Missing and Presumed Dead

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Summary

Three months after ESB, Luke Skywalker is still reeling from the revelation of his parentage. When he finally cracks and tells Leia, she comes up with a plot to get Darth Vader off his back: stage his death. However, neither of them know that Darth Vader actually cares for his son, so the news ends up creating a Sith Lord hell bent on destroying anyone even remotely involved in Luke's demise. But when Leia tries to contact an in-hiding Luke, she finds that something terrible has really happened, and now no one knows where he is.

Meanwhile, Darth Vader starts getting a mysterious, unwilling visitor in his dreams...

Notes

This story is my first Luke/Vader centered story, and I'm very nervous! I love reading them, so I thought I'd try my hand, and my wonderful SW fanfic Discord group was super supportive in letting me steal this prompt idea...so here we go!

Thank you to the all-mighty SpellCleaver for beta'ing! If you haven't already, PLEASE go check out her stories!
The binary suns were just beginning to set across the desert sand, turning the pourstone of the Lars homestead dome from wind-blasted white to a muted orange and purple. Luke Skywalker stood at the edge of the crater, watching the suns set, as he did every night. Though the blistering heat of the day still permeated the dry air, the barest hint of a gentle breeze brushed the sweat-soaked curls from his forehead.

He didn’t pay it any mind, only watched as the land around him grew darker and darker. Before long, he would need to go back inside, before the Tusken Raiders and other unsavory beings were out exploring the Jundland in full force. Though their home wasn’t technically in the Jundland, it was close enough to present a danger to him if he stayed out too long.

Truthfully, Luke could never say why he came up to watch the suns set every day. He’d only been allowed up alone a few years before, when he turned eight. Before that, he’d had to wait until Uncle Owen or Aunt Beru were able to come up with him, and sometimes they’d been so busy finishing up for the night that he missed it.

Those hadn’t been good days.

“Why do we do this?” Uncle Owen asked one evening after Luke insisted that he needed to go watch. Aunt Beru had already been asleep, and Uncle Owen looked like he’d been chewed up and spat out by a bantha.


Perhaps Luke enjoyed watching the suns set because it was the only beautiful part about Tatooine. The suns turned the desert from a dry, flat, barren wasteland to a sea of colors. Now that Luke didn’t have Owen’s grumbling or Beru’s nervous hums in the background to rush him, the pure, utter silence was almost comforting in a way nothing else on Tatooine ever would be.

But deep, deep down Luke suspected it was something else. Something he would never dare utter aloud, knowing how his uncle would respond. Something he only dreamed about in the dead of night, safe in his bed, in dreams that no one but him were privy to.

One day, he hoped to look out across the horizon and see not just two suns, but a ship. Each time he fantasized about it, the ship changed. A bulky freighter. A sleek, silver starship. A skyhopper. Or even just an old speeder.

But who was flying the ship never changed: his father.

His father was always faceless. He didn’t know what he looked like. Owen never told him. Refused to, actually. But it didn’t matter. Luke always recognized him anyway, and off they would go, flying off into the suns set as quickly as he’d appeared, off on an adventure.

But it was a dream. His father was dead. All that was left to him was a name he clung to despite his family’s insistence that he take theirs. So as the sky began to darken, Luke sighed, turning away from the disappearing suns and began heading back to the dome entrance.

Just as he reached the entrance threshold, something made him stop, his small hand on the smooth pourstone. He stood there, staring at the door to the house, listening, a frown creasing his lips. Where he expected silence, minus maybe the noises of bantha moans carrying across the flats, he
heard a high pitched whine, that increased with every breath he took.

As soon as he recognized it, his head jerked around, back towards where the suns were just beginning to disappear on the horizon.

There, speeding towards the farm, was a ship.

His breath caught in his throat, his mind whirling with possibilities. Was it someone from the Hutt clan coming to bully them into paying a water tax? Was it one of their distant neighbors coming to ask Uncle Owen for help fighting back Tuskan Raiders? Was it…?

No. It wasn’t a ship he recognized.

His heart flew into his throat as he made the connection, and before he knew it, he was rushing down the stairs to the house below, taking two, three steps at a time. “Uncle Owen, Uncle Owen!” He was shouting as he rushed to his room.

“What now, Luke?” Owen tiredly called from his own room.

“My father is here!” Luke dashed into his darkened bedroom, reaching under the bed where he left the pack he’d always kept packed just in case he was suddenly whisked away on an adventure.

“What?” Owen sounded confused. Luke didn’t blame him. It didn’t make any sense, but he just knew it was him. He felt it in his gut. “Luke, wait!”

Luke ignored him as he rushed back out, pack in hand, huffing and puffing as he again took two stairs at a time to climb up. By the time he reached the top, he was covered in sweat, taking in huge, heaping gulps of air as though Tatooine had just run out of it. What a way to finally meet his father, he thought briefly, but it was gone the moment he stepped outside and found his father’s ship settled right outside of his door.

And just like that, the elation was gone, replaced by a creeping dread that sent shivers across his skin. He dropped his pack, and it landed with a thump next to his feet.

There, right in front of him, was a ship he did not recognize. It looked Imperial: a TIE fighter, he recalled. But this was no TIE fighter he’d seen or read about.

The cockpit in the center was larger, the windows darkened. Even in his limited experience with ships, he could tell the ship had some serious modifications to it. A set of canons were mounted on it, and Luke couldn’t help but notice they were pointed at the homestead.

At him.

But the wings--instead of the signature vertical, hexagon wings with an X shape across the panels, these wings were curved and long.

Something wasn’t right. This ship didn’t look like anything that should even exist. Sure, Luke didn’t know much about the rest of the galaxy, but it still felt out of place.

Out of time.

And from behind that curved wing, out stepped a monster, all in black. A cloak swirled around his shoulders as he strode purposefully towards Luke. He was humanoid, but he wore a suit that was much too hot for anything that should ever be worn on Tatooine. A panel of lights was nestled in the center of his chest.
But the helmet…

And then there was that awful mechanical breathing…

Luke could barely breathe as the monster approached, the breathing echoing across the sands, reverberating in his head. Without thinking, he’d begun stumbling back, hand grasping behind him, fumbling for the panel that would work their front door. Perhaps, if he could get inside quick enough, he could lock the monster out.

But the hulking black figure was much too quick, and before Luke could take another step, he was there, a gloved hand grasping Luke’s upper arm in a vise grip. Unable to help himself, Luke whimpered in pain even as he pulled against his grip. “Let go of me, you--you--” He couldn’t even think of an insult fitting enough for what this creature was.

The helmeted head tilted, looking down at him with wide, glass bug eyes. “You are coming with me.”

The voice was deep, each word dripping with a dark menace. A warning, and a threat. Luke thought his heart stopped beating right then and there. He struggled harder against the grip.

He shouldn’t have told Owen it was his father. This was not…


Luke stared up at the man, his entire small frame trembling.

“I am your father.”

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Luke woke with a sharp, painful gasp, eyes wide. For a second, his mind still whirled with images of Darth Vader at his home on Tatooine, come to snatch him away from his guardians. His arms were flailing, hands hitting the bottom of the upper bunk of Wedge’s bed, his legs kicking and tangling in the sheets. The next thing he knew, the world was tilting as his torso slipped off the edge of the bed, dangling him upside down.

He continued gasping, even as the blood rushed to his head, but it was enough to bring him back to reality. His breathing slowed and he positioned himself to push himself back into his bottom bunk, peeling the sheets off his sweaty skin with a groan.

Force, he was glad Wedge wasn’t around tonight. Luke probably would have woken him up. Again.

Even if the reconnaissance mission Wedge was flying should have been one Luke was there for.

Luke continued to breathe in through his nose, out through his mouth, over and over again until his heart rate slowed enough that he was able to get out of bed, making his way over to the fresher, where he flipped on the light and stepped up to the sink.

It seemed to be an almost nightly ritual. He’d either toss and turn until the wee hours of the morning, or he’d be violently awoken from a nightmare. Then he’d end up in the fresher, splashing cool water over his sweaty face and neck, willing the images of the dreams to go away.
Then he’d look up at the mirror and frown at the changes in his appearance: shadows under his eyes, sunken cheeks, too-pale skin. He was pretty sure he’d lost weight, but he was too nervous to actually check. He didn’t need more confirmation that he’d irrevocably changed after Bespin. That everything in his life had changed.

Even if he liked to pretend it hadn’t.

After he’d been fitted for his new arm and discharged from the med bay, he’d immediately been summoned to Rebel High Command. Mothma, Dodonna, and Leia were there, naturally wanting to know the exact details of what had happened on Bespin.

He’d told the story with the utmost professionalism, not as if it had happened to him, but as though it had happened to someone else and he’d merely witnessed it. It had scared him, that eerie calmness, but he’d made it through the story.

Leaving out, of course, the most crucial truth that echoed with every breath he took, with every dream he had, always in the back of his mind.

Darth Vader was his father.

No, he highly doubted High Command would take too kindly to that bit of damning information. Or, worse, they’d make him the poster boy of the Rebellion. Well, a different sort of poster boy. Instead of the pilot who destroyed the Death Star, he’d become the defected son of Darth Vader himself.

Neither scenario would end well.

So he said nothing, keeping it a secret, even as it became more and more obvious he hadn’t returned the same optimistic Luke as before.

He used to have the top bunk. That changed after the first nightmare sent him completely falling off the bed and bruising his shoulder and forehead.

He used to lead most reconnaissance missions with Rogue Squadron. He hadn’t gone out nearly as often as he used to. Every time he did, it felt as though Vader was going to pop out of nowhere in his TIE Advanced to box him in and capture him. He now only volunteered when it was absolutely necessary.

He used to smile more. He used to laugh more. He used to hang out with his squad mates during down time. Now? If he did do those things, it was a ghost of what he used to be. He was going through the motions.

He knew no one blamed him. There were plenty of soldiers who had experienced far less than getting their hand cut off by Darth Vader who had just as much, if not worse, PTSD. But every time he caught a pitying look, he couldn’t help but wonder how they’d look at him if they found out who he really was.

If he even knew who that was, anymore.

He’d finished up in the fresher, heading back to his bed, when the knock came, sharp and quick. He frowned, and tentatively he stretched out with the Force to sense who it was. A fumbling attempt, since he still barely knew how to use the gift and curse his father had passed down to him, but a successful one.

Leia.
He rubbed his face, willing himself to look less disturbed, and opened the bedroom door. “Hey,” he greeted, giving her his best smile. It felt less fake than the smiles he gave to everyone else, but it still wasn’t his best. “What are you doing up so late?”

Leia was dressed in a white, flowing dress, perfect for sleeping. Her hair was unbound and flowing freely down her back, telling Luke she hadn’t been awake long. “I couldn’t sleep.” It was a lie. She was even bare footed, he noticed as she breezed past him uninvited into his quarters. “I thought you could use the company.”

“How did you know I was awake?” He shut the door behind her. It was a good thing Wedge wasn’t here. Then again, having Leia Organa alone in his room would probably flare up rumors of their supposed secret romance, if anyone were to catch them. Nevermind Leia was clearly head over heels for Han Solo, and he didn’t see her as anything beyond a sister-like figure. He’d stopped protesting a long time ago, since that only seemed to fuel the rumors.

“Intuition.” Leia replied airily as she looked around. His quarters, like most soldiers’, were bare except for his discarded flight suit in the corner, some data pads on top of the dresser, and one of their drawers askew. Wedge’s drawer.

At least their room was relatively clean.

When she was done checking out his room, she sat down on his bed, patting the spot next to her. “What’s this about?” Luke asked cautiously. Nonetheless, he did as she bid, sitting beside her. If Han were there, he might have made a big deal about Leia’s request, thus causing Leia to furiously revoke it. But Luke wasn’t Han. He rarely argued with Leia, and never for the sake of riling her up.

“Can’t I talk to my best friend?” Leia asked, quirking a brow, a wry smile twisting across her lips—a smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes. Sure enough, it quickly disappeared. “Since when did we start keeping secrets from each other?”

Luke’s stomach twisted, and he had to swallow back bile. “I don’t. Are you?” He tried to sound like he was teasing. It wasn’t convincing. Even as he said it, his mind conjured up the images from his nightmare, followed by the memory of Bespin.

I am your father.

Naturally, Leia didn’t believe him. “You can’t seriously believe that I haven’t noticed?” She asked, incredulously. He swallowed, hard. “Come on, Luke. I know you. You’ve always been that optimistic, bright light that everyone notices whenever you walk into a room. It’s infectious, and it’s part of what makes you so innocently charming.”


She nudged him with her elbow. “It’s a compliment. Really.” Her expression darkened. “More people need to be like you.”

Luke’s mouth had gone dry. No. They didn’t. She wouldn’t say that if she knew.

I am your father.

“But you’re different now. After Bespin.” She continued, her deep brown eyes searching his. No doubt seeing what he saw in the mirror every night. Her lips pinched together.

“Well, I did get my hand cut off.” He replied dryly, holding up his prosthetic hand to emphasize
the point. Not that anyone could really tell it wasn’t real from afar. The synth-skin matched his tone perfectly. A little too perfectly. He usually wore gloves now to avoid having to look at it.

Leia nodded, glaring at the hand, or rather, the reason for it. “I know. I thought at first it might have been a hard adjustment to the new hand, but now I just get this feeling that there’s something else bothering you.” She met his gaze. The sharp, piercing gaze of a princess, a politician, and a Rebellion leader. “Something you’re keeping from me.”

“I’m fine.” The words were automatic. There wasn’t even any feeling in them.

“Has anyone told you that you’re a bad liar?” Leia asked skeptically.

“Multiple times.” One corner of his lips turned upwards.

Leia shook her head, hair spilling out around her shoulders. “Are you not telling me because you’re afraid I might have to tell High Command?”

Yes. He kept his mouth shut.

She took that for what it was. Gently, she reached up, pressing a hand to his cheek. Her skin was warm and soft. “You’re all I have left, Luke.” Her voice, normally so controlled and confident, wavered. “There is nothing you could tell me that would change how much I care for you.”

He couldn’t help it. He scoffed, before he could stop himself, and instantly her eyes narrowed. “I can think of some things.” He tried to sound like he was joking, but again, he was a terrible liar. He figured Vader was probably a pretty good one, so he probably got that from whoever his mother was.

Her thumb traced his cheekbone lightly. “Well, are you planning on defecting and turning to the Empire?”

“What?” He gave her a look like she was crazy, “Of course not! Do people think…?”

“No.” Leia replied, amused. She was still tracing circles with her thumb across his cheek. “But that might be the only thing that would cause our relationship problems. And even then, it’s not like I don’t have people I care about who sided with the Empire.” She shrugged. “It would hurt, but this is a civil war. It’s not uncommon.”

She sounded so casual about it. Either she was really trying to convince him to tell her, or...no, she was trying to convince him to tell her.

“I can honestly say I won’t be doing that.” Luke assured her. Despite what his father wanted. “But this...this is something…” He trailed off. “I don’t even know how to deal with this, Leia.”

Her other hand reached up, cupping the other side of his face. Oh, now would be a terrible time for someone to walk in, he thought in the back of his mind. He didn’t move, though. It felt right. Not romantic...but still, right.

“That’s what I’m here for.” She promised, firmly. “I’m here to help you. Just as you, Han, Chewie, and even the droids have helped me.” Her grip tightened, just barely. “Let me help you.”

He couldn’t look away from her. Even if she wasn’t holding his face, he couldn’t have looked away. Maybe it was her political persuasiveness. Maybe it was the fact that she was his best friend. Or, maybe it was the fact that he could feel the truth in her words. A prompting from the Force? He didn’t know. He felt like he understood the Force less than he did the day Ben introduced it to
him in his hut.

But he felt he could trust her. Out of everyone, she was the one he could trust the most.

“He’s my father.”

Leia frowned, but she didn’t pull away. “What?”

“Darth Vader.” The words burned on his tongue. “He’s my father.”
Leia’s hands dropped from his face as though he’d burned her, and she cradled them against her chest as if she were trying to hold her beating heart from leaping out. “What?”

He felt as though his soul was caving in on itself, but he managed a tentative, pained smile. “Still think I couldn’t say or do anything to change how you feel about me?”

It was a lame joke at the worst possible time and she pointed her finger at him, shooting him a glare. “Don’t put words in my mouth.” She warned, but the glare fell away as quickly as it came. “I just...give me a second to think, okay?”

She stood before he answered and began to pace the room, one of her hands absently fiddling with her hair as she did so. He watched her, and though his heart was hammering in his chest, worried that he had done the wrong thing in telling her, he couldn’t help but wonder if anyone else knew that Leia Organa had a habit of playing with her hair when she was stressed. Maybe that was one of the many reasons she usually kept it in an elaborate braid or updo.

Minutes trickled by as she continued to pace. He waited, shifting uncomfortably when she continued to say nothing. Perhaps she would wear a rut into the floor of his quarters.

But finally, she stopped, taking a long, deep breath in. “What if he’s lying?”

“He’s not.”

“You said your father was Anakin Skywalker.”

“He is.”

Leia turned to stare at him, her eyes narrowed. “You’re telling me that one of the greatest Jedi heroes of the Republic is now Darth Vader?”

“Apparently so.” Luke replied, miserably. Unfortunately, neither one of them knew enough about Anakin Skywalker to even begin to piece together how that happened. He knew his father had been a Jedi, one of Obi-Wan’s friends, was one of the best pilots Obi-Wan had known, and was apparently not dead. Leia had once added to that knowledge with the only very vague story her own father had told her about Anakin Skywalker: some story about being part of the first battle of the Clone Wars on Geonosis.

So, in short, Luke had no idea, and no amount of him dissecting what little he knew would give him the answers.

Leia seemed to come to the same conclusion. “How do you know he’s not lying?”

“Maybe the Force is wrong.”

“I don’t think it is.” He shook his head. “The feeling I got when he told me...Leia, it’s like the Force confirmed his stupid revelation as fact. Like how I know Tatooine has two suns. It was that certain.” It still was, try as he had to change it.

Leia sat back down beside him, rubbing her temples. “So all that muttering you were doing on the Falcon that day, about Obi-Wan not telling you something?” He didn’t realize she’d paid attention to that. Then again, he’d been pretty out of it. “That had to do with this?”

“Yes.” He replied sourly. He still had yet to get answers about that, and try as he might, he couldn’t get Obi-Wan to make an appearance to explain himself. Convenient, this Force Ghost thing.

“And you’ve told no one since you found out?”

“No. You’re the first.”

Leia sighed, running her hands through her long tresses. “Kriff, Luke. I can’t believe you kept something like this from me.”

“I know.” He replied, wishing he could be shot out into the vacuum of space to escape the shame of this entire revelation and conversation. “I’m sorry.”

Her eyes snapped to his, and she leaned forward, her jaw tightening as she shot back hotly, “No. Don’t you dare be sorry for this. It’s not your fault you were born to a murderous, powerful tyrant. You are not him. You’re Luke Skywalker. A hero. One of the best pilots in the Rebellion.” She paused. “You’re my best friend.”

His throat tightened. “But you, Han and Chewie... He tortured you all. Because of me. He froze Han in carbonite. Because of me.”

“We knew that was his reasoning anyway. He wasn’t exactly subtle that he wanted you.” Leia pointed out. “I just thought it was because you blew up the Death Star.”

“Me too.”

Leia frowned. “A lot more makes sense now. How he seems to be hyper focused on capturing you. How he’s still only a few steps behind us, hunting us relentlessly, capturing more high ranking officers for information over killing them outright. Again, I thought it was just because he’s a monster and that’s what he does, but now...”

She was rambling now, making the connections that he’d long since thought about, over and over again. But then she stopped, a contemplative look over her face. “But that still doesn’t make sense. He’s Darth Vader. He doesn’t have feelings of parental love or, well, any love at all.”

He knew that. He’d thought that repeatedly. Yet hearing it aloud still sent a pang through his chest. Likely because he’d had such high expectations of the great Anakin Skywalker that now that he knew his father was the literal antithesis of his dreams…it hurt. Not to be wanted just because he was someone’s child. Most kids who didn’t know their birth parents dreamed about that bond.

Now his were crushed.

Leia continued. “I mean he cut off your hand. What does he even want you for, anyway?”

Luke felt himself flushing with shame. “Power.” He admitted. “To help overthrow the emperor and
rule at his side.”

He thought Leia might have been horrified at what Vader had tried to convince him to do, but she snorted in disbelief. “You? Clearly, he knows nothing about you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means that even though you may have a power I could never dream of having, you’re not the kind of person to go over to the Dark Side and rule the galaxy.”

She seemed so sure, and up until Bespin, he had been, too. But now? “Do you think Anakin Skywalker might have been like me at one point?” Luke asked quietly. A question that had haunted him. “If he could turn into Darth Vader, how do you know I can’t turn into a monster either?”

Leia opened her mouth to deny it...then shut it. She couldn’t say he wouldn’t. Neither of them really understood how the Force really worked. Maybe it just took a hell of a lot of good persuading, or maybe it was something he was born with. He didn’t feel evil, but maybe Vader didn’t either.

The debate raged in him non stop, and it made his stomach turn every time he thought too much about it.

“We can’t let that happen.” Leia finally said, that calculating look she often got during strategy meetings on her face. “Even now, Vader raided the last place we landed.” She hesitated. “I’m not supposed to tell, but High Command is worried there may no longer be any safe planet to set up home base.”

That didn’t make him feel better about the situation at all. “You won’t as long as I’m here.”

“And if he does catch up to us and he does capture you…” she trailed off. “That would spell disaster for the Rebellion. For the galaxy.”

“I know.” He knew too well.

She was silent for a long time. Then, her eyes hardened, and she leaned forward. “You need to run.”

He blinked. “What?” He had not expected that response.

“You need to run. Far away.” Her voice broke. “I’ve lost so much. I’ve lost friends. I lost my parents. I lost my people. I’ve lost soldiers under my command...and I’ve now lost Han. If I lost you...either because Vader figures out you’re not useful to him and kills you, or worse, he manages to do something to turn you to the Dark Side…” She let out a sharp breath, and he was surprised to see tears in her eyes. When had he last seen Leia cry? “I can’t. There’s only so many I can lose, Luke. Please don’t make me lose you too.”

He hadn’t realized she cared that much. Sure, they were close. If anyone ever threatened Leia, he’d die protecting her. But he hadn’t ever really considered she felt the same way. They were both people who had fought and lost more than they’d ever gained.

And maybe they were tired of it.

“I couldn’t abandon you all.” Luke said. “I’m not a deserter.”

“I know.” Leia nodded. “But what if it was a mission?”
“I haven’t been on a proper one since Bespin. How would you even convince High Command that I was ready? I mean look at me.” He gestured to himself. He definitely didn’t look fit for anything beyond the few flying missions he’d done with Rogue Squadron.

“I’m not planning on involving them.” Leia replied carefully, watching him for his reaction.

He was speechless for a moment. “But...wouldn’t that get you in trouble...?”

Leia shrugged. “Probably. But it’s not like people haven’t done it before. Generally as long as it’s successful, it gets overlooked. And besides, I am a member of High Command. So, technically...I’m giving you permission.” She crossed her arms over her chest, nodding curtly as if that settled it.

Out of all the ways he’d thought she would react to the news of his true parentage, this was not one of them. “But you know he’ll just follow me, right?”

“Nope.” Leia said confidently. “Because you’re going to fake your death.”

Luke almost stopped breathing. “I’m going to what?”

“Fake your death.” She was so sure of herself, so matter of fact. “Look. Vader has always been involved in the war, but his primary goal before you showed up was hunting down rogue Jedi, right?”

“So I’ve been told...” He’d still been stuck on Tatooine while all of that was going on.

“So if you aren’t here, and in fact, to his and everyone else’s knowledge, you’re dead, then he might ease up on the chase.”

“That is a huge might.” He pointed out. He could not believe they were having this conversation. Or that he was starting to consider it.

“It is. But he himself may get called away by the Emperor, leaving other lackeys of the Empire to hunt us. While that is still a problem, it is significantly less of a problem than Darth Vader leading it. As much as I hate to admit it, Vader isn’t stupid.”

“Exactly. He’s not stupid.” He hesitated, remembering his encounter with Vader’s voice in his head shortly after he’d been rescued. “But...Leia...there’s something else. Vader...after you rescued me...he...um. Spoke to me. In my mind.”

Now Leia hesitated. “Is that even possible?”

“Apparently.”

“Why?”

“No idea.” It was pathetic how little he knew about the Force. He should have stayed with Yoda.

Leia contemplated that information, turning it over in her mind carefully. “Has it happened since?”

“No.”

“Have you...felt him?”

His brows furrowed as he thought back over the last three months. “I have nightmares about him.”
He said. “But I think that’s probably normal after...after what happened.”

“Probably.”

“I felt his looming presence when we were trying to escape. But once we hit hyperspace…” He dug deeper into his memories. The hours after Bespin had been a blur. He remembered Leia ordering him back into bed. He remembered her tending to him. He remembered Chewie coming in to visit, and Lando dropping in to tell Leia something. He didn’t remember what. Artoo was at his side almost the entire time, beeping sadly. At one point he reached out his hand to pat the droids dome...only to remember he didn’t have a hand anymore and he’d cradled it back against his chest.

But now...now he remembered that dark, overbearing presence staying with him, slowly growing thinner and thinner as though he were stretching away on a string until finally, at one point, it snapped. He’d breathed a big sigh of relief, and concentrated on the dire state of his health, and of the awful revelation that would change how he viewed himself forever.

Had that been his father?

He reached into himself, searching through the Force...but felt nothing. Just normal Luke, and the normal power that would answer his call if he asked for it.

“I don’t feel him anymore.” He finally said. “I haven’t since that day.”

Leia breathed a sigh. “Then this might work. It might not,” she rushed to add when Luke opened his mouth to point out that neither of them could really know for sure, “but it’s worth a try, I think.”

“But how would we even...?”

“I don’t know yet.” She said. “I’d need to think about it, see what resources are available, all without bringing attention to what we’re planning. For this to work, the galaxy needs to truly believe you’re dead. Otherwise, Vader will just come after you.”

Not a fun thought, running from Vader by himself. But it wasn’t like he hadn’t done that before. “I assume we’d have a plan for if that happened.”

“Naturally.”

“And who would know I was still alive?”

“Me.” Leia replied automatically, and when Luke waited, she shrugged. “I guess Artoo. He’s shown himself to be pretty reliable in situations like this.”

A mission without Artoo...he rarely went anywhere without the droid. But perhaps that would need to be part of the plan to make it believable. “No one else?”

Leia shook her head. “The more people who know, the more likely the plot is discovered.”

He truly would be on his own out there then, minus whatever help Leia set up for him. “And what would I do once everyone thought I was dead? You said it would be a mission.”

Leia smiled. “Oh, I would imagine a dead person could probably get a lot of things done without pesky Imperials shadowing his trail. You could learn more about the Force, become stronger in it so you could surprise Vader and the Emperor later with your invincible powers.”
“I don’t know if it works that way…”

“In fact, preparing yourself for a surprise attack on Vader and the Emperor when the time is right is actually a great idea.” Leia grinned, apparently pleased with herself. “Maybe you could even help get Han back from wherever he ended up.”

That wasn’t a bad idea. He would still be useful. He would be doing things he actually really needed to do, things he couldn’t do while he was still under orders from the rest of the fleet. Besides, Wedge could take over Rogue Squadron. The man had shown multiple times that he was more than capable of doing it.

Plus, he thought guiltily, selfishly; he could use the peace and quiet to straighten himself out. Get his head right. Get healthy again, both mentally and physically.

It really wasn’t a bad idea. Dangerous...but it could work.

“What about you?” He asked, frowning with concern. “You said it yourself. You’ve lost so much. If I just up and leave…”

Suddenly, Leia threw her arms around his neck, holding him tightly. Instinctively, he hugged her back, tightening his grip on her. She was smaller than him, so she fit in his arms perfectly. It wasn’t often that happened. “I will miss you every single day.” She said into his ear. “But if this keeps you safe, while also giving us a badly needed advantage...it’s worth it.”

His chest squeezed. It wasn’t like he hadn’t left Leia before for long periods of time. But it was always hard. And this mission could take anywhere from months to even years. Was he really prepared for that?

Leia pushed away, though she didn’t let go. Her hands gripped his shoulders, and she smiled sadly. Force, she really was beautiful. Even if he saw her more like a sister than anything else, he could recognize Leia for what she was, both inside and out. One day, he hoped he could be more like her.

Not like the father he’d once foolishly idolized. Leia was what a leader should be. Really, she was the type of person he’d actually want to be related to.

Not Vader.

“I’ll need to think about how to do this.” She said. “Give me a few days. And if you think I’ll totally leave your pretend dead self alone while you’re on this mission, you’re sadly mistaken. I expect full, regular reports.” She leveled a stern look at him.

He couldn’t help it. He grinned. And for the first time in months, it felt real. “Yes, ma’am.”

Chapter End Notes

Phew! I normally don't post two chapters in one night, so don't expect that from me in the future. I only did this time because I felt weird combining the first chapter with this one. Idk why, but that's how it worked out.

Something you should know, I have playlists for all of my stories. They inspire the scenes in my head. They are also all over the place genre-wise, so... fair warning you'll
get everything from John Williams to a rap song and everywhere in-between.
So, the song for these last two chapters is Demons (feat. Jennel Garcia) by Boyce Avenue.
Leave some love!
Love,
Ladyvader23
Leia had picked the stage for his fake death well.

The Ring of Kafrene.

If Ben were there, he’d probably make a comment about how the old mining outpost was a breeding ground for the scum and villainy that eventually made its way to Tatooine. He knew Han had been there at least a few times, the last being right before the ambush on the Mako-Ta Space Docks. The fact that Han Solo had willingly gone there to trade business spoke volumes in itself for the sort of place the Ring of Kafrene was.

There were plenty of ways one could legitimately die there. Plenty of battle hardened criminals lost their lives there on a daily basis. Though the population was largely full of traders, criminals and other shady individuals, the outpost was controlled by the Imperials.

If he wanted his death to quickly spread to both the Rebellion and the Empire, this would be the place to do it.

But what else could he expect from Leia Organa? Once she got an idea in her head, she planned it thoroughly, and she planned it well. It was sort of scary how smart she was, and as he, Leia and Wedge pushed their way through winding, narrow alleys stuffed full of beings from all over the galaxy, he made a mental note to never get on her bad side.

“Lot of Imps wandering around,” Wedge grumbled quietly as Luke and Leia casually ducked their faces as two patrolling stormtroopers pushed past them. Luke suddenly had the horrible image of one of them recognizing him and calling Vader here, ruining their plans.

“Act casual and we’ll be fine,” Leia replied coolly as they passed a street vendor. They were selling something smelling of charred meat and spices; the smoke hit Luke’s face, giving him a good whiff of it, and his stomach churned with hunger. “Over here.”

Leia ducked into a doorway so small that if Chewie had been with them, he would’ve had to stoop halfway over and squeeze through. Luke and Leia had no problem, short as they both were, but Wedge had to duck his head to keep from hitting the top of the frame.

It was a tiny cantina, with little to no ventilation, so Luke was instantly hit with the putrid smell of musky, unwashed bodies of the various beings in the crowded room, mixed with the smell of strong liquor. He instantly wished he could go back outside and look at what the food vendor was selling again.

“This totally looks like a credible establishment,” Wedge commented sarcastically, a little too loudly. One of the patrons at the bar shot him a dark look over their shoulder before going back to
their drink.

“Take it from me, Wedge.” Luke replied quietly as they followed Leia to a group of Weequay’s taking up a booth in the corner, “Don’t draw attention to yourself if you don’t want to get shot.”

“I know that. I’m surprised you do.” Wedge grinned, nudging him playfully.

Luke managed a strained smile, and Wedge’s expression fell. “Let’s just say I have more experience than I’d like.” He recalled Leia’s comment about his innocence, and the last time he’d visited a cantina with Han. He’d literally told the smuggler he preferred milk and, well, Han had laughed himself hoarse. He suspected Wedge might never let him live it down if Luke told him that, so he decided to avoid the topic.

They stopped at the booth of Weequays, and Leia slid easily into an empty spot as if she owned the place.

“Good evening, gentlemen.”

Leia smiled, though her dark eyes were hard. Luke and Wedge didn’t sit with her, but instead took up defensive positions nearby. If this deal were to go bad and the smugglers were to attack, they would need to be ready. Just because Leia had orchestrated this trade to frame his death, didn’t mean that it wasn’t legitimately dangerous for all three of them.

The Weequays broke off whatever conversation they’d been having to stare at the newcomer. Leia was dressed in her normal white jumpsuit, with a dark, tan-colored cloak sweeping over her shoulders. Her hair was braided around the crown of her head like a halo, not a strand out of place. She was the brightest, most collected person in the joint, and from the way she carried herself, elegant and poised and sure of herself, Luke realized just how much she stood out. “Who the ‘ell are you?” one of the Weequays, the tallest one, demanded.

Leia lifted a brow, sizing him up. Though her hand was nowhere near the blaster at her side, Luke knew she would draw it in an instant if threatened. “Well. If that’s how I’m going to be greeted, I’m sure we can find someone else to buy the goods from.” In a crowded establishment, she wasn’t about to say flat out that they were buying weapons from the smugglers. She shook her head, tsking. For a moment, it reminded Luke of something Han might do. He was always a bit dramatic during deals, too. “Shame. All those credits…”

The Weequays straightened, realizing who it was that sat with them. “Sorry, Miss, we didn’t know...ah. Kriff. We wasn’t expecting a lady. ”

Both Leia and Luke snorted at the same time without meaning to, causing some of the Weequays to notice Luke and Wedge standing nearby.

“It hardly matters what I am. Maybe I was expecting someone more intimidating than the lot of you,” Leia replied sarcastically with a roll of her eyes. “Now. Are we going to do this or not? Do you have the package?”

The tall Weequay bristled at her tone, but Luke rather thought it was a mild insult coming from Leia. “Maybe,” he growled, leaning forward. “Depends on if you ‘ave the credits.”

“Oh, that’s not an issue.” Leia waved it off. “You’ll get your credits the moment we have the goods.”

The Weequay glared. “No, you pay now.”
“How do I know you won’t take my money and run?”

“‘Ow do I know you won’t scram wi’ ou’ goods?”

Leia inclined her head, considering. “Half now. Half upon delivery.” She stuck her hand out, waiting.

The Weequay looked at it, then leaned in to talk to one of his buddies in hushed tones. Though Luke hadn’t touched the Force much since...since Bespin, he tentatively reached out now, probing the men at the table. Though Leia could definitely handle herself, he wasn’t about to let her be blindly double crossed. Even if they needed the Weequays’ involvement to make this work.

He could be wrong...but they didn’t feel like they were going to double cross them. More like they were worried Leia would. But eventually they stopped muttering to each other and the tall Weequay straightened again, reaching out to grab Leia’s hand with his leathery one. “Done.”

As Leia paid out half of the credits, sliding them across the table, Luke quietly told Wedge, “It feels weird. Being here, doing a deal like this, without Han.”

Wedge frowned, crossing his arms over his chest. “I can imagine.” He sighed. “None of us here are really suited to this type of deal, are we?”

“No. You can say that again.” Luke again managed a smile for his friend, but it faded as he watched Leia and the Weequays stand, getting ready to leave.

Operation “Fake Luke’s Death” was officially in motion.

Not for the first time since Leia told him Wedge would be coming, Luke felt bad for his friend. Only Leia would know that he wasn’t really dead, but Leia had claimed they needed someone else to witness and truly believe his death for this to work. It made sense, but when all of this was over, and assuming they survived the war, he couldn’t imagine what Wedge would think when Luke showed up alive. He wondered if he would resent him for using him in the worst way possible. He hoped Wedge wouldn’t feel responsible for his death, either. It was almost enough to make him reconsider.

But then he thought about Vader, hunting him down, breathing mechanically down his neck, almost, and he’d steel his resolve.

It was time for Luke Skywalker to be dead to the galaxy. For now.

Wedge and Luke followed Leia and the Weequays from a short distance, filing back out of the tiny cantina into the busy street outside. Luke again breathed deeply, smelling that charred meat, and wondering if he had time to grab something to eat before he died. Last meal and all. But Leia had already turned to the Weequays, giving them the details of where to bring the shipment, before she gestured to Luke and Wedge and began to head off towards the cargo ship she’d flown.

“I’ll need both of your help to get the crates into the ship,” Leia told them as they began making their way towards her docked ship. “Then I’ll wait for your escort off planet.”

He and Wedge had taken their X-wings to get there, landing them in the private hangar of a Rebel sympathizer. Unlike the Falcon, which was currently with Lando and Chewie on the search for Han, the cargo ship Leia had chosen was not as fit for combat. So, she’d ‘innocently’ asked Luke and Wedge to be her escort.

It wasn’t an unusual request, given that they didn’t have Han and the Falcon, so Wedge didn’t
question it.

“Of course, Your Highness,” Wedge replied, giving her a crooked grin.

They continued back through the winding streets the way they’d come, pushing through the throngs of beings. This time, whenever they passed stormtroopers, neither Luke nor Leia ducked their face, though Luke had to fight against the habits he’d developed over the years as being the Empire’s Most Wanted to do so. Wedge, not being anywhere near the top of the Empire’s bounty list, didn’t seem to notice the change in their behavior, since he himself didn’t have to go to the same lengths to protect himself.

The whole time they walked, Luke kept himself tentatively immersed in the Force, specifically sensing for the stormtroopers. At first, most of the troopers they passed barely gave them a glance. But then when Luke almost knocked into one of them, he sensed their recognition. It wasn’t long before they had a discreet tail. Since Luke was such high priority bounty for the Empire, they wouldn’t risk stopping him with only the two trooper patrols.

No. Backup was coming.

Which, weirdly enough, was part of Leia’s plan. Why she wanted to contend with more danger than was truly necessary, he didn’t know. But he trusted her. She was the only one left he could truly trust. So he continued to monitor the situation.

Or, he tried to. On Bespin, he’d realized that he’d treated the Force as a magic trick, something to play hero with. Now, it was foreign to him, and his attempts at using it seemed childish.

He hoped he wasn’t going to genuinely get them all killed as a result.

When they arrived at Docking Bay 4, where Leia’s chosen inconspicuous cargo vessel was sitting, there were already a few Weequays waiting, different ones than those they met at the bar. Unlabeled crates sat on a hovering cart, waiting for inspection.

“Hey.” Luke grabbed Wedge’s shoulder, stopping him for a moment while Leia approached the Weequays and began asking them to lift the lid on the crates. “I’m going to help Leia for a sec. You should go change into your flight suit. We’ll need to make a quick getaway once we’re done here.”

Wedge frowned, glancing over to where Leia was now inspecting an open crate. “I’m sure I could wait.”

Luke gave him a look. “Come on. Wedge. I do missions like this all the time with Leia. Trust me. These missions always require a quick getaway.”

“But then shouldn’t you change with me?”

“When you come back out, I’ll go up to change. We’ll trade places. I just want to get out of here as quickly as possible.”

“Is it...a Force thing?” Wedge asked, hesitantly. It had been a while since Luke had been out with Wedge on anything seriously important, and it had been even longer since Luke had used the Force as a reason for making a decision during a mission.

And, technically, this wasn’t a lie. There were gathering stormtroopers heading their way.

“Yeah.” Luke nodded, not quite meeting his eyes. “You could say that.”
If Wedge sensed something was off, he didn’t say anything, though Luke noticed his friend’s hand edge closer to his gun. “Then let’s hurry.”

Luke breathed out a sigh of relief as he watched Wedge head up the ramp before he himself headed to Leia’s side. He brushed a hand against her shoulder when he approached, but he was certain Leia already knew he was there. “Is everything ready?” Luke asked, looking down at the crates.

He wasn’t talking about the crates, but Leia nodded sharply, looking up at the Weequay’s. “Thank you gentleman. You’ve earned the other half.” She reached over and handed one of them a pouch of money. “You don’t have to, but we’d appreciate it if you’d stick around to help us load these up.” She flashed her best, charming smile, the one she usually flashed at people when she wanted to convince them of something.

“Well, we don’ usually…” one of them began, before being sharply nudged in the ribs by one of their mates. “Oi!” he yelped, glaring.

“We gotta!” the nudging Weequay insisted, “She’s a lady!”

“An’ I’m a man o’ business.” The original Weequay grumbled, but nevertheless lifted one of the boxes. “Don’t mean nothin’.”

“Thank you, gentlemen.” Leia smiled, amused. “Our friend in the ship will tell you where to set them.” Then she turned to Luke, grabbing his arm and beginning to lead him away a bit. “Well?”


“And you have…what I gave you?” It was highly likely they were being watched. She wasn’t going to say anything that could potentially get back to Vader.

Luke swallowed hard, his hand reaching casually to his pocket where a small black velvet bag sat, one lonely pill inside of it.

“Yes.” He replied, seriously. “You’re sure it won’t…?” He trailed off.

She nodded, though her lips pinched in concern. “I triple checked, and then quadruple checked.”

Luke breathed out, steadying his nerves. He’d never used any kind of a drug before, let alone one that, in small doses, gave a pretty convincing appearance of death. “All or nothing, I guess.”

Leia snorted. “More like mostly or nothing. All would be really, really bad.”

“Right.” He said, sheepishly. Then, a split second later, “Look out!”

He grabbed Leia, pulling her down as bolts fired from the direction of the bay doors, behind what was left of the crates remaining to be loaded.

The stormtroopers had arrived, blocking off the entrance to the docking bay.

“Kriff!” one of the Weequays yelped from the loading ramp, dropping one of the crates, “It’s the Imps!”

But there would be no running and leaving Leia, Luke and Wedge on their own. If the Weequays wanted out, they would need to help fight their way out.

Just as Leia planned.
“I don’t know how you do it,” Luke muttered as he pulled out his blaster and peeked around the corner of a crate, quickly darting back when a bolt whizzed by and almost hit him in the face.

“See? Us regular people can have uncanny precognition when we want.” Leia replied as she expertly leaned out and fired off a few shots at the troopers swarming the entrance. Luke felt two life forces snuff out as Leia leaned back behind cover.

The Weequays were also attempting to fight back, using what little cover the ship could provide. Again, Luke longed for the Falcon and its seeming knack for getting them out of trouble--but that wasn’t the purpose of this trip, was it?

Wedge appeared from the top of the ramp, wearing his orange flight suit, blaster out and already firing on the Imperials. “You weren’t wrong, Luke!” Wedge shouted as Luke and Leia again darted out from cover to fire more shots. More troopers went down, as well as five more from the result of Wedge and the Weequay’s involvement. “We’re seriously outnumbered here!”

“We gunna die!” a Weequay yelped in panic. Not all smugglers were as brave as his best friend, it would seem.

“No, we’re not!” Leia shouted back as she and Luke ducked back behind the now badly damaged crates. It wouldn’t be long before there wouldn’t be adequate coverage. Luke internally thanked Leia for not purchasing anything that could detonate while they were being shot at. “We’re going to make a run for it. Get in the ship!”

“But ou’ boss…”

“We’ll drop you off.” Wedge promised, glaring at the troopers as he shot off a few more shots. There was no way in hell Wedge would leave his X-wing behind.

But it worked. The Weequays glanced at each other, nodded, and under Wedge, Luke, and Leia’s cover fire, they raced up the ramp into the ship.

“Come on, you two! I’ll cover you!” Wedge called once the Weequays were up.

Leia and Luke ducked back into cover, Leia nodding at Wedge before giving Luke a glance. She didn’t need to ask. He was ready.

She jumped up, making a break for the ramp. Luke leaned out at the same time, adding to Wedge’s cover for his friend, and once she reached the ramp, he moved back, his hand going to his pocket, grabbing for the velvet bag and pulling it out, clenching it in his fist.

“What are you doing?!” Leia shouted, “Come on, Luke, let’s go!”

“Hold on!” he called back. He moved, on hands and knees, his back to her as he headed for the handle of the cart carrying the weapon crates. “We can’t just leave these here, we need them!”

At the same time, he managed to fumble the pill out with shaking hands, and shove it into his mouth, wincing as he swallowed it dry. It felt like swallowing a pebble. A really, really dangerous pebble.

_You’ll have two minutes._ Leia had told him when she gave it to him that morning in the solitude of her room. _Make it count._

“Are you insane?!” Wedge yelled, “We gotta go, Luke!”
“Gimme a minute!” Luke waited for a split second, then at a small nudge from the Force, he stood, grabbing hold of the cart handles, and pushing with all his might.

It was heavier than he thought it would be, but with half of the crates already loaded onto the ship, it was manageable. Slower, though, than he’d like, but he kept pushing it towards the ship.

“Give it up, Luke!” Wedge shouted, even as he and Leia provided cover. Two of the Weequays had come tentatively back out to assist. So, some bravery after all, then.

“We need these--AH!”

Luke’s grip slipped from the handles as he was thrown to the side from the force of a bolt hitting him in the side, a searing, white-hot pain burning through his body.

“LUKE!” Leia shrieked. Distantly, he heard Wedge shouting too.

Force, it hurt. Even though Leia had planned for this--even though he had planned for it, had even made sure he wouldn’t be hit anywhere he wouldn’t survive--it still kripping hurt.

But it was beginning to dull. Everything was. When he managed to open his eyes, everything was a blur. Sounds of the stormtroopers and his friends trading fire at one another began to fade away. Distantly, he felt hands on his body, pulling, dragging him. Hopefully towards the cargo ship. He had a moment of panic as he thought it might have been the stormtroopers, claiming their bounty. If they were the ones dragging him, and he woke up later on the Executor... well, that would definitely be one of their worst plans-gone-awry.

But as his consciousness began to fade, he again heard Leia, closer than any other sound. “Oh Force, Luke, don’t leave me, please…”

And everything faded to black.

The plan had gone without a hitch. Luke had taken the pill, then shortly afterwards been shot. It looked worse than it actually was. She didn’t know how she knew that, she just...had looked at Luke once she’d dragged him onto the cargo ship and had known.

Wedge had panicked, though. As she knew he would. The Weequays in their ship had stared at Luke’s body with wide, ogling eyes, as if he were going to rise from the grave right then and there.

She made a show of trying to save Luke’s life while Wedge took the pilot’s seat. Under a barrage of fire, one of the Weequays had lifted the loading ramp, just as Wedge lifted the ship off the ground and blasted away. While Wedge had circled the Ring of Kafrene, seeking to blend in with the traffic around the outpost, Leia got one of the Weequays to help her with getting Luke onto a gurney so that she could begin applying bacta patches and slip an oxygen mask onto his face.

As if the oxygen mask would help. He already appeared very much dead.

“Miss,” the Weequay who had helped her said, gently, “I don’t think…”

“You don’t know Luke.” Her voice broke. Unlike Luke, she was much better at lying. She had to be, given her occupation and the Rebellion she had joined at a young age.

So the Weequay had left her, giving her a pitying touch on her shoulder before he did, leaving her alone with the unresponsive body of her best friend.
And it was eerie looking at Luke this way. Given that he’d struggled to sleep and keep his weight up after the encounter on Bespin, he’d already looked unhealthy. Now, with his skin pale and cold to the touch, his chest unmoving, he looked well and truly dead. It looked like a long, drawn out death, too, as though he’d been starved and tortured beforehand.

How she’d let him go on so long without telling her the truth of what was bothering him… she felt a wave of shame and a fierce protectiveness.

Vader would not take Luke from her. Father or no, he would go nowhere near her friend.

It wasn’t long before Wedge touched down in the private bunker he and Luke had stored their X-wings in, and the ramp was lowered. “We don’t have much time.” Wedge said, coming out of the cockpit. Artoo followed him, immediately rolling over to where she and Luke were, beeping mournfully.

Apparently, even Artoo, who definitely already knew what was really happening, was good at lying. Who knew?

Leia barely paid attention to the Weequays, as they filed out of the ship. She stayed next to Luke, reaching up to tenderly brush his hair from his face. His skin was ice, and even she had to remind herself this was just a ruse. Her friend wasn’t really dead.

Unless she’d messed up on the dosage.

She tried not to think about that.

Another gentle touch on her shoulder. “Your Highness,” Wedge said softly, carefully.

“He’s fine,” Leia replied automatically, and she was pleased at how devastated she sounded. She refused to look at Wedge.

“Your Highness, I don’t…” He sighed. Then, gingerly, he reached down and placed two fingers against Luke’s neck. “Leia, he’s gone.”

Artoo whined, long and sad.

She made a harsh, guttural, broken noise. “No. He’s not.”

“I’m sorry.” And Wedge sounded sad, too. This was, after all, his friend. His commander. Luke wasn’t just a hero of the Rebellion to Wedge. But Wedge was also a soldier. He’d lost friends and comrades before. It was never easy, but it was part of war.

Good people, heroes, died.

“Do you want me to fly us back?” Wedge asked softly.

Leia closed her eyes, rolling her shoulders back, before she turned to face him. Wedge was looking at her warily, as if he weren’t sure how to handle someone who’d lost their best friend. But Leia Organa had learned early on that even when facing loss, she needed to be strong. She needed to lead. She could cry when she was alone, away from those who looked to her to be the voice of reason when all seemed lost.

“No, that won’t be necessary. We can’t leave both of the X-wings here. I’ll...I’ll send for Luke’s to be picked up when we get back.”
Wedge frowned, but he nodded. “Okay.”

He turned to leave, to follow her orders, but she stopped him. “Wait. I…” He stopped, looking back at her over his shoulder as she turned and looked at Luke’s body. “I can’t bring him back like this.”

“Your Highness…”

“I know, Wedge.” She held up a hand, stopping him from again explaining to her as if she were a child that her friend was dead. “I can’t bring the hero of the Rebellion back to parade his dead body around like he’s some sort of commodity. Do you know what that might do?”

“It might piss everyone off and fire them up for revenge against the Empire?” Wedge asked, bitterly.

“Maybe,” Leia acknowledged, “Or it might terrify people into getting them to leave. If the hero who shot down the Death Star can die on an ordinary mission, then what does that say about everyone else?”

Wedge hesitated, but didn’t argue. “So, what do you propose we do?”

“Luke wasn’t big on crowds, anyway.” Leia fully turned to face him, staring him straight in the eyes, just daring him to challenge her. “We hold our own funeral.”

Leia made a show of choosing the planet it would be held on, but in reality, she’d already made decisions days before. But Wedge didn’t question her when she told him the coordinates to punch into the navicomputer of his X-wing, and off they went.

A few short hours later, they were jumping out of hyperspace, orbiting over the quiet forest planet of Takodana. Wedge immediately hailed her, and Artoo patched the message through. “Where to, Your Highness?” Wedge’s voice echoed through her cockpit, still gentle. Still pitying.

She paused, taking a moment, as though she were searching for a spot. As if she hadn’t already made arrangements beforehand. “I’m about to send you the coordinates,” she said, punching it through.

Moments later, Wedge replied, “Got it.” Then, a pause. “Are you sure we shouldn’t take him to Tatooine? I mean I know his family is gone, but…”

“Then why would he want to be buried there?” Leia pointed out logically. “Besides. Luke wasn’t that fond of Tatooine. No, I think he’d rather be buried on a nice planet with lots of forests and lakes.”

She didn’t actually know if that was true. Maybe she’d ask him one day...or not, since that was a rather morbid question.

She navigated the ship towards the coordinates, aware that Wedge’s X-wing was following closely. About an hour later, she was touching down at the edge of a forest and lowering the ramp.

She took a long, steadying breath as she powered off the ship.

Now for Phase Three.
She stood and left the cockpit, finding Wedge already at the top of the ramp, looking apprehensively at Luke’s still body. Artoo rolled back over to his master, bleeping sadly.

“How do we do this?” Wedge asked.

“Well.” Leia frowned, considering. “I think my father once said that the Jedi burned the bodies of their dead.”

Wedge squirmed uncomfortably. “So...you think we should...?”

“I do.”

Wedge visibly gulped. He probably hadn’t woken up that morning thinking he was going to burn a body. Leia, on the other hand, had. But Wedge didn’t need to know that. “Okay. So, do we carry him out first, or...?”

“We should build the pyre first,” Leia told him.

Wedge nodded, his skin looking a bit green. “R-right.”

They ventured out of the ship, leaving Artoo with Luke’s body, while they went to find the perfect spot to burn her best friend. Except, Leia had already chosen the spot. In fact, her own local informant had helped her choose a spot two days before. So, though Leia made a show of debating other spots with Wedge, it wasn’t that long before she came across the right one. “Here,” Leia said, her voice tight. “Here is the perfect spot.”

It was a small clearing, surrounded by trees and brush. Wedge frowned, opening his mouth as though to object, but he snapped it shut, changing his mind after getting another glance at her grief-stricken expression. “Alright, Your Highness. Let’s build a pyre.”

Well. She supposed she’d done stranger things in her lifetime.

It took them the majority of the afternoon, but come evening, they had a pyre built of sticks and leaves in the center of the clearing. Both of them were covered in sweat, and Leia was glad her hair was up: otherwise, it would be sticking to her neck uncomfortably. Wedge’s black hair was totally plastered to his forehead. “So, now do we...?” Wedge huffed.

Leia nodded. Luke should still be under the effects of the drug, but it wouldn’t be long before it started to wear off. “We’ll need a body, and a blanket.” When Wedge gave her a funny look, she explained, “They usually covered the body in Jedi funerals.” That, she was making up. But there was so little to be known about the Jedi, Wedge didn’t argue.

Together, they went back to her cargo shop and picked Luke’s body up. It was heavy, heavier than she expected, and stiffer. Again, her stomach clenched with worry. If she'd been wrong...then she would be responsible for killing Luke Skywalker.

They entered the clearing with Luke’s body, and carefully placed it atop the pyre. Wedge stepped back, breathing heavily, wiping the sweat from his brow. “So we put the blanket on and then...?”

He couldn’t finish. She thought he was likely too tired to get queasy at the thought of burning Luke Skywalker’s body.

She turned to Luke’s body, approaching. From behind her, she heard Artoo wheeling carefully into the clearing. “I’m sorry Wedge,” she said, softly. “But...could I have some time? Alone?”
Wedge hesitated. “We don’t know how safe it is out here…”

“I won’t be long,” she promised, then added, “Please.” Her voice broke on the word.

Wedge was silent. Then, “Alright, your highness. I’ll be at the ship. Come get me when you’re ready.”

She closed her eyes, listening to Wedge’s retreating footsteps through the undergrowth, until finally, finally everything was silent, minus the electric whirrs of Artoo’s gears. “Is he gone?” she asked Artoo quietly.

Artoo bleeped a considerably happier bleep, which she took as a yes.

She breathed out, turning to the droid and kneeling down. “Alright. Let’s wake him up, shall we?”

Artoo whistled, and opened one of his compartments. There, a syringe sat, carefully wrapped up in a handkerchief, which she carefully pulled out. “Time to wake up, Luke,” she said, nervously, as she stood back up and positioned the needle at his neck. She took a deep breath in, and slowly let it out. “Oh, please don’t really be dead.”

Then, she stabbed it into his neck, pressing the antidote in.

Once completed, she wrapped the syringe back up and handed it back to Artoo, her eyes never leaving Luke’s pale face.

She waited.

And waited.

And waited.

And just as it started to feel like an eternity had passed, just when she thought she might have actually killed Luke Skywalker… Luke’s eyes flew open and he sucked in a big, gulping breath.

“Luke,” she breathed, putting her hands on either side of his face as he began to cough. “Oh, thank the Force, you’re alive.”

“Of course…” cough, cough, “I’m alive. Wasn’t that,” cough, cough, “the plan?”

“Well, yes, but you were so convincing. I worried I might have done the dosage incorrectly,” she replied, sheepishly, as she brushed his hair away from his face. “How do you feel?”

He’d stopped coughing, instead just laying on the pyre, taking big, heaving breaths of air. “Like I’m still halfway through death’s door.”

She couldn’t help but chuckle, savoring the rich timbre of his voice, before she threw her arms around him and hugged him.

“Ouch.” He winced when her arm brushed against the blaster injury.

“Sorry.” She quickly pulled away, flushing. Stupid. He wasn’t completely unscathed. “I put bacta patches on it. There’s a nondescript ship nearby with more of them in the cockpit.”

Slowly, Luke began to sit up, wincing as he did so. “Thanks.”

She snorted. “Luke, don’t thank me for that. You were shot under my orders.”
“I knew what I was getting myself into,” he assured her, though he was still gingerly holding his side. “How is Wedge?”

“I think he’s trying to keep it together for me,” she said, throwing a look over her shoulder. “He believes you’re dead, though.”

Luke sighed, hanging his head. “I’ll need to apologize when this is over.”

“I’m sure he’ll understand.”

“Will he?” Luke looked up at her, and that dark look was in his clear blue eyes again. The one he got anytime he referenced Bespin. Or his father. “Because I’m never going to tell him the whole reason.” That he was Darth Vader’s son. Many in the Rebellion wouldn’t take kindly to that fact.

“We’ll figure it out when the time comes.” She reached out and grabbed his free hand. “Come on. Let me help you down from there.”

Luke nodded, wincing. “Who did you call to help you arrange all of this?” he asked as she carefully helped him slide down from the pyre. A few sticks poked her as she did so, but she paid them little mind.

“An old friend.” She smiled grimly. “She owns a cantina here, and she’s known for being able to procure things discreetly.”

“Does she know who…?”

“No. But I did have to give her a rough size of a body I needed to actually burn on this thing.” Leia motioned to the bushes at the far end of the clearing. “I had to keep reminding myself to keep Wedge away from that side when we were gathering materials.”

“Um.” Luke frowned in the direction she motioned to. “She didn’t… kill someone for this, did she…?”

“No. Stolen from the local morgue,” Leia assured him, patting his shoulder gently. “Maz isn’t much into killing people unless she has to.”

“Okay,” Luke frowned, chewing on his bottom lip. Clearly, he wasn’t fully convinced, but there wasn’t time to argue the point. “Do you need help, or…?”

“I’ll be fine.” Technically, true. It would be difficult without Wedge’s help, but she couldn’t exactly ask him to help her lift a different body onto the pyre without giving everything away. And with Luke still healing, she would manage on her own. She wasn’t part of High Command because she was the daughter of Bail Organa, after all. “First, let’s quickly go over the plan and send you on your way.” She stepped back, watching him carefully, ready to spring back if he lost his footing and fell.

He didn’t.

Artoo rolled forward, beeping something neither of them understood, before he opened up another compartment and revealed a secured, encrypted comlink. “Use only that comlink to make contact with me,” Leia explained as Luke took it from Artoo. “It’s patched directly to a frequency Artoo will maintain. No one should be able to intercept the messages you or I send to each other. So, don’t lose it, and keep in touch at least once a week. Otherwise, if something happens, I won’t be able to find you.”

Leia nodded grimly. “The ship is south of us. It’s ready to go, and it’s stocked with supplies, including anything you might need to disguise yourself and some credits.”

“This Maz person sure went all out for you,” Luke commented wryly. “What, did they lose a bet?”

“No.” Leia replied, “I just called in one of my father’s old favors.”

“Some favor.”

Leia shrugged. “Being the Princess of Alderaan still has some weight to some people.”

They stood there, staring at one another. Between them, Artoo beeped sadly. “I’ll miss you too, buddy,” Luke said, managing a small smile to the little droid, reaching up to pat its dome. “You take care of Leia and Threepio, alright?”

Artoo whistled in affirmative, but it was still mournful.

“Please take care of yourself out there.” Leia breathed, and this time when she hugged him, she was sure to be careful of his wound. She smiled sadly when she felt him reciprocate, holding her close to him. She would miss this. She would miss him. Enough so that she almost debated asking him to call the whole thing off.

But then she remembered Vader. She knew all too well what Vader would do to Luke once he got his hands on him.

She wouldn’t let it happen again. Vader would not harm anyone else she cared about, if it was the last thing she did.

“Before you know it, the war will be over and we’ll find each other again,” Luke promised, but even she knew it was mostly empty. This war had no end in sight, it seemed. It could very well be years before she saw Luke again.

She buried her face against him, breathing him in. “Okay,” she said simply. There weren’t words to express how much she would miss him. It was different than Han, and yet still no less painful.

She would see him again, she vowed. Even if she had to waltz through the doors of death to drag him out herself.

“You should go,” she said, pulling away, though she still held his flesh hand. It was warm in hers.


“Then, go.” She motioned in the direction of his awaiting ship.

Luke stood there, staring at her, as if imprinting her image in his brain. Then, slowly, he began to back away. She didn’t let go of his hand, didn’t let go until he finally stepped out of reach and he was forced to. Then, he turned, walking away into the forest, disappearing.

She still had her hand outstretched towards him, watching the tree line where he’d vanished. Artoo beeped inquisitively, and she slowly lowered it.

Why did she feel like she was watching part of herself go?
Luke didn’t wander far, at first. Despite what he’d told Leia, he wasn’t about to leave her totally alone in that clearing. So, he found some bushes, crouched down, and watched in the dimming light as she eventually stopped watching after him and went to pull out the body.

Instantly, he felt guilty. Guilty that she’d had to find some other poor sap who had (supposedly) already died, who fit his size and body type. Guilty that his side still throbbed to the point where he knew helping her was totally out of the question, and would likely have opened the wound rather than helped with anything.

At least she’d been right. She was a lot stronger than she looked, apparently.

But even worse, after she’d placed the blanket over the body and Artoo had rejoined her with Wedge in tow, Luke felt guilty that his friend was watching what he thought to be Luke’s body go up in flames.

He couldn’t hear from this far, but he could see Leia and Wedge’s lips moving. Maybe saying something over the fake-Luke’s dead body? Luke wondered if the real person who had once had that body would have liked a funeral like this, except with their own family and friends in attendance, saying things that were relevant to his life, not Luke’s life. He quickly felt guilty about that, too.

He was growing a rather long list of things to feel guilty about.

He watched his friends watch the burning pyre until the sky grew dark, and finally Wedge said something to Leia, putting a comforting hand on her shoulder. Leia didn’t look at him, just kept looking at the body, but she nodded. Wedge paused...then turned and walked away.

*I’ll be back, Leia*, he promised silently, as Leia straightened up, said something to Artoo, and turned away. *Be safe.*

He watched as Leia reached the tree line, paused, turned with a frown, scanning the area where he was hiding. When she saw nothing, she turned again and walked away, quickly disappearing into the darkness.


Chapter End Notes

This was a very hard chapter to write. Lots of research and muttered curse words went into writing it. Faking death is really difficult. So, hope ya'll enjoyed!
Next chapter: Dad Vader finds out....MUAHAHAHAHAHA!
The two songs for this chapter are: Renegade by Styx and Death of a Master by Kevin Kiner from Clone Wars.
Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
Darth Vader's News

Chapter Notes

Thank you to the wonderful, talented SpellCleaver for the beta! As always, go check out her stories if you haven't! You won't be disappointed! ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Luke Skywalker was…”

Leia paused, trying to come up with words that would be adequate for who Luke had been. Who he still was. She stood in front of an assembly of Rebels: from those in High Command to pilots to foot soldiers. She wore her best white dress; everyone else wore their best uniforms. It reminded her of the medal ceremony on Yavin IV, except much sadder.

But most importantly, their own media crew, who broadcast important Rebellion calls to action through the underground” broadcast system, was in attendance, recording everything she said.

If Vader hadn’t already gotten the message by that point, he would when the Imperial spy network or Imperial Censorship Bureau caught wind of the broadcast.

She needed to make this speech count.

“Luke Skywalker was the face of the Rebellion. He didn’t just save us and billions of other life forms by destroying the Death Star, but continued to save lives through the work he did.

“And Luke Skywalker was also another thing: he was a friend. He was a friend to anyone who needed one, whether he knew them well or not.” She hesitated. “And… and he was my best friend. Not because he rescued me from the Death Star. Not because our line of work frequently had us working together… but because he was loyal. He was loyal to what he believed in, to who he believed in. And he was good. Pure, innocent, and so, so damn good. He was a light in my darkest moments, and he was the pillar that people could believe in. It was that loyalty that prompted him to put himself in danger for the good of others. It was that loyalty that caused him to sacrifice his life so that others may have the tools needed to fight the Empire.

“So I refuse to let Luke’s death be in vain. I will fight in his memory. I will bring down the Empire in his memory. Because that’s what Luke would have wanted.” She lifted her chin, staring down the faces of those who stood in attendance. “For Luke Skywalker. For the Rebellion.”

“For Luke Skywalker!” came the answering shout as the soldiers in attendance saluted almost as one. “For the Rebellion!”

Hear that, Vader? she thought as the crowd began to disperse. The broadcast wouldn’t be quite done yet. She’d managed to get Wedge to agree to an exclusive interview to talk about what happened, though he hadn’t looked happy about it. You don’t get to have him. Luke is dead to you, dead to the Rebellion, dead to the galaxy.

You won’t touch him ever again.
Something was wrong.

It was the first thing Vader thought when he left his meditation chamber that morning, though it was fleeting and he barely registered the thought. It wasn’t that uncommon for something to be wrong. They were at war, and it was a large galaxy. Something wrong was happening somewhere at any given moment, and if he concerned himself with every single one of those problems he’d be driven mad.

But then, an hour later as he marched towards his first meeting of the day, where he expected a full report on the Rebellion’s movements—on his son’s movements—the thought came again.

Something was wrong.

He slowed a step, but then pressed on. Perhaps whatever it was that was wrong would be revealed in the meeting. If that was the case, then it likely meant the rebels had achieved a victory even he couldn’t scoff at, and that was a problem, indeed. One people would die for. He would be sure of that.

He was most interested in the main cell of the Rebellion, where his son currently sought refuge. A refuge he hadn’t left since Bespin.

Hiding from him.

Because of what he’d done to him.

But the meeting didn’t report on anything like that. The Rebels were still on the run from him, unable to find the refuge of a new base because he was only steps behind them. Yet, just like always, he was still far enough away that he couldn’t get through the weak bond he shared with his son to communicate with him.

What he’d say to him once he did...he had no idea.

The last time he’d tried to communicate with his son had not gone well.

Yet though the meeting had given him little cause for concern regarding the Rebellion, for he would eventually find them, and he would have his son at his side, he still felt...uneasy. Like something was about to happen.

Something terrible.

But what?

There was absolutely no indication from any of his sources, both official and unofficial, that something was on the horizon.

So what was it?

The feeling grew throughout the morning until he could no longer ignore it. So, without explanation, he left in the middle of yet another long, boring, pointless strategy meeting with his highest officers on board the Executor. No one bothered to stop him, and not just because they were not-so-secretly terrified of him. They were used to the Dark Lord randomly leaving during meetings, either because he was summoned by the Emperor, or because he sensed something else of more importance through the Force.
Or because he was bored and they were wasting his time.

Oh, the benefits of being second in command of the Empire.

But with each measured step he took towards his own private wing of the Executor, where his meditation chamber resided, the thought was practically screaming itself at him.

Something’s wrong something’s wrong something’s wrong something’s wrong…

He quickened his step. He did not run. He wouldn’t, not on the Executor where the eyes of his subordinates were always watching him warily. But the thought was no longer just a feeling, but a matter of fact.

And he suspected it had to do with his son.

The only way he knew to find the source of the problem quickly was through meditation. Even if all his attempts to find his son, to reach him, that way had failed miserably. Their bond had just barely been established with his rather abrasive revelation on Bespin. It hadn’t had any chance to grow, and even his connection to Luke by blood would just barely strengthen it. Not when Luke still so vehemently rejected that bond.

But now there was a problem and he didn’t know what it was.

He’d reached the door to his meditation chamber when it happened. The Force exploded in warning, so strong and quick he doubled over, using the wall to keep him on his feet. If the ventilation system in his life support suit wasn’t constantly regulating his breathing, he was sure he would have briefly stopped. It felt as if the Force had thrown a Super Star Destroyer on top of him. Repeatedly.

The phrase changed, repeating over and over in his mind:

Something's happened something’s happened something's happened something's happened…

He was alone in the corridor. It was his private wing, so it wasn’t as well-traveled, except by the 501st when on patrol. So no one saw him crumpled like that, trying to push back the torrent of wrongness the Force was projecting at him so that he could stumble to his feet and get to the bottom of the problem.

When he finally did manage to stand, he entered the dark room containing his meditation chamber and stumbled straight to the console, keying in the frequency for the bridge.

Admiral Piett answered quickly. “Lord Vader.”

Somehow, Vader managed to maintain his normal, deep, baritone, injecting just the right amount of threat and urgency into it. “Search all Imperial frequencies. Monitor it for any potential mention of Skywalker.”

Admiral Piett frowned. “We already are, my lord…”

Vader cut him off. Piett was one of the more competent admirals he’d ever had. It would be a shame to strangle the life out of him now and be saddled with someone of lesser ability and intelligence. “Check it actively. Send anything and everything to me personally. I want rumors, I want current as well as past confirmed sightings, I want everything, Admiral. Nothing is too insignificant a detail. Gather the intel and send it to me immediately.”
Admiral Piett was wise enough not to argue a second time. “It will be done, Lord Vader.”

He cut the feed before doubling over again, slowly backing up into his meditation pod until the back of his legs hit the cushioned black chair in the center. He collapsed into it, just as the top of the chamber lowered and the life support systems flickered on. A second later, the claw reached down and removed the top of his helmet, and he drew in a gasp of atmospheric gasses and oxygen into his lungs.

It did little to push the feeling away, little to calm the storm the Force around him had become.

Something’s happened something’s happened something’s happened something’s happened…

Vader’s hands gripped the meditation chair’s armrests so hard, it creaked and crumpled under them. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to make sense of what was happening—not to him, but to Luke.

Because it had to be Luke. There was nothing else in the universe that he would care about so much that the Force would react this way. Even if the Emperor died, he doubted he would feel as if his entire reality was caving in on itself.

But the bond he needed to find clear answers just wouldn’t respond. No matter how hard he pulled at it, no matter how much he banged against it, it was frustratingly silent. A growl escaped his throat, and his jaw tightened painfully.

But, as luck would have it, he was hailed by the bridge.

That was sooner than he’d expected. Normally, he might have been secretly pleased at Piett’s fast turnaround time, but this time, he had a feeling that it didn’t mean anything good.

He didn’t hesitate. He flipped the switch to bring the helmet back, the pod opening up at the same time. The feed established just as the helmet settled back onto his head. “Well?” He demanded.

“I’m sending you the file, my lord,” Piett said. Vader’s eyes narrowed. He didn’t miss the nervous twitch of the man’s lips. Just barely, but there. “Stormtroopers on the Ring of Kafrene reported engaging with Organa and Skywalker, along with some local smugglers.”

He was already pulling up the information on the data pad he kept in his chamber, just in case of moments like these. He scanned the report, consuming the information greedily.

And tensed.

“They reported injuring Skywalker before they escaped,” Piett finished.

The words echoed in his head. On the screen before him, he read the detail Piett had left out.

“…dragged unconscious by Organa after being shot…”

The datapad splintered in his hand. He felt Piett’s nerves spike through the Force, though there was no hint of it in his expression. “…we don’t have confirmation of Skywalker’s death. We will continue to—”

“Set a course for the Ring of Kafrene.” No. The boy wasn’t dead. He couldn’t be. He’d know it… And yet, the Force was still projecting Luke’s danger at him, strong as ever.

He refused to consider what it meant.
Not again. He swore he wouldn’t…

_Not again._

“Yes, my lord.” Piett wisely didn’t argue. They were supposed to hunt down the Rebels, and here they were again. Dropping everything to go after Skywalker.

Vader cut the feed. The Ring of Kafrene was nowhere near their location. It would take them a day to get there, a day when anything could happen. If Luke was seriously injured (and it felt like that was the very least of the problem), it could get worse before he got there.

He could die before he got to him.

Instantly, the thought made his chest tighten painfully. He was fumbling with the switch to his pod again, closing it, the claw coming back down to take the helmet off.

Space. He needed...he needed _space._

He couldn’t be dead. Vader wouldn’t _let_ him be dead.

But the last time he’d tried that, it hadn’t ended well.

Powerless. He was completely, utterly powerless.

And he hated it. Hated himself for allowing him to be put in this position in the first place.

He spent the time holed away in his meditation pod, trying (and failing) to meditate in order to hone the fury of raging thoughts and feelings into a weapon he would use against those who had hurt his son. But instead, his mind kept going back to that encounter on Bespin. not for the first time in the last three months since he’d watched the Millenium Falcon jump to hyperspace.

Since he’d felt Luke’s resolute rejection of their bond.

Bespin had become a stain on his already black soul. Everything had gone wrong. Organa had slipped through his fingers. Luke had avoided being frozen in carbonite. Originally, he’d planned on keeping Organa as a means to enticing his son into joining him on the Dark Side. He seemed attached to the girl, and he knew all too well how attachments could exploit someone into joining the Dark Side. Like father, like son, he’d thought.

But at the very least, he could have frozen Luke in carbonite, made some vague story up to the Emperor about losing the boy, and then unfrozen him himself so that he could break the news of his parentage.

But no. Organa had escaped and Luke had escaped. He’d lost control of his anger, and in it, he’d cut off his son’s hand, told him who he really was, then offered him a place at his side.

While his son was dangling precariously over a chasm in the underbelly of a floating city on a gas planet.

But every time he thought about Bespin, the Dark Side always seemed to push back the guilt with two points.

First, Luke had attacked _him_ first. Him. The Dark Lord of the Sith. Darth Vader. A man Luke had seen with his very own eyes take down entire squadrons of X-wings by himself, or slaughter over a thousand men, all without trying. Yet his brave, foolish son had ignited Anakin Skywalker’s
lightsaber and attacked Vader first.

Second, he hadn’t predicted Luke would literally throw himself down the pit of Cloud City. He was certain his offer to join him would have been preferable to dying. And Luke would have died, had there not been something for him to grab onto at the bottom of the city. The boy had made his choice. It was his own fault for anything that happened as a consequence of that decision.

That’s what he told himself, anyway. But then he’d be in the middle of meditating, searching for his son, and he’d get that feeling again. Guilt. Something Darth Vader had long since stopped feeling.

And now?

Now all Vader could think was their encounter. How it might have gone differently had he just stuck to his plan. Or, maybe, watched Luke come into the darkened room and just told him the truth, right then and there.

How would Luke have reacted? He didn’t know. But perhaps there would have been a chance the boy at least hesitated in attacking him.

But it hadn’t gone that way. Bespin was a failure, though the Emperor considered it simply confirmation the boy needed to be destroyed. And now…

And now…

Luke had been shot. He was at the very least unconscious. And Vader was helpless to save him.

Just like always.

It was his fault. Always, always his fault.

The day of hyperspace travel felt more like two weeks. The last hour of it felt like a hundred years. By that point, Vader had given up on meditation, too restless to stay in his pod for a second longer. He needed to do something—or at least give himself the impression that he was doing something useful. So, putting his helmet back on, he left for the bridge.

He did not fail to notice that the stormtroopers and officers on board were giving him a wider berth than usual. Most likely, Piett had warned them to stay out of his way. As if that would save them if he truly wanted to kill someone.

But at least the long walk to the bridge gave him something to put his mind on, small as it was. For once he was grateful for the sheer size of his ship. By the time he reached the bridge, there was only ten minutes to reversion, and though the Force still swirled around him like an angry rancor, he felt a little more in control.

He ignored Piett’s greeting. Ignored the way the entire room tensed up as he stalked down the walkway towards his favorite spot at the front of the bridge, right in front of the viewport. He stopped, clasping his hands behind his back, and merely watched the swirls of hyperspace as his mind went over what would need to be done to find his son when they reverted.

When they finally jumped out of hyperspace, revealing the failed mining compound turned trading post nestled between two asteroids, something eased in his chest. Just being here, being able to do something…

He’d find his son. He was fine. Injured, but fine. Nothing Vader couldn’t help him through. And
maybe, by nursing him back to health, maybe Luke would trust him enough to consider his offer again…

“... you tell him!”

The words, whispered behind him, made him pause.

“No, we’ll go to the Admiral. He’s gunna kill whoever brings him this…”

His hands clenched into fists.

That was never something he wanted to overhear. Even less so when it could involve his son.

He whirled, cloak billowing behind him as he approached the technicians at the terminals below the walkway. “Tell me what?” he challenged.

Two technicians, fairly young--new recruits, if he remembered correctly--straightened up, their skin going as pale as ice. “L-Lord Vader,” One of them stuttered. Behind his mask, he rolled his eyes. “I...I didn’t think…”

“No, you didn’t.” Vader shot back sarcastically. Force, he didn’t have time for this. “Spit it out.”

Cowards.

The techs looked at each other, one of them gulping in fear, until finally the tech who had addressed him cleared his throat, pulling out a data pad. “We just intercepted a transmission, my lord.”

Lord Vader stared. Waiting.

“It’s from the Rebels, my lord.” The other one added. He was shivering. “They’re broadcasting across a little known frequency, but…”

“I don’t care,” Vader cut them off, already ready to shove them out of an airlock. “Tell me what it says.”

They looked at each other again.

“It’s a memorial service, my lord.” The first tech replied. “It’s for Luke Skywalker.”

Silence.

Roaring, galaxy-crumbling silence.

He no longer saw the bridge. He just saw his son. The son he’d barely known, the son he’d always wanted.

The son who had stared at him in horror that day on Bespin. Horror and disgust. And betrayal.

He’d failed. He’d taken his son’s hand, driven him away into the waiting arms of Rebels who only cared for making the boy their poster propaganda child. All because he’d failed to maintain his control.

Just like the night he’d lashed out at Padmé.

He didn’t realize he’d crushed the technicians’ wind pipes, even as they collapsed lifeless to the
floor.

He didn’t care.

His son was gone.

And it was his fault. All his damn fault. It didn’t matter that Luke had attacked him first. That was a stupid, flimsy excuse, something he’d used to justify what happened. He still could have salvaged the situation. He could have brought him home, by his side, away from the danger that had killed him.

It was his fault.

“My lord…”

He didn’t hear the words. Didn’t recognize the voice that had spoken. The Force lashed out and he didn’t care where it landed. He didn’t care. He didn’t…

He only cared that his son was dead. Again.

He hadn’t meant it when he’d stubbornly told himself Luke had made his choice on Bespin, that he would have to live with the consequences of choosing death over being at his side. He hadn’t meant it.

If he only could have talked to him again...he could…

What?

He was a Sith Lord.

This wasn’t supposed to faze him. He killed people all the time. If Luke hadn’t been strong enough to survive, then he wasn’t worthy of...he stopped that thought cold.

“Lord Vader!”

Vader tilted his helmet towards the voice. Piett. Piett was standing there on the walkway, his lips pinched, eyes wide with terror. Vader blinked, turning his head back to the rest of the bridge.

The original technicians who had delivered the bad news were dead. They’d been right about his reaction to the news. But it wasn’t just them. Two others were dead too.

He didn’t remember killing them.

But it wasn’t their deaths that had given Piett the courage to interrupt the Dark Lord’s spiraling, destructive explosion of anger. The port windows were cracked, splintered into spider webs. He could barely see the Ring of Kafrene through them.

He’d almost taken out the entire Bridge.

His fists clenched, the leather of his gloves creaking. “Admiral.”

“My lord.” Piett’s voice was ever steady, despite the fact that he’d almost killed them all for a reason they didn’t fully understand.

“Prepare my ship,” he commanded, “and deploy the 501st.” He was already walking, and Piett hurried to move out of his way.
“Yes, my lord.” Piett nodded tersely.

“I’m going to investigate Skywalker’s death myself.”

And murder anyone who was even remotely involved.

As soon as Luke left Takodana and jumped to hyperspace in the rundown Corellian G9 Rigger-class light freighter, he’d immediately set to work on getting familiarized with what else had been left for him. True to Leia’s word, there were extra medical supplies, clothes, food rations, blasters, and credits stuffed in various compartments, and he’d immediately set about changing his appearance.

He couldn’t exactly go walking around looking like Luke Skywalker, after all.

First, there were the clothes. He couldn’t exactly go around in military fatigues. Not if he didn’t want to draw attention to himself. Thankfully, Leia must have agreed, because the drawers in the sleeping quarters were filled with clothes he could see Han wearing. He changed into a black, long sleeved shirt, dark brown pants, and black boots. In fact, it was so similar to the outfit Han had given him for the medal ceremony (minus the bright yellow jacket he’d picked for himself), Luke couldn’t help but smile fondly.

Next, he had to do something with his hair. He couldn’t go around as a blond farm boy. Not when the Imperials had listed that as one of his defining characteristics. So, he dug around in the fresher and found, sure enough, Leia had left him hair dye.

He’d never actually tried doing anything with his hair before beyond brushing or getting sand out of it. So, he carefully read the instructions, applied the dye, and…

Promptly made a gigantic mess all over the fresher.

But, when it was all done and he towled his hair off to dry, he no longer had his blond locks. Instead, he had pitch black hair.

He hated it.

With his pale complexion and the weight he’d lost over the last three months, he looked like a gaunt ghost. But, he supposed, at least he didn’t immediately look like Luke Skywalker from afar, or by those who didn’t really know him.

But he didn’t stop there. Along with the hair dye had been a box of contacts, and when he opened them up, he found they were brown.

Again, he’d never worn anything like them. He’d watched some of his fellow squad mates put them in and take them out every day, but he hadn’t had a need for them before. But the Empire had listed his eyes as being blue, so he read through the directions and attempted to put them in.

He promptly poked his eyes what felt like ten trillion times before he managed to succeed.

When he was done, he looked himself over in the dye-smeared mirror in the fresher and reluctantly admired his handiwork. He didn’t exactly like the look. He much preferred his natural hair and he liked not having to poke things into his eyes to make his eye color different. But combined with the outfit…it was a passable disguise, as long as he went nowhere near Darth Vader.

It would also help that he wasn’t wearing a lightsaber at his hip. That tended to be a dead
He heard the navicomputer ping, indicating the incoming reversion from hyperspace, and he went back into the cockpit, feeling just a little more at ease in the rudimentary disguise.

As soon as he guided the ship out of hyperspace, he leaned back in the pilot's chair, taking a deep breath in, staring out at the billions of stars surrounding him.

He hadn’t exactly picked anywhere in particular for his first jump as a free, dead man. He’d mostly concentrated on getting away from Takodana. Now that he was situated and away from the planet, now that everyone thought he was dead…

The entire galaxy was practically laid before him.

For the first time since...well, ever, he could do what he wanted. Go anywhere he desired. There was no one to give him orders. No one in particular to save. No obligation to become a Jedi like his father.

No horrible truths waiting for him at the end of that journey.

He was free.

For just a brief second, he felt lighter than he had since before he’d gone home to find his aunt and uncle burned alive. He basked in it, closing his eyes, drawing a deep breath into his lungs through his nose, releasing it out his mouth…

And realized he wasn’t really all that free. He’d promised Leia that he would use this time being fake dead to prepare to do...something useful. Destroy the Emperor, had been their main thought. But now that Luke was here, alone, sitting amongst the stars, he didn’t quite feel that was the smart choice.

After all, preparing to defeat the Emperor would mean finishing his journey as a Jedi. The last time he’d tried to do that, he’d found out that his father was Darth Vader, and that Ben and Yoda had lied to him about almost everything regarding his family’s past.

Perhaps he could go to Dagobah. Confront Yoda and the ghost of Ben Kenobi. Force knew they deserved it. Besides, he’d promised Yoda that he’d return.

But Dagobah was so...final. If he went back, he’d likely be obligated to stay until he became a full fledged Jedi.

He wasn’t quite sure that’s what he wanted anymore. He didn’t know what he wanted at all, actually.

He could try to find Han. He missed his best friend, and he knew finding Han would make Leia incredibly happy. But Lando and Chewie were out looking for him already, and if Luke’s path crossed with theirs, it would be obvious he wasn’t dead. He knew Chewie would be able to scent him out even with the best disguise in the world.

But, what then? What could he do?

He sat, staring at the stars, his mind turning over various possibilities. It was beginning to look like becoming a Jedi was the best option, but then…

*You could try to learn more about Anakin Skywalker.*
Luke blinked. He didn’t know where that thought came from. It was insane. He’d asked around about his father numerous times, and no one had answers for him.

Or maybe, like Ben and Yoda, they hadn’t wanted to tell him his father was a monster.

But it couldn’t hurt to try. If he found out more about Anakin Skywalker and why he fell to the Dark Side, then perhaps he could use that knowledge to prevent himself from falling. He could return to Dagobah feeling sure of himself again.

He figured Coruscant would probably have the best information, but even then, it was likely to be heavily edited. Plus, there was no way he could go anywhere near the planet, let alone any of the core worlds. Vader or the Emperor would sniff him out in a heartbeat.

But he could try the Jedi temple on Vrogas Vas.

He’d tried it once. Vader had been hot on his tail, had destroyed over a thousand soldiers--just to get to him, he now realized with a shudder. But now, Vader wasn’t hunting for him. Last he’d heard, Vrogas Vas had largely been abandoned by both the Empire and the Jedi. It was a desolate wasteland. Why bother keeping it?

And besides. At the time, he’d been told to turn around and leave, that he wasn’t ready. Now? Well, he still didn’t know if he was ready, but if he was looking for answers about his father…

Where else would he start?

“Worth a shot,” he muttered as he began calibrating the navicomputer. Either he’d show up and there would be maybe something he could use to find out more about Anakin Skywalker, or he’d run into the Empire and his charade would end very quickly.

But at least it was something.

Chapter End Notes

DAD VADER IS BEST VADER!
I had way too much fun writing this chapter...
There are two songs: For Vader: The Immolation Scene by John Williams
For Luke: Hopeless Wanderer by Mumford and Sons
Send some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
“I want every place of business, every home, every hangar, *everything* on this outpost to be searched, top to bottom,” Vader snarled at his troopers the moment their transport set down in Docking Bay One, the largest of the hangars on the Ring of Kafrene, reserved for Imperial resources only.

It had been an effort to wait for his troops to arrive. He himself had taken his TIE Advanced, with two of his best pilots flying escort. He’d almost strangled them while he waited for the rest of his troops.

What he really wanted to do was to rip the trading post to shreds himself, using nothing but his hands, his lightsaber and the Force, but even for him that would be too slow. A lone raging Sith Lord would be fairly obvious, and anyone who had anything to do with Luke’s--with what happened would have the sense to turn tail and run. He didn’t feel like giving chase, so he would instead use numbers to route out the perpetrators quickly and efficiently before they could escape.

He needed information on his son. He needed to confirm what the Force had already told him. He needed…

He needed his son.

“You will bring me all information on Skywalker. Anyone who saw him, anyone who engaged with him, anyone who was in the same room with him. I want them all apprehended and brought to me. *Alive.*” He put emphasis on that last word. Information required the informant to be breathing still.

Besides. He wanted to kill those responsible.

He would relish in their deaths.

Once the 501st acknowledged his orders and disappeared out of the hangar, Vader turned on his heel, marching towards the control center, the Force swirling angrily around him as he anticipated who awaited him there.

The stormtrooper squad that had fired the shot that killed his son.

When he entered the main control room, a line of ten stormtroopers waited at full attention. The other control officers in the room attempted to focus on their work, pretending Darth Vader hadn’t just called a squadron of their comrades to interrogate them in the middle of the room.

The stormtrooper squad that had fired the shot that killed his son.

Vader stopped before the waiting troopers, crossed his arms over his chest and stared at them for a full minute. There was nothing but the hushed tones of control officers giving clearance to passing ships and the rasp of his respirator. Through the Force, he sensed the troopers’ rising fear.
Precisely as he intended.

“Sergeant.” Vader turned the weight of his stare on the leader of the squad. “Report.”

The trooper at the far end of the line stepped forward. Though his helmeted face revealed no emotion, Vader could sense the trooper’s awareness of their impending doom.

Good.

“Lord Vader,” he acknowledged. “JN-584 was on patrol this morning when Skywalker was spotted with Organa and another pilot, known to us now as Wedge Antilles.” Vader mentally filed the information away for later. He’d known some information on Antilles simply because he shared a squadron with his son, but since he hadn’t been a viable option in getting Luke to turn himself over, he hadn’t bothered with anything more than the basics. That would need to be re-evaluated.

The Sergeant continued, “JN-584 called it in, and since Skywalker and Organa are considered dangerous, high-ranking Rebels, our squad decided to engage the Rebels before they could escape. They were in Docking Bay Four, loading smuggled weapons purchased from a local smuggling gang. We surprised the Rebels and the smugglers with them, and engaged. There were casualties on our end, but it ended with Skywalker being shot and the Rebels escaping.”

It was a condensed version of the official written report. “Remind me, Sergeant, wasn’t Skywalker’s bounty alive only?” Vader snarled.

The Sergeant hesitated. “Yes, Lord Vader.”

“Then what would possess you to set your blasters to kill?”

A silence. “Organa’s bounty was dead or alive, my lord.”

“I don’t care about Organa at the moment, Sergeant. I care that you deliberately ignored orders and shot the boy. Now Skywalker is dead.”

The room shook with those words, and everyone in the room held their breath until it subsided.

“We...couldn’t have known Skywalker would...” the Sergeant tried again, but he was cut off, his hand going to his throat, grasping for a hand that wasn’t there. Vader watched, unmoved, as the Sergeant collapsed to his knees, throwing off his helmet as if that would help him breathe easier. Even through the red-tinted lens of his mask Vader could see the man’s face turning colors, then with one last attempted gasp, he collapsed, staring unblinkingly at Vader’s boots.

“I don’t tolerate pathetic excuses.” Vader growled, glaring at the other troopers who stood frozen in terror. “Skywalker’s capture was vital to the Empire.” Vital to him. “Who fired the shot that killed him?”

The troopers before him were barely breathing, as if they thought making less noise would make him lose interest. The control techs were looking anywhere but at the doomed squad in the center of the room.

No one answered the question. He didn’t expect them to. But the good thing about most stormtroopers was that their minds weren’t shielded in the least. He didn’t even need to try to reach out through the Force and sense their thoughts.

It was mostly a jumble of panic. Panic that Darth Vader was standing before them, ready to kill them all. Most thought it wasn’t fair; they were only doing their jobs. A thought Vader rolled his
But then he sensed it.

*Oh kriff, he’s going to know.* His gaze zeroed in on the trooper in the center. *I didn’t think the Emperor cared that much if Skywalker lived! What should I do? What should I say? Maybe if we’re all silent, he’ll leave us alone. Or maybe he’ll torture it out of us. What’s Skywalker’s deal anyway? Shouldn’t we want the guy who blew up the Death Star dead? Kriff, I shouldn’t have bragged about it at lunch…*

“You.” The word was strangled, coming out of his throat. Though he didn’t know or care about the trooper’s number, the trooper in the center tensed all the same.

He knew exactly who Vader was addressing.

*Kriff. This is it. I should have called my family…*

*And you took mine from me,* Vader thought, his jaw clenched painfully as he watched the trooper step forward. Vader stared the trooper down. He had no other words for the murderer of his son.

“I’m...sorry, Lord Vader,” the trooper tried. Fool. Insignificant, idiotic fool. No wonder the Empire was falling apart. They were guarded by witless troops who couldn’t follow simple directives. “It was a mistake. It won’t happen again.”

Vader stared for a moment more...then quick as lightning, his gloved hand shot out, grabbing the trooper by the neck in an iron-tight grip, lifting him off the ground. The trooper flailed, and this time when the trooper reached up to his throat, there was a prosthetic hand there. But no way to get Vader to release his grip.

Vader watched, a dark satisfaction mixing with the fury that consumed his entire being. The only thing that would have made the moment better was if his hands were flesh and he could feel the life leaving the man who had murdered his son. The thought made him squeeze harder until the trachea beneath his gloved hand collapsed, and the trooper hung dead.

He drank in the sight of the dead trooper for one second longer before tossing him carelessly aside, his hand calling the lightsaber from his belt.

“Apology not accepted,” he snarled. The red blade ignited with a *snap-hiss.* The other troopers had already backed away; at the sight of his lightsaber, a few turned and flat out ran for the door.

*Imbeciles.*

He threw the ignited blade at them, extending the Force through the lightsaber as it flew. It sliced the running troopers in two. He called the lightsaber back into his hand, turned, and cut down the remaining troopers as they screamed.

He felt their deaths join the Force. He savored it, felt the Force grow stronger with each extinguished life, and when he was done, he was practically shaking with rage.

But when they were dead, he didn’t stop. Instead, his wrath turned on the control techs, and the room erupted in screams and shouts of confusion as he either sliced through them or crushed more tracheas.

They deserved it. They’d allowed his son and his friends to dock. If they’d turned them away, he wouldn’t have been ambushed by the stormtroopers. Then, to make things worse, they’d let them
get away. Taking the body of his son away from him.

