that he was not in complete control of the situation.

Seeing the captured leader the two Jedi rushed towards him.

“Chancellor,” Obi-Wan greeted the leader of the Republic with a bow.

“Are you all right?” Anakin asked, his voice full of concern.

“Count Dooku,” Palpatine replied, his attention suddenly on the blast door behind the Jedi.

Anakin and Obi-Wan turned and saw their old adversary striding into the room.

“This time we will do it together,” Obi-Wan told his former padawan, referencing their first disastrous duel with the Sith Lord where both had almost died and Anakin had lost his sword arm.
“I was about to say that,” Anakin replied.

Forgoing the stairs, Dooku leapt over the railing with a flashy flip and landed deftly on the main level. Surveying the two Jedi, he unclipped his lightsaber from his belt with dramatic flare.

Anakin and Obi-Wan shrugged out of their outer robes and let them fall to the ground. Lightsabers in hand, they walked forward to meet their Sith Lord adversary.

“Your swords, please. We don't want to make a mess of things in front of the Chancellor,” the Count announced.

“You won't get away this time, Dooku,” Obi-Wan replied.

All three ignited their lightsabers and engaged in the next round of their longstanding duel—which included no small amount of verbal confrontation during pauses in swordplay.

“I've been looking forward to this,” Dooku said with unbridled glee.

“My powers have doubled since the last time we met, Count,” Anakin announced as the trio circled each other.

“Good . . . Twice the pride, double the fall,” Dooku replied.

Their sabers clashed once more.
The Sith Lord, however, easily fought both Obi-Wan and Anakin not only with his lightsaber but with Force blasts as well.

Anakin found himself kicked hard into a steel wall, and watched in horror as Dooku flung Obi-Wan across the room and into the railing of the upper deck. As the older Jedi crumpled to the floor, Dooku used the Force to collapse a segment of the suspended platform and pinned the unconscious Jedi to the ground.

Rising to his feet Anakin reignited his lightsaber and charged the Count. He kicked the Sith Lord off the upper deck before leaping down after him. Red and blue lightsabers flashed with a considerable up tick in tempo.

Soon their sabers crossed and became locked in a battle of pure strength—and Dooku resumed his usual taunting of the young Jedi.

“i sense great fear in you, skywalker. you have hate. you have anger. but you don’t use them,” the sith lord told anakin.

With effort, Anakin broke out of the lock and went on the offensive.

Dooku fought with a more classical fighting style while Anakin’s was more fluid and spontaneous. Both combatants also knew that the Count had long been the superior swordsman.

This time, however, it was now all up to Anakin . . . and he knew it.

The Sith Lord, furthermore, was getting old and had lost a fraction of a step. The opening was small, but the younger Force user was determined to take every advantage.
Fighting harder than he ever had before, Anakin managed to disarm Dooku—slicing off the Count’s hands in the process.

The Sith Lord fell to his knees completely at the Jedi’s mercy, as Anakin ignited both his own lightsaber and that of the Count and crossed them in front of Dooku’s neck.

Finally—finally—Anakin had won.

But that was not the end. While superficially a battle between Separatist and the Republic the duel was really Sith Lord mastermind simultaneously upgrading apprentices and grooming Anakin for eventually fall to the dark side.

“Good, Anakin. Good,” Palpatine lavished the praise on Anakin that the younger man craved so badly—before adding “Kill him . . . Kill him now.”

Suddenly, for Anakin the thrill of victory was abruptly turned on its head.

Dooku looked over at Palpatine in disbelief, and what Anakin would one day come to understand was shock that his long and dutiful service was being repaid with such abrupt betrayal.

Turning back to Anakin, the Count’s eyes were no longer filled with taunts of his adversary’s youthful incompetence . . . but desperate hope and a plea for mercy.

“I shouldn't,” Anakin said as confusion welled up within him.
Anakin’s hesitation continued, and the secret Sith Lord master grew impatient.

“DO IT!” Palpatine commanded in a harsh voice that the young Jedi had never heard before.

Anakin responded by reflexively slitting Dooku’s throat.

He immediately regretted it—but it was too late to take the kill stroke back.

“You did well, Anakin. He was too dangerous to be kept alive,” Palpatine said soothingly.

“Yes, but he was an unarmed prisoner . . . I shouldn't have done that . . . It's not the Jedi way,” Anakin replied, full of consternation and remorse as he released the Chancellor’s restraints through the Force.

“It is only natural—He cut off your arm, and you wanted revenge,” Palpatine supplied as he rose from the command chair.

But did he really?

Anakin was not sure.
“It wasn't the first time, Anakin. Remember what you told me about your mother and the Sand People?” Palpatine added.

Anakin was still full of confusion.

“Now we must leave before more security droids arrive,” Palpatine said, not wishing to give the young Jedi further time to contemplate his actions.

As they walked towards the turbolift, however, Anakin’s attention was quickly caught by Obi-Wan’s unconscious form, and he rushed towards his mentor.

“Anakin, there's no time. We must get off this ship before it's too late,” Palpatine snapped.

“He seems to be all right,” Anakin replied.

“Leave him, or we'll never make it,” Palpatine commanded more forcefully.

That was an order, however, that the young Force user flatly refused to obey.

“His fate will be the same as ours,” Anakin replied as he lifted the older Jedi onto his back.

In the end, the other Jedi’s presence had not impeded their escape. It was impressed upon the Sith Lord mastermind once again, however, that in order to move forward with his plan for Anakin
something really needed to be done about Obi-Wan Kenobi.

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Tonight, the Chancellor was at the opera.

The performance of the evening was the sad tale of a pair of young lovers who fell under the spell of an evil sorcerer . . . with tragic consequences.

Anakin, however, was not there for the plot.

He sprinted up the grand staircase and down the corridor leading to the theater’s box seats, but slowed to a walk a few steps before reaching his destination. As Anakin entered the leader of the Republic’s private box the red clad Praetorian Guardsmen let him pass, and the young Jedi crouched down next to Palpatine.

“You wanted to see me, Chancellor?” Anakin asked quietly.

“Yes, Anakin—come closer—I have good news. Our Clone intelligence units have discovered the location of General Grievous. He's hiding in the Utapau system,” Palpatine said.

“At last! We'll be able to capture that monster and end this war,” Anakin replied, his face breaking into a wide smile at hearing the good news.

“I would worry about the collective wisdom of the Council if it doesn’t select you for this assignment. You're the best choice . . . by far,” Palpatine replied off handedly—as usual seizing every opportunity to sow seeds of discord between Anakin and the Jedi.
Palpatine let his words hang in the air for a few more heartbeats before continuing.

“Sit down,” he said warmly, before turning to the other occupants of the theatre box.

“Leave us,” the Chancellor commanded his entourage in a much sharper tone.

Palpatine’s mistress rose along with the rest of his departing inner circle, and Anakin slid into her vacated seat.

For a brief movement they sat together in silence.

“Anakin, you know I'm not able to rely on the Jedi Council,” the Chancellor said, a note of genuine regret detectable in his voice, “If they haven't included you in their plot, they soon will.”

“I'm not sure I understand,” Anakin replied.

“You must sense what I have come to suspect. The Jedi Council want control of the Republic—they're planning to betray me,” Palpatine said, not beating around the bush.

“I don't think that-” Anakin reflexively countered.

“Anakin . . .” Palpatine chided, “Search your feelings . . . you know . . . don't you.”

“I know they don't trust you,” Anakin answered carefully.
“-Or the Senate . . . or the Republic . . . or democracy, for that matter,” Palpatine finished Anakin sentence.

“I have to admit, my trust in them has been shaken,” Anakin conceded.

“Why?” Palpatine pressed.

Although reflexively raising his eyes to me Palpatine’s, Anakin remained silent as the Chancellor himself supplied an answer, “They asked you to do something that made you feel dishonest, didn’t they? . . . They asked you to spy on me, didn't they?”

At Palpatine’s words, Anakin looked away from the Chancellor’s penetrating gaze. He continued, however, to say nothing.

While every word the Chancellor had just spoken was completely true, Anakin had picked up enough of the basics of politics while married to Padmé to know that he could not actually admit that.

“I don't know what to say,” Anakin replied diplomatically.

“Remember back to your early teachings. All who gain power are afraid to lose it—even the Jedi,” Palpatine said, easily slipping into his role as teacher and mentor.

“The Jedi use their power for good,” Anakin argued.

“Good is a point of view, Anakin,” Palpatine countered, his argument an echo of the line Anakin had heard Obi-Wan frequent reiterated.

“The Sith and the Jedi are similar in almost every way . . . including their quest for greater power.”
Of all the lies Palpatine fed Anakin over the years that was not actually one of them.

“The Sith rely on their passion for their strength. They think inwards, only about themselves,” Anakin replied, harkening back to the lessons from his boyhood.

“And the Jedi don’t?” Palpatine countered sardonically.

“The Jedi are selfless. They only care about others,” Anakin said, again reflexively falling back on parroting the instruction of his youth with blind and unwavering conviction.

At that point Palpatine considered that line of conversation exhausted, and for a few moments the two sat in the semi-darkness of the theater. For a while they watched the production in companionable intimacy, before Palpatine again broke the silence.

“Did you ever hear the tragedy of Darth Plagueis the Wise?” Palpatine asked congenially.

“No,” Anakin replied, and again turned his attention to the Chancellor.

“I thought not. It's not a story the Jedi would tell you . . . It's a Sith legend,” Palpatine began carefully.

It was a testament to the rapport Palpatine had carefully cultivated with the young Force user over the last ten years that he could utter his next words without completely freaking Anakin out.

“Darth Plagueis was a dark lord of the Sith,” the Chancellor narrated, “He had such a knowledge of the dark side . . . he could even keep the ones he cared about . . . from dying.”
As anticipated, Palpatine suddenly had Anakin’s full and unthinking attention.

“He could actually . . . save people from death?” Anakin asked his voiced filled with intensity.

“The dark side of the Force is a pathway to many abilities . . . some consider to be unnatural,” Palpatine slowly replied.

“What happened to him?” Anakin asked urgently.

“He became so powerful the only thing he was afraid of was . . . losing his power,” Palpatine responded before continued in a subtly smug tone, “Which eventually, of course, he did. Unfortunately, he taught his apprentice everything he knew . . . Then his apprentice killed him in his sleep. It’s ironic. He could save others from death . . . but not himself.”

At the time, Anakin completely ignored the autobiographical feel and undertone of gloating that pervaded Palpatine’s story, instead becoming hyper-focused on a possible solution existing to his dire problem.

“Is it possible to learn this power?” Anakin asked, the intensity of his gaze now boring a hole in the Chancellor’s profile.

Slowly, Palpatine turned to face his young protégée.

“Not from a Jedi . . .”
Palpatine refused to tell Anakin anymore that night.

The young Force user, therefore, left, with his mind filled with the tantalizing hope of stopping history from repeating itself—hope of a power so great that he could out run the powerlessness of his mother dying in his arms, the fear of which had flare to the point of consuming him at the thought of similarly losing his wife.

Alone in the theatre box, Palpatine remained unmoving in the darkness.

Tenting his fingers he let his mind wander. His eyes stared unseeingly at the performance while his calculating gaze rested on his long and complicated plan—a plan that continued to remain invisible to everyone else.

As the secret Sith Lord Darth Sideous, Palpatine’s archenemy was of course Master Yoda and the rest of the Jedi.

They were not, however, the sole occupant on his list of adversaries.

The conniving Naboo had once described then Queen Amidala as ‘young and naïve,’ and he had been confident she could be manipulated with ease in his rise to power.

She had grown, however, into a worthy adversary—a politically astute senator set on opposing his plans at every turn. Senator Amidala—along with the insufferable coalition she led—was a royal pain in the neck on good days, and on bad ones had caused real setbacks and delays to the Sith Lord’s plan for galactic domination.

If Padmé had not had vital role still yet to play in his scheme, the Chancellor would have long ago have had her assassinated.

On the other hand, Palpatine reflected with an evil smile, there were other ways to destroy an
enemy than to simply kill them.

Anakin and Padmé coming together in secret was there undoing, and transformed their love into an exploitable weakness.

Padmé, furthermore, did not know her true foe. If she had she would have acted—and pried Anakin away from Palpatine before it was too late. She remained in ignorance, however, and the time grew near for the Chancellor to finally get his revenge.

And the Sith Lord’s plan to strike a much more personal blow—to steal Padmé’s husband and destroy her family—would ultimately be much more satisfying.

“Palpatine thinks General Grievous is on Utapau?” Master Mundi asked.

“A partial message was intercepted in a diplomatic packet from the chairman of Utapau,” Anakin explained.

“Act on this we must,” Master Yoda replied emphatically, “The capture of General Grievous will end this war. Quickly and decisively we should proceed.”

“The Chancellor has requested . . . that I lead the campaign,” Anakin said with some hesitation, well aware of the response with which his declaration would likely be met.

Palpatine may have manipulatively requested it, but in truth the cunning leader of the Republic desired no such thing . . . and the Jedi Council played predictably into his hands.
“The Council will make up its own mind who is to go—not the Chancellor,” Master Windu snapped at Anakin.

“A master is needed, with more experience,” Master Yoda seconded.

By this point in the war, Anakin had plenty of combat experience along with a better success record than any of the other Jedi Generals. As Palpatine had pointed out, he was imminently qualified for this mission, and the young Jedi knew by ‘more experience’ what Master Yoda really meant was ‘not Anakin.’

“I concur. Master Kenobi should go,” Master Mundi added.


The rest of the Jedi masters gave their formal agreement—oblivious to the look of disappointment that came over Anakin’s face—and the Council adjourned.

The plan was for Obi-Wan to leave immediately. Setting aside his slighted feeling, Anakin escorted the older Jedi to his departing cruiser—happy for a moment alone with his mentor.

“You’re going to need me on this one,” Anakin told Obi-Wan.
“I agree. However, it may turn out just to be a wild Bantha chase,” Obi-Wan replied jovially.

With the maturity of fatherhood giving Anakin a new perspective when it came to his own father figure, he knew there were things he needed to say to Obi-Wan that were long overdue.

“Master . . .” Anakin began, halting Obi-Wan’s walk towards the cruiser, “I’ve disappointed you . . . I haven’t been very appreciative of your training . . . I’ve been arrogant . . . and I apologize . . . I’ve just been so frustrated with the Council.”

In exchange for the words that cost him some pain to speak, Anakin was rewarded with the praise he had long craved from the closest person he had to a father.

“You are strong and wise, Anakin, and I am very proud of you,” Obi-Wan said with a wide smile, “I have trained you since you were a small boy. I have taught you everything I know . . . and you have become a far greater Jedi than I could ever hope to be.”

A smile broke over Anakin’s face at Obi-Wan’s words, and he briefly looked down in a sudden twinge of bashfulness. Warmth flooded his chest, and the raging turmoil inside of him quieted for a moment, and was replaced with deep peace and contentment.

“But be patient, Anakin,” Obi-Wan continued, “It will not be long before the Council makes you a Jedi Master.”

With that final exhortation, the older Jedi started down the gangplank to the waiting Cruiser.
“Obi-Wan . . .” Anakin called after him. As his best friend and mentor turned back to him Anakin continued, “May the Force be with you.”

“Goodbye, old friend. May the Force be with you,” Obi-Wan replied.

Little did the two friends know that would be the last time they would part as such.

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From his office in the Senate, Palpatine gazed over his tented fingers and out of the large bay window towards the shipyard where a cruiser was just lifting off.

A cruiser that would take Obi-Wan Kenobi far far away from Coruscant, where he could not again meddle with the Sith Lord’s plans.

Where the Jedi Master could not protect Anakin Skywalker.

The much-celebrated prophecy foretold that the Chosen One would bring balance to the Force.

The Jedi Council, Palpatine knew, had their own vague and rather passive interpretation on how that would come about.

The Sith Lord, on the other hand, took a more Machiavellian view of the prophecy—specifically that the balance of power would tip toward whoever ultimately controlled the Chosen One and held his allegiance.
In one of their extremely rare agreements both the Jedi Council and the Sith Lord agreed that the Chosen One was Anakin. Their strategies on engaging the young Force user, however, could not have been more different.

The Jedi arrogantly assumed Anakin’s allegiance while time and again giving him reason to question his loyalties with their harsh criticism and insensitivity. Although long in physical possession of the boy, therefore, Palpatine knew far better than the Council that the Jedi’s belief that he was permanently one of their own was an illusion.

Palpatine, on the other hand, had played his Sabacc hand to perfection for over ten years—carefully cultivating a strong rapport with the young man in need of kindness and support. In short, Anakin was getting played by a master.

The Jedi were quite late in waking up to this reality and found themselves flat footed when the battle for the Chosen One began to heat up. With the Council oblivious to the risk of mentally tearing Anakin apart and Palaptine in many ways counting on it—both sides grabbed a firmer grip on the young Jedi and began to pull.

Palpatine, however, held the advantage. A ward to a guardian as negligent Jedi Council, and was easy prey to the traps set by the wily enemy. The young Force user by that point had many exploitable weakness. His biggest one, however, was one that Palpatine knew well and the Jedi did not understand: family.

Beyond that, Master Yoda was now also off Coruscant... leaving the care of the Jedi Order in the hands of Master Windu.

Although Mace Windu’s naturally cold disposition was ultimately better suited for life under the Jedi Code that rejected emotions, under other circumstances, Palpatine knew, the Jedi’s proud and arrogant number two man would have made and excellent Sith. His guardianship resultantly left the Jedi Order vulnerable in ways only their enemy could appreciate.

With Obi-Wan away from Anakin and Master Yoda unavailable to protect the Jedi Order as a whole, circumstances were finally aligning fully in Palpatine’s favor.
Long had the Sith Lord waited . . . and at last it was time to make his move.

Anakin himself could sense a coming storm through a shift in the Force, although he could not for the life of him understand what it meant.

He also sensed a growing shift in himself. It was difficult to articulate, but in his growing distress Anakin tried to explain it to Padmé. Unfortunately she continued to be incapable of truly comprehending what he was trying to tell her.

“I feel lost,” Anakin confessed to his wife.

“Lost? What do you mean?” Padmé asked gently.

“Obi-Wan and the Council don't trust me,” Anakin replied dejectedly.

“They trust you with their lives,” Padmé countered.

Her response belied her complete lack of understanding of Anakin’s relationship with the Council, and he steered the conversation in what he hoped would be a more fruitful direction.

“Something’s happening,” Anakin said as he gazed out the window at the Coruscant skyline, “I'm not the Jedi I should be . . . I want more . . . And I know I shouldn't.”
“You expect too much of yourself,” Padmé replied, which again was the wrong thing to say.

If Ahsoka had been there she would have pointed out that perhaps the problem was not that Anakin expected too much of himself, but too little from his life as a Jedi—that it was good to want more. But Ahsoka was not there to reflect back the lesson Anakin had somehow managed to teach her but was unable to consciously learn himself.

Anakin again changed the subject.

“I found a way to save you,” Anakin confided to Padmé in a conspiratorial whisper.

“Save me?” Padmé replied in confusion.

“From my nightmares,” Anakin elaborated as he drew her closer and ran his artificial hand along her upper arm.

“Is that what’s bothering you?” Padmé asked.

“I won't lose you, Padmé,” Anakin declared.

“I'm not going to die in childbirth, Ani. I promise you,” Padmé responded with her standard minimizing.

“No, I promise you,” Anakin replied emphatically.

Both of them were convinced that this time they were at last speaking the truth.
The situation finally came to a head when Obi-Wan notified the Council that he had engaged General Grievous, and was waging what would be the last battle of the Clone Wars.

It was not, unfortunately, the joyous end to the long war everyone had been anticipating.

“Anakin, deliver this report to the Chancellor,” Master Windu ordered, “His reaction will give us a clue to his intentions.”

“Yes, Master,” Anakin replied.

As the young Force user left the room, the Jedi Masters continued their disquieted conversation.

“I sense a plot to destroy the Jedi,” Master Windu stated, as usual not beating around the bush, “The dark side of the Force surrounds the Chancellor.”

“If he does not give up his emergency powers after the destruction of Grievous then he should be removed from office,” Master Mundi argued.

“The Jedi Council would have to take control of the Senate in order to secure a peaceful transition,” Master Windu warned, well aware that the optics of such a move would look for all intensive purposes like a coup with the Jedi attempting to permanently take over the Republic.

“To a dark place this line of thought will carry us. Great care we must take,” Master Yoda agreed.

Even in their growing concern the Jedi were still blind. For Palpatine’s main power play was not for primarily for more control ing the Senate—but for the young Force user they had just sent to his office.
“Chancellor, we've just received a report from Master Kenobi. He has engaged General Grievous,” Anakin relayed upon entering the Leader of the Republic’s chambers.

“We can only hope that Master Kenobi is up to the challenge,” Palpatine replied, applying salt to Anakin’s still open wound.

“I should be there with him,” Anakin confided, not bothering to hide his distress and beginning to pace in front of the Chancellor’s desk.

“It's upsetting to me to see that the Council doesn't seem to fully appreciate your talents . . . Don't you wonder why they won't make you a Jedi master?” Palpatine said, as usual sowing seeds of discord under the guise of support.

“I wish I knew,” Anakin replied, a note of petulance creeping into his voice, “More and more I get the feeling that I'm being excluded from the Council.”

Anakin abruptly ceased his pacing, and turned back to his mentor with renewed intensity. Seeing where the young Force user was headed, Palpatine gave him a small nod of encouragement.

“I know there are things about the Force that they're not telling me,” Anakin said, not so subtly indicating his desire to resume their ominous conversation from the Opera house.

“They don't trust you, Anakin,” Palpatine replied, at first pass not appearing to follow Anakin’s opening, “They see your future . . . they know your power will be too strong to control. You must break through the fog of lies the Jedi have created around you.”

Rising from his desk, Palpatine put a fatherly hand on Anakin’s shoulder and led the young man into a room in the Chancellor’s office Anakin had only every walked through in haste.
The walls were covered in plush red fabric, which offset well the golden statues and large mural displayed around the room. Anakin would one day come to know that the statues were of the Four Sages of Dwartii, who expounded rather dubious philosophies from an era of Sith domination.

The golden relief was a Massassi frieze from their temple on Yavin IV that depicted a scene from the Great Hyperspace War—a battle waged between followers of the Light and servants of the dark side. Observant Jedi visitors to the Chancellor’s office mistakenly took it as a nod of respect towards their Order, rather than the testament of Palpatine's belief in Sith superiority that it actually was.

All in all it was a bold choice of office decoration for a Sith Lord hiding in plain sight.

“Let me help you to know the subtleties of the Force,” Palpatine continued.

“How do you know the ways of the Force?” Anakin responded with genuine confusion.

“My mentor taught me everything about the Force . . . Even the nature of the dark side,” the Sith Lord answered, at long last beginning to unveil his true self.

Anakin abruptly swung around to face Palpatine. The temperature in the room seemed to drop and the air crackled with new tension.

“You know the dark side?” Anakin asked, visibly disconcerted.

“If one is to understand the great mystery . . . one must study all its aspects . . . not just the dogmatic narrow view of the Jedi . . . If you wish to become a complete and wise leader you must embrace a larger view of the Force,” Palpatine began his fork tongued rationalization of the goodness of eating forbidden fruit.

By that point Anakin was breathing heavily, and with extreme wariness in his eyes began circling
the man he thought he knew.

Palpatine matched his movements, and continued on in his persuasive dangling of the knowledge that would allow Anakin to play God.

“Be careful of the Jedi, Anakin . . . Only through me can you achieve a power greater than any Jedi. Learn to know the dark side of the Force . . . and you will be able to save your wife . . . from certain death,” Palpatine said with a smile.

“What did you say?” Anakin exclaimed, the abrupt revelation that the Chancellor knew his secret completely unnerving him.

“Use my knowledge. I beg you,” Palpatine plead with false compassion.

Suddenly everything clicked into place in Anakin’s mind.

“You're the Sith Lord!” Anakin declared, igniting his lightsaber and brandishing it as the two continued circling.

“I know what's been troubling you,” Palpatine continued, ever the polished politician he refused to panic even with Anakin’s lightsaber in his face, “Listen to me . . . Don't continue to be a pawn of the Jedi Council!”

Anakin stop pacing but kept his lightsaber raised.

“Ever since I've known you, you've been searching for a life greater than that of an ordinary Jedi. A life of significance . . . of conscience,” Palpatine continued before testing Anakin’s resolve by
walking away with his back turned.

“Are you going to kill me?” Palpatine asked.

“I would certainly like to,” Anakin replied.

For a few seconds Anakin genuinely considered striking the Sith Lord down where he stood. Palpatine, however, had spent the last ten years securing the benefit of the doubt for those few seconds, and Anakin stayed his attack.

“I know you would,” Palpatine said, his voice briefly taking on a note of ecstasy that made Anakin’s skin crawl, before the older man’s voice changed to a tone of sinister sharpness, “I can feel your anger. It gives you focus, makes you stronger!”

It was the voice the Sith Lord had used to order Anakin to kill Count Dooku, and as Palpatine turned to again face him Anakin broke eye contact—realizing he did not want to execute anyone else. Taking a shaky breath, the young Jedi shut down his lightsaber.

“I'm going to turn you over to the Jedi Council,” Anakin declared.

“Of course you should,” Palpatine agreed before adding, “But you're not sure of their intentions, are you?”

“I will quickly discover the truth of all this,” Anakin countered.

“You have great wisdom, Anakin,” Palpatine replied, not bothering to argue with the younger man’s delusional conviction.

“Know the power of the dark side . . . power to save Padmé,” Palpatine finished with a smile.
With those final words hanging thickly in the air, Anakin quickly left the Chancellor’s office.

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Making a hasty retreat from the Senate building, Anakin headed straight back to the Jedi Temple. With Master Yoda and Obi-Wan off planet, he made a beeline towards the Order’s second in command and caught up with him in the Temple’s hanger.

“Master Windu, I must talk to you,” Anakin said with urgency.

“Skywalker, we just received word that Obi-Wan has destroyed General Grievous. We’re on our way to make sure the Chancellor returns emergency power back to the Senate,” Master Windu told him.

“He won't give up his power,” Anakin replied, “I've just learned a terrible truth. I think Chancellor Palpatine is a Sith Lord.”

Anakin suddenly had older Jedi’s undivided attention.

“A Sith Lord?!?” Master Windu responded, his Force sense exploding with shock and horror.

“Yes—the one we've been looking for,” Anakin replied.

“How do you know this?” Master Windu asked.

“He knows the ways of the Force. He's been trained to use the dark side,” Anakin said.
“Are you sure?” Master Windu pressed him.

“Absolutely,” Anakin replied emphatically.

“Then our worst fears have been realized. We must move quickly if the Jedi Order is to survive,” Master Windu said, quickening his pace towards the waiting transport.

“Master, the Chancellor is very powerful. You'll need my help if you're going to arrest him,” Anakin stated.

“For you own good, stay out of this affair. I sense a great deal of confusion in you, young Skywalker. There is much fear that clouds your judgment,” Master Windu said.

Anakin was afraid. Afraid the Jedi would not simply arrest Palpatine, and if he died the knowledge he possessed would die with him—knowledge Anakin was not ready to let go of having access to in his growing obsession with saving his wife.

“I must go, Master,” Anakin argued.

“No—if what you've told me is true, you will have gained my trust. But for now, remain here. Wait in the Council chambers until we return,” Master Windu ordered in a tone that left no room for argument.

“Yes, Master,” Anakin replied with no small degree of bitterness, before he dutifully retreated to upper room of the Temple.

In the empty Council chamber Anakin took his seat to await his superior’s return.
The young Force user knew why Master Windu had told him to wait there . . . when he returned he planned to finally promote Anakin to Jedi Master.

Palpatine’s ominous words, however, soon rose again to Anakin’s mind.

*If the Jedi destroy me . . . any chance of saving her will be lost.*

In the silence of the room, Anakin was powerless from stopping them from replaying in an endless loop.

Unable to sit still any longer he stood and walked to one of the chambers large windows. Looking out across the city his eyes came to rest on the Naboo Embassy’s penthouse in the Senate Apartment Complex. As he stared in the direction of his wife’s residence with intensity, Anakin could almost feel Padmé looking back at him.

If only she was strong in the Force like him and they could somehow communicate, Anakin wished not for the first time, then maybe together they could come up with a solution to this situation that would not end in disaster.

But Padmé was not Force sensitive, and in that moment Anakin was left to make his decision alone.

In reality he had been making decisions alone for a while now. Because the truth was this situation did not have anything to do with Padmé—what she wanted, what was best for her, what destiny the Force had chosen for her life and what lay beyond.

This was all about Anakin.
What Anakin wanted, what Anakin needed, and that Anakin could not handle her death. It would be like losing his mother all over again—something he had sworn on her grave he would never let happen again.

Anakin and Padmé had built their relationship on a lie and under the shadow of the dark side, and it was not without consequence. His obsession with keeping his wife alive had combined with his insecure possessiveness, which had long been growing like a cancer. Now it finally reached a critical tipping point in corrupting his love for her into something twisted and selfish.

A tear trickled down Anakin’s cheek as he turned away from the window—away from Padmé and their home. For in that moment he suddenly realized he did not want to be a Jedi Master. He wanted his family.

And for that he needed Palpatine alive.

Although the Jedi task force—made up of Council members who never missed an opportunity to tell Anakin how much they did not trust him—reportedly had gone to arrest the Chancellor, in this Anakin did not trust them either.

His decision made, Anakin sprinted from the room.

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Across town in the Senate building, Master Windu strode into the Chancellor’s office ahead of the other Jedi Masters who had come to confront the newly revealed Sith Lord.
Palpatine graciously accepted the group barging into his office, and offered his congratulation on their destruction of General Grievous.

Master Windu, however, was having none of it.

“In the name of the Galactic Senate of the Republic—you are under arrest, Chancellor,” Master Windu announced.

“Are you threatening me, Master Jedi?!” Palpatine asked, his voice no longer cordial.

“The Senate will decide your fate,” Master Windu replied.

“I am the Senate,” Palpatine declared.


The Sith Lord rose to his feet, and a lightsaber hilt suddenly snapped out of his sleeve and into his waiting hand.

“It's treason then,” Palpatine said—before igniting his red lightsaber and leaping into the air.

As with everything else about their hidden enemy, the Jedi had greatly underestimated Palpatine’s prowess as a swordsman—and he made quick work of slaughtering Master Fisto, Master Tiin, and Master Kolar.

Master Windu was then left to fight Palpatine alone, and their duel raged throughout the Chancellor’s office. As their sabers collided with the large bay window it exploded, and wind suddenly filled the chamber. At a critical moment, however, Palpatine leveled his most devastating blow against his enemy.
He allowed Master Windu to disarm him and kick him to the ground . . . just as Anakin burst into the room.

“Anakin, I told you it would come to this. I was right. The Jedi are taking over!” Palpatine exclaimed—Master Windu standing over him with a lightsaber in his face a testament to the veracity of his words.

“The oppression of the Sith will never return!” Master Windu shouted his eyes never leaving Palpatine, “You have lost!”

“No . . . no . . . You will die!” Palpatine screamed, as a cascade of blue lightning left his fingertips, and he demonstrated he was far from helpless without a lightsaber.

Master Windu caught the lightning on his lightsaber blade, and the two Force users became locked in a massive power struggle.

“He’s a traitor!” Palpatine yelled to Anakin through his effort to defend himself.

“He is the traitor!” Master Windu replied.

Anakin was now left to decide which man to believe and with whom to side.

Master Windu—who had never spoken a kind or uncritical word to the young Force user in his entire life, and was part of the Jedi Council which had treated Anakin horribly since their first meeting.

Or Palpatine—who had lavished Anakin with the praise and support he needed for the last ten years, but who was also apparently a Sith Lord.
Being fought over was by this point nothing new to Anakin. He had come to understand, however, that in many ways—especially in their mutual rejection of love—the Jedi and the Sith were two sides of the same coin. How was he supposed to choose the right side when both of them were varying degrees of wrong?

“I have the power to save the one you love,” Palpatine reminded him, “You must choose!”

“Don't listen to him, Anakin!” Master Windu shot back.

By that point the effort to fend off Master Windu's imminent attack appeared to be taking a heavy toll on Palpatine, who was becoming increasingly disfigured before Anakin’s very eyes.

“Don't let him kill me! . . . I can't hold it any longer . . . I can't . . . I'm weak . . . I'm too weak . . . Anakin! . . . help me! . . . Help me! . . . I can't hold on any longer . . .” Palpatine implored.

“I am going to end this . . . once and for all!” Master Windu said, the fire of hate burning in his eyes.

“You can't! He must stand trial!” Anakin argued.

“He has control of the Senate and the courts. He's too dangerous to be left alive!” Master Windu declared in response.

It was the same reasoning Palpatine had used when he talked Anakin into executing Dooku—something that Anakin had immediately regretted—and was very much against the Jedi Code.
“I’m too weak. Don’t kill me. Please!” Palpatine continued to beg.

“It’s not the Jedi way—he must live!” Anakin continued his attempts to reason with his superior.

His efforts were to no avail, however, and Anakin himself began to beg, “Please don't. I need him! Please don't!”

Master Windu, however, never listened to Anakin and was not going to start listening to him now.

He raised his lightsaber above his head and looked down upon his enemy.

Out of options to delay a choice, Anakin reflexively ignited his own lightsaber and blocked the Jedi’s kill stroke. In the ensuing scuffled he disarmed Master Windu—whose lightsaber hilt and severed hands fell from the open window as the Jedi Master began to scream in pain.

The second Master Windu was unarmed, however, Palpatine cease to be weak and helpless.

He sent wave after wave of blue lightning into the other man, until finally the Jedi Master was himself blasted out of the window . . . and fell to his death.

In the aftermath, Anakin staggered backwards and let his lightsaber fall to the ground.

“What have I done?” he cried.

“You're fulfilling your destiny, Anakin,” Palpatine said as he rose to stand, “Become my
apprentice. Learn to use the dark side of the Force.”

“I will do whatever you ask,” Anakin said, finally accepting there was no middle ground to this situation, “Just help me save Padmé’s life. I can't live without her.”

“To cheat death is a power only one has achieved . . . but if we work together I know we can discover the secret,” Palpatine replied, again dangling the forbidden fruit in front of the young Force user.

In his desperation Anakin reached out and ate.

“I pledge myself . . . to your teachings,” Anakin said, forcing the words to leave his mouth and his knees to bend until he was kneeling in front of his new master.

The cost was unthinkable, but to save Padmé he would pay it. Anakin would do anything—even sell his soul to the dark side.

“Good,” Palpatine crooned, “The Force is strong with you. A powerful Sith you will become. Henceforth you shall be known as Darth . . . Vader.”

