Summary

I went to sleep on the worst day of my life and woke to find myself in the past on the second worst day of my life. As experiences go, I don’t recommend it.

Notes

Based off of amarielah’s tumbler prompt “I need a Peggy Sue fic where TFA!Leia’s consciousness is sent back into ANH!Leia’s body and she decides that the only way to save her future son is to save her biodad from being an evil prick before he commits suicide-by-Sheev. Which is hard when she hates his guts and would happily kill him herself.”

Then my brain went, yes this is a thing we need to write. I point out I don’t write fic, brain said don’t care and proceeded to obsess over it. Then of course I put Leia in quite possibly the worst situation that this could happen in, cause you know Star Wars is pain. This is my first fic, please be kind.
Leia awoke to a brisk “Get up, your Highness.” and a shove at her shoulder.

She mumbled an instinctive protest “General.”

A harsh laugh filled her ears “The rebels so desperate they put you in charge?”

Her eyes flew open. She was in a cargo hold. There were stormtroopers all around her. The inherent strangeness of this took a few moments to settle in her mind before warning alarms went off. She was on an Imperial shuttle. There was a long bench in front of her stretching out along the side. She was sitting up, sandwiched between two stormtroopers. The one on her right, the one who had been talking pulled her up to her feet.

She looked down. Her hands were cuffed together. They were also a lot smoother than they had been last night. When she laid down, on her own bed, on D’Qar. She was wearing that ridiculous ceremonial white dress from her youth. She looked back up and noticed the company of stormtroopers in the back of the interior of the shuttle. There were at least fifteen of them, all who were wearing the old Imperial style armor. They were quietly talking among themselves and Leia could smell the faint aroma of the cleaning oil they used on their weapons in the air.

“What?” she asked out loud, the sheer impossibility of what she was seeing stealing her wits.

The stormtrooper on her left chose to answer her. “Have a nice nap your highness?” She tilted her face in his direction. He didn’t disappear in a poof of smoke. He remained distressingly real and smug “You won’t be so relaxed after he’s done with you.”

She opened herself to the Force. This had to be a vision or a nightmare of some kind. Han’s death and the destruction of the Hapan system had clearly done something to cause her to hallucinate. She needed an anchor to guide her out of this.

She felt at first that there was another presence here. It was close to her, distressingly close, with it’s dark and imposing aura. A blackness that ate everything around it. But the quiet desolation, the helplessness, the apathy, underneath all that anger puzzled her. Who was on this ship with her? It was no one she knew, therefore no one she could trust.

“Luke,” she whispered, reaching out with the Force. There was no response. He hadn’t answered her call in years. But instead of the impression of a door not being answered, there was a feeling of vagueness around him. That bright flame was there, he wasn’t dead. But it was diffuse somehow. Leia wondered what the hell she had fallen into this time.

The door to the cockpit opened and Leia turned her head, curious about the other Force user that was here. The tall figure emerged from the entrance and Leia felt her world give out underneath her.

“Lord Vader,” the stormtrooper who held her arm stated. “The prisoner is ready.” Leia’s breath whooshed out of her body as her mind started yelling at her to run, run, run. She had forgotten the eerie breathing, unconnected to his voice. She had forgotten how the armor gleamed under the lights like a dark reflection. She could only stare in horror at her worst nightmare made flesh.

“Take her to cell block on level 5 for processing, while I give my report.” He glanced at her for a moment, then stalked away down the gangplank.
“Come along.” the trooper pulled her after him towards the hanger heading to an elevator on the right side. Leia wasn’t sure how her legs were moving, it was all she could do not to fall to the ground and scream her denial.

The walk into the elevator and hallways passed by her in a haze. She offered no resistance and perhaps more telling no snide comments to the troopers increasingly escalating taunts. It wasn’t until she was escorted into her cell that Leia managed to shake off her shock.

In the confines of her prison, Leia began to pace the small space. This felt real. It was completely impossible and she had never even heard of such a thing happening. But this was no vision. She touched the walls, the smooth cold implacability of them. The background chatter she had heard on the way here. And the smells around her. Men in armor and being confined in to a small area with only recycled air. Generally, force visions didn't have smells associated with them. She punched her fist into the durasteel wall. Her hand immediately began to ache and pulse in pain. Not a dream.

She looked around, it was just as she saw it in her nightmares. The black walls with mica flecks. The top three feet of the ceiling in the front and back, leaning in to make the space feel even smaller than it was. There were the grates on the ceiling with the faint red light glow to them to be paralleled with the grates on the floor with the soft white light. There was the bench along the length of the far wall. No blankets or pillows to sleep on. The toiletries were in the corner. She shivered, the air was biting cold. Every detail, every scrap of this was meticulously correct.

“Think,” she whispered to herself. Panic wouldn't get her out of this. Making and implementing plans would get her out of this. Treat this as real. Believe it is real because everything around you says it is. Break this down into its component parts. She had no clue as to why she was here. Then it was irrelevant. Next problem. If she didn’t know how she got here she didn’t know how to get back. She would learn nothing here in this station about anything, so she needed to escape. What is your next step in order to do that? Vader will come along shortly and interrogate you for the location of the rebel base. You won’t give it. Tarkin will threaten Alderaan and….

Save Alderaan! Leia’s breath caught, she felt herself fall back onto the seat on the power of that realization. Her home was still here. It was still out there in the galaxy, she could save it. If this was real she could save them all. If this was real, she would be altering the timeline as she knew it in a fairly large way. She pondered this for all of two seconds. The damage was done, she realized. The timeline is already altered by her mere presence. There was no way she could stand by passively and let what happened unspool in front of her again. All she needed was time anyway. Luke, Obi-Wan, and Han... Her mind skittered away from that name, the pain so fresh her breath caught. Move on, if this is real he is alive, they were all still alive, and they were coming for her. Her presence here would have no effect on that sequence of events. She just needed to wait it out. She could give Vader Dantooine, like she had to Tarkin so long ago. After a bit of his mind probing let him see that information “accidentally”. No, she realized with a sinking dread, that wouldn’t work. The shields in her mind. The ones she had reluctantly let Luke teach her how to build. She had seen the sense at the time. Being able to keep out any unknown Dark side users certainly had its advantages. But now, they would doom her. Her shields were too good for an amateur, and she wasn’t skilled enough to hide them. Vader would know she had been trained. And his next question would be by whom.

Dropping them wasn’t an option either. There was so much she needed to keep from him. Both of
the Death Star’s fates, all the future plans of the alliance, General Kenobi, Yoda, Han, Ben, Luke, and herself. Yes, she had kept him out before, but then she was only trying to keep one thing from him. It had been like trying to keep a drop of water steady while someone was pushing her. Now she would be trying to keep a pool of water in her hands without spilling a drop. So, no torture, avoid torture by any means necessary.

So just tell him the name of the base when he walks in here. What would happen then? Vader was thorough, he wouldn’t just simply take her word for it. The moment his mind touched hers to confirm what she told him, Vader would know about the training she had gotten from Luke. She would be right back where she started. How to avoid that? The answer was there is no way to avoid it. She frowned, so what if she went the opposite way? What if she told him about them?

“Yes,” a voice in the back of her head that sounded of Han “Brilliant plan. Tell him you’re thirty-four years from the future and in that time some Jedi will teach you. I’m sure he’ll believe that.” She laughed at the ridiculousness of Vader’s reaction to that statement. Then she thought the scenario through fully. Why wouldn’t he believe her? She wasn’t lying, he would sense that. It definitely wouldn’t be anything he was expecting. Shock and curiosity might intrigue him enough to play along. She would have to be very careful and very clever to keep him away from subjects that would be dangerous to discuss, but it was doable. So buy for time, until Luke and Obi-Wan came for her. Do not get tortured, do not reveal anything important, do not lose your focus.

So, stick to telling the truth. From a certain point of view.

When he did come, Leia was forewarned by that dark cloud of power surrounding him. She felt the hairs on the back of her neck rise the closer he came. She stood up from the bench, where she had been meditating to steady her mind, and chose a position in the center of it. She wouldn’t cower in the corner this time.

The door opened and for a moment Leia forgot every lofty idea and thing she planned as his presence overwhelmed her. Earlier, on the flight deck, she hadn’t been this close to him. And she had been in such shock she hadn’t been paying attention to the details of him. They were coming back to her now. As he descended the stairs and came to meet her she wondered on how she could have forgotten that he actually was that tall. It wasn’t just her fear amplifying how he loomed over everyone. His mask, shaped to resemble a death head, with its sharp angles and inky black eyes, was close enough to a face, with an eerie lifeless look, to give anyone nightmares. Then there was the breathing, that steady and imposing sound that boomed even louder than normal in the small room. The noise of it sent shudders down her spine. She had forgotten, the steady rhythm of it. It was enough to drown out the increasing high pitch of the interrogation droid.

“And now your highness we will discuss the location of your hidden rebel base.” The door thumped closed behind him, in perfect time to his words. The theatricality of the gesture snapped Leia’s focus. She had to be here, not then. Then she noticed the two guards, dressed in black, standing at attention on either side of the door. She had forgotten about them, in her rush to prepare for the larger threat that Vader was.

“Is it still Imperial procedure that these ‘sessions’ she sneered the word “aren’t recorded?”

There was a pause “What?” Bafflement, she was off to an excellent start.

“Is this being recorded?” she asked again.
“No,” he informed her, speaking slowly “this is not.”

“Good,” she stated firmly. Now there was a sense of puzzlement. As if he was trying to guess what game she was playing. *Yeah, he’ll have good luck with that,* the voice of Han whispered on her mind.

“You are going to want to send them away.” she put on her best imperious voice that politics had taught her, as she waved at the guards.

“I will?” he seemed to be on surer footing.

“Yes, I have several things to say that you won’t want Tarkin to hear.”

“Blackmail?” now he seemed amused. “I thought the standards of a member of the Imperial Senate would preclude such an act.” Was the sarcasm really necessary, she wondered to herself.

“You are going to want them to leave,” she stated again. She didn’t need witnesses to this little dance, and the fewer people in the Empire who knew what she was going to say the better.

“Very well.” he dismissed them with a wave of his hand. The second one pulled out a small remote and the door whooshed open. Vader watched her, clearly trying to see if she was going to rush the door, but she merely stood and waited for the door to close before speaking again.

She pointed to the droid, which was beginning to hurt her ears with it’s high pitched tone. “That won’t work,” she stated flatly.

“I assure you, Princess, that it will.” that deep voice boomed.

She took a deep breath, centering her mind, and allowing her instinctive irritation at the title of Princess fall away. “When I say that it won't work I speak from experience, not conviction. This won’t work. Your droid pumps me full of drugs, that fails. You bang at my mental walls, that fails. Tarkin threatens Alderaan with this mechanical abomination. That also fails. I am not telling you where the base is.”

There was a pause “Experience?”

She snorted “Yes, I went to sleep on the worst day of my life and woke to find myself in the past on the second worst day of my life. As experiences go, I don’t recommend it.” She began to speak louder to compensate for the increasingly louder torture droid.

There was uncertainty around him now. He tilted his head studying her for a moment. Then he made a gesture and the droid ceased its insistent high-pitched whine. Leia sighed internally with relief. He had decided he wanted to play along.

“This is an interesting approach to avoiding interrogation.” he said.

“You think I am lying?”

“No,” he replied “You believe you are telling the truth. But a weak mind can find refuge in many different ways.”

She raised her eyebrow “You think I am weak minded?”

He paced three steps in front of her then the size of the cell forced him to stop and turn and face her. His arms clasped behind his back he stared at her “No,” he admitted, “I do not.”
She shrugged. “An impasse then.”

“What you claim is not possible.” he informed her.

She bit back her first response, took a calming breath, and settled for “Yet here I am.” she gestured to the cell around her.

“Why confess such a thing to me? If this is true, you have the events of the future at your disposal. That would make you a more valuable source of intelligence, not less.”

Well yes, but the alternative was worse. “You would have figured out something was wrong the minute you touched my mind.”

He huffed, and she felt the absent-minded feel of that power touch up against her shields. Then rage, bitter, sharp, and cutting, filled the Force. He straightened to his full height, and stalked up to her, his boots eating up the small space. Leia forced herself not to cower back as he came to a stop inches from her.

“You are a Jedi!” he hissed. Such loathing in that one word.

“No.”

“Your lies will not save you, your highness. Not here.”

“I am no Jedi.” she gave a short bitter laugh “But the Force is strong in my family.” She looked over his shoulder at the now quiet droid. She lifted a finger and it spun in a gentle circle, squealing in protest. She returned her gaze to his mask. “I will not be left defenseless on any battlefield Lord Vader. I was taught how to shield myself and to move small objects, no more. A few small tricks only.”

She could feel his rage cooling slightly and he pulled back, giving her a bit more space. “And who taught you?”

Now a real smile crossed her face “A very wise loved one.”

“The name of this Jedi? “ he demanded.

She shook her head. “No. There are many things I’ll tell you, but not that.”

He did that abortive walk again, clearly trying to think. She took a few breaths to calm herself, while he was distracted. Keep him off balance, keep him angry, but do not provoke that full throated rage. He would charge ahead and she would lose what little control she had in this situation.

“I am clearly dead in this future of yours.” he finally settled on.

She breathed out of her nose, “Yes.” trying to keep the triumph out her voice

“How?” he seemed resigned more than anything else.

She considered that for a moment, weighing the damage this could do. Then she mentally shrugged. Let the bastard know “Palpatine killed you.”

“I see.” he didn’t seem shocked by her answer. He continued his pacing.

Her eyebrow shot up. “You don’t seem surprised?” Mentally Leia berated herself. Stupid. Don’t
ask questions, just answer.

Now he shrugged “It is the sith way. There is a Master, and an apprentice. To achieve mastery the apprentice kills the Master. Failure to do so leads to the death of the apprentice.”

She stared at him “That is a horrible way to live.” Why was she still talking? She didn’t care about any of this.

“You wouldn’t understand the ways of the Dark side.” he intoned gravely “It’s true power is only for the strong.” She cocked her head, something was off about that statement. He wasn’t lying, not directly. He believed it. No, he said it like he should believe it. That was interesting. Let’s pull on this thread a little further.

“I was told that only the weak fell.”

He waved his hand dismissively “A lie the Jedi tell themselves. It is only the strong who survive the sith way.” He sounded like Ben then, in that last frantic conversation she had with him before he ran off. For a moment Leia felt the cell she was in closing in on her as her thoughts strayed to her son. He had sounded so lost and determined. She couldn’t make sense of the rambling monolog he had given her, and then the transmission had been cut off. By him, she later learned. Then, of course, she learned just what he had done before he placed that call to her.

She shook herself mentally. She hadn't expected these particular echoes in everything around her. Not here and now. In a conversation with Vader, of all people. But maybe that was the point. Maybe it wasn't just Alderaan she could save.

He had gone back to his pacing, still clearly trying to figure out what to do next. “Why did you fall?” she asked, hoping her voice was steady. This wasn’t initially where she imagined this conversation going, but needs must.

He stopped, and his head tilted to the side “What?” Confusion radiated off him.

“Why did you fall? What were you thinking?”

“You can not possibly be interested in joining me.”

So he clearly did understand that about her at least. But he could possibly have answers to some of the questions she had about Ben. There wasn’t anyone else she could ask, even in her own time. She had to be gentle here, though. Luke had told her how badly he reacted to being called by his old name. “You had another name, another life.” she clarified “Why walk away from that?”

Panic, sheer clawing panic. “You know who I was?” He was suddenly walking back from her as if she was unexpectedly a much more dangerous foe than he expected and he needed the distance.

She frowned. This wasn’t expected. She was expecting anger, or perhaps denial, not this overwhelming sense of helplessness. “Yes?” she answered uncertainly, not understanding the cause of his mood change.

The feeling only intensified. She found herself in the odd position of offering reassurance. Him panicking over this wouldn’t help her here. “I am not going to tell anyone. Who would believe me?”

His posture relaxed, a little. The pacing resumed, however, so he clearly believed her, but was uneasy that she knew. “I ask you again, who is your tutor?” Well, that was one of the least subtle subject changes she had heard. But until she understood the source of his panic she would play
“No one you have met yet.” she retorted.

“But I will meet them.” he pressed

“If I had my way, no. Their first encounter with you did not go well.”

“If I did not kill them on the first meeting then it went very well for them.” he informed her “There has only been one Jedi that has escaped me.”

She blinked in surprise and worked hard to keep it from showing on her face or in the Force. He was lying to her. That part was irrelevant. The more interesting issue was the subject of this lie. General Kenobi was, at this time, the only Jedi she knew who had escaped him. There were there others?

“Did the second encounter go better for them?” he followed up.

She thought of Luke’s haunted eyes and the nightmares that followed Endor. He had achieved one form of peace, but he paid a heavy price in other areas. “No”

“Because they will fail in trying to kill me?”

She snorted. “Who says they tried?”

“You were not lying before. The Emperor will kill me. So clearly this ‘wised loved one’ failed.” Again with the sarcasm.

She gave out a small laugh “Oh, no. Succeed in exactly what they were aiming for. Big goals, big heart, and a clear vision will get someone far in this life.”

“You love them. Dearly.” he seemed surprised. Was she somehow deemed incapable of love by some weird Sith metric?

She gave a small wan smile “My other half. And again I state, you will not learn their identity from me, no matter how many questions you ask around the edges.”

“Who taught them then? Or does this fanatic loyalty extend to everyone?”

“I find that life is often the best teacher.” she informed him primly.

There was a noise of irritation “Don't play word games with me.” There was a pause, as he was clearly thinking of likely possibilities “Was it Jarrus?”

Damn, now he was getting specific. “No, it was many people.”

“The Jedi are all but extinct. There are not many of them left that aren’t accounted for.” He paused for a moment, seeming to gather himself. “Ahsoka Tano?”

“No,” she said, surprised into giving a straight answer. She hadn’t know Fulcrum was a Jedi.

There was a long silence “Was it Obi-Wan Kenobi?” That name was said with a sense of anticipation. And there was a sense of longing? Yes, it was longing, swirling in the Force. Longing for what? Anticipation at the thought of killing Kenobi Leia understood, but longing?

While interesting, this line of thought was irrelevant. She didn’t see any way she could wiggle out
of this one. She didn’t want to disrupt this delicate dance between them by lying directly to him, and giving him Yoda’s name was out of the question. It didn’t much matter, in the long run, Kenobi was coming and the difference of a few hours wouldn’t mean much. She had known going in that he would probably come up.

“Yes.” she conceded.

There was an ugly sneer in his voice “He lives?”

“Do you feel that I am lying?” she sneered back.

“No.” He walked away from her, to the door as if he wanted to go out now and start the hunt. Leia blinked, just like that and the Rebel base was no longer important? Well if she had known that it was that important to him she would have told him about it first thing and sent him on his way to Tatooine. It would have bought her those hours she needed without having to endure his presence. By the time Vader reached that dustball, Kenobi and Luke would have been long gone.

He reached the door and then stopped. “Do you know where Kenobi is now?” So not so distracted that he didn’t want directions.

“No.” She had a good idea vaguely where he was, but not the particulars.

“No. I know where he has been hiding the last twenty years?”

Leia hesitated. Vader was from Tatooine. He might wonder the why of the General’s chosen planet of exile “Some outer rim world.”

“Like the one, we caught your ship circling?” he inquired.

Damn, he had put that together. “Yes.”

“Obi-Wan Kenobi spent the last twenty years on Tatooine?” he asked incredulously. “If I had designed a prison to hold him it couldn’t have been worse than that.” There was malicious glee in his voice now. Clearly, he held no love for his home world. Having been there Leia found herself in the odd position of agreeing with him. Between the Hutts, sand, and the hostile natives it was not a planet one spent time on voluntarily.

“What did he do to you?” she asked, curious despite herself.

“He is the reason I am in this suit.” So Luke had been told the truth about that. They had wondered. Well, she had wondered aloud and Luke hadn’t chastised her about questioning the veracity of it.

“His mistake then. He should have let you burn, then killed you.” she nearly bit her tongue. Where had that come from? Well, she knew where it had come from. It was just a lot harder than she anticipated being in this room with him. She took a breath, she had to stay focused. She could not let this get personal.

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“Such hatred your highness. I wonder why?” He pondered this a moment. “The force is strong in your family. Your parents?” he murmured, looking to her for confirmation, “One of them was a Jedi?” Now he was venturing into it.

A deep breath in. This is the truth, let him hear it, no matter how it stung personally. “My father.”

“Ahh, that would explain why Bail knew to forge your test results.” She shrugged. Truthfully she
had no idea how her father had gotten her around it. The blood test was mandatory for all Imperial citizens. This was safer ground to be on. She had nothing to say.

"And did I kill this man, Princess?" She cocked her head, startled, why had he jumped to that conclusion? "Is that the source of this rage towards me? Your long lost Jedi father?"

That was a little too close to the truth for comfort. She embraced the rage this question provoked and let the ice into her veins “You torture me, twice. Ripped apart my family, hunted down almost everyone I love, and left a poisonous legacy in your wake. Isn’t that enough?”

There was a snort of derision, for all that it was distorted by his vocoder. “Not for this, no. This is deeply personal for you, this hatred. I can sense it all around you."

She hissed “Yes, in a way I suppose you did destroy him.” Let him sit on that.

"I can tell you I probably took no pleasure in the act."

“And can I tell you what a great comfort that is to me.” she answered snidely.

“It was a necessary evil, the Jedi had lost their way. You would found your father a poor substitute to Organa.”

She laughed bitterly “On the whole, you're probably right about his fitness as a parent. That doesn't mean you were justified in what you did. My family isn’t the only one who was ripped asunder by you. The whole galaxy has paid for your decisions and I want to know why!"

“I owe you nothing. But why does this concern you so much?” his condescending tone grating on her nerves. Owed her nothing? He owed her everything.

“My son fell.” she shot back, losing control of her temper, and giving him the truth before she thought better of it. He paused, visibly surprised.

His head cocked “Then he is lost.” He didn't sound gleeful or triumphant, just matter of fact.

She shook her head in denial. “No,” she stated firmly “he is not.”

“It is not possible to return.”

“It is.” she insisted.

“Your highness, this is not a case where you can apply your will and make it happen. It is not possible.” he lectured.

But it is. You did it. She bit her tongue, that was not a revelation she could disclose without disastrous consequences.

“Are you afraid of the powers he has embraced?”

Was he being deliberately slow? Did he ever wonder about them? Plan and hope for hers and Luke’s future. “No,” she said slowly as if talking to an especially obtuse politician “He is my son. I want him to be happy. To fall in love. To laugh. To have joy. None of these things are what the Dark side offers.”

His sudden stillness at that statement was unsettling “Then he is fortunate indeed for such a mother.” There was a twinge there as if she struck something deep within him. Leia considered the basics of what Luke had known about their paternal grandmother. Shmi Skywalker had been a
slave. She had been freed and married her former master. She had been murdered by sandpeople. She had been held in high regard by Luke’s aunt. But Leia had never delved into any more than that with Luke. Now she was regretting that decision. Without knowing more she was reluctant to go forward on that point.

“How did he fall?” Vader asked. He genuinely seemed curious.

“Why do think I keep asking you?” she huffed.

“I have no answers for you. I fell when the Jedi betrayed the Republic.”

Oh, that was rich. “You betrayed the Republic.”

“You speak of things you do not understand.” he chided her.

“Because you won’t answer my questions. I don’t ask for my own amusement.” To buy time yes, but not for fun.

“You should ask your son.” he shot back, annoyed.

She gave him a disbelieving look “I would, but he doesn’t exist yet so that would be difficult.”

“Don’t be obtuse. You should have asked him then.” His anger was growing again, and she found hers rising to meet it at his deliberate evasion of her questions.

“I tried,” she hissed through gritted teeth “but all he said was he was embracing his destiny and he ran away.”

“Ran to where?”

She opened her mouth to answer and shut it closed when she realized she almost told him about the First Order. She had been so focused on following this thread that she almost forgot the point.

“Ah” he murmured “he found the Emperor didn't he?”

“A lecherous old man poured poison into his brain, yes.” she flung back.

“He has embraced the truth. You should too.” Darth Vader was lecturing her about personal truths? Han would have fallen out of his seat laughing if he had known.

“‘Yes, how noble, a government of thugs and tyrants. We should all aspire to such lofty heights.” she sneered.

“The Empire brings order. It brings peace.” he insisted.

“According to the Sith peace is a lie. That it's about power.” she retorted, using the little knowledge of Sith philosophy she possessed.

“There is no order without power.” he intoned, neatly sidestepping the thorny issues with Sith ideology “Without power, there is only chaos.”

Who exactly was he trying to convince with that line? “And the people who won’t and can't fall in line? Are they simply the collateral damage to your quest for order?”

“If they will not obey then yes, they brought it upon themselves.” Did he truly believe this nonsense? That even the smallest defiance brought about wholesale destruction? That this was the
price to be paid for galactic order?

She hissed “How convenient for you. Anything that opposes you is the enemy of peace, instead of simply wanting to live their lives and be left alone. And who are you to decide what is best for the entire galaxy?”

“Not me.” he said slightly mockingly “Someone wise.”

Her mouth fell open “Palpatine! Palpatine! You thought he would be a good choice for a dictator? Someone who cares for nothing but himself? You looked around a galaxy of sentient creatures and thought he was what was best for the galaxy?”

“He was all I was left with.” Her eyes narrowed, there was something there. Some thread of despair and grief that teased the edge of her senses. She shook herself mentally. No, that was not was she wanted or needed answered right now. It was time to bring this conversation back to its original question.

“I am not interested in a philosophical debate about tyranny versus democracy. I want to know why you fell.”

“You do have an extreme interest in events that happened long ago. Why do you care?” now exasperation was joining the anger from him.

“Do you see a plethora of fallen people around? Is there an abundance of Force users in this galaxy that I missed somehow? As much as it galls me, you are the only one I can ask. I need to understand what happened to my son.”

His hands fell to his belt as he considered this. “That isn't the whole truth.”

“You don’t have children,” Was that a flinch from him? “so maybe you can’t understand why I want him back. If I understand why you walked away from everything you had, maybe I can understand why he did too. Why he hurt me so badly?”

“You said you didn't talk to him after he fell. What did he do afterward to cause you such pain?” Of course, now he chooses to pay attention to what she told him. Then ask the most painful question of them all in the bargain. Her pain, the pain she had lived with since Luke told her about him since she had understood what had been stolen from her, since Ben fell to the same madness, since that madness had cost her everything she worked for, spilled over its dam in her mind. And with it came it’s twin emotion, her anger. She stared at the man who started all of this. He had thrown them away for some power mad sith and some skewed philosophy about order, power, and acceptable losses. Choices that everyone she loved were still paying for thirty years later.

“He killed his father!!” she howled, her frustration with him freeing her tongue. “He killed him and half a galaxy away I felt my heart being ripped out and couldn’t breathe from the pain. And I want to know why he turned his back on everyone who loved him. Betrayed everyone who loved him for the false promises of a deranged old man who did nothing but lie to him!”

His answering rage in the Force was shocking in its abruptness. She had gone too far. Something she had said ripped away his control and that simmered anger was now in full force. The voice coming through the vocoder dripped disdain and loathing “Your hatred of me pours through those oh so careful Jedi shields my lady. To you, I am the clearly the unredeemable monster and he is only ‘lost’. Yet what have I done that he has not? You ask and ask why I fell, but I tell you this your highness, the answer will not save your son. Not now and certainly not then.” He leaned down, his mask almost touching her. Leia felt her a tendril of fear travel down her spine, worried
for the first time that he might actually kill her before he learned anything useful from her. She wasn’t sure if he was aware of anything but of his desire to hurt her. “He is dead. What is walking in his place is not anyone you would give an ounce of compassion to under any other circumstances. Are you willing to extend the ‘mercy’ of your forgiveness simply because he is your blood? How hypocritical.”

Because he was her blood? It was because of her blood that the whole damn mess had started. Because of this towering dark mechanical half droid of a man. Who had killed her father, her mother, her planet. The amount of pain he had inflicted on the galaxy and the legacy of pain and betrayal he had left for her, Luke, and most especially for Ben. For a moment Leia was voiceless in her fury. And he dared to compare himself to Ben? It was his fault her son was even a target. Her snarled words were spit in his face, caution discarded as she went for the most damage she could inflict. “Jealous there was no one to forgive you for killing your wife?”

The Force contracted so sharply around Vadar it hurt to feel the whiplash of it. Then it snaked out and wrapped around her throat. Leia, in her panic, instinctively scrambled for the hands that weren’t there. “No,” she thought and forced her hands to drop. The left one formed a fist and for a moment she focused everything she was into it. With a definite gesture, she punched as hard as she could into the air in front of her. Vader cried out as the Force hit him in the solar plexus, shoving him clear across the room. Those invisible hands suddenly stopped. Gasping Leia sank to her knees, breathing in air and trying to ignore the fine tremors brought on by her rage.

“Why did you fall?” she rasped, her throat ached. There would be a ring of deep bruises around her neck later.

He didn’t answer her. Just leaned against the wall, orienting himself.

"Why?” she repeated as she slowly climbed back to her feet.

He shook his head in a silent denial.


“FOR HER!!” he screamed, loss and pain coming through even through the monotone, almost garbled into incoherency. “All I saw everywhere was her death. No matter what choice I made!! The Jedi only told me to accept the loss and let go. But Palpatine, he promised he could save her!! I lost my mother, I wouldn’t lose her!” Then the rage simply vanished as his head fell, exhausted, from its wake. “And it was for nothing.”

Leia knew this fear. Knew it in her bones, like an old unwanted ache. She had borne it through the long years of fighting the Empire. Through the years of ‘peace’ of the New Republic. Through the bitter slog with the First Order. When your entire world is taken from you, it leaves you with that fear. With that constant voice telling you to hold on as tight as you can, to those you love, for they will be taken away. Or worse, they will be used against you. Like Ben had been used against her. Like she had been used against Luke. Oh yes, she knew this, all too well. It was to live, driven by loss and pain so sharp you would do anything to make it go away.

“I failed.” he continued on “All I had left was me, Palpatine, and a galaxy in chaos. The Jedi made me a weapon, so a weapon in full I became. I would bring order to the galaxy. And I let nothing stand in my way.”

“You went back to what you knew,” Leia said hollowly.
“Yes.” he agreed dully, not reacting to her dawning horror about this facet of her personality. Maybe that wasn’t so surprising. The pain and grief that was around him scorched her mind. Had he ever truly mourned this loss? Had he ever confronted it at all in the last nineteen years? Or had he done the same as her, burying herself so deep so that she only had to dance around the edges of it?

For a moment, Leia felt sorry for him. For Vader, of all the people in the galaxy. Then the word “her” snagged in her mind, and the rage and pain came again. He hadn’t thought of them, hadn’t seen them.

“You bargained for her but not the child.” she spat, righteous indignation filling her.

Vader's head turned “The child?”

“Yes the child.” she repeated, annoyed at this dimness on his part.

“No,” he said in a slow measured way “I did not because Palpatine did not know.”

That was not the expected answer. Leia wasn’t sure how to process this. Vader hadn’t told Palpatine? Why?

He continued in that strange thoughtful way. “I didn’t tell anyone and neither did my wife.” Leia blinked. Why was it a secret? Why wouldn’t they tell anyone? Possible blackmail? Safety protocol? There was a war on. He had been a high profile General, and Padme had been as equally high profile in the political sphere. Leia knew, better than anyone, the vulnerabilities of having a young force sensitive child. “I am left to wonder how you know about my child. Or that I had a wife. It was forbidden among the Jedi, and neither of us told anyone.” Oh, no. She had misstepped. Badly. Luke hadn’t told her this bit about Jedi doctrine.

Leia’s heart jumped “My father told me.” she improvised. “He said she died with a child.”

He rose to his full height abruptly “That is a lie.”

Too close, too close, too close, the Force sang.

“Was it Obi-Wan?” uttered with such confidence. He thought she was protecting his former teacher. Well maybe in his eagerness to hunt the old Jedi down he would believe.

“Yes.”

He paused, clearly surprised “That is also a lie.” He crossed the room again, cape nipping at his heels. “You contain a font of information about me that almost no one knows. Even after my death, I can think of no reason you would go searching for this, or why. And when I ask for your source, this half honesty you have been dealing in dries up and you spit out lie after lie.” He grabbed the sides of her head between those strong metal hands, forcing her to look at him. She could feel no give beneath the leather gloves.

“I didn’t go searching,” she protested “After your death, I wanted nothing to do with you or anything about you.”

His head tilted “That is the truth.” She let out a small breath of relief, but he continued relentlessly “Someone felt you did need to know. Who was this person and why did they tell you?” Leia could feel those cybernetic fingers flex against her head in frustration. Her mind spun and she focused her eyes over his shoulder in a desperate attempt to avoid his gaze. The truth could not be said. Yoda was a name she could give. In the shock of that revelation maybe he would buy it. She discarded
that thought. It wasn’t even close enough to the truth for him to believe her. She had hit some
deeply personal spots for him and he clearly wanted to eliminate the person who had such
vulnerabilities on him. Maybe Mon Mothma would work. She had told them about Padme. As
long as she avoided why Mon felt the need to tell her, Leia wouldn't be putting her in any more
danger than she was already in. She opened her mouth and the fingers around her head abruptly
stopped their punishing pressure.

Her eyes flew back to his mask. He hadn’t released her, his hands still cupped her head but he was
so still, except for his breathing. The Force, which had been swirling around them with his
emotions just stopped. Leia felt like she had been taken out of a hot summer day and emerged into
the stillest pool imaginable. Gently, he pushed her head from one side to another, examining her.
She could feel his focus, laser sharp, and for a second, just a second, she thought she saw a
shadow of where his eyes were.

No. A voice, not her’s and not Luke’s, rang in her mind, filled with horror.

His hands released her head. They gently, so gently, reached down and they traced her neck.
Exactly where he had only moments before been throttling her.

No. It said again, filled with denial now.

He backed away, stumbling in his haste. The Force, outside of that calm pool, was a maelstrom of
too many emotions for Leia to identify.

NoNotAgainNoNotAgainNoNotAgainNoNotAgain. Was the wail of despair that echoed in her mind.

Leia flinched at the loud crack sound as it reverberated in the room. She looked around at the
walls as a spider web of cracks spread out along them.

“Did he know?” he choked out in a weird stuttering rhythm.

Oh Force please, please, please. Too late... “Did who know?”

“My alternate, did he know you were his daughter?”

Leia shut down. She sat blindly down on the bench behind her and curled in on herself as she
simultaneously made herself as small as she could in the Force. Waiting for the blow to come.

“I see.” is all he said. Then he turned around and motioned for the door to open and walked out.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Wow, I’ve been so blown away by all the kudos, thoughtful insights and kind words. Seriously thanks to all of you. I hope you enjoy!

Leia sat on the bench trembling. She tried to focus on breathing as she didn’t seem to be taking in enough air. She looked down to see her hands shaking uncontrollably and her leg bouncing up and down. Adrenaline surge, she thinks distantly, brought on by the fight or flight reflex. Trouble was there was no one here to fight, and she most definitely couldn’t take flight.

Cold sweat broke out all over her body, making the cold room feel like it was freezing as her skin temperature cooled even further. What had she done? Where had she gone wrong? He would tell the Emperor, she would be taken to Coruscant. Then everything would fall apart. Luke had told her once that the Emperor was far more skilled then Vader at probing one’s mind. Palpatine would learn everything she knew. Everything! Luke, Obi-wan, Yoda, all the future plans of the Alliance. Hell, there were probably details that she had forgotten that he could extract that would prove vitally important.

She needed to get out. She was trapped here. There was nowhere to go and Vader knew about her. The second best kept secret of the galaxy and Vader knew! How had he figured it out? She had been so careful! Hadn’t she? That didn’t matter. She needed a plan. Then she thought of her last plan and her mind circled back to the question of what had she done? And the whole vicious cycle repeated itself in her head.

“Focus,” she whispered to herself. “Dammit focus.” She stood up and began pacing the cell, in an effort to use the energy the adrenaline surge had given her. She needed to save the rest of this break down for later. Vader knew, soon the Emperor would know, and she had gambled everything for nothing, her panicky thoughts reminded her. How was she supposed to focus on anything but that?

That was not the problem at hand. She would worry about that later because focusing on that part now would do her no good. Later, when she was free of here, she would deal with the fallout of this. Right now her best option, hell her only option, lay in escaping. Modify the plan she had. She had no plan. Then she needed to come up with one. What were her assets right now in this cell? Leia sat back down on the bench and began taking deep breaths, trying to force her breathing to fall back into a more natural rhythm as she tried to somewhat get a hold of herself. Assess the situation, this is no different than any battle where everything has gone to hell and you need to make major adjustments on the fly. Treat this as a scenario you know and are familiar with.

She was in a cell on the Death Star. Disadvantage. Vader wasn’t currently torturing her. Advantage. He also wouldn’t be telling Tarkin that it was taking too long. Advantage. Tarkin would not be heading to Alderaan. Advantage. That part had gone according to plan, Alderaan wasn’t in any immediate danger. Even the disaster that conversation had turned into, there had been one objective that had been achieved. Vader’s unexpected departure had caused another problem, though. The interrogation had been too short, which meant Luke and Obi-Wan weren’t due for hours. Her entire world might have been rocked to its very foundation, but she doubted if that it had been more than thirty minutes since Vader had entered her cell.
She didn’t have hours, and that estimation was based on her remembering correctly. Something niggled at the back of her mind at that thought. She leaned back against the cell and tried to center herself. Closing her eyes she began to focus on her surroundings. The hard bench beneath her, the biting cold air that was making her shiver, the unevenness of the grate beneath her feet. After a few moments, she felt the technique work as her mind began to exit its spiral of recrimination. What was she not remembering correctly? What had she overlooked when she threw this together? Recreate the events, from another perspective then. Luke’s family bought the droids. R2 had escaped, Luke and C3PO followed, they all ran into Obi-wan. Luke’s family had been killed, they hired Han to bring them to Alderaan. They found the Death Star instead.

Leia’s eyes flew open and she sat straight up. They had been heading to Alderaan. That is how they ended up at the Death Star. A planet that the Death Star was not currently orbiting or even heading to, thanks to her alteration. Leia had no idea where it was, but that didn’t matter. They weren’t coming here. In her fear and panic of finding herself here, she had overlooked the most basic element to her initial escape from the Death Star.

Is that where she had made her fatal mistake with Vader? Thinking she knew more than she did? Or worse yet, not accounting for the extra thirty years to fuzz the edges of her memory? She knew this room, intimately, it had featured in her nightmares for years. She had not forgotten one single horrible thing about it. But as to the rest of it? If so, she was paying for her hubris now. This was her worst nightmare come to life. Vader was alive and he knew, and she was stuck here. She felt her breath began to shorten again as that thought once again echoed loudly in her mind.

If she couldn’t trust her own memories of what happened, could she trust anything? If she was capable of forgetting a major detail as that, what else was she missing? Her fear began once again to eat at her mind, and she desperately fought for her self-control. She didn’t have time for this.

When the door opened her head whirled so fast she almost saw stars. Then she cursed herself for not paying attention. But the action was enough for her instincts to come to the forefront. With something else to focus on, it was enough to break her mind once again out of its spiral. She braced herself, only to find three imperial officers standing at the entrance instead of Vader. She let out a small sigh of relief, then berated herself for, once again, letting her fear eat at her good sense. She would have felt Vader approaching. He did not have the most subtle of presences.

They entered the room quickly and again the door came down with that ominous thump. The one in front was a lieutenant, ISB, if she was reading his bars correctly. He was dressed in the drab olive gray uniform of a commissioned officer. He was flanked by two non-commissioned officers, dressed in black, their faces slightly obscured by their elongated round helmets.

“What did you say to him?” the officer in charge asked without any preamble.

“Excuse me?” She sat up straighter, tense and wary. This wasn’t how she expected any conversation at this point would go.

“What did you say to him? Lord Vader is barely in here, then comes stamping out, killing the two guards on the door and left the detention area.” He was watching her face intently, for her reactions. Then his eyes widened in shock and moved off her face to the wall behind her. She was puzzled to what he found so fascinating about the walls until her eyes fell on the ones on either side of the door opposite of her. Those strong walls that were probably built to withstand laser tools, looked oddly pretty with the cracked damage. The amount of power it had taken to do something like that was not something to be dismissed. Leia shivered as she realized how easy it would have been for him to turn that rage onto her. The lieutenant was clearly coming to the same conclusion. His face ashen, he turned slowly in a circle, surveying the room, noting how extensive the damage
spread. His voice wavered as he continued “Even for him, this is extreme behavior.”

Why in the hell would they care? It couldn’t be about the troopers. Vader had a reputation of killing his subordinates who failed him, this behavior couldn’t be that uncommon? Well no, the guards in the hallway hadn’t failed in anything. She was still here wasn’t she? Think this through as an Imperial. Why would Lord Vader kill them? Were they potential witness? Convenient targets for his rage? Practice? There had to be a reason for this impulsive action. And someone, somewhere, had decided they wanted to know that reason. Especially if they were already on the lookout for a soft spot or a bit of leverage on Vader.

“Not this one,” she thought, taking in his nervous body language “he is too far down the chain of command to take such a risk.” That left only one other option that was here on this station. “Tarkin sent you,” she said flatly.

“Yes,” he answered uneasily, clearly not liking the position this fishing expedition had placed him in. Caught between the two most ruthless commanders in the Imperial hierarchy. Vader would kill him if he found out he had been digging. Tarkin would kill him if he failed to get an answer.

“The Grand Moff is quite curious to what subject you brought up that has Lord Vader so angry.” He pointed to the device still hanging in the air mute, the solution of drugs still clearly visible in its needle “And since it’s clear that Vader didn’t use the droid, there are a whole host of subjects you and I will be discussing besides that one.” The color was returning to his face and his tone had slid into gleeful by the end. Clearly, this was someone who enjoyed the dirtier aspects of his work.

Wonderful, torture was back on the agenda. Well, she wasn’t going to tell this overconfident nitwit anything. That’s all she needed, Tarkin to find out about her parentage and weigh in on this fiasco. The fates only knew what he would do. Although it would be interesting what Vader would do to him in return, the cold analytical part of her mind whispered at her. If this whole situation hadn’t involved her life, she would have been delighted to have sown such dissension in the highest of the imperial ranks.

Then Leia focused behind her interrogator to the two guards flanking him. Their body posture was loose and relaxed. They clearly were here as a matter of protocol, not because they believed she was any danger to them. She frowned, it had been years since anyone hadn’t taken her as a real physical threat. Well, why would they? She was a spy, yes, but also a politician, and a very young one at that. She wouldn’t read to them as someone who would have enough training or knowledge to pose any real danger to them. They had no idea at all that Leia had spent years with the Rebellion, and then the Resistance. She was trained, experienced, and most of all desperate to get off this hell forsaken base.

Leia eyed the two soldiers, considered her options, and picked the one on her right as the best choice. She got up slowly from the bench, purposely keeping her posture loose and relaxed. She walked into the Lieutenant’s personal space and tilted her head up to look him directly in the eyes “Do you really want to know what I said to him?”

“Yes, traitor, I would.”

She gave the intelligence officer her best sunny smile and figured the truth would be enough to buy her the reaction she needed. “Lord Vader figured out that I am his biological daughter.”

The officer actually took a step back in his shock. More importantly, at least to her, the two guards swung their heads to her and seemed momentarily stunned. “What now?” the Lieutenant asked in a high pitched voice.
Leia took advantage of that precious moment of confusion and rammed her fist into the officer’s face. He cried out, backing away from her as his hands instinctively went for his nose, the blood already beginning to gush. Leia quickly grabbed the gun from the guard on her right and brought it up to fire at his companion on the other side of the room. The guard dropped to the ground as the blaster bolt hit him straight through the heart.

The guard whose gun she stole, managed to regain his wits and grab the arm holding the blaster. She dropped it immediately and twisted into his grip, bringing herself forward so they were face to face. She brought herself closer in so she could ram her knee into his crotch. He gave out a cry and his hand instinctively loosened the grip on her arm. He crouched over in front of her and Leia quickly grabbed his chin and the back of his helmet. With a quick jerk, she snapped his neck.

Letting him fall to the ground she recalled her stolen blaster using the Force. The officer was just recovered enough to start reaching for his own weapon. Without hesitation, she shot him in the chest and he too slumped to the ground.

Panting, this body was not in the best physical shape, she waited to see if the soundproofing held. When there were no alarms or pounding footsteps she placed the blaster on the bench and got to work undressing the shorter guard. She undid her side buns and quickly wrapped her hair into a bun sitting low on her head. That finished she stripped off her ceremonial white dress.

She ripped a strip of cloth from the bottom of her dress to make a makeshift breast binder. While females weren’t unheard of in the Imperial ranks, they were rare and they were almost never troopers of any kind. Hopefully, the ridiculously shaped helmet would hide her face from too close of an inspection. And it would give her the illusion of being several inches taller than she was.

The uniform wasn’t a great fit, too long in the leg and arms. The boots were bit bigger than she would prefer, but it would take a while for any blisters to form and she hoped to procure a replacement uniform before it came to that. The extra room on the sides of her leg did help as she stuffed the extra length of the pants down them. Hopefully, the ill-fitting uniform would give her some necessary padding to hide her slim build.

The sleeves were a bit too long but she would just walk with them clasped behind her. For someone who only wore black bare boned robes, the Emperor was fond of making the people around him parade in ridiculous outfits. Leia had no fond memories of the parties of the Imperial senate and court. The outfits were over the top, usually had enough feathers to kill a small flock of birds. Or so much fabric the person in them could barely exit a room without a personal entourage to help them. And these uniforms were the height of impractical. Looked scary as hell, a real liability in the field. This helmet reduced her visibility by at least a third. Even if the uniform had fit her correctly, the sleek lines and super close fitting would cut down her motion range. Even if they were very professional looking Leia preferred soldiers who could move.

She searched the officer's pockets for the remote access key. Imperial prisons didn’t have any interior panels to access the door. There was always a remote key on the highest ranked official, in case a quick exit was needed. She found it in his right pocket. She straightened up and headed a little left to the door, giving herself the smallest profile she could from the outside. She took a deep breath, released it slowly and brought the blaster up. As ready as she could be she signaled the door to open.

There were no guards. She really hadn’t expected there to be any. Tarkin was limiting the amount of people who would be questioned by Vader about this “interrogation”. Given how much time the people at the top spent sabotaging each other’s efforts it was a wonder anything got done. The New Republic might have been hampered by bureaucratic infighting but the Empire was no better. And at least in the new government odds were good you would walk away from a screw up alive. Well,
it had. She shoved thoughts of the fate of the Hosnian system out of her mind. It was fine, Alderaan was fine, Han was alive. If you want it to stay that way get moving.

She entered into the pentagon shaped alley, holstering the blaster as she walked, heading for the monitoring station. She kept her stride purposeful, but slow. Odds were fifty-fifty there would still be guards out there too. But there were definitely cameras in the room and any quick movements and running would catch someone’s attention somewhere. When she came to it, she let out a sigh of relief. For the first time since she had woken up, luck was on her side, there was no one here. She scooted around to the middle console and quickly brought up the footage of her cell. She needed to erase the last five minutes of footage…..and apparently, the trio of agents had already taken care of that. She was staring at herself, sitting on the bench, looking pale and wan. She mentally notched up the interest Tarkin had in this. He clearly had gone to a lot of effort to hide from bureaucratic eyes that he sent those men into her cell. She wondered idly if he would have killed all three of them even if they had gotten her to talk. She shrugged, not her concern. The clock in her head was warning her to go and she walked to the elevators, leaving the level she was on.

Leia was too practiced at walking through places where she didn’t belong to let the fact that she didn’t belong here throw her. She strode forward as if this was the corridors of the Resistance base on D’Quar. No, her problem was the damn architecture. She wanted to gawk at the decor, with its black shiny floors, gray walls in it’s three exciting shades, with the circular red emergency lights along the hallway. The retro feeling of everything was casting a sheen of unreality to this. She understood she was in the past, but now she felt like she was walking into it, and it was unnerving as hell. When she came across a group of officers, she consciously had to avert her eyes, as she realized she was gawking. The imperial uniforms of drab gray-green were the same as her now dead lieutenant, but it had been years since she had seen this many in one place. The stormtroopers in their shiny white armor were also reading as fake to her. It wasn’t until she realized she was expecting the First Order’s version, with its subtle difference in design, did she understand why they were also contributing to the unreality of all of this.

She walked down the hallways, aiming to move outwards. She needed a hanger bay and she needed a terminal near it. Perhaps it was petty, but shortly after his death, the Alliance had cracked several Imperial routines. Tarkin’s last authorization code had been among the info dump. Leia had memorized it as a reminder to herself that even the most powerful could be brought down. She was somewhat smug in the fact that if she did make it off this base, it would be with Tarkin’s help. Being petty could sometimes save your life.

After about five minutes she found a port window, overlooking a hanger bay. There were three Lambda-class shuttles, sitting in the hanger. It was a vehicle capable of lightspeed jumps. They weren’t fast, but Leia couldn’t afford to be choosy at this point. Grinning to herself she moved along the passage till she found a small alcove with a small bank of terminals for general use. Sitting in front of the terminal closest to the door she quickly entered into the system and looked for a floor plan of where she was. There was a supply closet not far from her that contained overstock of uniforms. Memorizing the location she then switched to the flight logs and selected the ship in the hangar that had been most recently been refueled. Creating an order, with Tarkin’s code as the authorized override, she set it for a departure in twenty minutes. She then wiped the logs as best she could. She stood up, and then made her way down the corridors until she found the supply closet.

When she entered the closet she found it unoccupied, much to her relief. She grabbed an olive gray officer's uniform, quickly changed her clothes, and placed the black uniform, folded, in a pile with
the others. Placing the helmet on a shelf lined with them she wished there was a shiny surface where she could check the neatness of her bun. She pulled the collar up, as high as it could go, hoping it would cover the bruises that were beginning to make their presence felt. Hopefully, the skin was just red, not blue and black yet, but she was running out of time on that problem. Leia snorted, she was running out of time on a lot of problems. She pulled the standard cap over her head and headed to the hanger.

When she arrived she gave the flight number to the mechanic on duty. After checking his orders, he waved her to the ship. Allowing herself a little more speed than necessary she hurried over to the open ramp. “Wait a minute.” a voice called out from behind her, full of authority. Leia swallowed her groan. Great, the deck officer wanted to chat.

“Yes sir.” she answered as respectfully as she could muster as she turned around to face him.

He was, as far as Leia could tell, in his mid-forties. Average height for a human, with mousy brown hair, had a few burn scars across his left cheek, and an attitude that he didn’t appreciate anyone messing in his little fiefdom.

“Where do you think you are going in such a rush?” he asked.

Leia inwardly groaned. The honest answer was “Well you see officer I need to get out of here before anyone realizes I’ve broken out of my cell.” She replied with “I was ordered to fly this shuttle to the Caamas Sector.”

“Yeah, I got the order. Still, doesn’t explain you moving out of here so quick,” he grumbled, clearly affronted by this disruption of his day.

“Look, sir, on any other day I would be more than happy to let you give me a hard time and dress me down and do whatever you want, but by any chance did you see who sent the orders down for this flight?” she asked, playing the part of harried minion.

He gave an indignant huff as he looked down at his flight manifest “I don’t care what uppity Admiral thinks that he can just snap his fingers and…” his voice trailed off as he registered Tarkin's authorization on the order.

“Exactly sir,” she said, putting a little bit of pleading in her tone “look this is my first post, I was ordered to do this and got pulled out of my meal break. I was told put a hustle, move fast, and don’t ask questions. I’m just trying to avoid the boot coming down on my head if I can at all help it.”

He swallowed, sympathy replacing his earlier irritation. “Yeah, I don’t blame you. Get going, I’ll tell the tower to clear your path.”

“Thank you.” she said, letting her gratitude suffuse her voice “I owe you a drink when I get back.”

“Yeah yeah.” he said jogging off, Leia continued her ascent up the ramp.

She ran through the preflight routine and switched on the comms “Control tower this is flight alpha-delta-eighteen requesting permission to depart.”

“Departure granted flight alpha-delta-eighteen. Your path is clear to the meridian point where you are clear to enter hyperspace.”

“Acknowledged.” Leia fired up the engines and left the Death Star behind her, nothing but relief in her.
In hyperspace, Leia sat trembling for a few minutes as the adrenalin surge she had been fighting off and on for hours finally was allowed to move through her system. She had a bit of time before she reached Caamas and she could use every precious minute of it to calm the hell down. She removed the cap from her hair and threw it onto the console. She could feel the worry and the fear building and she took a few centering breaths. This was not the time, she still had a while to go before she could give into her shock, but on the plus side, she was no longer on the Death Star. So there was that bit of good news to cling to.

She couldn’t go to Yavin, not yet. Vader was going to get over his shock at her parentage soon if he hadn’t already. With her no longer available for questioning he would go to the next best thing, Bail. Not to mention that without its destruction Obi-Wan, Luke and Han- and on that name her grief came rushing to the surface. He’s alive, dammit, focus on that.

They would all be there. That was a disaster waiting to happen. She had chosen the Caamas system for it’s proximity to Alderaan, it would only add an hour to the total trip time, hopefully, she would beat him there. Since she had used Tarkin’s own personal code, there would be no shuttle logged as stolen. They could spend hours in a futile attempt to find her on the station.

So that left her with a plan that hopefully wouldn’t lead Vader, or Tarkin, to think that home is where she had run too. Drop into the planned destination, program the navicomputer for Alderaan, destroy the tracking transponder and jump out. Without anyone actually looking at her trajectory it would be hard for them to pinpoint where the ship had fled to.

She darted underneath the flight console to check and yes, the standard transponder was there. She would wait until she arrived at her jump point to yank it out. Some of the newer models had alarms that went off if tampered with and she couldn’t get a good look it from this angle to determine which kind she was dealing with. No matter, it could wait. Shoving herself back up to her feet she wondered if there was any food on this ship. Her stomach was growling and she needed something to do so her mind wouldn’t dwell on the last two days.

She was surprised by the sob that broke out of her. “Not yet.” she talked to herself, as her chest constricted with the feeling of immense pressure. “No breakdowns until we are heading to Yavin.” There was an increasing amount of items on that breakdown list, but she shoved it aside. She needed to focus, get to Alderaan, get everyone she loved off it, and head to Yavin. It was the safest place in the Galaxy she could think of, a place where Vader couldn’t find her. She had been a soldier for too long not to take this opportunity to eat and rest and she moved to the back of the shuttle in search of just that.

When the console beeped with the proximity alarm, she awoke groggy and confused. She was looking up at a gray dull ceiling in what her muddled brain swore was an Imperial shuttle. This was not a nightmare she was familiar with having. Puzzled, she started to straighten up, only to find none of the expected aches and complaints from her back in payment for sleeping on a hard floor. Leia bolted straight upright as the details came flooding back. That beeping was the proximity alarm to Caamas, it was time to get to work.

It was somewhat anti-climatic. Leia had dropped into the system, and she had been hailed. Gave her flight code, and was given a wait time and vector to approach the planet. She had seen the green light of the navicomputer blink on, dropped under the console ripped out the transponder and destroyed it with a satisfying crunch. She hadn’t even heard a call from control as she punched it out of there. Only twenty minutes left and she would be home.
Leia felt herself fidgeting and barely able to hold still in her chair. Her thoughts were whirling in a confusing mixture of hope and disbelief. What if Tarkin had come here immediately after discovering her missing and demanded she show herself or he would destroy the planet? What if Vader decided to come here to grab Bail before continuing to talk to her? What if this was not her timeline but one very similar to hers and everyone was already dead? What if, despite all mounting evidence aside, this was a dream and she would wake up just when she got there? When the console beeped again with its approach warning Leia, with no little feeling of apprehension, dropped out of hyperspace.

Alderaan filled her viewscreen. It hung there, a shining orb of blue and white. The mountain ranges, that were so famous throughout the galaxy for their beauty topped with snow. The wide oceans, with their deep blue, framed the continents. The Isatabith rain forest, with its light green canopy, that she could see the entirety of from space. Leia didn’t even try to suppress the sob that came out of her mouth. She tentatively reached out a hand to the glass, stroking the image that she could see there, in all its wonderful full dimensional glory. This was no holo-recreation. This was real, it was here, and she was home. After thirty-four years of exile, she was getting to come home. It was not a field of asteroids that was even now starting to form a ring around the sun. Or will start forming a ring. Or, and her breath caught on this, or never become that desolate sight if she succeeded in this.

She shook herself out of her euphoria, this was only the first step. She could revel in all of this later. For now, she had a mission that needed to be filled or this was all for naught. She was hailed by the local control tower.

“Unidentified shuttle, please state your name and purpose.”

“This is phoneix eight two nine. I am here to see the Prince consort and Queen. It’s a surprise package they have been expecting.”

There was a long pause at the other end as her phrase, identifying her as a friendly in a hostile ship, and identity code as the princess was absorbed. Then the voice came back on “The path is clear. I’ll inform them.”

She turned her controls to the main continent and the mountain range where the royal palace was located. As she approached her tension mounted up. They were here. Papa and Mama were here. She didn’t know what to do with the riot of emotion rolling through her. As she approached the landing pad, located south of the palace, she noticed the other familiar vehicle parked there. It was the Millenium Falcon. Leia was surprised by the feeling of tears forming in her eyes. They were all here. Except for Ben, her entire family were here and so gloriously alive.

She landed and quickly shut the shuttle down. She ran into the bay, lowering the exit ramp, cursing under her breath at its slowness. Even before it completed it’s journey down she was moving, and as soon as she hit the ground she was running towards the entrance to the main building on the far side.

Mid-way there two figures came out of the door. Bail was first, and the moment he saw her he started running his long legs eating up the ground. Breha gathered the front of her skirt in one hand and followed. Leia continued to run until her father’s arms were around her. “Papa,” she whispered brokenly, returning the embrace as tightly as she could. Her mother's arms wrapped around her from her back, and she cried. The feeling of them pressed so close, she could touch them, was touching them, was almost more than Leia could bear.

“Please don’t let this be a dream.” As she clutched them tighter to her, she prayed to whatever had improbably brought her here, “Please, please, let me keep this.”
Well this took a lot longer then I was expecting. Real life came up and bit my ass hard. I'm still working on it going forward, but as always I can't guarantee when the next one goes up. On a much cooler note isaakfvkampfer did a translation of my fic into Chinese, which was super kind of her. I'm not sure how to get the link to appear at the bottom as a related work so if I'm overlooking something super obvious please let me know. ETA Link is in the notes at the bottom. Minor, and I do mean minor, Rouge One Spoilers.

Leia wanted nothing more in the world to stay here. This, right here, was a place that she had so longed for, dreamed for, to have it suddenly available to her was almost too much. If this impossible thing could happen, maybe she needn't worry about anything else. Just for this moment. It was that thought that broke through her joy. She knew better, her long life had taught her better. If she wanted to keep this she needed to gather her wits and fight for it. She pulled back from her parents and they both faced her concern written on their faces.

Bail, his voice shaking, asked “Leia, what happened? The last official word we heard was your ship had been raided and all aboard were killed. Then General Kenobi arrived, not twenty minutes ago and told us that you had been taken by the Empire. How did you escape?”

She shook her head “That doesn't matter. We need to leave.” She turned from them, intending to start the walk to the palace to get Kenobi and her brother.

“Leia” Bail said soothingly, catching her arm “I understand you’ve probably had a very trying experience. But I need to know what happened. Did you reveal anything to the Empire?” And just like that, the concerned parent was overtaken by the Rebellion leader. She had done the same thing too often in her own life to take offense.

“Vader caught me, took me to the Death Star, and I escaped.” She avoided answering about how she escaped, she didn't have the time now to go into this. She pulled her arm, trying to escape his grip. “All you need to know is we need to leave, and we need to leave now.”

“No Leia,” Bail shook his head “You need to leave. Preferably with General Kenobi as an escort. Your mother and I need to stay here and mitigate the damage to our people.” Now his voice changed to his lecturing tone “I appreciate, as your father, that when you ran you first thought to come here. But I had thought you knew better, you should have jumped to a more neutral location and then headed to Yavin. You have placed us all in danger.”

For a moment Leia was flabbergasted. While she understood, from his point of view, it did look like she had made a rookie mistake, she was irritated that her father would think she would ever make such an error. Yes, the first thing most people do when fleeing for safety is to run to a place that was known to them. But she would have never made such an error, not even when she actually had been nineteen. He trained her better than that. “You don’t understand,” her fear was catching up with her now, making her voice shriller “All of us need to leave this planet. You need to give the order for all the servants to scatter and burn everything. This is not a guess on my part, Vader is
coming. And he’s coming for both you and Mama.”

Breha spoke up in a soothing voice “You can’t know that Leia.”

“I can and I do. I don’t have time to explain. Just please trust me.” She couldn’t tell them everything, they think she had run mad. Hell, she was living it and she wasn’t a hundred percent certain she could trust her sanity. And they didn’t have time to argue about any of it.

Bail’s face revealed his skepticism “You're letting your fear of him rule over your sense. Why would Vader come here looking for me? Especially since it sounds if he didn’t have time to interrogate you?”

She gritted her teeth, they weren’t listening to her. All they saw was their nineteen-year-old daughter who had a traumatic experience and was babbling at them. She had no idea if a bit of the truth would be faster, but it might be enough of a shock to get them to go.

“Vader knows Papa.”

Bail frowned “Knows what?”

“He knows that I’m his biological daughter.” she said flatly.

Bail paled, “What?” Breha let out a sharp gasp.

“I came here for you.” she pointed at her father for emphasis “I couldn’t trust this intel over the comms. I came here to tell you to flee. Once he realizes I am no longer on the Death Star, you are his best option for information.”

Bail swayed, shock written all over his features. Breha stepped towards Leia, tentatively asking “He told you that you were his daughter. And you believed him?

Leia felt disbelief bleed through her. She had just told them their worst nightmare had come true and her mother's first reaction was to lie to her? For what, to protect her? It was too late for that, thirty-four-years too late. “It’s not a question of believing him or disbelieving him.” she told Breha flatly “I know it’s the truth.”

Bail made a pained noise “When did you find out?”

“Does that matter right now?” she asked exasperatedly.

Bail shook his head “No Leia,” he said shakily “It matters. This matters more than you can possibly know. It is the most heavily guarded secret in the galaxy. How did you learn it?”

She glared at him, that wasn’t even close to the truth. “I thought that was Luke. Although, if that’s the case, letting him keep the last name Skywalker was putting a giant target on his back. Knowing how Vader feels about Tatooine you might have been smart leaving him there, but overall I’m not sure how much thought you and Kenobi put into this whole plan.”

Breha admonished “Leia!” at her scathing tone but her father’s face drew in itself “You know about Luke?” he asked

“I know a lot of things. The most important being we do not have time to spend arguing about this. We have to go.”

Bail nodded quickly “You are right, Vader will come. We will discuss the rest of this latter.” He
turned around and quickly headed back to the entrance to the palace. She followed with her mother close behind her.

She followed her father down the corridors of her childhood home. For a second the sensation of vertigo overcame her and she couldn't figure out where she was. She fought down the panic. This was home, this is where she wanted to be. It was here, whole and in one piece. This was a long-denied dream then why was she feeling like a stranger, a ghost really, walking among its familiar passages?

They entered the great stateroom of the palace. She stopped at the edge of the grand arch leading into the room and stared in wonder. She had forgotten, how had she forgotten, the sheer scope of the room, with it’s two-story high arched ceiling. The clear windows that lined the four walls reached almost as high, bathing the room in the natural light of the setting sun. The warm clear marble that lay on the floor was the work of master craftsmen, laid out with contrasting patterns in various shades of blue. It was wide and welcoming, the work of generations of Alderaanian rulers. It was the history of her people, bright, open, welcoming, with innate grace and power, writ large.

Breha gave Bail a quick glance and said hurriedly, “I’ll handle the evacuation order and get our affairs in order.” She sailed past them, going on into the hallway leading further into the palace.

As Leia stared in wonder at a sight she never thought to see again, her roving eyes landed on the occupants standing in the middle of the room. There, within the confines of her home, were General Kenobi, C3PO, R2 and Luke. She slipped into the shadows of the room, not sure she could trust herself right then on her reactions That’s all that was needed now, her sobbing all over everyone.

Luke, she studied first. Her brother was a bright beacon in the slowly fading light, with his all white tunic, and matching pants. His blonde hair shined in the light and he was discussing something with Obi-Wan before Bail pulled the older man away. Luke stood there, looking a little lost as stood alone in the huge imposing room. Luke was here. Luke with his presence in the force soothing her in a way that was difficult to explain. She had often wondered what their bond would have looked like if they hadn’t been separated, another cost Vader had imposed on her life.

Then Han entered the room, Chewie at his heels and she couldn’t breathe. The cocky grin, tight pants, and black vest were like a vision to her. A familiar, beloved, if much younger, vision, as familiar to her as her own reflection. He was here, and her heart leaped to see him safe. Then he turned to face Luke and for a moment she caught the expression on his face as he acknowledged that she was in the room, and moved on as if she wasn’t important. The reality of where she was was came up and hit her like a cold splash of water.

This wasn’t Han. Leia felt her heart sink as she realized she was nothing but a stranger to him. It was Han, not a doppelganger or some weird variation that the timeline had spat out at her. But it wasn’t her Han. He was young, younger than Ben, and his eyes still held that cynical light that said he was out to screw the galaxy as much as it had screwed him. It was a look that had eased the longer he was with her. With Luke. Even Lando helped with that. And Ben, especially Ben. The look of wonder when the midwife had placed Ben in Han’s arms for the first time had made her cry tears of joy for the first time in years.

This Han didn’t have that. He had Chewie, but that was it. On soul among the billions in the galaxy that loved him for him, and wanted nothing more from him than him. This was the Han who was the cynical smuggler, who would bite off your hand of friendship, convinced you were going to strike him. Even later, after all, that had happened, her Han had never lost hope. He would never have confronted Ben if he hadn’t.
Han was dead. Because their son had killed him. Leia swallowed the wail that wanted to come at that thought. She had forgotten, over the chaos of the last two days, for such precious moments, that harrowing reality.

Bail finished with his conversation with Obi-wan, turned to Han “We are appreciative of your help Captain Solo, but we are no longer in need of your serves.”

Her mind retreated into a kind of numb detachment. Should she let him go? Would it be better in the long run for him? And her? She hadn’t thought the full ramifications of this. She had been so focused on Han being alive, that she had missed the fact that this too was open to change. She wasn’t young anymore, she knew the particulars of how they would fall apart. Was she even capable of risking her heart to this Han at all? Would it be better, for both of them, if she and Han never come together at all? Her Han had hope, yes, and he had learned to trust again, but Ben had broken all their hearts. Would it be fair to subject him to that again? Leia shoved that thought aside, that was a question for later.

Mentally she shook herself, now wasn't the time for this. Right here and now, this wishy-washy debate was pointless. They actually did need Han. There was no telling how long it would take them to find another ship that the Empire wouldn’t immediately flag as possibly containing them if it was an Alderaanian model. Han could be trusted, he was here, and any minute they could save was precious.

Leia spoke up for her shadowed corner in a firm voice. “Yes, we do.” All the men turned and looked at her in surprise. Her father, for her public contradiction, Han for her statement, and Obi-Wan for...was that amusement in the Force? Well, she was glad someone was finding laughter in all this.

Then there was Luke. He was radiating surprise and embarrassment because she had startled him. He hadn’t known she was there. Leia couldn’t even remember the last time her brother wasn’t intimately aware of where she was and what she was feeling. This was Luke, clearly excited to see her, drawn to her like she was to him, but it wasn’t her Luke. He hadn’t walked with her, he didn’t know the sorrows she did. She was alone. She was in a room surrounded by her family and Leia had never felt such crushing isolation. She shoved past it, escape now, breakdown later, she reminded herself.

Bail looked over at her and frowned “Leia...” he said warningly, shooting a worried look at Han. He didn’t trust him. The thought was so ludicrous Leia almost laughed. Well, she knew Han Solo’s mettle and to what length one could trust him, even this young brittle version of himself. She laid out her case. “They won’t be looking for his ship, he’s here, and no friend to the Empire. I’m sure we can pay whatever ludicrous price he’s sure to set.”

Her father opened his mouth to argue “We don’t have time, and we can’t take the one I stole. That will definitely be on all Imperial watchlists. It needs to be scuttled.”

Breha entered the room at a brisk pace. “I’ve given the order for everyone to depart. Captain Salano had agreed to take the Imperial ship to the base.” They all stared at her “Waste not, want not.” she explained “An Imperial shuttle is an Imperial shuttle. I’m sure someone will find a use for it, and he’s willing to take the risk to fly it out of here.”

Han’s face went smooth and easy as he slipped into his bargaining persona, as it dawned on him how tight of a bind they were in. “It will be an extra ten thousand.”

“Done.” Leia agreed. She could have gotten him to eight, but she didn’t have the time to barter. Or the heart.
His eyes shot up at her easy agreement “Well, you all are in a big hurry.” he commented wryly.

“More than likely there is going to be an entire Imperial garrison here in less than an hour tearing this place apart looking for me. We’ll pay your inflated price.”

He gave her a disbelieving smirk “You're an awfully little thing for such a fuss.” as he eyed her slowly from head to toe.

Beside him, Luke have an indignant squawk “Don’t you have any manners? She’s a princess!”

She eyed Han right back, thought he was playing with a pampered spoiled brat did he? “And you are in possession of one hell of a scrap heap to be that cocky.”

“Hey!” he said indignity, rising to the defense of his ship “She’s got it where it counts.”

“That’s what all men say.” she sniffed delicately.

“Leia!” Bail barked out, reproach in his tone for her manners.

Chewie let out a bark of laughter. <She has you their pup> he informed Han gravely. Leia felt her face turn red as the implications of her flirting in front of her father, her father, sank in. That hadn’t been an issue last time around.

“I believe in showing not telling.” Han muttered “Transfer the funds now. I have a feeling most of your legit accounts are about to be seized.” Leia couldn’t contain the wince that his mistrust struck in her. It was stupid, she knew it was stupid, he had no reason to trust her. But that didn’t remove the hurt his words provoked. Bail noticing her discomfort opened his mouth to rebuke Han, but she beat him to the punch.

“We honor our debts Captain,” she told him, internally wincing at how frigid she sounded right then. She wasn’t sure she could manage anything else, though. “It is the Alderaan way.”

“It is also our way to give respect to those who give it.” Bail’s voice was of frosty disapproval. Wonderful, now her father didn’t approve of Han.

Breha, in a quiet firm voice that brooked no argument stated, “I’ll see to your payment.” to Han. Clearly deciding the matter settled she turned to her daughter “While we have the chance you might want to change out of that.” she waved her hand over the Imperial uniform. Leia nodded her assent and walked out of the room, deliberately not introducing herself to Luke. Right now she could only handle one loved stranger at a time.

Leia walked into her closet and selected the most practical outfit she owned for Yavin’s moist atmosphere. A pair of practical brown trousers with a light fabric off white tunic to go over it. With its sturdy fabric and clean lines it would give her the movement she needed. Pulling on her boots she walked to her dresser to survey the knick knacks clutter on its top. Leia had been on the run too often in her life to really miss things, but this feeling of sadness as she was surrounded by tokens and mementos of her childhood wouldn’t leave her. It was likely to be overrun with Imperial forces in a matter of hours, a day if they were lucky.

She grabbed her to go bag and then quickly grabbed the photo holo in her dresser. In her youth, she had never considered anything but the practical in her survival bag. Extra clothes, a few blasters, credits, all standard fare. But now with the hindsight afforded by her strange circumstances, she knew these holos were to be her greatest treasures. There were so many loved ones whose faces
were blurred in her memory. So many places here on Alderaan that had lost their crispness in her recollections. Even if all went well, it would be years before she could return here. She slung her bag and walked once more out of her home.

She met her father in the hallway, and together they exited the palace.

Striding up to the Falcon, she was dismayed to see Han leaning against the ascent ramp, hands in his pockets. She wasn’t ready for this. Bail, picking up on her hesitation murmured softly “We can find another ship if he bothers you that much.” She shook her head in denial.

“We need to go, he’s here. It will be fine Papa,” she assured him. He gave her a reassuring smile, then continued on as Leia paused momentarily to gather her courage. She never had this issue in actual fights, why did it have to sneak up on her when her heart was involved? As her father walked up the familiar ramp, she shook herself. Now was not the time to wallow. She jutted her chin up and strode up to the Falcon.

“Well I’m sure the interior is not up to your exacting standards your worship, but she’ll get you where you need to go.” Han greeted her as he straightened up from his slouch.

“You wouldn’t know a thing about my standards Captain.” she tried to keep her voice even on that bitter truth. She kept her pace firm and brisk. Just keep going, one step in front of the other.

“My name is Han Solo. In all the fuss of you coming in and bossing everyone around I didn’t catch your name?” he asked from behind her.

Leia froze at that very logical question. How many times could her heart break today? Leia had the sinking feeling she was about to find out. “It’s Leia Organa.” she managed, turning to face him.

“No.” He’s trying to get a rise out of you. Do not take the bait.

At the lack of explanation, he shrugged “Well everybody else is on board, so if we could move along I would like to avoid another Imperial blockade today.”

She didn’t even have to think before her pride was answering for her. “Was that supposed to impress me?” So old patterns were definitely harder to break then Leia thought. The problem was it was only her side that knew this playing field.

“Yes. It’s not every day that occurs, I should know. Tell me, what did you do today that was so much more impressive?” He leaned against the bulkhead, smirking. So goddamn sure of himself.

Screw it. Let’s take him down a notch. He could use some humility.

“Well,” she said, tapping her forefinger on her chin in mock consideration “I was interrogated by Darth Vader, escaped an imperial battle station, stole a shuttle, and managed to find my way home with no one tailing me.” She gave him a wide mocking smile. “But sure, if you want we can compare that to you running a small blockade on some no name outer rim world. That especially deserves praise since you are a smuggler, and I would have thought you do that all the time.” She left him dumbfounded in her wake.

Han’s fears were ungrounded because it’s only when he’s sure nothing can go wrong, everything does. They left Alderaan's orbit, without an Imperial in sight.
Once they had entered hyperspace her father turned to Luke and said in a quiet voice, “My apologies, but I need to steal General Kenobi for a moment. There are things that we need to discuss with him privately.” Luke gave a bemused nod and wandered over to the cockpit.

Leia, walked down the corridor, headed for the secondary hold. Her parents, and Kenobi following in her wake. This room would do, there was seating, as long as you didn’t mind it was crates, and it had a door. She settled herself against the far right wall, leaning against it for support. This was not a conversation she wanted to have sitting down. Her parents followed her into the space and settled themselves on the long high crate, her mother looking faintly bemused as she took in the mess around her. Kenobi chose to stand near the wall opposite to her, a questioning look in his face, as he examined her.

“What did you wish to discuss that was so urgent and in privacy?” the Jedi addressed the room. So her father had decided to leave the telling to her.

“Vader knows I’m his child,” Leia said flatly, crossing her arms over her chest.

Obi-Wan’s face was more schooled than her father’s but the surprise was still clearly there.

“What?”

“Vader knows about me. But he doesn’t know about Luke, I made sure that of that. You are going to need to speed up my brother’s training.”

Obi-Wan shook his head as if to clear it. “I’m sorry your highness, but how do you know any of this?”

A human male appeared suddenly in the room, next to Kenobi. He was tall, with a long face, hair, and a large nose. He was dressed very similarly to Kenobi. He was also slightly blue. “Tread carefully Obi-Wan, there is something odd about the Force around her.”

Leia started out her position leaning on the wall, her hand instinctively going for the blaster at her side, remembering just in time that shooting a ghost would do her no good. “Who the hell are you?” she demanded.

Both the ghost and Obi-Wan’s focus sharpened in on her. “You can see him?” Obi-Wan asked.

“He’s standing right there.” She gestured to the man.

Bail, an intense look of worry on his face said gently. “Leia, there is no one there.”

“That is not entirely correct,” the ghost contradicted mildly. Bail and Breha both jumped to their feet, as presumably, their unwanted visitor made himself visible to them. “When I make an effort I can be visible to those without training,” he explained to Leia and her parents, then those sharp eyes came back to her. “Which leads me to some very interesting questions about where you received your Jedi training, your Highness?”

Bail frowned “She hasn’t had any. We didn’t want to draw attention to her.”

Obi-Wan shook his head “She can see him Bail, that says otherwise.” She felt the lightest of touches brush across her shields and Obi-Wan’s frown deepened. “You also are aware of your connection to Vader and Luke. Do you have an explanation, your highness?”

“Leia.” she said, biting her tongue on the automatic correction to General.
He smiled softly “Leia, then.” he acknowledged “When and how did you learn any of this?”

Leia sighed and rubbed her forehead. This was going to be fun. “I’m from thirty-four years in the future.” The looks of disbelief on their faces wasn’t a shock. But after the day she had, she wasn’t sure she could sustain any questions of her sanity. Looking to the door, to avoid reading their expressions, she began reciting the facts as she understood them

“I went to sleep, on my own bed, and everything was perfectly normal. I woke up on an Imperial shuttle with absolutely no explanation. The when I learned is four years from now, or thirty years ago from my perspective. The how I know is Luke told me. He learned that Vader was our father and the fact that we are siblings, from Yoda. Who, as far as I know, is currently living in exile on Dagobah. Luke is also the one who gave me my limited, and I cannot stress this enough, limited training in the Force.”

Obi-Wan’s voice was full of bafflement and disbelief “I’m sorry. Did I hear you say you're from the future?”

Leia swung her gaze to meet his eyes calmly “Yes.”

Breha made a small noise. When Leia looked over inquiring her mother looked at her sadly “You’re telling the truth aren't you?” she asked, hope and fear warring on her face. “That is how you know all this.”

Leia nodded her head “Yes, I am. I know how insane it sounds. I’m living it and I can’t wrap my head around it, but it is the truth.”

Her mother gave a small sob. Concerned Leia started to approach her, but she was waved off “Thirty-four years I’ve missed,” she explained “It’s a lot to take in.” Leia felt her heart ache. Her mother thought that she was staring at younger versions of her parents, instead of the frozen versions they would forever be. No not forever, she had changed that, they were here, not dead with their world.

Obi-Wan gestured towards her, disbelief clear in his voice. “That is not possible.” His ghost companion merely looked thoughtful, though.

She could have laughed at the irony. “Vader said almost the exact same thing when I told him too.”

Bail came forward at that “If all of this is true, and that is a big if, why would you tell him that Leia? You just made yourself more valuable to him, not less.”

Leia shrugged “I didn’t have many cards to play, and a lot to conceal. I thought if I told him the truth he would be intrigued enough to keep to questions about the future.”

Bail sputtered “So the first thing you tell him is you are his daughter?”

“I am not his daughter,” Leia snarled, this rejection cutting her to the core. “I am your daughter.”

Breha came to her, sweeping her into a hug “Of course you are.” she whispered “You are our Leia. That was never in doubt.”

She closed her eyes at the feel of her mother’s pain. “I’m sorry,” she said, her voice muffled by Breha’s shoulder. Then pulling away she turned to her father and repeated herself “I’m sorry. You didn’t deserve that. It’s just been,” and here she rubbed her forehead “a really long two days for me.”
Bail got up and enveloped her in his own hug “Leia," he whispered “of course, of course”

She shook her head and moved away from her parents embrace. If she stayed she would just end up sobbing uncontrollably. And this was a conversation that needs to be had here, in the relative privacy of the Falcon. Besides they had so many pitfalls in the coming conversation that if she cried at every one they would never get through everything. Starting with their dead guest.

She faced their unnamed ghost “But I have to say in all that time you never came up.”

His mouth twitched as if he wasn’t sure to be displeased or amused “Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn at your service my lady,” he gave a smooth bow.

“General Leia Organa.” she said by way of introduction, tilting her head to return the courtly gesture.

“General,” Breha questioned “Not Princess or Queen?”

“No” she made the statement as curt as possible, this was not the time to get into that. “So I have a name Jedi Master Jinn. But that still doesn’t explain who you are and why you are here?”

“I am an interested party,” he answered cryptically. Wonderful, either talking in riddles was a Jedi thing, or it was a force ghost thing.

“He was my master,” Obi-Wan explained “and while I was on Tatooine he continued in that role” So cryptic was a force ghost thing.

“Wait,” Leia frowned. “I thought Yoda was your master.”

“Yoda trained most of the younglings before they were accepted by an individual master.”

She gave out a frustrated sigh “Did you tell Luke anything that was true?” she demanded.

He gave her a startled look “If I am to believe you, then I have no idea. I don’t know what my alternate told him.”

“Anything you have said up to this point falls into that category Master Jedi.” she pointed out.

“Obi-Wan.” he insisted.

“Obi-Wan.” she agreed out of politeness.

He looked thoughtful as he gave her question some consideration. “Everything I have told him about the Force is true. I did train Anakin, he was a Jedi knight. The lightsaber I gave him did belong to your father. Anakin never mentioned it was for his children, I figured one of you should have it.” That damn lightsaber. The one Rey said Ben was obsessed with. She shoved thoughts of her son aside. He was a problem for a different day. A different decade even.

“Everything else being true from a certain point of view?” she asked sarcastically.

His smile was wry “That’s actually quite clever. Who said it?”

“You did.”

Qui-Gon snorted his amusement. She eyed him, but he offered no further comment. Then the thought occurred to her that he might know more about what had happened to her then he was letting on.
“You are one with the Force, correct?” Whatever the hell that meant. Luke had gotten terrifyingly vague about that concept.

“Yes General,” he answered. “I died long ago on Naboo.”

“Do you know what happened to me? Have you ever heard of anything like this?”

His somber eyes regard her “I’m dead, not omnipotent. And what I sense around you,” he waved his hands in the air, vaguely drawing her outline with the gesture “The Force curls around you in odd angles, like it is trapping you here,” He paused clearly thinking on how to explain this to her “Time doesn’t move for me like it does for you. Like the Force itself, time is everywhere and nowhere. They are bound together in ways that are very hard to put into concrete concepts the living can understand. And since I am part of the Force, and it’s a part of time, I can move along that line backward and forward to a limited degree.”

“How limited?” she asked.

“Too limited to travel as far forward as you seem to have come. I retain an essence of myself in the Force, and that is the leash that binds me. There is no power in this galaxy that comes without a price your highness, and this is the one I pay. If I let myself go fully into the Force, I could, of course see that far ahead, but there would no longer be enough of me to care. And I’ve never seen a living being able to go backward and forward like this at all. My training master was considered one of the finest historians on the odder legends surrounding the Force in all it’s uses. He never mentioned anything like this to me.”

Leia’s heart plummeted “You don’t think I can get back.”

He shook his head “No, I don’t. I don’t know why this has happened or how, but I don’t think there is any way for you to return while you are among the living.”

She swallowed. She couldn’t focus on this now. She hadn’t had much hope really that anyone could help her, but to hear it in such finite terms was disheartening. She had only looked at the positives of what she was facing, it hadn’t occurred to her that the costs were just as high.

“Wonderful,” she muttered. Bail looked at her with dawning comprehension. She could see the thoughts pass over his face. If a long ago dead Jedi Master was standing in front of him, explaining metaphysics of all things, it was certainly in the realm of possibility that what she said was the truth.

Obi-Wan cleared his throat “While I don’t want to trivialize your situation Leia, I do have more questions about your conversation with Vader.” he said gently.

Leia focused back on him. He was right, she knew he was right. If she was truly stuck here, they needed to know what amount of damage they were dealing with. She nodded at him to continue.

“I doubt you would be foolish enough to tell Vader of your parentage. I assume he tortured that information out of you?”

Her parents looked at her horrified. “No,” she said emphatically, trying to reassure them. “There was no torture. He figured it out. I thought I was being careful, but apparently not enough.”

“Forgive me General” Qui-Gon stated. “but those marks around your neck speak otherwise.”

Leia had forgotten about them. Turing, she spotted a reflective surface and winced when she saw how dark the bruising had become. She gave a bitter smile. “No this wasn’t him trying to torture
me. I’ve been tortured by Vader, I know what that entails.”

Bail looked horrified “He did torture you?” he asked disbelieving.

Leia frowned as she realized she had slipped in her words. “Not this one. The other one. The one in my past.” She got looks of bafflement, even the ghost looked confused. Force be damned, but tenses were very confusing right now. “The Vader from when I was actually nineteen, he did torture me.” She ran her fingers lightly around the bruises “The Vader here and now, he was trying to kill me at this point.”

“What did you say to him?” Obi-Wan asked. “What brought this on?”

“Obi-Wan!” Bail snapped, clearly defensive at the thought the the Jedi thought she deserved what had been done to her.

Obi-Wan waved his hands in the air, a look of dismay on his face. “I’m sorry. Too much time alone in the desert without talking to other people. I am clearly out of practice at it. I wasn’t trying to imply blame. What I meant was how did you provoke him to that? Vader is no fool, you are clearly an asset worth keeping alive.”

Leia grimaced, this would not look good in the eyes of her parents. “I lost my temper, and told him that he was jealous that there was no one there to forgive him for killing his wife.”

“Leia” Bail breathed horrified, “how could you be so foolish?”

“And cruel?” her mother asked disappointed “If we are to be as mean as our enemies are we no better than them?”

Given everything she had suffered at that creature’s hands, Leia wasn’t much in a forgiving mood. Ever. Breha meant well, she knew that, but that didn’t coverage the twinge of discomfort that gently chiding brought. Her mother had no idea what Leia had endured because of Vader. She had a right to her anger, and not even her mother would shame her in parting with it. Offering him compassion was not something Leia would do. Her father, on the other hand, was entirely correct on criticizing her for the extreme foolishness of her statement.

“That would have done it,” Obi-Wan muttered. “How did you escape his grip?”

Leia frowned “I punched him.” she explained, thinking it was rather plain on the how.

Bail “With your fist?” he asked puzzled.

She shook her head “No, with the Force.”

Obi-Wan stared at her before asking “And he let go because he was startled?”

She frowned “No because it threw him across the room.” the older man just continued to stare at her. “What? It’s not hard to do. Luke showed me years ago how to backup a punch with the Force. I can see why the choking trick works on non-Force sensitives, but it’s easy to break it if you know what you are doing and don’t panic.”

“Easy.” Obi-wan said, with a wry chuckle, shaking his head in disbelief “Easy to do she says. Leia I think you have a very skewed idea of what easy is.”

“I don’t understand.”
Bail interjected “Leia, he has killed full Jedi knights with that little ‘trick’ as you call it.”

“What? How?” The Jedi of old had been highly trained warriors. Why had none of them tried this?

Obi-wan’s voice was filled with amusement “Well teaching Luke is certainly going to be even more of an adventure than I anticipated.” Then it faded as he regarded her again “You said he figured it out?”

“Yes.” She was going to leave it at that, no need to go into the particulars of that conversation.

“I’m sorry to say that punch you threw was more than likely how he deduced your parentage. Leia, even at the height of the Jedi, there were very few beings in the Force that were powerful enough to do what you did.” She looked at him, uncomprehending. It wasn't that difficult, was it?

“Meet him in the Force head on and push back.” he elaborated “I only managed it once, and he was half out of his mind during that fight. Even Master Yoda couldn’t, and it is probably beyond Palpatine's power to do so as well. With trickery and distraction yes, it could be managed. But pure power versus power, he is quite beyond most in that regard.”

If that were true, why was he serving the Emperor? Why not simply overwhelm him and take control. This didn’t matter, move on.

“Oh,” she bit her lip “I didn't realize that was the case.” Is this where things had gone wrong with the new Jedi order. Luke not understanding the true scope of that power? She and Luke knew they were strong in the Force. It had been drummed into Luke’s head often enough with Yoda’s gimer stick. But did the problem start with how powerful he was and having unrealistic expectations of how everyone should be able to keep up? Was that what had built the resentment and bitterness in her son?

Bail shook himself “Then we need a plan to deal with him.”

She shook her head “No, Vader’s not the main problem right now. The Death Star is our more immediate concern.”

Obi-Wan’s eyebrow rose at that “What’s a Death Star?”

“It’s a battle station” Bail explained, jumping in before Leia could answer “One capable of destroying planets.”

Qui-Gon visibly started at this “Whole planets?”

Bail grimaced “We know it’s capable of destroying entire cities. In theory, it can destroy planets.”

“In fact.” Leia retorted.

Her father turned to her “Are you sure?”

She saw, in her mind’s eyes, Alderaan exploding into dust and swallowed her anger. “Yes.”

Breha looked horrified “The Empire used it?”

Leia, not trusting her voice nodded an affirmative.

Obi-wan groaned and put his face in his hands. “I truly am too old for this. Those are the plans that are in R2.”
“Yes.” Bail answered. “We can only hope that the engineer, Galen Erso, really did put in a weakness to exploit.”

“He did.” Leia assured him “There is an exhaust port that leads to the main reactor. One direct hit and the station will explode.”

They all stared at her “I did this once before.” she said defensively, not liking the looks she was getting.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said slowly “and it occurs to me that if you give us a rundown of what happened that would make things considerably easier.”

Leia opened her mouth to tell him how the battle of Yavin had gone then snapped it shut. It would be easy, so easy to tell them everything she knew and let them take over. But hadn’t that disastrous conversation with Vader shown her the danger of that kind of thinking? She didn’t have all the angles. These were events that happened thirty years in the past to her. And she had already made significant changes, what she knew could never come to pass. Could she trust them to make the right decisions with this?

“No,” she said.

“Excuse me?” Kenobi asked.

“No, I won’t tell you.”

“Leia,” Bail warned. “I think we have more experience in these matters than you.”

“No,” she answered on firmer ground here “you don’t know that. That’s the point. I have decades worth of experience, both in battle and political. I earned that rank of General, it wasn’t given to me as a sop or there wasn’t anyone else. This is too dangerous for you to know. It’s too dangerous for anyone to know, even me. But I’m stuck with it and for now, I’m keeping my silence.”

There were shocked faces staring at her from around the room. Qui-Gon interjected. “If you could explain your logic in refusing? I would have thought you would have jumped at the chance of ensuring a victory?”

She thought hard for a moment, trying to phrase this in a way that would make them understand. “The more we deviate from the timeline I know, the less valuable my intelligence becomes. But will anybody be able to resist relying on it anyway? I already fell into that trap, thinking I could stay on top of everything and look how that turned out. I will say something if I know we are heading into obvious problems, but I’m not going to give anyone a full briefing this. It is too tempting to use.”

“I understand your concerns, but surely not everything you remembered happening was bad?” Obi-Wan asked.

“No.” she conceded. “Not all of it.”

Bail’s face brightened “We won, didn’t we?” he asked.

Leia thought of the final signing of the Galactic Concordance, they had all such hope then. Then she looked at the man who had set so much of that into motion. Who never lived to see that victory. She could give that to him now. “Yes, we did,” she said with a fond smile. There was no need to tell them of the shadow of the evil they fought had reared its head again and within her lifetime. Besides, there were steps she could take, here and now, to help prevent that.
Breha asks “So what if we try to stick as close as we can to the events as you originally remember them? To ensure that victory?”

She shook her head “That’s not possible. Vader knows about me. I can guess, based off his alternate’s actions, what he is going to do, but I can’t know that for sure. That fact alone is going to alter what is coming. I escaped the Death Star much earlier than before. There are going to be major consequences for that action.” her father opened his mouth to question her about them and she shook her head. “No, I won’t tell you now what happened, not until the danger has passed. But trust me when I tell you they probably won’t be recreated. It’s already far too late to move the timeline back.”

Obi-Wan stated. “So you are going to decide what is best for the whole galaxy?”

“With this knowledge, yes.”

“Even though there is a good likelihood you can make the future worse.” he pressed.

Leia squared her shoulders. “Yes.”

“You are so like your father,” Qui-Gon remarked and vanished. She frowned, yes Bail was secretive, but as a leader of an insurgent group against a tyrannical empire, one had to be. What exactly had he meant by that?

Bail sighed, rubbing his forehead. “All right, we will table this discussion for now.” Which was her father’s polite way of stating he didn’t agree with her and that later, when he had marshaled his arguments, they would be returning to the subject “But to return to the distasteful subject of Vader, did you tell him anything else about the future?”

I told him about my son. I told him about Han. This is why her parents had been right about keeping a rein on her temper. Not that this was the scenario they had envisioned about the consequences of losing control over it. “That Palpatine kills him,” Obi-Wan’s face had a fleeting look of pain cross it. “But not about the fall of the Empire. Not that Palpatine died. He didn’t even ask,” her forehead wrinkled as she pondered that aloud “I don’t even think it occurred for him to ask.” How sad is that, to be so devoted to something to assume it will last forever and have it crumble around you so quickly.

“That would have been a short conversation.” Obi-Wan offered.

Now Leia did feel regret creeping up. He deserved the warning, she knew that. But she wasn’t sure if he could understand the necessity of her deciding that the knowledge she had of his survival was a card she had willingly played.

“I also told him about you.” she said.

He quirked an eyebrow. “May I ask as to why?”

“I was counting on the fact that you were going to show up on the Death Star in a few hours anyway,” she explained. “I didn’t think it would make that much of a difference and I had to tell him something.”

“Well, clearly that event didn’t happen.” He gave her a wry smile “Don’t worry yourself, Leia. It’s a moot point. Luke’s training in earnest now and that would have drawn his attention regardless.” Then, the thought occurred to him of why he was so expendable to her. “I died shortly after arriving on that station didn't I?”
“Yes, you did. Vader cut you down and your body disappeared.”

Bail asked disbelieving “Disappeared?”

“Yes, it was all very dramatic.” She grimaced, thinking of Luke's pain on that day, then continued her tale. “After Vader figured out our...connection he left the interrogation room. I got lucky, Tarkin took an interest in his reaction and sent some of his men to question me about it. I killed them and made my way out.”

“The future is always in motion. Although in your case it is the past.” Obi-Wan didn’t look angry about her disclosure, just thoughtful.

She noticed her father’s pale face “Papa?” she asked concerned.

“I never wanted you to be a soldier,” he explained, “and you casually talking about killing those Imperials prove that is exactly what you ended up being.”

“Not for all of it,” she assured him. He gave her a small sad smile but didn’t comment further.

“I suppose you have no desire to train with Luke?” Obi-Wan asked.

“No.”

“Ahh, well I suppose I will continue on then as planned.”

That sentence brought Leia up short. In the original plan, they hadn’t known they were related. No. Oh no, they were going to avoid that damn awkward business in this time. “I’m going to tell him I’m his sister,” she announced.

Obi-Wan frowned “Why?”

Leia squirmed. She and Luke hadn’t really ever discussed this beyond that one time Han had sat them down and got them really drunk. “Let’s just say it will avoid any difficult situations rising in the future.”

Obi-wan’s frown only deepened. “I understand you miss your brother your highness, but I don’t see how telling Luke now will do anything but distract him.”

She glared at him, tiring of not being listened to the first time around. It was this baby face, they kept forgetting that she was actually near their ages. “You have two young people who meet in a highly charged atmosphere where they could die at any time. These two people feel incredibly close to each other like they were meant to be side by side. That destiny meant for them to be together. What do you think will happen then?”

His eyes widened in horror as he comprehended her meaning “You didn’t.”

She shook her head “No.” Then feeling in this at least she owed them the complete truth “But it was close, though. Far too close for my comfort, and I need to be very drunk if I am going to talk about this further.”

Now he looked embarrassed “Yes, of course.” He looked around the room. “Is there anything else I need to know before we arrive at Yavin?” All three of them shook their heads. “Then if you don’t mind I feel the need to meditate. This is a lot to process.”

Bail waited until Obi-Wan left the room “We didn’t tell you? I can’t believe I wouldn’t have said
anything.”

She looked at him helplessly. But it was her mother, who understood first. “We died, didn’t we?”

Leia nodded, her grief was an old wound, but it still hurt. Which was ridiculous. They were talking to her right now.

Bail’s face fell “Oh, Leia.” Then he gathered himself “Can you tell us how?”

“No.” It was an automatic denial. She thought of his reaction to learning of the death of their planet, their way of life. Then she looked him straight in the eyes, seeing as always the calm man who had methodically done what was need to be done for justice. She didn’t need to protect him. Not from this. She just wasn’t sure how many life altering conversations she had left in her for today. “Not yet.” she amended.

Breha spoke up “Well I suggest we all take this time to rest. I imagine things will be quite busy on Yavin.”

Bail nodded and started to the door “Are you sure we can trust this smuggler?”

“Yes.” No hesitation and no doubt colored her voice.

He gave her a disbelieving look “His presence clearly disturbs you.”

“That is not his fault Papa.” He didn’t look reassured.

“Why do you trust him so much?”

“I married him.” The reply slipped out before she thought better of it.

Bail look shaken. “You married that mercenary?” She opened her mouth to defend Han, but he shook his head, cutting her off “I’m sorry. This is a lot to take in, I need a moment.” and he walked out of the room.

Breha came forward “He’s not angry with you Leia, he’s just upset. Give him time, this is a lot of information we have been given.”

“I know,” she whispered sadly. She had wondered, over the years, what her parents would have thought of her choice of husband. Well, she knew now.

Her mother took her hand and squeezed it gently “I’m sure the Captain is a very nice man, once you get to know him.”

Leia gave a small laugh, even as the tears began welling in her eyes “No he’s not. He’s really, really not.” She gave a half sob “He’s a scoundrel. But he was my scoundrel.”

“Oh.” She felt her mother’s hesitancy and then gently “Can I ask what he did that has you so rattled when you look at him?”

The tears spilled down her cheeks. “He died.”

Breha gave a small gasp “Oh, my love. I am so sorry. When?”

Leia felt herself crumbling “From my perspective?” her mother nodded “Yesterday.”

Breha gave her a small comforting sound and Leia broke. There was no one here. No one she had
to be strong for. It was just her mother, and with her, she could sob in her arms and not feel weak. And she cried and sobbed out every hurt of the last two days in the only place in the world where she felt it was safe.

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakvkampfer
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

There is a small spoiler for the book Bloodlines in this chapter, but you don't have to have read it to understand what is going on. I also borrowed some dialog from the Leia comic, as I saw it as a mantra all Alderaanians would use.

And RIP to Carrie Fisher, who was tragically killed in moonlight, strangled by her own bra. She was the co-creator and custodian of one kick ass character. She also managed the trick of being just as interesting and kick ass in real life. Thank you for all the inspiration and hope you gave me and so many others by being both Leia and Carrie.

Leia cried like she hadn't allowed herself in years. She cried for her parents, even though they were right here. She cried for her Luke and all his lost dreams. For Ben, her son who was so lost that he had killed Han. Ben, who until yesterday, she was sure that could be saved. She had been wrong on that, so wrong, and Han had paid the price. It hit her here and now crying in her mother’s arms that Han was dead. Her Han, not the young man in the cockpit, so angry and bitter. The Han with who she had built a life, both the good and bad. She had told Vader, but the truth of what she said hadn’t been absorbed. The events of the last two days had somewhat numbed her to it, but there was no running from it now. Could she ever forgive her son now? Worse, because of where, no when she was, could she ever even contemplate the risk of even having him? These thoughts chased in her head, and she was horrified at herself for even thinking them.

Would it be better for the galaxy as a whole if her son weren’t alive to wreck such havoc on it? She wanted him back, of course, she wanted Ben back. But that wasn’t the situation that was being put in front of her. This wasn't her pursuing her son in order to get him to stop what he was doing. This was asking could even take the risk of his existence? Was it irresponsible of her to ignore the harm he could cause simply because all she could think of was her little boy staring up at her with wide brown eyes saying in his soft childish voice “Mama.” Or the bright child, who was so serious and awkward about everything? Then she thought of how lost her son had become. Maybe Vader was right, damn his soul, maybe there was no way to reach him.

And lastly, she cried for herself. She didn’t know what to do with any of them, Luke, Han, Chewie, her parents. She had saved Alderaan, yes, but she had been so dazzled by this opportunity put in front of her, that she hadn’t realized, for all the promise this timeline offered, it would come with its own terrible costs. She was alone, she had been left by so many people that she loved she thought she had understood how biting that could be. She had been so wrong about that. Having all that history good and bad erased with everyone, she was a stranger to all of them.

Her mother continued to hold her, rocking her gently back and forth, singing a soft lullaby. Leia felt a tentative stroke in the Force, hesitant and unsure, trying to get a gauge on her mood. It was probably Luke, practicing in the Force with Kenobi. The gentle touch was filled with concern but was very hesitant. It drew away quickly as she turned her focus to it. Luke was probably just baffled by the storm of emotion, she reasoned. There was no else on this ship who could reach out to her like that or care too. Leia began to feel the sobs lessen at that sympathetic sign of support,
drawing strength from it. She was alone, yes, but she most certainly did not have to stay that way. She lifted her head to face her mother’s concerned face. She didn’t feel better precisely, just purged for now.

“Oh Leia,” she whispered “is this the first time you cried for him?”

She nodded her head. “I just went to sleep, thinking I would have a good cry in the morning about it when the shock had worn off and I woke up on that damn shuttle.”

Brela’s face was full of sympathy and shared grief. She cupped Leia’s face in her hands. Leia closed her eyes and savored this one victory out of the mess her life had just become.

“Leia, I can’t possibly know how far you’ve come, when I think about how things were for me thirty-four years ago to now, well,” she gave a gentle smile “I doubt I would be as calm as you. But know this, I am so so so very proud of the women I see before me.”

Leia felt panic rising. “You can’t know that.” she insisted.

“Can’t I?”

“You don’t know how often I failed in the future. Look how badly I just failed now. If I had just held my tongue-”

“Lea, Leia.” her mother interrupted, with a gentle shake of her head. “Listen to me. While I don’t know the particulars of what has occurred in your life, I do see a woman who has faced immeasurable evil and came out triumphant. I see a woman who was put in an impossible situation, one that would most certainly break lesser beings. Who had the courage and wherewithal to come up with a solution to get out of it? Yes, Vader knows, and you see that as a great failure on your part. But love, think of everything you did keep from him. The rebel base is safe. Your brother is safe. These are not small things.”

Leia opened her mouth to voice a denial but her mother cut her off. “You are always so impossibly hard on yourself. Pushing yourself further and further, always for some ever expanding goal. I worried, oh how I worried, that without your father and I here to tether you, you would spin yourself into nothingness. But you haven’t. You are here, still caring, still fighting, and not consumed by bitterness by what fate has left at your feet. You still love Leia.” and here her mother’s fingers began tracing the tear tracks still on Leia’s face. “Here is the proof. You still value that, and I can only marvel at the strength that must have taken.”

Leia’s felt a smile grow on her face at her mother’s reassurance. She laid her hands atop her mother’s “Oh I have missed you Mama.”

Her mother gave her a wide grin of love. “Well, I shall do my best to see that you don’t in the future.”

Leia’s smile wobbled, but she held onto that foolish promise. She was too heart sore to contemplate losing her mother again so soon. She squeezed her mother’s hands again and dropped them. Her mother did the same. Leia was reluctant to break this mood, but now that she was calmer a question was nagging her.

“Why did you lie to me? About him?”

Her mother’s face filled with surprise “About Vader? Leia, you were too young to know. Your father and I always intended to tell you.”
She already knew that. That damn music box that had brought everything down around her. She knew the message had been meant for after Vader’s death, by Luke’s hand or hers. Leia shoved the thought away. It was ungracious and unkind, they had good reasons for not disclosing the truth. She shook her head “No, I meant today. When I told you Vader knew, you lied to me.”

Her mother’s face clouded with comprehension. “Oh. Then.” She shook her head ruefully “Habit, I suppose. It’s a long-held reflex to protect you from that knowledge. And it was a rather large secret to keep for so long, we had to be so careful.” She laced her fingers together in front of her and squared her shoulders. “With what I know now I suppose it looks like a foolish action on my part, but I was trying to protect you. The daughter I remember talking to two weeks ago would not have handled that information well.”

Her mother’s rebukes were always worse than her father’s. They were always delivered kindly, but that only made the cut that much sharper for her. Leia tried to remember herself at nineteen, then imagining herself then learning about her parentage. She grimaced, that would have been a disaster. Even at twenty-three, with all she had learned about loss and betrayal, it was a hard blow. And that had been with her brother at her side supporting her as he was the only person in the galaxy to know what that burden was. Alone, she would have spun into a self-destructive rage.

“Enough of this Leia,” her mother chided gently, reading her face. “It’s done. You came through and survived. There is no sense of dealing with what might have been.”

Leia felt her hackles rise, and forced herself to calm down. Her mother wasn’t deliberately trying to be condescending. “Mama, right now all I am dealing with is might have been.” she reminded her.

Breha’s face now reflected embarrassment “Well, yes. I suppose I never thought of it like that.”

Leia let it go. There was nothing she could do but be patient with her parents. They were taking the revelation of circumstances quite well, but it would take time for them to adjust to the fact she was now much older then she appeared.

“I have a question for you if you don’t mind.”

Leia nodded her assent. She was fairly confident her mother wouldn’t venture into topics Leia wouldn’t feel comfortable in answering.

Breha’s grin was warm and welcoming “I spent years wondering about this.” she leaned in and whispered conspiratorially “What is your brother like?”

Leia laughed clear and free for the first time in what felt like forever. “I’ll let you make that discovery on your own. But, I think you’ll like him.”

She was sitting at the dejarik table in the main hold, running her fingers absently across the board. Her mother had wandered away to the crew quarters, seeking her rest. They had time yet before arriving at Yavin and she had wanted a moment alone with her thoughts. This place was home to her too and all she felt sitting here were the echoes of the conversations, dinners, and fights that had happened here. Ben’s laughter as Han chased him through these very halls. Chewie rebuking Han for some “improvement” to the Falcon that had gone wrong. Luke, silently laughing as R2 and Threepio indulged in one of their many bickering disagreements. And now all those events only existed in her mind. The ghosts of what might have been instead of what once was.

Alderaan was a home she might yet restore to herself. Could she say the same about the Falcon?
Should she restore it? She felt a flick of irritation at her own indecision with this. For once could she let it go, and let things happen as they will?

Then she felt Luke’s presence at the edge of the hall and coming closer. She debated walking away and putting this conversation off. No, he would take it the wrong way. He was clearly looking for her and she didn’t want their relationship to start on the wrong foot. The revelation of their blood ties could wait though. She was calmer, that was certain, but she didn’t trust herself fully yet to have another conversation about the situation she was in. For now, until she had gained more of her equilibrium from the shocks of the last two days she would hold her tongue. Maybe it was cowardly, but Leia felt that she had earned a breather.

He entered in through the door and saw her sitting at the table. He made his way over. She stared at him, curious how this would play out. He was radiating nervousness and she was clearly not seeking company.

“Hello, I am Luke Skywalker.” He gave her a wide nervous grin. Not as dramatic as his first introduction, but that was a fairly hard standard to beat.

Even an hour ago she couldn’t have imagined being able to have this conversation with her emotions intact. But after the breakdown in her mother’s arms, she felt much more level. Not that this wasn’t going to hurt, just that she would be able to deal with it better. He reached out his hand to shake and for a moment Leia was confused about the natural appearance of it. Luke’s smile wobbled a bit as she stared at his offered hand. Then her tired brain caught up with her circumstances and she quickly put hers up to clasp his not yet cut off hand.

“Hello Luke.” she said, giving him the friendliest smile she could manage “I am Leia Organa.”

He took that as an invitation and sat down next to her in the circular booth “Yeah I know. I was the one who found your message on the droids and brought them to Ben.”

“That was kind of you and brave.”

He blushed slightly at the compliment “I don’t know about brave, but it was the right thing to do.”

“It’s not the choice everyone would have made.” his face darkened at that and she got the fleeting impression of faces flash through his mind. Owen and Beru perhaps? She continued on the reassure him. “Well, you are here, with a fugitive from the Empire and an exiled Jedi. That was certainly a hard choice.”

His bashful manner disappeared, replaced by sorrow. “There really wasn’t much choice. My Aunt and Uncle were the ones who bought the droids. They were murdered by stormtroopers while I was with Ben. There is no home for me to go to.”

“I am sorry for your loss” she offered consolingly “And that you, and them, got dragged into this.” And she was. There was nothing she could have done of course. Either this time or the last, but it was indirectly her fault the droids have found their way to Luke’s family. Or maybe the Force. Her brother wasn’t destined to be a moisture farmer anymore then she was destined to be a nerf herder. She regretted that his family had paid the price though.

“It’s not your fault.” he said “It’s horrible that they are gone, but you aren’t the one who killed them. The Empire chose to do it. Hell, my Uncle would have sold the droids to them if they had asked. But instead they went or the most brutal method possible and that is not your doing. I want to help.” His face fell and then he gathered himself up and corrected to “I always wanted to help. But until now it wasn’t me that was paying the price for the Empire’s actions. It was all so far
away from me.” Grief, naked and horrible, filled his too young face. “I miss them, and after all of this is over I’m probably going to have a good cry about it, but if it hadn’t been them it would have been someone else.”

She didn’t remember Luke being this wise when he was young. Brave, yes. Loyal, yes. Insanely lucky also came to mind. But not this. When she thought of him at this age all she could remember was his wide eyes at every new thing he had encountered. While it was true his upbringing on an outer rim world hadn’t exposed him to the greater galaxy, he had never been naïve. Anyone growing up in Hutt controlled world quickly lost that.

“Well, that is my sad tale of how I ended up here. How did you end up joining the rebellion? It’s not something I would expect a princess from a Core world to do?”

She flashed him a teasing smile “Know a lot of princesses do you? I’m disappointed, I thought I would be your first. You should tell me how I measure up.”

“No, you’re my first. Well not girls, I know a lot of girls. Well, a few. Not well, or anything. What I meant was....” he trailed off as embarrassment flooded his face. Oh, it was adorable, her brother was tripping all over his tongue and spouting whatever came to mind. Her Luke hadn’t done this in years. Frankly, she had forgotten how tongue tied he became in front of people when he first joined up. It would be years before she let this Luke forget this. If ever. “Sorry, that was a dumb thing to say wasn’t it?”

She laughed and gently rocked her shoulder into his “It’s fine. A lot of people think that way, it’s how I get away with half of the things I do. And to answer your question, I guess I was born into it. My father was one of the founding members of the Alliance.” Her birth mother too, now that she thought about it. How wonderfully ironic, that she and Luke were the children of the founders of the twin pillars of the galaxy.

“Oh.” he looked very impressed. “How long have you been involved?”

“Ahh...” she frantically tried to do the math in her head, and gave up “Since I was sixteen.” she settled for.

“When I was sixteen, my uncle, barely let me go to the local outpost by myself. I can’t imagine being that trusted by my parents.” More than likely mistrust of the world. She couldn’t imagine, after everything she had heard of Owen and Beru Lars that they hadn’t had complete faith in their nephew. Hindsight would give Luke that revelation on his own though. Once he understood what danger he had been in his entire life, Luke had understood a lot of things about his childhood differently.

“I’ve never met anyone who trusted droids as much as you trust yours. How did you know that they would complete the mission?” He looked generally puzzled by that.

“Always trust the droid,” she told him. At his blank look, she inwardly sighed. Right, no experience with R2 and his endless capacity to get himself in and out of trouble. “I’ve used them before.” she assured him “Many times in my espionage work against the Empire.”

“You’re a spy?”

“Well, I was. I was a member of the Imperial Senate. The Empire has dissolved that body though so I’m out of a job.” He laughed at the weak joke, as she had intended. Dammit, did he know there was no way for her to know this yet? Apparently not, he didn't seem too puzzled by her, knowledge. “On the other hand, it looks like there are new and exciting opportunities in being an
outright rebel.”

“Well, it seems like we’ll both be starting at the same point.” He smiled shyly at the thought.

“I think I would like that.” she said gently, reaching out and squeezing his hand.

Of course, this is when Han, with his incredible timing for the worst possible entrance, entered the space.

“Well isn’t this cozy?” he drawled, taking in their close postures.

She frowned at his sarcasm, what had he taken offense too? This was his put-upon voice.

Beside her, Luke stiffened in apparent outrage on her behalf. “Yes, it’s called talking. It’s something people do to get to know each other. You should try that instead of making snide remarks at everything.” She was definitely feeling jealousy from her brother. Ok, maybe she should have brought up the being related thing. She was still bone tired and shaky on her control, but maybe that conversation wouldn’t be as bad as dealing with this.

“Don’t get all bent out of shape. I heard voices and just came in here to see how my passengers are doing.” Han gave them a wide saucy grin as he approached the table, clearly out to irritate Luke. Of flirt with her. Probably both of those things, honestly. “I like to think I run a full-service operation here.” He gave a lascivious wink at Leia.

“We’re fine” Luke gritted out. She was really regretting putting off telling him even for a day. She had forgotten about this...thing the two of them had about her in the beginning. No, she had made herself forget.

She was going to end this now before her face betrayed things she didn’t want to explain. “Well as fun as it is to be fought over like a rancor fights over a bone, I need to rest.” Luke looked up, slightly stricken at her icy tone, and she patted his hand in comfort “It was nice to meet you Luke Skywalker”

“It was nice to meet you too,” he said, smile restored. She left the two of them to their posturing.

She wandered the familiar halls, somewhat heading to the crew quarters, but no real destination in mind. She spotted her father in the second crew’s quarters, sitting in a chair. He gave her a pained smile when he noticed her standing in the door. “Come in Leia.” Then he cleared his throat as his hand moved restlessly in his lap.

“Leia, your mother spoke to me before she laid down to rest. She told me what happened to your husband.” his voice wavered on the word husband “I’m sorry I reacted so badly. All I saw was that he made you upset. I didn’t realize that it was for something that was no fault of his own.”

“You could have trusted my word.” she thought, a little bitterly. No, that wasn't fair, he was in a difficult situation too.

“It’s alright,” she said. Bail gave her a flat look “So it’s not alright.” She amended “But trust me if I know anything about Han Solo is that he makes the worst first impressions. I’ll try not to take it personally.”

He laughed “Well I can’t say that you don't know him,” then he sobered “Can you tell me how he died?”
She shook her head. “It wasn’t an accident or illness if you’re wondering. But I really don’t want to talk about this Papa. It’s too soon.”

“All right. I can understand that.” He hesitated and then followed up with “Can I ask what exactly you do see in him then?”

It irked her that again he wouldn’t simply take her word for it. She wouldn’t have married Han if she hadn’t had good reason too. She chided herself for the ungraciousness of that thought. Would she have reacted any differently with Ben? Bail was looking at his only child, who apparently married a stranger to him. Someone, who to be fair at this point, was little better than a ‘mercenary’, as he so eloquently put it. He was only seeking to understand.

She turned her mind over to all the instances of Han’s loyalty, his ability to make her laugh, his eagerness to meet her head on and yell back. But there was one instance that her father would immediately understand the significance of. “In what would have been a few years from now, we had walked into a trap the Empire had set up for us. We had sought shelter from a neutral party. We thought his offer to help us was genuine, he had no love of the Empire. Vader had beaten us there though and was waiting for us in a dining hall of all places. We walked into that room completely unprepared and he standing there waiting for us.” she swallowed her memory of the cold shock that sight had left her with. “The first thing Han does is pull his blaster and shoot him.” She gave a watery chuckle “It was useless of course, Vader deflected the bolts. But I’ve seen Imperial officers breakdown in full fear at seeing the famed Dark Lord of the Sith, but Han’s first reaction was to attack. That takes a spine of steel. This Han just doesn’t know it yet.”

Her father hummed under his breath. He didn’t looked convinced but he also didn’t look as worried. She stood in the silence for a moment wondering if he had any more questions for her about her husband. Or about grandchildren. Force, how was she supposed to explain Ben to her father?

“We need a story.” he told her instead.

Leia raised an eyebrow. “For what?”

“For how you escaped. I don’t think you want to tell everyone the truth about that Leia.”

They would know. Everyone would know again and those looks would follow. Leia generally didn’t give a damn about people thought of her. But the stark fear that filled people’s faces as the recognized her as “Lord Vader’s daughter” had filled her with instinctive nausea and loathing every time.

“Yes,” she agreed “I suppose I do.” She thought for a moment, wondering what the easiest thing to say would be. “Sticking as close to the truth as possible I think would work best. I was captured aboard the Tantive V and they brought me to the Death Star. Lord Vader started interrogating me.” she fingered the bruises around her neck. “He decided I needed to be transferred to Coruscant for reasons I am not privy too. I killed the guards in the shuttle and changed the flight plan.”

“It’s not the most believable story, but it will have to do.” Bail warned. “But I can’t think of a better one where you end up with possession of a Lambda-class Imperial shuttle.” Then he frowned “How did you manage to do that?”

“I used Tarkin’s authorization code.”

He sat up quickly in his chair “You did what?” he asked astonished.
She smirked “I used his code. I know his current one.”

“Why do you know it?”

Leia’s face scrunched in distaste “The reason why isn't important.” she downplayed.

“More of the future you won’t tell me about?” She gave him a flat stare and he sighed. He returned to his original point “You're going to have people wondering about if you're a plant.”

She shrugged “Let them wonder, I’m not.”

“There are going to be plenty of people within the rebellion are not going to believe that a nineteen-year-old, with no formal combat experience, was able to withstand torture from Vader, and manage to overpower her guard. And they will have good reason not to.” That was her father, always pointing out the practical problems to her more fanciful whims. Only this wasn’t a whim.

“I am trained though. You and my aunts saw to that.” He frowned, but nodded, conceding the point. “You said it yourself, there really isn’t a better story to tell them.”

“Tell them the truth” At her negative reply, he amended “At least the high command. With your intel backing what you say they will support you against any accusation.”

This again. “No. That is not happening. I told you why.”

“And I understand what you fear. But Leia surely with several people in on the problem we can manage our way around it.”

“No, Papa I don’t.”

“I don’t understand why you are so sure you can make this better by yourself.”

She shook her head “I am not that arrogant. I’m not sure I can make it better. What I do know is telling more people what might happen will make things worse.” That’s all she needed, committee based decision on possible alternate timelines.

Her father switched tactics “Leia, I don't think you understand how this will affect your reputation. Mistrust is going to follow you everywhere. It might not ever go away.”

She gave a bitter laugh “You think this is the first time people have questioned my motives. For all those years I was warning…” she trailed off as she realized she heading into dangerous territory. “No, we are not talking about that. Suffice to say I know what it is like to have people question your every move and motive.”

He looked pained “You really aren’t going to talk to me about the majority of your life?”

She shook her head. “I can’t. It’s too easy for me to give something away.”

Bail’s sorrow increased “Leia, that is no way to live. You can’t spend the rest of your life forever guarding your tongue. You need to talk to someone. Anyone.”

She felt her spine stiffen “Then that is the path I must walk. It’s not the first time I’ve had to stand on my own and it won’t be the last.”

Bail only shook his head, but he offered no further comment. Disheartened Leia left the doorway.
She found herself in the main hold again. She didn’t feel the need to rest, the talk with her father had left her jittery. He had raised a good point. Could she spend the next thirty-four years of her life forever biting her tongue? Carefully weighing everything she said for fear that she would say something she shouldn’t know. Or was afraid she would change it for the worst? Well, if that wasn’t the definition of hell for her, she didn’t know what was. This was all going to end in disaster. She leaned against the storage cabinets and started softly banging the back of her head against them in silent frustration.

“You’re going to hurt yourself if you keep doing that” Han remarked from the hallway.

She snorted “That is the least of my concerns Captain.” But she did stop the motion.

“Han. My name is Han.” He walked into the room, approaching her. When he didn’t stop and instead leaned in close to her she flinched as she buried the instinct to turn her head into his chest and seek reassurance.

“Relax.” he drawled, and then she heard a cabinet being opened behind her. He pulled his hand back so that she could see what was in it. It was a bacta patch “I was after this.” he handed it to her.

Silently she took it from him and unsealed the package. He backed up a few steps to a more polite distance.

“Sorry, it’s an ‘off market’ brand.” He gestured to her neck “Should be enough to handle that though.”

She gave a small huff of amusement “A smuggler has illegally made goods. I’m shocked I tell you. Shocked.” Gingerly she began to apply the long thin cloth to her neck. It wouldn’t cover all of the bruising, but it would be a good start.

“Well not all of us grew up in a palace.” His teasing grin faded as he took in the still visible portion of her bruising. “Vader huh?”

“Yes.”

“Never had the pleasure of meeting him. Heard stories though. You’re lucky he wanted you alive.”

“That’s me, lucky.” Yes, she was so lucky that she was his daughter. Maybe she ought to stop at every temple she came across and light a candle in prayer for that fact. At least it wasn’t Palpatine. Focus on the positive Leia, it could have been Palpatine. Let’s just keep that happy thought in mind.

“Thank you.” she said, gesturing to her neck, falling back on her manners.

“No problem.” He stood staring at her.

“What?” she demanded, unnerved by his silence and his staring.

“Just trying to figure you out. Most people I know would be blubbering in the hallways and be halfway to madness after an encounter with him. You, on the other hand, sail right through bossing everyone around and generally acting like you haven’t a care in the world. Just wasn’t what I was expecting from a royal born on a core world.” She hadn’t been though. She and Luke had never been able to find out where they had been born. Maybe she could find out now.

“I think you need to broaden your horizons.”

“Oh trust me, Princess, they’re plenty broad.” He narrows his eyes at her consideringly.
“Maybe you just need to meet more people.”

“Somehow I don’t think that is going to prove me wrong.” He gave her a flirtatious smile. “But you know the thing that I really don’t get?”

“I’m on the edge of anticipation.”

“Facing down the Emperor’s top enforcer doesn’t faze you, being on the run from the Empire doesn’t even produce a sweat. But me,” and here a pleased smirk crossed his lips. “little ole me. I make you jumpy.”

“Don’t flatter yourself Captain” she shot back “I happen to like nice men” Liar her inner Han chanted. Shut up, you are not being helpful.

“Is that a fact?” he hummed under his breath “I’ll keep that in mind.” And he sauntered away back to the cockpit. Leia watched him the entire way, admiring the view. She was only human after all.

When Han announced, by yelling, that they were coming up to their destination Leia and her father both crammed into the cockpit. Han threw open the comms channel as soon as they exited hyperspace. Bail leaned forward and gave their passcode.

Han started “Wait, wait, wait. Thought I was taking you to a meeting point. You actually had me bring you the rebel base. The actual rebel base. The one the Empire is offering a huge bounty for? Are you all mad?” His blue eyes were blown wide and his face was shocked.

Bail stiffened and shot him a look. “Leia believes that you can be trusted and I have faith in her opinion” Well Han wasn’t rising much in his estimation.

Han’s incredulous face swung to her and she arched her eyebrow in question. “Are you going to prove me wrong?” she asked.

“Well…..” he floundered.

Chewie huffed. <She isn’t wrong about you Han. You wouldn't tell the Empire anyway. Take the compliment and more importantly the payment and move on.>

When they disembarked from the Falcon Leia wasn’t shocked to see a large welcoming committee for them. Mon Mothma, Jan Dodonna, Davits Draven, and General Willard in the front as a group Leia and the others headed to them in the cavernous flight deck.

Mon gave a wide smile as she spotted them. “Bail, Breha, when we heard the call go out for your arrest we were so worried”

Bail gave an answering smile “We are safe.” He linked his hands behind his back and amended “If arriving in less than ideal circumstances. But I am happy to report that the plans are safe in this astromech memory banks.” He made a gesture and R2 came forward. General Willard made a motion and a group of technicians broke off from the side and swarmed forward to surround the little droid.

Threepio made a small noise of distress and Leia turned to him “He’ll be fine,” she assured the golden droid. “They’ll take special care with him.”
“But Princess Leia...” he objected, worry sharpening his tone.

She sighed. “Go with him then. You aren’t needed immediately and I’m sure it will make him feel better”

Threepio gave his thanks and followed the small crowd as they took to droid further into the base towards the data centers where they could dump the information.

Mon Mothma watched them go and turned back to face them all and seemed to noticed the other passengers other than Leia, Bail, and Breha. A look of profound relief crossed her face as she took in the old man in tattered robes. Smiling, she walked up to him until she was only a few feet in front of the white haired man. “General Obi-Wan Kenobi,” she stated in her firm clear voice, looking at the old Jedi with wonder. Her voice carried clearly through the cavern and both Dodonna’s, Draven’s, and Willard’s head whipped to look at the Jedi in shock.

A hush fell over the crowd in the hangar bay. All around them voices grew silent as faces filled with awe turned to them. It didn't seem to throw the old man’s stride as he gave a small smile and a deep formal bow “Senator Mon Mothma. It has been a while.”

Her mouth twitched in amusement. “I’m not a Senator anymore,” she informed him “just Mon will do. Bail mentioned he was sending someone to retrieve you. I cannot stress the direness of our circumstances.”

Obi-Wan frowned “I’m not sure what I can do, but I am more than willing to offer a hand.” He turned to Luke “May I introduce my companion? This is Luke Skywalker.”

Luke, looking a little flustered by all the attention focused on him, executed his own clumsy attempt at a bow. “Ma’am,” he said respectively.

“Skywalker? As in Anakin Skywalker?” she asked.

Luke nodded. “He was my father.” There was a touch of pride in his voice. Oh, this was going to come back and haunt them all later.

She shot both Bail and Obi-Wan a deeply unimpressed look. “I’m not sure why I am so surprised,” she said in a flat tone. Then directly addressing Obi-Wan “You did always have a flair for a dramatic entrance.”

His mouth twitched “I suppose that is a fair complaint.”

“Well, isn’t this just a day full of unexpected surprises,” she said “Come, we have much to discuss” she looked at Bail, Breha, and Leia. “All of you, I can’t wait to find out how this transpired.”

The following debrief was like all the other ones Leia had attended. A few relevant facts interspersed with far too much talking as everyone felt the need to comment on what was being said. She hated meetings. They were important, she knew they were important. She doesn’t understand why they always had to take twice as long as they needed to.

As expected, her story about how she escaped the Death Star was met with a healthy dose of skepticism, but Kenobi's presence seemed to capture most of their attention. Fair’s fair, a famed Jedi General from the clone wars, with his equally famous partner’s son in tow, was bound to be more interesting than her circumstances. She knew better than to think that this matter had been dropped completely. Obi-Wan was the shiny new toy, but eventually, the particulars of her escape
were going to come up again, probably at the worst possible time. Captain Salano had shown up ten minutes into the briefing, landing it into the flight deck. After it was checked for tracking devices, she was thanked for the acquisition of the shuttle. But Draven was still looking at her with suspicion in his eyes. She was going to have to keep an eye out for him.

After she was thankfully dismissed from the meeting, she wandered the base, not sure where she was going. The plans were still being analyzed, and the Alliance high command, along with Kenobi, was debating what to do with them next. Tracking down the Death Star was going to be priority one, but the question was how? It was capable of hyperspace flight and they needed to get to it before any planets paid the same price as Alderaan almost had.

Leia’s first thought was to copy the Emperor. Feed the location of Yavin to someone and see them coming, but she doubted anyone there would listen to her advice. The plan as too risky to the Alliance and they weren’t sure they were capable of taking the battle station out. Maybe here is where she should give a hint to her father about the fact that it could be done. If Tarkin came immediately to Yavin, that was fewer innocent planets that need be slaughtered. It would be almost impossible to track the station, why not bring it to them? They could evacuate most of the personnel and supplies in advance off site. It was a big risk, but a calculated one. Although after all the losses they had incurred getting the damn things she sincerely doubted anyone on the council would be willing to take such a gamble. She didn’t see Mon, Dodonna, or Willard signing off on that plan.

When she focused in on her surroundings she was surprised to see herself back in the hangar bay, only thirty feet from the Falcon. Han was loading supplies into the ship, with Chewie helping him. Well, this goodbye had come up on her suddenly. She didn't want him to leave. She wasn't sure what she wanted from him, but she knew she didn't want him to go. Well, she never really had gotten what she wanted out of life, had she? She could at least say goodbye.

She wandered over to the ship and gave Chewie a wide smile and grin as he noticed her first.

<Han, the princess is here. Be polite.> he barked at Han.

Leia laughed “Aren’t you asking a bit much from him?” she teased.

Chewbacca stiffened and Han looked up from the cargo he was loading, surprise on his face. “You speak Shyriiwook?”

“Understand yes. Speak, no. My accent was the bane of” she quickly switched out Chewie's name “my tutor’s existence. I have a good ear for the language, but I never quite mastered the tongue movements required.”

<Take heart your highness,> Chewie offered <Unless you trained from a young age, it’s almost impossible for a human to master it.>

“Are you ever going to make sense?” Han demanded.

She smiled up at him “Why should I, it’s so much more fun to get you all flustered?”

“So you're here to torment honest working captains of the galaxy?” he whined.

Her eyebrow lifted in mock amusement “Honest?” His look of mock innocence was just as strong.

He gave her a look of offense. “Of course.”

Her smile dimmed “No, I was in the area and saw that you were planning to leave. I came to say
goodbye and thank you.”

“Don’t need thanks for a job.”

“None the less you have it.” As she contemplated his more than likely next move, she felt the need to offer advice. He wasn’t going to take it, she knew he wouldn’t, but she had to try. “You should pay off those debts,” she remarked. “Jabba is not someone to cross in that regard.”

He looked at her suspiciously “And how do you know that your worship?”

Dammit, she was going to have to learn to think before she spoke to him. “You're a mercenary working out of Tatooine, the only person who you could owe money to and have no possibility of escaping is the Hutts. It’s not that hard to figure out.”

He still looked suspicious and she sighed “Either way Captain take care of yourself out there.” She was going to do this, she was going to let him go. She couldn’t force him and clearly, without the experience of the Death Star to rattle him to the evils of the Empire there was no way to shake him out of this. Maybe it was better this way. Without Han, there would be no Ben. Her head hurt at the thought. But this wasn’t her choice to make, it was his.

That’s when the sounding alarm of the base went off.

Han frowned “We under attack?” he asked, “No way they followed us.”

Leia felt anxiety creep over her heart. Something was coming, something big if the Force was correct. “It does seem unlikely,” she murmured.

The alarms cut off and the voice that came out of the speakers belong to no one in the Rebel Alliance. “Attention all Galactic citizens. This is Grand Moff Tarkin of the Imperial Navy. This message is being broadcasted along all known subspace and communication relays in an attempt to reach the insurrectionist terrorists known as the Rebel Alliance. I am currently aboard the newest weapon of the Empire, the Death Star. If the entire group does not surrender to face justice, I will destroy the planet of Alderaan. They have one standard galactic day to comply.” The message stopped for two beats and then began again repeating itself.

Han’s face drained of all color. “They can’t do that, can they? That would take more fire power than the entirety of the navy.”

Leia’s ears were pounding, she had failed. All of her tricks and planning and she had failed. Alderaan was still in danger. “I have to find my father,” she muttered and leaving a baffled Han in her wake. She ran from the flight deck into the bowels of the base.

There was panic everywhere, as pilots, soldiers, and mechanics were talking to each other, fear writ large across their faces. She caught up with Bail, just as he was about to head into the control center.

“We can't surrender.” she told him.

“Leia, you heard him.” Bail stated, his face drawn tight with resignation “If we don’t our home is forfeit. Billions of innocent lives would be lost.”

She shook her head “We can’t.” she stressed “It doesn’t matter. Even if we did, he will still destroy Alderaan. And the entirety of the Rebellion will be lost, for nothing.”

“Leia you can’t know that-” he started to say, then stopped. His eyes grew wide as the realization
struck him. “That’s what happened to you, isn’t it? Originally.”

She nodded “Yes, Vader’s methods were taking too long so Tarkin thought to speed up the process. I gave him Dantooine, but before he even checked to see if I was telling the truth, he ordered Alderaan’s destruction. Said it would be an example” she spat the word out in disgust. “

He swayed as the implications hit him. “Leia come with me.” He pulled her into the control room where Mon, her mother, Obi-Wan, and the rest of the Alliance leadership were around the display console, arguing in sharp voices.

“We can’t surrender,” he said firmly to all of them, bringing the conversation to a halt.

Mom frowned “Bail, with all due respect, we cannot let Tarkin destroy a planet. We are fighting to preserve lives, not help end them.”

Leia stepped forward “I agree with my father. Unless that station is destroyed Alderaan is forfeit. He has his new weapon and he wants to use it.” The leadership council looked blankly at her, but Obi-Wan’s and Breha’s faces filled with horror. Message received then.

Breha braced herself on the edge of the display table and took a deep breath. “General Willard, have the plans been analyzed yet?”

“Yes, your majesty they have. There is a flaw in the exhaust system that we can exploit, but if I might speak frankly, it’s one hell of a long shot.”

Her mother was silent for a moment, and Leia held her breath, wondering at what she would decide. Then the older woman straightened up to her full height and faced Willard head on. “That is better than no chance at all.”