Nevermind that they probably couldn’t have known who they let in. The entire trade station was a hive of scum and villainy. They probably couldn’t tell Rebels apart from half the population.

But that wasn’t his problem.

When he was done, the room was silent save for the hum of his still-ignited lightsaber and his mechanical breathing. He didn’t bother surveying the damage he’d done. He didn’t care.

But when he turned and left the room, he didn’t bother putting his lightsaber away.

No. He wasn’t done killing yet.

If he could get away with it, he’d destroy the entire damn asteroid. But Sidious didn’t look kindly on unauthorized exterminations of entire populations. Vader wouldn’t bother trying to get the authorization, either. The Emperor would know why Vader wanted to unleash the might of Death Squadron on the station and would likely deny it just to ‘teach him a lesson.’

Besides. Even in death, Vader didn’t want to give the Emperor any reason to look too closely into his son. Or his actions regarding him.

He exited the control tower, greeted with the sight of the 501st herding detainees back into the docking bay, organizing them into different groups.

“Lieutenant.” Vader approached. Though his lieutenant’s face was covered by the stormtrooper helmet, Vader could sense the man curiously glancing at his already ignited lightsaber. Unlike most squadrons of troops who rarely worked with Vader, members of the 501st were less likely to be completely petrified of him. Unless they screwed up. “Report.”

“Yes, my lord.” The lieutenant stood at attention. “So far, we’ve managed to round up all of the patrons still on site who were at the cantina the Rebels set as the meeting point for the arms deal.” He gestured to a small group of aliens and humans herded off to the side. “We collected the holo footage from the cantina to support the arrests.”

“Good.” Vader nodded. It was highly likely no one in the cantina had any significant information other than maybe seeing Luke, but he didn’t care.

“We also tracked down the smuggling gang they did business with.” The Lieutenant gestured at a group of Weequays near his ship. Like the cantina patrons, they were being held at gunpoint by his troops. “Their base of operations is here, and we caught them in the middle of trying to move.”

Smart move, considering who they’d consorted with. But they hadn’t been fast enough.

“We also have the holo footage from Docking Bay Four,” the Lieutenant finished.

“Send all footage to me,” Vader ordered. He would examine it in detail when he was back on the Executor. “Kill the cantina patrons. I have no use for them.”

Vader didn’t wait for the Lieutenant to comply. He was already storming towards the Weequays. Behind him, he heard blaster fire and screams, felt more lives join the Force, then silence. By the time he approached the Weequays, they were quaking in their boots.

Smugglers. His lip curled in disgust. For all they liked to act tough, they were just as terrified of him as anyone else.
“Who is in charge?” he demanded. Many of them were staring at the red lightsaber humming at his side.

“I-I am, sir.” One of them, a tall, skinny man, stepped forward. “Look, we’ll tell ya anythin’ ya want. We don’t want no trouble.”

“You’re smugglers,” Vader replied sarcastically. “Your livelihood invites it.” Briefly, he remembered the last Weequay he’d had any significant dealings with, back in his old life. These Weequays were nothing like the pirate he’d grudgingly had a tentative business relationship with.

“You will tell me what happened between you and the Rebels.” He made certain the threat was clear in his voice.

“Anything, sir.” The Weequay replied, his eyes darting to the dead cantina patrons behind him. “We got a deal for a’ arms deal. Nothin’ special. We set up a meetin’ at the cantina, go an’ wait at the set time. This lady shows up. Small thing, but with two men. One that was tall, dark an’ ‘andsome, the other short an’ plunky. Fresh faced, see.”

Vader wouldn’t have described Luke that way, but he did appear younger than he was. He had to admit that much.

The Weequay continued, and Vader sensed no lie in his words. “We made the deal, I send my men out to deliver. Just supposed to be a drop off, but the boys, see, they felt bad for the lil’ lady, so they stay an’ help. Tall dark an’ ‘andsome goes into the cargo ship to change, while the lad stay’s ou’side to help the lady. Tha’s when the Imps show...ah, the troopers show up.” The Weequay gave a nervous look at the stormtroopers with guns still pointed on him. “We was forced to fight. Tall dark an’ ‘andsome comes back out shootin’, covers our retreat into the cargo ship. He and the lad covered the lady’s escape into the ship. Some of us tried to stay and cover the lad’s retreat, bu’ he insisted on the goods. He tried to push it back in an’...well, that was when he got shot.”

Vader’s grip tightened on the lightsaber. “Did he die immediately?”

The Weequay nodded enthusiastically. “Yes, sir. When the lil’ lady dragged him in, he was cold an’ stiffening.”

Vader waited a breath. Then two. Then three.

“Where did the Rebels take you?”

This time, the Weequay hesitated. Vader lifted the tip of his thrumming red blade to his throat.

“Answer me, smuggler. And I will know if you lie.”

The Weequay’s eyes bulged at the sight of his lightsaber. “A private hangar over in sector four.”

That was all Vader needed.

He gave the smuggler a clean, swift death. He wasn’t even expecting it. One second his head was attached to his body...the next it wasn’t. Even the Weequay’s famous tough skin could not guard against a lightsaber.

The other Weequays began to scream, but Vader turned. He didn’t have time to kill the rest himself. He needed to find this hangar. With a wave of his hand, the stormtroopers opened fire on the remaining smugglers as he stalked out of the docking bay.
“With me,” he ordered as he passed his lieutenant. He didn’t need to look back to know his orders had been obeyed: he was now followed by five more stormtroopers.

Useful information or not, the Weequay had been part of the reason his son had died.

The sounds of blaster fire faded into the distance behind him. With their tougher skin, it would take more shots to kill them all. A slower death than usual, for a firing squad.

Not his problem.

He had other things to concern himself with.

The streets of the Ring of Kafrene were, he assumed, uncharacteristically empty. There were plenty of street stalls they stormed past that were abandoned, wares still out on full display, food burning in skillets over still open flames. The Force still swirled around him, begging to be unleashed on the next unlucky fool who got between him and finding his son.

Or, rather, the body of his son.

His throat tightened at the thought.

It wasn’t long before they reached the private hangar the smuggler had told him about. It was attached to what appeared to be a junk shop. He assumed the hangar was for fixing ships in need of repair. “Search the premises,” he ordered. “Bring me anyone inside. Alive.”

“My lord!” his lieutenant acknowledged before the troopers entered the junk shop, breaking the door in with their boots.

Vader didn’t bother waiting. He was already moving, heading for the hangar. The front was closed by a metal sliding door, locked.

As if that would stop him.

Vader rolled his eyes behind the mask, directing the Force at the lock, crunching it until it broke apart, falling to the ground with a ringing clang. Then, he thrust his arm aside, the metal door crashing open with an ear-splitting shriek, revealing the darkened hangar beyond.

As he expected, there were ship parts everywhere. Some in the process of being fixed, others shoved into a mountain of junk. Others, likely more usable than those in the heap, were lined up neatly around the sides of the domed hangar. Droids scattered at his presence, retreating into the depths of the shadows in the room. Above, he could tell that the domed ceiling could open up, revealing the vast vacuum of space beyond the port, allowing ships to come and go as needed. It was currently closed.

But his red-tinted gaze zeroed in on one thing in the center of the room.

An X-wing.

With measured, careful steps, he approached it, as if moving too fast would reveal it to be nothing more than a mirage. It was the only complete ship in the hangar and, with a cursory glance, nothing appeared wrong with it. In fact, it looked pristine.

He reached out, hesitating just a moment, before placing his gloved hand on the nose of the ship.

This was his ship. His son’s ship.

His chest constricted. He didn’t know much about his son, given the fact that their only interactions had been violent and brief, but he knew one thing for certain: Luke had inherited his piloting skills. It was part of what had made it so difficult for him to capture the boy. They were nearly equal. Therefore, he had to assume that like him, Luke probably didn’t willingly leave ships behind that he was fond of, and Vader knew Luke likely loved his X-wing.

And that, more than anything he’d thus far heard from those who had witnessed the boy’s death, confirmed his worst fears.

Luke was gone.

“No.” The word growled out through clenched teeth. Around him, parts began to quake and crunch inward into balled heaps, and the room echoed with the sound of shrieking, tearing metal. But the X-wing remained untouched. His last connection to his son.

His only connection.

His worst fears were confirmed. He’d failed him. Now Vader, once again, was alone. He’d been lonely for nineteen years, or thought he had been. Mostly by his choice, or by his master’s. When he’d found out about Luke, that loneliness had turned into a desperate longing for a connection to someone. But now reality crushed him, the Force whispering what he should have known from the start.

You are alone. You will always be alone. You should never have tried to change that. The boy is gone, dead, and it’s all your fault.

He wished he’d never known Luke was his son, if only to spare himself from this pain.

Behind him, the clanking footsteps of stormtroopers. “Lord Vader.”

His lieutenant. Vader didn’t respond. He simply looked over his shoulder. There his troopers stood, holding a Quarren man between them, his clawed hands in binders. “This shopkeep was the only one in the building. We found him hiding in an underground bunker.”

If Luke’s X-wing was here, and his Rebel friends let the smugglers go here, the Quarren was probably a Rebel. Or at least a sympathiser. He would likely know more about the Rebels who had led his son to his death.

Perhaps, even, their location.

“Take him to the Executor and throw him in a cell,” Vader ordered, turning away to once more look at the ship before him. “Then get this X-wing into my personal hangar.” He paused, considering. “And gather up all of the droids. I want their data extracted and sent to me for review.”

His son was dead. He knew that now. But that didn’t mean he was going to stop.

No. If the Rebels thought losing Skywalker to death would make him retreat and give up the chase, they were sorely mistaken.

And when he found them, they would wish for death.
They would all pay. Every last one of them.

Starting with Organa.

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It didn’t take Luke long to realize coming to Vrogas Vas was a mistake.

Not the type of mistake he usually made where he showed up and pretty much instantly got into trouble. No, this was the wasted-time type of mistake. He was grateful that he wasn’t getting shot at or threatened, but Vrogas Vas was no longer the potential for knowledge it had once been.

The first time around, the place hadn’t exactly...well, it hadn’t been in the best shape either. He hadn’t had a chance to see much of the barren planet, but he remembered this place at least. There had been ruins of a once great city, buried deep in the sands. Then the old Jedi temple, also ruined, had lain open to the elements. He’d seen a figure. Two, in fact, one he recognized as Ben, the other...he thought had been his father. Now he wasn’t so sure, since at the time his father was on planet with him, but very much alive and murdering over a thousand Rebels to get to him.

Now, he stood over where the ruins of the temple had been, but it was nothing. Just sand. No trace of a temple either physically or through the Force anywhere around him. It was as if it had never existed.

But it had. He’d been there. He’d seen it. Ben had told him to leave, that he wasn’t ready yet. He still wasn’t completely sure he was ready, but he needed to know about his father. His real father. Darth Vader. And he highly doubted asking the man would do him any good, if he wanted to stay free. If he wanted to be a Jedi.

If that was what he even wanted to be anymore.

He stood there, with his dyed hair, color-contact eyes, wearing unfamiliar clothes, staring at the sand. Perhaps, after the confrontation with the Rebellion, Vader had razed the place to the ground. As if he knew that someday his son would come back, seeking answers about his father. Answers Vader didn’t want him to know.

Or maybe he just hated the Jedi so much he wanted to wipe another remnant of them away.

Luke’s heart sank in his chest. If he were Vader, and he wanted information on someone, this wouldn’t be so difficult. When Vader wanted something, he seemed pretty good at getting it. Luke didn’t think it was just his father’s vast resources, though that probably helped. Maybe his father was the type of man to do what it took to get what he wanted, regardless of who or what stood in his way.

He was certain he hadn’t gotten that trait. Maybe he was more of his mother’s son.

Whoever she had been.

“I know absolutely nothing.” Though there was no one around and even the Force seemed to have abandoned this place, Luke spoke the words aloud anyway. “Nothing. What little I knew about my father was a lie,” He kicked at the sand in his frustration. “I haven’t ever heard a single word about my mother,” another useless, childish kick, “and the people who were supposed to mentor me apparently lied so I’d blindly kill my own father.” Another kick. By the end, he was yelling the words.
He whirled around, hands splayed out, glaring up into the endless blue sky. “What is the point of all this? Is Vader right? Does my destiny lie with him? He seems to get what he wants, one way or another, so maybe my being fake dead is a waste of time! Or am I supposed to just blindly become something I know literally nothing about?!”

He whirled again, breathing hard. “Come on, Ben! You’ve shown up when it was convenient for you before, but when I actually need you, you’re nowhere to be found! Afraid I won’t like the answers? I didn’t appreciate finding out about my father after he cut my damn hand off!”

Nothing answered him but the wind.

His breathing calmed, and the momentary anger dissipated into disappointment. “I didn’t ask for any of this,” he said, quietly. “All I ever wanted was to be someone my father could be proud of.

“Now? I don’t know.”

And there, he realized, was the problem. It wasn’t just Vader’s surprise revelation, and how it had changed how he viewed others and the galaxy around him. He didn’t know who he was anymore, or what he even wanted to be.

He’d lost his purpose.

And Vrogas Vas was a mistake. There would be no purpose here. There would be no finding answers about his father, not without asking either the man himself, or the people who had lied to him about it in the first place.

Luke shook his head, turned around, and headed back to his ship. To go where, he didn’t know.

He was starting to think he didn’t really care anymore.

Chapter End Notes

The murder spree has arrived! And it's probably not anywhere close to being done! In the meantime, poor Luke is having an identity crisis...as you do after your enemy-turned-father cuts your hand off and offers you galactic domination at his side. Next chapter is a turning point for our Luke. Stay tuned!

Obviously, The Imperial March was one of the songs I played a bunch writing Vader's murder spree, but Luke's little identity crisis was represented by Space Oddity by David Bowie.

Leave some love!
Love,
Ladyvader23
Luke Makes a Decision

Chapter Notes

Thank you to SpellCleaver, the queen of snap, for making sure everything reads well, as well as calming my doubts down without even knowing she's doing it! XD As always, go read her stuff if you haven't!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’d been a week since Luke “died.” A week of trying to be the glue that held the Rebellion together as they grappled with losing their star commander. A week of pretending to be sad over Luke’s death.

To be fair, that wasn’t hard. She did miss him, and she hated the quiet moments to herself that became all too frequent. Being alone meant she would need to confront painful memories: watching Alderaan explode, being tortured at the hands of Darth Vader, losing Han to carbonite… to name a few. With no one to turn to, she busied herself with her work, and when she caught up with that, she did it all over again.

But now she was alone in her quarters, with only Artoo as company. She made sure her door was firmly closed and sat down on the bunk, facing the little droid. “Alright, Artoo. Are you ready to contact Luke?”

Artoo squealed in delight, rocking from side to side. She smiled: she didn’t need to know droidspeak to understand the response. “Then let’s give him a call.”

A compartment opened at the top of Artoo’s dome, a transmitter sticking up, and an internal comm unit appeared. She held her breath as Artoo connected the signal to the encrypted comm she’d given Luke, hoping.

She didn’t wait long.

“Leia,” Luke’s voice greeted warmly, filling the room. It was good that she was one of the few who had her own private quarters.

She breathed out a sigh of relief, the tension in her chest easing. She hadn’t realized how much she missed hearing him. “Luke. I’m so glad you answered.”

“Of course I did.” She could hear the laughter in his voice. “I promised you I would, didn’t I?”

“Yes, but you could have...you know what, never mind. I’m just glad I can finally talk to you.” She smiled, reaching out and affectionately touching Artoo’s dome as though it were Luke. “So, do you want my news first, or do you want to tell me yours?”

A pause. “Let’s hear yours first.”

Her smile disappeared. Was it just her, or was that frustration in his voice?

“The entire galaxy knows you’re dead,” she began anyway, deciding she’d press him when she finished. “I delivered your eulogy, Wedge got interviewed, it was a whole big thing. The Empire
picked up on it pretty quickly, and shortly afterwards the Executor was reported over the Ring of Kafrene."


She nodded. “Yes. He probably wanted to confirm the report, so he and the 501st terrorized the locals.” Now, she hesitated. “A lot of people died. Both Imperial and local.”

“Because of me?” Luke asked, horrified.

“It’s not all that surprising.” She winced. Luke was reacting as badly as she feared, but she couldn’t lie to him. Never. “The stormtroopers who shot you probably got in trouble because you’re wanted alive. Then everyone else...well, he’s Darth Vader. He doesn’t really care who lives or dies, does he?”


Now for the other bit of news she knew Luke wouldn’t like. “Vader also captured the Rebel sympathizer whose hangar we used.” She cringed as she added, “Your X-wing got impounded.”

“What?!” Yup. There it was. As soon as she’d received the report, she’d known Luke wouldn’t be happy. “Vader has my ship?!”

“Unfortunately.”

“Do you know how long it took me to save for the modifications I put on that thing?”

“I was there when you bought them, so yes.” Never come between a pilot and their ship, Leia had learned. Luke was no exception. “Did you wipe the navicomputer?”

Luke groaned. “Not a hard wipe, no. He’d need to slice in to get that info. Do you think he would?”

“Of course he will. He’s Darth kriffing Vader.” Leia squeezed her eyes tight, leaning her forehead on the cool metal of Artoo’s side. She was already making plans to get Mon Mothma to start moving the base. They hadn’t planned on staying anyway, but it was sooner than they’d hoped. “This is exactly why we follow protocol, Luke.”

“I keep telling you, the navicomputer does better when you don’t wipe...you know what, that isn’t the point.” There was a silence. Then, “Maybe we shouldn’t have done this.”

She was already shaking her head. “This isn’t abnormal...well, not for Vader. You’ll see. Now that he knows you’re dead, he’ll turn his attention to other matters. Besides, it would be a bit awkward if you suddenly showed up alive. Especially after that fantastic eulogy I gave you.”

“Very funny.” Luke scoffed. “I just don’t want to be responsible for even more deaths.”

“You aren’t,” she assured him firmly. “You didn’t tell Vader to kill those people. He makes his own choices, like you make yours. As much as I hate it, this is war, Luke. People die.” She waited for him to object further, but he didn’t. Pleased she’d won the argument, she changed subjects. “Now. You were going to tell me what you’ve been up to.”


Her brows furrowed. Again, that frustration. “What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong?” he repeated. “What’s wrong is that now that I’m out here living as a normal
person, I don’t know what I want to do with my life. I tried to find out more information on my father…”

“On Vader?”

“No. Yes. I don’t know. Him, or Anakin Skywalker. I thought maybe if I knew how he fell to the
Dark Side, I’d be able to avoid doing the same. But short of me showing up in Coruscant, it seems
Vader’s done a good job at hiding anything that might be of use. So now I don’t know what to
do.”

She didn’t like the bitterness in her friend’s voice. “Why don’t you go to Dagobah and finish your
Jedi training?”

“It’s looking like that might be the only option.”

He sounded just as unhappy about that as he did hearing about his X-wing being impounded.
“You...don’t want to be a Jedi anymore?”

“I don’t know what I want, Leia.” Her lips pinched together. She felt helpless to help her best friend
when he was clearly in crisis. “I know I should, but I just...can’t. Not right now.”

She opened her mouth, then closed it. If this were her, she’d do her duty. She’d always had a talent
for putting duty before herself. But she’d had the chance to make informed decisions about what
she wanted from a young age. Her parents had been open and honest regarding the risks in joining
the Rebellion. She’d examined the decision, made it, and now she was committed.

Luke, on the other hand, found himself in the Rebellion by accident. He’d had to make decisions as
information was presented to him and hope he made the right ones. Some of that information,
apparently, had been lies. Lies specifically designed to manipulate him. If she was in Luke’s shoes,
she’d probably feel lost too.

So she didn’t tell him to suck it up and do his duty, even if that was advice she’d give herself.
“Take a break.”

A pause. “I’m sorry, who are you, and what have you done with Leia?” Luke asked in disbelief.

“I’m serious,” Leia insisted. “You have some time. If you want to go to some remote tropical
planet and lie on the beach, go do it. If you want to go to Dagobah, do it. If you want to get into
some local heroics, go do it--just don’t use the Force if you do, and stay away from Imperial
trouble.” She added, “Do what you need to do to figure out who you are and what you want, and
then make a decision.”

“But what about...?”

You’ll go crazy, make stupid mistakes that’ll get you killed. I would love to have you by my side
taking on the Empire as a full fledged Jedi, but not if you’re so miserable you hate looking in the
mirror. Take time to figure yourself out. I promise you’ll be much happier.”


“You’d still be bored on Tatooine.”

He snorted. “Don’t remind me.”
She smiled. “You go get some rest, Luke. I’ll talk to you next week.”

“Fine, fine. You stay out of trouble.”

“That’s my line.”

“I said it first.”

Finally. Time to himself.

The last few days had been busy, to say the least. The Rebel he’d captured had revealed the location of an old base he’d checked the previous week, proving fruitless. He didn’t give the man a quick death.

Then there was the Emperor, who had naturally contacted him to “check up” on him after Skywalker’s death.

Truthfully, the old man wanted to rub his failure in his face. Vader had no choice but to grit his teeth and wait on his knees until his Master was done gloating. He added it to the long list of reasons to kill the Emperor when he got a chance.

But at least the Emperor had given him full reign to punish those who had been involved.

Especially if they were Rebels.

Beyond some of the smaller cells that would be all too easy to crush, he was at a loss. He took out his frustration on a few officers who had the unlucky coincidence of getting in his way between meetings.

But tonight, he’d expressly told Piett to ensure his schedule was booked. He didn’t tell his admiral what for. He wouldn’t tell anyone.

He was going to take Luke’s X-wing apart.

If anyone dared to ask and he decided to answer, he’d say he was looking for clues as to where the boy had been prior to landing on the Ring of Kafrene. It wasn’t technically wrong. It was his best lead. But it definitely wasn’t the only reason.

He often found he could learn a lot about a person by the droid or the ship they had. Luke would be no exception.

So when he entered his private hangar, alone amongst his collection of various ships and models, his gaze narrowed in on the lonely X-wing sitting next to his TIE Advanced.

At first glance, the ship seemed just like any other X-wing he’d destroyed in combat. Yet as he approached the craft, he could still feel the imprint of Luke’s presence woven into the machinery of the ship, as if he himself had breathed life into the vehicle he relied on to carry him into battle. The feeling grew stronger when Vader again touched the outer plating, to the point where Vader almost withdrew his hand and turned around to leave.

Almost.

There were still those responsible for his son’s death roaming the galaxy.
And besides, he’d never really known much about his son. This was his last chance.

So Vader used the Force to jump up onto the ship, his weight causing it to shudder beneath him. He peered into a cockpit that absolutely shone with Luke’s presence.

It was cramped, much more so than his TIE Advanced. It was even smaller than a standard TIE fighter. Vader wasn’t sure if all X-wings were this small, but it was also possible that Luke had resized it to fit his diminutive size.

Carefully, Vader turned the ship on. It thrummed to life easily. On the navicomputer, the ship identified itself: AA-589.

Not unusual. Luke had crashed a few X-wings over the last few years--one of those had been into him--so there was no sense in giving it a special name beyond the factory setting.

Once the computer was finished booting up, Vader immediately began sifting through the various technical readouts on the screen. First, he checked the navigation log.

Unsurprisingly, it had been wiped.

Vader tilted his head, considering. More than likely, the ship had a backup stored somewhere deeper within the system, but for that he would need to pull the computer out and hook it to a decrypter. There was a chance that Luke would know that trick and have wiped that evidence as well.

But if Luke was anything like his father, he likely hadn’t done that--simply because the navicomputer tended to be faster and smarter without the hard wipes.

*Then again*, something whispered, *he could be a good soldier and follow orders.*

He doubted that. He’d flown against his son enough to know that Luke made his own decisions in flight, and he doubted the boy would listen to anyone telling him how to run his ship.

It was lucky that Vader knew how to get around the surface wipe.

But Vader didn’t dismantle the computer just yet. Instead, he checked the fuel logs, taking note of how much fuel his son had used. If he was wrong about the backup logs, he could try to calculate the fuel his son had against the hyperspace lanes leading to the Ring of Kafrene. It was dodgy at best, and he’d have to assume his son had left the Rebel base full on fuel. But with the Force, he’d figure out pretty quickly if the flimsy lead had any potential or not.

He then checked transmissions, either sent or received. Nothing. Those likely had been hard wiped, but he could check when he dismantled the computer.

Finding that there was little to be found on the navicomputer, he stretched his hand towards where he knew he’d last left his tools, called the right tool into his hand and set to work.

He worked slower than usual, trying to be careful with the ship his son loved so much. It was stupid and sentimental, but he’d already screwed up so much of what his son had cared about. He didn’t need to dishonor his memory by ruining more.

As soon as the computer was out, he sent the tool floating back to the cluttered tool table at the far end of the hangar, switching it out for another and the datapad he would need to begin the decryption. Once he had it, he plugged the dismantled computer into the datapad and set it down on Luke’s frayed leather seat before turning his attention to the inner workings of the ship.
This part wasn’t about finding the Rebels.

It wasn’t difficult to open up the panel of the ship to reveal the innards. Immediately, Vader’s expert eye caught the modifications added. He’d made it a point to study the models he went up against in battle, and this X-wing didn’t fit the blueprint. Luke had installed an upgraded hyperdrive, shielding, and engine thrusters. Taking them out carefully, Vader found that the shielding mechanism, though a newer model, looked gently used. Luke had likely bought it on discount or traded in for it. The hyperdrive and engine thrusters were relatively new though and, judging by the wear on it, the hyperdrive had been installed after Bespin.

He wondered if his sabotage of the Millennium Falcon had anything to do with that decision.

He knew even the Rebels paid a meager allowance to their soldiers. They probably paid more to commanders, but it still wasn’t likely to be enough to purchase two brand new, rather expensive parts. Either Luke had saved for a long time, or they were presents from his more well-off friends. He didn’t think Luke to be the type to accept presents like that, so he guessed it was a product of saving. And even if it was presents...

Did Luke even know his real birth date?

Guilt churned in his stomach. He’d surmised the date himself: Empire Day. The day he loathed with a passion.

But had Kenobi told the boy the true date of his birth? Did Luke use Empire Day celebrations to make an excuse for celebrating his birthday or did he even care?

He didn’t know why he was so interested. It wasn’t like Luke would have another one.

He continued pulling other parts out of the ship, laying them out carefully next to the X-wing in neat rows. Even the other parts that traditionally went with Luke’s model were well cared for. Some of them he could also tell were replacements, either for faulty predecessors or simply to keep damage from happening in the first place. When he was finished, he stepped back, taking in the disassembled X-wing in front of him.

New items had been added to the very short list of things he knew about his son. Luke was organized, clean, liked to maintain his possessions to prevent them from going bad in the first place, and valued spending his time and hard-earned credits on ship upgrades. His ship was his castle; he took fortifying and caring for it seriously.

Though he could see both traits of himself and his mother in those new bits of knowledge, they still felt impersonal. It was as if he were learning about a target, not his own child. The only personal trait about his son that he had any connection with was Luke’s anger. Anger that was very much like his own.

The knowledge made it hard to breathe. All he knew about Luke was his anger. All Luke knew of him...was his anger. He’d wasted three years of knowing Luke was alive to show him what he showed the rest of the galaxy. When he’d pictured Luke being at his side, even as his Sith apprentice, he hadn’t seen them as adversaries. He’d seen them as partners. Luke was supposed to be someone he could rely on.

But nothing he’d done had set their relationship up for that. Luke was blameless in this--Luke hadn’t known. But he had.

If only he could take it all back…
A ping interrupted his emotional spiraling. The datapad had finished reading the navicomputer’s harddrive. Numbly, Vader called the pad into his hand, reading the information that scrolled across the screen.

Slowly, the numbness faded into grim satisfaction. He’d confirmed another impersonal trait to add to his pathetic list of all things Luke:

Luke didn’t like hard wiping his hard drive.

The cantina was not a place Luke Skywalker would go alone.

So there Luke Skywalker was: in a nearly empty cantina on Taris.

Luke Skywalker didn’t often drink alcohol, and when he did, he wasn’t alone.

So there Luke Skywalker sat, drinking Corellian brandy, alone, trying not to make a face as he did so.

“You sure you like alcohol?” the bartender, a stout, portly, honey-skinned man, asked him with a raised brow.


“Uh huh. Sure.” The bartender frowned. “Just as long as you pay.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Luke grumbled, glaring down into the deep golden-brown liquor. He still didn’t get why Han and the boys of Rogue Squadron loved it so much.

No. That wasn’t true. He knew why. It was the same reason he’d shown up to this joint while his ship was in the process of being refueled. It was a way to forget their troubles, to pretend for just a few hours that they hadn’t lost so many loved ones in this blasted war.

And Han...well, Han probably just drank it because he thought he had people to impress and a reputation to uphold. Smugglers didn’t drink milk.

He didn’t have anyone to impress. No one looked twice at him. For the first time, he could be in public without feeling eyes watching him at all times. That, combined with the fact that Vader had gone on a killing spree while confirming his death, his stupidity in not hard wiping the navicomputer of his now-commandeered X-wing, and the fact that he still didn’t know where to go or what to do, the alcohol just made him feel shittier than before.

He should have just waited with the ship.

Eventually, he gave up trying to finish the brandy and pushed it away, leaving the credits he owed on the counter before sliding off the barstool and leaving the cantina, emerging back out into the polluted world that was Taris.

Luke had never before been to a planet that was entirely covered in a metropolis. He’d heard plenty of stories, both glamorous and not so, of Coruscant, but Taris was nothing like the heavily regulated atmosphere of the Empire’s heart. A thick, yellow fog hung in the air, smelling heavily of exhaust, rusty metal, and the combined putrid filth of the poorer beings who lived in the slums of the planet. The entire planet was said to be a glorified graveyard of downed ships from multiple
eras, most notably from the Clone Wars. The citizens of the district he currently strolled through had taken advantage of this, making their homes either directly in the skeleton of the dead ships, or from scavenged parts.

It likely wasn’t what Leia had in mind when she’d told him to figure himself out. She’d probably literally meant he should find a tropical paradise somewhere. But that still felt wrong, to enjoy vacation time like that. Besides, he’d been low on fuel anyway, and Taris was the closest planet.

With nothing better to do, he headed back towards the refueling station he’d left his ship at, already dreading the moment when he’d have to pick another destination to fly off to.

“Move it!”

A harsh, guttural voice had him stopping in his tracks.

He didn’t like the nudge from the Force directing him to check it out. Nudges meant trouble. Trouble meant run ins with Imperials. Run ins with Imperials meant bounties.

And it would really suck to have his new identity get a bounty in just over a week since he’d gotten rid of his last one.

But try as he might, he couldn’t bring himself to keep walking towards his waiting ship. Jedi or Rebel or not, he was still a citizen of the galaxy. If he could help, he had an obligation to at least try.

With a groan, he turned off the path and darted into an alley between two makeshift homes built out of spare parts. It was a narrow fit, and he had to turn his body sideways to slip through at various points. Stale, lime green water puddles congregated around his boots, and he tried not to think about what’d turned it that color as the alley finally opened out and he was able to dart behind a discarded pile of scrap metal.

Paces away, one of the ship-homes had been torn open. Two scruffy-looking humans stood over a Rodian man who lay on the ground, arms over his head, shaking violently. Even from this distance, Luke could see bruises covering his skin and blood staining the front of his shirt. Another Rodian, a woman, stood in the torn doorway, sobbing.

“Please,” she begged, “Don’t take him from us! We’ll get the money, we swear…”

She wasn’t talking about the man on the ground--her husband? Luke wasn’t sure. Three more scruffy looking humans held a young boy between them, at blaster-point. Luke wasn’t an expert in alien physiology, but he guessed the boy was about fourteen, maybe fifteen years of age.

“The boss already warned you, twice.” One of the men, who had a thick black mustache over his lip, said dismissively. “He also warned you what would happen if you didn’t pay. It’s time to collect.”

That only made the woman sob harder and sink to her knees, clasp her green suction cup fingers together. “Take me instead. If you have to take anyone, take me…”

Her beaten, possible-husband moved to get back up, and immediately the men over him kicked him back to the slime-covered dirt.

Luke’s expression darkened. He’d lived long enough on Tatooine to know debt collectors when he saw them. At least, that’s what they liked to call themselves. They were nothing but thugs and pirates, usually hired by a cartel like the Hutts or Crimson Dawn. Last he checked, Taris wasn’t
controlled by any of the cartels, but when much of the poor population was living in conditions like this, he didn’t doubt some of them turned to loaning to help them scrape by. Even on Tatooine, Luke made it a point to stand up to thugs like this. He couldn’t stand by and watch as someone weaker suffered at the hands of bullies.

Some things hadn’t changed.

He was leaving cover before he even had a plan. The blaster at his hip weighed heavier and heavier with each step. None of the thugs or the Rodians noticed him until he casually and calmly greeted, “Hello there.”

Everyone froze. The woman stopped sobbing, staring at him with glittering, tear-filled eyes. The boy and his probable father looked at him warily, unsure if he was there to join in their torment.

The thugs, though, looked at him like he was crazy.

“You must not be from around here, boy,” Mustache Thug sneered. “This here is Black Sun business, so if you don’t want trouble, you’d best be running along.”

Luke smiled warmly, though it didn’t touch his brown eyes. Unfortunately, Black Sun was not a cartel he was experienced in dealing with. “There’s no need for trouble.”

He willed the Force to project soothing feelings through his words, not enough to compel them into doing anything, just enough to calm them. Compelling them would just make Black Sun return with more pirates to harass the family. He didn’t know if it worked. He’d made clumsy mind-tricks before. He figured a little less push and maybe they’d calm enough to listen.

It didn’t work.

“Unless Wald here can pay his debt, we’ll be collecting on the consequences.” Mustache spat into the dust in front of the male Rodian. Wald, Luke guessed.

“How much does he owe?”


“No!” Wald cried, “It’s only a thousand-- Ach!” A swift kick to his gut cut him off.

Luke clenched his teeth. All of this over a thousand credits. Well, twenty thousand, now that he’d asked. They were now probably factoring in the credits they’d earn from selling the boy. The thought made his blood boil. “I can give you two thousand.” It wasn’t much profit, but there was no way he could afford the full twenty.

“No can do. There’s interest now.” Mustache shook his head, crossing his arms over his burly chest.

Luke inwardly cursed. He couldn’t fight all of them by himself. Well, he could, technically, but that would require some serious displays of the Force that he couldn’t explain away. All that would do would be to invite Darth Vader back into his life. He wasn’t willing to become a slave of the Sith himself.

But he also couldn’t leave the Rodians to their fate, either.

“Since you can’t pay, better run along now or…”
“Take me as payment.”

That brought Mustache up short. He ran another critical eye over Luke. “You can’t be worth more than the boy. You’re too old.”

Leia was going to kill him. But his mind was whirling, coming up with a semblance of a plan. A rather shoddy one at that, where multiple things could go wrong. But when had he ever not done something because it was likely to go wrong?

“But I can use the Force. That’s gotta be worth more.”

Yeah. He was insane. Even the Rodians looked at him like he was suicidal. But he could get himself out. The boy couldn’t.

Besides. With a galaxy full of billions of people, there were bound to be others who could use the Force without having a giant bounty on their head. Especially if they weren’t blowing up Death Stars and running around with lightsabers.

Mustache clearly didn’t believe him. “You’re lyin. Gotta be. No way you’d be stupid enough to…”

Luke rolled his eyes, stretching out a hand towards one of the discarded pieces of junk littering the street. *Please work,* he thought, concentrating on the object, feeling its imprint in the Force, imagining it being called into his hand…

Slowly, the scrap metal lifted, floating clumsily into his palm.

The thugs holding the boy let go, and the boy immediately ran into his mother's waiting arms while everyone stared. “Told you.”

“You’re--a Jedi?” someone whispered.

Luke scoffed. “No. I’m not suicidal. Just cursed with an unfortunate gift.” There was enough bitterness in his voice that he realized he believed at least part of that sentence.

It was that gift, after all, that made Vader way too interested in him.

“We could turn you into the Empire. Are you *insane*?” someone else asked, bewildered.

Luke shrugged, though his stomach twisted at that. “You could. They might even pay you for it. I assume, however, that I’d be worth a lot more on the black market.”

It was very strange to be talking himself up as a potential *slave.* If his aunt and uncle were alive to see him now, they’d likely never let him leave the farm again for fear that he was more a danger to himself than anything else.

They were probably right.

Mustache shook his head in disbelief, even as he pointed his blaster at him. All interest in the Rodian family gone, the rest of his thugs did the same.

“You’re an idiot,” he told Luke in disbelief. “And you deserve what’s about to happen to you. Search him!”

Mustache wasn’t wrong, Luke thought as he lifted his hands up and allowed himself to be searched, wincing at the rough hands patting him down. His blaster and the secure comm from
Leia were confiscated. But when Luke glanced at the Rodian family, saw that Wald was let back up and was holding his probable wife and son, a bit of tightness in his chest eased.

He didn’t think he’d ever be the type to hide and pretend the galaxy didn’t need him in some way. Even if it was as small as saving one family on a planet he’d probably never visit again.

So, with his half-thought up plan sprung into action, Luke concentrated on what came next. And how to get out of it without his real identity being revealed.

Black Dawn would be in for a serious payday if it did.

Chapter End Notes

That ending did not at all pan out like I thought it was going to, but honestly it made the most sense given who Luke is and the situation he was faced with. I originally planned some big shoot out, but then I realized there was no way the kid wouldn't have gotten caught in the crossfire, so I nixed that and here we are.

Warning, I am going on vacation! Going to Galaxy's Edge and Disneyland...so, I will be doing nothing but RELAXING. I'm not bringing my computer. So, I likely won't even begin the next chapter until next weekend, meaning a bit longer of an update this time. I'll try to update shortly after that, though.

The song for this chapter is Zombie, cover by DREAMERS.

Leave some love!

Love,

Ladyvader23
“This is not the Rodian boy I sent you to get,” a bearded man with a nasty scar stretching from his left temple to his chin snarled the moment Luke was dragged aboard the Discril-class cruiser’s command deck. His hands were cuffed, and three of the pirates had their double-barrel blasters jabbed into his back, reminding him that any wrong move he made would be met with disastrous consequences. “This is gonna to come outta your pay, Rayner.”

The bearded man, who Luke decided he would call Beard and was probably the captain, glared at Mustache. So, Mustache’s name was Rayner. Luke filed the information away for later, should he need it. “No, sir, this is better bounty, I promise,” Rayner protested, gesturing to Luke. “He’s a Jedi.”

Luke did his best to give Captain Beard his most innocent look. “Not a Jedi. I told them already.”

“What the hell?” one of them breathed.

“You...you...!” Rayner stuttered, going red in the face.

“A risky, risky move, pretending like what he’d done on Taris hadn’t happened. He’d spent the five hour hyperspace journey planning this moment, planning what he’d do if it worked out in his favor, and what he’d do if it didn’t. Now that he was staring at a captain of the Black Sun syndicate, he was less sure it would work. But he had to try. “Come on. If I really had those powers, do you honestly think the Emperor would let me live? Seriously? What would I be doing on Taris, of all places?”

Rayner recovered from his shock and slammed his fist into Luke’s gut. The breath whooshed out of him, stars forming in his vision as he sank to the deck on his knees, struggling to suck air back into
his lungs. “Liar! We all saw you, there’s multiple witnesses…”

“Taris is pretty foggy,” Luke gasped out. “Sure you didn’t imagine it?”

That earned him a kick to the ribs. “Show him!” Rayner was shouting, pointing at Captain Beard as Luke struggled to focus on what was happening rather than the sharp pain in his ribs. “Show him your powers, Jedi!”

“I’m...not...a Jedi.” Luke glared up at the pirate. “You have...no proof!”

Rayner let loose a guttural howl, raising his fist to strike Luke again, but the captain intervened. “Stop damaging the goods, you pile of bantha poodoo!”

Rayner’s expression twisted furiously, but he reluctantly lowered his fist and stepped away. Carefully, Luke stood back up, still breathing hard, and faced the pirate captain.

The man looked him over, his eyes narrowing, the scar making his face look not quite human. “Anyone ever told you that you look like that Skywalker kid?”

Luke stood perfectly still. “No. Can’t say they have.”

“Your hair and eyes are wrong,” the pirate admitted, “But you have similar facial structure. You look about the same age, too.”

He carefully considered how to respond. He didn’t want to appear too defensive. “I don’t pay much attention to war criminals. So, I have no idea.” He shrugged.

Captain Beard stared at Luke for a moment longer, then shrugged. “Well, as I said, the Skywalker kid is dead. But if my men are saying they saw you use the powers of a Jedi, I’m not gonna ignore them.”

“But I’m not…”

“Maybe you are, maybe you aren’t. But I’m sure we can sell you at a price worthy of a Jedi anyway. If you’re not, let your new owner deal with it.”

Kriff. Luke didn’t know what that would mean. He didn’t expect the pirates to let him go either way (a slave was a slave, after all), but if the captain truly believed he had the Force, they’d take more security measures to keep him contained. If he didn’t, then it would be easier to escape.

Or so Luke assumed.

“How many times do I have to tell you people, I’m just a normal person…”

“Normal or not, I can make some money off of you, and that’s what I’m going to do since our original bounty wasn’t collected.” The captain glared at Rayner and the other pirates before waving Luke away. “Get him outta my sight.”

Luck did not seem to be with him.

Han used to say that Luke was lucky. That was the only way he survived everything he’d gone through, his friend reasoned. But now Luke knew better. Luck had never really been with him. He’d always been doomed. He just happened to have a power that sometimes helped him out of it,
and sometimes didn’t.

So when he was tossed into a freezing cold cargo hold at the very furthest corner of the ship, hands still cuffed, he at first thought security would be light. Then he turned around and watched Rayner turn on a ray shield door.

“The captain might not fully believe us,” Rayner snarled through the glowing red shield, “but I saw you. You’re not getting outta here, Jedi. Maybe I’ll convince the boss to sell you to Imperials anyway, just for the hell of it.”

Luke shook his head, staring at the mustached man with a feigned expression of disbelief. “You have the wrong guy. It’s not my fault you can’t see that well in the fog…”

Rayner snorted. “As I said before. You’re an idiot.”

And just as Luke began considering a mind trick, Rayner slammed the blast doors shut, leaving Luke alone in the windowless cargo hold, staring.

Kriff. He hadn’t considered ray shielding in addition to a blast door. Blast doors were relatively simple to hot wire out of, if one knew how to do it. Which he did. But ray shielding? Even a lightsaber wouldn’t get through that. There was probably a way through it, but it would take him much longer to figure it out. He’d never had to escape one before, and his only knowledge of them was purely theoretical based on what he’d read on datapads.

Yes, Han was wrong. Luke didn’t have luck.

He let out a breath, attempting to calm his heightening nerves. If Yoda was there, he’d reprimand him for panicking. Actually, the green alien would probably smack him upside the head with his cane and chew him out for putting himself in this situation in the first place. But Luke couldn’t change what he’d already done. He simply needed to figure a way out, and that would mean taking it one step at a time.

He sat down on one of the few empty crates in the room, staring at the binders on his wrists. Those had to go first, if he wanted to get out.

They were simple, not anymore complicated than the Imperial standard cuffs that he’d broken his friends out of numerous times before. But back then, he was using tools, and the only tool he had now was the Force. He was sure that in theory, it was possible to break out with the Force, but he hadn’t tried. So far, most of his training had been focused on lifting things and lightsaber techniques. He’d achieved a mind trick once or twice, but anything beyond lifting and lightsabers, it was all guess work.

But he was familiar with the cuff mechanism. And Yoda had said that the Force was an energy that surrounds and binds all things. It was what Luke focused on when he was calling items to his hand. The principle should be the same when releasing the lock, right?

Luke let out a breath, closed his eyes, and dove into the Force.

Though he thought he’d figured out the theory, it still took him numerous tries and an incredible amount of patience. At some point, he felt the ship beneath him jump into hyperspace, but he refused to dwell on it. One step at a time. One step at a time. He repeated the mantra over and over again in his head as he focused on the lock, imagining the Force twisting and turning the mechanism until…

Finally, the cuffs sprang apart, dropping to the floor with a *clang!*
Luke opened his eyes, rubbing the raw red lines around his wrists, and a relieved, triumphant smile crossed his lips. It was good to know that he wasn’t a total failure when it came to the Force.

But the smile disappeared as he looked over to the ray shield protecting the blast doors.

Now for the difficult part.

He approached the shield, close enough that he could feel the heat emanating from it. He could see a small space between the shield and the blast door. On the wall panel, just out of reach, was a control panel for the blast doors. Maybe even the ray shields. He bit out a curse, glaring at the offending object. So close, yet so far.

Wildly, his mind conjured up the image of reaching his metal hand through the shield. It was replaceable, after all, but he quickly dispelled that notion. The appendage would be burned and severed long before he could do anything of use, and then he’d be short one hand. Not ideal, given his situation.

He stepped back, examining the exit in its entirety. If he could find the right tool, he could probably open up the plating around the frame of the door and dig into the wiring that way. It was definitely longer, and harder, but it was possible. Besides, Discril-class cruisers were old and outdated, and while his introduction to the ship had been limited, it didn’t appear that the owners cared about keeping it in pristine condition. They were pirates and thugs, after all. They likely had other things on their mind.

He approached the paneling and, using his metal hand, began to bang on each one. Sure enough, many of them were...well, not exactly loose, but the metal creaked beneath his fist. Yes, with the right amount of leverage, he could yank away the paneling and get to work on the wiring.

Which, naturally, was easier said than done. It took him what felt like over an hour to find a tool he could use to apply the leverage in the cargo room. In the end, he ended up breaking apart one of the empty, sturdy crates, using the Force to shatter it against the durasteel floor.

“Well,” he muttered to himself as he selected a particularly long, slender splinter, “If I can’t get out by the time they get back, I guess I could just throw a crate into their faces.”

Naturally, the plating was sturdier than he initially thought. Under his breath, he muttered every curse word he could think of (including ones Han and Wedge had taught him) as he wrestled with the edges of the metal. He stabbed, banged, punched, and even poorly attempted using the Force to help him pry the edges apart. By the time it finally gave with a screech, the fingers on his flesh hand were aching and raw.

But his bad luck only continued. Beneath his feet, he felt the ship shudder as it exited hyperspace.

“You have a lot of luck, kid,” Luke quoted sarcastically as he hurriedly reached his arm into the space and began grabbing at wires. He’d wanted to be free before they came for him, and if they were out of hyperspace the likelihood of them coming back to at least check on him was high. “Yeah, well, where’s that luck now?”

He worked hurriedly, wishing that he had Artoo with him to make the process go faster. They tangled together under his hands, some of them clearly old and useless, others meant to connect to other functions in the ship, but eventually he located the right ones and pulled.

Two things happened at once.

First and thankfully, the ray shield fizzed and winked out, leaving him alone with the blast door.
Second, the ship jolted violently to the side, knocking him off balance and sending him falling backwards.

He blinked, staring at the exposed wires sticking out of the hole he’d forced open. *That wasn’t...me, right?* he thought, dazed, but another explosion rocked the ship, the entire hold shuddering beneath him.

No, he realized, sitting up. They were under attack.

All the more reason to get out.

He pushed himself back up, reaching for the control panel for the blast door. But just as he began to work, more explosions rocked the ship. He lost his grip, falling back to the floor and sliding away, grasping for anything to stop him. There was nothing except the sliding empty crates, which narrowly missed him.

The ship righted itself, and if he wasn’t mistaken, he thought he heard gunners trying to return fire. But if the ship was already suffering enough damage that it was throwing him around like this, he didn’t think the pirates had much time left. Therefore, *he* didn’t have much time.

He scrambled back to his feet, making again for the door, but another explosion tore through the ship, and even from the cargo hold, he could hear metal screeching and buckling.

Then he was lifted into the air as the ship violently dove downwards, probably dragged into some nearby planetary well. He opened his mouth, but no sound escaped as he reached for something, *anything*, to hold onto, to brace himself against. He’d been in enough crashes to know when a ship was about to make an unexpected landing.

Except all of those times, he’d been in control of that landing. This time? He had no control.

They hit the upper atmosphere, and he was thrown back, slamming shoulder first into the back wall. Pain stabbed hot and fast through his neck and back, and he would have been dazed by the impact, if not for the crate that hurtled onto his leg a split second later. He thought he heard a crack, but he was screaming, and the ship was screeching as it descended quickly towards whatever planetary object they’d gotten caught in.

He should have been panicking more than he was. He logically knew this could very well be it. Luke Skywalker, actually dead, and he wouldn’t even know why. But the pain lancing through his shoulder and leg blocked those feelings out, and all he wanted was for it to stop. He’d give anything, *anything*, for it to stop, and…

The ship hit the ground. He was thrown forward, straight into the blast door, and he knew no more.

Luke wasn’t the only pilot who didn’t like to hard wipe his navicomputer.

Leia shook her head at the report. Wedge and many of the other pilots in Rogue Squadron were also found to have never performed a hard wipe of their ship. Wedge even complained when Leia had forced them to, explaining what Luke had already told her: that the ship performed better when it wasn’t constantly being wiped.

But she was already having to evacuate the Rebellion because of Luke’s lack of responsibility. She
wasn’t about to allow all of Rogue Squadron to put the entire Alliance in danger. She wondered if they’d all gotten the idea from Luke, or if they’d all just figured it out for themselves.

“We should be mostly completed by tomorrow morning,” General Dodonna was saying. He, Mothma, and Leia sat in Rebel High command, pouring over star charts to figure out their next move. “It is then that we will take our leave. Mon Mothma and I will take the main command ship. Leia, you will go with Admiral Ackbar on…”

One moment, Leia had been listening intently, even as her eyes poured over the reports of the available fighters before her. The next, pain. Pain like she’d never felt erupted through her chest, making it difficult to breathe. The world tilted, and numbly she realized she’d fallen out of her chair and was on hands and knees. She felt hands on her shoulders, heard voices asking her if she was alright. She didn’t answer. Couldn’t. Instead, she focused on the pain and the little voice in her head whispering of danger, that something terrible had happened.

“I’m…” She gasped, eyebrows furrowing as she tried to figure out the source of the pain. It wasn’t hers, she realized—though that revelation made no sense to her. It was as if she were feeling the pain of something, someone else…


She didn’t know how, she didn’t know why, but she knew one thing.

Something was wrong with Luke.

“I’m fine.” She forced out, and by some miracle, she stood on shaky legs. Mothma’s hands were on her elbow, steadying her.

“Are you sure?” The older woman frowned. “We should send for a medic…”

“I’m fine.” She needed to leave. Now. She needed to contact Luke, to find out what was happening... “I’ll go myself. I’m sorry.” She forcefully yanked her arm out of Mothma’s grasp, and before either of the two Rebellion leaders could protest, she was running from the room.

She barely saw where she was going. Her body felt like it was moving on its own. She almost barreled into multiple people on her way to her room, but she didn’t care. She didn’t stop to apologize. She barely even noticed.

All she cared about was getting to Luke.

It had to be a trick of some kind. There wasn’t any logical reason that she would be able to feel Luke’s danger, his pain. She would call him, hear his voice, and that would be that. It had to be.

And yet, some traitorous part of her mind whispered, didn’t you feel his pain on Bespin? Wasn’t that how she’d found him?

She shut the thought down as she reached her room and locked the door behind her. Artoo, waiting in a corner in low power mode, blinked awake at her approach and whistled inquisitively.


Artoo beeped in confusion, but nevertheless, he opened the top compartment and an antenna
appeared. She threw herself onto her knees beside the droid, waiting impatiently, barely breathing, as Artoo attempted to connect the transmission.

Seconds trickled into minutes. Then, Artoo beeped sadly. She didn’t need to know droidspeak to understand that he hadn’t been able to connect through.

“No, try again,” Leia begged, placing a hand on the cool metal of Artoo’s dome.

Artoo tried again.

Nothing.

“Again.”

Another call. No answer.

“Again.”

No answer.

“Again!” There were tears streaming down her face, hot against her cold skin. She had to be wrong. She just had to be…

Artoo whistled in a way that made her think he was doubtful he would get through, but he did as she asked anyway. Just as before, there was no answer.

Leia hadn’t cried when she’d watched her planet and her family be blown up by the Death Star. She hadn’t cried when she lost Han. She’d still had someone there for her, someone who needed her.

But now?

Now she knew something horrible had happened to Luke, the one person she had left that she loved and trusted. She leaned her forehead against Artoo as great, heaving sobs wracked her body, making it difficult to breathe.

“Please,” she cried, willing the pain and the feeling of loss to leave her, “please don’t take him too!”

Artoo was silent, uncharacteristically so, and she realized dimly that he hadn’t stopped trying to connect to Luke. With each unanswered attempt, the feeling in her chest strengthened until she knew for certain Luke wouldn’t answer. Couldn’t.

And it was all her fault. If she hadn’t let him go, if she hadn’t convinced him to fake his own death, he’d still be there with her. He’d be safe, and if he died, then she’d likely have died with him.

But now she didn’t know what had happened, other than it was bad. She didn’t even know how she knew. Was he dead? Injured?

She didn’t know. And now there was no one other than herself that could help her find out.

She was alone. Truly, alone.
Muahahahahahahahaha! I am way too excited to write these chapters! This one is a shorter chapter, but next one will be longer. Actually, I'm almost done with the next one, so likely, stay tuned!

The songs for this chapter are:
For Luke's: Goodbye, Old Friend from Godzilla, King of the Monsters
For Leia's: Hurts Like Hell by Fleurie. I've always wanted to use this song as an inspiration for something... it's one of my favorites!

Leave some love!

Love,
Ladyvader23
When Luke opened his eyes, the world around him swayed and blurred even though he could tell his body was lying on solid ground. His face was pressed up against metal flooring, and he could smell something rusty and metallic just under his nose. He felt as though he’d stuck medical cotton swabs in his mouth; he cracked his lips apart, attempting to lick the taste away. It only marginally improved.

Everything was otherwise numb. There was a ringing in his ears, insistent and unrelenting. He tried to think back to what had happened, only to be met with a blank.

Slowly, he lifted his head, wincing as his skin resisted--stuck in a thick, sticky substance that he quickly identified as dried blood--before it peeled away.

The movement again caused everything to spin and blur. He didn’t know where he was. Didn’t remember. And as he attempted to get upright, pain lanced through his left shoulder, hot and sharp, and he collapsed back onto the floor.

Maybe it wasn’t time to get up.

_No, you need to get up._

Luke closed his eyes. Yes, he did need to get up. He didn’t remember why, but something nudged at him, reminding him that he needed to take urgent action because...reasons.

But lying down calmed the dizziness. It calmed his racing, pounding heart. It felt nice. Better than being awake.

Five more minutes, he decided.

_No, get up._

Five minutes.

A promise he didn’t keep.

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The attack came early the next morning.

The majority of the Rebellion was already away. Mon Mothma and General Dodonna’s transport had left only an hour before. Leia was the last member of Rebel Command, left with a battalion of troops and a squadron of X-wings while she loaded the last of the equipment into the final transport. She moved purely on auto-pilot, not even fully recognizing what commands she was giving, hoping they were the right ones. So far, no one seemed concerned by anything she told them, so either she was keeping it together or they figured she was still grieving over her best
friend.

This time, they were right.

There were dark circles under her eyes. She’d spent the entire night attempting to contact Luke. Finally, two hours before she was supposed to wake up, she’d attempted to sleep, making Artoo promise to wake her the moment Luke answered.

He never did. She hadn’t slept a wink.

When her alarm went off, she’d stared up at the ceiling, heart hollowed out in her chest, and made her decision.

She would not be joining Admiral Ackbar and his fleet. She would separate from the Rebellion, and she’d find Luke.

Mothma hadn’t liked it. Not that Leia had told her the reason she was temporarily leaving the fleet. She simply kept it at “There’s something I need to take care of.” After her meltdown the day before, the older woman was hesitant to let Leia anywhere out of her sight. But Leia had always done exactly what she felt was right, damn the consequences, so after she made it clear that she would be leaving, Mothma had sighed and said, “I could order you to stay, but I know how well that’ll go. At least try to stay out of Imperial trouble.”

But now Imperial trouble had found them, and Leia hadn’t even left yet.

So much for keeping her head down.

First, the alarm went off. Everyone froze, staring up at the ceiling, as if staring would make the threat go away.

Then, Wedge came running in, face coated in sweat. “Princess, the Empire, they’re here, led by Darth Vader himself…”

Her heart sank into her stomach. At the same time, a wave of pure anger rolled over her, and she clenched her fists. Vader. Luke’s father. The reason she’d convinced Luke to go in the first place.

“Get the squad in the air. Provide air cover only. Do not go on the offensive.” She knew what would happen if they did. They had too few resources. The Empire would destroy them within minutes. She pointed at the support staff still loading equipment into the transport. They were frozen on the ramp, pale with fear. “Don’t bother with anything nonessential. Get everything that could give the Empire intel on our movements into the ship. Leave everything else behind.” Then she gestured at the rest of the troops. “To battlestations. We are stalling for time, not attempting to win the entire war.”

People began to scatter, moving to follow her very rushed orders. She kept a brave face, even as she jumped in to help get things loaded faster. She tried, and failed, not to think about the overwhelming odds against them.

This wasn’t Hoth. They weren’t on a full fledged base. There was no ion cannon to help the transport get away. It was highly likely they’d be destroyed. Or worse, captured. Their smaller ships could probably escape, but that was assuming they could get out before Vader got there.

Vader.

Honestly, she was surprised he was the one leading the attack. Luke was dead. This was an attack that could have been handled by other generals. Vader was overkill. Had this been an order of the Emperor? Surely, the second in command to the Empire had better things to do than kill off a small battalion of Rebels.

*Unless he actually cared about Luke.*

The thought came unbidden into her mind. She didn’t even know where it came from, because it was completely crazy. Vader, care about anyone? No. If he did, it was because that person could further his agenda, and Luke definitely would have done that.

But then why else would he be there?

She refused to dwell on it. She was stressed, and was operating on no sleep. Through the walls of the old, creaky building they’d made their temporary base in, she could hear blaster fire and could feel explosions rocking the ground nearby. They didn’t have much time.

With new orders to leave behind anything that wasn’t essential, they were able to finish loading the transport. Leia pulled out her comm.

“Commander,” she said into it, hoping the man wasn’t dead already.

“Your Highness,” his voice answered a second later. She could hear the shouts of men screaming, of blaster fire, and the distant hum of…

A lightsaber.

“Fall back to the transport,” Leia ordered. “They take off in no more than five minutes.” That was as much time as she could give them. If she could hear Vader’s lightsaber through the comm speakers, five minutes was probably pushing it, but she had to give as many people a chance as possible.

As soon as she got confirmation the order had been understood, she switched frequencies.

“Wedge.”

“Yes, Your Highness?” Wedge’s voice came back, strained. She winced. Rogue Squadron was Luke’s. Those were his friends. How many had been lost? She was afraid to ask. If Luke was still out there, and she was able to find him alive, what would she tell him? She’d convinced him to fake his death with the implication this wouldn’t happen anymore. Not by his father's hand, at least.

So she didn’t ask.

“The transport will be leaving soon. Provide cover, then jump to hyperspace and get clear.”

As soon as she got Wedge’s acknowledgement, she again turned her attention to the transport. By now, soldiers were pouring back into the hangar, some carrying wounded over their shoulders, leaving bloody footprints in their wake.

Her throat tightened, but she refused to appear concerned.

She waved them up the ramp, trying and failing not to notice just how few were returning. Perhaps they were held up…but no, somehow she knew.

They were dead.
Finally, she could hold the transport no longer. She turned to the technician at the top of the ramp. “Go! Go, now!”

“But Your Highness, you need to…”

“I’m taking my own ship,” she promised. “Now go!”

This time, they listened. The ramp closed and the inside of the transport disappeared from view.

As soon as it was done, Leia whirled, running for the G9 Rigger-class light freighter she’d managed to convince Mothma to let her use for her search. It was left in the corner of the hangar, the ramp open. At the top, Artoo waited, whistling impatiently. Behind the astromech was Threepio. “We’re doomed!” he was wailing. “This is the end, we’re finally done for!”

She’d debated on putting Threepio on the transport with the rest of the battalion and support crew, but she didn’t know where her search for Luke would take her. It would be helpful, she’d realized, to have a protocol droid who could translate for her should the need arise. Though the droid had more anxiety than was necessary in a protocol droid, he was more helpful than most people gave him credit for.

Besides, she couldn’t understand Artoo on her own anyway, so at the very least, Threepio could translate for the faithful little astromech.

“We’re leaving now,” she promised him when she reached the stop. “Go strap in. Artoo, get working on the coordinates.”

Artoo whistled inquisitively.

“Artoo wishes to know where, Princess,” Threepio translated despite his panic. Ever loyal to his programing.

Leia jumped into the pilots seat, turning the ship on as she thumbed the control for the ramp. “Dagobah.”

“Where?” Threepio asked, and if he could, she imagined he’d be frowning.

“Dagobah,” Leia repeated, firmly. Beyond the view port, she watched the transport take off, lifting into the air. Shortly afterwards, four X-wings moved to escort the larger craft. She swallowed, hard. Was that all that was left of Rogue Squadron?

“Well, I do hope it’s nicer than this dusty place,” Threepio muttered as he took the copilot seat beside her. Artoo whistled something as he plugged into the navicomputer and Threepio looked at him in alarm. “A what? A swamp? Oh, my poor joints…”

She couldn’t help the grim smile on her lips as she lifted the ship off the ground. Truth be told, she wasn’t sure if Dagobah was a wild shaak chase. The last time she’d spoken with Luke, he hadn’t been sure whether or not he wanted to finish his Jedi training. She’d told him to go on vacation first. It was highly likely he’d never reached the planet. But she also knew his mysterious Jedi Master lived there, and her friend still had plans to show up to meet him.

Perhaps he’d gone to Dagobah and crash landed. Maybe she just needed to find this Jedi Master, tell him, and they’d find Luke’s downed ship together. Or maybe the Jedi would offer some other useful tip to help her find her friend.

It was a chance she needed to take.
She began moving the ship out of the hangar, heading for the opening...only to suddenly be brought up short. The ship simply froze, in mid air. Frowning, she pushed harder on the throttle. “Artoo, what’s wrong...?”

Artoo beeped wildly in warning, shaking side to side.

“He says this isn’t the ship’s doing!” Threepio translated, raising his arms a little in panic. “He says...he says we’re being held, Your Highness!”

Leia didn’t stop pushing the throttle. “That’s impossible. We’re still in the hangar, we...” she trailed off as stormtroopers appeared before the ship, blasters pointed right at them. “Kriff.”

“Doomed!” Threepio wailed. “We’ll be boarded for sure!”

She hardly heard him. Not as Darth Vader stepped out, cape swirling around him, his hand outstretched...towards them. Towards their ship. Holding them there.

That would be the problem, she thought grimly. “Artoo, keep the ship steady. I’m going to try to fire on him.”

“We should surrender...” Threepio insisted. She ignored him, ignored Artoo’s frantic beeping, as she reached for the gunners controls.

“Princess...”

“Not now.” She hissed, pulling up the targeting computer and locked onto Vader.

“But, Princess...”

“Threepio, I said not now!” This is for Luke, you son of a bitch, she thought as she pulled the trigger...

Only for nothing to happen.

“What?” She kept pulling the trigger, horror creeping in as nothing happened.

“I keep trying to tell you, Princess, Artoo says the weapons on the ship are down! That’s why the ship was available for you to take!”

“We’re in trouble,” she responded, her hands going back to the throttle. The stormtroopers were coming closer, and Vader’s hand was lowering. The ship followed. Perhaps she could force her way out. Vader couldn’t be that strong could he?

She recognized that it was a stupid question immediately. This was Vader. The man who hadn’t even balked when Han had fired his blaster on him. The man who had destroyed over a thousand rebels single handedly simply because, she now realized, he’d wanted his son and they were in his way.

He could definitely stop her from taking off.

Memories of the torture she’d already endured at his hand entered her mind, of the torture he’d put Han through simply because he could. Her throat tightened in panic. Not again. She’d rather die, she’d rather...

An explosion rocked the entrance to the base, throwing stormtroopers into the air. Vader whirled, lightsaber igniting, just in time to block the red bolts of...
An X-wing.

“Take off now, Your Highness!” Wedge’s voice came over her comm. “This won’t hold him long!”

She didn’t need to be told twice. She yanked on the throttle, and they were rushing out of the hangar at a speed far faster than was recommended for take off. Shortly afterwards, she was aware of Wedge’s X-wing coming up beside their freighter as they pushed towards the upper atmosphere of the planet.

“Thanks Wedge,” she said into the comm. “I owe you one.”

“Don’t mention it, Your Highness.” Wedge replied. “Luke would have wanted to make sure you were safe.”

Her eyes burned with unshed tears; her heart clenched painfully. “We’re not out of this yet,” she said, refusing to acknowledge the comment. Especially now that Luke was possibly really gone.

Ahead, she could see the Executor, followed by five more Star Destroyers lying in wait. The transport ahead of them looked small and feeble compared to the might of the Empire, and again she wished they’d had ion cannons to fire. As it was, the chances of getting the larger ship through the blockade were slim.

“Artoo, do you have those coordinates ready?”

Artoo replied and Threepio translated, “Almost, Princess.”

“Well you’re going to need to hurry. I don’t want to be pulled in by a tractor beam.” She highly doubted the freighter they were in was faster than the Falcon, and she found herself wishing for the millionth time that Chewie and Han were here to get them out of this mess.

Just more people who had been taken from her.

Ahead, the transport breached the upper atmosphere, attempting to curve away from the Star Destroyers so that they could jump to hyperspace.

“Your Highness.” Wedge’s apprehensive voice filled the cockpit again. “I don’t think they’re going to make it…”

“They will.” She sounded more sure than she felt. Wedge didn’t respond, and she had no doubt it was because he didn’t believe her.

Again, the strange thought from before struck her: *Vader cared about Luke. That’s why he’s doing this.*

*No, he doesn’t!* She insisted back...to herself? She wasn’t sure, but she had the odd sense that she was going crazy. She had to be. Why else would insane thoughts like that be popping into her head? Why else would she be able to know without a shadow of a doubt that something horrible had happened to Luke?

Her musings were cut short. The Executor fired. The transport ahead of them exploded.

“Kriff,” Wedge hissed. “Rogue Squadron, jump to hyperspace, *now!***

Leia simply stared. She’d known it was a high possibility, but to actually watch it happen… All of
the technicians and support staff. The rest of the battalion. Gone, in the blink of an eye.

That voice was in her head again. It sounded so much like hers but wasn’t. *This is your fault. If Luke hadn’t faked his death, his X-wing wouldn’t have fallen into Vader’s hands. If Vader didn’t think his son was dead, he wouldn’t have found the X-wing. Those people are dead. Because of you.*

No. This was war. People died in war. She hadn’t had a choice. Had they waited and tried to fight off Vader, they’d all be dead or in the Executors cells awaiting torture.

And yet…

“Artoo…” She breathed.

Artoo beeped in confirmation. She didn’t need to ask for a translation.

Numbly, she reached for the lever and pulled, the scene before her elongating briefly before disappearing, replaced by the swirls of hyperspace.

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Vader stared after Organa’s ship, strangely calm. Perhaps it was because he could still feel the echo in the Force where hundreds of rebels had just died, their terror a split second before exploding fueling him. But, no, that wasn’t it. While he’d held Organa’s ship, he’d watched her through the viewport, the Force whispering a truth to him that he hadn’t considered before.

Leia Organa, Princess of Alderaan, was Luke Skywalker’s best friend. She knew him more than any other being in the galaxy. Probably better than Solo and the Wookiee.

Why else had the Rebels all but evacuated before he’d arrived? He’d been sure to come out of hyperspace outside of their detection, had ensured that the attack would be a surprise. But there was nothing left of the Rebel fleet except for unimportant support staff, one battalion, and a squadron of X-wings. The rest of the base showed signs of supporting more soldiers, but they were gone. He knew for certain Luke wasn’t around to warn the Rebellion of what he would find in his commandeered X-wing. That left Organa’s instinctive knowledge of what Luke would leave behind.

He’d kill Organa when he got his hands on her, but before he did, maybe she was of use to him.

He pulled his comm from his belt and thumbed the frequency to his admiral. “Yes, my lord?” Piett’s clear, calm voice answered a split second later.

“I want you to calculate every possible course that G9 Rigger-class light freighter could have taken.” Assuming she was jumping straight to her end destination. “And I want you to have Princess Leia’s bounty changed from dead or alive to alive only.”

A brief pause. No doubt Piett was wondering what Organa had done to deserve that change. Or maybe he was worried Vader was on another obsessive quest. “Yes, of course, my lord. It will be done before you return.”

He shut the comm off, still staring after the freighter. Bits of debris from the Rebel transport were still flickering above, burning up upon re-entry. He crossed his arms, ignoring his troopers as they set about looking for rebel survivors or any other clue to where the larger fleet might have gone.

If the Emperor asked, he would tell him he wanted Organa for the information she could potentially provide about the rest of Rebel command. A flimsy excuse. He’d find the rebels
without forcing the information out of her, and the girl was known to be resistant to giving up sensitive information about her cause. But he didn’t give a damn what the Emperor thought.

He was going to find out all he could about his son. Then, when he’d heard enough, he’d strangle the life out of the girl with his own hands. He would be sure to make it slow and painful.

But in the meantime, he had another destination in mind.

The X-wing’s navicomputer still held data up until just before their duel on Bespin. Though it was clearly not where the Rebellion would be, Vader nonetheless was interested in where the boy had been while he’d tortured his friends. Now that he’d pursued the Rebellion lead, he was free to investigate.

The Dagobah system.

---

You need to wake up. Now.

Luke’s eyes fluttered open...then closed. His mental voice was right. He knew that. But lying down felt so nice, and staying in the darkness of his consciousness was soothing.

If you don’t get up, you’re going to die.

Well. That was a convincing reason to wake up. But would dying be so bad? Waking up would mean pain. He still couldn’t remember what had happened, but he knew it wasn’t good.

What about Leia?

Slowly, Luke forced his eyes open. Everything swayed, as if he were on the ocean, and there was a ringing in his ears, though it wasn’t as loud as before. He stayed perfectly still, staring at the room he was in.

Besides the ringing, everything was silent.

Or maybe he couldn’t hear anything else but that.

Both were concerning signs. He wasn’t sure which was worse.

His brows furrowed, pulling on skin caked with dried blood. Where was he? He wondered. How had he gotten here? He attempted to recall the last thing he remembered.

He was on...some planet. It had been foggy. Green fog. He’d run into pirates, had saved a Rodian family by showing off his Force powers...then nothing. It was all flashes after that. A ray shield. A bearded man with a scar across his face. Then falling...falling…

He groaned. Despite the insistent whine in his ears, he could hear the sound, so he thanked the stars that he hadn’t gone deaf. Then, slowly, he moved his left hand to push himself up.

A stabbing pain instantly erupted in his shoulder, and he yelped, his entire body tensing, waiting for the pain to subside. It did eventually, but only into a pulsing throb.

Taking shallow breaths that did less to calm him and more to make him realize his stomach was twisted in knots, he used his right hand to slowly push himself up. As he did, he cried out through gritted teeth, his skin breaking out into a sweat, mixing with the blood on his face. But, finally, he was sitting upright.
He immediately wished he hadn’t.

If the world had been tilting before, it was nothing compared to sitting up. He squeezed his eyes shut for a few seconds, then opened them again. It only helped marginally.

“Kriff,” he muttered, closing his eyes again. “Kriff. You’ve really done it now, Skywalker.”

He sat like that for a few moments, trying to calm his racing heart, before finally he shook his head. Everyone in the Rebellion had to go through survival training, just in case of situations like this. He himself had been stranded on unknown planets before, but he’d never been injured. He’d honestly hoped he’d never have to put the training to practical use, but at least he’d paid attention.

“Step one,” he muttered. “Evaluate your injuries.” He wouldn’t get far without knowing what he was up against. Without attempting to treat himself.

First, he tested his right hand, then his arm. Everything seemed to be in working order. His mechanical hand’s sensors seemed connected to his nerves still. Then he attempted his other hand. His fingers flexed, he could move his wrist and elbow. But when he attempted to lift his arm, he almost doubled over, hissing, biting his lip, his vision going dark before clearing.

Yeah. Something was definitely broken in his shoulder.

Next, he attempted taking deep breaths. Technically he could do it, but he winced each time. His sides felt sore, as if he’d been punched repeatedly. He wasn’t sure what that meant—bruises? Cracked ribs? He thought if his ribs were broken, it would hurt way more, so at least he had that going for him.

Positive thoughts, he repeated in his mind. Positive thoughts.

Then he looked down at his legs, and his heart dropped into his stomach, all positive thoughts disappearing.

Just above the left ankle, his leg was clearly broken.

Through his pant leg, he could see that bone was twisted out of place, jutting to the right when it should have been straight with the rest of his limb. Now that he looked at it, he realized just how much it burned, as if someone had lit the inside of his leg on fire.

Bile rose in his throat, and he looked away.

Not good.

His chest rose and fell quickly. He was sweating again, but it was suddenly very cold. His throat felt tight, and he ran his mechanical hand over his face.

He needed to set it.

He didn’t want to.

He really didn’t.

But he had to. If he didn’t, when he finally got rescued, recovery would be a whole hell of a lot worse.

Or, a dark corner of his mind whispered, you’ll die before anyone bothers to look for you.
Not that anyone knew where he was.

He bit his lip again.

Maybe he’d be fine. Maybe he could just stay off the leg.

No. That was stupid. Of course not. He had to set it.

But how?

Though the thought of what he had to do made him want to recoil away and throw up, he forced himself to focus. Or as much as he could, given that his head still felt like it was about to pop off his shoulders at any moment.

He was in what looked to be some sort of cargo hold. Small, windowless, with a few crates. Pieces of a crate were scattered about the hold, and he wondered if the crate had smashed when...whatever it was. But other than the crates, the room was empty.

Not much to go on.

He forced himself to look at his broken leg again, and he cringed.

He could try to reset it with the Force…

The thought instantly made him shudder, causing his shoulder to protest and his vision to swim once again (now that he thought about it, it was possible he had a concussion, too). No, using the Force to set a bone was a terrible idea. One of his worst. He had barely learned to levitate. He was pretty sure fixing broken limbs was up there on the list of advanced Force abilities. If that even was an ability in the first place.

He sat there, trying to come up with an answer, until his temples began to throb. He couldn’t use both of his hands to do it. He could move his left hand, but he was pretty sure there wasn’t any real strength in it. Plus, even if he did, he couldn’t be sure he wouldn’t make his shoulder worse.

“Just...great. This is...great,” he grumbled quietly, shooting a glare at the offending injury. “I just had to play hero again, didn’t I?”

And yet, even as he said it, he couldn’t find it in him to actually regret what he’d done. If Han and Leia were there, they’d both give him a lengthy lecture on when to be the hero and when to fight another day...but he couldn’t change the past.

He frowned, considering the situation again. He could attempt to brace the leg between two crates, he thought, glancing over at them. Then he could probably use them to set the bone one-handed.

Again, not ideal. But it was better than blindly using the Force to do it.

He hoped.

He attempted to lift himself onto his one good leg, but the moment he moved his twisted limb, a fresh stab of pain rocketed up. He almost stopped breathing, his vision momentarily filled with black spots, and when it cleared, he realized hot tears were falling down his cheeks.

No. He wasn’t going anywhere until he could set it. When he did, he’d likely black out again. He was pretty sure that wouldn’t help his already-concussed head.

Time for the next plan.
Once he was able to breathe relatively calmly, he reached his good hand out, blindly reaching through the Force. Two crates shuddered, but didn’t move. He let out a breath, his head swimming.

He should have gone straight to Dagobah. Yoda probably could have used the Force effortlessly, even with as many injuries as Luke had. Probably. Luke could have learned what to do.

“You have to do it.” Luke muttered to himself. He couldn’t fail. Failure meant death, and it wouldn’t be a quick one. He needed to succeed.

So, with another deep breath, Luke closed his eyes, reached into the Force, and pulled.

The sound of heavy plastic dragging over metal flooring reached his ears, and when he opened his eyes, he was relieved to find two crates waiting in front of him. He sighed in relief, then gingerly, slowly, maneuvered his leg so that it was tightly wedged between them. It took longer than he would have liked, and again his vision blackened repeatedly, but he managed.

He sat back, staring once more at the injury. This was it. He needed to set it. But his good hand didn’t move to comply.


He still didn’t move. His every instinct screamed at him to avoid the results. It would hurt. A lot. He would definitely black out. Plus, the idea of pushing his own bone back in, feeling it under his hand…

He suddenly wished the droid who had fitted him with his mechanical hand had outfitted him with an older model, one that wouldn’t connect so heavily to his nerves. Then at least he wouldn’t feel it.

“You’re going to do this.” Luke said again, firmer this time. He leaned forward, grimacing as he forced his hand to reach out and steady itself on the leg. Just his gentle touch sent shivers up his spine. “Count of three.”

A deep breath.

“One.”

His hand tightened, and he squeezed his eyes shut.

“Two.”

A pause.

“Two and a half.”

Force, if his father were there, he was certain he’d mock him for his childishness.

The thought of the man clad in black armor, laughing at his inability to set a simple bone, made him grit his teeth, a stubborn fit of anger rising in his chest. “Three.”

He shoved, pushing the bone back with a CRACK, the crates keeping him from going too far, and he was screaming, and…

Nothing.
When Luke woke up, he was standing. Sweat ran in rivers down his spine, his chest. Hair stuck to his face. It wasn’t hard to see why. He was standing on a great, black cliff, overlooking a river of lava. Even from this distance, he could feel the stifling heat. It was hard to breathe, and his eyes watered. As far as his eyes could see, the land was covered in black soil and volcanic rock, and he saw great mountains of fire in the distance. Below, far below, a great black structure rose into the sky, as if in challenge to any who dared approach it.

He stood still, staring.

*Where am I?* he wondered, frowning. He’d just been stuck in a cargo hold, seriously injured. Now he was overlooking some sort of hellish planet, and though he was standing, he could still feel the painful ghost of his injuries lingering in his body.

Maybe he’d died. Maybe he’d gone wherever evil people went after death. He didn’t think he’d done anything to deserve that, but maybe just by being Darth Vader’s son, that had been enough to earn him a ticket there.

“Luke?”

He froze, eyes widening. He didn’t dare turn around. He didn’t dare…

“What are you *doing* here?”

The voice that haunted his dreams. He wanted to wake up. He wanted to run. He needed to, he couldn’t face him. He couldn’t…

Luke turned around to face the person who’d spoken.

There, standing behind him, a monolith against the fiery horizon, was Darth Vader.

### Chapter End Notes

I would apologize for that cliffhanger...but I'm not really sorry.... >.< I was way excited to write this chapter, hence the faster update for this chapter. Things are about to get fun (for me, at least)!

The songs for this chapter:

Leia’s: Star a War by Klergy, Valerie Broussard
Luke’s: Tsimtsum from Life of Pi (annnngst song I've always wanted to use!)

Leave some love!

Love,

Ladyvader23
Visions

Chapter Summary

Alternative Chapter Name: In Which Vader Confuses His Children

Chapter Notes

As always, thank you to the lovely SpellCleaver for the Beta!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Vader stared. When he’d settled in to meditate while waiting for the Executor to arrive in the Dagobah system, he certainly hadn’t been prepared to find his dead offspring waiting for him.

Apparently, Luke’s ghost hadn’t been either.

“What...why... where ?!” Luke backed up a step, looking wildly between him and the landscape of Mustafar--the planet Vader usually ended up in during visions. It was strong with the Dark Side of the Force. It helped to rejuvenate him. When it didn’t, he was often bombarded with visions from his past instead.

Visions of her.

And now, it seemed Luke’s ghost had been dragged in. Vader didn’t even realize he could do that, or that Luke would be strong enough to appear to him in ghost form. Their bond, while there, wasn’t strong--not like his bonds had been with the boy’s mother. And even when he saw her, she never seemed to know he was there.

But Luke was all too aware. He looked at Vader like he was an incensed rancor about tear him to shreds.

It stung, enough that even Vader stepped back. The movement made Luke’s eyes dart to the ground, narrow suspiciously, then glare up at him again. “What in the nine Corellian hells are you doing here?”

A phrase he’d likely picked up from the smuggler. It hurt to have that thrown at him, too. He’d spent hours, days, agonizing over his son’s death. He’d assumed he wouldn’t see him again.

Now here he stood, backed against a cliff overlooking the very river he’d burned in, and it was as if nothing had changed.

Luke still viewed him as his enemy.

*It’s not like you haven’t given him a reason to*, the Force reminded him. Anger at himself ballooned in his chest, choking him.

The Force, he decided, was definitely cruel. It showed him his lost son, only to make it clear he
wanted nothing to do with him, even in death.

But Luke could see him. He could hear him. His lost wife couldn’t; Vader’s pleas to her ghost fell on deaf ears.

Perhaps…

Vader straightened. He didn’t fail to notice how Luke’s body tensed, how he crouched low into a defensive position.

“I cannot hurt you.” Vader tried. Beyond the fact that even his powers couldn’t inflict pain on the dead, this was merely a vision. It was the visions that came true in waking life that were dangerous.


Behind the mask, he winced.

Making no sudden movements, Vader pushed back the cloak of his suit to reveal his weaponless belt. “I don’t even have my lightsaber. You are safe.”

The boy’s eyes narrowed. “You and I both know you don’t need that.”

He had a point.

“I have no intention of harming you,” he promised, willing for his son to feel the truth in his words. “I couldn’t anyway. You’re dead.”

Luke stared at him, still tense, still ready to bolt at a moment’s notice. Where he’d go in Vader’s own vision, he had no idea, but trust his son to find a way to slip through his fingers.

“Yeah,” he replied, slowly. “I’m dead.”

Vader frowned. An odd thing to say. Then again, he hadn’t had any two-way conversations with the dead. Who knew what they liked to talk about?

“But that doesn’t mean I want to be here,” his son added, that fire lighting in his blue eyes. “Where are we? Why am I here? How is this even happening?”

“Technically, you showed up in my meditation,” he pointed out. “I have no idea why you’re here. I didn’t call you.”

Not that Vader was complaining. While just looking at the boy he’d never have again made it difficult to breathe, he still couldn’t help but selfishly want to find out how to prolong the vision for as long as possible. What if this was a one time fluke? What if this was his only chance to get to know his son?

“Great. If you could just point me to the exit, I’ll leave you in peace. No hauntions from me…”

Panic. Vader reached up. “Wait!”


He cursed himself. Even if he didn’t want to scare someone, he managed to do it. He was the perfect Sith Lord, even when he didn’t want to be.
“Wait.” He tried to sound calmer, but the vocoder in his mask didn’t allow him to achieve that. “Don’t go.”

Through the Force, he could practically feel his son’s heartbeat frantically fluttering with terror. “I’m good, thanks.”

“I need to tell you…”

“I really don’t think that’s necessary…”

“It’s important…”

“Is it really? I’m already dead, how important is anything once you’re dead…?”

“LUKE.”

He couldn’t help it. He raised his voice, and Skywalker recoiled again, backing up another step. Vader attempted to calm down, images of Bespin and his failure replaying in his mind.

No, this couldn’t be another Bespin.

“I’m trying...what I mean to say…”

His son stared, wide-eyed, his body shaking.

“I’m trying to say I’m sorry.” The words, so un-Sith-like, were ground out through clenched teeth.

The boy blinked, looking at him like he was crazy. “Come again?”

Vader couldn’t help but snarl. He hadn’t apologized in over twenty years. Not to anyone living, at least. Not to anyone who could hear him. To repeat it again was almost physically painful.


Luke still didn’t appear to believe him. “This is a dream. Has to be.”

“Do the dead dream?”

“No, but what else would explain…” he gestured around, then between them, “...this?”

“It is not a dream,” Vader growled. Hadn’t the boy ever meditated before?

Probably not, he realized. And whose fault was that?

*Kenobi, for taking him away from you*, the Dark Side whispered. Except that made no sense, since the Jedi’s favorite thing to do was to meditate. Behind the mask, he rolled his eyes.

“Well, either way, the apology is not accepted.”

Luke might as well have stabbed him in the chest.

“What?” Vader demanded. “Why?” Didn’t the boy realize that Sith never apologized? He wouldn’t have said it if he didn’t mean it!

“Seriously?” Skywalker raised his right hand. It looked normal, but things sometimes appeared differently in visions than they were in real life. Unless he’d received one of those prosthetics with synth skin. “You cut off my hand and threw it down a chasm!”
“I gave you plenty of chances to surrender…”

“Oh wow, good for you. What do you want, a medal for Father of the Year?”

“No, I want you to believe me!” Why? Why was it so difficult for his son to just listen? He refused to listen on Bespin and now, even dead, the boy still stubbornly rejected him. Naturally, his anger was building, and though he tried to hold it back…

Well. He was a Sith Lord. Anger came naturally.

He was storming forward, finger pointing directly into the boy’s face before he could stop himself. “You are going to listen, and you will listen well, young one!”

Luke was panicking again, scrambling backwards to get away from the monster that was his father, until he ran out of room, backed up against the edge of the cliff.

This time, Vader didn’t take heed.

“I have lost too much, too much, and now you’re gone, and there is nothing of importance left for me!” They were words he’d never dare say aloud in life, but this was his son, his dead son, and the dead couldn’t tell, and Vader had nothing left… “I do not understand why, but the Force has brought us back together, literally spanning the chains of death to do so, so the very least I can do is apologize since I can’t go back and fix what’s already been done!”

Luke shrank back, gaze darting between his finger and his mask, wide-eyed and terrified.

“You are going to accept the apology, you are going to have a happy, content afterlife, or I swear, young one, when I die, I will hunt you down and make sure YOU. ARE. HAPPY.”

With each last word, he jabbed his finger into the boy’s chest.

Which...turned out to be a mistake.

With the last word, Luke’s footing on the edge of the cliff slipped. Intentionally or not, he wasn’t sure, but before Vader could grab him, before he realized what he’d done, he watched as his son lost his balance, arms flailing, eyes wide in horror, confusion, shock…

And he fell.

Ice coated Vader’s veins. No.

No, no, no, no, no, no…

He was afraid to look. Afraid to see his son burning in the fires of Mustafar. He could feel the ghost of that intense heat on his skin. He’d never wanted his son to experience that, never…

Cautiously, he peered over the cliff and into the lava below. There was nothing.

Just lava.

He’s already dead, Vader tried to reason; even if he wasn’t, it’s just a vision.

And yet, the intense guilt didn’t go away.

Just like Bespin, he thought bitterly, watching the thick fire below ooze by. The Force had given him the gift of seeing his son again, and he’d ruined it.
Just like Bespin.


He still felt like he was falling, falling towards the heat of the lava river below. Yet the sensation disappeared the moment he attempted to flail his arms, to grab hold of something steady and solid—and immediately hissed, squeezing his eyes and clenching his teeth as pain shot through his shoulder and neck, reminding him that this was reality.

In reality, he was seriously injured.

That had been the one good thing about the vision: his injuries felt more like sore muscles, and less like he’d been run over by a herd of banthas.

But the rest…

Luke lay on the cold, steel floor, focusing on taking steady, deep breaths, ignoring the slight protest of his ribs as he did so. Everything still hurt, but it felt more manageable, somehow. The moment he started moving around again, he probably wouldn’t think that.

But Luke had no immediate intentions of trying to move. Not when he had the vision and his conversation with Vader still swimming in his mind.

That conversation…

He groaned, reaching up with his mechanical hand to cradle his forehead—and paused, staring at the limb. The reminder of Bespin. The reminder of Vader’s terrible truth.

Of his terrible truth.

It had been a dream, right?

He wanted to believe that was true. He desperately did.

But it was too weird to be a dream. He’d had plenty of nightmares about Darth Vader since Bespin, but none had felt so real. None had been so oddly specific.

None had included Darth Vader shoving his finger into his chest, yelling about how he’d hunt him down in the afterlife to make sure he forgave him so he could be happy.

There was only one logical explanation.

He was going crazy.

Yet even as he thought it, he knew that wasn’t it.

*It’s a vision,* something in him whispered. *You connected with Vader in a vision.*

Luke covered his eyes with his hand. That wasn’t better. Honestly, if he had to pick between connecting with his Sith Lord father and going crazy, he was pretty sure he’d pick going crazy.

But the fact was, he wasn’t. Even his father had flat out told him--Luke had interrupted the Sith Lord’s meditation session. And, honestly, the weird hell-world Vader was meditating in seemed highly appropriate for the man. But that didn’t mean Luke wanted to go there.
He wasn’t even sure how he’d done it. The last thing he remembered was setting his leg, and…

He stilled, remembering why he’d been unconscious in the first place. Slowly, using his good arm for balance, Luke pushed himself back up. He ignored the way his head swam, or the increased pounding all over his body. He needed to know. He needed to make sure he wouldn’t have to set it again and go back to that hellscape.

The leg stretched out before him, still wedged between the two crates. Thankfully, it appeared to be relatively straight.

No more weird Darth Vader meetups. For now.

Because, knowing his luck, now that he’d somehow...met with Vader, mind to mind, he was sure the Force would shove them back together again. He didn’t know when. He didn’t know how. Hell, maybe he was overreacting and it was a fluke. But no. Luke Skywalker knew his luck.

Despite what Han always said, his luck was non-existent.

With a sigh, Luke carefully, slowly, began to peel off his shirt. He needed a makeshift brace to keep the leg in place. It wouldn’t be as effective with just a shirt, but it was better than letting it get bent out of shape all on it’s own.

It took much longer than he would have liked. He couldn’t lift his left arm at all. Any shift, any sudden move was enough for his shoulder to feel like it was burning from the inside out. Multiple times he had to stop, half undressed, just to keep himself from blacking out again. But, finally, he managed to slide the shirt off, then began the equally painful process of wrapping his broken leg as tightly as he could.

He made a mental note to figure out a sling for his arm later.

It definitely was not ideal to wrap the leg mostly one handed, but eventually he figured it out. Once completed, he leaned back, breathing hard, reaching up to wipe sweat out of his eyes. It could have been tighter, but it was just a temporary solution. He’d have to redo it anyway. He just needed to get out of the room.

Yet his mind kept going back to the vision. To the unexpected words Vader had snarled at him.

_I am sorry._

Did Sith apologize? From what he knew of their behavior, and the fact that Vader had sounded like he was in physical pain when he said it, it didn’t seem to be in their character. That in itself was enough to give him pause, to wonder if what he’d experienced had indeed been real. The Force told him it was, but...really?

An apology? From a _Sith_? From the man who’d cut his hand off?

It was enough for him to ask the Force, _Are you sure?_

_I have lost too much, too much, and now you’re gone._

He didn’t even know where to begin with that admission. He’d even implied that Luke was important to him, that he’d been the only important thing left. Vader seemed like he could have anything he wanted. He was second only to the Emperor. As long as the Emperor willed it, Luke was pretty sure nothing stood in the way of what his father wanted.
Yet...he’d rejected his father. He’d literally refused by throwing himself down a pit, fully expecting it would kill him. When it hadn’t, Vader continued his pursuit, to force him into joining him, Luke assumed. So he’d rejected him again by faking his death. Apparently, the man bought it, and...he was actually...upset about it?

It didn’t quite compute in his head. Cutting off his hand, torturing his friends, were not the actions of someone who cared about what happened to their offspring. But Luke didn’t think his father was lying.

*You are going to have a happy, content afterlife, or I swear, young one, when I die, I will hunt you down and make sure YOU. ARE. HAPPY.*

It was the strangest threat he’d ever received. He could still feel Vader’s prosthetic gloved finger jabbing into his chest. Had anyone told him Vader would threaten him into having a happy afterlife, he would have laughed in their face. It was ridiculous. But again, he didn’t think Vader was lying.

If he was confused after Bespin, it was nothing compared to the war of emotions swirling around in his head now.

“It’s gotta be brain damage,” he whispered to himself. There was no way that conversation had happened. He had to believe that. Anything else was just too much, and at that moment, he needed to figure out how to get out of the cargo hold.

He couldn’t have Vader and his weird mood swings distracting him.

Having decided that, despite the Force telling him the opposite, Luke set about the task of getting out. He spotted the control panel next to the blast door in seconds, and a grim smile broke out on his face.

He couldn’t deal Vader, but at least he could deal with tech.

“Princess Leia.”

Leia pulled her hands away from her face, opening her eyes to stare at the swirls of hyperspace outside of the view port.

She didn’t face the golden droid who’d spoken; her mind was still whirling with what had happened over the last few hours. Who had died, because of her actions. Where Luke could be. If he was dead, too, because of her.

She didn’t feel like company.