_Dark Father._

It was a strange name to give a boy who had long been in search of one. It was also an acknowledgement, however, that Anakin would do anything to protect his family—even really terrible things—the boundaries of which Palpatine was about to push as he initiated Order 66.
“Because the Council did not trust you, my young apprentice, I believe you are the only Jedi with no knowledge of this plot. When the Jedi learn what has transpired here they will kill us—along with all the senators,” the Chancellor declared.

As intended Palpatine could see Anakin mentally swapping ‘senators’ with ‘Padmé’ without the Sith Lord actually mentioning her name.

“I agree,” Anakin echoed robotically, “The Council's next move will be against the Senate.”

“Every single Jedi—including your friend Obi-Wan Kenobi—is now an enemy of the Republic,” Palpatine cautioned him.

“I understand, Master,” Anakin replied.

“We must move quickly. The Jedi are relentless. If they are not all destroyed, it will be civil war without end,” the Chancellor warned the battle weary young man.

His warnings ringing in Anakin’s ears, the Sith Lord uttered his diabolical orders.

“First I want you to go to the Jedi Temple. We will catch them off-balance . . . Do what must be done, Lord Vader! . . . Do not hesitate . . . Show no mercy . . . Only then will you be strong enough with the dark side . . . to save Padmé.”

Anakin offered no protestations and Palpatine continued.

After you have killed all the Jedi in the Temple go to the Mustafar system. Wipe out Viceroy Gunray and the other Separatist leaders,” Palpatine commanded before declaring, “Once more the
Sith will rule the galaxy! . . . And we shall have . . . peace.”

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Three years previously, the Clone Wars had begun under the shadow of a mystery. The vast forces of the Grand Army of the Republic had been ready at the exact moment they had been needed to fight the Separatists’ army of Battle Droids.

Why Jedi Master Sifo Dyas placed an order for an army with the Kaminoan Cloners ten years before then, however, the Jedi Council had no idea. While glimmers had surfaced throughout the long war, the Order never learned the truth.

Under direction from Palpatine, Count Dooku had posed as Sifo Dyas to order legions of Clone troopers . . . with one particular specification.

Secret inhibitor chips were to be surgically implanted in the brain of each Clone embryo. Allegedly the chips were to prevent Clone troopers from being overly independent and aggressive. Their true function, however, was much more sinister.

Alone again in his office, Palpatine pulled out his comlink.

“Commander Cody. The time has come. Execute Order 66,” the Chancellor ordered.

With that General Kenobi’s Clone commander and the rest of his troops’ free will and loyalty was suddenly replaced with an all-consuming and irresistible compulsion to kill their Jedi leaders.

Throughout the galaxy the entire Clone Army received similar activation codes . . . and one by one the Jedi Generals fell at the hands of men they had lead and trusted for years.
On Coruscant, Anakin raised the hood of his cloak and led a legion of zombiefied Clone troopers up the steps of the Jedi Temple—appearing to all the world to be just as brainwashed as the rest of them.

Palpatine had suggested that only such an act would drive Anakin far enough to the dark side for him to begin to tap into its power. The young Force user, however, had his own justification for the atrocities he was about to commit.

With visions of the Jedi Council showing up at the medical unit where Anakin was weeping over the cold, dead body of his wife—so Master Yoda could inform him that he was expelled from the Order while Obi-Wan carried away his infant son until Anakin could no longer hear his cries—Anakin marched into the Jedi Temple.

How history would judge him would likely depend on who ended up writing it, but in that moment Anakin prayed to the Force that someday, somehow, he son at least would understand that it had been time for the Jedi to end.

Slaughtering his way through the Temple as the Clones set it ablaze, Anakin entered the Council Chamber where the younglings had taken refuge. Seeing him the children trustingly came out from hiding.

“Master Skywalker, there are too many of them. What are we to do?” one of them asked.

Anakin did not answer.

Justifying to himself that like him they were better off dead than raised by the Jedi—and that this was the only way to ensure his son never became one of them—Anakin ignited his lightsaber and cut them all down.

His gruesome task complete, Anakin then raced home with his heart in his mouth—fear coursing through him that the Jedi had killed his family before he had wiped them out.
As Anakin leapt out of his starfighter, Padmé rushed forward to embrace him.

“Are you all right? I heard there was an attack on the Jedi Temple! You can see the smoke from here!” Padmé’s cried, still frantic that her own greatest fear had been realized and that Anakin had been killed.

“I’m fine,” Anakin replied, as usual waiving away her concern for his wellbeing, “I came to see if you and the baby are safe.”

“What’s happening?!” she cried.

“The Jedi have tried to overthrow the Republic,” he told her somberly.

“I can't believe that!” Padmé exclaimed.

“I saw Master Windu attempt to assassinate the Chancellor myself,” Anakin countered.

“Oh Anakin! What are you going do?” she asked.

Anakin turned away from his wife and walked briefly into the shadows before facing her and replying.

“I will not betray the Republic. My loyalties lie with the Chancellor . . . and with the Senate . . . and with you,” he told her.

To outward appearances Anakin appeared to be calm and rational. To Padmé, however, something about her husband seemed simultaneously completely unhinged, and she found it deeply frightening.
“Anakin, I'm afraid,” she told him.

“Have faith, my love,” Anakin said as he caressed her face.

Although looking right her, Padmé felt that somehow her husband was not really seeing her at all.

“Everything will soon be set right,” he continued, “The Chancellor has given me a very important mission. The Separatists have gathered on the Mustafar system. I'm going there to end this war,” Anakin told her with resounding conviction.

“Wait for me until I return. Things will be different, I promise,” Anakin declared.

They met half way for a lingering kiss.

As they broke apart he again asked her softly, “Please, wait for me.”

They separated fully, and Anakin returned to his ship. Padmé watched on until she could not longer see it.

She then burst into tears.

Anakin guided his starfighter out of Coruscant’s atmosphere, and Artoo unquestioningly plugged Mustafar’s coordinates into the nav computer.
The pair soon arrived on the volcanic planet. Landing his ship on the main mining facility, Anakin disembarked. Artoo made to follow, but Anakin stopped him.

“Artoo, stay with the ship,” he ordered.

Raising the hood of his cloak, Anakin marched towards the command center . . . and the waiting Separatist leaders.

“Welcome, Lord Vader. We've been expecting you,” Viceroy Gunray greeted him warmly.

Anakin regarded the Neimoidian former Viceroy of the Trade Federation—who had tried to kill Padmé on numerous occasions—but did not reply. Raising his hand he instead reached out through the Force and systematically closed all the windows and blastdoors.

He then ignited his lightsaber.

Ignoring that for Dooku and now the Separatist leaders the reward for faithful service to Palpatine was death, Anakin clung to his delusion that the Sith Lord and the dark side would help him save his wife’s life, and dutifully carried out more of his grisly orders.

He left Viceroy Gunray for last, and in confusion the Neimoidian begged for mercy, “The war is over. Lord Sidious promised us peace. We only want-”

Deaf to his pleas, the young Force user did not let him finish his sentence.

Cutting him down where he stood . . . Anakin ended the Clone Wars.
When it was all over, Anakin stepped around the bodies and walked back outside.

He had known going in the high price Palpatine demanded to save his family. But paying it was more horrible than he could have imagined.

Anakin looked up at the Mustafar sun—currently eclipsed by one of its moons. As he looked upon at the sun now covered in darkness, he grieved the loss of the Light within himself.

As he murdered the Separatists in cold blood his vision had become awash in yellow as the dark side fully enveloped him. Although his eyes where now those of a Sith, tears streamed out of them nevertheless.

And in the fading light of Mustafar Anakin wept.

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Anakin had just finished notifying Palpatine that the Separatist leaders were all dead and as instructed ordered all the remaining battle droids to shut down, when something on the monitor abruptly caught his attention.

Padmé’s ship had arrived on Mustafar.

Suddenly filled with anxiety, Anakin’s vision cleared, and lowering the hood of his cloak he sprinted towards the landing platform.
Rushing towards her he caught her in an embrace.

“I saw your ship,” Anakin told her, his void full of concern, “What are you doing out here?”

“I was so worried about you,” Padmé replied as she clutched his arms, “Obi-Wan told me terrible things . . .”

“What things?” Anakin demanded.

“He said you've turned to the dark side. That you . . . killed younglings,” she responded in a panic.

“Obi-Wan is trying to turn you against me,” Anakin warned her with indulgent patience.

“He cares about us,” Padmé told him.

“Us?” her secret husband asked in an alarming tone of voice.

“He knows,” she confessed, before adding, “He wants to help you.”

Anakin’s only response was a patronizing smile, and Padmé changed tacks.

“Anakin . . . all I want is your love,” Padmé told him, looking longingly into his eyes.

“Love won't save you, Padmé—Only my new powers can do that,” Anakin replied.

“At what cost? You're a good person—Don't do this!” she begged.
“I won't lose you the way I lost my mother!” Anakin avowed, “I am becoming more powerful than any Jedi has ever dreamed of . . . and I'm doing it for you . . . to protect you.”

Anakin could not believe Padmé’s ingratitude or lack of understanding. How could she ever doubt his love for her—especially since he had long comprehended that he loved her far more than she loved him. Beyond that, he had sworn on his mother’s grave that he would never let this happen again—that to fail again would be unacceptable and utterly unbearable.

Utilizing her full power of persuasion, however, Padmé, made him a counter offer.

“Come away with me,” Padmé pleaded as she caressed his face, “Help me raise our child. Leave everything else behind while we still can!”

It was Anakin’s turn not to understand.

“Don't you see? We don't have to run away any more,” he told her. The Jedi, were after all no longer around to steal their children.

“I have brought peace to the Republic. I am more powerful than the Chancellor. I-I can overthrow him,” Anakin continued—in his delusionality nevertheless having caught on quite well to the dynamics of the Sith master and apprentice relationship.

To Padmé, however, it was clear that her husband had completely lost his mind.

Ignoring that his wife was slowly starting to back away from him, Anakin plowed on.
“And together, you and I can rule the galaxy . . . make things the way we want them to be!” Anakin told her excitedly—somehow forgetting that how the galaxy should be governed was something they had never agree upon during the entire course of their relationship.

Having by that point backed out of Anakin’s physical reach, Padmé looked at him with new eyes, “I don’t believe what I'm hearing . . . Obi-Wan was right . . . you've changed.”

“I don't want to hear any more about Obi-Wan,” Anakin replied, his voice growing commanding and harsh, “The Jedi turned against me . . . don't you turn against me!”

No force in the galaxy, not the Jedi, her suitors, death—or even Padmé herself—would take her away from him. Anakin would make sure of that.

“I don't know you any more . . . Anakin . . . you're breaking my heart!” Padmé responded, and in her deep distress she started to cry. “You're going down a path I can't follow.”

“Because of Obi-Wan?” Anakin asked.

“Because of what you've done—what you plan to do! Stop. Stop now. Come back! I love you-” Padmé plead.

For a split second Anakin seriously thought about accepting her offer. Of reverting to his original plan and running away to hide his family on Tatooine.

Something over Padmé shoulder, however, caught his attention.
Obi-Wan standing at the entrance to Padmé’s ship.

Obi-Wan who was not there to help Anakin . . . he was there to kill him.

And with that the whole situation went straight to hell.

“Liar!” Anakin screamed at Padmé, “You’re with him! You brought him here to kill me!”

Padmé was a fool. She had betrayed him—betrayed their family—to the Jedi.

With that Anakin’s long simmering fears about his wife’s faithfulness and loyalty suddenly spun out of his control . . . and he reached out through the Force and grabbed her throat in a choke hold.

“No! NO!” Padmé begged, as she frantically grasped the air around her neck.

“Let her go, Anakin!—Let her go!” Obi-Wan ordered.

Anakin came within a hairs breath of killing Padmé himself, before he finally released her . . . and let his pregnant wife fall unconscious to the ground.
For a moment both men stared in horror at Padmé motionless form. Then Anakin turned his full rage against his former master.

“You turned her against me!” Anakin screamed.

“You have done that yourself,” Obi-Wan replied.

“You will not take her from me!” Anakin roared.

“Your anger and your lust for power have already done that,” the Jedi master replied—completely misunderstanding Anakin’s motivations—“You have allowed this dark lord to twist your mind until now . . . until now you have become the very thing you swore to destroy.”

“Don't lecture me, Obi-Wan. I see through the lies of the Jedi. I do not fear the dark side as you do. I have brought peace . . . freedom . . . justice . . . and security to my new empire,” Anakin retorted.

“Your new empire?” Obi-Wan responded incredulously.

“I should have known the Jedi were plotting to take over,” Anakin countered.

“Anakin, my allegiance is to the Republic, to democracy!” Obi-Wan shouted back.

Just as the Jedi assumed his allegiance without really earning it, they had also assumed they knew what he thought. Padmé alone had bothered to ask him, and had had to come to terms with the fact that while Anakin was committed to the Republic he was not attached the form of government it adopted—and found democracy rather messy, inefficient, and disorganized.

Anakin, moreover, was devoted to people not ideologies. To his mind there was no greater crime than disloyalty, and he became enraged at the betrayal he perceived from those to whom he was closest.
And now Obi-Wan—the closest person Anakin had to a father—was choosing the Jedi over him.

“Anakin—Chancellor Palpatine is evil!” Obi-Wan argued.

“From my point of view, the Jedi are evil,” Anakin countered.

‘Truth from a certain point of view,’ was that not what Obi-Wan was frequently expounding. From Anakin’s perspective both the Jedi and the Sith were two sides of the same coin in both rejecting love. And he was choosing the one that had promised him his family—no matter what the cost.

“Then you are lost!” Obi-Wan lamented.

“Don't make me kill you!” his former padawan replied.

“I will do what I must,” the Jedi master replied.

Obi-Wan ignited his lightsaber, and Anakin quickly followed suit and charged him.

The Force users were two of the most skilled swordsman the Jedi had ever produced. Fighting side by side their adversaries had fallen throughout the galaxy.

The duo, however, now turned their sabers on each other.
Evenly matched, their duel raged throughout the mining complex, and eventually ended up on the derby floating in the river of lava.

“This is the end for you, my master,” Anakin told his old mentor mockingly—his lightsaber flickering red as flecks of the lava hit it.

It was Obi-Wan, however, that leapt first back onto the sloping riverbank.

“It's over, Anakin—I have the high ground,” Obi-Wan replied.

“You underestimate my power,” the younger man boasted.

“Don't try it,” Obi-Wan warned him.

Anakin, however, was by that point beyond being reasonable.

With a flying leap the younger man sailed into the air . . .

But crashed to the ground as Obi-Wan’s lightsaber sliced off Anakin’s remaining limbs—and his dismembered body rolled down the hill towards the river of fire.

“I have failed you, Anakin . . . I have failed you,” Obi-Wan lamented.
It was certainly true. But Obi-Wan had failed his former padawan most in a way he still did not understand.

Obi-Wan had arrived on Mustafar believing Anakin’s choice had been irreversibly made—but he was wrong.

With that the Jedi master had layered tragedy upon tragedy. For if Obi-Wan had come like Padmé to save Anakin, together they would have been able to get him back from the dark side. He would have spent the rest of his life in penance for the atrocities he had committed, but Anakin would have never gone back to Palpatine—and the galaxy would have been a very different place.

The Sith Lord mastermind had long been aware of this danger, and sought to drive a wedge between the two friends—along with attempts to arrange for the older Jedi’s untimely demise on multiple occasions without success.

In the end it, however, it was Master Yoda who finally accomplished the feat. Not understanding the brotherly bond between the two could still accomplish great good, the Jedi Grandmaster fairly cruelly sent closest person Anakin had to a father to kill him.

Like Yoda, however, Obi-Wan failed to see what Padmé saw—that there still been good in Anakin—that he could have been turned back from the dark side. That he could still have fulfill his the prophecy as the Chosen One who would destroy the Sith—and this could still have been how they would win.

He failed to see, however, and with his bitter task complete Obi-Wan wept.

“Anakin, you were the Chosen One! . . . It was said that you would destroy the Sith, not join them! . . . Bring balance to the Force, not leave it in darkness!” Obi-Wan yelled with tears streaming down his face.

“I HATE YOU!” Anakin screamed.
“You were my brother, Anakin—I loved you,” Obi-Wan replied.

Anakin had craved hearing those words from Obi-Wan for over a decade, but with them finally spoken all the young Force user could hear was the past tense.

Sliding ever closer to the lava field, Anakin’s limbless body abruptly caught fire. Unable to bear it any longer, Obi-Wan turned away from the gruesome sight and Anakin’s screams of agony.

Obi-Wan stooped to pick up Anakin’s fallen lightsaber as he turned and walked away.

Anakin sensed Padmé and his son were still alive, but their sense disappeared with Obi-Wan’s, and Anakin knew Jedi had taken his family as well as his lightsaber.

Leaving Anakin—mutilated and burned beyond recognition—to die on the fiery slopes of Mustafar alone.

Coming somewhat back into his right mind, Anakin resigned himself that he had on some level always known were his recent choices would lead. That the wages of the dark side were death and destruction—and that the path he had barreled down would cost him his life.

He reflected on Padmé’s words that he was a good person when she asked him how he could do all this. The reality was there was darkness in everyone, and under the right circumstances and proper motivation anyone was capable of doing terrible things—of which Anakin was now a sticking example.
He relived with horror the memory of choking his beloved wife and letting her and his unborn child fall to the ground.

Anakin was a monster who deserved to die—and he was going to.

The wait for death was more painful than he had imagined it would be, but then again he had not anticipated having his limbs cut off and being burned alive. He would be trapped on the dark side for all eternity, but who else after all should pay for his numerous sins but him.

Padme and his son, however, would live—Palpatine had promised—and that was the only thing that mattered.

As if summoned by Anakin thinking his name, the young Force user felt his new master’s presence in the Force and saw the shadow of a shuttle pass overhead. A short while later a rescue party reached him.

“There he is . . . he’s still alive,” Palpatine said, surprised but pleased to find Anakin still technically among the living.

Soon a hooded figure crouched over him, and Anakin looked up into Palpatine disfigured countenance. His expression radiated a sense of joyous victory, which Anakin would one day understand as Palpatine’s glee at finally having Anakin all to himself . . .

The Sith Lord raised a hand to render him unconscious as a medical capsule was brought in, and Anakin thought that would be it.

But Anakin had not died.
He survived the long trip back to Coruscant, and the endless rounds of excruciating surgeries that followed. By that point he had long desired death to come and put an end to his excruciating pain—and the only thing that got him through was the memory of Padmé and his son’s strong life force as Obi-Wan took them away.

But still he did not die.

As the mask fell over his face and he was sealed into his new life-support suit, Anakin began to realize his fate would be quite different.

“Lord Vader, can you hear me?” Palpatine asked.

“Yes, Master,” Anakin replied in his new mechanical voice.

He then asked Palpatine the only question that mattered.

“Where is Padmé? Is she safe? Is she all right?”

“It seems, in your anger—you killed her,” Palpatine replied in a fairly callous tone.

“I-I couldn't have! She was alive! I felt it!” Anakin exclaimed.

His initial shock and confusion, however, soon gave way to clarity.
Padmé had said he was going someplace she could not follow . . . but she had.

Prioritizing her husband’s soul ahead of even her own life, she had surrendered her spirit and allowed him to unconsciously absorb her life force—in one final act of enabling him to avoid the natural consequences of his actions and cheat death.

Anakin knew now that it was too late that she had really loved him—more than he had ever dreamed. She had somehow followed him into death and sacrificed herself.

He suddenly realized that while being burned alive on the slopes of Mustafar he had not in fact known pain. It now ripped through his very soul. Anakin had torn his life apart and sold his soul to the devil and the dark side to save his family—and unwittingly been the hand that destroyed it.

In surgery for days, Anakin had also missed Padme’s funeral. He saw the holovid footage, however, of her still pregnant body lying in state as she was processed to her tomb—his wife was dead and their son within her.

Anakin had not thought of himself as Vader until he awoke to learn Padmé and their son were dead. He had, however, been serious when told Palpatine he could not live without her. And while Vader lived on permanent life support, in a very real sense Anakin Skywalker died with his family.

In his despair and self-loathing he no longer resisted using his anger and aggression. It pushed him the rest of the way to the dark side, and there he knew he would stay for the rest of his joyless, empty life.

In order to ‘ensure society’s continued safety and stability after the attempted coup by the Jedi,’
Palpatine had announced to thunderous applause from the Senate that the Republic would be reorganized into the First Galactic Empire—with himself of course as Emperor.

The Senate had long been accustomed to Palpatine’s leadership, and the vast majority of senators did not know what they were getting into with a shift to Imperial rule. The whole galaxy quickly found out, however, what the Sith Lord had in mind, and many senators soon fervently hoped that someone would oust the new Emperor.

Anakin had not been completely delusional when telling Padmé he could do it. As Palpatine himself had gloatingly told Master Yoda, Darth Vader was destined to become more powerful than either of them if left to his natural trajectory.

In Vader’s weakened state after being burned alive, however, that possibility was no more.

It was the Suit that kept Vader alive. His missing limbs had been replaced with the Suit’s mechanical prosthetics. With his own lungs severely damaged, only the Suit’s iron lung allowed him to breathe. He could no longer eat, so the Suit infused him with nutrition. Beyond that, the Suit provided for all of his basic functions for what was left of his body. More accurately, the Suit was a mechanical coffin that prolonged Vader’s living death.

The Suit, however, did little for the chronic pain that was now Vader’s constant companion. Full emersion in bacta was now the only time the new Sith Lord experienced any relief.

Palpatine too had not been left unscarred by the conflict with the Jedi. His deformed and disfigured appearance, however, reflected the Sith Lord’s true nature—a diabolical vision, which Vader was subjected to more than anyone else.

For over a decade, Anakin had believed to the core and defended Palpatine as a good man. With each passing day, however, Vader was increasingly educated on how untrue that really was. Both the Jedi and the Sith were wrong—but the young Force user was quickly learning that they differed greatly in degrees. The Jedi were problematic. The Sith were actually evil.

One of Palpatine’s more impressive feats as Chancellor of the Republic was concealing his deep seated racism. While the Senate was by its very nature a representation of as many beings in the galaxy as possible, Imperials—whether in the military or involved in regional governments—were uniformly human, and mostly white males. Anakin had not shared Palpatine’s hidden views, and if he had been at liberty to give his opinion neither did Vader.
Although now Galactic Emperor, Palpatine was, moreover, in many ways still enslaved to his obsession with the Jedi. Instead of razing his enemy’s home to the ground or keeping at a monument to his triumph like any sane victor, the Sith Lord had the Jedi Temple transformed into the Imperial Palace and moved in. He also now hobbled around with a fake walking stick—a superficial façade of weakness to the ignorant and stupid masking his might in the Force—in a direct imitation of Master Yoda.

Vader privately thought both were ridiculous.

Undercurrents of discord also marked the Sith Lord and apprentice’s new relationship.

Once Vader was ensnared in the Emperor’s service, Anakin’s supportive mentor disappeared. Palpatine was far and away the most abusive master Vader had ever had, and he regularly found his body pummeled with blue lightning.

Knowing nothing but slavery throughout his life, the young Force user had accepted his new servitude in hopelessness and resignation.

The Sith Lord Emperor soon discovered, however, that Vader’s obstinate disobedience and rebellious streak remained firmly intact. Although Palpatine had actively fanned it in when it was directed at the Jedi Order, he found it much more inconvenient when it became directed at him.

It would, moreover, become a great deal more than simply inconvenient in years to come . . . as the Emperor would one day learn.

Vader for his part quickly developed new coping mechanisms to defend against his disillusioning circumstances. He actively sought out ways to expound upon his arrogance, invincibility, might in the Force—all vitally necessary to protect him from his deep seeded feelings of inadequacy, weakness, incompetence after failing to protect his family or himself.

One of his main jobs in Palpatine’s new Empire was to scare people—Imperials and civilians alike. Himself barely able to breath, Force choking the life breath out of his victims quickly became his trademark—along with his legendary and lethal temper.
Obi-Wan having stolen Anakin’s lightsaber, Vader now needed a new one. According to the ways of the Sith, he dominated his new living kyber crystal in the Force, and subjugated it to his will until it bled red—not unlike what Palpatine had done to him.

His crowing glory in his monument to his personal might and power, however, was building his Castle. Towering over the volcanic Gahenn Plains of Mustafar, the colossal monstrosity was built over the remains of an ancient Sith Temple—and on the site of his greatest defeat at the hands of Obi-Wan.

Most of the time, however, it all just barely covered over the reality that Palpatine’s new apprentice was still a slave.

There was of course still a way out left to Vader.

Although the new Sith Lord suspected he might simply pass into the dark side nexus at Mustafar’s fiery planet core—and have his spirit enslaved by the Emperor in some terrible new way—Vader was still often tempted to fling himself off the turret of his Castle into the lava below and watch Palpatine try.

The one thing, however, always stopped him from so completely succumbing to despair.

Padmé surrendering her spirit was not merely an act of enabling, but in true Padmé style was her getting in the last word in their longstanding argument. All of their arguments, moreover, had boiled down to the same disagreement on the true value of Anakin’s life.

Anakin had never been free of a master controlling his life, so saw little problem with a dictatorship as an acceptable form of government. His value as a Jedi and a soldier was measured in military success and usefulness, and the risks he routinely took with his safety reflected that. Beyond that, his soul seemed a small price to pay to save his family when he was deceived by Palpatine’s lies.

Padmé, however, vehemently disagreed. In spite of his fallen state she still believed her husband’s life and soul were of incalculable worth. Even after all he had done she was still convinced there was still good in him—that he could still be redeemed and restored to the Light.
Vader’s life—if the living hell he existed in could still be called a life—had been purchased by his wife at an unimaginable price. Although trapped in the service of the devil, therefore, Vader did not feel at liberty to throw it away.

Sith master and apprentice did not agree on much. Purging the galaxy of the hubris, arrogance, and hypocrisy of the Jedi, however, was one cause Vader could whole-heartedly get behind in his unquenchable thirst for revenge.

The Jedi had played a real role in all of Vader’s terrible losses—including not protecting him from Palpatine. He hated them and would never forgive them for it. As he slaughtered the Tuscan raiders who killed his mother, Vader he rounded up the remaining Jedi, and without compunction or mercy summarily executed the Force users he held responsible for the death of his wife and child.

Although Obi-Wan would elude him for decades, Vader always sensed that one day he would confront him again. He waited with the patience he had not had in youth with a burning desire for vengeance.

Master Yoda he never found.

Although he continued to scour the galaxy, Vader was content in the knowledge that the last leader of the Jedi was suffering a fate worse than death—alive to watch the mighty Order which had lasted a thousand generations be destroyed on his watch. Master Yoda had failed Anakin Skywalker mightily with his negligence, indecisiveness, and a series of profoundly unwise decisions. Resultantly, much of the responsibility for Anakin’s loss to the dark side and the resulting destruction and devastation to the galaxy rested on his shoulders.

In whatever unfindable place in the galaxy Master Yoda was living out his days, Vader hoped that the Jedi Grandmaster was feeling full weight of his failure.
Officially, Ahsoka Tano had died on Mandalore during Order 66. A shadow of life remained detectable in their lingering Force bond, however, and Vader was not surprised to one day find that his own apprentice still lived.

He unconsciously avoided hunting her as long as possible—the girl he had raised and had loved so much.

Ahsoka was after all no longer a Jedi. In demonstration to her lack of allegiance to the old order, she now fought with white lightsabers.

She was, however, a Rebel. As a spy for the Alliance, ‘Fulcrum’ in many ways was a repository of Anakin’s goodness and a plant to undermine Vader’s execution of the Palpatine’s nefarious plan to nab Force sensitive children with the Jedi no longer around to do it. Her work was largely successful—and done in tribute to the memory of the man who had protected her and empowered her to truly be free.

It was with great emotion on both sides that their paths finally crossed.

“Our long awaited meeting has come at last,” Vader declared.

“I’m glad I gave you something to look forward to,” Ahsoka replied with her usual brashness and spunk.

“We need not be adversaries,” Vader informed her, “The Emperor will show you mercy if you if you tell me where the remaining Jedi can be found.”

That was not exactly true. Palpatine did not show anyone mercy including him. He was also not really expecting her to tell him, and his words were more spoken out of his desire to give her an out and not to hurt her than anything else.

“There are no Jedi. You and your Inquisitors have seen to that,” Ahsoka yelled before continuing, “I was beginning to believe I knew who you were behind that mask—but it’s impossible. My
master could never be as vile as you.”

“Anakin Skywalker was weak . . . I destroyed him,” Vader told her.

“Then I will avenge his death!” Ahsoka declared without the slightest trace of fear.

“Revenge is not the Jedi way,” Vader replied, somehow unable to avoid slipping into his former role as her teacher.

“I am no Jedi,” Ahsoka announced, before ignited her white lightsabers and charging him.

In answer Vader ignited his red one, and prepared to defend himself.

Red and white saber blades clashed, and the battle between them raged long. Ahsoka, however, was not one of his Inquisitor underlings. She had been his apprentice in the truest sense of the word. He had poured himself into her training . . . and as they dueled Vader found he was facing an equal.

No one got the upper hand on him—ever—but Ahsoka somehow managed it.

He cried out as she sliced a section of his mask and it fell away.

“Ahsoka!” he wheezed—Vader’s terrifying mechanical voiced mixed with the one that was dearest to her in the galaxy.

“Anakin . . .” Ahsoka replied in shock.

Vader was a liar. Her beloved master was still alive.
“I won’t leave you! . . . Not this time,” Ahsoka told him emphatically—no longer intent on avenging Anakin, but now determined to get him back from the dark side.

A look of sadness came over him, before his eyes again hardened. He had been prepared to let her walk away twice—but her rescuing Anakin was something Vader would not allow.

“Then you will die!” Vader replied.

This time he ignited his lightsaber first, and walked slowly forward as she stubbornly refused to move, and resumed their fight.

Ahsoka’s white sabers were made from red kyber crystals she had stolen from the Sith and healed, and she was determined to do the same for Anakin. With a heavy heart, however, she was forced to accept that redeeming her beloved master was just out of her reach.

Resigned that she could not save him, Ahsoka sent up a prayer to the Force that someday the Light would send someone who could.

Sensing it would be the last time she saw him in this life—and with no guarantee they would be reunited in the one to come—a heartbroken Ahsoka escape from Vader.

Forced to again leave her master, Ahsoka nonetheless had hope.

Although knowing how to play the part of a dutiful slave, the only thing that truly motivated Anakin Skywalker was love. While Palpatine appeared to have finally broken Anakin, Ahsoka saw
the Emperor’s hubris in his power over his apprentice for what it was—a blind spot that was perhaps the Sith Lord’s one great vulnerability.

For Ahsoka knew first hand that the fire of rebellion and resistance burned strongly in her master’s heart. Overlords or adversaries who thought they could truly control Anakin or predict his next move were deluding themselves—often fatally.

She prayed she would live to see the day when the spark of Light would resurrect Anakin. The day when Skywalker would again rise, and—finally fulfilling his destiny as the Chosen One—destroy the Sith and burn Palpatine’s evil empire to the ground.

While Ahsoka clung to a hope that her beloved master would be redeemed to the Light, he himself had none.

Vader would one day stand on the bridge of one of the innumerable Star Destroyers he spent his life aboard and watch the instillation of the dish that housed the Death Star’s laser that made the superweapon operational.

In that moment a memory from his childhood rose to the forefront of his mind—himself as a boy sitting at his mother’s kitchen table with Qui-Gon and Padmé.

“I had a dream I was a Jedi,” he had told Qui-Gon, “I came back here and freed all the slaves.”

Anakin had wanted to free all the slaves. Qui-Gon had wanted Anakin to bring balance to the Force. Padmé had wanted compassion restored to the governing body of the galaxy. Shmi had wanted her son to be happy and have a good life.

None of those dreams had come true for any of them.

Vader thought back to the poor slave boy on Tatooine, who had been free to love and rich in what
mattered most—family.

If he had set out to purposefully become as different as possible from the selfless, kindhearted boy of his youth, Vader knew he would not be any different than who he was in the moment—someone who knew everything there was to know about selfishness.

Instead of returning to free all the slaves he had thrown his lot in with a regime that had not one iota of respect for anyone’s free will—including his. On a grand scale the Death Star was poised to bring about order by destroying freedom and effectively enslaving all the being in the galaxy.

He too was still trapped. Trapped in a suit artificially keeping him alive, trapped as Palpatine’s apprentice as a servant of evil, and most of all trapped in his mind.

Gazing out the viewport at the Death Star, Vader felt a deepening of his despair.

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If anyone is interested here is the Anakin Happy Ending AU I wrote so I could stomach writing Anakin’s cannon fall to the dark side.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you as always for reading. Comments and kudos are much appreciated.

Next chapter: How Vader rescues Leia from the Death Star.

Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

LOTS Podcast: Reylo vs. Anidala - Couple Contrasts in Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdnZHfFl2-A&t=3s

Wayward Jedi: Rey and Ben - The Resurrected Heroes (Part 1 & 2) The One Big Story of Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkoY5MJ2pxY&t=5s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xqnQt13CQ
Wayward Jedi: Love is the Balance - A Rey and Kylo Ren Story
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEYCYL_9jl8&t=165s

Popculture Detective: The Case Against The Jedi Order
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUPD1w78D5I

Artwork: Still from Revenge of the Sith
Chapter Summary

“I’m taking an awful risk, Vader. This had better work.”

--Grand Moff Takin to Vader, after the Sith Lord talked him into letting Leia and everyone else go instead of executing her immediately.

In which Vader schemes, unwittingly interacts with his children—and bears more responsibility than anyone else for Leia escaping and the Rebels blowing up the Death Star.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 16: Vader

The next two decades of Vader’s life were spent aboard Star Destroyers terrorizing subordinates with his legendary temper and dark side powers, betraying allies without compunction, and earning every bit of his reputation as the most hated man in the galaxy.
The rise of the Empire, furthermore, made for strange bedfellows. Vader suddenly found himself allied with individuals who were once enemies, and former friends often became foe.

One of his many new jobs was overseeing Palpatine’s underworld influences, which Vader made supervisor to vicious punk Darth Maul, whom Palpatine put in charge of the Crimson Dawn crime syndicate.

Another unfortunate result, was Vader having to spend more time with Tarkin—now a Grand Moff—than the Sith Lord could ever dream of or want. To all appearances Tarkin appears to have ice in his veins, but Vader knew he was really a rabid cur, who had never been happier than when he was wreaking havoc on the galaxy with a new weapon of mass destruction. Knowing Palpatine, however, Vader did understand why the Emperor put such a rabid cur in such a position of power.

As the Emperor’s top lieutenant, furthermore, it was Vader’s job to enforce his master’s will, along with bringing—if not balance—at least order to the galaxy.

