In the Past

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Summary

It's been two months after Bespin, and Luke Skywalker is trying to come to terms with the events that happened there. During a dogfight with Darth Vader, both of their fighters crash. When they recover, they both find themselves on Coruscant at the end of the Clone Wars. Vader still aims to claim his son, but Luke has been taken to the Jedi Temple where he meets Anakin Skywalker.

Notes

AN: I do not own Star Wars. Done for fun.
This fic started off as a one-shot in my Between Light and Shadow: Luke & Vader one shot Collection. It was the most requested to be continued. Back in the summer I did a give away on my tumblr, and the winner requested I write more of this story. So here it is.

For nijiroz (on tumblr).
Chapter 1

Luke Skywalker was in uncontrolled spin in his X-Wing. His hands gripped tightly to the steering yolk as he tried to right his ship. He noticed the spinning view of the blackness of space was gone. It was now a blue sky and gray buildings. Buildings? Sky? There hadn't been any planets nearby. He had been in an asteroid field as the Alliance raided Imperial transports for supplies. It had all gone to plan until an Imperial fleet jumped out of hyperspace, and the cold dark presence of Darth Vader tightened around Luke.

"No. I am your father."

The words that had been told to him two months and eleven days ago echoed through Luke's head. He still wasn't ready to face Vader. To face his . . . Luke wasn't sure if he was ready to face that truth yet. He knew it was the truth, but it was still a hard truth to face. How could his father, Anakin Skywalker, be Darth Vader? How had it come to pass?

It wasn't long until Vader's TIE Advance X1 was chasing Luke's X-Wing through the asteroids. He gave Vader a good chase. Luke had almost made it clear of the asteroids so he could jump to hyperspace, when Vader's TIE slammed into Luke's ship. The two ships started to spin uncontrollably. Loud metal scraping on metal caused Luke to wince. He jerked his fighter free. There was a bright light, which at first he thought was an explosion. Yet when it passed, Luke's ship was still spinning. Just no longer in space apparently.

As the buildings got closer, again he was haunted by the words from Bespin. "I am your father." Luke wondered what had happened to Vader. If he was facing the same problem as Luke. As the gray buildings got closer and closer, one last string of words raced through his head.

"I am your father. Join me. Come with me. It is the only way."

Anakin Skywalker walked into a briefing room inside the Jedi Temple. He had made his way here the moment his transport had touched down in the hangar. He wasn't completely sure why he had been pulled off the front lines in the Outer Rim. Whatever it was, it surely had to be important. Anakin hated leaving in the middle of a battle, but hopefully Rex and his men would be able to manage without him.

In the middle of the briefing room sat a large holotable. Standing around the table were Obi-Wan Kenobi, Master Yoda, Mace Windu, and Luminara Unduli. Obi-Wan nodded at Anakin in greeting. A small smile on his lips.

"Good you're here, Skywalker," Mace said.
"Masters," Anakin said with a slight bob of his head. "What's going on? Why have I been summoned back here?"

Mace clicked a button on the holotable. The table projected a blue hologram of a young human man. About Anakin's age, if not younger. His hair was light colored. He didn't look happy. It appeared to Anakin he was sitting in a bed.

"Recognize this face, do you?" Master Yoda asked. All four masters were staring at Anakin intently.

"No," Anakin replied honestly. The masters exchanged a look with each other. "Should I?"

Again Mace clicked a button and this time a the projector showed a hologram of a lightsaber. "And this lightsaber?" Mace asked. "Have you seen it before?"

"No," Anakin answered again. "What is this about?"

"We believe a Sith is here on Coruscant," Obi-Wan said. "A new one. One we haven't encountered before."

"The Sith master?" Anakin asked hopefully. Could the mastermind behind Dooku have finally slipped up?

"And this lightsaber?" Mace asked. "Have you seen it before?"

"No," Anakin answered again. "What is this about?"

"We believe a Sith is here on Coruscant," Obi-Wan said. "A new one. One we haven't encountered before."

"And this lightsaber?" Mace asked. "Have you seen it before?"

"No," Anakin answered again. "What is this about?"

Anakin thought back at the youth in the hologram. No way that kid was Dooku's Sith master. "So what is with the kid then?" Anakin asked.

"We don't know that either," Obi-Wan said. "Two days ago a strange fighter crashed in the Industrial District. That man was inside it. He was taken to a local hospital."

"While he was still healing, he kept calling out a name." Mace paused here as he looked over at Anakin. "Your name."

"My name?" Anakin asked.

Mace clicked a button and the hologram changed. It showed the kid laying down in the hospital bed. His eyes were open, but he was clearly out of it. He kept tossing his head from side to side.


"So that's why I was summoned here?" Anakin asked a bit skeptical. "You couldn't just ask me about some kid over a holocall?"

"The kid's missing," Mace continued.

"Took him, this new Sith did," Yoda added.

"Took him?" Anakin asked.

The hologram changed yet again. It showed a hanger of the hospital. Medical speeders were parked neatly. There were a few droids rolling about. One pilot leaned against a speeder. Suddenly the pilot became alert. It appeared he shouted something, he started to move, but then he was levitated off the floor. His hands grabbing at his throat. Then his head turned sharply to the side and the body fell to the floor.

A second pilot ran onto the scene. He dropped next to the fallen pilot. He pulled out a blaster and
fired a few shots. Anakin could see the shots had been deflected. Then a man wearing a long robe
with a hood confidently strode into view. He held a lightsaber, which Anakin could tell was red
despite the blue of the holograph. Without hesitation, the man cut down the other pilot.

Then the robed man disappeared, only to shortly reappear. He was hunched over as he helped the
kid from the holo before to a speeder. The kid was still clearly injured and the man moved with care.
Once they were both in the speeder, they were gone.

Mace again changed the holographic image. It appeared to be from a security camera. It was of a
rooftop. Near one edge was a burning wreckage of a speeder. On the other side of the roof stood
three figures. Two quickly ignited their blades, followed the third whose blade was red. The Sith.
Anakin leaned in close. The security holo didn't provide a good detail shot of the Sith. He looked
human, but his back was mostly to the camera.

Anakin watched the security holo play out. It wasn't much of a fight. The Sith fought very well. The
two Jedi were quickly cut down. A third Jedi, who was helping the mystery kid out of the speeder,
had his head snapped around like the pilot from the hospital. There was no sound, but Anakin could
easily imagine the sound of bones breaking as the third Jedi's head was snapped at an awkward
angle.

"That was almost a loving gesture," Anakin pointed out. "As if the Sith cared about this boy."

"Love, Sith do not," Yoda said.

"But Anakin is right," Obi-Wan said. "I would say that from an appearance standpoint, the Sith did
seem to care about this boy."

"He also took great care getting the kid into the speeder. What else do we know about this mystery
boy?" Anakin asked.

"We've gone over the medical report," Luminara said. "We ran his blood through the system. No
known matches. The hospital said the boy never gave a name. He was possibly in shock. When the
hospital sent us his records, it including a blood sample. We ran a midichlorian count on it. It was
15,000."

"15,000?" Anakin asked with clear shock on his face. Sure it didn't beat Anakin's count of 27,000,
but Anakin's count was unnaturally high. Unheard of. Yoda's count was 17,000, which was also
considered extremely high. The highest in history until Anakin. Obi-Wan was at 13,500, and even
that count was considered high. For a kid to have a higher count than Obi-Wan . . . what kind of
power did that kid have?

"You understand the dilemma, Skywalker," Luminara said dragging Anakin from his thoughts.

Obi-Wan spoke up. "It's easy to see why a Sith Lord would have gone out of their way to get the
boy."

"Find this Sith and this boy we must," Yoda said. "Fall to the dark side, the boy must not. If the boy
falls too powerful the Dark Side will become."

Anakin hoped the boy hadn't fallen already.
Chapter 2

"The Force is with you, young Skywalker. But you are not a Jedi yet."

He was back. Back in the room on Bespin. The lights. The steam. The tall large dark form and the even mechanical breathing of the respirator. The lightsabers igniting. Blue on red. Red on blue. They hummed and hissed.

"You have learned much, young one," the deep voice of Vader called out.

Luke arrogantly replied, "You'll find I'm full of surprises."

But that wasn't true. It was Vader who was full of surprises. Or at least one surprise. One horrible truth.

"Your destiny lies with me, Skywalker," Vader said. His voice was so full of knowing. "Obi-Wan knew this to be true."

Why hadn't Ben told him? Why? He could have told Luke on Dagobah right before he left. He knew Luke was leaving to face Vader. Leaving to face his father, and yet he had said nothing!

"Only your hatred can destroy me."

Why? Why? Why was Darth Vader his father? How had it happened? What had happened to Anakin Skywalker? The war general people remembered warmly and proudly.

"I met your father once when I was just a boy," Luke recalled Red Leader telling him in the hangar on Yavin VI. "He was a great pilot."

Again the fateful words repeated in Luke's mind. "No. I am your father."

The words repeated over and over again. There was a coldness that grabbed him. It was dragging him down. Down the reactor shaft. Down into the darkness. The words spinning and lashing at him the entire time.

I am your father. I am your father. Father. Father.

Anakin made his way through the dark streets of the lower levels of Coruscant. Luckily, the Council had allowed Anakin to hunt for this Sith lord. Anakin guessed the Sith had not gotten very far with the boy as the boy was clearly injured. Anakin assumed the two were still nearby and hiding while the Sith treated the boy's injuries. At least that's what he hoped for.

Anakin made sure he was shielding himself properly. He didn't want the Sith lord or even the boy to know he was coming. Anakin's thoughts kept going back to the boy more than the Sith lord. The boy was a complete mystery. Anakin had gone over the data collected on the kid including images of the wreck he was found in. The fighter was a mystery too. It matched no known designs. Anakin had never seen anything quite like it, and he prided himself in knowing starfighter designs.

Anakin had examined the clothing the boy was first found in. It was a bright orange jumpsuit. The
Anakin wished they had gotten a better scan of the mechanics of the hand. He would have liked to seen it. From what little they did have, the technology was more advanced than Anakin's own hand. Which was an impressive feat.

A mystery boy crashed on to Coruscant in a mystery fighter with a mystery symbol on the helmet. The boy had a prosthetic hand more advanced than any current model. The boy also had an insanely high midichlorian count. He carried a lightsaber, but was not in any Jedi records. The kid called out the name Skywalker in his sleep. Then the kid was taken by a Sith lord. A Sith lord who was gentle with the kid?

None of it was adding up, and Anakin hated it. But he did agree with the Council. Whoever this kid was, he needed to be found. Along with this mystery Sith. Anakin couldn't help but wonder if this was the Sith mastermind behind the war. What if they did catch him? What if they could finally end the war? All this bloodshed could finally stop.

. . . father . . .

Anakin stopped. He had heard a call in the Force. At least he thought he had.

. . . father . . .

There it was again. Anakin reached out towards the source. He felt pain. Confusion. Fear. Anakin started to move towards it. Why was he hearing this voice? To be able to speak telepathically to another Force user, one must have an established bond. Anakin could just barely sense whoever it was. It wasn't Obi-Wan. It wasn't Ahsoka either . . .

Father . . .

Anakin followed the pull of the Force to a shady rundown apartment building. He felt no danger lurking inside, so Anakin carefully made his way in. He followed the pull up several flights of stairs to a door. A simple flick of the Force unlocked the door and Anakin was inside. The apartment was filthy, but mostly empty. In the main room Anakin found a large bed with someone sleeping in it.

Father, the kid called out again through the Force.

Anakin was on his comm unit at once with the Jedi Temple telling them he had found the kid. Anakin stretched out his senses with the Force, but still didn't feel the icy coldness of the Dark Side nearby. Granted the Sith could always be shielding himself. Anakin looked back down at the kid. Why did he keep calling out for his father? Was the Sith . . . the Sith his father? Surely not. Sith didn't love . . . and yet Anakin recalled the security holo of the roof. How the Sith had gently
caressed the kid's cheek. Was it possible this kid was the Sith's child? And if that was the case, why hadn't he fallen to the Dark Side?

Darth Vader watched from several rooftops over as Luke was loaded onto a Jedi shuttle inside a medical capsule. Vader's body was tense. It itched to move. He was very tempted to go down there and retrieve his son. It wouldn't take much. A powerful pull to the shuttle's engines would disable them. He could then take down whatever Jedi and clone troopers were down there. But . . .

Luke needed medical attention. A dip in a bacta tank preferably. Vader had nothing. Only the clothes he was wearing and his lightsaber. When he had crawled out of his wrecked fighter, he instantly recognized the Works, the factory district of Imperial Center. That was when he realized something was off in the Force. Really off. It was dizzying. Nauseating. Vader felt sick. Claustrophobic. Like he couldn't breathe. He had the sudden urge to take his helmet off, and his panic he did so. That was when he realized he could breathe without it.

His lungs . . . his lungs worked fine. There was no pain. No labored breathing. He took in a deep breath and relished in the sweet ease of his chest filling on its own. Over the next hour Vader discovered that it was more than just his lungs. Most of his body, besides his prosthetics, were healed. His skin was smoother, though still covered in faint scars. He could breathe and eat. It appeared he didn't need the suit at all. Prying himself out of it was painful due to the many tube and connections it had to his own body, but the pain was worth it.

He was free.

It had taken him much longer to come to the realization he was in the past. Then another stretch of time to accept it. By the time Vader had come to accept the truths about his current situation, a half a day had gone by. He had long left the wreckage of his TIE and the useless cage of his suit behind. He had found an abandoned factory to meditate in. That was when he felt the flicker of Luke's Force signature. Whatever had brought Vader about twenty-four years into the pass, had also dragged his son here as well.

It didn't matter what time he was in, nothing would stop Vader from claiming the boy. Luckily the boy was heavily dosed with drugs by the time Vader found him in the hospital. He came with Vader willingly. Vader had then made the mistake in relaxing as he piloted a speeder with his injured son away from the hospital. The CPF had tracked them down after Vader had left two dead in the hospital hangar, which then had resulted in the speeder crashing on to a rooftop and Vader's duel with the Jedi. Vader was not going to allow anyone to take his son from him.

Except . . .

He could feel Luke's pain. The boy desperately needed medical attention. And . . . The Jedi would see that Luke was healed. Vader was just going to have to . . . trust Luke to the Jedi for now. Plus Vader needed to get himself more secure in this time. He had no money. No resources. Once he was comfortable, then he could get his son. It was Luke's destiny to be at Vader's side.

Vader already knew all the weaknesses of the Order. He knew exactly how to manipulate them to freely handing Luke over if need be. The only thing that worried Vader was Sidious. Hopefully Vader's wayward reckless child would be wise enough to avoid the future Emperor. But that didn't mean Sidious was going to avoid Luke. Vader needed to act quickly. The Jedi were a doomed
caused. Their extinction was near, but the Sidious was just coming into his power. And Vader would not allow Sidious to get his hands on Luke.
"The Force is with you, young Skywalker. But you are not Jedi yet."

The world spun around Luke. He remembered the dark room. The steam and smoke. The hiss and hum of lightsabers. The smell of burnt ozone and blood. He also remembered the fear. It wasn't there at first. At first he was confident. But as the duel dragged on, once he was flung out the window, he started to fear.

"You are beaten. It is useless to resist. Don't let yourself be destroyed as Obi-Wan did."

The point of the red lightsaber hung right above his bruised and battered face. His breath was heavy and labored. Sweat made his hair and jumpsuit cling to him. He remembered the metal stairs digging into his back. He remembered the rush of adrenaline to keep going. He had to keep going! He couldn't give up! Not here! Not to him!

Then he was on the gantry. Sparks flying. Lightsabers clashing together. Then the pain! The stub of his arm shoved under the other arm. The wind snapped at him. His sweaty hand gripped tightly to the metal.

"No. I am your father."

The words echoed and spun all around him. No. I am your father. No. I am your father. Then Luke was falling. The words fell with him. I am your father. I am your father.

Luke gasped and sat straight up as he awoke with a start. He was sweaty and dizzy. Where was he? His mind spun. A horrible headache pounded against his skull. He took inventory of the room he is in. It's plain, but nice. Too nice. Not Alliance. If it's not Alliance, than Imperial? Doesn't quite look Imperial, but it could be.

He looked down to notice he was wearing white medical robes. He appeared to be in a medical bed, but there was a lack of medical instruments or droids. How did he get here? He tried to think back, he tried to push pass the horrible memories. He could still faintly hear the whisper of 'I am your father' haunting him.

A bright painful explosion filled his head. That's right! He had crashed! Where? Then he remembered the sabers. Sabers? Red on green and blue. Vader.

'I am your father.'

He threw the covers off of him and got out of bed. He had to get out of here. Whenever this was, it wasn't good. Vader was here. He was nearby. There was a sharp pain in his right arm where the real arm ended and the prosthetic began. 'I am your father.' No. He couldn't deal with this now. He couldn't be taken by Imperials.

He marched over to the door, but found it locked. He needed to calm down. Think of way out. But his thoughts just kept spinning faster and faster in his mind. He could smell the burnt ozone of the lightsaber. He could see the red haze and feel the heat against his face. 'I am your father.' He had to move. Get away. Now.

He heard a soft beep followed by the click of the door unlocking. Luke flattened himself against the wall next to the door but opposite of the bed. Don't see me, Luke willed into the Force. Don't see me. Someone walked in. From what Luke briefly saw, it was an orange Twi'lek girl dressed in white and
tan robes carrying tray. She didn't look at Luke. Her eyes were on his bed. As soon as she saw it empty she rushed over to it. It was the distraction Luke needed. His slid out the door behind her back and hurried down the hall.

He glanced wildly about on the lookout for stormtroopers. He saw none, but he did see others dressed in the white medical robes. He had to be in some type of med bay or hospital. But then he saw Ithorian in a tan and brown robes. The robes reminded him of Obi-Wan.

"Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father."

Luke pushed on. But then he saw a Tholothian and a Kajain'sa'Nikto both wearing the robes. Jedi robes, Luke realized. He recognized them from the statues and the few holos he'd seen of real Jedi. Why were these people dressed as a Jedi?

"But you are not a Jedi yet."

This was a trap. This was a horrible twisted trap of the Empire's. It had to be. Luke stumbled into a large sitting room. Various sentients of all types sat calmly about. Some wore the white medical robes others wore the Jedi robes. None wore the uniform of an Imperial or armor of a stormtrooper. Luke moved cautiously into the room. A few people glanced at him, but they went back to their business.

The sound of pounding feet were heard. Everyone in the room stopped. Quiet fell at once. Two forms dashed by the room. They were dressed differently than everyone else. They wore light colored tunics with no outer robe. They also wore white masks that completely covered their face. From what Luke caught of it, the mask was smooth, flat and avian looking. The two also carried long pikes with yellow light blades coming out both sides. He had a strong feeling those guys were running back to Luke's room.

While everyone was watching the two strange Jedi run by, Luke grabbed a brown cloak that hung off the back of a chair, threw it over him and pulled the hood up. The robe was a bit too long. It trailed on the floor, but luckily not enough to hamper his walking. Actually it worked well for hiding Luke's bare feet from view. He slowly made his way out of the room as the other people turned to each other and started whispering.

Luke recalled Han's advice to blend into a place was to act confident and act like you belong. Watch what other people were doing and mimic them. Everyone moved at a slow pace. No one seemed to be in a big hurry, so Luke made sure his pace was even as well. But he couldn't help eye them from under the shadows of his hood. Everyone still wore the robes of the Jedi. Surely the Empire hadn't created this elaborate of hoax for Luke.

He decided to look into the Force for answers. He closed his eyes and opened himself up to the Force. At once he was overwhelmed. He slammed his connection shut.

"What was that?" he asked himself.

The Force felt so alive. So busy. So loud. So bright. He had never felt it like that before. This time he was more cautious as he slowly opened up to the Force. He let it flow into him in slow bits. As he did, he became aware that indeed the Force felt so much brighter and busier. It was so alive. It was . . . too much.

"The Force is strong with you, young Skywalker. Obi-Wan has taught you well."

What was going on? Luke tried again to recall where he was before he woke up here. But again he
was met with the vision of flames and clashing lightsabers.

"It is your destiny. Join me. Come with me. It is the only way."

Was this even real? Was this a vision? His heart was pounding in his chest. He could feel sweat beading up on his forehead. The fake Jedi were starting to look at him. A few leaned over and whispered to a companion they were walking with.

Luke had to get out of here. Away. He spotted a turbolift and made his way to it. He thanked the Force when the door opened and no one was inside. He entered and hastily slammed on some buttons. He leaned against the wall. He welcomed the cool metal against his hot body. He tried to take deep calming breaths. He would find a way out of this, real or not. He wouldn't let himself fall to the Dark Side.

The sound of the lift doors opening brought him out of his thoughts. Without barely a look or thought, he stumbled out of the doors. It was only after he heard the soft hiss of the doors closing, that he got a good look at where he was. No longer was he in the nice posh hallways with calm fake Jedi. This hallway was small. Metal. Stark. A service floor?

He moved cautiously down the hall. Humming machinery buzzed all around him. Lights flickered on various control panels. A shot of electricity ran up his spine. He recalled the tunnel. The reactor room. The even mechanical breathing . . .

The snap-hiss of a lightsaber igniting caused him to whip around. Two people stood at the end of the hallway. They wore the white bird masks and carried the dual yellow lightsabers. Were they the same ones from earlier?

"Identify yourself," one said.

It wasn't the right voice. It wasn't the deep voice. A voice that whispered to him, "There is no escape. Don't make me destroy you."

Luke turned and ran. He could hear the two masked people chasing him. A sharp tug in the Force gave Luke just enough warning to dodge to the side as a yellow lightsaber swung down to his right.

"Don't let yourself be destroyed as Obi-Wan did."

"No," Luke said weakly as he dodged another swipe of a different yellow blade. "No!" His hand snapped out toward the two attackers. The Force poured out of Luke, down his arm, and out towards the two fake Jedi.
Chapter 4

A tremor ran through the Force. It caused Anakin to pause in his march through the temple. He wasn't the only one who was affected. All over other Jedi looked around uncomfortably. They felt it too. The fear.

"We've got to find him," Obi-Wan said.

Anakin nodded. The mystery kid had disappeared from his room. Now the whole Force rattled uncomfortably. How strong was this kid to affect the Force like this? Sure he had a high midichlorian count, but was it enough for someone to make these kind of waves in the Force? Had the count been wrong? Or was it something else?

Anakin and Obi-Wan hurried to a turbolift. The temple guards had reported seeing an unknown Jedi down in a service level. A floor between floors.

"He's losing control of his emotions," Obi-Wan said as he pinched the bridge of his nose. "He's projecting them into the Force. It's clear he isn't trained. Even a Sith isn't this careless."

Anakin said nothing. He was struggling to keep his own shields out to block the erratic waves in the Force. It just felt so strong. He could feel the fevered fear trying to grab at him. The lower the lift brought them, the stronger the emotions got.

"Only your hatred can destroy me."

Anakin's head snapped up. What was that voice? It made his hair stand on end. It was such a deep voice laced with dark power. The doors slid open into the service level. He wasted no time, he ran forward with Obi-Wan right behind him. The level reeked of fear and panic. As the two Jedi turned a corner, they saw two temple guards under a large piece of machinery.

"See to them Obi-Wan!" Anakin shouted as he used the Force to jump over the machinery and the guards. He continued down the hall.

The voice came again stopping him in his tracks. "Come with me. It is the only way." There was an oily taint in the Force when he heard that voice. It left a bad taste in Anakin's mouth. He glanced around briefly. He was about to take his first step to continue down the hall, but that is when he noticed a flash of yellow and white.

He froze as he looked through the machinery. Through the machinery he saw the kid. He quietly and carefully moved down the hallway and circled around the machinery. He eased around the corner. The kid had sunked down on to the floor. He had pulled his knees to him. Sweat had beaded up on his face. Slowly Anakin walked forward.

With a soft voice Anakin spoke. "Hey."

At once bright blue eyes snapped open and looked over at Anakin. They were wild and unfocused. The kid was on the edge of a panic attack if not already in one.

"Hey," Anakin repeated. "I'm not going to hurt you. I'm just trying to help. It's ok."

Blue eyes shifted to Anakin's lightsaber. He saw the kid wince and place a hand on the ground as if to push himself up. Anakin unclipped his lightsaber. He placed it on the ground and gently rolled it away.
"See?" he said again calmly. "I'm not going to hurt you." Anakin started to creep forward very slowly. He wasn't that great at Force suggestions, but if he made physical contact with the kid he might be able to impose a decent suggestion to get him to sleep. For now that would be best to end this episode.

The kid didn't move. But his eyes were wide as they watched Anakin move forward. Anakin couldn't help but stare into those eyes. There something unsettling about them. They were familiar, but he couldn't pinpoint how or why.

"Everything is going to be alright," Anakin said as he knelt down. He reached with his fingers. He was almost there, but then the kid shifted away from him. Anakin bit back an annoyed groan.

"Who- who are you?" came a soft but unsteady whisper.

"I'm Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker," he replied.

Suddenly it all stopped. The fear. The panic. The heaviness. It just stopped. It caused Anakin to skip a breath. The kid was frozen. Wide-eyed staring at Anakin.

"No," he whispered. "No. That can't be. That's impossible!"

Force, nothing with this kid made sense. "Listen, kid," Anakin said trying to stay calm. "You're really scared and confused right now. I understand. I'm just trying to help."

"No. No," the kid repeated again and again. Anakin reached forward again ready to stop this and send the kid to sleep. His fingers brushed against the kid's arm, but as Anakin called upon the Force to project the suggestion, something in the Force grabbed him. It was strong. Too strong and pulled him down.

Everything went black and he was falling and spinning. There was a sharp ringing in his ears. Then there was that voice. That terrible voice.

"You are beaten. Don't make me destroy you."

Anakin grabbed at his belt for his lightsaber but it wasn't there. He had rolled it away. Kriff, he cursed to himself. He looked around to find the source of the voice. He could feel the cold, oily, fire of the Dark Side growing stronger. He had never felt the Force feel this wrong and twisted before.

Slowly Anakin stopped falling and spinning. He heard a regulated mechanical breath. Kish-kosh. Kish-kosh. Slowly the darkness ebbed away. He saw a gantry over a large bottomless shaft. Two figures fought. He instantly recognized the kid. He wore a grey jumpsuit and wielded a blue lightsaber. But it was the one who fought against that stole Anakin's breath away.

There was no doubt about it. This was a Sith. The cold, raging fire spun out from the imposing figure beating his red lightsaber down on the tiring kid. The Sith was tall and huge. He wore all black with plastoid armor, cape, and mask. The look reminded Anakin a bit of clone trooper armor, but a bit more skull and insect like.

Then the red saber slashed out and cut right through the kids right hand. The hand and the lightsaber fell down the reactor shaft. The kid screamed out in pain as he stuffed the stub of his hand under his left elbow. Anakin couldn't help but feel a squeeze in his own heart as he recalled the loss of his own hand in a duel against a Sith.

The kid backed further and further away from the Sith, but he was running out of walkway on the gantry. The Sith slowly approached. The kid ducked under a railing and climbed onto a thin piece of
railing. He was forced to crawl along its thin edge.

"There is no escape," came the deep dark voice of the Sith. It was the same voice Anakin had been hearing. The Sith deactivated his lightsaber and clipped it to his belt. "Don't make me destroy you. You do not yet realize your importance. 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."

The kid had reached the tall instruments at the end of the railing. He grabbed on to it and straightened up. "I'll never join you!" the kid shouted back defiantly. Anakin couldn't help but admire the kid's spunk and courage in the situation. In truth he was doing better than Anakin had when he lost his arm.

"If you only knew the power of the Dark Side," the Sith continued. His breathing through the mask's respirator continued evenly. "Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father."

"Search your feelings. You know it to be true."

"No," the Sith said. There was a heavy weight to his words. "I am your father."

But the kid still shook his head. "No!" he cried. "No! No!" They were heartbreaking cries.

The Sith reached out a gloved hand to the kid. "Luke, 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."

The kid glanced down and then let go. He was falling and so was Anakin. Falling into the darkness.
The door to the room slid quietly open. The kid was sitting up in his bed. His head rested against the headboard and was turned towards the window. Yet his eyes were unfocused. Whatever the kid was staring at was not out the window. He didn't even react to Anakin walking into the room. Anakin knew they had given the kid some anti-anxiety medicine to keep him calm and prevent another episode from happening. According to the healers, he had been very unresponsive to questions. He only nodded yes or no at simple questions.

It had only been a day since the kid’s escape into the service level and the vision. Anakin approached the end of the bed and folded his arms across his chest. It was his first time getting a good look at the kid. He was young and small. He looked a bit thin and haggard. There were dark circles under his eyes.

"Join me, and together we can rule the galaxy as father and son." Dark words from the vision Anakin caused a shiver to run up his spine. The council had requested Anakin report on what had happened on the service floor. He had asked for a bit of time to meditate, which the council bought all too easily. However, his time was running out. The council would want to hear Anakin's report soon. He had come here in hopes of getting some answers, some sort of clarification as to what he saw.

"Hey," Anakin said softly.

The kid blinked a few times before he slowly turned his head. Sky blue eyes focused in on him. There was something about those eyes that pulled on him. They were familiar but also not.

"Hey," Anakin said again. "How are you feeling?"

The kid just looked at him. He blinked a few times, but it was clear he was thinking. He was focused on Anakin. He scrunched up his nose in thought. It instantly reminded Anakin of Padme. It was something she did when deep in thought. He liked to tease her about it, which she hated.

"You . . ." the kid said. His voice was shaky and dry sounding. "You're from . . . before . . ."

Anakin nodded. "Do you remember what happened?"

The kid's unsettling blue eyes slid off the Jedi. "I . . ." he started, but then paused. "Where . . . where am I?"

"The healing halls in the Jedi Temple," Anakin explained, but then he added, "On Coruscant. You crash landed here three days ago."

Instantly the eyes were back on Anakin. No longer did they look fuzzy from drugs. They were sharp and intense. "Coru . . . Coruscant?" There was clear disbelief there.

"Yes," Anakin said. "I got admit, crash landing here is quite impressive to get pass all the orbital security completely undetected." That was just lightly scratching the surface. There apparently was quite a bit of a buzz about the crash within the Galactic Army of the Republic. It was a huge security risk that a fighter ship, even a small one, got past the fleet protecting the planet.

"Coruscant?" the kid asked again. "Not . . . Imperial Center?"

"Imperial Center?" Anakin asked. He recalled the words from the vision. "You can destroy the
Emperor." The emperor of what and where? It was one of his many questions. He added, "Where is this Imperial Center?"

But the kid didn't answer. "You said the Jedi Temple... on Coruscant..."

"Yes."

"So this isn't the palace?"

The medical checks on the kid said he hadn't received any significant brain damage, but Anakin was starting to question that. He sighed. "The palace? Is that where the emperor lives? On Imperial Center?" The kid's eyes widened for a moment and then he turned his gaze back out the window. Anakin fought back an annoyed sigh. "Let's try something else. How about your name?" According to the vision, the Sith had called the kid Luke. Again those familiar blue eyes were on Anakin. The kid was still quiet. "I'll go first, though I've already introduced myself before. I'm Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker."

The blue eyes grew large and round. "You... you can't be..." he said softly. Anakin recalled the first time he told the kid his name. "No. That's impossible." Yet that was the same line the kid had said when the Sith revealed he was the kid's father. And another odd thing was that the kid also called out the name Skywalker in the hospital when he first crashed here. So he knew of Anakin. When was any of this going to make sense?

The door silently slid open and Obi-Wan walked in. He looked at the kid and then to Anakin. "Scaring him already?" Obi-Wan asked in his usual sarcastic tone.

"All I did was tell him my name," Anakin replied drily.

"That's scary enough for some," Obi-Wan said with a smile.

The kid collected himself and was now staring intently at Anakin as if scrutinizing him.

"I was trying to get him to tell me his name," Anakin explained. "I figured I would go first."

"Ah," Obi-Wan said with a nod. "Good plan. I am Master Obi-Wan Kenobi."

"What? You're old-" The kid snapped his mouth shut. Anakin repressed a laugh bubbling up in his throat at the old comment. Obi-Wan arched an eyebrow and casted a warning glance over at Anakin.

"Have you learned anything else?" Obi-Wan asked turning back to Anakin.

"Afraid not. He just woke up," Anakin replied. Obi-Wan nodded. "So how about that name?"

Anakin asked again.

"Luke," the kid said. "My name is Luke." It matched to what Anakin had seen in the vision. The first hint that the vision was a real event.

"Just Luke?" Obi-Wan asked probing for more information.


"Where are you from just Luke?" Obi-Wan continued. Yet now Luke was on guard. His shoulders were raised as he glared over at the two Jedi.

"Where were you born?" Anakin asked.

"Tatooine?" Anakin shouted. The kid jumped. Obi-Wan shot Anakin a glare. "Where on Tatooine?"

"Anakin is also from Tatooine. Mos Espa," Obi-Wan chimed in. Anakin wanted to scowl at Obi-Wan. He didn't openly share his past, but again sharp blue eyes focused on him.

"I grew up outside Anchorhead on my aunt and uncle's moisture farm . . .,，“ Luke explained.

"And your father?" Anakin asked at once. He noticed the kid trembled for a second.

"My . . . I was told my parents died when I was born," the kid said softly. He wasn't lying. Anakin would have sensed it. But it added up to the vision a small bit. The kid clearly didn't know his father was a Sith. "Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father." Anakin glanced over at Obi-Wan.

"Do you know this kid?" Anakin asked through the Force. Obi-Wan shot him an annoyed look. Talking through the Force was generally something for padawans and masters. However, Anakin had kept it up with his master even after being knighted. Obi-Wan felt Anakin needed to stop. To grow up.

"No, Obi-Wan replied.

_In that vision I saw, which I think is of his past, the Sith said to him that you never told him what happened to his father._

"You're just now mentioning this? Obi-Wan shot back. Anakin wanted to argue he had only spoken to Obi-Wan once since he had seen the vision. At the time he was still very much processing what had happened and what he had seen. Obi-Wan perhaps came to same realization. _I've never seen him before. I don't recall any Luke either much less talking to him about his father._"


"You built it?" Anakin asked. "How did you know to build a lightsaber?"

"I followed the instructions in Old Ben's journal," Luke said with a wave of a hand a bit in Obi-Wan's direction.

"Who is this Old Ben?" Obi-Wan asked. "A Jedi?"


Anakin pinched the bridge of his nose with his gloved hand. This was getting nowhere. What answers they did get from this kid, it only brought forth more questions.
"Where did you get the crystal?" Obi-Wan continued his questions.

Luke sighed. "It was with Old Ben's journal."

"Was Old Ben a Jedi?" Anakin asked.

Luke nodded. Well that was something. Something they could actually research later.

"Can I ask a question?" Luke said. Obi-Wan nodded. "What time is it? I mean . . . what is the date?"

Obi-Wan answered and again clear shock fell across the kid. It rippled through the Force. The kid's eyes were wide and his mouth fell open.

It was at that moment, the door slid open and Mace Windu walked in.

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Luke's head was spinning. This couldn't be. It was impossible. And yet . . . and yet it all just made so much sense.

He was in the past.

That explained why they were calling Imperial Center Coruscant. Why there was a Jedi Temple with Jedi. And . . . Luke looked at the tall Jedi standing at the foot of his bed. He wore dark leather robes. His dark blonde hair fell in long wavy curls down his face. And it made sense why this man could be Anakin Skywalker and not Darth Vader.

The door slid open and another Jedi walked in. He was a tall dark skinned human wearing light tan robes similar to the young Ben. There was a serious and stern look to his face.

"Master Windu," Obi-Wan greeted with a small bob of his head. "We were talking with young Luke here."


"Luke," he said. "The Jedi need to know about the man who took you out of the hospital."

_Hospital? Luke's memories were a blur. Most of them were of pain and . . . Bespin . . . The shaft. The lightsaber. The words . . .

"I'm . . . I'm not sure I know who you're talking about," he finally replied.

Windu dug out a small holodisc out of one his belt pouches. A blue holograph popped up. The scene looked like it was a from a security cam. There were speeders and a pilot nearby. Then he started to grab at his throat. A cold feeling ran through Luke as he watched the man levitate off his feet. He shivered as he saw the neck make a sharp and quick turn. A second pilot ran onto the scene. Shots were fired, bolts reflected, and a tall man wearing a dark hooded cape walked into the scene carrying a red lightsaber.

_Vader. Fath . . . No. Don't think that. Don't go there, Luke._

Once the second pilot was cut down, the figure disappeared and reappeared helping a limping Luke to the speeder. Luke didn't recall this, but that wasn't what he was focused on. He focused on the figure. His first thought it was Vader . . . and yet . . . Where was the suit? The mask and helmet?

"You know nothing of the man of that man in the hood?" Windu asked.

Luke opened his mouth, but then closed it. He looked at the Jedi who called himself Anakin Skywalker. What could Luke say? Even if he did say anything, he didn't know for certain that that was Vader.

Windu sighed. "Listen Luke, we're trying to catch a murderer. This man killed those two pilots and then later three Jedi." Luke groaned. It was sounding more and more like Vader. "And now he has broken into Chancellor Palpatine's apartment. Luckily the chancellor wasn't home, but he did kill several guards."

Chancellor Palpatine. Chancellor? This had to be the past. It had to be. Had Vader also come back into the past? His fighter had been caught up with Luke's. Had Vader attempted to speak to his master? Or . . .

"Join me, and together we can rule the galaxy as father and son," Vader had said to Luke back on Bespin. Had Vader attempted to kill the Emperor . . . before he ever became Emperor?


All three Jedi straightened up and shared a look.


"Do you know anything else about Darth Vader?" Windu asked.

"Not much," Luke said. It was a bit of the truth. He knew Darth Vader was in command of the Imperial Navy. He was a feared force of nature of the battlefield. I am your father. Again Luke looked at Anakin Skywalker. The Jedi's blue eyes were focused on Luke.

"Is he the one who cut off your hand?" Anakin asked.

Instantly sharp searing cold spread through Luke. He froze. How . . . How did he know? If this was the past . . . Anakin was still a Jedi. Whatever had happened to make him Vader had yet to happen. But . . . would it happen soon? Today's date was only a few months short of the first Empire Day . . . of Luke's birthday.

"I will take that as a yes," Anakin said. His voice a bit cold. For the first time Luke saw a flicker of Vader. The harshness of his voice. His body movement. All doubt was cleared from Luke's mind. He was in the past. This was Anakin Skywalker, whose future was to be Darth Vader.
Darth Vader made his way silently through the large open room. Large windows showed a decent view of Coruscant's highrises. The sun was setting and casting the planet in a golden orange glow. The current apartment he was in wasn't that high up, but it did give him a good view of the Jedi Temple, where he felt the unmistakable brightness of the boy.

_Luke_, he thought to himself. He had sensed Luke's turmoil the day before. He wanted to charge into the temple that very moment. What had happened? Had the Jedi done something to the child? It only lasted less than hour. Then Vader sensed Luke's presence calm down. Had Luke realized the truth? They were in the past?

Vader eyed the distant Jedi Temple. He had found this apartment and . . . borrowed it from its owner. The apartment was for sell and as such it was mostly empty. Only a few pieces of furniture, mostly cheap pieces meant for show, were scattered around. Now that Vader had credits and resources, he could secure the boy, _his son_, and work on a way of returning to their time.

Laying out on a table were various red Sith holocrons and artifacts. There were also various weapons, two of which were lightsabers with red blades, commlinks, and datapads. On the floor sat three small chests that contained a small fortune of credits. All of this Vader had taken from his master.

He smiled to himself. He almost felt like laughing. The Force, especially the Dark Side, was flooded with anger. Rage from Darth Sidious. Vader was impressed with his future master. He still had enough control not to let his shields slip. Those of the Light Side would feel nothing, but Vader was not of the light. Thus he felt the raging fire of Sidious.

It had been all too easy. Vader knew where Sidious' secret underground layer was. He knew how to bypass any traps set with the Force and the technological security was twenty years outdated for him. Sidious' layer had everything Vader needed. Datapads with contacts and codes. Weapons. Sith holocrons. Sith artifacts and texts. Granted Vader hadn't taken everything. He didn't need it all. He took what he thought might help him. The rest would be destroyed with carefully placed bombs he set to blow.

However, he waited to press the trigger. First he would raided Sidious' chancellor's apartment. There were a few Sith artifacts there, but it wasn't so much about acquiring more tools. This was a power play. It was a bold move, which alerted Sidious that a Sith, an unknown Sith to him, was moving against him. Sidious would now be on the hunt for Vader, but it was honestly only a matter of time before the future emperor learned of him. The Jedi were already aware of him. Eventually they would report to the senate and the chancellor. Vader might as well make himself known to Sidious on his own terms.

Now Vader had the resources he needed. Now he could get his son. The less time Luke spent with the Jedi the better. Vader was going to have reeducate Luke on whatever poor knowledge Obi-Wan had passed to the child. He didn't need the whole Jedi Order filling the boy's head with useless ideas. Plus there was . . . him.

Vader could feel him. A bright light. A supernova amongst the Jedi. Yet it wasn't as pure as it could be. As it _should_ be. There was no mistaking the presence of Anakin Skywalker. Vader and Luke's presence had already altered the events of the past. Skywalker should be in the outer rim, but now was back on Coruscant. Why had the Jedi come to the planet? Was it because of Luke?
Luke is my son, Vader thought as he fingered the trigger to the bombs. He was born to me. Darth Vader. Not that fool Skywalker.

Vader would need to keep Luke and Anakin far apart. He would not be sharing his son with his past self.

"Ah Anakin!" Chancellor Palpatine said as Anakin walked into the torn up apartment. Black scorch marks and smoldering piles of furniture were littered everywhere. A few clone troopers stood guard against a wall. A few blue Senate guards also lingered about. Buzzing around the place were camera droids documenting the crime. They were directed by CPF droids who were directed themselves by human CPF officers.

Anakin stepped carefully through the apartment and joined Palpatine at the windows. They were horribly cracked, but since the transparisteel was blast proof, it had held together. There wasn't much a view besides the late afternoon light. He nodded to the chancellor as he stepped up.

"Quite a mess here chancellor," Anakin said with a slight grin. "Do you have somewhere to stay for the night?"

"That has already been taken of," Palpatine said a bit tired. "I've been told that the Jedi think this may be the act of a Sith."

Anakin tensed a small bit. The council hadn't wanted to inform the senate and the chancellor of the new Sith quite yet. Anakin had argued against it, but since he wasn't on the council his opinion didn't hold enough weight.

"We believe it is a Sith," Anakin said. "The council didn't report this as they weren't sure if it was indeed a Sith. It's not a Sith we've seen before. They wanted a bit more facts before making a report."

Palpatine was quiet, but there was a tenseness in his body. There was an anger there, which Anakin found well founded. If the council had reported the Sith earlier, perhaps the chancellor's home wouldn't have been destroyed. It was luck that the chancellor wasn't home.

"A new Sith . . ." Palpatine said slowly.

"Possibly the Sith master," Anakin added. He didn't hide the hopeful edge in his voice. If it was the Sith master . . . they could finally end this war.

"And what do the Jedi know of this new Sith?"

"Not much," Anakin said annoyed.

"Is this why they called you back to Coruscant?"

Anakin paused. He had no problem sharing about the Sith, but when it came to Luke . . . Instantly Anakin recalled the kid's bright blue eyes and the scrunched up nose that was so like Padme's . . .

"Yes," he finally replied. "The only thing we seem to know is that his name might be Darth Vader."

"Might be?" Palpatine said as he turned to face Anakin more head on.
Anakin sighed and shook his head. "You can see why the council had yet to make a report."

"Anything else?"

_This Sith may or may not be the father of some kid we got in the Jedi Temple_, Anakin added into his head.

"At this time, no," Anakin said. He felt an odd flare of protectiveness over Luke. The poor kid was dealing with a lot. He didn't need to be involved in all this political nonsense yet.

"Please do keep me informed, dear boy," Palpatine said. "You're one of my most trusted friends."

Anakin smiled and nodded. He made his way back out of the wrecked apartment and to his speeder. He was usually one for speeding through the Coruscant traffic, but found himself taking his time. He thought of Luke. Was the Sith his father? And why had the Sith waited until Luke was older to approach him? It would have been far better to get Luke to turn to the Dark Side when he was a child. Plus Luke said he had been raised on Tatooine with his aunt and uncle. All too easy pickings for a Sith lord looking for a powerful apprentice.

Obi-Wan had stayed at the temple to look into this Jedi old Ben. Anakin had a feeling it wasn't much of a lead, but they had to look. It was a shame there weren't any Republic public records about Tatooine. Since it was a Hutt controlled world, there wasn't much of any records. Even if there were, they would be on planet.

_{What were the chances that the kid was from Tatooine? The same as me?_ Anakin mused to himself. It made sense why the kid hadn't been found and brought to the Jedi temple. At least . . . at least he wasn't a slave. Tatooine was a harsh and cruel world. The kid had been spared from the worst of it including being raised by a Sith father.

Who was Luke's father? Darth Vader? What kind of father just abandons his son on some backwater planet? Only to force him into a duel and cut his hand off? _Only a Sith would be that cold_, Anakin thought. What he really needed to do was just capture this Vader. Luke would be free of his possible father. Perhaps the galaxy would be finished with a war.

So what did Anakin know about Vader? He was a Sith. Possibly human. Possibly Luke's father, or claimed to be. If had a son as old as Luke, he himself had to be older. Was he old enough that he had Darth Maul as an apprentice back during the Naboo Invasion? Was Vader the Sith master? Or another apprentice? Then what did that make Dooku? And if Vader was older, what did he do prior to being a Sith? Dooku was a Jedi-

_A Jedi . . ._

It was . . . It was possible that Vader was once a Jedi like Dooku. Perhaps he had been thrown out of the Order for having an affair that resulted in Luke. A coldness grew inside Anakin. It was a fear he was all too familiar with. But perhaps when he returned to the temple, he could run the kids DNA against the Jedi records for parental matches. There might be something there. Perhaps this Vader was a child that was found but never became a Jedi.

Something in the Force shook. It was explosive. Dark and angry. A Sith. It was coming from behind him. Anakin whipped his head around. Had Vader returned to the apartment? He turned his speeder around and recklessly sped through the traffic back to the chancellor.
Chapter 7

Thanks everyone for the support and love for this story. I had a lot of chapters written before I posted this. Thus have been able to to do a every-three-days update schedule. That may end soonish if I run out of buffer chapters. However, it won't be for another two weeks. I'm currently writing chapter 10. Thanks again for all the comments.

Vader laughed. A fully hearty laugh. When was the last time he had done such a thing? For the past twenty years he had avoided it due to the pain it caused him. But now he could. He dropped the bomb trigger to the floor. Sidious' secret underground layer had just been destroyed. It was too far underground for there to be effects felt on the surface, but Sidious' anger . . . Oh his anger.

Vader had chipped away at the Sith master by invading his home. And now Sidious had slipped up. Every Force sensitive on the planet would have felt that. In fact Vader could sense the alarm coming from the Jedi. They were already on alert looking for a Sith lord. Why not give them a Sith lord to hunt for? The Jedi would focus all their energies on this Sith that was so close to them. It provided Vader with the perfect opportunity.

He stood at a heavy door. He pressed a code into the door pad. The heavy door slid open. In another time, Vader was quite skilled at sneaking in and out of the Jedi Temple so he could meet up with his wife. The old passages in the deep forgotten levels of the Temple were still there now. Vader made his way confidently through the darkness.

But in the darkness his thoughts bubbled into memories. Of using these same hallways. His heart racing as he was on his way to see . . . her. Vader had been tempted, very tempted, to go to her. To see her. But how could he? After she betrayed him? After what he had done to her? Plus she wouldn't even know him. He was a monster. Scarred. Aged. He didn't deserve to see her again. Plus his time here was fleeting. There was no point in dwelling on the past. He had done that enough for a lifetime. Seeing her . . . the wounds it would open. It would distract him. He had to focus on Luke and returning them both to their proper time.

As soon as he made it to the occupied levels, he found a Jedi robe. He slipped on the light tan and brown robes and left behind his black ones. He pulled the brown hood down low. Luckily the Jedi wouldn't be too bothered by someone they didn't recognize or know. There were so many Jedi who only came to the Temple every so often. Jedi that were unknown amongst those who lived at the Temple. He collected an extra set of robes and boots before moving on.

Vader followed the gentle pull of Luke's presence. He was not surprised to find the trail led him to the healing halls. It was the reason Vader had allowed the Jedi to take the boy. Hopefully the Jedi had seen to the boy's injuries. Even if they hadn't, Vader now could. A few Jedi and healers casted a glance at Vader, but no one stopped him. Vader tightened his shields. Being back in the Temple with all these . . . Jedi . . .

Memories threatened to bubble up of clones and blasters and a blue lightsaber slashing through robes. Master Skywalker, there's too many.

Vader's gloved hands tightened into fists as he chased such old thoughts away. He had done what he
had to do. He had done it to save Padme and the Republic from the lies and corruption of the Jedi.
He was Darth Vader, dark lord of the Sith. He did not regret his actions. They made him stronger.
They gave him more power.

Vader stopped at a door. He pressed the door release, but the door didn't open. A small flare of rage
bubbled inside of him. They had locked Luke up. Though it wasn't that surprising. He wasn't a Jedi.
Vader typed in a code, and he heard the door unlock. Anakin Skywalker of this time had yet to be
appointed to the Council, but the Anakin of Vader's past had. His old council codes unlocked the
door. If only those codes had allowed him access to the holocron vault . . .

Vader stepped into the room. Luke was sitting straight up in bed and looking out the window
towards Sidious' location. The boy had likely felt Sidious' explosive anger earlier. Hearing the door
open, Luke turned and looked at the door. Vader pulled down his hood revealing his bald and
scarred head. Luke's eyes grew wide. His mouth formed a small "oh."

words. The proper words the boy should use to address Vader. It appeared the boy had come to
accept the truth.

"Luke," Vader replied. "It is time to leave."

"Chancellor!" Anakin shouted as ran into the apartment. The place had already been a mess before,
but now . . . now it was worse. Night had fallen on Coruscant and the only lights in the room were
the glow of the city coming in from the now completely shattered and opened windows.

The first thing Anakin noticed were the bodies. They had been slashed and burned. The obvious
signs of a lightsaber. "Chancellor!" he shouted louder and more desperate. He stretched out into the
Force feeling for any survivors. He glanced around the room. Yet all he saw were sparking camera
and CPF droids and the dead bodies of the clone troopers and the senate guard.

"Chancellor?" Anakin called again as moved toward the hallway that lead deeper into the apartment.

"Anakin?"

The call was faint, but it was clearly the chancellor.

"Chancellor!" Anakin shouted as he ignited his blue lightsaber and ran down the hall. He ran into
what must be the bedroom. The chancellor was peeking out from behind a large stone statue. Chunks
of it were scattered on the floor with cooling slashes. "Chancellor! You're safe!"

"Yes! Yes I am!" Palpatine said as he fully stepped around the statue.

"What happened? Is the Sith here?"

"No, dear boy. He left when he heard you shouting my name."

Anakin scowled. He had just missed this new Sith. This Darth Vader. "Are you hurt?" he asked.

"No. You came just in time," Palpatine said as he smoothed down the rich fabric on his robe.

Anakin deactivated his lightsaber and walked over to the open and broken window. There was no
traffic lines next to this building. The airspace around it was a no-fly zone for security for the
chancellor. It wasn't like the Sith could have jumped out and landed on a random speeder. Either he
didn't jump, or he had transportation ready.
There was a headache forming between Anakin's eyes. He brought up his com and at once Master Windu answered. The whole Jedi Temple had felt that disturbance in the Force. Fresh troops would be arriving at once. Anakin was ordered to stay with the chancellor until they arrived. He couldn't stand still. He walked back into the living room and examined the carnage.

Where had it started? Where had the Sith entered? The cuts were precise and quick. The guards had their faces frozen in shouts of alarm. Anakin glanced around the room. He saw no blaster marks and none of the guards, troopers, or droids had blasters in their hands. Why not? At the very least the ones who died last would have had time to pull out a blaster.

He followed the burn marks on the floor and wall. He now stood where he had earlier when he had first come to the apartment. In front of the window. From what Anakin could tell, it had all started here. Shattered transparisteel littered the floor. Had the Sith jumped in from the already shattered window? Had he weakened the window when he was in the apartment earlier? And if that was the case, where had the chancellor been standing? It was possible he had moved away from the window by the time the Sith came charging through. Perhaps he was back in his bedroom.

But why wait until the apartment was filled with so much extra security? It was clear the Sith could get into the apartment. Why not wait until night when the chancellor would be asleep? Unless this wasn't about killing the chancellor at all . . .

The kid!

Anakin brought out his comlink and quickly dialed Obi-Wan's frequency.

"Anakin-" Obi-Wan said, but was unable to say another word.


"Is gone from his room."

"I think this was all a diversion with the chancellor," Anakin said. "The Sith went after Luke."

"Security is already looking through the cameras to see if they got a shot of where he went and if he went with someone," Obi-Wan explained. "Stay with the chancellor. I'll find the kid."

Anakin opened his mouth. He wanted to argue. He should leave at once and help find the kid and the Sith. But that was when he noticed Palpatine walk into the room. The reinforcements were minutes away. Anakin had duty to uphold not just as a Jedi, but as a member of the Republic. The chancellor needed to be protected.

"Good luck," Anakin said. "May the Force be with you."

He ended the call as Palpatine walked up. "Did I hear that right?" Palpatine said. "You think this was all a diversion? So the Sith could get . . . someone?"

There was no point in hiding it now. "There was a fighter that crashed on the planet three days ago."

"Yes I recall the report. Orbital Security had no idea how the fighter got passed them."

"Inside the fighter was this kid, Luke. He was taken to a local hospital, but it appears this new Sith lord is after him."

"Any idea why?" Palpatine said. His eyes were intently focused on Anakin.
"I . . . there are several theories, but we aren't completely sure," Anakin said.

"And what do you think? What is your theory?"

"I think there is . . . some kind of relationship between the two."

"Relationship?"

"Family."

"Ah, yes. Family," Palpatine said with a nod of his head. "People can go to such . . . extreme lengths to protect the people they love."
Chapter 8

Luke was tired of everything making his head spin. He was still trying to wrap his head around that this was the past. This was the Jedi Temple. With living real Jedi. And he had met a young Anakin Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi. And now . . . standing at the foot of his bed was his fath- was Darth Vader.

"Luke," Vader said. "It is time to leave."


"Casted aside. It was no longer necessary."

What did that mean? Vader walked along the side of the bed and stopped at Luke's side. Luke just looked up at him with his mouth still slightly open. Vader was bald with pale skin. Small light scars covered his skin. Some hinted at larger injuries such a line of scars on the left side of his head and cheek. His eyes were an unsettling yellow rimmed with red. And yet . . . Luke saw it. The nose and the strong chin and the cheekbones. Yes, they were the same as the Jedi Anakin Skywalker.

"Surely by now you've noticed where you are."

"You mean when we are?" Luke replied. "The past . . . I'm not even born yet."

"No," came Vader's short clipped answer.

"Is my mother . . . Is she still alive? Is she here? Somewhere?" Luke couldn't hide the hopeful edge to his voice. If he was able to meet Anakin Skywalker . . . then he could meet his mother as well.

But Vader only responded with, "Yes. She is alive."

Luke huffed at his father. "So now what?" he asked. "Do we go back? To our time?"

"Ideally."

"Ideally? Do you even know how to?"

"No."

Luke moaned. "So you're just as clueless as I am."

"I am not," Vader growled. "But you are coming with me, so when I do unlock the secret to returning, you are there."

"I'll just wait here."

"No, you will not."

Luke crossed his arms across his chest. He didn't want to leave with Vader. He'd much rather stay here and get to know his real father and the real Jedi. There was some much he could learn.

"Your thoughts betray you, young one," Vader said. "The Jedi will not accept you. They will teach you nothing. They do not see you as one of their own, and they do not share their knowledge with outsiders."
"I suppose you would know," Luke grumbled. "Right, Anakin Skywalker?"

A sharp coldness spread throughout the room. "That name means nothing to me," Vader hissed. "Anakin Skywalker was weak. I killed him."

"Really? I met him earlier today. He came to visit me."


"What did you say to him?" Vader's dark voice brought Luke on his memories. Vader's voice didn't quite match up to how it had sounded with the mask. It was deep and dark, but not as deep and dark.

"What could I say?" Luke said with a sigh. "Hey I'm your twenty-two year old son that isn't even born yet." He paused. "But I'm about to be born . . . My mother should be . . . pregnant by now. Does he even know? Did you even know about me?"

There was a flinch to Vader's face. A grimace? But it was brief and Luke almost missed it. "Did I know your mother was pregnant? Yes. It was . . . When she told me . . . one of my happiest moments . . ."

Luke's face fell slack in surprise. He hadn't expected to hear that from Darth Vader. He had been . . . happy to have a child? Then why . . . Why . . . There were so many thoughts. Luke was having a hard time organizing them. Why Bespin? Why the duel? Why cut his hand off? Why leave him on Tatooine with his aunt and uncle? Had his transformation from Anakin Skywalker to Darth Vader changed him that much? It was clear after meeting the past self, the two were different from each other. But there was also a note of similarity. They were still the same person.

"However, Skywalker of the past did not know of the pregnancy at this time. He was supposed to be out in the Outer Rim fighting the Separatists. Us being here has changed the past."

"What does that mean?" Luke asked.

"That the events of old may not play out as they previously had," Vader said. "Regardless, with what is coming . . . We should leave this planet."

"You mean the end of the Republic? The rise of the Empire?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you go to the chancellor's apartment?"

Vader's eyes narrowed on his son. "How did you know that?"

"The Jedi are looking for you. They asked me for information."

"I went to that apartment to secure knowledge and resources so we can go back to our original time," Vader explained.

"So you had no plans to kill the future Emperor? Before he became the Emperor?"

"No."

"Why not?" Luke asked. His voice soft and low. "Why hadn't you before? What did you mean . . . on Bespin? When you said I could kill the Emperor? That he had forseen it? That then we could . . ."
rule together?"

Vader said nothing. Only silence filled the room. Not even the sound of Vader's respirator was there. Just the soft breathing from the two of them.

"I am not strong enough," Vader finally said.

Luke could only stare at the tall form of Vader. How could . . . How could *Darth Vader* not be strong enough to take down the Emperor?

"The Emperor is a Sith Lord, Darth Sidious," Vader explained. "He is my Sith master. He is incredibly strong and knowledgeable about the Dark Side of the Force."

"And you think I could kill him?" Luke's gaze didn't waver. He sat up straight and glared up into the yellow eyes of Vader.

Finally Vader spoke up, "It matters not right now, young one."

"Oh?"

"There are other pressing matters, such as returning to our time. Put these on."

Vader threw a pile clothes on to Luke's lap. Luke instantly recognized them as Jedi robes such as the same Vader was wearing.

"I never agreed to go with you," Luke said.

Vader scowled. "The only way for you to get back home, to your proper time, is with me. You do not belong here. You will not be welcomed. Stop whatever foolish notions you have. You do not know the truth of Jedi, boy."

"Then why don't you educate me, then?"

"I have every intention to do just that," Vader growled pointing a gloved finger at Luke. "But not here and not now. Come and get dressed. Or do you need me to assist you?"

Luke looked back down at the pile of clothes. What should he do? Stay here? Surely Vader wasn't completely right. This was the Jedi Temple. It still existed. There were still Jedi here. Plus . . . there was . . . Anakin Skywalker. Not the man standing in front of him. Darth Vader.

"I came to the Order when I was nine years old," Vader said. His voice was soft. The sudden shift in tone startled Luke. "The Jedi had freed me from slavery on Tatooine. The Order initially refused to accept me. I was too old. Jedi are brought to the Temple and start their training at a young age. They were taken from their families. The only life they know is that of the Jedi."

"But they still did accept you."

Vader huffed. "My . . . master said he would train me whether the Order agreed or not, so the Order allowed me in. But I was never fully accepted. I was always an outsider. Never a true and proper Jedi. Luke, they will not accept you here. Whatever you are hoping to find here, acceptance, companionship, knowledge, you will not find it."

"I take it you never did," Luke said softly.

Vader's eyes widened. It was odd seeing him surprised. But of course it didn't last long. His face hardened back into his serious and stern expression. "No, I did not. Now come, or I will drag you
away from here."
The boy, *his boy*, quietly walked behind him. Vader was glad Luke had finally seen reason. There was no point in him staying with the Jedi. He would get nothing from this place. Only a headache, which Vader was already suffering from. He was ready to be gone from this place. He hated it no matter what time he was in. He hated it as the temple and as the palace.

Honestly, he was glad Luke had come willingly. Vader was willing to fight the whole Jedi Order to secure Luke, but he'd rather avoid it. He had to keep Luke safe. He didn't want a repeat of the speeder accident. Putting the Jedi on alert, would put the whole galaxy on alert. Right now they needed stealth. And if Vader had to use . . . words instead of action to get Luke out of the Temple. then so be it. He clenched his teeth together. He couldn't believe how open he had been with the boy. Why had he shared so much? Was it desperation? He just wanted Luke to leave with him and now.

The two walked through the dusty forgotten lower hallways of the temple. They were making their way back along the route Vader had used to enter the temple. Luke had said very little since getting dressed. He appeared to be deep in thought. Probably mulling over the conversation in his med room.

Honestly, Vader was too. It was the first real conversation he had with his son. It was the first time he experience Luke's personality. A little bit of a spitfire. Undaunted. Fearless. So much like his mother. Padme . . .

Luke had asked about her. Pointed out she would be pregnant. She would. Had Anakin Skywalker already used this same hallway to sneak away to visit her? Did she know that she was expecting? Would she share the news to him earlier than Vader had learned?

A feather soft voice drifted up from long locked up memories, "*Something wonderful has happened. Ani, I'm pregnant.*"

"*That's . . . that's wonderful.*"

"*We're not going to worry about anything right now. This is a happy moment. The happiest moment of my life.*"

Vader scowled silently to himself. He was glad Luke was behind him and unable to see his expression. It mattered not. *His* Padme was dead. She had been for decades now. For now he had to focus on his son and a way to return them both back to their time. Hopefully Luke could help look through the Sith texts and holocrons. Perhaps Vader would be able to instruct Luke in ways of the Dark Side. Nothing too bold, as the bold approach didn't seem to work with the boy. Just subtle techniques and ideas. It could be just enough for Luke to taste the true power of the Dark Side.

The sound of boots on tile caused Vader to halt. He felt the soft rustle of his Jedi robes as Luke almost ran into him. Someone was approaching down the hall from where they had come. Vader stepped around Luke, so Vader now stood between who was approaching and Luke.

"I assume you are not a Jedi," came a voice thick with a Coruscanti accent.

At once Vader tensed up. He ground his teeth against each other. He tightly grabbed his lightsaber and pulled it from his belt. "Kenobi," he hissed between his teeth. He heard a soft gasp from Luke
behind him.

Obi-Wan Kenobi stepped into the dull light. He was as Vader truly remembered him. Not that old man on the Death Star who had barely put up a fight. No, the man before him now was Kenobi. Ginger hair and beard. A cocky confidence. This was the image of the man Vader recalled over and over. The man who stood on the ashy rocky hill above the lava river. The one who claimed he had loved him.

"You seem to know who I am," Kenobi said. "But I'm afraid I do not know who you are."

"Your death," Vader said.

There was a small flinch in Kenobi as he took in Vader's words. No doubt he sensed the truth to them. For it was true. He was the death of Kenobi. A death that had already passed and yet at the same time had also not. There was a snap-hiss as Kenobi's lightsaber ignited.

"Death is it?" Kenobi said with a slight smile that only made Vader want to punch him in the face. Vader trigger the ignition button on his own saber. The mix of red and blue light from the sabers casted the hallway in an eerie light.

"Ah Luke," Kenobi said as he side stepped to see Luke better. "Is this man Darth Vader you mentioned before?"

"Do not speak to him," Vader growled. He wasn't sure if he was speaking to Luke or to Kenobi. Perhaps to both. They did not need to speak to each other. Kenobi of the past had already infected Luke with plenty of his venomous lies. Chief amongst them was who his father is.

Kenobi paused. He eyed Vader for a moment. Then with a swirl of his hand, he brought his saber up into his opening stance. His blade arm was pulled back and bent so the blade ran straight pass his face. His other hand was held out straight with two fingers pointed forward. It was a clear invite to start the duel, and Vader needed no other invitation. He went into action straight away charging forward at Kenobi. His red saber coming in low and swinging up. Kenobi easily met Vader's red blade.

Vader pressed on. He didn't allow a moment of respite. He used the anger boiling inside of him to power his blows. He would not lose this time. He would get his revenge.

Kenobi shifted his feet, signaling he was coming for an offense. He jabbed his saber forward once, then twice towards Vader's center. Vader blocked and brushed each blow aside. But Kenobi kept his momentum going. Keeping with the angle his blade had knocked off to, he swung the blade around in a graceful circle bringing it back around and down on Vader. He was using the new momentum to power the blade down.

Vader blocked, but Kenobi swung his blue lightsaber around again and again. A blue circle of light that slammed against Vader, causing him to lose ground and retreat a few steps. Vader shifted his stance and ducked low to avoid the predictable pattern Kenobi was in. He ducked inside the blue circle's path and stabbed his red saber forward towards Kenobi's vital center. At once the Jedi jumped back, but Vader was prepared. He moved forward and kept stabbing and slashing at Kenobi.

The Jedi was showing signs of a struggle. He would attempt to break away or attempt a parry, but Vader foresaw the moves. It wasn't because of the Force, he just knew Kenobi's attacks that well. Naturally Kenobi was a master of defense with his use of Soresu, but this Kenobi had yet to learn any new tricks. Vader recognized each move, each parry, each trick. He had recounted that fateful
duel on Mustafar a million times. Each time burned into his already blacked and ashy heart.

The lightsabers clashed and danced through the hallway. Vader kept pressing on Kenobi. He did a series of fast jabs and short slashes. Kenobi was parrying and blocking them, but he was having a hard time keeping up. He was losing ground and was quickly pushed into a wall. Vader brought down his red lightsaber with a heavy and powerful blow downwards. Kenobi managed to get his saber up across his chest to stop the deadly blow.

It then became a contest of strength. Vader pushed his blade down, while Kenobi struggled to push his up and away from his body. Vader scowled to himself as he saw Kenobi slip his free hand under the blue saber and use the Force to push both blades away from him. At least away enough that he was able to spin away. Vader growled and pushed all his weight forward attempting to catch Kenobi's side, but his blade only went through the wall as the Jedi slipped away.

And Kenobi was right there on the attack again. He brought his blade up towards Vader, hoping to catch him while the red lightsaber was still slashing through the wall. But Vader was able to swing his saber around in time to bounce the blue attack off. The rebound caused Kenobi to lose balance and fall to one knee. Instantly Vader was bringing his blade against the Jedi. Kenobi dropped to both knees and knelt back, allowing Vader's own power to knock him off balance. Kenobi slashed his blade up to catch Vader. Instead of falling into the waiting blade, Vader used the Force to flip over the Jedi. It was a trick he hadn't used... since Mustafar. Since before the suit.

But no longer was he weighed down by the blasted suit. Kenobi lashed out with his blade, hoping to catch Vader's backside while he flipped. But it failed, just as Kenobi would. For eventually Vader would win. He would savor his blade ripping into Kenobi's heart. No longer would he have to deal with the lies and betrayals of Kenobi... It wouldn't be just him. It would be Luke as well. Not just this Luke, but the future Luke. The one currently growing inside his mother's womb. If Vader killed Kenobi now, than the Jedi could never poison Padme's mind causing her to betray her husband. There would be no Kenobi to steal Luke and keep him away from his father. There would have been no duel on Mustafar... No injuries. No suit.

"Why not?" Luke's words from earlier echoed up. "So you had no plans to kill the future Emperor? Before he became the Emperor?"

Vader had honestly not thought about changing the past. The events of old were the only path forward. The Republic had to die. The Empire had to rise. Sidious would become Emperor. Vader had only broken into his master's hideout for money and resources. There was also a bit of petty revenge against his master. But he hadn't honestly thought of truly changing the past to alter the future.

But he could. Right now.

He could stop it. All the pain. The heartache. Padme could possibly... She could possibly live. They could be together. Her, Luke, and him.

But it wouldn't be you, a dark thought hissed. It would be the young Anakin Skywalker.

True. And that weak fool deserved none of it, but Padme and Luke... She deserved to live. To raise her baby. For her baby Luke to know his mother, or at least for him to know his father. Truly know him. To be raised with his family. His real family. And the obstacle to that happening was right here in front of Vader's blade.
Vader gripped his red lightsaber tighter as he brought it down hard against Kenobi's blue lightsaber.
Chapter 10

Luke Skywalker watched as Darth Vader and young Ben Kenobi dueled along the dark hallways under the Jedi Temple. Luke stood in awe at watching the two in a true lightsaber duel. It really put into perspective how little he actually knew. He also realized at how much Vader had been holding back on Bespin. Luke grabbed at his wrist where his prosthetic met his real arm.

"You are beaten. Don't make me destroy you."

He could have, Luke realized. He could have destroyed me. Easily. But he hadn't. True he had hurt Luke. Maimed him. But it could have been much worse.

Suddenly the duel between the Vader and Ben had changed. There was a dark burning rage pouring off of Vader. He had renewed his strength and was now battering down on Ben with hard harsh blows. It was clear Ben was having a hard time keeping up against the onslaught. The hairs on the back of Luke's neck stood on end as he recalled the beating he had received on the gantry on Bespin.

"If you only knew the power of the Dark Side," Vader had said. "Only your hatred can destroy me."

Vader was winning. Ben was going to lose . . . again. Luke was going to have to watch Ben die a second time. He had to . . . He had to do something! Anything! He didn't have a lightsaber. What could he do? Ben ducked as Vader's lightsaber came close to cutting his head off. The saber cut a deep gash into the wall. Luke snapped his hand up and he remembered. He had used the Force like this before. With those masked guys. How had he done it?

Ben let out a short shout in pain. Vader's blade had managed to graze Ben's arm. Luke had to act now! Ben was tiring. Luke opened himself up to the Force. It was buzzing and whirling. He could feel the dark maelstrom that was Vader spinning around. He could sense the steady glow of Ben. There was also the hundreds of nearby lights and vibrations of the Jedi in the temple. The Force was still so loud and bright and busy. It was so different than the Force Luke was used to, but he pushed past that.

He could do this. He pulled the Force closed to him and just focused. It wasn't the size or the distance that mattered. He closed his eyes as he imagined the Force pooling into his outstretched hand. Then it snapped, and it sprung forward. Luke's eyes quickly opened. Though invisible, Luke could almost see the Force as it sped down the hallway. Both Vader and Ben were blown down to the ground as the powerful Force push hit both of them.

"I did it," Luke said to himself. He looked down at his hand. He wiggled his fingers. He smiled as he recalled Master Yoda's words from Dagobah. "Do or do not. There is no try."

The sound of running boots brought Luke's attention down the hall. Two of those masked Jedi were running towards him. They were carrying the dual sided yellow lightsabers and wore the white smooth avian masks. Were these the Jedi guards?


A strong hard hand grabbed Luke and he was pulled a few steps. He bumped into something, no one, large. An arm wrapped around him. He looked up to see Vader. Vader had attacked the
guard and pulled him into a hold.

"Do not touch him," Vader growled. "He is mine."

Luke put his hands against Vader's chest to push himself around, but Vader only tightened his grip, pinning Luke down. But Vader's body shifted. There was a shake of his body and a hissing sound. Luke could feel the heat of lightsabers and hear the hum and hiss of the strikes. Was Vader attempting to duel while holding Luke? Luke pushed harder and this time Vader allowed him to go free.


"I will not let you take him and keep him away from me again," he snarled. Vader dashed down the hallway. Off to engage Ben again, but Luke's eyes were drawn to the smoldering corpses lying in pieces on the floor. The two Jedi guards had been hacked apart by Vader's blade. There was a hard lump in Luke's throat he couldn't swallow. The distant sound of lightsabers humming and hissing and clashing and this dark hallway . . .

"The Force is with you, young Skywalker. But you are not a Jedi yet."

No. He was falling back into his memories of Bespin. Not again. But he couldn't stop it. He saw himself igniting his lightsaber and lunging at Vader.

"You have learned much, young one," Vader had said.

Luke had replied, "You'll find I'm full of surprises." He wasn't. He wasn't! Vader was! Vader held all the cards. Even then he was going easy. Luke became faintly aware of the current fight down the hall between Vader and Ben. He saw his own fight with Vader playing out in transparent images over the real fight. It was so obvious. Vader was way out of Luke's league. He had never taken that fight on Bespin seriously. He had been toying with Luke. Seeing him fight Ben, truly fight . . .

"Your destiny lies with me, Skywalker. Obi-Wan knew this to be true."

"No!" Luke shouted.

"No! It can't be true! That's impossible!"

"Search your feelings. You know it to be true."

He was gripping the instruments at the end of the gantry. His eyes darting down the long reactor shaft.

"Come with me. It is the only way."

It wasn't the only way. There was another. He let go and he fell.

"The only way for you to get back home, to your proper time, is with me. Now come, or I will drag you away from here."

"No," he whimpered a bit softly. He still wasn't ready. He couldn't do this. He wasn't ready! So he ran. He ran away from the clash of sabers. He ran away from the dark cold presence. He ran away from his memories. He found the turbolift and stumbled into it once the doors slid open. He paused as he looked over the buttons. He pressed one and hoped that it took him some place . . . else. Away
Luke gasped. He hadn't been expecting to find a place like this. It was a huge indoor garden. There was a large open area by the door that quickly separated into several stone and dirt paths through the various trees and exotic foliage. There were small streams bubbling under small bridges. There were gentle fountains and in the very back in the center of the room was a large roaring waterfall.

Luke picked a stone path that appeared to take him to the waterfall. He glanced at the greenery. There were so many different types of bushes, trees, flowers, and vines. Some glowed softly. Some were purple and blue. Some thorny and hard. Many were green. Benches were spaced out amongst the path. Luke saw a few Jedi sitting on them either meditating or talking quietly to another Jedi.

The path took him by a large grassy open area. Jedi youths were practicing lightsabers while a few older Jedi watched on. The youths moved through a series of katas. They all moved at the same time. Each bend of their arm and gentle swoop of the lightsabers were graceful. Far more grace than Luke had ever had with a lightsaber. His cheeks ran a bit red. His techniques were crude and mostly self taught. He hurried past them.

He was getting closer to the waterfall, but saw a secluded bench sitting at the edge of a calm pond. Water plants gently bobbed in the water. A few sported beautiful pink flowers. They brought a small smile to his face, so he walked over and sat on the bench. He hunched over and placed his arms against his legs.

What was he going to do now? He had ran . . . He had ran away from Vader. From Vader fighting Ben. He should have stayed. He should have helped. But the words were there. The memories. The truth. He thought he was ready . . . but he wasn't. Had he learned nothing of himself from Bespin? Beside who Vader really was. Vader who had said Luke would not be welcomed here. Somehow Luke could tell he hadn't been lied to. There was a weight of truth to what Vader had said. And . . . he was right. Luke was not a Jedi. Not a real one. Not like the ones here. His training didn't seem to quite match up to the image of these serene knights. All of his training was more focused on power and fighting and resisting the Dark Side.

It was focused on getting him ready to face Darth Vader. His father . . .

And they had known! Ben and Yoda had known the truth! Why hadn't they told him?

Luke groaned as he leaned his head down into his hands. He felt the warm flesh hand and the synthskin of his prosthetic. Should he go back to Vader? So they could figure out how to go back to their time? What if he didn't? What if told the Jedi the truth? Would they believe him? What if they asked about the future? What would he tell them? That all this would be destroyed in a few months time? This place would become the Imperial Palace?

Would it change the future of this past?

Vader had said their presence had already affected the past. The events of old weren't playing out as they previously had. Could Luke change the future? Was it even possible? Could he . . . save his father? Stop him from becoming Vader? Or stop the Empire from rising? Or was it too late? Vader
said they should leave the planet due to the events that were coming. The final days of the Republic. The rise of the Empire.

"Come to think, a good place this is."

"Know me, you do. Hmmm? Interesting. Know you, I do not. Luke your name is?" Yoda said. He looked as he had looked in Luke's time. He just looked a bit fresher. Cleaner. His robes were nice and pressed. He leaned on a gimmer stick. His eyes seemed a bit clearer. He looked more like a Jedi master than some troll living on a swamp planet.

Yoda approached the bench and huffed as he climbed up and sat next to Luke. He folded his legs and placed his gimmer stick across his lap. Then he looked up at Luke. Luke straightened up under the gaze of the Jedi master.

"Troubled you are," Yoda said. "Left your room in the healing halls. With a stranger. Or was he? Know him you did."

Luke couldn't help but let out a small huff at that comment. "I suppose from a certain point of view you could say that," he grumbled.

"Darth Vader he is?"

Luke hesitated. There was no point in keeping that part a secret. Not after what had happened, what was happening several floors down. "Yes he is Darth Vader. And . . . He's fighting with Ben!"

Luke turned to face towards Yoda. "You have to send help!"

"Help already there is. Alone Master Kenobi is not. Many Jedi going to his aid," Yoda said.

"But those two in the masks were already killed!"

"Felt their passing in the Force, I did," Yoda said as he closed his eyes briefly. "More help is coming. Win the Sith will not."

Luke looked down at the ground. He didn't know if he should feel relieved that Ben would get help, but distressed that Vader might be captured . . . or killed. If that happened, what would Luke do? What would Vader do if captured?

Yoda spoke up, "Leave your medical room why did you? What did this Sith say?"

Luke sighed. This was a moment. A choice. He could tell Master Yoda everything. He could tell the truth. But . . . the tightness was still in chest. Would they believe him? Or . . . could they be trusted. The Yoda of old had lied to him.

"He said if I wanted to return home, I had to go with him," Luke said slowly. "That I would get no help from the Jedi."

"Hmph," Yoda huffed. "Speak for the Jedi, this Vader does not."

Luke was silent. He knew that.

Yoda continued, "Met him not the first time this is. How did you first meet?"

"I uh . . ." Luke mumbled as he looked down at the ground. "Blew up a weapon . . . Darth Vader was in charge of."

"Hmmmmm. Impossible shot was it?"
Luke looked over at Yoda. This Yoda wouldn't know about the Death Star or the one in a million chance to succeed at getting that fateful shot in.

"Used the Force you did. Sensed it Darth Vader did. After this join him he asked you?"

"Well actually he tried to kill me," Luke said remembering the first run-in with Vader on Cymoon 1.

"Yet you lived," Yoda said.

"I was just lucky."

"Luck it was not! The Force it was! Sensed your power the Sith did. How long ago was this?"

"Two years . . . "

"Obsessed Vader is," Yoda mumbled.

Luke let out a small huff. "Trust me, you have no idea." The extent Vader had gone to get to Luke. . . especially the last attempt. The attempt that had almost worked. Taking his friends. Torturing them so Luke would come to Bespin. "You were right," Luke said barely in a whisper. "I wasn't ready. I shouldn't have gone."

Luke squeezed his right wrist. It felt as though he was squeezing his heart. If he hadn't gone to Bespin he wouldn't have heard those words. Those horrible fateful words that had changed everything.


"It hasn't been that long," Luke said. It had only been two months. Yoda closed his eyes.

"Old pain. Pain of loss. You have lost loved ones, yes?"

Luke was going to say no, but that wasn't true. He had lost loved ones.

Yoda opened his eyes and said, "Pain leads to suffering. Suffering is the way of the Dark Side. Already Darth Vader has used your pain against you, yes? Used it to try to lure you to the Dark Side. Let go of this pain you must. Release it into the Force."


Luke opened himself to the Force. It wasn't hard to find the pain Yoda spoke of. It was always there. Luke had just learned to push it to the side or ignore it. Pulling on it and looking at it head on was hard. He wanted to flinch. To look away, but instead he looked at it straight on.

And it hurt.

The longer he looked at it the stronger and more overwhelming it became. His heart was being squeezed into a tiny ball. His skin was being pricked all over. He could feel each individual strand of hair on his body. His throat was dry, but he couldn't stop swallowing. His breathing was uneasy. His eyes started to burn and quickly filled with tears that ran down his face.

"Look at it," Yoda said. "Acknowledge the hurt."
There was so much of it. So much of it that Luke had just thrown to the side. He was on Tatooine again seeing the burned skeletons of Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru. He was digging their hastily made graves. He was in the hangar of the Death Star as he watched Vader's lightsaber slash through Ben. He was in his X-Wing in the Death Star trench as he saw Biggs' ship explode.

These were the ones that hurt the most, but here were others. The slaves on Cymoon 1. The Alliance pilots and soldiers on Vrogas Vas. So many Alliance members. There was also the Death Star. The million souls on that space station that had been ended by Luke's shot.

Had he ever given himself time to grieve? To truly grieve? He had always pushed it away. There was always something else to worry about. Getting Leia's message to Alderaan. Getting the Death Star plans to Yavin. Doing the next mission. He couldn't let his feelings bog him down. He had to keep going. He had to keep training. He had to defeat Darth Vader to revenge Ben and his father . . .

His father . . . Anakin Skywalker. He was supposed to be the great Jedi knight. A talented pilot. A war hero. He was everything Luke had hoped and wanted his father to be . . . and he ended up being . . . Darth Vader . . . And that hurt to. The lost of Anakin Skywalker. The grief that his father had become Vader. A man who had hunted him down mercilessly for two years. Who sliced his hand off. His own father . . .

The tears were falling heavily down his face. Luke sobbed quietly. Force, it hurt. It hurt so much. He wanted to fall over and curl up into a ball. But somehow he heard Yoda's voice.

"Good. Good," he said. How was this good? "Now release it you must. Let it go."

He didn't know. How did you let this go? How did you get rid of this? He wanted it gone. But how? How? How?

Deep breath.

Luke took a ragged breath in.

Now let go.

He pushed the air out and with it he felt the pain go with it. It didn't go gracefully. It burned and ached as it left him. He took another deep breath and pushed out the pain as he exhaled. He repeated this over and over until it felt like he was finally empty and wrung dry.

His breathing was now calm and even. The tears had stopped, but his face was left red and puffy. He opened his tear stained eyes. He looked at the waterfall. He felt . . . better. More at peace, but . . .


"Always be there it will," Yoda replied a bit sadly. "A Jedi you are not, but even for Jedi hard it is to fully release emotions. Cannot rid all of it for we cannot rid ourselves of the memory. When we remember, sad we are for the lost."

"Then what was the point of all that if it never goes away?"

"Suffering you were. The pain too much. Burying the pain you were. Suffering would only lead you to hate. Hate leads to anger. Anger leads to the Dark Side. Let it go you must before it consumed you."

Darth Vader's deep voice echoed inside of Luke, "Now release your anger. Only your hatred can destroy me." He shivered as he recalled those words.
"Come now young Luke," Yoda said. "Find you a new room we must."

Luke only nodded. His thoughts had circled around to what Vader had to said to him in his med room. What had caused Vader's pain and suffering? What caused his anger and hate? What caused him to fall to the Dark Side?

What did he lose?
Chapter 12

Anakin Skywalker ran through the old tunnels that ran to the Jedi Temple from the Coruscant underlevels. They were passageways that were forgotten as new layer upon new layer of the temple and the city were built. They were perfect for sneaking out of the temple and visiting Padme, but now a Sith had used them to break into the Temple.

The moment troops had arrived at the Chancellor's apartment, Anakin had zoomed off in his speeder. He knew he should have stayed at least until a member of the council had arrived. Master Kcaj was on his way, but Anakin hadn't stayed. He had been listening to the Temple security channels. The Sith had taken Luke and had engaged Obi-Wan down in these deep levels.

It appeared the Sith was using the same path Anakin often took to sneak out. A small shiver ran up his spine as he wondered how the Sith knew this path existed, but he didn't dwell on it long. The temple was responding to the Sith threat. Already there were two confirmed dead sentinels. Possibly more as more Jedi responded to the security call including Master Windu and Mundi.

Anakin reached out in the Force. He still felt Obi-Wan. His Force presence wasn't the even calm it usually was. His presence felt rattled and tired. Usually it was how he felt after a long battle or campaign with little rest. Anakin kept running down the dark tunnels. He hoped he would block the Sith's exit, pinching him in with Jedi on both sides.

He finally came to the old rusted door that separated the Temple from the Coruscant tunnels. The door slowly slid open on squeaky rails. The moment the door opened just wide enough, Anakin squeezed himself through and ran down the hallway. A call came over Anakin's commlink on his wrist. Two more knights were confirmed dead. The death total was up to four now.

This had to stop. Now.

Anakin took a sharp turn down a new hallway. He could feel the darkness growing stronger. It was inky and cold. He could feel goosebumps growing along his arms and down his back. He unclipped his saber hilt and gripped it tightly. He could hear the faint sounds of fighting. Grunting. Shouting. Lightsabers humming and hissing. Anakin took another turn into a new hallway and then stopped.

The hallway opened into a large rotunda. Various hallways spread out into different dark halls and there were sets of stairs leading up and down into other forgotten dark levels. The large domed room was lit by the glow of a single red lightsaber and several blue and green ones. The Sith had his back to Anakin as he was focused on the Jedi in front of him who were pouring out of a hallway. Looks like the Sith hadn't been expecting a Jedi to come up from behind.

Anakin ignited his lightsaber. He paused as he started to formulate a plan, but his thoughts were soon interrupted. He gasped and his knees weakened. He almost fell to the floor on his knees. There was pain. A deep, deep pain in the Force. But it wasn't his. Who did it belong to?

*Obi-Wan.*

It was the first name that popped into Anakin's head. Who else would be hurting so much right now and that Anakin would feel these emotions so strongly? What was wrong? Anakin quickly looked around the room, but saw no sight of Obi-Wan. Was he further down the hall? Had he succumbed to
an injury? Is that why he wasn't in the forefront fighting the Sith?

The pain started to ease up little by little, but it still hung around. Anakin swallowed down a deep breath and adjusted his grip on his saber. He may not know where the pain was coming from, but he had a good guess at what had caused it. And that was cause was right here, mere meters away from Anakin's blade.

As Anakin looked at the tall Sith, he noticed the Sith had bent over as if in pain. Had another Jedi landed a successful blow? But none of the other Jedi were close. They still held their ground. They eyed the Sith a bit uncomfortably. The Sith's head snapped to look straight up as if peering through the floors into the proper Temple above. Anakin felt the Sith's darkness in the Force reach out and up. Searching for something. Or someone?

The kid! Luke!

Right before Anakin had jumped out of his speeder, he recalled security saying the kid was secured with Master Yoda in the Room of a Thousand Fountains. Yoda would be staying with the kid in case the Sith pushed past the Jedi to get to Luke. Wait, was that was who was in pain? Anakin recalled when Luke first woke up in the temple. The kid was strong. Unnervingly strong. And he wasn't trained. He easily projected his emotions into the Force.

There was a low snarl coming off the Sith that made Anakin's hair stand on end. The snarl quickly crescendoed into a full shout of rage. "No!" he shouted. The Sith's freehand raised up and curled into claws. The five Jedi in front of the Sith, some still in the hallway while some were in the rotunda, all jerked up in an awkward motion. Their heads tilted slightly back.

"No," Anakin whispered to himself as he felt the Dark Side of the Force wrap around the Jedi's throats. "No! Stop!" he shouted as he ran into the room toward the Sith. But it was too late. The Sith's hand snapped shut into a fist. There were five snapping sounds that echoed around the room as each Jedi's neck was snapped. They all fell to the floor with a heavy thump.

Anakin leaped into the air, ready to bring his lightsaber down, but the Sith turned and met Anakin's blow. Blue and red lightsabers met and hissed. Anakin landed on his feet and quickly pulled his blade back and swung it forward for a fast and heavy onslaught. But the Sith blocked or parried each blow.

"Skywalker," the Sith said. Anakin paused as he took the Sith in. He was tall. Pale skin and bald. He was currently dressed in tan and brown Jedi robes. And his eyes were on Anakin. What in the Force were those eyes? The were a sickly yellow with a ring of red around the edges. The Sith's presence was as Anakin remembered from Luke's vision, but much stronger. It was a whirling vortex of icy darkness. Anakin had no doubt this was the Sith from the vision, just minus the suit and helmet.

"So you are Darth Vader," Anakin said.

"I am," the Sith said not denying it.

"And you're here for Luke."

Vader's eyes narrowed. He pointed his blade at Anakin. "He is mine, Skywalker," he growled.