Several of the commanders raised their voices in protest at her pronouncement. They continued for several moments until Breha spoke above them in a clear ringing voice. “I am Breha Organa of Alderaan. My family has ruled my planet peacefully for generations. We will not give into terror, especially if that terror is being wielded by the government in power. My husband and daughter are correct, the likelihood of Tarkin using this weapon no matter what we do is too great. I am Alderaanian. We answer rage with wisdom. We answer fear with imagination. We answer war with hope. I would rather we fight for one small hope then surrender to the darkness. And I believe my people would make the same choice.” Leia’s heart swelled with pride and admiration of her mother's clear and precise speech.

Dodonna spoke up “If we tell them to come to Yavin.” he suggested.

Leia’s panic at the thought must have bleed into the force because Obi-Wan spoke up “I served with Tarkin during the Clone Wars, I doubt that he has changed all that much. Their majesties are correct. Tarkin will destroy Alderaan no matter what we do.”

Draven’s eyes narrowed. He had noticed that both her mother and Obi-Wan were taking her lead on this. This was another tally being held in his mind against her. If she survived this he would need carefully watching in the future. No, when she survived this.

Mon frowned “That is two against, and four for. Willard, your thoughts?”

The older man spoke slowly “I’m afraid I’m going to have to agree with the assessment of Tarkin’s character. I vote we fight.”

Mon’s face was wiped of all color, but she spoke decisively “While I do not agree with your
assessment, I concede Breha, as the ruler of Alderaan you have the authority to make this decision. We fight then. General Dodonna, we will need your pilots ready in twenty minutes for a debriefing. I will make the announcement to the general troops that we have chosen to fight.” She closed her eyes and said in a prayer like manner “And may the Force be with us all.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakvkampfer
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, if you recognize the dialog it came from episode IV. Hope you enjoy!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With the decision made the logistics were needed to be seen to.

As he studied the schematics General Dodonna remarked to the room at large. “How long does it take to fully power up the station?”

One of the technicians answered “Depends on what they want to hit. For a cruiser, about a minute. For the reported destruction on Jedha and Scarif about five. Fifteen minutes for a planet.”

The older general frowned “That’s a long lag time, I can’t believe that it wasn’t sped up.”

The technician shrugged “It was primarily designed to destroy planets, not fight in a battle with cruisers. The highers up in the Empire probably thought the lag time wasn’t a pressing issue. It’s not like anyone can quickly move a planet.” Leia wondered briefly to herself if this was another subtle sabotage by Erso. But it could also be simply the laws of thermodynamics exerting their will. With the man long dead it was impossible to ask.

Obi-Wan spoke up from where he was standing a little off in the corner. “Tarkin could order it to remain powered up and Alderaan will be destroyed the minute those fighters exit hyperspace.”

The tech frowned instinctively and shook his head.”No sir. There is no way he leaves that thing warmed up for that long.” He leaned down to the console and tapped a section of the schematic. Leia looked on with interest. “The capacitor’s aren’t designed to hold the charge for significant portions of time. Slow build on the energy, but once it gets there, he’s got maybe, and I stress this is the max amount of time here, ten minutes to discharge that energy.” Leia didn't know that. Did Tarkin destroy Alderaan simply because he had too? That long ago interrogation took on new sinister meanings in her mind. There was no choice that she could have made that would have altered the outcome. Once he decided to threaten her planet with destruction it was doomed. She wanted to kill him all over again. Force willing she would.

“What happens if he does continue to run it without firing?” General Willard asked “He might decide that damage is worth the risk to keep us from doing the very thing we are planning to do.”

The technician shrugged “Go past that mark and some pretty critical systems start suffering from overheating as the capacitors start leaking energy. The most important of those systems is the thermal sinks they have built in to regulate the reactor. They could get temporarily get around that by exporting that heat to the station’s outer shell and bleed it off into space. But the conduits along that route aren’t rated as high and more than likely it will burn to death half of the crew in the process. As the energy build up continues the thermal sinks on the reactor will fail and station will explode. I didn't do the math so I couldn’t give you an exact estimate on that, but no more than a few hours.”

Obi-wan looked considering at the schematic. “Not something he is willing to risk then.”
“No.”

General Draven snorted “Nor does he need to, even if we came in with what is left of our fleet it wouldn’t be enough time to fatally cripple that thing. That is probably why they built it so big in the first place.”

Dodonna countered “But the one man fighters can get through those shields correct?”

Again the analyst nodded “It’ll be a little bumpy, but yes. I looked over the plans carefully and to maintain shields capable of keeping small craft out wasn’t feasible, given the perceived value of keeping them out. That would require a massive amount of energy. Between the power requirements to run the functions of the station, the hyperdrive, and the weapon itself, there just wasn’t much left for a moon sized shield”

“Thank you for your analysis “ Bail said, “It’s been most helpful”

The analyst nodded and left. Breha breathed out slowly as she weighed the plan before them. “So the fighters have fifteen minutes before Alderaan is destroyed. That doesn’t leave them much time.” Leia frowned to herself. In the battle of Yavin they had thirty minutes before the Death Star has been able to open fire. This was cutting their attack time in half.

Willard spoke up. “We can cut some of that by bringing them out of hyperspace as close as we can to the station. Given that Tarkin is still actively broadcasting the signal it shouldn’t be too difficult to triangulate its exact position near Alderaan.”

Mon shook her head, “It’s still not a lot of time. Breha are you sure you wish to press forward with this?”

Breha’s gaze fell on her daughter’s face. Leia gave a slight nod. Some of that long ago battle had been eaten up by the necessity of the fighters reaching the station. She couldn’t recall, with any certainty, how long it took the fighters to reach the station at Yavin, but it couldn’t have been more than ten minutes. This attack now would be cutting it uncomfortably close, but even this small chance was better than nothing.

“Yes.” her mother stated firmly.

Mon sighed “Very well. I will give the general call out and we will inform the entire base of our decision. General Dodonna the pilot’s briefing will held in twenty minutes. Time is not an asset we have much of now.”

As the various people broke away to fulfill their tasks Leia come up to her father and gently guided him to a deserted corner in the room.

“I’m going up there.” she told him, keeping her voice low to avoid the possibility of being overheard.

His eyes widened in panic “Leia, you don’t have the training, or the experience…” he trailed off as he took in her expression. “You do don’t you? Force Leia, did you go up there the first time?”

She shook her head “No. At the time, as you so correctly pointed out, I did not have the experience. I do now. This isn’t my first dogfight.”

“Leia..” he breathed disappointed. Leia swallowed the hurt caused by his reaction. She was who she was. She had tried the political route to secure the safety of the galaxy. She had hammered her head for years against that particular wall and in the end it was her skills planning and being on the
battlefield where she was of the most use. And she would not apologize to anyone, not even her father, for that.

She gave him a wry smile. “I’m a fairly competent pilot, not the best, but good. I’ll be fine.”

“You can’t know that.” Worry lines were appearing at the corners of his eyes.

“No. But what I do know is that I’m not sure a targeting computer can make that shot.”

His face grew concerned “Then why did you push for this madness?”

“A strong force sensitive can though.” she assured him “Luke is going to want to go, and I need to go along just in case. We can do this, I promise.”

His face reflected his conflict, but he only said “Very well. I’ll inform General Dodonna.”

The pilots briefing didn’t bolster anyone’s mood. When Dodonna entered, with her parents trailing behind him, he looked up and frowned as he took in their numbers. The gathered pilots low murmurs dropped into a visible hush as everyone noted that the room was not nearly as full as it had been three days go. Leia gave an internal sigh. This wasn’t the first time the Alliance had paid a high price for a win against the Empire. It wouldn’t be the last either. The only thing they could do was push forward and hope to hell the cost they paid made it worth. She would make it worth it dammit. She hadn’t been thrown into the past with no way to get home if she couldn’t in someway make this turn out better than it had last time.

The mood didn’t improve as Dodonna explained the plan, the pilots around her face grew dark. When he threw up the size and dimensions of the station, there were rumblings of dissent.

One of the pilots asked the question they were all thinking. “Pardon me for asking sir, but what good are snub fighters going to be against that?”

“Well, the Empire doesn’t consider a small one man fighter to be any threat or they would have found a way to create a tighter defense. An analysis of the plans that were stolen from the base at Scarif, and delivered by their highnesses has demonstrated a weakness in the battle station.” There were murmurs at that, but Dodonna ignored them and continued on in a warning voice “The approach will not be easy. You’re required to maneuver straight down this trench and skim the surface to this point.” A hologram appeared on screen. “It’s a small thermal exhaust port right below the main port. The shaft leads directly to the reactor. A precise hit, and only a precise hit, will start a chain reaction which should destroy the station. The shaft is ray shielded so you will have to use proton torpedoes.”

There is a murmur of dismay among the pilots and Wedge voices what they are all thinking “That’s impossible, even for a computer.”

“But it’s not impossible” Luke interjects “I used to bullseye womp rats on T-16 back home. They’re not much bigger than two meters.”

Her brother didn’t notice the fairly disbelieving looks that several of the other pilots shot him. They thought he was responding with a newbie’s bravado. Well, she had never seen him kill a womp rat, but Leia knew the value of the skills he had learned growing up on Tatooine. It was not a planet for the weak or stupid. Deserts were harsh unforgiving places in their own right, and when you added the corruption and brutality of the Hutts on top of it, well it gave one a very unique education on survival. Her brother had never understood this early on how extraordinary his talents
and skills were.

Breha stepped forward “I know we are asking a lot of you. But my planet is in danger, and we need your help. It will be difficult, but I do not believe it is impossible. Tarkin has made it very clear that one way or another Alderaan will pay the price. I would prefer we try to fight, but it is not my life on the line. This is a strictly volunteer mission. But, for everyone who chooses to go, I have faith that you will succeed.”

The crowd settled and silence fell once again as they absorbed what was on the line. Dodonna proclaimed “Then may the Force be with you.”

Leia turned to go and was surprised to see Han standing at the back near the entrance. She would have thought that he would have been long gone by now. He gave a shake of his head and he and Chewie disappeared down the corridor. She wasn’t sure where his head was at this moment. She gave Luke and small smile then motioned to him to follow Wedge to change into a flight suit. She hustled her way into the changing room and found a bright orange outfit for herself. She grimaced as she pulled it out. She didn’t remember these uniforms being quite so bright orange. Leia knew the Alliance was always short on cash, and it wasn’t until recently they even had standard uniforms, but still. This was walking around with begging to be shot by anyone with color vision.

Once dressed she walked quickly to the flight deck to find the chief acquisitions officer. When she explained what she wanted, he gave her a funny look, but agreed to her request. Smiling to herself she made her way across the hangar, heading to the Falcon. She spotted Han as he began loading his ship with supplies.

He looked up at her approach, then dismay filled his face as he took in her flight uniform.

“Are you insane? Going against that battle station is suicide.” his voice was condescending, but she see the concern he was trying to conceal.

She sighed “It’s my home Han. I can’t not go.” She gave him a cocky grin “I’m not that bad of a pilot.”

His eyes softened at that. “This is still madness you know that right?”

“I have faith.”

“I do too.” Luke came from behind her and slung an arm around her shoulders.

Han’s eyes widened as he took in their matching uniforms and he asked disbelieving “She dragged you into this to?”

“She didn’t drag me into anything. I volunteered.” Luke stated.

“Of course you did.” Han looked pained.

Luke looked around at the supplies around him. “You’re leaving?” he sounded surprised. “Why bother coming to the briefing then?” That was actually a good point. She raised her eyebrow at Han, silently backing Luke’s question.

Han shook his head “Wanted to see what the fuss was all about. And after that briefing…” he trailed off “There is no way to win this. You should run while you have the chance.”

Luke’s face twisted into disgust “Like you’re doing?
“What good is a payment if you aren’t around to use it?” Han shot back.

“Well I thought…” Luke looked around helplessly “You know what we are up against. What is on
the line. We could use a good pilot like you.”

Han threw his hands up in frustration “What is with you two? I’m a smuggler and I only look out
for one person. Me. That’s the way the galaxy works kid, and the sooner you accept that the longer
you’ll live. Like I told her worship here, it’s suicide.”

Luke looked as if had been slapped “Take care of yourself Han, I guess it’s what you’re good at.”
he stomped off.

him and kept walking away. “May the Force with be you.” Han continued on. Luke stopped for a
moment, then shrugged and kept walking.

Han sighed “Dammit.”

She sighed “That was very kind of you.”

He looked like he wanted to argue that but she just gave him a fond smile. “Take the compliment.”

He looked at Leia appraisingly “Are you sure I can’t convince you to come with me? You are
definitely calm under pressure. You can even drag the kid along if you like. I could use people like
you in my crew.”

“Tempting.” she admitted. More tempting then he knew. For a moment she indulged herself in the
fantasy of the three of them running around the galaxy, answerable to no one but themselves.
Hadn’t she done enough? Maybe it would be possible for her and Han to carve out a life together,
one where she wasn’t so burdened with so many expectations and responsibilities. She had been
fighting her whole life, and now she was poised to do the same fight all over again. She savored
that thought for a moment then she let the fantasy fall away.

That wasn’t who she was, that had never been who she was. She tired and she was afraid. Afraid
once again Alderaan would be lost. Afraid that she wasn’t making the right decision in keeping her
secrets. Afraid that she or Luke, or both of them would die up in this fight. But Leia had never run
away from a duty that had been placed squarely in front of her. She wasn’t about to start now. She
gave Han a regretful smile. “I’m afraid I’m going to have to pass on your offer”

His look was one part fondness and one part exasperation “I just knew you were going to say that.”
A look of embarrassment came across his face and he blurted out. “I mean that for you too you
know.”

“Mean what?”

“May the Force be with you.” He spat that out so fast it took Leia a few seconds to parse out what
he said. Then her heart broke at the meaning and worry behind that phrase.

She took in the sight of him standing there, embarrassed and defiant. She concentrated on
committing it to her memory. She didn’t want this face to fade from her memories like so many
other loved ones had. She leaned forward, and standing on her tip toes, brushed a small kiss on his
cheek. She said softly “And with you too.” When she pulled back his eyes were wide with his
shock. But he only gave her a small nod of farewell.

She turned, reminding herself not to look back, and headed in the direction her brother was
heading. He wasn’t hard to find. He was doing unnecessary checks of the X-Wing that had been assigned to him, muttering under his breath.

“Hey” she said concerned “What’s wrong?” Not that she didn’t have a good idea.

“I just thought,” he sighed and straightened up to face her. “I really thought he might help us.”

“He has to live his life as he sees fit. No one else can choose it for him.” Not even her.

“Yeah, I know.” Luke’s voice was filled with his disappointment.

To get him off this dour mood she gave him a cheeky smile. “I have a present for you.”

He frowned “A present? In the middle of all this?”

“Oh, you’ll like this one.” she reassured him. “I want you to use R2-D2 when you go up there.” And like his name had summoned him R2 rolled around the tail end of the ship whistling a greeting to Luke.

Luke bit his lip “Uhh, that’s really generous, but who will you use?”

“I’ve already requisitioned another astromech.” she assured him.

He looked longingly at the droid, a familiar companion in this unfamiliar world. “But he’s your droid. Are you sure?”

She laughed out loud. R2 hadn’t been her droid for a very long time. Not for the galaxy would she deprive Luke of his best co-pilot. This was a correction to her meddling that she most definitely was happy to undertake. “He likes you, you will work well together. Take him.” she urges.

He gave her a wide sunny smile and knelt down to address to R2. “What do say, you want to join me up there?” he asked.

R2 beeped a long affirmative whistle.

Luke looked up at her from his kneeling position “Thank you.”

“You are most welcome.”

The floor became more and more crowded as the techs were hustling around them as they got the ships ready. Leia was about to give her farewells to Luke when Obi-Wan’s voice came from behind her “That is very generous of you Leia.”

She turned to face him “It’s wasn’t really, just practical. R2 is old, but he’s clever. Luke is going to need every advantage he can get.”

Obi-Wan’s face had the briefest flicker of amusement “Yes, he is.” he agreed. Before Leia could ask what part of her statement he was agreeing with, he called out “Luke. I was looking for you.”

Luke, who was about to ascend the ladder into his cockpit came trotting back. “Really? What for?”

Obi-Wan looked at him solemnly “You are a good pilot Luke, but I’m been in a few battles myself, and this is your first one” He rested his hands on the blond’s shoulders and stared Luke directly in the face “Listen to the Force, trust your instincts. They do you credit.”

“I will.” Luke’s face was wide and questioning, but his voice held steady.
Leia turned to the General “Are you going up?”

He turned around to face her, his hands dropping from her brother's shoulders. “Me, oh no. I dislike flying, people are always shooting at me when I’m flying.”

Luke gave a muffled laugh and Leia rolled her eyes.


Her brother turned and his face broke into a wide grin “Biggs!” he shouted delighted. He ran to the man and they hugged.

Biggs. Biggs Darklighter. Childhood friend. He died in the battle of Yavin. Leia didn’t know much beyond that. Luke had never talked about Biggs much after the first year with the rebellion. His death had been a grief on top of too many other grief’s on that horrible day. Well maybe not this time.

“I told you!” Luke crowed “I told you I’d make it!”

Biggs grinned “Well of course you show up now, when it’s the worst possible time.”

Luke laughed “Just my natural good luck.”

Biggs shook his head ruefully “As much as I hate to see you here on this mission of all missions, you are still the best bush pilot in the outer rim. We could definitely use you. How did you end up here anyway?”

Her brother shrugged “That is a long story. But,” he tugged on his friend's arm, bringing them closer to her “there is someone I want you to meet. Biggs. Leia Organa” He gestured to her then repeated the gesture towards his friend “Leia Organa this is Biggs Darklighter.”

She gave the man the friendliest smile she could summon “Charmed” she said.

The flabbergasted look Biggs shoot Luke was rather amusing “Organa. Princess Organa?”

“Leia is fine.”

He shot Luke a look. “Skywalker what did you walk into this time?”

Her brother’s mood was teasing “I told you it was a long story.”

“Don’t believe a word this farm boy has to tell you about me. He lies all the time, it’s very tragic.”

Leia schooled her face not to show her amusement. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Biggs finally noticed Obi-Wan standing beside her “Kenobi.” he said with a jaunty grin “Surprised to see you out here.” So the gossip hadn’t reached the whole base about the Jedi’s identity.

“Darklighter.” Obi-Wan answered back smoothly “Still following Luke into trouble I see.”

Biggs gave him a wide look of innocence “Oh no sir. He was following me.”

Luke rolled his eyes, and Leia felt she was missing a very old joke between the three of them.

Biggs grabbed Luke and pulled him away ”Now let me give you a few pointers Luke, this is a bit different then that beat up old skyhopper of yours.”
Obi-Wan stood with her as the two men headed away. He was silent for a moment then in a quiet voice “You know he’ll be there.”

She snorted. There was no need to ask the who Obi-Wan was referring to. “Of course he will be. There is a cataclysmic event in my life threatening to tear everything I love asunder. Where else would he be?”

Obi-Wan’s eyes sharpened at her implied reference to future events but let it go “Keep your shields down tight Leia. As tight as you can.”

She nodded, trying to keep her face neutral. She wasn’t Luke heading off to her first battle. Yelling at him that she was only a few years younger then him and she didn’t need any lectures wouldn’t be productive right now. As much as she wished otherwise.

“And you should listen to your instincts too.”

“I’m still not a Jedi.” she insisted.

He looked at her appraisingly “No, but the Force is strong with you, and it always will be.”

When the ships exited hyperspace for a moment Leia lost focus. The Death Star was there hovering over her planet. Alderaan had no moon, so the sight must be visible to everyone on this side of the planet. With Tarkin’s galaxy wide broadcast there was no way her people didn’t know their death was filling the sky. She steeled her reserve. They could do this. It had been done it once before.

There was a wave of surprise in the Force, followed very quickly by panic. Concerned, she reached out to Luke, on instinct, to calm him. Her brother was worried yes, but he was focused and resolved to see this done. Then who….

“Leia?” the unfamiliar sounding mental voice was tentative, as if he was hoping that it was some other daughter currently barrelling towards her probable death. She had expected him to be here. She hadn’t been expecting to be bombarded by his surprise, fear and worry though. Did he really think she wouldn’t come? Did he think she would just wait in worry while her planet was in danger?

She threw up every shield she could, cursing herself for even letting a fraction of them down reaching for her brother. This was not the time to be caught in his panic and worry. Really, what was that about? Afraid his plans to use her would come to nothing?

She felt him reach out again, not nearly as tentative this time, but all she felt was the impression of someone knocking at the walls she carefully constructed. Annoying yes, but not nearly as distracting as his voice had been. The stray thought occurred to her that that voice was probably what he sounded like outside of the suit. It was a nice sounding voice, not ominous at all and it definitely didn’t fit the image of all that cold black armour. She shoved it away, that was completely irrelevant, she had bigger things to focus on.

“Would you look at the size of that thing?” Wedge said, awestruck. Leia brought her focus back to the matter at hand.

“Cut the chatter Red 2” Red Leader’s voice nonsense tone filled the comms. “Roll Call”

As the pilots in the red squadron duly reported back, Leia called in after her brother.
“This is Red 8 standing by.” she announced over the comms.

“Lock your S foils into attack position.” was the instruction that followed.

As they hit the magnetic field, R7 gave a warble of alarm and began making adjustments to the deflector shield. Bit bumpy her ass, the X-Wing felt like it was trying to tear itself apart. When she got back to Yavin she and that analyst were going to have a chat about appropriate rating systems. Fortunately that part didn’t last long and they were through.

As the Death Star filled her screen, Red Leader’s voice came over the comms. “Switch to the open frequency.”

Leia complied and Tarkin’s voice filled her comms “Citizens of the galaxy, I regret to inform you that the rebellion has elected not to surrender, but instead have launched a small set of one man fighters against this station. As a consequence, they and the Alderaan system will be destroyed. Such is the fate for all who defy the Empire.” The message began playing again on a loop and Leia switched back to the Alliance frequencies.

Red Leader’s voice was calm over the comms “Alright ladies and gents, this wasn’t anything we weren’t expecting. Everyone set your chronos to fifteen minutes. That is all the time we have to do this, and don’t forget to keep track. Keep your focus on the mission and let’s get this started.”

“Red leader this is Gold leader. We are starting our attack run now.” The three Y-Wings broke off from the main group heading to the trench.

“Copy that Gold Leader. We’ll cut across their axis and try to draw their fire” The rest of the fighters began to break off into their assigned groups of threes. They spilt across the surface as they began opening fire upon the station.

Leia took a deep breath and followed her squad down and across the trench to draw the fire of the cannons mounted to the station. The barrage began swiftly, but wasn’t very effective. The cannons mounted on the hull of the Death Star were designed for cruisers, not one man fighters. Leia began methodically targeting cannon after cannon on her run. Her fellow pilots were also raining destruction down upon the mechanical landscape. As she saw fireballs bloom and fold Leia felt a well of satisfaction rise in her. This was only a small part of the station. The damage they were inflicting was nothing but an annoyance in the long run. But to see it, to see it for herself, the damage they were causing this abomination that was the cause of one of the greatest tragedies in her life was undeniable.

“Heavy fire boss, twenty three degrees” Wedge let out.

“I see it, stay low.” Red Leader barked. The voices burst into her ear, bringing her back into the present. She shook her head, now was not a good time to lose her focus, no matter what the cause.

Leia banked and dodged as the cannon fire burst around her, concentrating on both destroying as many towers as she could find and keeping her senses open as she dared to keep track of her brother.

Luke’s voice filled her comms “This is Red Five, I’m going in.’

She couldn’t see what he was doing, precisely, she was too busy trying to fire at the cannons, but Biggs panicked voice followed soon after his announcement “Luke! Pull up!” Dammit Luke didn’t have enough experience flying in low gravity. The Station was big enough that flying over it wasn’t like flying in space where you could pull up quickly. And it certainly wasn’t the normal gravity of
Tatooine where Luke would know by experience how much he would have to fight the stick.

She dropped her shields and reached out, Luke was worried and feeling a bit chagrined, but otherwise unharmed.

“Are you alright?” Biggs asked.

“I got a little cooked but I’m okay.” he reassured him. She rolled her eyes. Typical of Luke, I almost died doing an insane stunt, but I figured out how to do it and I’m mostly intact. So everything is fine.

Biggs apparently also understood her brother because he didn’t lecture him either. “You are staying here. I’m going in now, cover me Porkins.”

“I’m right with you Red Three..” Porkins answered.

“Red Five I’m coming to you to cover your flank.” she announced. Leia pulled up from her flight path and brought the ship up a bit further from the surface to see where Luke was. Finding him she flew to coming to his left flank, and the two of them began their next strike run across the surface.

“I’ve got a problem here” Porkins declared.

“Eject” Biggs demanded.

“I can hold it” he insisted.

Leia switched on her comms “Pull out now.”

Porkins “I’m fine Red Eight.” He insisted, sounding annoyed.

Red Leader’s voice cut in “Not according to the stats your droid is feeding me. Your right stabilizer is blown and as of now you are useless to me. This is not a suicide mission. Get out of here now. That is an order.”

Porkins grumbled but did as he was told, pulling out and heading away from the station.

Biggs continued on with his attack solo and Leia kept her ship by Luke’s side. As explosion after explosion occurred on the surface, the amount of fire coming there way slowed down to a trickle. Then they stopped the barrage completely.

Red leader’s voice broke through “We’re going to get enemy fighters.”

Luke broke in “My scope isn’t picking up anything.”

Red Leader’s advice came across the comms “With this much weapons discharge your scopes can’t pick them up from the energy disbursement around here. Stick to visual confirmation”

Leia looked around frantically then felt a tug on the force. She looked to her right “I got them.” she announced “Sixteen of them heading in. Nineteen degrees.” Three other pilots chimed in with visual confirmation of Leia’s assessment.

Red Leader’s voice was commanding as he ordered “Whatever you do do not let those TIE’s into the trench.”

She banked and threw her fighter to the left, leaving Luke behind as she headed to where there were two TIE’s heading the way of Gold Squadron.
“If you pick one up watch it.” Luke stated.

“I can’t see him” Biggs sounded frightened.

“Bigg’s I’m heading your way.” Luke’s voice was filled with concern and Leia opened herself up just a little more to keep an eye on him. One of the TIE’S in her duo broke off and she continued to follow his companion.

“Thanks Red Five.” Biggs muttered.

Leia’s relief was short lived as she felt Luke’s worry flare across her mind.

“Watch your back Red Eight, watch your back!!” Red Leader’s voice broke through.

Leia cursed as she realized that she was too focused on what Luke was doing and not enough on her own situation. The TIE who had broken off was now on her six. The proximity alarms in her cockpit started wailing as the TIE tried to get a lock on her. She began to swing her ship wildly side to side, helping her to evade his shot.

“I can’t shake him.” she announced over the comms.

“Red Six do you see Red Eight?

“It’s a heavy firing zone, I can’t see her.”

Well help in that quarter wasn’t going to come quickly enough. Listen to your instincts, Kenobi had said. She took a deep breath and listened for that quiet nudge that told her what was the best option, only to gag at the overwhelming swirl of Vader’s emotions. Her hands jerked on the joystick and her X-Wing bobbed. She quickly pulled it out of the dive she inadvertently sent it into.

“Leia!” she flinched at his mental voice, it was full of everything he was feeling, and at full volume. It also had the side effect of overwhelming everything else she could possible feel in the Force. Leia’s head began to ache with the echoes of it, and the cloying nature of his fear was making her heart speed up and palms sweat. Didn't he understand the value of restraint? At all? "You need to leave. I know what you are trying to do, I've taken care of -"

“Are you trying to get me killed?” she howled, her frustration at this situation overwhelming her distaste at communicating with him in this intimate manner. She was fighting for her life and he wanted to chat? There was a flare of shock followed quickly by the withdrawing of that wave of overriding emotion. Apparently, much like his alternate had with Luke, he wanted her alive. Well wasn’t that useful to confirm. She gritted her teeth, thankful for the relative silence now, and listened for the internal tick that would tell her when and where to move.

“LEIA!!!” Luke’s voice was shaky “We are on our way.”

“Sooner would be better!” she shouted over the comms.

Then there was an X-Wing flying over her head, and the proximity alarms stopped their annoying wail.

“Got him!” Wedge exclaimed.

“Thank you.” she muttered, drawing her shields tight around her again, before Vader started yelling again. He was getting louder, and stronger. Experience with Luke told her that meant he was
getting closer. Once he entered the field, their chances were going to slip further away. Damn it they were running out of time. And though she had long practice with her shields she had never been in a battle with someone so strong and determined to get her to hear him. Maybe Obi-Wan had a point about warning her, and was not being a condescending.

“Red Leader this is Gold Leader we are in range for the targeting computer.”

Luke’s voice “I see a new group. Three of them coming in on vector two nine.”

Leia brought her X-Wing up just in time to see the squad disappear into the trench. The Force around her grew cold, even through her shields she could feel the sharp jagged edges of. Vader was leading that squad. She tamped down on the instinct to follow them. She had been given no orders to do so and there was still enemy fighters up here. “Gold Leader you’re about to have company.” She announced over the comms.

There was an ominous silence as all of the remaining pilots not in the trench absorbed her words. “It’s almost there” Gold Leader breathed.

“Sir we’ve got enemy fighter coming in on us” Gold Five stated. “They-” his transmission was cut off abruptly. Another life at Vader’s hands. This was not anything she thought she would have to grapple with ever again. Her eyes briefly closed in regret, and then she force herself to let it all of it go. She couldn’t afford to be distracted. She needed to focus on what she was doing. That is what had lead her to her earlier disaster of falling into a trap.

“It’s away!!!” Gold Leader’s voice was triumphant.

“Did it go in?” Red Leader asked hopefully.

There was a beat of silence and a defeated “No, just deflected to the side.”

Leia felt doubts close in on her. If she took into account Red Leader’s attempt at Yavin, that was two tries with the targeting computer that failed. She glanced at the chrono and she cursed when she read seven minutes. They had used up half of their allotted time. She didn’t want to send more men into that trench trying for something only she or Luke could achieve, but she had no way of making sure they were the next ones.

“Gold Leader to Red leader, I am out of the trench, but I lost Tyree and lost Hutch.”

“I copy Gold Leader.”

“They came at us from behind-” the transmission was cut off in a burst of static. Red Leader called out “Red 3, Red 5, and Red 8, you’re closer to the entrance point and so I need you to start your run. We’ll wait up here and get ready for ours.” Leia felt a wash of relief come over her, luck or the Force, it didn’t matter to her who delivered this opportunity. It was up to her and Luke now, and hopefully more lives would be saved as they wouldn't be in the trench to be mowed down by Vader.

The three up them briefly flew higher as they clustered together and then as one the swooped down and entered the trench.

“Let’s go full speed, that should keep those fighters off our tails.”

“Luke at that speed will be able to pull up in time?” Biggs asked.

As they flew down past the metal canyon walls, the guns did not start again.

“Keep an eye out for those fighters.” Luke warned, as they got closer and closer to the starting point for the targeting computer.

“Come on, Come on” Leia whispered pointless, urging the ground before them to go by faster. The lack of fire coming from the turrets meant that those TIE’s were near. Then that cold presence was there, making all the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. The proximity alarms started going off again, and Leia felt despair wash over her.

Then Vader began banging at her shields again. Presumably he had started again because he could see where she was and figured she could handle the distraction. She gritted her teeth and ignored him. Whatever he was going to offer her to coax to try to get her to leave wasn’t anything she was interested in hearing. Then he opened fire, concentrating his efforts on Bigg’s ships.

Bigg’s panicked voice came over the speaker “I can’t hold them.”

Luke’s voice came over the comms “I’ve activated the targeting computer. I just need a little time.”

Taking a gamble, Leia veered left, directly behind Luke trying to simultaneously cover her brother and to try to get Vader’s attention, but he was focused on Biggs.

“Luke hurry up.” Biggs was genuinely panicked now, and Leia thought briefly of screaming at Vader again to get him to stop. She gathered herself for the shout and there was a fiery ball that flashed in the corner of her eyes. Biggs was gone. Because of her shields she couldn’t feel her brother’s reaction but she knew that she had failed to protect one of the last living links to his past. He was going to be devastated over this. Again. “Dammit.” she muttered.

Then Vader began firing at her. The energy beams passed her view screen, with their deep green color. Leia let out a startled yelp and almost began to do evasive maneuvers out of habit. So much for wanting her alive. She stilled herself though. If she started to move, Luke would die before he got off the shot. He would die and Alderaan would die. And then she took a deep steadying breath, and analyzed what was happening here.

To someone who wasn’t as familiar with his abilities as a pilot it would look like he was just missing. Leia had spent four years in the rebellion and was bitterly acquainted with the level of his abilities. The list of Rebel pilots that had lost their lives to him was long. She was also aware to her own levels. She was competent, but she wasn’t brilliant, and he was. She was almost directly in front of him and was doing nothing to evade his shots. He was deliberately missing, hoping to spook her into moving so that he could have a clear aim at Luke. “Tricky.” she muttered under her breath “Very very tricky. But I’m just as clever. And more importantly I’m not moving.”

This was fast becoming a moot point. They were soon going to hit the point of no return and Luke was still not reaching out with the Force. His targeting computer was still trying to calculate and it probably wouldn’t work anyway. She couldn’t make the shot, not while he was in the way. But she couldn’t move or Vader would take him out. This was something she wanted to avoid. She had no desire to have Vader become aware of Luke, and at this close he would sense anything her brother did. Luke was just as loud as she was in the Force. But if she did nothing, Alderaan was lost. She bit her lip as she weighed her brother’s anonymity with her planet’s survival.

Luke would be the first one to kick her ass for this line of thinking. His temporary safety against billions of lives, it wouldn’t even be a question for him. He wanted to train as a Jedi, Vader was going to learn about him one way or another. She would prefer to have it happen later, but there
was no sense in railing against it now.

Bracing herself, she reached out, knowing that this would weaken her shields. She made a note to practice this in the future. She knew it was possible to both maintain them and talk mentally, she just didn’t have enough practice to keep Vader out. “Luke.” she whispered into the Force, feeling his shock and confusion at her voice. She continued, hoping against hope that he would believe this was real and not a figment of his imagination “Luke, the targeting computer won’t work. Please, trust your instincts.”

“LEIA!!!” reverberated in her skull. She flinched automatically at his bellow, and did her best to ignore him.

“This will work.” she put every bit of faith and love she held for him into that sentence “Please Luke, we are running out of time. Trust me. Trust the Force. Take the shot.”

“LEIA PLEASE LISTEN TO ME!” Dammit did he ever shut up?


“Yes, I’m alright” he assured them “Everything is okay.”

She felt him reach out, like a baby bird trying it’s first flight, wobble and unsure. That got Vader’s attention, and she felt his focus break from her as he concentrated on this new development. She held her breath as Luke tried to make sense of what he was feeling. Then a bright flare of confusion and fear tore through the Force like ripples in a pond. She felt Vader’s cold dark presence move rapidly away from her.

Then there was a most loved voice, repeating something she had heard in one of her darkest moments. “You’re all clear kid,” Han crowded across the comms “now let’s blow this thing and go home.”

Leia felt her brother’s calm focused moment and then the torpedoes were away. She whooped as the entered the port and quickly disappeared. She and Luke pulled out of the trench and ascended out of the trench. Once they hit the surface they kept at full speed, trying to place as much distance between themselves and the Death Star as they could.

“Great shot kid, that was one in a million!!!”

“Good job Red Five.” she said, echoing Han.

There were whoops and calls on the comm as the surviving pilots realized what had been accomplished.

Red Leader’s voice cut through all of it. “Alright boys and girls, let’s get out of here.” And they all exited to hyperspace.

When they arrived on Yavin Leia quickly descended from her cockpit and went running to Luke.

“You did it!” she crowed. He grinned and returned the hug just as enthusiastically.

“Thanks to you” he whispered in her ear. Pulling back slightly he gave her a puzzled look “That was you, right?”
She nodded “Later.” she promised “I’ll explain everything later.”

Then Han’s arms were around both of them. “That was without a doubt the best flying I have ever seen!!” he shouted jubilantly.

“I knew you would come back!” Leia teased, enjoying the feeling of his hug “If only for the reward.”

His grin faltered for a moment, then seeing her grin, he realized she wasn’t being serious. “Oh of course.” he said “I’m only in it for myself!” Then he shook his head “You two are in a serious need of a keeper.”

“Are you volunteering?” she asked, delighted by the glimmer of hope in his eyes.

He opened his mouth to answer but Chewie gave a roar of victory and enclosed all of them in his embrace, practically pulling them all off the floor. Leia was still laughing when it seemed the rest of the rebellion descended on them.

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer
ABA (After the Battle of Alderaan) - Day 1

Leia was asleep, at least she was reasonably certain she was asleep, in that state of neither here nor there. Where she believed wholeheartedly, she was dreaming, and also at the same time that everything happening was real.

Mon Mothma was sitting at her desk, in her office as Chancellor for the New Republic. It was a wide open space, the walls painted a cheery yellow, dominated by three circular windows at the back. The room itself was sparsely furnished, only seating and two tables flanking the doors. There were no adornments hanging on the walls. Leia often thought that it was almost too sterile, but she understood Mon’s political statement of the shunning of Palpatine’s excesses in decoration. Mon’s desk sat in the middle of the room, the light pouring onto her and lightening up her flame red hair. She was calm and cool as always when she spoke “It is vital to the survival of the New Republic that we open a restaurant on the floor of the Senate, Leia.”

Leia frowned at this. There were so many arguments against this insane plan of action she wasn’t even sure where to start. She was just opening her mouth to voice some of them when she felt a hard push against her shields. Frowning she turned to the door, wondering who was trying to get in.

Mon continued on, and she turned her head back to the woman. “When the Senators are hungry they get grumpy.” She gave Leia a pleading look. “And when they are grumpy none of the bills we need to pass come to anything. Leia, you are one of my most astute and trusted political advisers, I need your support on this.”

That push came again, and Leia turned away from the older woman, to stare at the door in puzzlement. Who would be so rude as to interrupt them now? She frowned as she recognized the presence behind the annoyance. It was him. Well, she didn’t want to talk to him, she was too busy trying to tear down everything he built.

“Chancellor, if you could give me a moment,” she explained to Mon and resolutely got up. Heading to one of the tables at the side of the door, she pulled it across the entrance as a barrier. Satisfied she nodded, that would keep him out.

When she turned back around Mon raised an eyebrow in inquiry “Are you quite finished Leia? I told the guards not to let anyone in, I hardly think that was necessary.”

Leia muttered, “Can’t be too careful nowadays.” She returned to her seat and began her counter-arguments “Mon, we don’t have the permits needed to open a restaurant on the Senate floor. It will
take months to acquire them, and with so many species represented here, I don’t think it would very practical in any case. The food the Bothans eat would drive the Wookie contingent crazy with the smell alone. And we need to pass the bill of rights for nerf herders now, or they will withdraw their support.”

Mon sighed “I understand all of this Leia, but I-” the rest of her sentence was cut off as a loud wail of pain came through the door. Leia turned in annoyance to yell at him, she really didn’t have time for this right now. Couldn’t he sense she was busy? Then the wail came again, and Leia shivered when she recognized the sound of that voice. It was Luke, not him, and her brother was in pain. The part of her that believed this was real disappeared as, without thinking she stepped into her brother’s mind, that office from so long ago fading away.

She was standing in the desert, watching several small buildings burn in front of her. There was destruction all around, but the figure who standing in front of it all was focused on one particular site above all others. The pair of skeletons, stripped of all recognizable features by the fire, were splayed carelessly in front of the building closest to them. She sighed, this was an old nightmare, as familiar to her as one of her own. She stepped up to the figure watching it all, with disbelief and grief swirling around him.

“This wasn’t your fault Luke,” she said as gently as she could, grabbing his hand in hers, sending him comfort.

His head turned to look down on her, his eyes wide and startled as he took her in.

“What was that?” he asked in a high pitched voice “What are you doing here?”

Leia felt her eyes snap open as she reacted to her brother’s surprise and was startled to see the rough, worn walls of an unfamiliar complex meet her eyes. No, not unfamiliar. An old base she had’t thought of in years, Yavin, she was on Yavin. The last few days flew into her mind, and she sat up in bed cursing. She was in the past, Alderaan was saved, and she just walked into her brother’s nineteen-year-old mind, without so much as a by your leave. Well hell, this was a massive screw up on her part.

She got dressed and headed to the hallways. She wasn’t getting back to sleep now. She vaguely knew where her brother had been stationed and she followed her sense of him to guide her to his location. He was so unguarded that he was leaking his confusion and panic everywhere and Leia resisted the urge to delve deeper into that. It would be...not good, to take advantage of him like that. He didn’t understand what was going on around him and he hadn’t given her permission to delve into his mind. She was half surprised she hadn’t run into Obi-Wan yet, demanding answers about what was going on. She came to his quarters, at least where he was sleeping for the night, and knocked on the door. He immediately opened the door, seemingly not surprised to see her there. He was dressed in night clothes that were too big on him. Probably borrowed from Han.

“What was that?” he demanded “Am I losing my mind or-”

She shook her head, cutting him off. There was no such thing as privacy in the halls of a military base. “Not here, get dressed, and we will go somewhere a bit more private.” He nodded his assent and closed the door. She waited for a few minutes until he emerged, looking worried and a bit defiant. Leia couldn’t blame him, she had done something really stupid and invasive, he was entitled to his anger. She motioned him to follow her as they made their way through the labyrinth of corridors finally heading to the flight deck and walking out of the entrance into the moist night air. She waited till they were about fifty yards out, far enough away that if there was yelling
involved no one would overhear, but not close enough to the sensor’s boundary to set off any alarms. She turned and faced Luke head on. “Alright, I don’t think anyone will overhear us, go ahead.”

“You spoke to me in my mind. On the Death Star run.” She nodded in affirmation, and he continued “And then, just now, you were in my dream.”

She grimaced, “Yes I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have done that without permission. It’s a habit.”

“Habit?” his face betrayed only bewilderment. Oh, she was mucking this up badly.

“Yes. I…” she trailed off as she searched for the right words. You’d think she be a bit better at telling people this. “I was going to tell you tomorrow anyway. Obi-Wan knows, so do my parents.”

“You’re a Jedi.” his face filled with wonder.

“No!” she was very tired of being told that. “I am not. Strong in the Force, yes. Jedi no.”

“Then how?” he crossed his arms over his chest, glaring at her.

Best just to jump into then. “I am from the future.”

He cocked his head “Excuse me?”

“I am from the future. About thirty years” she elaborated.

A look of distrust crossed his face “Funny, you don’t look that old.”

She gaped at him. Trust him to narrow down onto the practicalities. “No, I mean yes. This body is nineteen” she gestured down at herself. Then she tapped her head “But up here, I’m fifty-three years old. I went to sleep, then without explanation, I woke up in this time.”

“Just like that?”

“Yes, just like that.”

“Okay,” he looked thoughtful, losing some of his defensive posturing “Then why do you have the habit of walking into my dreams fifty-three year old Leia?”

“Not all your dreams.” she assured him “Just the nightmares. As a way to offer comfort. You use to do the same.”

“This is a thing Jedi do?”

“You know I have no idea.” she answered thoughtfully “We always figured it was easy for us because we’re…” she trailed off, unsure how to phrase this. Well, she wasn’t going to go about it the way he had. Best just come out and say it.

“Because we are what?” Impatience was coloring his voice.

“Because we are twins” she answered “You’re my brother Luke. We were separated at birth to protect us from the Emperor.”

He stared at her flatly for a minute “So you learned this in the future?”

“Yes, ask Obi-Wan. He can confirm that.”
“That you're from the future?”

She grimaced “Well he doesn’t have any more evidence then you do on that point. But the siblings part, that he can confirm.”

His face was terrifyingly blank for a moment then something like acceptance rolled over him “I’m going to go with this. In the last few days, I learned my father was a Jedi, crazy old Ben is some sort of famous war hero, and I blow up a moon-sized battle station. You being my twin sister from the future is just another escalation of the crazy and impossible.”

“Really?” she breathed.

He shrugged “Really.”

“You believe me?”

“You’re the one who told me to trust my instincts. They say you aren’t lying, so yes. I believe you.”

She laughed and caught him in a hug. Startled he caught her back and then he returned the hug just as fiercely. She couldn’t even express how happy she was to be believed. Just believed. She was worried that he would question and prod and it was exhausting her just thinking about it. But Luke, Luke had faith. He had always had faith.

They hugged for a while then she pulled back and gave him her sunniest smile. He gave one back and asked, “What is that for?”

“For being you. For being my brother. For believing me.”

“Alright, but you need higher standards for the next unexpected family member you find.”

For a moment her thoughts flickered over to Vader. That had been him earlier, trying to to get her attention. She shoved thoughts of him away. Her shields had held, she could keep him out, this was not a problem she needed to be worried about right now. This was about Luke, and she wouldn’t let Vader steal her joy in them finding each other again.

“And later?” her conscience whispered. “You are going to have to discuss this sometime, General.”

But not today.

He looked her over, head to toe, and then asked, “I have so many questions, I’m not sure where to start?”

“What’s the first one then?” Please not about the future, I don’t want to talk about that.

His face screwed up in thought as he tried to settle on one of the million thoughts in his head. “Which of us is older?”

She laughed “I don’t know. We never figured it out actually.”

He nodded and then gave her a sly smile. “I feel like I’m the older brother. Plus I’m taller so you can be the little sister in all ways.”

She smirked at that. He didn’t know it, but this was a really old conversation between the two of them. “Well I’m wiser, so clearly I was born first.” and she shoved him playfully on the shoulder “Plus it’s really rude to bring up the height thing. It’s not like you aren’t a little short to be a
stormtrooper."

“Huh?” Right, she had been following a script that they hadn’t written here.

“Doesn’t matter,” she assured him. “Needless to say we never resolved that particular argument.”

His eyes darkened at that “There was no one left to tell us? Didn’t your parents know?”

Her bright mood dimmed at that “No,” she answered, “They never got the chance.”

His face fell in sympathy, but then he grabbed her hand and squeezed it in comfort. “You could ask them now.” he pointed out gently, remind her they were still here.

“Yes,” she agreed “But no because it’s the middle of the night and I don’t think they would appreciate being woken up. My mother is not someone to cross until she has her morning tea.”

“My Uncle Owen is the same way…” He trailed off as he realized what he just said.

“I am sorry,” she said in a rush. “I arrived too late to change that. I would have if I could, I know how much you loved them and I-” he shook his head, cutting her rambling off.

“I told you, that wasn’t your fault.” he reminded her “And it’s still not your fault. Even if you mysteriously appear in your own past to change things.” he frowned “You are changing things right?”

“Yes,” she said slowly, wondering where his mind was going with this.

“So you know what is going to happen?”

“No, I have an idea, but the changes I’ve already done have had a huge impact on the timeline. My specific intelligence is useless.” He thought about that for a minute. She wondered if he was going to ask about the Rebellion, his own training, or any other myriad possibilities about the future. But this was Luke, for him the personal details were always more important than any big picture.

“You knew Biggs would die?” he asked softly.

Leia bit her lip.  “He did before yes. I was hoping my presence would save more lives. And it did, just not his. I’m sorry.” She seemed to be saying that to him a lot.

He shook his head. “He made his choice. Hell, he made the choice to join the rebellion before I even did. You didn’t force him to go, and you didn’t shoot him down Leia.” No, but their biological father had. Vader had probably done it before too. Leia wondered if Luke had known that. Maybe she hadn’t been able to save Biggs, but her actions led to Obi-Wan surviving, so he didn’t walk away from this completely alone from anyone who had known him as a child. And he had her. He would always have her.

“How many people know about this?” he asked suddenly, interrupting her recriminations. “That you’re from the future?” Then his brow creased as another thought occurred to him “Or that we’re related?”

“My parents and Obi-Wan. On both counts actually.”

He looked a little hurt “Obi-Wan knew? That you're my sister? But why didn’t he tell me when I showed him your hologram?”

Leia shrugged “I have no idea.” And come to think of it if he had that would have saved her and
Luke from some very embarrassing situations in her past. Not to mention here and now. Maybe Luke learning now the old man had an interesting grasp of the truth wouldn’t be such a bad idea. “But I would like to keep both things secret for now.”

“Why wouldn’t you want people to know we’re siblings? Ashamed of me already?” the question was asked only half in jest.

“No,” she stated firmly, grabbing his hand “No, never.” He was most definitely not the family member she was ashamed of, he wasn’t the one that came with enormous problems. But how to explain this without looking like she was rejecting him. “But the name Skywalker, it paints a target on your back, Luke. I already have a big enough one, I don’t need to add to it.”

His face darkened “Vader,” he said flatly.

“Tell him.Tell him.Tell him.” Her conscience pricked. She looked into that face and couldn’t bring herself to do it. She had dealt with enough ups and downs in the last few days. This could wait. But she didn’t want to lie directly to him either. So she gave him the other reason.

“And the Emperor, too.”

He looked shocked. “What does he have to do with this?”

“Well he is a Sith Lord.” she explained, “I’m strong in the Force, I’m just as much a target as you.”

“What’s a Sith Lord?”

She was getting ahead of herself. “That’s probably a question Obi-Wan can answer with more depth then I can. But broadly speaking a Jedi uses the Light side of the Force, and the Sith use the Dark.”

He nodded his head and bit his lip thinking. “Alright, for now, I won’t say anything.” Leia breathed a sigh of relief. “Or about you time traveling either.” He got a baffled look on his face “There’s a sentence I never thought I’d utter. It’s probably for the best that you keep that to yourself. I can’t imagine how it would turn out if everyone thought they knew what was going to happen.”

“Poorly.”

He looked startled “You’ve been here for what? Three days at most? That was fast to come to that conclusion.”

“Let’s say I have personally experienced with thinking I could control events and it blew up in my face.”

He grew concerned “Leia, when exactly did you arrive here?”

She fidgeted a little, knowing this answer would head into territory she didn’t want to explore, but she wasn’t going to lie to him “When my shuttle arrived at the Death Star.”

He winced “That was not good.”

She gave a bitter laugh. “No, it wasn’t.” She shuddered as she remembered that all-encompassing panic at the sight of Vader. “But I got through it, and the station is destroyed. No point on dwelling on it.”

He grew suspicious “Is that your nice way of telling me to back off?”
She sighed “I’m rarely nice, Luke. You’re the nice one.” He looked slightly offended at that, and she amended “Or the meaner one with a better face for playing dumb. But no, I don’t want to talk about it right now. There are a lot of things that I can’t talk about right now.”

“Would you mind if I still ask you some questions? You don’t have to answer them if you don’t want.”

“Alright.”

“How much training did you get? I can’t imagine every person who has Force talent can walk into other people’s minds.”

“No, you’re right about that.” She did a quick look around and made sure no one was paying attention to them. Then she floated the rock to her, slowly and methodically. Luke’s eyes went wide. “Who taught you that?”

She laughed “You did. Or would. I don’t practice all that often. It’s not something I’m comfortable with.”

“Why?” He looked honestly baffled. “Even the little bit I did on the Falcon, and at the Death Star it felt...” he trailed off trying to find the words “Like coming home.”

"Because of where this comes from. Because I’m driven by my anger, and I don’t necessarily think that is a bad thing. Because I know my limitations and don’t want to be Vader."

“It’s complicated.”

“Part of the knowledge that we will not be speaking of?” He looked so sad at being denied knowledge of her. Just like her father had been.

“Yes,” then she equivocated, not bearing the thought of his disappointment “I will tell you. Just not now.”

“Alright,” he hummed under his breath. Then jumped to another thought track entirely. “So you know almost everything about me.”

“I wouldn't say everything,” Leia hedged.

"Like why you abandoned me when I needed you the most.” She shoved that thought away. They each had their own ways of coping with trauma. She knew that, she didn’t begrudge Luke his. Well, maybe only a little. “But I know a lot yes.”

“Well, clearly I am behind. So I need to catch up. What’s your favorite food?”

Leia snuggled up to her brother and gathered his hand into hers, and they talked through the night.

The medal ceremony was held mid-day, by Yavin’s solar rhythm. It was actually much grander than the first one. Not also being incredibly busy trying to evacuate as much equipment before the Empire came calling probably helped. She was part of it, again, but a recipient of a medal, along with Luke, Han, and Chewie, instead of being the one giving them. She wasn’t sure how she felt about receiving this honor at all. She had only peripherally involved in the what had been the last leg in a long chain of people who had helped in the destruction of the Death Star. She understood the importance of the ceremony to members of Rebellion, she just couldn’t shake the fact that she
felt like she had cheated her way into this.

Her mother was the one giving out the medals, her father standing slightly behind her on her right. As Leia walked side by side with Luke, Han and Chewie directly behind them, as she could see was her mother’s wide smile as they approached. When Breha leaned down to place the medal around her neck, she whispered in her ears. “I am so very proud of you my daughter.” Leia’s eyes filled with tears. For now, Alderaan was safe, and her parents were perhaps the only ones here who truly understood what a moment this was for Leia.

The party afterward was also a new change. After the Battle of Yavin, there had been many parties, but due to the evacuation, they had been much smaller affairs then this, broken up among the various escape ships. Now the crowd was roaring and filled with abandon as the liquor was flowing freely. As the night progressed, things got louder and louder as the pilots recalled their battles to the ground troops and techs. Luke seemed to be hanging on the edges, following along with stories but giving all the pilots their due. Han was keeping him company, so she wasn’t too worried about the amount of trouble he could get into.

Leia herself also stayed on the edges. She was reluctant to drink for fear of what she would say with a loosened tongue. And as much as this victory meant to her, she was all too bitterly aware of the long fight still left in front of them. She slipped away and walked into the clearing that was just outside the main temple, on the opposite side of the airfield. She was staring at it for long moments before she felt her mother come up to her side.

“What is so fascinating about the grass Leia?” she teased.

Leia grinned widely, this was something she didn’t mind sharing about the future “That it’s empty. That there is nothing here.”

Her mother tutted “I think you’ve spent too much time around Jedi’s, even if you claim not to be one.”

Leia laughed “It wasn't a metaphorical answer, but a real one. Before, in the old version of these events, there is a statue erected here honoring you and father as martyrs to the cause.” She gave a sigh of satisfaction, “And it’s not here.”

ABA - Day 2

When Leia awoke the next morning she groggy and tired. Not from anything fun like drinking, but on Vader becoming increasingly louder and louder through the night. It had lead to so many odd and disjointed dreams of her locking doors and put barricades up everywhere she went. She finally gave up around dawn, got up and dressed. She was amused to see the cafeteria almost empty of everyone. Well, it had been a long week with so many losses, she really couldn't begrudge anyone the time to cut loose, celebrate, and mourn. After battle victories were always a mess of emotions and drinking. Usually heavy on the drinking.

As she ate her breakfast, she reviewed her memories of the time. Yes, she had been thrust into a leadership position of the Alliance council, mainly for the public relations value of it, and the fact that she had managed to get the plans they had paid such a price for to the High Command. She had proven herself, but those first few months after Alderaan’s destruction there were many conversations she was excluded from on the basis of that most of the leadership hadn’t taken her seriously. Dodonna especially was prone to chalk up her more militant stances to “grief.” Some of them probably were, but she had made some very good points. And here she was again, facing the
same problem, only on a much wider scale, because she didn’t even have the symbolic leadership role given to her by her parent's death.

“You look grumpy” Luke sat down next to her at the table.

“Pondering my next move,” she told him in a quiet voice. There was practically no one in the hall at this moment, but it paid to be careful.

“Does it involve killing someone? Because I have to say I doubt that table did anything to deserve the scowl you are sending it.”

She laughed softly. “Just my own appearance.” she explained “No one is going to take my ideas seriously with this very youthful face looking at them. There are huge leadership vacuums right now, due to the personnel loss we took retrieving those plans and the fight to destroy the Death Star. But getting the pull I need, that is going to take time, which we do not have.”

He shrugged “So convince your parents.”

She frowned “What?”

Luke picked up his caff and took a long swig. “Convince your parents. Your father is on the Alliance Council, isn’t he? Convince them of the merit of your ideas and arguments. They can present them as their own until you’ve proven yourself.” he frowned “Although I would have thought getting the Death Star plans to safety would count for something.”

She sighed “It does. But that is just getting my foot in the door. Anybody can pull off one amazing feat. It’s repeating it and having a track record when your words start carrying real weight.”

“Surviving your one amazing feat counts too.” His face tightened in grief, clearly thinking of all those pilots, Biggs especially, who didn’t make it back from the defense of Alderaan.

“You’re right about that.” She felt very slow that Luke had to bring up her parents. This was like the reserve of the grieving process. But instead of forgetting that they were dead, she kept forgetting they were alive.

“Well this is cozy” Han smirked as he sat down across from them, no trace of last night revelry on his face. He always had a good head for liquor. “Some secret plan you two are hatching?”

Luke gave him a friendly smile. “Nah, complaining about the food.”

“Kid, it doesn’t matter what army you fight for, the food is always going to suck.”

Luke’s eyes widened “You mean all those tales about soldiers dining on the finest food was propaganda that the Empire uses?” He gave Han such an earnest disappointed look that the older man was temporarily taken aback. Then Han’s eyes narrowed suspiciously, and Luke’s face broke into a wide teasing grin.

“Remind me never to play sabacc with you.” Han turned to face Leia, “Well I’m off.”

“Third time's the charm?”

“I have some debts to pay off. But Mothma offered me a job, a trial run if you will, and I will be back.”

“I can’t tell you how relieved I am” she responded in a tone as dry as the desert, to cover the fact
she was in fact very relieved.

Chewbacca ambled over <Let’s go pup.> he barked.

“Make sure he actually pays the damn thing,” she told Chewie “the Alliance really can’t afford a smuggler who is being hunted by the Hutts and the Empire.”

Chewie let out a woof of laughter <I’ll see to it.>


Han shrugged “Found myself in debt to Jabba. Had some cargo that I had to dump and I owe him the money for it. It’s not a big deal kid.”

“Not a big deal” Luke echoed, and Leia stiffened in alarm. Luke was pissed. No Luke was past pissed and rapidly heading into anger. It had been a long time since Leia had seen her brother’s temper on full display. She had forgotten the thing ran deep as her own.

Han, fortunately, picked up on it too. Better yet he seemed to be understanding the source of Luke’s anger. “No,” he said firmly “I dealt with spice and intelligence gathering only. The occasional passenger, like yourself, who wanted no Imperial entanglements. No water exports and definitely no slaves.” Luke was still sitting there vibrating with fury “Luke, I blew up a very promising career with the Imps to free this one.” and here he gestured to Chewbacca “Why the hell would I go back to that now? I’ve done some shady stuff, and I’d be the first to admit it, but I would never do that.”

Luke unwound a little at that “And the cargo you dumped?” he pressed.

“Spice only.”

Luke seemed to weigh that for a moment, then gave a firm shake of his head. “Alright, then Leia is right. Pay the damn thing off.” He then went back to eating his breakfast, the subject closed as far as he was concerned.

Han gave them both a nod and headed out to the flight deck, Chewie by his side. Leia waited until they were out of earshot before she turned to Luke. “He was telling the truth about what he did,” she assured him.

Luke shrugged “I figured. It’s just..” he sighed “You’re from a core world, you wouldn’t understand the grip the Hutts have on the outer rim. The Republic, the Empire, it didn’t make much of a difference to us. Neither of them were willing to take them on. It was not their problem.”

“I know.” And it was a problem that had continued to dodge the New Republic too. Most of the conscripts of the First Order were children stolen from the Outer Rim territories. Obi-Wan appeared at their side before Leia could even begin contemplating how to fix a problem which had been centuries in the making.

“Good morning.” he sat down across from them “You two don’t seem the worse for wear from last night's revelry.”

Leia shrugged “Didn’t really participate that much.”

Luke nodded “The same for me.”

Obi-Wan grinned, “Well, if I could steal Leia for a moment, Luke. Her parents and I would like to
discuss something with her, and then we can start your lessons later this morning.”

“Sure. But can you answer a question for me?”

“If I can.”

Luke’s grin widened “Whose older, me or Leia?”

Obi-Wan stiffened slightly and then looked at Leia “You told him.”

She shrugged “I said I would” What was his issue? It wasn’t like she hadn’t warned him.

He sighed “Well Luke you are older, by about five minutes if I remember correctly.”

“Ha!” Luke slapped the table in triumph. “I told you!”

No, she wasn’t going to lose this argument, not after the last thirty some odd years of duking it out with Luke. “I got thrown back in time, so technically I’m still older,” she replied calmly.

His mouth dropped at that, and he sputtered for a response.

Obi-Wan watched the exchange, his face falling into a still blank mask. “You certainly don’t do things by half measures do you Leia?” his voice holding a careful neutrality to it. So he didn’t approve of her telling Luke about that? Tough.

“I’m not going to lie to him Obi-Wan. There are things I won’t say, but I won’t directly lie to him.” she wondered if he understood her veiled mention of the subject of Vader. She wasn’t getting a good read on him, his shields were drawn tightly around him. Luke frowned at the gathering tension between them and Obi-Wan let out a sigh.

Then he asked. “Is there anything else you would like to know about your birth?”

Luke opened his mouth to answer, but Leia held up her hand.

“Not right now for me, thanks,” she answered. She didn’t want to keep control of her emotions during his explanation. She was sure he would stick mostly to the truth, but she was sure Vader was in there somewhere in this tale, and she didn’t want to have to conceal her reactions from Luke. There was so much she wasn’t telling him, and so far he was willing to play along. But soon, when the truth came out, she wanted as little to explain as possible to her twin.

Luke looked disappointed, but Obi-Wan turned to him and offered “I can tell you later Luke if you like.” He turned back to Leia “And if we can get going?”

“Is this a meeting Luke really doesn’t need to be a part of or was he excluded because of what I told you on the Falcon?” People were starting to stagger in, not many but enough that Leia was feeling uncomfortable saying the word time travel.

“He was excluded because of the Falcon. But now that he knows I suppose there is no harm in letting him come along.”

“Why do you need me? I’m just a farm boy who can fly and shoot straight?” he asked puzzled.

“Because if you’re going to be a radical terrorist looking to overthrow a tyrannical government, you should at least have some understanding of the scope of the problem we are looking at.” Leia told him cheerfully “Which means meetings. Lots of meetings where everyone feels the need to express their opinion instead of doing something. Then when they do decide on a plan action half the time
they come up with the worst possible solution. All the while you have to sit there and look like you’re paying attention.”

“Well doesn’t that sound like fun,” he muttered darkly.

Obi-Wan looked vaguely alarmed at her cynical take “They aren’t all that bad.” he protested.

She sighed “Yes they are.” He opened his mouth to disagree, and she held up her hand to forestall him. “They are necessary, I know that. But so is physical training and eating a well-balanced diet. I despise both of them too, I still do it.”

Now she was picking up something in the Force from him, wariness and disquiet. Because she didn’t like meetings and regimented exercise? That seemed a bit extreme. Maybe the desert sun had baked his brain. “Well, that is certainly an interesting take on responsibilities.” he offered diplomatically.

Luke picked up his tray and gestured for Leia’s. She slid it over to him and deposited back on the serving line. When he came back the three of them walked into the base, heading to Bail and Breha’s room.

When they arrived her father looked surprised to see Luke, but her mother didn’t seem to share the sentiment. She walked over to Luke and stared at him for a moment. “I’m assuming your presence here means Leia told you about her, unique circumstances?”

Luke bobbed his head nervously “Yes Ma’am.” he said.

She shook her head in bemusement “Breha, please. No need for formality.” She then gave him a wide smile “I’ve waited a long time to meet you Luke Skywalker. How are you handling everything?”

“Just trying to ride out the storm, Ma’am-Breha” he corrected too quickly when he saw the look on her face.

Bail came up to his wife “We’ve both waited a long time.” he said “It is a pleasure to meet you at last.”

“Yes Sir.” her brother looked so nervous, but all Leia could do was marvel at what she was seeing before her. This was a moment that before now had only existed in her dreams and she wanted to savor that it had come to pass.

Obi-Wan cleared his throat “I hate to interrupt, but we do not have a lot of time before the Alliance high command is called together.” A meeting Leia hadn’t even been aware of until this minute. So, she wasn’t going to be invited into those just yet. She firmed her resolve, she would be, and until then she would play with the hand she had.

“Of course,” Breha muttered and gave Luke’s hand a reassuring squeeze. He looked baffled but moved to the center of the room, where there was a square table with two benches on either side. Bail and Breha’s status within the Rebellion offered them a larger room than most, they even had a separate bedroom from the living space. But overall it was not a large space, and the table was more meant for eating meals then a gathering place for meetings. Luke sat on the bench closest to the door, and Leia sat next to him, with her parents choosing to sit on the bench opposite of them. Obi-Wan, after seeing how they all barely fit on the benches, pulled the one free standing chair in the room to the head of the table.
“Well Leia” he began “We were wondering if you could give us some insight on how you think we should best proceed.”

Leia’s back went up “I told you,” she warned him, annoyance creeping into her voice. “That I wouldn’t say anything unless we are heading into trouble.”

“No Leia,” Breha interjected, she shot Obi-Wan a chastising glare, “We want your opinion based on your expertise, not your experiences.” When Leia looked over to her confused, her mother elaborated “You did say you earned that rank of General. It would be foolish of us to discount your advice. We just needed a private place to get it.”

Oh, that she could do. Now she felt foolish and felt her cheeks warm in embarrassment. She gave Obi-Wan an apologetic look “I’m sorry for jumping to the wrong conclusion.” she said contritely.

“It’s alright.” he murmured. The frown between his eyebrows stated differently, but Leia let it lie.

She thought about what had happened over the last two days, and what the destruction of the Death Star had done in her own timeline, and the few things that were still applicable here. “Tarkin’s death is a massive blow to the Empire—” she started with, and her father immediately interrupted her.

“He was just one man. A brilliant and deadly one, but just one person Leia. I don’t know if you aren’t overstating things.”

She frowned at him, did he want her opinion or not? He stopped, then made a face as he realized what he had done. He looked slightly abashed and nodded for her to continue. “Tarkin was one man, yes, but the real problem for the Empire is that its top structure, which was centered on Palpatine, Tarkin, and Vader, has just become dangerously unbalanced.”

Seeing the looks of confusion on everyone’s face, she elaborated “The Emperor trusted Tarkin, as much as he could trust anyone. As a result, Tarkin had a lot of power concentrated into his hands. Part of what him so effective, from a bureaucratic standpoint, is that he could win a lot of arguments about what to do just by opening his mouth. His word was the Emperor’s word.”

Bail’s face showed dawning comprehension “And without him there to make those decisions, we are about to see the top level of military officers fight amongst themselves about how to fight back.”

She nodded, “Yes. Without him, a lot of those responsibilities and powers he had are going to be delegated to a lot of other people. We are the enemy, but the Emperor believes in deliberately putting his subordinates against each other. Excepting Vader, there is no one else who had such pull to make clear, concise decisions that quickly.”

“There are rumors that Vader was killed.” Breha offered.

“He wasn’t.” both Obi-Wan and Leia contradicted at the same time. He looked at her in surprise, but she shrugged.

“I think every force sensitive in the galaxy would have felt it if he died,” she offered to Obi-Wan in explanation “He’s not exactly a quiet and calm presence.”

“No,” he said, a bittersweet smile on his face “He never was.”

Seeing the anger and grief on Luke’s face, Leia quickly got off that painful subject. “It doesn’t matter. Palpatine isn’t going to give any of that power to Vader. For one, it’s too much for him to
even reasonably handle. Two, it would strengthen his position in the military more than it already is. Sith Lords try to kill each other yes?” Obi-Wan nodded “Then there is no way Palpatine gives Vader an iota more power then he needs to.” She shook her head “Instead of dealing with one focused individual who had the authority to chase us across several jurisdictions we are going to have many individuals chasing us. That doesn’t take into account the political side of things with the Governors and Moffs also trying to catch us. And among the more ambitious ones, we can expect internal sabotaging as they try to hamper their compatriot’s efforts in that area.”

“Except Vader,” Luke muttered angrily. “He still has the power and pull that Tarkin did.”

She bit her lip, worried about this focus of his on this subject. But he was participating, and he was learning, so she gave him her honest answer. “Yes, he does. And I don’t see that changing.” she admitted, “Unless someone gets really ambitious and tries to use the destruction of the Death Star to try to unseat him.”

“A fool’s errand” Bail stated, “He might not play politics very well, in comparison to some of the other officers, but he’s also a lot deadlier than they are.”

Obi-Wan swallowed hard and looked away. Leia didn’t want to know if she wanted to offer him comfort in his obvious pain over this or yell at him for not finishing the job when he had the chance and saying them all this trouble.

“Well,” Bail interjected “at least we have the possible destruction of Alderaan. That is something that might lead to planet-wide revolts.”

And this was a dangerous line of thinking to pursue. Leia shook her head. “No, it won’t.”

Obi-Wan frowned “Are you sure?”

She sighed, weighed the pros and cons in her head about telling them this, and gave him the brutal truth. “Yes, because the actual destruction of Alderaan didn’t lead to that.”

Beside her, Luke gasped, and his hand immediately found hers under the table. She accepted the comfort but kept her face neutral as she faced her mother and father. “Originally the Alliance thought that for a while. It didn’t pan out that way. Alderaan was gone, there was no hiding that, but the Empire hushed it up.”

“Hushed it up?” Breha asked, her voice quavering with anger “How did the Empire hush up the fact that they destroyed an entire world?”

Leia grimaced “When the Alliance blew up the Death Star not even a day later it left the Empire in a tight spot. On one hand, they had destroyed a planet to keep the galaxy in line. On the other, that weapon was gone, destroyed by the very insurgents they were trying to stamp out.” She sighed, “They lied, Mama. It was put forth that it was a ‘natural disaster’ that led to the destruction of the planet.”

Bail sputtered “The galaxy accepted this?”

Leia snorted “I’d say about fifteen percent of the population actually believed that was the case.” Luke looked disappointed, but Leia continued on “The rest of the galaxy broke down into three other groups. The largest was those who believed the truth but were too frightened to do anything, or they were willing to swallow that lie for a sense of order. Then there were those who knew it was true, but wanted the Empire to stay in power for their own various reasons.” At Obi-Wan’s grimaced she gave a cynical smile. “Power attracts power, and there are always those who feel that
they can sell everyone else out if it gives them the advantage.”

Luke looked sad “So it was pointless then?”

She shook her head “No, never that. No planet suffered the same fate as Alderaan. That is a victory worth the sacrifice. And it wasn’t all bad. We did see an influx of cash and supplies, which after Yavin and Scarif were desperately needed.”

She thought about the politics of that first year, trying to view it in mind with what could be useful here without giving too much away. “The Empire also became much more fragile. Alderaan was a core world with a long history and, for all the political agitators that came from our planet, was not in open revolt. The fact that Tarkin destroyed it anyway made a lot of worlds think that no matter what they did, they wouldn’t survive. And there was definitely an uptick in independent cell activity. But as I said, the Emperor denied everything. We did see a flux of new recruits, but not from where you would think.”

Obi-Wan spoke up “Imperial troops.” he guessed.

She nodded. “Yes, quite a few of them. A lot of officers too. They had joined because they wanted to bring order and stability to the galaxy. Blowing up civilian planets is not what they had in mind.” She sighed “A lot of the Imperials who came to us were the ones who were at heart decent, and trying to be fair. When they defected the Empire cracked down even harder, and without their voices and push back the regime got even more brutal. It was a boon for us, in the long run, but a lot of people in the galaxy paid a heavy price for it.”

“She that is not our problem here though,” Bail put in “Tarkin made a galaxy-wide announcement about his intentions, there is no way the Empire can walk that back.”

“No, but we did fight, and we did place Alderaan in danger by doing so.” Obi-Wan pointed out reasonably.

Leia bristled “Tarkin would have blown the planet anyway.”

“Yes, but the galaxy doesn’t know that. We claim to be protecting them, and we landed a harsh blow to the Empire” her mother pointed out, “but the risk was still taken. The Empire can deny what Tarkin would have done, and with him dead there is no way to contradict it.”

“We need propaganda. Of some kind.” Leia mulled this over in her head, she had been the face of the rebellion last time. She and Luke, the last Jedi and the last leader of Alderaan. But she had hated it, and Luke wasn’t too comfortable with it either. It had all fallen apart when their parentage had been revealed. So let’s avoid that problem this time around. Her eyes fell on her mother. She had always been better at the more public aspects of being the ruler of Alderaan. And if Leia’s parentage did become public knowledge again, the fallout would be much more contained. Taking in a child of an evil murderous bastard was entirely more sympathetic than being said child.

“We should make holos and distribute them,” she said looking her mother straight in the eyes. “But of you.”

“Why me?” she asked baffled.

“The speech you gave in the war council yesterday, it was good. And explains the reasoning behind why the Alliance took such a risk. We would have to tweak some parts of it, but it could work.” Leia mulled over the possibilities “We still might be able to stir up the same resentment. Tarkin was willing to destroy an entire world just to get a few dissenters in line. Then those dissenters
managed to protect the world he was threatening. We might not get the exact reaction, but with the Death Star gone, we might be able to convince people we are capable of protecting them. And Mon’s right, you do have sovereignty over our people. This was your decision to make. You have also maintained a strict policy of staying neutral on the issue of the rebellion. At least in public,” she explained to Luke, who looked puzzled. “Tarkin threatening our world is what lead you to make this statement.”

“And what about our people?” Bail pressed “If she does this, Alderaan is going to get squeezed in retaliation by the Empire. At the very least several garrisons and a provisional governor. There is a lot of harm that can be done if she openly defies Palpatine on this.”

Leia bit her lip “I know. But we also have to look at the possibility that even if we say nothing, the Empire is going to do that anyway. Alderaan itself had nothing to do with this, but it’s a symbol of defiance, and they can’t let that stand unmolested. At least this way our people know why.”

Bail sighed, and Obi-Wan looked thoughtful. Breha nodded “She is correct Bail. We can’t do anything with the resources we have now to help. The best way to protect our people is to overthrow the Empire in its entirety.”

“Distribution is going to be an issue” her father pointed out.

“Yes, it always is.” Leia countered “But if we say nothing the Empire will fill that silence.”

He sighed, but he nodded. “Then that is what we will tell the council. Thank you, Leia, for your input. It was most helpful.” Both her parents rose as if to leave but Leia cleared her throat to catch their attention

“I have one other matter I would like you to address at the meeting,” she said. Bail and Breha shot puzzled looks at each other but returned to their seats.

“What are you concerned with Leia?” her mother asked.

“Luke.” Her brother gave her a startled look, and she smiled in reassurance at him. “About his identity more specifically. I would like you to press the Alliance to keep the name of the pilot who destroyed the Death Star secret. Or at least as secret as it possibly can be.”

Bail frowned “Why? It’s a good story. A farm boy from the Outer Rim, whose only family was killed by the Empire managed to deliver a heavy blow to the Empire. We are in need of all the good PR we can get Leia. You know that.”

She nodded “We do. And I’m not disputing the effectiveness of that campaign. But the longer we can go without Vader or the Emperor becoming aware of Luke’s identity the better we will all be.”

Bail looked thoughtful and then gave a slow glance over the Obi-Wan.

“What do you think?” he asked the Jedi Master.

The older man sighed “She’s not wrong.”

Luke interjected “I’m not afraid of the consequences of what I did.” he insisted “It needed doing, and if that puts me in danger so be it. If it helps in the Rebellion, I want to do it.”

Breha shook her head “Unfortunately it is not that simple Luke. There are precisely two people in the galaxy we aware of that have the potential to take down Vader and the Emperor. And both of them are here in this room. Leia has repeated several times she has no wish to train as a Jedi, and we respect that decision. You do want to be trained, but you aren’t ready yet. This isn’t about
hiding, this is about protecting a valuable ally until they are ready.”

Luke looked mulish, but he didn’t disagree with the overall point.

“Besides,” Bail said, “We have another person we can use in a similar capacity.”

Obi-Wan’s eyebrow lifted “We do?”

Bail’s smile sharpened “We have you.”

“Excuse me?”

“We have you” her father explained “We have a famed Jedi general of the Clone Wars. One who had a reputation as a brilliant tactician, and more importantly, was not erased from the official narrative of the Clone Wars.” Obi-Wan looked puzzled at that.

“Why ever not?”

“You were running almost a fifth of the Grand Republic Army Obi-Wan. That is hard to finagle around. Plus there was never a confirmed kill for you. The Emperor wanted you remembered in case someone came across you. If you were erased, it would make you that much harder to find.” Bail explained. Leia supposed there wasn’t much propaganda filtered into Tatooine. There was really no need for such steps in Hutt controlled territory. The Empire gave leeway to the Hutts, and as long as those oversized slugs gave their “taxes,” the Empire was inclined to let them rule that area of space as they saw fit. Although from what Luke had told her the Hutt’s rule had been just as bad as the Empire’s, if not exactly in the same ways.

Leia warmed to the idea of it “Your very existence is a symbol of defiance,” she said, “Plus we wouldn’t be giving away anything that the Empire isn’t already aware of.”

There was a self-deprecating smirk on Obi-Wan’s face as he looked at them “It’s hardly the first time in my life I was thrown into the public spotlight to placate the wolves. I had hoped that my exile would put an end to such things, but alas it was not meant to be.” He waved his hand as Luke opened his mouth to protest “No, it’s a solid plan, Luke. I don’t mind, I was just marveling at life’s interesting ironies.”

Luke definitely didn’t look happy with any of this, but he nodded. Turning to her parents, he asked, “Are we going to tell anyone Leia is my sister?” Her mother looked startled, but she shook her head “No, we hadn’t planned to.”

Luke nodded his head “Good. As you said Leia doesn’t want to be a Jedi, but if it was general knowledge she’s related to me and Anakin Skywalker there would be a lot of pressure for her to do so.”

As delighted as she was with his initiative in participating in the conversation with his own concerns, Leia felt the brush of irritation. She was the one who was supposed to protect him, not the other way around. “I am capable of saying no Luke.”

He turned his wide eyes to her “I don’t think anyone who has ever met you thought otherwise. But you shouldn’t have to. If people don’t know we are related you don’t get bothered.” She couldn’t argue with his logic, and he was honoring her wishes regarding their relationship, but it still rankled her a bit. Still, she nodded.

Bail looked around “Is there anything else?” Everyone shook their heads, “Excellent, we should
get going.” After her mother got up, she leaned down and gave Leia a kiss goodbye on the cheek. Then with an impish grin, she planted one on Luke’s startled face, and she and Bail excited the room.

Luke looked at her thoughtfully “Well that meeting wasn’t boring, or even that long.”

She laughed, and even Obi-Wan looked amused. “I wouldn’t count on the next one going that well,” she remarked wryly “You rarely get a group of people with this much common sense between them.” The Jedi stood up, leaving to follow her parents.

“Obi-Wan” she called after him “Might I have a brief word with you in private?”

He stopped and looked at her thoughtfully “Of course.”

Luke grinned and gave Leia’s hands one final squeeze. “I have some paperwork to fill out with my commanding officer, so I will catch up with you later.” He stood and turned to Obi-Wan “I’ll be in the flight deck when you are done with your meeting with the High Command.”

Obi-Wan gave a nod of acknowledgment and turned back to the table. He slid into the bench her parents had just vacated.

“What can I do for you Leia?” he asked pleasantly.

“Where are you going to train Luke?” she asked.

He looked puzzled by the abrupt subject change, but he answered smoothly “I had thought to take him to an isolated world and conduct his training there.” he explained. “This place is filled with too many distractions. He needs to be focused on that. The path of a Jedi is not an easy one.”

She shook her head “No, the rebellion needs Luke.”

“The rebellion needs a trained Jedi.”

She rolled her eyes “The rebellion needs Commander Luke Skywalker. He’s smart, a quick learner, and a natural leader. There are too many missions that are coming where he is instrumental.”

Obi-Wan’s eyebrow lifted “And this isn’t about how you miss your brother and want to rebuild that relationship?” There was a faint air of disapproval around him.

Leia stomped down on her irritation. He didn’t know her. He didn’t know her and Luke’s history. Of course, she missed Luke, but she had lived without her brother before, and she could do it again. “This isn’t about wanting to keep him close Obi-Wan. This is about what is needed. We need him.”

“I thought you wanted me to speed up his training?”

Well, she should at least put that point in context if she wanted him to listen to her. “He didn’t start for three years after this, as long as you beat that time frame, I think we’re fine.”

Obi-Wan looked thoughtful “Well, so much of the old way of doing things has been rendered impractical, we will try it your way for now.”

She grinned at him, “Besides I need you here, there is a mission I think you are going to want to participate in. And the sooner we get started, the better.”

He looked intrigued “Really and what is that?”
She grinned “We are going to rob a Hutt. Grakkus Hutt to be precise.”

“And why are we going to be committing an act of thievery against a crime lord?”

“Because he has the largest collection of Jedi holocrons and lightsabers that I know of in the galaxy.”

Obi-Wan went very still at that, and then a sharp, fierce grin crossed his face. “My dear,” he said in a pleasant voice “never let it be said you don't know the value of a good bribe.”

She grinned back just as fiercely “I had some of the finest teachers in the galaxy.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawnsby isaakfkampfer
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

So this chapter completely got away from me. It was suppose to cover the whole day. I only got Leia through breakfast, cause everyone got chatty. Bonus for all of you, it's a bit longer then my usual chapters. Hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ABA - Day 3

She was standing in the field, her heart breaking as she looked around at the damage her son had left behind him. The fires had gone out, but she could see the charred remains from where they had burnt. There were lightsaber scores across the building walls and the smell of death was in the air, although she could see no corpses from where she stood. Luke would never have left the bodies out to rot. The evidence of his heartbreaking work was to her left. They were pyres, too many pyres, to signal where his students were. Leia had come to see for herself what her son had done. To see the flavor of the madness that had consumed him and how it had manifested itself. She wanted to turn away, not because it was a battlefield. She had seen too many of those in her life to truly be horrified by them anymore. When exactly had the sight of this much slaughter stopped provoking her rage and instead only produced a bone deep weariness?

But that wasn’t what this battlefield induced in her. No, not a battlefield, that implied that one side had a chance, and that clearly wasn’t the case here. This was a killing field. This was betrayal and death all delivered by someone who wore a friendly face. Ben, her precious loving Ben, had done this. She wanted to look away, so badly did she want that, but she forced herself to stare and commit all of this horror to her memory. No matter what happened going forward, she could not forget any of this when she confronted her son.

“What are you doing here?” a deep voice asked behind her. Startled, she whirled bringing up her blaster, looking for an enemy. She had come here alone, despite everyone’s protest for her safety. She wanted no one, not even Han, to see her here. They loved her enough to respect her wishes on the matter. Who ever was here was no one she could trust. The figure that met her eyes made absolutely no sense. Vader was standing at the edge of the field, his cape moving softly in the slight wind, not ten paces from her. She failed to pull the trigger as her shock rendered her motionless. What was he doing here?

He was long dead, it was a bit much for him to crawl out of his grave to haunt her now.

Then the reality of where she was and who she was looking at sank in, shattering the sense of reality surrounding this place. She was dreaming. She wasn’t here. This hadn’t even happened yet. She was asleep on Yavin, having a nightmare about the one of the worst days of her life. That in itself wasn’t surprising. This was a time and a place that her mind had returned to many times since that long ago day. Only now, her worst nightmare had just walked into it.

“What are you doing here?” she demanded as she pushed herself to lower the blaster. It wouldn’t work against him in reality, there was no point in trying to shoot him here. No matter how tempting the idea was.

He shifted from foot to foot, slightly, but it was there. “I could feel your pain,” he finally said, sounding uncertain of all things “and when I called, I could get in.”
“I don’t want you here.” she snarled, cursing herself for the hole she had apparently left in her shields. A weakness made of her grief and sorrow that he had somehow wormed his way through.

That lead him to here of all places. Of all the nightmares that lived in her mind he shows up in this one. Leia wanted to scream at him, to tell him to look around and take a long look at the legacy he had left her. But she didn’t want him to understand the significance of what he was looking at. It was just another battlefield, nothing left to mark it as the New Jedi Order. He couldn’t understand the context of where he was, and she wasn’t about to tell him so he could gloat. So instead she put all her loathing and distaste of him into one word and ordered “Go.”

He stiffened at that, his uncertain manner leaving him. Her anger seemed to be something he understood how to deal with over her sorrow. Well, he was a Sith Lord, anger was something he was an expert at. “Leia, you must leave this place.” he demanded, waving his hand to encompass the wreck and ruin.

Her answer didn’t even require thought. “No.” It was all she could do not to rage and attack him, and he dared to give her orders like she was one of his mindless lackeys?

He actually took a step back in his shock at that. Knowing what she did about his place in the Empire she imagined it wasn’t a word he heard often. “Leia,” he said evenly, as he took a step toward her. She pushed down the instinct to back away and squared her shoulders. If he wanted a fight, she was most certainly in the mood to give him one. The damage to her own mind be damned. She gathered herself in the Force, readying herself to deliver the first strike.

He immediately stopped his approach to her as he took her measure. He paused, accessing his options, then slowly moved both of his hands out to his sides. The universal human gesture to show he was unarmed and came in peace. “Leia,” he said calmly and slowly, as if he were talking to a frightened child. “I felt you cry out half way across the galaxy. Do not stay here, and inflict further harm on yourself, simply for the sake of spiting me.”

She looked straight at him, staring into those fathomless blank eye shields, reluctant to concede even this small of a point. If she gave into him now, even the tiniest bit, what else would he try to get from her? He stood still, very deliberately not looking around at the landscape surrounding them. It slowly occurred to her that he didn’t seem to interested in sneaking a peak of the future. This was of course a future he never lived to see, but he had no way of knowing that.

She wondered if anyone else in her life that knew her circumstances, and found themselves here, would do the same thing. Probably not. It was too much of a temptation. Even for Luke, who had shown the least amount of interest in what she knew. But of course Vader had to be the exception to that. He seemed to find the only thing here worth his attention to be be her. Well, wasn’t that fantastic?

She could feel his impatience growing the longer they continued this game of who will blink first. He didn’t say anything, not a command or even a plea. Just stood there with the only sound the rhythmic in and out draw of air from his respirator. Waiting for her to bend to his will and remove herself from here.

As the moments stretched on, with the two of them staring at each other, she began to reassert control of herself. Her revulsion and fear at his presence had robbed her of thinking about anything but his departure. As her breaths began to calm, she pondered her options and tried to rationally, well as rationally as possible given the circumstances, think this through.

For now, he was willing to grant her autonomy. But, as she could feel his impatience growing, she wondered what he would do when that leash he seemed to be keeping himself on finally snapped. His actions at the Battle of Alderaan, and here and now proved that he had no desire to deliberately
hurt her. But what damage could he do to her, however unwittingly, in the effort to get her comply with his wishes? She thought of the damage done to her cell on the Death Star and repressed a shudder.

Was she really willing to go to war with him over a point as petty as this? There were too many things she had to do, and too many people that she needed to protect. Could she abandon all of those responsibilities and burn herself out? All over what was essentially the scenery in her own mind?

Leia swallowed her instinctive distaste for doing anything he asked without a fight. She could be mature about this. She didn’t need to be ruled by her temper. Besides this wasn’t a retreat or a submission of any kind. This was her, moving them to a more advantageous battle ground. She slowly drew in a breath and focused her concentration. Without a word of warning to him, she took them to the great state room of the Royal Palace of Alderaan. If all of this was going to end in a battle she preferred to be in a place where she felt comfortable. A reminder of her own history and strength, and that she had somehow done the impossible and saved it all.

He gave a startled noise as the background faded away and reappeared at nauseatingly quick speed. But when he looked around and saw where they were his posture relaxed. “Thank you my child.”

She gritted her teeth at the endearment. “Now get out.” she repeated, hoping more then expecting him to comply.

He straightened up, and put his arms behind his back “I have some questions for you.”

Well good for him. She sneered “I don’t care.”

“For every question, you answer willingly, I will answer one in return.”

Oh, he wanted to play that game did he? She went straight for a question she did actually want answered. If he told her it would be helpful to her, and if he refused she would know the real limits of his desire for answers from her. “What’s the current passcode for the list of imperial spies in the Rebellion?” she challenged.

There was no reply, just a wave of incredulity from him.

Unable to help herself, she knew he hadn’t wanted to know that badly, she taunted “Don’t know it? Alright, let’s stick with something I know you know. Where is the 501st currently stationed and where is the location of their next target?”

“That information is not what I was offering and you know it.” he hissed, his anger breaking out from behind his shields in waves.

“That information is the only thing you have that I want from you.”

She could feel the swirl of his anger roll up to just the edges of her inner shields in a ramming fashion, only to be violently yanked back as he reined himself in. His fists clenched and unclenched in a steady rhythm. Leia realized with a start he was using it to calm himself down. Well taking long rhythmic breaths was certainly out of the question for him. She wondered if he was counting to ten in his head too.

“That is not the only thing I have that you want.” he finally countered.

“Oh I doubt that.”
She sensed the briefest flicker of pain from him, before it was swallowed back into that rolling mass that was his anger. “You want my absence.” Well, well, well. She did have the ability to hurt him. Wasn’t that interesting to know.

He was also unfortunately correct. This was something she wanted from him.

Sensing her hesitation he pressed on “If you answer my questions, and answer them truthfully, I will leave willingly.” he offered.

“What do you get out of this?” she asked suspiciously.

“Answers. The other three people who have them are beyond my reach, for the time being. Currently you are the only source I have.” She felt a chill at the bite in his tone, when he mentioned the other sources for his questions. The gods only knew what he would do to her parents and Obi-Wan if he got his hands on them.

“And what do I get out of this?”

“My willing departure.”

“Do you think I'm defenseless here?” she countered “That I wouldn’t have trained myself to expel an unwelcome intruder?”

Bitter amusement filled the air between them. “I would never discount you learning everything you could in order to protect yourself Leia.” She opened her mouth to order him once more to leave. Sensing her intent he barrelled on “But consider this, it would cost us both dearly if we fought here in your mind. You more than me, but it is a fight neither of us can afford. I will win, but the damage you are capable of inflicting would be...inconvenient.” Then he took a long look at her and taking in her expression and the strength of the gathering of the Force she still held at the ready, amended “Possibly deadly. And the cost you would pay would be even higher, even if you lived through it. There are worse things than death Leia.”

“He would know all about that ” she thought, looking at all the machinery he need merely to stay alive.

He had also summed up the impasse they were in pretty succinctly, and correctly. As twisted as his thinking had to be on other matters, there was nothing wrong with his abilities as a strategist. Leia squashed that part of her that was pleased that he saw her as a threat. This was not a character trait that was the least bit helpful right this moment. She needed to keep a cool head right now. Or at least as tight a reign on her temper as she could.

Just because he wanted her alive that didn’t necessarily mean unharmed. Luke’s bruised and battered body as they brought him aboard the Falcon at Bespin flashed in her mind as she weighed her options. She had proof that just because he didn’t want to hurt her, didn't mean he wouldn’t to get what he wanted. And while there was no way she could lose a hand in this place, you could lose things that weren’t so easy to replace. This was the least harmful way to get him to leave. Then there were the other factors to consider as well. His increasingly desperate attempts to get her to listen to him as he knocked at her shields would only increase. Maybe she could buy herself some small respite and at least one night's worth of good sleep. Even with all that, she wasn’t going to give him free reign to do what he wished.

“Nothing about the Rebellion or our current whereabouts.” she demanded.

“I would not ask for something I was not willing to give myself.” he sounded affronted. She didn’t
know why. It was the first question she asked him after all. Fair's fair, unless you explicitly forbid it.

“I retain the right to refuse to answer any question on any other subject.”

He rolled his shoulders, she supposed he was attempting to relieve the tension in them “I suppose this is a dictate you put on all your conversations?” he asked the bitterness spilling out of him.

She bit back her first reply, which was to wonder why he thought he deserved any consideration from her. She would keep her cool, and she wouldn’t goad him. If she goaded him he wouldn’t leave. She needed to keep that outcome in mind, no matter how tempting it was to hurt him. She snorted instead and gave him the truth. “When it comes to events that may or may not happen, yes I do.”

His head cocked, clearly surprised. The Force calmed down to it’s usual dull roar around him he realized that she was telling the truth. “Very well.” He agreed.

Now for the last bit, she didn’t want him here for hours either. She wasn’t sure if she could stay reasonable if she had to endure his presence for anything but a short length of time. “You get four questions and four questions only.”

He shook his head “That is not enough.”

“Then we find out how out of practice you are defending your mind.” She ready herself and brought up the Force.

He held up his hand in a wait gesture “Ten questions.”

As her skin crawled at the thought what he could learn in ten questions she countered “Five. But if I refuse to answer, you can ask another in it’s place.”

His voice sounded disappointed but he stated “Very well” Leia drew in a breath and then with conscious thought let go of the bit of Force she had, letting it return to it’s place in the cosmos.

He hesitated for a moment, clearly thinking about what he wanted to say. “When did you learn that you were my daughter?”

Leia steeled herself against giving any sarcastic answers. “Several hours before you died.” As he stared at her, willing her to go on, she kept her silence. She said she would be truthful, not that she would be helpful.

“I see.” he finally conceded. He began pacing, up and down the length of the hall, his hands tightly clasped behind his back. But he maintained his distance and never came any nearer to her. When he finally stopped Leia braced herself for whatever he was going to ask next, but all he did was stare at her, his head cocked. Finally she spoke up.

“My patience with your presence is not unlimited Lord Vader.” and at that title his left hand clenched into a fist. He really didn’t like her using his full title did he? “So may I ask what is so fascinating about my appearance that it has left you speechless?”

“I understand, intellectually, you are from the future.” he retorted, anger creeping back into his voice “I am having trouble adjusting to seeing the reality of it.” she blinked, surprised. She looked down at her hands, once again in their lined glory. She was dressed in her preferred gray jumpsuit, with the purple vest, that had become a uniform of sorts while leading the resistance. The hair that was escaping her braid that she could see had a familiar grey cast to it. It hadn’t even occurred to
her that she would look like herself again. Stupid really, she was still startled every time she saw her reflection of her nineteen year old face. No wonder her mind was showing this self.

She gave a small huff of amusement. This is what was baffling him? Not her existence as his child, not the time travel, but her looking her actual age? “I’m fifty three years old. What did you expect?”

She could feel the ripple of undisguised shock echo across the Force. His voice sounded almost hoarse as he told her “You’re older then I am.”

Now it was her turn to be shocked. It never occurred to her Vader even had an age. He was the faceless thing that went around as the Emperor’s attack dog. He didn’t have birthdays, he just was. Poofed into existence to be a torment to anyone who had the misfortune to share the Skywalker name.

There was so much sorrow around him now, sharp and bitter. “So much time taken from us.”

“I, for one, don’t regret that,” she shot back angered by his grief. He had no right to mourn that fact. He was the one who had thrown it all away.

There was a moment of non comprehension from him. Then that bittersweet emotion vanished replaced with his rage, laced with determination. “Who told you I was your father?”

At the sheer indignity that he dared to use that title in reference to himself Leia lost control of her tongue. “Bail is my father. You are a cruel cosmic joke that has been inflicted on me.”

The scene around her wavered as his anger flared, red, hot, and so cutting. She hissed involuntarily as the pain it caused caught her by surprise. She felt him reign himself in and he gritted out “Who. Told. You.”

She wanted him gone, she reminded herself, this is the way to do it. You want that more than you want to hurt him. “My tutor did.”

“His name?” His tone was eager and demanding.

She laughed bitterly. “When I wouldn’t tell you in a cell, where you had me at your mercy, what makes you think I would tell you now, where I at least have weapons to fight back with?”

He plowed on “Is he the pilot who destroyed the Death Star?”

Leia clenched her jaw and crossed her arms in front of her chest. “You will get nothing from me on that subject. Even if I have to condemn both of us to live the rest of our lives out as burnt out mindless husks to do it.”

He stilled at that threat, and the mess of emotions that Leia felt from him were cycling too fast for her to get an accurate read on them. “You value him that much over me?”

This was a question he had the nerve to ask? He thought just because they had blood ties between them it outweighed all the pain and torment that he had inflicted upon her life? “I value almost the entirety of the galaxy over you.”

He flinched at that, but offered no retort. He was silent for a moment, then in a subdued voice he followed up with “If you won’t answer that then do you know who stole you from me?”

Leia took umbrage at his word choice, and her hands fell back to her sides, clenched in tight fists.
“No one stole me from you, because I am not a thing that can be stolen!”

There was shame now, overwhelming shame. His posture lost its rigidity and if she didn’t know better she would have said he was slumping his shoulders “You are correct.” he said in a soft voice. “You are not a thing. You are a person and your name is Leia.” Leia tried to find her balance. That was an unexpected answer. The last thing she thought he was capable of was conceding any point that she threw at him. What brought this revelation on? And what an odd way to phrase that. There was something important here. Something about the way he said that had the feel of a well worn mantra. He continued on before she could ask him. “Kidnapped. Who kidnapped you?”

“I don’t know.”

“Leia” he growled, raising his finger at her in frustration. Clearly he had reached the point where he believed she was giving him a half truth in order to protect someone.

“I don’t know” she insisted, clearly and firmly. If he believed that she was breaking the rules set down by this arrangement he would never leave. She continued on, despite her reluctance to give him any more than the basics, in order to get him to believe her. “I really don’t. In my past by the time I knew there was anything to ask, everyone involved was dead. And I have so many other things to do now, frankly it’s at the bottom on my list of things I want to know.” Oh she was so grateful she had stopped Obi-Wan from telling her any of the particulars. Even if this hadn’t exactly been the reasons she had in mind at the time.

He stood stock still for a moment, as he processed that, then lowered his finger so that once again his hands were by his side.

“You are down to your last question.” Leia said in warning and relief.

He fidgeted then. He didn’t seem to know what to do, pacing back and forth in front of her. Looking at her, then away. Just when Leia was about to yell at him to spit it out already he stopped right in front of her as said “Will you come to me?”

Leia’s mouth dropped open “What?!” Of all the questions he could ask, this was one that never would have occurred to her that he would be stupid enough to put forth.

“Will you come to me?” he repeated, as if that would make the question make any more sense.

“That was a waste of a question. The answer is no.” Leia couldn’t wrap her mind around this. Was he suffering from some Dark Side delusion? High on spice? Had he hit his head?

“Not to the Empire.” he clarified “I am very clear on of your beliefs on that matter. Will you come to me?” She shook her head in denial, shock making her mute.

“I know you will not betray your cause. I know that you will not betray the Alliance. This has nothing to do with anything you might know.” he continued in a pleading tone, almost begging “Leia, I cannot protect you while you remain with the Rebellion.”

The insult to her abilities broke her out of her stupor. She bristled “I can handle myself.”

“You cannot know what the Empire will do. What resources will be marshalled to hunt you down.” he argued “Please Leia, I merely wish for you to be safe.”

“I don’t know?” she screamed, the sheer stupidity of that statement making her temples pulse with her anger. “I don’t know? Who do you think was pursuing me the last time?”
He went frightfully still. “My alternate.”

She sneered “Yes, so don’t try to frighten me with your ominous warnings.”

He stalked towards her, the dark wave of his rage riding every step “What did he do?”

She backed up quickly, despite herself. There were too many memories of him in a similar state suddenly crowded in her head. She felt her breath catch as the wave of fear she felt caught her by surprise. He stopped, still furious, but not coming any closer to her.

“You are out of questions.” she reminded him. She could feel that stubborn will firm up and he shook his head in denial. She felt a flicker of something that in anyone else she would have labeled as compassion. That was enough. She was done with this, she had fulfilled her end of the bargain. Now it was time he did the same. If he wouldn’t leave voluntarily she would bring the point home as painfully as possible.

“Just imagine what you would have done to any Rebel that escaped your grasp and you have a pretty good idea of the answer.” A whirlwind of shock and fear emanated from him at her statement. Putting as much determination in her words as she could she ordered “Now get out!!”

He vanished without another word.

Leia woke in her own room, shaking with her anger. How dare he, how dare he? By what right did he think he was entitled to anything from her? She got up and began pacing in her small room trying to burn some of her anger off. She gave an internal thanks that her position in the Alliance afforded her a private room. It was small, only a bunk and toiletries, but there were no roommates to ask her about this. Nightmares weren’t uncommon in the Alliance, but she didn’t want to explain why she was waking up spoiling for a fight instead of screaming. She began accessing the situation in her head. What had happened and more importantly how to prevent it from happening again. If she focused on solutions, then maybe she could keep the fear at bay.

She needed to work on her shields. She clearly was too over confident she could keep him out and look what happened. Leia had had one bad dream and he came walking in like he had any right to do so. She didn’t want anymore training, she didn’t. But as she told Obi-Wan, there were a lot of things she did, that she had no particular desire for, in order to further her goals.

She ended her pacing standing in front of the mirror in her room. She examined her face and took in the pupils that were blown wide from her anger and fear. And the tight line of her mouth. Han had always gotten extra cautious with her when her mouth moved into that configuration.

“I take it your talk with Vader did not go well?” a deep voice asked. Leia jerked her eyes past her reflection to see who was behind her. There, sitting on her bed, casual as you please, was the soft blue form of Master Qui-Gon Jinn. It seemed that this was her day for uninvited guests wasn't it?

She took a deep breath in and turned around to face him.

“Why do you want to know?” she asked, suspicion lacing her voice “Are you going to run to Obi-Wan and tell him about this?”

“You don’t trust me.” he remarked, looking oddly surprised.

“I don’t know you.” she pointed out.

“You trusted me when I told you you were more than likely stuck here in this time.”
“You are practically the only expert in the galaxy on the subject of time travel. Trusting your professional opinion is different then trusting you. There are plenty of beings I have worked with in the past I wouldn’t trust with my houseplant, but I knew they would get the job done.”

“Is there anyone in the galaxy you actually trust?” He asked, curiosity winding around him.

That was a question she didn’t owe him an answer to. “Or maybe don’t want to think about how short that list is, sweetheart.” the voice of her Han whispered in her head. So she asked her own question in the form of an answer. “Why are you spying on me?”

He regarded her solemnly for a moment, that hawkish face pensive, but he let it go. “I was not ‘spying’ on anyone.” he answered her steadily “I was merely keeping an eye out, and the connection between the two of you caught my attention.”

“Do you know what we talked about?”

“If I knew that General, I wouldn't have asked how it went.” his reasonable tone was beginning to grate on her.

She changed tactics, she wasn’t going to answer anyone’s questions about that conversation. Most especially someone she could see through. “Why are you keeping an eye on me? Trying to suss out hints of the future?”

He let out a deep barrell roll of a laugh at that. “I have no need of that General. As I said before I’m not moored to the present in the same way you are. If I wanted to see the future, I could just skim along it. And unlike you I could see the many possibilities that could play out.”

“Then why are you….” then her mind jumped to the other person in that conversation “Vader. You are keeping watch over Vader.”

The amusement drained from his face, and his eyes took a serious glint. “Yes.” he confirmed.

“Why would you subject yourself to that?” she asked, honestly baffled.

“I’m an interested party.” That was a singularly unhelpful answer, and he was repeating himself from their first conversation.

“Why?” she asked again.

He gave her a shake of his head. “No, you aren’t ready to hear that answer yet.”

“I only look nineteen.” she pointed out, “I can definitely handle what ever truth you think you are protecting me from. I have certainly had enough practice.”

“Yes, you probably have. But, like you, I will rely on my own judgement on when it’s best to reveal that information.” Leia squashed her irritation at her arguments being used against her. Her parents had taught her from a young age that screaming “That’s not fair!” rarely got her anything. Using facts and speeches to make that point more elegantly did, and right now she had none to lob at him. Didn’t mean she couldn’t ask around the edges and see what she dug up though.

“You sure don’t do it so you can go running back to Obi-Wan? I’m sure you have plenty of stories that he can flagellate himself with.”

His eyes widened in surprise, but contained it quickly. “You do pick up things fast don’t you?”
“I’ve spent most of my life in an active rebellion or politics. You don’t get good at either of those without paying attention to people and what drives them.”

“True. But no, I don’t tell Obi-Wan anything. I failed him enough in life, I don’t see the need to continue his pain after my death.”

Now what the hell did he mean by that? Leia’s patience slipped, she had enough frustrating conversations for one day, and it was only a little past dawn. “Why are you here? What do you want from me?” she said, figuring he was a man who responded to bluntless well, for all his weirdly cryptic answers.

“A bit of advice. You are conflating what happened in your past with the present you find yourself currently in. It will only damage your goals. But you can avoid it if you listen, not just hear, but listen to what is currently going on around you.” He gave her an enigmatic smile “That is all I want, for you to listen.” And with that he disappeared. She gritted her teeth to keep back the scream of frustration that wanted to escape. This room was not soundproof and she didn’t want to explain to her neighbors why she was cursing at the top of her lungs. That was annoying, it was hard to get the last word in when the person, or in this case ghost, just upped and vanished on you.

“Listen,” she muttered “I want you to listen. But does he tell me what he wants me to listen for? Nooooo. That would be too straightforward of him.” She should ask Obi-Wan if the man was as infuriating in life as he is in death.

Then the inevitable question he would ask, about why Jinn felt the need to appear to her, stopped that line of thinking. She would have to admit to the conversation with Vader. She would have to voluntarily admit a weakness to someone, who for all intents and purposes, was a stranger to her. What she did know about him did not exactly fill her with confidence. On the positive side she knew he was a famed General in the Clone Wars, and earned the nickname of “The Negotiator”. She knew that her father had held him in the highest regard and trust.

She also knew that he continually lied to Luke, broke his heart and trust. That action alone she might have been willing to forgive. She certainly understood wanting to protect Luke from the truth of where he came from. It was a decision that she was reluctantly making even now. But what she had a harder time letting go was his decision to stay with that lie past the time it was smart to do so. He and Yoda should have told Luke the minute he decided to confront Vader on Bespin. Her brother had gone into that battle half crippled and not even knowing it.

Did Obi-Wan think that Vader wasn’t going to say anything? Had he met the man? One positive virtue she could concede that Vader had was that he was intensely goal oriented. He had been so before when hunting Luke, and now she was the focus of that obsession. Maybe in the long term, it would be better for her brother, seeing as Vader wouldn’t be as focused in this here and now on finding the pilot who destroyed the Death Star. But eventually, the truth was going to come out and then he would be hunting for them both. Even if Vader had no interest in them besides possible targets for assassination, throwing that truth at Luke would have been a great way to distract him. Luke had made his peace with the decision his teachers had made that placed him in such danger. She had not.

No. She wouldn’t be telling Obi-Wan anything until she got a better handle on him. One that she observed herself and wasn’t filtered through other people’s perceptions and secondhand knowledge of his actions. She would be keeping her reasons for seeking more training at her shields to herself.

She took in a deep calming breath, then another. Well that wasn’t going to work, she needed an outlet for this rage, against Vader, Jinn, Kenobi, her life in general. And trying to let it go this way wasn't going to work. Leia was familiar enough with herself to know that. She wanted to get this
body into better shape. Now was the perfect time to start.

After dressing in some light weight clothes, Leia headed to the large room that was currently serving as a sort of gym for the Alliance. It was hexagonal in shape, which didn’t make it the perfect fit, but was large enough that there was enough room to run around the perimeter if you wanted to jog without dealing with the native predators on the moon. There were various exercise machines scattered through the middle of the room. They were for focused attention to certain muscles, but Leia was going to bypass them all. She was more interested in running herself into the ground until this feeling of being trapped left her.

As she walked through the door she was surprised to see Luke already there. Sweat was plastered to his shirt, he had clearly been here a while, and he was running on the far side of the room. Luke being up this early wasn’t a shock, farm boys rarely slept in, no matter what planet they came from or were currently on. She just couldn’t figure out why he was working out. She didn’t remember this happening last time.

He paced the side of the room and came around the corner. She felt his pleased surprise as he spotted her. He continued his pace until he was in front of her coming to a gentle halt. His face lit up with a wide welcoming smile “Good morning. How are you?”

“Fine.” she replied

He frowned a bit “No, you’re not.”

Still young enough not to let a polite lie go. “Had a bit of a nightmare” she elaborated, responding to his concern “Came down here to run it off.”

“I’m sorry about that. Maybe I should try to reach out to you like you did with me?”

Leia stifled the instinctive “No.” she wanted to scream at him. That’s all she needed, Luke and Vader in her head at the same time. She tamped it all down. She was tiring of this, but the alternate choice, tell Luke about Vader was not something she could face right now.

“Thank you for the offer, but for now I would prefer you not.” He looked hurt at that and she hastened to explain “A lot of my nightmares are about things that haven’t happened yet Luke. And if I’m really clever and lucky, they never will. For right now I need you to promise me that you will stay out of my head unless I invite you in.”

“I’m not afraid of what the future holds Leia.”

You should be. That was his youth talking. Force, had she ever been that confident? That the worse had happened and there was nothing that could shock her? Probably. Leia was very aware of her faults, and she would own to holding onto that bit of arrogance until Ben fell. After that nothing the universe threw at her shocked her anymore. Well the time travel one had given her a huge pause, she would admit to that.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

He frowned "Running?"

“Yes I can see that. But why?”

“Oh, Obi-Wan suggested it to me yesterday. Said I had a lot of physical strength, but my endurance
could use some work. Also I should try to keep my mind clear while I’m doing it.”

“He tried to teach you meditation, didn’t he?”

He looked a little sheepish “Yeah, I fell asleep on him. He thought maybe if I tried to do it with a mindless task I might have better luck figuring out what he is talking about.”

That was true. Early on Luke had always been on the move, constantly tripping over his own feet. He only just recently achieved this height and it was still tripping him up as he got use to the longer limbs. Also he was energetic, Leia could see the wisdom of using exhaustion to teach him how to reach that spot where your mind was focused on nothing and everything at the same time. If he didn’t understand what he was looking for, it would be difficult to reach it.

He snapped his fingers as a thought occurred to him. “Hey did I teach you this? If I did I’m sure you can teach it back to me the way I taught you. Maybe it would be easier for me to understand what Obi-Wan is asking me to do.”

That wasn’t a bad idea. She shook her head ruefully “No you didn’t. I already knew how to meditate. My father taught it to me when I was younger. Said that it would help me if I wanted to keep a clear head. You did teach me how to reach for the Force when I was doing it though.”

“Oh.” he looked crestfallen “So much for hoping there was an easier way to figure this out.”

“No I am afraid not. If it’s any comfort you can figure this out.” She gave Luke a grin. “Mind if I join you? The nightmare is only half the reason I’m down here. I also need to build my endurance.” she gestured down at herself “There wasn’t a lot of call for running around and dodging blaster fire in the Senate.”

“As opposed to say being a radical rebel who wants to overthrow a tyrannical government?”

“Honestly that doesn’t happen as as much as you think. There is a lot of hurry up and wait. It’s those few hours in between where it becomes important.” She sighed and began to stretch, trying to limber herself up.

He gave a dubious look at her, taking in that she was several inches shorter then him “You sure you can keep up?”

Jerk. “Won’t be a problem.” she replied, giving him a sweet smile. He looked momentarily concerned at her tone but shrugged.

They fell into step with each other and Leia lost herself in the rhythm of her feet pounding on the floor. Her muscles began to ache after the first lap, and burn after the second. She was having to move faster than she probably should given what shape this body was in, but damn if she was going to fall behind Luke after that snide comment about her height. He was panting along side her, also starting to feel it. She wondered how long he had been here before she arrived, she could feel his fatigue. As they rounded the third time she gasped out, “You can stop if you want.”

“Not happening.” Between his height advantage and the fact that up until now he lead a much more active life then the body she was currently inhabiting, he thought he could beat her. Well, she had never agreed not to cheat.

She grinned and pulled a bit on the Force to help her muscles along. Beside her she heard Luke give a small gasp, as he clearly felt what she was doing. There was the wispy touches against her mind, full of curiosity and wonder. Wondering if he would catch it by example Leia stopped the constant pull on the Force and gave Luke a moment to realize that she had stopped. When he sent
back a questioning thought, more feeling than words, she once again threw the Force into her tired muscles to give her that extra speed she needed. She felt Luke’s comprehension and delight, as he tried to replicate what she had done.

It didn’t work. His efforts to replicate the push pull she was engaged in was clumsy and ineffective. She had a disorienting moment to flashing back to when they had first done this and she had marveled at the ease the Force had answered Luke’s call. She remembered his voice wry and amused as he explained how to tie herself to her body so she wouldn’t get lost in the euphoria the Force produced as she called on it to do her will.

This Luke wasn’t there yet, but he was close, so close, to understanding how she was doing this. He was certainly picking it up faster than she had. Maybe, for him, being physically active and a live example were necessary for him to understand. She once again repeated the trick and then she felt him reach clumsily out and pull. She felt his blaze of triumph, as for a moment everything clicked. Then in his eagerness he called on more and it was much more than he needed to maintain this pace. He was suddenly ten feet in front of her. He gave a startled yelp as he realized what he had done, and promptly tripped over his own feet in his surprise.

Leia jogged up to him and laughing asked “Are you hurt?”

“Does damaging my pride count?” he asked from his position on the floor.

“No.”

“Then I’m fine.” he rolled up to his feet. “Okay let’s try that again.”

“You sure?”

“Wouldn't be the first time I've hurt myself learning a new trick.” She took him at his word and started jogging again, Luke falling to her right. As deliberately and as slowly as she could she once more pulled on the Force to augment her speed. She felt his intense focus on her, for all that he was staring at the track. Awkwardly she felt him reach out and then…

The Force danced. There was no other word for it. Luke’s joy and exhilaration at figuring this out broadcasted loudly at her side she almost fell over at the intensity of it. Instinctively she brought up her own shields in an effort to mute him a bit. He had no idea how loud he was being and she didn’t want to break him out of the state he had just found himself in. Let him get used to it so he could more easily recall this feeling later on.

She hadn’t expected him to be that loud. It was almost as overwhelming as Vader had been on the Death Star. The older Luke must have had phenomenal control, or Yoda had simply gotten tired of being Force deafened and taught him to reign it in. But maybe physical exercise wasn’t the only thing she could practice this morning. Concentrating on her keeping her shields up she sent him the pride she had in him at figuring this out. She wasn’t sure she could handle words at this moment, so she kept to the simpler expressions. There was a wave of startlement, but Leia didn’t feel like she had been blasted by the sun by them.

Then that faded away and she felt his hesitation. Then there was a wave of love/awe/not alone rushing towards her. Apparently the running trick wasn’t the only thing he wanted to try and copy. Grinning she put on a bit more speed, inviting him to fall further into this. She felt his rush of understanding and deepened his broadcasting of emotions as he caught up. She wasn’t sure how long they continued this oddly synchronized run until she felt a huge splash of shock break through their bond.
She and Luke instantly dropped out of their connection. Luke didn’t have enough practice at this to hold on to that state when startled. He also crashed to the floor again as he lost the Force and was solely relying on his none too steady physical senses to monitor his movement. Leia managed to hold her balance, barely, and came to a more graceful stop.

Obi-Wan was in the doorway, staring at them in surprise. She wanted to give him a lecture him about his rudeness of broadcasting his emotions everywhere. Luke didn’t know any better, Obi-Wan certainly did. Then his pale face caught her attention as he stuttered out “When did you learn to do that Leia?”

“Run with the Force? Decades ago.” she answered baffled by his clearly agitated state. She elaborated “Having a bit of extra speed in a battle is useful. I’m a bit out of practice though.”

“Out of practice?” his voice kept getting higher. What had she done now to worry him?

“Yes.” And now her muscles were screaming at her in protest at the size of her misjudgement of how out of practice she was. “Didn’t judge the ratio of how much I needed to maintain that. Relied too much on my muscles.” She winced, and began walking, despite the protests from her body.

Luke moaned from his prone position on the floor “Oh, now you tell me. I feel like I’ve been run over by a bantha.”

She walked over to him slowly and gave him a gentle kick to his side “You need to get up. Holding still like that only makes the muscles tighten more.” He let out a loud dramatic groan, but he rolled slowly to his side and pushed himself to his feet. She wanted to help, but wasn’t sure if she could manage both of them with her wobbly legs.

Obi-Wan was still staring at her like she had grown another head “Is this something that the other Luke taught you?” he asked, his voice hoarse.

She frowned at him. Who else could have it been? “Of course. In the beginning he only knew had to do powered jumps. He figured out on his own how to apply that technique to moving faster, but that was only for short bursts. It was by a simple accident he learned how to make it last longer.”

“Figured it out? By accident?” Obi-Wan’s voice was incredulous.

Leia felt her hackles rise at his slight to her brother “He only had a few months of training Obi-Wan. There were a lot of gaps in there. If there is a better way please let me know.”

He shook his head “Leia you misunderstand. Until today I would have said what you and Luke were doing is impossible.”

“Excuse me?” She couldn’t have heard him correctly.

“Force enhanced speed and jumps are meant for short term use only. Long term, like what you were just doing, was only used in the most dire of circumstances because it will burn out your body. The Force can enhance what is there and augment it many times manifold but ultimately it comes down to your own body’s ability to maintain such activity. It’s why the Jedi order had such a strict physical training discipline. The more muscles and training you had the more effective you will be when you use the Force to boost it. But that comes with a price. The more you sink into the Force like that, the more you become disconnected from your own body, and the more muscles and calories you burn without being aware of it.”

“You are likely to burn yourself out.” she finished, eyes going wide at the implications. It never occurred to either Luke or her that such an outcome was even possible. That trick could have gone
so wrong so easily. But wait, something wasn’t right with that statement. “Why didn’t you use the Force to strengthen the connection to your own body?” she demanded.

“What?”

“That’s what Luke did. The Force can be so loud when you use it, it’s easy to get lost in it. So you use a part of the Force to amplify the reactions of your own body to cut through the noise. Getting that balance can be a little tricky at first,” and here she gestured down to her own aching body as proof “but that step can stop you from doing something truly stupid.” Obi-Wan just looked at her uncomprehendingly “It’s just like the shields, at first it takes a lot of thought to maintain them, but eventually they become second habit and unless you’re being attacked, they are just there.” She frowned in thought “Actually, it’s easier than shields because it’s your natural state to listen to what your body is telling you.” She looked up at Obi-Wan’s face “This isn’t something the Jedi Order taught is it?”

The older man shook his head “No, it is not. There were the physical disciplines and then there were the mental ones. It never occurred to anyone, outside of the Healers, to use the Force to monitor someone’s health. And as far as I know it never even occurred to them to do it to monitor their own. Healers were especially prone to burnout because so much of what they did was mental they didn’t even need to monitor their surroundings half the time. They could sink into the Force to do what they needed. The mental and physical were taught as two entirely different things because beyond the basic level they were viewed as to having two incompatible needs.”

Luke snorted “That’s stupid. Aunt Beru always said you can’t maintain the mind without the care of the body, and that to abuse your body can harm the mind. Separating them is foolishness.”

Both of them stared at him for a moment and he let out a defensive “What?”

Leia laughed “And now I know where that came from. Tricky of you, well him, not to mention that it wasn’t something he was taught to do, instead of figuring it out on his own.”

“No,” Obi-Wan muttered “Not figured out, something he would do on instinct. The first time he reached for the Force and it answered him in full, he used that connection to anchor himself to his body to mitigate the loss of feedback.” He shook his head in wonderment. “Remarkable.”

Leia was wondering about how the Jedi order had become so disconnected from their own bodies that such a thing was even possible. Luke had warned her when they started her training that the Force could overwhelm everything. He had explained on how to tie yourself to, well yourself, before she had ever tried to consciously reach for anything. But those first moments when she felt like she was nothing more than a small speck in a very large storm had been nauseatingly disorienting. She had instinctively reached for anything to anchor her and found it. How had the Jedi not lost their very selves when they reached for the Force? What had they tied themselves to?

“What brings you here Ben?” Luke asked breaking up her train of thought.

The old man shook himself “Leia actually.” he turned to her “I talked to Draven yesterday about any information the Alliance and his network has on Grakkus. There isn’t much, except he’s located on Nar Shadda.”

She nodded “Makes sense. The only information I remember us really having on any of the Hutts was Jabba. I hoped I was wrong though.”

Luke frowned “Why are we seeking information on any Hutt?”
Obi-Wan cut in “Because Grakkus has a large collection of Jedi artifacts that we are going to relieve from him. And we need security layouts, personnel files, and any other information we can get if we want to pull off such a heist.”


Obi-Wan sighed “For now it’s going to have to wait. Apparently for the most part the Alliance avoids the Hutt’s.”

Luke looked surprised “Really? I thought they would do business with anyone? You have cash and need weapons. I thought they would be first in line to do business with you.”

Leia snorted “Oh they will. They’ll sell us all the weapons we want, if we don’t mind the fact that half the time the delivery is a trap because they sold us out to the Empire. Then they can keep our money, keep the bounty, and keep the government they prefer in power.”

Luke looked baffled “They have a preferred government? I thought they wanted themselves in power.”

She shrugged “They are in no position to take on the Empire and they know it. But for a little bit of graft on their side, the Empire looks the other way. That arrangement is vastly preferable to a bunch of idealists who wish to return to power a government, that at least nominally, tried to rein them in.”

Obi-Wan shook his head “And we didn’t even do that well. One of the many reasons that the Separatists were so appealing to so many systems was the Republic and the Jedi’s failure to protect them from the encroaching influence of the Hutt Empire.” Leia was surprised at the admission. Obi-Wan took in her look of disbelief and smiled ruefully “Nineteen years in a desert is a long time to think about everything that went wrong.” he said with self-censure in every word. “Not all of us are as fortunate as you to be thrown back in time to fix them.”

She opened her mouth to contradict him. She wouldn’t call her circumstances “fortunate”. She was isolated, a stranger to everyone she loved, and was burdened with the knowledge that she could easily make things worse. Hell, it would be even more of a torment in this time if she failed because she knew it was possible to succeed.

Then there was Han, and not far from that Ben. Vader wasn't the only disturbing thing that had happened in her dreams last night. She had a reminder, given to her by her own mind no less, the danger her son represented. She was weighing the love she felt for him against her duty to the galaxy at large. She was weighing the possible destruction of someone she loved. Worse the negation of his existence. But she loved Han and Luke too. Could she overlook the possible danger Ben would be to people she swore she would protect? And neither Han nor Luke were here to tell her what they wished for her to do. Did she have the right to gamble with their lives without their consent?

Rolled into that situation she was also daily given the chance to play the role of a God. Leia was well aware she had somewhat of an authoritarian streak. This temptation that had been laid before her was a serious test of all the rules and teaching her parents ever laid down. The cost of the situation she was in was high.

Then she thought of Alderaan and her parents. She thought of how Obi-Wan wasn’t looking at all of those factors that made this so hard for her. He was simply seeing that she had averted the destruction of her entire people. He was wishing for the same opportunity so he could do the same for his. And was it really fair to wail and whine about this? If she had been offered even a week
ago for this very chance wouldn’t she have leapt at it? She would have figured that would all be worth it? _Be careful what you wish for_, her father had warned her time and time again, _you might not like the cost that comes with it_. He had been right about that.

Luke, still musing about a blow against the Hutts said “Why don’t we ask Han when he comes back?”

They turned to him, both surprised. He looked at them his own surprise evident “Well he does have a lot of dealings with Jabba. Maybe he knows something, or knows who we can ask.” But a worried look passed his face. “I know you lived on Tatooine Ben, but you kept yourself pretty isolated. If you rob a Hutt, expect that a whole host of trouble will fall on your head.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, unconcerned. “He would have a long list of people to get behind that would love to have my head.”

Leia tapped her fingers absentmindedly on her leg, trying to think about what happened last time. “Not if we can get the Empire to take him out for us.” They looked at her puzzled “That collection is very illegal. After the first time during the debrief Luke informed the Alliance that the Gamemaster for the games Grakkus holds there, is actually a stormtrooper. Grakkus has an Imperial spy high in his ranks, and he doesn’t even know it.” She turned to Obi-Wan excited “If we can use you, instead of Luke, as the bait, we can steal what we want and have the Empire remove a major crime lord.”

Obi-Wan looked resigned. But he nodded his agreement “You don’t plan small, do you?”

She shrugged “When necessary. But when the opportunity avails itself you should seize it.” Again, that fleeting feeling of grief passed over him. She let it go. There were plenty of things she wasn’t telling him. The man was entitled to his privacy from her. Then a thought occurred to her “What did you tell Draven when he asked why you wanted information on a Hutt?”

He gave her a serious look “That the Force told me it was important.”

She gaped at him “Really?” Draven, suspicious down to earth Draven, bought that?

His face retained that serious pose for a second then it melted into a wide satisfied smile “No. Although you would be surprised how often that line works. I told him I heard rumors in the bars on Tatooine.” Obi-Wan at turns baffled and frustrated her, but she had to give him this, the man had a sly sense of humor.

He turned to Luke, “Well I can see you did manage to reach the Force, if not quite in the manner I intended. Can you meet me after dinner for some lessons. I understand your schedule is in flux, and I’ll speak to your commander about how we are going to divide up your time.”

Luke nodded “Not a problem.” he gestured down to himself “I’m going to take a shower and get some breakfast. Do you want to join me?”

The Jedi shook his head, “No, unfortunately my schedule is filled up for most of the day.” he said regretfully.

Luke took this in stride and turned to her “Leia?” he asked.

“Yes, I just need a quick word with Obi-Wan and I’ll join you in the hallway in ten minutes.”

Luke nodded and bounded off to the showers.
“Leia?” Obi-Wan asked some what defensively as soon as the blond was out of earshot. Well to be fair when she had done this yesterday it was to lecture him about how to train Luke. She wasn’t sure how much the Jedi answered to others about the training of their apprentices, but she couldn’t imagine it was much.

“If you don’t mind, I would like some extra lessons on shielding my mind.”

He frowned, “You seem to have remarkable control over them already. I’ve rarely felt them slip at all.”

She shook her head “Above the Death Star...” she trailed off and then tried again, thinking through carefully how to word this so he wouldn’t call her out on how much she was leaving out. “You were right about how tight I would need to have my shields. Even then he was very loud. And distracting. I can’t imagine this will be the only time he will reach out to me. I want to be able to...lessen his presence?” she shrugged. Then figured she could give him some details of the future. It wouldn’t be anything that he couldn’t figure out on his own. “There weren’t many trained Force users in the future and looking back I can see I was inherently stronger than all of them. They couldn’t overwhelm me the way he can. I can’t get by on sheer power alone on this.”

At his puzzled look she went on “I was just wondering if there were perhaps more techniques I wasn’t aware of. Luke did his best, but I was...reluctant.” More like kicking and screaming, despite the wisdom she saw in having them. “Even if you can’t help me, at the very least Luke is going to run into the same problem. He should be forewarned about it.”

He hummed thoughtfully “Well, I can certainly try. You are correct in that Vader is probably the strongest Force user you will ever encounter. Come to my quarters with Luke tonight and let’s talk about the training you did receive. We’ll take it from there.”

She and Luke ran into her father in the mess hall. He gave her a puzzled look at her attire, but shrugged it off. “Leia, I know we skipped it yesterday because the High Command meeting was so early, but did you honestly forget?” he asked in a teasing voice.

“Forget what?” she asked, baffled.

His eyes saddened at that and he continued “That we are all in the same place and it’s morning.”

She mentally reviewed the things she was having trouble remembering. Alderaan was saved, Han wasn’t her husband, and her parents were alive. These were the slightly odd facts of her current existence she was having trouble integrating into her daily life. What was he talking about? Yes she was savoring the fact they were all here, with Luke, but what did that have to do with the time of day, nevermind morning?

“Oh,” she whispered, as a long forgotten practice clicked into her head.

Luke frowned “Oh?” he asked.

“Breakfast. Whenever any member of the family is within reasonable distance to each other we always have breakfast together. It’s the one meal that is least likely to be interrupted by an emergency, or a meeting, or working late won’t interrupt.” She had done the same with Han, Luke, Chewie and then later on Ben. Then as her family was peeled away from her one by one, that tradition had stopped. She *had* completely forgotten about it. She looked up at her father, and she gave him a watery grin. “Let me change my clothes and I’ll join you shortly in your quarters.”
If her father noticed the shadows in her eyes he didn’t comment on it. Luke gave her a wave and started to walk away, likely to get his own food when Bail’s voice stopped him “And where are you going young man?”

Luke stopped and swallowed hard as he faced the older man. “To get breakfast?” he ventured.

Bail’s eyebrow went up “Did you not hear Leia mention this was for family?”

Luke nodded “Yes, but I’m not-” he started

Bail cut him off “You are Leia’s family, so I was sent to fetch you by my wife. I do so hate to disappoint my wife Luke.”

Luke nodded nervously “Okay. Then I should change my clothes too and I’ll meet you there.” he walked away.

Bail’s concerned look came back over his face as he took Leia in “How long since you’ve done this with your family?”

“Too long.” she answered, then gave him a hug, because he was here and damn what anybody in the mess hall thought. “But it’s a habit I am more than happy to pick up again.”

He returned the hug and she grinned to herself as he took in the sound of his heartbeat under her ear. She remembered when she was little, she would crawl into his lap, demanding a story, but really only wanting to hear that thump, thump, as she fell asleep. He pulled away after a few moments, a fond look on his face.

“You better hurry Leia,” he teased gently “You wouldn’t want to be late and your know how your mother is about being on time.”

“That it is one of the easiest ways of being polite,” she said back automatically. Grinning, it had been a long time since she had heard that phrase at her, rather than her saying it. She gave him a kiss on the cheek and hurried off to her own rooms.

By the time she reached her parent’s room, she was no longer sore. As she marveled at her nineteen-year-old’s body ability to recover, Luke caught her bending and squatting in the hallway.

“What are you doing?” He asked, amusement on his face.

“Loving my knees,” she answered him cheerfully, uncaring of how odd she sounded. Her parents quarters were further back in the base, and fairly isolated. It was unlikely anyone was around to overhear her. And if they did they would think she had run mad, not that she was a time traveler. “Enjoy your body now Luke. When you are older, things start breaking down, and you forget that it’s breaking down, and then it rebels against you in the form of aches and pains. It’s all a nightmare.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” but he clearly thought she was a little off.

Knowing it would annoy him she leaned over and patted him on the cheek “You should listen to your elders baby brother, I know of what I speak.”

“I’m older,” he insisted indignantly. Then his face sobering “Is it really all that bad?” he asked.
“Annoying, yes. Bad, eh,” she shrugged “It just requires more work and care, and when you forget, your body punishes you. Harshly. Unfortunately patience has never been my strong suit.”

“Mine either,” he agreed. He eyed the door nervously and tugged his tunic down. “Do I look alright?” he asked her.

She stared at him, noticing that the clothes he was wearing wasn’t his usual borrowed mishmash. They were of good quality, a tunic of startling blue, matched by a pair of black trousers. He was still wearing the knee high brown boots, but all the rest of his clothes had to have been borrowed. Why would he borrow someone’s best outfit? She realized, with a start, that he was nervous. Why was he nervous? “You met them yesterday Luke,” she reminded him gently “They didn’t bite you then, and I certainly don’t think they are going to now.”

“No, they’re Human Royalty so that wouldn’t be a thing that would be considered polite.” She gaped at him “Tatooine is a smugglers haven. Even out in the hinterlands, you can come across some very odd customs and practices,” he said defensively. “And we are getting off the point. Leia, what if they don’t like me?”

Of all the ridiculous things. “What’s not to like?”

“Leia!” he whined “I have no practice at this sort of thing. I don’t really do small talk, or know anything about politics, and the weather here doesn’t really change. It’s just damp and wet. All I needed to do yesterday was be quiet and listen. And I didn’t even really do that very well.”

She opened her mouth to counter his opinion that he offered nothing of value at that meeting but he barreled on “They are going to want to talk to me today. I can’t just sit there like a lump. I need to make a good impression. They’re your parents and royalty! I’m just a farm boy from the outskirts of the galaxy, who barely has an education. They only thing I have going for me is that I’m a good pilot.”

She shook her head “No, you're an excellent pilot. And you are selling yourself short.”

“You're biased,” he muttered, embarrassed at the compliment.

“Yes, but that doesn't make me wrong. Luke,” she grabbed his face between her hands and waited until his eyes met hers “Trust me, they are going to love you. And even if you walk in there and accidentally drop food all over yourself or manage to mortally offend them, that won’t matter to me.” He looked horrified at the thought of dropping food everywhere. She gave him a teasing grin and continued “Even if they decide that you will forever be the embarrassing relation we keep locked away that won’t change anything for me. I will still love you.”

“It’s just, I’ve never been good at this. Back home I was the odd kid almost nobody liked. They called me Wormie for goodness sake. I think Biggs only stuck around because I was the only one who could beat him at flying.”