In this task Vader was still assisted by his personal unit—the 501st Battalion—which was now made up of stormtroopers instead Clones troopers. As it had been in the Grand Army of the Republic, ‘Vader’s Fist’ was still the most elite legion in the Imperial army. In the Imperial war machine, however, the 501st shifted from being legendary to infamous as they dominated there through every sector and brutally subjugated the galaxy.

Palpatine had once promised his new apprentice that once the Sith rose the galaxy would be at peace. It was another lie that war weary Anakin had eaten up. The truth was, however, that the Sith Lord mastermind was perfectly at home embroiled in war and chaos.

Which was good since war—a real war—and not a puppet war of Palpatine’s creation was exactly what he got.

Senator Mon Mothma, who represented Chandrila in the Republic and later the Imperial Senate, had long been and ally of Senator Amidala of Naboo and Senator Bail Organa of Alderaan in their commitment to promoting peace. After Padmé’s death the other woman had strode out of her colleague’s long shadow and become a bigger thorn in Palpatine’s side than Padmé had ever
unwittingly been.

Her loud opposition to the executive powers the Imperial Senate was increasingly ceding to Palpatine crescendoed with a very public denouncing of the new Emperor. After which she left her colleagues like Organa—who to outward appearances remained loyal to the new Empire—and disappeared to unite the different opposition factions into a unified Rebel Alliance.

Soon crushing the rebellion—which he had himself in a sense fathered by enforcing the Palpatine’s tyrannical rule—that too became Vader’s problem.

The irony of that the poster boy for rebelliousness was now tasked with squashing the Rebel Alliance was not lost on Vader. He, himself, knew that ruling by authoritarian might never fully worked. Constrained only by direct orders from Palpatine, Vader took all the latitude he could get away with while playing the part of a dutiful Imperial.

And beyond all of that—last but certainly not least—overseeing and safeguarding construction of the Emperor’s new super weapon also fell to Vader’s overtaxed shoulders.

The keffing Death Star . . .

The vainglorious and overambitious weapon of mass destruction aspired to transform the power of kyber crystals—looted from the Jedi Temple on Jedha—into enough power to destroy entire planets. As the Emperor’s current superweapon, Vader deeply resented the Death Star, and considered it far more trouble than it was worth.

From the beginning, the whole project has been fraught with problems. There were, however, a few more memorable incidents.

The first event that had Palpatine seeing red, was the time the Death Star’s chief engineer and designer, Galen Erso, somehow escaped Coruscant with his family, and it took project director, Orson Krennic, and inordinate amount of time to track him down.
Then whispers reached Vader from the fringe that some ship called the *Millennium Falcon* had made the Kessel Run in twelve parsecs with a stockpile of stolen *coaxium*. As once the best pilot in the galaxy, Vader was aware the treacherous route usually took a minimum of twenty, and was impressed in spite of himself. He also sensed the brewing storm when the six hundred million credits worth of refined hyperdrive fuel intended to pass through Red Dawn and on to cover the Death Star building expenses, instead ended up in the hands of a gang of rebel pirates.

The resulting delay to the space station’s construction had not been insignificant. Worse it soon became clear that those funds where now being channeled to the Rebel Alliance, and elevated the Rebels from a nuisance to a real problem—and lead to a dramatic escalation in the Galactic Civil War.

Worst to Vader mind, however, the Death Star was making the Imperial command increasingly arrogant—a reality that was hammered home to the Sith Lord at a recent meeting.

“Until this battle station is fully operational, we are vulnerable,” Commander Tagge observed, “The Rebel Alliance is too well equipped. They’re more dangerous than you realize.”

“Dangerous to your starfleet, Commander, not to this Battle Station,” Admiral Motti declared before continuing, “This station is now the ultimate power in the galaxy!”

The in Vader’s opinion too young to be Admiral’s haughtiness, however, was beyond what the Sith Lord could silently brush off.

“Don’t be too proud of this technological terror you’ve constructed. The ability to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force,” Vader warned him.

Motti’s response dripped with disrespect, “Don’t try to frighten us with your sorcerer’s ways, Lord Vader. Your sad devotion to that ancient religion has not given you clairvoyance enough to find the Rebel’s hidden fortress.”

Uninterested in tolerating the young man’s insolence—especially in his reminder of Vader’s ongoing failure to locate the Alliance’s secret base—the Sith Lord reached out through the Force with narrowing thumb and index finger, and began to slowly crush Motti’s airway.
“I find your lack of faith disturbing,” Vader informed Motti—who was now struggling to breath.

“Enough of this! Vader, release him!” Tarkin ordered.

“As you wish,” Vader replied—and having already made his point—obediently released Motti, who collapsed onto the conference table gasping for air.

“This bickering is pointless,” Tarkin continued, “Lord Vader will provide us with the location of the rebel fortress by the time this station is operational. We will then crush the Rebellion with one swift stroke.”

Behind his mask, Vader scowled. The Imperial high command drove him crazy. With each passing day of their acquaintance, moreover, Vader found his dislike of Tarkin steadily growing—and Vader had had the misfortune of knowing the other man for decades.

Even after it was finished the blasted superweapon still created endless problems, which Vader was inevitably tasked with cleaning up.

Tarkin decided to test the Death Star and destroy Jedha without proper authorization—likely as part of his endless power struggle with Krennic—which then had to be hidden from the Imperial Senate. Krennic himself had then had the gall to ask Vader to get into the middle of their spat. The Sith Lord, however, was confident that the power hungry director had received his negative answer as he lay on the ground gasping for air.

The squabbling, in fighting, and back stabbing amongst the upper echelon of the Imperials was worse than it had ever been in the chaos of the Republic Senate.

Vader was disgusted with the whole lot of them.
The Sith Lord knew the insufferable situation was the result of the Emperor, like the arrogant Motti, increasingly ranking confidence in the Death Star ahead of Vader. But there was nothing Vader could do about it, other than hold to the private opinion—which he was not really allowed to have—that he would not particularly care if the someone blew up the troublesome battle station as long as he was not on it.

There were growing concerns, however, that the Death Star was not as invincible as it was supposed to be—and that Vader might actual get his secret wish.

A troubling rumor surfaced that Galen Erso had managed to get a message out to the Rebels through a defecting cargo pilot. The man himself could not be interrogated, because he had died in an open attack by Rebels on an Imperial facility on Eadu. Question had been raised, however, of what else he might have done during the weapon’s construction . . .

The situation continued to spiral out of control as the Rebels had gone after and succeeded in stealing a copy of the Death Star schematics on the library on Scarif. It was now extremely likely that Galen Erso had indeed done something to sabotage the Death Star, which the enemies of the Empire were now trying to exploit.

And of course recovering the stolen plans fell to Vader—along with fulfilling the Emperor’s increasingly insistent demand that he locate the Alliance’s secret base—and all of the other myriad of tasks with which he had been charged.

Vader finally caught up with the Rebel ship harboring the stolen plans orbiting Tatooine of all places.

Boarding the small vessel after the 501st had subdued the crew’s initial resistance, Vader was informed that the Death Star plans were not in the ship’s man computer.

“Where are those transmissions you intercepted?! What have you done with those plans?!” Vader demanded of the captain—who was dangling several feet above the deck as the Sith Lord gripped
his throat.

“We intercepted no transmissions. This is a consular ship. We're on a diplomatic mission—” the man gasped out.

Enraged at being lied to Vader crushed his windpipe and flung his lifeless body into a wall.

Which for someone tasked with finding the location of the Rebel base was, upon reflection, not the Sith Lord’s best move . . .

“Commander, tear this ship apart until you've found those plans, and bring me the passengers! I want them alive!” Vader roared.

Carrying out his orders, the storm trooper soon marched Leia Organa into his presence. The adolescent daughter of Bail Organa, Princess Leia of Alderaan was the youngest member of the Imperial Senate. Vader had not previously met the girl, but he sensed that her reputation for being quit the firecracker had not been exaggerated.

“Darth Vader . . . only you could be so bold. The Imperial Senate will not sit still for this! When they hear you've attacked a diplomatic—” Leia scolded.

“Don't act so surprised, Your Highness. You weren't on any mercy mission this time,” Vader interrupted, his voice dripping with sarcasm, “Several transmissions were beamed to this ship by Rebel spies. I want to know what happened to the plans they sent you.”

Glowering down at her with his hands on his hips, Vader almost felt he was reprimanding a teenager over some typical act of willful disobedience instead of something so serious.
Vader also could not remember the last person outside of the Imperial high command who had not been absolutely terrified of him. This petite wisp of a girl, however, glared up at him without fear. In her he also did not find the arrogance of the Imperial officers who really should be more afraid of him—no Leia was just brave.

Maybe it was because they were orbiting Tatooine, but something about Leia’s poise, strength, and even the way she did her hair reminded Vader of Padmé—his long dead wife he had not allowed himself to think about in years.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m a member of the Imperial Senate on a diplomatic mission to Alderaan!” Leia boldly insisted.

Two sets of equally fiery tempered eyes glared at each other.

If he was being honest with himself—which Vader had no intention whatsoever of doing—this girl who glowered at him with rebellious defiance and brazenly lied to his face—also reminded him an awful lot of himself.

Both comparisons were unwelcome, however, and Vader resultantly lost his temper.

“You are part of the Rebel Alliance and a TRAITOR!” Vader roared, the subject of traitors rendering him rather touché, “Take her away!”

A continued search of the ship only yielded more bad news.

“Lord Vader, the Battle Station plans are not aboard this ship, and no transmissions were made,” an officer reported, “An escape pod was jettisoned during the fighting, but no life-forms were aboard.”
Vader knew if he inquired why the Imperials had not blown up the escape pod anyway the idiot would not have a reasonable answer, and chose to save his breath. He instead noted, “She must have hidden the plans in the escape pod.”

And now Vader had a choice to make—go after the plans himself or begin interrogating the captured Rebels as quickly as possible.

Vader, however, did not want to go back to his home planet. Having spent too long without the company of Artoo, Vader convinced himself that acquiring one little droid rolling around in the sand was a task even the Imperials could not screw up.

“Send a detachment down to retrieve them. See to it personally, Commander,” Vader delegated to the officer.

It did not take long for Vader to regret that decision as subsequent events soon proved he was gravely mistaken when it came to the depths of the Imperials’ incompetence.

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Vader took the Rebel prisoners back to the Death Star, and was soon well into a proper interrogation.

It was then that he felt it—a sudden awakening in the Force.

As if a Force sensitive who had previously been hidden, likely by the Force dampening effect he himself had experienced growing up on Tatooine, had abruptly left that protection and immediately reached his awareness.
Vader was trying to make sense of what had just occurred when the report came in from the Star Destroyer he had left orbiting Tatooine.

Vader knew before the Imperial officer even opened his mouth that the news was not good.

“Sir, the droids with the plans were identified as a golden 3PO model protocol droid and a blue and white R2 model astromech droid.”

No, it couldn’t be . . .

For a moment Vader’s mind flashed back to Threepio he had built and Artoo who had been his stalwart companion in another life . . . but that had to be just a coincidence. The Sith Lord, however, did not have time to ponder the improbable identities of the droids further as the report took a distinct down turn.

“We were, however, unable to acquire the droids on Tatooine,” the officer told him, the sweat running down his face was now visible even over holovid, “It escaped capture aboard a Corellian YT model freighter.”

Vader was furious.

He was furious with the Imperials. He was furious with the Rebel traitors and the droids with the stolen plans. Most of all he was furious with himself for failing to remember that in this most vital of matters if wanted something done right he had to do it himself.

With an unnerving degree of calm, however, the Sith Lord asked, “Anything else?”
Still rightly terrified, the officer nonetheless had no choice but to continue, and blurted out, “The two were accompanied by a known smuggler, his Wookiee copilot, an old man, and a boy-”

_The boy._

With a sudden violent motion Vader reached out through the Force, and the officer in the holovid suddenly reached for his throat.

“What boy?” Vader demanded.

The Imperial annoyingly but not unsurprisingly had no further information, and Vader crushed his windpipe for bringing him bad news.

The droids having slipped through their collective fingers and the network of Imperial spies put on the alert, there was nothing left for Vader to do but return to his interrogations and await news.

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For reasons he did not want to examine to closely, Vader left Leia’s interrogation until the end. After full interrogations and complete mindsift of the other now dead Rebels revealed only that the secret base was “in a jungle” somewhere in the galaxy, Vader was forced to concede that Leia was the only one high-ranking enough in the Alliance to have an actual location.

He, therefore, resigned himself to marching down to her cell with a hovering interrogation droid in tow.
“And now, Your Highness, we will discuss the location of your hidden Rebel base,” Vader announced, slipping into the sinister voice he used for interrogations.

As she eyed the interrogation droid, however, Vader could tell that Leia was finally getting scared . . . and he found himself limiting his interrogation to yelling.

She would forever see him as a monstrous creature in a mask, but in truth Leia was having strangely humanizing effect on him.

Resultantly, Vader neither used the interrogation droid, nor unleashed his full power on her. He left her alive, and unharmed both physically . . . and mentally.

For his other option of course was to perform a mind probe.

The idea that a teenager could resist a mind probe from Vader was absurd. Forced to do despicable things on a daily basis, moreover, it had been years since Vader refused a task on the basis of conscience. But he now found that invading the mind of this spunky, fearless girl, who reminded him of Padmé, was something he simply would not do.

Tarkin, however, did not need to know that.

“Her resistance to the mind probe is considerable,” Vader informed the Moff, “It'll be some time before we can extract any information from her.”

His lie, however, was not to be the stall tactic for which the Sith Lord had been aiming.

“Perhaps she would respond to an alternative form of persuasion,” Tarkin replied ominously.
“What do you mean?” Vader asked, a sense of deep unease coming over him.

“I think it is time we demonstrated the full power of this station. Set course for Alderaan,” Tarkin ordered.

Once they were orbiting her home planet, Tarkin had Leia brought to the bridge. She marched in glaring, completely ignored Motti, and launched straight into the Moff.

“Governor Tarkin. I should have expected to find you holding Vader's leash,” Leia observed rather insightfully, “I recognized your foul stench when I was brought on board.

“Charming to the last,” Tarkin replied sardonically.

Reaching one hand up, the Moff roughly caressed her chin in a way Vader did not like, and continued, “You don't know how hard I found it signing the order to terminate your life.”

“I'm surprised you had the courage to take the responsibility yourself,” she retorted.

“Princess Leia, before your execution . . . I would like you to be my guest at a ceremony that will make this battle station operational,” Tarkin announced, “No star system will dare oppose the Emperor now.”

“The more you tighten your grip, Tarkin, the more star systems will slip through your fingers,” Leia responded with brash confidence.

“Not after we demonstrate the power of this station,” he countered, “In a way, you have determined the choice of the planet that will be destroyed first. Since you are reluctant to provide us with the location of the Rebel base, I have chosen to test this station's destructive power on your home planet of Alderaan!”
In the face of Tarkin’s terrible threat Leia’s defiant attitude finally crumbled.

“No! Alderaan is peaceful. We have no weapons. You can't possibly—”

“You would prefer another target? A military target? Then name the system!” Tarkin snapped.

The Moff moved into her personal space threateningly, and Leia back up against the solidness of Vader’s chest.

“I grow tired of asking this, so it will be the last time,” Tarkin glowered down, “Where is the Rebel base?”

The Princess looked longingly out at her home planet, before returning her gaze to Tarkin.

“Dantooine . . . They're on Dantooine,” she answered, her spirit broken and her no longer fiery eyes dropping to the ground.

“There. You see, Lord Vader? She can be reasonable,” Tarkin commented, before turning back to Motti, “Continue with the operation—You may fire when ready.”

“What?!” Leia cried.

“You're far too trusting,” the Moff told her smugly, “Dantooine is too remote to make an effective demonstration, but don't worry. We will deal with your Rebel friends soon enough.”
Vader knew that all of this too was a lie.

Originally everyone was impatiently waiting for the Sith Lord to locate the Rebel base so that could be the first official target of the Death Star.

It was finally confirmed beyond a shadow of a doubt, however, that Bail Organa was a traitor—likely with a position of leadership among the Rebel Alliance. More importantly, after the Emperor recently dissolved the Imperial Senate the inconvenience associated with turning the influential Senator into a martyr was also no longer a concern. The Alderaanian Senator was now at the top of the Empire’s kill list—just below his Chandrila coconspirator.

And Imperial spies had learnt that Bail Organa was actually at home on planet.

Alderaan was, therefore, already slated to be the Death Star’s first victim—an entire planet targeted to kill one man—which allowed for Tarkin’s cruel trick.

Vader put a restraining black gloved hand on Leia’s shoulder as she made a move towards Tarkin. He left his hand there—a parody of a father’s comforting hand—as she leaned against his chest and watched as her home world paid for her real father’s sins.

Personally committing atrocities on a regular basis, Vader was surprised by how much the genocide of Alderaan affected him. More likely, he amended, it was Leia’s reaction that impacted him so deeply.

As he watched her look on in horror as her home was destroyed, Vader was finally forced to consciously admit the truth.

*He had compassion for her.*

This stunning realization was fresh on Vader’s mind when an officer brought Tarkin the latest
“Our scout ships have reached Dantooine. They found the remains of a rebel base, but they estimate that it has been deserted for some time,” the officer relayed.

“She lied! She lied to us!” Tarkin exclaimed, aghast with outraged shock.

Oh good gracious!

Of course she lied. What in the galaxy was Tarkin expecting?

“I told you she would never consciously betray the Rebellion,” the Sith Lord replied—now taking has turn to be smug.

“Terminate her. Immediately!” Tarkin ordered.

“As you wish,” Vader replied, the lie of his own smoothly leaving his lips as they always did.

Tarkin had told Leia she was far too trusting. The irony of those words coming out of the Moth’s mouth, were not lost of Vader. The limit of Tarkin’s creativity was straight forward backstabbing, and the Sith Lord found the man quit gullible when it came to subterfuge with any degree of subtlety.

And ‘immediately,’ after all, was such a vague unit of time.
Tarkin may have signed Leia’s death warrant, but it was Vader who would carry it out. Which meant it was the Sith Lord, not Tarkin, who was in ultimate control of when, where—and in this particular case if—the execution would take place.

In that moment, a memory rose to Vader’s mind. Tarkin spitefully attempting to execute his seventeen-year-old padawan for high treason despite knowing she was innocent.

Leia was not innocent. Vader, however, was not going to let Tarkin kill her either.

Having thrown in her lot with the Rebellion, Vader knew that the Princess would likely meet her end sooner or rather than later. As he walked out Tarkin’s presence, however, the Sith Lord was filled with an unusual degree of resolve—that this brave girl who reminded him of Padmé was not going to die onboard the Death Star.

Gazing out of one of the Death Star’s many viewports, Vader mulled over his options for how next to proceed.

It was then that he again felt a tremor in the Force—and realized that an intriguing possibility for getting Leia off the space station had just dropped out of hyperspace into the rubble that used to be Alderaan.

Vader snapped on his comlink, and quickly instructed one of the TIE fighters out on patrol to lure the ship closer. He then ordered the tractor beam crew to grab the Corellian YT model freighter—the *Millennium Falcon* under the command of Captain Han Solo—before it could jump back into hyperspace.

A plan was now forming in Vader’s sharp mind—half-baked as always—but one that Tarkin would still likely buy into hook, line, and sinker.
Leia’s biting comment about Tarkin holding Vader’s leash had been quite perceptive. To outward appearances, Vader was no longer a man but a chained beast forced to do the bidding of even those who were not his master.

That too, however, was an illusion. The only reason Vader tolerated orders from Tarkin and maintained his act of subservience was it made it far easier for Sith Lord to lead the narrow-minded Moff around by the nose.

“We've captured a freighter entering the remains of the Alderaan system. Its markings match those of a ship that blasted its way out of Mos Eisley,” the report came over Tarkin’s com.

“They must be trying to return the stolen plans to the princess. She may yet be of some use to us,” Vader noted, officially staying Leia’s execution that he was not carrying out anyway.

And now it was time for an uptick in the Sith Lord’s usual theatrics.

“I sense something, a presence I've not felt since . . .” Vader said, before a dramatic pause, “Obi-Wan is here.”

“Obi-Wan Kenobi? What makes you think so?” Tarkin asked incredulously.

“A tremor in the Force. The last time I felt it was in the presence of my old master,” Vader replied.

“Surely he must be dead by now,” Tarkin argued.

Oh how long Vader had wished for that to be true.
“Don't underestimate the Force,” Vader warned.

“The Jedi are extinct. Their fire has gone out of the universe. You, my friend, are all that's left of their religion,” the Moff replied, displaying his ignorance of such things.

“Obi-Wan is here. The Force is with him,” Vader insisted.

“If you're right, he must not be allowed to escape!” Tarkin exclaimed.

“Escape is not his plan. I must face him . . . alone,” Vader replied.

His parting words designed to keep Tarkin safely out of his way, the Sith Lord swept out of the room.

Vader’s first stop after leaving the Moff was to the hanger with the captured ship.

“There's no one on board, sir,” the naïve officer reported, “According to the log, the crew abandoned ship right after takeoff. It must be a decoy, sir. Several of the escape pods have been jettisoned.”

Someone really needed to educate the officers in the Imperial rank and file that smuggling ships tended to have concealed smuggling compartments. The Sith Lord—who had no trouble sensing there were still passengers aboard the Falcon—was disinclined to take up the task.

“Send a scanning crew aboard. I want every part of this ship checked,” Vader ordered.
After all, if the ship’s occupants were to be transformed into his impromptu rescue party they would need access to appropriate attire.

The Sith Lord’s next destination was the control room for the Death Star’s internal security team.

With abruptness, he marched into the room and wordlessly pointed one black-gloved finger at the door. After the Imperials tripped over themselves in their hast to vacate, Vader was soon alone. Sealing the door behind him, he sat down at the control board and surveyed the bank of monitors.

With the touch of a few computer keys, Vader tapped into the feed from the hanger of interest—just in time to hear blaster fire and the howl of a Wookiee coming from inside the hanger’s command room.

The Sith Lord reflected that if it had been anyone other than himself monitoring the feed the whole station would by that point know the Death Star had been infiltrated. It was not an especially promising start to Vader’s scheme, but the Sith Lord remained confident he could work with what he had.

Before the *Falcon* could leave, the tractor beams would have to be shut down. Obi-Wan would take care of that—that was a given.

Leaving his young companions alone and ripe for the picking.

Entrusted with the Death Star plans, Princess Leia Organa was an important leader in the Rebel Alliance . . . a Rebellion that had by now amassed an annoyingly large amount of credits.

With the opportunity for daring do and the excitement of rescuing a captive princess—and the reward money that could be extracted from the Rebels for her safe return—Vader dangled the bait and waited for a bite.
At the touch of another few computer keystrokes information on the prisoners held on detention block AA-23 was sufficiently unencrypted to allow an astromech droid to easily access it. Soon afterwards a Wookiee ‘prisoner’ and two guards—one far too short to be a stormtrooper—were seen walking the corridors, and boarding a turbolift bound for detention block AA-23.

Switching video feed Vader watched them arrive. The video feed, however, abruptly erupted into a cacophony of blaster fire before cutting out as the cameras were each destroyed. It was not something even the Imperials could miss, and detention control commed in for a status report.

“Uh . . . everything's under control—situation normal,” a very unmilitary-like voice answered.

“What happened?” the officer demanded.

“Had a slight weapons malfunction, but, uh, everything's perfectly all right now . . . We're fine . . . We're all fine here now . . . Thank you—How are you?” the voice replied in an inappropriately conversational tone.

“We're sending a squad up,” the officer replied.

“Uh, negative, negative! We have a reactor leak here, uh, now. Give us a few minutes to lock it down. Uh, large leak, very dangerous . . .” the voice was now urgent.

“Who is this? What's your operating number?” demanded the now very suspicious officer.

“Uh-” the voice said before the sound of blaster fire erupted and the line went dead.

Wow, just wow. There really were no other words.

Vader, who as a younger man had been exceptionally good and infiltrating enemy strong holds, found himself experiencing the long forgotten sensation of deep amusement.
Moving on to the next phase of his plan, the Sith Lord commed detention control and informed them he would take care of the matter personally.

And now it was time for the 501st to make their debut.

‘Vader’s Fist’ was now ‘Vader’s Shepherding Hand,’ and had to strike a delicate balance between herding the heroes and the rescued princess back to their ship unharmed, and not making it blatantly obvious they were being allowed to escape.

Imperial armor was rather shoddy, for which Vader’s old commander in the Clone Wars would have never stood. Imagining Rex’s reaction to standard issued stormtrooper armor, Vader had demanded that the 501st be outfitted with considerably upgraded gear. Although they could resultantly take quite a hit, the members of Vader’s Fist were instructed to periodically ‘die’ and keep up appearances in master’s current charade.

In hindsight, Vader reflected that he should have let the escapes leave the detention block before the 501st arrived to chase them. Unfortunately, the stormtroopers had already barged in and blocked the main entrance.

The rescue party was supposed to head to the far end of the corridor, to the small access door Vader had rendered easily hotwireable. They did not know this, however, and were not above some improvisation of their own. Pinned down in the corridor, they jumped into the nearby trash compactor instead . . . which almost immediately begun one of its processing cycles.

Wonderful.

“Threepio! Come in Threepio! . . . Where could he be?! Threepio!” a frantic voice came over a
Vader was simultaneously in shock at how small the galaxy continue to be—and coming to the realizing he had neglected to stop the shift change in the hanger control room near the freighter—when a prissy mechanical voice finally answered.

“Are you there, sir? . . . We’ve had some problems—”

“Will you shut up and listen to me?! Shut down all the garbage mashers on the detention level, will ya?! Do you copy!?”

Vader knew if that really was Threepio down there he had likely turned off his comlink at an inopportune time—and would absolutely not act fast enough to keep the kids from getting squashed.

Waiting as long as he dared, the Sith Lord finally shut off the trash compactor himself.

With triumphant whoops coming over the com from the still alive kids, Vader let the droids open the door—worried that he had already tipped his hand too much.

Making sure the surrounding area remained clear, Vader ordered the 501st to hold off resuming their pursuit while the kids cleaned up.

He then sat back heavily in his chair. For, finally accepting that ‘golden protocol droid’ in question really was the droid he had built as a child, Vader now had a decision to make.
For where Threepio went, also went Artoo.

Anyone with half a brain would know not to trust Threepio with sensitive information like the coordinates of their secret base. Artoo, however, was another matter entirely.

Artoo, who was likely carrying around a lot more than the plans for the Death Star.

There was a real possibility that someone among the Alliance had figured out the value of Artoo’s unwiped memory, and left it intact—likely including the coordinates, or at the very least clues, to the location of the Rebel base.

Tarkin and the other Imperials were too by the book when it came to security protocol with droids to ever consider such a thing. Vader—who himself had never wiped Artoo’s memory—knew better.

As part of his convoluted plan, the Sith Lord had already convinced Tarkin to leave the droids alone—that the plans were the only sufficient incentive to send the princess and her rescuers flying straight back to the Rebel base in a tracked ship.

With the revelation of the droids’ identity, however, Vader knew the most responsible course of action was to raid the little astromech’s memory—that the dual prize of both the missing plans and the location of the Rebel base was sitting squarely in his grasp.

The thought, however, of Artoo falling into Imperial hands and being disassembled did not sit well with Vader for some reason. He refused, however, to attribute it to lingering sentiment. He also did not examine too closely his prioritization of a plot to get the location of the Rebel base that included getting Leia off the Death Star over the far easier one sitting right in front of him.
So Vader said nothing, and moved forward with his preexisting scheme.

Strange events were also in motion, Vader reflected.

First there was the awakening in the Force. Then Obi-Wan had finally come out of hiding. It was not, however, just the return of Obi-Wan’s presence that Vader felt. There was another faint one, not yet fully in tune with the Force, but there. Almost familiar . . .

_The boy . . ._

Things were changing and something was happening—what exactly, Vader had no idea.

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Although the utility room off of the trash compactor was monitored by audio surveillance only, Vader could tell the kids had dried off and appeared to be ready to get moving again. He alerted the 501st to be ready, even as he continued to listen in to their conversation.

“If we can just avoid any more female advice, we ought to be able to get outta here,” said a cocky male voice—likely belonging to Captain Solo.

An alarm began to blare somewhere in the room and spooked the Wookiee, who started to roar. The smuggler apparently raised his blaster towards the offending machinery much to the princess’ dismay.
“No, wait! They'll hear!” she yelled.

Captain Solo did not listen to her, and the 501st did in fact hear his shot.

“Listen . . . I don't know who you are or where you came from, but from now on, you do as I tell you, ‘kay?” Leia announced with ill-tempered bossiness.

Vader knew from personal experience that hell had no fury like an angry petite brunette. Captain Solo, however, plowed on.

“Look, Your Worshipfulness, let's get one thing straight. I take orders from just one person . . . me,” he barked back.

“It’s a wonder you're still alive,” Leia retorted with her usual insightfulness before demanding, “Will somebody get this big walking carpet out of my way?”

To say that the princess was unimpressed with her bumbling liberators was a vast understatement. As a younger man, Vader had mounted countless successful rescue mission, and was more than competent. His current resources, however, were rather limited and Leia was just going to have to deal.

Vader waited until the kids were practically back to the Falcon before sending the 501st to ‘find them’ and push them the rest of the way. The detachment of his stormtroopers Vader had sent aboard the Falcon reported that the homing beacon and back ups were all in place.
The Sith Lord then rose from his chair and left the room. He needed to give Tarkin an update in person—especially if he wanted the Moff to continue to stay out of the way. The annoying task completed, Vader returned to the security command room.

To find, however, that the situation had devolved into a frenzied mess.

Captain Solo and the Wookiee were now chasing a group of stormtroopers who—handcuffed by their order not to shoot them—where running away. The princess and the boy were on a completely different level, and after taking a bad turn were heading away from the ship.

For a superweapon that could blow up a planet, the Imperials somehow still managed to the Death Star—and themselves—too seriously. As a result, Vader found the current absurdity of a bunch of kids running loose in the vainglorious monstrosity and leading stormtroopers in a chaotic mess of a merry chase highly fitting.

Wishing he could see the look on Tarkin’s face as the Moff watched it unfold, Vader himself did something he had not done in decades . . . he threw his head back and laughed.

Getting the kids back to the hangar and aboard the now trackable *Falcon* continued to be an exercise in herding lothcats—but the 501st finally managed it. And Vader again rose from his chair.

It was now time to take care of some unfinished business.

Obi-Wan knew what he was doing sneaking around in enemy territory, and did not appear on any of the monitors. Vader, however, knew his old master was here. And while the kids would be allowed to leave—their Jedi companion would not be joining them.

After double-checking that Obi-Wan had successfully deactivated the tractor beams, Vader ignited his red lightsaber and strode from the room.
In the corridor near the *Falcon*, Vader finally came face to face with the man who had once been his closest friend.

The man who left him limbless and burning on the fiery slopes of Mustafar.

“I’ve been waiting for you, Obi-Wan,” Vader greeted him, “We meet again at last. The circle is now complete. When I left you, I was but the learner. Now *I* am the master.”

“Only a master of evil,” Obi-Wan replied.

Igniting his own lightsaber, Obi-Wan struck first. Vader block and parried. Red and blue sabers flashed and crackled as they repeatedly clashed.

The years had not been kind to either of them. Vader was half a man and Obi-Wan was an old one, and their duel was but a shadow of their last encounter.

“My powers are weak, old man,” Vader taunted.

“You can’t win,” Obi-Wan countered, “If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine.”

Vader did not know what Obi-Wan was talking about, and did not care.
“You should not have come back,” the Sith Lord replied, as he again lashed out.

In the hanger, the kids were finally making a run for the *Falcon*.

The boy abruptly stopped running, however, his attention seized by the lightsaber duel.

“Ben?” the boy exclaimed.

Both Vader and Obi-Wan glanced over.

Seeing Leia and the boy running together, a small smile Vader did not understand at the time tugged at the corner of Obi-Wan’s mouth.

The old Jedi then raised his saber and left himself open to a fatal blow.

Vader swung his lightsaber through Obi-Wan with all his pent up ferocity and pain of the last two decades. But as his saber reached the other Force user, Obi-Wan seemed to somehow pass into the Force and vanish just before Vader’s kill stroke reached him.

Obiwan had cut off his limbs and was responsible for his current state, and Vader was enraged to be robbed of the opportunity similarly slice up the other man’s body. All that was left of the once great Jedi master, however, was a brown robe lying on the ground.
“NO!” screamed the boy, raising his blaster and firing in Vader’s direction.

The boy . . .

Vader was again struck by the almost familiar Force signature the youth was emitting.

The kids, however, absolutely needed to get onto their ship and leave.

Reaching out through the Force Vader closed the blastdoors, and in a few minutes the *Falcon*—finally—lifted off and shot out of the hanger and into space.

Vader returned the bridge of the Death Star and stood with Tarkin as they watched the *Falcon* jump to hyperspace.

“You're sure the homing beacon is secure aboard their ship?” Tarkin asked before declaring, “I'm taking an awful risk, Vader . . . this had better work.”

It was an awful risk.

Everyone from the Emperor right on down the Imperial chain of command, however, was obsessed with finding the Rebel base.
Believing in the indestructability of Death Star, Tarkin considered letting the plans go to be minimal and acceptable risk for the chance to triumphantly located and crush the Rebel Alliance in one fell swoop.

Vader, however, knew the full magnitude of what they had done.

For all his intimidating physical presence and awesome power with the Force, it was often overlooked that perhaps Vader’s greatest asset was still his brain. A tactical genius during the Clone Wars, the Force user alone seemed to consider finding the Rebels completely unnecessary.

All they really needed to do was use Death Star to destroy Chandrila, the home planet of Rebel Alliance leader Mon Mothma, who needed to be taught a personal and painful lesson. Next up would likely be Mon Cal, followed by Alderaan. With the Alliance leaders’ home planets obliterated or scheduled for annihilation, the Rebellion would be brought to its knees without the Empire ever located the blasted base.

Vader, however, did not really care, and did not bother pointing out the alternative plan.

Beyond that, while others believed that the man who designed the Death Star had not managed to sabotage his legacy, Vader knew in his bones that ensnaring a man into Imperial service after destroying his family was a very different thing than holding his genuine allegiance.

Galen Erso was a traitor to the Empire.

And there were, after all, different kinds of legacies.
Krennic had killed Erso’s wife, but their child—a daughter—had slipped through his fingers. Vader idly wondered if Erso’s daughter had played some part in stealing the Death Star plans, and was resisting the Empire on behalf of her enslaved father who could not.

With that understanding came the knowledge that Vader had talked Tarkin into taking an outrageous risk—totally out of proportion with the possibly gain—a risk that was profoundly reckless even by the Sith Lord’s lacks standard.

Vader’s inadvisable plan, however, was nevertheless successful.

Tracking the escapees to Yavin IV, the Death Star soon dropped out of hyperspace and began making its way slowly around the gas giant’s orbit to put the small moon in range.