"Yours to be your apprentice?" Anakin shot back. "Or yours because he is your son?" Vader didn't say anything. He didn't moved, but Anakin could feel the darkness growing. "Perhaps both?"

Anakin pushed on.

"You do not know what you speak of, Skywalker," Vader hissed.
"I think I do," Anakin said with a slight cocky smile. It felt good to get under this Sith's skin. "Shame he doesn't seem to want to be either one, especially after you cut his hand off."

Vader lunged forward with a shout. Anakin thought he was ready as his blade crashed against Vader's, but Force! He hadn't been expecting how strong that blow would be. Anakin had to step back.

"Out of the way, Jedi," Vader said. "Nothing will keep me from the boy, especially you."

"You honestly think you can take on the whole Jedi Temple?"

"Yes."

A shiver ran through Anakin at the surety and confidence in Vader's words. The way the words hung in the air seemed to speak of truth. Of experience. Well it didn't matter. No matter how overconfident and arrogant this Sith was, he would not be getting through Anakin. Anakin dashed forward, bringing his saber in low and up. Vader of course easily blocked it, but Anakin let his blue blade slide off the red. He spun in a tight circle and wove under Vader's arm. He swung his blade up towards Vader's exposed back. But kriff! The Sith was fast. He ducked, hit the floor, and rolled out of the way. Though Anakin noticed he wasn't that graceful with the movement and there was an odd sound when the Sith hit the floor.

*Prosthetics*, Anakin realized.

"Give up, Sith," Anakin said. "You won't be getting Luke. You won't be getting past me."

An odd laugh came out of the Sith. "You think you can stop me? You think I've been seriously fighting you? I know you, Anakin Skywalker. I know everything about you."

Anakin didn't give the chance for the Sith to finish his speech. Again he dashed forward. His lightsaber jutting forward as fast as he could manage in a series of sharp jabs. Vader's blade swung gracefully around him. The only thing Anakin could see was a blur of red light as Vader blocked each blow. Anakin gritted his teeth as he allowed the Force to dictate his movements hoping to get in a successful blow. He would make Vader take him seriously.

He jumped and summersaulted over Vader. He swung his blade down hard to slash down on Vader's shoulder and back, but the Sith spun and met Anakin's blade. The blue lightsaber blade was knocked off to the side and at once Vader was there as Anakin's feet hit the ground. Vader's knee came up and slammed into Anakin's stomach. At once the air was pushed out of the Jedi. A strong hand grabbed Anakin by the collar.

"You can not win against me, you weak fool," Vader spat as he pulled Anakin's face even to his. "I know all your moves. All your thoughts."

"You know nothing about me," Anakin spat right back into Vader's pasty face. He tried to move his lightsaber arm, but found it unable to move. The Force was tightly spun around his arm preventing it from moving.

Again there was that twisted smile that crawled across Vader's face. "I do," Vader said in a low voice. "I know all about you, little slave boy, the son of Shmi Skywalker. Who killed the Tusken Raiders who took her away from you. You killed them all like the animals they were."

A coldness crept through Anakin. How . . . How did Vader know this? He had told no one, except Padme and the Chancellor.
"I know exactly the lengths you will go to protect what is yours," Vader continued. "You too would allow nothing to keep you from your son."

"I don't have a son," Anakin growled as he brought his foot up to kick at Vader, but was met with a hard cold metal leg kicking his own foot back down.

"Oh? Your wife hasn't shared the good news?" Vader said with a knowing smile. Anakin froze. *Wife? Had Vader said wife?* "Then I suggest running back down these hallways to her bed. Go celebrate your impending fatherhood, Skywalker. Let it sink into you that you will allow nothing to hurt your family. That you will do *anything* to keep them safe."

Then Anakin was in the air. The Force was wrapped all around him as it flung him across the large room. His mind was frozen. Blank. He just leg his body fly. His thoughts raced back on Vader's words. How did this Sith know about Padme? That he was married? And what did he mean? Impending fatherhood? Was Padme pregnant?

It was the last thought Anakin Skywalker had as he slammed into the stone wall and lost consciousness.

Chapter End Notes

So I'm with the current mess going on with tumblr, where I've met a lot of cool SW fic writers/readers, I created a discord server. It's for lovers of Star Wars fics. This includes writers and readers. We talk about writing, reading, Star Wars, and naturally random stuff as well. Check it out:

https://discord.gg/4RZ8Qce
Chapter 13

Luke!

What was wrong? What had happened to him? What had the Jedi done to the boy?

The pain that poured into the Force was strong enough to cause Vader to bend over and gasp. Vader was all too familiar with pain. His existence for the past two decades had been nothing but unending pain. He knew all of its varieties including the pain Luke was projecting. He knew it the best of all.

Heartache.

The boy wasn't in physical pain, but deep emotion pain. Why? What Jedi trick had the cursed masters played on the boy? Luckily, the pain was easing away. Luke was calming down. But Vader had to get to his son and get him out of here. Away from these vile deceivers. Away from those who were hurting him.

The Sith looked at the crumpled form against the wall. It was somewhat satisfying to see Anakin Skywalker's form flung through the air and slammed into the wall. Not as satisfying as it would be to stab a lightsaber through the fool's heart or choke the air out of him, but Vader didn't know what would happen if Skywalker died. Would he die? He wasn't sure how this all worked, but now was not the time to debate the paradoxes of time travel. He had to get to Luke.

Already more Jedi were on their way here. Vader could feel the familiar pulse of Force presences of Jedi he hadn't felt in a long time... and yet he had never forgotten. Mace Windu and Ki-Adi-Mundi. Two of the Order's best duelists. Vader gripped his lightsaber. Its red blade hummed. There was a slight tug at the corner of his mouth. He spun and marched down the hallway. He had taken this Temple once before. He would take it again. He would fuel the Dark Side with the dying screams of Jedi. He would slay them all to get and protect what was his.

"Sith," Windu said in his usual stern voice. It made Vader's smile vanish into a scowl. He wasn't here to talk. He had already done too much of that with Skywalker. So he charged forward. Naturally Windu was ready. Fighting against Windu's Vaapad would be a challenge. Tied with Mundi's Makashi form, this was not a time for Vader's concentration to waver.

Mace at once was swinging wildly. True Vaapad form could look sloppy, but as the purple blade grew faster the genius of it was shown. The fast unconnected strikes made it hard to predict. A Vaapad duelist had to be deeply connected to the Force. They used their opponent's anger to fuel the form's own fury. In a way, Vader was fighting against himself. His thought, will, and resulting moves would be picked up by Windu in the Force causing the purple blade to move to counter Vader's.

Windu's lightsaber moved so fast that it created an illusion of multiple blades. Vader gritted his teeth as he opened himself more to the Force. Windu might have an impressive connection with the Force, but Vader had more. The inky coldness of the Dark Side heeded his call. It came swarming to him.

That was when Mundi jumped in. These weren't weak knights Vader was fighting against. These
two were true masters. True duelists. While Windu's blade danced around in large sweeps, Mundi's blade came at Vader in sharp thrusts. And the Cerean Jedi had fast reaction times. Vader recalled reading the clone trooper's Order 66 report on the death of Mundi. The troops had received the order and opened fired on Mundi. While he had eventually fallen, he had lasted several moments. He was able to bounce back two shots into two troopers bringing them down before he was finally overwhelmed.

Windu's Vaapad and Mundi's Makashi were a good combination. One making up for the other's weakness. However, there was one problem. Both forms were at their best in a single blade to blade battle. The two Jedi had to be weary of the other. It meant Windu wouldn't able to fully immerse himself into his form, while Mundi would have slower reaction times to make sure his blade didn't go into Windu.

So Vader pressed on. He focused on his rage. The rage that these two Jedi were still alive. That these were masters of the council, the council that had often berated him, sought to hold him back from his rightful glory, and now held his son from him. No more. Vader would suffer these Jedi no more. His own red blade was a flurry of mad and fast strikes. It bounced from Windu's purple blade to Mundi's blue as he blocked each blow and strike. And he was gaining ground despite being on the defensive. The two Jedi were having to back step as the Sith just kept advancing.

Mundi came in with a series of sharp jabs and quick slashes. Vader followed each one, and with the last he blew against Mundi's blade sending into sailing up into the sky. Then Vader switched to Windu as the wild unpredictable purple lightsaber made its way to him. It swung from one blow to a strike to a jab without any warning or reasoning. Vader was barely countering the moves, but finally was able to use the Force to power a blow sending Mace back a few steps.

Only for Mundi to jump in again. Vader was tiring. Already he had fought against Kenobi and Skywalker. And while he hadn't taken Skywalker's duel seriously, he still had to fight. His muscles were straining. Sweat was starting to bead up on his face. He was so used to his suit handling these situations. When was the last time he truly dealt with sweat getting into his eyes?

Windu came forward with purple light streams dancing around him. Mundi danced to Vader's side. He took whatever opening Windu gave him allowing no openings for Vader. Fine, he growled to himself. He would end this. But not with his blade.

He sharply pulled the Force to him and curled his left hand into a fist. He swung his blade up against Windu's, and allowed his left hand to snake out toward Mundi. His fist landed strongly into Mundi's upper arm, causing the Cerean's lightsaber to swing out wide. It was an unpredictable move, and since Windu's form focused on one duelist at a time, he didn't see the sudden strike of blue heading towards him. Yet of course Windu was still a master. He was able to duck and avoid the wild strike, but it completely dropped him out of his focus. Thus he had no defenses prepared when the Force wrapped around his throat and picked him off the floor.

"Tch," he scowled to himself. He had been blinded and didn't sense another Jedi coming up to the
But . . . he was becoming too fixated on the Jedi. Despite how great it would be to slay them all (again), that wasn't why he was here. Luke. He needed to get to Luke. So he deactivated his lightsaber and closed his eyes as he opened himself to the Force. Luke was so easy to find even amongst the many Jedi of the Temple. He was a glorious ball of light that easily out shone all around him. Vader guessed the boy was probably in or near the Room of a Thousand Fountains when he had projected all that pain, but he had moved . . .

He was nearing one of the temple hangars!

"No!" Vader shouted. If they got the boy in a ship and took him off planet . . . Vader would find him. But it would be just another repeat of his last two years as he had hunted the boy across the galaxy. And now he didn't have the backing of the Imperial navy and information networks.

Darth Vader turned and ran. He wasn't one for running, but he would not allow fools to take his son across the galaxy, again. The rebel scum had already done that. There would be no repeat with the Jedi. The quickest way to the hangar would be for Vader to get back to his speeder and fly up there. So he ran back down the hallways. He ran past the corpses of the Jedi and Skywalker's motionless-but-still-alive form. He ran past the doors Skywalker had left open in his haste to get into the Temple. Then he saw Skywalker's speeder. Vader's own was still further hidden down the tunnels, so he jumped in Skywalker's.

He couldn't help but smile for at least that fool of his former self had some sense in picking a good speeder. Vader gripped the controls and started the engine up. He used the Force to help him steer through the tunnel and out of Coruscant's underbelly and into the night sky. But he paused as he angled the speeder towards the large and looming temple. Again he reached out to discern Luke's location.

He hadn't moved. He was close to a hangar, but still not in it. Which meant he wasn't in a ship. Perhaps the Jedi were waiting. Waiting to see what Vader would do. If they needed to move Luke out of the Temple. But it would be far better to keep him in there. The Temple the Jedi thought safe and sacred. The place they believed they could keep Luke the most secure and safe.

So Vader slowly turned his speeder away from the Temple and towards the looming towers of the city. Vader would much rather Luke be at the Temple for he knew the Temple and the Jedi. There were other ways he could still secure the boy. Sneaking into the temple had been his preferred method, but it wasn't his only plan. Next time the boy was in his reach, Vader would be sure to cuff him with binders to his own wrist. Then the child wouldn't run away.

He made his way carefully back to his apartment. The speeder lanes were filled with the CPF and a few Jedi. They were all hunting for him. By the time Vader marched into the apartment, he was in a fowl mood. He wanted to take his anger out on something. On someone. But he hadn't. Couldn't. There was no one here.

He grabbed at the brown Jedi cloak and threw it to the ground. He went to grab at the belt when a darkness clawed into Vader. It was quickly followed by inky tendrils that wrapped around him. He was unable to move. He closed his eyes and quickly welcomed the Force. He was met with a vision of a figure. It wore a black robe with a deep hood that hid its face. It was small and hunched over.
"Darth Sidious," Vader snarled into the Force. He would know his master anywhere.

"Darth Vader, I presume," Sidious hissed back.
Chapter 14

Getting out of the temple had been a headache. The lower levels were crawling with Jedi as they cleaned up the carnage left by Vader. There had been nine total deaths so far caused by Vader's intrusion into the temple. Three more Jedi were in the healing halls in critical care. No one was sure if they'd survive the night. Anakin had been released and told to go rest in his room. Obi-Wan had received some bacta patches for his arm, and he had already retired to his room. Masters Windu and Mundi had also retired to their rooms. But Anakin couldn't rest.

He had to get out of the temple. Instead of sneaking out through old doors in the lower levels, he simply walked out the main door. If anyone asked, he could claim he needed to walk. He needed to see if could find the Sith. He had no doubt they would scold him about such actions, but he could handle it. He had already handled it plenty of times before. Plus it was better than telling the truth.

He now stood on the veranda of Padmé's apartment. The apartment was dark. It was late. Padmé should have long since gone to bed. His was torn. He wanted to run through the apartment and into the bedroom. He wanted to pull her into his arms and make sure everything was fine. At the same time he was frozen. He didn't want to break the calmness of this place. He was a pebble, and this apartment was a smooth lake.

Darth Vader's words haunted him. "Then I suggest running back down these hallways to her bed. Go celebrate your impending fatherhood, Skywalker."

Ripples ran out through the lake as Anakin made his way quietly to the bedroom. Padmé slept peacefully in her bed. He eased himself down on to the very bottom corner of the bed on her side. He just sat there and watched her. He couldn't see her face, it was blocked by a curtain of brown curls resting on her cheek. Yet that was ok.

She was here. He could see her. Hear her soft breathes. Smell her sweet smell. And he could touch her. All he had to do was reach out, but he didn't. He sat frozen just watching her. Vader's words ran in circles in his mind. How had he known the things he knew? How did he know about Anakin's mother? How Anakin had killed the Tuskens? How did he know that Anakin was married? That he used those same hallways to see Padmé? How did Vader... How did he know about... about...

Your impending fatherhood.

"Anakin?"

Her voice, that sweet voice, pulled him from his thoughts. She had pushed herself up on her elbows and was looking down at him. Those beautiful brown eyes were looking right at him taking him in as much as he was taking her in. It was a brief pause, before she pushed the covers off of her and was crawling over them to get to him. He didn't move. He still felt rooted in place. But when her arms wrapped around him, he felt like he was pulled back. Pulled back into reality. Pulled back to her. He had been afloat. Lost. He hadn't even realized it. She was his lifeline. His anchor.

His arms wrapped around her and he pulled her close. The two hugged tightly for a few moments. Then she tried to pull away, but he wouldn't let her. He only squeezed her tighter. So eventually she stilled and just let him hold her.

She anchored him back down again with her lovely voice. "You can hold me laying down in the bed," she whispered. "I'm sure it would much more comfortable." This time when she pulled away, he let her slide through his arms. "Let's get you dressed for bed," she said as she undid his belt.
Slowly he stood up and she followed. He let her help take off his belt and tunics. As he pulled off his boots and pants, she walked over to the dresser and pulled out his sleep pants she kept stored there. Once in them, he turned and looked at her. His eyes lingered on her stomach.

"Ani?" she asked. "Is something wrong . . . You seem so distant tonight."

"I'm . . . I'm fine . . ." he said knowing his words were not convincing. He walked over to her and placed his hands on her hips. His eyes still on her stomach. "Padmé . . . are you . . . are you . . ." He couldn't say it. His tongue suddenly felt twice as big and heavy. A soft smooth hand cupped against his cheek. She tilted his head back up to her face.

"Anakin," she said in a soft voice. "Something wonderful has happened. I'm . . . I'm pregnant."

His breath caught in his throat. It was true. It was true. *It was true!* He was going to be a father! The Sith was right! How? How did he know?

"Ani . . .?" Padmé asked. Her eyebrows were furrowed in concerned. He could sense the unasked question.

"That's . . . that's wonderful," he finally managed to say. But it didn't ease her fear.

"You're not happy," she said slowly.

"No! No. I am. This is a happy moment. The happiest moment of my life," he said. "It's just . . ." Her eyes were so round. He could feel her trembling. "There is a Sith on Coruscant. Possibly . . . possibly the Sith behind all of this. The war . . . He went into the Temple tonight. He killed nine Jedi. I fought him . . ."

"Ani . . ." Her voice was laced heavily with concern.

"And I . . . and I lost. He could have killed me, but he didn't. He left me alive."

"Oh Ani," she said.

"But . . . he knew Padmé."

"He knew?"

"He knew that you were pregnant. He knew I was married. He knew my mother's name. That I killed all those Tuskens when she died . . . *He knew.*"

"What do you mean? He knew? How?"

"I don't know . . ."

"Is it . . . Is it the Force?"

"I don't know."

She leaned into him, and he wrapped her up in his arms.

"What are we going to do?" she whispered.

"You're going to be safe," he said. "Don't do anything risky. Use extra security." She needed a Jedi
guard. She needed him to be there. Regular guards wouldn't stop a Sith. But at least for right now he was here. The two crawled into bed together. He spooned around her. Her body fit perfectly into his. He wrapped his arms around her waist. Her breathing slowly evened as she fell asleep.

Right here, in this moment, everything was fine. He was here. She was in his arms. He would keep her safe. He would let nothing happen to her.

*Let it sink into you that you will allow nothing to hurt your family. That you will do anything to keep them safe.*

Ice ran through Anakin's veins. Darth Vader knew. He *knew.*

*I know all your moves. All your thoughts.*

How did he know?
Chapter 15

Vader was tired. He couldn't recall the last time he had been this tired. But the multiple fights inside of the Jedi Temple had worn him down much more than he expected. Perhaps it was because he was now without the suit. Perhaps the suit did more for him than he realized. It pumped drugs into his system that kept him awake and energized. He rarely slept. Often he just meditated when he needed rest. But now, for the first time in years, he wanted to sleep.

However that first meant dealing with Darth Sidious. "Darth Vader, I presume," Sidious' figure in the Force vision hissed back.

Vader said nothing. Instead he went to work to undoing Sidious' hold on him. It wasn't easy work. He was tired. His strength was fleeing him.

"You think you can ignore me?" Sidious snarled.

Again, Vader said nothing as he was slowly undoing Sidious' hold.

"I am the Sith master here!" Sidious roared. His hold reasserting itself and tightening around Vader. "You are nothing!"

Memories crashed into Vader's mind. Time and time again he was bowing in that blasted suit with his prosthetics burning and aching. Sidious sat on his throne and berated Vader over and over.

"Oh, you are the Chosen One, Vader," the Emperor had hissed as he pointed a finger at his apprentice. "Chosen one to be responsible."

"I will make it right," Vader vowed after the destruction of the Death Star. "I will crush the rebels."

"I think not. You think yourself so clever, but you have proved yourself a blunt instrument, far better to be wielded than to wield."

Sometimes these punishments would end in Force lightning blasting into Vader. Remembering the pain, the shame, and the anger, it all boiled inside of him. No more. No longer was he subject to Sidious' whims. No longer was he entombed in that suit. Vader fully opened himself to the Dark Side. It flooded into him joyously as it fed on his dark emotions. Then he pushed it out of him. Sidious' dark tendrils were blasted apart into fine pieces of floating ash. The Sith master snarled as his hold disintegrated.

"I am everything," Vader said as he looked Sidious face on. "I am everything I should be. Everything you have denied me."

"Oh?" Sidious purred. "What have I denied you? This is the first time we've met. Or is it? What pathetic little worm were you before you became a Sith? Who was the master that pulled you from the gutter?"

"You know my master well," Vader replied. "But that does not matter. Continue with your own plans. I will not hamper you."

"Hamper me? Already you have stolen from me. My plans already need to be reworked because of you! I almost lost complete control tonight! Do you understood what that would have costed me? You think you can just slink away from this? I know what you're after in the Temple. A boy. Your son is it? I will claim him, Darth Vader. He will be mine. I wonder what his screams will be like. Maybe
"I'll take pity on him. Make him into an apprentice."

"You will not go near him," Vader growled.

"Oh? Do not underestimate me. I have all the power here."

"Not yet," Vader said darkly. "You do not have it all yet. Plus you will not take my son as an apprentice. You will not throw away all that work you have done on Anakin Skywalker. All that grooming. You would not want to lose your trophy of having the Chosen One as yours." Vader paused. "But touch my son and I will see to your ruin, Sidious. You will never have Skywalker or see your empire."

Sidious' eyes narrowed and his head lowered just a little bit as he glared at Vader.

"Go back to your schemes, Sidious," Vader continued. He was enjoying watching Sidious squirm. How does it feel, my master? Vader thought. For once Sidious did not hold the cards. He did not know everything. He did not have all the power. "Plan your attacks. Ready your sweet speeches to the Senate and to the galaxy. Continue pushing Skywalker. Bring about the destruction of the Jedi. Let the Sith Empire rise. I will not stop you . . . unless you touch what is mine."

The two Sith were quiet. Both just taking in the other.

"What do you get out of this?" Sidious finally asked.

"The same as you," Vader said. "An empire."

While they had been talking, Vader had been pooling his power. He unleashed a mighty blow that completely knocked Sidious' hold on Vader off.

"You think you can steal-" Sidious screamed, but then the Sith master was blown away from Vader's presence. At once Vader brought up his shields to prevent Sidious from latching on again.

Vader sighed as he glanced around the dark apartment. The lights of Coruscant came in through the windows. In the distance he could see the Jedi Temple. He could feel Luke's presence still inside the ziggurat. He needed time to think of how to enact his next plan to get the boy. This time he would be meticulous. He had been too hasty the past two times. The next time he would succeed.

But first he would sleep. Slowly he stumbled to the bedroom and collapsed onto the bed.

Anakin awoke to the chime of his comlink going off. He groaned and decided he would ignore it. Instead he wrapped his arms tighter around Padmé and brought her closer. He buried his head into her silky curls and took a deep breath enjoying her lovely smell. The comlink chimed again. Padmé stirred.

". . . Anakin?" she said still half asleep. "Your comlink."

He let out a half sigh half groan. "I know," he said as he leaned over and kissed her cheek. "It can wait."

Padmé snuggled closer to him. They both laid there happily content, but the peace was again shattered by the comlink. Anakin moaned as he sat up and summoned the blasted device to him using the Force. The message was simple. He had been summoned to a council meeting at the Temple to talk about the events of last night.
"I've . . ." Anakin started and then looked down at Padmé. She had rolled over so she could look at him. Even with her curls a mess and spread out over the pillow, she was still beautiful. "I've got to go," he mumbled. "Council meeting to discuss this Darth Vader."

"Then you should go," she said.

"I know . . . I know . . . but . . ." He couldn't stop staring at her.

A smile tugged on one corner of her lips. "But . . .?"

He fell back down and she let out a giggle as he pulled her close and kissed her. "But I would much rather be here." He kissed her again and again. She laughed. The sound soothed Anakin's heart. Finally her hands cupped his face and held him still. Then she leaned in. Her lips met his. He felt the tension seep out of him. Force, he loved the feeling of her lips against his. He loved her. Then she pulled away. Her cheeks were flushed red. There was a sparkle in her eyes.

"Now go," she said as she playfully slapped him.

"Mmmm no," Anakin said. "Not yet. One more."

He leaned in and captured her lips while she laughed and tried to tell him to get out of bed.
Chapter 16

"There are two Sith on Coruscant?" Master Windu asked. Anakin stood in the round council chamber an hour after he had received the summon while still at Padmé's. About half of the seats were filled with masters while the other half showed blue holographs as those masters attended the meeting from their respected battlefields.

"At least two," Anakin said. "Temple security holocams caught Darth Vader walking to the healing halls right after I left the Chancellor's apartment. Right about the same time that dark explosion was felt in the Force. Everyone here felt that." He sighed. "There had to be two. One at the apartment, while Vader was in the temple."

"And I don't think the second one was Count Dooku," Obi-Wan chimed in. He sat reclined in his seat. His Jedi robes hid the bacta patches on his arm. "I don't see the count acting as the decoy."

"So certain we are a Sith at the apartment?" Master Yoda asked.

"Everyone felt that disturbance!" Anakin said. He realized he said that a bit too loud and hasty as he got a dark look from Mace.

"I will agree with Anakin," Master Mundi said. "That disturbance, that darkness, it had to be a Sith."

"I agree too," Obi-Wan said. "I do not think that was a disciple like Ventress was. Whoever it was, they were too strong in the Force."

"Troubling this is," Yoda said. "Two Sith on Coruscant."

"Possibly a total of three," Anakin muttered.

"Where does current Republic intelligence place Dooku?" Master Fisto's hologram asked.

"His last confirmed sighting was at a Confederacy senate meeting five standard days ago," Mace answered.

"Enough time to get to Coruscant," Master Allie's hologram noted. "We can't rule Dooku out quite yet."

Master Koon spoke up next, "Though I will agree with Master Kenobi. This does not seem to match up to Dooku's previous actions."

"If Dooku is the Sith apprentice, he may have been forced to act on his master's orders," Mace said.

"But is Vader the master?" Anakin asked.

"Always two there are," Yoda said. "No more, no less."

Several council members nodded their head.

"No offense Master Yoda," Anakin said. He ignored the look Obi-Wan shot him telling him not to butt heads with the council. Again. "But I don't think we should limit ourselves to that thinking. We can't just assume that there aren't three Sith because of some old mantra."

A tense silence fell across the room. It was of course Mace who spoke up first. "We must listen to the Force and approach this cautiously. We can assume nothing at this point. I do think Luke knows
more than he is telling us. Skywalker, I would like you to question him further. You have gotten the
most information out of him in the past."

Anakin nodded. He was actually glad to be given that task. He wanted to talk and question Luke
himself.

"Did you learn anything when you talked to the boy, Master Yoda?" Obi-Wan asked.

It had been Yoda who had found Luke when he had ran away from the duel between Obi-Wan and
Vader.

"Repeated Darth Vader the Sith's name was," Yoda replied. "Hunting Luke this Sith has for two
years after a show of the Force. Went with the Sith Luke did because the Sith said it was the only
Help him I did to let it go. Fall to the Sith the boy cannot. Too strong the Dark Side already is."

"Master Kenobi, your take on the Sith you fought?" Mace asked.

"I have never had a duel like that before," Obi-Wan said. "Not against Dooku, Ventress, or
Grievous. This Vader . . . he knew my moves. He wasn't just reading my movements, he recognized
my stances. It almost felt like I was fighting Anakin. Like I was fighting someone who I had fought
against a hundred times. Who just knew my movements intuitively. If more Jedi hadn't arrived when
they had, I'm not sure I would have survived that duel."

A small quiet fell across the council. Many of those who had come to Obi-Wan's aid had died.


"Ben was the name of the Jedi whose journal Luke learned to build a lightsaber from," Obi-Wan said
thoughtfully. "I could find no definite connections to any known Jedi in the database that could
match this Ben. Though why would he call me Ben?"

Anakin spoke up, "Why did he call my name out right after his crash in the hospital? Then only to
turn around and act surprised and wary around me?"

"And where is the boy now?" asked Fisto's hologram.

"Kept secure in a room here in the temple," Mace answered. "He will always be with a Jedi guard
from now on. Temple security is also constantly monitoring him."

It was a shame they hadn't been while he was in the med room. Anakin would have paid good
credits to listen in on what Vader had said to Luke to get the boy to willingly leave the Temple.
Especially after Luke's panic attack down in the service floor. Yoda was right. There was a deep
pain in the boy, and a lot of it seemed to come from Darth Vader.

"No. I am your father. Join me, and together we can rule the galaxy as father and son. Come with
me. It is the only way."

Anakin recalled the words he had seen in the vision. He recalled Luke's desperate look down the
reactor shaft. Then the calmness worthy of Jedi that smoothed out his face as he let go. Surely Luke
had picked death over joining the Sith. So why would he leave with Vader now? The man who cut
off his arm? The man that caused the boy to attempt suicide instead of accepting as his father? What
had been said in the med room?

Anakin realized he had gotten lost in his own thoughts. As he looked around the room, he noticed
the serious faces. Ah, so they had gotten to this part. A part that luckily no blame could be placed on him. The council always liked to blame Anakin. They were quick to point out his mistakes. He smiled inwardly to himself. This time it was the other way around.

Mace was speaking. "Darth Vader used council member's codes to unlock Luke's door."

A thick silence fell across the room. The unsaid question weighted heavily on each council member. How did Vader have the codes? Had a council member given them to him? No one said anything. Anakin opened himself up to the Force, and he listened. He wasn't one to be still. He wasn't one to meditate. But right now he did. If there was a traitor amongst the Jedi . . . amongst the council . . . His hands balled into fists. Who could betray them?

"It is possible he was able to slice into our systems," Master Koon said breaking the silence. At least two other members nodded. That was possible . . .

"Know the temple the Sith did," Yoda said with small hurmph at the end.

"It would not be the first of this war," Mundi said gravely. The name Pong Krell was left unspoken, but Anakin knew they were all thinking it.

"What if Vader had connections to the Jedi before he became a Sith?" Anakin said. The eyes of the council all fell on him. He resisted the urge to fidget and wiggle under their glare. With how many times he had faced them, he should be used to this by now. "What if he was like Dooku? A Jedi or an initiate before he became a Sith?"

"He knew his way around the Temple with ease," Obi-Wan noted. "Watching the security footage, there was no hesitation in him. He knew to use those old hallways. He knew there was an exit out of the temple there. It's not something that shows up on any official maps or blueprints. It's a door long forgotten as the temple was built up. Not to mention he knew where to find Jedi robes."

Another silence fell across the room as each council member and Anakin thought over this new theory. Anakin was so lost in his thoughts that he barely heard Koon ask if there was any DNA Vader left behind to test against the Jedi databanks. Mace responded that no samples had been found. There was a tightness in Anakin's chest. He was planning to get a fresh sample of DNA from Luke and run it against the Jedi archives for a paternal match.

He hadn't told the council the full truth of Luke's vision. He hadn't told them the critical piece. That Vader might be Luke's father. Why was he still thinking about it that way? Vader had confirmed Luke was his son to Anakin last night. Anakin had seen Luke's vision. Perhaps he was just holding out that perhaps this was all still a mistake. Perhaps Luke wasn't related to a Sith. It just seemed like a heavy burden to bear for such a kid. Anakin had decided that once he knew for certain that Vader was Luke's father, then he would tell the Council. Perhaps when he talked to Luke next, he might finally get some real answers.
Chapter 17

Anakin had wanted to rush off the moment the council meeting was over, but he had enough clarity to remember to grab two mugs of caf. They were still steaming as he hit the door chime at the room where Luke was being kept. They had given him one of the rare suites. Most Jedi had a single room. A few of the masters, like those on the council, had a small suite made up of a bedroom and a sitting room. Luke had been placed in one of those. Perhaps it was because now he was under constant watch. At the very least he could have some measure of privacy in the bedroom.

The Jedi who answered the door was one Anakin was not familiar with. It was a female Nautolan, the same species as Master Fisto.

"Knight Skywalker," the Jedi greeted. "I am Knight Tonna Lor. I was told to expect you."

Anakin bobbed his head as he entered the room. He quickly glanced around the room and didn't spot Luke. He had to be in the bedroom.

"Is he awake?" Anakin asked.

Tonna looked at the bedroom door. "I believe so. He ate earlier, but then retreated back into his room."

"Has he . . . said anything?"

"He asked what happened to the Sith."

"What did you tell him?"


"How did he react?"

"Relieved," she responded. "Don't you think that's a bit odd?" Anakin looked at her. "You would think he would feel more anxious or fearful. He's an odd one."

He didn't respond as he walked through the sitting room still holding the two mugs in one hand. He paused at the door to the bedroom. He had been so determined in getting here, but now that he was here, he was uncertain how to proceed. What would be the best way to get the kid to open up to him? Anakin needed answers. He pressed the door panel button, and the door slid open. He took a deep breath and walked in.

"Hey," Anakin said with a smile as he walked over.


"I came to see how you were doing," Anakin said as he sat down next to Luke on the bed. He offered the mug of caf and the kid took it. Anakin tried to hide his relief that Luke had taken the mug. If he hadn't, it would make his plan harder to do without being obvious.
"You mean you're here to question me," Luke grumbled.

Anakin sighed, "Yeah. That too."

Luke sighed and turned his gaze back to the window. He stared at the city for a while clearly deep in thought. He took a few sips of the caf. Then he faced Anakin. His unsettling blue eyes weren't annoyed or afraid. They were set with determination.

"Fine," he said. "Let's get this over with."

Anakin liked this kid. He nodded and asked, "Is the Sith that was here last night Darth Vader?"

"Yes."

"Is he your father?"

Luke jolted straight up and looked at Anakin with wide eyes. The Jedi was having a hard time reading the kid's emotions. Was he scared? Surprised? Shocked? But then gave a nervous smile.

"Getting right to it, I see," he mumbled. Then he took a steadying breath and answered, "Yes. Darth Vader is my father."

"Are . . . are you sure?"

The kid's face drooped. He frowned. There was a clear note of sadness that hummed in the Force. "Yes," he said softly. "I'm sure he's my father." The Force flowed evenly around those words. Truth. Or at least the kid believed it to be the truth.

"When you first came here, you woke up and escaped from your room. You were scared. I met you for the first time in a service level. When I reached out to you, I saw a vision." Anakin paused, but he had Luke's full attention. "I saw you and a man wearing a black suit with a mask and cape wielding a red lightsaber. You wielded a blue one. You fought above a massive shaft. The man cut your hand off and you tried to escape. The man said he was your father, but you couldn't believe it . . . so you let go and fell . . ."

The color had drained from Luke's face. "You . . . you saw that?"

Anakin let out a sigh of relief. So what he had seen was a memory. But then he realized it was probably a memory Luke didn't want to recall much less share with anyone. The kid's face was pale. Anakin wouldn't want to share his embarrassing duel with Count Dooku at the First Battle of Geonosis where he had lost his arm.

"Well, it was unintentional," Anakin added. "But . . . I just can't put the pieces together. Was that Darth Vader in your vision wearing the suit? The same man who came into the temple last night."

Luke paused. His eyes were distant. There was an uneasiness about him. The Force moved erratically around him. "Yes," Luke finally answered. "That's the same person."

"How long ago did that vision take place?"

"Two months ago."

"Two months?" Anakin exclaimed. Luke flinched.

Anakin wanted to ask what was with that getup in the vision, but it was a minor detail. One he didn't need to dwell on right now. There were more pressing matters.
“So why did you leave with him last night if only two months you were willing to throw yourself down some bottomless shaft instead of go with him?” Anakin asked.

Luke looked down at his mug of caf. The cup was half way full. Anakin's own mug sat untouched in his hand.

Anakin continued his questioning. "You told Master Yoda last night that this Darth Vader said the only way for you to get home was with him. That the Jedi wouldn't help you."

"Yeah . . ."

"And you believed him?"

Luke rolled his eyes. "Listen, it's . . . complicated." He straightened up and looked right at Anakin. "Really complicated."

Anakin searched for something he could say to convince the kid he was a trustworthy guy. He could handle whatever Luke had to throw at him, but perhaps now was not the time. So he moved on to the next topic. "What was his name?" Anakin asked. Luke looked over at him a bit confused. "Before it was Darth Vader. What was his name?"

Luke's eyes widened for a brief second and then he quickly looked away. Anakin noticed a tightening in his jaw. Okay, Anakin thought, another topic he doesn't want to answer. But he needed something, anything, on Vader. So Anakin pushed on. "Was he once a Jedi or related to the Jedi?"

Luke looked back over at Anakin. His face was pale again. His eyes wide. His mouth was slightly parted. Anakin couldn't stop the small smile that pulled on his lips. "I'll take that as a yes," Anakin said a bit triumphantly. Finally he had something to go on. If Vader had connections to the Jedi, than that most likely meant his DNA was in the archives.

"So do you know why he left the Jedi?" Anakin asked. "Was it because of you?"

"Me?" Luke asked.

"Yeah because he had attachments."

"What . . . what does that mean?"

"A Jedi can't have attachments."

"Wait . . . what? They're not allowed attachments? So . . . you don't . . . you don't have a wife?"

It was Anakin's turn to turn pale. His eyes widened a small bit, but otherwise he fought to keep his face neutral. But inside his heart was pounding. He tightened the grip on his mug.

"No," Anakin said as smoothly as he could muster. "No of course I don't have a wife."


"No," Anakin said more forceful this time. "The Jedi Code forbids us Jedi from such things."


Suddenly Anakin's blood had turned cold. "What does that mean?" he hissed at the kid.

"They forbid you from having children?" Luke asked.
"Yes . . ."

"But what would happen . . . if you *did* have a child?" Luke asked. There was an innocence to his question. A naivety about it. But somehow the kid seemed to be hinting at something else. Did he know? Did he know like Darth Vader knew? That Anakin was married and now expecting a child? How? How did they know? And Luke wasn't giving him the answers he wanted!

Luke gasped as his mug suddenly shattered. He jumped up as the warm caf spilled all over his borrowed Jedi tunics. He wiped his lap to get the liquid off. Suddenly his hissed as he brought up his hand. The side of his pinky finger was bleeding from a small cut.

"Let me help," Anakin said as he jumped and pulled a torn piece of cloth from his pocket. He dabbed the cut. "I'm sure there are some patches in the refresher," Anakin said looking at the door in the corner. Luke nodded and made his way over there while sucking at the cut. Anakin looked down at the small red blots on the cloth. He smiled. His plan had worked. He now had a fresh sample of Luke's DNA to run for parental matches. One way or another, Anakin would figure out the mystery of Darth Vader and Luke.
Chapter 18

Luke walked out of the refresher after putting a bacta patch on his finger. His clothes were damp from the spilt caf, but he didn't know if there were extra clothes in the room. He had yet to explore the drawers. Luckily it wasn't too uncomfortable. For now he'd just bare with it. Anakin smiled when he saw Luke return. He was standing. His cup of caf sat on a small table. The broken pieces of Luke's cup right next to it.

"I told Knight Lor to get a cleaning droid up here," Anakin said as he waved to the stain on the floor.

Luke only nodded. He had been thinking while in the refresher applying the patch. According to Vader, Luke's mother should be pregnant right now. That when he had learned of the pregnancy, it had been the happiest moment in his life. But Anakin said he wasn't married nor did he have a lover. Granted, it wasn't like Luke had a lot of information to go on. Perhaps Luke's mother was just a fling. A one-night stand.

But . . .

It just didn't seem right.

When Vader mentioned it, there was real pain there. Plus Vader said originally he hadn't learned of the pregnancy this early. Skywalker was supposed to be out fighting in the Clone Wars. That meant he had some connection with Luke's mother. So one of the Anakin Skywalkers was lying to Luke, and he had a feeling it was the younger one. Vader was a lot of things, but a liar didn't seem to be one of them.

No. I am your father.

Yes Vader was always blunt. Luke recalled their first meeting face to face on Cymoon 1.

"You hold that weapon like an untrained child. This is most pathetic. You are not worth the seconds it would take to finish you." Luke recalled Vader's harsh words.

Plus why would Anakin Skywalker open up to Luke? If what he had said is true then Jedi weren't supposed to have relationships like a wife and child. It was odd this was the first time Luke was hearing about it. Neither Ben or Yoda had said anything to Luke. Now that Luke was here, amongst the Jedi, he realized how little he knew about them.

"You know," Anakin said. "I never did find out why you were calling my name in the hospital after you first crashed here."

"Ah . . . um . . . It wasn't your name I was calling . . ." Luke said awkwardly. He didn't recall much, but most likely he was saying his own name thinking he was with Alliance medics. Anakin raised an eyebrow.

"Really?" he said as he gave Luke a skeptical glare.

"Like I said it's complicated."

"Uh huh. Alright then let's talk about your empire."

A chill ran through Luke. "Empire?"
"You've mentioned it lightly. You were a bit confused about where you were. You mentioned an Imperial Palace and an emperor. So where is this empire? Where were you before you came here? What were you doing in that fighter you crashed in? You know from looking at the pieces of it, I haven't quite seen anything like it. It reminds me of the Clone Z-95 starfighter or . . . maybe the newer ARC-170 fighter with what appears to be those multiple wings. It was hard to tell from the wreckage." Anakin shrugged.

Luke realized he was talking about his X-Wing and fought off a groan. In retrospect of course his fighter had been trashed. He just didn't look forward to having to tell the Alliance that he lost a ship. Again. No doubt he would get another lecture on the price of X-Wings. Anakin had read into Luke's silence.

"Let me guess," the Jedi asked, "it's also complicated?"


"So what were you fighting against? That ship of yours is a fighter. Those guns it had speaks for itself. Are you part of some Separatist group way out in the Outer Rim?"

"Uh . . . no," Luke said. "I um . . . I'm a rebel. I fight against the Empire." That seemed like safe information to pass off.

"A rebel, huh?" Anakin said as he took two steps closer to Luke. He leaned in. "Where does a local rebellion get a ship like that? Now unless I'm reading things wrong, which I don't think I am, did your ship have a Class 1.0 hyperdrive on it?"

"Kriff," Luke swore to himself. Putting hyperdrives on to small snub fighters was a more recent thing, wasn't it? They used to use hyperdrive sleds or rings. But old Y-wings had them. They were rather large and bulky fighters, especially the old models. They were known to be a bit buggy in atmospheric conditions.

"Oh come on!" Anakin said. "Don't tell me that's too complicated too." Anakin stepped up to Luke and wrapped an arm around his shoulder, pulling him close. "Listen I've been modifying my various fighters for years now to get a good small fast hyperdrive on them. However, I have yet to perfect it. The small hyperdrives have limited range. Now, I have yet to get my hands on whatever your fighter had, but you've got to tell me. How does it work? Good range? Does it affect your fighter at all? Who made it?"

"You're into ships?" was all Luke managed to squeeze out. As soon as the words left his mouth, he cursed himself. Force he sounded like such a fool. Of course Anakin Skywalker was into ships! He was known as one of the best pilots in the galaxy! If Anakin didn't have his arm around him, he'd be tempted to smack his own forehead.

Luckily Anakin only laughed. "You could say that," he said with a huge dorky smile that reminded Luke of . . . of himself. "And you? I take it you're a pilot? Or . . . maybe not?"

"No! No I am," Luke said wanting to defend himself. If there was at least one true thing he prided himself on, it was his piloting skills. Anakin's eyes lit up.

"And how long have you been flying?" he asked. He let his arm slide away from Luke's shoulder and took a small step away.

"Well . . . I've only been flying fighters for a bit over two years now. But before that I used to fly
skyhoppers through the canyons back on Tatooine."

"Skyhoppers?" Anakin said a bit disgusted. "Never tried a podracer?"


"And?"

"I crashed. I'm lucky I walked away from it at all."

Anakin only laughed.

"Don't tell me you . . . you have piloted one?" Luke asked.

"Oh come on! You're from Tatooine. Surely you've heard of me? I won the Boonta Eve Classic. Only human to do so."

Luke was sure his eyes almost popped out of his head. "You . . . won? The Boonta Eve?" Anakin laughed.

"But seriously, you've never heard of me? Mr. Calling-Out-the-Name-Skywalker-In-His-Sleep? But ah yes. That's right. It wasn't my name."

"No," Luke said steering the conversation back to racing and piloting. "I never heard about that. Podracing is . . . frowned upon out in Anchorhead. It's for Hutts and gangsters and gamblers. But I have seen the track. Flown along it in my skyhopper a few times."

Anakin seemed to retreat a bit, but nodded his head. "Yeah . . . for Hutts . . ." He spat the word Hutts. A shiver went through Luke as he recalled the little bit of history he did know about his father and grandmother. They had been slaves. And if they were slaves on Tatooine, that most likely meant a Hutt was involved.

"Wait . . . how old were you?" Luke asked as he recalled Vader telling him he had come to the Order at the age of nine.

A big smile spread across Anakin's face chasing away the darkness that had lingered there a moment before. "Nine," he said in full confidence and arrogance.

"Nine? You were nine?"

Again Anakin laughed. "Yep, sure was."

"So . . . when did you become a Jedi?"

Anakin's face fell again. He took a deep sigh. "Right after that, actually. That race got me noticed by a Jedi. I left Tatooine the same day as that race."

Well that matched up with what Vader had said. Now if only Luke could get Anakin to talk about Luke's mother.

"By the way," Luke asked. "How old are you now?"

"Twenty-three," he said.

"Really?" Luke asked. "I'm almost twenty-three myself."

Luke didn't understand why Anakin was that shocked. It should be Luke who was surprised to learn his father was the same age as him.
Chapter 19

Anakin couldn't believe it. The kid was the same age as him. He wasn't a kid at all. But stang, he sure did look like it. There was just something about Luke that didn't quite click with him being twenty-three. There was something about Luke, an air around him, perhaps even the Force, that just buzzed that he was young. Or at least younger than Anakin.

Now that Anakin had loosen Luke up a bit, perhaps he could get the kid (kriff, he's not a kid!) to speak more about Darth Vader. Though Anakin would love to talk more about Luke's fighter. But Anakin also needed information to bring back to the council about the Sith.

"So where does Darth Vader fit into this empire business you rebel against?" Anakin asked.

At once Luke tensed up. He had started to get comfortable. A few times he had flashed a goofy grin, but coming back to Vader, Luke's father, caused him to stiffen up.

"Is he the emperor you mentioned before?" Anakin pushed on.

"No," Luke quickly answered. "No . . . he's the Emperor's enforcer. The Supreme Commander of the Imperial Navy. The heir apparent to the Empire. Or perhaps it's heir presumptive. I forget which one Leia said it was."

"So . . . why is he here? Shouldn't he be back at his empire commanding the navy?"

Luke fidgeted nervously and looked at the ground. The answer was pretty obvious.

Anakin sighed, "He's here because of you. Because you're his son."


"So what's going on with that?"

Luke finally looked up. Again Anakin couldn't help but be unsettled by his blue eyes. There was something in the back of his mind about those eyes that Anakin couldn't quite place.

"Going on with that?" Luke asked.

"In your vision, which I assume was actually a memory that really happened two months ago, Darth Vader wearing that . . . suit said he was your father. And from the looks of it that was new information to you. You couldn't believe it was true. In fact you said in the vision that Vader had killed your father."

"That's what I was told," Luke said softly. "I don't . . . I don't know why. My aunt and uncle told me my father was a spice freighter navigator who died before I was born. Ben said my dad was murdered by Darth Vader. I never expected my father to be . . . alive. Someone who has been ruthlessly hunting me down for years. Who . . . tried to kill me more than once."

"He's a Sith," Anakin said. "They only care about power. He's only interested in you joining him in the Dark Side. To make himself more powerful. He said so in that vision. He wants to take down your emperor. Rule the galaxy."

Luke was still. It was almost if he wasn't breathing. But his full attention was Anakin. His eyes darted back and forth to Anakin's own eyes. Luke was looking hard at Anakin. As if he was
scrutinizing him. Analyzing him. It sent a weird chill up Anakin's spine and crawled up his neck and head. He didn't like it.

"What . . . is a Sith?" Luke asked.

"Force users who use the Dark Side of the Force. They focus on hate, greed, and anger. It gives them more power in the Force. They are obsessed with seeking it above all else. I'm not surprised Darth Vader seeks to be an emperor."

"Hmmm," Luke said as his turned away from Anakin and looked out the window. Anakin moved to stand beside him.

"And you know nothing about why or how he became a Sith?" Anakin asked.

Luke was still looking out the window, but answered, "No. I'm still trying to figure that out myself." He turned again to look straight at Anakin. Again it was with one of those piercing looks Anakin hated. "Why would someone become a Sith. What drives them to do it? What . . . What would make you become one?"

Anakin froze. It was only for a moment. A second. A breath, though he himself didn't take one. "Me?" he finally spat. "I would never turn to the Dark Side!" Luke flinched and took a step back.

"Sorry," he mumbled.

Anakin ran his ungloved hand through his hair. "No, sorry. You're just trying to figure this all out. Your father was a Jedi right?" Luke nodded. Anakin hid his triumph at getting a real confirmation about that fact. "I get why you'd ask a Jedi then."

Luke frowned and seemed to chew on his lip. He wanted to say something, but wasn't. So Anakin continued.

"There have been . . . other Jedi who have fallen. They no longer believe in the Order. In the Republic. Thinking the Jedi are wrong. Thus they turn to the Dark Side. Some go because of the promise of power to change things. To make things better. But it doesn't."

"And you don't think there is anything in your life that could be better? That you could change with power?" Luke asked.

There was a moment of internal whiplash. What was with this questioning from this kid who knew nothing? Or did he? What did he know? And what did he mean? There was a tightness in Anakin's heart. How much did Luke know? Was he like his father? He knew things he shouldn't know? Of course there were things Anakin wanted to make better! He wanted to be a recognized Jedi master by the council. He wanted to publicly come out about Padmé being his wife without being thrown out of the Order. He wanted to end this war!

"What do you know?" Anakin asked finally snapping.

"What . . . what do I know?" Luke said. His face was a bit pale.

"What do you know?" Anakin growled stepping forward and pointing at Luke with his gloved hand. Luke gripped his right wrist. His prosthetic wrist. His eyes were wide. "You're his son aren't you? Darth Vader? How does he know the stuff he knows?"

"How did he know my moves? Obi-Wan's moves? The council codes to unlock your door? How did he know his way through the temple? How does he know about Padmé? How did he know she was pregnant before I did and when she hadn't told anyone else? How? HOW?"

Luke had backed away from Anakin all the way to the wall. Anakin kept walking until he stood right in front of Luke. He grabbed his collar.

"Tell me," Anakin demanded, "What do you know?"

"You don't want to know what I know," Luke said. His voice was darker than it normally was. There was an edge to it. A sharp truth.

"Yes I do," Anakin bit back.

"You want to know what I know?" Luke said as he took a step forward. He pointed a finger at Anakin. "I finally see how a Jedi can fall to the Dark Side. Something you said you would never do. You're scared, Anakin Skywalker, of Darth Vader. I know that fear all too well. Let me ask a question. What is it he knows that you're so afraid of?"

"I am not afraid of some Sith," Anakin spat.

Luke walked passed Anakin towards the door. He pressed the door panel button, and the door to the sitting room slid open. He looked back over his shoulder.

"Well maybe you should be," Luke said quietly. "Maybe then you won't become one."

Then Luke walked into the sitting room marking the clear end of the discussion. The door slid shut leaving Anakin alone. He just stood there staring at the door with one thought on his mind.

"What does that mean?" he asked.
Anakin marched down the hall. His hands balled into tight fists. A few Jedi shot him looks. He knew he wasn't being a good Jedi right now. He was angry. He was fuming and projecting it into the Force. He wasn't being a serene and proper Jedi Knight, and you know what? Kriff that. He had barely gotten any new information out of Luke.

Anakin now knew that Darth Vader was Luke's father. Darth Vader had been a Jedi. Luke was fighting in some outer rim rebellion against some local empire that Darth Vader worked for. And... And that was it!

Fine.

If Luke didn't want to give Anakin answers, than he would find them himself. He made his way to the healing halls and pulled over the first med droid he found. It was one of the small AZI hovering droids.

"I need this DNA analyzed," he barked. "Now."

The droid was luckily unphased. It paused only for a second, before it said, "Of course." Anakin took out the torn cloth with Luke's DNA on it and the droid took it. Then it sped off most likely to find a terminal.

Anakin ran both hands through his hair. He felt restless. It was a common feeling for him. Always too much energy inside of him. He was tempted to return to his room and find some droid or engine part to work on. Perhaps he could look over images of Luke's crashed fighter again. Take a good look at that hyperdrive.

Or he could... go back to Padmé's apartment. Back home. But she was probably still at work. Anakin groaned. He just wanted to be with her. Last night had barely been enough time with her. A small smile pulled on his lips, because he thought that no matter how much time he spent with her. It was always too little.

The AZI medical droid hovered back over to Anakin. He held out a data chip. "The DNA has been analyzed," it said matter of factly. "Here is the DNA code of the sample."

"Thanks," Anakin muttered as he took the chip.

He left the healing halls and started to make his way to the archives. As he did he went over the conversation with Luke again. He realized Luke had revealed that Darth Vader worked as the right-hand man of some emperor. So then he couldn't be the Sith lord behind the Clone Wars. Could he? Luke's vision matched up to what the kid had said. Vader himself told Luke to join him so they could kill the emperor. Clearly this father and son were far too much wrapped up in some outer rim drama. It could be related to Separatists, but the more Anakin learned, the less he saw Vader as Dooku's Sith master.

So that would mean there are at least three Sith, Anakin mused to himself as he walked through the grand hallways of the Temple. This time his gait was slow and even. No other passing Jedi gave him disapproving looks. Vader, Dooku, and Dooku's master at the least. So who was the Sith at the Chancellor's apartment? Dooku? Dooku's master? Or yet another Sith? Is Vader even connected to Dooku and his master? And what of Vader's master? Perhaps Vader has an apprentice.

Anakin added that to the ever growing questions he would like to ask Luke. Or even better,
questions to ask Darth Vader when he finally managed to corner that Sith scum.

He walked into the archives and found an empty terminal. He entered the data chip and brought up the list of Jedi. He entered the search parameters. During that first meeting, he was told the Order had already run Luke's DNA against the archives. But that was for exact matches. Anakin had to set up the search for partial matches. If Luke and Vader were father and son and Vader was truly a former Jedi, then there should be a match.

With everything set, Anakin clicked the button to start.

He drummed the fingers of his gloved hand against the desk. It only took a few short moments before there was a soft ping announcing the results. Anakin smiled. So Vader had been a Jedi, and now hopefully Anakin could get some answers. He looked at the results.

Match found: 1 of 1
Partial DNA Match to sample(1)
Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker
50% DNA match

Anakin looked at the screen. He blinked a few times as he read over the results a second time. A third time.

"What?" he shouted. Several Jedi either sitting on other terminals or browsing the shelves looked at him. Anakin ducked his head back down. There had to be a mistake. He cleared the search and ran it again. His fingers drummed much harder this time as he waited for the results. It seemed to take twice as long this time around, but finally came the soft ping.

And it was the same karkin results!

There was a mistake! There had to be. Some of his DNA must have rubbed off on to the cloth. Anakin ejected the data chip, stormed out of the archives and made his way back to the healing halls. He found the same AZI droid easily enough.

"You!" Anakin barked. The droid jumped in surprise. "There was an error in that DNA."

"An error?" the droid said. There was a slight tone of disbelief.

"Some of my DNA must have got mixed in. I need a clean sample."

"I do not think there was an error," the droid said.

"There was," Anakin growled.

"Very well," the droid said with an edge of attitude. "We shall take a DNA sample from you. I can isolate your DNA and get a clean sample."

Anakin had to wonder who designed this droid's personality programming, but followed the droid into a small dark room with several terminals. The small droid hovered over to a shelf and returned shortly with a needle and syringe. Anakin rolled up the sleeve on his left arm, his flesh arm, and the droid stabbed him harshly with the needle.

"Ow!"

"There will be a small sting," the droid warned after the fact. The droid applied a small patch once the needle was withdrawn. He brought the small syringe over to the terminal. "Do you still have the
But somehow he managed to get out a staggered, "Wha... What?"

"Perhaps you have a twin sibling?" the droid offered a bit cheerfully. "Or this sample is of one of your parents? Surely it is not... from a child."

"No, he's twenty-three." It was Anakin who said that, but also not. Another part of his brain that was able to function and speak properly said it.

"Oh a twin brother then," the droid said while bobbing in the air properly. "I can see why you thought there was a contamination with the sample with such a high centiMorgan match." The droid continued ramble on, but Anakin had stopped listening.

What did this mean? What did this mean? WHAT DID THIS MEAN?

The DNA test wasn't supposed to come back to him. This was supposed to finally answer questions, not open a whole other galaxy of them. He was supposed to find out who Darth Vader was and find out why he-

His train of thought ended sharply. Anakin saw those eyes. Those wide blue unsettling eyes. They were staring at him right now! He blinked. It wasn't Luke. He wasn't here. He was staring at his own reflection in the shiny metal divider between the terminals. Whose eyes were they again? His or Luke's? His... or Luke's... They... were the same. The same blue. The same shape. They were the same! That's why it unsettled him! That's where he knew those eyes from. They were his eyes! But... how...
"It can't be," Anakin said aloud. The AZI droid titled its head.

"It's complicated. Really complicated," Luke said about his father while looking right at Anakin. The kid . . . kid . . . a kid . . . He felt so young . . .

"But what would happen . . . if you did have a child?" Luke had asked.

No . . . No . . . It could not be . . . It was impossible . . . Wait. Weren't those the very same words Luke had said . . .

"Can I ask a question?" Luke had asked while he sat in his med bed. "What time is it? I mean . . . what is the date?"

What is the date? What is the _date_?

Fifty percent match.

_Such a high rate of centiMorgans usually predicts a biological relationship of a parent and child._

_Surely it is not . . . from a child._

_No. No. That can't be. That's impossible._

_It wasn't your name I was calling._


_I don't have a son._

_Something wonderful has happened. I'm . . . I'm pregnant._

Anakin couldn't breath. He couldn't move. Everything was spinning. Somewhere he thought he heard a mechanical voice asking him something. He just didn't know. Words kept spinning in his head.

Then he heard that deep mechanical voice. The one of the Sith from Luke's vision, "_I am your father._"

_I am your father._

He had to be sure. He had to be sure. He had to be sure. Despite the singing of the Force all around him telling him it was true. Anakin Skywalker was the father of . . . Luke. Which was impossible. They were the same age!

Anakin was barely aware of ejecting the sample data disc from the terminal and almost running through the Temple to the nearest hangar. Flying through Coruscant traffic was a blur. He landed his speeder on one of the docking bays at the Republic Executive Building. He made his way straight to Padmé's office.

"Anakin?" she exclaimed as he walked in. Luckily she was alone. She stood up from her desk. She was wearing a lovely light pale blue outer layer with a high collar. Gold embroidery was done heavily along the edges in a vine motif. Underneath that was a cream gold dress. Her hair was twisted up in twin braids that circled around her head to a cascading ponytail. The moment he reached her, he pulled her into an embrace.

He just held her, while enjoying how her body fit against his. He closed his eyes as he took a deep breath enjoying that lovely floral scent of hers. No matter how many systems he went to, he never found a scent like hers. Despite her layers of clothing, he could feel her warm body.

"Anakin?" she asked again as she slowly pulled away. Anakin lightly groaned as she slipped through his fingers. "Is everything okay?"

He brought his flesh hand up to her face and cupped her cheek. "I just wanted to see you," he said. She smiled. Force, her smile.

"It's only been what? A couple of hours since we last saw each other?"

He wrapped his arms around her again. "Which is still a couple of hours too long," he murmured into her hair. There was a soft giggle. The soft vibration he could feel against his chest and it made its way straight to his heart. There it wrapped around his heart and warmed him up.

Again she pulled away. "So why are you really here?" she asked.

"I . . . need a DNA sample," he said.

She straightened up and shot him a look. "A DNA sample? What for?"

He quickly diverted his eyes. He hadn't thought this far in advance. He couldn't tell her the real reason.

"Does this have anything to do with that Sith?" she asked softly.

"Yes . . ." he said slowly trying to gauge her reaction at the same time.

"Anakin," she said sternly. "What is this about? Why do you need my DNA sample?"

"It's . . . complicated?"

"Complicated?" she said with a bit of anger in her voice. How did Luke get away with saying that? Anakin placed his hands on her upper arms.

"It's for my peace of mind," Anakin said. "And so I can keep you and the baby safe."
Her hands slowly went up to her stomach. "Do you . . . do you think the Sith lord got a hold of my DNA somehow?" she asked. Her eyes were so big and round. Her could feel her fear in the Force. He fought off the frown that was tugging at his lips. She didn't need to be afraid. He would protect her. She continued, "I was thinking how he could know. If he got a hold of my DNA and ran a pregnancy test . . ."

Anakin said nothing. Only pulled her close to him again. He didn't want to voice his real thoughts. His real fears about how Vader knew. He was having a hard time grasping the concept of Luke. He didn't need to think about Vader as well. This time it was him who pulled away.

"You know, I was so focused on getting here, I didn't bring anything with me to collect a sample," Anakin explained. Padmé looked at him, rolled her eyes, but then smiled at him.

"There is a small med closet down the hall," she explained. "I'm sure there is something there."

Her hand slipped into his ungloved one. His flesh one. The one he could feel her with. Her hand was small and smooth. But it slipped out as soon as they entered the hall. He sighed, and she shot him a glance. He folded his hands behind his back so he looked every bit the professional Jedi general simply walking down the hall next to a senator.

They made it to the med closet without incident. The door slid open to reveal shelves of first aid supplies. It was a quick ordeal. In a few short minutes Anakin pocketed a piece of gauze with Padmé's DNA on it. They headed back to her office. He should go back to the Temple and run her DNA against Luke's. If Luke had fifty percent DNA from Anakin and Padmé . . .

"Skywalker?"

Anakin and Padmé both froze for a second before turning around. He tried to school his face as best he could after hearing that voice.

"Master Windu," Anakin said as gracefully as he could.

A few steps down the hall, just exiting out of one of the adjoining halls, were Master Windu and Chancellor Palpatine along with a small entourage of the chancellor's.

"Anakin, good to see you," the chancellor said as he approached. "And Senator Amidala as well."


"Skywalker I thought you were to be at the Temple," Mace said in his normal no-nonsense stern voice.

"I was just . . ." Anakin stumbled, "Following a lead due to my investigations."

"With Senator Amidala?" Mace asked.

Anakin could sense Padmé tense up next to him. The Chancellor was quiet, but staring intently at the scene unfolding in front of him.

"Forgive me Master Windu," Padmé said as she took a step into the center of the group. "I asked Anakin here after I saw something strange last night."

"Strange?" Mace pressed.

"There was a strange man on a speeder," she explained gracefully. She was confident. Regal. Even
in the Force, her words didn't read as lies.

"I see," Mace said slowly.

"I was trying to see if I could calculate which direction this strange man was going. Perhaps see if he was caught on any local security cams," Anakin said straightening up.

"Is this about the Sith?" the chancellor said joining in on the conversation.

"Yes, Chancellor," Anakin said.

"He is a dangerous man," the chancellor said. "He must be caught quickly. I have no doubt you, Anakin, will see to it."

"The Jedi," Mace said, "are doing everything in their power to find this Sith lord and bring him to justice."

"Of course," Palpatine said with a slight nod of his head. "And this boy? The one he is after? Luke?"

Padmé turned sharply and looked at him. Her face clearly portraying the unspoken question.

"Luke is being kept safe at the Temple," Mace said. "He will be with a Jedi guard at all times."

"Perhaps the boy could be moved," Palpatine suggested. "The Jedi Temple has already suffered terrible loss from this Sith. I'm sure we could find a safe place for the boy and place him under the watch of some clone troopers."

"The Jedi can keep him safe," Anakin said quickly. "Plus after last night, I fear even troopers may be no match for this Sith."

"I agree," Mace added. "The Temple is the safest place for now."

Palpatine glared, then it eased away. "Of course. I shall accept your judgement master Jedi," he said. Mace bowed and Anakin followed suit. Palpatine bobbed his head and went on his way. His entourage followed behind him.

"Have a good day Senator," Anakin said bobbing his head to Padmé. "You've been a great help."

"Of course Knight Skywalker," she said. She nodded to Mace before heading back to her office. Anakin bit back a sigh as he followed the other Jedi back to the landing pads.
Thank you everyone for all the comments. I read them two or three times each. It has been noted that I do short chapters. Yes I do them but the trade off is I update every three days. So short chapters and a short wait.

Anakin paced around his room at the Jedi Temple. His hands were clasped tightly behind his back. The moment he had returned to the Temple, Anakin got Padmé's DNA sequenced and compared it to Luke's sample. The results were the same as when compared to Anakin's.

Partial DNA Match to sample(1)
Sample(1) to Sample(2)
50% DNA match

Fifty percent match to Padmé. Fifty percent match to *both* Anakin and Padmé. There was only one way anyone would have such a match to both of them. Luke was the child of Anakin and Padmé. Despite everything in Anakin screaming that such a thing was impossible, the Force hummed and buzzed around him singing that it was the truth.

Luke was the child of Anakin and Padmé.

"How is that possible?" Anakin said aloud to himself. How could someone the same age as Anakin be his son? How? "How?" he shouted aloud. Time travel. It was the idea that made the most sense. But that couldn't be correct . . . Luke couldn't be Anakin's son from the future . . . Right?

"Can I ask a question?" Luke had asked. "What time is it? I mean . . . what is the date?"

Anakin scowled at that memory. He paused in his pacing and took a deep breath.

"So let's say Luke is my time-traveling son," he mused to himself. "So does that mean . . . he's the baby Padmé is pregnant with?"

Force, it was a bit too confusing to think about. But the more Anakin thought about his interactions with Luke, the more it made sense. Like the fact he got a small hyperdrive on his fighter! Or why he didn't want to mention his last name. Or . . . want to talk about Darth Vader . . .

Darth . . . Vader . . .

The Sith who claimed Luke was his son, and whom Luke said was his father. There was no doubt in either of those declarations. Luke clearly knew Vader. They had a history. And if Luke was from the future . . . was Vader as well? And if Luke was Anakin's son but also Vader's son . . . Who did that make Vader before he became a Sith?

Luke said Vader had been a Jedi before he became a Sith . . .

No. No way. No way did Anakin fall to the Dark Side and become a Sith. No way did he become Darth Vader. The man, that monster, killed without hesitation. In Luke's vision, that Sith had sliced off Luke's hand. *His son's* hand!
Luke's own words haunted Anakin. "Why would someone become a Sith. What drives them to do it? You don't think there is anything in your life that could be better? That you could change with power? What . . . What would make you become one?"

That was right. Luke didn't know why Darth Vader had fallen. He said he had been trying to figure that out himself.

"You want to know what I know?" Luke asked when Anakin had pressed the boy for more information. "I finally see how a Jedi can fall to the Dark Side. Something you said you would never do. What are you so afraid of? Maybe you should be afraid. Maybe then you won't become one."

Maybe then you won't become one . . . Maybe then you won't become a Sith.

Luke knew. That's what he meant when he said that Anakin didn't want to know what he knew. He knew. He knew Anakin would fall to the Dark Side and become Darth Vader. He knew.

Anakin sat down on the corner of his bed. This couldn't be true. There was no way this could be true!

"I know you, Anakin Skywalker," Darth Vader had said when he taunted Anakin last night. "I know all your moves. All your thoughts. I know exactly the lengths you will go to protect what is yours. You too would allow nothing to keep you from your son. You will allow nothing to hurt your family. That you will do anything to keep them safe."

Anakin's head spun around and around. The racing posters on his wall blurred with the windows and the door.

That's how Vader knew so much. Knew things about Anakin that only Anakin knew. That only Anakin knew . . .

His room spun faster and faster around him. The light on ceiling and the stripes of sunlight coming from the blinds on his windows were now nothing but pricks and streaks of lights. Stars and comets in his dizzy mind. He was no longer sitting but standing. The stars were now below him. They had stillled but glowed brightly.

He knew this . . . He had seen it before . . .

The stars started to flicker and dance up. But now they were no longer stars, but glowing embers dancing upwards. They grew brighter and brighter. From dark red to slowly a bright burning red laced with slashes of bright yellow. Lava. Anakin stood on a small island of rock completely surrounded by lava.

"I have a gift for you," a whispery but deep and powerful voice said.

Anakin at once on the balls of his feet. His hand pulled his lightsaber free of his belt. He glanced wildly around, but saw no one else.

The voice came again, "What if I could show you . . . the future?"

"No." Despite the lava and the heat, a chill washed through him. That was his voice. "No," came his voice again. "Stop it."

"Know yourself," said the voice. Then the tone changed. The voice was dark and heavy and loud. "Know what you will become!"
"I will not look!" Anakin's voice shouted.

The real Anakin looked around wildly, but there was nothing there but the black, the lava, and the floating embers. But the Force was heavy with the Dark Side. It was wild. It danced as if it was a fire and lashed out at Anakin. It almost seemed to sting where the tendrils of the dark struck him.

Then he heard a raspy voice. Different from the deep powerful one before. "The Force is strong with you. A powerful Sith you will become."

It was almost as if the Force was a storm and Anakin was in the eye. It spun and lashed at him as if it were lightning striking him. He put his free hand up, trying to block it, but to no avail. He lit his lightsaber, but only seemed to wave it around uselessly. Through it all he heard his voice again. It sounded weak and pitiful and in pain.

"I will do such terrible things," it said.

The Force storm continued around him. It spun faster and faster. The embers from the lava were whipped up in its frenzy. Again making a night sky of shooting stars. Through it all he heard a soft echo of Obi-Wan's voice.

"Anakin, why?" it asked.

"I'm sorry," came Anakin's voice in reply. "I have seen that it is the Jedi who stand in the way of peace."

He knew these words. Where? When? The stars continued to race around. He heard his own voice again.

"I will cause so much pain," he said. His own heart clenched at those words. He recognized the pain that Anakin felt.

"Your destiny can change," came a new voice. An older voice. But there was something off about it. "Nothing is set in stone. If there is to be balance, what you have seen must be forgotten."

What you have seen . . . must be forgotten . . . Forgotten . . .

He had seen this before. He had forgotten it. But when . . . where? The stars started to slow down and gently faded away. Anakin stumbled backwards. He found himself stumbling up a short flight of steps. He sat himself on the top metal step and placed his head into his hands.

A horrible headache pounded against his skull. He felt it behind his eyes, in his forehead, and in the back of his head. His muscles were sore and strained. His eyes stung. What he had just seen and heard was from a memory. In that memory he had seen something, but what . . . Anakin couldn't remember. Clearly he had seen the future-

He had seen the future! His future.

A powerful Sith you will become.

I will do such terrible things. I will cause so much pain.

"There is no escape," came a dark deep voice over the sound of even mechanical breathing. "Do not make me destroy you. You do not yet realize your importance. If you only knew the power of the Dark Side."
Anakin knew that voice. It was from Luke's vision. Of the Sith he fought. Of Darth Vader . . . of himself. Of Anakin Skywalker.
Chapter 23

I wanted to thank my beta reader pub4 / Red Heathen. I also wanted to thank coleroz on tumblr for this amazing piece of artwork.

Vader let the folds of the Force flow around him. He had to delve deeply into the Force, since it was currently so loud and annoyingly flooded with light. There were deep cracks in that light where the darkness bled through, but the Force was still far too loud and busy with the many Jedi accessing it. Plus Sidious was still crawling around trying to locate him, so he had to go in deep to find peace and solitude.

Finally able to open himself up to the Force, he meditated on what he should do next. He needed to get his son out of the Jedi Temple as well as figure a way back to their proper time. He knew it was the Force that had brought the two back for what else could it be? Thus it was with the Force Vader should find answers on how to get back. But so far, the Force was providing him with nothing.

His annoyance and frustration summoned the burning cold of the Dark Side. It swirled around him. Every now and then a tendril would lash out and snap against him. The pain only made him angrier. Only strengthened the Dark Side.

He moved on to how to get Luke out of the Temple. He lifted his head to glance toward Luke's presence. Even this deep down, Luke's presence was a bright and gentle light. However, it currently hummed with annoyance. Perhaps the boy was finally seeing the truth of the Jedi. Wouldn't it be nice if Luke left the Temple on his own after he saw the truth in his father's words? If so, Vader would be there the moment he did. But most likely, the blasted Jedi would not let him go willingly. Not any more. Not after last night's failure.

Again there was a surge in the Dark Side as it drank Vader's dark emotions. It would be too foolish to go back to the Temple. The Jedi were on guard now. Even if Vader did get the boy and drag him out, the Jedi wouldn't leave them alone. They would be on the hunt for the two. Thus a different approach was needed. The Jedi needed to hand Luke over to Vader willingly. And they would as long as Vader had something of enough value to trade for.

A twisted smile grew across his face. Luckily for Vader, he knew the Jedi Order. There were many weaknesses he could exploit. He just needed to figure out which one would be the easiest, fastest, and the most effective. Kidnap a group of younglings? Or perhaps -

Suddenly everything shifted. Vader was thrown off balance as the Force spun around him. Dark inky clouds clouded his vision.

"The Force is with you, young Skywalker. But you are not a Jedi yet."

Vader's head snapped up. He knew that voice. It was his voice. His vocoder voice from when he wore the suit. Slowly the clouds became lighter and lighter until they were white. He could hear the hiss of steam being released. Slowly through the steam he saw orange and blue lights. More and more of the room came into focus. There was dark black machinery. Hissing steam out of pipes. A hole in the ground.
He knew this place. This was carbon-freezing chamber in Cloud City on Bespin. Why was the Force showing him this place? He did not want to recall this place. This failure. He collected the Force to him and tried to push out. Tried to push the vision away, but it didn't budge. Vader growled, but it came out jumbled. Mechanical. Then he heard it.

Kish-kosh. Kish-kosh.

The steady rhythm that had haunted him the past two decades. He looked down, and through red photoreceptors he saw he was in his suit. The blasted suit! No! He had been freed from it. The Force had healed him! He grabbed at his helmet and threw it to the ground. Then he ripped off the mask and casted it aside as well. He could hear it clatter against the grates. He clawed at the collar mount that held the respirator in place. It still pushed air at him.

_I do not need this anymore!_

Finally, he undid the hatches and pulled the collar off of him. He threw it into the steam. He stood there hunched over taking deep breaths. Deep breaths he could take naturally. Without aid. Without the suit! But he was still wearing the rest of it. _This is just a vision_, he reminded himself. But why? Why was the Force showing him this? Was it a reminder? A reminder of what he had -

Again his thoughts were cut off as he heard his old vocoder voice. "_Obi-Wan has taught you well. You have controlled your fear . . . now release your anger. Only your hatred can destroy me._"

Cautiously, Vader stepped through the steam and glanced around. He thought he heard a faint sound of lightsabers clashing, but he didn't see Luke. He made his way to the window that overlooked the reactor shaft. He could see the gantry walkway jutting out into the middle of the shaft. Everything was intact. No railing or instruments had been cut by a lightsaber. Even the window was whole. Yet despite there being no signs of battle, he still heard the voices.

"_I'll never join you!_" Luke's voice shouted. It was clear. As if the boy was right in front of him as he clung onto the instruments on the gantry's far end.

"_If you only knew the power of the Dark Side. Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father,_" Vader's old voice said. The real Vader scowled. He didn't want to relive this memory. He tried again to push the vision away. To pull himself elsewhere, but still the vision wouldn't budge.

"_He told me enough!_" came Luke's accusing voice. "_It was you who killed him._"

"_No_," Vader's voice said. It was deep. Dark. "_I am your father._"

"_No_," came Luke's pitiful denial. "_No. That's not true! That's impossible!_"

"_Search your feelings. You know it to be true._"

"_No! No! No!_"

"No," Vader mumbled to himself as he stepped away from the window. Those horrible shouts as Luke realized who Vader was were painful. Each word sent a spike through Vader's heart. Reliving it was seemed more painful than the first time.

Again he tried to get the vision to disappear. He didn't want to see or hear what came next. Didn't the Force know that he tortured himself by replaying this very scene over and over in his mind the past two months?

"_Come with me. It is the only way_," he heard his own voice say. He was no longer by the window,
but the voice was still clear. And he felt the jolt of his own heart as he knew Luke had let go of the gantry.

He balled his hands into fists. This wasn't how it was supposed to go! Luke was supposed to join him! The boy was his son. He was supposed to be angry! He had been lied to! Deceived! He had been stolen and kept from what was rightfully his! And Vader, his father, was finally showing the boy the truth! Yet instead of anger and acceptance and a thirst for revenge, Luke had only felt despair and hopelessness. Instead of taking his father's hand, he had let go . . .

Perhaps the Force was answering Vader's questions. He had been wanting to know how to get Luke . . . Not just out of the Temple, but he wanted his son to accept him. He wanted his son . . . His child . . . He wanted . . . to be . . .

"The Force works in mysterious ways."

Vader nodded, but then froze. He thought he had been the one just now to speak. It was his voice. Not the vocoder voice. But no it wasn't his voice. He turned slowly. His gaze went up the small staircase. Sitting on the top step was Anakin Skywalker. He wasn't just a figment of the vision. He was here as Vader was here. Vader could sense the large supernova that was Skywalker's presence in the Force.

He pushed again. He did not want to be here. He did not want to deal with his younger self, but the Force still didn't budge. Why wasn't it listening to him?

*But it is. It is listening to you. Just not this you.*

This vision . . . it wasn't his vision. It was Skywalker's. Why was he in Skywalker's vision? And why was Skywalker seeing *this*? This looked way too detailed to be from the Force alone. *Luke,* Vader realized. Luke would know the details of this place. Had he shown Skywalker this vision? What was the boy trying to do? Prevent Skywalker from falling? Vader scowled. He needed to get that boy away from the Jedi.

Anakin slowly stood up and walked down the steps. His blue eyes were focused straight on Vader. He stopped right in front of the Sith. Vader was taller, so Skywalker had to look up at him.

"Darth Vader," Skywalker said slowly.

Vader didn't respond. Already a headache was drilling into his mind between his eyes.

"I wanted to talk with you," Skywalker said as he clasped his hands behind his back and started to pace. He looked around the room as he talked. "Last night . . . You knew all of my moves. You knew all of Obi-Wan's moves. He said it was as if he was fighting me. You knew council codes to unlock Luke's med room. You knew those old passages in the temple, the very same I use . . . to see Padmé. You also knew about her. Knew she was pregnant . . ."

He finally stopped pacing and looked straight at Vader. "And yet you didn't kill me," he said. "You could have. You should have. You killed all the other Jedi you ran into. Yet you spared me." He paused as he folded his arms across his chest and straightened his back. He looked Vader dead on. "I see now why you didn't. How you knew all those things."

"So you've learned the truth, young Skywalker," Vader growled. Yes, he needed to separate Luke and Skywalker as soon as possible. That foolish boy had told Skywalker the truth. He was telling him about the future. He was trying to change it.

"Young Skywalker?" Anakin said with a slight raise of one eyebrow. And then he smirked. It was a
smirk Vader knew all too well. It was his own smirk. "I guess you would say that. Huh, *Old Skywalker?*"
Anakin looked up at Darth Vader. The lighting wasn't the best in this odd room with the orange and blue lights, but it was better than the dark Temple hallways. He looked hard at Vader's face. It was pale and bald. His eyes were a sickly and disgusting shade of yellow tinged in red. The skin seemed to be grayer around the eyes. When he looked closer, he could make out that Vader's face was covered in faint scars. Though of course the scar next to his right eye was still visible along with a clawing scar on the top left of the head and another set on the left cheek. Vader still wore most of the suit from Luke's vision.

"What happened to you?" Anakin asked. "How did you . . . how did I . . . " He undid his arms and just gestured to Vader. "How did I become this?" Vader's expression darkened at once.

"Do not like what you see? What you become?" he growled.

"No," Anakin replied instantly. "I'd like to prevent it from happening."

"You can not," Vader said. There was a weight to those words. They were heavy and dark.

"I will not fall to the Dark Side. I will not become a Sith. I will not become . . . you. I will stop it."

"You can not," Vader said again. His words more of a growl this time. He raised one of his gloved fingers and pointed at him. "This is the only path. The only way. You cannot escape it."

"There is always another way. I will find it."

Vader huffed and turned sharply away from Anakin and marched away. His cape snapping at his back. Vader was wrong. There was a way to prevent him from falling. He wouldn't become Darth Vader. But how much time did he have? Luke said he was raised by his aunt and uncle. That he was told his father died before he was born. Was that when it happened? That only gave Anakin a few months.

"Wait," Anakin said. "Luke said he was raised by his aunt and uncle on Tatooine . . . that they were moisture farmers. Was his talking about the Lars? Why did you let that happen?"

Vader sharply turned around. His finger was up pointing accusingly at Anakin. "He was stolen!" he shouted. "I had no idea he lived! If I had known, I would have given him the whole galaxy!"

"Stolen . . . ?" Anakin asked in a whisper. "What do you mean?" His voice was getting louder with each word. Now he was shouting. "What do you mean he was stolen? How did you let that happen?"

Vader marched back over to Anakin. "You want to know why you fall?" he hissed. "You will lose everything. Everything. Everyone will betray and leave you. They will take your newborn son and hide him away from you. They will lie to you saying the baby died. They will lie to the boy saying his father died. Then they will feed the boy more lies so they could make him into a weapon to kill his father."

As Vader had talked, the room had grown colder and colder.

"When Kenobi," he spat the name with such a strong vehemence, that it caused a chill to run through Anakin, "betrays you, fights you, leaves you for dead, steals your child, and goes into hiding, I suggest the first place you look for him is on Tatooine."
Quiet fell across the room. Anakin was taking short small breaths. They were calm and even, but it
wasn't enough air. He needed more air.

"Obi... Obi-Wan?" Anakin finally managed to get out.

"Did you not hear me? I said everyone will betray you. But none more than Kenobi."

"... And Padmé?" Anakin asked. Vader stilled. His shoulders lowered. His eyes widened just a
small amount. Than he looked nervously away. "And Padmé?" Anakin demanded this time. "What
of her? Does she also betray and leave me? Why... wasn't Luke with her?"

Vader's lips dipped down into a deep frown. Anakin noticed the Sith's hands ball into tight fists. A
sign he knew all too well. Vader was having a hard time with his emotions.

"What happened to her?" Anakin said as he quickly covered the distance separating the two. He
grabbed Vader's arm. Yellow eyes instantly fell on Anakin. "No way she would let her baby get
stolen." Vader jerked his arm out of Anakin's grasp and took two steps away from him. "Wait... when you said you didn't know he lived... They told you he died when he was a newborn..."

Ice spread completely over Anakin. It clawed at his heart and pulled it down deep inside of him.
There was a deep dark pit there. No, he thought. It could not be. Painfully, slowly his eyes met
Vader's. The yellow eyes had softened just a bit. Not as angry, but sad.

"What happened to her?" Anakin whispered. "Please... tell me..." His words were weak and
pitiful.

"She dies," Vader said. His words still dark, but not longer as sharp.

"No. No. No!" Anakin shouted the last one. "I can't... I can't live without her! How... how did
she die? How could you let that happen?"

"I did everything I could!" Vader shouted.

"Clearly it wasn't enough!" Anakin shouted back.

"You think you can stop it?" Vader roared.

"I can! I won't let her die! Tell me how it happens!"

Vader took in a sharp breath of air. "She..." He looked away uncomfortably. "She... I..." His
head looked up. "I was told... I was lied to... I thought for so long... that I..." Vader looked
away unable to meet Anakin's gaze.

"That you killed her?" Anakin asked finishing Vader's sentence. Vader looked back at Anakin.

"Yes," he said. "But it was just another lie. She lived. She had to. At least long enough to give
birth."

The ice still kept Anakin frozen, but his eyes still moved. He couldn't stand to look at Vader, so he
glanced down at the grated floor. How did this all of this happen? Padmé dead. Obi-Wan betrayed

"Why?"

Anakin looked up, and Vader was looking right at him. Anakin realized it was he who had spoken.
"Why?" he asked again. "Why did you think you killed her?"

Vader said nothing. Did nothing. He stood there unmoving.

"Why?" Anakin shouted again. "Tell me! What did you do? And don't tell me that it is the only way! Why else would you be here? At this time in your past?" Still Vader said nothing. "If there is one thing for you to change, it must be this! She must live!"

"Then you fall to the Dark Side," Vader said slowly.

"What would make you become a Sith?" Luke's words echoed around Anakin. "You don't think there is anything in your life that could be better? That you could change with power? What are you so afraid of?"

Slowly Anakin's blue eyes rose to meet Vader's yellow. Anakin's eyes were wide. He understood now. Not all of it. There were still so many questions. So many things he hadn't worked out, but he understood the root of it. Vader said nothing, but slowly he nodded his head confirming the thoughts in Anakin's head. The words that were left unsaid but hung heavy in the air.

Anakin Skywalker fell to the Dark Side trying to save his wife.

Suddenly, the ice washed away. There was a fire burning inside of him. He balled his fists up as he had seen Vader do moments ago.

"I will save her," Anakin said glaring at Vader, daring him to say something. "And I will not fall."
Anakin Skywalker stood staring defiantly at Darth Vader in the Force vision in the Bespin carbon-freezing chamber. There was a righteous fire burning in Skywalker's blue eyes. He stood straight and tall, though the Jedi still fell short of the Sith. He was so full of faith and determination that he could save Padmé. That he would do it where Vader had failed.

Vader wanted to punch the young idiot.

How dare that fool. He knew none of the lengths Vader had gone through to save her. What he had damned himself to. Vader could recall himself kneeling in Palpatine's office as he first swore himself to the Sith as long as Sidious could save Padmé. How he had spared no one in the Jedi Temple. None of them mattered. The masters, the knights, the padawans... not even the younglings. They were all better off dead, especially if it meant Padmé lived. As long as she was still there when the galaxy burned and was left to ashes, it was all ok.

Yet it had all been for nothing. Nothing. She had died. He had failed. She was gone. Even then he had tried to bring her back from the dead. He would save her...

"Padmé. I'm here. Take my hand," he said to her. His hand held out to her. "Come with me. I can save you. I can save both of us."

He could still see her beautiful apparition standing there. The white flowers in her hair. The wind blowing her curls.

"Please," he had begged. "We have to go."

"Why? I don't know you. Anakin Skywalker is dead."

He had failed to bring her back. He had learned an important lesson. A hard truth. There was no saving her. No matter what he did, Padmé would die. The Republic would fall. The Empire would rise. Darth Vader would be born when Anakin Skywalker died.

Vader's yellow eyes landed back on Skywalker. There was a tenseness to him as if he was daring Vader to say something. Vader scowled and sharply turned away from the Jedi. There was a smug wave of victory in the Force, as if Anakin thought he had won some silent battle of wills between the two. Vader sharply turned back to the fool and-

Suddenly the chamber filled with white blinding steam. It whitened out everything around him except for Skywalker, who stood unblocked by the clouds.

"What are you doing?" Vader growled.

"What am I doing? What are you doing?" Skywalker snapped back.

"This is not my vision, it is yours."

"I'm not doing anything."

The white steam started to ebb away. Vader could just make out the blurry silhouettes of skyscrapers and the streaking lines of speeder traffic. It appeared as if they were on a rooftop on Coruscant.

"I do not accept failure."
Vader spun at once. He knew that voice. That raspy voice. The voice of Darth Sidious. There was a blurry figure standing a bit away from Vader. The figure was tall and humanoid. They were clearly looking down at a comlink on their wrist. The blue glow of a holograph could be seen, but it was too blurry to make out who it was. Vader heard Skywalker walk up next to him.

"There won't be any," a female voice said. Vader heard a soft click and the glow of the holograph disappeared. The woman bent down and picked up a long rifle. Then she disappeared into the blurry steam of the vision.

"Friend of yours?" Skywalker asked.

"No," Vader said.

A small silence fell over them. Out of the corner of his eye, Vader saw Skywalker cross his arms across his chest. "An enemy then," Skywalker mused. Vader didn't answer, yet that silence spoke for itself. "Who have you already managed to piss off to the point they're hiring bounty hunters?" Vader turned his head and glowered down at Skywalker, who only smiled back up.

Vader started walking and as he did so he pushed with the Force. This time the Force started to let go of him. He was leaving the vision. Behind him he heard Skywalker shouting.

"Hey! We weren't done talking! You never told me how she dies!"

But Vader didn't turn back, and Skywalker's voice slowly faded away as did the vision. It wasn't long before Vader was back in his real body standing in his apartment. He stood staring out a window. Night was falling. The sky was turning purple. The glow of the city planet lit up the skyline.

So Sidious was stooping to hiring bounty hunters. Really? Bounty hunters? Against a Sith Lord? He was desperate. But then again considering the history of the Separatists who used bounty hunters quite a bit in their schemes, it wasn't that surprising. It was no matter to Vader. He could bare whatever Sidious had to throw at him, especially in this time.

Vader's gaze focused on the Jedi Temple in the distance.

_That boy_, he said to himself. _That foolish boy. He is trying to change the past._

Vader needed to get his son away from the Jedi and soon. Either he needed the Jedi to freely hand over the boy or for Luke to leave on his own . . . or both . . . Vader started to walk through his apartment. He felt restless. Though it wasn't long before he found himself standing at a window again, but this time he wasn't looking at the Jedi Temple. This view was of a different skyline of Coruscant. His eyes easily fell on a certain high rise. He looked at the top where the penthouse apartment would be.