“No, that wasn't why he stuck around Luke,” she thought sadly and wondered if these thoughts had plagued her Luke the first time around. He had never mentioned it at the time. Then again he was in that weird competitive streak with Han for her attention, so that wasn't something he was likely to bring up. Later, when they realized the actual nature of their connection it wouldn’t have occurred to him to tell her. For Luke what was done was done, there was no sense in rehashing it for no reason.

“You belong here,” she said firmly, “And who are you to contradict royalty?”
He gave her a small smile “Royalty? Wouldn’t dream of it. My bratty younger sister? I’m finding that is lot more fun then I thought it would be.” She laughed out loud and let him go.

“I’ll give you a hint about them if it will make you feel better.”

“Really, and what is that?”

She gave him an impish smile and then she deliberately knocked on the door. At his panicked look she informed him primly “They really like punctuality.”

“Thanks a lot,” he muttered under his breath as the door swung open and Breha greeted them both with a warm smile.


He blushed under the gesture and murmured “Thank you for inviting me.”

“It’s a family tradition,” she informed him as she walked back through the door, “So, barring any scheduling conflicts, I expect to see you everyday around the same time.”

“Uh, okay.” Luke looked flabbergasted as he followed her mother into the room. Leia grinned to herself as Luke was pulled along by her Mama’s commanding presence. Leia had envied that talent when she was younger. Her mother could walk into a room and in a few moments, without saying a word, could draw the attention of everyone there. Leia could gather everyone’s attention of course, but she tended to be a lot louder when she did it. It wasn’t until she was in her thirties that she resigned herself to never possessing that particular talent.

There were four plates on the small table, filled with meat and various fruits. “We didn’t know what you liked to eat Luke, so we got a bit of everything for you.” Bail gestured to the plate with the most food.

“Thank you,” her brother sat down at the table. Leia sat next to him and her parents on the other side. There was a moment of awkwardness as the four of them stared at each other. Then Leia realized Luke was waiting anxiously for someone to copy to that he didn’t inadvertently do something rude. She picked up her fork and began eating, and beside her Luke, with obvious relief, started to do the same.

Leia, enjoying the novelty of all of this, and hoping to put Luke at ease, went for one of the more obvious topics of conversation. “What are you doing today Mama?” she asked

Her mother sighed “Filming those propaganda holos you suggested. Mon, it turns out, agrees with you that we need to fill the silence before the Empire does. I was going to ask you to come by and perhaps offer some suggestions on the speeches?”

Leia nodded “Of course, but it will have to be after lunch. I’m helping Commander Orrelios with inventory today for the base.”

Luke looked up “Isn’t that a little bit below your skill set?” he asked.

She shook her head “Not to where they think I am. Learning and helping in inventory is one of the things they train you in when you are on the track for a command. You can’t run anything without knowing what you have. A hungry army is a weaponless army. Then it gets into logistics and supply lines…” she trailed off as everyone stared at her. “I like solving puzzles,” she muttered
Bail shook his head “Yes, you always did. I didn't realize you got that far into the administrative side of things.”

She shrugged “When you're short handed you help where you can. We are going to be very short handed over the next few months. I go where I am needed.”

Breha turned to Luke “And what will you be doing today?”

He shrugged “With Gold Leader gone, Red Leader, I mean Commander Dreis, says that he wants me to train under him as his second. If that goes well, then in a couple of months he wants me to form my own squad.”

Leia nodded her head, this was what happened last time too. The only difference was there were no squad leaders left to train Luke. He had been thrust into a leadership position for the PR value of it and given no instruction. If wasn’t for the fact that he had Wedge as his second, who did have experience, and was such a fast learner, the whole thing could have ended easily in disaster. “Makes sense, you are a good pilot.”

“But what do I know about leading a fighter squadron?” he asked.

“What do you know about the Force?” Breha countered “You’re young Luke, not stupid. Ignorance is fixable, willfully stupid is not.”

Bail spoke up, offering his own advice “Mon and I knew nothing about running a rebellion when we started this. Even now there are times when I look around and think to myself ‘There has to be someone better suited for this’. And there might be, but they are not here. You are, so go forward as you mean to be, and hopefully your success will outweigh your failures. That is all any of us expect from you.”

Luke’s eyes were wide and he nodded his acceptance. This was advice Leia had heard before, hell it was advice she had given Luke around this time. She just always had the thought in the back of her mind that her Father would have done a better job delivering it. Turns out she had been corrected on that front.

Breha spoke up “And your Jedi training?”

“Ben and I will be discussing that tonight. He’d told me yesterday that between what Leia has told him, and the needs of the Rebellion, we need to work out a schedule. He is also getting inundated with requests for help so somehow we need to find the balance for both of us.”

Bail frowned “That is an awful lot to take on at the same time.”

Luke shook his head “I don’t mind. In fact the busier I can be the better off I think it will be.”

Both Bail and Breha frowned at this and Breha put down her fork to reach a comforting hand to Luke. “Obi-Wan told us what happened to your family. Is there any ritual or observance that you would like to plan, or have us participate in?”

Leia swallowed her anger at herself for her thoughtlessness for not thinking to offer this earlier to Luke. This time travel business snuck up on her in the oddest of ways. She had forgotten that for him, they had only been dead for about four days, not decades.

Luke shook his head “No ma’am. Death was a fairly routine, and private affair on Tatooine. There wasn’t much to bury in any case, and all the prayers I’ve already said. We didn’t go in for much, no fancy ceremonies. Just a quiet goodbye.”
“Why waste resources?” Leia muttered. She was thinking of Luke’s frugal approach to every material object in his life, even past the point where money wasn’t as much of a concern as it had been for him.

Her parents looked downright shocked at the apparent callousness of her statement, but Luke gave her a grateful nod “Yes.”

“Well,” Breha patted his hand reassuringly. “Just please, keep in mind to be kind to yourself over the next few days. Grief is a horrible thing, and you don’t want it to catch you unawares. We are here if you need anything. Even if it’s only a silent shoulder to cry on.” And then she gave him a small smile “And it’s still Breha Luke, not Ma’am.”

Luke nodded and gave a small pleased smile “Breha. Although it might take me a while to remember that. My Aunt Beru she will” his face tightened and he corrected to “would, have rapped my fingers for being rude to my elders. It’s a lesson that is going to take a while to unstick.”

Her mother laughed “Fair enough.”

They all continued to eat in silence for the next few minutes. Now that Luke understood that these were family affairs, where everyone caught up with each other, not a lecture hall where they discussed galactic politics he seemed much more relaxed.

Leia was the one to break the silence after she finished her meal. There had been too many years of too many places for her to be for her to ever really slowly eat anything anymore. “I have to be off,” she said, truly regretful “But rest assured I will remember to come tomorrow.”

Luke, looking up from his meal “Hey do you mind if we meet in the gym before hand? I would like to run with you again if you don’t mind. Then we can come here afterwards.”

She stood up and leaned down and gave him a kiss on the cheek “Of course. But I will be seeing you tonight after dinner. If you don’t mind I’ve asked Obi-Wan for some additional training with my shields. I won’t be there for the entire lesson” she warned him at his hopeful look. “I still have no intention of training as a Jedi. But with two Sith Lords running around I need to bolster my defenses.”

She couldn’t blame him for wanting her along on the journey he was about to take. Especially after the elation of the experience she had with him down in the gym. The only time in her life she had seriously considered following her brother to become a Jedi had been after the first time they had managed to sync like that. It was a heady feeling. Luke just didn’t understand her reluctance. Yet. Unfortunately, sooner rather than later, he would be needed to be told.

Breha gave her a puzzled look. “Why would you need to remember? Leia, this is something we have always done.”

Bail cut in “She fell out of the habit. But if your husband didn’t like the practice, the rest of your family can certainly fill that need.”

Luke looked up completely shocked “Husband?” his voice was high. “What husband?”

Breha sighed “Bail,” she said warily.

But Bail was focused on Luke, then he looked up at her “You didn’t tell him?”

She gritted her teeth at the dig at Han and valiantly tried to keep her tone civil. “It hadn’t come up yet.” Truthfully she had simply forgotten that Luke didn’t know. She returned to his assumptions
that he made though “Papa, that isn’t what happened.”

“Then what did happen? If you won’t tell me, Leia, I’ll be forced to draw my own conclusions.”

She thought of all the joys and horrors that followed her because of the blood in her veins. She thought of explaining how there were too many directions she had been pulled in, too many costs that she, her son, her husband, and her brother had to bear because of decisions made by other people, including him, long ago. She thought of his heartbreak if she told him about what happened to his grandson, to Luke and his Jedi Order, to the New Republic.

She met his eyes and couldn’t bring herself to do it. To tell him that all they had sacrificed had only brought a temporary reprieve from the darkness. That it was his and Mon’s mistakes that help lead them all into disaster, again. No matter how angry she was she couldn't bring herself to break his heart like that.

But she was also too angry to truly reassure him so she spat out. “Fate. Fate happened. But if there is one thing you taught me it's that I need to forge my own destiny. And by all the known gods in the galaxy, I intend to see it all changed.” She walked out of the room, leaving her mother and Luke behind with their worried looks.

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfkampfer
Chapter 8

Hey guys! Got another long one for you. There is a small spoiler for the Rebels episode "Secret Cargo".

If you’re curious to Breha’s hairstyle it would look something like this http://therighthairstyles.com/crown-braids/20/

Helping with inventory was a boring task, but after the last few days that Leia had, she could use a little boring. Plus seeing Commander Orrelios constantly argue and whine at the cranky droid Chopper was vastly amusing. Leia wondered if she had brought C3-PO, how the two droids would have gotten along, but she had thought he would be of more use to her mother this morning. Orrelios grumbled, but he indulged the orange droid enough for Leia to know he was sincerely fond of him.

The state of their supplies left Leia worried though. The amount of weapons, equipment, and people who had been lost in the last week were truly staggering. Either Leia had forgotten or had been so lost in the haze of grief for those first few months, but she was taken aback at how strained the Alliance currently stood. The only thing they weren’t desperately low on was food, and that was because the amount of personnel they had to feed had been cut down dramatically.

Leia felt the residual bitterness from that time in her past fade away. Back then she had been too lost in her grief and simply trying to continue forward to think clearly about what the state of the Alliance was. Looking at the inventory lists she now, she saw that the push that had come for her to do those holos had been driven by desperate need. She had done them of course, and without complaint, but she had secretly resented having her loss being made so public simply for the purposes of fundraising. She would never trade Alderaan’s and her parent's survival, but she had to wonder how they were going to go forward without the catalyst that was the destruction of her homeworld.

By the time she had finished her lunch in the mess hall Leia’s irritation at her father hadn’t completely cooled. Heading to the ad hoc recording studio that the Alliance had to film all its propaganda, she had the strange thought that she hoped he wasn’t there. Leia felt it was a sign of just how out of control this all was because it had only been four days since she had been given the unexpected gift of his return and now she was trying to avoid him. Or maybe, she thought ruefully, you recognize you and he are incredibly raw right now and don’t want to pour more fuel into the fire.

Perhaps she should skip this all together, but she had promised her mother all the help she could give. Threepio had found her in the crowded hall “Princess Leia, Princess Leia.” he said, his high-pitched voice easily carrying over the background noise of the corridor “Your mother wished me to inform you that she is currently in her quarters.”

“Thank you Threepio,” she said, changing direction to head to her mother’s quarters. “Where is your other half?” she asked, curious.
Threepio gave a disgruntled noise “He’s with Master Luke, your highness. They are engaged in training exercises.” He gave a worried sigh “I understand that he wishes to be of help, and I would, of course, wish Master Luke to be in the best of hands. But I don’t understand why he has to throw himself into such danger.”

As Leia wandered down the halls she considered Threepio's question seriously “Well I think R2 feels he has to do what he believes is right.” Or what will be the most fun. Sometimes it was hard to tell with the little astromech.

Threepio sighed “I do understand that. But I worry about him.”

“Just because you care for someone doesn’t mean you get to dictate how they live their life. Droid or not.” Leia found herself at her mother’s door and reached out to pat Threepio's arm. “It will be alright. How long have you known R2?”

“Oh, it feels like a lifetime, but almost twenty years.”

“In all that time he’s managed to pull himself out of every scrap he’s ever found himself in. You should have faith in him. He is nothing if not clever.”

“Yes Princess, much to my displeasure.” Threepio wandered off then, muttering under his breath about astromech droids who were too confident in their own abilities. For the hundredth time, Leia wondered who had built C3-PO and what the hell they had been thinking. The droid was clearly a custom job, his internal parts were too much of a mishmash of different manufacturers to be anything else. His programming was also way out of line for a standard protocol droid. Six million forms of communication? Under what circumstances did anyone think that was needed? The extra hardware that had been welded into him to be able to process that much information was childlike in its approach, more is better, but had an underlying elegance to the design. This left the golden droid with way more processors then he needed on a daily basis, which was the foundation on which he built his outsized personality. When she asked him about it, years ago, or years from now depending on how you looked at it, about who had built him he had answered in a puzzled voice that he didn’t know. That he had always been in the service of her family as far as he could remember.

Then there was the issue of his desire to be ‘useful’. She had ever met a droid who was so dependent on positive feedback and constant validation. He did his job well, and he had never failed any task she had set before him, despite all of his wailing about how he wasn’t programmed for such things. That remarkable adaptability wasn’t something you usually saw in droids. Then there was his loyalty. Not once, despite the visible annoyance and disrespect she had shown him when she was younger, did he ever waver in his commitment to her. And then later on Luke. R2 was the way he was because as far as she could tell he had never been wiped, and as he got older his personality grew with it. There was no such explanation for 3PO.

Unfortunately, all of those outsized personality traits made him a more than a touch neurotic, fussy, and prone to hysterics. Leia was willing to live with his follies. If there was anything that she had learned in her later years to value above all else it was sincere affection and loyalty. Threepio had that in spades, which certainly helped keep his other way more annoying qualities in a better light.

As Leia entered the room she found her mother staring pensively at the two head pieces that were lying on the table, surrounded by a hairbrush and a mountain of hair pins. Leia stopped just inside
the room to stare at her mother in shock. Breha’s hair was undone and fell to her waist in a solid brown wave. Leia couldn’t ever recall a time that her mother’s hair was unadorned in such a fashion this late into the day unless she was ill. Realizing her mother was completely lost in thought she gently cleared her throat to get her attention.

“Leia,” her mother said, startled turning to her “Threepio found you quickly.”

“Yes. I’m here, as promised.”

Her mother gave a small smile and then returned to headpieces. “Which one do you think?”

Leia looked between the two headdresses, and her mother’s outfit, a simple frock dress, with no decorations or embellishments on it, but of good cloth. She weighed which would look more regal in this context, then thought about her moment of shock at the door. This was a message for the greater galaxy, but it was also a resource sent to her people. It foremost needed to be something that would instantly catch their attention. “Neither.”

Breha looked shocked at the answer “Leia, the rulers of Alderaan never go anywhere outside of their private quarters without a head covering.”

“You are currently not the ruler of Alderaan.”

Her mother’s eyes widened in pain and Leia winced as she realized how harsh that statement must have sounded. “What I mean is that you are the Queen, but a Queen in exile. You have no throne to sit on. Any of the royal houses that declare their loyalty to you will be shortly stripped of any possessions and power they have. For now, you are a Queen in name only. Your head should reflect that.” she frowned as she mentally went through all the possibilities. Leaving it just like this was too much of a step in the wrong direction. It would read as Breha abandoning all their traditions without a by your leave. Perhaps a compromise of some sort?

“Maybe the coronal braid?” she offered “It’s symbolic in our culture of a leader in waiting or a leader yet to be. It also had the practical side effect of looking somewhat like a crown, so the meaning won’t be lost on anyone.”

Breha looked at Leia’s own hairstyle, of the three looped braids atop her head. “You don’t seem to have lost practice with styling your hair,” she remarked

Leia’s back stiffened “Mama, do you think I cut my hair?” she demanded, incredulous that her mother thought she would ever do such a thing. On Alderaan, the heads of houses and their heirs always grew their hair long. It was a symbol for all of them, male or female, to mark who they were. You did not cut it unless you were cast off from your family or lost it in some sort of disaster. The longer the hair, the more worth that was given to the person who grew it, because it was assumed that you were both lucky and skilled enough to have avoided any scenarios where there would be need to.

As she had gotten older, and as her life had pared down to the merest essentials it had become more and more clear to her what a luxury it was that this custom had even arisen on her world. It relied on the assumption of time and servants to help manage it. It relied on the assumption that you would always have enough access to the proper nutrients so you could grow it. It relied on the fact that you could be reasonably sure that you would have access to supplies to clean it. That basic assumption that all of those factors should be in your life was the crystallizing moment for her when Luke informed her that she and almost every citizen of a core world were spoiled. Not
because their lives weren’t hard, but that they grew up with the luxury of thinking that was true. And having spent years in the mid rim and outer territories where she saw so many sapients deprived of even these basic assumptions Leia had conceded his point.

The sheer time and effort that she spent on her hair also became more and more of a hindrance to her as her life increasingly between too many goals and not enough time. But at the thought of cutting her hair, the last visible sign she carried to others that she was of Alderaan, left her stomach in knots. All she could remember was her mother braiding it for her when she was little, and her father playfully pulling on it to get her attention.

Her mother’s face filled with apprehension, then faded away as she gained control of herself. She answered Leia’s question in a carefully neutral voice “I wasn’t sure. It’s easy to infer that you were on the run for a good long while. It would have been the practical thing to do. And with your stated preference for the title General over your Alderaan titles I just came to the conclusion...” her voice trailed off as she began to lose control of it.

Leia rushed over quickly and grabbed her mother in a fierce hug. “Never,” she said fiercely into her ear. “I never once seriously considered it. I found hairstyles that were fast and easy and not Alderaanian in origin, but I never cut my hair. “ She pulled back to look her mother in the face “And you’re right. It probably would have been easier to do so. There were certainly times and places where I cursed the inconvenience, but I couldn’t do it. It would have been severing the last link I had to you.”

“Leia love,” Breha’s eye filled with tears as her hands reached up to cup Leia’s face. “Oh my darling girl, there is so much more binding us together then your hair. Never forget that.”

Leia closed her eyes for a brief moment, taking comfort in the statement. Then she opened them again she gently wiped away at the tears as they spilled down her mother’s face. “Speaking of hair, would you mind if I do your braid? I’m a bit out of practice working with other people's so it won’t be fast,” she warned, “but I promise it will be neat.”

Her mother dropped her hands from her face and gave her a bright smile “Of course.” She sat on the bench closest to them. Leia took a deep breath and picked up the brush from its position on the table. While it was true she had plenty of practice on her own hair, it had been decades since she had done this for anyone else. If she and Han had more children…and she slammed that thought right off. She didn’t want anything to intrude on this moment of peace and quiet.

She slowly pulled the brush through, making sure there were no knots to tangle the style she wished to do and trying to ensure she wasn’t going to pull too hard on her mother’s head. Pulling out on the large section on the left side, she split into three separate parts. Then she transferred the brush to her right hand and then began to braid the strands together. The smell of vanilla and starflowers came wafting up as she began to work the hair through her fingers. Leia swallowed back her tears. She had been so sure that she remembered her mother so clearly, and she had forgotten the smell of her hair.

“Leia?” he mother inquired as Leia’s motions came to a stop.

“It’s nothing.” she told her, voice husky, quickly resuming her work. Quickly finishing the first and largest of the braids she grabbed a hair tire from the table to tie it up. Her mother, hearing her tone, went on hesitantly.

“Leia, if this is about this morning...”
So much for not letting anything in on this moment. Leia gave a bitter laugh “No. It’s just been a long time since I had anyone to do this on.” She began to separate out another section of hair, thinner than the first for the second braid.

Her mother absorbed this and said in a soft voice “What I told Luke goes double for you Leia. Grief can catch you unawares.”

“Nobody is dead.” she told her mother, trying to inject lightness into her voice “In fact the exact opposite is true.”

“That is not true Leia. And you do yourself no favors by denying that.”

Leia’s hands began to shake, and she temporarily stopped working on the braid. “I don’t want to talk about Han,” she said flatly.

“Alright,” Breha said, sounding a bit disappointed but she didn’t press further on it. Leia started weaving the strands together again. “But I can’t imagine he is the only one for your life you are going to run across and have them view you as a stranger. Although,” she said wonderingly “you seem to have latched on to Luke quite strongly. I noticed you didn’t hesitate to bring him into the truth of your circumstances.”

“Luke is different,” Leia said automatically, as she completed the second row of the braid and let it fall to rest next to the first.

“Because he isn’t dead where you come from?” her mother said gently.

“No, because he’s Luke,” she said. “He’s my twin. When I’m near him, the Force…things are better when we are together. I don’t know if I can explain it any better than that.” She brushed the remaining section of hair and once again repeated the separating into three strands. Her fingers were now finding a long forgotten rhythm of this and she felt the old habit coming back to her more clearly. Of course, now she was almost done, but maybe she should offer to do this more often for her mother. Leia had missed the fun of playing with another's hair. “Besides with his training starting he would figure out very quickly that I was lying to him. I didn’t want to start a relationship with him based on a lie.”

“Aren’t you?” Breha’s voice had the slightest bit of censure to it. Even here she couldn’t escape Vader’s shadow.

“No.” she stated firmly. Hearing her mother sigh in disappointment she elaborated. “They’re things I’m not telling him. But I did warn Luke that there were issues and topics I was going to avoid with him.” She sighed. “He took it well. Better than Papa did.”

She hadn’t meant to come across as whining, but clearly, her mother knew her, thirty years gap or no thirty-year gap. “No Leia,” Breha shook her head, causing the third braid Leia was working on to fall out of her fingers, undoing the work. “You are both adults and you can work this out for yourselves. I learned my lesson in your youth. I will not mediate between the two of you.”

Leia frowned “What do you mean?”

Her mother chuckled “You don't remember your teenage years well do you? Your father and you used to butt heads all the time. It lead to some very intense rows between the two of you. There
Leia didn’t remember this at all. Frowning she undid the last braid, it was a mess now, and resorted to the sections. She remembered the laughter and joy. The family breakfasts, lessons, and stories told to her before bedtime. She remembered disagreements with her father, especially at her insistence on helping with the rebellion, but she didn’t remember fighting with her parents. Was this something that she had glossed over? Or did she include screaming and yelling as a fight? She and Han certainly never bothered to retain any pretense of civilized behavior when they went at each other. Maybe that was one of the things that appealed to her about him. There was no expectation from him for her to retain her “manners”. In fact, he got more insulted the more remote she became. He would goad and pick and pry until she finally lost her temper and fought back. If her mother was thinking of this morning as a serious fight, instead of a mild tempest, Leia realized that they were looking at the same word very differently.

Then again she and Han had done everything loudly. Flirt, laugh, plan missions, it was all so vividly in your face and real that Leia was momentarily overtaken with the longing to have it all back. There was no coyness with Han. If he was aware of what he was feeling he went straight for telling you about it.

“But you aren’t disappointed in me.” she felt the need to point out.

“Did it ever occur to you Leia, that we feared very different things for your future? I was worried that you would spin yourself into nothing for your cause. Your father was worried that you would have need to. That you wouldn’t live a life as peaceful as the one he knew, not ever. The Republic was dying when we were growing up, that is true. But there was a sense of strength and the feeling of security when we were young.”

Leia blinked in surprise at that statement. Given what history she had found out about the time period of when her mother grew up that statement sounded horribly naive. Slowly and thoughtfully she finished off the last braid. “Because you were on a Core World.”

Her mother’s head cocked, as she registered her surprise. ’Yes.” she said slowly “I suppose that is right. I imagine there were plenty of worlds who even at the time would have laughed at our arrogance in that assumption.” Leia took the largest braid and wrapped it low around her mother’s head and holding it place with her left hand, she began the task of pinning it in place.

She wasn’t sure what she thought of her mother missing this obvious fact. Maybe it was her long exposure to Luke, who had grown up on the Outer Rim. Maybe it was the experience of being made a refugee with no world to really feel like you belonged to for years until they had managed to found New Alderaan. But to her, that feeling her parents kept talking about existing in the Old Republic sounded like willful blindness on their part.

Finished with pinning the first braid, Leia brought up the second to nestle on the inside of the half circle of the first braid and began the process of securing it to her mother’s head. It was wonderful they realized there was a problem, which is more than she could say for most citizens of the galaxy at the time, but it had taken things falling apart to an unprecedented degree before they had realized there was a problem. Her parents hadn’t even been the first to defy Palpatine, that had been the Separatists, and for the longest time, they had been vocal in their opposition to that cause. Leia had thought for the longest time her parents were so wise. But statements like what her mother just uttered made her wonder if they would have agreed with the New Republic Senate about her stance against the First Order. Would they have thought she was being paranoid and fear mongering too? Would they have been as blind?
Before she could vocalize these thoughts to her mother, and just as she finished securing the third braid to her mother’s head there was a knock on the door. “Your Majesty?” a familiar voice called out.

Breha turned around and said “Enter.” Evaan Verlaine entered the room. Leia felt her breath catch. It had been years since she had seen the blond and it wasn’t until this moment she realized how much she had missed her. As the tall blond came over she gave Breha a warm smile and shot Leia an inquiring look. Right, Leia hadn’t met her yet. “Leia, this is Evaan Verlaine, perhaps my greatest pupil. Evaan, this is my daughter Leia” Evaan gave her a small bow as she took her in. “Your highness,” she said respectfully.

“Lt. Verlaine,” Leia said back, quickly scanning the women’s rank on her uniform. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Evaan nodded, “We hadn’t been formally introduced, but I was one of the pilots who participated in the Battle of Alderaan.” Of course, she was. She, like Leia, would never had stayed away from that fight. Funny though Leia didn’t remember Evaan as being a survivor of the battle of Yavin. Scarif yes, but not Yavin. She wondered what changes in the timing had let it be possible for the women to have flown both missions “You aren’t a bad pilot.”

Leia gave her a small smile “No, I’m an average pilot, but luck was with me and Lt. Skywalker.”

Evaan bowed her head in acknowledgment, then her eyes took in the coronal braid on Breha’s head, and the two unused headdresses on the table. A flare of comprehension entered her eyes as she studied the crown-like structure on Breha’s head. “Very clever your Majesty,” she said appreciatively. There was a reason the woman had been her mother’s favorite, she had always been very acute at picking up the smallest cue’s.

“Thank you Evaan, but I must confess it was Leia’s idea.” Evaan turned to Leia, a speculative look in her eyes. Her mother continued on “I take it you were sent to fetch me?”

“Yes your Majesty, they have the equipment all set up now.”

“Probably a lie, techs are never ready, but we shouldn’t keep them waiting.” Breha rose from her seat and Leia and Evaan fell in behind her.

When they arrived it was to the hustle of tech’s running around, as predicted, doing last minute checks of something. After being directed to stand in the corner to wait, Mon came up to Breha. “Thank you for agreeing to do this Breha.” the red-headed woman said.

Breha gave a nervous smile. “I’m not sure what good I can do, but I’m always willing to play my part. Do you have what you want me to say?”

Mon nodded and handed a datapad to Breha. Her mother looked over it and then handed it to Leia. “My dear what do you think?”

As Leia began to proof the speech, she could feel Evaan moving restlessly beside her. Leia tried to ignore it, focusing on if there were any changes she could make. But her mother sighed and spoke softly “You have a question for me Evaan?”

“No, ma’am.”
“Evaan I know you too well, please let me know what is on your mind.”

“Are you sure this is the right thing to do?” Leia bit her tongue, this woman didn’t know her, and Mama was more than capable of defending herself. Interfering would do her no good at this point. She refocused on the speech. Opening it with “My fellow citizens” was ridiculous. Nearly a quarter of the people they were trying to reach weren’t technically citizens anymore. She changed the phrase to “To all who hear this broadcast.” Better, more inclusive.

Evaan continued on “Our people are going to pay a heavy price for this action you are taking.”

Breha nodded “Yes. To pretend otherwise is foolish.”

“Then why are you doing this?” Leia’s eyes flew up to take in Evaan’s face. The blonde’s body language was screaming fear, even if her face remained perfectly blank. Evaan’s came from a long line of royal loyalists if Leia was remembering correctly. They would take any action Breha did quite seriously and would also speak out. Leia hoped they weren’t that blinded by their loyalty and choose smarter ways to resist. She didn’t know. Family was a subject she and Evaan never discussed, it had been too painful for both of them.

Breha’s face was resolute “Because it is both the right and politic thing to do Evaan.”

“How is bringing the Emperor’s wrath down on Alderaan’s head the politic thing to do?” Evaan snapped back.

Frustrated that the woman was letting her fear blind her Leia spoke up “Our people will pay a heavy price, either way, Evaan. At least this way they will know the truth, as opposed to whatever lie the Empire chooses to sell.” She didn’t remember the woman being this spineless.

The look on the blonde’s face was shock at Leia’s daring to interject into this conversation “Begging your pardon Princess, but you are very young. I’m not sure you understand all the ramifications of this decision.” she said, condensation dripping in her voice. “You were only seventeen when Mon Mothma made her rather dramatic exit from the Senate. Chandrila has endured needless suffering because of it.”

The woman in question cleared her throat and Evaan’s face turned a light pink as she realized what she had just said, and who was standing next to her. She straightened into parade rest and addressed Mon “I understand your reasoning at the time ma’am,” with a sincere note of apology in her voice “but I’m questioning the need to bait the Empire like this right now.”

Mon arched an eyebrow “You think it was easy for me to do what I did? Knowing what would befall my planet?” she shook her head “But in the long run I would do more damage if I stayed silent. The Empire has been cautious in its brutality in the Mid-Rim and Core worlds for precisely that reason. It is a divide and conquer strategy that has been playing out for years. As long as the majority of the galaxy’s citizens could lie to themselves about what could befall their world they weren’t willing to get involved. And the Death Star was the crowning achievement of that strategy, once it was completed. With it, the Emperor could then afford to move against anyone he wished, Core World or no. Tarkin has proven that, by threatening Alderaan with its destruction. It was only luck and the sacrifice of so many that thwarted the final culmination of his plans.”

“You think it was coincidence Palpatine dissolved the Senate right before this?” Breha asked gently “I understand you are worried for our people, but I can not remain silent anymore. It is not
right that we ask so many others to sacrifice while we cower under the beds hoping someone will save us. It was not by my choice Alderaan got pulled into this conflict so directly but now that it has the best way to save our people, and the galaxy as a whole is to stand up Palpatine.”

“I see ma’am,” Evaan said. Then she looked at Leia “And you Princess? Do you believe this is the right course?”

“Yes, I agree with my mother. As inefficient and decorative as the Senate had become, it was at least a symbol of the Empire’s willingness to pretend to listen to the concerns of its citizens. And Palpatine has smashed it beneath his heel. He is no longer holding on to any pretense that this isn’t a war he has declared on the entire known Galaxy to bring us all under his power and domain. The time for talk and hope for a diplomatic solution passed us by long ago. We can only go forward and hope it’s not too late for all of us.”

Mon looked surprised at the stridency of her words, but Evaan’s eyes filled with a bleak despair “Even if it leads to the destruction of our people?”

Leia felt her spine stiffen at the unintentional insult. She felt her voice adopt an imperious tone as she said “I think you underestimate our people.”

“I was at Scarif,” the tall woman shot back “I saw what the Empire ordered done on their own people to get their way. You have no idea what you are blithely condemning our people to.” Cold bitch was at least left unsaid, but Leia knew that expression well, especially on this face. Evaan thought Leia was ignoring the plight of their people in her eagerness to bring down the Empire. Leia was committed to that cause, as was Evaan or she wouldn’t be here. But to her these consequences, while not inconsequential in the slightest, was so much better then what Leia knew would have happened. Evaan didn't know what true destruction looked like. Buildings could be rebuilt, a culture could be preserved. Alderaan wasn’t so weak as to fall into ruin and despair because it was now an occupied land. They had survived the destruction of their homeworld, they could survive anything.

Breha, reading her daughter's face, and perhaps understanding what damage Evaan was inflicting with her choice of words spoke up. “My daughter is not so removed from the consequences of actions taken against the Empire,” she tried to placate Evaan, but Leia had enough. She wasn’t going to let Evaan’s fear overwhelm her. Especially since she knew the woman was capable of more.

Stepping to her she lifted her chin as high as it would go and stared at the blond, letting a calm mask of indifference fall across her face. “I was at Scarif too Lt. Verlaine, and unlike you, the Empire successfully followed and captured me.” She took another step to the woman, refusing to break eye contact. Because of the height difference, Evaan was forced to lower head if she wanted to keep her eye’s locked on Leia’s. “What can be done to a sentient body and still be survived is only theory for you. I’ve learned what can be endured first hand. If you ever come across Vader, pray that he kills you, because it is the only form of kindness he knows.” At that comment for just a second Evaan’s eyes dropped to Leia’s throat and then realizing what she was doing brought them back up to Leia’s. But the one flicker was enough. Time to bring this lesson home. “I hope you never go through what I had to endure. But if you do I hope that people will treat you kinder than you have treated me. I hope that the people around you don’t give into their fear for their loved ones and lash out at you by suggesting that you are not intimately aware of the consequences of defiance.” The blonde’s face drained of color.

“My lady I...” her eyes were now flicking between Leia and her mother.
Mon’s breath hissed through her teeth “That’s enough Leia. I believe the Lt. has absorbed the lesson.”

Leia thought for a moment of contradicting Mon, she wasn’t sure if Evaan had, but it would not do to so openly defy the leader of the Alliance. Not now. Nodding she stepped back a few paces from Evaan and that was when there was the sound of someone clearing their throat.

All four women turned to see a tech standing nervously, his eyes wide. Leia wondered how much of the conversation he had just overheard. “Uhh, I hate to interrupt, but we’re ready for you, Your Majesty.”

Breha’s face melted into what Leia had always thought of as her “thoughtful ruler” mask and she nodded “Of course. Leia?” Leia focused her attention back on the speech and finished her read. It didn’t really require any edits. “It’s fine Mama,” she said, handing it back.

The tech, still looking nervous at the mood he interrupted “If the rest of you could please enter the sound booth?”

The three of them trooped in and stood behind the clear barrier as Breha took her cue in the middle. Mon stayed by Leia and Evaan for a moment, clearly checking if more mediation was needed between them, but seeing that neither woman looked inclined to talk, the redhead wandered away to confer with some of the others standing in the room.

As one of the techs began instructing Breha to which camera she should address the speech to Evaan broke the silence. “Is this going live?” she asked the room in general.

It was a deep male voice from the shadows that answered her “No, we are taping it and will be hijacking the holonets later tonight. We are also recording several other variations of the speech to distribute on personal holos through various sectors.” Draven emerged from the back of the room.

“Why?”

“Because her Majesty has never spoken up this vocally before. We wanted to make sure that she was calm and clear to avoid any hints that she was being coerced by us to say this.” A bitter smile touched his mouth “Up until now she has been very neutral on the subject of the Rebellion in public, while the rest of us have been bleeding and dying.” He said it loud enough that the rest of the room’s occupants heard him.

Mon sighed “We had need for that Draven. You know that. As long as the Senate existed we needed people in and around it who were on our side but played neutral.”

“I am aware.” the older man snorted “Doesn’t mean I have to like it.” He then eyed Leia suspiciously “And what is your take on the matter?”

“Mama will do fine,” Leia said neutrality, sidestepping his real question about what she thought of playing politics versus fighting. “She always does.”

“Hmmm.” He eyed her, and it was not the friendliest of looks. “I overheard some of that fracas you four were having. You were very militant in your defense of this move. Interesting that you have a meeting with your parents yesterday, and they both come out proposing this. It’s quite unusual for them.”
Leia met his eyes calmly. She might not have been a spy in decades but she wasn’t going to fall for such as obvious feint as this one. Cassian would rise from his grave to shame her for forgetting all the teaching if she had. “Having your planet threatened in a blackmail attempt is apt to change one’s priorities,” she commented mildly, inwardly cursing. Damn, he was keeping an eye on her at the base. Apparently helping in the destruction of a major Imperial asset wasn’t enough to allay his concerns over the story of her escape. “And my parents and I often meet in the morning. We have breakfast when we can, it’s just something we’ve always done.” She was hoping to sever any connection in his mind of her parent's new ferocity in fighting against the Empire with anything to do with her. If he believed anything they proposed came from her, that they were somehow her unwilling puppets, he would immediately oppose it.

She was probably going to fail, Draven was in charge of intelligence, he saw shadows everywhere. The point was to cast enough doubt that his suspicions remained with him, not shared with the entirety of the Alliance leadership. Well, Papa had warned her and Leia never backed down from the course she saw as the right one.

“And how are you, your highness?” he drawled “That was quite an ordeal you endured.”

“Alderaan almost being destroyed?”

“No, with Vader.” For a moment all Leia could think of was the conversation the two of them had this morning and wondering on the hell Draven had learned about it. Then she realized he was talking about the Death Star.

“It was awful.” she stated flatly.

“Yes but you are alive, which is more than most people can say after an encounter with him.”

Beside her, Evaan, who had been subtly eavesdropping stiffen. Leia felt a little bit of her own internal worry about that unclench a bit. Evaan might think she was the coldest person in this base right now. And probably was still bruised from the smackdown Leia had given in front of her mentor and commander, but the blond didn’t for a moment believe she was a traitor.

Leia felt an eyebrow go up. “But hardly unscathed, you saw my injuries.”

“I read the report yes. But I have to wonder how you got off so light? Or why Vader was so foolish as to leave you with a lightly guarded shuttle? He’s a monster, not a fool”

Evaan butted in “What are you implying about her highness?” she demanded. There was the Evaan Leia had known. Protective and fearless, even if not as subtle as she could have been challenging a superior officer.

Draven affected a look of shock “Implying? I am implying nothing. Just remarking on the nature of her Highness's good luck.”

Maybe she could use this baby face to her advantage after all. She widened her eyes and gave him a confused look “If you mean the luck of being overly prepared, so when an opportunity presents itself to you-you take it, then yes, I am lucky.”

He looked confused “Well prepared?”
Evaan, bless her, spoke up again, “Of course. Her parents have seen that her highness has been instructed in all manner of self-defense.”

Draven looked skeptical ‘But Alderaan is famous for being pacifists.”

Leia let out a low chuckle “That doesn’t mean undefended. We won’t throw the first punch, but we will damn well learn how to get out of its way. Given all the intrigue my parents have been involved in since before I was born it would have been foolish of them not to prepare me for the worse. And they are no fools General.”

He didn’t look any more convinced, but the man clearly understood when it was time to back off. “Thank you for the insight ladies. If there is anything more you need from me, please don’t hesitate to contact me.”

Leia wondered what would happen if she told him that she had a list of various Imperial officers and government aids that she would like to have assassinated. Most who were, right now in this time, not high enough in the Imperial structure to be considered threats. But in about three to ten years would change. As entertaining as the look on his face would be Leia let that thought go. She really needed to spend most of her resources on winning the war she was in now, not the one that was coming. But she would keep her eyes open for certain names, for certain hardliners that would never abandon the Empire’s foul poison. Instead, she gave Draven a pleasant smile and bowed her head. “Of course.” He walked to the other side of the room to consult with Mon and the others.

Evaan hissed in a low breath. “The nerve of the man. As if you would betray your mother that way.”

Leia shrugged “Spies are always suspicious of everyone. I don’t take it personally.”

She huffed and then gave Leia an appraising look. “You really overpowered your guards?”

Leia nodded “I really did.” She had, not in the shuttle of course, but that was a small detail.

The woman bit her lip. “I’m a good pilot,” she offered “but my hand to hand could use some work. Think you could help with that?”

Leia nodded “It would be my pleasure.” and they both turned to watch Breha finish giving her speech.

After finishing her dinner Leia found herself bumping into Luke as they both made their way to Obi-Wan's room. He looked at her with concern and she summoned a bright smile.

“Not quite how I expected breakfast to go.” she offered 

He gave her a small grin in return. “Don’t worry about it, you should have seen some of the arguments I got into with my Uncle and Aunt.” The teasing light left his eyes and he regarded her with a solemn expression “Husband?” There was a ton of hurt and bewilderment in his voice. That was the last thing she wanted him to think, that she was deliberately hiding away parts of her. There were things she wouldn’t talk about, for a variety of reasons, but she never wanted Luke to think that she was hiding from him.
“I wasn’t keeping it from you on purpose. And it wasn’t because I’m ashamed of him. You, he,” she corrected quickly when she saw the annoyed glare in Luke’s eyes “were in my wedding party. In fact, he was one of the few people who didn’t question my sanity when I got married. I just forgot that you, here and now, didn’t know.” How to explain to him the bond the three of them had shared? How to explain how interwoven all their lives had become? Especially since she didn’t know if it could be recreated here?

Leia didn’t believe in simply succumbing to the whims of Fate. And just because they had clicked before doesn’t mean it would happen again. Could she be so lucky to have it happen again? Given her track record with luck, she sincerely doubted it.

Luke moved his hands to her shoulders in a reassuring gesture. “It’s okay. You are allowed to misremember now and then.” He gave her a light shake “I’m not mad Leia.” No, but he was hurt, although she could feel that receding as he accepted her explanation. “You got me curious now though who is he?”

“My parents didn’t tell you?”

Luke shook his head “I think your father might have said something but your mother informed him that he had done enough damage for one meal. If he wanted to continue to blab all your secrets he could do it far from her presence. I got the impression she’s pretty mad at him.”

She could be. Her mother and father tried their best to keep any disagreements away from her. Even after this talk this morning she didn’t know what her mother’s feelings were on what had happened at breakfast. Maybe that was why she never quite learned how to argue with someone she loved without it dissolving into shouting. She had never had an example put in front of her. “Possibly. If she doesn’t want you to know what she’s feeling, it can be hard to tell with her.”

Luke snorted “I don’t even know what she thinks of your husband, but your father was pretty clear on the subject.” He flashed her a teasing grin “I know I just meet him, but the only person I can think of that would get him that riled up was Han. That was a first meeting that did not go well. I think Obi-Wan had to physically get between them to stop your father from physically throwing him out of the palace.”

“The good captain has that effect on people.” she said, trying to keep her tone light.

Apparently of the two of them, Luke was the one with a better sabaac face. The laughter died in his eyes as he took in her expression and tone. Embarrassment poured out of him as the realization hit. “Bantha shit, it’s Han isn’t it?”

“Yes.” Why was everyone so surprised by this? Then she thought of who Han was now, not who he had become and wondered why she was so surprised by everyone’s shock.

Luke’s eyes widened. “Well, that explains a lot.” He thought about it for a moment “I can see why your father isn’t thrilled.”

“And you?”

“He came back.” Luke said with a shrug “And he didn’t have to. He also saved our lives in the process. That does buy the guy a lot of slack. I’m sure there are other sterling qualities he has that I’m missing on account of being covered up by his enormous ego.”
She laughed out loud at the description. Luke's embarrassment was slipping away and they were back in their easy familiar rhythm. “I’m not asking you to like him for my sake, just give him a chance. There is a lot there under that massive ego.”

He looked dubious “If you say so.” Maybe Leia shouldn’t worry about this too much. If Han could manage to charm Luke before, even with that competitive twist in the nature of their relationship to her, maybe in this timeline he could do it again.

Obi-Wan’s door slid open and he stuck his head out. “Ah, I thought I heard you two out here. Why didn’t you knock?”

“We were gossiping,” Leia informed him as she slid her arm into Luke’s.

The older man’s eyebrow went up. “Oh, about what?”


“Dare I ask who's?” Obi-Wan inquired.

“Mine actually,” she answered. He gave her a long look, taking in her blank face and clearly decide to let it lie.

“As stimulating as that would be I do have an early morning tomorrow. So please come in.” He gestured for them to enter his room. His chambers were larger than Leia’s but not as large as her parents. He only had a bed though, which he sat on gratefully.

“I apologize for the lack of chairs,” he said regretfully “I meant to procure some, but my day got away from me and I somehow managed not to get round to it.”

Leia shrugged and sat cross-legged on the floor. Luke joined her on her left. “It’s not a problem,” she assured him “My tolerance for sitting on the floor has dramatically increased over the last week.”

“Ahh youth.” he murmured “That must be one benefit to this madness you have found yourself in.”

“She said she was in love with her knees.” Luke offered before she could reply.

Obi-Wan actually let out a full belly laugh at that “Yes, I imagine so. They are certainly something I miss as well.” Leia looked at him, really looked at him. His face was more lined than a man of his age should be. Her father was a least five years older than him, but Obi-Wan looked at least a decade older then Bail. A life of stress and the desert had done him no favors. She wondered how his body had fared living for that long alone. There was that cold clinical part of her, that part that was too experienced on being a field general, that wondered, Force enhanced or not, what use the man could be in any sort of battle. That fight she had witnessed so long ago with Vader did not fill her with much confidence to his current level of abilities.

“Leia how much training would you say you received?” he asked curious, ditching any preliminaries, and diving right into the heart of the matter.

“A few months, on and off,” she replied. “Mainly it was focused on my shields, but Luke persuaded me of the value of a few other things.”
“Enough to defend yourself, but not enough to get into trouble.” he murmured, more to himself than her. He seemed to be deep in thought for a moment.

“I suppose. I never really thought about it like that.”

The older man sat on the bed staring down at her then asked politely. “Can you bring your shields up to their full strength Leia? I would like to take a closer look at them if you don’t mind?”

Leia did as he asked and she felt the Force moved across them, not pushing strongly against them, but with enough pressure that she could feel what he was doing. He was testing them for weakness, she surmised.

“They are quite impressive.” He sat back and assumed a thoughtful expression. “But they are one solid thing? You think of it as a blockade or a wall to keep everything out?”

She nodded. “Yes.”

“Well, I can see why Luke taught you this method. It’s the easiest option and the fastest method to teach. And you certainly have enough innate power to easily ignore most people. It was often taught to the younglings as their first step. But that is all it was meant to be, a first step. I don’t know if he knew more techniques and thought you didn’t have the patience to learn them or if he honestly only knew that. You’re lucky though. It sounds like there weren't many Force users in your time who would have the skills to be able to break such a wall.”

She felt a chill run up her spine. “What do you mean?”

“It’s like any physical wall, if there is a weak spot, leverage can be used to get through it. It requires a lot of skill, but it is possible for a weaker force user to break through the shields of a stronger one.

Leia felt panic rise in her. That sentence, delivered in such a calm, banal way, tore to shreds the whole purpose of why she agreed to any training at all. “In my original timeline, Vader managed to enter my mind.” Obi-Wan’s face reflected horror “I could keep him from learning what he wanted to know, but I couldn’t keep him out completely. Have you ever had someone root through who you are at a core level? Look through all your most precious of memories and deem them unimportant?”

Obi-Wan shook his head “Not to that extent no.”

“Then you can see why I took up Luke when he offered to teach me. I thought I would be able to stop anyone from being able to do that again.”

Obi-Wan looked thoughtful “Since I don’t know the extent of what he learned, or by accident managed to figure out, I’m not sure what to tell you. He more than likely thought it was enough Leia. It doesn’t sound like he would deliberately mislead you.”

Luke spoke up “But why would he offer reassurances on something he wasn’t a hundred percent sure on?”

That was what Leia was wondering herself. But that question, along with so many others was beyond her ability to ask anymore. She had to wonder now, though, about some of the details she hadn’t understood in that original encounter with Vader.
“Vader is highly trained, in both Jedi and Sith techniques. Why wasn’t he able to shatter through my natural defenses more quickly?”

Obi-Wan looked grave. “He didn’t want to shatter your mind, Leia. There is an art to delving into a Force sensitives mind. Push too hard and break a shield, natural or deliberate, and it can lead to devastating effects.” She looked at him puzzled and he sighed. “Think of it like a buildup of pressure. The stronger the Force user, the stronger the pressure is behind the shield, and the greater the reverberations in your mind when the wall finally shatters. He’s stronger than you, but the amount of resistance you would instinctively offer would have made him move with caution. If he was looking for specific information sending you into madness would have done him no good.”

“What kind of madness?” Luke asked, eyes wide with a morbid kind of curiosity.

“The mildest form is a light psychosis. At the strength you and Leia are capable of resisting the effect would be reality merging completely with your perceptions of the Force. He would never be able to know if you were giving him an answer from the past, the present, or the future. Or if you were conflating what you see with the Force with the physical world.”

Leia thought of being lost in that chaotic storm of everything and shuddered. “Good reason for him to proceed with caution.” But that meant Vader, that other Vader, had been aware she was a strong Force sensitive. She understood why he didn’t tell her. Why hand a possible weapon to an enemy? It was also Imperial policy, although a very quiet one, to kill or convert all force sensitives. She was as good as dead, for being a Rebel collaborator, so that wasn’t something that would hasten her execution.

What was she puzzled about was why hadn’t he tried to torture her into compliance as his apprentice? Almost all of the Inquisitors that the Alliance had backgrounds on had suffered that fate. She was powerful and could have been used as a weapon against the Emperor. Why ignore her after her escape? There was no bring in alive caveat on her bounty, unlike Luke’s. Maybe it had been his plan after Bespin? He had altered his deal with Lando on the subject of her and Chewie. It did explain one of his actions on Bespin. He knew she would reach Luke with her cries in the Force.

Lost in thought she almost missed Luke’s anger filled question of “What was he looking for?”

She pulled her thoughts from the past and turned her focus back onto her brother. “He wanted the location of this base.”

“Did you tell him?”

“No. After a couple of hours that’s when Tarkin lost patience and used Alderaan as motivation to talk.”

“And you still didn’t say anything?” His anger drained away replaced with pride and horror. Pride that he assumed she defied them but horrified that she had such a choice placed in front of her.

“Of course I talked at that point, Luke.”

“You did?” was his shocked reply.

“Of course. I told them the rebel base was on Dantooine.”
“You lied? To Tarkin and Vader’s face? And they bought it?”

She nodded “I was hoping for time so I could figure out what to do.” She clenched her hands into fists in her lap “Didn’t matter. Tarkin had the Death Star primed for firing and he wanted to make an ‘example’. Dantooine was too remote a location to be effective in that regard.”

Luke’s face clouded with a grim satisfaction. “I’m glad he’s dead. The galaxy is better off without him.”


She could feel Luke wrestling with that temper of his, trying to contain his anger at someone who was beyond his reach, but who had hurt someone he cared for. Obi-Wan, in the long run, was correct. This was something Luke would need to learn how to control. But right now he wouldn’t hear any lecture the older man, or even she would say about it. So she opted for the lighter touch.

“I got to see him dead twice Luke.” she pointed out gently “How often can one say that about a hated enemy?”

He took a sharp look at her, and those wispy tendrils drifted across her mind, trying to verify the veracity of her statement. But all she really did feel was satisfaction in that amazing feat, and she felt him let go of that tide of anger.

Both she and Obi-Wan started to relax when a fresh wave of horror washed across both of them. Luke looked at her worry in his eyes “Did Vader invade your mind? Did he do it again? In this time?”

She shook her head “Not this time, no. I wasn’t sure if I could keep everything from him. Even the smallest bit of information in his hands could be disastrous.”

“So how did you stop him?” And now they were wandering into territory she would much rather avoid. Also, Luke’s temper was rising the longer they stayed on this subject. She could feel it building, not into anything that would explode now, in this room. No this ran much deeper. This was being put in a list in Luke’s mind, a tally of all the pain Vader had caused him. This was quickly heading into a long term grudge, that wouldn’t be so easily dislodged as his anger at Tarkin.

“I didn’t stop him,” she admitted, not seeing a better way to phrase it than that. “I distracted him and that is all I’m going to say on that matter, Luke.”

He looked hurt at the abruptness of her reply, but he didn’t let the subject go. “Is that why you’re suddenly asking for more training? Because of what did happen in that cell?”

A lie was out of the question here. She sighed. “He was above the Death Star Luke. That’s when he really tried to get my attention. It was very unnerving.”

Luke said nothing for a moment, then comprehension and grief passed over his face “He was the pilot who killed Biggs isn’t he?”

Leia nodded her head reluctantly. When Luke learned the truth, what would this do to him? To
whom he would become? Luke forgave Vader. That was just a fact of her existence. She didn’t understand it, and she most certainly wasn’t going to follow his lead, but Luke’s capacity for forgiveness was such a pillar of her life for so long, she never thought it was possible it could change. But seeing this Luke in front of her, with their shared temper not fully reigned in or understood, she wondered about that. Luke had always been forgiving of people who had harmed him. Harming the people he loved, that was a different matter. She owed him the truth to his question though so she gave him a straight answer. “Yes, he was.”

Bitterness filled Luke, but he said nothing.

Sensing, finally, that perhaps it was not wise to let Luke learn any more on this topic, Obi-Wan interrupted. “Perhaps layers might work?”

“Layers?” she frowned, not understanding his abrupt subject change.

“As I said, the wall was the first step. But the next lesson would be learning how to layer your shields. It will have fewer weakness to exploit and it might provide the buffering you seek from Vader’s overall presence. Think of it like the weave of fabric on good body armor. Individually the layers themselves are strong, but not as solid as a piece of durasteel. Layer them on top of each other, to make a solid whole, and you have something that is much stronger and flexible than the stoutest constructed wall.”

“For a metaphysics lesson, this has a lot of grounding in reality.”

“Of course it does. How else would your mind understand it?” She thought of Qui-Gon and his explanations of the limits of understanding imposed by a physical body. Well her brain was wired to deliver sensory input to her in one form. Made sense to try to build a framework for the incomprehensible taking into account those limitations.

“Alright, what’s my first step?”

“Luke I want you to pay attention. You haven’t mastered the first part of this, but letting you see where we are going might prove helpful to you.” Luke nodded. “Now Leia, I want you to thin out that wall in your mind. Not the intensity of it, or its strength, just how physically large you feel it is.”

It was hard. She had these walls in place for so long it was like trying to straighten a back that had been slumping for too long. When she finally felt she had them as thin as she could said softly “Okay.”

Obi-Wan’s light touch in the Force gently ran over them again, testing them. “Very good Leia. Now leave them there and try to rebuild that thick wall you had before behind them.”

Closing her eyes to block out any external distractions Leia focused all her concentration into this. She began to imagine a wall behind that gossamer shield and found herself thickening what was already there. Letting that go, and feeling as her shields returned to that thin state, she readied herself for her second try.

As she carefully began drafting the second layer, she felt the top layer hold. But the second she tried to pour her strength into the other edifice, the top layer of her shields thinned out, leaving holes in her defense. Frustrated she growled to herself.
“It’s alright Leia” Obi-Wan counseled “You’re doing fine.”

He meant to be encouraging, but all Leia felt was anger at her own incompetence. She was fifty-three years old, a seasoned veteran of politics and two wars. She should be able to hold two very different ideas in her head at the same time.

Then Luke’s voice filled the air “I have an idea.”

She felt Luke reach out to her in the Force and gently touch that first barrier. At that familiar feel of her brother’s mind, Leia returned the touch, latching onto him. Humming, pleased with himself, he spread his touch out, encompassing the whole of her shield in her mind, holding it clearly in his grasp. Feeling a faint “I got this.” coming from him, she understood what he was trying to do. With Luke’s familiar mind there, holding her shield in place, she didn’t need to focus so hard on maintaining that shield as she built the other. Hastily, she didn’t know how long Luke could comfortably hold her shield like that, she constructed a wall as tall and thick as her previous one. When she was done, she did an internal check to make sure it was as solid as the old one had been. Satisfied, she gave Luke a small nudge, telling him he could let go. He withdrew slowly, and for a moment, Leia felt both walls wobble, but she had the feeling of this now. She knew what it was supposed to be and they responded, solidifying in her mind.

Luke gave a pleased hum in the back of his throat and her eyes flew open to him grinning at her with a wide smile of satisfaction.

“Luke,” Obi-Wan’s voice was slightly strangled. “What did you just do?”

Luke’s joy dimmed a bit. “What we did earlier today when we ran. I synced up with her to give her an anchor. Something to hold on to while she built that second shield.” Obi-Wan just stared “I didn’t go deep into her mind.” he said defensively “I know now that would be a bad idea without more training.”

Leia felt a sense of foreboding creep up her spine. “Let me guess, this is something new and weird too?”

“The act itself, no. The fact that you both have minimal training and seem to be able to join up like that, yes.”

Leia shrugged “Luke and I did it all the time.”

“And that meld is something that happened a lot?”

Leia shrugged “No. Sometimes when we meditated together. More often when we exercised. We figured it was a twin thing.”

“That probably helped yes. But no not all of it is the “twin thing”.” He turned at Luke “I didn’t understand what you were actually doing in the gym this morning. Running in sync like that, Luke, that’s a skill that took me years to master, and I could only do it with certain individuals”

Leia frowned “I don’t remember Luke’s students having that problem. It took them a bit longer to get than me and Luke, but we figured the blood ties are what helped.”

“It might.” He frowned pondering this “There were twins in the order, and they definitely had an easier time than most of us doing this, but not to this degree. This might be a function of blood ties,
power, and proximity.” He looked up, worry tugging at the lines around his mouth. “I’m going to have to think about this Leia.” Unspoken was that if this was the case between her and Luke that meant all of this also applied to Vader. “In the meanwhile, please continue practicing that technique. Hold up a thin shield, then behind it build a wall. Then as you get comfortable with both of them thin out the wall and rebuild another behind it.”

“How deep should I go?”

“As many as you can comfortable hold. There is no limit here Leia.”

“Alright.” she got up from the floor and gave Luke’s hair a fond ruffle. “I’ll see you tomorrow in the gym.”

“Okay.”

“And don’t fall asleep this time.”

“I won’t. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight Luke.” She gave a small bow of her head to Obi-Wan. “Goodnight Master Kenobi.”

“Good night Leia.”

Leia was meditating on her bed, trying to replicate what she had done with Luke, and having moderate success, when she heard the quiet knock on her door. Sighing she got up and opened the door to see her father standing there, a cup in his hand.

“Papa?” she asked.

“Good evening Leia, may I come in?”

Her angered had cooled enough by now that she was slightly ashamed of how she had reacted this morning. She was a grown up and if she wanted her parents to see beyond this impossibly youthful face she needed to start acting like it. True Han was a sore subject for her, but she should have been able to hold her temper. She gestured for him to enter.

He looked around the small room and seeing no other option sat on her bed. He held the cup out to her. “It’s for you. Alderaan jasmine, it’s your favorite.”

As the door closed behind her she felt tears begin to build in her eyes. After Alderaan’s destruction, there hadn’t been enough seeds for the plant to survive. There had been a successful hybrid that had become available a few years after the collapse of the Empire, but the taste of it was never quite right to Leia. He could have no way of knowing, but this was the first time in decades Leia would be having this beverage.

“Thank you,” she whispered as she walked over to the bed to take it from him. Sitting down next to him, she brought the tea to her nose and inhaled the soft familiar scent.

He looked startled at her overflowing gratitude and then comprehension passed over his face. “Another thing you lost?” She nodded and he let out a weighty sigh. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry you
were left alone in this fight.”

Leia felt that all too familiar grief and rage build in her breast “It wasn’t your fault. At all. It was the Empire. It was Tarkin. Not you.”

“But I did encourage you on this path Leia.”

She snorted “No you didn’t. You simply taught me to know right from wrong and let me make my own conclusions. Nobody forced me into anything.”

He looked regretful “But you paid a heavy price for that.”

“A lot of people did. It wasn’t just me Papa.”

“True, but you are the only one out of that legion that is my daughter.” He sighed and rubbed his hands over his eyes. She sipped her tea and savored the flavor of it, letting the silence fill. He was the one who had come to her. He clearly had something he wanted to say to her and her pushing the issue would only lead to hurt feelings on both sides.

He took a deep breath “I owe you an apology for this morning,” he began “It was completely out of line and I’m sorry.”

She gave him a faint smile “Thank you. And I’m sorry in return for the way I responded. It was childish of me to storm out like that.”

“Your mother is handling this better than I am. She is the more adaptive of the two of us.” he admitted. He shifted uncomfortably on the bed and then looked her straight in the eyes “I feel like I’m looking at a stranger sometimes when I look at you, Leia. It’s not an excuse for my behavior, but it’s deeply unsettling for me.”

She swallowed the hurt “Am I really so different?”

He looked up into her eyes and said clearly “Yes. You were always filled with passion, and that is still there. But you were never this secretive on the whole, and certainly not with me or your mother. You were never this blatantly distrustful. Cautious yes, but Leia, half the time you look at Obi-Wan like he’s going to bite your hand off.”

Really? She thought she was being nothing but polite.

“And your anger,” he shook his head “You were always upset with the injustice in the galaxy since you were old enough to understand what was going on. But now, there is so much rage in you. Your body language has changed Leia, did you know that? I can’t get a good read on you. I have no idea you were about to storm out this morning. One moment I was talking to my daughter, the next she’s replaced with this woman who is looking at me like I’m an enemy.”

“I didn’t mean-” she said horrified at his implication.

“No, I didn’t think you did. But do you understand why I’m so concerned? I see an angry secretive stranger who won’t tell me what made her that way. You case rooms when you enter them looking automatically for exits. You access everyone who comes across your path for their threat level. You jump to the worst conclusion about anything anyone says. And don’t deny that is what you are doing. I watched too many of the Jedi go through the same thing during the clone wars. I know
what I’m seeing Leia..”

“I’m sorry you’re disappointed in me that I’m a soldier and failed at bringing peace through more peaceful means.”

He shook his head in frustration. “Leia, I’m not disappointed in you because you became a soldier. I’m terrified that at fifty-three years old you still are one.” He sighed “This war has existed in one form or another for going on twenty-two years, I look at you and the only conclusion I can draw is that it will continue for another thirty.”

There was such hopelessness in his eyes “That is not true. There was peace. I promise you the Empire did fall.”

“But what came after? What happened after that Leia?”

And we were back to this again. “The future is always in motion.” she reminded him as gently as she could.

“But you’ve seen it.” he countered

She shook her head “Not this future. Not based on these possibilities.”

“But you have given us hints and clues. I don’t understand why you will confirm and say somethings, but remain so tight-lipped about others. Why won’t you lay out the entire story and we can work out a solution together.”

“I confirm things that will exist regardless of the changes I made.” She thought about the advice she had given them yesterday. “The political fallout from Tarkin’s death? That is going to happen because my arrival here did nothing to alter how the Empire’s power base was structured. And as we come to certain scenarios and people there are things I will tell you about because there is no way anything I could have done would any effect on them. But the further we go along this path the less and less things remain that simple.”

“Then explain it to me. Because all I’m hearing is you dismissing my concerns as ‘You are not ready to hear this’”

Well, that was certainly not what she meant. She thought about how to frame this in a scenario he would understand and then said fiercely “Luke falls in love with Nakari Kelen.”

“What?” he asked befuddled by the abrupt change in topics.

“Luke falls in love with Nakari Kelen, the biotech mogul Fayet Kelen's daughter. Three years from now she dies of a rare genetic disorder. The irony is her father found the cure two months after she died. I can’t recreate that cure, hell I don’t even know a direction to point her father in now to find it. Not that he would accept any requests from us. Luke never recovered from her loss. Do I tell him all this? Or do I manipulate him into not meeting her that first time? Of course, that was a critical mission for the Alliance and if either of them is not there it could fail. Perhaps I do nothing and let him go down this path anyway. Who am I to play God in someone’s life and there is nothing I can do to alter her fate.”

“On the other hand, she might live. Her disease isn’t well understood, and nobody has been able to crack what causes it to manifest itself. She could just carry the genes for it but never have a
problem. Then I would have deprived Luke of a source of great joy in his life for nothing.”

“Of course if things do play out the way I remember them after she dies he might be a little pissed I didn’t give him a heads up. Or not, Luke is pretty forgiving. Or maybe he won’t be here. There are some pretty brutal experiences that shaped that forgiveness that I have essentially taken off the table as being able to happen. So who knows?”

His eyes widened “Leia, that is horrible.”

“This is what I’m balancing. Do you see why having the whole sorry tale will do you no good? For starters, I don’t know everything. I can’t even tell you who might be a spy on this base because Draven is always going to be a suspicious bastard and tended to take care of them very quietly. There is also the fact that my memories are suspect, it was thirty years ago for me. And even then I wasn’t paying complete attention to everything that was going on.” She sighed “People have the right to live their lives as they see fit and while I can advise, I certainly can’t tell them how to live their lives based on what could happen. And believe me, it’s tempting, so tempting to think that I can make this all better. That I can control this. But I tried that with Vader and because there were key details I wasn’t aware of it all blew up in my face.”

“What do you mean?” his voice tight with anger at the mention of the Sith Lord.

“I didn’t know Jedi were forbidden from marriage. So when I knew about his wife and child, he was very curious as to the why and how I came to possess that knowledge.”

“Oh.”

“Yes oh. Between that and my strength in the Force, another thing I didn’t know was that unusual I would like to point out, he was able to guess at my parentage.” With the hand not holding her tea, she rubbed her forehead in frustration. “Look at like this. I have very specific intelligence from a trusted source, but who isn’t recalling all the details has well as you would like. I’m not even sure if I can give you an accurate reading of anybody who wishes to help us in the next coming months. The destruction of Alderaan caused a lot of defections and hardened a lot of lines. There are people who could come to us that I remember being loyal Imperialists but honestly bought the company line in my timeline. But as you said Tarkin made his intentions clear. Or people I remember belonging to our cause, but only came because Alderaan was destroyed. I can only make guesses Papa, they are very good guesses, but they aren’t fact. And you will try to treat them such, even if you cautioned yourself against it because I do it all the time and I certainly know better.”

There was a long pause. “Alright, I see your point.”

She nodded “Good because I made up that entire story about Luke.”

He gave her a disbelieving look. She shrugged “It wasn’t fair to give you something real, then you would be fighting to tell whoever it is what you know.”

“And again it sounds like you are trying to protect me.”

“And why is that a bad thing?”

“I’m the parent Leia, it’s my job to protect you.”

“Yes, but you can’t realistically expect to do that forever. I’m not nineteen anymore, I understand
that to you I was until just a few days ago. But that girl is thirty years in the past for me. That is a long time to live without having your parents there to see you and hopefully guide you, as a person. How well would you respond if your parents showed up right now and tried to treat you like you were nineteen again?"

He harrumphed “Probably not well.” he said finally, conceding the point “In fact, they would be aghast at the fact that I was running an armed rebellion to overthrow a government. But my larger point still stands Leia. You are my daughter. To suddenly say I have no responsibility to see to your well being and safety is sheer arrogance."

“You died.” she countered harshly “You and Mama died and left me alone. But somehow, by a weird quirk of something, I managed to change all that. You are sitting here lecturing me out of love and concern and as frustrating as I find it, do you think I would willing trade that away? I will be damned if I let anything happen to you again.”

There was a long moment of silence following that proclamation and then Bail said in a quiet voice “That is not a promise you can keep Leia.”

“I know.” she closed her eyes and slumped.

“It feels like you don’t trust me.”

“Funny I was saying the same thing about you.”

“I’m trying Leia, but this is quite the shift.” They sat there in silence for a few minutes. Leia finished her tea and placed the cup on the floor, trying to figure a way out of this emotional quagmire she had found herself in.

Finally, Bail spoke up. “Might I offer a suggestion that might help both of us come to terms with this?”

“What?”

“We acknowledge that we both have the right and privilege to protect each other?”

She felt a smile break out across her face. It had been a long time since anyone had offered her reciprocity on that. She was the one who protected, not the other way around. Well except Luke, until he left her. “It might take a while to sink in, but yes, that is a compromise I can live with.”

“As long as you acknowledge the same for me,” he added with a wry grin. “But that doesn’t mitigate my concern about you, Leia. This will tear you apart if you let it. It isn’t your responsibility or burden to change everything in the galaxy.”

“No but it’s the task that’s been put before me.” she thought bitterly. Because of the Force, or whatever whimsical power had brought her here.

“And then there's your husband.”

She thought about the conversation of this morning and asked: “Do you truly have such little faith in me that you can’t take my word on Han being a good man?”

He looked amazed at the very suggestion “Leia I would trust you with my life. I have trusted you
with my life.”

“Then why won’t you accept that I loved Han? That we were married and that most of it were good. Why are you constantly belittling him? I understand he’s a stranger to you and not who you envisioned me with, but at the very least can you trust my word?”

“Words lie, actions don’t.” she frowned, it was a favorite axiom of her mother’s and was frequently quoted while she was growing up. What did this have to do with the here and now? “It worries me that you absolutely refuse to talk about him. With me, your mother, or even your own brother. When you aren’t flirting with him outrageously Leia, you seem hesitant and frightened around him. Those are two words I would never associate with you. And because you refuse to answer any questions, I’m only drawing conclusions based on what I see.”

She felt indignation rise up in her breast “You know what happened to him. Did it ever occur to you that my behavior has an explanation beyond him being an abusive asshole?”

“I never said he was abusive.” Bail quickly clarified. “I never even really thought that. I just think that things were clearly not very happy between you. Why else would you avoid the most basic of questions? How long were you married? What did he do for a living? I can’t imagine you would marry him if he continued on in semi-illegal activities. Did you have any children?”

“Did it ever occur to you that it is incredibly hard to mourn someone when they are standing right in front of you?” she demanded.

Bail’s breath drew in sharply “Leia..” he started shocked.

She kept on, the frustration of this nipping at her heels. “He’s not Han. At least, he is not my husband Han. Not yet anyway. Just because we fell in love all those years ago doesn’t mean he will even like the person I am now. I know him, but he doesn’t know me. I love him, but when I look at him I see someone he used to be. Who he is here and now is the young cynical version of him. I see the possibility of a good husband, friend and a great general. But I also see a ghost.” Leia swallowed harshly and rubbed her hands over her eyes to discreetly wipe away the tears. “People grow together in a marriage Papa, and they change each other. At least that was what I learned from you and Mama. He’s the exact same person he was thirty-four years ago but I’m not either.”

After all the older Han had run from her rather than stand together to face what Ben had become. Leia wasn’t going to get into that painful subject and continued.

“For me, it was five days ago that he died Papa, and it broke my heart. I haven’t even begun to process the shock from that and I’m confronted with this earlier version of my husband. One I can talk to and know so well, but he doesn’t know me. Who looked at me like I was a stranger instead of the center of his world. And that hurts. It’s like a knife pressing on the open wound left by his death. He’s a living, breathing reminder of all I lost. Then I realized if I open myself up to him again, even if we somehow manage to fall together like that again, I’m opening myself up to the exact same level of pain. Only now I know exactly what it will do to me if he dies on me again. Can I really make myself that vulnerable again?

“Leia everyone you love will leave you one way or another.”

“I know that!” she hissed “But I also know that when you are young that doesn’t seem much of a threat because it’s so far away. Even in these dangerous times, I convinced myself we would somehow find a way. It was that or run mad. I never wanted to fall in love. To have my heart beating in someone else’s chest struck me as the height of lunacy. And by the time I figured that
out that it was too late for me, that I was already in the middle of it, to take it back would be more painfully then leaving it there. But now....” she sighed “I don’t know Papa. I just don’t know.”

There was silence, as Bail took in everything she said. “My last concern about him is this. It says something that you won’t tell him the truth of your circumstances.”

She gave a small snort of derision, this was actually the easiest of all his accusations to refute. “No, because I understand who he is now. You, Mama, Obi-Wan accepted what I had to say because I knew things that you would deem impossible to learn any other way. Luke believed me because I’m his twin, and as he so eloquently put it, I was just the natural escalation of a truly crazy few days. Where everything he knew was yanked out from underneath him.”

“Han right now doesn’t even believe in the Force. He thinks the Jedi was just some giant made up hokey religion. If I told Han, this Han, everything, he would think I was out of my mind. And with good reason. If I started with spouting off stuff from his past, stuff I shouldn’t know, he would accuse me of stalking him for some perverse reason.”

“Alright, those are all valid points. I just don’t understand what you see in him.” Bail’s voice was bewildered “Name one thing he has done now, not has the potential to be, but now that makes him so appealing to you. Or more accurately what made him so appealing to you when you were nineteen.”

“Well he’s very attractive.” she answered in a dry tone, hoping she could use levity to move him off this subject.

“Leia!”

She sighed, so much for the glib answer. Her father wasn’t in the mood to take the bait. “He came back, Papa. When it was against every self-preservation instinct he had he came back and helped us destroy the Death Star.”

“Only because you were involved, not because it was the right thing to do.”

“Maybe. Maybe not.” she allowed. “Though if we held every person on this base to that standard we would very quickly run out of people.” Bail opened his mouth to object but she held up her hand. “Don’t. Cassian Andor was just the first in a long line of people who are in this fight simply because it’s all they know. Or they are here to avenge a loved one’s murder at the hands of the Empire. Or they simply got swept away in the ‘grandeur’ of it all and now don’t know how to get out. People have a multitude of reasons to be here. Are you going to deny Han his?”

Her father grimaced “Not when one of those reasons involves the fact that he is lusting after my daughter and wants to impress her.”

“Well participating in the saving of a girl’s homeworld is the way to every woman's heart,” she answered sarcastically. “I don’t know why more people don’t try it.” Really, it's not like Han did something simple and mundane and had gone out and retrieved some flowers for her. He had helped save their world. As gestures go, it was pretty damn impressive. Her father got a guilty look on his face, and nodded, conceding her point. She continued on “But isn’t that the first step? To take an action because it will benefit another? Even if the motivation is a little selfish. Don’t answer now, just please think on it.”

“I’ll try. I make no promises, but I will try.” he stretched and stood up “It’s late, and we have
plenty to do tomorrow.”

“We always do.” she observed wryly.

He leaned down and gave her a kiss on the forehead. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

She gave him a true smile, the thought of family breakfast still a novel treat. She reached down and handed the empty cup back to him. “Of course.”

“Sleep well Leia, I love you.”

“I love you too.” she answered.

After he left Leia crawled into bed exhausted after the emotional turmoil of the day and the last three days poor sleep catching up with her. Leia wasn’t sure if Vader was being cautious in approaching her after last night's debacle or Obi-Wan’s advice was starting to work, but she slept through the night with undisturbed dreams.

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer
Hi guys! So just to give you a heads up I have a ton of people coming to my home for this whole weekend for a family event. I'm thinking this might impact my writing schedule and I didn't want anyone to worry if I go beyond my usual 2-3 week update schedule. Hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ABA - Day 4

When Leia went to the gym to meet up with Luke in the morning, she was startled to see that there were other people there. Stupid really, this was the only facility of its kind on the base where you could run indoors. There were several others scattered here and there with the workout machines, but this was the largest room they had found barring the flight deck. They had been incredibly lucky yesterday that they had been interrupted by Obi-Wan and no one else. She sighed. She should be more on guard, but this place was so familiar to her it was hard to keep that mentality forefront in her mind. She needed to though. Draven wasn’t going to let things slide.

She eyed the people around her, wondering if any of them were here at his request. Then shook her head. She would be as bad as him if she kept jumping at shadows. Act normally, don’t be suspicious, and soon some other distraction will occupy him.

Luke gave her a forlorn look when he noticed her and she smiled at him. “Still want to run?” she offered.

“Yeah but…” he looked around and she could feel the disappointment radiating off of him. She was glad he still wanted the company but she found herself sharing in his disappointment. She was a bit surprised by that. She had been looking forward to falling into the Force with him again. It had been so long since she could reliably count on seeing Luke regularly, even before everything that happened with Ben. She had been tied down to the New Republic Senate and him with his students in rebuilding the Jedi Order. Here and now she wanted to make the most of the time they had before everything inevitably pulled them from each other again.

It would be safer just to stick to running. But she thought of how rare it would be to find this place empty again. She thought of all the time her and Luke had been denied just to be, by all the separations throughout their lives. To keep them in hiding, because of duty, because of grief. Screw safe. Time to live a little. She wasn’t going to deny what she and Luke both wanted just to take the easy way out. Their lives had been one long impossible gamble, why start playing safe now?

“We can synch if you like, but we’ll have to keep it to human speed” she thought at him, allowing a hint of a challenge to enter her thoughts. “Do you think you can manage it?”

Luke’s face lit up in delight, but then he thought through what she was saying. “If I speed up, you will too, won’t you?” he asked a soft whisper, clearly hoping to avoid being overheard.

She nodded her head.
“Good training exercise then,” he said in a normal voice. “You ready?”

She grinned, taking him at his word, and the two of them started to lap the room, both of them eagerly reaching for the other. Not once did he did he lose control.

ABA - Day 5

Leia was absently staring off into space, enjoying the last bit of her caff on her lunch break when Han plopped down right in front of her on the opposite side of the table. Startled at the sudden intrusion she looked up to see his wide welcoming grin.

“Good afternoon your Highness,” he said. “How are you?”

She felt her heart lurch at the familiar sight of his teasing smile. She wanted to reach over and cup his cheek and demand to know what had he done to put that self-satisfied look in his eyes. She wanted to check him over with her fingers and make sure for herself he was uninjured. And because she wanted to do all of these things and knew she couldn’t, she ended up blurt out “What do you know about Grakkus the Hutt?”

The smile remained fixed, but the cast of it instantly became more jaded. “I’m beginning to think that I had the idea of royalty wrong. I thought you were supposed to be all manners and graciousness.”

Damn, she had hurt him. He had been playing and friendly and she had demanded something from him like a spoiled child. It didn’t matter that his face had only changed subtly, she knew better. Leia had always found Han to be a terrible liar. “My apologies Captain,” she said firmly, hoping her face reflected her sincere regret.

The smile vanished, but so did the hurt look in his eyes. He searched her face for a moment, looking for any sign of mockery. Finding none, she hoped, his face relaxed into something more friendly. “It’s Han,” he said. “My name is Han, it’s not that hard to say your Highnessness.”

She gave him a wide saucy grin “Neither is Leia.”

He bit his lip as pleasure danced across his face. “You are right about that Leia.”

Delighted that she had chased away the hurt her words caused she inclined her head in the most regal manner possible. “You are quite correct. I let my eagerness get in the way of my manners. How was your trip?”

He only smirked at her high-handed imperious tone and answered with just as much mockery “It was fine. Jabba was as rude and smelly as ever, but I am in one piece. Thank you for asking.” Then he tried to replicate the subtle head bow but misjudged the depth by an inch or so. He looked like he was checking his shirt to see if he had spilled anything on it. She snickered at the ridiculousness of the picture he presented and clapped her hand over her mouth to muffle the sound, afraid he would misunderstand the source of her amusement. His head came back up quickly and took a look at her face.

Then his wide ‘Aren’t I clever?’ smile broke out across his face. She let her laugh fly loose then. Cheeky bastard, he had done it on purpose. She had missed that smile. She had missed so much of him in the last few years, but his desire to make her laugh was quite possibly the thing that she had ached for the most. There hadn’t been much to laugh about for her in the last few years. Then she remembered that her husband was dead and her laughter died in her throat.
Han’s face grew puzzled at her abrupt mood change when Chewbacca sat down next to him, breaking the odd little moment they were caught in. Quickly gaining control of herself she looked at the Wookie and gave him a smile. “And did you also have a pleasant trip?” she asked.

<I hate that planet.> Chewie grumbled <It’s hot, dusty and sand gets in my fur in the most uncomfortable places.>

“I’m sorry,” she said sympathetically, “I know how much a pain in the ass it is to take care of my hair, and it’s only on my head. I can’t imagine how many washings it takes to get sand out of that many places.”

He grunted an agreement and gave Han a hard glare. The brown haired man put his hands up defensively “I didn't choose it for my headquarters. Blame Jabba.” Chewie just continued to look at him “We go where the money is pal.”

<Uh-huh> Chewie said. <That would explain why we came back here to do a job at half our usual rates.>

Han reddened at that and shot a nervous glance at Leia. “Work’s work.” he said defensively “Besides the Alliance has a good rep for paying their bills. And as a bonus, they are less likely to order a hit on us if we fail. Worth the rate cut.”

“Oh,” Leia said as sweetly as possible “of course. What other possible reason could you have?”

He shrugged and then that charming mask she hated so much fell over his face “It’s just business.”

She narrowed her eyes at him, but let it go. Knowing Chewbacca would tell her the truth she gave the Wookie an arch look “He says everything went fine. Is he telling the truth? Or is he bleeding from sixteen different places I don’t know about?”

The Wookie let out a chuckle and shook his head, while Han let out an indignant squawk. <He’s fine your highness.> he said in his soft rumbly voice <Everything went smoothly.>

“Hey,” Han protested “it’s me. Of course, it went smoothly.”

They both stared at him in flat disbelief. “Ok,” he said, pointing his finger at Leia, “you haven’t known me long enough to make that judgment.” And then he swung the finger to point at Chewie “And I have just as much dirt on you as you have on me. Don’t forget that.”

<I didn’t say a thing!> Chewie protested.

Han turned back around to her and this time the smile was genuine “Free and clear, just as I promised.” Leia sighed in relief internally. Going through the ordeal of rescuing Han from Jabba was not something she wanted to do ever again. It looked like that was another thing she had managed to permanently change. Although she had been fond of the nickname Hutt Slayer. It had a certain ring to it.

“Well as fun as I find your company, Leia,” he said her name with special emphasis “I actually need your help.”

“With what?” she asked, suspicion tightening her tone. If he started spouting his well-worn pickup lines she was going to slap him good and proper for being stupid enough to think they would work on her.

“Do you know where the old man is?”
Leia frowned, what did he want with Obi-Wan? “In a meeting, I think. I can help you track him down if you want. What do want him for?”

“Paid me for a job” he pulled up an old battered leather bag that had been laying beside him on the bench, unseen by her. “Thought he was crazy for how much he gave me.” she gave him a deeply unimpressed look.

“I didn't ask for money.” he protested. “He told me the job, and how much he was going to pay me. Said he didn't have a lot of time before it became really unsafe for him to go back and retrieve it himself. Thought he was exaggerating till I saw the holo playing in Jabba’s palace.”

“Holo?” she asked.

“Yeah the ones where he claims he’s Obi-Wan Kenobi.” He gave her a conspiratorial wink at her puzzled look. “You know the Jedi? The general from the Clone Wars? If you’ve never heard of him your father really overpaid for your tutors.”

“I know who he is,” she said exasperatedly. “I just hadn't realized those had been distributed.” They must have made Kenobi’s before her mother’s, that was the only way that Han could have seen them so soon. There was also no disruption of all the nets to get the message across. They must be playing a long game with the news of Kenobi's survival.

Han did a double take “Wait, you knew about them?”

She nodded “They were my father’s idea.”

“I knew the old man was crazy, but I didn’t think he was that crazy,” Han said shaking his head. “I know he sort of looks like the old general but he’s at least two decades too old to be playing Kenobi.”

“Desert life is harsh,” Leia responded. Then the phrase Han used sank into her brain. “Wait, did you say playing?”

“Yeah,” Han said, a frown creeping across his face “There is no way that hermit is Kenobi. The Jedi are extinct, only madmen and con men are left…” his voice trailed off, as he took in her expression. His eyes widened and genuine surprise appeared on his face “Shavit,”’ he said feelingly “Really?”

Chewie knocked him gently on the shoulder <I told you it was him, Han,> he said gently.

“No offense pal, but you ain’t that great at identifying human faces.” he looked thoughtfully at the bag in his hands. “Huh, if that is true then yeah the old man definitely didn't pay me enough.” He gave a wry shake of his head and continued his voice almost fond “Wily old coot if I had known that I would have charged him double.”

“Enough to do what?” Leia asked, curious.

“He wanted me to go to his hovel, in the middle of the Jundland Wastes no less, and pick up a few things he left there.” Han shook the bag “If he is Kenobi, it’s only by sheer luck that I missed the Imperial brigade heading there to tear the place apart. No wonder he insisted I do that first before I went to see Jabba.”

“What was the reaction at Jabba’s to the holo?” she asked, curious.

“Most of them thought he was a fake, same as me.” Then his face grew serious. “Jabba didn’t
though. He was furious that the old man might have been on Tatooine all these years and he never knew.” Han looked thoughtfully “I thought the old slug was letting his ego and greed get away with him, wouldn’t be the first time, but it really is him?”

Leia nodded “It really is.”

Han’s head came to rest in his hand, which was propped on the table “Well that’s definitely going to put a crawl up the Empire’s back. You know, if they believe it is him.”

Oh, they would believe. Vader knew it was true thanks to their little ‘talk’. Given his eagerness to hunt Obi-Wan down she could see him marshaling all the forces he had at his disposal to make sure everyone else in the Empire knew it too. She gave Han a bitter smile “The reward on Kenobi is twenty million credits, dead or alive. It’s been one of the highest standing bounties since the founding of the Empire. There is no one who has higher.”

Which was odd now that she thought about it. The Empire never had a confirmed kill for Kenobi, but shouldn’t Yoda be on that list for the same reason? She had never even heard a whisper of the possibility of the survival of the Grand Master of the Jedi Order. She made a mental note to ask to see what his status was in the Imperial records. “They wouldn’t have left it open if they didn’t think he was alive.”

Han nodded and sat up straight “Okay, I can see that. But here’s your other issue.”

“Which is?”

“Convincing the rest of the galaxy this isn’t a hoax. I sincerely doubt I’m going to be the only one who had the reaction of disbelief Leia.”

“Most people aren’t as cynical as you.”

He snorted. Chewie interjected <Your Highness, look at it from the point of view of most of the civilians. The Alliance destroys a major Imperial weapon and found a missing Jedi Master all at the same time? Han’s right, it does sound awfully convenient.>

That was true, those events were going to be linked in people’s minds. Of course, Han was also correct in the fact Obi-Wan looked too old. And the Empire had done a very good job of hunting down any and all Jedi. There was the open bounty, the Empire never declared Kenobi dead, but how many civilians even knew about that?

On the other hand, there had been the blowback about Luke too, in the original timeline. There had been whispers and rumors about him. Some contended that the actual fatal blow to the Death Star had been delivered by another pilot and that the Alliance had found someone with the last name Skywalker to paraded around as the Hero with No Fear’s son. Others would concede that Luke was the pilot who had destroyed the Death Star, but as some sort of ploy, the Alliance had changed his last name. People could and would crawl into so many logic holes and conspiracy theories in order to maintain their belief in reality as they saw it.

Then there was the one person Leia wished had believed that Luke was some Alliance ploy. Vader had latched on to the truth like a parasite. Based on the Dark Lord’s sudden and very visible ramping up of efforts to find the rebellion about a year after Yavin, that was when Leia guessed he first heard the name Skywalker. Maybe her request to suppress Luke’s name would stretch that out a bit, but she couldn’t reliably count on it being any longer than that.

“Hey, where did you go?” Han demanded.
“Hmm?” she brought her focus back to him.

“Just now,” he said. “We were in what I thought, frankly, was a wonderful conversation where I was giving you my very valuable insight into your PR problem, and you just drift off into your own head.”

“It’s called thinking. You should try it instead of talking all the time.”

His eyes widened slightly in mock hurt. “Hell, you have to be the rudest Princess I have ever met,” he informed her.

Her eyebrow went up. “How so?”

“I thought you were all about making the ‘lesser’ people feel comfortable and being gracious to everyone that crosses your path.”

She gave him an arch smile “Are you admitting to being a serf of some sort Captain? Going to be my servant now and fetch my boots when I bid you?”

“I can definitely think of better ways to serve you,” he informed her seriously, leaning in closer across the table.

This was stupid, this was beyond stupid. She knew that this would lead to nowhere good and she should stop it right now. He didn't want anything to do with her, beyond the obvious, and going any further with this ghost would only lead to heartache and regret. But then she caught the smell of him as he leaned forward and she couldn’t seem to help herself. “Really?” she purred, leaning forward too so that their faces were almost touching. “In what way?”

“Something entirely more enjoyable…” his face paled a bit and he sat up straighter. “Like making sure you eat your full meal, nutrition is important.”

She blinked, even by his standards, that was a horribly awkward offer.

Then a voice behind her said civilly “I’m so glad you are concerned with my daughter’s health Captain.”

Oh, he spotted her father coming up behind her. Leia could hear Chewie’s soft woofing, which for a Wookie meant he was trying to swallow his laughter. Well, wasn’t all this lovely? She closed her eyes, as she leaned back into her seat, and mentally cursed herself. Papa had said he wanted her help after lunch with going over the details of how to move more money into the Alliance coffers without attracting the Empire’s attention. If she hadn’t been so distracted by Han, she would have remembered and left the commissary several minutes ago. She could have avoided this entire awkward situation.

“Papa.” she said, proud about how even her voice sounded as she turned to face him, “My apologies, I lost track of the time.”

“So I see.” His face was carefully blank as he looked at Han.

Han's adams apple bobbed nervously but thankfully, for once, he didn’t try to say anything.

“Captain Solo has a delivery for General Kenobi, do you happen to know where he is?”

Bail said nothing for a moment, just stared down at Han. Then he turned to Leia and his face melted into affection “He’s in the main command room. I think that meeting is breaking up soon.”
“Thank you, sir,” Han mumbled.

“Your welcome.” Bail responded. “Leia I’ll meet you in my quarters in ten minutes. Please do show the good Captain the way?” He walked off. Well, that could have gone better, but at least he was trying to be civil. Not exactly succeeding, but then again he had caught Leia practically crawling across a table in public to flirt with Han, so she was going to cut him some slack on this one.

“Come on,” she said, scooping up her tray. “I’ll lead the way.”

Han sighed and rubbed the back of his neck “He really doesn't like me does he?”

“No.” It was sweet, though, in a very awkward kind of way, that he seemed concerned with her father’s respect.

He grimaced as he stood, Chewie following his lead. “You really don’t beat around the bush do you?”

She shrugged “It's a waste of time. I find being blunt usually works faster. Besides from what Luke told me about your first meeting it can’t be all that much of a surprise.” She dumped the tray into its slot, then turned and headed down the corridor, the two men trailing close behind her.

There was a flare of jealousy in his voice as he tried to casually ask “You and the Kid getting along?”

<Han.> Chewie said so softly Leia almost missed it. <Don’t>

“I’m just asking,” Han whined.

“We are getting along fine. He is a great asset to the rebellion.” Keep it in the professional. There was no need to flame that fire.

They wound their way around the corridors and came into the main command center, to see Obi-Wan coming to the exit. He spotted them and he gave them a small smile.

“Captain Solo,” he said. “I take it everything went well?”

“Yeah,” Han said, handing the bag to the older man. “I don’t think you paid me enough General.”

Obi-Wan’s lips twitched “If I recall correctly it was a fight to get you to take that much.”

Han looked embarrassed again “I don’t set out to rob old poor fools.”

The Jedi shrugged “A fool I may be, but poor I am not.”

Leia frowned “Really?”

The older man nodded “Once I had access to a good network I was able to get ahold of the Temple’s hidden accounts.”

“Hidden accounts? What hidden accounts?”

“Before and during the war the Jedi did a lot of undercover operations. Those accounts were hidden and separate from our regular funding. At the time it was done so that anyone doing a background check on one of our operatives wouldn’t find any connection with the Temple.”
Leia found herself frowning “And you didn’t tell the Senate?” All things being considered it was fortunate that the old man hadn’t, but the thought of a semi-military force hiding money from its oversight didn’t sit well with her. Just how badly broken had been the relations between the two great pillars of the old Republic?

“No,” the older man said. “Since before the war, a lot of investigations we were doing were on sitting members of the Senate or patrons of Senators. After the war started, well the Senate didn’t want to know. Plausible deniability and all that.”

How much of that had Palpatine fostered? Leia wondered. How much of that fracturing was his fault and how much was the Jedi’s?

“Well, if we are done here,” Han said, gesturing to the bag. “I need to see Mon Mothma. See what job she has for me to do next.” He started to turn away but Obi-Wan’s voice followed him.

“I have another job if you're interested.” Han turned around at that, his eyes filled with interest.

“Is it going to involve me almost being caught by Imperials again? Because I have to say that was a bit underhanded of you to send me there without warning.”

“I did warn you, Captain, you chose not to believe me,” the older man said thoughtfully “but no. This is something else entirely.” He looked around the crowded room. Although no one was really paying attention to their conversation, that didn’t mean nobody wasn’t trying to listen in. Obi-Wan was a subject of a lot of interest to many people. “Please, if you and Chewbacca could take a walk with me. You too Leia, if you have the time.”

She fell into step with the other two as they walked down the corridor and then entered into an antechamber off the main hallway. Leia didn’t know what it’s original use had been in the temple, but the Alliance had turned it into a small break room. There were chairs and a long narrow cot for anyone who wished to take a short nap. It was fortunately for them, currently empty.

Han’s eyes narrowed, “And what exactly do you want me to do that you don't want anyone to overhear?”

“Nothing too untoward,” Obi-Wan assured him.

“That why you asked her to come?” Han’s hands waved to Leia.

“I thought it would be an incentive yes,” Obi-Wan said “And assurance that I wasn’t planning anything shady. I just want to keep this request private for now.”

“And you want me to do what exactly?”

The older man rubbed his chin thoughtfully “What do you know of Grakkus the Hutt?”

Han shot her a look and she shrugged “I was asking on behalf of him.”

“Mid-Level Hutt, located on Nar Shaddaa. Bit unusually for a Hutt, he collects art and antiques. Why?”

“I’m interested in knowing everything about him. Most especially his security precautions, blueprints of his base of operations, and the roster of his guards if at all possible. And most of all I would like to avoid the Alliance leadership finding out about this.”

“So this would be an off the books job?” Han sounded incredulous. “It’s sweet of you to think that
I would be against such a job when I engage in smuggling for a living.”

The older man shrugged “I wouldn’t wish to assume anything.”

“And why are you so interested in the Hutts? Especially this Hutt? You were on Tatooine for what, twenty years? And not once did you make a move against Jabba.”

The smile that twisted across Kenobi’s face was full of secrets. “I wouldn’t say that is entirely true. I merely did not get caught. But the reasons for this are personal.”

Han shook his head. “No deal. I don’t care what you offer to pay me. I just got one Hutt off my back, I’m not about to invite another one.” Leia wanted to protest, that they would take out Grakkus, that the Empire would deal with the Hutt, but she held her tongue. There was no reason Han would believe them at this point. And he would want to know where they had gotten the information about the spy.

“It’s personal to me Captain because I have it from a very good source that he has a rather large collection of Jedi artifacts. I would like to have them back and will pay you handsomely for any information that leads to that outcome.”

Han's face contorted in pity for a second, and then he looked at Chewie “What do you think? It’s your neck too.”

The Wookie shrugged <If he is willing to pay, I say why not?>

Han nodded slowly. “I'll ask around. But I make no promises, on anything.”

Obi-Wan gave a small secret smile “That is all I ask.”

ABY - Day 6

“What is she doing here?” Draven asked, surprise in his voice.

Mon paused by the door, made wary by the hint of challenge in the General’s voice. Leia managed to keep her eyes from rolling in annoyance. “Because I asked her here.” she said calmly “Leia has experience with the Givin.”

Draven frowned “So does her father.”

“Bail is busy negotiating with the Rodarian syndicate. Leia had multiple dealings with the Givin in the Imperial Senate and I thought she would make an acceptable substitute. We can, of course, wait for Bail if you wish, but I was given to understand that this was a rather time sensitive matter.”

Draven nodded reluctantly. “Yes, it is.” His eyes narrowed he went on “Through various sources it has come to our attention that Drusil Bephorin has expressed interest in defecting.”

Mon frowned, her fingers drumming on the table “The name sounds familiar. She’s a slicer isn’t she?”

“She’s not just a slicer, she’s one of the Empire’s most talented data cryptographers. She has personally designed most of the current encryption protocols the Empire uses.”

“Background?” Mon asked.
“Trained at the Republic Institute for Cryptography and Mathematics on Coruscant. Was considered to be the best student of that facility in the last two hundred years. She stayed at the Institute when the Clone Wars broke out, even though her home planet of Yag’Dhu ultimately joined up with the Separatists. Unfortunately for her she didn’t leave Coruscant and was teaching there when Palpatine took power. She “disappeared” shortly after that for about four years. When she resurfaced she was assigned to the Imperial R&D department. Around that time her family suddenly was moved away from their home in the city of Ha-gan to the edge of the backwater.”

“Leverage” Leia whispered, desperately trying to recall the details of this one. Luke had been involved in the rescue mission of the scientist herself. Was that the mission where Nakari had died or was it the assault on Vrgos Vas? She couldn’t remember. She had only met the woman a few times and she was having trouble remembering who died when. There were far too many of them to keep track of, it had become a blur in Leia's mind over the years.

Draven nodded. “We are in the first steps, and we are still negotiating with third parties. As you can imagine she is heavily watched, the Empire needs her, but given that she doesn't seem to be a willing participant it lends credit to her story that she wishes to escape.”

“She wants to join us?” Mon asked.

Draven shook his head “I don’t know. But I do know whatever she offers us, her family is going to be part of the bargain.”

“A two prong rescue.” Mon rubbed her head “Well that will be interesting to pull off.”

Draven gave a fierce grin. “I’ve been trying to subtly woo this woman for years. Trying to convince her that we could keep her and her family safe. Suddenly with the destruction of the Death Star, she started to believe we could. Who are we to prove her wrong?”

Well, when he put it like that.

Mon sighed “Where do we begin?”

ABA - Day 9

Leia was walking back to her own rooms after dinner, looking forward to a peaceful night of rest, when she was surprised to find Obi-Wan standing by her door.

“Ah, Leia,” he said, smiling “I was wondering if I might have a word?”

She nodded and opened the door to her quarter’s, inviting him in with a gesture of her hand. She hadn’t had much interaction with the Jedi in the past week. She had been busy, offering to do what jobs she could to cover their personnel gaps, which generally speaking ended up with her doing a lot of grunt work. She didn’t mind, it needed to be done and a good step in order to get where she needed to be with the Alliance leadership was to be as helpful as she could to as many people as she could reasonably accommodate.

Obi-Wan had been busy too. Between training Luke and the various consultations and advice he was giving, she imagined he didn’t have any more free time than she did. So what prompted him to delay his customary nighttime lesson with Luke to visit her? She was fairly sure he was as wary of her as she was of him, probably for a lot of the same reasons.

“What can I do for you Master Jedi?” she asked as soon as the door closed.
“Several things,” he said making himself comfortable on her bed. Leia decided to remain standing. She didn’t know what he wanted, but she doubted it was anything simple. “First how are your layered shields progressing?”

She relaxed a bit, remembering her father’s admonishments of not jumping to the worst conclusions. “Fine,” she said evenly.

And they were. She had been working on them every night and could now hold seven layers in her mind if she really stretched. She found those layers slipping to three when she was very upset or tired, but she was working on it. Obi-Wan had invited her to join those nightly sessions with Luke, but she had declined. For one, she had all the training she needed. Two, she also wanted to avoid any questions about what exactly she was doing in the room with them. It was well known around the base that when Luke was in Obi-Wan’s quarters they were training and were not to be interrupted. They had taken to doing his physical training in the jungle. Anytime they tried in the temple they attracted too much of a crowd. She didn’t want anyone to start questioning what she was doing there.

“Well, that is good to hear.” He looked like a proud if distracted teacher when she felt his touch in the Force rake across her mind. She gave a startled yelp, it hadn’t hurt, but it was very uncomfortable. And incredibly rude.

He gave her an apologetic look at her “What was that for?”

“My apologies, I wanted to see what they were like when you weren’t prepared.”

She gritted her teeth, but she couldn’t deny the soundness of his logic.

“And your verdict?”

“You’ve made excellent progress. I’m quite impressed.”

“Thank you. Is that all you wanted to speak to me about?” Leia tried to keep her voice calm and knew she was failing.

“No, there is a matter concerning Luke.” he said calmly, not rising to the pique in her tone “I need your assistance in his training.”

Her eyes narrowed “I’m still not a Jedi, I don’t know how I can offer him anything you aren’t entirely more qualified to teach him.”

Obi-Wan sighed, and she saw the exhaustion cross his face before he shoved it all away. “Luke is a fine student and very quick to pick up on things.” He gave a small fond smile “Much like his father.” Leia stiffened at the mention of Vader and the older man gave her an apologetic look.

“My apologies, I seem to have picked up an old man’s habit of reminiscing on the past. My point is that while Luke is certainly very dedicated and diligent he is still having serious issues with his shields.”

“Really?” Leia asked. He hadn’t mentioned anything about that in any of their running sessions.

The white haired man nodded “Normally I would let him proceed at his own pace, given enough time I’m sure he would manage to master this on his own. Your own training shows that he will. But we are in the open here,” he put up a hand to forestall her protests “No Leia, I agreed to train him here, and I’m not taking that decision back. From what I can see you were correct in your advice. If I didn’t believe that was the case I wouldn’t remain here, despite the incentive of your
“Bribe.” And here a self-deprecating smile crossed his face.

“But there were good reasons I wanted Luke to be trained in isolation. There are many matters pressing on his time, and I respect that. It’s unfortunate that this seems to be the lesson that he is having the hardest time grasping. His mind is very vulnerable to Vader right now. The only thing we have on our side is the Sith’s ignorance of his existence, but that state of affairs isn’t going to last very long. We simply do not have the luxury of letting Luke develop this at his own pace. Given your own difficulties with Vader’s presence, Luke needs to grasp this as soon as possible and move on to the more advanced techniques of shielding.

“You’re hoping that I can repeat the same trick he did with me for my shields.” she said, understanding dawning.

He nodded “Yes. It’s remarkable how fast you two pick up things from each other. I understand you are reluctant to be associated with his training in any manner, but I am asking for Luke’s sake.”

“Alright,” she said, rubbing her forehead to ease the stress headache that was building there. “Let me change into something clean and I’ll be there shortly.”

She left it to Obi-Wan to explain her presence. Luke’s face had lit up with such delight when he had seen her enter the room. He still was hoping she would join him in this. But by the time Obi-Wan had finished his reasons for inviting Leia here Luke the happy look was wiped from his face.

“Isn’t this cheating?” he asked, slightly confused.

She and Obi-Wan exchanged looks. “Yes.” Leia said “But this isn’t a game Luke. Your very survival depends on these shields. We really don’t have time for you to figure this out on your own. So in the future, when you can and it’s available, take the shortcut.”

Obi-Wan shot her a disapproving look. What, like he didn’t agree with her? He was the one who asked her here, it was his idea. Luke needed to grasp all of this as soon as possible. “She’s correct Luke. If this is how you learn faster then this is how we should proceed.”

So the two of them sat on the floor facing each other. Luke brought up the wall in his mind, and Leia immediately understood what Obi-Wan had been talking about. The walls were impressively thick when you looked at them, but she could feel where the weak spots were. Luke’s emotions were pouring out of them like water out of a sieve.

She reached out, conscious of Obi-Wan’s presence in the Force watching the two of them, and she filled the holes with her own strength.

“Like this,” she said gently into Luke’s mind.

“Ok,” Came back to her. Luke was working on sending words instead of just thoughts, but it was like listening to a very staticky radio. Sometimes things weren’t very clear. She felt him probe what she had done and look at it clearly.

“Pull back.”

Leia drew back. The wall didn’t even last a second before once again his emotions started leaking again.
There was a mix of embarrassment and self-recrimination coming from him. She tapped lightly on the wall, and said, “Can I come in?”

There was a flicker of surprise and then she heard a faint “Yes.”

She gently sank through the nearest weak spot to her until she was in the upper part of his mind. Obi-Wan’s alarmed flared briefly, then he reigned it back in, not wanting to break her concentration. She shook her head, she knew what she was doing, did the old man really need to hover so much? Did he really believe she would ever knowingly endanger Luke?

Sighing she focused back up and ran her touch over his shields from the inside. The places where they were the strongest were built on an oasis of calm and directness. Where they were the weakest was where his emotions were rolling, as he tried to force them to be something they were not. Frowning, this was not how her Luke had constructed his wall, she sent out “Why did you do it this way?”

Because she was in his mind, his ability to answer her was much better. “Obi-Wan said that I need to be calm and focused at all times. That was the emotion I should use to build them.”

Leia snorted. Obi-Wan said that training Luke would be full of surprises, but she was disappointed to find out that he hadn’t grasped fully what that meant. No wonder he and Luke were having such issues with this lesson. “That would work for a child raised to seek to calm themselves their whole life, but not for a nineteen-year-old with no training in any mental discipline.”

“Then how?”

“Take the emotion and build it into the wall Luke.”

“Isn’t that the Dark side?”

“Not exactly. The calm is a good foundation, a necessary one, but you aren’t capable of maintaining it to the levels Obi-Wan can.”

A feeling of shame washed over him.

“No,” she thought firmly at him “Luke, I was taught meditation and patience since I was twelve years old and I couldn’t do it this way either. There is nothing wrong with you. He’s just going to have to alter his approach to take into account your needs and limitations.”

She let one of the holes she was patching thin “Watch.” she instructed him. Attention on her, he watched as she took her love and determination and filled the hole with it, mixing in the calm around him.

“It’s like mixing chemicals to get the right fuel you want,” he said

She laughed “I personally thought of mixing paints, but yes I suppose that metaphor works too. As long as you don’t use any negative emotion to build the wall you’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Well a possible version of yourself was, so if this all goes to hell we can still blame you.”

He laughed. The feeling of it sending tickles up and down her very soul. She had missed this.

“Want to try again?”
“Yes.”

Carefully she extracted herself from his mind and once again filled all the weak spots.

She felt Obi-Wan’s curiosity, but he remained quiet and watched what Luke was doing.

Slowly, so slowly, she felt Luke pushing against her stop gap measure and she let him gently push her out. When the last one was almost full she sent a “You good?”

“Yes,” came back to her. Pulling away, the wall wobbled for a second, then held firm. Leia sent her joy and pride.

Obi-Wan’s quiet, “Well done Luke,” had her brother sending them a feeling of pleasure.

So when the door abruptly slid open in the real world, followed by a wave of rage and disbelief, neither Luke nor Leia was truly prepared. Their eyes both flew open in surprise, at the shock of the intrusion, and the vast depth of the emotions being emitted had them caught in a feedback loop with each other. Leia, after waiting for a beat for her brother to seize control, and realizing she would be waiting awhile due to his ignorance, severed their connection.

At the less than graceful way she had handled it, it took them both a few precious seconds to get their bearings. Then Leia frowned up at the door. Who the hell had just walked in here in such a mood?

All she saw standing in the door was an older, bald, heavyset man, dressed in a variation of stormtrooper armor, who was staring at Obi-Wan like he’d seen a ghost. Leia frowned, the man’s appearance was tickling something in the back of her brain. She had seen him before, but where?

Obi-Wan meanwhile, hadn’t even opened his eyes. “It’s rude to enter someone’s quarters unannounced,” he said, the mildness in his voice covering his irritation.

At those words, the man seemed to have found his voice. “That’s rude!!” the man bellowed “That’s rude! Let’s talk about you let me think you were dead, for decades!!” his voice was dripping with disbelief. “How you convinced everyone who knew differently to lie to me about it! Then, when you do decide to rejoin the living instead of telling me personally, I have to find out via holo you are still alive!!! Dammit General after the Rako Hardeen incident, you swore you would never fake your own death again! So yes let’s talk about rude.” The man was practically howling at the end of that statement.

Obi-Wan’s eyes flew open “Rex?” he asked, his voice shaking.

“No, it’s Hondo and I’m here to collect on the fifty rockets you owe me. Yes, Rex!” the man threw his helmet at Obi-Wan, who caught it with the Force using an absent-minded hand gesture, his eyes never leaving Rex’s face. “Dammit man, where the hell have you been?”

Obi-Wan’s shock was flaring all over the place “Tatooine.”

“What the hell was on that dustball that was so important that you were in hiding for almost twenty years?” there was so much pain in the man’s voice and then it clicked for Leia where she had seen him before. Commander Rex had been the ground troop leader on the mission to Endor. Her mind automatically filled in the details. He had come highly recommended, had decades worth of experience, and was one hell of a field commander. He was also one of the few remaining clones that were still alive. Most had been burned up by the Empire in suicide missions of one sort or another. The rest had sought it on their own when the chips had degraded to the point where their actions against the Jedi had driven them mad.
Oh, that. She had forgotten about that fact. This was about to get super awkward. Before she could even suggest they leave Obi-Wan’s voice cut across the room “Luke.”

Luke grimaced “Yes?” he offered. Leia didn’t need the Force to know he was hoping the older man would excuse them out of this situation.

Kenobi focused back in on the two of them, seemingly surprised to see them there. Had he forgotten about them? Who was Rex to him to have him this rattled? “No, that was the answer to the question. Luke was on Tatooine.” Kenobi gestured to her brother.

Rex’s eyes narrowed and his head swiveled down to take in the both of them sitting on the floor. Luke gave a nervous wave “Hello.” he said sheepishly.


Rex’s face drained of color. “What?” he asked in a hoarse whisper.

Luke exchanged a look with Leia. She shrugged, she had no idea what was going on either. She knew he had survived Endor, but she hadn’t followed up on him after that. She had no idea why Luke’s name would cause such a reaction. Luke, apparently guessed the cause better than she did, because he gave the man a wry smile. “I take it you knew my father?” he asked.

Rex laughed and covered his face with his hands. His head shook back and forth in incredulous disbelief. As his hands slid from his face he gave a watery chuckle. “Yeah, I did. He was without a doubt the craziest General I had the pleasure of serving under. Well, except for this asshole.” At that, Rex gave Obi-Wan a hard glare.

Obi-Wan’s face had returned to its usual gentle bemused state “This wasn’t reason enough?” he asked mildly.

Rex’s shoulders slumped “For you, yes. There is nothing you wouldn’t have done for him. Hell, I don’t think you would have stayed in the order if he left. Figures that you would ignore everything for his kid.”

Leia gave a hard look at the old man, but his shields were locked down tight. Leave the order? Obi-Wan Kenobi, a member of the Jedi council, one-half of the most famous Jedi team that had ever been, would have left the order? For Vader? Just exactly how close had they been? Obi-Wan had left Vader to burn, he hadn’t given him the mercy of a clean kill. He had done that to someone he had loved that fiercely? What the hell happened between them?

Rex finally seemed to actually see her, and he did a double take. A broad smile crossed his face. “I’m sorry I didn’t catch your name,” he said.

“Leia Organa.” For a moment disbelief flared across the Force, then all of it was gone. All the emotions that had been pouring out of him just vanished. Leia frowned. She had never run into someone, who wasn’t a Force sensitive, who could do that. Maybe it was during the long years with the Jedi he picked up that trick?

“Organa?” he said slowly “You’re Bail’s daughter?”

“Yes, I am.” Those amber eyes studied her hard for a moment, then they slid back to Luke. Whatever the man was thinking he didn’t say.
He gave a hearty sigh and rubbed his hands across his face. “Since I failed to introduce myself properly, my name is Commander Rex, former Captain of the 501st legion of the Grand Army of the Republic.” He gave Luke a lopsided grin. “Your father was my commanding general.”

Luke gave him a blazing grin “Really? Have any embarrassing stories on him?” He pointed to Obi-Wan, “All he talks about is how he was a good friend who was always saving his butt or falling into trouble.”

Leia shot the old man a sharp look, which he ignored. On so many levels that was a bad idea. He never said anything about Vader when she was around, so she had foolishly assumed that was the case when she wasn’t. She and the General were going to have a little chat about that.

“Oh I have so many,” and here the man waved at Obi-Wan “Him too if you’re interested”

Luke’s smile became practically luminous than it was replaced by a frown. “The 501st? Vader’s Fist?” Well, someone had been giving him lessons on the Imperial military structure.

Rex looked angry now. “Not while I was in charge. That was after I left.”

Luke’s face darkened “So not only did he kill him, Vader stole his troops from him?”

Rex paled and looked at Obi-Wan shocked “Vader killed Anakin?” He didn’t know. Even with the man’s emotions tightened down like they were, there was no way anyone was that good of an actor.

Obi-Wan gave him a long stare and then said flatly “Yes.”

Leia frowned. Obi-Wan believed he was telling the truth. She could sense no lie in that statement. Who or what did Kenobi believe was running around in that suit? So far this conversation was revealing a lot of very disturbing issues with Obi-Wan Kenobi.

Rex’s eyes closed in sorrow. “Senator Organa told me he died, but I never asked how.” He sighed. “So many lost in this madness.” He rubbed his forehead in pain.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said “Most of us at the hands of those we trusted.”

Rex stiffened “Not me.” His fingers traced a scar along his right temple. “I never turned on my Jedi.”

Obi-Wan sighed and his voice was filled with genuine regret. “Forgive me, old friend, I did learn about those later. It was unfair to bring it up. But at the time...” his voice trailed off and he closed his eyes as if he found himself there again.

Rex swallowed hard “Cody really did fire on you at Utapau didn’t he?”

Obi-Wan’s eyes open and he stared at Rex. “Yes.”

Rex shook his head “We, I mean he…. He looked away “After what went down with Fives, I should have convinced more of my brothers to removed those blasted chips.”

Obi-Wan’s grief was written on his face “It wasn't your fault Rex.”

“Think….leave?” Luke’s mental voice drifted across her mind, as the two men fell into silence staring at each other. The thought of leaving this room for them to hash this out was very appealing to Leia. As interesting as the insights she was learning on Kenobi were, there was too much pain
and grief here. They deserved privacy for this.

“Hell yes.” she sent back.

Luke and she rose to their feet, grabbing the attention of both men. “I think you and Rex have a lot to catch up on.” he offered to Obi-Wan “And I think it would be a lot easier on everyone if Leia and I leave.”

Before either man could say anything the two of them swiftly exited the room, leaving Obi-Wan and Rex to discuss their ghosts.

ABA - Day 13

‘I’m telling you you’re doing it wrong.” Luke insisted, waving his hands in the air to get Han’s attention. He clearly had just come off his CAP rotation and was still dressed in that eye-bleeding orange jumpsuit. Leia was in the hanger, helping to unload donated supplies from a shuttle that just returned. She sank back into the shadows, curious to see what they two of them would do if neither knew she was here.

“Look, kid,” Han shot back, “I’ve been taking care of my ship for years, I don’t need some fresh-faced farm boy telling me how to repair her.”

Chewie let out a soft chuckle of amusement. <No, you screw that up all on your own.>

“Did I ask you?” Han demanded.

“Look,” Luke said, clearly trying to keep his tone civil “I’m not saying your way will lead to the hyperdrive blowing up or anything. It’s just that the T-456 power converters are notoriously unstable. The company that makes them are crap and you never know if it’s going to last you a few days or a year.”

“Well cash flow is currently somewhat of a problem as of late, and while you all pay well it’s not nearly as lucrative as some of my old jobs. So, since I can’t afford the WV-900’s I’m stuck with the crap model.

“If you go with the L-34’s you’ll be better off. There cheap.”

“I would. Except the L-34’s aren’t compatible with the Falcon hyperdrive. You think I just started doing this yesterday?”

Luke gritted his teeth, “Not if you strip the input valve from the T-456 and attach it to the L-34. The exterior port to those models are different, but the interior ports are compatible with each other. Even if you buy both, it’s still way cheaper then the 900’s.”

Han stopped for a second and stared at Luke. “Really?”

“Yes, really.”

Han’s eyes narrowed. “Show me,” he said thrusting the part in question at Luke.

Grabbing it Luke muttered to himself as he went off to find the tools in which to presumably take the thing apart. A few minutes later Leia heard Han’s “SON OF A BITCH!! REALLY!?!” There was a long pause. “Okay kid, show me what else you got.”
She smirked to herself. They seem to be finding their own way without her.

ABA - Day 16

Leia was watching the great holo projection of Starkiller base as the little dots flew around and one by one the greens and reds disappeared. Far more of the red ones then green, but each green light was a pilot that followed her here. This was her responsibility, the least she could do was not look away as they died.

Then there was a screaming howl of pain across the Force and for a second Leia felt like something had just burned a hole through her heart.

She staggered and sat on one of the benches, that lined the perimeter of the holo-screen, her hand coming to her chest to check for a wound, as her eyes closed against the pain. This made no sense. She was safe here, there was no one here that she didn’t know, or who had been vouchsafed by someone whose judgment she trusted. She hadn’t heard any blaster fire. Who would attack her here?

“Leia!?” she heard a muffled if very intense, voice ask. As if someone were screaming at her but they were far away.

There was no wound on her chest. Her fingers laid lightly on her clothes and there was no damage to the cloth. Was this a heart attack? A poison of some kind? Then a voice screamed across the Force in a howl of rage and despair.

What have I done? What have I done? What have I done?

Ben?

He didn’t answer her, but the pain in her chest was gone. Leia merely sat, trying to catch her breath. What had he done? What had set Ben off like that? She reached out, calling his name, but only found a whirlwind of confusion and pain. He wasn’t even trying to keep her out, but he was so lost in whatever had happened he wasn’t hearing her either. She left her son, for the moment, and reached out for that other presence. Han was there too, and while he was not as easy to see in the Force, muffled was the word Luke had used to describe searching for non Force sensitives, she knew him. To the bones she knew him, he was love, longing, and home.

There was nothing there.

No, that couldn’t be right. Maybe he was unconscious or injured. Maybe he was near death. That could all account for her not finding him. He couldn’t be dead. Because if he was dead…..if Ben is the one who had let out that gut wrenching cry, that childish wail, Leia had a terrible icy suspicion of who killed Han. She reached again desperately for both of them and found only her son, who was surrounded by the chittering glee of the Darkside, screaming in pain.

No, not Han. Not by Ben. Not like this.

“Leia! Let me in!” Who was trying to talk to her? She looked up, no one was paying attention to her, they were all focused on the battle that was being waged so far away. As she should be, she should get up, she should give orders to the pilots, they were all counting on her. But how could she when her son just killed her husband? What was the point of any of this now?

“Leia!! You’re dreaming. Wake up!!!”
Leia’s eyes flew open, her scream just barely held back. Han was dead, Ben had killed him and everything was lost. Then there was a familiar desperate push against her shields, as Vader tried to get her attention. It was enough to snap her back to the here and now. She was on Yavin, she had been dreaming and now the main author of almost all the misery in her life wanted a late night chat.

“Leia!?!?” what she could feel through her shields was his frantic worry. At the sound of that low mellow voice, filled with concern, Leia felt her control snap. It wasn't his place to offer comfort, that pleasant voice didn't sound like him, and he had no right to be here.

“My son turned because of you!” she snarled at him “My husband died because of you!” She threw all of her grief, anger, and despair into her next statement. “SO LEAVE ME ALONE!!!” There was a pause, as she held her breath, almost wishing for a fight, then she felt him retreat.

Leia waited a few minutes, to see if this was the end of it. Her breath was still coming in rapidly and her whole body was shaking. She fought it, and then realized the futility of this struggle. What did it matter? She wasn’t General Leia Organa here and now. If she appeared in the morning with signs of grief and stress on her face it wouldn’t harm morale. It wouldn’t send a flurry of rumors and whispers through the ranks. The only people who would care she was upset loved her and didn’t expect her to lead them in anything. So why was she punishing herself like this?

She turned onto her side and cried herself to sleep.

ABA - Day 23

“I wanted to thank you for the tea Luke.” her mother said, as Leia and her brother entered her parent’s room. “You’re right, it has quite the kick. It’s just what I needed to get myself started in the morning.”

He beamed at her. “I’m glad you liked it. It wasn’t too spicy, was it? Most off-worlders have a hard time with that. I gave some to Wedge, and I swear he almost started crying.”

Her mother’s peal of laughter rang out “Oh, that poor man.”

Bail laughed as he sat “Don’t take my wife as the norm, Luke. I’m not sure how, but somehow she developed a love of spicy food.”

Breha rolled her eyes. “I will defend my world’s culinary dishes to anyone who disparages them. But between you and me Luke, on the whole they can be a bit bland.”

He grinned “That is not something that can be said about food from Tatooine.” He pondered it for a second. “Maybe I can talk Han into buying some spices and more tea the next time he goes out? If the cooks here let me I can fix you breakfast?” he sounded so hopeful.

Leia felt the need to put on qualifiers to that offer for her sake and her father’s “Only if it’s mild. Core world mild,” she said sticking her finger in Luke’s face at the mischievous look he got when she said mild, “otherwise I will be spending the entire day in the fresher.”

“Not a fan?”

Bail grinned “Oh, she’s a fan. Her digestive track on the other hand…”

Leia rolled her eyes. “You eat one Chaldiran hot pepper on a dare and no one will let you forget it.”
Breha laughed “Honey, you were sick for three days afterward.”


Leia bit into her omelet and stifled a grin. She stuck her tongue out at him and he joined in the laughter with her parents. She knew all three of them would have gotten along.

ABA - Day 25

“You’ve been avoiding me.” a voice remarked from the doorway.

Leia looked up from the schematic she was studying “Excuse me?”

Han was leaning against the entrance to the room, arms crossed against his chest. “You’ve been avoiding me.”

Leia blinked and tried to pull her mind from the mission plan that Rex had wanted her to go over. Of course, she had. Since her nightmare the other day she couldn't look at this face without wanting to scream at him that it wasn’t fair he was alive, and her Han was dead. Since that wasn’t fair to him, not to mention he would think she had lost her mind, she had taken to avoiding him.

“No, I haven’t.” She allowed her eyes to rest somewhere over his shoulder so she didn’t have to look him in the face.

“Liar.” he said petulantly.

She had to stifle back her instinctive response. Getting into a fight with him right now wasn’t something she had the heart for. Instead, she gestured around her “Unlike certain people I could name, I actually do work for the Alliance full time. And as you can see I’m busy. So let’s put off my stroking of your ego for another day shall we?” She bent her head back to the schematic.

There was a long pause. “Did I do something to offend you?” he asked in a serious voice.

She snorted and kept her eyes firmly fixed down, pretending to be absorbed in her work “Captain, do I strike you as someone who wouldn’t inform you immediately if you made me mad?”

“No,” then there was a shuffling of his feet. “Which is why I’m wondering what the hell caused you to suddenly act like I’m some sort of disease?” There was a wealth of bewilderment under that nonchalant tone.

If she really was the cold bitch everyone seemed to think she was she would be able to cut him off and send him on his way. But she knew all too well the damage and hurt that would cause him. Swallowing her own pain, and making sure her face was as soft and inviting as she could make it she looked up and stared him directly in the face. “Honestly Han, there is nothing you have done. I’m just buried in work right now, that’s all.”

His face twisted with jealousy “You still find time to run with Luke in the morning.”

She put a slight edge of mocking on her tone “Would you get up that early? To work out? Just to spend time with me?”

He got defensive “Maybe if you asked.”
Leia felt a fond smile grow across her face “Liar.”

He sighed “Alright. You sure that’s it?”

“I’m sure.” she fought to keep her voice level and her face honest.

He straightened up “See you around Leia.”

“Sure,” she said softly, watching as he walked away. Then she shook herself and buried herself back into her work.

ABA - Day 30

Leia sat at the conference table, next to her mother, with her father flanking Breha’s other side. They had been called here by Mon, who was sitting opposite of them, flanked on either side by Dodonna and Draven.

Mon spoke up “Thank you for coming. I wanted to let you know that what I’m about to tell you,’ she stopped and took a deep breath, gathering her thoughts.

“Tomorrow we expect a galaxy wide announcement on this,“ A look of deep sympathy passed over her face. “But I thought the three of you should be given time and privacy to deal with this, before having to face very public scrutiny. We know who has been appointed the governor of Alderaan.”

Breha’s breath drew in sharply but her face remained deliberately neutral. Just below the table, Leia grabbed her mother’s hand in support, where no one could see.

Her father cleared his throat “Captain Piett is not being appointed to the position permanently?”

When the announcement of the temporary governor had been made Leia had breathed a sigh of relief. Piett might have been one of Vader’s favorite lapdogs, but by all accounts, he was not prone to overreacting to provocation. He was also level-headed, competent, and most important of all not corrupt. Alderaan was a very wealthy world, and there were plenty of Governor’s, Moff’s, and military officers who would have seen the position as one of plunder.

Draven shook his head “No, but the chances of that were fairly slim. He’s navy through and through, and with the destruction of the Death Star, they are hurting quite badly for competent officers. Also, he seems to be one of the few senior officers that Vader appears to tolerate. He’s being moved back onto the fleet.”

“Who then?” Breha asked softly, her hand tightening on Leia’s the only indication of her distress.

Dodonna briefly looked at Mon before answering “Jylia Shale”

Leia twitched. That was someone she hadn’t thought of in a very long time. The woman was a brilliant strategist and cunning warrior. She would hold Alderaan in a very tight grip that would be difficult to pry her home out of. But Shale was also very practical and while a hard liner, she wasn’t cruel for the sake of it.

Bail’s breath came out in a long whoosh “I thought she had retired?” he asked puzzled.

Dodonna nodded “She had. But the Emperor thought it would be best to replace Her Majesty with a woman. Plus the Empire has never tried to hold a core world like this. They can’t rely on the tactics that they use elsewhere, it would cause problems that would be harder to gloss over. Our
understanding is that most of the current governor’s were passed over for this reason. They needed someone with a nuanced approach and a will of iron. Shale has both, and is intensely loyal.”

But not to the point of idiocy. The woman had turned on her former government without so much as a flicker of regret the minute it became practical to do so.

Mon leaned forward “I know this is hard for you to hear, but this is good news. Shale is many things, but she isn’t stupid. She isn’t going to start with the hardline tactics and wonder why everything blows up in her face. We have time Breha.”

“Provided that no one provokes her,” Breha said softly to herself. Then she focused back in on Draven. “Any more news from Alderaan?”

He shook his head “The curfew is still in effect. All the major cities are under occupation, but the countryside has been left virtually untouched by Imperial forces. As far as we’ve been able to ascertain things are quiet.”

She gave him a nod of thanks.

Dodonna bit his lip and then offered “I know this is a hard blow. And I know your people are paying the price for your decisions, but I really do think it was the right thing to do. Your message has reached a lot of people. Daily we are seeing new recruits, even among active Imperial officers. Our coffers and supplies are being steadily refilled. We are gaining strength every day and a large part of that is due to you.”

Breha gave him a hard look “I understand it was the right thing to do or I wouldn’t have done it. Nonetheless, that doesn’t negate the responsibility I have to my people, and they will be the ones paying the costs for my choices. The two ideas are not mutually exclusive.”

Draven snorted “Could have been worse.”

Mon hissed “Draven.”

Draven shook his head, “No, they deserve to hear this. Shale was the second choice. Originally it was going to be Valco Pandion”

Bail let out a muffled oath. “That blowhard? The one who thinks every problem can be solved if you just throw enough men with blasters at it?”

“Yes.”

“What changed?” Leia asked, not liking where this was going. The Emperor almost never made personnel changes like this, unless the person in question had failed him. “Why go with Shale?”

“Vader killed him,” Mon said tonelessly.

Bail started at that “What? Why?”

Draven shot her a hard look, then a nasty smile crossed his face. “At the informal banquet celebrating his promotion, Pandion apparently had a bit too much to drink. He challenged Vader on how he handled guarding the Death Star in the middle of the room, loudly enough so that everyone could hear.”

Bail’s face became hard “So the jockeying for power begins.”
Draven’s smile became even more twisted. “That’s one way to look at it. As you can imagine that didn’t sit well with Vader. He took out his lightsaber and decapitated the man then and there. Apparently, it caused quite the stir in the Imperial court.” He stared at her as if he was expecting her to react to that.

She arched an eyebrow “Am I supposed to mourn that idiot’s death?” she inquired after a few moments of silence.

Disappointment filtered across his face, but he drew back. What reaction was he looking for from her? Clearly, he felt he hadn’t gotten it.

Bail cleared his throat. “I thank you for breaking this news to us now.” he said, his voice slightly raspy “but if you don’t mind, I think we need a little privacy.”

“Of course,” Mon said, standing, the two men following her out of the room.

After the door whooshed closed. Leia leaned in and wrapped her arms around her mother in a fierce hug. “It will be alright Mama,” she whispered the comforting lie.

She felt her father’s arms lay atop hers as he joined her in embracing Breha. They both said soothing and nonsense things as the Queen of Alderaan cried silently for her people.

ABA - Day 37

Leia hummed to herself as she exited the cockpit and climbed down the ladder. Doing the CAP run was either the dullest job on base or the most exciting. Her trip up had fallen on the more boring side, but it meant there were no enemies spotted so Leia was just fine with that.

“I heard you made yourself of use to Dodonna,” Draven remarked from behind her.

Leia stiffened. She wasn’t expecting him to so openly confront her like this for at least another month. Clearly, she had underestimated his paranoia.

“Half of the pilots are out with the flu,” she said, turning around to face him “I’m not the best pilot, but I am competent, and the CAP still needs to be flown.”

“Oh yes,” the older man said softly “it was explained to me. I just can’t help noticing how many people in the Alliance leadership you seem to be currying favor with.”

Leia had to seriously resist the urge to throw something sharp and heavy at Draven’s head. She allowed her face to merely remain puzzled instead of indignant. “I’m simply trying to be of help.”

“What’s wrong with ambition?”

“Oh, of course,” he answered mockingly “And it has nothing to do what so ever with you aiming to be put into a leadership position.”

She gave him a puzzled frown. “What’s wrong with ambition?”

“Not a thing,” he assured her, a fake smile crossing his face. “Unless of course, you have ulterior motives for such a promotion.”

Okay, there was paranoia and then there was outright lunacy. There was no logical way that the Empire would sacrifice the Death Star simply to place one spy in the Rebellion. She had helped destroy the thing, so why was he still pursuing this like he thought she was a traitor?
“Well,” he said starting to walk away, “just letting you know I’ll be watching your advancement with keen interest.”

Meaning he thought she was a spy and nothing she did on this base could be considered private. Hell, even if she managed to get a mission off this base there would probably be a member of any team she was on that would report to him.

Fuming at the injustice of it all, she eyed the back of his head, wondering how hard a hit it would take to knock some sense into him. There was a sharp grating sound as one of the tools on the bench ten feet away moved by itself. Draven was too far away by that point to hear the sound it made, swallowed up by the noisy din that was the flight deck, but Leia was close enough. She looked over to the table holding the neatly spaced tools to see that the wrench was misaligned by a few inches. Her anger at Draven dissipated, and her fear rose. Oh, that was not good.

In Obi-Wan’s quarters later that night she paced back and forth in an attempt to work off some of the nervous energy she felt as she explained the problem to Obi-Wan and Luke. Luke was sitting in one of the chairs the old man had finally gotten around to putting in his room, and he was watching her fascinated.

Obi-Wan was much more controlled in his response but when she got to the part about how she almost subconsciously threw something at Draven she felt a flash of deep fear roll across the Force. It was so fast she wondered if she had imagined it, Luke didn’t seem to have noticed, but when she saw the older man’s face she knew it hadn’t been her mind playing tricks on her. Great, another tally in his head against her. If she wasn’t so worried about this she would have preferred to skip this discussion altogether.

“I haven’t had this many problems controlling my temper in years Obi-Wan,” Luke looked at her a little disbelieving. “I’m not saying I don’t have one,” she said defensively. “Just that the impulse to reign it in seems to be gone. I thought at first it was the fact that I was...unsettled by finding myself here. That as I came to accept where I was this would all settle down.”

“Not an unreasonable theory.” the white haired man said.

Leia bit back a retort. Yes, she already knew that. “I know it’s not been that long, but I am still having as many problems as I did when I first got here. It’s not getting any better.”

Then there was Han. She constantly found herself wanting to kiss him, lick him, bite him all over. She didn't think it was because she was so shallow that this was all driven by the fact that her husband was suddenly younger. He wasn’t even strictly speaking her husband. And it had been years since she had gripped by this much lust, for anyone. She wasn’t confessing that little tidbit to her brother and Obi-Wan though. She had some pride.

“It’s not just your knees Leia,” Obi-Wan remarked.

“Pardon?” she said.

“I said it’s not just your knees that are younger.” He stood up and gently tapped her forehead for emphasis “You might be fifty-three but this brain is nineteen. That means those centers of your brain, the ones for impulse control and forethought, haven’t fully formed yet. You are fighting against your own lack of neurostructure.” Then an embarrassed look crossed over his face and then he said quietly “I also believe that, physically at least, you only recently completed puberty within the last year or so? Unexpected hormones can also play hell on your equilibrium.”
Oh. Oh. Well, that certainly explained a few things.

“Wonderful” she muttered, “Just what I wanted to live through again.” Then a horrible thought occurred to her “I’m going to get my period again aren’t I?”

Obi-Wan looked at her blankly “You haven’t already?”

She glared at him, all wise, all knowing Jedi, her ass. How did he not know this? “No, because I took a shot to prevent it. Most human women on this base do. The whole thing is frankly a mess and we don’t want to deal with it,” she sighed and rubbed her forehead. “Have any ideas how I can casually ask the medics when the last time I had my shot was? I sure as hell don’t remember, and they are only good for six months. I don’t want to be caught unaware.”