“This will be a day long remembered . . . It has seen the end of Kenobi, and will soon see the end of the Rebellion,” Vader commented mollifyingly to Tarkin—although his words were far from being a guaranteed outcome.

The truth was Vader was cutting this one way too close—a point that was reinforced when Rebel fighters began attacking a very specific part of the Death Star.

“Prepare my ship,” Vader barked into his comlink.

He well aware that he bore a rather high degree of responsibility for the Rebel’s having a fighting chance, and that he really should make an effort to stop them.

Having already sent the 501st away on a nonexistent errand, moreover, the Sith Lord had no interest in being aboard the technological terror should the Rebels succeed in blowing it up—and he was getting off this death trap.

Picking up a pair of TIE pilots to cover him, Vader made his way to his own fighter left the hanger
at top speed.

Once outside, Vader made quick work of picking off three B-wing, followed by a similar group of X-wings that appeared to be trying to hit a tiny exhaust port with proton torpedoes.

A new trio of X-wings entered the trench at much higher speed.

Vader and his wingmen quickly gave chase.

The left flanking X-wings took a hit and abruptly pulled up.

“Let him go—stay on the leader,” Vader barked to the accompanying TIEs, before turning the fighter on the right into a fireball.

One last fighter remained.

But there was something different about this X-wing pilot.

“The Force is strong with this one,” Vader commented.

He took a shot, but only succeeded in hitting the fighter’s astromech droid.
Reaching out with the Force, Vader was finally able to identify the remaining pilot as the youth who had recently left Death Star.

*The boy...*

The recognition coincided with the X-wing drifting into the center of Vader’s scope.

“I have you now,” Vader declared, and his thumbs moved to press down on the trigger.

But even as the words left his mouth the sense of familiarity again arose in his mind.

*Where had he felt this Force signature before?*

The hesitation was brief but proved to still too much of a delay.

Out of nowhere the *Millennium Falcon* swooped in, blew up his escorts, sent Vader shot missing wide and his TIE spinning off into space.

And as the Death Star exploded it suddenly came to Vader where he had felt that Force presence before.
The boy was his son.

It was impossible . . . But it was true.

Later, as Vader lay in agony recovering from the waves of lighting the Emperor had nearly killed him with in punishment over the fiasco of the Death Star’s destruction, the Sith Lord had time to reflect.

If his son was alive then part of Padmé was alive too—he had not completely destroyed his family.

With that revelation, Vader felt a spark of Anakin Skywalker flicker back to life with new hope.

Chapter End Notes

I think one of the more amazing things about Star Wars is that looking back at Vader's actions in ANH, Anakin--in all of his flaws and personality quirks--is still clearly visible in that suit.

Thanks so much for reading, and for all the kudos and comments!
Dark Father

Chapter Summary

In which Vader schemes some more, less unwittingly interacts with his children—and makes a power play for Sith Lord master.

Vader’s POV of the Empire Strikes Back, and includes a reference to Clone Wars S3E18, The Citadel.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 17: Dark Father

The destruction of the Death Star had taken the elite in the Imperial military down several pegs—or outright killed them. Resultantly, Vader’s super-class Star Destroyer Executor was now the
baddest thing in the sky, and the Sith Lord himself was in sole command of the Imperial Fleet.

Vader was also again charged with chasing down the Rebel Alliance—which was preferable to having anything to do with the new Death Star that, in his power hungry madness, the Emperor already had under construction.

It also coincided nicely with Vader’s new obsession: finding his son.


No one knew much about the young Rebel who had come out of nowhere and destroyed the Empire’s superweapon.

As Vader pondered recent events, however, things fell into place rather easily.

The Death Star plans had not randomly ended up orbiting Tatooine. No, the Rebels were there looking for Obi-Wan. Obi-Wan who had gone into hiding on the Force-dampened planet after the Purge . . . with Luke. The Jedi Master had taken the baby to Anakin’s stepfamily. Lars would be dead by now, but Owen and Beru were likely still there. Vader had unconsciously avoided going back there in his search, and there Obi-Wan and the boy had remained hidden for eighteen years.

The more Vader thought about it the more he knew that was exactly what had happened. That had, after all, been Anakin’s plan to hide his family from the Jedi.

Vader, furthermore, was utterly enraged that in spite of his best efforts to wipe them out the Jedi has still managed to take his son from him.

By the time of Luke’s birth, the Jedi turn Sith Lord had already done terrible things. Much of the
reason he stayed on the dark side, however, was out of rage, despair, and hopelessness at the loss of his family.

Obi-Wan and Master Yoda had believed Anakin’s choice for the dark side had been irrevocably made. Convinced that the young Force user was beyond redemption they hide his son from him.

But if he had been aware of the truth, what would Anakin have done?

There was always the possibility that the outcome would have been exactly the same, if not worse.

The Forcer user, however, knew in his heart that things would have been different.

Before her tragic death, Padmé had begged him to run away with her and raise their son, and he had almost done it. Anakin had understood what it was to grow up without a father. For Luke, therefore, he would have found the strength that he could not find for himself or even Padmé.

Knowing his son was alive and needed him, he would have returned to the Light and resumed being Anakin—particularly back in the beginning when ‘Vader’ had not been so firmly set as he was now.

He would have left Palpatine, taken his son, and disappeared.

Perhaps it would have been the opening he needed to reconcile with Obi-Wan. Maybe they could have hidden his son on Tatooine together. Anakin would not have survived long, but his son would have known him for a little while, and Anakin would have left a better legacy than the one Vader had created.

Luke would have still grown up in the desert under Obi-Wan’s watchful eye, but Anakin would have been out of the way.

There would have been no Vader doing the Emperor’s bidding, and the Sith Lord knew the galaxy would have been a very different place without him. He had done a great deal of heavy lifting for
Palpatine over the last two decades. And not matter what Tarkin or Krennic thought, without Vader’s shadowy assistance and protection they would have never succeeded in finishing the Death Star.

The Jedi, however, had robbed him of that crucial choice.

But now Vader knew his son was alive . . . and he was determined to find him.

That, however, was as far as the Force user’s conscious mind got in contemplating the currently shifting landscape.

Stuck in the mentality of a slave, Anakin had not believed he could break with the Jedi. Palpatine had an even stronger mental hold on Vader, who had to settle for standard acts of disobedience against a master of whom he would never be free.

Something deep inside the Force users whispered, however, that his son’s presence opened up possibilities for him that had not existed before.

It was with his considerable abandon, therefore, that Vader chased after Luke Skywalker.

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The galaxy, however, was obnoxiously large, and Vader spent three years after the Battle of Yavin scouring it for the new Rebel base.

To the Sith Lord’s infinite annoyance the Imperial Fleet also required more micromanaging and the motivation of his presence far beyond what than the soldiers he had commanded during the
Clone Wars ever had.

Vader repeatedly found Imperial officers to be even stupider than Separatist battle droids, and regularly longed for his days commanding a unit of intelligent and competent Clone troopers.

The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that with the Death Star had died a disproportionate number of the relatively proficient senior and midlevel Imperial officers. In danger of running through the entire remaining officer core, therefore, Vader was forced to exercise a degree of patience, and engage in a feeling out process to determine which officers had potential . . . and which did not.

And so it was Kendal Ozzel who currently held the position of Imperial Fleet Admiral when a promising lead on the Rebel’s whereabouts finally came in.

“I think we've got something, sir. The report is only a fragment . . . from a probe droid in the Hoth system, but it's the best lead we've had,” Captain Piett relayed to the admiral.

“We have thousands of probe droids searching the galaxy,” Ozzel replied dismissively, “I want proof, not leads.”

Overhearing their conversation, Vader did not like the direction in which it was going and stepped in.

“You found something?” he asked the captain of the Executor.

“Yes, my lord,” Piett said, calling up an image that the ill-fated probe droid has sent.

One look was all Vader needed.
“That’s it! The Rebels are there!” Vader declared.

“My lord, there are so many uncharted systems. It could be smugglers—” Ozzel said with patronizing patience.

“That is the system,” the Sith Lord cut him off, “And I’m sure Skywalker is with them.”

Ozzel continued to look dubious and annoyed, but held his tongue.

“Set your course for the Hoth system,” Vader ordered the admiral, his suspicions growing that Ozzel would soon be deemed to “lack potential.”

In Vader’s impatience, the Imperial Fleet’s flight to the Hoth system was maddeningly long. Finally General Veers—whom the Admiral had disrespectfully sent in his stead—appeared to communicate their arrival.

Along with some unfortunate news . . .

“The fleet has moved out of light speed . . . ComScan has detected an energy field protecting an area of the sixth planet of the Hoth system. The field is strong enough to deflect any bombardment,” the general reported.

“The Rebels are alerted to our presence,” Vader replied, fury quickly escalating, “Admiral Ozzel came out of lightspeed too close to the system.”
“He felt surprise was wiser—” Veers attempted a justification.

“He is as clumsy as he is stupid,” Vader snapped.

Dismissing the general to prepare for a surface attack, Vader commed the bridge. The image of Ozzel standing next to Piett soon filled the large monitor.

“Lord Vader. The fleet has moved out of lightspeed, and we’re preparing to—” Ozzel’s pompous report was abruptly cut short as he gasped for air.

“You have failed me for the last time, Admiral,” the Sith Lord hissed.

As Ozzel continued to wheeze before falling dead to the ground, Vader turned his attention to the other officer.

“Captain Piett . . . Make ready to land our troops beyond their energy field, and deploy the fleet so that nothing gets off the system . . . You are in command now, Admiral Piett!”

“Thank you, Lord Vader,” Piett replied, awkwardly attempting to simultaneously appear grateful and not look at Ozzel dead body lying at his feet.

Although the error in the chain of command had been dealt with, Vader’s fury remained unabated, as any failure on the part of the Fleet ultimately reflected on Vader—both to Palpatine and most especially to himself.

Ineptitude that threatened to raise Vader deep seeded belief in his own incompetence and failure to his conscious awareness, moreover, was a crime punishable to death.
The Sith Lord hoped his new admiral had more longevity than his predecessor.

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Under Veer’s command the shield generator on Hoth was soon down, and an Imperial ground assault was well underway of the new Rebel base.

Vader, however, was done delegating important tasks, and himself lead the winter-gear clad 501st through the now deserted base.

They arrived in the man hanger just in time to watch the Millennium Falcon take off and race towards deep space.

Soon Vader felt his son’s Force signature also disappear, indicating that Luke had jumped to hyperspace along with the rest of the Rebel Fleet.

If Vader ever had mastered the art of preventing people from dying he would have now resurrected Ozzel—so he could kill him again.

Fortunately, not quite all the Rebel forces had escaped to lightspeed . . . as the Millennium Falcon appeared to have a broken hyperdrive.

And apparently neither Artoo nor another competent astromech was on board to fix it quickly.
Vader was not about to let his only lead to finding his son slip through his fingers, and soon the whole Hoth taskforce was pursuing the solitary ship.

Although the Sith Lord had long thought the *Falcon* strongly resembled a piece of junk, he quickly got an education that looks were quite deceiving when it came to the lightning fast, highly maneuverable ship.

Gone too was the hapless nerfhearding oaf chasing after stormtroopers who were ordered not to fire on him. In the *Falcon*, Captain Solo was a force to be reckoned with.

Vader watched as the *Falcon* continued to avoid capture—somehow causing a near collision between three Star Destroyers no less. As one of the only other pilots who could pull off that kind of move, Vader had to acknowledge that perhaps he was chasing his successor as the best pilot in the galaxy.

As he watched the other pilot’s theatrics, the Sith Lord also wondered if he was perhaps chasing not only the ship but also the pilot who had made the amazing Kessel run . . . and with a growing scowl began wondering if Han Solo had played a role in the missing *coaxium hyperdrive fuel* that had subsequently funded the Rebel Alliance.

In a last ditch crazy move, the *Falcon* headed into an asteroid field to avoid pursuit. If Captain Solo thought he could outdo Vader in recklessness, however, he was in for an education.

“*Asteroids do not concern me, Admiral—I want that ship, not excuses,“* Vader informed Piett.

The newly minted admiral blanched, but obeyed . . . and on Vader’s orders threw the entire Imperial Fleet into the highly destructive asteroid field after the single freighter.

Admiral Piett was not the only one who was unhappy.
“-That, Lord Vader, was the last time they appeared in any of our scopes. Considering the damage we've sustained, they must have been destroyed,” argued the image of an Imperial officer who desperately wanted to move his ship out of harms way.

“No, Captain, they're alive. I want every ship available to sweep the asteroid field until they are found,” the exasperated Sith Lord replied.

Vader shut off the com in disgust, only to see Piett hastily approaching. Soon the admiral stood where the holovid of the other captain had been a moment before, and from the anxiety roiling off him Vader knew he did not come bearing good news.

“Lord Vader, the Emperor commands you to make contact with him,” Piett said.

“Move the ship out of the asteroid field so that we can send a clear transmission,” Vader ordered.

Cursing Palpatine’s impeccable bad timing, the Sith Lord swept off the bridge.

Upon entering his own quarters, Vader took a knee on the black circular holovid platform. After bowing his head in a show of respect, he lifted his gaze to the large holographic image of Palpatine’s head that now filled half the room.

“What is thy bidding, my master?” Vader asked.

“There is a great disturbance in the Force . . . We have a new enemy . . . the young Rebel who destroyed the Death Star,” the Emperor began, his words immediately setting his apprentice on edge.

“I have no doubt this boy is the offspring of . . . Anakin Skywalker,” Palpatine declared.
“How is that possible?” Vader asked—in shock at this brand new information.

“Search your feelings, Lord Vader. You will know it to be true,” the Emperor replied before adding, “He could destroy us.”

A chill went up Vader’s spine, and he was suddenly filled with dread. With difficulty he managed to maintain his composure.

“He's just a boy . . . Obi-Wan can no longer help him,” Vader replied, beginning a subtle defense of his son’s life which now hung in the balance.

“The Force is strong with him,” Palpatine declared, “The son of Skywalker must not become a Jedi.”

Vader knew what the Emperor’s next words would be, and was desperate to stop them from leaving Palpatine’s mouth.

“If he could be turned, he would become a powerful . . . ally,” Vader countered.

“Yes. He would be a great . . . asset,” the Emperor replied, seemingly taken with the idea, “Can it be done?”

What Palpatine was really asking is would Vader allow Luke to kill him and let him take his place as apprentice. For with the Sith there were always—and only—two.

As an alternative to killing his son? . . . Absolutely.
“He will join us or die, Master,” Vader avowed.

After the Emperor’s unnecessarily large holoimage disappeared, his apprentice remained motionless for a few heartbeats.

On the one hand Vader was impressed it had taken Palpatine this long to figure out what was going on. After his triumphant victor over the Jedi, the newly self appointed Emperor had retired from public life and rarely left the Imperial Palace. Although obsessed with rooting out attempts to undermine his power among the military elite, the seclusion also left Palpatine fairly out of touch in other areas.

That it had taken several years for the name of ‘Luke Skywalker’—the Rebellion hero who blew up the Death Star and whose name was reaching legendary proportion as it inspired hope across the galaxy—to reach the Emperor’s ears was a testament to just how oblivious the Emperor could be.

On the other hand, the Palpatine was finally aware of Luke’s growing presence in the Force—which meant Vader was running out of time.

With the stakes suddenly much higher, Vader redoubled his efforts to capture the Falcon, and get back on Luke’s trail. His lack of faith in the Imperials knew no bounds, however, and Vader was not above covering all of his bases with alternative methods.

“Bounty hunters . . . we don’t need their scum,” Admiral Piett muttered under his breath, “Those Rebels won’t escape us.”

Vader disagreed.
“There will be a substantial reward for the one who finds the Millennium Falcon,” Vader announced as he walked down the line of the galaxy’s top hunters.

“You are free to use any methods necessary . . . but I want them alive,” he continued.

Having made himself abundantly clear, he never the less stopped and waggled a black-gloved finger specifically in Boba Fett’s face, “No disintegrations.”

“As you wish,” Fett replied, clearly disappointed.

Vader’s instructions, however, were soon interrupted by Piett.

“Lord Vader, we have them,” the admiral announced with satisfaction . . . no doubt anxious to get the scum of the galaxy off of his bridge.

That report soon proved to be premature.

Soon Captain Needa of the Star Destroyer Avenger stood before the Sith Lord—apologetically groveling for again losing the ship.

“Apology accepted, Captain Needa,” Vader said as he stepped over the captain’s lifeless body.

Two underlings quickly removed Needa’s asphyxiate corpse from the bridge, and the Sith Lord turned his attention to Piett.

“Lord Vader, our ships have completed their scan and found nothing. If the Millennium Falcon went into lightspeed it'll be on the other side of the galaxy now.”
“Alert all commands. Calculate every possible destination along their last known trajectory,” Vader ordered.

“Yes, my lord. We'll find them,” Piett replied with unwarranted confidence.

“Don't fail me again... Admiral,” the Sith Lord told the officer, whose high-ranking title was now a threat.

“Alert all commands. Deploy the fleet,” Piett ordered the com operator.

With the admiral running around giving orders, and bounty hunters tracking down their own leads, Vader never the less knew that the one most likely to find the Falcon was himself.

Piett and the other officers believed the Falcon had jumped to hyperspace. Unlike the upper echelon Imperials, however, Vader was an experienced starfighter pilot and was certain the ship’s hyperdrive was still broken.

As himself a master of improvisation, as a younger man he and Artoo had pulled all kinds of stunts. Vader, therefore, suspected that Captain Solo had likely done something cute. But while Vader had the Force, Captain Solo appeared to rely on his seemingly endless supply of luck.

The Falcon itself was also entering his life at such a frequent occurrence that Vader had long ago commissioned a data search to be conducted for all information regarding the ship itself, and not simply the captain. Aware that the Falcon's previous owner was a man named Lando Calrissian, it did not take Vader long to figure out where in the Anoat system the hyperdriveless Falcon was headed.

After a quick hyperspace jump, Vader soon arrived near Bespin. Stashing the Imperial Fleet nearby but out of sight, the Sith Lord then made his way surreptitiously into Cloud City with a contingent of the 501st. Once on planet Vader sought a meeting with Calrissian—now the Tibanna gas mine's chief administrator—and made all sorts of promises the Sith Lord had no intention of keeping.
After the meeting, Vader idly wondered if Calrissian or Tarkin were more gullible. Probably still Tarkin. For a professional gambler, however, Calrissian was a surprisingly close second. In fairness to Calrissian, Vader had told him exactly what he wanted to hear, which allowed the other man to delude himself from the harsh truth that from the moment Vader had entered the Bespin’s orbit Calrissian had ceased to have any real power.

A minor complication arose in the first phase of Vader’s new plan, however, when one of the more intelligent bounty hunters also figured out how to track the *Falcon* and showed up unexpectedly.

Vader had been recently wishing—quite a bit actually—that the Imperials were more like the Clone troopers of the Grand Army of the Republic. And speaking of the Clone army, Vader was not surprised to find it was Boba Fett, one of the last remaining Clones of template Jango Fett, who had cleverly followed Solo.

Vader had also had the misfortune of knowing Boba Fet since his youth. Although a talented bounty hunter, Boba had always been a little punk, and over the decades had more fully reached his potential.

Since the Sith Lord had gotten there first he certainly was not going to pay the bounty hunter, but he also did not want him causing trouble. The two settled on an arrangement that Fett could take Captain Solo to Jabba the Hutt and collect the bounty on the smuggler’s head after Vader was done with him.

Soon the *Falcon* arrived on Cloud City . . . and Lando Calrissian betrayed his friends.

“We would be honored if you would join us . . .” Vader announced as his quarry entered the room.

Captain Solo reflexively pulled out his blaster and began firing. Anyone else who dared fire on Vader, would have their blots fatally deflected back to them by the Sith Lord’s lightsaber. Rather uncharacteristically, however, Vader simply raised his hand and defensively froze the blaster bolts
before wrenching the weapon out of the younger man’s hand.

Captain Solo used his now empty hand to grab hold of Princess Leia’s—whom Vader was not particularly surprised to find among the party.

Aware that his son was growing strong with the Force—and by now likely experiencing Force visions—Vader set his trap.

For some inexplicable reason he continued to have a massive soft spot for Leia. Although her suffering would have been much more effective bait for his son, Vader choose to torture Captain Solo alone.

Even then, however, Vader made sure the pilot was not permanently damaged. In an uncharacteristic act of thoughtfulness, he then granted Leia’s unspoken wish to be with Captain Solo in the prison cell so she could console him after his ordeal.

The lure cast, it was time for Vader to move on to how he would actually capture his Force sensitive son and get him safely to the Emperor, which was no small feat.

Fortunately, the city had carbonite freezing capabilities.

“This facility is crude, but it should be adequate to freeze Skywalker for his journey to the Emperor,” Vader observed.

Calrissian, however, protested that they had not frozen any life forms here, and Vader was not about to use untested equipment on his son.
“I do not want the Emperor's prize damaged,” he declared, “We will test it on Captain Solo.”

As the prisoners were brought into the chamber, the Sith Lord alone was happy with his plan.

“What if he doesn't survive? He's worth a lot to me,” complained Fett.

As a younger man, Vader had frozen himself and an entire infiltration unit in carbonite to get past a Separatist army life scan reading. Although he was not going to use untested equipment on his son, Vader knew that Captain Solo was probably going to be just fine.

“The Empire will compensate you if he dies,” Vader replied sarcastically, before ordering, “Put him in!”

At that, Han’s Wookiee copilot went berserk and began flinging stormtroopers around, much to the dismay of Threepio, who had somehow ending up in pieces and was strapped to his back. The golden personification of Anakin Skywalker’s anxieties struck up his own cacophony of woe as he unsuccessfully begged Chewbacca to clam down.

Vader reflexively stopped Boba Fett from firing off his blaster and was just getting ready to have the Wookiee stunned, when Captain Solo stepped in.

“Hey! Hey! . . . Listen to me! . . . Chewie, this won't help me . . . The princess—you have to take care of her . . . Do you hear me?” Han shouted at his friend, who begrudgingly acquiesced and calmed down.

Han then turned to Leia.
Their eyes met for a heartbeat, before they both surged forward to lock in a passionate kiss.

As stormtroopers broke them up, the part of Vader’s heart that had thawed ever so slightly was somewhat sorry to be separating the lovers. They would have learned the truth sooner or later, however, that the galaxy was not kind to young love.

*Not that this scoundrel of a smuggler is even remotely worthy of Leia.*

Vader was more than a little surprised by the bizarre and irrelevant thought that flittered through his mind. No matter what his motivations, however, the Sith Lord knew that even if Captain Solo did manage to escape from Jabba the Hutt, Vader was still never letting him see Leia again.

“I love you,” Leia told the young man, her face a picture of heartbreak.

“I know,” Han replied.

*Oh, for goodness sake . . .*

With the situation rapidly deteriorating into something out of a bad holodrama, Vader signaled for the activation switch to finally be flipped.

As the slab of carbonite was lifted from the freezing chamber, the Wookiee let out a howl of despair and Leia fixed Vader with what he had come to think of as her ‘death glare.’

Threepio, however, cheerfully chimed in as only Threepio could.
“They’ve encased him in carbonite. He should be quite well-protected if he survived the freezing process.”

Exactly.

Vader was a little stunned to hear Threepio talk sense.

For Vader knew Boba Fett quiet well, and in spite of the bounty hunter’s protestations the Sith Lord was well aware that traveling encased in carbonite would ensure Captain Solo was delivered to Jabba alive—which with Fett would otherwise be highly questionable.

“He’s alive . . . and in perfect hibernation,” Calrissian reported, and Boba Fett stepped forward to claim his prize.

Of course he was. Good the equipment was working properly.

“Reset the chamber for Skywalker,” Vader ordered, before adding, “Calrissian—take the princess and the Wookiee to my ship.”

“You said they’d be left under my supervision!” Calrissian protested.

*How stupid was this man?*
“I am altering the deal . . . Pray I don’t alter it any further,” Vader replied, ignoring the inadvisability of bringing Leia anywhere near Palpatine and deciding on a whim that he wanted her with him.

With the carbonite chamber reset, everyone else cleared the room . . . leaving Vader alone to await his son’s arrival.

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Although objectively not long, to Vader the wait felt like an eternity. Finally, however, Vader watched from a raised platform as a panel in the floor grating opened . . . and Luke rose into the dimly lit chamber.

His mechanical voice echoing eerily in the large chamber, Vader declared, “The Force is with you, young Skywalker . . . But you are not a Jedi yet.”

After all, if he had been the young Force user would not have been attached to his friends enough for Vader to use them as bait.

Luke made no reply as he slowly walked up the platform’s stairs. Standing before Vader, he unclipped a lightsaber from his belt and ignited the blue blade.

Vader immediately recognized it as Anakin’s lightsaber. The one Obi-Wan had stolen from him on the slopes of Mustafar and had clearly given to Luke . . . the saber and the life of a Jedi that father
had not wanted his son to have.

In answer Vader ignited his red one, and prepared to defend himself.

As Luke stepped forward and swung, red and blue saber blades clashed.

Luke fought with all his might. For Vader, however, it was a master class—his first lesson to his son in the ways of the Force.

“Your destiny lies with me, Skywalker. Obi-Wan knew this to be true,” he told his son, as they fought on.


Even still, Vader had another task to accomplish. Disarming his young opponent, Vader then Force blasted him into the carbonite freezing chamber and flipped the activation lever with the Force . . . only to find Luke had jumped out and was now clinging to the tubes that hung from the ceiling.

“Impressive . . . Most impressive,” Vader told him as he cut the tubing and forced Luke back down to the ground.

Luke called his lightsaber and resumed their duel.
“Obi-Wan has taught you well,” Vader told him.

It was now, however, time for Vader to begin his son’s education in the ways of the Sith.

“You have controlled your fear. Now . . . release your anger . . . Only your hatred can destroy me,” Vader declared.

And Luke did hate him—the monster who killed Obi-Wan and the father he needed so badly.

Tapping into his rage, Luke caught the Sith Lord off guard and he fell off the edge of the platform and down to the level below. Stalking each other through the Force, they eventually reconverged and resumed their fight.

Vader, however, was done playing. Luke soon found himself heavily outmatched, and backed onto the end of a catwalk that jutted out into the center of the city’s reactor shaft.

“You are beaten!” Vader said, pointing his lightsaber at Luke’s chest as the boy lay sprawled on the deck, “It is useless to resist—don't let yourself be destroyed as Obi-Wan did!”

The mention of Obi-Wan roused Luke to fight on, and he rose to resume hacking away at Vader with Anakin’s lightsaber. The Sith Lord, however, had grown tired of that lightsaber—a reminder of the life he used to have and the person he used to be.

With a flick of his red saber, Vader sent Anakin’s blue one falling down the reactor shaft . . . along with Luke’s severed hand.
Unarmed and in pain, Luke still resisted and crawled out past the barrier to the very end of the catwalk. Finally unable to back away any further, however, the young Force user was now forced to listen to Vader.

It was then that the new possibility Vader had long sensed brewing in his mind fully surfaced.

For with the Sith there were only two.

But Palpatine did not have to be one of them . . .

Long the apprentice, Vader finally made a power play for master.

“Luke . . . You do not yet realize your importance,” Vader began, his voice taking on a tone of new urgency, “You have only begun to discover your power . . . Join me and I will complete your training. With our combined strength we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to the galaxy!”


“If you only knew the power of the dark side,” Vader answered.

This line of persuasion, however, was not working, and Vader switched tacks to one of a more personal nature.
“Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father . . .” Vader began.

“He told me enough . . . He told me you killed him,” Luke replied, his voice dripping with hate.

*Of course he did.*

Vader recognized one of Obi-Wan’s ‘truths from a certain point of view’ . . . that was really a lie.

The irony was not lost on Vader—who was trapped in the service of the father of lies, and who told more lies and truths on a daily basis—that he was the one left to speak such an important truth.

“No,” Vader corrected Luke, “. . . I am your father.”

As Vader watched, a look of horror came over his son’s face.


“Search your feelings . . . You *know* it to be true!” Vader countered.


Having shattered Luke’s worldview to the core, Vader again made his pitch.
“Luke, you can *destroy the Emperor*. He has foreseen this! . . . It is your *destiny!*” Vader proclaimed, “Join me and *together* we can rule the galaxy as father and son.


“Come with me . . . It is the only way!” Vader said with insistence—a ‘please’ implicit in his outstretched hand.

With outstretched black-gloved hand, he had made similar pitches to both Padmé and Ahsoka decades earlier . . . and as the two women had Luke now refused his offer.

It, was after all, was not the only way—and preferring suicide to joining the Sith—Luke let go of the catwalk and fell into the bottomless shaft of the reactor core.

Vader finally let his arm drop, and looked on in deep sadness as his son disappeared from sight.

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All was not lost, however, as the Sith Lord was well aware that Luke was not actually going to die.

Activating his comlink Vader set in motion one of his innumerable contingency plans.

Calrissian had finally stopped obeying Vader’s instructions. Cut off from his own ship, Lando had
predictably boarded the *Falcon* with Leia and the Wookiee, and then picked up Luke, who was dangling from the underside of the floating city. The young Force user boarded the freighter safely and without objection—unlike if one of Imperial ship waiting below to catch him had attempted a rescue.

The *Falcon* then made for deep space . . . with TIE fighter of course herding them in the right direction.

“They’ll be in range of our tractor beam in moments, my lord,” Admiral Piett informed Vader as he strode onto the bridge of the *Executor*. 

“Did your men deactivate the hyperdrive on the *Millennium Falcon*?” Vader asked.

“Yes, my lord,” Piett answered.

“Good . . . Prepare the boarding party and set your weapons for stun,” Vader ordered.

Unable to wait until the ship was aboard the Star Destroyer to again speak with his son, however, Vader reached out through the Force.


“Father,” Luke replied, much more calmly and more accepting of that truth than the last time they spoke.

“Son, come with me,” Vader said, tenderness filling his voice.

The younger Force user did not readily reply, but Vader sensed they would have a much more productive conversation next time around once he was on board the *Executor*. 
“Luke, it is your destiny . . .” Vader repeated.

Vader sensed his son was about to answer him, even as the bridge crew prepared to activate the tractor beams-

-When the *Falcon* abruptly jumped to hyperspace and disappeared.

The initial shock passing, a pall fell over the entire bridge and all the color drained from Piett’s face.

Vader, however, just stared out of the transparasteel at the spot the *Falcon*—his son—had been a few seconds before.

The organics were not the only passengers aboard the freighter. And Threepio was the only droid.

Artoo was with them this time.

Artoo who was now his son’s astromech, and who had arrived on Cloud City in Luke’s X-wing.

Artoo who had reactivated the hyperdrive.
Over the course of their acquaintance, many had overlooked and underestimated the little droid—much to Vader’s personal advantage as a younger man.

Now he had succumbed to the mistake himself . . . and it cost him dearly.

Although his plan had failed, Vader felt none of his usual rage—only profound sadness.

For the next time he encountered his son it would be on Palpatine’s terms.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading, and for all the kudos and comments!

Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

LOTS Podcast: Reylo vs. Anidala - Couple Contrasts in Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdnZHfFf2-A&t=3s

Artwork: The Making of the Empire Strikes Back (production photo), page 221.
Chapter Summary

In which Vader prepares to make the ultimate sacrifice to save his son’s life.

Vader’s POV of the Return of the Jedi.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 18: No Greater Love

Although the Emperor may have been out of touch about a great many things, Vader’s attempted coup caused a big enough disturbance in the Force to reach Palpatine’s notice.

Conceding that excessive punishment just fueled Vader’s rebelliousness, the Emperor opted for being superficially nice while shortened his apprentice’s leash considerably.

Vader’s resultantly found that his reprieve from being involved in the second Death Star project
was at an end—and his punishment was to endure the aggravation of cowing the insufficient workforce into finishing the latest iteration of the superweapon in the Emperor’s unreasonable timeframe.

The Sith Lord arrived on the battle station in a foul temper and with little patience for the obsequious reception with which the Imperials welcomed him.

“Lord Vader, this is an unexpected pleasure. We're honored by your presence,” Moff Jerjerrod fawned nervously.

“You may dispense with the pleasantries, Commander. I'm here to put you back on schedule,” the Sith Lord retorted.

“I assure you, Lord Vader, my men are working as fast as they can,” Jerjerrod argued.

“Perhaps I can find new ways to motivate them,” Vader menaced.

“But the Emperor asks the impossible . . . I need more men,” the young officer whispered pleadingly.

It never ceased to amaze Vader the number of Imperials who expected Palpatine to be reasonable.

Although the Emperor’s insistence on the construction of a second Death Star even after its proven vulnerability as additional evidence, only a handful of the more level headed officers in the higher ranks of the Imperial fleet had began to understand what Vader had known for decades—but had still come to know too late.

Palpatine was an insane megalomaniac.
The young Moff in charge of constructions, however, was apparently not among that pathetically small group.

"Then perhaps you can tell him when he arrives," Vader suggested to Jerjerrod.

"The Emperor's coming here?" the Moff replied, visibly taken aback.

"That is correct, Commander—and he is most displeased with your apparent lack of progress," Vader said.

"We shall double our efforts," Jerjerrod responded with visible resolve.

"I hope so, Commander . . . for your sake," Vader threatened, "The Emperor is not as forgiving as I am . . ."

In the end, Vader did not have to asphyxiate as many workers as he originally thought for the rest of the crew to get the message that they were expected to work themselves to death of their own volition. Construction, therefore, was back on inordinately unrealistic schedule by the time Palpatine made his long anticipated arrival.

And arrive the Emperor did, with all the pomp and circumstance befitting one of the ruler of the galaxy’s rare public appearances.

As Palpatine’s shuttle arrived and his red Praetorian guardsmen filed out, Vader took a knee and bowed his head—a model of dutiful loyalty.

"Rise, my friend," Palpatine greeted his servitude bound apprentice, who had recently plotted to overthrow him.
“The Death Star will be completed on schedule,” Vader informed him, well aware that was not why Palpatine was really here.

Unbeknownst to the Imperials, the Emperor was not leaving the fortress of his Imperial Palace to oversee completion of the second Death Star, but rather to ensure the successful acquisition of a different superweapon—his new apprentice.

Vader, after all, had demonstrated that in this task he required . . . more active supervision.

“You've done well, Lord Vader,” Palpatine said before moving to a topic of mutual interest, “. . . And now I sense you wish to continue your search for young Skywalker.”

“Yes, my master,” Vader conceded.

“Patience, my friend,” Palpatine replied, “In time, he will seek you out.”

“He will come to me?” Vader asked, more than a little surprised given how things had gone the last time with Luke.

“I have foreseen it . . . His compassion for you will be his undoing,” Palpatine answered with great self-assurance, “He will come to you . . . and then you will bring him before me.”