He found himself standing here as much as he did at the other window. Perhaps a bit more if he was honest at himself. Looking towards . . . Looking towards her. She was there. Not just an apparition. Not a figment. But truly there.

If he reached out into the Force he swore he could feel her. She wasn't Force sensitive. She didn't glow brightly in the Force like Jedi did. She blended in with the millions of other life forms of the planet. But perhaps it was the tiny Force-strong baby growing inside her, but there was a soft light that stood out amongst all the others. Just a tiny bit.

She wasn't dead. Yet. He hadn't failed. Yet. Destiny hadn't claimed her fate.
He took a step closer to the window. He recalled Skywalker's determination. His blind and arrogant faith in himself that he was strong enough to save her. If only he knew how. And he would give everything, *everything*, to find the way.

But there was no way to save her. Sidious had lied.

Again he stepped closer to the window. He stood right in front of it. He placed a gloved hand against the transparisteel. She was at home. So close . . .

*I don't know you. Anakin Skywalker is dead.*

His hand snapped away from the glass.

"I don't know you anymore. Anakin, you're breaking my heart."

Yes, she wouldn't know him . . . He was . . .

*Anakin Skywalker is dead.*

He was Darth Vader. Dark Lord of the Sith. The Supreme Commander of the Imperial Forces. Second in Command of the Galactic Empire.

An Empire that didn't even exist here . . .

"I will save her. And I will not fall." Skywalker's words rang in his ears. What did that Jedi know?

He would fall. He would! There was no other way for Anakin Skywalker to save Padmé.

"Why else would you be here? At this time in your past? If there is one thing for you to change, it must be this! She must live!"

For you to change . . . Not Anakin but Vader.

Anakin Skywalker would fail, but what of Darth Vader?

Vader looked out across the lights and buildings to that certain apartment building. He caught his hand going back up to the window and he snatched it down. He balled his hands into fists. His thoughts were wandering! He should be focused on Luke and returning back to their own time. He should be looking into the Sith artifacts . . .

Ones he had no idea what they held. Knowledge Sidious had withheld from Vader. What if there was an answer on how to save her there? If the Force could bring Vader and Luke back in time, surely it could save her.

He scowled and tightened his fists. His leather gloves creaked. This is why he needed to get his son and leave this planet. From this place. From this time. From her. From the pain she brought his heart.

He turned sharply and marched back towards the other end of the apartment. He came back to the window that overlooked the Jedi Temple. Yes, he should focus on Luke. His son . . . Her son . . .


"Hmmm," Vader hummed to himself as a plan formed in his mind.
It would be best for Luke to be with him willingly to make sure he didn't run back to the Jedi. And perhaps Vader had been thinking too grandly. He had been thinking of dealing with the whole Jedi Order. He didn't need to deal with them all. All he needed was for one Jedi to hand over Luke. Luckily Vader had just thought of the perfect thing to use as a bargaining chip against a foolish Jedi and wishful child.

And it finally gave him an excuse to see her.
Night had fallen on Coruscant. Anakin was thankful that he had the night free. A council meeting was scheduled in the morning for an update on the Sith situation and investigation. Luckily that gave him a few hours to think. A few hours he needed. There was a lot to think about.

After the Force vision with Vader, Anakin had gone to Luke's room. He wanted to talk to Luke. His . . . son . . . Anakin had made it to Luke's room, but just stood outside. He could feel Luke's annoyance and anger humming in the Force. Clearly he had yet to get over their conversation from earlier. In the end he was unable to bring himself to press the door panel button. Perhaps it was for the best that Anakin waited until he had properly digested all the new things he had learned.

It was not that he wasn't ready to face Luke as his future son. That he didn't even know what to say. How was he going to bring that topic up? Once he did, what would he say? It was an odd feeling knowing Luke was his son, but the boy was now grown. The two were the same age. How should Anakin act around him?

He would eventually have to talk to Luke. Vader hadn't given Anakin all the answers he wanted. Anakin had to find out how Padmé died. How could he save the future? Because the more Anakin replayed Luke's words, the more he realized the future was a bleak one. Anakin fallen to the Sith, Padmé dead, Obi-Wan betrayed Anakin and secreted Luke away, and the empire. Luke said he was a rebel who fought against an empire. An empire where Darth Vader was second in command.

Did that mean the Republic lost the war? But even so how did an empire come to be? And who was the emperor? Dooku? Anakin could not imagine bowing to that man. And how would the Republic lose so completely? The war was currently going in the Republic's favor. Most of the war was now in the outer rim as Republic forces fought against the last few stubborn hold outs.

Anakin was missing something. There was something coming. Something big and drastic. Something that would alter the course of the galaxy. It would result in Anakin Skywalker becoming Darth Vader. It would cause an empire to be born. There was a heavy feeling of foreboding weighing on Anakin. Whatever was coming, was coming soon. He would have to talk to Luke and hopefully Vader again. He had to stop this.

He told himself he needed time to work through all these thoughts, but he couldn't stop the anxiety that kept clawing at his heart. There was a single cold thought racing through his mind over and over again: Padmé will die. He had to go to her. To see her. He had to make sure everything was fine and ok. The horrible future of Darth Vader had yet to happen, and it would never happen.

Padmé was already dressed for bed when he got there. She wore a simple white nightgown that flowed freely around her. The moment he saw her, Anakin was at her side, placing his hands on her hips and pulling her towards him. Their lips met as they shared a short kiss.

"So," she said as her hands slid down his arms. A shiver ran up his spine at her touch. "Are you going to tell me?"

"Tell you?"

"About your investigation with the Sith? What you needed my DNA for? And who is this Luke the Sith is after?"

"Oh," Anakin said awkwardly. It felt like the event of being at her office had happened a lifetime ago.
ago instead of a few hours. "Ah yeah. That."

"Yes, that," Padmé said as she took a step back out of his reach. Anakin missed the feel of her warmth at once. He bit back a disappointed groan. Padmé crossed her arms across her chest.

"Luke is this kid, well he's not really a kid. He's the same age as me," Anakin explained. He could feel his cheeks starting to burn. "And uh his father is the Sith lord who attacked the Temple. He was after his son."

"Then why did this Sith attack the chancellor? Why did he know I was pregnant?"

"All good questions," Anakin mumbled. "Not sure I have the answers to all of them, but I think the attack on the Chancellor was a diversion so he could sneak into the Temple to get his son without being noticed."

Padmé let out a breath and slowly walked back into Anakin's arms. "Ani," she said softly. At once his hands were tightening around her.

"It's going to be ok," he whispered. "I don't think any harm will come to you or the baby."

"How can you be so sure?" she whispered back. Her head rested against his chest.

"I just know. I don't think I can explain it, but I don't think this Sith would harm you."

"But he already killed so many," Padmé said as she looked up at him. Her warm brown eyes were filled with fear and concern. "And you . . . And you . . ."

He leaned down and caught her lips at once. She leaned into the kiss eagerly. He placed his forehead against hers. "Let's not talk about the Sith anymore," he whispered. Her mouth turned down in a cute little pout. "Let's talk about the baby," he offered.

"The baby?"

"Yeah," he said as he put his flesh hand against her stomach. It was still flat, or perhaps there was just the smallest hint of bump there. "I think he's going to be wonderful."

"He?" she said smiling.

"Yeah, he. He'll look just like his dad. Blonde hair. Blue eyes. My chin. But you'll still see his mother in him like when he's angry and he scrunches up his nose."

"I don't do that!" she said as she scrunched up her nose. Anakin let out a small laugh.

"He'll be a pilot," he continued. "I'm sure a really good pilot."

"Mmmhmmm," Padmé said. "Well I'm sure our daughter will look just like her mother with long brown curly hair and brown eyes. But you'll still see her father in her like when she's angry and she balls up her hands into fists at her side. She'll be a politician. A really good one."

Anakin wrapped his arms around his wife's waist and picked her up. Her twirled her around. She laughed as her arms wrapped around his neck.

"So you think it's going to be a girl?" he asked as he stopped and placed her gently on the floor.

"I hadn't given it much thought until you started talking about how it might be a boy," she said.
"It is a boy," Anakin corrected with a smile.

"Oh? And how do you know this Anakin Skywalker? The Force?"

"Something like that," he said as leaned in and gave her a quick kiss.

"Well the mommy Force in me says it's a girl," she said defiantly.

"And the daddy Force doesn't count?"

"The daddy Force doesn't actually have to do any of the work for the baby. If anyone knows this baby, it's me."

"Hey, I helped make the baby!" Anakin said putting on a fake pouting face. Padmé was unamused.

"Mmmhmm."

He couldn't help but laugh, and she laughed as well. Her laugh was a beautiful wonderful sound. He loved the way her eyes twinkled and her curls bounced as her laughter shook her. But his joy was cut short. He recalled what he had learned.

"Pad . . . Padmé," he said a bit uncertain.

"Yes?"

"Have you . . . Have you gone to see any doctors? About the baby? To see if everything is fine?"

She looked down. "No," she said. "I . . . I . . . what would I say to them when they asked about the father?" She looked back up at him. "I couldn't tell them the truth. What if they told someone? What would happen to us? Our careers?"

He sighed. She was right. If the truth came out he would be expelled from the Order. No doubt Padmé's political adversaries would use anything to run a smear campaign against her. It made sense that she had yet gone to a doctor . . . But . . . Was this how he had thought? Is this what Vader thought in this same moment in his own past?

"I think you should," Anakin said. "Just to be sure."

"Do you think something is wrong?" Padmé said.

"No," he lied. "But I just want what's best for you and the baby. Maybe we can find a medical droid. Use a fake name. I just . . . I can't lose you Padmé."

She tilted her head. "You're not going to lose me," she said.

His flesh hand slid around her neck and up into her curls. "I need you," he whispered. "The baby needs you." He thought of Luke growing up on Tatooine without either parent. "And Padmé?" She looked at him. "If something happens to me or . . . or to you, promise me one thing? Our son will never grow up on Tatooine. Anywhere. Anywhere else."

"Tatooine?" she said. "What has gotten into you Anakin?" She paused. "It's this Sith business isn't it?" He only nodded quietly unable to tell her the truth. "Our daughter will not grow up on Tatooine. Nothing is going to happen to me. Nothing is going to happen to you."

"And you're going to go to a doctor to make sure of that," Anakin said. Padmé sighed.
"Fine," she agreed. "We'll find a *discrete* doctor."

"Thank you," he said as he leaned down to kiss her again, but his lips never touched hers. That's when he heard the blaster shot followed by the sound of glass shattering. Then the pain exploded into the Force.

"Padmé!" he shouted. He was on the ground. The pain stabbed at him all around. It wasn't his pain. It was . . . Oh Force. Padmé.

"Anakin? Anakin!" she shouted. She was leaning over him. Her face completely etched in fear. "What's wrong? Anakin?"

His eyes looked wildly around. There was no blaster burn on Padmé. No shot. No blood. He looked at the windows. Nothing. They were whole. Then what-

His thoughts were cut off as anger sliced through his mind. It was cold and sharp and almost seemed to burn. It was also dark. A deep thick darkness.

*Vader,* Anakin realized.

"Anakin?" Padmé continued to ask.

He still didn't answer her. What was that shot? Where? Who? Had it been Vader? His comlink went off and he absentmindedly brought it up.

"Skywalker," he said into the com.


There was a buzzing in his ears. He didn't hear what came next. Not from Obi-Wan. Not from Padmé. Just the high pitched ringing.

It was Luke.

The shot. The pain. Vader's anger.

*It was Luke.*
Chapter 27

Luke paced around the small bedroom. His hands were clasped behind his back. His eyes kept darting to the window. He still wasn't used to the neverending city of this planet. He had been to a few large cities, but nothing compared to Imperi- No. Coruscant. It was still Coruscant. Yes, this was the past. The Empire had yet to rise. The Jedi had yet to be eradicated. And Anakin Skywalker had yet to become Darth Vader.

Anakin Skywalker . . . Luke thought back to the conversation he had with his younger father.

"He's a Sith," Anakin had said of Vader. "They only care about power. He's only interested in you joining him in the Dark Side. To make himself more powerful."

Was that all Vader saw Luke as? A tool to overthrow the Emperor? A way to gather more power?

"I am not strong enough," Vader had said of himself killing the Emperor. But surely . . . surely there was more than that. There was something there inside Vader. There was a light in him. Anakin Skywalker was overflowing with light, but that same light was inside Vader. It was faint. It was small, but it was there. Luke was sure of it. Plus Vader had said that when he found out Luke's mother was pregnant, it was one of the happiest moments of his life. Surely that meant, that just maybe, Vader actually cared for Luke.

Luke just wished he knew what to do. Should he tell Anakin the truth? Should he warn those of the past of the future? Would it change the future for the better or perhaps for the worse? And if it did change, what would become of Luke? It was all too much. He walked over to the window and eyed the distant traffic lighting up the dark skies.

He sighed. He wanted to be flying. He wanted to feel his heart pound in his chest as he pulled a few G's doing daring turns and sharp drops. Flying always made him feel better. So did his friends. His friends . . . he missed them. He so badly wanted to talk to Leia or Han or even Wedge. He just wanted someone he could lean on. He felt so alienated here. So alone.

He also felt on edge. The sensation had been growing as the day had worn on. Perhaps he was dreading the next conversation with Anakin or perhaps Vader. A few Jedi had come in and talked to him after lunch. They wanted to know more about Darth Vader, and Luke told them very little. The Jedi were getting a bit frustrated with him. Perhaps that was the anxiety he was feeling.

Luke scoffed and marched away from the window deeper into the room. What should he do? What did he want? He paused as he considered these questions. What did he want? He wanted to meet his mother. He wanted to save his father. He didn't want him to become Darth Vader. But Luke didn't know how to save Anakin. He had no clue why Anakin had become a Sith in the first place.

His anxiety was growing. There was a pain in his chest as his heart beat faster and faster, and it grew more painful. As if there were needles poking into his heart. Was he going to have a panic attack? Luke ran a hand through his hair.

What he really wanted was to be home. Home was no longer a place for him, but more of a feeling when he was with Leia and Han or amongst the Rogue Squadron. He wanted to be back in his own time. Dealing with the enormity of the Empire seemed simpler than time travel. The goal was straight forward. Destroy the Empire. Restore the Republic. There were no deep thoughts or concerns about time and changing history. So how does he get back? With Vader? With the Jedi? He got here in his X-Wing, perhaps he needed to get a ship.
His body was tightly wound. He felt squeezed. His hair on the back of his neck stood on end. He should meditate. He needed to calm down. He needed to move. Move. Right now!

It felt as if everything was in slow motion. He saw the blaster bolt burn a hole into the transparisteel. He saw the lines of cracks race and grow out of the hole in the window. He saw the red bolt hurtling toward him. Everything around him was screaming. MOVE! He tried to go to the right, but his whole body was slow. Too slow. The red bolt was on its path straight for him. He wasn't going to be able to get free.

It had truly been a matter of seconds since the shot burst through the window and hit Luke. At once pain exploded and burned through him. He hit the floor with a thud. He was stunned. He just laid there. Pain raced through almost every part of him. Sharp razors filled his blood and cut through his whole body. He could feel warm blood pooling around him. Deep thumps of footsteps were heard as someone ran up to him and knelt by his side. There were sounds that were possibly someone speaking, but Luke heard none of it. The pain was easing away and he was growing tired.

He closed his eyes and it felt so good to do so. He was so tired. Tired of the past. Tired of dealing with Anakin and Vader. He just wanted to be home. And if he closed his eyes . . . perhaps it would be like he was home. It was quiet and so comfortable . . .

Anakin rushed through the Temple towards the healing halls. But the entire time there was a coldness snapping at him. A sharp constant rapping on a door inside of Anakin's mind. Vader. Somehow the two now had a Force bond, a connection. Anakin made sure that the door Vader kept pounding on was well shut and secured.

Anakin found Obi-Wan in the healing halls. "What happened?" Anakin asked.

Obi-Wan looked tired with dark circles under his eyes. His hair looked unkempt. "Looks like it was an assassination attempt," Obi-Wan said.


"No," Obi-Wan said. "They were on a speeder. Shot a blaster bolt right through Luke's window."

"Is he ok?" Anakin said surprised to find his voice came out as a whisper.

"He is with the healers now. The bolt went into his neck. My guess is this assassin was aiming for the head and Luke just barely managed to dodge it."

A cold chill washed over Anakin. None of this was making any sense. Who wanted Luke dead and why? The kid had been here in this time only a week.

"We do have some security footage," Obi-Wan was explaining, "of the speeder with two passengers inside . . ."

Anakin wasn't listening. He needed answers and there was only one person who may have them. "Excuse me, Obi-Wan," he said to his old master as he took a few steps away. Slowly he opened the door inside of his mind and welcomed the cold and the dark in.

"Skywalker, Vader growled in the Force. My son. What have you Jedi scum done to my son?"

"We Jedi are saving your son, Anakin barked back. This was an assassination attempt. Someone on a speeder shot at him through a window."
Is he . . .

Going to make it? Currently, but he is still undergoing treatment with the healers.

Anakin could feel the relief that flooded out of Vader. However, it was quickly pushed away as fear and anger came roaring back along the shared Force connection.

An assassin? Vader asked.

Yes, an assassin, Anakin responded. Who would want to kill Luke? If you two are time travelers then no one should know him here unless you've already involved him in some Sith trouble.

I have not involved him in- But Vader suddenly cut himself off. A tense silence fell along the Force bond.

Vader? Anakin asked. What have you done?

Why was Anakin not surprised? With all that he had learned about Darth Vader, it was no surprise that he was already mixed up in something.

The bounty hunter, Vader hissed.

The what?

The bounty hunter. The one we saw in the Force vision on the rooftop speaking to Sidious. I thought Sidious had hired them to come after me. It was Luke! Luke was the mark!

Burning cold anger lashed out in the Force. Anakin withdrew as much as he could from Vader without breaking their bond.

Who is Sidious? Anakin asked.

My Sith master, Vader said.

And why does he want Luke dead?

Because he does not like when things do not fit into his perfectly formed plans. My arrival to this time has upset the order of the Dark Side. I am not welcomed here. I am an enemy.

And if they can't get at you, they went after the thing you were after, Anakin figured.

I warned him, Vader hissed. I warned him not to touch Luke!

Who? Your Sith master? Do you know who he is? Is he a Sith known here in this time? Is he Dooku's master? The one running the war? Anakin pushed.

He had only briefly thought about who a twisted version of Anakin would bow and swear allegiance to in the Dark Side. But was this the other Sith the Republic and the Jedi were looking for? The mastermind behind the Separatists and this war? But then he felt the connection close off from Vader's end. The bond went still and quiet.

"Kriff," Anakin cursed. Again he was left with questions after talking with Vader. But perhaps the most worrying question was, what was Vader going to do now?
Vader stood on the quiet and dark veranda of Padmé's apartment. He had pulled the hood of his borrowed Jedi robe down low over his face. He was tense and poised to move at the smallest sound. He hadn't expected to come here this soon. But then Sidious had targeted Luke. The pain that had washed over Vader had sent him to his knees. He ran to his speeder, and it was only while he was on his way to the Temple that he realized what he was doing. He'd already tried fighting his way through the Temple once.

He was torn. Luke! But he wouldn't be able to get him. Not without carving his way through the Jedi. Not without risking the Jedi moving Luke elsewhere. So he turned the speeder around, but he still wanted to know what had happened to his son. He dove into the Force and found something new there. A new connection that connected him to Skywalker.

After he heard what happened... He was angry. He almost damaged his speeder. A few nearby speeders hadn't been spared his rage as they went careening out of control. He had warned Sidious not to touch his son! He would pay. But first he needed to secure Luke, so he found himself here.

He slowly moved deeper in the apartment. His eyes raked over everything. Each small detail. It was just as he remembered it. It wasn't the bare apartment as he had last seen it after her family had come and cleaned it out after her death. Nothing left of her except memories. He had stood there and wallowed in his grief, which turned to anger. His anger fueled the Dark Side which he unleashed on the apartment. He destroyed it with his rage alone.

But this apartment was still whole. The finely made curved furniture was still there. The small nods of Nubian culture were scattered around. The Naboo emblem could be seen scattered around as motifs in the wood or sewn into the curtains. There were a few statues of Shiraya, the Naboo goddess Padmé worshipped, tucked away on end tables next to vases of fresh flowers.

There was so little security. He had easily gained access to the landing pad using old codes he had easily remembered. The codes Skywalker would also use. Perhaps the security system thought he was Skywalker... He let out a small huff of air. Best not to let himself think further on that.

He paused as he found himself in the sitting room before her bedroom. He eyed the curved yellow sofas. He recalled often waiting for her to come home from the senate while sitting here. His eyes went to the balcony where she would often go to gaze at the city planet. He would often come out there just to watch her.

"I've never been so happy as I am in this moment," he recalled himself saying to his wife as she brushed her hair on the balcony.

"Ani?"

His head snapped up to see... to see... her. Padmé. She was here. She was dressed in a simple white nightgown. Her curls were loose and cascaded down around her shoulders.

"Is everything alright?" she asked as she started to walk forward. "After you fell down, you were so pale. Then you rushed off so suddenly." Her voice was thick with concern. "Is it the Sith? Has he..."

Her voice trailed off. She had stopped only a few steps away. Her eyes quickly darted over his form. She had finally recognized this was not Skywalker. This person was too tall. The skin too pale once
she was able to see it. She took a step back.

"Who- who are you?" she asked. Her eyes quickly darted to the side, back towards her bedroom.

"Pad . . . mé . . ." he said slowly. Awkwardly. The name he had barely spoken in years. Decades. But her eyes didn't soften. They hardened instead. Her body grew tense. She started to step away slowly.

"Who are you?" she asked again. This time her voice was steady. There was an underlying current of fear, but she was also brave and demanding.

Vader started to walk forward. He raised a hand.

"Padmé," he said again. "I . . ."

"It's you, isn't it?" she asked. "The Sith?"

He didn't answer. He didn't want to answer. He didn't want to see the fear that would spread across her face when he told her the truth. He kept approaching, and she kept stepping away.

"Leave," she ordered as she backed into her bedroom. She turned her head. He knew what she was looking at. The drawer she kept a blaster in. He took another step forward, and she turned and rushed for the drawer. She ripped the blaster out, expertly leveled it, and shot. He was ready. He met the bolt with his gloved hand. It bounced off and into the wall leaving a smoldering hole.

Her eyes widened, and he could sense her preparing to shoot again. With a sharp tug of the Force, he ripped the blaster out of her hand and into his.

"Padmé," he said again. This time his voice was more even. Steady. He was getting over the shock of seeing her alive and well. "You are in danger."

"Yes, clearly," she snapped back. "If only this danger would leave my room and apartment."

"I would not-" he started to shout. He would never hurt her, but he knew that was a lie. He had hurt her. He took a deep breath. "I will not hurt you." She did not recognize the importance of these words. It was a promise to her and himself. He would not harm her. Not again. Not ever. She paused. Her eyes narrowed. She looked at him cautiously.

"Who are you?" she asked. "Why are you here? What danger am I in? And why do you know about me?"

"A Sith," she hissed softly.

"Yes, but . . ." Why was this so hard? What could he say?

"Leave," she barked. Her eyes were set with a fire of determination. She wasn't going to cower or beg. It only made his heart thaw. Force, she had always been so brave. She had never backed down. The only time he had ever seen her truly scared was . . .
I don't know you anymore. Anakin, you're breaking my heart.

"You are coming with me," he said. It was probably the wrong way to bring this up. She only grew angrier.

"I will be going nowhere with you," she said.

"I am trying to help you."

"I do not need your help."

"Then you will die!" He hadn't meant to shout, but he had. She had jumped from his outburst. Her eyes grew wide. A moment of fear took her, but at once she was back in control. She would have made a fine Jedi.

"I will die?" she asked. "From what? From whom? You?"

"No, I," he croaked but couldn't finish. His throat felt tight. He couldn't breath. "No . . . I . . . will . . . I didn't mean to . . . Please, Padmé."

Her eyes darted to the closet and the dresser. She only hesitated a minute before she ran towards them. Did she have a second blaster? But he caught her by the arm. She spun and at once was pushing at his chest and kicking at his legs. However she quickly stopped the later when she flinched from hitting the metal prosthetic legs.

"Let go!" she shouted. "Let me go!" She pulled and twisted.

"Stop," he said. "You are only going to hurt yourself."

But she didn't stop.

"Padmé," he pleaded, but she wasn't listening. "Stop. Please. Just stop! Just *sleep*!"

Her thrashing started to die down. Her movements were becoming sluggish. Her eyes were fighting to stay open. When her eyes were open, they were unfocused.

"Ana . . . Anakin," she whispered as finally the Force suggestion took hold. He collected her in his arms. He couldn't help but stare. She was real. He was holding her. Touching her. Feeling her! She was real. She was *alive*.

He untangled one hand and gently brushed the curls from her face. "I am here," he whispered to her.
Luke was trying to sleep. He had been placed in a small windowless med room. He knew outside his door a Jedi was always standing guard. At least they gave him some privacy, but every now and then a healer would come in and check on him. He was also glad they hadn't bugged him too much with questioning. So far all the questions had been about his health and how he was feeling. Though the dark skinned Jedi and Master Yoda did stop by. They asked if Luke knew anything about who shot him. If he was in his own time, that would have been an easy question to answer. But he had no clue who wanted him dead in this time.

For now he just wanted to sleep. His neck and shoulder still hurt where the bolt had grazed him. Luke closed his eyes and tried to let his mind go quiet, but his mind was a hive of activity. There was a pressure growing inside of him. He tried to ignore it, but it seemed to be pressing harder and harder. A cold wave seemed to hit him, and he shivered. He wanted an extra blanket, but didn't want to move or call someone in.

He curled up and pulled his blanket tighter. The pressure seemed was cold as well, but it was also familiar. Briefly Luke thought of Hoth and the never ending cold that came with that place. But no, this cold didn't completely match up to Hoth. (No cold matched up to Hoth.) It also wasn't the cold of space, which was nothing but a void that sucked all heat away. No, this cold pressing against him was gentle. It reminded him a bit of when the suns finally set on Tatooine, and finally the heat of the desert died down. Slowly the coolness of the night would creep in.

His mind wandered back to that time and place. Of the sound of the generator being shut off for the night. The sand gently blowing down into the courtyard. The distant baying of banthas echoing across the flats. His aunt shouting goodnight to him from the courtyard.

Thinking of Tatooine was apparently relaxing. He could feel his mind drifting away . . .


His eyes snapped open with a sharp breath. The cold was still there, but this time much stronger. Now he realized where he recognized it from. Vader. It was the same when he had talked to him through the Force as Luke fled Bespin on the Falcon.

"Luke, are you . . . are you well?" Vader's voice was hesitant. It was unlike him.

"Yes," Luke moaned. He wasn't sure how he could speak back in the Force. But saying it loud seemed to do the trick.

"Good, Vader said a bit awkwardly. Was this his attempt at comfort? "Luke, it is not safe for you to stay at the Temple any longer. You need to leave."

"I think it's pretty safe," Luke whispered into his pillow.

"You were shot!" Vader's anger brought a fresh wave of sharp coldness. Luke shivered.

"You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"
It was a bounty hunter hired by Sidious.

"Sidious? You mean . . . wait . . . the Emperor?"

Yes.

"But . . . how? Why? He shouldn't know anything about me!"

It has little to do with you, Vader said. His tone seemed to have softened some. I angered him when I stole from him. He was trying to get back at me.

"You should have thought about that before you stole from him," Luke mumbled.


"Of course you would say that. And where should I go?"

You will come with me, Vader said matter-of-factly.

"And then what?" Luke asked.

We find a way back to our time.

"Do . . . do you think that's even possible?" Luke whispered.

Vader was silent for a long time. I do not know, he responded truthfully. But it was through the Force we came to be here. It is through the Force we will go home.

"Haven't you ever thought we came here for a reason? That the Force wanted us to change things?"

Luke, Vader said annoyed. We can have these discussions later. For now you need to leave. Sidious may not be the Emperor yet, but he still has a lot of power both as the Chancellor and as a Sith lord. He has say over the Jedi Order. He will not shy away from using it. I fear he may ask you be transferred away from the Temple. You cannot allow yourself to fall into his clutches.

Luke shivered, but this time it was not from the cold.

You need to leave soon. The longer you wait, the more time Sidious has to pull together a legal reason to get you out of the Temple.

"And how am I supposed to do that?" Luke asked. "There is a Jedi always guarding my door now."

There was a slight pause before Vader spoke again. After how many times you avoided and escaped from Imperial capture, I would think you would be well versed in getting out of places you do not wish to be in.

Luke let out a small laugh. Vader did have a point there. But then Luke let out a long sigh. What Vader said made sense, but should Luke go to Vader? Was there anywhere else to go? There had to be someone. Possibly Mon Mothma or Bail Organa would help. But what would he even say to them?


Yes.

"But-"

*If you wish to meet her, you will leave the Temple and come to me.*

And the coldness and the pressure was gone.


He wasn't sure how long he laid in bed going over what Vader had said. There were no windows in the room, and he had yet to locate the chrono. But he knew some time had passed when the door to his room quietly slid open. Luke was expecting another check-up by a healer. Instead Anakin Skywalker walked in with his dark leather Jedi robes. Luke bit back a groan. Honestly he did not want to see him.

"Hi," Anakin said awkwardly as he walked in. He had half a smile on his face. As if he had started to smile, but stopped before it was a proper smile. "How are you . . . How are you feeling?" Anakin came to a stop right next to Luke's bed.

Luke pushed himself up. There was still pain in his left shoulder and neck, but it was dull compared to the intensity it had been at before.


Anakin just stood there. He shifted his weight and fidgeted with his glove on his right hand nervously. Nervously? What was his nervous about?

"Listen," he said. "I think we got off on the wrong foot. And I . . . I wanted to apologize."

Luke could only stare up at him. He didn't know Anakin. He had two conversations with him. So he didn't know if this was normal for him.

Anakin continued, "I uh . . . Perhaps we should try again?" Silence. "I'm Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker." This time his smile was full and genuine.

A smile tugged on Luke's lips, but he didn't let it grow. He was wary. Part of him wanted desperately to get to know Anakin. But after seeing his mood swings and those hints of darkness lurking below the surface, did he want to? Luke sighed and opened his mouth, but his words died on his lips as the door opened again. Young Ben Kenobi walked in. He smiled and nodded at Luke, but then turned his full attention to Anakin.

"I figured I'd find you in here," Ben said. "The Council meeting is starting."

Anakin cursed under his breath. "I was just on my way," Anakin said straightening up. Ben shot Anakin a disbelieving look. "I was just going over a few last minute details with Luke," Anakin continued.

"Luke, I hope you are feeling better. We must be on our way," Ben said. Anakin let out a disappointed sigh. "Come on, Anakin," Ben said as he made his way to the door. "The Chancellor will be attending the meeting via holo. He requested your presence this morning stating he had new information regarding the Sith. Instead the Council decided it was best he attend the meeting."

The Chancellor was attending the meeting? A shiver ran down Luke's spine as he recalled Vader's

"Ana-Anakin," Luke said. The Jedi stopped and looked over his shoulder. "Good bye and may the Force be with you."

Anakin smiled. It was warm and gentle and completely reached his eyes. Then he walked through the door, which slid shut behind him. Luke only hesitated a minute before he was throwing off his covers, ignoring the pain in his shoulder, and searching for clothes to wear.
Anakin shifted on his feet. He was tired. Exhausted. And the last thing he wanted to be doing was standing in the Council chamber attending this meeting. Each chair of the Council was full though some were occupied by blue holograms. Chancellor Palpatine's hologram projector had been placed in the middle of the room.

The formalities and greetings had just finished, and Master Windu was rambling on about a summary of the events of the past few days. Anakin fought back a yawn as his eyes traveled past the occupied chairs to the windows and the city beyond.

Last night after he had talked to Vader through the Force, Obi-Wan had insisted he go to his room and get sleep. Anakin was going to argue, but Obi-Wan grabbed him by the arm and dragged him out of the healing halls. Obi-Wan accompanied Anakin all the way back to his room. Once inside, Anakin slouched on to the edge of his bed.

"Get some rest, Anakin," Obi-Wan said. "I know how devoted you can be to a project, but exhaustion will benefit no one."

Anakin only weakly nodded and had hoped Obi-Wan would then leave. But he didn't. He stayed. Anakin shifted his weight and stared around his room as he avoided looking at Obi-Wan.

"Anakin is everything alright?" Obi-Wan finally asked. His voice was soft.

Finally Anakin looked back over at his friend. Obi-Wan was slouched just a bit. He must be as tired as Anakin was. Had he even completely healed from his wound from Vader? Anakin wasn't sure what to say. So he said the only thing he could think of.

"Yeah."

Obi-Wan's eyebrows raised. He did not look convinced. Anakin looked down at his lap. What else could he say? The truth. He could tell Obi-Wan the truth. But that included . . . telling him about Padmé, about Luke, and . . . about . . . Vader. It wasn't just Vader. It was about Anakin himself. How would Obi-Wan look at him once he learned Anakin would become a Sith in the future? No. Anakin wouldn't be able to bear that.

A hand fell on Anakin's shoulder. He looked up to see Obi-Wan standing right next to him.

"Anakin," he said. "If you ever need to talk to me, please let me know."

A small silence stretched. Neither one moved. Neither one averted their gaze from the other. "Obi-Wan," Anakin said softly. "Have you ever . . . ever thought about leaving the Order?"

Obi-Wan's eyebrows shot straight up. He pulled his hand off Anakin's shoulder and awkwardly looked around the room in thought. Obi-Wan was the perfect Jedi. There was no way he had ever-

"Yes," Obi-Wan said softly.

It was Anakin's turn to be surprised. "Wha- What? You?"

Obi-Wan turned back to Anakin with a sad smile. "Surely you remember Carmelion IV?"

Anakin nodded and said, "I said I was going to leave the Order."
"And if you had left, I was going to leave as well."

Anakin forgot to take a breath, but finally he opened his mouth. The air rushed in. "What?" he gaped.

"I was not going to break my vow to Qui-Gon," Obi-Wan continued. "The Force currents swirl around you, Anakin. I don't know if you've ever noticed them yourself. You were still young. I knew you still needed guidance at that time. If the Dark Side ever found you, I feared what could happen."

A sharp spike of cold drove right down the center of Anakin. His insides felt squeezed. He was sure he had turned pale.

"I . . . I see . . ." he managed to utter. Obi-Wan walked over and put his hand on Anakin's shoulder again.

"You can still leave," Obi-Wan said in a soft whisper.

"And what of Qui-Gon?"

"I have completed my vow. I have trained you. You are no longer a padawan."

Anakin sighed and looked down at his lap. "It almost feels like I still am a padawan," Anakin muttered.

"We never stop learning, Anakin," Obi-Wan said as he squeezed Anakin's shoulder.

That wasn't what Anakin had meant. How many times had he stood before the Council and been berated? Told he wasn't ready? He was too rash? Too attached? He needed to be more Jedi-like? No matter what he did, no matter how hard he tried, it never seemed enough.

Obi-Wan squeezed Anakin's shoulder again. "Whatever path you choose, I am proud of you."

Anakin looked up into the blue eyes of his old master. There was no pity there. Only warmth and love. Anakin gave a weak smile and nodded. Finally Obi-Wan left to give Anakin some rest, but Anakin found no rest. Now he stood in the Council chamber tired. His body felt sore. His right arm felt heavier than usual.

"With this recent attack on the Temple," the Chancellor was saying, "I do believe it for the best we have this Luke transferred elsewhere. At least until this Sith, Darth Vader, is dealt with."

"Suggest where do you?" Master Yoda asked.

"There are plenty of safe places within the Republic," Palpatine said.

Anakin shifted uncomfortably. He didn't like this idea. If they moved Luke elsewhere, Anakin would lose his access to him. He still had so much he wanted to say and learn from Luke. Perhaps he could ask the Chancellor to accompany Luke as a guard. But being in the Temple worked much better for Anakin. He could still sneak away to see Padmé.

Suddenly Anakin realized he could have Luke and Padmé meet once Anakin got past the whole 'I know you're my time traveling son' bit. What would Luke think? What would Padmé think?

"Skywalker?"

Anakin straightened up. The entire room was looking at him. He realized he hadn't been paying
"Yes?" he asked.

"Your report?" Master Windu said slightly annoyed. "You spoke with Luke as well as with Senator Amidala yesterday. What do you have to report of your investigation?"

KriFF. He had yet to formulate what he was going to say about everything he found out about Luke and Vader. There was no way he could tell the council everything.

"Uh yes," he said awkwardly, "I spoke with Luke yesterday morning. He told me he was a rebel fighting against some empire. Darth Vader is the supreme commander of the empire's navy."

A few Jedi on the council exchanged looks.

"Speak of this emperor Luke did?" Yoda asked.

"I'm afraid not," Anakin replied.

Sith craved power. Why would a Sith serve under someone else? Unless the person they served under was more powerful than they were. Vader had already shown his strength to the Jedi by invading and attacking the Temple. Whoever he served had to be mighty indeed. As such it made sense for the Council to want to know who that person was.

"And of this empire?" Mace asked.

"Not much about that either," Anakin said truthfully.

The empire was another thing he needed to find out about. If the Republic was going to lose the war, he wanted to know as much as he could. Was this emperor Dooku? But Vader had used the name Sidious as his master. It would make sense if Vader's Sith master was also the Emperor. Then . . . that meant . . . that Sidious was here in this time. He was the one who hired the bounty hunters to kill Luke.

*Most likely Sidious is the Sith master we've been hunting*, Anakin thought to himself.

"I questioned him as well," Mace said. "He is very reluctant with information."

"Perhaps we should try other methods?" Palpatine asked.

"Other methods?" Obi-Wan asked as his eyes narrowed at the chancellor.

Yet before another word could be said, the door to the Council room opened. A Jedi Anakin didn't recognize rushed in. She was a young Twi'lek with green spotted skin. Her left eye had a horrible scar slashing through it. The eye was sewn shut. Anakin could just make out slashes of scars peeking out from her tunics on her neck. He wondered if perhaps she had been injured during a battle commanding clones.

"Knight Manula," Mace said. "What is the meaning of this interruption?"

"I'm sorry masters," Manula said as she came to a stop near Palpatine's hologram. "Forgive me for this intrusion, but I felt like this information couldn't wait."

"About the Sith it is?" Yoda asked.

Manula spun to face Yoda. She bobbed her head and said, "Yes."

Mace eased back into his seat. "Very well," he said. "Please give us your report."
"Thank you Master Windu," she said. She straightened up and pulled a small holoprojector from her pocket. "I am Knight Manula. I had been assigned to review the security devices in Luke's room." She paused and Yoda nodded for her to continue. "Well . . . last night the devices caught some interesting audio. I only got around to reviewing them this morning."

Anakin perked up. Manula clicked on the holoprojector. At once it showed Luke's small med room he was currently in. He was laying in bed. There was no one else in the room. Then he moaned and grumbled out a clear, "Yes."

There was a small stretch of silence before Luke spoke again. "I think it's pretty safe." This time there was a shorter silence. "You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

It looked as if Luke was talking to someone. But who? He wasn't talking into a comlink. He didn't even have access to one. Was it through the Force? Was it . . . Vader? And if that was the case, why was he talking out loud? Why not just communicate through the Force alone?

"Sidious?" Luke asked the air. Palpatine's holograph stiffen. "You mean . . . wait . . . the Emperor?"

"I was right, Anakin thought. Sidious is the Emperor and Vader's master."

"You should have thought about that before you stole from him," Luke mumbled.

It must be Vader Luke was talking to. Why was Anakin not surprised that Vader had already caused trouble elsewhere? How else did the Sith in this time know of him? Was Luke's assassination attempt more about revenge? Anakin glanced around the room. The masters were all intently watching and listening, but Palpatine . . . looked angry. A deep scowl was etched around his face.


There was something painful about those words. It pulled on Anakin's own heart. There was a long stretch of silence before Luke spoke up again.

"Haven't you ever thought we came here for a reason? That the Force wanted us to change things?" Luke asked.

Anakin recalled the argument he had with Vader in the Force vision. He had thought the same. Vader had to have come back in time for a reason. It had to be to stop the horrible future that was looming on the horizon. It had to be!

"And how am I supposed to do that?" Luke asked. "There is a Jedi always guarding my door now."

Cold dread quickly filled Anakin. Luke let out a small laugh as if Vader had told a joke.


Manula clicked the holoprojector and turned it off. The room was quiet.

"Thank you Knight Manula," Mace said ending the silence. Manula bobbed her head and left the room.

"I think it is clear," Palpatine said slowly, "we reevaluate this Luke. I suggest we move him into the
Republic Judiciary Central Detention Center. It appears he is in league with this Sith."

"No," Anakin shouted. All eyes turned to him. "I don't think that's the case at all."

"More to say you have Skywalker?" Yoda asked.

"Perhaps you already knew of this connection between Luke and Vader?" Mace asked. He brought out his own holoprojector. He clicked it on. At once it showed Anakin and Luke in the apartment bedroom.

"Is the Sith that was here last night Darth Vader?" Anakin asked.


"Is he your father?"

"Getting right to it, I see," Luke mumbled. Then he took a breath and said, "Yes. Darth Vader is my father."

Kriff, Anakin cursed to himself.
Chapter 31

Anakin cursed to himself. Of course there were security devices in Luke's room at that time! And of course they caught Luke saying Vader was his father.

"Report this you did not," Yoda said looking at Anakin.

"It is clear this is all a Sith plot," Palpatine said. "This Luke is an enemy of the Republic just as his Sith father."

"Luke is not part of a Sith plot!" Anakin shouted.

Obi-Wan's eyes grew wide and then he slightly shook his head. "Anakin," he said. He was trying to warn him that Anakin was stepping out of line with the Council. Again.

"Luke barely knows anything about his father!" Anakin continued while ignoring Obi-Wan. "He only discovered that Darth Vader was his father two months ago after Vader cut his hand off."

"Are you so sure, Anakin?" Chancellor Palpatine asked. "The boy could be fooling you. Look how wrapped up the Jedi have been about this mysterious boy and his father. Who knows what could be happening out in the battlefronts? This could all be a Separatist distraction. Our best generals have all been lured here instead of being out on the battlefield."


"I agree as well," Obi-Wan added. "I have sensed no hostilities from Luke."

"I fear your judgement may be clouded," Palpatine said lowly. Then he took a deep breath. "I do not mean to degrade your order, master Jedi. But it is clear something is going on here even if this young Luke is innocent. I have read the report about Darth Vader's infiltration into the Temple. How he used Jedi Council codes, which is something that has yet to be explained."

"We are currently still looking into it, Chancellor," Mace answered.

"I hope you are. We do not need another incident such as Nax Cirvan, Pong Krell or Barriss Offee," Palpatine said.

"Are you suggesting there is a traitor amongst the Council?" Anakin asked.

Mace shot Anakin a stern look. Anakin had overstepped, but Palpatine smiled at him.

"It is a possibility we can't overlook," Palpatine said.

"Vader could have easily sliced into our system to get the codes," Master Fisto's hologram spoke up.

Obi-Wan added, "'Do not doubt the Jedi so easily."

"It is clear we need to talk to Luke again," Master Ti's hologram said. "Our main focus should be on arresting Vader."

"Yes," Palpatine said. "I'm afraid I received some troubling news this morning." His hologram turned and faced Anakin. "It appears as if Senator Amidala is missing."
For a brief moment the whole world went away. There was a blinding white nothingness and high pitched ringing noise.

"Security cameras show a large man in Jedi robes carrying her into a speeder," came Palpatine's voice. Slowly the Council chamber came back into focus. Anakin saw the chairs filled with the Jedi masters and Palpatine's hologram. "We have reason to believe it was Darth Vader."

"Senator Amidala did state she saw something odd the night before," Mace said. He looked over at Anakin. "What did she say to you, Skywalker?"

Anakin opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He just stood there. His thoughts tumbling one over another.

Padmé was gone? She was taken? By Vader?

Palpatine was speaking, "I still think the boy should be transferred out of the Temple, especially after Knight Manula's report and the kidnapping of Senator Amidala. It seems the boy may have thoughts of reuniting with his father."

"We shall make sure Luke stays at the Temple," Mace said.

Anakin frowned and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Ana-Anakin," Luke had said when Anakin had last seen him. "Good bye and may the Force be with you."

Goodbye.

"Kriff," Anakin said aloud.

He turned and ran out of the Council chamber. He heard Obi-Wan shout after him, but he didn't look back. He ran into the lift and slammed down on the buttons. He reached out in the Force towards the healing halls and found . . . nothing. No hint of Luke. Anakin should be able to feel him. He had before when Luke first wandered away out of the healing halls. So Anakin expanded himself out further and that's when he found him. Luke was still in the Temple.

The lift doors slid open, and Anakin ran out.

Luke wasn't sure what was the Force and what part was just pure luck. When he had opened the door to his med room, his Jedi guard was distracted. They were talking to a healer. Neither the Jedi nor the healer noticed Luke sneak out of the room behind their backs. It just seemed too easy. But so had sneaking onto the Death Star. Thinking back to that memory is how Luke found himself in the sewage line.

He was sure there were no security cameras down here. No guards. Nothing. Just rotting, smelling sewage that he didn't want to think too much on. There were also orange security lights every few steps. Luke glanced at the dark liquid that came out to his mid thighs. The sewage had to go somewhere. Most likely out of the Temple. That was what he was hoping on.
He stopped and leaned against the curved side of the large pipe. He took a few deep breaths. His wound was hurting him. He was tired, but he needed to keep moving. He pushed himself off the wall and that was when he heard the sloshing sounds of steps.


"Anakin?" Luke called back.

"Luke!" Anakin shouted. Slowly Anakin Skywalker came sloshing through the sewage. He was bent over as the large pipe was a bit too small for him to stand up completely. He paused when he saw Luke. A huge smile was on his face. "Found you," he said as he walked the last few steps up to Luke.

"Yes," Luke sighed. "I suppose you're here to take me back."

Anakin paused as he placed a hand, his ungloved hand, against the side of pipe. "No," he finally said. "I'm not."

He wasn't? Luke could only stare at Anakin.


Silence.

"You know what?" Luke asked slowly. Each word was a fight to get out.

"I know that . . . you talked to Vader last night."


"There were security devices in your room. Caught the whole conversation. Or at least your side of it. Why didn't you just talk to him through the Force?"

"I . . . don't know how to do that," Luke said as he looked away.


"My . . . my mother?"

"You mentioned her in the conversation," Anakin explained.

"He said . . ." Luke trailed off. There was no way around this was there?

"That he kidnapped her?" Anakin asked. His voice a bit dark. It caused a wave of goosebumps to break out Luke's arm. Anakin sounded too much like Vader.

"What? Kidnapped her?" Luke said. "That wasn't what he said at all. He said if I wanted to meet her, I should go to him."

Anakin scoffed and rolled his eyes. "Because he kidnapped her last night."

"How do you know that?"
"Her disappearance was reported this morning. A figure that looked like Vader was caught on security holos putting her in a speeder."

"No," Luke said more sternly. He tried to match the dark voice Anakin used. "How do you know it's my mother?" Anakin said nothing, but his mouth twisted into an odd smile mixed with a grimace.

Anakin took a deep breath. "I know Luke," he said a bit fast. Then he took another deep breath. "I know that you're a time traveler. I know that . . . that you're my . . . You're my son from the future. I know that Darth Vader is me from the future."

Luke was still. The only thing moving was his chest lightly falling and rising with his breaths.

"When you said Darth Vader used to be a Jedi, I compared your DNA to the Jedi archive. It came back matching to me. And then I compared it to your mother as well. There is only one explanation I can think of how it matches both me and your mother."

Luke just stared as he processed this new information. Anakin knew. Luke wasn't sure how much he knew, but he knew. He knew Luke was his son as well as a time traveler. He knew he was Darth Vader. How had Anakin handled the truth? That he would fall to the Dark Side? It looked like he was doing fine. Yet despite all that, there was one thing still nagging at Luke.

"I thought you said you didn't have a lover," Luke said quietly. "How did you know it would be my mother?"

Anakin flinched and ran a hand through his hair. "I . . . I lied," he said. "I told you the truth about how Jedi are not allowed to have attachments. I'm not supposed to have a wife. That is why we have kept it a secret."

"Who is she?" Luke asked. His voice still low. He always wanted to know about his mother. His uncle and aunt knew nothing. Vader had only teased Luke with any knowledge. Would Anakin do the same?

Anakin cocked his head to the side. "Who is she?" he asked. But his eyes widened as he looked harder at Luke. "You don't know?" he whispered. "You don't know who she is?"


"That kriffin' Sith," Anakin murmured as he banged his hand against the pipe wall. "He never told you anything about your mother? His wife?"

"No. But not like we've talked all that much. Our first real conversation was when he snuck into my medical room to get me out."

Anakin pinched the bridge of his nose, but then straightened up. "Your mother is the most amazing woman I have ever met. An angel." He smiled as if he was remembering a sweet memory. "Her name is Padmé Amidala. She is a senator of Naboo."

Luke had barely listened to anything else once Anakin had said the name.

"Padmé Amidala . . ." he said slowly. "Padmé."

He had a mother. She was real. And now Luke could learn about her. He was more than just Vader and Anakin.

Luke paused as he looked into Anakin's eyes. "Can I meet her?"
Anakin walked up and placed a hand on Luke's shoulder. "You're going to love her. She's going to love you. Force, she already does. A version of you."

"That's right. She should be pregnant."

Anakin squeezed Luke's shoulder. Then he let out a low grumble. "But first we need to find her." Luke nodded. Anakin asked, "What did he say to you about where he would be?"

"He didn't," Luke replied honestly. "He just said I needed to leave and go with him."

Anakin rolled his eyes again. "Well can you contact him in the Force? Like you did last night? I've been trying to do it, but he's ignoring me."

"I don't know how."

Anakin smiled. "Then I'll teach you."
Father, Luke called out into the Force along the bond.

Anakin was actually a good teacher. He took it slow and explained things well. It didn't take long for Luke to locate the bond he shared with Vader. It had been there for a while, most likely since Bespin. Luke just didn't know what it was until now.

Father, he called out again.

Something changed. The bond seemed to shift. There was a coldness spreading into Luke. An inky cold darkness.

Luke smiled and nodded at Anakin. Anakin had brought them out of the sewage pipe into a small maintenance area that was free of security cameras.

Father, did you kidnap my mother? Luke asked.

Vader was silent.

Father? Luke growled, or at least tried to.

You have been speaking to Skywalker, Vader said.

Yes. He's right here wanting to know where his pregnant wife is.

Good, Vader said and then the bond shifted. It closed.

"Hey!" Luke shouted out loud.

"What happened?" Anakin asked.

"He's gone," Luke said. "He didn't tell me anything."

"Fantastic," Anakin muttered. "We might need to try-" Anakin stopped midsentence as his eyes went wide. "Oh! He's opening up the Force bond to me. Give me a second. I'll try talking to him."

Luke was quiet and still. Anakin's face was smooth at first, but then it scrunched up in annoyance followed by frustration. It was clear he was talking to Vader. Anakin rolled his eyes and scowled. Then his eyebrows shot up. It was odd watching this play out by only watching Anakin's expressions.

Finally Anakin let out a long sigh. He looked at Luke. "Is he always like that?" Anakin asked. "When did I- How did I become like that?"

"You tell me," Luke said. "What did he say?"

"He said that Padmé was safe. Far safer with him than with me," Anakin grumbled that last bit. "He said, and I'm going to quote him here, 'She will continue to be my side until I have my son.'"

Luke let out a small groan. It appeared Vader was up to his old tricks. Capturing the ones Luke cared about to try to lure him to his side. At least this time there would be no torture, Luke hoped. Surely
Vader wouldn't hurt his wife? His pregnant wife?

Anakin continued, "He said he'll be waiting for us where you two dueled."


"Where is that?" Anakin asked. "It sounds a bit familiar. Is it a Separatist system?"


"That could be problematic," Anakin mumbled. "There are several battlefronts going in the outer rim right now."

Luke hoped Vader wouldn't have picked a place that was unsafe. If Vader remembered other details about the past, surely he would know which systems were safe and which weren't.

"We need a ship," Luke said.

A huge smile spread across Anakin's face. "I've got a ship," he said.

Luke tugged awkwardly at the military uniform Anakin had stolen. It was similar to the uniforms of the Empire. Not completely the same, but similar. Very similar. Only a few small design changes was all that separated the two. Luke pulled at his collar as he looked around the Republic military base Anakin had brought him too. Like the uniform, it felt all too much like the Empire.

Troopers walked around in white armor. Clone troopers. Not yet stormtroopers. Yet they looked like stormtroopers wearing very similar white plastoid armor. Red flags flapped in the wind all bearing a black sunburst symbol surrounded by a broken circle. Luke could easily see it as the Imperial cog symbol.

There must be an airfield near by as Luke saw ships coming and going. Most were small ships like shuttles or snub fighters. But then a large triangular ship rose. Luke paused. His heart pounded in his chest. It had a large red stripe going down the center with other red markings. The silhouette wasn't a completely full triangle like a star destroyer. But it was close. Too close.

Luke hurried after Anakin. This military base was leaving a bad taste in his mouth. If history continued on its course, then the Empire would rise in about five months time. But it already felt and looked so much like the Empire. How well had this all been planned out by Emperor Palpatine? From what Luke recalled, it always felt like some sudden tragedy that the Republic had failed and the Empire was created. But being here now in the past . . . it was too obvious where this was all headed.

Could the future even be averted? Of course Luke had thought about changing the future. About stopping the Empire. About saving his father. Now it felt like changing the future would be impossible. Already everything was tumbling towards the Empire. Was this what Vader felt? He seemed to be uninterested in changing the past.

Anakin led them into a hangar. It was busy and bustling with troopers, mechanics, and droids. A few even turned and nodded at Anakin. One even shouted a greeting calling Anakin a general. Luke was on edge. Any moment now he was expecting these troopers to turn on them. They would raise their blasters and slap them in binders. But everything continued on normally. Anakin walked with his head held high and a confident swagger.

Luke eyed the ships. Most looked like military ships. Some bore colored stripes along the sides. A
few even had art on them. One of which was pin up on lady holding a blaster. Anakin was walking up to a ship. It stood out amongst the military ships.

"What is that?" Luke asked.

Anakin stopped and spun to face. "This is my ship," he said with a wave of a hand.

Luke wanted to say 'That piece of junk?' He bit back that remark. He had once said that of the Millenium Falcon.

Anakin walked up to the side of the ship and placed a hand on it. "This is the Twilight II," he said lovingly.

"What happened to the Twilight I?" Luke asked as he eyed the run-down looking ship.

If Luke knew his ships well enough, it was a G9 Rigger freighter. The only reason Luke even knew what this ship was was because the Hutts had started using them to smuggle contraband across the galaxy over the past year or so. Well the last year back in Luke's time.

"Shot down on Mandalore when I let Obi-Wan borrow her," Anakin said a bit sadly, but then he perked up. "But the Twilight II is better! I've updated her hyperdrive and rewired her steering to make her more agile . . ." He continued to ramble on about his upgrades.

He slowly walked up the loading ramp and Luke followed into a small cargo bay. They walked up a set of stairs towards a door.

"So I had to build a custom nozzle ring and cowling for the portside auxiliary thruster," Anakin said. "It's not all that legal. There have been a few Republic officers who didn't want this baby on their warships, but well . . ." He paused, smiled, and shrugged his shoulders. "They haven't stopped me yet."

Anakin pressed the door panel button. The door slid open and the two walked in. At once they both stopped. They weren't alone. Obi-Wan Kenobi stood next to the pilot's chair. His back was to them as he stared out the viewport. He stood straight with his hands clasped behind his back. Slowly he turned around to face them.

"Obi-Obi-Wan," Anakin stuttered.

"Anakin," Obi-Wan said. "I knew you would be coming here."

"What makes you say that?" Anakin replied.

"You're going to attempt to rescue Senator Amidala," Obi-Wan replied evenly. "My guess is that Darth Vader has offered her release in return for Luke, his son."

Luke's eyes darted between the two Jedi. The two Jedi said nothing. Anakin shifted his weight from one foot to another. Obi-Wan sighed.

"Anakin," he said. His face relaxed and his brows furrowed in concern.

"Obi-Wan this is something I have to do," Anakin replied.

"And running out in the middle of the Council meeting and sneaking Luke out of the Temple was the best way to do it?" Obi-Wan snapped.

"Obi-Wan . . ." Anakin mumbled. His voice was a bit pained.
"I know what you're about to say, Anakin," Obi-Wan said sternly. "And I hope it isn't that you don't trust the Council's decisions. That you are doing what you feel must be done regardless of what the Council thinks."

Anakin straightened up. Clearly he had been thinking that.

"There are things the Council doesn't know," Anakin said.

"Because you didn't tell them?"

Anakin moaned.

"Yes I didn't tell them," Anakin admitted. Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow. "I don't think they would have made the right choice."

"And this is?" Obi-Wan asked as he gestured to the ship and Luke.

"You just don't understand," Anakin replied.

"I think I do," Obi-Wan said.

Anakin pinched his nose in frustration. Obi-Wan shook his head and looked over at Luke. He stared at him for a moment. Then he walked over to Anakin and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"I think we need to talk in private," Obi-Wan said softly.

Anakin paused as he considered the other Jedi. Then he nodded. The two left the cockpit. The door quietly slid shut behind them leaving Luke alone.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Anakin led Obi-Wan down into the crew quarters under the cockpit where they would have privacy. There was a tightness in his chest that he wasn't comfortable with. He knew he would have to explain himself and his actions. He just hadn't expected it to happen this soon.

They both stood there awkwardly for a moment. Both unsure of who should start first or where. It was of course Obi-Wan who broke the silence.

"Anakin," Obi-Wan said. His voice a bit heavy with annoyance, but there was a note of concern. "What have you gotten yourself involved in now? What makes you think your decisions are the right ones? The Order has a Council for a reason. You need to trust in their judgement. You can't just go run off whenever you like and do whatever you want."

Anakin moaned.

"Anakin," Obi-Wan said again. His voice heavy with reprimand.

"Because the Council doesn't trust me," Anakin suddenly said.

"That is not true," Obi-Wan said.

"Really?" Anakin asked. "What happened when I asked about all those prisoners-of-war I have captured and wanted to know what was happening to them? How many times has the Council degraded me for my victories in this war? Questioned my actions?"

Obi-Wan clearly didn't have a quick response to those accusations. Anakin looked down at the ground as he felt a bit ashamed. Obi-Wan was part of the Council, which meant Anakin had accused Obi-Wan of all those things as well.

"Anakin," Obi-Wan said a third time. Yet, unlike the previous two times, this time it was soft. "Why didn't you just tell me?"

Anakin slowly looked back up. "Tell you what?"

Obi-Wan just threw his hands out and waved around him. "This. Any of this. About Luke or Darth Vader or . . . even about Padmé."

Anakin froze. He could feel every single part of his body. Every hair on his arms stood on end. He was aware of the feel of his robes against his chest as he breathed.

"What?" he asked. His voice barely came out.

"Really Anakin who did you think you were fooling? I've known you and Padmé have had a close relationship for quite a while. One not appropriate for a Jedi Knight. I should have said something sooner, but . . . with this war . . . " Obi-Wan sighed heavily. He scratched his beard. "I just hadn't expected it had gone this far."

"This far?" Anakin asked. He wasn't ready to give up anything yet.

"A child, Anakin?"
"Ah, yeah. That far," Anakin replied. So Obi-Wan knew. He had known. For how long? Anakin did his best to hide it. And how did . . . "How do you know she's pregnant?" he blurted out.

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow. "So she's already pregnant?"

"Wait . . . you didn't know? But how- What?" He paused as his eyes went wide. "You know."

"Really Anakin give me some credit," Obi-Wan said with a smirk on his face. "Did you forget I was also investigating Luke and Vader? When I didn't find any leads on a Jedi named Ben, I wondered if he may have been a relation of Luke's. Quite a surprise that was when I ran his DNA against the archives."

"But that didn't prove anything," Anakin said. "Luke could have been my unknown brother."

Obi-Wan just gave a look that said 'Really, Anakin? Really?'

Obi-Wan continued, "From there it wasn't hard to put the pieces together, as impossible as it seemed. I knew the Force could work in mysterious ways, but time travel?"

Yes, Obi-Wan knew. Obi-Wan ran a hand through his beard and sighed.

"I can't blame you," he said. "You're right, the Council would not have taken all of this well at all. They would expel from the Order just from the relationship with Padmé. But the part about you falling to the dark side and becoming a Sith? That Darth Vader is you?"

"I'm not him yet," Anakin said defensively. "I haven't fallen. And I won't. I don't know what happened to him, well at least all of it. But I won't." His hands had balled up into fists. "That's why I have to do this. I knew if I told the Council, they wouldn't let me near any of this. Probably lock me up. But the only way I can prevent myself from falling is to figure out how it happened. The only person who really seems to know how that happened is Vader."

"So you're walking right into his trap?"

"What else can I do? He has Padmé. Plus he clearly planned for me to be involved."

"How so?"

"He knew I could get a ship to bring Luke to him."

"He knew that by using Padmé, you would act without involving the Council."

"How else am I supposed to get to him?" Anakin asked. "I need him to tell me how he fell! And it's more than that, Obi-Wan. We lose this war. There is some Empire in the future. Something is coming that is going to burn down this galaxy. I can't let it happen. I think Luke and Vader were brought back into this time for a reason. Sure the Force works in mysterious ways, but this seems too coincidental. It chose my future self and son to come back. It could have picked plenty of other people. It could have been you or Yoda."

"Yes I know," Obi-Wan said thoughtfully. "I've tried to meditate on this. I'd hope the Force would guide me to some answer."

"Didn't get anything?"

Both Jedi opened themselves up to the Force and felt the great connection and flows. Ever since the start of the war there had been a fog within it. Even now it was still there. But where the fog had always been a thick smooth layer, now it was kicked it up. It swirled and danced. Anakin drew back into himself.

"So now what?" he asked. "You going to drag me back to the Council to explain myself?"

Obi-Wan paused as he looked at his old padawan. "No," he said slowly.

"No?" Anakin asked full of disbelief.

"I think this is the better course of action," Obi-Wan said.

"Wait. But just a minute ago you were all mad at me for going against the Council."

"I want you to be aware of all the repercussions your actions have," Obi-Wan said. "I don't approve, but . . . You are right. At least about some of it."

Anakin blinked and then a huge smile grew across his face. "Did you just say I'm right? About going against the Council?"


"Where is a holorecorder when you need one?"

"Anakin."

"So what are you going to do? Come with us and be a little rebel against the Council too? I think it would be good for you, Obi-Wan. You follow the Council far too strictly."

"And you barely follow them at all," Obi-Wan grumbled. "But I will stay here. You ran out of the meeting and didn't hear what happened next. Mace played the rest of the recording of the conversation between you and Luke. Luke revealed his father was once a Jedi."

Anakin's heart squeezed in on itself. He let out a small gasp.

"They're going to run his DNA against the archive," Anakin said slowly and softly.

Obi-Wan nodded. Just like Anakin and Obi-Wan had, they would get the same results. A fifty percent match to Anakin.

"Do you think . . . do you think they'll figure the rest out?" Anakin whispered.

"I don't know," Obi-Wan said thoughtfully. "It's possible. I suspect Master Yoda or Mace might already know more than they are letting on."

Anakin looked down at the ground. What was going to happen now? Everything was going to be different. A hand came to rest on his shoulder. He looked up and Obi-Wan now stood in front of him.

"I mean what I said last night," Obi-Wan said. "You can still leave the Order."

"You really don't want that, do you?" Anakin managed to squeeze out.

"No . . ." Obi-Wan said. "No. I think you should stay. But if leaving means you don't become a Sith . . ."
Anakin nodded.

"Anakin, I . . ." Obi-Wan started. He let his hand drop. He looked uncomfortable. Nervous. "If Satine had ever asked me to leave the Order, I would have."

Anakin's mouth fell open. He knew those two had feelings for one another, but Obi-Wan had thought about leaving the Order for her?

"What are you trying to say?" Anakin asked. "That I should leave? That you should have left?"

"I don't know," Obi-Wan said in a soft almost whisper. "But know you are not the first to make such choices. Whichever way you decide, I am proud of you. I truly am."

"Thank you," Anakin replied.

Obi-Wan took a big breath of air. "You best be off," he said. "The Council is already looking for you and Luke. It has yet to be reported you two have left the Temple. Best leave now."

Anakin nodded. Obi-Wan turned and walked out of the crew's quarters. Anakin was right behind him. Obi-Wan made to leave the ship through the loading ramp out of the cargo bay.

"Obi-Wan," Anakin called out. His former master stopped. "Thank you. For . . . all of this."

Obi-Wan smiled and nodded. "May the Force be with you, Anakin," he said.

Anakin nodded, and Obi-Wan turned and left. Anakin watched him turn and disappear from sight. Then he made his way back up to the cockpit. Luke was sitting quietly in the co-pilot chair.

"What happened?" he asked.

"I'm afraid the Council is on to our relationship. It's only a matter of time they realize you're a time traveler," Anakin explained. Luke's eyes went wide. "That's why we need to get going now."

Anakin sat down in the pilot's chair and began the start-up sequence. He was thankful his clearance codes still worked. They were able to take off without issue. As the ship rose up, Anakin couldn't help but look at the Jedi Temple. He wondered if he would ever be welcomed back there. He wasn't just going against the Council. He was going against the Code.

He looked over at Luke. His eyes were large and wide. There was a goofy smile on his face as he took in the scenery of Coruscant. Anakin could only smile at the sight. He knew what he was doing was right. It had to be. Soon they were in the blackness of space and free of orbital traffic. The coordinates were set. The jumps calculated. Anakin pulled on the handle and the ship jumped to hyperspace.

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to thank all the kind comments and support for this fic. Thank you all! In the Past will be going on a bit of a break. Various reasons, but it is not because I have grown tired or overwhelmed. I rather like this fic, and that is why I do such frequent updates. I have every intention of continuing this fic, but my other fics have been suffering. So, I'm forcing myself to pause on this one to give my others a bit of love. I don't have a set time I'll return to regular updates. Sorry. But I won't leave you without
nothing. I do plan on doing one to three interlude chapters during the break. You can always come by the Star Wars Writer's discord chat (for readers and writers), and ask on how things are going. https://discord.gg/4RZ8Qce
Interlude

Interlude - - -

Obi-Wan Kenobi watched as the *Twilight II* lifted out of the hangar and into the sky. He stood there a while after it had disappeared. There was a pull on his heart. A tightness to his chest. If he was honest with himself, he was not ok with any of this. He wasn't okay with Anakin running off with Luke, who was Anakin's time-traveling son, to go face his time-traveling future Sith self.

Obi-Wan's tongue felt heavy. There was already a bit of regret creeping up inside of him due to what he had said to Anakin. He didn't really want Anakin to leave the Order. Anakin was supposed to be the Chosen One. He was supposed to bring balance to the Force. It was a belief that Qui-Gon had held on to with his dying breath. But . . .

He recalled facing Darth Vader in the lower levels of the Temple. The pure anger and unbelievable darkness that had poured off the Sith. Darth Vader hated Obi-Wan. He wanted him dead. It sent a chill through Obi-Wan to think that Darth Vader was once Anakin Skywalker, but it made sense. Darth Vader knew Obi-Wan's moves. Knew them intimately. Obi-Wan had even commented how it felt like he was dueling Anakin not knowing at the time he was. At least from a certain point of view.

Obi-Wan was left with various questions. Why had Anakin fallen? Why did Darth Vader hate him so much? What had happened in Darth Vader's past between the two of them? Obi-Wan doubted it was anything good. Sith were the enemy of the Jedi. They were to be detained, locked away, or killed. Had Anakin fallen and the Council ordered Obi-Wan to take down his once padawan?

Answers were needed, and Anakin was right. Darth Vader seemed to be the one with them. Only he would truly know what drove him to the Dark Side. Though Obi-Wan was skeptical if Vader would share how it happened. Hopefully, Obi-Wan had imparted some negotiating skills on to Anakin. He may need them, or he may not. Negotiating between two Anakin Skywalkers sounded like an absolute headache. Who else to deal with Anakin's bullheaded nonsense than another Anakin?

Anakin needed to face these questions and truths. Even if it meant he would leave the Order, and even though such a thought caused Obi-Wan to despair. But Anakin turning into Darth Vader caused him to despair more. Obi-Wan would rather Anakin leave the Order to be with Padmé and their child than ever become a Sith.

He had always wavered. Coming into the Temple as nine-year-old had been harsh. He hadn't been accepted by the other younglings, especially when he quickly surpassed them in use of the Force. He was teased due to his status as a former slave. As a young teen he debated on leaving the Order. Anakin always butted heads with the Council. He always felt like he was being held back.

Obi-Wan wasn't surprised to learn that Anakin had broken the code. That he had grown attached to Padmé Amidala. Anakin's attachment had always been a concern for the Council. His multiple starships had always been a headache. When he lost the *Twilight* and the *Azure Angel*, he quickly replaced both with the *Twilight II* and *Azure Angel II*. Yes, Anakin had problems with attachment and letting things go. The Council had hoped that giving him a padawan would help him learn to let go, but Ahsoka's departure had not gone to plan. Perhaps it had done more damage to Anakin's
Obi-Wan fished his comlink out of his pocket and turned it on. At once it beeped with several missed calls and messages. He looked back up at the sky. The *Twilight II* had long since vanished. He reached out in the Force and sent a silent prayer to it. A prayer for Anakin that the Force would be with him. He was going to need it.

Padmé glared at her Sith captor. He was pale with scars that crossed his face. There were prominent ones in a series along the top left on his bald head, the left cheek, and a very curious one next to his right eye. His eyes were a sulfur yellow and the skin around them a darker shade of gray. He was tall. Very tall. He had changed out of the Jedi robes, and now wore all black including black gloves.

Despite his appearance, he looked a bit uncomfortable. He always seemed that way in her presence. His eyes glanced around a lot. He fidgeted with his hands. He never seemed to know where to rest them.

She sat at the small table in her bunk on the ship. At least she assumed it was a ship. It was built like a ship. Hummed like a ship. The Sith had brought in a small tray of food. He stood next to the table and eyed the room. The room was a mess. Anything and everything that wasn't bolted down, she had thrown at him at some point.

The previous time he had come in before this was right after Padmé had woken up from a nap. She found fresh blankets on top her, and she realized he must have come in and put them on her. She decided not to throw things at him this time. When he asked if there was anything she wanted, she had requested silver-leafed Seo tea. He only nodded and left. She had not been expecting him to procure it.

Sitting on the tray he had brought in was a cup of silver-leafed Seo tea. The tea left a silvery sheen to the water. She gently picked up the cup and smelled it. It had a beautiful and delicate armora.

"Where did you get this?" she asked. There was no way he had it in stock on this ship. The tea was rare. It only grew in mountains on Alderaan. The tender downy buds had to be handpicked within a two-day span right before the leaf would open. It was expensive and not easy to find.

The Sith, Darth Vader, said nothing. Padmé sipped her tea. If he had acquired the tea that easily, it meant they were in a place he could easily get it from. The viewports in her room were closed. She had no view outside the ship. She could feel the gentle hum of the ships engines, so the ship was at the very least in space. They hadn't jumped to hyperspace while she had been awake. So were they just in orbit around Coruscant?

"When will you let me go?" she asked when she was halfway through her cup. Again he was silent. "I must admit," she continued, "I have been captured by the Separatists several times. You have the best accommodations. Generally prisoners are kept in a cell. Perhaps you should com Count Dooku or General Grievous to get some tips from them."

His face darkened and he scowled. "I am not a Separatist," he said.

"Yes, but beside that." Again he said nothing. So she decided to push. "A father?" she asked raising the pitch of her voice slightly.

"A Sith," he said.
His eyes narrowed and he frowned. He crossed his arms across his chest. She didn't stop the small smile that came across her face.

"Just tell me," she said. "Is this about your son? Luke, was it? The one in the Jedi Temple? Are you using me to barter for your son?"

He glared at her for a few seconds before he answered, "Yes."

She placed her cup back down on the small table. "Then how did you know I was pregnant?" she asked.

He seemed taken aback by the question. His eyes widened and he blinked a few times. "What?" he finally said. His voice had lost the dark edge it usually had.

"You revealed to the Jedi you knew I was pregnant. I had told no one else, and yet you knew. What did you do? Sneak a sample of my DNA? Run a pregnancy test?"


It was interesting seeing him all flustered. Perhaps it was time to push a bit more.

"What did you mean you are trying to help me? That I would die?" she asked. She couldn't help but recall his words from her apartment.

At once he looked down. A look of pain clear upon his face. Then slowly he looked back up. The pain still heavy in his eyes. Padmé's heart skipped a beat. He looked so much like- No, that was silly.

"There are those out there who wish you harm," he said. Each word felt heavy. Like he was forcing them out.

"And you're not one of them?" she asked.

"No."

"Who are they? The ones who wish me harm?"

He paused as he considered telling her. "Enough of this," he muttered. He turned sharply and left the room. She sat there staring at her tea thinking about Darth Vader.

Sheev Palaptine stood in his office in the Republic Executive Building. He stood at the large windows. His hands were clasped behind his back. His plans . . . His plans had gone off track.

Darth Vader and his son, Luke.

Who were they?

What were they?

Darth Vader was clearly a Sith, but how. Who had trained him? There should be no other line of Sith. Sidious knew of no others, and yet Vader claimed Sidious knew Vader's master well.

Was it a Jedi who had fallen?

Sidious scowled. He tried to seek answers from the Force, but when it came to Vader and his son, the Force was clouded. The Force always provided! Sidious scowled some more.
He had changed the bounty on Luke and Vader. He wanted them *alive*. He wanted answers. The boy's words Palpatine heard at the Jedi Council meeting still haunted him.

"Sidious? You mean . . . wait . . . the Emperor?"

Darth Vader not only knew that Sheev Palpatine was Darth Sidious, but also several of Sidious' plans. Did Vader hold the power of foresight as well? Had he passed on his visions to his son?


What had the boy meant by that? Sidious returned to what Vader had said.

"Plan your attacks. Ready your sweet speeches to the Senate and to the galaxy. Continue pushing Skywalker. Bring about the destruction of the Jedi. Let the Sith Empire rise."

So at the very least these two Force users foresaw Sidious as Emperor. How very interesting. Sidious wondered what else they had foreseen, because at the moment his carefully laid plans were a mess. Everything had been going so well. He could sense the birth of his Empire coming. Then Vader and Luke entered the picture.

Yet something didn't sit quite right with Sidious. Foresight didn't seem to fit with Vader or Luke. There was a weight and truth to Vader's words. No matter what, there was always a sense of uncertainty when one talked about the future. Even with Sidious' impressive foresight, there were surprises even he didn't foresee. Vader talked as if *knew* the Sith Empire would happen. He spoke from *truth*.

And one rarely spoke so confidentiality unless one had seen it. Not just in visions. But had lived it. Felt it. Even Luke's words had a finality about them when he called Sidious the Emperor.

Yes, what an odd pair Luke and Vader were. And Sidious desperately wanted to *meet* them.
The *Twilight II* had jumped to hyperspace. The stars had changed into blue whorls. Anakin leaned back in his seat. It was clear he was deep in thought. Luke watched the blue lines swirl. When he glanced back at the pilot's chair, he noticed Anakin was watching him.


"Knows?" Luke asked.

"About you. Me. Darth Vader. Time travel. All of that."

"You told him?"

"No. He figured it out. And if he figured it out, then the Council won't be far behind him." Anakin said as he hunched over in his chair.

"So what happens if they found out?" Luke asked. The cold inside him eased.

"I don't know. I broke the Jedi Code. I got married. I'm going to have a child. And now that child is here from the future with my future self. Who is... Who is a Sith. And that is much worse than simply breaking the Code. If it was just marriage and a child, I would just be kicked out of the Order. But a Sith?"


Anakin straightened back up. "You're right. I'm not one yet. And I don't plan on becoming one. I need your help, Luke. Tell me how it happened."

"I don't know how it happened," Luke said. "I've told you that. I've been trying to figure that out myself."

Anakin let out a mix between a groan and a sigh. He leaned back and looked up at the ceiling. Should Luke have said something else? He hadn't mentioned that Anakin was close to becoming one. The darkness was already creeping into him. That there were notes of Vader already within Anakin.

"Well," Anakin said. "I do know that Vader fell to the Dark Side trying to save Padme. That she died in childbirth."


"Alright," Anakin said. "Let's go over what you do know."

"My aunt and uncle-"

"Wait, your aunt and uncle? You were raised on Tatooine. Who were your- Wait. The *Lars*?"

Anakin pinched the bridge of his nose. "Ok. Ok. Just continue."

"My aunt and uncle always said my father was a navigator on a spice freighter. His ship crashed and he died."

"A navigator on a spice freighter? Really?"

Anakin looked appalled and perhaps a bit insulted.

Luke shrugged and continued, "Ben, err I mean Obi-Wan, was the one who told me otherwise. He said that my father was a Jedi Knight. He was a cunning warrior and the best star pilot in the galaxy."

A huge grin spread across Anakin's face.

"And," Luke continued, "When I asked how my father died, Ben said a Jedi named Darth Vader killed him. Vader had been a pupil of Ben's until he turned evil. He helped the Empire hunt down and destroy the Jedi Knights."

"Wait," Anakin said as his smile completely fell. "Hunt down and destroy the Jedi?"

"There aren't . . . any . . . Jedi . . ." Luke said awkwardly realizing that Anakin didn't know the truth. "In the future, I mean. They're gone."

"Gone? What does that mean? Gone? Where did they go?"

"They're dead. They were all killed."

"How? There is no way they were all killed by Vader!"

Luke took a deep breath. "I tried looking into it, but the Empire covered up a lot of things. From what the history archives say, the Jedi tried to take control over the Republic. Tried to kill the Emperor."

"Who?"

"Emperor Palpatine. I think he's currently the chancellor . . . Anakin?"

Anakin's face had fallen. His skin was pale. "Emperor Palpatine?" he choked out.

"Yes."

"I thought . . . when you said Emperor that . . . that the Republic lost the war. That the Separatists won."

"No. That Separatists lost. The Senate voted to make the Republic an empire with Palpatine as the emperor."

Anakin was in shock. His eyes darted around as he tried to keep up with the thoughts running through his mind. What had Luke done? His old fears and anxiety returned. This was why he didn't want to reveal the future. How was this knowledge going to change the future? Was it going to make it better? Or worse?

"Okay," Anakin said slowly. "So the Jedi tried to kill . . . Palpatine . . . and he was voted emperor . . . and so . . . it was decided to just . . . kill off all of the Jedi?"
"To stop the Jedi Rebellion," Luke said softly. "Now, or in the future, there are no Jedi. Ben and Master Yoda were the last ones . . . Even Jedi artifacts are illegal."

Luke thought of Grakkus the Hutt's collection. Of the piles of crates and the large statues of Jedi standing stoically. And of course the holocrons. There were so many little blue cubes that had lit up. So many dead Jedi that suddenly sprung to life. Luke wondered briefly if any of those Jedi were alive right now.

"Wait, Yoda?" Anakin asked in disbelief. "Yoda? Out of all the Jedi to survive, one out of two was Yoda?"

Luke shrugged unsure of what to say. Anakin ran his flesh hand down his face.

"Kriff," he cursed. "This future sounds worse and worse. And I still have no idea how to prevent any of it."

"I wonder if it can be prevented," Luke said softly.

"Just the way Vader has talked-"

"Don't listen to him," Anakin snapped interrupting Luke.

"I'm just saying, what if it's too late? The Empire is supposed to rise the day before my birthday. That's only a few months away!"

"There has to be a way to stop it. Why else would you be here? The Force sent you back for a reason."

Luke sighed. Anakin jumped out of his seat and paced around the cockpit.

"So in a few months the Republic becomes the Empire. I become Darth Vader. Padme dies. You somehow get to Tatooine. I think Obi-Wan is to be blamed for that one. And all of the other Jedi are killed. Anything else?"

Anakin's whole body went still. His shoulders went slack. His eyes went wide. His mouth opened just a small amount.


Anakin found himself in the small cargo hold of the Twilight II. It was large enough to hold his Jedi starfighter but was currently empty. So he paced from one end to the other. His hands were tightly clasped behind his back. His mind raced over the words Luke had said.

Palpatine was a Sith. Palpatine was Darth Sidious. Palpatine was Vader's Sith master.

Palpatine couldn't be a Sith! Anakin had known the chancellor since he was a boy! Palpatine had always been kind! He was like a mentor. He was a friend! He was always trying to do what was best! There was no way he could be a Sith . . .
The night Vader went into the Temple... That night there had been two Sith on Coruscant. Vader who was at the Temple and a second at the chancellor's apartment. Anakin saw Palpatine's torn up apartment. The guards who never drew their blasters. None of them had. Why not?

Because the person attacking them wasn't an unknown assailant.

It was Palpatine. Palpatine was the Sith at the apartment. He was the one who had killed his own guards. Why? WHY?

What the kriff had happened? How?

Was Palpatine always a Sith? Ever since... the beginning? Did that mean... He was behind Maul? Behind the Invasion of Naboo? It had resulted in him becoming the chancellor. So what about the current war? The Separatists were supposedly led by Dooku's Sith master. Was that Sith also Palpatine? Was he pulling the strings behind both sides of the war?

Why? Why?

Palpatine was a Sith. Palpatine was the Emperor. Future Emperor.

If Palpatine had used Naboo to become chancellor... Was he using the Clone Wars to become the Emperor?

But... It couldn't be. It simply could not be. Not the chancellor. Not Palpatine! Anakin knew him!

There had to be a mistake. Vader was lying. Luke was lying. Anakin marched back and forth across the cargo bay. Why? Why? His thoughts repeated over and over. He ignored the shouts from the Force screaming that he already had the answer. That it was the truth. His heart was being stabbed by hundreds of needles. A cold stone was weighing him down on the inside. He continued to pace hoping the pain would pass. Hoping the Force would change it cires saying it was all lies. It didn't.

Anakin needed answers. Vader would know.

Chapter End Notes

"Hey this isn't an interlude chapter. It's a normal chapter. Does this mean updates are back to normal?" No. 1. There is going to be one more interlude chapter, but there was a small time jump from the previous chapter. I decided that this chapter should go now. 2. "Aww, when are you returning to your old update schedule?" There is one more interlude chapter planned, so hopefully after that. Thanks for all the kind reviews and support.
Sidious didn't like how things currently were. He had spent the majority of his life preparing for this moment. The moment when the Republic fell, his Empire rose, and the destruction of the Jedi. The moment when the Chosen One, Anakin Skywalker, would become his apprentice. Luckily, the Empire was still on track to rise with or without Anakin. But it would just be so sweet to have the boy by his side for when the time did come.

Except Anakin Skywalker was now missing. Had been for a few days when he disappeared with that boy Luke. There were no signs of Anakin, Luke, or the man called Darth Vader who had kidnapped Padmé Amidala.

Sidious had already contacted Dooku. The Separatists were preparing for their attack on Coruscant and the kidnapping of the chancellor. Hopefully that would lure Anakin back. The boy after all was so devout to his duty as a defender of the Republic. It was why he had a secret marriage instead of simply leaving the Jedi Order.

But if there was one thing that might pull Anakin Skywalker away from defending the Republic, it was his secret wife Padmé Amidala. Who was now in the hands of Darth Vader. Sidious had to commend this so-called Sith lord. He choose the perfect pawns in Padmé and Anakin to get his son back.

Luke and Vader knew something. Knew something of the future. Something about an Empire where Sidious was the Emperor. A future Sidious wanted to hear about, but didn't want Anakin to know about. Not yet at least.

The boy was primed. It was time to start pushing him towards the Dark Side. Sidious hoped that during his kidnapping, Obi-Wan would come to the chancellor's rescue and fail. His death would cause Anakin to lose one of his strongest anchors to the Light Side. It would make Anakin feel helpless. Powerless. And Sidious could offer him power. Power to save and protect those he cares for.

Sidious planned to use Padmé's kidnapping to his advantage. All it would take were some softly said words full of concern about how Padmé always seemed to be getting herself in trouble. How she never listened to Anakin's advice and warnings. Her death would be glorious. One of the final steps needed to secure Anakin's place amongst the Sith. There would be no one else for the boy except for Sidious.

Sidious also hoped to ruin the relationship between Anakin and Padmé before that happened. Perhaps even get Anakin to kill her himself. Now that would be delightful. Even her memory could taint Anakin once he was a Sith. Something for him to disgustingly cling to. Sidious had toyed with the idea of spreading rumors that Padmé Amidala and Obi-Wan Kenobi were having a secret affair. How would Anakin handle that? What anger and possession would it ignite in the boy?

But for any of that to happen, Anakin needed to be under Sidious' thumb. Thus he needed to be found. So far the Jedi Order and the Grand Army of the Republic had issued an order for Anakin Skywalker to be detained and returned to the Temple if spotted. Sidious had sent out some bounty
hunters to see if they could track Anakin or Vader down. While it had only been a few days, there was no sight of any of them.

The attack on Coruscant was fast approaching. Anakin should be the hero to save the chancellor. The one truly loyal Jedi that will still serve the Emperor after the rest of the Jedi are marked traitors. Sidious wasn't ready to completely give up on Anakin after grooming him for so many years. He wasn't ready to let his prized trophy go quite yet. That was why he found himself here, in a shabby building deep in Coruscant's under levels.

He made his way through the poorly lit hall. He wore his long dark hooded cloak. His face mostly obscured by hood. He was glad he had secured this place at the start of the war. He wasn't sure what he'd use it for, but it had proven to be useful. The place was run down. Moisture dripped from the walls. Mold grew in spots throughout. There was only one thing Sidious kept here. With a wave of his hand, a door slid open. It creaked on its tracks as it loudly announced his arrival.

Yellow eyes peered at Sidious from the darkness. Again he waved his hand, this time lights jumped on. Sitting on a metal bench on the far side of the room sat Maul. He was shackled to the wall with Force suppressant cuffs. This idiot fool had dragged himself out of the trash pits he had been living in thinking he could be something more than disgrace he already was.

Maul had grown too powerful with his acts on Mandalore, so Sidious had to put Maul back into his place. The original goal was to use Maul to lure out Mother Talzin, but the Mandalorians had decided to let Maul rot in the Separatist prison he was first put into it. So Sidious had him brought here, so Sidious could torture him in hopes of finally getting Talzin to slip up. So far, that hadn't happened.

"What did you do to me?" Maul rasped. He glanced down at his chest. A crude scar slashed across his left side. Sidious pulled out a small transmitter. Maul's eyes narrowed as he eyed the device, then they widened. Then his face settled into a scowl. "A slave chip," he hissed.

"Yes," Sidious said in his raspy voice. "I have a new use for you."

"Oh good," Maul replied sarcastically. His face was a slight scowl.

"I need you to hunt someone down for me and bring them to me. Alive."

Maul let out a small laugh. "And why would I do that?"

Sidious' finger slide over the detonate button. Maul flinched. Instead of pushing the button lightning at once snaked out of Sidious' hand into Maul, who clenched down on his teeth and bit back his screams. The lightning stopped and Maul's body sagged forward. His breathing was heavy.

"Do you not wish for your freedom?" Sidious purred.

"Freedom?" he said as his laughter died down. "You mean do I not wish for my death? That is the only thing you have planned for me. You said it yourself, there can only be two Sith and I have been replaced."

This was true. Maul couldn't be left alive. He had already proven he had matured since his youthful idiotic days full of blinded bloodlust. But the Zabrak could still be useful. It was why he was still currently alive.

"I will let you go back to your little Shadow Collective or rebuild something new," Sidious said with
an absent-minded wave of his hand.

"As long as I serve you," Maul hissed eyeing the transmitter.

Sidious paused. "Of course," he hissed back. He made sure those words had weight. They had a promise.

Maul's eyes narrowed. "And what would you have me do?" He was already scheming how to weasel himself out from under Sidious.

"There is a . . . Sith," Sidious said almost spitting that last word. "He calls himself Darth Vader. He was not trained by me nor my master. I want to know who trained him. I want to meet him."

Maul was quiet. His red-ringed yellows focused on Sidious's yellows eyes.

"He also has a son. Luke," Sidious continued. "I'm sure he can provide an incentive to get Vader talking."

"That is all?" Maul asked.

"That is all."

Maul was clearly thinking about this deal. But Sidious already knew where the other's thoughts were going.