“Stress of the last few months has made you forget?” Luke offered. She turned her glare on him, but he put his hands up in self-defense “Hey, you wanted an excuse. You didn’t say it had to be one that made you look good.”

He was right, it might make her look like a ninny, but it was reasonable. She rubbed her forehead, who would have thought mysteriously becoming younger would come with so many issues?


“How?”

“You could have come back before you hit puberty.”

Asshole. “You are a great comfort to me, little brother.”

“I’m older!!!”

“I have a few suggestions.” Obi-Wan offered, interrupting them before they could get into a back and forth about it.

She looked at him. He had such a satisfied look on his face. “Let me guess?” she asked “More meditation with the Force?”

He nodded. “It’s like you read my mind.”

“Great.” she muttered “More training. What will this do?”

“Help you shore up those parts of your mind. The Jedi younglings and Padawans used to do this all the time.”

She gaped at him “You taught children how to use the Force to alter the shape of their own brains?” What the hell had the order been thinking? Never mind the blatant disregard for ethics that action caused, it was in violation of several laws and ordinances. And that was right now, under the Empire.

He shook his head at her alarmed look. “No, no, nothing like that. It was only to enhance what’s already there Leia, and strengthen it. This will not build new structures, I promise.”

“Alright,” she said, believing him for now. But she would keep a close eye on what he was doing to her and Luke with this. But she did need the help, she couldn’t be flinging random objects at everyone who annoyed her. Or worse yet, jump Han in the hallways. Although both ideas definitely had some appeal. “Where do we start?”
ABA - Day 44

“This is what I have,” Han announced, a data crystal clutched in his hands.

The three of them looked up, startled from their lunch.

“I thought you weren’t due back until tomorrow?” Luke said questioningly.

“Nah, got done earlier than I thought. But here is where it gets fun for you. One of my friends, well not friend, contact really, apparently has quite the grudge against Grakkus. A cousin, or a brother or something like that, died in one of his exhibition matches. He wants revenge but wants to keep his hands clean. That’s a condition of this deal, Grakkus never learns you got the information from him, and that you bring the slug down. Think you can pull it off?” Han’s face was full of challenge to the older man.

“Depends on what is available on the crystal,” Obi-Wan said quietly.

“I have the detailed blueprints of the overall structure and the vault. I also have the guards schedule for the days when they hold the exhibitions. Unfortunately, I don’t have anything about the security precautions on the days when those aren’t happening.”

Kenobi gave Han a fierce grin. “Captain I have worked far greater miracles than this with far less.”

“Given the legends surrounding you that was what I was hoping you say.” Then a sly look entered his eyes. “So how much is this worth to you?”

“Everything,” the Jedi answered honestly. Han looked taken aback at that. “But if you mean money, I will give you seven thousand for it.”

Han looked at him, and then down at the data crystal in his hands. He shook his head. “Naw, for this, I’ll only charge you three thousand.”

ABA - Day 45

Mon shook her head “No.”

Leia was surprised “No?”

“No.” she sighed “I cannot authorize the use of Alliance resources for this.” She shot an apologetic look at Obi-Wan. “Right now we are too strapped for cash, supplies, and men for me to use them on anything but what has been deemed mission critical. I understand why you want to pursue this, and the information you have retrieved certainly seems to be valid, but I’m afraid my answer is still no.”

Obi-Wan’s face didn’t even twitch to register his displeasure “I see. And if I don’t use Alliance resources?”

She exchanged a shocked look with Ackbar and returned her gaze to the Jedi. “I wouldn’t advise it.” She began.

“Nonetheless,” he said in a polite and firm tone “While I have offered my help and assistance, I am in no way under anyone’s command structure. I’m certainly not being paid by anyone to obey
orders, not that I would be terribly good at it. This is important to me Mon. I thought this knowledge was lost forever. Yes, I can teach Luke, but to rely on one source of information to rebuild the Jedi is folly. For all, I know this is all that is left of my people.” The Alliance leadership looked uneasy about that but said nothing. “I understand your concerns, and I share them. Leia has been nothing if not colorful in her description of the state of everything. But all I wish to know is will you stop me if I go on my own?”

“No,” Bail said flatly “you are correct, you answer to no one but yourself.”

The white haired man gave a short bow “Excellent.” Then he gave them a small grin “Then I shall hire Captain Solo and his co-pilot.”

Ackbar let out a watery snort “Bottom of the barrel.”

“On the contrary, he seems to be highly capable, if a bit unorthodox in his approach. And if I can borrow Luke for this adventure?” He looked straight at Dodonna while saying this.

He old man sighed “Alright, you can have him for this. We did agree to share him, and I suppose this does in the loosest way, fall under his training.”

Leia spoke up “I’m going too.” Now everyone’s heads turned to stare at her. “While I am being paid by the Alliance, currently right now I have no permanent assignment. I go where there is a need, and clearly, there is need here.”

Mon’s face registered surprise, Draven’s didn’t. “All right Leia.” the redhead said. She turned back to Obi-Wan “That leaves you with yourself, Captain Solo, Chewbacca, Lt. Skywalker and her Highness.”

“I could not ask for a better team.” he said dryly.

It wasn’t until the rest of the group had left the room that her father pulled her aside.

“Leia,” he said, his voice tight with worry. “I have strong reservations about this.”

Well, at least he hadn’t outright forbid her. She noted the stress lines around his eyes and reminded herself of their promise to each other. He was only stating his opinion, not questioning her competence. “What are they?”

“For starters, there is a rather large bounty on your head.”

Oh, that. Leia frankly couldn’t remember a time when she didn’t have someone offering huge amounts of money to kill her. She shrugged “Wouldn’t be the first time.”

Bail opened his mouth to refute that and closed it shut with a snap. “No,” he said slowly, as he began thinking it through “it wouldn’t be. After the destruction of Alderaan, you would have become a symbol of defiance.”

She nodded “And I was the one used in all the propaganda the Alliance released.” His face twisted “I wasn’t all that fond of it myself. But it did work.”

“Leia,” and now the guilt was back. How ridiculous was this? He felt guilty for dying in an alternate timeline.

She rose up on her toes and gave him a light kiss on the cheek. “I love you.” she stated firmly “And it will be fine. You forget I’ve worked with this particular team before.” then she frowned “Not
Kenobi obviously, but you would be amazed at what we are capable of.”

He gave her a fond smile “Well, I wait in anticipation.”

ABA - Day 47

“We can’t use Kenobi,” Han said flatly.

“What?” Leia said.

“We can’t use Kenobi,” Han repeated.

“Why not Captain?” the man in question asked.

“Because of all those holos you did. Your face has been plastered all over the Empire and across all known subspace frequencies. You walk onto Nar Shaddaa, Grakkus isn’t going to put you in his kill zone. He’s going to turn you over to the Empire.”

“You can’t know that.” Luke protested.

Han rolled his eyes “Twenty million bounty, Kid. Unless it’s personal there is no way Grakkus walks away from that.” She knew, almost better than anyone here besides Luke, how petty and vicious the Hutts could be in their dealings with people they believed wronged them. Jabba had plenty of reason to forgo the money on Han, but the reward he would have received for her and Luke’s head? It was beyond foolish that he kept her as a pet and tried to kill Luke. The Empire would have executed them, well at least as far as Jabba knew the Empire would have executed them. Luke, she shuddered to think what would have happened to Luke, but she would have received a very public execution, broadcasted live across all of subspace.

“Then who do you suggest we use Captain?” Obi-Wan asked all polite inquiry.

“We use the kid.”

Leia’s head snapped up at that. Send Luke?

Han seeing the look on her face held his hands up defensively. “Look, I can’t do it, I’m too well known in these circles. You can’t do it either your worship for the same reason as Kenobi. The Empire has nothing on Luke. Not a picture, not a name, nothing. He’s the only one we can use as bait.”

“He’s right,” Obi-Wan said calmly.

Leia looked at her brother, she had wanted to avoid this. It wasn’t that she didn’t have faith in his abilities, it was just, well, she wasn’t sure what his current skill level was.

“You up for this?” she asked him.

“Yes.” he said, eagerness written all over his face.

She shook her head “No Luke, I want a real answer. One you actually thought through. All of our lives are riding on your ability to pull this off.”

“And also what could be the only surviving archived knowledge of Jedi teachings.” Obi-Wan said softly.
Luke got a serious look on his face as he took in both of their expressions. He bit his lip as he looked at the schematics and notes strewn around on the table. “I don’t know if I’m ready, but I’m more prepared than I’ve ever been in my life for something like this. All I can do is promise I will do my best.”

“Good enough for me,” Han said cheerfully, as he clapped his hands together. “Now let’s go rob a Hutt.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Hi guys!! So the family event didn't really cut into my writing time as much as I thought it would. Unfortunately the bronchitis infection I picked up from my house guests really did. Sorry, it's late, but everything is back on track, so I should be on my normal schedule for the next chapter. Hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ABA - Day 49

The hanger bay was it’s usual cacophonous din as Han and Chewie loaded up the empty containers they were hoping to stuff with Jedi artifacts. Leia had offered to help them and had gotten a grin with the line of “Obi-Wan’s paying and it’s all part of the service.” That attitude wouldn't last long, she had many memories of hauling supplies into the Falcon herself, so she was going to enjoy this while she could.

“General, I don’t like this,” Rex growled, reiterating his feelings regarding the fact that he was flat out forbidden to go with them. Leia knew, because he had gone to Mon at least three times to get permission, and she had complained, gently, about his single-mindedness to Leia. He was pacing in front of Obi-Wan, his arms gesturing wildly. “Just you five, that’s it? To take on a Hutt?”

“We are not ‘taking on a Hutt’” Obi-Wan said soothingly, his Coruscant accent becoming more pronounced. It often did that when he was talking to Rex. “We are only robbing one.”

Rex rolled his eyes. “Oh, that is so much better.” He had a point. Obi-Wan certainly had a skewed view of ‘better’.

Han came back down the gangplank “Relax old timer, I can guarantee you that Chewie and I have definitely handled more dangerous situations than this.”

Rex transferred his glare to Han “I’m not that much older than you, knock it off with the old timer business.”

Han did a double take “Really? What the hell happened to you?”

“Kaminoans.”

“The who now?” Han’s face showed his bafflement. His formal education up to this point had been shoddy at best, and almost all of it Imperial drivel. The source of the clones had not been covered up exactly in the official narrative, but it was never specifically mentioned where they came from either. It wasn’t surprising that Han had no idea what Rex was talking about.

Chewbacca on the other hand, as a veteran of said war, certainly did and more importantly understood the sore spot Han was poking. <He’s a clone Han.> Chewie barked <Now, stop being an ass and help me load the containers.>
“A clone? Like the Clone War soldiers?”

“Not like a Clone War soldier, I was a Clone War soldier.” There was pride and defiance in his voice. “I served for three years in the Grand Army of the Republic”

“Okay.” Han still looked baffled “What does that have to do with how you look like your Kenobi's age?”

Rex’s face flushed with anger but before he could answer, Chewie, none too gently, grabbed Han’s arm. <Help me.>

“But we’ve loaded everything.” Han protested.

<Now.> And he dragged Han back into the Falcon. Hopefully, he could pound some sense into his head.

Leia sighed. You could never accuse Han, any Han no matter the age, of having a head for diplomacy, or tact for that matter. But she didn’t remember it being this bad. Maybe as he got older he had finally stopped stepping into awkward situations as often?

Rex turned to Obi-Wan and spat out “Him, you’re taking him, and not me.”

“Rex, you just met him,” Obi-Wan said reasonably.

“I’ve seen enough.”

“You weren’t exaggerating his ability to offend people on their first meeting were you?” Her father’s voice drifted in from behind her, soft enough that only she could hear him

“Not in the slightest,” she said.

“Well, I’m glad to see it’s not just me.”

She turned to face him, and saw, to her pleasure, her mother was there too. Evaan was standing a respectful distance behind them. When the woman wasn’t busy with her Alliance duties she had taken to following Breha everywhere as an unofficial bodyguard. The blonde’s face was studiously blank, but her mothers was lit in amusement. “Here to send me off?” Leia asked.

Bail gave her a small smile, but it didn’t quite reach his eyes. “Yes, and to wish you luck.”

She stepped up on her tiptoes and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Thank you, Papa.”

Breha approached her next, and when she was near enough grabbed Leia’s hand. Leia noted that though her mother’s face was a calm mask of light bemusement, her fingers were shaking in Leia’s own. “I’ll be alright Mama,” she said reassuringly and reached out and hugged the woman tight. “I know what I’m doing,” she whispered into her ear.

“It’s a mother’s prerogative to worry, no matter how capable the child.” she whispered back.

Leia gave her one final squeeze and stepped back. She knew it wasn’t fair to them, so she tried to keep her resentment on her face. She had so many missions under her belt, she wasn’t a newbie, fresh off her training. She tried to see this from their perspective. While serving in the Imperial Senate she had been a spy, which was dangerous work, that had been part of the reason they had fought her for so long against the idea. But that work hadn’t been nearly as dangerous as to what she was about to do.
But her mother’s words made her thoughts drift to Ben. If she had been in the same circumstances with him, of wishing him well when he went running off into danger without her there. And yes, she had many many missions under her belt, but for her parents, this was the first time for them. All things considered, they were showing remarkable restraint.

She kept a sigh to herself. This wasn't something she was used to dealing with anymore, and not just her parents, but anyone. There had been subordinates and trusted allies, who would be upset if she was hurt or killed, but it wasn’t the same. And even before Luke and Han left, more often than not any mission she went on, one of them would come with her. She thought of the missions after Endor, after everything was out in the open between them and how she hated it when they went off without her there to watch their backs.

She chided herself for her ungratefulness. They were alive, they loved her, and she was moaning about the awkwardness and resentment brought about by their well meaning hovering. All of this was a gift, and she shouldn’t lose sight of that. Not if the alternative was them being dead again. She should focus on that, not the parts that annoyed her. She learned to deal with this once upon a time, she was simply out of practice because her family had, left, died, or fell to the Dark Side.

She cut that thought right off. She couldn’t afford to be distracted right now. No, this wasn't taking on the Empire, or even the First Order, but Grakkus wasn’t exactly a pushover either. She needed to be here and now. A Hutt with mechanical legs? Wouldn’t that be fun?

Evaan was scowling at her, “I should be coming along too.” she said, echoing Rex.

“I thought you trusted my abilities, Evaan,” she said teasingly. The woman certainly had taken their sparring lessons to heart and was a fast learner. Without being able to use the Force to counteract Evaan’s greater reach and the fact she now knew most of Leia’s tricks, she more often than not found herself tapping out of their matches first.

Evaan’s scowl only deepened “Of course I do. But it’s my duty to see to your safety.”

Leia shook her head “Your duty is to the Alliance.”

“My first oath is to the royal family of Alderaan, which you are a part of your Highness.” The woman had that stubborn look in her eyes. Great another person that thought she needed protecting, and this was one that she wasn’t inclined to be as forgiving about. Had Evaan not truly changed her opinion of her abilities after all those training sessions? Leia was sure that people thought she needed protecting because she was so short for a human. Of all the things Vader had given her that she resented, a blood-soaked legacy, her temper, the fear of what she could possibly become, the one thing she wouldn't have minded, his height, had been denied to her. It wasn’t fair in the slightest.

Rex piped up “If she goes, I am definitely going.”

Obi-Wan shook his head, beginning to show hints of exasperation. “Nobody else is going. Luke and Leia were the only Alliance personnel I could get for this mission, Rex. You know that.” He tempered his tone a bit. “I won’t have you getting in trouble over this. We can handle this on our own. There’s a time and a place for open defiance.” Then a sly grin split his face “Besides R2 is coming along, and you know how much he’s worth on a mission like this.”

The clone crossed his hands in front of his chest, a stubborn look on his face “Threepio is going too so that’s going to keep him occupied. You need someone to watch your back.”

Evaan nodded her head in agreement “She does too.” pointing to Leia.
“Leia needs a what now?” Luke’s voice said. Leia turned to see her brother coming towards them, trying to adjust his thigh holster strap, and not paying much attention to where he was going. Threepio and R2 were trailing behind him.

“Watching.” Rex supplied “The general too.”

“No, I don’t.” Both her and Obi-Wan said at the same time. They gave each other startled looks, but Breha only let out an amused chuckle and headed over to Luke. She gave him a kiss on the cheek, and then swiftly tightened the strap so that it was comfortable for him.

“You do so need a keeper.” Rex insisted.

“Relax,” Han said as he descended down the ramp “Compared to these two,” and he waved his hand at Luke and Leia “how bad can Kenobi be? He at least was sane enough to stay here instead of taking on a battle station the size of a moon. Besides, weren’t the Jedi all about control and discipline?”

Rex just stared at him, “You are in for quite the treat Captain.” he said dryly “If I didn’t dislike you so much I’d feel sorry for you.”

Han winced and rubbed his hand on the back of his neck sheepishly “Uh, yeah. About that, sorry about the comments.”

Rex stared at him for a long moment, then his gaze swung from Obi-Wan to Luke and then surprisingly her, and said flatly “Bring them all home, and I do mean all of them, in one piece and you're forgiven.”

“What could possibly go wrong?” Han said blithely. Leia bit back the groan. Well, Han had just doomed them all.

Her mother gave voice to that thought “Isn’t that inviting bad luck Captain?”

Han gave her a wide flirtatious smile “I don’t need luck. I rely on my nerve and daring and it serves me so much better.”

Breha’s eyebrow went up, but by the subtle twitching at the corner of her mouth, Leia knew her mother was more amused than anything else. “Oh really?”

Han sauntered, yes sauntered, over to her mother “Of course it would be terribly rude of me not to accept the well wishes of a beautiful woman.” Oh, that was smooth, that was Lando levels of smooth. Why did he never sound that smooth when he was talking to her? All she got was awkwardly phrased compliments and unintentional insults.

Of course, Han might not believe in bad luck, but bad luck certainly believed in him, because clearly, he hadn’t seen her father, who was still standing beside her, and also heard every word he had said.

“Flirting with my wife Captain?” he inquired calmly.

The blood actually drained out of Han’s face as he whirled to see her and Bail standing there. Luke actually had to cover his mouth to muffle his laughing, and Rex had a supreme look of satisfaction on his face.

“Ahhh…” Han said, scrambling for something to settle on finally came up with “No?”
Bail nodded his head “So you were lying just now? My wife isn’t beautiful?”

“No, I mean yes.” Han shot her a pleading look of ‘Help me!’.

She maintained her stoic unimpressed look for a moment longer, just to see him squirm, then let her laughter escape. Flabbergasted, Han could only stare at her as she let loose her amusement. His gaze shifted to her father and Bail allowed the corners of his mouth to curve upward. Han’s eyes narrowed as he realized Bail had been yanking on his chain. “Lies, all the stories I’ve been told about royalty are lies,” he stomped back up the gangplank.

Breha voice was chiding, even if her face was full of amusement, “Bail that wasn’t very nice.”

“No,” he agreed “But he makes it so very easy. He’s afraid of me. Nobody else here on this base is afraid of me. How can I resist?” He gave his wife a cheeky grin “Besides I wouldn’t have had an opportunity if you hadn’t been so accommodating.”

“The day I don’t receive with pleasure compliments on my beauty from handsome young men is the day I am dead my love.” she said, coming towards him and giving him a kiss on the cheek.

Obi-Wan’s voice cut through “Well as amusing as this has been I am afraid we do need to get going.”

Giving her parents one last wave, Leia marched up the plank, with her brother and Obi-Wan on her heels.

The Falcon was different. Not in any way that was blatantly obvious, but enough that it was reading as subtly wrong to Leia. The seat cushions were still tattered, but the were an off white color, instead of the light brown Han had reupholstered them with a year after Ben was born. The kitchen galley was also smaller than she was used to. Han had expanded it shortly after Endor so that he could comfortably store enough food for all of four of them. The scuff marks also weren’t in the right places. Han had replaced most of the panels when Ben had been about ten, and those pristine panels had lasted what felt like about a minute before new scuffs were created. But the marks she was seeing now weren’t in the right patterns. The whole Falcon had the feel of not quite right, like a mock-up made to fool her.

She hadn’t been paying attention to the details the last time she was aboard, she had still been trying not to have a nervous breakdown on the ‘when’ of where she had found herself. She also hadn’t been back aboard since then, although Han kept offering to give her a tour of his beloved ship. She hadn’t the heart.

She was regretting that decision now because apparently, Han was picking up on her disquiet. He, of course, took it entirely the wrong way.

“You seem a little jumpy. You okay?”

“I’m fine.”

“Oh-huh.” He gave her an appraising look. “You’ve got a cool head, but it’s okay to be nervous. First time you’ve seen hand to hand combat?”

Memories flashed through her so quickly she had to stop herself from visibly blanching. Then the anger grew, but she fought it down. It was a reasonable question, one he should have thought to ask before left Yavin, but Han was never much for looking before he leaped when money was
involved.

“You’re not asking him that?” she said accusatory, pointing to Obi-Wan. It was a fair question, yes he was a Jedi, but he hadn’t seen combat in almost twenty years. He had a body that showed the very hard life that he had led. Leia hadn’t been all too fond of her fifty-three year old knees, but at least she had decent health care to take care of them, Kenobi hadn’t had that in a very long time.

Then there was the issue Han wasn’t aware of, the duel Leia had seen on the Death Star from the other Kenobi. It had been slow, plodding, and clearly showed that the Jedi was out of practice. She knew that his training with Luke probably had sharpened his skills a bit, but there was only so much one could do to fight the limits imposed by one’s body.

His eyes narrowed “He’s a famed General from the Clone Wars. Asking him if he’s seen battle seems to me to be a bit rude.”

You look nineteen, she reminded herself, you look nineteen, you can’t lose it every time someone questions your competency. But to hear that question from Han. Of course, her Han had first hand experience with her abilities, since she pretty much exited her cell, grabbed a blaster and started shooting.

“I’ll be fine.” she gritted out. “But thank you so much for questioning my skills, I appreciate it.”

“Hey, I’m just showing some concern for your well-being.”

“Luke’s never seen hand to hand either, I don’t see you playing mother hen with him.”

“He grew up on a gangster infested hell hole. I’ve seen what passes for fun and recreation on that planet. Have you? It involves shooting six-foot rat things, that live in large groups, and are poisonous.”

“Oh and I’ve spent my life living in a pampered palace with servants to chew my food for me?”

Luke cleared his throat, “Uh guys?”

They both turned to glare at him. He flinched a little under their combined gaze, but he continued on. “You going to fight like this the whole time?” he said, standing his ground “Cause I’m about to walk into a pretty dicey situation and probably going to have to fight a rancor, and I was wondering if perhaps you might want to focus a little bit?”

“Well it is rather entertaining,” Obi-Wan offered “but I don’t relish acting as referee either.”

Translation: you’re both grown-ups, allegedly in Han’s case, act like it. Chastised Leia went to stand over by Luke.

“Sorry,” she said. “I didn’t mean to add to your stress.”

“I know this is one of the ways you work off yours, but can you please wait till I’m not in earshot?” his smile was there, but she could see the nerves dancing behind it.

Because the information they had on Grakkus’ security detail was only relevant for the days he had an exhibition, they needed an arena fight to happen. Unfortunately, that could take anywhere from weeks to months, depending on the Hutt’s available victims and money outflow. None of them had that amount of time to spend away from the rebellion. So they were going to hurry the issue along. And they were going to use Luke as the bait.
The bar they had selected was close enough to Grakkus’ coliseum that anybody there would be either be under his direct employ or at least be aware of the Hutt’s desires for anything Jedi. Leia had been more comfortable with using Obi-Wan in this part, his use of the Force suggestion would have ensured that he arrived at the arena, but Han was right about the bounty being too high for Grakkus to pass up. Luke's skill with Force suggestion was sadly lagging, Obi-Wan’s words, not hers, but that probably had more to do with her brother’s disgust of it rather than skill.

It had been a surprise to Obi-Wan that Luke had moral objections to the use of the Force to convince others to do his bidding. The Jedi had tried to reassure Luke that it couldn’t be used to make others do self-harm, or do things that they were strongly opposed to doing. Luke had countered that it was the revoking of a sentient free will, and it didn't matter that it only worked on the weak-minded. Weren't the Jedi suppose to protect the weak?

To Luke, it didn't matter that it was only used in service to a greater good, it was the deed in and of itself that was the issue, not that goal it ultimately served. Wasn’t that the same logic the Empire used to convince others that thought what it was doing now was evil, but it was in the interests of building them all a glorious future? Obi-Wan conceded that he had never thought of it in those terms. It had been interesting to watch him back down merely on Luke’s philosophical terms.

From a practical standpoint, Leia agreed with Obi-Wan on the fact that Luke should learn this. Better to learn it and never use it, then never learn it and need it. But it was Luke’s morals that were the stumbling block, not hers. In these cases, she generally gave more weight to his finer distinctions on ethics than her own. She was well aware of her tendency to steamroll over what appeared to her as minor objections in pursuit of her own goals.

So Luke was to walk into the bar, start a fight, claim to be the son of a Jedi, identify himself as Poe Dameron, wield his lightsaber around, and that was when greed should take over. The rest of them meanwhile would be staying a flop house not too far from the Arena. With such an obvious prey they were counting on an exhibition soon. Leia was not fond of how closely this all followed the original way Luke had fallen into this mess, but she conceded the point Obi-Wan had made, that with no way of knowing when the next exhibit was, or more importantly when the Empire might come calling, this was their best shot.

Han was nervous too, for all that he pretended indifference. He seemed to be incapable of sitting still, just paced around the hold, checking equipment that didn’t need to be checked, and shooting glances at all of them surreptitiously.

“How about this spy?” Obi-wan finally asked.

“You sure about this spy?”

She would never tell him, but on this point, Leia agreed with Han. Not about the existence of the spy, she knew that he was real. What worried her was that she didn’t have a great track record with using her original timeline to guess on what people would do in this one. It made her nervous to rely on the actions they had done in her past, especially someone who's real name they didn’t even have. Draven had snidely informed that Mon said no Alliance resources were to be used on this mission, so he wouldn’t authorize the use of his spies to track down information about Grakkus’ game master.

Luke was the one who pointed out that all the factors that influenced this unknown person before were all still here now. There was no reason that it wouldn’t be the same person and the Empire had reason to watch Grakkus, and nothing she had done or changed would affect that. If he had been smart enough before to report to the Empire the suspected existence of a Force user, then there was no reason he wouldn’t do it again. The Inquisitors might be almost extinct, but the
Empire was always on the lookout for new talent.

“As sure as one can be.”

Han frowned “I don’t know why you won’t tell me where this intel came from. Nobody and I mean nobody has even a whisper of it.”

Obi-Wan smirked “Worried that I’m hiring other smugglers? I’m afraid I never promised exclusivity to you, Captain.”

“Funny, but no. Worried that you’re being fed a line.”

“I trust my source.”

Han began his pacing again “Do we have to take the duo?” and here he waved to the droids.

“R2 is useful!” Luke protested.

“As is Threepio” Leia felt the need to defend him.

“Thank you, Princess Leia,” Threepio said, surprise and gratitude in his voice. “I, of course, will do my utmost to serve you in any capacity you need, even if this isn’t what I was built for.”

Han didn’t say anything, just gave her a look that clearly said “Really?” In this case yes, Threepio was annoying, and that were going to use that in their favor.

“Besides we need him to translate for R2.” Luke finally came up with to defend the taller droid.

“I understand binary,” Leia offered off-handedly ”if you are that worried about it. But I don’t know why you didn’t bring this all up before.” she said shooting a look at Han.

“I did bring this up before!” Han protested “I was overruled. And what why do you understand Binary?”

“It’s useful.” she offered. She had learned it so that she could talk to R2 without Threepio. Luke and Han had picked it up too. There had just been one too many close calls where C3-PO’s limited mobility had almost cost them dearly. R2 was more mobile and didn't run into that problem as much. Threepio had fretted about them going on missions without him, but then again the droid fretted when he went with them. Better all around they kept him safe and didn't drag him everywhere.

“What kind of tutors did you father hire?” Han asked incredulously.

“Thorough ones.”

Obi-Wan cleared his throat, a subtle reminder, and Leia took the warning. Han, a slightly abashed look on his face did too.

“We should be arriving soon,” Han offered, “everyone should get ready.” He left, heading to the cockpit.

Leia’s nose wrinkled in disgust. She had a breathing mask, meant for people who had lung damage or found themselves on a planet with non-human compatible air, to wear. The benefit to Leia was that it covered the lower half of her face. Between it and the headscarf, she had brought it should be enough to fool any camera’s that had facial recognition software in them from identifying her. Obi-Wan’s face wasn’t the only one that had been plastered all over the holonet, but she hated
wearing the thing. She didn’t like using only a mask to obscure her identity. She would have preferred something that covered her whole face, but finding such equipment that was good, and didn’t impair her vision was money the Alliance really didn’t have to spare right now.

She should really see where the bounty hunter Boushh was right now. It might be worth it to hunt him down and steal his identity again. Despite his idiocy and ignorance, the man had excellent equipment, and they were near the same height, so it hadn’t needed much altering. It certainly had been useful for infiltrating Jabba’s palace, and it wouldn’t take much to brush up her skills with the Uba language.

Obi-Wan meanwhile was dressed in a pair of black pants, topped with a blue overshirt, belted at the waist. He had also dyed his beard and hair with a temporary brown color. He was even more unhappy with his outfit than she was with the mask. And that wasn’t even getting into the robe. It was cheap, threadbare, and black. He had given a deeply unimpressed look at the quartermaster who supplied it. He had protested all of it but Breha, of all people, had told him that he needed to get a grip.

“You are too use to wearing that tattered outfit,” she told him “and looking like a Jedi in this context is out of the question. I understand this isn’t what you are used to, but give it a chance.” She gave him a bright smile, “Except for the robe, which is dreadful I will give you that, I think you look quite dashing.”

Bail chuckled “I’m afraid the robe is my fault. I told the quartermaster to go cheap on that.”

“Why?” the older man had practically whined.

“Obi-Wan, the number of robes you have left strewn across this galaxy are too numerous to mention. I’m not sure why you even bothered to wear them in the first place.”

Obi-Wan gave a deeply unhappy sigh as he took in the robe and put it on as Leia slipped her mask over her face.

“Here we go again.” she muttered.

Nar Shaddaa was a pit. Leia had never been to Nal Hutta, the Hutt homeworld, but she had been told by many people that this moon was a paradise compared to the polluted homeworld of the Hutts. If so she was never going there. This moon was too crowded, the buildings so tightly together she felt like she was in a durasteel canyon. There was trash and decaying organics littering the streets, on top of which the sewer system seemed to deposit directly into the narrow streets.

She tightened her breathing mask to her face. The amount of smog and smell were bad enough through the filter. She didn’t even want to know how bad it would be without that protection. She didn’t remember it being this bad here last time. Maybe she had been too focused on rescuing her wayward brother?

Luke, slightly bouncing on his toes, seemed to be dealing with it better. Of course, he came from only a slightly more hospitable planet than this one, so maybe it didn’t occur to him to be bothered. Or the excitement of finding himself on a new planet hadn’t worn off yet and he was able to look around in wonder.

“Alright Kid, the bar in question is two streets down that way.” Han pointed down the street if it could be called that. “You know what to do?”

“That’s the spirit!” Han slapped him on the back.

Obi-Wan’s face was grave “In all seriousness Luke, please don’t show off your skills.”

“Meager as they are.”

“They are not meager, you are just new at this,” Obi-Wan reassured.

“One off world hick coming up,” he muttered, a little bitterly. He looked at Leia. “Any advice?”

She cocked her head to the side “Expect the unexpected.” she offered.

He gaped at her. Han let out a loud laugh. “Thought he was the Jedi you worship.” he said, tipping his head to Obi-Wan “That was unnecessarily broad and unhelpful.”

She scowled, she sounded nothing like a Jedi. “It’s good advice!” she protested.

Luke shook his head, “Now that I’m thoroughly confused I’ll be heading off.” He walked away, keeping his stride in time with the other occupants of the street.

Han gave her a worried look “Think he’ll be okay?”

She arched her eyebrow “Concerned for his safety?”

“Well Rex did threaten to gut me if I didn’t bring you all back in one piece,” he said blustering, covering up his concern. She sighed inwardly, she had gone too far in her teasing of him. He hadn’t taken it in the spirit it was offered, he was still looking to conceal his soft spots, not convinced yet she wouldn’t use them against him.

Chewie shook his head <He said no such thing Han.>

“It was all in the eyes.” Han insisted.

“Indeed,” Obi-Wan said smoothly, not confirming if he was agreeing with Han or with Chewie “But I believe if we stay out here much longer like this we will attract attention. Shall we?”

Han nodded and they headed the opposite way of Luke.

ABA - Day 50

At breakfast, such as it was, the next morning, they heard the excited cheers from the streets, when it was announced that there would be an exhibition that afternoon.

“Well, I believe that is our cue,” Han mumbled. “You ready for this?” he asked directly to Leia.

She snorted, “Do I look worried”

“No, but then again you never do look worried when you should, and you do look worried when you shouldn’t.”

She felt her back stiffen in indignation “What’s that suppose to mean?”
He leaned forward until he was just a hair breadth distance from her and smiled seductively. She felt her breath catch as she wondered what the hell he was doing. At that small expression from her he leaned back, a look of satisfaction on his face “Now you look worried.” he proclaimed, than in an almost a conspiratorial tone he told her “And you really shouldn't.” Oh, he has no idea what a danger he was to her and she to him.

Before she could even think of an appropriate response, Chewie cut in. <If you two are done?> Chewie asked patiently, <We all have somewhere to be don’t we?>

Obi-Wan, for once looked as worried as the Force said he was, muttered “Quite.”

Grakkus brought in outside security, which was a generous term to use for the low life thugs he rounded up on the days of these matches. Even then, he still was still leaving things a little thin. However, he did cover the loading dock entrance, located at the back of his coliseum, with two Clone War era Magnaguard droids. Despite their age, they would be enough of a deterrent to any average crooks. They had been designed and built to take on Jedi after all.

Fortunately, they had brought a Jedi along, with two excellent distractions to help.

Leia positioned herself on the nearest corner to the road leading to the back. It wasn’t much of a view, but there was a clear view of the deli on the other side. The smells coming out of it were not in the least bit appetizing, but it did have a large window that let anyone get a clear view of the customers within. If anyone paid attention to her standing here, they would assume she was spying on someone in the deli, not interested in what was around the corner.

Taking a look at her chrono, and confirming they were on schedule, she verified visually that everyone else was in position. She gave a nod to Threepio and R2, who immediately started trundling down the access road to the door, arguing with each other the entire way.

“I told you R2 our master did not come this way,” Threepio whined at the smaller droid, who only gave him an irritated chirp in response. Leia didn’t even hear the two magnaguards issue a warning of any kind, just the surprised wail of R2.

“Oh, my!!” Threepio cried out, and even from this distance, Leia could tell it was completely over the top. “My apologies, but we seem to be a bit turned around. Could you give us directions to the entrance to the Arena?”

Neither of them answered Leia began to wonder if they even had the ability to speak.

“Threepio” Obi-Wan called out, hustling awkwardly to the droids, sounding vaguely out of breath. “Threepio back away now!” There was a sharp note of command. “My apologies good sirs. My droids are very old, and not quite bright. I’m afraid they seem to have gotten themselves turned around.”

Leia continued her watch over the deli, straining her ears for the slightest sign that Obi-Wan was in trouble. Han had questioned her abilities, but had he thought that maybe the old man wasn’t up to snuff anymore? She wanted to turn around so badly, but she was too well trained to draw attention to what they were doing like that. Although interesting enough, there seemed to be several customers across the street who were beginning to notice her and becoming visibly nervous. She idly wondered to herself who they thought sent her?

Somehow she missed everything with that moment of inattention. She felt something in the Force
though, like a cool wind floating across the back of her neck. It was subtle, barely a ripple, but it was there.

“We’re clear,” she heard Obi-Wan’s voice come from the back of the alley. She quickly rounded the corner and jogged down the alley, knowing that when Han saw that she had left her spot he would follow with the cart. He and Chewie had been waiting further down the cross street so that it wouldn’t be obvious to an outsider that they were together.

There was one Magnaguard droid laid out in sprawled fashion, in the middle of the street, about seven paces from Obi-Wan, that had been decapitated. For some reason, it also had a hole in the middle of its chest. Well, clearly the droids reputation for being hard to kill hadn’t been exaggerated.

She looked up to find the second one was impaled onto a pipe that was protruding from the neighboring wall, the lights in its eyes dimming even as Leia watched. Obi-Wan must have used the Force to throw it into the wall, that was probably the ripple she felt. She hadn’t heard the lightsaber activate, the sound of the crowd must have drowned it out, which they could all be thankful for. They didn’t need a crowd drawn here after all. R2 gave a cheerful whistle and went to the outlet on the side of the large doors, trying to slice the door.

Leia headed to the droid laying in the middle of the road and began pulling it towards the entrance. She might have cheated a bit, pulling on the Force to help her drag it along, the thing was heavy. She heard Chewie’s deep rumble behind her.

<Allow me.>

She stepped aside. Not that pulling the droid was all that hard, but he had no way of knowing that. It would look odd for someone of her size being able to move something like that without apparent effort.

“What are you doing?” Han hissed as he rounded the corner, the cart loaded with their empty boxes being dragged behind him.

“Hiding the evidence?” she hissed back.

“There is no guard scheduled to come around here for another twenty minutes.”

“Better safe than sorry” she shot back. Anyone could walk past and noticed the guard. She doubted that any citizen of this planet was civic minded, but they might be tempted to raise the alarm simply for the reward they might get.

Threepio came up “Is there anything more you need from me, your Highness?”

“No,” she said briskly “head back to the ship and get it warmed up. We might need to make a fast exit.”

“Hey, it’s my ship! I give the orders” Han said indignantly from behind his boxes.

“Really, and what do you want him to do?” This was ridiculous, why was he arguing with her about every little thing?

There was a brief pause. “Go back to the ship and warm her up,” he said to the droid, in an abashed tone, well aware of the ridiculousness of what he was saying. Threepio wandered off, muttering about how he didn’t understand why nobody could make up their minds.
R2 gave a cry of [Done!] and the door slid open. She and Chewie slid the hunk of tin in. Obi-Wan grabbed the other one off its mount on the wall and pulled it in too, but Leia wasn’t sure if it was because he agreed with her decision or was moving it out of Han and the cart’s way.

Once inside R2 closed the door behind them and without missing a beat whirled and started rolling down one of the many corridors in the complex.

“Lead the way,” Han said sarcastically to the little droid.

R2 gave a rude bleep. [I can see in this, you can’t. But if you want to get lost by all means go your own way.] Leia snorted and Han gave her a suspicious look but she only gave a bland smile. [Follow me!], R2 called out to her and Obi-Wan. Han grumbled under his breath, but he started pulling the cart along, following the little droid.

Leia rolled her eyes. Yes, all of them had studied the maps of this complex, but the lighting was rather dim for Human eyes. Hutt’s had very good night vision, and as a security precaution, as well as their own comfort, tended to keep the lights in any facility of theirs dark. R2 could see better than they could here. Was it really so grating to his fragile ego to follow a droid?

They walked down the corridors with purposeful steps, but not running. They didn’t want to draw attention to themselves, plus the cart didn’t exactly have the best maneuverability. With the dim lighting, they wanted to proceed with caution so that it catch on any corners. Leia could hear the chanting of the crowd, even this far into the building. She reached out for a quick check on Luke, who was nervous, but calm. So he wasn’t in the arena yet, probably a warm up act of some kind to get the crowd good and ready for the main event

They finally arrived at a large set of gray doors, with an actual physical bar laid across it. Leia blinked in surprise. She hadn’t seen a lock this old fashioned in a long time.

“R2?” she asked. This was not the lock that had been on the schematics.

[Give me a minute] the droid chirped back and plugged into the port on the right side. He gave an annoyed grunt and started whirling the port faster as he encountered resistance.

“Hurry up, hurry up,” Han was muttering under his breath.

“Oh like you could do better.” she hissed to him.

“I’m not a bad slicer,” he said defensively. Thinking of his failure on Endor, Leia gave a dismissive sniff.

“Sure you are.” she drawled.

“Hey.” he protested, but then with a loud clang noise the bar withdrew from across the door and, slowly the two doors parted. They hustled in and waited while R2 locked it behind them.

“Lights R2,” Obi-Wan said softly. They came up in several sections, flooding the long cavernous room. It was easily the size of the gym back on the Yavin and was packed almost half way full, with a corridor bisecting the middle. There were statues, clothes, and was that a Jedi fighter? But for the most part what surround them were boxes, lots and lots of boxes. Oh, Grakkus had put some things on display, what looked like a Jedi robe in a display case was to Leia’s left, but most of what was in this room were packed away. Some collector, more like a hoarder, it would take them far too long to do a search of everything.

“R2” she called out softly, “Can you see if there is a manifest or inventory of all of this?”
[Of course.] The droid once again plugged himself into the outlet. Han and Chewie, continued on with the cart until they were in the middle of the room.

Obi-Wan hadn’t moved very far into the room, his face haunted as he took in the various objects scattered around him. “So much,” he whispered, “I never dreamed so much survived.”

“Obi-Wan” Leia hissed, trying to catch his attention.

He didn’t answer her, merely closed his eyes in pain. Chewie and Han, either oblivious or trying to give them space, started to unload the boxes from the cart and open them.

“Obi-Wan,” Leia said trying not to shout. She wasn’t sure of the soundproofing that was on this room, and she didn’t want any stray visitors walking down the hallway to wonder at the voices coming from a supposedly empty room. She strode over and caught the Jedi’s arm. “Obi-Wan mourn later, focus now.”

“You can’t know.” his eyes flew open and he swung his gaze to stare down at her. She was startled by the raw pain and anger that danced in his eyes for her to see. Normally he was nothing but a pool of calm and serenity around her. “You have no idea what it’s like to be in a room full of things that are all that is left of your people. That the history of your kind does survive in some small way and you are grateful that even this much is here. Grateful! For this small pittance, even though there was once so much more.” He raised a trembling hand and pointed at the Jedi robe in its display box “To be thankful that this exists, even though the people who created all of this are gone.” Obi-Wan’s voice never raised to a yell, actually it never even rose above his usual conversational tone, but all Leia could hear was the ragged pain buried underneath everything. And because, despite Kenobi’s claims, she understood this pain that was driving him. If it had been anyone else in the galaxy who had said such a thing to her, Leia was fairly certain that she would have torn them to shreds where they stood. Even in this timeline, where Alderaan still stood, that was a wound that was too large and painful to ever fully heal.

But Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi was not speaking in exaggeration. His world was gone. There was no one left from his childhood, there was nobody left who had a shared sense of his culture, there was nowhere left to call home. And she knew what this pain could do to a person. It had help fuel her into toppling an Empire, and when a new one grew from its ashes, it had led her to once again fight it with all her might.

Much like the survivors of Alderaan had done, he could rebuild, but it would never be the same. This had shattered him, in ways that she was cursing herself for not seeing. He baffled and enraged her on most days, but this, this was the one thing about him she could understand. They had both been survivors of the ultimate destruction of their homes and culture.

She cupped his face in her hands, trying to ground him to the here and now. In a low whisper, hoping Han wouldn’t hear her, she said “Yes, Obi-Wan I do understand. I might be the only one left alive in this galaxy, except Master Yoda, who understands what you are feeling. I once stood in a room much like this one, filled with artifacts from Alderaan that had been gathered for an auction. I once stood in a place like this, where the last of remnants of my people stood and knew that this was probably the vast majority of what was left. And I wanted to tear down the people who had gathered such a thing out of greed, instead of reverence for what was lost. I know Obi-Wan what it is like to never be able to go home again, and have everything you love become nothing more than a cautionary tale.”

His eyes were terrifyingly blank for a moment and then comprehension filled them. “Leia, my apologies, that was incredibly thoughtless of me.” The Force sang with his guilt and sorrow.
She shook her head, “I understand. Believe me, I understand the need to lash out. But if you want even the smallest amount of this back, we have to move.”

He straightened “Of course.”

“You two done?” Han asked as he flipped the lid open on the first box, his tone pushy, but not as snide as he could have made it.

Obi-Wan gave him a rueful smile and trotted over to the pair. “My apologies Captain, I became...distracted.”

Han shrugged “Don’t blame you in the slightest. But we do have a timetable here. So what’s the priority?”

“These,” Obi-Wan said and held out his hand.

Abruptly across the room, about thirty small lights flared to life. Obi-Wan gave a satisfied grin as he took them in.

Han groaned. “We don’t have enough time to go and get all those.”

“No need,” and then all the lights flew straight at them. Han yelped and dropped to the ground, but they stopped several feet from the open box that was still in the cart, hovering. Han came up, looking at them cautiously, floating in mid-air, with no apparent support. For a second there was a total look of wonder on his face as he beheld a sight that had not been seen in the galaxy in a long time.

“So the stories, they weren’t made up?” he said softly, reaching out to touch one of the holocrons gently.

“Not all of them.” They slowly began to pack themselves in, their light disappearing as they were lowered into the box.

R2 gave a loud excited whistle and detached himself from the port. [I found them!!] Was all he said as he rolled passed them heading further back into the room. Leia followed him, curious to see what had caught his attention. He rolled up to a low table covered with a dusty tarp.

[Here.] the droid practically screamed in his excitement. [They are here!]

Leia reached out and pulled the tarp off the table and let out a small gasp at what she found. There were about three dozen lightsabers, in various conditions from broken to almost pristine, lying in neat rows. She knew there had been some here of course. R2 had brought them to her Han, and Chewie the first time they had done this. But she hadn’t realized that there were this many.

Han came up behind her and let out a long whistle as he took them in. “Are those what I think they are?” She nodded, and carefully grabbed as many as she could.

Han did the same and they brought them back to the cart, carefully loading them into the box with the holocrons. Obi-Wan and Chewie also joined in, and in a few trips, they had them all.

<Anything else?> Chewie asked.

“R2?” Obi-Wan said. The droid gave an affirmative whistle and they trundled past the now empty lightsaber table to the end of the room to see what else he had found.
It was a set of three crates, all of them stacked into one tall tower. Han leaned in to take a look at the label on the front of the tallest box and said “Jedi Archive data recordings.” He looked up to the Jedi. “I take it this is a take?”

Obi-Wan could only nod. Leia glanced at the middle and bottom ones “Same here.” she said.

“Okay then.” Han moved to grab the top one but Obi-Wan held out a hand and the three boxes floated over to the cart.

Han looked at him sideways “Show off.” he muttered.

Obi-Wan gave an enigmatic smile. “You were the one who said we were pressed for time.”

They ended up having to remove one of the empty boxes they had brought, but they managed to fit it all on the cart.

“Is that everything R2?” Leia asked.

The droid gave a shake of his domed head [Everything else is trinkets and clothes according to the database.]

Obi-Wan looked at her hopefully, but she shook her head. “No” Obi-Wan looked around the room, taking in everything. He closed his eyes, and she felt the touch of the Force sweeping the room, searching. He opened them defeated. There was nothing else here that they needed. There were, however many things that Obi-Wan wanted, and she felt her heart break a little for him. They all knew that if things went according to plan the Empire would be coming shortly, and all of this would be destroyed.

“We can grab something else if you like.” Han offered, at the look of pain on Kenobi’s face.

“No,” he said sadly, “I think this is all we have time to take. Luke is going to need us to help him soon, and he is the higher priority” Leia came up and gave the man a reassuring squeeze on the shoulder. She knew he believed what he said, but it still must be breaking his heart to leave all this behind simply to be destroyed.

He gave her an appreciative smile and R2 gave an affirmative beep and rolled back to the door to open it.

“We’re done.” Leia sent to her brother. All she got back was a rush of worry, fear, and the sense that he was close. Luke still hadn’t managed to quite get words through when he was tired.

“Alright then.” Han swung the cart around and started pushing it back towards the door as it began its loud clanking process of opening. “Let’s get this through the back door, have Chewie and the droid take it to the Falcon, rescue the Kid, and get the hell off this rock.”

That’s when Luke came running into the room full speed. “We’ve got some problems!” he yelled. His head was facing backward, looking at whatever was behind him, which is why he didn’t see her as he crashed into her, sending them both to the ground.

Han’s voice boomed over their heads “What are you doing here? We were coming to get you, don’t you remember that part?”

Luke, his face hovering over hers, ignored him “You okay?” he asked.

She nodded, she was bruised, but not too badly. “Next time use the Force to be a little bit more
aware of your surroundings” she sent chasteningly.

He nodded, his face red with his embarrassment and then pushed himself up. Then he turned to face Han.

“I’d like to see you play keep away with a rancor!!!” Luke shot back defensively “I didn’t exactly have a lot of room for playing inept. But that isn’t the issue.”

Leia rolled to her side, preparing to get herself up when something shiny caught her eye. It was lying beside one of the crates that were covered by a tarp, not a foot from her. How did a lightsaber end up here? It was dusty, clearly, it had been there for awhile, they hadn’t dropped it in their haste to load up the box. She reached out and grabbed it, then hauled herself to her feet.

The thud thud thud, of something heavy coming towards them, caught all their attention. Obi-Wan’s eyes widened “Oh dear.” he said.


Then Grakkus came barreling through the wide opening. The Hutt was about half the size of Jabba, and he was balanced precariously on his mechanical legs. Leia knew about them of course but to actually see them on the Hutt was damn near hard to believe. He was panting heavily as he took in the sight of them.

“THIEVES!!” he screamed. “GUARDS!!”

Obi-Wan ignited his lightsaber and even in the well-lit room, it drew everyone's eyes to it. Including Grakkus.

“You….” he breathed, recognition crossing his face. “You're him.”

“I am,” Obi-Wan said lightly. “You have an interesting interpretation of theft.” he brought his lightsaber up perpendicular to his face, his non-sabered arm coming up parallel to the blade “Given what you are wearing around your neck. I sincerely doubt you built any of those yourself.”

Leia took a closer look at the massive slug. She had been so distracted by the horror show that was his legs she had missed that the Hutt had a necklace circling his fat neck. Since when did Hutt’s wear jewelry. Han’s breath hissed inwards and then she felt her own blood freeze. Lightsabers, the Hutt had a lightsaber necklace. The Force around her practically pulsed with Obi-Wan’s revulsion.

“It’s mine!” The Hutt shouted gleefully. “All of this is mine!” He waved his arms to encompass everything within it “You should thank me Jedi, I am the only reason any of this survived.”

“Thank you.” he said tonelessly “And now I will be taking it back.”

Grakkus let out a loud laugh “You have spirit, Obi-Wan Kenobi, I will give you that. If it wasn’t for the money your head would bring I admit you would make a fine addition to my collection.”

“Move,” Obi-Wan said softly, not moving yet, just maintaining his stance.

“And what do I have to fear from one old man?” the Hutt sneered, his legs pacing as he brought himself further into the room. “The greatest thing all fear in my arena is not one of my creatures, but me.” Then the Hutt began to charge. It was a sight Leia wasn’t sure she would ever forget as a half ton slug started barrelling down on them.

Leia didn’t see Obi-Wan move, but she felt it in the Force as it surged around the old man, and she
heard it as the sound of his lightsaber cutting through the air rang in her ears. Leia just managed to
blink, trying to process what was going on, and by the time she had finished the motion, all twelve
of the Hutt’s legs had been cut off and he was on the floor, screaming as his fat gelatinous body
fell on the remaining stumps.

Obi-Wan was six feet in front of him, far enough way that the Hutt couldn’t reach him with his
small arms. Deactivating the lightsaber he gestured and slowly the Hutt floated up, still screaming
in pain. The lightsaber necklace was pulled from his neck and slowly made its way to hang at Obi-
Wan’s side. The older man just stared at the writhing creature in front of him, then casually flicked
his hand. Grakkus went sailing towards the back of the room, where he landed with a loud thump,
his body no longer blocking the door.

Leia tried to will her face into showing something other than outright shock. What was that?
Clearly, the old man hadn’t let his skills rot while standing guard over Luke. But now what was
she to think of that fight with Vader so long ago aboard the Death Star? That Kenobi had not shown
even the slightest hint of this level of skill. This line of thinking was not mission critical, dwell on
it later, along with every other oddity the man had shown.

The whole thing had taken less than half a minute and Obi-Wan looked from the lightsaber
necklace, to see all of them staring at him, except Luke. He was focused on the Hutt, who had
fallen silent. “Is he dead?” he asked in a quiet voice.

Obi-Wan shook his head “Merely unconscious.”

Luke’s hand tightened on the lightsaber in his hand and started to walk to the slug.

“Luke we don’t have time for this.” Obi-Wan cautioned. “We’ll lock him in the vault and when the
Empire comes they will deal with him with far more viscousness than you can imagine.”

Well, that wasn’t very Jedi-like was it? But Luke did stop and turned to Obi-Wan a guilty look on
his face.

“Uhh, that would be problem number two.”

Chewie let out a bark <There is no Imperial spy?> he demanded.

Her brother shook his head “Oh, there is a spy. But he is not just an Imperial, he’s a member of the
501st. He didn’t just call for reinforcements, he called Vader.”

For a moment they all just looked at him in shock, and then Han’s voice, yelling, cut through the
silence. “We need to move!” He began pulling the cart, arms straining at the effort as he tried to get
it to move faster under the weight of all it’s contents. Chewie, slinging his crossbow back over his
shoulder, came up behind him and shoved him to one side.

<I’m stronger> he said <I can pull it faster>

Obi-Wan flung the light saber necklace on top of the cart, assuming that with them tied together
they wouldn’t fall off. Leia couldn’t take that chance with her one lightsaber, she clipped it to her
belt. They didn’t have time to open a box for her to shove it into.

Leia asked her brother as they hustled out of the room “Do you know when he’s going to arrive?”

He shook his head “No, but I got the impression he wasn’t far away.”

They quickly exited the room, R2D2 locking it behind them. Grakkus was now the Empire’s
problem. They had just signed sealed and delivered him with a mountain of contraband evidence
around him. Whatever deal he had cut with the Empire would now be null and void. Vader wasn’t
known for his leniency in dealing with people who owned Jedi artifacts.

They weren’t as worried now about being caught in the halls, not with this greater threat coming.
They quickly made the way back they came, not full out running, but close to it. Even with Chewie
pulling the cart there was a limit to how fast they could go. Obi-Wan was in the front, R2 at his
side. She, Han and Luke were behind the cart, watching everyone’s backs. The crowd noises Leia
could hear now no longer sounded cheerfully bloodthirsty, but screaming in fear and pain.


She heard sheepish confession in his voice. “I might have set a few of the banners in the stadium
on fire on my way out.”

“What? Why? How?” Han was asking in a baffled voice.

“Did you know a lightsaber on a low setting can set cloth on fire? As to the why I needed a
distraction. A stampeding crowd is as good as any. There aren’t many species that don’t panic at
the sight of an uncontrollable fire.”

That was good thinking on his part. “Good job,” she heard Han say weakly, clearly not quite yet
used to the level of insanity Luke was capable of bringing.

“I’m just following Leia’s advice. She’s the one who told me to expect the unexpected.” And now
he was getting sassy, she could hear it in his voice. Since they had arrived at the exit, she actually
turned her head to answer him back, but the movement of two beings behind him caught her
attention.

Without thinking she drew her blaster and shot at both of them. Both shots passed within mere
inches on either of Han’s torso.

“Hey!!!” he cried out indignantly but cut off his cry as he heard the two bodies thump to the
ground behind him.

He turned, saw the two guards lying dead behind him, and then looked back up at Leia. There was
a look of almost awe on his face but what came out of his mouth was “You almost shot me.”

She snorted “I wasn’t even close to hitting you.”

“You shoot that accurately every time?”

“Yes.”

The awe came back, mingling with respect and something that came and went on his face so fast
she couldn’t decipher it. “We need to move.” She reminded them, turning to face the door as it
started to clang open. What was with all the noisy doors in this place. She saw nothing but an
empty street in front of her, though street that crossed this one was full of running people as they
clearly were trying to run from the building that was on fire.

“Leia,” Obi-Wan said softly “you’re letting your fear rule you. If he was anywhere in this system I
would feel it.” Then his wry mental voice followed up that thought “You would as well.”

She tensed at the unfamiliar voice in her head, Obi-Wan didn’t do this with her, but she felt herself
relax a bit, as she processed what he was saying. He was right, she knew he was right. Vader
wasn’t the subtlest of presences, hadn’t she said so herself?

That’s when the door, which was almost done opening, abruptly reversed itself and clamped close with a hard thunk.

R2 let out a loud wail [They engaged emergency lock down mode] he offered up [Give me a minute to override it.]

Who would initiate a shutdown of all the exits in the middle of a fire? Leia wondered and felt a wash of fear travel up her spine when the intercom in the complex flared to life. There was nothing but silence for a moment, then that rhythmic breathing sound, the one that lived in so many of her nightmares, spilled out of the speakers. It was followed by that deep mechanical voice “Leia, I know you are here.”

“You were saying about feeling him if he was here old man?” Han asked exasperatedly.

Leia could barely hear him over the pounding of the blood in her ears. How the hell had Vader managed to be here? To enter the system, hell, be in this building, without her being able to feel him? Even now as she reached out, there was nothing there in the Force.

Luke, reacting to her fear, came up and grabbed her hand. “Leia,” he said his voice sharp. When she didn’t respond he tried mentally “Leia.” She swung her head to look him in the eye. They were trapped here, and Luke was here. Vader would come here and he would see, and there would be no escape for either of them.

That voice continued, “You know what I want. No one needs to die. Come to me and the others can go free.”

Luke, still beside her, went rigid all over, his hand clamping down on hers in a grip that was painfully tight. His head snapped up to stare at the speakers, and his anger was just there, rolling and hot, chasing away his concern for her. That was enough to snap Leia out of her paralysis. If the door wouldn’t open, and based on R2’s frantic wailing and beeping it wouldn't, she would make a door. She would get them out of this.

She tried to shake Luke’s hand off hers, but he merely tightened his grip as she tried to escape his grasp. “Luke let me go!” she yelled at him in the Force, and his face swung back down to stare at her. His pupils were blown wide, and she could feel him try to process what she had just said. His eyes slid down to their joined hands, and she felt him give a visible effort to free her hand.

Once he let go she quickly unsnapped the lightsaber on her belt. Staring down at the controls, she flicked the middle one, hoping that the thing was still functional. She almost dropped it when a purple blade extended out. Purple, they came in purple?

She shook her head, not the time. Striding over to the door she called out to Luke and Obi-Wan “Little help”.

Positioning herself on the far right of the door, she reached up as high as she could and rammed the saber into the door, the durasteel instantly heating to red. Gritting her teeth she began to drag it down.

Luke, immediately understanding what she was trying to do, hurried up to the left side of the door and began mimicking her movements. Obi-Wan, the Force around him reading as shocked, followed a few moments after Luke. The older man positioned himself right behind her, sinking his blade at the start of her line at the top and began cutting across the width. She tried to ignore
Han’s frantic whispers of “Hurry up, Hurry up.”

“Leia, it doesn’t need to end this way. You don’t need to run.”

That was a hard pass on that offer. Even if she was desperate enough to take him up on it, that action wouldn’t save Luke. He wouldn’t leave her voluntarily, and even if Obi-Wan or Han knocked him out to get him out of here, he would try to rescue her himself. And more than likely die in the process of trying.

She wasn’t staying here that was for damn sure. She hit the floor a few seconds before her brother did. They both stepped back to give Obi-Wan space to finish the top. Deactivating the lightsaber, she waited, all her muscles quivering in her effort to not bolt heedlessly. Obi-Wan finished and with a casual flick of his hand sent the door careening into the alley.

The door was open, the path was clear.

“There is nowhere you won’t run that I won’t follow.” There was a surveillance camera trained on them somewhere because he could clearly see her. Did he understand how creepy he just sounded? He was practically raised by Obi-Wan, who was a rather smooth operator when he chose to be. Did the man understand any social interactions besides death threats? Luke’s anger and protectiveness flared all around her again, laced with what she dreaded most, his rage.


“But…” he said protesting, ready to fight.

“No Luke we need to go.” And all of them broke into the alley, Chewie bringing up the rear with the cart. Making it to the cross street, with no blaster fire behind them, they fell into the crowd, that was also running as far away from the Imperial stormtroopers as they could. Somehow they managed to make it to the Falcon without a soul following them.

On the Falcon Leia sat at the derrick table, trying to calm herself. Luke sat to her right, his arm slung around her in comfort. He was sending love and reassurance at her, low-key, but it was there. She basked in its steady reassurance, trying to recenter herself. Obi-Wan sat on the far left of the half circle booth, staring at what appeared to be nothing.

Luke was the one who broke the silence “How was he on the planet and neither of you felt him?” Han and Chewie were in the cockpit, and he was speaking in a low, if intense whisper, but Leia felt herself stiffen. The question needed to be asked, but couldn’t have Luke waited till they had access to somewhere a little more private?

Obi-Wan merely thoughtfully pulled on his beard “Clearly Leia isn’t the only one who has decided to brush up on her skills.” He sighed “I apologize for the oversight on my part. It is something all Jedi are taught, but frankly, he never did much mind the lesson. There was so much of him to contain, and he lost any cloaking he did have the minute he became even the littlest bit distracted. It never occurred to me that he would practice that skill now.”

“It should have,” a rather nasty voice in her head remarked.

“I didn’t know that was even possible.” she said trusting herself for the first time to speak without screaming.

Obi-Wan looked surprised “Really? This isn’t something Luke taught you?”
She shook her head “He never mentioned it no. I don’t know if no one taught him, or if he thought it was better to have me focused on other areas.” And a bitter smile crossed her mouth “Or he thought I wouldn’t listen.” She shifted to get closer to Luke, and his reassuring presence. He was fine, Vader hadn’t seen him, Vader didn’t know, her brother was still safe. Then the lightsaber on her belt poked uncomfortably into her side.

She shifted momentarily away from Luke and unclipped the thing. “Here,” she said, holding it out to Obi-Wan.

He looked at it thoughtfully for a moment, then looked up to meet her eyes. “I meant to ask where did you find this?”

“When Luke knocked me to the floor I saw it lying, half hidden under a tarp. I grabbed it before I got up.”

“Hmmm…” He continued to stare at it. Leia's arm began to tremble slightly, as her adrenaline surge started to fade away and her fatigue began to catch up with her.

“Do you want to keep it?” He finally asked, making no move to take it from her, his voice in deadly earnest.

She almost dropped it in her shock “What? No. I told you, I don't want to be a Jedi.”

A there was a great wave of relief, chased by of a small thread disappointment that flowed out of him before he regained control and reigned it all back in. Exhaustion must be catching up with him too, usually she got nothing from Obi-Wan. “I just find it interesting that you would find that particular lightsaber, of all of the lightsabers that survived the purges and were there in that room, to wield.”

Obi-Wan reached out then, grabbing hold of it from her hand, carefully, like it was a precious gift. Other than the color, which was rather distinct, what made this blade so special to him? Then the obvious connection clicked in her mind. “You know whose this was,” she stated softly, trying to be respectful of his grief, for all that he wasn’t showing it on his face. Luke’s face lost it’s worried frown and morphed into something more like genuine interest.

Obi-Wan’s mouth ticked up in a slight smile. “Yes, I do. He, like you, was quite the singular individual.” His smile changed into something sadder. “I don’t think he would have liked you very much though.”

“Thanks.” she said dryly.

“Don’t take it personally, he didn't really like anybody, even me. But he most certainly would have respected you, Leia, that was a rare honor in itself.” he clipped the lightsaber to his belt. “And I think he would have found it most appropriate that you were the one to find and wield it today.”

“It's just a coincidence,” she said flatly.

“Hmmm. There are coincidences then there are coincidences.” He gave her an enigmatic smile. “But of course I will honor your wishes in this matter”

That was when Han entered the room. Leia had a nasty moment of fear, how much had he overheard? This is why they couldn’t start complicated conversational matters in insecure places. Because, when she wasn’t thinking too hard or was distracted, she still thought of the Falcon as home. That meant safety, warmth, and most important in this context, a freedom to say what she wished. And she couldn’t, this wasn’t her home, not really, it was only the echo of one.
Being here lead her to disclose things, that if overheard would lead to some very awkward questions. Fortunately for her, Han was entirely too preoccupied with his own concerns to pay much attention to what was being said around him.

“What was that?” he said, his eyes full of shock, as he marched up to the derrick table.

“What was what?” Leia answered back, leaning a bit more into Luke’s side, trying to shore up her emotions as much as she could with his presence.

“That ultimatum. What in the bleeding hells does Vader want with you?”

She shrugged “I escaped. That has to rub him the wrong way.”

Han’s eyes narrowed “That sounded a hell of a lot more personal than tracking down one wayward former captive. He offered to let us go for you.” And here he gestured at Kenobi, “Could he feel you? Like you were supposed to be able to feel him?”

Obi-Wan didn’t get offended, did the man ever?, but merely answered Han’s questions “Since I wasn’t hiding myself as fiercely as he was, yes more than likely he knew I was there.”

“Vader hates the Jedi. Vader kills the Jedi. What has got him so riled up about you he would let one go?” Han’s eyes were as wild and out of control as his voice.

“I haven’t the faintest idea what goes on in his head Han.” she said.

At her side, Luke’s armed tightened around her as if by force he could keep her away from the Sith Lord. Clearly, this line of thinking hadn’t occurred to him. Han’s eyes lost their wild look and flared with jealousy instead.

“That’s what you’re going to tell me.” he asked, hurt in his voice.

“That’s what I know.” she said back tiredly.

He gave out a disbelieving snort “Then the only conclusion I can come to is that you aren’t taking this very seriously. This isn't some mid-level bureaucratic that you can make cry with a good tongue lashing. This is Vader you are dealing with.”

She tapped down the hysterical giggle that threatened to emerge from her throat. This was quite possibly her worst nightmare come to life and he thought she wasn’t taking it seriously?

Frustrated at her non-answer, he turned to Luke “She listens to you,” and to his credit, he managed to keep most of the jealousy out of his voice “Please get it through her head this isn’t something she can just ignore.”

Luke gave him a long look “I don’t think she's underestimating how serious this is.”

“Okay, I understand you’re still a little rocky on the Imperial power structure, so let me give you a free lesson. Vader, the second in command of a ruthless government, who is basically in charge of an equally ruthless military, is hunting for her.”

Luke opened his mouth to protest, but Han ran right over his objections, hands flying in the air in his agitation, “Yes yes. You grew up on Tatooine. You’ve dealt with the Hutt’s. Let me give you a heads up, they are child’s play compared to this. This isn’t the same as hiding from the Hutt’s and laying low in the desert for a few years to get them off her trail. This is Vader!! The smart move is to hide her on the remotest planet in the outer rim we can find, and maybe, just maybe she’ll live.
He never fails in what he sets his sights on.”

She stiffened in outrage. She was sitting right here, he didn’t need to talk over her like she was a small child. “I am not running away and hiding!” she shot at Han.

“Well if you want to live to see another birthday you should!”

“Why? So I can ask others to fight him in my place? No thank you.”

She could actually see him grinding his teeth in frustration. He then turned and appealed to Obi-Wan “Please tell me you aren’t going to encourage this madness.”

Obi-Wan looked at the two of them sitting there, “I believe events have been set into motion that cannot be stopped.” he said tiredly.

Han’s voice was practically frantic “That’s what you’re going with?! Destiny?”

“Yes.”

Han shook his head in disgust, “Sure. Destiny. It’s all her destiny to be hunted down by Vader, killed, and the Kid with her trying to protect her.”

“Han,” Leia said, trying to be reassuring, but he cut her off.

“No. This is madness, you can’t win this fight.”

“I don’t see why not.” Luke protested.

“What?”

“I said I don’t see why not. You said the Hutt’s are child’s play next to the Empire, you’re probably right about that. But on my world, you didn’t defy them, at all. It wasn’t a fight you could win. But we won today. We took down a Hutt.”

“Not the same. You are not taking down the Empire with the five of us.”

“It is the same.” Luke insisted “The only difference is that one is a much bigger problem than the other. So you scale up, but it can be done.”

Han just stared at Luke, then swung his gaze back to her “Are you two for real?” he demanded.

Obi-Wan actually laughed out loud at that. “A question I find myself asking almost daily Captain.”

“When I said you two needed a keeper, I didn’t realize you were this crazy!!” Han muttered.

“You still volunteering?” Leia asked, her heart lodged in her throat. Please don’t let him back out of this now. She still didn’t know what she wanted from him precisely, it seemed to change daily on her. Sometimes when she looked at him all she wanted to do was never let him out of her sight. Other days, the bad days, she wanted to scream at him to grow up already, that he could be more than this. But she did know if he left, if she had to watch him walk away again, it would break something in her that might never recover.

He hesitated a minute, looking as if he was having some internal debate with himself. Leia held her breath, not sure what his answer would be. Imagine that, things really were different here, she had no idea what Han was going to do next. Han let out a long sigh and shook his head sadly. “We’ll I don’t see anyone else volunteering.”
Leia hid her grin to herself, now was not the time to make him think she was mocking him and she settled for “Thought you were the responsible one?”

“Only in comparison to you two.” he shot back. He rubbed his hands over his face. “This is all going to end in tears.”

It had in fact done precisely that, if not in the way he thought, but Leia was damn sure it wouldn’t this time. “Maybe, but it definitely won’t be boring.”

“No, that is not the word I would use to describe it.”

Leia relaxed and leaned back into Luke’s side, for a moment everything was right in her world. Then Han took in the gesture and flushed. “Well, glad we had this chat.” he blurted out “I...yeah I think I hear Chewie calling for me.” Both she and Luke watched him stumble out of the main hold.

Luke looked at the corridor Han disappeared down, a thoughtful look on his face. “He’s jealous isn’t he?”

“Apparently,” Leia muttered.

“I’m not sure if I’m horrified that he’s assuming we’re together, or flattered that he’s so jealous of a little ole farm boy like me.”

“You’re no little ole farm boy,” she contradicted.

“Yeah, well…” he trailed off, clearly embarrassed. Then he cleared his throat “You shouldn’t use me like that.” he chided gently.

Leia withdrew back slightly and stared up at him “Not for comfort?” she asked, the hurt evident in her voice.

He shook his head “No, for that, anytime. But you’re using me to hide from Han”

She felt her cheeks redden “No I’m not.” she insisted.

He gave her a patient look. Stupid perceptive interfering little brother.

“Why are you hiding from Captain Solo?” Obi-Wan asked, genuine curiosity in his voice.

“He’s her husband.” Luke offered.

Obi-Wan blinked “Really?”

Leia rolled her eyes “Let me guess, you have thoughts on the weirdness of that too?”

The Jedi shook his head “No, quite the contrary, it makes a great deal of sense to me.”

They both stared at him “Really?” Luke asked.

The man gave a secretive smile “Oh, yes. His potential is vast, if underdeveloped. But I can see the appeal to you, Leia.”

Luke cocked his head to the side, “I would argue with you, but he just for all intents and purposes agreed to be our protector as we take on a brutal murderous empire.” He swung back to look at Leia “This is what you saw in him?”
She nodded.

“Huh. Wonder why he hides it that under that bravo and ego?”

That wasn't her story to tell. If Han wanted to, eventually he would share it with Luke. Maybe if she was really lucky he would share it with her again too.

Luke leaned his head down so that their foreheads were touching “He was right.”

She gave him a fond smile “Han is never right. And when he is we don’t admit it, only feeds his ego.”

He gave a light chuckle, but the laughter didn't reach his eyes. “No, I meant about the threat Vader poses to you.” He was carefully not asking her about that, but there was a question in his eyes. He didn’t understand anymore than Han did.

She sighed “This isn’t your fight. I can handle this.”

His hands came from his sides and grabbed hers tightly “I love you.” he said fiercely.

Leia felt something in her settle into place at those words. It was the first time since she had come here, to this time, that he had said those words to her. Of course, she knew that he loved her before this declaration, there wasn’t much she couldn’t pick up on in his emotions when they sank into the Force together. But knowing it and hearing it were two different things.

“I love you too.” she said back softly.

Then worry filled his eyes, and permeated the Force around him. “You are the only family I have left. I won’t let him hurt you, Leia.” Well as long as he permitted her to return the favor, she saw no problem with that.

Obi-Wan’s alarm flared out like a bright flame, but unlike before he didn’t draw it back in. Luke, who was still not that great at figuring out specific emotions from the overall background noise of the Force, didn’t notice. Leia could though. Something about what Luke said was worrying him, and he wanted Leia to know it was worrying him. What was the cagey old man up to now?

The rest of the trip was spent in silence, only with each other’s company and Obi-Wan’s worried face.

When the Falcon arrived in the hanger, there was a small crowd already there, waiting for them in front of the Falcon’s landing slot. As Han set her down, Leia peered through the front windows, she shook her head at the sight of her Father, Mother, and Rex standing there. It put her in mind of the one time she had snuck out of the palace, when she had been about thirteen, to attend a party her parents had forbidden her to go to. She had slipped through the guards, security system, and managed to ‘borrow’ transportation from the Royal guards.

She hadn’t had much fun there. Her desire to go more had to do with the fact that she desperately, for once, wanted to experience something that everyone else her age group had. The bitter truth was she was only invited because she was the Princess of Alderaan, and that nobody there had been interested in anything else about her. She had returned home, only to find her parents standing in the front of her bedroom door, disapproval and worry radiating off of them.

Them being here and alive, was quite possibly one of the best gifts she had received in her life. But
she never factored in the fact that they would occasionally make her feel like a young child again.

Luke’s thoughts were apparently in the same vein as her’s, because he asked in a halfway serious voice “Think we’re going to get grounded?”

She flashed him a big smile “I hope not. I promised Mon that I would help her with her paperwork tomorrow, and that would be rather tricky from my room.”

Han snorted “Everything went fine, what’s to worry about? We got the goods, nobody’s hurt, and best of all, no briefing because this was a private mission.”

She and Luke exchanged glances, his openly startled. Han’s background wasn’t something Luke knew anything about, yet, but that remark revealed a lot more than Han intended to him.

When Chewie descended down the gangplank first, the cart of their precious cargo behind him, Leia heard a small cheer rise from the flight deck crew. Apparently, the rumor mill had been in overdrive concerning this little mission. The Alliance leadership might not have deemed this mission critical but the rank and file did.

Rex was waiting there, in front of her parents, his arms crossed, tension vibrating from every pore. He visibly relaxed when he saw the three of them descended the gangplank. Then his eyes narrowed on Kenobi.

“You look like hell? Somebody bleeding?”

“Nobody is bleeding Rex,” Obi-Wan responded in a tired voice “Just some unexpected complications.”

“Yeah, that’s a surprise, because that never happens on any of your missions.”

Bail gave a small laugh and he and Breha came over to hug her and Luke.

Han descend next and the clone gave him a hard glare “They’re all in one piece, congratulations you get to live.”

“See!!” Han cried out to Chewie, who was waiting patiently on the ground for them to disembark. “I told you that he threatened to kill me!”

Chewie just gave a soft snort <With how many people you piss off, it can’t be that surprising Han.> Deciding to ignore his friends comment Han turned back to Rex “Next time, I don’t care what the leadership says, you are coming with us. They” and he gestured to her and Luke “are hard enough to keep in line. I’m not doing it for gramps over here too.”

Rex actually laughed “What did he do?”

Obi-Wan sniffed delicately “Nothing too outrageous.”

“He charged a Hutt.” Han contradicted.

Rex frowned “Isn’t that a little counterproductive?”

Luke gave a cheerful grin “Oh no, he had mechanical legs and was running at us at full speed.”

Rex’s stared at her, as he expected her to refute that statement. She gave a small shrug, it was true
after all. “Well, now I have heard of everything. Why did he have mechanical legs?” then he shook his head “No, on second thought I withdraw the question. I don’t want to know.”

Breha gave her and Luke a hard look “And what did you two do that has Captain Solo so worried?”

Luke lightly scuffed his foot into the ground in embarrassment. “Oh, nothing too outrageous.”

“He set fire to the building we were robbing. While we were still in it.” Han said flatly.


Rex looked at Han and then laughed out loud. “Consider yourself lucky Solo. If it had been his father he would have used explosives.” At Han’s look of disbelief, he gave a jaunty salute to Obi-Wan and walked off.

“Am I the only one with any sense?” he demanded of no one in particular.

<That’s pushing it Han.> Chewie muttered. <I distinctly remember that bar->

Han’s face grew worried and he cut Chewie off, shooting a worried look in Leia’s direction “We said we were never going to talk about the Florrum system incident ever again.”

The Wookie only snickered.

“Luke,” Obi-Wan called out. “Could you please go with Captain Solo and Chewbacca and put these away in the storage room. I’ll meet you in my quarters when we’re done.”

“Of course Ben, I mean Master.” he gave a clumsy bow and trotted off with the two other men.

Leia gave Obi-Wan a wary glance. “What did you want to talk about that you didn't want him to overhear?”

“About what you did do to worry Captain Solo.” Her mother’s pleasant court mask fell over her face and Bail paled a little.

“I didn’t do anything.” she insisted, giving her parents a reassuring smile.

Obi-Wan looking over to the couple and taking in their reactions amended “You are correct. But what is being done around you is worrisome.”

Vader was always worrisome, she didn’t see anything new about that. “Not here.”

“Shall we adjourn to our quarters?” Breha asked and Leia winced. If her mother was retreating into this formal of a tone and language she must be out of her mind with worry.

“Lead the way,” Obi-Wan said and the four of them departed to her parent’s room.

Bail and Breha sat at the table, with Obi-Wan sitting across from them. Feeling a bit trapped, and not understanding Kenobi’s clear agitation, Leia opted for the chair this time.
As she sat in it Bail asked, his face drawn in worry “What is this about Obi-Wan?”

“Vader was there,” he answered. Her mother gasped and looked at Leia in worry.

“You saw him?” she asked.

Leia shook her head. “No, he was in the building, and he had access to the speaker system, so I definitely heard him, but he never got close.”

“Him being on the same planet as you is close enough!” Bail shouted. Leia looked at him in surprise, startled by his loss of control.

“Forgive me,” he said. “I shouldn’t have yelled.”

“It’s okay Papa, it’s a subject that is definitely worth yelling about,” Leia reassured him. “I’m not happy about it either.”

“What happened?” her mother pressed.

Leia scowled “I’m sorry, I messed up. I sincerely thought the spy was only an Imperial, not a member of the 501st.”

Obi-Wan shook his head. “That’s actually understandable. These are very old events from your perspective. No, what concerns me is the offer he made you.”

Leia blinked “You don’t think I had any desire to take him up on it do you?” she asked shocked that was the conclusion the older man had come to.

“Of course not,” and now the smooth veneer was beginning to slip.

“What offer?” Bail demanded.

“He offered to let the rest of us go if Leia came to him,” Obi-Wan explained. “But again that is not where my concern lies.”

“Then what is your concern Master Jedi?” Leia snapped, losing patience with this circular conversation.

“That you believed him. You didn’t even hesitate, you treated it like it was a genuine offer. One you rejected out of hand” he said, quelling any protests from her parents “but you still believed he’d honor it.”

Leia frowned “Yes I did.”

Obi-Wan’s face shifted from horror to disbelief to that infuriatingly blank mask of his. “Why? Could you sense his emotions?”

“No, he was blank to me just like he was to you.”

Obi-Wan swallowed hard “Then why did you believe him?”

“Because between his behavior above the Death Star and his constant attempts to break through my shields to talk to me I know he’s desperate. Desperate enough to honor any agreement he enters into with me.” She wasn’t going to even bother getting into the dream conversation that she had with him. That was a problem she had fixed, so they didn’t need to know.
“What does any of that have to do with you believing that he’d let us go after killing you?” Obi-Wan demanded.

Wait, what? Somewhere in this conversation the two of them had started talking past each other. “Why do you think he wants to kill me?” she asked shocked.

All three of them exchanged startled looks and turned back to stare at her.

“Why don’t you?” Bail finally asked.

“Because if he wanted to, he would have already done it. He could have killed me in that cell, I certainly was in no frame of mind to defend myself. Hell, he had a clear shot of me over the Death Star when I was covering Luke. He didn’t take it.”

“He doesn’t want to kill you?” Obi-Wan asked finally, something like hope in his voice.

She shook her head. “No.”

Breha’s quiet voice intruded “Leia, what exactly did happen in that cell?”

She looked at her mother, at the fear and concern that was written across her face, across all their faces. But she didn’t want to talk about that. Even thinking about it made her mind cloud with fear. So she turned the question back on them. “Why are you all so certain he would want to kill either me or Luke?”

Obi-Wan’s voice went flat. “He’s a Sith Lord Leia. Family ties are not something they are known for. I thought at first...after I learned that he fell, that there might be something of Anakin left. When I got to Mustafar and found what he did to your mother…” his voice broke then, and his grief came up in a giant wave to crash against her shields. What exactly had Vader done to their mother? He thought she died there obviously, or she and Luke’s survival wouldn’t have been much of a secret. But what precisely had he done that lead to her death?

Before she could ask Bail cut in “You and Luke are quite possibly the greatest potential threat to him. Both as individuals capable of meeting him in a fight head on, but also as possible replacement apprentices to the Emperor. He knows this. So we always assumed if he learned of either of you or your brother’s existence…” his voice trailed off.

“That he would kill us.” she finished.

“Yes.”

That actually made a great deal of sense, if you didn’t have all the facts Leia did. It’s not like she hadn’t asked herself that very same question after he learned of her parentage. But if she was going to be honest with herself, now that she was further away from the event, it was no more than an idle speculation on her part. She had never really considered that he would try to kill her. Hadn’t she protected Luke in the most obvious way possible? Gambling on the fact that he wanted her alive. And his frantic screaming at her above the Death Star, and subsequent withdrawal as to not break her concentration, only reinforced that belief. No, what she feared from Vader was nothing as kind as death.

“I see your point.” she said slowly and thoughtfully, “But I think there are a few factors you didn’t take into consideration.”

“Like what?” Obi-Wan’s voice was full of bitterness “He doesn’t want to kill you because you aren’t a Jedi? That’s helpful, but it still leaves Luke as vulnerable to him as your Luke was.”
She slapped her hands down on the table, frustration at his unfair accusation making her blood boil. He thought she would leave Luke vulnerable? She had practically dared Vader to a suicide pact to protect Luke. What had Kenobi done? Filled his head with stories about his heroic father and the horrible monster that killed him. “He doesn’t want us dead, he wants us to turn Obi-Wan!!” she hissed through her teeth.

Bail’s tan face lost all its color. “What?”

She closed her eyes, damn it, she had forgotten they were still here. She hadn’t meant to disclose that to her parents. They had enough to deal with, without having this burden placed on them as well. Well, there was no choice now but to go on.

“That is what he offered my,” she thought of this Luke’s soft words on the Falcon, and no, that wasn’t the right word to use here, “I mean the other Luke. The factors I was referring to” and here she shot Kenobi a hardened glare “was that when this all started we were infants. Of no use to anyone, and yes, a major potential threat. But we are now adults and are very useful pieces in this little game.”

“It’s not a game Leia.” her mother said reproachfully “It’s the fate of the galaxy itself.”

Well, not the whole galaxy, nobody controlled the Unknown Regions, but she knew what her mother was trying to say. “I know Mama. But I have to think of it that way or I’ll never stop screaming.”

Obi-Wan leaned back in the booth, every line of exhaustion suddenly prominent on his face. He shook his head in contradiction. “There are only ever two Sith Leia. A master and an apprentice.”

“Yes, I’ve heard that,” she said, trying to understand where the man’s head was at. He normally wasn’t this slow. “And that is precisely what Vader is going to do.”

A bleak sense of despair entered his eyes. “He wants to kill Palpatine.”

“The other Vader definitely did and I’m guessing that this one does too. But if that is his goal, he is going to need help.”

“Hence his offer to you on Nar Shaddaa.”

“Yes.”

He gave a long weary sigh. “Luke rejected it?”

She gave him an unimpressed stare. He raised his hands defensively “I’m merely trying not to assume anything Leia. I think I’ve already filled my quota of that today.”

“Yes. He did, emphatically.”

Bail spoke up “And Vader make the same offer to you on the Death Star?”

She shook her head. “No.”

Breha frowned “What did he do?”

She didn’t want to talk about this, she didn’t want to even think about this, but it was her mother asking, and she desired to know how much danger her daughter was in. “At first he just froze.” Then his voice, although she hadn’t been aware it was his voice at the time, and that long painful
wail of No, not again. Had he choked her birth mother? Is that what set him off? Thinking over his reaction, if she didn’t know any better, she would have thought he had a panic attack in that cell with her.

“Leia?” her mother asked, as the silence grew to an uncomfortable length.

“He just asked if his alternate knew I was his daughter and walked out when I didn’t answer the question. He never offered me anything.”

“And later? Did he offer you anything later?” Obi-Wan pressed. “You said he got loud over the Death Star, is that what he was offering you?”

*I cannot protect you while you remain with the Rebellion.*

A ploy and a trick, that is what that offer was. Offering her safety so that he could work on her at his leisure. She focused back in on the here and now.

She gave a bitter smile. “No, I cut him off before he could finish what he was saying. I don’t think so though. Maybe he doesn’t think women are meant to rule. Palpatine certainly seems to think it’s beyond us.”

Obi-Wan actually laughed at that. “No. There are many things I was wrong about concerning his character, but he never had that particular flaw.”

Oh, well wasn’t that nice to know.

She shrugged “Then I have no idea. Maybe he just hasn’t gotten around to it yet. It’s not something I’m interested in any way. What would I do with a galaxy-wide Empire? Sounds awfully boring.”

Her parents broke out into relieved smiles at her admittedly weak joke, but it served to break the tension a bit, which is what she intended. She felt herself yawn and thought longingly of her bed. It had been a long day on so many fronts, and all she wanted to do now was crawl into it and let the oblivion of sleep take her for a few hours.

“Is there anything else?” she asked.

Her parents shook their heads, “Then I’m going to bed.”

Obi-Wan stood “And I have to meet with Luke in my quarters. Leia, would you mind some company on your walk?”

“Sure.” So what did he want to discuss that he didn’t want her parents involved in?.

He was silent until they reached her door, “May I come in?”

She seriously considered refusing him entry. She was tired, and she didn’t want to fight with him right this second. On the other hand, they had put this conversation off for far too long, and waiting would only make it worse. Sighing she opened her door and gestured for him to come in.

He looked around, curiously, taking in the small space. “Cozy.” he finally offered.

“I don’t spend much time here so it doesn’t much matter,” she said simply. She let the silence grow. He was the one who wanted to talk, if he wanted to put it off, that was fine by her.

“Leia,” he began, then he sat tiredly on her bed “I’m concerned about Luke.” So apparently they weren’t going to address the issues between them. Fine, Luke was something they could agree on.
“Why?”

His hands twisted in his lap “His reaction to you being in danger is a bit, well, extreme.”

Her eyes narrowed “I don’t follow.”

“I understand that he is young, and not a Jedi padawan, but I’m worried that his anger against Vader is building into something that he will lose control of.”

It wasn’t an unreasonable fear. Luke’s anger at the Sith Lord had been bad enough in her original timeline when he just believed that Vader had killed his father, and set into motion the events that led to the murder of his Aunt and Uncle. Those were all still events that had happened here, and now they were adding his knowledge of who killed Bigg’s and her into the mix. Luke believed that Vader was a clear and present danger to her personally. And she had no way of reassuring him that wasn’t the case. Even if she told him right now Vader was their father and didn’t want her dead, he was still a threat to her because of what he wanted.

The months following Bespin had been a roller coaster of emotions for Luke. She hadn’t understood it at the time, lacking context and wrapped up in her own bone-numbing fear regarding Han, but she had noticed. Later, when they talked about that time, Luke confessed how hard it all of it had been for him. And yes, his anger at all the betrayal in his life, from almost everyone he trusted, certainly had been a big part of it. But he also mourned the loss of that anger that had driven him to confront Vader in the first place. That sense of righteousness, that need for justice to be done. It had been taken away and he had been left floundering in its absence.

“Doesn’t sound like a very Jedi concept.” she had told him.

“No, it wasn’t.” He said, “Which is why I wasn’t a Jedi yet when I left Dagobah the first time. But it was still there Leia, I still had to deal with it. Saying it’s not very Jedi-like isn’t actually a solution to processing anything. That’s just denial.”

She sighed and rubbed her forehead. “I can talk to him, try to reassure him, but I don’t think that is going to solve anything long term.”

Obi-Wan bit his lip “No, I don’t think it will either, but I don’t know how to deal with this.”

“Well, maybe you should stop with the stories of our wonderful father? Maybe not encourage him to be so attached?” she said snidely. Why had even started doing that? What possible purpose could it serve?

Obi-Wan stiffened “I haven’t said anything that isn’t true. And he wants to know.”

She gritted her teeth. He was worried about the wrong things. Leia was afraid of what it would do to who Luke became when he found out. Obi-Wan was worried about what Luke would do when asked to kill his father. And here they all were, courting the exact same reaction the other Luke had, only on a much larger scale.

Would this send Luke to the Dark Side? Unlikely, she had more faith in her brother than that, but it could turn him into someone very different. He could be like her, someone who never found peace with their heritage, and held it all at arm’s bay. She had always envied that about him. Not enough to emulate him, but enough that it gave her the odd twinge now and then. Especially when she considered that she knew her mother would have agreed with Luke. “Forgiveness is offered freely, not earned because we all make mistakes, and one day you are going to be the one asking.” she had told Leia many times when her spite against someone burned.
“You encouraging him on this path is a dangerous line of thinking.”

“No, this is the most important task, to annihilate the Sith. Luke needs to be focused on his training to accomplish that.”

That statement had a flavor of hate to it. “I thought revenge wasn’t the Jedi way.”

Obi-Wan blinked in surprise “You would disagree he needs to be stopped?”

He would ask that of her? Of all people? The injustice of the accusation was shredding her already tenuous control over her temper. It had been a long day, she was exhausted, and he was being stupid. “No I would disagree with you and Yoda turning us into unknowing patricides.” she shot back.

He blinked as if this angle hadn’t occurred to him. “You want him dead.” he ventured.

She rolled her eyes. “Yes, I do. But that is my choice, and I make it with all full knowledge of the particulars. If it's so important he be dead why don't you do it? You took him down before.”

He stood up, agitation pouring off of him “I told you he was half out of his mind during that fight. That is the only way I managed to win. There is no way I can take him now!”

“Then why didn’t you kill him then?” she practically howled. “You would have saved us all a world of trouble.”

He flinched and the pain that came across his face was an open wound. “Because you still loved him. That was..” her voice trailed off as too many word choices filled her mind. Stupid. Dumb. Suicidal. Ignorant. Then she stopped. She didn't, couldn't, understand why Kenobi loved such a monster, but it was clear he did and it was not her place to mock it or the pain it caused him.

“I don’t love Vader.” he said weariness in his tone “I loved Anakin and he is dead. All I can do is make sure his murderer doesn’t do the same to his son.”

Okay, they were heading into dangerous territory here. “That is your truth, but it's not the truth Obi-Wan,” she said. This insistence on dividing Anakin Skywalker from Vader was foolish at best, delusional at worst. ”And because you are clinging so hard to it you're fatally crippling Luke in any confrontation he will have with Vader.”

Anger, true and genuine swirled around them “You think I would ever place him in danger?”

“Willingly, no. But I know how this plays out.”

He sneered, the expression looking wrong on that elegant face. “You know how a possibility of it plays out.”

Her back stiffened “I know Luke. I understand you are asking him to do what you could not, and now can’t. I understand you are placing the burden on him of cleaning up your mess. I understand you are taking his choices away. I understand, better than you ever will that it would destroy him if he did kill Vader and learned the truth after.”

A smirk crossed his face “And if it’s so important, why don’t you do it?”

She actually stepped back at her own words being thrown in her face. In a very clean elegant way, he had hit on the guilt that was building every day she didn’t disclose the truth. Even now, with so much at stake, she couldn’t even imagine trying to break this to her brother.
She narrowed her eyes at the older man “You know why I won’t. Because it would cause him pain and break his heart, and I don't want to be the one who delivers the blow. And frankly, right now I would handle it so badly as to make the situation so much worse.”

And here she stepped up until she was right in Obi-Wan’s face “But I’m not the one who filled his head with stories about our father being kind, loving, and so wonderful. I’m not the one who did this deliberately to Luke to get him focused on his ‘murderer’ so he will do what needs to be done. I think he would take it better hearing it from you and you would be better at delivering it, but not enough to wait much longer. This isn’t the first time in my life I’ve been forced to make a hard decision and won’t be the last. We are going to run out of time on this, Vader is going to find out and believe me, he won’t be very quiet on that.”

Obi-Wan scowled "You had the Alliance withhold Luke's name. Do you really think that won't work to keep him hidden?"

"He destroyed the Death Star!!" she shot right back "The Empire is right now marshaling every effort to learn the name of that pilot! You think you are protecting Luke from the truth will help in doing what needs to be done, but it's his choice to make, not yours."

Obi-Wan's face paled and took a step back from her. His jaw clenched and unclenched. "I will take what you said under advisement." he said finally, through gritted teeth. "Now if you will excuse me." he gave her a short bow and walked to the door.

Before he could exit she called out "Kenobi, a warning. If you don't tell him, and tell him soon, I will.” He didn't respond as he walked out of her room.

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawnsbyisaakfvkampfer
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Hi, guys. It's been a while since I mention this, but here's another warning for those who care. There are major spoilers for the Star Wars #1 comic in the following chapter, so if you don't want to be spoiled please don't read. I also borrowed a few lines of dialog from that comic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

ABA - Day 51

Leia entered the gym in a foul mood. She hadn't slept well, and her conversation with Kenobi was still preying on her mind. The only thing that could have made things worse was if Vader had come calling last night, but he was strangely silent. On the other hand, she had to admit, if only to herself, that it might have been useful to have him try to talk to her. It would have been very cathartic to vent all of her frustrations on someone without feeling guilty.

Luke was already running when she got there, the gym mostly empty. She waited until her brother lapped the circle to where she was at and she fell into step beside him. He didn’t say anything, was just determinedly moving forward. That wasn’t so strange, his silence in the Force however was.

She sent a soft “Hey,” at him, but he determinedly ignored her. Alright then, something was clearly up with him.

“Are you okay?” she finally asked out loud, as they completed the first loop and he still hadn’t said a word to her.

“Are you ever going to tell me?” he said back, hostility dancing in his tone.

She started, taken aback by both his tone and question, and she almost lost her rhythm on the run. “Tell you what?” she asked cautiously, heart in her throat, as she tried not to jump to any conclusions. Her conscience piped up that clearly the old man had taken her words to heart about Vader and told Luke last night. She had threatened to tell Luke, yes, but given his mood when he left her quarters she never seriously thought Kenobi would do it.

“About what Vader wants with you!!” that came through clearly enough, as did his anger. Leia felt a wash of relief go through her. So Obi-Wan had kept his mouth shut. She wouldn't have to face this particular hurdle today. Then she cursed herself for her hypocrisy and cowardice on this subject. She couldn’t avoid this forever, she knew that.

“No.” she answered, then caught the wave of hurt and disbelief on his face. “At least not yet.” she amended.

“Why?” there was a whine to that word that was grating to Leia’s ears. He’s young, she reminded herself. He’s only nineteen, and you are not. This was the first time since she had arrived here in this time, that the gulf between them had felt so large. She was so used to being in synch with
Luke, that this misstep between them was jarring.

“It’s complicated.”

“Not complicated enough that you didn’t tell Obi-Wan!” there was jealousy there now. Why was he jealous? “Why do you trust him and not me?” Where in the hell had he gotten that idea from?

“Luke, what’s going on?” Leia asked, honestly baffled. He was holding himself tight in the Force, she could gather nothing from him without moving beyond passive listening and that would be a serious violation of his trust. No matter how much she wanted to know.

He actually stopped running, and she was so taken aback by that she actually kept going a few steps beyond him. She stopped and turned around to face him. His face was drawn into tight lines as he spat in a low urgent whisper “Why won’t you tell me?” So he wasn't so far gone in whatever this was not to be mindful of the other occupants in the room “I know you and Obi-Wan discussed it last night. He wouldn’t tell me either. Said I should let it go in the Force, and not worry about it.”

Oh, of course, the old man had given the worst advice ever. He should instead encourage Luke to actually acknowledge and process his anger. Or at the very least tell Luke he had the right to feel whatever he wanted. It was what he did with those feelings that was the issue. She shoved those thoughts aside, that was a problem for another time.

Luke continued on, stepping closer to her, agitation in his every step. “Whatever you said to him has him spooked. He came back from your quarters white as a sheet. Are you trying to protect me from the truth? I know I’m younger than you but I’m not a child. I can handle it.”

He most certainly could, at least he did before. But she wasn't sure that this was something she could handle. Not only did she not want to do this she wasn't sure she had the heart for it. How the hell had Luke had found the courage to tell her? And face Vader? All in the same night? She focused back in on this Luke, not the possibility of who he could be. The one in front of her was clearly upset, and platitudes like Kenobi had tried to placate him with would only make this worse.

She stuck with the truth. “I can handle this.” she insisted.

“I know you think that.” he countered “But Leia, I think this might be beyond even you.”

She scowled at him “Thanks for the vote of confidence.”

“I believe in you,” he said, then his face contorted like he was in great pain. “But it’s me I’m not so sure on. I can’t let it happen again.”

Leia blinked, suddenly the check he had on himself fell, and it wasn’t anger she was getting off him. It was pain and fear that slapped her like a great wave. “Let what happen again?” she asked bewildered.

“Come back and find that the Empire has killed my family.”

Fear, more specifically fear for her was what was driving this. This wasn’t the reaction she had expected. Of course, by the time the other Luke had discovered they were related, it was three years out from the murder of his Uncle and Aunt. They were also in the beginning stages of the Empire’s collapse and they all had known it. His Jedi training and the lessons he had learned during his three years with the rebellion probably helped him maintain an even keel. This Luke, the one standing before her, trembling with every fear and worry in his heart was nineteen, newly orphaned, and part of a guerrilla group facing an almost impossible task. She should have realized that, for all that they were similar, she shouldn't expect him to react in ways his alternate did. She
should listen to what he was saying, not what she expected to hear.

She stepped forward, her mouth opening to tell him everything. Enough of her quibbling. This wasn’t fair to him. She couldn’t leave him in this much pain simply to avoid the inevitable truth. Before she could even utter a word he startled her by also stepping forward to grab her in a fierce hug. He was shaking. She tightened her own arms in response and reflexively sent comfort to him through the Force. His response to this was to practically collapse against her, and she staggered. There was movement in the corner of her eye, and she saw someone come over, concern on his face. She gave a shake of her head, indicating she didn’t need his help with this, and slowly lowered them both to the floor.

Luke sobbed, they were great wracking sobs that shook his frame. The few people left in the gym quietly exited, leaving the two of them with Luke’s grief. The wasn’t the first time someone in the Alliance had a breakdown in a public area, and it wouldn’t be the last. It was unfortunate their cause didn’t seem to attract more people who had training in mind healing. They did their best with counseling, but it was always a struggle to find people. It wasn’t like they could outright hire someone.

Luke didn’t scream or shout, just continued to sob and sob as Leia whispered reassurances in his ear. She should have seen this coming. Luke had never been shy about showing his protectiveness of her. The incident with Vader yesterday had shaken him badly. On top of that, the mood Obi-Wan had been in when he returned to his quarter had only intensified his worry and concern. Luke had been like a detonator, with the fuse lit, waiting to explode at the first person with answers who crossed his path.

She had promised Luke she would stay out of his dreams, but now she was regretting that she had not at least left her sense of him open. Vader threatening her like that, at least what he thought of as Vader threatening her, had ripped open every wound he had in his grief. If she had been paying attention to him last night, she would have been prepared when she walked into this room and not bungled this all so badly.

Luke’s sobs calmed down enough that he was able to speak. “I left because R2 tricked me into removing his restraining bolt.” He gave a soft hiccup “He showed a glimpse of your message and said the bolt was interfering with his ability to retrieve the whole message. Did you know that?”

“Yes,” she said softly, her own guilt in getting his family caught up in this hitting her anew. “He told me about it.”

“I couldn't chase him in the dark. Tatooine is not a place where you want to get caught out at night. I got up early that morning to track him down, and I took Threepio along for help. I didn’t even say goodbye to either of them I just bolted out of there as fast as I could. I knew that if I didn’t bring him back, and soon, Uncle Owen was going to tan my hide for being so damn stupid. Stupid gets you killed in the desert, fast. As Ben proved when the Tusken came up on me unawares. Then I spent the morning with him. He tried to convince me to go with him to save you.” A harsh sob escaped him “And I refused. I refused to save my own twin….”

“No,” she said firmly, placing her head on top of his, and tightening her grip on him. “You had no way of knowing that Luke.”

“But I knew you were important!!” he wailed, “I didn't know why, but I certainly felt it. And I definitely knew the fight against the Empire was important. And I did nothing. “

Well, you would have done something if Obi-Wan would have bothered to open his mouth. So she was still a little raw at the old man for that. Thirty years of resentment of the two of them being
denied that knowledge was hard to let go of. But that wasn’t the important issue here, Luke was.

How long had he allowed this guilt and grief to fester without saying anything to anyone?

“Then heading back to the farm, all I could feel was my resentment building that they were
keeping me on Tatooine. That they needed my help and because I loved them I couldn’t leave.
Then we saw the smoke from the Jawa’s traveler. When Ben told me about why they had been
attacked….” his voice trailed off.

That was when he rushed back home to find everything gone. Leia closed her eyes and merely
continued to rest her head on top of her brothers. She couldn’t tell him about Vader, not like this.
But for his sake, this fear and worry for her would eat him alive, she couldn’t put it off much
longer. A day, maybe two at the most. But to do it now would shatter him into a million pieces. He
needed to bleed this wound off, and the least she could do was help him with that. And perhaps
offer a bit of comfort.

There was no pleasant lie she could give him, not one that he would believe anyway, as much as
she wished otherwise. So she stuck with the truth. Lifting her own head up, she grabbed his in her
hands she forced him to look her in the eyes.

“I can’t promise that I won’t die.” she said gently, a small rueful smile touching her lips “I am
living proof that anything can happen. But I can promise this. That if the worse somehow does
happen to me, that I never wanted to go. And that I made each and every one of them pays for
every inch they take.”

He gave a watery chuckle “I wouldn’t expect anything less.” Then his expression sobered. “And
Vader?”

“I can handle Vader.”

His hands came atop of hers and he leaned in so their foreheads were touching. “You’re afraid of
him.” he whispered, his voice hoarse “ I’ve never seen you afraid. Tired, angry, frustrated, but
never afraid. And you’ve experienced involuntary time travel.”

She swallowed hard, “Of course I am, I’d be a fool not to be,” and oh how that confession burned,
but this was Luke. Lying to him about her fear was like lying to herself, it wasn’t something she
could get away with for long. “But I want you to listen to me, really listen to me.” She waited until
she could feel him in the Force, attention fixed on her. “Am I lying when I tell you I can handle it?”

He searched her face carefully, measuring the strength of her resolve, then a reluctant “No.” A
pensive look crossed his face, then he followed up with “You sure?”

“As sure as I can be.”

Luke let his hands drop from hers, and sat back, pulling himself from her embrace. He wiped the
tears from his face. “I really don’t feel like finishing our run.”

“I don’t either,” she confessed. Then inspiration struck and she leaned in conspiratorially “Let’s go
by the cafeteria and find the sweetest, fat filled, unhealthy breakfast we can and take it to my
parent’s quarters.”

“With hot chocolate?” he asked hopefully.

“Pfft,” she said dismissively “As if we would get anything else.”

“You have a deal.” Luke’s eyes looked a little brighter. Then he whispered, “Love you.”
“Love you too.” And Leia hoped one day he would forgive her for everything she wasn’t saying.

ABA - Day 52

Leia was walking through the hanger deck, looking for Han, when she was startled to see Obi-Wan loading up one of the Alliance’s scout ships. She debated for a moment on letting him be, of walking on by and not saying anything. The rudeness of that gesture bothered her though. It was so small and petty. Not that she couldn’t be petty, but in general she preferred to do it on a grand scale. They couldn’t avoid each other forever, she might as well get this over with now, where there were witnesses to reign both of them in. She walked up to the gangplank as he, without noticing her, picked up his box and started walking up the plank to deposit it in the ship.

“Did I chase you away?” she inquired to his back, only half in jest. She saw him momentarily stiffen, then deliberately relax.

He turned around and gently placed the box down. Leia was startled to not that it was one of the Jedi data archive boxes. “No, Leia. I just need to get these somewhere safe.”

“They aren’t safe here?” she inquired, puzzlement chasing away her irritation at him. They were well guarded here, and not so easy to remove. Who on this base did he think would try to steal them? Did Draven warn him about possible spies? The Empire might burn one of them to retrieve the contents, but it was an awful risk to take.

Sensing her confusion Obi-Wan gave a sigh. “Given what I’ve learned about the numerous successive bases the Alliance has had to leave in a hurry, no.” He rubbed a hand over his forehead, “We might have to evacuate this base at any moment. I do not want to endanger what we have, but neither do I want anyone to die trying to bring it with them. I spent most of yesterday going through the holocrons and removed three for the purposes of training Luke. The rest of them, the data archives and lightsabers I’m moving to a more secure location.”

Leia didn’t comment on the fact that it didn’t take long to figure out what was on a Jedi holocron. It should have taken him two, maybe three hours tops to go through all of them. But some of those holocrons more than likely had been created by dead friends. She knew well the hit that gave a person. She still hadn’t made it through the entirety of her photo holo. She could only look at a few before she had to shut it off. It was too painful to see old beloved faces that had soften in her memory, and that was with the knowledge that as far as she knew those people were still alive.

Removing such precious items from an active Imperial target made a great deal of sense when put that way. “Where are you taking them?” she asked curiously.

He opened his mouth to answer her, then looked around the hanger, remembering that there were ears everywhere. A look of concern passed over his face and Leia realized with a jolt he was weighing if he could trust her with this. She took a deep breath in, let the indignation fill her, acknowledged the pettiness of it, then let it go with her outbound breath. He had the right to treat her as warily as she did him. Besides she was a high-value target. Chances were high she would be taken alive, and well…that line of thinking lead to unpleasant memories and increasing the odds she would have a nightmare tonight. The less she knew about this the better. She waited patiently for what he would say in answer to her question. His eyes met hers, assessing her, and coming to some sort of judgment. He murmured quietly “An old friend.”

Yoda. He was going to take this all to Yoda. She had to admit it made a great deal of sense. Dagobah was remote, isolated, and Yoda would make a dedicated caretaker. It would only take a
few precautions to protect these items from the moisture in the swamp, but it was definitely the last place in the galaxy the Empire would look for them. Then another reason occurred to her about why Obi-Wan had selected that location beside storing their stolen booty.

“Going to catch him up on everything that has happened so far?” she asked, also mindful of all the ears on the flight deck. Obi-Wan was still enough of a novelty that he attracted attention.

A flare of disappointment came from him and his shoulders slumped “Must you always attribute everything I do to underhanded motives?” he asked, frustration leaking into his voice.

Leia blinked, shocked that he had taken that so personally. It wasn’t just him, it was everyone who did things for multiple reasons. This had nothing to do with her wariness of him. “I attribute almost everyone to having second motives.”

He snorted “Then why do you only ever ask me?”

“Because you know I’m not everything I appear to be,” she said. “It doesn’t look out of character to you.”

A look of startlement washed over his face as if he hadn’t considered that fact. Then the suspicion came right back. “Your parents and Luke both know everything and I don’t see you interrogating them in this manner.”

Her eyebrow arched “That’s because I know them Obi-Wan. They don’t need to tell me all their reasons because I have a pretty good idea of them already. And if I don’t, I trust them enough to follow along with what they ask me to do.”

“You don’t trust me?” he said, sounding hurt.

Leia bit her lip. No, she didn’t, but she didn’t need the Force to tell her the precipice they were dancing on right now in regards to their relationship. What she said now could reverberate between them for years, and they would always have Luke caught between them. She had many reservations and worries about Obi-Wan, the main one being his blind and stubborn attitude towards Vader. It was placing Luke in danger. But she understood that he didn’t see it that way even if she thought he was a fool for doing so. Nothing he had done so far suggested he would ever willing betray or deliberately hurt Luke. He had sacrificed twenty years on that dustball to protect her brother and those actions had a lot of influence in tempering her words.

“Despite the enormous influence you have had on my life, and the lives of the people I love, I met you for the first time a little over a month ago Obi-Wan. I don’t know you. And what I do know of you is contradictory in the extreme. For all intents and purposes, you are a stranger, one who has enormous influence and power over people I love.”

His face lost its combative edge and grew thoughtful as he tugged his beard. “So you do like me?”

He had left his shields open to her, and all she could feel was his vulnerability and hope. Her opinion of him mattered. She didn’t understand why it mattered to him, but it did. “Yes, for the most part. I just don’t understand you. Which isn’t the best place to be, given how intertwined you are in my life.” She paused, then took a deep breath, wondering what she actually hoped his answer to this next question would be. “Luke is central to both our lives, we can’t forever be pulling him in two different directions. So Obi-Wan, I ask the same question of you. Do you trust me? Like me?”

He looked so sad as he answered her “Leia, I happen to care about you a great deal.” No answer to the trust question though. Han was right, he was a cagey bastard sometimes.
“Except when I scare you.” He looked away from her not meeting her eyes, taking a deep breath in. As uncomfortable as she was making both of them this wasn’t a point she could let slide. “I’m not blind Obi-Wan. It’s not often, I will give you that, but it happens enough.”

“This was not the situation I was expecting to walk into after twenty years in the desert,” he finally settled on, raising his eyes to meet hers “Can you blame me for taking time to adjust?” The fact that the Force, for whatever reason, had decided to bring her wasn’t the only thing she had done to scare him, and they both knew. There were times when he looked at her like she was a detonator that was about go off in his hand. But this wasn’t something she could press him on, not here in front of all these witnesses. She allowed her frustration with him to fill the Force between them.

His face twisted into something like regret, but instead of addressing her point he offered “I had intended to fill in my old friend with all the current gossip, but I can certainly refrain if you wish.”

Now, here was a sticky offer from him. As much as she wished otherwise, the fewer people who knew a secret, the less likely it would spill, the smart move here was to inform Yoda. She rubbed the bridge of her nose, trying to massage away the tension headache she could feel building. “He should be told. A lot of circumstances he was counting on have been thrown into flux.” And their twenty-year-old plan for bringing down Palpatine and Vader now had a lot of holes blown into it by her arrival. “Besides there is no telling if our light blue friend has already blabbed,” she said, a sour tone in her voice as she thought of the pushy and dead Jedi master.

Realizing that insulting his training master was perhaps not the most politic move right this minute she offered “My apologies I don’t mean to disparage him to your face.”

Obi-Wan actually threw his head back and laughed out loud “My dear, you are most certainly not the first person to have that tone when talking about him. And you were a good deal politer about it then most of the comments I’ve heard about him”

Oh, good, the man had been just as annoying in life. His face sobered as his mirth died.

She swallowed, wanting nothing more than to flee this conversation but she had one more point to press. “Luke told me a bit of what you said to him last night.”

His eyebrow arched “Oh?”

“Yes. In the future, I would suggest you might find better ways to advise Luke on how to deal with his feelings. Telling him to let it go is a wonderful way to sound mysterious and wise, but for practical purposes, it’s next to useless advice to someone who wasn’t raised in a Jedi Temple.” She tried to keep the accusation out of her voice. It would only make Obi-Wan defensive and he wouldn’t listen to what she was trying to say.

Now it was his turn to sigh “I actually do know that. But I confess to being very rattled last night by our conversation and fell into old habits. I will speak with Luke when I get back and apologize. And try to explain better what I meant.”

“Thank you,” she said. She shifted from foot to foot uncomfortably. She wasn’t going to apologize for last night, she had meant everything she had said, and Kenobi certainly needed the sharp wake up call in some regards.

She gave him a sharp nod in farewell, ending the conversation “Well I hope everything goes well for you.” she paused then added, “May the Force be with you.”

He gave a nod back “Thank you, Leia. May it also be with you.”
Leia and Luke arrived at her parents quarters for breakfast, only to be greeted by Threepio.

“Good morning Princess Leia, Master Luke.” the droid said, “Princess Leia your parents asked me to convey the message that both of you should meet them in the Alliance central command.”

Leia felt a cold frisson of fear dance down her spine “Did they say why?”

“I am very sorry, but that information was not left with me.”

“Threepio how long have you been here?” Luke asked.

“Their highnesses were called into a command leadership meeting about two hours ago. Queen Breha instructed me to wait here for you about an hour ago.”

Leia whirled and took off running down the corridors, Luke on her heels. It took every ounce of her self-control not to use the Force to increase her speed. It would only buy her a minute at most, and the questions she would have to answer wouldn’t be worth that. Her mind whirled with all the possibilities that this could be. She had checked in with the analysts last night, and everything had been reported as quiet on Alderaan. Maybe marshall law had been declared? A natural disaster of some sort? Had massive broken out? Someone they knew had been executed? A cacophony of worse case scenarios beat in her head as she raced passed startled personnel, weaving her way through the corridors. She tried to reason with herself, if her parents hadn’t sent C3-PO to the gym it couldn’t be that bad.

She burst into the Command Room, Luke at her heels. She came to an abrupt stop before she plowed into Admiral Ackbar. Every member of the Alliance leadership that was on planet were there, but there were no holographs of anyone off planet. That was a good sign, that meant they weren’t looking at a complete disaster.

All of them turned to stare at her and Luke, astonishment on their faces at their harried entrance

“What’s wrong?” she asked. “Why were we summoned here?”

Bail and Breha exchanged looks with each other, then Breha said soothingly “Nothing has happened on Alderaan Leia, this isn’t about that.”

Leia sucked in air, trying to catch her breath, and regain a little decorum “Oh.”

“My apologies Leia that we weren’t very clear on what is happening. It certainly wasn’t my intention to panic you.” Mon said, calmly walking up to them “But it was of vital importance that the fewest people possible know what I’m about to tell you.”

Leia shook her head “It’s alright, I understand the importance of security precautions.” She and Luke sidled over to her parents, with her trying to ignore the piteous looks everyone was sending her. Well except Draven, he was glaring at her suspiciously as usual. Clearly, he had been outvoted in the decision to include her and Luke in this meeting. She was startled to see Obi-Wan standing next to Mon, looking haggard and tired. When had he gotten back? He was clutching a cup of caff in his hands like it was his lightsaber and she could see the exhaustion written all across his face.

“We have a mission for you and Lt. Skywalker, but I want you to know before we begin to debrief you on it that acceptance is strictly voluntary.” And here Mon gave a stern warning glance at both
of them. “And I want you to hear all the details before you commit to anything.”

Dondonna looked up, surprised “But Mon-” he protested.

She shook her head. “I understand how important this is, but I do not like the odds on it and they get to choose.”

Leia snuck a glance at her parents. Both their faces were polite masks of indifference. This was something they didn't like then. What did Mon want them to do that had her parents so worried?

“Alright.” Luke said, curiosity in his voice “I’m listening.”

“General Draven,” Mon said, yielding her spot to the him “it’s your debrief.”

Draven gave her an unhappy look and then looked at the two of them. He sighed and said “Early yesterday morning we intercepted and decoded a message that was heading to the Outer Rim. We’ve verified its authenticity with two other sources.” He took a deep breath in “The Empire executed Grakkus.”

Leia felt her eyes widen “What? Why?” Swift trial and executions weren’t unheard of in the Empire of course, but Grakkus was a Hutt, one of some importance in the Hutt underworld. He was not a pawn to be sacrificed lightly. It was why the Empire hadn’t executed him last time around, they had merely imprisoned him at the Megalox Beta prison. The Empire had wanted to send a message, but they hadn’t wanted to fracture the alliance that was helping them hold down a rather large piece of the Outer Rim territories for them. What had caused this escalation in the Empire's response?

Draven’s face actually broke out into a genuine smile. “Seems Palpatine was very upset that Grakkus’ collection fell into the hands of a Jedi. And so publicly too.”

“We didn’t take all of it?” Luke offered.

“No, but you took enough. And what you did get was extremely valuable, at least from the perspective of trying to rebuild any Jedi order.” Draven gave Luke a long look “There is also now an arrest warrant for one Poe Dameron issued by the Empire. They still don’t have a good holo of your face, but they definitely will be looking for you now. You’ve also got a bounty being offered for your capture.”

Luke only looked thoughtful “How much?”

“Five million credits.”

Kenobi's eyebrow lifted in surprise “I thought it would be higher than that.” Easy for him to say. Only compared to his bounty did that figure look small. But that amount catapulted Luke into the top ten of the most valuable bounties that the Empire offered.

Draven shrugged “Rumor is it wouldn’t even be that high if Vader wasn’t the one who set it. Everyone knows how he feels about even the hint of a trained Force-user.” Yes, everyone did, but Leia had the sinking feeling that this bounty had more to do with her than Luke. After all, Draven had stated capture, not kill, for that bounty. The man was a paranoid lunatic, but he was nothing if not precise in his debriefs.

“From what our sources tell us most of the Moff's are having trouble believing that the kid in the holos has any Jedi training. It’s not the performance I suppose they were expecting.” He gave Luke a long look “That was deliberate right? I hate to think that you and Obi-Wan aren’t doing anything
useful out there in the jungle.”

Leia’s eyebrows lifted at the slight to her brother. “Of course not. That is just how far Luke is in his training. I mean would any of us have taken into account that the fight would have witnesses or be recorded?”

Draven transferred his glare to her and she felt her mother shift next to her, grabbing her fingers in a subtle warning. That was unusual. Her mother didn’t normally try to run interference for her. Just how much trouble had the general been giving her parents because of her? She had the sinking feeling that it was a lot more than they were saying.

‘Nonetheless,” Mon continued, effectively ending their argument. “We have to qualify this as a success. Any stresses that can be put on the Hutt/Imperial alliance is a victory for us. The more the Empire has to thin out its ranks to hold what it has, the more targets they present, and the easier those targets will be to hit.” There were nods of agreement all around them, and Leia frowned. She didn't remember the Alliance being this aggressive after the destruction of the Death Star. Of course in her past, they had also lost Alderaan, one of its founding members, a good third of their fleet, and their base of operations. Now that they were still hidden, her father was still alive, and Alderaan only under occupation, the leadership seemed to be willing to take a much more aggressive approach with its strategy.

“So how does this lead to a mission for Luke and myself?” she asked.

Willard spoke up for the first time. “In the encrypted message we intercepted, we also found a message demanding that the Hutts present themselves, or an envoy of their choice, to Weapons Factory Alpha for a meeting to renegotiate the terms of their alliance. Given Grakkus' actions and the current resource strain the Empire is under, we don’t think this will be a meeting so much as an extortion from the Hutt's for more supplies and less payment. We intercepted a Hutt shuttle coming in from the Outer Rim approximately four hours ago, carrying an associate of Jabba’s and two guards.

Leia fought to contain nothing but polite interest on her face. This was the Cymoon 1 mission. But that couldn’t be right, this was months before it was supposed to happen. Leia felt a chill work its way up her spine. She had a sinking feeling why she, Luke and Kenobi had been pulled into this meeting.

Mon continued on “We are hoping to switch out the crew, place our own people aboard and sabotage Weapons Factory Alpha.” It was the largest weapons factory in the Empire and was run to the twenty-four hours in a standard Coruscant day. When they had destroyed it in her past it had bought the Alliance much needed time to regroup. They had still been looking for a base at that point and the fleet was horribly vulnerable. Mon continued on "We realize it might be asking too much, but if at all possible we want you to conceal your identities while you are on this mission. While it’s not the highest priority, we would prefer that the Empire think that the Hutt's who did this, not the Alliance." As helpful as it would be for the galaxy to realize that the Empire could be struck repeatedly by the Alliance, Leia could see the wisdom in placing emphasis in fracturing the alliance with the Hutt's.


Ackbar cut in here “You did a good job with Grakkus and given that we only have two uniforms available we can only send a small team.”

Leia kept her focus on Draven. He was not happy about any of this, and she had a pretty good idea as to why. Ackbar could spout as much flattery as he wanted but she knew the real reason they
were approaching the two of them, and it wasn't on the basis of a mission the leadership hadn’t even been debriefed on. She didn’t precisely care who got credit for that mission, and the apparently golden opportunity that had been dropped into the Alliance’s lap because of it. Her only concern lay with that past successes brought a weight to her words that she needed moving forward. But no matter how important an event taking Grakkus out was turning into this wasn’t about her and Luke's ability to pull off the impossible. This was about Han.

“General Kenobi has already agreed to go on this mission. His record in the clone Wars speaks for itself.”

“Knight.” Obi-wan corrected softly.

“Beg pardon?” Ackbar said.

“I prefer the title Knight, not General.” There were baffled looks all around, but the members of the leadership shrugged and nodded their heads.

Leia shot Obi-Wan a worried glance. “I really wished you had talked to me before accepting this mission.”

He merely lifted an eyebrow in her direction.

Leia broadcasted her next thought across the room so Luke would hear. “Did you ask who is coming to negotiate on behalf of the Empire before agreeing?”

At his puzzled frown, she cursed to herself. Dammit.

Her mother shot her a questioning look, clearly picking up on her unease but it was Luke who asked the next question.

“Do we know who the negotiator for the Empire will be?”

Draven shook his head. “Jabba’s people didn’t know. We are hoping that if you get out of here fast enough you won’t run into them. It’s probably going to be one the higher level bureaucrats from the Navy. At least that was the one who handled it last time.” Oh hell, they didn’t even know.

Mon spoke up “As I said before, this is a strict volunteer mission only.” Now she understood why her parents were so upset about this. This caveat must have been in to appease them. “The rewards of this mission are high, it would be a double blow to the Empire. We would simultaneously put more fractures in the alliance with the Hutts and push back their ability to manufacture weapons. We won’t get another shot like this anytime soon. However, I am deeply concerned about the lack of prep time and the frankly impossible odds you will be facing.”

She didn’t even know the half of it, but Mon still did have the right of it. True the Alliance’s position was not nearly as precarious as it had been last time, but this action would definitely remove a very valuable piece from the board. She weighed what not doing this would do to the long term survival of the Rebellion. There was also the consideration that it might not be Vader who showed up this time. His standing in the Empire had certainly taken a blow with the destruction of the Death Star. And as far as she knew he wasn’t doing much to repair that status, random executions in ballrooms aside. Oh no, he was focused on annoying her every chance he got.

She was willing to take that risk but was she willing to throw Obi-Wan and Luke into that gamble? She also wondered if all the hard earned credit she had been slowly amassing over the past weeks would be blown away if she refused to go. Would she be seen as a coward? Or too young and
inexperienced? That the previous mission was a fluke, and it was Obi-Wan who truly pulled it off. Leia could feel all the options and plans she had for the future being closed off. Was there a way to refuse without refusing?

Mon asked “Princess Leia?”

Frantically she seized upon the only thing she could think of. “Of course, as long as our participation does not rely on us being able to convince Captain Solo to take us there.” There were startled glances all around the table. She wanted to snort, and Draven for once looked like he was in agreement with her. She wasn’t stupid. There was only one person on this base currently who was a known associate of Jabba’s that they could use as a reasonable replacement for an envoy.

“I’m with Leia.” Luke spoke up “He’s a trusted ally, but that’s it. He’s an ally. He’s not a member of this rebellion and has a reputation and livelihood outside of us.” Oh, she was banking on that. This was also too early for Han to be willing to take such a risk. If it ever got out that he was the one that helped them his smuggling career would be over. This Han was not ready to make that leap yet, at least not on behest of the Alliance. Maybe in a month or two but not right now. Now if she and Luke were the ones to do the asking…..

Mon gave her an enigmatic smile. “No, in fact, it doesn’t. We’ve already approached him and his only conditions were that he would only work with you two. And since anywhere Luke goes Knight Kenobi follows he also demanded that Commander Rex also come along to and I quote 'Keep on top of the crazy old wizard.’”

Well hell, she had gotten royally outmaneuvered on this one.

Five minutes later the five of them had gathered in Bail and Breha’s room to “plan” the mission.

“Leia, what has got you so rattled?” her mother asked quietly as soon as the door closed behind them.

Leia took a deep breath in, knowing the bomb she was about to drop on all of them. “In my timeline, Vader was the negotiator that was sent,” she answered back.

There was dead silence among everyone in the room for a few seconds. Then, almost all of them at the same time started speaking.

“We have to back out!” Luke said.

“Leia why didn’t you warn us about this?” her father demanded.

“Leia are you sure?” Obi-Wan asked.

She held up her hand for silence. As they all quieted she began answering them “Papa I didn’t mention it, because this mission is happening months ahead of when it did before. The Empire only imprisoned Grakkus they didn’t execute him. That’s putting pressure in corners I didn’t account for.”

“If you would only give us a general overview of what happened before we could help you figure out what you aren’t taking into account.” her father insisted stubbornly.

She thought they were past this. “Maybe, or maybe the leadership would be so focused on what might happen they wouldn’t see what is happening. If I had told them how things went with this in
my timeline would they even have been listening as hard to see what the fallout was?” He didn’t answer that.

“I’m right, aren’t I? Your doubting that they would. And we would have missed this opportunity because we would have been looking for it far too late. This is a perfect example of where using my past as a guideline can lead us astray.”

She turned to her brother then “Luke we can’t back out. How are we going to explain that to Mon? Tell them her I’m a time traveler and there is a good possibility that Vader is going to show up? Besides, if we pull this off, it will be worth it.”

“Obi-Wan, I’m not sure if he will be there” She gave them all a wan smile. “This is months early, Vader is still in deep disgrace over the destruction of the Death Star. Maybe we’ll get lucky and Palpatine decides to send someone else.”

Luke snorted “When has luck been on our side lately? I’m telling you, Leia, this is a very bad idea.”

Breha nodded slowly “Leia I’m hesitant to tell you what you can and cannot do. You are an adult, and your decisions are your own. But I agree with your brother. This mission was a long shot in the best of circumstances, but now…” her voice trailed off.

Leia sighed and pushed away her own fear. “It’s too late now to back off. We have a very small window to get that shuttle back on its course or it’s going to be very obvious something has gone wrong. Besides,” and here she grimaced “if Vader does show up, maybe we can use my presence to our advantage.”

“Leia no!” Luke said. “You haven’t done any training to hide your presence from him.” Great another thing she had to do because of Vader. She was getting tired of this. “There is nothing there that is worth putting you that much at risk.”

“Oh and you’ve mastered that trick have you?” she shot back, irritated with his double standards. He was in as much danger as her from Vader, perhaps even more because Vader didn’t know who he was, and wouldn’t hesitate to kill him. “We managed to blow the factory before, even with Vader there. This is doable!” Her brother gave a shake of his head

“If we do this we need to leave now,” Obi-Wan cautioned. “It’s supposed to start in a day or so and the sooner we leave, the sooner we get there, and the less likely we will meet Vader there.”

“We can attach the shuttle to the Falcon using the docking ring and use that to make up for lost time. Last time we took them separately, and Chewie and Threepio were waiting for us when we arrived. We just jump in a few sectors before Cymoon 1 and follow the game plan as before.”

Obi-Wan sighed. “That will be cutting it awfully close for Rex, Chewbacca, and I to be in place.”

Luke perked up “So Obi-Wan and Rex go in with Han and we stay outside.”

She shook her head “Han will never agree to that. Hell, the only reason he probably agreed to do this at all was to watch ‘our’ backs, and he’s non-negotiable. He has to be the one walking in the front door.” And of all times for her to underestimate his growing loyalty to them, it had to be now. If he had still been just a tad bit more selfish her refusal would have worked.

“And what about the rest of the team?” Luke challenged “Are we going to leave them in the dark.”

“Rex is a soldier, he understands that sometimes intel isn’t shared.” Obi-Wan offered.
“Crappy way to treat your friend, General.” Luke shot back. “And Rex may be a soldier, but Han and Chewie aren’t. The only reason they got roped into this is because they trust us. Are you saying we should abuse that?”

She didn’t like the fact they couldn’t tell Han, Chewie, and Rex about the deadline they were facing. Having half the team unaware there was a time crunch was counterproductive at best and self-sabotaging at worst.

The alternative though was to let the Empire’s main production line continue on unabated. Their own forces still were depleted, they need the small breather this would give them. It wasn’t as essential as it had been last time, but accomplishing this would help keep them on track. Nobody else could do this, it was Han or no one. And he had made it very clear he would only go with them.

She took a deep breath in. If she had more time, she was sure she could reassure Luke more gently. Or manage to convince him that the necessity of this outweighed the risks. That they were committed and there was no turning back. But time was something that they had almost none of. Hating herself a bit, Leia used the argument she knew that would sway Luke and sway him now. “There are slaves in that factory,” she said softly, focusing in on his face. Luke’s breath came in on a sharp exhalation.

“No.” he protested. “It’s all automated.”

She gave a bitter laugh “Oh and the Empire never lies. The Empire never uses slave labor. It’s all ‘prisoners’ doing their just penance to society.” Luke’s face was ashen, but he still looked uncertain. She went in for the kill. “They’re there Luke. I wouldn’t lie to you about something like this. In my timeline, your alternate found them.”

Luke swallowed hard “Did you free them?” he asked.

Leia bit her lip, the sight of all those people being mowed down by Vader and the stormtroopers replaying in her mind’s eye. “They died free,” she offered.

Luke closed his eyes, his need to protect her conflicting with his need to see this injustice right. She said nothing. Even at this young of an age, you could never tell Luke what to do. He had to come to his own conclusions or he would fight you the entire way. He could be persuaded, or swayed, but never ordered.

He sighed “I have a very bad feeling about this,” he finally offered, reopening his eyes and focusing on Obi-Wan, “but I don’t see a better choice.”

Breha’s eyes closed and she whispered, “May all the Gods watch over you then.”

Cymoon 1 was located in the Corellian Industrial Cluster, with a huge debris field surrounding it. That was fortunate for them. Leia found it ironic that despite her deep dislike of it, they kept using plans from her original timeline, with a few modifications to accommodate Obi-Wan and Rex, to go forward.

Obi-Wan, Rex, and Chewie would jump in on the far side of the moon, and power down to the lowest levels possible. They would use minimal thrusters and the debris field as cover and fall in a gentle arc towards the moon. They could fool the sensors into thinking it was just another piece of detritus falling to the moon’s surface, at least they had last time. Once near the surface, they would
skim along until they landed the Falcon in one of the many trash heaps around the complex. Then Rex and Obi-Wan would head out to be their backup on the outside, while Chewie remained with the Falcon.

She and Luke were dressing up as two of Jabba’s guards. With the facemasks obscuring their faces, they were hoping nobody could identify them. Han was just being Han, the whole plan relied on the Empire’s spy network noticing his face.

“So it’s Obi-Wan, me and Chewie who are going to be watching your backs on the outside of the facility?” Rex asked as they stood in the galley of the Falcon.

Leia shook her head “Somebody, besides Threepio needs to stay with the ship.”

“And why did we bring Goldenrod?” Han asked dryly.

“We’re taking R2 with us,” she pointed out “Unless you want to rely on your slicing skills to erase all the footage of you being there and also set the power core to explode?” Han rolled his eyes, but he didn’t contradict her. “So we need Threepio to stay with the ship to talk to the Falcon if there is a mechanical failure somewhere on this bucket of bolts.”

“Do you have to insult my baby?” he whined.

“Her? No, she’s lovely. It’s your ability to keep her in the air I question.”

Rex coughed, interrupting them before Han could really get going. “And why does Chewbacca need to stay with the ship?”

“To keep the native scavengers from stripping the Falcon of all it’s component parts.”

Rex looked at her blankly “And how do you know this?”

“Research.” she said flatly.

“When did you find the time?” he asked, baffled.

“I made the time.” she said, then hoping to get him off this subject she asked, “Do I even need to bother asking you where you're going?”

“I’m with my general.” Obi-Wan wasn’t in the room to take offense to the thought that he needed watching. Rex had bullied the man into one of the sleeping quarters to take a nap until they arrived at the moon. Leia wasn’t surprised to learn that Kenobi had been pulled immediately into the meeting as soon as he landed on his return, the man looked like he hadn’t slept in days. She wondered if his trip to Dagobah had gone well. Given the stress that was pouring off the older man, she wasn’t inclined to think so. Yoda must not have reacted well to the news of her presence.

“Future problem,” she reminded herself “Focus on the here and now.”

“Okay, we ready for this?” Han asked.

Luke and Leia nodded and R2 gave an affirmative whistle.

“Alright then.” He turned to Chewie “Don’t crash my ship.”