Skywalker the younger had refused to join Vader in overthrowing the Emperor and ruling the galaxy. To both Vader and Palpatine there was, therefore, only one other way this situation would play out. Luke would turn to the dark side, kill Vader, and take his place as Palpatine’s apprentice. And if he refused . . . Palpatine would kill him.

It was as simple as that.
The prospect of his son falling into Palpatine’s clutches turned Vader’s stomach. His son dying, however, was exponentially worse.

And for a slave of the Sith Lord, there was only one acceptable response.

“As you wish, my master,” Vader said with resignation.

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Soon Palpatine’s predictions were proven correct, and on the moon of Endor Vader’s son once again stood before him.

Luke had grown a lot in the last year—in poise and in the Force.

“This is the Rebel that surrendered to us,” the officer told the Sith Lord, “He was armed only with this—”

The young Imperial briefly held up a lightsaber before dropping it into Vader’s outstretched hand.

“Good work, Commander,” Vader replied as he dismissed him.

Soon Vader and Luke were alone.
“The Emperor has been expecting you,” Vader informed his son.


“So, you have accepted the truth,” the Sith Lord observed.

“I've accepted the truth that you were once Anakin Skywalker—my father,” his son replied.

With his words, Luke touched a deep nerve, and Vader reflexively lashed out in ire.

“That name no longer has any meaning for me!” he snapped.

“It is the name of your true self. You've only forgotten!” Luke countered, “I know there is good in you. The Emperor hasn't driven it from you fully.”

Luke then turned away towards the forest, and played what Vader could tell were all his cards, “That was why you couldn't destroy me. That's why you won't bring me to your Emperor now.”

Vader looked down at his son’s lightsaber held in his hand.

“I see you have constructed a new lightsaber. Your skills are complete,” Vader commented, his voice filling with pride. He ignited it and it glowed green in the dim light. “Indeed you are powerful as the Emperor has foreseen.”

Luke, however, switched tacks and plowed on.
“Come with me,” he countered, an echo of his mother.

Vader knew he should have gone with Padmé all those years ago, but he had made a different decision and now it was too late.

“You don't know the power of the dark side... I must obey my master,” Vader said, a note of sadness coming into his voice.

“I will not turn... and you'll be forced to kill me,” Luke replied, demonstrating his total lack of understanding of the situation.

“If that is your destiny...” Vader replied to his son, whom he was absolutely not killing.

“Search your feelings, Father. You can't do this! I feel the conflict within you. Let go of your hate!” Luke cried.

A slave of some sort for all of his life, first on Tatooine, then with the Jedi, and finally with Palpatine, Vader was trapped in a prison not made of steel but in his mind—and there he would remain for the rest of his life.

“It is too late for me, son,” Vader said with sorrowful resignation, “The Emperor will show you the true nature of the Force—He is your master now.”

“Then my father is truly dead,” Luke replied bitterly.
It would have probably been better for the galaxy if Vader had died a long time ago. He had stayed alive all these year, however, to not dishonor his wife’s sacrifice.

But to save their son he was prepared to lay down his life.

Padmé would understand.

At the Sith Lord’s signal, stormtroopers escorted Luke to the waiting shuttle. Still holding his son’s lightsaber—the weapon that would kill him—Vader followed behind.

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What followed was a short flight to the Death Star, a long but silent turbolift ride with his son to the Emperor’s throne room, and a walk up to Palpatine himself that felt like an eternity.

As he had all those years ago when switching apprentices from Dooku to Anakin, the Emperor slowly turned his throne away from the viewport to face the pair.

He then addressed Luke, “Welcome, young Skywalker.”

“I have been expecting you,” Palpatine continued in a grating voice and evil smile that chilled Vader to the bone, “I'm looking forward to completing your training . . . In time, you will call me master.”

“You're gravely mistaken,” Luke said, clinging to his resolve with bravado, “You won't convert me as you did my father.”
“Oh no, my young Jedi . . . You will find that it is you who are mistaken . . . about a great many things,” Palpatine replied.

“His lightsaber,” Vader interjected before handing it to the Emperor.


Actually, it looked nothing like either Anakin’s distinctive hilt or Vader’s new one. It looked more like Obi-Wan’s—the saber that had nearly killed Vader on Mustafar. It was somehow fitting that one so similar would now finish the job.

“By now you must know your father can never be turned from the dark side,” Palpatine declared, “So will it be with you . . .”

“You're wrong,” Luke countered, “Your overconfidence is your weakness.”

“Your faith in your friends is yours,” Palpatine snapped.

“It is pointless to resist, my son,” Vader told Luke, who was only delaying the inevitable.

Still Luke refused to be cowed.

Palpatine, however, knew what he was doing. As the Emperor laid out the details of the trap he had set for both the Rebels on Endor and the Alliance Fleet—Vader felt Luke’s resolve begin to waiver.
“As you can see, your friends have failed,” Palpatine gloated, “From here, you will witness the final destruction of the Alliance and the end of your insignificant Rebellion!”

Forced to stand at the viewport and watch as the Rebel fleet begin to be obliterated by the operational second Death Star, Luke’s hope completely failed . . . and his eyes fell onto his lightsaber lying next to the Emperor.

“You want this . . . don’t you?” Palpatine crooned evilly, as he stroked Luke’s lightsaber.

“The hate is swelling in you now . . . Good . . . I can feel your anger,” he continued, a look of ecstasy coming over his grotesque face, “Take your Jedi weapon—use it—I am unarmed. Give in to your anger! Strike me down with all of your hatred . . . and your journey towards the dark side will be complete!”

Luke was breathing heavily now, and Vader sensed his restraint was almost gone.

“There is no escape—my young apprentice—with each passing moment, you make yourself more my servant . . .” Palpatine continued, barely able to contain his glee.

Although he had known exactly what would happen beforehand, Vader felt bile rising to his mouth as he watched Palpatine seduce his son to the dark side.

With a shuddering breath, however, Luke turned away and gave his answer, “No.”

“It is unavoidable . . . It is your destiny,” Palpatine ignored him, “You—like your father—are now . . . mine.”
Finally Luke could contain his rage against the sadistic man no longer. Reaching out through the Force, he snatched back his lightsaber, ignited it, and swung at Palpatine with all his strength.

Palpatine of course had no intention of letting Luke kill him, and the boy’s swing was Vader’s cue to make his entrance. Igniting his red saber the Sith Lord blocked his son’s attempted kill stroke—before Palpatine blasted him with blue lightning.

Father and son quickly found themselves locked in a feverishly paced lightsaber duel that spanned the large throne room. Luke eventually landed a vicious kick, sending Vader back flipping down the stairs to land sprawling on the deck.

“Good,” Palpatine crooned, “Use your aggressive feelings, boy! . . . Let the hate flow through you!”

On the surface the scene appeared nearly identical to one from decades earlier—the Sith Lord goading Anakin into killing Dooku—and securing himself an upgraded apprentice. Palpatine was now similarly grooming his son for a fall to the dark side by having Luke kill Vader in anger.

That, however, was where the comparison ended as both father and son were each determined to save the other.

The Emperor’s words recalled Luke to himself and to his purpose in coming here, and the young Force user extinguished his lightsaber.
“I will not fight you, Father,” Luke announced to Vader.

Obi-wan—choosing the Jedi code over the brother he loved—had come to kill him on Master Yoda’s orders. Vader could tell his son had been given the same orders, but was ignoring them out of love.

Only one of them was surviving this encounter with Palpatine, however, and Vader was determined it was going to be Luke.

Rising from where he had fallen, the Sith Lord slowly walked back up the stairs to again stand towering over Luke.

“You are unwise to lower your defenses,” he shouted. Swinging his lightsaber Vader forced his son to resume their duel.

Red and green sabers flash, until Luke leaped away onto an upperlevel catwalk.

“You thoughts betray you, Father. I feel the good in you—the conflict,” Luke said.

“There is no conflict,” Vader lied.

“You couldn't bring yourself to kill me before. I don't believe you'll destroy me now,” Luke replied, continuing to completely miss the point.

“You underestimate the power of the dark side . . . If you will not fight then you will meet your destiny,” Vader answered.
Throwing his lightsaber, Vader cut away the supports of the catwalk and forced Luke back down to the ground. As Vader stalked Luke who was now hiding in a darker part of the chamber, Palpatine continued to take a perverse enjoyment in watching father and son fight.

Having already dealt with the Jedi and Sith fighting over him, Vader was accepting that this fight extended to his offspring. After his destruction of the Jedi had failed to protect his son, Vader also accepted the inevitability of Palpatine getting what he wanted.

All Vader wanted now was to keep Luke alive.

At all cost.

“You cannot hide forever, Luke,” Vader told him, as with lightsaber ignited he slowly moved through the dark section of the room in which his son was hiding.

“I will not fight you,” Luke answered from somewhere up ahead.

“Give yourself to the dark side,” Vader replied, as he reached out through the Force to touch his son’s mind, “It is the only way you can save your friends . . .”

Vader felt Luke’s anxiety level begin to spike, and only escalated as he continued.

“Yes . . . Your thoughts betray you . . . Your feelings for them are strong . . . especially for . . . sister.”
And suddenly Vader understood why Leia reminded him so much of Padmé.

*How in the galaxy had he missed there were two of them?*

Luke must have masked her with his stronger Force signature—that was the only explanation.

Although in shock and with his own mind racing, Vader tried to stay focused on the crucial task at hand.

For at last he had found the pressure point he needed to drive his son to kill him and save his life.

And with that knowledge, Vader began to pushed down . . .

“So . . . you have a twin sister . . . Your feelings have now betrayed her, too . . . If you will not turn to the dark side . . . then perhaps she will.”

“Never!” screamed Luke, as he abruptly reignited his lightsaber and attacked.

Gripped with fear and furious with himself for betraying Leia, Luke was enraged with their father for threatening her and charged Vader with unbridled fury.

Luke landed blow after blow of rage and drove Vader out onto a catwalk above an open shaft. In a reversal of their first duel on Cloud City, the younger Skywalker found an opening and cut off his father’s sword hand. This time it was Vader’s red lightsaber and mechanical right hand that fell into the depths of the Death Star.
Vader gazed up at his son, who suddenly had him completely at his mercy.

With the integrity of his suit destroyed, his breaths grew increasingly labored as he waited for the end.

“Good! . . . Your hate has made you powerful,” Palpatine cackled, “Now . . . fulfill your destiny and take your father's place at my side!”

A life for a hand.

It was the same rationalization that Palpatine had given Anakin for killing Dooku all those years ago. After he gave a similar order to kill . . . which Anakin had obeyed.

Luke, however, looked down at his mechanical hand and then to his fallen father who now lacked one.

He saw his future yawning out before him—his supposed destiny to become the ‘New Vader’—and in his capacity for freedom he rejected that path.

Luke was too full of his mother’s goodness and his father’s heart, back when he had been Anakin Skywalker, and he made another choice.

Looking down at his father, Luke chose mercy—something Vader did not deserve, but his son was giving him anyway.
Luke looked down at the blade of his lightsaber, before shutting it down and throwing it down the shaft after Vader’s red one—determined that his would forever remain green.

He then turned to the Emperor.


And with that last act of defiance, Luke sealed his fate.

Despair ripped through Vader’s heart.

No.

NO!

Luke was making the same choice he had in the reactor shaft on Cloud City, but Vader knew this time his son had truly chosen death.

And there was nothing more Vader could do to stop him.
“So be it . . . Jedi,” Palpatine answered Luke with cold fury, “If you will not be turned . . . you will be destroyed.”

No longer smiling or laughing, Palpatine sent bolts of blue lighting straight into Luke’s chest.

Walking in front of Vader, who had struggled to his feet, the Emperor sent wave after wave of electricity coursing through Luke.

“Young fool . . . only now, at the end do you understand . . . Your feeble skills are no match for the power of the dark side,” he continued as Luke writhed on the ground in pain.

“You have paid the price for your lack of vision . . . Now, young Skywalker . . . you will die,” Palpatine declared with a haughty smile.

Palpatine intensified his attack, and Luke’s agony increased.

“Father, please!—Help me!” he screamed between shouts of pain.

The Emperor did not bat an eyelid at the dying boys cries for help. Long had Palpatine taken Vader’s acquiescence of their exploitative partnership for granted—along with his confidence that the prophecy of the Chosen One destroying the Sith would forever go unfulfilled.

But Palpatine—who had murdered his own master, Darth Pelagius—did not understand the innate bond between a father and son.
In what was perhaps his one blind spot, the Emperor did not recognize the danger—that never before had his power over his apprentice been so weak.

For Vader selflessness and willingness to pay the ultimate sacrifice to save his son made him again open to the Light.

And just as Luke’s proton torpedoes had blown up the Death Star, the his screams now reached his father’s heart—and exploded Palpatine’s control over Vader.

Unable to bear his son’s agony and pleas any longer, Vader found the strength to do for his son what he could not do from himself or even for Padmé.

“No! . . . NO!” Vader yell, as he picked up the Emperor—the man who had seduced him to the dark side and duped him into destroying his family—and hurled him down the open shaft.

Vader had successfully stopped Palpatine, but in doing so he received a fatal dose of blue lightning. As he collapsed to the deck, Vader knew that while Luke was alive it had indeed cost him his life.

Recovering somewhat from being tortured, Luke made his way to his father. Vader felt his son catch his body and lay his helmeted head against his shoulder as the former Sith Lord slide to the floor.

His enduring control over Vader was not the Emperor’s only miscalculation, however, and the Rebels he had underestimated were about to again blow up the Death Star. Unwilling to concede the inevitable, Luke carried and then dragged Vader back towards his shuttle—desperate to get them both to safety.

Vader knew he was not going to make it, and at the ramp of the shuttle made his last request.
“Luke . . . help me take this mask off,” he said.


“Nothing . . . can stop that now,” Vader said, his breathing becoming more labored, “Just for once . . . let me look on you with my own eyes.

Luke obeyed, carefully removing Vader’s helmet and mask, and Anakin looked for the first and last time into the eyes of his son.

“Now go, my son. Leave me,” Anakin said in his own voice.

“No. You're coming with me,” Luke said with desperate insistence, “I'm not leaving you here! I've got to save you!”

“You already have, Luke,” Anakin said with gratitude and pride.

Anakin had ended up needing all the extra time Padmé had bought him with her sacrifice—but in the end he returned to the Light before it was too late.

In his death, however, much was left unfinished.

Unreconciled with his beautiful Leia—the daughter he had always wanted—Anakin sensed the consequences of him not being able to raise his children would last on past his death.

In his final moments all Anakin could leave for her was a brief and inadequate message.
“You were right . . . You were right about me. Tell your sister you were right . . .” Anakin implored Luke.

Anakin had never reached his full potential, or fulfilled his destiny to bring balance to the Force and peace to the galaxy. Redeemed but his crimes unatoned for, Anakin himself, however, was finally free of the terrible conflict and darkness that had ruined so much of his life.

With a parting smile to his son, Anakin Skywalker died in peace.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading, and for all the kudos and comments! They are much appreciated.

Next chapter jumps back to “present day” (back to Reylo!)

As I wrap up the cannon material from the movies, however, I just have to say that one of the best parts of going on this long Star Wars writing journey is I feel like I got to meet Anakin Skywalker in a whole new way.

My appreciation for how remarkable he is has grown exponentially, and he is now tied with Ben Solo for my favorite character in all of Star Wars.

And stay tuned because he is getting a HAPPY ENDING!

Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

LOTS Podcast: Reylo vs. Anidala - Couple Contrasts in Star Wars
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdnZHiFi2-A&t=3s
Artwork: Artist unknown (if anyone knows please tell me, I tried to find it listed somewhere on several site but could not find it). Available at: https://www.goodfon.com/download/star-wars-episode-vi-return-of-the-jedi-palpatine-darth-sidi/1280x800/
Return to Jakku

Chapter Summary

Rey returns to Jakku to finally uncover the mystery of her past (and learns she is NOT a Palpatine).

Includes references to Luke’s dream on Ahch-To in the TLJ novelization and deleted scenes from ANH (see end of chapter for related links).

Chapter Notes

Thanks so much to everyone who has been with me from the beginning. If you are just joining, welcome!

Just to briefly recap, after Crait the Resistance sought sanctuary on Naboo. Leia was reunited with her Naberrie extended family but fell back into a (super temporary) coma. Poe is now the leader of the New Rebel Alliance, and travels the galaxy with Finn to recruit ships to take a stand against the First Order. Finn and Rose are together.

Rey and Luke patched things up, and he began her Jedi training for real after she completed repairs to Anakin’s lightsaber. The kyber crystal broke in two (like Ben and Rey’s hearts at the end of TLJ) and it’s now a double-bladed saberstaff. Rey is also out of place on Naboo, and feels increasingly distant from her friends in the New Rebel Alliance. On one of her numerous visits to Padmé’s grave, she had another force vision depicting Finn and Poe dying in combat, Rey back on Jakku, and Kylo on Mustafar turning fully to the dark side.

Leaving Hux to oversee repairs to the Supremacy and the installation of a new Death Star cannon, Kylo takes the Knights of Ren to Mustafar. In the remnants of the Sith Temple under Vader’s Castle he falls fully to the dark side. As he explores the Castle, he also begins to realize he does not know his grandfather as well as he thinks he does. In moment of weakness Kylo asks him for help, and in answer has a dream about his grandfather’s life covering the events of the PT, Clone Wars, and OT (yes, I really do love Anakin Skywalker that much).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Awaking with a jolt, Rey sat bolt upright.

*The dream.*

So vivid and detailed that she knew was more than just a dream. It was more like her recent Force vision at Padmé’s tomb on Naboo, or the one she had had on Takodana when she touched the legacy saber and had gotten a glimpse of the tragic events surrounding the last of the Skywalkers.

Now fully alert, Rey got up and relieved Chewie at the helm for what remained of their flight to Jakku. Alone in the cockpit as the Wookiee slept, Rey had time to think.

As she played back the dream of Anakin’s version the events surrounding his sad life and fall to the dark side, she could not help but compare it with that of his grandson and heir—an exercise that resulted in a surge of anger and frustration washing over her.

Anakin Skywalker’s grandson yes—but Ben Solo had not been born a ‘New Vader.’ Like his grandfather, Ben’s tragic decent into darkness had not had to happen, and to Rey it felt as if history had been doomed to both unnecessarily and inevitably repeated itself.
Rey remained lost in thought until the sound of the proximity alert recalled her to her present task.

It was also one of the few noises that could wake the Falcon’s Wookiee copilot from a dead sleep, and Rey was not surprised to see Chewie slide into his seat as she prepared to drop them out of hyperspace. The starlines faded into black as she did so, and muted browns were suddenly visible through the viewport.

Jakku.

The last time Rey had been in Jakku’s orbit she had not had a chance to glance back as she, Finn, and BB-8 had been flying away from their First Order pursuers as fast as the Falcon would carry them. Now she got her first view from space of her homeworld. Huge craters were visible—damage incurred from the massive battle that had ended the Galactic Civil War and the Empire.

From this distance the planet looked dead, and Rey knew that was more or less the truth up close as well.

Immediately returning to Jakku had been Rey’s burning obsession the second she was away, and she had only been prevented from doing so by Ben carrying her off.

Although the quest to find Luke and then rescue Ben carried her even further away from the desert planet, Rey had always planned to return to the only home she had ever known to continue waiting for her parents to come back for her.

Right up until Ben confronted her with the truth she had always known but did not want to accept.

“Do you want to know the truth about your parents?” Ben had demanded in an attempt to change her mind after she refused to join him, “Or have you always known? . . . And you've just hidden it away . . . You know the truth . . . Say it.”
By that point she had been close to tears, but Ben had not let her off the hook.

“Say it!” he insisted.

“They were nobody,” Rey answered, with tears streaming down her face.

“They were filthy junk traders, who sold you off for drinking money,” Ben had pushed on in spite of her deepening sobs, “They're dead in a pauper’s grave in the Jakku desert.”

She had known what he said was true—and from that moment her desire to return had completely vanished. After that Rey would have been surprised if she ever went back to Jakku.

The Force as usual, however, had a different plan.

The brown landscape grew to fill the entire viewport as the *Falcon* entered Jakku’s atmosphere. With Niima Outpost being the only location on the entire planet that registered on the navigational computer, it did not take Rey long to get her bearings. Having no desire to go into town or renew any of her previous acquaintances, however, Rey brought the *Falcon* down in the outskirts of the settlement on a rocky ridge she knew could hold the weight of the ship without danger of it sinking into the sand.

Once landed, Rey also realized she had set down only a few meters from the spot she had seen herself in her Force vision—although then it had been evening, just after the sun had set, which meant she still had a few hours to kill.

Rey was also quickly reminded of just how hot it was on Jakku—something she had not really understood until she experienced the more temperate climates of Takodana, Ahch-To, and Naboo—and she chose to wait out the intense heat of the day on the *Falcon*. 
As sunset neared, however, Rey headed out to stand in the spot she had seen herself.

Rey stood alone on the sandy ridge gazing out over the desert in this place that held so many conflicting emotions, and a flood of memories rushed upon her.

She could not see the Star Destroyer graveyard from here, but she remembered the hours she had spent inside the ships honing her considerable skill in identifying parts of the metal carcasses that could be salvaged and given new life on some other ship, and were therefore still valuable.

Easily the worst part of her day was trading the fruits of her backbreaking labor for the meager foodstuff Unkar Plutt doled out that barely kept her alive—the amount having more to do with his mood than the actual value of her offerings.

Rey recalled the bloated beefy man without anything resembling fondness. Blob fish in appearance, rumor had it he was from an oceanic planet. How in the galaxy he had ended up—and quite frankly how he managed to even survive—living in the unrelenting heat of the arid deserts was not known to Rey or any of other scavengers.

Her relationship with the miserly and domineering man, furthermore, had been rather complicated.

On the one hand, the junkyard boss had regularly cheated her, and was not above flat out stealing from her. On the other, Plutt had kept her alive and relatively safe when she was a small child and worked directly for him.

Even when she had set out on her own—learning the hard way that the only person she could trust and rely upon was herself—she quickly became Plutt’s best scavenger, and to a certain degree he guarded her from afar as he did his bottom line.

He had ordered that Rey be left unmolested, and his thugs had seen to it that the she was left alone and unharmed when she had been too young to truly protect herself. As she grew older she could eventually hold her own, even from the thugs themselves—as they found out when they tried to steal BB-8 after Rey refused to sell the little droid.
Rey had thus been spared from anything really bad happening to her . . . unlike Ben.

The junkyard boss had even tolerated her aboard his stolen ships, and endured the gall of her disagreeing with his modifications, such as the compressor he had installed on his latest acquisition—a Corellian YT model freighter. Of course if he had known she would one day possess the capacity to fly the thing and steal it from him the way he had stolen it from others he would have absolutely not let her anywhere near his ill-gotten space crafts.

Rey’s gaze soon shifted from Niima Outpost in the direction of the collapsed AT-AT that had been her home.

Of the available options for shelter, the AT-AT had been a good one. It kept her safe from sandstorms and was secure enough for her to sleep well at night without fear of intruders. With parts from the Star Destroyers she had also figured out how to lock it from the outside, which prevented thieves from looting the place while she was out scavenging.

What dominated the interior décor of her home—as well as her life—was the wall where she scratched a mark every evening, and counted the days until her parents would come back for her. Ben, Rey reflected, would probably have called it her wall of denial.

There were other personal items, however, in her AT-AT as well. Over the years she had added to her small collection of treasures, which were of no practical help in filling her stomach but were nonetheless important to feed her heart and soul. The small silver bell that still rang with a clear sound. The rose that an off-worlder had brought and discarded that Rey had carefully dried— touches of beauty that she found and clung to.

The AT-AT itself was Rey’s sanctuary—the place where she could rest and recover from days filled with dangerous work and the drudgery of desert life. Beyond that, it was a place of comfort where for a few minutes life was about more than just surviving and Rey could dream.

What Rey dreamt of most, besides being reunited with her family, was adventure—of flying among the stars that filled the night sky above Jakku.

The doll she had made for herself because she was a little girl and needed a doll, was nonetheless a starfighter pilot. It was inspired by the pilot named Raeh whose helmet Rey had found and
frequently wore as she wound down from her day—and which had inspired Rey when choosing a name for herself.

The helmet was also a source of encouragement as Rey pursued her unrealistic dream of herself becoming a pilot. She made due with limited resources, and plowed on with disciplined determination. When the day’s work was done, Rey attempted to teach herself to fly—developing her crude piloting skills as best she with the flight simulator program in the AT-AT and the clunkers at her disposal that could barely be called ships.

As Rey reflected back on her helmet and other treasures, she thought about going back to get them. She knew, however, that by now they would be gone. Although in the grand scheme of things Rey had not really been gone all that long, she knew her AT-AT would by this point have been looted. Plutt had likely blown the door off himself after what she had done.

Rey also knew it felt as though she had been gone far longer than she really had largely due to how much she had changed since she left. She had grown up—and now could not go back to her doll, helmet, or childhood even if she still wanted to.

As Rey watched the huge Jakku sun finally sank beneath the horizon.

The sense of anticipation that had been building in her turned to disquiet as the moment from her Force vision seemed to have come and gone.

Rey was just beginning to wonder what she was supposed to do now, when she heard a noise off to one side. Turning, she saw Unkar Plutt and a small caravan of his minions heading her way.

Someone must have spotted the *Falcon*, and the news subsequently reached the junkyard boss’ ear holes. Since she was still here when Plutt no longer had to venture out in the intense heat of the day, he had chosen to come and confront her.

As the caravan drew closer, Plutt’s squinty eyes locked with Rey’s.
Tension suddenly filled the air and Rey took up a stance for combat as the thugs began to approach her. She ignited her lightsaber, and one of the blue white blades glowed in the fading light of evening—sending the underlings scurrying backwards.

“Calm down girl,” Plutt said gruffly, his voiced filled with annoyance, as he also motioned with a hand signaled for his men to stand down.

The king of the junkyard and the former scavenger then eyed each other.

Rey, however, let him speak first.

“I see you’ve brought back my ship you stole, you little cretin,” Plutt glowered, his grotesque face contorting into scowl.

“I took it as back wages for all the portions you cheated me out of while I was growing up,” Rey shot back, refusing to back down.

Plutt did not bother to deny it.

It was clear to all present that Rey had not come back to return to her former boss’ service. The question of why exactly she had come back hung think in air—along with the tension.

Finally Rey spoke.
“Who did you get me from?” she demanded.

Rey continued to glare at Plutt, knowing that asking politely would be taken as a sign of weakness and get her nowhere with the brute.

For a long moment Unkar Plutt just looked at Rey . . . and she could tell he was deciding whether or not to answer her.

On the one hand, Plutt’s warped fatherly feelings towards Rey remained. He had actually been missing her recently—and her absence’s impact on his income. Plutt had also never understood the true value of the *Falcon*, and having already stolen another ship, his anger towards her was somewhat mollified.

Furthermore, he did not fully understand how much a knowledge of her origins really meant to her—and what a bargaining chip he possessed. Even as Plutt gave Rey a long hard look, the junkyard boss also knew his news was not comforting and he eventually acquiesced to Rey’s demand.

“The drunkards said they pulled you off the corpse of a dead woman,” Plutt said, “They came to Jakku to escape what I can only assume where massive debts. Tired of feeding you and needing money they sold you to me.”

Rey remained silent, trying to process what she was hearing without letting any emotions show on her face—unaware there was more to his story.

Plutt for his part hesitated before continuing. He was for once in his miserably, miserly life being given the opportunity to do something altruistic—to help even a girl who had stolen from him—and he decided to take it.
“They sold this to me at the same time. I’ve always assumed they pulled it off the same dead woman,” Plutt said, and from somewhere on his person that Rey did not even want to think about the beefy man pulled a grubby parcel.

Which he then handed to Rey . . .

Rey accepted the unknown item wrapped in a disgusting piece of cloth in dumbstruck wonder.

Once completed, the good deed appeared to be too overwhelmingly out of character for the bloated man. He scowled at Rey and aggressively bid her farewell.

“Unless you’ve come back to work, I better not ever see your miserable face again, you wretched girl!” Plutt declared.

With that he turn around and with his thugs in tow headed back to Niima Outpost.

Rey stared after Plutt in utter bewilderment until he was no longer visible. She then turned her attention to his gift—which if he was to be believed had likely belonged to her mother. With trembling fingers she untied the dirty rage, and in the fading light of evening beheld its contents.

It was a necklace of brown leather cord, with a single white crystal for a pendant.
The fact that the junkyard boss had for some reason kept it all these years, and had liked it enough not to sell it like virtually everything else that passed through his meaty hands—and then just handed it to her—was a miracle beyond her wildest imaginings.

For the first time Rey consciously knew that the Force was with her, and what a powerful ally it was.

Reaching up, Rey clasped her hand around the crystal, and was not surprised when she was caught up in another Force vision.

She was gazing up with the nearsighted eyes of baby into the smiling tan face of a woman with brown hair and eyes full of love.

“She’s a miracle Camie. A gift to us from the Force!” said a male voice belonging to someone whom Rey could not see, “I’m so relieved everything went okay. With your father having to let your aunt and uncle raise you after your mother died giving birth-”

“I know Laze. I was worried too. But now she’s here with us, and I can’t believe I’m actually holding her in my arms!” Rey’s mother answered her eye’s never leaving Rey’s face.

“Thank the Force she was blessed with your looks!” her father joked.

“Well maybe she will have your aptitude for mechanics. You’ll have to teach her when she’s old enough. Although somehow I don’t think you’ll wait that long . . .” her mother said, her voice full of laughter.

“Looks like she likes your mother’s necklace,” her father commented.

“Well, my father left it for me, and one day I’ll give it to her,” her mother replied.
“Remind me again what your father told you in that vision?” Rey’s father asked.

“He told me that we shouldn’t worry that we didn’t have any children. He said the Force would send us a child, and that our child would help right a grave mistake he had made that was still causing great wrong,” her mother said with a tone of concentrated remembering.

“I’m not sure what that means,” said Rey’s father. “I guess one day we’ll find out. All I know is her spirit is so bright I can almost see her glowing.”

Then the scene shifted, Rey felt older but still quite small. And this time she could sense darkness and overwhelming fear in the air. Servants of the dark side were searching for her.

Her father’s voice was full of panic and fear, “They’ve come for the children—take her and hide!” From a distance he added, “I’ll come back for you!”

Rey could hear violent sounds and the distinctive pitch of E-11 blaster rifles . . . standard issue for stormtroopers.

A bolt came near them, and her mother stiffened in pain before continuing to flee. Her mother carried Rey in her arms as she ran, and Rey could feel her mother’s tears on her head.

They were hiding among rocks for what seemed like ages. Her mother’s arms that held her grew cold, and Rey herself started to cry.

In morning light, new faces peered down at her with eyes searching out anything of value. Rough hands lifted her away from the cold body of her mother and scavenged her.

The vision faded.
Coming back to the present Rey found herself on her knees in the shallow sand with her eyes burning with tears and her face wet. She shakily tried to get to her feet before giving up and sinking back down to sit on the sand.

Wiping her eyes, Rey took a few deep ragged breaths and gazed out at the star fill sky of Jakku night.

Growing up an orphan, Rey had long been obsessed with her parentage. It was a bittersweet comfort to now know that her mother and father had loved her, and had died saving her from the First Order—the dark side—that was bent on destroying her. A relief to know that the people who had scavenged her and sold her off to Plutt for drinking money were not her parents.

On the other hand, Rey realized that her traumatizing situation had not materially changed. Her parents seemed to have been simple people—and in that sense Rey was still a no one from nowhere. Her parents had both died violent deaths and were still not coming back for her.

She was still alone.

*Well not quite anymore.*

With the reminder of her mental amendment, Rey reached out through the Force to Luke.

Soon the Jedi Master appeared, the blue glow he now gave off more prominent than usual in the darkness. Having grown up on Tatooine, Luke had been no stranger to sitting in sand, and he soon settled himself at Rey’s side. His eyes filled with concern as he looked at her. Luke waited patiently, however, for Rey to speak.

While it had not been that long since she had last seen her mentor, so much had happened that Rey
did not know where to begin. Taking a deep breath, she finally broke the silence.

Rey ended up starting with the dream she had had about Anakin. Luke was deeply affected by the story of his “Chosen One” father. The tragic end of Anakin’s friendship with Obi-Wan—who had been sent to kill him after his fall to the dark side—was one of many details of his parent’s life that Luke had not previously known. Even later parts of the story that involved himself, Luke now viewed with new perspective.

Luke then listened attentively as Rey moved on to Plutt, the necklace, and her latest Force vision.

By this point in their relationship Rey expected Luke to calmly listen to her with attentive support. She was a bit startled, therefore, when her account was met with such a degree of shock that it washed over her through the Force.

“Camie and Laze?!” Luke exclaimed, “You’re sure your parents were named Camie and Laze?”

“Yes,” Rey replied, confused by the Jedi Master’s reaction.

“Rey, I grew up with a Camie and Laze on Tatooine!” Luke told her.

It was now Rey’s turn to be stunned.

“Wait. Are you saying I’m from Tatooine . . . and that you actually knew my parents?” Rey responded in dumbfounded disbelief.

“It certainly looks that way,” Luke answer, amazed that the vast galaxy could still be such a small place.
Thinking hard, Luke recalled what he could remember about to his peers on Tatooine.

Camie Marstrap had bought water from his family’s moisture farm for her family’s hydroponics gardens in Anchorhead. To be honest neither of them had liked each other very much. Camie had also been dating Laze for as long as he could remember, and Luke and everyone else had assumed she would one day marry him.

Until recently Luke had not thought about Camie in decades—although now that he thought about it Rey did look a heck of a lot like her.

But then the Jedi Master thought back to the dream he had had on Ahch-To—to the alternate life he would have lived had he gone after Artoo the night he ran away instead of waiting until the next morning. The version where he had never left Tatooine with Obi-Wan, Leia had died on the Death Star, and the Empire had won.

The version of events where he had married Camie, and lived out his life as a moisture farmer.

Although at the time closing himself off from the Force, Luke had awoken from the dream knowing the Force had managed to warn him that something was coming to Ahct-To—something that turned out to be Rey.

At the time Luke had thought that was all there was to it. This new revelation, however, that Rey’s parents had been people he had grown up with in a tiny town on an insignificant planet in the Outer Rim added a whole new confusing layer to his dream.

Although he and Camie had not had any children in his dream, Luke contemplated that in the alternate version of events the Force had shown him he could have theoretically been Rey’s father. That for some reason the Force had deliberately picked a spot on Tatooine as close to him—and Anakin—as possible, and then dropped Rey into it.

Luke sensed, however, there was still more to the mystery of Rey’s origins.

“Rey, let me see that necklace more closely,” Luke said.
Stunned speechless by his revelation, she wordlessly complied.