"Do not think you can remove that chip," Sidious warned. "It has replaced some of the membrane around your heart. Removing it will rupture your heart wall resulting in your death." He held the transmitter up higher. "But do this job, do it well, and I shall give you this."

"I'm sure you have another."

"No. This is the only one," Sidious said. He let the truth of his words ring out. There was only one transmitter. Currently. But Sidious of course had the chip's broadcast frequency and code recorded.

Maul was quiet for a while. Sidious lowered his hand. After a while the Sith lord grew impatient.

"Perhaps I shall give you time to think on it," Sidious said. "I shall return."

"No," Maul snapped. Sidious fought back his growing smile. "I will do it."

This time Sidious let his smile grow. "Good, good."

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Obi-Wan walked through the never ending night of a low level of Coruscant. Bright lights and signs dotted the sides of buildings advertising the various businesses. Speeders of all types sped by in the open airways between the city clocks. It was loud, and the walkways were filled with various species and people. Obi-Wan blended in with his cloak pulled tight and hood down low.

Anakin and Luke had gone after Darth Vader and Senator Amidala a few days ago. Since then the High Council had learned of Anakin's and Luke's DNA match. That had been an interesting council meeting. Though currently they hadn't quite reached the theory of time-travel, but Obi-Wan still suspected Yoda and Mace may have already gotten to that conclusion.

Regardless, Anakin was wanted back at the Temple. If spotted by any Jedi or clones, Anakin was to be detained and returned to the Temple. The chancellor had been constantly bugging the Order for updates about Anakin and the Sith. There was a coldness that had settled in Obi-Wan's stomach. He
had tried to meditate on it. He had even spoken with Master Yoda about it, but it had yet to go away.

He had a bad feeling about Anakin. Was something going to go wrong? What if Vader betrayed Anakin? Surely Vader wouldn't kill him? His past self? How would that work? If Anakin died would Vader? What would happen to Luke and Padmé?

Obi-Wan would feel better if there was someone else there for Anakin. This is why he found himself ducking into a dirty alley lit by poorly spaced lights.

"It's you," came a raspy voice.

Asajj Ventress stepped out of the shadows. No longer did she wear the purple robes and dresses of a Separatist. Instead she was dressed as a bounty hunter. She wore a woven brown tunic that crossed her chest and a black high neck collar. It was sleeveless and she wore long bracers that extended past her elbows. She wore a piece of armour on her left shoulder. She hadn't completely rid herself of her trademark purple. There were hints of it with her leggings and gloves. She wore a masked helmet to hide her face.

"Yes," Obi-Wan said. "I've come to hire you. You're a bounty hunter, no?"

Her body language was aggressive. She was ready to launch herself at him at a moment's notice.

"And why would I take a job from you?" Asajj snarled at him.

Obi-Wan dug into his cloak and pulled out two identical lightsaber hilts. "I think you'll find the payment rather rewarding," Obi-Wan said.

The lightsabers were hers. They had been stolen by a Jedi padawan who decided to no longer follow the Order's teachings. The padawan had been discovered and detained. The lightsabers were locked away.

"What is this job?" she asked slowly. Her body had relaxed a small amount.

"I need you to deliver a message," Obi-Wan said as he fished out a small holodisc. "The recipient may request transportation after hearing it. You will provide it."

"Do I look like a chauffeur?"

Obi-Wan only raised an eyebrow. Asajj was currently a bounty hunter, which meant taking odd jobs such as these.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And why can't High General Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi send a message himself? Why doesn't he use the might of the Jedi Order or even the Republic Army to send this message?"

That was a good question.

"I need this sent discreetly," Obi-Wan said.

"Hmph," Asajj said. "Very well. Where is this message going?"

She held out her hand for the holodisc. Obi-Wan stepped forward and handed it to her along with a small datapad. She turned on the pad and looked through it. Her helmeted head snapped back up at
"You do know that is an active battlefield right?" she said.

"Of course I do," Obi-Wan said.

"If you want me to go than I demand half of the payment up front."

Obi-Wan looked down at the lightsabers. Then he tossed one of them to her. She gracefully caught it. Most likely she would have a need of it. She tucked the lightsaber, the datapad, and the holodisc away into pockets of her outfit. She turned to leave.

"May the Force be with you," Obi-Wan said.

She paused, but didn't turn around. There was only a slight bob of her head to indicate she had heard him. Then she slipped into the shadows and was gone.

Chapter End Notes

I think my break might be over. At the very least the next chapter will be coming to you soon. Regardless I'm working on getting this fic back up to its previous update schedule. Thanks for being patient.
The ship exited hyperspace. They had traveled for a long time. Wherever they were, it wasn't close to Coruscant. Most likely somewhere out in the outer rim. Padmé was still confined to her room despite her best efforts. She had tried to get Vader to let her go during their jump.

But he grumbled at her, "You do not fool me. You are far too much of a capable woman."

Vader was an interesting man. He seemed uncomfortable around her. It was an odd mixture of annoyance, shyness, and yet this weird fascination. His eyes were always on her, unless she looked directly at him. Then he would nervously look away.

She had tried to get him to talk, but he said very little especially about himself. She had asked why he was so scarred, which only caused his face to darkened. He bit down on his jaw, clenched his hands into fists, and stormed out.

The ship vibrated and jerked as it landed or docked. If there was a time to escape, it would be now. But she had to give credit to Vader, there was nothing in her room she could use to get the door open. She cursed to herself that she had been taken in her nightgown. Most of her outfits she carried several hidden tools. She might need to rethink her sleeping attire.

Vader didn't show up until about two hours later once the ship had stopped. He also didn't come alone. Two droids followed behind him. Both were med droids. One was a tall humanoid shaped one and the other a small floating one.

"What are they doing here?" she asked standing up.

"For you," Vader said in his normal short terse manner of speaking.

"Me?" she glanced at the droids. The humanoid one carried a metal case with it. "You don't mean . . ."

"They are here to check on your baby," Vader explained.

"Please lay down," the smaller droid said. "We will begin the examination."

"No," Padmé said as she crossed her arms across her chest. "I do not need your exam. Leave."

The droids paused and shared a look. They glanced at Vader, who stood tall and still. He glared at Padmé.

"They will perform the exam," he said through clenched teeth.

"No they will not," she snapped back at him.

"They are here to make sure the baby is fine," he growled.

"It is fine."

"Is it?" he asked.

A chill washed over her.
"Have you gone to see any doctors? About the baby? To see if everything is fine?" Anakin had asked her.

"Nothing is going to happen to me. Nothing is going to happen to you," she had told Anakin.

"And you're going to a doctor to make sure of that."

Anakin had said the Sith knew. Knew she was pregnant. Why? Why did Vader know she was pregnant? And why did he care so much?

"What do you want?" Padmé said in a harsh whisper. "Do you want my child? Is this what this is all about?"

Vader's whole body went slack. His yellow eyes went wide. His hands unclenched. He looked at Padmé in shock.

"Do I want- No. No! I do not want your baby. I want you to keep your baby," he said. His cheeks flushed a slight pink.

"Then why do you care so much? Why this?" she asked as she waved at the droids.

"As I said, to make sure you and the baby are fine," he mumbled.

"I can do this on my own," she said. "Once you get your son back and you release me, I am capable of seeking medical assistance on my own private time. My affairs and that of my unborn child are none of your concern."

Vader's face scrunched up and he pointed a finger at her. "You will go through with this exam."

"No."

"Padmé," he growled. Then he took a sharp breath in through his nose. Then another. "Padmé," he said again but this time softer. "Please."

She let her hands drop to her side. "I will go through with the exam," she said slowly. At once there was relief on Vader's face. "But," she added. Finally she had a bargaining chip. "First I want answers."

Vader said nothing. Only glared. Finally he pushed out, "What?"

"Why do you care so much about me and the baby? Why kidnap me? Why spare Anakin at the Jedi Temple when you slaughtered so many others?"

"I . . . " He paused, took a deep breath, and continued. "I once had a wife. She died in childbirth. I thought our child had died with her. He hadn't. He had been stolen."

"And now you're trying to get him back?" she asked softly.

"Yes," he said.

"And?"

"And?"

"Why me? Why Anakin? Why have you latched on to our baby to save? There are plenty of other mothers in this galaxy."
"I have seen the future," he said slowly. "In it you die, like my P- like my wife. Your child is taken, no stolen, by the Jedi. I . . . I . . . I do not wish for that future to happen."

Suddenly she was taken back to the eve of the wars. To when she was on Varykino with a young Jedi padawan who was having nightmares about his mother. She knew the could Force give one visions. A chill ran up her spine.

"And why Anakin?"

"Because," he said in a strained voice, "he needs to live."

"What happens if he dies?"

Vader paused in thought for a moment. "For a better future for me, he needs to live."

Vader was good at giving information and yet at the same time not giving information. He could make a good politician if he wasn't so rough and terse.

"Now, you will have the exam," he said. It wasn't a question. It was an order.

But she did lay down instead of continuing their verbal sparring. It was just a check-up. Perhaps it was for the best. There was a worry nagging at her heart. Anakin was concerned and clearly . . . Vader was as well. She may not be able to use the Force or see the future, but she did have trust in science and in herself. She needed to be confident and comfortable to move forward, and to do that she needed knowledge. She needed to know her baby was safe. Then she could deal with Anakin and Vader's worries.

She lifted her shirt, and the droids applied a cold jelly to her abdomen. The metal case held a small ultrasound machine. The droid placed the wand to her skin and pushed it around. Vader shuffled closer so he could look at the viewscreen on the machine.

"Hmmm," said the humanoid droid pushing the wand around.

Padmé frowned. "Hmm?" she asked. "Is there something wrong?"

The droid said nothing. He flipped a switch on the machine. An odd gurgling sound came out of it, but soon it turned into an even and fast thump. Thump-thump. Thump-thump. A heartbeat. She couldn't stop the smile that spread across her face.

"What is that?" Vader asked as he looked at the screen. It was turned away from Padmé, so she couldn't see.

"Everything looks normal," said the droid. "The babies are fine."

Everything faded away except for the fast beating heartbeat. Thump-thump. Thump-thump.

"Babies?" Vader asked.

The droid turned to him. "Yes. Two babies. Twins. Two heart beats."

His eyes went wide. "Two . . . two?" he choked out. "They were two? Twins? But . . . I . . . what happened to the other one?"

"I do not understand the question," the droid said.

"I never knew . . . I never saw the other child!" Vader said. He was unraveling. His voice was
becoming uneven in pitch. Then he turned and ran from the room.

Padmé wasted no time. She was up out of bed pulling her shirt down. The gel at once started to stick to the shirt, but she ignored it. Finally, Vader wasn’t on his guard. The two med droids shouted at her, but she ran into the hall. She dashed down it. Her eyes quickly scanned each door she ran by, but she knew the loading ramp would be unmistakable.

When she finally spotted it, it caused her to miss a breath. Soon she was there slamming her hand against the door panel release, but nothing happened. She let out a frustrated shout and slammed her hand against the button again and again. Nothing. It was locked. She pressed at the buttons hoping it would release the ramp. Nothing.

Vader!

Well if she couldn't get out the normal way, perhaps there was another way. An escape pod. A hatch somewhere. Or . . . she could go to the cockpit. There should be an override to release the ramp. She walked cautiously through the ship's corridors. She didn't know where Vader would be lurking, but she should have known it would be in the cockpit.

He sat in the pilot's chair hunched over. His elbows rested on his knees. His head buried in his gloved hands. She paused as she looked at him. She could feel the grief coming off of him in waves. She walked forward. She could hear his breathing. It was loud and uneven, possibly a bit pained. But he wasn't crying.

Why?

Why was he so bothered? There was something going on here she didn't know about. Something she didn't like. This Sith had too much personal interest in her life. In her children's lives. She looked beyond him to the control panels of the ship. She looked around for the loading ramp release. She spotted it on the co-pilot side.

She crept closer. Vader didn't stir. Could she get away with this with him sitting right there? She was now right at the co-pilot's chair. She brought her hand up and leaned forward. That's when a cold leather hand snapped up and grabbed her wrist.

"Don't," came the pained wheezy voice.

She grit her teeth and spun on him, but the burning retort died in her throat. For a moment, just for a moment, she swore his eyes weren't yellow. They were blue. A sky blue. She gasped. The sound seemed to shake him. He snarled, and at once his eyes were yellow again.

"Who . . . who are you?" Padmé asked. "Who are you really?"

Vader seemed to have collected himself. He stood up. "An old fool," he growled. "Now come. Skywalker is here."
Chapter 38

Anakin eyed the navigational screen. The *Twilight II* would soon exit hyperspace. They would arrive at Bespin. Finally he could secure Padmé as well as talk to Vader. He sighed as he thought of his future self. Over the course of the journey, Luke and Anakin had gotten to know each other better. The two swapped stories about their lives.

Luke had told Anakin all about joining the Rebel Alliance. How he had bought R2-D2 and C-3PO from Jawas. Anakin couldn't believe his old droids found their way to Luke. It turns out Senator Organa came into possession of them. Anakin had shared about his life as well, which was odd. Usually he didn't like talking about his past, but with Luke he opened up. Well maybe he didn't share everything, but he was far more open than he had ever been with anyone else besides Padmé.

The kid's bright blue eyes always lit up when Anakin mentioned Padmé, so Anakin told many stories involving her. It was the first time he had ever recounted his time as her bodyguard on Naboo. Where they had truly fallen in love and eventually married.

"And what about you?" Anakin asked. "Is there no one you feel strongly about?"


"Not even that princess? Senator Organa's daughter?"

Anakin was horrified to hear about the Death Star and Alderaan's destruction. It was another thing he had to add to his list of things to prevent.

"Oh no," Luke said. "Leia and I are just friends. I may have originally had a crush on her, but now . . ." He paused as he smiled. "Now, we're just friends. I do care about her deeply, but not in romantic sense."

Anakin nodded. He was glad Luke had a strong community of friends after the loss of his life on Tatooine. Anakin had never felt a strong connection to his fellow Jedi. Sure there were many he got along with, but he had never made deep relationships with any of them besides Obi-Wan and Ahsoka. In that respect, he wasn't that surprised to learn Vader had become unsatisfied with the Order. In fact, Anakin himself often felt like that. But was it to the point of falling to the Dark Side? To the point of *murdering* other Jedi?

*What if it meant saving Padmé's life?*

Anakin clenched his jaw. Vader had said he fell to the Dark Side trying to save Padmé. Was that the price that Palpatine had asked for? The blood of the entire Jedi Order? What would Anakin choose? He himself didn't even know. Part of him wanted to say he would choose the right thing. He wouldn't kill innocents to save Padmé, but there was something deep inside of him. Something he didn't want to face. A shameful darkness that would pick Padmé over the Jedi.

They came out of hyperspace and made their way down to the planet. Anakin piloted his ship towards a landing platform of the large floating city in the clouds. He could feel Vader's presence. He glanced over at Luke. His face was somber as he looked out the viewport.

"Hey," Anakin said breaking the tension in the cockpit. Luke looked over, and Anakin flashed him a grin. "You're not alone this time. We stick to the plan."

Luke took a steadying breath and nodded.
Luke remembered very little of the actual city part of Cloud City. He easily recalled the service levels. He could remember almost every detail of the gantry and the reactor shaft, but this area? These clean white halls? It was very different than what lay underneath.

It was hard to keep the memories back. They kept wanting to resurface. Luke had to keep repeating to himself that he was past this. It was in the past. The trick was to keep his thoughts focused on something else. He replayed Anakin's stories in his head. He replayed their plan. The moment his mind went idle, he could hear Vader's deep words and the hiss of lightsabers clashing.

Luckily he didn't have to think about where he was going. Anakin was leading the way. Luke assumed he was in contact with Vader via the Force as Anakin moved with a determined and quick speed. Luke let his hand drop to the belt on his borrowed old Republic officer uniform. Anakin had retrieved Luke's lightsaber and returned it to him.

Anakin led them up into one of the skyscrapers. The pink and yellow clouds seemed to glow. It was a pretty sight. It was a shame the only real memory Luke had of these clouds was when he was dangling from the antenna at the bottom of the city. A walkway connected two of the buildings together. Anakin stopped at the doorway.

"They're over there," Anakin said looking across the walkway.

"Is Padmé with him?"

"Yes," Anakin said. Not once had his gaze wavered on the other building.

Luke paused and opened himself up to the Force. He had been so focused on not thinking about Vader, that he hadn't been aware of how close Vader's presence actually was. Almost as soon as Luke reached out, Vader was there swirling around Luke with an inky iciness. The door on the other side of the walkway slid open. A tall man wearing a long black hooded cloak stepped out. One of his gloved hands tightly gripped the upper arm of a small woman.

Padmé. His mother.

Leia, Luke thought. Padmé reminded Luke of Leia. She was small, especially compared to Vader, but didn't shrink back. Padmé held her head high. She tugged on her arm to see if Vader would break his hold, which did not happen. But she gritted her teeth and carried on. She had long brown curly hair that was being whipped up by the wind. She wore a simple outfit: plain pants, boots, a shirt, and a brown jacket that looked too big for her.

Luke looked over at Anakin. His face had grown sterner. More serious. More angry. Darker. Luke could see the cracks within Anakin where the Dark Side awaited. The same coldness that Luke felt from Vader was lurking in Anakin. How easy would it be to break the Light within Anakin? In this instant, it seemed so fragile. Anakin may swear he won't fall to the Dark Side, but was it even possible? Like how the Republic of old already looked so much like the Empire, how much of Anakin was already Vader?

Anakin took a deep breath. He gave Luke a quick glance and a nod, and then he pressed the door panel button. The door in front of them slid open. At once the wind snapped at Anakin's brown Jedi robe. Anakin stepped out first, but Luke was right behind him. Vader stopped only about a third of the way across the walkway from his side. Padmé's eyes went wide.

"Anakin!" she shouted. Again she jerked her arm trying to free it from Vader. He turned to her and said something, but it was lost on the wind. She snapped something back and turned back to face her
husband. "Anakin!" she shouted again.

"Padmé!" Anakin said. "It's all right!"

She didn't seem all that comforted. She glanced nervously from Vader to Anakin. Anakin stopped at the midway point on the walkway.

"Vader!" Anakin shouted. "Release her!"

Vader wasn't looking at his past self. He was looking at Luke.

"Give me my son," Vader said. He hadn't shouted, but his words still carried. Luke heard them clearly. Was it a trick of the Force?


*Stick to the plan*, Anakin said through the Force.

Luke nodded and gave a weak smile. Then he started to make his way across the walkway. For once he saw Padmé looking at him. There was a curious nature to her gaze. Luke averted his eyes. It didn't take long before he stood right in front of Vader. Luke took a deep breath and raised his head to look his father in the eyes. Gold eyes met blue. Out of the corner of his eye, Luke noticed Vader's free hand raise just a fraction, but Vader quickly snatched it back down.

"Now let Padmé go!" Anakin shouted.

Vader's eyes snapped off of Luke and focused behind Luke. He was clearly looking at Anakin. Vader paused. His eyes narrowed. He looked down at Padmé. She was glaring up at Vader. It didn't show on Vader's face, but Luke felt it in the Force. Vader flashed through several emotions: fear, grief, worry, anger, love, and back to fear.

"Let her go, Vader!" Anakin shouted growing impatient. "You have your son!"

Vader grabbed Luke's arm and pulled him to the side. Then Vader stepped forward, letting both Padmé and Luke go. At once Padmé moved to pass Vader up, but stopped as Vader's red lightsaber came on with a snap-hiss. He held it out, blocking her passage. Anakin's blue lightsaber was quickly ignited.

Luke's hand lingered down to his own lightsaber. *Stick to the plan*, Luke reminded himself. He grabbed Padmé's arm and pulled her back. Anakin ran forward. He jumped and soared into the air. His lightsaber clashed hard against Vader's. Vader at once pushed Anakin off. Anakin landed on the railing, and Vader slashed at it. The metal broke apart into neat little slices with the ends glowing a bright red. Anakin jumped, brought his lightsaber down, and then landed on the walkway. Vader was there crashing his own saber down.

Padmé pulled on Luke's arm. Her gaze was focused on the duel. What did she think she was going to do? Stop them? With what?

"Come on," Luke said. He pulled her back towards the door she and Vader had exited from. Once inside, the door shut. It was quieter without the wind.

"Are you going to stop them?" Padmé asked.

"No," Luke said as he watched the two versions of his father fight. "They need to get this fight out of their system."
Anakin was leading Vader away from Padmé and Luke. Luke sighed. He wanted to watch, but knew it was for the best they leave. There was a chance that Vader would win.

"Come on," Luke said. "We will go get the ship ready."

Padmé looked at him. She was tense, as if she was about to argue. She glanced back at the fight. Her brows furrowed. She was clearly worried about Anakin. Then she turned back to Luke.

"Lead the way," she said.
Chapter 39

Anakin was angry. He knew he shouldn't be dwelling and acting on this emotion, but he couldn't help it. Not when faced with Darth Vader, who had broken their agreement. Of course he didn't let Padmé go. Anakin wouldn't have either, and Anakin and Vader were the same person. That was why Luke was supposed to get Padmé back to the ship, while Anakin distracted Vader. A task he had no problem performing.

Anakin had been aching for this fight, because Vader just deserved a good beating and Anakin wanted to be the one to give it to him. Anakin was just so annoyed and frustrated and angry and all those negative emotions were caused by Vader.

What had happened to make Anakin become Vader? A Sith? To make him willingly betray the Order and kill Jedi? Why had Vader hurt his own son? Anakin would never do such a thing! Luke had been plagued with nightmares of the duel with his own father. Vader cut off his own son's hand! And what of Padmé? Why hadn't he done more to save her? What had he done to try and save her?

Anakin needed answers! He couldn't become Vader, but he also couldn't let Padmé die. There had to be a way to have both! He was going to find it.

"Vader!" Anakin shouted. "I need answers, Vader!"

Vader said nothing. Instead he came barreling down the walkway. He came at Anakin with a quick low slash. Anakin flipped over it, used the railing for leverage, and vaulted himself up higher in the air to come down on Vader from on high. Vader's red blade clashed against Anakin's blue. Vader Force pushed Anakin away, and the Jedi went flying over the railing into the open air.

Vader jumped over the railing and was falling after Anakin. A simple push of the Force from Anakin sent Vader slamming into the side of one of the skyscrapers. The Sith disappeared into a cloud of shattered transparisteel. Anakin used the Force to cushion his landing on the rooftop of another building. He glanced up at the skyscraper Vader had disappeared into. In the distance he could hear sirens wailing.

Two large black pieces of machinery burst through two windows. Shards of transparisteel glittered in the yellow and pink light of the Bespin. The machinery pieces took a sharp turn and came straight at Anakin. Anakin jumped and slashed through them both with his lightsaber, but more pieces were waiting. Vents. Large computer terminals. A desk. A kriffin' door.

Then it was Vader himself. He jumped out of the window once Anakin was directly below him. His red saber was pointed directly down, ready to stab at the Jedi. Anakin jumped and flipped. He barely got his lightsaber up to knock off Vader's next few blows as the Sith advanced without waiting.

The two lightsabers hissed and hummed as they struck each other. Anakin clenched his teeth. He couldn't hold back. Not against Vader. Vader was him. And while Vader knew all of Anakin's moves, Anakin did not know all of Vader's. Clearly Vader's form had changed. Now that Anakin was looking for it, he saw the notes of his old moves. But Vader had moved on and adapted them into a whole new form.

"I need to know, Vader!" Anakin shouted between blows. "How did you fall? What did Palpatine promise you?"

The Sith paused. A scowl on his face that morphed into a growl as he charged forward. He slammed
his saber against Anakin's. The two swords hissed and sputtered against each other.

"I see Luke cannot hold his tongue," Vader said.

"Maybe it's because he wants to change the future," Anakin snapped back.

"You are a fool, Anakin Skywalker, if you think the future can be averted."

"Then you must think Luke a fool as well."

"He is a naive child!"

"Perhaps! Perhaps he is a child that just wants his family! A father! A mother!"

Vader's eyes widened just a fractioned, before they darkened again. He let out a horrible shout as he pulled back his saber and brought it back down. He unleashed a torrent of heavy blows. Anakin struggled to block them. He was forced backwards, but Vader wasn't letting him get away.

Luke led Padmé back through the hallways of Cloud City. An alarm had started to blare. People exchanged worried glances and started to hurry their way back to the safety of their homes. Guards were seen running with blasters. They spared no glances for Luke and Padmé. Their grim faces were focused pass them. Mostly likely towards Vader and Anakin.

Luke was internally cursing at himself for not paying better attention when Anakin had led him to Vader. He had already gotten turned around once.

"Do you know where you're going?" Padmé asked.

Luke's cheeks burned red. "Yes," he said and continued their march on. Luckily, the Force seemed to be pulling him along. Perhaps it was leading him back to the ship.

They exited a white hallway and entered a large round atrium. It extended several stories up. It was mostly empty, and quiet save for the alarms. Luke remembered walking through it earlier. They were getting close to the ship. Padmé suddenly let out a sharp hiss, grabbed Luke's arm, and yanked him down. The two hid behind a raised flower bed.


"What planet are we on?" Padmé asked.

"Bespin. Why?"

"Is it a Separatist planet?"

"I . . . I don't know."

Padmé let out a small huff in annoyance. Then she peered over the flowers. Luke did the same. On the other end of the atrium were droids. Older models for Luke, but they weren't old in this time. They were battle droids. He had seen millions of their parts before. They littered even the junkyards of Tatooine. They marched in neat little squads, each holding a blaster.

"You know how to use that?" Padmé asked. She was looking at his lightsaber.

Luke unhooked it from his belt. "Stay here," he said. She nodded. He took a deep breath, jumped over the flowers, and ignited his lightsaber. At once the droids were firing at him. He kept running as
he blocked and bounced the bolts away. He met the first squad in a rush of green swings from his lightsaber. Then he moved on to the next.

There was something easy about cutting down the droids. There was no scream in the Force as it did when a life was killed. Luke had grown numb to that scream. How many Imperials troopers and pilots had he personally killed? But with the droids, there was nothing. An eerie silence in the Force. However, that didn't make them an easy opponent. Unlike sentients, the droids simply marched on and kept firing. They didn't move to shield themselves. They had very little self preservation coding.

As Luke finished up the last squadron, red blaster bolts slammed into the last few droids. He looked over his shoulder to see Padmé holding one of the droid blasters in her hands. She wasted no time stepping over the droid bodies littered all over the floor.

"Where's the ship?" she asked. "We have to get Anakin and get out of here."

Luke deactivated his lightsaber. He glanced at the smoldering droid remains.

"This way," he said. He clipped his saber to his belt and ran down a new hall.

The fight had brought Anakin and Vader into a building. The hallway was littered with deep scorch marks, a few of which still smoldered. Anakin was tiring, and Vader was still going strong. Not just physically, but also mentally. Anakin had to be on his best game. One little misstep and Vader was there. He knew all of Anakin's feints and tells. He knew all of Anakin's tricks.

However, Anakin had managed to get a few jabs and strikes past Vader's guards. It seemed to only anger him more. Vader was powering down on Anakin with a series of fast blows and strikes. Anakin had been constantly losing ground the entire fight. Only a few times had he managed to get Vader to step back.

Vader stabbed at Anakin's head. Anakin tilted his head. He felt the red heat of Vader's blade sear across his cheek and ear. Anakin knocked Vader's blade away. Vader came down with a blow. Anakin met it. Again. Again! Anakin spun quickly around and came down low. Vader's body arched as he stretched his blade to meet Anakin's.

"Force!" Vader was good.

Vader came in low with a strike, aiming to get Anakin while he was still low to the ground. Anakin used the Force and jumped over Vader's blade. He brought his leg out and kicked at Vader's side. Vader wavered, but didn't completely fall off balance. Anakin grabbed onto Vader's side. He landed and pulled. Vader fell, but rolled himself back up to his feet.

Anakin was there. He was coming in from up high while Vader was still low. After a few blows, Vader sideswiped Anakin with one of his legs. Anakin was kicked down the hall. He landed hard, but quickly pushed himself up. The red lightsaber came down and seared into the floor where Anakin had just been. Anakin paused. His body taking deep breaths.

"You cannot win," Vader said pointing his saber straight at Anakin.

Anakin rushed towards Vader anyways. Their lightsabers clashed. Neither backed away. Both pushed towards the other. They didn't have room for wide arcing blows. It was quick jabs and short strikes. Vader stomped down on Anakin's foot. Anakin yelped. It caused him to backstep, and Vader grinned at the small victory.

Anakin pushed his blade against Vader's and kept it there. It became a contest of power. The blades
deadlocked as the other pushed. The blades grew white where they touched.

"Are you happy with your life?" Anakin ground out between his clenched teeth. "Are you happy that your wife died? You never knew your child? That you were some husk who had to wear a suit?"

Vader's face twisted in rage. He let out an angry shout and pushed forward, managing to overpower Anakin. Anakin had to retreat quickly as Vader's saber came in for a fast strike. It just barely missed Anakin's tunic. It caused him to backstep again and lose his balance. Vader used the Force to knock Anakin off his feet. He fell to the ground. He had no time to get up to his feet. Vader's saber was there crashing down on him. It took all of Anakin's remaining strength to block the blows.

Vader finally paused. He took a step back, but held his lightsaber pointing down at Anakin, who still laid on the floor panting.

"You didn't answer my question," Anakin said. "Are you happy with the life you lived these past twenty years? Tell me honestly. Don't lie to me! To yourself!"

Vader's blade lowered. "No," he said.

"Then help me fix it!"

Vader was motionless. He just stood there. A chill crawled up Anakin's back. A warning in the Force. Was Vader going to attack again? Anakin pushed himself up. His body was sluggish and sore. He wasn't going to last much longer. Before Anakin could bring his saber up, Vader's free hand was held up in stopping motion.

"Droids," Vader hissed.

That was when Anakin heard it. A sound he had grown all too familiar with the past three years. The sound of marching battle droids. At once Vader and Anakin were running down the hallway towards the sound. They turned a corner and met the droids head on. Working side by side, the two finished the droids quickly.

Vader kicked a droid's head. Then he looked over at Anakin. He asked, "Where are Padmé and Luke?"

"They should be on my ship," Anakin said.

"It's too far," Vader mumbled.

"What?"

"Your ship is too far."

"How do you know?"

"I can sense Luke. My ship is closer."

"I'm not going with you on your ship!"

"Then stay here," Vader said. He deactivated his lightsaber and ran down the hall.

Anakin stood there for a second. He could run back to his ship and join Luke and Padmé, but . . . but he still didn't have his answers. He needed Vader to talk, so he ran down the hall after the Sith.
Chapter 40

Streaks of hyperspace filled the viewport of the cockpit of the Twilight II. Luke sat in the pilot's chair with Padme next to him. Getting off of Bespin had been tricky, but nothing Luke couldn't handle. Padme had ranted on for a small time about how they were fools to go to a Separatist controlled planet for of course there would be droids.

Speaking through the Force to both Vader and Anakin, it had been decided they would go to Hoth. It was close while also remote, or as Padme put it "a frozen wasteland no one would ever go to." Luke smiled at the thought of the large Alliance base that had been there. Or will be. Or may be there?

Luke was relieved that Vader and Anakin were traveling together. He wondered how their duel ended and how both decided to at least get along well enough to get to Vader's ship. However, Luke didn't dwell much on it because his attention was completely taken up by Padme. She had turned her chair to face him. Her face was set in a grim serious expression.

It was hard to match up to the image Luke had in his head of her from all of Anakin's stories. He had imagined this soft lovely woman with a spark inside of her instead of this fierce small warrior woman.

"So you're Luke?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"You're Vader's son?"

"Yes. He didn't . . . He didn't hurt you did he?"

She sighed. "No. Quite the opposite in fact. He brought med droids on board to give me a check up."

A tension inside of Luke released. He wasn't even aware he had been holding it. Padme clearly saw it.

"I take it he's not known for his hospitality?"

"No," Luke said softly. He squeezed his right wrist where the flesh and the prosthetic met.

"What is really going on?"

"What do you mean?"

"Supposedly this is about Vader getting you, his son. But why is he so focused on me and my children? He was supposed to let me go back to Anakin once he had you, but he didn't."

Luke sighed. "I take it he didn't tell you?"

"No. In fact he's quite impossible to get anything out of."

Luke smiled. "Yeah, trust me. I know."

"So? What is going on here? Why me? Why Anakin? What do you and Vader have to do with us?"

"I don't . . . I don't know if I should be the one to tell you," Luke said. Padme only glared at him. "I
mean . . . I don't know if you would believe me."

"I am open to anything," Padme said holding her head up high.

"Uh, ok. Well then." Luke paused and took a deep breath. "I am a time traveler."

He paused and watched for Padme's reaction. She only reacted a small amount. A flicker of curiosity, but she said nothing.

So Luke continued, "I am from the future. Twenty-three years in to the future. I don't know how I got here. I think the Force brought me here. One minute I was in my snub fighter trying to get away from Darth Vader, and then the next thing I woke up in the past."

"So Darth Vader is also from the future?" she asked.

"Yes."

"So when Vader said he had seen the future . . . I had thought he was talking about some sort of Force vision. But he was talking about what really did happen."

"He talked about what happened in the future?" he asked clearly surprised Vader had said anything.

"Only that he saw that I died in childbirth, and my child was taken by the Jedi. He said didn't wish for that to happen."

Even though it seemed like Vader had only said a little bit, at the same time he said so much. He did want to change the future! He didn't want Padme to die! Luke's mouth formed an 'oh' shape.

"But that doesn't explain why he's so focused on me and my babies. Does it have to do with . . . with their father? What future is he trying to avoid and why?"

"Uh . . . well . . . " Luke said as he glanced around nervously not wanting to meet Padme's gaze. "You see . . . I am . . . My name is Luke Skywalker." He looked Padme head on. "I think you're my mother."

Padme's eyes went wide. She leaned back in her seat. She tilted her head to one side as she looked at Luke. Then she titled to the other. She leaned forward and really examined Luke's face.

She talked to herself softly. "Your chin . . . it's just like Anakin's. You have his hair and eyes, but no . . . just the eye color. Not the shape . . ." She leaned back again. "This . . . this is impossible. You can't be my son."

Luke's cheeks burned red. There was a soft pain in his heart. He knew that it was logical that she didn't believe him. Who would? But her saying she wasn't his mother still hurt. He had never thought much of his mother growing up. She was merely a figment. A ghost. He had to have had one, but no one knew anything about her. At least anything concrete. Sure his aunt had mentioned a woman the one time she met Anakin, but she didn't know for sure if that woman was Luke's mother. Though Aunt Beru had commented the woman and Anakin appeared quite close.

Instead Luke had looked towards his father. Most of his life he just knew Anakin Skywalker as the navigator on a spice freighter. Only recently it was a Jedi Knight. A hero. Though that view had since been changed. So it was odd that his mother sat in front of him. A physical real person with a name.

And he wanted to know her. To really know her. Not just through the bias of Anakin's stories, but he
wanted to form a real opinion of her. His own opinion of her. Because she was so much more than just the stories. Sure Anakin had mentioned how she could hold her own with a blaster, but he didn't really translate how fearless she was. How she had taken charge effortlessly and fearlessly.

"Wait, if . . . Vader is your father . . . Then . . ." she said in a soft whisper. She was quiet for a while. Until she finally said in a soft but sharp voice. "Anakin."

Luke bowed his head and stared at his lap. What was there to say? So he closed his eyes and opened himself up to the Force. Perhaps there he would find a moment of balance. As he opened himself up, he could feel the inner turmoil raging through Padme. He felt for her. He knew the feeling all too well of being faced with hard truths. He wondered if he should say anything, or if perhaps the best thing was to stay silent.

"Wait," Padme said softly. Luke looked up. She was looking right at him. "What happened to the other baby?"

"What? What other baby?"

"I'm pregnant with twins."

Luke's eyes grew wide. His mouth fell open. His shoulders sagged. "Twins?" he gasped. "You mean I have a brother?"

"Or a sister," Padme corrected. "But you . . . you didn't know?"


"That's why he said he didn't see the other child. He didn't know either."

"So what happened to the other child?" Luke asked.

The course was set. They were going to Hoth. Vader was not alone. He looked over at the copilot chair to see . . . him. Anakin. He should have left the foolish Jedi back on Bespin, yet now they were here together in Vader's ship. Anakin had his arms crossed across his chest as he stared out at space. He was glancing around the control panel.

Then without a word, he stood up and walked out of the cockpit. Vader sagged a bit in his seat. He was tired and sore. The fight with his younger self had been a hard one. He had barely kept up with the younger, healthier man. Vader did have a few things going for him. For one Anakin was him, so he knew all of his moves. But also Vader had evolved beyond those moves.

Partly he had to evolve due to his suit. He had been forced to reform his fighting style, and as such Anakin didn't know Vader's moves as well as Vader knew Anakin's. One thing Vader had to work on was footwork. With the suit on, he was no longer as quick or as limber. He could no longer do the fancy flips Anakin still performed. Thus he had to have better footwork.

Along with better footwork, he learned to lean more on power. He had bulk, and he needed to use that. His powerful blows, aggressive footwork, and being able to predict Anakin's movements, allowed Vader to almost always be on the advance. Such tactics frustrated Anakin, which only helped Vader. Though Anakin did manage to slip past Vader a few times and land a few blows. What Anakin didn't know was how much focus it took Vader to be the one on top in that duel.

Vader was now tired. He wanted to eat and sleep, a concept he hadn't dealt with in twenty years but now had to with a healthier body, but his whole body was still tense with that Jedi around. He
pushed himself out of the seat and left the cockpit wondering what trouble his younger self had gotten into. He first checked the engine room as that was where he would be, but oddly no one was there.

He found Anakin in the cargo hold. He was digging through the metal boxes of Sith holocrons and artifacts he had stolen from Sidious.

"What are you doing?" Vader growled. "Put those back. You have no idea what power you could be toying with."

Anakin paused. A sith holocron was in his hand. He looked down at the red and metal pyramid holocron. He tossed it up in the air and easily caught it. Vader clenched his teeth and balled his hands into fists.

"What is all this?" Anakin asked. "Where did you get all of it? I mean it's not like I had all of this hiding in my room in the Temple."

"I took it from my Sith master."

"You mean Palpatine? So you were at his apartment. Wait . . . that night you snuck into the Temple. There were two Siths. I was so sure of it. You who was at the Temple and another at the Chancellor's apartment . . . The one who killed all the guards. That wasn't . . . Palpatine was it?"

"Most likely," Vader said. "The apartment robbery was a ruse. None of this was there. I got this from his underground hideout. I laced it with bombs and detonated them right before I went into the Temple. I knew it would anger Sidious." Vader paused as he smiled. "I just did not expect it would anger him that much."

Anakin frowned. He placed the holocron back in the box.

"So you took all of this to piss Palpatine off? I mean, not that I'm against it after I learned he's the Sith mastermind who has been pulling the strings on both sides of this war. But he's your master."

Vader let out a huff that was a mix with a growl. "Master is an adequate word for him," he said.

Anakin's face darkened. He understood Vader's meaning behind that word. Anakin's face twisted. Vader could just make out the conflict inside of Anakin behind his shields.

"It is an act," Vader said. "He only acts as your kind friend until he gets what he wants. His slave whip of choice is Force lightning, which is extremely painful when you are in a life support suit."

"And why would you ever accept that?" Anakin spat.

Vader all too easily recognized that anger in Anakin's eyes.

"Because of Padme," Vader said.

"But . . . but she died! You failed in saving her! You just stayed with Palpatine for twenty years after that?"

Vader ground his teeth together. "There was nothing else," he muttered. "It was all there was. I had lost everything for the power Palpatine gave me. I was going to make the galaxy better. There was no other path for me to take."

"There is always another path."
"Not for me. Not at that point."

"But you've changed your mind."

Vader said nothing.

Anakin repeated, "You've changed your mind. Even if you don't want to help me, you do want to help Padme. You still want her to live. And what about Luke? Why are you so focused on him?"

"He is my son."

"And?"

"And?"

"You wish to do what with him? Turn him to the Dark Side? Rule the galaxy together as father and son?"

"Yes," Vader said between his teeth.

"He doesn't want to do that. He literally jumped off."

"He will," Vader said a bit louder. He pointed a finger at Anakin. "I just need to show him the power of the Dark Side."

"And what if he still says no?"

Vader broke his gaze from Anakin. "He has to. It is the only way," Vader said softly.

"He has to? Or . . . or what? What will happen? Vader? Vader! What will happen? You don't mean to . . . kill him if doesn't join you?"

"No!" Vader shouted.

A tense silence stretched between them. The two just stared at each other. It was Anakin who spoke first.

"So you do care for him," he pointed out.

Again, Vader averted his gaze. "He is my son," he said. That was all he needed to say. That should be enough to convey Vader's feelings.

"And what does Palpatine think of this?" Anakin asked slowly. "The Palpatine of the future? Your master? Does he know of your son?"

"Yes, he knows of Luke."

"I take he does not approve."

"He . . . wanted Luke dead."

"Wanted? Past tense?"

"He has foreseen that Luke will become powerful, even more so than I. He believes Luke can destroy him."

Anakin smiled. "Good," he said with a nod. But then his face turned more serious. "But I doubt he's
going to just let that threat waltz around the galaxy."

"I told the Emperor that Luke could be turned to the Dark Side. If he did not join us, then . . . "

"Then the threat to the mighty empire would need to be eliminated. And you would just go along with it? Follow your masters bidding, just like that? *Kill* your son?"

"That is why Luke needs to join me! Together we can kill the Emperor."

"Ugh," Anakin said while he pinched the bridge of his nose. "We're just going in circles here."

"Agreed. This conversation is pointless. The priority is finding a way for Luke and I to return to our proper time. This is why I stole these items from Sidious. I am hoping they have some knowledge on time travel."

"You really want to go back?" Anakin asked. "That future sounds horrible."

"You would rather I stay here?" Vader said.

Anakin paused as he considered that thought. "Hmm. Yeah. Good point." He looked at the boxes. "This is a lot. This will take a while to go through."

"I will have Luke to assist me."

"I can help."

Vader froze. He straightened up. His eyes narrowed at his younger self. "What?" he asked.

"I can help you get back to your time. In return, you help me prevent your future."

"I do not think you can prevent it," Vader said.

"You're lying," Anakin growled. He pointed a finger at Vader. "You *do* think the future can change. If you think Padme can live, than everything else can change as well."

Vader considered Anakin's offer. It would go faster having another experienced Force user to go through the holocrons. Vader would have to instruct Luke, which he honestly was looking forward to. But it would take more time. With Anakin's help, getting through all the materials would go faster and as such get back to Vader's time faster.

"I will think on your proposal," Vader said. "I am going to go meditate." Anakin rolled his eyes. "Do not touch anything in these boxes," Vader continued. He turned to walk from the cargo hold, but stopped at the door. He turned and faced Anakin. "And do not touch my ship." Vader turned back around and walked away.
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Sorry I'm late with this update. Life got unexpectedly demanding and writing took a backseat as well this chapter was a bit hard for me to write. But it's here now, and it's twice the length of a normal chapter.

The Twilight II sat in a large cavern on Hoth. Luke could see metal crates of supplies, tubes and wires criss-crossing the floor, droids buzzing around, Alliance members walking around, and the cavern filled with ships. It was odd. This cavern was once the hangar of Echo Base, but also . . . it wasn't. Not yet. Possibly, not ever.

Luke and Padmé hadn't talked much after she revealed she was carrying twins. She had questioned Luke on his family making sure he had no idea he had a sibling. The idea was surreal. He had a sibling. But what happened to them? No one had ever mentioned a sibling to him, especially Ben. Then again Ben wasn't all that forthcoming with information regarding the Skywalker family.

Luke stood in the cargo hold. The large loading ramp was lowered. Anakin and Vader had entered the system a bit ago. They would be landing soon. Padmé had joined him at the top of the ramp. Neither one said anything to each other. Both watched the cavern opening. Both lost in their own thoughts.

He heard Padmé take a breath in as they saw a dark dot in the distance. They both watched as it grew closer and the sounds of engines grew louder. Eventually a ship entered the cavern. It was a nice ship, but not flashy. It would be rather nondescript if wasn't for the two laser cannons mounted on top and a third mounted down below. It would fit right in a hangar full of smugglers' ships like the Falcon or the Volt Cobra.

Once the ship landed, it didn't take long for the loading ramp to lower, and Anakin was running down the ramp before it touched the ground. His eyes were completely focused on Padmé. She hesitated for a moment as she watched him run across the cavern, but then she ran down the Twilight's ramp. He scooped her up in his arms and spun her around as he held her tightly.

Despite the biting cold, there was a growing warmth. A light fluffy sparkling feeling as husband and wife reunited. Was Luke picking up on Anakin's emotions in the Force? He didn't know, but it was clear he was feeling the love between Anakin and Padmé. The two now stood still. One of Anakin's hands was stroking her hair, while the other one cupped her face. Padmé had her arms wrapped around Anakin's neck. They were both whispering softly to each other. A few times one would lean in to kiss the other.

Luke realized this was the first time he had actually seen his parents together. He smiled as he watched them, but his smile faded as he noticed the tall dark shadow standing at the top of the other ship's ramp.

Luke reached out in the Force and brushed against Vader's presence. Vader didn't seem to notice. He was too focused on the couple. Luke pulled himself back in. Even with that simple and quick brush, Luke could sense the grief and pain in Vader. He wondered what it must be like for Vader to see his wife alive and so clearly in love with his past self.
Vader suddenly stiffened. Padmé was looking beyond Anakin to the figure of Darth Vader. Then she looked over at Luke.

"I would like to speak to you privately," Padmé said to Anakin.

Anakin looked at both Vader and Luke. He nodded, and the two made their way towards the Twilight. Despite there being plenty of room for privacy on the ship, Luke started to walk down the ramp as he felt like he would be intruding. Anakin paused at the foot of the ramp as Luke walked down. Anakin smiled and placed his hand on Luke's shoulder.

"Make sure he doesn't just grab you and run away," Anakin said glancing over his shoulder. "I still have a lot to ask him."

Luke nodded. Anakin and Padmé made their way up the ramp into the Twilight. Luke walked across the cavern towards the large cavern mouth. He stopped right before the snow started to collect in piles. He looked out at the white landscape. He watched as the snow swirled and drifted. It reminded him of the sands of Tatooine. Hoth and Tatooine were such different worlds. Two different extremes, and yet the same. Both barren and hostile, yet also had these moments of beauty.

"You have been discussing the future," Vader said as he walked up and stood beside Luke.

"And you haven't," Luke said. He sighed and turned to face his father. "You don't think it can change. That it is too late." Vader said nothing. His gold eyes stared at his son. His face was neutral. "Or do you actually like that future?" Luke asked a bit bitterly.

Vader turned his attention out to the snow. A silence fell between them. Only the sound of wind and snow was heard.

"You have a chance," Luke said quietly. "A chance to change your life for the better."


"Yes, you are," Luke said defensively.

"I may have once been him, but that man in our time is dead. His wife is dead. His son stolen. His health gone and body imprisoned. When we return to our time it will not suddenly be a new future where Darth Vader never existed. Where you were raised properly with your parents. The Empire and the Rebellion will still be there. Nothing will have changed for us."

"You don't know that," Luke said softly. "You don't know what will happen by changing the future."

"You think differently?"

"No," Luke admitted. He also believed that if they did go back to their time, it would be the one they left behind. Whatever was happening here wasn't going to affect Luke's future. His past had already played out, but this future had yet to happen. Luke looked Vader in the eye. "But is it wrong to want something better for someone else? For . . . everyone else? The whole galaxy?"

There was a slight pull on the corner of Vader's lips. "You always seem to be thinking of others over yourself. You would shoot down the Death Star to save a planet. Fly your ship head first into mine to save the other pilots on Vrogas Vas. You came to Bespin to save your friends." He paused. The smile faded. "It is a weakness, Luke."

"It is not!" Luke shouted. "There is nothing wrong with wanting to protect and save people. Just like
there is nothing wrong with wanting a different future for myself even if I never get to experience it."

Again silence fell between them. Time stretched on. The cold was getting to Luke. He said nothing as he turned from the cavern mouth and made his back towards the ships.

Anakin led Padmé into the *Twilight*'s cockpit. There was something comforting about being in here. If something went wrong, the controls were only a few steps away. Though he didn't sit down. He turned around wrapped Padmé up in his arms. His hand cupped her face, and his lips met hers. Sure he had peppered her with soft kisses earlier, but now he held nothing back.

It was Padmé who pulled away, and Anakin sighed. Already he missed her warmth.

"What is going on?" she asked. He put his hands on her upper arms, but they slipped off as she stepped away. "I want answers, Anakin."

Anakin sat down in the pilot's chair, and she sat down in the copilot's chair. He took a breath. Then another. Then he started to tell her the events of the last few days. He started at the beginning, though she already knew that part. He told her after Vader's attack on the Temple, he was determined to figure out who this Sith was. Luke had mentioned that his father had once been a Jedi, so Anakin ran Luke's DNA for partial matches against the Temple's archives.

That was when the DNA came back to Anakin as a match. He realized that Luke and Vader may be time travelers after connecting several things the two had said, but to prove this hunch he needed Padmé's DNA. It was also a match to Luke. There was only one way possible for Luke to match both Padmé and Anakin. Luke was their time-traveling son, which meant Darth Vader was Anakin Skywalker from the future.

However by the time Anakin had pieced this together, Vader had already kidnapped Padmé and Luke had tried to leave the Temple. So Anakin helped Luke leave as Vader had offered the deal of exchanging Padmé for Luke. Which led them to their current situation.

"So you believe all of this?" Padmé asked when he was done. "That Luke is our . . . is our son? From the future?"

"Yes," he said.

It must be hard for Padmé, Anakin thought. Unlike him, she didn't have the Force confirming the truth of the situation. She didn't even have science to see the DNA results. All she had was the word of Anakin and Luke.

"And that would mean that Vader is . . ."

"Me," he finished for her.

Padmé's large brown eyes bore into him. Her brows were wrinkled. "But . . . how? Why? I can't believe that . . . that man is you."

"He fell trying to save you," Anakin said. "You died in childbirth."

"That's why he was so insistent about getting a check up," she said softly.

"Check up?"

She smiled. "Yes. He brought in two medical droids."
Anakin's stomach knotted up. "And?" he asked.

"They're fine. Everything is fine," she said. And then her smile grew. It only made him smile as well. She scooted to the end of her seat, and Anakin did the same. She grabbed his hands. "It's twins," she said.

"Twins?" Anakin said. "Twins? Are you . . . are you sure?"

"There were two heartbeats."


"Yes. I asked him about it. He was surprised as well. Vader . . . did not take it well at all. He said he had never seen a second child and fled the room."

"Huh," Anakin said. He squeezed her hands. "Don't worry, Padmé. I'm starting to figure this all out. I've made a deal with Vader, which hopefully he sticks to."

"A deal?" she asked taken aback.

"I help him try to find a way back to his time and he helps me prevent his future."

"Do you think that's possible?"

He squeezed her hands again. "It has to be," he said softly. "I can't . . . I can't fall to the Dark Side. I can't let that future come to past."

"It won't. Now that you know- Now that we know, we can prevent it from happening."

She gave him a small smile. Anakin leaned over and brought her hands up so he could kiss them. Then he sighed deeply.

"There is more," he said slowly. She looked at him. "More about this future . . . The Republic falls."

"What?" she said. She pulled her hands out of his. "We lose the war?"

"No," Anakin said. "The Republic wins, but it becomes an empire."

He said nothing. He just sat there watching her. Her eyes went wide, but were also unfocused as her thoughts ran through the implications.

"I knew it," she said softly. "I knew it!" she said again louder. "It's Palpatine, isn't it? He doesn't release his power. He keeps it! This is exactly what Mon, Bail, and I were talking about!"

He smiled weakly. He knew it didn't reach his eyes, which Padmé caught. She paused and tilted her head.

"Anakin?" she asked. "What else? There's more, isn't there?"

"I'm afraid," he said in an almost whisper, "it gets worse."

Luke stood in the cargo hold of Vader's ship. He had come back to this ship instead of the Twilight as he still wanted to give Anakin and Padmé space. After wandering around a bit, he found himself in this room that was filled with metal boxes. Vader joined him a few moments later.
Vader had been explaining the boxes. How these were items he had stolen from his Sith master in hopes of finding a clue back to their time. Vader had brought out a strange glowing red pyramid device. He was explaining it was a holocron, like those Luke had seen in Grakkus' collection, a sort of storage device that used the Force. However, he stopped as he heard feet marching loudly down the hallway.

Padmé entered the hold in a storm. Her eyes burned with a determined fire. Her jaw was clenched. Her head held high. Her hair was loose and hung around her wildly. Her gaze only briefly rested on Luke before it snapped onto Vader.

"You!" she shouted as she pointed a finger at him.

Vader didn't step away, but he did tilt his head back. Padmé marched right up to him. Anakin was right behind her, but lingered by the door. Padmé stopped right in front of Vader.

"Tell me and tell me the truth," she said. "Are you Anakin Skywalker?"

Vader's eyes briefly glanced over at Anakin, but then went right back to Padmé. A tense silence filled the air. Finally Vader said in a pained voice, "Yes."

Again silence stretched. It was a thick and heavy. It consumed everything. Even the sound of breathing wasn't heard.

"You claim to be Anakin Skywalker," Padmé said breaking the spell. "But you are not him. Anakin would never fall to the Dark Side. He would never fall to the Sith. He would never do the deeds you have done!"

Vader's breathing was short and uneven. His body was completely tensed up. His mouth turned down into a sharp frown, which gave a small glimpse of his teeth. His gaze shifted and he focused on Anakin. Anakin tensed up. He glared at Vader. Vader only looked back at Padmé.

"Then you must not know him well at all. Or . . ." He paused as his gaze briefly flicked on Anakin for a moment before he focused back on Padmé. "You are lying to yourself."

Padmé sucked in a sharp breath of air. Anakin took two steps forward, but stopped from the glare Vader gave him.

"I told you before," Vader said to Anakin. "I know all about you. I am you."

There was something being unsaid here. Luke could feel it. Something the other three knew about, but he didn't. Had something happened? Had Anakin done something in the past? Or had they simply noticed the cracks within Anakin as well?

Padmé closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She reopened her eyes. She was calmer and collected.

"How did it happen?" she asked. "What made you fall?" Vader said nothing. "To save me? To prevent me from dying?" Again Vader was silent. "You said it yourself. Your own wife died and your child was stolen. You didn't want that to happen to me."

"Yes," Vader growled. "I kept having dreams of you dying in childbirth." Luke noticed Anakin stiffened. "I sought advice from the Jedi. They told me to rejoice once you died and became one with the Force. I tried to access the holocron vault, but only masters could enter. I was finally given a seat on the Council, and they refused to give me the title of master!"
"What?" Anakin shouted. "How can you be on the Council and not a master? That's never been done before. It's insulting!"

"They acted as they always have. Afraid of my power. I was given the seat so I could spy on the Chancellor and report back to the Council his dealings," Vader said.

"Did the Council start to suspect his was a Sith?" Anakin asked.

Vader ignored the question. He continued, "Despite being on the Council, I was excluded more and more. They were keeping things from me. When Kenobi defeated Grievous, Palpatine revealed to me he was the Sith lord we had been looking for. I informed the Council . . . Instead of arresting Palpatine and letting him stand trial, they attempted to murder him and . . . I . . ."

"Wouldn't let that happen?" Padmé asked.

"No," he said. "The Jedi were planning a coup."

"Impossible!" Anakin said.

Vader glared at him. "They were planning on taking over the Senate. They had to be destroyed."

"And you agreed with this," Anakin said slowly. "You took Palpatine's side."

"I couldn't let him die," Vader said darkly. "I had to know how to save Padmé."

"And did you?" Padmé snapped. "Did you save me? How did I die?"

"You thought you killed her," Anakin added. "You said it was lie, but you believed you were responsible."

Vader looked away.

"What happened?" Padmé asked. "What did you do?"

"I couldn't let him die," Vader said darkly. "I had to know how to save Padmé."

"And did you?" Padmé snapped. "Did you save me? How did I die?"

"You thought you killed her," Anakin added. "You said it was lie, but you believed you were responsible."

"What did you do?" Padmé asked again taking a step toward Vader.

Luke took a step forward, debating on stopping her. The darkness was whipping up all around Vader. It was lashing out. The room was growing colder. It felt as if they were outside not inside.

Anakin walked up and put a hand on Padmé's shoulder. He gently pulled her back a few steps, but Padmé didn't cower.

"What did you do?" she repeated. "Why did you think you killed me?"

"It was a lie!" Vader shouted. The whole room shook. The metal boxes were slammed against the walls and each other. "I knew you were alive! I felt it!"

Anakin pulled Padmé behind him. He stood between her and Vader.

"Is this how it happened?" Anakin asked. "You lost control? She found out, didn't she? What you had done. You murdered the Jedi." The room was growing colder. Luke could see his breath. The metal of the ship was creaking. But Anakin continued. "Was it like what happened with Luke? She wouldn't accept you, so you grew angry and attacked?"
The storm around Vader was collapsing in on itself. It was swirling into Vader like a black hole. Luke didn't even realize he had taken the first step. As he took the second step, he debated on stopping. But by the third he had made up his mind. It was a small cargo hold so it didn't take much to cross it to get to Vader. Anakin's hand came up as if to stop Luke, but didn't move from his spot protecting Padmé.

Standing this close to Vader was painful. The Force lashed and screamed as it was pulled into Vader. But being this close also allowed Luke to feel Vader's emotions. There was a bottomless grief there. It hurt. It was sharp and cutting but also dull and grinding. It pulled on Luke's heart. Stabbed his heart. Burned it. Froze it. Ripped it apart. Squeezed it.

Luke gasped. It felt like at any moment he was going to die. His heart was going to give out. Was this what Vader had lived with for twenty-three years? This agonizing despair and heartache? It was endless. Cold and dark and lonely. There was nothing down in there. Just himself and his pain.

Luke reached out and touched Vader's arm. His upper arm. Luke could feel the flesh under the black clothes. Vader's head slowly turned to look at Luke. His gold eyes were dull in color, but held so much pain. Luke squeezed Vader's arm and smiled. It wasn't a grand smile. It was weak and a bit painful. It wasn't warm, but it was there.

And in that moment, in the deepest depths, there was a small flicker inside of Vader. It had been but a glimpse, but it was there. Anakin Skywalker was there inside of Vader.
My plan was to get back on a regular schedule, but life just keeps throwing me curveballs. I got really sick with food poisoning this last week. So here's to hoping nothing pops up going forward.

"What are we going to do?" Padmé asked.

Anakin ran a hand through his hair. Luke had suggested it was probably for the best if everyone ate something and rested. Anakin and Padmé had protested. They both wanted answers from Vader, but Luke held his ground. Luke pushed Anakin and Padmé out of the hold. They had decided to return to the *Twilight*. They ate some ration bars before settling down on to the bunks in the crew quarters.

"We still need more information," Anakin said. "We did learn a few new things."

Padmé nodded.

"I had . . . dreams . . ." Anakin said. He knew his voice came out pained. Padmé left her bunk and sat down next to him. She knew he was thinking of his mother. She wrapped an arm around him.

"Anakin . . ." she said softly. "Have you had dreams of me dying?"

"No."

"Then maybe this time it won't come to pass. Maybe enough has changed or we now know enough this time."

"For you not to die," he said as he squeezed her tightly.

"Agreed. And for you not to fall to the Dark Side. What else?"

"For there to be no empire."

"And for the Jedi to survive," she added. He nodded. "So now let's focus on what we can do to prevent these things from happening."

"I don't know Padmé," Anakin said softly. "I fear we may not be able to prevent it from happening."

Padmé's hands came up and gently grabbed Anakin's face. She turned it so he looked at her.

"Don't say that," she said. "Don't give up. We can prevent this."

Anakin smiled and tilted his head downwards, forehead touching hers. His hands slid up into her
hair. The two just sat like that for a long while.

Luke stared at the ceiling of Vader's ship. He was laying on a gravity couch in the hold. Vader was in the crew's quarters. Hopefully he was getting some sleep, but Luke doubted it. He doubted anyone was actually sleeping right now. Instead he thought about Vader. He thought about how it felt when he touched him.

He recalled Yoda's words from the Jedi Temple. "Suffering you were. The pain too much. Burying the pain you were. Suffering would only lead you to hate. Hate leads you to anger. Anger leads to the Dark Side."

Vader was suffering, and Luke guessed he had been suffering for twenty-three years now. The suffering was so deep. There was nothing down there. Just Vader and his pain. No wonder he wasn't open to changing the past for Anakin Skywalker. Luke could tell Vader was bitter, but it might go deeper than that. To Vader it probably felt like it wasn't fair.

It wouldn't be fair that another Anakin Skywalker got everything that Vader had lost.

Wasn't it the same for Luke in a ways? The still-growing Luke might grow up knowing his parents. Both of his parents. And his sibling. He may grow up on a wonderful planet like Naboo or Coruscant where there was no Empire. He may even become a proper Jedi.

But not matter how hard Luke tried, he didn't feel bitter towards his unborn self. Luke did feel sad. Sad that he would never have those experiences, but he didn't resent his other self for possibly getting them. What he had said to Vader earlier still rang true. He did want happiness and a better life for his other self.

But Vader's pain was so much more than Luke's. So much of a deeper wound. Wound may not be a good word. A gaping hole inside of Vader that twisted and still bled raw to this day. But in there was still Anakin. Luke had felt it. A brief moment. There was good in Vader. He had just forgotten. He had buried it. Hidden it under all the pain and suffering.

Is this what Yoda had meant about letting the pain and suffering go? Would Luke's own pain have devoured him too eventually? And if Luke could let go of his pain, could Vader? It hadn't been easy for Luke. It had hurt so much. It would be far worse for Vader. Of course the bigger question was, would Vader even want to let go of it? He had been holding on to it for so long.

And what would happen if he did? Would he stop being Darth Vader? What did that even mean?

Anakin quietly untangled himself from the sheets and Padmé's arms and left the crew quarters. He had managed to get a small bit of sleep, but it was mostly fleeting. There was too much going on in his mind. His thoughts were too noisy. He walked out of the ship into the cavern. He was surprised to see he wasn't the only one out here.

Towards the cavern mouth was Vader. His red lightsaber was ignited as went through katas. Anakin just stopped and watched. He had to admit, Vader was impressive. It caused a smile to pull on the corner of Anakin's lips. Vader was him after all. Vader finished his current series of moves and then paused. He turned off his lightsaber, turned, and glared at Anakin. Even from this distance Anakin could see Vader's scowl.

Anakin walked over. Vader crossed his arm across his chest as he watched his younger self approach.
"Don't suppose you care to spar?" Anakin asked in a light-hearted tone.

"No," Vader quickly replied.

Anakin hadn't expected Vader to actually agree. Vader started to walk away.

"Wait!" Anakin shouted. His voice echoed in the cave. Vader paused and looked over at Anakin. "I want to know. What happened?"

Vader made a huffing noise and turned sharply away.

"I need to know!" Anakin shouted. "You said it yourself. You know all about me. You are me. Don't lie to me. To yourself."

Vader turned back around to face Anakin. He pointed a black gloved finger at Anakin. "I may have once been you, but you are not me."

"Thank the Force for that," Anakin mumbled. Vader narrowed his eyes. Anakin took a deep breath. "I think you regret it. I think it pains you every day. You see her now, alive, and you don't want her dead. That's why you brought in those med droids to check on her health. That's why you didn't want to go through with the exchange on Bespin. You're worried that I may still harm her. Whatever you did, you think I'm going to repeat it."

He paused. Vader had tensed up, but otherwise hadn't moved.

Anakin continued, "I don't want to kill Padmé. I don't want her to die! Tell me what happened. It's just us. No Padmé. No Luke. The only person you have to tell is yourself."

"She betrayed me," Vader said in a low voice.

Anakin blinked. "What? She . . . she betrayed you? How? Why? Because she didn't agree with you slaughtering Jedi or joining the Dark Side?"

"After I . . . After I pledge myself to the Sith and proved my loyalty by stopping the Jedi coup, I was sent to end the war by killing the Separatist Council. I told Padmé where I was going. I told her I would set everything right, but she followed me. She brought Kenobi with her. He was there to kill me."

"Are you sure?"

"Am I sure?" Vader asked appalled.

"Are you sure Obi-Wan was there to kill you? What if he just wanted to talk?"

"He cut off my legs and my arm!" Vader shouted. "He left me to die on the banks of a lava river! He stood there and watched while my clothes caught fire and burned me! My skin flaked away. My lungs were scorched. My vocal chords ruined. My sight weakened. My eardrums melted. Kenobi stood there and said he loved me. Then he turned and left me. I clawed my way up the bank with one arm. I was saved because Sidious arrived, but I had already changed. The change was burned into me forever. I was Darth Vader, without a trace of Anakin Skywalker, a Sith lord. Scarred and kept alive only by machinery and my own black will."

Anakin looked at Vader. He saw the pale skinned bald head. The multitude of scars that littered it.

"Is there anything else?" Vader hissed.
There of course was so much more, but at the moment no words came to Anakin. He was speechless as he thought of what Vader said. Of Obi-Wan injuring Vader like that. Of injuring . . . him like that. Vader turned and walked back to his ship. Anakin just watched him go.
Chapter 43

Vader was in a terrible mood. He wanted something to take his anger out on. He was tempted to march out into the snow and fight some of the local wildlife, but that would mean Luke would be left alone with Anakin Skywalker. A thought which only soured Vader's mood even more.

He had tried to practice his lightsaber techniques. Once again he would have to modify his fighting as he was no longer bound to his suit. He could move easier. He could lift his arms above his head. But of course Anakin had interrupted Vader. So now Vader sat with his son on the gravity couch in his ship's hold. Luke sat hunched over looking at an old flimsi book. It was one of the ones from Sidious' hideout.

Vader should be looking over the books and holocrons as well, but . . . His mind kept wandering. He thought about his old suit and his injuries that were now healed. He could breathe without assistance. He could hear and see fine. He could eat solid foods. The more serious burns on his skin had been healed, though his skin was still heavily scarred.

But why was he healed? Why had the Force changed him? Why now? Why only when he went into the past? Had his body reverted back in time as well? If that was the case, why did he not have his three limbs back? Why was his skin still scarred? And what would happen if he went back into the future? The future where he had to wear the suit? Would he return to his own time and suddenly find himself dying?

"You really want to go back? That future sounds horrible." Anakin had asked Vader that.

What did the future have? The Empire had risen and was well established, and the Jedi were dead. But Luke was here, and so was . . . so was Padmé. What of the other child? Luke's twin? Had they even survived? Had they died with their mother? Perhaps Luke was the only survivor.

Footsteps rang through the ship announcing Padmé and Anakin's arrival. The two shortly entered the hold. Luke closed his book and placed on the couch next to him. Anakin nodded at Luke, who nodded back. This only made Vader frown.

"We need to decide our next steps," Padmé said. "I know you plan on looking through your stolen collection to find a way back to your time. I want to return to Coruscant and the Senate."

"No," Vader said at once. What was she thinking? Padmé glared at him.

"You," she snapped, "have no right to decide what I do or don't do."

"It is too dangerous," Vader growled.

"I will not sit in some cave while the Republic crumbles apart. I need to return and continue my work with the Delegation of 2,000. We are almost ready to present the petition."

"That is a fool's errand," Vader said. "The only thing it succeeds in doing is putting a target on the back on those who oppose Palpatine the loudest. Many of the delegation were arrested after the fall of the Republic. A few executed. A few like Organa and Mothma went on to be traitors and formed the Rebellion."

Vader noticed Luke's attention sharpen at the mention of the Rebellion. How his eyes grew wide as he looked over at Padmé.
"Glad to know that some people never stop fighting for what they believe in," Padmé said. "But I cannot sit here and do nothing."

"You are only putting yourself in the line of danger," Vader continued. "Palpatine didn't just seize control. The Senate voted for the Republic to be an Empire. They were tired of the war. They wanted peace and security. You realize Palpatine is running both sides of the war. He creates events to seize more and more power like with what he did on Scipio with the banks."

Padmé frowned and Anakin shifted uncomfortably.

"Nevertheless," Padmé said, "I will not stop trying. I can at least prepare for bringing Palpatine to trial. There has to be evidence of his crimes."

"It is all very well hidden, and the moment you start poking your nose into things, Palpatine will not hesitate to do something about it," Vader said as he stood up.

"Then help me out! Give me something I can look for discretely."

"He has everything planned. Even if you unroot something, he will quickly cover it up. Just like he did with -" Vader suddenly stopped. He was going to say 'Just like he did with Fives.'

"Just he did with . . . what?" Anakin asked. "You remembered something."

Yes, he had. The clone inhibitor chips that allowed Sidious to issue Order 66 and bring down the Jedi. It would give plenty of fuel for Padmé's cause. But . . . what if Vader never found a way back to the future? What if he decided to stay? If he stayed, didn't he want the Jedi dead? Didn't he want the Empire? That couldn't happen without the clones. Without the chips.

"I did," Vader said finally. "However, you have yet to deliver on your promise Skywalker. You have yet to help me find a way back to my time. Who is to say you won't run away the moment I have told you everything?"

Anakin frowned. Vader could feel the frustration building inside of him. How fragile his Light already was, Vader mused.

"Fine," Padmé said. "I can look on my own."

Vader wanted to argue. He didn't want Padmé to leave. She should stay here where she would be kept safe.

"So what will you three do? You can't stay in this cave forever. You'll eventually need supplies," Padmé said.

"I was thinking we could go to Naboo. Stay at Varykino," Anakin said.

"No," Vader said quickly. He did not want to go there. Not to that place. Not ever.

"What about Manda?" Luke said.

Everyone looked at him.

"Manda?" Anakin asked.

"It's a Mid Rim world," Luke explained. "The Baobab Archives are there. We might need access to records."
Anakin and Padmé shared a look.

"When did you go to Manda, young one?" Vader asked.

"I never went. I just heard about it," Luke said with a shrug of his shoulders. "It was some place recommended to me when I was looking for information about the Jedi."

"It isn't a Separatist world," Padmé said slowly.

"It would be at least a place to start," Anakin said. Padmé nodded. "Then shall we make preparations?"

Luke found himself back at the mouth of the cavern. Something was off. Something was bothering him. He had tried opening himself up to the Force. Tried meditating, but that was hard. Vader and Anakin were so loud in the Force. Luke wasn't used to be around other Force sensitives, especially ones like his father. He found it hard to quiet to himself and truly listen.

He was glad they were leaving. Ever since leaving Tatooine with the stolen Death Star plans, he wasn't one to stay in one spot for long. Plus he kept having this feeling his was being watched or perhaps something was searching for him. It was a feeling he used to have back in his own time from Vader constantly trying to hunt him down. But why would he be having it here in this time? Who would be looking for him? The Jedi? Sidious?

Luke heard the soft crunch of snow and ice as someone walked up. Padmé was the last one he expected it to be. She was wrapped up in Anakin's large brown outer Jedi robe.

"It's almost time to go," she said softly.

Luke only nodded. He still felt awkward around her. He wasn't even sure what to say, so he talked about one thing he did know.

"You uh know Senator Organa and Mothma?" Luke asked.

Padmé tilted her head slightly and then smiled. "Yes, they are both good friends and colleagues of mine. Vader said they joined the Rebellion. The one you're apart of?" Luke nodded. "Do you know them?"

"Mon Mothma is the chancellor of the Alliance. The Alliance to Restore the Republic is its proper name. I never knew Senator Organa, but I am close friends with his daughter."

"So Bail did finally decide to adopt," Padmé mused to herself with a smile.


"The Organas have been wanting a child, but can't conceive one."

"Huh," Luke said more to himself. Leia had never mentioned she had been adopted.

"Luke . . ."

She stepped forward and wrapped her arms around him. At first he tensed up, but she tightened her hug. He started to relax. His arms wrapped around her, and he hugged her back. She was soft and warm. Her hair smelled of flowers. It reminded him so much of Leia and so much of Aunt Beru. He missed them. He missed her, his mother, Padmé as well. The woman he had never known about.
He couldn't stop the tears from forming in his eyes. He tried to blink them away, but a few escaped anyways. He pulled away and wiped his face with his sleeve. He didn't want to cry all over her. Padmé smiled. It was a sad but warm smile. She brought her hands up and wiped away the last of his tears.

"This may be the last time we see each other," she said. "You may end up finding a way back to your time. And I . . . I never really got a chance to know you. I still find this all hard to believe and wrap my head around that your my son. The same one in here." She looked down at her stomach.

She continued, "I can't speak for your mother. She and I may be the same person, but at the same time we're not. But I do know, that I love my child so much. I haven't even met him. And I know that if your mother was truly me, she felt the same way too."

Luke couldn't help it. He started to cry again. He felt a gentle prod from Vader wondering why he was upset, but Luke pushed it away. Padmé pulled him into another hug.


"I wish I got to know you better. May the Force be with you," Padmé said as she stepped away. Luke could only smile and nod as he wiped his fresh tears away.

He watched as she walked back to the Twilight II. His was a little sad to see her go. He wished he had gotten to know her more too. She was so fearless. He reminded her so much of Leia. Even the round face and brown eyes and curly brown hair . . . An odd thought suddenly hit Luke. An impossible thought. It couldn't be . . . could it? But what if it was true?

Luke thought about bringing it up with Vader, but quickly reconsidered. At least for now. Perhaps there would be a better time to bring it up.
Anakin was laying on the bunk in the crew quarters of Vader's ship. The bed smelled like Padmé. It must have been where she stayed when she was on this ship. If he closed his eyes he could still recall their goodbye on board the *Twilight II*. They had held each other for a long moment. They shared a few kisses. Anakin sighed thinking about her warm lips.

Then he had gotten down on one knee. He placed his head against her stomach. He closed his eyes and opened himself to the Force. Yes, there was something there. There was life. Small and tiny, but it was there. He smiled and kissed her stomach. Padmé giggled and stroked his hair. He stood back up.

"Please be careful," Anakin had said to her. "Get extra security."

"I will," she said with a smile.

Anakin pushed himself off the bunk. He knew Vader was in the cockpit. He expected to find Luke in the hold still reading over the Sith books, but he was not there. Anakin instead found him in the cargo hold. All the metal boxes holding the Sith artifacts had been pushed to one side.

Luke stood in the middle. He still wore his officer pants, but had taken off the jacket and wore the white undershirt. His green lightsaber was lit. He was slashing it around, but he wasn't following any type of form. He wasn't practicing a set of katas.

"What are you doing?" Anakin asked.

"I was feeling restless. Decided to practice with my lightsaber."

"Practice? That's what you were doing?"

Luke looked down at his lightsaber. He looked a bit sad. There was a pull on the corner of his lips downward.

"Not like I was taught anything differently," Luke said softly. "I'm mostly just self taught. Ben taught me very little. Yoda the same. I picked up a few things here and there."

Anakin walked over. "Well for starters," he said. "A lightsaber is to be an extension of yourself. When you master it, it will move with instinct as if it were a part of your body. You need to use the Force, not your senses, to help you wield it."

Anakin unclipped his own lightsaber and ignited it. He moved into the basic Form I starting stance. He nodded at Luke, who mimicked the stance.

"There are seven forms of lightsaber combat. This is Form I: Shii-Cho. It's mainly used in training. Not that many duelists use it," Anakin explained.

"I take it you don't?" Luke asked as he examined Anakin's body. He shifted his weight a bit to try and match Anakin's a bit better.

"No," Anakin said. "I use Form V."
"Does Vader use it as well?"

Anakin paused as he considered Vader's movements. There were strong notes of Form V in Vader's form, but it looked like he incorporated other forms in there as well.

"For the most part, yes," Anakin replied. "Let's focus on the basics first. To learn proper attacks and parries, you must know what you're targeting. As such the body is broken down into Target Zones. Zone 1 is the head, Zone 2 and 3 are the right arm and left arm, Zone 4 is the entire body section, and Zone 5 and 6 are the right and left legs. There are certain attacks that are best for each zone, and as such there are certain parries and guards best for blocking these attacks."

Luke paused and then nodded.

"Something wrong?" Anakin asked.

"It's just . . . a lot. It's a lot I just don't know," Luke said. "No one told me any of this."

Anakin had to wonder what Luke's life must have been like. It must have felt so lonely. Anakin understood the deep desire of wanting to be a Jedi. But what was that like when there were no other Jedi?

"Well I'm telling you now," Anakin said with a smile. "Let's start with Zone 1 as your head is a pretty important part of your body. Also, it's a good place to target on your opponents."

Anakin was a good instructor. He actually took the time to explain the moves. True they were the basics, but they were basics Luke had never learned.

"Zone 4 is your entire midsection," Anakin explained, "but most opponents will be aiming for your back. A successful Zone 4 attack is almost always fatal. It's why you don't want to show your back and always face your opponent as much as possible. But of course, you need to know how to attack this Zone as well as defend it."

Anakin brought his lightsaber up to his neck. He reached the hilt over his shoulder and tilted it so the blade ran down his back.

"This is the basic Parry 4 position," Anakin continued. "Try swiping at my back. See if you can use a Zone 2 attack on me. Watch as I parry it."

It was at that moment Darth Vader walked in. He looked from Luke to Anakin and then back to Luke. He frowned and stiffened. Anakin lowered his lightsaber down to his side.

"I see you are fast at work researching time travel," Vader said in an annoyed tone.

"Oh, and how much researching have you actually done Darth? I think Luke here is the only one who has at least looked at anything," Anakin said.

Luke smiled at that, which Vader caught.

"You are teaching him Shii-Cho?" Vader asked. He sounded a bit disgusted. As if learning such a Form was beneath Luke.

"He was never taught it," Anakin replied. "And he wants to learn it."

"If you want to learn," Vader said looking at Luke, "I can teach you."
Something cold settled inside Luke. There was a tingle that ran up his neck. He found it hard to swallow. He thought he was past this. But he could hear a faint echo of mechanical breathing and the release of steam. He lightly shook his head to knock away the memories. He gripped his right hand right where the real skin ended and the synthskin began.

"Oh, by all means," Anakin said. He deactivated his lightsaber and clipped it to his belt. He stepped to the side while sweeping one of his gloved hands out wide to the open area. "Please, go ahead. I want to see this."


"It will have to wait," Vader said bringing Luke out of his thoughts. "We are about to revert to real space."

"We can't be in the Mid Rim yet," Anakin said. Luke agreed.

"We are making a stop," Vader said as he turned and left the cargo hold. Anakin gave Luke a glance. Luke only shrugged. They joined Vader in the cockpit. Anakin took the copilot chair, which only caused Vader to give off a nasty glare. Vader pulled on the hyperspace lever, and the blue swirls of stars suddenly became single white pinpricks.

In front of them was a large space station. Large rectangular pieces stuck out in every direction from a central line. Windows and landing bays dotted the buildings. All types of craft were coming and going, though Luke did note none of them were large ships. The place was also littered with quite a bit of junk just floating around.

"What is this place?" Anakin asked.

"A smuggler's cove," Vader dryly.

"And how do you know about it?"

"Because in the Republic, such establishments are able to easily go unnoticed with the right bribes. But during the Empire, they were purged."

Luke couldn't stop the small laugh that escaped from him. Both Anakin and Vader looked back at him. Vader was glaring, while Anakin smiled.

"They weren't purged because of their illegal activities," Luke said. "They were purged because of their ties to the Alliance. I assure you, there are still plenty of places full of scum and villainy in the future."

"The Rebels are thieves and traitors," Vader growled.

"And what did this place do to get the attention of Darth Vader?" Luke asked.

"Harboring Jedi criminals and their sympathizers," Vader said as he piloted the ship towards a docking bay.

"My kind of place already," Anakin said to himself. "So what are we doing here? Supplies? It couldn't wait until Manda?"

"Supplies, yes," Vader replied. "And also clothing." He looked pointedly at Anakin and then back at Luke. "You need something to blend in."
It didn't take Luke long to find some new clothes. It was general spacer fare of leather and boots with a holster for a blaster. The lady he had bought clothes from had insisted on him taking a large brown scarf, and he decided on taking it just so he could leave. He looped the scarf around his neck. He had left Anakin and Vader claiming he could buy clothes on his own. Walking through the streets and looking at the different vendors, it was easy to forget he was in the past. So much was the same. Of course Luke would see really outdated parts being advertised as new.

He made his way back to the docking bay Vader had his ship in. As he did he grew more uncomfortable. There was that feeling again. That feeling of being watched. Of being hunted. Looked for. It wasn't hard to slip into the movements he used when he was on an Alliance mission. He started to scan his surroundings. He looked for anyone following him or people constantly looking at him.

The feeling never eased up by the time he had made it back to the ship. He had almost debated on not returning right away but figured the best thing would be to go back and be with Anakin and Vader. If anyone or anything was going to show up, at least Luke wouldn't be alone.

He thought about mentioning it to both versions of his father, but the thought was knocked out of his head as soon as he entered the hold.

"No," Vader said sternly.

"Oh come on!" Anakin was saying. A metal box sat at Anakin's feet.

"Get it off my ship," Vader growled.

"It'll smooth out your jumps to and from hyperspace," Anakin said. "I know you felt it! It was a bit bumpy!"

Vader pointed a finger at Anakin. "You are not touching my ship." Then he pointed at the box. "Take that junk back."

Luke approached the two, and Anakin faced him. "You felt it, didn't you?" Anakin asked. "That there was a lot of vibration during jumps." Luke looked down to see some engine parts in the box. He was sure he spotted a stabilizing coil in there. "All you need to do is take out the old warp vortex stabilizers and-"

"No!" Vader shouted as he stormed away.

Anakin turned to Luke as soon as Vader was gone. "Sometimes I just don't see how he's me."
They had left the space station and were now on their way to Manda. Anakin was hoping perhaps he could train with Luke some more. Teach him some more about lightsabers. Anakin enjoyed sharing his knowledge. He had once made a holocron about lightsaber techniques. But Luke was uncomfortable about it when Anakin brought it up. Anakin figured it was due to Vader.

Vader was constantly around Luke. He barely left the poor kid alone. When Anakin was around, Vader kept glaring at him. Anakin just glared back for he was watching Vader closely. He had yet to really observe Vader and Luke's interaction until now. Luke was still a bit shy and uncertain around the Sith, but he was also willing to be around him. He could have avoided and ignored his father, but didn't.

There was something gentle but fierce inside of Luke. Like when Vader had lost control and Luke walked up to him. All he did was simply put a hand on his arm, and yet that had calmed Vader down. There was a part of Luke that wanted to know Vader. It also wanted to know Anakin. Anakin smiled at the thought.

Anakin thought he had Luke pretty well figured it out. Vader? Vader not so much. Which was odd considering Vader was Anakin. So Anakin watched Vader carefully. Luke was looking at one of the old Sith books. The book was talking about hyperspace travel. Luke thought it might be good to look into considering Vader and Luke were both in their fighters when they were sent into the past. Perhaps they had been knocked into hyperspace.

Luke was reading out loud and musing to himself. Vader would comment every now and then. When Luke wasn't focused on Vader, Vader's face would soften. He would lean in closer to Luke.

"So you do care for him," Anakin had said to Vader.

"He is my son," Vader had replied. He had said nothing more.

He is my son? What kind of response was that? What did that mean? What would that mean if Anakin had said it? In truth he still had a hard time wrapping his mind around that Luke was his son. He liked the kid. Cared for him. Would even call him a friend. But did he love him? Like he did his mother? Like he did Padmé?

No, he did not. But Vader did. That's what he meant when he said Luke was his son. He loved Luke. Yet Vader was a Sith. They weren't supposed to love. They were supposed to value power above all else.

_Foolish idiot_, Anakin thought to himself.

Though if Vader was willing to love his son, truly love him, perhaps there was hope for the stupid Sith yet. Anakin waited for an opportunity for when Luke left. He approached Vader.

"Thought you were going to teach him some lightsaber techniques," Anakin said.

At first, Vader did his usual, glared grumpily at Anakin, then he spoke in an annoyed tone. "He has not brought it up."

"He probably won't," Anakin said. _At least not with you_, he added to himself. "Not like he came up to me and asked to be taught. I offered."
Vader frowned.

"I thought you wanted to be the one to teach him," Anakin pushed.

Vader kept frowning and glaring. Anakin shrugged. It was at least worth a try. He decided to leave so when Luke came back he and Vader could have some time alone. Proper father-son bonding. Not knowing what else to do, he made his way to the cockpit and was surprised to find Luke sitting in the pilot's chair.

"Hey," Anakin said. "What are you doing in here?"

"Thinking," Luke said as he stared out the viewport at the blue swirls of hyperspace.

"Good place to do that," Anakin said as he sat down in the copilot chair.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"It's about my twin."

Anakin nodded and said, "Padmé said you and Vader had no clue there was a second baby."

"No one ever told me. I wonder if anyone ever knew. Surely someone had to know. But I was thinking about it. Do you think it is possible that we were separated?"

"Like maybe your sibling went to live with Padmé's family?" Anakin asked. "I wouldn't allow it. I would have never had my children separated. I'm sure Padmé feels the same."

"I'm sure you also said you would never allow your child to be raised on Tatooine."

"That too."

"But maybe that was the point? To hide us from the Empire and Vader. What if he did come back to Tatooine? What if he found out he had a son sooner? Then at least the other child would still be safe."

"It's possible," Anakin said. "And it sounds like something the Jedi Council would do. Do you think you have a lost sibling back in the future? You suspect someone don't you?"


"You could talk to Vader about it," Anakin suggested.


"Why not?"

"They have a history. A bad history. They hate each other."

"It won't get any better unless you tell them."

"Well it's not like I know for sure," Luke said. "I don't want to jump to conclusions."


Anakin smiled and nodded as Luke got up and left.

Luke entered the hold to find Vader hadn't moved. He still sat on the gravity couch. His gold eyes were at once on Luke. Luke paused and nodded awkwardly. He moved towards the couch to resume his research.


It made Luke jump in surprise. "Yes?" he asked.

"You wanted to learn lightsaber techniques."


"Skywalker was showing you through the forms of Shii-Cho."


"That form is beneath you," Vader said gruffly. "It is for younglings. You are beyond that."

Luke sighed. This sounded like typical Vader. "I never learned those basics," Luke said as he ran a hand through his hair. "Especially when it comes to dueling against another lightsaber."

Luke noticed a slight flinch in Vader's jaw. Vader stood up. He towered over Luke. He was even taller than Anakin. Luke had realized all of Vader's limbs were prosthetics. The prosthetic legs must be longer than his natural legs were.

"I can teach you some," Vader said.

Luke shifted awkwardly. The only reason he hadn't asked Anakin to teach him some more was because Vader was always there.


Luke stood there awkwardly unsure of what to do. He didn't want to practice with Vader, but at the same time he did. He knew he was lacking in knowledge and experience. Luke took a deep breath and followed after his father. He found Vader in the cargo hold. The metal crates were still pushed to the side. Vader had taken off his black cloak, and it was tossed on top of a crate.

"Did you . . . Did you want to continue learning Shii-Cho?" Vader asked. For the first time he sounded uncertain.

Luke thought he could do this. But now he just stood there. A lump in his throat. A cold sweat forming on his neck. He gripped his right hand tightly with his left. Right where his real flesh ended. Right where he lost his hand to the man right in front of him.

Vader's eyes looked down at Luke's hands. "Luke . . ." he said softly. It was too soft. It wasn't the right voice. It wasn't the deep baritone that echoed in your very bones. It didn't have the even rasp of a respirator.
"You hold that weapon like an untrained child. You have no right to it. You boy, are no Jedi." Old
words, even older than the ones from Bespin, came to Luke's mind. "This is most pathetic. You are
not worth the seconds it would take to finish you. Who sent you here to die like this?"

That first encounter with Vader on Cymoon 1 . . .

"So . . . Obi-Wan Kenobi gave you this lightsaber. A shame he did not teach you how to wield it. He
ever did make for much of a master."

"I'd rather die than yield to you!" Luke had said. But at that point Vader had already used the Force
to snatch Luke's lightsaber away. His old lightsaber. The lightsaber of his father. Of Anakin
Skywalker.

But right as Vader was about to strike, he paused.

"Wait . . . this lightsaber . . . I know this weapon. This once belonged to-

What was Vader going to say? Was he going to say the lightsaber once belonged to Skywalker?
Would he disassociate Anakin from himself? Like he always did when talking about his past? Or
was he going to say the lightsaber once belonged to him? Because he was Anakin.

Luke slowly let go of his right hand. He unhooked his lightsaber and nodded. "Yes, let's just do
something simple," Luke said. His throat was tight.

He wasn't even sure how he managed to get words out. He didn't want to do this. Not with Vader.
But he couldn't keep running away from this. He ignited his lightsaber and nodded.