“You are far more likely to do that than I am.”

“It’s my ship, I can crash it if I want to.”
Rex grinned and turned to Luke. “You know your father had a very similar attitude to his ships.”

“Really?” Luke looked delighted “I thought he was a good pilot? At least that is what everyone tells me.”

“Oh he was great at flying, he could pull off moves you had to see to believe. Landing, on the other hand, was a different story.”

Leia winced but kept her mouth shut. This wasn’t like Obi-Wan, Rex didn't know any better and she couldn’t begrudge the man his loyalty and love to Anakin Skywalker. He didn’t know any better.

They dropped the Falcon out of hyperspace and the three of them clambered into the stolen shuttle still slave docked to the Falcon. As soon as he closed the hatch Luke knocked on it several times to let Rex know they were ready. Leia heard a slight hiss, and then there was a slight jolt as the shuttle drifted away from the Falcon. Within seconds both ships jumped into hyperspace.

They were greeted by the same warm welcome that they had received last time. A loud snotty voice blasted over the shuttles' speakers the second that they dropped out of hyperspace. “Tatooine Shuttle,” and that was the name assigned to this ship. The Hutt’s had little imagination outside of making money and amassing power “your credentials have been approved. You are cleared for landing at the weapons Factory Alpha. Deviate from your approved flight path and you will be obliterated. Welcome to the Corellian Industrial Cluster. Welcome to Cymoon 1.”


“Most Imperial officers thinks it’s beneath them to deal with smugglers and bandits.” Leia remarked cheerfully “Fortunately the Alliance isn’t so picky.”

“Hey!” Han objected.

Luke swallowed his amusement. “Is this going to be a thing with you two? Because once again we are facing mortal peril and you two are flirting.”

“No we’re not!!” both of them shot back at Luke, who only grinned at them unrepentant.

“Get your mask on Kid,” Han grumbled as they approached the landing dock. “We got a factory to blow.”

They exited the ship down the gangplank. There was an Imperial official standing there, a phalanx of stormtroopers at his back, with one droid standing to his right. “Greetings in the name of the Emperor. He thanks you for joining us here today and hopes our negotiations prove swift and fruitful. I am Overseer Aggadeen. Whom do I have the honor of addressing?”

Aggadeen was not out of the ordinary as far as imperial bureaucrats went. Pompous, arrogant, and with just a hint of cruelty in his address. A petty man who believed he had more power than he actually did. Leia couldn’t remember if he was the one here last time. Probably, but then again these flunkies did tend to all blend together in her mind.

Han actually swaggered as he walked up to the man. Given that he was standing in front of her Leia couldn’t see the cocky grin that was on his face, but she could hear it in his voice as he replied
“The official emissary of his High Exaltedness, the illustrious Jabba the Hutt. Mightiest of all the Hutts, Master of Tatooine and Grand Warlord of the Outer Rim.” She would accuse him of grandstanding, but that actually was how Jabba instructed all of his minions to refer to him as.

“My name is Han Solo. But you can call me Han.” He reached out and took Aggadeen’s hand. Leia had to give Han credit for seizing control of the conversation. The Imperial looked like he would rather shake hands with a dead Mon Calamari than shake the hand of a known smuggler, but couldn't see a way to avoid the gesture without giving offense.

The droid standing next to the Overseer looked at Han and said, “Identity confirmed. Han Solo, captain of the Millennium Falcon. Known associate of Jabba the Hutt.”

“Yes well,” Aggadeen said, withdrawing his hand as soon as Han let it go. He subtly wiped it on his pants. “You'll forgive me for not recognizing you Mr. Solo. We tend to execute smugglers around here.”

“Don’t blame you in the slightest. We’re a shifty lot and liable to steal the clothes off your back.” Han slapped his hands together and rubbed them “Now if you don’t mind, I would like to get started as soon as possible. I don’t know about you but my boss is not what you would call a patient being.”

The Imperial sniffed. “Your ‘bodyguards’ and yourself need to surrender all your blasters here. There are no weapons permitted by outsiders on the factory floor.”

“Of course,” Han said smoothly. He turned and addressed them “Gentleman if you please.”

She and Luke unholstered their stolen blasters and handed them to the waiting stormtrooper. “Not that I don’t trust you, but I also need you to walk through these scanners” Aggadeen gestured to the tall black arch behind them. “The droid too.”

“Look If it makes you feel safer, then, by all means, lead the way.”

They all passed under the arch and Aggadeen looked to the tech who was reading the screen. “They’re clean sir,” he said in a bored voice.

Leia felt her brother relax just a fraction at that pronouncement. She told him that his lightsaber wouldn’t set the system off. It was too rare of a weapon for the Empire to spend the time and money to program the scanners to look for it.

Aggadeen was talking to Han as they walked through the vast doors at the front of the complex and entered onto the factory floor. The room, no this wasn’t a room, this was a deliberately constructed cavern, stretched out before them. There were assembly lines upon assembly lines of TIE fighters being worked on. Leia noted that even here, all the ships were assembled my machine. Even to the Hutt’s, who certainly wouldn’t care and probably provided them with plenty of labor from the Outer Rim, the Empire was not showing its secrets. They continued at a leisurely place that set Leia’s teeth on edge, as Aggadeen went droning on and on about something. Leia could just make out that he was talking, but the words themselves were lost in the background noise coming from the factory floor. It was deafening and she had no idea if Han could even hear the man or was just nodding along out of politeness.

They finally made it to the end of the walkway and went through blast shield doors. As they closed behind them the Overseer gestured to a finely appointed conference room to her left.

“And here is where you will wait for the negotiator.”
“Looks quiet.”

“It’s shielded yes.”

“And this is where we will be negotiating?”

The Imperial snorted “It appears you have some misconceptions about what will happen here today Mr. Solo. There will be no bargaining. The negotiator will deliver the Empire’s terms and then you will accept them. Your organization will provide whatever materials we require and you will take the pay you are given, without complaint.”

“Why here?” Han asked, adopting his most aggravating attitude.

“Don’t be idiotic. Why would we hold negotiations on the factory floor?” The twit asked.

“Don’t you remember? You just said it yourself. We aren’t here to negotiate. R2!” Han barked, his own arrogant smirk crossing his face.

R2 gave a beep and then started dumping the liquid they stored in one of his compartments.

“Your droid appears to be...leaking,” Aggadeen said, faintly bemused.

Han didn’t flinch, didn’t lose focus as R2 brought out his arc welder and aimed at the liquid now seeping under several of their escorts feet. While not flammable, the sensors they passed on their way here would have noticed that it was highly conductive. The electricity shot up all the guard's legs and they collapsed before they even realized there was a problem.

Leia reached up and kicked the guard standing behind her in the knee. He gave out a cry as he fell to the floor and she quickly pushed his head down as hard as she could manage. There was a grunt, then he fell silent.

Standing, she looked over to make sure Luke had handled his guard to see him standing and pointing a blaster at Aggadeen. Seeing that everyone was down except the Overseer, she allowed Han to continue talking. She had no way of explaining why she knew where the power control room was.

“What kind of envoy are you?” Aggadeen asked, sweat starting to bead on his brow.

“Well,” Han said lightly, grabbing a fallen blaster from the floor and aiming it at him “We are the very aggressive kind. Now, where is the power control room?”

The man’s chin lifted in a sign of false bravado “I am an officer of the Imperial Navy. I do not give into the likes of you!!”

“Really?” Han drawled. Then he smirked and tipped his head to the droid. “What about him?” R2 rolled forward, still brandishing his arc welder and let the sparks fly menacingly.

Aggadeen gulped and then pointed to the corridor to his left “That way.”

“Kid?” Han asked under his breath.

Luke snorted. Taking that as an affirmative Han turned back to the officer “Thank you so much for your cooperation.” Then, using the hand not holding the blaster, he socked the man across the jaw. Aggadeen went down without another word.

“Let’s move.”
“We just can’t leave them all lying here like this.” Leia protested, what was it with Han and leaving unconscious bodies everywhere? “Someone is bound to notice.”

“What do you suggest we do? Drag them along with us?” Han shot back.

Leia glanced around her, hoping to find a closet or small room they could stuff everyone into. Then she spotted a chute door just a little to the right and behind where Han was standing. A wicked grin crossed her face. Oh, this was too ironic to pass up.

“We put them in there.” she said, pointing.

Han followed her finger and then taking in what he was seeing blurted out “You want to throw them down into the trash compactor?”

“Yes.”

A slow wicked grin crossed over his face. “I really love it when you’re mean to other people.”

She gave him a saucy grin in return “I know.”

“Do you need a little privacy to finish this? Or can we start throwing these guys down there?” Luke asked, a snigger hidden behind his reasonable question.

Guilty they both turned and joined Luke in dragging the bodies over to the shoot. When Han had his back to them Luke tauntingly mouthing the word “Flirting!” over and over again. She scowled at him.

“Mind your own business little brother.” she shot back.

He only gave her a bratty smile and continued on with their work.

“Okay, now can we go?” Han asked as the shoved Aggadeen down the chute.

“I give permission yes,” she answered back. Han rolled his eyes and they took off down the corridor. As they made their way to the power room Luke spoke into the comms. “Guys we’re in, heading to the power station now. How are things on your end?”

<These creatures do not understand ‘go away’> she heard Chewie answer, irritation clear in his voice, as she heard blaster fire follow his words. <But so far the Falcon is fine.>

“I must concur with Chewbacca.” Threepio chimed in “Though I feel compelled to inform you that the odds of him being able to hold them off for more then fifteen munites is 651 to 1. For now, all scans show that all internal and external systems are still intact.”

“Things are nice and quiet on our end,” Rex volunteered. Chewie growled his displeasure over that and Leia heard more blaster fire.

“Tell them to keep an eye out.” Han interjected, “Aggo mentioned that an Imperial negotiator was on his way, so sooner rather than later, we're going to have company.”

“Did you copy that?” Luke asked.

“Yes.” Obi-Wan said.”We will remain here and keep watch.”

They entered the power room and Leia gave Luke a subtle head nod to the door that was in the back of the room. He nodded, showing he understood and quickly slipped away.
“R2?” Han asked.

[On it!] The droid chirped, heading over to one of the open data ports and plugging himself in.

As they stood in the silence, waiting for the little astromech to complete his task Leia offered “Thank you for doing this.”

Han snorted “Thank me when we get out of here.”

“No Han I mean it.” she insisted “You didn't have to help us, or the Alliance.”

He shrugged, clearly uncomfortable with her gratitude. “Win for me too. The fewer ships the Empire has to chase down smugglers like me, the better business is.”

“It’s still quite the risk.” she pressed, not wanting to let this go until he got it through his thick skull. Although this unexpected move made it so that she had few options but to walk directly into Vader's path, there was no way he could have known that. He was trying to help, and he deserved her thanks for it. “Even after R2 erases all the footage of you being here, and this place blows sky high, there is going to be an official inquiry. There could be survivors who identify you as to how we got in.”

“No risk, no reward.” he gave her a nonchalant look, “Besides there is no telling what kind of trouble you and the kid could get into without me here.” Then, noticing Luke’s absence from the room, looked around “Speaking of which, where did he go?”

[Got it!!] R2-D2 beeped [All safety protocols have been disabled, and I’ve set the reactor to full power. We have about 15.63 minutes to evacuate beyond the blast range.] He disengaged from the port.

“Thanks, R2,” Leia said softly.

“I swear I take my eyes off one of you for just a second…” Han muttered.

Luke then reappeared, a small bruise on his face above the half mask he still wore, but other than that unharmed.

“Where did you go?” Han demanded, his hands falling to his hips.


“Now there is a surprise. You vanish and a complication appears.”

That was when a too-thin Twi’lek appeared behind her brother. Dressed in a tattered gray prisoners uniform, she looked around furtively searching for any guards.


“Found them downstairs, locked away.”

Han groaned. “Them? How many is them?”

“About thirty I think.”

“There is no way we are going to be able to sneak that many people past the guards at the front entrance.”
R2 piped up [In the likely event of us being spotted, or running into an unforeseen ‘complication’ I studied the schematics of this base while I was in the mainframe. There is a maintenance tunnel, not three corridors down from here that runs underneath the base straight into the trash heaps.]

“Really? Leia asked the droid.

He gave her a burst of short whistles that was his version of laughter. [It pays to think ahead with this team.]

“What did he say?” Han demanded.

“That we are helpless incompetents who would all die without him.” Leia said dryly “Also there is a maintenance tunnel not far from here that we can use to get to the trash heaps.”

“Well then,” Luke said ‘let’s get going.”

R2 and Luke were at the head of their party, with Leia and Han bringing up the rear. They only had the three blasters stolen from the guards, so none of the former prisoners, _slaves call them what they are Leia, slaves_, were armed. Leia wasn’t sure even if they had any extra weapons she would give them to anyone. Too many of them were shaking, whether, from outright terror or starvation, she couldn't really tell. And a few of them had a look in their eyes that said they would shoot anything that wore an Imperial uniform. Leia couldn’t blame them in the slightest for that, but so far they had managed to avoid attracting notice. She didn’t think any of those beings would take that into consideration.

They managed, by the Force or a minor miracle, to get the whole crew down the corridors to the door that led into the tunnel without being spotted. It wasn’t a blast door, just the standard width, so they could only stream in two people at a time, but they managed to stay undetected until she and Han were about to go through. The door suddenly slammed shut without warning. Both of them tensed, expecting the wailing of alarms to indicate they had been spotted, but there was nothing but silence.

“Han!!” Luke’s voice came out of Han’s communicator.

“Get them to Falcon Kid.” Han instructed “Leia and I will find another way out.”

“But-” he started to protest and Leia grabbed the com from Han’s hand to speak into it directly.

“We don’t have time to argue. There are no alarms Luke, this wasn’t because we were spotted. It’s standard Imperial procedure to lock down all exterior doors before the visit of a high-ranking officer.” There was dead silence on the other end of the comm and she felt his panic, then it spurted away as he reigned it in.

She pressed on “Get them out of here Luke. They don’t deserve to die here.” reminding him of their fate in another time. “We’ll head to the back gate and call you and Chewie when we reach it. It’s got less defensive capabilities and guards, you can come get us.”

There was a heavy sigh. “Understood,” he said grimly.

“R2?” Leia continued on the comm “How much time do we have?”

[Thirteen minutes Leia.]
“Okay.” she muttered, looked up at Han “Let’s go flyboy.”

“With such a nice invitation how can I refuse?” he asked.

Leia looked both ways down the corridor, trying to decide which way would be the most likely to lead to an exit. She could, just faintly in the distance, hear the sounds of the factory floor coming from her right “We’re going this way.” she said pointing to her left.

“Why?”

“Factory floor is that way.” she pointed down the hallway “Stands to reason that the back loading dock this place would be, you know, in the back of the factory.”

“Smartass,” but there was no heat in the word.

“Let’s go,” she muttered as they began walking down the hallway. She had to keep reminding herself that though the hallways were empty of people, it was not empty of cameras. It was bad enough they were wandering the halls of this base without an escort if they started running, or hell even walking fast, it was bound to catch someone's attention somewhere.

At every intersection, they would cock their heads, trying to determine which way they should go. Why the Empire refused to clearly label their exits was beyond her. Yes, in a situation like this, where there were intruders it did lead them in circles, but it also meant any personnel on this base would be screwed in case of an emergency. Then again the Empire didn’t much care about its people. There were plenty of ways to replace them if they died. There were all viewed as cogs in the machine. It was one of the most infuriating things about the Empire. It wasn’t just that they didn’t care about the people they ruled, they didn’t even care about their own.

“Any ideas on what to do if we’re caught?” Han asked.

“No,” she admitted “making this up as I go along.”

He gave her a cocky grin “Oh don’t worry your Highness, talking my way out of sticky situations is what I am best at.”

Leia reminded herself that if she laughed right now he wouldn’t take it the right way. Han was charming and personable but his tongue got him in more trouble then it got him out of. But he was showing off, preening, in front of her in a life and death situation. It was adorable how this baby Han thought she would be impressed by these cool lines uttered under pressure.

As they reached another intersection Leia looked around and cursed. “Pretty sure we’ve come this way.”

“How can you tell?” whined Han “they all look the same.”

“Yeah, but if you pay attention-” Leia’s voice trailed off. A storm of cold dark fury just appeared out of nowhere. There was a long pregnant pause in the Force and Leia felt a quick flare of pleased surprise and shock wash over her. Then all of it just stopped.

“Pay attention to what?” Han demanded, but she heard him like a distant bug flying near her ears.

So Vader had just arrived in the system. So much for hoping that Palpatine would send anyone else. "Did you really believe that yourself?" Han's voice said mockingly in her mind. She felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up as every sense went on alert. The one advantage they had was that he hadn’t been expecting her here. He was genuinely surprised she was on the planet.
“Leia!!” Oh, wonderful, Vader was intense enough that Luke just felt all of that. There was panic and worry in his Force presence. She cut him off before he could even suggest what she knew he wanted to do.

“We’ve got time till he makes planetfall.” she sent to her brother “Get them out of here!!”

She got the sense that he wanted to argue with her, but then her comm crackled to life.

“Vader just entered the system,” Kenobi said over it.

Han’s eyes widened. “Are you sure?” he demanded.

“No Captain I just made it up to make you move faster.”

“No need to get snippy.” Han shot back.

“I’m informing you because it would not be wise for me to remain so close to the landing area. Rex and I are heading to the back gate for extraction. We’ll meet you there.” The comm dropped off.

Han gave her a long suspicious look, “Did you hear that?”

She arched an eyebrow “I’m not deaf, Han.”

“Just wanted to check since you drifted off into your own head again. Normally I wouldn’t mind, but it’s somewhat inconvenient when you do that while we are trying to flee for our lives.”

She wasn’t sure how to explain to him about why she had drifted off, but she was saved from having to give an explanation by the wailing of the alarms.

“Well, I’d say they know we’re here.”

Vader must have told them, and for once she actually thanked him in her head for his timing. “No sense in trying to be subtle anymore,” she muttered as she ripped off that damn face mask throwing it to the side. She took off at a dead run, the opposite way they had the last time they had been in this corridor. Apparently, she chose correctly this time because they came to a loading dock door.

She and Han placed themselves on either side of the door to avoid any incoming fire from anyone who might be on the other side.

“I go high, you go low.” he told her, his hand poised over the button to open it.

She rolled her eyes “I hardly think it would work the other way.”

His hand moved to press the button, and with a swoosh, it opened. There was no immediate blaster fire, so she stepped into the open doorway, dropping to one knee, and aiming her blaster straightforward. Han stayed standing, on the other side of the door, his blaster also pointing forward. There was only the long gray square that was the landing bay, bracketed on all sides by huge mounds of discarded waste. Leia never thought she would be so happy to see piles of garbage in her life.

“There they are!!!” came a cry from behind them.

Both she and Han instantly burst through the doorway and Han turned around to close the door. A few shot got through before they closed with a loud thud. Han shot the controls.

“That should hold them for a bit.” He pulled out his comm as he and Leia broke out into a run onto
the tarmac. Those weren't blast doors and were much easier to cut through. They wouldn't hold for long and they needed to be as far away as possible before the phalanx of stormtroopers came pouring out. Their only hope for cover was at least a hundred yards ahead of them.

“Obi-Wan where the hell are you and Rex?”

“About two minutes out Solo,” Rex replied.

“Put a little speed into it, we are about to have company and we need the backup. Chewie!!!”

“I heard you, Han, I’m on my way. But we have a problem with Luke he-> the comm crackled and the rest of Chewie’s sentence died with it.

“Someone just turned on a jammer,” Leia muttered.

“Of course Luke isn’t following the plan.” Han grumbled, “He never has before, why start now?”

Then there was a roll of anticipation and longing, and it wasn’t Luke she was sensing. Obi-Wan apparently had been correct that Vader couldn’t hide his presence for long if he was doing something else, despite his efforts to practice. There were cracks forming in his shields, and she had a pretty good bead on where he was in relation to her. He was heading her way and was far too close for her comfort. Leia felt the sweat trickle down the back of her neck as she and Han moved forward, heading to the edge of the tarmac, and temporary safety.

She reached out for Luke, who was also moving towards her, but much slower then he would have been if he had been in the Falcon. Great, he was on foot and heading their way. She stumbled a bit as Vader’s surprise and curiosity washed over her. In her haste to keep track of both of them, she had lowered her shields far too much and she felt like she had been scraped raw by the power of the Sith Lord’s emotions. Adjusting, she thickened them a bit and just as she reached the edge of the tarmac she relocated Vader’s general location.

Dammit. Dammit. Dammit. Vader was peeling away from chasing her. What the hell had caught his attention? There were only two possible answers to that question and only one of them was stupid enough to try this.

“Luke!” she called out “What are you doing?”

“Protecting you!” he answered back, his desperation making his mental voice clear.

A blaster shot whizzed by her head, missing her by inches. She whirled around and behind her and Han a whole cadre of stormtroopers peeled out of the door. Han grabbed her arm and cried out “This way!!!” He pulled her to the bottom of one of the trash heaps, seeking cover behind what looked like a broken TIE wing.

“Luke, now is not the time to play hero!” she shouted back “Run!” She leaned out to the left, and let out three shots, and all three hit their intended targets before she pulled back to her cover. She would have been more proud of that if it wasn’t for the fact she sure it was the Force guiding her more than her own reflexes. Her attention was badly divided here, and she was relying on it to cover both ends more than she was comfortable with.

“I can handle this!” he insisted. Oh, by all the Gods he was going to get himself killed, and this was all her fault. She should have told him, he wouldn’t be rushing to confront their father if he knew the truth. And now he was about to be cut down like an animal at a slaughterhouse because she was a coward.
“No you can’t!!” she yelled back, “You think I can handle your death any more than you can handle mine? Luke, please!! There is no way I can do this without you. Don’t leave me here all alone.”

She felt a wave of surprise break through his anger, and he hesitated.

“All right,” he said, “I’m heading your way.”

“Thank you.” Leia breathed a sigh of relief, and then the Force screamed. She looked up to see what was wrong and caught the glint of sunlight bouncing off a shiny metal object about two hundred yards in front of her. There was the smallest white figure moving out there on the trash hills and Leia felt her blood go cold. Sharpshooter.

She looked over to Han to see if he was okay and saw that there two of him. One was popping up, and shooting at the stormtroopers. The second one was in the process of ducking behind the TIE wing. She blinked in confusion, was this a Force vision? She never had one before, but Luke had mentioned them to her several times. So that left her with the question which one was the real Han?

As she sat there dumbfounded, the two Han’s switched places, the first one now the ground, the second one standing. If she was reading this right, the one on the ground seemed to be about thirty seconds behind the Han who was currently standing. Then the one standing jerked forward, as a blaster shot caught him in the back. He turned to face her, an almost comical look of surprise on his face. Leia could see the darkened area where the blast had passed through his chest.

“No.” she whimpered, the grief welling up in her like a desperate animal. Not again, she couldn’t lose Han like this again. She wasn’t strong enough to survive losing him, especially since she had been given this second improbable chance. “NO!” she screamed. Then the shot Han disappeared and the other one, who was just now starting to rise turned to face her, a look of concern on his face.

“Leia?”

She didn’t even bother to answer, just used the Force to surge forward and tackle him to the ground. There was a burst of pain in her back, and she gasped out loud as it hit her full on. But it faded quickly enough. Okay, this wasn’t so bad, the shot she had taken on Endor had hurt worse than this.

“Leia?” she heard from below her. She turned her head to face Han as he laid below her, concern written all over his features. Leia tried to open her mouth to tell him she was fine, but strangely enough, the words wouldn’t come. His eyes widened and he placed his hand on her back. She still didn’t feel anything, but his face paled. He drew his hand back towards him and when it crossed her line of vision, she could see it was smeared with blood.

“Oh, no, no, no, no,” he said, voice rising in his panic “No you don’t get to do this.”

Then he was gone and time seemed to jump on her because now instead of lying on top of him, she was on her side, and Han’s boots were right in her line of vision. Oh, that was because he was standing, and from the sound of it, still trying to shoot the stormtroopers coming their way.

“About time you showed up!!” he screamed “Obi-Wan help me! Rex, see to her, she’s bleeding!!”

“I am?” she thought. She tried to focus, tried to get her body to move. They were still in danger, she needed to help Han. She needed to help Luke. They needed to get the hell off this rock. Then she heard the familiar buzz of a lightsaber swinging through the air. When had Obi-Wan gotten
here? She tried to fumble for her blaster and cried out as the pain spiked down her side in a jagged arch.

“Leia!?!?” two male voices screamed at her in the Force, and oh, she must have broadcasted that feeling across the whole damn planet. She tried to rein it in, Luke couldn’t be distracted right now. And wait, was that other voice Vader?

There were hands pressing on her side “Senator I need you to stay damn still!!” Somehow she had missed Rex was kneeling beside her, he was tearing fabric off her uniform. She tried to move again and he snarled at her “Every time you move you make it worse!!! If you don’t stay absolutely still I swear by all my brothers I will tie you up.”

Rex had never been anything but respectful to her. If he was reverting to treating her like a child then that meant this was bad. He only did that when Obi-Wan was being especially idiotic.

Rex, let out what sound like a swear in Mando and then said softly “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, but I don’t have any pain meds on me right now. This is going to hurt.” She tried to brace herself, she needed to stay silent in the Force. Then there was pressure on her back and the pain wiped everything away. When she came to her senses she could hear herself screaming and could feel Vader and Luke's absolute panic.

“Leia hold on!” Vader was screaming, and moving fast towards her.


“No Luke, don’t!” she said. Or maybe only thought it, she couldn’t tell “Stay away, or he’ll find you too.”

There was no answer, and Leia could feel everything slipping away. She fought to remain conscious, fought to remain here. But she had limits, and she had hit every single one of them. Her last thought, before her eyes closed, and she slipped into the darkness, was that this was going to turn into the most awkward family reunion ever.
Leia was floating. She could hear voices above her, around her? Where was she?

“Leia!” that was Luke, why was he so upset? She tried to answer him, but she was so tired. Maybe in a bit. She slipped back into the darkness.

“Leia!” It was louder this time. Leia stirred, and she tried to will herself to pay attention.

“Luke don’t.” That was Obi-Wan's voice. Why was the man here? He didn’t belong.

“But-”

“Luke you can’t go that far into her mind. It’s not safe. We don’t know how aware she is right now. She could attack you not realizing who she was hurting.” As if she would ever do such a thing. She knew Luke like she knew her own heartbeat. And as soon as she was able to open her eyes she was going to tell Obi-Wan off for thinking such stupid things.

“I don’t care.” There was her brother’s stubbornness. Good for him.

“Then consider this, it’s also not safe for her Luke. Neither of you are properly trained enough to delve that far. Any stray thought, any strong feeling on your part and she will be wide open to it.”

“I can keep myself in check!!”

“She could pull you into one of her memories, or worse a nightmare, and you would be caught along for the ride.”

“I’m definitely not leaving her to that then.”

“And if in your panic in one of them you rip her mind apart trying to escape?”

There was a sense of worry, grief, of failure. That wasn’t right, Luke was doing fine in his training, as far as she could tell. “Alright,” he agreed reluctantly.

Leia felt a bit disappointed. She was tired, she couldn’t remember the last time she had felt this exhausted, but she was also lonely. A little company wouldn’t be amiss, but she fell back into the
darkness before she could tell Luke that.

She was standing on D'Qar, inside the hangar bay looking out into the light gray tarmac, where the rows of X-Wings and ships littered the landscape. Leia frowned, this was wrong. She walked forward cautiously, her steps echoing oddly in the large room. It was empty. Her frown deepened as she walked outside and into the tarmac. What was going on? Everywhere she looked it was empty, not just of the people, but of the droids too. She cocked her head, listening. It was deadly silent. Not only from the absence of people, and machines whirring, but there were no noises from the jungle surrounding the base.

“Hey, your worship.” a roughened voice said from behind her.

She turned to see Han standing there, sunlight reflecting off his gray hair, wearing that new jacket of his. He was casually leaning against Poe’s black X-Wing fighter, hands tucked into his pants pockets. He gave her a wide smile of greeting. “Miss me?”

There was something wrong about this, about all of this, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it. But this was Han, she had never been able to long resist him, so she walked up to him and wrapped her arms around him, burying her face in his chest. His arms came up and wrapped around her too just as fiercely.

“Yes,” she answered hoarsely. “I missed you.”

There was something she was supposed to remember, something that was niggling in the back of her brain, something about Han. But she was so tired, and he smelled so good. Like grease, engine parts, and spices. Whatever it was it could wait, there were currently no emergencies she had to take care of. She could just stand here and breath.

He started humming under his breath as he rocked her, a tune from his home of Corellia, a lullaby, she thinks. It’s soothing for all that he can barely carry a tune.

“You are the last person I thought I’d be saying this too but you can’t run from this Leia.” he said finally, his voice rumbling in her ear.

Oh yes, that’s what she had forgotten. Han was dead. Ben had murdered him.

“Watch me.” she grumbled, burrowing her face in his chest and counting the steady heartbeats she heard.

He laughed at that, “I give it five minutes before you are bored of out your mind.”

She leaned back, enough so that she could see his face, without having to let go of the hold she had around him. “Oh, I don’t know, I’m sure we can think of something to do to fill that time up. If my memory serves me correctly you are good for at least ten minutes of entertainment.”

His eyes light up at that and his voice deepened. “Don’t know. Age might have shortened that a bit.”

“We should test that theory.”

“God I love it when you have a plan.”

She laughed out loud and his mouth caught the end of the sound. She hummed in pleasure and rose
up on her tiptoes to be able to meet him full on, long practiced in doing this with their absurd height differences. He might have a point about age catching up with them, she could definitely feel a crick developing in the base of her neck way earlier then she remembered in the past. She steadfastly ignored it and focussed on enjoying the feel of Han right beneath her hands. She wasn’t a hundred percent sure where she was, but she couldn't bring herself to care. She would take this, whatever it was, for as long as possible. They embraced like that for what felt like an impossibly long time.

He was the one to pull away first. She whined and tried to follow him, but he shook his head. “Leia, we need to talk.”

“Oh, we need to talk?” she said.

“You know what.” Yes, she did, and no she didn’t want to talk about that. This was far more pleasurable activity. “A few more minutes.” she murmured, placing small nips along the underside of his jaw. “It’s not like I have anywhere to be.”

“Uhh…” he swallowed hard. She grinned to herself. Yep, she still knew what moves to pull to distract him. “This isn't going to work.” he tried to say firmly, but his voice was breathy and high pitched.

“Yes it will.” she countered and bit just a little bit harder on the junction between his jaw and his neck.

He gave a small moan of pleasure “Okay, you might be right.” he admitted, but his arms fell away from her waist. “But Leia you were never one to be able to live in denial for long.”

Well hell, she wasn’t the only one who knew had to wield a weakness against the other. She gave one last kiss and pulled back, letting her hands fall away from his back. But she couldn't sever the physical connection completely and she grabbed both his hands in hers. She looked down at that sight, something she hadn’t done in so long, and she tightened her grip as tears filled her eyes.

“What’s on your mind sweetheart?” he asked gently.

She looked up to face him, his face blurry through her tears. “I'm sorry.”

There was honest bafflement in his voice “For what?”

“Where do you want me to start? For encouraging you to go after Ben? For letting you out of my sight and letting you go on that mission without me? For getting you killed?” those last words almost swallowed by the sobs she was repressing.

“Hey, hey, hey,” he said soothingly, letting one hand of her hands go to wipe away at the tears streaming down her face. “That wasn’t your fault.”

“You never would have tried if I hadn’t asked.”

A look of disappointment crossed his face “Look, I know I screwed up with leaving you like I did, okay? I completely and totally own up to the fact that it was a stupid move on my part. But Leia, do you honestly think I wouldn’t go after our son if given the chance?” there was a world of hurt in his voice.

“No,” she admitted. “But then again you’re probably a figment of my imagination.”

His smile became wicked and teasing “Dream about me?”
“Often,” she answered honestly. “For years.”

That smile slipped and he sighed, dropping her other hand. He rubbed his face for a moment, then looked her straight in the eyes. “I didn’t know what else to do. I knew looking at me was painful. All you saw was him.”

“No,” she shook her head, “that’s not true.”

“Really?” he stared at her steadily for a moment and she just stared back at him resolute. He wasn’t going to pawn off any of his bantha shit reasoning on her. He had wanted to leave, it was what he did when he was hurt. She couldn’t fault him for that, it was who he was. What she could and did blame him for was not coming back. She thought a few weeks, maybe months, and then the two of them would tackle the problem together. Instead, he had just kept running from her, for years. “I just wanted you.”

“Then why didn’t you say so when I left?” he demanded.

“I knew you needed a little time to lick your wounds in private. I did too. But I never thought you would abandon me!!!” she shouted back, “I thought it would have been obvious that I wanted you!”

“Not to me. I’ve known you a long time Leia, but unlike you, I don’t have a mystical energy field that helps me read people’s minds!!! Sometimes I need actual words, not things thought at me really hard.”

Okay, he might have a point about that. “I didn’t know how to ask.” she wavered.

“Why the hell not!”

“Because I was afraid you would say no!!!” she said, hurt and bewilderment in her voice. “Nobody else in my life has stayed around. My parents, all of them, Luke, Ben. Why should you be any different!!!”

His eyes closed in defeat “We really screwed this one up didn’t we?”

“Yeah,” she admitted. “And I’m making it worse by arguing with an aspect of my own mind.”

His head cocked and he regarded her thoughtfully. “Are you sure about that?”

“Of course I’m sure. You’re dead!”

“Fraid so.”

“This is my mind,” and here she waved to the strangely silent background “I’m dreaming.”

“Yes.”

“You are not a Force ghost.”

His eyebrows went up at that “Light blue was never my color.”

“See.” she stated firmly, poking him in the chest for emphasis “Take all that together and it adds up to you not being real.”

“Leia, what were you doing before you got here?”
“What?”

“What were you doing?” he repeated, patiently.

She thought about for a second, then answered him. “I was on a mission, on Cymoon 1, and I was shot…” her voice trailed off.

“Yeah,” he leaned back a bit on his heels and gave her his ‘I’m so clever’ look.

“This isn’t possible.” she stated faintly.

“For someone who magically woke up thirty-four years in her past that isn’t a phrase that should be in your vocabulary.”

“You’re real?” she whispered, hoping against the impossible.

“What do you think?”

Of course, he wouldn’t give her an answer, why should anything be straightforward? This was why she hated all those mystical philosophical discussions Luke so often indulged in. She preferred a straight yes or no. As she stared at him, weighing if this was a cruel joke of the Force or her own mind, he stepped forward and placed a soft kiss on her forehead.

“You’re overthinking this.”

She swatted him on the shoulder in irritation “You’re the one who put the idea in my head.”

“Yeah, but I didn't do it to cause you pain.”

“Then why?”

“Closure.”

She let out a small pained noise. “I don’t want to.”

His smile was aching and sad. “I’m not a big fan of it myself. I lose you and you get to trade me in for a younger model.”

She crossed her arms across her chest, irritated with his trivialization of the situation. She huffed, “Younger, but also dumber.”

“That’ll change. You won’t give him much of a choice.”

“I don’t want to say goodbye.” she whined.

“It’s not, not really.”

“He’s not you.”

“No, and he never will be. Not exactly.” and here he grabbed her hands and kissed them both in quick succession. “But if he’s any Han Solo at all he will know that you are quite possibly one of the best things that ever walked into his life.”

She felt the tears come back. “Even with how it all ended?”

“Even then. Wouldn’t trade a thing. Well maybe a few things, but never you. Never the kid.” And
then he swallowed hard, regret and grief on his face. “And not even Ben.”

“But-” she protested.

He placed a finger on her lips, silencing her. She narrowed her eyes at him, he knew she hated it when he did that. He gave her a watery chuckle. “I loved him, I loved being a father, and I loved our family, as loud and argumentative as we could all be. There were a lot of good, hell even great years.” He leaned forward and placed his forehead against hers. “And yeah it all went to hell, and I’m not saying that didn’t cut my heart from my chest. But here’s the thing Leia, it was my life and it sure as hell turned out a lot more interesting and full than I ever thought possible growing up. You just can’t take the bad out and without affecting and changing the good things that happened. It doesn’t work that way.”

“A lesson that I’m learning.” she said sourly.

He chuckled at that. “Knowing you, there were a lot of walls you ran into on the way.” She thought of all the decisions she had been making, on how she kept trying to change things for the better, only to have new and more vexing problems pop in their place. She scowled at him.

“I’m right aren’t I?” he crowed, “You only ever get that face when I’m right, and you don’t want to admit it.”

She humphed, and then her mind returned to one of the things she had been avoiding thinking about changing.

“I don’t know if I can forgive him.” she said her voice hoarse, “What does that say about me? I’m his mother and if he appeared in front of me right now I don’t know what I would do.” In the days following Han’s death and arrival here, she hadn’t let the full implications of what Ben had done hit her. But it wasn’t a truth she could avoid forever. And here, real or not, was someone who could understand that.

“It says that you're human, and as always being entirely too hard on yourself.” His large hand cradled her face “I worry about you.”

“I’m fine,” she reassured him. This was ridiculous and so like him. He was dead, and he was still fretting over her. Han Solo, rogue, pirate, smuggler, absolute mother hen with someone he loved.

“LEIA!!!!!!!” a voice screamed across the landscape. Her breath caught in her throat and her heart started to pound madly. She actually flinched as the echoes of it bounced across the empty base. Oh wonderful, look who had decided to join the party.

“Speaking of my number one issue. Got that under control do you?” Han asked sarcastically.

She rolled her eyes at him. “Nobody has him under control, especially himself. But I can handle it.”

“Uh-huh.” There was a wealth of skepticism in his voice.

“LEIA!!!” a voice bellows “ANSWER ME!”

“Looks like tall dark and imposing is losing his patience” Han remarked.

She scowled. Angry that he wouldn’t leave her alone. Angry that even the thought of him brought old fears she thought long buried to the forefront of her mind. Angry, that Han was starting to withdraw, the look of goodbye on his face. She snarled one of Han’s favorite expressions “He can take a piss in the wind.”
Han laughed loud and hard “Thank you for that image your worship, I’ll take it to my grave”

She gave him a sad smile “Your already dead, I thought at the very least we agreed on that.”

His eyes sobered at that “Yeah, and you came pretty damn close yourself.” He traced a finger down her cheek “Don’t follow me, Leia. I mean it. You were always the strongest out of all of us, and I’m not expecting a little thing like reliving your life to stop you.”

Her eyes closed. He and Luke always had such faith in her strength. She never was able to convince either one of them that is was always the people around her that she kept fighting for. If it was for her, and only her, she would have given up long ago. “I love you,” she told him, her eyes opening to take him in one last time.

He gave her that cocky grin she always wanted to smack off his face “I know.”

“LEIA!!”

She gritted her teeth “Does he ever give up?” she demanded of Han.

“Well sweetheart, you and Luke had to get it from somewhere.” She shot him a glare and he gave her a shrug. “I gotta go anyway. Places to go, people to see”

She swallowed her instinctive rejection of that statement. Whatever this was, hallucination or Force dream, it was done, and no manner of pleading with him would change that. She cupped his face, reveling in the feel of that cheek, memorizing every wrinkle and line. Like so much of Alderaan, she had no holo of him at this age. It would be decades before she saw this face again, and that was if she could sort out her feelings for his alternate. She committed everything she could to her memory. “Goodbye”. He vanished under her fingers.

Then a loud mechanized voice behind her demanded. “Who was that?”

She swallowed back her tears and wiped her face, straightening her back. No matter how raw and bruised she felt right now, he was here, and it was time to focus on that. She turned to face him as soon as she was sure every tear and sorrow had been wiped from her face.

“None of your business” she shot back, as she let her anger wash over her to meet his. If he had just stayed away she could have had Han here longer.

Vader stood on the tarmac, not ten feet from her, fists clenching and unclenching “Was that your precious tutor?” There was jealousy, twisted all around him like a strangling vine.

“Why do you care who I do or do not let into my mind?”

“He failed you!” was the hissed response.

“Using what twisted logic did you come to that conclusion?”

“You were hurt because he wasn’t at your side protecting you!! Add now you let him traipse through your mind at the deepest of levels! He’s half trained and powerful. You have no idea what damage he could do!” Obi-Wan’s warning to Luke floated through her mind. At least she thought that was what that was. She wasn’t entirely sure she hadn’t dreamed that whole conversation between the two of them.

“And I let you in willingly?”
“I know what I am doing!!” he howled, his anger pulsing all around her. It felt like a thousand small cuts, all of them wielded against her mind. She took a sharp breath in, trying to raise her shields. All she felt in response was the thin gossamer one, not the thicker one, the multi-layered one she had spent so much time constructing, come up slowly. It brought her some small relief, but it was nowhere near what she needed. She tried to pour more into it but there was nothing there for her to give.

She stared at him. As much as she wanted to counteract that delusion he was operating under, that he knew more than he thought he did, she had no energy to push him out if it came to a battle of wills between them. Hell, she didn't even have the strength to project enough shielding to protect her from his surface emotions.

She didn’t have the resources for brute force to use here and she couldn’t afford to dwell on the subject of Luke for too long. If she was having this much trouble keeping him out, the Gods only knew what was leaking from her. Holes in shields went both ways, chances were good most of what she was thinking was probably bleeding into him too.

“That wasn’t him. It was a memory. Nothing more.” At least that was what she was telling herself. She would think about Han’s implication that he was real later. When this nuisance had left and she had time to think.

"Oh.” his shoulders actually slumped, and she could feel those ragged tears in his self-control rein themselves in. She gave a small sigh of relief, as the pain they were causing her faded.

Leia watched him warily, that first rush of anger and fear at his appearance had faded, and all she was left with was feeling tired. Even this deep in her own mind she could feel the edges of exhaustion nipping at her. She wondered how bad that shot had actually been. She wondered how the hell she was still alive. Then a terrifying thought occurred to her, the last thing she remembered was being on the ground, Han, Obi-Wan and Rex nearby. No Chewie with the Falcon, and definitely no Luke. He had been heading her way though, as Vader had been. She chewed her lip in worry.

First problem, she knew that once he gained access to her mind he wasn’t going to leave by choice. She was exhausted and tired, so the amount of information he could learn from her in this state could have devastating consequences. Second problem, she couldn’t ask him directly what happened, he would just lie to maintain an advantage over her. She had nothing she was willing to bargain with this time to make him tell the truth.

“So if you can’t get into the castle from the entrance go through the side Leia.” she could hear her mother whisper to her. Good advice, let’s see how that goes. So, new plan, trick him into finding out what the hell happened at that factory and then somehow get him to leave.

“Where are we?” she asked.

“You don’t know where we are?” he demanded, panic causing his voice to escalate in volume.

Gods, he was being touchy, even for him. She looked at him in bafflement “Why would I?”

“This is your mind Leia, not mine. If you don’t know where we are then your injury is far greater than I thought.”

She took what she could from that. It wasn’t a confirmation that he knew what her injury was, it also wasn’t, unfortunately, a denial. It took her brain a few precious seconds to catch on to what he was actually saying and she just gaped at him for a moment. “Not here.” she said, waving her
hands around her “I know where this is. Where are we actually?”

“In the Force, there is no difference.” he intoned.

Give him a Coruscanti accent, get rid of the vocoder, and he sounded just like Obi-Wan. She actually rolled her eyes in exasperation. “Was there a class in the Jedi temple on how to give vague and unhelpful answers?” she demanded before she could think better of it.

There was a sudden chill in the air, and he was so still that the only movement coming from him was his ventilator, moving his chest up and down. Even in the Force, he was quiet. Stupid, stupid, stupid, she berated herself. Luke had warned her, that Vader, his children excepted, did not react well to any associations with the name Anakin Skywalker. And at the top of that list was any mention of the Jedi. She was clearly too exhausted to guard both her tongue and her mind, but since he wasn’t obliging her in leaving so she was going to have to muddle through this.

There was a shift of something inside him, and there was nothing but incredulity from him. From her daring or stupidity, she wasn’t quite sure, but all he said softly was “You’ve been spending time with Kenobi.”

This isn’t anger, she reminded herself, you just got incredibly lucky that he didn’t react in anger. Play along. “Yes,” she admitted.

There was a strange mix of resignation and eagerness as he asked. “Decided to embrace your destiny at last?”

“Decided I needed help keeping you out.” she clarified, nipping that thought in the bud now. She most certainly didn’t need him thinking that she was training to be a Jedi. “Obi-Wan is quite helpful in that regard.” If in almost nothing else regarding her.

There was a flare of anger, and Leia fought to keep her mind and face blank as she could, as the pain that was causing her traveled up her spine. She would reveal no weakness to him, if he knew just how tenuous her position actually was, there was no telling what he would do. Her track record in predicting him was abysmal. Best to keep it simple.

“He is a deluded old fool,” he spat “who only thinks he can help gifted children. You would do better to learn from me.”

The oddness of what he was offering made her head hurt. Did he even hear what he was saying? “In order to keep Obi-Wan from you, yes.” He wasn’t lying. He genuinely meant it. But Leia was more interested in the emotions accompanying that statement than the words themselves. There was jealousy there, given his obsession with her she wasn’t shocked by that, but there was fear too. Fear of what exactly? Did he think Obi-Wan would hurt her in some way? She had her problems with the Jedi, but she could never imagine that he would hurt her willingly in any physical way. The two of them echoing each other like this made her uneasy. They both clearly believed the other was a grave threat to her. She didn’t understand how Vader came to that conclusion, but all the proof she need was currently glowering not ten feet in front of her, his fear bleeding all over the place. Kenobi’s position was a lot more clear to her, for all that she disagreed with his methods of protection. She reigned her wandering mind back to her point.

“That still doesn’t tell me where he or my tutor are?” Take the bait, she urged in the recesses of her mind. Please take the bait. His answer would tell her a lot, even if he didn’t mean it to.
“Why is this so important to you?” he asked exasperatedly.

That startled her, and for a moment she felt an actual flicker of pity for him. Had he been removed from a genuine connection for so long that he didn’t understand this? Had he really been locked into that suit for so long he actually thought he wasn’t human anymore? “Because they are my friends and I want to know if they are all right.” Even if that wasn’t the whole of it.

He cocked his head considering, she could practically feel his mind whirring, as he weighed his options, debating what he was willing to tell her. Finally, he said flatly “I have no idea what condition they are in. Your friends got away.”

That had the finality of truth behind it, and since there was no shading of that statement in any way, that meant there was no reasonable way he could find out. This wasn’t a situation where he had deliberately remained ignorant of their condition so he could weasel his way around that question. He really didn’t have any idea and no way to find out. Leia felt a wash of relief run through her, and she thanked whatever benign force looked after foolish and arrogant time travelers, who walked into situations they should have known better to avoid. “So that means you don’t have me.”

For a second there was only raging incredulity from him and he stated. “There is no possible way you can know that.”

She lifted her chin in defiance “You don’t know and can’t find anything about their condition. You don’t have them, and therefore you don’t have me. They would never abandon me.” she stated simply. This was a fact of her world.

“Such faith,” he snarled.

“Truth,” she countered.

“You would do better than to trust Kenobi in this regard. He will only abandon you at your greatest hour of need.”

Now that was a twisted way to look at how Obi-Wan reacted to his falling to the Dark Side.

“And you haven’t?” she countered.

There was an ugly twist to his emotions in the Force. Too many things dancing around for her to separate them out, but disbelief and rage were definitely there. “What lies has Kenobi been telling you about me?”

At this Leia almost laughed. Obi-Wan said nothing about him to her. No all the warm and fuzzy stories were reserved for Luke. But then again she didn’t need those tales of a might have been father, she actually had one. “Not a damn one. I don’t need him to tell me anything. You’ve already abandoned me once before.”

“You were kidnapped!!” he roared, his fists clenched at his sides, “I would never have left you!!”

Oh, he wanted to play that card, did he? Well, he wasn’t talking to some ignorant nineteen-year-old who didn’t understand anything about the Force. “What do think falling to the Dark Side is!!?” she demanded, “Do you think I am not intimately aware of what that does to a person!” As soon as the words were out of her mouth she wanted to claw them back in. She had no problems keeping her silence about her son with the people she loved and trusted. Why was it she kept mentioning Ben around him? He had nothing to say on the matter that she wanted to hear.

His frustration and anger drained away, and there only remained of all things a profound sense of
regret. Leia didn’t even want to try to decipher what he was thinking, so she closed her eyes and concentrated on her breathing, trying to find her calm center. She pictured the great stateroom of Alderaan, where she knew who she was and where she stood and there were no tall figures dressed in black armor to annoy her. She let the peace that image caused her to fill every corner of her mind, and slowly she opened her eyes. She was still on D’Qar, and he was still standing there. There was a long pregnant pause as the both stood there. She sighed, it was a small hope that he would leave on his own anyway.

“I-” he began, as soon as he was aware of her focus being back on him.

“Don’t,” she warned. “Whatever you are going to say, whatever platitude or excuse you have to offer, I don’t care.”

“Your son-”

“No,” and even she could hear how deadly calm her voice had become “He is not a subject that is up for discussion.”

His hands came up almost instinctively in front of him, in a placating gesture. “All right,” he agreed. She said nothing to that, letting the silence grow. He slowly lowered his hands, and she could see the subtly shifting he did from foot to foot, clearly waiting for her to speak. That would be a while, she didn’t want him here and had nothing to say. Maybe subjecting him to the silent treatment would convince him of his unwelcome.

He finally let a noise out that she thought was him clearing his throat, it was hard to tell through the distortion of the vocoder. “All your friends and you escaped on that ship,” he said in a clear firm voice, going back to their original topic. “I arrived at the back door just as your tutor was boarding it. I tried to give chase, but the explosion of the factory was quite the distraction and an inconvenience for me in sending ships after you.”

Well if he was looking for a topic that wouldn’t set her off, he couldn’t have picked a better one. They were safe. Luke was safe, Vader hadn’t even really seen him. And Luke had beaten Vader to her using the Force, by quite a long bit it sounded like. Her brother had figured out something even their all powerful Sith Lord of a father hadn’t with that running trick. Or would have. Whatever. “You only have yourself to blame on that one.” she gloated, unable to resist the temptation to lord this over him.

“How so?” he wasn't angry strangely enough. He only sounded curious.

“You knew I was on the planet. I’m fairly certain you didn’t miss Obi-Wan’s presence either. If you hadn’t been so focused on” she searched for a word that wouldn’t immediately anger him, like kidnapping or stealing, “retrieving me, you would have realized we weren’t there to take in the sights.”

“That is correct,” he conceded, but before she could even comment on that, he continued on “However since your ‘retrieval’ was the only thing of interest to me the second I realized you were in the system I deemed whatever you had done to the factory to be irrelevant. If I had taken the time to find out and reverse whatever you had done, you most likely would have gotten away. If I moved forward and pursued you anyway greatly increased my chances of getting what I wanted.”

He had known, or strongly suspected, what they had done. And he came for her anyway. He had willingly sacrificed the most important weapons factory in the Empire, simply to increase his chances of catching her. Luke might have inadvertently saved her with his foolish action by drawing his attention away, no matter how briefly.
And this presented an even bigger problem. Luke’s presence had been enough to sway Vader’s attention, to break him off from his pursuit, even if it was for only a few seconds when a huge tactical asset to the Empire had not been. But was he chasing Luke because he wanted to kill a potential Jedi? Or was he hoping to capture him to use as bait for her? He was more than capable of using a loved one against a child to force their compliance. Either way she looked at this, it was not good.

“If you had just come to me when I asked you would not be in this situation at all. He clearly lacks the skills to adequately protect you. The fool was actually trying to head back to the factory and my way, when you persuaded him to do otherwise.” So he had felt her talk to Luke but clearly didn’t hear what she had said to him. If he had this conversation would be going in a very different direction. Still best to be certain.

“How are you sure that it was me talking to him, and not Obi-Wan?” she challenged.

He huffed and crossed his arms over his chest. “Kenobi would never discourage someone from trying to kill me, no matter how doomed the effort.” So it was logic, not the Force, that helped him deduce who had reached out to Luke.

Leia felt her blood run cold as several nightmare scenarios ran through her mind's eye of how that could have gone if they had met face to face, if she hadn’t been able to persuade Luke to alter his course. "He thought he was protecting me,” she stuttered as she focused on all her training to banish those thoughts from her mind. Who knew what he could pick up from her?

“Protect you? From me?” he was actually radiating hurt. “I would never harm you, Leia.”

That brought her focus back in on him. Liar, it was far too late for him to say that. “No, you just leave it to one of your stormtroopers to shoot me!!” she spat back.

Vader stilled at that, “They were aiming for you?” he asked in an almost calm voice.

Leia repressed the urge to back away. This sudden switch from volatile to almost placid calm was more frightening than had he started raging to the skies. Best not to push him on this one. “No,” she finally answered “They were aiming for someone else. I got in the way of the shot.”

“Young tutor was not there, neither was Kenobi. Who were you protecting Leia?”

Okay, there was cautious and then there was no way in hell. He already had Luke, her parents, and Obi-Wan to use against her. There was no way in hell she was giving him Han, no matter the cost. She crossed her arms in front of her chest and just glared at him mutinously.

At her refusal to answer him, he started pacing, clearly too agitated to stay still, but not willing to end whatever this was. Conversation? Interrogation?

As she watched him warily, she could feel herself starting to sway, only a little, but it was there. All she wanted to do was sleep, but she wasn’t sure if that was even possible in this place, and she sure as hell wasn’t going to do it while he was still here. Time to push hard on the second part of her plan.

Let’s see if manners would sway him. “Well this has been most enlightening,” she said evenly, trying for a calm even tone “but I believe that we have both learned what we wanted from this meeting. Please leave.”

He stopped his pacing and turned to face her. “I respectfully decline.” Well, at least it was a polite refusal.
“What do you want?” she asked, opting for the direct approach. Who knows, maybe his request would be simple.

“Many things,” great he was never going to leave. “But for now I’ll settle for the name of your tutor.”

Leia was too tired to play games with him, but this was really beyond belief. “Look at the arrest warrant. Or better yet that bounty you put on his head.

He snorted, actually snorted. “If his name is Poe Dameron then mine is Hondo Ohnaka.”

Leia’s head cocked, attention caught despite herself. There was that name again. “Who the hell is Hondo?” she demanded. “Rex mentioned him too.”

There was a wave of incredulity “Rex?” There was a pause, then "Captain Rex? He is still alive?” Now his voice took on ominous tones "And with the Rebellion??” Dammit. She really needed him to go, she was talking too much.

She chose not to answer, merely stood there as his anger grew again and once more he started pacing. “He chose to betray the Empire?” He chose to betray me? That wasn’t what he said but Leia heard it nonetheless. She wasn’t sure is he was talking to her or himself. Hell, she wasn’t sure if he even knew.

This, she couldn’t let stand. She couldn’t mitigate his anger towards Obi-Wan and her parents. She couldn’t shake him from his obsession with Luke, but maybe, just maybe she could sway him here. “Funny attitude from a man who needs a chip in his commander's head to get him to obey.”

“I did no such thing!” He stopped his pacing, and whirled, his cloak moving along behind him in a dark wave. He sounded offended.

“But you were more than willingly to go along with it once you knew? After the Jedi were exterminated those chips were left in. I didn’t ever hear of you do anything to change that. Or did I miss something?”

He said nothing to that, but his silence was enough of an answer. She pressed on. “Rex removed his, sometime during the Clone Wars. That’s why he didn't comply with the order to kill the Jedi.”

“That explains a great deal. The last time I saw him he was with...” he trailed off. Explained a great deal about what? Rex was with who? And he still hadn’t answered her question about who the hell Hondo Ohnaka was. For a man who was constantly demanding answers from her, he never gave any back in return. Let’s not focus on that part, it will only make you angry, and you don’t have the energy to be angry right now. She could feel the trembling starting in her hands and she crossed her hands in front of her chest to hide it. Focus, the issue here is Rex.

She forced a nonchalant shrug “He doesn't know about you. Obi-Wan lied through his teeth when he asked about your fate.”

Vader’s head cocked, “There is something you are hiding in that statement.”

Oh great, that he picks up on. Was there any way to train in lying around other Force users? Maybe, but it was probably something Jedi doctrine didn’t encourage. She wondered if she could get Vader to teach her. It seemed like a Sith Lord specialty. If she could stand being in his presence for long enough without trying to kill him, it might be a useful thing to learn. She dismissed the idle speculation and returned to the matter at hand. “Rex really doesn’t know.” He didn’t answer her, only stared, silently demanding more. Gods, he was noisy. “Obi-Wan told him that Vader
killed you,” she elaborated.

“Obi-Wan said what!” his voice was indignant and shocked.

Okay, maybe that was a topic she shouldn’t have brought up. But it did bring home that Rex didn’t ‘betray’ him, and it’s not like with this revelation she was adding more fuel to the fire of his hatred of Obi-Wan. The man had left him to burn, after all, she’d be pissed at him too.

She knew that what she was about to say wouldn’t save Rex if he ever had the misfortune to be in the same room as Vader, but maybe she could mitigate the Sith Lord’s desire to actively hunt his old commander down. Time to see how far this ‘caring’ of her really extended.

“Rex was there, on Cymoon 1. He was the one giving me medical attention. When he put pressure on the wound that was when you heard me cry out the second time.” His anger came rising up again and she hurriedly went on “He probably saved my life.”

Vader underwent one of those lightning-quick mood changes and he shifted uneasily. Leia frowned “That was your voice I heard? Not some other random Force user?” she asked, suspicions dancing in her mind, that’s all she needed, Palpatine's attentions.

“Yes,” he answered forcefully, then the hesitation came back “I was...unprepared, for how loud you would be.” If he was overwhelmed what had Luke gone through? She was amazed he even made it the ship. “Then you vanished. I thought you had been killed.” There was grief there, actual grief.

She just stared at him not sure how to respond to this vulnerability on his part. Was he even aware of how much he was projecting right now? On how much she could pick up because of how deep he was in her mind? “Oh,” she finally settled on.

Now his posture became defensive “You thought I wouldn’t feel that?”

She didn’t know how to handle this. She wasn’t sure she believed that he had any real depth to his feelings for her. But maybe that wasn’t the point. He believed they were real and genuine. It was probably a lie he was telling himself, for whatever reason, but she was in no place to contradict it. The truth, that she was useful to him alive, and that was the real reason she believed he wanted her, probably wouldn't go over well. She settled for saying “I haven’t really thought about how you would react to me getting hurt.” There, that was factual, and it was also tactful. Her mother couldn’t have come up with better.

He actually seemed hurt by that. “You're my daughter!”

Okay, there was placating him, and then there was letting him think that their blood ties mattered to her. “Yeah me. So that makes me special enough to be treated as a sentient creature?”

He was drowning the Force in his frustration and confusion. “You mistake my meaning.”

“Frankly I don’t care enough to even try to decipher that.”

“This wouldn’t have happened if you would just come to me.” This again. Did he really think she was in any way tempted by such an offer?

“Why? So I can join you in the dark side of the Force and we can rule the galaxy together? In one big dysfunctional family mess?” She snorted derisively “Thanks, but no thanks.”

“You almost died!” He really wasn’t letting that go, was he?
She shrugged “But I didn’t.”

“I forbid you to go on any more missions!” he thundered.

Leia felt her eyes go so wide they felt like they would pop out of their sockets. “Are you trying to ground me?” she asked incredulously. She didn’t give him time to answer. Her hands dropped from her chest and she waved them around her face, to every line, wrinkle and gray hair. Even with his visor distorting his view, there was no way he could miss this. “Even if I was inclined to listen to you, which I am not, I would like to remind you that I am older than you.”

He gave a growl of frustration “Then if you insist on pursuing this foolish course you need to be more careful!”

She surprised herself, she found a genuine laugh escaping her at that statement “That is very rich coming from you. I’m not unaware of the insanity of some of the moves you pull.”

“You’ve studied me?” he seemed surprised, and there was a thread of pleasure wrapped in that.

She was not leaving him with the impression she had done it to know him. She had done it because she was trying to kill him. For her parents, for Alderaan, for the galaxy as a whole. She didn’t even know he was her father at the time. But as she opened her mouth, she could see the background behind him waver. Hell, she couldn’t afford to really piss him off. “Know your enemy.” she retorted, not willing to let it go, but not willing to be really pissy about it either.

He took a step forward at that. She quelled the urge to back up. No weakness, not even a tiny hint. “We are not enemies.”

She blinked. He really did need this spelled out for him, didn’t he? “You, Imperial Agent,” she said pointing a finger at him. Then she poked her chest. “Me, Rebel insurgent. I admit there is a lot of gray areas that exists in this galaxy, but that is not one of them.”

“Why do you think that matters to me? What lies have you been fed about me?” he actually seemed indignant at this.

“Your actions speak louder than any words? I won’t turn to the dark side. I have no interest in running your Empire. What use am I to you?”

“Don’t be obtuse. You of all people know not everything is about power.”

What? Did she just hear that correctly? “I’m sorry but who is the Sith Lord in this conversation?”

“But you are not a Jedi,” he countered “Therefore you are not an enemy.”

Well wasn’t that generous of him. “So all those people you killed in the name of your Empire? What were they if not your enemy?”

“In my way.”

Well wasn’t that bloody practical of him. Leia thought of all those people, Rebels mostly, but civilians and Imperials too, that statement included. To have all those lives and possibilities snuffed out of existence for no more a reason then he couldn’t bother to even attempt to find a better way. She didn’t have clean hands, she had killed before, and more than likely, given the when of where she was, would do so again. But she was aware, so aware, of the costs of those decisions. She might not regret many of them, but she sure as hell wasn’t dismissive of them either. There was a cost to those actions, and that was always, always, to be remembered. He seemed to regard killing
as a mildly inconvenient chore. “I’m done with this.” her voice filled with disgust “Get out.”

“Leia-” he came forward again. He was far too close for her comfort, she could feel the licks of fear growing into something more. The background flickered momentarily to her cell in the Death Star, before returning to the lush landscape of D’Qar.

“No,” she shook her head, and immediately regretted the action. Bright spots started dancing across her eyes. What did that say about her energy levels right now? She was in her own mind and was starting to see the physical effects of fatigue. She tried to reason with him. “You wanted to know if I was still alive. I am. You wanted the name of my tutor. I’ll see you in hell before I ever answer that question. There is nothing here for you, so please just leave.”

“If you would only listen to me-” he practically begged, coming towards her. Now she did step back and felt the blood rush to her head at the motion. Fuck. This was bad, this was so bad. There was only one other time in her life she had felt this tired and helpless, and he had been there too. This far in her own mind, how long was it before she flashed back there?

“Now.” she insisted, but her voice came out sounding thin, even to her own ears.

He actually stopped at that, his blaze of furious determination being replaced by concern. “Leia, are you alright?”

No, she wasn’t alright, she had just been shot and her overbearing possessive Sith Lord of a biological father wouldn’t get the hell out of her head, and she was on the verge of a flashback. “I’m fine,” she lied, then wobbled on her feet.

He ignored that and began rapidly heading towards her again, his arms coming up as if he intended to steady her.

“Don’t touch me!!” she warned, but he didn’t stop.

Those mechanical hands, encased in their gloves grabbed her upper arms firmly, practically holding her up as her legs gave up the fight and collapsed under her. Her head fell to her chest, suddenly weighing as much as a rancor, and impossible to hold up.

“Leia,” he said in a strong demanding voice “Look at me!”

She didn’t want to. She had been warned about him. That he had strange abilities and could peer into your very mind through your eyes. She couldn't afford to let him see. She had so very much to protect.

“Leia!!” he demanded and the panic in his voice made her reluctantly look at him, trying to find the source of his fear. If she knew that maybe she could use it against him?

She met his eyes and the room was suddenly so cold. She was puzzled by that, hadn’t she been warm a second ago? Hadn’t she been somewhere else? Then he shook her, and the nausea that action caused brought her focus back in on him. She was standing, of a sort, alright Vader was holding her up by her arms, and she was in that gray cell that had been her prison for the last few hours.

“Look at me!!” He demanded, but she didn't want to. He had given her something, in that droid of his. It might her all floaty and detached, and strangely compliant. She had been expecting pain, why wasn’t there pain?

"Why use pain? That always gets you horrible results, and everyone starts babbling and crying for
their mother.” She knew that voice. It was familiar, but she couldn't quite place it. That was also weird thought to have, where had that come from? Then Vader was demanding the location of the base.

“What base?” she asked him dreamily, trying to puzzle out where she was.

“The Rebel Base.”

She said the first planet that came to mind. “Coruscant.”

He actually shook her in his frustration and the nausea came up again fiercer this time.

“You do that again and I’m going to throw up on you,” she whined. It was only polite to warn him after all. Even though he was causing the problem in the first place. He stopped what he was doing and she let out a sigh of relief as her stomach somewhat settled.

"You should have puked all over his boots." That voice remarked.

Mama taught me better than that.

"Forget manners, he deserves it."

“Where is the base your Highness?” he asked again.

“I don’t know. Around.”

“Very well, we do this the hard way.” He pushed her back and she dropped back onto the cold bench behind her with a hard thump. She whimpered, that had hurt, and sitting was going to be an issue for a while. He was kneeling in front of her, hard hands cupping her face, forcing her to look at him. Huh, they had no give, must be artificial. Or maybe he really was a droid underneath all the armor.

“No, Leia, you need to let me go. I don’t need to see this,” that voice was pleading with her now, desperation and in pain.

Well, she didn’t want to live it, but what was done was done. There was a cold hard touch in her mind. Leia squirmed in her seat, trying to wiggle away, but his grip wouldn’t let her. That touch spread into her mind like she had eaten a frozen dessert too fast and had brain freeze. Only she couldn’t make this stop by pressing her tongue to the roof of her mouth.

“Where is it?” he said, no, that wasn’t right, he thought it at her. Then that touch went rummaging in her mind, trying to see what answers that question brought up. Leia couldn’t keep him out. Vader was walking through her mind, tossing aside memories of training, of family breakfasts, the smell of her mother's hair, her father’s laugh, the first boy she had ever had a crush on. He ran through all of them, dismissing them all. The totality of her life and he swatted it around like she was nothing more than an annoying insect. And everywhere he went that cold fire, with its maddening howl, followed.

What was worse was the apathy, she could feel it clinging to him. He was doing this because he had been told, but he didn’t care. About any of this. He was trying to tear her apart, piece by piece, to find the Rebel base, and it didn’t matter to him at all. She didn’t matter, she was just another in a long list of annoyances and obstacles.

She fell further and further into her mind, trying to escape him and his endless question of Where? Where? Where? She drew further and further into herself, towards that core of her she trusted, solid
walls made of her strength and her secrets. This is where her luck came from. This was the place that whispered to her of warnings she had learned to heed. This was the place of the wild song that she could almost frustratingly understand the words to. This was the place in her mind of her greatest secrets. And this is the place where that cold fire crashed into, unable to crest over its smooth strong walls.

There was shock, surprise, and a good dose of wariness from him. She could feel him, running tiny waves up and down along those walls, looking for a weak spot, looking for a place to ram. She braced herself for the blow, but instead of a strong hammer, what felt like a thin blade of fire was swiped across them. Everything In her mind screamed at the unexpected form of the attack, and for a second she was lost in it.

“Where?” he demanded in that deep baritone.

“Leia, please.” That mellow voice was back again, and there was something about it, something that she knew she didn't like about it. “You need to wake up. This is hurting you to re-live it.”

Cracks started appearing around the area he had sliced through, and she tightened her grip on everything here, deliberately keeping her mind blank. If she didn’t think about what she was guarding, then he wouldn’t be able to find it.

That slice came again, and Leia didn’t even try to hold in her howl of pain, and then one precious memory slipped thru that sliver of fracture in her mind.

She felt his pleasure and confirmation, then it turned to disgust as he realized it was of her father, telling her, finally of his involvement in the Rebellion. She had been fifteen, and so sure she wanted to join the fight and wanting, at last, the divulging of all secrets between them

“I already know this,” and across those cracks, the feel of his voice hurt. But she took comfort in the fact she hadn’t betrayed her father. She hadn’t told Vader anything he couldn't already could prove. She strengthened her resolve, and despite the pain it caused her, tried to pour all of her strength into those cracks, shoring them up.

“WHERE IS THE REBEL BASE?” he screamed, and this time it was accompanied by many slashes on that one point, over and over, trying to whack away everything she was pouring into them to keep them closed.

She felt herself wavering under the onslaught, and her for just a moment her grip slipped. She had a second to decided and she clung to the base with all her might. Her oldest secret, a much wondered about face, filled with sadness and kind eyes, slid out. It was the only memory she had of her birth mother, and it was treasured for all her parents told her that she had been too young to know what the woman looked like. Leia had been too young when she died, she couldn’t possibly remember her. But she did, she knew that this woman was her mother and that she was important. At her insistence that it was real, fueled by the belief of the very young, her parents had given up on convincing her of the impossibility of what she saw. Instead, they firmly entrenched in her head the importance of never discussing that face with anyone. And now he would see.

She shouldn’t have worried. He didn't even look at it. She could feel his cursory examination, but he really didn’t see that beloved face. He only saw that she was Leia’s birth mother and that she was long dead. His disbelief was a slap to her senses along with his questions. Why had she fought so hard to protect a dead woman? She was a nothing, a nobody, and this had nothing to do with the rebellion, it was unimportant, so why would he even care about her?

"You should have saved yourself the trouble," he told her sneeringly in that deep mechanical voice.
"Padme," said that voice that wasn’t her voice, and it was full of grief, pain, and a towering inferno of incredulous disbelief. Wait, she hadn’t known her mother’s name. Not then. She had only learned it later, from Mon, of all people. She really wasn’t here, she had been on D’Qar. No that wasn’t right either, she had been on Cymoon 1 and she had been shot. Then she had been in her own mind, and Han, her Han had come. Then he had left because Vader-

Vader. That was Vader’s voice, the one he spoke to her with when he wanted something. Oh, gods, he was here, living this with her, and what if he saw-

Everything abruptly shifted back to D’Qar as he let her go and she fell to the ground.

She lay there for a moment, eyes closed, the rough pavement scraping her cheek, trying to catch her breath. She could hear Vader’s respirator breath in and out, so he was near her, and by the sound of it, he was also near the ground. “What the hell had knocked the wind of his sails?” she thought bitterly.

She tried to move, and nothing came, just a feeling of her body telling her that it had enough of this. She focused on opening her eyes, at the very least she would then be able to see him and reality was always far more preferable then to what her mind could come up with on its own. Most times.

She struggled, and by a feat of extreme willpower and stubbornness, managed to open them. He was kneeling in front of her, not three feet away, but he wasn't touching her, just staring.

“Go away,” she tried to say. Nothing came out. Okay, time to move to the second option, no matter her revulsion using this method with him. “Go away.”

He started at that, broken out of whatever he had been thinking.

“I cannot leave you here like this.” he said.

Force after all that and he still wouldn’t leave. He had everything he wanted, didn’t he? He knew what happened on the Death Star. He couldn’t have possibly missed where the Rebel Base was. The only comfort she had was that he cut her off before she could even think of Luke. “I’m done talking to you.”

“I meant,” and there was a wealth of exasperation in his voice “I cannot leave you here lying on the ground like this.”

What the hell did that matter? It’s not like this was real. This was just another excuse he was using. “What difference does it make where you leave me in my own head?”

There was only incredulous disbelief flooding from him. “Your focus determines your reality. Didn’t you learn that?”

"Not a Jedi," she reminded him.

“This is a manifestation of your mind, Leia. What happens here can have actual physical consequences on your body. That is what I meant by in the Force there is no difference between here and the physical world.”

Oh, that was a nice straightforward explanation. Why the hell couldn’t Obi-Wan put it that way? “So go and leave me to my rest.”

“And if I leave you here like this what do you think that will do to your actual physical self?”
sarcasm creeping into his voice.

He had a point there. What she was manifesting here was not her nineteen-year-old body, with its wonderfully forgiving nature of the abuse she heaped on it. Still, she wasn’t sure what would happen if he tried to touch her again. “I don’t need your help. Go away.”

He sighed. “Where are the sleeping quarters?”

She knew this was all bullshit, he was trying to learn the layout of what he thought was the Alliance’s current location. “This isn’t our base. It’s one after you died.”

“Given the fact that I just saw you tortured for the information on the Rebel Base and I still didn’t learn where it is, I can’t say I’m not surprised by that.”

Leia felt a wash of surprise flood her, followed by her anger. “Don’t lie to me!!” she said as strongly as she could, tears of frustration welling in her eyes. After all this time and the bastard finally had pried the location of the base out of her. She didn’t need his pity on top of her failure.

He stilled at that. “I am not lying Leia,” he said it slowly, calmly, emphasizing every word. She started to try to contradict him but he continued on, “I have not once lied to you. I really don’t know where the Alliance is currently located. You are correct in the fact that if you don’t name a thing it makes it harder for someone to find it in your mind. Even if that someone who is there was trying to break free and didn't mean to eavesdrop.” He leaned forward, making sure she was looking at him “You never once referred to the base by name. Your secret is still safe.”

Hadn’t she? She quickly went back over the incident in her mind. No, she hadn’t. She hadn’t failed. She hadn’t. Everyone she loved and her cause was still safe. Relief made her giddy, and then the exhaustion followed in its wake made her yawn.

“You need to rest.” he intoned, and Leia resisted rolling her eyes at him. She already knew that, thanks. He leaned forward even more, and Leia just managed to stay silent. Probably because she didn’t have the strength to scream at him, but she was going to take what victories she could from this.

He must have picked up on her unease though because he flinched and drew back. With a groan, he pushed himself to his feet. Before she could even guess at what he intended to do, she felt the Force wrap around her. She felt herself rise from the ground like she was being cradled in someone's arms.

“Sleeping quarters Leia?”

Was he seriously going to tuck her into bed like a wayward child? She had to admit though that the thought had a lot of appeal. She debated with herself what to do when he threw in another consideration for her.

“The sooner you are in bed the sooner I leave.”

Well, that clinched it. “First hallway on the right you come across in the hangar bay.”

Without another word, he moved her forward until she was in front of him. She assumed he started walking towards the hangar bay because it started to pass her by.

Leia fought to keep her eyes open, but whatever reserves she had were fading fast. Figuring that if she closed her eyes she would have more energy to stay conscious she let them slide close. He could learn nothing from here anyway. There were no people occupying this landscape and since
the sun was out there were no stars that he could use triangulate the location of this planet.

As she swayed in the Force’s embrace she became aware of a barely leashed under layer of anger and pain underneath that solid grip. It was the Dark Side, she was no stranger to its presence, but then again she had never been held by it before either. He seemed to be trying to reign himself in, so as not to hurt her, but she could feel the build up of his rage underneath that calm veneer he was scrambling to hold. Why the hell was he so pissed? He wasn’t the one who just had to relieve one of his worst nightmares because someone was a pushy bastard and wouldn’t leave.

“I’m not angry at you Leia.”

Had she said any of that aloud?

“No,” he answered, “But you are exhausted and your shields are not what they should be. I’m trying not to listen, but you are being very loud.”

Oh, manners again. Then she wondered who was he angry with. She didn’t lay good odds on their survival.

“That is very true. I would love to be able to kill him, slowly. Unfortunately, he is someone far beyond even my reach.”

Now, who could he talking about? She tried to think of everyone mentioned in their conversation, but they were all people he wanted dead anyway. This anger had the feel of something fresh and new. It took her brain an unusually long time to puzzle out the answer. She was blaming her exhaustion and the sheer strangeness of the answer to why it took her so long.

“Did you just threaten to kill yourself?”

They stopped abruptly, and Leia tried to fight the nausea that rose up in her at the sudden motion. There was a long pause as he seemed to absorb this and she swore she heard something that could be classified as a chuckle come out of him.

“Yes, I suppose I did.”

Okay, she really didn’t energy to speak again but she couldn’t let that go “That is the oddest thing I’ve heard in years, and I just recently time traveled.”

“Is it?” that deep mechanical voice doesn’t contain much ability for modulation of tone, but even with that factor, she could hear the sadness in his voice. What the hell had she said to make him sad? He made no sense.

“I make a great deal of sense. You’re simply not listening.” Was he lecturing her about listening? Him? The one who couldn’t take a simple “Go away.”

Then his words struck something in the back of her mind. He wasn’t the first person to say that to her. Someone else had too, and it was recent. Someone older and annoying but she couldn’t quite bring up who it was. Then she felt herself being lowered into a bed.

“Sleep Leia. I will not bother you again this night.”

Uh-huh. Her mother had raised no fool. There was a wave of anger and self-loathing from him at that thought, guess he heard that too, although she had no idea what she had said to set him off this time. All she understood was that she wasn’t sleeping until he as gone.
“Fine. I will leave.” He used the Force and she felt a blanket being pulled over her body. Was he tucking her in? This just kept getting stranger and stranger. Then that storm that was the Dark Side was gone. She forced herself to wait a few moments, to see if he was really gone. Satisfied that he had left, she slipped into sleep.

ABA - Day 62

There was someone holding her hand. That was what Leia was most aware of. There was someone holding her hand and they were crying. Leia slid her eyes open, just a bit, to see who was there. Her mother had her hand and was holding it as she rocked gently to herself. Why was Mama upset?

“Mama,” she croaked.

Her mother’s head snapped up “Leia?” her face was a track of tears and her eyes were red-rimmed. This was odd, usually, when Leia dreamed of her mother she was smiling.

“What are you doing here?” she said.

“Where else would I be?”

“Dead.”

Leia heard an intake of air from someone else that was in the room. Something passed over her mother’s face and she leaned forward. “Why would I be dead Leia?”

That wasn’t important, her mother already knew that. “Why are you sad?” she asked, troubled by that fact. Her father’s face appeared next to her mother’s, also pinched with worry, but it relaxed a bit when he saw her looking at him. Oh, that was the other person she heard. She tried to reach out for him, but her hand was pushing against something soft and wouldn’t move up. Why wouldn’t it move up? Oh, because she was pushing it against the bed. She frowned, she was laying on her front, why was she laying on her front?

“Leia,” Papa said, “Do you know where you are?”

That was a silly question. “Infirmary. Drugged.”

There was a look of relief on his face “Yes, that’s right Leia.”

That was all well and good, but that didn’t answer her question. “Why are you sad?” she asked her mother.

Her mother’s eyes widened “Because you are hurt.”

No, that couldn't be it. “You weren’t sad the other times I was here.” she pointed out.

The blood drained out of her mother’s face “What?” she asked.

“The other times I was hurt.” she explained patiently “You came to me then too, but you were never sad. You were always so happy to see me.” She closed her eyes, remembering “I was too. But then I would wake up and for a moment I thought you were still alive. Then the grief would
come again when I remembered you weren’t really there anymore.”

“Leia honey, we’re not dead. Remember?” her mother’s voice was insistent.

“Of course you are. You left me all alone.” her eyes opened again, and she felt the tears roll down her cheeks, even in her drugged state. “I know it wasn’t your fault. It was mine. And Tarkin’s. Mostly Tarkin’s. But he killed our world because of me. Because I wouldn't tell Vader where the base was.”

Her mother’s face grew horrified. “Is that what happened?” and she swung her head to look at her father. Whatever she saw there wasn’t what she was expecting “You knew.” she said flatly.

“You knew too.” he tried to placate his wife. That wasn’t going to work, Leia could tell. Her mother was furious.

“I knew Alderaan had been destroyed,” her mother hissed quietly. “I didn’t know it was done to make her talk. I didn’t know she watched it happen.”

But Leia was losing patience with this dim recreation of her parents. “You’re not her.” she mumbled “She knows she’s dead. Go away.”

“Leia, love,” but whatever this fake ghost of her mother had to say was lost on Leia as she slipped back into sleep.

ABA Day - 63

Leia was drugged. She knew this, she just didn’t seem to be able to make herself care. There was pain, so much pain, but it was behind this fog of non-caring that was quite nice. She opened her eyes, curious to where she was and found herself lying face down on a bed. She could hear the whirs and beeps of what was the all too familiar sound of a med bay.

Han was asleep in a chair right in her line of sight. His head had fallen to rest on his chest, and wow, that was a decision he was going to regret in the morning. Or night. What time was it?

She contented herself to just looking at him. He was so very handsome, even with the days of beard growth on his face and his hair muffled so badly.

“So pretty,” she said. “You were always so pretty.”

His head jerked up at the sound of her voice and his wide eyes meet hers.

“Leia?” he asked, scrambling to sit up and moving the chair closer to her bed. “How do you feel?”

“Floaty.”

“Yeah, I bet you are.”

“Han?”

“Yeah?”

“Why am I sleeping on my front? I hate sleeping that way. You know that.”
His eyes widened at that statement, although she wasn’t sure why, but he said gently “Well you got shot in the back and the armor you were wearing shattered. It cut you up pretty good. The medics don’t want you resting on it because the skin is still pretty fragile.”

Oh, that made sense. Still, “I don’t like it.” she complained.

“Shh, I know.” he dragged his fingers across her forehead in a gesture of comfort. “It’s just for a few more days, till the bacta treatments have time to do all their work.”

“Fine.” she huffed. She looked at him, with his face all scrunched up in concern. It was cute.

“I’ve always liked you.” she said dreamily.

A look of pleasure crossed his face. “Really?”

“Uh-huh.”

Then he leaned forward and whispered “I’ll let you in on a secret. I like you to.”

She blew a raspberry at him “Not much of a secret.” she let out a huge yawn “I even like you when you are driving me crazy.”

“Really? I’m going to have to remember that.”

“You should. Except when you are being stupid, you should stop doing that. Only makes me mad. And not the fun flirting type of mad either.”

“When have I been stupid according to you?”

“When you shot the door in the trash compactor. That was really dumb. Did you think the rest of us hadn’t thought of that? You almost killed Luke.”

Obi-Wan’s face appeared out of nowhere and he asked mildly “Captain Solo did what to Luke?”

Han looked a little miffed. “I have no idea what she is talking about. They must have given her the really good stuff. I have certainly never been in a garbage compactor with her and Luke.”

“Chewie was there too.” she reminded him. “He complained about the smell for years.”

“Did he now?” Obi-Wan’s eyebrow lifted, and he looked at her bemusedly. “I have no idea what she is talking about. They must have given her the really good stuff. I have certainly never been in a garbage compactor with her and Luke.”

“Chewie was there too.” she reminded him. “He complained about the smell for years.”

“Did he now?” Obi-Wan’s eyebrow lifted, and he looked at her bemusedly. “I’m sure he had a good reason.”

“It was the only way to get out of the hallway,” she told him earnestly. “It’s not like I wanted to go down there.” It was very important he believed her about that.

“Of course you didn’t.” he soothed. See, it was fine, Obi-Wan agreed with her. He never agreed with her, so she must be in the right here.

She settled for looking at Han again, marveling at how young he looked. Baby Han, she thought fondly, then she frowned. The other Han had been here too? She remembered talking to him. She looked around the infirmary for him, well she craned her neck up and down a lot. He wasn’t here. Did he leave her again? She scowled and then brought her attention back to baby Han. She better spell this out clearly for him.

She frowned “And you were being especially stupid when you left me, just because I forgot to use my words. That was so dumb. I didn’t like it.”
“Left you?” he looked so confused. Good, so was she, she hated to be alone in that.

She yawned again, wow she was tired. Why was she so tired? “You’re lucky you're cute, or I would have shot you on Takodana when you showed up with that new jacket. That would have been a shame.”

“Wait? Takodana? You know Maz?”

“Who doesn’t know Maz?” she asked, puzzled.

Obi-Wan’s voice broke in “It would have been a shame to shoot Captain Solo?”

“No,” Force he was slow on the uptake. “Ruining the jacket. I liked it.”

Han blinked, trying to keep up. “Uh-huh, Leia-”

“Sleepy,” she said. “Quiet now.” Then she closed her eyes and went back to her rest.

ABA - Day 65

Leia came to with a pair of hands on resting on her back. She was no longer on her front, which was an improvement, but now she was laying on her side, which also wasn’t ideal. The floating feeling was also gone, which meant they had taken her off the heavy drugs. There was a wave of energy in the Force and she felt something inside her unclench.

“That’s it Luke, nice and slow. You don’t want to overwhelm her system.” Obi-Wan’s calm voice floated from somewhere below her feet.

“What?” she started to say but stopped when a croak was all she could admit.

“Leia!!” Luke’s voice was loud, excited, and directly in her ear. She winced and he immediately followed up with a much more reasonable “Sorry.”

“Water?” she asked him, not willing to try to speak again, but so desperately thirsty.

“Sure,” then his hands were gone and he was pulling her shirt back down. She felt the bed shift and the pad of his steps. Then there was the light touch of something against her lips. A straw. Greedily she took a few sips and the dry scratchy feeling in the back of her throat faded.

Slowly opening her eyes, and blinked a few times to clear them. Luke was sitting on the bed next to her, holding the cup up to her face. “Where?” she asked.

He gave her a tight smile. “Yavin. We’re on Yavin.”

“Oh.” Hell, she felt sore, like someone had taken a small hammer and beat it up and down her whole body. Slowly, pain medication tended to make her nauseous, she moved her head, trying to see around the room. Obi-Wan standing at the foot of her bed.

“Han?” she asked, she vaguely remember talking to him about something. Or had that been a dream? She remembered him being both young and old.

“He was here earlier Leia, but Chewbacca dragged him back to the Falcon to get some much-
needed rest a few hours ago,” Obi-Wan informed her.

She nodded and looked back at her brother “What happened?”

He scowled “You got shot.”

“I know.” the scratch was back so she took another small sip of the water he was still holding in.

“After that?”

Obi-Wan’s calm voice floated over her “The Falcon landed shortly after you lost consciousness, Luke arrived not more than a minute after it landed. We bundled you on board and left the system.”

“There was no way it was that easy.” she said to her brother.

His face twisted. “Easy? You think dodging the three Imperial cruisers that accompanied Vader to that planet easy? With thirty scared hysterical sentients on board? All the while Rex was trying to keep you from bleeding out? Then, when we realized you didn’t have the time to make it back here, rerouting the entire fleet, with the medical frigate, to meet us? Then the six hours of surgery to fix your back and internal organs, along with three days in a bacta tank? No Leia, none of that was easy.”

Okay, when he put it that way. But she thought of the major complication that had been at that factory that he hadn’t mentioned. “Vader?” she croaked.

Luke’s mood darkened, even more, twisted by...something. Something she couldn't identify. “Still alive.” But she already knew that, didn’t she? She pushed that thought away, she could have hysterics about that episode in her mind later.

“Factory?”

The scowl dropped from his face “A smoldering wreck.”

“Slaves?”

And here his face softened even more, and a smile broke his face. It was small, but it was there. “Free.”

“Here?”

He shook his head “No, they’re-”

“Ahhh, you're awake.” a new voice joined them, then there were footsteps and a human male walked into her line of sight. “Good afternoon. We were wondering when you would decide to join us. My name is Healer Banok.”

She waved her hand in a greeting gesture, not willing to waste her few precious words on this man. He was tall, a redhead, built thickly all over, and perhaps in his early thirties.

Obi-Wan spoke up again “If you don’t mind Leia, I will go inform your parents and Captain Solo that you’re awake.” She nodded her acquiescence and she was surprised to see him cross in front of the healer and lean down and placed a light kiss on her forehead. “I’m glad to see you are alright Leia, you gave us all quite the fright.”

She could only stare at him in astonishment and the words and the physical affection. Obi-Wan didn’t do this sort of thing. Not with anybody, even Luke, who she knew he loved and adored.
Gods how bad had she been injured to promote this kind of reaction?

The healer waited until Obi-Wan left the room before turning to Luke. “If you don’t mind Lt. Skywalker, could you give us the room? I’m about to discuss private medical concerns with her Highness.”


His face softened and she pulled on his arm, indicating that he should get back on the bed with her. He stood, and bit his lip, contemplating the best way to do it. He ended up crawling back in behind her, where he had been before when she had woken up, spooning her from behind. With her brother at her back, Leia whispered “How bad?”

The Healer, who was watching them with avid fascination, and she wondered what gossip would travel around the base about this incident, jerked his attention back to her. “All together you were rather lucky.” If she really had been lucky she wouldn't have been shot in the first place, but she continued to listen to the Healer.

"Let’s start with bad news. Unfortunately for you, the armor was of an inferior make, my understanding that it’s quite cheap, and it shows. When the shot hit you, the back piece actually shattered into your back leading to multiple deep lacerations all along your spine. You also had a two-inch piece of the armor that, melted into the wound, greatly increasing your chance for infection and septic shock. If that piece of shrapnel had been even an inch more to the right it would have severed your spinal cord."

Okay, she could see why everyone was so upset. "Good news?"

"Well, as cheap as that armor you were wearing was, it did take most of the brunt of the impact. The recoil lead to two of your ribs being broken, but the shot itself did not pass completely through your body. So the internal damage was limited to a depth of about two inches. That includes your collapsed lung and the fractured shoulder blade from the heat stress.

"You were lucky that your friends were quick witted enough to radio the Alliance, and that you had enough pull for them to redirect the fleet. If you had been delayed treatment by even another hour I can’t say you would have made it.”

“Oh.”

He hmmmed. “After your surgery, you required three days in the bacta tank. You're going to be tired over the next few days, and I want you back here in a week for a follow-up. The muscles in your right arm have atrophied a bit, so we’ll start you on light PT tomorrow.”

Sounded good to Leia. “When can I leave?” he scowled a bit at this, but before he could answer her a voice cut across the room.

“Leia!!” he said, a wide smile breaking across his face as he took her in. His hair was sticking up at all kinds of angles, and his clothes were wrinkled, but he had shaved his face. She felt the same rush of love, bemusement, and guilt she always did when she saw this younger version of her husband.

“Closure.” she heard her Han say in the back of her mind, and that conversation suddenly came flooding back. For a moment all she could feel was a profound sense of loss and grief. Luke’s arms tightened around her as he reacted to heartache.
“Later,” she promised herself. She would think about that conversation, and whether it was real or not later. For now, she needed to focus on this Han.

She forced herself to give him a wide smile. “You’re alright,” she said, relief in her tone, as she looked at his chest. That Force vision image of him dead playing across her mind’s eye.

His smile vanished and a scowl replaced it. “Of course I’m alright. Because you took a shot meant for me,” he stalked towards her and sat on the chair near her bed. “Don’t do that again,” he said darkly. “I don’t like owing anybody anything.”

She could feel Luke’s amusement, as he too heard what Han wasn’t saying. That he was supposed to protect them, not the other way around. “You don’t owe me anything Han,” she said gently. “That’s not how this works.”

“Not in my world sister.”

The Healer once again cleared his throat and all of them looked at him.

“As I was saying,” he said “or perhaps there is more guilt tripping you would all like to indulge in?” They all shook their heads. “Good.” he turned back to focus on Leia “To answer your question Princess, I would like to keep you here for at least one more day for observation. You can be discharged tomorrow, but I do insist that you stay with someone so they can monitor you.”

“She can stay with me.” both Han and Luke said at the same time. Han scowled at Luke, and then for the first time seemed to actually notice how her brother was positioned around her. His scowl deepened, and jealousy crossed his face.

“Or perhaps she should stay with her mother and father?” a mild voice asked from the doorway. “Given that we at least have some moderating influence on her. Knowing Leia, the first time she’s able to stay awake for more than five minutes she is going to throw herself into her work full speed.”

Healer Banok scowled, from yet another interruption, or the prediction of what she would try to do when she left his infirmary she wasn’t sure. He wagged his finger in her direction. “You are restricted to light activities only for two weeks. I want you to rest and relax.” she opened her mouth to protest and he shook his head. “No your highness, I must insist on this, or I won’t let you out of here that entire time. Your body has been through a horrible trauma and you need to give it time to heal. I know most patients are more comfortable in familiar surroundings then here, but I will keep you here if you don’t promise me you will take it easy.”

She scowled, she had too much to do, and she was a grown woman, she knew her limits. But her father’s voice came across stern and demanding “Leia.”

At her back, Luke’s arms tightened around her “You’ve done enough for now, please Leia.”

She sighed “I promise.”

The Healer’s face brightened “Good. I hate to tie up this bed for that long simply because you were being difficult.” Well, that was one of the subtlest smackdowns she had ever received in her life. “Do you have any more questions for me?” She shook her head. “Good. I’ll schedule your PT for tomorrow, and after that is done I will release you into your parent’s care.” And with that, he bustled off.

Her father slightly shifted to let the man pass, and then he came into the room, “Luke,” he greeted her brother warmly, then he turned to Han “Captain Solo,” which was not quite as warm, but not as
hostile as it could have been.

“Sir,” Han responded, wiggling in his chair uncomfortably.

“You are looking a bit more refreshed than the last time I saw you.” her father offered.

“Yeah,” and here Han ran his hands through his hair, “The nap helped.” Then he seemed to notice that he was sitting in the only available seating in the room and he stood up hastily. “So this is a bit crowded for my tastes. I should get going.” He shot a look at Leia, who was simply baffled by the abrupt turn that this conversation had taken. “I’ll see you later Princess,” and with that, he beat a hasty retreat from the room.

All three of them watched him go and Leia blurted out “What did I miss?”

Her father sighed. “I seem to make him even more nervous when I treat him with respect.”

She focused in on her father “Respect?” she asked. Her father tolerated Han, but respect was a bit of a stretch.

Papa sighed and sat down in the chair Han had just vacated. “I’ll be honest Leia, I still don’t like him. But respect has very little do with liking a person.” Her father gave her a rueful grin “I was there for all the debriefing on this mission. He defended you. He could have run, in fact before all this happened I would have laid good money down that faced with this situation that’s exactly what he would do. But he didn’t. He stood, out in the open, and defended you.”

She scowled, insulted on Han’s behalf “Of course he would.”

“That may have been obvious to you Leia, but it wasn't as clear to me.”

“That’s because you were looking Han’s inability to be loyal to organizations. You were confusing that with the ability to be loyal to people.” Luke blurted out.

Both she and her father turned their heads, her brother blushed under their scrutiny but continued on. “Han’s loyal to people. He really doesn't care too much about the ideas Leia and I are fighting for. One government is the same as another to him. But he does care that we care.”

Her father hummed in the back of his throat at that. Leia let it lie. Maybe her father would never like Han, but if he was willing to give his respect, that was something she could live with. She could feel her lids drooping, but there was one more thing she needed to know before she went back to sleep.

“The slaves?” she asked.

Luke gave a delighted huff. “They’re fine. We left them on the medical frigate. They were all in pretty rough shape, and command didn’t think it was wise to let them know where the base was.”

“They are going to need counseling,” she warned “and new identities. We can’t just let them go with no help.”

Her father laughed and ran his fingers across her foreheads “I know Leia, this isn’t the first time I’ve handled something like this. Luke and I have it well in hand. Go to sleep.”

Well if anyone would have a good idea of what was needed for those people it was her father and brother. Confident that they were in good hands, she drifted back into sleep.
It ended up being her mother who escorted her from the med bay. “Your father wanted to be here,” she said gently, as she helped Leia to her feet. She was wiped from the PT session she had completed that morning and had just woken up from her nap. “But he was pulled into an emergency meeting about a last minute change to the plan to rescue Drusil Bephorin.”

Leia frowned “How’s that going.”

“No work your Highness,” Healer Banok warned. “I mean it. Just rest.”

She shot him a glare, but her mother only chuckled. “I’ll see that she behaves,” she assured him.

He gave her a long dubious look but shrugged. “Just remember to be here again tomorrow for PT.”

Leia nodded, ready to promise him anything, as long as he let her leave this place.

“Ready?” she asked Mama, and Breha nodded.

They made their way slowly down the corridors. Leia knew that she wasn’t allowed to sleep in her own quarters, as they were too small to accommodate Luke to watch her. So for the next two weeks, she would be sleeping in her parent's quarters.

“Are you sure about me staying with you?” Leia asked her mother again

Her mother hummed and patted Leia’s arm affectionately. “It will be fine.”

“One of you should be staying in my room, rather than sleeping on a cot,” she pointed out. Her parents had informed her that their bed wasn’t big enough to accommodate all three of them. So they had brought in a sleeping cot to place on the floor, and they would take turns sleeping on it, as she stayed on the bed. Leia would have protested, this body could handle the hard comfort of the cot better than theirs, but honestly, right now she felt like she was ninety, not nineteen, so she swallowed her pride and said nothing.

“Maybe after a few nights,” her mother conceded. “Depending on how much sleep we end up actually getting. But if you think either one of us will be sleeping well in a place where we can’t get up immediately and check on you, you are sadly mistaken.”

Alright, that was fair. They approached her parent’s door and Leia could only feel gratitude. Even this short of a walk had left her physically exhausted, and she thought longingly of the big bed where she could rest for a few minutes. Her mother guided her into the bedroom and stayed with her as she gratefully sank down to sit on it.

Her mother watched her intently for a minute, then she got up and closed the door to the bedroom. Leia frowned, what was this all about?

Her mother turned and faced her, but didn’t come back over. She stood there for a moment, staring at her then said softly. “Leia, there is a question I want to ask you.”

Okay, her mother had been in and out of the infirmary over the last day, along with Luke and her father. What did she want to ask Leia that they, and the medical staff terrible gossips that they
were, overhear? “Alright,” Leia answered her cautiously.

“I really want you to think about this and give me an answer. Not your immediate instinctive response, not what you think I want to hear, but the truth.” There was the aura of command around her mother, and the formal request helped sink into Leia’s mind that whatever this was her mother was treating it with the utmost importance.

“I promise Mama.”

Her mother took in a deep breath, centered herself, then asked flatly “Do you want to die?”

Leia felt as if she had been kicked in the stomach. “What?” she managed.

“Do you want to die Leia?”

“No!” she shouted back.

“I wanted you to think about it.”

“There’s no need to think about it. The answer is no.”

“Are you sure? Because from where I’m standing it doesn't look like you want to live.”

Leia felt bafflement and hurt rising within her. How could someone who knew her so well, was this close to her, think that? “How did you come to that conclusion?”

Her mother gave a small sob. “When you work yourself to the bone day in and day out without taking a rest or relaxing in any way. When you go on impossible missions, where the odds are so firmly stacked against you I can’t even imagine how you think you will survive. When several people warn you that the plan you are embarking is foolish at best and suicidal at worst and you ignore them. When you know that Vader is going to be somewhere, and you go anyway!” her mother wasn’t shouting, but there was an intensity to the look in her eyes and a tightness around her mouth that suggested it was only decades of training that kept her voice even.

“I didn’t know for sure he would be there.” she protested, sticking to the one fact in that speech that she could honestly refute.

“Don’t you dare try to fool me Leia Organa.” her mother’s voice was sharp and bitter. “You can lie to yourself all you like, but don’t you dare sit there and tell me you thought the chances were good he wouldn’t be on that planet.”

Leia had nothing to say to that.

“I have held my peace until now. You are an adult, even if you were the age your face says you are, and you are far past the age when I have any right to forbid you to do anything.”

Leia felt panic rise in her at that statement. “That’s not true.” Leia protested “You are and always will be my Queen.” If her mother refuted that it was a cut at the core of her identity at the deepest level.

Breha gave her a sad smile “Yes, I am, and Leia you are, above all else, Alderaanian. But greatest importance to me is that foremost and first, you are my daughter. To order you to do such a thing would forever make me your Queen first, not your mother. And since it is a mother’s wish to keep you out of danger, it is not something I can allow myself to do.”
“Sometimes the personal must be separated from the political. The Queen of Alderaan is wholly made of you, but the Queen of Alderaan is not wholly you.” It was a saying her mother had given her growing up, as she wondered at her mother’s public stance on Alderaan’s neutrality on the subject of the Rebellion. She couldn’t understand how her mother, who she knew was a supporter of the Rebellion, would not say as much in public.

Breha sighed and wiped a hand across her face, discreetly wiping away her tears. “I can’t blame you if you are. Your husband is lost, the life you had built, however dark it might have been, and don’t say otherwise,” she warned Leia as she opened her mouth to speak “I know you were not in a happy place when you make this leap, even taking in account Han’s death. You are not as careful with the details as you think you are. Not for someone who knows you and is listening. And I’ve been listening very hard, Leia. Your silence on the matter has left me little choice.”

Leia opened her mouth to say, yet again, her reasons for her silence, but her mother put up a hand to forestall that. “I know you have your reasons, I even agree with some of them. But that doesn’t take away my worry. That doesn’t remove my desire to know. The life you built, no matter how imperfect, is gone and you have found yourself once more in a fight you thought you had won. I can’t imagine the toll that has taken on you.”

Leia sat there, trying to listen to what her mother was saying. “I don’t want to die,” she said finally. “I acknowledge that this has been hard on me. I know that it looks like I’m being reckless and foolish. But I can promise you that I’m not.”

“You knew Vader as going to be there Leia.”

“He doesn’t want to kill me.” she countered “And I also knew what a victory at that plant would bring the Alliance. I made a calculated risk. I’ve done it my whole life.”

“You never gave so little weight to your own survival before.”

“This is worth it!” Leia insisted “Trust me it was true when I was nineteen, it’s even more true now that I know what victory will bring us.” It had been temporary, but it had been real.

“No, it is not.”

“How can you say that?” Leia asked, aghast.

“What good is the defeating the Empire if you are not around to see it?” Breha demanded. “Leia, my love, why do you think your father and I fought so hard for this! It was to make the galaxy better for you!! And it’s all for naught if you die.”

“Because I’m the future?” she asked bitterly “Because your line dies with me if I don’t survive? I can promise you Alderaan’s culture would survive. It is much stronger than that.”

“Because you’re my daughter and I love you!!” Her mother was trembling, “This isn’t about legacies or bloodlines, or the fact you are my heir. This is about how I believe the Galaxy is a much better place with you in it.” Whatever energy she seemed to posses left her and Breha’s shoulders slumped. Wearily she sat down on the bed next to Leia and took her hands in hers.

“We tried so long for a child,” she whispered, her voice soft. “No matter what we did, or medical procedure we tried, it all came to naught.” She looked up at Leia then, eyes sad “Then Bail brought you to me.” Breha’s left hand came up and cupped Leia’s cheek. “And you were perfect. Loving, bright, and so full of life. And I felt so guilty because I knew you were meant to be ours, but a friend had to die to make that so.”
She shook her head sadly. “Leia, we didn’t take you in simply to turn you into a weapon against Vader and the Emperor. If that had been the case there were certainly better places to put you that wouldn’t put you so prominently in their paths. We took you in because we loved and wanted you.”

“I know you love me, Mama,” Leia said brokenly. “I never once doubted that.”

“Then you know the agony when we received the call from Obi-Wan saying that you had been hurt. That the healers weren’t sure if you would survive.” Her hand fell away from Leia’s face and a soft sigh escaped her. “Or maybe you can’t. It’s not the same. There is a special twist of pain to the agony of not knowing the fate of your child.” Breha’s voice trailed off as she took in Leia’s face.

Leia fought to keep her reply in check. Yes, she knew this, she was all too bitterly intimate with that particular pain. And all she could feel was sorrow and regret that she had put her parents through it, however unintentionally. She searched for the words to apologize, to say she hadn’t meant to be that thoughtless, that it had been decades since she had to even consider such a thing, but she would be more careful in the future. She focused on her mother, opening her mouth to say all of this, but her Breha’s face was no longer filled with anguish, but a kind of muted comprehension.

When Luke had explained that she was strong in the Force, a great many things about her intuition made much more sense to her. But her ability to read people, their body language, their faces, the words they choose to use and not use, that she had learned at her mother’s knee. And those keen eyes were paying close attention to her now.

“You do know what I’m talking about.” she whispered, stunned.

Leia felt panic rise in her chest. “I don’t want to talk about this.”

“Leia, you had a child?”

“Mama, I really don’t want to discuss this.”

But for once her mother wasn’t listening to her, too wrapped up in the discovery she had just made. “Leia, what happened to them?”

Leia shook her head, the thoughts of Ben pulling on her heart, along with her rising fury at him. The two were too closely linked to her to ever fully pull them apart again. “I’m tired, Mama.”

Her mother said nothing for a moment, then said softly “All right, we’ll table this for now. I’ll leave you to your rest then.” She got up and headed to the door “Leia, please do think about what I said.” she gave a small smile “And if you ever want to talk about your child I will be here for you when you are ready.”

Leia waited until her mother left the room and crawled into the bed, determined to use the oblivion of sleep to escape all of this.

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Mon was sitting at her desk when Leia entered the room. She looked up from the datapad she had been reading and gave her a wide smile. “Leia, thank you for meeting with me. How are you
feeling?”

Leia gave a smile in return and came into the room sitting on the chair on the other side of the desk. “Better. I can go a whole five hours without wanting to take a nap.”

“Sleep is good.”

“Sleep is annoying but necessary.” Healer Banok had been frustratingly correct on her limits.

Mon regarded her solemnly for a moment then she said quietly “Do you have any idea why I asked to speak to you?”

“I’m assuming it has to do with the mission to Cymoon 1.”

“Partially, yes. I’ve read your debriefing, along with the rest of your team’s and it raised a few concerns that I have put off for far too long.” She sighed and rubbed her forehead “Leia how long have we known each other?”

Decades, but only on Leia’s ends “Since I was ten. That was the year you finally managed to attend one of my father's birthday parties.”

Mon gave her a faint smile. “Yes, I’ve known you for a long time. Outside of being friends and allies with your parents, I do care for who you are Leia.” She folded her hands together and placed them in front of her, along the top of her desk “Which is why I requested the meeting, in private, with you.”

Leia sat up straighter, this probably wasn’t going to lead anywhere good. “Mon-” she started, but Mon shook her head.

“No Leia, this isn't an interrogation. I am asking as your friend, not your commanding officer. You are not under any obligation to answer this question.” The woman drew in a deep breath and said firmly “Leia, what exactly happened in that cell between you and Vader?”

Leia felt all the air whoosh out of her lungs. “What?”

“I normally wouldn't pry, but as far as I can tell everything starts from that point.”

“What starts from that point?” she demanded.

“This radical shift in your personality. Ever since your escape from the Death Star you’ve been distant, remote. Almost every friend you have on this base you’ve withdrawn from.”

“That’s not true.”

Mon gave her a patient look. “Leia when was the last time you and I spoke?”

“Three days before I left for Cymoon 1.”

Mon shook her head. “No, we were working, planning the mission to rescue Drusil Bephorin. I meant actually talked, about something besides the Alliance.”

Leia fell silent, her mind coming up with nothing.

“Except your sudden relationship with Lt. Skywalker-”

“What’s wrong with that?” Leia demanded hotly, first, she was too remote, now she was too
friendly.

Mon blinked, startled. “Not a thing. He’s not only a valuable asset to this cause, he’s quite the remarkable and charming young man. But Leia, as you said, I’ve known you since you were ten, I’ve never seen you trust someone so fast.”

“And you are obsessed with work. Any hobbies and activities you once did for fun I’ve yet to see you do. It’s not healthy Leia. I’ve mentioned it to your parents but they assure me you are fine.” She gave a delicate snort “Anyone can see you are not fine.”

“Mon,” she protested “I am fine.”

Mon ignored that, and kept talking “And then there is Vader.”

A chill went down Leia’s spine at the mention of that name “What about him?”

“Let’s start with this.” Mon slid the datapad across the table.

Leia looked down to see an Imperial bounty notice with a holo of her taken while she was in the Imperial Senate. “I don’t understand what the problem is Mon. I’m not the only one in the Rebellion with a bounty on my head.”

“Look at the amount and details Leia.”

Leia glanced down, expecting to see the ten million credits that had been on her head last time. She saw in big letters twenty-five million, with the caveat alive and unharmed. Leia felt the blood drain from her face. She was, with this amount, the most wanted fugitive in the Empire.

“I didn’t know about this,” she whispered, her fingers tracing the amount reflected on the screen. She should have though. Had she been thinking clearly, and not letting her own prejudices blind her, she should have realized this was exactly what Vader would do. It was the exact same terms and conditions for Luke’s capture, once upon a time.

Mon’s voice was gentle but firm, “No, I can see that you didn’t. That’s not the only thing. He’s interviewed, personally, everyone on Alderaan who was in the smallest way associated with your life. Old school mates, teachers, family.”

Leia’s head shot up, worry making her heart pound, “My aunts?” she demanded. She hadn’t heard anything about their capture, but that meant nothing. It was well in the realm of possibility that a decision was made somewhere in the chain of command not to tell her.

Mon shook her head “As far as we know they are still free. They went to ground as soon as your parents gave the evacuation order at the palace. They haven’t resurfaced as far as we, and more importantly, the Empire, can tell.” Leia let out a long sigh of relief.

Mon went on, “But he has talked to every distant cousin he was able to track down. He’s even interviewed every seller at the local market to the palace. All he asked them about was you. Your likes, dislikes, every important memory they could drudge up. He personally oversaw the seizure of the Alderaanian Royal Palace, and rumor has it that everything that is yours he personally confiscated. The stormtrooper who shot you?” Leia nodded “Vader had him and his entire squadron executed.”

Leia fought her rising panic “That could be because we destroyed the base and got away. Vader doesn’t look kindly on failure.”
“Maybe,” Mon said doubtfully “But he tends to hold individuals accountable, not entire groups of people. And then there was that business with Pandion.”

“Because he killed some Imperial flunkie who insulted him? It’s not like he hasn’t done that before.”

“No Leia, because he personally lobbied hard that Piett be given the post of Governor of Alderaan. And he objected, quite strenuously, to Pandion's appointment. And when he wasn’t listened to he removed the problem, in public, using a method of execution he normally only employs against rebels and traitors. He doesn’t involve himself in the political appointment of governors Leia. At least he never had before. Every spy we have near him says that he is obsessed past the point of reason with you.”

Leia put the pieces together, finally. “This is why Draven thinks I’m a spy.”

Mon sighed “He confronted you about his suspicions?”

Leia nodded.

Mon actually rolled her eyes, "Of course he did. Yes, this is why.”

“That makes no sense,” she protested “Why would the Empire sacrifice a major imperial asset to place one spy in an organization that the Death Star could easily wipe out?”

Mon shook her head. “You are looking at this the wrong way Leia. No, the Empire would do no such thing. But Vader easily could.”

Leia frowned. Vader was the Empire’s will, it’s brutal enforcement. He was who was sent when a clear message was needed. Then that conversation that she wasn’t dwelling on up floated in her mind. That wasn’t true anymore, not strictly speaking.

“Draven thinks I’m Vader’s spy.” If the situation wasn’t so dire Leia would break into hysterical laughter at that thought. If only he knew the truth.

“Yes. Vader was never a fan of the Death Star Leia. We know this. He fought against its construction from the beginning. He is on the record stating that he thought it was a massive waste of time and resources. By destroying it, we have greatly weakened the Empire's position yes, but more importantly from his standpoint, we removed a potential political rival in Tarkin, weakened the Emperor's position among his own men, and allies that Palpatine has used fear and intimidation to make cooperate, and removed a weapon he viewed with great distaste.”

“You think he’s moving against the Emperor?” she asked.

Mon shook her head. “We’re not sure. I’m not convinced that is the case, even if Draven is. Vader is definitely making more of an effort to court the Imperial Navy hierarchy” translation, he wasn’t killing them as often, “But I remain skeptical a coup is what he has in mind. He simply could be shoring up his own support in the wake of the Death Star’s destruction. It makes no sense, after all these years of being Palpatine’s attack dog, he would turn on his master now.”

No, from Mon’s point of view it didn’t. However if he believed he had another player, who could help him do it, it did make sense. Winning the actual fight with Palpatine was one thing, lining up support for your rule was another. He needed her for the first, but not the second, but he was clearly making moves to prepare for that eventuality.

Leia swallowed and looked at the women who had been her mentor and friend for decades. Heart
in her throat she asked, “And do you think I’m a spy?”

Mon stared at her for a long moment then said firmly “No.”

Leia let out a sigh of relief. At least she hadn’t screwed this up.

“And the rest of the Alliance leadership?” she asked.

“They had their doubts. About half of them took Draven’s warnings seriously, but when none of the false information we passed to you got sent to any Imperial, much less Vader, then his theory lost credibility.”

Leia felt her anger rise “When they what?” she said deadly serious.

Mon gave her a chastising look “I never believed what Draven was saying. We are all trapped in our own world views, Leia. His is that betrayal can come from any person and that anyone acting suspiciously is automatically a traitor.” Her face twisted in regret for a moment

"Did my parents know that you had done this?” Leia demanded.

Mon shook her head. "No, of course not. I would never put them in that position."

"You mean Draven didn't want to risk them tipping me off."

"No Leia, I mean that they are my friends, and I didn't want to make them choose between the cause the have dedicated their lives to and their daughter." She sighed "It all came to nothing anyway. Draven was ordered to suspend his surveillance of you, and that's when I suspect he confronted you with his suspicions. He was hoping to spook you into making a mistake."

“I want to be very clear here Leia, I don't think what Vader was doing necessarily meant that you were his plant. It was too obvious he was interested in you, and this reward,” and here she tapped the pad “put too much a target on your back to make you of great use to the Alliance. Even for Vader, who is not known for being subtle, it was too much. However, I acknowledge my affection for you could be blinding me. I was also facing pressure from several quarters that it was better to be safe than sorry. They were having issues believing that you could have so easily escaped his grasp.”

Leia unconsciously rubbed her neck, remembering those few terrifying seconds when he had her in his grip “I wouldn’t say it was easy.” she countered.

“No, but you are alive, in one piece, and sane. Not many people can say that.”

Leia acknowledged the point with a nod of her head.

“By your own admission, he was going to pull you to Coruscant. You say you don’t know why, and I chose to believe you on that point, but something has clearly caught his attention about you. And something happened in that cell between you. Something that has altered you drastically. As your friend, I’m asking you to confide in me. Or if you can’t do that, given my position in the Alliance, at least someone. You are the future of this rebellion and any government we hope to build afterward. I know it makes you uncomfortable but we can pull rank and make sure you have access to one of the mind healers.”

Leia just stared at her, wondering what she should say. My personality didn’t really undergo that radical of a transformation because I’m thirty-four years older. Vader’s obsessed with me because I’m his daughter. I’ve got just as much potential in the Force as Luke and if you knew that, friend
or no friend you’d be pushing me to train along with him. Because I’m a decent politician, but being a Jedi is a rare talent and it would of be more use to you, and this future you want to build. I see all our hopes and dreams murdered by my son.

Instead, she said, “Thank you for the concern Mon, but I have this under control.”

Mon’s eyes registered disappointment, but all she said was “Very well. If you change your mind, you now where to find me.”

Leia walked out of Mon’s office, head whirling with all the everything she just learned. She wasn’t paying much attention to where she was going, too lost in her own head, so when a hand grabbed hers, she gave a small jump of in startlement.

She looked up to see Luke’s face in front of her, “Luke,” she said, pleasure in her tone, and then that feeling faded as she took in his serious and drawn face.

“What’s wrong?” she asked concerned.

He shook his head. “Not here.” He tugged on her hand, indicating he wanted her to follow him. He pulled her through the bustling hallways past the flight deck, into the open landing field. He said nothing the entire way, and he was keeping a tight reign on his emotions so she wasn’t able to get even a hint of what this was. When they reached the edge of the landing field, to where she had taken him when she confessed their relationship to him, he finally stopped and dropped her hand.

“Luke?” she said to his back.

“I was waiting until you were feeling better to bring this up,” he said, his voice tight and controlled. “And then I thought it would be best to have this conversation in private, away from everyone.”

“Luke what is this about?” impatience creeping into her voice, she already had filled her quota of hard conversations today, and she had the sinking feeling she was about to land herself into another one.

“What does Vader want with you? Because I know it’s not your death.”

Leia felt the blood drain from her face. “And how do you know that?” she demanded. There had been nothing, not in the mission reports, not in Vader’s account, nothing, that suggested the two of them had talked.

“Because he told me.” Luke finally turned around to face her with that statement, face blank.

Leia felt lightheaded with fear. “He spoke to you!?? Luke when was he close enough to do that!”

Luke shook his head, “Not with words Leia.º” he trailed off and didn’t continue. He seemed to be thinking about how he wanted to phrase this and then he sighed. “Let me show you. I think that will be the best way to explain this.”

There was a tap on her shields and she let them down, scared as she hadn’t been for so long, at what she would find in her brother’s memories.

He was running, Leia’s plea ringing in his ears. He had left so much of his family alone and been
left alone in return, that he couldn’t bring himself to do that to her. No matter that this was probably the only chance he would get for a long time at a shot at Vader, he couldn’t ignore his sister's fear for him on this. Leia feared almost nothing, and to realize how much he was scaring her with his actions was enough to make him think, not react, to Vader.

Then her pain was dancing across the Force, sending shooting spikes of agony up his sides. The breath was stolen from his body for a moment, then he was frantically trying to recenter himself so he could focus enough to call out to her.

“Leia!!” he screamed.

There was no answer, she always answered him when he called. Something had gone wrong, very very wrong. He could feel it in the Force, it whispered in his ears to move faster. He pulled every bit of it in himself he could, till he felt like he would burn up with all the energy and light that was contained within him, and he moved. The landscape passed by his eyes in a blur, but that was okay because he knew where the obstacles were, he knew the best path forward. It was like breathing, he didn’t even have to think about it, as he ran faster than he had ever dared to before.

He was almost there, he was so close, when another, more brutal scream of pain ripped everything away from him. For a moment all that was in his world was that pain, then it faded back to more manageable levels. He came to himself, feeling raw and bleeding, only slightly in the metaphorical sense. He was on the ground, skid marks behind him to show how he fell and how the ground brought him to a harsh stop. He ached all over, and he was sure he was covered from head to toes in bruises. His back also felt wet, and with a trembling hand, he placed a hand on it, trying to see how bad it was. It was dry, despite everything in him insisting that he was bleeding. This was her blood he was sensing, not his.

“Leia I’m coming,” he sent to her determinedly then raised his shields as tight as he could. As much as he needed the reassurance that she was still alive he couldn’t afford to be distracted like that again. The Falcon roared overhead, heading in the direction to where Leia was. He gave himself a good shake, all over, trying to figure out if any of the injuries he felt were actually his and if he would make it worse by running on them. He was sore and injured yes, but nothing that couldn't wait. He opened himself to that great ocean of power and took off again.

He arrived to the ship in a burst of speed to find Han staring at him gobsmacked. “Where the hell did you come from?” he demanded as a blaster bolt whirled by his head. He cursed and then turned around to return the fire. Obi-Wan was ten feet in front of him, beyond the shelter Han was crouched behind, deflecting the majority of the shots, heading their way.

“Nevermind that!” a voice roared from the ground. Luke looked down to see Rex leaning over Leia, his hands soaked with her blood, he roared “Luke, take the General’s place, General you’re going to have to use the Force to pick her up.”

Luke was puzzled until he got a good look at his sister's back. The back half of the body armor was gone. He could see the under cloth soaked through with blood, and near her shoulder, there was a large piece of melted armor sticking out. Clearly, this is where the shot had gone in. No wonder Rex didn’t want to pick her up, any odd movements of that piece could cut across an artery.

“LUKE!!” Obi-Wan cried out. Luke brought his attention back to his teacher.

“Right,” he said determinedly, and brought out his lightsaber, igniting as he stepped forward to deflect the blaster bolts being aimed at Han. He wasn’t the best at reflecting them directly back at their shooters, but Han had a steady aim, and the last few stormtroopers started to fall.
Chewie roared something, and Han spat out. “She’s in the ship, let’s go.”

“Go,” Luke ordered, even as he started backing up himself. “I’ll cover you.” He heard Han’s footsteps beat a hasty retreat. As soon as he heard the familiar clang, clang, as his boots hit the gangplank Luke sped up his own withdrawal. He had one foot on the gangplank when across the field the back doors of the facility opened. Luke swallowed, bracing himself for more stormtroopers, but it was a solitary figure that stepped out. As it methodically started heading towards them, and Luke could, even at this distance, see he was tall, and dressed from head to toe in black body armor.

Luke felt the air whoosh out of his lungs as he realized who he must be looking at. This was him, this was Vader. Luke had seen holos of the man, everyone on the Rebel base had. It was accompanied with the warning that if you ever saw this creature on the battlefield you run. He felt his presence when he entered into the system, that aura of pain and misery was hard to overlook. But to see the entire package together was a sight that wouldn’t leave Luke, ever.

Luke took an instinctive step forward, all thoughts of escape blown from his mind. Vader was here, and apparently unarmed, he could end this now.

The figure continued his slow methodical walk, then stopped, his head tilting.

Luke braced himself, clearly, the creature had seen him, but what happened next was completely unexpected.

“So you are her tutor,” a male voice intoned in his mind, despite the fierce shields he had put in place to stop this. There was jealousy and possessiveness beating hard underneath every word.

“What?” Of all the ways Luke had imagined confronting Biggs and his father’s killer, this scenario had never even remotely crossed his mind.

“You are shorter than I expected.” Luke scrambled to find his bearings. He had been expecting death threats, not petty insults to his height.

He focused on the fight in front of him. “I’ll die before I let you have her!!” he howled, sure that this nightmare could hear him.

“That does not provide much of a hindrance to me,” and he began walking again, steps sure. Then there was a ripple of something, across the Force. Luke cursed himself, he should be able to figure this out. Ben would know what that meant, Leia too probably. It was only him and his ignorance that left them all vulnerable.

And Vader apparently understood it too because he stopped and said. “We don’t have time for this.”

“Make time!!” Luke shot back "You killed my father. I’m not letting this go so easily.”

There was a wealth of exasperation following the answer to that challenge “You are going to have to be more specific. I’ve killed a lot of father’s.”

Anakin Skywalker, Luke thought, remember him? You betrayed and murdered him. But there was no answer from the figure, no reaction at all. Damn it he had let his focus slip and Vader hadn’t heard that. He took a deep breath in, trying to bring his concentration in line with this one simple task, to make sure Vader heard every word, but before he could that ripple in the Force shifted into a whirlwind.
“You need to get her out of here.” Now, all that anger was gone, a deep chilling fear put in its place.

“If you think for one second I’m going to believe anything you have to say-” Luke started, but Vader cut him off.

“Don’t you feel that boy!!” he demanded “She’s running out of time! If you have even an ounce of the love and loyalty for her that she does for you, YOU WILL LEAVE!!” The last was said on a roar, and even through his shields, Luke could feel the scorching heat of them.

Luke stood there indecisive for a moment, then he heard Ben’s voice “Luke, we need to leave. Now!!”

He powered down his lightsaber and turned to head up the gangplank. That voice followed him “ A warning boy, if Leia dies there is nowhere in the galaxy that I won’t hunt you down.”

He headed into the Falcon in a daze. He knew Leia wasn’t telling him everything about her encounter with Vader, but what in all the hell had that been about?

Leia’s eyes flew open as her brother withdrew from her mind.

“Well?” he demanded.

She pressed her lips together, trying to find the words beyond hysterical screaming. Oh gods, Luke had almost told him. In that disaster of a mission, at the worst possible time ever, Luke had come so close to telling Vader the truth. Only his inability to project words when he was upset had saved them all. She pressed her hands to her mouth, trying to keep the screams inside.

“Leia?” now Luke’s face was full of concern.

She had done this. Through her cowardice and avoidance of this subject, she had left them all vulnerable. Cymoon 1 could have so easily turned into another Bespin, where Luke’s life was on the line and everything he had known and trusted had come tumbling down around him.

“Leia, what’s wrong? You’re trembling?” he pulled her into a hug. She hugged him back as fiercely, thankful that nothing had happened, that Vader didn’t know, that Luke hadn’t paid the ultimate price for her arrogance and stupidity.

She forced herself to back away from him, and he let her go, reluctantly.


He shook his head. “Forget it. We’ll talk about this later, you are in no condition to explain anything to me right now.”

Leia wanted, oh how she wanted, to take the escape he was offering her. As she had done so many times in the past three months. To avoid all of this and put it off for another day. But she couldn’t. Luke’s own actions showed she couldn’t. He wasn’t going to let this go.

“About Vader-” she started again.

His face darkened “Don’t worry about it, I’ll handle it.”
“That’s what I’m afraid of.” she said and his face twisted even more.

“You think I can’t take him?” he demanded.

Now, no. Later though….she had seen what Luke was capable of as a full-blown Jedi Master. It was something she was beginning to realize that was beyond what the old Jedi order had been capable of producing. It was a great and terrible thing to see, and none of them, not her parents, not Obi-Wan, not Yoda, and certainly not Vader, could even imagine such a thing existing.

“I think you’ll be able to yes, but the question is will you want to?”

“Of course I will!” he waved his hands around, indicating the galaxy in general. “Do you think there is another way to stop him?”

From me, no. From you, possibly. But he wouldn’t understand that answer yet. “Revenge isn’t the Jedi way.” she cautioned, worried about the hate she found beating in his heart.

“This isn’t revenge!” he shot back “This is self-preservation. He’s threatening you! Why, I don’t know, but whatever he wants from you, it can’t be good.”

She bit her lip, trying to find the words, but Luke kept going on “May I remind you of all that he has taken from me. He killed Biggs! He killed our father!

There was no avoiding it now. “No Luke,” she said gently, “he is our father.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer and Acyanat
Chapter 13

Hi guys!! I'm sorry that I left you with a cliffhanger and then to add to the fun this chapter is a few days late. My life, and more importantly my beta's life, got a little hectic. Man sometimes adulting sucks. Anyway, there are spoilers for Heir to the Jedi in this chapter, so read at your own risk. Hope you enjoy!!!

The words were finally said, the truth was out, and all avoidance of this topic had come to an end. And Luke’s reaction was nothing. Not horror, not disbelief, just an eerie blank nothingness. She waited with bated breath, and it felt like everything around her, including the usually noisy jungle, waited in breathless silence with them. Then in a hollow tone he finally asked. “I’m not the child of Anakin Skywalker?”

She frowned. Why was this his first thought? Where is this coming from? This wasn’t even on the list of reactions she was expecting, and she shook her head, “No, of course, you are Luke.”

In a split second his numbness vanished and confusion took its place. “But you just said Vader is our father.”

“He is Luke.” Her voice full of grief for the sorrow that was about to come to him. "He is our father."

He frowned at her, concern filling his face. He stepped up close to her and grabbed her chin in his hand and peered into her eyes. “Leia, are you on any pain medication? Any drugs at all?”

“What?” she asked, baffled at his response, “No?”

“Any dizziness? Disorientation?”

Suddenly he was a healer? What was with all the questions? “I’m fine.” she insisted.

“You’re not fine. Something’s wrong. You’re not thinking clearly.” Luke bit his lip in worry. She could feel the Force, like a distant echo, pulsing with urgency and confusion. Oh, wonderful, he’s calling for Obi-Wan, that’s just what this difficult conversation needed added to the mix.

“Do you understand what I just told you?” she asked.

He shook his head. “You aren’t making any sense.” He grabbed her hand and attempted to pull her back to the base. “We need to find your parents. You need to see Healer Banok.”

She dug her heels in and pulled back the hand he held in his grasp. “No, Luke. I don’t need to see the healer, and we definitely don’t need Obi-Wan. I’m fine.”

“You’re not fine!” he protested. “You’re speaking in riddles.”

She yanked her hand, hard, out of his grasp.”No, I am not.” He stopped and turned, reaching to take her hand again, his face set in determined lines, worry and fear dancing along the edges of her
shields. It clicked then, what was going on. Hell, he didn’t understand what she was telling him. The concept of Vader and Father being so apart in his mind he clearly wasn’t comprehending what she had said.

“Luke, stop!” his own hand dropped as he looked at her with wide eyes at her strident tone. She took a deep breath in and stepped into his personal space, grabbing his chin and forcing him to look her in the eyes.

“Are you listening to me?” she demanded.

He nodded, clearly trying to placate her. So she was going to have to make this as simple as possible. She understood, all too well, his desire to flee from this. To take any refuge, and any hole to wiggle through, so as to not have this knowledge permanently etched into his mind. But his own actions left her little choice in the matter. If he was going to survive any of this he needed to know, and now. The time for shielding him from this was past, long past if she was going, to be honest with herself. It was only her cowardice after all that was keeping him in ignorance.

“We are twins.” He frowned at her when she didn't say anything further. After a beat he nodded in the affirmative, agreeing with her simple statement. Good, he was paying close attention to her now.

“Anakin Skywalker is our biological father.” He nodded again, a little more firmly this time.

“Anakin Skywalker is not dead.” he started to shake his head in the negative, but she used a bit of the Force to strengthen her hand so he couldn’t move it.

“Listen!!” she said firmly, “I want you to really listen right now Luke, in every way.” His eyes wide, she could feel the Force wrapped around her as he opened every sense to her.

“Anakin Skywalker is Darth Vader.”

She watched as the knowledge slowly sank into his face, his heart, and his mind. Satisfied that he understood what she was telling him, she let his chin go, and took a step back. She was still close enough that if he wanted physical comfort she could offer it to him easily. But the little bit of space was also so he didn’t feel trapped.

His face paled, and she felt something like grief tear through him. There was a long pause, and then he said in a tiny whisper. “That’s not true.” He sounded so lost. “That’s impossible.”

This was a response she understood. This she knew how to react to. “Why?” she asked, keeping it level.

“The Empire makes slaves.” Luke’s voice was almost childlike in its appeal for her to make this all go away “The Wookies were made slaves. The Twi'leks were made slaves. The Empire supports the Hutt’s, and they are open slavers. Vader is the enforcer of the will of the Empire. Are you telling me that our father used his freedom to take it away from others?” His voice broke with this final statement.

The older Luke had never really discussed with her his reaction to learning Vader was their father. He never went into the details about how he made peace with the fact that Vader was a Sith Lord, a mass murderer, and the right-hand man of a brutal dictator. He had only broadly generalized his reactions during that time of his life. “Be truthful Leia,” she chided herself “You didn’t want to know, and he was respecting your wishes in that regard.”
She wished she had asked now. Because this angle of thinking is something that never occurred to her. She more objected to the mass subjection the galaxy and the killings. But this struck at the heart of who Luke was to his bones. He was Luke Skywalker, the first of his line to be born in freedom in a very long time. She loathed slavery, it violated every principle she had. But that was nothing compared to the raging storm Luke held inside himself on the subject. With every fiber of his being, did he hold the practice in contempt. In the way only those who have lived around it, who have been threatened by it, whose family experienced it in living memory, did he viscerally despise the practice.

“Yes,” she said slowly, treading so carefully. “You can say that.”

His face crumpled “But why? Why would he do that?”

“For her.” She heard him howl in her mind, for a second she once more in that cramped cell on the Death Star. She brushed that reasoning aside, it might be true, it might not. Vader certainly believed it was, but she knew, hell her own life was proof, how easily memories could be twisted along the passage of decades. And even if it was true that was certainly no reason to keep on that dark path after Padme died. If anything he should have turned on Palpatine for not keeping his word. Instead, he had taken his anger out on the galaxy.

“I’m not really sure,” she answered truthfully. Nor did she really care. She wasn’t interested in Vader’s sad tale of woe.

His eyes went huge and vacant. He didn’t need any pushing right now, and she could feel the storm brewing underneath that blank facade. So she waited, patience wasn’t her strong suit, but for Luke, she would wait eons if she had to.

When he finally focused back in on her, she could see the thousands of questions dancing in his eyes. He started with the one she was least eager to answer. “Who told you?”

She swallowed hard, bracing herself. Here it comes. “Your alternate.”

She could see the flare of betrayal, which was quickly followed by denial. She knew her brother and could anticipate his line of thinking on this. If she had learned just before she arrived here, he had an excuse to forgive her for withholding information this important and vital. “When?” he asked, desperate. “When did you learn about him?”

Her mind flashed back to Endor. She was standing among those tall trees, that in all likelihood started growing at the founding of the Old Republic, with her brother. Luke’s gentle face, slightly different than the one before her, that one had been marred by a wampa, had been so kind, and filled with compassion as he shattered her world into a thousand pieces. She prayed to whatever benign force that would heed her that she could be as gentle with this Luke as his alternate was with her. Even though she knew he was going to lash out at her in anger. Somehow, she had the feeling that thirty years didn't qualify as not enough time to learn to deal with this, no matter how devastating.

“When I was twenty-three.”

He blinked as she saw that hope of an easy escape from accusing her die with her answer. His quick mind did the math. “Decades!??” he demanded “You knew for decades!! And the whole time you’ve been here, you said nothing!??” He shook his head in disbelief. “No worse than nothing. You lied to me?” his voice was becoming more and more strident as the full implications of what she had done hit him.
“No, I never said our father was dead.” she refuted, taking refuge in the one distinction she had drawn for herself.

His nostrils flared “Don’t you dare use that diplomatic bantha shit on me, Leia. You knew and you said nothing!!!”

“I’m saying something now.” her voice almost a whisper.