“Yes, Threepio?” she said anyway, and she hated how lifeless her voice sounded. As if she’d died along with Luke.

A hesitation. “Artoo says he has something to show you.”

Leia closed her eyes, sucked in a deep breath, mentally preparing herself. Then, she turned her chair to face the droids. “What is it?”

Artoo whistled something, and Threepio glanced at him in what Leiathought was disapproval. “He says it’s data left from his previous master. I tried to tell him we have always been owned by the Organa family, but he insists.”

She didn’t bother to point out to Threepio that he’d likely been wiped by her father when he acquired the droids. She was a little surprised Artoo wasn’t, but the little astromech had proven to be smarter than most droids. Maybe her father hadn’t wanted to lose that intelligence.

Still, she wasn’t sure how anything from before she was born would be helpful to her now.

“Alright.” she humored him. “Who was your previous master, Artoo?”

Artoo was silent for a breath, then…

A hologram appeared. Grainy, flickering, but clear enough for her to fully make out that the scene playing before her was a wedding.

The woman wore a gorgeous cream gown with lace galore. Her dark curls fell freely around her shoulders, hidden mostly by an equally lacy veil that covered most of her head. The man wore what Leia recognized from her father’s old holos as the robes of a Jedi. Simple, plain, not necessarily formal enough for a wedding, but decent. His hair was short, except for a long, thin braid resting on his shoulder.

One of his hands glinted—a metal hand.

It was too grainy to clearly make out their faces, especially while they were kissing, over and over again.

“Um.” Leia frowned, more confused than ever. “Who?”

Artoo beeped a response, and Threepio turned his body to look at his friend.

“Um,” Threepio replied awkwardly. A sure sign that he wasn’t enthusiastic to translate. “He says he was under the employ of Senator Amidala, who gave him as a wedding gift to…are you sure, Artoo?”

Artoo said something that sounded a bit offended.

“Anakin Skywalker,” Threepio finished, resigned.

Leia straightened up, feeling as though her entire body had been electrified. “I’m sorry, the Anakin Skywalker? Luke’s father?”

“That’s what he says. I’m sure he must be confused. His bolts are getting a bit rusty, and…”

She ignored Threepio’s assurances. “Why haven’t you told us this before?” she demanded.

Artoo whistled sadly. “He says he was tasked by Obi-Wan Kenobi and your father to keep it a secret.”

She bit back a curse. Of course her father was still keeping secrets from her. Not that she’d have known what to do had she known anyway. Even if her father had told her he had Anakin Skywalker’s droid, she wouldn’t have really understood the importance until Luke told her who Vader really was. Now she knew, and to know she had Darth Vader’s droid in her care, all this time…to know the droid had purposefully neglected to tell Luke…

“Why now?”
Artoo was hesitant in his response, but he gave it. “He hopes to help you find Master Luke. But he also says you need to understand Anakin Skywalker’s past to have the best chance at finding him.” Threepio paused. “I don’t...fully understand...what that means…”

She didn’t either. She knew what the droid really meant: that she needed to understand something about Vader’s past. But why that would help her find Luke, she didn’t know. The goal was to find him, hopefully alive, without letting Vader know they’d faked his death.

But… “Show me.”

The hologram changed. It was clearer, and this time, she got a much better view of the faces of the couple.

“Pause,” she ordered, and Artoo complied. She leaned forward, studying.

The woman, Padme Amidala, she’d seen before. She’d been to Naboo a few times in her life. She’d seen plenty of pictures of the planet’s favorite queen. She’d known the young queen had turned into a senator, and had been quite accomplished, though there were few records of what she’d done. All that were left were the speeches the Empire deemed safe enough for the public, speeches that were minor and innocent or heavily edited. She only knew that because her parents had told her.

But this version of Padme seemed younger. More relaxed. It probably helped that she was clearly wearing a nightgown, but without her formal wear she seemed...innocent, somehow. Yet she was one of the most beautiful women Leia had ever seen.

Her stomach was swollen. Pregnant.

With Luke.

Then there was Anakin, or rather, Darth Vader. Leia instantly saw Luke in his face. It was him she studied the most, the man hidden behind the monster that terrorized the galaxy, that tortured her, and haunted her dreams.

He had dirty blond hair that hung loosely. His eyes were light, and though she couldn’t fully make out the color, she thought they might have been the same blue as Luke’s. The right eye had a scar over it. He had the same lips as Luke, but his jawline was stronger, his entire body muscled in ways Leia didn’t think Luke could ever be. No, Luke got his softness and his nose from his mother.

This was Darth Vader. The Second in Command to the entire Empire. The Right Hand of the Emperor. This was Anakin Skywalker, the legendary Jedi some of the older Rebellion members whispered about when they saw Luke pass by.

This was her enemy. This was the man who hunted her friend.

Who hunted his son.

He no longer looked like this, even under the mask. She didn’t know what he looked like, but there were rumors. He was deformed now. From what, she didn’t know. Some said he was more droid than man. The suit he wore wasn’t just an instrument of terror--it was how he survived.

But at this point in time, Leia had to admit, he was handsome. He and Padme Amidala were a beautiful couple.

She really, really hated to admit that. She wouldn’t ever say the words aloud.
“Okay. Play.”

Artoo complied.

“*There was a dream,*” Vader--no, Anakin at this time--said, apprehensively. Again, it was odd to hear his voice sound so... *human.* So much like her best friend’s.

“*Bad?*” Padme asked. From the way she said it, she already knew what the answer would be.

“*Like the ones I used to have about my mother. Just before she died.*” There was an old bitterness in his voice that he couldn’t quite keep out. He refused to look at his wife.

Leia wondered what had happened with his mother, or even who she was. It was hard to believe Darth Vader had been a child at one point. It seemed more fitting that he’d appear out of thin air in that monster of a suit, but evidently, that was not the case.

“*And?*”

Finally, Vader/Anakin turned to face Padme. “*And, it was about you.*”

The worry was evident in his expression, in the way he turned away the moment the words were out, unable to face her. To face her future.

Padme reached up and rubbed his shoulder, comfortingly. Leia couldn’t imagine anyone doing that to Vader now. He’d probably strangle them before they could touch him. “*Tell me.*”

Vader/Anakin sighed, then got up, pulling away from her touch. “*It was only a dream.*”

But Padme’s waiting stare followed him, and he stopped with another painful sigh, then turned to face her. He stared at her, as if he were memorizing her face, imprinting her into his brain so he wouldn’t forget. “*You die in childbirth.*”

Leia had suspected. Luke knew nothing about his mother. His aunt and uncle, he told her, didn’t even know who she’d been. If Padme had survived, she couldn’t imagine the woman would have left Luke so ignorant of who she was.

Who his father was.

Padme’s hands instantly went to her protruding stomach. “*And the baby?*” There was genuine fear in her voice, fear for the boy she was carrying. Despite her choices in men, Leia had to admit: she couldn’t help but like the woman.

But Vader/Anakin sounded just as worried--even tortured--as he replied, “*I don’t know.*” He seemed on the verge of a panic attack.

Which, again, was a *really* strange thing to hear, coming from the man who would become Vader. The man who wouldn’t weep over the deaths of other children.

Had he wept over his own?

“*It was only a dream,*” Padme tried to insist, but she didn’t sound like she really believed it. Whatever had happened with Vader and his mother made Padme take this seriously.

“*I won’t let this one become real.*” He took her in his arms, looking her deep in the eyes, imploring her, imploring himself to believe it.
“This baby will change our lives. I doubt the Queen will allow me to continue to serve in the Senate, and if the council discovers that you’re the father, you’ll be expelled…”

“I know, I know.” He made a face, looking away from her, and it was such a human gesture, a human response…

They weren’t supposed to be together. No one knew they were together. It was a secret… that was why Luke’s aunt and uncle didn’t know who his mother was. That was why nothing Leia had ever heard or read about Senator Amidala mentioned anything about a family.

She had a bad feeling this had something to do with how Vader came to be.

“Do you think...Obi-Wan might be able to help us?”

So not even Obi-Wan had known. That must have been quite the shock. When had the Jedi had found out? Didn’t Luke say Vader had been Obi-Wan’s apprentice at some point?

“We don’t need his help,” Vader/Anakin insisted. Then a reluctant but genuine smile broke out across his face. It only made him more handsome than before. Maybe she could sort of see why Padme had fallen for him. Maybe. “Our baby is a blessing.”

The hologram shut off, and Leia was left staring at the empty spot where it had been.

A secret marriage.

Bad dreams that came true.

A baby that Vader considered to be a blessing.

Leia could hardly breathe. Vader at least at one point...had loved. The proof stared her in the face. That whole conversation had been an intimate discussion between a terrified husband, and a worried wife.

And at one point, Luke had been a blessing to Vader.

Meaning...it was very possible the man cared for Luke.

She recoiled at the thought. If he cared, then why hunt him down like an animal? Why cut his hand off? Why do anything Vader had ever done to him?

But...Senator Amidala… was his wife…

The last time she’d been on Naboo. she’d stumbled across one of the many paintings of her in her queenly regalia. She’d sworn the woman had looked at her, had literally turned her head to regard her sadly...but when she’d blinked, the painting was normal.

Then there was that time she’d run into Moff Panaka, right before he’d been assassinated. She’d actually worn one of Queen Amidala’s dresses, borrowed from the Queen of Naboo at the time. When Moff Panaka had looked at her, he’d seemed...stunned. Then, it was as if he’d put something together, and his attitude towards her had been strange, almost reverent.

Then her parents, when she’d returned, had grilled her about why she’d gone to Naboo. They’d wanted to know why she’d gone, if it had been for another reason besides the mercy mission…

She looked at Artoo, then at Threepio, then back to Artoo. “If you were Anakin Skywalker’s droid,” she breathed, “why did Obi-Wan give you to my father? Why not leave you for Luke to
The droid was silent. Truthfully, Leia was afraid of the answer, so when the console began to beep, signaling upcoming reversion from hyperspace, she was almost glad the droid was silent. She turned, pretending to be fully focused on tasks she could have done in her sleep, the silence in the cabin weighing heavily on her shoulders.

But she didn’t have time to dwell on that, because as the swirls of hyperspace disappeared, she was faced with a new focus.

Dagobah. Where Jedi Master Yoda lived.

It seemed she had more questions to ask beyond Luke’s whereabouts.

Chapter End Notes

I LOVED writing this chapter so much! Especially the Force Bond Vision and Leia's scene. Pretty much, this entire chapter is Darth Vader confusing his children and I love it muahahahahahaha!
The song for this chapter is I'll be Good by Jaymes Young.
Leave some love!
Love,
Sarah
Since Artoo was the only being on board who had actually visited the Jedi Master, Leia listened closely to his instructions as she guided the ship through the landing sequence.

“Does this planet feel wrong to either of you?” she asked as they entered the upper atmosphere. The entire view port was blocked with fog, which in her mind was never a good sign, but it was more than that. Though Dagobah was classified as uninhabited, she could practically feel that they weren’t alone. It was as though eyes were watching them descend, and they weren’t happy to be disturbed.

Artoo whistled a response and Threepio jolted back in horror. “Oh my,” he turned to face her, “Princess, perhaps we should turn around. Artoo says Master Luke crash landed here and that a swamp monster almost ate them!”

Conveniently, Luke had left that bit out when he’d told her what he’d been doing here. Typical. “Oh wonderful. Let’s not crash land or get eaten, shall we?”

“That is not what I had in mind…”

She ignored him. There was no way she was turning back now. There were answers she needed, not just to save her friend’s life, but…

She didn’t finish that thought.

She managed to find a safe landing spot in a clearing surrounded by thick, towering trees, hairy vines, and an ominous-looking swamp. Even if Artoo hadn’t said anything, she would have wondered how Luke could have landed safely—-it was a miracle *she* had. So maybe she wouldn’t chew him out for not telling her the full story.

That is, if she found him again.

She powered down the engine and stood. “Threepio, it’s probably best that you stay here.”

Threepio appeared relieved. “I will be more than happy to look after the ship, Your Highness.”

She glanced at Artoo, her question from earlier once more rattling around in her brain. She had half a mind to ask him to stay as well. She didn’t even know how he’d be able to get around on such unstable, swampy terrain, but she knew better than to ask. Artoo tended to do whatever he pleased—which saved their lives more often than not. “Come on. Let’s go find this Jedi Master of yours.”

Dagobah’s atmosphere was just as inhospitable as it looked, and she instantly understood why no one wanted to live there. The stale, musty air smelled strongly of rotten soil and decaying lifeforms. Though they were on solid ground, her boots squished deep into the mud. It was so humid, she was certain that she looked like she’d taken a disgusting shower five minutes after
leaving the ship. The jungle was alive with the cries of creatures, big or small, and she felt as though their every move were being watched. As she’d expected, Artoo moved slower than usual, but he somehow managed and, to her knowledge, didn’t complain.

Eventually, they came upon another clearing where a domed hut stood, practically blended into its surroundings.

“That it?” she asked, her voice low. But even as she asked it, her eyes caught sight of a small, hobbled creature in a ratty robe, leaning on a knobbed cane. Watching her.

When it noticed she’d seen it, it called out. “Greetings!” The voice was definitely ancient and garbled, but soothing and kind. So at odds with the permeated sense of darkness she felt from the rest of the planet. “Who comes to visit me in my humble home, hmmm?”

Leia stood still, hardly breathing, taking in what was now clearly Yoda from Luke’s descriptions. He was as small and strange looking as he’d told her. Yet even she could see the wise set of his amber eyes. “I believe you already know, Master Yoda,” she replied finally, squaring her shoulders. She didn’t actually know if he did know, but it felt right saying that.

“Ohhh,” Yoda’s eyes widened, his ears twitching. “More perceptive you are than young Skywalker.”

“No, Luke told me enough to recognize you.” She couldn’t help but give the ancient Jedi a small smile.

“Hmmm.” His expression fell at that, and he suddenly began to cough. Huge, wracking coughs that shook his little body. “Well. Come in, come in. Much to tell you, there seems to be.”

She didn’t hesitate to follow him, Artoo close on her heels. If Luke trusted him, then she would, too.

The inside of Yoda’s hut was remarkably drier than it was outside, despite the fact that the windows of the hut didn’t have any glass panes protecting the home. But a warm fire was going in the fireplace and a pot of stew bubbled, filling the home with an aroma that made her stomach grumble. Other than that, the home was mostly bare, with only the essentials.

“Hungry, are you?” Yoda asked, hobbling over to the pot.

She had no idea if the food was as good as it smelled, but she fell back on her manners anyway. “That would be wonderful. Thank you, Master Yoda.” She sat down in a corner out of the way, crossing her legs beneath her. She was suddenly grateful for her small stature. The image of Luke being squished into the hut made her smile briefly before a pang of anguish and longing made it disappear.

Yoda made an approving noise. “Such a polite princess,” he muttered under his breath as he scooped out a few spoonfuls of soup into a small clay bowl. “So unlike Skywalker. Teach him manners, you should.”

She snorted at that. “Trust me. Out of all the boys I work with, Luke is the most polite out of all of them.” If Yoda thought he was bad, she decided.

Yoda began to laugh, but it quickly turned into another coughing fit. He could barely look at her as he handed her the bowl. “Glad you came, I am.” Yoda wheezed when he finished, sitting across from her with his own food. “Not much time I have.”
She frowned. “Are you alright, Master Yoda?” She already knew the answer to that question. Those coughs didn’t sound good.

“Nine hundred years old, I am,” Yoda informed her. “Almost up, my time is.” He didn’t seem bothered by that statement, not like many other dying men she’d met in her life. Rather, he seemed content, as though death were an old friend he would welcome with open arms.

“I’m sorry,” she said anyway. It was the polite thing to say, and yet it made the ancient Jedi chuckle.

“No need for apologies. A natural part of life, death is.” He paused, frowning, his ears tilting downwards as he did so. “Waiting for Skywalker to return, I was.”

She swallowed, hard. “That’s...actually why I came.”

“Yes, yes. Missing, Skywalker is. For this reason have you come.” Sure enough, her suspicions were confirmed. That made it easier to jump right in.

“Luke found out about his father. His real father.” She watched the Jedi Master carefully, but Yoda’s face was what Han would call a perfect sabacc expression. “It explained why Vader hunted us so vehemently--or rather, Luke.”

Yoda let out a sigh. “Possessive, Sith are. Fight to protect what they view is theirs, they will.” He nodded sadly. “A natural reaction. A predictable one.”

Leia hesitated. Had Yoda told her this before Artoo had shown her the video of Luke’s parents, she might have accepted that. But Vader’s words echoed in her head: Our baby is a blessing. That seemed less like the response of a villain and more like the natural response of a parent. She didn’t want to admit that, but she couldn’t deny the proof in front of her.

“Master Yoda.” She spoke carefully. Her stomach was tied in knots, and she clutched the bowl tightly between her hands. “If I may, I need to know something.”

She waited for Yoda to object or to tell her that he already knew what she was about to ask, but he said nothing. He simply waited.

“It isn’t a secret that I’m not by blood an Organa. I’ve never asked my parents for information on my biological family. I didn’t need to know. I was happy. But now...now there are things happening that make me believe that I can’t live in ignorance anymore.”

“Describe these things,” Yoda replied patiently, then began to cough.

Leia waited for him to finish before she continued. “My droids were owned by Anakin Skywalker and Padme Amidala.” She motioned to the window where Artoo peeked in. “Every time I’ve gone to Senator Amidala’s home planet, something weird and unexplainable has always happened. At Bespin, I heard Luke’s call for help, and when he went missing…” She trailed off, taking a few deep breaths. “I knew--I know something terrible has happened to him. I shouldn’t know that.”

Her throat tightened. She couldn’t jump right to the heart of what she feared she already knew. Not yet.

“Master Yoda, am I Force sensitive?”

Still a terrifying question, but safer than what she really needed to know.
“Force sensitive, you are, but another question you have,” Yoda replied.

Her lips thinned into an even line. “Is...Is Vader...”

She stopped. She couldn’t finish that question.

“What...?” She couldn’t finish that question either.

She huffed out a breath. “Is Luke my brother?”

There. The answer would still be the same, but phrasing it that way made it easier.

Yoda closed his eyes. “Hmmmm.” He lowered his head, and without looking at her, replied, “Strong in the Force, are you. Your brother he is.”

She could hardly breathe, not as emotions crashed into her, hard and fast.

Luke was her brother.

Her twin brother, since they were the same age.

That alone was enough to fill her with so much joy, she was lightheaded. Brother. Of course. So many things made sense now. They both understood the other so deeply. They knew when something was wrong, even when separated on opposite ends of the galaxy. They instinctively and naturally guarded one another’s weak spots when in battle together. They knew what needed to be said or done for the other without asking.

But that also meant that Darth Vader was her father.

The man who had tortured her. Who had held her back while Tarkin ordered her planet destroyed. Who had chased her, terrorized her, thrown her boyfriend into carbonite. Who had maimed her brother and traumatized him to the point where she’d convinced him to fake his own death just to get away from the monster.

The man she hated more than anyone else, including the Emperor himself, was her father.

He clearly didn’t know. They’d met multiple times, and he’d treated her as he had any other Rebel: like an annoying bug he wanted to squash. The last time they’d seen each other on Bespin flashed in her mind, how their eyes had met in the carbonite chamber. How he’d stared at her through that horrifying mask. She’d felt the cold, the wrongness of him, and she’d retreated away from him, though she hadn’t dared to take her eyes off him until she reached the safety of Chewie’s side.

Perhaps even then, she’d known.

“Why?” she breathed. It was then that she realized she’d dropped the bowl of soup in her shock. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have...”

Yoda held up a wobbly hand. “Understand I do.”

She ignored him and bent down to start cleaning it up anyway. “You still haven’t answered my question.”

Why?

Yoda sighed, which turned into another round of terrible coughing that made her wince. She shouldn’t have pushed him like this, but she had to know. “To protect you from the Emperor, we
hid you both. If alive you were, you would be a threat to the Emperor. Either kill you or turn you, he would. So, into hiding you went, separated from one another so that the Emperor and Vader would never know.”

They’d been lied to.

She understood why. She understood the great risk her parents had taken in taking her in.

But it seemed so unfair. She’d been given a life of opportunity, with parents who were honest, who allowed her to make her own informed decisions. Yet Luke had been forced to live on a planet he hated, had been lied to, and had been separated from opportunities that could have helped him.

If they had to separate them, why treat them so unequally? Luke had been treated more like a sacrificial sheep than anything else.

And she was his back up.—+

“Upset, you are.”

“Of course I am,” she replied, leveling a glare at Yoda. “Did you even think to warn him that he was going to face his father before he went to Bespin?”

“Warned him he would be destroyed as Vader was, I did. Warned him he would face Vader alone, that ready he was not.”

“That’s great, but that’s not the same thing as saying ‘by the way, your father is Darth Vader.’” She shook her head. “You know what? That’s not the point. The point is, now he knows, he’s traumatized, and now he’s alone, hurt or dead or whatever, and now I need to find him.” She forced herself to take a few calming breaths. “Do you know where he could be?”

Yoda shook his head. “Know this, I do not. A bond you have with young Skywalker. Follow it you must, to find him.”

She gritted her teeth. Luke was right—Yoda was as cryptic as he was helpful. “That’s wonderful, except I don’t know how to do that, nor do I have the time to figure it out.”

The Jedi tilted his head. “Then, fail you will. Lost, Skywalker will be.”

“So he’s at least alive?”

“For now.” Yoda pointed at her with his cane. “Train in the ways of the Force, you must, if you wish to help Skywalker.”

A steady throbbing was beginning to form in her head. “I’m not a Jedi. Not like Luke. I know who I am, Master Yoda, and that isn’t a Jedi.”

“Your destiny it is. A gift you were given that must be controlled, or control you, it will.”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t ask for it.” She knew she sounded like a child throwing a tantrum, but she couldn’t help it. Everything she’d ever known was crumbling before her, and now she was being asked to take on a mantle she’d never wanted, let alone thought she could even do… “Luke is your Jedi. Not me. So I need to find him or winning this war will be a much more difficult task.”

Yoda coughed, shaking his head. He looked much older, as though he’d melt into a pile of wrinkles and disappear. “Force you, I cannot, but far greater your potential is to become a Jedi and defeat

“It might be too late then.” She huffed. Not to mention, despite what amazing powers she’d seen Luke pull, she couldn’t believe one person was destined to save an entire Galaxy. Wars were won through the collective efforts of many, in the hope that at the end of it all, something better awaited. To say that she or Luke were the only ones who were destined to save them all seemed foolish, and altogether more terrifying if it was true. “And I’m sorry, Master Yoda, but I didn’t come here to be trained. I came here to find my brother, and if you’re not willing to help, then I’ll find him on my own.”

The Jedi Master frowned. “Stubborn, Skywalkers are. Strong in their connections to one another, connections that, it would seem, cannot be broken.”

The words made her flinch, not because of what it meant for her and Luke, but what it meant for Vader. If their bonds were strong, it would only be a matter of time before Vader found her.

Or...found...Luke…

She immediately flinched away from that thought. No, she was not about to go running to Vader for help. No kriffing way. She’d die first.

Our baby is a blessing.

Blessing. Luke was a blessing to Vader.

She...was a blessing to him.

“I need to leave.” She was going to throw up. Her father was Darth Vader and she was a blessing to him…

“Use your bond. Use it, and find Skywalker, you will,” Yoda promised as she stood, crouching over so that she wouldn’t hit her head. “One with the Force I may be when you return.”

A warning. Another offer to stay, to learn while she could. But...she wasn’t wrong. She knew who she was, and it wasn’t what Yoda wanted for her. If she was honest, it wasn’t only because she’d always known what she wanted.

If Anakin Skywalker, hero of the Republic, could fall...then who was to say she couldn’t?

She wouldn’t even entertain anything that would lead her to that end.

“I understand,” she said, getting to the door and looking back at the Jedi master. He hadn’t moved from his seat and watched her sadly. “I’ll find him. I will.”

Yoda nodded, though his amber eyes still spoke to years of sorrow. “Then may the Force be with you, young Skywalker.”

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The moment they dropped out of hyperspace, Vader felt it.

Dagobah was strong with the Force.

He’d visited many planets strong in the Force throughout his life. Usually, it was sections of the planet, or a specific location, where an old Jedi or Sith temple was usually built on top of it. But the entirety of Dagobah pulsed with it, instantly calling to him, drawing him from his dark musings over his meditation dream.
What was further unique was that it was both equally light and dark.

He opted to go alone as a result.

But upon approaching the planet in his TIE Advanced, he quickly became frustrated. The Force, normally so clear, seemed to drag him in different directions. It was as if the entire planet wanted him to take a tour of it. The idea of exploring the planet to learn its secrets was appealing, but this mission was specifically to find out more about his son. He highly doubted Luke went to Dagobah on a sightseeing tour.

*If I were Luke,* he thought, glaring at the planet below, *where would I go?*

A stupid question for him to ask himself. He still barely knew anything about the boy, or at least not enough to answer that question. If there were someone who needed saving on the planet, he’d probably guess there, but he couldn’t sense anyone in need of that. In fact, anytime he tried to get a sense of anything down below, it came back muddled. There were some rather large presences of various monsters, some he recognized and some he didn’t, but otherwise the Force was clouded.

He snarled in frustration, pushing himself deeper into the Force. He just needed a direction. He’d hunt down further clues on his own once he had a starting place.

Though it took longer than usual, he finally felt the faint, familiar tug. He didn’t hesitate to follow, pushing his TIE as fast as it could safely go through the upper atmosphere. As he descended, he kept himself firmly rooted within the Force, following the weak call towards the answers he sought. Good thing, too, because not long before his sensors indicated he was nearing the ground, he sensed obstacles in his way. He swerved to avoid, cursing. Much too close. He slowed the ship down, hoping that would help him sense the upcoming danger faster, but it didn’t.

If the dueling energies of the Force were clouding his senses this much, he’d have to study this planet further in the future. When there wasn’t a war to fight, he’d ask his Master for permission to make an extended stay to do so.

Finally, he was able to land. The ship rocked when he did so, indicating the ground wasn’t as stable as he’d like, so he resolved to move quickly.

But leaving the ship only threw off his senses even more. Multiple life forms resided nearby, big and small, many of which held strong connections to the Force. It didn’t help that his prosthetics were squishing into the mud, deep enough that it took more effort than usual to lift his heavy legs. His cloak snagged on branches and other various obstacles, and though it took nothing more than a tug on the Force to free it, it was still kriffing annoying.

His mood was getting worse by the second, if that were even possible. What the hell had Luke been doing there? If he was alive, he’d demand answers and…

“*You need to help her.*”

Vader whirled, heart flying into his throat. He knew that voice, as surely as he knew his own. He didn’t know how or when that came to be. Hours of studying holorecordings from security holos, perhaps, because standing behind him, looking completely at home in the eerie surroundings of the swamp, stood his son. But, he quickly noted, not as he’d known him.

Luke wore all black. There was a glove covering his prosthetic hand. His hair was shorter, more of a military cut instead of the carefree locks Vader had come to know. His expression was solemn, steady, less of the idealistic bravado of the boy from Tatooine. But perhaps the most startling
change was the scar over his left eye. Vader resisted the urge to touch his mask, right over where
his own was. They were almost exact matches, but on different sides.


Of course, the boy didn’t give him a straight answer. “I need your help to save her.”

He just had to be difficult. He was certain it was programmed into him.

But he didn’t need to confirm it; Vader quickly surmised what this had to be: a vision. His son was
dead, and he knew for a fact the boy didn’t look like...this.

But the last time he’d seen his son in a vision, not hours before, it was as he’d last known his boy.
More importantly, Luke had reacted to him as normally as one would given their relationship. But
now he was asking him, Darth Vader, Lord of the Sith, his enemy, for help?

Even for a vision, that was...a change.

He didn’t trust it. It must have been a result of the strange way the planet and the Force worked
一起. And yet...he’d play along. For now.

“Who?” Vader settled on. “Who needs our help?”

The words felt strange in his mouth. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d verbally said he’d
even consider helping someone. But instead of being surprised or even commenting on it, Luke
turned and began walking away.

Years of chasing his son had him following as briskly as he could on instinct. He thought about
asking where they were going, but given that he hadn’t answered any of his questions, Vader
doubted he would answer another one. So he opted to stay silent and observe, considering as he did
so. Had his son been seeking out visions when he’d come to Dagobah? Did he think he could learn
more about the Force through those visions?

He could have told him a thing or two about visions, he thought bitterly as he stepped over a fallen
log and used the Force to push vines out of the way. Nothing good ever came from visions.

Given that logic, he was probably walking into yet another tragic ending. Considering that his real
son was dead, he didn’t much care. The Force had nothing left to take from him. Yet, he had to
admit, it was cruel of the Force to use Luke’s likeness in this vision.

Vision Luke stopped and Vader came to stand beside him. Just as they should have been in real
life, father and son, side by side. But he didn’t dwell long on it.

In the distance, something growled, low and menacing. He barely noticed it--his attention instead
was drawn to the true predator in the swamp: an unseen, cold presence that he knew all too well.

The Dark Side. It was strongest just ahead, through a thick copse of trees.

“She’s waiting. In there,” Luke said, and though his voice and expression were calm, it came off as
rather ominous.

Definitely a trap.

He hesitated, resisting the urge to ask again who they were helping. The Dark Side was a balm, and
yet he also felt...wrong. He hadn’t felt that way around the Dark Side of the Force in years.
It was *definitely* a trap, and he was going to spring it anyway. There had to be a reason the Force chose to use Luke’s likeness.

As if to confirm, he gave into the urge and asked, “Did you come to this place in life?”

He had a hard time picturing his son here. Though he wanted him to join him, to know the power of the Dark Side, somehow standing in a place oozing with it made him almost wish he could grab him and drag him back to the safety of the Executor. He didn’t want to think about that urge now, nor its implications, and thankfully Luke decided to actually answer this time.

“I did. I wouldn’t recommend it, but it’s necessary to save her.”

There was that mysterious ‘her’ again. He was so, so tempted, but he knew how these visions went.

“Let’s get this done with,” he said instead, striding confidently forward into the dark shadows, ducking his head to avoid bent over tree trunks. Vision Luke, he noted, followed silently. Watching him. It felt like his gaze burned holes into his back.

It wasn’t long before they reached the end where a hole opened up into the ground. He was glad for the mask that covered the grimace as he noted just how small the opening was. A perfect fit for Luke’s lithe form, but his hulking one? It would be tight. He was glad Luke wasn’t actually there to see him struggle.

But, he managed to get through, and he found himself in a dark, dank cave. The roots of trees hung from the ceiling, and lizards and snakes slithered away from his presence. It stretched and twisted away, fog obscuring what lay beyond. His mechanical breathing seemed to echo too loudly in his ears.

Most importantly, the Dark Side seemed to wrap around the cave in a loving embrace, and when he entered it reacted gleefully, swirling around him. Feeling him out, as though he were a long lost lover returned. It whispered at the edges of his mind, of dark temptations and truths and fantasies…

He waved it away and strode deeper into the cave. He didn’t have time for that.

Luke followed him, closer this time, though there wasn’t much room for him to wander off anyway. Vader glanced at him, again taking note of how different he looked in this vision, and turned away. “Is this a girlfriend we’re looking for?”

The idea of his son ever dating was enough to make him shudder. Romantic relationships were a weakness, one Vader knew all too well. But who else would mean so much to Vision Luke that he’d drag Vader on this quest?

He was pleased to hear Luke let out an unintended gag. “No. Trust me. No.”

“Do I know this person?” He waited for an answer, and got none. He bit back a frustrated growl. “It would be helpful to know what I’m getting into. Who is this? What is she to you?” *To me?* he added mentally. Because why else would the Force bother sending a Vision Luke to lead him on a wild Bantha chase through a cave imbued with the Dark Side?

He didn’t get an answer. He didn’t need to. From the mist ahead, a cloaked figure appeared, stalking forward until she was but an arms length away. They stopped, taking the figure in: she was tiny, smaller than even Luke. He couldn’t see much through the shadows of the hood over her head, but she wore Imperial-style jumpsuit, pristine despite the environment they were in. In her gloved hands she held a lightsaber, unlit. He probed her presence, attempting to get a read on her.
He wasn’t aware that Luke knew any Force Sensitives besides himself…

Especially one whose presence radiated with the chill of the Dark Side.

He called his own lightsaber into his hand, though he didn’t yet light it. This was, after all, a vision, and if this was a new threat, perhaps even a new rival apprentice for Darth Sidious, he needed to know all he could before he ended it.

“Why have you come?” a feminine voice demanded, harsh and full of anger, anger that seemed to be directly aimed at him.

Strange. He knew that voice, but where? The answer lingered on the edge of his consciousness, so close, and yet he couldn’t quite pin where he’d…

“We came to save you,” Luke was saying.

“You didn’t tell me she was Force Sensitive,” Vader countered furiously. “She’s a threat.”

That earned him a glare from his son, and the figure tensed.

“I knew it,” she hissed, and again Vader was struck with an overwhelming sense of familiarity.

“He did come here to save you.”

“Why? Is it because you asked him to?” The voice was mocking, bitter, and the name was on the tip of his tongue...

“Please,” Luke begged, and he sounded so anguished that even Vader paused, focusing on his son and the woman who made him sound so pained. “Leia…”

If the suit would have allowed him to, he would have stopped breathing. What?

As if in slow motion, the woman reached up and removed the hood, revealing a face he knew all too well—and yet it had also changed. Gone was the soft plumpness, replaced with sunken-in cheeks, making her cheekbones stand out sharply. Her expression was one he’d seen many times, full of hate and anger and, as usual, leveled right at him. But her eyes—even with the red-tinted lens of his mask, he could tell they were not their usual dark color. He knew eyes like that. They were the same eyes his master stared out at him with.


He’d been in her mind. How had he missed this? How many other times had they crossed paths and he’d never sensed it? Never thought to even look?

Unless this was a lie?

But, no, Force Visions were often misleading, but they weren’t lies. Real Organa was Force Sensitive, and if she ever came into her power, if she ever served the Emperor, she would be a threat.

He couldn’t let that happen. That must have been what the Force was trying to tell him.

Having figured that out, he ignited his lightsaber. “Enough. This ends now.”

“No!” The betrayal was evident Luke’s voice. “You said you’d help her!”
“He’s a Sith. Like I am. We don’t help others,” Organa scoffed as she too ignited her own blade. As red as his own.

He lifted his lightsaber, ready to strike, to end this vision. The girl copied the movement, her golden eyes sharp and hard as steel.

Just as they moved, blades slicing through the air as though in slow motion, Luke jumped between them. “Father, no!”

He cursed inwardly, tried to stop, to pull back. Even in a vision, he didn’t want to hurt him again. But it was too late. Both his and Organa’s blades struck Luke, piercing through him...and just like that, both Organa and Luke disappeared, leaving nothing but mist behind.

Vader stood there, his breathing echoing through the cave, the hum of his blade ringing in his ears. “Luke?” he called, heart hammering in his chest.

There was no answer.

How is it possible to constantly ruin everything when it comes to him? Vader thought bitterly as he disengaged his lightsaber and pressed deeper into the cave. He’d expected Vision Luke to disappear, but he hadn’t intended to send him away by chopping him in half. He wondered if this would continue to happen for the rest of his life: he’d see Luke in visions, and then somehow always end up accidentally killing him all over again.

He truly was a menace to his son.

Vision Luke didn’t appear again, and neither did Vision Organa. It wasn’t long before the cave opened out, mist spilling through the vine-covered opening and into the swamp beyond. He stepped through, pushing through the rather hairy, twisting vines, stretching out with the Force.

Still no Vision Luke, and the Force was as muddled as ever, except...

His fists clenched, and he was moving before he even fully recognized the presence.

Organa.

Not Vision Organa. The real Organa. She was close, close enough that even the strange planet couldn’t hide her. Or maybe it was that he knew what to look for. Now that he knew what she was, it was so kriiffing obvious. Her presence was bright, shining through the Force. She was as unreadable as ever, and he couldn’t sense her full potential like he did Luke, but it was possible even she didn’t know she had the Force, otherwise he was certain his son would have dragged her along on his foolish quests to find out more about it from long dead sources.

Still, with each step he took, getting closer and closer, his fury grew, fueling him until he was a raging storm. He should have seen it. He should have gotten rid of her himself the moment he captured her aboard her ship. He’d meant what he’d said—the Death Star was nothing compared to the power of the Force, and if the vision he’d seen was any indication, she could be a great threat.

He wasn’t about to let that happen. He was going to capture her, force her to tell him what he wanted to know about Luke, and then kill her. He’d leave her body in the bog. No one would ever know what happened to the last Princess of Alderaan.

He entered a clearing. Sure enough, the freighter that had escaped him the day before sat there, the ramp still open. He pressed himself to move faster. The ship had no weapons, nothing to stop him.
from keeping it from escaping him. But Organa’s presence didn’t move, and he took that as a sign that she truly didn’t know her power. Otherwise, she would have sensed him the same time he sensed her. As it was, it wasn’t until he’d reached the ramp that he felt her jump, her Force signature tainted with fear--and anger.

Yes. If Sidious ever found her, she’d be a powerful tool.

He ignited his lightsaber a split second before blaster shots rang out. He deflected them with ease, sending them back. Organa ducked away, attempting to close the cockpit doors in a foolish attempt to keep him out.

He scoffed, rolling his eyes, even as the ship hummed to life around him. What was her plan, to take off with the ramp doors open and hope he fell out? To keep them open as she exited the upper atmosphere and back into the void of space?

She wouldn’t be taking off. Dagobah would be her final resting place. The galaxy would be rid of another threat to the rule of the Sith.

He stabbed his saber through the blast doors. He heard her yelp, and another robotic voice screaming “We’re doomed!” even as he easily cut a hole through it. And of course Organa attempted to shoot him again. This time, he deflected the bolt and it hit true. She cried out in pain, the blaster falling from her hand with a clatter against the steel floor, and she held her wrist in agony.

He didn’t pay it much mind. She had more than a wound to her wrist to worry about, something he reminded her of the moment he stepped through the hole and caught her throat in a chokehold through the Force, lifting her into the air.

“Princess,” he snarled. “What a pleasant surprise.”

She didn’t answer. She couldn’t. She was grasping for her throat, just as his victim’s always did, trying to gasp in air.

“We surrender!” a droid cried to his left. He ignored it. He’d take care of it after he dealt with the girl…

His concentration was broken by an electric current zapping through the flesh part of his leg. He growled in pain and surprise, moving away from the source, his hold loosening on Organa just enough for her to draw in a much needed breath. He looked down, ready to destroy whatever it was that had…

He froze as a familiar astromech droid began sputtering angrily at him, bumping hard into his leg, demanding he release the princess.

He stared. He’d know that droid anywhere. He knew him better than almost any other droid. He’d gone to battle with him on numerous occasions, trusted him with top military secrets as well as his own. The last time he’d seen him was on Mustafar…

Slowly, he turned his head to the other voice still begging for mercy. Sure enough, the astromech’s companion, the droid he’d once created so long ago, sat in the co-pilot’s seat, arms raised in panic. The droid he’d given to his wife to serve her…

Artoo. Threepio.

He eased his hold on Organa just a bit more so that she could not only breathe, but talk as well.
Somehow, his list of questions for the girl was growing by the minute. “Where did you get these droids?” he demanded.

“That’s what you want to know?” Leia coughed, glaring at him with such malice, it was a miracle her eyes didn’t turn Sith gold. Her hand was still at her throat though she was drawing breath.

He clenched his jaw. “Let me guess. The Death Star plans were in Artoo.”

Artoo sputtered angry curses at him, knocking into his leg further. He used the Force to push the droid away, which only enraged him further.

Organa didn’t answer. Typical. It was the Death Star all over again. “No matter. I’ll find out for myself.” He stepped closer until he was towering over her. If his invasion of her personal space bothered her, she didn’t show it. He couldn’t even sense anything from her except anger and defiance. So many others crumbled in his presence, reduced to whimpering babes as they offered to tell him whatever he wanted if only he’d let them live. Decorated war generals who had committed some of the worst atrocities in the galaxy trembled in fear before him. Not the Princess. She faced him as though she were the one to be feared, as though he couldn’t snap her neck with barely a thought.

He didn’t like it. It was unnerving, reminding him of someone else he’d known and cared for long ago. He needed her to stop looking at him that way. He knew just how to do it.

“I assume Luke didn’t know you were Force Sensitive.”

There. A flash of fear. He saw it in her dark eyes, eyes that were somehow familiar…

“Go to hell,” she spat, her voice tight.

Too late for that, he thought wryly. He increased the pressure, just a bit. “I tire of these games, Princess. You know what I want, and I’m going to get it.”

Her fear increased. “I don’t…know what….”

He pointed a warning finger into her face. “Don’t play games with me. It’s well known you and Skywalker were close. You’re going to tell me what you know about him…”

Unexpectedly, the fear in her presence disappeared at those words, replaced with incredulousness. “That’s what you want?” She gasped. Her skin was turning unnatural colors.

“You will tell me what you know about Luke Skywalker,” he repeated again, injecting as much menace and threat into his voice as he could. It wasn’t difficult. “Tell me and perhaps I will give you a merciful death.”

He wouldn’t. Not after everything she’d done. It was her fault Luke was dead. It was her fault his son had thrown himself into danger, time and time again. Hell, it was her fault even Vision Luke had thrown himself in front of his blade…

He’d make her death slow and agonizing. He’d enjoy every second of it. If she’d trained in the Force, she might have been able to stop him. But she hadn’t, and she was at his mercy now.

She knew that as well as he did. She sensed the empty promise. But she didn’t cower. She didn’t resign herself to her fate. He could sense her trying to find a way out of this, trying to find a way to survive.
He sneered at her from behind the mask. He hoped she could sense it.

Her eyes hardened and she stared him right in the eyes, just as she had on that day at Bespin. “You want to know something about Luke?” she rasped.

He paused. Somehow, he felt like she was setting him up for something. “I don’t have the patience for this.”

Even as his hold began to tighten on her throat again, she had the audacity to sneer at him. Snee. As if she could turn the table in her favor. “I’ll tell you something about Luke. Something no one else knows.”

He paused, feeling the warning from the Force just before she finished, her words slicing him apart.

“Luke Skywalker is my twin brother.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the later than usual update. I got sick. I'd written like half the chapter while sick, then had to stop, then later had to fix it because it was all nonsense lol.
So, no real Luke in this chapter, but some major revelations between Vader and Leia. And a potential fate for Leia if she continues down her path of anger and revenge?
Those Force visions are always so tricky!
The song for this chapter is Watch Your Back by Sam Tinnesz
Leave some love!
Love,
Ladyvader23
This was a disaster.

One he never would have predicted, but he should have.

It was obvious now that the truth was out, and again he was horrified by his inability to have found the truth for himself. He’d wanted to deny it, to laugh in her face and finish her off for such an audacious lie, but the truth sang in the Force. Just as it had when he’d heard Luke’s full name for the first time.

Leia Organa--Leia Skywalker--was his daughter.

It was a disaster, and he didn’t know how to even begin going about fixing it.

It wasn’t that he didn’t want another child, a daughter. The idea that he wasn’t alone, that there was still a purpose to life, that he still had a chance to make things right in his family, should have brought him the same sense of single-minded purpose from before. On some level, it still did.

But Luke, at the time, had only a few close encounters with him. He hadn’t done anything totally irreparable to him.

Leia?

He’d murdered her crew. Tortured her. Invaded her mind. Held her back as her entire homeworld was blown to smithereens, almost killed her numerous times, tortured her friends and thrown her lover into carbonite. Not that he regretted that.

He’d hurt her brother.

Kriiffing hells. Leia was his daughter.

A disaster, a screw up, a menace. That’s what he was as a father.

Artoo and Threepio were switched off, pushed into the cockpit corner. He no longer had his daughter--his kriiffing daughter--by the throat, but he did have her pinned to the copilot chair as he guided the ship through the upper atmosphere of Dagobah.

He hadn’t said a word. She’d shocked him into speechlessness. He’d simply moved on an instinct--to protect. As much as she projected her deep loathing for him, he didn’t care. He’d lost one child. He’d lost her mother. He wasn’t losing anyone else.

Twins. Padme had had twins.
He remembered insisting to her that she was pregnant with a girl, and how she insisted the baby was a boy. They’d both been right.

Leia talked non-stop—or rather, gave him a piece of her mind non-stop. He didn’t focus on most of it more than to get the gist; how she hated him, how he needed to unhand her, how she had important work to do, how the Alliance would want to know what happened to her…

All things he would normally have a snarky response for. As it was, he remained silently panicking until he brought the ship through the upper atmosphere and received an immediate hail from the Executor.

“Unidentified vessel, transmit your identification codes or prepare to be boarded.”

In her chair, Leia bristled, as though she were about to turn her ire on the technician. He had the mental image of her reaching through and strangling the man despite the distance between them.

“This is Black Leader. I have commandeered this vessel. Get me Admiral Piett. Now,” he demanded. He half expected Leia to shout, but thankfully she didn’t. She remained silent, for once. He didn’t know how he would explain bringing one of the most notorious Rebel Leaders aboard and treating her less like a prisoner and more like…well, his daughter.

“Right away, my lord.”

He waited a moment while the comm was connected.

“Lord Vader,” Piett’s cool, collected voice greeted over the comm.

“I want all stormtroopers evacuated from my wing of the ship. No one is allowed in those corridors except for myself. I need the highest security turned on for room four. Also, send someone for my ship. I’ll transmit the coordinates to you.” He listed his orders in rapid fire, and at that last pronouncement, Leia shot him another glare that could have melted durasteel.

“Right away, my lord.” Anyone else would have questioned or snooped to find out what was going on, but not Piett. At least someone was useful.

“And one more thing; send a medical droid,” he added as an afterthought.

A pause. He was probably considering to ask if he was alright. But again, Piett smartly left the matter alone. “It will be done, Lord Vader.”

As soon as the connection cut, Leia began talking again. “What, no welcome party like the last time?”

He clenched his teeth. “It would be in both of our interests for you to remain undiscovered.”

“You could just let me go…”

“That is not going to happen, so cease your useless requests.” He was well aware that the only reason she’d told him of their relationship was to save her own skin. It wasn’t from any desire to know him as her father. As much as it stung, he didn’t blame her. “How long have you even known about this? Did Luke know?”

“Oh, so now you want to talk?” Leia snapped. “I have no reason to tell you anything.”

A headache was beginning to form. Literally, anyone else in the galaxy would have been long dead
by now. But anyone else had learned at this point to watch what they said around him. Not Leia.

*General Grievous. You’re shorter than I expected.*

The long-forgotten memory sprung up, unbidden and he glanced at his viper of a daughter. “You look like her,” he couldn’t stop himself from saying. Her revelation truly had shaken him. “Your mother. You’re almost an exact copy.”

Surprisingly, that seemed to calm her. Marginally. “I’m aware.”

He tilted his head in question.

“Artoo showed me.”

Of course he did. He was afraid to ask just how much the droid had told her--and Luke.

“But you’re also too much like me. That’s dangerous,” he finished instead, deciding he’d deal with that later.

That was the wrong thing to say.

“I am *nothing* like you!”

“I think it’s fair to say we don’t know each other at all, so how would you even know that?”

“I would rather die than end up like you!”

He winced at that, the image from his vision replaying in his mind. “Believe me, Your Highness, I have no current plans to turn you.”

“There is nothing...wait, what?” Leia blinked at him, taken aback. They were nearing the Executor now and he looped the ship towards his personal hangar.

“As I said. You are too much like me. If the Emperor were to find you, to find out what you truly are, you’d end up like me and likely worse.” He didn’t bother to explain how he’d seen it. In his experience, telling people about his visions did little to stop them from happening.

Her eyes narrowed in suspicion. “So, what, Luke’s good enough to get an offer of joining you by your side to take over the Empire, but I’m not?”

“The offer is open. I just didn’t think you’d be so eager.”

His words had its intended effect. She bristled. “I am not eager for anything but an end to your tyrannical reign!”

He ignored that. If he was honest, he wasn’t necessarily as eager to persuade her to his side because after everything he’d done to her, he doubted she’d side with him. She’d fall right into Sidious’ hands. He wasn’t about to do the dirty work for his master.

No. He needed to figure out how to turn this situation around, if that were even possible. Then he could worry about her Force abilities. He would do everything in his power to keep the vision from happening. In the meantime, she would stay safe under his watch, away from anyone or anything that could harm her.

“How long have you known?” he asked again as he straightened the ship up and began the landing cycle into his empty hangar.
She was silent until he’d landed the ship and powered it down. He almost thought he’d pushed her into ignoring him. “Today.”

“How did you find out?”

Another lengthy pause. “Artoo.”

Vader rolled his eyes. Of course. “It is a shame he could not have done that for Luke when he had the chance.”

“It’s too bad you decided to chop his hand off before telling him yourself.”

Anger and frustration swelled in his chest; he fought to keep it under control.

Yes. She was too much his daughter. If he didn’t think of a way to get her to at least cooperate with him, he was starting to think that between the two of them, they might tear the Executor to shreds with willpower alone. But, thankfully, it was at that moment he watched a med droid enter the hangar.

He stood, thankful to get out of the cockpit that felt more claustrophobic by the second, and grabbed Leia’s upper arm in a vice-grip. She hissed, more in protest than anything else. “I would prefer not to drag you kicking and screaming. Am I going to have to do that?”

She sneered. “What do you think?”

He stared at her, again marveling at how much she looked like her mother but burned with his fury. The Force truly had a sick sense of humor.

“Then you leave me no choice.”

He reached down.

“What are you doing?” she demanded.

Given that she was, from the neck down, immobile, it was easy for him to pick her up and throw her over his shoulder. He made certain to be careful with her injured arm.

But oh, how the action sent pure, white-hot hate and humiliation into the Force. “LET GO OF ME!”

“Perhaps next time you’ll decide to be mature and act your age.” He had a twenty two year old daughter, and he was having to carry her like a sack of meilooruns off the ship and into the hangar. He left the droids turned off in the cockpit. He knew what Artoo would do the moment he thought he wasn’t looking.

He wasn’t losing another Skywalker ever again. Over his dead body.

He could sense her straining against his hold on her, but with no knowledge of how to use the power at her disposal, she had no hope of escaping. “PUT ME DOWN!”

“Or what?” Vader couldn’t help it. It was a little amusing, if also horrifying. She was so tiny, smaller even than her mother--how was it even possible for her to contain such powerful, vivid emotions in such a petite form? He was beginning to wonder if the Rebels were as terrified of her as his stormtroopers were of him. “You’ll tell me how much you hate me and everything I stand for?”
It was a miracle she hadn’t used her powers. At this rate, she would have been wild, more of a
danger to herself than anyone else.

She sputtered angrily as he approached the med droid. “AVI-B-3, at your service, my lord,” it
announced, it’s gaze settling on Leia. “My sensors indicate that the female subject has high levels
of stress.”

Not surprising. Most people probably would have had a heart attack if he’d thrown them over his
shoulder like this. Not that he ever would for anyone else. His wayward children, on the other
hand... “Follow, droid. You will conduct a thorough medical examination and treat her injuries.”

“I do not need a--!”

“Yes, Lord Vader,” the droid replied, then fell into step behind him as he stormed into his wing of
the ship.

Thankfully, Piett had made quick work of evacuating all personnel from his wing. The halls were
mercifully empty, leaving no one to witness the strange picture of Darth Vader carrying the
Princess of Alderaan over his shoulder like she was five.

“I don’t need you to carry me!” Force, he was wishing his helmet included a volume adjuster, she
was so damn loud. “And I sure as hell don’t need your medical assistance!”

“In case you haven’t noticed, you have a blaster wound on your wrist.” Logic. Senators liked logic,
didn’t they? He would have assumed the wound would be bothering her--no, he knew it was. He
could feel her pain.

“And whose fault is that?!”

“Yours, actually. You’re the one who shot at me, Your Highness.” He supposed she wasn’t really
a princess, but he’d gotten so used to thinking of her so impersonally, it felt strange to just call her
Leia. He doubted she’d appreciate it. If he wanted to intentionally make her mad in the future, he
could call her by her name.

But then again, he had a feeling just breathing around her would send her into a rage.

“Because you were attacking me and of course I’d shoot at you, you’re Darth Kriffing Vader!”

“And you knew I was your father when you started shooting. Perhaps you should have led with
that bit of vital information.” He knew needling at her like this wasn’t helping the situation, but she
was so damn frustrating and far too much like him...

“Oh that’s rich coming from you, Lord Chops-Off-His-Sons-Hand-Then-Tells-Him Vader!”

By that point, they’d reached room four, and he punched in his personal credentials to deactivate
the security and open the door.

He brought Leia over to the black leather couch near the view port. AVI-B-3 followed close
behind as the blast doors slid shut behind them.

Vader asked, “What exactly did Luke tell you?”

“I told you enough about--AAAAH!”

He’d dumped her rather unceremoniously, though safely, onto the couch. The droid tsked in
disapproval, but otherwise reached for Leia’s injured arm and began tending to the injury. She strained her neck as far away from the droid as she could, shooting nasty glares at him as she did so, but he kept her firmly immobile. He wasn’t in the mood to physically fight her, or he’d end up seriously injuring her further.

He was getting rather tired of maiming his children.

“So, no cell? No interrogation droid?” she demanded after a brief awkward silence. He hadn’t stopped looking at her since he dropped her.

“If you’d prefer.” He didn’t really mean that. Even if she demanded to be put in a cell for some misplaced ideology, he wasn’t going to do that. He doubted it would improve their relationship and make her cooperate.

She didn’t take him up on the offer, though. Instead, she craned her neck to look around as the droid finished applying a bacta patch on her wrist before moving on to check the rest of her health.

“What even is this place? I didn’t think you’d be so…” She trailed off.

“It’s a spare room.” Originally meant for diplomats, or simply if he was selfish and wanted multiple suites to himself.

But even as he replied, her eyes widened. “Was this supposed to be Luke’s room?”

He crossed his arms over his chest, glaring at her. Not that she could see it.

“You seriously put together a room for him like an expectant father?”

He clenched his jaw so hard, it was beginning to hurt. The novelty of discovering his daughter was beginning to tire fast. “I will deliver appropriate attire for you tomorrow morning.” He didn’t love the idea of playing delivery boy, but there was no way he’d trust a droid alone with his daughter. She’d find a way to use it to her advantage and escape.

She shook her head incredulously. “You inspire terror in everyone across the galaxy. You are the very face of Imperial atrocities. You are a monster. Giving Luke a room, not throwing me in a cell, doesn’t change any of that.”

He was as still as stone for a few breaths. “I am a Sith Lord. I do not waste time on feelings and useless expressions of love. It is a weakness. You would do well to learn that now before it’s too late.”

The words felt like plastic in his mouth. An expected response, even as her words cut him to the core. Monster.

But Leia wasn’t done. Ever the politician, she had more to say. “You want to know more about your son? Fine. Your son spent his last months alive living in a waking nightmare. You didn’t just take his hand, you took the very essence of who he was. He barely slept, lost weight, and looked like he’d lost his very soul on Bespin. All because the very person he spent his whole life idolizing turned out to be you.”

Once again, he was speechless. Not because he didn’t have a response. No, he had the perfect Sith reply: idolizing an unrealistic version of his father was foolish and was always bound to lead to tragedy. It wasn’t his fault that the boy had built up unrealistic expectations. Better to know the truth and accept it before it could be exploited.
And yet, he couldn’t say it.

Not as a wave of shame hit him, hard and fast, making the confines of his suit suddenly feel claustrophobic.

He wanted out.

He needed to be away from Leia, away before…

As the droid finished its medical examination of his daughter, she sneered at him with a haughty disdainfulness that only a royal could achieve. “Luke died **hating** you, wishing he’d had a different father.”

His mind violently rejected it, even as his shriveled heart accepted the truth of her words. His hands clenched into fists, and though there was nothing not bolted down in the room (he’d ensured that so Luke wouldn’t have a weapon to attack him with), the furniture shook.

It was nothing he didn’t already suspect, but to hear it from Leia, Luke’s closest companion, his **twin**... somehow it felt different.

He needed to leave. Before he broke his new no-maiming-his-children policy.

“Droid,” he snapped. “Are you finished?”

“Yes, Lord Vader,” the droid replied, a bit too cheerily for his current murderous mood.

“And?”

“And, besides a blaster wound that will heal with consistent applications of bacta, the female subject is completely healthy, if a bit stressed.”

“What a kriffing surprise,” Leia grumbled under her breath.

Vader ignored the comment. He was done talking to her. Another word, and he doubted he’d maintain what little control he had left.

With a flick of his wrist, the droid crumpled in on itself, falling to the floor with a shower of sparks. Leia winced, but otherwise said nothing as she watched it fall.

Without another word, Vader turned and stormed out of the room, resetting the security on the door as soon as it closed. The moment there was an impenetrable blast door between them, he released his hold on her. Not a few seconds later there was a massive **bang** against the door as, he assumed, the crumpled droid was hurled at it.

He shook his head, staring at the door.

*By the Force.* Leia was...something else.

More and more he was beginning to wonder if there was any way he could avoid the events of the vision. If she touched her Force abilities, there was no way she wouldn’t immediately fall to the Dark Side and try to murder him.

It should have made him proud. In that current moment, it just made him wish he could somehow build a time machine and change the entire mess he’d created for himself.

There had to be a way to at least make her be somewhat civil. At the moment he didn’t need her to...
immediately view him as her father, just trust him enough to let him get to know her and her deceased brother.

He stood there, trying and failing to come up with an idea, before a plausible one finally hit. He hissed in revulsion.

_No._ There had to be another way, one side of him reasoned. Literally, he’d do _anything_ but _that._

But it wasn’t like he could do anything else. There was no bringing back Alderaan, or changing the fact that he’d tortured her and her friends.

There was just one thing that he’d done to her that he could fix.

The idea was absolutely revolting. It was completely against who he was as a Sith Lord, and the idea that he’d willingly bring back the stupid smuggler, who was in every way well below the worth of his children, was completely ludicrous.

But if he didn’t do something drastic to attempt to mend the rift between them, it would only be a matter of time before things reached their breaking point. If it got too out of hand, there was a possibility that Sidious would sense something was off and investigate.

And if he’d learned anything from the last hour or two, it was that Leia needed to stay as far away from the Emperor as possible.

That didn’t mean it didn’t take him another few hours of trying to rein in his anger in his meditation pod before he could force himself to make the call to Piett to set course for Tatooine.

He would fix this. Even if he had to swallow his pride temporarily, he would fix this.

He wouldn’t lose her.

Not like he lost Luke.

______________________________

_Sweet freedom._

It had taken him hours to get the blast door open, much longer than it should have. Sitting upright made the headache worse, his vision swimming. With each minute spent trying to hotwire the doors open, his injuries throbbed worse and worse until all he wanted was to sleep for eternity. Anything to not feel it anymore. Several times he was forced to do so, carefully lying down on his back to avoid aggravating his wounds further.

Each time, he worried he’d find himself in another vision with his father breathing down his neck. Thankfully, he either didn’t have any or didn’t remember them when he woke up.

But the ship was completely dead. The wires had no power whatsoever. Unless he attempted to reboot the entire system, there was no way he could open the door. It might have been the end for him, had he not had the Force.

That was easier said than done. He couldn’t remember having unlocked something with the Force before, but for whatever reason it wasn’t hard to picture what he needed to do in his mind. So, maybe he had. Another clear, obvious sign that he had a concussion.

But knowing what he had just made it more frustrating when he attempted to dedicate the concentration needed to open the door...only to be met with a sharp, splitting headache. He’d
instantly had to lie down to prevent from passing out again, and each time he attempted to sit back up to try again, he was met with the same results.

After a particularly long, dreamless sleep, he resolved to try again, this time lying down. He pressed his mechanical hand to the cool metal of the door, closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and forced it.

With an ear-splitting screech, it opened just wide enough for him to pull himself through, and he was free.

He reveled in the victory, small as it was, lying on the floor of an eerily empty, silent corridor that was tilted and unstable. There was little light for him to see by. Carefully, he reached out, attempting to sense anyone nearby. Again, it took more mental effort than he wanted, but he managed to sense smaller life forms scurrying about outside of the ship. Nothing large or sentient, though.

Unless his senses were completely clouded, he appeared to be alone.

He could have laid there in the darkness and fallen asleep again. He was exhausted, and he felt as if someone had rammed a ship into the left side of his body. But again, that survival instinct kicked back in.

*You need food*, it whispered, insistently pushing at him to get up. *You need water. You need medical supplies.*

He needed to search the ship.

But though he’d taken care of the immediate danger, his injuries were now settling in and his body was punishing him for it. It didn’t help that he hadn’t eaten anything in Force knew how long, his contacts were burning his eyes, and his mouth was so dry, he felt like he’d stuffed sand in it. He had maybe the energy to open one more door.

He had to make it count, and the only way to do that was by trusting in the Force.

*Just like the Death Star,* he thought as he slowly pulled himself up so that he was leaning against the wall, putting his weight on his good leg.

If he thought sitting up was bad, standing was worse. Infinitely worse.

*If you don’t do this,* he thought as he began pitifully hopping slowly, clumsily down the corridor, *you’re going to die.* While that sounded easier than pushing himself in the hopes that someone friendly would take pity and rescue him, he couldn’t go down without fighting. There was still so much that he had to do. Granted, he had no idea what that meant anymore, but he knew he had to do it.

And Leia...he couldn’t leave her alone. She was already so lonely. After losing her home planet, her family, Han...No. He wouldn’t give up without a fight. He wouldn’t be the cause of more pain and sorrow for her.

That was easier said than done. After a few hops, sweat coated his skin and he was breathing hard, his good leg aching. Every once in a while, he stopped, leaning against the wall to gulp in air. Was it just him, or was the corridor almost as hot as the cantina in Mos Eisley?

After a few more pitiful jumps, he decided it was worse.
He turned a corner, and mercifully, he could make out doors. He buried himself into the Force, searching for that familiar tug as he slowly, achingly passed each one.

Nothing.

He turned another corner to find a dead end with an open hatch in the ceiling. A single ladder was bolted into the wall. The only way up.

He groaned, leaning again against the wall, resting his sweaty, blood-crusted forehead against the cool metal.

Maybe he wouldn’t have the energy when he found what he needed.

He stayed like that until his muscles felt like they were burning, then he gritted his teeth and hobbled to the ladder. He stared up at the hatch above. It felt like it was lightyears away. What should have been an easy task suddenly felt impossible.

But he had to do it. If he wanted to live, he’d have to suck it up and get it over with.

There was no way he could use both legs, not with one as broken as it was. So, attempting to brace himself, he grabbed hold of a ladder rung, and jumped.

Even as his good leg managed to find purchase, his shoulder tightened up until he felt like a lightsaber was slowly burning through his flesh. He screamed in pain, fighting to draw breath, to stay conscious for a few, tense, terrible seconds until he managed to convince himself it was bearable. Then, before he could convince himself otherwise, her grabbed hold of another rung and repeated.

Each time, the agony was worse.

By the time he reached the top and managed to pull himself onto the upper floor, he felt like his shoulder had literally been cut free of his torso. He couldn’t feel his left hand anymore, and his entire arm tingled. He gasped, lying on his stomach, fighting unconsciousness with each breath. If he thought he was drenched in sweat before, it was nothing compared to now.

He didn’t know how long it lasted, but by the time everything began to feel somewhat right again, the sweat had begun to dry, sticking to his skin.

“Stairs,” he muttered to himself, slowly pushing himself back up with his good arm. There was no way he was using his other arm for a while. “Are the absolute worst.”

It was as he stood that he saw the first real extent of damage the ship had taken.

Just ahead of him, a gaping hole opened out to a dark forest beyond, beckoning with a gentle, cool breeze. Sparks and debris were still falling from the tear in the hull, and he could dimly make out scattered objects lying out on the ground below. The trees were massive, their trunks larger than his arm span, and as he hobbled as close as he dared, he realized he could barely see the tops of them.

The other half of the ship was nowhere to be seen. At least, from that angle. He’d probably have to leave the ship to investigate further—and there was no way in hell that he was ready for that.

“Oh,” he whispered, staring out at the never-ending line of trees surrounding him, “I have a very bad feeling about this…”
And even as he said it, he felt the pull he’d been looking for, leading him to a door right next to the torn section of the ship.

Well. At least something went right, he thought bitterly before setting about getting to work on getting it open.

Thankfully, it didn’t take as long to open, but the door opened with as much resistance as the other. The screech of metal made his head throb even more and he muttered curses as he slid through, careful not to aggravate his injuries further. But as soon as he was through, he immediately set to work searching for what he needed.

It seemed to be some sort of supply room—but a completely unorganized one at that. He wasn’t sure if it was that way before the crash, or after. Maybe both, he decided as he opened a drawer full of used bandages and rope. Not wanting to touch the filthy rags, he used the Force to lift the rope out, placing it in a neat pile near the door.

In fact, a lot of the supply room looked like no one had bothered to clean it. What was left was pitiful, but as he rummaged and gathered what he could...it was a start. He found a few packets of unopened bacta patches (one of which he put on the cut on his forehead), an empty bottle with a filtration system in it as well as a small bottle of unopened water (which he promptly gulped down). He found a box of rations, one roll of clean bandages, a light, and a tarp.

Again. Not much. But it was better than nothing.

Having gathered what he could into a neat pile, he sat back against the wall, closing his eyes as he opened a ration packet and began to eat, grimacing at the stale taste. It wasn’t his idea of a feast, but with each bite the growling in his stomach began to settle.

He’d accomplished his goal. He’d found supplies, food and water. He even managed to get the contacts out of his eyes. For now he was stuck, at least until morning. There was no way he could climb down from the ship and search for help until there was daylight.

He had nothing to do but sleep, something he desperately needed...but also something he desperately didn’t want to need.

Sooner or later, he had a feeling he would fall asleep only to find he wasn’t alone anymore. And he still wasn’t sure what the hell to think about his last encounter with his father.

But even as he fought it, his eyes drooped, his head lulling, his train of thought becoming scattered and erratic. Before he knew it, his body gave in, and he slumped over, falling into a deep sleep.

He knew this place. He almost didn’t recognize it, but after staring around at the uncharacteristically empty room, he recognized it as the cantina in Mos Eisley.

Even without star pilots, low lifes and criminals crowding corners and the bar area, it was just as sweltering and dimly lit as he remembered. He’d only been there once, but as his eyes scanned the empty, dusty alcoves, he recognized the spot where he and Obi-Wan had negotiated with Han for the first time.

Why he was here, he had no idea, but the first thing he did was check to see if a certain Sith Lord was lurking nearby.

But no, he was totally alone.
At least for now.

He scowled and, not knowing what else to do, walked to the booth where he’d met his best friend.

It was as dusty as he remembered, but then again, what wasn’t coated in a sheen of dirt on Tatooine? What he was more surprised by was that he could still smell alcohol as if he were really there. Maybe the smell was so permeated into the walls of the establishment that even in dream form, it was detectable.

But what was more concerning was that by the time he reached the booth, his left leg felt like it was burning. The last time, his injuries felt more like muscles did after a workout. Now they barely felt better than they did in the real world. It was a blessing to sit down, leaning his back against the torn up seats, resting his head back against the filthy wall.

He sat there for a minute, letting the pain fade away, staring blankly across. It wasn’t long before his mind began to wander.

Would Vader show up?

He wasn’t exactly knowledgeable in these things. He had no idea how this worked. He wasn’t sure if maybe the cantina was a place Vader had known in the past, and he was again intruding on the man’s meditation, or if this came from his own mind. He wasn’t meditating, but he hadn’t the first time either. But Vader made it clear that he truly thought he was dead. As long as he could keep that pretense up, he should be relatively safe…

Right?

Or, something whispered in his mind, you could just tell him the truth. He does have a talent for hunting you down.

He immediately rejected that thought, his stomach turning in horror and shame. No. If Vader knew he was alive, if he found him, he’d force him to turn to the Dark Side. Or at least he’d try. When it failed, he’d destroy him, just as he promised on Bespin.

No. He wasn’t going to go that way. He’d take his chances.

It was as he was debating what he’d do if Vader showed up, that the man himself appeared. Or, rather, Luke heard his breathing from behind him.

He didn’t move. He couldn’t risk showing that he was in pain. Dead people probably didn’t feel pain.

So instead, with more confidence than he felt, he asked dryly, “Is this going to be a thing from now on? Us meeting like this?”

He listened as his father approached, boots falling heavily against the sand-crusted tiles. “Are you overly fond of cantinas on Tatooine?” he asked instead, coming to a stop beside his booth. Luke met his father’s gaze and watched as he took in what was going on. “Do you...normally just sit and stare at the wall in a cantina?”

Luke stared at him. Was that...supposed to be...a joke?

“Why bother drinking in a vision? It’s not like it’ll do anything.” Besides. He didn’t care for alcohol. He preferred milk. Or hot chocolate. But there was no way in hell he was about to tell his father, the Dark Lord of the Sith, that bit of information. He didn’t need more embarrassment in his
life.

Vader stood there for a second longer, then before Luke could protest, he planted himself in the seat across from him, leaving him no choice but to focus on him. “There are days I wish I could still drink,” his father said dryly. Bitterly.

He was pretty sure that was something no one else would have heard from him. He didn’t know whether to be curious or horrified that Darth Vader felt comfortable telling him that. Then again, he probably assumed Luke wouldn’t be telling anyone whatever he decided to say…

Underneath the table, his hands clenched, an idea forming in his head.

“I don’t suppose there’s a way to make this stop,” Luke carefully began.

Vader tilted his head. “I wouldn’t tell you if there was.”

“You like me disturbing your--what are you, sleeping? Meditating?”

“Meditating,” Vader replied. “And no, I don’t mind.”

That seemed like something he’d normally care very much about, but maybe Luke was the exception because he was his son. He didn’t want to dwell on that too long. It would lead to old wounds he’d rather not be reopened. “Why is it happening?”

His father considered, probably trying to decide if Luke could use the answer to make the visions stop. “It’s probably due to our bond.”

“Bond?”

Vader made a noise of disapproval. “Did Kenobi really teach you nothing? Bonds are formed between Force sensitives who have close relationships. They usually happen between masters and their students, but those bonds are weaker than what we have. Because I am your father and you my son, there is automatically a bond in place.” He paused, and Luke swore he felt the room chill. “We didn’t have a chance to strengthen it to its full potential while you were alive.”

The plan in his head seemed like a bad idea all of a sudden. Yet…he’d always wanted to know his father. Vader thought he was dead. With any luck, it would stay that way.

No one knew anything about the man other than official Imperial propaganda, or the stories of those who had narrowly escaped being killed by him. And hadn’t he wanted to know more about his father before he’d been stranded? Why not ask the man himself?

That is, if his father would even tell him.

“I’ve been thinking since we last met,” Luke began.

“As in Bespin, or as in our previous vision encounter?”

He glared. Well, at least he knew one personal thing about his father. He was a bit of a smart ass. When he didn’t respond, Vader motioned for him to continue.

“If we’re going to be stuck together...maybe we should...get to know each other?” It felt stupid, saying it out loud. He might be his father, but he was still Darth kriffing Vader. Family bonding was not a thing for the Sith...he was pretty sure, at least.
So he added, lamely, “You know. Without trying to murder each other.”

Vader was silent for so long, Luke almost took it back. It was stupid, so stupid. He tortured his friends, killed others, hunted him down from one end of the galaxy to the other, then proceeded to chop his hand off. Vader didn’t do get to know you sessions, and Luke shouldn’t have even wanted to ask. But as he opened his mouth to take it back, Vader responded. “I am open to this proposition, provided there are rules.”

“So such?” He attempted to squash the hope that rose unbidden in his chest.

“Such as, you are to leave Anakin Skywalker’s past out of your questioning.”

Luke glared. “That’s not answering anything, then. Everything about you as Vader is well known Imperial propaganda. I could have read that on the holonet if I wanted to.” He didn’t mention that he had, repeatedly, after Bespin.

“Anakin Skywalker is dead. Him and his past no longer have any meaning for me.”

“Then I shouldn’t have any meaning to you. Anakin Skywalker was my father. Not Darth Vader. You can’t have both.” He could feel Vader’s mood growing worse and worse. Now that bonds had been explained to him, it was so obvious. How had he missed that? “Look. How about this? If you don’t want to answer the question, you can pass. But if you do answer and it’s some Imperial propaganda bullshit, then I’ll tell you Rebellion propaganda about me.”

He could feel his father’s displeasure ringing clearly through the Force—through their bond—but after consideration he gritted out, “These are acceptable terms. For now.”

He couldn’t believe he’d done it. He’d expected Vader to laugh him off. But then Vader added, “You first.”

He blanked. What could he tell a Sith Lord that he’d want to know? Vader didn’t ask any specific questions to make it easier, and he obviously had to stay away from anything related to the Rebellion. That was still an active conflict and he wouldn’t endanger his friends like that. He glanced around, thinking…and realized what he could say.

“I think you already know I was raised by my aunt and uncle,” he began. To his surprise, Vader interrupted.

“They weren’t your aunt and uncle,” he fumed, and Luke flinched back from the fury in his voice. Seeing that, he tried to calm down. “They’re not related to you.”

Luke opened his mouth to ask, but then decided he’d save that for Vader’s turn. “Well. They raised me. They were good to me…”

“They stole you…”

“Are you going to let me talk or not?” His father could be irritating, he was finding out.

He waited, and when Vader didn’t interrupt, he continued. “Owen and I didn’t always see eye to eye. He wanted me to stay and be a moisture farmer, but I wanted an adventure.” Like I imagined you did, he thought, but he didn’t add. No, that was too personal.

Vader scoffed. “Moisture farmer. You are meant for far greater than that…”

At an exasperated look, he trailed off.
Another thing to add to his personal list of things he knew about his father: if he had something to say, he wouldn’t hesitate to do it.

“I ran away from home a few times. I never made it far.”

“That explains your habit of constantly escaping me.”

Luke sighed. He’d just have to accept that his father wasn’t a great listener. “I’m sure it’ll please you to know Owen didn’t like Ben.”

“Ben?”

“Obi-Wan.” At the mention of his name, he was definitely sure the room got colder. The table trembled between them with Vader’s anger. But at least it wasn’t focused on harming some part of his body. “He wouldn’t let him come near the farm. So I didn’t get any training until we were on our way to Alderaan.”

The anger turned to incredulosity. “Kenobi accepted that?”


Vader shook his head, and he could feel the disgust radiating from his father. “It’s a miracle you survived as long as you did, young one. It is far more dangerous to remain untrained than not. Obi-Wan was a fool to comply to such a ridiculous restraint.”

“So you’d rather I have been trained as a Jedi?”

There was that icy coolness again. It was almost as bad as the cave in Dagobah, but in the sweltering heat of the cantina, he surprisingly didn’t mind. “Of course not.”

“Then don’t complain.” Such a dangerous thing to say, yet Vader merely growled at him. “Now. Your turn. I’ve told you plenty.”

Silence.

Luke huffed. “Good to know you don’t keep your promises.”

“I always do. Sometimes I alter them, though.”

Not helpful. He sighed, reaching up with his good hand to rub at the back of his neck. Maybe he just needed a nudge. “You said you and Owen aren’t related.”

“Pass.”

“Seriously?” He glared. “You’re the one who mentioned it!”

“Now who is the one not keeping his promises?” But before Luke could retort, he continued, albeit reluctantly. “My mother married his father after I left Tatooine. I met him once.”

“Shmi Skywalker?” Luke recalled the worn gravestone outside his family’s homestead.

His father leaned back, as though stung. “It seems he didn’t completely keep you in the dark,” he growled. “But, yes.”

Then, there was a long, long pause. So long that he began to wonder if Vader had decided that was all that needed to be said. He mentally noted that unsurprising detail: his father liked to talk, but not
about himself. But then he spoke, and the words made Luke’s heart drop.

“I was born to a slave. I didn’t get released until the Jedi found me when I was nine. They left my mother in slavery. It was Owen’s father who freed and married her.” Another weighted pause. “For that, I suppose I can’t completely hate the Lars family.”

A slave. Being from Tatooine, he was all too aware of what that meant. His guardians had spared him from witnessing what was done to them, but he’d figured it out on his own. He got the sense Vader didn’t share the information with anyone easily, and he was beginning to think that maybe the man didn’t like to talk about his past because there was very little to be said that wasn’t horrible.

So much for the carefree, adventurous father he’d imagined growing up.


“I’m not. I’m processing.” Luke frowned, grasping on another detail Vader had let drop. It could be a lie, meant to shake his faith in the Jedi, but...it felt true. “The Jedi left your mother in slavery? Why?”

He couldn’t see it, but he could feel the sneer leveled at him. “I’m sure there’s plenty Kenobi didn’t tell you about the Jedi. They pretended to be so perfect, and yet they were just as corrupt as anyone else.”

Luke opened his mouth to deny it—and shut it. If there was one thing he was quickly learning, it was that he truly knew very little about what Ben had pushed him into.


He never got to hear the end of his statement, not as the room suddenly and violently swayed, knocking him completely from the seat. He heard Vader calling his name, even as he hit the ground and everything disintegrated....

And he was back in the supply room on the ship, the entire structure heaving and swaying around him as something furious slammed into the side of the ship, letting out an earth-shattering roar.

Chapter End Notes

So, Vader's situation with Leia could have gone better. But it could have been much, much worse. At least Luke is...ah, I wouldn't say warming up to his father, but they're having a conversation without killing each other. Baby steps, ya'll. Though, Luke doesn't really have time for baby steps. Oh, the stubbornness of Skywalkers. When will they ever learn?
The answer is never.
For Leia's part, the song is Teenagers by My Chemical Romance. For Luke's part, the song is Dreamweaver by J2/Keeley Bumford.
Leave some love!
Love,
Thank you to the lovely Angst, Snap Queen SpellCleaver! Her stories are updating again, and it makes me happy every time they update!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Whatever was attacking, it was big enough to tilt the ship.

His heart beat erratically in his chest, in his ears, as he struggled to keep himself from tumbling onto his injuries. Instinctively, he breathed as quietly as he could, as though that would somehow make the creature go away. It was silly, since the thing was outside the hull, slamming against it, and Luke was safely inside, but he did it anyway.

After another crash, the thing roared again. It was like nothing he’d ever heard before. Then again, the galaxy was a big place, and he didn’t know where he was. There was a good chance he was still in the Outer Rim, and there were plenty of unknowns as well. On a good day, something like this would be a significant problem.

But Luke Skywalker was not having a good day.

With a broken leg, something broken in his shoulder, a concussion, and no weapons, there was no way in hell that he was going to be able to fight or run from anything. Let alone something that big. All he could do was ride it out and hope it decided to move on.

And of course, hope that he didn’t die in the process.

Just as suddenly as it came, though, the pushing and banging stopped. He could hear it snort and snarl. Heavy footsteps stalked around the severed half of the ship. It drew closer, as if looking for something.

He stayed absolutely still, until his already strained muscles screamed for relief. He didn’t dare give in to the temptation to relax. Not when he didn’t know what he was up against.

Was this creature mad that a broken ship had appeared in its territory? Did it think it was a threat? Or could it smell or sense Luke and wanted to eat him?

He closed his eyes, reaching out with the Force towards the animal. As he suspected, its presence in the Force was huge, almost as large as the ship itself. He couldn’t get all of the details, but it was definitely predatory.

What was strange was how the presence felt. Most creatures he’d encountered felt light, innocent. Even the predators. They were, after all, just animals following their instincts.

But this...this felt dark.

Cold.

Colder even than Vader’s presence. It was more like the same coldness he’d felt in the cave at
Dagobah.

And it was clumsily searching, not with its physical senses...but with the Force.

Not long after Luke had begun probing it, he felt it latch onto him. He felt its rage--and it’s hunger.

He rapidly withdrew, completely pushing his power deep within himself to keep from touching it as the thing screeched in fury, and the attack on the hull renewed...not quite above the storage room he was in, but close. Too close.

He didn’t understand how, but this... thing could sense when he used his powers. He’d pulled back quick enough that maybe it didn’t have a total lock on him, but if his theory was correct…

He was in deep trouble.

He hadn’t stopped using the Force since he’d learned of its existence the day his aunt and uncle were murdered. Sure, it was still something he had to concentrate on to use effectively, but there were times, like in these weird Force dreams, that he didn’t control it. The thing currently trying to tear into the hull with what sounded to be claws had probably sensed him using it while he’d been dreaming with his father.

It was an effort not to begin to panic, even as he listened to metal begin to give way to claw in--maybe the room next door? He wasn’t sure. He didn’t want to know. He closed his eyes tight, resisting the urge to seek comfort from the very thing he’d begun to rely on for years, and hoped that it would lose track of him and go away.

The ripping of metal stopped, and the thing, having not found its quarry, erupted. Luke barely had a chance to brace himself. It slammed into the ship so hard the entire room tilted again.

He was sliding, his hands desperately grasping for anything he could hold onto, but nothing was bolted down.

Another slam, and the room tilted even more, to the point that he recognized what was about to happen.

The ship was going to roll.

He cursed inwardly, struggling not to make a noise as he attempted to slide with the fall. He tried to keep it controlled as much as possible: when he did land, he wanted it to be on his good side.

Still, as the thing crashed repeatedly into the ship, turning it over, he was pelted with boxes. In the back, the hip, the head--and finally, his injured shoulder.

He bit down on his lip to keep from screaming, to the point where he tasted blood. Black dots swam in his vision.

But, finally, it stopped.

Just as he’d intended, he slid to what had once been the ceiling on his right leg. It crumpled under his weight and he sank to his knees, but at least nothing new had been broken. At least, he was pretty sure it hadn’t.

He waited, barely breathing, but the creature stood still, as if waiting for him to stupidly use the Force again. When he didn’t, it slowly began to move, stopped again...and after tense minutes that seemed like hours, it began to stalk away.
He didn’t move. He barely breathed. His shoulder felt worse than ever, but he didn’t dare try to look at it. He merely waited, crouched there, ignoring spasms of pain, his mind whirling as he attempted to figure out what in the hell he was going to do against...whatever that was.

And in the midst of all that panic, for a tiny, brief moment, he wished Vader was there.

Not because he wanted him to be--but because at the very least, Luke knew what he was in for with him.

And just maybe... maybe ...Vader didn’t want him dead. At least, not immediately.

If I’m wishing Vader was here, Luke thought darkly, then I must really be screwed.

It didn’t make it any less true.

Vader had planned for Luke well.

As soon as she was sure Vader was off doing whatever it was evil estranged fathers did, she began searching the room for a way out.

But given Luke’s tendency to slip through Vader’s fingers, it was as if Vader had personally tested out every conceivable way to escape. Everything was bolted down, not a bolt loose or out of place. There were no fixtures that she could use as weapons, giving the room a creepy, unlived in feel. Even the vent, too high for her to reach anyway, had the edges sealed completely shut. She’d need some serious tools to get it open, tools Vader definitely didn’t leave for her to use. In the bedroom, she found a closet full of black Imperial-style clothes that would have fit Luke perfectly--as well as just as many capes of various styles and lengths.

Apparently Vader had a thing for capes.

But that didn’t help her get out. After hours of searching, searching again, and then searching a third time for good measure, she collapsed on the couch, resigned at least for the moment to her fate.

She had to hand it to him: he’d planned Luke’s arrival here well.

The only thing she could probably use against him was the crumpled droid, but she doubted it would do much. She’d watched him take on a thousand fully armed rebels and win with ease. She was seriously outmatched.

If only Artoo were turned on. He would have had her out in no time. But even then, she didn’t hold out hope. This wasn’t some unsuspecting enemy who underestimated the droid’s abilities. Artoo was, apparently, Darth Vader’s droid. He probably knew all of the droid’s tricks.

She was trapped. Well and truly trapped, and just because she wasn’t in a cell didn’t mean she’d have an easier time of escaping. In fact, now that Vader knew who she was, she had a sinking feeling that escape would be harder than ever.

She’d told him the truth to save her life--so that she could escape and save Luke’s life. There was no other reason. At least, that’s what she told herself.

Our baby is a blessing.
Even as she’d hurled insults and jabs she knew would at the very least get under his skin, those words had echoed in her brain. Over and over again, as though in warning, or a plea.

*Our baby is a blessing.*

She was his blessing. Luke was his blessing. A murderer, a man who cared for no one and nothing…

If it was true--and it was definitely a big ‘if’--then instead of insulting him, she should be telling him the truth. About what she and Luke had done. About how she still felt what she thought might be one of those warnings Luke got through the Force. About how Luke might actually be dead, and if he wasn’t then he didn’t have much time.

But no. She couldn’t do that. Who knew how Vader would react? Then once he found him, Luke would be just as trapped as she was, at the total mercy of the galaxy’s most evil man.

He’d faked his death to get away from the man. She doubted being captured by him would help.

Leia wouldn’t be the one to do that to him. Never. Knowing Luke was her twin brother just made her want to protect him even more.

And yet…

She buried her face in her hands, curling up on the couch. She’d really done it this time. How the hell was she going to get out of this one?

She didn’t know how long she stayed there, but eventually she felt the familiar shudder of the ship reverting from hyperspace. She sat there for a moment, dreading what she would find if she looked out the port window.

Had Vader taken her to Coruscant? No, he’d seemed pretty adamant that she and the Emperor stay far away from one another. It was the only thing she agreed with him on.

But, then, where were they? Over another Rebel base? Was she going to be forced to watch helplessly as another Rebel cell was destroyed?

She couldn’t take the wondering. She stood, wincing as her muscles protested from having been in the same position for so long, and made her way to the viewport.

And found herself staring down at a golden planet.

Tatooine.

She’d barely registered this when the door behind her hissed open, followed by footsteps and mechanical breathing. Shivers raced up her spine as she listened to him approach.

She shouldn’t turn her back on him. She should have faced him and made it yet again known that she wanted nothing to do with him…but she simply stared at the planet below.

He came to a stop beside her, not too close, but not far enough for her taste. He crossed his arms, staring down at the planet with her. It occurred to her, then, that Luke was raised here by his aunt and uncle-- her aunt and uncle. So, did that mean Vader was from here?

It was strange to think about. It was much too humanizing.

“Why are we over Tatooine?” she asked when he didn’t say anything. “There’s no Rebel activity
It was a well known fact. The Hutt Clan’s seat of power was here, and officially they worked with the Empire when they had to. Otherwise, they did whatever they wanted, and none of that was friendly to the Rebellions cause.

But Vader answered her question with one of his own. “Has Luke visited you in dreams?”

The question caught her off guard. It was enough to get her to draw her gaze away from the planet to look at the man who, somehow, was her father. “What?”

A stupid question, but how else was she supposed to answer a question like that? What did that even mean?

But if Vader was annoyed by her response, he didn’t show it. In fact, she got the sense that he was...perturbed by something. “Dreams. Force users have the ability to share bonds with other Force sensitives. It’s stronger among family. Given that you are twins, I thought maybe…” he trailed off.

She felt like every nerve had been electrified. Why would he be asking her this? Did he suspect? Or--or was he having dreams with Luke? If that was the case, then he definitely suspected. But if he did, why didn’t he come out and say it?

Maybe they weren’t here on Tatooine for the reason she’d thought at all. Maybe this is where Luke was, and Vader was coming to collect.

Vader turned to her. “You will come with me.”

Her entire being recoiled from the order and she glared. “Why should I?”

Vader stared at her, and she got the sense for about the millionth time since she’d told him the truth that he was taking her in, not as Princess Leia Organa of Alderaan, but as his daughter.

She wanted to punch him for it, but she’d probably break her hand.

“I am going to collect the smuggler from Jabba,” he finally replied, sounding more annoyed by being questioned than anything else. He probably punished those who questioned his orders. “I would like you to join.”

Her heart dropped, terror gripping her. “If you think holding Han hostage will make me work with you, or even think of you as my…”

Vader held up a hand. “It is a peace offering. I intend to let him go free.”

He didn’t sound particularly enthused. In fact, it sounded like it pained him to speak the words.

Her brows furrowed. There had to be a trick. Darth Vader didn’t do anything unless it somehow benefited him. “He wouldn’t leave me.”

“You think too highly of him. He is a smuggler. They are adept in cutting ties to save their own skin.”

“He won’t leave me,” she said again, firmly.

Vader growled. “We shall see. The fact remains, I am going down there to get the smuggler. You can come with me, or stay here. Either way, I’m leaving now.” To prove his point, he turned and
began towards the door.

“ Aren’t you afraid I’ll escape? ” It was such a dumb thing to say, but this whole situation was bizarre. Was this his idea of a father-daughter bonding session?

Actually, knowing Vader, he probably did think something like this counted as family time.

Vader made a noise that she thought might have been a snort of derision. “ You will not escape. Try, and the smuggler may become a hostage. That is your choice. ”

She gritted her teeth. Typical.

And yet...the idea of sitting in this inescapable room knowing that Vader was getting Han…

There was no way she would let that happen. If Han ever found out she’d trusted him with Vader, alone, he’d be furious. For good reason.

Wordlessly, she followed Vader, trying to ignore the strangeness of the entire situation, and the words that still replayed in her mind.

 Our baby is a blessing.

There were three reasons he’d asked Leia to come with him.

First, he didn’t trust her not to somehow escape. Now that he knew they were twins, it was obvious that both of his children had a knack for escaping even when it seemed impossible. Though he was sure that he’d escape-proofed that room, he figured that if she did manage to pull it off, he would be nearby to stop her.

Second, after the bizarre encounter with Luke in his meditation, he couldn’t help but feel on edge. The boy was dead, so watching him suddenly fly out of his seat and hit the floor before disappearing shouldn’t have been that disconcerting. But, all the same, it was, and though he was sure Leia was safe on the Executor...he couldn’t risk it.

Third, as much as he would never in a million years admit it...he wanted to know his daughter. Though she seemed determined to continue to put up a justifiably furious front, he was sure at some point in this mission her composure would crack. Just a little. This was, after all, to rescue her...smuggler. He refused to think of Solo as anything but that. Just a smuggler with no significant importance…

Even if their little declaration of love on Bespin was anything but insignificant.

He landed his shuttle directly outside of Jabba’s palace. Leia sat in the chair furthest away from him as though that would stop him from monitoring her every breath. She let out a frustrated noise...the same frustrated noise Luke had made in his Force dream. Evidently, their familial resemblance was less in appearance and more in gestures and expressions. “ I’m fairly certain Jabba won’t appreciate us parking on his lawn. ”

“ That would require him to have a lawn in the first place. ” He smirked at his own joke, but it disappeared quickly. When was the last time he’d done that?

He stood, not bothering to wait as Leia unfastened herself from the crash webbing and threw on the
hooded cloak he’d supplied her with. He wasn’t concerned that she’d attempt to escape. No one escaped him, not once he had them at his mercy. She seemed to know that too, because it wasn’t long before she was trailing just a step behind him.

Then again, maybe she was cooperating because he was working to free her...smuggler.

Whatever the case was, he didn’t care.

It was as they left the shuttle and were crossing towards the massive reinforced blast door that she asked her first real question: “So, if your family raised Luke here, then that means you’re from here too, right?”

He almost stopped in his tracks.

How was it that he’d managed to go over twenty years without someone directly confronting him about his past, and in the span of a few hours both his children managed to ask essentially the same question?

Twins, indeed.

But unlike Luke, who was dead and wouldn’t be revealing his secrets to anyone, Leia was very much alive. He wasn’t going to risk it, and he knew just how to get her to drop it permanently. “I didn’t get the impression you wanted to learn more about your father.”

“I did not say that!”

Surprisingly, another grin broke out over his face as he felt her swell with anger.

“Didn’t you?”

Her mood further darkened, and the Dark Side practically drank it up. Yes, she would be a formidable Sith indeed. Maybe one day, when he was certain she would answer to him. “Nevermind.”

All too easy.

By that point, they reached the blast doors. A TT-8L/Y7 droid popped out and rapidly began demanding what they wanted in Huttese.

He pointed at it. “Tell your master that he has ten seconds to open this door before I come through.”

The droid spat a curse in Huttese before retracting and leaving them alone.

“Well. I’m sure that put them in a negotiating mood,” Leia remarked.

“I’m not here to negotiate.” He was counting the seconds in his head. On the tenth second, he added, “Stay right where you are.”

“I wasn’t...why...”

He didn’t bother to explain. Not as he stretched his hand out, dove into the deep well of power the Dark Side provided to him, and pushed.

The blast doors heaved, resisting for a second, but then with another shove the metal buckled and the door went flying into the fortress with a great, terrible explosion.
Beside him, Leia had thrown her hands over her ears, and though he couldn’t see her face from beneath the shadows of the hood, he could tell she was cringing. “Well great, now the entire planet knows we’re here! How the hell is that supposed to get Jabba to release Han?!"