Anakin smiled smugly to himself. Vader was walking Luke through the basics of Shii-Cho. He had
been spying on the two from the hallway. He stretched as he made his way down the hallway away
from the cargo hold. It would be best to leave those two alone. While he walked, he entertained
himself with the thought of raising his own son, his own little Luke. Of teaching him how to hold a
lightsaber and to fight.

He entered the hold and looked at the books Luke had been looking at. He sighed. He had yet to
really look at any of the artifacts despite the deal he had made with Vader. He should probably at
least look at one of the books or-

The ship suddenly bounced. Anakin was able to keep his balance, but he wobbled a bit on his feet.
He started to move towards the cockpit, but the ship jerked again. Anakin had to brace himself
against the side of the hallway. He heard feet running down towards him. He made it to the cockpit


Warning lights blinked and a beeping alarm was going off. Anakin looked at the ship's computer as it
ran its diagnostics.

"I tried to warn you about that warp stabilizer," Anakin muttered.

"It is not the warp stabilizer," Vader growled.
The computer was lagging. Anakin pulled the ship out of hyperspace. He then pushed away from the flight console. He had to shoulder his way past Vader to get to the door.

"I'm going to the engine room," he said. "Something is not right."
Anakin climbed down the ladder into the engine room. The ship still hummed despite the engine being off as the life support systems were still running. Anakin found a toolkit and pulled out a flashlight. He squatted down and peered into the engine. He of course looked at the warp stabilizers first. Though not up to Anakin's standards, they looked just fine.

He heard heavy steps approach the hatch. Anakin didn't need to feel the inky coldness of Vader's presence to know it was him. Vader's heavy metal feet were quite loud as he climbed down the ladder.

"Well it's not the stabilizers," Anakin said.

He moved the light slowly across the engine. Then he saw it. A streak of black soot. He followed the mark to its origin. As he did so, he saw more and more streaks. They led to a small black crater on the floor. Anakin crawled over to it. He touched it with his flesh hand, and even through his glove, he could still feel the heat.

What had exploded? He looked around. There shouldn't be anything in this spot. Nothing was connected to it. There appeared to be nothing to keep something screwed down and in place. He felt along the soot covered floor. The metal was different under the soot. He started to wipe it away with his glove. There appeared to be a hole that had been patched up. Metal soldering marks went around in a circle. Anakin looked around the engine once more, taking stock of what was damaged. Then he crawled backwards back out.

Luke was still up in the hallway. His head poked down into the hatch. Vader stood by the ladder with his arms crossed.

"The ion flux converter has been damaged. It's leaking," Anakin said.


"No," Anakin said as he wiped his grimy gloves on his pants. "But fixable. We can patch up the hole. Hopefully we can make it to Manda. If not, somewhere else."

"Did you see what caused the leak?" Vader asked.

"Yeah," Anakin said. "Something exploded."


"From the looks of it, it was planted on the ship," Anakin said.

The room seemed to get a bit colder. Vader clenched his jaw.
“I checked over this ship myself,” he growled.

“And when did you do that?” Anakin snapped back. “Looks like someone opened up a small hole, stuck the explosion in, and patched the hole back up. There’s soldering marks near the explosion.”

Vader was quiet as he thought.

“Well?” Anakin asked, growing impatient.

“Before I left Coruscant,” Vader said.

“So either on Bespin, Hoth, or at the space station,” Luke said. Vader glanced up at him, missing the nod Anakin gave.

“Well Hoth is out of the question,” Anakin said. “Bespin would have been the better opportunity, but nothing happened going to or leaving Hoth. The explosion happened after the space station. Plus we were in hyperspace. I doubt a detonator would have range. It had to be on a timer.”

The three fell silent.

“You know,” Luke said softly. “I felt something while we were at the space station.” Both Vader and Anakin looked up at him. “It felt like someone was watching me. Following me.”

“And you bring this up now?” Vader asked.

Luke shrugged, Vader let out an annoyed growl, and Anakin sighed.

“Well listen. We need to patch up the converter,” Anakin said. “Floating in space is doing us no good.”

“You think someone is going to show up?” Luke asked.

Vader frowned.

“If they are tracking us,” Anakin said, “then they couldn’t currently be in hyperspace. If they were in hyperspace, say behind us, then it would be all too easy to go past us once we stopped. They would have to pull out of hyperspace, and then vector out a new jump to get back to us. That or they waited until we stopped to jump to us. That is why we should get the ship back up and going.”

“Or they could be waiting for us at our next port,” Vader said.

“What?” Anakin asked.

“The explosion was small and not that powerful. Clearly, they didn’t mean to blow up the ship nor completely pull the engine offline. It was also smartly placed if the only thing seriously damaged was the converter. What this does mean, that wherever we stop next, we will have to stop and do repairs. That is where I would wait for a confrontation.”

A chill ran up Anakin’s spine. He had forgotten Vader was a Sith. Memories of the fight in the Jedi Temple rushed back to him.

“And who would do that?”

It was Luke who asked, though it was the same as Anakin had. Vader looked back up at his son.

“Sidious,” he hissed in disgust.
"Palpatine?" Anakin asked.

"Not him himself," Vader said. "Bounty hunters most likely. Like those he hired to shoot Luke at the Temple. I have angered Sidious. He is not going to simply let me get away."

Again silence fell in the engine room.

"So," Luke said. "Wherever we go next, we need to be ready and careful. Should we even go to Manda? What if we ditched the ship as soon as we landed?"

"And leave behind the Sith artifacts?" Vader grumbled. "No. I will not run from whatever scum Sidious has sent."

"Well you two can argue that out," Anakin said as he reached for the toolkit. "I'm going to fix the ship."

He lowered himself to the floor. As he crawled back under the engine, he listened to Vader and Luke continue to argue.

"If there is a tracker we need to find it," Luke said.

"It is most likely on the outside of the ship," Vader responded.

"Yeah. I can just go out and look."

"You are not going out on a spacewalk," Vader barked.

Anakin smiled at how much those two sounded like a real father and son bickering. He crawled back to the explosion and set about patching up the leaking converter. It was messy work and nothing but a quick patch job, but it should do the trick until they could get to another space port.

Anakin frowned as he crawled back out. Luke was right. They were going to have to think real careful about their next stop. Though he did agree more with Vader. They should just wait and see whoever came for them. Perhaps capture them and ask some questions. Was it really Palpatine that was behind this? Sure Luke and Vader had explained it was Palpatine who was the Sith Master. Anakin and Padme had even went over how a lot of events matched up to Sidious being in control of both parts of the war, but still a part of Anakin just couldn't believe that Palpatine, his friend and mentor, was evil.

Not much had changed as Anakin stood back up in the engine room. Vader was at the bottom of the ladder looking up at Luke. Luke was sitting on the floor with his head poking out of the hatch at the top of the ladder. The conversation had shifted to the best spot to put a tracker on a ship. Of course they both disagreed with the other.

"Well I think it's good," Anakin said. "Let's turn it on and warm it up."

To set course and get the ship moving, one had to be in the cockpit. But to simply turn the engine on, there was a manual switch in the engine room. From in here at the very least, they could see how well it started up. Anakin walked over to the engine and flipped the on switch. At once the ship jerked and bounced. Anakin grabbed hold of the engine itself to keep himself from falling over.

Luke let out a shout. Anakin's hand snapped out and quickly turned the ship off. "Well that did not go as planned," he murmured to himself. His mind was going back to the engine. What had he overlooked? But all that was instantly cleared out of his mind as the Force exploded with pain.

Anakin spun around. He glanced up, but Luke was no longer up at the hatch. Instead he was down on the floor at the bottom of the ladder. He must have fallen forward and down into the engine room when the ship bounced.

"Luke!" Anakin said as he rushed over. It was hard to see. The engine room was small. It was why Luke hadn't come down. It would have been too cramped with all three in there. Luke lay motionless at the bottom of the ladder. There was a large gash on his forehead. Blood smeared one of the rungs on the ladder. Clearly, he had banged his head as he came down.

Vader collected Luke into his arms. Luke was conscious, but clearly in pain. It hummed in the Force in sharp staccato beats. He was squeezing his eyes shut. One of his hands touched gently around his wound.

"Luke," Vader said. His voice was squeezed. Pained.

Anakin moved pass the two and jumped up on the ladder. "Come on," Anakin said. "Let's get him up here where we can treat him."


Anakin's breath caught in his throat. He had never seen Vader look like this. Vader's face was pained and clearly etched in worry. He was . . . Worried? No. He was scared. Anakin could feel it in the Force. A tightness that wrapped around your heart and squeezed. But what truly caught Anakin's attention were the blue eyes staring up at him. No longer the nasty yellow, but blue. Blue like Luke's. Blue like his.

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to thank all the readers for their support and comments. I do read every single comment I get. When I do lightsaber fight scenes, it's always interesting to read the debates of "I think Anakin would have won" vs "I think Vader should have won." So thanks again. I know the story is currently between plot peaks (as one commenter said last chapter), but thanks for sticking around.
Chapter 47

Luke lay on the gravity couch in the hold. He stared up at the gray plating of the ceiling. The past two weeks had not been kind to his body. He had crashed his X-Wing, got in a speeder crash, got shot at, and had fallen head first down a ladder. He could just see his fellow Rebel buddies laughing at Luke's misfortunes. It would make a good tale as they sat on metal crates in a hangar filled with X-Wings and A-Wings as the pilots passed around some cheap liquor someone had purchased.

Luke gently touched the tender and bruised spot on his head. He still wore a bacta patch over the wound. It was healing nicely, but the patch did nothing for the pounding headache he had been suffering from. After Anakin and Vader had patched Luke up after his fall, he had slept for a few hours in the crew quarters. Upon waking, he learned they were going to stop at a closer port to fix the ship than try to make it to Manda.

Luke wasn't even sure where they had landed. He knew it was a warm and humid planet, and the air smelled moldy. Luke rolled his head. On the table in front of the gravity couch sat the tracking device that had been attached to the ship. Vader and Anakin had decided to keep it intact for now. Those two wanted to meet whoever was following them.

Luke had seen little of Vader since he woke up. Earlier, Vader had hovered around Luke until he fell asleep. But then he disappeared into the engine room. He had been the one to fix the engine this time around since Anakin's skills were lacking and insufficient. Vader was now off shopping for new engine parts. They figured that they would have to wait around for whoever was following them to show up.

Anakin walked into the hold carrying a bag. He walked over and plopped it on the table next to the tracker. Luke could smell food. He slowly sat up.

"Did you leave?" Luke asked.

Anakin smiled as he opened the bag. "I'm not one to pass up an opportunity for freshly cooked food. I've lived off of ration bars for too long. If I can get some real food, I will."

Anakin pulled out a container of food and passed it to Luke then sat down on the couch with his own container.

"Has Vader's eyes always been yellow?" Anakin asked.

Luke had just placed the lid of his container on the counter. He paused for a moment before picking up his fork to eat. "Yes," he said. "Though . . . I never saw his face until I came to the past."

"He was always wearing that suit," Anakin noted.

"You know, now that I think about it. Your eyes are blue, yet Vader's are yellow. Why is that?"

"The Dark Side," Anakin said with a mouthful of meat covered in a thick sauce.

"The Dark Side? It changes your eye color?"

"The Dark Side changes you a lot," Anakin said. "It offers power for power's sake. Those who wield it seek power above all else with no reservations or hesitations. The Dark Side does give you power, but at a price. There are tales of Sith who were basically walking corpses."
A chill ran up Luke's spine. Is that what had happened to Vader? But all those scars . . . something more had to have happened. The two ate in silence for a bit. That's when Luke felt the cold pressure build. It felt like it was stabbing him between the eyes. He let out a small moan.

"You ok?" Anakin asked. "Is your wound bothering you?"

"It's not my wound," Luke said. Though this new pain was just causing his existing headache to worsen. "I think . . . I think it's . . . them."

Anakin's face hardened. He set down his food and stood up. His hand lingered above his lightsaber. He walked out of the hold towards the loading ramp. Luke was right behind him. Blinding sun and heat hit him as he stepped out onto a sandy landing pad. It was the first time he had really laid eyes on this planet.

There wasn't much around. Duracrete landing pads spread out from a central hub, which was nothing more than a small bunker-looking building. Beyond that was gentle white hills of sand. Palm trees clumped together. Tall waving grass and shrubs grew in the sand. Luke was sure he could hear the distant sound of waves.

Whoever had picked this spaceport had chosen a good spot. The land was mostly flat and empty. Whoever was coming couldn't hide their approach, which was why it was odd Luke didn't see anyone. Not a speeder nor a ship, and yet the pressure was growing inside of him.

"Luke, came Vader's voice in the Force. I am on my way."

Anakin must have informed Vader. Anakin now had his lightsaber in hand, but it was unlit. His feet shifted. He was ready to jump into action. He glanced around at the sand, the trees, and the shrubs.


It was quiet for a minute longer, and then Luke heard it. The soft shuffling of sand. The tell-tale sign of someone approaching. Something black appeared on the crest of one of the hills. Then slowly whatever it was, whoever it was, stood up. Luke realized they had been crawling to avoid being seen.

Anakin took in a sharp breath of air that sounded like a hiss. "Maul," he said.

A humanoid man walked down the hill and stopped at the edge of the landing pad. He looked like a Zabrak with the horns coming off of his head, but Luke had never seen a Zabrak look like this. His skin was a mix of black and bright red that swirled together in sharp jagged lines. He was dressed in black tabards revealing his red and black chest. He had on dull shoulder amour, long sleeves, and long gloves. It reminded Luke a bit of Anakin's dark Jedi robes, which Anakin was still wearing.

The Zabrak had on a wide belt and baggy long shorts that gathered right above his knee. Luke only saw black metal prosthetics for the legs. Though most chilling were the eyes. They were a bright glowing yellow. They seemed to bleed red into the white of his eyes. In the Zabraks' hand was a long hilt. He ignited it and two red blades hissed out from either side. He swirled it a lazy circle before allowing to come to a rest at his side.

"Well, well. I didn't know I was going to be in the presence of a celebrity," the Zabrak said. He nodded his head at Anakin. "Anakin Skywalker. The Hero With No Fear. Tell me young Jedi, how did Master Kenobi enjoy my last gift?"

Anakin's body shifted into an offensive stance. Maul did the same.
"I wouldn't mind adding to it," Maul said in a low tone. "I wonder how Kenobi will act seeing his young student dead?"

Anakin let out a shout as he ran right at Maul.

"Anakin!" Luke shouted, but he knew it would be to no avail.

There was no steady build up. Maul's blades spun. Anakin's blue blade clashed and clashed against them in a fast and steady rhythm. Luke was frozen. His mouth slightly open. Maul's blades dug into the ground. Bright molten duracrete and blackened fresh glass from the melted sand created curved lines all around the two duelists.

Anakin was giving Maul no room to swing his dual blades around. Maul had the advantage with reach, so Anakin was pressing him hard not to gain any distance. With strikes and stabs, Anakin kept up an endless onslaught. Finally Maul got in a good kick at Anakin's stomach. Anakin hunched over, and Maul backed up a few steps.

"Why are you here?" Anakin growled. "Who sent you?"

"Now, now," Maul said with a pleased smile. "Let's not be too hasty."

"Was it Sidious?" Luke shouted. Maul's sick yellow eyes at once zeroed in on him.

"And who this? Is this Luke?" Maul asked.

Luke couldn't stop the shiver that ran down his spine at the way Maul had said his name.

"Are you a Jedi, boy?" Maul asked, pointing with the tip of his blade at the lightsaber hanging on Luke's belt.

Luke pulled his lightsaber free and moved himself into a defensive position. Anakin shifted his weight. He was preparing another offensive against Maul, but Maul moved first. Not towards Anakin, but towards Luke. As he ran across the landing pad, he ran his lightsaber deep into the ground. Sand was kicked up and sprayed into the air, obstructing Anakin's vision. Luke could hear Anakin curse. It was a cheap trick, and it wouldn't buy Maul much time.

"Luke!" Anakin shouted as he jumped into the fight.

"Stay out of this!" Maul shouted.

Anakin was coming in from up high, but Maul deactivated his lightsabers. He dropped to the ground, his metal knees making a loud thunking sound. Anakin completely overshot. He tumbled over Maul. Maul grabbed Anakin's leg. Then he threw Anakin across the landing pad. The Jedi landed into a hill with a small cloud of sand.


"Put that weapon away, boy," Maul said.

"Oh? You think you can take me on?" Maul purred.

"I can."

Luke had said nothing. He had held his position ready for the duel to start again, but now both he and Maul looked up. Standing on top of Vader's ship was Vader himself. His red lightsaber was ignited. His black cloak billowed in the wind. He jumped and landed on the landing pad with a loud thump between Luke and Maul.

"You must be Darth Vader," Maul said.

"Maul," Vader said in a flat voice.

"Darth Maul."

"You are no darth," Vader sneered.

"And you are?"

Vader said nothing, only shifted his stance.

"My master wishes to talk to you," Maul said.

"You still bow your head to Sidious?" Vader asked. "Trying to get him to take you back? He has already moved on."

"I bow my head to no one!" Maul shouted as he lept at Vader.
Chapter 48

The past had changed far more than Vader had thought. Maul wasn't supposed to be here. He was supposed to be on Mandalore for the siege. It was why . . . It was why Ahsoka had come back. But Anakin had been pulled away from Mandalore to return to the core for the Battle of Coruscant. Skywalker left a battalion of the 501st behind to assist his former apprentice.

So why was Maul here on Kothlis when he should be on Mandalore? Why was he working with Sidious? Sidious had informed Vader of his history with Maul. A history lesson Vader would be wise not to repeat. Maul was like a Tatooine roach, he just kept coming back after one thought he was dead. And Sidious hated this. He suffered no rivals. No would-be Siths. So why were the two working together now? What had changed?

Though Vader didn't dwell it on too much. Regardless of what the shift was, Vader could simply fix it by killing Maul. Something Vader would enjoy. As a padawan, Vader had sliced into the Jedi training droids so they would mimic Maul. At the time Maul was the first known Sith to the Jedi in centuries, and Vader wanted to defeat him. He wanted to prove himself. There were so many voices, especially of the other padawans, who said he didn't deserve to be there. He didn't deserve to have Obi-Wan Kenobi, the Sith Slayer, as his master. No, he did deserve to be there. He was better than them. Stronger. He could even defeat Maul.

Vader had never crossed blades with the real Maul. So it was satisfying to hear the hiss of the lightsabers as their two red beams crashed into each other. Vader smiled as Maul sneered. Vader brought his saber down again and again. Maul bounced between his two blades as he blocked the blows. Vader bent his knees as he brought his strikes lower; however, he kept his strikes aimed upwards towards Maul's core. The onslaught of strikes wouldn't allow Maul to lower his saber, so he was left at an awkward angle deflecting Vader's blade. One sloppy move such as Maul moving his saber up too high would allow Vader to come in for a kill strike.

But then Maul jumped backwards. Vader swung his blade out in an attempt to catch him, but Maul was too fast.

"Running away already?" Vader hissed as he stood back up.

Maul spun his blades around. Vader came at him, bringing his blade up from down low. Maul bounced Vader's blade from his lower blade to the higher one. Vader struck at the top blade in series of quick sharp strikes. Almost tapping on Maul's saber. Maul pushed on the upper blade and swung his lower blade towards Vader. Vader had to take a small step back to parry the blow. Maul, of course, continued his attack by swinging the upper blade around for another quick attack.

Maul's blade came down heavily on Vader. Their blades locked and sizzled. Maul pushed down, but Vader didn't budge. That was when Anakin Skywalker jumped into the fight. He had finally recovered from being thrown into the sand. Sand clung to his Jedi robes and occasionally fell out of his hair. Maul was forced to jump back, but both Vader and Anakin were waiting for the move.

Anakin gave a powerful swing of his saber right at the middle of Maul. Maul blocked it, but he had no time to parry or switch to an offense. At the moment Anakin's blade pulled away, Vader was right there. The two fought Maul head on. Anakin and Vader wove together almost as one being. They ducked under the other's arm. Danced through the other's feet. They were almost like one figure.

Luke was completely in awe.
Maul was losing ground. Anakin got more daring. He started to add flips and jumps to his attacks. Luke realized he was aiming at Maul's head, while Vader still focused on Maul's core and legs. Though Maul had a longer weapon, it had a disadvantage of having wider and slower swings. Thus if Anakin could lure Maul's weapon up high, it would leave Maul open down low for Vader.

But Maul wasn't giving them the opening they were looking for. He kept backstepping. Anakin tried to flip and dash around Maul to get to his backside. Then the Sith would be really pressed to block both his front and back. Anakin ducked down low, attempting to slide under Maul's blade to get behind him. Maul's leg came out and kicked Anakin. Anakin jumped back as Vader slashed at Maul's leg. The lightsaber just barely nicked the prosthetic leg.

Maul hissed, but he kept going. Luke was mesmerized. Maul's was deadly fast with his dual saber. Vader and Anakin pressed him on and on. It was like a dance with those two. They moved so fluidly and smoothly. They would block and deflect blows meant for the other. Their bodies were intertwined. Often one leaning against the other and the other pushing against them to push them forward.

Vader was raining down a series of strikes coming down from up high. Anakin was using his blade to strike at Maul's lower blade, while also kicking at Maul's legs. Yet Maul kicked back. The Zabrak was quite athletic. He was able to stretch his body out to kick with his feet while he still spun his lightsaber in deadly arcs. He flipped and spun as he tried to turn the tide of the battle, but he was still on the defense from Anakin and Vader.

Perhaps Luke should join? He gripped his lightsaber hilt tighter. If he could come in from behind Maul, the three could pincher him in. Plus by now the fight was looping around the landing pad. Maul's back was to Luke. Vader and Anakin were herding him towards the ship. Luke ignited his lightsaber. He readied himself. He moved his weight to the balls of his feet, ready to move the moment he saw an opening.


Luke could feel the alarm in the Force from Vader and Anakin, though mostly from Vader. Vader snapped his hand out and sent a powerful Force push at Maul. Maul toppled over but managed to get himself into a roll and bounce back up on his feet. But Vader had used that time to close the distance between them. His lightsaber came down in fast angry slashes. Vader's face was twisted into a rage-filled scowl. His eyes were wide.

Maul used the Force to push Vader back as he spun away and went under the ship. Vader followed. Anakin was slowly moving in a wide arc to get behind Maul and Luke decided to do the same from the other side. No matter which way Maul moved, he would have to move towards one of them with another able to close in on his back.

Vader continued his fight against Maul. Maul's lightsaber hummed loudly as it spun through the air. Luke could see Maul looking around. He saw his eyes narrow as he realized he was getting trapped in. What would he do now? Maul managed to lure Vader into a high strike, then he kicked at Vader's legs. A loud clank of metal on metal was heard. Maul spun away from Vader and towards Luke. Luke stood in a defensive position. He just needed to hold Maul still while Vader and Anakin would come up behind.

But Maul didn't bring his saber down on Luke. Instead, he swiped at the landing gear leg of the ship. His red lightsaber cut through it easily. Vader, Luke, and Anakin were all too far away to stop it,
though Anakin did have his hand out. Luke could feel the Force swirling around Anakin as he summoned it and threw it at Maul. Maul was blown away from the leg, but too late. The ship creaked and at once started to tilt and fall down.

Maul bounced back up, threw a Force push at Luke, who toppled over, and then he ran away. Anakin shouted, but Luke wasn't focused on Maul any more. His eyes were wide at the ship falling down right on him. However, it soon came to a sudden stop.

"Get out," Vader said in a strained voice.

Luke looked over to his father holding a hand above his head. His fingers outstretched and curled. He was holding the whole ship up with the Force. Luke scrambled to his feet and rushed out from under the ship. Vader soon followed and slowly lowered the ship to the ground. Luke looked around. There was no sign of Maul or Anakin.

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Anakin returned the landing pad. He was not in a good mood. Maul had gotten away. He had managed to run back to his speeder. Anakin was unable to pursue him. When he had dug himself out of the sandhill, he had to shout at Vader in the Force to not kill Maul. Vader's intent to kill was obvious, but, as Anakin had argued, they could kill Maul after they questioned him. But a dead Maul was better than one that had gotten away.

But the Skywalkers weren't the only one fighting cautiously. Maul also lacked a killing intent. He had quickly realized he wasn't going to win the fight once Anakin joined. But Anakin had also sensed a large amount of curiosity from the Zabrak. Maul was testing them.

Anakin walked up to Vader's ship. It now sat at a tilt since it lost one of its landing gear supports. Luke and Vader stood by the ship. They had both put away their sabers. Anakin didn't need to say a word about how Maul had gotten away. They all already knew.

Vader eyed Anakin up and down. A frown pulled on his lips.

"What?" Anakin barked.

"You are covered in sand," Vader said.

"Yes," Anakin growled back. "I am aware."

He started to pull off his belt, then his outer tabard. He shook it out. Stupid sand. It was most likely everywhere. Anakin took off his under robes. Vader was still watching. Anakin paused before he shook off his robes. He shook the vest at Vader causing the sand to fling at him. At once Vader flinched back and let out an annoyed grunt. Anakin only laughed causing him to shake his robes harder.

At least some things never changed. It looked like Darth Vader still hated sand.

Luke rolled his eyes and shook his head. "Will you two stop?" he asked. Anakin dropped his robes to the ground as he grabbed at one of his boots. "We have got to get this fixed."

"Agreed," Vader said as he brushed sand off his cloak while glaring at Anakin. "It would do no good to linger here any longer than we have to. It is wise to remember Sidious has almost unlimited resources plus control of two armies. If Maul is working for Sidious, then he will be back. Possibly with reinforcements."

"Then let's focus on the engine," Anakin said. "The ship doesn't actually need the landing gear."
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

"Anakin . . ."

The voice was soft and distant. Anakin looked around, but found he was in a completely featureless place. Everything was a dark, dark brown. It was impossible to tell if he was outside or inside. The voice called again.

"Anakin!"

This time it was more urgent. More pained. Anakin's heart started to beat faster. He stumbled forward. On and on he ran. The voice called his name again and again. Each time it seemed to get worse. More desperate. More painful. He tripped and almost fell. He caught himself. His hands grabbing onto a flat object. As he steadied himself, he saw that he was gripping a table.

It was a medical table. Padmé laid on it. She was dressed in white medical robes. Her stomach was very large and round. Her legs were bent up. Her face was red and sweaty. Tears leaked from her unfocused eyes. Her hands gripped the side of the table. Her knuckles white.

"Anakin!" she shouted again.

"Padmé!" Anakin shouted back. "I'm here!"

He tried to move, but found he was stuck. Frozen. He was gripping the same table as she was, but couldn't even move his hand to touch hers. Instead all he could do was look down at her as her head rolled back and forth. Her body trembled.

"Anakin! Padmé!" Padmé said. Her voice cracked.

Oh Force. Oh Force. She was in pain. So much pain. She was dying.

"Anakin! Anakin!" Padmé whimpered between her painful cries.

Then he heard the wailing of a baby. He wanted to turn his head, but he couldn't. He couldn't see the baby. Just heard its cry. Padmé's body sagged. Her head rolled to the side.


"Padmé! I'm right here. It's going to be alright!"

Anakin heard the snap-hiss of a lightsaber. Padmé's body was bathed in a red light. Yet Anakin still couldn't turn his head. He couldn't even look up to see who was approaching. He could sense them. He could see the light of the lightsaber coming closer. Padmé's eyes grew wide as she saw the figure. She tensed up.
"Anakin!" she shouted as the red beam slashed down at her.

"Padmé!" Anakin shouted as he snapped awake. His heart was pounding in his chest. It took him a few seconds for him to register his surroundings. To register it had all been a dream.

He was laying on the duracrete landing pad under Vader's ship. Piles of tools and parts were littered about him. He recalled reclining for a bit. He must have dozed off. He sat up and leaned over his legs. He placed his arms on his legs and took deep breaths.

It was night on Kothlis. Though the weather had cooled down, it was still warm and humid. Anakin's body was covered in a sticky sweat. He wore his Jedi pants and boots, but only wore a loose beige shirt on top. He was letting the rest of his clothes air out. He sighed as he ran his flesh hand through his sweaty dirty hair. He needed a shower.

He glanced up at the belly of the ship. They had found some crates to rest the ship against so it was now level. Vader was working on the engine inside (as he still wouldn't let Anakin work on it), while Anakin was working on the landing gear leg. Luke was helping him by preparing the wiring on the inside of the ship for the landing gear.

Anakin placed his hands on the ground and pushed himself up. His body was sore from sleeping on the ground. He stretched as he worked the kinks out of his back and neck. He was stretching out his arms when he saw Vader. He was dressed in his black robe. His hood was down and pooled around his shoulders. He held a coil of wiring in his gloved hand. He was unmoving. He just stood there watching.

Anakin turned his back to him, but heard the heavy footsteps approach. Anakin sighed. He was not in the mood for Vader. Already a headache was forming. His throat was dry. When was the last time he had anything to drink? Perhaps it was time to call it a night.

Vader grabbed Anakin's arm and pulled him so the two faced each other. Anakin scowled as he jerked his arm free.

"What?"  Anakin barked.

"You had a dream," Vader said.

"And?"

"What was it?"

Anakin said nothing. Only glared.

"What was it?"  Vader asked. His voice lower. More of a growl. "Was it a vision? A vision of Padmé?"

Anakin couldn't stop the flinch that ran through him. A tense silence fell between them. Vader looked at the ground.

"What did she say?"  Vader asked in a quiet voice.

"Huh?"

Vader looked up. His gold eyes seemed to glow slightly in the dark. "What did she say? Whose name did she call out?"
"Whose . . . Whose name did she call out? Mine of course."

"Good."

"Good? Good? What part of that was good? I watched her die!"

Anakin couldn't stand to be around Vader. He didn't want to hear whatever nonsense the Sith was about to preach. Probably something about how there was no way to change the future. But Anakin would change the future. He turned away and marched into the ship. As he made his way through the hold, he noticed Luke asleep on the gravity couch. It looked like he had fallen asleep threading some wire together. But there was a blanket over him. Anakin assumed Vader had put it there.

Anakin walked into the cockpit and shut the door. He settled down into the pilot's chair. So these were the visions Vader had had. The ones that drove him to the Dark Side to try and save Padme. A cold chill ran through him that caused him to shiver. How many times had Vader seen these visions? Did he see them every time he had slept?

Anakin pulled out his commlink from his pocket. It was a new one he had bought back at the space station. He had memorized Padmé's personal com frequency. He typed in the code and sent a ping. He didn't even know what time it was on Coruscant. Would she be at the Senate? Was she asleep? He didn't know. But he needed to see her. Hear her voice.

He needed to know she was ok.

His mind played the vision over and over again. He saw her screaming on the table. Heard the cry of a baby. The snap-hiss of a lightsaber.

His comm chimed. Anakin at once turned it on. His breath got caught in his throat as he saw a small blue holograph of Padmé from the chest up. She was dressed for bed. Her hair was in loose curls. She was clearly wearing a nightgown.

"Anakin?" she asked. Her voice was soft and full of concern. Not the painful screaming or weak whimpers of the visions.

"Pad- Padmé," he said. His words getting stuck as his emotions boiled up in him. "Oh Force, Padmé. I'm so glad to see you."

She frowned. "Is everything alright?"

"Yes," he said. He tried to smile, but knew it didn't look sincere. "I was just thinking of you. I was worried."

"I was worried too," she said.

He sighed. His body was starting to release the tension now that he could see and hear her.

"What happened when you got back?" he asked. "How was Coruscant?"

She rolled her eyes and let out a small groan. "I got quite a lecture from my staff and the queen about my personal safety. The CPF showed up and interviewed me. The Jedi showed up and interviewed me. And Palpatine showed up and interviewed me."

"Palpatine?" Anakin asked alarmed. "He showed up at your apartment?"

"Yes," she said clearly annoyed.
"What . . . what did he say? What did he want?"

"He wanted to know about Vader and Luke. He also asked about you."

"What did you tell him?"

"As little as I could," she said as she crossed her arms. "I told him the same thing I told the Jedi. I said that after I got free of Vader, we decided that I should go back to Coruscant to where it was safe, while you went off after Luke and Vader."

"And they bought it? Palpatine and the Jedi?"

"Oh they know I'm not telling them the whole story," she said. There was a smug smile on her face. Most likely she had talked circles around them. They were dealing with an experienced politician. But so was Palpatine.

"Just be careful," he said.

"I am," she said. "I'm not even staying at my apartment. Especially after that look Palpatine gave me. It was but for a second. I don't think he knew I was watching. But for a second, his face darkened into a horrible scowl."

"Padmé," Anakin said softly.

She barreled on. "I've been talking with Bail and Mon," she said. "They're still determined to continue with the delegation. I've been trying to ease them into the idea of investigating Palpatine. Bail is a bit more open to it."

Anakin nodded. The conversation fell into silence. He noticed she seemed to be fidgeting with her necklace. The necklace he had given her so long ago. He couldn't help but smile.

"I," she said in a soft voice. The bravado from seconds before gone. "I went and saw a doctor."

"And?" Anakin asked. He found himself on the edge of the pilot's seat.

She smiled. It was a large genuine smile. "Everything is fine," she said. "The babies are doing great."

He smiled back, but he knew it didn't match hers. His was one of relief, but still carried notes of worry.

"Anakin are you sure everything is fine?" she prodded again.

He sighed and told her what had happened since they left Hoth.

"Maul," she said. The two grew quiet as they speculated on their situations. It was Padmé who spoke up first. "But how did he even find you? On the space station? From what you said, it seemed only Vader knew he was going to make that stop."

"You think Vader and Maul are working together?" Anakin asked.

"No," she said. "Unless you have reason to suspect that?"

"No," Anakin said.

"So how did Maul find you? Clearly he found you at the space station as he could put the bomb on your ship. But how did he know you were there to begin with?"
"That is a good question . . ." Anakin said. One none of them had really stopped to think on. They were too focused on getting the ship back up and running.

"If he found you once, he can find you again," she said. "He was able to track us down on Tatooine when we first met you."

Anakin nodded. The Jedi investigation into Maul and the Sith had theorized that Maul had traced the call Sio Bibble had made to Queen Amidala while they were on Tatooine. But no one on Vader's ship had made calls. At least none that he knew of. Who would Vader or Luke even call?

"One more thing," Padmé said. "Obi-Wan also visited. Alone. Not with the other Jedi."

Anakin had told his wife that Obi-Wan knew the truth. The truth about Padmé and Luke and Vader.

Padmé continued, "He didn't stay long and didn't say much, but he did say the Council has been looking into time traveling. He said . . . Anakin, he said, there has been instances of time travel before."

"Vader was right," he grumbled. "The Council is keeping knowledge hidden away. Obi-Wan didn't give you any more information did he?"

"Afraid not," she said. "But . . ." She paused and smile. "He did leave this." She held up a blue holocron.

"I'm sure that's helpful, but it does me no good if it's on Coruscant."

"Well good thing I've found the perfect person to bring it to you."

"Padmé . . ." Anakin groaned. "We can't involve anyone else."

A loud series of beeps and whistles started up at once. Padmé smiled as she turned the commlink away from her. The holograph changed to that of a small astromech, who was using some very colorful language. The droid was not pleased to have been left behind. Anakin couldn't stop smiling.

"Good to see you too, buddy," Anakin said. "Don't worry. We'll find a way to get you to me."

Chapter End Notes

Anyone have any suggestions for the name of Vader's ship? I have yet to name it.
Anakin stepped out of the small refresher of Vader's ship. He was only wearing his Jedi pants while he held the rest of his clothes in his hand. He had fallen asleep in the copilot's chair and upon waking had decided to go shower. He debated on laying down on one of the bunks in the crew quarters and try to get some decent sleep. However, Luke was sitting on one of the two beds. He held his lightsaber in his hands. He was staring at it intently.

"Good morning," Anakin said. "I think." He had no idea what time it was. Surely it was morning by now.

"Mmm," Luke mumbled back. He didn't look over at Anakin. He barely nodded his head. He just kept staring at his lightsaber.

Anakin sat down on the other bunk and started to put his boots on.

"Vader finished the engine," Luke said still not looking up. "He's now finishing up the repairs to the landing gear. We should be leaving within a few hours."

"Does that man ever sleep," Anakin mumbled to himself.

Finally, Luke looked up. A small smile on his lips. "I guess now we need to decide on where to go next," he said.

"We continue on as planned. We go to Manda," Anakin said as he did the snaps on his boot.

"Are you sure? What if-"

Anakin cut him off. "There are a lot of what if's. But staying here won't do us any good. Vader was at least right about that. It gives them a chance to gather forces."

"And you think Manda will be? If you think Maul left to gather more help, then I think no matter where we go they will be waiting. It would be foolish for Maul to not have a Force easily mobilized."

Anakin had been reaching for his undershirt, when he paused. He looked over at Luke. Luke was staring right at Anakin. His blue eyes bright and determined. The Force was abuzz all around him. Something had . . . changed . . . shifted inside of Luke.

"You forget I was a Rebel. This is what we did. This was my life for the past two years. Constantly on the run with people with way more resources, power, and manpower after you."

"Alright, Rebel. What do you think we should do?"


"Well if we couldn't get in contact with High Command, then we always focused on other ways to help the Rebellion. Find an Imperial target, secure supplies, or talk to people to get them to support our cause. That doesn't work here."

Anakin nodded. It all sounded familiar. How often had he done the very same thing over the past
three years? War was still war.

"We can always keep running," Anakin said as he picked up his undershirt and slipped it on. "And hopefully finally catch Maul, but there is one thing I have learned the past few years. The Sith and other Dark Side users are slippery bastards and have an annoying talent of not getting caught. The number of times Ventress and Dooku or Grievous slipped away . . ."

"My father would argue the opposite case," Luke said smiling.

"Father?"

"Huh?"

"You just called Vader father," Anakin pointed out.


"I talked to Padmé earlier," Anakin said. Luke perked back up. "Obi-Wan went and talked to her. He said that there were records of time traveling in the Jedi Archives. He gave her a holocron, and I told her to send it to Manda so I can pick it up."

"I see," Luke said. "Well, you must be glad to hear from Padmé. Is she doing well?"

"Yes . . ."

"That didn't sound too convincing."

"She went to the doctor, who said everything was fine. But . . ."

"But?"

"I don't know. I'm worried."

"I keep telling myself that, but I had a dream. A vision . . . Of . . ."

"Padmé? Like Vader had? Of her dying in childbirth?"

"Yeah . . ." Anakin said in a soft small voice.

"Have you talked to Vader about it?" Luke asked.

Anakin rolled his eyes. "He knows I had one. I don't need him to go on about how me falling to Dark Side is inevitable."

"That isn't the same thing as talking to him about it," Luke said. There was a hardness to his voice as if he was reprimanding him. Anakin frowned, and Luke leaned forward. He said, "I thought you didn't want to fall to the Dark Side. The only person who can truly help you do that is Vader. You need to talk to him. If Padmé's death is what caused Vader to fall in the first place, it seems like this isn't something you should avoid."

Luke was . . . right . . . Anakin grudgingly admitted. He just didn't want to talk to Vader.

"I don't think you realize," Luke continued, "how much you two are alike."
"What? Me and Vader?" Anakin said. "We are not."

Luke raised an eyebrow and shot a clearly questioning look.

"There are some small similarities," Anakin added.

"You both like ships. You both like to fix things," Luke said as he counted off on his fingers. "You're both protective of your loved ones. You both fight the same. You-

"We do not fight the same," Anakin interrupted.

"You fight similarly enough."

It was Anakin's turn to give Luke a disbelieving glance.

"You just don't see it," Luke said. "When you two fought Maul together, it was like you were one person."

Anakin scoffed. "I am nothing like that Sith."

"He has good in him," Luke said. "I've seen it."

At once the image of Vader with blue eyes hit Anakin. Anakin shook his head. He didn't want to admit out loud that perhaps Luke was right.

"And you have darkness in you," Luke added. His voice was a bit softer.

"What?" Anakin said. He was at the edge of the bed. His hands curled tightly around the edge.

Luke sighed. "Vader didn't become Vader overnight," he said. "I don't know how it all happened, but I see it in you when you get mad. Especially when it concerns your loved ones."

Anakin only glared at Luke. There was no way he had any darkness in him! He was not a Sith. He was not Darth Vader!

"Don't you remember when you questioned me back at the Jedi Temple? When my cup broke? I told you I saw it then. I saw you could become a Sith. That is the moments I'm talking about. They're fleeting, but they are there. Anakin, you have to be able to face your darkness so you won't fall . . ."

Luke looked away from Anakin. His eyes were unfocused. He was clearly thinking of something else. Had Luke faced his own darkness? Luke blinked and seemed to have come back to himself. He looked back over at Anakin. He stood up.

"Listen," he said. "Darth Vader was once Anakin Skywalker. Was once you. And as it stands, you are going to be him unless you do something about it." Anakin opened his mouth, but Luke barreled on not giving Anakin a chance to talk. "I'm not just talking about stopping Sidious or Maul. I'm talking about you. You need to change too."

Anakin didn't know what to say. Luke only stayed a minute more, before he walked out of the room leaving Anakin alone with his thoughts.

The door to the crew quarters slid shut. Luke could feel the soft rush of wind on his back and in his hair. He stood there unsure of what to do or where to go. He looked down at his lightsaber which he still held in his hand. He slowly walked to the hold.
Indecision.

He was plagued with it, and he wasn't one to teeter on the edge of taking action. He was Luke Skywalker. He once tried to suicide bomb Darth Vader while in his X-Wing above Vrogas Vas if it meant saving the lives of many other Alliance members. How many times had he stood before his commanding officer or even the Alliance High Command as they gave him disappointed looks about how he had once again done something extremely rash and often against orders? He made Leia angry a few times too.

Yet once he found out he was in the past, he found himself constantly wavering on whether to do something or not. When he first woke up in the past, the first thing he did was escape from his med room in the Jedi Temple and take down two guards. And yet now . . . Where had the Skywalker of old gone to? Where was his usual spunk, courage, and confidence?

Had he lost it at Bespin with his hand? Had he never noticed it until now? Or was it being in the past? Was he scared?

"I won't fail you," Luke had said to Yoda on Dagobah. "I'm not afraid."

"Oh, you will be," Yoda said slowly. "You will be."

If Luke was honest with himself, he was scared despite the bravado he showed Vader about how the past could be changed for the best. But what if he messed it up? Vader had said the past was already changing since they got there. Events were no longer playing out like they once had. How was this going to affect the galaxy going forward? And what if Luke made things worse?

What if by buying his scarf at the space station meant that someone else didn't buy it? What if they went without a scarf? They were never able to pass it along to their nephew who adored their aunt. An aunt who died in an Imperial attack, thus causing her nephew to join the Alliance. A nephew who piloted an X-Wing and provided cover for Luke or Biggs or Wedge or even Leia or Han. Without them there, what would happen? Could one small thing as a scarf create larger ripples later down the line?

Does Anakin Skywalker knowing that he becomes Darth Vader enough to keep him from falling to the Dark Side?

Yet even though Anakin knows what he will become, or could become, there is still that darkness in him. Luke saw again during the fight with Maul. The cracks within Anakin. The inner darkness lurking inside of him. It was also when Luke realized his own problem with indecision. He had stood there like a newborn bantha watching Vader, Anakin, and Maul duel. Granted watching Vader and Anakin work together had been completely mesmerizing. But if Luke had jumped in sooner, Maul may not have gotten away.

He had been working on the new wiring for the landing gear as he thought of these thoughts. That was when he decided he would confront Anakin. There was still the fear Luke would make things worse, but there was also the hope he could make things better.

"I am almost finished," he said. "We can leave within an hour or two."

Luke sighed as he made his way down the loading ramp. He clipped his lightsaber to his belt. Vader stood next to the landing gear working away at piecing it together. He stopped as he saw Luke approaching.

Luke looked at the sky. It was starting to lighten as dawn approached.
"I think you should get some sleep," Luke said. "I can finish the leg."

Vader stared blankly at Luke, but it was clear message that he was not going to stop now.

Luke sighed. "At least sleep once we're in space before you fall over."

Luke realized he was chastising Vader, Darth Vader, Supreme Commander of the Imperial Navy, who was still looking at Luke with a blank face.

"Perhaps," Vader said finally as he turned his attention back to the leg.


Vader paused, or perhaps he froze. He didn't move. Didn't even seem to be breathing. His head turned very slightly. His gold eyes were on Luke. Then he moved his head just the faintest amount. Barely even a nod.

"Very well," he said as he turned back to the leg. "Grab a piece of plating."

Luke walked past Vader to the strips of metal plating laying on the ground. He looked over his shoulder, but Vader was back at work. Had Luke been imagining things? Had Vader's eyes looked different a moment ago? Not as yellow? Luke made a note to get a closer look as he picked up a piece of metal and walked back over to his father.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the ship name suggestions. Sorry this chapter is a bit late. I work two jobs and worked a lot this past weekend. I ended up sleeping when I wasn't working. Not sure if things will even out, but if updates aren't as regular you know why. I will continue to aim to get chapters up on schedule.
Luke, the boy, his boy, his son, was right next to him holding up a piece of plating so Vader could fasten it to the landing gear leg. Luke was so close. His arm kept brushing against Vader's as they worked side by side. Vader couldn't help but keep stealing glances over at him.

He had spent the last two years chasing this child down. Two years of frustration. Near misses. Glimpses stolen, often through blurry spy or security holocams. Then the duel on Bespin that had gone so wrong. And now . . . he was here. Right next to him. Father and son.

While they had spent a bit of time together talking or practicing lightsabers, this was different. Luke had come to him. He wanted to be here. And he was relaxed and calm. There was something pulling on the corners of Vader's lips. A smile? When was the time he smiled? Truly smiled? A smile out of happiness? A happiness from joy not malice?

He shoved the idea out of his head. Now was not the time to be thinking about such things. The leg needed to be finished. They needed to get off this planet. They needed to get back to their time where they could . . . could what? Destroy Sidious? Claim the Empire for their own?

"You wish to do what with him? Turn him to the Dark Side? Rule the galaxy together as father and son? He doesn't want to do that. He literally jumped off." Anakin had once said to Vader. "What will happen if he doesn't? You don't mean to kill him if he doesn't join you?"


They finished the leg and Luke said he would clean up while Vader warmed up the engine and made sure everything was good to go. Vader found Anakin sitting in the pilot's chair in the cockpit.

"Up," Vader growled.

Anakin glared at him, but he did move over to the co-pilot chair. Vader sat down without a word and initiated the start-up sequence. The engine was running well. Luke finished bringing the tools on board, and the ship took off from Kothlis.

"Transmit your identification code," came a gruff voice over the com. Vader flipped the switch to transmit his code. "Very well. You're cleared for takeoff Light Keeper."

Vader piloted the ship higher into the atmosphere and into space. He could feel Anakin's eyes on him. Vader glanced over. The foolish Jedi had a huge grin on his face.

"What?" Vader barked.

"Light Keeper?" Anakin said. "That's what you named your ship?"

Vader said nothing. He started the ship's calculations for hyperspace.

"Now, I know I like to give my ships special names. Like the Azure Angel. She was named after
"And the Jabitha?" Vader said without looking over at Anakin.

"That was different and you know it," Anakin said pointing a finger at Vader. "So what does Light Keeper mean? What is the significance of its name? Let's see . . . Hmm . . . Light . . . Light . . . Did you know the old Nubian word for light is luka? So similar to Luke is it not? Did you name your ship after your son?"

Out of his peripheral vision, Vader could make out the stupid huge grin on Anakin's face.


"I am tired of chasing my son," Vader said in a low annoyed voice. Anakin's smile widened. Vader just wanted his son to stay put. He added, "It's far more original than the Twilight II or Azure Angel II."

"Oh? And what do you go around naming your ships nowadays oh dark lord of the Sith?"

"My current flagship is named the Executor," Vader said.

Anakin raised his eyebrows and nodded his head. "Not bad. Did you say current? You had one before that?"

"The Devastator."

"Fitting I suppose."

"Better than the Garrett."

"Garrett? You named a ship Garrett?"

"No, I did not name it," Vader said. "But I was forced to use it as my flagship. It was a joke. An insult. Punishment."

The cockpit grew quiet. Vader pulled on the handle, and the ship jumped into hyperspace. The dots of stars at once elongating into white stripes that filled the viewport. They were quickly replaced by the blue swirls of hyperspace.

"Can I ask you something?" Anakin asked.

Vader finally turned his chair to face his younger self. Anakin had a hand on the back of his neck. He was looking away from Vader. Not making eye contact.

"What?" Vader said. He was tired and he should get some sleep while they were in hyperspace.

"When you asked what name Padmé called in my vision, what did you mean by that?"

Vader stiffened at once. He clenched his jaw. His hands tightened into balls. He could still hear Padmé's painful screams twenty-three years later.

"What did you mean by that?" Anakin asked again. His tone sterner.

"The dreams changed," Vader said.
"They did?" Anakin asked. He had jumped to the edge of his seat. His eyes were wide and full of hope.

"She always died," Vader said and watched as the light in Anakin's eyes faded. "At first she called out my name. But later it changed to Obi-Wan."

"Oh," Anakin said unsure. The fool hadn't realized the importance of this shift.

"You forget of his betrayal. He went to her and told her lies. He turned her against me. She was the only one who knew where I was on Mustafar. She brought him to me to kill me. Plus there were . . . rumors . . ."

"Rumors?"

"Rumors of Obi-Wan seeing a Senator in secret."

"Obi-Wan? Impossible. I would know about it. You would have known about it. And you think he was seeing Padmé? Padmé would never do such a thing."

"And yet I sensed his presence lingering in her apartment. He had come to visit her when I was not there."

"Better than if he visited when you were there," Anakin mumbled. "But who told you these things? Was this some padawan gossip?"

"No," Vader said.

Anakin leaned over. "Who told you that?"

Silence.

"It was Palpatine," Anakin said as he leaned back. Again there was silence. Vader looked away. He stared out the viewport at whorls. "When you say this all aloud, do you realize how obvious it is?" Anakin asked.

Yes. Yes it was obvious. But Vader didn't want to voice that aloud. Didn't want to admit that to Skywalker of all people.

Anakin sighed. "I can't believe I fell for any of it," he mumbled.

Vader tightened his hands. The leather of his gloves creaked. "You were not there," Vader hissed.

"True."

The two glared at each other. The air buzzed with tension as if at any moment lightning would strike.

"What about the lightsaber?" Anakin asked, not averting his gaze. He was looking at Vader straight on. He sat tall in his chair.

"Lightsaber?"

"In the vision. That's what killed Padmé," Anakin explained. "Someone walked up to her and cut her down with a lightsaber. I just didn't see . . ." Anakin trailed off as he noticed Vader's reaction.

Vader's eyes were wide. His mouth hung open very slightly. His shoulders had dropped.
"There was no lightsaber," Vader finally said.

"What do you mean there was no lightsaber? I saw it! A red beam cut down at Padmé!"

"That is not what I saw."

"Then what did you see?"

"Padmé crying in pain as she slowly died during childbirth."

This time it was Anakin who went wide-eyed. His eyes darted back and forth as he thought about Vader's words.

"So you didn't... attack her?"

"Attack her? With my lightsaber?" Vader said appalled.

"I don't know! You attacked Luke! Your own son!"

"In a lightsaber duel! You think I would cut down my own unarmed pregnant wife?"

"I don't know! You clearly did something!"

"I lost control of myself and lashed out at her with the Force!"

"Well, I assure you, I won't let that happen."

"You already have let that happen," Vader growled.

The words went unspoken, but they both knew Vader was referring to the incident regarding their mother and the Tusken Raider village.

The door to the cockpit slid open and Luke walked in. He wore only a pair of pants and nothing else. His skin was pink and hair disheveled. He had clearly just gotten out of the sonic shower. He said nothing. His eyes only darted between Anakin and Vader.

"Everything all right?" he finally asked.

"The vision is different," Vader said ignoring Luke. "It has changed. The future of this time is already changing and shifting away from the old future."

"Isn't that good?" Luke asked as took a step closer to the chairs.

"I don't know," Anakin muttered.


"If Padmé dies by a lightsaber," Vader said. "Then we need to find out who is wielding the lightsaber."

"The vision didn't show me," Anakin said.

Luke took two more steps closer.

"Perhaps you should meditate on it," Vader said. Anakin let out a small huff and rolled his eyes. Vader could almost hear him thinking, 'You sound like Obi-Wan.' He put his hands on the armrests and pushed himself up out of the seat. "One of you watch the ship. I'm going to get some rest."
Luke grabbed his arm as he passed him. Vader looked down at his son. He was expecting to see annoyance or anger, but Luke's face only showed concern. It was genuine. Vader could feel it pulsating off the boy in the Force. Luke gave Vader a weak smile and squeezed his arm. Vader nodded his head. He wasn't even sure what he was communicating, but Luke's smile brightened. A small smile pulled on Vader's lips.

Luke's hand fell away, and Vader walked out of the cockpit. As he walked towards the crew quarters his thoughts tumbled over each other. Skywalker's vision had changed. Padmé died from a lightsaber. Who was wielding the blade? Was it Anakin? Was it someone else? Sidious? Maul? Perhaps . . . Vader?

Chapter End Notes

There was a SSD Garrett, which Vader did use as his flagship during the Star Wars: TIE Fighter video game. It's just a funny name among all the other destroyers like Accuser, Agonizer, Avenger, Conqueror, Inflexible, Malice, Punisher, Stalker, Tormentor, and . . . Garrett.

Anakin did have a ship named Jabitha in the old EU Rogue Planet novel. The planet was sentient and the people of the planet made sentient ships, and they gave one to Anakin. He named it Jabitha after the Magister's daughter. This only took place three years after the Phantom Menace, so Anakin was still quite young.
The trip to Manda had been uneventful, and the three Skywalkers had been on the planet for three
days now. They had settled into a routine. In the morning, Anakin would go to the archives and
research time travel. Luke thought it was because Anakin felt too stifled in the ship. Vader had of
course argued.

"You are not one to sit down and do research," Vader said.

"I can," Anakin said defensively.

Vader rolled his eyes. "And you mean to go out dressed like that? Still in your Jedi robes?"

Anakin looked down at himself. "Just one second," he said as he dashed back to the crew quarters.
He reappeared wearing a poncho over his robes.

"That is not a disguise," Vader grumbled.

"What's wrong with a good poncho?" Luke asked. He himself had often worn a poncho a few times
when on Alliance missions.

"Luke gets it," Anakin said smiling. "And I actually blend in. Gee, I wonder which one of us is the
scary Sith lord? Oh it must be the nerf herder dressed completely in black from head to toe."

Anakin gave Vader a pointed look. Vader only glared menacingly at Anakin.

While Anakin was gone, Luke and Vader went through the Sith artifacts. Most of it was listening to
the Sith holocrons. Vader had explained how to open them, something one could only do with the
Dark Side. Many of the holocrons talked about deepening one's connection to the Dark Side. Some
talked about Sith history. A few talked about various Force skills. Some mentioned the pursuit of
power and killing Jedi and enslaving others.

It got tedious around the fifth holocrion. Even Vader at times seemed uninterested. Though there
were a few he seemed to listen in on closely. Mostly these had to do with various techniques and
skills.

In the afternoon, Anakin would return with lunch. The three would eat, and then they would go their
separate ways. Sometimes Vader would return to the Sith artifacts. Other times he would work on his
ship. He seemed a bit paranoid about it now. Anakin had started bringing back mechanical parts to
the ship. He had claimed a section of the hold for his project.

"Are you building a droid?" Luke had asked.

"Yep," Anakin said.

However, Anakin wouldn't reveal what type of droid. So far it looked humanoid. Vader apparently
knew what it was. A few times he would wander over, stare at the jumble of wires, make some
comment, and either Anakin would nod and agree or the two would argue.

In the afternoons, Luke would often leave the ship. It was decided that two people should stay with
the ship in case Maul showed up or something else happened. It wasn't until the second day that
Luke realized he was able to walk around Manda without worrying about exposing himself. There
was no large-bounty on his head. He wasn't a wanted Rebel fighting against the Empire. He was just
When was the last time he had such freedom? To be able to walk around without constantly having to watch his back? Though Luke often found himself falling back into his old habits. He would scan the crowd. Watch for anyone grabbing a blaster.

While he hadn't felt anything odd in the Force, there was still Maul to worry about. They still didn't know how Maul had found them on the space station. Though Luke did have a theory: Vader and Anakin's duel on Bespin had been caught on security holos. Maul was already in the area and possibly had somehow either gotten lucky, was able to track their ship using records on Bespin, or picked up on them using the Force.

In the evening, they would eat dinner. Then they would work on fighting practice. It was during the first meal that Luke had spoken up.

"Can you train me?" he asked.

Both Anakin and Vader perked up at that question. Then they both shot each other a glance.

"Which one of us?" Anakin asked.

"Both of you," Luke replied. Vader's lips were already turning down into a frown. "I want to practice fighting two on one."

"Why?" Vader asked.

"We don't have one of those dual lightsabers like Maul has," Luke said. "I know it won't be the same, but I have no experience against two lightsabers. Especially against two independent ones."

"And when do you think you'll be fighting against two lightsabers, young one?" Vader asked.


"This is true," Anakin said.

That first night, Anakin and Vader had come at Luke very slowly. But it allowed the two experienced fighters to analyze Luke's movements.

"Don't shift your left foot so far out," Anakin said. "It allows you to be easily kicked or slashed at." He lowered his saber and walked over to Luke. He would push Luke's leg into place. "Hold your weight on your knees and keep on your toes during those kind of attacks." He would keep positioning Luke's body until it was right.

Now after three days, they were able to speed things up. Anakin and Vader came at Luke hard and fast. Luke still felt like the others were holding back. Yet that was to be expected. They were just training, and Vader and Anakin were quite deadly at their full potential.

It was afternoon, and Luke sat on the gravity couch in the hold. Anakin wanted to go buy some parts for his droid and had gone out after lunch. Vader was down in the engine room. Luke was looking at one of the Sith books. They had found so little about real time travel. There were theories mentioned. There were some that referenced the idea, but none that talked about it concretely.

Luke leaned his back against the couch. He wondered if it was even possible to go back to the future. It felt almost impossible. He closed his eyes as he thought about what he would do as soon as he got back. He would get in contact with the Alliance. With Leia. Had she found Han? Did they
rescue him? What had happened while Luke was gone? Had the Alliance made any headway? Had they taken any great losses? How had things changed since he was gone? Since Darth Vader was gone?

Darth Vader . . .

What would he do when they got back? Seek out the Emperor? Return to his navy? Or would he . . .? Would he what? He was still Darth Vader. No way the Alliance would accept him. Right? Plus, Luke couldn't see Vader joining the Alliance. Luke sighed. For now it didn't matter. For now he was stuck here in the this time-

Luke heard the soft beeping and bopping of a droid. At once his eyes were open and his head snapped up. It couldn't be. He listened closer. Those beeps. It sounded just like R2. But . . . that couldn't be. But that was right when a small astromech rolled into the hold.

"Artoo?" Luke said jumping. "How? It can't be!"

The droid rolled back a bit and beeped at Luke. Luke only understood a few pieces of what the droid said, but he understood the droid was confused. Of course he was. He didn't know Luke.

"I uh . . ." Luke said taking a step back. "Sorry. I thought you were a different droid."

But what was R2 doing here? How was this possible? Shouldn't he be with Leia's father? Senator Organa? Luke gave a half smile. He didn't know what to do next. Part of him was excited and relieved to see his droid. His friend who had accompanied him faithfully. And part of him was sad. This friend didn't know him. They shared no history together.

Steps were heard coming down the hallway and soon Anakin entered the hold. A huge smile was on his face.

"There you are buddy," Anakin said as he placed a hand on the droid's domed head as he passed it. R2 let out a happy beep followed by a longer collections of beeps and whistles. Anakin paused as he listened. Then he turned to Luke. "Artoo says you mistook him for another droid."

"Uh . . . yeah . . . I have an R2 astromech droid . . ." Luke said slowly.

Anakin smiled. "They're a great little droids," he said. "This is R2-D2. He's been my companion for a long time."

R2 let out a few happy beeps. He rolled forward and bumped into Anakin's leg. Anakin laughed and again patted R2 on the head. Luke just stood there numbly. His eyes were drawn to the hallway entrance as a second pair of feet were heard. He expected to see Vader walking in, but it wasn't.

A young Togruta woman stepped into the hold. She wore a large brown robe with a hood, which she pulled down once in the room. Now that Luke could see her face clearly, he noted she was younger than he first suspected though not by much. Originally he thought she was the same age as him, but now he could tell she was a bit younger. He could tell because her lekku and montrails were still on the short side.
She had orange skin with light markings on her face. Her lekku and montrails were white with blue striping. She had a metal headband on and was dressed in a dark blue with white striping details. It kind of looked a bit like a bounty hunter outfit with its geometric metal panels and arm guards.

She looked around the ship, but then her teal eyes settled on Luke. He was unsure of what to say. Who was she? Why was she here? She took off her robe and as she did so, Luke noticed the two lightsabers hanging on her hip. Was she a Jedi?


"Luke, where is your uh . . . father?" Anakin asked.

That was a bit odd for Anakin to refer to Vader as Luke's father. "Down in the engine room," Luke said.

"Good," Anakin said. "Good. I'm going to go talk to him before he comes up-" He stopped as the distinctive heavy footsteps of Vader were heard coming down the hallway. Anakin sighed, turned and faced the entrance way.

Darth Vader walked into the hold. He wasn't wearing his outer black robe, but still wore all black. The only skin showing was his white bald scarred head. His yellow eyes instantly snapped right on to Ahsoka.

"Ah . . . Ahsoka?" Vader said in a whisper.

Ahsoka had tensed up. Her hand was right above her lightsabers. She shot Anakin a look. "What's going on?" she asked. "He's . . . He's a Sith."

Vader crossed his arms and shifted his weight. He looked uncomfortable. "What is she doing here?" he growled at Anakin.

Anakin stepped between Ahsoka and Vader. "Obi-Wan sent for her. She brought the holocron and Artoo."

Vader's head titled as he took in the little droid, who beeped defensively at the Sith. Vader's eyes narrowed, but he said nothing.

"Anakin," Ahsoka said taking a step closer to him. "What is going on? Obi-Wan said you needed my help. That it was of the utmost importance that I leave Mandalore to come help you."

Anakin sighed and dragged a hand through his hair. "I'm going to explain. It's going to sound crazy at first, but just listen to the whole thing ok?"


Ahsoka scrunched up her face in confusion and skepticism. She looked at Luke and then back at Anakin. Luke could still feel Vader's anger. He decided he would rather go handle his father than stick around for this awkward conversation. He nodded to Anakin and Ahsoka and walked down the hall and out of the ship. He followed Vader's dark and moody presence into the streets of Manda.
Chapter 53

"Perhaps I was wrong."

"It wouldn't be the first time!"

Vader clenched his hands into fists as he stalked through the streets of Manda. He bit on his jaw. He tried to push the memories away, but they came at him anyway.

"I was foretold you would be here," he had said. "Our long-awaited meeting has come at last."

"I'm glad I gave you something to look forward to!"

"We need not be adversaries," he said as he deactivated his lightsaber. "The Emperor will show you mercy if you tell me where the remaining Jedi can be found."

"There are no Jedi," she had said back.

She was older than he had last seen her. Of course she was. So much time had passed. She was no longer a child, but an adult. Her montrails and lekku were longer. Her face had long since lost any roundness. Her markings on face had also grown out. "You and your inquisitors have seen to that."

He looked down at the boy crawling on the floor. "Perhaps this child will confess what you will not."

"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," he said. "I destroyed him."

"Then I will avenge his death," she said.

"Revenge is not the Jedi way."

"I am no Jedi," she said as she ignited her twin lightsabers. No longer were they the ones he had given her. Those had been found in a shallow grave on Mandalore. Through the red lenses of his helmet he could tell they had white beams.

So she was going to fight him. He had hoped . . . He had hoped she would join him. She could be his apprentice again. They could hunt down Kenobi. He could have his revenge. They could even dispose of the Emperor. But of course she had chosen to fight him. Like everyone else, she decided to turn against him.

"Ahsoka," he had called. "Ahsoka."

She turned to him. "Anakin," she said in a soft voice.

He slowly stood up after her blow had knocked him down. Her lightsaber had slashed through the right side of his mask cutting off a small chunk revealing his right eye. His respirator wheezed. He looked at her with his own eyes.

"I won't leave you," she declared. "Not this time."

He paused as he considered her words. They stung. They stirred a long since dormant part of him.
She had left him. Left him like Padmé had. Like Obi-Wan. And now she dared to say she wouldn't leave? After all he had been through? After all the sacrifices he made to achieve this power?

No. No. He wasn't that weak fool. He wasn't Anakin Skywalker. He was Darth Vader. He had destroyed Anakin. He couldn't be that weak Jedi again.

"Then you will die," he said as he ignited his lightsaber.

They had continued to fight. The Sith Temple around them crumbling apart. She stabbed her lightsabers into the ground causing it to crack. He slashed out at her but his saber never met her. She was yanked away at the same moment the ground beneath him gave way. As he limped out of the temple, he could sense she was gone. The last link of Anakin Skywalker was gone.

Except now she was here. Alive. And of course with that fool Jedi. And that droid, that droid, was there as well. Vader scowled. His rage was bubbling up. He wanted to lash out. He wanted to feel the fear of those weaker than him. Feed on it. Strengthen himself in the Dark Side. He wasn't Anakin Skywalker. He wasn't-

"Father?"

Vader spun. Luke stood there. His hand held out as if he was about to grab Vader. His face creased in worry and concern.


Luke could sense Vader's distress growing. He quickened his pace. He was almost running through the streets. It was odd how everyone else seemed so normal. Still going about their lives when there was a building storm in the Force. The Force swirled. It had darkened and chilled. It moved unevenly. Static electricity had filled the air and in any moment, lightning would strike.

Finally Luke spotted Vader amongst the crowd. He easily stood out. He was tall and with a bald white head. Luke pushed his way through the crowd. He put his arm up, ready to grab Vader the moment he was close enough.

"Father?" he called out as he approached.

Vader spun around. His eyes and nostrils were wide. His jaw was clenched and his lips pulled down in a frown.


Then everything seemed to calm down. Luke lowered his arm. They just stood there. The people on the streets continued to move around them. The storm in the Force eased away.

"Are . . . are you ok?" Luke finally asked knowing full well Vader wasn't. How had this man dealt with his emotions before? He choked and killed people, he thought.

Vader straightened up. He was stiff. Awkward. "I am fine," he said in a clear lie. He turned and continued to walk down the street. Despite being guarded and stiff, his emotions were much more in check. Luke joined him at his side. Vader slowed his pace so it matched with Luke.


"She is no Jedi," Vader said gruffly. His mood still sour.
"She had lightsabers."

"As do you," Vader pointed out. "Carrying a lightsaber does not make you a Jedi."


Vader glanced down at him. There was a slight upward pull in one corner of his mouth. "Yes," he said in a lighter tone.

"If she isn't a Jedi, how do you know her? Clearly, you knew her in the past, before . . ." Luke shot Vader a look. He gestured to Vader. "Before all of this." The ghost of the smile faded as Vader frowned.

"She was a Jedi," Vader said looking ahead. "She left the Order."

"Oh. She seems rather young. Younger than me."

"She is."

The conversation lulled. Luke looked at the various shops and market stalls along the street. Manda was mainly populated by humans. It was a rather peaceful and rich world. Walking down this street he could hardly tell there was a war waging across the galaxy.

"Ahsoka was my . . . Was Skywalker's apprentice," Vader suddenly said.

Luke looked up at his father. He had noticed Vader referring to his younger self as Skywalker. "Your apprentice?" Luke asked emphasizing the you part. Vader was Anakin Skywalker. "You had an apprentice? As a Jedi?"

Vader's face darkened as he noticed Luke's play on words. "Yes," he said. "She was a padawan."

"Wait, did she even finish her training?"

"No."

Silence fell between them again. Luke hoped Vader would continue to explain on his own. But after a few minutes of walking, Vader was still quiet.

So Luke took a breath and asked, "Why did she leave?"

There was a slight falter in Vader's step. He stopped and so did Luke. He looked down at his son. "There were Jedi who were not pleased with the Order's involvement in the war. The Jedi were supposed to be peacekeepers not generals and soldiers. There were some who decided to simply leave."

"And that's what happened with Ahsoka?"

"No. There were others who decided to turn against the Jedi. Decided to turn towards the Dark Side."

Luke thought back on the young Togruta he had just met. She didn't feel like a dark sider. Not like Maul or Vader did. Granted Luke's experience with Force users was very limited.

"She is not of the Dark Side," Vader said picking up on Luke's thoughts. "But there was another padawan who was. She placed a bomb in a hangar in the Jedi Temple. It killed several people."
Ahsoka was framed for the crime and expelled from the Order. I discovered the real culprit and revealed the truth. Afterwards, the Council offered Ahsoka to rejoin the Order, but instead she left.

The two started to walk again. They had come to a big square with a large fountain in the middle of it. There were a few street performers scattered about. People sat on the edge of the fountain eating food from the market carts. Luke thought on Vader's words. Ahsoka had left the Order after they thought she had committed a crime. Had she lost faith in the Jedi when they showed they had no faith in her? And how did Anakin take it? Luke glanced over at his father.

_Not well, Luke guessed to himself. It still bothers him that she left._

But wasn't that Vader's biggest problem? People kept leaving him. Is this why he was so desperate to save his wife? He didn't want her to leave him? Could the same argument be made for why Vader cut Luke's hand off? He was just desperate to be with his son? And Vader just didn't know how to accomplish these things without resorting to violence?

Luke wanted to ask, but he felt it wasn't the right time. Vader's mood was only just recovering from the storm. They had made a lap of the square. It looked like Vader was steering them back down the street they had come. Most likely back towards the ship.

"What happened to her?" Luke asked. "Is she alive in our time? If she wasn't a Jedi, did she survive the purge?"

"She is not alive," Vader grounded out.

The hairs on the back of Luke's neck stood on end. "Let me guess," Luke said quietly but in a sharp tone, "You had something to do with that?"

Vader stopped. He took in a few sharp breaths before he looked down at his son. "She was a traitor to the Empire. A rebel. I offered her a chance to join the Empire. To join me."

There was a sharp pain in Luke's chest. His vision was blurry. He was fighting back the memories of Bespin.

"Join me," Vader had said. His voice deep. The sound of his respirator evenly going in and out. The wind snapping at Luke's tattered clothes. His blood pounding in his ears. _And together we can rule the galaxy as father and son. Come with me. It is the only way._

_The only way, huh?_ Luke thought to himself. _Or the only answer Vader would accept?_ What if Luke had said no but stayed on the gantry? What if he decided not to let go? What would have happened? What would Vader have done? Kill him? Like he had his own former apprentice?

Luke blinked as he came back to himself standing in the street. He looked at his father, expecting him to be staring at him, but Vader's attention was elsewhere. He was looking at a stall down the street. He was tense. He shoulders and jaw squared.

"Vader?" Luke asked in a soft voice.

"Ventress," Vader hissed between clenched teeth.

Luke followed Vader's gaze. A woman stood at the stall. She was tall and lithe. She wore a full-head helmet, but the face plate was up revealing a pale skinned very human looking face. There were purple markings on her face around her mouth and eyes. She was dressed in very typical spacer fare. It bordered a bit on bounty hunter looking with the metal shoulder plate on one shoulder. She stood out a bit from the long robes and dresses that the Mandians wore.
Then Luke noticed the lightsaber on her back. "She has a lightsaber. Is she-"

"No," Vader interrupted.

"A lightsaber doesn't make a Jedi?" Luke asked with a smile, but Vader didn't smile back.

"Nor a Sith," Vader grumbled. "But she is a Dark Side user. She used to be a Separatist working for Dooku."

"Dooku?"

Vader looked down at Luke. A frown deep on his face. "Your education needs seeing to," he mumbled. "Dooku was . . . is the public leader of the Separatists. Ventress worked as one of his commanders and assassins before she finally left."

"So did you two ever fight each other?"

"Yes," Vader said. His voice was stressed. Luke could feel the cold inking out of Vader as his anger grew.

"Did you . . . Did you lose?" Luke guessed.

Vader glared down at Luke. His eyes a clear golden yellow, and yet Luke could only smile. Vader's reaction made it so clear.

"You did lose, didn't you?" Luke said fighting back a laugh.

"I did not lose," Vader hissed. "But she did give me this scar." Vader pointed to the one by his right eye. The one Anakin also had.

"Huh, so that's how you got it," Luke said.

"How did you think I go it?"

"I don't know. Slipping in the shower?"

Vader scowled.

"So she's not with the Separatists now?" Luke said looking back at the woman.

"No. She became a bounty hunter."

"So why is she on Manda?"

"Is she working with Maul I wonder?" Vader growled. He put a hand on Luke's shoulder. "We should go," he said as his grip tightened on Luke's shoulder and he steered his son around the stall and down the street back towards the ship.
Chapter 54

Ahsoka was pacing in the hold of Vader's ship, the *Light Keeper*. Anakin had received a message from Padmé telling him that R2 had finally made it to Manda. He had not been expecting Ahsoka to be with the droid. Part of him was happy and relieved to see her. She was safe. She looked good. Plus it was nice to see someone he truly loved and trusted.

But on the other hand, he was worried. He didn't want to involve someone else in this mess. It was already getting complicated enough. However, it wasn't Padmé who had sent her. It was Obi-Wan who had contacted Ahsoka saying Anakin needed help.

"I can't believe that you," Ahsoka said and paused in her pacing to look right at him, "fall to the Dark Side and become a Sith. *You.*"

"Yes I know," Anakin said. "I found it very hard to believe as well."

However, Ahsoka didn't notice how his voice wasn't as certain as it had once been. Luke's words haunted him. *Vader didn't become Vader overnight.* Seeing Ahsoka, he recalled the incident with Poggle the Lesser. How he had interrogated the bug when Ahsoka's ship had been over run with brain worms. He remembered the anger and desperation that grew in him. He went to Poggle's cell alone. Told the guards to leave. He had tried to do get answers the proper way, but then Poggle refused. He remembered the Force obeying his command as Poggle was lifted off the floor. His long bug hands grasping at his throat.

"So what's the plan?" Ahsoka asked bringing Anakin out of his thoughts.

"What?"

"You have a plan, yes? Some crazy plan to stop all of this?"

"I uh . . . Not really," he admitted. "I told Vader I would help him find a way back to his own time if he told me how to avoid becoming him."

Ahsoka grew still. Her bright teal eyes narrowed. Her lips became slightly pursed. "Are you serious?" she asked. "*That's* your plan? That's all you've got? Come on Skyguy!"

"What?" he asked defensively.

She walked over to him. "You need to really start thinking serious about all of this! Do you really want there to be some Empire? One with you as a Sith lord? You shouldn't be hiding away on some planet. You should be out there working to stop this Empire from forming! The chrono is ticking! You only have a few months before it all comes crashing down! Stop the Empire first, then you can worry about some stupid Sith going back to his own time. Plus it's time travel. It's not like he's missing anything from his own time."

"You don't know that," Anakin said, oddly finding himself defensive of Vader and Luke. "We don't know how time travel works. What if time is still moving in their time? What if the amount of time they've been here, the same amount of time has also moved forward?"

"And what if they go back to the exact moment they left from?" Ahsoka said drily. "We just don't know, Anakin. We need to focus on our future. *Your* future!"

Anakin ran a hand through his hair.
"Come on," Ahsoka continued. "We have a chance to end this war. We have a guy who's lived it! If that Sith is really you, I bet he knows all the future battles."

"He's said the future has been changing from how it happened before," he said.

"Good," she said planting her hands on her hips.

Neither one said anything. An odd thick silence laid between them. Both lost in their own thoughts. What should he do? Ahsoka was right. He should be focusing on his future. He should be out there trying to stop Palpatine. He didn't know how long it was going to take to find a way for Vader and Luke to get back to their own time. What if they never did?

Time was ticking. How much time had he wasted chasing after Vader? Even making their way to Manda? And what did they have to show for it? Nothing besides knowing Maul was now involved.

R2 let out a series of beeps. He bumped into Anakin's leg. Anakin put his hand on the top of droid's dome. R2 beeped at him again.

"That's right," Anakin said. "The holocron. There might be something in there."

R2 gave out a happy whistle. Anakin looked back over at Ahsoka.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Back on the ship," she said. "I didn't want anything to happen to it. I didn't know what I would find. Obi-Wan said you needed my help. I could only imagine what kind of trouble you were in. Wasn't expecting this though."

Anakin smiled at her.

"I'll just com Ventress and have her bring it here," Ahsoka said reaching for her comlink.

"Ventress?" Anakin said as he stilled.

"I would like to ask the same," said a deeper voice.

Anakin, Ahsoka, and R2 all looked to the hallway doorway. Vader stood there with his arms crossed. Anakin could just make out Luke peeking around Vader's large form.

"I just saw that Separatist scum in the market," Vader growled stepping into the hold.

Ahsoka immediately went on the defense. Her form stiffened. Her legs shifted into a stance that allowed for her to easily jump forward or back. One of her hands drifted above her lightsabers.

"She's cut all ties with Dooku," Ahsoka said as she held her head up high and stared Vader down.

"She is still not be trusted," Vader growled.

"Oh? Speaking from experience?" Ahsoka said. There was a slight tilt in her hip. "Is there something we should know about? Something she does in the future?"

Vader's eyes narrowed as his glare deepened. Anakin fought back a smile. Some things never changed. Ahsoka was just as snippy to Vader as she was to him.

"So Ventress is with you?" Luke asked stepping around Vader. "She isn't working with Maul?"
"Maul?" Ahsoka exclaimed. She turned and faced Anakin. "Maul? I thought Maul was on Mandalore! That's why I was there!"

"He was supposed to be," Vader mumbled.

Ahsoka whipped her attention back to Vader. "At least tell me we get him."

"You don't," he replied bluntly.

"Argh!" Ahsoka yelled as she turned back to Anakin. She waved her arms at Vader. "See? This is what I'm talking about! Why aren't we using what he knows to win this war?"

"Who says I want you to win this war?" Vader growled.

A chill ran up Anakin's spine. Luke must have felt it too. He frowned and looked at Vader. Darth Vader. Part of the empire that Palpatine created.

"You want the Empire to come about?" Luke asked.

"Compare to the alternative?" Vader said. "To keep the rotten and corrupted Republic?"


"The Republic that you fought so hard for?" Ahsoka said taking a step towards Vader. "That is if you really are my master."

"You of all people should know the how quickly the Republic fails its people," Vader growled pointing a finger at her. "Or did you forget how quick and ready they were to throw you in jail and let you rot?"

"Hey!" Anakin said stepping up beside Ahsoka and placing his hand on her shoulder. He gave it a squeeze.

"I am only speaking the truth, Skywalker," Vader said.

"And like the Empire is any better," Luke said. He glared up at Vader. Vader paused as he looked down at his son. His frown growing.

"Your education is lacking, my son," Vader said looking Luke straight on. "It has been fed by liars and traitors. This is something I will see rectified."

"Oh I have plenty of first hand experience with the Empire," Luke said as he took a small step towards Vader. A smile grew on Anakin's lips as he watched his son glare down a Sith lord.

The beeping of com suddenly cut through the tension in the room. Everyone stilled. Anakin looked down at Ahsoka. She gave him a look, before bringing out her comlink.

"Ahsoka," she said into it.

The distinctive raspy voice of Asajj Ventress answered. "Tano. Where are you?"

"Found my target," Ahsoka answered back. "I'm going to send you my location. Can you deliver the package?"

There was a pause before Ventress replied. "On my way." There was a small beep as Ventress disconnected from her end.
"Package?" Luke asked. His eyes flickered from Vader to Ahsoka and Anakin.

"The holocron," Anakin said finally letting his hand slide off Ahsoka's shoulder. "The one Obi-Wan gave Padmé. Hopefully it contains something about time travel."

Luke's eyes grew wide. Anakin could see the hope inside of him. It was clear the kid wanted to go back to his own time. There was a slight pang of pain inside of Anakin. Is that . . . is that what Anakin wanted?

"I don't know if we should let them see it," Ahsoka grumbled softly to Anakin. "Maybe we should barter it. Tell us what you know about the future of this war and we'll give you the holocron."


"Ahsoka," Anakin said softly.

"That wasn't the deal, Tano," Vader said. He looked directly at Anakin. His sickly gold eyes piercing him. "You help me get back to my own time. I tell you how to avoid becoming a Sith."

Ahsoka looked at Anakin. "Don't you think you already know enough?" she asked softly to him. She didn't know all the details, but she had a good general idea.

But it was a good question. Could Anakin prevent his falling with what he had already learned? He knew Palpatine was Sidious, who was controlling both sides of the war. A war that the Republic won, but turned into an empire with Palpatine as emperor. Padmé died in childbirth, which seemed to be the main turning point in Vader's fall. Though supposedly she died after Vader attacked with her the Force, while in Anakin's vision she died from a lightsaber.

It also looked like Palpatine was trying to turn Anakin against Obi-Wan and Padmé by spreading rumors about the two of them. Obi-Wan who had supposedly turned against Vader. The two had dueled and left Vader horribly injured and scarred. He had to live in a life support suit.

Those things did seem easy to avoid now that Anakin knew of them. But what of the war? He knew little. He knew Vader was made a member of the Jedi Council, and according to Vader it was to spy on the Chancellor. He knew Obi-Wan finally defeated Grievous. The Senate voted for the Republic to turn into an empire.

When Vader told the Council that Palpatine was a Sith, they tried to murder him instead of arresting him. Vader said the Jedi were planning a coup to take control of the Senate, so the entire Jedi Order was ordered to be executed. Which had worked, because there were no Jedi in the future. What else did Anakin know? That Vader had gone to Mustafar to kill off the Separatist council. It was there that Padmé 'betrayed' him. He attacked her, and then had the duel with Obi-Wan.

Was it enough? Enough to prevent the future?

*Vader didn't become Vader overnight.*

Anakin became aware he was cold. He looked up to see Vader staring intently at him. Then Vader slowly raised his head. A small smile pulling on his lips. Anakin frowned. He did not like that look.

"You think you have it all figured out," Vader said. "That our deal is no longer needed."

"Is it?" Ahsoka snapped.

Vader shot her a quick glance, but looked back over at Anakin. "Is it?" he purred. Anakin's frown
"Who says we need your help?" Ahsoka said. "We can just ask him." She waved at Luke.

All eyes turned to Luke, who had gone wide-eyed with the attention on him.


"He is of no help," Vader snapped as he took a step forward and put an arm out protectively in front of Luke.

Anakin shot Ahsoka a look. It was not a good idea to target Luke in front of Vader. If the Sith had one weak spot, it was his son. He had taken on the entire Jedi Temple in an attempt to get Luke back. Luke pushed Vader's arm down and took a step away.

"Luke has already told me all he knows," Anakin added.

The room grew quiet as approaching steps were heard. Vader moved to the side. He grabbed Luke by the shoulder and pulled him with him. Luke let out a small yelp and pushed Vader's hand off of him. The two exchanged glares before Vader positioned himself slightly in front of Luke.

*So he can protect him,* Anakin noted.

Asajj Ventress walked into the hold. She looked the same as Anakin had last seen her on Coruscant. Dressed as a bounty hunter though she had added a helmet with a full mask. The mask was currently up. Asajj looked around the room. Her eyes settled on Anakin. They narrowed and darkened before they moved on.

A numbness ran through Anakin. The last time he had seen Ventress . . . During Ahsoka's trial. He had thought Ventress was behind the Temple bombing. He had tracked down in Coruscant's underlayer. Fought her. Overwhelmed her.

Her saw her grabbing at her bare throat. Just like Poggle the Lesser had. But then he saw his own hand wrapped around it as he demanded information.

"Who is this?" Ventress asked. She was glaring at Vader. "You're clearly a Sith."

"I am," Vader said.

"Well isn't this a nice development," she said looking back at Anakin. "Have you turned traitor to the Republic, Skywalker?"

"No," Anakin said at once.

"Do you have the holocron?" Vader asked. He eyed the bag hanging on Ventress' side.

"Perhaps," Ventress said. She walked over to Ahsoka and Anakin. "Tell me Skywalker, have you seen the news?"

"News?" Anakin asked.

"It's all over the holonet. Everyone in the streets is talking about it," Ventress said. "About Coruscant and Palpatine."

"Did he die of a sudden heart attack?" Ahsoka asked bitterly.
Ventress cocked an eyebrow at that statement.

"Ah," Vader said. Everyone looked at him, but he was looking right at Anakin. "I told you you did not know everything. It seems the Battle of Coruscant has begun."

Anakin's heart plunged into his chest. A sharp cold ran up his back. It clawed at his throat.

"The battle of what?" he asked.

"I am curious to see how it will go this time," Vader mused. His voice uncharacteristically light. "Without you there to bring victory. Perhaps I could tell you how it goes . . . for a price."

"No good Sith spit," Ahsoka grumbled.

"You can't be serious!" Anakin shouted. "What about Padmé?"

Vader noticeably flinched. "Hand over the holocron," he growled. "And I'll tell you."
Chapter 55

The hold was silent. Everyone was looking at Vader. Anakin looked shaken up. Ahsoka had crossed her arms across her chest while she continued to glare at Vader. Ventress looked amused. Vader looked the same with a deep serious scowl on his face that was unwavering. Luke hoped his own annoyance could be read on his face, though Vader wasn't looking at him. His focus was on Anakin.

"Just give him the holocron," Anakin said.

Ventress looked from Ahsoka to Anakin. Ahsoka nodded reluctantly. Ventress pulled a blue cube from the bag. Luke only vaguely remembered such items from Grakkus the Hutt's collection. However, at once it flew out of Ventress' hand and into Vader's. She shot him a dirty look, but it wasn't as nasty as the one Ahsoka had settled into.

"Now what do you know?" Ahsoka asked.

Vader looked down at the softly glowing holocron in his hand. Then he looked at Luke. What did he want? Then he handed it to Luke. Luke was a bit surprised, but cautiously took the holocron with both hands. He looked at the blue cube with its intricate metal detailed casing.

"Well?" Anakin asked, growing impatient.

Vader sighed then explained, "The Separatists planned a lightning attack against the Republic with a large fleet. They struck at Coruscant using an unknown hyperspace lane that took them through the deep core. They were then able to overwhelm the Coruscant Home Fleet before they could get into a defensive position and activate the planetary shield. This allowed the Separatists to send raids down to the surface during which General Grievous kidnapped Palpatine. Once he returned to space, only then had Home Fleet gathered themselves and started an offense. The first wave of reinforcements had arrived, blocking the Separatists retreat to hyperspace."

He paid close attention to the reactions of the others. Anakin's face was unmoving. It was set in a stern frown and steely gaze. Ahsoka's glare had softened. Her eyes had widened the more she heard. Ventress looked a third amused, a third confused, and a third skeptical. Reasonably so. She had no idea about the time travel. At least Luke thought so.

"I'm assuming," Vader said as he continued on matter-of-factly, "that Grievous has just broadcasted to the galaxy that he has the Chancellor in hand and that it was time for the Republic's corrupt reign to end."

A small silence fell across the hold.

"And then what happened?" Anakin asked slowly. "This sounds like stuff that has already happened. You said I led the Republic to victory."

"More reinforcements arrived," Vader continued. "The Open Circle Fleet reached the battle. You and Kenobi headed out in your fighters and were able to land on the Separatist flagship, the Invisible Hand. There you were able to rescue the Chancellor, cause Grievous to retreat, and eventually end the battle."

There was more to it than that. Luke didn't think Vader was lying, but he wasn't telling the whole truth. Clearly Anakin thought the same way as he narrowed his eyes. Luke had noted how Vader had avoided talking about himself. Instead he shifted the perspective on to Anakin. It was *you* who did this. Not *I* who did this.
"And what about Padmé?" Anakin asked.

"She was fine. No harm came to her."

Anakin let out a small breath of relief and a bit of the tension he had been holding in him left. He was still tense, but his shoulders were a bit lower.

"What if it doesn't happen the same way?" Luke asked. Vader turned to face HIM, who looked right back up at his father. "You've said it yourself. Things aren't happening as they did before."

Vader stilled as he considered Luke's words. His lips turned down in a frown.

*It's already changed, hasn't it?* Luke asked through the Force. He didn't know how he knew or how Vader knew. Not like they had any details about Coruscant's current situation, but there was a sense of truth to that thought.

*The battle has come about earlier than it originally did,* Vader said as he turned to face Anakin.

Anakin was fidgeting. He could barely stand still. Finally he shouted, "Ugh! I have to call her!" He dug through his robes and pulled out a comlink. At once he typed in a frequency and pressed the call button. Everyone was quiet and still as they waited. Padme didn't pick up.