He began pacing at this, trying to work off his rage. She waited, silent. She would only anger him with pleas for understanding, or for forgiveness. He had a right to be furious at her, and they both knew it.

His physical exertion failing to calm him, he whirled on her, chest heaving. “Who else knows Leia?” he demanded.

She flinched at the raw hurt and anger in his voice. No, not just his voice, it was also there in the Force, whipping around her in small slices, cutting into her shields. She strengthened them in response to his slip, she doubted the rest of this conversation would be any easier on his control. There was no telling what she would be blasted with, in an unguarded moment on his part.

“Who?” he shouted, his voice startling several of the native birds in the jungle into flight when she didn’t answer him fast enough.

“My parents.” He nodded, clearly expecting that answer. “Obi-Wan.”

“Obi-Wan knew too?” Luke stopped his frantic motion and stilled at that. There was a long pause on his part and he said bewilderingly “That can’t be right. He’s been encouraging me to kill Vader.”

There was a sharp edge of fury in his tone as he continued to pelt her with questions, “He told me that he and our father were close. Was that a lie too?”

She shook her head “No, as far as I can tell they were.” Vader believed Obi-Wan betrayed him. You only get into that mindset with someone you felt close to and trusted.

Then dawning horror crossed his face “He’s been encouraging me to kill my own father?” As heartbroken as she was for him, part of Leia sighed in relief. He was starting to see the two as the same man. His conscious mind may not be fully there yet, but there was a part of Luke that knew she was speaking the truth.

“Yes.” She had her own betrayals of trust to deal with, and she warned Obi-Wan what he was doing was a bad idea. He was on his own with that decision.

“No,” Luke shook his head, “you must be mistaken. There is no way Ben would do that to me.” Oh gods, she was going to have to break his heart even more. For a moment she felt a flare of true hatred at Obi-Wan for this, for putting her in this position. If he had just kept his damn mouth shut, she wouldn’t have to be here.

“Who do you think put him in that suit Luke?” she asked, somehow maintaining that gentle tone. This wasn’t about Obi-Wan and his complicated relationship with the truth and Vader. This wasn’t about her feelings and issues. This was about getting Luke through this.

The Force whipped up then, and not just in her senses. Small gusts of wind started swirling around them, picking up stray fallen leaves and twigs from the jungle floor. They all whirled around them, in reactions to Luke’s anger as it came, blazing, hot, and looking for a target.
“Did Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru know? Did everyone in my life that claimed to love me lie to me?”

She stammered, startled by his loss of control, and not expecting this line of attack. “I don’t know.”

“Don’t lie to me, Leia!!”

She put her hands up in a defensive gesture “I really don’t know Luke.” He stared at her, his mouth pressed into a thin line, then she felt his touch in the Force, rough and uncaring, so different from his usual hesitation, all around her, verifying the truth of her statement. She swallowed the hurt. He had every right to question everything she told him right this second. Keeping an eye on the small tornado building around them, she held her hands up in a helpless gesture “Your alternate didn’t know either. I told you, everyone who knew anything was dead by that point.” The eye of this little storm they were in the middle of started to contract in. Leia’s eyes widened, but Luke continued on speaking.

“But that is not the case now. You haven’t thought to ask?”

She thought of Obi-Wan’s offer to explain the circumstances of their birth and Vader’s intrusion into her mind. She had so many secrets to keep, after that scare she hadn’t wanted another thing to conceal. It wasn’t worth the cost in her mind. When Vader was dead, then she would ask. “No.”

His face twisted “I said don’t lie to me!!!” The whirlwind she could see and feel were both roaring, she could feel it in her bones.

“Alright,” she said placating, “I thought of it, yes. But I didn't want to know in case Vader-” she stopped herself, but it was too late.

His face paled “Vader knows.” And she saw, all the frantic motion around them come to a disconcerting stop. The debris hung motionless in the air for a second, before everything dropped back to the ground.

She wasn't afraid of Luke. She actually probably had more training than he did at this point, and she wasn’t Obi-Wan, she was fully capable of blocking any blow he might accidentally send her way. But she was frightened, so frightened, for him at this second. Because she would bet every credit she had that Luke hadn’t even noticed what he had just done.

She had never seen the other Luke do anything like this. Nor his students, the few times she visited the Jedi school, or even Ben. In fact, the only time she could recall anything of the sort was the shockwave Vader had released in her cell on the Death Star.

Vader hadn’t noticed what he had done either, granted tossing a few sticks around wasn’t anywhere near the level of damage Vader had done to those supposedly impenetrable walls, but she had a feeling it was lack of focus, not power that was the main cause of the differences between the two events. Vader wanted to destroy something, Luke merely wanted an outlet for his rage. She nodded her head in the affirmative to his question, not trusting what her voice would reveal this second.

He turned baffled eyes to her. “That’s why he’s pursuing you the way he is?”

She nodded again, wishing for a second he wasn’t quite so clever, so she take a few seconds to catch her breath.

Hurt filled his face “You told him and not me?”

“No!!” for the first time Leia actually shouted. Luke flinched back as her own panic and pain over
his perceived betrayal rolled over her shields and hit him full in the Force. She took a deep breath in and re-centered herself. Calm, she must remain calm. He didn’t need her feeding into his emotions and creating a feedback loop between the two of them. “I didn’t tell him anything, Luke. He figured it out.”

Then at what had to be the worst possible moment ever, Leia heard Obi-Wan’s smooth voice coming from behind Luke. “Luke, what was that Force storm? What is wrong with Leia?”

Oh gods, Obi-Wan. She had completely forgotten that Luke had called him here. This was the last thing they needed.

Luke whirled, he might not know how to directly express his rage at her, feedback loops were a bitch as she well knew. But he had no such problem with Obi-Wan.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he roared, hands clenching and unclenching at his sides, looking like he would like nothing more than to strike the older man.

Obi-Wan actually took a step back at the unexpected feint, both physical and verbal. “Tell you what Luke?” he asked, baffled. Then he noticed Leia. She wasn’t sure what emotion was on her face, but he seemed to pick up the subject under discussion from it quickly enough. “You told him,” he said disapprovingly.

Oh no, he wasn’t shoving this mess onto her. “I warned you I would.” Her chin coming up in defiance of his obvious disapproval.

“Did you order her not to tell me?” Luke demanded, pacing up to the older man, tension running through him. Leia was more than willing to let Obi-Wan pay the price for his sins with Luke, but she wasn’t going to let him take the blame for a decision that was hers.

“No Luke,” she shook her head, and he stopped and turned to look at her. “He didn’t order me to do anything. I did think it would be better if you heard this from him, he has a better diplomatic tongue then I do. But I did warn him that if he wouldn’t, I would.” But now she did let her disapproval radiate, and she glared at Obi-Wan “I did however strongly stress the foolishness of telling you stories about our Father the Jedi hero.”


“I’m sure it wasn’t” Leia snapped back. “You just conveniently left out what he did later.”

“Anakin is dead.” Obi-Wan said simply “Vader killed him.”

Luke just stared at him flabbergasted. “Then who is running around in that suit?” he demanded.

“Vader.”

“And who put him there?”

There was a screaming wave of pain in the Force, Leia’s breath caught as the guilt, fear, and love threatened to drown everything, even through her reinforced shields. Then as quickly it had come it was gone. Obi-Wan’s face didn’t even twitch to reveal that he had been the source of that maelstrom. “I did.”

Luke was looking at him, shock and confusion vibrating all around him, the Force practically twisting itself into knots as he could feel the belief behind what Obi-Wan was saying. But he also knew she wasn’t lying. Leia’s teeth gritted, couldn’t Obi-Wan make this the tiniest bit easier on all
of them? Obi-Wan’s strange mental dance on this issue needed to come to an end, but he had been telling himself this lie for almost twenty years, she didn’t want to get into a clash of who could out-stubborn who. She honestly wasn’t sure who would win. Fine, if a frontal assault wouldn’t work, let’s try to flank him from the sides. “What is Vader’s birth name?” she demanded.

Obi-Wan looked at her, eyes narrowing as he saw where she was going with this, but all he said was “Vader.” It still rang true. What was his problem? If Luke had been thinking, instead of reacting, he would simply march up to her parents and demanded they collaborate either her or Obi-Wan’s version. She knew what her parents would tell Luke if he asked. Why was Obi-Wan doing this?

“No, it’s Anakin Skywalker,” she said, trying to maintain her calm in the face of the implacable stubbornness. Luke’s gaze swung back and forth between the two of them. “Anakin Skywalker is in that suit. You fought with him on Mustafar. I assume you removed his arms, given that they are both cybernetic, and probably his legs too, but I don’t have confirmation that they are mechanical. Then, instead of doing the smart thing and putting him out of all of our misery, including his own, you left him to burn on that planet, probably thinking no one could survive that. But he did, or” she conceded “Palpatine made sure he did because I sincerely doubt Vader designed that suit he got stuffed into, in the condition he was in.”

She took in a deep breath “And somehow, in the middle of that mess, our mother was involved. He hurt her, she gave birth to us, and died. That is what happened.” Obi-Wan’s face took on an ashen hue, but Leia would not relent. “Play whatever word games you like with yourself Obi-Wan, but don’t you dare play them with Luke.”

“This is not a game,” Obi-Wan said, voice hoarse. “My Anakin is dead!”

There, there was the crack in his reasoning. If she could just pry it open enough, maybe he would admit the truth in front of Luke.

“Really?” she shot back “Then why did you refuse to kill Vader on Mustafar? What stopped you?”

“Your mother was hurt. I didn’t have time.” Those fissures in him were widening the more she pressed. Luke stood, riveted, as she walked past her brother, to get closer to the older man. To use the truth to hammer him out of this hole he had dug in his own mind.

“And what precisely, was she doing on Mustafar? A senator of the Old Republic?”

“Imperial,” Obi-Wan muttered. “It was Imperial by then.” She ignored his correction, he was looking for any excuse, any avenue, for him to escape this interrogation. Well, he wasn’t the only one who had been taught to use their words as weapons. If it had involved anything but Luke’s understanding the full extent of the danger he was in she would let the man be, she knew how hard it was to achieve peace with the past, and she could certainly understand why he went with this method. But Luke was in danger, so she pressed on.

“What was she doing there Obi-Wan? She asked, voice gentle now, inviting confidences, inviting him to share his pain.

“She thought she could save -” he cut himself off, his eyes flickering over her shoulder to Luke. Dammit, it was the misguided notion he was protecting Luke that had stopped the completion of that sentence. And they had been so close.

“Save who?” Obi-Wan looked at her, stubborn refusal in his eyes “Anakin?” she asked. He didn’t answer but she could feel the Force ring like a bell. Luke’s breath drew in on a gasp of
comprehension, so he felt that too. “She wanted to save Anakin from a Sith Lord? How exactly was she planning on doing that? A politician against a trained dark side user? I don’t know much about our mother, but I do know she couldn't have possibly been that foolish.”

She could feel Luke’s presence behind her, torn between two impulses. On one hand, he cared about Obi-Wan and clearly wanted her to stop, to let the old man step away and lick his wounds. On the other hand, he was desperate to know, everything, even if the knowledge fractured everything he thought he knew about his origins.

She gave Kenobi the bait to follow. “Or was Anakin already dead by that point?”

“Of course he was dead by then!!” Obi-Wan hissed “I don’t know what she thought she could do! I should have stopped her, but I needed her to lead me to him, but I never thought he would-” again his voice trailed off.

“What? Hurt her?” He had admitted this much to her. But again he retreated from any confession.

“He was dead.” he insisted.

“For a dead man he seems awfully eager to claim his daughter.” she remarked, frustrated.

“He’s dead Leia! My brother vowed never to kneel in subservience to another again. My brother would never have murdered the defenseless younglings in the Jedi Temple!!” Obi-Wan’s face was heartbroken. “My brother would not have harmed a hair on Padme’s head. Everything that made up my brother is gone!”

He had switched words on her, from dead to gone, and that schism within him was growing so wide she was surprised he hadn’t split in two. “No he is not!!” she howled back. If she could see the truth of what her own son had become, why the hell couldn’t he admit the same about Anakin?

“Twenty-five million credits Obi-Wan.” Obi-Wan visibly flinched at that and took a step back. “That is the bounty Vader put on my head. Alive and unharmed. Does that sound like someone who wants to repudiate everything he once was?” She shook her head. “Vader, Anakin, what you call him doesn’t matter. He’s the tall one, dressed in head to toe black body armor, running around doing the gods only knows what in the name of the Empire. But that doesn’t change the fact that he was born on Tatooine, that he was your student, your brother, a Jedi, and the fact that he’s trying to retrieve me like some sort of lost possession he misplaced. It’s still him. Twisted, warped and distorted, but him.”

“But it can’t be,” Obi-Wan said.

“Why?”

“Because how can I still love and miss him, when I know such a monster is currently living in his skin!??” Obi-Wan howled. He stood there, panting hard. Leia stepped back, giving him room. She had gotten what she wanted she could leave him be.


Both of their heads swung to him, he was looking at both of them with such horror in his eyes. She had gotten so caught up in making the old man see the truth she had forgotten that Luke was the point of all of this. “Luke-” she whispered, reaching out to confront him.

He stepped back, avoiding her touch. Leia could barely contain the gasp of pain at that rejection of her aid. Luke shook his head “I can’t-” he started. Then looked at Obi-Wan “I don’t-”
It struck Leia then at that moment he never looked more like her other Luke. With the lines of pain and betrayal set around his mouth and eyes. “Luke I’m sorry.” she offered.

“Sorry for what Leia? Sorry for not speaking up? Sorry for not telling me when I first asked? Sorry for letting me go in on that mission blind? Sorry for letting me put us all in grave danger?” He gave a bitter laugh “I wasn’t easy about keeping Rex, Han, and Chewie in the dark about what we knew, I just never considered you would do that to me too.” Then he shot Obi-Wan a disgusted look “Or that you would be heartless enough to try to have me kill my own father.”

“Luke I-”

“Were you ever going to tell me?” he asked, more hopefully than expecting a negative answer to his question. Obi-Wan’s silence spoke volumes. A look of profound disappointment crossed Luke's face. He ran his hands through his hair, darker now that he wasn’t daily in Tatooine’s dual suns, and gave a harsh laugh. He was still shaking his head when he started to walk away.

“I didn’t mean -” Obi-Wan started to say to his retreating back.

“Don’t. Just don’t.” He turned around. “I need to be away from you both. I need to think. I just need….” his voice trailed off, but Leia could see what he wasn’t saying. I need this not to be true. And with that pronouncement, he stalked off. She and Obi-Wan watched him go, and as soon as he entered the great cavernous hangar bay the older man turned to face her head on.

“Why did you tell him?” there was no emotion in that icy voice. Whatever he was thinking it was locked tightly away.

“He needed to know. And we were running out of time.”

“So you said before Leia. But that doesn’t tell me what event precipitated this sudden move on your part.” She could hear the anger, flowing under that icy reserve. Good, she wasn’t the only one who was pissed off. She needed to be calm for Luke, she was under no such obligation with Obi-Wan.

“You focusing him in on his father’s killer,” she spat back, Luke’s unsent words dancing in her mind. How close they had all come to disaster because Obi-Wan couldn’t let his ghosts be.

“You're repeating yourself Your Highness,” he said in an arch tone “I fail to see what relevance that answer has to my question.”

“Vader talked to him Obi-Wan!!” She howled, the fear that had been nipping at her since she exited Luke’s mind sharpening her voice. “On Cymoon 1 Vader reached out to him!!”

Obi-Wan’s face paled and she could hear the fear in his voice. “What? Why?”

Why the hell did he think she knew? She was his daughter, not his translator. “Who knows? Maybe he was curious about the lightsaber wielding person who wasn’t you? He wanted to see your student? He wanted to know who my tutor was?”

“What do you mean your tutor?”

This was not the point, but she could concede, even if only in her mind, Obi-Wan probably needed to know this. In fact, she should have told him ages ago. The only reason she hadn’t was her extreme reluctance to even think about that conversation. This day was shaping up for all kinds of unpleasant truths, wasn’t it? “Vader wanted to know who I taught me how to build my shields. I never gave him a name, just referred to Luke as my tutor.”
Obi-Wan snorted “But you had no problems giving him mine.”

She knew he wasn’t as understanding of that decision as he said he was at the time. “I had to give him someone Obi-Wan. Or would you rather if I had actually given Luke’s?”

He glared at her, but she counted it as a win when he didn’t say anything in return. She returned to her earlier point. “When Vader reached out Luke told him, that Vader killed his father. And it’s only by the grace of the Force Luke managed to botch sending the name of that father!!” she gave a hollow laugh “I thought that mission couldn’t get any more screwed up, but clearly I was wrong. Can you imagine if Luke had sent it? What Vader would have said? What Luke would have said in return?” She shook her head.

“I only wanted to stop Vader from inflicting more harm. It wasn’t about making Luke hate him” he said, voice shaking as he realized how close to a disaster they had all come. “Revenge is not the Jedi way.”

She wasn’t touching that rationalization with a dead Hutt’s tail. But he was failing to see her larger point. “Justice is the Jedi way. Or at least that is Luke’s understanding of it,” she countered. And she got closer to the older man, adrenaline was making her shake a bit. “And here is where you are talking past him Obi-Wan. Luke doesn’t see justice as this pristine dispassionate thing handed down from on high. He wasn’t educated to the philosophical texts and the concept of the rule of law. He’s from Tatooine. To him justice is the weak being freed from the strong. Justice is anger, directed and given righteousness. Justice is the weighing of balance.”

Something in the Force twanged at that, although she didn’t have a clue as to why. But Obi-Wan did, something like comprehension flashed across his face, twisted by profound regret and sorrow. What the hell had she just set into motion with her simple analysis of Luke? That wasn't something to worry about right this minute, she would worry about this complication later. Right now getting Obi-Wan to understand where he was going wrong was the goal.

“And in no scenario, you can imagine does he ever deliver justice without telling the person in question why. There is no way Luke would ever confront Vader and not tell him who he is. There is no Luke Skywalker who grows up on Tatooine who doesn’t do this. Your plan to have him kill Vader and be done with it was never going to work.”

“I think I understand Luke better than you. You are conflating the him of now with whom he could be.”

She wanted to start tearing her hair out she was so frustrated with him. “Why are you not listening to me?” He paled at that accusation, “Or to anyone who holds views different from your own?”

He opened his mouth to refute that, but she continued on “Twenty years on that dustball and you never learned any of this from the residents of that planet? Did you ever talk to anyone there, or were you sitting on the edges of the desert sulking?”

“I was not sulking,” he hissed back “I was protecting Luke.”

“From anything physical, yes. But did you ever think to wonder how growing up in that culture would shape him? How it would alter his world view from a Jedi initiate?”

Obi-Wan flushed “His family were good people.” He said defensively. “I will not have you besmirch their character when they are no longer here to defend themselves.”

“Of course they were good people!” she snarled back, “You think I don’t know that! You aren’t
capable of surviving what he is capable of enduring, with your sanity intact, if a very solid foundation of love and support wasn’t put there in the first place.” Although that hadn’t saved Ben. She shoved that thought aside, that wasn’t the point right now.

Profound disappointment crossed the older man’s face. “You’ve just made this all so much harder.”

Her teeth gritted, this habit of his of changing the subject when he was losing ground against her was annoying. “It is his choice Obi-Wan.”

“Then who is going to kill Vader? And the Emperor? You are the only other one who even has a hope of doing so.”

“I. AM. NOT. A. JEDI!!” she screamed, tired of having to explain this over and over again.

A sneer crossed his face “Please, by all means, continue to tell yourself that.”

Her fury came to an abrupt halt and panic crawled up her throat. “I’m not.” she protested “I only know a few tricks.”

He snorted “Yes, a few “tricks” that most Jedi Masters in the temple were incapable of doing. A few “tricks”, like talking mind to mind reliably to whoever you wish, which is a skill even Anakin never managed. You might have no knowledge of the philosophical teachings, and you do not wield a lightsaber, but you are committed body and soul to the defense of those who cannot defend themselves, and you use every weapon you have in your arsenal to see that Justice is done. And that includes the Force.”

She wanted to refute this, all of this, but the words were stuck in her throat. He gave her a deep patronizing look “As you said, it doesn't matter what name you call it, it still is. By how you skillfully manipulate the force, Leia you would at the very least be considered a senior level padawan. No, you are not a Master or even a Knight, but that doesn’t mean you aren’t a Jedi.”

That wasn’t true. She wasn’t a Jedi. She couldn’t be in any way shape or form be considered a Jedi. She wasn’t blind, nor naive, she knew what the Force was pushing her to do in this second chance she had been given. What being here in this time, with a Vader who knew she was his daughter, was forcing her to do. Well, no mystical energy field could tell her what to do with her life. She was too angry, too full of impatience and had no desire to curb either trait as her brother had done, to embrace that way of life

“And since you refuse to see the truth, and made things much harder for Luke, we are all facing centuries of rule by the Sith. Because you refuse to see the sacrifices required.”

The condescension in his voice set her on edge. Well here, on this matter, she was on much more solid ground.

“Like I should have sacrificed Alderaan?” He actually flinched like she had struck him “Is that your line of thinking? Because if I had, if I had done nothing different, and let everything play out as it once did, it would have ensured victory. Of course, you are dead in that scenario too so I’m not sure how well that works out for you.”

“That is not what I’m saying.”

“That is exactly what you are saying. The good of the many outweighs the needs of the few? It’s a convenient line of thinking when you aren’t the one making the sacrifice, but making that decision on behalf of others.”
“You think I haven’t made sacrifices? That this war hasn’t taken everything from me?” his voice actually rose till he was shouting at her. “I’ve been fighting this war since before you were born.”

“That is not the point Obi-Wan.”

“That’s easy for you to say. You lost everything but you got a chance to take it all back. So don’t you dare lecture me about costs.”

“No, I’m lecturing you because I’m telling you there is a better way, and you aren’t listening!!”

“As you claim so loudly you are not a Jedi master, I think I am the best judge of how to train Luke, stop interfering!!!” His hands came to his hips as he glared at her. It was eerily reminiscent of Vader’s stance when he tried to ground her from missions. He was trying to use his authority to make her back down. Well, that trick had been tried on her by the likes of men much more twisted and dark than he ever hoped to be, and she hadn’t hesitated with them either. When needs must, she would always speak truth to power.

“I know, better than you, the potential Luke has. You hope for who he could become, I’ve lived it. I’ve seen him turn the whole galaxy around with nothing more than his compassion and will.”

“Compassion? You think compassion will win this? The Jedi had compassion, and look where that got us?”

“So compassionate that you ignored your mandate to the citizens of the galaxy? So compassionate that you became helplessly entangled into the affairs of the Senate. The Jedi were meant to be a bulwark against the Senate, along with the Courts. The Jedi were meant to defend the individual citizens of the galaxy, not the status quo. You were the Senate’s watchers, not it’s lapdog.”

His eyes narrowed as she struck at the heart of his identity. “You dare!!”

“You’re damn right I do! What in the kriffing hell were you doing leading an army “General”? An army of sentient creatures who were little better than slaves!! Had the Jedi truly lost their way that much? Maybe Dooku had a point.”

He spat out. “I will not be lectured about the war from someone who takes Dooku of Serrenno’s side.”

“The Separatists and he weren’t wrong about the Republic!!” Gods knew there were enough of them in the Rebellion. Leia had understood, from a very early age, their criticisms of the Old Republic. She had agreed with almost all of them, it was only their method of exacting change she disagreed with. Burning down the whole galaxy wasn’t the best way to go about achieving a fair and just political system. “Just because he was fallen doesn't mean he didn’t have valid points.”

He gave her a nasty smile “No, I tend to take a dim view of Dooku’s positions because he was a Sith.”

Leia felt the breath knocked out of her ”What?” she managed.

“Didn’t know that did you?”

“No, I didn’t,” she whispered shocked. Any history she could find only said that Dooku was a rogue Jedi. She figured it had been all Imperial propaganda, another way to frame the Jedi for the start of the Clone Wars, and their supposed play for power. After the destruction of Alderaan, when she was much more in their company, she talked to the few remaining veterans of that war and heard of the atrocities that had been committed by Dooku, or those directly under his
command, she had revised her opinion to that he had fallen. But a Sith? Why hadn’t her parent’s told her that? This wasn’t like her parentage, at nineteen she was more than capable of handling that information.

Then a more insidious thought occurred to her. Did they even know? Had anyone outside of the Jedi Order known this?

“In all your all encompassing other life that never came up? He was a Sith, it was a two-man con, and Palpatine was the winner."

She narrowed her eyes “Did you ever tell anyone that he was?”

“Of course not. The order was already on the precipice as it was in public opinion. The last thing we needed was the Senate to find out that the boogeyman of the past had returned and one of our own members had fallen in league with it.”

"And those ‘slaves’ were commissioned by Dooku precisely so the Jedi would be able to enter into the war. It was too thin out numbers in the ensuing conflict, and help turn the public against us.”

“You still didn’t refuse to use them.” she pointed out.

His smug look vanished and he looked uncomfortable again. “The Senate were the ones who authorized that.”

“And again I return to the point of being their lapdogs.”

“What else were we supposed to do? The Republic was fracturing and everyone wanted us to fix it. We always intended to see that they were recognized as sentient creatures.”

She sneered at him “What, after half of them bled and died for you?”

“They slaughtered us!”

“Because they had no choice!! And if you had done the right thing when presented with them you never would have been put into that position in the first place.”

He tugged is hair in frustration “You can’t save everyone, Leia!! We made a choice.”

“It was the wrong one. And no, you can’t save everyone, but that is no gods damn reason not to try!!” she shot back.

“It must be easy for you to look down on what we did from the lofty perch of hindsight!”

“No, it’s easy because the cost of the decisions you made were left for me to pay! For Luke to pay!!! And then you left it to us to fix your mess while leaving us completely in the dark about how it all fell apart in the first place.”

His eyes sharpened at that. “Is that what happened to you? At least the Republic lasted a thousand years before it fell apart. You couldn’t seem to have even managed even thirty.” Dammit, he was too good at picking up on what she wasn’t saying.

She drew in a deep breath as her temper flared. “You speak of things you have no knowledge of.”

“And why is that? Because you won’t tell us.”

“Aren’t you the one always going on about how the future is always in motion? I can’t unknow
what I know Obi-Wan, any more then I can make myself actually nineteen again. But I’ll be
damned if I don’t try to make it better. Better for all of us, for the galaxy at large. Isn’t that what
the Jedi are supposed to do? Offer protection and to fight for those who cannot?”

“That’s what we did!” he insisted, red-faced.

“No, you were preserving the existing order, at all costs. No matter the corruption in the Senate,
which you certainly weren’t blind to. Or the indifference of the Courts, which was obvious to
everyone. You were the third pillar of the government and you failed.”

“That’s not true,” he shook his head “We did a lot of good.”

“For who Obi-Wan? The Senate or the citizen's? Because they are not at all the same thing.”

“And what would you have had us do? Destroy both of the other branches and seize power for
ourselves?”

“Why is it always extreme’s with you? You could have gotten involved in the Senate. Tried to
reform it from the inside. Perhaps seized back functions you had given away?”

“The Jedi were above such matters!”

“Refraining from political acts is a political act Obi-Wan. If you don’t take action someone will do
it for you.”

“It wasn’t done. We needed to maintain our neutrality.”

“For what? Defend an ever shrinking Republic, as your power base was whittled away? You
weren’t doing anything but trying to survive.”

“And what, in your oh so wise view, do you think we should have been doing?”

“Anything!! Crackdown on smuggling? Actually, enforce the trade deals that the Banking Clan
was continually breaking? Break apart the Hutt’s control of the slave trade?”

“That’s not what we were meant to be!”

She threw up her hands in frustration “And where is your compassion now Master Jedi? Where is
your sense of justice? If all of those people weren’t worth saving because that wasn’t what you
weren’t meant to be, why did the Order even bother? Why do I?” She was shaking, she was so
furious “Anything I say just goes in one ear and out the other. Simply because I’m younger than
you? Because I’m less experienced than you?” She could hear the whining in her voice, but she
was too upset to stop it. “Because I’m less trained in the “wise ways” of the Jedi? Because I upset
your precious “balanced” worldview? Is that why you brush me off and won’t listen to me!!”

“You always say that Anakin but that is not true!!” he shouted back.

Leia felt the air whoosh out of her lungs as if she had been hit in the solar plexus. “What did you
call me?” she whispered, shocked.

His face didn’t even show confusion “Leia.” he said promptly.

She frightened him, she knew that. She would do or say something and his fear would bleed all
over her. And when she confronted him about it, Obi-Wan had refused to tell her why. If this was
the reason if it was because she reminded Obi-Wan of him...
He frowned at her, then a mangled look of grief and regret passed over his face. “Leia-” he started. She shook her head in denial and started the walk back to the base. She was done with all of this.

It was a long walk back to her quarters, she had gone about half way before the adrenaline surge started to wear off and all she felt was the ache of exhaustion deep in her bones. She had stupidly pushed herself today. Between Mon, Luke, and Obi-Wan she was all done with any more conversations today. She started to pull on the Force, to bolster her reserves, when Obi-Wan’s accusations floated up in her mind. No, she would not be doing that, she would stop using the Force in this manner. She had helped topple an Empire without conscious use of the Force, she could do it again. Besides it’s not like she had never been tired before, she would muddle through.

So of course, when she finally managed to enter the hangar, after she felt like she had been walking for days, that is when Han found her.

“Hey-” he started a wide grin on his face, that died when he got a good look at her. Appropriate, today she was making everyone who loved her miserable.

“What’s wrong?” he demanded, coming up to her.

She shook her head “Nothing.”

“Okay normally I would be happy as hell to play our little banter back and forth about how you are a terrible liar, and you insult me in fun and inventive ways.” He cupped her cheek so softly, “But you are white as a sheet, so let’s skip that for today.” She savored his touch for a second, then determinedly pulled away, she needed to go to bed, not cuddle with Han in front of everyone.

He gently placed a hand on her shoulder “Leia, stop.”

“Need to go to sleep.” she whined.

“Yeah, I'm not arguing with you there,” he said mildly “but you’re heading the wrong way.”

She looked at him, it was so hard to keep her eyes open and a large yawn forced itself past her lips.

What was he talking about?

“Quarters.” and she pointed down the hallway for emphasis.

“You're staying at your parent’s? Remember?” He pointed to the back of the hanger “You know the ones that way?”

Oh, that was right. They were staying on the opposite side of the Temple from her rooms. She shuffled and started heading towards the back of the bay, instead of the right side. Han came up right beside her and looped his arm into hers. His grip was anything but casual though, he was doing his best to make sure she stayed on her feet.

“You sure you don’t need to go to medical?” he asked, concern loud in his voice, as they moved slowly through the hangar, gently steering her from walking into anyone.

“Tired,” she mumbled. “Pushed myself too far.”

“Yeah, I’m shocked by that.”

She scowled, she wasn’t a child, she knew her limits. “Didn’t mean to, people kept ambushing me
with feelings.”

“Uh-huh.”

She could feel eddies of curiosity in the Force as he led her through the hanger bay. She felt the distant roar of panic in her fogged brain. Even though she was exhausted, she had her shields in place, and she was still receiving this much? What doors had she opened in her quest to protect herself from Vader? From listening to the other Luke and starting any training despite her deep reservations? She had the sinking feeling that it was far too late for her to turn back now on this path.

Adding to her heartache, like a storm on the horizon, she could feel Luke. He was still on the base, somewhere, and his shields were slipping, the mix of emotions too entangled for her to get a proper read, but the chaotic roll of them were enough for her to realize that he was still riding the wave of his anger. She tried to shore up her own shields, he had a right to be mad, he didn’t need her regret and pain bleeding all over him. She found she had nothing to give though, they remained stubbornly full of weak spots and holes. Reluctantly, she called on the Force for this one task. Hell, she was not even able to go five minutes without using something she hadn’t even been aware of for a good quarter of her life.

“Here we are,” Han said with false cheer.

She looked up to see the door to her parent’s quarters. She fumbled for the button to open it, stumbled forward as she lost her balance, and only by sheer luck managed to hit it.

“Whoa,” Han said, as caught her before she could tumble to the floor. "Okay, don’t take what I’m about to do the wrong way. And definitely don’t tell your father I did this.” And with that he swept her up into his arms, cradling her to his chest.

She snuggled into that warm body, and familiar scent, too grateful and relieved to complain about his presumptuousness. “I won’t if you don’t”

He strode into the room and seeing the door to her parent’s room headed to it. “Can you get the button?” he asked, “This isn’t as easy as it looks and I don’t want to drop you.”

She did as he asked, grumbling. She wanted to go to sleep, not move. “I don’t see why not, I’m very tiny.”

“Not personality wise,” he said back. She felt herself being lowered into the bed. He gently removed her shoes and pulled the blanket over her.

“Go to sleep Princess.” she thought she heard him say, but she was already drifting into oblivion.

Someone was shaking her shoulder “Leia,” her father’s voice was low and soft. “Leia are you hungry?”

Blearily she opened her eyes to find him sitting on the edge of the bed. Blinking, confused she mumbled, “What time is it?”

“Twenty standard hours.”

Leia bolted straight up. “What?” she asked confused, if that time was right she had been asleep for most of the day.
He gave her a reassuring smile “You didn't miss anything. You’re on medical leave remember? Han told me that he had to escort you back to our room. Your mother and I have been in and out all day keeping an eye on you.”

“Why didn’t you wake me?” she asked, rubbing at her eyes to remove the sleep seeds from them. “I missed my PT appointment.”

Bail patted her arm reassuringly, “Leia, it’s alright. You are allowed to have a bad day.” She shook her head in denial.

Her mother’s voice came from the doorway. “I canceled your appointment when I came in at lunch time and saw that you weren’t stirring. We figured you needed the rest more than the PT.”

Papa sat down next to her and rapped her nose lightly “But you also need food, so I thought I’d see if you would wake up.”

She didn't feel particularly hungry, but if she really had slept through the whole day, then yes she should get something to eat. She started to shift, to get out of the bed, but he put a restraining arm on her. “No need.” he turned his head “Threepio?”

“Yes Senator Organa?” came the droid’s voice from the living space.

“Can you please retrieve a tray of dinner for Leia from the mess hall? You know what she likes.”

“That isn’t necessary.” she protested. “I’m not an invalid, I can go.”

He gave her a smile “Indulge us.”

She heard Threepio exit the room, presumably, in order to retrieve her food. She slumped back down on the bed as the day’s events crawling back into her mind.

“Do I want to know why you are so tired?” her mother asked gently as she headed over to the bed to sit on the edge of it at Leia’s feet. “Or am I going to have to lecture you about taking it easy?”

She shook her head, “No, it was nothing like that.” She started plucking at the blanket with her fingers, too restless to stay still, but also too tired to move out of the warm comfy bed she was in to start pacing.

“Leia?” her father prompted.

“I had a fight with Luke,” she muttered, and because if there was one lesson she had been reminded of today, it was, to be honest with your loved ones in matters that concerned them. She sat back up as she confessed. “And Obi-Wan too.”

“Ahh.”

She looked up “You already knew that.” she accused., taking in the look on both their faces.

Papa spoke up. “Know? No, not for certain.”

“But suspect? Oh yes.” Mama gave a rueful shake of her head. “It’s a small community, Leia. The entire base is gossiping about the three of you going out in the jungle, and both Luke and Obi-Wan coming back looking ready to kill someone, and you looking like death warmed over.”

She swallowed nervously “Do you want to know what it was about? Or did the gossip mongers already fill you in with lurid tales?”
Bail gave her a condescending look at her flippant remark. “Given how close you and Luke are there is only one subject I can think of that would make him that upset with you.” He sighed “But we were wondering why you chose to tell him now.”

She looked away, not sure if she could bear to see the disappointment on their faces as she revealed her cowardice. “He needed to know.”

“Why Leia?” Her mother asked.

Leia’s eyes flew up to her mother’s. “You know why.”

“I know why I wanted to tell him.” her mother corrected gently. “But I don’t know why you do. It does seem a little strange to us your sudden move to inform him.”

“We are not very clear on your thinking Leia,” Papa said, “You’ve been most adamant in your refusal to discuss Vader, in any capacity, with us.”

She swallowed hard. They had done their best by her, she knew that they had their reasons as to why they concealed the truth from her, just like she did with Luke. That didn’t remove the sting of betrayal that she felt at them for it though. For so long she had mourned them and brushed aside even questioning the hurt they had done to her. It seemed, traitorous, somehow to accuse them when they weren’t there to defend themselves.

But now that they were here, she had a hard time remaining rational about even talking about that time in her life. It had been filled with so much triumph as they brought the Empire down. And so much inner conflict for her, as she learned the creature she loathed the most in the galaxy was her own biological father. That her beloved parents, the ones that had brought her up, taught her to be true and moral, to always weigh the consequences of her decisions and the effects they would have, would willingly let her remain in ignorance and with a good chance that she would become an unwilling patricide.

She didn’t object to killing Vader, but like she told Obi-Wan, that was her choice. And if there was one thing that Leia hated above all others, was the feeling that her choices had been taken away from her, no matter how well meaning.

But that wasn’t something she wanted to discuss with them. Ever. So she stuck to the practical aspects of her decision. “Vader is hunting me and there is no mission that I could go on that Luke wouldn’t insist on accompanying me. Having those two so close to each other was asking for disaster.” She gave her parents a worried look “Luke almost told Vader on Cymoon 1 who he was Papa. I couldn’t leave him that vulnerable.”

She looked up at her father, he had a patient look on his face “And?” he prompted.

“And what?” she said defensively.

He shook his head “Leia, you have changed in a great many ways that I do not fully understand, yet, but you still have the exact same look on your face when you think you have done something wrong, and don’t wish to confess.”

Leia had her parents back in her life for three months, and she was still trying to get used to the fact that they knew her, and her tells, so well. It was odd to be both be a stranger in so many ways to them but to have them intimately understand the fundamentals that shaped her personality in ways that even Luke and Han could never had. “I was a coward,” she whispered.
“In what way?” her father asked.

“What do you mean in what way? I should have told him sooner. He needed to know the minute I confessed I was his sister and from the future.”

“Maybe you should have.” her mother said, softly, placing a hand on Leia’s knee in comfort “Why didn’t you?”

Leia closed her eyes and admitted, “Because I wasn’t ready to.”

“Then maybe that was for the best that you didn’t.”

Leia looked at her mother flabbergasted. She was the one who had disapproved of her starting any relationship with Luke while withholding such an important piece of information from him. “Leia I don’t think you realize how shell shocked you were when you first arrived. Do you think you would have been able to handle this subject any better then?”

Leia, squirmed uncomfortable “No,” she admitted, “but that is no excuse.”

Her father pinched the bridge of his nose “I can never understand why you can be so understanding of the weakness of others, and plan accordingly, yet are incapable of extending that courtesy to yourself.”

Because she needed to be better than them. She knew better, she had been taught better, and she had the strength to fight for what was right when others didn’t. It was her power and her responsibility to always hold that line.

“He’s angry at you too,” she warned them. She knew how much her parents had grown to love Luke, and she had dropped this huge bomb into their relationship with him without even bothering to consult them. Obi-Wan had at least gotten a warning from her about her intended actions.

“Yes, I imagine he will be. And he has every right.” At her startled look, he shook his head “Leia, I am an adult, and I could have told him just as easily as you did. Your mother and I have had multiple discussions with Obi-Wan about this, it wasn’t just you who saw the danger in keeping Luke in the dark. But like you, we could have said something to him. We are under no obligation to obey the wishes of Obi-Wan Kenobi, as much as we respect his opinion.”

“Then why didn’t you?” she asked curiously.

Her mother sighed, “At first because we felt he wouldn’t believe us. He liked us, but he didn’t know us. All we would be doing was sowing discord and confusion in a situation that required as much trust and finesse as we could manage. As he grew to know us we hesitated because he was clearly trying to run from his grief over the loss of his family, and we felt that this might be one blow too many. However, after you were injured it became clear to both of us that if he had any say in the matter he would accompany you on any mission you have off base. That would increase the chances of him encountering Vader.”

Leia opened her mouth to ask, but Breha shook her head. “He didn’t tell us either Leia that he spoke to Vader, and it’s definitely not in any of the mission reports, classified or not. Luke’s standing in the Rebellion isn’t under any suspicion, as far as I know.” Well, that was a small comfort.

Bail continued on “We wanted to talk to you first on how to best broach the subject with him. We were waiting for you to get the all clear for light duty, since we knew this would be hard on you physically, especially at this stage of your recovery.” And here he glared at her. “Which you decided to ignore, and tell him otherwise.”
“I panicked,” she said softly. “When I saw what he almost had done, all I could think was that I couldn't let anything like this happen again.” She rubbed her forehead, trying to ease the ache there. “And in the worst way. There was no softening the blow at all, I just blurted it out.”

“Is there really any gentle way to break news like this?” her father asked, curious.

Leia shook her head, “Luke managed it.”

Breha gave her a disappointed look “Leia, you are not your brother, your temperament is different than his. It doesn’t make you a worse person than him, just different.”

“I should have been able to find a way, gods knew I had enough time to think about it.”

“When Luke told you was he mysteriously transported to the past, facing a wealth of new problems all while trying to make sure the best parts of the future he remembered come to pass?” her mother asked neutrally.

“No,” she admitted, but he had been only told of there relation a few days prior, and then he was marching off to his certain death. At least that was how she saw it, Luke, of course, had proved her wrong. His ability to get people to listen to him never ceased to amaze her.

“I understand he is angry now, and justifiably so, but Leia you have to give him time.” her father warned. “He’s just had his entire worldview shaken up on him, and from his perspective, it came out of nowhere.”

“I know.” she whispered, “But what if he never forgives me?” then she let out her greatest fear. “What if he never trusts me again?”

“Do you really have so little faith in him?” her father asked. “He loves you Leia, and more to the point, he knows you love him in return. He’ll come around.”

“Love is no excuse for causing pain.” she countered “And you didn’t see his face.” She could see that riot of emotion that crossed that so young face, a look there she had never seen aimed at her. “You didn’t feel what he was feeling. I lied to him. I’ve never lied like this to Luke in my entire life. Either of them.” She felt a tear slip down her cheek “I have no idea how he’s going to react to this.”

“You’ve never kept a secret from him?” Papa sounded worried “Leia that doesn’t sound healthy.”

She shook her head “No, of course, I’ve kept secrets from him, just like he kept them from me. Military maneuvers, intelligence briefings, other people’s confessions, things along those lines. But it was all things he wasn’t entitled to know, and he knew that.” She gave a short laugh that was almost entirely devoid of humor “I think we can all agree he was entitled to know this.”

Her parents exchanged helpless looks, unable to refute what she was saying. They merely drew her into their arms as she cried.

ABA - Day 72

Leia didn’t leave her parent’s bedroom the entire day.

ABA - Day 74

She woke the next morning, thoroughly sick of herself and her self-pity. Enough was enough. She was due back in the Med Bay tomorrow for the follow up that would hopefully let her at least let her back to light duty. She had missed two days of PT and now she was terrified that she would not be considered fit for even doing paperwork. Yes, this situation hurt and was all of her own making but there were still things to do.

The Rebellion was still in full swing, despite the fact that her world had come crashing down all around her. The Empire certainly didn’t care that she wasn’t in the mood today to fight them, and was still chugging along, doing its brutal work. She had her sulk, she had indulged herself, now it was time to get back to work. Even with that speech ringing in her head, it wasn’t until lunch time she managed to get out of bed, and head to the mess hall.

When she arrived at the hall, with a tray of food in hand she looked around for somewhere to sit and eat. With a sinking heart, she realized that there was no one here that she felt comfortable just siding up to and asking to sit down with. To even converse casually with. Maybe Mama and Mon were right. She was too focused on the Rebellion, and with Luke not here, she was at a loss of where to sit.

She scanned for Evaan, Han, Rex, hell she’d take Wedge at this point, he knew when it was best to be quiet, but there was no one. All she got were questioning looks by the people who did dare to meet her eyes, and a feeling of curiosity hanging in the air. It wasn’t malicious, just that she was a person of interest in the latest drama rolling the base. It would pass as soon as someone else did something worth talking about. But until then anywhere she sat with people she would be peppered with questions.

Sighing she made her way to a clear spot at one of the tables and sat down. She needed to eat, she needed to be out of her parent’s room, socializing wasn’t on her list of things to do this afternoon anyway. She had been sitting quietly for a few moments, eating her food when she felt a thump beside her. She turned to see what brave soul had decided they wanted to directly ask her what happened in the jungle, only to see Han staring at her face intently.

“Where’s your shadow?” Han asked.

She gritted her teeth. He had to have heard the gossip by now, everyone knew Luke was avoiding her and Obi-Wan, hell even her parents had heard it, and they were in command. He was just playing dumb. She continued to eat her food, not deigning to answer. She didn’t have the strength to deal with either his jealousy or protectiveness of Luke right this second. Maybe if she gave him the silent treatment he would get the hint and go away.

“You two have a fight?” he pressed.

She slammed her fork down and turned to glare at him “Trying to move in on me now?” she
sneered, maybe anger would get him to move.

“Hey,” he said, grabbing her hand to prevent her from standing up and walking away. “This is me concerned, alright? You’ve been hiding in your room, clearly miserable, Luke looks like a gundark kicked him in the gut, and neither of you are talking. I’m worried.”

She drooped, there was no other word for it. Maybe this had all been a bad idea. Maybe if she just stayed in her room for the next thirty years everything would work out on its own. Oh, her mistake, not her room, her parent’s room, like a sick child.

“Leia,” Han said gently, cupping her chin and forcing her to look at him “It’s going to be alright.”

“You don’t know that.”

“No, but whatever this is all about I’m sure you two can work it all out.” He gently wiped the tear from her cheek, then his eyes slipped past her and narrowed. She didn’t look, she didn’t want to, and she resisted the urge to expand her senses in the Force to find out what caught his ire. It didn’t matter, even through her shields, she could feel the hungry gazes of those around them, taking in the latest episode of the drama unfolding around them. Wonderful, not only was her strength in the Force being honed ever more but what would the gossips make of Han’s act of kindness and interest in this?

“I’ve got an idea.” he said smiling “You come back with me to the Falcon.”

That was fast. She thought it would be at least another month before he started propositioning her. She arched an eyebrow “That confident of your skills to entertain me?”

He blushed at that. “No,” he said firmly, then hearing what he said, grimaced and quickly corrected to “Not that I’m not. Entertaining. I’m very entertaining. I’ve had compliments.” She just stared at him, bemused. He was that entertaining and distracting, at least to her, but damn if she was going to admit that to this Han so early in the game.

He rushed on clarifying “I meant to eat in peace, maybe watch a holo. Away from prying eyes.”

That sounded delightful. “Let’s go,” she said, quickly picking up her tray, not bothering to wait for him as she walked out of the hall. She heard him curse behind her at her speed, and there was the quick patter of his boots as he hustled to catch up with her.

The Falcon was still its weird blend of new and old, but she ignored the dissonance that caused. In the chaos that was her life currently, this was far down the list of things that were most upsetting her. She plopped her tray down on the the dejarik table and threw herself into the wide circular bench like it was a second home. Which it was, even if Han didn’t know that. Han stared at her for a moment, as she made herself comfortable, then asked her awkwardly “I don’t really have many holos to choose from. Do you have any preferences?”

“He looked like I care?” she said, picking up her fork and began to eat again. “Put on something you want to watch.” It’s not like she was all that up to date on the latest, well, anything. The Resistance had consumed everything from her, including most of her free time to read anything not work related or watch the latest holos, in her effort to flee the pain her son had caused.

She paused and thought the implications of that sentence through. Is that what she had been doing here? Still running from actions that may or may not happen? It certainly hadn’t been the first time in her life she had used her mission to out run her pain was it? After the destruction of Alderaan, she had shut everyone from her old life out. It was Luke and Han who managed to reach her then,
to pull her back from the brink of self destruction. They had showed her it was okay to laugh again, to have trust again, to love again.

Ben hadn't just destroyed are her hopes and dreams, he had caused a severing in the two relationships she used to keep herself grounded. Neither of them had left her with that purpose in mind. At least not in Han's case, if she was to believe that vision she had, and she was almost certain that was the case with Luke too. They both had their own demons they were running from. But neither Han or Luke had ever backed down from her, when they thought they were right, no matter what she had thrown at them. Without them there to pound into her admittedly thick skull, that what she was doing wasn't healthy, or wise, she had sunk into old, and very isolating habits.

It had been such a gradual change in her old life, she really hadn't noticed that it was happening. She was sure their were people around her that tried to tell her, that she needed to take a break, a rest, not obsessively work, but she more then likely blew them off. And because she was the "General" they let her. Well, she could start correcting that behavior now, she knew she was courting burnout with the behavior she had done over the last few years, and it was time to catch up on everything she had missed over the last seven years.

Then a small grin lit her face, no she was nineteen again. She was up to date on most forms of entertainment. In fact, strictly speaking, she was ahead of the curve.

During her ruminations, Han left the hold and returned with the holoprojector. He placed it on the edge of the table. “There was a race on Malastare, about a week ago. Haven’t watched it yet.” There was a defensive tone in his voice as if he was expecting her to mock him for having such low brow tastes.

She shrugged, it’s not like she hadn’t figured that was all he had on hand. She knew him too well to believe there was a holo of the latest opera hiding somewhere on this hunk of junk. “It’s fine.”

A flicker of relief passed over his face and then he leaned over to flick it on. He very hesitantly sat down on the opposite side of the bench, and then scooted in until he was, not right next to her exactly, but close enough that she could touch him if she wanted to. She could feel him watching her, looking for what, she wasn’t sure, but she steadfastly ignored him in favor of finishing her lunch.

Eventually, he lost interest in staring at her and turned to watch the ships zoom across the track. As soon as she was done eating she placed her fork down, and she could practically feel him tightening up at the thought that she was leaving. She shoved the tray to the edge of the table, not on the side that held the the holo projector and pushed herself till she was sitting right next to him.

“Who’s winning?” she asked.

“You follow racing?” His tone expressed legions of doubt about that concept.

“No, but you clearly do. So tell me.”

He pointed to the screen “That’s Delan Vook, currently the favorite to win this, and is in second place.”

“Is that good or bad?”

“Oh, he’s right where he wants to be,” and Han was off, explaining in detail every racer, their current position, and past history. She watched his animated face, and just basked in it all. She actually knew most of this, well sort of. Han had always been nothing if not vocal in his
appreciation of the sport. She really hadn’t cared, but she liked how passionate he was going on about the subject, and apparently, she had absorbed more than she thought she had.

He broke off “You’re not listening to me.”

She gave him a smug smile “Yes I am. Loo Re Anno is currently ranked third, is now in fourth place, and you think she’s going to win.”

“Yeah, that’s right.” he looked at her puzzled. “You don’t care about this do you?”

She shook her head “No, not really, but I like the way you talk about it.”

His eyebrow went up “Really?”

She smiled “Really.”

“Okay then.” He leaned back against the bench, his arm coming up behind her, clearly offering her a place to snuggle if she wanted. Sometimes, so rarely, he could be so slick.

If she really was nineteen she would have stomped out right this instant, in a righteous storm of indignation. They had been having a perfectly lovely conversation and he had to start flirting in the middle of it. But her nineteen-year-old self had been rather self-involved in seeing certain things. Han was just a tactile person. He needed to touch people, and flirting wasn’t always what he had in mind. He was always touching her, but also Luke, Chewie, Ben. She slammed that thought right off. He needed this right now and she did too if she was being honest with herself.

Without a word, she let herself relax and slumped against his chest as she took him up on his offer. She heard a surprised noise escape his throat as she rested against his side, enjoying the scent of him all around her, that steady heartbeat beneath her ear. His arm left the top of the bench and settled on her shoulders, and she made no noise of protest at this.

They continued to watch the race, mostly in silence, though Han did make a few disparaging remarks here and there when a racer did something he thought was incredibly stupid. She could feel herself unwinding as time past, the tension in her muscles draining away as she took in the race, Han, and nothing else. Maybe Mon and her Mother had a point. She had been so focused and driven that she was wound tighter than a spring.

She wasn’t sure how long she was there, enjoying the quiet solitude with Han when Luke’s voice drifted up.

“Hey Han,” he called out, his footsteps echoing down the hall as he climbed up the embankment ramp, “You up here? I thought I could try to make that modification to-” his voice trailed off and he came to a dead stop when he saw her, and Leia saw his face shift from open and friendly to closed off and remote. His shields came down in a rush in the Force, that she could almost feel the backlash of.

“Kid!!” Han said, his forced cheer evident. “Look who I found in the mess hall eating by herself,” Luke said nothing, just kept staring at her, his face tight and anxious. She felt the calm and tranquility that she had been building up slide away. She sighed and pushed herself out of Han’s embrace. She needed to go, Luke clearly needed someone to spend some time with, and she wouldn’t do anything right now to make her brother’s life the littlest iota harder.

“It’s okay, I should be going anyway.” she told Han as his hand came out to grab her arm to keep her from leaving.
“No, you don’t” Han protested to Luke “Tell her she doesn’t.”

“It’s fine,” Luke said flatly. “I only had one question, then I can go.” Okay, even Han could see that was a big fat lie.

“I’ll go,” she sent in the Force, not willing to hide behind Han’s request to force her brother to stay here with her. She saw Luke’s eyes flare with a refusal, so she continued on. “It’s not fair to put him in the middle.”

She saw his jaw tightened, and aiming for levity she added “Really it’s okay. I know I was raised as an only child, but I do know how to share.” She didn’t feel any answering flicker from him but Luke relaxed slightly, and she saw the smallest nod from him.

She turned to Han “Thank you for the racing lesson.” she smiled “It was...educational.”

“Anytime.” But his eyes were flicking back and forth between her and Luke, taking in his frosty air, and her guilty face. He had heard the rumors on base, who hadn’t at this point? But sitting here he was getting a damn clear look at how upset Luke was with her, even if he was baffled as to the why of it.

She extracted herself from the bench, and swinging out as far out as she could in the tight space, walked around Luke. He said nothing, didn’t move, didn't twitch. Gods he never was going to forgive her was he? Well, if their positions had been reversed would she?

She was a few feet out of the Falcon when Chewie's voice rumbled from her behind her on left <Good afternoon your Highness.>

She paused, wondering at his formality. Had she done something to upset him? Then she reviewed the last few months in her mind and if she could have she would have slapped herself for her stupidity. She had never given Chewie permission to use her name. “It’s Leia,” she stated firmly “Not your Highness.”

He cocked his head <Titles are important to my people. It would be rude to refer to you as such. Didn’t your tutor tell you that?>

She smiled at his dismissive tone of this clearly defective unknown Wookie. “He did. He also told me that titles don’t matter much among friends.”

He let out a small snort of surprise <There aren’t many humans who would claim a Wookie for a friend these days.>

She gave a dismissive wave of her hand. “Well, they’re all fools and not worth your time.”

He let out his loud barking laugh <On that we are agreed> there was a small pause then <Leia.>

She gave him a full smile and on impulse ran over to give him a hug. He was stiff for a moment, startled, then she felt him bend, a lot, to return the embrace.

<Don’t worry about Luke,> he rumbled softly <Han and I will look after him during this.>

“Thank you,” she whispered and squeezed him tighter in response. Then, she took a few steps back, “See you around Chewie.”

<Of course.>
Satisfied that she had done at least one thing right today, she headed to her parent’s quarters for her afternoon nap.

ABA - Day 75

Healer Banok was strict. Oh, he was charming enough, but the look he gave her as she asked on her progress held nothing but durasteel patience in it. She would know as soon as he was done with his examination and not a moment before. As she went through all the motions he requested of her she had to concede the man was nothing if not thorough in his assessment of her healing shoulder.

“Looks good,” he murmured, as she rotated it, his hands laying flat across her shoulder blade, to feel the muscles. “You’ve regained most of your strength back. Your bloodwork came back all clear as well.”

“So I can go back to full duty?”

His eyebrow shot up “So eager to throw yourself back into danger?”

“So eager to be out of my parent’s room.”

He laughed at that. “Well, I can’t say I blame you there. You can go back to light duty. And I do mean light.” He wagged his finger in her face “Half days only, and you still need to continue on with your PT for at least another week. But yes, you can move back to your own quarters.”

She gave a small sigh of relief. She loved her parents, but if she didn’t escape their constant ever vigilant presence she was going to scream. She had scared them, and badly, she understood that. But did they have to watch her like she was going to disappear right in front of them?

She was fifty-three years old, she was long past the age of needing a minder. She had been taking care of herself, and living by herself, for years. It was hard to readjust to having other people constantly in her space, and the hovering they indulged in didn’t help.

When she had arrived in this time she hadn’t done that to them. Of course, she, was discounting the times she would wake up, thinking that they were still dead, and this was all a dream and the waves of panic that would send her into. And maybe, just maybe, on those days she was a bit eager for their family breakfasts. Or the times she had almost slipped and referred to them in the past tense, while they were right in front of her. And perhaps, sometimes, she would randomly hug them, no matter where they were or who was watching, simply because she could. But even given all that, she still didn’t hover over them.

“Thank you, Healer Banok.”

“Anytime,” he said giving her a warm smile “And by that I mean I hope to never see you in my infirmary again.”

She laughed “Will you be offended if I hope for the same thing?”

He patted her hand “That’s what I like all my patients to say” he assured her.
Leia was walking into the main data bank room, rubbing the back of her neck to ease some of the tension there. She was tired, but it wasn’t the fatigue of healing, just the ache after a day, half-day, she corrected ruefully, of work. She needed to eat and get to bed, she wasn’t anywhere near pushing herself too hard, and she wanted to keep it that way. But she hadn’t been by here since she was injured on Cymoon 1, and it was a habit she was going to get back into.

She headed to the back, where there were a wealth of personnel who were tasked to listening to all Imperial propaganda, so she could take a quick look at all the data readouts. She was looking for news of Alderaan in that day's feed. She didn’t believe anyone was deliberately trying to keep information from her, or more importantly, her parents, but the analysts were only really paying attention to the higher ups. They couldn’t be expected to remember all the names of friends and acquaintances to listen for. She was searching for personal information, not state secrets, and the lists of people incarcerated and killed were public knowledge, and so far blessedly short But every day that passed without hearing any loved one's names was made a better day.

When she walked further into the room she was startled to see that Evaan was standing in the corner, a readout already in her hand. Her focus was so intense on the days’ data that she didn’t see Leia until she cleared her throat to get the taller woman’s attention.

Evaan’s head came up at the noise and stared at Leia for a few seconds as she tried to register who was trying to get her attention. Then a deep blush washed over her face and she gave Leia a formal bow. “Good evening Your Highness.” she offered, as she came up, pad still clutched in her hand. Then she frowned “What are you doing here? Aren’t you still on medical rest?”

Clearly, Leia had acquired an entire flock of nursemaids to watch over her every move after the mission to Cymoon 1. “No, as of this morning, I’m on light duty,” she informed the blonde “Besides my visit has nothing to do with the Rebellion,” she waved a hand over the various techs slicing and crunching the data. “I used to come every night, before I was injured, to see if I recognize any of the names.”

“Oh,” Evaan said, somewhat sheepishly.

“Anything on your family?” Leia asked, as gently as she could manage.

Evaan’s face tightened, then rolled back into a smooth mask. “No. Governor Shale seems to have a “firm” grasp on things though.”

Leia’s mouth twitched “Were you expecting anything else?”

“With her reputation, no.” the blond looked down “Are you going to tell me that no news is good news?”

Leia shook her head “No news is a form of torture. Because they are both alive and dead and you don’t know which one is true.”

Evaan’s eyes flew up and met hers, startled. “Your mother would disagree with that.”

Leia shook her head “I love my mother, but I’ve never been able to emulate her calm approach to life. She’s a realist, but prefers to err on the side of optimism.”

“And you’re a pessimist?” Evaan asked, a wry twist to her lips “I tell you I’m shocked.”

“Expect the worst, if it happens you’re prepared. If it doesn’t you end up being pleasantly
surprised. I find it’s a good way to live.”

“In a war yes, but for your whole life?” Evaan frowned thoughtfully “You’d be living constantly on
the edge, always afraid that something was going to destroy your joy.”

Well, in general, that was what happened in her life, so she had good reason to adopt the attitude.
She frowned as she thought that over. When exactly had she lost the certainty that things could get
better? When Ben turned? Or before that, as she could see the New Republic began its downward
slide into fatal ignorance? When the whispers of the existence of the First Order and what they
were doing in the Uncharted Territories reached her ears? Or had it begun earlier than that? When
she learned Vader was her father? When Alderaan was destroyed? She didn’t always use to think
this way. She wouldn’t have joined the Rebellion in the first place if she had that attitude.

Mistaking Leia’s expression as a recrimination against her, Evvan stiffened. “Forgive me, your
highness, it’s not my place to say.”

Leia found her frown deepening. Did the woman really see herself as Leia’s subordinate? “Leia.
My name is Leia.”

Evaan blanched at that. “That-I mean” she cleared her throat “That wouldn’t be proper.”

“Are we friends?” Leia asked, wonderingly. She had thought so, not especially close ones, but
friends nonetheless.

“What?” The woman couldn't have been more surprised if Leia had announced her true parentage
to her. Clearly, Leia was very out of practice at this sort of thing.

“Are we friends Evaan?” she repeated.

Evaan stammered, looking flustered “I would never presume-”

“Please, presume away.” Leia interjected, “I know I’m very bad at making overtures in the
traditional way, but I can assure you that I consider us friends.” She sighed and rubbed her
forehead. “It has been brought to my attention that I seem to be withdrawn and a little work
focused. That for the sake of my mental health I need to do other things than work.”

"I denied that initially, then tried to come up with a list of people I socialize with, and it's
shockingly small." She gave Evaan a small smile “But you are one of those people. If I’m wrong,
and please feel free to tell me if I am, but I thought we had fun together.”

“We beat the crap out of each other in the sparring room.” Evaan said slowly “That’s not most
people’s idea of fun bonding.”

“Is it yours?” Leia asked, curious.

A slow smile crept across the woman’s face “Yes. Yes, it is.”

“Good.”

“Alright...Leia.” the blonde gave her a shy smile. “I’ll see you later then.”
ABA - Day 81

When Leia was called into the Alliance leadership council, she felt a tiny thrill go through her. Finally, she was getting somewhere, Draven’s suspicions seemed to be cast aside, they were finally trusting her to do something big. She wouldn’t have been called into a meeting like this, just her, unless it was something big. When she arrived at Mon’s office, she found the situation the exact opposite of what she was expecting.

Luke was there, a scowl on his face when he saw her enter, that was then efficiently wiped clean when he noticed Mon’s and Ackbar’s attention on him. His desire to hide from her must be one hell of a motivation, his shield work clearly had improved by vast strides, since she had not a clue he was in the room until she walked into it.

Leia contained the flinch the reaction of seeing her brother, but not being able to feel him caused in her. She would rather have his anger and pain beating on her. This echoing void where she had just gotten used to his presence in the Force again was unbearable. It was too close to the years she spent calling out to the other him in vain. She had never lost a limb, but she imagined this feeling was as close as she could get to it, to constantly reach for something that wasn’t there, only to find it missing.

She could ignore it when he wasn’t near her, she was used to this Luke wanting privacy when they weren’t in the same room. But this was the first time since their encounter in the Falcon that they had been in each other’s presence and it hit her anew.

“Ahh, Leia,” Ackbar said cheerfully. “Now we can begin.”

“Begin what?” Leia asked cautiously, wondering why she was here at all.

Mon gave a tight smile “The Admiral and I felt, given the limited resources you had on your last mission, and the success it was, that it was time to send Lt. Skywalker in his first solo mission.”

“Despite the fact that you didn’t want us going at all,” Leia thought a little bitterly. Mon had been right about the dangers, Leia’s own injuries could attest to that, but that didn’t mean it wasn’t worth the cost she had paid. Mon had always had the knack for implying full credit on things she had come just shy of outright forbidding. The prime of example of that being the Scarif mission, where she had withheld her open support, but when that mission had led to the destruction of the Death Star, Mon had ridden that wishy-washy endorsement for all it was worth. It was one of the reasons she was such a successful politician. Leia wasn’t sure if she was more disapproving or envious of that talent.

Mon, ever aware of the undercurrents in a room, gave her a tight smile in response to Leia’s inquiring look. “We wanted to ask for Lt. Skywalker’s help in another mission that you are familiar with Leia.”

“Help with what?” Luke asked. Leia was right there with him. If Mon and Ackbar wanted them to go on a mission together right now, in some weird attempt to force them to patch things up, that was courting disaster.

“We need to send a negotiating party to Rodian. We are hoping to purchase weapons from them.” Ackbar clarified. Leia frowned, that meant her participation was out. There was no way they were sending her, and her twenty-five million bounty, to a world that far under the thumb of the Empire.

“And Leia is here because?” Luke asked, tone coolly civil, echoing her own thoughts.
Ackbar and Mon turned to look at her expectantly. She looked back, genuine lost, she had no idea what they wanted from her. She blinked in surprise as the answer occurred to her with Mon’s prompting of “Leia?”

Leia tried to keep her irritation off her face. They really had called her into this meeting simply to try to force Luke and her to be in the same room? For information that she was sure they both knew? In some misguided attempt to help them reconcile? She fought to keep her voice level. “Because I did all the background information and research.” she said, giving in, and shooting both Mon and Ackbar a glare.

“I thought the Rodian were staunchly Imperialist?” Luke asked skeptically, picking up on her hesitation.

Well, that wouldn't do. It was the two busybodies in the room she was doubting, not the mission itself. “They are. But it’s the Chattan clan that is currently ruling Rodia. Their closest rivals for power, the Chekko clan, are also in the business of manufacturing weapons.” Leia found herself lecturing.

“You think they’ll help us to spite the Chattan?” There was a twist to those words. Luke clearly didn’t want to touch her mind with the Force, but he also wanted the answer.

She nodded. “That’s what I believe yes.” She couldn’t give any special meaning or emphasis on any of her words. Mon knew her far too well and would wonder what was going on. The woman had enough to deal with, she didn’t need to doubt herself on her belief to Leia’s loyalty to the Alliance.

Luke picked up on the answer though, because there was the barest hint of recognition in his eyes as he processed that yes, this was possible.

Luke looked from Ackbar to Mon. “Who’s going with me? And how am I getting there?”

“We can’t send any Alliance vessel.” Ackbar said mournfully. “Rodian space is too tightly controlled for that to work.”

“Han?” Luke asked, his face brightening.

Ackbar’s nostril slits flared in irritation. “Certainly not. Using smugglers is an unwise and unnecessary risk.”

Both her and Luke’s eyes narrowed at the insult to Han. Mon, sensing the defense that both of them were going to launch about Han, hurriedly spoke up. “Captain Solo is currently unavailable to help us. We did ask,” and here she shot a glare to Ackbar, “but he is currently on another assignment.”

“Smuggling for a criminal enterprise you mean,” Ackbar corrected.

“Admiral,” Mon sighed “the man does have to eat.”

“Then who are we using?” Luke asked, “If not Han?”

“Nakari Kelen.” Mon said.


“His daughter,” Ackbar explained, “She has offered us the use of her private vessel, the Desert Jewel, to get you into Rodian space.”

Mon smiled faintly at his enthusiasm “As soon as you're ready.”

“Great.” Luke walked out of the conference room without another word to her. Both Mon and Ackbar watched him go, disappointment on their faces. Leia felt her temper rise. If they had bothered to ask her, instead of treating her and Luke like recalcitrant children, she could have told them this farce would never work.

She shot them a glare. Ackbar got a defensive look on his face, but Mon just shrugged. “It wasn’t just about trying to get you two to make up, it was also to see if Lt. Skywalker could act like a professional around you, while you two are in this dispute.”

“Of course Luke would act professionally,” Leia said, indignant at the slight to her twin.

Mon didn’t rise to the bait though, she merely raised a thoughtful eyebrow “You are very defensive of a person that everybody says you are currently furious with.”

Leia’s eyes narrowed “You shouldn't believe everything you hear Mon.” The older woman said nothing, silently waiting for an answer. “I am not mad at him.” she finally elaborated.

“And Obi-Wan?” Ackbar asked.

Leia flushed, but merely raised her chin and responded coolly “I don’t see how that is any of your business Admiral.”

He gurgled in irritation, “It’s my business when it starts affecting the Alliance.”

“In what way is our personal business affecting the Alliance?” she asked, incredulously.

“Luke stopped his Jedi training,” he spat back “So, yes that does make it my business. We need all the Jedi we can get if we ever have a hope of taking down Vader.” He stopped his rant and took in the look on her face. “You didn’t know that, did you?” he asked surprised.

No, she hadn’t, but it wasn’t a huge surprise to her either. “It’s his choice Admiral. If he feels that this isn’t the course for his life, then we should respect it.”

“I would agree with you except not anybody can use the Force, we have a limited pool to work with, thanks to the Empire’s determination to wipe out or co-opt anyone with the hint of Force talent.”

“So your solution is to force him?” she sneered back, panic in her throat. This could just as easily be him talking about her. “Like the Empire forced those poor souls to become Inquisitors? How do even begin to square that with the ideals that we are fighting for!??!”

“Of course we aren’t going to force him,” Ackbar said, his tone somewhat gentler as he realized his misstep with her. “But I would like to know what is going on between the three of you so I can talk to Luke about this.”

“Ask Obi-Wan.” she shot back.

“I did. He refused to answer.”

“And you thought I would be the weak link?” she asked, fury rising at his presumption.

Mon held up her hand for silence, and they both fell quiet. “No Leia, we thought you might be the
rational one in all of this.” Well, that was flattering, but not the case.

She crossed her arms across her chest “You were mistaken.” she said “Stay out of this. We will work it out on our own.” When neither of them said anything more she inquired “If that is all?”

Mon sighed and rubbed her forehead. “Yes Leia, that is all. You can go.”

She stormed out of the office, and caught a glimpse of Luke, turning right, at the end of the corridor. She gave a sigh, that took longer than she thought, and if she hadn’t let her temper override her good sense she would have walked out with him. With a snort of derision at her lack of commitment to her decision to not use the Force, she checked both ways down the corridor to make sure they were deserted. Then she put on all the speed she could racing down the hallway to catch up to her brother.

She was at the intersection of the hallway in a second, and called out “Luke.”

He stopped, and for one heartbreaking minute, she thought he was going to ignore her. He did answer her. Over his shoulder, not fully turning around to look at her, but he did answer. “Let me guess, you wanted to assure me that little ambush wasn’t your idea?”

“Ahhh, no.” she answered, startled.

He whirled then to face her, anger on his face. “Then it was your idea?” he demanded, indignant.

She rolled her eyes. “Of course not. I just assumed you knew that I had nothing to do with it.”

“Oh.” he seemed to deflate a little at that, but he did walk closer to her so they weren’t shouting at each other. When he was two feet in front of her he gave her a sour, “What did you want then?”

“On this mission…” she trailed off, wondering how to best phrase this “Above all else, remember to be yourself.” She had been out of the loop for two weeks, and she was still playing catch up. She had no idea if the Kupohan’s spy was anywhere near Llanic at this point. Or even if Nakari was planning to use that as their jump point. But if they did end up there, and that ship with the spy on board was also there, she needed him to save it.

“More cryptic advice, thanks.” So he still wasn’t ready to talk to her. That didn’t matter, this did.

“This important the Rebellion Luke,” she pressed.

He sneered “If it’s so important why don’t you tell me directly? Or is this another thing you think I’m too young to understand?”

Leia felt her anger rise a notch. It was one thing to blow her off, he had earned that. But he had no right to endanger their cause simply because he was mad. “You know why I don’t get more specific.”

“Because you have an abundance of control issues?” he offered snidely.

“Alright,” she hissed ”If you’re going to act like a child, and not listen to me simply because you’re pissed, I suppose I’ll have to treat you like one.”

He took a step forward, deliberately pushing into her personal space “And you are such a great judge of deeming what is important and what isn’t? I have the most utter confidence in you given your track record.”
The sneer on his face snapped her last fraying nerve and she snapped. “Fine you want specifics, I’ll give you specifics. If you see a Kupohan ship being chased by Imperial ships do whatever you have to do to save it.” And she stormed off, heading away from him, before she said something more damning, and couldn’t take it back.

She was on one of the outdoor observation platforms, high in the air, trying to find her center when Rex found her.

“Leia,” he said as he climbed up the ladder “Mind if I join you?”

She gave him a smile, while she didn’t want to seek company, she wouldn’t send it away either. “If you don’t mind that it’s going to be a bit crowded.”

He laughed “If there is one thing my years in the Clone Wars taught me, it was not to be bothered by cramped spaces.” He finished his climb up the ladder and stood beside her, leading on the rail.

“Waiting for the Desert Jewel to leave?”

She nodded, not in the least surprise he was keeping track of when Luke went off world.

“Luke still pissed at you?”

She nodded again.

“I have no idea what is going on between you, Obi-Wan, and Luke, but my ear is always open if you need it, Leia.”

She gave him a sad smile “Thanks.” Then the use of her name caught a snag in the back of her mind. Rex had never called her Your Highness or Senator. It was always Leia. Why? Because Rex always paid attention to how people introduced themselves to him, and never changed that unless they asked. He was the only one on the base who was allowed to call Obi-Wan “General”, and that was because the older man had never asked him to stop.

<Titles are important> she remembered Chewie saying. Yes, they were. So why then on Cymoon 1 had he suddenly started using hers?

“Rex?” she asked.

“Hmm..”

“Why did you call me Senator on Cymoon 1?”

He turned to stare at her, blankly. “When I was on the ground, bleeding out. You threatened to tie me up if I didn't stop moving. But you didn’t say, Leia, you said Senator.”

He stiffened, it was subtle, but it was there “That's your title isn’t it?” he challenged.

Oh yes, she was onto something here. “One you have never called me by before,” she said mildly.

He had nothing to say to that for a moment, then reluctantly “For a second I thought you were someone else.”

Someone who looked like her, was a Senator, and that he could have possible met. That narrowed the possibilities considerably. She wondered why he hadn't said anything to her about this before.
“You mean my birth mother?” she asked gently.

A look of profound relief crossed his face “You know.”

“I know.” More than you unfortunately.

“I wasn’t sure. I didn’t want to say anything in case you had been left in the dark.”

“A soldier to the end.” she observed.

“I suppose you could look at it like that.” A look of consternation crossed his face “It was more the fact that it wasn’t my place to tell you if you didn’t know. I had no proof, just my intuition.”

“When did you figure it out?” she asked curiously.

“The moment I saw you sitting on the General’s floor next to your brother. And if I hadn’t put it together then, I certainly would have the first time I saw you practice shooting your blaster on the target range.”

She gave him a surprised look, and he laughed “Your mother was one hell of a shot. Did no one ever tell you that?”

“No,” she said, “I was mostly told she was an effective and honest politician when they were in short supply, she was fully committed to her ideals, and she was a believer in democracy,”

“That too,” he agreed, “but I’m not the best one to judge her skills as a legislator. But in battle, especially for a civilian, she was someone you definitely wanted on your side.”

“How do you know this?” she asked, fascinated by this new side of her mother.

“She found herself in a scrape or two during the war,” a fond smile broke across his face "The first time I ever met her though was at the first battle of Geonosis.”

“She was there?” Leia asked.

“Yes, she was.”

That had been mentioned nowhere in any of the histories she had read about Padme Amidala Naberrie. Mon hadn’t said anything either. She pondered this information for a second, then put it to the back of her mind for further thought later. There was a more pressing issue she had to address with Rex first.

“Do you think anyone else ‘guessed’?”

He gave a sad laugh. “Probably not. If anyone has an inkling it’s Mon. She worked with your mother fairly frequently in the Senate, but I can’t say for certain. There weren’t a lot of people who remember them now.”

She frowned "I wouldn't say that."

"Oh no, their legends are certainly remembered," he said, his grief naked on his face. "But who they were as people? No, that is being forgotten."

“You remember,” she said gently “enough that you were able to spot both of their children when they were sitting right in front of you.”
“They were my friends,” he said simply “how could I not?” He reached out and gently touched her cheek “You look so much like her. Have her sense of duty too. Not that General Skywalker didn’t have one” he hastened to add “but he was more loyal to people than ideas. You and your brother though,” he sighed. “You both carry duty to your ideals to the extreme like she did.”

Except for the obvious reference to how much they looked alike, nobody had ever compared her to her mother before. It was nice to know that she might have inherited something besides a tendency towards megalomania and a connection to a power she didn’t much care for.

She heard the Desert Jewel exit the hangar before she saw it. As it’s bright red hull came into her line of sight, Leia watched intently, as it rose into the atmosphere, and away from Yavin.

“He’ll forgive you.” Rex offered.

“You don’t even know what we are fighting about.”

“No, I don’t. But he’s your brother and he loves you. As long as whatever you did wasn’t to deliberately hurt him, he’ll forgive you. He’s too much like his mother not to.” He gave her a watery chuckle “I might not know much about how families work, but one of the things I do know, if the love is there, eventually they forgive you.”

He would know, his brothers had also done some unspeakable things. There were a few of them, besides Rex, who were members of the Rebellion. Even though Rex had never turned on his Jedi, never done the things that the Empire had ordered the clones to do later, he treated them with nothing but love.

She looked up to the sky. Luke was going on his first mission without her, Obi-Wan or Han to back him up. It was Luke, and she had the utmost confidence in him, but the universe was a harsh and unforgiving place. Did she really want her last words to him before he left to be ones of anger?

“May the Force be with you,” she sent out to him. He didn't answer her, but that didn’t stop Leia from keeping track of him in the Force until he left the system.

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawnsbyisaakfkampfer and Acyancat
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Hey guys!!! Few notes, the statistic Leia cites is actually a real thing. Since the SW calendar year contains 364 days, I figured it applied in a galaxy far far away, but math was never my strong suit, so don't quote me on that. Also I totally stole a line from Bloodlines. Imaginary cookies if you know which one it is. As always hope you enjoy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Leia was still staring at the spot that the Desert Jewel had vanished into when she heard Rex clear his throat.

“You okay?” he asked. She used to have such a good sabacc face when it came to concealing her emotions from everyone. What had happened to that?

“You now have people who know you, and not your legend.” That little voice sounded suspiciously like Luke, the older one, not the one who was so furious he didn’t know what to do with her.

“Yes.”

Rex gave her a disbelieving look. “If you really believe that I have a planet to sell you on the Outer Rim.”

It had been years since she had this many people around her that cared about her, Leia Organa, rather than the General. She was thankful for this, she hadn’t realized had lonely she had become, how isolated, until she found her herself in this time. The downside to all of that love and attention was it was very hard to conceal anything from their sharp gazes and none of them would allow her to hide for long. Why did everyone she love, have to be so smart? “I don’t like it when he goes on a mission without me,” she muttered.

“I know that feeling. I don’t like it much when the General goes without me either.” He shook his head “For decades I thought the man was dead, you think that would make it easier.”

She thought about that for a moment, staring out into the great canopy of Yavin's jungle. “I would have thought it made it worse. Now you know what it’s like to lose him. You went through it and have no intention of doing it again.” The gods only know what would happen to her if she lost her parents again, or Han. That was why she didn’t regret, beyond the heartache she caused others, her actions on Cymoon 1. She would have rather have died than have Han, any Han, be ripped away from her again.

“Huh, never thought of it that way.” He pondered that for a moment, “You know that feeling includes you and your brother right?” Startled she looked at him. There was a wealth of feeling in that statement, and in the Force. Rex had relaxed that iron control of his, and she could feel his protectiveness of her swirl around him. He wanted her to know this, in every possible way. This was more than looking out for the children of two dear friends. This was caring and concern for
their own sake. She thought he had come up here to comfort her, it never occurred to her that he was also worried about Luke.

All of this made her wonder what that other Rex had known about her. The Force knew she was in Luke’s company enough, no matter what timeline she found herself in. If this Rex had put it together that she and Luke were related, on nothing more than seeing them sit together, chances were good the other one had put it together too.

She couldn’t remember if he had joined them on any other missions besides Endor. And even on that one, had he gone, not because it represented the best chance to bring down an Empire he loathed, but because he figured, with Han leading it, the odds were good her and Luke would be there too? Had that Rex been trying to protect them? Why hadn’t he ever said anything to her? Or to Luke? Or approach them after it became public knowledge that she and Luke were related? How much of her life did she not know about, and was now only getting the full details of?

Rex, miss reading the expression on her face, reassured her. “It’s fine, you don’t have to say anything. I just thought you should know.”

She shook her head and leaned forward so she could stare directly into his eyes. “No Rex, never that. It just took me by surprise, that’s all.” She gave him a grin “I had my aunts growing up, who taught me how to fight, how to shoot, how to out-think the enemy. I would be honored if I had an Uncle who would expand on that knowledge.”

A shy grin crossed his face “Really?”

“Really.” then her pleasure faded and she looked to the sky once more, worry for Luke nibbling away at the back of her mind.

“He’s capable, he’ll be fine.” She didn’t know who he was trying to reassure more her or himself.

“I know that,” she insisted “it’s the rest of the galaxy I don’t trust.”

“Yeah, General Skywalker was always itchy when he wasn’t on a mission with General Kenobi.” The comparison didn’t sting as much when Rex made it, she noted clinically. Maybe it was because of the fraught nature of her and Obi-Wan’s relationship. Maybe it had to do with the fact that Rex had no idea what had happened to his beloved General. He had no idea what comparisons he was striking up in Leia’s mind with his innocent observations.

“And when Ahsoka was on a mission there really was no living with him.” he added.

“Ahsoka? Ahsoka Tano?” she asked, her mind racing. So Vader had known her, not just of her. “You mean the first Fulcrum?”

“Yeah,” a fond smile crossed his lips “She was his padawan.” Leia gave him a blank look, not understanding the word. Rex elaborated “It was a Jedi term for apprentice. Like your brother is to the General.”

She was his what? “I didn’t know he had one,” she said, shocked. Luke had never mentioned that Vader had any Jedi pupils. She knew about the Inquisitors of course, but it was a stretch to call them pupils. More like victims of brainwashing.

Rex nodded “They were close. She was a real spitfire back then.”

“Then?” Leia said wryly, trying to cover her shock “I only remember meeting her a few times, but I don’t think she outgrew that.”
“Oh trust me,” he said, a fond smile tugging on his lips, “she became more focused as she got older.”

He gave a weighty sigh, “I miss her. I miss him. Hard to think that the last time we were all together was so long ago. Sometimes I feel like it was yesterday. I’ll just turn the corner and there they will be, laughing and joking together.” He closed his eyes in remembrance. “It’s strange to think fondly of times that were so violent and chaotic.”

Leia could sympathize with that feeling. Sometimes, in the long slog of the Resistance, she had longed for the days of the Rebellion. When things were so easily defined. Where you knew who the bad guys were, and you could strike at them directly. When she had Luke and Han at her side, keeping her grounded and watching her back.

“When was the last time you saw them?” she asked, offering him a listening ear if he wanted it.

“During the Siege for Mandalore,” he said softly, his eyes coming back open. Leia straightened, that was only days before the end of the war. “The Generals were called away to rescue the Chancellor. He had been kidnapped by Dooku. Ahsoka and I stayed behind so we could deal with Maul.”

“Maul?” Fascinated, she couldn’t keep her questions to herself. This was a part of the galactic history that had been severely distorted by the Empire’s propaganda machine. Between the shortened life span of the clones, the purge of the Jedi, and the lives lost during the Rebellion, by the time the Empire had fallen, there were very few people left who had actually fought in the Clone Wars. One of the first acts Mon commissioned as High Chancellor was an inquiry into what actually happened during that turbulent time. Historians and academics could then actually study, instead of parrot the party line, that time period. But without access to many first person accounts and so many records destroyed, it was almost impossible to sort fact from fiction.

“He was a Dark Side user.”

“Was he a Sith?” she wondered because apparently there had been more than just Palpatine running around.

Rex shook his head “I don’t think so. At least not by then. What I do know is that he orchestrated the death of the Duchess of Mandalore, and in the ensuing chaos seized control of that world. He was going to use that as his base of operations to take over the galaxy on his own terms, and destroy both the Jedi and the Sith. If you want to know more you are going to have to ask the General. I’m not too sure on the whole history there, they were all pretty tight-lipped about it.”

With that small bit of information, Vader’s weird half mutterings in their last conversation suddenly made sense. He had left Rex with Ahsoka. That is how she survived the first purge.

“And then came Order 66.” she said softly.

Rex’s eyes darkened and his face took on a tight look, “Yeah, that was a nightmare of epic proportions. One minute we were all on the same page, we had finally trapped Maul into a ray shield. Then we get a priority transmission, and they all turned on her.”

“And you?”

He fingered the scar on his forehead “I already had removed the chip by then.” His face twisted bitterly “The irony was Ahsoka wasn’t even a Jedi at the time. Didn’t matter, my brothers still turned on her.”
So there was more to this story. She had wondered why her parents had never mentioned that Fulcrum was a Jedi like they had told her about Obi-Wan. “Why wasn’t she in the Order?”

“It’s not a pretty story.”

“Was anything from the Clone Wars pleasant?” she asked.

He grunted “Point.” A look of profound tiredness washed over his features “She had been framed in a set of bombings that happened at the Jedi Temple. Instead of protecting her, the Order threw her to the mercy of the Military courts.”

Oh, that didn't sound good. She waited a minute, to see if he would continue. He said nothing, just the songs of the native birds reaching her ears. “And then?” she prompted.

“It all came to light that she had been framed, by a friend no less, but by then it was too late for her. She walked away from the Order. Not that I could blame her. She needed to find out who she was outside of the Jedi. General Skywalker was crushed.”

“Why?”

“Your father was a good man,” he said softly “but he was also a very passionate one, and sometimes it ruled him. He felt like the Order should have defended Ahsoka, not leave her to the mercies of then Admiral Tarkin.”

At that name Leia shuddered, so she had found something that she actually agreed with Vader on.

“Met him?” Rex said dryly at her reaction.

“Once or twice. And that was enough.” The smirk on his face as he ordered the destruction of Alderaan.

“I know he was human, but he was without a doubt the most cold-blooded person I ever met. Nothing but ice in his veins. General Skywalker always took the failure to protect the ones he cared about personally.” He sighed “He was a brilliant General and a loyal friend, but there was a friction between him and most of the other Jedi I never could quite understand. The whole situation with Ahsoka just made it even worse.”

Maybe they were sensing the evil that was lurking under his skin, but then again she could admit he seemed to have a legitimate grievance with the Order in the treatment of his apprentice. How many other issues were there that she wasn’t aware of? And did she care enough to ask about them? Nothing could migrate Vader's culpability for the actions he took later in his life.

But none of that was Rex's fault. The truth didn't change the swirl of emotions being projected by the man next to her. “I'm sorry,” she said, aware of how inadequate those words were, but not able to maintain her silence in the face of his grief.

“It was long ago.”

Not to you, it wasn’t, but she wasn’t going to say anything that would upset this man’s hard-won peace.

She returned instead to her vigilant staring at Yavin’s sky, giving the man time to collect himself. Rex stayed with her for a few minutes more, the silence between them comforting instead of awkward.
Then a soft beeping filled the air. Rex looked down at his chrono and winced. “I’m sorry, but I actually do have an appointment to get to soon.”

She waved her hand brushing away his apology “Of course, go.”

He turned to head down the ladder and asked over his shoulder “You coming?”

“No,” she said, “I think I’ll stay up here for a while. But Rex?” He swung around on the ladder, then waited there at the top for her to continue. “Thank you.”

He only looked puzzled “For what?” Was she really this out of practice with pleasantries like this?

“For coming to find me. For telling me about my mother. For being you.”

A wide pleased smile crossed his face “Anytime Leia,” His chrono beeped again.

She laughed “Except now. Go” she said shooing him with her hand “You’re going to be late.”

After his departure, Leia felt like she was somewhat at loose ends. On any other day, when her movements weren't being restricted and monitored, she would simply throw herself into work until she dropped. That was infinitely more pleasant than the itchy prickling under her skin that insisted that everything was about to go horribly wrong without her there. Not that Luke currently wanted her on Rodia but still…

That avenue was cut off to her though. She had already met her assigned duties for today, and if she tried to sneak back in Mon would definitely tattle to Healer Banok. Leia was only three more days from being given the all clear, she didn't want to jeopardize that. So she stood there, on the tower, letting her mind wander and fill with nothing. It wasn’t until she heard the familiar sound of an engine she knew like her own heartbeat, that she realized she had fallen into a meditative trance in the Force.

Scowling, she really didn't mean to keep using the Force, she adjusted her eyes to see the Falcon, heading into the docking bay. Grinning, Han was always an excellent distraction, she set off to head down the ladder to greet him and Chewie.

When she got there she found Han already outside the Falcon, talking to the deck officer. She waited until the two of them were done before she came up behind Han, using the ambient noise of the bay to hide her approach.

“You’re back early.” She told his back.

He stiffened a bit in surprise, the turned around slowly, giving her a wide flirtatious smile. “Keeping track of my schedule?”

Yes. “No,” she said primly. “Heard that rust bucket you called a ship fly in and came down to see what trouble you had landed yourself into this time.”

“Of course, it had nothing to do with how you’ve been pining away for me?” he said in half-mocking tone.

“Yes,” she said, meeting his sarcastic tone with her own, and waved her hands down herself “as you can see I’m wasting away here. I’m all skin and bones.”
He followed the path of her hands with his eyes, and remarked casually “Not from where I’m standing.”

<Han,> Chewie’s voice floated in from behind her, a long suffering air about it, as he exited down the gang plank <When you are done flirting with Leia do you want to come with me to the mess hall to get some food?>

Han didn’t even bat an eye at the Wookie’s scolding tone, he just looked at her questioningly “You bothered to eat yet?”

She was about to tell him she didn’t need a nursemaid when her stomach let out a huge growl. Han frowned “Get caught up in your work?” he demanded, worry lines appearing at the corner of his eyes.

“No,” she said defensively “I was just up in one of the watchtowers and lost track of time.”

“Doing what?” He didn’t look like he believed her.

“Nothing,” she muttered, embarrassed by that fact. She didn’t know why. It made no sense. She had been forbidden from doing anything useful, and anything else she could have been doing would have been just as frivolous as staring vacantly up into space.

“Really?” He looked skeptical “You were up there, doing nothing, and lost track of time?”

“Yes,” she said, “and if you don’t believe me ask Rex, he was with me for some of it.”

Han grunted, “I’ll take your word for it.”

“More like you want to continue to avoid Rex,” she countered “You know not everyone in the galaxy is as forgiving as I about your big mouth.”

“Hey,” he protested “I have friends.”

“Name some besides me, Luke, and Chewie,” she countered, expecting at least the name of Lando to appear. Huh, she wondered what Lando was up to right now. Maybe she could convince Han to drop in on his old friend and see how he was doing? Perhaps he would like join them in their helpless crusade? Or were the two of them in one of their fight phases? It was frankly hard to remember.

A surprised, and pleased look crossed his face,”We’re friends?” he asked softly, wonder in his tone.

She swallowed. She knew she had been running hot and cold with him over the last few months. It was hard to reconcile her Han with this younger rougher version of himself. But she hadn’t thought she had made him this uncertain. She didn’t think she was any more contradictory than when she had actually been nineteen and trying to run from everything he provoked in her. When all she wanted to do was retreat into her personal mission to destroy the Empire and block out her pain.

Or maybe this Han was more certain in getting an honest answer, instead of a sarcastic retort from her? Gods, time travel made this all so confusing. She knew him and at the same time didn’t. The core of him was still blessedly the same, but she sometimes she would see glimpses of who he could be and wasn’t quite yet, and she would ache in mourning. Then he would show her this soft side, the one her Han hadn’t dared showed her until after his rescue from Jabba, and she was breathless with the courage this one was showing her in baring his vulnerabilities.
She owed him an honest answer. “Of course we are laser brains.” Of course, nobody said it had to be said in a nice way.

His face flushed in pleasure, and Chewie gave a soft woof of approval. This was Han though, he was never long without his words. “Well when you put it so nicely, how can I refuse?” He bowed low, just this side of mocking “Would my lady like to join us for lunch?”

“I would love to” she answered.

When they entered the mess hall, there was a small drop in the volume of the chatter, but it wasn't nearly as noticeable as it would have been even three days ago. Clearly, she wasn’t quite the person of interest she once was and the gossips of the base had moved on to more salacious subjects. Although what that could be Leia wasn’t sure. Nobody ever shared gossip with her. Maybe everybody thought it was beneath the dignity of a Princess?

“Or maybe you haven’t been the most approachable lately”, a voice that sounded like Mon rang in her head.

She sat down at the long table with Han and Chewie sitting directly in front of her.

“Yum,” Han said, picking up the food off his tray. “Protein bars.” The Alliance was going through one of its phases of not having a great variety of food to offer. Leia knew of several raids planned on Imperial depots that were in the works, one should be heading out for tomorrow in fact, but for now, they were down to the cheap, bland, if nutritional, option.

Leia shrugged “It's food.” And without hesitation, she proceed to dig in.

Han looked on in somewhat baffled amazement, Chewie joining him in the staring.

She swallowed her first bite “What?” she demanded.

'I just thought, as royalty, you’d have a refined palate or something.” He offered.

Leia shook her head “No, not at all. I was taught from a very early age that you eat what is in front of you, as long as it is offered in good faith. It would be rude to do otherwise.”

“Diplomatic banquets?” he asked. “Thought the high and mighty would serve better food at those.”

“Ahh, but not all those high and mighty ones are human, or even have anything close to human based physiology.” she countered ‘And some dishes can venture on the…” she trailed off, looking for the diplomatic term for some of the things she had eaten in her life, “adventurous.”

Not quite the whole truth. The Resistance had just as many, if not more, problems acquiring supplies. She had gotten used to eating ration bars, often times it was the only thing they could afford to purchase. And the handy option of robbing the First Order was definitely out since that would have been a clear act of war. Both sides, but especially the New Republic, were very interested in maintaining the status of that fake peace. At least until the Starkiller was ready for the First Order. Leia shoved that away. She was here, Alderaan and Hosnian Prime stood, the Death Star was gone, and the Empire had to die before she could even begin the real work of killing its replacement in its infancy.

She went on “Besides it’s not just them. Sometimes it’s a person who is offering you the best that they have.”
He looked thoughtful at that. “Makes sense. At least as far as your parents are concerned. They seem to be decent people.”

She arched an eyebrow “Seem to be?”

“You father is scary.” he confessed.

She actually laughed “You are the only one on this base that thinks so.”

“It’s always the well-mannered ones you have to watch out for in the galaxy Princess.”

“And my mother is not well mannered?” she countered.

He gave her a fond smile “Oh, she is. But she has a bit of the whimsy and mischievous in her, just like you.”

She almost choked on her bar at the plain simple compliment. She wasn’t expecting him to get this sweet with her so soon. The man was continually full of surprises.

She took a sip of her water to help her swallow the food down. “And my father doesn’t?”

<A rule follower,> Chewie said, speaking up for the first time. <through and through. There is no mischief in him.>

“Odd thing to say about a man who helped found a conspiracy to overthrow a government.” she observed.

<No,> Chewie countered, smiling and showing his teeth in a fierce display <He’s just following rules from a time long gone if it ever existed.>

She pondered that thought. Chewie had been badly burned by the Clone Wars and the Emperor’s betrayal of the Wookies. If it wasn’t for the fact that he loved Han, and then later expanded that love to included her and Luke, he never would have gotten involved in the Rebellion. He had told her once, after the death of the Emperor, but before the liberation of Kashyyyk, that he had been without hope for so long, that sometimes he didn’t know what to do with the sensation. He had begun to believe that things could actually be better for his family, for his son, then they were for him. Well, maybe she could help him find that hope again.

She turned to face Han, and returned to their earlier, and less fraught subject matter “I really don’t have an opinion on food one way or another. You need it to keep going, and except for caff, of which I need vast amounts of to function, I really don’t care, as long as it doesn’t taste foul.” Random kitchen raids for comfort food aside. But that was chocolate! Who wouldn’t indulge in some petty theft for chocolate?

“Just food,” he snorted “I really need to cook a meal for you sometime and show you what a real meal looks like.”

Leia stilled at that. Han loved cooking, but it wasn’t something he just let anybody know though. Growing up, hard on the streets of Corellia, he always had to scramble for food. When he was older, he had taught himself how to cook it. Everything he learned he had done, in that small galley in the Falcon, in between the long hauls, using all the foods he didn’t have access to as a child. He wasn’t a master chef or anything, but it was good.

In fact, after the New Republic started, between his cooking and badgering, she had taken an interest in food again. Not enough to cook it herself, but enough to appreciate it. After she started
the Resistance, and Han had disappeared, that had been one more thing that she had cut out of her life for practicalities sake. Leia wondered just how much of herself she had cut away in order to throw herself into her work so she could ignore the pain she was in? Her parents had been right, she really needed to get some hobbies or a personal life of some sort. It was a wonder she hadn’t gone mad yet.

Bringing her wandering mind back to the conversation at hand, she realized that she was staring vacantly at Chewie’s face. The Wookie was starting to look angry, and ready to leap to Han’s defense. She slid her eyes over to Han to see a look of embarrassment on his face. “That would be nice,” she said quickly.

Han shrugged nonchalantly to cover his embarrassment “It’s fine, you don’t have to bother.”

“No really,” she insisted “A home cooked meal sounds nice.”

“It’s nothing fancy,” he said defensively.

“I eat ration bars without complaint. You think I care about fancy?” He still looked defensive and she sighed. “I wasn’t trying to find a polite way to say no Han, my mind just wandered.”

His posture eased and a look of puzzlement crossed his face, “Just where do you go when you do that?”

She gave him a bitter smile “The future.”

Chewie huffed, his own posture easing when he realized that Leia hadn’t meant to give offense. <That’s how polite people tell each other to drop it, Han.>

“Her? Polite?” Han snorted, then turned to her, teasing in his voice. “No questions about my ability?”

She smiled and felt her own body relax as he let her unintentional insult go. “I never assumed because you’re a second rate smuggler that you would also be a second rate cook.”

He put on a look of wounded dignity “Hey, there is nothing second rate about me sister,” he defended.

‘Uh-huh,” she took a large bite out of the protein bar and gave him a challenging smile. “Care to prove it?”

He leaned forward across the table “Here and now? You sure?”

She gave him a wide saucy grin and started leaning forward “Why not?” she offered

“I’m always up for a challenge, but are you sure this is where you want to start?”

“Coward,” she said challengingly. He was so close, those full lips of his were just a small motion away.

Chewie cleared his throat <As entertaining as that would be, could you two hold off for a least a month before you do anything in public? I have a bet I don’t want to lose.>

Han’s eyes widened and he pulled back from her as he turned to face Chewie “Bet? What bet?” he demanded.

<Whether you or Luke end up with Leia first.>
“When we what!??!” Han’s face was priceless as confusion, competitiveness, and embarrassment crossed his face. He shot her a panicked look. “I didn’t have anything to do with this.”

Leia kept her chuckle to herself. Times like this really brought home that Han had never lived in a small community before. She should be nice to him, ease him into this. Oh, where the hell is the fun in that?

“What are the odds?” she asked Chewie.

<Currently thirty-seventy, in Han’s favor.> Han looked very pleased by that. Chewie snarled <Don't get cocky. It used to be fifty-fifty.>

Han looked gobsmacked. Oh, he was making this too easy.

“What are the odds on Han and Luke getting together first?” she said. She was going to chalk this up to hormones and a nineteen-year-old brain that had trouble with impulse control. It had nothing to do with the fact that it was adorable to watch him flail around in befuddled confusion.

Chewie roared at that and Han turned bright red. “I’m not” he spluttered “Not that there is anything wrong- I don’t want the kid like that!!” he practically wailed.

“Funny how you call him kid, but flirt with me like there is no tomorrow. You do know we are the same age right? We even have the same birthday?”

“Really?” He looked surprised. Did he not know that? Oh, right, he was still unaware of her and Luke’s relation. Dammit, she had strayed into territory she would rather avoid with him.

“Hm-hm.” she said noncommittally, hoping he would drop it.

“What are the odds of that?” he muttered.

“In a group of people numbering over 75?” she answered deadpan “There is a 99.9 percent that two people in that group will share the same birthday.”

“What?”

She shrugged “I told you, my father hired excellent tutors.”

“Why would you need to know that?” He looked so baffled.

“ Weird and odd facts are useful when you have to do social engagements. That way you can appear interesting, without revealing anything personal about yourself.” He looked very thoughtful at that statement, and she realized that she had revealed a lot more about herself and their interactions then she intended to.

Knowing this would get Han’s mind off that train of thought before he could fully work out the implications, she turned to Chewie and asked. “Did you put any money on Luke?” she wondered.

<Only a little.>

“You bet against me?” Han howled. “What kind of friend are you pal?”

<One who likes to win.> Chewie retorted. Then taking in Han’s wounded expression he sighed. < I had to, otherwise it would look like I knew something more then I was telling and it would have swung the odds in your favor. I wouldn’t have won as much.> He gently cuffed Han across the back of his head. <I did place my bigger bet on you.>
Han didn't seem all that reassured by Chewie's explanation but was at a loss on how to refute the idea it was better to win more money, so he turned on his other tormentor. “And you knew too?” He pointed an accusatory finger at her.

She couldn’t hold the laugh in this time. “No,” she said between giggles “but it was easy to guess.” she waved her hands to encompass the mess hall “In between the five or ten minutes they are fighting for their lives, military work is a lot of hurry up and wait. People get bored. There is probably a bet on everything that is happening on this base.”

“Huh.” The poor man looked so confused. “So you aren’t offended?”

“Of all the things in the galaxy to get offended about, this isn’t even near the top of my list.”

He gave her a thoughtful look and absentmindedly took a bite from his protein bar, then his face crinkled in disgust. “Seriously? You don’t mind eating this?”

“No.”

“Heathen,” he muttered.

After they were done eating, Leia was at a loss as what to do next.

Han, reading her face offered quietly, “I have a new racing holo, if you want to watch.”

“That sounds lovely,” she said, more the thought of the peace and quiet and Han’s company, then any enthusiasm for the subject matter.

In the hallway by force of habit, she almost looped her arm into his. It was only at the last second she remembered she had no right to do that here, and she let the hand fall. Han didn’t notice, thankfully, that would have been very awkward to explain.

They were heading back to the hangar bay, not in any particular hurry when Threepio's voice cut in behind her. “Princess Leia! Princess Leia! Do you know-” then the droid cut off when the two of them turned to stare at him. Honestly, the droid’s ability to interrupt them in fun moments really was remarkable, no matter what timeline she found herself in.

“Yes, goldenrod?”Han growled, looks like she wasn’t the only one looking forward to a bit of quiet alone time.

“Oh,” the droid's voice registered surprise "I was sent to looking for you. I thought the Princess might know where to locate you."

"Well, here I am? What do you want?"

"Mon is requesting your presence.”

He rolled his eyes “I'm not supposed to be here for another day. Can’t it wait?”

“But sir, Master Luke is in trouble.”

All annoyance fled from Han’s face and he didn't even ask her before he took off at a dead run towards the command room. Leia, after a moment to comprehend what just happened, took after him. She didn’t use the Force to increase her speed, but she would admit to using it to prop up her
endurance. The only exercise she had been doing in the last few weeks had been her PT, and as soon as she had gone only a few steps her muscles screamed in protest.

Without the use of the Force, she couldn't keep up with Han's much longer stride. He quickly outpaced her, and she gritted her teeth in annoyance at his impatience. Would it kill him to match his pace to hers?

She came skidding into the room, Han already talking to Mon, her mother, and father standing slightly to Mon’s left around the giant holo table. Her mother, noticing her abrupt entrance, gave her a reassuring smile. Leia tried to force her pounding heart to calm down, it couldn't be that bad. No matter how hard Luke was currently shielding himself from her she would have felt it if it had been bad. And her mother wouldn’t give her such a calm smile if there was anything truly wrong.

Then Han’s voice rose above the normal din of the room, loud and demanding “What do you mean he’s stuck on Rodia? What is he doing there in the first place? I said I would take him when I got back from this job” He shot an accusing glare at Leia “Did you know about this?”

Before she could even draw in a breath to answer Ackbar cut in “He’s negotiating for weapons and supplies Captain. And the Alliance doesn’t wait at your convenience for its needs.”

“This wasn’t mission critical, I thought I had time.” Han argued back, his hands resting on his hips, giving no quarter “And I needed the money for some maintenance on the Falcon.”

“Do you think we don't pay you enough?” Ackbar said in indignation.

“For my skill level, no,” Han said frankly.

Leia interrupted before the two of them could get into a shouting match. “What do you mean by ‘stuck’?” Leia asked.

Her mother answered, “He’s fine,” she assured Leia and Han, “It’s the Desert Jewel that is the issue. They took some fire at the Llanic jump point. Luke managed to get to Rodia, but the ship needs major repair work.”

“What happened?” Han demanded

“Apparently there was a Kupohan ship that was being chased by Imperial forces.” Ackbar explained, “Luke interceded.” Leia kept her wince to herself. This was what she got for letting her temper get away from her and actually answering Luke’s questions about the future. He clearly over-extended himself, last time they hadn’t had this problem.

“Of course he did.” Han rubbed his forehead. “Chewie and I will have the Falcon ready in thirty minutes to pick him up. He can’t stay on that planet for too long, not with his bounty. He’s bound to be recognized.”

Ackbar sneered, disdain crawling in his voice “And how exactly are you going to manage that? The Falcon is also wanted by Imperial’s in several systems.”

Han didn’t back down “This is what I do,” he said, voice tight “I change the transponder codes and then we’re golden. Trust me, nobody pays attention to my ship. It’s too old looking and beat up to register as dangerous to an underpaid relay attendant.”

Ackbar wasn’t done though. “How much is that going to cost us, Captain?”

Han’s face flushed with anger “Not a damn thing. I don’t charge to rescue my friends. And if you
had all waited I would have taken him there for free.”

Mon put a gentle hand on Ackbar’s arm before the Admiral could inflame the situation even more. “We weren’t aware of that Captain,” she said soothingly. “But the mission is a bit more complicated than that.”

Leia’s eyebrow shot up. She had a feeling she knew where this was going, once again they were ahead of schedule. The last time money problems had put this mission on the back burner until the Desert Jewel could be upgraded to have more weapons. She was fast, but only had a single cannon for defense. Granted they didn’t have that problem with the Falcon, but there was the other end of the operation, Major Derlin’s retrieval of Drusil Bephorin’s family.

The Alliance had been filling its coffers quite steadily since the battle of Alderaan, but Leia didn’t remember if it was more or less than they had raised last time. She also didn’t know if this sudden bout of aggressive moves was a product of winning so decisive a battle without incurring the loss of Alderaan in the bargain or the influx of cash.

“How so?”

“The Desert Jewel is repairable, but it needs a least two weeks in dock. Meanwhile, the ship Luke assisted was containing the last bit of information we need for a retrieval mission.”

“So I need to pick him up and take him on this mission?”

“Yes, although you both need to come back here for the debrief first, and Nakari as well.”

At Han’s puzzled look Leia piped up “She’s the captain of the Desert Jewel.”

“So I need to break into Rodian space and pick up two passengers. They expecting me?”

“Yes. The information for the next mission is too important to be trusted even over encrypted channels. This is a time sensitive matter Captain, and since you claim your ship is fast-”

“She is,” Han answered.

“Well, we need you to do this with all possible haste.”

Leia spoke up “I’m coming too,” she announced. Her mother’s face blanched, Leia saw it, and her father opened his mouth to offer his protest but Han beat him to it. He whirled to face her ”The hell you are.” he snarled.

She scowled at him “Luke is in trouble,” That was all the explanation required.

“And you’re still on medical leave.” He shot back.

“I’m on half days.” she corrected.

“Yeah, and if we get in a firefight, do you think you can keep up for long?” he strode up to her and poked her in her still healing shoulder. She was so surprised by his unexpected attack that she couldn’t contain the wince that motion caused.

“It’s fine,” she insisted, refusing to back down.

“Don’t think I haven’t noticed that you just now caught your breath from that little jaunt down the hallway. I’m not carrying you through the streets of Rodia. It’s undignified.”
Her eyes narrowed and her fist clenched at her sides “Nobody needs to carry me anywhere. It’ll be fine. It’s just a simple retrieval mission.”

He snorted “Yeah because our missions have all been such easy straightforward things.”

She squared her shoulders and lifted her chin up to meet his eyes squarely. “I’m not letting you wander into Rodia with only Chewie as back up when Luke is in danger.”

His face flushed with anger and he practically spat at her “Last time I checked I wasn’t one of your subjects that you could order around. You are staying here.”

“You said it yourself, our missions go sideways. You need back up.”

“Well it ain’t going to be you.” he said stridently “Pay attention sweetheart, I’m the Captain, it’s my ship, and I don’t have to let you on. If you’re going to Rodia it’s not going to be on the Falcon.”

She hissed “You are not the boss of me.”

Mon cleared her throat and both of their heads swiveled to meet her amused stare. “No, he isn’t,” she agreed, “but I am. Leia, you don’t have medical clearance yet, you're staying here.”

“Ha!! I was right.” Han said, but Mon kept right on talking.

“Captain Solo, Leia also has a good point. You’re taking back up with you. I’ll order Captain Rex to meet you in the hangar bay in thirty minutes.”

Han’s face paled at the thought of a mission with Rex without Obi-Wan to run interference. It was a wise choice on Mon’s part. Luke and Obi-Wan’s troubles were no more a secret than hers and Luke’s. There was no telling how Luke would react on a mission of this delicacy to Obi-Wan’s unexpected arrival. Rex was capable, and not involved in what was going on between the three of them. Han felt very differently, however.

“But-” he protested.

“Is there a problem?” Mon asked sweetly. “This is of the utmost importance. Do you question Captain Rex’s skills?”

Trapped in a neat box made of his own logic he muttered sulkily “No, ma’am.”

Leia leaned closer to him and whispered, “See, if you had kept your mouth shut you wouldn’t be stuck with Rex.”

He turned and glared at her “If it means you stay here I’d do the mission with Ackbar.”

Taken aback at the ferocity of his tone Leia said gently “I’m only three days from an all clear. It would have been fine.”

He stared at her in resignation. “Do you ever stop?” Han asked tiredly.

“That is a question I would like the answer to as well,” her mother’s tight voice said.

Leia turned to look at her, her mother’s face was a tight mask of control. Clearly, Han wasn’t the only one who was upset with her for trying to participate in the mission. Papa though was looking shocked at Han.
Mon spoke up “If you all are done?” Guilty all of three of them looked to her. “Captain you’ll have your flight clearance in thirty minutes minute. Get moving.”

“Yes ma’am,” and Han took off, heading back to the hanger bay.

Leia turned intending to go to her room, apparently she had nothing else to do today but be useless, she might as well take a nap since everyone thought she was an invalid when her mother grabbed her arm.

“Leia,” she said softly “A word please.”

Puzzled Leia followed her mother out of the room into one of the side rooms, her father trailing behind them. Mama closed the door and rested against it for a moment before straightening and looking Leia in the face.

“What were you thinking volunteering for that mission?” Breha’s voice wasn’t a shout, but it was close to it.

Leia took an instinctive step back. She could only recall a handful of times in her life when her mother had ever raised her voice to her. “That Luke needs my help,” she stammered.

Her mother’s eyes narrowed “He’s not in immediate danger and you are still not cleared for full duty. What could you possibly do but make the situation worse for him and everyone else involved?”

“It’s manageable,” Leia protested “This isn’t the first time I’ve been injured. I know my own limits.”

Her mother’s hands flexed open and closed, a rare display from her of her agitation. “You make it sound like this happened often.”

Realizing her error, Leia hedged “Not that often.”

“You mentioned when you were in the infirmary that you had been there several times before, so I know it wasn’t rare Leia.” She had said what? No wonder her parents were hovering so protectively.

Here at least Leia could reassure her mother “No, that is the worst I’ve ever been hurt on a mission. I promise. I wasn’t in there all that often.”

Her mother’s eyes narrowed “And to be in a life or death situation? How often did that happen Leia?”

Now, that happened a lot more then her mother would ever be comfortable with. She was wondering how to frame this in a way that wouldn’t frighten her parents more than they already were.

Papa cut in “Leia, please don’t evade the question. We are all grown ups in this room. Your mother and I would prefer the truth.”

She sighed “That happened quite a bit.”

Her mother’s lips compressed into a thin line “For how long did this go on?”

“A decade at most.” She had never given them a date for the fall of the Empire, perhaps they
would think that was how long it took to bring that behemoth down. Leia wasn’t even counting the various bounties that had been on her head since she was nineteen. They had persisted even when she was in the New Republic Senate. Especially when she was in the Senate. She had thought that it showed she was doing her job correctly if she was pissing off that many powerful people into wanting her dead.

Papa’s head cocked “Consecutively?”

She didn’t know why she bothered. She had learned almost every skill she had at interrogation from these two. There was no way that she could fool them for long. In fact, it was only their patience with her that had held this conversation off this long. “No.”

Her mother swallowed hard “Leia, when did you learn to value your life so little?”

“I don’t!” she protested “That’s not it at all!”

“Rationally, you have to know going on that mission to Rodia is very foolish,” her father chided “And given what I am assuming is at least a decade in open warfare of some kind you have neither inexperience or your youth to blame. So what is motivating this?


“Leia your brother’s life isn’t worth less or more than yours,” her mother said exasperated, and she began pacing. Leia knew that of course, she knew that. She opened her mouth to explain, but no words would come to shape that idea correctly to her mother.

“No,” her father said slowly, looking at her face and coming to all the correct conclusions “But it is worth any cost to avoid losing someone you love again.”

Leia froze, that struck too close to home. “I’m not suicidal,” she insisted to her mother.

A drawing look of horror passed over her father’s face “No, you are not. What you are is determined to do whatever you need to make sure you never see the collapse of your world again.”

Her mother stopped her pacing, and stared at her “Leia,” she whispered horrified.

“It’s fine,” Leia said, unable to keep the trembling from her voice “You’re here, Alderaan is here, Han’s here, it didn't happen, everything is fine.”

“No,” Bail shook his head “It did happen for you,” grief and regret was on his face “Oh, Leia. What did our deaths do to you? What did Han’s?” Then a long measuring look entered his eyes “And your child’s?”

So Mama had shared that bit of information with him. That didn’t matter, they couldn't know the particulars about Ben.

“It wasn’t your fault,” she said, trying to ease the guilty look in his eyes. “It wasn’t mine. It wasn’t Han’s. It was Tarkin.” She didn’t mention Han’s killer or the fate of her child.

If her parents noticed, they didn’t say. “That doesn’t mean you weren’t shattered by it,” her father said soothingly, coming forward slowly like she was going to run off at any moment. “That doesn't mean that you can so easily unlearn those lessons.”

“I don’t like it when I’m helpless,” Leia whispered. “That’s what I took from that. That I need to help.”
Her mother, showing none of her father’s hesitancy, came striding over and gathered her up “I
know, I know. But Leia you are not alone anymore. You don’t have to shoulder this by yourself.”

Her father came up behind and swept his arms around them both “We are here now. We can help
you.” he murmured comfortingly.

Leia didn’t cry, she wanted too, but the tears seemed frozen inside of her. She didn’t reject the
embrace either. She just soaked in all the love and support she could. She knew they meant well,
but this was her task. It had been put in front of her, by the Force no less. She needed to protect
them from what the future had become and forge it into something better.

Or was that her need for control talking? Hadn’t she thought the same way first time? After
everything she knew had been ripped from her? She thought it was better to be alone to go it alone,
because the people you loved, no matter how they wished otherwise, always left you one way or
another.

But she had been wrong. Together, her, Luke and Han had been capable of so much. Hadn't it had
been worth the pain that came later, for those decades of love and laughter? Would she really try to
trade that all away? Her own actions were proving where her desires really lay. Here she was,
reaching for them both again, despite knowing how it could all end.

No, neither of her parents were people who were the best in an actual battlefield, but they were
determined, smart, and on her side. Why was she making it so hard on herself? Why was she
openly refusing their help?

“Because they left you before when you needed them most?” that petty, childish part of her
answered. But she wasn’t a child. She was General Leia Organa, last Princess of Alderaan, she
wouldn’t give into that petty voice and its fears. They were here now, and she had brought that
about. It was proof, that was hugging her right now, that anything was possible.

“Okay,” she whispered. “I'll try.”

“That’s all we ask,” her father said. Then he pulled back and discreetly wiped away his own tears.
“I know it will be hard for you, I think you’ve been alone longer than you are comfortable
admitting, even before Han died.”

“Bail,” her mother protested weakly, still wrapped around Leia. “Now is not the time.”

He waved a hand in apology, “I wasn’t trying to slight him. I don’t know what the state of your
marriage was before all this, but it isn’t fair to blame the whole thing on him without knowing the
particulars.”

Leia kissed her mother’s cheek and slowly pulled out of her mother’s embrace. “Why the sudden
change of heart?”

“Credit where credit is due, I didn’t think he had it in him.”

She frowned “To go get Luke?”

“No, stand up to you.”

She cocked her head “People say no to me all the time,”

“Not when you are on a tear to get something,” he corrected, a fond smile on his face “Not when
you try to use your will to beat them down.”
That sounded uncomfortably too close to the reasons why Obi-Wan had called her the wrong name, no matter how loving the words were delivered “Am I really that much of a tyrant?”

“No you are not a tyrant,” he mother assured her, “Just very passionate when you care.”

Rex had said that about Vader too. She knew her parents had known Padme. How well had they known Anakin Skywalker? She remembered so many lessons about controlling her temper, about weighing the consequences of her actions, of thinking before she committed to any course of action. Her parents weren’t afraid of her, she knew that, she was too sure of their love and reassurance. How much did they see Vader in her and not Padme? How much had they been afraid for her?

Like she had been with Ben? She had thought she didn’t need to tell him the truth of their origins, that he would have been better off not knowing. Well, that decision had bitten her in the ass. Her son was not her, or Luke, she had made the biggest mistake of her life thinking that way.

Everyone is always locked into their own perspectives. It was advice she had heard so often growing up. “You will be the ruler of Alderaan, and you need to remember that”, her mother had said time and time again “Otherwise, you will never be able to judge your people fairly.”

That was easy for her to remember in politics and war, but when it came to her personal life it was a goal that had eluded her. She sighed, it was humbling to realize that she had reached the age of fifty-three, and there was still so many lessons she had yet to fully grasp, even if it took an involuntary trip into her past to see that.

ABA - Day - 82

Leia was heading back to her room after spending a delightful morning wrestling with requisition demands, personnel requests and flight schedules. Her head hurt from all the internal calculating she had to do with their supplies, people, and pilots. She knew it was only two days until she was released from this grating, if necessary, task, but she really disliked paperwork. If she never had to process another standardized form in her life she could die a happy woman.

Evaan’s voice called out to her over her shoulder, breaking whatever pleasant thoughts she had of an afternoon to herself. “Leia!”

Leia whirled and met the woman’s gaze. “What’s wrong?” she demanded, her mind whirling through various worst case scenarios. She knew something was bound to happen on Rodia.

The woman shook her head. “Nothing,” she assured her “My apologies, I didn’t mean to frighten you. You didn’t hear me the first time I called out so I ended up yelling.”

“Oh,” Leia said, “Sorry, caught in my own world. What’s going on?”

She gave her a wide smile. “I thought you might want to know that the Falcon just landed in the hangar bay. You still might catch them before they are pulled into their debrief.”

That was fast. She sent a small prayer of thanks to whatever deity chose to listen in thanks that for once there were no issues.

Leia rushed up to the woman, and at a good pace, they headed to the hangar bay. She wasn’t sure if
Luke was ready to see her yet, but she wanted to verify, with her own eyes that he was fine and unharmed.

When they entered the bay, Han was nowhere in sight, but she did catch a glimpse of Luke. He was walking to someone whose back was to him, walking through the bay. It wasn’t until Luke caught the man by the arm and turned him around, that Leia realized it was Obi-Wan. The older man must have had the same idea as her, to come in and discreetly check on Luke. Apparently her brother didn’t mind talking to him.

Leia was too far away to hear what they were saying, but close enough to read the older man’s face. There was surprise, and then delight, crossing his face. With expressions like that she didn’t need the words to get the gist of the conversation. Well, wasn’t that delightful? Looks like Luke had decided to make up with the old man.

Evaan’s breath hissed slightly as she caught the expression on the old Jedi’s face and came to the same conclusion as Leia. She quickly turned and placed herself squarely in front of Leia, blocking her from being seen with her much taller frame, by either of the two men if they happened to glance over.

There was nothing but fierce resolve on the woman’s face as she asked, “Is there any chance you’re going to tell me what the hell is going on?”

Leia shook her head.

“Thought not.” But instead of a lecture about how Leia should open up to someone, the woman gave her a soft inviting smile. “Well, I had plans for this morning, and if you are up to it you are more then welcome to join me.”

“Does it involve alcohol?” Leia said bitterly.

Evaan shook her head “No, I’m afraid it does not. I have to be in my CAP rotation in about five hours, so drinking is out for me. I definitely encourage you though, to drink as much as you want.”

That sounded horribly tempting. But given what she had started blurt out when she was high on pain meds, it probably wasn’t the smartest idea. “No, I’ll pass,” she said, a bit regretfully.

“That’s okay!” Evaan said. “Because I have something better in mind.”

“Corellian holo dramas?” Leia asked incredulously five minutes later as Evaan brought up the holo she had placed in the projector. They were sitting in one of the various break rooms scattered about the base. This one was blissfully empty. Apparently, you had to request it in advance, and this had been Evaan’s plan for this morning.

Evaan shrugged “You need something to take your mind of what’s going on. These,” and she gestured to the projection “are just the way to do it.”

Leia raised a doubtful eyebrow “Aren’t this the ‘historical’ and I use that term very loosely, stories with the long lost princesses and evil dukes who are always threatening to ravage the countryside?”

Evaan nodded “Some of them have that plot line, yes.”

“And there is random dancing and singing for no apparent reason about every ten minutes?”
“That does happen.”

“Okay,” she didn't want to insult the other woman, she clearly had this planned well before Leia’s arrival, and she was trying to make Leia feel better, but really?

“By your doubtful expression, you are wondering why I watch these?” Evaan’s face contained a bit of defensiveness.

“I wouldn’t have put it quite that bluntly,” Leia said reassuringly, trying to spare Evaan’s feelings. “But this doesn't strike me as your form of entertainment. It’s all so…” she waved a hand in the air “frivolous.”

The woman shrugged “That's why I like it. There are no real stakes. It’s bright, beautiful, and people get a happy ending.”

“That's not real life.”

Evaan snorted “If I wanted reality, I would just stick my head out the door. They’re easy. They’re meant to be easy. Easy to consume and easy to enjoy. There is no hidden meanings, justice is always served to those who deserve it, and some of the songs have a good beat. Think of it as comfort food for the mind.”

“Alright,” Leia was doubtful, but it wasn’t like she had anything better to do.

The opening credits rolled by, and then a human male appeared, dressed in all black, with a half-length cape.

“Villain?”

“What gave it away?” Evaan said. "Now shush." Then the man started singing.

The song wasn’t bad, Leia had to admit. It had a good beat, one that you wanted to tap your foot to. She leaned forward, intrigued despite herself.

Two hours later, Leia sat back into the couch she had been sitting on.

“Well?” Evaan said. To her credit, there was only a small hint of teasing.

Leia shrugged “It wasn't horrible.” she offered.

The woman laughed out loud and lightly smacked Leia’s arm. “You really don’t like being proven wrong do you?”

Leia gave her a hopeless sheepish smile “No.”

“So you liked it?” Evaan asked. “You’re not just being polite?”

Leia sighed “If you tell anyone else I will kill you,” she said sternly to the woman’s laughing face. “But yes, I liked it. You were one hundred percent right. That was beautiful and distracting and I don't think laughed so hard in a while.”

Evan was practically bouncing in her seat, Leia was struck by the realization that this was a mood she hadn’t seen Evaan in before. She had thought they were friends in the other timeline, but
maybe that Evaan didn’t feel comfortable revealing this part of herself to Leia? Or was it because the destruction of Alderaan had destroyed this part of her? She shoved that thought aside. The cause didn’t matter, it lightened Leia’s heart to see such joy on her face.

“I’m glad it worked,” the woman said. “You’ve been too sad lately.”

Leia looked down at her lap “It’s nothing I can’t handle,” she muttered.

“Don’t think for a second I’m doubting your capabilities,” the woman reassured her, “But it’s still nice to see you smile.”

“This was fun,” Leia commented “We should do it again,”

“Mmmm,” Evaan’s head tilted thoughtfully, “I’m pretty sure this room is booked solid for the next three weeks, but I can put in a request.”

“If you don’t mind the lack of space, we can watch more in my quarters.”

“You got a private room?”

Leia squirmed “Yes, rank has its privileges.”

Evaan shook her head, “Leia, you work twice as hard as anyone I know on this base, nobody begrudges you your own personal room.” She stood up and stretched, working the kinks out of her back. “Well I hate to leave, but I need to change and head to my workout.”

Leia stood as well “Of course, I didn’t mean to keep you.”

The woman laughed “I invited you remember? I know you’re on medical leave for another two days. If you come by my quarters after dinner I can lend you some more of these to watch by yourself if you want,” Leia thought about it and nodded. She hadn’t had much luck being able to focus enough to read, the holos sounded like a better alternative. As Leia headed towards the door Evaan offered. “If you do want to talk about Luke, I’m around?”

Leia kept her sigh to herself. She had been too lonely for too long to really snap at everyone who made that offer, but seriously did she have a sign over her head saying “Please ask me about my fight with Luke?”

“No. But thank you.”

Evaan gave her a long look “You sure?”

“It’s fine.” Leia gave her a warning look.

Evaan gave her a wicked smile in return “Oh, I have no doubt about that. But I have money on those relationship bets, and my real goal was to get the inside scoop.”

Now, this was more along the lines of the woman Leia remembered. Sarcastic wit to give Leia a perfect exit without too much sentimentality involved. ”Who’d you bet on? Han or Luke?” Leia asked curiously.

“Oh, your Highness.” Evaan said sweetly “Why settle for one? I put my money on you grabbing them both.”

Leia was still in the middle of the room laughing when the next set of people came in, wanting to use the space.
Later that evening, there was a knock on her door as Leia laid on her bed, watching the first of the holos Evaan had given her. Sighing, she rolled to her feet and pressed pause on the projector as she passed it. Opening the door she was shocked to see Obi-Wan standing there.

“Ahh,” she said intelligently, startled beyond belief. If there was a list of people she would expect to find at her door, he would rank slightly above the Emperor.

“I saw you earlier in the hangar bay,” he explained “when I was talking to Luke. I wanted to explain.”

“You don’t owe me an explanation for talking to Luke,” she said defensively, trying to keep the bitterness and jealousy out of her tone. By the look on his face, she wasn’t succeeding.

“Please Leia,” he said softly “I know you were hurt that Luke talked to me first. Can I at least explain?”

She wasn’t going to keep him waiting in the hallway. Besides the fact that she didn’t want anyone overhearing their conversation it was childish, not to mention petty. Her mother had taught her better.

And if her mother heard about this, and if he stayed in the hallway much longer she would. In turn Leia, fifty-three or not, would get a royal dressing down on the importance of manners.

“Come in,” she said leaving the door frame and sitting on her bed. Obi-Wan, looking around the room to see she still had no chair, sat at the foot of it.

He stared at her uncomfortably for a moment then said softly. “Luke wanted to give me this,” and he pulled a lightsaber out of his robe.

Leia’s eyes widened when she saw it. “Where did he find that?” she asked, the design clearly showing it wasn’t Obi-Wan’s.

The Jedi was watching her closely, “So you didn’t know about it?” his voice was neutral.

She looked up at him a frown on her face “I wouldn’t have withheld something like this Obi-Wan,” she said, “No matter how angry I was.” She swallowed hard as the memories threatened to overwhelm her for a moment. The long frantic searches for any authentic Alderaan object she could find. The race to get to it before it disappeared forever into some private collection. “I’ve been in your position for too long to do that to you.”

His face softened at that, as she reminded him, no matter what the current reality was, she knew his pain. “So you don’t know anything about the Rodian Jedi who wielded it?”

“No, I-” she trailed off, trying to think. “Wait, did you say Rodia?” Of course, he said Rodia, where else had Luke been for the last two days?

He didn’t make a comment about the inanity of her statement, just nodded in the affirmative.

“I think, maybe?” she offered. “I knew Luke found one around this time. I just couldn’t remember where or how.”

He gave a sad smile and placed the hilt on her bed. “Luke said he found it on Rodia,” his voice was soft. “That it belonged to Knight Huulik, he was buried with it. What did your Luke do with it?
She thought back, “If I remember correctly he took it apart.” Obi-Wan winced, Leia came to the defense of her brother “The first thing you do with any weapon Obi-Wan is understand it. Naturally, he didn’t want to take such a risk with his father’s lightsaber…” Her voice trailed off, with Vader’s lightsaber. The one Luke still had. The one Ben was obsessed with. Was obsessed with? Would be? Tenses were still a muddled mess in her mind. She wrenched her thoughts away from her son and looked up to see the grief on Obi-Wan’s face.

Unsure of what to do with this she said gently. “I’m glad he made it home.”

Obi-Wan shook his head “No he made it to his place of origin. His home was already burned out.” The sorrow that filled the Force around him made it hard to breathe.

Leaning forward a bit, she reached out and gave him a reassuring squeeze on his arm. “He made it to people who loved and respected him. He was buried with honor. That something right?” So many other Jedi hadn’t. Their bodies had been left where they fell, carrion for any creature that happened to come along.

He gave her a sad smile, “Yes, I suppose it is.” He looked down at the hilt, still laying innocently on her covers. “According to Luke, his nephew Soonta, still seemed to care.”

“Was he a friend?

Obi-Wan shook his head “No. I knew of him. We probably met once or twice in passing.” He let his finger run up and down on the hilt. “Are there any more lightsabers you can remember turning up?”

Well, that was a tricky question. “I don’t think so, I’ll have to think on it.”

His head came up sharply, “Leia, please don’t lie to my face.”

“I’m not!” she protested. “I don’t remember if there are any more Jedi lightsabers.”

His eyes narrowed at her word choice “Are there any other lightsabers that don’t belong to the Jedi?”

“Well, the Darksaber turned up a few years ago. But you’re going to have ask the Mandalorians about that one.” she offered.

“Leia,” his tone was exasperated. She sighed. Yes, she was still mad at him, but he wasn’t someone who was just going to go away. Their lives were too woven together to be pulled apart easily. Even if Luke did decide to forgo his Jedi training, which personally she didn’t think he would, Obi-Wan was still an important member of the Alliance. If only for the sake of their working relationship, she needed to be more upfront with him. Even if she knew that he was not going to react well to this nugget of information.

“There is a sith lightsaber in the basement of the history museum of Coronet City on Corellia.”

“There is a what?!?” Obi-Wan barked.

“It’s fine for now Obi-Wan,” she said soothingly, “it’s not like it’s on display.”

He ran a hand over his face “Force preserve us really?” She nodded her head. “Why? Why is it there? In a history museum of all places?”

“That I don’t know.” she said, speaking the full truth as she knew it “Or how it got there.”
"Why do you know this?" he asked. Leia thought about deflecting the question, it wasn’t any of his business. But if they were going to have any relationship beyond this weird mutual distrust they were doing she needed to be honest with him. She couldn’t demand it of him and not offer it in return.

“I can’t tell you that,” she settled on.

“The future?"

She nodded.

“I see.”

An awkward silence descended down on both of them. If she was going to go for honest, she might as well start with the hard part first. She stared at the older man, not looking away. She wasn’t going to apologize, for any of what she had said in the jungle. But she did want to know, now that he was standing here, in front of her. The question that had been gnawing away at the back of her mind for days now.

“Am I really so like him?” she whispered, bracing herself for the answer.

A look of profound regret passed over his face, but he did the courtesy of giving her a straight answer. “In so many ways that terrify and comfort me, yes, you are.”

And here was where her fear of being a Jedi came from. Bad enough that she suspected it, but to have it actually confirmed by someone who had known Vader, well before he was Vader, and see how alike they are.

At her look of horror, he hastily went on “This is why I didn’t want to say anything, I knew this would be your reaction. I had no desire to hurt you.”

She shook her head “I would rather have the truth then be cosseted like a fragile child.”

“It’s not cosseting Leia.” he countered “It’s was me not mentioning something that I felt had no relevance in your current life.”

“Not relevant?” she hissed “Not relevant? You’re telling me I remind you of a brutal, dictatorial, merciless killing machine and it’s not relevant?”