“This isn’t the Senate, Princess.” It still felt strange to refer to her as his daughter, or just simply Leia. He supposed, with him being the heir to the Empire, it was technically still true. But he still wondered why Luke was so easy to be informal with and Leia...wasn’t.

He’d think on it later.

He swept into the fortress even as Gamorrean guards wobbled furiously towards them, axes raised. He scoffed, easily latching onto their throats before they got close, crushing them before throwing the bodies to the wayside.

“Are you crazy?!...Wait, don’t answer that, you’re Darth Vader.”

Crazy was probably the nicest word he’d been called in a long time, so he didn’t bother commenting on it. “Be grateful I’m doing this at all. You deserve far more than the smuggler.” He told her as they turned down a corridor of stairs.

“Are...are you...don’t you dare tell me who I can and can’t date, you have no right...”

“I believe I have every right.” He didn’t bother reminding her why, not when they were now deep within the fortress. “Now if I were you, I’d be silent, unless you want bigger problems than just me to deal with.” Namely, the Emperor.

He didn’t miss the muttered, “I find that hard to believe.” But she went mercifully silent as they entered a throne room full of lowlife from across the galaxy.

The majority of Jabba’s cronies were just that--pawns in his cartel. Thieves, bounty hunters, murderers...slaves…

It wasn’t as busy as it normally was whenever he came to visit. Evidently, Jabba wasn’t expecting company. He glanced around, wondering if Boba Fett was skulking around somewhere, but he appeared to be absent. More guards had arrived to plant themselves between him and Jabba, but as he stepped into the dim light, his mechanical breathing almost drowning out the crowd, Jabba held up a grubby hand, effectively holding the guards from attacking.

“Lord Vader,” he thundered before continuing in Huttese. Oh yes, destroying his palace had made him angry. Good. “What makes you think you can tear down my door and murder those under my protection?”

Vader glowered. Protection. Right. Jabba knew full well there was no protecting from him.

He stopped before the trap door he was well aware existed, and Leia stopped right beside him. “I do not explain myself to you.” He jabbed his finger at the slug, and the Hutt had the nerve to appear offended. “I am here to collect the smuggler.”

“I have many smugglers. If you wanted one, you could have asked.” Jabba motioned to a group of beings in a dark corner who he assumed were smugglers available for hire.

“You know as well as I do that I have no need to smuggle.” He sneered. “I am here for Solo. I hope, for your sake, that you have not yet killed him.”

In actuality, he sort of hoped he had. Then he could at least tell Leia he tried and be done with it.
But then he sensed Leia hold her breath, her body tensing, her fear so palpable, he could almost
taste it.

His hands clenched into fists. As much as she clearly hated and wanted nothing to do with him, the
idea of her being afraid and distraught for any reason was...unacceptable.

Even if that reason was Han Solo.

Jabba blinked stupidly, his tiny brain processing what he’d demanded, then let out a deep laugh
that didn’t strike him as genuine. “Solo is not for sale. I quite like him where he is.”

He gestured behind Vader. He tilted his head to look.

He felt Leia’s white hot fury and horror before he’d fully realized the implications of what he was
looking at. Solo still resided in carbonite, exactly as he’d been frozen, and was hung on Jabba’s
wall, lit up like a prized trophy.

Part of him had to give the slug some commendation for his creativity. To leave someone in
hibernation like that was a special kind of cruelty, but then to mount them on the wall for everyone
to gawk at? Cruel and humiliating. More than that, with Solo being in carbonite for that long, he’d
have more side effects once he was released. He himself wasn’t patient enough to inflict that kind
of torture.

But the devastation he could feel from Leia...his daughter...

“I am not asking, Hutt,” Vader warned, turning back to Jabba. His hand moved closer to his
lightsaber. “I am leaving here with Solo. You can choose to be paid, or not.” He didn’t elaborate on
what the or not meant. It was usually heavily implied.

Which was why he was mildly surprised when Jabba glared, digging in. “Solo is mine. He is not
for sale.”

Solo must have done something egregious to really piss the gangster off to get him to make such a
stupid decision.

He called his lightsaber into his hand. The guards tensed, raising their weapons further. As if they
could stop him. “I will not ask again. Solo comes with me.”

Jabba never got a chance to answer. At that moment, he sensed Leia behind him step towards her
frozen...smuggler, just far enough away from him to give one of the lowlifes standing around them
the courage to attempt to grab her arm in a vise grip.

Fury flashed through him even as Leia instantly responded by punching the Rodian who’d dared to
touch her in the throat. He let her go, but he no longer drew breath. In a single instant, Vader
crushed his windpipe and he fell to the floor. The other scum in the room erupted in gasps and
screams.

“Hold your fire!” Jabba ordered as the guards moved to attack a now very hostile Sith Lord.

Fools. All of them. How dare they lay a hand on his daughter?! How dare they think they could
protect their disgusting master from him? How dare the Hutt deny him what he needed?!

In his fury, he almost missed the new emotion from the slug:

Lust.
His mind didn’t even fully register it until Jabba said, “Perhaps a deal can be made, Lord Vader. A trade. My trophy for your companion.”

He froze. Then, slowly, turned to look at Leia.

She was again standing near him, one hand on her arm...her hood having fallen off in the tussle, revealing easily the most beautiful face in the entire room.

And at Jabba’s words, her dark eyes widened, and she glanced between him and the Hutt. He could feel her weighing her chances in running before he could sell her out…

His lightsaber was ignited and soaring through the air before he’d consciously made the decision to do it. He didn’t even recognize what he’d done until the saber easily sliced through the thick blubber of Jabba’s neck, completely severing it.

It was an incredibly stupid decision. A power vacuum would definitely open up in the Outer Rim because of his actions. His master, when he found out, would definitely not be pleased.

But in that moment, he didn’t give a damn. He watched with gleeful, furious satisfaction as the head slid from its body, landing and rolling across the ground, that stupid, lustful expression still on it’s face.

No one harmed his daughter. No one touched her. No one would so much as even look at her like she was some piece of meat to be auctioned off in a market.

The lightsaber returned to his hand, and that seemed to break the horrified silence in the room. Screaming began, blaster bolts rained down on him, which he reflected easily back at their source.

They would all pay for the Rodian’s and Jabba’s mistake. All of them.

“Get your smuggler,” he snarled over his shoulder. “Now.”

He didn’t have to tell her twice. Leia jumped into action, moving with the grace of an experienced warrior towards her...smuggler.

He drew in a deep breath, allowing the Dark Side to fuel him.

No one except himself, Leia and the smuggler would leave there alive.

No one.

“Shit!” She hissed as she leapt over a table, sliding over the alcohol-smeared surface and dropped to the other side. “Shit, shit, shit, shit, SHIT!”

How could she be so oblivious?!

She’d taken one look at Han, still frozen and hung up like some grotesque knick knack, and she’d lost track of where she’d been standing. Not that she wanted to be anywhere near Vader in the first place, but considering he was there to get Han out, standing near him had been the smart thing to do. But she’d stepped towards Han, and before she knew it, hands were on her, she was instinctively punching whoever grabbed her in the throat, Vader killed him and her hood had fallen.
Then Jabba made his offer, and for one horrible second, she thought Vader might…

It was stupid. Of course he wouldn’t have. Even if she wasn’t his daughter, he had flat out told her he was only doing this as a peace offering for her. But after everything they’d been through, instinct had her considering how to get out before Vader could sell her off to Jabba.

And now Jabba was dead, and Vader was in the process of killing everyone else.

All because of her, and her stupid moment of weakness.

She kept low as she reached the carbonite, avoiding the bolts that were flying over her head. Quickly, she found the panel and pulled the lever. The slab holding Han lowered with a thud and she winced, looking around to see if anyone noticed.

But no. Everyone was currently trying to deal with the furious black hole that was Vader and his lightsaber.

Her fingers were moving over the dials and knobs, and before long a green light began to flash, indicating the unfreezing process. She crouched beside the slab as a stray blaster bolt hit the wall over her head. Her stomach twisted into knots as she watched the imprint of Han turn red. Then slowly, too damn slowly, the carbonite began to evaporate in a flash of light.

First his lips moved.

Then his fingers.

She had the horrible mental image of him getting shot before he could get out.

Then... he was free, tumbling forward before she could move to catch him.

He lay there on the dirt floor, his clothes wet and sticking to his skin as he began to shiver. Quickly, she reached for him, feeling his trembling body beneath her hands as she heaved him into her lap.

“Han,” she said, struggling to be heard over the sound of blaster fire, the lightsaber, Darth Vader’s horrible mechanical breathing, and the sounds of people dying. “Han, can you hear me?!"

Han stared unblinkingly in the direction of her voice, his brows furrowing. “Wha...who... Leia?”

“This isn’t exactly how I wanted to free you.” She ducked as another bolt hit the wall above her, raining down dust. “And I’m sorry, I know you’re just barely out of carbon freeze, but we need to go now if we want to live.”

“What...what the hell is happening?”

She was wondering that herself. She had been since she’d felt Luke...Luke’s danger. “I’ll explain on the way.”

“I can’t see…”

“It’s hibernation sickness.” A flash of fury choked her. It was too bad Jabba was dead. She would have liked to kill him herself for what he’d done to Han. “Just hold onto me and don’t let go.”

She threw Han’s arm around her neck and with all of her strength, pulled them both to their feet. Thankfully, he seemed to have at least understood they weren’t in a safe spot, because he attempted to help.
They began stumbling towards the exit. Han didn’t waste time in beginning to ask questions.

“How long have I been…?”

“Three months.”

“Thr-- three months?!”

“You sure know how to pick who you go into debt with.” She muttered then gasped as something out of the corner of her eye came flying at them. “DUCK!”

She dragged them down and they hit the ground hard enough that her breath left her lungs. But not a moment too soon--a dead body came soaring over their heads, hitting the wall with a sickening crunch.

“What the hell was that?!” Han demanded, blinking in the general direction of the noise.

“A dead body.” She was pulling them back to their feet. He reluctantly complied.

“Why are dead bodies flying at us?”

She winced. “Because Darth Vader is murdering everyone in Jabba’s throne room.”

For a moment, he said nothing. Stunned into silence. It didn’t last long. As they reached the stairs, he replied in horror, "I’m out for three months and everything has gone to total shit."

“You’re not wrong.” she remarked grimly. “We’re going up stairs so...be careful.”

“I don’t think I have much of a choice…” He began clumsily stumbling up the steps with her. Too slowly. They were going too slow… “Where’s Jabba?”

“Dead.”

“...Vader?”

“Yes.” Please don’t ask why...

“Why? You’d think they’d get along.”

She let out a sigh, wincing under his weight. Damn, he was heavier than he looked. “Long story, but he tried to trade you for me.”

“He what?!”

“He’s dead now, so it doesn’t really matter. What matters is that we get out of here, so less talking, more climbing.”

“No, you can’t just tell me that and expect me to…”

As he said it, something else came flying at them. She moved them aside just as a severed arm landed on the step where they’d been standing.

“Please, Han,” she begged. Even if there wasn’t a massacre going on behind them, she couldn’t have revealed everything that happened in the middle of Jabba’s palace. Not if she wanted her secrets to stay secrets. “I promise, I’ll tell you everything as soon as we’re safe.”
There was a silence as Han considered. Then, mercifully, he said, “Okay, Leia, if that’s what you need.”

She let out a breath in relief. Thank the Force. As stubborn as he could be, even he knew when to back off.

They reached the top of the stairs and were stumbling down the last corridor when the sounds of screaming and dying beings cut off, followed by silence.

“I assume we’re not out of this free?” Han asked, hearing it as well.

Bile rose in her throat. She could see Vader’s shuttle waiting just outside...and yet, they were still much too far away. Unless Han could move faster, there was no way they’d reach the shuttle, get it powered up, and escape before Vader could show up.

And yet that’s exactly what she’d needed to do. Luke was still out there, alone, at the very least gravely injured. Maybe dead. The longer she looked for a way out, the worse his situation became.

Unless…

No.

“Unfortunately.”

“I was kind of hoping we’d be done with torture…”

She winced at the words. She didn’t know what Vader planned for Han after this was done. He’d claimed he would set him free for her, but she knew she was right; Han wouldn’t leave her in Vader’s hands. So if he refused to leave, then what would the man do?

She didn’t want to find out.

“We’ll figure it out.” She tried to sound more confident than she actually felt. “Together. Like we always do.”

If this was Luke she was talking to, the positivity would have worked. But Han was a realist, and he wasn’t buying it. “I think we’re going to need a lot more than luck this time.”

And as she heard the echo of Vader’s respirator behind them, she couldn’t help but agree.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the unexpected long update! Unfortunately, this is pretty typical for most people around the holidays. I do have part of the next chapter already written, but I’m also trying to complete some secret santa fics before the end of the month, and of course I never write anything SHORT. It's a blessing and a curse, I'm telling you... Anyway, the song for this chapter super inspired Vader's murder spree: It's "Start a Riot" by Duckwrth, Shaboozey. I was on a walk one day and spotify played it and that scene perfectly played out and I still imagine it playing in the background as Vader murders everyone muahahahahaha!
I hope to update soon! We're about to hit a turning point in the story! :) Leave some love! Love, LadyVader23
There were a few things he’d learned when attending trainings on surviving in the wild. First, as soon as possible, find suitable shelter. Technically, Luke already had that: the ship was a mess, but it was sturdy, would keep out the elements, and provided adequate ways to keep warm and shade as necessary. What was even better was that it wasn’t his only option, either. After he’d rebandaged his broken leg into a sturdier splint and made a makeshift sling for his injured arm, he’d ventured out to explore a little and found the front end of the crashed hull crunched over downed trees nearby. It was definitely in worse shape, but if he needed to pull parts or even switch shelters completely, he could.

Second, he needed a water source. This need he was all too familiar with. On Tatooine, water was a scarce commodity. If you ran out, you were done for. He had a few bottles left from his side of the downed ship, so he set about breaking into the front end to find more.

Surely, if he found supplies in the bottom half, he would find more in the other, right?

He wasn’t in any shape to be moving about through the forest, not with a broken leg and shoulder. If he knew where he was going, that was one thing. If it was close by, that was another. But he didn’t know, and picking a direction and hoping he was right was a risk he wasn’t yet willing to take.

If he could use the Force without bringing back that… thing, it would be easier. But he obviously didn’t want it to come back, so that was the end of that.

But that also made searching the front of the torn ship almost impossible. At least, any closed doors remained that way without the Force or a welding saw. Thankfully, there were more open than closed, and he managed to find more water bottles and rations. It was his first real stroke of luck since the crash, and he carefully packed them away for later.

That luck increased when he came upon the first dead body--a Gran. The rot was so bad he gagged repeatedly. Flies swarmed around it. Still, he couldn’t pass up the opportunity to find a blaster, or even better, a comlink. So, taking a deep breath, he searched the body, grimacing the entire time.

No comlink, but he did find a blaster. Lucky. Just not as lucky as he would have liked. But a symbol on the filthy jacket gave Luke pause. A sun with the top ray shooting up above the others, a triangle on either side of it. A sense of familiarity overwhelmed him, and he pushed against murky memories to remember where he’d seen that symbol before. He cursed under his breath when he did.

Black Sun.

So, this was a Black Sun ship. Or, maybe they’d been attacked by pirates belonging to the syndicate? He tried to remember, but everything was still fuzzy. That in itself was a concern...if he
had lost memories, it meant that his concussion was serious. At least, he thought so. He wasn’t a
doctor, but that definitely seemed bad.

With nothing else of use found on the body, he pushed himself back up onto his good leg and
hobbled forward.

As he moved deeper, he found other bodies. Some did have comlinks, but they were either
completely fried or broken in half.

Perhaps his luck was running out.

His suspicions were confirmed when he reached the main bridge of the ship. The doors were
slightly ajar, allowing him to squeeze through. It made his ribs ache and he accidentally brushed
the broken leg against the frame. It took him a few solid seconds to push back the burst of pain so
that he could take a look at the damage.

Each breath drew in the scent of smoke and embers. He felt as if he’d walked into a still cooling
even. Sentient-shaped mounds were scattered about on the floor. The view port was shattered, and
the nose of the ship beyond that was completely gone. Perhaps disintegrated upon entry...or it had
been destroyed when...whatever happened.

He stood there in silence, leaning his back against the door as he took it all in. If he had any hope of
finding a long range comlink, or even a short range one, it would have been in this room. He’d
even thought that if he could get some electricity jump started back into the console, he could have
sent out a distress signal. But he didn’t need to have experience with tech to see that everything in
the room was completely unusable.

If he couldn’t get a signal out, he’d have to hope there was civilized life on the planet and that
somehow, he’d find it. Where it would be, he had no idea, and even if he did it would be extremely
difficult to make it there. That was assuming he didn’t get caught by that thing and eaten before he
could.

*Maybe you should just tell Vader.*

He scowled as the unwanted thought came into his head. *No.*

Maybe the engine room was still intact. Maybe there would be more options there.

*Or maybe you’re making excuses.*

*No.*

He had a whole list of perfectly reasonable reasons not to tell Vader. Just the fact that his father
would try to force him to join the Dark Side was enough of one. He’d rather die.

But he was already talking to the inner voice in his head. He was pretty sure that was the first sign
of going crazy. Half of his body was almost unusable. He felt like someone was constantly
pounding a multitool into his head. All he wanted to do was lie down, close his eyes, and sleep for
half a year. And yet falling asleep would mean more potential Force dreams, which could attract a
terrifying predator who seemed to have a special taste for Force sensitives.

His list of reasons to tell Vader was growing.

It wasn’t long enough yet. Maybe Han was right. Maybe he would get lucky. He’d been rescued
after being shot down before. Until then, he had a growing pile of supplies to tide him over. If they
began to dwindle, then maybe he’d seriously consider telling him the truth.

So, with a grunt, he turned and left the cockpit, focusing again on perfecting the first two rules of survival.

“So. Are you going to explain what the hell’s goin’ on?” Han demanded the moment the Darth Vader and the med droid left the secure medbay.

With a shot to the neck, Han’s vision had cleared up rather quickly, just in time to witness her and Vader arguing about letting her stay. She’d managed to get him to agree to staying with him for an hour, probably because for some unfathomable reason Vader seemed to think he could somehow repair the damage he’d caused to their relationship.

As if.

“Last I checked, we were enemies of the Empire and Vader was more interested in torturing us than...whatever the hell all of this is.” Han motioned to the room around them.

She glared at the door. She supposed it was a miracle Vader hadn’t revealed their relationship to Han on the way up, but he seemed eager to get the smuggler off the ship. Despite how she knew Han would react.

“It’s...complicated.”

“Oh,” Han drawled, “I thought it was a one word answer. Thanks for clueing me in, Princess. Of course it’s complicated!”

Irritated, she rolled her eyes and turned back to him. “Somehow, you still manage to be the most annoying nerf herder in the room.”

“I’m the only nerf herder in this room, thank you very much.” He crossed his arms over his chest.

She had to admit, seeing him in the Imperial officer uniform he’d been forced to change into was unnerving. It didn’t suit him. He looked like he was ready to tear himself out of it and walk around the Executor in nothing but his under things. “Now. What’s goin’ on?”

She opened her mouth...then closed it, suddenly realizing just how much had happened since Bespin.

So many unpleasant things... where to start?

“You’re not going to like it.”

“I already don’t.” He spread his arms out, motioning to the stiff uniform he’d been stuffed into and the ship they were trapped on.

“It gets worse. Trust me.”

He sighed, shaking his head. “Okay. Just get it over with. Stop stalling.”

He was right. She was stalling. And now that she couldn’t anymore, she suddenly felt as though she were going to throw up.

“Luke came to rescue us on Bespin. Vader cut off his hand. I barely managed to rescue him.”
“Kid’s lucky he didn’t lose more than a hand.”

Unconsciously, she rubbed her arms. “That’s what I thought. That’s what we all thought. But he wasn’t the same. He...he was haunted, Han. Nothing I did made anything better. I thought maybe it was because we lost you and he felt responsible for it, but it was so much worse.”

She half expected Han to make some joke about how nothing could be worse than losing him, but he didn’t. He remained silent, staring at her, waiting for her to continue. She took a deep breath.

“Darth Vader is Luke’s father.”

“What?” Han frowned, his brows creasing. “But...he said…”

“It was a lie. Obi-Wan lied to him. Probably to spare his feelings, I don’t know.”

“That damned old man, I told Luke he was somethin…”

She closed her eyes. She didn’t want to tell him. She didn’t need to...but she had no one else to talk to. Someone...well, relatively sane. And if not Han, who she loved, then who else?

“But it’s not just Luke.”

“Huh? What does that even mean? What, does Vader have a bunch of other kids hiding across the…”

“Luke is my twin brother.”

Silence.

It wasn’t often that he was shocked into silence. Usually, she couldn’t get him to shut up.

She was afraid to look at him, afraid of what she’d see in his eyes. As a smuggler, he wasn’t usually one to judge. He did, after all, hang with the scum of the galaxy. But somehow, being Vader’s daughter felt different.

Dirtier.

Wrong.

And Han had been tortured and hunted by him.

They both had, and yet…

She felt calloused hands on her face. Gentle. A thumb caressed her cheek as he pulled her face back to him.

There was nothing but grim understanding in his gaze as he softly asked, “What can I do? What do you need?”

Her lip trembled and against her will, tears poured down her cheeks. Because of course he wouldn’t have been disgusted with her. Her parentage wasn’t her fault. It didn’t change who she was. It only changed what she’d gone through in the sense that it was her own father who had done it to her. He was the monster, not her, and Han knew that. And since Bespin, he understood a little more, and she wished he didn’t, wished she could somehow turn everything back…

“Hold me.”
She didn’t need to ask again. His arms immediately wrapped around her, holding her close. She buried her face in the stiff collar of the jacket he wore, her hands bunching into the material. Great, heaving sobs wracked her body.

It was so rare she cried. Even more so in front of others. But here, with Han, it felt right. It felt needed. For once, it felt necessary to be vulnerable, and for him to understand that…

Words were tumbling out of her mouth between gasps. “But it’s worse.”

“How?”

Again, no sarcastic remarks. No jokes. No pushing her buttons to get her riled up.

“I...I wanted to protect Luke...and I just ruined everything!”

“I’m sure you didn’t…”

“I convinced him to fake his death.”

A pause. “Well...Did Vader buy it…?”

“Yes, the whole galaxy thinks he’s dead, but that’s not the terrible part. I...I apparently have the Force, too. I...I felt him...I don’t know what I felt, what I’m still feeling, but it’s horrible and he’s either really injured or...or actually dead…”

“Hold on,” Han’s arms tightened around her, “you’re telling me that Luke faked his death, and now he might really be dead?” She nodded. “I’m...sure he’s fine...he’s lucky, remember?”

*Oh Han.* She appreciated that he was trying to make her feel better, but she was beyond that. She would stay that way until she knew for sure. And if he’d really died…

“N-no, Han,” she hiccuped. Force, she was an embarrassing mess. “I don’t think the Force works like that. I lost Luke Skywalker. I lost my twin brother.”

She’d thought that. Multiple times. But to say the words aloud made it real. She didn’t just lose the hero of the Rebellion. She lost her brother. What would she have done differently if she’d known?

“We don’t know he’s dead.” He began rubbing soothing circles over her back. “How did you end up here?”

“I stupidly ran into Vader while looking for Luke. I had to tell him who I was.” She didn’t elaborate why. She didn’t need to.

“Damn bastard,” Han muttered under his breath. “Lemme guess. Escaping him is impossible now that he knows.”

“I already tried.”

“If I hadn’t been so out of it we could have…”

“No. I have no doubt he prepared for that possibility. We would have been caught, and I don’t think you’d be in humane quarters.”

“If you can call being locked in and under guard humane…”

She couldn’t argue with him there. Vader’s private medbay was technically better than a cell, but
even then, not really. She was his daughter. Did he seriously think locking them up would win her over?

And continuing to cry wasn’t going to get them out.

She pulled away and he reluctantly let her go, though he still eyed her warily. She reached up and wiped the tears away, attempting to get a hold of herself. “We have to get out of here.”

Han paused, making a face. “Ye-eah…”

Her eyes narrowed. “What?”

He shifted uncomfortably. “Well...do you have a lead on where we can find Luke?”

She gritted her teeth. There was that tone...the one that told her she wouldn’t like what he had to say, and he knew it. “I can find one.”

“But do you have one now?”

“Well, Master Yoda said that if I followed the bond I have with him, I’d find him…”

“Yeah, I don’t know who that is, but it sounds like they had no idea either.” He waited for her to object, but she didn’t know enough about the Force to know if he was right or not. Maybe Yoda just said it to make her feel better. “Look. I know you don’t want to hear it…”

“Then don’t say it!” She began pacing, suddenly agitated. She knew where he was going with this. “All of this happened because I was trying to keep him safe…”

“I know, I’m not saying I like it any more than you do. But if we wanna help the kid, we gotta be smart about this.”

Her hands clenched, aware that Han was watching her as warily as one would a hungry nexu. “I don’t think you understand how angry he will be if I tell him. He might decide to kill me anyway for endangering his precious son.”

“Leia.” Force she hated it when he used that tone. That reasonable tone. She liked him better when he was coming up with insane, suicidal plans. But then again, even considering telling Vader the truth was suicidal, so maybe she didn’t love that either. “If we were to escape right now, we’d have to rendezvous with Chewie and the Falcon. Then we’d have to hope we could find some sort of lead, and then when we found it, hope that lead takes us straight to him. And the entire time we would have Darth Vader breathing down our necks. If we were to find him and it happens to be too late and Vader finds out then, then we’re definitely dead.”

She growled out in frustration. He had a point. Why did he have a point? Why couldn’t he just tell her she was right and they could escape together? “If I tell him, then both Luke and I could end up being stuck here.”

“If there’s one thing I know about Vader, it’s that he has a talent for finding Luke. If he found him before it’s too late, at least the kid is still alive. Believe me, you can do a lot more to rescue a live person than a dead one.”

She stopped pacing and buried her face in her hands. “I don’t want you to be right.”

To say Vader would be pissed would be an understatement. She actually really wasn’t sure if he’d refrain from harming her. He seemed to be attempting to control himself, but she was certain he
hadn’t even thought to kill Jabba before he was dead. Plus he’d known Luke was his son and he’d cut his hand off anyway…

She felt a little bit like she did when she was preparing to tell her parents something she’d done wrong when she was little. Except the Organas wouldn’t have harmed her. Grounded her, definitely, but not hurt her or someone she loved.

“When do you ever want me to be right?” He sighed, and placed reassuring hands on her shoulders. “I wouldn’t suggest it if I didn’t think it was our only shot.”

She looked up, memorizing his face. “Somehow, I’m far more afraid now than I’ve ever been before.”

He grimaced, but he tried to console her anyway. “Come on. I’m here. Despite what Vader says, I’m not goin’ anywhere.”

“That’s part of why I’m afraid. What if…?”

“No what ifs. We got this. Together. We’ve been through worse and made it through.”

No, they hadn’t. Knowing that Vader was her father, and worse, Vader knowing she was his daughter, changed the whole game.

But she didn’t correct him. He was trying to make her feel better.

She had to admit, knowing she wasn’t alone was slightly comforting.

“Don’t say I didn’t tell you so when this goes wrong,” she finally relented.

He grinned and leaned down, kissing her forehead…

Just as the doors swished open and the sound of Vader’s mechanical breathing filled the room.

The hour was up. She suddenly felt a million times colder.

“Unhand my daughter, Solo,” Vader thundered, taking a threatening step into the room. Leia didn’t fail to miss his hand going to his lightsaber…

Though Han’s grip tightened on her, she pulled away, stepping in between Vader and Han. “First of all, you don’t get to tell Han and I what we can and cannot do. We’re adults and you have no right to even have a say in my relationships.”

It worked. Vader’s attention snapped to her, though his hand didn’t leave his belt. “Do not tempt me to show you just how much of a say I have in anything that happens on this ship…”

“Second of all,” she interrupted, glaring, “you wanted to learn more about Luke, right?”

That shut him up. He stared, that mask unfeeling, and yet she thought she sensed something. A…flicker. Surprise? Hope?

She crossed her arms over her chest. “We need to talk. Alone.”

Chapter End Notes
Muahahahahahaha I know, mean cliffhanger, but...ah, well, half of the next chapter is already written. I had a bit of an anxiety attack this week and needed to just write some Vader. For some reason, that super helped, so now I just need to find the time to finish the next chapter. I am trying to finish up some secret santa fics, so that likely won't happen until the beginning of January. I'm also home for the holidays and like...I used to be able to write anywhere with no problems and now I've found that my parents entire house is incredibly uncomfortable for writing in terms of body positioning. So...we'll see what happens.

The song for this chapter is Bad Dreams (piano version) by Faozia.

Leave some love!

Love,

LadyVader23
It would seem his efforts in repairing his relationship with his daughter were going somewhere. Who knew the smuggler would be so useful. Maybe he’d let her keep him around for a little longer…

No.

He immediately shoved that thought away. Solo was unworthy of her.

But his rescue had certainly sped things along, and he couldn’t complain about that. In fact, if things continued this way, perhaps he could reconsider turning Leia to the dark side.

He mulled this over as he followed Leia back to her quarters. Leia remained uncharacteristically silent, though he could feel turmoil and hatred still coating her presence. Yes, those feelings would serve her well in the future, but as willing to talk as she suddenly was, he wasn’t foolish enough to think she was ready for him to push her into joining him. But if Solo was her weakness…

The kiss he’d walked in on was enough to remind him that he was still potentially better off throwing the man in an escape pod. Who knew what would happen between them if he kept the smuggler around?

As soon as they were back in the confines of her quarters, Vader crossed his arms, giving off the picture of confidence and superiority...despite the fact that he had no idea how to proceed from there. Did Leia have something specific to say about Luke? Should he just ask what he wanted to know anyway? Then again, he was interested in anything she had to say about her brother.

But if it was more about his son hating him...well. He was already fully aware of that.

Leia walked to the view port, staring out at the stars and the planet below. They had still yet to move from over Tatooine. They likely wouldn’t for some time, if only to contain the power vacuum Vader had opened by killing Jabba. “You were going to tell me information about Luke,” Vader finally said when she continued to stare out, saying nothing.

There was a spike of fear in the Force before it was smothered by forced determination. Interesting. He opened his mouth to pry further, but she finally spoke.

“What did you do with Luke’s X-wing?”

He frowned in annoyance. “You said you had information for me, not that you were going to pester me with useless questions.”

He watched her tense and waited for her to snap at him. Instead, she repeated, “What did you do with Luke’s X-wing?”

His fists clenched. “You are stalling. The X-wing is in my private hangar, all information stripped from it.”

Leia was silent, still staring out at the stars. “He loved that ship. He would be pissed if you ruined it.”
“He is dead, so it doesn’t matter…”

“No.”

If Vader could have, he would have stopped breathing. His brain struggled to process that simple response.

“...No?” he repeated, lowly, dangerously.

Luke was dead. He’d felt it. He knew it for a fact.

Perhaps she had yet to process it herself. Twins were, after all, closer than any other familial relationship, so perhaps…

She was speaking, words he heard but struggled to match with the reality he’d grown to accept.

“I told you what you did to him on Bespin haunted him. It changed him. He barely ate. Barely slept. Lost weight. I was worried, and I confronted him. He...told me what happened. Suddenly your crazed obsession with him made too much sense, and I wanted to protect him. From you. From the fate you wanted for him. So I convinced him…” a hesitation, and another spark of fear, “...I convinced him to fake his death.”

His mouth was dry.

The floor felt like it was crumbling beneath him. He took an involuntary step back, his back hitting the blast door.

Air was being pumped into his lungs, but it felt like his respirator was malfunctioning.

“... What?”

Somehow, his booming voice sounded too normal...or as normal as it could be. Nothing about this was normal. Nothing about this was expected.

She didn’t stop speaking, each word a nail in his lungs, his heart, his limbs, his head…

“We staged the mission on the Ring of Kafrene. The only people who knew the plan was myself and Luke. Luke let himself get shot, then swallowed a drug that would give him the appearance of death to everyone except the most trained medical professional. I staged a fake burial on Takodana, then set him up with the supplies he’d need to lie low. I intentionally broadcasted the news of his death so that everyone would hear it...especially you.”

Luke was dead. He had to be. He’d felt it. He was dead, dead, dead, dead, dead…

But...Leia had...staged it…?

He was suddenly afraid of what he’d find if he touched the bond between him and his son.

But he couldn’t ignore it now.

He dived deep into the Force, grasping onto it. Eagerly seeking the answer to Leia’s words. Dreading what he’d find.

If she was saying this as some sort of cruel trick to rip him to shreds all over again…

He didn’t think he would spare her his full wrath.
If Luke was dead, the bond would have snapped. All that would have been left would have been a
dull imprint. Perhaps it would have taken longer to dull simply because of the nature of their bond
and their shared heightened sensitivity to the Force…

But no.

It was there.

Weakly. Stretched thin. Barely. But it was there, still pulsing vibrantly in the Force.

And it radiated sickening danger.

The room was tilting. Something was crunching in, and Leia whirled in alarm, eyes wide as she
took in whatever he was destroying with barely a thought.

He didn’t know what it was. He didn’t care. All he cared about was the lie, the lie he’d so stupidly
believed.

Luke was dead. But...really, he was alive.

And both of his children had deceived him.


It wasn’t a question. It was an order, one spoken with such anger and fury, it was only her
relationship to him and the information he desperately needed that kept her alive.

She’d gone pale, but when she spoke, it was with far more confidence than she was feeling. “Not
long after he left, I...felt...I felt this horrible feeling. I can’t describe it, but it felt like I couldn’t
breathe. I knew it was him, somehow. I knew…”

“The Force.” His words were spoken on a furious snarl. “It was a warning. He is in danger.”

“I know. I tried to contact him, but I couldn’t…”

“You knew he was in danger and you did not TELL me?!”

Something else was screeching as it crumpled under his power. He didn’t care, Leia jumped a little,
eyes darting towards it...then glared at him. As if she thought he was overreacting. “You’re Darth
Vader. I convinced him to fake his death to get away from you. Why the hell would I deliver him
to you?!”

It suddenly felt too confining. The suit felt too small, the helmet constricting his head, his hands
burning, his skin feeling like insects crawled over it by the millions…

“He is my son!”

Somehow, this was worse than finding out he’d died.

He’d been foolish to take the warning in the Force and the information he’d been given about his
son’s death, convincing as it was, and believed it. It had been a warning and he’d misinterpreted it,
shied away from the bond, and the boy hadn’t ever gotten out of danger. He didn’t have time to
confront why, and now…

“And he’s my brother,” Leia replied icily. “I did what I thought was best to protect him.”
He took a shaking step forward, anger choking him, blinding him. Leia’s eyes immediately tracked the movement. “You had no right! You made it worse! I would have protected him, I…”

“You cut his hand off!”

He pointed at her, advancing further. “That is none of your business…”

Leia laughed harshly, sneering. “It is so my business. You hurt him, just like you hurt me, and countless others. You are incapable of love…”

He barely felt himself moving. His son...his son was out there, in danger, alive, and he had no idea where he was…

“EVERYTHING I have done has been for love!” he roared. He’d reached her, and in alarm she backed up until she was pressed against the glass. Her eyes were wide as she stared up at him, and suddenly she seemed so small, so fragile…

He didn’t give a damn.

Luke was alive. In danger. Because of her.

And because of her, he might not be alive for much longer.

He’d sworn not to maim his children any longer, alive or dead. He needed to control himself. He needed to back away. But...but…

But.

His hands, shaking, snapped up. Leia had but a second to make a noise of terror before his hands were around her throat…

No.

He did not squeeze.

His entire body shook violently. He wanted to throw up. He wanted to kill. He wanted to feel life slip away into the Force beneath his mechanical fingertips…

Anyone else who had endangered his son for far less would have been dead. People had already died for unwittingly being involved in his fake death.

And yet.

Leia was his daughter. As much as he was tempted to forget that fact, that same bond between them told him of her terror at having his hands wrapped around her slender throat. She was so small, so easily breakable…

And for one terrible moment, when he looked into her face, it wasn’t Leia staring back at him with wide, frightened dark eyes. It was her. That night on Mustafar, her belly swollen with his babies, her eyes pleading with him as he crushed her throat…

He let go.

Leia let out a breath she’d been holding.

He stepped back.
And the entire room behind him *shattered*.

Every piece of furniture.

Everything that wasn’t her.

It all splintered into a million pieces.

Leia shrank back, lifting her arms to defend herself from flying debris, but none came. He made sure of that. He simply stood there over her, hands clenched at his sides, *raging*.

“You *will* cooperate.” His voice was deadly quiet. “You *will* tell me everything you know. You *will* hold *nothing* back. And you had better hope we are not too late to *save him.*” His throat tightened at those last words.

He couldn’t consider it. He’d lost him once...no, twice, no, *thrice*...

He stopped counting.

Leia’s chest rose and fell quickly as she stared at the wrecked room, one hand on her bare throat, eyes wide. Then, slowly, she looked up at him. Anyone else would have cowered for far less.

But not Leia.

Her expression hardened into a glare, and again he felt that renewed resolve, that renewed hatred spilling freely from her.

“I don’t care who you are. You don’t scare me.”

A lie. He didn’t bother to correct her.

“I only do this to save Luke.” She didn’t yell, but each word was yet another stab to his heart as she nodded to the destruction around them. “But this...this is why I didn’t tell you. This is why I sent him away. *Because of you.*”

*It seems, in your anger, you killed her.*

Sidious’ words from his past echoed in his head. An image of him slicing Luke’s hand off accompanied it.

Luke may not have been dead. His children may have deceived him.

But this was still because of him. Because of Bespin. Because of what he’d done, what he could still do.

Somehow, it was so much worse than when he thought Luke was dead.

But he didn’t acknowledge it. Not to her. Instead, he tilted his head and demanded evenly, “Tell me what you know.”

She had lied. She was *terrified* of her Sith Lord father. She could still feel the soft leather of his gloves as his hands wrapped around her throat. Vader’s most infamous execution method was by choking his victims, and to think he’d come so close to doing it to her…

No. She was lucky he hadn’t. He should have killed her for what she’d done. He’d killed for far
less important reasons than losing his son. If she was smart, she’d be trying to find a way out, away from where he could get to her to finish what he’d started...

She only had to remember the slaughter in Jabba’s palace to be reminded why he hadn’t squeezed. As his daughter, he wanted her alive. He wanted her completely under his supervision, damn the consequences.

Everything he did, according to him, had been to fulfill his twisted vision of love. The thought that maybe he’d stayed his hand because he thought he loved her…

She suppressed a shudder. She didn’t want to think about that.

But it was that twisted love for Luke that she needed to rely on if she had any hope of seeing Luke alive again.

*Do it for Luke*, she repeated over and over again to ease her nerves, *do it for him.*

She would not fall apart. Not now.

“I assume you were not stupid enough to let him go without some means of contact?” Vader began icily.

She bit back a snappy, hateful response. Cooperate. As much as she hated it, she needed to cooperate. *For Luke, for Luke, for Luke, for…*

“ I gave him an encrypted comm. We talked once after he left Takodana.”

Vader was pacing, ignoring the ruined debris crunching under his boots, hands clasped behind his back. The entire sitting room was completely destroyed. “When?”

She didn’t think it was possible for him to sound angrier than he usually did, but his dark baritone voice promised death. Maybe not her death, but someone. She shuddered, feeling a strange sort of pity for whatever officer got in his way later, and guiltily grateful it wouldn’t be her. “A week after he left.”

“What did you talk about?”

“You, mostly.” He stopped and turned his helmet towards her, waiting for her to expand. “It wasn’t anything important, just reports on how you reacted to his death.”

His shoulders tensed and she felt the air in the room plunge even colder than it already was. She absently rubbed at her arms.


“Then you should have known to *tell me immediately…*”

“Again, you’re Darth Vader. Murder is your thing. How was I supposed to know you killed all of those people because you cared for Luke? We figured you were angry about losing your quarry…”

“You…?!” He made a noise that might have been a frustrated sigh. “What *else* did you talk about?!”

She hesitated. How much was too much information in this situation? How would Luke feel once he found out he was captured because of *her*? As much as his imagined betrayal stung, it hurt far
more to think he wouldn’t ever come back, so she inwardly prayed for forgiveness and answered.

“Luke was frustrated. He didn’t know what he wanted anymore, so I suggested he go on vacation.”

“Oh vacation?” Vader repeated incredulously.

“Yeah. Vacation. It’s a thing people do when they’re stressed out…”

“I know what a vacation is,” Vader snapped, pointing at her in irritation. “Just because I have no use for such things does not mean I am unaware of the concept. And even if I did, there is no way I would take one during a war, so why you’d suggest such a thing to your brother…”

“It seemed like the right decision at the time!” she argued, even as her heart leaped at the words your brother. She would never admit it to him, but hearing Luke be referred to that way, so personally, made her heart both warm with affection and freeze from terror at what he could be going through. “And since he didn’t look like himself…”

“Explain.”

Oh. That would be important information if she wanted his help in finding Luke. Oops. “I provided hair dye and contacts. So if he used them like he was supposed to, he’d look...well more like me, actually.”

Vader crossed his arms, and she got the impression that he was considering something. What, he didn’t elaborate on, but before she could ask he moved on. “Was there anything else you talked about?”

“No. About a day later is when I sensed...something wrong.” She hesitated. “He’s...not dead, is he?”

“He is alive.” Despite Vader’s tense reply and the implications behind it, she relaxed marginally. “Though he is in considerable danger. It is imperative we find him quickly. Are you still in possession of the comm you used to contact him?”

She frowned. “Yes, it’s in Artoo, but I don’t see...hey!”

He had turned and started making his way towards the door. Ideally, she wanted to be as far away from him as possible, especially after he’d almost killed her not ten minutes earlier, but if he was going after Luke, she wanted to be involved. So even without an invitation, she followed.

He stopped at the door, evidently either sensing her determination or the fight she’d put up if he locked her up (maybe both), and gestured impatiently ahead of him. “If you try anything, Princess, I’ll lock you back in here and find him myself.”

Despite the necessity to cooperate, she bristled. “I wasn’t planning on it, but keep in mind, Lord Vader, I know Luke. You don’t. You may be good at tracking him down, but this would go quicker with me involved. So let’s skip the threats and find him, shall we?”

Vader’s hands clenched into fists, but he said nothing as the door swished open on its own...or rather, at his silent command.

It’s just like Luke, she thought to herself as she pushed past him into the hallway and made her way towards the hangar, Luke does stuff like that all the time.

Except he didn’t. Not because he couldn’t, but because it unnerved others who weren’t used to
displays of the Force. He was kind, and considerate of others’ comfort, where Vader used it to intimidate. As much as Luke had wanted to be like his father, he seemed his total opposite. Thank the Force.

She did her best to ignore Vader breathing down her neck as they entered the hangar and headed towards her ship. Though she didn’t want to converse with him more than she had to, she asked, “Do you really think you can get a clue from the comm? It was encrypted…”

“Artoo will have tracked the call.”

He said it with such confidence, she wanted to argue. Then she remembered Artoo had previously been his droid, and the confidence made sense. “Unless my father changed…”

“Organa was not your father,” Vader interrupted heatedly. “He kidnapped and hid you from me and your rightful heritage.”

Was that true? Had her father kidnapped her? It didn’t change the fact that he was right to do so, given who Vader was…but even as she thought that, another voice whispered, what if he was as wrong as you were to convince Luke to fake his death?

No. Bail wasn’t wrong. She loved her adoptive parents. Vader wouldn’t change her mind.

“My father might have changed Artoo’s programming,” she insisted, challenging him to push her on this. If he thought being blood related meant she would warm up to him, he had another thing coming.

For once he didn’t, but she suspected it was because they’d reached the shuttle and were heading up the ramp.

“Let us hope he didn’t, for Luke’s sake,” Vader hissed, brushing past her to go to the motionless droid. Again she felt the ghost of his hands on her neck and she stopped cold, reaching up to rub it as she swallowed bile.

She watched as Vader approached Artoo and reached down to turn him on. The little droid slowly flickered back to life, swiveling it’s head in what Leia imagined to be confusion, before focusing on the Sith Lord glowering above him. He let out a furious squeal, and rolled back as if to give himself personal space.

Vader snapped, “Save your insults, droid, I need the comm my son contacted you on.”

She blinked. “You know droidspeak?”

Vader glanced at her in what she thought was irritation.

She snorted. “Of course you do.”

Artoo swiveled his head between the Sith and herself before sputtering something else.

“She is unharmed. The comm, droid, unless you wish for Luke to really die.” Vader extended his hand impatiently.

This time, Artoo seemed to process what Vader was really saying. Slowly, he swiveled his head towards her and beeped something in question, which caused Vader to growl. “Tell Artoo he needs to give me the comm.”
Again, she wrestled with the desire to do the exact opposite just to spite him. *For Luke, for Luke, for...* “Give him the comm, Artoo. It’s alright.”

Artoo continued to stare at her, as if waiting for her to start laughing and say gotcha, but when she didn’t, he opened the compartment holding the device and held it out. Vader snatched it and turned, brushing past her to head back onto the ramp.

“I assume you tracked Luke’s call,” he said, then as Artoo responded, he stretched out another hand and Leia watched as some sort of device flew into it quickly. “It’s a start.”

He didn’t exactly sound pleased but... “What did he say?”

“The call was not long enough for an exact location. It is better than nothing.”

Leia shot Artoo a glare. “You could have told me that.”

“And what would you have done with the information?” Vader hooked the device up to the comm. “The Force will be my guide. Given that you never use it, what would you have done?”

She opened her mouth to argue...and closed it. A general location wasn’t the same thing as a specific location. She might have been able to guess, but if she’d been wrong... she would have been in the same situation Han had theorized earlier. Her having wasted time, and Luke closer to death.


“You tell me, Princess, since you know him so well.” She shot a glare at the back of his head. “No matter. I will meditate on it.”

“What the hell is that going to do?” Artoo beeped in agreement...at least, she thought he did. Given his apparent familiarity with the Force, he might have actually meant that for her. She didn’t dare ask. She’d wake Threepio up before she had Darth Vader be her droid translator.

“As I said. The Force will be my guide.” Vader motioned towards her. “We are done here. You will return to your room.”

She hesitated. “I want Artoo with me.”

“That is out of the question. I am aware of his abilities.” Behind her, Artoo began to protest, bounding side to side on his legs. Vader flicked his wrist and the droid went silent, powering off. She shuddered.

“What am I supposed to do, while I wait, nothing?”

“Yes.”

“I want to help.”

“You’ve done far too much helping. Helping is what got us in this mess in the first place.” He motioned ahead of him again. “I will not ask again.”

She glared, remembering the last time she’d left her shuttle...thrown over his shoulder, immobile. She had no doubt he’d do it again.
So, swallowing her pride, she marched down the ramp. “You’ll find me when you find his trail.”

She didn’t phrase it as a question. It was a demand, and she half expected him to refuse.

“I will get you when I deem appropriate. You have no power to make orders of me.”

But even as they returned to her room, they both knew that wasn’t completely true. While Vader clearly held far more power than she ever could, she had one advantage: she knew Luke better than anyone. And if they had any hope of finding him, they’d need each other.

Even if neither of them would ever admit it aloud.

Chapter End Notes

Hehehehehehe the angst in this chapter makes me so happy. Vader knows the truth now! Time to find his wayward, very injured son. Hopefully the next chapter shouldn't take as long to update: I was traveling, writing for two fic exchanges, and then I finished it all off with a week long illness. So, hopefully, none of that will happen again.
The song for this chapter is When You Break by Bear's Den.
Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
The creature visited again not long after sunset.

Luke was already huddled in the makeshift shelter he’d created within the ship, having just finished his pathetic dinner of rations. He was exhausted, his eyes drooping, in danger of nodding off, but the sounds of the gigantic... \textit{thing} woke him right back up with a burst of adrenaline that had his entire body shaking and aching.

It was searching for him. He didn’t need to use the Force to know that. He listened to it lumber around, snuffling loudly. More than once, he felt it brush up against the broken ship, tilting it dangerously. It took all of his will power not to make a sound, not to call upon the Force to steady himself, not even when he once lost his balance and fell sideways onto his injured shoulder.

He didn’t know how long it stayed, but it felt like hours before it finally seemed to reluctantly give up and wander away. He stayed wide awake, fighting against bone-deep weariness, barely breathing. One wrong move, and he could have it come rushing back to finish him off.

And of course, after what seemed like a long while, it came back, repeating the same ritual. Searching, messing with the broken ship, then retreating into the night.

Again. And again.

Just before dawn, it was back again. By that point, he hadn’t slept since his last vision with Vader, and his broken body was screaming. He felt as though his body and his mind were two separate entities, warring with one another, and he knew eventually, he’d have to give in. But once he did…

The likelihood of Vader waiting for him was high. It was what had brought the monster to him in the first place, and he didn’t know if this time he’d be able to wake up in time.

It was that terror that kept him going, pinching himself whenever his eyelids threatened to close, concentrating on the noises of the beast as it searched…

Then suddenly, the thing squealed in what sounded like pain, and the ground shuddered as it ran off, trees snapping and groaning in its wake.

\textit{Why?} he wondered, frowning. Each time throughout the night, it had left at its own leisure. Why was it in pain? Did something...or someone...hurt it?

He hadn’t heard anything and honestly, he wasn’t sure he wanted to meet whatever \textit{could} hurt that thing.

Still. The idea of not knowing was too much. He needed to very cautiously investigate and hope it didn’t kill him. And yet when his brain attempted to tell the rest of his body to stand and hobble out of the ship...his body stayed put, crouched against the corner of his shelter. Shaking violently.
No, he thought weakly as his head lulled and his vision began to grow dark, *not now, not…*  

He never finished that thought. One moment he was looking at the cluttered room that was his shelter, and the next…  

He blinked.  

Sand.  

Not the sand of Tatooine. This was a different sort, not quite as hot, but still deadly just the same.  

He...recognized it.  

Vrogas Vas.  

He groaned. Just his luck.  

Another Force vision.  

He needed to wake up. He tried pinching himself, but just as he feared, it didn’t work. Worse, as if to drive the point home that his body was beyond the point of consciousness, he felt as if he needed to lie down in the burning sand to sleep in the dream.  

*Bad* didn’t even begin to cover the situation he was in.  

And, naturally, he wasn’t alone.  

“Vrogas Vas,” Darth Vader’s deep voice intoned behind him. He winced at the barely controlled anger in it as he made himself turn to face him. To be fair, his father usually sounded like one wrong word would make him unleash his fury, but somehow…  

Something was off.  

He immediately tried to look normal. He couldn’t look exhausted. He couldn’t show how even in the dream, his leg and shoulder and *ribs* were hurting him.  

Would Vader think it was strange if he just...sat down? What would he do if he ignored him and fell asleep?  

Well. It would be a pretty big clue that he wasn’t really dead.  

He couldn’t have that.  

So he forced himself to nod in a way that he hoped was normal given their strained relationship and greeted, “Hello, Father.”  

Deep in the Force vision, he could sense his father’s mood drop further. He frowned, not expecting...that. What had changed since he’d last seen him? They weren’t exactly the picture perfect father-son duo, but they’d...well, they hadn’t tried to kill each other. Recently.  

“Luke.” He didn’t think his name could be spoken with so much venom. It was almost offensive. “Why were you on Vrogas Vas?”  

His father crossed his arms over his chest, and though the mask remained as impassive as ever, Luke could practically feel him glaring at him.
Something had definitely changed. Something monumental. Not knowing made it difficult to think about anything beyond that moment.

“Ah,” he stupidly stammered. It was such a random question. Vader wouldn’t know about his second visit to the ruined temple, but he knew about the wreck that was his first visit. “I...was looking for answers.” Technically, it was true about both instances, but... “I thought you already knew? You were there. Why ask now?”

He shivered as the Sith’s anger grew. How was it possible to stand in the middle of a desert and feel like he was back on Hoth?

“Tell me,” Vader began, and the way he spoke made the hair on his arms stand on end. Danger, the Force seemed to sing to him, You’re in danger... “What do you do in the afterlife?”

This is a trick question.

He didn’t know why, or what it meant, but he knew if he said one wrong word, he’d fall into Vader’s trap. Again.

“I’m...going to pass on this question.”

Either he didn’t remember their earlier deal, or he didn’t care, because his father ignored him. “Who have you talked to since you’ve died? I’m sure there are plenty of dead Jedi waiting to fill your head with lies.”

Luke’s mouth had gone dry. It was suddenly hard to breathe.

“Pass,” he said again, weakly.

Because somehow, his father knew the truth.

He knew he wasn’t really dead.

And he was pissed.

Vader pointed at him accusingly. “You lied. You are a liar.”

Shit.

He considered convincing him that he was really dead, because of course Vader knowing the truth meant he was once again a marked man, but he doubted it would work. So instead he crossed his arms defensively, wishing he had a lightsaber just in case. “Honestly, I’m not sure why you’d think I’d do any differently.”

Wrong thing to say.

Vader stormed towards him, roaring, “Do you have any idea what you’ve done?!”

Nervously, Luke backed up a step before forcing himself to stand his ground, even as the behemoth that was his father invaded his personal space.

This isn’t Bespin, he chanted over and over again in his mind, he can’t hurt you here...

His right hand twitched painfully anyway.

“I took a vacation?” Luke tried with a shrug. “It’s not a crime, last I checked.”
“People have died because I thought they played a part in killing you!”

“That’s not my fault! I didn’t make you do anything! You chose to kill them when you didn’t have to!” His own anger rose, pushing away the shock of his father finding out the truth. “Don’t think I don’t know that you don’t regret it either, so don’t give me that bullshit!”

But just as Vader intended, he couldn’t help the guilt that wormed its way deep into his chest. He’d known about his father killing people at the Ring of Kafrene. Who else had died because of his fake death?

He wouldn’t ask.

“Of course not, but I would have thought you wouldn’t do something so incredibly stupid!”

“I’m a Rebel, Father; we make risky decisions all the time! Besides, how was I supposed to know you weren’t going to drop it as soon as you thought I was dead?”

“You are my son!”

“Yeah, and you’re a murderous Sith Lord who cut off my hand!”

“I already apologized, there is no point in dwelling on that further!”

“Oh you’re right, that’ll miraculously give me my hand back! How stupid of me.”

Vader made a sputtering noise that might have been amusing had it not come from one of the most dangerous men in the galaxy. He pointed his finger directly into his face. “This conversation is pointless. You will tell me where you are. Now.”

“No, I don’t think it is pointless! How did you even find out?”

Because he knew for certain that Leia had done her job well. She’d sounded so sure when she’d told him people believed his death, and it was obvious Vader believed it in the last few visions. So, what had changed?

Vader suddenly went silent, his hand dropping. Yet again, there was a warning in the Force. Something else had happened, something he wouldn’t like…

“Your…sister told me the truth.”

Luke blinked at him, his heated response dying on his lips.

Sister?

“I…don’t have a sister,” he started, genuinely confused. Was this supposed to be a trick? Was this yet another one of Vader’s ploys to somehow get him to join the Dark Side? He would know if he had a sister, someone would have told him by now…

But there was no lie in Vader’s words, and he shifted uncomfortably, his hands going to his hips as though he wasn’t sure what to do with them… “I was just as surprised as you are.” If Luke wasn’t mistaken, there was a slight edge of shame in his father’s voice. The behavior was so uncharacteristic of him, it confirmed he wasn’t lying.

Who?

The answer dawned on him, and a sick, twisted feeling settled in his gut.
Leia.

Who else knew the truth?

Besides that, she’d heard him when he called for her on Bespin. And somehow, he’d known to call for her. Out of everyone he’d grown close to, it was her he called, her he knew would answer him.

And on top of all that, she’d once made an offhand comment to him that she was adopted.

“*What have you done with Leia?!*”

Now it was Vader who took a step back at the flash of pure rage coming from his son. Luke didn’t care. He barely noticed. All of the pain, all of the exhaustion, melted away, and he saw red.

There was no way in hell Leia would ever cooperate with Vader, even to save his own life. Therefore that meant Vader had her, and he’d done something to her, and…

“She…” Vader trailed off, and Luke could sense him deciding what to do. Evidently, he hadn’t expected him to react this way. “She is safe on board the Executor. No harm has befallen her, I assure…”

“*Liar!*”

Even though distantly, he sensed the truth of Vader’s words, he didn’t give a damn. For all Vader was concerned she was unharmed, but this was coming from the guy who had chopped his son’s hand off and thought an apology would suffice. So the truth, as far as Luke was concerned, was a matter of perspective. He wasn’t interested in Vader’s.

“She is safe. I even freed Solo for her--”

“You mean you freed Han to use against her?!”

*Shit, shit, shit, shit, he has my friends, he has them, I’ve failed, they’re doomed and I can’t get off this kriffing planet without telling Vader…*

“That was not my intention--”

Clearly this conversation was *not* how his father expected it to go. Luke himself hadn’t thought his situation could get worse, but everything was falling apart and once again it was his father’s doing...

“*Bullshit! You used my friends to get me to come to Bespin! What, is this another ploy to get me to tell you where I am?!!*”

Nevermind that he didn’t even know, so if that was the case, he was even more screwed and his friends would pay the price and…

Vader tilted his head, then slowly said, “It wasn’t my intention this time, but if it works…”

Luke sputtered, a million angry responses wanting to be said, but he settled with: “Hell no!”

happened on Bespin.” Not that he wasn’t glad his father had changed his mind, because it was part of the reason why Lando had turned on Vader…

Naturally he wasn’t amused. “You are my son. And whether you like it or not, you are my priority. Your safety is my top concern, and I know you’re in danger. I can feel it! So you will cease this foolishness and tell me where you are!”

Luke snorted. “I have zero reason to believe you.”

Vader’s answering snarl would have sent most men running for the hills, but not Luke. He simply glared, staring the Sith Lord down in challenge, anger and terror for his best friend and his apparent sister blossoming in his chest.

“Did your aunt and uncle raise you to be so obstinate?!” Vader demanded. “Did they teach you to care so little about your life?!”

“Don’t you dare bring them into this! They were better guardians than you ever could have been!”

“Well it’s the only sensible reason that you’d refuse my help!”

Luke laughed bitterly. “Oh, let’s count the reasons, shall we?”

“Young One, if you bring up the hand again–”

“Oh look, there’s one reason!” Luke held up a finger and began tallying them out, “My aunt and uncle were murdered…”

“I had nothing to do with that!”

“…by stormtroopers looking for the droids, which was technically your order, wasn’t it?” Vader was silent, and again Luke could feel him glaring. “You tortured Leia. You were supportive of a weapon that destroys entire planets, you chased us all over the galaxy, murdering literally thousands of people, you…”

“Again, is there a point?”

“The point is that I can’t trust anything you say!” Luke shouted.

Force, when was the last time he’d been this angry? Bespin?

“I am aware that I have done things you don’t agree with, but that is no reason to refuse help…”

“Fine, you want a reason?” He was shaking now. Could Vader tell? He didn’t give a damn. “My entire life, all I ever wanted was my father! I didn’t care if he was some cargo pilot or a daring Jedi. I wanted someone who would understand me! Who would want to go on adventures together! Someone I could trust! Then you finally come along, and not only are you a murderous Sith Lord, but the only reason you want anything to do with me is because you want me to use my power to help you overthrow the guy you sold your soul to!”

“That is... not... I…that’s not what…” Again, his father sounded uncharacteristically taken aback.

Luke sneered. “Really? Join me or be destroyed. That’s basically what you told me.”

“The Jedi are weak. They were destroyed. Do you know how many wannabe Jedi have tried to overthrow the Empire? They all failed. Why would I want that for my son?” He sounded so logical, like a twisted version of a concerned parent. And yet…
“If you found out about me, and found out I didn’t have any Force abilities, would you have wanted me?”

It was a question he himself had refused to ask himself, because somehow, the answer could be so much more devastating than anything else. He waited, hardly breathing, while Vader stood there, for once speechless.

“You are Force sensitive. You wouldn’t have survived this long if you weren’t. So it has little to do with anything.”

And even though he was furious, even though he told himself he wanted nothing to do with his father, he still felt like he’d been gutted. He felt as if the abyss of Cloud City was swallowing him whole all over again, and this time he’d keep falling, falling...

“Well.” He couldn’t yell anymore. His voice was quiet. Too quiet. “I guess I have my answer, then.”

“I am a Sith, I am not here to coddle you or pretend to be someone you want me to be.”

“You are my father.” Luke backed up a step. He needed to get out. It didn’t matter anymore that some stupid monster probably was honing in on him that very moment, (though that was still a concern). He needed to get away. From him. “It’s obvious being enslaved to the Dark Side is more important to you than anything else.”

There was a spike of fury in the Force. “You know nothing of slavery.”

He ignored him, focusing instead on trying to push himself out of the dream. He imagined himself opening his eyes to see the room inside of the ship, smelling leaking engine oil and moss and…

“If you won’t tell me,” Vader warned, “I will hunt you down. One way or another, you will be mine!”

And even though Luke was stranded, injured, and hunted, he smiled bitterly.

“Come and get me then,” he challenged…

Just as he finally broke through the vision and woke up gasping, his entire body coated in sweat.

Darth Vader emerged from his vision with a furious roar...or it would have been, had he not been sitting in his meditation pod with his helmet off. Without the helmet and the vocoder within it, his raw, burnt vocal cords made it sound far weaker than it was meant to be.

It only served to infuriate him more, and he slammed a little too hard on the switch to bring his helmet back down, breaking it. Instead of smoothly being lowered onto his head, the claw released the helmet abruptly, and it was only his quick reflexes that caught it before it hit him in the head.

He wasn’t enslaved.

That, even more so than Luke’s idiotic refusal to tell him where he was and the fact that his son had lied to him, infuriated him more than anything else.

He fastened the helmet back over his head before opening the pod and swirling around in his chair, his fists tightening on the armrests as he used the Force to punch in a call to the bridge.
A young cadet answered. “Yes, Lord Vader…?” he began, but was cut off as Vader immediately began choking him. In the background, Piett hurriedly made his way over in a misguided attempt to save the young cadet who’d done nothing wrong except be in the wrong place at the wrong time…

_He wasn’t a slave._ He was Darth Vader, second most powerful man in the galaxy, soon to be the _most_ powerful, and when he found his son he’d make sure he didn’t forget that….

“Lord Vader?” Piett was too late. By the time he’d reached the comm, the cadet had fallen off screen. Dead. Though Piett’s face was as controlled as ever, Vader could still feel his pity for the cadet and curiosity for what had put the Dark Lord in such a bad mood.

_He wasn’t a slave._ How _dare_ the boy suggest such a thing?!

He’d find him. He didn’t know exactly where he was, but Vrogas Vas was in the sector Artoo had traced the comm message to.

“Set a course for Vrogas Vas.” Vader demanded.

Piett blinked, surprised. There was no reason to return to that planet, but Vader wouldn’t explain to the Admiral. At least, not publicly. He might have to explain eventually that Luke Skywalker wasn’t dead but…

If there was one good thing about this whole mess, it was that the Emperor thought Luke was dead. Now, when he found his son, he wouldn’t be forced to turn him over. He’d have time to convince him that the Dark Side was more powerful, that he wasn’t _enslaved_…

“Yes, Lord Vader. Should we inform the rest of the 501st?”

“No. Tell them they are to continue going after the Rebellion. We will join up with them soon enough.” He cut the feed as soon as Piett acknowledged the order…and then slumped forward, placing his head in his hands.

He wasn’t a slave. He had no master.

And yet…

Sidious’ hooded, wrinkled face appeared in his mind. Smiling sickly as he watched him kneel before him…

He stood, pushing the image out of his mind, willing himself to forget what Luke had said…

But the entire conversation played in his head, over and over again.

He swept out of the room, not sure where he was going, only that he needed to move. He needed to _do_ something.

He shouldn’t have been surprised when he ended up at Leia’s door.

She barely looked up when he entered. One of the droids had apparently come in and cleaned up the mess that he’d left behind, and the entrance room was completely bare of furniture. Leia sat on the floor, eating a sandwich that had evidently been brought to her.

“What have you fed Han?”

The first words out of her mouth. And yet they broke him out of the spiraling repeat of Luke’s
words in his head, replacing them with irritation. “Of course he’s been fed.”

Actually, he had no idea if the droids had brought the smuggler food. He’d only ordered them to bring food to Leia...he hadn’t expected to keep the smuggler this long.

“Don’t forget to tell the droids to feed him.” Leia glared.

“He will be set free soon enough. He can go get himself food.”

“He’s not going to leave me. I already told you.”

He opened his mouth to argue...then shut it, overcome with a sense of exhaustion all of a sudden. “I didn’t come here to argue,” he said, walking to the view port. Staring out at the stars frequently calmed him, at least enough to handle things...somewhat civilly.

“Then what did you come in here for?” Leia asked suspiciously. “You made it pretty clear you didn’t want my help.”

He hadn’t quite said that...but he supposed he had implied as much. He was still furious with what she’d done. It reminded him far too much of what Obi-Wan had once done to him; pretending to die, not telling him it was for a mission, letting him suffer and go through the pain of losing him...

“Why would Luke go back to Vrogas Vas?” he asked, letting that memory fade away.

Leia considered. “He originally went seeking answers. Obi-Wan left him journals and mentioned a Jedi temple there.”

“I had it destroyed after our confrontation.” Not just because he’d had an obligation to destroy the temple, but because he hadn’t cared to hear voices of the past. Hadn’t wanted to feel that guilt.

It was a useless distraction.

“Maybe he didn’t know that,” Leia replied.

“What answers would he be looking for?”

Leia hesitated, and he turned to her, about to remind her that any information she had would be information he’d need to find him, but she answered before he did. “He was probably looking for answers about you.”

_My entire life, all I ever wanted was my father!_  

Luke’s words echoed in his head, and his fists clenched.

“It isn’t my fault Luke had such unrealistic expectations,” he snapped, turning back to glare out at the stars. “That’s on him!”

“Um,” Leia said, “I never said anything about that.”

He rolled his eyes. “Sometimes when I meditate, because of the bond that exists between Luke and I, I can...connect with him.”

She was silent for a moment. Then, “You can what?” she breathed, standing up abruptly. “Did you just see him? Is he okay? Did he tell you where he was? Did...”

She continued asking questions and he slowly turned to look at her. Again, he was reminded that as
twins, and Force sensitive ones at that, they probably were close in ways he couldn’t even fathom. Luke had figured out Leia’s identity as his sister quickly, then he’d exploded.

Certainly, he’d seen Luke angry-- he’d even wanted him to get angry-- but he hadn’t expected...that. And now Leia was yet again willing to talk to him and ignore her deep burning hatred if it meant finding her brother.

“Your attachment to your brother could be used against you. Be careful,” he observed warily, and Leia’s expression became guarded again. Suspicious.

“Is that a threat?”

He sighed, a headache blossoming in his head. His children would be the death of him; he was certain of it. “No. I am merely reminding you to be cautious. If the Emperor were to ever find out…”


“I...don’t know,” he answered, truthfully. “The Force tells me he’s in danger, but he refuses to tell me anything.”

She winced. “Well...I’m glad he’s so stubborn, but now really isn’t a great time for that, is it?”

“If you asked me, I’d say both of you are too stubborn for your own good.”

“I think I could say the same of you.”

Yes, that was true. It was as if the Force had taken his and Padme’s stubbornness and shoved it into both of his children. It must have been a cruel punishment for all the wrong he’d done.

Outside, the stars suddenly elongated and they found themselves staring at the swirls of hyperspace. “So, are we headed to Vrogas Vas then?” Leia asked.

“Yes.”

“Do you...think we’ll find anything?”

“It is not a matter of a presence of physical evidence. The Force will be my guide.” Because surely, if Luke wanted to keep people thinking he was dead, he wouldn’t have left obvious signs behind. He’d need to rely on the Force, and given how...connected Vrogas Vas was to the light side of the Force, he would be lying if he said he wasn’t apprehensive of what he might see. He’d never admit that to Leia, though.

They stood there, staring silently out the view port. It struck him that this was the calmest moment he’d ever had with his daughter.

“Did he...really look up to me?” he suddenly asked.

“Not you, specifically. Let’s be clear on that.” He waited for her to continue, and she sighed. “It’s not abnormal for kids who don’t know their parents to imagine what they’d be like. Lots of orphans dream of finding belonging with their biological parents.”

He didn’t ask if she ever thought that way. He had a feeling he already knew the answer. “It would be easier if Luke just told me where he was. How do I get him to do that?”

Leia snorted. “Yeah, he’s got a million reasons not to tell you.” She paused. “Maybe...maybe I
could try?”

He tensed, the vision from Dagobah replaying in his mind. Leia’s gold eyes...her hatred towards him...Luke throwing himself between them and getting himself killed…

“No.”

Under normal circumstances, Leia would be an ideal candidate for becoming a Sith. Maybe even more so than Luke. She had the temperament and the dedication, plus her quick wit would be a serious advantage. She wasn’t a senior member of the Rebellion just because she was raised by the Organas. But if she turned against him, and Luke got in the way…

He couldn’t stand the thought.

“If it helps find Luke quicker…” she tried again but he held up a hand.

“I said no.”

Her brows pulled together, and he could feel her confusion, surprise and disappointment through the Force. “I would have thought you’d jump at the opportunity.”

“Do you want to be a Sith?”

“No, but I know that meditation thing doesn’t just belong to the Sith. Luke does it too.”

He cringed at her terming meditation as that meditation thing but he held his ground, the images from his vision still fresh in his head. “No.”

She sighed. “Then let’s hope you can find him in time.”

“I will,” he promised, even as he checked on the bond he had with Luke. The sense of danger hadn’t passed, and he felt a distant sense of panic down it. His throat tightened.

Foolish, foolish boy.

He would find him. Whether Luke liked it or not, he’d find him, and when he did, he’d lock the boy up somewhere he wouldn’t be a danger to himself. Then...then he’d work to change his perspective of the Dark Side.

Enslaved. He wasn’t enslaved.

He told himself that...and refused to consider anything else. Because if he was, if that was the case…

No. He wouldn’t consider it.

So instead he stood there with his daughter, silently staring into the lines of hyperspace.

Chapter End Notes

All Darth Vader wants his is babies... and he's so bad at expressing that to them. I freaking love this train wreck of a family. But at least he got a somewhat calm moment with his daughter? Progress is very tinie, tiny baby steps for this family. Also, I told
you I was back in the swing of things! :D
The song for this chapter is Dark Matter by Les Friction.
Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader22
Vader was coming.

That sentence repeated over and over, a death knell that rang deep in his very core.

It was over. He was a hunted man again.

Worse, Vader had his friends--no, it was worse than that, he had his sister, Leia was his sister and there wasn’t anything he could do, nothing--

Panic was what drove him to his one good leg. Panic was what had him hobbling out wildly into the forest, monster be damned.

He didn’t know where he was going. He didn’t care.

Vader was coming.

He was pissed and he was coming and he had his friends…

At some point he scooped up a long piece of shrapnel, using it as a makeshift walking stick. It barely helped. His lungs instantly burned, his ribs strained, his head pounded, his shoulder screamed, and his stupid leg was little better than lead.

He needed to get out. He needed to escape. There had to be sentient life somewhere on the planet, right? He couldn’t be the only one there. He couldn’t.

And even if he was, maybe there used to be someone. Maybe they’d left equipment behind and he could get a signal out to the Alliance. He’d have some explaining to do and he didn’t know what the hell to say, but he could recover, then go after his friends…

And either way, he’d come face to face with him.

With Vader.

He tried to hobble faster, as if he were already hot on his trail. He imagined the chill of the Dark Side enveloping him possessively, refusing to let go, forcing him to submit or be killed.

He wouldn’t do it. He couldn’t. He’d die before he did.

He barely noticed where he was going. He barely felt branches tearing into his skin, tangling into his hair.

He simply panicked, trying to get anywhere he could that was out of Vader’s reach.

It all came crumbling down when his good foot snagged on a root and he went crashing forward,
the piece of shrapnel falling from his hand as the ground rushed up to meet his face. Sharp, violent pain flooded his senses as his broken leg hit the ground and stabbed into the waiting rocks. Momentarily, his vision blackened, his breath leaving his lungs in a *whoosh*, and when it cleared he realized he was screaming into the mud.

Pathetic.

The word clanged through him, not spoken in his voice, but Vader’s. When Vader found him (not *if*, he knew that now), he’d find him in his sorry state and the first word out of his stupid mask would be *pathetic*.

Because he *was* pathetic. He didn’t even remember all the details regarding how he’d ended up like this in the first place, but it didn’t matter. He couldn’t walk. He could barely use his left arm. He was exhausted, hungry, *thirsty*, and he hadn’t had a shower in Force knew how long. Who knew how long it would take Vader to find him?

By then, if he hadn’t died from getting eaten or the inability to survive with his injuries, he’d probably be in an even worse state.

Pathetic.

He lay there for a while, breathing heavily, until panic slowly began to subside and he was left numb.

What was he *doing*?

He looked up, taking in the forest around him. Trees. Trees as far as the eye could see. He could barely see sunlight drifting through the canopy above. He could hear birds and...and was that… monkey howls?

He couldn’t be sure. He’d never actually seen in real life anything but Kowakian monkey lizards that Jabba’s goons liked to keep around, but he’d seen other types of monkeys in holo dramas.

And then there was something else. Fainter, and familiar. A trickling sound, like water gently running over a bed of rocks...

*Water.*

He was struggling back to his one good leg and moving before he consciously thought to do it. *Water.* Rule number two of survival. He still had water, but when he ran out? He’d be in trouble.

He reached a little stream minutes later, and collapsed beside it, dunking his hands in and splashing cool, clear liquid over his face. He groaned, splashing more, then began scrubbing at the dirt and dried blood.

It wasn’t much. But oh, it was *something*.

And as he did, his head cleared just a bit more, his panic subsiding to a dull throb. His eyes focused on his right hand, the synth-skin wet, and frowned.

Being out here, it no longer looked so new. The skin had dirt caked into the microscopic imitation of pores and under his nails. The skin was still a smidge too light, and probably always would be, but it looked less alien.
He clenched it, willing himself to ignore the resentment that swelled in his breast.

Yes, his father was coming for him. Yes, he’d probably capture him. Yes, he’d probably try to force him to turn to the Dark Side, and he’d probably turn him in to the Emperor.

But he had time. Time to heal. Time to figure out where to go. And if he couldn’t escape...he had time to prepare himself for whatever Vader had in store for him. Running wildly through the forest on an unknown planet with a monster lurking somewhere nearby wasn’t his best move, and now he had to hope he could figure out how to get back to shelter before dark. He probably hadn’t gone far, but it was still a stupid move.

He looked down at the stream, wishing he’d brought the filtration container he’d found and cursing his stupidity, before reluctantly getting back up and heading back the way he was pretty sure he’d come.

Darth Vader was coming...but he had time.

He took a deep breath.

He had time.

---

He didn’t know why he’d agreed to let Leia come along. Considering she was still part of Rebel High Command and it was her fault they had to hunt Luke down in the first place, he should have kept her locked in her room. And yet he didn’t put up enough of a fight when she demanded she go with him. If Sidious had witnessed their pitiful argument, he’d have accused Vader of going soft.

He wasn’t soft. He wasn’t enslaved. He just...still felt guilty about almost strangling his only daughter and needed to make it up to her. The best way to do that would be to let her feel like she was contributing to the search for her brother.

That, and he didn’t want her and the smuggler to somehow reunite while he was away. He highly doubted it would happen, given the security on both of their rooms...but chasing Luke had taught him not to underestimate his children when they wanted something.

“So, what, you’re just going to walk around...feeling for Luke?” Leia asked skeptically when they’d landed outside of the buried Jedi temple. She was frowning at the endless sand and rocky cliffs through his shuttle’s view port.

“Meditation is not...” he began irritably, but broke off. Technically, to someone who hadn’t ever meditated in the Force before, it must have seemed exactly like that. So instead he settled with, “It’s more complicated than that.”

“Kind of convenient to have a built-in tracker. Can you track everyone this way?”

He looked up at the ceiling of the shuttle as he switched the engines off. Why? Why did she suddenly want to know so much about the Force? Why couldn’t he have found out her relationship to him and therefore her Force sensitivity before he’d had that stupid vision?

“Sometimes, if they leave enough physical evidence behind.”

“You said Luke probably didn’t.”

“He’s different.”
“Because he’s your son?”

He wondered if he was ever this inquisitive. Surely this was a trait from her mother? Or perhaps Organa had taught her to never stop asking questions even at the most inopportune moments?

He didn’t want to know the answer to that.

“Because he is my son,” he confirmed, standing and striding for the already opening ramp.

“Does that mean you could track me…?”

“Leia!” he snapped, and when she flinched he struggled to calm himself before continuing on. “I need to be able to concentrate. This trail is old. If you want to ask appropriate questions later, you may do so after we know where to go next.”

He half expected her to argue (which probably would have resulted in him losing his temper, despite his best efforts), but she tilted her head with a frown. “Fine. But we’re not done with this conversation.”

Of course they weren’t.

He rolled his eyes and strode down the ramp. “Keep up,” he growled without turning around, but it turned out he didn’t have to. She was already hot on his heels, her determination bleeding into the Force.

Well. It was better than her normal hatred of him.

As they continued over the buried temple, he could feel the Light Side whispering on the edges of his consciousness. He scowled, pushing back at it. Even destroyed this place reeked of Jedi.

“This place…” Leia said, almost breaking his concentration. “It...it feels weird. What is it?”

“What did I say about questions?”

“I know it’s just...Is this what the Force feels like?”

He stopped in his tracks, turning to point at her. “Let me be clear. You will not follow your brother’s foolish path and become a Jedi.”

Leia raised an unamused brow, looking from his finger to him. “So this is the Light Side, then.”

“It is weak. There is a reason the Jedi were so easily destroyed. I will not have that for either of my children.”

It was an order, and yet Leia simply rolled her eyes and walked past him. Unfazed. “Lucky for you, I’m not interested in changing my occupation.”

“Your current occupation as a Rebel is also not acceptable,” he growled, following after her. He caught up in a matter of strides. Force, she was so short…

“I meant as a senator. You know. Democracy? Ever heard of it?”

He attempted to ignore her. He was not interested in political conversation. Not with anyone, but least of all her. It was as if he was talking to…

“Oh wait, you’ve definitely heard of it, since you were married to Padme Amidala, the greatest
champion of…”

He stopped cold.

It was difficult to breathe.

His fingers twitched, the Force rising to his call, begging to be used, begging to crush whoever had brought her up--

“Do not speak of her!”

His voice thundered, and yet it seemed to be sucked up by the sand surrounding them.

Again, he watched Leia flinch, but when she turned to face him, she was as cool and collected as ever. He swallowed thickly, struck once more by how similar she was to her mother...but with Anakin’s temperament mixed in.

“She’s my mother. I have a right to know about her.”

She was technically right. She did have a right to know about her real mother, just as she should have been told about him...just as she should have been his from the moment of her birth.

Just as Luke should have been.

And yet...here…

The Light Side of the Force seemed to shine brighter even at the mention of her. The whispers grew louder, threatening to breach his defences, and…

“Go back to the ship!” he ordered. There was no room for argument. He needed to get away from this conversation. He needed to stop looking at Leia, needed to forget…

Leia crossed her arms, glaring. “I want to help.”

He snarled in frustration, wanting to argue, knowing it wouldn’t do any good. He needed to get away, needed to... “Fine! Go...go look for signs your brother might have left behind.”

“But you said…”

“Forget what I said! Just...do it!”

Literally. Anyone else in this position would be dead. She was on thin ice. He was going to snap, he…

“Fine. But I’m not going to let this go.”

He didn’t respond. He simply turned and started walking away. He was distantly aware that he probably looked a little like he was running away from her and the conversation...but he would figure out a way to answer her.

Just...not here. Not now.

Not without a plan...and the ability to retreat easily to the cold comfort of the Dark Side.

He pressed deeper into the temple, a headache beginning to form. He’d made sure to destroy the ruins before he’d left last time, and by now the sand had swallowed the rubble up completely. Yet
he could still feel the Force as strongly as the first time, growing brighter and more annoying the further he went, until he’d reached what would have been the center of the temple complex. Right over its beating heart.

It pulsed through him, warring against the darkness he had become. You don’t belong here, it whispered, not anymore. Not since…

An echo of a lightsaber and blaster bolts. Children screaming: why, why did you betray us…?

He clenched his teeth, shoving the whispers away.

“I know I am not welcome here. I do not come because I want to.”

Perhaps it was good he’d left Leia behind. He didn’t feel like explaining why he was talking to voices she probably couldn’t hear yet.

Yet.

The Force seemed to latch onto the thought of his daughter, and before he could stop it, an image appeared—a mirage, wavering slightly in the heat. A little girl, her dark hair in buns, holding a stuffed loth wolf, staring up at him with large, innocent dark eyes.

Padme’s eyes.

Were we so different than your children? Would you kill them too at your master’s orders?

His chest tightened, and violently he shoved back until the image of his daughter disappeared.

“I am not here to debate. I am looking for my son. I know he came here.”

Another image appeared, this time of a little boy. Undoubtedly, it was his son, clutching a toy sky hopper, his blond hair disheveled and full of sand. As Luke grinned, showing off a missing front tooth, Vader’s stomach clenched.

He came here, the Force confirmed. Mocking, though it sounded as annoyingly serene as ever.

“I know that.” He’d forgotten how annoying the light could be. How cryptic. “I need to know where he went.”

Whispers hissed across the sand, and the image of the small boy disappeared, only to be replaced by his adult son.

If Vader could have, he would have stopped breathing.

This wasn’t the Luke he knew.

The boy before him was a shadow of his former self. His hair was dyed brown, his eyes a murky color from the colored contacts, so he assumed this was what Luke had looked like the second time he’d come here. His expression, normally so bright and innocent even when grim and determined, was twisted in pain.

Not physical pain, but another kind.

Shadows etched themselves under his eyes, and he’d clearly lost weight; he looked smaller than he usually did. As a result, the shirt he was wearing looked too big.
In his visions with Luke, he saw the boy as he’d known him. Leia had thrown this reality into his face before, but seeing it…

*This is what you did to him,* the Force whispered. *This is what you’d turn him into.*

No.

This wasn’t what he’d wanted.

He’d wanted Luke to be happy his father was alive. He’d expected him to join him once he saw how much more powerful the Dark Side was.

Maybe the boy would go back to normal once he accepted his fate. He had to believe that.

And yet, looking into the mirage’s eyes…

The pain there reflected his own. And he found...he found he didn’t like it.

“I need to know where he went.”

He didn’t have it in him to push the image away, but oh he wanted to. He couldn’t confront...couldn’t confront what he’d done to his son, what had made the boy agree to his sister’s foolish plan…

“You will find no answers here, Vader.”

That voice.

His lightsaber was in his hand and ignited even before he whirled, bringing it up to the ghostly neck of none other than the condescending face of Kenobi.

The man standing before him was not the frail old man he’d destroyed on the Death Star. No. Kenobi was there, glowing, as young as the day he’d left Vader to burn on the shores of Mustafar. He wore that stupid Jedi robe, that same *holier-than-thou* expression, his beard streaked with gray. His arms were crossed over his chest, and he stared at him with sickening *pity*.

Hate blacker than the color of his suit seeped into his heart. “Kenobi,” he spat.

“Hello, Vader,” Kenobi replied, unfazed. “What are you going to do with that lightsaber? Poke me with it?”

He clenched his teeth so hard his jaw hurt. He refused to admit he had a point.

He was already dead. There was nothing Vader could do to him.

“Your death was far too quick.”

“That’s not *my* fault. Even now, after all these years, you’re still too quick to act. Look at the consequences.” He gestured toward where the image of Luke stood.


“I’m not the one who showed up here wanting something.”

He seriously considered stabbing at the apparition anyway.
“You took my son from me. Lied to him about me. About who he is. Who he was meant to be.”

Kenobi shook his head, that stupid pity lining his face. “Luke wanted to become a Jedi like his father.”

“He didn’t know the truth.” If he’d known his father was a Sith from the start, perhaps convincing him would have been easier. He might have shown up himself to offer his allegiance, his skills… His love.

“You don’t know the boy. Luke is his mother’s son. He will never turn, regardless of how you may tempt and threaten him.”

Padme’s face flashed in his mind. Her accusing eyes as she begged him to turn from his path, a path he’d taken to save her, and she’d betrayed him… Because of Kenobi.

“Don’t you ever mention her!”

Kenobi stared at him for a moment, shaking his head. “You will not find your answers here. I won’t allow it.”

He took a threatening step forward, which only seemed to amuse the ghost. “You won’t allow it?! You have no power to do that!”

“On the contrary,” Kenobi drawled, “This is a Jedi temple. You are trespassing, and if it is within my power, I will protect the boy.”

“He will die!” Even in the depth of his anger, he still had room to panic. This was his only lead. His son was in danger. It was a knowledge that beat into him every moment he couldn’t find him.

“Better to die than turn into you.”

He threw his lightsaber at the ghost. As he knew it would, it passed right through him.

Kenobi shook his head again. “But in all honesty, he’ll find his way out. He’s resourceful.”

“If you want to protect him so damn much,” Vader hissed, calling his now turned-off lightsaber back into his hand, “then perhaps instead of wasting my time you should be helping him.”

Kenobi said nothing to this, though he was sure his eyes darkened with…something.

“You will find nothing here,” he repeated. “Leave. If you care about your children, you will let Leia go as well.”

“Never.”

Nonetheless, it was clear there was nothing he would be able to learn the more he stayed here. It was a Jedi place.

A Sith was not welcome, even when looking to help a Jedi.

He should have known.

He’d need to find another way. What, he didn’t know, but he wasn’t going to figure it out with
Kenobi’s ghost taunting him.

He’d killed him far too quickly.

“We’re done here.” Vader turned on his heel and began to storm away.

He expected that to be the end of it. It was obvious Kenobi didn’t want him there anymore than he wanted him around. But as he stormed from the temple, Kenobi’s voice stopped him cold.

“She didn’t betray you.”

He was frozen. Hatred and sorrow choked him. Her eyes as she was strangled haunted him. The betrayal in them had always made him scoff—she’d betrayed him. As much as he loved her, she had no right to look at him that way…

“She refused to help me find you. She wanted to protect you, even after I told her what you’d done,” Kenobi continued on, each word a knife in his chest. “She didn’t know I snuck on board her ship.”

The look of horror on her face when he’d accused her of lying. She’d whirled, saw Kenobi standing on the ramp of her ship, shouted no…

He’d been too far gone. Even now, as much as he’d regretted lashing out at her, he’d always thought…

He wanted to accuse Kenobi of lying. But there was truth in his words.

She hadn’t betrayed him.

She’d been sincere. Foolish, but sincere.

And he’d rewarded her by strangling her while she was heavily pregnant with his children.

“How?” he asked, intending to finally know how she died, but when he turned around, he was alone. The Force was silent and Kenobi’s ghost was gone, just as quickly as he’d come.

If anything, he was left with fewer answers than he’d come with.

For once, he wished the sand beneath his feet would swallow him whole.

Chapter End Notes

Me while writing this chapter: "YOU get angst, and YOU get angst....ERREBODY GETS ANGST!!!"
(TBH, that's probably me every chapter...)
But my favorite part to write this chapter was probably Vader and Leia. Vader's learned the ways of the Jedi. He's learned the ways of the Sith. Now he must learn the hardest job of all: the ways of the DAD.
The song for Luke: The Sound of Silence by Disturbed
Song for Vader's: The Mourning Tree by Jessica Curry
Leave some love!
Love,
He’d finally been able to get some rest.  
Some. Not a lot. But it was better than nothing.  
The night had been blessedly uneventful, though he stayed up throughout it anyway. He’d had to slap himself a few times, but it worked. At least, until just before dawn, when he’d unwillingly fallen into a fitful slumber.  
Yet his sleep wasn’t invaded by another Force vision with his father.  
At first he’d thought it was a good thing. But then he realized he likely wasn’t meditating because he was looking for him.  
So his dreams were filled with over-the-top nightmares about his father anyway. Sometimes he was back on Cloud City, having forgotten his lightsaber; sometimes he could hear his breathing throughout and around the ship, taunting him before the breathing turned into the monstrous roars of the creature.  
And sometimes his father simply entered his shelter, took one long look at him and scoffed.  
*Pathetic.*  
Eventually he couldn’t take it anymore and, ignoring his aching, exhausted body, he grabbed the water filtration bottle and a makeshift walking stick he’d worked on since he last left and headed out.  
It should have been a simple task, going to and from the stream with clean water, but it took the majority of the afternoon. Several times, he had to stop and catch his breath, or wait until pain subsided. But being able to fill empty containers with clean water was enough to motivate him to keep going.  
The sky was just starting to turn orange when it happened.  
He’d reached shelter, leaning down carefully to pour the contents into his last jug, when the Force shrieked danger. Reacting on instinct even as he pushed the feeling away, he dropped the bottle, his good hand reaching to his waistband where he’d stuffed the dead pirate’s blaster, and clumsily spun around.  
Just in time to see a black, horned, dog-like creature come barreling towards him at full speed, fangs bared.  
He fired twice, his first shot missing, the second hitting the creature dead between the eyes. It collapsed and rolled, stopping just at his feet. A terrible, foul stench rose up from the creature, and
up close he realized that instead of fur, it was covered in scales.

He didn’t have time to examine it further, though. More came bursting through the foliage, and he was firing again. Though he’d had plenty of practice shooting without the use of the Force, he wished he didn’t have to now. But he couldn’t risk it, not when he knew the Creature would likely sense it and come back.

If it already hadn’t…

He killed one, then another. A fourth dog skidded and changed direction, prowling along the edges of the encampment, saliva dripping from its maw. Luke kept his eyes on it, resisting the urge to reach into the Force to look for others. He wasn’t sure what species this was, but he did know predatory dogs tended to hunt in packs. How big was this pack? Had he killed most of them, or were there others circling around?

He hobbled until he could lean against the ship, protecting his back. The dog-thing hadn’t stopped stalking back and forth, growling hungrily as it eyed Luke.

“What the hell is with this place and wanting me to get eaten?!” he grumbled under his breath. His grip tightened on his blaster.

He could kill the thing, but…it wasn’t attacking. He wasn’t an expert in all things Jedi by any means, but he had a feeling he’d know what Yoda would say if he were there.

*Kill, a Jedi does not, unless absolutely necessary.*

Or...something like that.

*You are not a Jedi yet,* Vader’s mocking voice drifted back to him.

A Jedi might not kill the dog unless necessary, but Vader wouldn’t hesitate. A Sith would neutralize the dog before it decided to attack him again.

Actually, now that he thought about it, Han would too. Most people would. It made sense. What if the dog decided to leave and find more friends?

Yet even with his finger over the trigger...he couldn’t pull it. Not while it just prowled around.

He wished, more than anything, that he could freely seek guidance from the Force.

But the Force, evidently, was not keen on being ignored. Once more, against his wishes, he felt it flare in warning, this time from above him. He gasped, turning, pointing his blaster up…

Too late.

A blur of fangs, horns and scales came crashing down on top of him, claws digging into his chest. He screamed as his back hit the ground, his shoulder exploding, his vision blackening…

When it cleared, a fifth dog lay limp on top of him, jaw hinged open at an unnatural angle, yellow eyes unseeing. His blaster was still shoved into its chest, black blood oozing from the bolt Luke had instinctively given it as he’d gone down. Somewhere, distantly, he heard the whining of the other dog…

Then he felt the ground rumble once.

Twice.
Footsteps.

He knew those footsteps, and evidently the other dog did too, because it whined once more and scampered off into the underbrush.

But those thundering steps still came towards him.

Biting his lip to keep from screaming, he used his good arm to push the dog’s corpse off him. Then, he held his breath and unhooked the claws from his chest, blood instantly pooling out. He closed his eyes, using all of his strength to keep from making more than a pained groan, then rolled over.

The creature was so close now that he could hear branches snapping and cracking behind it. Panic overwhelmed him. He didn’t know what it was yet, but he didn’t have the luxury of finding out, especially now. There wasn’t any time to attempt to stand, or even to figure out how to balance on his one good leg and arm and crawl, so he just began pushing and dragging himself as fast as he could into the ship.

Blood smeared through his shirt and into the mud, then across steel when he finally managed to slip in. He didn’t stop, dragging himself deeper inside. His shoulders screamed and burned; his right arm felt like it was going to fall off from dragging his whole weight. Occasionally his foot would accidentally brush against his splint, and blackness would edge around his vision, but he refused to let himself pass out.