"Artoo!" Anakin snapped. The little droid beeped in a way that was so familiar to Luke. "Come on, let's go try the ship's com."

Anakin marched out of the hold with the little astromech right behind him. Luke stepped up to Vader. In a low voice he said, "Can I talk to you? In private?"

Vader hesitated for a second before he nodded. Then his attention was back on the ladies.

"Ventress," he growled, "You can see yourself out."

"Gladly," she said.

Luke didn't wait to see if she did leave. He walked out of the hold. He could hear Vader's heavy steps behind him. The two went into the crew quarters. Vader walked over to a drawer and dug around in it. He pulled out a bag and handed it to Luke.

"Put the holocron in there," Vader said. "Keep it close."

"Why?" Luke snapped, no longer able to hold back his own annoyance. "I can't believe you! Why did you do that? Anakin would have let us see the holocron without you holding information over his head!"

"Information is all we have," growled Vader. "Eventually I will run out of it or it will no longer be relevant."

"And what do you think is going to happen then? Anakin will just stop helping us? I don't think him helping us was part of the plan to begin with. You barely like him. Unless there is something else you're trying to accomplish here?"

Luke paused as he gave Vader a chance to answer, but Vader was quiet. Luke let out of a huff of frustration. What did Vader gain by using such tactics? Or perhaps it had been Ahsoka that had set him off. Luke didn't know.

"What's the worst that could happen?" he asked. "Anakin leaves and goes back to his life? His better
"We get imprisoned by the Jedi Order in a secret prison only the Council knows about. It is designed to hold Force sensitives. You'll never feel the Force again. Never make it back to your own time," Vader answered. "Or they kill us."

"I think that's the worst that could happen to you," Luke grumbled. "Unlike you, I haven't committed several crimes."

"That does not mean they would not find one, young one. We are time travelers. We don't belong here in this time. We are upsetting things. Changing things. Currently there are two of us when there should only be one. We are intruders, a paradox. Eventually the Order will not allow such a stain to continue."

"Then why did the Force send us here if we're just to be some stain?"

"Perhaps it is not the past it wishes to change."

"What does that mean?"

"Perhaps it is our future it wishes to change. It has brought us together as father and son. Unified us."

Luke held his breath ready for Vader to continue about how they could rule together, but instead the Sith stopped. He . . . He wasn't wrong. Their relationship had changed. But surely that couldn't be all, could it?

Suddenly, the ship engine's rumbled to life. Vader and Luke shared a look before they were both heading to the cockpit with Vader in the lead. Before they made it, they felt the ship lift off.

"Skywalker!" Vader barked as he entered the cockpit. "What are you doing?"

"There is interference!" he said. "I'm going to try getting free of the atmosphere."

Anakin sat at the pilot's seat with R2 plugged into the ship's computer next to him. Ahsoka sat in the copilot's chair. Vader came to a stop directly behind Anakin.

"You won't be able to get a call through," Vader said. "The initial attack has completely taken down Coruscant's holonet and communication array. It took time before they even managed to get military coms up."

"You couldn't have mentioned that sooner?" Anakin snapped as he looked over his shoulder.

However, he didn't pilot the ship back down. The sky faded into black as they left Manda's atmosphere and entered orbit. Anakin told R2 to try the call again. Everyone was quiet. Luke jumped when he heard the high pitch beep that signaled the call had connected to the other line. R2 projected a hologram, but it was only filled with blue lined static.

"Padme?" Anakin said. He scooted to the edge of his seat as he hovered over the hologram. "Padme?"

Silence. Vader leaned forward as well. Luke noticed his hands had tightened into fists. Despite Vader's words and sour attitude, he did want to change this past. He didn't want Padme to die. Perhaps he didn't want Anakin to fall to the Dark Side either. Though Luke doubted Vader would ever voice that because that would mean Vader would have to admit he had made some major mistakes and that he was unhappy with his life.
But he is unhappy, Luke noted to himself. He was miserable and horribly lonely. Luke had felt it.

"Hello Skywalker," came a smooth pleased voice. The holocam slowly turned, revealing the black and red head of Maul.

"Maul!" Anakin hissed. "Where's Padme?"

Maul smiled. "Your lady friend is keeping me company."

The camera continued to turn, but only so it showed what was over Maul's shoulder. It was Padme bound to a chair. A cloth gag tied tightly around her mouth. It looked like she hadn't gone down without a fight. Her clothes were disheveled and a sleeve was torn. Her hair was coming undone from whatever nice updo she had it in. Curls fell in clumps in front of her face.

"Let her go!" Anakin said.

"I think you know how this works," Maul said. "You did this just recently, no? You give me what I want, and I give you what you want."

"And what is it that you want?" Anakin growled.

"My master wants to talk to your friend. Darth Vader."

Anakin looked over his shoulder at Vader, who stepped forward into the holocam's field so Maul would be able to see him.

"Was it that Sidious wants with me?" Vader asked. "Revenge?"

"If only it were that simple," Maul replied. "I could have blown your ship up a week ago. Alas, he merely wishes to talk to you."

"About?"

"You will have to ask him that."

The leather creaked as Vader tightened his fists. Luke could feel the cold starting to come out of him. Maul's attention turned back to Anakin.

"And Skywalker?" Maul said with a smile. "I wouldn't waste too much time. I would hurry back to Coruscant. There is a battle happening here. I've heard even the Chancellor has been kidnapped. Ships are falling out of the sky everywhere. Casualties are quite high. It would be a shame if something happened to the Senator from Naboo. Plus . . ." He paused there.

He brought up a syringe with a long needle. He walked over to Padme. Her eyes grew wide as she watched Maul approach. She struggled against the binders holding her to the chair. Luke could hear her muffled screams through the gag. Maul placed the needle against Padme's stomach.

"Maul!" Anakin screamed.


"You wouldn't want something to happen to your baby, now would we?" he said as he pushed the needle in. Padme screamed. Her terror and horror clear.

"Stop!" Anakin shouted. His voice a terrible raging but broken thing. "Padme! Maul! Stop!"
The com clicked off before Anakin could shout again. There was a short second of silence before Anakin let out a large scream. The whole ship shook. A few panels sparked. R2 let out a low whine. Anakin breath was ragged and uneven.

It wasn't just Anakin's anger rising, but Vader's as well. This wasn't good. Maul was pushing them both towards the Dark Side. It was getting cold in here. Luke was feeling numb and lightheaded. Vader put a hand on Anakin's shoulder.

"This is all Sidious' doing," he said. "This is a trap. It always was. The Battle of Coruscant was the start of the end of the war. The Separatists were meant to lose this battle, but not without Palpatine gaining more support to continue to militarize the Republic. That way when he does have his Empire, he could stomp out any opposition. But it also had another goal of pushing you closer to the Dark Side."

Anakin glared up at Vader. His face was red and sweaty. His eyes bloodshot.

"How so?" It was Ahsoka who had spoken up.

Luke wobbled on his feet. He stumbled back and leaned against the back wall of the cockpit. Neither Anakin nor Vader had noticed. They hadn't even looked over at Ahsoka. Both still held each other's gaze.

"Sidious wants you to kill Dooku. Get rid of his old apprentice to welcome in his new one. He goads you into killing him after you had won the duel against him. He was unarmed and defenseless. Sidious pushed on your anger. Your darkness," Vader said.

"And you fell for it," Anakin said. His voice coarse.

"Yes," Vader said. "But Sidious can't do that if you're not there."

"No," Vader snapped. "Of course not! But you can't go rushing into this. You wanted to know how to avoid becoming me. This was the beginning of the fall."

"I won't . . . I won't fall," Anakin said. "But I can't leave her either. I can't let her die! You of all people should know that!"

"I do," Vader said in a low hard voice.

Luke shivered. His head was starting to spin more. His vision was getting spotty.

"So we go save her," Ahsoka said. "We should set course for Coruscant."

"No," Vader said. Ahsoka gave him a questioning look. "We cannot go rushing into this. That is what Sidious is expecting. A desperate, arrogant, and angry Jedi to come swooping in to save the day. We know the cards he holds. We can call his bluffs."

"You think that was a just a show with Padme?" Anakin asked.


"Luke?" Vader said as started to walk over to him slowly.

"Something . . . is wrong . . ." Luke said. His voice only a whisper.
"What? What is wrong?" Vader said as he stopped in front of his son.

"Something is wrong . . . wrong with me," Luke said. "I can feel it. In the Force. Can't you?"

He looked at the other three. Anakin and Ahsoka had stood up. They both looked concerned, but they didn't look like Vader. He looked worried. No scared. Tears welled up in Luke's eyes. The faces grew blurry. Vader gently grabbed Luke's arm.

"Feel what?" he asked softly.

"You said it, didn't you?" Luke whimpered. "We're a stain. We're not supposed to be here. A paradox."

"What does that mean?" Anakin asked as he came to stand besides Vader. "What does that mean?"

"There is something wrong with me. But not me. The other me. The baby," Luke said. His voice growing softer and softer.

He could feel it. Across the lightyears. There was a small burning little light. And something was wrong with it. It was scared. So scared. And so it had reached out, and the only one it must have been able to reach was itself. Was Luke. The light was trembling. Luke wanted to help it. But how?

Vader pulled Luke forward. He stumbled right into Vader's chest. Large arms wrapped around his shivering body. "It's going to be alright," Vader whispered. "We'll stop this." Luke sighed and let his head rest against his father's shoulder.
Chapter 56

Vader slowly stood up, bringing Luke with him. The kid leaned heavily on the large form of his father.

"You should go lay down," Vader said softly.

Anakin leaned his head over a bit to get a look at Vader's eyes. They weren't blue, but they weren't that sickening bright yellow either. They were an odd dull yellow that was almost green. An inbetween. Anakin understood. Part of him was burning with anger at what Maul had done. Another part of him was filled with worry and anxiety over Padmé. The last part of him was worried about Luke.

"No," Luke said. His voice sounded stronger than how it was a moment before. "I'm fine."


"I am fine," Luke said again. "I just need to sit down."

Anakin and Ahsoka moved out of the way as Vader helped Luke to the copilot chair. Luke slumped into it and rested his head back with his eyes closed. He took a few deep breaths.

"Why don't you go get him some water?" Anakin asked Vader through the Force.

The Sith looked at him. Was his face paler than usual? Then again his skin was already white to begin with. Vader nodded and left the cockpit. Anakin hadn't expected Vader to actually listen to his advice. He had been ready for Vader to object, possibly argue that Anakin should be the one to go do it. But Vader had left, which left Anakin with an unopposed opportunity.


"Close your eyes," Anakin said as he reached forward with both his hands.

Luke didn't even hesitate. He simply did it. Anakin placed his fingers on Luke's temples. Anakin closed his eyes as he opened himself to the Force. It was easy to find Luke. They already had an established connection, and Anakin followed along it.

It wasn't hard to slip into Luke's mind. His shielding was odd. In some places it was very impressive, but in others it wasn't. Anakin could sense the lingering touches of Obi-Wan and see the signature of Yoda here and there. If Anakin had to guess, Luke had only been taught very specific shielding while other techniques were never touched upon. Then again in a future where the only other Force users were two Sith, why was anything else needed?

Luckily Anakin wasn't a Sith, which was why it was easy to get in. Or perhaps Luke just trusted him and had lowered his own defenses. Regardless, Anakin was in Luke's mind. He didn't linger. At once, he was looking for the thread Luke had said was there. The one connecting Luke to the other Luke. The baby still growing in Padmé.

But he couldn't find nor sense it. Whatever Luke was feeling in the Force, Anakin couldn't feel it. And it was clear he was sensing something. Luke's mind was all twisted up. Anakin sighed. He wasn't sure what he was hoping to accomplish if he did connect to the baby's mind. Instead Anakin helped Luke's mind create some shields that should help block the pain and anxiety the baby was
Anakin lowered his hands from Luke's head. Luke opened his eyes and blinked a few times. His face was still quite pale and a bit red from crying, but he was looking better.


Anakin smiled as he straightened up. Vader was back and handed Luke a bottle of water.

"Well let's get going," Ahsoka said. She had been quiet for a while now. "Let's set course to Coruscant."

"No," Vader said. However, his voice wasn't stern and dark. It sounded tired.

"And why not?" Ahsoka asked.

Vader pinched the bridge of his nose. A gesture Anakin found all too familiar. "Because it is a war zone," he said.

"Are you saying your piloting isn't good enough?" Ahsoka quipped. "We could always have Anakin do it."

"One does not simply fly through the Battle of Coruscant," Vader growled. "Especially in a small smuggling ship."

"I've gotten through the Empire's security in a beat-up ship before," Luke said. "Just try spinning. That always works."

Vader's intense attention snapped to him. Anakin's smile grew larger. Luke and Ahsoka were also smiling, though Ahsoka's was larger and more cheerful. Luke's was still a bit pained.

"You do not realize the size of this battle," Vader said. "Do you know the size of the Home Fleet? Most of it was taken out in a matter of minutes by the Separatists. When this battle happened in my time, one-third of the entire Separatist fleet was lost at Coruscant. And that was what was lost. Not what retreated and got away."

The Separatist strategy had always been to overwhelm with numbers since droids were so much quicker to make than clones. That meant they had a lot of ships. More than the Republic. And if one-third of the entire Separatist armada had shown up . . . It would be the biggest battle in the entire war. This wasn't just a few capital ships against each other. Not even a hundred, but thousands.

"You have grasped the enormity of it," Vader continued. "Plus Grievous also deployed mass-shadow mines at key hyperspace reversion points to pull ships out of hyperspace earlier than their intended exit point. That way the Separatists warships could fire upon reinforcements as they exit."

"Then we don't go to Coruscant," Luke said. Everyone's attention turned to him. His face was starting to regain color. "When I worked with the Alliance and there was a target we needed, we waited or prompted the target to be moved. If getting to the surface of Coruscant will be too hard, then we need to meet Maul and Padmé elsewhere."
Silence fell across the four of them as they each thought of what to do next. It was Vader who spoke up first.

"Droid," he barked. R2's dome spun and stopped sharply so his optical lense was pointed right at him. "Send a message to the com you just called. Tell Maul we cannot get to the planet's surface due to the battle. We shall have to meet them in space."

R2's lense turned and looked at Anakin. A slight smile pulled on Anakin's lips at the droid's loyalty. He nodded, and R2's dome spun around as he got to work.

"And what if Maul doesn't agree?" Ahsoka asked.

"I believe he will," Vader answered.

"Oh?"

"It is not Maul pulling the strings, but Sidious. Sidious who is currently being held hostage, and he wants Anakin to rescue him. That way when he frames the Jedi as traitors, he can say that Anakin was always faithful. Anakin was the one true good Jedi. Thus he gets to keep his apprentice while the rest of the Jedi are destroyed. That can't happen if Anakin does not come. I predict Maul would have taken Padmé to the Invisible Hand regardless of our request. Sidious has set up his stage and the rest of his pieces. He's just missing his main player."

That did make sense, but Anakin was uneasy about how much attention was put on him. The lengths Palpatine was going through, had already gone through, to see Anakin fall to the Dark Side was extensive. And this time I'm aware of it, a chilling thought came to him. Vader had none of this foresight. He thought he was going in to save the Chancellor, save the Republic, and instead was tricked into falling to the Dark Side.

"But that means we're still going into the battle. Just going to the enemy flagship instead of the planet," Ahsoka pointed out.

"That is why we will not go to Coruscant first," Vader said.

"Then what are you suggesting?" Anakin asked. He was starting to grow a headache.

"We go to Anaxes."

"Anaxes?" Ahsoka asked.


"A prominent shipyard and military base," Anakin said. "It was attacked by Admiral Trench earlier in the war. But it should have Republic ships there, if that's what you're after. Though I don't see why we shouldn't go to Kuat or Corellia."

"It is closer," Vader explained. "And that attack by Trench wasn't as serious as it was reported per Sidious' plans. For you see it was Anaxes who sent the first wave of reinforcements to Coruscant. It was these reinforcements that blocked the Separatists retreat once they had Palpatine."

The planet had been receiving a continued flow of supplies to rebuild their shipyard as well as materials for new ships being built in the facilities that were working. But if the damage was superficial or only cosmetic, then Anaxes had enough supplies to be building a lot more ships than they had reported.
"So what exactly were they building on Anaxes then?" Anakin asked.

"Ships," Vader explained. "A whole secret fleet of *Imperators.*"

"*Imperators? Really?"

"They become known as the *Imperial I*-class Star Destroyer," Luke said softly. "They become the symbol of the Empire."

"And who is manning these ships? Where did he get the clones from?" Anakin asked.

"Another secret project," Vader said dully. "There are cloning facilities on Centax-2."

"What?" Ahsoka asked.

Vader said nothing. Only stood still and quiet. Anakin understood the surprise Ahsoka was feeling. Centax-2 was one of the moons of Coruscant. To think they had been making clones right under their noses.

"Ok . . ." Anakin said slowly. "We go to Anaxes. Get a ship? And then what?"

Vader sighed. "We are presented with an opportunity. Palpatine is currently acting the role of the helpless and *imprisoned* Chancellor. If he has set the stage in the same way, he will be bound to a chair."

A small silence stretched the group as they all took in Vader's words.


"It would be a waste of an opportunity if we did not act on it," Vader added.

To kill Palpatine . . . To kill the Sith master . . . The one behind this all . . . But he was still Palpatine. He was still the Chancellor! But . . . the man had bred clones and built an entire secret fleet. He had orchestrated a war. He was trying to turn Anakin to the Dark Side. It was still hard to think of Palpatine as an evil mastermind. Anakin had yet to see any of this in person. Could he go through with seeing him killed so cold-heartedly?

"If Sidious is your master," Luke said, "isn't he really strong?"

"Yes," Vader answered.

"Do we stand a chance?" Luke asked.

Vader looked at each of them in turn. First Luke, then Ahsoka, and lastly on Anakin.

"We will have the element of surprise," Vader explained. "At Anaxes, Anakin will secure a Republic ship that Anakin and I will take. Luke and Ahsoka will take the *Light Keeper.* Hopefully Maul will respond and give us security codes to let us pass through the Separatist ships unharmed. We shall board the *Invisible Hand* and go through with the deal to get Padmé released, while Luke and Ahsoka follow us."

"What if they don't hand over Padmé?" Ahsoka asked.

"What if they kill you out right?" Anakin asked.

"There are a lot of things that could happen," Vader said exasperated. "But the point is for them to
have their attention on Anakin and I, while Ahsoka and Luke sneak up behind."

Luke paled. "You don't mean for me to kill the Emperor," he said.

Vader glared at him. "I thought you wanted to make this future better. That cannot truly happen with Sidious alive."

Luke nodded his head.

The course had been set. They were in hyperspace to Anaxes. Maul had responded by saying they would meet on the Invisible Hand as Vader had predicted. So everything was falling into place. Hopefully Sidious would still be bound in his chair. No doubt the man could use the Force to free himself, but that would require seconds. Seconds that could mean life or death.

Vader had followed Luke out of the hold. His son was eating a ration bar, but said he wanted to practice his lightsaber techniques. No doubt he was feeling nervous. Ahsoka had offered to spar saying she needed to get some energy off. Vader left the two alone and went into the crew quarters. He sat down on the edge of the bed.

He was still tired and should try to get some sleep. No doubt he would need everything for the upcoming confrontation. His eyes traveled around the quarters. His mind going back to the conversation in the hold.

None of them had caught on to his lie.

They had trusted him so fully. Sidious' secret fleet wasn't built on Anaxes but on Kuat, though Anaxes should also be building Imperators. Vader only knew this because he had looked into the service records of a few Star Destroyers as the navy's supreme commander and noticed their year and planet of completion.

Not that the lie had changed much, but going there would give Vader a lot of information. How many ships were still there? How many were Sidious holding back? Or had they been dispatched to Coruscant? It would be wise to know if there was a whole other fleet nearby. Luckily they had a trusted Jedi general at their side to issue commands if Vader needed to use this fleet.

For nothing was going to delight him more than seeing Sidious' carefully laid plans go up in flames.
Two blue lightsabers came at Luke. He knocked one aside with his own green lightsaber. He ducked to avoid the second beam, but by then the first beam was coming back at him again. He managed to get his saber up in time to block it. He pushed the first beam off and prepared for the second beam, but it wasn't there. Instead, Ahsoka dashed forward and kneed him in the chest.

Luke doubled over, momentarily out of breath. He took a few deep breaths and slowly straightened up. Ahsoka smiled as she held her twin sabers. Luke was glad she had offered to practice with him. She was different from Anakin and Vader, both of which did fight similarly to each other. Ahsoka, however, used a different style as well as two lightsabers instead of one.

"You're a fast learner," she said.

Luke smiled at the compliment. "I had to be," he said. He looked at her sabers and asked, "Do you mind?"

She followed his gaze and nodded. Luke deactivated his own blade and clipped the hilt back to his belt. Then he took Ahsoka's sabers from her hand. They were both made from a white metal and had a similar design, but one was shorter than the other. Luke took a few steps back to give himself room to run through a few moves. Ahsoka watched with her arms crossed.

"Ever thought about going for two sabers?" she asked.

Luke paused and looked down at the lightsabers. "Two lightsabers? When I lost my father's lightsaber, I feared I wouldn't get another one much less two."

"Your father's lightsaber? Vader's?"

"No. Anakin's. Ben, er I mean Obi-Wan, gave it to me. It's the same one Anakin has on him now."

"So Obi-Wan is alive and kicking in the future," she said with a soft smile.

"No," he said. "He's dead."

He deactivated her lightsabers and handed them back to her.

"Did Vader kill him?" she asked bitterly.

"Yeah, he did," Luke said averting his gaze away from her.

"How can you stand him?" she asked. He looked back at her. "After all he's done. You just admitted he killed Obi-Wan. Obi-Wan who was his master and best friend. I just can't believe he's Anakin. I don't see why you two put up with him."

Luke sighed. "The first time I ever saw Vader was on the Death Star." Ahsoka gave him a curious look, but he didn't pause to explain. "He and Obi-Wan were dueling. I watched as Vader slashed through Obi-Wan. A few days later Vader shot down my best friend's fighter. The friend I had had all my life. Then a month later I met Vader in person. Neither one of us knew who the other were. He stole my lightsaber and tried to kill me with it."

Ahsoka's face had fallen into a disapproving frown.

He continued, "And there is more. So much more. More he's done to me." His left hand grabbed his
right wrist. "More he's done to others, the Alliance, the Jedi, and to the galaxy. Lot's of horrible things. I could dwell on it. I have. I've let it fester in me. I've hated him. I was told he was the one who killed my father. I wanted revenge. But . . ."

He paused. He closed his eyes and opened himself up to the Force. It was instantly there swirling around him. He took a look at himself. At the wound left from the truth he learned at Bespin. He let go of the Force and reopened his eyes.

"But I can't keep living like that," he said in a soft voice. "I can't keep holding on to that pain and anger." He smiled. "It only leads to hate, which leads-"

"To the Dark Side," she said with a sigh.

"I've seen it," he said. "There is good in him. In Vader. Believe it or not he's gotten better. I think I can reach him. Help him."

"Return him to the light? Luke, that's . . . that's never been done before."

Luke could only shrug. "It's what I feel is right," he said.

"Even if you did bring him back, then what? Just forget everything he's done?"

"No," Luke said. "It would be impossible to forget that, not to mention to even forgive it. But I can't just leave him to his darkness. I think he hates it. He hates himself, and that he's very lonely. Even though he won't admit it, he does want a better future for this time."

Anakin sat in the cockpit, hunched over in the pilot's chair. R2 stood dutifully by. The blue swirls of hyperspace casted the small room in a strange dancing light that was doing nothing for the headache building in him. Everyone else was busy. Luke and Ahsoka were training in the cargo hold. Vader was in the crew quarters either sulking, plotting, or sleeping. Perhaps all three.

When everyone had been here, it had kept his mind occupied. But now with no distractions, his thoughts ran wild. And with them so did his fear and anxiety. He had time to really think of what had happened. What had happened to Padmé. Maul had her, and he had . . .

"Padmé!" he cried out loud as he buried his face into his hands.

What was in that syringe? What had Maul done to her? Done to the babies? Anakin had seen Luke's reaction. He had felt it when he dove into Luke's mind. The absolute fear. Anakin's baby was scared. This was his baby. And right now he could do nothing to help it nor its mother.

*Please let Padmé be alright,* he said to himself.

He prayed they got there in time. Surely nothing would happen until then, right? The point was to lure Anakin to the Dark Side. Let him get desperate enough to save her. Wasn't he already there? He felt like it. He felt like he would do anything to make sure Padmé and the babies were safe. But the real question was, would he? What would be asked of him? To kill Dooku or Maul? He could do that with no hesitation.

What about Vader?
If it came down to it, Anakin knew he would pick Padmé. And Luke? There he hesitated. It shouldn't come to that, but what if it did? What if Anakin had no choice? Either Padmé or Luke? He knew what he wanted to say. That he wouldn't kill Luke, but he knew deep down he would if he was forced to choose he would choose Padmé almost above all others.

Above the whole Jedi Order? The entire galaxy?

This is what Vader had felt. This black nasty fear that he was going to lose Padmé. This horrible feeling of if he lost her, he would be alone. Truly alone. She was the most amazing thing that had happened to him. All his fears could be soothed by her voice. His anxiety washed away by her fingers trailing his skin. Happiness lingered on her lips and the warmth of her body. He couldn't lose that. He couldn't lose her.

"I'll save Padmé, and I won't fall," he had once said.

He took a deep breath. He could do this! He wasn't going to become Vader. Even if the plan didn't work, he could still just attack and kill Palpatine himself.

But what if the cure to Padmé went with him?

Anakin's heart squeezed on itself. Cold rushed through his veins. It became hard to breath. It was a struggle to push his lungs open. What if by killing Palpatine he killed Padmé as well?

"Ugh," he groaned. He was just thinking of everything that could go wrong. That wasn't what was going to happen. He'd make sure of it. It was going to work out, or at the very least he'd save Padmé. That was his first goal. Just focus on making sure she was safe. He could do that.

From space the planet Anaxes was a dull purple and blue. Anakin imagined it must have been vibrant in color once long ago. Large glowing circles and long lines of lights crosshatched across the planet on the darker purple parts. It looked similar to Coruscant, but luckily the oceans of Anaxes were still untouched. At least from what he could see. Surrounding the planet was a small fleet of ships.

"Not all of the fleet is here," Ahsoka noted.

Vader and Anakin sat in the piloting chairs while Luke and Ahsoka stood behind them.

"I bet some went to Coruscant," Anakin said.

It wasn't long before their com was hailed, and he opened the channel.

"Unknown ship, this the Anaxes Security Fleet. This planet is currently locked down," came the voice through the com.

"This is General Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker," he said. "Requesting permission to land on Anaxes. I need a ship so I can assist on Coruscant."

Silence.

Would they buy it that simply?
"General Skywalker, please provide security clearance codes."

"Do you have any of those?" Ahsoka asked in a whisper.

He started typing in string of code. It was the last code Anakin had used, so it was older and may be outdated. But it was what Anakin had. He finished typing and sent it off. Again there was a wait. No one said anything. Vader's hands tightened on the steering yoke. Anakin knew he was ready to pull back in case the Republic ships decided to fire on them instead.

The com came on, "General Skywalker, you are cleared to land on Anaxes. Please follow the route provided. Do not deviate from it. You will have an escort."

Anakin sighed and shot a weak smile at them. Vader steered the ship towards the planet. They were soon joined by an escort of four Republican Clone Z-95 starfighters. They bore the red markings of the Republic. Anakin felt it was a bit overkill to have four, but then again security must be tight with the Battle of Coruscant raging nearby.

They followed the route to a large military base on the surface. In the distance, large cranes of the shipyard could be seen. Anakin had to admit, the Anaxes base was impressive. Possibly the largest base he had ever seen. The largest building was possibly seventy stories high. There was a huge parade ground in front of it with bleacher seating that rivaled that of a podrace. What were they parading here? Palpatine’s secret army? The place did seem large enough to house a whole fleet of clones.

Vader piloted the ship into a hangar. A squad of clone troopers were waiting along with a few officers.

"Well, we're here," he said.


"Be careful, Snips," he said.

"Don't worry Skyguy," she said with a cocky smile. "We'll be right behind you."

"You'll have to get out of here first," he said.

"That's why we have Artoo," she said.

The little droid beeped. The group walked into the hold. Vader pulled out a pair of binders. He gave them to Luke, who snapped them on his father's wrists. Anakin walked over and snatched Vader's lightsaber off his belt. This only resulted in Vader scowling at him.

"You can't go in there wearing that," Anakin said as he clipped the lightsaber to his own belt. Then he grabbed Vader by the upper arm. He could feel the thick muscle underneath. The man was built.

"May the Force be with you," Luke said.

"May the Force be with you as well," Anakin replied. And with that he led Vader out of the hold and down the loading ramp.

The highest ranking officer walked up to them. "General Skywalker," he said in a clipped voice. "I am Commander Deltix."
"Commander," Anakin said nodding.

The commander was eyeing Vader, who was looking his normal irritated and grumpy self. The commander nodded back at the waiting clones, and two stepped forward with binders.

"Those won't be needed," Anakin said. "I already have him in binders."

"These binders aren't for your prisoner. They are for you," the commander said as the clones approached.

"What?" Anakin said.

"Current orders are for you to be detained."

"You're going to detain me? What for? Under what charges? I left to track down a dangerous criminal who killed several Jedi inside our own Temple!" Anakin shouted as he yanked on Vader's arm.

Vader glared at him. *Don't oversell it, Skywalker,* he hissed at him in the Force.

"Now I need to get back to Coruscant as soon as possible!" Anakin continued. "They need everyone they can get!"

The commander uncomfortably eyed Vader and then Anakin.

"Sir, if you would," he said uneasily. "I am only following orders . . ."

"And I am giving you new ones! You are to give me a Republic ship and let me leave to Coruscant at once!"

"Sir, if you are going into active battle, you can't be worried about a prison-" the commander was cut off. His hands clawed at his throat. Slowly he was lifted off the ground. Anakin could sense the Dark Side slithering off of Vader and around the commander's throat.

"Ahem," Anakin said said straightening up. "As you can see he's too dangerous to leave here. I have to get him back to Coruscant as soon as possible."

The commander was right at the breaking point. Either he would give in and let Anakin and Vader go, or insist they stay. Luckily that's when the alarm went off.

*Good timing, Artoo,* Anakin said to himself.

The clones and the officers looked around wildly as if an attack was going to happen right here in the
hangar. Deltix's com beeped.

"Deltix," he shouted.

"Commander, we've just received word from Coruscant! The Separatists are slipping through the grasp. They're preparing to jump to hyperspace. It looks like the exit point is bringing them right here!"

Deltix's face went white and his mouth fell open.

"Get me a ship now, commander!" Anakin barked.

Deltix nodded slowly. "Right- right this way, sir."

Anakin marched after him, pulling Vader along.
R2 rolled back into view. The alarms of the base were blaring. Red lights were flashing. Ahsoka and Luke used the Force to lift the droid back into the ship. They then closed the access hatch. R2 was already rolling towards the cockpit beeping and whistling while he went. Luke and Ahsoka followed after.

Luke slid into the pilot's chair. His hands gripped the steering yokes. For a moment, everything faded away; the alarm, the flashing lights, R2's beeping, Ahsoka pressing the start-up sequence. When was the last time he had flown? Force, he had missed it.


"Skyguy?" he said with a smile.

They were ready for liftoff. The ship luckily had a screen that could display R2's speech. Even after two years with the droid, Luke wasn't completely fluent in binary. He could understand some things, but detailed sentences was beyond him. He glanced at the string of green text on the black monitor.

R2 had sliced into the base's system. He had sent out the fake report about the Separatists approaching Anaxes. He had also secured codes for the *Light Keeper* to take off. However, the ship still sat on the ground. Ahsoka was growing restless, and R2's dome spun so his optical lense pointed right at him. An inquisitive beep came out of the droid.


"What are we waiting for?" Ahsoka asked.

"More chaos," he replied with a knowing smile. "The base's pilots haven't gotten to their fighters yet. We should leave with them. Orbital control will be heavily swamped with requests for clearance. We'll be able to get out easier that way."

Ahsoka gave him a studying look.

"It's sometimes easier to blend in with the crowd," he explained. "A trick I learned as a Rebel."

And so they waited for the fighters to lift off. Luke took them up with the crowd. Their clearance came quickly. R2 plotted a hyperspace route. They were going to rendezvous with Anakin and Vader near Coruscant. Once clear of the fighters, the ship jumped to hyperspace.

Anakin wished he was piloting, but Vader had literally yanked Anakin out of the pilot's chair. However, Vader was a good pilot. He wove through the battle effortlessly. Anakin had been shocked when they exited hyperspace. Even though they exited a good distance away from the planet, they could already see the battle. All around were thousands of ships, thousands of green and red blaster streaks, and fiery explosions as ships as of all sizes were lost.

Never had Anakin seen anything like it. No other battle could compare.
They were now in the thick of it. Everywhere Anakin looked, there were ships. There was no plane of attack. Ships were scattered everywhere in all directions. Sometimes he would spot a group of ships maneuvering in attack or defensive patterns, but overall it looked a mess. He could only imagine what a nightmare this must be to Republic command trying to run this battle.

By now the battle had been waging on for two days. If one side was winning, Anakin couldn't tell. It wasn't surprising the Separatist had yet to retreat with Palpatine. There was simply no safe hyperspace exit. All it took would be one stray ship to be blasted in the jump's path.

Vader mostly stuck to flying between Separatist ships. With the codes Maul had sent, the droids weren't firing on them. However, that didn't mean they weren't firing on the droids. Anakin was on gun controls. If it was easier to blast through the droids, they did so. Plus they needed to make a clear path for Luke and Ahsoka following behind them. And unlike Anakin's ship, the *Light Keeper* wasn't broadcasting any codes. Separatist or Republic.

If there was a ship Anakin truly wished to be piloting, it was that one. He had a few times reached out in the Force. It was chaotic and loud. It was almost unbearable with the flares as thousands upon thousands of clones died all around him. But through it, he could sense Luke's anxiety and focus as he flew through the battle and Ahsoka's determination mixed with fear.

There were some very daring maneuvers Vader pulled. Some extremely close calls. The battle was intense and Vader's flying was equally so. Anakin wondered if some of the moves that Vader had pulled if he would have been able to do them. However it was a situation where one relied on the Force, intuition and skill. Anakin wouldn't know if he could match Vader's moves unless he found himself in a similar situation. For now he focused on shooting.

It took far longer than Anakin would have liked for them to even clearly see the *Invisible Hand*. It lingered close to Coruscant's atmosphere. Here the battle looked more formal. There were clear formations as the two sides strategized how to get the upper hand. The Separatists were defending their flagship, trying to carve a way out for it to retreat. Meanwhile the Republic was pushing an aggressive offense clearly targeting the flagship as they tried to rescue the Chancellor.

As they made their way through the Separatist, a squad of Vulture droids formed around them as escorts. Vader had turned off the com. Anakin wondered if Republic command had noticed the Republic ship behind enemy lines being escorted to the flagship. If so, they were probably desperately trying to hail the ship. Or perhaps they had simply gotten lost as a small blip amongst the thousand others.

The Vulture droids led them right into a hangar where Vader set down the ship. There was already a welcoming committee waiting. It consisted of four MagnaGuards, a dozen super battle droids, and about twice as many B1s. Neither Anakin nor Vader said anything. They sat in silence for a small moment. Both collecting their thoughts. Both going over the plan and the backup plans. Both centering themselves in the Force. In silence, they stood up and exited the ship.

For a brief moment, Vader thought about Obi-Wan. Where was the traitor now? Before, Anakin and Obi-Wan had been together fighting the Outer Rim Sieges when they were called back to Coruscant. But now that had changed. Was Obi-Wan on Coruscant when the battle started or had he been called
back to the front? What role was he playing in this battle now? Would he attempt the rescue mission without Anakin?

Vader hadn't planned on any Republic or Jedi interference while on the *Invisible Hand* though there was a possibility the Jedi could manage something. Vader assumed Sidious would only allow Anakin this close as a lot of this was done for his sake, which worked well for Vader. It meant that Sidious wouldn't be expecting anyone else, which hopefully allowed Luke and Ahsoka to be a surprise.

Even though Vader had access to the Force, he had yet to contact his son. He didn't want to risk them being found out early. The boy had a habit of breaking and entering and worming his way into places he shouldn't be. Hopefully, he put those skills into use here.

Soon they were in the large open strategy room. The droid guards, except for two MagnaGuards, stayed in the hallway letting them enter alone. Vader realized how much it looked like an Imperial throne room, of which Sidious had perhaps hundreds scattered about the universe including some on capital ships such as this. Sidious sat in the large admiral's chair near the viewports. Blue electric cuffs bound his hands to the chair.

He was doing well to play the captive Chancellor. Only for a brief second did his eyes betray him as he glared at Vader, but then he went back to being the concerned looking Chancellor. He wasn't alone. Standing off to the right was Maul, who stood guard over a seated Padmé. She was bound to a chair. Her head was slumped forward. Her hair completely covering her face. She didn't look conscious. Vader bit back his rage. Anakin, however, did not.

"Padmé!" he shouted. He stepped forward towards her. Maul hissed. He ignited his dual lightsaber and brought a red beam close to Padmé. Anakin halted. "I kept up my part of the deal!" Anakin snapped. "Give her the antidote and release her!"

Maul's eyes narrowed. He looked over at Vader and studied him.

Anakin used the Force to break free of his binders. He summoned his lightsaber from the nearby MagnaGuard. He grabbed Vader and yanked him to him. He placed the lightsaber hilt under Vader's chin.

"The antidote," Anakin hissed. "And release her."

Vader frowned. He could feel the Dark Side crawling up within Anakin. He could taste the fear. It was an all too familiar taste. It was a strong flavor that in too strong of doses caused panic and stupid decisions. Like this one.

Vader scowled at Anakin, but otherwise made no other moves. For now, he would see how this would play out. Anakin had technically not gone off script. Yet.

"Do as he says," came the distinct voice of Count Dooku.

Maul only hesitated a moment, but Vader didn't miss the annoyance rolling off the Zabrack. He knelt down and pulled out a box that had been hidden under Padmé's chair. He pulled out a syringe and stabbed the needle into her stomach. Once he was done, he carelessly tossed the needle aside. She
didn't stir.

Anakin pushed Vader away as he ran over to his wife. However, Maul pointed one end of his lightsaber at Anakin, who tensed up. His hand still held his unlit saber. Vader could feel Anakin's itch to ignite it.

"Darth Vader, was it?" Dooku said with his head held high as he approached the group.

"Darth Tryrannus," Vader growled back.

Dooku didn't flinch at the use of his Sith name. There was only a small curious flicker of his eyebrow.

"My master would like to speak with you," Dooku said smoothly.

Vader turned away from Dooku and looked straight at Sidious. "I'm sure he would," Vader said.

"Let Padmé go," Anakin growled. "I held up my end of the deal. I brought you Vader."

"We will release her in due time," Dooku said with a small wave of his hand at her. "You, Skywalker, are a different matter. Did you really think I was going to allow you to walk out of here? You have been a thorn in my side far too long, boy. Now, hand over your lightsaber. We don't want to make a mess of things in front of the Chancellor, do we?"

Anakin ignited his lightsaber. Dooku did the same.

"I must admit, I have been looking forward to this," Dooku said.

"My powers have doubled since the last time we met, Count," Anakin said darkly.

Vader fought back a groan at hearing those words.

"Good," Dooku said with a smile. "Twice the pride, double the fall."

Anakin dashed forward. Dooku met his saber. The room filled with the snaps and hisses and hums of lightsabers clashing. Anakin pushed on and brought his saber down heavily on Dooku. Dooku was graceful as ever. He swirled and met Anakin's blade. It looked effortless.

Anakin came in with a few fast slashes until he paused to press down on the Count. Dooku smiled as he pushed forward, causing Anakin's blade to slide off his. The Jedi took a few steps back and brought his saber up in defense as Dooku rushed forward. It was said he was one of the Order's finest duelists before he left.

Dooku was a master of Form II Makashi lightsaber technique. It was the technique made for blade to blade combat. As such, Dooku's moments were quick and precise. He didn't do big sweeping slashes. Instead he focused on jabs, parries, and light cuts. It granted him speed, which in turn he used to try to lure Anakin into fients to confuse and trap him. The two had moved back towards the door. Dooku's footwork was a smooth back and forth as he pushed and pulled Anakin on.

You stand idly by, Sidious said through the Force to Vader. His words were like slick black oil. We both know you could rid yourself of those binders and call upon your lightsaber.

So could you, Vader noted as he looked at directly at Sidious. Yet, you also sit idly by.

You spent a good amount of time with young Skywalker even after you had secured your son. What is it that you hope to accomplish, Darth Vader? You wish to woo the boy to your side? Claim him as
Vader turned back to the duel. Anakin was doing his best to use his brute strength to overpower Dooku. It was Makashi’s weakness. The quick fluid motions meant there was little build up of energy and heavy strong blows could easily push aside the lighter Makashi strikes. However, Dooku was expecting this. He was quick to backstep when needed.

Vader looked back at Sidious and said through the Force, *He is quite a powerful tool.*

There was a brief flicker on Sidious’ face. Though in the Force, Vader could feel his anger rising. A small smile tugged on Vader’s lips. He enjoyed seeing his master so unsettled.


*Elsewhere.*

*Is he now? Somewhere you assume safe? No matter. He will eventually be found. He is quite a curious boy. He said some interesting things when he was under surveillance at the Jedi Temple. He referred to me as emperor.*

Vader fought to keep his face neutral and his emotions behind a shield. He would not grant Sidious any joy from seeing Vader rattled by his words. But Vader did curse to himself. That foolish boy of his.

*You also spoke of a Sith Empire,* Sidious continued. *You seem to have great powers of foresight. Or perhaps . . . it is something else?*

Vader made sure he kept his gaze on Sidious, but out of the corner of his eye he noticed a slight movement outside the viewport. He quickly pulled on his bond to Anakin. It was all that was needed.

"I sense fear in you, Skywalker," Dooku said as pressed his blade against Anakin's. "You have hate. You have anger, but you don't use them."

Anakin let out a shout as he pushed Dooku on. By now their duel had arched around the back half of the room. Anakin was pushing Dooku closer to the group again.

*Tell me about yourself Vader,* Sidious continued to push. *Who trained you? Where do you come from? Your son speaks of an Empire of which you are second in command. A mighty Sith such as yourself? Second in command?*

*Second to only my master,* Vader replied. *But you know the way of the Sith. It is only a matter of time before the apprentice kills the master to become the master himself.*

That was when the green blaster bolt tore through the viewport. At once, everything went screeching towards the hole as the vacuum of space sucked everything out. Using the Force, Vader activated the magnetic clamps of his boots. Anakin did the same, but abandoned his duel. He rushed over to Padmé, who was still bound to her chair. Luckily, most starship furniture were bolted to the floor. Her chair was well secured.

Dooku had grabbed on to the strategy table. Sidious hands gripped the handles of his chair tightly. Maul had slammed against the viewport, but braced himself against one of the panes. The security shutters were starting to close. That was when the two bodies crashed through the transparisteel.

Both Luke and Ahsoka rolled in as the shutters closed. Both wore spacesuits with protective helmets.
Neither wasted time in igniting their lightsabers. Neither did Vader. He snapped free of his binders and summoned his lightsaber. Luke only hesitated a second as his eyes landed on his target. He had landed behind Sidious as was planned. The boy jumped, arching his saber down towards the chair and the Sith bound within it.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the delay getting this chapter up. As I mentioned before, real life is keeping me busy.
Chapter 59

The moment Anakin heard the crash through the viewport, he switched on the magnetic clamps on his boots. Dooku was sucked forward as the vacuum of space started to pull everything out. Anakin rushed forward to his wife. Padmé sat limp in the chair she was still bound in. Her hair and head were being sucked towards the viewports. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her head to his chest.

Luke and Ahsoka burst in. The shutters closed. The room settled down. Anakin slowly undid his hold on Padmé and looked down at her. She was pale and cold. And despite everything that had been happening, she was still unconscious.

"Padmé?" Anakin whispered as he brushed her hair from her face. "Padmé?"

There was no response. Anxiety was building up in him. What was wrong with her? What had they done to her? He needed to get her out of here. He looked up and . . . Everything was moving in slow motion. Luke had jumped up. His lightsaber held high above his head. It was aimed directly at Palpatine, who was still bound in his chair. Palpatine's eyes had gone wide. His head was turning to look behind him.

Anakin's breath caught in his throat. It felt like even his heart had stopped beating.

Then the blue streaks of lightning tore through the room and landed right in the middle of Luke's chest. The kid was knocked backwards and hit the shuttered viewports hard. He slid to the ground. Anakin turned to see Dooku's hand lowering. He had been the one to shoot the Force lightning.

Vader let out a shout and dashed towards Palpatine. Ahsoka hesitated for a moment between checking on Luke and charging forward. She chose the second. Both her lightsabers were alight and she jumped towards Palpatine.

Anakin's eyes went wide. His mouth fell open. Palpatine ripped his arms up. The cuffs snapped off and clattered to the floor. He jumped out of his seat, flipped and landed on the floor. A red lightsaber was in his hand. He is able to meet Vader's first blow. He stretched out his free hand and sent a Force blow towards Ahsoka. She was blown off her feet. Palpatine turned his attention back to Vader.

Palpatine . . . Palpatine . . . was a Sith. Vader was right. Anakin knew Vader was right. But seeing it was something else. Gone was the kindly old man that had been Anakin's friend and mentor for the past twelve years. Now there was this Sith. He was matching Vader move for move.

He was . . . matching . . . Vader . . .

Palpatine knew how to fight. He was good at it. How had Anakin missed this? It was so obvious. Even in the Force Anakin could feel the thick ooze that came off of Palpatine. It was worse than Vader or Dooku. There was something so dark and twisted about Palpatine's presence. Dooku used a Force leap to jump over to the two dueling Sith. He joined Palpatine in attacking Vader.

Anakin looked back down at Padmé. This would be the perfect time to get her away. Everyone was busy. He had to put her first, but . . . He looked over at Vader. He was holding his own, but Anakin noticed the signs of struggle. He should help. But . . . Padmé . . .

With a wave of his hand, her cuffs came undone. He bent over to scoop her into his arms, but instead grabbed her and rolled onto the floor as a red lightsaber sliced through the air where he had just been.
Maul glared down at him. A twisted smile on his face.

"Thinking on leaving the party?" he asked.

He spun his lightsaber and then angled it down at Anakin. **Kriff**, Anakin cursed to himself. This was going to be hard to block or parry with Padmé in his arms. Luckily that was when Ahsoka literally hurled herself at Maul. Maul spun to meet her two blue blades. He had to take a step back as she had thrown all of her weight into the attack.

"Go!" Ahsoka said through clenched teeth. "Get Padmé out of here!"

Maul's sickly yellow red eyes flashed at Anakin. He scowled. He pushed Ahsoka off and again came at Anakin, but Ahsoka was there. Her movements were fast and furious. Maul could not slip through her. Anakin adjusted his grip on Padmé and stood up. He glanced at the fight between Vader, Palpatine and Dooku. It was a blur of red lightsabers. Luke was just starting to stir.

*Padmé first*, he told himself.

He got up and started to make a hasty retreat towards the door. The two MagnaGuards that had entered with Dooku approached him. Their electrified staffs buzzing to life. He did not have time for this. With a flick of his finger one of the staffs swung into the other droid. Then he used the Force to throw both of them against a far wall.

He was almost through the door when he felt it. An unbelievably heavy darkness. Anakin froze. He looked over his shoulder. Palpatine was glaring at him. His eyes were like Maul's, a sick sulfur yellow lined in a bleeding red. They almost seemed to glow. The air around Anakin grew thick and cold. It almost felt like the air was wrapping around him. Tightening around him. Forcing its way into his lungs. It was thick and heavy. It was hard to breath. His chest beat loudly in his ears.

Bright blue lightning suddenly filled his vision. He didn't have time to do much else, but angle his body so it would hit him and not Padmé. At once he let out a pained shout and fell to his knees. He tried desperately to keep his hold on his wife, but the pain was too much. She slipped through his fingers and rolled onto the floor. He took a sharp breath as the lightning finally died away. He wasn't going to get away. Palpatine wasn't going to let him. Vader was right. This was all a stage set up for Anakin, and Palpatine wasn't going to let it all go to waste.

Dooku was slowly approaching. Again, he had been the one to shoot the lightning out. Anakin pulled his lightsaber off his belt and ignited it.

"Shall we continue where we left off?" Dooku asked.

Anakin didn't even bother with words. He dashed forward. He was tired of this. He had to get Padmé away. She had yet to stir. What was wrong with her? Was she alright? She needed to get to a doctor right away. Anakin needed to help her. But. These. Scum. Kept. Getting. In. His. Way.

Luke came to with a ringing in his ears and a pounding in his head. As he sat up it took a minute to process what he was seeing. It was three different fights. To his right, Vader and Sidious were fighting. Sidious moved fast and fluidly. In the center towards the back of the room Anakin fought Dooku. To the left and closest to Luke, Ahsoka was fighting Maul.

Luke gripped his own lightsaber. He looked between the three fights. Where should he go? Who should he help? Everyone seemed to be handling their own fights. Yet his eyes kept going back to Vader. In the Force there was a strong intensity in that duel and also a thick darkness like Luke had never experienced before. It was like a black hole. It consumed all light. It was vast, and Luke felt
small and weak before it.

Luke stood up. He remembered he was still wearing the bulky spacesuit and quickly stripped it off. He now wore a white tank and tight black pants. He lit his saber and slowly he made his way towards Vader and Sidious. For a brief second, he saw Vader's eyes flash on him. Which only caused Sidious to turn to him. In a fluid motion, the old man had tucked away his lightsaber and brought up both hands. At once lightning snaked out towards both Vader and Luke.

Luke brought his lightsaber up. The lightning clashed against it. Luke grit his teeth and lowered his weight into his knees. It was hard to fend off the lightning. His whole body shook. It was taking all of his concentration to keep his lightsaber up. The lightning disappeared as quickly as it had started. Vader's chest heaved while he held his lightsaber up. The same strained expression Luke wore was mirrored on his father.

"Ah so good you could join us," Sidious said to Luke. "I was hoping for a chance to meet you. We have so many interesting things to discuss."

"You will not speak to him," Vader growled.

He jumped forward, but Sidious only blasted him with a short wave of lightning which Vader met with his lightsaber but halted his approach.

"You two seem to be so well informed," Sidious hissed. "I pondered as to why that was. How it was. But I think I see it now. It isn't a matter of how but when."

A sharp coldness ran through Luke, causing goosebumps to flood down his arm and his hair to stand on end. His breath caught in his throat.

"It does not matter," Vader shouted as he launched a new attack at his master.

_I can help!_ Luke said. _We can take him together._

There was a pause. There was a small hum in the Force from Vader. A moment of humor, though Luke didn't understand why.

_You said you weren't strong enough to kill him_, Luke said reminding Vader of his own words.

Vader's blade was thrown off Sidious'. It went out wide, but Vader used the momentum to spin himself and his blade around. He fell to his knees to bring his blade swinging around towards Sidious' knees. The Sith master jumped over Vader's red blade and brought his blade to push Vader's down. Vader blew the blade off and pushed off the floor with one leg to allow himself to kick with the other. Sidious black flipped out of the way.

_Go_, Vader hissed. _Get Padmé out of here._
Luke looked to the chair she had been in before, but noticed it was now empty. He glanced around the room. He briefly lingered on Ahsoka and Maul. Beyond those two, he saw Padmé on the floor. Her brown hair splayed on the ground. Luke wavered. He wanted to help his father, and Padmé wasn't in any immediate danger.

Vader seemed to sense those thoughts. *Do not forget,* Vader said. *If anything happens to her, to the babies, it can affect you.*

Luke sighed and nodded his head. Vader was right. They needed to get Padmé out of here. But he didn't move right away. Instead he waited until he was able to catch his father's eye. Luke gave him a smile, a nod, and through the Force said, *May the Force be with you, Father.* Then he ran across the room.

It was easy to get past Anakin and Dooku. They were both absorbed in their own fight to notice Luke running by. Luke slid on to his knees and carefully looped his arms under Padmé's knees and shoulder. He stood up and took two steps forward, but that was when the Force screamed a warning at him. He fell to his knees and watched as a red lightsaber slash over his head. He tilted his head back to see Dooku looming above him.

However before Dooku could make a second move, Anakin was there. There was a wildness to him as he attacked Dooku. A darkness. The cracks inside Anakin had grown. The two sabers crashed and crashed and crashed. Anakin was able to get a solid kick on Dooku's stomach. The old Sith fell back, but quickly recovered. The blow had moved the duel close to Ahsoka and Maul.

Maul flipped over Ahsoka's blades. His feet spinning in the air. He was able to catch her and knock her to the ground. Then he jumped and flipped again, this time at Anakin. Dooku moved in at the same moment. Anakin didn't hesitate. He dashed forward keeping the duel close. Not allowing Maul the maneuverability he needed with his dual lightsabers nor allowing Dooku to backstep as seemed to be his style.

Dooku jabbed his blade forward. Anakin jerked his head to the side. The red blade slid only centimeters away from Anakin's face. Anakin jabbed his lightsaber forward. He used the hilt to catch Dooku's throat. He pulled and threw Dooku to the ground.

**Move,** something in Luke said. Had it come from Vader? Or Anakin? Perhaps it was himself.

That was right. He was going to get Padmé out of her. He pushed himself onto his feet and made sure his grip was tight. He looked over his shoulder to see Vader and Sidious were still dueling, then over his other shoulder to see Ahsoka had joined Anakin against Dooku and Maul. He started to leave the room, though there was still a burning desire to help and fight.
There was a pause in the fight. Vader looked at Sidious. Sidious looked at him. The duel was dragging out. Vader had never sparred with his master. Had never seen him truly fight before. He was better than Vader expected. He thought for sure when it came to a lightsaber duel, Vader would be better. After all he did have the experience of hundreds of battles. How many battles had Sidious actually been in? And yet, the old man was still very skilled.

Sidious had his blade down low. Vader had his up in a defensive position. He wasn't sure if Sidious was trying to lure him, thus the pause in the battle. Tired of waiting for Vader, Sidious struck. He stepped forward, bringing his saber up and out in a wide swing. Vader side stepped and spun. He brought his saber up to parry against Sidious as he turned, knocking the other blade off. Sidious spun and angled his blade down to catch a heavy strike from Vader as he regained his footing.

Sidious then came in fast. His blade swung around. Vader parried and had to step back as Sidious pushed forward. Vader jabbed his blade forward to take advantage of Sidious' wider strikes. He wasn't able to get a hit, but Sidious had to take a step back. He spun his blade up in a vertical defensive pose. The two regarded each other again.

Not that it lasted long. Sidious came in again. Saber beating down on Vader as Vader slashed just as hard back. The hum and hiss of sabers filled the air around them. Sidious lunged forward. Vader slipped around him. He tried to kick at Sidious as the two passed, but was unable to land a blow. So he quickly stepped forward with his blade swinging down in attempt to get Sidious' exposed back. The blade merely hummed through the air and caught nothing.

Sidious spun to face Vader with his saber up. Vader was there at once. This time it was Vader moving forward with Sidious the one losing ground. Vader called upon the Force to help power his strikes. He pummeled down on Sidious with heavy blow after heavy blow, yet still the fight was even. Neither one truly gaining the upper hand on the other.

Sidious knocked Vader's blade aside and slid in close. Vader moved to the left, but Sidious grabbed his non-saber arm. Instead of throwing him, Sidious locked his arm and pulled Vader close. He brought his saber around in an attempt to get at Vader's back, but Vader had already seen through it. He brought his lightsaber down over his shoulder to block the attack. He swung his leg out and kicked Sidious away. Sidious didn't go away meekly. He kept up his strikes until he was a safe distance away.

Another pause in the battle as the two Sith strategized. Over Sidious' shoulder, Vader could see that Luke had finally left the room. Ahsoka and Anakin had teamed up against Dooku and Maul. Vader hoped they could end the battle soon. He didn't know if he could beat Sidious one on one.

Anakin slashed at Dooku, who parried the blade and then came in with his own fast jab while stepping forward. Anakin bounced the strike off, but then had to quickly lean back to avoid Maul's blade. Maul came in for a quick jab followed by a strike downwards. Anakin blocked it, and Maul spun away to deal with an incoming strike from Ashoka. Dooku was there at once to replace Maul.

Anakin jabbed his lightsaber forward twice. Dooku repelled both blows. Anakin brought down a powerful slash from up high. Dooku side stepped and whipped his saber up towards Anakin's neck. Anakin blocked it with his blade and with his free hand grabbed Dooku's blade hand. He pulled it down and then brought his other elbow up towards Dooku's face. Dooku managed to get his free arm up to block Anakin's blow.
So Anakin threw his head forward. He headbutted Dooku straight on. The count staggered back. Anakin spun away from Dooku, and focused on Maul. He ducked to avoid a swing from Maul's saber and lashed out with his. The blades hissed as Anakin pushed down on Maul's saber to hopefully allow Ahsoka time to attack from behind.

But Anakin couldn't wait. He kicked Maul aside and spun. His saber instantly hitting Dooku's. Their blades locked in a close deadlock. Anakin could feel the heat of the lightsabers. Sweat rolled down his face and back. He threw his elbow up and this time was able to land a blow against the side of Dooku's face. He grabbed the Dooku's arm and threw him down.

Maul was there. They traded two strikes, and then Maul made the mistake of unleashing a vertical strike from up high with both hands. If it had landed, it would have been a good attack. However, it now gave Anakin an opening. He avoided the blow and threw his free hand out. He pushed down on Maul's arms while making sure the dual lightsaber was pointing down. He jabbed forward his own lightsaber, aiming for the face. The move took less than a second.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could make out Ahsoka fighting against Dooku. Her twin blue blades furiously striking against Dooku's red. Maul also looked over at the other fight. A scowl pulled on Maul's lips as he looked over at Vader and Palpatine. Anakin also glanced over. The two were still dueling. Though it looked like there was no end in sight. Maul shifted his feet. Anakin prepared his lightsaber.

Maul Force jumped up high. He swung his lightsaber down, but Anakin was easily able to knock it aside. Maul landed and unleashed a Force blow. It knocked Anakin right into the fight between Ahsoka and Dooku. At once Dooku's blade was slashing down at Anakin's midsection. Anakin whipped his blade up to meet Dooku's. Their blades locked for a second, before Dooku pulled away. He took a step back, but only to allow himself better footing. He slashed out at Ahsoka's incoming strike and then struck heavily down on Anakin. Dooku sunk low to his knees and jumped up into a spin. His blade powerfully knocking aside Ahsoka's blades and coming right at Anakin.

Anakin rolled and avoided the attack. He jumped up and spun. His lightsaber spinning in his hand. He was ready for the next attack from Maul, but there wasn't one. He looked around. There was no Maul. Had he joined Palpatine? Anakin looked over. No.

He wasn't in the room. He had left . . . Luke! Padmé!

"Ahsoka!" Anakin shouted out. He jumped back into the fight with Dooku. "Maul went after Luke and Padmé! I'll deal with Dooku!"

There was a brief flicker of hesitation, but only that. She nodded. Anakin dashed forward. His blade coming down heavy on Dooku. The moment Dooku's attention was on Anakin, Ahsoka turned and ran. Anakin opened himself up further in the Force and felt for his bond with Vader.

This is taking too long, he grumbled.

Yes, came the short reply.

Anakin spun, arching his arm behind him to block an attack from Dooku. He bounced Dooku's
blade up and spun around with a Force kick aimed at Dooku's side. It landed, and Dooku staggered back. Anakin quickly fished out his commlink.

"R2," he said into it. "Open the shutters in the strategy room."

The droid beeped a worried reply.

"Just do it!" Anakin said as he brought his blade up to block another strike from Dooku.

There was a screeching noise as the metal shutters started to slide open. At once the vacuum of space started to suck everything out. Anakin turned on the magnetic clamps of his boots. Dooku was forced to find something to grab on to. Anakin wasted no time. He turned and ran for the door. It was hard work as the pull of the vacuum was ripping at his body, but he made it into the hallway. Vader was right behind him. Once both were past the doorway, Anakin slammed his hand against the door panel. The door slid shut.

The only sounds were the heavy breathing of both Anakin and Vader. They exchanged looks. Both were sweaty and tired.

"That won't hold them for long," Vader said.

"I know," Anakin said. "But something had to change. Hopefully we can lure them away from each other. Take them out one at a time. Take them out together."

There was a slight tilt to Vader's head. He looked down the hallway.


"Then let's go," Vader said as he looked at the door. He jabbed his lightsaber into the door control panel. "The shutters have been closed. Dooku and Sidious will be collecting themselves."

Anakin nodded, the two turned, and ran down the hall.

Padmé was getting heavy. Luke was sweating. He paused as he readjusted and tightened his grip. It wasn't much further to the airlock where the Light Keeper was docked. He had to pass through a large cargo hold filled with crates of ammunition. The few droids he had run into, he was able to disable them with the use of the Force. Usually aiming their own blasters at each other.

He entered the hold. It was vast. Again he reassured his grip and started to rush across the room. He paused when he heard the heavy clanking feet running into the room. At first he feared it was one of those serious looking droids, but it was Maul rushing into the room. He paused as he saw Luke. A twisted smile grew on his red and black face.

"I was hoping I would get to play with you boy," he said as he ignited both blades of his lightsaber. He spun it around.

Luke had no choice but to lower Padmé to the ground. He unclipped his own lightsaber and ignited it. He moved slowly to the left to lure the fight away from Padmé. Maul's focus seemed to be only on Luke. He ran forward and then jumped high into the air. His saber spinning and came humming down, but Luke was able to easily avoid it.

Maul landed and launched himself into a side flip. His saber a blur of red as it spun. Luke this time came in fast and knocked the blade off to the side. Maul landed on his feet and the duel paused, but only for a moment. Maul feigned with one blade, and then feigned with the other to see if he could
lure Luke in. Luke had flinched, but otherwise didn't go in for a strike or parry.

This time Maul came in with his upper blade, and Luke struck against it. At once he had to aim for the incoming lower blade. The two were constantly moving and circling the other. Looking for any slips in their footwork. Again Maul came in from the upper blade and then again from the lower blade. Was he testing Luke?

Maul came in faster this time. Upper blade, lower blade. His blows were moving to the right and up. Luke was now holding his saber up high. He had to angle his blade downward to keep his defense up to protect his body. He realized Maul's plan to lure Luke's saber away to weaken his defense against his body. *Kriff*, he cursed to himself.

He spun, bringing his saber over his back to block another blow. He kept spinning and brought his saber over his head in a downward blow to block Maul's blade. He brought the blade back to his front and slid into a much better defense position.

Maul struck at Luke's blade. He blows were fast as he alternated using the upper and lower blade. Luke waited until Maul had hit a predictable pattern before he shifted his feet and struck out with his blade. He was hoping to get Maul while he transitioned between the blades and thus was left open. However, Maul was able to bring down his upper blade faster than Luke had anticipated.

But Luke kept going. He leaned over, spun, and whipped his blade with him. He aimed his blade at Maul's midsection. Again Maul blocked. Luke came in fast now. He was the one on the offense striking against Maul's blades as Maul altered the blades for defensive blocks and parries. Maul was losing ground. Luke struck and struck. His blows heavy and unrelenting.

"Tell me," Maul said, "why does my master have such an interest in you and your father? Is it because he is a Sith? A Sith outside the Rule of Two?"

"I wouldn't know about that," Luke said.

"You lie," Maul hissed.

Luke rushed forward. Maul leaned back so he could put his whole upper body into the next strike. He used the momentum to spin his saber around and duck down low. Luke's saber went right over Maul's head. Maul at once was spinning his saber up. Luke was barely able to block it and was forced to step away. But he quickly brought his saber back up and struck from the side. Maul came in with a sweeping slash. Luke parried the blade away, but Maul kept his body moving. He spun and brought his blade around with him. Luke was forced to block the blow aimed at his side. He stepped and spun away to keep Maul's blow focused on his front.

"We need not be enemies," he said. "I believe we might share a common enemy."

The two continued their duel. Neither one was losing ground, nor were they gaining any. Back and forth the blows went. Luke was finally able to lead Maul's blows up high. He spun and lowered himself. He made a wide swipe at Maul's legs, but Maul easily jumped over the green blade. Maul angled his blade down and knocked Luke's blade away. Then Maul jumped back.
Luke shifted into a defensive stance. He raised an eyebrow as the only response to Maul.

"You tried to kill him earlier," Maul said.


"Ah, so you do know the truth of who he is. That alone puts a target on your back, and yet you were wanted alive. Not dead. You know something."

"Perhaps. But isn't he your master?"

Maul let out a small laugh. "Master?" he hissed. The disgust clear in his voice. "He left me for dead the moment I failed him. Now he uses me as a mere dog, expecting me to play fetch."

"Why do his bidding at all?"

"He is a hard man to say no to."

"Then why did you fight me just now?"

"I had to see if you're skilled enough to be bothered with."

"Luke!" Ahsoka shouted as she ran into the hold. She never stopped running as she looked from Maul to Luke to Padmé. She came to a stop a short distance away. She quickly ignited her lightsabers.

"Now, now, padawan," Maul said to her. "Luke and I were just talking."

"Talking?" Ahsoka said with a small laugh.

"About joining forces," Maul said.


"Betraying means there is loyalty to begin with. Of which, I have none."

"And yet, here you are on his side," Ahsoka said.

"A side I am forced to take," Maul said. His voice was almost pleading. "I have been implanted with a slave chip."

"Unfortunate," Ahsoka said, not moved.

Maul's face darkened. "I am giving you an opportunity, padawan. Even with a Sith on your side, you lot weren't able to defeat Sidious."

"So having two will?" she asked.

"It won't hurt," Maul said.

"Then you'll have no problems with letting me go," Luke said. The other two looked at him. "Let me take Padmé and get her out of here."

Maul's eyes narrowed. Then his blades returned to his long hilt as he deactivated his lightsaber. He waved at Padmé. "Go ahead," he said.

Luke shared a look with Ahsoka. She nodded. She didn't change her stance. Her blades were still
ignited. The message was clear. If Maul tried anything, she would stop him. Luke deactivated his blade. He walked backwards, unwilling to turn his back to Maul, to Padmé. Maul rolled his eyes. Luke picked her back up.

He had barely adjusted Padmé's weight in his arms, when the room shook. Luke wobbled about as he tried to keep his balance and grip on her. There was a loud screeching tearing sound. He looked up to the roof being ripped apart. A large tear was opening up. Luke's breath caught in his throat. He was waiting for the vacuum of space or fire. Surely the ship had been hit in battle. He was not prepared for the figure that jumped out of the hole into the hold.

Dooku landed with grace. His red lightsaber lit. The moment his feet touched the ground, he was on the move. He dashed forward. With his free hand he picked up some large cylinders of ammunition and threw them towards Ahsoka and Maul. But Luke's attention was on Dooku. The man was running at him. The red saber ready to strike.

There wasn't time.

There wasn't time to drop Padmé and pull his lightsaber up. He tried to shift her weight to free up a hand. He sent out a Force blow, but it didn't phase Dooku. He was charging forward and he was almost here. Luke knew he was going to be hit. He looked down at Padmé.

*If anything happens to her, to the babies, it can affect you.*

So he shifted and angled his body. He loosened his arms and started to lower Padmé to the ground. When the red saber struck, it sliced a hole in his left side. There was no scream. The air was completely sucked right out of him. He looked down to see the red saber sticking out his side, but luckily Padmé was on the floor uninjured.

The blade was pulled out and Luke collapsed to his knees.
Chapter 61

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the slight delay in this chapter. It's been a combo of real life as well as making sure I get things right in the story. I ended up reworking and rewriting this chapter which added on to delay. But I am much happier with the newer version.

Last chapter I noticed I had posted on 06/11/2019, which is seven months after I first posted this story up on 11/11/2018. Wow. Seven months. Sixty-one chapters. Over 100,000 words. A chapter of benchmarks.

As such, I wanted to thank all of my readers. Thank you so much! I do read every single comment. I do notice and recognize the reviewers who take their time every single chapter to comment. (Or just comment every now and then.) I have used suggestions or taken into consideration good-hearted critiques from commenters before, though its often subtle things.

Anyways thank you every single reader. The ones who comment all the time. The quiet ones who don't. The ones reading this the day I posted it, or the ones who are discovering this some time in the future. If you're reading this, than you've made it through over 100,000 words to chapter 61. So thanks for reading and the love!

-SilverDaye

P.S. Warning: This chapter is intense. It contains death and violence.

Something was wrong. There was a tightness to the Force as if it was stretched too thin. An explosion rocked the ship. Vader had to fight to keep his footing, but he didn't stop running. Luke's presence was directly ahead. Directly where the explosion had just been. Vader and Anakin were approaching a large door. Black smoke billowed out of it.

He ran into the room, and paused as he took in his surroundings. It was a large cargo hold with racks of ammunition canisters. He looked to his left to see a few canisters were in a pile and blown open. Smoke poured from them. The wall was blackened and dented behind them. If Vader had to guess, they had been thrown there with the Force.

His eyes moved to the right. He saw Ahsoka standing several paces from Maul. They were blackened from the smoke, but both stood with lightsabers ignited and in a defensive position. There was a nagging feeling inside of him. Where was Luke? He continued to look right.

He saw Dooku and Palpatine. He let out a small frustrated growl. Vader noticed a large tear in the ceiling. The two must have literally cut through the ship to create a shortcut as they had the advantage of knowing the ship layout. Then Vader saw the figure hunched over on his knees in front of Dooku.

It was Luke . . . Vader sent out tendrils in the Force to assess his son, and the moment he touched his
son the tendrils recoiled.

"LUKE!" Vader shouted.

Vader lunged forward. The Dark Side responded to his anger and fear. It exploded all around him. Despite the heat from the smoking canisters, a searing coldness spread through the room. The floor cracked each time Vader's foot landed. Sparks poured down from the lights overhead. He bared his teeth and ignited his lightsaber. He let out a guttural scream as he finally got within striking distance of Dooku.

In a quick smooth motion, Dooku lashed out and grabbed Luke by the hair. He jerked Luke up and exposed his neck. Luke moaned and winced in pain. Dooku rested his red lightsaber near Luke's throat. Vader landed directly in front of Dooku, but he didn't pause as Dooku had been expecting with his hostage in hand.

Vader came in fast. He fueled the Dark Side with everything he had. His bottomless anger and pain. His fear. His strike came in fast. It sliced through Dooku's arm without any resistance. Dooku let out a shout, and started to fall to his knees. However, before he even hit the ground, Vader struck again. Dooku's other arm came off with ease.

There was a solid thump as Dooku landed on his knees next to Luke, who had curled up in pain. Vader grabbed the count by the hair and jerked him up like how Dooku had done to Luke. Vader pressed his lightsaber against Dooku's throat. Dooku looked up at him. His face white and his eyes wide. He was afraid. But Vader had seen this before. He smiled as he took dark satisfaction as his blade went through Dooku's neck. He watched as the body hit the ground, and then he finally let go of the head.


What . . . what was Vader going to do? Luke needed medical help. He needed to get off this ship. Away from the Separatists. Away from the fighting. From Sidious.

You could heal him, a voice said in him.

No . . . he couldn't. He had never been a healer. He had tried, Force had he tried, to heal himself over the years. He had spent many long meditation sessions either in his bacta tank or in his hyperbolic chamber trying to heal his lungs. And while he could manage a small amount of time without his helmet, he had never fully managed to heal himself fully.

Luke let a few pained gasps. His flesh hand came to rest on top of one of Vader's gloved hands. Vader couldn't even sense it, but he could see Luke's fingers curling slightly around his hand.


A sob spilled out of Vader. No, he couldn't! He couldn't lose Luke! Oh Force! Please don't take this

What was the best course of action? What could he do? Get to a ship? The Republic ship Vader had come in on was a good distance away in a hangar. Vader had no idea where the *Light Keeper* was. But he couldn't sit here and do nothing. He had to do something!


"It is ok," Vader whispered.

He closed his eyes and opened himself to the Force. He wasn't sure he would be able to get to the level of concentration he needed for healing. But he dove in anyways. The Force was a mess. Sidious' toxious presence stained it. Anakin was growing angrier and angrier, and the Force was responding to that. Maul was a bundle of anger and resentment. Ahsoka seemed to be the only bright light amongst them, as Luke's light had dimmed considerably.

Vader pushed past the surface level of the Force and went down deeper into the folds. He closed his eyes. He tried to block out the hum and hiss of lightsabers coming from nearby. He pushed that all away. He focused on the steady beat of his own heart. Of his own power. It led him deeper and deeper.

He reached out towards Luke. He felt the Luke's failing warmth. He brushed against the shields that had always prevented Vader from finding the boy. Shields that reeked of Obi-Wan and Yoda, but now were crumbling. It didn't take much to break through them. And then he was in. He was in Luke's mind.

He had to pause as he was overwhelmed by . . . by emotion. Emotions Vader hadn't felt this strongly in years. Even with all the pain, Luke still felt so strongly. There was courage and determination, which Vader always knew the boy had. Sometimes he had too much of it. There was of course friendship and loyalty. Something that almost seemed to burn Vader when he looked too closely at it, but his eyes were drawn to the strongest emotion. Love. Brilliant. Warm. Unending.

Tears pooled in Vader's closed eyes. He felt them stream down his face. A painful hiss from Luke reminded Vader what he needed to be doing. He pushed past the emotions and into the Force that made up and connected Luke's body. He sensed the rushing blood and the erratic beating of his heart. His body was on high alert as it fought the damage. Vader found his way to the wound in Luke's side.

The lightsaber had destroyed a portion of his large and small intestine along with tearing open several muscles. That wasn't counting the damage to the circulatory and nervous system. First he focused on the blood. Luke could live a while longer with damaged intestines, but not without blood. It was hard work to grab each small vein and will it to heal and grow. The midichlorians in the veins seemed to curl and slither away from Vader, so he would have to grab on fast and tight. Each time causing Luke to hiss or moan.

Slowly he knitted the veins back together. Then he moved to the intestines. He could do this! He was healing his son! Sweat was rolling down his head and back. A headache was pounding behind his eyes. But he couldn't stop! He focused on the large intestine first. He reached out for the midichlorians, but a scream pierced through his concentration.

Vader's eyes popped open. He looked down at Luke, but it hadn't been Luke who had screamed. Vader heard another ear splitting scream. Luke's eyes were wide, but again it was not him.
"Ahsoka!"

Vader looked over. Anakin stood frozen. His right arm was up. His lightsaber gripped tightly in his hand. The same lightsaber that was now buried into Ahsoka's body. Ahsoka was wide-eyed. Her mouth open. Her twin blades had fallen to the ground.

What had happened?

Anakin took a staggering step forward and grabbed her with his free hand. "Ahsoka," he sobbed.

There was a flash of red. Vader saw it coming, but it was going too fast. There was nothing he could do from his position on the floor holding Luke. So he sat there and watched Sidious' blade sliced through Ahsoka's body. She fell to the ground with two deafening thumps. Anakin screamed, a guttural heart-wrenching scream.

Then Anakin leapt at Sidious with a snarl. His attacks were wild and feral. Gone was the calculating Jedi general. It was all instinct and the Force. Anakin shouted with each swing.


Vader looked down at Luke. Had his color returned some?

"You- you have to- to help him," Luke said.

"No," Vader said. "I have to heal you. Anakin can fight his own battles."


Vader looked over at Anakin. It was true. Vader could see it. Anakin was cracking apart. Each swing broke him apart further. He was drawing upon his anger. He was using the Dark Side, which was eager to consume the Jedi.

Vader looked back down at his son. Luke was better, but he was still in need of care.


"No," Vader said. "I have to save you."

Luke came first. Luke was more important. Didn't the boy see that?

"I'll heal you, then I'll help Anakin," Vader said as he prepared himself to go back into the Force.

"It'll- it'll be too late," Luke said. "He's falling- ing now."


He closed his eyes and delved back into the Force. It was quicker this time, but as he reached out to Luke he ran into a block. A shield. Vader reared back and pushed again. The shield held. Vader opened his eyes. Luke's blue eyes were staring intently at him.


"No," Luke said gathering whatever scraps of determination he had left in him. "I won't- won't. Not- not until you save your- yourself. Save Ana- Anakin."

"Fath- father. It's fine," he said. "We're- we're the stains here. We don't- don't be- belong."

"And?" Vader barked. "Are you saying their lives are more important than ours?"

Luke smiled. "You already said- said that yourself- self."

He had told Luke that if anything happened to the baby inside of Padmé, it could affect him. He had said to get Luke to focus on getting Padmé out of there instead clinging on to his usual heroics of trying to save the day.

"Go- go," Luke said. His hands stained with his own burnt blood and skin pushed on Vader's chest.

Vader debated on arguing. On pushing his way past Luke's shields. Tearing them down with pure force. But a chill ran up his back. He looked over at Anakin. Almost all of his light was gone. He looked back down at his son. His Luke, who nodded.

Slowly Vader's arms slipped away. Vader slowly got to his feet. He gave his son one last look as he summoned his saber to his hand. He then turned. He best end this fast and be done with it. Luke needed him.

Luke watched as Vader stormed away. The Force was fleeting each time Luke tried to grab at it, like water slipping through his fingers, but he could feel Vader's anger and annoyance. Vader would rather stay with Luke than deal with Anakin. Luckily, he had gone. And Luke was thankful for that.

He shifted his weight so he wasn't leaning against his injured left side. He did feel somewhat better, but there was still a lot of pain. He looked across the floor to Ahsoka. He noticed her arm was moving. Was she . . . Was she still alive? The fight between Vader, Anakin, and Sidious had begun and had moved deeper into the hold. Luke pushed himself onto his arms and legs, though his left leg was rather weak. He crawled over to Ahsoka.

She looked worse than he did. There was a circular wound in the middle of her body. But there was nothing . . . nothing below her hips. She had been cut in half. But she was still alive. Her eyes were wide. Her breathing pained and shallow. Her once vibrant orange skin was dull.

"Ahsoka," Luke said. Cloudy teal eyes landed on him. She was dying. Far more than he was dying. She was truly dying.

Was there anything he could do for her? Could he do the same that Vader had done to him? He had no idea what Vader had even done. Luke felt lightheaded and he could only weakly feel the Force, but he had to try. He closed his eyes. He had a hard time keeping his focus. Sweat was beading up on his forehead, but he grit his teeth and pushed on.

A hand grabbed at his hair and yanked him back. His first thought was it was Dooku, but Dooku was dead. Luke had not only felt that in the Force, but had seen Vader behead the man. So Luke looked up to see the black and red face of Maul.

"Don't," he hissed. "You'll end up killing yourself trying to heal her. She's too far gone."

Luke tried to elbow Maul and push away from him, but Maul held tight on to Luke's hair.

"So what if I use my life to save hers?" Luke spat.
"Because I want you alive," Maul growled.

He let go of Luke's hair. Then he swept down and swung Luke over his shoulder. Luke yelped in pain. He tried to push and kick and punch, but his whole body was weak and sluggish. Maul turned away from Ahsoka, away from Vader and Anakin.

"No!" Luke shouted. "Stop! Vader! Father!"

"We can't have you doing that," Maul said.

Then something hard and cold hit Luke in the head. Everything went instantly black.
Chapter 62

Anakin watched as Vader beheaded Dooku. He felt numb. He should feel excited or relieved or . . . something. But he felt nothing towards the end of the man who had cut off his own arm. Anakin was tired. His body ached and his limbs felt heavy. Vader fell to his knees as he leaned over and cradled Luke. Anakin's eyes slid past them to the all-too-still figure on the floor.

Padmé.

She was still unconscious. A frown pulled on his lips. He needed to get her out of here. However, there was still one thing in his way. Palpatine. He looked over at the Chancellor. He was glaring at Vader and Luke. His lips were turned down into a tight frown. What was going on in his mind? His apprentice had just been killed.

And . . . And it hadn't been Anakin who had killed Dooku.

Vader's past and Anakin's future had changed. Palpatine's plans were unraveling. It was supposed to be Anakin who attacked and killed Dooku. Anakin who was to let his anger consume him, but it hadn't. So Anakin let out a small short laugh. Ahsoka, who stood nearby with her sabers drawn, shot him a worried glance, while Maul looked unamused.

"Ah, young Skywalker," Palpatine said. His voice sent a shiver up Anakin's spine. Horrible, sickly yellow eyes looked straight at him.


"This isn't how I wanted it to be," Palpatine said. His voice more like the one Anakin knew. The one of a friend and mentor.

"Clearly," Anakin said. His voice was tired and lacked any sting.

"Anakin, my dear boy, I am just trying to help you. I know you all too well. You have always yearned for more. The Jedi are holding you back."

"And now you're going to say you won't?"

"You want more," Palpatine continued. "You long for recognition, for a position fitting of your power. You want to be respected. Trusted. You are tired of constantly being second-guessed. Constantly being held to standards no one else is held to. Constantly being told you're not good enough when you've given them everything and more."

"You know nothing about what I want," Anakin said.

Palpatine chastised Anakin with a sigh and a knowing look. "Anakin," he said. "I know everything about you. I know everything you want." With a sharp flick of his hand, Padmé's body jerked up and slid across the floor. She landed at his feet. Still unmoving. Something gripped Anakin's heart to see her like that. "You want," Palpatine said slowly, "your pretty little wife. You want to be needed. Loved."

Anakin said nothing. He only took in a sharp breath through his teeth.

"Anakin, I just want to help you," Palpatine continued. "I can help you save Padmé."
"Save her?" Anakin asked. "Save her from what? You?"

Palpatine's face softened as a sad smile grew on his face. "From the poison, my dear boy," he said in a sickly sweet voice.

"But she was given the antidote! I saw it!" Anakin shouted.

"Yes, but it didn't change the damage that had already been done. You can save her. I can teach you."

"As a Sith? By using the Dark Side?"

Palpatine sighed and shook his head lightly.

"Still clinging to the Jedi's point of view," he said sadly. "The Dark Lords of the Sith believe in security and justice, the same as the Jedi, and yet they are considered by the Jedi to be . . ."

"Annoying," Ahsoka snapped.

Sidious shot her a deadly look. He looked back over at Anakin. "Evil," he finished.

"If you're trying to paint yourself as the good guy here," Ahsoka said. "You're not doing a good job by kidnapping and poisoning a pregnant lady."

Lightning sizzled out of Palpatine's hand. It arched through the air straight at Ahsoka. She was able to block it with her lightsabers for a short time, before the lightning grew too strong. She was knocked off her feet, but otherwise seemed to be fine. Palpatine turned his attention back to Anakin.

"The Sith and the Jedi are similar in almost every way, including their quest for great power," he said. "The difference between the two is the Sith are not afraid of the Dark Side of the Force. That is why they are more powerful."

"The Sith rely on their passion for their strength," Anakin said. "They think inward, only about themselves."

"You sound like a school child reciting lines from a textbook," Palpatine said. "But aren't the Jedi the same?"

"The Jedi are selfless," Anakin said. A headache was starting behind his eyes. "They only care about others."

"Did they care about a slave woman when they took her only son away from her?" Palpatine asked. "Or about a padawan of their Order when she was falsely accused?" He looked over at Ahsoka, who had risen back to her feet and was slowly approaching. "The moment they were proved wrong, they tried to act like it was some grand test. As if they weren't ready to lock her away moments earlier. They couldn't have anything threatening their image, their power. Remember back to your early teachings, Anakin. 'All those who gain power are afraid to lose it.'"

"And you're no different," Anakin said.

"The fear of losing power is a weakness of both the Jedi and the Sith. But I am trying to bring peace to the galaxy," Palpatine pleaded. "True peace! Think of it Anakin! A galaxy with no slavery! No wars! Where you can be free to be with your wife and child! The Dark Side of the Force is a pathway to many abilities the Jedi consider to be unnatural."
He looked over at Vader and Luke, at the broken and twisted man trying to save a son he had only just started to know. Anakin looked back at Palpatine.

"I will not fall to the Dark Side," he said. "Your promises are hollow. I know what they lead to. Now, hand Padmé over."

Palpatine hissed. His face twisted into someone Anakin barely recognized. It became wrinkled and menacing. The skin around the eyes greyed and darkened. The yellow eyes seemed to glow.

"You will kneel to me, Skywalker!" Palpatine hissed. "Or perhaps I shall just take your offspring." He glanced over at Vader and Luke then down to Padmé. "I'm sure your son will be very powerful in the Force."

Anakin pressed the ignition button of his lightsaber. It sprung to life with a snap-hiss. "You will not touch them!" he shouted.

Palpatine pulled his own lightsaber out from his robes. A reb blade shot out of it. He lowered it so it pointed at Padmé. "Then kneel, boy! I only need the baby. She can lose some limbs and still give birth."

It was then a large canister of ammunition flew right at Palpatine. It didn't take much for Palpatine to use the Force to knock the canister off its path. It soared over his head. It crashed into the floor next to the wall and exploded. The room started to fill with thick smoke.

"Stang," Ahsoka muttered. She must have been the one to throw the canister.

Anakin was only slightly aware of these things. He had taken full advantage of the disruption. He rushed forward. He jumped, so he could clear Padmé, and lunged at Palpatine. Palpatine met Anakin's sword with his own. He laughed, which was unsettling. The two crossed blades again and again. Anakin grunted as he swung each strike. Palpatine brought his blade up high, ready to slash it down, but it was caught by two twin blue blades. Ahsoka knocked Palpatine's blade aside.

Anakin didn't hesitate. He came in quick. He pushed himself forward so he would be close, too close for Palpatine to wiggle away. But Palpatine's free hand came out, and Anakin was hit by a bolt of Force lightning. It knocked him down to one knee. Ahsoka slashed at Palpatine, forcing him to stop the lightning and parry her attacks. All throughout this, Palpatine continued to laugh.

The smoke was growing thicker. Anakin jumped to his feet and ran forward. He slashed his blade upwards, but Palpatine knocked the blow wide. The Chancellor spun as he parried Ahsoka's next blow while simultaneously kicking at Anakin with one of his legs. Anakin swerved to the side and brought his saber up to jab at Palpatine, but he was instead forced to shift into a defensive stance as another round of lightning came at him. He caught it with his lightsaber. He gritted his teeth and closed his eyes.

This was getting annoying. It was taking too long. Each breath he took he could feel the smoke mixing with the air. It wasn't good for him. It was especially not good for Padmé. The lightning ended as Ahsoka came back at Palpatine with a series of attacks. Anakin joined her. The two wove between each other as their lightsabers crashed against Palpatine's.

Anakin was tired. His legs were getting heavy. He was covered in sweat. It was taking more and more focus to fight. His mind was sluggish. He was tired of all the mental games. Tired of constantly contemplating the future. He just wanted to rest. With Padmé.

Palpatine landed a solid kick into Anakin's side. Anakin let out a grunt as he fought to regain his
footing. It wasn't surprising when yet another round of lightning came at him. But this time Anakin
didn't just meekly stand there while he waited for it to subside. He closed his eyes half-way and
started to slowly walk forward. It was hard work. It felt as if he was walking through freezing mud
while his whole body shivered with an extreme frequency. Every part of him was shaking.

Step. Another step. He was getting closer. He would be in range soon. Step. He shifted his stance,
raised his sword, and pushed it forward. The lightning faded away. With it gone, a surge of strength
hit Anakin. He used it to power his legs forward, to put more muscle behind his blow at Palpatine.
Palpatine who was smiling at Anakin. Palpatine who had gripped Ahsoka by the shoulder. Palpatine
who pulled her forward and then pushed her in front of him right in the path of Anakin's blow.

Anakin couldn't . . . No . . . there was no . . . It was too late . . . It was all in motion. He couldn't stop
this. His heart fell into his stomach. Ahsoka's eyes were wide as she realized what was happening.
What could he do? It would hit her, he knew that much. But he could perhaps alter the aim some and
hoped it avoided any major organs.

He watched as the blade hit her in the waist. There was barely any resistance as the blade slid
through her. Anakin let out a sob as he finally came to a stop. The sob soon morphed into a scream.
What had he done? He screamed again as everything bubbled out of him. His horror. His grief. What
had he done?

"Ahsoka!" Anakin shouted. He hadn't meant to shout it, but he had no control over his voice. He
meant to say it softly. He meant to make it express how sorry he was. How bad he felt. How he was
going to make this right! But it came out pained and frantic, which if he was being honest, he felt that
too.