“Luke reminds me of him too, always has, do you hold your brother to the same standard?”

“Of course not,” she shot back because Luke had always been the far kinder of the two of them, “but you, as far as I know, have never confused Luke with him. You did that with me.”

“You might have a point there, although Luke looks a great deal like him at that age,” Obi-Wan said a fond smile dancing on his lips. “If a bit shorter,” He gave a rueful smile “You both seemed to have inherited Padme’s height, rather than his.” Much to Leia's regret.

He turned his suddenly serious eyes back on her, “No, I’ve never made that mistake with Luke. But not for any nefarious reasons. It’s mainly because Luke doesn’t push back the way Anakin did. And how you do now.” He swallowed hard.

“That’ll change,” she muttered, deciding, for now, to focus on the second part of his statement instead of the first. “The only difference between the two of us is he tends to be a bit more polite about it.”
“You and he are too like both of your parents for me to believe otherwise. And it seems to be that obstinance runs through your family. Owen and Beru could out-stubborn Bantha’s when they set their mind to something.”

“Like?” she asked, curious for another perspective on this part of her family that died before she ever had the chance to meet them.

“Like Luke keeping his name.”

She stilled at that. “What?”

“When I handed Luke over to them, I told them Anakin died in the last days of the Clone Wars.” At the look on her face, he put up a restraining hand “At that point, I did honestly believe that Leia. I might have glossed over how he died, but I didn't think there was any way he could have survived what happened-” he swallowed hard and closed his eyes, and in a pained whispered corrected to “No, what I did to him. I didn't believe he could survive what I did to him.”

Well, at least he was openly acknowledging, if in a roundabout way, that Anakin and Vader were the same person. Small victories to come out of this mess. She felt a slice of guilt pass over her. Luke’s safety was always her greatest priority, and if she had too she would do it all over again, but she did regret that she had made Obi-Wan relive what sounded like the worst day of his life.

He continued on in a more normal tone. “I had no reason to believe the Emperor would ever come to Tatooine, it placed him too physically close to the threat of Jabba. Your parents and I, along with a loyal doctor, made sure that Padme was interred looking pregnant.”

He rubbed his forehead, “Even with all those precautions I was still worried. It would be safer if Luke’s last name was Lars. They refused. They said they weren’t going to disrespect the name of a woman they had both loved and let her line die out like that.”

“My grandmother?” Leia wondered.

He nodded, “Yes, Shmi. I never met her, much to my regret, but Anakin, what little he did say about her was nothing but respectful.” And why was Vader not willing to talk about his mother when he arrived at the temple? That wasn’t important right this minute, but she pushed it to the back of her mind to ask about later if she got the chance. She owed it to the person her grandmother had been.

“Shmi was willing to sacrifice everything, including the very real possibility she would never see him again, to see that Anakin escaped the trap that she was in. I can’t imagine the courage that took or the heartache it must have caused.” His eyes went distant for a second, caught in some internal musings of his own. Or he was very interested in the mirror hanging on the other side of her room.

She cleared her throat, now understanding Han’s annoyance when she did that to him, and he went on. “It wasn’t until a few years later, oh Luke would have been about four at the time, that I began hearing rumors of the Emperor’s attack dog. A tall creature, encased in a suit, whose mechanized breathing would haunt your nightmares if you were unlucky enough to hear it.” There was a well of sorrow, grief, and pain. “It wasn’t long after those tidbits reached even the Outer Rim that a name for this creature surfaced.”

“Darth Vader,” she surmised.

He nodded. “That is when I learned he had survived.” And more than likely this was when he
really began to retreat into his lie. “It was far too late by that point to change Luke’s name. It would have looked even more suspicious, even if they had agreed to do it. I just prayed Ana-” he cut that name off “Vader. Vader’s loathing of the planet was enough to keep him away.”

She took a moment to digest all this. This was about Luke, not her jealousy of Obi-Wan’s mending relationship with him, even though she hadn’t been the one to encourage him to kill their father. She pushed past this and asked, to clarify. “So Owen and Beru didn’t know he was still alive?”

“No,” Obi-Wan gave her a helpless look “It was bad enough when they thought he died in a war they didn’t understand the point of. How could I tell them that what happened was so much worse than that?”

“You should tell Luke. At this point he thinks everyone in his life has lied to him about who he is. It’ll comfort him to know that they at least were innocent in this.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Not that this isn’t interesting, but you’re trying to distract me,” she observed wryly.

“Yes,” he confessed, “Is it working?”

“Somewhat,” she admitted, “But I still need answers Obi-Wan. Why didn’t you answer my questions when I confronted you before you left for Dagobah? Do you really think that I am that much of a danger?”

He took in her drawn face. “We are all dangerous Leia. You, me, Luke, Han, even your father can be quite deadly when he puts his mind to it.”

“That’s what Han thinks too,” she grumbled, “I don’t see how.”

“No, Bail doesn’t carry a blaster, but that doesn’t mean he can't plot and plan with the best of them. He and your mother managed to hide you, with your strong Force presence, right under Vader and the Emperor’s nose, without either of them being the wiser to your identity. That wasn’t because your father relied solely on luck.”

She had never thought if it in those terms before. Papa was just Papa. He was the opposite of Vader, therefore he wasn’t dangerous.

Obi-wan went on, “No, Leia I didn't tell you because it would hurt you. Not because I think it’s something you should be ashamed of. He wasn’t always so lost, he was a good man once.”

“I’ll have to take your word for it,” she said bitterly “All I’ve known from him is abandonment and pain.”

That aching painful sorrow filled his face. “I failed him,” that had the ring of something he beat himself over the head with constantly.

“Maybe, maybe not,” she countered “but he was an adult when he fell Obi-Wan….” then she remembered Vader’s shocked “You’re older than I,” comment in that first dream encounter with him.

“How old is he?” she asked out loud, more startled by that sudden revelation then really wanting the answer.

“You don’t know?” Obi-Wan’s tone wasn't judgemental, simply curious.
She shrugged “Luke probably did, I never asked.”

He gave her a long searching look, seeing who knows what, but he did answer her. “He’s forty-two.”

She had more than a decade on him!?! That was an unsettling thought. When she had heard him say that, she thought at most she had a year on him. He died at the age of forty-five? She had never thought he was that young. Hell, until he commented on her age she wouldn’t have pegged him as being younger than sixty now. When she imagined Vader dying, it was of an old man, not a middle-aged one, that filled her mind’s eye. She knew he had served in the Clone Wars as a field General, like Obi-Wan, so in the past it made her guess his age to be much older.

Although that was a bit foolish of her now that she was actually thinking about it. She knew, now, how old Obi-Wan was thanks to this unexpected trip through her past. If he was Vader’s teaching Master, it would make sense that Vader was younger then she supposed him to be.

Then she did the actual math “Wait, he was running around as a General at twenty-three?”

“Twenty actually.” She actually startled at that answer, shocked to her core. Oh, gods how desperate were the Jedi if they made a twenty-year-old a General? “All Knights were automatically made Generals.”

“What were you thinking?” she demanded, hands flying around in her exasperation “I know a great deal of Jedi at the time weren’t even trained for field duty.” Her father had stressed that point over and over again with her. Part of the reason for the Jedi’s fall both literally, and in the public eye, was that they had been stretched into roles they were not suited for. They were peacekeepers, not soldiers.

Self loathing filled his features. “Well in hindsight that is blatantly obvious. But at the time, I rather think that was the point. We weren’t thinking, we were reacting.” Obi-Wan sighed and rubbed his hand over his face tiredly “There was almost no Navy to speak of, so it was assumed since we were all trained to fight, even the healers, that we could handle battle.”

She groaned “Oh gods, this is even worse than I thought.”

“It got pretty bad,” he acknowledged with a wry grin. “But then again we weren’t coming from a great place to begin with. The Republic had been dying slowly for decades, and we were aware of it Leia, but somehow held out hope that it would save itself.”

She snorted in derision at that hopelessly naive statement.

“Decades of conflict led us all, the Senate, the Courts, and the Jedi, to fairly dark places.” He shook his head sadly, “And you were right about the clones. I knew it even when you said it. Hell, I knew it then too. Anakin made a lot of the same arguments, if not nearly as articulately as you did.”

She just stared at him “Then why did you fight me on it?”

He shifted, and absently stroked his beard. “Because I was angry and afraid. I was convinced you had just placed Luke in grave danger. In fact, I’m not convinced you haven’t,” she opened her mouth to argue her point, again, but he held up his hand to stop her. “It’s done Leia, and it can’t be undone. But my point is I don’t respond very rationally when I am that upset.”

She gave him a baffled look “Does anyone?”
“Well, no.” He conceded, “but I’m older than you-”

“By only four years!” she interrupted.

“And a Jedi master. Which no matter how far you are on that path, is not something you have achieved yet.” She bit down the instinctive rejection of that claim. She was too conflicted about it to even begin to speak rationally about the whole subject. Her little experiment over the last few days to cut down on the Force had shown her how interwoven she had let it become in her life. This was not the time to go over that particular sore spot of hers.

“You left me with the impression that you disagreed with everything I said.”

His face twisted “Twenty years to think over what went wrong Leia. Twenty years with precious little else to do.”

“Except survive.”

He snorted “The desert is merciless and one careless act could get you killed, but it wasn’t deliberately trying to kill me. I’ve faced worse foes.”

She looked down at her hands, not wanting to see the expression on his face as he answered her next question. “How many times have I echoed him?”

“Excuse me?”

She smoothed the blanket down that was near her knee. “You said he made the same arguments as me about the clones. How many other times have I opened my mouth and his words came pouring out?”

“It doesn’t matter,” he said.

She did look up then, he had a tight closed look to his face “It does matter Obi-Wan. If I’ve started walking down his path-” she cut herself off as her voice came out much sharper and accusatory then she meant. The old fears and questions about herself was making her throat dry, and she could feel her breath start to quicken in response.

His eyes widened as he took her meaning “Leia no, it’s not the same thing at all.”

She gave out a little bitter laugh “Do you think I wouldn’t burn down the whole galaxy if I thought it was the right thing to do?”

He studied her for a moment, giving her question the merit it deserved. “Yes,” he said, somewhat reluctantly. Then in a thoughtful tone continued on “At least I believe you are capable of such an act. But having gotten to know you, unlike him, I don’t think you would ever discount the costs of that devastation.”

He might be giving her too much credit. She thought of herself on the Dark Side consuming everything in her path because it was righteous. It would be so easy to sell herself that lie. Then she thought of Luke in that scenario. Luke on the Dark Side, standing beside her, on that destructive path. Because where one of them went, the other, without a massive undertaking of will, would soon follow. Luke, had virtually disappeared out of the galaxy and cut all contact in order to ensure that she couldn’t find him.

Her stomach rolled with nausea at the image but she could see the structure of it far too easily. Luke was so deadly, and everyone who ever met him forgot that. Because he was quiet and sel-
effacing. Because he was polite and soft spoken. Because he had a really great face for deception. Everyone forgot underneath all that softness and manner laid someone who had survived Tatooine, someone who was highly skilled and insanely deadly when he chooses to be. Leia was prickly and passionate and unable to keep that under wraps for long. It put people on edge around her.

Luke was the more pleasant and far deadlier of the two of them. And he wouldn’t make the mistake the Emperor had, he wouldn’t discount the pull that love and hope had on people. He would just use both of them to get what he wanted. He would be a more terrifying version of Palpatine because he wouldn’t amass power just for the sake of it. No, not Luke, with his frugal ways, he would never do it for such a frivolous reason as that. He would do it for a cause, just like her. And the two of them together? She shuddered, what could they wreak on the galaxy?

“You fear the wrong things,” she said softly, still caught up in the vision she saw before her. Was this the Force showing her a might have been? Or was it a product of her own fears about herself?

“Leia,” Obi-Wan said softly, “You misunderstand me entirely.”

She pulled herself away from that horrific vision and focused on his face.

He gave her a sweet smile. “I look at you, and Luke, and all I see was the great man he could have been. That is what I see echoed in you.” He reached out, giving her time to reject the touch if she wanted, and grasped her hand, squeezing it tightly. She watched the motion, mesmerized and looked back at his face.

Tears were starting to form in the corners of his eyes. “It was my fault.” he whispered “He had such a large heart, even as a child. And I was reckless with it.” His eyes closed and those tears fell down his bearded cheeks “We were all reckless with it. The Jedi tried to cut him off from it. We did it with the best of intentions. I did it with the best of intentions. He was so passionate, so uncontrolled in our little-cloistered world. I thought it was what he needed.”

His eyes came back open “But it wasn’t. He needed someone to listen to him. And because I didn’t, or at least until it was far too late, he turned to Palpatine.”

Leia felt herself stiffen in shock “Palpatine?” she echoed, horrible suspicions beginning to dawn in the back of her mind.

“Oh, yes. The chancellor took a great interest in him. Came to the temple often to see how he was doing.”

Leia could barely force the words out “How old was he when this started?”

Obi-Wan bowed his head as if there was a great weight attached to it. “When he first came to the temple.”

“How old was he Obi-Wan?” she asked again.

“He was nine.”

Leia felt as if her blood had turned to ice. This was uncomfortably close to what happened between Snoke and Ben. That had been bad enough, the damage that man had inflicted had warped her son’s heart. But Snoke was nothing compared to the Emperor. The thought of a child, any child, even Vader, being that close to that malevolent storm masquerading as a human was horrifying.

She was comfortable in her condemnation of Vader, and this little fact was a great crack in the foundation of that pillar of her world. “And that didn’t raise any suspicion?” she hissed,
withdraw her hand from Obi-Wan’s “From any of you? That a man of that age would be interested in a boy?“

He flinched as if she had struck him “Yes, and no. Palpatine was an ambitious politician. Anakin had just participated in the saving of his homeworld. We thought he was trying to cultivate the friendship of a Jedi who had the future potential to become the greatest of us all.” Obi-Wan’s head came back up, a bitter smile on his face. “He was, but not in a way any of us could conceive of.”

No wonder, even after everything Palpatine did and had failed to do, could he still commanded such loyalty from Vader. But not forever. Vader had managed to break his chains in the end.

“If it brings you any peace, I can tell you how he died.” she said hesitantly, thinking he might gain comfort in the fact Vader had returned to the light. “I can tell you how he-”

Obi-Wan shook his head. “No Leia. I don’t want to know. Besides, you said it often enough yourself, it’s only a possibility.”

That was true, but then again Luke always had an indomitable will when he thought he was right. She wasn’t sure if he would make the same choice about Vader that the other Luke did, but if he did, she wouldn’t bet against her brother.

“All right,” she soothed, trying to be respectful of his grief. “I won’t say anything.”

“Thank you,” he uttered and unhurriedly wiped the tears away from his face. “My apologies, I didn’t come here with the intention of unburdening myself like this.”

“It’s alright,” she said, frankly marveling at the pain this man had endured. “I was the one who pushed it.”

“I truly thought Anakin understood,” Obi-Wan muttered, still mostly to himself, “I thought he knew I would do anything to see him happy.”

“Did you ever tell him that?”

“Once,” he looked uncomfortable.

“When?” Her eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“After I cut him down on Mustafar.” Leia’s eyes closed at the pain he was emitting. Gods almighty they were both idiots. “That is the only time you told him you loved him?” she whispered, “Then?”

“Yes.”

“Mustafar is where Jedi go to die,” she thought, the old saying floating up into her mind. That was certainly the case for Obi-Wan, he had left a part of himself there. It was where Vader had his home base, where the Inquisitors were all trained. She sighed and rubbed her forehead. “This is why adults talk to each other Obi-Wan.”

He gave her a bitter smile. “A lesson I thought I had learned. Apparently, I sometimes have a very thick head.”

She thought of her own behavior over the past few months, no, she should be honest with herself, it was years, and shook her head. “Oh, no, the lesson is simple. Where things get complicated is when you confuse simple with easy.”
He gave her a shrewd assessing look “Speak from experience?”

“Self-reflection is rather hard to ignore when you find yourself reliving your life.” She gave him an inviting smile “No, it’s not living isolated in a desert but I can assure you it creates just a dramatic turn to your thinking.”

He actually let out a laugh at that. It was a weak one, but it was there “I can imagine.” His smile faded as he regarded her. “Are we alright Leia?”

She thought about it, “No, but we can be.” She leaned forward, resting her hands lightly on the bed, “But because I’m an adult, twice over, in fact, I do need you to understand that in the future, when I ask a question, please do me the honesty of answering it. Or at least acknowledging that I have a legitimate point, not brushing it aside.”

He turned that thought over in his mind and nodded his agreement. “Alright, if in the future you plainly tell me when you can’t discuss something, instead of feeding me half-truths and evasions. I don’t react well when people try to hide things from me Leia. Especially when they are so bad at it.”

She grimaced “Am I that easy to read?”

He gave her his playful half smile “I do have somewhat of an unfair advantage in that regard, given how close I am and was, to all four of your parents.”

Leia felt something that had been clenched tight in her since he called her Anakin relax at that. She wasn’t merely the echo of Anakin Skywalker, or the just the physical reflection of Padme Amidala Naberrie. She was also the child of Queen Breha of Alderaan and her Consort Bail Organa. They had given her love, the space to find out who she was, and the firm ground to stand on with all of herself.

She stuck her hand out for him to shake. He solemnly grasped it in his. “Deal.” she said.

ABA - Day 83

She was walking through the market near the royal palace of Alderaan, stacked full with various stalls of goods, with her mother.

They were trying to find fabric for the dress she needed to wear to the ball celebrating Papa’s birthday, but every one she picked out her mother kept rejecting, a frown on her face. Despite her frustration with the venture, Leia managed to hold her tongue and continued their perusal through the various wares. She didn’t like it when her mother was sad, it was an expression she saw too often on that lovely face.

“What about this one?” she asked, handing a dark green fabric, embroidered with roses, to her mother.

Mother held it in her hands for a moment, fingers plucking over it. “Oh, my Leia, this is too dark for you” she chided. This was the fifth or was it the sixth, fabric she had rejected.

“Do you have something particular in mind?” Leia gritted out.
Her mother looked around then pointed to a light purple fabric just a few feet in front of them. “What about that one? It’s a lovely color for a lovely young girl.”

Leia, took one glance at the fabric and dismissed it immediately. It was too close to the color of the vest she had worn in the Resistance. She didn’t want to be reminded of that time during her father’s birthday. “Mother, you know I’m only a few years younger than you,” Leia pointed out reasonably, gesturing to the few gray hairs that were escaping her braid.

That sad smile was back as her mother reached up and tucked a stray hair behind Leia’s ear. “No, you are much older than I ever got to be.” Leia frowned as she took her mother fully in. There was something wrong here, but she couldn’t quite put her finger on it. “Are you sure about the purple? It would look lovely against your skin tone. And I would know.” She gave Leia an impish smile. “It’s the same as mine.”

No, that wasn’t true. Leia was much paler than her mother. Leia opened her mouth to argue but a cry cut across the sky.

“LEIA!!” It was Luke. She frowned, what was Luke doing here?

“You should go see what he wants,” her mother said softly “He sounds like he needs you.”

Leia turned to look at her mother again, biting her lip in worry “Are you sure?” she wondered out loud “We so rarely get to see each other.”

Her mother gave her a wide happy smile, the exact copy of the one Leia saw in the mirror. “That is true. But I think we’ll be seeing each other more often from now then we have in the past. Or was it the future?” She cupped Leia’s cheek when she frowned at her in confusion. What did that mean?

“You weren’t wrong about opened doors not being so easy to close Leia. I know it’s not what you wanted, but there are so many possibilities that door creates. Now that you’re starting to listen, don’t be so hasty to shut it again.”


“Go,” her mother repeated. “I’ll be here when you’re ready to hear what I have to say.”

Leia frowned but did as her mother asked, quickly heading down the path of stalls, till she reached the end of the row. She turned to her left and walked straight into a jungle.

“What?” she gasped.

“Is this what happened?” Luke was right by her side, worry and fear making his voice hard.

Leia was completely disoriented as her brain scrambled to make sense of what just happened, She was dreaming, she was sure of that now. And Luke had called for her, and her mother told her to go. But that hadn’t been Breha she was talking to.

“Leia, is this what happened?”

Leia shoved all thoughts aside of who had just been walking through her subconscious, and whether or not it was the product of her own mind or the Force. She could ponder that later at her leisure. She brought her focus in on her brother. Luke’s face was pale and he looked like his heart was breaking.

“Luke, what’s wrong?”
He gestured into the jungle. Leia could see immediately they weren’t on Yavin. The trees that littered the landscape were not the right shade of green, and they were much shorter. The ground was also a lot muddier, the whole place was almost swamp like. She followed the motion of Luke’s hand to see another version of her brother gently closing the eyes of a dark-haired woman lying on the ground. Even from this distance, she could see the shrapnel pieces extruding from the body.


“Luke, who is that?” Leia asked.

His temper flared all around them, and she winced at the pain that caused her. She had walked into his mind with no shielding of any kind. She brought them up, cursing herself for her carelessness. Luke didn’t even notice “Don’t play coy with me Leia, now is not the time.”

“I’m not playing coy,” she shot back, irritated with his attitude. He had called her here dammit. She was perfectly willing to give him his space if he needed it, but she wasn’t here to be his punching bag. “Luke, I have no idea who that is.”

“It’s Nakari,” he gritted out.

Oh. She took the scene in again then asked softly, “Have you dreamed of the future before?”

“No,” His face twisted “Why didn’t you warn me?”

Her heart twisted “Did she die?”

He frowned “No, she’s fine.” He gestured to the scene, ”This didn’t happen, we landed on Omereth fine, nobody followed us. We reunited Drusil with her family, and we are heading back to Yavin now.”

“Then what are you on a tear about?” she shot back, exasperated. “Why call me here?”

He shook his head. “Is this what happened before?”

Fine, let him be stubborn. The sooner she answered his questions the sooner she could go back to sleep. “Probably. I know she died, I don’t remember the details.”

“Why didn’t you say anything when Han brought me back to Yavin?”

He’s scared, he’s worried, he just saw someone he cares about die in an alternate timeline. Leia counseled to herself, show some patience. “One because every time I approach you lately you run from me like you are being chased by stormtroopers. Two, I warned you about the Kupohan ship and you got stranded in Rodia as a result.”

He frowned “That didn’t happen before?”

“No, that didn’t happen before.” She rubbed her forehead. “I keep telling everyone, my knowledge is a limited thing, what I even remember correctly.” She waved to the frozen scene before them “I know she died Luke, but I couldn't remember when. There were a lot of people who died during the Rebellion, after a while, it’s just one big long blur of funerals. And even if I had recalled it correctly, it’s dangerous to rely solely on me. We are rapidly coming to the point where it will be vague generalities. Nothing more specific. And when I do tell someone something concrete,” and here she glared at her brother “he takes it a bit too much to heart.”

“Oh,” He said, somewhat abashed.
“Yes, oh.”

“I thought…”


“I thought you were hiding more from me because you thought I was weak?”

What the hell was he talking about? “Where did you get that idea?” she demanded. “Have I given you any indication I don’t have the utmost faith in you?”

His back stiffened and a haughty look came over his face. “When you didn’t tell me about Vader. You were protecting me, right? That was your reason? Because I wasn’t ready?”

Oh, no, no, no, no. He had drawn all the wrong conclusions from that decision.

“No, Luke, that wasn’t about you. It was never about you.” And here she swallowed her pride and admitted the truth. “It was because I wasn’t ready.”

His face went soft with confusion “Leia?”

“I wasn't ready,” she whispered, forcing the words out. He had asked, and she never wanted to hide anything on this subject ever again. Their relationship wouldn't survive this crack in that foundation. Oh, they would eventually work together again, the magnetic pull between them was too strong to ignore, and the Rebellion needed them both too much. But it would never be what it could have been. And Leia, would spend the rest of her life aching for that closeness again. She had already endured seven years of silence from Luke, she wasn’t sure she could take a lifetime of it.

“What do you mean you weren’t ready? Leia you've know this for decades?” he wasn’t accusatory, just baffled.

“You’re right, that is enough time. And I thought I had!! I really thought I had come to grips with all of this years ago. His legacy, the ability to use the Force, what he had done.”

She gave a bitter laugh “And then I was on that shuttle, and he was there!! He was just standing there, my worst nightmare come to life. All I wanted to do was run. Run as far as I could and pretend that this was all a bad dream.”

“But you had nowhere to go,” he said softly.

She nodded “No, I didn’t. Then they put me in that cell. That cell where he tore my mind apart looking for Yavin. Only this time I had so much more to hide then the Rebels. I had you, I had Han,” and she whispered “And I had me. So I thought, I know more than he does, that gives me the advantage. I can control this.”

Luke’s face twisted “That didn’t work out so well did it?”

She shook her head “I did alright at first, but fear has an infectious way of eating at your controls, and I completely lost it. And because of that loss of control, he knows. He’s alive and he knows I’m his daughter Luke. And he won't leave me alone, the pushy bastard.” she wailed.

Luke’s mouth opened, probably to ask for clarification that comment, but Leia continued on, afraid that if she stopped she would never be able to finish this. “But he could have killed you. If you hadn’t listened to me, and come when I called, if you hadn’t walked away he would have killed
you and that is something I could never forgive myself for. Not if my weakness got you killed. I
was never conflicted about you. Never. But I wasn't ready, and it was just a twist of fate that you
didn’t reveal yourself.”

“Leia you don't know for sure that he would have won.”

She shook her head, one glimpse across a field did not prepare one for the full reality of Vader
standing three feet in front of you, lightsaber drawn. “You're not ready to face him. Not yet.” she
amended, as she thought of the possibilities of what Luke could become “But if you ever get
cornered you tell him your name.”

Luke shook his head in mute disagreement. Leia stepped forward and grabbed his chin, forcing
him to look at her, “You tell him your name. Do you understand me? He won't kill you. You might
find yourself on a one-way trip to Coruscant, but you won't be dead.”

Luke looked at her, sorrow on his face, “I think I’d rather be dead if it's all the same to you.”

“No!” she said firmly “I will come for you! If you call I will always come. But there is nothing I
can do if you're dead Luke.” Leia dropped her hand, taking a few steps back to give herself some
room and try to regain control of herself. Even the thought of contemplating an existence without
Luke tore at her heart. Losing Han had nearly destroyed her, even with this younger version here,
losing Luke would be the final blow she would not be able to get up from.

“You know that sounds crazy right?” he gave her a doubtful look.

She shrugged “I’ve done crazier.”

“No. I don’t know whether I should be frightened or reassured by that.” He looked pensive for a
moment, his body swaying slightly in indecision, then he rushed forward and hugged her. “I’m still
so mad,” he whispered into her ear “but I’ve missed you.”

She returned the embrace as hard as she could “I missed you too.”

“I mean it, Leia,” he pulled back and looked her in the eyes, his hands coming up to cup her face.
“No more secrets.” At her frown, he amended “Not about things that involve my life.”

“Alright,” she whispered. She owed him this.

His hands slid down, releasing her from his hold. “So let’s start with something simple.” She
controlled her breathing, worried about what he would ask, but Luke was always focused on the
now “How does Vader know about you?”

This was not exactly her most stellar moment to recall, but there was nothing to hide. “I let some
things slip that I didn’t know were relevant.”

“Like?” he pressed.

“That I knew his old name. That he was married and had a child.” She snorted “I didn’t even know
the old Jedi order forbid marriage.”

His eyes widened “What? Ben hasn’t mentioned that. Why?”

“I don’t know? Conflict of interest? Worried about passions run amok? Your alternate never said
anything about it, so I’m just as baffled as you.”
He thought that over for a moment. “Is that all?”

She grimaced “I might have punched him with the Force and threw him against a wall. Apparently, that is something not many people are capable of.”

“Not many people being you and me?”

She sighed “Yes. But before you get any ideas about your strength against his, Luke he didn’t want to kill me in that cell. It's very hard, even for a Sith Lord, to interrogate a corpse.”

“How did you tell him when he asked why you knew all this? He thinks you're nineteen….” his voice trailed off as he took in her expression. “You told him you're from the future!?! Leia, for kriffing sake why???” Luke’s voice rose with his exasperation.

"I had to tell him something! I have shields, Luke. He would know someone had trained me in them.” she shot back “I needed to keep him out of my head, it’s not just the knowledge of your existence in there, but the course of the whole war.”

Luke stilled at that, “He doesn’t know about me, does he?” he whispered, fear in his voice.

“That you’re my brother, no. That you exist, yes he does. He knows I have a tutor, he knows you blew up the Death Star.”

“I’m also his son.” Luke looked like he had just swallowed something sour at that.

“Sorry?”

“You said he doesn’t know I’m your brother, instead of he doesn’t know I’m his son.” Luke’s eyes were boring into hers.

“Well, you are my brother.” she said, arms crossing over her chest defensively.

“Hmmm.” those too old eyes slid away. “So it’s just him then? No other relatives that fell to the Dark Side that I need to worry about?” He said it in a friendly manner, inviting her to join in the joke in his attempt to break the somber mood. But all Leia could see was Ben’s face flash before her mind’s eye, her breath caught.

“Leia?” he asked, panicked. “We don’t have any more relatives do we?”

She shook her head “No,” then she recalled with a wince that wasn’t exactly true. “I mean yes. We have an aunt, uncle, and two cousins on Naboo. Our maternal grandparents might still be alive. I don’t remember exactly when they died.”

“Leia…” he said, voice showing his lack of patience on her avoidance of this.

She swallowed hard. “I won’t lie to you if you ask Luke. But I’m asking, no begging you, not to. It’s not an issue yet.”

He studied her hard for a moment, then he reached out and took her hand. “Alright, but can I ask another question about the future?”

“Okay.”

“How bad did it get for you?”

She wanted to lie, so badly did she want to retreat from this, and it was only a little bit for Luke’s
sake. But she had promised him, and Leia tried to never go back on her word if she could help it.
“Pretty bad.” Her eyes closed, as a truth, she had been dancing away from settled over her like a too heavy cloak. “I lost you both.”

“I died?” there was no fear in his voice, just a wondering curiosity.

“No, but you had left.”

“Are you sure I wasn’t dead?” he asked skeptically “I can’t see myself leaving you voluntarily.”

She shook her head, refuting his innocent claim. He had no idea what true heartbreak could do to you. “You weren’t dead,” she said, her eyes opening so she could better read his face. He wasn’t going to like this answer about himself. “I would have felt that. But you were...shut off. I called for you and you never answered.”

He looked troubled at this, and then tentatively asked, “And Han?”

Luke’s face became blurred as the tears filled her eyes “He did die. The day before I arrived here.”

“Oh Leia, Leia,” and he swept her up into his arms again, as she sobbed into his shoulder. “I’m sorry.” he whispered “I’m so so so sorry Leia.” over and over again.

When she had calmed down enough that her sobs had been reduced to slight hiccups he pulled back “Can we prevent his death?” he asked her seriously.

Han’s words floated up in her mind. “I loved being a father,” Her conflict over Ben’s existence wasn’t something she let herself dwell on too much. It was so easy, too easy, in this time and place, to view it all as a bad dream. But like Han, she had loved being a mother, and she had loved the person her son had once been.

That was even supposing that Ben would exist here at all, she had already changed so much. Had she already set into motion the dominoes to prevent his existence? All she knew was that the only way to be sure Ben was never born was to reject Han. Given that he had the same pull on her as ever that was looking less and less likely that would happen. She didn’t have the strength to run from him like she had foolishly done in her youth.

“I don’t know.” she confessed.

“What happened?”

Heartbreak. Betrayal. The damn legacy Vader left us. Foolish hope. She went with the simple statement. “He was murdered.”

Luke’s eyes darkened “Well, we have plenty of time. It’s thirty years from now, there are ways to stop that,” voice serious and remote.

She bit her lip, considering, then went up to as close as she dared to revealing Ben. “He hasn’t been born yet,” she whispered hoarsely.

He stared at her in silence for a moment, conclusions being drawn in that oh so clever mind of his. “This was someone you loved?” he asked finally.

“Yes.” she croaked. He said nothing more, but the sadness and sorrow filled the Force between them.
“Okay,” he said decisively, “You’re right, this is all a problem for another day.”

He stepped forward and rubbed his hands down her arms. “I don’t know about you, but I think I’ve hit my limit on heavy conversation for today.” He leaned forward until his forehead touched hers. “The Falcon should be arriving at Yavin soon after dawn. I sincerely doubt either of us is going to go back to sleep after this. I know Han has some hot chocolate on board. When we land, and after the debrief, how about all three of us retreat to the Falcon and watch some holos. Chewie too if he’s interested.”

She gave him a watery smile “Evaan lent me some Correllian holo dramas.”

“Are they cheesy?”

“She said they would rot my brain.”

“Well then ‘General’” and here there was a faint sense of mocking in his tone “It looks like we have a plan.”

“Yeah,” she whispered back “We always seem to have one.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfalkemper and Acyancat

Translation into Russian available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Chapter 15

Hey guys, I'm sorry this one is late. This chapter fought me tooth and nail. It has had three separate endings at one time or another. Quick notes, I'm leaving for vacation next week (yeah!) to a place with very spotty Wi-Fi (boo!) so I'm thinking the next chapter is also going to be delayed. Spoilers within for the book "The Weapon of a Jedi." As always I hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Luke was slightly off about the Falcon’s arrival time. Han must be taking it easy on the return trip, given that there was no need to hurry. Given how violate the Falcon could be it was a good choice on his part. No sense in pushing when there was no need.

That meant though that they didn’t arrive in system until about two hours after dawn. By then Leia was eating breakfast with her parents, but she felt it when her brother hit the system. As soon as that bright presence flared across her senses she immediately called out to him.

“Do you want to have some fun?” she asked.

There was a pause. Maybe she had been a bit too eager to reach out to him, but she had missed him. Yes, they still had issues to get through, and he was still more than a little mad at her, but after the stress of the last two weeks, Leia was definitely in the mood for a little fun.

“Sure,” There was a tinge of suspicion and a good dose of wariness in that word but he did answer her.

“How long is your debrief going to be?”

She could feel Luke’s shrug, she wasn’t sure how he communicated that along the Force, but somehow he had. “Probably a couple of hours, it was an eventful trip. Why?”

For once Leia was glad that she was still restricted to half days. “Great.”

“Leia, can you pass the caff?” her mother’s voice cut through her her conversation.

“Sure,” Leia answered distractedly, passing the pitcher that was next to her on her left.


“Leia, that was the water.” Bail said teasingly “You sure you had enough of your own caff yet?”

“Just a minute,” she told Luke. Turning her attention to the table, she reached to her right and passed that pitcher to her mother.

“Sorry,” she mumbled.

“It’s alright,” Mama answered “Leia are you alright? You seemed a little distracted.”
Leia gave her a wide smile “I’m great!” Her mother, reassured by that statement, went back to
talking to Papa about….something. Leia hadn’t been paying any attention to their conversation.


There was a wave of anger, betrayal before Luke swallowed it whole. Right, he was still mad at
them. Just because he decided he wanted to talk to her didn’t mean everything was going to go
back to the way it was. She reached for her earlier lighter tone, inviting him in on the fun.

“I’ll be done with my workload by then and I’ll meet you in the control room. That way we have a
bigger audience.”

There was the smallest flicker of interest in him “Where are you going with this?”

Leia bit her lip “How much do you know about those bets everyone has placed on you, me, and
Han?”

There was a moment of silence and then Luke laughed. The feel of that light and airy sound felt
like a balm on her soul. “I’m new on the base Leia, but I’m not that new.”

“I wasn’t sure,” she offered, then went in for the kill “Han didn’t know.”

There was the swell of Luke’s delight at that fact. “How did he miss them? Nobody is exactly being
subtle about it.” Oh, Han was in for some major teasing about that. Although come to think of it
how did Luke find out? Before Chewie had confirmed their existence, Leia hadn’t heard anything
about them either. She was basing her knowledge on her years of familiarity with military bases
and the personnel who ran them.

“How did you find out about them?”

“Wedge wanted the inside scoop.”

“He told you that!” Wedge’s mouth could get away from him sometimes, but she didn’t remember
him being this bad when he was younger.

Luke’s eyes rolled so hard she could feel it “No. But he’s not exactly the subtlest interrogator I’ve
ever had. Honestly, I think Threepio would do a better job than him.”

Now she was curious “What did you tell him?”

Luke’s satisfaction was rolling off him. When he asked me who I would prefer to have in my life,
long term, “hypothetically” of course.”

“Oh, of course,”

“I said that I loved you both, and asking me to only choose one person to be my ‘friend’ for the
rest of my life was a cruel thing. And that I didn’t understand the point of asking such a mean
question, even in the hypothetical.” Luke smirked, “I even gave him a very sad face.”

She actually laughed out loud at that, startling both her parents. “Luke, that was mean!!”

“Hey, if he took it to mean in a non-platonic way, that is completely not my fault. If he’s going to
try to make money off of bets I can’t even participate in, he gets what he deserves.”

Luke’s ability to play the wide eyed innocent worked long past the time when everyone should
have known better. In that other time, even when people knew he had confronted Vader and the
Emperor, and believed that he had killed them, they still bought it. Wedge wasn’t going to see this coming.

“Leia?” her mother asked, “What’s so funny?”

“I’ll let you know when I’m done,” he told her and retreated from their link.

Leia focused back in on her parents. “Private joke between Luke and me.” she assured them.

Neither of their faces relaxed. “Leia he’s not back yet,” her father said gently.

She frowned, “Yes he is. He just hit the system.”

“And you talked to him?” her father looked shocked.

“We had a talk last night,” she assured him, “and worked through most of our issues.” Luke was going to be wary around her for a while, but she could live with that.

Leia didn’t think her mother was reassured, going by her stricken face. Leia frowned, puzzled by the reaction. Maybe it was an issue of consent? Leia had been raised to be polite after all. There were no firm Jedi rules of etiquette about reaching into someone else’s mind that she knew of. “I wouldn’t have reached out like that if I didn’t have permission,” she reassured her.

“Reach out?” Papa sounded faint. “With the Force?”

“Yes,” her joy dimmed a bit as she took in both their faces. They were both staring at her, shock making their eyes wide. Dammit, it looked like the Jedi had been keeping even more secrets about their abilities than she thought. “I take it this was something you didn’t know the Jedi could do?”

Her father shook his head “No Leia. It’s not a question of not knowing they could do it. Obi-Wan and Vader, they were both capable of it. So was Master Yoda, but it was rare gift. Very rare.” Looking at her confused face he added “And they certainly couldn’t reach out as far as you just did.”

Leia knew that wasn’t true, Vader’s forays into her dreams proved that. But just because he could do it now, didn’t mean it was something he knew how to do when he was with the Jedi. Was this another thing that the Order never figured out how to do? Obi-Wan had mentioned something along these lines to her in their argument. He cited it as a reason that she was a Jedi, proof of her advanced training.

But that couldn't be right. Ben was capable of this at five. All of Luke’s students could do it. How rare a talent could it be if all those people were capable of it? Not to the distance she and Luke could reach, the two of them were capable of reaching each other across systems, but they had all been capable of reaching out to the distance she and Luke just had.

She pondered that as she finished her breakfast, ignoring the worried looks her parents were sending her.

As lunchtime begin approaching Leia was left wondering exactly what had happened on that mission to cause the debrief to last this long. Yes, acquiring the services of Drusil Bephorin was a huge boon to their intelligence operation, but it shouldn’t be taking this long. She was about to be finished with her own work, and that was after she had considerably slowed down in the last hour to stretch out when she felt a light tap on her shields.
“Mon’s wrapping up.”

“Be there in a minute.”

With a gleeful smile, Leia took the last acquisition form and filed it away. Even in a rebellion such as theirs, she knew some bureaucracy was needed to keep things in order, but the constant forms, again and again, was boring as hell. She couldn't wait to be cleared by medical and put this behind her. Assuming the leadership would let her off the planet. She frowned to herself, Vader and that ridiculous bounty of his was putting serious obstacles in her future plans. There were things she needed to do, and couldn't if no one would let her off Yavin. If the Rebellion hadn't been so desperate for Han’s services on Cymoon 1 she had a feeling she wouldn’t have been included.

That was a problem for another day. She let the head tech know she was done for the day, and the woman dismissed Leia with a wave of her hand, barely looking up from her own work. Hustling, Leia sped down the corridors, heading for the main control room.

Given the importance of Drusil as a slicer, Mon had wanted to attend this debrief herself. So it was being held in her office, instead of the various meeting rooms they had designated across the temple. That suited Leia’s purposes just fine. It meant her and Luke would have an audience for this little drama.

When she entered the large room, a few people beside the entrance gave her startled looks, then swung their heads nervously to the back, where Mon’s office was located. Leia didn't meet anyone’s eyes, she just continued her casual visual perusal of the room, as if she was looking for someone. The second Mon’s door opened, Han, Mon, and Luke stepped out. Leia allowed her regal princess look, so called by Han, to descend over her face as she caught sight of Luke.

“Do you want to go first or should I”? she sent to her brother, who wasn’t facing the room, head turned so he could talk to Mon. Han spotted her first, and a welcoming smile broke across his face. At her stony look, it slipped away and he gave a slightly panicked look down to Luke.

“I got this,” Luke said, as he finished his conversation. He turned his head as if he was going to talk to Han and let his gaze fall on her. In an instant, all warmth fled from his face, and disdain filled it.

There were too many people in this room, doing very important things, for a complete hush to fall over the entire crowd, but the noise level dimmed enough to be noticeable. Leia could feel the eyes on her and Luke, as people waited for the blow-up and confrontation.

“Your Highness,” Luke said disdainfully. He slowly walked the length of the room until he was just a hair's breadth away from being in her personal space.

“Lt. Dameron,” she said back just as frostily.

They stood there for a beat, intently staring at each other, making sure they had the attention of the crowd before Luke continued.

“Didn’t think you had the courage to show up to confront me directly like this,” he said, arms crossing over his chest.

She lifted her eyebrow “Do you really believe I would be frightened away by someone like you?”

The interest of the crowd whipped up into a frenzy. Leia could hear the whispers start, as people nearest to them started relaying to the ones further away what was being said.
Think we should start yelling so everyone can hear?"

Luke’s amusement danced in his eyes “Why? Make them work for it.”

Han cleared his throat, “Uh guys, you sure you want to do this here?”

“I don’t know,” Leia said snottily “do we want to do this here Lt. Dameron?”

He stared at her for a second, then his face cracked. He quickly set it to rights, but by the gasp, Leia heard somewhere behind her, someone else had seen it too.

She dropped the ice princesses routine and hit Luke in the shoulder. “You ruined it,” she whined.

Now Luke did lose it, and he broke out into huge guffaws. “Sorry, sorry,” he sputtered, “It’s just” and he gestured to her “your face!!”

“What!??” Han shouted.

“What’s wrong with my face?” she demanded, hands falling to her hips.

He just continued to laugh, bending over as he desperately tried to catch his breath. Finally, he gained enough control to wheeze out, “It was all” and his face twisted into a condescending version of itself. He stuck his nose high in the air and pitched his voice to be higher than his normal pleasant tenor. “Peasant you are bothering me with your existence.” Then he cracked again, and in between his large laughs he managed to spit out “I thought you were going to order my execution.”

“I do not sound like that!” she protested.

“Oh, you do.” He managed to regain some control and straightened. “Don’t worry, it sounds cute.”

Her eyes narrowed “I'll have you know I am very frightening.”

He reached out and patted her head condescendingly “Of course you are,” he assured her in a sugary sweet voice.

Lightning quick she grabbed the hand before he could fully pull it back. Putting pressure on the web of skin between his thumb and forefinger, gently though, she didn't want to hurt him too badly, she began applying pressure.

“Ow!” he said, trying to twist out of her grasp.

“Big baby.” she said, “Frightened of me yet?”

“Of this little pinch?” he snorted then as she squeezed harder he said “Ow! Ow! Ow! Will you quit it?”

“Take it back!”

“I’ve been trained to resist torture,” he boasted, then let out a swear in Huttense as she squeezed just a bit harder at that tender skin “Let me go!!”

“Ah-hem!!” Both her and Luke froze, and they swung their heads in tandem to stare at Mon. She was looking at them as if she regretted all her life choices that had brought her here. Han was just openly gaping at them.

“If you two are quite done?” Mon asked dryly.
Leia immediately dropped Luke’s hand and he stepped away from her. “Sorry,” they said in unison.

Mon’s eyes flickered around the room, taking in the nearly silent room with its gaping onlookers, “Yes,” she said, “I’m sure you are.”

Han finally found his voice. “No, really,” he demanded, “What the hell!?!?”


“Why? We’re having fun aren’t we?”

Luke stepped up to Leia’s side and looped his arm into her’s. “We’re going to watch some holos. Want to come?”

Han’s mouth opened and closed silently a few times as he tried to process what he just witnessed. He finally threw his hands up in the air in defeat and cried out, “Really?”

“It was just an invitation Han,” Leia said pouting, allowing her shoulders to slump, and a faux expression of hurt to cross her face. “You don't have to come if you don’t want.”

His eyes narrowed as he glared at both of them “I hate both of you.”

Luke gave him a look of pure innocence “It’s just a holo, Han, not an invitation to your death.”

Leia widened her eyes and gave him her most wounded expression “If you don’t want to come all you have to say is no.”

Han slapped his hands over his face and let out a hysterical sounding laugh. After a few seconds he dropped them and gave her and Luke the once over as if confirming their sincerity. When they simply gave him hopeful smiles he spat. “Fine, but we’re doing it on the Falcon.” He pointed at Leia “I’ve seen prison cells bigger than your quarters,” and there was a quiet gasp and hushed murmurings coming from that statement. Then he moved the finger slightly, jabbing it in Luke’s direction. “And you live with ten other people, no thanks.”

Luke beamed “We are looking forward to alone time with you. It’s been too long.”

Han, who was now picking up on the excited chatter in the room, gave them both an incredulous glare before he stomped out Leia watched him go, laughter threatening to bubble out of her.

She heard Mon behind her call out briskly “Back to work if you please.”

Leia turned her head back around to see if Mon was really upset with them for this, only to meet Nakari’s stricken face. Dammit, the woman must have been standing behind Han the whole time. Leia momentarily tightened her hand on her brother’s arm.

“You didn’t tell me she was here!!” she hissed in the Force. She would never have done this if she had known the woman was in the room. She had her suspicions about the girl's feelings, based on what little she remembered of her the last time, and this pale face just confirmed all of them.

Luke didn’t look at her, but he sent her a confused “Why does that matter?”

Oh, he deserved a smack on the back of his head for this idiocy. How could someone so observant be this oblivious? She smiled sweetly at the girl, figuring she owed to her, if not her idiot twin, to repair the damage they just did with this little charade. “You are more than welcome to join us,”
she offered.

Nakari just gave her a long appraising look, that contained a hint of hostility. Leia couldn’t blame her for that. Then her gaze slid to Luke, and it morphed into an uneasiness. She shook her head. “No, thank you,” she said politely.

Luke, apparently now picking up that he misstepped somewhere, if not understanding exactly where, dropped Leia’s arm, and rushed forward to the brunette “No, really, it’ll be fun.”

She looked at him seriously for a moment, biting her lip with indecision. Then her gaze switched to Leia. Leia tried to keep the inviting look on her face. “No,” Nakari said finally, “I think you two have a lot to talk about.” Luke’s face fell, then she hesitantly added “But dinner?”

Luke’s face broke out into his radiant smile “I would like that.”

“Okay,” she gave Leia a nod, “Your Highness.”

“Leia,” she corrected.

The woman gave her a dubious look, but answered back “Leia then,” then she walked out of the room.

Luke watched her go, a wistful look in his eyes.

“You are a dumbass,” she informed her twin as he came back to her side.

“What? I told her there was nothing going on between us. Or me and Han.”

There were a million responses Leia could make to that foolish bit of fancy, but she let it go. Let him figure out this one on his own.

“Come on,” she said out loud, grabbing Luke’s hand, “Han’s waiting for us.”

As she and Luke entered into the Falcon, Han was already at the dejark table, setting up the projector.

“I’ve got the Boonta Eve Classic.” he told them, as they entered the living section.

Luke’s face brightened, but Leia put up her hand.

“No, I’ve got some Corellian holo dramas.”

Han’s face did something weird, and Chewie let out a woof.


“Nothing,” Han said.

“That wasn’t a nothing face Han, that was a something face,” Luke insisted.

“No,” he said, “It’s fine.”

Leia’s eyes narrowed “You have something against my choice?”

Chewie did laugh out loud then <No, it’s just a former partner of ours was a big fan.>
Lando. Chewie was talking about Lando, that was the only other partner Han had ever had. Lando was a Correllian holo drama fan? Lando? This was so going into her mental arsenal of teasing him. After she was introduced to him again of course.

“Don’t you mean if you’re introduced to him again?” Leia shoved that thought away. She knew where he would be in three years. She would drop in on him then.

Luke’s thoughts went into a different direction “Old partner? What happened?”

Han tried for nonchalance and shrugged “He and I had a minor falling out.” His voice betrayed his tension. So they were in one of their fight phases.

Luke’s frowned in puzzlement “Over what?”

“The Falcon.”

Luke’s grin became teasing “He insult your ship too? Let me guess, didn’t get away with it because he’s not as cute as Leia?”

Han’s face didn’t even twitch. Crap, this wasn't one of their phases, this was the major fight. The one, even as time went on, neither of them would talk about with her or Luke.


“Why?”

“Very sore subject.”

“It’s annoying when you know the answer,” he complained, but he didn’t push. Han’s secrets were his own, not Luke's. Instead, her brother moved over to the table and sat on the bench. “Well I’ve never seen a holo drama, much less a Corellian one, so let’s get started.”

It was going fine until halfway through the holo. The three of them were on the bench, Chewie electing to sit on the floor so he could stretch his legs out, and all of them were laughing at the hero’s attempt to “woo” his lady.

Luke nudged her, as the heroine’s face broke out in bright red blisters, an allergic reaction to the flowers that the hero, what was his name again, had brought her. “Anything like that ever happen to you?”

“I once had the Bith Ambassador give me a mathematical equation,” she replied “He claimed that is was the building block of the galaxy in its purest form. That it was the poetry of existence.”

“And it made you break out into hives?” Han teased.

She turned and glared up at him “No it did not.”

Chewie huffed from his position on the floor <I wouldn't be surprised if it did. Poetry is not how one woos a mate.>

“Speak for yourself pal,” Han said “I’ve had plenty of success with a couplet or two.”

Behind her, Leia could feel Luke swing his gaze from the holo to Han in disbelief “In what?” he asked, “Driving them away?”
“I have a very sensitive soul!” Han protested.

<Sensitive as a rock perhaps.> Chewie grumbled.

“I’ll show you,” Han sat up straight.

Chewie huffed <I’ve told you many times, you are not my type.>

Han ignored the Wookie and took one of Leia’s hands, clasping it between both of his. He leaned forward, gazing deeply into her eyes. “My Lady, who does wander among the stars—”

Leia brought up her free hand to slap it over Han’s mouth. “Do I strike you as someone who wants poetry?” she asked.

She could feel his mouth move behind her hand. Then a stripe of wetness as he stuck his tongue out and ran against her palm.

“Ew!!” she said, pulling her hand back “Gross. I don’t know where that's been.”

“All kinds of fun places,” he told her cheekily. Then his eyes grew thoughtful, “No, poetry is not for you. Still, it never hurts to check.” A mischievous light entered his eyes. “Bet a custom blaster is much more your speed.”

Leia wiped her hand across her pants. “Well, you won't know until you give me one.”

“I’m the hard working down on his luck hero of this story. You’re rich, aren’t you supposed to be the one who buys me gifts?”

She sniffed delicately “You forget. I am an actual princess. According to these,” and she waved her hand to the holo “you are supposed to shower me with gifts and adoration.”

“Yeah, I’ll pass.” Han handed over a ration bar “Want one of these instead?”

“Jerk,” but she snatched the bar out of his hand. She was getting hungry, she hadn’t eaten lunch yet.

Han snickered, then Luke said, “Hush, I can’t hear.” They all dutifully returned to their viewing.

That was when Leia ruined everything. They had gotten to the part where the first of three obstacles were thrown into the lover’s path. Leia had only watched about four of these things, but that pattern held in all of them She wondered what the cultural significance of that number was in Corellian culture. Maybe Han would know?

She slid a glance over to him. No, probably not.

Then she actually focused on the words of the song. The Hero, no Kamin, his name was Kamin, was singing a song about his lost family, that they had died before his eyes, and how he would defy anyone who tried to take his love from him. The song was about average as these things go, but this specific set of circumstances hit a little too close to home for her comfort. Leia felt tears gathering in her eyes, and she could feel a similar feeling building in Luke.

Without thinking, Leia leaned into her brother, and he put his arm around her, laying a light kiss on her forehead. Beside her she felt Han tense up, but he didn’t say anything. It would have been better if he had. Then Luke became aware of Han’s tension, and the cause for it. He removed his arm from around Leia’s shoulders and she quickly sat up, cursing herself.
Han didn’t relax though. He continued to fidget beside her for the rest of the holo, clearly uncomfortable. The good mood they had been in was broken. As soon as the holo ended Han jumped up.

“Well this has been fun, but I think you two have a lot to talk about.” and he hustled out of there before Leia could even get a word in edgewise.

Luke sighed behind her, and Chewie gave her a reproachful look as he too stood up and followed his friend.

When the thumps of his heavy foot tread faded away Luke spoke up. “That wasn’t nice Leia,” censure in his voice.

“I know” she sighed and rubbed her forehead “I just wasn’t thinking.” She waved her hand at the holo “That song hit a little too close to home.”

He said nothing, but she could feel the disbelief surrounding him.

“What?” she demanded.

“Leia you are always thinking.”

“No, I’m not,” she shot back.

“Yes you are,” Luke said, a hint of temper in his tone, “Even now, sitting here when we are supposed to be relaxing, I can see a thousand thoughts and plans zinging around in that head of yours.”

“You make me sound like some evil mastermind, plotting everyone’s demise.”

His face flushed a bit “To our demise? No. To what you think everyone should do? Yes.”

She tried to keep the hurt out of her voice. “Is that what you think I’m doing? Manipulating everyone around me so they do as I see fit?”

He offered up a very unconvincing “No.”

“Luke remember how you said I need to be honest with you? Well, that is a two-way road.”

He looked down at his hands. “Then yes, that is what you do. You hide and evade, and I’ve never seen anyone use words the way you do.”

“Use words like what?”

He looked back up at her, gaze troubled. “Like they are a weapon.”

Clearly he and Obi-Wan hadn’t gotten into an argument where the older man actually fought back full throttle. She snorted “Well if Mama and Papa had taken you instead of me, you could have seen first hand the Imperial court where that was the practice. Along with actual weapons.”

“Maybe,” he nibbled his lip, “My original point to all of this was you very rarely take an action without considering all the consequences.”

“I wasn’t thinking-” she protested.

He gave her a disappointed look “Just now? No, you weren’t. That I think you did out of habit. My
question is why you started in the first place"

“What are you talking about?” she hissed “I’m always reaching out to touch you.”

He nodded “Yes, but you really do it when Han is around.”

“That’s not true!”

“Yes, it is!” He shouted back. Leia felt her eyes widen at the abrupt escalation of his anger. He stopped himself, took a deep breath in, and released it in a long exhale. He went on in a much calmer tone “And you do it knowing full well what he thinks something is going on between us. It’s not fair to him Leia.”

“Well if he’s going to get in a jealous snit-” she snarled back, defensive.

Anger chased over his face as he cut her off “It’s not a “jealous snit” and you know it. If it was simply a snit he would demand that you choose. Or warned me to stay away from you! He has done neither.”

Luke rubbed his hands over his eyes tiredly "He hasn’t even asked me about anything that’s been going on between me and you, and gods know over the last two weeks he was dying to. Not because he was going to move in on you, but because he wanted to know what was wrong with us so he could fix it.”

Leia fell back into the seat, all of her defensiveness draining. “I know,” she said tiredly.

Luke started, shock clearly written on his face. “Are you admitting you are wrong?”

She rolled her head on the back of the bench and gave him a flat look “I admit that all the time.”

“Not out loud.”

She huffed “Are you going to get to the point of all of this? Or are we going to wax some more about my failings?”

He reached out tentatively and took her hand. “This also isn’t fair to me. He’s a friend, and he thinks we are in some sort of competition for your heart. A thought you have never bothered to correct. In fact, you encourage it every time the three of us are in the same room together.”

“Yeah,” she was too tired to fight that particular truth.

Luke’s voice was gentle but firm. “I don’t understand why you won’t tell him.”

Leia let out a bitter laugh and every fear she had been harboring about Han and his reaction came bubbling up. “Oh yes, that will go well.” She turned to face Luke, her face twisting in self-recrimination “Han, you know that all-present, powerful mystical energy field you’ve just now started to believe is real? Well, guess what? It dumped me here from thirty-four years from the future. And not in my old body. Oh no. I’m all fresh faced and nineteen again. Which is great as far as my energy levels go, but I definitely don’t look old enough to be your mother. Which I am!!”

Luke opened his mouth, to say who knew what, but Leia kept going on. Every worse case scenario rolling through her mind.

“And it gets better! We were married!! I know almost every dark secret you currently have, will have, or even think about having. We were fairly happy too until it all fell apart, and you were murdered. That’s why I’ve been running hot and cold with you for the last few months. Sometimes
I want to yell at you because you’re not my husband. He’s dead, and you’re not, and it really isn’t fair. Other times I want to climb you like a tree. I know you inside and out, but you don’t know me at all and just think I’m hot. Want to start dating?”

Luke blinked “That’s one way to approach it,” he said slowly “I was actually talking about telling him that we are related. You know, start small, ease him into it a bit?”

Now Leia felt stupid. Luke didn't deserve that diatribe hurled at him. Especially over this. And he would think about the small steps, not take everything in one huge jump. When would she learn moderation?

“Oh, that’s not why you won’t tell Han about Luke being your brother.” that small petty side of herself whispered. She closed her eyes in defeat, she had promised to tell Luke the truth. “It’s just easier,” she confessed. “Not to tell him. To hide behind you. To keep him at a distance.”

“Easier for who?” he pressed.

“For me,” she admitted, self-loathing rich in her voice. She opened her eyes to see Luke’s reaction to her weakness.

It was filled only with confusion “Leia, I don’t understand. You love him.”

“Of course I do.” This was something about herself that she long ago knew she couldn’t change. She didn’t love easily, she understood that much about herself, but when she did, she never let them go, even if by the machinations of the Force they were radically younger.

“Now I’m really confused. What are you so afraid of?”

Leia felt her hurt and anger fill her. “Why are you asking that? I told you dammit!” He didn't rise to the bait, simply kept his eyes steady on hers, demanding answers. “I’m afraid of how it will all end,” she hissed.

Luke shot her a look of disappointment. He shook his head, frustration making his tone snappish “We have time to change that Leia. We have thirty-four years in fact. It’s just an excuse.”

Leia flinched as if he struck her. It was and was not an excuse. Yes, she could possibly change the events leading to Han’s murder. Hell, she should change this, not just for her sake, but Han’s, Luke’s and the galaxies. But the clearest way to do that was to avoid Han all together, and that was a sacrifice she was unwilling to make. She focused on Luke. She had involved him in this, in this trap she had created for herself. She needed to tell him why what he said was correct, and tore a hole in her heart at the same time.

“Do you know how I know I’m old enough to be his mother?” Even Leia could hear the weariness in her tone.

He frowned at her, not sure where she was going with this. “Math?” he offered.

She swallowed, trying to dislodge the lump in her throat. “Because Han is currently younger than our son was when I traveled here.”

A wash of his emotions rushed over her in the Force, but Luke’s face remained open and inviting. “I see.”

She studied him carefully, “Do you?”
He did look away then, his gaze unfocused as he stared at the gray dingy walls of the Falcon. He wasn’t ignoring her, he was trying to put his thoughts in order. Finally, he came back from wherever he had slipped to and took a deep breath in.

“You don’t have to answer this question, Leia,” He leaned forward and cupped her face between his hands, his voice gentle “I’m not going to use your promise to me to force you to tell me. But I think for the sake of your own sanity you should.”

She stared at him, then gave a slight nod of permission. Luke’s face his face became serious and grave. “Leia, who killed Han?”

Leia sat there for a minute, gathering her courage, then whispered “Ben. The name of the person who murdered Han is named Ben.”

There was no reaction to that familiar name, Luke’s gaze was steady and sure. “Alright. Ben then. And how do you know him?”

Leia sat there, trying her hardest to force the words out between suddenly numb lips. Luke just waited, displaying a patience she didn’t think this young version of him had. Finally, she managed “Because he’s our son. Ben is our son and he killed Han.” Luke’s hands momentarily tightened on her face, and she closed her eyes out to block his face.

For a moment she wished that it wasn’t that too young face in front of her. She wanted Luke, the other Luke, the one who had walked down this path with her. Who understood the source of this pain, who knew this horror already, and wouldn’t be forcing her to answer these questions. But he was gone, all those experiences with him, and it was her duty to make sure this one never had all his hopes and dreams pulled down by a loved one.

“Were you there when it happened?”

She shook her head “No, but I felt it. Half a galaxy away and I felt that lightsaber go through Han’s chest.”

“So he was alone?” there was no condemnation in his voice. There should be, she had let the other Han go on that mission alone. It was her fault he died alone, no matter what that older Han had said in her dream.

Why was Luke doing this? Why was he forcing her to re-live this? Didn't he have enough details? Her eyes flew open and she angrily jerked her head out of his hands and spat “Do I have to recount every horrible minute of it? Don’t you know enough?”

His eyes were filled with nothing but sympathy. “You tell me. You’re the one that has been dancing around this. I’m asking not because I’m curious, but because I think that you need to talk to someone about it. Anyone, but I’m the one who is here. Leia, as far as I can tell, this is what has been driving you so fiercely since you got here. Not the goal of ensuring the fall of the Empire, not Vader, this. And it’s tearing you apart.”

The words hit her like a slap in the face. Luke was right. Her father had tried to tell her this, as did her mother. Hell, even Vader had mentioned it in passing. She felt her shoulders fall in defeat.

“Ben fell,” she said tonelessly “He was corrupted to the Dark Side, by a malicious creature bent on the destruction of the New Republic named Snoke. And he succeeded. He succeeded in every way imaginable. He had a Skywalker as his apprentice, and a weapon even more powerful than the Death Star, and he had Ben...” her voice trailed off.
“He had Ben do what?”

“Slaughtered the new Jedi order. He killed your students Luke. That’s why you,” she stopped and corrected herself “He, why he ran. At least I think that’s why he ran. He never spoke to me about it. Just buried his students and vanished, looking for answers.”

“Answers to what?”

“To why his order failed. How he failed.” A tear slipped down her cheek “That’s when Han ran too. Everyone left me.”

There were tears in Luke’s voice now, but he asked, “And what did you do?”

She looked down to her hands and clenched them into fists “What I know how to do. I formed a guerrilla army and plotted the resistance.” She gave a mocking laugh “That’s what we called it. The Rebellion in form if not in name.”

She looked back up to her brother “But I never lost hope. I was so convinced we could pull him back. That the Dark Side hadn’t eaten away at everything my son was.” And here a sob escaped her, “And Han paid the price for that belief.”

“So he died?”

She nodded, out of words.

“And that night you went to sleep?”

She nodded again.

Understanding filled his face “Then you woke up on that shuttle, with Vader.”

“I didn't think it through. Once I got over the shock of what had happened to me, once I realized that all of this was real, all I could think of was this was the opportunity to set everything right. That I could save Alderaan.” Oh, how that thought still brought a fierce joy to her heart, even now, when she was talking about the shattered ruins Ben had left in her life. Yes her home was currently occupied by the Empire, but it still stood.

“But when I arrived on Alderaan to find you and Han there, neither of you knew who I was. Two people who I loved more than my own life, and I was a stranger, to both of you.” She swallowed and confessed the darkest impulse she had in that great state room, “For a moment I thought, maybe, it’s better that way.”

Luke broke then and pulled her into his arms “No, Leia, never,” he whispered into her hair. “Despite everything that has happened between us I would never having a family again. I would never trade you.”

She returned the hug just as fiercely, as she let out a pitiful noise as she tried to muffle the sob those words caused her.

Luke’s voice was fierce and determined “It wouldn’t have worked anyway. I was far too fascinated by you to let you walk away without at least talking to you.”

She gave a watery chuckle. “Oh, I picked up on your interest when you approached me on the Falcon.”
He pulled back then, his face red with embarrassment, “Ah, that wasn’t because I thought of you as family.”

“I know.” She shook her head ruefully “Believe me I know.”

Luke’s eyes widened as her words sank in. “Leia how long was it before we knew we were related in that other time?”

She grimaced “About four years.”

His face paled “Oh, no.”

She shook her head, “It’s fine. Nothing happened.” She thought of a few incidents and backpedaled “Well nothing serious happened.”

“Nothing serious?” his voice got high.

She shook her head. “We don’t have any alcohol.”

“Huh?”

“I am not discussing that with you unless I’m drunk. That’s the rule. Just take my word for it and let’s move on.”

He looked a little queasy and nodded his head enthusiastically “Agreed.”

“Regardless, I realized very quickly I couldn’t keep you away. You were drawn to me like I was drawn to you. More importantly, I didn’t want to keep you away. But Han,” she waved her hands uselessly in the air. “I had forgotten how angry and bitter he was. It hurt to see because I knew it didn’t have to be that way. But then I wondered, yes, maybe it would be better if he stayed that way. If he never mends his heart, then how can Ben break it again?”

“He didn’t run away though.”

“No,” she sniffed “he didn’t. Well, he did,” thinking of the last minute rescue he had performed above the Death Star, both times. “But he came back.”

Luke gave her a grin “He did at that.”

She snorted “Typical, he does exactly the opposite of what I thought he would.”

She looked down at her lap, her fingers twisting “And yes, I used you to keep some distance between us at first. You’re right about that, it was a conscious choice on my part.” Then she frowned thoughtfully and clarified “At least once I told you that you were my brother, and wouldn’t take it the wrong way.”

“Why did you feel the need to do that?”

“Because he was so clearly interested,” she huffed “That took me by surprise.”

“Why?” Luke looked generally puzzled. That was very sweet of him to say. Very dense, but sweet.

She waved her hands up and down her body in emphasis “I’m not who this Han falls in love with. I am not who I was when I was nineteen Luke. I’m old, bitter, and far too cynical. If anything my tongue is even sharper now then it was then, and I’m twice as judgemental of fools.”
He cocked his head thoughtfully “Han isn’t a fool.”

She sighed “No, foolish perhaps, but not a fool.” She rubbed her forehead, trying to ease the tension building there. “But I found myself quickly falling into old familiar patterns with him, even as I mourned him, which is an odd place to be.”

“And what is so horrible about that?” Luke persisted “Why is falling in love with Han again such a bad thing?”

“Because of Ben.”

He was quiet for a moment as he absorbed that. Then he offered “There is no guarantee that you’ll have him.”

She felt a shiver run down her spine at his words, although it wasn’t anything she hadn’t thought herself. For the sake of the galaxy, she should make damn sure Ben was never born. It wouldn’t even be that hard, but long term would that solve anything?

“It’s not that easy Luke. He’s my son. I miss him and love him even while I am so angry with him. He isn’t here to ask, so I will never know what he was thinking. He did horrible things, to you, to me, to Han, hell the galaxy at large, but can I bring myself to erase him from existence altogether?”

She felt the words spilling out of her mouth faster and faster as every dark thought she had about this came spilling out of her. “How do I deal with this? How do I even have a relationship with Han knowing what it would bring? It might not even be limited to Ben. Is every child I could possibly have doomed to fall to the Dark Side with me as their mother? Would my blood run true no matter what?”

“Or maybe it isn’t an issue of blood. I screwed up so badly with him that he fell to the Dark Side.” She pounded her fist against her chest for emphasis “Is there something wrong with me? Did I do this to my son?”

Luke looked at her, eyes wide in shock “There is nothing wrong with you Leia.”

She gave out a bitter laugh “He called me Anakin! If that doesn’t give you a big hint of the problem I’m facing I don’t know what will.”

“Who???” Luke’s voice trailed off, as realization dawned. “Be-Obi-Wan” he corrected to when he realized that there might be too many Ben’s in their conversation “Obi-Wan called you that.”

She nodded her head. “Yes.”

“When?”

“After…” she trailed off not wanting to get into that painful memory.

“After I found out our father is not dead?” he said diplomatically.

“Yes, after you stormed off. We kept going at and I said something and he told me it wasn’t true, but he called me Anakin.” She gave a small sob, “He didn’t even realize he had done it.”


“Not then. I just walked off. Later though, he said it was because I was what he,” and she spat the word “could have been.”
“You are nothing like Vader,” Luke said it with such conviction. Too bad she couldn’t believe him on this.

“You don’t know that.”

“Well, I know you are not running around enslaving people and claiming it’s for their own good, so there is a point of difference between you.” He said firmly, anger flaring.

“No, I’m not,” she smiled at him sadly “But that is a pretty low bar to set.”

“Leia,” he ran his fingers through his hair in agitation. “Do you think I don’t have my own issues to grapple with on this?”

She blinked, surprised. “That’s ridiculous,” she said instinctively.

“No,” she could feel his leg start to bounce up and down under the table, his calm fading away. This was the Luke she remembered from this age, full of energy and movement. “No, Obi-Wan never called me Anakin by accident. But he said it all the time. How like my father I was.”

Dammit, she was just starting to get over her anger at Obi-Wan’s idiocy, now she had to start all over again on maintain her calm with the man. Why the hell couldn’t he have kept his mouth shut?

“You’re not like him,” she said.

Luke let out a bitter chuckle “That means you aren’t either.”

Leia really didn’t have an argument to that.

“I get it now,” he said, gazing drifting away from her face, “I didn’t understand why you rejected so strongly to being trained as a Jedi, but I do now.”

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, “I wish it was different for you.”

He let out a harsh bark of a laugh “Yeah, me too. For both of us.” He looked down at the dejarik table and absentmindedly starting tracing random patterns onto its surface. “Though I’m giving serious thought to not doing it.”

“Not doing what?” Leia didn’t understand.

“To not training as a Jedi.” He didn’t look up as he said that, and it took every bit of Leia’s self-control not to blurt out “But that is who you are.”

No, that was who he could be. He wasn’t locked into that path anymore than she was. She took a deep breath in and said quietly “May I ask why?”

“Because of the danger I represent. I know your Luke managed not to fall, but that doesn't mean it isn't a possibility.” His fingers picked up speed, rubbing at the table harder. “And I don't know if I can bring myself to trust Obi-Wan to see me through the training. What kind of relationship would we have where the student doesn’t trust the Master to have the students best interests at heart?”

Leia frowned “But I thought—”

His head came up “You thought what?” he demanded.

“I saw you, talking to him when you got back from Rodia. I thought you two had patched things up,”
“You were in the hanger?” She nodded. He grimaced. “Guess you missed the part where I stormed off.”

“Yeah, I guess I did.” Well that sneaky old coot. He had never said it outright, but Obi-Wan sure as hell implied that he and Luke were mending their relationship.

“I just wanted to give him the lightsaber.” Luke said “I saw how he reacted in Grakkus’ vault, and all I could hear was Aunt Beru’s voice in my head saying that Obi-Wan might have done me wrong, but Jedi Knight Huulik hadn’t. He deserved to have his belongings returned to his people.”

Leia reached out and rubbed her brother’s shoulder in comfort.

“The conversation went fine until he started pushing me about resuming my training. He said he understood I was hurt, but this was my destiny and I couldn’t prevent it from finding me…” Luke gave a small shrug “I snapped and told him that destiny and his teaching methods hadn’t worked so well with my father.”

Leia winced. Oh, that was hitting the mark dead on. “It’s your choice Luke,” she said “I’ll support you in whatever you decide to do. Even if I have to go to war with the entire Alliance leadership over it.”

He looked at her with gratitude in his eyes “Thank you. You have no idea what that means to me.”

Leia snorted “It’s not worth much. I don’t have that much weight with them.”

“Why not?”

She propped her head on her hand and gave him a saucy smile. “I’m young, I’m opinionated, they don’t think I know what I’m doing. But honestly? I think it’s this baby face I have.”

He laughed then “Their loss for not listening. I’ve never met anyone who is as straight and true as you are.”

Leia felt the smile slip from her face. She shook her head “Don’t say that. Of all people here and now you know that isn’t true. I lied to you. I hurt you.”

He swallowed hard, “Yes, you did. But once you realize you made a mistake you admitted to it and tried to rectify it.”

“Not in time.”

“In time enough.” He cupped her face “Leia, listen to me, you didn’t do it to hurt me or even deceive me. You were doing it to protect yourself. You’re human, you are going to make mistakes.”

“But I can’t” she whispered “I can’t, not here. There is too much riding on all of this. I have to get it right, or we fail.”

A dark look entered his eyes and some sort of loathing passed through him, but all he said was “We won last time.”

“But I’ve already changed so much,” she whispered. “What if I’ve changed that too?”

“You are not a god Leia, you can only move forward as you intend and work as hard as you can.” His hand dropped and he gave a friendly push to her shoulder “You’re being too hard on yourself.
Like you never made a mistake last time?”

She gave a watery chuckle “At least none I will admit to.”

“See? It’ll be fine.” Such faith. How did he know everything he did and still maintain such faith? Leia fought because she knew no other way to be. Luke fought because he truly believed they could do this.

“What should I do about Han?” she asked.

“What do you want to do?” he responded bluntly.

“Wrap myself around him and never let him out of my sight.”

Luke’s eyebrow rose. “Not healthy. Understandable, but not healthy.” He sighed. “Leia I know I said to be as honest with me as you can be about my future, but I don’t want you to tell me anything about any relationships I might have had.”

Leia cocked her head “Why?”

“I don’t want to know. I don’t want to keep looking for a face I might never meet. Or meet them and be disappointed.” He swallowed hard. “Or make comparisons between the family I will build to the one I could have had.”

She nodded. There was a lot of sorrow there, she couldn’t blame him for not wanting to know.

“And Ben? Please, Luke, tell me what I should do about Ben.”

He shook his head. “I don’t know Leia. What should I do about Obi-Wan and my Jedi training?”

She didn’t have any more answers than he did, so they sat there in the silence of the Falcon.

ABA - Day 84

Healer Banok gave her a long assessing look, “You’re good to go.”

Leia perked up “Really?” She would have thought the Healer would have put her through more hoops than that. He looked like the kind of man who retaliated on difficult patients with paperwork.

“Yes really. I clear you to resume all duties and assignments.” He pulled back a bit and gave her a stern look “But for my peace of mind, start out light with the workouts.”

“Of course,” she assured him.

“And if you have any deep pain or aches that last more than eight hours I want you back in here. Don’t put it off.”

“No problem.” She promised.

He sighed “I’ll give you this, at least you lie to my face cheerfully. Go, get out of my wing. I have other patients who actually listen to me, to attend to.”
Leia beat a hasty retreat.

ABA - Day 91

Leia was eating her lunch alone when Evaan plopped down beside her to her left and said out of nowhere “I don’t like her.”

Leia gave her friend a long side wise glance “Care to narrow that down for me? That covers a lot of the people on this base.”

“Nakari. I don’t like her.”

Leia set down her fork and took a deep breath in. “Any particular reason why?”

Evaan frowned as if she expected a different answer. “She’s wrong for Luke.”

Luke’s fascination with Nakari hadn’t slowed down. Accepting his morning workouts with her, these days Luke spent most of his free time in the brunette’s company. Including his breakfast. Leia shoved the hurt that action caused away. It wasn’t about her, it was about her parents. Luke was still fairly angry with them and didn’t want to say anything to them that he would regret later. She understood that, but she still missed seeing his face across her table every morning.

“And this has nothing to do with the money you have riding on that?” Leia asked wryly.

Evaan snorted “As if I would be that petty.”

Leia gave the woman a smile “You are exactly that petty. That’s why I like you.”

“Point. But my opinion still stands, I don’t like her for Luke.”

Leia frowned “Why?” she finally asked. She really had no opinion on the woman. She seemed nice enough, the few times Leia had caught her in the halls. But the woman didn’t go out of her way to socialize with Leia, and understanding her reasons Leia didn’t push. Leia took a sip of her water, waiting for Evaan’s answer.

“You’re better for him,” the woman said matter of factly. “If you want me to kill her and hide the body just say the word.”

Leia nearly spit her water out across the table. As it was she swallowed too fast and it went down the wrong pipe. Coughing, she tried to catch her breath. “I thought you said you put money on Han and Luke.” she finally managed to gasp out.

“I did. But if you are going to limit yourself to one partner, it should be Luke. You two maintain a better balance.” At Leia’s frown, Evaan waved her hand “Oh, don’t get me wrong. I like Han. I even like the thought of you and Han together. I just think long term Luke would be the better fit.”

“Any other objections beside the fact that she’s standing in the way of mine and Luke's non-existent epic love?”

“Really?” Evaan asked.

“Really Evaan, there is exactly zero chance Luke and I will ever engage in a romantic
relationship.”

“Even with Han to balance you out?”

Leia glared at her friend, and Evaan put her hands up in a defensive position. “Okay. okay. I get it.” She sighed “I’m not going to win that bet am I?”

“No.”

She snapped her fingers “Dammit, that's ten credits I’m never going to get back. I was so sure.” Then she brightened, “Does Luke know about the fact that the two of you are never going to be?”

“I should say so.”

A fierce grin crossed her face. “Good. That means Wedge is going to lose his bet. He was sure it was going to come down to you and Luke.”

Leia growled, “At this point, I’m going to make out with Chewie in the hangar bay just to make it stop.”

“Well if that was your goal you shouldn’t have pulled that stunt with Luke in the Command Center. You just kicked everything up again.”

Leia wasn't going to admit to that smug face that Evaan had a point. At the time it seemed like such a brilliant way to bond with Luke. “Back to your problems with Nakari?”

A thoughtful look crossed Evaan’s face “She’s too….slight.”

Leia frowned “She works as a guide on quite dangerous worlds. Quite a few of our people learned to shoot from her. I wouldn't call any of what she does slight.”

The other woman shook her head “No, I don't mean in her skill set. She’s fine there. It’s just, what you see is what you get.”

“Isn’t that a good thing that she’s not deceptive?”

“Yes, but Luke...he’s special.”

“Yes,” Leia frowned

“I’m not referring to the Force thing,” Evaan said exasperated “I just mean-”

Rex sat across from them “What are we talking about that has you two looking so serious?” he asked.

“Evaan doesn't like Nakari,” Leia said flatly.

Rex frowned at Evaan. “She’s a good shot. What’s your problem?” Of course, things were that simple for the man. As far as he was concerned if you were a good shot, in the Rebellion, and didn’t torture people that made you a good person.

“I don’t like her for Luke,” Evaan explained.

“Oh,” the older man’s face lost its tension and turned to face Leia. “In that case, I agree with Evaan.”
Leia threw her arms up in exasperation “Why?” At least Rex wouldn’t be pushing the Luke is better for you then Han angle.

“She’s simple.” the clone answered back.

"She’s not dumb Rex.” Leia wasn’t sure why she felt the need to defend someone she barely knew. She was trying to stay out of it. Luke had made it very clear that he didn’t want to know anything about the particulars of any relationships he may or may not have.

Rex nodded “No, she is not. But things are very simple for her. Life is very simple for her.”

“And what is wrong with that?” she demanded. Wasn’t she the one everyone accused of being overprotective of Luke? Apparently he a picked up quite a lot of other defenders.

“Not a damn thing. In fact, it’s a worldview I wish I could share. I’d probably be a lot happier.” Leia tapped her fingers on the table, annoyed with his evasion. He sighed. “She’s not evil, or stupid, but things aren’t complicated for her. Luke, Luke is complicated.”

Leia couldn’t disagree with that but still, “He’s not asking her to marry him, he’s just looking for company.”

Evaan shrugged “Just be ready for it to end in tears. Mostly hers I think.”

ABA - Day 95

Leia was beginning to wonder if the only time she would ever leave Yavin was when the inevitable evacuation of the planet came because the Empire showed up. Given her experience with Vader in that other timeline about the lengths he would go to hunt down his missing child, she knew it was a question of when the Empire found them, not if.

Nevertheless, she felt if she wasn’t put on a mission with some meat on it soon, she was going to vibrate out of her skin. Granted the amount of paperwork she had to file had been cut back, but the meetings and endless holo calls trying to drum up money for their cause weren't much better. She was still offering shift relief to pilots on the CAP rotation, but Dodonna had flatly refused to let her go on a mission that took her out of the system.

So when the call came for her to come to Mon’s office, she wasn’t expecting anything besides being assigned to another boring task. She could be forgiven for being taken aback at the sight of Mon sitting at her desk flanked by Dodonna and Draven on the right, and Luke on the left.

Leia’s heart begin to pound in her chest. What had she walked into now? Was this some intervention the Alliance leadership had concocted to convince Luke to continue his training? Was there some threat to Alderaan that she had missed in the data dump from last night?

She paused at the entrance of the door. “Mon,” she said warily in greeting, “Generals,” She walked in and nodded to her brother “Luke.”

“Leia,” Dodonna said warmly. “I’m imagining you are wondering what this is about?”

Draven huffed “I would like to state for the record, again, that I think this is a bad idea.”
Mon rose to her feet, “Yes, your objection has been noted. Several times.” She glared at the man “And you were overruled.”


“He thinks I’m a spy for Vader.” she answered without thinking.

“What?!” Luke was to the side of everyone else, and he didn’t flinch or give his reaction away in anywhere but his face. Leia watched as the shock waved over those familiar features. There was honest and there was acknowledging that certain times weren’t good to divulge certain truths.

She walked up to the desk, hoping to keep everyone’s attention to her. “How can I be of assistance?” she asked pleasantly while at the same time reaching out in the Force to her brother.

“Luke we will discuss this later. Right now I need you to act like nothing’s wrong.” Draven hadn’t noticed Luke’s reaction, that Jedi training keeping his physical reactions in check, but one glance at Luke’s face would open them both up to a host of questions.

“An intriguing offer was made to us this morning,” Mon said smoothly.

Leia tilted her head “From who?”

Mon and Dodonna turned to Draven. He shook his head in resignation and spit out “The rebel cell on Whiforla II.”

Leia frowned, wracking her brain for the details. Whiforla, Whiforla, “They’re an independent cell are they not?”

Draven nodded, “Yes, they’ve spent the last few months intercepting the local Imperial broadcasts. In the process, they managed to get their hands on the official travel logs along the Shipwriter’s Trace for the last six months.”


Leia was practically bouncing on her toes, and she answered him before Draven could.

“Shipwriter’s Trace is one of the major hyperlane’s of the galaxy. And in this sector, it’s the one all Imperial traffic is routed through. Those logs can tell us the names of all the ships that traveled on it. The communications between ships, where the ships were when they placed those calls, and the places where those ships have stopped in this sector. The Alliance could use that data to figure out ship movements and supply runs over the last few months. And maybe get an idea of where the Empire thinks we are.”

Luke’s eyes widened “Really?”

Draven nodded, grudging respect in his eyes that she knew that. “Yes, we can also use it to find hidden bases. Their transmissions are coded, but they will be logged from where they came from. We match where all the ships are going and talking with known Imperial bases, and everything that is left-”

“Is probably a base.” Luke grinned “When do we get it?”

Mon shook her head. “It’s not that simple.”

Luke sighed “Of course not. What do they want?”
“Money,” Dodonna said flatly. “They want money.”

“Are you sure this is a resistance cell and not mercenaries?” Luke looked puzzled.

“They are,” Mon’s face was carved in stone

“Then why are they charging us?”

“Because they aren’t stupid.” Draven said.

“Draven,” Dodonna said, impatience in his tone.

He shook his head, “No, they want the Empire off their world. I can’t fault them for that being their primary goal.” And he shot the other two a glare “And just because they were on the other side of the Clone Wars doesn’t make them a less valuable ally or resource.”

Dodonna sighed “This isn’t about that.”

Draven’s eyes were bitter “Oh, of course not.”

Dodonna sneered “We cannot do what they want, and it would be counterproductive for us to try. We barely have the resources to conduct the guerrilla operation we are running now. We do not have the resources to hold a planet against the entire Imperial Navy.”

Draven gritted his teeth “I know that. But it doesn’t change the fact that the Alliance is being shortsighted in our treatment of this group. And the other ones like it.”

As much as she hated to admit it, Draven was right. This was the kind of thinking that lead to the fall of the Old Republic. And the circumstances that allowed the First Order to rise. As people retreated more and more on themselves the fringes of the galaxy had gone looking for any stability they could. But Dodonna wasn’t wrong either, as it stood now the Alliance didn’t have the resources to hold a planet, even one so far out into the Rim. It would be an exercise in futility. That didn’t mean they should leave those groups without any support.

Luke interrupted again “So why contact us?”

Leia sighed “They are rather independent, but they are affiliated with us in the loosest sense. Any blow against the Empire is something they want.”

Dodonna’s smile was bitter, “And the money.”

Mon’s voice was icy, “The money wasn’t their idea.” All of them turned to look at her. Mon’s mouth curled up in a small smirk. “When they contacted us, I was in the room when the transmission was received.” At Luke’s puzzled look she elaborated “Given how frayed our relationships are with most of these groups I find that it’s helpful from time to time to step in personally and soothe what tempers I can.”

“I really wish you would stop doing that Mon,” Draven complained. “You know the Empire has set up several of these groups as traps to lure you into confirming your location.”

She waved her hand in dismissal “The risks are minimal and I am one of the public, and more importantly civilian leaders of this rebellion. It’s worth it.”

When Draven made no counter to that she went on “When they made the offer, of course, I told them we would be more than willing to pay for such valuable information.”

Mon’s smile was sad “They still need to eat. And buy supplies. While I understand the general state of our current abilities, that doesn’t mean we can’t return a favor for a favor.”

Draven’s eyebrow went up “You mean it was a way to give them the help that the Alliance Leadership couldn’t wiggle out of.”

Mon clucked her tongue in disapproval “So cynical Draven. We offer what help that we can.”

This was the kind of thinking that led Mon to become the first Chancellor of the New Republic. Between this ability and her own personal charisma, she had held the government together for a long time. Too well in fact, because she had helped mask some serious flaws in its operations when her replacement proved to be not as gifted as she. None of this explained Leia’s presence though.

“So where do I come in?” Leia asked.

Mon smiled. “We need someone to go get it. The data is too big to send over transmission in subspace. We don’t want them to think we are trying to tell them what to do. In the public eyes, you’re a civilian, like your Father and Mother. But you are trained to handle yourself.”

Luke snorted “When she isn’t throwing herself in front of blaster bolts.”

Dodonna gave him a reassuring smile “That’s why you are going with her.”

“I’m not a civilian.”

“No,” Mon said “but you are a pilot, not a field commander. They aren’t going to be as hostile to your presence.”


Leia piped up “Whiforla was a contested planet in the Clone Wars. Sending a clone for this would be counterproductive.”

Luke shook his head “He is not going to be happy about that.”

“That is the same reason Obi-Wan was not considered for this mission either.” Dodanna interjected.

“I’m high profile enough to prove we are taking them seriously,” Leia said.

Mon nodded, “It’s also an easy mission. To ease you into things.” Leia blinked in surprise. Mon gave her a sad smile. “I’m aware we are not using you to your full capabilities, Leia.”

Draven snorted at that. Leia’s eyes narrowed, she had thought her parents were causing her absence from these missions. Not that they would directly ask for her to be taken out of rotation, but they were friends with a lot of people on the council. Those people, in turn, might be responding to her parent’s unspoken fears about her safety. Leia was perturbed to realize that this current situation had more to do with Draven’s influence.

“Wow,” Luke sent “he really doesn’t trust you.”

“I’m aware.” Leia sent bitterly.

“When do we leave?” She asked out loud.
“We’ve arranged someone to take you there and back,” Mon said. “You will be meeting them in the hanger in twenty minutes.”

Leia nodded “I assume Threepio and R2 are coming?”

“Unless you’ve spontaneously created the ability to speak in pitches higher than you can hear yes.” Draven sniped.

Mon and Dodonna glared at him, and she and Luke quickly beat a retreat before this got any more awkward.

As they walked to their quarters to grab their to go-bags Luke complained bitterly. “When I joined up with the Rebel Alliance I didn’t think I would be playing courier.”

Leia gave him a punch in the arm “I don’t care, I’m getting off this base!!”

“Restless much?” Luke’s grin was infectious and she gave him one in return.

“I am not made to do paperwork.” She said solemnly. They came to split in the hallway. Luke went down to his quarter’s and Leia to hers.

“A spy? Vader’s spy?” Luke’s voice was still incredulous.

Leia sent her frustration and anger at Draven to him.

There was a pause “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“First off, this is a secret in my life, not yours” she sent defensively, worried about his perception that she was lying to him again.

“I know, but why didn’t you tell me?”

“I can handle it.”

Luke’s voice was exasperated “Yes, so well that he’s managed to ground you for the last few weeks.”

“Most of that time I was on medical leave anyway.”

“Leia!”

She sighed “There is nothing I can do about it, Luke. Mon assured me most of the council doesn’t believe him. All I can do is go forward and make sure this doesn’t hit you.”

Leia’s quarters were further out than Luke’s, so when she arrived in the hanger she wasn’t surprised to see that he had beaten her there. She found him looking wistfully at his X-Wing.

“This is important,” she told Luke as she came up behind him, “It’s not terribly exciting-”


“The Force willing” she conceded. “this will be very boring. But it is necessary.”
“I know, I know.” He sighed “I was just hoping for an outlet for all this anger.”

Han’s voice floated up from behind them, “You two ready to go?”

Luke looked at him startled “You’re our ride?”

Han shook his head “You seriously thought I let you two wander off planet without me?” Han snorted. “Like that was going to happen.”

“Where’s Chewie?” Leia asked.

Anger crossed Han’s face “He’s too conspicuous. We are making several stops between here and Whiforla, and all of them are in major trade areas. A free Wookie will attract too much attention.”

Leia felt her breath whoosh out of her lungs. She remembered, of course she remembered, that the Wookie’s were enslaved now, but she had forgotten the realities that would impose on Chewie’s movements in this time.

Luke’s face reddened “That’s not fair.”

Han shrugged “It’s the way of the galaxy.”

Leia snarled “Not for long,”

Han blinked at the ferocity of her tone “Let’s just stick to going to Whiforla today okay? You can declare war on all injustice in the galaxy tomorrow when your calendar is free.”

The joke was on him, Leia was always at war in one way or another.

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfykampfer and Aeyancat

Translation into Russian available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Chapter Notes


See the end of the chapter for more notes

The only regret that Leia had in their quick leaving was the fact that she wouldn't have time to personally see her parents and tell them goodbye. She knew the value of such things, especially given, from her parent's point of view, this was a very new experience for them. Given her long life, Leia didn't view it as superstitious to say “Goodbye” and “I love you” before a mission, it was just practicality.

Threepio informed her, as she asked about their whereabouts, they were both in meetings that could not be disturbed. She left holo messages on their personal networks so that they could access them later. It wasn't exactly the most in depth goodbye message, but she was limited by the fact that she was standing in front of the Falcon, in full view of everyone in the hanger. It was better than nothing, and it certainly was better than them leaving their meetings and finding her gone. At the speed all of this was moving, she wouldn't be surprised to find out that didn't know that she was even leaving the planet.

As she shut off her personal comm, Luke’s worried face popped into her line of sight.


Leia grimaced. Right, she had forgotten that he wasn’t going to come along on this little adventure. “I was hoping you would tell him?” she said.

Having her family again was a wondrous miracle, one that she constantly had to daily remind herself not to discount. Even though she constantly felt the pull of annoyance at the demands and restrictions they placed on her. Leia had spent the last seven years answering to practically no one. She was the leader of the Resistance, and although she always tried to be receptive to criticism and advice, at the end of the day she was the one making the decisions, and people obeyed. She was out of practice, she supposed, at balancing this many people's needs and fears against her own actions, no matter how dearly she loved them.

Luke frowned at her, but he did bring up his wrist to speak into his comm.

“Lt. Skywalker to Captain Rex,” he said.

“This is Rex,”

“Hey Rex,” Luke said in a slow drawl. Han, who was carrying the supplies onto the ship, sniggered as he passed the two of them, a large crate in his hands.

“What are you up to?” Rex demanded in a flat voice.

Luke grimaced, and Leia, in this moment finding discretion was the better part of valor, headed up the gangplank.
She found Threepio standing inside the Falcon, to the right, out of her line of sight from the ground.

“Threepio,” she said, “You ready?”

“Oh yes Mistress Leia,” he said cheerfully “I’m most excited to visit Whiforall II.”

Leia’s eyebrows arched “Really?” Usually, they had to drag Threepio kicking and screaming off any planet.

“Yes,” he said excitedly “The Whiforla’s have a most unusual language. It is a quite difficult to master, even for a droid, but it is beautiful. In fact, I would say it is more like music than words.”

Leia grinned at Threepio’s good cheer, it wouldn’t last long, given the droid’s general anxious state it never did, but it was nice to see him excited.

“Speaking of which, we should spend some time during the journey in lessons on a few simple greetings.”

“Like what?” Han’s voice came from behind her shoulder, as he came up to the door.

“Oh, nothing elaborate Capitan Solo.” the droid said “Phrases like - Well met. We must part. I’m currently not molting.”

Han’s face collapsed into a flat look “Molting?”

R2 appeared in the corner of Leia’s eyes and began to trudge up the ramp.

“Yes, sir.” C-3PO said eagerly “It shouldn't take long I assure you.”

“No,” Han said “I’m just the transport. I’m not going to waste my time learning how to tell someone I’m not molting.”

“But sir!” Threepio protested “Etiquette is very important to the Whiforlans.”

“I find money helps soothes all ills.”

“But.”

Han shot the droid a steely eyed look. “Keep your opinions to yourself.” he snarled “Or you’ll find yourself powered down the entire trip.”

Leia opened her mouth to interject, there was no call for that, Threepio was right, but they could limit the lessons to herself and Luke.

[I’ve been asking him for decades to keep his feelings to himself Captain and had no luck. Maybe I should try that threat next time.] R2 beeped cheerfully then made his way down the hallway.

“You ungrateful little tin pot,” Threepio snarked, chasing after his counterpart, and sparing Han the lecture that would end up with the droid and Han upset at each other. Leia didn’t care how mad Han got at Threepio, she wouldn’t let him arbitrary shut the droid down simply because he was annoying. She had done so in her youth, not often, but enough. It made her uncomfortable to think of it now. Threepio had been the only companion throughout her life that she had that never abandoned her. That unswerving loyalty and love deserved respect in return.

Frowning, Leia watched the two droids squabble as they walked down the hallway, as Han descend back down the ramp to get more supplies. Leia was almost positive that R2’s needling
remark had been purposeful. Threepio had never been good at reading Han’s sarcasm correctly, but
R2 would have no problems picking up on it. He intervened before the situation could escalate any
more.

There wasn’t much Leia could do about Han’s reaction to Threepio going forward but wait. The
older Han had developed a fondness for Threepio, buried but there, though that was after years of
exposure and coming to the understanding his personal qualities outweighed his many annoyances.

Luke, apparently finished with his call, came walking up to Leia. “Rex took that better than I
thought,” he said. “I only got one swear word.”

“Only one?” Leia was rather impressed with Rex’s restraint. Rex was a soldier and understood
orders that came fast. But he also understood that he had made very clear to the both of them, and
Alliance Council, that he wanted to be in on all missions that included them.

Luke’s smile was mischievous “Oh yeah. However, there were many colorful expletives that were
aimed at Mon and Dodonna though.” He rolled a bit up on his toes “I really wish I could see the
chew out he’s going to give them.”

“So we’re not in trouble with him?” Leia wanted to be sure that point was very clear.

“Nope.” Well, now that she knew she wouldn’t receive a lecture from Rex and her parents when
she got back, she let a grin cross her face.

“You know this is all very fascinating,” Han said, exasperatedly. They both turned and saw him
standing there, holding a rather large box in his hands. “But perhaps we could move this along?
You guys aren’t paying me by the hour.”

Leia felt her face twitch “Are you getting paid at all?”

Han’s face flushed, and he shot out a defensive “Of course!”


Han gave them a wary look “It’s creepy when you two do that.”

The Alliance was not anything if not paranoid about the location of the Yavin base. Their course,
plotted by R2, who got it from Intelligence, took them to three different stops on their way to
Whiforla. This wasn’t that unusual, Leia knew. Standing operating procedure was that the only
flights that were allowed to leave the planet directly were the fighter wings, and only then if they
were being deployed on a sudden mission.

Leia could appreciate the caution, but she was wishing for a slight relaxing of the rules right now.
She had been so eager to get off Yavin, that she hadn’t thought this part all way through because
this put her in close proximity with Han for many hours.

She and Threepio were in the galley, practicing the rolling flute like noises that meant “Hello,”
Threepio was right, it was beautiful, even in her botching of his much more melodic singing. It was
also very long, phonetically speaking. Leia hoped that the Whiforlain word for hello just happened
to be long, but since when had her luck ever held? This was going to be a very long conversation if
all their words took this much time to say.

Luke came strolling out of the cockpit, and she felt the wave of fondness roll over him as he
watched her failing attempts to mimic Threepio.

“Where’s Han?” he asked, as soon as the sounds died from Leia’s lips.

“Sleeping,” she answered. “Apparently this is a turn and burn for him.” She focused on her brother, noticing the tight lines around his eyes. “What’s wrong?” she demanded.

“Threepio, can you give us the room?” Luke asked.

“Of course Master Luke,” Threepio said, and he shuffled off, muttering about recharging during this break.

“Luke?” Leia pressed, as soon as the droid was out of earshot.

He leaned against the hallways walls. “I need some help.”

“What?” she asked.

He ran his hands through his hair in frustration. “With meditation.”

Alarm bells started going off in the back of Leia’s mind. “Why?”

He shrugged “I can’t seem to get deep enough to get a clear look at what I’m feeling.”

He had her full attention now. Luke had always had a clear sensitivity to the future that she seemed to lack “You have a bad feeling about this mission?”

He shook his head “Not bad, not precisely. I just have an itchy feeling. Like there is something I’m forgetting?” Or maybe something important is going to happen? Or might happen?” he trailed off, frustration clouding his face. “Please Leia? I can go deeper when you meditate with me.”

There was no choice of course. Or at least not to Leia’s reckoning. “Where?” she asked.

“In the cockpit?” Luke said, a little sheepishly. “I find the passing of Hyperspace soothing.” While not the traditional focus beginners used, Leia could appreciate the aesthetics of the choice.

They settled into the pilot’s and co-pilot’s chair and reached for each other’s mind. There was a traitorous part of her that noted that she and this Luke did this far better than her and the other Luke. She locked that thought away. It was only to be expected. They had much more practice, that was all. This Luke needed help understanding the Force, she was here and could explain things faster this way.

As they settled into that whirling mass where they were both themselves and a “them” simultaneously, Leia took a moment to bask in this feeling. Then she understood what Luke was talking about. Only it wasn’t an image that refused to focus for her. She heard it as a song, one she just couldn’t quite remember the words too.

“Deeper?” her thought or Luke’s? Didn’t matter, it was the correct way forward.

They dived deeper, that song growing ever louder but still unintelligible. Luke was right, there was no danger associated with this, just gentle pushing that it was important.

She reached out, and Luke strained his ears and suddenly they were somewhere else.

*There were two pale moons hung in the sky. They were still floating, but it wasn't in the Force, but actually water. Luke, giggled at the cool feel of it, sliding over their body as they lazily kicked their*
way across the lake.

There was a voice in the distance, demanding that they come back. They didn’t want to. this felt too
too nice and instead flipped over, diving to the murky depths, where that loud voice couldn’t follow.
They breathed in deep, not choking on the water, but filtering-

And both Leia and Luke came up gasping, back on the Falcon, the connection shattered.

“What the hell was that?” Leia demanded.

Luke shook his head, “No idea. That’s never happened to me before when I meditate.”

Leia shook her head to clear it of the ache caused by the backlash of their connection severing so
abruptly.

Picking up on her pain, Luke grimaced “Sorry, sorry,” he said. “That was my fault. I felt the water

go in our lungs and thought we were drowning.”

Leia waved her hand, dismissing the apology. “It’s okay. But for the record, that isn’t what
drowning feels like. Whose ever experience we tapped into, they clearly were an aquatic race.”

“Oh,” then a thoughtful look crossed his face. “Is that what swimming feels like?”

Leia cocked her head “Yes.”

Such wonder crossed his face. Luke was a creature of the desert but he had a fondness for
swimming. Even later in his life, he never lost his love for it. “That is nothing like taking a bath.”

“No,” she agreed “it’s better.” An impish grin crossed her face “First chance we get I’ll teach
you.”

“I would like that.” He sighed and stretched a bit in the chair “So other than the Force ensuring I
learn how to swim, what do you think that was about?”

“I have no idea,” Leia confessed. “That’s a first for me too.”

“Great,” Luke started fidgeting, then quietly asked, “If I commed Obi-Wan do you think he would
give me an answer?”

The distrust and quiet pain in that voice broke Leia’s heart. “Yes,” she said without hesitation, “but
I don’t think he would know any more than you do.”

“Huh?”

She shrugged “The other Luke always warned me about taking visions like that literally. That they
were very subjective, and usually the person seeing it had a better idea of what it meant than any
outside opinion.” She frowned, recalling that long ago lecture “I think he had some bad experiences
with people interpreting his visions for him.”

“Like Obi-Wan?”

“No, not Obi-Wan,” she said, “he was dead by that point anyway.”

Luke’s eyes sharpened with interest. “Then who are we talking about?”

Shavitt, she had really stepped into here. Had Obi-Wan never mentioned Yoda? She shook her
head “Someone you haven’t met yet.” she said, hoping he would drop it.

“No Luke, I can’t tell you this. It’s not my secret to divulge.” Come to think of it, how many people did know Yoda was alive? Her father clearly. He hadn’t batted an eye when she mentioned it as proof she was from the future all those months ago. But did anyone else in the Alliance know that? Mon? Ackbar? Then an interesting thought crossed her mind. Did Vader or the Emperor even suspect?

“If this has something to do with my life—” he started and she cut him off there.

“No, it’s someone that could possibly be in your life. Obi-Wan’s survival here throws that into a much more remote possibility.” She looked at her brother’s set face and sighed “Honestly Luke, it’s classified. I mean really classified, I’m not even sure Mon knows about this. If she’s been kept out of the loop, I’m not filling you in just to satisfy your curiosity.”

Luke remained stubbornly defiant for a moment, then his face relaxed into reluctant acceptance. “Alright, alright. I see your point.” He slouched back into the chair, tiredness written across his features.

They were like that for a few minutes, each lost in their own thoughts when Han’s voice came floating in from behind them. “What are you two doing in here?” he asked.

Luke and Leia swiveled their chairs as one to look at Han. “Stargazing,” Luke answered, without missing a beat. Waving his hand at the hyperspace beyond the Falcon’s view ports.

“Okay. Han looked dubious at that answer. “I thought you were napping?” Leia asked.

He looked at her puzzled “And now I’m finished. Leia, I went to sleep over two hours ago.” Leia flicked her eyes over to the chrono on the Falcon’s panel. She and Luke had been in that trance for two hours? It had felt like minutes. “Woke up and wanted to see what you two were up to.”

“And avoid Threepio's lessons?” Luke said, grinning.

“I do not need to know how to tell these people I’m not going to molt.” Han looked very firm on this point. “I can think of much better things to occupy my time.” He gave a wink to Leia.

“Well, I can see when I’m not wanted.” Luke sent to her.

“Don’t you dare,” she warned, “I do not need you to play matchmaker!”

“Oh, I think you do.” and before she could verbally cut him off, Luke stood up from the pilot’s chair “Well I know Leia has already learned how to say this, so I should find Threepio and start learning too.” He walked past Han and turned around as soon he was out of Han’s line of sight, giving her a big wink.

“Stay out of this little brother,” she shot back at him.

“I was born first!” he sing-songed back to her “No matter how much time traveling you’ve done.”
“Traitor,” she shot at him and scowled. Han caught the expression on her face as he lowered himself into the pilot’s chair. He paused, looked behind him, only to see the Luke’s retreating back as he walked away.

“So you and the Kid okay?” He asked, settling into the chair.

Leia frowned at him, “Yes, why wouldn’t we be?”

“That wasn’t the friendliest look you just shot him.”

Leia huffed “He’s being a brat.”

Han shrugged “When is he not when he thinks he’s right?”

She laughed “Alright, that’s true.”

Han didn’t laugh with her, just studied her seriously. “You sure?” he finally asked hesitantly. At her flat look, he put both hands up defensively, “Not that I’m trying to interfere, but those three weeks had to be the most uncomfortable I’ve been in a long time.”

“Really? Why?”

“You said it yourself, I don’t exactly have a lot of friends.” He lowered his hands back down, resting them on his knees, and gave her a searching look “I just want to know if I need to find cover again.”

Leia looked at him, stunned by the admission, no matter how self-centered he tried to frame it. “It’s sweet you’re looking after your own self-interest, but we’re fine,” she insisted.

He looked doubtful “Even with Nakari?”

Leia blinked “What does she have to do with anything?”

“You and Luke are pretty close,” Han looked away uneasy “I was just wondering.”

The light dawned “You think I’m jealous of Nakari? “ she sputtered “Why?”

Han shifted uneasily “I’m just making sure I don’t have to wrangle the two of you again.”


“Luke said you were fine with it, but he’s also nineteen and doesn’t realize ‘fine’ has a lot of meanings.”

“Oh, and your extensive romantic relationships taught you that?” Han’s face fell and Leia cursed herself. That was mean.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “That was uncalled for.”

Han surprised her though. Instead of returning the cutting barb, he admitted quietly. “No, you’re right. It’s the reason why a lot of them ended.” Well, this was her day to step all over everyone’s feelings, wasn’t it? He was trying to communicate, however inarticulately, his worry for her and Luke, and she had slapped him down. Oblivious to her inner criticism, Han went on, looking down at his hands. “It’s why I want to make sure that the Kid doesn’t repeat my mistakes.”

Leia bit her lip. Luke was right, she needed to give him something. She was hurting him with
constantly hiding behind her brother. And intentionally hurting Han was something that Leia could not let stand.

But she couldn’t tell him the truth. He would have questions, so many questions, and now was not the time to get into any of it. But she could give him something. “Luke and I are never going to happen.”

He froze at that, his head still looking down at the Falcon’s console. Leia could feel his mind whirling, even from over here, and for one wild moment she thought about reaching out and taking his hand, and confess everything.

Still not looking at her he reached up, and oh so nonchalantly started fiddling with the Falcon’s controls. “Really?” he asked, trying so hard to appear impartial to her answer.

She rolled her eyes. Who did he think he was fooling? “Really.” she said firmly “Never.”

He didn’t say anything, at first, just continued to fiddle with the controls. Then a long sigh escaped him and he looked back up at her “Okay then.”

They sat there in a comfortable silence for a few moments, then the proximity alarm went off. Han cleared his throat.

“We are about to hit Deveron.” he offered.

Leia nodded, “Okay. I’ll go get R2 to plug in the next part of our route.” She started to rise from her chair.

“Leia-” Han looked at her seriously, “Why are you doing this?”

Leia felt her eyebrow rise “Because if I don’t we don’t know where we are supposed to go next.”

He shook his head, “Not that. I meant this.” he waved his hands around “Why are you fighting this lost crusade?”

She felt her spine stiffen. “I wouldn't be in this fight if I didn’t think we could win Han,” Leia said patiently.

He swiveled the chair to look at her head on. “You seem to have a thing for lost causes.”

Her eyebrow arched “Based on what?”

“You like me don’t you?” he said.

“You are not a lost cause!” she snapped, furious at that semi-serious tone of his.

He blinked at that and a look of such pleasure crossed his face it stole Leia’s breath right out of her. When had she become so important to his sense of self? Why hasn’t she noticed this? And more importantly, did this mean what she thought it meant about the current state of his feelings for her.

Panic clogged up in her throat, she wasn’t ready for this. Yes, she missed Han, but she wasn’t ready to open herself in any honest way to this man. But she didn’t have the strength to turn him away.

She needn’t have worried, that look of pleasure slid away, and then doubt crept across his face. “We’re just going to have to agree to disagree on that one.”
Aware of how close this all had almost become a disaster, she managed to summon a tremulous smile. Han didn’t look like he bought it completely, but he didn’t comment on it. “I don’t know, I think I can get you to my way of thinking.”

He gave her a flirtatious smile, the public one, not the smaller private one and said “Might take a while.”

While she wasn’t ready to jump into anything with this, he wasn’t allowed to think he could slink away either. “Yes, and you are just running into the night screaming to get away from me.”

He didn’t have an answer to that, just a warm smile, and he turned to drop them out of hyperspace. Leia went to find R2.

Whiforla II was a beautiful world from space.

But as the Falcon moved closer and closer to the capital city of Hishic, the lurid purple fauna, framed nicely by green moss, became dirtier and dirtier. Even through the Falcon’s view screens, she could see those clear, almost white skies, become blackened with ash and smog.

Even if she had been given no background history of this planet, Leia could tell it was an Imperial occupied world. By the time they landed in the main port, the pollution made it so you could only see at best a few feet in front of her. Leia sighed, another world ravaged with no care for the consequences. As if it wouldn’t take the simplest steps to prevent this from happening. It was a yet another subtle dig to the people of this planet that they didn’t matter, their world didn’t matter, it was meant only to be used by the Empire.

Han brought them into the dock, giving the station master one of his false ID names for the Falcon.

Leia’s eyebrows shot up as he called it in “Serenity?” she asked “Really?”

Han shrugged “It’s not hard to remember. It's also not that remarkable, lot’s of Captain's give their ships names for what they hope their life will be. Like the Valiant, or Truth, or the Dodger. It’s a common spacer superstition thing,” Han made a face “The worse Captains are the ones who name it after their spouse. They always get very weird about their ships.”

“And you don’t?” Luke cut in.

Han turned the Captain's chair to face him “Hey, my ship is one of a kind, of course I’m protective.”

Luke’s face didn’t even break as he said smoothly “That’s a word for it.”

Han rolled his heads and swung back to park the Falcon in the allotted dock space.

“You two got your masks?” he asked, they both nodded. “Great, put them on. It’s showtime.”

Threepio and R2 met them by the descending ramp. “Oh, Mistress Leia,–” he began.

“Jessika,” Leia corrected. She had actually been given permission to craft her own fake name, with matching identity cards. Given that the woman wasn’t born yet, Leia didn't think she would mind so much if she borrowed her name. “And Luke is Korb Marcus.” Poe Dameron was now on every wanted list across the Empire. Luke has bemusedly wondered, as he had been handed his new ID,
how many names he was going to have during his life.

“Yes Mistress Jessika,” he said promptly “Are you sure this area is safe? The information I downloaded mentioned nothing about these levels of pollution. Also, it looks significantly...seedier out there than I was led to expect.” She needed to have a word with Alliance Intelligence. She didn't want them lying to Threepio, simply because they felt it would lead to less whining on his part. He was grating, yes, but he had a right to his fears, the same as anyone else.

“Not at all,” Han said cheerfully, as he hit the button for the ramp to descend, “That’s what makes this fun.”

His moment of triumph against the droid lasted for all of two seconds. As soon as he breathed in the air, he started coughing violently. When the fit settled a bit, he pulled a rag out of his back pocket and tied it around his face. That done he looked up at the two of them, waiting at the top of the ramp.

“Did you two bring more of those?” he asked, voice slightly muffled.

Both Luke and Leia shook their heads. Han sighed, “Great. Well, at least we won’t get any questions about them. Let’s make this quick and hope we don’t have to run anywhere really fast.”

They headed to the port’s exits, Leia was surprised when they were forced to stand in line to exit through a checkpoint. Just how aggressive had the cell on this planet gotten that the Governor in charge was checking who was coming on this planet as well as off?

“ID’s” the trooper barked, and the three of them silently handed them over.

“Business?”

“Wholesale food cargo,” Han said smoothly.

“The droids?” the trooper asked.

“I am C3-PO, Human cyborg relations.” He placed a hand on R2’s dome “and this is my counterpart R2-D2.”

“The answer protocol droid would have been fine, and shorter.”

“Yes sir, I am fluent in six million -”

“Whatever,” The trooper cut Threepio off and stuck the ID’s into the scanner. Leia waited as one by one they all lit green. Their guard waved them through and cried out “Next!”

“Well, I never!” Threepio complained.

[Consider yourself lucky], R2 beeped [instead of being rude he could have shot you.]

“I do not understand organics,” the droid wailed as the five of them pushed through the crowds, heading into the streets “My primary function is communication and every time I try to do that someone says-”

“Shut up,” Han drawled.

“Yes! Exactly!” Threepio agreed, missing Han’s sarcasm.

“Threepio we will discuss this later. Han stops winding him up,” Leia ordered, half of her attention
on the streets.

Han grumbled, but asked, “So where is our contact?”

“We don’t know.” Luke said, “Draven said they would find us.”

Han snorted “This is a terrible plan.”

Luke protested “It’s not my plan!”

“You sure about that? Sounds like one of yours.”

Her brother snarled something back at Han but Leia was distracted by the sudden feeling of something small and cylindrical against her ribs. She froze instinctively. Her attacker did nothing but wrap his free arm around her.

“Guys,” she said, looking to where Han and Luke and stopped three feet in front of her to continue their argument

“Guys!” they whirled as one, and Han’s hand dropped to his side, to his empty blaster holster. They hadn’t been allowed to bring any weapons that the scanner could catch. Luke just shifted slowly to what her untrained eye thought was a parrying stance. He had his lightsaber on him since the Empire still hasn't updated their scanners to detect them. Luke had been reluctant to bring it, for obvious reasons, and Leia did understand that. She also understood it was a weapon that he could fairly safely smuggle onto this planet. When she pointed that out to him, Luke brought it along.

Leia offered them both a weak smile “I think they found us.”

Two masked figures stepped behind Han and Luke. The one on her side let out a soft trill.

Threepio said hesitantly “He says that he welcomes you to Whiforla and if you would please follow him, he will be happy to take you to the merchandise.”

Leia closed her eyes and cursed the Alliance Council and its Core World centric focus in her head. Multiple times, In all the languages she knew. She understood that they would have a frosty reception, but she hadn’t expected it to be quite this hostile. Clearly, Draven was underplaying the tensions that this group was feeling toward the Rebellion. Although she didn't necessarily think a few soothing word would settle these people right this second, the Alliance lost nothing in being polite.


“Play along for now,” she ordered. She felt better knowing that Luke could yank that blaster out of her ribs. That knowledge helped calm the fear licking up her spine, but it did not dissipate it entirely. This was hardly an auspicious beginning.

She deliberately kept her posture relaxed and told Threepio, “Tell them of course. We didn’t travel this far for nothing.”

Luke hissed something under his breath, and Han, keeping a cool head, murmured something soothing to him. Luke grudgingly shifted out of the fighting stance he adopted. Leia sent a thought of small thanks to whatever was listening that Rex wasn’t here. He would have shot this man the second he realized what was going on and then they would be even more screwed.

Threepio spoke in that high pitched language. She heard a grunt from her companion and was
subtly pushed forward. Leia kept her focus on her surroundings, wary of Imperial entanglements. Yes, these...men? Or were they women? They were masked, so it was hard to tell, but given the oddly jointed gait she felt at her side, she didn’t think they could pass for human. Stormtroopers took a dim view of “non-human” creatures, hassling the human looking ones. Especially for her, since she was small, and currently very fragile looking.

She shouldn’t have bothered, near the dock, there were plenty of Stormtroopers standing guard at various buildings, or patrolling the streets, but her ‘guide’ was leading them further and further out. Leia saw the buildings become more and more shabby and old until they finally gave way to total disrepair. There were old burn marks, and the remnants of blaster fire scorched along the walls. She was also seeing less and less of the Imperial propaganda posters and more and more of what she assumed was the art native to the planet decorating the broken walls. Leia, with her trained eyes, and familiarity with how the Empire treated hostile native species, assumed they were heading into Hishic’s slums.

As they moved further and further from the docks and the Imperial center, a number of native Whlofrains also increased. They were a tall bipedal people on the whole. Thin too, but Leia wasn’t sure if that was because they naturally ran lean, or the people here were deprived of adequate rations. Contrary to their bird like calls, they were covered in green to blue iridescent scales, giving them a more reptilian appearance. The only feathers that Leia could see were on their heads, in all sorts of colors, covering the entire skull in a soft fluffy down.

Leia hadn’t been given enough time to properly research these people on her own, and the briefing packet Draven had given them was barely two pages of information. Threepio had extensive knowledge, but it was more on the philology of their language rather than their history and physiology. Appropriate for a protocol droid, but nowhere near the level of information Leia needed to feel comfortable in correctly reading what was going on. She sighed and opened every sense she had to the Force. Maybe if she hadn’t been so reluctant to use it when they arrived here, she wouldn’t have been so startled by their host's hostile approach.

Leia wasn’t too surprised by the people themselves. She saw the usual on her way to their destination. Markets, stalls, people going about their daily lives, trying their best to ignore what was going on around them. But there was the flare of leashed anger under all that frantic motion. Not enough to riot, not now, but not that far off.

Leia had spent much of her teenage year’s railing against situations like this. She asked Papa when she was about fifteen, why these worlds didn’t simply rise up as one and throw off their oppressors. Even in the best of times, ruling the known galaxy was a difficult beast. They clearly outnumbered the Empire’s troops. Billions and billions of sentients in this galaxy and the Rebellion could only attract a handful of people out of that.

Papa had given her a sad smile “You have no idea what a war really looks like.”

“But we are at war now,” Leia insisted. “It’s the galaxy versus the Empire.”

He laughed, but there hadn’t been much humor in “No, these are simply skirmishes' Leia. You’ve never seen the horrific casualties, from the battlefield, but also from the disease and poverty following the destruction of a planet’s infrastructure. You’ve never seen what the collapse of an economy can do to a once prosperous world.” He had signed and rubbed his hand over his eyes tiredly “It’s a horrible thing, and I can’t blame most people who lived through the Clone Wars for thinking any alternative is better than that.”

She glared at him, “But they're wrong.”
He shook his head “No, they are not. They are simply weighing their priorities differently than you.”

“Well if they won’t fight, why should I fight for them?” she demanded hotly.

“Simply because they are too scared to do the right thing, is no excuse for you not to.”

Leia was pulled from her revery of the past as she became aware that their guides had increased in number. As they had walked further and further into the native control portions of the city more and more people began following them. For the most part, they were silent, although one new comer did make a sort of chirping noise.

“He wants to know why you and Lt. Marcus’s faces are covered,” Threepio translated.

Han harrumphed “With this air? The better question is why isn’t he?”

“Han!!” Luke and Leia said in unison.

“We’re going to be polite to people who have guns to their heads? Who can’t understand us anyway?”

Leia rolled her eyes “We don’t know that for certain.”

“In Han’s defense, the briefing said they couldn’t” Luke offered.

“One, he didn't attend the briefing, and two, sometimes briefings are wrong.” Leia pushed back. She addressed Han “And it’s not like you’ve never done a business arrangement with a blaster to your head.” Neither man had anything more to add to that so she told Threepio “Tell him he’ll see why soon enough.”

Then even the semi functional buildings fell away as they entered a block that stood in ruins except for lone tall building. It had been a warehouse or a hangar at one point, normally buildings didn’t come with such huge doors on the front. She wondered why it had been left alone when so much around it had been destroyed.

She was guided to a much smaller door to the left side and was shoved through it. She tried to see if both Han and Luke were also being escorted in, but the sudden switch from light to darkness didn’t give her eyes enough time to adjust. As soon as the door was closed behind them they were shoved into a section of the wall.

“Hey!” Luke bellowed out indignantly. Han, apparently chastised by her earlier words, wisely kept his mouth shut.

“It’s alright Luke,” Leia said gently, “They need to search us.”

Threepio relayed what she said to the guards. She could feel a low lying tension of nervousness in them, but they did their work efficiently, patting down all three of them for weapons, and running their equipment over them, looking for any kind of electrical signal. R2 gave a weird fuzzy sounding beep when it was passed over him, but it didn’t seem to interfere with Threepio’s sensors at all. It was presumably hand made since it had no look if any scanner Leia had ever seen on the market.

When they were done, the one who had been handling the equipment gave a short nod to someone standing in the shadows. They came forward, speaking in that beautiful langue.
“Trehhipoi welcomes you to Whiforla II,” Threepio said, So this was one of the leaders of this little cell. Or perhaps the leader, but Leia wasn’t stupid enough to ask for confirmation of that. “But he doesn’t deal with people who won’t reveal their faces.”

Leia reached up and removed the half mask from her face as Luke did the same, “Tell him our apologies,” she said, “but we need to avoid the surveillance droids getting a good look at our faces.”

There was movement among the group, and Leia not knowing enough about Whiforlan body language, used the Force to get a good sense of what was going on. Wonderment and awe were the prevailing emotions.

The leader came forward and examined Luke closely. Trehhipoi let out a long exciting sounding whistle. Threepio answered him back.


“They aren’t about to kill us all are they?” Han asked, wary.

“Oh no Captain Solo,” the droid said, “they are just marveling that Master Lu-Korl was willing to come to an Imperial occupied world. Even here they have heard of how you are the one who destroyed the Death Star.”

There was an excited chirps among the crowd, and Leia noted with interest as the feathers on several heads stood straight up. Trehhipoi waved his hand for silence. He briefly examined Han’s face and finding nothing of interest moved on the Leia.

“I helped too,” Han muttered.

“Your face isn’t the one plastered over bounty posters saying that you did,” Luke hissed back, “And anytime you want to share in that honor let me know.”

Leia ignored them both as Trehhipoi bent down to examine her face. She met his stare full on and there were a few seconds of puzzlement then his shock rolled over her and he took a step forward and grabbed Leia's face in his hand, peering even more intently. Short, angry sounding whistles emerged from his mouth, all musical cadence lost.

“Threepio?” Leia demanded

“My pardon your Highness, but all he is saying is that you are very short.”

She felt her spine stiffen as Han let out a chortle. “Excuse me?” He was puzzled over her height? Threepio spoke for several seconds. Trehhipoi let out a long guttural cry, and Leia felt a wave of astonishment and wariness fill the Force from his people. Now every head she could see had the feathers sticking straight up.

Threepio’s “Oh my!!” wasn’t exactly the most reassuring answer to those noises.

“Goldenrod!!” Han barked.

“Oh yes, it’s just that he wasn’t expecting the one who-” Threepio trailed off “I’m sorry I must have misheard that.” He repeated the earlier sounds. This was why Leia taught herself as many languages as she could. It wasn’t because she was a know it all, thanks for that suggestion Han, but because in situations like this she disliked relying on others, especially Threepio, to tell her in time
enough to understand what was going on. That wasn’t a possibility in this case, given she hadn’t had the time, and couldn’t hear half of what was being said anyway, but it left her feeling vulnerable. She hated that, especially right now, because something about her had clearly startled these people, and she didn’t have the first clue as to what.

Trehhipoi’s eyes dilated and he let Leia’s face go, walking back warily.

“He says he wasn’t expecting the one who defeated Darth Vader to be so small.”

Leia’s eyebrows went shooting up “I did what now?”

Threepio listened to the talk around them, his head cocked as he spat out more of their tongue. Turning to her he elaborated. “Yes, they believe that you defeated Lord Vader when he was sent to interrogate you. That you fought him, stole the Death Star plans and escaped. It’s why they believe your bounty is so high, and why he wants you alive. He wishes to kill you himself in combat to restore his honor.”

Leia glanced over at Han and Luke. Han was just puzzled but Luke’s eyes were very wide with shock. So he hadn’t heard anything like this rumor floating around either. She had been sent because she was high profile, but she was thinking that the Alliance was underestimating her reputation if these were the types of rumors going around about her and Vader.

How far had this idea spread? In that other life, she had been a symbol of what the Empire had done, and what it was capable of doing to anyone that stood in its way. It hadn't been a role she was terribly comfortable with, but she had played it in the hopes that it would help other worlds avoid that terrible fate. Was she going to become a symbol here too? Only this time that you could defy the Empire and still survive?

These were all questions for later. Right now, this needed to be handled very carefully. She cleared her throat, and she noticed the noise caught Trehhipoi’s attention, waiting for what she would say, not Threepio’s translation. Well, wasn’t that interesting?

“Threepio if you could inform our hosts I did escape the Death Star. But it was *after my* interrogation with Vader, I most certainly didn’t ‘defeat’ him in anything.”

Threepio did as she requested. Trehhipoi listened, quiet, but his men chattered angrily at the droid. Again their leader waved them to silence, and he addressed Threepio.

“No,” Threepio said, not waiting for him finish, but translating along as the Whiforlian spoke “you’re alive. Nobody walks away from Vader when he sets his sights on you.” He said a few more things and then in a distressed voice added “I think there might be some cultural issues going on here that I don’t fully understand. But to the best of my understanding is that to a Whiforlian, if you survive an encounter with a sworn enemy, you are victorious. To deny such a victory is an affront to you…” The droids voiced trailed off “Or possibly the gods. There is some idiom use here I’m not that familiar with.”

“We get it,” Han said, “You don’t actually speak six million forms of communication. Just five million, nine hundred-”

“Han,” Leia said, cutting off Han’s teasing of the droid. She met Trehhipoi’s eyes again, he was watching her, eyes intent on what she would do. Alright, she would take this, she didn’t agree with their interpretation, but who was she to knock down their cultural norms? She did wonder though what exactly was the difference between an enemy and a sworn enemy to these people.
“We are not enemies.” Vader’s declaration from their last conversation suddenly floated through her head. She shoved that memory away, that’s what he thought. She was going to hold on to her interpretation of their relationship.

“Now that bit of info has been cleared up,” Luke offered in a falsely cheerful voice, “shall we talk about travel logs?”

If Leia hadn’t been looking straight at him she might have missed the slight movement of Trehhipoi’s mouth. But she did see, and silently added it to her list about him.

The negotiations themselves were pretty short. Mon had already hammered out most of what this group would be receiving before they left Yavin. The only issue was who would get what when. It was finally agreed upon that two of them would remain here as ‘leverage’. Han, predictably, objected to that part of the plan the most. He wanted to only leave one of them behind. And two of them would go with a group of Trehhipoi’s men to retrieve the credits and supplies. He lost that argument but won the one that before anyone went anywhere R2 would verify that the data on the disk was real. The Whiforlains had bristled at that, but Trehhipoi was surprisingly sanguine about it, giving his consent and handing over the data disk.

Then it was an argument to who would go with the independent Rebels. Han won by virtue of spitting out “It’s my ship, and I control who and who does not come on it.” His face softened at both her and Luke’s side long looks. “Besides, the longer you two are out there in the open the more likely it is you’ll be identified.

After they left, Lea and Luke sat down on the hard bare floor to wait. It would be at least a half an hour before they would make it back, and there was no sense standing around that entire time. Leia looked around her the warehouse, taking note the bareness of the supplies here, and wished there was more that the Alliance could do to help these people.

Trehhipoi, noticing her looking, spat something out. Threepio hastily said “He says this isn’t their main base,” Of course it wasn’t, nothing he had done so far showed him to be anything but competent if a bit paranoid, “You shouldn’t judge their efforts.”

Leia shook her head “Of course this isn’t. You aren’t stupid. I just wish we could help more.”

Trehhipoi bared his teeth and spoke in jabbing noises. Beside her, Luke went alert as he caught the immediate anger and pride that was coloring the Force. Leia felt a small smile drift on her lips. So she had been right “So you do understand basic.” she said, addressing him directly, cutting him off mid sentence.

Trehhipoi stopped speaking, and his eyes met hers, and then gave a small nod of his head. He muttered something in his own tongue and Threepio offered. “Of course he understands basic.”

Beside her, Luke offered a bitter sounding, “Oh, of course.”

There was a series of harsh and fast pace flute like noises. Before Threepio could say anything Leia placed a hand on Luke’s arm. “Easy Luke,” she said the turned to the angry chittering Whoflorian “My apologies for my companions outburst. He wasn’t directing it at you, but at the intel we were given before we left. We were told that your physiology did not allow you to hear the tones in our speech.”

Trehhipoi’s angry noises stopped, as he considered what Leia said.
“You are aware our ears hear less than half of what you say?” she asked.

Trehhipoi gave a jerky nod, the gesture looking odd. Probably something in his bone structure in the neck that made the movement difficult for him. At what point did he spend enough time around humans to be fluent in both basic and their body language? Given the rough treatment at the hands of the Empire Leia sincerely doubted it was a happy story.

“Our intel on your species is very sporadic. Apparently, some analyst somewhere decided since we couldn’t hear what you say the reverse must be true.”

Trehhipoi spat on the ground at that. Well, she didn’t need Threepio's translation of that gesture. Just how badly had the Alliance Council treated these people?

Luke sighed beside him “The core worlds may inhabit the center of the galaxy, but that doesn't mean they are the center of the galaxy. It was a stupid assumption to make. Leia’s right, I was angry at our intel, not you.”

Trehhipoi swung his gaze to Luke.“You are not from a core world?” Threepio asked.

Luke shook his head “No, I’m from Tatooine.”

“I have never heard of it. Where is that?”

Luke gave a bitter laugh “It’s on the Outer Rim, in Hutt controlled space.”

There were several clicks and Trehhipoi placed his hands over his eyes. Threepio “It’s a sign that he wishes he could unsee such evil.”

Luke snorted “No kidding.”

Jabba was someone Leia would dearly love to kill again. She hadn’t been exaggerating when she told Vader she valued almost the entire galaxy over him. Jabba was one of those things that she valued less. Say what you wanted about the man, Vader didn't actually take any pleasure in the harm he inflicted, Jabba did. Jabba had also been at this a lot longer than Vader had even existed.

Leia wondered, not for the first time if it would be worth it for the Alliance to put more pressure on the Hutt and Imperial Alliance. It was far more damaged here than it had ever been in her original timeline. Shattering that alliance would also help their own cause. It would make the Hutt’s vulnerable, show the people in that territory they weren’t forgotten, and put incredible strain on the Empire’s resources. Or it could lead to the Empire declaring war on the Hutt’s, which would result in a lot of dead Hutt’s, but it would also lead to more civilian casualties in the Outer Rims then last time.

And thinking of how the Core and Mid-Rim worlds essential cut the Outer Rim out during the construction of the New Republic, Leia wondered if deviating too far from the original timeline, in this case, would do more harm than good. She didn’t have enough pull now, or the perceived experience to argue effectively for any kind of real effort put into securing the Outer Rim as allies. Luke would be willing to help her she was sure. He had argued passionately last time for the rights of those people, and Leia, in her arrogance, hadn't listened to him telling her about how easy it would be for the Galaxy to forget the territories. That there was a long history of the Old Republic doing exactly that. Leia had dismissed his concerns. So many members of the Alliance, not the leadership, but the bulk of their forces, had come from that section of space. She knew there was no way that those people would be cut off and left adrift. She wouldn't be making that mistake again.
Trehhipoi lowered his hands then let out, what sounded to Leia, something a little less hostile. Threepio offered “His people don’t need the Alliance's pity.”

Leia put her hands out in apology “It’s not pity. It’s sorrow we don’t have the resources to help everyone capable of fighting back.”

Trehhipoi actually reared back, in shock no doubt, and Leia cursed out the Alliance leadership and Draven for being right about this. This was ridiculous. Respect doesn't cost anything but a little effort, and this group had earned it. What these people had done was not easy, and they could have sat on the information and the Alliance would never have known the difference.

These people weren’t like Saw Guerra and his merry band of fanatics, regarding everyone who wasn’t with them as an enemy. With that group, Leia understood why the Alliance had cut ties. But she could see no evidence that this group held the same beliefs. Hell, the Alliance had treated them shabbily and they still offered, however reluctantly, valuable information. Draven was right, this was about the Clone Wars and old grudges.

Trehhipoi looked at them consideringly. “And if you could help us?” Threepio said, “What would you do?”

Leia shook her head “Pretty much what Mon is doing, but openly, and more of it. Food and medicine, of course, a hungry sick rebellion goes nowhere. And money.”

“Just money? Not men?”

Leia frowned “Do you need men?”

“No.”

“Then why would I offer them to you?” she gestured to the data disk in Trehhipoi’s hand. “You seem to be doing fine on your own. I would just give you the tools to expand what you are already doing.”

“And the conditions of this help?” Threepio said, and then added. “If you don't mind me saying so Mistress Jessika, he doesn’t sound convinced.”

Leia shrugged “Don’t deliberately target civilians, and make a reasonable effort that they don’t get caught in the crossfire.” Leia said promptly, “I find out you are doing otherwise, I cut you off then and there. Share any relevant intel that comes your way, but don’t kill yourselves to get it.”