Not now. Not now!

Finally he managed to roll around a corner at the furthest end of the ship, swallowed almost completely in shadows. Now he did force himself to struggle upright, his good hand reaching up to apply pressure on the claw marks in his chest. Blood still oozed between his fingers. He needed to examine them and get bacta patches on them as soon as possible, but…

He carefully peeked around the corner…and abruptly pulled back.

The creature was right there.

He hadn’t seen much, not enough to identify it, but he’d certainly seen enough to confirm his worst suspicions.

There had been claws as long as his leg. And a scarred snout pressed against the ground, baring teeth as long as his forearm.

Frozen, barely breathing, he listened to it snuffle. Smelling the dead dogs he’d killed. Smelling his blood. Then a snarl that echoed through the ship made him jolt painfully, but he didn’t dare make a noise. Not this close.

Silence...followed by the ominous crunch of what Luke realized was bones as it started snacking on the corpses.

His mouth went dry, imagining getting caught by that thing...eaten…

That was the sound he’d make as the jaws closed around him…

Suddenly, Vader didn’t seem so bad.

In fact, he thought, hardly feeling his own body anymore, now would be a great time for him to
Instead, he was answered by a bone-splitting screech that made him yelp. He slammed his bloody hand over his mouth. The monster was trying to dig into the ship.

He didn’t dare move, hoping the sound of the creatures claws scraping against metal had covered his cry. The monster was too big to get inside, that much was obvious, but he also had no doubt it could tear it apart. The question was, how long would it take? Even his half of the ship wasn’t small, and it had been built to withstand atmospheric changes in space. It wouldn’t give easily but…

Eventually, it would.

The thing roared, and he squeezed his eyes shut, tears leaking down his dirt-smeared face.

It was about to be a long night.

Perhaps his last.

Vader was different.

Leia didn’t know how different, or even how she knew that, but...she could sense it.

Maybe it was a Force thing? That bond thing he’d told her about? The thought of sharing any bond with Vader made her sick to her stomach, and she wished she could somehow change whatever it was that gave her that connection...but the fact was, she could sense a change in Vader.

He was still a dark, cold, angry presence...but somehow, it seemed diminished. He hadn’t said much to her since he’d returned from wherever he’d gone in the temple. He didn’t say anything on the flight back to his personal hangar on the Executor, either. She asked questions, but she was met with either one word answers or silence broken only by his mechanical breathing.

When they landed, she decided to try to get him to react by pushing a button she knew would elicit a reaction. “So...can I see Han?”

As she expected, he twisted around in the pilots seat, his gaze zeroing in on her. “No.”

There. There was a little more of that cold fire she was used to from him. But...still a one word answer.

“Why not? I’ve been helping you--”

“Did you find anything of Luke?”

“No, but you said--”

“Then no. You can’t see the Smuggler.” He stood, and the ramp of the ship lowered...probably triggered by him using the Force on the switch. She wondered how often he did anything normal like opening a door with his hands.

Probably never.

She got up to follow. Now that she had him talking, maybe he would finally tell her what he
learned. “What about you? What did you find?”

Silence.

Maybe not.

They exited the ship, and she again scoured her mind for anything she could use to get him talking. It was a dangerous game, pushing Vader’s buttons, but she needed to know.

It was just as she was thinking this that her eyes caught sight of Luke’s X-Wing.

“You still have it?!” she gasped, forgetting that she was technically his prisoner and began making her way over to it.

But Vader didn’t stop her. She could feel his eyes on her as she approached the familiar ship, could feel him watch her closely as she reached up to touch the nose.

“I thought you would have destroyed it.”

Vader made a noise. “No.”

“Why?” She ducked underneath, keeping her hand on the outer shell, examining the parts.

A pause. “Do you...have interest in mechanics?”

She snorted. “Not like Luke, no. But I know enough. Han’s trusted me with working on the Falcon, and he doesn’t trust many—for good reason.” She thought back to Lando and Cloud City. He’d trusted Lando, and look where that had gotten them.

“Does Luke trust you to work on his ship?”

She shrugged, frowning as she bent to get a closer look. “I don’t know; he’s never mentioned it. But I did go with him to get parts once.” Her frown turned into a scowl and she ducked back to shoot Vader a glare. “What did you do?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“This ship has been gutted!”

“How do you think I found your base?” He crossed his arms defensively over his chest.

“I know, but you know Luke’s going to be pissed when he sees what you did, right?!” She took another look and groaned. “He worked so hard for those parts…”

“I thought he was dead,” he reminded her pointedly. “Besides, I can give him a better ship.”

“That’s not the point.”

“He shouldn’t be flying a Rebel’s ship…”

“It doesn’t matter!” She came back around, hands on her hips as she faced him down. “He loves that ship! It has nothing to do with it being Alliance-issued! Don’t you have any reverence for anything, or are you really more machine than man?!”

He was incredibly still.
Then, “I am a Sith.”

As if that explained it.

She shook her head in disgust. “What happened down there? What the hell is wrong with you?!”

“There is nothing wrong.”

“Liar!”

She watched his hands clench into fists...but somehow, even his rising fury didn’t feel the same. Something had definitely happened.

“This conversation is pointless. You will go back to your quarters.”

“And do what? Did you find where Luke is?!”

Silence. Again, that stupid silence. It was almost worse than him blowing up and threatening her. Almost.

“You didn’t find him,” she guessed.

He didn’t deny it. He simply stared at her.

“Is that why you’re in a weird mood?”

“I’m not...” He broke off...then turned to stare out at the stars. She’d noticed he seemed to do that, especially when he was trying to gather his thoughts or calm down. If she was honest with herself, it was a very Luke-like gesture, and it made her heart ache.

“I...was denied information,” he finally replied.

Well. Now they were getting somewhere. Though again, it sounded tied in with the Force, and she didn’t know more than what Luke and now Vader had told her.

She made a face, then asked, “What does that even mean?”

She should have gotten Yoda to tell her at least the basic rules of the Force.

“It means that because I am a Sith, and the Jedi Temple is full of the Light Side, I was denied answers to where Luke is.”

He was so bitter, it sent shivers up her spine. There. There was the angry Sith she knew.

“Is that the only reason you’re in such a bad mood?”

To her surprise, his shoulders slumped. “Young One, you are treading on thin ice.” But his voice didn’t have the same bite to it that it normally did.

She raised a brow at the expression of...endearment? She wasn’t sure. “I usually am.”

She turned back to Luke’s ship, the only thing she had left that had been truly his, and reached up to touch it again. She closed her eyes, letting the cool metal ground her. “If you can’t get an answer, why won’t you let me try?”

She expected him to give her the same stubborn answer, or even question if she was so eager to
join the Dark Side. But his answer was surprisingly honest. “I could train you to meditate. However, it has been so long since I meditated using the Light Side of the Force, I would end up training you to use the Dark Side. Is that what you want?”

She bit her lip. “No. Of course not.” She turned around again. “But isn’t that what you want?”

This time, he didn’t answer that.

“So what now?” she asked, a hollow feeling spreading through her chest. She was back where she started, no closer to Luke than she was before. “Can you do that Meditation Thing and talk to him? Maybe I could give you a message for him, to convince him to at least trust me if not you…”

“It will not work.”

She blinked, not missing the genuine bitterness and sorrow in those words. “Why the hell not?”

“Because any message I would give, he’d assume I did something terrible to you to get you to give it to me.”

She winced. “Well. He has a point…and I couldn’t just...learn meditation on my own?”

Now Vader met her gaze, appraising her. “Most Force Sensitives could not, no. But...as my daughter, probably. With time.”

And time wasn’t something they had much of.

“And there wasn’t anything else Luke might have said that you could use to convince him?” It was weird asking Darth Vader to convince Luke to do anything, but she was starting to get used to having abnormal interactions with him. “Anything?”

Vader stared at her for a long moment. Then, reluctantly, he admitted, “He asked me a question that I refused to answer.”

“That’s it?” It was so simple. Surely the guy who had manipulated Lando into turning on Han wouldn’t say whatever he needed to in order to get Luke to talk. “What was it?”

“He…” Pause. “He…he asked me if I’d want him even if he wasn’t Force sensitive.”

She blinked. It was such a simple question, and yet coming from Luke, she knew it was intimately personal. Her heart ached with sympathy, even as she wanted to strangle him for choosing to still pursue that connection he’d always wanted with his father.

Even with Vader, even after everything Vader had done, Luke wanted it.

No.

He needed it.

“Why didn’t you answer him?”

She already knew what Vader would say, but it didn’t make her any less furious when Vader replied stubbornly, “Because I am a Sith, and it is irrelevant. He is Force sensitive, and nothing will change that.”

She stared at Darth Vader for a good long moment. Then, quietly, she said, “You are a kriffing, idiotic nerf herder.”
Vader stepped back as if she’d hit him in the...well, helmet. “What did you say?!”

Finally. There was that barely controlled anger she knew so well. The air seemed to plummet in temperature, and she shivered, but she didn’t back down.

Instead, she swallowed the fear settling in her gut and moved forward...towards the Sith.

“How many times do I have to tell you?! Luke has wanted nothing but to have any kind of connection with you!”

“It is not my fault he had unrealistic expectations.”

Dismissal on the surface, and yet...

“But he had them! Fair or not, he had them, and you know what?! That’s kriffing normal for an orphan! Pretending it doesn’t exist doesn’t make how he felt about those expectations change!”

“I am a Sith--”

“You are a father first!”

She was standing right before him now, and though he was standing his ground, she still felt as if she was attacking a cornered animal.

She didn’t give a damn.

She pointed out towards space. “He is out there, in danger, and you are the only person capable of finding him! All he wants is some sort of acknowledgement that you want him because he is your son, not a stupid asset! And if you can’t do that because you only see him as an asset, then yeah, he’d probably rather die than let you help him!”

“I will not let him--” Vader tried again, lifting a finger into her face.

She pushed it away.

Dangerous. This was so dangerous.

She was beyond caring.

Her brother was out there, and she couldn’t do what was necessary to find him in time, and the person who could was Darth kriffing Vader and she was the only one who could maybe convince him to suck up his pride to help her brother…

An impossible task. But when had Leia Organa let that stop her?

“Do you know why I told you that I was your daughter?!”

Vader froze. She didn’t care why.

“Because Artoo showed me a holo of you and my mother! You told her we were a blessing!”

“Artoo did what?!”

She ignored the anger in his voice. “I wouldn’t have said anything if he hadn’t!”

“And you’d be dead--”
“The point still stands! At one point in your life you considered us to be a blessing! You are clearly not the same man who once said those words, but that’s the man who needs to step up and be the father Luke needs!”

“Anakin Skywalker is dead. He was weak. He...he couldn’t save Padme…”

There was no mistake. She could feel her father’s anguish like an old, festering wound.

Interesting. She’d never felt that from him before. She’d think about that later.

“I am not arguing for you to change who you are,” she didn’t even think that was possible, “but like it or not, you are a father. You don’t get to be selfish anymore! You have to swallow your stupid pride and answer Luke honestly, because you and I both know you didn’t answer because you didn’t want to admit that you want him, Force sensitive or not!”

The silence was so deafening, she swore her voice echoed throughout the hangar. She was practically chest to chest with the man, her hands on her hips, giving him her best nasty glare.

It was a challenge to deny it.

He didn’t.

“Sith...Sith don’t love,” he finally said. Though his voice modulator didn’t allow much emotion in his voice, she knew he was crumbling. Whatever had happened in that temple...combined with her pushing…

He was crumbling.

She just hoped it would make him help her brother.


“My...actions have made that clear.”

He was clearly out of his depth. He was lost, unsure of himself. It wasn’t anything she’d seen before, not from Vader.

Maybe. Just maybe...there was still something of Anakin Skywalker left in Vader after all.

She tilted her head, leaning back. “Then go back and do your Force Bond meditation thing. Be his father. For five minutes, don’t be a Sith.”

Chapter End Notes

I’m not sorry for the (sort of?) cliffhanger! :D
The song for this chapter is Man in Black by Sonya Belousova. Actually I pretty much listened to the entire Witcher soundtrack while writing this chapter.
Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
It was the worst night of his life.

As predicted, the Creature methodically worked on prying the hull apart. The groaning of the metal shook him to his core, and when it let out a horrible, bone-chattering screech he knew it had pried it open just a bit more. Then that was usually accompanied by the sound of claws dragging themselves across the floor as it tried to tunnel in.

But at least it wasn’t tossing the ship around like the last time. Still, Luke felt like he was waiting inside a huge chew toy, and he was the juicy reward for tearing it to shreds.

He’d dragged himself as far into the corner as he could. His broken leg stretched out before him while his other was pulled to his chest and he’d unslung his left arm so that he could cover his mouth and nose. Hopefully, it would stifle the sound of his breathing.

He didn’t know if it would help, but it made him feel like he had more control over the situation than he did, so he kept at it and ignored the ache in his shoulder.

The claw marks had largely stopped bleeding. He kept his good hand pressed tightly over it just in case. He didn’t dare move to check how deep they were, but that had to be a good sign, right?

He was going with yes.

It seemed to last an eternity. Multiple times, he glanced at the nearby ladder leading into the cargo hold and considered retreating further but considering how difficult it had been to get up the stairs the one and only time he’d attempted it, he quickly pushed that idea away.

Only if necessary, he thought.

He doubted it would do much to protect him if the Creature got that far in.

Unfortunately, more shrieking of metal made him reach up to cover his ears, and a split second later he watched a clawed fur foot reach into the hallway ahead of him.

He didn’t dare breathe as he watched those claws dig into the floor and pull, tearing gouges.

This was it.

It was necessary. The thing was too close; he could smell its foul breath. It wouldn’t be long until it moved to tear his hallway open.

He needed to move.

Moving as quietly as possible, he pushed himself to the hatch, staring into the dark abyss below.
This was a bad idea. He knew that. But the creature gnawing on the ship spurred him to carefully grab hold of the ladder and move his good foot onto the lowest rung he could reach.

Curse his short stature.

He slowly, painfully lowered himself into the darkness, praying he was quiet enough. But, all too soon, he realized going down would be much harder than going up, especially with no light and no Force to guide him.

He’d need to trust that he was lucky enough to find the next rung.

*On the count of three,* he thought, squeezing his eyes shut.

*One…*

More metal tore above.

*Two…*

The monster roared.

*Th--*

The ship violently rocked sideways. Air caught in his throat as his fingers slipped, and he was falling, falling…

*Snap!*

He screamed, his body seizing up. Dots blackened his vision, and he felt like his soul briefly detached from his body before slamming back in. Wave after agonizing wave rushed up his leg and through him and for one wild moment he wanted his lightsaber so he could cut it off and be done with the pain…

Dimly, he was aware of the little light above him starting to brighten, and he again reached up with his good hand to cover the sobs still choking out of his throat. Slowly, excruciatingly, he lifted his head to look down…

The splint had broken, and with it, so had his leg.

Again.

He collapsed back, staring up at the hatch above him as light kept brightening.

This was it. He was dead. There was no way the monster hadn’t heard him. There was no way he’d be able to bounce back from rebreaking his leg. He didn’t even know if he had the strength to set it again…

But even as his vision began to fade, a distant part of him realized something.

*The ship is quiet.*

For some unfathomable reason, the Creature was gone.

And Luke didn’t have the energy to care anymore as he slipped from consciousness into darkness.
He woke up standing on the command deck of a Star Destroyer. Not that he had much personal experience, but he’d been aboard the Harbringer, though he hadn’t much time to really study anything in great detail. He stood too far back from the port windows, but he was sure that if he approached, he’d see the rest of the ship stretching out ahead in its famous arrow shape.

A dream. And, this time, the setting was not his own.

He had no doubt whose it was. It was probably the deck of the Executor.

And yet...he was alone.

Vader wasn’t hiding in any shadows he could see. He couldn’t hear his mechanical breathing.

He was alone.

And...he didn’t have the energy to care.

He didn’t care that he was alone. He didn’t care that Vader would likely show up any second. He didn’t care that he’d likely get grilled about his location again.

He just didn’t care.

His leg was unbearably painful. Though it looked whole in this dream, he still felt the break. He couldn’t muster up the energy to keep standing. Not this time.

He sat down on the edge of the walkway, letting his feet dangle over the pit below.

And he waited.

He stared at the empty, dead computers below.

I’m going to be dead tonight.

The thought replayed in his head repeatedly. He knew he should care more about it, but he was too damn tired. Maybe he’d leave a message with Vader to give to Leia. If he’d even agree to that. But the idea of telling Vader he was that close to dying…

He shuddered.

Vader would mock him for it.

Even now, he didn’t want to deal with that.

Right on cue, the bay doors swished open, and the mechanical breathing of his father filled the room. Luke didn’t bother to turn to acknowledge him. He didn’t bother to attempt to stand. That alone would probably be a dead give away to his pathetic state, but he couldn’t do it. Even hanging limply, pain coiled around his leg like he’d submerged it in ice.

So instead he just listened to his father approach.

Stop.


His vocoder made it impossible for him to sound gentle, or even quiet, but he supposed it was quiet by Vader’s standards.
He felt Vader reach out through their bond, searching his feelings.


“Father,” he replied, harder than he meant.

He felt his father hesitate, debate on pushing...then he pulled away.

Vader didn’t move for an achingly long time. He just stood there, breathing. Then, he continued down the walk way, his cloak brushing Luke’s back as he passed.

Luke winced as his shoulder twinged from the contact.

Vader either didn’t notice or didn’t care. He stopped somewhere to his left, but Luke was too tired to look. At least, not until Vader said, “When I am stressed, or need to think through something, this is my favorite spot on the entire ship.”


His father stood at the view port, staring out at the stars, arms crossed over his chest. Luke tried to imagine him doing that in real life, when the bridge was sure to be full of busy officers working their stations. Likely, as calming as it was for Vader, it wasn’t so for everyone else.

“Is that why we’re here?” he found himself asking without thinking.

“Probably.” He didn’t elaborate further. Instead Luke watched his father observe the stars...then his shoulders slumped. “I would like to trade information.”

Luke couldn’t help it. He scoffed. “It’s a bit late for that.”

“Is it? You’re alive, are you not?”

He didn’t answer.

But Vader didn’t wait for him to agree. He simply continued on as if Luke had agreed to starting their pointless game all over again.

“Do you know...do you know who your mother was?”

Luke blinked, surprised. “No...?”

He’d wondered, of course. He’d even thought to ask Vader the first time they’d played this sharing of information. But something told him this topic might be sensitive. He didn’t know if Vader had cared for his mother or not, but he’d thought it might have been a bit aggressive to start with. If he did, he didn’t think Vader would appreciate the prying.

And now here Vader was, offering up the information.

“Lars probably didn’t know,” Vader mused. He hadn’t turned away from the stars, and when Luke reluctantly reached for their bond he felt an immense anguish from his father. There was still that anger and hatred he’d grown so accustomed to, but it was turned on himself. Not the woman in question. “Her name was Padme Naberrie, though she adopted the name Amidala when she was elected Queen of Naboo.”

Padme.
His mother had a name. At long last. Somehow, it made her seem real.

But Vader wasn’t done, and with each word he very clearly forced out, Luke could feel his sorrow deepen until it was a black hole that sucked his breath away.

“From the moment we met, I knew I’d marry her. But the Jedi forbade attachments, and she had a duty as a senator. So we married in secret.”

It wasn’t a fling.

In just a few short sentences, Vader had conveyed more information than he’d ever known not only about his mother, but about him. They’d loved each other, enough to risk everything to be together.

His father had loved, once.

“There were...complications, when she became pregnant.” Vader spoke slowly, choosing each word with care, but Luke could feel the sincerity anyway. “Some expected, some...not. But...but when she told me I...it was...” He paused, struggling, then forced it out. “It was the happiest day of my life.”

Luke couldn’t breathe.

Vader. Happy?

Because of Leia? Because of him?

He was afraid to believe it.

“I wanted a family. Damn the consequences.” Another long pause. “And there were consequences. Many.”

He didn’t know how his mother had died, but as far as he knew, he’d been with his aunt and uncle since he was a baby. Did she die in childbirth?

“I thought you were dead.”

Evidently so.

“And without her, without...I dedicated my life to the teachings of the Sith. I gave everything for it.”

Was that what had happened? Ben had said Darth Vader betrayed the Jedi. Luke had learned from others that Vader and his inquisitors had killed them all. Did Vader do that because he lost his mother?

Because he lost them?

“From the moment I learned that you were alive, I have done nothing, nothing, but work to have you by my side. Where you belong.”

That part Luke sort of knew. “Because you want to overthrow the Emperor and rule yourself?”

Vader turned around at that. “It would be preferable. The Emperor must go. You and I agree on that point, though our methods are clearly different.”
He said it so casually, like he was discussing podrace stats, not talking about overthrowing the Emperor.

“But that is not my point right now,” Vader continued, looking Luke square in the eye. “You asked me if I’d still come for you if you didn’t have the Force.”

He already knew. He didn’t need to hear it again--

“I would tear the galaxy apart to find you. To find your sister. To find both of you. I would have done so a long time ago had I known you survived. I would do so with or without you being Force sensitive.”

His throat had gone dry. His brain struggled to process. He double checked...then triple checked.

Vader was telling the truth.

His father wanted him. They still didn’t agree on each other's methods, but…

_He wanted him._

“I know you’re in danger. I can feel it. Let me help.”

_His father wanted him._

Everything was shifting. His breathing had picked up as he stared at the man he’d once hated and feared.

And now?

“I’m not asking as a Sith looking to overthrow his master. Not now. I’m asking as your father. _Let me save you._”

And the desperation he felt in that bond, the desperation to save what was left of his family—_Darth Vader’s family_—was what finally made the last of his walls crumble.

Maybe he could keep fighting just a little longer. Just long enough for his father to find him.

---

Vader felt naked. _Exposed_. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d let a bond flow so freely and openly.

Yet he did it. For his son.

He hadn’t been sure when he’d slipped into his meditation. Twenty years of anger and hate had made it difficult to even _think_ the words he’d told his son.

But when he’d walked onto the bridge and seen him sitting on the edge of the control pit, he’d been hit with the undeniable truth.

If he didn’t do as Leia had demanded and stop being a Sith long enough to answer Luke’s question, there would be no more meetings with his son.

He didn’t know why. He didn’t know the details of his son’s circumstances, and by vision standards he looked fine. But the Force told him otherwise, and there was no other way than to connect with his son in the way Luke needed.
Each word felt like fire on this tongue, especially when he talked of Padme. But he’d done it. He’d made himself do it.


And now his offer was extended again. A different offer, yet he couldn’t help but remember the last time he’d done so. Luke had chosen death over him.

If Leia was wrong, and Luke still chose death over accepting his help…

He didn’t think he’d be able to stop raging. He might actually tear the galaxy apart.

But Luke’s mouth thinned into a hard, determined line. “I can’t tell you where I am,” a burst of outraged, incredulous fury swept over him, and Luke quickly added, “because I don’t know where I am. But…maybe you can figure it out from what I do know? You’ve been all over the galaxy, right? Maybe something will be familiar to you?”

His anger evaporated, replaced by a growing concern. “Why don’t you know where you are?” Luke winced. “It’s…a long story.”

“Then talk.”

He knew he shouldn’t sound so impatient, but he was so close and he needed to know what was in the boy’s head to find him…

“I think you gathered that I went to Vrogas Vas.”

“Yes.” He didn’t bother mentioning how that lead had been a massive failure.

“I went to a foggy planet after that. Green fog, specifically. I think I went there to refuel.”

He wracked his mind. There were many planets that were foggy, many even within jump distance to Vrogas Vas, but green fog?

There was only one.

“Taris.” He supplied the name. Taris was a solid lead. Unlike Vrogas Vas, there were plenty of things he could do to pick up Luke’s trail.

But Luke wasn’t done. “I ran into a Rodian family getting harassed by pirates. I...ah, may have directly disobeyed Leia’s orders and used the Force to... distract the pirates?”

He clenched his jaw.

Of course he had.

He was the son of Anakin and Padme, indeed. It didn’t make it any less frustrating. “What else?”


Alarm replaced frustration. “Why are you having trouble remembering?”

He wished he could see Luke as he currently was. He knew he was in danger, but had he been injured as well?
Luke skirted around the question and added quickly, “I did find out the pirates belonged to Black Sun. Does that help?”

It did, but that was a serious criminal organization and they were not kind to prisoners. “How injured are you?”

He didn’t want to ask the question, but if Luke was having trouble remembering things and Black Sun was involved…

And Luke wasn’t standing up…


It was true, but he also needed to know how much time he had left to save his son.

“Well…the ship crashed. I don’t know why, or how, or where. But the crash split the ship in two. And no, before you ask, I can’t get a signal out, I already tried. Everything’s fried.”

He couldn’t help the flash of pride. That actually was going to be his next question, and it would have been the first thing he’d checked in Luke’s situation.

“As for why I can’t remember…” Luke hesitated.

Vader crossed his arms over his chest. “I’m waiting.”

Luke made a pained expression. “I probably have…a concussion?”

He stared.

“And I’m pretty sure something in my shoulder is broken?”

His stomach dropped. He thought he’d sensed Luke wince earlier but he’d thought…

“And I also broke my leg. Oh and I just rebroke it and lost consciousness so here I am…?”

Even though the suit pushed air into his lungs normally, he suddenly felt strangled.

“How?” he demanded tightly, and with more anger than he intended. His son was lost and hurt and he didn’t know where he was… “Leia said she sent you on vacation and you get kidnapped by pirates and horribly mutilated?!”

Luke was silent for a moment. “Um. I’m not even done yet.”

“Luke!”

Horrified.

Terrified. He could barely think. He couldn’t even remember the last time he’d panicked. His son looked to be in good condition in the vision, but in reality he was already half dead?! “The very first thing you should have said when I accused you of being dead should have been all of this information, not leading me to believe the lie!”

There was no way Luke’s guardians taught him to be so careless with his life. There was no way Obi-Wan would have stood for it, as much as he hated the man. And though Leia’s idea to fake his death had been foolish in the first place, it was obvious she’d given him explicit orders not to get
into situations like this!

Was this some sort of cruel joke? Was this retribution for all the wrong he’d done in the galaxy?

Except he knew why this was happening.

Luke was his son. And unlike him, he hadn’t received the training necessary to get out of situations like this.

He needed to get his son. Now.

Luke’s face flushed. “I...didn’t expect this reaction.”

“I am your father--”

“You cut my hand--”

“I know!” He raised his hand to stop him. He needed to calm down. Of course his son thought he wouldn’t care for his well being. He hadn’t given him any other reason to think otherwise.

But damn, did he hate that he’d led him to believe that. If he could take back Bespin, he would.

“What else?” he ground out. He didn’t want to know, but he had to.

“Um.” Luke shifted awkwardly. “Pretty sure I bruised my ribs. And some dog thing took a swipe at my chest with its claws, but I don’t think it’s too deep.”

He didn’t think it was too deep...

“When I find you,” he said evenly, “you will not leave my sight. Again.” Luke opened his mouth to object, but Vader pointed at him. “I will hear no arguments!”

His mouth snapped shut, but the spark didn’t leave his eyes. Vader was certain he’d hear arguments in the future.

But not now.

“I guess I should also tell you I almost got eaten tonight...okay actually multiple times, but tonight especially.”

For once, he was utterly speechless. How was it possible that every time his son opened his mouth, something worse came out of it?

“Explain.”

“There’s this monster. It’s huge. I don’t know what it is, but when I tried to use the Force to find out more about it, it sensed me. It used that to track where I was. It comes back every night...I think it might be nocturnal, but I haven’t wanted to risk finding out. It pretty much spent the whole night tearing the ship apart.”

So the danger he sensed wasn’t just Luke’s inability to keep himself whole. Given his condition and his strong connection to the Force, it was a miracle he was still alive.

It didn’t help the rising panic in his chest, or the strange out-of-body feeling.

It was a nightmare. His son was alive, but who knew for how long?
He needed to find him.

“What else have you noticed about where you are? Any identifying traits of the planet?”

Luke frowned. “No. I’m just surrounded by forest. I don’t know how big it is.”

It wasn’t great information, but it was better than nothing. He could rule out any planet that wasn’t suitable for forests, but was it a planet with occasional forests or was it a forest planet? If Luke wasn’t using the Force often for fear of attracting a predator, he likely didn’t know.

“You said there was a dog?” Maybe he would recognize the dog species, or he could look it up, but even that was a gamble. Dogs, like cat species, tended to get carried either intentionally or otherwise to planets all across the galaxy. They could have been part of an invasive species.


It wasn’t one he immediately recognized. He’d need to have analysts look it up-- discretely. He wasn’t about to have the Emperor wonder why he was looking up information on dogs. He doubted he’d buy the looking for a pet excuse.

“Anything else I can use?”

Luke considered for a moment, then shook his head. “Was it enough?”

“I would have preferred the specific location, given your current... condition.” He couldn’t help but snarl the last word, and Luke winced. “But it’s more than enough.”

Luke let out a breath. Of relief? He thought so, but he wasn’t going to confirm.

There was still business to be conducted.

“Now, you will listen to me, Young One, and you will do exactly as I say. Am I clear?” He pointed at him emphatically.


“The Creature that hunts you is likely strong with the Force. More than likely, given that it’s aggressive and nocturnal, it’s strong with the Dark Side.”

“That’s a thing?” He paled.

“It is.”

“Do you... know what it might be?”

“I have not heard of something quite like that, though I have encountered other smaller Dark Side creatures in the past. If this one is big and strong enough to rip open a ship…” he trailed off. Normally, he’d encourage his son to use his strength in the Force to destroy it. But that was at full health. “Using the Force will be too risky. You need to avoid it.”

Luke rolled his eyes. “I think we agree there.”

“No, I mean you need to leave.”
His brows furrowed. “Didn’t you hear what I said?”

“Too clearly, yes.” He tried not to think about the injuries at the moment. Thinking about them would only make him panic, which would likely distract his son. He wouldn’t allow Luke to die because he’d been worried about his father exploding again. “It will be slow going, but the creature knows your location. You will not survive if you stay.”

Luke hesitated, but he had a feeling he already knew he was right. “I don’t even know if this planet is populated.”

“Easy.” He waved the concern off. “During daylight, use the Force to determine if there is civilized life. If there isn’t, use it to determine the safest way to go.”

“And that won’t...draw attention?”

“Not if you do it a few hours after dawn. It will likely be asleep.” At least, he hoped. He didn’t like being uncertain or sending his seriously injured son off into an unknown situation. But it was the best chance he had-- that he was certain about. “I would recommend sleeping in the morning. I will contact you then.”

“Alright…” Luke didn’t seem totally convinced, but when Vader’s mind brushed up against his in emphasis, he sighed. “Fine, I got it, you don’t need to do that.”

“I need to make sure you don’t die before I get there.” He paused and debated not elaborating, but Leia’s heated tirade echoed in his memory all too fresh.

*For five minutes, stop being a Sith!*

It was well over five minutes now...but he had to admit, she was right. Luke told him exactly what he needed to continue the search.

So, reluctantly he added another truth.

“I don’t want to lose you again.”

The words were foreign on his tongue, and yet...his son brightened a little. Tension eased in his own chest.

It was worth it.

“What if there are people?” Luke asked after a silence. “They may not be friendly.”

“Do not immediately engage. If they are friendly, I will give you my personal frequency so you can hail me. If not...stay put. Do not engage, and don’t let them find you.” Though if Leia was right and Luke had dyed his hair, he might not be instantly recognizable. Still, he wasn’t about to give his son any further life-threatening ideas.

He listed off his personal frequency, and Luke silently mouthed it over and over again, committing it to memory, then nodded. “Got it.”

“Good.”

“Anything else?”

He considered. “Trust in the Force. It will give you strength.”
Luke made a face. “Well. Good to know the Sith and the Jedi agree on that.”

“We are not similar,” he snapped, pointing. “Do not forget it.”

“Oh huh.”

He wanted to say more, both on matters of the strength of the Sith and more on how to keep himself out of trouble, but time was running out. If Luke had any chance of re-setting his leg and leaving the wreck, he needed to let him go.

And yet...he found he didn’t want to. He wanted to keep his son with him, to protect him, to get to know him more.

But this was an illusion. His actual son was in grave danger, and to get him out, he’d need to let Luke take more risks.

He hated it.

“And don’t you dare give up,” he decided to finish. He approached, and though Luke had to crane his neck back to look at him, he didn’t flinch or glare.

Progress.

“I will not be pleased if I arrive to find you dead,” he warned.

“Sentimental.” Luke rolled his eyes, but the corners of his lips were turning into a small grin.

“I am a Sith. I am not sentimental.”

Nevermind that this entire conversation proved otherwise. He’d never admit it aloud though.

Luke seemed to know that. “I’ll be careful,” he promised. Earnestly. Vader sensed only sincerity in the promise. “I’ll see you soon?”

Vader took a moment to memorize his son’s face. Despite knowing he’d given him the best advice he could, he couldn’t help but worry this might be the last time he’d see his son.

He pushed the thought from his mind.

He’d survive.

He’d make sure of it.

“I will be there.”

Chapter End Notes

THE TRUTH IS OUT! I repeat, THE TRUTH IS OUT!
Now Vader just needs to find him.
Did ya'll enjoy family feels? Vader finally learned some Dad moves, and he actually meant it! He deserves a snack. Like...a smoothie or something. He can have that, right?
I super loved writing this chapter, btw. I've been so excited to write it for a long time!
Thanks for the opportunity and support!
The song for this chapter is Hell or High Water by the Rescues.
Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
Difficult Choices

Chapter Notes

Thank you as always to my lovely beta, SpellCleaver! Check out her stuff!

It couldn’t be that hard.

At least, that’s what Leia told herself when she sat cross legged on her bed, placed her hands on her knees, and closed her eyes.

Plenty of cultures had a form of meditation. Most, granted, weren’t Force sensitive as far as she knew, but she was. And if Vader could reach Luke through meditation, then why couldn’t she?

She just needed to figure out how to do it with a power she’d never actively tried to use.

First, she attempted to calm herself. That seemed rather crucial to meditation. But considering she was locked in a room provided by Darth Vader on an enemy ship, it wasn’t easy. The stillness just made her think back to all the things that had gone wrong, things that were still out of her control.

When that didn’t work, she simply focused all her thoughts on Luke. That wasn’t as difficult; she could picture him clearly.

His sandy hair. Kind eyes. His soft features, especially when he smiled. His voice...his laugh…

It wasn’t hard to think about Luke.

But how did she connect to him?

He’d done it on Bespin. He’d called her name, and she’d heard it as clearly as though he were standing next to her. She’d known where he was. She could feel the turbulent emotions rushing through him.

It was the same impression she sometimes got from Vader. Even behind that mask, she somehow could detect how he felt, and not just the obvious anger and frustration. The little emotions. Confusion, anguish, longing.

Loneliness.

Vader had said they were connected. Was this the Force? Was that what the connection was supposed to feel like?

She breathed in deeply, then slowly expelled it from her lungs.


From the sitting room, she heard the blast door open, followed by Vader’s mechanical breathing and purposeful footsteps.

She sighed and opened her eyes. So much for that idea.
Scooting to the edge of her bed, she stood just as Vader reached her door. She expected him to barge in, but he hesitated...then knocked.

Her brows rose in surprise. Interesting.

It was rather impatient and demanding, but...interesting.

“Come in,” she said, crossing her arms over her chest.

She’d barely finished when the doors whisked open and in stormed Vader.

“I have a lead.”

She instantly perked at that. “You got him to talk?” *You answered his question?* She’d honestly wondered, after the way he’d sulkily left her in her quarters with only a few grumbled words.

“I did.” Though he didn’t elaborate, those two words told her everything she needed to know. He’d acted as the father Luke needed. There was no way he would have gotten him to talk otherwise. “And he is gravely injured.”

Her heart dropped like lead into her stomach, and she swallowed thickly. “I...it doesn’t surprise me.” And it didn’t. She’d honestly felt like he was dead, back when she’d first lost contact with him. It made sense that he was injured. “How bad?”

Vader was silent for a few breathing cycles, and she was alarmed to feel panic coming from him. Since when did Darth Vader panic? He was known for single handedly taking impossible situations and turning them in his favor...with incredibly bloody results. If Luke was that hurt…

“Injured,” was all Vader said, darkly.

She closed her eyes. Shit. She didn’t know what that meant, exactly, but it sounded *bad.* “That is the last time he is allowed out alone.”

“It would seem we agree.”

“We apparently agree on a lot when it comes to Luke.” It was an observation, one she wasn’t sure she was comfortable with...but it was true, nonetheless.

“Evidently.” He placed his hands on his hips. “He doesn’t know where he is exactly. The ship he was on crashed, but there are two leads we can use to pinpoint his location. First, Taris. He went there to refuel and got captured by pirates while saving a Rodian family.”

*Of course he did.*

Vader must have picked up on the thought. “You are not surprised.”

“No. It’s totally something he would do.” And yet, she was grateful to know that even after all the trauma he’d gone through, he was still him. He was, at his very core, *good.* She wasn’t sure even the Emperor could take that from him.

“We could find the family and find out what they know. And maybe someone else knows more about these pirates,” Leia continued, beginning to formulate a plan in her head already.

“The pirates are Black Sun,” Vader said. “And they are our second lead. We should go straight to the source.”
She considered the information. “They’re on relatively good terms with the Empire, aren’t they? Could we just...ask?”

“We could.” Yet Vader hesitated. “I would prefer to do so discreetly.”

Leia lifted a brow. “You? Discreet?”

“I do not wish the Emperor to know that Luke is alive,” Vader growled, and she was certain he was glaring at her behind his mask.

Now, that was interesting. Luke had been so certain Vader would turn him over to the Emperor, but now he seemed anxious to do anything but.

“Well. You’re in luck. I have just the person who can help.”

Silence. Then, the air plunged a few degrees. “Absolutely not.”

“You said it yourself. Han has a questionable reputation, one that crime lords can’t help but initially trust.” She didn’t mention how Han tended to draw the ire of those same crime lords shortly afterwards. But Vader probably already knew that, considering that Jabba had literally kept him as a frozen art piece on his wall.

“We would be better off alone.”

“It would be faster if he went to Black Sun, and we went to Taris,” she pushed. She was right, and she knew it, and she had a feeling Vader did too.

Deep, deep down.

“Look. You said it yourself. You showing up asking about a boy who looks somewhat like Luke would probably get back to the Emperor. Maybe if you let me go alone--”

“Absolutely not, I don’t need two children in danger!”

She decided to ignore that comment. For now. “--they might give me the information, but a senior member of the Rebellion asking for that same information would probably also get back to the Emperor and raise questions.”

“And Solo asking wouldn’t?”

“Out of the three of us, he’s least likely to, yeah.” She waited, but Vader still seemed either uncertain, or unwilling to bend. “Look. Han just got released from Jabba the Hutt. He got into trouble because he was helping the Rebellion instead of paying off his debts.”

“So why wouldn’t Black Sun assume he’s with the Rebellion still and go to the Emperor?”

“Because it’s totally plausible that he only stayed with us because of me, and if we broke up--”

“Which you should--”

“--then it makes sense that a smuggler would decide to seek his fortunes elsewhere.” She shot him an annoyed look, but he didn’t seem apologetic. Not that he ever did. “Does the galaxy know who destroyed Jabba yet?”

“This is not happening--”
“Then Han can say he’s now employed by the organization that took down Jabba. It may make Black Sun more forthcoming with information to know he’s backed up by someone who can do that and escape unnoticed.”

“Or I could do it myself.” For some reason, as terrifying as Vader was, the argument felt a bit childish. Not that she’d ever admit that out loud.

“Then send Han to Taris. Either way, not getting him involved will just make it that more difficult to get to Luke in a timely manner. Or do you think he’s okay enough to wait?”

By the way Vader’s mood plunged even further, she knew she’d won. As she’d said before--when it came to Luke, she and Vader could agree. Even if they didn’t necessarily like it.

He made a noise that through his mask sounded like a strangled growl or sigh, then he whirled, storming from the room. She took that as her sign to follow and did, trying to bury her triumph deep down where he wouldn’t sense it.

She wasn’t successful. “I am only doing this because Luke doesn’t have time,” Vader snarled as they entered the hallway and stormed towards the room Han was being kept in. “Don’t get any funny ideas. He’s a smuggler. The fact that he’s a good candidate for dealing with Black Sun should show just how much he’s not worth your attention.”

“I feel like that’s a bit hypocritical, coming from you.”

“I am second in command to the Empire--”

“Which is far worse than being a smuggler.”

Vader turned to shoot her an emotionless glare over his shoulder. “You’d rather I was a smuggler?”

“You wouldn’t have been involved in destroying Alderaan.”

He made that strange strangled noise again, and turned forward once more, just as they reached the doors.

The moment they were open, he jabbed a pointed finger at Han. “There will be no touching my daughter, do you understand, Solo?!”

Han was sitting on the sofa, hands behind his head, blinking in surprise at Vader...then her. His feet were propped up on the caf table. The Imperial uniform he’d been given was unbuttoned at the collar, and even with the rest of it pristine, he still managed to look scruffy.

Behind Vader’s back, she threw him an apologetic look.

He recovered quickly, settling deeper into the couch. Please don’t piss him off... She wanted to say, but it was futile. This was Han.

“Well,” Han smirked, though it didn’t touch his eyes, “glad to see Leia’s still alive.”

“Of course she’s alive!”

Han shrugged. It was such a nonchalant gesture, and yet she doubted he felt anything but that. How the hell did he manage it? She was pretty sure she got away with pushing Vader’s buttons simply because she was his daughter, but Han? His only protection was that she was in love with him. She
didn’t think Vader would be as patient. “Last time I saw her, she was about to tell you about Luke. Then I don’t see her again and you don’t feed me for twenty four hours. I wondered.”

He was worried.

She should have found a way to convince Vader to let her see him sooner than this. But she’d fought so hard just to get him to agree to do what was necessary to find Luke. As much as she put up a tough front, she was exhausted, and there was only so much she could accomplish. Fighting Vader even verbally was like fighting a furious rancor.

“I did not come here to listen to your complaints, Solo. I came because my son has need of your services.” Each word dripped with distaste. She had the feeling that any wrong word from Han and Vader might either storm out or strangle him, her feelings be damned.

Maybe this was a bad idea…

But Han straightened at the mention of Luke. “You found him?”

“No,” Leia cut in. “But we have two leads that require us to split up--and discretion. Your knack for getting into trouble with Crime Lords just might help us find him faster.”

Han’s eyes narrowed. “I’m not about to get frozen in carbonite again, am I?” He glanced at Vader as though the Sith would grab him and throw him in a chamber at any moment.

“Hopefully not. Don’t piss them off,” Leia replied dryly.

“An impossible task for him,” Vader added darkly.

“Hey,” Han said, offended, “I’ll have you know, I’m quite charming.”

“As charming as a snake,” Leia huffed.

Han grinned. “Worked on you, didn’t it?”

“Cease your flirting!” She was certain Vader was both disgusted and horrified at the same time. He shot her a look. “We will discuss your relationship choices later.”

She rolled her eyes. “No. We will not.” Then before Vader could insist, she added to Han, “We need you to work your magic on Black Sun.”

“Black Sun?” Now Han’s expression turned serious. “Luke got involved with them?” Then, before either of them could reply, he answered his own question. “What am I saying, of course he did. See, this is why I can’t leave either of you alone--”

“Is he usually so talkative?” Vader demanded.

“Usually.” And despite everything, she couldn’t help the small smile that tugged at her lips. “Can you get them to tell you about any of their downed ships?”

“Sweetheart, I can get information outta anyone.” Even stuck on the Executor with Darth Vader glaring at him, Han was still as cocky as ever. She was torn between rolling her eyes and kissing him for the familiarity.

She doubted Vader would like that.

“Then now’s your chance to prove it,” she said instead.
“And you had best not screw it up,” Vader added sourly. “If my son dies--”

“You’ll strangle me?”

“You’ll wish that is all I do to you.”

It wasn’t an empty threat, and as much as she wanted to argue and make clear he would under no circumstances harm Han, she wasn’t an idiot. Vader...as much as she didn’t want to admit it... cared for his children. In his own weird, twisted, dark, possessive way. And if something were to happen to one of them…

She felt the ghost of Vader’s hands around her neck.

Even as his daughter, she wouldn’t be able to stop him.

Maybe she shouldn’t have involved Han.

“Alright.” Even with the threat on his life, Han didn’t seem too terribly perturbed. “What ship am I taking?”

When Luke opened his eyes, one thought echoed in his mind, over and over again.

*My father is coming, and I’m going to make it.*

At least, he would if he followed Vader’s instructions. They went against everything he’d been taught in training, but they made sense given his situation.

That didn’t mean it wasn’t going to be incredibly difficult.

Above him, he could still see the sun's rays filtering in. He didn’t know what time it was or how much time he had, but he had to move, even if he still wanted to go back to sleep.

He could sleep when Vader found him.

So he got to work.

First he closed his eyes and dove deep into the Force. It wrapped around him like a cocoon, spreading warmth and light through him as if it was happy to finally be actively used. He reveled in it for a moment, before he extended his senses out, searching for life forms.

The forest teemed with life. He felt everything from the tiniest insects crawling on tree trunks, to the horned dogs prowling in the distance. He pushed and pushed, spreading his awareness out over the land like a blanket.

He felt the icy coldness of the Creature to the northwest of him. He shuddered away, but he doubted it noticed him. It’s presence was clouded--fast asleep.

*Not that way,* he decided firmly.

Then he veered South, and after a few moments he felt them. Bright lights in the Force. Duller than his own, but enough so that they left a significant imprint. If he concentrated hard enough, he could catch impressions and emotions from them. Intelligent, sentient life.

He wasn’t alone, and he had a direction to go.
Hope and excitement surged through him, enough so that he pushed himself up and, ignoring aching muscles and a swimming head, he reached down, grabbed hold of the rebroken leg, and snapped it back into place.

Just as before, he blacked out. There was only so much pain he could withstand, but this time there was no Vader waiting to keep him down. Instead, the words repeated over and over again in his brain like a call to action.

*My father is coming, and I’m going to make it.*

It was enough that even in darkness, he knew he needed to open his eyes.

So he did. It felt like minutes, but it could have been hours. He didn’t know, he didn’t care. Sunlight was still above him. That was what mattered.

It took him longer to reset the splint, but once it was done, he pushed himself back to his feet, grasped the rungs of the ladder, and started hopping up. It was as exhausting as it was the last time, and he made sure to visually measure the jump before he made it, but he managed to crawl up into the hallway. He lay there for a moment, gulping in heaving breaths, drenched in sweat, his shoulder burning, but he was up. He’d conquered the stairs.

And there was still sunlight. Waning now, but it was there.

With little time to spare, he pushed himself back to his good leg. He hobbled through what little was left of the hallway, over deep gouges carved into the metal flooring, ducking to avoid scraps of torn metal that had fallen from the ruined ceiling.

Almost the entire shelter had been ripped apart.

All of his supplies were scattered. Most were either completely lost or destroyed, but there were some left. He found one bacta patch, which he promptly placed over the scratch on his chest. He found water containers, some slashed open, but a few still full. He gulped one down, then continued to search until he found the one with the filter and pocketed it. Then he gathered as many ration bars (many broken) and shoved them into his other pocket.

It wasn’t going to last him long, but it was all he could carry. Water was the most important part. He could survive longer without food.

Hopefully his father would be there before that happened.

Taking a deep breath, Luke looked up at the sky. Still sunlight, though the clouds were stained a faint pink and orange.

He needed to go. Get as far as he possibly could, then considering his late start, he’d need to continue through the night. It was risky even leaving shelter, much less traveling in the dark, unable to use the Force to guide him. But he’d do it.

He had to.

So, finding his discarded blaster and shoving it back into his waistband, he began his slow hobble away from the crashed ship and into the thick of the forest.

*My father is coming, and I’m going to make it.*

Those words repeated in his head with each labored hop, with each dry breath.
There were multiple places Luke could have landed on Taris; it had many ports, after all. But this one felt right.

So Vader transmitted codes that would ensure little trouble with air traffic control and maneuvered the shuttle towards it.

Behind him, Threepio gravely announced, “The chances of finding anyone who saw Master Luke are three million, five hundred and--”

“You were not brought here for probability calculations, droid,” Vader snapped. “You are here to assist Princess Leia in translation if necessary.”

After days of calling his daughter Leia, it was strange to refer to her by her title. But, upon waking the droid up to explain the situation, he hadn’t used that title, Threepio had lectured him on referring to her properly.

Force, why had he not changed the droid’s programming? It was far too nervous for a protocol droid...though he supposed most protocol droids hadn’t seen as much action as Threepio had. If Leia was anyone but a wanted Rebel criminal, he’d use one of his own (less anxious) ones. But she was, and he didn’t want a language barrier to keep him from the information they needed to find Luke, so...

Here Threepio was.

“I was merely pointing out that Taris is significantly populated. Master Luke is one person, and if he was in hiding--”


“Nonsense, Artoo, even with the Force, the chances are still--”

“Threepio,” Leia cut in. She sat in the copilot’s seat, though he needed no copilot, wearing a nondescript black jumper and a leather jacket that was a few sizes too big for her. She stared out the port window, and though by all appearances she looked calm, he could feel her anticipation for what they might find. “Not now.”

Threepio paused, as if debating on pressing the matter, but protocol to follow his lady’s orders overrode any objections. “Yes, Princess.”

Maybe he’d reprogram the droid when all of this was done.

By that point, they reached the port, and the Force rang again with the surety that his son had been there. As soon as he brought the shuttle in for a landing, Leia swiveled around expectantly.

She raised her brows. “Well?”

He gritted his teeth. This plan had not turned out as he would’ve liked. Not only was the smuggler off contacting Black Sun (*or, he’d better be*, he thought darkly), but Leia had managed to convince him it would be faster to split up to look for leads on Luke.

She was right, but he hated it anyway. The idea of her out of his sight, on a planet where there were
multiple ways to escape, and with her smuggler boyfriend loose no less, was discomforting. Normally he wouldn’t have allowed it, but then he remembered the list of Luke’s injuries, as well as his circumstances and he’d been forced to agree with her.

He had to trust that her desire to find her brother was stronger than her hate for him.

That didn’t mean that he didn’t check his messages to see if Piett’s analysts had found information on the dog creatures Luke had described before he answered her.

Nothing.

Damn. Maybe that was a good thing though. He’d asked Piett to be discrete, but the Emperor had ways of finding out it was really him who’d asked for the strange information.

Reluctantly he pulled a compact blaster from his belt and handed it to his daughter.

“Do not even think about running,” he warned. Again.

“Or you’ll have to hunt me down, and we might not find Luke in time, yes, yes. You made yourself clear.” Leia rolled her eyes and took it from him, concealing it in her jacket before pulling a hood up over her head. “Has anyone ever told you that you have trust issues?”

“For good reason.” Vader stood, and Artoo rolled closer. “Are you certain you don’t want to look for the ship? I could interrogate much quicker.”


He scowled, hating the suit even more than usual. The fact that he was here on Taris at all was odd, but looking for a specific non-descript ship wouldn’t necessarily raise concern if it got back to the Emperor. It wasn’t like he didn’t collect various models of ships anyway.

“Fine,” he snapped, pointing his finger at his daughter. “Come back unharmed and alive.”

“Your concern is touching,” Leia drawled, turning away “Don’t kill any innocent bystanders.”

He glared at her retreating back. He’d do what was necessary, though he didn’t say that. He needed her to focus, not only to find Luke but...to come back safely.

He didn’t need both of his children harmed. At least here, he was close enough to protect her if she got into trouble.

“Oh, do come back in one piece, Artoo,” Threepio chided, and Vader didn’t miss the look the droid sent him.

_I will be fine, Threepio. Protect the Princess_, Artoo replied. As concerned as Threepio was about the whole situation, he had a feeling Artoo was rather anxious to get started.

Some things never changed.

It wasn’t a comforting thought.
Definitely a set up chapter, but the next one is suuuuper long, so be ready!
I should warn ya'll: I have a bunch of surgeries on my mouth in the upcoming month or two. So, I'm writing as much as I can before my face feels like the fires of Mustafar, but I've never had this much work done before, so I don't know what it's going to be like. So, my schedule might be a bit off. As I said, I'm trying to get ahead as much as possible to prevent that, but if I don't update as often, it's because I'm hating life in bed, not abandoning or suffering from writers block lol.
The song for this chapter is Home by Vince Staples and Richie Kohan
Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
Thank you as always to my lovely beta, SpellCleaver! ^_^ This one was a longer chapter to beta, so she deserves all the kudos and love!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Han almost wished he was back on the Executor.

*Almost.*

At least there he wasn’t completely out of his element. He had, after all, once been an Imperial. Not that Vader cared. But Leia was there, and being so far away from her while she was in the clutches of Vader--her kriffing father--didn’t sit well with him.

Here, on the pleasure barge that was Prince Xizor’s mobile headquarters, he was almost totally out of his depth.

Sure, he was used to dealing with crime syndicates. The Hutts. Crimson Dawn. Hell, he’d run into Black Sun a few times, too. But he’d avoided them as much as possible due to their stronger entanglements with the Empire.

Prince Xizor especially. The Falleen had some sway with the Emperor that even Jabba hadn’t had. That alone made him lethal.

But he stood in the man’s office with a relaxed posture anyway, swirling a drink in his hand.

“You’re no longer a wall ornament,” Prince Xizor observed from behind his desk, with a grin that definitely didn’t touch his eyes.

He gave a non committal one-shoulder shrug. “I don’t recommend it.”

That got a raspy laugh. “I heard you were a charming one. Han Solo. Legendary outlaw. Though you’re missing your furry companion, and your famous ship.”

“The Falcon needed some repairs. Chewie should have it done as we speak.” Where Vader had gotten the non-descript cargo ship he’d flown here, Han had no idea. He wasn’t about to have a ship conversation with the second most powerful man in the galaxy. It was too...normal. But it had done decently enough getting there.

It wasn’t the Millennium Falcon, though.

“Yes, I’ve heard that about the ship, too. A hunk of junk, people call it.”

“She’s the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy.” He tried not to sound offended. He’d rather have a conversation about ships with Vader than get into an argument about them with Xizor.

“I didn’t mean offense. I’m just curious why Han Solo, Rebellion pilot and smuggler, is seeking an audience with me.” He leaned forward in his seat, blue eyes flashing.
“Former Rebellion pilot,” Han corrected, taking a gulp of the drink.

He tried not to make a face. It was...far too sweet. But one thing he’d learned about crime lords: they didn’t like it when you insulted their food.

“Former?”

“Yeah. Wasn’t in it for the cause. My friend is dead, and the girl I loved…” He trailed off. “It didn’t work out.”

“Ah.” He leaned back again, steepling his fingers over his chest. “Too bad about Skywalker. I expected a more glorious death for a Jedi.”

He took another drink. That one wasn’t for show. “Yeah. Too bad,” was all he said on that subject.

He didn’t want to think about what was currently happening to the kid, but it was why he was there. As much as he didn’t like or trust Vader, they could agree on Luke, it seemed.

“So who does Han Solo serve now?”

“‘Fraid that’s confidential, Your Highness.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. All I can say is they were the ones who destroyed Jabba.”

Just as Leia predicted, *that* got the prince interested, though he tried not to show it. “Now that *is* a mystery that everyone is talking about these days. And you say it’s confidential?”

“Yeah. I’m under strict orders, I’m afraid.” Because Vader would definitely strangle him (or worse) if he deviated from the plan in any way.

“I see. And what does this... *organization* want from me?”

“Information.”

“Funny. They don’t seem willing to share information with *me*. Why should I bother giving them anything?”

Han shrugged, placing the empty glass on a tray. “I mean. If you want to piss off the people who took down Jabba, be my guest.”

Xizor’s eyes narrowed. “Is that a threat, Solo?”

“No. It’s just a reminder of who you’re dealing with.” He motioned to the case that he’d brought with him. “Plus, do you usually get threats with a bunch of credits?”

He tilted his head, watching as Han opened the case and revealed enough credits to make a man rich for two lifetimes. “You’d be surprised...so what information do they want, specifically?”

“They want to know about any ships you may have lost in the last month and a half. Where they were last heard from. If there were any survivors. That sort of thing.”

His brow furrowed. “That’s it? Your employer sends you here with a vague threat and a king’s ransom for *that*?”
“Look, I don’t ask questions. I get paid for successful completion of the job, alright?” He’d thought it was a bit overkill too, but Vader wasn’t leaving things up to chance. The guy apparently had a serious protective streak for his kids.

“So you don’t know why he’s looking for this info?”

“Didn’t say it was a he.”

Xizor rolled his eyes. “The question still stands.”

“Nope. No idea.” Han paused. “Do you wanna get paid or not? Easiest money you could make, if you ask me.”

“Yes…” Xizor frowned, then pulled out a datapad from a drawer. Han waited as he worked with it, pulled out a data chip, scanned it, and held it out to him. “There you are. All lost ships in the last month and a half, including their last known locations. Unfortunately, we’ve run into a bit of trouble recently with some of the neighboring syndicates. You know how it goes.”

“Yeah.” Han took the chip, turning it over in his hand. “And this is all of them?”

Xizor glared. “I don’t appreciate the distrust.”

“Sorry. Habit. And as I said, the people I report to...they won’t be happy if it’s not exactly what they paid for.” Han pocketed the chip. “Thanks for the business.”

“Your employer is quite peculiar. Any chance I’ll meet him...I’m sorry, them, in the future?”

Something told him the man had some guesses. He just hoped he would assume he’d never work for Darth Vader, of all people. “Probably so.”

“I told you this would happen, Princess,” Threepio tutted as they walked away from a group of Rodians. Yet again, Leia had shown the doctored holo Vader created of Luke with darker hair and eyes, and no one had seen anyone like that. “I am sure that Darth Vader landed at the wrong port.”

“Hush, Threepio.” She shot a glare at the golden droid before scanning the street again. “And no, I don’t think that’s it.”

She’d lost count of how many people she’d shown the holo to. They only approached those who looked like someone Luke might stop to talk to. Which was most people. He was supposed to be under cover but...he was still Luke. Even running from the Empire, the guy was too friendly for his own good. Plus, Vader had specifically mentioned a Rodian family, so she made sure to talk to any Rodians she ran across.

Honestly, she didn’t know how Vader did it. He claimed that the Force was his guide and that’s how he’d pick up Luke’s trail. And...well, she couldn’t say it didn’t work; usually it did. But whenever she watched him do it, he just stood there, looking off into the distance, and then he just...acted.

Even Luke had his moments. They were moments where he’d pause, get a funny look on his face, then say they shouldn’t go that way, or they should make friends with the people trying to kill them, or whatever the crazy situation may be. He had far less training than Vader, and he’d managed the mystical communication with the Force just fine.

She had no doubt she could, but the question was how? What did it feel like? Meditation she could
kind of understand since that wasn’t a principle specific to Jedi or Sith. Was receiving answers from the Force like a prayer?

They reached a fork in the road and she stopped. “Which way, Princess?” Threepio asked.

She frowned, considering. Now, she supposed, was as good as any time to try it out.

*Oh great and powerful Force,* she began in her head, staring as hard as she could at the different paths to take, *where did Luke go? Who saw him?*

Silence.

Clearly, it wasn’t like a prayer.

“Princess, are you alright?”

She sighed. “Yes. Sorry.” She should have asked Vader how he did it. Or, better yet, she should figure out meditation and ask Luke. “Let’s just go down this way.”

They headed down a street lined with what could barely pass for buildings. Downed ships, mostly from the Clone Wars, had been turned into makeshift homes. The air smelled strongly of old engine oil and grease, along with the unwashed filth of waste dumped into the gutters.

“I hardly think Master Luke would have come down here,” Threepio said, appalled.

“He would if he was trying to keep a low profile,” she countered before she approached another group of people.

Again, no one recognized the holo.

It continued on like that, until finally Leia was about ready to give up. Vader would get tired of waiting and either contact her through the comm he’d given her, or worse, he’d find her himself. The idea of having to explain to him that she hadn’t found anything, thus proving him *right,* made her clench her fists in irritation.

No. She’d picked this task because she *knew* Luke. She was his twin sister, dammit. Vader wasn’t the only one who had some mystical connection to him.

It was as she lamented this that her eyes caught sight of an open doorway tucked behind a half-rotted ship hull. A glowing neon sign hung above it that simply said *Cantina,* and a drunk Yuzzum was passed out in the shadows.

Luke didn’t like alcohol. She knew that for a fact. He’d only sip at it when Han or Rogue Squadron took him out drinking. With Han, she knew for a fact he often ordered the milk anyway. Of anywhere she’d looked, that was the least likely for him to go.

And yet she couldn’t tear her eyes off of it.

*He wouldn’t. I know him. He probably wouldn’t have even finished whatever he ordered if he did…*

But she was moving for it anyway.

Was this what that ‘Force feeling’ was? She didn’t know. For now, she wasn’t about to ignore what drew her to the cantina, just in case it was.
“Oh, dear,” Threepio muttered nervously as they entered. “I’m quite sure he wouldn’t have come in here.”

The room barely passed as a proper Cantina. She wasn’t sure even Han would have bothered stopping by it. It was crowded, dank, with a low-hanging ceiling. Even though they were inside, she felt like the fog from outside still lingered within. Tables were haphazardly put together from scrap metal, and the counter was little more than a long piece of plywood. Locals of every size and race took up seats, and while her outfit was nondescript enough, she suddenly felt too clean for this place.

She could feel the eyes on her as she headed straight for the bar keep, a portly honey skinned man who gave her a suspicious glare.

Well. It wasn’t like she hadn’t worked with mistrustful people before.

Sliding onto an open bar stool, she leveled a hard stare at the man. “Corellian Brandy. On the rocks.” Han’s favorite. She preferred something with a bit more elegance, but she didn’t want to draw more attention than she already had. She doubted this place would even have what she liked.

The man ran a critical eye over her, then over Threepio, and snorted. “Have it yer way.”

She settled in to watch, even as she strained to listen to the conversations around her. When the man slid her drink over, she nodded and took a long, deep gulp that wasn’t completely for show. After everything she’d gone through, especially with Vader, she didn’t mind some alcohol.

When she plunked it back on the counter, she pulled out the holodisk. “I’m looking for someone.”

“Ain’t seen no one.” The man crossed his arms.

Her lips pressed together and she reached into her pocket, pulling out the credits for the drink...and a bit extra. Once she’d slid it over the counter and watched him recognize the additional credits, she turned on the holo of her disguised brother. “Seen him?”

The man had picked up the credits and was thoughtfully counting through them, frowning at the image. “Not one of my regulars.”

“He wouldn’t have been. He’s a traveler.”

His bushy brows furrowed...then he nodded. “Ah. Right. Boy came in a few weeks ago. Didn’t finish his drink. Left without issue.”

She couldn’t help but let out the breath she hadn’t realized she’d held as she switched the hologram off.

Finally.

“Did he mention where he was going?”


Which was either from the alcohol he’d apparently tried to stomach, or the lost weight. Maybe both.

“Do you mind if I ask others?” She would do it anyway, but it was polite to ask. Thankfully, the
man nodded, already shrugging her off to move on with his day.

She finished her drink and turned to Threepio. “See? He was here.”

“Goodness knows why.”

Some things never changed.

“Come on. I’m going to need your help.”

They began their rotation of interviews. Most life forms they approached spoke basic, but those who didn’t Threepio covered. There were a few others who claimed to have seen him, but all had the same story as the bar keep. One commented on how young he looked, then stared hard at Leia and said, “Ya know, ya look just like ‘im.”

She made a noncommittal shrug, then turned to move on to the next table.

A man sat there, staring at her with narrowed, suspicious eyes. He was a normal human male, with a dark mustache and grimey hair. “You lookin for the Jedi?” He asked before she’d even opened her mouth.

She tensed, willing her face to remain neutral.

Whoever this was, he’d definitely seen Luke. He wasn’t Rodian so...perhaps part of Black Sun?

“Who said I was looking for a Jedi?”

“That holo you’re showin. I seen him. He got the same powers as them mystic Jedi.”

There was an angry edge to his voice, and a bad feeling sank into the pit of her stomach. Something told her Luke and this particular pirate didn’t end on good terms.

If Luke wasn’t so injured, she would have dropped the conversation and left, but he was, and she didn’t have time to ignore him. “What happened to him?”

He shrugged, his eyes never once leaving her face. “Dunno. Went missing, last I heard.”

There was more to this story, but with every word the bad feeling grew worse.

“You look a bit like him. Anyone ever tell you that?”

“Can’t say they have.” Nevermind that someone had just said it not five minutes earlier. She should have given Luke black hair dye and green contacts. Or, simply, she shouldn’t have let him go in the first place.

“You a Jedi, too?”

She didn’t miss the way he narrowed his eyes on her. The blaster in her jacket felt heavier under his gaze.

“Not even close.”

That, at least, was true.

The man snorted, shook his head, then stood. “Well. Hope you find what you’re lookin’ for.” From his pocket he slapped a credit on the table, then turned and walked away.
The bad feeling didn’t leave with him.

“I don’t like the look of him,” Threepio observed nervously. She didn’t bother reassuring him.

“We should go.” She needed to comm Vader. If she didn’t leave now, something told her that wouldn’t be the last she saw of him...

She forgot the feeling when a Rodian male stepped into the bar, head drooping as he made his way over to the counter.

Well, she decided, making her way for him, one more couldn’t hurt.

“Hey.” She smiled when she approached.

The Rodian flinched as if she’d threatened him. “What do you want?”

Her smile disappeared. “I’m looking for someone. Thought I’d ask if you’d seen him.” She brought out the holo and turned it on. “Did you see this man?”

She held her breath, waiting as the Rodian took him in...then scowled. “Yeah. I know him. He tried to save my boy.”

The tone suggested he’d done anything but that. But at least she’d finally found the Rodian. “What happened?”

The man sneered. “That Jedi offered himself up to save my son from slavery.”

Leia blinked, sure she’d heard him wrong.

“He. Did. What?”

She’d known he had a soft heart, but surely he wouldn’t do something so incredibly stupid--

“He tried to save my son from slavery by offering himself,” he repeated hotly, but then his shoulders slumped. “It was all my fault. I didn’t pay my debts. He was only trying to help...but then the pirates came back later. Said the Jedi escaped, and they took my son anyway.”

Luke had offered himself up into slavery.

The idea was completely insane, and yet the more she digested it, the more she realized it was something he’d do. But the fact that he’d actually done it...she couldn’t wrap her head around it. Not completely. Then the kid had been taken into slavery anyway…

This was the total opposite of vacation.

“The people who did this,” she tried not to sound upset. It failed. “Was one of them a human male with a mustache?”

“Yeah. Rayner. He and his goons still hang around here.” He glared at the door, and she assumed he’d seen the man as he was coming in. To not only have his son taken away, but to also have to see his kidnappers daily...

She could see why Luke had stepped in. Even if his methods were incredibly risky and stupid.

She turned off the holo. “I’m sorry for your loss.” She meant it. One day, when the Empire was gone, they’d eradicate slavery completely. Maybe then she and Luke could truly reunite the boy
with his family. “If there’s anything I can do…?”

The Rodian turned away. “Your friend already did enough.”

And as mad as she was at Luke for his stupid decision, she couldn’t help but feel the need to comfort the man herself. But she knew it wouldn’t do much good. Unless she could produce the man’s son herself and get them off world before Black Sun could track them down again, there was nothing she could do.

Besides. She already had someone she was looking for. And while she still didn’t know where he was, the picture of how they’d gotten to this point was a little clearer.

She was going to kill him when she found him.

_Do you have to kill everyone we run into?_ Artoo beeped unhappily at him as he strangled the junk yard operator.

“I have justified reasons.”

He needed to be discreet. It didn’t help that his suit made that extremely difficult. So, anyone in his way, he simply killed. Therefore, there wouldn’t be any rumors or speculation why Darth Vader was on Taris looking for a ship. Sure, he could have talked his way out of it with the Emperor…

But why do that if he didn’t have to?

_Had I known you were going to kill everyone we ran into on the way over here I wouldn’t have told you where they moved Master Skywalker’s ship._

“You better not have lied to me, droid.”

_If I did, all those lives would be in vain._

He resisted the urge to scoff. Ten lives. On most normal days, ten was a small number lost under his command.

That seemed to be changing though with his daughter around.

“You will not tell the princess of this.”

_You mean your daughter?_  

He gritted his teeth, moving deeper into the junk yard. “I don’t appreciate you showing her my past.”

His eyes scanned each ship, looking for the right model; a Corellian G-9 Rigger-Class light freighter. Ironic, considering he’d once used one frequently during the Clone Wars. It was likely just what Leia could produce, but...ironic, just the same.

_She wouldn’t have told you had I not. I saved her life. You’re welcome._

He scowled, refusing to admit that the droid probably had a point there. He also didn’t want to think about how close he’d come to killing his daughter...numerous times. “As I said. You will not tell her the specifics of our mission.”

_Or what, you’ll deactivate me?_
“I’m considering it.” Though in all honesty, even as annoying as he was, the droid was still the most useful droid he’d ever owned. It would be a shame to have to start him over by wiping his memory.

Besides. He’d been a gift from her…

The thought stopped cold as he located Luke’s ship.

“There.” He pointed, and Artoo rolled over, inserting his data probe into the ship’s port. Moments later, the ship opened it’s hatch with a hiss, and Vader stepped in.

He didn’t expect to find a clue to Luke’s location, but he did expect to find more clues as to what had happened. Understanding the full picture would ultimately help him find him, and if Solo did his job, he could piece the clues together to find his location.

At least, that was the official reason for finding the ship. Alternatively, he was also interested in where Luke had spent his newfound solitude after his faked death. He still wanted to learn more about his son--information he likely wouldn’t tell him verbally.

The ship was silent and almost empty. He approached the cockpit, turning on the computer systems, looking for any information on recent repairs, or other detours his son forgot to tell him about. Artoo rolled in, plugging into the terminal to download information.

They searched for some time. Most of it was old data from the previous owner, and he discarded those quickly. But then he found the log to Vrogas Vas, then the jump to coordinates he knew for a fact was just the middle of deep space. Nothing of interest…

But there was a recording.

*You shouldn’t be snooping through Master Luke’s recordings,* Artoo chided when he attempted to pull it up.

Vader glared down at him. “Are you keeping me from accessing it?”

*Yes.*

“It could be important.”

*It has the same signal as the one Princess Leia received. It contains no information on his current whereabouts.*

“I don’t care. I want it. Now.”

*Threepio would tell you it’s rude to snoop.*

“I’m *not* snooping--”

*You are.*

He growled in frustration. “I’ll get that recording one way or another.”

*I know. It doesn’t mean I have to make it easy for you.*

If Artoo wasn’t helpful or the previous property of his wife, he would have used him for lightsaber practice.
He stood. “Collect any other data you can. I’m investigating the rest of the ship.” He didn’t bother to wait for a response before storming out and into the living quarters.

The moment he entered, he was struck with the realization that he’d never been in a room Luke had personally lived in. Sure, he hadn’t been there for long, but one look at it told Vader plenty of information he hadn’t known about his son before.

First, he wasn’t particularly tidy.

The living quarters weren’t a mess by any stretch of the word. The floor was clear, but the bed was ruffled and unmade. A shirt was tossed on top of the sheets. An extra blaster lay on a night stand. The fresher was a bit messier, with the sink stained with hair dye, and some broken contacts still on the floor. Apparently, he’d had some trouble with them, suggesting he had no need for corrective vision enhancements.

He didn’t fail to notice the used bacta patches and bloody bandages in the trash, either, reminding him that his son had actually been shot on the Ring of Kafrene.

His mood soured at that, and he had the urge to contact Leia right then to give her another lecture on the danger she’d put her brother in.

But...she knew that already. He could feel her guilt deepening with each passing day, as well as her longing to be reunited with him. She’d been doing everything she could to help him find Luke.

He still hated that it had happened in the first place, but grudgingly, he had to admit she was trying.

It was at that moment his comm pinged. He answered, and Leia’s voice rang out through the cabin. “I found out how Luke ended up with the pirates.”

“And?”

“You’re not going to like it.”

He rolled his eyes. “I don’t like most things I’m told.”

There was a hesitation. “He gave himself up to Black Sun to save a kid from slavery.”

He stared at the comm, unsure he’d heard right, but Leia didn’t take it back. And she was close enough that he could feel her barely restrained anger with her brother.

The mirror in the fresher cracked.

Of all the stupid, idiotic things he could have done, he’d willingly offered himself up as a slave?!

Memories flooded back, and he clenched his free fist as the mirror finished shattering. No son of his would ever be a slave. He would not allow it! How could Luke be so reckless and stupid?!

Even Anakin Skywalker wouldn’t have done something so idiotic!

“Vader?” Leia’s voice pulled him out of his internal spiraling. “What did you break this time?”

“None of your concern,” he hissed. “It seems I have much to teach him, including not offering himself up as a slave!”

“I’m going to have to agree with you there.” A pause. “Did you find the ship?”
He focused on breathing to calm down. It only marginally worked. “Yes.” Then, “Is the Rebellion so lax in their military regimen to allow such untidiness?”

“He didn’t make the bed, did he?”

“That behavior wouldn’t be accepted in the Imperial Fleet.” Yet, even as he said it, he couldn’t help but remember the many times Padme had chewed him out for the same thing.

Now he didn’t need a bed to worry about it.

“Good thing he isn’t an Imperial officer.” There was an edge to her voice. A reminder of what Luke was--what she was. “Are you done? We’re heading back to the shu--”

She never finished the sentence.

There was the sound of blaster fire, then a “Shit!” and the line went dead.

Ice flooded his veins. He pulled on their fledgling bond, frantically seeking answers.

The Force responded with sensations of danger, anger, fear…

And pain.

Leia!

He was moving before he’d thought to do so. “Artoo, get the engines going, now!” he shouted, heading into the cockpit.

What is it? What’s wrong? Nevertheless, the droid followed orders; by the time he took the pilots seat, the flight sequence was ready to be performed.

“Danger,” he snarled as he took off. It didn’t feel any different than the Twilight had.

“Leia’s in danger.”

Her arm was numb.

But that didn’t stop her from whirling around, pulling out her concealed blaster, and returning fire.

Unlike her assailants, she had better aim. She took out three before they ducked for cover.

“Your Highness!” Threepio wailed, waving his arms. “Your arm is bleeding!”

“Shut up and get back to the ship!”

The comm was broken on the ground, but she wasn’t concerned about Vader finding her. She didn’t understand everything about the Force, but if she did have a bond with him like he said, he’d find her. She’d need to give him room. The alley they were in was too narrow. Civilians were likely to get hurt if they stayed.

Thankfully, Threepio listened, though he cried, “How do we always get into this mess? Can’t we have one normal afternoon?!?”

Oh, wouldn’t that be wonderful, she silently agreed as she covered his retreat with more fire, ducking when it was returned. She couldn’t tell how many were left, but she had no doubt who
they were.

Black Sun.

Rayner’s thugs, probably.

Whenever she could, she darted between cover, shooting as she went. More dropped dead under her fire, but the onslaught didn’t slow.

You must’ve really pissed this dude off, Luke, she’d say if he were there. Honestly, he and his lightsaber would have been nice to have at that moment. But he wasn’t, and she’d have to make do until Vader arrived.

Sure enough, as they reached the port, she spotted the shuttle. “Make for the ship!” she shouted at Threepio when he turned to look for her.

He threw up his hands again, shouting, “Oh my!” and shuffling further into the port...where he quickly turned around when more blaster bolts came for him. “It’s a trap!”

Shit.

She ducked behind metal crates, thoughts whirling to find a way out of this. They were surrounded, and she didn’t know how long Vader would be, and her arm was starting to burn…

The unmistakable sound of powerful cannon fire made her duck instinctively, even as she heard screams then a boom. Even behind the crates she could feel the blistering heat; when it faded, her ears were ringing.

Carefully, she edged out from behind cover.

The shuttle they’d arrived on was on fire.

And the light freighter she’d given to Luke was landing in front of it, the hatch opening.

“Help!” Threepio wailed, blown over by the explosion. His legs and arms flailed about.

Then Vader appeared, cape swirling around his ankles, lightsaber ignited and blazing in his hand.

“Get. In,” he snarled, reaching towards her…

And she heard people behind her start to scream--then abrupt silence.

She didn’t need to be told twice.

She ran forward, ducking as more blasters were fired and froze in mid-air while she reached down, grabbed Threepio’s arm, and tugged him to his feet. As soon as she and Threepio were out of range, the bolts were released, hitting where she’d been moments before.

“Thank goodness you’re--AAAAH!” Threepio yelped as she shoved him into the ship and jumped in after him. As she did, the hatch to the ship began to close, Vader redirecting bolts back to their origin.

The moment the hatch closed, he turned off his saber and whirled on her. “You are injured.”

He sounded angry as hell, and she could tell he was, but somehow she knew it wasn’t at her. It was for her. Whatever it was that told her Vader’s emotions, it was currently screaming his panic for
her safety, his intense need to protect what was his…

“I’m fine. We need to get out of here.” They were still shooting at the ship. It wouldn’t do anything against the shields, but it was a pressing reminder that they were no longer unnoticed and anonymous.

Vader had blown his cover, to protect her.

She had to hope no one had recognized her.

But he didn’t move, staring at her with that unreadable mask of his and she sighed, showing him the injury. “See? Nothing serious.”

The air practically turned to ice. “You’ve been shot. That is hardly--”

“In the arm! We can treat it as soon as we’re out of firing range!”

His mood plunged further, but this time he whirled and headed back to the cockpit. “Get the medkit and get in here!”

She rolled her eyes, exasperated, but did as she was told.

At least they were moving.

Leia was shot.

It was almost all he could focus on, even as he lifted the ship off and pushed it towards the upper atmosphere.

Leia was shot.

He shouldn’t have let her go alone. Nevermind that she’d accomplished her goal: now she was hurt and he hadn’t been there to stop it…

Leia entered the cockpit, taking up the copilot’s seat. In her lap was the medkit, and she’d stripped the jacket off and rolled up her sleeve. Vader’s grip tightened on the steering at the sight of the wound, bloody and exposing muscle…

“That isn’t fine.”

Hell, he could feel the pain it caused her as if it were his own.

“It’s not horrible.” He could hear the edge of pain in her voice.

She was right. It could have been worse, and he didn’t think it hit an artery, but he didn’t give a damn.

Leia was his daughter. No one touched her.

He was tempted to turn around and…

The ship rocked as they were shot from behind.

He stretched his senses out. Three enemy ships.

Too easy.
She’d pulled out bacta patches and was in the middle of wrapping the wound when he yanked back on the yoke, flipped the ship around, and as it stalled, fired, hitting one of the ships dead center.

He felt the spike of terror as the medical supplies slipped off Leia’s lap and skidded across the floor. “What the hell?!” she shouted.

Still as crazy as ever, Artoo added even as he worked to adjust the ship’s hydraulics to match what he pushed the ship to do. After all these years, the little droid still knew his preferences.

He didn’t answer either of them as he took the ship into a sharp dive. Beside him, Leia had tugged on her seatbelt, the bacta patch forgotten as she gripped the seat rests in a death grip.

He sensed the other ship’s fire, took the ship into a spin that had Leia gasping, then yanked up. “Focus on your injury!” he snapped, the ship still spinning.

“I’m focusing on not losing my lunch!”

Somewhere else in the ship, Threepio was screaming as he once more flipped the ship up and around, fired, and destroyed the second ship.

“I am doing nothing Luke hasn’t done!” he hissed as he moved to pursue the final, fleeing ship.

It would not get away from him. Not after daring to threaten Leia’s life.

“*He never does it with me in the--shiiiiiiit!*” The other fighter attempted a steep nose dive towards the planet’s surface below, and he scoffed as he dove sharply after it in the middle of Leia’s sentence.

*She’s right, you know. Luke doesn’t try anything risky with her on board. You’re scaring her.*

“I am saving our lives!” he snapped back at her, at Artoo, even as the ground drew closer and closer…

He fired, and the last one blew up just above one of the skyscrapers. The light freighter wasn’t quick enough to avoid the flaming debris, and he barely managed to pull it out of its spin before narrowly splattering against the skyscraper, but he managed. Artoo hadn’t needed to be told to strengthen the shields as he did it.

With the pursuers gone, he resumed taking off for the upper atmosphere, ignoring the hails on the dashboard that was likely coming from the authorities.

“Get the jump ready,” he ordered Artoo, before glancing at Leia.

Even with the red hue of his lens, he was sure she was pale. Again his mood darkened and he snapped, “Finish dressing that wound or *I* will! You’re pale as a ghost.”

Slowly, she turned her head to look at him in disbelief. “It’s *not* because of this wound, *I* assure you.”

Nevertheless, she began wrapping the wound again.

They exited the atmosphere, and the light on the dashboard flashed the ready signal.

“It would seem you did not inherit my piloting skills.”

“You mean the reckless ones?!! *No!*”
He rolled his eyes, then made the jump to hyperspace. “You will be examined by a med droid the moment we are back. Understood?”

“I told you, I’m--”

He turned in the seat to face her. “Understood?!”

Her mouth snapped shut and she leveled a dark glare at him, but she nodded.

It wasn’t much reassurance, but… it would have to do for now. He doubted she’d appreciate him examining it himself, and neither Artoo nor Threepio were equipped to help with such wounds.

That didn’t mean he didn’t settle in to keep an eye on her, earning him another eye roll as she finished working on dressing her wound.

Rayner stared at one of his few survivors. “Darth Vader?” he breathed in disbelief. “Terra, you gotta be kidding me…”

Terra shook his head quickly. “No, sir. Saw it with my own eyes. Darth Vader came to that girl’s rescue. He didn’t even leave the ship and he killed over half our men, not to mention the three fighters we sent after them.”

Rayner leaned back in his chair. He’d expected some trouble from the girl since she was clearly that damned Jedi’s friend, but he hadn’t expected Darth Vader to show up.

But... why?

He wasn’t well versed in the news from the Civil War, but he was pretty sure Vader was supposed to be on a battlefield somewhere.

If Vader was involved…perhaps he was on the trail of the Jedi to kill him? Had they attacked one of his agents?

But…he frowned.

No.

That girl. She was familiar, too, and not just because she looked like that Jedi scum.

He stood. “We’re leaving Taris.”

Terra blinked. “Where are we going?”

If the girl was looking for the Jedi, and Vader was with her, that meant they believed the Jedi had survived the crash. And if he’d survived the crash…

“We’re going back to Arorua.”

Chapter End Notes

Woot! And now Vader and Leia know just how reckless and irresponsible Luke was (is it irresponsible to try to save a kid??? Maybe the method, idk). I LOVED writing
this chapter. Having Vader freak Leia out with his flying was like one of the very first vivid scenes I had planned at the very start of this thing. Han and Luke can be crazy, but Vader's...I mean he's the original psycho in the skies XD
First part of the procedure went well. Far less pain than I thought it would be, but that continues this week and I don't think I'll be as lucky. I'm already halfway through the next chapter, so I'll try to get as much done before I just want to watch TV.
Stay safe out there everyone!
Songs for this chapter:
Han: Back in Black by ACDC
Vader's flight scene: What's Up Danger by Blackway and Black Caviar
Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
Chapter Notes

Thank you to my lovely beta, SpellCleaver! She has an AMAZING Luke Palpatine story on Tumblr that I binged. Go check it out!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Getting shot, even in a non-vital area, was no walk in the park. Once the numbness had worn off, the burning turned into stinging, throbbing, pulsing that she could feel throughout her entire arm. It wasn’t the first time she’d been shot, and if she was honest with herself, it probably wouldn’t be the last.

It was, however, the first time she had Darth Vader hovering over her as his personal med droid patched the wound up.

True to his word, the moment they’d docked on the Executor, he marched her to his own personal chambers. She’d barely had time to look at the giant chamber in the center of the room before he swept her into a very creepy but state-of-the-art medical center. He’d made an adjustment to the droid, then forced her up on the highly uncomfortable steel operating table, and then he stared at her, crossing his arms over his chest.

It was definitely not ideal.

But every protest was met with his mood darkening further. He didn’t say a word beyond basic commands, and she’d given up complaining in the hopes that maybe he’d lighten up.

No. He absolutely didn’t.

She did her best to try not to look pained as the droid expertly and carefully handled her wound.

“What did you do to the droid?” she asked, partly to distract herself, but mostly to get him to stop hovering and glowering in the corner. It was creepy as hell and she was sure she’d have nightmares about it.

“I modified some of its programming.”

His tone suggested she not pry further. “Yeah, I got that, but what?”

“Has anyone ever told you that you ask too many questions?”

“Yes.” She waited for him to answer anyway.

Seeing that, Vader reluctantly replied, “I modified its patient handling personality.”

If he told her that before the droid had begun on her, she might have assumed he programmed it to be rough. That’s what Imperial med droids were known to do with especially valuable prisoners if they were sent in to clean them up. But this droid was as gentle as the droid who’d worked on Luke’s hand.
“It wasn’t already?” Because why would Darth Vader keep a droid that caused him pain? But then again, his operating table wasn’t the epitome of comfort, either…

“I will not answer that.” He meant it. And this time, she didn’t bother pressing. She was starting to think she knew the answer already. For whatever reason, Vader preferred pain. Not only for those who failed him, or were his to torture, but he preferred it himself, too.

She wasn’t sure she wanted to know why.

It occurred to her, then, that she didn’t really know the extent of Darth Vader’s…ailments. No one did. Most people thought he was more machine or monster than man. She’d seen Anakin Skywalker for herself, though, so she knew that wasn’t true. But it was also obvious he needed the suit, and the abundance of medical equipment and lack of a bed suggested extensive injuries.

Vader seemed to pick up on those thoughts. “Kenobi cut off my limbs and left me to burn on the shores of Mustafar.”

That was it. No explanation of why he and Obi-Wan were fighting (though she guessed it had to do with one being a Jedi and the other being a Sith). Not even an explanation of how he managed to survive--

“The Dark Side of the Force can allow the user to use pain to sustain them in dire circumstances, if necessary.”

“Stop reading my mind.”

“Stop projecting your thoughts.”

She glared, realizing again that she knew so little about the gift Vader had passed on to her. “Why are you telling me these things?”

Vader was silent for a moment, and the droid finished working on her wound. “Procedure complete,” it announced. “Redress daily with bacta patches for a week.”

“Make that two,” Vader added darkly, and the droid, sensing it was dismissed, hovered back to its charging station.

“That’s overkill. It wasn’t serious.”

“Two. Weeks.” He pointed at her.

Well. He wasn’t asking her to do anything evil, and it wasn’t more than a minor annoyance. She’d let it slide. “Can I go now?”

Vader tilted his head. “I have not answered your question.”

“I didn’t think you were going to answer.”

He didn’t acknowledge that. “You are my daughter. As such, there are certain things you have a right to know.”

“And me knowing what happened to you is one of those?”

“On a basic level.” When she raised her brows in question, he elaborated, “You would find out eventually anyway.”
A cold feeling settled in her gut. She hadn’t exactly made concrete plans for when this mess was over and Luke was under her safe watch, but Vader clearly did. They sounded much too permanent for her liking. “I think it’s time for a reality check. We are not friends.”

She wasn’t sure how she expected him to react, but amusement was not it. “No. We are certainly not,” he agreed.

Scowling, she clarified, “And we’re not family either.”

“Would you like for me to wake the med droid again for a paternity test?”

Who knew Darth Vader had a sense of humor? Dark as it was. Then again, his vocoder didn’t allow for any amusement to be heard, so she wondered if no one picked up on it.

“It should be unnecessary, though. You already know the truth. And the fact you can feel my emotions is physical proof enough,” he added, and now there was the expected annoyance.

“Our bond?”

“Yes.”

“And it can’t be broken.” She glowered at him.

“No. Though I am shielding, so you are strong with the Force indeed if you can still get...impressions.”

She didn’t know what any of that meant, but he was distracting her from her original point. “You and I may be related by blood, but my parents will always be the Organas.”

The amusement completely evaporated.

He physically tensed. “They stole you from me. They are thieves. They have no right--”

“They are my parents!”

She didn’t know why she was bringing this up. She knew he wouldn’t change his mind. It was probably better to pretend the conversation didn’t need to be said; it would only make him more suspicious and therefore harder to escape from.

Yet she couldn’t stop talking.

“They were the ones who raised me, who clothed and fed me, who gave me an education. They held me when I cried, they listened to me no matter how ridiculous I was being, they went to every parent-teacher meeting, to all of my sports and speech debates...they weren’t perfect but they loved me enough to risk everything to protect me from you.”

The temperature was dropping, but she didn’t give a damn.

“You don’t know how I would have raised you.” It was said on a scoff, but it didn’t hide that he was on the defense.

“Maybe not, but I know what you have done!” She needed to stop. This wasn’t a conversation that was at all helpful. Nothing could be changed, and yet... “You tortured me! You forced me to watch as Tarkin blew up my home! You have done nothing but tear down everything I have ever tried to work for!”
“You’re a Rebel, it’s my job.”

It was true, but it didn’t make it any less important. “You think my parents agreed with everything I did?! Of course not! But they didn’t actively discourage me anyway! And they certainly didn’t try to kill me when they didn’t agree!” She slid off the table, and she didn’t miss the way Vader tensed further as he watched her every move.

“I released your smuggler. I’ve trusted you enough to allow you to accompany me on missions, though your injury is making me rethink that.” He crossed his arms. “I am cleaning up your mistake with your brother. I cannot change the past. What more do you want from me?!”

As much as his words stung her, made her want to punch the buttons on his chest plate--whatever that would do--he had a point. She had a feeling he’d never offer even a useless apology for the scars he’d left on her. If there was one thing she’d learned about him, he was a man of action. Getting him to use his words was like pulling teeth from a raging gundark. His actions were more consistent with the stories she’d heard of Anakin Skywalker than of Darth Vader.

And maybe that was it.

She wanted to hate him. It would be easier if he was only the man who’d destroyed her life. But his actions and the impressions she got from him spoke of someone far more complicated, and she didn’t know what to think.

She could have lied, or followed his example and simply stopped talking to him, but instead she admitted, “I don’t know what you are to me, Lord Vader. It’s not a father figure, that’s for sure. It’s not entirely an enemy, either. Regardless, you would do well to remember that there is nothing you can do to make me forgive you for Alderaan. Nothing. This relationship is strictly professional. I’d prefer it if you kept it that way.”

He was silent, which...could technically mean a lot of things, when it came to him, and she tried to clumsily read his feelings. This time, however, she felt nothing. Whatever it was, she had a feeling he was doing...that shielding thing. She wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing, but she never got to find out. His comm beeped, and he used that as an excuse to drop the subject.

“What?” His voice, even with the vocoder, was clipped.

A crisp Imperial accent reached her ears. “Lord Vader. The shuttle using clearance code LT-231 has requested to dock in your personal hangar.”

Leia tensed, her hand unconsciously going to touch her wounded arm.

Han.

Had he done it? She was confident he could, but even she had to admit things often went awry when Han was involved. She wouldn’t ever tell Vader that, but she couldn’t help but be worried.

“I am expecting them,” Vader dismissed. “Allow them to board.”

“It will be done.” Vader moved to turn off the comm, but the Imperial wasn’t done yet. “There’s something else, my lord.”

Now the annoyance was obvious, and Leia was sure she’d felt him debating...well, she didn’t know exactly, but she had a guess. “Speak. I don’t have time for nonsense.”

“The Emperor requests that you contact him at your earliest convenience.”
The words hung in the air. She fought back the flash of hatred for the despot, and surprisingly, she found her emotions echoing Vader’s.

She frowned at him curiously. He was the right hand of the Emperor. The enforcer of the Emperor’s will. Everyone knew that. And yet...he hated the Emperor just as much, if not more, than she did.

Perhaps Luke wasn’t the only person they shared views on.

She didn’t know how to feel about that either.

“I will contact him immediately.” Vader snapped, then shut off the comm before the Imperial could continue. Then, before Leia had a chance to ask any questions, Vader pointed at her. “Go talk to your Solo. Find out if he succeeded, then prepare the information for my review. I will be there shortly.”

She blinked, watching him as he turned to head for the door. “You’re just...going to let me do that?”

Vader paused at the door. “I trust that you care more about Luke than escaping, considering his...condition.”

He was right. She did, but…

Vader turned his head to look at her over his shoulder. “Our interests are aligned. I believe that makes us temporary...colleagues.”

She didn’t miss the spike of fury before it was quickly smothered.

Colleagues didn’t quite feel right regarding their relationship either, but...it was the closest thing she could think of.

*If Mon Mothma could see me now, I’d be kicked out of the Rebellion and labeled a traitor.*

She tried not to think about that, either. Instead, she let loose a breath she didn’t remember holding, and nodded. “Have fun with the Emperor.”