“Rey, that’s a *kyber* crystal . . .” Luke observed.

Having spent so much time repairing Anakin’s lightsaber—transforming the broken crystal into a new doubled-bladed saberstaff—Rey quickly saw on closer examination that Luke was right.

While Rey looked intently at the kyber crystal, Luke looked intently at the young Force user—aware that the answer she had long been seeking about her origin was about to get even more jarring.

Because there was really only one way any of this made any sense.

“Rey, I think everything is strongly pointing to your being Obi-Wan Kenobi’s granddaughter,” Luke said.

As soon as the words left his mouth, Luke knew with absolute certainty they were true—along with the accompanying realization that there was a lot he still did not know about his first mentor. That Obi-Wan, like Anakin, had apparently lost a wife in childbirth and had not been able to raise his daughter was apparently one of them.

With her arms already resting on her tented knees, Rey let her forehead drop onto them as she suddenly encountered a whole new level of astonishment and disorientation.
Six months ago learning she was likely a Kenobi was exactly the kind of revelation Rey had desperately wanted to hear—convinced that if she knew her family and her origins were significant enough then she would neatly understand her place in the galaxy.

Instead she got Ben confronting her with what they both had believed was the truth at the time.

“You have no place in this story—you come from nothing—you’re nothing.”

While Ben in his desperation was trying get her to lean on him instead—in spite of his poor choices—his words had instead forced Rey to confront the most difficult answer to her long burning question.

No one was going to hand her her place in the galaxy.

She was going to have to stand on her own two feet and pave her own unique path—no one else could do it for her.

It had been hard, but Rey had done it.

To now be told that by blood she had a rather significant role in this story after all . . . sent Rey’s world tumbling sideways yet again.

The more Rey thought about it the more she too knew it was true. On top of Luke’s sound logic,
the necklace, and her latest Force vision, Rey realized in hindsight that the voice calling her name in the dark forest of her first Force vision on Takodana was recognizable as Obi-Wan’s.

Rey was also surprised to find that her initial reaction to the revelation she thought she had always wanted was a wave of intense anger.

Yes, her parents were dead. But Obi-Wan had been a Jedi. He had appeared to Luke after his death —so why not her? Why had he left Rey alone in the desert?

Rey was now also confronted with realization that she had mentally shifted the responsibility for the creation of Kylo Ren from Luke to the older Jedi—the man who had told Luke to kill his father and planted the “kill Vader” order deep within him that had lead to the events of that night.

To now be told that that man—Obi-Wan Kenobi—was her own grandfather, was a bitter and unwelcome truth to swallow.

As Rey sat stewing in her anger, however, another version of Obi-Wan rose to her mind—the young idealistic Jedi from her dream about Anakin caught up in the tragic mess along with everyone else. Later, a man who had spoken to Rey’s mother about his deep regret.

Realizing she was being unfair, Rey tried to let go of her resentment . . . but found she was unable.

A voice rose in the back of her mind, cutting through her tangled thoughts.

*What would be different if you had known sooner?*
Distracted from her anger, Rey pondered that rather poignant question.

The objective facts of her childhood would have not been altered in the slightest. Subjectively, perhaps she would not have been able to live so fully in her protective delusion that her parents were coming back for her. Whether or not that would have improved her situation, however, was highly debatable.

Once she left Jakku, would knowledge of her Kenobi legacy have actually helped her find her place in the galaxy as she had always believed . . . or would her bloodline have crushed her and forced her down a path not of her choosing as it had Ben?

Lost in thought Rey gazed out at the Jakku star fill nightscape. The planet was dirt poor and devoid proper civilization. Which meant there was no light pollution to ruin what Rey now appreciated as one of the most beautiful night skies in the galaxy.

It was a reminder that appearances and preconceptions could be deceiving—particularly in her own life.

Growing up in a barren desert like Anakin and Luke, Rey also only had the appearance of being a ‘nobody from nowhere.’ She had come back to this wasteland for answers, and she had finally gotten them. But the clearest answer that she received was she had been asking the wrong question.

Her long quest to find her parents was on a deeper level a burning desire to know where she belonged and what purpose the Force had for her life. In that vein, Rey finally understood that more important than who she was, was what she was. Looking up at the familiar night sky, Rey again sensed something that had always burned deep inside—a conviction that the Force had bigger plans for her than wasting her life in the sand.

With new perspective, Rey reflected that her time on Jakku on as an abandoned child was also a time of preparation for a mission. It had been a time of great difficulty and loneliness . . . but she had also learned to wait, to see the hidden good value in things others had cast aside as unredeemable junk, and to have unfading optimism and hope even in the face of bleakness and
despair.

Skills and virtues that were now being called to extend well beyond assessing ship part.

Rey recalled Maz’s words to her on Takodana, “Dear child, I see your eyes. You already know the truth. Whomever you’re waiting for on Jakku, they’re never coming back. But there’s someone who still could . . . The belonging you seek is not behind you but ahead.”

At the time Rey had thought Maz was speaking about Luke and had said as much. But Maz had never actually confirmed Rey’s assumption.

Looking back now Rey knew, whether consciously or as a prompting of the Force, Maz had referred those words not to the mythic Jedi who had gone missing, but to Ben Solo.

As branded in Rey’s mind as Maz’s words, moreover, were the subsequent events in the Takodana forest. Rey thought back on her first meeting with Kylo Ren—and how her feelings for Ben were now completely the opposite.

Now the thought of living the rest of her life without him made her heart ache. She was again reminded that she no longer wanted to be a part of just any family but his family—of her desire to claim her role in unbreaking Anakin’s bloodline as she had the Skywalker legacy lightsaber.

And that, Rey realized, was precisely what the Force was asking of her.

To balance the heir of the Chosen One, so he could finally bring balance to the Force and the Galaxy. To invite him to—not kill the past—but in this case to let it go. Not to change him—that was something only he could do for himself—but to extend one more call to return to the Light and his true self. To again be the good man with his father’s heart who Rey had fallen in love with, and who she knew deep down he still was and still wanted to be.
The Force had been pointing her to Ben for a while Rey realized in hindsight—skipping over the question of her parentage that she was constantly asking, and instead gave her glimmers of her mission—like the shadowy figure in the mirror cave on Acho-To that looked an awful lot like Ben.

Rey, furthermore, began to understand that the Force was only giving her such clarity now, because it was merely a confirmation of the path that in her heart Rey knew she had already chosen. With her free will fully intact, she was not merely the last Kenobi inevitably tasked with going after the last Skywalker—but was just Rey preparing to go after Ben.

Sitting in the sand she hated so much, however, Rey felt her resolve waiver. The last time she and Ben had been connected through the Force bound had not gone well.

He had lashed out—deliberately pushed her away by methodically putting his mask back on and snarling, “If you get in my way, I will destroy you.” Rey’s knee jerk reaction was to do just that—to stay far far away from Ben, and never let him reject or hurt her again.

Rey, however, was no longer the five-year old who had been abandoned on Jakku, and her recent time away from the desert prison had helped her grow enough to no longer be stuck solely with the mental tools of a traumatized child.

She was now able to take Ben’s perspective into consideration—that her leaving him on the Supremacy had likely felt deeply retraumatizing to the boy who had also experienced his own family’s rejection.

Rey also resigned herself to the unavoidable reality that one of them would have to set aside their fear and try again if there was any hope for this ending well. Ben, she knew, was a complete mess right now. So it was going to have to be her who made a move.

Taking a deep breath, Rey rose to her feet with renewed determination.
Luke had sat silently as Rey worked through her thoughts. But as he now rose to stand along with her, the Jedi Master could see without asking what Rey had decided to do.

“You don’t have to do this, you still have a choice,” he hesitantly said.

“I know . . . but if I don’t try to reach him one more time I will regret it for the rest of my life,” she replied.

Looking into her eyes Luke saw her determination, and a haunted look at the prospect of the alternative.

“Would you have done differently for your father?” she challenged him.


Luke could see that unlike the last time they had had this conversation, Rey knew full well how improbably her chances were of succeeding, and this could well end in her being killed. He could also see that she was not choosing this path because she was supposed to, but because she wanted to.

Just as she somehow knew she could bypass the compressor on the *Falcon*, Rey sensed there was a real chance she could reach Ben when no one else could, and it was something that she could not ignore. Although she could not explain her conviction, Rey knew that one of the only people in the galaxy who was truly capable of understanding was Luke Skywalker.

“He’s somewhere where there are rivers of fire,” Rey said.
She searched her memory of the dream about Anakin as she walked up into the *Falcon*.

“Mustafar? I think that was it. Darth Vader built his Castle is there—built it over a Sith temple, out of some special stone to channel the dark side. That’s where any remaining Jedi Vader rounded up were brought to be killed,” Rey elaborated before asking, “In your search for the original Jedi Temple did you ever come across its location?”

Walking beside her, Luke took a deep resigned breath and slowly let it out.

“I know it’s somewhere in the Outer Rim, but I don’t have the coordinates,” he replied, “From what I could tell it was deleted from the records of the Republic and was one of the more heavily guarded secrets of the Empire. Before I left, Leia told me she had heard it took the First Order years to slice into those records. I’m sorry Rey, but I don’t have any idea of how to find him.”

Rey stood in silence with a heavy heart, trying to think of what next to do.

Artoo, unfazed by her from his perspective one-sided conversation, had begun rolling towards one of the ship’s jacks at her mention of Mustafar. Her conversation with Luke had stalled by the time he had plugged in. In his usual understated series of beeps, he told Rey that he had the coordinates to Mustafar and was feeding them into the nav computer.

Both Rey and Luke stood in stunned silence for a moment.

Of course Artoo had the coordinates to Mustafar, Rey thought as she remembered back to the
dream. He had been Anakin’s astromech droid on that first ill-fated trip.

Luke chuckled and Rey flashed the droid one of her most iridescent smiles before saying, “Artoo, you are truly amazing.”

Artoo beeped back that she was not too bad herself, and Rey headed to the cockpit to ask Chewie to start pre-flight.

Before they left, however, Rey had one call to make. She became so choked up with emotion when she heard Finn’s voice, however, that she almost could not speak.

“Did you find what you were looking for?” he asked.

“Yes,” Rey managed to tell him.

She then took a deep breath.

“Finn, I’m not going to make it back in time. There is something I need to do,” she continued.

“More Jedi stuff?” Finn asked.

“Yes,” Rey answered, her voice filled with relief at his easy acceptance.

“I’ll let Poe know,” Finn told her, “You take care of yourself.”
“Finn, if something happens I want you to know you’re the best family I could have ever ask for.”

“You too,” Finn answered. He paused and she could hear the smile in his voice. “And Rey. May the Force be with you.”

“And with you, my dear friend,” she replied.

Rey cut the line, and sat blinking away the tears that had welled up in her eyes. Wiping them away with her forearm, she rose and returned to the cockpit where Chewbacca had fired up the sublight engines. Taking her seat in the pilot’s chair, Rey tried to clear her mind as the *Falcon* rose off the ground and again left Jakku.
Originally, Rey was going to remain “Rey Nobody,” because I really liked where that took her arc in TLJ and the degree of agency it gave her. By the time I reached this chapter, however, I realized that Anakin and Obi-Wan’s arc, and the overall story needed her to be a Kenobi. So I’ve tried to make her simultaneously a Kenobi without ruining her personal arc. Don’t know how well I pulled it off, but that was the goal.

Thank you for reading, and for the comments and kudos. They are much appreciated and motivating!

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Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

LOTS Podcast: Rey and Reylo: Psychology of the Characterization
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rP0NTri4fB8&t=3480s

Artwork: Art of the Force Awakens, page 222
From the bridge of the *Ackbar*—the Mon-Calamari Star Cruiser that now served as the New Rebel Alliance’s flagship—Poe Dameron bit his lip as he looked out of the viewport without really seeing any of the ships that were steadily dropping out of hyperspace.

He had a problem.
Actually he had many problems, from concerns about the inevitable information leaks in an operation like this resulting in everyone half expecting a fleet of First Order Star Destroyers to be the next ships to drop in from light speed, to the normal logistical challenges of organizing such a diverse group of species and ships into an effective strike force.

No this was more of a personal dilemma.

As successor to Mon Mothma, Admiral Ackbar, and General Leia Organa and current leader of the New Rebel Alliance, Poe’s place during the upcoming battle was at the helm of the fleet’s flag ship. He was also, however, the fleet’s best starfighter pilot, and the thought of not lending his considerable skill in such a decisive battle also did not sit well with him. Poe felt genuinely torn, and after weighing the situation long and hard was still at a loss for what he should do.

Long aware that Poe was only half listening, Kaydel Connix stood beside him and never the less continued to dutifully read off the updated list of the ships that had answered the call to join the attack fleet and stand against the First Order.

“Lady Luck, SoroSuub Personal Luxury Yacht 3000, pilot Lando Calrissian-”

“What did you say?” Poe asked.

Without waiting for her answer, Poe took the data pad Connix was reading off and looked down in disbelief.

And there it was in big beautiful basic—the Force’s answer to his fervent prayer and the solution to his problem.
The *Lady Luck*.

Private ship of one Lando Calrissian.

Upstanding businessman, professional gambler.

... and Rebellion war hero from the Battle of Endor.

In a manor not quit befitting the leader of the New Rebellion, Poe dove for the com and quickly invited the former general of the original Rebel Alliance aboard the flag ship.

Lando was no fool. He knew exactly what Poe had in mind long before he walked onto the bridge of the *Ackbar*. The older man, however, seemed to finally be resigned to the reality that the situation with Supreme Leader Kylo Ren was not going to work itself out in another way, and accept that this was a fight he could no longer avoid.

Soon the collection of ordinary beings from across the galaxy, who were banding together to make a last stand against the First Order, were assembled under the command of the great General Lando Calrissian—the man who had flown the *Millennium Falcon* into the heart of the second Death Star, and who along with Rogue Squadron, had blown up the superweapon and liberated the galaxy from the tyranny of the Empire.

The all around boost in moral for the entire strike for was considerable, and with a new spring in his step Poe leapt into the cockpit of his new black X-wing where BB-8 was already at work.

Poe hummed, as man and droid made final preparations for what would one way or another be a decisive run on the *Supremacy*. 
“We’re going to do this,” Poe said, flashing the droid his trademark grin.

BB-8 replied with what were unmistakably happy beeps.

On the bridge of the *Supremacy*, General Armitage Hux gazed out the viewport with a satisfied smirk as he put the finishing touches on his plan.

It was actually Kylo Ren’s plan—who as a student of the Imperial archives was simply repurposing Palpatine’s trap at the second Death Star. But since it was a good plan Hux had long thought of it as his.

As if his merely thinking the other man’s name could summon him, Hux turned to find the Supreme Leader’s life-size holographic image suddenly appear on the bridge.

“General Hux,” Ren said in terse greeting.

“Supreme Leader,” Hux bit out through clenched teeth.

“Status report,” Ren barked.

“The weapon nears completion. Within the next two days—”
On Mustafar, Kylo raised one black-gloved hand and slowly narrowed the space between his thumb and other fingers, and watched as the holographic Hux reached for his throat.

“What was that?” Kylo asked the now gasping General.

“The weapon is ready,” Hux choked out.

“That’s what I thought,” Kylo replied, letting his hand drop.

Hux inhaled deeply but managed to stay on his feet, all the while glaring blaster bolts at his rival.

“Anything else?” Kylo demanded.

“As a matter of fact, yes,” Hux answered, “The Millennium Falcon was spotted leaving the Naboo system—”

Beneath his mask, Kylo mentally kicked himself that, capitalizing on his avoidance of all things family, his mother had so easily outsmarted him.

“—and was then tracked to Jakku,” Hux finished.

Kylo briefly closed his eyes, as his mind shifted to wondering why in the galaxy Rey had gone back to the desert planet. An answer to that question was not forthcoming, however, and he moved on to more urgent matters.
“And the Rebellion?” he pressed his redheaded counterpart.

“They continue to amass their forces at the expected rendezvous point,” Hux reported, the beginnings of a scowl forming on his face, “It would be a straightforward operation to-”

“No, continue with the plan. Let them come to us,” Kylo interrupted emphatically.

Hux’s scowl deepened considerably. It was, after all, not the first time they had had this argument.

Although happy to mentally take credit for the plan when he was alone, the presence of its true author reminded Hux it was not the one he would have chosen. In stark contrast to the rabid war dog, Kylo passivity was one his more un-Vaderlike qualities that never failed to drive Hux absolutely crazy.

Kylo’s strong preference for defensive military tactics—to pound an adversary into oblivion only after they took the initiative towards aggression—was firmly entrenched, however, and since he was currently Supreme Leader that is what was happening whether Hux liked it or not.

For Kylo, having the galaxy band together and attack him before he had really done anything was long what he expected for other people—validating his belief that if he was not ruling the galaxy with an iron fist he would never be safe.

Once the crown prince of the New Republic, Kylo was familiar with many of the species and peoples that were being rallied to the cause, and had come up with a rough guess had how long it would take for them to each cough up assistance. In the aftermath of the disaster on Crait, he weighed that with the timetable to complete the necessary repairs to the Supremacy. It would be tight, he knew, but it should work.

Although his mother’s base of operations had eluded him, the New Rebellion’s overall progress was easy enough to monitor through the network of First Order spies. Kylo’s estimates had held true, and the repairs to the Supremacy were completed before the Rebellion could get organized.
In elegant simplicity, all that had been required was to leak a false timetable for the completion of the *Supremacy*’s upgrades and the construction of its new super weapon, move the First Order’s secondary forces a short hyperspace jump away, and wait.

The Rebels would attack the *Supremacy*, fall into the trap, and be destroyed.

Once they were wiped out, furthermore, there would be a virtually clear path for Kylo to move forward in bringing safety and order to the galaxy.

If Leia Organa had been in charge of the New Rebel Alliance, the Supreme Leader knew his plan would be unlikely to work. Kylo had inherited much of his considerable intelligence from his mother, and she was a worthy adversary who would not be so easily outmaneuvered. But his mother remained in a coma, and if the gut-wrenching reports were to be believed any breath she had taken over the past months could have been her last.

Unlike the First Order, therefore, the Rebels was now being led by an X-wing pilot with minimal experience and no formal training in leading anything beyond a squadron of starfighters. Poe Dameron may be her heir apparent, but he was no Leia Organa. While a truly a brilliant starfighter pilot, outside of a cockpit Poe’s skills dipped sharply into the realm of merely above average competence.

Kylo had also been inside the other man’s mind, and knew full well that Poe was prone to fixating on one plan of attack and be slow to abandon it and change course when necessary. Even without such intimate knowledge, however, it was still incredibly easy for Kylo to outthink the New Rebel Alliance’s golden boy.

And the fallen son of the New Republic was looking forward to the upcoming battle.

To destroying the cause to which his mother had dedicated all of her time.
To thrashing Poe Dameron—her replacement son.

And proving once and for all that his mother had chosen wrongly.

“The computer stays off until eighteen hours before the attack,” Kylo ordered, returning to the present moment, “I will have rejoined you by then.”

“Yes, Supreme Leader,” Hux answered.

“Anything else?” Kylo asked.

“Nothing of significance. I will of course contact you immediately with any major developments,” Hux replied.

“Of course,” Kylo echoed sarcastically.

For a moment the two men glared at each other.

Kylo could sense there was something he was missing that Hux was not telling him. As he reached out through the Force, however, he could not figure out what it was—only that it was not of major significance to his plan for his mother’s Rebellion.

“I will see you very soon, General,” Kylo declared as a parting threat.
Hux’s face remained stony, and Kylo cut the connection.

On the bridge of the *Supremacy* Ren’s holographic image disappeared, and Hux’s lips curled into a subtle smile.

“You heard the Supreme Leader, turn on the computer!” Hux barked.

That the Rebels had apparently pushed up their attack to within the next eighteen hours was after all a very *minor* detail—hardly worth troubling a man as busy as the for the moment leader of the First Order.

As the sound of electronics coming back to life at long last filled the bridge, Hux closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. A full smile broke over his face.

Ren choking him from a distance was a reminder that he could get to Hux while Hux could not get to him.

The one-sided situation, however, was rapidly coming to an end.
First Hux would obliterated the Alliance’s attack force with Ren’s obnoxiously defensive second Death Star plan—and baring any alleged betrayals by Vader or suicidal Rebel attacks led by the *Millennium Falcon*, which Hux was grateful the First Order would not have to deal with—this time the plan would work.

After that he would put an end to Ren’s tenure as Supreme Leader.

For with the *Supremacy’s* supercomputer back online it was only a matter of time to locate him. At last the glorious sight of the too long blackened computer screen coming to life filled Hux’s eyes, and the General set the hyperdrive enhanced computer to start calculating the coordinates of Ren’s Star Destroyer with a satisfied smile.

Hux had also not felt the need to mention to the Supreme Leader that he continued to have the *Falcon* tracked after it recently left Jakku—as he had a vague inkling that the freighter might actually do the job of locating Ren for him.

The ginger haired General was interested to see if the ship or the computer would be first in providing him with the current location of his arch nemesis.

That task set in motion, Hux then indulged his long harbored suspicions and called up the security footage from Snoke’s private turbolift. His eyes narrowed as he watched Ren and the girl enter the car alone.

“You don’t have to do this,” the girl said, her back for the moment still to Ren, “I feel the conflict in you—it’s tearing you apart.”

Turning to face him she continued.
“Ben, when we touched hands I saw your future . . . Just the shape of it, but solid and clear.” she said with conviction.

“You will not bow before Snoke!” the girl declared as she moved forward to crowd Ren’s personal space, “You’ll turn.”

Ren remained silent, but the palpable heat of his gaze intensified at her proximity.

“I’ll help you,” the girl whispered leaning still closer, “I saw it.”

Ren moved fractionally closer to her, and Hux by that point would not have been surprised if the other man hand bent down and kissed her.

“I saw something too,” Ren replied, “Because of what I saw I know when the moment comes you’ll be the one to turn. You’ll stand with me Rey . . .”

Hux did not have to be aware of all the particulars to now know exactly what had happened in Snoke’s throne room and how the Supreme Leader had died.

Like a dog who was trying to chew on a new bone while simultaneously barking at the person who had given it to him, Hux’s face contorted into an odd expression of rage at Ren’s treachery mixed with smug satisfaction in now feeling fully justified in what he had always been planning to do anyway.

Kylo Ren was a traitor.
Hopefully he would still be vulnerably on the ground when Hux was finished with the Rebels and came for him. That would be ideal—as it would be a shame to have to destroy the Resurgent-class Star Destroyer Ren was using as his current flagship.

If necessary, however, it was a sacrifice that Hux was willing to make.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading!

Next up BENDEMPTION!

The Lady Luck is the name of Lando's ship in the EU (first appearing in the Thrawn trilogy by Timothy Zahn).

Art of the Force Awakens, page 159
Mustafar

Chapter Summary

Bendemption (Beauty and the Beast style). Spoiler alert: He lives.

Chapter Notes

A note about the Knights of Ren.

I set up the KoR’s back-story when all there was to go on was the picture from the Art of the Force Awakens, which is why there are only five. I was happy to keep it that way, however, as I felt it more fitting to have there be only six KoR (including Kylo) which is a more “imperfect/incomplete” number in story telling than seven.

From a psychological standpoint, I believe while Anakin’s defensive construct is Vader’s Castle, safety obsessed Ben’s is the Knights of Ren.

Vader’s Castle: The vainglorious monstrosity and shrine to his power, which Vader built by hand using the power of the dark side on the site of his greatest defeat (lost lightsaber duel with Obi-Wan who left him to die limbless after taking his lightsaber) and where he lost Padme. A place of misery and isolation, it still serves to protect Anakin from the incompetence he feels over failing to beat Obi-Wan and save his wife/mother replacement.

Knights of Ren: Kylo’s dysfunctional biker gang that protects him at all cost.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Hux’s holographic image vanished, and Kylo turned his attention back to Vader’s Mustafar Castle and the other Knights of Ren.

In the space on the large circular suspension bridge that filled most of the chamber that was not taken up by Vader’s throne-like command chair, the massive holographic map of the galaxy, and the electronic equipment lining the outer edge, Amory and Heavy were laughingly choking each other through the Force until one of them passed out.

On the narrow catwalk that lined the inner wall of the castle, with edges demarcated by permights and no guardrails, Rouge and Monk were honing their lightsaber skills—with their sparing frequently leaving visible slashes in the walls.

Sniper stood on one of the shorter bridges that joined the larger suspension bridge with the outer walkway like spokes on a wheel. As Kylo watched, he lazily tossed another grenades out over an open section, and raising his blaster riffle shot it. Both watched the grenade exploded and the shrapnel fall into the river of lava far below.

As Kylo surveyed his aggressive comrades enjoying their violent pastimes—so fitting their current surrounding—he reflected on the dream his grandfather had sent him of the story of his sad life.
For the first time Kylo began to wonder if perhaps being the heir of Anakin Skywalker and the heir of Vader were two different things. His destiny to finish what his grandfather had started, resultantly, no longer appeared as straightforward as he had always believed.

It was hard to think on Mustafar, however, and Kylo also wondered if that was the main reason why Palpatine had maneuvered his grandfather into living here.

“Ren, how much longer are we going to be here?” Sniper asked, breaking Kylo’s reverie.

The Knights were getting bored—which Kylo knew was not good. He would continue his mental examination when they were back aboard his Star Destroyer . . . and if time did not allow then after the upcoming battle.

“Not much longer,” Kylo answered from behind his repaired mask, “It’s time to get back to Supremacy—Hux is lying about something.”

“Shocking,” Rogue said sarcastically as he pinned Monk with his lightsaber and won their latest duel.

Kylo gave the battle plan for galactic domination he had worked out on Vader’s holomap of the galaxy one last glance before transferring it to a datacard. After pocketing the card, he was just raising his comlink to alert the Vindicator to prepare for their arrival—when Kylo suddenly felt Rey’s presence in the Force.

Not through their Force bond opening up . . . but dropping out of hyperspace.
Kylo took a ragged breath as his pulse abruptly skyrocketed.

She was _here_.

How she had found him Kylo did not know, but he now had a decision to make.

Kylo was not stupid. He knew how this scenario went—although Rey being the one the Rebels sent to kill him was in many ways even more cruel than the Jedi tasking Obi-Wan with killing Anakin on this very spot.

He absolutely should not let her land. After all, letting her anywhere near him went against the whole reason for him safely holing up in his grandfather’s stronghold in the first place.

Kylo found, however, that he could not bring himself to have her impersonally blown out of the sky.

As dangerous as it was, part of him desperately wanted to see her one more time—even if he would then have to decide just how far he was willing to go to protect himself.

“Unidentified star fighter—you are cleared to land,” a voice drawled through the com.

Well Ben knew she was here and was not simply having the _Falcon_ shot out from under her. That at least was something, Rey mused.
Chewie rose to check on something in the back of the ship and took Artoo with him. For a moment Rey was alone.

Part of her was a little sorry the small fleet of orbiting Star Destroyers was not opening fire—which would provide an excuse for her to turn around and leave.

Even more of her could not shake the scene from her Force vision on Naboo of Poe dying in battle, and Finn, Rose and the rest of the Rebels getting blown up. If she left right now she could still make it to the *Supremacy* in time to help. Assisting the New Rebel Alliance would also require minimal personal investment and be far less emotionally taxing than the rescue operation on Mustafar she had set before herself.

She was steadied, however, by Luke suddenly appearing beside her.

“I’m afraid all my friends are going to die if I’m not there to help,” Rey confessed.

“Rey, I’m not going to tell you not to care whether or not your friends die,” Luke replied, demonstrating his far superior understanding of the agony of such decisions than that of Master Yoda, “All I can tell you is to trust the Force.”

Rey closed her eyes and reached out to ground herself in the Light. Taking several deep breaths she let it flow through and fill her. She had, furthermore, learnt from Anakin and Luke’s experience of running around trying to prevent Force visions from coming true, and taking another cleansing breath, Rey renewed her resolve and stayed her current course.

For a moment the two of them silently gazed out of the viewport at the hellfire planet below.
“I can’t follow you down there . . . It’s too strong with the dark side,” Luke finally said.

Rey nodded, and they again lapsed into silence before Rey finally broke it.

“Is this the part where you tell me if he won’t turn back from the dark side I should kill him for the sake of the galaxy?” Rey asked.

“Actually, this is the part where I tell you that you should absolutely not kill him to save the galaxy,” Luke replied.

Rey was a bit surprised by his answer.

“If you start killing out of a belief that you are right, and being right justifies any action at all, then you’re no different from the First Order—and the dark side has already won,” he elaborated.

Luke’s eyes filled with emotion as he looked at Rey and added, “Whether or not you choose to fight him in self-defense is up to you.”

Rey, however, knew from his version of past events—and in even more detail from the dream about Anakin—what choice Luke had made. His refusal to kill his father had almost cost him his life—before ultimately saving his father and the galaxy.

Rey turned towards Luke, and for a moment master and apprentice just looked at each other in silence as memories of their old conversations filled the air.
“It was a Jedi Master who was responsible for the training and creation of Darth Vader,” Luke had reminded Rey on Ahch-To.

Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi—Rey’s grandfather.

“And a Jedi who saved him,” Rey had countered, “Yes the most hated man in the galaxy, but you saw there was conflict inside him. You believed that he wasn’t gone—that he could be turned!”

“And I became a legend,” Luke had replied.

Wallowing in his failure after himself training and creating the New Vader, it was a legend the Jedi Master had grown to despise . . . and in his bitterness on Ahch-To it was a sentiment he had eventually passed on to Rey.

“That old Legend of Luke Skywalker that you hate so much—I believed in it,” Rey had later told him in disappointed rage as tears stained her cheeks, “I was wrong!”

Suspended in orbit above Mustafar, however, Rey realized the Legend of Luke Skywalker was one she desperately needed again.

Luke looked at her with compassion.

“Do you remember what you yelled at me when you finally learned the truth?” he asked.

“I said ‘You failed him by thinking his choice was made. It wasn’t. There’s still conflict in him. If
he would turn from the dark side that could shift the tide. This could be how we win,’” Rey replied this time in a flat monotone, “‘If I go to him, Ben Solo will turn’ and ‘he’s our last hope.’”


Upon reflection, Rey found that once again she did still believe her original assessment was correct—that getting Ben back from the dark side and having him as an ally was the best way to help the New Rebel Alliance beat the First Order and bring balance to the Force. And that going after him would still be her chosen course if saving Ben Solo for his own sake was the only goal.

This time, however, her conviction was not born of overly optimistic naiveté—but was more akin to what Han Solo had believed as he walked out onto the catwalk on Starkiller Base after his son.

Rey took a shuttering breath and asked, “And if I’m wrong again, and he-?”

“Then I’ll be waiting for you on the other side,” Luke answered.

Her mentor left her then, and with Chewbacca and Artoo returned to the cockpit, Rey steered the Falcon down into Mustafar’s atmosphere. Artoo provided more specific coordinate to a destination on the planet, and Rey flew on until they finally broke through planet’s cloud cover.

It was night . . . in more ways then one.

Although Mustafar’s sun had long since set, pillars of smoke were still visible as they billowed from the rivers of fiery lava. The glow of the lines of bright red-orange was offset against the pitch-blackness of the volcanic rock.

The planet was also profoundly strong with the dark side of the Force, and the closer Rey brought
the *Falcon* to the surface the more she was assaulted by dark side energy.

As she followed a single stream towards her destination, Rey idly wondered how much her flight path was deviating from that of Padmé’s when the other woman had followed Anakin to this living hell. Whether or not her flight in mirrored Padmé’s, Rey fervently hoped that her own journey would have a far different outcome.

One different was readily apparent. As it rose into view on the horizon, Rey was confident that Padmé had not been met by a sight as striking and terrifying as Vader’s Castle.

The vainglorious monstrosity sat atop a cliff at the edge of a large lava field. It appeared to harness power from the rage of the fiery river of molten rock that passed beneath it, before allowing the lava to pass over the cliff in a single narrow stream.

It was only when Rey set the *Falcon* down on the landing platform behind Ben’s Upsilon-class command shuttle, however, that the trio aboard understood the sheer massiveness of Vader’s monument to his might in the Force.

With its twin spires towering over the landscape, the citadel of stark brutalist design rivaled the height of the Star Destroyers carcasses half buried in the Jakku desert. Even then as Rey looked up at it, Vader’s Castle dwarfed the massive ships in sheer presence. The main tower was tuning fork in appearance, and seemed to pulse with further concentrated dark side energy—which filled Rey with unease.

She briefly let her head fall into her hand as she wondered what in the galaxy she was doing here.

If Threepio had been there—as Rey was now quit aware—he would have been doing his absolute best to dissuade her from doing anything but turning the *Falcon* around and leaving by provided statistics of poor odds and predictions of doom. Rey was very glad the golden personification of all of Anakin’s internal anxieties was not there, and that his sturdy counterpart and her Wookiee copilot were.
The fact that Chewbacca and Artoo had uttered not a single syllable of protest to her coming to his terrifying place in her determination to again go after Ben also spoke volumes.

In hindsight, Rey realized she had taken it completely for granted when Chewie and Artoo had gone along with her insanely reckless, half-baked plan to rescue Ben from the *Supremacy*. They had unquestioningly launched her out into a swarm of Star Destroyers in only the *Falcon*’s escape pod, before jumping back into hyperspace to await her signal at the rendezvous point when she somehow managed to not get killed, captured, or turned the dark side.

Chewbacca’s automatic acquiescence, Rey guessed, was likely due to a lifetime of watching Han beat the odds and somehow make his crazy schemes turn out in his favor. How Artoo had acquired his high tolerance for risk, Rey did not know. She guessed, however, that it had a great deal to do with his time as Anakin’s astromech. Unlike Ben, Rey shared the two men’s wonton disregard for impossible odds, and tendency to rush headlong into danger on yet another rescue mission.

As they all looked up at Vader’s Castle, however, Rey knew her current plan was pushing the bound for all three of them. Chewie roared questioningly and Artoo warbled mournfully as he rocked nervously back and forth as they double-checked that she really wanted to do this. They were both ultimately supportive, however, and were once again going along with her latest risky and dangerous plan to reach Ben.

Neither Wookiee nor astromech offered any protest as Rey bid them what she fervently hoped were not her final farewells and disembark.

Leaving the *Falcon* behind her, Rey set out towards Vader’s Castle. With her determination outweighing her apprehension and driving her feet methodically forward, Rey marched straight ahead along the citadel’s long landing platform.

At the entrance Rey again stopped to collect herself. Taking a deep breath, she ran her fingers through her hair and straightened her clothes. As it had been on the *Supremacy*, Rey had her hair down—sensing Ben’s preference for it that way. She had, however, returned to a light colored outfit. She could not return to her childhood, nor did she want to anymore. It was, however, a statement of what side of the Force she was on—and where she would remain. She would remain loyal to the Light to which she was calling Ben to return one more time.