Ahsoka was wide-eyed. His mouth open and gaping. Her lightsabers had fallen from her hands.
Anakin took a step forward and grabbed her shoulder.

"Ahsoka," he sobbed. His mouth opened. He was trying to say 'I'm sorry,' but his lips weren't
working properly. His tongue was heavy. He squeezed his eyes. He could feel the tears starting to
build up. Oh Force, he had failed. He was suppose to be her master! Even though she had left the
Order, she was still his padawan. And he had failed to protect her!

The Force screamed. Anakin's eyes snapped up and almost bulged out of his head as his vision was
filled with a searing slash of red. He was so stupid! So karkin' stupid! He was still in a fight. He
stepped back, his grip still tight on Ahsoka, his blade still buried in her, but he pulled her with him.
But it was too little too late.

Palpatine's blade sliced right through Ahsoka's body at her hips. Her body fell backwards. His
lightsaber slid out of her as she did so. It felt like there was nothing there on his sword as she went.
There was a distinct two thuds as she landed . . . in pieces . . .

Something deep inside of him came crawling up his throat and burst out. He screamed. It was
everything he was feeling in that moment being unleashed. Horror. Guilt. Fear. Despair. Anger. So
much anger. Anger at Palpatine!

He leapt. His lips curling into a snarl as he jumped at Palpatine. He swung and slashed. All he saw
were the blue and red of the beams crashing and slashing. He wasn't thinking of stances or
countermoves or footing. He only had one thought: attack and kill. He opened himself up more to the
Force. He let it guide him. He shouted and grunted with each strike, and with each strike something
inside of him chipped away.

Why? WHY? Why him? Why had Palpatine chosen him? Because he was the Chosen One? Anakin
never wanted that! He just wanted to be Anakin! He just wanted to be with the ones he loved and keep them safe and happy! He wanted to free his mother! He wanted to marry and be with Padmé! To have a family with her! To laugh with Ahsoka! To relax with Obi-Wan!

But . . . but . . . now. Now it was all crumbling apart. Ahsoka was dying. Dying because of him! All because of him! Because he was the Chosen One! Because Palpatine had done all of this to lure Anakin here! Ahsoka had come to help him! And now she was going to die! DIE!

And so was Padmé! And the babies! Oh Force! He had been so stupid! He should have grabbed her and run the moment she was in his arms. He never should have engaged Dooku earlier. He had fallen for their trap. And now he was losing everything!

He didn't want to! He just wanted this all to stop! He wanted to fix it all! For it to all to go back! Go back before Vader and Luke arrived!

"Yes! Yes!" Palpatine said as battered aside another blow. "Give into your hatred, boy. Let it fuel you. Feel the unlimited power of the Dark Side!"

Yes, that is what he needed. He needed power. He needed to stop Palpatine! And now! So he reached for that part that was calling to him. That was offering sweet promises tainted in darkness, but Anakin didn't care for any of that. He only cared for one thing: power.

He could feel the shift in the battle. Palpatine's face flinched for a moment. His joyous attitude had faded. His face had grown more serious. He was having to focus and finally take Anakin seriously. Anakin screamed as he jumped and swung his blade down against Palpatine. He hammered down at the elderly man, yet still Palpatine was able to block each strike.


He needed power! More power! And it was there! Why had he never reached for it before? It was glorious! He pushed it all into his arms and legs to make him faster and stronger. His lightsaber slashed out. This time it would be a killing blow. But a red lightsaber crashed into his blue one and the two blades locked.

But it wasn't Palpatine's blade. It was Vader. Darth Vader. He knocked aside Anakin's blow then turned sharply. His blade came right for Palpatine. Palpatine snarled as he faced the new opponent. Anakin curved around to Palpatine's other side, hoping to pincher the man between them. But Palpatine was good as he continued to put up a fight, yet Anakin could sense he was starting to tire. Starting to worry. Starting to fear.

Good.
The fight continued. Vader and Anakin were keeping a strong and steady pace against Palpatine. They were going to do this! They were going to win! But the power Anakin had moments ago was fading away. No! He needed it! He wouldn't be able to end this without it!

His legs grew heavy and slow. His strikes weren't as powerful. Palpatine sensed this change in Anakin. There was a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his lips. No! Did he think he was going to win? Anakin could not let that happen! The power surged back into him. For a brief second he closed his eyes and enjoyed it. Yes, there was power.

He couldn't waste this opportunity in case the power left him again. He dodged between Vader's strikes and found an opening. He slashed up hoping to bisect Palpatine as he had Ahsoka. A red blade locked against his, but it wasn't Palpatine's blade. It was Vader's.

Anakin took a small jump back. He didn't even give Vader a second look. His eyes were back on Palpatine, and he jumped forward ready to bring forth another deadly strike. Again, Vader intervened and blocked it.

"What are you doing?" Anakin shouted. "Move aside! I'm going to kill him!"

"We have a deal, Skywalker," Vader hissed back. "I am supposed to keep you from becoming me. Do this, and you will fall!"

"I don't care!" Anakin shouted. His voice cracking. "I will kill him! I can kill him! I can end this!"

He brought his saber up and swung it at Vader. Vader back stepped to the side, placing himself between Anakin and Palpatine.

"Get out of the way!" Anakin screamed as he dashed at Vader. He attempted to side step him, but Vader blocked him again.

"You're falling to the Dark Side!" Vader shouted at him over the hum and hiss of lightsabers.

Anakin ignored that statement. "I need to kill him!" he shouted. How could Vader not understand this? "How can you protect him?"

"I am not protecting him!" he grunted. "I am protecting you! I'm protecting Padmé! Luke! The other baby! I'm protecting their future! Their future with their father! With you!"

"They won't have a future if they die!"

Didn't Vader see this? Hadn't he already lived through this? They were all dying or dead because of him! He had to stop this! He had to kill Palpatine!

"I have to do this!" Anakin said. His voice weak. Cracking. Strained.

"No, you do not! Step away, Anakin! Do what I could not! Let me finish this! Get Padmé and Luke out of here!"

Vader stared at him with blue eyes. Blue eyes? Vader didn't have blue eyes. He was a Sith . . . Weak,
a voice inside Anakin hissed. *He's gone weak. He can't do this!* Anakin didn't move. He stood frozen, but neither Vader or Palpatine waited for his decision. The fight continued.

Vader . . . Vader was right. He had to get Padmé out of here. He lowered his weapon and turned to walk towards her. But then his hair stood up on end. A chill washed down his spin. He whipped back around. Palpatine had pushed Vader to the side. His free hand was raised as sparks danced between his fingers. But the hand wasn't aimed at Anakin or Vader, it was aimed at Padmé.

Padmé who was so still. So motionless. She hadn't stirred once. Was Palpatine right about the poison? Had the damage already been done? He pushed himself forward to block the lightning, but he suddenly found himself so sluggish. His body so slow. He wasn't going to make it. It was happening again! He wasn't going to make it!

Just like he had with Ahsoka! He saw it coming, and couldn't do a *kriffin'* thing. Just like his mother! And now Padmé! No. No! NO!

The lightning came off of Palpatine's hand. But it only went a short way as Vader jumped in the way. He let out a loud, pained shout and fell to his knees as Palpatine laughed. Anakin wavered on his feet as dizziness overtook him. His vision blurred and blackened.

And then he was seeing everything in red. But he was no longer in the ammunition cargo hold filled with smoke. He was in a strange circular room with med droids and screaming. It was him screaming. A long powerful shout filled with despair.

"*You told me you could save her,*" a mechanical voice said. *His* voice. But not his voice.

"*In your rage you chose . . . a different path.*"

Vader noticed Palpatine. He had been thrown into a wall of metal paneling. It was dented and cracked from the Force of the body landing on it. Palpatine looked hideous. He was deformed. His face was white and heavily wrinkled. It looked as if his face had melted. His teeth were yellow and crooked. His eyes a sickly burning yellow.

"*Padmé . . . is dead, my friend. Even the power of the Dark Side cannot bring her back. But in her death, she has given you a gift. Pain.*"

Palpatine was peeling himself out of the metal wall. Anakin realized he was kneeling. His body hurt. Everything hurt so much. His legs hurt where they connected to prosthetics. His left arm hurt where it connected to a prosthetic. Every inch of his skin itched and burned. Worst of all was the breathing. Each breath was pained. Each time air passed through his throat, it scratched and burned. He couldn't even stop the breathing to give himself a momentary reprieve, as the air was being forced into him. There was a steady kish-kosh filling his ears.

"*Now,*" Palpatine said. "*You must choose. Will you accept that gift? Will you use it . . . or will you die?*"

"*I . . .*" Anakin said. Force, even talking hurt. "*I will live.*"

"*Good,*" Palpatine said as he approached. "*And now . . .*"

Both of his hands snapped up. Lightning poured from both of them. It instantly struck him. He screamed. Oh Force! He was dying! He couldn't breath! The lightning was preventing him from breathing! His heart! It hurt! It beat erratically. The lightning stopped and Anakin hunched over as his body smoked. Words were being said, but Anakin couldn't focus on them. All he could feel was the pain. Neverending pain.
He finally managed to raise his head. Palpatine was pointing a red lightsaber at his throat.

"You are a Sith," he snarled. "I realize this has been a . . . traumatic time for you. But if you touch me with the Force again, I will finish what Kenobi could not." His lightsaber slunk back into its hilt. "You are my friend, Lord Vader. I do hope we never find ourselves in this position again. Rise. The great work must continue."

Palpatine turned away from him as Anakin unsteadily rose to his feet, his prosthetic feet. Feet clad in black. He was clad completely in black. He was in a suit. The suit! He stood there unmoving as he realized he was seeing a memory from Vader.

"You think of revenge," Palpatine said. His back to Vader. "You wish to leave, to find the source of all your pain. I can sense it. Set such feelings aside. Your personal vendettas pale next to the needs of our Galactic Empire."

The red world grew blurry and black. Anakin blinked and found himself back on the Separatist command ship in the ammunition hold. Vader was on his knees as he was being struck with Force lightning.

Padmé is dead. But in her death, she has given you a gift. Pain. You wish to find the source of all your pain.

The source of all your pain.

Pain.

Will you accept that gift? Will you use it or will you die?

No, but Padmé wasn't dead yet. She wasn't dead!

Will you let Padmé die?

Pain.

The source of all your pain.

Will you use it?

Yes. Yes, he would use it! He couldn't let that future come to pass! The source was right here! Vader had distracted him a moment ago! He was going to kill Palpatine! But then Vader got in the way. Anakin snapped his hand up and threw the Force at Palpatine. It knocked the old man off his feet. The lightning stopped. Vader was hunched over grunting and gasping in pain.

Anakin took in a deep breath. The Force came to him like it had never done before. It brought power. So much power. Wonderful, intoxicating power. He gripped his saber tighter and ran at Palpatine. The Force, cold and inky, whispered to him. Sung to him. He knew where to strike and how fast to power his blows. He could see Palpatine's attacks so easily now. He was able to throw them off.

There was laughing. His laughing. Anakin was laughing.

Yes! He was going to stop it all right now! He wasn't going to get distracted this time! He was going to kill Palpatine! He was-

Vader slammed into him, knocking him to the side. Anakin snarled up at him.
"Stop getting in my way," he hissed as he stood back on his feet. He turned ready to attack Palpatine.

But Vader was there.

"STOP!" Anakin shouted.

"Do this and there is no coming back!" Vader shouted back.

Anakin spun his saber around to build up on momentum and then lashed out at Vader. The blades hissed as they crashed against each other in a blur of blue and red. Anakin kept pushing his strikes harder and harder, but Vader was just pushing back. Anakin tried coming in down low and flipping to come in from up high, but Vader had a solid defense. Plus he was easily reading Anakin's attacks!

It was infuriating! Why was he stronger than him?! Why couldn't he beat him?! He just needed to get out of Anakin's way! He could save Padmé! Ahsoka! Luke!

Then Anakin noticed. It was a small thing. One that could be easily overlooked, but Anakin was faster than Vader. Perhaps the prosthetics weighed and slowed him down.

He came in, fast. Faster than Vader. He threw his saber up high, Vader blocked it, but then Anakin spun, struck his saber down low while Vader's was still up high, and jabbed at Vader's leg. Vader let out a yell as he fell over. A smoking hole went straight through the metal leg. Anakin let out a snarl as he looked down at him, then turned away. The smoke was heavy now. It was hard to see, but Anakin could see Palpatine's form only a short distance away. Vader's attempt to stop him had been in vain. Palpatine would die. Now.

Anakin marched forward, but his feet slipped out from under him with a sharp tug from the Force. He pushed himself up to his feet and whipped around. Vader had pushed himself up to his knees. His hand was held out. He had used the Force to pull Anakin down.

The power inside of Anakin hummed as it completely devoured him. Every single part of his body tingled. He shot his free hand out. He focused the power into that hand and let go. Lightning zapped out of his hand and right into Vader. Vader screamed, and Anakin could only smile at the sound. He kept the lightning going a little while longer before reined the power back in. Vader laid smoking in a heap on the unconscious floor. But Anakin knew it wouldn't last long.

Somewhere within him, there was a voice saying he needed to go help her. To heal her. But no! NO! The only way to stop this all was to kill Palpatine! He let out a scream of frustration. The smoke was instantly blown away, revealing a large clear circle of the cargo hold. Ahsoka, Padmé, and Vader were behind him and in front of him . . . was Palpatine. Anakin smiled. It was dark, feral, and predatory.

He ran. The power spun all around him. It was pulling the entire galaxy with him. He could drag moons from their orbit if he so wished. Rip the cores from planets. Realign the stars. But all he wanted was for Palpatine to die. The Force came to him so easily as he snapped his free hand up and pushed the Force out. It didn't listen to Palpatine at all as he tried to bend it to his will. No, the Force was doing what Anakin wanted it to do. Palpatine was thrown onto his back.

Anakin leapt and landed on top of the man. He pressed his knee against Palpatine's chest. Palpatine's eyes went wide. Anakin's smile grew wider as he paused to savor this moment. He brought up his
lightsaber. This was it. This was truly it.

But of course, it was not.

The Force gave Anakin warning. He was able to deflect the oncoming bolts with a spin of his saber. Clone troopers ran into the hold. Their blasters up and poised on Anakin and Vader.

"Help me!" Palpatine shouted.

Anakin looked down at him. The mask of the Chancellor had slid back on. The Sith lightsaber was no longer in his hand.

"Help me!" Palpatine shouted. "He's trying to kill me!"

"Don't!" Anakin shouted. "Don't listen to him! He's the Sith lord!"

"Help me, please!" Palpatine whimpered pathetically.

Anakin hissed as he pushed his knee down harder on Palpatine's chest.

"Anakin?"

Anakin's breath caught in his throat as he looked back to the entrance. The troopers parted to let Obi-Wan through. His lightsaber was ignited as he looked upon the scene.

"Anakin, what are you doing?" Obi-Wan asked.

"Master Kenobi!" Palpatine shouted. "He's turned to the Dark Side! He's trying to kill me!"

Obi-Wan's face fell into confusion and turmoil, and Anakin's heart twisted on himself to see such an expression from his old master cast on him.

"No!" Anakin shouted. Plead. "You don't understand, Obi-Wan! *He's* the Sith Lord! I have to end this! I have to kill him!"

"Master Kenobe!" Palpatine whimpered. "Anakin has betrayed me, just as he will betray you! Don't let him kill me!"

"You Sith disease!" Anakin hissed. "I am going to end this once and for all!"

"You can't kill him, Anakin!" Obi-Wan shouted as he started to move forward. The troops moved with him. Not once had they lowered their blasters. Anakin was aware Vader had awakened and had pushed himself to sit up. "If he is a Sith lord, the Sith lord, then he must stand trial!"

"He has too much control!" Anakin snapped. "He controls the Senate and the Courts! He is too dangerous to be kept alive! He must die!"

"Don't! Please don't kill me! Please," Palpatine gasped.

"It is not the Jedi way, Anakin!" Obi-Wan shouted.

"Then so be it!" Anakin said as he raised his saber. He was done with this! Done with Obi-Wan's condescending looks and tone. Done with Vader's interferences. Done with Palpatine's schemes! Done with loss! With death! With pain!

"No! Please! Shoot him! Stop him!" Palpatine shouted in disgustingly fake weak voice.
And the clones who were engineered to take orders perfectly, pressed their triggers, and a volley of bolts came flying right at Anakin. They were green stun bolts. Most likely from an order had been given that Anakin had missed. Anakin and Palpatine were too close. A stray shot could easily hit the Chancellor. But fighting off bolts were hard, stun or regular. And the clones were good shots. Anakin had to step away from the Chancellor to prevent himself from being hit.

*We need to get out of here,* Vader said through the Force.

Out of the corner of Anakin's eye, he saw Vader limping and swinging his own blade to blow off the bolts.

*We can take them!* Anakin growled at him.

*Take them and Obi-Wan? And the reinforcements that are running down the hallway? We are tired. Injured. We have to leave. Now.* Vader said.

*No!*

*Skywalker, if one bolt hits us, we are down. We will be placed in a prison. If they are smart they will bind us away from the Force. We will be in Palpatine's hands.*

Vader was right. Already the clones had moved pass Ahsoka and Padmé. Medics had knelt down next to them. A clone kicked at Dooku's head.

*We won't make it to our ship,* Anakin said. Their ship was through the clones.

*I believe the Light Keeper must be nearby. It was why Luke was here with Padmé in the first place.*

Anakin dug out his com and hailed R2. Vader was right, *again.* The ship was docked at a cargo loading airlock nearby.

"Anakin!* Obi-Wan shouted. There was so much in that word. In that name. Obi-Wan no doubt had so many questions. But there wasn't time for that. Anakin opened up the old bond he had with his former master.

*I'm sorry, Obi-Wan,* he said.

*Anakin?*

*Don't trust Palpatine.*

Vader picked up one of the broken and empty canisters that had been thrown around earlier. He threw it between them and the troopers. It gave them just enough time to make it to the far side of the hold and through the back entrance. Vader slashed at the door panel. Anakin paused as he stared at the jammed door.

On the other side of the door was all the people he loved the most. Padmé. Ahsoka. Obi-Wan. All of them were with Palpatine. Anakin clenched his jaw as he turned sharply on his heels. This wasn't done. This was not done! Palpatine would die, Anakin promised himself.

Chapter End Notes
"Wwwwhhhhhaaaaatttt?" you cry. "I thought this was the end! The finale!" This is not the finale of the story. It is the ending of a section, an act, of the story. Part 2 of 3.
Vader awoke to the dull gray metal panels that made up the crew quarters on the *Light Keeper*. He felt horrible. He was dizzy and nauseated. He was sore all over. His throat was dry. A headache was pounding at the base of his skull and on his temples. He couldn't remember the last time he had felt this bad. There had always been drugs to help ease away all these minor issues. But there was no more suit to constantly monitor his body.

He squeezed his eyes shut. How had he come into this condition again? Then he recalled the lightning. Not from Palpatine but from Anakin. Vader let out an angry groan. He was going to strangle that foolish Jedi. Anakin had embraced the Dark Side. What would Luke-

*Luke*!

He had left Luke behind . . . Behind with Sidious. With the Jedi and the clones. Vader groaned again. He was back where he started with Luke in custody of the Republic, and this time it would be worse. Sidious knew who Luke and Vader were, and possibly so did the Jedi Order.

How was he going to get his son this time?

Though hopefully Luke's injuries would be treated. He recalled seeing a medic kneel down to check on Padmé and Ahsoka . . . Where was Luke? His memory wasn't clear. He had just gotten up from the lightning. He had been angry at Anakin for shooting it at him. But where was Luke?

*Where was Luke?*

"Skywalker!" Vader bellowed out loud and into the Force.

He was going to kill that Jedi. Kriff the consequences if it would kill him too. He might be understanding if Anakin had taken the leg he had damaged, but to take all four? Why? His anger was rising. He gritted his teeth as he was unable to do much else.

The door to the crew quarters slid open and Anakin walked in. Vader rolled over to his side so he could glare at him properly.

"You look like shavit," Vader said.

"I took them," Anakin said.
"Why?" Vader asked between clenched teeth.

"Because I didn't want you getting in my way," Anakin said. There was a growl to his voice. "I could have killed Palpatine. I could ended it! But you! You stopped me!"

"I was preventing you from falling to the Dark Side."

"Oh? Now you care? Didn't you say that that was my fate? That I couldn't escape it?"

Vader was silent. He didn't want to admit to Anakin he had changed his mind, mainly because of Luke. But even then he was lying to himself. The moment he had seen Kenobi in the dark hallways of the Temple, he knew the future, at least the future of this time, could be altered. And he wanted to alter it.

Anakin let out a short crazed laugh. Vader frowned.

"It's doesn't matter now," Anakin said as he walked over. "Too late."

Vader took a closer look at Anakin. He noticed the eyes. Anakin's yellow eyes. They were no longer blue.

"What have you done?" Vader asked.

"I can see why you did it," Anakin said. "I finally understand. I couldn't for so long. I thought myself... too righteous to give in to the darkness. But that isn't the right word. It's not giving in. It's accepting. Accepting the power the Dark Side gives you."

"Look at me, Anakin," Vader said. "This is what awaits you down this path."

Anakin tilted his head as he looked at Vader. "If given the chance to go back and do it all again, you wouldn't have chosen the Dark Side?" he asked.

Vader paused as he considered this. It was one thing to prevent another Anakin from falling, but himself? After he knew the addicting taste of the Dark Side? If he was back in Palpatine's office, what choice would he make? Kneel to the Dark Side or strike out using the Light Side? One side offered power and a way to fix the broken galaxy. The other... Padmé... Luke and his twin.

"No," Vader said.

"Liar," Anakin hissed.

"I am not lying, Skywalker," Vader growled back. "The Dark Side has given me nothing. That alluring power... look what it has gained me. Look at me! I am a lump of flesh! I was bound to a life support suit for twenty-three years! And I had nothing. I had lost everything. So no, I would not choose this path again."

Anakin paused. Vader hoped he was thinking on his words. Then Anakin sighed and shook his head.

"Except I am no longer on the same path you were," Anakin said. His eyes looked off into the distance.

"Good. There is still time to reverse this. You have yet to fully embrace the Dark Side. Yet to kill anyone with it. I believe you can still turn back."

Anakin's yellow eyes fell back on Vader. "I don't want to turn back," he said in a low voice that sent
a shiver up Vader's spin.

"Skywalker," Vader said slowly.

"I was hoping you wouldn't be against me, Vader," Anakin said. "I am in need of a teacher."

Vader's eyes widened. "You . . . you want to become my apprentice?"

Anakin said nothing. His face gave nothing away either. He just looked at Vader. Silence stretched between them. Then Anakin sighed.

"So will you teach me?" Anakin said. He sounded tired.

"No," Vader said.

Anakin ran a hand through his hair.

"Stop this," Vader said. "Turn away from the Dark Side. Whatever you think this power will give you, let you accomplish, it won't."

Anakin's yellow eyes narrowed. "Oh, I think it will give me everything I want," he said.

"Which is what?" Vader barked.

"To kill Palpatine!" Anakin said as he clenched one hand into a fist.

"That is not everything you want. I know what you want. You want to be with Padmé. With your children. That is what you truly want."

"I will have that too!" Anakin shouted. "You act like I have to make a choice. I either choose the Dark Side or Padmé and my loved ones. No. I will have it all."

A moment of déjà vu ran through Vader. He himself had said those words once. For him it was only two years ago. A few months after Yavin. He had hired Boba Fett to bring him the pilot that shot down the Death Star. The bounty hunter had failed, but had brought back a name. Skywalker. That was when Vader learned the truth. That was when his hunt truly began. For in that moment he had sworn to himself that Luke would be his. It would all be his.

And now Anakin was swearing those same words. He was deeper in the Dark Side than Vader had thought.

"Padmé . . ." Vader said slowly. "Padmé will not accept this."

Anakin's face twisted in anger.

"She refused," Vader said. "I offered her the entire galaxy, and she refused." He paused as he took in the growing anger in Anakin. "Like you are now, I grew angry and lashed out. I wouldn't allow her to leave me. So I choked her. So no, Anakin Skywalker, you cannot have both."

"I can't lose her!" Anakin said. His pained voice all too familiar to Vader. "Especially after . . . after . . . Ahsoka! I am not only going to kill Palpatine, I am going to destroy him. I am going to take everything from him. Like he did to me. Like he did to you! Join me! Together we can destroy him!"

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. Come with me. It is the only way.
Vader was stunned into silence. He didn't know what to say. He wanted Sidious dead. He wanted to see him destroyed. What Anakin was offering was very tempting.

"You have to help him," Luke had said. "He's falling. You made a deal that he wouldn't become like you. Save yourself. Save Anakin."

Save yourself. Save Anakin.

Vader took a deep breath. "No," he said. "I will not help you with this. I will not let you destroy yourself and everything you hold dear. I lived through it once. I will not let it happen again."

Anakin rolled his eyes and scowled.

"I'm going to let you think on this, Darth Vader," Anakin said darkly. "Not like you are going anywhere else. But think on it. Truly think on it. We can fix this galaxy. Together. You couldn't kill Palpatine in your own time. You were hoping to have Luke join you so you could do it together. But you and I can do it together! We can prevent Palpatine's empire!"

He smiled as he looked down at a limbless Vader. He dug into his robe and brought out a Sith holocron. Vader could feel the darkness growing as the room got colder. The holocron opened.

"While you think about it," he said, "I am going to help myself to your many Sith holocrons and texts. I should be able to learn something from them. I'm sure you're familiar with the saying from Jedi Master Sun Tzu. 'If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.' I need to know Palpatine. I need to know the Dark Side. I need to know myself, which includes you."

The holocron closed and Anakin stuffed it back into his tunic. Then he marched over to Vader and crouched down so they were face to face.

"You don't have to teach me," Anakin said. "I'm sure I can learn well enough from the holocrons, but-" He paused. His yellow eyes seemed to glow. "What I do want from you is your knowledge." He tapped a finger against Vader's head. "You know Sidious. He was your master. You know how he works. You know who his allies are or will be once the Republic falls. I'm sure you know all sorts of secrets about him, and that is what I want to know. You want your limbs back? Tell me what I want to know, and I'll give them back."

Vader only glared at Anakin. Anakin laughed as he stood back up.

"How the tables have turned," he said. "Help me destroy Palpatine and I'll even help you get your son back. Perhaps even find a way to properly get back to your own time. But why return to your own time when this time could be better? With your knowledge and my power, we can make this galaxy better. Save Padmé. Save Luke. Save everyone. We don't have to lose anyone we love any more. I'll let you think on it."

He turned and swiftly left the room. Vader rolled onto his back and looked back up at the ceiling.

Now what?

He wasn't in the same situation as before. This was worse. And now Vader couldn't even move. Not against Sidious. Not against the Jedi. Not to find his son. Not even to go to the kriffin' refresher!

Anakin Skywalker.
What was Vader going to do about Anakin? *Save yourself. Save Anakin.* Yes, but how? He tried to reason with him. Tried to get him to see that this was a fool's errand. It was only going to end in disaster as it had for him.

Vader took a deep breath and flung his upper body up. He managed to sit up. He glanced around the room. He doubted Anakin would be stupid enough to leave his limbs in here. But maybe there was something in here he could use. Like his lightsaber to jab Anakin with. That might make him feel better. There wasn't much in the room. A few piles of clothes. Some ration bar wrappers and crumbs. Luke's scarf and Anakin's stupid poncho. A brown bag . . . a brown bag. The one he had given to Luke! The one with the holocron Obi-Wan had sent!

Vader had placed it in the bag and told Luke to hold on to it. Vader closed his eyes and centered himself in the Force. It wasn't long before the bag settled in his lap, and he used the Force to summon the holocron out. The holocron now sat on top of the bag as Vader looked at it. But he wouldn't be able to open it. It required the Light Side of the Force. Plus what good would it do him now?

It was supposed to have information about time travel. That didn't do him any good at the moment. He wouldn't be returning to his own time without Luke.

He continued to look at the glowing blue cube. What else did he have to do anyway? Perhaps it would reveal how to travel in time. He could get his limbs, get Luke and just return to his own time and leave this mess behind him. Let the people of this time figure it all out for themselves.

He sighed. It didn't matter. He wouldn't be able to open it. He was a Sith, a dark lord, Darth Vader. But perhaps he could corrupt it? Like what a Sith did when they bled a kyber crystal to become red. He could force the holocron to open. Bend the Force to his will.

He closed his eyes and delved into the Force. He relaxed as he welcomed the cold velvety folds that surrounded him. He could sense Anakin. He was like an eclipsed sun. Mostly blackened, but streaks of light were still visible. He hadn't completely ruined himself yet. Vader recalled his own lightness remaining a small while when he first became a Sith. He saw them as white butterflies that floated in a horrid burning red mental wasteland.

He pushed that thought aside as he turned his attention to the holocron. *Open,* he demanded of it. He imagined blackened, clawed hands ripping the cube apart. He pushed his will on the cube. He demanded that it open. Nothing was happening in the Force, so he just let himself meditate. Let himself be surrounded by the Force and the swirling darkness and burning wasteland that was his mind.

Then he saw something. He looked up. There was a small speck of white. A piece of ash or perhaps a torn piece of cloth. It was white and glowing. It did not belong here. At once Vader sent tendrils of his darkness out to lash at it. To destroy it, but it danced between the tendrils and avoided their deadly touch. It started to grow bigger and change shape. The tendrils died down as Vader curiously watched on.

Wings unfurled from the spot. Butterfly wings. It had opened up into a butterfly. A pure white glowing butterfly. Why was it here? He had destroyed them so long ago . . .

Vader opened his eyes as he felt something move in his lap. He looked down at his lap to see an opened holocron.

Chapter End Notes
This officially marks the end of act 2 for the story. It was almost as long as act 1, which ended on chapter 33. (Chapter 66 was where I was hoping to end act 2 to make them even. But 64 is close enough.) The fic is going to take a short break and then come back with interlude chapters, which offers POVs that aren't the three main Skywalker characters. How long will the break be? Right now I'm planning for two weeks. Thanks again to all the readers and commenters. You guys give me so much motivation to keep this story going. So thank you all so much. Also feel free to come hang out in my SW Writer's Discord server. It's a small server of fellow readers, lovers, and writers of SW fics. https://discord.gg/4RZ8Qce
Interlude

Obi-Wan stepped out of his speeder he had parked in the lower hangar of the Grand Republic Medical Facility. The building itself was huge and towered high into the Coruscant sky. It competed as one of the tallest towers in the area. It was also known as one of the best medical facilities of the Republic. At least, that was its reputation.

Clone troopers stood at the entrance. They had red markings on their white plastoid armor which marked them as shock troopers and part of the Coruscant Guard.

"General Kenobi," one clone greeted as Obi-Wan approached. Obi-Wan nodded back. By now they knew him well. The clone pressed the door panel, and Obi-Wan entered the facility. He made his way to the turbolifts and up to the correct floor. More shock troopers stood guard on this floor. A few nodded in greeting as Obi-Wan passed.

He made his way to Ahsoka's room first. She floated in a bacta tank. There was nothing below her hips. No legs. The legs were actually in another bacta tank. It hadn't been decided how they would proceed with her legs. She hadn't come out of her coma. The doctors said she was stable, and now it was all a waiting game to see if she would awaken. Once she did, then they would decide the best course of action for her legs. They weren't sure if they could heal her actual legs or if they should clone them or perhaps just go with prosthetics.

Obi-Wan didn't linger long. He had already visited every day over the past week. There wasn't much he could do. Each time he came, he tried to reach out to Ahsoka in the Force, but was always met with nothing. He sighed as he left her room and headed down the hall. Two shock troopers stood outside a single door. They said nothing as they let him enter the room.

Padmé laid in the medical bed asleep. Machines around her whirled and beeped softly. They monitored her along with the twins she carried.

Twins.

Anakin was having twins. Did he know? Did Padmé?

Like Ahsoka, Padmé had yet to awaken. Obi-Wan found this troubling. She should have woken up by now. The doctors tried to reassure him that everything was fine. Padmé was recovering from shock while also pregnant. And yet . . . nothing.

Obi-Wan stroked his beard as he watched Padmé's chest rise and fall evenly. There was a small but clear bump of her pregnant stomach protruding from the covers. Something was . . . off here. He could feel it in the Force, but whenever he tried to reach out for it, the feeling slipped away. He had tried some simple meditation, but never achieved a deep connection with the Force. Nurses would always come in and out of the rooms to check on the patients. They asked him if he was alright and needed anything. When he meditated back at the Temple, he found nothing. The feeling only existed here.

Finished with his visit, Obi-Wan returned to his speeder and left the facility. However, he did not return to the Temple. He made his way to one to one of the giant circular openings that cut deep into
the city. His speeder descended into the darkness as he made his way down into the lower levels. Down where there was no sunlight. Only artificial lights from neon signs and blinking street lights.

He parked his speeder in an alley and pulled up his hood as he stepped on to a wider street. He made his way through the maze of buildings to a rundown bar. A few of the occupants glanced at him, and he made his way quietly to a booth in the back. It was a perfect place for a meeting. Loud music to drown out the conversation and low light to hide in. He didn't have to wait long before someone slid into the seat across from him.

Asajj Ventress looked the same as he had last seen her. She was still dressed as a bounty hunter, and still wore her helmet. However, she kept the mask down hiding her face.

"I see you finally made it back," Obi-Wan said.

"Do you know how hard it was to get on to Coruscant?" Ventress hissed.

After the battle with the Separatists, the planet had been heavily monitoring all traffic.

"I'm here for my payment," she said, holding out her hand.

Obi-Wan dug into his robe and flashed the lightsaber, but didn't pull it out. Yet.

"I have some questions," Obi-Wan said. "I want to know what happened."

"Not much," Ventress said. "I got Tano off of Mandalore, picked up that droid, and went to Manda. We found Skywalker. Job completed. I left."

"That . . . that was it?" Obi-Wan asked.

"Skywalker . . . wasn't alone," Ventress said.

"Was it a man? A boy?"

"Both," Ventress said. "That man. He was a Sith. I could feel it."

So Anakin had been traveling with Vader and Luke. When Padmé had returned to Coruscant after her kidnapping, she hadn't given much information as to what had happened. She said Anakin had showed up with some blonde kid. Anakin fought Vader, while she and the kid got away. She took Anakin's ships back to Coruscant, as that was what Anakin told her to do. So what had happened to Anakin? Had he and Vader fought? And then what?

"Was Anakin . . . in distress?" Obi-Wan asked.

"No. Well, not until I told him the news of the battle. And then . . ."

"And then?" he prompted.

"That Sith . . . He talked as if . . . As if this had all happened before. He was able to just list out information about the battle, a battle that had just started light-years away. At first, I thought he was a Separatist. Perhaps Dooku's new apprentice, but . . . he knew of the Republic's movements as well. And the way he said it . . ."

"How did Anakin react to this? React to this Sith?"

"Skywalker wanted to know more information. The Sith wouldn't tell him unless they gave him your holocron."
A silence fell between them that was filled with the thumping music. Had Anakin and Vader come to a truce then?

"No matter," Ventress said. "Give me my payment and I will be on my way."

Obi-Wan pulled out her lightsaber, but didn't hand it over. "I have another job, if you're interested."

He had a feeling she was raising a single eyebrow under her mask.

"I don't think you have the credits for my services," she said.

"This job isn't from me . . . It's from the Jedi Council," he said in a low voice.

She leaned over the table. "The Jedi get their funds from the Republic. I doubt they're going to approve the Jedi using a bounty hunter."

"This won't be reported to the Republic."

Another short silence between them.

"No," she said as she leaned back against her seat. "Whatever mess this is, it is your mess. I'm done."

He couldn't blame her. Perhaps all she wanted was a simple life, at least compared to the life she had lived as an assassin of the Confederacy.

"If you do this job," Obi-Wan said slowly. "The Order is willing to get all your charges against the Republic dropped. They would grant you citizenship."

He could sense her surprise. She stilled as she contemplated this. Ventress was still marked as a traitor and criminal of the Republic when she sided with the Confederacy. There was a warrant on her head.

"And how is the Order going to do this without the approval of the Senate?" she asked.

"We'll have a good case to present of your good deeds of helping the Republic after this job," he informed her.

"And what exactly is this job?"

"To find Anakin Skywalker and bring him back to the Temple."

She tilted her head. "That's . . . that's it? Why didn't you give me that job earlier? I could have snatched him on Manda! And how is fetching some little lost Jedi going to win me over to the Senate?"

Obi-Wan was quiet for a moment. "I'm afraid you must come to the Temple for the rest of those details," he said. Finally he handed over her lightsaber. She snatched it out of his hand. "What do you say?" he asked. "You can still say no once you hear what the Council has to say."

She didn't hesitate for long before she agreed to come with Obi-Wan back to the Temple.
Being an assassin gave her that sense of control and power. She decided whether someone lived or died. Then she was given command for the Separatists in battle. When she tasted victory, it was exhilarating. But it was short lived, for soon came the defeat. After defeat. After another defeat. She was losing control. She grew angry.

And then came the betrayal. Dooku tried to kill her. And she realized how used she had been. Her anger was bottomless. She wanted revenge, but even in that she failed. A failure that cost her all of the other Nightsisters. So she had stepped away from that life. She had started to find a sense of peace as a bounty hunter. She was able to find a sense of control as she was able to decide what jobs to take. And there was a feeling of power each time she successfully brought in a bounty.

It felt like she was walking on a thin wire as she walked through the halls of the Jedi Temple. A simple push, a strong gust of wind, someone to gently knock the wire, and she would fall into the dark depths of failure again. Why was she here? She should have never agreed to this. She should back out. Just return to being a bounty hunter.

A bounty hunter. Is that all she aspired to be in life? A bounty hunter? Is that what she wanted? She already knew the answer, because it was what waited on the other end of the wire she was treading on. She knew herself too well. She wanted more. And the Jedi might just offer that to her. There was a risk, but at least this time she was aware she walking the wire.

She kept her mask on as she followed Kenobi through the halls. They passed other Jedi. A few nodded at Kenobi. Asajj had plenty of experience with Jedi, mainly fighting against them. But she had never seen so many Jedi in one place. The Jedi were spread thin with the war, so she only came across them occasionally. It was also why when the Jedi teamed up with each other, it was annoying. And none were more annoying than Kenobi and Skywalker due to how frequently they worked together.

Kenobi led her into a large circular room. A large holotable sat in the middle. The room was surrounded by benched seating that circled around the room in elevated tiers. There were a few Jedi waiting for them. She instantly recognized Yoda. The Grandmaster of the Order was unmistakable. Standing beside him was Mace Windu. There were still a few others, though the only other Jedi she really recognized was Kit Fisto.

The door to the room slid shut. All eyes were on her. She was on edge, ready for the moment they would lunge at her to strike her down.

"Come you have, Asajj Ventress," Yoda said.

"I hear you have a job," she said trying to sound cool and collective. "A well paying job."

Yoda shared a look with Windu, who nodded.

"We are willing to offer you a full pardon of your crimes against the Republic and renew your citizenship," Windu said.

"And you'll just let me go after that?" she asked. "A Sith?"

"A Sith you are not," Yoda said.

Asajj hissed at him, "But I do use the Dark Side. I have attacked and killed many of your fellow Jedi."

"And that is one of the reasons we are seeking to hire you," Windu said. He was still calm. They were all still calm. Krifin' emotionless Jedi.
"Kenobi told me you wish to find Anakin Skywalker and return him back to Coruscant," she said.

"Return him to the Jedi Order," Windu said.

Asajj paused. The Order was doing this without the approval of the Senate. They wanted Anakin brought here, to the Jedi. Something had happened.

"And why are you seeking me out for this task? Why not send one of your Jedi? Kriff, even Kenobi would be better to bring back Skywalker," she noted.

The Jedi exchanged a few looks with each other. A few uncomfortable looks. They were getting to the real issue.

She continued to push. "You are wanting me to sidestep the Senate, aren't you? Keep this all quiet from the politicians. Why? What did Skywalker do?"

"He tried to kill the Chancellor," Windu said.

Asajj stilled. Her insides turned cold as she recalled her joking comment when she had last seen Skywalker on his ship. She had asked if he had become a traitor. He had answered so confidently. *No*, he had said.

"Is this some sort of joke?" she asked.

"It is not," Kenobi said somberly. "I saw it myself."

"Why?"

"That we do not know," Yoda said.

Things were starting to click into place as she put the pieces together. "And that's why you want him back here instead of going back to the Republic? Which I assume is also hunting for him."

"You assume correctly," Windu said.

Windu turned to the large holotable and pressed a button. The table jumped to life projecting an image of Skywalker from the shoulders up. It was part of an alert stating the Jedi was wanted on acts of treason. He was to be considered highly dangerous, but was wanted alive. Windu clicked another button and the image shifted. This time it was a bounty posting. Asajj let out an audible whistle when she saw the amount of credits tied to the alive-only sum.

"So you want me to go find Skywalker before anyone else does?" she asked.

"Correct," Windu said. "These two postings are not public. The first has only been shared amongst officers in the GAR and the Jedi Order. The second is only for a select few bounty hunters hired in secrecy by the Senate. It would be disastrous for the Republic and the war effort if it became known that Anakin Skywalker was a suspected traitor. This is all being kept very quiet."

"I want that money as well as the pardon," she said. She didn't see why she couldn't reap the rewards of the Senate and the Jedi.

The Jedi shared a look.

"We will do what we can," Windu said.

"Very well, I will take the job," she said.
"Dangerous this mission will be," Yoda said.

"I have handled Skywalker plenty of times before," she pointed out. She had given him that scar he wore so proudly on his face.

A stillness fell over the room. A tense silence stretched. She narrowed her eyes, which was hidden under her mask.

"Anakin has fallen to the Dark Side," Kenobi said.

Asajj turned sharply to face him head on. "What?" she asked.

"When he attacked the Chancellor, he was using the Dark Side of the Force," Kenobi repeated.

She wasn't. . . She wasn't that surprised to be honest. He had wrapped his own hands around her neck and strangled her to get information about Tano. He was always dancing towards being overly emotional for a Jedi, especially his anger.

"Very dangerous he is," Yoda said. "Not only to you, but himself. Go not alone, you will."

"We are assigning a Jedi to help you," Windu said.

He motioned with his hand to one of the Jedi standing in a room. The man was a Kiffar, a near human species. He had dark skin and a bright yellow stripe across his face under his eyes. His black hair was braided into locks that extended down to his shoulders. He wore a traditional black Jedi tunic, but it was sleeveless. He wore black armor on his chest and right shoulder.

"This is Quinlan Vos," Windu said. Vos nodded. "He is proficient in psychometry, an ability that lets him read information from an object by touching it."

She gave Vos a harder look.

"I'm especially good at tracking," Vos said in an Kiffu accent. He seemed a bit of the arrogant cocky type.

"And if I don't require help?" she asked.

"This is a requirement of the job," Windu said giving her a stern look.

She looked back over at Vos. At least he wasn't a stuffy serious Jedi.

"Fine," she snapped.

Vos smiled at her.
"Anakin, what are you doing?" Obi-Wan had asked. He had felt the darkness even before he landed on the Separate command ship. Never had he felt darkness like this. Not with Dooku nor Maul. Something was wrong.

"Master Kenobi!" Palpatine shouted. "He's turned to the Dark Side! He's trying to kill me!"

What? How? Anakin would never fall to the Dark Side! But then he took a closer look. Anakin with his knee pressed against the Chancellor's chest. His lightsaber drawn and ready to strike. And in the Force Obi-Wan could see it. The darkness hissing out of Anakin. He was using the Dark Side.

Pain blossomed in Obi-Wan's chest. There was no way Anakin would fall to the Dark Side. Not willingly. He was stronger than this!

"No!" Anakin shouted. "You don't understand, Obi-Wan! He's -" Pain erupted in Obi-Wan's head. Anakin's words blurred. "I have to end this! I have to kill him!"

"Master Kenobi!" Palpatine whimpered. "Anakin has betrayed me, just as he will betray you! Don't let him kill me!"

"You - disease!" Anakin hissed. "I am going to end this once and for all!"

There was a skip of words. A blur. A distortion.

"You can't kill him, Anakin!" Obi-Wan shouted as he started to move forward. The clones moved forward with him. Their blasters were still at the ready. Obi-Wan noticed Vader standing. He looked haggard and worn, but he still ignited his red lightsaber. Obi-Wan opened his mouth, but the words were jumbled. His tongue felt heavy.

"- He is a Sith lord, the Sith lord, - -!" Obi-Wan had said.

Who was? Vader?

The memory went dizzy. The world spun. Anakin was shouting. Screaming. Pleading.

"- He is too dangerous to be kept alive!" Anakin shouted as his words came back into focus. "He must die!"

"Don't! Please don't kill me! Please," Palpatine gasped.

"It is not the Jedi way, Anakin!" Obi-Wan shouted. Killing out of anger, killing a defenseless person, was the way of the Dark Side. Of the Sith!

"Then so be it!" Anakin said as he raised his saber. And his eyes, oh Force his eyes, were gold. He had fallen. Anakin Skywalker had fallen.

Obi-Wan snapped awake. He sat up at once. His body was covered in sweat. A headache pounded in his head from all angles. It attacked the base of his skull, his temples, between his eyes. Just everywhere. He should lay back down, but instead he pushed himself out of his bed onto unsteady feet. He made his way into his private refresher.
He leaned heavily against the sink. He splashed cold water on his face. He cupped his hands brought up handfuls of cold water. He fumbled around the counter until he found a bottle of headache pills. He quickly popped two into his mouth. He generally wasn't one for taking medicine. He usually relied on the Force, but these nightmares and headaches had been persistent and annoying. They interfered when he tried to meditate to rid himself of the blasted things.

He walked back into his room and took a seat on a round cushion. He crossed his legs and closed his eyes to meditate. The Force was there, like it always was. But as he tried to let go and become one with the Force, his headache intensified. He tried to push through it, to just deal with the pain for now.

He focused on his dreams. On his memories. On Anakin. Anakin using the Dark Side of the Force. With yellow eyes. With so much anger in him. He wanted to kill the Chancellor. Why? What had happened? What had gone wrong? Had it been Vader? Vader who was supposedly Anakin from the future?

Something had happened. There was no way Anakin would blindly fall to the Dark Side. Obi-Wan knew Anakin. There had to be a reason. Anakin had seemed unhinged. Desperate. He stated how he had to end this. End what? The war?

Obi-Wan's head continued to hurt. He recalled how Anakin and Vader left together. Were they allies or enemies?

Obi-Wan gave up on meditating. He took a colder shower and dressed in his Jedi robes. Eventually he made his way towards the healing halls.

"Obi-Wan Kenobi?"

Obi-Wan paused and looked over his shoulder to see a familiar Jedi approaching. He couldn't stop his smile.

"Bant," he said as he turned to face her.

She smiled as well. Bant Eerin was one of Obi-Wan's oldest friends. She was two years younger than he was, but they had grown up in the Temple together. She was a Mon Calamari who dressed in light tan Jedi robes.

"I did not know you were back from the front," he said.

She nodded solemnly. A look he was all too familiar with. A haunted look when one thought about the war. When they thought about what they had seen. What they had done.

"It is nice to be home," she said.

"And you are most welcomed," Obi-Wan said.

"Though do tell me, Master Kenobi. Do my eyes deceive or are you walking towards the healing halls on your own?" she asked.

Obi-Wan laughed. Even as a youngling, Obi-Wan disliked the healing halls. He had a reputation, which still stuck to him today, of avoiding medical care and shortening it as much as possible.

"Do not tell me you are going there for a check-up? Without an escort of two healers? Or perhaps you are visiting someone?"
Obi-Wan sighed. "I am afraid you were closer with the first guess."

"Oh," she said sadly. "Are you alright? Were you injured in the Battle of Coruscant?"

"Yes. Attacked from behind. I never saw or it sensed it. One second I was leading the clone troopers who were escorting the Chancellor, and the next I was on the ground blacking out. I woke up in the med bay on a Republic ship. Ever since I've had these bad persistent headaches. It even affects me when I try to meditate."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Bant said.

"It doesn't help that the Force seems to want my attention. I feel like I'm missing something."

"Missing what?"

"I don't know. But I think it relates to what happened on the Seperatist command ship. My memories are fuzzy. Plus, each time I go visit Ahsoka Tano or Senator Amidala, there is a pressing feeling there."

"I don't know if I could help you with your memories, but I could come with you to visit your old grand-padawan."

His appointment with the mind healer had gone as normal. They were able to help ease the pain of his headaches, but they were still there. He would have to continue to deal with it for now.

Obi-Wan had accepted Bant's proposal. That afternoon the two took a speeder to Grand Republic Medical Facility. The red Coruscant Guard clone troopers greeted him as usual and opened the door. They went to Ahsoka's room first. As always, she floated in a bacta tank.

"I see what you mean," Bant said softly. "There is something . . . off here."

"I am relieved to hear it was not just me," Obi-Wan said as he walked up to the tank and pressed his hand against it.

"I'll try to meditate. Perhaps the Force will guide us," she said.

Obi-Wan nodded. Bant sat down on the floor and closed her eyes. Obi-Wan debated about delving into the Force himself, but he could already sense the flare up of his headache if he tried. So he just found peace without the Force. There was the steady beeping of the monitors and Bant's breathing. He closed his eyes and just focused on his own breathing. He reopened his eyes when he heard Bant standing back up.

He looked at her expectantly. Yet she wasn't looking at him. She had stood up and walked right over to a monitor connected to Ahsoka's various life support machines. Bant furiously typed at it. There was an unease in her. Her shoulders were up and tense.

"Bant?" Obi-Wan finally asked. She didn't even spare him a look. "Bant?" he asked again.

"Something is wrong," she said. She looked over at him. "These medications are wrong."

"Are you sure?" he asked.

Bant in her youth had thought about entering the healing halls as a healer. She had spent a few years studying it, before she realized it wasn't for her.

"Yes," she said. "These drugs they're pumping into her system are a dangerous mix. It's almost as if . . ."
"Almost as if?" Obi-Wan prompted.

"They don't want her to wake up," she said softly. "They've been slowly amping up the dosage of the drugs they've been giving her. The anesthesia drug itself is dangerous. It can cause respiratory and cardiovascular collapse."

A chill washed over him. He didn't doubt Bant's words, but there had to be a mistake.

"Obi-Wan," she said in a hard but soft voice. "We have to get her out of here."

He nodded. Bant turned back to the monitor and began typing on it.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"I'm lowering the drug dosages," she said. "Though if someone checks, they'll quickly notice. So I'm not sure how good of a fix this will be." She turned back to him. "She should go check on the senator."

Obi-Wan led the way to Padmé's room. He eyed the two Coruscant Guard that stood guarding her room. For the first time there was a tightness in his chest. They passed into the room without incident. At once Bant walked over to the monitors and began tapping and typing away. It only took a few short minutes before she paused and looked over at him.

"Well?" he asked. His throat a little tight.

"Nothing as bad as Ahsoka," Bant said. "Just some anesthesia to keep her under."

"Wait . . . she's not in a coma?"

"A medically induced one. I would not recommend keeping her down for this long since she's pregnant."

He walked over to her bedside. Again that feeling in the Force was all around him. It caused the hairs on his arm to stand on end. Was this what the Force was trying to tell him? That Padmé and Ahsoka were in danger? But why? This was a Republic medical center. Was there a traitor amongst the staff here?

He placed a hand on Padmé's arm. The Force surged up his arm in a bolt of cool lightning.

"I'm sorry, Obi-Wan. Don't trust Palpatine."

Obi-Wan snatched his hand away. That had been Anakin's voice. But . . . how? What? Anakin wasn't here. But . . . It felt familiar . . . It seemed like it had already been said. But when? He cautiously lowered his hand and placed it on Padmé's arm again. Again he felt the Force surge up his arm.

He was in the cargo hold back on the Invisible Hand. Stun bolts were flying at a retreating Anakin and Vader. They were retreating together towards an entrance in the back.

"Anakin!" Obi-Wan shouted. It was such a desperate plea. His old padawan needed to stop. They needed to fix this. Anakin paused as he looked at Obi-Wan. His face crumpled in grief for a brief instant, and then it faded away. Obi-Wan felt their old master and padawan bond open. A bond that had never been permanently cut.
I'm sorry, Obi-Wan, Anakin said through the Force.

Anakin? Obi-Wan asked.

Don't trust Palpatine, Anakin replied.

Then the bond was closed, and Obi-Wan found himself back in the med room staring down at Padmé. His eyes traveled to her stomach. Padmé herself wasn't Force sensitive. But her two growing babies were bubbling with it. But there was no way that babies, no fetuses, could have sent Obi-Wan the memory. There was no way.

Was this some trick? A trick of the Dark Side? And yet Obi-Wan didn't sense any darkness. Plus that memory . . . it fit. It was like a puzzle piece sliding into its perfectly shaped home. It was a memory. His memory. A memory he had forgotten.

The tightness in his heart doubled. It squeezed his heart. He could hear and feel it pounding harder in his chest.

Don't trust Palpatine.

The Jedi Council already didn't trust Palpatine. He was gathering too much power. With Luke being a time traveler and his talk of an Empire, there was concern this Empire was not the Seperatist winning the war, but Palpatine taking over the Republic.

Don't trust Palpatine.

Ahsoka was slowly being poisoned. Padmé was being kept in a coma. Why? Unless they had seen something on the Invisible Hand. Unless they knew something. They already knew Anakin fell to the Dark Side. That he had attacked the Chancellor. What else was there?

Don't trust Palpatine.

If Palpatine couldn't be trusted, then he had to get Ahsoka and Padmé out of here.
General Grievous marched through the caves of Utapau. His robotic prosthetic limbs were clasped behind his back. He had come here on Sidious' orders. The Sith had claimed it was so the CIS army could regroup and gather their strength, but Grievous saw it as what it really is. They were hiding. Hiding after such a horrible failure and loss.

One-third of their forces had been lost! One-third! It should not have been their loss! The plan was solid! And yet still the Republic dogs and the Jedi filth managed to win.

*Jedi.*

How typical they would come in at the last minute and claim the victory. They were filth. A filth that needed to be purged from this galaxy. A task Grievous was all too willing to undertake himself. He had collected many Jedi lightsabers as proof of this personal quest. The humiliating loss at Coruscant had only continued to fuel his hatred for the vile selfish beings.

The CIS was crippled. Dooku was dead. A fact the Republic was touting loudly and stating the end of the war was near. Grievous wasn't one for politics. Controlling the Separatist Senate was not for him. There was still the Separatist Council, which were here on Utapau as well, but they were annoying, selfish, cowardish worms. Dooku kept them on too loose of a leash which allowed them to do as they pleased. Their greedy exploits oftened hendered the CIS war machine than helped.

So now he was here, General Grievous, feared Jedi hunter, the Supreme Commander of the Droid Army, hiding on some backwater planet. *Hiding!* This was not him! This was not to be his fate! A week was enough time to collect the remaining droid forces. It was time to go on the offensive again. They were already losing systems. They had to strike back! The CIS wasn't the only one to suffer losses at Coruscant! The Republic was stretched thin. He had already thought of several plans to swing the tide of the war back into the favor of the CIS.

But Sidious had said no to all of Grievous' plans and suggestions. He kept saying to be patient. To wait. To rest. Their time was coming. Sidious said the Republic was still reeling from the Battle of Coruscant. The tensions were still high. Their guard was still up. Let them soak in their victory. Let them build up a sense of confidence and arrogance. Then it would be time to strike again.

Grievous disagreed. The Republic forces were still pathetic blood-bag clones. Resting would only strengthen them. Allow them to recover. Droids needed no time to recuperate. Now was the time to keep pushing. Strike them while the wounds were still fresh.

The steady hum and march of droids had faded away as Grievous prowled the tunnels. He found himself in a secluded cave. A place where he could be alone to think and plan and plot.

"You must be Grievous," said a voice.

Grievous spun around. A rapsy scowl escaped from his mouth. Lounging, *lounging!* against a rock was a man. One leg was propped up while the other hung loosely off the rock. He held a lightsaber in his hand and wore black tunics. Though Grievous had never seen him in person, he knew this Jedi all too well.

"Skywalker," Grievous rasped. He didn't hide the enjoyment in his voice.
"General Grievous," Skywalker said with a lazy smile that only made Grievous’ blood boil.

At once the CIS general had pulled two lightsabers out and ignited them. One blue and one green.

"I was looking for a way to cure my boredom. How frutious of you to appear," Grievous said.

"I'm not here to fight," Skywalker said.

"Here to bow and scrape your way to the Separatists? I heard you had gone traitor to the Republic."

Grievous had seen the bounty the GAR had placed on Skywalker, though it was supposedly top-secret intel. However, it wasn’t just the Republic after the famed Jedi’s head, but Sidious also wanted Skywalker alive. Grievous was given strict orders to apprehend the Jedi should he appear. But at this moment, Grievous didn’t care. All he saw was a Jedi. A very annoying Jedi. A Jedi he would love to personally slay.

Skywalker let out a small laugh. "I will be bowing and scraping to no one. Not any more."

"Really? So you mean to tell you are here alone? No Kenobi lurking about to bail you out?"

Grievous had learned that Kenobi and Skywalker were a very annoying team. Where one was, the other was sure to follow.

"Afraid of being defeated? Again?" Skywalker teased.

Grievous growled. He took two large steps forward. Skywalker slid off his rock and ignited his lightsaber. A red blade hummed. Grievous squinted his eyes at the blade. That wasn’t . . . That wasn’t Skywalker’s hilt. Grievous prided himself on knowing the lightsabers of the Jedi, especially those he was most eager to add to his collection. Skywalker’s made that list. But this was not Skywalker’s hilt. At least the one he had used before. Had he crafted a new saber?

But also the beam was red. Only Sith had red lightsabers. Had Skywalker truly turned traitor not only to the Republic but also the Jedi? No matter. Sith or Jedi, Grievous would gladly add that lightsaber to his collection.

"If you're wanting a fight to the death, I will gladly give it to you," Skywalker said in a cocky arrogant voice. "However . . . Before we do that I would like ten minutes of your time."

"To do what?"

"Talk. We can do it from here. With our lightsabers drawn if you would like."

"What do you have to offer me?"

"Victory," Skywalker said with a smile.

"So you have turned traitor, Skywalker. Are you here to give me intel on the Republic and the Jedi?"

"Let's be honest here, shall we? You aren't that interested in the CIS and their politics. The only thing you want, is a fight. And the best fight you can get is by hunting down Jedi. You want to prove yourself the best."

What game was Skywalker playing at?

Skywalker continued, "That same attitude reflects in your commanding abilities. You like winning, especially against the Republic. But you haven't been winning, have you?"
Skywalker smiled. Grievous tightened his grip on his lightsabers. He should just leap forward and end this Jedi now.

"Now, now," Skywalker said sensing the growing aggression. "Let me finish. I'm almost done. Don't you think it is odd how your best laid plans always seem to . . . just perfectly fail? As if . . . someone knew of your plans?"

"Are you saying there is a spy?" Grievous hissed.

He had long suspected that was the case. Skywalker was right. There were some battles that the GAR always seemed to wiggle their way to victory despite the odds. The only way they would have won was if they had known where to attack. Where the weakness in the CIS forces were.

"I don't think spy is the correct word," Skywalker said. There was something off about him. Grievous had never come face to face with him, but knew there was something wrong here. "Let me just cut to the chase here. You're being played, Grievous. The entire CIS is. So is the Republic and the Jedi. Myself included. We're just pawns for your master Sidious."

"Sidious?"

"Tell me, in all your dealings with that man, have you ever seen his face? No? Because he's been hiding his true identity from you. He's really Sheev Palpatine, Chancellor of the Republic."

Skywalker's tone had changed. His voice grew angrier as he went on, till he was speaking through clenched teeth.

"What . . . Sidious is Palpatine?" Grievous asked.

How could that be?

"Think about it, Grievous," Skywalker said. "Think about the times you have won. The times you have lost. What effect did it have on the Republic? On the way their Senate voted? On the powers it gave Palpatine? Scipio? The Republic took over the banks. The attack on Coruscant's powergrid? Resulted in a push in the Senate to keep the war going instead of pursuing peace talks.

"And your last crusade? The Battle of Coruscant? Shouldn't it have worked out for you? You snuck up on Coruscant. You were able to kidnap the Chancellor, and yet the Republic had secret forces waiting nearby. Which only now does Palpatine reveal he had built, and of course the public applauds him for his foresight and grants him more political and military power."

Grievous spun the blue saber in his hand. He was getting antsy.

"This war is a farce," Skywalker spat. "It is all a ploy to give more and more power to Palpatine, so in the end he can create an empire. One built off the Republic, not the Confederacy. The Confederacy exists to provide turmoil so Palpatine can give peace to the people at the price of giving him power. You are meant to lose this war, Grievous."

Grievous spun his lightsaber again. He couldn't deny some of what Skywalker had said.

"You want to know what happens next?" Skywalker teased. "Palpatine tells the Jedi that intelligence has learned of your location here. Fearing it could be a wild bantha chase, they only send Kenobi. However, he manages to defeat you."

"And how you would know that?" Grievous rasped.

"I have a very informed friend. It only cost him an arm," Skywalker said with a slight laugh under
his words. It was as if there was an inside joke there. "How about this. I'm going to leave, and let you think on what I've said. Do some research. Possibly plan to move off this planet? I wouldn't inform Sidious of it. I'll be back in two days time. You can either accept my offer or we can fight."

"Your offer? What offer?"

Skywalker took a step forward. "To destroy Sidious," he growled. "I want to rip him apart piece by piece. I want to take everything he has built up and tear it from him. I've been made a fool. You've been made a fool. The whole galaxy has."

Skywalker deactivated his lightsaber.

"I'll be back," he said. "Oh and here."

He tossed a small datadisc at Grievous' feet.

"You might want to take a look at that," he said again with that stupid cocky smile. "I'll be back, general."

Then he walked away. And Grievous let him walk away. He should have jumped after him. Attacked him while his back was turned. And yet. Grievous stared down at the datadisc while Skywalker's words spun inside his head. He deactivated his lightsabers and clipped them back into place on his back. He slowly bent over and grabbed the disc.

Skywalker returned two days later as promised. He walked in with a confident swagger and that stupid smile upon his face. For a brief moment, Grievous was tempted to capture this fool so he could throw him at the feet of Sidious. To prove his worth. But that thought quickly pushed aside though he still longed to kill Skywalker.

"I see you have your resolve," Skywalker said. "What shall we be doing today? Dueling to our deaths? Or plotting revenge?"

"Revenge," Grievous said.

Skywalker's smile grew larger. He hated Skywalker, but he hated the Republic and the Jedi more. And now he hated Sidious. The disc Skywalker had given had provided him with all the details about Sidious' plans for Grievous. Plans that started when he was still a general on Kalee.

He had been approached by the InterGalactic Banking Clan. They offered him a deal. He would work for them and in exchange the Clan would take on Kalee's massive debt. Kalee was struggling through famine and poverty. Thousands had died. All because of the Huk, the Republic, and the Jedi.

The Huk were the Kaleesh's sworn enemies. The soulless bugs constantly bombarded their planet without respite to capture the Kaleesh to use as slaves. Grievous fought back, and he started to win. He freed the Kaleesh, but that would not sate him. He started to attack all Huk colony worlds. There was going to be nothing left of the Huk when Grievous was done.

But then the Huk turned to the Republic. They pleaded that it was the Kaleesh who started the war, and the fools believed the bugs. The Republic sided with the Huk. They sent Jedi Knights to end the war. The Republic put hefty fines and embargos on the Kaleesh. Then came the droughts then the famine. They couldn't afford off-world trade. Thousands upon thousands died.

The Banking Clan promised an end to it. They alleviated Kalee's debt and started to reestablish trade.
All at the cost of Grievous working for them as their enforcer and debt collector throughout the galaxy. But he missed his home and old life. He hated working with the mindless droids. So when he heard the Huk had desecrated Kaleesh burial grounds and the Republic had done nothing, he abandoned the Clan and returned to Kalee.

He collected his elite warriors. They boarded a ship and were ready to reignite the Huk Wars, but his ship exploded. All of his warriors died, but he survived. Survived because a Clan vessel found his escape pod. But he was barely alive. Grievous was nothing but a husk of what he had been. The Banking Clan had taken him to Geonosis and offered to give him a new experimental bionic body. With it Grievous could take his revenge on the Republic, who had been the ones behind his ship's destruction, by taking command of the newly founded CIS droid army. Grievous consented under the condition they didn't alter his mind.

It had been a lie. It had all been a lie! There had been no Republic plot to destroy his ship. It had been Dooku! He and the CIS had planted a bomb on Grievous' ship. Had made sure his seat would eject from the wreck at the last moment. But Grievous hadn't been as injured as they had hoped when they scooped him out of the wreckage. They had to add injuries to make it appear more life threatening.

And then they had altered Grievous' mind. They trimmed away unwanted memories, memories that would keep his loyalty to Kalee. They enhanced his rage centers. They had purposely crafted their desired general and warrior.

A warrior he was. A warrior he would continue to be! The CIS had been fools to grant him supreme command of their armies. He was going to destroy them. Destroy the Republic. Destroy the Jedi. Then he would use the droid army to bring about a new era for Kalee. One of prosperity and health. But first he had to deal with Skywalker. Oh, he still planned on a driving a lightsaber or two through that pathetic worm. But first he would get what he could out of him. No doubt Skywalker also had similar thoughts. As if he was going to allow Grievous to waltz around the galaxy after Sidious was dead.

So be it. Let them have their revenge. Then they could have their duel to the death.
R2-D2 booted up. His dome swiveled around as he took in the empty cockpit. He detached himself from the charging bank and left to explore the rest of the ship.

**Function:** Locate AS Unit

**Status:** Unable to locate.

So the AS unit was still gone. The droid went about checking up on the ship. He checked the life support systems as well as the engine. Everything was running smoothly. He opened up a connection to the holonet. He had several searches going as per requested from his organic unit. He collected the completed searches, stored them away in the proper files, and then started up a few new ones.

With that done, he made his way to the crew quarters. It was time to check up on the DV unit.

**Function:** Locate and Assess DV Unit

**Status:** Found. Alive. Unhurt[?]. No change in previous status.

The DV unit sat on the floor with his eyes closed. His back was against the bed. He was equipped with only a small amount of exterior cloth. Usually organics wore a bit more. The unit only wore an open robe and some underwear. Then again the unit was missing several appendages. Wasn't much there to cover up.

"What do you want, droid?" the unit asked.

**Query:** [Fueled?]

DV glared at the droid. "Are you wondering if I have eaten?"

R2's dome swiveled around the room and noted the ration bars still sitting untouched on the small table.

**Statement:** [Affirmative.]

"I will eat when I am hungry," DV grumbled.

**Statement:** [Your battery will get low. Need to refuel. Do not want to reach critical condition.]

DV continued to glare. Then he snapped up his hand, his only hand. One of the ration bars floated off the table and into the open hand. DV used his teeth to rip open the package. Then he took a large bite out of the bar.

"Satisfied?" he said with a mouth full of food.
R2 turned around, but the DV unit spoke up again.

"Droid," he said.

RS stopped and spun his dome around so his photoreceptor pointed at him.


The DV unit was quite interesting. According to the AS unit, which was R2's 'master,' the DV unit was actually the same unit as AS. Which was very odd as they did not look the same. Granted there were astromech models very similar to R2. Some even almost identical. But the DV unit was quite different from his source.

But AS had explained that DV was from the future. He had been corrupted and heavily damaged. And DV wasn't from the future alone. There was also his son, the LS unit. Organics could combine two source codes from two organic units to create a new one. The new unit was manufactured inside one of these units, usually the 'female' unit. R2's other primary master, the PA unit, was currently building a new small organic unit. And this new organic was actually the LS unit.

Statement: [No. I've searched through the Republic and Jedi files. No mention of the LS unit.]

The DV unit deflated. He lowered his head. His hand tightened around the ration bar. It crumbled and broke apart. It was clear the DV unit cared greatly for his son. R2 let out a low tone beep. DV didn't look up or respond, so R2 left him. He made sure to lock the door behind him though he questioned how well it would actually hold DV. If he was anything like R2's AS unit, then a locked door would not be enough to hold him in. But so far it had worked.

R2 returned to searching the holonet. He made sure to run some fresh searches for the LS unit. He had been able to find the PA unit and the AT unit in the Grand Republic Medical Facility at Coruscant under heavy guard. He wasn't able to dig into the medical files, as they were placed behind some hefty and impressive firewalls. R2 was currently working on slicing into them.

It was odd that the LS unit wasn't there as well. It was a shame the Invisible Hand had been destroyed at the Battle of Coruscant. R2 could have sliced into the ship's security holos and tracked what had happened to the LS unit after the DV and AS units lost track of him. Even AS had asked the whereabouts of the LS unit. R2 hadn't had much interaction with this newer Skywalker model, but he seemed much more like AS than DV. R2 approved.

The AS unit returned a few hours later. He walked into the cockpit slowly. Almost as if he was dragging himself. He collapsed into the pilot's chair. R2 disconnected from the holonet and rolled over to his primary master unit.

Query: [Recharge and refuel?]

AS sighed as he leaned his head back.
"There is still so much to do," he said.

**Query:** [How was your mission?]

AS lowered his head and smiled. "Successful," he said. "Grievous is going to take command of the droid army. I helped him dig through their program to get rid of any failsafes Palpatine may have put in there. Any override controls."

**Statement:** [I do not trust that cyborg.]

"Heh. Neither do I. He doesn't trust me either. That's fine. I don't care. He's played his role for now. All I wanted was for him to take control of the droid army away from Palpatine."

**Query:** [And what if he attacks the Republic with it? Goes after my primary organic units? This is dangerous.]

"We need a little bit of chaos," AS said. "Trust me, this is all part of the plan."

R2 didn't respond right away. He was uncomfortable about this, but he did trust AS.

**Statement:** [Ok.]

AS smiled and again pet R2's dome.

"Any updates?" he asked.

**Statement:** [PA and AT units are still in medbay on Coruscant. However, the Jedi Order has requested their transfer to the Jedi Temple.]

AS sat up a little straighter in his chair. "And?" he asked.

**Statement:** [The request was denied.]

AS sighed and leaned back into his chair. "It would have been better to get them to the Temple," he muttered. "At least I know they'd be in safer hands . . . Is there no way you can alter the request response? Approve it?"

**Statement:** [I can look into it.]

AS smiled, though it wasn't a large smile. "Thanks," he said softly.

**Query:** [I am worried about the two organic units. Can we not secure them ourselves?]

"I've been thinking on that," AS said as brought his gloved hand up and pinched the bridge of his nose. "But that bounty on my head makes it really hard to go to Coruscant right now."

While digging through the Republic and Jedi files, R2 had come across the classified bounty the Republic had put on the AS unit. It was a very large amount. AS was sure the bounty had been placed on his head by Palpatine.

"How's Vader?"

**Statement:** [DV unit is grumpy and is still asking about the LS unit. Still unable to locate LS.]

"And what of Palpatine?" AS asked. His tone of voice had shifted. There was anger there.
"And not speaking up for the Jedi who supposedly saved him? Allowing the public to think it was all the Jedi's fault?"

Statement: [Affirmative.]

"So I've gotten the droid army away from Palpatine," AS said. "I think it might be time to rid any control he has over the Separatists."

Query: [How so?]

A smile grew on AS's face. A smile R2 didn't like.

"We just need to get rid of the Separatist Council," he said. "With them gone, Palpatine's major pawns in the CIS will be gone. Then it will be time to focus on the Republic side. Hopefully by then Vader will be more open and willing to share his knowledge."

R2 only said nothing.

"Alright," AS said. "R2 I need you to set a course for Mustafar."

R2 beep a confirmation and plugged into the terminal. He set the course, and the ship jumped to hyperspace.

Obi-Wan and Bant had reported to the Council about Padmé and Ahsoka's condition. The Council believed the report, but wanted more definitive proof. So the next day Obi-Wan returned to the Grand Republic Medical Center with Vokara Che, Chief Healer of the Order. They found the terminal in Ahsoka's room had been locked down. They couldn't access her records nor the machines.

However, Vokara looked carefully at all the equipment, especially to what the various tubes were connected to.

"What do you see?" Obi-Wan asked.

"There is a lot of medicine going into her," Vokara said. "Though I am not sure what."

Padmé's terminal had not been locked down, but Bant hadn't changed anything there. They returned to the Temple and Council meeting was called.

"I believe Knight Eerin's report is correct," Vokara said. "However, I do not have proof on Ahsoka Tano. I can confirm Padmé Amidala's status. She is currently being kept in a medicated coma."

"Worrying this is," Yoda said.

The Council agreed that the two should be moved out of the med center. First they tried the official way by requesting the two be moved to the Jedi Temple's healing halls. Ahsoka, previously a Jedi and Force sensitive, may heal better with Jedi healers. Padmé was carrying two Force sensitive babies. Plus, the Jedi could keep both of them safe from Anakin, which was why the medical center was under such strict guard.

Obi-Wan returned to the med center the next day. He parked his speeder in the hangar and walked to
the door with the two red Coruscant clone trooper Guards.

"I'm sorry sir," one said, holding up a hand. "But the Medical Center is closed to guests. Only medical personnel are allowed to enter."

Obi-Wan returned to the Temple and found out the request to move Padmé and Ahsoka had been denied. There was a sinking feeling in his heart. With no visitors allowed, there was no need to put up a show of having Ahsoka slowly dying. They could just kill her outright and claim she had a sudden turn for the worse.

They had to get her out of there.

A new Council meeting was called. It ran very long. Those attending over holocalls came and went as they were needed at their respective war fronts.

"We are Jedi," Master Shaak Ti said. "We are not criminals. We cannot simply force or break our way into a Republic medical center. How would we explain that to the Republic? To the Senate?"

The Order was currently receiving a lot of negative backlash after the Battle of Coruscant. Why hadn't the Jedi done more? Shouldn't they have prevented this? Shouldn't they have ended the battle faster? The public needed something to vent their frustrations on, and instead of the Separatists, it had been the Jedi. Stealing patients from a med center would earn the Order no favors.

"So you suggest we plead our case to the Senate?" a holograph of Master Plo Koon asked.

"I fear that would take too long," a holograph of Master Ki-Adi-Mundi said. "This is a rather time sensitive matter."

"Plus, we do not have a lot of hard evidence," Vokara Che pointed out. She was sitting in on the meeting. "If there really is someone working within the medical center, they could quickly change records to dispute our claims."

"And thus drag out a Senate hearing," Mace said.

"Perhaps we should simply put our trust in the Force," Master Oppo Rancisis said. "Ahsoka Tano isn't dead yet, but if it is time for her to become one with the Force then it is time."

"Are you saying we just let her be murdered?" Obi-Wan asked.

Master Rancisis only shrugged.

"If Master Kenobi's suspicions are true," Master Agen Kolar said, "and Senator Amidala and Ahsoka Tano were witness to crimes against the Republic, we should free them from the medical center. Especially if this concerns Chancellor Palpatine."

"And what if the one causing the poison is nothing more than an undercover Separatist? That this has nothing to do with Palpatine?" Master Stass Allie via holograph asked. "We serve the Republic. We cannot simply break the laws when they don't work for us. We have to uphold the order. We must continue to push this through official channels."

"And if Palpatine is behind this," Agen argued, "then he can easily get the matter delayed or shuffled off to some committee while Ahsoka Tano is poisoned to death."

The debate went round and round the Council room. The meeting had been adjourned with the agreement the Order would push the official channels. The Jedi were peacekeepers. They couldn't
break the law.

Obi-Wan returned to his room. His heart was heavy. He agreed with the Council. They had to put their faith in the Republic. But . . . There was that pressing feeling in the Force. There was a part of him that wanted to break into the medical center and get them out. But how would he? It wasn't like Padmé or Ahsoka could walk out. He would have to secure medical pods along with additional help.

Then he'd have to contend with the Coruscant Guard. He'd need a large speeder or ship. Then there was the question of where to bring them. Could he get them off planet? Or should he try and return to the Temple? What if the Republic demanded them back? What if they demanded Obi-Wan's arrest? Would he be labeled a traitor? A criminal? Would he be put on trial as Ahsoka had?

Yes, he would.

That wasn't who he was. He was a Jedi. He faithfully served the Order and the Republic. And yet . . . Why did he feel this way? He took a deep breath. He should try to meditate, though he was still plagued with the headaches.

"Meditate we all should," Yoda had said as he ended the Council meeting. "Jedi we are, remember you all should. Attached we are not."

Obi-Wan could sense more than one Council member wanting to argue against it. This wasn't about attachment, at least to them. This was about bringing justice and peace to the Republic, so they believed. But Yoda was right. This was why it was dangerous for a Jedi to get too attached. They must serve the entire galaxy. Not just their personal feelings.

But that didn't make it any easier to deal with one's personal misery.
Mustafar Klegger Corp Mining Facility.
Control Center.
Security Holocam #142.
Date: 009-15-4509-182.
Time: 0642 CST.

The blue hologram of the security recording showed the control center of the mining facility on Mustafar. Several beings stood around with several B-1 battle droids standing guard. A few droids were stationed at terminals as they monitored the war progress. Wat Tambor was looking at a datapad. Nute Gunray was off to the side with his aid, Aruteous Gunnay, and Rune Haako. They were whispering softly to each other. The camera's audio was unable to pick up what they were saying, but their tone could be heard as angry.

San Hill, the current chairman of the InterGalactic Banking Clan, sat next to his vice-chairman, Lo Vapeet and another unknown Muun banking clan representative. They were sitting at terminals. What were on those terminals was unknown. The camera's angle was not right to capture it. Shu Mai was sitting while her aid, Cat Miin, fixed her hair.

Poggle the Lesser along with Chief Lieutenant Sun Fac both hovered behind a B-1 droid who was at a terminal against the wall. The monitor was showing progress of one of the Outer Rim sieges against the Republic. The two Geonosians were arguing amongst themselves and pointing at the screen.

Tikkes, the Quarren Mon Calamari senator, was nodding off in a chair. Passel Argente held a small comlink in a secluded section of the command room. He was on a private voice-only call. He spoke in a soft voice unable to be picked up by the security camera. His entourage of three Koorivars, which included Denaria Kree, stood nearby watching him anxiously. The last two members of the Seperatist Council, Po Nudo and Rogwa Wodrata, were talking with each other. Po's aid walked up to them and offered a bottled drink to the two.

Suddenly there was a loud beep. All members of the Council stopped and looked at the large holotable in the center of the room. It was Nute Gunray who approached it and turned it on. A holograph of General Grievous appeared.

"I see the Council has made it safely to Mustafar," Grievous said.

"We have yet to come in contact with Lord Sidious," Gunray said. "I am questioning your orders to send us here."

Grievous coughed. His whole body hunched over. But the spell quickly ended and the general straightened back up.
"The Republic dogs are eager to end this war," Grievous said. "They think after Coruscant that their victory is secured. They are hunting the Council down as we speak. It was no longer safe to stay at Utapau."

"And you think of us safe here?" Wat Tambor asked as he approached the holotable.

"I am sending you a bodyguard," Grievous said. "He should be arriving soon."

"And who is it?" Shu Mai asked. "It isn't that Maul creature is it? He's proven to be quite unstable and his results are rather lacking."

"No," Grievous said. "His name is Lord Vader."

"And when shall we leave?" asked Passel Argente. "With Dooku dead we need to take control of the Confederacy. We can't keep hiding forever on backwater planets."

"When we will hear from Sidious?" Gunray demanded.

"All in due time councilors," Grievous said. "Please direct all your questions to Vader once he arrives. He is quite familiar with Lord Sidious. He has worked at his side for years."

The call shut off. The council members shared looks and grumbled amongst themselves. Nute Gunray waved his aids over to him. They were talking softly, but they were close to the security camera. It was able to pick up the conversation.

"I do not like this," Nute said. "I do not trust Grievous."

"You think he is acting without Sidious' approval?" Rune Haako asked.

"We need to get in contact with him," Nute said. "Grievous isn't aware of our lord's full grand plan. That Kalee cyborg trash is only a pawn. This war is dragging on too long. We were promised peace and a handsome reward! And who is this Vader? I have never heard of him before."

It wasn't long before a B-1 droid announced an approaching ship that had clearance codes to land. The Council let the ship land. San Hill stood beside Wat Tambor at the window.

"That looks like a smuggler ship," San Hill said as he crossed his long arms over his thin chest.

- Video paused. -

- Switching to new camera feed. -

Mustafar Klegger Corp Mining Facility.
Landing Pad #3.
Security Holocam #38
Date: 009-15-4509-182.
Time: 0726 CST.

A medium sized freighter ship sat down on the landing pad. The loading ramp came down and soon a tall humanoid figure swept down the ramp. He wore a black cloak with a hood drawn up over its face. A white and blue astromech trailed behind him. However the figure stopped and turned to the droid.

"Stay here," the figure said. "Watch the ship."
The droid let out a sad sounding beep.

The figure turned and walked down towards the mining facility. The droid rolled back into the ship and the landing ramp closed.

- Video paused. -

- Switching to new camera feed. -

Mustafar Klegger Corp Mining Facility.
Control Center.
Security Holocam #147.
Date: 009-15-4509-182.
Time: 0734 CST.

The blue hologram switched back to the control center. However, this time it was from a different angle. The door was in clear view against the far wall. It slid open and in walked the cloaked figure from the landing pad. The face was heavily shadowed. The door shut behind him. The Council members moved forward to greet him. San Hill, with his long thin legs, was there first.

"Welcome, Lord Vader!" he said enthusiastically. Senator Tikkes rolled his eyes at such a display. "On behalf of the leadership of the Confederacy of Independent Systems, let me be the first to welcome you!"

He held out his long gray hand for Vader to take, but the figure didn't take it. Instead the cloaked head moved as Vader looked around the room.

"Is this all of you?" asked a clear, but dark voice. A man's voice.

San withdrew his hand to his side. He glanced back at the others.

"Yes this is all of us," Shu Mai said stepping forward. "Grievous told us you've been working alongside Lord Sidious for years, and yet none of us have ever heard your name until now."

"Do you know the frequency with which to get in contact with Lord Sidious?" Passel Argente asked. "We have not heard from him. I would like to confirm your appointment from him myself."

"Do you doubt my abilities?" Vader asked.

"I do," Passel said as he stood up straight. "I doubt Grievous as well. Droids secure this man. If he confirms your appointment, then we shall let you go. You must understand our caution."

Two B-1 droids approached. Their blasters raised as they approached.

"You do have one thing right," Vader said as he watched the droids approached. "You were right to be cautious."

As the droids approached, a blue beam snapped to life in Vader's hand. He easily slashed through the two droids. Their severed bodies fell to the floor. Vader straightened up. His hood had fallen back. San Hill visibly recoiled and took a few steps back.

"You're- you're Anakin Skywalker!" he shouted.

"A Jedi!" someone else shouted.
"This is a trap!"

"Kill him! Droids!"

Vader / Anakin Skywalker smiled. He lunged forward. His lightsaber burning into San Hill's chest and curving an arch through it in order to get the Muun's three hearts. The Council members watched in frozen horror as San fell to the floor with a sickening thump.

"You have gotten one thing wrong," Vader / Skywalker said. "I am not a Jedi."

Darth Sidious watched the security holocams from the Mustafar mining facility as Anakin Skywalker, calling himself Darth Vader, cut through the Separatist Council. It should have been a sight Sidious watched in glee. But instead it was with barely controlled anger.

The Council members scrambled away from Skywalker as the battle droids approached. The droids did little to slow Skywalker down. Then he came for the council members one by one. Some tried to escape. Poggle the Lesser tried to get around Skywalker. He scrambled around the floor over the broken bodies of the droids like the bug he was hoping to get to the door. Until he was ripped off the floor with the Force. He hung there, his wings fluttering fast, his hands scrambled to his throat. And then a lightning flash of blue slashed across his neck freeing his head from his body.

Other members tried to beg and plead for mercy. Shu Mai was down on her knees with her hands clasped before her. Tears streamed down her shriveled cheeks.

"Please," she begged. "We were bribed! We were promised a reward! A h- h- handsome reward- !"

Skywalker paused before her. He smiled. Shu smiled. A desperate smile. Had she gotten to him? He leaned over and placed a hand on her cheek.

"But I am your reward," Skywalker said softly. The camera's audiofeed just barely picking it up.

"Don't you find me handsome?"

"Please!" she screeched. "Plea-"

The blue blade was pushed right through her mouth silencing her forever.

Sidious scowled. He had to switch to another camera as he tracked Skywalker's progress. As Skywalker walked casually after the remaining living council members, he carelessly let his lightsaber drag across the fallen bodies and various machines leaving a sizzling trail of molten metal and charred flesh. The last few remaining Council members had fled down a hall to a conference room. Of course the door did little to hold Skywalker back. Skywalker ripped it off its track with the use of the Force. He threw it down the hall behind him.

"Stop!" Rune cried. "Enough! We surrender! Do you understand? You win! We surrender!"

Skywalker paused, but then he brought up his lightsaber.

"You can't just kill us!" Rune cried. "We're unarmed! Defenseless! We surrender! Please! Please! You're a Jedi!"
Skywalker paused again. "And yet you started a war to destroy the Jedi," he said. "Congratulations. You've destroyed one of them."

Sidious' anger continued to rise. It was boiling inside him as he watched Skywalker cut off Wat Tambor's arms. Without his suit, Tambor's body started to depressurize and oxygen filled the methane fed piping. Nute Gunray was saved for last. His death was the slowest and cruelest.

"No- no!" Nute Gunray pleaded as Skywalker slowly approached. "Please! I will give you anything you want! Just name your price! Cre- credits? Lots of credits?"

Skywalker just continued his slow progress forward. Nute Gunray was on the floor. He had crawled backwards into the far wall. His heads were out in front of him as that would be enough to fend off a Force user.

"Women!" croaked Nute. "I give you women! Or men! Anyone! Anything! Property! Houses! Ships!" The pitch of his voice was going higher and higher.

Skywalker paused as his boots came to a stop right in front of Nute.

"There is . . . There is one thing," Skywalker said.

"Yes?" Nute said. There was a hopeful edge in his voice. "Name it!"

Skywalker looked down at Nute. His smile twisted into something dreadful. He brought his lightsaber and pointed it at Nute.

"Your death," Skywalker hissed.

"No- no!" Nute cried. That cried quickly morphed into a scream as Skywalker chopped off one of the extended hands.

"A very slow death," Skywalker added as he expertly sliced off the second hand.

Then piece by piece, Skywalker took apart Nute Gunray all while leaving him alive. The head was the last to go. As it rolled onto the floor amongst Nute's other scorched body parts, Skywalker paused and looked at his work.

"Thank you," he said pleased as he deactivated his lightsaber.

Sidious stopped the recording.

Anakin Skywalker!

Sidious had to admit, part of him was impressed with how far the golden Chosen One of the Jedi had fallen into the Dark Side. However, Sidious was pissed that Anakin had fallen outside of his control. Anakin was supposed to have bowed his head to Sidious. Be Sidious' newest and greatest tool in bringing about his new Empire.

But now that new Empire was in jeopardy of even happening. Everything had been going so smoothly! Until Darth Vader and his son Luke arrived from the future. Clearly Sidious' plans had worked! Anakin had fallen. Sidious had reviewed the tapes the Jedi Order had supplied of Anakin and Luke talking. Luke talked of an Empire. One where Vader was second-in-command to an Emperor. Vader was a mighty and fearsome Sith lord! And yet he was only second. Second to Sidious!
Apparently in the future Sidious had not instilled enough loyalty into Vader. Then again it was the nature of the Sith to be deceitful. Perhaps Sidious had taught Vader too well. Sidious had noticed that Vader was absent from Skywalker's little Mustafar excursion, though the two had left the *Invisible Hand* together. Granted the two may not be on the best of terms after Vader tried to prevent Anakin from falling to the Dark Side. What was even more interesting was Skywalker was using Vader's name.

Sidious drummed his fingers against his desk. Anakin Skywalker was becoming a problem. A serious problem. It hadn't even been two weeks, and already he was wreaking havoc across the galaxy. The Mustafar security recordings had proven Skywalker had approached Grievous, which would explain Grievous taking off with the droid army. Sidious had tried to contact the general to demand what he was doing. But no calls went through. He tried the deactivation sequence of the droids. It didn't work. Grievous had complete control of the droids and was still fighting the Republic.

The irony wasn't lost on Sidious. Isn't this what he had aimed to do? Why Dooku had rebuilt Grievous this way? Why Sidious had manipulated Anakin Skywalker just so? Grievous was supposed to be a war hungry general. Anakin was supposed to fall to the Dark Side.