And despite his clear dislike for his Master, she again thought she felt humor from him. “I’ll see what I can do.”

And with that, he swept from the room.

It was inevitable. He’d always known that. But damn, the Emperor had the worst timing.

Knowing him, it was probably timed perfectly. He just hoped it was timed with something else in mind, something that had absolutely nothing to do with Luke.

He shoved all thoughts of Luke and Leia and that stupid smuggler as deep as he could while reinforcing his shields. He punched in the Emperor’s comm and knelt before the holo pad, head bowed, and for good measure focused his thoughts on things that would make him enraged.

The Rebellion slipping from his grasp. The war dragging on and on. Being forced to deal with pompous, idiotic officers given their positions because of bribery or lineage.

Choking his wife for betraying him...when she hadn’t.
Luke throwing himself into slavery, only to be lost and seriously injured, out of his reach.

Leia refusing to view him as her father.

And his inability to blame her for it.

The list was uncomfortably long, and by the time the Emperor deigned to answer, his wrinkled, cloaked face flickering above him, he was definitely furious and self-loathing.

“What is thy bidding, my master?”

The words were ash in his mouth.

Master. Slave.

Luke’s words from their confrontation repeated in his mind, especially now that he was literally kneeling before...his master.

Slave.

“Lord Vader.” On the surface, the Emperor’s voice was friendly. Conversational. But Vader knew otherwise. “How goes your search for information on your son?”

“Unfinished.” Of course he’d ask about that, but that didn’t mean he wanted to discuss his son in any way with the man.

“You destroyed a Rebel base, last I heard. Congratulations are in order.”

Vader said nothing. He knew just as well as Sidious did that one Rebel base meant nothing for the overall war effort. He refused to think of the Rebellion leader a few rooms away…

The Emperor continued. “Since then, the Executor’s logs are rather...sporadic. None of the locations seem rather important.”

The best lies were told with a kernel of truth. “The boy took quite a few detours.”

The Emperor frowned, and Vader didn’t miss the dark tendrils probing his presence, seeking out whatever he wished to find. He allowed him only to see snippets that would corroborate his story, holding his breath.

Finally, the tendrils drew away.

“I see.”

He couldn’t read the Emperor’s expression, nor the flat tone of his voice. Did he suspect? Or had he expected more?

“Well. I trust you have done enough searching. There is a war, after all, and someone decided to off Jabba the Hutt.”

He forced himself not to react.

Someone.

He’d expected this. Of course it would have drawn the attention of the Emperor.
“The Hutt clan is now a dying syndicate. The sector is wide open, and Rebels have already begun moving in to take advantage. We must secure Imperial power before that happens.”

He was right. As much as he hated to admit it, Hutt Space controlled multiple important shipping lanes through the Outer Rim. Many of the planets were strategic locations in the war effort, as well. It was smart to secure it, and Death Squadron had enough firepower to accomplish it.

And yet.

“It will be secured, my Master.” Again, that was true. He would order the rest of Death Squadron to secure the sector. “However, I will not be joining them.”

Bold. Oh, so bold. But not telling the Emperor he had no intent to join them would only lead to more problems, and there was no way in hell he was going to stop searching for Luke, not when he was so injured. By the way the Emperor’s expression froze, Vader knew he did not approve.

“Lord Vader.” The words were polite, but the tone patronizing at best. “I did not realize your search for your dead son was more important than the safety and security of my Empire.”

He allowed himself to flinch, but he did not back down. He couldn’t.

Luke’s safety was on the line.

“Your bidding will be done. My squadron does not need to be babysat: they are capable of accomplishing this task. My search for information on Skywalker has not concluded, and I believe there is much to be learned that may have vital consequences for the Empire.”

“Is that so?” Vader didn’t like the way that was said, and he definitely didn’t like those golden eyes narrowing on him. “What vital consequences are you talking about, Lord Vader?”

The best lies were based in a kernel of truth. He repeated that to himself over and over again as he replied, “Skywalker was partly trained when I faced him on Bespin. I believe he had a teacher.”

He hadn’t actually given much thought to that, but it made some sense. His training was still extremely sparse and nowhere near the level it needed to be, but it was true he’d been better prepared compared to their previous encounters. It was a disturbing thought, and he wondered if Leia knew anything about it.

But that didn’t matter at the moment. What mattered was that Sidious at least appeared to take the bait. “Perhaps he practiced on what Kenobi taught him.”

“I don’t believe he actually knew Kenobi long enough, Master.” He didn’t mention he only knew that because Luke told him. “There is another source. Perhaps an ancient library we overlooked, or worse.”

“Another Jedi,” Sidious surmised, and his expression twisted in malice. “And you think this...source might be used against us by the Rebellion?”

“I am not willing to risk it. Skywalker did enough damage. We don’t need the Rebels causing more.”

Sidious considered for a moment, and again Vader felt those tendrils probing him. He waited, allowing him to see the truths he wished to see, before finally the Emperor scoffed. “Fine. Do as you wish. Destroy this source, and immediately join back with the rest of your squadron.”
Vader bowed his head, trying not to let any relief bleed through his shields. “It will be done, my master.”

*Slave. Master. Slave.*

“Oh. One more thing.” It took every fiber of his will power not to tense at those words, especially as the Emperor continued, “Our spies in the Rebellion have not recently heard or seen Organa. It is as if she disappeared. You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that, would you?”

*Does he know?*

No. If he knew Leia was in his possession, and worse, that she was his daughter, he’d order for him to return to Coruscant immediately. He couldn’t know.

But the vision replayed in his head. Leia’s red saber, her golden eyes. Luke throwing himself between them to stop them…

“Nothing more than our spy reports.”

*Buy it.*

If he could will the Emperor to believe him, he would. He had to protect his children at all costs. He would not lose them again…

“Pity. I suppose we will find out Organa’s fate in due course.” He sounded like he was moving on, but Vader wasn’t sure. There was little reason for him to bring her up unless he suspected something. He willed himself to stay angry, to stay focused, if only to keep the Emperor from sensing that he was hiding something. “You are dismissed.”

Vader kept his head bowed until the hologram shut off, and he was alone once more.

Only then did he allow himself to release his panic.

Chapter End Notes

So this chapter was meant to be longer, but I had very little energy last week. It was about as much as I could do, and hey. It's a good stopping place anyway! Poor Vader. He just couldn't catch a break this chapter. And while Leia's speech is pretty much...not...very bonding....it still sort of ended up being bonding because she really needed to get that out there. Poor Leia. POOR SKYWALKER FAMILY. I don't even know how any of them have survived this long, tbh.

Surgery last week went good! They had to do a lot more because of the craziness of the world, so...yeah. ZERO ENERGY last week. This week should be better! ^_^ Leave some love!

Love
LadyVader23
Meditation

Chapter Notes

Thank you to my lovely beta, SpellCleaver <3 I may or may not have sold my soul to her... (I did). It's fine, I'm sure...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What the hell happened to you?!” were the first words out of Han’s mouth the moment he saw her...and her bandaged arm.

Leia ignored the question; just finished crossing the hangar to him, where she threw her good arm around his neck, pulled him down and kissed him.

He only slightly resisted.

“Glad you’re not dead, too.” She smiled when she reluctantly pulled away. There was a strong part of her that wanted to use the time she had alone with him to continue, but Luke’s dire circumstances were always at the forefront of her mind. As long as Han didn’t annoy Vader into killing him anyway, she’d have time for those things later.

She hoped.

“You didn’t answer my question,” Han pressed.

“I got shot.” She shrugged. “Did you get what we needed from Black Sun?”

“You got shot?!”

“It’s not even bad--”

He pulled away from her, eyes scanning the room until he found Threepio and Artoo near Luke’s X-Wing. “Hey, goldenrod!”

“Oh dear,” Threepio muttered to Artoo, but nevertheless he shuffled forward anyways. “How can I help you, Captain Solo?”

“Han, I said I’m fine--”

“What the hell happened?! You were supposed to be looking out for her!”

At that, she actually snorted.

“I’m afraid we were attacked by those pirates. The Princess and Darth Vader made quick work of them, I assure you, though we barely made it out alive--”

“We were fine ,” Leia interrupted, taking Han’s hand in her own. “As he said: Vader was there. And honestly, I was in far more danger from his flying than anything else.”

Though Han didn’t look fully convinced, he did let out a snort at that. “Yeah. That I believe.” He’d managed to survive a dogfight with Vader before, and now that she’d actually experienced
Vader’s...skills, it was no small wonder that Han survived.

“Did you get what we needed?” she repeated.

He hesitated. She braced herself for an argument, but he finally sighed and nodded.

“Yes.” He reached into his pocket and held up a data chip. “I just hope it’s the right information.”

She snatched it eagerly. “I knew you could do it!” She was already moving to Artoo, who whistled happily as he settled in to prepare to accept the data. “Did they suspect who sent you?”

“That I don’t know.” Han followed her. “But there aren’t many people in the galaxy strong enough to off Jabba and his goons and get away with it.”

Had they gotten away with it? She wasn’t sure. It was on the long list of things to worry about once Luke was safe and his injuries well on the mend. She inserted the chip into a slot just below Artoo’s dome and waited for him to process the information.

“What about you?” Han asked. “Besides getting shot, I mean.”

She scowled, reminded yet again of her conversation with the Rodian. “Luke’s in this mess because he offered himself up as a slave in place of a little girl—”

“What?!”

“I know.”

A stunned silence. Then, “What the hell is wrong with him?!”

“You know Luke. He has a hard time not helping others, regardless of the consequences.”

“Yeah, I know, but slavery?!” Han huffed, crossing his arms. “You can’t leave the kid alone for five minutes.”

She completely agreed.

Artoo beeped happily, and his projector lit, and a star map of the Outer Rim surrounded them.

“Well good to know it wasn’t empty,” Han grumbled as Leia eagerly began reviewing it in detail.

“And better, he’s highlighted sectors where they lost ships.” And it was good news, but she frowned at the sheer number of them. “There’s more than I would have expected.”

“Maybe he added in some to throw us off.”

“Do you think he knows?” A horrible thought occurred to her. “Black Sun’s relationship with the Empire is on good terms, but what about Vader?”

“I don’t think he realized it was Vader, exactly.”

“But if his pirates on Taris told him Vader was there—”

“He wouldn’t know until well after I left.” He paused, thinking about it. “Probably.”

Probably wasn’t secure enough for her comfort, but she dropped it anyway. For now. “Well, we
know Luke’s on a planet that can sustain forests. So I think we can narrow this down some.”

Leia led Han and Artoo into her quarters where they spent the next half hour zooming in on various planets. Neither of them had a datapad, so they began with the planets they knew wouldn’t be a likely candidate. Water worlds, ice planets, volcanic planets...as they identified them, Artoo dimmed their brightness on the map. She knew quite a few from her time as a senator, but Han knew far more. He was, after all, a smuggler: he’d roamed the Outer Rim for years, getting up close and personal with many of them. Sometimes he added a comment about how the world they were discussing fared as an ideal hide out for pirates and smugglers, which she also mentally noted as they moved through the planets.

Soon though, they heard the sound of a blast door opening, followed by the purposeful footsteps and mechanical breathing of Darth Vader.

Han hesitantly put some space between them, and she immediately missed the warmth of his presence, especially as Vader’s cold one approached.

“Well?” Vader growled, turning his mask on Han.

Han nodded to the star map. “We’re narrowing the list down now.”

She raised a brow, pleased he hadn’t given Vader a sarcastic retort. Then again, Han’s eyes were still riveted to the map, a thoughtful frown on his face.

Vader was silent for a few breaths, before he too turned his attention to the map. “What have you based your search on so far?”

“We took out any planet that wouldn’t support a forest...though you might know more that we’re missing.” Leia said. Vader was probably more traveled than the both of them combined.

Vader reviewed it for a moment, and she half expected him to insist Han leave, but he too apparently didn’t care to get into a verbal (or worse, physical) match. “Remove Brembo…” he said, and continued listing planets. Artoo dutifully did as told.

“Did Luke say if they made multiple hyperspace jumps?” Han asked when he finished.

“No.” Vader crossed his arms. “And unfortunately the dog creatures that attacked him are relatively common on multiple Outer Rim planets.”

“It would still be good to chart possible planets within hyperspace jump from Taris.” Leia said.

“And the smuggler’s lanes,” Han added.

Vader inclined his head, and she could feel his distaste as he reluctantly motioned to the map. “Show us.”

Han gave the coordinates to Artoo, and an uncharted hyper lane appeared. “There’s been some Imperial activity recently along that route, but the chances of being stopped are still relatively low. If they intended to carry a cargo of slaves, particularly someone they expected to get a lot of money on--”

The temperature plunged, and even Han stepped back as Vader snapped, “Speaking from experience, Solo?!”

Han glared. “I may be a smuggler, Your Breathlessness, but I’d never smuggle slaves!”
Vader tensed, and he reached up--

Leia quickly stepped between him and Han, heart hammering in her chest. She had no idea if that would stop her father from strangling him, but she didn’t know what else to do.

“If you two can’t play nice then separate!” She leveled a glare at Vader, and though he didn’t look at her...he slowly lowered his hand, as though it took him considerable effort.

“As you wish.”

And without another word, he turned back to the star map.

Behind her, Han wheezed, and black fury courséd through her.

She hadn’t stopped it.

It was a reminder that yet again, not only did she know next to nothing about the Force, but Han was in danger here. She wanted to demand that he leave now to save himself; she was sure Vader would still be more than happy to let him go. But she knew Han wouldn’t leave her.

What would she do if Vader killed him? She was powerless to stop him, and the thought of losing Han forever...

“Well,” Han managed, and his throat sounded drier than the sand on Tatooine. “I can see I’m not needed here anymore.”

She didn’t dare take her eyes off Vader, who resolutely ignored him, but her heart ached. If it weren’t for her...sure, he’d still be in carbonite, but he also wouldn’t be under constant threat from her own father. “I’ll take you back--”

“No,” Han rushed as Vader tensed yet again. “I can show myself out.”

Vader turned, but said nothing.

“If you’re worried I’ll leave--”

“You should,” Vader grumbled.

“--you don’t need to worry. I have zero desire to talk to any of your Imperial friends.”

“Han…” Leia started, but he was already leaving. She yearned to follow, to make sure he was alright...

And Han must have read her mind, because at the door he turned. “Find Luke, Leia. I’m fine.”

And he was gone.

Leaving her alone with Vader.

She clenched her fists as she reluctantly turned back to the star map, resolutely choosing not to look or acknowledge the man standing next to her. I should go after him anyway, she thought, and yet she didn’t. Han was right. As much as she hated Vader for what he’d done, Han was alive. Luke was in far greater danger.

But that didn’t mean she wanted to continue working with the man who’d attacked her lover.
She watched Vader trace the various hyperspace lanes, marking planets along the way that fit Luke’s description. There were two on the lane Han suggested, and four more on other more traveled lanes.

Vader studied them. “Assuming they didn’t drop out of hyperspace to chart another course elsewhere, these are likely our best bets.”

She said nothing, only glared at the highlighted planets.

Hopefully, Luke was on one of them. They’d find him, he’d get the treatment he needed, then the three of them could figure out how the hell to get out of Vader’s clutches.

“You are angry with me.”

“No shit.”

“I don’t appreciate the language.”

“Please. I’m not five.”

“Solo responded aggressively. I decided to finish it.”

“By killing him? Because he called you a name?!” She whirled on him, finally.

“I wasn’t going to kill him.” He sounded annoyed, as if she would have expected any differently when he started strangling him.

“This is exactly what I was talking about earlier!”

“I am a--”

“A Sith, yes, you’ve said that a billion times!” She rolled her eyes. “And my answer hasn’t changed! You’re supposed to be a father first, and as much as I hate you, that includes both Luke and I!”

Vader was silent, and she huffed furiously. “Whatever. Let’s just find Luke. I agree those would be the top picks, but we need to make sure there wasn’t another jump somewhere.”

He continued in silence for a few breaths more, before he reluctantly nodded. “It is nearing the time I told him I’d contact him if I had further questions. I will ask.”

At the mention of Vader’s meditation bond with Luke, her mood tanked further.

“I want to talk to Luke.” It sounded petulant and childish, but she didn’t bother taking it back. She was tired of Vader being the middleman, and for once, she wanted some kind of control over the mysterious power she’d been given.

“You do not know how.”

“I would if you taught me.”

There. She’d said it. She wasn’t asking to learn the Dark Side but if she just learned something, even from Vader…

She could contact Luke. She could protect Han.
She could protect herself.

Vader stared at her, and she could feel him deciding. Part of him seemed tempted to train her, and she doubted it was for anything as innocent as meditation...but he shook his head. “My answer has not changed.”

But why?

He’d been so eager to force Luke to join him that he’d cut his hand off. Why the second thoughts now? Was it because he just wanted to train Luke?

Did he not think she was capable?

Her earlier anger deepened, even as Vader turned. “As I said. I’m going to contact Luke. I will update you later and we will make changes to the map depending on what he says.”

“Fine.”

It wasn’t fine. She watched him go, ideas filling her head even as he went.

He wasn’t the only one who’d talk to Luke today.

*Hell no.*

She’d figure out meditation. She’d contact Luke. She’d show Vader she had just as much skill as her brother did.

She didn’t give a damn what it took.

---

It had been two days since he’d started his painfully slow journey towards civilization. Even the muscles in his good leg had begun burning within the first hour, and by now it was totally numb and threatening to give out. He had to frequently stop and lean against a tree trunk to catch his breath, and it wasn’t long before he was totally drenched in sweat. The constant movement exacerbated his injuries further, and he could feel his leg, his shoulder, his chest, his *head* throb harder and harder with each passing hour.

But he didn’t give up.

*My father is coming.*

Those words were chanted in his head and under his breath like a prayer. They were a lifeline that he focused on, even as dark settled and behind him he heard the echoes of the Creature tearing into the ship again.

*My father is coming, my father is coming, my father is coming, my father…*

In the dark he stumbled far too often to count. More scratches and bruises formed on his skin, but he barely felt them. Not when he still needed to put distance between him and that Creature. He wasn’t even sure he was going in the right direction, but he bit down on the urge to use the Force to guide him through. He maintained a straight course, and hoped it worked for the best.

That first morning, just before dawn, he’d heard the Creature’s furious roar.

He froze, winced, and waited. He didn’t know for sure, but it sounded like it had discovered he wasn’t there anymore.
But even with his slow pace, he was now too far ahead for it to try to find him before sunlight, so he heard nothing more.

As soon as sunlight hit, he found a sturdy, thick tree trunk, sat down, and instantly passed out.

He was half hoping Vader would be there, if only to ask him how close he was to finding him. But his dreams had been normal, interrupted only by noises of the forest.

It turned out to be a blessing. His body needed the rest. If it weren’t for the knowledge that he was on an unknown planet, in a forest that had very real threats to his life, and he still needed to get to civilization, he might have kept sleeping. But his mind constantly reminded him: _Wake up. Your father is coming. You’re in danger. Get up._

He slowly came to--then bolted awake when he felt hands in his pockets.

Except they weren’t hands. He found himself face-to-face with beeked monkeys...and in their paws were the last of his ration bars.

“_Hey!_” he shouted, then reached out to take his only food back. The monkeys darted away, faster than he could move. He barely had time to focus on one of the bars and yank it back using the Force before they had disappeared into the treetops.

He scowled at his one remaining bar, the only food he now had left, and cursed his rotten luck. Now, more than ever before, he hoped his father was near, especially as his stomach growled painfully. He still had his water container. He could survive...but he’d already lost weight before this whole mess began. He didn’t know how long he had left, or what his father would find when he did make it there.

“Kriffing beek monkeys,” he muttered, and though his muscles quivered and ached, he forced himself back on his leg. “_Kriffing beek monkeys!_”

And for the rest of that day and into the night, his chant switched between _My father is coming._ and _kriffing beek monkeys._

But at least during the night, when he heard the Creature’s roars, it was far away.

The next morning, he again found a sturdy, thick trunk and propped up against it. His muscles shivered in relief as he slid down to the ground, stretching his broken leg out as comfortably as he could.

By now, his last ration bar had been eaten, so he didn’t have to worry about more food thieves. Still, he checked the water container a few times even as he leaned his head back against the rough wood and closed his eyes.

When he opened them, his father was there.

They were still in the forest. The scenery hadn’t changed, and his heartbeat quickened.

He was here! He’d _finally_ found him! He could finally go back...well, not home exactly, but somewhere where he wasn’t under constant threat of being eaten.

He opened his mouth to ask where he’d landed the ship. Maybe he could bring it a little closer so he wouldn’t have to get up and walk so far…

“Is this the forest you described?”
Hope fled so quickly, it was as if Vader had punched him in the gut. He swallowed thickly, trying (and failing) to push back tears. He glanced down to hide them. “I...yeah. It is.”

He was dreaming. And this stupid kripping planet had now become meaningful enough to him that he was now seeing it in his dreams. Even if he did escape, he’d probably still see it when he slept.

It wasn’t a comforting thought.

Vader was silent, and Luke heard his footsteps as he walked around. “You were not lying when you said there weren’t many identifying features of this forest,” he said after a while, and he realized he’d been looking for more clues.

“Trust me. If there were, I’d have told you the last time I saw you.”

He still glared down at his hands folded in his lap, listening to Vader’s consistent breathing pattern.

“What troubles you?” Vader finally asked, and Luke picked up on the worry that something else had injured him.


Despite the sweat still sticking to his skin, the temperature plunged and he shivered. “Scrapes?!”

And despite the fact that he was hungry, tired, hurting, and very much disappointed that his father hadn’t found him, he couldn’t help but laugh, finally looking back up. “You can’t really be upset over that.”

Vader crossed his arms over his chest. “I am not pleased you are in a position to get them.”

“I’m not either, but it could be worse.”

And Vader’s mood plunged further, his shoulders tensing. Luke had the distinct impression he was glaring at him. “It very nearly was.”

Luke wracked his brain for anything that had happened that he hadn’t told him already. The only thing he could think was… “You’re not in my head, are you?”

“No. Why? Should I be?”

Luke shuddered as he felt dark tendrils brush against his shields. “No. That’s creepy, don’t do that.”

“Then why are you asking? What are you hiding?”

Yes, he was definitely getting glared at.

“I’m not hiding anything. I just thought you’d found out about the monkeys.”

Vader hesitated. “I almost don’t want to ask.”

But he wouldn’t let him not tell him anyway. Luke sighed. “Apparently this forest is infested with beek monkeys. They stole all but one of my food rations. And now I’m out completely.”

Vader was silent for so long, Luke was starting to think he didn’t know what to do with him. He didn’t blame him. He didn’t know what to do with himself, these days.
“If it helps,” Vader finally said, “I believe I am close to knowing where you are. If you are lucky, I will find you within the next twenty four hours.”

“Well my luck has been shit lately, so what’s the max amount of time?”

“I am certain—”

“I know, but what if it isn’t? I need to start preparing for the worst.”

Vader’s fury suddenly spiked, and Luke flinched as he pointed at him. “You will not die, don’t you dare--”

“I didn’t mean that!” How was it possible to be so quick to anger? How was it possible to be so possessive? He didn’t know how he’d handle it once he was safe and had nothing else to do but deal with Vader’s volatile mood swings. “I meant if I need to find other sources of food. Jeez, would you calm down?!”

“I would be a lot calmer if my son hadn’t tried to offer himself as a slave to Black Sun!”

Luke’s words died on his tongue.

What?

“Your sister found the Rodian family on Taris,” Vader explained heatedly. “You attempted to save their child from slavery by offering yourself.”

He scrambled to remember.

The memories were blurry, and they made his head throb. He could see a Rodian man on the ground, with bruises and blood on his shirt. A woman sank to her knees as she begged. Three scruffy-looking humans held a young boy between them, and a mustached pirate was telling him to leave.

Take me instead.

A sick feeling settled in the pit of his stomach.

“Do you recall now?!” Vader hissed. And this time, he had every right to be pissed.

“I…it does sound like something I’d do…”

Wrong words to say.

“Something you’d do?!” Vader repeated. He was yelling now, his vocoder booming through the forest. “Something you’d do?!”

“I couldn’t just let them take--”

“Do you have any idea what it means to be a slave?!” Vader was pacing now, hands clenched at his sides. “You’re fitted with a chip, a chip that prevents you from leaving or escaping, because if you do, all your master has to do is press a switch and your head blows up!”

His mouth went dry. He’d heard stories on Tatooine, but his aunt and uncle had done their best to shelter him from that life…

And Vader had been a slave. He’d once had a chip.
“When you are a slave you are no longer human in the eyes of your masters! You are expendable! You are a commodity that can be bought and sold on a whim! It breaks your soul and grinds you until you no longer feel like a person. Your very identity is stripped from you and--” Vader broke off, suddenly stopping in his tracks, staring out into the forest.

Luke could feel the anger choking him. Anger at him, for daring to throw his life away. And...anger at himself.

It’s obvious being enslaved to the Dark Side is more important to you than anything else.

His words from their earlier argument hung in the air. He’d said them in a fit of anger, more to wound Vader than anything else. He’d forgotten it up until now, having had other problems weighing on his mind, but now they were inescapable.

Vader’s description of slavery...it fit.

And though it gave some troubling insight into why his father was the way he was...his heart ached.

He opened his mouth to...to say what, he didn’t know, but Vader interrupted. “How did you plan on getting out of that?!”

So. He wasn’t done getting chewed out. To be fair, it had been one of his more reckless stunts. He sort of deserved it.

He tried to remember. Again, everything was a haze...but he remembered standing on the bridge of the ship he’d spent the last few weeks in. A bearded man stood there, glaring at him, and another mustached man was arguing with him.

He didn’t remember all the words...but a few phrases did jump out.

“He’s a Jedi!”

“Show him!”

Then his own voice, boldly declaring, “I told you, I don’t have those powers!”

It was enough that Luke was able to fill in the rest of the blanks, and he winced.

“Well?!” Vader demanded.

“Uh. You won’t like it.”

“I already don’t like it! It can’t be any worse!” He winced again, and the temperature dropped further. “What did you do?!”

“Eh...I...I must have shown the pirates on Taris my powers--”

“What?!”

“--and then when they brought me to...probably their captain, I pretended that I didn’t.”

Vader just stared at him. And considering Luke could feel the black fury his father was spiraling into, that was somehow worse than the yelling. His right hand twitched, and he was tempted to try to stand up to at least defend himself if his father attempted to lash out again...
But neither one of them had a chance to respond.

For a new presence entered the vision, this one bright and pure and just as strong as his own. It was as if a second sun had arrived...

And it centered its focus directly on him.

“Luke Skywalker!”

Vader whirled, anger partly evaporating into shock. And Luke...Luke just stared at his father, trying to comprehend the voice that was so familiar, he knew it as well as his own.

No. It...it couldn’t be. Had the dream started mutating into a pain fueled illusion? And yet...yet he’d called out to her on Bespin, but he’d known how to do so...Leia didn’t know, at least he didn’t think...

And yet when he finally turned towards the voice, towards the presence that was stomping furiously towards him, he couldn’t deny that he was, indeed, looking at a very-real Leia Organa.

Or rather, Leia Skywalker.

Just as he and Vader were, she was as he’d last seen her. Her hair was braided into a crown around her head. She wore the white, dirtied jumpsuit, and there was that righteous fire in her dark brown eyes that made full grown men twice her size think twice about disobeying her.

And they were focused directly on him.

“I told you to go on vacation!” She stopped over him, hands on her hips. From the ground, he was forced to look up at her. The visual somehow made her seem far more... terrifying. “Do you know what that word means?! Do you need the definition?!”

He tried and failed to come up with an adequate response. Vader, he’d been expecting here, but not Leia. It wasn’t as though he wasn’t happy to see her, he was, but his brain was still trying to comprehend the sudden arrival of his now twin sister, and the fact that she was apparently just as pissed off as Vader was.

He honestly wasn’t sure who to be afraid of more.

“How did you get here?” Vader demanded...or it sounded that way. Distantly, Luke could feel his confusion echoing his own. Apparently, Vader hadn’t thought she knew how, either.

Leia barely spared him a glance. “Oh, like meditation is hard?”

Vader hesitated. “Actually, yes. For some.”

Luke wanted to ask if it had been hard for Vader when he’d first started, but he didn’t think now was the appropriate time.

Especially as Leia turned her wrath back on him.

“I told you to lay low! Do you have any idea how scared I am for you?! Do you have any idea what I thought when I felt you...you get injured?!”

She’d felt that?

“I thought you’d died! Then I couldn’t reach you anymore and I was certain of it! Then this moof
milker shows up and forces me to tell him I’m related to you--”

“*Moof milker?!*” Vader started, and Leia threw him a dark glare, pointing at him with just as much threat as any point their father had done.

“*Do not interrupt me!*”

Vader bristled, about to do just that, but Leia was back on Luke.

“Then I had to tell him what happened and *only then did I know you weren’t dead!*”

Guilt washed over him. If he’d thought Leia was dead, and for so long, with only Vader to tell him she was alive in probably not the most comforting terms…

“Leia, I--” he croaked, pleading.

“*I said don’t interrupt me!*” Now she was pointing at him, and he shrank back against the tree.

He’d decided. He was far more afraid of Leia.

“Then I find out you offered yourself up to be a *slave*?! What the *hell* is wrong with you, Luke?!”

He didn’t answer. He wasn’t sure how to, and he wasn’t sure she was done yet…

She wasn’t. “Even if you weren’t dead, I could have lost you forever anyway! And the kid you were trying to save was taken into slavery anyway! That means all of this was for *nothing!*”

He’d felt as if he’d been punched. “Wait, *what*? Vader didn’t say--”

“I didn’t know,” Vader added, staring at Leia.

And this time, Leia’s anger seemed to pause. Then, quieter this time, she repeated, “The kid was sold into slavery anyway, Luke. You could have *died* for nothing. You’re *injured and lost* for nothing.”

“Your *sister* is injured for nothing,” Vader added darkly. “She was shot at Taris.”

“In the *arm*, I am fine, stop being dramatic!”

It was as if he’d been gutted. He could hardly breathe--it *hurt* to breathe. When he swallowed, it felt as if he were trying to swallow an entire Jogan Fruit whole.

The boy was a slave anyway. He didn’t regret trying to save him, but to know he’d failed so spectacularly, and now Leia was not only injured but forced to tell Vader her identity…

He knew how much she’d hated him. Vader took his hand, but he’d taken far more from her. And now she was with him, putting her life at risk to find him…

And the boy hadn’t even been saved.

Leia’s features softened. “Luke, I didn’t mean...the fact you tried--”

“I’m sorry.” The words were bitter on his tongue, but he forced himself to say them anyway as he looked from Vader to Leia. “I’m sorry.”

He was sorry for failing to save the boy. He was sorry for how he’d gone about doing it. He was
sorry for forcing Leia to be in this situation, that she’d gotten hurt.

He was sorry for making both of them think he was dead, intentionally and unintentionally.

Leia’s shoulders slumped, and the anger evaporated just as quickly as it had come. He tried not to see the similarities between that and his father’s emotions, but it was difficult not to.

“Oh Luke,” she said softly, shaking her head...then turned to Vader. “Well. I’m here now. You can go.”

Vader’s gaze had never left her from the moment she arrived, but now his fury was back. “I am not done here.”

“You’ve had plenty of time with Luke.” Leia made a motion with her hand. “Shoo. I’ll ask him about the hyperspace jump.”


Did she just... *shoo Darth Vader*?!?

Despite the guilt still eating him alive, it was such a Leia thing to do, he couldn’t help but smile.

Vader hesitated, obviously wanting to tell her exactly what he thought of that request (and probably the way she’d said it), but then he stopped.

“Fine,” he snarled, pointing at her. “But hurry up. He has to wake up and keep moving.”


What exactly had happened between the two of them while he’d been stuck here? He wondered, but didn’t dare ask. Not as Leia huffed and gave a mock salute, and Vader disappeared.

Leaving him alone with his sister.

Chapter End Notes

Vader gets called names. Han gets Force choked. Luke's list of problems keep being added to. Leia is such a fire cracker. She almost literally banged the metaphorical vision door down and practically was like "ALRIGHT NO MORE BOYS CLUB, ITS MY TURN NOW"! Leia is goals. Seriously. But hey! At least Luke and Leia get to talk again!

The rest of my procedures are put on hold due to the Corona Virus situation, so...no more face pain for a while. Which is good I guess in the sense that I'll have more energy to write?? So, yay????

The song for this chapter is Leave Out All The Rest by Linkin Park

Leave some love!

Love,
LadyVader23
Luke and Leia

Chapter Notes

Thank you to the lovely beta, SpellCleaver! I sold her my soul for more angst abilities, and I have zero regrets!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I can’t believe you shooed Darth Vader.”

Leia’s shoulders slumped, all of her righteous fury evaporating. She sat down on the forest floor...or the dream forest floor. She hadn’t actually stopped to get a good look at the scenery before she’d launched her tirade.

Every time she’d envisioned this moment, it hadn’t quite looked like this. She’d pictured tears and hugging him, forbidding him from leaving her sight again. And she’d hoped Luke would actually be there, not in a dream and still stuck on some distant planet. But she’d entered the dream, taken one look at him, and just...lost it.

“It’s not hard.”

“I wouldn’t dare.”

“You’d probably get away with it too.”

“No. I’m certain I wouldn’t.”

Their eyes met, and despite the fact that he looked terrible with dark circles under his eyes and the lost weight, she couldn’t help but smile. A smile he returned, though it didn’t quite touch his eyes.

Now that he was here, now that she could see him.…

Could she touch him?

Carefully, she reached out with trembling hands, and found his.

Warm, calloused skin on the left; cool, unnatural smoothness on the right. And the moment they touched, his hands gripped hers, firmly.

She let out a shaky breath she didn’t realize she’d been holding. “Luke...” She breathed his name like a reverent prayer, and tears swam in her vision. “Luke…”


Yes, she’d been angry with him for foolishly throwing his life away despite her orders. Yes, she hated the situation he was in. But mostly, she was terrified for him.

“No, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have ever suggested you fake your death.” The tears spilled onto her cheeks, and she was surprised at how potently she felt Luke’s alarm before he reached up with his mechanical hand and brushed them away.
He hadn’t ever been that good with tears. At least, not hers. If he ever found her crying, he always attempted to find the root cause so he could fix it. She’d assumed it was because he was her best friend, and maybe that was still the case, but now? Now she wondered if he could feel her emotions just as potently as she did his.

“You... we thought we were doing the right thing,” he reminded her gently.

“But I was still wrong.” She grabbed the hand that was still wiping her tears away. She needed him to understand. She needed him to listen.

And she didn’t have to ask. He fell silent, and waited.

He knew her. More so than anyone. It was...strange, and yet... right.

Twins, indeed.

She took a few deep breaths before she continued. “I wanted to protect you from him. I didn’t want to see you like this anymore. I just wanted to help.”

And she could feel his guilt echoing hers...

“Instead you’re injured and lost, and everything’s gone wrong, and now I have these powers I know nothing about—”

“Nothing? Really?” Luke motioned around them. “Leia, if you haven’t noticed, this isn’t nothing. It took me forever to figure out how to meditate, and even then, Master Yoda said I was doing it wrong. I didn’t even know dreams like this could happen until I ran into Vader.”

“And you kept pretending to be dead.”

“Well yeah, wasn’t that the whole point of all this?”

It was, but...she let it go. She was the one who’d put the idea in his head.

She could still feel his guilt, just as strongly as her own. As if they shared a mind. Twins...Vader had said there was a bond between family, but...this didn’t feel like what she felt around Vader.

“Can you feel what I’m feeling?”

Luke hesitated, as if he were afraid she’d be upset by his invasion of her privacy. “I...usually get impressions, from most people, unless I actively pay attention. Some people are harder to read than others.”

“But what about my feelings?”

Another hesitation. “Yeah. Not consciously,” he rushed to add. “You’re always so...natural, to me. I don’t know if that makes sense.”

She nodded. “It does.” She didn’t know how else to explain it either. “So that explains why you always seem to know when I need you.”

Luke laughed a little. “And you, too.”

She made a face. “Vader says it’s our bond.”

“Yeah, but...but you feel different to me.”
So it wasn’t just her. “Because I’m not a psychotic Sith Lord?”

She succeeded in getting another laugh from him. “I’m sure that helps.”

She smiled back, then reached up to wipe her own tears away. “If I’d known you were my twin, I’d never have let you go.”

“You did what you thought best. You have nothing to be sorry for.”

She had everything to be sorry for. “I almost lost you, Luke. You wouldn’t be in this situation at all if it weren’t for me.”

He glanced down at their hands, and ran a thumb over her skin. “If I hadn’t offered myself up as a slave—”

“I am upset about that,” she agreed, giving him another pointed look. “But it’s also such a you thing to do…I can’t blame you for being you.”

But Luke shook his head. “No. I should have found another way. I disobeyed you not as my sister, but as my commander, and…I mean I didn’t know Father had issues with slavery, so now he’s taking it personally, I’m sure.”

She snorted. “Please. He’s part of the reason slavery is so rampant in the galaxy. Tell him to get over it.”

Luke shot her a strange look. “How do you do that?”

“Oh I am terrified of him. But that’s not going to change anything. I’m not going to let him rule my life, or the lives of those I care about. If I die for that…” She shrugged. “Then I die. It’s no different than the other risks I’ve taken throughout this entire war.”

“I see.” He continued to give her that strange look, and she was about to ask before he continued. “How did you even find out we were siblings?”

Oh. Oh.

It occurred to her just how much he’d missed.

“I went looking for you. I knew you’d planned on going to Dagobah, so I went there first. Artoo showed me a recording of our parents—”

“He what?!” Luke straightened, his widening. “How long has he had that?!”

“Probably the whole time.” How different would things have been if Artoo had shown them that footage earlier? She felt like seeing that footage right after Yavin IV would have been the perfect time, not when she was desperately looking for Luke. “You know how independent he is.”

“I know but he knew I was looking…” Luke trailed off, gaze sliding to his mechanical hand. She didn’t need to be his sister to know what he was thinking.
“I had my suspicions after that. I mean why else would I have Anakin Skywalker’s droids?”

“Wait, what?” He looked so lost, and she was again struck by how little he knew. She’d wanted nothing to do with her birth parents. Luke had always wanted to know his, and here she was, with far more information on them, and not enough time to go into all of it.

“When I find you, I’ll tell you everything,” she promised fiercely. “So don’t you dare die.”

“I’m pretty sure Vader wouldn’t let me,” Luke remarked dryly, “But I’ll see what I can do. At least tell me the basics.”

Basics. He said it like it was so easy. Nothing about either of their lives had been basic since...well, she supposed since they joined the Rebellion. Where to even start? How to keep it short?

“Well,” she tilted her head, “I met your Master Jedi, Yoda. He’s dying, by the way.”

“Why?”

Basics. She didn’t have time to stop and explain, even with the pained look on her brother's face. Her brother. Now that he was here...it felt good to think it while looking at him.

“He wanted me to train. I said no. Then I ran into Vader. You know how that turned out.”

“Okay, but... Yoda’s dying?”

She nodded sadly. “He might already be dead. He...wasn’t doing good. I got the feeling he was trying to hold out for you, but…” She trailed off at the intense guilt she sensed from him. “I’m sorry, Luke.”

She took his hand again, his flesh one. She reveled in its warmth, especially as his tightened over hers.

Force, she missed him. Dearly.

“Go on,” he encouraged, through a strained voice.

She wanted to comfort him more...but they didn’t have time.

“Right. Vader.” She cleared her throat. “He rescued Han for me. Oh...and you should probably also know he killed Jabba and his entire inner court—”

“Why is it that every new bit of information is somehow more shocking than the last?!”

“Well...we are related. Must be in our genes.”

That got a true, real smile out of Luke, and he leaned his head back against the trunk of the tree he sat against. And he laughed.

Truly, laughed.

She’d forgotten how much that smile lit up his face--how much it lit up the galaxy. It was a smile she could feel in her very bones.

“I miss you. So much,” she said, automatically, and Luke’s smile dropped some and there was that
guilt again. “Han misses you. Hell, Vader misses you. He…” She hesitated. Should she say it? Did he already know? “He missed you before. When he thought you were really dead. I didn’t think it was possible but…”

*Our baby is a blessing.*

Luke deserved to know.

“In the recording Artoo showed of our parents, Vader... Anakin said we were a blessing. He told our mother that. He meant it.” She looked down at their entwined hands. “I don’t...know what to do with that information. But you should know that.”

She was right to have told him. The guilt washed away, replaced by a deep warmth that could thaw even Vader’s cold presence. When Luke spoke, he sounded choked. “He...told me finding out we were coming was the happiest day of his life. He was willing to deal with the consequences. He didn’t say what those were, though.”

Like their mother probably dying in childbirth. She had a feeling it wasn’t a topic Vader would ever willingly discuss.

“What did she look like?” Luke asked, and when she looked up she found his piercing blue eyes on her. “Do I...look like her?”

“You have her softness, and her nose...and her stature.”

She felt each word land deep within Luke’s very soul. He treasured every detail, even as he jokingly said, “Are you calling me short?”

“I’m shorter than you, too. We both owe it to her.” She rolled her eyes. “But...other than that, you look like...like Anakin. Before he became Vader. You have his hair, his eyes...even some of the expressions on his face are definitely yours.”

Naturally, he both cherished that information...and felt uncomfortable by it. She understood far too well.

“So. I look more like Father. And you look more like Mother,” he surmised after a silence.

“Yes.” She didn’t mention her suspicions on their personalities. She...wasn’t quite ready to admit that herself, let alone say it aloud. When they found him, he’d probably see for himself. “And there’s a lot more I can tell you...there’s probably more you could probably force out of Vader. So as much as I could spend all day talking to you...I do actually need information from you, or Vader might kill me.”

“We wouldn’t want that.” Luke rolled his eyes. “What do you need to know that I haven’t already told him?”

“We’ve narrowed down a list of planets. Some are within one hyper jump from Taris. You...don’t have much time, so we’d rather start in the right search area.” She winced as she said it, even as she felt it to be true. He didn’t look injured here, but somehow she could feel there was an underlying pain beneath the surface.

He needed to be home. He needed to be resting.

Even if home was with Vader.
“Do you remember how many hyperspace jumps were taken? Did you take more than one hyperspace jump?”

Luke’s brows furrowed, and again that sense of pain strengthened...specifically in his head. Likely, he was concussed...she swallowed her panic, and waited. Panicking wouldn’t help, she reminded herself.

But he thought about it so long, she began to worry. Finally, he replied, “No. I don’t think so. I was in a cargo hold with no windows, though. I might have missed feeling the second jump.”

It wasn’t as reliable as she was hoping...but she didn’t think he was holding anything back. In fact, she felt his frustration with himself clearly. “Hey. It’s alright. That’s good information for us to know. Hopefully we choose the right area first.’”

But he scowled. “I’m useless like this. I’m sorry.”

“You can’t even see the sorry state I’m in.” That alone was a terrifying statement; he already looked terrible. “I probably smell horrible, too. I can’t remember the last time I’ve showered.”

“I don’t care, Luke. I just want you home.” She hesitated, hating that she felt it necessary to say, but she added, “And Vader doesn’t care either.”

Actually, if his reaction to her being shot was any indication, he’d probably become completely insufferable with his hovering and overprotectiveness. She made a mental note to keep Han far out of his way when that happened.

Luke let out a breath. “I want to be home too.”

She brushed a thumb over his cheek. “When I find you, I’ll tell you everything I learned. Then we’ll tackle Vader together and get more answers out of him.”

That made him smile. “He won’t know what hit him.”

“No, he won’t, and too bad. Then once you’re healed...we’ll figure out the rest of everything else. Together. So hold on. Do whatever it takes...but hold on.”

This time, it was Luke whose eyes filled with tears. “I will. I promise, Leia.”

It was a dangerous thing to promise...so much could happen. Leia’s heart swelled anyway, and she wanted nothing but to stay with him until they found him. But Vader was right--he needed to wake up. He couldn’t survive in this dream world.

So, trembling, she made herself lean forward and press a tender kiss on his forehead. “Come home, Luke.”

---

He sensed her emerge from her meditation, and he immediately tugged on their bond. Demanding and furious.

Be nice, Artoo, who had occupied his time by re-showing him the star map, chided. He’d made a few more modifications--anything to keep himself from storming into Leia’s bedroom to shake her
out and demand to know how the hell she’d accomplished meditation with zero instruction.

“I will do as I wish,” he snarled at the droid, pointing at him...which earned him a raspberry.

If the droid wasn’t so useful….

He was interrupted by the door opening. Leia stood there, blinking, staring at him like she’d forgotten he was there. He stood, hooking his thumbs in his belt, about to give her a piece of his mind…

The words died on his tongue.

Tears.

She was crying.

Instantly, he shifted awkwardly. Tears. He was always terrible with knowing what to do with them, even as Skywalker. As a Sith he’d made plenty of people cry, usually as he was killing them, but Leia…

Somehow, they were different.

But she evidently didn’t want him to do anything, because she quickly brushed them away, sniffling, then in her best attempt at a normal voice, blurted, “He doesn’t think they made another hyperspace jump.”

“That’s...good.”

That is all you have to say? Artoo gave the droid equivalent of a snort.

He opened his mouth, wracking his brain for anything...but nothing felt genuine. He doubted she’d appreciate it.

She didn’t seem to expect it, either. She approached them, looking at the star map still illuminated around them. “So? Where to?”

His gaze hadn’t left her. Whether he wanted to admit it or not, it still felt wrong to just...ignore the pained feelings he could sense in their bond. She refused to look at him, staring resolutely at the highlighted planets.

“I see you worked on it more.”

“Yes.” He truly was a failure of a father. He couldn’t even figure out the right words to say to make her stop hurting. The source of her pain wasn’t even him this time--it was Luke. And perhaps the actions she’d taken to put Luke in that position, a position that required immediate resolution due to injuries, a monster...and now lack of food.

But he still felt...wrong.

“You meditated.”

“Like I said. It wasn’t hard.” A spike of resentment that he didn’t miss, not when her feelings were so openly displayed before him.

Why? What would she be resentful about?
“How?”

She let out a sharp, annoyed breath. She still refused to look at him. “I just crossed my legs, closed my eyes, relaxed and thought about Luke.”

An unease settled over him. “It shouldn’t have been that easy. There must be more.”

Now she finally glared at him. “Well maybe I did more. I don’t know. It’s not like you’re eager to tell me for some reason.”

And there it was. The source of her resentment.

“You are upset about that.” Honestly, he hadn’t expected her to even want to train with him. Not seriously. Luke absolutely refused, and he’d done far less to the boy. Leia…

He wasn’t going to even begin thinking about that long list.

“No. It’s clear who you want to train. I’ll just ask Luke later.”

“*What?*” He couldn’t help it. He was so surprised by the admission, he actually backed up a step.

Leia followed the movement with her eyes, a delicate brow raising. “Are you having trouble hearing now?” she asked dryly. “I’m not repeating myself.”

No, he’d heard fine, it was just…

Leia was… *jealous* of Luke?

No. Even as he wondered, he didn’t feel that from her at all. The feeling she had for her brother was much too pure for him to examine for long. But that resentment…that was solely reserved for *him*.

“My decision to not train you has nothing to do with your brother.”

He hoped she’d take that as a good enough answer and leave it be, but of course he didn’t get his way. He was starting to realize Leia was just as hyper focused and demanding as he was.

Her eyes, so like her mothers, met his and he felt as though she were staring straight into the pit of what little was left of his soul. “Then why? Do you think I’m not capable?”

“No.” Hell, she’d figured out *meditation* on her own, just by *guessing*. Meditation had been one of the most difficult parts of his training, both as a Jedi and as a Sith. The fact that she’d simply decided to do it and then… *did it*…

The twins were equal in their power. But it was clear Leia was a natural.

Under different circumstances, he would have been pleased, but that vision replayed in his head…

“It is too dangerous for you to train.” He tried to turn back to the star map, hoping that would end it…

But of course not. She moved right in front of him, hands on her hips, glaring as though she dared him to ignore her.

“And yet it’s not dangerous for *Luke* to train? That makes *zero sense.* ”
She’s got you there. Artoo sounded too much like he was enjoying this.

If he didn’t have the star map…

“Don’t get me wrong. I’m not upset that you clearly favor my brother more. That works out just fine for me, but at least be honest about it.”

“I told you, I don’t favor him.”

“It’s only natural. You found out about him first. He looks like you did--”

“Do not mention my past!” Damn Artoo and his stupid recordings. The moment Luke was safe, he was wiping his memory--

“Clearly it has to do with the situation, so I’ll mention what I want. Besides, it probably isn’t great that I look like my mother--”

She continued, but he no longer listened. He simply stared.

Surely….surely she didn’t think he resented her for looking like her mother?

He actually wasn’t sure he even knew the answer to that. He hadn’t dared to think about it...but if her appearance bothered him, it wasn’t what kept him from training her--

“I saw a vision.”

The words were out before he could stop them, and Leia cut off.

An awkward silence passed between them. Even Artoo dared not intervene. He cursed himself, and the fact that she seemed to have a way of getting him to talk without him wanting to.

Just like Padme.

Maybe...maybe there was something to what she’d said.

But he wouldn’t deal with it then. Or ever. What mattered was that she understood why he didn’t want to train her. And given the fact that their views on Luke were largely similar, she’d likely agree with his decision anyway.

What did he have to lose?

“Luke was with me in the vision. He wanted me to help him save someone.”


“Yes.” Which was why it likely was real, and he had to prevent that future. “The person he wanted me to save was you.”

“Was this before or after you knew who I was?”

“Before.” Right before. He’d literally exited the Dark Side cave and walked in on her trying to escape. “You...you were a Sith. And you and I were clearly enemies.”

“I would never,” she replied hotly, that righteous fire that reminded him so much of her mother lighting in her eyes. “That goes against everything I’ve worked so hard towards.”
“But you were. And when we began to fight, Luke...he got in the way.” He paused, remembering her tears earlier. “We kill Luke.”

The words weighed heavily between them. Leia stared and her disbelief, her denial screamed at him. “I would never.”

“If I were to train you, it would to be a Sith. It is the nature of the Sith to kill their master.”

“I’m not asking to be trained as a Sith!” She stepped away, breathing hard. “Did you even bother asking me what I wanted?! No, you’re still protecting him over me!”

He opened his mouth to object...then closed it.

Hadn’t that been his exact reason? To protect Luke? To keep her from becoming a threat?

“I need to know how to protect myself so I don’t get shot! I need to know how to communicate with my brother—hell, with you if I need to, though don’t get me wrong I definitely don’t want to. I clearly need to know how to shield my emotions and thoughts so you stop reading them...there are plenty of things I could be taught that have nothing to do with Jedi or Sith and are just pragmatic abilities!”

“If you haven’t noticed, you and I are far too much alike. If I train you, especially as you are now, you will fall, and that vision will come true.” He pointed at her. She needed to understand, now more than ever. He knew she didn’t want to think about their similarities, no more than he wanted to think about her looking so much like her mother… but it was imperative for her to realize she was the perfect candidate to become a Sith.

If he turned her and she still hated him…

No, worse, if Palpatine got hold of her...especially if he’d done training with her…

Her lips tightened at that reminder, but this time she didn’t argue. Either because she was accepting their similarities, or something else, Vader didn’t know. But when she spoke, it was low and even. “I know who I am, Lord Vader. I am not a Jedi. I am not a Sith. But I’m tired of being left out in the dark. So either trust me enough to teach me, or get the hell out of my way and I’ll do it myself.”

Trust?

When was the last time he’d trusted anyone?

He knew that answer. He refused to think about it, even with her spitting image standing directly in front of him.

But...he’d been wrong. She’d never betrayed him. He’d broken his trust in her because of a lie...because Kenobi had betrayed her trust in him. And everything had fallen apart because of that.

What if the answer to avoiding the vision was simply to...trust his daughter?

It was a foreign concept. He didn’t know where to begin. It wasn’t even something a Sith should do...but lately, he’d been doing a lot of things contrary to who he was supposed to be. All because...because he needed to be a father first.

To Luke, and to Leia.
“Look at the star map,” he ordered, and when Leia blinked at him, he repeated impatiently, “Look at the star map!”

She frowned, but did as told.

“Now.” He came to stand directly behind her. “I want you to look at the highlighted hyperspace lanes, and I want you to think about Luke exactly like you did earlier.”

She tensed in disbelief...but then her shoulders relaxed, and her thoughts turned away from him. Instead, she focused on Luke, projecting those thoughts so strongly into the Force that he was tempted to back away.

Images. Luke’s smile...a smile that Vader hadn’t ever seen on his son’s face, a smile that lit up the entire galaxy...

His laugh. It rang in Vader’s ears even as it did in Leia’s mind. Then there was a smell...a smell he knew too well. Dust and earth, sage, mixed with the smell of engine oil.

And even though they were separated...he could practically see that bond between Leia and Luke flaring to life, calling to her...

“What hyperlane should we explore first?” It was an effort to speak. The images, sounds and smells were so intimate, something he as his father should have known, but didn’t. He felt like he was intruding on something he shouldn’t have...but he was his son and he should have known too...

Leia hesitated, but only for a brief moment. He felt her clarity in the Force just as she did. “That one.” She pointed to the hyperspace lane Solo had highlighted earlier. “That’s the lane we need to check first.”

Of course. Of course Solo had given them a good lead. He wished the source had come from literally anyone but him but...he had to admit, the Force wasn’t wrong, and it had been a good lead.

Maybe Solo had a use, after all.

“Excellent.”

She turned around, blinking skeptically, completely unaware of the feat she’d pulled. “That’s it? It’s that easy?”

Easy. He stared at her, amazed and...dare he admit it, proud of the girl who had once been such a thorn in his side.

She was strong. So, so strong.

“Go get the smuggler,” he said instead, crossing his arms. “We have planets to search.”


That was the new chant in his head, the one he whispered under his breath when he stumbled and exacerbated his injuries further. When he was covered in so much sweat, his clothes were completely drenched. When he wanted to give up.

Home.
With Han. With Leia. With Vader.

A...really strange home he never would have dreamed about, and he doubted it would be without serious problems when this was all over.

But he’d keep going. He’d keep fighting.

For Han.

Absolutely for Leia.

And...for some insane reason, for his father.

It was late at night, and it was eerily...quiet. There were no roars. There were no thundering footsteps. All that was left was the sound of nightlife in the trees, of stupid beek monkeys calling to one another...and the howls of those dog things in the distance.

He made sure his blaster was within quick drawing distance. Just in case.

When he’d woken up, he’d once more reached out towards sentient life. He was much closer now, though still far enough away that it would likely take him another day or two before he reached it, given his agonizingly slow pace. But when he’d reached out, he was certain he felt that the...settlement? Maybe? Whatever it was, he was certain it had grown larger.

Strange.

He’d need to be careful before he approached, assuming Vader didn’t find him first. But if they were friendly, he could borrow a comm link…

He still had Vader’s personal comm number memorized. It would be much faster, and maybe he could eat and get medical attention before he showed up and was disappointed by the state he was in.

He didn’t care what Leia said. Vader was definitely the type to value strength over weakness. Sure, he’d told him his injuries...but to actually see them, or worse, smell him …

He just couldn’t shake the thought that he looked pretty pathetic, and he’d probably get a lecture at the very least about it.

So. He was hoping these people were friendly, and that they’d provide some medical care and maybe a shower before his father showed up.

He tried not to dwell on it too much, though. Especially as the night grew darker and darker, and thoughts of being rescued turned to thoughts of fluffy, luxurious, soft, rock-free beds. He pictured it so vividly in his mind, his eyes began to droop and he stumbled, barely managing to catch himself in time.

He braced against the tree with his good shoulder, then reached up and flicked himself in the face a few times. “Wake up,” he muttered, wishing he could make the heaviness in his eyelids go away. “Wake...”

He stopped short.

And listened.

For a moment, he heard nothing out of the usual. Adrenaline began to pump through his veins, and
his hand again lowered to the blaster at his side…

Especially as he heard the unmistakable sound of a speeder bike engine zooming in the distance.

And coming closer.

He hardly breathed, suddenly wide awake, bile rising in his throat as he quickly weighed his options. Unmistakable civilization was right there and…and he had no idea if they were friendly or not. He could reach out into the Force and find out immediately. But that would send up a signal in the Force, and if that Creature was looking for him, it would be like waving a neon “Here’s dinner, come and eat me!” sign.

But they were coming closer. And the thought of being rescued, of being able to sleep in a real bed, of getting medical treatment and finally contacting someone who could help…

It was tantalizing.

It could be a trap, though. They could have evil intent. And what if they recognized him? Sure, his hair was still dyed and he was certain he’d lost even more weight, plus he hadn’t shaved in weeks, but still. It was a risk--and one he shouldn’t take.

He should stick with the plan and keep going until he reached the settlement. Then he could wait until daylight and safely use the Force.

But what if they were friendly? He’d wait days, and who knew what other horrors could happen to him in that time? He was hungry, injured, exhausted and he wanted nothing more than an honest, uninterrupted nap.

Besides, the galaxy thought he was dead. The pirates were all dead, too. So it wasn’t like they were looking for him.

A risk. Such a risk.

I’m not going to do it. I’m going to wait. I…I can keep going…

But his hand was pulling out his blaster, shaking uncontrollably.

I’m not going to. I’ll follow the plan. Vader might even find me before I get there. Leia will be with him. Maybe Han. I can rest on the Executor…

But even as he thought it, he knew the risks of staying on his own were far too great.

He sucked in a breath.

“Hey!” he shouted, pointing the blaster up into the treetops and firing a few times. “Over here! Help!”

Force, he hoped this paid off.

The sound of the engines swerved, coming even closer. He continued to shout, leaning heavily against the tree. Soon enough, headlights appeared, blinding him. Then…

A speeder bike pulled up. An ordinary, albeit a little run down, speeder bike. An old man sat on it, wearing camo gear with a green helmet and goggles over his eyes. On the back of the bike, where his supplies were tied down, was a fresh deer carcass.
A hunter.

“What the hell are you doin all the way out here?” The man demanded, then frowned at him as he got a better look at the sorry state he was in. “Bloody hell, what happened to you?”

Luke wanted to relax his guard...but he didn’t dare. “The ship I was on crashed. I was the only survivor and I’ve...I’ve been stranded for a while.”

His voice broke. This was the first time he’d actually, really talked to another human being. He’d only communicated with Vader, and only in his mind. To actually use his vocal cords to talk to someone…

“I need help.”

He was begging. Tears began streaking down his face. This was a stranger, one whose intent he didn’t know, but he just needed help.

The old man frowned, eyes narrowing as he took him in. “Well...alright. I s’pose I could at least take you back.”

He was desperate, but… “Back where, exactly?”

“My farm.”

That made sense. He clearly looked like a hunter, bringing home food. Except...Except...

“Why are you going deeper into the forest?”

He already had a kill. Why keep going when he could go home with it and be done for the night?

But the man had an answer for that, as well. “Oh, I was gunna hunt some bigger game and use this as bait.”

Luke still hesitated. It seemed logical enough. Considering the size of the Creature, who knew what else large enough to want an entire deer lived out there?

“Look, I don’t got all night. You want help, or not, boy?”

“I do.” Then, stronger, he repeated, “I do.”

“Well, climb aboard, then.” He scooted forward, making room for Luke on the back of the bike. “Be careful with your leg. That looks nasty.”

Luke could have cried just over how fast the speeder carried them. What would have taken him days, took only a few hours. Something as simple as a speeder bike seemed like a miracle, passing over rocks and roots that had slowed him down, stuck into his sides while he slept, and tripped him. Over and over, he thanked the man, not caring that he sounded like a babbling idiot.

“I already told you, it’s fine. You got lucky, boy.” The man paused. “What’s your name, anyway?”

He was so happy, he almost answered with his real name, but he stopped himself. “Lars.”

It wasn’t technically a lie. His uncle had tried repeatedly to get Luke to use their last name, but the moment he’d learned his father’s last name, he’d refused to give it up. If his uncle was there now, he’d probably grumble about how he’d finally learned.
“Well, Lars. The name’s Recheer.” The man said. “Glad I found you when I did. This forest is dangerous if you don’t know it.”

“No kidding.” Luke wondered if the man knew what the Creature was. He was a hunter, after all. Surely he knew of its existence, or even how to beat it.

Except Luke didn’t want to care anymore. He was going home. In a few short hours, he was sure Vader would show up, and he’d be off this hell hole of a planet. “Do you have a comm I could use?”

“You got someone lookin for you?”

He couldn’t help but smile. “Yeah.”

“Good. I’ve got a comm back home. You can use that, then you should shower. You smell as bad as the deer.”

He was probably right. He wasn’t sure how he’d navigate a shower with his injuries, but he’d make it work. Anything to look somewhat less pathetic.

By the time they cleared the treeline and out into an open field, it was about an hour until sunrise. Luke breathed a sigh of relief, eyes scanning ahead, looking for the farm that would save his life.

But there was no farm.

There was no village.

Sure there were a lot of buildings, but they looked industrial, rather than like what he’d expect for a village.

“I thought you said we were going to your farm?” he asked as Recheer moved the bike towards it.

“Yeah, we are. It’s beyond the factory district. I wanted to drop the deer off at the butcher’s since I can’t use it.”

That seemed...like an okay answer. One Luke didn’t like, but...this had been his destination in the first place. This is where he’d sensed all those sentient beings. He would have shown up here anyway.

“Maybe you could just leave me here,” he suggested. “Is there a doctor? One that has a comm?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t mind you comin over. There’s plenty of room at my place.” Luke didn’t like that he was insisting, especially with a town right there, but then the man added, “Though I guess you’re pretty injured...maybe I should take you to a doctor.”

Luke relaxed a little. “Yeah. You can still drop off your deer... I just need to get home quickly.”

“Sure, kid.” They were entering the town, and again Luke was tempted to use the Force to gauge the intentions of those around him. But there was still no sunlight, and he didn’t want to risk drawing that monster towards town.

“Will they even be awake?” Luke asked, noticing the streets were eerily empty.

“It’s a butcher shop.” Recheer snorted. “My pal’s gotta be up early if he wants to open on time.”

That...also made sense. So when Recheer pulled over in front of a building that definitely didn’t
look like a typical butcher’s shop, Luke was only slightly cautious.

Recheer cut the engine, and Luke’s ears rang in the sudden, eerie silence.

“Oi!” Recheer yelled, getting off his bike.

Luke stayed put, frowning. It was...odd to yell if most of the town was asleep. Wasn’t it? And why did the butcher's shop look so much more like a small office building?

A bad feeling began to settle in his gut, and Luke reached for his blaster.

A door opened, and light spilled out into the street. Luke winced, trying to make out the silhouette in the doorway, shadowed by the light behind him.

There was a bang! And suddenly his entire body went numb, and his world was tilting as he fell, or rather, slid from the bike, collapsing on the cobblestone streets.

Instinctively, he reached for the Force, no longer caring what he drew towards town.

The Force screamed at him, even as someone stepped into his line of vision.

*Danger! Danger, danger, danger--!*

A man stood over him, a man...a man he thought he recognized, with his mustache…

“Remember me, asshole?!” the man spat, lifting a blaster. “You thought you could escape, after the stunt you pulled?!”

He scrambled to remember. He knew the man’s face, but what about a name? Was this the pirate he’d tried to swindle?

Dammit, he couldn’t *remember* and his entire body felt numb--

“Well guess what? *I’m in charge now*. And you’re going to wish you’d died with the rest of the crew when I’m through with you!”


But the man pulled the trigger, and blue light once again shot at him-- a *stun gun*-- and his vision blackened.

Chapter End Notes

I AM (NOT) SORRY. It started so nice and then it ended with ANGST! AND PAIN! Muahahahahahahaha!!!!!!

(Why am I so mean to Luke? Idk. I love him so much....but let's be real, he also gets injured consistently in the OT too so...I'm not the only one, here. He's going to want a restraining order from me by the end of this, though)

The songs for this chapter are:

Luke and Leia, by John Williams (THE MASTER)

Will I Make It Out Alive by Tommee Profitt and Jessie Early (WILL HE MAKE IT OUT ALIVE?!)
Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
When Luke opened his eyes, his vision was out of focus and a constant ringing filled his ears. He could hear his own breathing loud and clear, but the voices around him were distorted. For too long, he tried to make sense of what was happening--where was up and down? What position was he in?

Where **was** he?

He squeezed his eyes shut, releasing a groan. A split second later, a sharp pain reverberated at the top of his head, and his head was yanked up. A mustached man was right in his face, snarling something. Splittle flew from his mouth to hit his skin.

“Personal...space...” he gasped.

That earned him a swift punch to the face, and pain exploded through his jaw as his head whipped to the side, then dropped back to his chest. Coppery fluid-- **blood**-- filled his mouth, and he gagged, causing it to dribble out of his mouth and towards the floor.

Upright. He was upright.

And apparently, he’d pissed someone off.

Again.

The man was talking. He spat out more blood, trying to determine what he’d lost, why he was there with...with…

His arms were up. Chained up, reaching towards the ceiling.

And the feeling was coming back into his limbs far too quickly. He was suddenly aware of screeching pain tearing through his shoulders, but most especially through his left--

“I said,” the man hissed, and Luke hardly had time to marvel that he could finally understand before something **pressed** into his bruised ribs. He gasped, gagged again on blood --tongue, he’d bitten his **tongue**-- and coughed it out. “What is your name, little Jedi?”

Jedi. Mustache. Pirates. He was starting to remember, though everything was still a haze of agony…

“Black Sun,” he managed. “You’re...I know you.”

A harsh laugh, and his head was being yanked up again by the hair. Tears sprang unwillingly to his
eyes. “What, did you get brain damage in that crash?”

Crash. Right. That’s why he was injured. His father was coming for him. Leia was coming for him. Where were they? He tried to remember the last conversation he had with them…

*Come home, Luke.*

“I thought you were dead,” the man snarled, his face so close to Luke’s that he could smell the rot in his breath. “If me and my crew had stayed aboard, maybe I’d be dead, too.”

That’s right. There’d been bodies. Charred bodies at the crash site.

“I figure, if they’re dead, you’re dead. Then one day some little girl comes lookin for you. And if she’s lookin, then maybe you *aren’t* dead. So I come back with my crew. Turns out we already got a base with resources, and we start searchin. Then you *hand yourself over*."

He was starting to remember the sound of the speeder, then the hunter, then…

He’d been stunned. This pirate had stunned him. And now he was hanging in…in some makeshift prison that looked more like a storage room…

“So. What. Is. Your. Name?”


The man let go of his hair, and again Luke’s head fell forward. “See, after the stunt you pulled, I find it difficult to believe anything you say.”

“Then why bother asking?” The bleeding in his mouth seemed to be slowing down. At least, when he spat, there didn’t seem to be as much blood.

“Because you’re awfully familiar, Jedi.”

Bile rose in his throat. What would this pirate do if he found out who he was? There were too many possibilities. Maybe, if he was lucky, he’d turn him in to Vader and unwittingly help him get home.

But then the pirate said, “That girl was familiar too. I looked her up. Turns out, she’s Leia Organa.”

Shit.

“Since I thought you were dead, I decided to take out my revenge on your friend. She escaped with the help of Darth Vader.”

Again his hair was being yanked, and he groaned at the sharp pain at the back of his scalp. “Now. Why would Leia Organa, famed Rebel Princess, be working with Darth Vader to find a Jedi?”

He wasn’t sure how to respond to that. At least not in a way that wouldn’t get him turned over to the Emperor. Because that was the worst case scenario, right? What would his father do if he was handed over to the Emperor?

Sure, he’d planned on it at Bespin, but since then… he hadn’t mentioned it.

In fact, Luke got the distinct impression he was trying to avoid it.
But he’d been wrong about his father before.

“Why the hell would I know?” was what he settled on. “Maybe you imagined Organa with him too—” he was cut off by a kick to the ribs, and without meaning to, he screamed. It felt as though his chest was on fire, and it was so damn difficult to breathe--

“Don’t give me that bullshit!” the pirate snarled. “I know what you are. I know what I saw! You’re a Jedi, and that girl was Leia Organa, and for some reason she and Darth Vader are working together and they’re going after you! What is your name?!?”

There were stars in his eyes, and he couldn’t even think, let alone draw the breath it would take to answer.

“Answer me!”

“...Lars,” he finally managed to wheeze out. “Moisture...farmer....Tatooine...ask anyone....”

He knew the lie would cost him, but he had a feeling the truth would cost even more. So he braced himself for the next blow, for the inevitable pain.

It didn’t come.

The door opened.

“Rayner.” An unfamiliar voice, heavily accented. He didn’t have the strength to look up.

Rayner. Yes, that name sounded familiar.

“I’m busy.”

“Prince Xizor requests you contact him.”

There was a long pause. “I’ll contact him when I’m done--”

“Immediately.”

Rayner cursed. “Fine. I’m coming.”

Luke remained absolutely still, partly hoping he’d be forgotten, but after a pause a fist was rammed into his stomach. Instinctively, Luke attempted to curl inwards, even as what little air he had in his lungs left him in a whoosh. It shot white-hot pain through his shoulder as his arms pulled on the chains.

He was going to be sick. He was going to be sick...

He threw up.

“Think on your answers, Lars. This isn’t over.” Rayner hissed, then Luke listened as his footsteps retreated away, followed by the sound of the door slamming shut. An electronic beep sounded, locking it.

Breathe, he distantly reminded himself over and over again, breathe!

He only managed short, painful gasps. But it was something.

How far away was his father? Leia hadn’t said, other than they’d found possible planets. He’d
thought his worst problem while he waited was starving to death, or maybe falling and injuring himself further, or getting eaten. Now he was captured by a pirate with a serious grudge against him, who suspected something major was going on, and he didn’t know how long he had. A few hours? A day?

He had a feeling a week would be too much to ask for.

Though his mind was a haze of agony, and his spirit felt like it wanted to detach from his body just to leave pain behind, he knew he needed to take advantage of Rayner’s absence.

Time to figure out what he was going to do. Time to clear his head enough to get the Force back under his control.

Time to figure out how to escape...and maybe contact his father on the way out.

It would take a few hours to get to the first planet: Brachi. Then, if he didn’t sense Luke there, they’d jump to the other viable planet on the smuggler’s route: Arorua. Thankfully, the jump between those two planets was only about a forty five minute jump, but to potentially be so close to his son…

He almost didn’t dare let himself hope.

When it came to his son, things always seemed to go terribly wrong. It was as if the Force were trying to pry them apart.

But Leia’s feeling hadn’t been off. He’d sensed it too--as much as he hated Solo for being the one to suggest it, the smuggler’s route made the most sense both logically and with the Force.

“Make sure quarters are prepared, Admiral. The west rooms, connected to mine.” In the hologram over his comm, Piett frowned. Vader paid it little heed; he, Leia, Artoo and Solo were already loaded onto one of his Lambda class shuttles, sitting in orbit outside the Executor. “It had better be done by the time I return. Then I again want no one in my sector of the ship.”

Sometimes, it paid to be the second in command of the entire galaxy. Let alone commander of the armed forces.

Still, as carefully controlled as his expression was, he could see the hesitation in Piett’s eyes. He didn’t need the Force to know what it was he was wondering: he’d been ignoring his work. He’d barely left his quarters in his preoccupation with Leia, Solo and the search for his supposed-dead son.

He would not explain it to Piett. Not now. Perhaps when his son was returned and well on his way to healing, he’d decide whether or not to include the Admiral on the knowledge of who’d been taking residence on the Executor.

But not when his son still needed to be found.

Luckily for him, the Admiral seemed to sense that questions would not be tolerated. “It will be done, My Lord.”

He didn’t sound happy about it.

Vader switched the comm off just as Solo entered the cockpit. “I can’t believe I’m asking this,” Solo began grudgingly.
“Then don’t ask.”

He doubted he’d ultimately need Solo’s help with his son’s rescue, but he’d decided it wouldn’t hurt to surprise Luke. He didn’t understand what his children saw in the smuggler, but if it made Luke happy...he’d allow the man to be there for his rescue.

“Lambda class shuttles are easier to fly with two people. I figured you could use the help of the best pilot in the galaxy.”

Vader’s lip curled, a million retorts leaping to his tongue at the ridiculous boast. Solo had managed to survive him in battle, but only barely. Perhaps when this was done he’d challenge Solo and best him, just to make sure it was clear who that title belonged to.

And maybe, just maybe, an accident would befall the smuggler, and…

He couldn’t help but be pleased at the image of Solo’s ship blowing to pieces on an asteroid as he waved a hand to Artoo, who was plugged into the system. “I have my navigator. I have no need of help from an insignificant smuggler. Now go strap in and do not lay a hand on my daughter.”

He knew that last command was likely to be ignored, but he was throwing it out there anyway. He’d deal with Solo when he caught him disobeying later.

“Fine. Just thought I’d offer.”

Vader scowled, turning around to rip into Solo again, but the smuggler had already left the cockpit. Vader sensed him approaching Leia on the other end of the ship.

*Maybe he was looking for quality time,* Artoo had the audacity to suggest, earning him a glare. *Is it not tradition for significant others of one's offspring to attempt to forge a connection with their parental units?*

“He is not his significant other. We are not discussing this. Plug in the coordinates for Brachi.”

*Denial.* Artoo blew a raspberry but before Vader could lose his temper, the coordinates flashed across the console screen.

As troublesome as the little droid was, he was reliable. He didn’t need Solo. Leia didn’t need Solo. *Luke* didn’t need him either.

And there was no way in hell he was bonding with the man.

Not when he could barely do so with his own children.

“You will not mention this again,” he warned, ignoring Artoo’s answering laugh before he launched the shuttle into hyperspace.

_______________________________________________________________

It was a very, very stupid plan.

But he didn’t have many options.

Who knew where his father was? Who knew if he’d live until he arrived? Or worse, who knew if he’d be carted off to the Emperor, or fitted with a slave chip and…

Those risks were still there regardless of what choice he made. He wasn’t about to sit there until the choice was made for him.
So while Rayner was gone for a few hours, Luke closed his eyes, did his best to ignore the pain, and buried himself in the Force.

The industrial village--district?--was definitely full of pirates. Rayner hadn’t lied; this was an outpost of some sort. Not a single mind he brushed against was well intended enough to trust. Hell, even Han when he’d first met him felt more honorable than these thugs.

He considered potentially playing them against each other...but he wasn’t great at manipulation. Besides, anyone who succeeded in a battle with Rayner, Luke wasn’t sure he had the energy to take them. He quickly discarded that idea.

He did take note of potential exits, however. At least, the areas of the compound he sensed people coming and going through. It wasn’t a perfect map, but he thought he had a pretty good idea of a mental layout after a while.

After a while, a shaky plan had formed, one that if successful, could get him handed back to his father. And if it wasn’t...

Well. He had a back up plan too.

Which...might get him killed.

Just in case, he reviewed other potential exits until the door opened and he sensed the familiar grimy presence of Rayner.

Yes. He’d definitely sensed this man before, on Taris. How had he forgotten for so long?

“Times up, little Jedi,” Rayner snarled. When Luke opened his eyes and lifted his head, he found him holding a baton, casually smacking the end of it into the palm of his hand. He grinned when he noticed Luke’s gaze and gave it a particularly hard smack! “Who are you?”

Behind him, the door shut after admitting another man--a Quarren, who leaned against the wall and eyed Luke warily.

He took a painful, but calming breath.

Time for Plan A.

“Fine. You want to know why Darth Vader was with Organa?”

Rayner paused, the baton going still. “So it was Organa.”

“Assuming you’re right. I wasn’t there.” Rayner’s grip tightened on the baton, and Luke quickly hurried on. “Organa is one of Vader’s personal agents. She’s a spy, infiltrating the Rebellion at the highest order.”

It was such a blatant lie, one Leia would kill him for if she ever heard about it. But wouldn’t that be what the Rebellion would think if they found out she and Luke were Darth Vader’s children? So...in a way...it wasn’t that much of a stretch, from a certain point of view.

He just had to hope Rayner didn’t know much about Leia personally to buy the lie.

The pirate hesitated, disbelief clouding his Force signature. “How the hell would you know that? What, are you some kind of Rebel?”

Sick delight washed over his face and he jabbed the end of the baton sharply into the center of his chest. “You admit it! You are a--”

“No... quite.”

That was the truth. He’d barely had any training. Regardless of their apparent...progress (if he could even call it that), Vader had made the point quite clear. You are not a Jedi yet.

Yet.

But as far as Rayner knew, it was a lie, and his face yet again twisted as he raised the baton…

“Vader and Organa are looking for me because I’m his son.”

Such a risk. He was playing with fire.

But it at least froze both Rayner and the Quarren. They stared at him like he’d grown a second head.

“Impossible.” The Quarren shook his head, his tentacles quivering even as he denied it.

“I think we’d know if Darth Vader had a son,” Rayner agreed, glaring at him. “You’re a kriffing liar--”

“You want proof that I’m not lying?” Please work, please work-- “I have Vader’s personal comm number. Call him. He’ll tell you.”

There was silence in the room as the pirates stared at him. Clearly, this wasn’t how either of them pictured this conversation would go. “You’re lyin,” Rayner whispered. His disbelief was obvious, but Luke could sense him start wondering what if…

Luke met his dark eyes, willing the calming light of the Force to fill each word as he said, “You will call Darth Vader and inform him his son is here.”

The Quarren straightened, a glassy look in his eyes, but Rayner just frowned. “You can’t be his son. He’s a monster. He’s a machine.”

Damn.

“Like I said. Call him. Tell him I’m here. See what he says.” And in the off chance it worked on his friend, Luke listed the comm number he’d repeated until it was practically tattooed on his brain.

The Quarren whispered the numbers to himself.

Maybe. Just...maybe it had worked.

But Rayner’s expression darkened, and Luke only had the tightening of his hands on the baton as a warning before the vicious attack.

“Liar!”

Whack on the cheekbone.

“You’re a Jedi!”
Side of the head. He saw stars.

“*You’re a Jedi!*”

Slam on his injured shoulder. He screamed, instinctively trying to move away…

“Rayner, *stop!*” The Quarren. Luke was still reeling from the onslaught, bracing himself for more...but none came.

“If he’s telling the truth, this will only damn us further!”

There was a silence. Luke’s vision was still swimming, his cheek, head and shoulder throbbing and pulsing…

“When I come back,” Rayner hissed finally, “I’ll have decided what to do with you.”

From his tone, Luke doubted it would be to announce Darth Vader was coming to pick him up.

Distantly, he could feel the conflict in the Quarren. Perhaps his plan worked. Perhaps Rayner’s mind would be changed. He doubted he could afford to wait.

No, Luke decided as he was again left alone, the Force responding to his thoughts.

It was time for Plan B.

It was extremely awkward being stuck on a ship with Darth Vader and the boyfriend he didn’t approve of. Not that she cared he didn’t approve--after all, he didn’t have the right to do so.

Still, that made her the one in the middle, and the atmosphere was so suffocating, she half wished they’d left Han behind. The other half, though, was glad for some sense of normalcy in the whole situation. It was nice to have someone with her who cared about her for who she was, not for...whatever it was Vader viewed her as.

Shortly after entering hyperspace, Vader joined them in the main holding area. He said nothing, other than throwing what Leia thought was a glower at Han (which he ignored), and instead pulled out a deactivated medical droid. Then he sat right across from them, as though trying to prove a point, and began working on the deactivated droid.

It definitely killed any conversation she might have wanted to have with Han.

She usually tried to steer clear of thinking about her friends from Alderaan. Most of them had died, after all. But she couldn’t help but remember one of them complaining loudly that their father had done something similar.

“When he showed up, my dad was sitting on the porch literally cleaning his blaster! Who even does that?!”

Apparently, Vader. Except he *was* the weapon.

She didn’t know long it was until she finally asked, “What are you doing?”

Anything to break the awkward silence.

“Fixing the droid,” Vader replied flatly.
“Seems perfectly fine to me,” Han grumbled, clearly annoyed. The fact that he was only annoyed when most men would have been terrified…

Vader definitely underestimated him.

“I didn’t say it was broken.” Vader didn’t even look up from what he was doing.

She remembered the droid who’d worked on her injured arm. Vader had adjusted that droid before it had touched her, too.

*I modified its patient handling personality.*

He was preparing it to work on Luke. She’d figured it was for him anyway, but he was truly **preparing** it for his arrival. Given what he’d told her of Luke’s state, he’d definitely need it, but…

“When we find your brother,” Vader said, as though reading her thoughts. He probably was, and she shot him a look. “I have modified the captain’s quarters as a temporary med bay.”

The shuttle wasn’t quite as roomy as the Falcon, but it did have at least one small private room near the cockpit. She had to admit, that was...ideal.

“You will stay with the droid and your brother while I take us back to the Executor.”

She couldn’t help but be pleased with the assignment. When they found him, she didn’t ever want him out of her sight again anyway.

“What am I supposed to do?” Han asked.

Vader paused in what he was doing on the droid. “When I find a use for you, I will let you know.” He pointed at him. “*Don’t get in my way.*”

She winced. She knew how good Han was at taking orders, even ones that made sense: he was **terrible.** And from coming from Vader, she half expected him to start calling him names again.

But Han did none of that. Though his mood darkened, he merely nodded and gave a somewhat sarcastic, “Yes, **sir.**”

Either Han was learning not to mess with Vader, or he was too worried about Luke to cause unnecessary arguments. She wasn’t sure.

She was just grateful when Vader stared at Han a moment more, then went right back to his fiddling.

---

Plan B had several steps.

The first step, and perhaps the craziest, was to wake the monster.

It was still daylight. At least, he thought so based on the activity around the compound. The Creature wouldn’t be able to wreak havoc until nightfall. That would give him time for the other steps in his plan.

But it took longer than he thought to stretch his senses out and find the Creature. Evidently, he was further from it than he thought. Would it even be able to show up in time?

He didn’t know, but he needed some sort of distraction. He wouldn’t get far as injured as he was.
So when he finally sensed it, already on the cusp of alertness, he imagined his own presence shoving against the Creature’s. *Hard.*

*Get up, you kriffing monster!* he mentally shouted at it.

He didn’t know if it would work. It was, after all, in theory. He’d never attempted something like this. But he felt it shudder awake, confused at first, before dark tendrils latched onto his, and he felt its hunger.

And its fury at being woken up a tad bit early.

*Come and get me!*

He could have sworn he heard its snarl in his head as he retreated, taking his time to draw back so it could easily track him.

If he played his cards right, he’d escape before the Creature got through the pirates. If he was lucky, the pirates would kill the Creature.

And if he was even luckier, his father would show up and take him far away from any pirates or Sith Creatures.

Hopefully, Han’s insistence that he was lucky would be true. Just for a few hours.

The next step was breaking free of the chains. He’d had some practice back at the crash site of using the Force to unlock doors, and the manacles around his wrists weren’t much different. He focused first on his left wrist, wanting to ease the pain in his shoulder as soon as possible. It took a few tries, but soon the metal released, and his arm came crashing down.

He gasped, tears involuntarily spilling down his face as his shoulder both burned and stabbed at him, while the gasp made his ribs feel like they were jabbing into his lungs. He squeezed his eyes shut, willing the pain to subside just long enough for him to continue...and once it did, he immediately set back to working on the right manacle.

When he was free, he crashed to the floor--but he was prepared. Instead of hitting hard on his left side, he twisted his body so his right would take the brunt of the impact. Still, when his injured leg and arm jostled against the floor, his vision blackened for a terrifying moment.

*No, I don’t have time for this, stay awake!*

He forced himself to keep breathing, to ignore the injuries that made him want to crawl into a corner and sleep for a thousand years. If this plan was to work, he needed to keep moving.

Even if lying on the floor, even a cold, unforgiving one, made him want to stay.

The moment he could, he carefully crawled to the door and to the glowing panel on the side of it. It took longer than usual (his head was still reeling from the earlier blows), but he managed to identify the locking mechanism.

It was older, and he hadn’t worked on this type as much as a result. In fact, if he remembered correctly, it was even a pre-Clone Wars era lock type. While he could splice into it, it would take way too long, and he definitely didn’t have the right tools for it. So the easiest way would be to simply short it out. Most people didn’t have those means when trapped behind a lock like this.

Luke looked down at his right hand.
But he did.

It would render his one good hand useless. He could technically use his other still, though not as adeptly and with a fair bit of pain… but it was too late to back out now. Not with an angry monster coming his way.

Maybe he should have called the Creature after he sprung himself free.

But no, that would have messed with the timing of his plan.

With a grimace, he used the Force to yank open the panel in his prosthetic, exposing the wires, then did the same to the lock mechanism. Then, he found the appropriate wire for each, ripped them out so they were exposed...then took a slow, careful, shallow breath before shoving them together.

He yelped as electricity zinged up his arm before the current between the wires shorted out his hand--and the door. The lights on the lock popped, died, and the door whooshed open, revealing a quiet hallway.

He frowned at his now useless right hand, hanging limply, and struggled to his good leg.

Well. He could still use it to help him brace against the wall.

Before he began moving, he reached into the Force, stretching out. He marked where the nearest pirates were, then beyond, towards where the Creature was…

It must have been dark, because it was headed towards him. And as it sensed him again, it moved faster.

He immediately retreated. He’d need to move fast himself to find a way to contact Vader. He’d probably need to use a mind trick, and with that thing coming for him, he didn’t have long to do it.

Then he’d have to hope he could get away.

He started forward, hopping as silently as he could, using the wall to brace himself. Before each corner, he’d pause, stretch out with the Force to check for pirates, and when there were none, only then did he turn and continue forward. It was agonizing, and it was odd to not be able to move his right hand to a steadier position, but he made do. He’d have to, considering he was on a short timeline.

But finally, before he made his third turn, he sensed a lone man headed towards him. It wasn’t a presence he was familiar with, and it flickered uncertainly in the Force.

He was pretty sure it was the right target...but he’d only successfully used a mind trick a few times. He wasn’t exactly an expert on being able to tell who was susceptible and who wasn’t.

So as the man turned the corner, coming face to face with him, Luke moved.

“Hey--!”

Luke allowed the calm light of the Force to infuse with each word as he lifted his left hand in the man’s face. “You will give me your comm unit.”

He held his breath.

The man stared at him, his gaze becoming slightly unfocused. “I...will...give you my comm unit.”
Luke didn’t dare rejoice, even as the man reached into his pocket and pulled out exactly what he’d asked for.

“You will tell me what planet we’re on,” he added with another wave. His shoulder was straining from the movement...

The man hesitated even as Luke took the comm from him. “Arorua is the planet we are on.”

Arorua.

It was strange to finally have a name for the hell hole he’d been living on. It almost didn’t feel real. In fact, he thought he’d probably refer to it later as Hell, but…

He had a location. He had a comm.

He had Vader’s number.

“You will forget you saw me and drop your blaster,” Luke finished.

“I will forget I saw you and drop my blaster.” The man detached the blaster from his holster and dropped it to the floor, then turned and began walking away.

Luke watched him go, picking the blaster up with the Force and balancing it awkwardly under his right armpit. It was terrible form, and Han would have chewed him out for it…

But he had a call to make, and only one hand to do it with.

Maybe his luck was turning around after all.

It took him only a few minutes after dropping out of hyperspace to determine Luke was not on Brachi.

“How the hell do you know that?” Solo demanded when he’d announced it. “You just looked at it! Shouldn’t we go down there and check?”

His hands clenched on the steering yoke.

Calm down, it is not like he knows. He is not like you and Luke, Artoo whistled at him.

Still. The fact that he was friends with Luke, Vader would have assumed Solo would know more. He had been hoping to find his son’s presence the moment he dropped out of hyperspace; he wasn’t in the mood to explain why he was yet again disappointed by his lack of a son.

But he didn’t need to. Leia answered. “I think it’s because he can sense him. It’s...a bond thing, I think.”

He turned his helmet towards her, regarding her. She sat in the copilot’s seat, staring at the world below as if she too were searching for the bright star that was her brother.

“You are correct,” he replied, and he couldn’t help the swell of pride. If there was a day he was rid of the Emperor, perhaps he’d reconsider training her to be a Sith.

Maybe she’d change her mind by then, too.

“But it is also because Luke is a supernova in the Force. Even without that bond, I would feel him.
It is a miracle he has evaded the Emperor’s clutches for so long.”

He didn’t miss the way Leia paled, or the confused frown on the smuggler’s face.

He scowled. Once again, Solo only showed he was not worthy of the time either of his children gave him.

But when Solo spoke, it wasn’t another question. “Fine. So, if you’re sure, then I guess onto the next--”

Vader’s comm beeped.

His first instinct was that it was Piett, or worse, the Emperor. But when he rerouted it to the central comm unit...

The voice that answered was not either of those.

“Arorua.”


All three of them tensed. If Vader could have, he would have stopped breathing.

His son.

His alive, breathing, non-Force-dream son.

Despite the fact that he’d spoken to him by dream only a few days before, he sounded so different. There was heavy exhaustion in his voice, and he sounded like he was trying to stay quiet.

And Vader did not miss the pain there as he added, “I’d like to get off this hell hole, please.”

Arorua. That was the next planet he was to visit anyway. It would be a forty five minute jump. He’d thought it was short earlier, but now, hearing how Luke sounded…

He looked down at the console. Artoo was already in the process of setting course.

“We will be there within the hour,” Vader promised darkly. “Stay out of trouble.”

A pause…and Vader’s unease grew. Next to him, Leia cursed, also interpreting that as a bad sign.

“Um. It’s a little late for that.”

He glared at the comm unit.

How?

How was it possible that things continually got worse for the boy every time he turned his back on him?!

There was a sound from Luke’s end--something that sounded suspiciously like a roar.

“Shit, I gotta go, I’ll try not to be eaten in the next hour--”


I have the coordinates, Artoo announced.
“I will be there within the hour,” Vader repeated. “Do not, under any circumstances, be eaten.”

How the monster was anywhere near Luke, Vader didn’t know. He thought he’d told Luke to get away from it. If it harmed him in any way…

No. He wouldn’t think about it.

“See you soon,” Luke promised, and the comm cut off even as Vader made the jump to hyperspace.

“We have to call!” Terra insisted for the billionth time. “If he’s telling the truth and he is Vader’s son--”

“There’s no way in hell that’s Vader’s kid!” Rayner snapped. Again. But even as he did so, he couldn’t deny he wasn’t unsure himself.

He didn’t know much about Imperial elites. He knew some basics about Black Sun’s relationship with the Empire, but that was about it. He’d heard horrifying stories from some of Black Sun’s higher ups about what they’d seen Vader do. The stories...sounded a little like what that Jedi had done, except…

Well. They weren’t usually done to save slave boys.

And that’s what bothered him. The boy was too respectable. Sure, he looked like death at the moment, with all his injuries and being covered in filth, but Rayner had seen him on Taris. He’d been clean. He stood out in the crowd, and he went out of his way to try to help a child at the expense of his own life.

That didn’t seem like something the son of Vader would do.

And didn’t Vader hate Jedi? Hadn’t he killed most of them? If the tales were to be believed.

But then again...what if he was telling the truth?

Prince Xizor would need to be informed. Rayner heard rumors that the man hated Vader, and he’d probably get a promotion for handing him a bargaining chip. But those were just rumors. Prince Xizor also had a strong alliance with the Emperor, and Vader was the Emperor’s right hand.

If Vader was pissed his son had been harmed...that probably didn’t mean good things for Prince Xizor. Which meant he’d be the one to be punished.

“We have to get rid of him,” he decided. He’d come to this conclusion before, but Terra had vehemently protested against it. “We have to get rid of him.”

“If Vader found out, he’d murder us--”

“He’d murder us for the condition he’s in right now anyway!”

“You’re just mad he’s made a fool outta you! Seriously, Rayner, petty revenge isn’t worth dying for!”

He couldn’t deny that wasn’t part of the reason he wanted him dead. Actually, he’d planned on turning a profit for the Jedi, but if he was telling the truth and Vader found him…

He didn’t fancy waking up to one of Vader’s magic sword things being stuck in his gut.
“We’ll kill him. We’ll shoot his body out into a dark corner of space. Vader will never--”

He was cut off by the distant sound of a roar.

“What the hell was that?” he demanded, but Terra shrugged his shoulders, eyes wide. “Well go find out!”

Terra hesitated. “You should come with me.”

“I have to deal with the Jedi.”

“You mean Darth Vader’s son.”

“He’s not--”

Another roar. This time, closer...followed by screams and the sound of blaster fire.

“Go!” Rayner ordered. Terra again hesitated...then nodded.

“Don’t sign your death warrant, Rayner,” he said, then turned and fled out the door.