Preparing to enter the metal stronghold, Rey was unable to stop herself for gazing up and up and up at the black castle. She could sense this was not only a place of great power, but also of great
isolation and misery, and her heart broke that Anakin and now Ben had come here.

With fear rising up within her, Rey reached into her pocket and touched Han’s golden dice that she had taken from their place in the *Falcon*—she could use all legendary Solo luck she could get.

Rey’s hand then rose and closed around the pendant of Leia’s ring and the kyber crystal necklace that Obi-Wan had left for her mother. After giving each a squeeze, Rey tucked them safely away inside of her shirt.

Turning once more she could make out the comforting site of the Chewbacca and Artoo standing beneath the *Millennium Falcon*.

Lastly, Rey brought to mind and clung to the Legend of Luke Skywalker—redeemer of Vader.

Most comforting of all, however, was the weight of the Skywalker legacy lightsaber in her hand. Rey tightened her grip on Anakin’s saber—her chief ally as she walked further into the edifice of Vader’s living hell and dark side madness.

Upon entering Rey encountered no one, but found that the interior of the fortress was as intimidating as the exterior. Gigantic stone carvings of macabre Sith religious reliefs were offset by the black obsidian that lined the walls—its recognizable geometric pattern of black volcanic glass shimmering in the dim light.

The ambience was deeply disturbing, and only the encouragement of a strong voice in the back her mind steadied Rey and stopped her from turning around and fleeing the castle.

From what she remembered of this place from the dream about Anakin, Rey knew that had she been summoned there to see Vader she would have been left in the audience chamber for him to
make an impressive entrance. She understood, however, that that was not where she would find Ben. Although perfectly capable of doing so, making an intimidating entrance really was not Ben’s preferred style.

Sensing he was above her, Rey instead entered the castle’s turbolift.

As the car ascended, Rey remembered her first turbolift ride to a different throne room—back when she and Ben had been a team. The doors opened to again reveal a room awash with red and the Supreme Leader of the First Order seated on a throne. The majority of the large chamber was fill by an enormous suspension bridge, and near the far edge was Ben.

Rey was fully aware that monumental things had happened on suspension bridges. Vader had severed Luke’s hand, Ben had killed Han . . . and Luke had shown mercy on his father and won him back to the Light. Something similar to one of those events was going to happen on this bridge—which one exactly Rey could not be sure.

The tubolift doors closed behind her with an ominous clang.

Deliberately avoiding looking down at the lava far below, Rey slowly walked across one of the connecting walkways until she reached the main bridge—all the while keeping her gaze fixed on Ben.

He sat on Vader’s throne like command chair, which was raised on a dais for a better view of the stunning holo of the galaxy that sprawled out before him. Rey could tell from behind his mask Ben was glaring at her coolly—although she again felt conflict roiling off of him.

In a scene no less carefully crafted then one of Vader’s creation, he was dressed in full Kylo Ren regalia and lounged in the command chair—clearly conveying her presence was not worth the effort of walking, standing, or even sitting up straight.

The portrait of cool indifference he was painting, however, was belied by the intensity with which Ben gripped the handle of his Vaderesque red lightsaber—a grip that matched Rey’s own grip on
Anakin’s. Although resting casually on one thigh, it was clearly ready to be ignited and flare to life in Ben’s defense at the slightest provocation or sign threat.

The impression of him Rey had in that moment was of a wounded animal—one made more dangerous by his injury.

Ben had also left the holomap of the galaxy illuminated, a clear sign to Rey where she was to halt her approach towards him—and a symbol of the distance he considered existing between them.

Rey stopped at the galaxy holo’s far edge, and for a few heartbeats neither of them spoke. Ben finally broke the silence.

“They sent you to kill me,” he said accusingly.

“No,” Rey emphatically answered.

She felt him probing her mind for evidence of a lie, and was glad Luke had not burdened her with that. If he had Ben would have found it and this would have been over. But Luke had broken the cycle, and not passed on to Rey the order to “kill Vader” which Obi-Wan had passed to him after receiving it from Master Yoda.

Ben was surprise not to find the murderous edict, and Rey felt his suspiciousness subsided somewhat—although he remained wary.

“She sensed his hesitation. But Rey was not repeating the mistake of her grandfather, and the fact that she had not come to kill him and had chosen to be here instead of with the Rebellion preparing
for the offensive he knew was coming—that Rey was there for him, and him alone—seemed to count for something.

He hesitated for so long that Rey thought he was refusing her.

But then as he had the first time . . . Ben slowly reached up and removed his mask.

He glared down at her, and although he tried to hide it, Rey felt how badly she had hurt him. Rey had been sure that if she could just see his eyes she could again reach him. They were tinged with yellow and a coldness, however, that had not been there before.

“Why are you here?” he demanded.

“You know why I’m here,” she answered as she sent all the love she could through the Force in his direction.

It seemed to bounce off him like cold stone, and he was unmoved.

“I’m not leaving without you!” Rey impassionedly declared, growing frustrated and digging in her heals.

“What makes you think-” an icy voice that sent a chill up Rey’s spine loudly whispered from off to one side, “-that you will be leaving at all?”
Expanding her attention beyond Ben, Rey looked around and saw the nightmarish figures of the Knights of Ren.

Each walked across one of the connecting bridges—effectively blocking her path back to the turbolift—before halting in unison as they reached the edge of the main platform.

“This is a place where Jedi come to die,” the icy voice announced.

Like a pack of wolves they slowly began to circle her—herding her away from their leader.

Rey ignited both blades of her saberstaff and separated it into two individual sabers as she prepared to defend herself—all the while knowing she would not be able to.

“Ben, please!” Rey cried, sending an desperate glance in his direction.

He looked at her coldly and did not move. Rey realized then he was not coming to her rescue this time . . . he was going to let his thugs kill her.

Despair welled up within her as Rey accepted that history was doomed to repeat itself.

Like Padmé, she had failed to reach her love . . . and she was about to die.
The Knights abruptly ceased their circling—and in unison attacked.

Kylo watched as his Knights identified Rey as a threat to his safety, and making his decision for him began circling her menacingly.

Igniting the saber that—like his heart—was now split in two, Rey cried out to him.

“Ben, please!” she beseeched.

_She was begging him? Well hadn’t he begged her?_

Kylo felt bitterness well up in him. His eyes clouded a deeper yellow as a wave of cold resentment and unforgiveness washed over him, hardening his heart.

And in that moment Ben Solo was truly gone—lost to the dark side—and replaced by Kylo Ren.

Suddenly a vision flashed before him—the mask descending onto the chard face of Anakin in the
last movement before Vader was fully born. But instead of looking up his grandfather was looking straight at him.

His grandfather who knew all about botched training, negligent caregivers, the manipulations of evil men, and the overwhelming grief of lost love.

His grandfather who had learnt the hard way that good and evil existed as objective truths and were not merely a matter of a relativistic point of view.

And in that look was the lesson that his grandson still had free will—and none of what he had endured absolved him of personal responsibility for his choices.

That look warned him that he had been given several chances to get off the path to the dark side that led only to isolation, pain, and despair—and this was his last one.

While Rey was sacrificing herself for her deep conviction he was not beyond redemption, his grandfather was truly the last person in the galaxy to whom he would listen.

And where all others had failed, Anakin’s warning finally reached his grandson.

Kylo’s vision cleared and his mind snapped out of the dark side fog. In horror he watched as in union the Knights launched their attack.

“STOP!” Kylo shouted.
None of them so much as flinched . . . and Kylo realized with a jolt that he was no longer Master of the Knights of Ren.

As he ignited his red saber and started running towards Rey, Kylo reached out through the Force to help her.

Neutralizing Sniper and his blaster fire was of paramount importance. Rey had somehow managed to deflect his opening salvo, but that would not last. Kylo redirected the next blaster bolt to line up with Armory instead. It struck the Knight in the leg and allowed Rey an opening to cut him down.

The next shot briefly hung in midair—before Kylo pushed it straight back and struck Sniper squarely in the chest. Even then Kylo did not let up, and continued to push the marksmen through the Force . . . until he toppled over the edge of the bridge and fell into the roiling lava below.

Turning his attention back to the fight, Kylo saw that the remaining three Knights had continued their attack on Rey unabated.

Rogue and Monk had ignited their yellow sabers and were slashing at her with all their might. Heavy, meanwhile, had reached out through the Force and had her neck in a choke hold.

Rey tried to fight on but was in danger slipping into unconsciousness—when the grenade Armory had been preparing to launch at her exploded in his lifeless hand. The combatants lost their balance, and Heavy lost his Force grip on Rey. She inhaled sharply and fought on.

Rogue then cut Rey’s legs out from under her through the Force, as he and Monk raised their sabers high in preparation to cut her in half and Heavy raised his hand to again choke her.

Kylo continued to run, but saw he was not going reach Rey in time. Locking his red saber on, he threw it. It flew straight through Heavy—who collapsed to the ground—before arriving above Rey only just in time to join her blue blades in blocking the Knight’s downward slashes.
Kylo also managed to catch Rey with a Force grip before she hit the ground. For a moment she hung suspended—her strength combined with his against Monk and Rogue. With more effort in the Force than he had every used before Kylo broke stalemate—pushing back the Knight’s lightsabers and setting Rey on her feet.

He was finally there, and reached out for his red saber. Before he could grab it, however, Rogue chopped down with his own blade . . . slicing the hilt of Kylo’s saber in half and shattering the kyber crystal within.

For a moment Kylo remained motionless—in shock at the loss of what had long been an extension of his arm—before Rey smoothly slid his half of Anakin’s lightsaber into his still outstretched hand.

And once again he was fighting back to back with Rey.

As they fought, both reached out through the Force. Kylo found that their connection was far deeper than it had been in Snoke’s throne room. He felt Rey’s joy that they were together again, and her bright hope that if they could just survive things would be different this time.

But Kylo knew this was not like last time. For they were not fighting Snoke’s Praetorian guards—but the Force sensitive Knights of Ren. In his heart Kylo knew that only one of them would be walking out of there.

And it was going to be Rey.

Because he was not ending up like his grandfather—living out the rest of his empty life because the woman he loved sacrificed herself for him.
Blue and yellow sabers clashed as the lightsaber duel intensified.

Kylo deliberately took Rogue, leaving Rey to fight Monk. Although all of them with their sensitivity to the Force could see briefly into the future, with his Force gift superior to the Knights and more developed than Rey’s, Kylo found he was fighting a split second ahead of the others.

And finally the opportunity came that Kylo had been waiting for.

Reaching behind he blocked Monk’s saber, and allowed Rey to deliver a killing blow. To help Rey, however, required Kylo to leave himself undefended—and he was unsurprised when Rogue stabbed his yellow saber straight through his stomach.

Kylo was briefly gripped by fear that Rogue had also managed to spear Rey, and relief flooded him upon realizing she had moved out of the way in the nick of time. Rey, however, was filled with panic as she turned from Monk’s lifeless body to face Kylo and Rogue.

“No!” she screamed.

With the yellow saber piercing him, Kylo grabbed Rogue’s arm and held him fast—allowing Rey to cut down the remaining Knight. In death, Rogue lost his grip on his lightsaber. It shut down and fell to the floor next to its master’s lifeless body.

The Knights of Ren were gone—but were taking their former master with them.

Kylo had been prepared for the kill shot, and as on Starkiller had managed to contain it. Unlike Chewbacca’s bow caster bolt, however, this time it was only temporary. He felt Rey trying to support him, but his weight was too great. As his lightsaber fell from his hand, his body slid to the floor.
Looking up he saw Rey hovering over him, and felt her desperately clutching his shirt.

“Ben!” she exclaimed.

“Rey . . . You came back,” he said.

“Of course I came back!” Rey replied, and through her tears stammered, “You’ll be alright . . . we’re together now . . . everything’s going to be fine . . .”

Inwardly, Kylo had to smile. Her staunch refusal to accept reality to the bitter end was so very ‘Rey.’

“At least . . . I got to see you . . . one last time,” he told her, his breathing becoming more labored.

Sensing his desire to touch her face just once, Rey removed the glove from his right hand—which unlike his grandfather and uncle was still intact—and pressed it to her cheek. Turning her face she kissed his palm before turning her gaze back to his for the few remaining seconds they had together.

“Rey . . . Sweetheart . . . Don’t cry,” he said as he managed to sweep his thumb across her face to wipe away some of her tears, “You saved me.”

As much as he longed to gaze into her eyes forever, his eyelids began to droop until he could not hold on any longer.
As he closed his eye for the last time he heard her pleading in a whisper, “No! . . . Please don’t leave me! . . . Please . . . I love you.”

Heartbroken to be leaving her, Ben was nonetheless relieved to be dying in peace—finally free of the terrible conflict that had dominated his life for so long.

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Ben’s eyes closed and his chest ceased to rise and fall as his life breath slipped away.

The only sound that broke the stillness of the chamber’s stale air was the dull roar of the lava far below.

Rey once again found herself alone.

*It could not end this way—it just couldn’t.*

Cradling Ben’s lifeless body in her arms, Rey thought of Anakin holding his dead mother.

“I will be the most powerful Jedi ever—I will even learn to stop people from dying!” he had later screamed.
In that moment Rey knew how he felt.

Anakin never had learnt to unlock the secrets of life and death. The tragic irony, however, was as a Child of the Force like no other he probably could have. But in his quest Anakin had chosen to put his trust in the dark side, and its shadow brought death not only to him but to the very one he was trying to save.

Poor Padmé had followed her love to this living hell and then followed him further into death. Rey too had followed her love to this terrible place, but she would not follow him any farther into the darkness and was not following him into death.

Like Anakin, however, Rey too sensed that her strength in the Force extended beyond the finality of death. Ben would likely tell her she was again being willfully delusional, but Ben was not currently capable of having a say in the matter—which was after all the problem.

Rey was determined, and even now she refused to believe that this was the end of the Skywalkers. Learning from Anakin’s mistake, however, Rey turned to the Light for help.

Bending down she touched her lips to Ben’s—still warm in a parody of life. Rey poured all her love for him and the power of the Light into her kiss as she reached out to the Force and willed breath back into his lifeless body.

She was just beginning to despair that her efforts were in vain—that she had been foolish to believe she could call on the Force to alter fate—when she sensed that something was happening. Pulling away, Rey saw that light had begun emanating from the wound that had killed Ben—not the red-orange glow of the lava, but a soft white light.

All of a sudden Ben inhaled deeply and opened his eyes.
As he looked up at her, Rey saw that his vision was bright and clear. She felt, moreover, that as a result of his ultimate self-sacrifice his spirit was cleaner that it had ever felt before—that he had been freed from much of the darkness he had inherited in consequence of his grandfather’s sin, to which he had added his own crimes.

Ben sat up, and in disbelief he touched the unblemished skin that minutes ago had been a gaping wound. His gaze then rose to lock with Rey’s, and his hand returned to caress her face.

“Ben,” she said, her voice radiating peace.

A wide smile broke over his face at the sound of his true name on her lips, and Rey raised her own hands to caress his cheeks. For several heartbeats all they could do was stare into each other’s eyes in wonder and joy—before they both surged forward to meet in a kiss.

It was not a kiss of parting but of new beginning, and their future life together felt never ending and brimming with possibility. As it had been the first time they had touched hands on Ahch-To, as their lips touched they also found themselves connected in the Force—only far more deeply after all they had gone through together and done for each other.

When they finally broke apart, his hand remained on her cheek, wiping away the tears that still streamed down her face.

“Ben, can we please get out of this horrible place?” Rey asked.

“Yes,” Ben replied, as he stood and helped her up. He changed his mind, however, and amended, “In a moment.”
Walking back to Vader’s throne he picked up his Kylo Ren mask . . . and then the chard mask of Vader. At the edge of the suspension bridge he hurled one after the other into the river of lava below.

Ben was just turning back to Rey when the translucent Force ghost of Anakin Skywalker appeared before them.

Luke had told Rey that he could not come with her to Mustafar, but as he had been during his earthly life Anakin appeared to be subject to different rules. He was somehow able to appear in this place to which he had such strong ties, although his image was faint and he did not appear to be able to speak.

Ben found, however, that he did not need to hear words as he had craved for so long—his grandfather nodding at him approvingly was enough for now.

Anakin then smiled at Ben and Rey before disappearing. Although not understanding how, the pair sensed that Ben’s sacrifice has somehow also freed Anakin from the last of his bonds, which had remained in consequence of the lingering effects his crimes had on his family and especially his grandson.

Ben reached for Rey’s hand. Taking nothing but Anakin’s saber they left Vader’s Castle.

Once outside, they wrapped their arms around each other as they walked along the long landing pad toward their respective ships.

“Rey, I need to go deal with Hux, and you need to back to the Alliance and tell them to hold off
their attack,” Ben said, tightening his grip in anticipation of duty separating them for a time, “The superweapon on the *Supremacy* is up and running, and if the Rebels attack now they’ll fall into a trap and be obliterated.”

Rey halted in mid-step, and pulling away she looked up at him in horror.

“They moved up the attack. The whole fleet is already enroute and on radio silence,” Rey said.

And Ben finally had an answer to what Hux had been lying about.

Beside him, Ben felt fear grip Rey’s heart, and he could sense a rising wave of panic welling up in her. Turning fully towards her, he took her face in both hands and looked intensely at her.

“No, Rey—Sweetheart—look at me,” Ben said insistently. She finally raised her eyes to his and he continued, “You and I are going to fix this—*together.*”

She still looked like she was about to cry, be he could sense her panic was subsiding. Again wrapping his arm around her shoulders, Ben pulled out his comlink as he quickened their steps.

“Captain Peavey,” Ben barked into the com.

“Yes sir,” came the captain’s quick reply.

“Take the fleet back to the *Supremacy*. Do not engage the enemy without my express permission. I will meet you there, and will be relieving General Hux of duty,” Ben told him before adding, “You are in command now, Admiral Peavey.”
“Very good, sir,” Peavey answered, accepting the news of his abrupt promotion with the levelheaded calmness Ben had come to expect from the officer.

Shutting off his com, he inclined his head towards Rey.

“We’ll take the Falcon. It’s faster,” Ben said, hoping the ship his father often boasted had made the Kessel Run in twelve parsecs would be fast enough to make his promise to her come true.

As they rounded his command shuttle and the distinctive freighter came fully into view, however, Ben suddenly realized that taking the Falcon would not be as straightforward as simply walking onboard. For at the bottom of the gangplank stood a seven and a half foot tall Wookiee.

The last time Ben had seen Han Solo’s best friend and copilot, Chewbacca had fired a bowcaster bolt into his side after Ben had killed his father. Ben had known Uncle Chewie his entire life, and knew there was nothing he could say that would come close to being adequate.

Stopping several meters away from the Wookiee, he looked Chewbacca in the eye simply said, “I’m sorry.”

Ben’s words were sincere and heartfelt, and for a moment man and Wookiee stared at each other—the intense pain of the absence of Han Solo mirrored in the other’s eyes.

Having spent decades with the Solo family, Chewbacca’s relationship with Ben was simultaneously complicated and very simple. The Wookiee knew—even if Ben did not and Han had poorly expressed it—that the day Ben was born the Falcon had ceased to be what was most precious to Han in the galaxy.
Without a word, Chewbacca stepped aside and let Ben have his father’s ship.

Exhaling the breath he had been unconsciously holding, Ben’s attention was then drawn to the smaller figure of the astromech droid who was also standing by the *Falcon*.

In that moment with the red glare of lava reflecting off him, Artoo looked as he must have all those years ago—waiting obediently for a beloved master who had never come back.

Ben walked over and crouched down in front of the little droid, laying one hand on his domed head. For a moment they just looked at each other.

“I’m so sorry, Artoo,” Ben said, this time his words coming out in a choked sob.

Artoo wobbled back and forth, chirping softly. It took quite a while for Ben to regain his composure after reuniting with the droid who had done more than anyone else to raise him. Finally he wiped away his tears and rose.

The little droid, however, was just getting going and appeared in no hurry to slow down.

Ben, who knew Artoo would never let out his pent up emotions unless all was once again well gave him a rueful grin, grabbed Rey’s hand, and intertwined his fingers with hers as he started up the gangplank of the *Falcon*.

“Come on Artoo,” he called over his shoulder, “We’ve got a long flight a head of us. You can lecture me on the folly of my ways enroute.”
Rey now understood that Artoo and Ben knew each other extremely well. It explained a lot about the little droid’s recent behavior, and validated Rey’s suspicions that he knew a lot more about the history of the Skywalkers than she had originally given him credit.

And from the way Artoo was now making increasingly loud, hysterical squawking noises as he rolled up the ramp after them, Rey had a feeling the astromech’s grievances would take up much of the flight.

Passing Chewbacca going somewhere with a toolbox, Rey followed Ben into the cockpit. Ahead of her Ben climbed into the pilot’s seat, and Rey could not help but reflexively be a little concerned. The *Falcon* was quirky and temperamental.

Ben looked over at her and gave her a patient look—his momentary glance away from the control panel not slowing down his hands as they flew over the controls in the slightest. He had removed his other glove and was now expertly flipping switches, punching ignition sequences, entering coordinates into the nav computer, and running through the pre-flight checks at rapid speed.

Rey slid into the copilot’s seat, somewhat abashedly realizing that while she had flown the *Falcon* with an infusion of Force knowledge Ben’s understanding was based on countless hours of flight time and watching his father at the controls. This was the ship he had learned to fly in and began honing his considerable piloting skills.

Ben’s hands continue to fly over the controls until of course he found the compressor.

“What the-” he exclaimed, in a tone not unlike what Rey remembered Han’s had been.

“Short version, the compressor has been bypassed,” Rey said.

“Good,” Ben replied.
Soon the *Falcon’s* amazingly fast startup sequence was complete and she was ready to fly.

“It’s still a piece of junk,” Ben mumbled under his breath as he expertly lifted off and climbed towards deep space.

Rey sensed his words lacked substance, however, now that he was back flying the beloved freighter. The *Falcon* herself also seemed to understand, and required remarkably little maintenance during their flight.

Chapter End Notes

Happy to finally be sharing the version of Bendemption in my head that helped me survive TROS. How you enjoyed it and thanks so much for reading!
The holomap of the galaxy is taken from The Last Command (last book in the Thrawn Trilogy) by Timothy Zahn. In the EU both Palpatine and Thrawn have one of the special holomaps, and it would make sense to me if Vader had one too.


Acknowledgment of works of commentary that contributed ideas significantly included in this chapter:

Bridges Tropes in Star Wars meta by clairen45


https://clairen45.tumblr.com/post/183289143738/addendum-on-my-sw-bridge-trope-meta

Artwork: Art of Rogue One, page 176 and move still shot from “The Rise of Skywalker”
Chapter 22: Battle for Supremacy

In the blackness of space, the New Rebel Alliance attack force was assembled and ready to fly.

“General, we’re in position. All fighters accounted for,” Poe announced from the cockpit of Black One.
“Proceed with the count down,” General Lando Calrissian replied from the bridge of the Ackbar, “All groups assume attack coordinates and prepare to jump into hyperspace on my mark . . . and may the Force be with us.”

Poe activated his X-wing’s hyperdrive, and the rest of the armada followed suit.

As the lead X-wing hurtled along at lightspeed, BB-8 made what he fervently hoped were the final pre-battle systems checks. He found, however, that Black One had generated a lengthy list of urgent action items—which had absolutely nothing to do with preparing for space combat—in the few minutes since the last time the droid had checked.

Letting out an electronic sigh, BB-8 deleted them . . . again.

Before dying a fiery death on the Raddus, the previous Black One had been a prickly, vainglorious machine, and the astromech had hoped its successor would be less of a pain. BB-8 found, however, that the new Black One was as much of a deva as its predecessors, and decided with resignation that it must be a design flaw in the whole line.

The round droid soon had other things to worry about as Poe dropped the X-wing out of hyperspace, and the rest of the Rebel strike force quickly joined them.

The Supremacy loomed up ahead. The mega-class Star Destroyer was quite an imposing sight.

“All wings report in,” Poe barked into the com, and the fighters all quickly checked in.

“Lock S-foils in attack positions . . . we’re going in,” Poe announced to Black squadron.
The First Order launched their own fighters, and with a grin on his face Poe engaged the enemy TIEs. The Star Destroyer’s guarding the *Supremacy* began bombarding the Rebellion capital ships, which readily returned fire, and the battle was quickly underway.

“General, we have incoming enemy ships!” Connix announced to the *Ackbar’s* bridge.

A large number of ships had just dropped out of hyperspace behind the Rebel forces. The Star Destroyers were as usual the most noticeable. Another set of ships Lando recognized, however, quickly grabbed the General’s attention, and a sinking feeling developed in he pit of his stomach.

“Take evasive action!” Lando ordered as the new Star Destroyers joined the fight with their turbolasers and launched their TIE fighters.

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On the bridge of the *Supremacy*, General Armitage Hux gazed out the viewport with a malevolent smile as he watched the First Order’s secondary forces drop into normal space—on cue and in perfect formation.

The Star Destroyers were impressive as always, but it was the salvaged group of Interdictor Cruisers that were the linchpin in this operation. With their four huge gravity-wave generators capable of simulating planet-size masses, the specialized ships had been the Empire’s favorite tool for keeping opponents from escaping to lightspeed as Imperial forces pounded them into oblivion.

The Interdictor Cruisers . . . and the *Supremacy’s* new Death Star weaponry now being charged.
The motley collection of Rebel ships out there represented the majority of the galaxy’s resistance to First Order rule—and soon they would all be gone.

Hux’s smile broadened at what would come after this decisive battle. The spy ship tailing the *Millennium Falcon* had tracked it to Mustafar and returned as instructed. The ginger haired general now had the coordinates for where Ren—his true rival—had holed up with his hooligans. After the Rebels were gone, Hux would go to Mustafar and obliterate Ren’s entire fortress.

He imagined with enjoyment the look on Ren’s masked face the moment before being incinerated from the face of the galaxy—the moment he understood that he had lost and Hux had won.

And with both Ren and the New Rebel Alliance fleet gone there would be nothing to stop him, Supreme Leader Hux, as he rolled out his First Order war machine in a mighty campaign . . . starting with a trip to the treacherous Naboo.

Word finally came that the *Supremacy’s* new weapon of mass destruction was primed and ready.

“Fire,” Hux ordered.

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Poe was in the middle of convening with Lando and the other Rebellion leaders to adjust their battle plan, when with a flash of green a Mon Calamari Star Cruiser near the *Ackbar* abruptly blew up.

“On no!” Connix cried.
“That blast came from the *Supremacy*—that thing’s operational!” Lando exclaimed.

“It’s a trap” Poe said, his voice flat.

With this new development, even Poe would have conceded that it was time to retreat—except the Interdictor Cruisers were there to make sure that did not happen.

“Black Squad, Red Squad—the Interdictor Cruiser closest to the *Ackbar*, we’ve got to take it out,” Poe barked into the com.

“Copy Black Leader,” the other starfighter pilots answered.

“Go for the gravity-wave generators—alright let’s light it up!” Poe ordered, traces of stress creeping into his voice.

It was a good plan . . . but one that the architect of the First Order battle strategy had anticipated. The X-wings quickly discovered the Interdictors were heavily shielded, and with their efforts proving futile they were quickly overrun with enemy fighters.

In the part of his mind that was not consumed with space combat, Poe Dameron came to some harsh realizations.

Both of his parents—Pathfinder Kes Dameron and starfighter pilot Shara Bey—had been hard core Rebels, and growing up on Yavin IV Poe had loved to listen to their stories of the original Rebel Alliance triumphing over the evil Empire.

Tales of Luke Skywalker, who blew up the First Death Star and later personally ended Emperor Palpatine’s reign. He was the man who had once rescued his parents from certain death on Hoth,
and later given his mother a fragment of a Force sensitive tree to plant in the new colony on Yavin IV. And he was the legendary Jedi who had sacrificed himself so the remnant of the Resistance could live and fight another day against the tyranny of the First Order.

Stories of the brash smuggler turned Rebellion General Han Solo, who Kes had served under in the special forces strike team tasked with dismantling the shield generator on Endor. Han Solo who had come to the Resistance’s rescue on Starkiller—infiltrating the base to again take out the planetary shields and blast a hole in the Oscillator that allowed Poe enough access to blow the whole thing up.

And Leia Organa—Alderaanian princess, Senator, and Rebellion and Resistance leader—who had been the bedrock in the galaxy’s fight for freedom day in and day out for her entire life.

Poe realized that from the first time he heard his parents’ stories to that very moment he had taken the outcome of good triumphing over evil completely for granted. The reality had been quite different. The uncertain fate of the galaxy had hung precariously in the balance on numerous occasions—with the Light triumphing at those critical moments due largely to the heroic efforts of a Skywalker or Solo. Luke and Han had passed on from their earthly lives, and still comatose Leia appeared destined to join them soon. As a result, there were no members of that great family left to bail the Rebellion out this time.

And the full force of a horrifying realization suddenly struck Poe.

They were going to lose.

As TIE fighters converged on him, Poe also realized he had run out of moves. The brash pilot had managed to escape certain doom so many times, but this was where it would all end.

Steeling himself, Poe prepared for his X-wing’s cockpit to explode into a fireball . . .
Artoo had had no luck reaching the Alliance enroute from Mustafar, and the *Falcon* dropped out of hyperspace just in time to watch a Rebellion capital ship explode.

Rey was immediately gripped with fear that her friends had died on board. Ben sent her as much calm and focus through the Force as he could—knowing now was not the time to worry about that.

“Rey take the quads,” he said, hoping the task would take her mind off unproductively worrying about the battle at large.

One of his few non-Luke memories of the Battle of Crait, moreover, had been that Rey was an excellent shot. Ben had built upon her innate talent by also giving her a brief crash course about using the Force in space combat, and was grateful that Rey was as usual a quick study. As she rose and made her way to the gunner position, Ben angled the shields to provide her maximum protection, and received an approving nod from Chewbacca.

“Chewie take the *Falcon* for a second, and Artoo make sure the shields stay up,” Ben continued.

Receiving both a roar and electronic twitter of acknowledgment, Ben sat back in his chair and closed his eyes.

Setting aside his wish that his plan to entrap and destroy the Rebellion had not been quite so effective, Ben focused instead on the task at hand.

Ending the battle and saving the Rebels from Hux was after all the right thing to do. Far more
importantly, however, it was what Rey wanted—and Ben was not letting her down again.

Clearing his mind, Ben reached out to the Force for guidance—as his uncle and not Snoke had taught him to do.

The real question was how best to stop the battle already raging outside.

Even if he ordered the rest of the First Order forces to disengage, Hux would ignore him. His rival would, therefore, first have to be neutralized, and knowing Hux that would likely require taking him out.

Ben could board the First Order flagship and forcibly take command. But with the **Supremacy** blowing up Alliance capital ships as soon as the weapon was reloaded, getting from the hanger to the bridge through whatever barriers Hux would have in place to block him would take time they did not have. No, the only way to take out Hux fast enough was do what he always did—blow up the bridge from the outside.

Which was an absolutely insane idea.

The **Supremacy**’s defenses were not that of an ordinary ship, and even its viewport was made of reinforced transparasteel and could withstand the firepower of anything less than a heavily armored capital ship. Even the weapons his TIE **Silencer** was equipped with would not be enough.

But Ben was not in the **Silencer** . . . he was in the **Millennium Falcon**.

The **Falcon** was not only the fastest ship in the galaxy, but was also as maneuverable as all but the nimblest of starfighters. The freighter’s hull, furthermore, was made of Duralloy plates salvaged from an Imperial cruiser, and resultantly it could take a hit far beyond other ships of its size. In addition to having the hull armor of a capital ship, the **Falcon** was also armed like one—supplementing the ventral and dorsal quad laser cannons, she also sported two Arakyd ST2
concussion missile tubes, each of which carried a four-missile magazine.

It was insane—but in the *Falcon* Ben knew he could do it.

*But after that, then what?*

With Hux out of the way, Ben could stand down the First Order forces. To completely stop the battle, however, a Rebellion leader would need to give the same order to the ships on the other side.

Which meant finding Poe Dameron . . .

Well if events had gone the way they were supposed to, Ben Solo would have likely have been Poe in this battle.

And if Ben were leading the Rebellion, where would he be?

On the bridge of the flagship?

No, he would be in his X-wing . . . Ben concentrated harder . . . on a suicidal mission to attack the Interdictor Cruisers and free the fleet.

With effort he let go of another layer of his resentment towards his mother’s precious cause and her replacement son.
And with a prompting of the Force, he knew he had to find Poe—now.

Ben eyes flew open.

“Artoo find Black One!” he said, as he took back control of the Falcon and gunned it towards the Interdictors.

Both Artoo and BB-8 were two of the best astromechs that had ever existed, and the droids quickly found each other. BB-8 fed them coordinates, and Ben shot the Falcon towards Poe’s X-wing with all the freighter’s considerable speed.

And arrived just in time for Rey to gun down a group of TIE fighters converging on Black One.

“Artoo open a com channel for Rey,” Ben said as he continued to dodge and spin his way among the combatants.

Rey heard his request over the intercom headsets and sent him a questioning sense. Ben replied back through the Force he was not going to try to explain everything to Poe in the middle of this chaotic mess. Agreeing he had a point, it was Rey who explained their insane plan to Poe.

“I don’t know about this Rey,” Poe replied after thanking her for saving him and hearing her out.

“Poe, trust me. If we can take out the Supremacy’s bridge we can end the battle and save the fleet!” Rey insisted.
And like the decisive battles of the Galactic Civil War that his parents had filled his childhood with, Poe knew right here and now was what it all came down to—whether to trust military tactics or people.

“Blue Squad, gold Squad, keep our friends busy. Red Squad, Black Squad, cover the Falcon. We’re making a run on the Supremacy,” Poe announced over the com.

Knowing many of the fighters would not make it, Poe nonetheless chose to trust Rey and her Jedi instincts that this was their best chance to save the Rebellion.

With the X-wings following, Ben swung the Falcon around in a tight arc until it was again facing the Mega Star Destroyer.

“Well, this is where the fun begins,” Rey commented.

Although piloted by different captains, the Millennium Falcon had played a key role in all of the major galactic battles from the destruction of both the Death Stars at the Battle of Yavin and the Battle of Endor, the final death of the Empire in the skirmish over Jakku, the destruction of Star Killer base, and the small but crucial show down on Crait. With a Force sensitive Solo at the helm, the Falcon was again poised to make her contribution to this deceive moment in galactic history.

“Artoo, plot us a course to the Supremacy’s bridge,” Ben said.