But they were supposed to do it under Sidious' control! They were his tools! His pawns! He was the master here!

"Vader," Sidious hissed.

This was all Vader's fault. He was dangerous. Far too dangerous. He knew too much. How else would Skywalker and Grievous know of the droid deactivation code? A cold feeling settled deep and low inside Sidious. A feeling he was not accustomed to feeling. One of fear.

What else did Vader know? If he knew about the droids, did he know about the clones? Surely he did.

Sidious had to stop this. *Now.*

But how? He hadn't planned for time travelers. He hadn't planned for Grievous nor Skywalker going rogue. Everything was a mess. With Dooku and the Separatist Council both dead, his hold the Separatists was slim. He only had a few puppets left within the CIS, and even then they weren't the best. It would be too much of a hassle to try and regain control. He should cut his losses with the CIS, and move to reassert his control on the Republic.

He still had a few worthy pawns to lure out Skywalker such as Kenobi, Tano, and Skywalker's pregnant wife Amidala. Sidious was pleased with himself for not outright killing them all off. He wanted to, especially Kenobi. Instead he had the clones stun Kenobi, allowing Sidious time to alter the Jedi master's memories. Kenobi couldn't be free to go back to the Order with any thoughts that Palpatine was a Sith. That would not do. Nor could he allow Ahsoka Tano or Padmé Amidala to talk about what they knew either. They were both being kept quiet.


Which one of these three pawns would be best to use against Skywalker? Sidious already knew the answer. Amidala was the best, but Sidious wasn't as willing to use her. At least not until she gave birth. If Sidious couldn't have the Chosen One, then he would have the Chosen One's children. That left Kenobi and Tano.

How was Sidious going to play this off? His goal was to have Anakin Skywalker at his side as his
apprentice. Was that still possible? Sidious had planned to make Skywalker continue to be the hero the public loved. The hero of the Republic and the hero of the Empire. It was why he had made sure Anakin's deflection had been kept a classified secret.

But was it worth it? Was Skywalker too far gone to be lured to Sidious' side? If so, he needed to be killed.

Sidious drummed his fingers on his desk as he thought. He twisted his pawns this way and that on his mental playing board. It took him a while, but finally a smile crawled across his face as a plan settled in his mind.
Interlude

- - - Interlude - - -

Far above, far below.
We don't know where we'll fall.
Far above, far below.
What once was great, is rendered small.

Darth Maul repeated his personal mantra he used his entire life to hone his focus. Hone his hate and anger. To help him endure. It was ironic in how it reflected Maul's life.

Far above, far below.

He again stood in the Naboo reactor shaft. The screams of the padawan causing him to smile as the Jedi master fell.

We don't know where we'll fall.

He was falling down, down, down the shaft.

Far above, far below.

Savage. His brother. Savage had saved him. Mother Telzin helped him claw his way out of insanity. He was made new. Made new to seek his revenge. It took a few setbacks, but eventually he had started his criminal empire on Mandalore. Until Sidious arrived . . .

What once was great, is rendered small.

Sidious had defeated him. Imprisoned him. Put a slave chip in him. He was no longer the valued apprentice. He was a slave. The leash was back around this throat, only this time tighter. He was a Sith. Powerful. Deadly. One who used fear, anger, and hate as their weapons. His life would end only when his rage had finally been vented. When his need for vengeance was finally satisfied. It would be a long life.

However, he hated waiting. He hated hiding. Two things which he was doing now. He sat with legs crossed on a cold metal floor meditating. His eyes were closed. A hand rose and felt the scar on his bare chest. A scar marking where Sidious had placed the slave chip against his heart. His anger and hatred roared to life.

Sidious.

How he hated that man. He would be Maul's finest victory. For in killing one's master, a Sith finally became a true master. Then there would be no one to stop him from creating his own empire. A dark empire void of Jedi. For finally Maul would have his revenge! The revenge of all the Sith who had fallen to a Jedi's blade! He would destroy the Jedi as they had destroyed the Sith! Finally those emotionless cowards would taste the dust of their own demise. They would-

A large crash brought Maul immediately out of his meditation. His eyes snapped open. A scowl pulled on his lips. He grabbed his lightsaber which had been resting on the floor in front of him. He jumped to his bare feet. He wore only his tight black pants. He marched through the cold dark halls of the abandoned workshop. He followed the disgustingly bright light in the Force to the hangar.
A flick of his fingers and the door slid open. At once a metal crate was being thrown at him. He quickly rolled and dodged it. The metal crate slammed into the door and clattered loudly to the floor. Though Maul had no time to rest. Small engine parts and tools were being flung at him. He summersaulted over them and batted a few away with his unlit saber. He would have slashed them in half, but had already learned the hard way that replacing the tools cost money. He was already on his third set.

Maul ducked under some empty oil jugs and threw his hands up. He sent a powerful Force blow across the hangar, and the other figure flew off his feet.

Finally.

Maul clipped his saber to his belt as he marched across the hangar to the fallen youth. He slammed his foot down on the boy's chest. He let out a scream in pain. Maul leaned over.

"I have to give you credit," Maul said. "You aren't one for quitting, are you?"

Bright blue eyes glared up at him. This boy was no Jedi, though he sung with a sickening brightness in the Force. But those eyes also held anger and hatred. Maul had pondered about possibly turning this boy. Making him his apprentice. If Maul was to become a true Sith lord, he would need one.

"It's a bad habit of mine," the boy said. His voice laced with pain.

Maul growled at him and finally lifted his foot off. Blood had soaked through the tan shirt he wore. The boy's wound had reopened. Maul bent down, grabbed the boy by the arm, and pulled him up to his feet. Maul noted the broken metal chain that was connected to the metal binder around the boy's ankle. It looked like the boy had used the Force to pry one of the links apart.

Maul was running out of ideas and resources in keeping this karkin' boy confined. He dragged the boy back to his room and threw him down on the thin mattress on the floor.

"Take your shirt off," Maul barked.

The boy hesitated, but then slowly lifted his shirt up. He flinched as the fabric got caught on his wound. His torso was wrapped in linen bandages which covered the bacta patches. Blood was seeping through where the boy had been stabbed in the side by Dooku. Maul growled as he grew impatient. He wasn't one for going slow. One for healing. For waiting. For patience. Even with his own wounds, he often relied on the Force and his anger to help ease the pain and speed up the healing.

He had to remind himself of what he was after. That the prize was worth it.

Time travel.

This boy, this Luke, was from the future. No wonder Sidious was interested in him and his father. With knowledge of the future, Sidious could learn how well his plans played out. Though from the looks of it, Vader was trying to derail them. Vader who was an older Anakin Skywalker.

Wasn't that interesting?

Not that Maul could blame Vader. As a previous apprentice of Sidious, he too wanted to unravel his master's plans. Which is why he had taken Luke. He wanted to know the secret of time travel. Even if it was a one way thing. Even if it only went to the past. Even if he only managed to go back a year. That was enough for Maul.
The knowledge of knowing future events was so tantalizing. He could topple Sidious. Create his own dark empire. He'd be able to destroy the Jedi Order himself. No one would hold him back. He could use his younger self. Though he'd have to careful. He knew himself too well. He didn't tolerate rivals. If he was his younger self, he would aim to kill his older self.

But all of this was mere fantasizing. There was still the task of finding out how to time travel, and so far the boy was not helpful. He said he had already told Maul everything he knew. He didn't know how he had time traveled, though he did believe the Force had done it. Of course it was the Force! What else would it be?

"Thanks," Luke muttered as he pulled on a fresh shirt over his new bandages. He glanced down at the binders on his feet. "You going to chain me up again?"

"Should I?" Maul asked. "Are you going to try and run again?"

Luke shrugged. Maul believed he would try to run again, but doubtful he would try again soon. Though he might. For now Maul would have to settle on keeping Luke close instead of keeping him locked away. He was far less likely to attempt something if Maul was watching his every move.

"Let's go," Maul grumbled.

Luke looked up at him again with that unsettling blue gaze. He nodded and got to his feet. They went to a large open room that was now a living room. It was mostly empty with a thread-bare brown couch, a low table, and two chairs in one corner. A holoprojector sat on top of the table. The rest of the space was Maul's office. He had set up a desk in a corner and with acquired holoprojectors and terminals.

Nar Shaddaa was an obvious place to hide, but it was a good hiding place. Known as Little Coruscant, the moon of the Hutt homeworld was completely covered by never ending city. However there was nothing nice about the moon. It was completely filled with scum and villainy. Many bounty hunters called this place home. As did many underground criminal organizations, especially those run by the Hutts. Which in turn meant there were a lot of credits to be found here along with whatever else you wanted to buy. Weapons. Ships. Parts. Drugs. Information. The list was endless.

Luke hobbled over to the couch and collapsed on to it. It creaked loudly. Maul turned away and headed to his desk. He heard the holoprojector turn on. He wasn't sure how long he could suffer this boy until he threw him back into his room with a fresh chain. Luke brought up the holonet and started to browse through the channels. Maul gritted his teeth as he sat down.

"Welcome to the Republic Galactic News. I'm Kara Talgen," came a voice of a female newscaster.

"And I'm Eno Vaken," came a male's voice. "We have a report on the war."

"After the Battle of Coruscant and the death of Count Dooku, the Republic was hoping for a quick and swift end to the three-year long war," Kara said.

Eno chimed in, "Reports over the last two Coruscant standard days state that Separatists droid forces have been retreating from several battlefronts in the Outer Rim. Many were hopeful this truly did
"However," Kara said, "Reports have been coming in over several hours that a large Separatist fleet has entered the Polith system in the Inner Rim and started attacking Thyferra."

Maul turned around to look at the projector. The holo showed two people, one a female human and a red male humanoid, presenting the news while images of a battle was projected behind them.

"Thyferra has always had constant and heavy protection by the Galactic Army of the Republic," Eon said. "It is where 95% of the galaxy's bacta is produced. This attack has many across the Republic questioning and fearing if bacta supplies will soon run low. If the Separatists get control of the planet, this could greatly hinder not only the clone army but also the citizens of the Republic."

"The good news is that the GAR has been quick to respond to this threat," Kara said. "A military spokesperson responded to our request for information. They said, 'There was always the possibility that the CIS would target Thyferra. Since the start of the war, there have been several contingencies in place in case an attack occurred. We are confident the GAR will quickly throw back the droid forces.'"

"This is quite a daring move for the Separatists," Eon said looking over at Kara.

She nodded. "Thyferra is an Inner Rim World."

"Yes, and the Separatist have been moving their attacks more and more Core world. Of course attacking Coruscant itself just weeks ago."

"Sounds like to me they're just growing more desperate."

"It is unknown how badly the droid forces suffered at Coruscant, but it is estimated that the CIS lost a quarter of their forces there if not more. And thankfully Supreme Chancellor Palpatine had commissioned those new ships."

"Great foresight on his part," Kara agreed.

Maul rolled his eyes. He was about to turn around when suddenly the scene changed. Bright red text rolled across the hologram stating it was "breaking news." Then it showed the two newscasters again. They were both looking down at datapads.

Kara looked up. "This is just in," she stated. "Supreme Chancellor Palpatine has just released an emergency bulletin."

The scene changed. It showed Sidious in his mask as Palpatine. He sat behind an impressive desk. His hands were folded neatly. He wore a dark fancy robe. His face was full of sorrow as the ever empathetic and kind leader he projected.

"Citizens of this grand Republic," Sidious said. "I have come before you to announce dreadful news."

The news showed scenes from battle. Clones fighting droids. In the distance one could see a glowing lightsaber zipping through the enemy line. The camera zoomed in on the Jedi. The Jedi did a somersault and landed on his knees. The camera was finally able to focus on the Jedi's face. It was Anakin Skywalker.

"General and Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker, a famed and respected hero of our Republic, often called The Hero With No Fear, has been working tirelessly these last three years to bring peace to the
"However," Sidious said. His tone of voice had changed. It had gotten lower and more serious. "As we have investigated the Battle of Coruscant and my kidnapping, Republic Intelligence has uncovered security holocam recordings from on board the Separatist command ship. These recordings have led us to believe that Jedi Knight Skywalker may have turned against the Republic."

The scene changed. It was a bit blurry. Clearly they were projecting hologram footage. It showed Anakin swinging his blue saber forward. His back was to the camera. Then Ahsoka Tano came into view, and Anakin stabbed her right in the middle. He grabbed onto her shoulder. He was visibly shaking. Behind her could be seen Sidious though his face was blurred. Then suddenly he ripped the lightsaber out of her and the recording ended.

Maul recalled the incident as well. He had seen it happen in person. The footage had clearly been masterfully edited. You couldn't see Sidious' lightsaber nor his face.

So Sidious was making a move against Skywalker. Retaliation against not going along with his plans? Or something more?

"As you can see from this footage," Sidious said as the feed went back to his face, "we can see the brave Ahsoka Tano defending me. Tano is a former Jedi padawan whose master was Anakin Skywalker. She left the Jedi Order almost a year ago. Despite that, she still worked to bring peace to the galaxy even at the price of herself. She is currently in critical condition."

The news showed Tano floating in a bacta tank. It clearly showed she was missing her bottom half. A sensation Maul was all too familiar with. He clenched his teeth as he thought of losing his own legs to Kenobi.

"Republic Intelligence also recovered this footage of Skywalker meeting with key leaders from the Confederacy of Independent Systems."

The scene changed again. It showed a dark room with a crowd of people. All of which were aliens. Maul recognized Nute Gunray of the Trade Federation. A human shaped figure wearing a dark hood walked up to them. A Muun stepped forward and offered his hand in greeting. The clip ended there.

Had that truly been Anakin Skywalker? You couldn't see the face. And more importantly, what was the recording not showing? If Anakin had truly met with the Separatists, why not showing them actually conversing together? With his face shown? Unless there was no conversing happening.

If Skywalker and Vader were trying to undo Sidious' plans, it would be easier to target the CIS side first. Had Skywalker attacked them? Maul would pay good credits to see that recording if that was the case. But that didn't seem like Skywalker's style. He was a Jedi. Perhaps it was Vader under that cloak.

"Until this matter is resolved," Sidious continued, "Anakin Skywalker is to be considered a traitor and criminal. If seen, please report all sightings to Republic Intelligence. I hope this is all some sort of deep misunderstanding. Surely our greatest hero has not left us in our time of need, especially for Ahsoka Tano, who will continue to be in my thoughts."

The scene switched back to the two newscasters.
"Anakin Skywalker turned traitor?" Kara asked as she looked at Eon.

"I am as shocked as you are," Eon responded. "Attacking his own apprentice? Meeting with the Separatists? This doesn't look good."

"It does not," she agreed. "But the chancellor said this might be a misunderstanding."

The two continued to prattle on, but Maul bent over and turned the news off. Silence fell across the large dark room. Luke slowly leaned back against the back of the couch. His eyes distant as he was clearly in thought.

"I suppose," Maul said slowly. "You know nothing about this?"


Far above, far below.
We don't know where we'll fall.

Anakin Skywalker . . . Anakin Skywalker. Had he fallen away from the Jedi Order and the Republic as Sidious stated? Had he slipped through Sidious' fingers? Were things going too far out of control for the Sith master and now he was trying to reel everything back in? Sidious hated his plans being messed up. Time and time again Sidious had threatened Maul with unspeakable pain and death if he ever stepped out of line and messed up his carefully laid plans. What if Skywalker wasn't following along with the script?

Sidious would be pissed.

Maul smiled.

Far above, far below.
What once was great, is rendered small.

The great Darth Sidious could fall. And it would be so much sweeter if Maul was the one to orchestrate it. If he could go back in time and have his revenge, his complete revenge, against everyone. Maul looked at Luke. It was time to move. With Sidious' announcement, the whole underworld would be stirred up. While there had been no bounty announced, no doubt there was one. Official or not.

"Get up," Maul barked at Luke. "We're leaving."

"Leaving?" Luke asked. "Where?"

Maul paused and smile. No doubt his white teeth stood in contrast to his black and red skin. Luke's brows furrowed in concern. In fear. Good. Hopefully the boy would learn his place.

"To meet my mother," Maul said.
Chapter 71

Darth Vader sat on the bunk in the crew quarters on board the *Light Keeper*. He was missing his prosthetic legs and his right arm. He had been given back his left arm after providing Anakin with details about how the war ended for the Separatists.

The blue holocron sat on his lap. He had been able to open it with ease. He had done so over and over again. It was obvious. He was using the Light Side of the Force, but how was that possible? He was a Sith. A dark lord. He used the Dark Side. And yet . . . when he meditated the white butterflies had multiplied. He couldn't deny it. He could use the Light Side.

But he could also use the Dark Side. It was still there. If he reached into his anger and pain, he could access the darkness. What did this mean? How could he reach both sides of the Force? Was that even possible? To fluctuate between the two? Did one have to be one side or the other? Could you be both?

He didn't know. He rubbed his head with his only metal hand. He had been trying to come up with a plan to get himself out of his current predicament. Get his limbs back. Find his son. Get back to his own time. Possibly push Anakin back into the light. If not stab him with a lightsaber or choke him with the Force for being so kriffin' annoying.

The holocron had good information on time travel. Vader wasn't surprised. He always suspected the Council was hiding knowledge. Was there something in the holocron vault that would have saved Padme? That would save her still?

Vader heard the lock to the door unlatch. The door slid open, and R2-D2 rolled into the room screeching a high pitched beep.

"What have you done?" the droid demanded. "What have you done to my primary unit?"

"What are you talking about?" Vader demanded.

"You've corrupted him! Whatever virus got into your system has gotten into my AS Unit!"

"Ahhh."

So the droid had noticed. And if the droid had noticed Anakin's fall, that begged the question of what had Anakin done.

[Fix him! Repair his firewall! Get him a new anti-virus software! Restore him to his previous settings!] R2 demanded. He had rolled over so he was right up against the bunk.

"You think I haven't tried?" Vader said. "He won't listen to me."

[Do more than talking! Do you need some tools? I can get you some. The medical type for fixing organics!]

"It doesn't work like that," Vader said.

R2 let out some annoyed beeps. [Fix him! Help me!]

The door slid open again, and Anakin walked in. R2's dome spun around and he rolled over to Anakin.
"What's going on?" Anakin asked.

[DV Unit is being unhelpful!] R2 said.

Anakin smiled. "He is very unhelpful. Don't worry, he's like that to everyone."

He looked up at Vader with a smile on his face. A smile that had come to unnerve Vader, but that wasn't what he was focused on. Anakin's face was all red. His eyes bloodshot and puffy. Had he been crying? Is that what had caused R2's outburst?

"Hey," Anakin said looking down at R2. "Can you go check on your holonet searches? I want to talk to Vader."

R2 paused. His photoreceptor swung back around as he looked at Vader. Then he beeped a confirmation and rolled out of the room leaving Vader and Anakin alone.

"What have you done?" Vader demanded.

"What makes you ask that?" Anakin said as he made a slow circle around the room.

"Because you've upset your droid."

Anakin said nothing as he came to a stop near the bunk. He looked at the holocron in Vader's lap.

"I'm only doing what has to be done," Anakin said. His voice sounded tired. "I've told you, I'm going to destroy Palpatine."

"And what have you done?" Vader asked again.

"I'm ending this war!" Anakin said. "If there is no war, there is no way for Palpatine to keep pushing for more military power and control over the Senate."

Vader leaned back. His head hit the cold wall behind him. "Mustafar," he said softly.

Anakin's body tensed up. His face darkened. Vader had guessed correctly. So the past wasn't playing out completely to a new tune. It was still following some of the old melody.

"That's why you were crying," Vader noted.

Anakin's brows shot up and his eyes widened. "You think ... you think I cried over that scum? I enjoyed their deaths!" he hissed.

"I know," Vader said. His voice was calm. "I did the same thing. But you weren't crying over them. You were crying for yourself."

Anakin's face fell. He stood there in silence for a moment.

"You've left the path of the Jedi behind," Vader continued. "You've fully embraced the Dark Side now. The Anakin Skywalker of old is gone. Your mourn his passing. Your mourn the lost of yourself. Of your old dreams of being a grand hero Jedi. Of going back to Tatooine and freeing all the slaves. The person you are now, is a villain to the Skywalker of old."

Again, a silence stretched.

"You also cried," Anakin said slowly.
"I did," Vader admitted. No point in lying about it. But if Anakin had cried, perhaps there was still hope for him. Perhaps he still had a lot of his butterflies.

Anakin sighed and sat down on the edge of the bed. He looked so tired and vulnerable. It was the first time he had actually come within reach of Vader. Vader had promised himself if Anakin ever did so, he was going to smack him. But for now he would save it. Perhaps he was finally reaching Anakin now that Anakin had truly tasted the Dark Side. Had relished in death and fear. Had realized the price it was costing him.

The door slid open and R2 came screeching back in a second time.

"What is it?" Anakin asked as he stood back up.

[The chancellor unit has released a news statement about you!] R2 said.

Anakin looked over at Vader, but Vader shook his head. This was going into new territory for him. By the time Mustafar had happened for Vader, he had already sworn himself to Sidious.

"Show it," Anakin said.

The droid projected a hologram. It showed Sidious sitting at his desk.

"Citizens of this grand Republic," Sidious said. "I have come before you to announce dreadful news. General and Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker, a famed and respected hero of our Republic, often called The Hero With No Fear, has been working tirelessly these last three years to bring peace to the galaxy."

The bulletin continued. Sidious was publicly declaring Anakin a traitor of the state. The broadcast even showed Anakin meeting with the Separatist Council. Right before he slaughtered them all, though that part wasn't shown. Anakin grew angrier and angrier as the broadcast continued. His hands twisted into fists. His face pulled into a scowl. The room was growing colder. Vader could taste the Dark Side.

"Surely our greatest hero has not left us in our time of need, especially for Ahsoka Tano, who will continue to be in my thoughts," Sidious said.

The hologram ended.

"I'm going to kill him," Anakin growled.

"That last part was a threat," Vader pointed out.

Gold eyes locked onto Vader. "I am aware of that," Anakin hissed.

"What did you think he was going to do?" Vader asked. "You killed off the Separtist Council. His reach on the Confederacy is now slim."

"No, it's non existent," Anakin said.

If Vader had eyebrows, he would be raising one.

"I convinced Grievous to go rogue and create a sort of an alliance with me," Anakin said with a smile. "You were right about what they did to him. I found the files on the surgery as well as information on the droid overrides. Now Grievous has complete control of the droids. He's taken them to Thyferra."
Bacta. Grievous was going after the bacta supplies. It was a bold move and a good one, but not an easy one.

"Vader," Anakin said slowly. "I'm going to ask you again. I would like you to train me in the way of the Dark Side."

"No," Vader said at once.

Anakin rolled his eyes. "Fine," he said. "Then at least join me in bringing Sidious down. You want him dead as much as I do. I don't know why you're being so difficult here."

"And you would give me back my limbs?" Vader asked.

Anakin paused. "You would have to earn those back," he said slowly.

"You don't trust me," Vader said.

"And why should you?"

That was a fair point.

"But," Anakin said with that stupid smile. "How about you earn back another limb? I want more information. I know you're still keeping things from me. I've dealt with the Separatists. Sidious has lost all control of them. Without the Council, Grievous will not be getting any more reinforcements. It's only a matter of time before the Republic finishes him off or I find a useful death for him. Now what I need to know about is the Republic side. Who are Palpatine's allies? What were his first moves when he started the Empire?"

A long silence stretched between them. R2 had been quietly watching this whole time.

"Fine," Vader said.

Anakin was taken aback. "What?" he asked.

"Fine," Vader said. "I'll tell you what you want to know, but I have conditions."

"Really, Vader?" Anakin asked. "Are you in any position to twist my arm?"

He smiled at the joke. Vader only glared at him.

"I want my son," Vader said.

"Is that all?"

"No. And my limbs and my lightsaber."

"As I said before, you have to earn those."

Vader growled, but Anakin only smiled. But Vader was tired. He was tired of sitting in this room all day unable to move. Tired of dealing with Anakin. If he went along with Anakin for now, he could hopefully find Luke. Hopefully stop Anakin before he did something stupid instead of learning about it afterward.

"So then," Anakin said, "where do we start?"

"Losing control on the droids, Sidious will want the war to end quickly. This means a lot of his end
game plans will be going into effect. He needs the fear of the war to continue until he's Emperor so people willingly accept this change as a way out of the chaos of the war," Vader said.

He paused. Anakin raised an eyebrow.

"We stop this war where it started," Vader said. "With the clones and the droids."

Luke had never seen a planet quite like this before. It felt wrong. Incredibly wrong. It reminded him of the cave on Dagobah. Thick with the Dark Side of the Force. A layer of red mist covered the red landscape. Large black thorny vine-like trees twisted out of the ground. Odd cocoon like thorny sacks hung from the branches. Sharp spiky mountains could be seen piercing the red sky in the distance.

"Where is this?" Luke said in a hushed voice as he followed Maul out of the ship.

"My home," Maul said without looking back.

Luke looked around. He didn't see any settlements. He didn't even seen anything alive. He couldn't sense anything alive either. Though he did think the place matched Maul. The red sky and the black vines matched Maul's red and black body. As they walked, Luke noticed the signs of battle. Scorch marks on the vines. Tread marks in the dirt. He saw droid parts covered in dust hiding in the ground.

And there was also the heavy feel of death. It clawed at Luke. Tightened around his throat. He found it hard to breath. He swore he could hear high pitched screams, but he would shake his head and realize it was just echoes. Something had happened here. Something bad.

They approached a side of a mountain where there was a cave. The overhang of the entrance had been cut sharply into a something like a porch. Four large female stone pillars held up the porch. A large femine face was carved into the smooth side of the cliff above the figures. The mouth was open and long. It looked like it was screaming. Maul led them into the door carved into under the mouth.

Luke struggled to follow. His side hurt him. Sweat dripped down his side. But then the path opened up to a large cavern. At the bottom was a strange glowing teal liquid, and in this glowing sea were small islands. On top of the islands were buildings. Bridges and pathways connected the islands. It was a whole village. Warm yellow light shone through windows or in globes on top of posts. Fires flickered on torches and in braziers. They walked through the village. Luke looked around but saw no one. The village was just as desolate as the outside.

Maul continued his trek to what looked like the village center, a large open area with a large flat table in the middle. They continued past it to a building behind the village square. Candles and flame lanterns lit up the inside of the place. Who had lit all these fires? There had to be someone here.

"This is your home?" Luke asked. Maul said nothing. "And I thought my home planet was bad," Luke muttered to himself. He looked around and still saw no one. "Does anyone actually live here?"

"No," Maul said. "Not any more. The Nightsisters were all killed by Count Dooku and General Grievous."

"You said we were here to meet your mother," Luke said softly.

"We are," Maul said.

A cold sharp breeze ran through the room. The flames flickered and a few blew out. Then came a horrible feeling. It caused Luke's hair to stand on end. Every nerve seemed to be tense as if it was
bracing for impact. There was a whispery sound that was slowly growing louder. It reminded Luke of an approaching sandstorm or distant echoes of a dying bantha lost in the desert.

Then came the green mist. It was just a tendril. It snaked its way in from the door. It whisked this way and that until it stopped in the center of the room. The glowing green mist pooled there. It grew and grew until it was taller than Luke. Slowly it started to take the form of a humanoid woman.

She reminded Luke of the face carved on the front of the cave. Her skin was white. She had black tattoos around the eyes that went up to her forehead. There was one marking on her nose. Then her mouth was completely covered in all black. A thick line connected it to dark markings on her cheeks. Overall it gave her face a skull like appearance.

She was dressed in shades of red. She wore some type of pointed hood with ends trailing down to her waist. Large pointed shoulder pads extended up into the air. Two strips extended from her back into the air as well. She looked like some sort of strange four-winged red insect. The rest of her robes crossed and gathered at a belt and then draped down her legs.

"Mother," Maul said. His tone was completely different. Soft wasn't the right word. Maybe it was respect. Perhaps it just lacked Maul's usual tone of disdain.

"Who have you brought me?" the figure asked.

Luke wasn't sure what to make of her. She reminded him of a ghost, but he could feel her. There was a presence there in the Force. But it was off. It didn't feel completely like a living thing. She was living but not. How was that possible?

Maul's mother approached and circled around Luke. "He is an outsider," she said. Her voice raspy and whispery. "He is not from this existence."

"He's a time traveler," Maul said. "He came from the future."

"He is strong in the Force," the mother said.

"He is the son of Anakin Skywalker."

"The Chosen One."

_The Chosen One? Luke thought. What did that mean?_

"He will serve our purposes well," the mother said.

Luke did not like this. He did not like this at all. So he ran. He ran past the ghost and into the square. He made it to the next island when suddenly there was a screaming noise. Glowing green mist erupted from the water. Ghost like figures with bright glowing eyes flew around Luke.

"I should have warned you mother," Maul said as he calmly walked up. His mother's ghost walking besides him. "He has no manners and has an annoying habit of trying to run away."

"Do not worry," the mother said as she walked up to Luke. "He shall learn."

Her hand lashed out and grabbed Luke. Icy cold stabbed into him. He let out a yelp. Maul's mother pulled him back to the village center and the building behind it.
Chapter 72

They stood in front of the altar in the middle of the Nightsister underground village. On the altar were three tall skinny vases with two chalice cups in front. Luke watched as Maul poured some of the glowing water from the right vase into the middle vase. Now he picked up the left vase. Dark liquid poured into the center vase, and green glowing smoke puffed out. Maul picked up the middle vase at the top and sloshed the liquid around. Then he poured half into one cup and another half into the other. The ghost of his mother stood behind him whispering the directions to him. Maul picked up one of the cups and nodded at the other.

"You must drink from the cup," Maul said.

Luke didn't want to. He really didn't want to. He looked at the cave entrance. It was lit with golden red light. It was so close. A short sprint. But he could feel his hair standing on end. Maul was growing tense as well as tired of waiting. Though it wasn't that far, Luke knew he wouldn't make it. Not before Maul got him or before the ghosts popped out of the water. He had already tried twice before.

Luke grabbed the cup. Maul took a sip and then paused. They were performing some Nightsister magic spell. Maul had called it a memory merge. He and his mother had been unsatisfied with the answers Luke had given them about time travel. It was Mother Talzin who had recommended performing the spell.

"You must drink it all," Maul said. "Just like me. All of it."

Luke looked down at the cup. It wasn't glowing. It was just a dark liquid. He looked back up at Maul. He had a feeling if he didn't drink it willingly, he'd be forced to. So he put the metal cup to his lips and drank it all.

At once his head started to spin. It reminded him of getting drunk. He didn't realize he had dropped the cup until he heard it clatter to the ground. There was a pressure building behind his eyes. His head felt stuffed. His eyes burned. His throat itched and he coughed.

"It's . . . working . . ." he heard Maul say. Though his voice sounded distorted and far away.

The pressure behind his eyes continued to build. It pushed against his eyelids. It needed to get out. He had to open his eyes. He had to let it out, so he did. He looked at Maul. His eyes were all green and glowing. Green smoke poured out of his eyes. Luke was sure he looked the same. He looked up as did Maul. The smoke coming out of the eyes traveled up into the air above them. There it pooled together.

"Show me!" Maul hissed. "I want to know how he did it!"

A cloud of glowing smoke grew. It's center glowed white.

"I see it . . ." Maul said in a soft voice.

He saw it? What did Maul see?

And then suddenly a wave of darkness came over Luke. He felt disoriented. As if he was in space in zero gravity. He didn't know which way was which. What was up or down. He was just falling and tumbling.
Luke shook his head. He had to focus. His hands tightened on the steering yoke of his X-wing. The Alliance was engaged with Imperial forces in an asteroid belt. Everything had gone to plan. The mission was to secure and raid some Imperial transports carrying food and supplies. Then just as the Alliance ships were finishing up, the Death Squadron jumped out of hyperspace. Now the Alliance was trying to retreat, but the Imperials were pressing hard to prevent that.


The dark voice of Darth Vader called in the Force.

*It is your destiny to join me.*

Luke ignored the voice. He clenched his teeth. He focused on the TIE fighters swarming around the Alliance ships. They needed to get clear of the ships and asteroids for a clear jump into hyperspace. He tried to ignore the growing darkness that seemed to be clawing at him. A streak of explosions brought his attention to his left. He saw the TIE Advanced X1 aiming right for him.

At once Luke pulled away from the Alliance ships. There was no use in drawing anyone else into Vader's crosshairs. Luke dove into the asteroids hoping he could draw Vader away from the Alliance fleet and then escape himself. Luke gripped the handles tighter. He pushed his fighter on and called up every trick he knew. He kept going at high speeds, pulling hard sharp turns, skimming along the asteroids, diving between two colliding rocks, while trying to stay one step ahead of of the TIE Advanced's blaster bolts.

*It is useless, my son. You cannot escape from me,* Vader said.

*No,* Luke thought. He couldn't fail here. He would become a Jedi. He wouldn't fall to the Dark Side.

*"If you only knew the power of the Dark Side,"* the echo from Bespin said in Luke's mind. Luke tried to push the next lines out of his head, but they still came anyways. *"Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father."*

*No,* Luke told himself. He couldn't lose himself to his memories right now. Not with Vader chasing him down. Luke flipped his fighter around a large asteroid. The Force pulled him sharply to the right. There! Just ahead was an opening. Luke could jump to hyperspace. He could get away from Vader.

*"No. I am your father."*

He zoomed through the remaining asteroids. He was almost there, then he'd been in open space.

*"I am your father."*

Suddenly, his ship slammed to his left. His hands burned with how tight he was gripping the steering yoke as he fought to keep his fighter steady and free from slamming into an asteroid.

*Luke,* came Vader's voice through the force. It was quickly followed by another echo of *"I am your father."*

Another hit by a blaster bolt sent Luke's ship spinning. Vader was shooting to disable Luke's ship, not to destroy. Luckily the hyperdrive was still untouched. The Force pulled on Luke again. He was so close! All he had to do was make it clear of these last few asteroids. He made sure the computer was ready for a jump the moment he was free. His fighter wasn't reacting well. It was sluggish. Vader must have landed a few good shots on him. He got too close to one of the rocks. The screeching of metal filled to cockpit as his fighter's nose scraped along an asteroid.
Luke. This time there was an edge to Vader's voice. It seemed like he was nervous. But Luke pushed it aside. He was almost there. Luke! Vader shouted.

Luke turned to glance back at Vader's ship, but all he saw was a bright blue light and the TIE Advanced spinning wildly right towards Luke's own ship. He tried to get his ship to move away, but his ship was still too slow. The curved wing of the TIE caught in the two left wings of Luke's fighter. The two ships snagged each other and the TIE brought the X-wing into a spin.

Luke could sense Vader's fear. It was unusual and uncomfortable. Usually Vader created fear. He projected anger. But it was clear now, Vader was afraid. And so was Luke. He was trying to shake his fighter loose. This could go really bad for both of them. All they had to do was spin into an asteroid. Even if only one ship got hit, both would go up in the explosion.


"I am your father," again echoed through Luke's mind. "Join me. Come with me. It is the only way."

Luke jerked at the yolk. Metal scraped against metal as the wings fought to break free. It was getting hard to concentrate. The bright blue light was getting closer and brighter. Luke's eyes were watering. He had to blink back the tears which only made his vision blurry.

And then the light completely consumed him. He squeezed his eyes shut, but he continued to pull hard on the steering yoke as the fighter continued to spin. Suddenly he felt his ship snap free. Now he was spinning, but at least he wasn't spinning with Vader. He could tell the light was dimming. He slowly opened his eyes.

He was still in an uncontrolled spin, but no longer did he see the blackness of space and the asteroids. It was blue sky and gray buildings. Buildings? Sky? There hadn't been any planets nearby. Had that blue light perhaps been some sort of jump to hyperspace? But he didn't have time to dwell on it. The buildings were getting closer, and he still didn't have control yet.

True fear started to seize him. The weight of the inevitable settled on him. He was going to crash. Even if he got the fighter to stop spinning, there was no way he was going to be able to safely land. All he could do was hopefully make this a bit less painful than it was going to be.

As the buildings got closer, again he was haunted by the words from Bespin. "I am your father." Luke wondered what had happened to Vader. If he was facing the same problem as Luke. As the gray buildings got closer and closer, one last string of words raced through his head.

"It is the only way."


He was back in the cave. Back on Maul's hellish homeworld. That had all been a memory. A memory of going into the past. He was glad this was over but he couldn't look away. The green cloud still hung in the air. The center still burned a bright white.

"Do you know this place, my apprentice?"
Luke was... somewhere. Somewhere else. A strange dark grey world. A large pyramid stood in the
distance nearby. The top, unlike everything else, was red. Perhaps the wind had kept it
clean of the thick layer of dust that hung on everything else. Around him were ruins. Large slabs of
stones and metal lay scattered everywhere. It wasn't time that had brought this place down. It was a
battle. Explosions had blasted apart this place. Parts of buildings had been violently thrown to the
ground. If there were any scorch marks or signs of burns, it was hidden behind the dust.

"Yes, master," came Luke's voice. But it wasn't his voice. It was Maul's voice. "I have seen it... in
my dreams."

He noticed he wasn't alone. Standing to his left was a man. He wore a dark hooded cloak. The hood
was pulled low so only his lower face was visible. A chill ran up Luke's spine. Even only seeing half
the face, he still recognized it. The Emperor.

Yet Luke didn't dwell on that. But perhaps it wasn't Luke. It was Maul. He stepped off the cracked
road into the ruins. It was littered with humanoid shaped statues. They were so caked in dust there
were no details. Just featureless bodies all posed in terror. Some were running away. Others had their
hands up as if to defend themselves. Others were curled on the ground as if crying.

"It was here on... on this dead world... that the Jedi struck a terrible blow against the Sith,"
Sidious said. "Many of our order were struck down. All because they wanted to be free."

Luke approached one of the statues. It was about his height. The figure had one arm raised towards
the sky. The other was wide out to its side. It looked like the figure was trying to block out the sun or
a bright light. Or perhaps flag someone down. He reached forward and touched the shoulder. The
spot he touched crumbled. Smoke and dust and red embers flew into the air.

"Ghhhk!" Luke shouted as the dust flew into his eyes and mouth.

"Breathe it in, my apprentice," Sidious said. "Breath in the ash of the Empire that came before! Let
the hate fill you!"

The world turned a darker grey. Shadowy figures with glowing red eyes approached. They were all
shapes and sizes of various different races. They all held lightsabers, which were either blue or green.
Jedi. These figures were Jedi.

Suddenly there was a human. Pale and bald. His eyes yellow with a red bleeding ring. A blue
lightsaber bust out of his chest as pale clawed hands grabbed at him. It didn't stop there. He watched
as a woman was cut into. Then a red Twi'lek had a lightsaber stabbed through his heart. He watched
as Sith after Sith were killed. Their red lightsabers fell as their hands were sliced off. Their heads
were cut from their bodies. The heads rolled amongst other seared and smoking body parts and unlit
lightsabers that littered the ground.

And the sound. Oh the terrible sound. The sound of lightsabers. The sounds of screaming. Of the
dying. It was cold. It was so unbelievably cold. Sharp and searing and painful. The ice stabbed at
every part of him. It was hard to breath. Hard to move. His heart was beating in his chest as even that
became harder and harder to do.

He screamed.

Then the Jedi turned towards him. He ran, but he felt a lightsaber slash through his back. He
stumbled forward towards another group of Jedi. He was slashed across his chest. He fell to the
ground and looked up as a green lightsaber seared through his neck. But his head didn't fall. He
shouldn't be alive! He should be dead.
Again the lightsabers came. Again and again. He died a thousand ways. He tried to use his red dual tipped lightsaber. He tried to fight them off. His hands were cut off. His lightsaber fell. And he was hacked and slashed over and over and over.

"Endure," said a voice Luke couldn't identify. "Endure as the Sith before you endured the treachery and untold pain as their liberty was stripped from them. No, stolen. Stolen by the murderous Jedi."

It hadn't stopped. The Jedi were unending. They kept coming. They kept killing him. Over and over.

"The Jedi are so proud of their lack of emotion," the voice continued. "Ironically so afraid of those who sought a different way. Cowards and assassins, one and all. Treacherous hypocrites. Feel the pain of a thousand cuts. The deaths of a thousand Sith. They will be made stronger in you. The Sith deserved their revenge. You deserve your revenge."

Yes. Yes! He would have his revenge! He would destroy all the Jedi for what they have done! For each death he had felt, he would deliver that back to the Jedi. They would be destroyed as the Sith had! As he had! And no man . . . no Jedi . . . no master . . . was going to deny him this!

And then the dark gray world melted away. The Jedi faded into the shadows. Suddenly he was somewhere new. In a small room. No a cell. He was suspended in the air. His wrists and ankles bound by cuffs that kept him afloat in an energy field. The triangular door before him opened and a man Luke recognized as Dooku walked in.


"The Hutts have abandoned you, Maul. But Black Sun and the Pykes remain loyal," Dooku said. "I want your resources and your sway over the black market."

"You are Dooku . . . The Jedi betrayer? I have heard much of you since my rebirth. I expected . . . more," Maul said.

"I'll ask this only once," Dooku said. He was growing angry. "Give me the names of your underworld leaders and the locations of your Shadow Collective bases."

"Never," Maul spat.

Dooku raised his hands and lightning streaked out of them and straight into Maul's chest. Maul let out a painful shout as his head jerked backwards from the pain. Then it stopped as quick as it had started. Maul's head sagged down to his chest. Dooku turned away.

"Know that there is nothing that you possess that I cannot take away," Dooku said. "I hope our next conversation will be more fruitful."

That fool! He would never possess Maul's spirit itself. Never possess his rage. His power. His desires. This replacement would never possess it all!

Then the cell disappeared. The world twisted and turned. Luke's head hurt. Something . . . something wasn't right . . . Force, it hurt. Everything was spinning. Everything was hurting, especially his head. It felt wrong. It all felt wrong.

He continued to see more, but it was all glimpses. Flashes. He barely grasped one before it faded away.

He saw Ahsoka crossing blades with Maul. Maul trapped in a ray shield as clone troopers turned
their weapons on Ahsoka and fired at her. He saw Maul barking orders at what looked like criminals and smugglers. He saw Maul gripping tightly to a steering yolk as his ship crashed. He saw a boy, a teenager, with dark blue hair holding a red Sith holocron. He saw the same kid in the Nightsister village in a hut filled with junk and artifacts.

Then he saw Maul on a ship. Tatooine in the distance. Luke watched as Maul approached a fire in the desert. Ben Kenobi sat next to it. He wasn't the young Ben of this time, but he wasn't the old one of Luke's time. Though he was old. His hair mostly white. Luke watched as Maul ignited his lightsaber and Ben did the same.

Then Maul was on the ground. The fire was out. Ben leaned over him.

"Tell me . . ." Maul said. His voice pained. "Is it the Chosen One?"

"He is," Obi-Wan said.

"He . . . will . . . avenge us . . ." Maul said. Then it all faded away.

It hurt. It hurt so bad. Why had these last few glimpses hurt more than the others? Why? He screamed and fell to his knees. He was in the cave. The green smoke had disappeared. Maul stood over him. The ghost of his mother behind him. The pain in his head was too much. He closed his eyes and let the darkness take him.
Chapter 73

Luke was aware he was asleep and that what he was seeing was a dream. Of course it was a dream. One moment he would be driving a speeder along the salt flats on Tatooine and the next he was actually in his X-Wing zipping amongst star destroyers and dodging TIE fighters. Everything just blurred from one thing to the next. And throughout it all he saw the shadowy Jedi with the glowing red eyes from Maul's memory. They were constantly trying to slash at Luke with their blue and green lightsabers.

There were moments when he'd be on the edge of waking up. He could feel the real world around him. Hear it. Smell it. But then he'd always dive back under despite trying his hardest to just open his eyes and be done with this.

During one such moment of almost waking, Maul was trying to shake him awake to no avail.

"What has happened to him?" Maul asked.

"There is a limit to the ritual," Talzin said. "It is only supposed to last a short time. The merging of memories is to be a brief contact, but your connection lasted longer than it should have. And what you saw . . ."

"You mean me dying at the hands of Kenobi?" Maul hissed.

"Those were not your memories," she said. "At least the you before me now. But the you of the boy's time. Somehow he connected to his time. It was why he was in so much pain. His mind and soul are lost in the in-between. He must find a way back."

"And if he doesn't?"

There was a pause. "Perhaps it is time we prepare," Talzin said. "He still needs to pay the price for performing the ritual."

Maul scowled. "I still didn't get my answers. I still don't know how to time travel. Is there not a way to enter his mind and see if this 'in-between' place has the answers?"

"No," she said. "You run the risk of getting lost yourself."

And then Luke faded back into his dream. So was he fluctuating between the two times? Was Maul right? Could he find the answer to time traveling down here? But . . . he needed to wake up. He didn't like the sound of Talzin mentioning a price for the ritual.

He drifted some more between dreams and murderous Jedi and the real world. It was hard to tell how much time had passed, but suddenly he grew cold. Something was wrong. It felt like he was placed in a block of ice. He was frozen. He couldn't move. He could just barely breath. What was going on. He could hear the voices of Talzin and Maul. He tried to push his way back up, but his head spun and fell into the deep, deep blackness.

He fell for a long time. It was just a space of nothingness. No matter where he looked or which way he turned, it was dark. And the further he fell, the further he went from his body.

"No," he muttered to himself. He didn't want to be lost here. He didn't even want to be in this time. He wanted to be home. With Leia and Han and Wedge and the Alliance and his R2. Where things made sense.
"I miss him too," a voice drifted through the darkness.

"Wedge?" Luke shouted recognizing the voice. His heart swelled. "Wedge!"

"I just don't think he's gone," came Leia's voice. "I can't explain it. I just feel it."

"Leia . . . It's been a month."

"Leia!" Luke called out. He held out his hands towards the direction he thought the voices were coming from. "Leia! Leia!"

But there was nothing. She didn't respond. A sob bubbled up inside of Luke. He was so close. His own time was just within reach. If only he could just stretch out and grab it. Tears burned his eyes and soon they were falling down his face.

Was this his fate? The fate he had escaped on Bespin? To fall to his death? To never accomplish anything? He'd never become a Jedi. Never stop the Empire. He wouldn't even save his father. He was just a blip in the radar. There and now gone.

He slowly relaxed his body. His limbs grew limp. There was a part of him that told him just to close his eyes and fade away to nothing, but the louder voice in him told him not to. He couldn't give up. Not yet. But what was he supposed to do?


Something brushed against his face. He turned to see a white butterfly flying right next to him. He blinked to clear his eyes from tears. Yes, it was a white butterfly. What . . . what was it doing here? He raised his hand and slowly raised it towards the butterfly. It landed on one of his fingers. Luke smiled.

"Hello," he said.

_Luke_?

The voice startled him and caused him to flinch. It scared the butterfly, which flew off his finger but it didn't fly away.

"Hello?" Luke called out again. "Who's there? Can you hear me?"

Nothing. Great. Now he was imagining things. The butterfly flew around his head a few times before it landed on his cheek this time. The soft feather touches of its legs tickled.

"At least I'm not alone anymore," he said softly.

_Luke_? came the voice again.


"He- hello?" he asked softly.

_Luke_!

"Who's there?"

A pause. _Your father_, the voice replied.
"Father?" Luke asked. His voice getting a bit louder. "Vader?"

Yes.

"Where are you?"

*In hyperspace on my way to Mandalore. I sensed something was wrong, so I meditated. Where are you?*

"I . . . I don't know!"

There was a spike of anger. Luke noticed small parts of the butterfly's wing started to disintegrate.

"No, don't go!" he cried out.

The anger stopped. The butterfly was still there though missing half a wing. Luke took a steadying breath.

"I was with Maul," he said. "He took me to meet his mother, but she's a ghost. She made us perform some sort of magic ritual that merged our memories together as Maul wanted to find out how to time travel. And now . . . and now I can't wake up. I'm just in this place. A dark featureless place. Maul's mother called it an in-between place."

*A world between worlds,* Vader said.

"You've heard of it before?"

*Kenobi's holocron, the one Ahsoka brought us on Manda, talked about it.*

"Do you know how to get out?"

*That I do not know. I had my doubts such a place even existed.*

Luke couldn't stop the small sigh he let out. "Maul's mother said if I can't find a way out . . ." He trailed off, letting the silence fill in the rest.

*You will find a way out, son.*

"I've tried," he said in a small voice.

*You will try again. And again. I will help.*

"How?" he asked a bit bitterly.

*We are talking through our shared bond. Reach out with the force. See if you can feel me. Use that like a lifeline and find your way back.*

Luke closed his eyes. He took a shaky breath and opened himself up to the Force. It felt off. Skewed. As if he was looking through water and the light had become distorted. But . . . if it was just water . . . he could push himself through it. So he reached. He thought of his father. His father on the *Light Keeper* showing him how to fight. His father arguing with Anakin. His father standing with him in the cave on Hoth. Standing at his bedside in the Jedi Temple.

But he still couldn't find the way out. Tears were building up in his eyes again. He had to blink them away, but when he opened his eyes he noticed there were more butterflies. The one with half a wing was still sitting on his cheek, but now about four fluttered above him. He then noticed one flying in
the distance. And beyond that one . . . another one.

*It's a trail,* Luke realized. *They're showing me the way.*

He closed his eyes. This time he reached out for the butterflies. He reached out for one in the Force. He could it feel it. It felt like . . . It felt like Vader. But . . . softer. It had a note of Anakin in it. Luke tightened his hold on it and suddenly bright light exploded beyond his closed eyes.

"What have I done?"

Luke recognized the voice. It was Anakin's. It was shaken. A tremor ran through it.

"You're fulfilling your destiny, Anakin," came a dark gravelly voice. Luke knew this one as well. It was the Emperor's voice. "Become my apprentice. Learn to use the Dark Side of the Force."

The bright light faded away and Luke found himself staring into a lap. His lap? No. He was in another memory. Whose? Anakin's? No . . . Vader's! This was Vader's memory. When he was still Anakin. Luke could hear Anakin breathing loudly. Slowly he looked up to see Sidious standing right in front of him. His face was white and his skin hung off his face. He looked nothing like the man Luke had seen on the Separatist ship.

"I will do anything you ask," Anakin said between pants.

Sidious paused for a second. A smile was starting to grow on his face. "Good," he said slowly. "Good."


Anakin reopened his eyes and looked back up at Sidious.

"To cheat death is a power only one has achieved," Sidious said in a soft voice. "But if we work together, I know we can discover the secret."

And while Sidious talked, Anakin slid off the seat he was sitting in on to his knees. He looked up at the Sith.

"I pledge myself to your teachings," he said. "To the ways of the Sith."

"Good. Good," Sidious purred. Anakin looked down again as if he was unable to face Sidious in this moment. "The Force is strong with you. A powerful Sith you will become." Anakin again slowly looked back up as if lured by Sidious' words. "Henceforth you shall be known as Darth . . . Vader."

"Thank you," Anakin said slowly. "My master."

"Rise," Sidious said.

Anakin rose to his feet slowly as Sidious walked over to his desk.

"You must learn to cast off the petty restraints that the Jedi have tried to place upon your power. It's time. I need you to help me restore order to the galaxy."

There was only silence as Anakin came to stand in front of the desk.

"Every single Jedi, including your friend Obi-Wan Kenobi, has been revealed as enemies of the Republic now. You understand that, don't you?"
"I came to save your life, sir," Anakin said. "Not to betray my friends-"

"What friends?" Sidious snorted. Anakin was silent.

"And do you think that task is finished, my boy?" Sidious asked. "Do you think that killing one traitor will end treason? Do you think the Jedi will ever stop until I am dead? It's them or me, Anakin. Or perhaps I should put it more plainly: It's them or Padmé."

Anakin took a deep breath. "Yes, my master," he said.

"The Jedi are relentless," Sidious spat. "If they are not destroyed to the last being, there will be civil war without end. To sterilize the Jedi Temple will be your first task. Do what must be done." Sidious paused then added, "Darth Vader."

"I will, my master," Anakin, no Vader, said.

"Do not hesitate. Show no mercy. Leave no living creature behind. Only then will you be strong enough with the Dark Side to save Padmé."

"What of the other Jedi?"

"Leave them to me. After you have finished at the Temple, your second task will be the Separatist leadership in their 'secret bunker' on Mustafar. When you have killed them all, the Sith will rule the galaxy once more, and we shall have peace. Forever."

The memory blurred out. Luke found himself in the dark place. He opened his palm to see a crushed white butterfly. Though the one on his cheek still remained as well as the four fluttering around him. He looked and saw the trail of butterflies. Was this the way out? By using Vader's memories?

He closed his eyes and reached out for the next one. He wasn't surprised when there was a bright flash of light.

"Anakin!" someone gasped. Luke opened his eyes to a pale bald human man standing in front of him. A string of symbols was tattooed on the left side of his head. He was dressed in dark Jedi robes. "Anakin, what happened? Where are the masters?"

Vader just glared at him. "Where is Shaak Ti?" he asked.

"In the meditation chambers- we felt something happen in the Force, something awful. She's searching the Force in deep meditation, trying to get some feel for what's going on . . ."

"Something has happened, hasn't it?" Vader said. His tone off. The Jedi looked beyond Vader. His eyes widened in terror. Luke couldn't see what the Jedi was seeing since Vader wasn't looking that way, but he could hear it. The sound of boots marching. The sound of troops. A lot of them.


Vader stepped forward in a smooth motion bringing his saber up. The Jedi didn't even have time to respond as the blue beam shot up with a sharp snap-hiss into the bottom of the Jedi's jaw. The beam shot out the top of his skull.

"You have no idea . . ." Vader said softly as he pulled the lightsaber out and the Jedi fell dead to the
It was a short memory, and it faded away. Luke at once grabbed for the next butterfly. He dreaded what he was going to see, but he had to. This was the only way out. Plus he wanted to know. He had to see this.

And he saw it. Vader marching into the Jedi Temple with an untold amount of clone troopers behind him. He saw Vader killing Jedi after Jedi with many other Jedi fell to the endless onslaught of blaster fire.

*It's the same*, Luke realized. What he had seen in Maul's vision of the Jedi killing the Sith and now the Jedi being killed by Vader and his troops. It was the same. Whether it be from lightsabers or blasters, the users of the Force fell. The two sets of memories blurred together in front of Luke. Sometimes he saw Jedi attacking and defending themselves. Other times he saw the Jedi attacking and hacking apart people with red lightsabers. Only for those Jedi to be shot to pieces by clones.

Butterfly by butterfly, memory by memory, Luke made his way through the massacre. He saw it all. The Room of a Thousand Fountains have its waters run red. The masters and knights jumping into battle first. The padawans defending the younglings. And the younglings . . .

"Master Skywalker, there are too many of them," one had said.

*Do not hesitate. Show no mercy. Leave no living creature behind.* That had been Sidious' words. Words Vader had taken to heart.

Luke knew. He knew what his father had done. He knew he had killed off the Jedi. But knowing and seeing it was different. How could his father do this? When Luke thought of the young Anakin Skywalker of this time, was he possible of this? *All* of this? There was a darkness lurking there, yes, but outright murder? Mass murder?

For what?

To save his wife? Padmé? No wonder Vader felt so horrible. So alone. He had paid a terrible price to save his wife and it didn’t work. He lost her and the babies she carried. Then he lost himself. His body. His health. His heart.

Luke opened his hand to see another white butterfly crushed in it. But Vader hadn’t completely lost his heart, Luke noted. Vader wasn’t completely lost. He looked at the white butterfly still on his cheek. Where had they come from? They held Vader's memories. They must come from him. But why white butterflies? He gently touched the one on his cheek. It was warm and light to the touch, almost nothing like Vader.

But it was Vader. There were those notes of emptiness. Loneliness. Apathy. And so much hatred and pain. But there was also worry, regret, and love. Mostly love. These little butterflies were mainly made of love. Love? For . . . for Luke? Vader loved him? Even after . . . everything he had done?

Yes. Each little butterfly was mostly made of love.

But could Luke love Vader in return? He sighed as he reached out for another butterfly and was thrown into the nightmares of Vader's past. Could Luke love the man who had done all of this?
Luke entered another one of Vader's memories. It looked like Vader was on Coruscant traveling in a small fighter. It was night and the lights of the city-planet glowed. Lines of traffic criss-crossed across the sky. Vader approached a tall skyscraper. He landed on a landing pad connected to a large open veranda. The cockpit slid open, and Vader jumped out. Luke noticed a gold protocol droid that looked like C-3PO pass Vader.

Padmé approached from inside the veranda. Her steps were quick. Her face creased with concern. Vader quickly walked over to her with arms held out. As soon as she could, her arms were wrapped around his neck and he pulled her close. They held each other for a moment. Then Padmé pulled away first.

"Are you alright?" she asked. Her hands had slid down to his shoulders. His hands had yet to leave her side. "I heard there was an attack on the Jedi Temple. You could see the smoke from here!"

"I'm fine," Vader said almost cutting her off. "I'm fine. I came to see if you and the baby are safe."

He glanced down briefly. Padmé's round stomach could be seen through her light blue nightgown.

"What's happening?" she asked bringing Vader's eyes back up to her face. She had stepped away from him. They no longer touched.

"The Jedi have tried to overthrow the Republic," Vader said slowly.

"I can't believe that," Padmé said. Her eyes searching Vader's.

"I saw Master Windu attempt to assassinate the Chancellor myself," he said.

"Anakin, what are you going to do?"

Vader paused. He looked down then turned away from her. It wasn't what he was going to do, Luke realized. It was what he had already done. He walked a few steps away from her.

"I will not betray the Republic," he said in a slow deep voice. He turned back around to face her. "My loyalties lies with the Chancellor." He started to walk back to her. "With the Senate. And with you."

"What about Obi-Wan?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said with a slight shake of his head. "Many Jedi have been killed. We can only hope that he's remained loyal to the Chancellor."

"Anakin," she said softly. "I'm afraid."

His hand, his flesh hand, came up and rested against the side of her face. His fingers slid into her curls.

"Have faith, my love," he said in a soft voice. "Everything will soon be set right. The Chancellor has given me a very important mission. The Separatists have gathered in the Mustafar system." His voice was growing harder. "I'm going there to end his war. Wait for me until I return." His voice then
softened. The anger residing. "Things will be different, I promise."

Padmé nodded her head. Husband and wife leaned in and shared a kiss.

"Please, wait for me," Vader said in an almost whisper as he turned away from her and walked back to his waiting fighter.

The memory faded. Luke came back into the dark nothing of the inbetween place. The world between worlds as Vader had called it. He opened his hand to see a crushed white butterfly in his palm. It was the last one. The one that had been on his cheek. The one that was missing half a wing. There were no more butterflies.

But the world around him felt different. He could feel his body. He must be close. So he reached out. He started to feel the weight of the world. His limbs felt heavy. He could feel his chest rising and falling as he breathed. He could smell the smoke of the fires of the Nightsisters' village. He was almost there. He just needed to open his eyes.

"There you are," growled Maul's voice.

Luke whipped around away from his physical body. There floated Maul only a short distance away. He wore a sleeveless tunic, but otherwise looked the same. His usual annoyed expression was splashed across the face.

"What are you doing here?" Luke asked. He didn't want to dwell here any more.

Maul came closer and closer. "I have yet to get what I want, boy," Maul said. "I want to know the secret behind time travel."

"I don't know it," Luke barked back. "You saw it for yourself."

"The secret is here!" Maul hissed. "You are the key. You exist between two times."

"Why?" Luke asked. "Why do you want to travel in time?"

"To undo all the wrongs against me! To become the unrivaled power I was always destined to become! And to finally have my revenge!"

"Revenge? Against who? Sidious? The Jedi?"

"Yes."

Luke reached out and clasped Maul's forearms. He pulled up Vader's memories. They were still very fresh in his mind. Then he pushed them out onto Maul. He brought forth the images of the Jedi Temple massacre. Of the Jedi being killed just like the Sith had.

"What . . . What is this?" Maul shouted as he let go of Luke.

"Your revenge!" Luke shouted and pushed him away.

Then Luke turned around and reached for his body. He grabbed hold of it and pulled himself into it. His eyes snapped open with a loud gasp. He pushed himself to sit up. He was back. Back in the real world. He noticed Maul lying on the ground next to him. His brows were furrowed. His head rocked from side to side.
Luke stood up. His legs were weak and shaky, but he didn't have time to dwell on that. His gait was uneven and his legs wobbled a bit as he made his way out of the hut. The village was unchanged. He was in a building on another island from the center one. He noticed the altar and a figure standing next to it. It was Maul's mother, but . . . But she was solid. No longer was she a ghost. Luke could sense her in the Force.

He didn't dwell on that too long. Her attention was focused on the altar. Her back to him. He quickly made his way across the bridge to the next island and then the next. He kept side eyeing Talzin, but she never turned around to face him. He was on the last island. All he had to do was cross the next bridge, go up the path, and he'd be outside. No ghosts had risen from the water. He didn't know why, and he didn't care.

So he ran. His legs burned. His heart slammed inside of his chest. He made it down the path and into the red light outside. He kept running right into the ship Maul had used to get them here. His legs were starting to give out. He had to push himself against the walls to help himself along. He stumbled into the cockpit. He basically collapsed into the pilot's chair. He wasted no time in starting up the engines. He flipped the switch to close the landing ramp.

He grabbed the steering yoke with one hand while turning the thrusters on. He pulled back and the ship started to take off.

"Where . . . do you . . . think . . . you're going?"


"We're . . . not done . . . yet," Maul said. He pushed himself forward.

"I don't have time for you right now!" Luke said.

He flung his hand back. The Force came with ease. It flowed through him, out of his hand, and right into Maul's chest. Maul flew down the hallway. With another flick of his finger Luke shut the door to the cockpit and locked it. He turned back around and grabbed the yoke as he brought the ship out of the atmosphere. At once he was typing in hyperspace coordinates and letting the ship's navigation calculate the jump.

He heard a sizzling noise behind him. He turned around to see a red beam poking through the door. It was leaving behind a trail of molten metal as Maul used his lightsaber to cut through the door.

"Really?" Luke asked himself.

He turned back around and pulled the hyperspace lever. The ship jumped to hyperspace. At least he was away from that planet and Maul's mother. He pulled his lightsaber off his belt. He stood up. His legs were still not steady, but it would have to do for now. He slammed his hand against the door panel button. He didn't hear the door unlock, but watched as a second later it slid open. No point in damaging the door further from Maul's lightsaber.

Maul was hunched over. One hand flat against the wall as he supported himself. Sweat was dripping down his sides. Luke ignited his green lightsaber as he eyed Maul's own lit lightsaber. However, only one side was lit.

"Are you really wanting to do this? Here? In this small ship?" Luke asked.

Maul glanced around. His eyes lingered beyond Luke at the streaks of hyperspace out the viewport. Then his lightsaber slid back into the hilt. Luke deactivated his. Maul grit his teeth and slowly stood
up. They stared at each other. Luke wondered what Maul was going to do next. Demand they go back to Maul's mother? Ask more about time traveling?

Luke was not expecting Maul's eyes to roll back into his head and for him to collapse on the floor. Luke just stared at the unconscious man for a moment. Perhaps waiting to see if he would wake up, but Maul didn't stir. Luke debated on dragging Maul to the crew quarters or perhaps to the cargo hold or even a closet. But Luke was tired. His own legs still shaky. So he knelt down, grabbed Maul's saber off the floor, and headed back to the cockpit where he sunk into the pilot's chair.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the short chapter and the space between updates. I do try to keep a schedule of every three days, but real life has been a bit rough. So this all I have for now.
Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay. Lots of stuff going on. Job. Other job. Health. Family. Construction work on my building eight hours a day every week day. Writer's block. I'm hoping that's all through now.

"Sir?" came the familiar voice through a vocoder. "General Skywalker?"

Anakin stepped out of the shadow of the stairwell. Rex tensed up, but he wasn't holding his blasters. His helmet was still on, but Anakin could tell Rex was focusing hard on the Jedi. Anakin held his hands up, showing he had no weapons in his hands.

"You came," Anakin said as he slowly approached.

After what Vader had revealed about the clones and their chips, they had set course for Mandalore. Anakin was against it, but Vader persisted.

"We need at least a few clones to help us," Vader said.

Then the old man had the audacity to pass out right before they got here. He had been meditating rather heavily in the Force for quite a while. Then he slumped over and fell asleep in the co-pilot's chair. Anakin had tried to wake Vader up, but he was out cold.

So now Anakin stood with Rex in an abandoned and relatively unscathed office building in the city of Sundair. Mandalore was in the middle of a civil war, one the Republic had sent aid to. Cracks in the biodome allowed sunlight to filter through. Though there was no electricity running in the building, there was enough light for the two to see each other clearly.

Rex put both hands on his helmet and slowly took it off. He let it rest against his side tucked under one of his arms.

"Sir, I do have orders to contain you," Rex said.

"I know," Anakin said. "I know I've been marked a traitor, but you came after getting my message. You could have brought the whole 501st down here to capture me, but you didn't."

"No offense, sir," Rex said dryly, "but I know how dangerous you are. I'd rather not kill off my men."

"You think I would kill you? Or them?" Anakin said as his hands lowered.

Rex looked uncomfortably away for a second, but he quickly looked back. "No, sir. The General Skywalker I know would not hurt his men." Anakin smiled. "But the General Skywalker I know also wouldn't have hurt his padawan."

Anakin rolled his eyes and let out a groan.

"Ok, first of all," Anakin said. "That footage was heavily doctored."
"So they edited it to make it look like you stabbed Commander Tano?"

"Actually, I have a set orders overriding that one. You are to be handed over to the Jedi if detained, not the Republic," Rex said. There was a frown on his face.

Rex had been given conflicting orders, and most likely the Jedi had given out theirs in secret. This could go bad really quickly. Palpatine could turn the clones against the Jedi if it was revealed the Jedi were giving out secret orders.

"Rex, do you remember Fives?" Anakin asked.

Rex was startled. He clearly had not been expecting that. "Of course I do, sir," he said.

"And how . . . how he died? How Tup died? How they said his biochip malfunctioned?"

Rex only nodded.

Anakin took a deep breath. "Rex, Fives was right. Those biochips . . . The inhibitor chips . . . they aren't there to make you less aggressive. They hold a command that when initiated, you are forced to do that command without question or hesitation. It completely overrides any self control."

"Is that . . . Is that what happened to Tup? He was given some . . . command that made him kill General Tiplar?"

"Yes . . . It made him kill Tiplar. It was why he kept repeating that good soldiers follow orders."

"So why are they calling you a traitor? Did you discover the truth about this chip? Like Fives did? Do you have one too? Is that why you attacked Ahsoka and the Chancellor."

"No, I do not have a chip. Only the clones do. But, I learned the truth about all of it, Rex," Anakin said. "Not just the chips, but this whole war. It's all a farce. The Sith lord leading the Separatists is also leading the Republic."

"How is that even possible?"

"Because the Sith lord is Palpatine!" Anakin said. He paused to watch Rex's reaction. Would the clone believe him? Rex's eyes darted this way and that as he clearly thought over what Anakin had said.

"The Supreme Chancellor . . . is the one behind the Separatists?" Rex asked slowly. "But how?"

So Anakin told him. It was a short version that he had practiced back on the ship. One meant to quickly and efficiently get the facts across and present it in a logical manner. Because it was more than just presenting the facts, Anakin was also persuading Rex to help him. And that would mean becoming a traitor to the Republic. It would go against the loyalty that was literally programmed into Rex's very genes. But if there was a clone Anakin could convince, it was Rex. If this didn't work, Anakin wasn't sure what he and Vader would do then.
Mandalore was a desolate planet. Luke wasn't that surprised. Mandalorians were known for their warriors, and such warriors could come from such a harsh planet. Luke was tired. He had avoided sleeping. He was afraid he would slip back to that in-between place. Plus Maul was still on board. Luke had left him still unconscious back on the ship, though he still had Maul's lightsaber.

When Luke had reverted to real space, he had tried to contact both Vader and Anakin via the Force. Anakin was closed off, and Vader seemed distant and didn't respond. However, Luke could sense Vader. So he followed that pull to this city. Luke had noticed that the settlements of Mandalore seemed to be inside large black domes. Probably as an escape from the harsh climate.

The city was heavily damaged. The tell-tale signs of battle were all over. Scorch marks and craters littered the roads and buildings. Some buildings were missing entire sections that had been blown away. Rubble was everywhere. The smell of death lingered. Even worse was the feeling in the Force. The stain of death and fear clung to everything.

As he moved quietly through the city, he noted he didn't see any droids. He saw plenty of clone and Mandalorians, but no droids. Wasn't this war between the droids and clones? Where were the droid parts? And with that thought, what were Anakin and Vader doing here? Why come to this battle weary place?

Luke paused in a small alleyway. His lack of sleep was getting to him. His body was sore. He leaned against a wall and slid down it to finally give his legs a rest. Sweat dampened his clothes. He leaned his head against the wall. He closed his eyes and tried to reach Vader again. It was still foggy. He switched to Anakin. A hard wall. Both were still closed off.

Luke sighed. This would be so much easier if he could get in contact with one of them. In the distance he heard a sound growing closer. An engine? Could be. Though not a large one. It grew louder the closer it got. Multiple small engines. Speeders?

He pushed himself up to his feet and went to the end of the alley. He carefully looked around. It was a strange city made up of blocky buildings that often created columns up to the top of the dome. The sound still grew louder. Three speeders came into view. The riders were all humanoids, and they weren't in the clone trooper white. They were dressed in Mandalorian armor. Locals?

He knew it would be best not to reveal himself to them, but perhaps he could follow them. The moment they passed by him, he shot out of the alley. He had tried to find a speeder during his walk through the city earlier, but all the vehicles he had found were either destroyed or had been scavenged for parts. It wasn't uncommon on active battlefields. The Alliance would scrap and reuse everything they could.

The speeders had long since disappeared, but Luke still went in the direction they were headed. It wasn't long before he started to see signs of more recent battles. The stench of scorched duracrete and metal was strong. Piles of rubble still smoked. Blood was still bright red, not having yet turned a dark brown with age. Yet it was still pretty quiet. He had yet to hear the sound of blasters. Was there a lull in the fighting?

He started to see more Mandalorian warriors. He must be getting near their base. But he was tired. It would do no good if he could barely stand up. So he found a residential building. The original owners long since abandoned this place. For a moment Luke wondered where the original citizens of this city had gone to. Were they all hiding? Had they had fled? He entered an open apartment and made his way to the windows. It gave him a good view of the city. He sat down and watched the ruined city.

Perhaps he should rest here. Perhaps even take a nap. He was feeling sluggish. He eyed a dusty sofa.
It wouldn't hurt to get in a power nap. He slowly walked over and let himself sink onto the cushions. It took no time at all for him to fall asleep . . .

Noises woke him up. The sky outside had darkened, but it wasn't night. He stilled as his ears strained to hear what had woken him up. More noises. In this building. He rolled off the couch into a crouch. He crawled to the open doorway and peered up and down the hall. There was no one out there but he could hear people. Heavy steps. The sounds of things being pushed over. Doors opening and closing. He knew these sounds. The sounds of searching.

Luckily all the sounds were coming from his left. Luke turned right and made his way to the end of the hall. He found a stairwell. He paused and listened. He heard nothing, so he entered it and headed down. Once he had made it down several stories, he started to relax some. That was why when the fist slammed into his stomach as he made a turn in the stairwell, he didn't see it coming.

Luke stumbled back into the wall. A blaster was shoved in his face. He looked up into a Mandalorian mask.

"Who are you?" barked a voice through the vocoder.

Luke only glared.

"Patrol," the Mandalorian said into a com on their wrist. "I think I found the kid we've been looking for."

They were looking for him?

"Hands up!" the Mandalorian snapped.

Luke used the wall to push himself forward. He slammed into the Mandalorian. They both tumbled over. They wrestled for control over the gun. Luke summoned the Force and delivered a quick punch to the helmet. It disoriented the warrior enough that Luke was able to get the blaster, set it to stun, and shoot the warrior. The warrior went limp.

Luke stood there panting for a moment. He caught his breath and then he was moving down the stairs again. He could have taken out that Mandalorian. Killed them with his lightsaber, but he wasn't sure who was on whose side. For now it might be best to avoid killing if he could.

He exited out of the stairway straight into an alley. He had only gone a few steps before he was dodging blaster fire. It was coming from above. He glanced over his shoulder. He saw two Mandalorians flying on jetpacks aiming at him. He tossed the blaster and pulled out his saber. The green blade flared up, and he turned around just in time to deflect two bolts. He dodged two more, then ran down the alley. It was best to keep moving.

He turned down another alley and used the Force to open a door. It slid open and Luke ducked inside as bolts started to rain down on him again. He ran down the hallway and down a flight of stairs. Being out in the open was a disadvantage to him if the Mandalorians had jetpacks. For now close quarter fights would be better. Yet he also knew he didn't want to get trapped inside this building.

He entered a large open room. There was a dried up fountain in the middle. Dried up potted plants were placed neatly in arrangements around the room. The room towered up some four stories, and the roof was clear windows to the city above. Luke slowed as he eyed the different hallways that connected to the room. Which way? However, he wasn't given much choice when the glass from the roof shattered and six Mandalorians swooped down on their jet packs. They immediately opened fire
His lightsaber was out at once. He blocked the bolts, but they were forcing to walk backwards. Back the way he had come. At least with the next attack, the Force gave him a warning. He ducked. A boot slid in the air where his head would have been. He spun around and was face to face with the two Mandalorians from outside.

*Kriff*. He was trapped from both ends.

The Mandalorian came at him again. This time the kick made contact as it slammed into Luke's side. By now the other six had landed and had circled around him. Their blasters were all up and pointed at him.

"Surrender," one of them barked.

"Hand over the lightsaber," another said.

Luke glanced around the circle. Could he fight them? Possibly. Without killing them? Probably not. He deactivated his lightsaber and tossed it to the ground.

"Both lightsabers," one warrior growled.

Ah, that was right. Maul's saber. He grabbed the long hilted saber and tossed to the ground.

"On your knees! Hands out!" one ordered.

Luke wasn't fast enough. A warrior from behind kicked him in the legs. He fell to his knees. It wasn't long before he was in binders and being escorted to a speeder. They only flew a short distance. Then he was dragged out and into a lift that took him down several levels. When they exited the lift, he was surrounded by Mandalorian warriors all in armor though not all wore their helmets.

They brought him into a room and forced him down onto his knees. Luke shot them a nasty glare.

"We meet again," came a voice.

Luke didn't hide his annoyance. "Seriously?" he asked as he saw Maul sitting on the other side of the room. He was lounging in a chair. One knee propped up.

Maul slowly stood up and walked over. One of Luke's guards handed him the two lightsabers.

"Out of all the planets in this galaxy you could have gone to, you came to this one," Maul said in light-hearted tone.

"I take you know these people," Luke said, glancing at the warriors.

"These are Death Watch," Maul said as he hooked the lightsabers to his belt. "And they work for me."


Maul smiled.

It was of course at that very moment that Vader finally reached out.

*Luke?* he called in the Force. *I can sense you . . . You are near.*
Suddenly, Luke could sense Vader much stronger. Was he projecting himself to Luke?

_You will need to come to me_, Vader said answering Luke's own question.

About that . . . Luke muttered into the Force. _I am currently being held captive by some Mandalorian warriors._

There was a long stretch of silence.

_My son_, Vader said. His mental Force voice sounded strained. _How do you manage to constantly find yourself in these situations?_

_Giving you a few grey hairs?_ Luke joked.

Luke smiled, which only caused Maul's eyes to narrow. Luke was sure Vader was rolling his eyes.
"How many clones are you talking about?" Rex asked. The two stood next to each other in the office building. It was starting to get dark out. Rex's helmet sat on the floor next to his feet.

"Ideally a squad," Anakin replied. He was glad Rex had believed him.

"Eight more if you count myself," Rex said thoughtfully. "That may be a tall order."

"What about Kix?" Anakin asked. "And Jesse?"

"They're at the top of my list. All the men of the 501st are good men."

"Rex, I know. I want them to stay good men," Anakin said. There was a tap against his bond with Vader. He ignored it for now.

"But . . ." Rex said. He sighed.

"You're not sure who would take this leap," Anakin finished. "It's a lot to ask."

"I'll head back to base," Rex said. "Perhaps it may be best to start with Kix and Jesse. They may have some ideas or who else to ask. However, I don't know if we'll come up with more names."

Anakin closed the distance between them and placed his hand on Rex's shoulder.

"Thank you, Rex," he said sincerely.

Rex, ever the soldier, nodded. He bent over and put his helmet on.

"I'll see what I can do, general," he said.

Anakin wanted to reprimand him. Was he really a general any more? It didn't matter. He nodded and Rex left. He ran a hand through his hair as he walked over to a window. Vader was still trying to get his attention. He continued to ignore it. He watched as Rex cautiously made his way out of the building and into the streets. He glanced both ways and then jogged away.

The meeting had gone well. Rex believed Anakin, though there was still some trepidation. The clone was working against his genetic coding. However, Anakin was relieved to learn that Rex had already taken his chip out. Rex had been uncomfortable with it after what had happened to Fives. And perhaps he wanted to prove Fives was right. Clones weren't more aggressive without their chips.

Which made it a little bit easier for Anakin. But they needed more than just Rex.

Skywalker.

Anakin sighed. Vader had been pushing against his mind for a solid ten minutes now. He hadn't gotten the message that Anakin did not want to deal with him.

What? Anakin snapped.

Luke is on Mandalore, Vader said. He is being held by Death Watch and Maul.

Anakin groaned out loud. How did he manage that? Anakin asked.
Maul took him on the Invisible Hand. It was why there were no Republic records of him.

Anakin pinched the bridge of his nose.

Skywalker, Vader said. You made a deal with me. You said you would help me get my son. I have been upholding my end of the bargain.

And you got your other arm back, Anakin pointed out.

He could feel Vader's anger growing. It only made Anakin smile. The darkness within him stirred.

Fine, Anakin said. I will get your son.

He reached out into the Force. He quickly found Luke through their shared Force bond. He was close. Just on the other side of the city. Anakin fingered Vader's lightsaber hanging on his belt. He was getting restless. He needed to release some stress.

The Dark Side came easy enough. He welcomed it. Unleashed it. He thought about Mustafar as he made way out of the office building and into the streets. How he had enjoyed it.

When the lift doors opened to the underground base of Death Watch, there was already a path of carnage behind Anakin. Vader's lightsaber casted the hallways in a red light. Two members rushed at him. He sliced his blade up. It cleanly sliced through the first member and beheaded the second one all in one go. He watched as the bodies fell to the floor with satisfying thumps.

Death Watch deserved this. They were the ones who had started this civil war. The ones who had killed the Duchess Satine, who Obi-Wan cared for. Possibly loved if Anakin had guessed correctly. Now they had taken Luke. The galaxy would be better without Death Watch.

He laughed as he used the Force to twist a member's arms backward. The arms hung limpy at their side as the warrior screamed in pain. Anakin summoned the Force and used it to slowly crunch the warrior into a compact ball. The Dark Side was intoxicating. There was no holding back. There was no constant thought in his mind he should stop and that he was going too far. Now, he could go as far as he wanted.

It was . . . liberating.

Always he had been afraid of his power. He skirted around being a good Jedi. Doing it exactly how his teachers and the Council had wanted him to use his power. But when he did it faster or better or with more power than they expected, he was chastised. So he grew to be wary of his powers. Always second-guessing himself. Trying to fit into the mold that all the other Jedi fit into.

And now he had broken free of that mold. And it felt good.

He pulled the red lightsaber out of the chest of a member on the floor. He stared at the smoking molten hole in the armor. The burning smell of skin used to make him sick. Used to make him think of sand and inhuman screams and his mother's lifeless body. It still dug up those memories, but instead of causing him to shrink back in fear, it only made him stronger.

He paused at an intersection. He could sense Maul up ahead to the left, but Luke was to the right. Luke who was anxious. Luke who would not be ok with what Anakin was doing. That was ok. He was the best parts of Vader. Anakin smiled softly at that thought. That meant his baby would be the best of him. Babies, he corrected himself.

Padmé.
Her and their unborn children were still in Palpatine's grasp. Anakin's hand tightened on the lightsaber. He clenched his teeth. He turned left. His hand snapped up. His fingers curled and the door in front of him buckled and bent. With a flick of his hand, the doorway blew into the room. Anakin entered. Maul stood alone in the room holding his unlit lightsaber in front of him.

"Anakin Skywalker?" he asked. "I was expecting Vader."

"He's having trouble getting himself together," Anakin said.

"Shame," Maul said. "I was hoping to talk to him."

"Whatever business you have with him, will have to be done with me."

"You hold no interest to me," Maul sneered.

"Oh?"

"Did you think waving that red lightsaber and using the Dark Side suddenly made you worth my time? If your future self is a Sith, I find it no surprise you have fallen so quickly and easily. I have met Siths before, Skywalker. Time travelers however, are far more interesting."

"Is that why you took Luke?" Anakin asked.

"Are you going to tell me that since you've met Luke and Vader, you haven't once asked them about the future?" Maul said. He ignited both ends of his lightsaber. "That you haven't acted on what they said happens in the future?" Silence. Anakin only glared at Maul. "I think you have. You tried to kill Palpatine, I mean Sidious, on the Invisible Hand. You've killed the Separatist Council. And now . . . you're here. I'm curious as to what led you here, but it's not a hard guess. Your men are here. The ones most loyal to you."

Anakin spun the lightsaber in his hand.

"Let me guess, you need men to help you fight the inevitable future?" Maul said with a smile.

"Inevitable?" Anakin asked.

"The rise of the Sith empire."

"The future can be changed," Anakin growled spinning the lightsaber again.

"Can it? Look at you, Skywalker. You've fallen to the Dark Side. You look just like your other younger self."

"What do you know?" Anakin said through clenched teeth.

"I've seen it," Maul said smiling. "The revenge of the Sith. The destruction of the Jedi. All done by you. You entered the Jedi Temple and killed them all. The masters. The knights. The padawans. The younglings. All of them. And behind you marched your men. Your clones with the blue markings. Ever loyal to their general."

"You don't believe that," Anakin said in a low tone taking a step forward towards Maul. "You think you can change the future as well. Why else would you have taken Luke? Where did you see yourself in this future?"

Maul snarled. His white teeth stood out amongst his black and red face.
"Hmmm?" Anakin purred smiling. "Not the happy ending you had hoped for? What happened? Did Obi-Wan finally finish what he started?"

Maul's face instantly darkened. Anakin laughed.

"I'm afraid, whatever future you're hoping for won't come to pass," Anakin said. He lazily slashed his saber against the floor. Sparks flew up. Red gashes crossed the floor.

"We need not fight," Maul said. "We have the same goal."

"I don't think we do."

"We both want Sidious gone."

"Oh? And then who will rule this inevitable Sith empire?" Anakin asked. "You? You're doing such a good job here on Mandalore. Look at how quickly it has come crumbling down."

Maul spun his saber. He sliced it across the floor adding more molten gashes to it.

"You know what I do recall?" Anakin said. "I recall you standing next to my wife." He hissed the last words. "My pregnant wife, whom you stuck a needle into her stomach. What was in that needle?"

The darkness was clawing up inside. Wrapping around his heart. Slithering up his throat. He had no doubt his eyes were gold with a bleeding ring of red around them.

"I wouldn't know," Maul growled.

"How could you not?"

"I was implanted with a slave chip," Maul snarled. "Something you should be familiar with, right little slave boy?"

Anakin shouted as he lunged at Maul. He slammed his saber down onto Maul's, who kicked at him. He jumped back. Maul jabbed his saber forward. Anakin blocked it. Back and forth they went. Anakin slashing and jabbing. Maul blocking and bouncing Anakin's blade between his two. He would come in for a stab or slash, and Anakin would parry or block it. Neither one gaining ground on the other.

Anakin snapped his hand up and blew Maul back against the far wall with the Force. Maul barely had time to get his saber up before Anakin was pressing his blade against against him. Anakin pushed. The two blades were locked. They sizzled and hummed. Anakin growled. The edge of his blade dipped into the wall near Maul's head. Maul pushed his sword out and kicked Anakin in the chest. Maul spun away and Anakin lashed out with his sword. The tip of which sliced easily through the wall where Maul had been moments before.

"Really, boy?" Maul smirked. "I was expecting better."

"So was I," Anakin growled back.

"With that rage you had when you talked about your sweet wife and dear sweet baby."
Anakin smiled as Maul grasped at his throat. As he listened to the soft gagging sounds as Maul tried desperately to get air. Then he laughed as he felt it. He felt Maul's fear. His fear as he knew he was going to die. It was such an exhilarating feeling. Anakin's fingers slowly curled tighter together as Maul's airways slowly shut.

He was dragging this out, because he was savoring every second of this. This scum had hurt Padmé. Had hurt his babies. *His* babies. Sure Luke could be considered his son, but the children inside Padmé... He felt much more connected to. They were *his* children. Not Vader's. *He* was their father.

Maul's eyes had rolled back in his head. His body hung limply. He was barely alive. Anakin frowned. It wasn't as enjoyable with Maul out cold. He loosened his grip on the throat. He wasn't expecting Maul's eyes to snap open, nor for the eyes to be glowing green with green smoke pouring from them.

What was happening?

Maul opened his mouth. More glowing green smoke came out of it and a horrible noise. A powerful Force blow slammed into Anakin. He was knocked off his feet, clear across the room, and slammed into the far wall knocking him out.

The Death Watch hadn't taken off his binders when they threw Luke into this cell. He had twisted his hands every way he could to try and figure a way out of them. His left wrist was now red and raw where the binders had rubbed against his skin. His right wrist with the synthskin was unphased.

He had split his time between the binders and the door. It appeared this place wasn't originally a military facility. It seemed like this was just a small spare windowless room. Perhaps a storage closet. The only things in here was a chair and a light in the ceiling. There were no vents or security cams. Not even a sink or a drain.

Luke was slouched in the chair. His hands rested in his lap. He stared at the binders. There had to be a way to use the Force to unlock them. If a picklock could use tools to unlock locks, why couldn't he use the Force? However, it was a bit hard to focus when he was constantly being interrupted by Vader.

*Has Skywalker not gotten you out yet?* he grumbled.


*He is there. I can sense him close to you.*

Luke had tried to contact Anakin himself, but like before there appeared to be something blocking the bond.

*If all you're going to do is complain, why didn't you come?* Luke asked.

Vader was silent. It felt like he had withdrawn himself a bit.


*If I was able to, I would have.* Vader said. His words short and clipped.
What did that mean? If he was able to? Luke let the conversation drop. He tried to open himself up more to the Force, but it felt restless. Cold. It made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on in. His heart was tight in his chest. His body on edge. The Force almost seemed to whisper danger at him, but he didn't know from where.

He jumped when the door slid open. Anakin slouched against the door.

"Anakin!" Luke said as he jumped to his feet.

Anakin smiled.

"Hey," he said.

It only took three steps to cross the room. Luke got a better look at Anakin. He looked horrible. There were dark circles under his eyes. His hair was greasy and sweaty.

"Give me those," Anakin said as he straightened up.

Luke held out his hands. With a simple flick of two fingers, the binders snapped opened.

"You need to teach me that trick," Luke muttered as he let the binders fall to the ground. He massaged his left wrist.

"In due time," Anakin said as he turned. "Let's go."

"What happened to the Death Watch warriors? How did you get pass them?" Luke asked as he glanced around the empty hallway and didn't see anyone.

"They've been dealt with," Anakin said. He was walking in front of Luke, so Luke couldn't see his expression.

"And Maul? Did you run into him?"

"I did," Anakin said.

"And?"

"I was going to leave him . . . hanging around with the other members of Death Watch, but he got away," Anakin said. The tone of his voice had been light at the start, as if he was making a joke, but had turned sour as he went on.

They made it to a lift and rode it in silence. As they exited the building, it was then Luke spotted the first body. He eyed Anakin, who walked on unphased. It was war, Luke knew. He had seen plenty of dead bodies before. If they were Imperials would he have spared a second thought? He shook his head. Probably not.

They made their way towards some speeders. Anakin jumped in one and Luke climbed in after him.

"You know," Anakin said as he started up the engine, "Your father has been worried about you."

"Vader? Really?"

Anakin had grabbed the steering yoke, but he paused as he glanced over at Luke. Luke noticed Anakin's eyes weren't as blue as they usually were. They looked a bit dirty. Dull.

"Yes," Anakin said. Then he smiled. "I don't think you realize how much he cares about you."
Luke leaned against the side of the speeder as it took off. He recalled the trail of white butterflies Vader had left him. He remembered what those butterflies had held. Vader's memories. Vader's dark memories of him falling to the Sith. Of what he had done to the Jedi. All to save his wife and child.


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