Rayner glared after him. He didn’t know what the hell was going on, but he had a weird feeling it had to do with the Jedi. Or...perhaps Terra was right. His anger for the bullshit the Jedi had pulled was finally making him crazy.

It didn’t matter. He’d been right. It was safer to cut the loss and kill the Jedi.

And hope he wasn’t who he said he was.

He wasn’t sure even Black Sun could protect him from the wrath of Darth Vader if it were true.

Chapter End Notes

Hey! Luke got a (brief) real conversation! They're super close to each other! Let's just hope they get there in time, huh?
Arorua was a planet from the EU that had Sith Monsters on it. Such a pretty place with a pretty name...too bad it's a hell...
The song for this chapter is Not Gonna Die by Skillet
Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
Reunion

Chapter Notes

Seriously, thank you to my beta, SpellCleaver....not only have I shoved three chapters at her in a week, but they were all LONG chapters so. Give her some love. Also warning, this chapter is pretty gory... I think. But just in case, I'm warning anyway.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gripping the blaster hurt. Who knew that a broken shoulder would affect the use of his hand so much? He could hold it, but actually lifting it to shoot would be a problem. Whenever he turned a corner he always brought it up, ready for whoever tried to attack him. Each time was an effort, and soon his whole arm was shaking.

Less than an hour. Less than an hour. He’d heard it straight from his father, and that was enough to keep him going.

He was so close. So, damn close.

There was blaster fire and screams in the distance behind him, and the pained, furious roars of the Creature. It made it hard to not panic and run (or hop) blindly.

It was an effort to follow the turns he thought he’d mapped out in his head earlier--especially when he quickly realized he’d gotten it wrong. He’d known he was taking a gamble before, but to be faced with the very real potential consequences of his choice…

No. He’d make it out. The pirates were busy with the Creature. One would take care of the other, and whoever was left...well, by then his father would likely be there.

The memory of what Vader did to the Rebels at Vrogas Vas replayed in his mind. Rebels whose only crime had been getting in his way to finding Luke. What would Vader do to pirates who’d harmed him?

An uneasy feeling settled in his gut. He was pretty sure he didn’t want to know.

He didn’t know how long he’d been moving before he finally turned a corner and found a lone door. Through its window, the outside world was enough to make Luke let out a shaky, painful breath of relief. He was almost there--just beyond those doors was fresh, open air, which meant he could find an exit from the town, which meant he could escape while everyone was preoccupied…

He began to hop faster, using the wall to keep him from stumbling. Then--

Footsteps.

Shit.

There was no cover. He could use the Force, but the Creature was too close now, so he’d only trade one enemy for another. And he was so damn close maybe he could get out the door, then use that as cover while he took out whoever was following.
Yeah. That was his best bet.

He gritted his teeth, pushing faster, even as his entire body seemed to go numb from the strained effort on his exhausted muscles.

The footsteps were closer.

Almost there.

*Almost*--

*“Lars!”*

Rayner.

He reached the door, whirling, forcing the blaster up even as he slammed his inoperable mechanical hand into the door switch--

He barely saw Rayner’s enraged face. He barely had time to aim--he shot on instinct, even as the pirate’s blaster aimed at him. His bolt hit him in the shoulder just as he shot at Luke, throwing him off with a shout of pain…

Then a massive force slammed into his abdomen, throwing him backwards through the newly opened door and onto his back, head thunking against permacrete.

His vision darkened. Ringing drowned out the rest of the world. Thoughts were a scrambled mess.

There were other sensations-- *bad sensations*-- but he couldn’t think long enough to register them...

Then his vision cleared. He was staring up at the darkened sky. The lights of the town weren’t enough to drown out the flood of stars above.

*Beautiful.* And yet...wrong.

Something was terribly wrong.

There was a warmth spreading over his torso--his *very numb torso*. Was he paralyzed? No. He could wiggle his toes and his left hand. Not paralyzed. So what--?

A slow, building, sting--then horrid, scalding *agony* spread from his abdomen. His hands instantly went to the source, pressing as though he could push it away--

*Don’t scream, don’t scream, don’t remember why, but don’t scream*--

He screamed.

Liquid. His left hand registered the warmth spreading over him was liquid--

Lifting his hand, he strained to see what it was.

Red. Warm. He dropped the hand back, squeezed his eyes shut as he wrestled to breathe, to stay *conscious*.

Blood.

He was bleeding.
No. This couldn’t be how it ended. He was so close. He’d managed to survive so much! Yet even as he thought it, he could feel the life leaving him.

No. I’m so close--Father is coming--

Footsteps.

“Where’s your father now, Lars?”

Rayner.

Open your eyes, open your eyes, open your eyes--

But Force, it hurt so much--

“That thing killing my men is here because of you, isn’t it!!”

Open your eyes--

A noise. Then, he felt the unmistakable cool metal of the barrel of a blaster being pressed against his forehead.

Fight back.

With what?

Fight back--

“I’m going to enjoy this--and I’m going to enjoy tossing your body out an airlock.”

Luke clenched his teeth, pressure building up.

FIGHT.

The Force exploded, blind and desperate, heeding his call.

Several things happened at once.

The blaster was gone from his forehead. He didn’t know why, he didn’t know how. He didn’t care. His breaths fell rapidly as the Force pushed and pushed--

Then there was someone else there in the Force with him. Someone cold, dark, and furious.

It was a fury he normally would have shied away from simply for its intensity--but then that presence was shooting for him, wrapping around his own presence, and a roaring filled his mind--

What HAPPENED?

Where ARE YOU?

DO NOT MOVE!

His father.

He knew it like he knew his own name. Like he knew--like he knew--
Rayner was choking above him by an unseen Force.

_Vader._

Even from wherever his father was, he was killing Rayner, and Luke didn’t have the energy to tell him to stop--

Except no. No, that wasn’t his father--

It was him.

_He_ was strangling Rayner. Without even realizing it, in an effort to protect—even _inflict pain_ on the person who’d done this to him…

And he didn’t let go. Even as another even colder, darker presence zeroed in on him, and in the distance a roar shook the ground beneath him.

His loss of control was a beacon in the night. Would it be his wounds or the Creature that killed him first? He needed to let go. He needed to _move_, to find somewhere safe to wait for his Father, who was so close it was almost all Luke could feel--

But then another presence.

This one was as bright as the sun, and also near his father, somewhere above. And her emotions he felt as strongly as his own—nauseating fear for him, for what had happened, confusion, and an anxious longing to get to him, to save him.

Leia.

With her being so close, he could now feel her strength in the Force, almost as untrained as his own, but strong enough that he could feel her searching for him. He wanted to reach out, to let her know exactly where he was…

But Rayner was going purple. And the power flooding through him, wild and terrified, determined to protect and hurt…

He couldn’t reach out. Not like this. Not while he was about to use the Dark Side to kill a man.

So he let go.

Rayner dropped to the ground next to him, unconscious…but breathing.

He took another few gulps of air, pressing into his abdomen to keep the blood in. The monster was ever focused on him, even as it battled pirates. And Vader was roaring the same phrases as before into his mind; Leia searching…

He gritted his teeth.

So close. _So close._

Life was draining away. There would be no more standing. But he couldn’t stay either, not next to Rayner, not out in the open.

He cast his gaze about, looking for something—_anything_—within crawling distance. His vision was blurry, but he managed to identify two potential safe havens. A sewer (terrible for his wound, he’d definitely die of infection), and the building he’d come from originally. Everything else was
too far.

*Here.* He speared his own presence back at both Vader and Leia, even as he forced himself to turn over so he could begin dragging himself back towards the building. He allowed himself to shine brightly, a beacon for them to follow. Instantly, Leia’s presence latched onto his--

*Come and get me.*

Then, even with Vader slamming against his shields, even as he felt the echo of Leia’s terror, he pulled away from the Force, smothering it as much as he could.

For that beacon was not just seen by his family, and he had to hope he’d be rescued before he died of his wounds…

Or he was eaten.

Leia had known something had gone horribly wrong moments before dropping out of hyperspace.

One moment, she’d been sitting anxiously in the copilot's seat, waiting for Han to bring back the blasters Vader had sent him to retrieve. The next, she was doubled over, her arms around her stomach. Her skin chilled like someone had thrown ice water over her, and she couldn’t breathe.

Something was *screaming* at her, over and over again, until it was all she could hear.


There were hands on her and she wanted them off. The cockpit felt too tight, too compressed, and the air was freezing and dark and--

She was being shaken. She needed out. She needed to *find her brother!*

A dark force brushed against her mind. “Focus, little one, *focus!*”

She knew that voice. She hated and...and...she didn’t know what, but that voice evoked a strong enough emotion that she lifted her head.

“Something’s gone wrong!” There were tears streaming down her face. This was like when she’d first lost him but somehow so much *worse*-- “Something’s wrong with Luke!”

“How do you know?!” Han. Han was the one who had her, who was trying to console her, likely trying to figure out what the hell was going on. “We’re literally sixty seconds--”

“I know.” Vader interrupted darkly, and she realized the cabin was so cold because of him. He was always angry, and she’d started to grow used to his mood swings, but this--this--

It was as if a black hole had erupted, and was intent on pulling everything and everyone in. But he just stared resolutely out the port window, his hands gripping the steering yolk.

He was a inferno of terror for his son, and hate for those that had done...whatever had happened to him.

Focus. She needed to focus.

The ship beeped. Vader brought them out of hyperspace, a green lush planet appearing before them--
And the feeling intensified tenfold.

Something had gone horribly wrong, and *Luke was so close.*

Immediately, she tried to do as Vader had taught her earlier. She focused on her brother. This time it wasn’t the things that reminded her of Luke she thought of, but rather the horrible feeling churning in her gut and in her chest. The feeling that told her that if they didn’t find him fast, she would lose him forever.

But all she could tell for sure was that he was on planet, and that he wasn’t just in horrible pain…

His very essence was fading.

She didn’t dare ask Vader what that meant. She had a feeling he already sensed it too, because he roared, twisting the steering yolk so suddenly that it was only Han holding her that kept her from tumbling out of her seat.

“You sense him.”

“*Yes.*”

That one word confirmed everything she needed to know. She shivered, and suddenly wanted to throw up.

What would she do if she lost Luke? She had no doubt others would die by Vader’s hand if he died—hell, even if he lived, people would still die for whatever had caused this.

And for the first time, she truly understood why Vader would do it. That anger, that *fear,* that driving need to protect and do whatever necessary to bring Luke home…

She understood.

And though it chilled her to the bone, she didn’t care.

She just wanted Luke. She’d do anything to find him, to *save* him before it was too late.

If only she could find his exact location…

Vader dived into the upper atmosphere, pushing the ship at a speed that caused alarms to set off, red lights flashing. Han’s arms tightened around her, the one sign he was worried about their own safety, but he didn’t object. Considering the circumstances, he’d probably do the same.

“Solo,” Vader snarled, paying no heed to the warnings flashing across the console. Then a split second later they were cut off—likely courtesy of Artoo. “You and Artoo will provide aerial support. You will use *any* means necessary to assist in rescuing my son.”

“No objections here.” Han nodded, and Artoo whistled.

But Leia and Vader were no longer paying attention.

Luke’s presence suddenly lit up like a brilliant beacon, and Leia locked onto him. She’d done this before at Bespin, but this was so much more potent and desperate—like a sun suddenly going supernova.

A town appeared on the horizon, and her eyes immediately went right to where the beacon emitted.
Here. Leia made a pained noise at how much worse he sounded, at how she could feel his strength weakening every moment. *Come and get me.*

Then, just like that, it was gone.

The ship began shaking--and it had nothing to do with the insane speed it was being pushed into. She didn’t even have it in her to remind Vader they needed a ship to bring Luke back in, because what if...what if…

*Do not finish that thought!* Vader’s words thundered in her mind, even as the ship flew over the town…

Or rather, what was left of it.

Half of it was gone--the buildings were torn to shreds. Below her, fire licked at ruins, and she was certain she could feel people dying--

And ahead, the thing causing it made her heart drop into her stomach.

She’d seen a lot of monsters in her life. Most were of the human variety; senators, Grand Moffs, the Emperor, even Vader himself. Then she’d seen plenty of the animal kind while running from the Empire. Wampas, kongos, plenty she didn’t know the names of--all were driven by the need for food, the need for freedom, to protect their territory…

But the monstrosity ahead of them was *something else.*

By the time Vader flew over it, she’d only had time to see a few things: it was *massive,* it had spindly, clawed appendages, and scaled armor that seemed to be taking the brunt of most of the blaster fire being leveled constantly at it. And when they flew over it, it screeched so loudly she instinctively covered her ears.

That wasn’t the worst--the black, cold darkness it emitted put Vader’s presence to absolute shame.

She could feel its hatred, it’s hunger, and it *was headed for her brother.*

Luke was near. Too near. But still out of reach of that thing.

But Vader didn’t head for Luke. Instead, he whipped the ship around halfway, finding a good landing spot, and began the landing sequence.


“You will get a med pack and you will find him immediately.” Vader finished landing, then stood, his lightsaber already in hand. “I must deal with the obvious immediate threat. Solo will assist, and then we will meet up with you.”

She wanted to object. It would be easier to just grab Luke and go. But she didn’t know what condition he’d be in, and it would be safer to kill the murderous monster who clearly wanted to eat him. Then when they brought him aboard, there wouldn’t be anything to get in their way, or make things worse for Luke’s condition.

So instead, Han released her and she moved to do exactly as she was told.

“Be careful,” Han called after her. She heard (and felt) his worry.

She wished she had time to assure him...she wished she *could* assure him. But she didn’t know
what she’d find when she reached Luke.

“I’ll be back,” was all she could say for certain.

After retrieving the med pack and a blaster, she rushed to join Vader at the lowering landing ramp. “Focus,” he growled when she approached. “Do not allow him to die.”

She nodded, swallowing bile. “Don’t die either.”

It was a ridiculous thing to say. He was Darth Vader. He could handle a few...whoever these people were and a monster. But Vader simply pointed at her and reiterated, “Do not let him die. I will be there shortly.”

Then the ramp lowered, and they both moved. She burst into a run, hearing the snap-hiss of his lightsaber igniting as he moved in the opposite direction.

She had to trust him. She’d seen the carnage he’d wreaked on literally over a thousand Rebels. He’d make quick work of the threat to Luke’s life, and Luke...Luke…

She pushed herself as fast--no, faster--than she’d ever run. She couldn’t feel him anymore, but his last location was burned into her very soul. Every step, every breath, echoed the need to get to him.

I’m coming. She didn’t know how to project that thought, not like he and Vader did. She doubted it reached him, but she repeated it as hard as she could, over and over again in her mind.

I’m coming, I’m coming, I’m coming, I’m coming…

She skidded around a corner...and faltered as she saw blood, too much blood, staining the ground. Beside it, a body. She didn’t know if it was dead or not, but she didn’t care.

All of that blood...she knew without a doubt it was Luke’s. And if he’d lost that much blood…

He didn’t have much time.

Luke was nowhere to be seen, but that didn’t matter. The blood trail was clear and fresh. He’d dragged himself towards a blast door...and made it inside the building.

She threw herself against the door, wildly slamming the button to let her inside, hoping it was unlocked…

The door swished open.

“Luke!”

The name tore from her throat on a scream as she took him in.

She’d expected...she’d felt...but to actually see it…

It was definitely difficult to breathe as she threw herself to the floor, her knees skidding in her brother’s blood. He was lying half-propped up against the wall, eyes closed, head lolled to the side, hands over a gaping, bleeding unmistakable blaster shot wound in his abdomen…

Hot tears were already flowing down her cheeks as she moved his hands away...and saw the hole there, exposing flesh and Force, were those organs?
There was absolutely nothing in that med pack that would fix this.

She shoved her hand onto the wound, putting pressure on it in an attempt to staunch the bleeding, while her other fumbled with the med pack.

“Don’t you dare leave me! I just found you, don’t you leave, I can’t--”

His eyes cracked open a bit, and he managed a tiny smile. “I...didn’t get...eaten."

She let out a pained cry instead of a laugh. She had brought bacta patches and a spray, but they were meant for minor injuries.

Still, she pulled them out and used her teeth to help her open them up.

“Not funny.”

“I...thought so.”

She lifted the hand over his wound long enough to douse the wound with spray. “You’re not laughing either.”

He winced at the stinging it probably caused him. “It...hurts.”

“You are literally covered with injuries with a hole in your stomach, I think that’s an understatement.” The bottle was absolutely pathetic, but maybe it would stop or slow the bleeding. She reached into the pack and pulled out gauze. “I’m going to have to move you so I can wrap this around you.”

He only nodded, and she carefully helped him sit up enough to let her start wrapping.

“Va…” The name faltered. This was Luke. He needed to hear… “Father is coming. He’s killing that monster so we can get you out of here safely.”

She half expected him to protest. He was, after all, Luke. He had a soft spot for most beings, afterall.

But instead he said, “Good...riddance.”

Which meant that thing had given him far too much trouble for even Luke to feel bad for it. She wasn’t sure if she found that amusing, or disheartening.

She finished and tied the gauze up before again going back to putting pressure on the wound. “Just...hold on. Don’t...don’t go…”

Kriff. She was sobbing. She just felt so useless, and now that she’d at least attempted to help his worst injury, she was now taking in the rest of him. He’d lost even more weight. His hair, still dyed brown, was filthy. His right leg was thrown into a makeshift splint that didn’t look like it was done right. There were bruises on his face--he was definitely developing a black eye. Then there were cuff marks on his left wrist, and he was filthy beyond belief…

With the wound in his stomach to top it off, it was a miracle he was even still alive…

“I’m….sorry, Leia.” And slowly, carefully, he began to reach up to wipe her tears away.

She quickly, and carefully, pushed it back down. Moving him at all would aggravate his injuries, and she wasn’t even sure what she’d done so far worked well enough. “Please. Please. Just focus
on being okay.”

Now that she had him again, she wouldn’t let him go. Never again.

She listened to his labored breathing, watched him slowly nod. “What...do I...need to do?”

She had no idea. She tried to think back to what she’d seen nurses do in the med bay while they waited with critically injured patients to get the care they needed.


He swallowed, hard. “Okay. Anything...in particular?”

She closed her eyes, fresh tears streaking down her cheeks. “Whatever you want. Just don’t leave me again.”

She listened to him breathe for a few moments. Then he began to speak, and she soaked in every word.

And tried not to think that they might be his last.

Luke needed him. He needed him now. That med pack likely would do little to help his son, judging by the danger and pain he felt through their bond.

Their ever weakening bond.

He clung to it like a lifeline, even as he stormed towards the chaos of the monster that threatened his son’s life.

When he arrived, the monster had a screaming man in its jaws. Then, with a terrible crunch, it bit down and blood sprayed onto the permacrete below.

It certainly was a creature of the Dark Side. It oozed anger and hate for those that were still shooting at it. From this close, Vader could see that the black scales were torn to shreds, but it was still largely uninjured. If anything, the constant barrage of blaster fire just served to make it angrier.

Above, his shuttle swooped in, turbolasers firing. Unlike mere blasters, these managed to do some damage. It screeched in pain, dropping the body and rearing onto its hind legs. Its long, slender neck whipped back and forth; as the shuttle flew overhead, turning around for a second pass, the monster tracked it. Vader could practically feel it working out how to deal with the new threat…

But that was not the threat it needed to be worried about.

Vader stretched out a hand before it could regain its balance and pushed. The Force shoved it back and a building collapsed underneath it.

He barely noticed (or cared) about the lives that were extinguished into the Force as a result.

And above, as the monster struggled and thrashed to get back on its six feet, Solo swooped in again, another barrage of turbo fire slamming into it.

Vader didn’t bother to take pleasure in the thing’s screams. He didn’t have time. His son needed him, and every second was another wasted. So instead he reached into the Force, found the pirates (a quick look into one’s mind told him as much), and dragged them out of cover.
And unleashed his lightsaber on them.

With each he killed, he yanked any sort of grenade, detonator, anything that could do serious damage, and flung them at the monster, pulling the pins as he did so. Whenever it tried to stand, another explosion brought it down. It screamed and screamed, and he felt it shift focus from getting to Luke to getting to him.

Good.

He would make it pay. He’d make them all pay—but it was that monster he cared most about.

He approached where the monster had fallen, focused his own rage at the fear and torment it had caused his son, and dragged it back out of the wreckage. Its limbs kicked and thrashed, one coming close to tearing him through. He stepped out of the way in time, and just as swiftly brought his lightsaber down, severing its foot from the leg.

It responded by twisting its body, hissing and snapping its jaws...and getting to its feet. Reptilian gold eyes took him in; he could sense it re-evaluating.

What are you? it seemed to demand, its presence brushing against his shields.

“I am a Lord of the Sith,” he snarled, and as Solo made another pass at the monster, he again lashed out at any nearby pirates. This time, he simply went for the throat, crushing larynxes with barely a thought.

When the barrage stopped, and the monster staggered to its remaining feet, scales hung from its body. Muscle and bone gleamed underneath.

Vader took great pleasure in seizing those bones and, with a twist of his hand, shattering them.

“If I had time, I’d break every bone in your body as retribution for my son.” He doubted it understood him, or even heard him over its pained cries. He didn’t give a damn, and threw the lightsaber, watching it slice through two more legs.

As it went down, he made sure to push it into another ruined building where pirates lay in wait. They were so close this time, he heard their screams just before they cut off.

They deserved it. They all did. If Luke died…

If Luke died…

The creature was struggling to get up as he stepped into the wreckage, approached its prone body, and stabbed his lightsaber into the exposed flesh from the turbo lasers. It whipped its neck around, jaws full of incredible teeth coming straight for his face.

He grasped its neck with the Force. It gagged, spewing putrid, coppery breath over him.

“Pathetic,” he growled, and began inching closer to the head, still dragging the lightsaber through its body. “You are not worthy of the Dark Side.”

Its eyes never left him, full of rage and pain and even dying, he could feel its desire to tear into his flesh, to take him down with it.

Not today. He’d had enough. His son’s bond was slipping further from his grasp. He needed to get to him.
With a snarl, he yanked the saber out of its hide and sliced it through the neck of the beast. The head slammed onto the ground, jaws still opening and closing as its eyes rolled into the back of its head. The remaining part of the neck flapped about as the body finally and fully collapsed.

But Vader had other problems.

With the monster dead, it was clear the biggest threat to the pirates was Vader. Most wisely turned and ran. On any other day, he might have pursued just to prove he could, but there were still those who decided to get in his way and start shooting at him.

Compared to the beast, they were nothing. Just mild inconveniences.

He deflected bolts back to their owners. Anyone foolish enough to actually charge him, he sliced in half. Others, he crushed their windpipes or yanked them out of windows to fall head first into the permacrete below.

All the while, he was moving for his son, grasping onto that bond with everything he had.

He would not lose him again.

This time, there would be no surprise daughter to announce it was a trick. This was too real, and if he died…

He refused to think of it.

As soon as the last of the resisting pirates were down, Vader did what he rarely ever did.

He ran.

His prosthetics made it difficult, of course. They were unreasonably heavy and cumbersome, but he willed the Force to ease the weight just so he could move faster.

He had to get there.

Luke needed him. He needed medical attention--immediate attention. He wasn’t even sure his droid had all that it needed to heal him, and he’d always been terrible at healing with the Force. And Leia wasn’t at all trained to do it.

He needed to get to his son.

He whirled the final corner, slowing only slightly when he saw another pirate struggling to get to his feet, coughing violently. At his feet was a pool of blood.


He didn’t have to ask. He didn’t need to see the boy. The Force whispered the truth, and with a roar he lashed out, using the Force to drag the man straight into his awaiting hand.

“You.”

The man grasped at his hand while he lifted him above the ground. His eyes bulged, and his legs kicked at him, but through the haze of his desperate last gasps, Vader heard his thoughts loud and clear.

Shit...not a lie...kid’s....his son...
That filled in many, many blanks in the story.

“My son told you I was his father, and you still harmed him?!” He squeezed tighter.

He wanted to drag this man back to the Executor. He wanted to torture him for just as long as Luke had suffered. He wanted to inflict the same injuries Luke had sustained…

But he didn’t have time.

Luke and Leia were just beyond that door, and he could sense Luke’s weak attempts at reaching through to stop him.

“You are lucky I don’t have time for you!” he snarled, and with one last squeeze, he felt the man’s windpipe crunch.

He dropped the body and didn’t spare it another glance as he turned for the door, where his son's blood trail led. Behind him, he barely noticed Solo landing the shuttle.

Not as the doors swished open and revealed a sight that stopped him in his tracks.

Luke had told him of his injuries. He’d known. Then he’d felt the obviously new injury the pirate had given him to what he now saw was his abdomen.

But this…

This…

Blood was everywhere. All over the floor. All over Leia’s hands, arms, and even a smudge on her cheek.

All over Luke.

And as he stood there, Leia whirled, met his eyes, and though he couldn’t hear her over the roaring in his mind, he watched her mouth form the words, Help him.

He already looked dead. He was too pale, and his head hung limply…

Numb, he moved, yanking his cape from his shoulders. Leia jumped away, and he could feel her anguish and terror pounding against his mind, though it was meant for Luke, not him…

He threw the cape over Luke’s body, stooped down, and picked him up.

Too light. Luke was small, but this was too light. His head rolled back, giving him a clearer view of the bruises and the black eye, proving that the pirate had given him more than just the one injury.

He’d given him a too swift death. If he could bring him back just to kill him over again, he would.

He carried Luke out of the building, Leia hot on his heels. He couldn’t speak, he was too enraged to do so and convey what he needed to with his vocoder. So instead he tentatively, desperately brushed against Luke’s semi-conscious mind.

I am here, little one. No one will harm you again.

At first, there was no response. Then...a weak acknowledgement.

No words. Just an acknowledgement.
While he was relieved for a response, the fact that he didn’t have the strength for words…

Stay, he pleaded.

The ramp of the shuttle was lowered. Solo and Artoo were there, pushing the medical droid towards them. Leia’s anguish was his shadow.

Stay with me.

He boarded the ramp.

There was again just a flicker of acknowledgement. No promises. Just the impression that he’d been heard.

For the first time in twenty two years, Vader was lost, powerless. All he could do was rush Luke into the makeshift med bay and order the droid to fix him.

But for good measure, he again pleaded with his son.

I will do anything you ask. Just don’t leave me too.

But by then, the droid slipped a breathing mask over his son’s face, and his son was sent into a full unconscious state.

Chapter End Notes

They're reunited! And Luke (sort of???) got a hug! Ish?? Does carrying almost unconscious count?? I think it does. I'm going with yes.
Oh man. I literally started writing this mid Saturday afternoon and didn't stop until about midnight. I've planned this since August. It's so good to finally get it out of my head and on paper... idk if ya'll will agree with me, but hey! They're reunited now! :D
The song for this chapter is Meet Me on The Battlefield, the acoustic version by SVRCINA. I also hardcore listened to the Witcher soundtrack for all the action (it's a GREAT soundtrack for that)
Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
Sleep

Chapter Notes

Thank you forever to my lovely Beta, SpellCleaver! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were no dreams. Simply thoughts.

Thoughts of Tatooine. He’d promised his uncle to stay on for another season, then...another season never came. All of his ties to home were gone; his aunt and uncle. Ben. Biggs. They were all dead, and he’d never had a real chance to mourn them.

Thoughts of flying. Flying in his skyhopper, dreaming of adventure in the stars. Usually those dreams involved finding his long lost father, then together they’d explore the galaxy. Then he got his first X-wing, and it was as natural as breathing. Twisting and turning, weightless...the feel of adrenaline coursing through his veins as he dove, down, down…

Thoughts of his friends.

Wedge. What must he think of him now that he thought he was dead? Maybe he’d forever think those things, if Luke died tonight.

Chewie. He’d only recently learned enough Shyriiwook to understand without asking for help. It had certainly opened up their friendship, to say the least.

Lando. Well...he didn’t really know Lando, but he admired him, for his willingness to do whatever it took to save Han.

Han. He’d taken him under his wing, taught him plenty of practical survival skills, including how to swim. Never once had he judged him, and he wished he’d thanked him for that...

Leia.

She wasn’t a friend. She was more than that. She was his sister. All this time...he still could hardly believe it.

And...and…

Anakin Skywalker.

Vader.

The father he’d always wanted, and the man he’d hated and feared. They were one and the same. There was still so much he had to work through to figure out what he’d even do with that relationship. But…

He wanted one.

A relationship.
As insane as that was, it was true.

And though everything was dark, he knew he was near. He could feel him. Like the void of space Luke loved so much, Vader was all at once cold and terrifying… and yet soothing and breathtaking, with pinpricks of brilliant light that were as the stars.

How had he never noticed? In all of their Force interactions, he’d never seen anything beyond the inky blackness that was the Dark Side.

And yet…there was light. And those lights shone brightly, just for him, calling him back.

*I will do anything you ask.*

The voice of his father pleaded with him. Distant, but there. It didn’t sound quite like Vader--at least, not as Luke now knew him.

*Stay.*

*I will do anything you ask.*

*Stay with me.*

*Don’t leave me too.*

He couldn’t open his eyes. He couldn’t find his way out of darkness. But he clung to those brilliant, illuminated stars within Vader’s presence…

And wondered if his father could feel him, too.

Leia felt as though someone had hollowed her out. Every breath felt heavy. Han had made her wash Luke’s blood off her hands once they’d jumped to hyperspace, but she still felt its stains on her skin.

Maybe it would never wash away.

The shuttle was suffocating. The time to their destination felt too long and impossible. She wanted nothing more than to get her brother off this shuttle and into a proper med bay.

But for now, she was forced to wait.

Not at his bedside, like she wanted--the room Luke was in was too small for that, and Vader was immovable. She hadn’t even tried--she felt it, and knew without a doubt that if she tried to convince him to leave, it would not end well.

Luke was too critical. If he was as sensitive as she was to others emotions, especially Vader’s...she doubted it would do well for his recovery.

So she waited. In agony. She was the reason he was like this...she’d do anything to give him the best fighting chance.

But she wasn’t alone. Han sat beside her, gently running fingers up and down her spine. Silent and waiting. In front of her, Artoo sat, his optical sensor fixed on her, as though he were anticipating her needs.

Artoo. He was her droid, but he’d flown with Luke so much, he might as well be his. She’d never
consciously told the droid to fly with him, but Artoo had volunteered himself to fly with Luke at the Battle of Yavin and...that was that.

She reached up and silently placed a hand on the cool metal of his dome. A mournful moan escaped him.

“Thank you,” she said, softly. “Thank you both, for everything today.” And for every other day Artoo and Han had helped him.

“Sure, Leia,” Han said, “What else would we do? He’s our friend, too.”

Of course. She knew that. In fact, Han had a tendency to jump to Luke’s assistance even when she herself had advised against it. He was the one who constantly took her brother under his wing, teaching him everything from smuggling to how to swim to how to make a good deal. Hell, even at the medal ceremony on Yavin, he’d given Luke his best dress outfit, just so he’d have something other than farmer's clothes to wear.

No. It wasn’t just for her sake Han had helped.

“If he dies...” Leia trailed off. She couldn’t think about it, and yet it was completely out of her hands. As much as Vader would deny it, it was out of his hands, too.

“You can’t blame yourself.”

She tensed, whirling. “I can because it is my fault! If I hadn’t--”

“He never would’ve known his father cared about him.” Han raised his brows, daring her to challenge him. When she didn’t, he continued, “You know how much that meant to him. Even if it is...uh. Darth Vader.” He lowered his voice, making a face at the door Vader was behind.

“I’m pretty sure he can probably hear us.”

“Well. Good thing I said something nice, then.” She wasn’t sure that was really a compliment for Vader, but...it wasn’t the worst thing. “Anyway. I’d still be in carbonite, too. You can’t say you wouldn’t miss me.”

It was a tease that would have either made her smile or riled her up. It was something normal, and she appreciated that he was trying. He even gave her that goofy grin of his, though it didn’t touch his eyes.

She made an attempt to smile...but it crumbled and fresh tears fell down her face.

“I don’t want to lose him, Han.”

The grin fell away. “I know. I’m sorry we couldn’t rescue him sooner.”

She shook her head, leaning into him, Vader be damned. “If you hadn’t pointed out that smuggling route, we might not have been close enough to save him at all.”

His arm looped around her, and she savored his warmth. “He’s going to be okay, Leia.”

“How do you know?” She buried her face against him.

“You Skywalkers are lucky. Even when you’re not.”

That did make her smile, just a little.
But the moment didn’t last long. She jumped at the strange tug she felt in her gut, pulling her attention back towards the room Luke was in.


“No, I don’t think--” There was another tug, more insistent, then before she could explain the strange sensation, Vader’s voice was in her head.

_I am calling you. Your brother needs you. Now._

She yelped, bolting to her feet. Vader had said it was possible, and she’d even shared that meditation dream with him, but to actually hear his voice in her mind like it was her own voice…

“I’ll be back.” She didn’t bother to explain to Han as she left him there, going for the room.

As bothered as she was by the intrusion into her mind, she hadn’t missed the severe impatience in his tone. And if she could help Luke, she didn’t blame him.

She entered the tiny room, immediately squeezing against the wall. With the med droid taking one side of the room to assist Luke, her brother on a stretcher, and Vader on the other side, she felt like she was already in the way.

“What can I do?” She tried to sound strong and unbothered by the fact that her brother was still covered in blood, with a mask and tubes all over him...he looked so _small_, smaller than her, even…

“The patient needs a blood transfusion,” the droid informed her.

She frowned, glancing at Vader, who tensed under her questioning gaze. “I am not a _ideal_ candidate.”

His tone suggested she not ask any questions...and she didn’t. Not now. Not when Luke needed her.

“Allright.” She was already rolling up her sleeve. “Do what you have to do.”

Impossibly, Vader tensed further. “Do _not_ harm her,” he warned the droid.

“I’m sure it’s done it plenty of times,” she assured him, inching carefully around Luke’s stretcher before holding her arm out.

The droid turned to her. “Relation to the patient?” it inquired.

“I’m his twin.”

“Most likely an ideal candidate.”

“Yeah, sure, just do it.” As the droid set to work with testing her blood, she glanced at Vader. His gaze was back on Luke, though she could feel him monitoring the droid’s actions. She didn’t dare make a noise as her finger was pricked.

But that was all she sensed from Vader. Everything else seemed to be locked behind steel walls.

“How is he?” she dared ask as the droid analyzed the results.

There was silence, save for the whirring of the droid and the steady rasp of Vader’s respirator, but finally he ground out, “ _Stable._”
One word answers. That was never a good sign. And though Luke looked anything but alright, she figured the droid wouldn’t be stopping to do a blood transfusion if he wasn’t at least somewhat stabilized.

That still didn’t tell her what she wanted to know, though.

*Would he live?*

Vader’s helmet snapped to her the moment the thought crossed her mind. “He will live.” He pointed at her, as though challenging her to contradict him.

Her lips tightened. “Are you telling me that because that’s what the droid told you? Or because that’s what we both want?”

“He will live! There are no other alternatives!”

She opened her mouth to argue...and closed it. For just a moment, those shields crumbled. He hastily re-erected them, but...

He was terrified. Powerless.

Anything that could make Vader feel that way…it was almost like a stubborn, vulnerable child believing what he wanted, despite all the facts pointing to the opposite.

She swallowed, hard, then nodded. “Okay,” she said instead. “Good.”

He probably sensed she was saying it for his sake, and he glared at her for a moment longer...before turning back to Luke.

“Blood type match,” the droid announced. “Indeed, you are an ideal candidate for blood transfusion. Shall we begin?”

She too looked at her brother. Too pale. He was *too pale*...

“Yes,” Leia said through numb lips. “Do whatever he needs.”

---

He felt like he was floating.

Was he flying? Did someone turn off the artificial gravity field? Was it broken? He could fix that.

If it wasn’t so dark…

Not that he was afraid of it. Not when he could feel his father still there with him.

Maybe he could ask him. He probably had the answers to what was happening. How did he even get here, anyway?

He should ask. He needed to. He didn’t know why it was important, but…

How did he do that, again?

He tried to remember, but it was difficult to concentrate on any one thought for long. Each time he thought he was onto something, the thought slipped from his fingers. Sometimes he managed to hold onto one, but it ended up not being useful, at all. Things like how to reinstall a hyperdrive in an X-wing, or how to piece a motor on a vaporator using tape and some old droid parts.
None of that helped him reach his father.

But that star-flecked presence never left. Not for a single second. Maybe he’d have to settle with that.

Yet...he wanted to reach him…

So he kept trying. Most of the time the thoughts slipped away or he forgot what he was trying to do.

But eventually, he managed it.

There were no words. He couldn’t remember how to speak, let alone project coherent thought. And it probably was an accident when he finally managed to brush back against his father’s presence.

Immediately, it grew stronger, wrapping around him, eagerly searching him. He was pretty sure there were words too, intermingled with his own.


*Okay?*

*Surgery…*

*Safe.*

*Talk…*

Those were the only words he managed to pick out, and they made no sense. He wanted to ask, or even show his father he was confused...but he forgot how again.

Reluctantly, he stopped trying, and allowed himself to float in darkness.


Not on the shuttle. Not when Solo dropped them out of hyperspace and needed the clearance codes to dock. Not when the droid moved Luke’s stretcher to his personal med bay. Not when Luke, with a newly stitched up abdomen, was dunked into bacta.

It was there he waited, working on other med droids so that when Luke was ready, more droids would be available to assist to the fullest extent.

“Why not just use a normal doctor?” Leia questioned when he explained why he was working on them. She had followed them into the med bay, and though he would never admit it, it was somewhat soothing to have her near.

At least one of his children was alive and mostly intact. Besides, he couldn’t have torn her away from Luke if he tried. And maybe having her near would help him. He was willing to try anything to bring him back.

“I will not risk my son’s life to human error,” he growled.

Besides. He knew these droids and their skills intimately. They’d worked on him plenty enough, and if they could handle his extensive injuries, then surely they could help Luke’s.
Injuries that he’d sustained because of a foolish decision to help someone beyond saving. A decision that had presented itself because Leia had sought to protect Luke from him.

Because of what he’d done on Bespin.

Because of how he’d treated her every time they’d run into one another.

His hands stilled, guilt churning in his gut until he wanted nothing more but to break and tear and let the entire galaxy feel the pain of what he’d done…

He was a failure of a father. Luke’s condition only proved that.

The original droid helping his son approached, breaking him from his internal spiraling. “I have completed an analysis of what needs to be done on the patient,” it announced. Though he’d modified it to be gentle and efficient in its procedures, it still spoke impassively.

It was too calm. He felt that everyone should be roaring in rage, in terror, just to fit the horrid situation he’d pushed his son into.

He glanced at the boy floating peacefully in the bacta, half hoping his son would reach out to him. He hadn’t stopped trying, not once, since Arorua.

“Explain.”

The droid tilted its head, accessing Luke’s internal file. “The patient has a broken clavicle and leg, with two cracked ribs. The leg is the worst break, but the patient did a decent job at stabilizing the injury, so it only needs resetting and a plasto-cast.”

Vader wasn’t surprised, but he still clenched his fists.

His fault. His fault.

“The clavicle fracture is beyond fifteen millimeters out of place. I would recommend surgical assistance so it heals properly.”

If only he’d spared that pirate...he could at least take out his fury on him. He’d killed him much too fast, even if it had been necessary to get to his son.

“The ribs have not punctured the lung. As long as the patient refrains from strenuous activity, they should heal on their own.”

Oh, that wouldn’t be an issue. There was no way in hell Luke would be doing anything but focusing on a full recovery.

“The bacta should heal the bruising on his face, as well as old wounds on his chest. He has a concussion that he must rest from, or serious damage could occur. He will also likely have scarring from the abdominal injury.”

Vader couldn’t help but look again at the boy’s exposed stomach, and wrestled to control the white hot rage that threatened to overwhelm him.

If he broke something important to Luke’s recovery, he’d never forgive himself. Even with the stomach wound relatively fixed, he was still far from safe.

“Finally, there is a matter of his diet. He is far under recommended weight. I will draw up a recommended nutrition schedule to assist.”
He’d already begun losing weight even before this whole misadventure. *Because of what he’d done.*

His gaze strayed to the hand he’d taken, the one that looked deceptively real. It hung limply. It would forever be a reminder of what he’d done. He should have just told him the truth the moment he’d walked into that room. But no, he’d wanted to see what his untrained son was capable of, and he’d lost control and--

“Is that all?” Leia asked.

He needed to stay focused. He was no use to his son out of control, and if he hurt Leia unintentionally…

“The patient is lucky to be alive.” The droid shook its head, and Vader fought the urge to stab a lightsaber through it. “If he makes it through, he will also need physical therapy to ensure proper mobility of his shoulder and leg.”

“He will make it through,” Vader snarled, pointing at the droid. But the droid just stared at him, the threat either going over its head, or its personality wasn’t programmed to care about threats to its own wellbeing.

“I understand your concern. I will do my best to save the patient.” The words were spoken like it was reading from a pre-written script, and he suddenly had the urge to completely reprogram the droid to have some sort of a personality--

There was a brush against his bond, and Vader whirled back to Luke. The heart he didn’t even know he still had leapt into his throat, terror and hope rushing through him so quickly, it was painful.

He knew that presence.


He’d responded back. There had been no words, but it was the first response he’d had since Arorua. It was the first personal sign that there was still life there, and that his son was fighting to come back.

Are you okay? Can you hear me?

He gently and ever so carefully probed his son’s mind. It was a jumbled mess, and he couldn’t get anything specific.

He tried again.

*The med droid says you’ll need surgery. I’m not going to leave you. You will be safe, I promise.*

He wasn’t in any position to promise anything. He’d promised Padme he’d save her from death, and that had turned out…well.

“What’s wrong?” Leia asked from behind, and he sensed her worry.

He approached the bacta tank, placing a hand on the glass as though he could physically pull him back from the brink of death.

*Please. Talk to me. Please.*
But his son’s mind had quieted, and his bond had gone silent again. He could feel him alive, but it was almost like there was a barrier between them, one he couldn’t break through.

Slowly, he leaned his helmet against the glass.

“T—d don’t care what you have to do,” his voice was quiet, and he knew the stupid droid wouldn’t pick up the lethal fury in his tone, but he seethed with it anyway, “you will save my son or you will find yourself in pieces.”

Not that he’d stop there. If he lost Luke...if he lost him again...

“I understand your concern. I will do my best to save the patient.”

He gritted his teeth, but didn’t move. The droid definitely had terrible bedside manner programming. Regardless of the outcome, it would be in pieces at the end of it.

The droid floated away, back to Luke’s monitor, and still Vader did not move. He needed to finish with the other droids, but if Luke reached out again, he wanted to be right there. It was ridiculous, since he was already in the same room and there was nowhere on the Executor even that he would not immediately be able to respond to his son. But he didn’t move anyway.

At least, not until he sensed Leia approach from behind, hesitate, then... “Lord Vader?”

He closed his eyes. Lord Vader. How he hated the title. How he hated the name. At least, when it was spoken from his daughter's lips. “What?”

Another hesitation...then he felt a trembling hand on his arm, and he stiffened.

She was...touching him. Willingly touching him, and even through the suit, he felt as if his arm was on fire.

He pulled away from the tank, looking down at the hand that suddenly seemed too small and delicate, then at the girl it belonged to. Her eyes were rimmed red from tears he’d largely ignored, but she now stared at him with determination.

“I know Luke,” she said, softly but firmly. “He’s a fighter. If he’s lasted this long, he’s not going to give up.”

She didn’t try to say he would be alright, when neither of them knew they had no control over that. And the way she looked at him, with her hand on his arm, even as tentative as it was...His throat tightened as the image of her came into his mind. How many times had Padme comforted him like this? Maybe a little warmer, but...

He nodded once. Curtly. Then, he reluctantly stepped aside. An invitation to join him at his side as he watched over Luke.

She accepted it, and wordlessly, they monitored the person they both cared for beyond anything else in the galaxy.

Something was wrong.

He knew now. He was asleep. It felt so good, like a comforting blanket had been wrapped around his mind. For once, he didn’t even feel the sting of sharp rocks pressing into his back, or the feel of cool metal on his face. He felt like he was lying on clouds, clouds that were sucking him deeper
and deeper into a cocoon of total comfort.

And it was wrong.

He was in danger. He remembered that now, but he couldn’t remember why. He couldn’t sleep for too long or...or...

Or what?

He needed to get up. He needed to get moving. He didn’t remember why, but he began fighting to wake up, to get up--

His father’s presence, ever there, strengthened, and he felt his mind and body relaxing, seemingly out of his own control before he fell back into oblivion.

At least, for a while.

Sometime later, the feeling was back. His mind was once again screaming that he was in danger, and he needed to get up or he’d die. He felt the clouds again, and the warmth surrounding him that spoke the opposite, but he didn’t care.

He had to get up, he needed to protect himself--

His father was there again, and this time he was certain he felt his gloved hand on his forehead.

Sleep, son. You are safe.

He felt his body immediately relax. He wanted to say something. He wanted to at least ask if Vader would take care of whatever it was that threatened him, but his mind was yet again going black. It was like some unseen force ignored his instincts and forced him to sleep...

The third time (was it the third?) he could have sworn he actually opened his eyes.

The images that entered his brain were not familiar. The room was gray and black and bare. There were black sheets and pillows everywhere. A huge viewport overlooked what he thought were stars.

Danger! his mind screamed at him, and he closed his eyes again. He imagined fighting, or getting up to get out. A few times he even thought he did, only to open his eyes again and realize he was still being swallowed by pillows.

Get up, get up, get up, get up, get up, get up...

And this time, even as his father’s presence rushed to push him back to sleep...he found himself already blackening out himself.

Tired. He was so, so tired...and these pillows felt great...

Maybe it was okay to be eaten if he was so comfortable before it happened.

It had been a week since they’d brought Luke back to the Executor. A week since Luke had undergone multiple procedures to save his life. The first few days had been the worst. He’d teetered on the edge of life and death, though Vader said he could feel him reaching out through their bond occasionally. Leia had begun to pick up on when that happened, because Vader would drop whatever he was doing to check on him.
Not that he’d left the room Luke was in. She hardly had either, except when Vader made her get rest herself. The first time he’d forced her to sleep, she’d been awake for two days straight and the suggestion had made her whirl on him to tell him *exactly* where he could shove it.

But the look he’d given her (or rather, the look she’d felt), made the words dry up in her mouth.

He wasn’t in a patient mood, but he was trying for Luke’s sake.

So she should, too.

She continued to try that entire week. Eventually Vader stopped pressuring her to sleep, and Han and Artoo took up the task instead. She wondered if Vader had ordered them to. Or maybe they were just worried…

But she was pretty sure Vader was the ultimate cause.

Now it was her ‘turn’ to watch Luke. Vader didn’t sleep like normal people, it seemed—instead, he meditated, and he’d decided Luke’s room was the perfect place to do it. So even though he was as asleep as he would ever get, she knew she was not truly the only one monitoring her brother.

Especially since, according to Vader, Luke had attempted waking up multiple times. Each time Vader had apparently forced him back to sleep, claiming he wasn’t yet ‘ready,’ whatever that meant. But…maybe he was right. Luke was out of the med bay, and they were certain by now that he would live, but he still looked too fragile. Because he *was*. If Luke made a wrong move, it could cause his injuries to worsen and…

She sat down on the edge of the bed, her gaze following the mess of wires still attached to him. She swallowed a lump in her throat. There were no tears left. Not after everything this week. But she wished he’d get better soon, just so she didn’t have to see him like this and feel the guilt weighing heavily on her shoulders…

Luke shifted, and she tensed, watching him carefully. Part of her hoped he’d wake up, just so she’d truly know he was going to be okay, but he needed the rest. She couldn’t be selfish and hope for something that would delay his recovery.

But then his eyes opened. Blue as a clear sky on Alderaan. They were unfocused and darted around, clearly taking in the unfamiliar surroundings.

She should wake Vader and have him help him back to sleep. That’s what he told her to do.

And yet…

She inched closer, hardly breathing, so that she was in his line of sight. She knew he recognized her, because she watched him relax further into the pillows, his breathing slowing to a calmer rate.

“Leia.”

She’d lied to herself. There were *definitely* tears left, and they were falling silently at hearing his voice say her name. It was rough from not being used in a while and from having a breathing tube shoved down his throat during surgery, but she recognized it anyway.

“I’m so sorry,” she whispered back. With trembling hands, she reached out and touched his cheek. “I’m *so* sorry, Luke. Please forgive me.”

His gaze never left her. “Nothin. For--forgive.”
The words were slurred, but she got the gist anyway. “You’re too forgiving.”

The corners of his mouth twitched upwards, and his eyes were drooping.

“I love you, brother,” she whispered, stroking his cheek. “I’m glad you’re home.”

He closed his eyes, and she knew he was drifting away.

“Love...sis.”

He was asleep again, and she felt as though a load was taken from her chest.

The next time he was pulled from sleep, it was because everything *hurt*.

His entire body throbbed. His head. His chest and shoulder. His leg.

It certainly wasn’t the first time pain woke him up. But this felt different, somehow. It felt...healing.

He didn’t know how else to describe it. In fact, as his mind became more alert, he could feel his leg elevated and wrapped in something tight, hard, and relatively *uncomfortable*. His left arm was also elevated, on what felt like pillows.

But his chest...and Force, his *abdomen*...

He felt like someone had beat him with a rod for a week straight.

And someone was poking his right hand.

The hand, he vaguely remembered, he’d rendered useless in his escape attempt.

A… an escape that had gone horribly wrong…

His eyes snapped open.

The room was very clearly Imperial. It had the sterile gray and black colors, with the lights in the wall blinding him. To his right, he heard the sound of Vader’s respirator before he managed to turn his stiff neck to look at him.

Vader’s helmet was turned downwards, staring at his mechanical hand. The wires compartment on his wrist was open, and he was fiddling with a tool.

Fixing his hand.

Luke watched, too stunned to say anything.

He’d taken that hand from him. How many times since Bespin had Luke looked at that hand with vindictiveness for everything it stood for? It was a physical reminder of his failure, of the last of his innocence lost as Vader hurled the truth of his parentage in his face. He’d hated it, and he hadn’t cared that he’d damaged it in his escape attempt beyond the difficulty it would cause.

And now Vader was fixing it.

Luke’s head blanked. There just… weren’t words to describe the odd yet strangely intimate care the man he’d once hated showed.
“Move your fingers,” Vader suddenly ordered without looking up.

He should have known he’d know he was awake. Not that he was trying to hide it, but…

He wiggled his fingers.

Was it just him, or were they somehow smoother and more natural than ever before? If it weren’t for the exposed wires and the too-perfect synth skin, he might never notice the difference again.

“Your Rebellion may have given you a top of the line model prosthetic, but they don’t know how to properly install it.”

He swallowed, and noticed just how sore his throat was. “It didn’t stop working because of that.”

When was the last time he’d said a full sentence? Though it hurt to talk, it also felt liberating to do it. And to actually talk to someone face to face…

Or. Face to mask. Whatever.

“I am aware. I didn’t just fix that. I improved it.”

Luke didn’t miss the satisfaction and guilt simultaneously in his father’s voice. And though Vader had given a rather terrible apology in their first vision together, he felt as if this was an apology worth far more than words could ever convey.

He looked around the room again as Vader finished. “I’m on the Executor.”

“Yes.” He heard the compartment snap shut, and again he wiggled his fingers.

“How long have I been out?”

A pause, and Luke swore the room darkened. “Over a week.”

“A week?!” He tried to sit up, and immediately regretted it as a wave of horrible pain slammed into him and he was back against the pillows.

Vader jumped up and hovered over him. It might have been terrifying to see his mask over him before, but now…

“Do not move or I will put you back to sleep!” he warned, shoving his finger in his face.

No. It was still terrifying, if also a little confusing at how much concern there was in their bond.

“Put me back to…?” he finally managed to gasp out, then, “Hey wait a minute, have you been doing that?!”

Vader froze. “...It was necessary.”

“Necessary?! How?!”

“You were only waking up because you thought you were in danger still. You were not in your right mind, and you needed the rest.” He crossed his arms. “I was not pleased about it either.”

Again, he couldn’t help but be stunned. From what he’d seen of his father, he was rather selfish. He would have thought he’d force him awake the first chance he got.
Was he really *that* worried about him?

Yes, something seemed to whisper, and he thought he remembered something, something before he’d blackened out…

*I will do anything you ask.*


Was that a dream caused by blood loss? He’d been sure he was going to die. He’d lost the ability to talk to Leia, and she’d been begging him to keep going, to say anything. Then something heavy and warm covered him and he was being lifted…

It was too bizarre to be a dream.

“I think,” Luke rasped, “we should talk.”

He was half afraid Vader would scoff and say no. He didn’t strike him as the kind of man who favored talk over action, and their conversations often led to either extreme awkwardness or an argument. He didn’t have it in him to argue now, and he was well aware that he was totally at his father’s mercy.

But though Vader remained tense, he hesitated… and nodded.

“Yes,” he rumbled. “We do.”

Chapter End Notes

So no hugs (that would REALLY hurt Luke in this chapter), but....feels???? The Vader fixing Luke's hand was significantly inspired by pydiyudie on Tumblr. In fact it was one of the first pictures that inspired a lot of how Luke and Vader's relationship has progressed in this story. [https://pydiyudie.tumblr.com/post/137672560802](https://pydiyudie.tumblr.com/post/137672560802)

Also thank you so much for the support! I'm seriously blown away! Please everyone stay safe out there! <3

The song that inspired the title: Sleep by Eric Whitacre
All of my Birds by Jessica Curry
Safe and Sound cover by Madilyn Bailey

Leave some love!

Love,

LadyVader23
He should make Luke go back to sleep. The bond between them was thick with exhaustion.

Vader had spent over a week agonizing over every action that had led Luke to this point. He hated dwelling on the past; he preferred to act and deal with the consequences later. But he wasn’t able to concentrate on anything but the wellbeing of his son. Just looking at the boy forced him to think about it, and though he shielded it as best he could from Leia, guilt was tearing him to shreds.

He couldn’t let this happen again. He’d do whatever it took to make sure it didn’t, including using Luke’s first moment of alertness to accomplish it. This wasn’t something he could sell his soul to Sidious for. This had nothing to do with the Force, either light or dark.

If he wanted to truly keep Luke from putting himself in harm's way, he needed to be a father.

At least, he was sure that was the answer. It was, after all, what had finally made Luke open up to him in the first place.

That didn’t mean it was easy.

He became well aware that Luke was staring, also searching for the right words to begin.

Force, he was so small. Too small, and pale as a ghost. The pillows Vader had stuffed the bed with practically swallowed him whole.

“I am...not good with words.”

He was almost glad Luke still had enough energy to look amused by that. “I never would have guessed.”

Still. He could do without the sarcasm. But it meant his son was alive, and considering how close he’d been to losing him forever...he decided to let it go.

“Even before...even before this, I was never good at expressing…” He made a face. If his Master could see him now… “Emotions.”

Luke frowned, and it just made him look even more skeletal. Vader’s gut twisted. “You mean when you were still Anakin?”

Instinctively, he gritted his teeth, but he managed to ground out, “Yes. It was...frowned upon.”

“By...the Jedi?”

So, evidently Leia was not the only one who asked too many questions. He filed that information away under the personal things he’d learned about Luke.
“Yes. So I cannot guarantee that I will say things...correctly.” He hated being so unsure. He hated how vulnerable and exposed he felt under Luke’s piercing gaze.

But at least his eyes were open. At least he could feel that way.


Vader watched his chest rise and fall a few times under the blankets, deciding where to start. There were so many potential places to begin. So many of them opened up a host of other issues he’d rather not speak of at all…

So he decided to start with, “I thought you were dead.”

Luke winced. “I think I was pretty close--”

“That is not what I mean.” His fists clenched at the reminder. “I thought you’d died with your mother. I investigated. I made sure…” He trailed off. The first few years after... after, he’d done everything he possibly could to find a way to bring Padme back. When he couldn’t...he’d checked her grave. He’d watched her funeral once, just to be sure. He’d destroyed almost every personal ship he’d owned in grief and rage.

Multiple officers died that day.

Then the coroner had said…

A lie.

Even when he’d found out about the deception to hide Luke, he’d had the coroner killed before he could extract information about Leia.

“I would have come for you.” He’d told him this before. It was the truth, and what had convinced Luke to tell him the information he’d needed to find him in the first place. But he needed to say it again, and again, and again. “You were the most important person in the entire universe the second I found out you were alive.”

And like before, he felt the words hit Luke, felt him hold them close and wonder over them. But now, he could see the pain and longing in his eyes. The shared sorrow for what they’d lost was etched into his furrowed brows.

It was...strange, to know that someone else shared even a fraction of his pain. But...a good strange.

He continued. “I hid your identity from the Emperor. As far as he knew, you were just the pilot who destroyed the Death Star. He...found out though. Right before Cloud City.”


“Sith traditionally only have a Master and an apprentice.” Vader crossed his arms. “Even a normal Force sensitive would be a threat to him. But my offspring would be...significantly more so.”

“That doesn’t make me any less confused.”

Vader stared. Did he truly not know? “Even as a Jedi, I was the most powerful to have ever lived.”

But that only made Luke look at him skeptically. “Do you really have to exaggerate? I thought we were being honest with each other.”
He swallowed thickly, trying to control the surge of annoyance. It was a miracle his son was alive, he didn’t want to ruin it like he had Bespin…

But he couldn’t help growling irritably, “I have a midichlorian count of over twenty thousand. It is no exaggeration.”

He was expecting Luke to be impressed by the news, but he only stared at him. His confusion and apprehension to admit it was palpable.

“…you know what that is, don’t you?”

Surely the Jedi would have explained that to him. It was the first thing he’d learned within the first five minutes of his very first class, in fact. But to his dismay, Luke winced and shook his head...then winced again from the pain the movement caused him.

He’d...forgotten how little Luke knew. Even with some training, he knew barely more than Leia did.

He waited a beat, willing himself to calm down enough to speak again. He wouldn’t rampage over what Kenobi had stolen from him, from Luke-- “I will explain it further later. For now, it is the biological reason some are able to feel and control the Force more than others. So, it is no exaggeration.”

“Okay.” Luke said in a tone that suggested there would be far more questions later, and again Vader bit back the rage at the simple information that had been denied to his children. “So, the Emperor found out, and I guess he didn’t take it well?”

“He initially wanted you dead.” If that information bothered Luke, Vader couldn’t tell. Then again, as a Rebel, it was likely the least surprising information he had for him. “But I convinced him to let you live so I could convince you to join us.”

“Which is not happening,” Luke said fiercely, and before Vader could respond, he changed the subject. “But if there are supposed to only be two Sith, then why would he even consider me?”

He didn’t answer for a moment, wrestling with his desire to not appear vulnerable in any way...but one look at Luke’s injured and deteriorated state finally made him ground out, “I thought I could convince you to join me in overthrowing him. But I also knew he has been trying to get rid of me since I lost my battle with Kenobi. I...hoped you wouldn’t join him, but if it meant you lived...I’d do anything.”

He’d never admitted that aloud. It wasn’t like he had many people to talk to, anyway, but it was yet another strange...feeling. He hadn’t been this open with someone since...since…

Padme.

Even with his dyed hair, he still looked more like him than her, but his demeanor… it was hers.

Leia was much like Anakin, but Luke was his mother’s son.

His chest tightened at the comparison.

“On one hand, I don’t appreciate my future being decided by you or anyone else.” Luke frowned. “But on the other…I guess that sort of explains some things at Bespin.”

“Sort of,” Vader agreed dryly. “What would you have done had I told you that you were my son...
when you walked into the carbon-freeze chamber?”

He waited while Luke considered. “You still hurt my friends. I still wouldn’t have reacted well, but...I probably would have a hand.”

“You wouldn’t have fought me?”

“Maybe. Maybe not. You... My father was always my hero. Knowing I was trying to kill my father would have changed a lot of things. I just don’t know how much.”

They’d never know, now.

“Ironically,” Vader mused, “I myself planned on faking your death or misplacing you once I had you in carbon-freeze. Then I would have found a safe place to unfreeze you, tell you the truth, and then once you agreed to be by my side, we would overthrow the Emperor together.”


“You say that because you are resistant to accepting that the Dark Side is far more--”

Luke groaned. “Are we really doing this now?”

“The point is,” Vader growled, then attempted to soften his tone as he noted Luke tensing, “is that I had every intention of telling you. And... if we are being honest, I was curious.”


“Of what you knew. I knew you had some training. I wanted to see how much.”

“I feel like there were better ways to do that.”

“Maybe. Maybe not,” Vader quoted back at him. “I underestimated you. You foiled the carbon-freeze plan, and every time you managed to get past my defences, I lost more and more of my temper.” He hesitated. “I...never meant to take your hand. I never meant to terrorize you into...into taking up a risky, terrible plan that almost got you killed just to get away from me. Leia may blame herself for suggesting you pretend to die, but she... she was trying to protect you just as I sought to protect you from the Emperor. Maybe my plan wouldn’t have worked either.”

“It wouldn’t have,” Luke replied firmly, though his gaze was clouded, his mind lost in thought.

“You would have been with me in my plan, though.”

“And what else would you have done when I refused to join you? Kill me? Cut off my hand anyway? Cut off all of my limbs?”

Rage immediately flashed through him at even the mention that he’d kill his son...but hadn’t he threatened to do just that on Bespin?

Don’t make me destroy you. Those had been his exact words, and as much as he’d like to deny it... he couldn’t.

But he couldn’t admit it aloud, either.

“All I know is that when I was told you were dead...” He trailed off, rage melting into guilt and terror for what might have been, for what almost happened again. “I’ve lost everyone I have ever cared for. I do not want to lose you, either.”
And he hated that it had taken his son almost dying for him to realize that.

Luke felt it… and he sensed him understand, even as he wondered over it. He couldn’t blame him--he was a *Sith*. Sith did not generally express any kind of emotion beyond anger and hate. But he was his son, and… Leia was right.

Luke deserved to know.

He could hardly breathe. It wasn’t just because he could feel his ribs were *definitely* cracked, and because his abdomen felt like it was on fire...but because any dream he’d had of reconciling with his father had died on Bespin.

Now...now he didn’t know *what* to think.

Every word rang with the truth. More than that, he couldn’t help but marvel: every time he began to lose his temper, he managed to reign it back in. For *him*.

It was everything he’d ever wanted, but…

But.

“Before I slipped away,” Luke began, tentatively, “you told me you’d do anything I asked.” His father’s mood soured at that, and he knew he’d hoped he’d forget. He almost *had*, but… how could he?

His father was a beacon in the Force. He doubted he could ever fully forget anything he did, good or bad.

“Did you mean it?”

Vader met his gaze, and Luke could practically see his emotions warring with each other. The fact that he was even bothering to consider it was nothing short of a miracle. But finally, his father managed to bite out:

“Yes.”

Luke bit his lip.

He almost didn’t want to hope, but…

“Don’t force me to turn to the Dark Side.”

It was such a risky thing to ask. He knew it would anger his father, and it *definitely* did. This time, Vader did not hold back the snarl as he pointed in his face. “It is the only way to defeat the Emperor! The Light Side has repeatedly failed to do *anything*--”

“Because of you. You’re the one who killed all of the Jedi. If you weren’t around, do you really think he’d survive?”

As Vader tensed to the point Luke was half-sure he would snap, it occurred to him that maybe this wasn’t the time to bring it up. He was, after all, almost completely unable to move. Vader claimed he didn’t want him dead, but what if he lost it again? What if he accidentally hurt him again, or worse?

As quickly as the anger loomed, he sensed Vader attempting to reign it in. He failed.
“I will *not* hurt you,” he snarled.

Distantly, Luke thought it would be better to shield those emotions...but shielding required extra energy, which he had very little of.

He’d...have to deal with Vader sensing everything. For now.

“Is that what you wish? It will likely mean your doom.” Even as he said it, he could tell Vader rejected the thought. He would not *allow* it. It didn’t give Luke hope for getting what he needed, but he stared Vader straight in the eyes and practically shoved how serious he was down their bond.

“I understand. I *won’t* do it.”

Again, there was that warring of emotions. Fury that he was being so stubborn, and terror for his safety. “You could ask for *anything* else. I’m surprised you didn’t ask for me to help aid your Rebellion.”

And maybe he should have. Leia might have...but she was Leia Organa, princess and member of Rebel Command. She had different priorities, priorities he mostly shared. But…

“When I was asleep--”

“That is *not* how I’d describe your physical state over the last week.”

“--I felt you there.”

Vader hesitated. “I never left.”

“I know, but I mean I felt you.”

“I wasn’t about to let you die. So I did not stop calling you back.”

Briefly Luke wondered if that was a Force bond thing, or if all Force sensitives could do it. Or maybe it was just Vader’s sheer will power that had made it possible.

He carefully considered his next words, reaching through to the bond that was now so open between them. Perhaps it had only been a dream. But, no--those stars of light shone clearly through the icy darkness he’d grown accustomed to.

“It wasn’t your Darkness that kept me grounded. There is brilliant *light* there, and that’s what I reached for.”

He wasn’t sure how he expected Vader to react to that. With more fury and denial, probably. But he froze, and when he spoke it was soft...or as soft as the mask allowed. “That is not possible. It is... too late for me, my son.”

Luke shook his head--and winced as a terrible pounding in his head began from the movement. He ignored the flash of worry from his father and insisted, “I know what I sensed. It wasn’t delirium. I can even sense it now. Either you haven’t noticed, or you’re too stubborn to admit it, but there is *good* in you.” He paused, the pounding starting to fade to a dull ache. “But I can’t force you to do something you don’t want to do.”

He doubted Vader would have even gone for it, but that didn’t make it any less true.

“Why?”
“Because I don’t like being manipulated into doing something I know isn’t me.” He gave him a pointed look. “And you’re your own person. You decide your fate. Not me.”

As much as he wanted to have his father be saved from the dark...he meant what he said. Vader needed to want it himself.

His father stared at him, and for the first time since their conversation began, Luke couldn’t sense what he was thinking. He started to worry that was a bad thing, but then Vader said, “Has anyone ever told you that you are...different?”


What did that mean?

“Is...that a good thing?”

Vader tilted his head, studying him. He could feel his presence probing him tentatively, almost like he was trying to figure out something new.

Finally, he said, “I will not force you to join the Dark Side. Not unless you yourself wish it.”

He was so surprised by the answer, he tried to sit up. “Rea--AH!”

Vader was instantly there, hands on his shoulders as he carefully guided Luke back down to pillows that immediately half-swallowed him.

“Do not move!” Vader snapped as soon as he was settled again. “You are lucky you didn’t puncture a lung, and you are still recovering from multiple serious surgeries. I told you before, I will not lose you again!”

It was hard to concentrate on anything but making the pain go away, so he wasn’t sure if he was mad or worried. “I’m sorry,” he managed to gasp out. “I was...surprised…”

“I told you I meant it, I am not a liar.” He was definitely annoyed, as if he thought Luke could immediately trust everything he said. How the hell did he change moods so quickly? It was almost as exhausting as his actual injuries. “Now you will stay down, you will not move, and you will recover. If you do not, then perhaps I’ll reconsider!”

He breathed easier now, staring up at his father, who still hovered over him, ensuring he wouldn’t move. He could still hardly believe he’d agreed, though the way he’d phrased the promise made Luke think he was probably hoping he’d change his mind...but he wasn’t going to argue.

“Oh, okay,” he promised, “You don’t need to hover.”

“I am not hovering.” He crossed his arms over his chest, and Luke got the distinct feeling he was being glared at.

“Right…” Luke tried not to roll his eyes. He had a feeling this was going to become his new normal for however long it took to heal.

Not that he would complain. This was, after all, all he’d ever wanted.

“So what exactly did happen after…” He trailed off, suddenly remembering in horror that he’d had to be carried like a child to safety. The details were shaky, and he mostly remembered his father begging him to stay, but there was no other way he could have been saved.
That was the *exact* opposite of how he’d wanted to be found. What else had happened? How weak did he appear now?

The temperature in the room plunged, and suddenly Vader was gripping his chin...and carefully, he forced Luke to look at him.

“I will answer your question, young one.” Luke winced at the seething in Vader’s voice, and he felt Vader’s fingers tighten just barely. “It took far too long for the med droid to stabilize you. Leia gave you a blood transfusion once you were, and the droid had to then stitch you back together.”

Luke gulped, his stomach twisting at the thought of the droid reaching inside of him to piece him like some gruesome puzzle.

“You were in bacta for hours.”

That wasn’t surprising; he could feel a soft, grainy layer on his skin and smell the sourness still lingering on him. But remembering what that entailed... and if his father and sister were there the whole time...

He was definitely flushing red now.

“Your shoulder was broken to the point it was operated on. They reset your leg, confirmed you had cracked ribs, a concussion, and suffered from malnutrition.”

Luke’s breath hitched as Vader leaned in close.

“A lesser man would have *died*. You said yourself. The crash killed everyone else, but *not you*.”

His throat tightened.

“You can claim the circumstances might have saved your life, but you had plenty of serious injuries that could have killed you. They didn’t because you *fought*. When I told you to move towards safety, you *did*. Seasoned warriors with working limbs have died doing the same thing, but you did it on one good leg and survived. Then you dealt with pirates, managed to... mostly escape, and even on the brink of death, *you held on*. So don’t you *dare* think you are weak. You would not be alive if you were.”

His eyes were burning, tears pricking at them.

Force, he would not cry. Not with nowhere to hide the tears, not with Vader right in his face...

But holding tears back only made his headache worse, and unable to stop himself, tears fell.

Vader’s hand stilled and Luke felt his terror that he’d somehow hurt him.

“I’m sorry.” Luke wanted to pull away, or at least summon the energy to wipe the tears away, but he couldn’t do either of those things. “I’m sorry.”

He wasn’t even just apologizing for the tears (though he was definitely horrified and a little afraid of what Vader might do). He meant for everything--for not just facing his issues instead of agreeing to run. For making Vader think he was dead the first time--and for almost dying the second time. For even caring what others would think of his injuries enough that he’d lowered his guard in trusting the hunter-turned-pirate.

Did people even survive long enough to apologize to Vader? It felt weird to even try, but right at
the same time.

Finally, Vader’s grip on his chin relaxed. Then he let him go…

Only to begin wiping the tears away himself.

“I...am the one who failed you.”

He definitely was having trouble breathing. His chest hurt, but not from the ribs--he felt like he was going to explode with emotion and the tears wouldn’t stop as hard as he tried…

Vader kept wiping them away. “And yet despite my failings, you have become more than I ever could have imagined.”

He had to be dreaming.


Those words shattered him. Not in the way he had on Bespin--those words were meant to tear and destroy. These...these were meant to rebuild anew.

He stopped bothering to try to stop crying. It hurt his whole body to do so, and he was a blubbering mess in a Sith Lord’s hands, but he didn’t give a damn.

Sith Lord or not, this was his father. And even with an uncertain future ahead, he knew where he needed to be.

“I want to stay,” he managed to gasp out.

“You have no choice in that matter,” Vader reminded him, and Luke could feel his amusement that he’d even suggest differently. “For a multitude of reasons.”

“I don’t care, even if I did, I’m staying.”

It made everything so much more complicated. He’d figure it out. He doubted Master Yoda or Ben would approve, but this was his choice.

He was staying with his father.

Vader ruffled his hair, and it was such a fatherly gesture, Luke didn’t even care that it caused more throbbing. “Your primary concern should be healing, young one. That is all you will be doing for the foreseeable future.”

The tears were slowing now, and he nodded--and winced.

“Stop nodding.”

“I can’t help it.”

“It will only make your recovery that much longer.”

Luke smiled shakily. “Fine, though I’m pretty sure I’m going to get eaten by all these pillows in my sleep.”

“You are exaggerating. They are to help you heal.”
He shifted his good leg, and the movement sent two tumbling out from underneath the covers at the edge of the bed. “How many are on this thing? I’m not even lying on most of these.”

“They are necessary to ensure maximum comfort, which will speed the healing process.” Vader reluctantly let his face go. There was no reason for him to keep holding, he supposed, but Luke found himself sort of missing the touch.

“I don’t think fifty pillows is going to help with that. There’s such a thing as too much.”

“There are not fifty on the bed,” Vader assured him, lifting the pillows he’d kicked off back to his hands.

“What, did you count?”

Vader’s mood soured. “No. Your smuggler friend did.”

Honestly, he was surprised Vader had even let Han in the room. Hell, he was surprised he hadn’t thrown him in a cell. “How many?”

“Twenty.”

“Twenty?” Vader said it like it was no big deal, but that was absolutely overkill. He didn’t have a great view of the bed from his position, but now that he looked it did seem a little too lumpy. “I don’t need that many.”

“You would not say that if you saw yourself.”

He...probably wasn’t that wrong. But still, twenty pillows?

Vader leaned down to put the pillows back. “No! No, no, they are not necessary.”

He couldn’t see Vader’s face, but by the way he paused and tilted his helmet towards him, he was certain he was exasperated. “When you are well enough to remove them yourself, then you may do so. But for now, you will deal with as many as I see fit.”

Luke scowled...but didn’t press. He was too exhausted, and all of the emotions over the course of their conversation hadn’t helped in that regard.

Vader sensed it. When he finished replacing the pillows, he straightened and pointed at him. “We will speak more later. You need to sleep.”

“Yeah,” Luke agreed...but knowing Vader was right there, staring at him…

Vader stretched out a hand, again ruffling his hair. “Sleep, my son,” he repeated, and this time he felt the command deep within him.

Unwillingly, his eyes began to drift closed.

“Is...Dark...S…?” he slurred, and his eyes closed.

“No.”

He drifted deeper towards unconsciousness. Just as before, he felt his father with him, as constant and vigilant as the stars outside the viewport.

*Teach me sometime?*
He didn’t even know if the thought made it to him.

But it must have, because right before he fully fell asleep, Vader’s voice replied.

*Of course, my son. Anything for you.*

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to Heart of Stars for the pillow idea! OMG. If you want me to write angst, I got it covered, easy, but this chapter was HARD. I'd write a line, then stare at the screen like, "....Ok how would the other react to this?" I mean I CAN do fluff, but the emotion in this was serious to me. So, I hope I got the emotion right.

The songs for this chapter are:
My Precious Child, My Precious Gift by Samuel Kim and Blake Matthews
And the mood of Father and Son by Cat Stevens (I was watching Guardians of the Galaxy between writing sessions, idk)
Leave some love!
LadyVader23
A Dysfunctional Family

Chapter Notes

Thank you to my lovely Beta, SpellCleaver! <3 She posted part one of her Luke Palpatine story on AO3! It's great! Go read it!
Happy Revenge of the 5th!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“...” Han muttered as they all stared at the door. Vader had just stormed through, leaving Luke alone with Leia and Han.

Of course, it had been all Leia’s doing. The moment he’d woken up and she’d seen he was coherent enough to converse, she’d turned on Vader, demanding ‘alone time’ like he’d had. Luke thought he would say no, but… Leia was Leia. After an explosive argument, she’d managed to win an hour for themselves.

“He’s pissed,” Luke commented dryly. He could practically feel his father sulking from wherever he’d holed up.

Darth Vader. Sulking. He had a feeling his father had all sorts of surprises waiting for him.

“I know,” Leia replied, crossing the room to sit on the edge of the bed next to him. She took his good hand in her own, and he squeezed it.

Force, it felt so good to finally have her there. Her presence had been strong in the meditation dream, but now that they were together again… it felt like their presences were intermingling, communicating in ways that no words could ever do justice. The emotion that flooded that bond...somehow was stronger than that of his bond with Vader. The strong sense of Leia, and her relief and joy at finally having him back, gave him a sort of energy boost that he sorely needed.

“Is he ever not angry?” Han sighed, pulling up a chair to sit with them. “It’s a miracle I’m still alive.”

“He must not hate you that much, then,” Luke said.

“Oh, ha ha. Very funny.” Han lifted a brow. Luke took a moment to absorb the sight of his best friend. He hadn’t seen him since Hoth... well no, that wasn’t true. He’d technically seen Boba Fett floating his carbonite body away, though he hadn’t realized it at the time. “Anyway. Enough about Darth Moody. How ya feelin, kid?”

He’d asked him the exact same question, in the exact same way, with just enough lightness in his tone to conceal the real concern there. And his signature vaguely-insulting nicknames... he’d always found them mildly amusing, and it was good to hear him use one again. Even if Darth Moody was a nickname he was certain Vader would try to kill him for.

He shoved the last dark thought away. They were together again. It was... extremely different circumstances, but they were together. That’s what mattered now.

“Like I was hit by a speeder,” Luke replied honestly. He couldn’t lift himself up, but he was
propped up anyway using a bunch of those the stupid pillows.

Han’s smile faltered. “That was probably the one thing that didn’t happen to you.”


“What’re you apologizing to me for, kid?” Han shrugged. “I mean, it’s only me who constantly has to come save you...what are we on now, three you owe me?”

“No, we’re still at two. I did try to come save you on Bespin.”

Han made a show of thinking about it. “Fine. Two. And I’m going to make sure I call in the favors on something good.”

Luke made a face. “If I let you up it to three, will you help me get these pillows off my bed?”

Han burst out laughing, and Leia shook her head.

“See, I told you he’d hate it,” she said with a pointed look.

“Oh I had no doubt, Sweetheart.”

“But you’re the one who encouraged the behavior by counting the pillows.” She reached under the cover and pulled one of the pillows out, holding it up to inspect it.

_Damn. Vader didn’t skimp on quality._

Luke was startled by her voice in his head. She wasn’t looking at him though; she was still inspecting the pillow.

Had...she meant to communicate that way?

She finally put the pillow down. “If you knew, why didn’t you help me try to stop him?”

There wasn’t any indication she’d intended to...had he accidentally read her thoughts or was it her? He wanted to ask, but Han was...Han whenever he started talking Force stuff. He doubted he’d appreciate being stuck between them.

Han grinned, crossing his arms over his chest. “Because I thought it would be funny. Besides, it’s not like it hurt him.”

“Well, maybe I’ll stuff your bed with twenty pillows and see how you like it,” Luke mumbled. He’d bring it up with Leia later, he decided. He didn’t want to accidentally hear something he wasn’t supposed to.

“You’d have to get better first. Then you’re more than welcome to do whatever you want...within reason, of course.”

Luke stared at Han for a moment, then he couldn’t help but curve his lips into a warm smile. “It’s good to see you, Han. I’m... glad you’re safe.”

“Thanks...though I gotta say, it’s really weird to have been saved by your dad. You know he murdered Jabba and his whole court?”

Having grown up knowing the horrible, vile things the Hutt did to ordinary, innocent people, he almost wished he’d been there to see it. “Leia told me... I imagine that’s causing some chaos?”
Leia hesitated. “To be honest...I assume so, but I don’t really know.”

He frowned. “What do you mean, you don’t know? I assumed you’d want to know something that important.”

“Normally, yes, but my main focus since losing contact with you has been to find you. I haven’t even bothered Vader for information on it.”

*Oh, I’m going to get a court martial for sure.*

Luke winced as yet again, her voice was in his head.

“Well, from what little Prince Xizor told me, it sounds like the slug-shaped hole in the Outer Rim is causing some significant problems, especially since no one knows besides us who did it.” Han gave her a look. “Also, I’m just going to drink in the moment for a second. I knew something you only guessed at.”

Leia rolled her eyes. “I have had bigger problems to think about.”

*Like making sure Luke was alright.*

Yeah. She definitely wasn’t sending her thoughts to him on purpose.

“This isn’t about me. Luke, how the hell did you even end up in that town, anyway?” She turned on him, her brows raised expectantly.

Luke sank into the pillows some. He’d dreaded that question. He suddenly wished the pillows would swallow him whole. “Um. It’s going to sound really dumb.”

Leia and Han shared a look. “I’m almost afraid to know the answer,” she said, gripping his hand a little tighter.

He was afraid to tell her, so...that made the three of them.

“I...was exhausted. I hadn’t really gotten any real rest in who knows how long, and I just wanted it to be done. Plus I...didn’t want you and Vader to see me so injured, and I smelled terrible--I still do, probably. So when I heard the engines of a speeder bike… I couldn’t help it.” He didn’t meet her eyes; his cheeks were hot. “Turns out it was a trap.”

Again, that completely open bond between them transmitted her hurt and sadness before she even spoke. “How could you think I’d think that was dumb?” Reaching up, she brushed some of his hair away from his face.

*Thank the Force. His temperature is finally normal.*

Had...he had a fever? Vader hadn’t told him that…

She continued, oblivious to what she’d let slip. “It’s completely natural to feel that way. You said yourself, you were tired and already injured. I probably would have made a similar decision.”

“Me, too,” Han grumbled. “Hell, I don’t think I woulda made it past the first week. You and that Skywalker luck, kid.”

Luke let out a breath of relief. “I thought about both of you a lot. Actually, I kept thinking I was proving your luck theory wrong, Han.”
“The fact that you’re here at all proves me right,” Han insisted. “You didn’t see yourself when Vader carried you back. I thought you were dead.”

“You very nearly were,” Leia added softly. Painfully.

Luke absorbed that quietly. He must have looked terrible to have rattled Han

“The pirates are dead,” It wasn’t a question.

“Yes.”

“The monster?”

“Also dead.”

Thank the Force. He was sure that thing would haunt his nightmares for years to come. Maybe Vader would tell him how he killed it...then again, Vader wasn’t much of a storyteller.

He tried to push the thought of the monster’s claws and teeth out of his head.

Maybe it was for the best that he didn’t know the details.

“...did he get all of the pirates?”

Leia frowned, and he not only felt her concern but heard, That’s not like Luke to wish death on everyone...

Luke looked down in shame. He hadn’t meant it that way. He added, “I may have...used my relationship with Vader to try to bluff my way free.”

He may have been Vader’s son, but he didn’t wish death on most people. Hell, he still felt guilty for the innocent lives that had been on the Death Star. It was a war and if he hadn’t, the Rebellion and Leia would have been lost, but he still had plenty of sleepless nights over it.

“Damn, and I thought I took risky bluffs.” Han whistled.


“I’m sure Vader got whoever knew about it, even if he didn’t get everyone,” Leia said, and even without their wide-open connection he could tell she was trying to reassure him despite the odds against them. “We...we could feel you were in bad shape before we even found you, so I think his main concern was just clearing immediate danger so we could get you safe.”

His smile faltered. “I guess we’ll find out.”

He waited for her to tell him what he already knew; this could lead to disastrous consequences. They should be preparing for that eventuality, maybe even call Vader back in there to plan... but she shook her head instead. “Well. I promised you an exchange of information when you got back.”

Despite it all, a flash of excitement managed to make him temporarily forget about the potential danger he’d put them in. He tried to sit up but stopped, groaning as pain shot through his abdomen and ribs. Leia and Han were instantly up, pushing him gently back down against the pillows, their expressions filled with worry.

Seconds later, he felt the cold, searching presence of Vader. What is going on?! Why are you in
Luke winced. His father was the most demanding person he’d ever met.

He forced himself to take even, slow breaths before answering. Each second he didn’t answer though, he could feel his father’s terror growing... I’m fine. I just moved accidentally.

Vader only barely calmed. What did I tell you about moving?! Luke was about to respond, but-- If it happens again, I’m coming back, hour time limit be damned. Understood?

Luke fought the urge to sigh. That would only do exactly what would bring Vader back in there. Understood.

Then before he could comment on more of his life choices, he cut the communication off.

“Please don’t hurt yourself,” Leia admonished, an odd look on her face. “And don’t bring Vader back in here.”

“He communicated with you too?”

“Unfortunately.”

Han frowned, glancing between them. “Wait. He just...did some kind of voodoo mind speaking or something?”

Luke couldn’t help but snort. Voodoo. Where did Han get these things? “He felt my pain and checked in, yes.”

His friend frowned. “Um. I didn’t realize the mind reading was real. I… should stop thinking...certain things around him, shouldn’t I?”

Luke wasn’t sure what he meant by certain things, and he wasn’t sure he wanted to know, but Leia stepped in before he could decide to ask. “Han, could you go get Artoo? I want to show Luke something.”

They met gazes, and Luke could have sworn they were communicating on an entirely different level, before Han nodded. “Sure.” He grinned at Luke. “Don’t go anywhere.”

“Ha ha. So funny.” He rolled his eyes.

Leia waited until Han had left before she let out a sigh, her shoulders drooping. “Please. I know you’re reckless and prone to danger. But please don’t ever scare me like that again.”

“Prone to danger?” Luke raised a brow. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Her eyes narrowed, and he immediately realized his mistake. “Let’s list, shall we? There was that monster in the trash compactor on the Death Star.”

Oh. He’d almost forgotten about that one.

“Then there was the time--”

“Okay, okay, I get it.” He took her hand again. “I know. I’m sorry.”

Leia let out a sigh, shaking her head. Her other hand went to cover both of theirs. “It’s not your fault. It’s…” She trailed off. They’d already been over this in their meditation dream, and they both
knew it was likely that they wouldn’t budge on their stances over whose fault it was. “Just...if I can do anything to make you more comfortable, or if you need anything or,” she paused, rolling her eyes, “or Vader is driving you nuts, I’m here to help.”

He didn’t think he’d want to witness more explosive arguments like the one he’d seen earlier, but he appreciated the thought anyway. “I’m glad you’re here Leia...I shouldn’t be. But I am.”

She frowned. “Why shouldn’t you?”

“Well...I know how you feel about Vader...” he broke off, not sure how to phrase it delicately. More so than most people, Leia had been through a lot at the hands of the Empire, let alone their father. On some level he understood, but he doubted Leia would ever get to the point where she’d willingly want to stay.

What would she say if he told her he was willingly staying?

He looked at her, the words on the top of his tongue. I’m staying with our father. Even if she left...he didn’t want her to leave, but even if she did, he wouldn’t stop her. But would she leave? After everything? And as obvious as it was that she and Vader had issues with one another, he also couldn’t help but notice there was a connection between them now.

Would she even want to leave?

No. She was Leia. She did her duty to the Rebellion. He doubted even Vader would stop her.

Maybe he needed to prepare for that eventuality. But...not today. Today, he was exhausted, and he didn’t think he had the energy to bring up such an emotional topic.

“I’m not going to worry about that now. What matters is that you get better.” She was so confident and firm, he almost believed she wasn’t worried...but their open connection said otherwise.

“I...think I should also let you know that I’m hearing some of your thoughts. Accidentally, I swear,” he rushed to add when he felt her flash of alarm.

She hesitated, a strange look passing over her face. “No, I...that doesn’t surprise me.”

It didn’t really surprise him either. They were twins, afterall. “And he didn’t teach you how he does that...blocking thing?”

“When he’s shielding his own emotions from us?”

“Yeah.”

Leia frowned. “No. He didn’t want to teach me at all.”

Now that was a surprise. That had been one of Vader’s main objectives on Bespin. Why wouldn’t it be the same with Leia?

At his questioning look, Leia expounded. “He had a vision. In it, I was a Sith. He and I were fighting, and you tried to stop us, and we accidentally killed you. He thought not training me would keep that future from happening.”

His mouth went dry. She said it so normally, so unconcerned, like there was no reason for either of them to dwell on it and Vader was, as usual, overreacting. Sure, it was Leia... she was the most committed person to the Rebellion he’d ever met. And he’d met plenty of dedicated Rebels. But
that didn’t sound like something to brush off, either.

Leia rolled her eyes when he continued to stare. “Don’t tell me you’re worried about it too.”

“I’m not unconcerned, yeah. Maybe not in the way Vader is, but Force visions aren’t something to ignore, either.”

“What, have you had one before?”

“Yes. On Dagobah.” He suppressed a shudder. “It wasn’t literal. But it had me facing off against Darth Vader. It was before I knew who he was, and when I cut his head off, the mask blew off to reveal my own face.”

“Well...I suppose in retrospect that sort of makes sense,” Leia said, making a face.

“Yeah. Now I understand it. But at the time I was pretty confused and horrified.”

“Remind me to never have a Force dream, ever. They sound terrible.”

He laughed…and quickly stopped as more pain erupted in his torso. Again, Vader’s presence immediately zeroed back on him, but by then the pain was gone and he sent a reassuring feeling down their bond. Hopefully that would be enough to calm the storm that was his father. “I...don’t think that’s how it works. But I’ll remind you.”

“Good.” Again, Leia reached up and brushed his hair out of his face, her touch gentle. “Maybe you and I could convince Vader to teach us some non-Dark Side things together.”

“Maybe.”

“And if he refuses to teach me, then you’ll teach me when he’s not around. Deal?” She grinned.

It sounded pretty messed up when she put it that way. Like Vader favored him over Leia, but Luke didn’t think that was the case. And yet he also wasn’t sure Leia would appreciate Vader caring for her, not when she already had parents she loved and obviously favored herself. But it felt important to say, so he opened his mouth…

Just as the door opened and in rolled Artoo, followed by Threepio and Han.

Artoo’s dome swiveled to him and he let out a pleased squeal, rolling faster to the side of the bed.

“Oh, Master Luke! You’re awake! Thank the Maker!” Threepio said, lifting his stiff arms towards the ceiling.

“He insisted he come,” Han explained, rolling his eyes. “He wouldn’t shut up until I let him.”

“Well of course I came, I too am most concerned for the young Master’s health!”

Luke broke out into a wide smile. He’d missed this. The droids were the same as they’d ever been, and Han still pretended he didn’t like them despite the fact that he obviously did. Carefully, with his good hand, he let go of Leia and reached out. Artoo met him halfway, and he touched the cool, smooth metal of his dome. It was so familiar, so normal, that he felt himself relax some.

“I missed you both too,” he assured them.

“You simply must get better, Master Luke. What will we do without you? Everything has been so dreadful since that Darth Vader--”
“Artoo,” Leia interrupted. She too was smiling. “Could you play that recording you showed me?”

The recording. Yes, she’d mentioned a recording of their parents in their meditation dream. He would have sat up to get a better view...but he’d learned his lesson twice, and he didn’t think Vader would be in a good mood if he burst in to find them watching the recording. So he forced himself to stay still as Artoo beeped affirmatively and his projector lit up.

A couple stood there, speaking to one another. Even if Leia hadn’t told him who they were, he would have recognized...well, at least his father. As odd as it was to see him for who he truly was, as the hero Jedi those in the Rebellion had told him stories of, he would have recognized him anywhere. One look and he knew. He even looked almost exactly like him. Except way taller and filled out.

In all of his imaginings growing up, his father had looked something like this. Not exactly, of course, but...close.

But it was the woman who drew Luke’s eye. The woman he’d never known.

His mother.

She was the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen. Her dark brown curls fell around her like a waterfall. Her dark eyes were filled with concern, and yet there was so much life. She was soft, too, at least she seemed that way compared to his father. And she was short--taller than Leia, but still so small. Not enough to appear fragile. No, he could see beyond her concern was an inner strength that exuded from every movement she made.

Padme Amidala. That was her name. And now, he had a face, and a sweet voice, to put to the name.

This was his family. Leia, his twin. His incredibly complicated father, and a beautiful angel of a mother.

As obviously dysfunctional as it was...

In that moment, he’d never felt more complete.

They were talking about a dream. A dream in which, apparently, his father saw her die. He mentioned a few other details Luke understood, like his own mother’s death and the Jedi Council not knowing about their relationship, but what struck him was how desperate he sounded. As desperate as he’d sounded in his mind on Arorua, when he’d begged him to stay.

As desperate as he’d sounded in his mind on Arorua, when he’d begged him to stay.

Then there were the words that Leia had told him.

“*Our baby is a blessing.*”

He’d known that, but hearing his father say it in another lifetime…

There was silence when the recording stopped. Leia’s brow was furrowed as if she were going over the details again in her mind, while Han outright stared at the spot where the vision had been playing. Finally, it was him who spoke.

“*That’s Vader?’*”

“Yes.” Leia sighed.
“Damn he...uh. Well. Talk about a change in lifestyle.”

Leia shot him a glare, but Luke ignored the comment. He was still focused on what he’d seen. It felt like a puzzle piece he’d been missing his whole life was finally snapped into place.

He imagined another lifetime, what might have been. Growing up with this sister, hopefully on a world other than Tatooine. They would have had each other’s backs. They probably would have driven both of their parents mad. But whenever they’d come home from an afternoon of play, their mother would be there, waiting with open arms, and she’d clutch them both to her. Then maybe he’d convince their father to tell them stories about his adventures, and they’d work on droids and ships together. He’d teach them how to fly and...

And it was a fantasy.

That would never be their life. He intended to make the best of what he’d been given, but he couldn’t help the longing and pain at the glimpse of the life they could have had together.