From the speed of the droid’s reply Ben knew he had been working on it well before being asked.
Artoo’s unwavering confidence in Ben was a calming balm to the young Force user. Ben also knew that all the flight time they had logged together was coming down to the next few minutes—and that running his uncle’s X-wing through an asteroid field would soon no longer be the craziest thing he and Artoo had done together.

In the seconds before beginning the attack run, Ben paused and asked himself one last question.

*Would my Dad have done this?*

Ben knew in his heart the answer was a resounding “yes.”

Reaching up, he touched the golden dice that again hung in their proper place. Summoning all the Solo luck he had hopefully inherited along with his Force abilities, Ben offered up a silent prayer for Han Solo’s intercession—recalling Luke’s parting words that his father would always be with him.

Letting go of his lingering doubt, Ben cleared his mind and reached out to the Force. His combat senses on full alert he accelerated the *Falcon* to attack speed.

And flew straight at the *Supremacy.*

Hux’s smile had only grown wider over the last few minutes. From the safety of the bridge the battle raging outside appeared to be a chaotic dance, which the First Order General found quite
beautiful.

Abruptly his revere was rudely interrupted.

“General, enemy freighter hailing . . . ship ID registering as the Millennium Falcon,” the com operator relayed, her voice as usual calm, robotic, and impervious to the mayhem outside.

“The Millennium Falcon?” Hux said in consternation.

“Patch it through,” he barked to the com officer, “This is General Hux of the First Ord-”

“This is Supreme Leader Kylo Ren,” Ben cut him off, “General Hux, disengage from the battle and recall all fighters. I repeat, disengage from the battle and recall all fighters-”

“Ren?!” Hux cried, his surprise immediately giving way to righteous indignation as he flew into a rage, “How dare you presume to command me, you loathsome, murdering TRAITOR! You have not only betrayed Supreme Leader Snoke but everything the First Order stands for, you disloyal treacherous piece of filth!”

From the cockpit of the Falcon Ben did not bother arguing with Hux since everything he was screaming about was true.

“Is the weapon recharged? It is?” Hux spoke to someone on the bridge.

“He, do not fire the weapon!” Ben ordered.

Threading the needle of Artoo’s complicated flight plan—twisting abruptly and alternating speeds to avoid tubolaser fire from the huge ship and what felt like most of the First Order’s TIE fighters chasing them—Ben knew that he was splitting his attention dangerously in talking to Hux. Newly
redeemed to the Light, however, he still felt duty bound to make one last attempt to do this the bloodless way.

Hux had not the slightest intension of taking him up on that offer.

“Destroy that ship!” Hux screamed, pointing a menacing index finger in the freighter’s direction for unnecessary emphasis.

The fire from the *Supremacy* intensified.

The *Falcon*, however, kept closing.

“Hux—” Ben warned.

“—AND FIRE THE WEAPON!” Hux roared.
Compressing the trigger, Ben emptied the *Falcon’s* entire armory of missiles in one huge payload.

All eight flew straight towards their target.

A look of horror came over Hux’s face as he saw them coming . . .

Until the missiles struck true—and the bridge of the *Supremacy* exploded in a series of fireballs.

“This is Supreme Leader Kylo Ren. All First Order forces ceasefire and disengage, I repeat all First Order forces ceasefire disengage. All Interdictor Cruisers power down. All fighters return to your ships. This is Supreme Leader Kylo Ren” . . .

In cockpits and on bridges throughout the First Order forces computers verified the new orders with a vocal recognition match, and the warships shifted from attack to a tense ceasefire.

“All Rebel ships, this is General Poe Dameron. Full retreat to the rendezvous point, I repeat full retreat to the rendezvous point” . . .
The second the Interdictor Cruisers had shut down their gravity-wave generators, the Alliance fleet quickly escaped into hyperspace.

After Ben alerted Peavey and the incoming Star Destroyers to set up a temporary bridge when he arrived to secure and take command of the *Supremacy*, the *Falcon* and its occupants also jumped to lightspeed to meet up with the Rebels. Soon the Corellian YT model freighter—which had once again saved the day—was docking in the hanger of the *Ackbar*.

Ben had let Rey and Chewie land the *Falcon*, deeming it prudent to stay out of sight until they disembarked.

As Chewbacca and Artoo made their way down the gangplank, however, Ben grabbed Rey’s hand and stopped her from following.

“Rey-” Ben started, but finding his throat had suddenly gone dry he swallowed and began again, “Rey, I don’t know what’s going to happen out there.”

Taking her other hand in his, he looked deeply into her eyes.

“I want you to know that no matter what . . . I will always come back for you,” Ben told her.

In reply, Rey reached into the collar of her shirt and pulled out the necklace with Leia’s ring as pendant.

Ben’s breath hitched as he recognized his mother’s twin stone ring. Unclasping it, Rey refastened it around Ben’s neck. She rested her hands on his chest as he raised one of his own to the pendant so he could examine the precious gift more closely. When his gaze returned to her eyes Rey she saw tears in his.
In unspoken agreement they both surged forward for another kiss.

While both wished they could ignore the rest of the galaxy and stay there forever—just the two of them—both knew right now it could not be. With reluctance they broke apart all too soon. With one last caress of her face and look of love, Ben turned and strode down the gangplank.

The group of Rebels who had gathered outside the *Falcon* to congratulate and celebrate with their hero Rey were not expecting Ben, and the looks of excitement and triumph fell from their faces.

Several people screamed.

And someone even fired a shot off at him.

Chewbacca gave out a roar of fury and stepped in front of Ben, Artoo quickly rolled nearer, and Rey sprinted down the gangplank to fling her body in front of his with her arms splayed out in a protective stance.

Ben of course had frozen the blaster bolt in midair a split second after it was fired—but still greatly appreciated their gestures.

Poe finally stepped forward and wordlessly motioned for the Rebels to stand down. Ben responded by deflecting the suspended shot harmlessly into the deck off to the side.

Everyone then went back to silently staring at each other.
With tension giving way to profound awkwardness that had no end in sight, General Lando Calrissian stepped forward.

Ben was simultaneously surprised and not surprised to see his father’s old friend.

And as usual, Lando alone knew exactly what to say.

“That was one a hell of a run, kid—your father would be proud of you.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading and for all your continued support. Comments especially welcome!
Three more chapters to go. Next up the big Ben and Leia reunion!

Special thanks to @stawrog80 for accepting my commission and making all my Ben Solo flying the Falcon dreams come true with her gorgeous artwork.

ko-fi.com/stawrogin
https://www.redbubble.com/people/stawrog80/shop?ref=artist_title_name#profile

BB-8’s internal monologue is heavily based on the charming section about him in Chapter 6 of “The Last Jedi” novelization by Jason Fry.

Interdictor Cruisers are from the Thrawn Trilogy by Timothy Zahn (Heir to the Empire pg 178, and Dark Force Rising pg 15)

Artwork: Art of Solo: A Star Wars Story
Heir of the Chosen One

Chapter Summary

Ben and Leia are reunited, and Anakin returns with a surprise for Rey.

Chapter Notes

This chapter based heavily on the probably shouldn’t have been deleted scenes from Attack of the Clones of Anakin and Padmé visiting her family on Naboo (starting at 4:08 through 13:32):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDPmS7a1UYo

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Stopping the battle was of course merely the first step in ending the conflict between the First Order and the New Rebel Alliance, and with Ben already on board the Ackbar peace talks were quickly underway.

Rey did not have to know anything about politics to understand that negotiations were going very badly.

Ben had been groomed and educated for leadership his entire life, with some of the elite on Honsinan Prime pegging him to lead the whole New Republic someday. Although peers in a starfighter cockpit, therefore, Poe was no match for Ben at a conference table.

Furthermore, although Ben had set aside his resentment towards the Alliance in general and Poe in particular long enough to save their lives, when forced into prolonged contact with them Ben’s jealously where his mother was concern once more began to rage.

As a result Ben was mopping the floor with Poe out of pure spite.

During a brief recess after yet another disastrous round of talks, Rey sidled up to Ben in the hallway. Taking his hand in hers, she began leading him towards the Falcon. Once in the hanger, Ben finally understood what she had in mind.

“No Rey! I can’t!” he loudly protested, stopping dead in his tracks.

Rey raised her eyebrows at him and resumed tugging him forward. Artoo had been rolling along next to them, and now began bumping into the back of Ben’s legs until he started walking again. Seeing them approaching, Chewbacca immediately went to prep the Falcon for take off.

After all, there was only one person who could possibly fix this situation—and she was not aboard the Ackbar.
“Rey, we were breaking for ten minutes! Where are you going?!” Poe demanded over the com.

“Naboo,” Rey told him calmly.

“Wait? What!?” Poe exclaimed, “No! You can’t take him to the General! It’s too dangerous!”

“She’s his mother!” Rey snapped.

Poe continued his frantic obnoxious arguments, and Rey hung up on him. And since none of the Rebels were going to catch them in the Falcon, Rey serenely flew on towards the lush planet where so much of this epic story had begun.

Ben was not calm.

He sat in silent dejection behind Rey, and sunk lower and lower in the passenger seat the closer to Naboo they got. Finally, he rose and moved towards the rear of the ship—to add at least the length of the Falcon to the rapidly diminishing distance between him and his mother.

At last they were there. If Poe had called ahead to try and block their arrival Chewbacca’s contacts in the spaceport paid the request no mind, and quickly assigned the Falcon to a landing platform. After touching down Rey, Chewie, and Artoo went looking for Ben.

The trio found him in the very back of the ship, curled up into as small a ball as his large frame would fit and having no intention of moving anytime this century.

How could he make them understand that for him there was no one more terrifying in the whole galaxy than his five foot nothing mother? Her disappointment, her rejection, her death—they were
all too petrifying. Even with her in a coma—especially with her in coma—Ben simply could not face her.

Chewie asked Ben if he needed to carry him, and the indignity of that mental image spurred Ben into finally unfolding his limbs and allowing himself to be pulled to his feet.

With Rey again pulling him along by his hand, Chewbacca propelling him forward with the weight of one of his large paws on Ben’s upper back, and Artoo rolling into his calves if he stopped moving, Ben found himself walking down the gangplank of the *Falcon* and into the streets of Naboo’s capital.

Dusk had fallen, and while lamps cast soft light onto the elegant buildings, there were few natives still out. The little group marched Ben on and on down a series of streets with stone archways until he was thoroughly lost.

Ben was just getting ready to tell Chewie that he was in fact going to have to carry him the rest of the way, when they abruptly reached their destination.

They stopped outside of a modest but elegant house—there were not any other kind here from what Ben could see. At the top of a set of steep stone stairs a door opened and a child peaked out.

“Mom, Grandma Ryoo, Grandma Sola—Rey, Chewie, and Artoo are back,” the child called into the house, before giving Ben an odd look and adding, “And they brought someone new.”

A very old woman appeared in the doorway. From the dream Anakin had sent him, Ben recognized her as Padmé’s sister Sola.

“You must be my grandnephew,” Sola said with a wide smile, before exclaiming, “My, you’re just as tall as your grandfather!”
Never before had anyone made a comparison between Ben and his grandfather and meant it as a compliment.

Hands and paws and bumps on his calves propelled him up the stairs towards the old woman and the other figures now crowding the doorway. Everyone moved inside to make room for the new comers, and with Rey, Chewie, and Artoo coming in behind him, Ben entered surveyed the group before him.

His family, Ben realized with a jolt.

Young and old, all of the occupants of the Naberrie house were smiling at him and radiating a sense of welcome and peace. Which was good, because this meeting could have been very awkward indeed-

A mechanical shuffling noise soon caught his attention, however, and as a familiar golden droid entered the room Ben realized it likely still would be.

“Master Ben! Good gracious!” Threepio exclaimed.

“Hello Threepio,” Ben replied through partially gritted teeth—well aware that a lecture from the protocol droid frequently followed his exuberant greetings.

“Where have you been! Princess Leia was been quit beside herself, I tell you. She made herself sick with worry-” Threepio continued, ignoring the fact that since Leia was in a coma his choice of words was especially poor.

Ben was all to aware that in spite of being a protocol droid Threepio somehow managed to be completely devoid of tact. He was tempted to borrow a line from his father and tell the droid to
“Can it, Goldenrod!” Ben, however, did have tact, and in front of his posh Naboo relations opted for his mother’s much politer “Thank you, Threepio—That will be all,” albeit still with clenched teeth.

He was rescued from the golden droid continuing to not take the hint by Artoo finally rolling into the room after ascending the stairs—and immediately drawing his counterpart’s attention and ire.

“Artoo! How could you abandon me!” Threepio cried, “You didn’t tell me you were leaving the city let alone the planet! I had to find out from Master Finn that you were gone! My circuits are still recovering from the shock—”

The little blue astromech replied with a series of beeps and twitters.

“You went with Mistress Rey to Jakku and then to Mustafar?! Those are two of the most horrible places in the galaxy! Why would you ever want to go there?!” Threepio exclaimed.

Artoo began rolling as he replied, forcing Threepio follow him out of the room—in the opposite direction from Leia’s bedroom, Rey noticed.

“And the war is over?! Thank the maker! So the New Rebel Alliance won the battle then . . . What do you mean ‘Not really’! Artoo come back here at once and explain yourself—”

As Threepio’s voice mercifully began to fade, Ben looked down to find his great-aunt Sola had drawn near him. Taking his hand in her much smaller one she guided him to a different part of the house.

“You’re here to see your mother of course,” she said as they walked down a nearby corridor, “She’s had a restless day. I guess now we know why!”

They stopped by an open doorway, and Sola indicated for him to go in.
“She’s been waiting for you,” she said with a smile in her bright eyes.

Ben entered and found his mother lying on an ornate bed. She looked so much older than he remembered—and he could barely see her breathing, she was so still. To Ben it felt like he was stepping into his worst nightmare, walking into his mother’s wake as she lay in state awaiting her funeral.

A wave of panic crashed over him, and he moved to turn around and flee the room.

“Ben no!” Rey cried, “She’s still here!”

Again grabbing his hand Rey forced it onto one of his mother’s. It was warm and Ben could feel her strong pulse. He took a ragged but calming breath, and reached out to his mother through the Force.

Her life presence was as strong as her pulse, and Ben gasped as he felt his mother reach back to him—her sense of relief mirroring his own.

Leia Organa did not immediately open her eyes . . . but her son knew she soon would.

Ben sank into a nearby chair. He gently grasped his mother’s hand in both of his larger ones and let his forehead fall forward onto the bed nearby as tears began to stream down his face.
“My dear, would you care to join me in my sitting room?” Aunt Sola asked Rey.

Sending him reassurance that she would be nearby, Rey followed the older woman out of the room and left Ben and Leia alone.

Ben did not know how long he stayed like that, but finally he was out of tears for the moment and raised his head to gaze adoringly hat his mother’s face. Reaching a hand up he brushed a few imaginary strands of her beautiful hair from her cheek. With deep conviction that she would wake up soon, Ben was unsure exactly how long it would take and how he was supposed to tolerate the wait.

As if in answer to his unspoken question, he suddenly felt a tremor in the Force . . . and the glowing figure of his grandfather suddenly appeared.

Anakin looked at Leia with deep love and profound sadness in his eyes. He had not been reconciled with his daughter before his death, and Ben sensed that Anakin’s efforts to make sure that Leia would be reconciled with her son were his grandfather’s attempt to make up for that.

Walking over to her bedside he briefly rested his hand on Leia’s free one before leaning down to brush a kiss across her forehead. Rising he inclined his head to indicate that his grandson should follow him out of the room.

Ben had spent years running away from his mother and desperately longing to communicate with his grandfather. He found in that moment, however, that he could not bring himself to leave her bedside even to finally talk to the man he had long sought to emulate.

“It won’t take long,” Anakin told him, “And you’re going to want to leave her even less after she wakes up.”
After letting Rey know through the Force that he was alright and would be back soon, Ben followed his grandfather through the garden, out the back gate, and back onto the streets of Theed. They walked across a long stone bridge that jutted out over a large body of water adjacent to the city proper, and finally arrived at what Ben saw was an ornate tomb.

The tomb of Padmé Amidala.

As they had at his mother’s bedside minutes before, they stood on either side of the elaborate stone death mask of his grandmother. Ben watched as his grandfather reached a hand out to cover her stone ones and looked adoringly at the replica of her face.

“We had so many arguments about what political system was best,” Anakin said.

A rueful smile tugging the corner of his mouth as he continued, “I was constantly trying to tell her that democracy was a chaotic mess and that a single strong leader would be much more effective and efficient. She kept insisting that although messy and often dysfunctional, democracy was the only form of government that sufficiently respected the free will of all the beings who lived under it.”

“I finally got my fill of the totalitarian regime I argued for,” Anakin said with a sigh, “And learned the hard way that she was right.”

He then fixed Ben with a hard look. Ben knew that his grandfather was well aware that his grandson knew exactly what he was talking about. From his observation of his mother’s experience in the New Republic Senate, Ben had once had exactly the same thoughts about democracy—before living under the rule of a tyrannical dictator and planning to himself become one.

“Tell me what happened to the galaxy after the Battle of Endor,” Anakin then asked.
Ben sighed, recalling his lessons on a period of history he had not thought about in a long time.

“It took the New Republic many years to get off the ground, and in the meantime the galaxy was a mess. The Outer Rim and even some of the Mid Rim systems devolved into lawless Wild Space ruled by crime syndicates and ex-Imperials, and was crawling with gangsters and bounty hunters,” Ben answered, seeing exactly where his grandfather was going with this.

“The New Republic is gone, and the galaxy needs a new central government—and it needs it right now,” Anakin said emphatically, and Ben glanced down at his boots.

“And while none of this is your fault, Ben, the responsibility is going to fall to you to bring peace, justice, and stability to the people of the galaxy . . . not just to yourself,” Anakin continued.

For the entirety of Ben’s life his family and everyone else had been obsessed with him being the heir of Vader. Anakin, however, appeared to understand something only Rey had figured out—in temperament, character, and destiny—his grandson was nothing like him.

“What the galaxy need most right now is the grandson of Padmé Amidala,” Anakin said, piercing Ben with his intense gaze before continuing, “She worked her whole life to bring sanity and compassion back to the intergalactic governing body—and you need to finish what she started.”

His grandfather then left him to his thoughts—and Ben had an awful lot to think about on his walk back to the Naberrie House.

He arrived to find the house in an uproar . . . for Leia had woken up.
Stopping awkwardly at the entrance to her room, Ben peaked inside.

“Mom?” he tentatively asked.

She looked up—and a tidal wave of joy, relief, and love slammed into him through the Force.

“Ben!” she exclaimed.

Holding back no longer, he quickly closed the distance between them. Sitting on the side of her bed, Ben reached a hand up to caress her face as tears sprang into his eyes. At his touch his mother reached a hand up to grasp his forearm. Closing her eyes, she let her own tears stream down her face.

With his composure quickly deteriorating, however, Ben soon slid to kneel at her bedside and with arms encircling her he buried his face into his mother’s stomach as sobs to rock his body. At present, her soothing hands on his head and back did nothing to quell his tears.

Everyone quickly vacated the room to give mother and son a moment alone. Although the rest of the family moved to a different part of the house, Rey had no desire to follow them and remained lingering in the hallway. Soon, however, she could hear loud sobbing from both Ben and Leia. Feeling that even standing outside she was intruding, Rey walked down the hall to Aunt Sola’s sitting room.

It was late and the lights were dim, but the holos on the walls still glowed with their internal light. Rey slowly walked around and looked at them all for the umpteenth time—now with renewed hope that one day she would truly be a part of this family.
Feeling a tremor in the Force she turned expecting to see Luke. To Rey’s surprised it was not Luke but Anakin that glowed in the low light—Anakin, who Rey realized with a jolt, had actually been inside this house all those decades ago.

Young and handsome as he had been before falling to the dark side, Anakin beamed down at her with his brilliant smile.

“Well . . . you did it.”

Anakin spoke the words not out loud, but directly into her mind. At the sound of his telepathic voice, Rey’s eyes widened in shock . . . and recognition.

And with new understanding, a very different perspective of her childhood and life flashed before Rey’s eyes.

Having no actual memories from before the trauma of her parent’s death and being abandoned on Jakku, Rey could not remember a time when the voice—a kind, strong, and deeply encouraging voice—had not been audible in the back of her mind.

It seemed to know how to survive especially in the desert. When she was a small child the voice had told her when to run, hide, and find shelter from oncoming sandstorms. It taught her how to store water properly, and when it was too hot for her to go outside no matter how hungry she was—days that had inevitably claimed the lives of other children who unwisely ventured out. It was also there to commiserate with her in the trials of desert life, “Yes Rey, sand is coarse, rough, irritating, and gets everywhere. That’s just the way it is.”
The voice also taught Rey to differentiate between debris and ship parts that still had value—a lesson she learnt well enough to get into Unkar Plutt's good graces and onto his "leave alone" list.

Rey still vividly remembered the day she stood outside the carcass of a dead Star Destroyer, crying because although she was hungry and that was where all the "good stuff" was that would get her food, it was too dark and scary in there. The voice again came to her rescue and soothingly said, “Courage little one.” It told her she was brave enough to go inside, and when she finally did she found it was not in fact so bad.

The voice then made a game of finding the best routes to climb up the dangerous ship interior and where to tie her lines. It also kept Rey calm when she occasionally got stuck, and stopped her flailing in panic that would have gotten her fatally trapped. Soon Rey was plundering areas of the Starship Graveyard no other scavenger would dare venture.

Running and hiding also became less necessary as Rey grew older and the voice instructed her in how to fight with a quarterstaff—a skill that proved to be an excellent foundation for future lightsaber combat.

Later, the voice finally convinced her to strike out on her own—to get away from the older scavengers who were using her for labor and were frequently less than kind—and guided Rey to the abandoned AT-AT that became her home. It was safe shelter, and had a working computer—with a flight simulator program—that greatly expanded her education.

Unsatisfied with her merely salvaging parts, the voice also taught her how to fix just about anything—something to which her working stove, lanterns, and landspeeder could attest. It also quickly moved her beyond identifying parts that were still valuable to what role they played in an operational starship. Rey resultantly became quite advanced in her knowledge of ship construction and skilled in starship maintenance to the point that Plutt, himself, often gave her extra portions to work on his stolen ships.

The voice also taught her other things like how to read and write basic. After making her spell out the letters on the fighter pilot helmet she found, R-A-E-H, the voice had taken to calling her Rey—until that was her name.

Basic was not the only language the voice taught her. It built upon her natural ability to understand droids, and taught her how to use her still dormant Force ability to sense meaning from other beings communications and so learn their dialects. Being fluent in Huttese was also highly useful in the backwater of the galaxy, and allowed Rey to anticipate power struggles between Plutt and those who wanted to usurp him—and stay out of it.
Surrounded on Jakku by untrustworthy beings, the voices’ lesson on the importance of Rey forming attachments and connecting with others people was less successful. In hindsight, its only major achievement was convincing her to approach one of the older women and ask for help when she hit puberty.

Rey also continued to protect herself from the disillusioning reality that she had been abandoned on Jakku by persevering in her obstinate belief that her parents were coming back for her. Not wanting to rip away the psychological protection that her false hope was providing, the voice nonetheless spent years convincing her to one day leave Jakku.

“You’re a pilot, Rey,” the voice said, “And I promise you that someday you’re going to fly away from this place.”

Between the voice’s own instruction and the flight simulator on her computer, as a teenager Rey really was a pilot. After finding a ship that could be salvaged to again fly things appeared to looking up—although Rey continued to consider just selling the ship to Plutt and continuing to wait for her parents.

Rey even began make some progress in trusting and connecting with other people when two other young scavengers began helping restore the ship and share in acquiring the needed parts that required so many sacrificed food portions. But when her false friends stole the finished ship and Rey found herself abandoned on Jakku for the second time, she regressed considerably—and all the voice could do was simply accompany her in her dejection and suffering.

Although it had let her be for the most part about connecting with others after that incident, as Rey was walking away from the newly rescued BB-8 the voice had nonetheless asked her, "Seriously, Rey?" Bitter and jaded as she was, the voice’s prompting got her to stop and begrudgingly change her mind about parting ways with the little droid.

In the end, however, it took stormtroopers literally chasing her off the planet for Rey to be finally open to at least temporarily leaving. But after meeting BB-8 and Finn, Rey finally found herself sprinting towards one of the spaceships in Niima Outpost with that intent.

"The other ship, Rey!" the voice told her.
"That one is garbage," Rey had argued just as much to the voice as she had to Finn.

With her chosen Quad Jumper transformed into a fireball before her eyes, however, the voice had again insisted, "The other ship!" Rey finally listened.

The “other ship” was really the Millennium Falcon, and possessed an intimidatingly complicated set of controls. The voice, however, helped Rey get the Falcon off the ground, merrily exclaiming, “This is where the fun begins!”

It then guided Rey move for move as she, Finn, and BB-8 fled the First Order TIE fighters and escaped Jakku into the blackness of space. In hindsight, it was likely to be some of the trickiest flying Rey would ever do in her entire life—and something only a handful of pilots in the whole galaxy could have pulled off.

Freedom and slavery were a state of mind, and the voice did everything it could to make sure Rey was mentally empowered thought as one free. While not unscathed particularly in her ability to form attachments after growing up in such extreme isolation, Rey nevertheless flew away from Jakku with skills, knowledge, and confidence that she should not have had.

Although the fastest ship in the galaxy, the Falcon was still the Falcon, and with the compressor Plutt had unwisely installed putting too much stress on the hyperdrive, something had inevitably gone wrong. With alarms blaring it was all hands on deck.

“Electrical overload!” Han shouted.

"You know how to fix that, Rey," the voice prompted.

And she did.

“Coolants leaking,” Han added.

“Try transferring auxiliary power to secondary tank,” to voice instructed—a suggestion that Rey
parroted to the older pilot, much to Han’s approval.

Alarms, however, continued to blare.

“This hyperdrive blows there going to be pieces of us in three different systems!” Han frantically said and the alarms took on a more ominous pitch.

"Why don’t you just bypass the compressor?” the voice suggested.

Rey found she could easily figure out how to do that too, and with the task complete the alarms stopped. After that they had all safely reached Takodana.

Although enjoying her wonder at so much green, the voice had also possessed a new sense of urgency and purpose. Eventually, it told Rey to follow the sound of a child crying down the stone steps in Maz’s Castle, enter the last door on the left, open the box at the back of the room—and take out the lightsaber she found inside.

The accompanying Force vision had been all too much for Rey, and refusing to take back the saber from Maz she ran away in the direction of “the desert.” The voice was even more unenthusiastic than everyone else about her plan to go back to Jakku, however, and took on a sense of tried patience as she took off into the forest.

Although as Kylo Ren stepped into view with drawn lightsaber, the voice was initially filled with concern.

“Stop shooting!” it instructed frantically, although in full panic Rey had not listened.

As the masked figure proceeded to unnecessarily chase her through the foliage, however, the voice’s disquiet changed to inquisitiveness. And as Kylo put her into a Force bind and swept Rey up and down with an appraising gaze, the voice seemed to come to a new understanding about something.
And the last thought that passed through Rey’s mind before the scary warlord waved his hand and rendered her unconscious was the voice calmly telling her, “Rey, I think you will find you are in surprisingly good hands . . .”

Which was not to say the voice was going to let her stay imprisoned on Starkiller Base following her “interrogation.”

Although Kylo had broken their connection and fled the room, Rey realized a dizzying amount of information on about using the Force remained in her mind after he was gone. The whole situation was overwhelming, and Rey did not know the first thing about how to process what had happened let alone how to sift through all the new information that was suddenly in her head.

The voice, however, had calmly brought to the forefront of her mind a small point of Kylo’s training. Something called a ‘Jedi mindtrick.’ The more Rey focused on it the more she realized this ‘Jedi mindtrick’ might actually help her escape—because if she could get into a mind as strong as Kylo Ren’s then she could likely get the guard to let her go.

Assuming she could actually do it . . .

Her first couple of tries only yielded an angry guard, and Rey began to fear her efforts were in vain. The voice, however, told her to try again “calmer and with more focus”—corrections that finally rendered her efforts successful.

Suddenly she was free.

“And drop your weapon,” the voice added as an afterthought.

And armed.

Sneaking around an enemy base was yet another thing with which the voice could confidently guide her. Rey made her way stealthily toward the main hanger undetected before eventually running into her friends.
Later in the forests, however, Rey again found herself alone with Kylo. With Finn immobilized, Rey was not sure what to do, and the voice again stepped in.

“Call the lightsaber, Rey,” the voice said, drawing her attention to the hilt buried in the snow.

She hesitated. The voice, however, told Rey that she needed to get over her initial aversion to the weapon, because as a powerful Force user she needed a lightsaber—and no matter how legitimate Ben Solo’s claim to the Skywalker legacy saber was because of his bloodline, Anakin’s lightsaber was being bequeathed to her and not to Kylo Ren.

At first it quivered but did not budge.

“Try again,” the voice instructed.

Recalling the voice’s earlier instructions for greater calm and concentration, Rey did, and this time the saber flew straight past Kylo’s face and into her outstretched hand. And with the voice’s encouragement that it was alright for her to fight Kylo, Rey ignited the Skywalker family lightsaber and found that everything had turned out surprisingly okay . . . well for her anyway.

On Ahch-To it was the voice that encouraged Rey to be patient and persevering when it came to the disappointingly grumpy Jedi master she found there. Although, it later buzzed with disapproval at the shaming Luke had included in his first lesson, and emphatically stated, "Don't listen to that."

The voice, however, took not the slightest issue with Luke's bitter critique of the Jedi Order, Rey’s increasingly charged interactions with Ben Solo, or her eventually falling head first into the dark side cave.

In retrospect, Rey realized that in almost showing her the shadowy figure of tall, broad-shouldered man, with a profile that looked an awful lot like Ben’s, the mirror cave on Ahch-To had not in fact been as dismissive of her request to see her parents as Rey had originally thought.
At the time of course she had been devastated.

The voice took the opportunity to resume its gentle encouragement for her to reach out make real connections with other people.

"Why don't you talk to Ben?" the voice suggested.

It was an idea that Rey actually found surprisingly appealing. And connect with Ben she had—on a far deeper level than she had ever previously done so with anyone else. Rey found the floodgates of her own need flung open, and she finally allowed herself to admit just how badly she wanted a deep connection with another person.

That is until Luke barged in on her and the last of the Skywalkers. In hindsight, the voice’s profoundly exasperated, “Oh this is fan-tastic,” could be distinguished from her own fury at the Jedi Master.

The voice also seemed to worry about different things than most of the people Rey was meeting. It did not seem concerned about Rey’s unconscious understanding that the general rules of what was possible did not seem to apply to her, or her tendency to leap into highly improvised ‘plans’ to rescue people and somehow just ‘making it work’—traits she had acquired from somewhere long before meeting Han Solo.

The voice, therefore, did not echo Luke’s efforts to dissuade her from her half-baked rescue plan to rush off and storm the Supremacy. As she hopped into the Falcon’s escape pod, it merely added with urgency, “Get the legacy saber to Ben.” That Rey did, and soon stood in the remains of Snoke’s throne room with the severed body of the Supreme Leader and those of his Praetorian guardsmen scattered about.

In the aftermath of the fight, however, a new danger arose. Ben stood before her with outstretched black-gloved hand, expecting an immediate answer to his proposal that she join him in ruling the galaxy as his dark side empress. The voice, however, had cut through the confusion of her swirling thoughts and emotions—and with authority told her that this path would end in disaster.
“Rey, you need to leave—right now,” the voice gently but firmly commanded.

A command that was renewed on Crait as she stood on the *Falcon* with Ben looking up at her in heartbroken despondancy.

“The answer still has to be ‘no,’ Rey,” the voice reminded her.

She had wanted to argue with the voice and yell at it—that for all its pushing her to form attachments with other people, now it was telling her the main relationship she cared about was one she could not have. But she knew in her heart the voice was right. As long as Ben was choosing to follow in Vader’s footsteps, be a dictator, and stay on the dark side of the Force she could not be with him.

As she raised the *Falcon*’s gangplank and Ben disappeared from view, Rey remembered being really angry not only with Ben but also with Darth Vader for being such a horrible person and example—and the voice giving off a sense of deeply ironic amusement.

On Naboo, the voice had been completely unfazed by Anakin’s broken lightsaber, and mentally reframed the broken kyber crystal as an “interesting challenge” rather than a cause for despair. It also seemed to enjoy brainstorming more complicated saber designs the split crystal called for, and made helpful suggestions when she got stuck in her reconstruction work.

The voice also encouraged her to give Luke another chance—insisting that her first impression of him was not a reflection of his true nature—and seemed to think a do-over of their relationship was good for both of them. To that end, with the exception of making minor changes to her combat technique and lightsaber grip that ended up making a huge difference, the voice was content to let Luke be in charge of Rey’s Force training.

It also made a point of telling her she looked nice, and needed to stop caring what other people thought, particularly the snobby Naboo. “Don’t mind the Naboo, Rey. They really can’t help it.”

In hindsight, it also was perhaps not such a happy accident that Rey had found Padmé’s tomb so quickly.
On Jakku the voice had shared Rey’s surprise—and even exceeded it—that she apparently was Obi-Wan’s Kenobi’s granddaughter.

And it was the voice that spoke to Rey as she stood quaking at the hellish gates of Vader’s Castle—reminding her with conviction not to underestimate the redemptive power of love and the Light.

The voice was the part of herself that Rey could rely on the most, a wellspring of her confidence, and was deeply trustworthy. But Rey now understood that the voice had never been just a part of herself at all.

The voice belonged to Anakin Skywalker.

Bound up in a strange purgatory and state of limbo until someone atoned for his sins—the ongoing consequences of which still raged through his family and the galaxy—Anakin had finally come to accept what he had not been able to in his earthly life.

Although he was in a special way a Child of the Force—the ways of the Force were not his ways, and the plans of the Force were not his plan.

While it made no logical sense at the time, Anakin came to accept and trust that the best way for him to help his family was to raise the Force sensitive orphan the Light was hiding from Snoke on Jakku. Though trapped with considerable limitations, Anakin had nonetheless devoted himself to the task with his usual abandon.


While an incredibly powerful Force user in his own right, Anakin was perhaps an even better
teacher—and his particular skill in raising strong, confident young women was something to which Ahsoka Tano could personally attest.

Rey now looked up at Anakin with tears in her eyes.

“We did it,” she corrected him, acknowledging her understanding of the truth.

The truth that Rey had never been alone... Anakin had been with her.

And as he embraced her in arms that were surprisingly solid and kissed the crown of her head, Rey knew he always would be.
Chapter End Notes

While Ben was labeled the ‘New Vader’, in temperament and character Rey always seemed to the true ‘New Anakin.’ Anakin himself having a role in her upbringing seemed to be the best explanation for that.

Thanks so much for reading and for all your continued support. Comments especially welcome!

Special thanks again to @stavrogin80 for her stunning artwork.

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End Notes

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