“It makes sense why the vision he had about you bothers him so much,” he finally said. He wouldn’t share those feelings. Not verbally, but from the way Leia watched him carefully, he thought she might have sensed it anyway.

“Vision?” Han frowned. “What vision?”

“I’ll tell you later,” Leia assured him.

“First his mother dies after a vision he had, then our mother...no wonder he’s taking it literally.”

“It’s also really weird to even imagine he had a mother…” Han grumbled, earning him another glare from Leia.

“Did he tell you about her?” Luke asked, deciding to ignore Han’s comment...though to be fair, it wasn’t the worst thing people had said about Vader’s nature. He’d heard far worse within the Rebellion.

She shook her head. “He told you?”

“Yeah. Not about the death part, though. Uncle Owen told me that part. They were slaves on Tatooine.”

Both Han and Leia seemed taken aback by that.

“What, Vader?” Han asked, stunned.

“Yes… I uh, wouldn’t mention it to him. It seems a touchy subject.”

“Too late.” Han reached up and began unconsciously rubbing his neck, his gaze faraway as if lost in thought.

Luke didn’t need to ask what had happened.

“Well. Anyway. The Jedi found and freed him, but they left his mother behind. My...well, I guess my step grandfather freed her and they fell in love and got married later.”

“They just...left her? Really?” Leia asked. She looked a bit pale, and when he probed their bond, he could feel her horror and pity. Feelings he knew Vader wouldn’t appreciate.
Don’t let Father know you feel that way, he sent to her. She jumped a bit, flushing, but nodded. Barely, so as not to tip off Han that they’d shared communication telepathically. It wasn’t a secret, but Han could be vocal.

“That was my question, too. All I got was a rant about how the Jedi weren’t as good as I thought they were.” He frowned, remembering how Ben had purposely omitted important information about his own father in the hopes that he’d...what, murder Vader? That was what it seemed, at least.

“You...said your uncle told you how she died?” Leia pressed when he didn’t continue.

“Oh. Yeah, a bit. Apparently she was taken and killed by Tusken Raiders. He used to tell me that story mainly to keep me from wandering too far from the farm or from going out at night.”

“Was...Vader there?”

He hesitated. “Father probably was, yes. Though I’m just guessing. My uncle tried to avoid the subject.”

For obvious reasons, apparently.

Leia’s lips pressed together at the title, but she made no further comment on it. “Well...yeah, I see your point about the vision thing then.”

“Again, what vision?” Han sighed.

“I think it best to stop asking questions. They’ll only confuse you more, I’m afraid,” Threepio told him seriously. Beside him, Artoo made a noise that sounded an awful lot like laughing.

Luke smiled yet again, appreciating the normallacy his droids brought. “Well. Thanks for showing me.” His throat tightened as unexpected tears sprang to his eyes. “I...it’s good to finally have faces to put to our parents.”

Leia’s expression softened. “Padme was a good woman. I knew who she was before I knew her as our mother.”

He recalled Vader mentioning that she’d been a senator. It only made sense that Leia had at least heard of her. “Can you tell me more about her?”

He’d heard so much of his father...and there was still much to learn about him. But he knew so much less about the woman who’d given them life, he suddenly had an urge to know as much as he possibly could.

Leia smiled, nodded, and began. No one dared interrupt her as she did so, and Luke hung on to her every word.

Chapter End Notes

Finally another chapter up! This last week was pretty busy for me, so it took me a while to get this chapter to where I needed it to be. The trio and the droids are back together again! And Vader does not know what he's created...he's outnumbered now ;) Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
Vader quickly learned that adding to his list of things to know about Luke was much easier when his son was actually there. Not that he told him he was mentally compiling a list, and he himself thought it was foolish to continue to do so. And yet once he’d started, he found it hard to stop. Each fact that was added to the list brought him great pleasure.

The first fact that he added came shortly after Luke began staying awake for longer periods of time.

He’d just re-added a pillow Luke had ‘accidentally’ nudged off the bed. It seemed like every time he turned his back or left the room, he came back to find pillows on the ground. Once he even caught Leia trying to sneak a few out of the room (and promptly made her put it back).

“I’m uncomfortable,” Luke insisted. “I’ve been sleeping on hard ground for weeks. I feel like I’m being eaten alive.”

Yes, he was all too aware of what that was like. Even in his former life, he’d returned home from particularly long campaigns and found it difficult to sleep next to…

He cut the thought off furiously, focusing instead on the fact that Luke shouldn’t have had to experience that sort of trauma in the first place. He would ensure this would be the last time he ever felt this way about a bed.

“There are worse things to be eaten by than a few pillows.” He pointed a finger at him. “Or would you prefer that monster?”

Luke swallowed thickly, and Vader wondered incredulously if he was about to insist he’d take his chances with the monster, but instead he said, “There are more than a few.”

“You will thank me later when you are healed.”

He didn’t break gazes with him. Anyone else on his ship would have backed down under the weight of his glare, but not either of his children, apparently. No one else would have foughed him over pillows, but it appeared Luke liked making his life difficult for himself. But when Luke spoke again, he abruptly changed the subject to one Vader didn’t expect.

“Can I at least take a bath?!”

Vader blinked.

“... What?”

“Yeah. Can’t you smell me?” Luke frowned, and Vader was even further surprised by the genuine concern in his eyes. “I smell like a sour grape.”

Thank you as always to the lovely SpellCleaver for the beta!
“That is just bacta.”

“I know, and it’s gross. I want to take a bath.”

Under normal circumstances, Vader wouldn’t have stopped him, but… he was literally unable to sit up. The last thing that should be on his mind, from his point of view, was personal hygiene.

Maybe this was how his son constantly got himself into further trouble. Maybe he was oblivious to how serious his circumstances were and charged forward anyway, making it worse for himself. Had he not noticed that he was unable to even laugh without causing himself pain?

Unless…?

“You…are not asking... me to give you one...?”

He dreaded the answer. Sure, he’d do anything for his son, especially if it meant saving his life, but this really didn’t seem like it was a necessary father-son bonding moment either of them needed to go through.

Thankfully, Luke went completely red and gasped, “Force, no! Why the hell would you think that?!?”

He immediately noticed the pain the gasp caused his son, but Luke seemed too focused on the horrific image to care. This time, he chose not to mention it. “Good. It will not happen.”

“Good! I didn’t want it to!”

“Then how do you propose that would even happen? Are you suggesting Solo do it?”

“I’m not suggesting anyone do it!”

“As noble as it is to practice good hygiene habits, you are not in a position to do it yourself.” Just the thought of Luke trying it on his own filled him with agitated concern. He doubted he’d even make it into the tub without causing himself further harm.

“Okay, well then why can’t one of the droids do it?”

He hesitated. That technically could be an option but…the images of Luke getting further injuries as a result of his cleanliness desires was too probable to ignore. “You will wait a few days. You must be stronger before attempting such a thing. Then I will consider it.”

Luke made a face that clearly indicated he wasn’t pleased with the deal, but on this, Vader would not budge. “My smell really doesn’t bother you?”

He didn’t bother to mention he hadn’t had a sense of smell in years. Not only did the mask filter such things, but almost burning alive had destroyed that sense. “I am certain anyone will understand. And if they don’t, they will deal with me.”

That didn’t seem to assure him, however. “Great. Sounds like a fun conversation.” Another frown and a suspicious look. “You promise we’ll talk about it again in a few days?”

“Yes.” By the Force, the boy was stubborn.

“And a few days is how many days exactly?”

“Luke!”
Finally he dropped it.

Mentally, he added to his list: Luke cared far too much about his hygiene to the point of considering reckless acts of personal endangerment.

The next fact came a few days later.

By then, Luke finally had the strength to sit up on his own, albeit with pillow support. Leia sat on the bed, having placed a tray of food over Luke’s lap. Vader monitored from his chair in the corner, noting that the choices of food were, as usual, part of the approved diet plan the medical droid had given him.

The first time he’d attempted to be the one ensuring Luke ate everything, it had... not gone well. By the end of it, he was certain Luke was re-thinking his decision to stay. Not that he had a choice, but he found he liked the idea of him staying willingly, so he allowed Leia to take the task on after that.

That didn’t mean he didn’t watch extremely closely.

Halfway through the meal, Luke, as he always did, stopped. And, as she had since taking over the position, Leia stepped in. “Come on. I know you like this food. And, much as I hate to admit it, it’s better quality than anything you’ll get back with the Rebellion.”

“Because the Rebellion is underfunded and barely able to feed its best people, let alone continue fighting against the might of the Empire.” The words were out before he’d thought to say them, but he didn’t bother to take it back. He simply crossed his arms and unflinchingly met the looks his children threw his way.

The fact that he had agreed not to train Luke in the Dark Side didn’t mean he approved of their allegiances to a group of lawless criminals who couldn’t even feed his son properly.

“Anyway.” Leia rolled her eyes. “You know you have to eat everything. Doctor's orders.”

“Your father’s orders,” Vader reminded them, only to be ignored.

Was this what it meant to be a father? To give orders only for his children to pretend they didn’t hear them? Shouldn’t military service instill more discipline? This was just further proof the Rebellion was unworthy of their time and talents. Again, if only they’d listen.

“I know,” Luke mumbled, moving food around on his plate with the Force. An...odd way to use the Force, but Vader was pleased he had the energy to use it again. “I know that but I’m just… not hungry.”

He didn’t miss the frustration in their bond, and he immediately sent what reassurance he could. This was normal behavior, the med droid had said. It would take time for Luke to eat without being prompted with the right portion sizes. Having spent so long with sporadic, pitiful meals even before the crash had taken its toll on him.

“Don’t you think you two are exaggerating just a bit? I mean I already ate a lot.” More shifting of food with the Force. He was half tempted to tell him not to play with his food.

Leia hesitated, and he knew she was seeing the same thing he did. “It’s really important you eat everything. Trust me on this.”

“I get it, but can’t I stop now? Just this once?”
Yet again, his son was not fully aware of his own circumstances. He added this as an official fact to his list of things about Luke. “You will eat every bite on that plate. There are no exceptions.”


“I will not hear of it,” he interrupted firmly, and before he could think better of it, he shoved the image of what he saw every time he looked at him down their bond.

Luke went pale, and his breathing hitched. “Is that what I look like?”

“Yes,” Vader said, distastefully noting for the billionth time how his cheeks looked too sunken, his shoulders a bit too narrow, his clothing too big for him just enough to be noticeable.

“Did you really need to do that?” Leia glared at him. “He doesn’t need any more negativity.”

“He doesn’t need coddling, either. He needs to understand why we’re insisting he eat everything.”

And yet now Luke looked like he’d eaten something that didn’t agree with him. “I had no idea...I mean I knew I lost weight but…” He trailed off. He’d stopped moving his food around.

“If you follow this plan, you will be back to a healthy weight soon enough.” Why couldn’t he see how obvious it was?

“And this is why you put me in charge of this task.” If looks could kill, Leia would have...come close to doing so with the one she gave him.

He opened his mouth to respond...and the door opened. His mood plunged further as Solo walked in, seemingly oblivious to what he’d just interrupted.

“Hey, kid!” he greeted with that stupid smug grin. “Perfect timing, I brought something for ya!”

Before Vader could stop and demand to know what it was, Solo brandished a steaming cup of...something with whip cream on top. “Tada!”

Vader was on his feet and storming towards the smuggler. “That does not look approved, Solo, what is it?!?”

It was obvious the smuggler was no intentional threat to his son, but if Luke ate something that didn’t agree with him, it could set his health back further.

Yet, as he came closer to the bed, he paused.

Luke’s face…

He was staring at the cup as if it was the only thing in the room, eyes wide, with a blinding smile beginning to break out across his face.

“Is that what I think it is?!” he breathed, reaching for it.

Vader was too stunned to stop Solo as he carefully handed the cup to Luke. “You bet! I was curious what could be ordered on this fancy ship and it turns out not only do they have normal hot chocolate, there are multiple flavors you can choose from! Ya don’t get that in the Rebellion, huh?”

With each word, Luke’s entire being lit up until he was a shining light in the Force. “What flavor is this one?” he asked.
“Try it and find out.”

He didn’t need to be asked twice. Vader watched as his son took a sip from the cup as though he were trying the most expensive cup of caf in the known galaxy, then grinned, foam coating his upper lip as he announced, “Salted vanilla.”

“Yup! And hey, if you always eat all of your food, I’ll be sure to order the other flavors for you.”

“You’re bribing me?”

“Is it working?” Solo grinned.

Slowly, Luke set the hot chocolate down on the tray, and in answer, picked up his fork and began to eat.

Hot chocolate.

His son...loved hot chocolate. Like a small child.

It was an incredibly personal detail that he immediately added to his list. But as he stared at his son eating with renewed vigor, taking sips of a beverage that he was certain didn’t at all go with the meal he was eating, Vader tried to imagine Luke as his Sith apprentice. In his mind he saw his son in all black, returning home from a particularly bloody mission...and settling in with hot chocolate.

The image was ridiculous. It was probably the least Sith-like drink in the entire galaxy. He tried to imagine his Master drinking hot chocolate as he plotted and…

Perhaps his hopes at turning his son to the Dark Side had been doomed from the very start.

From then on, he always made sure hot chocolate was part of Luke’s dietary plan. Bribery or not, he would not deny his son something that made him that happy.

The next fact was not only about Luke, but about Leia as well.

And it was a dangerous fact.

As Luke became stronger, he was forced to begin going back to his duties. Duties that had once brought him at least some measure of satisfaction now felt hollow, especially when his mind was always with his son.

Worse, he felt as though everything he was doing was not of his own free will. Every action completed, every task, felt like he was fulfilling the wishes of his Master. He should have been with his children, not plotting a war against a Rebellion who were far too disorganized and weak to warrant his attention.

If his Master found out how his priorities had changed…

No. He couldn’t. He wouldn’t.

He had little doubt Luke and Leia enjoyed their time alone, but being away from them made him on edge, something the rest of the crew picked up on, and their fear was so tangible he could practically taste it.

But he refrained from lashing out. Not unless absolutely necessary. He doubted Leia would pick up what he’d done, but he knew Luke would and the idea of returning to him upset…
It was foolish, of course. He was a Sith. It was what he was supposed to do. But Luke’s words
replayed in his mind whenever he considered strangling an idiotic officer.

“*It wasn’t your Darkness that kept me grounded. There is brilliant light there, and that’s what I
reached for.*”

He didn’t believe it of course. He was a *Sith,* he’d long killed any light within him...and yet he
couldn’t bring himself to prove his son wrong. Not yet, at least.

So he often dealt directly with Admiral Piett. At least he could count on the Admiral to not tempt
him into murdering him.

Usually when he returned, he had to chase Solo or the droids out. But that day when he returned,
entering the hallway outside of Luke’s room...he stopped.

He could...sense them.

Or, he always could sense them. Luke and Leia were his children after all, and on their own they
both were powerhouses in the Force. They were almost impossible to ignore. But this
was...different. It didn’t feel the same. It felt…

Like their presences were merged, somehow. Like they had somehow joined their power together
and it was pulsing in the Force. Light slammed against his darkness, and he almost wanted to turn
and retreat to the safety of his meditation pod to hide from it.

But curiosity had him entering the quarters, crossing the sitting room and opening the bedroom
door.

They didn’t even look up. They just stared at each other intently. Luke was strong enough to sit up
without any support; Leia sat on the other end of the bed. And between, they were passing one of
the pillows back and forth with the Force.

He wasn’t aware Leia knew levitation. Perhaps Luke had taught her. It was a simple act, and yet
they were so intent into what they were doing, their bond was practically *visible* to him.

A deep, cold fear settled in his gut.

“Luke. Leia. ” He didn’t mean to, but he snapped the names. They both jumped, as if they’d just
now noticed him, and the pillow dropped to the bed between them.

“I’ll put it back,” Luke began to insist, misreading his emotions. “It hasn’t even left the bed.”

He stared at them, even as in the Force the light began to dissipate slowly back to their normal
presence as separate, albeit powerful, beings.

Leia met his gaze, her expression growing serious. “Is this about your vision? Are you still worried
about that?”

Yes. But that wasn’t the only thing he was worried about now. He had not anticipated the effect of
them being together would have on the Force.

He was starting to understand why Obi-Wan had separated them. He disagreed and hated it, hated
*him,* but he could now understand it. If they’d been together as innocent children, his Master would
have found them. Maybe before he even knew about them, and he would have…
The possibilities were many. None of them were at all to his liking.

But they were adults now. Perhaps they were exuding such power because of their lack of training.

Yes. That was it.

If it wasn’t…

He refused to consider those possibilities.

They were *his*. He would not lose either of them again.

“You have both asked for training in abilities that are not of the Dark Side of the Force,” he finally said. They glanced at one another, frowning. “We will start with blocking your mind.”

“That sounds great,” Luke said, and he genuinely meant it despite the confusion emanating from him. “But is this because you’re tired of hearing our thoughts?”

“No, is this because we’re in danger?” Leia asked.

He considered how to respond. Eventually, he decided the truth was the best option if he wanted them to take it seriously. “You are both individually unusually strong in the Force. Together you are a supernova. I...fear the Emperor may sense it and come for you.”

Their faces paled, and they shared another look as though they were silently communicating something. In fact, he was certain they were.

After a moment, Leia sighed. “Alright. But don’t you *dare* try to sneak in some Dark Side powers.”

He rolled his eyes. “I have already given my word I would not unless you asked.”

Technically, he promised *Luke* that, not Leia, and he was quickly understanding that Leia would be the far more ideal candidate as a potential Sith apprentice, but that would only bring about the vision.

Despite their...issues, he had little desire to fight his daughter unless absolutely necessary. He had far less desire to lose his son. After everything that had happened, it was obvious Leia felt the same.

He kept his word. He started with shielding, then when they mastered that, he went over other fundamental basics. Midichlorians. Levitation. Locking and unlocking doors (that one was a particularly enjoyable lesson. It ended in Solo getting locked out of the room, and he took great pleasure in the man’s frustration).

They were quick learners. Luke, because he’d already had some training, and Leia because...she was almost *aggressive* in her desire to learn.

The next thing he added to his list came shortly after Luke had been cleared to begin attempting to walk. Walking, of course, was a relative term. His leg was nowhere near healed, but the med droid requested that he start using a crutch to help him begin getting used to walking again. Apparently, it would help *blood circulation*.

At least, that’s what the droid said after Vader had interrogated it five times.
The idea of his still clearly injured son walking around on a crutch was enough to give him nightmares. As soon as the droid was gone, he whirled on him. “You will not do any walking without me there to ensure you do not re-injure yourself. Am I clear?”

“I sort of got the point after you almost ripped the droid to shreds.” Luke sat on the edge of his bed, his uninjured leg dangling over the side.

“I didn’t even touch it.”

“No, but it was obvious you were thinking about it.” Leia shook her head. “He can’t stay in bed forever.”

Maybe not, but it still felt far too soon. He looked remarkably better than he had, but when he looked at him Vader couldn’t help but note the injuries still present and worry what could happen if he did too much too soon. He was, after all, his son. That meant he knew better than anyone how reckless he could potentially be.

And yet it was that precise reason that he understood what would happen if he refused. Luke would simply wait for him to be called off to duty on the bridge and would do it on his own. Leia may help him, but if he fell she was far too short to adequately support him. There was no way in hell he’d trust Solo to assist, either, despite admittedly showing competency since Arorua.

“Fine,” he ground out, the word tasting bitter on his tongue, “But you will only do so when I am available to ensure no further harm will come to you. Have I made myself clear?”

“He’s an adult--” Leia began, immediately jumping to his defence, but Luke held up his hand, stopping what surely would have become a bigger argument.

“It’s fine, Leia. I don’t think it’s an unreasonable request. For now.” He grinned at him. As usual, it lit the room up, but this time Vader found himself at a loss for words.

It was rare that he was the subject of one of Luke’s smiles. It was even rarer that anyone smiled at him at all. Not genuinely, at least. The tension in his shoulders eased some, and he wondered if Luke knew the effect the look would have on him.

He found he didn’t care.

“Perhaps we could try now.” He said, and his son’s smile widened.

He brought the crutch to his son and helped him stand while Leia assisted in positioning it correctly under Luke’s good arm. When they were certain that he was properly supported, they cautiously stepped back. Despite Leia’s insistence that he was an adult and needed to be allowed to do things on his own, she looked just as ready to jump in to help as he was.

“Well?” Leia asked. “How do you feel?”

“This is not as comfortable as it looks, but otherwise it’s good to be on my feet--uh, foot, again.”

Vader didn’t think it looked comfortable at all, and he was half tempted to suggest getting back into bed until he could find a way to make it more comfortable, but Luke felt so energized and happy he decided against it.


He crossed his arms. “Absolutely not. It is too far of a walk.”
“You weren’t expecting me to stay in here were you?”

“Yes.”

gone was the happiness, replaced by irritation. “Father, if I have to only stare at these walls much longer I’m going to go insane!”

“You have a view port.”

“And most of the time it’s just stars!” Luke’s expression turned pleading. On anyone else he would have scoffed, but Vader couldn’t help the twinge of guilt as he said, “Please? You’ll be with me the whole time! Plus, I want to see your ships.”

He stared at him, wrestling with his inner desire to keep him protected and the desire to share a moment he had no doubt his son would love. A moment that would probably only bring them closer together, if the quality of Luke’s X-Wing was anything to go by.

Besides, it was rare that he got to show off even the fraction of the collection he had with him. Even when his wing of the ship wasn’t closed off to the rest of the crew, he never let anyone but the Admiral in his private hangar.

He should have said no. Instead, he found himself saying, “Fine. But the moment you are unable to continue, you will tell me immediately.”

Luke beamed in triumph, confirming Vader’s suspicions that he’d known exactly how to get his way. That, he was beginning to fear, would become a serious problem. He would need to use his next meditation session to figure out how to go back to the ways of the Sith and not cave to such obvious begging.

“Well. This should be interesting.” Leia snorted, crossing her arms over her chest, then seemed to realize she’d copied his stance and quickly dropped them.

He didn’t know what she meant by that, but he didn’t bother asking as Luke began to take his first steps, heading for the door.

“Where are we going, then?” Luke asked, and Vader followed close behind, guiding him in the right direction.

As they made their way down the hallway, he carefully watched for any hint that he needed help. Leia took up walking beside Luke, doing the same. It was slow going, but he sensed nothing but familiar eager excitement.

Vader smiled. He too had once felt that way when going to see new ships, and to some extent he still felt anticipation when being introduced to a new model. But it had been a very long time since he or anyone around him had reacted with such innocent enthusiasm.

It was... pleasing to confirm that he and Luke had an obvious similar interest.

He only sensed minor exhaustion from Luke when they reached the hangar. As soon as they entered, a happy whistle greeted them.

“Artoo!” Luke replied happily as the little droid rushed over. “I’d...uh, say hello with a pat, but I only have one good hand. Sorry.”

I am pleased you are up at all, Artoo told him, and Vader wondered if Luke understood binary.
Evidently not, because he didn’t reply, his gaze already sweeping over the ships in the hangar.

“Han wasn’t kidding,” he said after a moment. “You really do have an impressive collection.”

Pride swelled in his chest at the praise. Not that he would ever admit that to the smuggler, but...

“Solo said that?”

“It certainly wasn’t me.” Leia said. At his probing gaze, she added, “I don’t have the obsession with ships; Luke does. Your collection, impressive as it is, isn’t something I’d write home about.”

“But it is impressive.” Luke was hobbling forward, gaze sweeping over the hangar until he abruptly stopped. “My X-Wing!”

Leia grinned at Vader. She rarely did that. Instantly, he was suspicious; why was she doing that?

Then, he remembered.

Luke was already moving for the ship...the ship he remembered now that he hadn’t put back together.

“That is enough, young one. We should head back to your room--”

Too late.

As Luke got closer, he felt his son’s joyous surprise turn to confusion, then to horror. “What the hell happened?!”

“Nothing is broken. I can fix it.” He was moving for the parts that were still neatly lined up from when he’d explored the ship at the start of this mess. He hadn’t had any time to put it back where he’d found it. In fact, it completely slipped his mind.

“I told you he’d be pissed,” Leia added, and he had no doubt she hadn’t forgotten about it. He glared back at her.

She set him up.

Her grin turned sly.

She was spending far too much time with the damn smuggler.

“Yeah, I’m pissed!” Luke was too short to see the full extent of what he’d done, but evidently he didn’t like what he saw from the angle he was at. “What did you do?!?”

“I was looking for answers about you. I did not think you were still alive at the time.”

Luke turned, glaring. “That’s why you took apart my ship? Do you have any idea how long I saved for these parts?”

So he had saved for them. They weren’t a gift. He made a mental note, and replied, “As I said. I did nothing that could not be easily fixed. Besides, I have better ships if you wish--”

“I don’t want better ships, this is my ship and I need to fix it!” Luke struggled to move around the nose of the X-Wing. “Where are the tools?”

“No, Luke, you’re not fixing it right now.” Leia quickly stepped in front of him, blocking his way towards his work bench with all of his tools. “You’re lucky to have made it this far walking over
here. You’re not climbing around a ship.”

“Your sister is right.” And yet, it was obvious that Luke was a true pilot at heart. Now that he knew the state of his apparent favorite ship, he wouldn’t rest until he knew it was fixed. “Leia, find Luke a chair. I will fix the ship.”

“I can fix it! Besides, how do I know you’ll do it right?” Luke demanded, and he scoffed.

“Son. I have been building ships since before I could fly. I built Threepio from scratch at nine. There is not a ship in this galaxy I couldn’t fix.”

He didn’t realize he’d revealed new information about himself until Leia frowned and asked, “You built Threepio?”

Luke’s glare had disappeared, turning into that curious expression that reminded him far too much of his mother. “I never would have picked Threepio if you told me you built a droid.”

He scowled. Yes, he would need to seek strength from the Dark Side later. His children were turning him into...into... something he wasn’t sure he liked. “That is all I will say on the matter. The point is, I will fix the X-Wing and leave it in better shape than I found it.”

The mention of his X-Wing successfully distracted Luke once again. “My X-Wing was in great shape before you touched it!”

He was seriously regretting allowing him into the hangar. “Take a seat, son. I will take care of it.”

He waited until Leia found him somewhere to sit before he began. In his mind he added probably one of the most important facts about his son.

He loved his ship. And apparently, he did not appreciate him messing with it.

The next several hours were spent working on the X-Wing. Luke watched carefully, often asking specific questions when he couldn’t fully see what he was doing. He wasn’t used to having anyone watch him work, but the questions often led to deeper discussions on ships and the best ways of modifying them. He had already assumed Luke was competent in his knowledge of ship modification based on what he’d observed when taking it apart, but the conversation only proved it. It wasn’t long before both of them forgot why he was putting the ship back together in the first place.

Leia, on the other hand, grew bored, and muttered something about looking for Threepio before wandering off.

“Do not look for that smuggler!” he called after her, seeing through her intentions. She didn’t even bother turning around. Instead, she lifted her hand in a rude gesture and continued out of the hangar.

“...I don’t think I’d be brave enough to do that to you,” Luke admitted after an awkward silence of watching her go.

Vader shook his head. “Do not try it.” He didn’t bother mentioning that the thought of doing anything else to Leia felt like adding to his long list of crimes against her.

He could handle a rude gesture. There were...worse things that could happen between them.

Luke seemed to get the picture and didn’t press.
When he got to the hyperdrive, he paused. “I know you said you wanted the ship exactly as it was, but I can improve the efficiency of the hyperdrive.”


“By replacing it completely with a newer model.”

“I didn’t think the newer models were compatible.”

“They aren’t, usually. But I found a way to modify it so that it is possible.” He then launched into the specifics, going far more in detail than he had in a very long time. Luke listened, occasionally asking clarifying questions, and when he finished, he motioned to the cockpit of the ship. “I would test it out myself to prove it to you, but I don’t believe I’d fit in such a small space.”

“Hey, I’m not that short.”

Vader allowed his son to feel his amusement. “If you say so.”

Luke considered for a moment. “I like the idea.”

“But?”

“But I want to try it myself—and before you freak out,” he added in a rush as Vader prepared to tell him exactly what he thought about that, “I meant later. When I’m feeling better. Then we could...you know. Do it together?”

He said it like he expected Vader to scoff and reject him. But he could only stare at the boy as he’d done every time he’d done something surprising. Anyone else would have been far too terrified or stressed out to work on a ship with him. But here his son was, asking him like they were a normal father-son duo. As good as it felt, it was still...strange.

“You are different.”

“That’s not the first time you’ve told me that. What does it mean?”

Vader paused. The first time he’d said it, it was because it was the only word he had for what Luke Skywalker was. He’d thought at the time, there was no one else like him. But now…

“It means you are different. Like your mother was.” The words were out before he’d thought better of it, and the moment they were he felt his chest cleaving open at the raw wounds still festering even now, all these years later.

Luke’s expression turned serious, and for a horrible moment Vader thought he’d finally ask him about her.

He was right.

“I know it’s touchy.”

He couldn’t help the flash of anger as he pointed the hydrospanner at him and snapped, “Then don’t ask.”

Luke didn’t flinch, nor did he back down. “She’s my mother. Don’t you think I have a right to know about her?”

Of course he did. Leia did, too. He’d known this day would come, and he thought he could prepare
for it.

He was wrong.

“Even as secretive as you are about your past, I could find out about you far more than I could about her. Even Leia only knows impersonal details; enough to make an admittedly rather impressive resume, sure, but…” he trailed off, his expression growing far away.

Then, when he looked at him, it was with a longing that he understood far too well.

“I want to know my mother from someone who knew and loved her.”

And as much as the pain of her memory choked him, as much as it made him want to retreat to his meditation chamber and never leave...he knew he couldn’t.

Just as he now knew he could not deny Luke what answers he sought. All of them.

“We...should find your sister,” he said, not looking at his son. “She should hear this, too.”

Chapter End Notes

IS IT FLUFFY ENOUGH???? SEE I can WRITE FLUFF! (It's incredibly difficult for me, hence the longer than usual update, but IT'S HERE and I hope ya'll enjoyed it!) Dad Vader is definitely getting better at the dad thing. Even if he is super awkward about it.
The song for this chapter is Take You Home by Scars on 45!
Leave some love!
Love,
LadyVader23
Luke sat on the couch, legs propped up on the cushions. Leia sat in a chair nearby, as regal as any princess about to listen to an important briefing. Compared to her, Luke felt oddly informal, like he was seriously under prepared or even dressed for hearing something as important as information about his mother. But it was a miracle he’d gotten his overprotective father to let him stay on the couch, and he doubted he’d let him get up again.

Vader stared out the viewport, hands behind his back. He was reminded of what he’d once told him, that when he was stressed, he enjoyed staring out at the stars on the bridge. This wasn’t the bridge, but Luke could feel him trying to maintain control over his emotions anyway.

This would not be an easy conversation for his father. Considering their past experiences, he had a feeling he wasn’t going to like everything he’d hear, too.

“What do you want to know?” Vader finally asked, his tone just barely neutral.

He and Leia glanced at one another. I thought he would just tell us, Leia said down their bond, slightly irritated. They had, after all, interrupted her time with Han for this.

Luke decided to take the initiative. “How did you meet?” It seemed like a safe question to start with.

At least, until he felt the air plunge.

Maybe not.

It was a while before Vader spoke, and when he did, it came out almost strangled. Luke didn’t miss his clenched fists. “We met on Tatooine. She was posing as a handmaiden of the queen. I had no idea who she was, I just…” he paused, and was silent for so long, Luke and Leia glanced at each other in concern. “I thought she was an angel.”

Luke swallowed, processing that intensely personal detail.

“I won repair parts for her ship in a podrace, as well as...other things.”

He knew instantly what he referred to, though it was hard to picture Vader as being associated with it. “The Boonta Eve Classic?”

Vader’s shoulders tensed and he turned slightly. “...I am not surprised you know it.”

“Well...podracing may be banned, but you know the Hutts ignore the ban anyway. Not that I’ve ever been.”
“Good.” Vader turned back to the stars, and Luke frowned at his back. As much as he didn’t care for the Hutts, he had to admit he’d always wanted to go to a race. He wasn’t allowed for obvious reasons, and now with Jabba dead…

“When the Jedi took me from Tatooine, she was the only person who bothered to stop and make sure I was okay. I was alone on an unfamiliar ship, going to a planet I’d never seen without anyone I knew, and even though she was a queen with other important duties, she made sure I was cared for.” He paused, tilting his head. “She was as kind as she was beautiful. And she served her entire life in the service of others.”

“I filled Luke in on those details.” Leia was frowning, staring at Vader like she’d never seen him before. “I didn’t realize you valued those qualities.”

“I don’t,” Vader replied firmly. “But at one point Anakin Skywalker did.”

Luke made a face at the way Vader phrased that, but for now…he’d drop it. He was afraid that if he changed the subject, it would take forever to get his father back in the mood to tell him about her. “How long did you, uh, date?”

Asking Darth Vader about his dating life was definitely one of the strangest sensations he’d had in a while, but he was beginning to get used to it. Everything was weird between them.

“I was a Jedi. Dating or attachments of any sort were forbidden. There was not a long courting period as a result.”

Luke couldn’t read the emotions coming from his father clearly; most were blocked, but some still bled through. Bitterness. Amusement. Anguish and loss.

“We really only spent a few days together before we decided to marry. The Clone Wars had begun, and it was clear that either one of us could lose our lives at any moment. So we decided it was better to act and deal with the consequences later.”

Yes. There was definitely bitterness there.

“How long were you married?” Leia asked.

“Three years.”

That seemed so...short. Like it was a passionate romance that burned hot and quick, then died suddenly. There were plenty of people whose relationships didn’t even last that long, but…

“And no one found out about the relationship?” Leia sounded skeptical. “That’s kind of a major thing to hide.”

Vader turned his head slightly and Luke got the impression he was glaring at her. “I’ve managed to hide three highly wanted Rebels aboard the Executor. I managed to hide my relationship to Luke from the Emperor for three years. Let’s just say I have experience hiding things.”

It seemed Vader at least managed to hide things for about three years, at least. Luke sort of hoped the conflict against the Empire would end by then, but then again, he hadn’t quite thought about how he wanted that to look after his decision to stay. Or at least, he hadn’t come up with a workable solution.
“No one even suspected?” Leia pressed.

The temperature once again plunged. “I suspect Kenobi knew. Not to the full extent, but he knew we were close. We never talked about it. Doing so would mean consequences, and neither of us wanted to face them.”

Luke wondered if Ben ever knew everything. He’d never thought to ask him about his mother before he’d died. Guilt swelled in his chest—why hadn’t he ever thought to ask? Maybe it was because he’d been so focused on trying to learn the powers his father had passed to him, but that still seemed like a weak excuse. If he’d never reconciled with his father, would he ever have learned about her?

“How did she die?”

Leia asked the most important question. And sure enough, Vader flinched. 

_Flinched._

Barely, but Luke saw it.

His heart dropped into his stomach.

“I...wanted to save her.”

“You saw dreams.” Leia was firm and unwavering, despite the apprehension he sensed from her. She too knew this would not be a good answer. “You told her you wouldn’t let her die.”

“I should really wipe that droid…” Vader snarled, and when neither Luke nor Leia responded, he continued haltingly. “I looked for a way to save her. I went to the Jedi first. I went to Grand Master Yoda himself.” Behind his back, it was their turn to flinch at the name. “He told me to rejoice in her death. _Rejoice._ And I know it was to spite me—she was an important figure in the Republic, a close ally to the Jedi, and yet they were willing to let her die!”

His voice rose with each word, the room growing colder and colder until Luke was shivering.

“Did you tell him it was her?” he asked, trying to keep his teeth from chattering.

“It doesn’t matter!” Vader whirled, hands clenched at his sides. “We were supposed to save people, not let them die! He gave me barely five minutes of his time and sent me off with pitiful, useless advice!”

“So you went to Palpatine. And what, did he promise you he could save her?” Leia jumped in, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Yes. With the Dark Side, he said it was possible.” Vader pointed at her, as if challenging her to push back.

Leia, as always, rose to the challenge. “And has he shown you?”

Vader’s hand curled back into a fist. “He...didn’t have time to.”

“Why?”

There was a long silence as Vader’s fury rose like a raging inferno...then almost as quickly, melted into embers. Even then, he didn’t continue for a while, and each second that passed they grew more and more tense.
He wasn’t going to like his father’s answer. Something terrible happened. Something Vader did, and maybe he wasn’t ready to hear it, but no, he needed to, he needed to understand--

“I thought she betrayed me.”

Luke swallowed bile.

“She came to Mustafar. She begged me to run away with her, to raise you in hiding. I was convinced I could save her. But then Obi-Wan was there and I thought she’d brought him to kill me.”

No, no, no, no, no…

“Young mother had never been reckless enough that she would ask me to run away, so I thought she had turned against me. I thought she was trying to create a diversion so Obi-Wan could finish me off. And I…” Vader looked down at his hands. He unclenched them, then clenched them again, over and over again. “I lashed out.”

He didn’t need to tell them what he’d done. Vader was famous for it, after all.

He’d strangled her.

He’d strangled their mother. Their pregnant mother.

“Obi-Wan stopped me and…the last I saw of her, she’d collapsed. But she was alive. I felt it. I felt it even as Obi-Wan and I dueled to the death. I felt it as he cut my limbs off and left me to burn. I felt it as my Master rescued me and put me back together.

“And then…she was dead. The Emperor told me I’d done it, and I…didn’t even fully believe him until I’d confirmed it myself.”

He was still staring at his hands, his entire frame shaking.

“He told me I did it. I believed it—I’d lashed out, after all. I had no reason to question what I’d been told, but then…then Luke blew up the Death Star, and Boba Fett dropped the knowledge of his name in my lap and now? Now I don’t know how she truly died. Worse, she didn’t even know that Obi-Wan had boarded her ship. She never betrayed me and I…never should have harmed her, but I know I couldn’t have killed her. She wouldn’t have been able to give birth to you if that was the case.” He dropped his hands finally. “I fear I will never know the truth.”

He’d known it would be bad, but hearing it…he felt gutted. Like he was falling back down the shaft of Cloud City, falling forever into the planet below.

“If you loved her,” Leia’s voice was shaking—from rage, from horror, from anguish at the mother they’d lost and never known, “how could you have hurt her?! ”

She was right. How could he have done something so wrong, so horrible, to his wife? To his unborn children?

But then again, he’d cut his hand off even after knowing who he was. As much as Luke could see light in his father, there was still great capacity for darkness.

“I thought she betrayed me. I thought she brought Obi-Wan to kill me.” The response sounded rehearsed and almost lifeless. Anguish and guilt bled through Vader’s shields. “I didn’t know until Taris.”
“I don’t give a damn, she was your pregnant wife!” Leia stood from her chair, breathing hard.

He should stop her. He should stop them both, before things went too far...and yet he sat there, frozen, waves of nausea rolling in his stomach as he tried and failed not to imagine the beautiful woman he’d seen in Artoo’s holo reaching for her throat as her own husband choked her.

“Did you even let her explain before you started choking her?! Did you ask her if she wanted you to save her life and destroy everything she’d devoted that life to?!”

Vader stared at Leia...and said nothing.

There was no excuse. There was nothing he could say to excuse it.

“Maybe that was why my father and Obi-Wan took us from you! Because you attacked her! They had every right to do so--”

“They had no right!” Some of the familiar heat was back in Vader’s voice.

“Yes, they did! You would have turned us into monsters, like you!”

Luke...wasn’t sure that was the case, and he opened his mouth to object...then closed it. Not because he wanted to, but because the revelation of the last few hours of his mother’s life still shook him to his core.

He’d known this was a possibility, but hearing it was another matter.

“You would have been powerful. We would have been together. Perhaps we could have overthrown the Emperor--”

“And what, you could’ve replaced him?! Oh yes, that would honor the memory of our democracy-loving mother just perfectly!”

“The Republic failed! She would have seen that eventually!”

“It failed because you helped it fail!”

Luke had told him something similar, except he’d been talking about the Jedi, not the Republic. And he didn’t miss the way Vader glanced at him, as if remembering.

But Leia wasn’t done.

“What would she say if she saw what you’d become?!”

“Stop,” Vader tried, evenly. The guilt was rising, shields falling away to reveal the depth of it. It was endless, years of it built as a vise grip around the very core of Vader’s entire being.

Leia did not stop. Her shields had also fallen away, and instead of guilt, there was pain and loss and anger for what had been done in the name of the Empire, to her, to the galaxy.

“What would she say if she saw the galaxy as it is now?! What would she say if she knew how many innocent people you’ve killed?!”

“Stop!” It was a plea.

She ignored them both.

“What would my mother say if she knew you’d tortured me?! What would she say if she knew you’d cut Luke’s hand off?! What would she say if she knew you did nothing as Tarkin gave the order to blow up an entire planet?!”

Leia’s voice had gone hoarse, and tears of fury were streaming down her face. Her entire small frame was shaking, and Luke instinctively reached out for her to offer what small comfort he could. It was barely acknowledged.

Vader was definitely shaking. From restrained rage, from pain, sorrow, *everything*, Luke didn’t know. But when he spoke, it was the least steady he’d ever heard from him. “She would hate me. I *know* this. It has haunted me since…”

He trailed off. Then, he turned his helmet towards Luke.

“Do you understand now?”

He didn’t need to ask what he meant. He referred to the light he’d insisted he could sense in his father.

“Do you wish to change your mind about staying now?”

Luke tried to clear his mind enough to answer, but before he could, Leia whirled on him.

“What is he talking about?”

There was a dangerous edge to her voice, and it suddenly occurred to Luke that he hadn’t actually told her what he’d decided.

Kriff.

“What is he *talking* about Luke?!”

He swallowed. Hard. Then reached for the crutch leaning against the couch.

This was not a conversation he wanted in front of Darth Vader.

“I think we need to talk.”

Leia knew what Luke was going to say before they’d even entered his bedroom, leaving Vader standing in the receiving room.

She knew, but it did nothing to quell the rising tide of anger that threatened to swallow her whole.

The moment the door was shut, the moment he was sitting back in the chair Vader usually sat in while he was watching over him, Leia whirled. “You’re staying, aren’t you?!”

The guilt on his face wasn’t unfamiliar to her, but never before had she been so angry to see it. She wasn’t *surprised* to see it, not deep down, but she would have thought, after hearing about what he’d done to their mother--

“Leia, I--”

“No, don’t Leia, me!” She pivoted and stormed to the viewport, knowing she was doing exactly
what a certain blood relative liked to do when he was upset, but she didn’t give a damn. “He’s Darth Vader! I don’t care if he’s your father, he’s evil, Luke!”

“I’m not asking you to stay. I know how you feel, and you’re completely justified—”

“The crazy thing is you should feel the same way!” She couldn’t stand staring at the stars for long. There was so much energy humming beneath her skin, she wanted to explode, to run the entire length of the Executor, something except be trapped in this little room with Vader next door. “And you know I can’t leave you, so that’s exactly what you’re asking me to do!”

“Leia, I’m just as responsible for my own actions as you are.” Luke was still giving her that look when she turned back around. “I know there is good in him. I’ve felt it. It’s what I held onto when I was dying.”

She wanted to point out that maybe, since he’d been dying, he might have dreamed it. She really, really wanted to throw it in his face. But she couldn’t.

Because as much as she wanted to go back into the other room and scream at Vader for everything he’d taken from her, from them, she couldn’t completely deny it. She still had much to learn about the Force, but she thought she knew enough to at least recognize some light in Vader. Maybe it was just how he was around them. Maybe he was changing. She didn’t know, and she didn’t care.

But hadn’t she reached out to comfort him when Luke was dying?

And yet, he’d hurt their mother. He’d hurt her. He’d killed so many, and stood aside as even more were blown to bits. Did it really matter if there was any light in him?

No.

At least...she was sure of it.

Everything was so confusing and it just made her angrier.

“I know you’ve always wanted your father, but he’s-- he’s a Sith, Luke. You’re a Jedi, a natural enemy! When you don’t turn, how long do you think he’s going to stay like this? What happens when his master comes calling?!”

“He won’t turn me over.” Luke sounded far more confident than he should have been, considering they’d just heard the man tell them he strangled his pregnant wife. “This whole situation has proved that he cares for us.” He motioned to his leg with his good hand.

“He cares for you.”

Luke frowned. “He cares about both of us. Look, I know you’re angry. You have every right to be, more than most people. But anger has eaten away at our father until he’s become...become this. And there was that vision—”

“What if Vader was lying about that?!” It was stupid to even suggest it. She knew as well as Luke did that Vader hadn’t lied. Vader was many things, but he didn’t seem to be a liar.

“Regardless, anger and hate can turn even the best people into something they’re not. I can’t tell you to stop hating him, because again, you have every right. But...I just have this feeling. There are...other ways to win this war.”
She scoffed, crossing her arms over her chest. “Peace? We already tried it. Repeatedly. The Empire responded by tightening down further and building the damn Death Star!”

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean we should stop trying.”

Growing up on Alderaan, she understood the pacifist philosophy well. It wasn’t lost on her that Luke, who came from a planet of crime lords, scum and all manner of villainy, was advocating for what her teachers would have encouraged her to choose.

But she’d never been a very good pacifist. Maybe her parents chose the wrong twin--

She shied away from the thought, even as she demanded, “You’re not bothered at all that he strangled our mother?!”

“Of course I am, and you know it.”

He was right. She did know it, she could feel it, just as she felt that he wasn’t going to budge and there was nothing she could do about it.

“This won’t end happily,” she warned him. “If you stay, you’ll have to risk him deciding not to turn back. Then you’ll have to decide what to do. This...this can’t last.”

And even though she knew it was true, she couldn’t help but feel bad telling him. Luke deserved a father who didn’t make him choose sides. He deserved a father who could freely love him with no consequences between the Alliance and the Empire. He deserved better. They both did.

But hadn’t she always known, deep down, that this was what Luke would want?

“I know,” Luke said, grimly. “But I’m staying. I won’t force you to stay. Regardless of you being his daughter...I know you could escape. If you really wanted to.”

She wasn’t quite sure about that. Vader seemed just as determined to keep her as he did Luke. He’d hunt her across the galaxy if he had to.

But...if she did have the choice, could she really leave Luke behind?

She knew the answer the moment she’d thought it, and she hated herself even more.

Yes. She would have to. Not because she wanted to. No, it would tear her to shreds. But if something were to happen…

No. No. I’m not going through this again.

If it came down to it, she’d find a way to get Luke away. It was selfish, and he’d be angry with her for it, but she couldn’t do it. She’d come so close to losing him too many times and she just. Couldn’t.

But she had a feeling it would hurt their relationship far more than anything else she could do.

“Leia,” Luke said when she continued to stare at him. “Are you alright?”

No. No, of course she wasn’t. And she needed to leave, to...think. Away from Vader, whose presence she could feel hovering far too closely nearby. Away from Luke, who was well meaning and yet working towards a goal she couldn’t follow. A goal she didn’t want to let him follow.

She needed to think.
“I’m sorry,” she said, and before he could ask why, she turned and left, resolutely ignoring Vader on her way out.

Half of him didn’t want to enter the room. Luke hadn’t answered his question earlier, and though he couldn’t hear what was said between his children, it was obvious from the glimpses of emotion in their bond that they’d argued.

From what little he knew of them, he didn’t think they argued often. And since it was obvious that the argument started from his question, he was afraid to walk in and find out that his son no longer wished to stay.

Not that he had a choice in the matter. Even if he trusted Luke to come back, he wasn’t keen on letting him out of his sight. If he was honest with himself, he worried about what Luke would get himself into while he was on the bridge.

But it didn’t mean it wouldn’t hurt if Luke changed his mind. He deserved it, of course; he’d understand, and yet they’d made such progress over the last few weeks…

Darth Vader, as much as he didn’t want to admit it, was afraid.

This was exactly why he didn’t want to tell them about their mother. It was bad enough that she’d died, but telling them that he’d hurt her...and just because he now knew he hadn’t directly killed her, he still wondered how things would have been different if he’d made different choices.

But he couldn’t change the past. He’d tried. It had...not ended well.

Now all he could do was face his children. Leia reacted as he thought she would, but Luke?

Luke was harder to read.

Or maybe he wasn’t. Maybe he didn’t want to read him, because he knew what he’d find there.


Emotions that would do well for him as a Sith, but as a son?

His limbs felt...heavier than usual. But he needed to know. He needed to get it over with. Then he could leave and take out his anger on fencing droids, or destroy his quarters, or even more productively, he could take it out on pitiful crew members who deserved it for their failure…

And cause Luke to hate him even more.

There was no sense in waiting. He needed to face Luke.

Gritting his teeth, he made himself storm into the room, where he brought himself up short.

Luke was not in bed, like he should have been. He was in his seat, staring at the viewport with a faraway look, rubbing his chin with his good hand. The light he usually gave off in the Force seemed just slightly diminished. Though he usually appeared younger than he was, now he suddenly seemed far older, like the knowledge of his mother and his argument with his sister had aged him ten years.

Vader didn’t like it. Not one bit.

“You should be in bed,” he decided to lead with. It seemed...safe, enough. And it was true. Already
he’d been far too lenient with him.

Luke started, as if noticing him for the first time. He doubted that to be the case: he wasn’t exactly subtle. But Luke’s shoulder slumped and he gave him a weak smile. “How did I know that would be the first thing you’d say?”

“Then you should have climbed into bed instead of waiting for the inevitable.” He crossed his arms, suspicious; he was acting far calmer than his emotions suggested.

“I will, I will.” Luke sighed, but he still didn’t move. He’d gone back to looking out the port window. Vader was about to hotly demand he do as he was told, when he said, “My answer hasn’t changed.”

Given what he was quickly learning about his son, he shouldn’t have been surprised. But it didn’t make sense.

Leia’s reaction, as much as he hated it, was something he could understand. It was something he could handle. But even though he could feel Luke’s hurt and horror over what he’d revealed, he also sensed no lie in Luke’s answer.

“How are you like this?” he demanded. “You would be better off wanting to be away from me. I hurt your mother. I’ve killed countless. I hurt you, Leia, your friends—why are you like this?”

Luke looked back at him, frowning. “I didn’t say I wasn’t hurt or horrified by what you’ve done. I’m even angered by it. But it doesn’t change my decision. It doesn’t change the fact that I can sense good in you.”

“I am not. Good.”

How could he not see that?! He’d spent years destroying his past, what made him Anakin Skywalker. And yet he also couldn’t deny that he felt as though his son saw straight through him. Part of him wanted to leave, to hide in his meditation chamber and never face the boy again.

But part of him yearned for that connection. When was the last time he’d had that?

Padme.

Again. Luke reminded him so much of her it ached.

“If you could change things, would you?”

He scowled. “Of course I would. That’s all I have dreamed about for years. And yet I’m still a Sith, and destruction and anger and pain is in my nature.”

“But you were also a Jedi. You were a hero.”

“That past is dead.”

Luke’s gaze bore into him, tunneling into the core of his very soul. “You saved me from Arorua. More than that, you’ve spent weeks taking care of me. I don’t think it’s dead at all.”

“You’re my son. It’s different.”

It sounded like an excuse, even to his own ears.

“Well you haven’t tried to kill Han recently. I feel like that’s a small improvement. And you keep
saying you’re going to wipe the droid’s memories, but you haven’t.”

“You are reaching.”

Luke gave him another smile that didn’t quite touch his eyes. “The point is, you can’t change the past. Your actions now won’t affect that. But that doesn’t mean you can’t choose a different future now. You don’t have to be something you don’t want to be.” The smile fell away. “Do you even know what you want?”

Vader opened his mouth...and closed it.

He didn’t know how to answer that. Really, since the moment he heard Luke was dead, the purpose he’d imagined for himself seemed...murky. And now that his children were with him, he no longer knew the answer.

He knew what he should want. He could easily tell Luke that answer, but there was no point. Not when he’d see right through him.

But he’d need to make that decision soon. The galaxy would not wait, and soon enough, there would be consequences for what had happened between him and his children.

If he didn’t decide, he could very well end up hurting them, or worse, losing them. Again.

That, he knew, he could not do again.

“I am...” He trailed off. Sith didn’t apologize, and even if he did, there was no changing what he’d done to Padme. What he’d done to his children. “I regret many things. But your mother...” He swallowed, thickly. “That is my greatest regret.”

It was as close to an apology as he could get, and Luke seemed to understand. He didn’t sense any happiness from his son...but there was acceptance.

“My aunt taught me that it’s okay to be angry sometimes. I am angry about it...I would be lying if I said you didn’t frequently make me angry, or scared. But I was raised to know that you don’t have to act on those feelings. I’m not perfect at it, but...I am choosing to move forward. It doesn’t fix it, it doesn’t change that it was horribly, disastrously wrong, but...that’s my choice.”

“Those are the teachings of the Jedi. That’s what made them weak.” The response was automatic, and immediately Luke scoffed.

“Believe me. It isn’t weakness, Father.”

He opened his mouth to argue, but Luke was reaching for his crutch. Immediately he forgot his argument, moving to help his son stand. Luke hesitated...but accepted the help, and soon he was standing so close, closer than most people willingly would have stood.

Something passed over Luke’s face, an emotion Vader couldn’t read. Then, he looked up, craning his neck to meet his gaze. “Thank you for telling me about her. I know it...wasn’t easy.”

His throat tightened.

He would never admit it, but one of the worst things about his condition, in his mind, was that he could not cry. He’d never been able to properly mourn her, as a result. Normally any mention of her set him on edge and fueled his anger, but now, with Luke so close...
He felt empty.

“You deserved to know.” The words felt robotic, like he’d been programmed to say them. But it was true. As much as it hurt them, Luke and Leia deserved to know their mother.

If only he’d been able to save her. If only she’d lived. So many things would have been different, been--

His train of thought was cut off by the feel of an arm wrapping around his torso, and a face being pressed into his chest.

He froze.

If he could have, he would have stopped breathing.

It took him a moment to realize he wasn’t being attacked. It took him a few more seconds to keep himself from reacting violently. But his entire body tensed, like he was being wound far too tightly.

His son...was hugging him.

Luke was hugging him.

He couldn’t even remember the last time he’d been hugged--no, that wasn’t true. The last time he’d received a hug was just after Padme arrived on Mustafar. Before everything went disastrously wrong.

And now his son was hugging him. A one-armed, awkward hug, but it was genuine nonetheless.

He didn’t know how to deal with it. At least, not after his initial instinct to push him away and draw his lightsaber.

No. He couldn’t let this end as his last one did…

But hugging was...a normal human reaction, wasn’t it? But he wasn’t normal. He was barely even human. He was a monster. Why would Luke even want to hug him…?

“I just wanted to show you how much it meant to me,” Luke mumbled into his chest.

He must have let the thought slip. He was also certain there were other methods of showing appreciation, but his son was terribly naive…

Except…

Except…

He didn’t...want it to stop.

As the initial shock wore off, he suddenly felt a strong sense of...something. Something like loneliness, except…

No. Longing.

The moment the emotion was identified, it grew overwhelming to the point that he was reaching up to carefully pull Luke closer to him, holding him back.
He had no idea. He hadn’t been touched in any kind of affection in so many years. Leia had done so, sort of, while they were waiting for Luke to recover, but this openness...this freedom to show familial love...

He should hate it. He was a *Sith*.

But he found a long dormant craving he didn’t even know he had, and suddenly he never wanted to let go.

His son.

The son he should have raised. The son he should have held numerous times before this.

The son who, as angry and hurt as he was over what he’d done to his mother, still found it in him to show him more human affection than he’d received in over twenty years.

“Luke,” he managed, but he blanked. He didn’t know what to say. His grip on his son tightened just a bit, then...very reluctantly, he released him. “You need to get in bed.”

“Or maybe I’m not done hugging you yet,” Luke tried, but he let go. Vader could still feel the warmth of his body against his, and with it gone he suddenly felt...cold.

He was half tempted to take him up on his offer. Just to feel human for a little longer.

“You are not healed. As much as you hate staying in bed, it is necessary.” He hesitated. “If you’d like, we can work on your X-Wing again tomorrow.”

This time when Luke smiled, it was real. “That sounds like a great plan.”

Chapter End Notes

HUGS.
I REPEAT.
HUGS!!!!!!!

Sorry for the later than usual update, I've been really struggling with deciding on pacing. In fact, I wasn't sure where I'd end this chapter, so I left "I Don't Know Yet" as a placeholder chapter title and forgot to remove it so Spell was like "...is that really the name of the chapter?" And then offered to come up with the chapter name after I explained. So you have her to thank for the lovely call back!
The song for this chapter is Memories of Mother from God of War. I seriously love this song. The anguish in it is just so real, I can practically taste it.
Love you all!
LadyVader23
A Critical Choice

Chapter Notes

For my lovely beta, SpellCleaver! <3 I love you, but also... you have my soul. You know what this means.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

What did he want?

Telling Luke and Leia about their mother, the argument and the hug it had spawned, prompted that question to replay in Vader’s mind with every breath the respirator took.

What did he want?

He’d wanted to be a Jedi, once. And yet, had he really wanted that? In many ways, he had, but now that he looked back on it, becoming a Jedi seemed like a dream Qui Gon had dangled in front of a scared slave boy as a ticket to freedom. But instead he’d swapped a literal master for an immense pressure to be the one to fulfill some idiotic prophesy, all while gaining little trust from those who were supposed to support him.

After much thought, Vader realized that the only thing he’d ever done in his life that he’d truly wanted to do was marry Padme. And even their relationship had been constrained with lies and deceit as they hid their love from the galaxy.

Do you even know what you want?

Luke’s question haunted him, because the answer to it would have ramifications that he was afraid he could not control.

Especially when he realized while meditating that he’d never actually wanted to become a Sith.

Not really, at least. He’d told himself he did for years and years, to justify what he’d done, to give meaning to what he’d lost.

He’d wanted to save Padme. Becoming a Sith had just been a means to that end.

The revelation didn’t change what he was, or anything he’d done. But it did give clarity to the answer to Luke’s question.

He wanted his family. Or what was left of it.

He wanted his *children*.

The answer felt obvious. He had, after all, spent almost two months capturing Leia, then searching for Luke, then healing said son. He’d known he wanted his children since the moment Boba Fett brought him the name Skywalker.

But this...this was different.
The reports he received about Rebel movements were meaningless. The idea of spending his time with his troops over his children made him restless, and any moment he spent away from them, they were always at the forefront of his mind. He didn’t even care that the officers had noticed the change in his behavior, and he flat out ignored Piett’s concerned expressions as he hurried away from duty to retreat to his wing of the ship.

He wanted Luke and Leia. And he was willing to do whatever it took to keep them. That revelation certainly had galaxy-changing ramifications.

And who better to conspire with than Leia, a leader of the Rebellion?

At least, in theory. She’d barely spoken to him in the days following the argument. If he was honest with himself, he too had been avoiding her. And as much as he hated the yawning rift between them, he could not blame her for reacting the way she had.

But perhaps he could turn that around. Perhaps he could win her.

He was sure he had the plan to do it.

He waited in his office, staring out at the stars as he tugged incessantly on their bond. She ignored him, as expected, but he did not let up.

Her annoyance increased to flat out anger and finally he felt her storming towards the room. He smirked triumphantly as he listened to the door swish open behind him, followed by the bright, furious presence of his daughter.

“What do you want?!” she seethed, coming to a stop beyond the desk he rarely used.

He turned to face her, crossing his arms over his chest. “When I call you, I expect you to answer.”

Her expression darkened as he suspected it would. “Again, Lord Vader, we may share the same blood, but you are not my--”

“I have a plan to end the war,” he interrupted, not wishing to hear what she’d already thrown in his face a thousand times. It worked. She scoffed in disbelief, but she didn’t immediately turn him down.

“And what would that be? Not another Death Star, is it?”

He hesitated. That in particular was a card he was still going to keep close until the right moment. At least, he hoped it would be the right moment. He was not great at playing the political game. “No. I have decided that we must overthrow the Emperor. As long as he exists, he will be a threat to you and your brother.”

He expected this to be a surprise to her, given that it was coming from him, but she rolled her eyes. “So you are going to try to become the next Emperor then? You know I’m not going to join you, and I know Luke won’t either.”

“No,” he said, resisting the urge to grit his teeth at that reminder too. If they’d been willing, it would have made things easier, but here they were. “I am going to make you Empress.”

Now that surprised her. She blinked, then took a step back as though he’d pushed her. She frowned, her brows furrowing. Then, “What?”

He said nothing.
“... Are you insane?”

“Some would say so. But I am not, especially with this.” He tilted his head, studying her, running through the logic he’d pondered since discovering what it was he truly wanted, “You are the most logical successor. You were...raised with immense responsibility on your shoulders as the sole heir to the Alderaanian throne. You served in the Senate from a young age. You continue to use your qualities as a natural born leader to command troops in battle. As smart as Luke is, he was raised on a farm on Tatooine.” He winced as he recalled the now hundreds of cups of hot chocolate the boy had consumed. “He too is a natural leader, but I fear the throne is not suited to him.”

She was still looking at him like he’d lost his mind, but when she spoke, she sounded...well. Like a politician.

Like her mother.

“And you don’t think you’re up to the task of being Emperor?”

He considered his words carefully. “As a Sith, I should. But like you’ve repeatedly reminded me, making decisions based on that has caused more problems than otherwise.” The words were bitter in his mouth, but he thought they might appease her. “I am not a politician. The formalities consistently frustrate me. I could change it, of course, but I highly doubt your Rebellion would accept me as Emperor, and the war would merely continue. It would be difficult to maintain order on the throne while also fighting on a battlefield.”

He paused.

“I would not have the time for you and Luke. And to your point, neither of you would stand for much of my vision for the Empire. I could again force you, but I would rather not fight my children any longer.”

For the most part, the shields he’d taught her to use held, but for a brief moment he caught a glimpse of the turmoil roiling through her. Otherwise, her face had molded into the perfect mask of a politician. “Beyond the fact that I want little to do with you,” she began, and his fists tightened, “you do realize that I have no interest in becoming an Empress? If you haven’t noticed, I am fighting for democracy.”

“I am aware. You have lived as a princess in a traditional monarchy, while also maintaining your…” he tried not to sneer. He failed. “Principles. There are many, myself included, who do not wish to see the failure that was the Republic return, but as Empress, you could attempt to rebuild it. I do not agree, but I would not stop you.”

She blinked. “Beyond the fact that the Republic was not a failure, why wouldn’t you stop me? Hell, why not just ally with the Alliance--”

He pointed at her. “I will ally with no one but you and Luke. I neither trust nor care for the rest of your Rebellion. I will not turn the Empire over to people who would immediately try to do away with the Empire and install a brand new government overnight; there would be complete and total chaos.” He paused, allowing her to process before adding, “The Empire was not born when the Chancellor declared himself Emperor. It was slowly built. The declaration was simply a formality. I happen to believe the Empire is effective for maintaining order and stability, but if a Republic does return, you are the only one I trust not to throw the entire galaxy into carnage.”

It was the truth. He wanted Leia to be Empress, and stay that way. But he was also no fool. She’d made her political beliefs clear from the moment she became a senator. But with that being said, he
reached through to the bond he had with his son. *Come to my location. Bring Artoo.*

He felt Luke's acknowledgement, and his curiosity, but unlike Leia, he didn’t wait around to listen to him. It would still take him time to complete the task, however. Time he’d use to convince Leia to accept his plan.

“The Rebellion won’t stand for it.”

“The Rebellion tried negotiating with the Emperor for years.” Nevermind that the Emperor had never had any intention of negotiation, but that was an entirely different matter.

“That was before the Empire used a super weapon to destroy Alderaan, and part of Jedha!”

Not this again. He was beginning to curse ever putting up with the Death Star in the first place. “Are you implying that the Rebellion would not trust you, even if you promised to bring back your precious democracy?” His lip curled on the word.

Leia hesitated. “No, they wouldn’t trust you. And they might stop trusting me if they found out I was your daughter.”

“Then that is entirely their own fault, and you deserve better allies.” He thought that anyway, but it didn’t seem wise to mention it now. “Besides, I have other information to potentially win at least some measure of reluctant trust.”

Leia snorted and rolled her eyes. “I thought you didn’t want to work with the Alliance directly?”

“I do not, but if some information will get them to negotiate with you, then I will consider doing it.” He tilted his head. “Unless you prefer my original plan?”

“Where you kill the Emperor, take over, and destroy the Alliance?”

“Precisely. It would be much easier.”

She scowled. “And what information, exactly, do you have?”

“Plenty. I’ll tell you when we’ve managed to set up a time and location to negotiate.”

He tried to read her feelings. It had been so easy for so long, but once she learned something, she quickly mastered it. He couldn’t sense anything, and her expression remained so much like her mother’s in the Senate, it almost made him shift uncomfortably.

“And how, exactly, do you plan to set that up? Are you sending me?”

He snorted. “No.” He didn’t trust her that much. Even with Luke staying with him. “I will send the smuggler.”

“Han?” Again, he’d managed to surprise her. He doubted many were able to do that, so he took small pride in it. “He wouldn’t hold the same influence as me. They may not even let him see Mon Mothma.”

“I would not doubt Solo to find a way.” That was as close as he’d ever get to admitting that the man had some...uses. That didn’t involve making his daughter tolerate him but... He’d proved himself in dealing with Black Sun, suggesting the hidden smuggling hyperspace lane, and helping him clear a path for saving Luke.

From the look on her face, he had a feeling Leia was about to press, but the door opened and in
limped Luke with Artoo by his side. He did not fail to notice the twins lock eyes before looking away.

It would seem they too had not quite resolved their argument.

He would need to deal with that, too.

Luke took one of the seats in front of his desk, carefully setting down his crutch. Vader, as he always did, ran a critical eye over his son, determining his state of health. His form had filled out thanks to the diet plan, and there were no circles under his eyes; the bruises were gone, and there seemed to be a spark in those eyes that hadn’t been there before. Now if only his leg and arm would heal up, they could also discuss how to take down the Emperor…

So...what’s all this?” Luke asked, glancing between the two of them.

He motioned to Artoo. “When your mother was alive, she frequently stored copies of her speeches in his data banks for backup purposes. Since he apparently has footage left over, I assume he still has those copies.”

_of course I do. I have not had a memory wipe since rolling off the factory conveyor belt, _Artoo_ whistled proudly.

Luke turned a narrowed gaze on the little droid. “What _else_ are you hiding from us?”

_Oh, you would not believe the secrets I have._

“He probably still has Republic secrets from the Clone Wars stored,” Vader grumbled irritably. If the droid wasn’t so useful with his memories intact, he’d have wiped his memory per standard protocol a long time ago. But like a good ship’s navigation system, constant memory wipes led to costly mistakes. “You should use those speeches to help you prepare.”

“Prepare for what?” Luke asked, looking between them now. “What did I just walk in on?”

“Vader wants to kill the Emperor and make me Empress,” Leia said, though she was looking at Artoo curiously. “And these speeches aren’t the obviously heavily edited crap the Empire puts out?”

“That should be obvious.”

“Wait, what?” Luke leaned back in the chair, staring at Leia like he’d never seen her before. “Hold on, back up--”

There was a chime at the door, interrupting them.

“Right on schedule,” Vader rumbled, using the Force to press the door switch, and in walked his other scheduled guest.

Who immediately froze at the threshold, staring in horror at the two highly wanted Rebel criminals sitting in his office.

“Admiral Piett,” Vader said, triggering the door to shut since the Admiral didn’t do it himself. “I would like to formally introduce you--”

“What the _hell_?!” Leia whirled on Piett, her hand reaching to where her blaster might have been had he allowed her to carry one on his ship. “You might have warned us that you were inviting
your Admiral!”

“Oh, well at least I’m not the only one surprised,” Luke mumbled. He’d swiveled the chair around, though he thankfully did not attempt to stand. In fact, he sensed far less apprehension from his son than he did Leia.

At least one of his children trusted him. Somewhat.

“My Lord.” Piett swallowed thickly. He was normally excellent at keeping his expression neutral, but now he stared at the twins like they were Vader’s personal rancors. “I...what is the meaning of this?”

Vader ignored the question, instead taking the moment to probe him. He’d once taught Piett how to build his own mental shields, and though they were no match for a particularly determined Force wielder, they were decent enough that he didn’t immediately get a sense of what the man was thinking beyond the general confusion and horror.

Good. Then he was not wrong to make this introduction.

“As you know, this is Princess Leia Organa of Alderaan.” He motioned to Leia, who immediately glared at him. He ignored her and indicated Luke. “And Commander Luke Skywalker, who is not actually dead.”

There was an awkward silence. Then, slowly, Luke lifted his good hand. “Hi.”

Vader rolled his eyes. They would need to have a word about proper etiquette.

“Luke, Leia. This is Admiral Firmus Piett.” Then, because he would not admit it out loud, he added down their bonds, Out of everyone on this ship, I trust him the most. He is loyal to me.

“It is...good to meet you,” Piett forced out. He was definitely pale as his gaze darted between the twins. “Lord Vader, why are they here?”

Luke looked back at him in question.

“This information is highly classified. It must not leave this room. Am I understood, Admiral?” He let the threat hang heavily when he finished, and he lightly brushed the man's neck with the Force. A...gentle reminder of what would happen if he betrayed him.

He ignored the glare he got from both of his children.

“I...understand, My Lord,” Piett answered weakly.

“Good. Luke and Leia are twins. They are also my children. I will be staging a coup against the Emperor, and I have plans to make Leia the next Empress.”

He felt the news hit the man hard, but Piett didn’t get a chance to respond before Leia turned on him. “How can you trust him?! He’s an Imperial--”

“And I am a Sith.” He waved the question away. “He has known about the possibility of a coup for a while, have you not, Admiral?”

Piett swallowed thickly. “Y-yes, My Lord.”

“So the only real news is that you are my daughter, and you will be taking the throne.”
“That’s still news to me, too,” Luke muttered, but was ignored.

I missed being involved in Skywalker plans. Artoo made a noise that was suspiciously like laughter.

“I haven’t agreed to anything,” Leia seethed.

“I am aware.” He waved her off. “But in the meantime, if I am not available, you both may trust Admiral Piett to communicate whatever is necessary directly to me.”

Leia glared at him, then whirled around and marched up to the older man. She stopped barely inches away from him, and though Piett towered over her, Leia’s sheer will alone was enough to convey the message that he did not intimidate her.

Piett, to his credit, did not back down. He simply waited, expression mostly composed, even as Vader could feel his apprehension.

Finally, Leia snorted. “You can help by staying out of my way.” She backed out of Piett’s personal space to shoot another look at him over her shoulder. “I’ll go talk to Han about what we discussed.”

Then, before anyone could stop her, she stormed out, leaving them in silence.

“Should we tell him Han Solo is here, too?” Luke asked, frowning.

Vader suppressed a sigh, even as Piett immediately registered that information. No doubt the Admiral was piecing together some version of what had really been going on recently. “You already have, my son. Do take care to send information like that telepathically.”

“I think I might have figured it out from the Princesses comment, My Lord,” Piett pointed out delicately.

“Yes.” He was certain introducing the twins to Piett was the right decision. He could not, after all, pull off a coup alone, and the Admiral had protocols in place for when such an event would happen. “Neither of my children are particularly subtle.”

“We’re your children. I think that’s obvious,” Luke pointed out.

Despite the situation, Vader couldn’t help a small smile.

And he did not miss the re-evaluating his Admiral was doing on his son.

Yes. He made the right decision.

“Now,” he said, squaring his shoulders. “Let us discuss details.”

Empress.

Empress.

He was insane. He was a murderer, a terrorist, and he was insane.

Nevermind that there was some logic in it, but her? Empress?!

It had taken all of her years of training to keep herself cool and contained in that room. But as
Vader brought in Luke and Artoo, then worse, his stupid Admiral, it just became more and more obvious how serious he was. He meant this. Maybe there was a catch, something else she didn’t know, some hidden betrayal but--

**Empress**?

She burst into Han’s room, tears of anger streaming down her face. “Han!” she shouted when she didn’t see him immediately. She could feel him near, but-- “Han!!”

The door to the fresher opened, and Han stepped out, pulling on a shirt, his hair wet and plastered to his forehead. “What’s wrong, Leia?”

His eyes swept her, looking for injuries. She doubted he trusted Vader not to hurt her.

Especially after she’d told him what he’d done to her pregnant mother--

“He wants me to become Empress.” She collapsed on the couch, hugging herself. “He wants to send you to the Alliance, offer them negotiations. He’s going to kill the Emperor and make me Empress.”

She didn’t know if she was making sense.

Han was there seconds later, kneeling in front of her, his expression serious. Well. At least he wasn’t joking around. She didn’t think she could handle it. “How would that even work?”

She squeezed her eyes tight. “If he kills the Emperor, he’s the heir to the throne. He could abdicate and-- I can’t be Empress!”

“Okay, okay.” Han’s hands went to her knees, his thumbs tracing soothing circles on the insides of them. “Alright. What do you need me to do?”

She forced deep breaths into her lungs, willing her mind to clear before she spoke. “Instead of going to the Alliance, get the Falcon.”

“I won’t argue there.” Han snorted. “Then what?”

“You come back. Say….say Lando is representing the Alliance to see if Vader’s serious--”

“Wait, Lando?!”

“Yes, he should be with Chewie and the Falcon. They were supposed to look for you.” She frowned. “They probably think we’re all dead by now.”

“Lando’s probably made off with my ship by now,” Han growled. “But…I guess I’ll try. Hopefully Chewie kept him from doing anything rash with it.”

Of course he’d be worried about his ship. His obsession with the Falcon was the most normal thing about their entire situation, and she couldn’t help but smile.

“When you’re given clearance to dock...instead, Luke and I are going to eject out in a escape pod--”


“For now. Han, this is Vader’s ship! This is Darth Vader we’re talking about!”
“I’m fully aware of that, sweetheart, but I highly doubt Vader’s going to be happy with us if we not only escape, but kidnap his other kid!”

“It’s not kidnapping, it’s rescuing—”

“Bullshit.” She glared at him. “Well, it is! Luke’s made it clear he doesn’t want to leave. Beyond the monster we’ll be creating if we take him, if we do it against his will, Luke’s going to be angry.”

“He’ll get over it.” She knew it was a lie even as she said it.

“No. He won’t. And you know it.”

She scowled at him, but he didn’t flinch away from her gaze. He never did, especially...especially when she knew he was right. Her shoulders slumped. “I can’t leave him again.”

“Then let’s go along with the negotiation plan for now, and if it doesn’t work out, it doesn’t work out.”

“It not working out could very well mean vital people die. He’s Darth Vader. He doesn’t even need weapons to kill them all.” She shuddered. “No. We can’t. At least...at least not when he holds all of the cards.”

“Okay, then I will help you escape, and if Luke wants to come, he can. But I won’t kidnap him.”

She buried her face in her hands and let out a frustrated, muffled shout. “What if I lose him, Han?”

“You and I both saw how Vader hovered over him. The kid isn’t in any danger from his father.”

She pressed her hands into her eyes so hard, she began to see shapes beyond her eyelids. “I don’t know if I have the strength to leave him.”

“Then—”

“But I can’t stay!” She worked to slow her breathing. “He choked my mother. He killed so many innocents. He stood by as Alderaan blew. He tortured you and me, took Luke’s hand, killed—”

She broke off. She’d been over this a million times, partly because even as she said it, she also remembered him murdering Jabba’s entire court because she was threatened. She remembered him hovering over her when she’d been injured, or how even as he warred with himself, he managed to put Luke first and tell him what he needed to hear. She vividly recalled the moments where he seemed torn between acting on his anger, and acting on doing what was best for her and Luke.

When she closed her eyes, the image of Vader standing vigil over Luke’s motionless body, or carrying him in his arms, replayed over and over again in her mind.

And above it all, Vader’s words, spoken in another lifetime:

Our baby is a blessing.

Maybe Luke was right. But she...as much as she tried, for Luke’s sake, she just couldn’t fathom staying and hoping she didn’t doom the entire galaxy by doing so.

“I’ll escape in an escape pod. With or without Luke.” She hated to say it, but Han was right. She couldn’t force her brother. Even if it was breaking her heart to think of leaving him behind. “You’ll pick me up in the Falcon, and we’ll be gone before Vader knows what happened.”
At least, she hoped. She was certain he trusted her more now, but…

“And what then?” Han asked grimly. “Vader won’t settle for just Luke. He’ll tear apart the galaxy to get you back.”

“He won’t have to. We’ll offer negotiations again--but this time, on our terms,” she replied, fiercely.

And in the end, she would not become Empress.

It was a few days after Solo left when Vader stood on the bridge, for the first time in a long time feeling content as he stared out at the stars. He ran the plan again in his mind. Solo would return, likely with an Alliance representative to ensure that he was serious, and then they could set about choosing a place to negotiate. Though Piett was currently working with the techs in the pits behind him, he and Luke had spent plenty of time together over the last few days preparing what they’d need.

Not that Luke would be going to the meeting. As much weight as he’d put on, his leg and shoulder were still healing. Besides, he had plans to use Luke in surprising the Emperor.

After all: as far as Palpatine knew, Luke Skywalker was still dead.

As much trouble as Leia’s staged death plan had been, that was probably the best outcome of it. He could definitely work with that.

Leia, he knew, was mainly holed up in her room with Artoo, reading over the speeches Padme left behind. He...tried to avoid her when he knew she was reviewing them. As much as he knew they’d help Leia in the transition to...whatever she wanted to be as Empress, that didn’t mean he wanted such a close reminder of her. He feared it would be like she was speaking to him from the grave, even if they were simply political speeches.

Yes. As far as he knew, he was as prepared as he had ever been. Solo was due back soon: he’d received a message indicating that he was incoming within the next half hour. It was all coming together. He’d spent far too long calling Palpatine Master. It was time to throw off the chains and finally focus on what he wanted.

It was just as he thought this that the horribly familiar, ice-cold, oily presence washed over him. On instinct, his shields snapped up, even as he tensed and whirled, eyes sweeping the bridge. Of course the hooded, shriveled figure of the Emperor was not there, but--

“My Lord.” Admiral Piett. He was out of the pits, and he was rushing to him, deathly pale. Even more pale than he was when he’d told him he had twins, and those twins were the galaxy’s most wanted criminals. “Lord Vader. There’s an incoming ship--”

Vader was whirling towards the viewport again, watching in horror as said ship dropped out of hyperspace.

It was not Solo.

“It’s the Eclipse, My Lord.”

Yes. He could see that. The Eclipse was, after all, the Executor’s sister ship.
And the flagship of the Emperor.

His heart was sinking into his stomach, even as he felt his Master reaching for him--

“The Emperor has arrived. It’s…it’s an inspection, My Lord.”

The words rang in his ears.

The Emperor suspected something. No. He was almost certain of it. He wouldn’t have come otherwise.

The twins were in danger.

Their presences in the Force, if one didn’t know them well, were bright and similar enough that maybe Palpatine would only be able to discern one of them, but--

He’d sense them.

He probably already had, judging by the cruel anger and delight he could sense from him.

He had to get them out.

Immediately, he recoiled against the thought of losing his children. He couldn’t. They’d just barely had a chance to be any sort of a family.

But Luke was in no condition to fight against the Emperor, and Leia was still far too inexperienced to help. If it was just Palpatine alone, he probably could have handled him, but not with the might of another dreadnought behind him.

If he didn’t do something, his children were doomed.

His chest felt like it was cleaving open, even as he strengthened his shields against his Master. Even as he turned to Piett. “Assemble a welcome party. Immediately.”

Leia, he shot down their bond, fierce and intense, leaving no room for argument. He wanted, no, pleaded with the Force to make this stop so he could take the words back, but…

No.

He knew what he wanted.

He could not get that if they stayed. As much as he hated it. He’d have to find them again afterwards.

If there was an afterwards.

He doubted he could explain such a bright Force presence to his master. It would take work to convince him that it was only one he sensed, not two--

“What about you, My Lord?” Piett asked, even as he keyed in the order on his datapad. Above, an alarm began to sound, hailing a quick assembly in the main hangar.

Vader knew what he was really asking.

“I will join you.” He couldn’t risk going to see them, not even to say goodbye. He doubted he could let them go if he did, and besides, he would need to hold the Emperor off.
Piett nodded curtly, a grim look on his face, and Vader followed him out, feeling like he was
walking on numb limbs.

_Leia_, he sent again. _The Emperor is here. You must take Luke and escape._

With each step, his fury built until it was a roaring, raging inferno.

He was about to lose everything again. Because of Palpatine. Because of the Sith and their
ridiculous _Rule of Two._

Because he had not acted when he should have--to get rid of the despot when he had the chance.

Leia sat in the hangar, listening to Threepio prattle on to Artoo while she sorted through Artoo’s
files. She had him plugged up to a datapad, sorting through anything he had that was uploaded
specifically by Padme Amidala. She’d been through his files before, but now that Vader had given
the order, it was suddenly like an entire new treasure trove had been unlocked.

Her mother was...quite the speech writer. She wasn’t even halfway through all of them. She was
starting to think being a senator was Padme’s hobby, not her job.

But now, she couldn’t quite concentrate on the words. And not because the droids were fussing
with each other.

Han had messaged her. Vader had finally given her an albeit limited comm link before Han had
left, and she had his contact info, Luke’s, Vader’s, and that stupid Admiral’s loaded in it.

Han’s message was brief and succinct: _Half an hour._

That was two minutes ago.

She’d need to wait until the last moment. If she left too early, Vader might sense it and stop her.

So instead she pretended to be occupied with the files, sorting through them aimlessly, looking for
something that looked less like a long, well-researched speech and more like…

She frowned when her eye caught on a holovid file at the bottom of the list. At first, she thought it
must have been a recording. Maybe her mother had used Artoo to practice. She’d done that herself
with some of her droids back in the day.

But the length looked too short for that.

She hesitated, checking the time. No, she wasn’t ready to go yet. She had time.

Leia opened the file, and Artoo whistled as his projector lit up and there sat a heavily pregnant
Padme Amidala.

She was as beautiful as ever. In this holo, she appeared to be in her casual home wear, similar to the
last recording Artoo showed her. It was obvious that she was pregnant, and her hands were absentley
rubbing her belly as she smiled into the camera sadly.

“If you are watching this, Anakin, then it means I died.”

Leia froze.

What...was this...?
"I know I told you it was just a dream, but...well. Your dream about your mother came true, so I thought it might be a good idea to prepare. Just in case. But I’m sure everything turned out fine, and we’re probably with our baby now. You’ll never see this recording. Though if for some reason I did die..."

She trailed off, a dark look passing over her expression. After a moment, she continued.

"There are a few things I’d like for you to do. First of all, I want you to keep our baby with you. If the baby is Force-sensitive, I don’t want them to be separated from you by the Jedi. I know they mean well, but you and I both know how being away from your mother affected you. I don’t want that to happen to our child."

Leia’s heart was shattering. Her limbs were heavy. She couldn’t breathe.

"Next, I want you to bring the baby to my family on Naboo."

Wait, she had family still there? Of...of course she did...how had Leia not thought about this...?

“I’m not asking you because it will be good for my family and the baby to get to know each other, but because you will need a support system, Ani. I can’t imagine how hard this must be, me leaving you with the baby, after everything...” Padme’s lip trembled. “Please. They might be upset at first that we kept this from them, but they’ll accept you and the baby with open arms. I know it. If you need to, show them this message.

“Finally, and this is probably the most important thing and I know you won’t want to hear it...but keep the baby away from Palpatine. At all costs. I know you respect him. I know he’s done a lot for you, but Ani...he’s a politician. And I just have this growing sense that something is wrong. I know we’ve discussed this, but the people you need right now are your family. Not a man who has garnered more and more power until the Senate is all but useless in this war.”

So even her mother had suspected Palpatine was evil. Somehow, that didn’t surprise her, even if the Empire liked to use Padme Amidala as a propaganda tool to tout the Emperor’s good nature. “After all, Senator Amidala and the Emperor were friends!” She’d heard that all her life, but here it seemed the woman doubted that relationship herself.

“Ani.” Padme’s voice brought her back to reality. “I love you. That will never change. If I have died, then I will watch over you and our child until your time has come, and I’ll be the first to greet you. I promise. Please...please never let our child forget that I loved them. Even if I never got to meet them. You’re a good person, Ani. You’ll be a great father. I know it.”

Leia felt as if she’d been punched in the gut. Tears were falling freely down her cheeks.

Leia. Vader’s voice was in her head, urgent and demanding. She ignored it, staring at the visage of her mother.

Padme smiled sadly one last time. “I love you, Ani. With all my soul. Goodbye.”

The holovid stopped, and the hangar was far too silent.

Until an alarm suddenly began blaring throughout the ship, and Vader’s voice was again in her head.

Leia. The Emperor is here. You must take Luke and escape.

The datapad slipped from her hands, the screen shattering as it hit the floor. For the first time, she
realized she was shivering, and not just because she’d just watched a goodbye message from her mother to her father (and one she was pretty sure Vader didn’t even know existed).

The air was as cold as the inside of a carbonite chamber. She felt as if oil was somehow sticking to her skin, making her want nothing more than to take a long, hot shower. It felt ten times worse than anytime she’d been in Vader’s presence.

The Emperor.

And even as she hurried to check her shields, she felt as though eyes were watching her.

*Keep the baby away from Palpatine. At all costs.*

Her mother’s final wish. From the message Leia hadn’t even fully had time to process.

She was on her feet, her entire body trembling. “Threepio. Artoo. Quickly, follow me!”

Escape. They had to escape. She sent acknowledgement back at Vader, but his shields were so thick and tight, she wasn’t sure he sensed it.

There would be no coup now. Even if Vader tried it, Luke was injured, and she didn’t know enough about the Force to even begin thinking of taking on the Emperor. Could Vader kill him? Maybe. He’d explained that he was particularly strong in the Force.

But then, why had he not killed the Emperor before?

No. No, she needed to get Luke and escape.

Good thing she already had an escape plan in the works.

“Oh dear,” Threepio chided as he and Artoo shuffled after her. “I do believe something dreadful has happened…”

She didn’t answer. If she told him the Emperor had arrived, she couldn’t imagine his panic. They definitely couldn’t afford that.

When they got to the hallway, Luke was already emerging from his room, looking around with a troubled frown. They locked eyes, and whatever he saw there made his expression turn dark. “What’s wrong?”

Her throat tightened at seeing him, knowing what she was about to say and do would crush him. Who knew Vader would be the one to tell her to do it?

“The Emperor has arrived.”

“The Emperor has what?!” Threepio wailed and she winced. “Oh, no! We’re doomed!”

They both ignored him.

She felt Luke’s terror even as he too worked on strengthening his shields. “Where’s Father?”

“I don’t know.” She didn’t bother arguing that Vader was nothing more than a blood relative. They didn’t have time. “But we have to go.”

She’d reached him, and she began trying to turn him around towards the escape pods. Han would be here soon--
“You can’t be serious!” Luke protested, and despite only having one good working leg and arm, he was incredibly difficult to budge. “We can’t leave Father!”

“He ordered me to get you and escape!” Leia argued back. “You are in no condition to fight!”

“I can help!” But even as he said it, she knew as well as he did that he couldn’t. “We can’t just leave him! The Emperor will have sensed us by now!”

She hesitated.

She hadn’t thought of that.

“That doesn’t change the fact that we can’t face him. I’ve never trained for anything like this, and you won’t last five seconds!” When he still looked like he was about to argue, she added, “Vader has handled the Emperor for years, Luke. He will be fine. You’ve seen him in battle. He won’t die. But he might if he’s worried about us being found or getting in his way. I’m sure he’ll come find us afterwards.”

Nevermind that she had no intention to go back to Vader. But Luke did.

She was sure she was right. Vader could handle this.

Couldn’t he?

Guilt wormed its way into her stomach.

What would Luke do if he lost his father?

What...what would she do?

“Princess Leia is right, Master Luke,” Threepio urged, and even Artoo gently bumped into him. “Please listen!”

Luke looked between each of them. As he did so, the foreboding, freezing feeling grew stronger, and she was about to start dragging him anyway when he finally nodded.

But the look in his eyes, like he was watching his entire world crumble...

She let out a breath. “Turn around. We’re going to the escape pods.”

“Escape pods? But why not--?”

“Because Han will be here any moment, and I told him to pick up an escape pod!” She was again trying to turn him around, and this time he did, hobbling achingly slow.

For the first time in weeks, she was hyper aware of the danger her brother’s condition presented. This time, it was for an entirely different reason.

This is my fault.

She tried to push the thought away even as they headed towards where she knew the escape pods would be. She’d had Artoo slice into the Executor’s system to obtain a schematic. They weren’t far outside of Vader’s wing of the ship. She’d have to hope they wouldn’t run into anyone.

Maybe Han’s “Skywalker Luck” theory would hold, this time.
“If the Emperor knows we’re here,” Luke huffed as they made for the main blast doors, “he could accuse Father of treason and execute him.”

Leia tried not to be bothered by the words. Vader deserved execution. He’d done more than enough wrong.

*Our baby is a blessing.*

“He’s going to be fine.” The words were automatic. Meaningless. “And even if he does, he’ll escape. He’ll find us.”

They reached the blast door, and Artoo set to work unlocking it. It didn’t take long, and they slid open, revealing a hallway she’d only seen on a stolen schematic.

“What if he doesn’t?”

Her heart tore at the pain in Luke’s voice. With each step they took towards freedom, she felt her brother’s turmoil.

“He will.”

She...wasn’t sure she believed that.

*You’re a good person, Ani. You’ll be a great father. I know it.*

Except he hadn’t been. He was probably the worst father in the entire galaxy.

But he’d saved Luke. And Luke loved him, despite everything. He believed there was good in the man, and if she was really honest with herself…

She didn’t think he was entirely wrong.

*But he’s a Sith, there’s a million reasons not to care what happens to him!*

The hall was mercifully empty. She wondered if the alarm had anything to do with it, even as it suddenly stopped and the foreboding feeling grew until she could barely breathe.

“The Emperor.” Luke hesitated, and she grasped his good arm and gently pulled. Reluctantly, he began hobbling with the crutch again. “He’s here.”

“I know.”

It would be fine. It had to be fine. Vader knew what he was doing. She needed to save Luke, not worry about Vader.

But if Vader died...

They reached the escape pods and she flipped the hatch. It began opening with a hiss. Luke watched it, his body growing so tense, she thought he might snap. “We shouldn’t leave him, Leia. Something’s different. Something’s *wrong*. Can’t you feel it?” He turned big, pleading blue eyes on her, and the terror there…

“Threepio. Artoo. Get in first,” she ordered, even as she reached up to place a comforting hand on Luke’s cheek. “If we stay,” she murmured, ignoring the droids as they climbed into the pod, “he will kill us. Or *worse.*”
Luke clenched his jaw even as his eyes closed. “I know. I know. But he’s our father--”

“And he’s survived worse.”

Lie.

Luke knew it. She knew it.

“He’s probably sensed us. He knows Vader’s betrayed him, that’s why he’s here--”

“He is here to get us. And if he gets us, that’s it. That’s the end, especially if he has us both.”

She was right. She knew she was right.

And yet…

“We will see him again. I promise.”

That…wasn’t a lie. She meant it.

*Our baby is a blessing.*

*You’re a good person, Ani. You’ll be a great father. I know it.*


Vader watching as a droid bandaged her arm.

He was not a good man. He *deserved this.*

And yet.

*Our baby is a blessing.*

“Well,” Luke breathed out, and the word sounded like he’d torn it from his own throat. He warred against every instinct he had to go play hero and save everyone. “Alright. Let’s go.”

Leia let go of him, nodding at the escape pod. Artoo and Threepio were already bickering about the other taking up too much space. “Right behind you.”

Luke closed his eyes, took a deep breath and nodded. Then, he turned and carefully climbed in.

She approached the entrance after him, pulling out the comm link. Quickly, she sent a written message to let Han know that the escape pod was about to launch at the planned coordinates.

Then she activated the door release.

Luke had barely chosen a seat and was still trying to shift himself over so she could comfortably fit. But as the door hissed closed, he looked up in alarm--

And a new kind of terror washed over his face as the door sealed shut, separating them.

“*LEIA!*”

She didn’t hear him. The door was too thick for that. But she could read his lips, even as he
launched himself at it, tripping over the crutch and falling to the floor instead.

*I’m sorry,* she sent to him.

And pressed the launch button just as Luke pulled himself from the floor and flung himself towards her. Towards the button that would release the door and let him back onto the ship.

But it was too late.

The last she saw of her brother, he was still screaming her name as the pod ejected into the deep cold of space.

Chapter End Notes

MUHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!
Aunnnd it all comes crashing down :P
The song for this chapter is Your World Will Fail by Les Friction
muahahahahahahahahahahaha
Love you all! I’ll be responding to comments soon!
Love,
LadyVader23

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!