Trehhipoi was quiet for a moment. “That’s it?”


Trehhipoi let out a guttural noise, “If that had been the original offer the Alliance made, we would all be better off.” Threepio translated.

Leia rubbed her forehead “They wanted to control you,” There had been a tightening of the rebel groups over the last few years. Since Mon’s open declaration of rebellion there had been a concentrated effort to bring in all formerly independent cells as one large working cohesive whole. Leia understood where the leadership was coming from, but honestly, Whiforla was too far out to be effectively brought in that way. They should have let them be. “How very short sighted of them,” she remarked drolly.

Threepio cocked his head, listing then said, “He knew you were brave, he wasn't aware you were
Leia let her full grin break out on her face “A lot of people think that. It’s how I get away with so much.”

Trehhipoi let out a noise that sounded to Leia’s ears like grinding gears, but Threepio didn’t let out an alarmed “Oh my!” so she assumed it must be a laugh of some sort.

“Same here your Highness.” Trehhipoi said after he calmed down “That’s why I pretend not to understand Basic. You would be amazed at what people say.”

Not really, even on Alderaan, there were those of ‘noble’ families who treated servants as if they were deaf, dumb, and blind. How much more could you get away with that kind of thinking if you thought that the species around you couldn’t even hear what you were saying?

Leia’s eyes narrowed “The misinformation wasn’t an analyst getting it wrong, was it? You deliberately spread that rumor.”

Trehhipoi rocked a bit, his glee a bit too obvious in the Force “I can neither confirm nor deny.”

Luke gave him a two fingered salute “Well played.”

There was a noise as the small door opened with loud cries being uttered.

“Your companion has returned with the promised supplies,” Trehhipoi said. Trehhipoi handed over the data disk. She was pondering strategies the Alliance could use, with the intel from now and then playing out in her head when Han entered the building.

Trehhipoi stood and bowed to the three of them. Threepio offered “We have his thanks, and he understands the respect the Alliance meant to show by sending you two. And the risks you personally have taken. Tell Senator Mothma that he is also aware of what she has done for him personally.”

Leia stood as well and offered the bow in return, Luke beside her clumsily copying her. ‘I hope in the future we will be better able to communicate with each other.”

Trehhipoi gave out that rusty sound again and Threepio said “At the very least. But he hopes it will involve killing Imperials, not just exchanging data.”

Han, who was close enough to hear that let out a loud groan, “Please don’t encourage them. They already think they can take on the entire galaxy by themselves.”

Trehhipoi came out of his bow and looked at Han assessing “Is that such a bad thing? The galaxy doesn’t change without a push?”” Threepio said.

Han didn’t bat an eye at Trehhipoi’s direct question to him. He had picked up on that too. “I’m more concerned with the price those who change the galaxy pay.”

Trehhipoi did that strange looking head nod again, “I wish you well on such a task, and let you leave, and continue on all our paths.”

Luke and Leia pulled their face masks back up and headed for the door with Han, and the droids trailing them.

Walking back to the docks, Han’s shoulders didn’t relax until the entered the ship.

Han shook his head “That was too easy.”

Luke groaned “Now you’ve jinxed us.”

Luke wasn’t wrong, they got hailed leaving the system.

“Serenity, this Imperial ship Vigilant. We are instructing you to shut down your engines and prepared to be boarded.”

Han’s eyes went wide and he leaned into the comm system “Uh, this is Serenity. Is there a problem?”

“No problem.” the voice was young and very bored “It’s simply a random search of your vessel for contraband. Please power down all shields and await further instructions.”

“We understand and are complying.” He switched the microphone off and swore. “Great. I want to state that this is not my fault.”

“I told you,” Luke said, but there was no triumph in his voice.

“Yeah, because this is random.”

Luke closed his eyes, then after a moment, they shot open again “It is,” he said. Han shot him a disbelieving look. “I’m not getting anything from that ship except boredom,” Luke explained. Leia reached out too and got the same thing in the Force. Dammit of all the luck.

Han scowled “Don’t use that mystical mumbo jumbo stuff on me. There is no way this is random.”

“Serenity, your shields have not been lowered. Please comply.”

“Of course” Luke added, “if we don’t bolt soon that state of boredom isn’t going to last.”

Han hissed “The nav-computer is still calculating.”

Leia reached over and lowered the shields.

“What are you doing?” Han said. “You’re not seriously thinking about letting them board? Even if you put those masks back on, they will make you remove them, and there is no way they don’t recognize either of you.”

“Well, we don’t have a lot of options at this point.” Leia shot back “At least lowering the shields gives us a few more moments to think.”

“And when the follow Imperial protocol and lock a tractor beam on us? Then what?” Han shot. “At least with the shields up we have a chance to dodge them until the nav computer is done.”

“They won’t,” she said “your ship looks like a scrap heap, remember? They’ll just coast until they are right on top of us. They think even if we do bolt they will be able to catch us.”

“You’re riding a lot on one bored guy sitting at the controls,” Han muttered darkly.

“You got a better idea?” she said.
“We put the shields back up. That will at least give us a shot while I play keep away until we have
the coordinates.”

Leia scoffed “That’s a terrible idea. There are at least six other Imperial frigates surrounding this
planet. Can you dodge all of them?”

“How do you know that?” Han demanded.

“This is why you attend briefings!!” she snapped.

“Can we hide in the smuggling compartments?” Luke’s face frowned as the first shadow of the
larger ship appeared in the Falcon’s viewscreen.

Han whirled his chair to face Luke “How do you know about those?”

Luke gave him a look that seriously suggested he was questioning Han’s intelligence. “You’re a
smuggler? Stands to reason you have compartments too, I don’t know, smuggle things in?”

“Oh,” Han’s face relaxed a bit, then he shook his head. “Wouldn’t work. The manifest says there
are two crew members, and you were both logged as leaving the port. They don’t find you on the
ship, they will do a scan, and that will find you.”

The shadow now covered about half of the view port, and Leia could see the very tip of the
Imperial frigate. Not a cruiser, but still not a clunker either. But thankfully, as of yet, there was no
tractor beam.

Han looked down at the nav-computer. “Come on, Come on.” he urged it, as the shadow grew
darker. Leia felt the hairs on the back of her neck rise.

“Got it!” Han screamed. Leia threw a few toggles, throwing the shields back up.

“Serenity, this is Vigilant.” that voice wasn’t bored now, “Power down now, or you will be fired
upon.”

Han immediately sent them into a dive, heading towards the planet, just as a bolt of green flashed
past the view window.

“Well, that wasn’t a very long wait.” He muttered, banking so that they could pull out of the
planet’s gravity field.

Another shot came across their bow, then a thud as another one hit the Falcon. Then the stars
streaked by as they entered hyperspace.

“So there is good news” Han announced as he climbed out of the maintenance hatch. “And there is
bad news.”

“What’s the good news?” Luke asked.

“We will definitely make it back to Deveron.”

Devaron had been one of their stops on the way here, it made sense that Han had entered in a
destination that was last in the system to cut down on calculating time.

“Bad news?” Leia asked.
“When we got hit on the starboard side.” At Leia’s look of concern, Han grimaced “There is no major damage, but we got a crack somewhere along the fuel system.”

“And that means what?” Leia asked, her technical expertise extend to minor fixes and many many lessons from Han on how not to break something.

Luke’s face twisted “We’re leaking fuel.”

Han wiped his hands on a dirt rag “We’re leaking fuel.” He tossed the rag in frustration. “So we need to inform the Alliance we’re going to be a few days late with this.”

The trip to Devaron only took a few hours.

“Well this looks bleak,” Luke commented from the back seat in the cockpit. He was leaning forward to look up the list of available ports and stations on the planet below in the Falcon’s control panel.

Leia privately agreed with him, but she pointed to the third item on the list. “What about that one? Tikaroo.”

“Why there?” Han asked.

“It’s on the opposite side of the planet from the Imperial garrison.” she said.

Han shrugged “Doesn't mean there won’t be any stormtroopers there.”

Leia countered “Devaron has almost no rebel presence. Why would they be there? The only reason they here at all is because the Empire has a refueling station here. The further we are from that garrison, the better for us.” She tapped on the name and a list of business and services available filled the screen. “By the looks of this, Tikaroo is small, but it does have a refueling station of decent size.”

“It’s in the middle of nowhere.” Han countered, “We’d be better going off to one of the bigger trading cites.”

“Where we’ll be dodging Imperial troops the entire time?” she snorted “You know a bulletin has gone out about this ship.”

“I changed the transponder,” Han said, “It’ll be fine.”

“We are not that far from Whiforla, they will be looking for us. Tikaroo is a little far off the beaten path, but not too far. There’s a decent shot someone there will have the have parts we need.”

“Slim pickings for a mechanic,” Han remarked.

She shot him a look, “Are you saying you can’t do it by yourself? Thought the Falcon was your baby, and only you could fix her?.”

“It’s a two person job,” He leaned closer “Unless of course your volunteering to help me. Be warned though, it’s a lot of hot, dirty work, in very enclosed spaces.”

That was a little too blatant, even for Han’s annoy you till you drop version of flirting. She leaned away from him and her eyes narrowed. “You agree with me about going there,” she said flatly.
Han gave a teasing smile. “Yes.”

“Then why are you arguing with me about it?”

His face was full of open delight, “Because it’s fun.”

“I’m tired, and want to sleep,” Luke said in a bored tone from behind them, “so can you two cut out the flirting until after we’ve parked?”

“Another point in its favor,” Leia said, as Han took the controls to head down to the planet, “It’s going to be night there. We can get some sleep and not throw our sleep rhythms.”

Han shot her a look out of the corner of his eyes “You know you won right? In fact, we weren’t really arguing in the first place?”

“Maybe I like arguing with you too.” she said.

Luke let out a loud dramatic groan in the back.

Han sighed and threw his hands out, “Stop interrupting my fun Kid.”


“Well we aren’t doing anything when we land, go back and start to sleep now.”

“Can’t” Luke whined. Sometimes Leia was really hit with the fact that Luke was nineteen.

“Why?”

“I can’t fall asleep in a ship that’s moving.”

Leia had forgotten about that little detail. It wasn’t an issue for most people in space travel, but Luke swore up and down that he could feel the ship in space vibrating. In that other time, it had taken him months before he could sleep all the way through the night on the fleet after they evacuated Yavin. Clearly, this Luke was still trying to figure that out.

“Well, there is no time like the present to practice.”

Luke blew a raspberry at him in return.

“Oh, that’s mature,” Han muttered.

It was nightfall by the time they reached Tikaroo. What Leia could see from the viewport was not encouraging. It looked smaller than the list of business that was gathered here would suggest it should be.

Han requested permission to dock at the local port, and set the Falcon down, muttering “Not even a covered dock. Yeah, we’re going to find what we need here.”

Leia shot him an incredulous look “Are you now switching to your fake arguing points?”

Han gestured out the window. “Well, it doesn't look like there is much here.”

Leia sighed “Let’s get some sleep. We’ll wake up in the morning, see what’s out there.”
“Yes,” Luke said, standing from his chair “I like this plan.”

Han snorted “You think we’re gonna find anything?”

“I know there are fewer Imperials here,” she said “I know we need to rest. I know we have enough fuel to get us to one of those bigger trading cities you were using to wind me up. I know our luck is as good here as it is anywhere else on this planet.”

“I know that I’m tired,” Luke said, “and I also know you are both being really loud.”

“That’s the plan?” Han said incredulous “Rely on luck?”

Behind her, Luke said drolly “Oh, I don’t know, I think our luck is about to change.” Leia swung her gaze to her brother, but he was staring intently out the Falcon’s view screens, into the open sky.

Leia frowned and swung her gaze to outside to what had caught his attention. There, hanging like two perfect orbs in the sky, were the two moons from their vision.

Sithspit, she really hated it when the Force pulled crap like this.

ABA - Day 96

When they exited the Falcon in the morning their situation looked a bit better. There was a decently sized crowd milling about. Mostly Devaronians, but there was also a healthy mix of several other species.

“Looks like we weren’t the only ones who want to avoid the Empire,” Luke said dryly.

Leia shrugged “Maybe. But there were a lot of hunting guides on that list of business, and we are fairly close to a rather large jungle.” She waved her hand toward the greenery in the distance “Maybe this planet has a big game?” She took in their surroundings. Now that it wasn’t dark she could more clearly see the structure of the town. There were the docks behind him, but unlike Whiforla there was no entry or exit point. It was just a wall, with several open doorways dotted along it. She frowned. Han was right, this was a very bare bones operation here. They might as well have put up a rope instead for all the good that wall did keeping people out.

There was a long row of shop fronts, that extended all the way down to the refueling station. All in all the town itself was maybe the length of the Yavin temple.

Han’s tone was skeptical “Yeah, this looks promising.”

“There is no harm in checking before we waste more fuel,” Leia sniped.

“Let’s see what we find,” Han said.

By mid-morning, Leia was beginning to agree with Han that they weren’t going to find what they needed here. So far they had talked to three separate mechanics and hadn’t found anyone. The first didn’t have the part they needed, the second was a little too interested in their circumstances, and the third couldn’t get to the Falcon for at least another two days. Han was currently talking to their fourth prospect. She and Luke were sitting on one of the public benches on the street, not twenty
feet away from him.

Luke leaned his head against his hand “Wonder what he’ll find wrong with this one?”

Leia snorted as Han’s voice raised, and he started waving his hands wildly “Probably wants us to pay through the nose.”

Luke shook his head “Han does know the Alliance will pay him back?”

“Yes,” Leia said “but that doesn’t change the fact that what he has on hand now is our budget. Besides, you and I both agreed about the second one he rejected. He was a bit too interested in the type of damage we took.”

“Yeah I know, I know.” Luke sighed, “You never mentioned in your recruitment speech that we would be spending time sitting in the hot sun, while out friend tries to haggle with a mechanic.”

Leia was about to retort that she had, in fact, told him there was a lot of boring work associated with the Rebellion when Qui-Gon Jinn suddenly appeared right in front of her. He gave her a warm smile and a wave, before turning and starting to walk down along the row of shops.

Leia blinked, trying to see if that would make him disappear, but he was still there, casually walking through the crowd. Actually walking through them, it was a very disorienting sight.

Beside her, Luke shivered and sat up straighter, “What is that?” he asked in a whisper.

Han, who apparently given up on haggling, was suddenly at Leia’s side. “Ten thousand credits,” he muttered, “Is he insane?” Then he actually looked at the two of them “What’s up?” he said, shooting a nervous look around the crowd.

“Leia,” Luke said gently trying to get her attention, “What’s wrong?”

She ignored them, keeping a close eye on the Jedi as he meandered down the street. He wasn’t walking with any particular hurry, but he had a clear destination in mind. About two hundred feet from them, he stopped in front of a Devaronian woman, given the lack of horns on her forehead. He turned to face her, making sure she was paying attention, and he winked, actually winked at her, before disappearing as suddenly as he appeared. Well, that was the least subtle invitation she had ever gotten from the man.

“Give me a second,” she said to Han and Luke, rising from her seat.

She ignored Han’s indignant “What?” as she weaved expertly through the crowd. She wasn’t running but it was close. She didn’t want the woman to wander away into the crowd.

She was too busy staring into the crowd, looking longingly at some of the caravans that were passing through to pay attention to Leia.

Which is probably why when Leia said “Hello,” she gave a tiny shriek, and whirled around, eyes wide.

Leia put her hands up, “Sorry, sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you.”

A frown crossed the woman’s face. She was taller than Leia, honestly who wasn’t but not by too many inches. She had the two black marks on her forehead, instead of the horns the males carried. Her skin was a pale orange color, framed by brown shoulder length hair. She was dressed in well-worn pants and long sleeved short. Both looked like they had been patched many times, but the
practical boots on her feet didn’t have any holes, so Leia pegged her as poor, but not destitute.

“What do you want?” she asked, giving Leia a look up and down, and coming to the conclusion that physically she wasn't much of a threat.

Young, at least if Leia was going to go by the defensive attitude. “I’m just looking for a little help.”

“With what?” the girl said suspiciously.

“My friends and I ran into some issue with our ship,” she gestured behind her, to where Han and Luke were struggling to catch up with her, “I was wondering if you could recommend anyone in this port for repairs.”

“My father can.” she said proudly, sticking her chin out “He can fix anything.”

“Great,” Leia stuck out her hand “I’m Jessika Pava. What’s your name?”

The girl looked down at her outstretched hand suspiciously, but she did take it to shake. “Farnay”

“Where’s your father?”

Farnay pointed behind Leia. She turned to see a tall, red skinned Devorian stepped out of one of the shop fronts. He had a grim look on his face and a rather large pipe cutter in one of his massive hands.

“Farnay?” he asked, eyes never leaving Leia’s.

The girl huffed “It’s fine Father,” she said, “she’s just looking for a mechanic.” Mentally Leia shifted the girl's age to adolescent. There was just something in her tone that suggested she wasn’t quite an adult yet, but neither, by her physical appearance, was she a child.

“Hello,” Leia said, giving him the warmest look she could. “I was wondering if you could help us?”

His eyes narrowed “With what?”

Han and Luke, who finally managed to catch up with her, came up behind her. Han said in his best friendly tone “Jessika, what’s going on?”

“Farnay thinks her father can help us.”

“‘Oh,” Han took in the general look of displeasure on Farnay’s fathers face, and the pipe which he was still clutching “Does she?”

“What’s your name?” Leia asked the Devaronian.

“Kivas.”

“Well Kivas, we ran into some problems with some pirates and took some fire. We need to replace the fuel pump. Do you think you can help us?”

He looked at them, and settled his eyes on Han, “Took fire from pirates?”

“Yeah.” Han said, “We were making some deliveries to the Outer Rims and we ran into some trouble.”
“Uh-huh.” He didn’t look like he believed them, but he also didn’t look like he cared that they were lying either. “You should report it to the local garrison,” Kivas said flatly, his grip loosening on his pipe.

Han shrugged “You know how it is. They’ll be an investigation, they’ll want to question us. We have a strict enough timetable as it is. We don’t want to be any later than we already are.”

Kaivas didn’t say anything to that, just stared at Han.

“Of course, we are willing to compensate you most generously for your quick work,” Han offered.

“What model?” Kivas said.

“Excuse me?” Han asked.

“What model is your ship?”

“YT-1300 light freighter,” Han said.

Kivas cocked his head “Well that’s an old one. Don’t see those ships too much anymore.”

Han only smiled “It’s Correllian, they’re meant to last.”

“So what part do you need?”

“We’ve got micro fractures along the fuel line.”

Kivas stroked his chin thoughtfully “I got the fuel line hose for the YT-1500. It’s a bit longer than the 1300, but that’s easy enough to fix.” He turned around and walked back into the store he had exited, placing the pipe by the door. Han shot her a dubious look as he took in the dusty and clearly ratty shop. Leia shrugged. Qui-Gon leads her her for a reason, and so far neither Kivas nor his daughter was setting off any alarm bells in her head. Kvas came back out with a data screen.

“Two thousand for the part, and one thousand for the install.” Kivas said.

“Two thousand, for a fuel line?” Han was incredulous.

Kivas shrugged “Consider it a tax on the part for quick work, and the fact that I’ll be filing all the paperwork with the Imperial garrison.”

Han stilled at that “They track everyone who comes through here.”

“Oh yes. Quite the noisy ones the Imperials. But for two thousand, I’ll wait till you leave the planet.”

“Okay,” Han said “Two thousand for the part, but five hundred to install.”

Kivas shook his head “That's five hundred for me and five hundred for my daughter. It’s a two man job.”

“I know. That’s why I’ll be helping you.”

Kivas gave Han a disbelieving look. “You know what you’re doing?”

“Yes,” Han said as both she and Luke said “No,” at the same time.
“Hey, she hasn’t fallen out of the sky yet!” Han protested.

A look of comprehension crossed Kivan’s face. “Oh, you’re one of those.” He shrugged “Deal. It’s probably for the best you help me. I got the feeling you’ve customized it a lot.”

Han gave him a sheepish look and rubbed the back of his neck.

“So where is your ship?”

“Dock 29” Luke answered. Kivas nodded his head, “My daughter and I will meet you there.”

Kivas and Farnay arrived, as promised, fifteen minutes later. Dragging a sled behind them loaded down with supplies, and Leia presumed the part they needed.

She and Luke went over to help but Han waved them away “It really is a two person job, any more people and things get really tight.”

So she and Luke went to one of the Falcon’s landing struts, sitting down in the cool shade offered, and watched as Han and Kivas hauled everything into the ship. Leia couldn't see Farnay, but given the intense talk, she had seen the man give his daughter she had a feeling the girl wasn’t far.


He shot her a lazy smile “I’m from Tatooine. Every planet is cold compared to that.”

“Yavin isn’t,” she said, making a face.

“Yavin isn’t cold,” he agreed, “But it is not as nearly as hot as Tatooine. It is however hot and damp at the same time, which is its own special version of Hell.”

She laughed out loud at that. “Humid, the word to describe that is humid.”

“Of course there is a word for it,” He shook his head, “No, I’m not cold. It’s just this place.” He looked up to the sky, to where the two moons would be visible if it was night. “I feel like I’ve seen this place before.”

“We have seen this place before.” she countered.

“No, it’s more than that. Like I’ve walked these streets, smelled the air,” He sighed “Or maybe I’m going crazy.”

“Could be both are true.”

“Thanks, that’s comforting.” He gave her a questioning glance “How did you know Farnay would lead us to Kivas?” he asked

Leia was surprised “You didn’t see him?”

“See who?”

“Qui-Gon Jinn.”

No comprehension crossed his face, instead, he said “Who is Qui-Gon Jinn?”
She really needed to have a talk with Obi-Wan about what he had and hadn’t covered with Luke. She was tired of mentioning subjects to him, and him giving her that dumbfounded look. “He’s Obi-Wan’s teaching master.”

Luke frowned “Leia, I have no idea what you are talking about.”

“Obi-Wan never mentioned that is his master is still hanging around?”

“No, that never came up.” Luke’s head cocked, “Wait did you say Obi-Wan’s master?” Leia nodded her head “Obi-Wan said he died decades ago.” Anger chased away his confusion “Did he lie to me about that too?”

Dammit all to hell, Obi-Wan hadn’t gone into this? At all? Leia hissed through her teeth in frustration and rubbed her forehead. “No, he wasn’t lying to you, Luke. Qui-Gon is dead, and has been for a very long time.”

“But you said he was still around!”

“He’s ‘One with the Force.’”

Luke threw his hands up in the air “What the hell does that mean?”

Leia shrugged “I never really got a good explanation myself.” Luke’s look of bafflement didn’t fade, so she went on “I just tend to think of them as ghosts.”

Luke’s eyes widened “Ghosts? Of course. Long lost siblings, time travel, not dead father's, why not throw in ghosts?” He groaned and put his head in his hands “My life, how did this become my life?”

“Now that is a question I ask myself a lot,” She reached out and put her arm around, giving him a small squeeze in comfort. “Cheer up, it could have been worse.”

His “How?” was muffled in his hands.

“You could have actually had to talk to Qui-Gon.”

His head lifted at that, “That stubborn?”

She shot Luke a look. He only laughed at her.

“You only get that tone in your voice with people who don’t agree with you, and you can’t prove that they are wrong.”

She frowned, “I do not do that. I am reasonable.”

He didn’t say anything, but she could hear his snickers.

“I’m reasonable-ish.” she amended.

“Yeah, that’ll I buy.” The laughter faded away, and a thoughtful look replaced it, “So that’s what I was feeling on the bench this morning?”

She shrugged “Don’t know. I’m surprised you didn’t see him.”

“Maybe I missed him in the crowd?” he mused.
She snorted “He’s tall, transparent, and has a light blue sheen, he’s hard to miss.”

“Okay then.” That sat there in silence for a few minutes, when the sound of shuffling feet heading their way got Leia’s attention. She turned her head slightly to see Farnay wandering over, a bored look on her face.


“Hi,” she said as she sat down across from them. There was a long awkward pause after that.

“Didn’t you come here to watch your father?” Leia finally asked. She couldn’t think of any other reason the man would drag his daughter here.

Farnay shook her head “I already know how to do this. He just doesn't want me in the shop by myself.”


“No, it’s pretty peaceful most times.” She dragged her hand through the dirt on the ground. “My mother died last year and he’s been a bit overprotective since then.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Leia offered.

Farnay shook her head, “It happened,” she said, trying for non-caring and failing to hit that mark. “But since he won’t let me lead one of the guided hunts, we should have someone at the store right now.”

“He won’t let you on what hunts?” Luke asked.

“There is an animal on the planet, the pikhron. A lot of off worlders come here to hunt them.”

“I see,” Luke said.

“It’s good money. But father says that they are part of the land, and we should leave them be.” She snorted “Like living in harmony with this planet is going to kept us fed.”

Clearly, this rant had been building for a while, if she was willing to divulge it to practical strangers.

“And and they’re being hunted to extinction so it won’t be an option much longer. We should make the credits now, while we still can.”

She and Luke exchanged glances.

“Maybe he thinks their existence shouldn’t be wiped out over credits?” Luke offered.

The girl looked petulant “I don’t either! But there is nothing I can do to stop it, but I can do something to stop us from being thrown out of our home and left to starve on the streets.”

Luke didn’t try to condescend to Farnay, telling her she should let the adults worry about it. Luke had been expected to work and work hard for his family survival, at a very young age. He understood, even for the most loving of parents, oftentimes there wasn't much of a choice “Maybe he’s also hesitant to let you go wandering into the jungle, with a group of unknown people, who are carrying blasters?”

Farnay took all of two seconds to ponder that thought, but she shook her head “But I could make us
“Maybe he just wants to keep you safe,” Leia offered, “And he’s not doing a good job of showing it?”

“Maybe he wants to keep me as a child,” she huffed, crossing her arms over her chest. Leia remembered Ben being volatile at this age, but given she had never really spent all that much time around people her own age when she was growing up, she had no real baseline to work from. Where all adolescents this whiny?

“What places do you know?” Leia asked, desperate to steer this conversation too much less fraught subjects.

“Eedit for starters.” The Force rang like a bell in her ear, and by the gasp coming from Luke, he felt it too.

“Eedit’s off limits, and you know that.” Kavis’s voice boomed from the gang plank. “Farnay come here and stop bothering the clients.” The girl reluctantly got up and walked, slightly hunched back to her father.

“No, wait,” Luke said, scrambling to follow, Leia a second behind him. They emerged from underneath the carriage just a beat behind Farnay.

“It’s okay.” Luke told Kavis, “She wasn’t bothering us.” Before the older man could even answer him he turned back to Farnay “Why is it forbidden?”

“It’s cursed.” The girl said.

Han’s voice floated down from the top of the Falcon’s ramp, “Cursed?”

She nodded her head, “It’s said that the old sorcerers of the Republic summoned a demon warrior to help them fight against the machines. But the spell went wrong, and they are forever trapped there with it.”

“Sorcerer’s?” Leia asked, suspicions growing in the back of her mind.

Kaivas snorted “Don’t be ridiculous.” he told his daughter. “There is no curse, and there certainly weren’t any sorcerers there.” Well, it looked like someone wasn’t buying the Imperial propaganda, “The Empire forbid anyone into the temple after they razed it to the ground. The whole area is mined with traps and sensors to keep people out.” He gave his daughter a warning look, “That’s why there are so many pikhron there.”

That sounded like a Jedi temple to Leia, Luke too if she was reading his face right. She couldn’t recall anything about a temple being located on Devaron but that wasn’t too surprising. The Empire had been very thorough in destroying most of the records that held the locations of the old Jedi temples. It was why it had been so hard to find Luke in the future after all.

Luke looked up at her, a challenging grin crossing his face.

Han shook his head. “No,” he said flatly, coming down the ramp and pointing his finger at Luke “Just no.”

Luke tried to look innocent “No, what?”

“No, you are not going to the ruins. We are going to have the Falcon fixed and we are leaving this
planet. Remember, we have—” his eyes flickered to Kivas, who only looked bored “a timetable we have to meet. Hell if I’m letting you wander off.”


“I'll go with him,” Leia offered

“Oh, instead of one trouble magnet running lose, there will be two. No.”

Leia shook her head amused, “You know you aren’t actually in charge us right?”

“I’m the Captain and my word is law.”

“On the ship yes,” Leia countered “but we aren’t on the ship are we?”

Han went with another tactic, “There is nothing there, even if it is a Temple. You heard Kavis, the Empire burned everything of value to the ground.”

Luke got a stubborn look on his face. “Then why set up all those traps if there is nothing of value there?”

“Paranoia? A trap for idiots like yourself? Who knows, but it certainly isn’t worth the risk.” Han tried to reason with Luke “You don’t even know where this place is.”

“Parnay does and we can pay,” Luke said.

“How much?” she said.

Luke grinned “How long would it take to get there?”

The girl shot a look at her father, who looked interested in the ‘pay’ part of that sentence and nodded his agreement. She turned her head back to Luke, beaming, “Two days, round trip.”

“Then how about five hundred credits?”

Han looked like he was about to lob another argument, but Leia asked Kivas directly, “How long is it going to take to fix the Falcon?”

“One day,” Han snarled.

Farnay shrugged “Four days,”

“No.” Han muttered.

Farnay looked at him “For you? No. To my savings? Yes. I won’t let Farnay lead idiots into the jungle to hunt the pikhron. But all your friends want to do is take a look at some old ruins,” the man shrugged “Easy money, and I do have to eat”

“See?” Luke said, “We’ll be back before you even finish the repairs.”

“No,” Han said again, crossing his hands over his chest, “This is a terrible idea.”

Leia sighed, “Kivas, Farnay can you give us a minute?”

Han waited until the father and girl were out of earshot and hissed “This is not the time to be chasing after Jedi ghosts.”
“But it’s important,” Luke said. “I have a feeling about it.”

“A feeling?” Han said, “You’re about to go trooping off into an unfamiliar jungle based on a feeling?”

Luke let out a dismissive noise “I doubt it’s any more dangerous than where I grew up.”

“Yeah except you don’t know where the danger is!”

“That’s why we’re hiring Farnay,” Luke said soothingly.

Han’s arms fell to his hips, “I thought you were giving up this Jedi stuff.”

“No, I said I wasn’t training with Obi-Wan. Those are two totally different things.”

Han let out a frustrated noise. “He’s what’s left, kid. I don’t think you’re going to find another teacher.”

“I know. That’s part of the reason I want to go. Maybe there is data disk, or a scroll, or another holocron there.”

“What the hell happened to all the ones we almost died getting from Grakkus?” Han demanded

“Don’t exaggerate. We didn't almost die,” Leia said.

Han shot her a look “I think you and I are remembering very different missions.”

Luke shook his head “Obi-Wan moved them off the planet for safe keeping.”

Han hissed through his teeth, then turned to Leia “Promise me you won’t let him do anything stupid.”

“I promise,” she said solemnly.

Han looked at her suspiciously “Promise me you won’t do anything stupid.”

Well, he was catching on fast. She pouted, but he didn’t relent his steady silent demand. “Fine.” she said, “I promise.”

“Alright, but if you’re not back in three days, I start tearing the jungle apart looking for you, and I don’t care what attention it brings.”

He would do it too. Leia had no doubts about that. He didn't care that it would reveal to the Empire that there was a rebel presence on this planet. Han didn’t care about the Rebellion, he cared about them. He had also hit upon the one way to ensure they would be careful.


“Way of the galaxy Kid,” Han shot back.

Farnay had their supplies ready in about an hour. Leia wasn’t sure if that was because she was still running her guide business without her father knowledge, or she was just that eager to earn credits. It really wasn’t her business either way.
While Farnay was saying goodbye to her father, she and Luke were breaking the news to Han they were leaving the droids here.

“R2 is useful but really Threepio?” He whined.

Leia sighed, “We’ll go much faster through the jungle if we aren’t lugging them behind us,” she pointed out to Han. He still didn’t look convinced, “Think of it as a bonding experience.” she said lightly.

“I can’t guarantee he will be in one piece when you get back,” he muttered darkly. At their dual looks of disappointment, he huffed “Fine. I promise I won’t hurt the droid.”

Farnay took them to the edge of town on the opposite side of the refueling depot. There were three rather large creatures tied to a hitching post. They were four legged, with leathery grey skin and about the size of a Dewback. There had saddles on them, and several packs attached to each one. Farnay drew up to the smallest one gave it a gentle pat.

“This one’s mine,” she said. She pointed to the other two “You can pick whichever one you want, but I rented those. If they die in the jungle, you are paying to replace them.”


The girl looked at them and then worriedly blurted out “Have you ever ridden a Happore before?”

Luke shook his head “No, but I have ridden similar creatures.”

“Me too,” Leia said.

She gave a relieved smile. “Great!”

The trek through the jungle wasn’t as bad as Leia feared. It was hot and humid, but the canopy was dense enough to cast a good amount of shade. Unlike Yavin’s jungle, this one had hills, but they weren’t too steep, and the paths were fairly well trodden. Apparently hunting pikhron was a popular sport.

Farnay was a quiet guide, only speaking to point out an animal or plant they should avoid if they saw it in the future. It took most of the day to reach the temple, although the girl didn’t bring them to it directly. She brought them to a cliff edge that overlooked the ruins so they could see what they were dealing with.

Leia looked out and could count five towers, in various states of disrepair. Luke looked around with interest, then frowned.

“I don’t see any watchtowers.”

Farnay withdrew a pair of macrobinoculars and handed them to Luke. He put them to his eyes and stared at the direction Farnay was pointing at. He gave out a low whistle and handed them to Leia.

Kivas hadn’t been exaggerating, almost everywhere Leia looked, there were extensive white spines sticking from the ground. “How far do these extend?” she asked Farnay, lowering the binoculars.

“All around the temple,” she said. “There is no way to get in that way. People have tried.”

“There is supposed to be treasure there,” she shrugged at their baffled looks. “What kind of sorcerers don’t have treasure?” That was a good point.

“There has to be another way in,” Luke said.

“Well, we only have a day to find it,” she reminded Luke.

Luke turned to Farnay. “What about the lake?”

She frowned “What lake?”

She and Luke exchanged glances, but this had to be the right place. There couldn’t be two ruined Jedi temples on this planet, could there?

“Was there ever a lake here?” Leia asked, “Maybe in the past?” Just because they had a vision didn’t mean it was of anyone recently. Time and the Force were a funny thing.

Farney looked thoughtful, “No,” she said slowly, thinking it through “but there was a dam. There's still wreckage.”


“About three clicks that way,” she said, pointing to the right.

“Is it in the sensors net?”

She shook her head “No.”


She nodded “Yes, scavengers picked it cleaned years ago. You can still get some of the duristeel that came from it in certain stores.”

“Let’s go.”

It took half an hour to reach. They exited some foliage and it was suddenly there. Leia could see where the dam had once been, it’s jagged edges still clinging to it the sides of the valley. Behind it was a huge crater, though it had the look of being caused by cannon fire then a natural depression. The river that had once fed that lake was now merrily moving through the former boundary that once held it up.


He looked around and pulled out the macro binoculars. He spent several minutes scanning the surrounding area, then he stilled, focusing them in on a spot high on one of the valley’s walls.

“There,” he said, then he handed the binoculars over to Leia. She took them and pointed them in the direction Luke had spotted. Sure enough, there was a small cave, halfway up the wall of the valley.

“That’s going to be quite the climb,” she said, lowering the binoculars.

“It’s going to be dark soon,” Farnay said. I wouldn't recommend trying to climb it now.”
Luke sighed, disappointed “Alright.”

“Great,” Leia said. “Let’s set up camp.”

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The cliff wasn’t difficult to climb. All told it only took an hour until they reached the small cave. Leia peered into the back of, only to see dark inky blackness.


“Sort of?” Luke withdrew his lightsaber and lit it. She gave him a questioning look. He shrugged “I didn’t feel right leaving it on the Falcon.”

The blackness revealed itself to be tunnel walls. “Well this isn’t creepy,” she muttered.

“Let’s get going,” Leia said “We promised Farnay we’d be back before nightfall.

The tunnel itself wasn’t in too bad of shape. There was debris littered on the ground, but Leia didn’t see any major cracks in the walls. They continued on for about fifteen minutes until they ran smack into a wall of large rocks.

“Here,” Luke handed the lightsaber over to Leia, and she was so startled she almost dropped the thing. She had actually never handled this lightsaber after she found out who it had once belonged to. Rey had offered it to her, gods was that only months ago, on D’Qar, but she had told the woman to take it back to Luke, she wanted nothing to do with it.

Nothing happened. There was no answering call from the Force, no visions of horrible things. It was just a lightsaber.

Luke was scrambling up the rock slide. “There’s a hole at the top,” he shouted.

“Can we crawl through the opening?”

“No,” he then carefully picked his way down. “We need to make to make it bigger.”

She gave the lightsaber back over to him. He extinguished it and plunged the tunnel back into darkness.

“Ready?” he said.

“Yeah,” she said, as she concentrated and reached out with Luke for one of the large boulders at the top. Leia would never have tried this on her own. She could move small objects, but she had fallen horribly out of practice with anything large. The only time she had ever moved anything this big, was in the lesson she received so long ago from Luke. Surprisingly it wasn’t that hard to remember how, especially with her brother standing by her side. It wasn’t until she felt him fail about, that she drew herself to the now, as opposed to then. She slipped under Luke in the Force to reinforce what he was doing.

“You’re thinking too hard,” she said.

“It’s heavy.” he complained.
Leia blinked and automatically found herself saying. “How do you know that?”

“Because I know how much rocks weigh?” Luke sounded like he was out of breath. Why was he straining so hard? He hadn’t had this lesson yet, Leia realized. He didn’t know.

Leia felt a grin cross her face. Oh, this was all to perfect. Adopting her most serious tone she said “And if you didn’t know, would it still be heavy?” They were slowly lowering the boulder to the ground. There was a large thump as it hit the dirt.

“You sound like Ben,” he grumbled.

She laughed out loud. “We’ll I’m quoting you, so really it’s you who sounds like Obi-Wan.”

She couldn’t see his face, but she had the distinct impression he was sticking his tongue out at her.


She shrugged “The object is the same, no matter how big it is.”

“The rock isn’t heavy because you think it isn’t heavy?” Luke just sounded baffled.

“Think about it this way,” she said, “What is color to a blind creature?”

“Darkness?”

“No,” Leia shook her head. “It’s a thought experiment. It’s about trying to wrap your mind around the fact that the way you see the world, isn't the way you see the world. It’s the way your mind is interpreting what your senses are telling you.”

“Obi-Wan told me that I shouldn’t trust my senses, that they’ll lie to me.”

“No, they can’t lie, because that implies your nervous system has a concept of reporting one thing while believing another. It’s your mind’s interpretation that is the lie.”

Luke pondered that for a moment. “I don’t understand.”

Leia wrinkled her nose. “When you were a child, did you have an imaginary friend?”

Luke blinked. “No,” he said “but I did think that the jemali were going to get me.”

“Jemali?”

“They were a creature that lived in the desert and came out at night to suck the water from your bones.”

Every time she thought she grasped how horrible Tatooine was she learned something new. “That’s horrible.”

“They’re not real,” Luke assured her. “It's just an old old mother’s tale told to keep children inside at night.”

“Alright,” Leia said “You know how when you were little that the jemali were real? That you could have sworn up and down that you saw one once? That even now, looking back on that memory, knowing it’s not possible, there is still that one second when you go ‘But I saw it’”

“That’s what you need to do here.”


“No, this is very real.” She scooted closer to him and used the Force to tell her where exactly where he was standing. “Look at the rock”

“It’s pitch black,” he whined.

Leia sighed “Do you want help with this, or do you want to point out the obvious?”

“Okay, okay.” he turned to the rock slide. “Looking at the rock.”

“Now say, it’s small, I know I can move it.”

“Do I have to?”

She gently whacked him on the back of his head “Say it.”

“Okay, okay, stop doing that.” He straightened his shoulders, and in a dutiful voice said “It’s small, I know I can do this.”

“Now move the rock.”

He reached out and Leia felt him grab the next rock that needed to come down. He moved it down masterfully and set it down next to the one they had already moved.

“See?” Leia said. “Easy.”

He gave out a bitter laugh, “No, I actually grabbed a small rock. That’s why I could do it.”

Leia didn’t answer him, merely grabbed the lightsaber with the Force and she called it her hand. As soon as it hit her palm she ignited it.

The soft blue light spilled out several feet. It was enough of a circle to see the two huge boulders, gently resting against each other on the tunnel floor.


“Your senses aren’t the only thing that can deceive you. The trick is to learn when it’s appropriate to lie to yourself,” she said.

“I-,” Luke walked up to the two boulders, touching the one he had moved. “But it was small.” He said, “I felt it.”

“And the jemali is real.” She said.

He turned his head to look at her. “Is this how I learned this?”

“I don’t know,” she said, “All I know this is the trick you used to teach me.”

He looked back at the boulder, then her. “Are you sure you can’t teach me to be a Jedi?”

“That is a horrible idea,” Leia said, turning the lightsaber off, plunging them back into darkness “Especially since this is about the most complex lesson I know.”

“Well,” Luke said eagerly, “I should start practicing then. Let’s make a hole shall we?”
After they had moved another rock, light started to begin to seep into the tunnel. After they had five boulders they deposited on the ground, Luke climbed up. She watched from the bottom, ready to catch him if he should happen to fall.

Luke peered through the hole they had made and let out a long whistle.

“What is it?” Leia cried out.

“Come see for yourself,” he called back, then shimmied through the hole. Leia scowled and began the climb. As she reached the top she peered through to see what had caught her brother’s attention. It took her eyes a few seconds to get adjusted to the brighter light, but once they did she let out a gasp at what she saw.

It was the remains of a great hallway. Leia could see the skeletal remains of the roof. If she was looking at this right, they had come to a point that was almost as tall as the great state hall of Alderaan. There was the remains of a beautiful tiled floor. Giant statues, of various figures dressed in the traditional garb of a Jedi, ran down each side of the corridor. She noticed that most of the damage seemed to be caused by a large impact crater towards the middle of the hall. Leia looked closer at the statues and saw the marks of laser weapons. She hissed as she realized that the Empire had come in after the aerial bombardment just to deface the interior.

Luke, at the bottom, said “Yeah,” looking at a severed stone hand laying on the ground, “the Empire really didn’t want anything surviving did they?”

“They are nothing if not complete about destruction they cause,” Leia said.

She hauled herself through the hole, then made her way carefully down.

Luke looked around them, “Should we go through there?” he asked, pointing to the huge stone doors at the end of the hall.

Leia shook her head, “No, best not to open anything like that. The Empire could have left more than just perimeter sensors here.”

“Okay,” he peered down the hall, “There is a cross walk up ahead,” he suggested.

“Let’s see where it takes us.”

The followed the smaller hallway. There are no statues here, but Leia could see beautiful art fresco in between the blaster marks on the wall. She was relieved to see no signs of lightsaber damage though. That was one less atrocity she had learned Vader had committed. At least he hadn’t led the sacking of this temple.

As they walked Luke seemed to grow more and more relaxed. He stopped suddenly and said “Is it just me?” he asked her.

Leia cocked her head, expanding her senses. “Is what just you?”

“The Force, it feels lighter somehow. Fresher.”

Leia frowned, she hadn't picked up on anything like that. Cautiously she lowered the first few
layers of her shields, and she let out a small gasp.


Leia was too busy luxuriating in the feel of this place to answer him. It felt like the cool mountain lakes of Alderaan to her. Perhaps not the best analogy, but it was clean and refreshing, and soothing.

“Ben said there were places like this in the galaxy,” Luke said quietly “Places where the Force seemed to be embedded within it. Some dark, some light.”

“If that’s true,” Leia murmured “it makes sense they would build a temple here.”

“You’ve never felt this before?”

She shook her head, ”Doesn’t mean I haven’t been to one. Just that I wasn’t paying attention.” Or ignoring it, she tended to that a lot with the Force.


The hallway deposited them into the remains of a courtyard. The plants and trees had pretty much been left to run wild, but Leia could see how this area once held great appeal.

There were the remains of a great fountain in the middle of the square. The remaining walls left standing to enclose the space were, like every other one they had seen, scored in blaster marks. The ones they could see anyway. There was a moss type plant crawling up their ragged edges, so it didn’t look quite as desolate.

Leia caught a flicker of movement out of the corner of her eye and she whirled her head, only to see a vision of the walls suddenly intact. She heard laughter and turned her head back to the suddenly intact fountain, happily bubbling away. The grass was at a reasonable level, and she could see at least a dozen different people, of all species, milling around.

Leia blinked, they were once again standing in that ruined courtyard.

“Did you see that?” Luke breathed.

She nodded. Luke walked around the fountain, keeping his eyes alert for anything.

Leia looked around “You think you’re going to find something here?” she asked dubiously. This was a lovely spot, and she would admit to feeling reinvigorated after bathing in the Force’s soothing presence here, but seeing the damage around her she doubted anything here would help Luke. The Empire had been far too through.

“That depends on what you seek,” an amused voice said behind her.

Leia whirled and saw Qui-Gon standing before her, a small half smile on his face.

“Leia,” Luke’s strangled voice came from behind her, “please tell me you see him too.”

Leia shook her figure at the ghostly figure “It’s not nice to scare people like that.”

“My apologies,” he said, giving her a small half bow “sometimes I forget the niceties of the living.”

Leia narrowed her eyes “From what Obi-Wan has said, you weren’t much for them when you were
Qui-Gon let out that huge barrel laugh of his. “That is true.”

Luke who had made his way to standing beside her side, “Leia?”

Leia, seeking to give Luke a few moments to compose himself, fell back on her manners. She gestured to the blue Jedi “Luke, this is Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn. Master Jinn, this is my brother Luke Skywalker.”

Qui-Gon gave a tip of his head “Hello young Skywalker,”


Qui-Gon looked amused at her brother’s fumbling “I don’t bite young one. I lack the physical form to do it.”

“Yes, right.” Luke shook his head “Sorry, this is just a little-” his voice trailed off as he frantically searched for a polite word.

“Odd?” Qui-Gon offered.

“Yes, odd. That’s a good word for it.” Luke frowned “Hey, wait, why can I see you now, and not yesterday?”

Qui-Gon’s eyebrow lifted “Do you think you wouldn’t have shouted in alarm to suddenly see a transparent blue person standing in front of you? If you wouldn’t have, you have my apologies for underestimating you.”

Luke blushed “Fair point.”

“Why did you bring us here Qui-Gon?” Leia asked, cutting them off, no matter how much fun it was to watch her brother flail about.

The Jedi only cocked his head “I certainly didn’t bring you anywhere.”

She rolled her eyes “Lead us here then.”

“The Force led you here, I merely...helped it along.” He looked so amused.


“Answers.”

“Yes, but where?” Luke said.

Qui-Gon appeared to look very thoughtful at that and then said solemnly “Where you look for them.”

Luke’s face fell “What?”

Leia snorted “Well that was both vague and unhelpful.”

A flicker of sorrow crossed his features and he shook his head, “You are still not listening.”

And a lecture, great. “Listening to what?” she demanded.
Qui-Gon ignored her and faced her brother “What you seek is here, but the question is are you brave enough to ask your sister who you could be.” And then he vanished.

There was dead silence in the courtyard, even the birds had stopped singing. Then Luke’s frustrated voice rang out. “What the hell was that?”

Leia rubbed her forehead “That was a Jedi Force ghost being his usual vague and unhelpful self.”

“What did he mean you’re not listening?”

Leia shook her head “I have no idea. He told me that I would fail in this time if I didn’t listen. But listen to who or what he won’t say.” Then she focused in on Luke. “Ask me what?”

Luke blanched and shook his head “It doesn’t matter.” he said.

“Clearly it does if the man felt like breaking from his rest in the Force to tell you about it.”

Luke eyes dropped and muttered something under his breath.


“I said we are going to lose this war because I can’t do what must be done.” He said.

“Luke,” Leia said, voice gentle “you don’t have to become a Jedi.”

He threw his hands up in frustration “It’s not about that. It’s about…” he trailed off again.

“About what?” Leia asked.

He sighed, and ran his hand through his hair in frustration “I know you hate his guts, and I know you would have no problems handling it yourself. But I really don’t understand how I could let myself become that. Do that.”

Leia was so lost “Do what?”

He went on, not looking at her “It’s one thing to wonder if you would something horrible. It’s quite another to learn you actually can do it. I’m just worried about what that means about me.” He gave a bitter laugh “Do you know what it's like to be disappointed in yourself for something you might have done.”

“Disappointed in yourself?” Leia asked, losing patience with Luke’s dancing around what was bothering him “For what?”

“I just don’t understand how I could make the decision to kill my own father. Even now, when I’m so furious with him my head is spinning I don’t see how I could commit patricide.”

Leia’s eyes went wide, “Who said you killed Vader?” she demanded.

Luke’s head snapped up so fast she was surprised that he hadn’t hurt himself. “But you said we won. That they died. I just assumed-” his voice trailed off.

Is this what has been haunting him? “No Luke.” she said firmly “He didn’t kill Vader. Once he knew he was our father he didn’t even try.”

Relief was shining in Luke’s eyes, only to be replaced by confusion. “Then who did kill him?”
“Palpatine.”

Then Luke asked the question that her parents, Obi-Wan, hell even Vader himself, never bothered to. “Why?”

Leia found herself hesitating. She had promised Luke she wouldn’t lie to him anymore about questions he asked about his life, but she really didn’t want to give this answer. She had no idea if what Luke had done last time was even possible to recreate. Vader had given his life to save Luke’s but she sincerely doubted he meant to die in the process. Hanging all their hopes on a split second decision made by an alternate version of Vader was not exactly a good plan moving forward.

But she had given her word, and now was not the time to dance around this. Luke’s needs superseded her own wishes, and he was clearly tearing himself in two about this. “Vader was trying to protect you, the other Luke, from Palpatine.” She stopped and swallowed hard at nausea that rose in her stomach at the thought of Luke, any Luke, dead. “Vader killed Palpatine,” a small satisfied smile crossed her face as she thought of Palpatine’s death “He threw him down a ventilation shaft. Not the most painful ending, but definitely fittingly ridiculous.” That smile faded away as she took in Luke’s pale face. “Vader did it to save you. He died of the wounds he received.”

“What?” Luke’s voice was barely a whisper.

Leia closed her eyes briefly, and then backed up the story a bit. “We were on” she almost said Endor but switched the word out at the last minute “a mission. A very important one. Vader was there too. You said you could feel him on the command ship we passed by on our way there.” And how Vader had missed her presence all those years if it was just as bright as Luke’s was baffling. She pushed the resentment that thought provoked aside. Yes, she probably would have skipped the tortures she had received at his hands, but her life would have been far darker. His blindness towards her had saved her from that life.

“You told me that he knew you were there, and for the sake of the mission, you need to turn yourself in. I thought it was the dumbest thing you could do.” She looked away then, those memories suddenly crowding her thoughts. She hadn’t dwelt much on that conversation on Endor in years. The rage, pain, and hopelessness she had cycled through, and now in the space of less than a month, she found herself reliving that moment twice.

“That’s when he told you,” Luke interjected, interrupting her thoughts.

She nodded, “Both about Vader, and the fact that we were siblings.” She gave a shake of her head “He insisted that Vader could be saved. That there was still good in him. I begged him to run away, but that has never been your way. Vader took him to the Emperor. I never got the full details of what happened in that throne room.” She stopped there, and shook her head, “No, I never asked what happened in that throne room, but I do know Vader saved him.”

Luke got up and started pacing back and forth. Leia let him pace without commenting. This was a lot she had just shared with him. He stopped and stared off into the distance. “So you can come back from the dark side?” he asked, not facing her.

Of course, that was the point he focused on “Yes, but I’m given to understand it’s not easy. And I have no idea how long Vader’s change of heart would have lasted had he lived. But Luke swore up and down that he had left the dark side before he died.”

“And you believed him?”
She snorted “It took years, with a lot of kicking and screaming on my end, but eventually, yes.”

Luke’s voice was filled with comprehension “This is why you thought you could save your son.”

Leia nodded, then realizing he couldn’t see her said softly “Yes.”

Luke was quiet for a moment, then turning he asked “Does Ben know?”

“That Vader died? Yes. That Palpatine, and not you killed him? Yes. Anything beyond that?” she sighed wearily “No. And when I tried to tell him he said he didn’t want to know.”

“You didn’t push?” Luke’s wry grin met her face “You know it would make him feel better if he knew Father repented.”

“It might.” she agreed “But it might not. He could end up blaming himself for not trying harder on Mustafar to reach him. I try not to cause people pain if I can help it, Luke. He has enough guilt and pain about Vader if he feels that not knowing the particulars how he died eases his burden, who am I to say differently?”

“He really did love Father.” Luke wasn’t really talking to her, but himself.

“Loves,” She corrected. Luke focused in on her at that correction “He still loves him, Luke. And that I think is the hardest truth Obi-Wan is running from.”

Luke’s eyes flashed “He has a funny way of showing it.”

“Luke, Obi-Wan is running from his past almost as much as I am.”

Luke shook his head “No. The situations are completely different. You were betrayed.”

“And he wasn’t?” She went over to him and took his hand in hers “It’s your choice to be mad at him, but please be mad for the right things. There is a reason you never picked up on the fact that Obi-Wan wasn’t lying.”

“Because he’s good at it?” he muttered petulantly.

Leia gave him a disappointed look. “No, because it’s true to him. Anakin is dead. Obi-Wan wasn’t asking you to kill your father, he was asking you to stop his murderer.” She looked into Luke’s troubled eyes “He had to believe that, or otherwise the person he loves most in this galaxy turned into a monster. And Obi-Wan couldn’t even stop him, just horribly hurt and disfigured him.” She sighed “Many a person would have broken under that.”

“You’ve forgiven him?” Luke was astonished.

“For that yes. A trapped person is never rational.”

“Then what are you angry at him for?”

Leia gritted her teeth, “For not listening to me. For dismissing my concerns. For taking your choices away. For placing you in danger.”

Luke nibble on his lip, “Do you think I should be a Jedi?

Leia cocked her head “You are the only one who can live your life, Luke. What difference does it make what I want or think?”
He frowned and pulled his hand out from hers “I hate it when you do that.”

“Do what?” she asked.

“Give me a question to answer my question.”

Leia sighed, and put her hands on her hips, “What do you want me to say? Do I think you should be a Jedi? Yes, because I know how good you are at it, and it’s what the rebellion desperately needs right now. Do I think you have to be a Jedi? No. You are bright, curious, and you learn fast. I think you’d be extraordinary in anything you choose to do.”

“But for the good of the galaxy I should?”

She shook her head “No, you cannot live your life solely to the expectations of others and what they want from you. This isn’t some career you can flit away from when you’re bored Luke. This is who you will be for the rest of your life. You never stop being a Jedi, even if you put down your lightsaber and isolate yourself from the galaxy.”

“Unless I fall to the Dark Side.”

Leia’s arms fell, “That is true.” she said.

“I just don’t see my way around it,” he confessed, “I don’t know if I can trust Obi-Wan to teach me.”

“That’s a valid point,” she conceded, “but you need to find a way to let this go.”

“Why? You don’t!” he snapped.

She frowned “What are you talking about?”

“Your anger at Vader, it’s a living thing around you Leia. Even now.”

“Yes,” she said, confused.

His righteous fury faded “I don’t understand.”

“You think coming to grips with your anger makes it go away?” she said.

“But Ben said-”

“Do yourself a favor, do not listen to Obi-Wan about how to deal with emotions. Go to a mind healer, they will give you much better advice.”

Luke pondered that for a minute. “So it’s not the same thing?”

“Not even close.” She walked up to him, “You are allowed to be angry. You are allowed to be sad. It’s what you do with that emotion that is important. I’m furious with Vader, but I acknowledge that, and try to be aware of when it is governing my actions.”

“That’s it? You don’t let it go?”

She shrugged “That method works for a lot of people, but it’s not for everyone. It’s a different way of dealing with the same problem. What do you do with negative emotions?”

“It sounds easier than trying to let things go,”
Leia shook her head, “No, it’s still hard, just in a different way. It requires a lot of self-knowledge and a radical honesty most people can’t bear to have about themselves.”

“Huh,” he ran his hands through his hair, “That makes sense.” He added hesitantly “Is denial why Obi-Wan tried to have Father set up to be killed by his own children?”

Leia shook her head, “No, that was practicality.” Luke’s face fell “He needs to be stopped Luke,” she said gently “and Obi-Wan can’t, or won’t do it. You and I are the best hope in the galaxy to do so.”

“So we kill Vader and suddenly everything is fine?” Luke’s tone was dubious.

Leia shrugged “There might be some tunnel vision going on there. But I do know this, there is almost no way of killing the Emperor without going through Vader first.”

Luke sighed “It was easier to be furious at Ben before I knew all this.” He kicked a rock on the ground in frustration “I much prefer when I was completely right, and he was completely wrong.”

“If it makes you feel any better, you’re still mostly right, and he’s still mostly wrong.”

“No, it doesn’t.” Luke sighed “Did he ever care about me? At all? Or am I just a do over for all the mistakes he made with our father?”

Leia was shocked by the question, Luke had been hiding this pain well. “I can’t speak for him Luke, but I believe he does love you.”

“I don’t know what to do,” he said. “At what point does it become clear to me what I’m supposed to do?”

“I’ll let you in on a little secret Luke,’ she leaned forward “It doesn’t matter how old we get, we all go through life constantly saying that all the time.”

He looked at her so lost. “So how do you deal with it?”

She shrugged “I keep going, make the best decision I can, and hope for the best.”

“Fake it until you make it? That’s your advice?” He looked shocked.

“It works more often than you think it would.” she reassured him.

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer and Acynacat

Translation into Russian available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Hi guys, quick note for those who don't subscribe, or didn't notice, I've started putting up one shots of other character's POV called Scenes from the Middle Game. The first one went up about three weeks ago and it's Vader's POV of the interrogation scene in the Death Star. There are spoilers in this chapter for the book "The Weapon of a Jedi." As always I hope you enjoy.

They stared around the empty courtyard, and Leia looked to the sky. According to the sun’s position, it was mid-afternoon on this planet, they still had a while before they needed to leave. She didn’t want to think of trying to scale that cliff wall in the dark.


Why did he think she knew? Leia looked at him blankly “I have no idea.”

“How can you not know?” Luke squawked.

“Well, it might startle you to learn this is the first time I’ve gone on a quest to a haunted Jedi temple looking for answers for metaphysical questions,” Leia said exasperatedly.

Luke looked at her, “What did you do?”

“Do?”

“After the Empire fell. But before the Resistance.”

She really hated it when she was asked about the future. Then again, telling him this wouldn’t be too risky. He already knew the Empire fell. What harm could this do? “I was the Senator for New Alderaan in the New Republic.”

“Huh,” he looked thoughtful.

“What?” she demanded.

He shook his head “It’s nothing.” His face caved at her flat look “Alright, alright.” He let out a weighty sigh “It’s just not what I pictured you doing.”

Leia frowned. She had been raised to do exactly two things. Help lead an insurgent group to overthrow a tyrannical government, and to be a fair-minded political leader. After the collapse of the Empire what else was there for her to do? “Why?”

He gave her a disbelieving look. “Leia you don’t like politics.”

Oh, well if he looked at it that way, she could see his point. She shrugged. “No, I don’t.”

Now he just looked confused. “Then why do it?”
“Because I’m competent at it and it needs doing.” She gave him a wry grin “I also don’t trust anyone else to get it right.”

“Now that does sound like you,” he observed. His eyes wandered around the overgrown courtyard, with it’s cracked walls and blaster marks everywhere. “So vision quests weren’t a Senate feature?”

No,” She grinned though, thinking of every irritating and self-serving politician she ever had to deal with, mucking through this fallen down temple, complaining about how their clothes were being ruined. “But now I’m thinking we should make it mandatory.”

Luke, catching the implied glee in her voice, grinned back “Couldn’t hurt.” he said. Then he frowned. “You really don’t know anything about this place, do you?”

She shook her head, “If you ever came here you didn’t mention it to me.” She thought about those years when Luke would come to her, flush with excitement with some new discovery he had made in the Force. How fascinated she had been with everything he told her, her instincts telling her to remember everything he said.

“Or at least you never mentioned it by name.” she amended.

“What do you mean?”

“You can’t be tortured to reveal something you don’t know.” she said gently, “He thought it was best not to divulge the place of some of his knowledge. And afterward, when it was safer...” her voice trailed off.

Luke’s face went pale “You found out about Vader and didn’t want to know.”

She nodded her head “I didn’t want to know.”

“But you’re here now.” he said confused “You convinced Han to let me come.”

“One, Han is not in charge of us on the ground. Two, I didn’t convince him of anything, I simply told him we were going. Three, you asked for my help.”

Luke shot her a puzzled look. “Only with the meditation.”

“Which led us here.”

Luke shook his head. “Han’s right. You need a keeper.”

“I am older than both of you!” she shot back “Even when you add your ages together!”

“Well I’m not the one who threw myself in front of a blaster bolt,” he said defensively.

Of all the damn nerve. “Well, I’m not the one who went up in a ship I’ve never handled before, to engage in battle, and had never even flown in space!!”

His face twisted. “I had thirty minutes in the simulator!” He protested.

“Oh, a whole thirty minutes,” she mocked.

“Fine. Han’s right. We both need a keeper!”

They scowled at each other for a few more seconds before they both burst out into laughter.
Leia gained control of herself first. “Alright, he might have a point about us seeking trouble.”

“But we don’t tell him that.” Luke said earnestly “I remember.” He looked once more around the courtyard then frowned. “What’s that?” he said, pointing to one of the broken pillars.

Leia turned to the direction he was pointing in and craned her neck up. There, twenty feet above the ground, was a lever.

“Why is there a lever all the way up there?” Luke asked.

“Really tall Jedi?” she offered.

“Funny.” he reached out his hand and gestured. The lever gave a groan and then slid down. There was a slight whirring noise and a panel opened up at the bottom of it.

“Hidden compartment,” Luke muttered. “Why have that here?”

“Let’s see what they wanted to hide,” Leia said.

Walking over, they both leaned over to peer inside. “Training remotes?” Luke was disappointed. “Why would they hide that? Ben has a dozen of these things, and they aren’t that hard to come by.”

Leia looked around the courtyard again. “Maybe it was aesthetics,” she said. He gave her a puzzled look. She swept her hand to encompass the whole courtyard “Think about it, Luke. This is a nice open area, a great place to have a group of students practicing deflecting the blasters. But where do you put them when they aren’t in use?”

“You bring them with you?”

“You could,” she agreed. Then she rapped the pillar with her knuckles “Or you hollow out a storage unit in the practice area itself, and you have form and function. It’s a rather elegant solution.”

“Seems like a lot of effort to keep things pretty.”

“Maybe. Or perhaps they wanted to keep this place calm. A beautiful view is easier to get lost in then a chaotic one.”

Luke looked at the fountain, “Maybe.”

Leia was about to add that there were several such storage units contained in the walls of the Alderaanian palace when she heard the snapping of a twig. Both she and Luke whirled, him with his lightsaber already in his hand, ignited, and she with her blaster.

There was a rather large grey creature staring at the both of them, startled. It vaguely resembled the Happore’s they had ridden to the temple, only this creature was much larger, and the face was different. It was full of wrinkles of flesh around its large black eyes, instead of the smooth skin of their ride. It stared at them, standing perfectly still.

Leia felt herself relax, and lower her blaster “This is a pikhron I presume?” she said, studying the animal.

Luke shut down his blade “Farnay did say that they came here to escape the hunters.” he remarked.

The creature, seeing that they made no movement towards them, ambled to the far side of the courtyard, and began munching on the grass. It was joined by several of its companions.
“Wonder why everyone is so keen on hunting them?” Luke wondered “They don’t look all that impressive.”

Leia shrugged “A sign of the times. The Empire believes that destroying anything is worth something, and if it’s beautiful so much the better that it’s gone.”

“I thought it was about power?”

Leia shrugged “It’s a side effect of seeking power. The whole system is set up to whirl around Palpatine. The closer you get to him, the safer you are from others, but the more you are in danger from him.”

Luke’s face darkened “That sounds like the slave system. The closer to the Master you are the more valuable you become and the less likely you are going to be destroyed by someone else. They have to pay to replace you. But that doesn’t save you from whatever whims cross your Master’s mind.”

That was never a comparison her Luke had ever made to her. It was elegantly beautiful in its own horrifying way. “Yes.”

“And our Father sits at the center.”

“Yes.”

Luke was quiet for a moment “The biggest perpetrator and victim.”

“He’s not exactly helpless Luke.”

He gave her such a sad look, “He’s still a victim.”

“And an enforcer. The enforcer.”

Luke shook his head, “There is a part of me that is glad you don’t understand what I’m talking about.”

“He needs to be stopped.”

“I’m not disagreeing with that part Leia. It’s just I don’t see the tools we need.” His face grew grim and went over to the broken fountain and sat down on it in a huff. Then he looked at Leia, still standing. “It really wouldn’t bother you to kill him?”

Leia bit down her instinctive no. He wanted her to think about this, not give a pat answer “Probably not.” she admitted. “But there is a long history there between us. None of it good.”

Luke’s head cocked “Between you and the other Vader.”

“Excuse me?”

“You and the other Vader.” He clarified “I’m assuming this one hasn’t done the same things to you?”

Well, he had nearly choked her to death. But she had deliberately provoked him, so all things considered she had gotten off fairly lightly with this Vader. “No.”

“And it still wouldn’t bother you? To kill this one?”
“He’s still capable of it!” she argued. “The only reason he isn’t recreating what he once did is that he knows I’m his daughter.”

“Yes,” Luke said slowly. He pondered that for a moment, then looked at her straight in the eye. “You’ve never told me that I had to kill him.”

“Of course not,” she said, indignant.

“But you don’t agree with me on trying to find another way.”

“No, I think it’s the height of foolishness.” She shrugged “But I thought it was the height of foolishness to surrender to him too, and that worked out fairly well, so what do I know?” She looked Luke straight in the eye “What I want is for you to make the choice that you feel is right.”

His eyes narrowed “He took away my choices,” he murmured.

“Pardon?”

Luke stood up and came back over to her. “That’s one of the reasons you gave for your anger at Obi-Wan. He took away my choices.”

“He did!” Leia was still more than a little angry with Obi-Wan about that.

Luke’s face grew grave and he gently grasped her hand, squeezing it in comfort. “Did someone take yours away?”

Leia stiffened. “It’s not like it would have torn me up find out I killed my biological father. Especially this biological father.”

Luke shook his head “No, but it would have devastated you to think you were viewed as a weapon, and that only. Because it would play into the worst fears you harbor about yourself.”

Leia shifted uneasily on her feet. This mix of the wise Luke and young Luke was disorienting. He was making similar arguments that he had once made to her many times. But they weren’t exactly the same one, and the difference was resonating with her much more than his original argument. “Which is what?”

“That all you are meant for is the fight.”

Leia lifted her chin up, meeting his gaze squarely. “I rather prefer peace, thank you very much.”

“No, not war Leia. The fight. You love to fight. Fists, words, hell even moral questions, it’s all the same to you.”

She puzzled over that. “That makes me sound like a horrible person.”

“Why?” he asked.

“That I reject peace.”

Luke snorted “Peace, at least in the long term is an illusion. It’s an oasis that you stop in, but you can’t live there. Life, from birth to death is the fight.” He shook his head “For all your understanding I think that fact alludes you. Grow up in a desert, it will teach you very quickly the true meaning of struggle.”

This at least was familiar ground. Luke had said this to her many times.
“It’s not like people on other worlds don’t have it rough,” she offered as a counter argument.

His lips twitched, “See what I mean? You agree with me, but you’re arguing with me simply to see the flaws in my statement.”

Leia grinned “My tutors called it critical thinking.”

Luke drawled out his outer rim accent “Well that just sounds like a fancy way to pick something apart clean to the bone.”

She laughed, as he meant her too. But the good mood didn’t last long.

Luke’s face sobered and he drew in a deep breath. “I don’t want to be him Leia, but I don’t see any other way around it.”

“Just don’t go on any killing sprees and you’ll be fine,” Leia suggested glibly.

He scowled at her. “I’m being serious Leia, I do want to stop the Empire. But the best way for me to do that is to train as a Jedi.” Leia opened her mouth to refute that point and he shook his head, “I said best, not only. But what if that is the kind of thinking that started him on his path? What if I’m copying his mistakes?”

She doubted that, she sincerely believed Vader didn’t care much about anything outside his own limited circle. But enough was enough, she had let him stew and think things through. She had thought that now that he understood patricide was not required he could find some peace with this. All she was reading off him was an ugly roll of pain, fear, and worry. Time to get to the bottom of this. “Ok, let’s make this simple. Why did you want to be a Jedi?” Leia asked.

Luke’s face grew frustrated “You know why.”

“Tell me again.”

“Because of our father.”

Leia snorted, no wonder he was tripping all over himself. “No.”

Luke’s voice was belligerent “What do you mean no?”

“That isn’t the reason why.”

Luke’s face grew angry “I wanted to be connected to him alright? I know you have a father,” and oh how that sentence reeked of jealousy “and can’t understand this, but I wanted to be connected to my blood.” He kicked a small rock in front of him “I wanted to be connected to him.”

Leia’s heart broke “You didn’t know what he had become. There is nothing wrong in looking up to Anakin Skywalker. From what I understand he did a lot of remarkable things.”


“It’s entirely possible he’s telling the truth about that.”

Luke’s eyes darkened at that. “Oh, and Obi-Wan and the truth are such strong companions.”

She sighed. Time to move off that thread, it was only making Luke angry and defensive. “I don’t doubt that seeking a connection to our father is part of the reason you wanted to become a Jedi. But that isn’t the main reason.”
“Then tell me oh wise one.” He sneered.

“I don’t need too. You said it yourself the first time we met.”

Luke rolled his eyes “I don’t know what I said the first time we met.”

Leia shook her head “No, not him Luke,” She made sure that his entire focus was on her. She pointed at him “You.”

He sighed in exasperation “As I recall I made a bumbling fool of myself by telling you that I have in fact talked to girls before.”

Leia’s lips curved up into a smile. That would never stop being adorable. “Yes you did, but that wasn’t what I was referring to.”

“I don’t know.” His face scrunched up as he tried to recall that conversation. “I told you that my Uncle wouldn’t let me go to Tosche Station by myself at sixteen. That it wasn’t your fault that he had bought the droids and was killed by the Empire….” his voice trailed off as he realized where she was going with this.

“I told you that I wanted to help,” he said, his adam's apple bobbing up and down as he swallowed hard, trying to control the wobble suddenly in his voice. “That I always wanted to help.”

“Yes,” she said.

His face twisted “Doesn’t mean anything. I might have wanted to, but I didn’t do anything until it personally involved me!”

Leia rocked back on her heels by the loathing in his voice. It surprised her. Unfortunately, that was not the reaction she was aiming for. She was hoping to prod him into thinking. This vacillation between teenager and adult was hard to track sometimes. “Why?”


“Why didn’t you help?”

He looked at her like she was dumb. “My Aunt and Uncle wouldn’t let me go. You know that.”

Leia shrugged “You are an adult by every legal metric of the galaxy. They couldn’t have stopped you.”

Luke looked horrified “But they needed me.”

She nodded “Yes, they did.”

He just stared at her for a moment, then comprehension dawned “They needed me.”

“So you stayed. You loved them, Luke. You wanted to help them. Or at the very least not leave them worse off when you left. There is no shame in that.”

“You didn’t see how much I resented them for it.” He muttered. He really had dug his heels in on this one. Of all the times for Luke’s stubborn streak to rear its head. Then Leia pondered that. No, it wasn’t like Luke to dig his heels in about something like this, not even when he was nineteen. Was this his grief and guilt talking? Or his fears about Vader? Or both?

“Did you do anything about it?” she demanded.
“What do you mean?”

“Did you talk disrespectfully to them? Threaten them?” she tapped her chin thoughtfully
“Deliberately sabotage their equipment in some way to show how angry you were?”

Luke looked horrified at the very thought “Of course not!”

She clicked her tongue on the roof of her mouth in a chiding noise. “You can’t control your
feelings, Luke. You can only control your actions. And other then it sounding like you whined
about it, you did nothing else.”

“But isn’t the fate of the galaxy more important than two moisture farmers?”

She shook her head “Not to you. And even if that were the case, you can justify a lot of horrible
things using that logic. If you won’t care for those closest to you, why would you care about the
galaxy at large?”

Leia went over to him and gently pulled his head down so they were touching forehead to forehead.
“Luke you stayed because you cared. They were your family, and family is a mighty privilege and
can be a source of great comfort, but it is also a responsibility. You left when you have nothing left
to be responsible for.”

He opened his mouth to protest and she shook her head. “That is who you are Luke Skywalker.
You may have started on this path because of him, but you want to stay on it because you want to
help.”

“But-” he protested.

“No buts.” she insisted. “And if you can’t train with Obi-Wan we will find another way.”

“Promise?” he whispered.

This was going to end in disaster, but she didn’t have it in her to deny him. “I will teach you
everything I know, and will do everything I can to help you figure out everything else.”

His wry chuckle came out. “Don't overcommit there.”

“Granted it’s not much,” she admitted, “But it’s what I have.”

He sighed, “What about this other person? The one you won’t tell me about? Could he supervise
my training?”

Leia pulled back and looked him straight in the eyes, “I’ll take you to him if we need too.” Luke’s
face brightened, and Leia knew she couldn’t leave it at that. She added warningly “I never met
him, but I have a feeling he won’t be very receptive.”

“Why?” Luke was confused

“A Jedi must have the deepest commitment,” she intoned, using Luke’s favorite impression of
Yoda.


“He won’t see it that way. All he’ll see is that you don’t like your current teacher and want to trade
him in for a new one.”
Luke scowled. “And the fact that I can’t trust Ben wouldn’t be a concern.”

“Maybe, maybe not.” she said “As I said, I never met him. But I heard enough stories.”

Luke sighed “Great.”

There was a weird high pitched noise from behind them and both of them turned to see an infant pikhron run into the glade along the stone path leading to the fountain.. During their conversation, more than half a dozen of the creatures had wandered in.

“Well that’s going to make searching a tad bit more difficult,” Leia remarked.

She stepped forward, only to have Luke grab her arm to stop her.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“I’m going to scare them off,” Leia explained “They’re rather large creatures and wild. It’s not like we can walk among them without risking injury.”

“This is their home Leia, we are the intruders here,” Luke argued, “besides don’t you feel that?”

Leia almost asked him what he meant, but she caught herself. She sighed and dropped her shields again. A warm feeling of peace and love filled her. She turned to stare at the pikhron frolicking in the glade, caught in their moment of happiness and joy in this safe harbor.

“I don’t want to disturb this,” Luke said “They aren’t everywhere.” He pointed to a shadowed alcove. “We can start looking over there and once we finished, we’ll see where they are then.”

Leia nodded, seeing his point. They walked slowly over to the alcove. A couple of the creatures looked up to watch them, but seeing no threat, contentedly went back to munching on the grass.

They entered the alcove and Luke let out a low whistle. Leia looked into the back to see a frieze. It had been vandalized of course, like everything else in this temple, but she could make out children in Jedi robes, in various defensive poses. She followed the wall with her eyes, there were several Jedi meditating on the panel farthest to the right. On the left one, there were what looked to be half a dozen Jedi, lightsabers drawn, fighting some sort of spiked creature.

Eagerly Luke went up to the wall, “What is this?” he asked, tracing everything he could with his fingers.

“It’s a frieze,” Leia said.

“A what?”

“A frieze. It’s a type of artwork.” He looked at her, silently asking for more. “You take a thick stone tile, square-shaped usually, and carve figures into it. Then you attach it to a wall or ceiling.”

“It’s beautiful,” he whispered.

It was, or at least what she could see of them that hadn’t been defaced had once probably been very pretty. But this was in no way what Leia hoped to find. Although, she looked around the room as Luke studied the art, maybe she wasn’t looking hard enough.

“Aesthetics,” she murmured to herself. The Jedi of this temple liked to hide things. Lessons about the dangers of being distracted by beauty? Or were they just being secretive? Didn’t matter. She spotted what she was looking for in moments. Grinning to herself, she pulled on the lever, cleverly
hidden in one of the fighting Jedi’s lightsabers.

Luke gave a yelp as the floor beneath him moved. He jumped back and shot her a glare.

“Warn a guy will you?”

“I think what you meant to say was thank you, Leia, for finding the secret storeroom,” she told him.

“It’s probably just more training remotes,” he muttered.

Leia took a step closer to the revealed hole. There was a set of stairs starting at the top. “I don’t think so,” she remarked.

Luke looked down and frowned. “Don’t suppose there is any power down there?”

“Yeah, we’re not that lucky.”

He withdrew his lightsaber off his belt and ignited it. He went down the stairs first, Leia following.

It was only one flight of stairs, which led to a door, carved with a langue Leia didn’t recognize.


“Well, I suppose all those scavengers who were looking for treasure would have brought cutters of some kind,” Leia remarked.

“I have one?” Luke offered, waving the lightsaber slightly.

Leia’s stomach rolled as she thought of the previous owner of that lightsaber. In its history, it had probably been used to cut down plenty of Jedi doors. “No,” she said firmly.

“No?” Luke looked confused, then comprehension lit his face. “Oh…” He reached out with the Force and pushed the door open. Not where Leia had been going with that, but probably the correct answer. There was a hiss as the air went rushing into the room. Airtight then, the signs were looking good that this was a safe of some kind.

They cautiously stepped into the room. The lightsaber wasn't as direct as a lantern or a flashlight, they couldn’t really direct where the light went. But it’s pale blue light revealed enough. It wasn’t a large room, perhaps twenty feet by twenty feet, and it was made of large stone blocks. There were extensive cracks along the wall that Leia could see, and parts of the stone ceiling had fallen to the floor. There were crushed storage boxes underneath some of the fallen stones, spread haphazardly about the room.


“Probably damage done during the bombing,” Leia said, thinking of the large craters in the great hall they had walked through. She walked into the room, heading for one of the uncrushed storage units. She turned back to Luke to ask him to come in further so she could see what she was doing, and let out a gasp.

“Leia, what’s wro-” Luke’s voice trailed away as he caught sight of the two corpses, bracketing the door. The had clearly been here for decades, most likely since the fall of the temple, and they had become mummified in the airtight room. A human and a Nautolan, judging by the large dull green tentacles falling from the skull. Their robes were wrapped around them, and both had lightsabers
clutched in their hands.

Leia swallowed hard and came up to the Natolanian.


She nodded her head.


Leia reached to examine the corpse, to see if there were any blaster wounds on the fabric. Her fingers met the long wide sleeves and -

He didn’t want to come to the surface. It was so cool and peaceful in this lake. Peace had been in short supply as of late. The Clone Wars had spread like a virus throughout the galaxy bringing misery and destruction in its wake. The Jedi were being pushed to the breaking point, and every day only brought new horrors and atrocities. He knew he should return to the Temple. He knew Driben would have his hide for making them late like this, but was it too much to ask that he find a few moments relaxation in the Force?

Leia let out a gasp and pulled her hand back.


“I think we found our mystery swimmer,” she said.

He looked down to the body. “You sure?”

She nodded, “Yes, the Nautolan are an aquatic race. It wouldn’t have been hard for him to go under the water like that.”

Luke turned to his companion “I wonder if this was the person that was calling him back?”

Leia shook her head, “I don’t know. I didn’t see him. Just got a name, Driben.”

“Why show us a vision? Why not approach us directly? Like Qui-Gon?”

“Because they have moved on in the Force.” said an annoyingly familiar voice.

Leia looked up to see said dead Jedi Master standing in the corner of the small room. “Moved on?” she croaked.

He gave her a small smile “My path is not for everyone General. In fact, it took me several years before I could even reach out to the living. And even then, they mostly brushed me aside as a figment of their imagination.”


“Because I saw that I would be needed.” He stared at the two corpses and then around the room sadly. “They barricaded themselves here to protect this,” he waved his hand to the one intact box.

“Just that?” Luke said dubiously.

“There were more, but they were destroyed.”

Leia wanted to make a snarky comment about how it wasn’t so hard to give a straight answer, but
the sorrow on the man’s face held her tongue.

“Thank you for your help,” she said, floundering on what else to say.

His eyes focused back in on her, and he gave her a wide smile. “You are most welcome General,” Then he disappeared.

“General?” Luke asked, “not Your Highness?”

“It’s how I introduced myself to him,” she said absently.

“Why?”

Leia stiffened, this was not something she wanted to explain. “Because I hadn’t been called Your Highness in a very long time.”


“Luke, we’re on a limited time frame here. Can we get into this later?”

He looked at her suspiciously but dropped it. He came over and opened the box.

Inside lay three holocrons, and a pile of data crystals.

“Oh,” Luke said wonderingly. He handed her the lightsaber and reached out his hand. All three of them came up into the air and spun around him.

Leia watched, as they emitted their soft glow. “They have anything on them?” she asked. Obi-Wan had shown Luke how to use one, but she had declined a similar lesson.

Luke nodded, his face filled with wonder.

“Good,” she reached down and with one hand emptied her utility belt pouches. She stuffed the data crystals into them and snapped them close.

She looked up to see Luke still moving the holocrons around him. “Did you bring a bag?” she asked.

Luke’s face fell a little, and he brought the three of them into his hand. “No, but they’ll fit in my pant’s pocket.” He stood, and put the three of them in his pants. He looked around the room, sorrow on his face, as he took in the crushed containers, littering the floor.

“I wish more survived,” he said.

“Frankly I’m surprised even this much survived.” Leia said, getting to her feet and walking towards the door.

Luke hesitated for a moment. “They died in here,” he whispered. “They deliberately locked themselves into an airtight room to protect this as long as they could. All in order to try to save this.”

She walked up to him and put a gentle touch on his shoulder “They succeeded. We found it, and put it to good use.”

Luke nodded. “I know. I just wish we could do more.” He looked at the corpses for a moment, then went over to to the Nautolan. He leaned down and whispered something near the head. Then
he turned and did the same for the body on the other side of the door.

Leia let him be. Luke was always reticent about speaking about his faith to her. He would answer any questions she asked, but she got the feeling it was only because she was family. Tatooine was a place of many secrets. She respected his right to keep them.

Luke stood “Are you going to take the lightsabers back to Obi-Wan?” she asked, curious.

Luke shook his head, “No. This is their ground, they should be left here.”


Luke nodded and they exited the room. He carefully closed the door behind them.

The pikhron were still milling about in the courtyard when they finished climbing the stairs.

“Want to keep searching?” Leia asked. “See if there is anything we missed?”

Luke looked up at the sky, noting the position of the sun and shook his head. “No. I think we found what we were meant to find. There is no need to push it.”

“Alright.”

They made their way quietly back into the corridor that led to the great hall. It wasn't until they were halfway down the corridor that Luke suddenly blurted out “You don’t think this will work do you?” She stopped and frowned at him “You and me trying to figure this out on our own,” he elaborated.

Leia frowned “I don’t know.” He huffed in irritation. “No, Luke I really don’t. There are things that your alternate could do, that Obi-Wan considers impossible.”

“Like the running.”

“Like the running,” she agreed, “but I don’t have a basic grounding in any theory. I don’t know what the Jedi considered impossible, that I know you can do.” She thought about that for a second then said “The reverse is also probably true. There might be things Luke thought was impossible that for the Jedi were basic skills.”

She gestured to his pants, “Even if those holocrons contain any knowledge, I’m not sure if I would be any good to you in interpreting what they mean.”

There was a pause and then “Spit it out, Leia.”

She sighed, “And for all the fact that Obi-Wan doesn’t understand your mindset, he is vastly more aware of where the danger is when it comes to the Dark Side. I’m not the best person to ask.”

There were a few beats of silence, then Luke’s voice came up, firm and direct “I still think you would make a great Jedi.” She would make a horrible Jedi, but she appreciated the thought behind that sentiment.

She turned and they continued to the great hall. As soon as they reached the rock slide they used to enter Leia gestured for him to stop.
“Leia?” he asked.

“Give me the holocrons,” she said. “We don’t want them to be damaged on your way up. When you get to the top just call them back to you.”

“I think they’re sturdier than that,” he said. “Besides I still have to hold them crawling my way back down the other side of this thing.”

“Then wait until you get to the bottom of the tunnel side and call them then.” Luke frowned “Do you really want to risk damaging them?”

“No,” He nodded and carefully picked his way up the rock slide.

Leia waited patiently at the bottom. After about five minutes, she heard Luke call out. “I’m up!” She held her hand out and felt the whisper pull of her brother as the three holocrons zoomed to the top. Leia set to her own climb.

As soon as she reached the top she saw Luke standing at the bottom, lightsaber lit to guide her way. She carefully made her way down to him. He didn’t say anything until her feet hit the floor.

As soon as she was beside him he blurted out “Do you think Obi-Wan would even teach me anymore?”

Leia blinked, that thought honestly hadn’t occurred to her. She started walking down the tunnel, pondering the question. He followed behind her, giving her time to think.

Finally, she shrugged. There was no point in wondering what Obi-Wan would do. “What did Obi-Wan say they last time you talked to him?” There was nothing but silence from behind her. She stopped and turned to face him.


“You haven’t spoken to him? At all?”

Luke shook his head. “Except for the time I gave him the lightsaber, I’ve avoided him.”

Leia was aghast “You mean this whole time you’ve been chewing this over in your head and you didn’t have any questions for him?”

“Oh, I had questions.” Luke was back to looking furious again.

“Did you ever think just to ask him about it?”

A mulish look crossed over his face. “I thought about it, but then I didn’t want to.”

Nineteen, he’s nineteen. “Well, I’m sorry to say that is not how this works.”

“Oh, and how does it work?”

“You talk to him, Luke. You sit down, preferably somewhere isolated, and you have a long hard conversation.”

He looked devastated “You said you would help me.”
“And I will,” a look of relief passed over his face. “After you talk to Obi-Wan.”

“Oh, like you did?” he said snottily.

She blinked “Yes?”

Amazement crossed his face “What? When? Why?”

“Because he came in peace to my doorstep and I had some questions.”

“But you said you don’t trust him!!” Luke protested.

“I’m working on it,” Leia shook her head “Even if he doesn’t train you, Luke, you have to settle this between you.”

“Why?” That threw Leia, Luke was the most forgiving person she knew. No, Luke would become the most forgiving person she knew. He wasn’t there yet. He might never get there. That wasn’t her choice to make. All she could do was offer advice.

Keep it in the practical, Leia reminded herself. He’s too angry to listen to an emotional plea about fairness and decency. “Because you are both important members of the Rebellion, and they can’t reasonably keep you apart on missions going forward.”

“They have so far,” he said.

“To give you time, and because I think Obi-Wan backed it. That state of affairs isn’t going to last forever.”

“How do you know that?”

Experience “Because you’ll be thrown together in a mission at the worst possible time. At the very least you two need a working relationship.”

He muttered under his breath and petulantly started walking again. After a few moments, he whined “Fine.”

“Good,” she said.

They made it another few feet before he asked, semi-seriously “Any advice on how to keep things under control?”

“Eat beforehand.”

“What?”

“A full stomach makes it easier to think.” Leia bit her lip, trying to think. It had been a long time since she had to use this knowledge. “You need to set up boundaries beforehand.”

Luke’s voice was confused “Like where to stand?”

“No, like what you want to discuss. Who can talk when. What subjects are off the table for the first discussion. Establish a phrase to opt out if either of you loses control and set a time limit on when you can come back to discuss things again. Also, choose a place that is neutral to you both. Neither of your rooms, gym, hangar bay or Obi-Wan’s office.”

“Of course he does. Where do you think he goes when he’s planning strikes for the Alliance?”

“I didn't really think about it?”

Of course he didn’t. To be fair, Luke was much more involved in the practicalities of learning how to lead an X-Wing squadron, and those lessons were done in the pilot’s briefing room. And until this whole debacle, his Jedi training had been done in the jungle. Why would he know Obi-Wan needed, never mind had, an office?

“You seem to have a lot of tips.”

Leia gave him a look “I did spend a big chunk of my life getting people to agree to things.”

“It’s just all very specific.”

“I don’t solve every problem with a blaster.”

He looked dubious at that statement and Leia scowled at him.

“We’re running out of daylight. Let’s get going.” She said.

When they arrived at the mouth of the cave, they spotted Farnay, sitting at their camp. They waved to her and she waved back, indicating she saw them.

Leia peered at the sky, “We’re cutting it a little close, but I think we can make it to the bottom before nightfall.” Leia said, kneeling down to the hook she had attached to the bottom of the cave floor and attaching the rope.

Luke looked at her “I’m going to ask this now, while I’m thinking about it.” She gave him an expectant look, wondering what painful scar he was going to stumble into now. “Just out of curiosity, you understand, how did your first meeting with my alternate go?”

Leia relaxed and laughed, “He came into my cell on the Death Star, dressed as a stormtrooper and stared at me.”

“Oh,” Luke’s eyes went wide “Good to know you render me speechless in all timelines.”

Leia gave a sharp grin. “Then he took the helmet off and said ‘I’m Luke Skywalker. I’m here to rescue you.’”

Luke whistled “Oh, that is a good line.”

She shook her head “Somewhat undercut by the fact that I had no idea who you were.”

“And did I rescue you?” Leia nodded. Luke smiled, full of satisfaction “Now that is ironic. I rescued you for a change.”

She scowled at him, no use in letting him get a full head. “Well, he got me out of my cell.” Leia admitted to that smirking face, “But I got us out of the corridor. We were cut off from the escape route by stormtroopers. You and Han had come into the detention center, blasters blazing, with no plan on how to get us out.”

That smug look was gone. “What did you do?”
“Made us all jump down the garbage chute.”

Luke gave her a long skeptical look, “Now I know you’re pulling my leg.”

She gave him a sweet smile “Believe what you want baby brother.”

“I was born first!” he protested.

“Yes, you were. I’m still older.” she said, as she swung down to begin her climb down the cliff wall.

ABA - Day 98

The stay at the campsite and journey back to Tikaroo was uneventful. Farnay lead them back into hangar bay just as the sun was beginning to set.

Han was standing outside the Falcon as they came in through the arch, and his face lit up at the site of them.

“How did it go?” he asked. He was covered in engine crease all over, and there were a few scrapes on his face.

“Better than you apparently,” Leia remarked as she stepped up to him, examining his face.

“Yeah, it went fine,” Luke said.

Han looked him over “Find what you were looking for?” he asked.


“Uh-huh,” He looked over to Farnay “Are they telling the truth about not being injured?”


The girl shrugged “Nothing happened when I had them in my sights. And they didn’t return from the cave with any more cuts than when they left.”

“How would you know if we cut ourselves?” Luke said

She tapped her nose “Much better than a humans” she told him.

Luke grinned at Han “You would have been proud, there were no near misses.”

“I’m so delighted,” Han said, “You’ll be happy to know I didn’t kill Threepio, and that the Falcon is ready to go.”

Leia looked at him startled “But you said it would take four days.”

“That is because he is a crazy man,” Kivas said, as he suddenly appeared on the Falcon’s ramp, dragging a box behind him. “He insisted we work on this strangely retrofitted ship day and night.”

Leia and Luke both looked at Han, who rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. “I didn’t like the thought of you two being out there, and I was unable to reach you if anything happened,” he said.
“As I said,” Kivas said, “crazy man.” He left them and walked over to his daughter. “Are you alright?” he asked.

“I’m fine,” she said.

Luke walked over and handed her a small pouch. “Five hundred credits,” he said. “As promised.”

Farnay took it from him, and then looked up “If you ever want to go back to the temple, you know where we are.”


“Did you find any treasure?” she asked.

Luke laughed “Of a sort.”

She scowled at him “That doesn't sound like there were any jewels there.”

“No jewels,” he said. “But there were a lot of pikhron.”

Farnay nodded “Good, I’m glad they have a place to hide.” He looked at the three of them “I will file the paperwork an hour after you leave.” He gave Luke and Leia a smile “Please, feel free to come back anytime,” then he scowled at Han “You can come too, but I’m not doing any more repairs on this poor mutilated ship.”

“She’s not mutilated, she’s finely tuned!” Han insisted hotly.

“Crazy man,” he muttered, and he and his daughter left.

Leia went up to Han, “Did you really drive that poor man crazy simply to ease your mind?”

“No,” he said, as Luke walked passed him, heading for the Falcon’s ramp. She arched her eyebrow at him, “Yes.” he admitted.

She gave him a fond smile and stepped up to him to give him a hug. He stiffened in her arms at first, then relaxed and gingerly returned it. She soaked in the sensation for a moment then playfully shoved him away, “But before we leave you are taking a shower.”

Papa was there to greet them as they disembarked from the Falcon. Leia stiffened slightly when she saw him. Mama wasn't here, but that didn't mean they had decided to have only one parent giving the lecture.

“Leia,” he said warmly as she disembarked. Then he turned to Han “Are they in one piece?” he asked.

“Yes sir,” Han said.

Bail nodded “Good. Debriefing is in ten minutes in the red conference room.”

Han gave him a blank look, “Debriefing? Why do I have to be at the debriefing? I’m just the hired transport.”

Bail raised an eyebrow at him. Han paled a bit and muttered, “Of course sir, I’ll be there sir.”
Luke coming in from behind Han, slapped him on the shoulder, “I can show you the way.”

“Thanks, kid, you’re all heart.” Han muttered.

Leia watched them head away and turned to meet her father’s eyes.

“Papa I’m sorry I couldn’t—”

He shook his head. “No Leia, no apologies.”

She narrowed her eyes “Excuse me?”

“You were asked to go on a mission, an important one. You took reasonable steps to see that we were informed, and left messages. You did everything we could expect you to.” Bail sighed.

“Your mother and I don’t like it. We will never like it, but you aren’t wrong that you have valuable skills that the Rebellion could use. And those skills are in the field.”

“So no lecture?” she said.

“No lecture.” he agreed. “But perhaps I can interest you in an escort?” She gave him a blinding smile and looped her arm through his as they headed to the debrief.

Debriefings should be on the Imperial torture list. There was nothing more irritating to Leia to give a report, have people who weren’t there question your decisions, then at length explain how they would have done better if they were there. It was like meetings, only with a question and answer session at the end.

This particular session was attended by Ackbar, via holo, Mon, Draven, Dodonna, and oddly Obi-Wan. Luke had gulped when he saw the man sitting there and Leia squashed the urge to send “I told you so,” at him. Clearly, the leadership had enough of the two of them avoiding each other.

Luke was answering Draven’s question, for the fifth time, about how he knew that the search had been random.

“I told you,” Luke said, trying to keep his temper in check “They were bored. If it had been a deliberate trap there would have been much more excitement on that cruiser.”

Draven shot her a hostile look, and Leia barely refrained from rolling her eyes. “I just find it suspicious-” he started to say.

Obi-Wan, who until this point had been silent, interrupted him “Are you suggesting Luke is lying? Or that he is incompetent in using the Force?”

Draven paled a bit, “Neither Lt. Skywalker’s nor his abilities are under question here.”

Obi-Wan folded his hands neatly in front of him on the table “No, just Leia’s loyalties.”

“Which is a question that has been answered,” Ackbar said, shooting Leia a sympathetic look.

“Yes,” Mon said. Ignoring Draven’s sputterings she turned to Leia “Analysis of the cell?” Mon said.

“They need help,” she said.
Dodonna snorted “They were offered help.”

Leia scowled at him “No they were told to fall in line and wait their turn. Given how successful they’ve been on their own, it was an insult to their abilities and intelligence.”

Draven’s eyes narrowed. “What do you suggest?”

“Money, medical supplies, and an understanding about sharing valuable intel,” Leia answered promptly.

Dodonna sputtered “We can’t afford that! We can barely keep our own groups afloat.”

He was right about that. The money was coming in, more than they had last time, or was it the same amount? Leia couldn’t remember. She had tried, oh she had tried. But that first chaotic year after the death of her parents and Alderaan, their revenue stream just wasn’t something she had focused all that much on. She was fairly certain that they had spent more in that other timeline than the one she was currently in. While it was an effective way to hide from the Empire, running the fleet all over the outer rim territories to avoid detection wasn’t the cheapest option available. This Rebellion wasn’t hampered by the fact they had no base, and had to spend the credits to stay on the move.

“How about a little respect then?” she said firmly “Trehhipoi isn’t stupid. If you explain it to him in those terms and are polite about it, I’m sure he’d understand. It costs us nothing but time.”

“They aren’t to be trusted!” Dodonna protested.

“Why?” Han asked, looking mystified “They hate the Empire, you hate the Empire. Everyone seems to be in agreement about bringing down the Empire.”

“Because they were on the wrong side of the Clone Wars?” Luke asked softly.

Dodonna's face flushed with anger, and Mon only looked pensive.

Leia scowled “By that definition half of the people here qualify.” She snapped “Or have you not paid attention to how many former Separatists are in our ranks?”

“You don’t know these people like I do!” the general insisted.

Luke’s voice was full of sarcasm “Because no good ideas come from the Outer Rim? We just bumble along until the Core decides to grace us with their wisdom and knowledge.”

“No that isn’t it,” Dodonna said. Luke gave a snort of derision. “My problem with them is that the only reason they are good at this is that they honed these tactics against the Republic. If they hadn’t followed Dooku down his insane path of splitting the Republic, Palpatine never would have been able to seize power!”

Obi-Wan’s voice was calm, but his face was terrifyingly blank “So you are condemning them for making the same mistake you did?”

Every face in the room swung to the Jedi’s direction. “Explain,” Draven demanded.

Obi-Wan took a deep breath in “Dooku was a Sith.”

There was a low murmuring in the room, and Mon frowned. “So?”

Obi-Wan looked at Papa “You never told them?”
Papa gave a helpless shrug “What good would it have done?” he asked “There was no way for me to prove it. And them knowing about it increased the chances Palpatine would have found out they knew.” He gave the Jedi a long look. “He would want to know who told them. Which would lead him to me.”

And to Leia. Her parents had walked such a fine line between helping the Rebellion and protecting her. She wondered if they could have gotten more done if she had been raised on Tatooine with Luke.

The rest of the leadership only waited in impatient silence. Obi-Wan gave a hopeless laugh and shook his head. “Palpatine is a Sith Lord,” he said.

This pronouncement was met with dead silence. “Excuse me?” Ackbar said. “I couldn’t have possibly heard that right.”

“Palpatine is a Sith Lord.” Obi-Wan repeated “He was Dooku’s Master. As he is Vader’s”

“No,” It was Mon of all people who spoke up next “Vader is his lap dog, yes, but he has powers the Emperor couldn’t dream of.”

Obi-Wan shook his head “No, the exact opposite is true.”

Ackbar let out an indignant “Why didn’t you tell the Senate that Dooku was a Sith Lord?”

Obi-Wan faced the Mon Calamari, face drawn “And set off a panic? We already were having to face a messy political fallout because of the fact that Dooku was a former Jedi. If it had been known that he was a Sith do you honestly think the Senate would have continued to support us?”

Maybe that would have been for the best, Leia thought. It would have forced the Jedi out of their thinking that the people and the Republic were the same things. But hindsight was perfect, and she had to admit that one would have been a hard thing to see then.

“If we had been warned-” Ackbar continued.

Mon let out an impatient huff “Enough.” she said, “We are not here to re-fight the Clone Wars.” She gave everyone in the room a steely glare. “I understand that this information has passions running high, but it in no way changes our situation now, except we have a better understanding of our enemy.” She turned her head “General Draven?”

He instantly stiffened into parade rest at her tone “Senator?”

“Any idea on how long it will take for the analysts to comb the data?”

“A few days,” he said.

Mon’s eyebrow shot up “That quickly?”

He nodded “Drusil gifted us with a few programs to help us break the Imperial codes, and to speed up the time of any analysis we do on large data sets like this.”

She nodded “Excellent.” She turned and glared at everyone in the room “We will reconvene in three days to discuss the information in that file, and the information just given to us by Obi-Wan.” Was it Leia’s imagination or did her glare intensify when it passed over her father’s face? “Luke, Leia, and Han, none of you will have to attend that meeting.”
“Yeah,” Han said.

“In the meanwhile, I expect all of you,” and here she shot a warning look at Han “to stay quiet about what we just heard until we come to a consensus on what to do with it.”

Han held his hands up “Didn’t hear anything,” he assured Mon.

“Dismissed.” They all stood to leave, “Not you Bail,” Yep, Mon was pissed.

Papa gave her a wave, indicating she should go on ahead and not wait for him. Leia nodded and slipped out of the room.

Han came up beside her, “Got any plans?” he said eagerly.

“Sleep,” she said.

A flash of disappointment crossed his face, but he hid it quickly. “Probably a good idea.”

“Want to meet for lunch tomorrow?” she asked.

“Why not breakfast?” Han suggested.

She shook her head “I can’t. I already have plans.”

“Right,” he said. Then he tried to give her a smile. It was very short of sincere. “You probably eat with Luke after your workout.”

“No, actually. My parents.” He looked at her, surprised. “We have breakfast together every morning we are all on the same planet,” she explained. Then a wicked grin crossed her face “You are more than welcome to join us if you like.”

The look of absolute panic that crossed his face was an expression she would treasure for a long time. “No!” he said, then wincing at his harsh tone, said much more softly “Uh, no thank you.”

“You sure?” she pressed.

“If I wanted to try to make awkward small talk, and fear for my life, I’d just swing by Jabba’s palace for breakfast.”

“Papa is not that bad!!”

“No, he’s worse.” Han grumbled “At Jabba’s palace I can see the weapons.”

Leia laughed, and on impulse rose up on her toes and gave him a kiss on the cheek. When she pulled back, his eyes were wide with surprise, and there was a light blush on his cheeks.

“What was that for?” he asked bewildered.

“For making me laugh,” she said sincerely. “I don’t have a lot of reasons to lately.”

“Oh,” he said.

“This is my stop,” she said waving her hand to the corridor that would take her to her room. “Goodnight, Han.”

A shy smile crossed his lips “Goodnight, Leia,” he said. And then headed down the corridor
leading to the hanger bay.

Leia hummed to herself, pleased.

She was less pleased to see Draven leaning against her door when she arrived at her room. She stopped in the hallway, wondering if she should just walk away, then dismissed the thought. She was tired and wanted to go to bed.

Draven watched her approach. “Are you going to invite me in?” he asked.

“No,” she said flatly, then crossed her arms. “What do you want General?”

A startled look crossed his face at her flat refusal, but he recovered quickly “Don’t think this will work.”

“What will work?” she asked, tired of his hostility.

“Taking my side to soften my defenses.”

She blinked “What!?!?”

He sneered “You may have charmed your way back into Lt. Skywalker’s and Knight Kenobi’s good graces, but I will not be so easily swayed.”

She rubbed her forehead in frustration “Did it ever occur to you I was taking your side in there because I think you are right?”

A look of consternation crossed his face, then was replaced with his usual wariness “No.”

Of course not. “I don’t like you and you don’t like me. But we both want the Empire gone,” she stepped into his personal space, refusing to back down “Interpret my motives as you like, but don’t you dare suggest that I wouldn’t do anything to bring it down.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” he said, “You’d do anything, and that includes a plot with Vader.”

Of all the ridiculous notions. “Really?” she said, drawing the word out “That is the only scenario you can come up with?”

“The facts don’t add up quite all the way,” he conceded “but it’s the only explanation I have that fits.”

“Did it occur to you there might be things going on you don’t know?”

“No,” he said flatly.

Spymasters, they were all a bunch of paranoid bastards. “I’m not working with Vader,” she said as calmly as she could.

He ignored her, “Heed my warning Your Highness, scarier people then you have tried to control that monster and they all died. I don’t know why he’s playing along with your scheme, but it will end nowhere good for you.” And he pushed himself upright and walked away before she could respond.

“Shows what you know,” she muttered, “I’m plenty scary.”
Leia was in one of the break rooms, sitting in front of one of the computers scattered among the base for personal use. While the tech was outdated she wanted the relative privacy using this machine afforded her. She could, of course, use one of the consoles in the main station. Leia was avoiding that for two reasons. One, she wasn't trying to access anything confidential that would require the more networked machines. Two, there was no way Draven had given up in his surveillance of her. If she logged into one of those main terminals with her ID he would be able to see what she was researching. This was a subject where she wasn’t sure what players knew what. It was better to use one of the more anonymous terminals while she confirmed a suspicion that had been niggling away at the back of her mind for several days.

She pulled up the Empire’s most wanted list by the amount of the bounty offered for their capture. She scowled as her own face came up first. That was an honor she could have done without. Her name was followed by Obi-Wan, with his official holo from the Clone Wars, and also with a blurrier image she assumed was taken at the raid of Grakkus’ base. Mon was third, but Leia wasn’t actually all that interested in these listings. This wasn't anything new to her. Frowning she began to scroll down the bounty list. She got into the upper fifties before she stopped. If Yoda was on this list he would have shown up by now.

She minimized that list and brought up the list of unconfirmed Jedi dead. It was distressingly short, but again, Yoda’s name was missing. She closed that search screen and brought up the list of confirmed Jedi killed. This one took several minutes to load, and she muttered under her breath about out of date equipment. Finally, it popped up. It was significantly longer than the other two but in alphabetical order.

She scrolled down, and name after name was listed with the cause of death as being Order 66. She swallowed hard, she was looking at the bureaucratic documentation of a genocide. Then the ages listed with some of those names caught her eye and she had to close her eyes briefly to force the nausea away. She had known there were children in those temples, but to see the facts of it laid out so plainly broke her heart. Leia focused on not seeing, and keeping her mind blank until she reached the Y’s. She frowned, he wasn’t listed there either.

She closed out that list and brought up the bounty list again, her face, that impossible young face, coming up to greet her again. For the last two decades, it had been Obi-Wan Kenobi, until she had replaced him. In another timeline it would have been Luke’s face she would have been seeing right now.

No wait that wasn't right. After the destruction of the Death Star Mon had been the number one target, then followed by Luke. The Imperials hadn’t had a name, just a blurry holo taken in the hangar bay on Yavin.

Draven had been pissed about that one because it clearly had been taken recently. Two months later he said he had taken care of it, and no one knew who exactly the mole had been, but none of them had questioned his findings. Suspicious bastard, it would be helpful to know that now. If she did, she could point Draven in this person’s direction and get him off her back. Or it would reinforce in his mind she was a spy, selling out another spy to maintain her cover.

About a year after Yavin, Luke’s bounty had been suddenly raised, with little fanfare, to twenty-five million, alive, no serious damage, and with him identified by name. Leia had been on that
bounty list too but behind Ackbar and Dodonna. And she had only been worth ten million, dead or alive.

There was a prickle in the Force behind her, but she said nothing as the man came closer to her.

“Curious about your worth?” Obi-Wan’s cultured voice spoke over her shoulder as he peered at what she was reading.

She shook her head. “Curious about someone else’s.”

“Oh?” Obi-Wan came over and leaned against the console, facing her. “Whose?”

She glanced around, making sure the corridor she could see was empty. Still didn’t hurt to be cautious. “Yoda.” she sent to him.

At that name Obi-Wan stilled. He nervously cleared his throat. “And what is his going rate?”

She shook her head, “That’s the thing. He doesn’t have one.”

A look of relief crossed Obi-Wan’s face “The Empire put him on the confirmed dead list.”

A smile crossed her face “No, I checked there. But he’s also not on the list of Jedi with no confirmation of death.”

“Thorough.”

“I tend to be.” She leaned back in her chair and studied the old man. “So that leads me to the question about why the Grand Ma-” she stopped and switched to “our mutual green friend isn’t listed anywhere among the records of the Jedi?”

His mouth twitched in amusement “I’d give you several reasons, but I wouldn’t want to deprive you of telling me your theory.”

“They don’t know if he is alive or dead,” Leia ventured “And they don’t want to spread rumors or more importantly the hope, that he is alive.”

Obi-wan gave her a smile, a twinkle of mischief in his eye. “Not a bad theory.”

He looked entirely too satisfied with himself. Her eyes narrowed “But not right.”

“It’s possible that some in the upper echelons believe that, but I know of one person who should suspect Yoda is alive.”

Leia frowned “I don’t have all the facts do I?”

“No,” Obi-Wan’s smile was smug “Irritating isn’t it?”

Leia scowled “I think I liked you better when you pretended you were all wise and serene.”

He laughed at that, “No you don’t.”

She sighed and conceded “No I don’t. I found it pompous and irritating.” She tapped her fingers restlessly on her thigh. “Alright what am I missing?”

“Palpatine fought a duel with Yoda in the Senate dome after Order 66.”
Leia’s eyes went wide. There wasn’t even a hint of this anywhere. “I’m sorry, what now?”

“They fought in the Senate dome. Yoda lost, but he did escape Coruscant.”

She frowned “What was he thinking taking on Palpatine alone? Where were you?” she demanded.

Pain cut into her shields and Leia bit back a curse. Of course. Mustafar. Obi-Wan had gone to Mustafar. She held up her hand “I withdraw the question.”

He gave her a thankful look. “Nevertheless, the Emperor should have a suspicion our green friend could possibly be alive.”

“Maybe,” Leia chewed her lip as she thought about it. “Does anyone in the Alliance know?” she asked.

He looked thoughtful “Your parents, of course. But beyond that, I don’t think so. At least no one has asked me to try to bring him here.”

That was what Leia thought, but she would seek confirmation from Papa.

“Palpatine didn’t tell Vader either.”

Obi-Wan didn’t flinch at that name, progress being made on that front. “What do you mean?”

“In that cell, when he was asking who Luke’s master was. He went through several names, but he never mentioned our green friend.”

“That’s fortunate for us.” Obi-Wan stroked his beard. “But I don’t see how it could possibly be of any use.” He didn’t even ask about the names Vader had mentioned. Leia didn’t offer them. There were probably quite a few friends Obi-Wan didn’t know the fate of. If he didn’t ask, they were still alive. Leia couldn’t say she wouldn’t think about making the same choice in his position.

Leia shrugged “Probably won’t be. But I find knowing where the pressure points are in any relationship can be helpful to know.”

“Possibly, but they are Sith Lords, trust isn't something they do.”

“The Apprentice kills the Master,” she muttered, remembering Vader lecturing her in that cell.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan’s face contorted into grief. Leia searched for a less fraught subject.

“Why are you here Obi-Wan?”

The man drew back into himself. “To thank you.”

Leia frowned “Thank me? For what?”

“For convincing Luke to resume his Jedi training with me.”

So Luke had decided, good for him. But she shook her head “I did nothing of the sort.”

“I beg to differ.”

She sighed and rubbed her forehead “No I didn’t. Trust me on this, when Luke sets his mind to something, especially if he thinks he is right, there is no moving him.”
“Are you sure? Because that sounds like you are describing yourself.”

She glared at him. “I know my brother.”

“Do you?” He held his hands up in a placating gesture “I’m trying not to assume anything Leia. I just want to make sure that you are seeing him as he is, not of who you want to be there.” He gave her such a sad smile “I made such a mistake like that once and it cost me dearly.”

Leia swallowed hard. That long list of dead Jedi flashing in her mind. Those were a lot of reasons to question her on this. In an as reasonable tone as she could manage she said “He spent three years trying to teach himself how to use the Force. He went looking for every fraud, huckster, and scrap of information he could find. Does that sound like someone who just gives up?”

He gave her a gentle smile. “I agree with you. It does not.” The words were meant kindly, but there was an echo of grief there.

Leia sighed “Let me guess. It reminds you of,” she couldn't say “our father”, not in the open like this. She quickly substituted “his father.”

Obi-Wan’s eyebrow quirked up, “No actually. In this case, I was thinking it fell more in the line with-” he gave her a wry look “his mother. She was unshakable if she thought she was on the correct path.” There was an amused twitch of his lips, “Even when she was angering some very powerful people, and had a bounty hunter try to kill her.”

“Interesting,” she said, mulling that one over in her mind. Obi-Wan merely sat there in silence as she tried to reconcile that piece of knowledge with what she already knew about Padme.

“Since you are here and we agreed to handle things like adults, I have to confess I’m a little angry at you.”

“Oh, what for?”

“For saying that you and Luke had started to repair your relationship in order to influence me to repair ours.”

“I did no such thing,’ he said mildly, a half smile twisting his lips “You assumed and I didn’t correct you.”

Wiley old man. She had to applaud his skill level though. Twenty years in the desert with almost no contact with a living soul and the man had neatly danced a circle around her. Leia had no false modesty when it came to this, she was good at listening and hearing what people meant to say, rather than what they actually said. The fact that Obi-Wan could manipulate her like this was impressive.

She wondered what he must have been like in his prime, with his skills daily honed. Negotiating teams must have cried when they found out he was coming. Leia wished she could have seen that. Most ambassadors cursed up a storm when they learned of her presence, but she could see the appeal of making one’s opponent cry instead.

“Alright,” she conceded with a nod of her head “You’re right. That was foolish of me. But I don’t understand why?”

“Why what?”

“Why go to all the trouble to manipulate me like that?”
“I dislike the word manipulate. It sounds so harsh. I prefer the term smoothing obstacles.”

Leia snorted “Fine, why smooth the obstacle that is my temper? Why put forth the effort?”

A look of disappointment crossed his face. “Is it really so hard for you to believe that I genuinely care for you?”

Leia squirmed in her chair, uncomfortable. “I’m not exactly the easiest person to like.”

“I like difficult people,” he said, a rueful grin on his face. “Which is fortunate since I happen to be one myself.”

“Yes,” she said pleasantly, warmed by the thought that he did care for her, independent of Luke. “Yes, you are.” Then her eyes narrowed. “Did Luke really agree to resume his training?”

A delighted smile crossed his lips, at the thought of training Luke, or that she thought to ask him she wasn’t sure. “Yes Leia, he really did. It’s going to be slow at first, but he did agree.” He looked at her, “So suspicious,” he shook his head sadly.

She looked at him flatly “Yes I am. And a word of warning Obi-Wan, I learn fast.”

“Then I shall look forward to our next engagement,” he gave her a wolfish smile “It’s been a long time since I met anyone who could keep up with me.”

ABA - Day 102

Leia woke up aching all over. She laid there for a moment, trying to figure out why. Then she felt a shiver work its way down her body. She was freezing and buried underneath blankets on a tropical planet. Wonderful, she was sick. She didn’t have time for this.

She tried to push herself off the tiny bed and collapsed back into it for her efforts. She gritted her teeth, there was too much to do. She could push through this.

“Leia you are not alone anymore. You don’t have to shoulder this by yourself.” Mama’s chiding voice rang in her head. No, she wasn’t alone anymore.

This wasn’t the Resistance. She didn’t need to do this to herself. She wasn’t in charge here, the morale of everyone didn’t rely on her. The cause didn’t lay with just her. She could stay in this damn bed and for once be kind to herself, and not worry those who loved her by pushing so hard.

She did, however, need to tell them. There was no need to send everyone in a panic when she didn’t show up for her morning workout. But at even the thought of trying to rise sent nausea rolling through her. “Luke?” she reached out.

“Leia?” his voice was sleepy, and not quite awake.

“Luke, I need your help.”

She felt his attention immediately sharpen and the adrenaline surge her words caused. Surely she wasn’t that bad about asking for help was she? “What’s wrong?” he demanded.

It took Leia a few seconds to marshal her thoughts, somewhat caught in the feel of his emotions.
“Sick.”

“Okay,” she heard him say, “I’ll get dressed and go get Healer Banok.”


“Leia,” there was exasperation and fondness all mixed together in his mind.

“Too far to walk,” she said

“How about I bring him to you?”

Oh, that was a good idea. “You’re brilliant.”

“And you’re tired,” he said, “I’ll take care of it, go back to sleep.”

“Okay,” she felt him retreat from her mind then, “Mama!”

“I’ll tell her too,” he said “I’m sure she’ll be over soon.”

“No, she needs to handle-”

“Leia,” he was chastising her now, “I got it. Go back to sleep.”

Leia went back to sleep.

She woke when she felt someone shake her shoulder

“Leia,” a voice said.

“Whazutt?” she said, her mouth full of something that tasted unpleasant.

“Leia,” Oh it was Luke “Leia, Healer Banok is here.”

She was lying on her front, why was she on her front? Oh right because she had been an idiot and tried to get up. She rolled to her side and blinked. Healer Banok was indeed in her room.

She blinked again, wondering if he would disappear. “Am I dreaming?”

He came up to the bed to stand next to Luke “I’m flattered that you dream of me Your Highness, but I’m afraid I’m taken.”

She frowned, “You’re not funny.”

“I’m hilarious,” he said dryly and sat on the bed. He reached out and placed a hand on her forehead. “Mmmm, definitely warm,” He reached down and suddenly there was a carry bag on her bed. He drew something out, “Now be still please.”

“For what?” Leia wondered, then felt a slight pinch on her finger. “What was that?”

“A blood sample,” he said cheerfully.

Leia closed her eyes for a second only to have them fly open at another pinch, this time on her arm. “What?” she demanded.
In the second she had closed her eyes Banok had moved to standing by her bed, holding her arm.

“It’s an antiviral,” he said cheerfully. “Along with a fever reducer. You seem to have picked up the flu.”

“Oh,” she blinked “Do I have to go to the infirmary?”

“No.”

Well, he didn’t have to sound so cheerful about her not being there. She was nothing if not pleasant and charming. She scowled at him. “Good, I don’t like that place.”

“Most people don’t.” He addressed her brother, who was now apparently sitting on her bed. When had that happened? “I’ll leave her next two doses here. They need to be given every six hours.”


“Did she vomit?” Banok asked.

Luke shook his head “She didn’t mention it.”

“Alright, keep her on water for the next couple of hours. If she can keep that down, some sort of broth or soup. If she does start vomiting, and it lasts longer then four hours, bring her to the infirmary. Letting her get dehydrated will hamper the medicines job.”

“But she’s alright?” Luke looked so worried.

“Two days of rest and meds and she will be back on her feet terrorizing every poor soul that crosses her path.”

“I’m not mean.” Leia pouted.

“Of course not,” the healer said, not even bothering to wipe the smirk off his face. “Everybody on this base makes Sgt. Riker cry.”

“It was only the once,” she muttered, “And I said I was sorry.” But Riker would have been crying a lot more if that munitions he had been handling incorrectly had blown up in his hands.

Banok said to Luke “Com me if you run into any problems.”

Leia closed her eyes, too tired to follow the rest of what was said.

She opened them again when a delicious smell hit her nose. Luke was walking through her door, carrying a tray in his hands. Leia knew this smell. Luke had brought soup. No, Luke had brought zatib soup. It was their grandmother’s recipe, and Leia hadn’t had it in years.

Seeing that she was awake, he gave her a big smile. “Thought you could use some food.” he said cheerfully “So I made you some zatib. My Aunt Beru said it could-”

“Cure anything,” she finished for him, sitting up and giving herself a pat on the back for not immediately falling over.

“You’ve had it before?” Luke asked.
“Yes,” He settled the tray over her lap.
“I love you,” she said in all seriousness.
“Are you talking to me, or the soup?” He seemed amused.
Leia thought about that for a second. “Yes,” she decided.
He laughed. “Thanks for that.”
“I love you more,” she assured him “Because if I eat the soup, it’s gone. But you, you, will make me more soup.”
His hand gently pressed her forehead, checking her temperature “Yes Leia, I will make you more soup”
“Yes!”
“If you finish this one.”
She tried, she really did, but she could only eat half the bowl before she found herself yawning. “Tired,” she mumbled.
He picked the tray up off her lap, and Leia immediately scooted down to lay back down.
“Then sleep Leia, I’ll stand watch.” Leia closed her eyes before she could warn him not to give her soup to anyone else.

She woke to see Han sitting on a chair directly in front of her bed. She didn't have any chairs in this room. Where had it come from?
“Hey,” she croaked.

He looked up from the bowl he was eating from. “Hey, how are you feeling?”
Leia drew in a deep breath, and a familiar smell greeted her. Leia pouted “You’re eating my soup.” she whined. She loved him, but she would kill to keep that soup.
Han laughed “Don’t worry Luke brought some more for you. You up for eating some?”
Leia yawned “No.”
He got an indignant look on his face “Then why are you complaining about me eating it?”
“My soup,” she said firmly.
“I’ll keep that in mind.”
“Good,” she snuggled back into the blankets, content that he was here, and keeping watch.
“Thanks for being here,” she murmured “I sleep better when you’re here.”
She felt gentle fingers brush her forehead, “Anytime,” he said, voice low “Besides, I owe you one.”
She fell back asleep before she could correct him. That wasn’t how this worked.
Mama was here and she was singing. Leia was about to roll over and ask her for some water when she heard the door open. Her mother immediately stopped and there was a soft “Oh.”

Luke’s voice reached her ears, “I’m just here to drop off more soup. Then I can go.”

There was the sound of rustling fabric, and Leia heard her mother get up. “No, it’s quite alright Luke. I can go, you’re her brother and you deserve some time with her.”

“And you’re her mother,” he said. Leia could feel him approach and she heard the sound of a tray being set on the floor.


Leia could feel her brother’s reluctance, both to leave her and to stay in the same room as her Mama. She felt a sob build in the back of her throat. This was her fault. If she hadn’t been so impulsive she and her parents could have told Luke a better way.

“I’m not sure that is a wise idea, Your Majesty,” he finally said.

Mama drew in a sharp little breath, “See,” her brother said, “it would probably be better if we set up terms beforehand. I wasn’t trying to be rude.”

“Set up terms?” Mama asked.

“Just some tips Leia gave me for talking to Ben. On how important it is to set up boundaries and expectations. And to eat beforehand.”

“It’s never good to try to negotiate on an empty stomach.”

There was wonder in his tone “You taught her that.”

“I did, yes.” There was a warm chuckle “You might be doing better than you think Luke.” Leia felt her mother gently stroke her hair. “Since she’s arrived here all I have seen is the soldier. I’m glad to know the diplomat is still there.”

There was a long silence, then Luke blurted out “Why didn’t you tell me?” His voice was hurt.

Mama sighed “Because we didn't know how to Luke.” There was the sound of rustling fabric as her mother shifted. “We told Leia we were waiting for her input on how to best break this to you, but the truth is Luke we didn’t know how.” There was warmth and affection in her tone “We care a great deal for you, outside of the fact that you're Leia’s brother, and we didn’t want to break your heart. Perhaps it was cowardly of us, but we didn’t...” her voice trailed off. Then she cleared it and started again. “You loved your Uncle did you not?”

“Yes.” Luke’s tone was confused.

“But he was your Uncle, for all that he was your only father figure. Leia seems to have no problem holding the concept that both Bail and Vader are her father, however reluctantly.” Breha sighed “But Leia grew up with a father. You didn’t. We were afraid of how you would receive the news.”

“You thought I’d go running to him?” Luke’s voice was offended. “To a slaver?”

There was a long pause from her mother “I suppose I never looked at it from that angle.” There was the rustle of fabric and Leia felt the bed dip as her mother sat down.
“Did you know fear is much easier for people to understand?” she asked conversationally.


“Fear is simple. Love is harder. Loneliness even harder.” Mama let out a wet chuckle and Leia realized her mother was crying “People will do strange things for a family, for a sense of belonging. I try not to underestimate the power that holds, no matter how much they may come to regret the actions they took in pursuing it.”


“I think your entire known family was killed not too long ago. I think you were thrust into a world and a fight you were ill-prepared for. I think you have had a great many assumptions about yourself and your place in the galaxy ripped away from you in a very short amount of time.”

“So you don’t think I’m lonely but weak?”

“No Luke I don’t. But you never discover the true limits of your strength until you run into them. And Bail and I were desperately afraid that this would break you. And Leia would join you.”

“She’s stronger than all of us,” Luke said hotly, coming to her defense.

“Yes, she is.” Mama said calmly “But she has been given a hard road to walk, even before she was thrust into this situation. She won’t speak of it, but I know her heart was shattered, probably more than once. I don’t think she could survive losing you.”

Luke was silent for a moment, “So you were protecting Leia?”

“No Luke, we were protecting you both.”

Leia would have protested that she was long past the point of needing anyone’s protection, but she was so tired and cold. She hadn’t been this cold since.... She drifted off before she could finish the thought.

ABA - Day 103

She was on Hoth, leaning against one of the parked X-Wings. Major Derlin was standing in front of her, Threepio at her right. The Major was gently trying to tell her that they needed to close the shield doors for the night. That wasn’t anything she hadn’t already known about this situation. But she had hoped. Luke and Han had pulled miracles out of dire situations before. She shot one more look out into that snowy whiteness. But this wasn’t the Empire or incompetent bounty hunters, this was the weather itself. There was no outsmarting or bargaining with it. Night was coming, along with the snow storms and the deadly temperatures.

“All you will do by arguing with the storm is wear yourself out Leia,” her father had told her time and time again.

Leia focused back in on Derlin. He was standing there, a worried look on his face. She gave a reluctant nod, knowing the order she gave would more than likely kill the two people left in this galaxy that she depended on. Derlin peeled away, a grateful look on his face. Threepio and R2 watched him as he quickly hurried away.
“Close the doors,” he bellowed out. Immediately the great steel beasts began their slow crawl forward. Leia forced herself to watch. She could hear Chewie letting out a series of painful whimpers, but she dared not look at him for fear she would burst into sobs.

She got a flicker of warning this time. Not from the cold, this place was so frozen Leia wondered even if she threw herself into a star’s corona she would thaw. But that tempest storm of the Force that followed him everywhere he went was pinging on her senses. Maybe he was learning not to come upon her unawares. Maybe he was getting sloppy. No matter the reason, Leia valued those few precious seconds to steel herself. Because of course, of course, he showed up to see this.

One happy side effect of his presence is the illusion that she was in the past shattered. She was dreaming, and she knew how this long night would end. It also meant that she had control. She concentrated and everything around them froze, hung in one solitary second, she was not willing to give him even a second of intelligence.

“Who is out there Leia?” His voice boomed in the cavernous room.

Leia scowled, but she didn’t lash out. She continued to stare out into the approaching night, refusing to meet his gaze. “Are you going to show up every time I have a nightmare?” she asked, bitterness clear even to her.

“No,” he answered seriously, ignoring her sarcastic tone. “You are, of course, my greatest priority but I do have other responsibilities.” She heard the heavy tread of his footfalls. Not knowing where he was made the spot between her shoulder blades itch. She did a quick flick of her eyes to the side to see. He was coming up beside her, but not close enough for him to be able to touch her. His back also to the X-Wing, and he stood, his hands on his hips. Leia flicked her eyes back to the frozen shield wall.

“Well, why don’t you toddle off and see to one of them?” she offered.

“You are my priority,” he repeated. There was a pause, then he said “That doesn’t mean I don’t check every night.”

Well good for him. Leia had given up wondering if he understood how unsettling he sounded when he made statements like that. The answer was clearly no. Then again, when was the last time he had to interact with anyone as a human being instead of the Emperor’s rabid beast?

“I would talk to you more often but you have become quite adept at keeping me out.”

She didn't answer him, which she felt was a very adult decision on her part. She wanted so badly to taunt him with the fact and that it was through Obi-Wan’s tutelage she had been able to achieve it. She crossed her arms over her chest, staring mutinously out into the wintery whiteness. When he said nothing she risked another side glance to see what he was doing.

He appeared to be staring at what she was. Trying to see what held her attention? Trying to think for some polite greeting? Then another thought occurred to her. Maybe he was studying her. Hard to tell where his eyes were under that mask. As long as he kept his head straight there was no telling where his gaze fell. Well, it’s not like he would learn anything, except that where they were was cold.

“Is there anything you wish to tell me Leia?”

No, she did not. She stubbornly held her tongue. As the silence went on, she could feel his anger rising with each moment that passed with nothing being said. Surely the fact she wanted him gone
couldn’t still surprise him? After a few minutes of this fraught silence, he finally announced in a clipped tone “It’s only when you are physically weakened I am able to get in.”

Leia stiffened at the unexpected gift of this intelligence. “Noted,” she said neutrally.

Maybe she could have Luke stand guard over her mind in situations like this? Given how easily their minds synchronized he should be able to help her reinforce them for unwanted nighttime visitors. Of course, that meant that she would have to confess to these late night chats with Vader.

Vader’s temper whiplashed around her at her short statement, and several of the tools lying around hurled themselves off into the distance. Leia flinched at the unexpected outburst and turned to face him. Just what the hell did he think he was doing? He too had turned, and his finger came up, pointed at her “Who hurt you Leia?” and there was violence in every word he spoke.

Leia blinked. What was he going on about? “What are you talking about?” she demanded.

“I could slip in without resistance. That only happens when you are injured.”

She frowned, this line of questioning was so unexpected, and in her confusion of trying to understand where he got this asinine idea from, she blurted out the first thing that came to mind. “One event is not a defined pattern.”

His left hand lashed out and he punched the X-Wing’s side. The metal groaned and cracks appeared around his fist in a spider web’s pattern. “Who. Hurt. You.”

“So you can what? Hunt them down?” Leia scoffed, annoyed at this farce of paternal affection.

“Yes.”

She swallowed, her annoyance fading away. He meant that. The Force was radiating his very clear intent to kill whoever had harmed her.

Hell, Mon had been right, he had executed those stormtroopers because they hurt her. She didn’t understand his reaction, but it was clear what he would do when he exited her mind. She didn’t want whatever actions he would deem appropriate to be on her conscience. No, she wasn’t responsible for what he did, but she couldn’t unleash him on an unsuspecting galaxy in a killing mood. Not when it cost her nothing to set him straight. “There’s nobody to blame,” she said.

His hand dropped from the dent it had left in the X-Wing and he took to pacing back and forth in front of her. “My presence here would state otherwise.” He wasn’t happy when he couldn’t get in, wasn’t happy when he could.

But this rage of his was very real and starting to prickle the shields in her mind in very uncomfortable ways. She didn’t want to spend the energy defending herself over something so trivial. She needed to save what reserves she had because there was going to be something else that she would need to attack on. There always was with him.

Leia rolled her eyes, hoping he didn’t see through her false nonchalance. “Going to kill a virus are you?”

He stopped moving at that and angled his head towards her. “What do you mean?”

“I. Have. The. Flu.” she said, emphasizing every word. “So there is no need to go on a murderous rampage on my behalf.” Not that he needed her as an excuse to go on one.
He looked away from her at that, and the cacophony of emotions he had inadvertently been battering her with calmed. His fists began clenching and unclenching, and Leia let out a small sigh of relief at the sight. He was trying to reign himself in.

Leia went to looking back at the metal door to the Hoth base. After a few minutes she could hear the sound of his respirator growing louder, he was coming closer but she refused to look at him. The sound ended a few feet to her right. Again he wasn’t getting close enough to touch her. Maybe she could teach him some boundaries after all. Or more then likely he didn’t want to risk getting caught in another one of her flashbacks. Hadn't Obi-Wan said she was fully capable of tearing someone apart in one of them?

She could feel his eyes on her, and the sense of awkwardness grew around him, but Leia refused to engage. The silence continued on for what felt like to Leia like an eternity. Then quietly, in a halting voice, he asked. “How sick are you?”

Ten minutes and that was the best question he could come up with? He really didn’t know how to interact with people anymore beyond death threats, did he? Didn’t matter, she wasn’t going to play along.

There was a long silence again. “Have you sought medical attention?”

How could he be so bad at this? For years she had seen him on the edges of the galas and balls the Emperor had thrown for his own twisted pleasure. Vader had always been on the fringes over those events, like some god of doom. She always thought that he had hovered like a predatory animal because he enjoyed the rush of fear and unease he caused in his wake. But maybe that wasn’t why. Perhaps he did that because the man was abysmal at small talk. That was neither here nor there. She didn't care about his poor socialization, she just wanted him gone. She crossed her arms over her chest, refusing to answer.

“Are you in the infirmary?”

Again she didn’t respond, no matter how desperate he sounded. It wasn’t her fault, if he hadn’t entered her mind, where he knew he wasn’t wanted, she wouldn't be treating him this way.

“Is someone on your base looking after you? Bringing you medicine and food?”

She continued to keep her gaze away from him. There was no point in this pretend game he was indulging in. She didn't care how concerned he felt in the Force. This was a trap to gain her confidence.

“He was nine,” Obi-Wan’s voice said in the back of her mind, and for a moment sympathy swept over her. To have that young of a mind be warped that early, what had it done to him?

“Yes, he was, and he probably had learned all manner of tricks from those encounters.” Her more rational side pointed out. No wonder he could only play at being human. Still, the desperation in his voice made her queasy. He wasn’t trying to hurt her with these questions. He wasn’t probing for any sensitive information.

There was a sharp lash of jealousy now entering in the Force, but his voice didn’t change it’s deliberate even tone. “Leia, are at least the Organas checking in on you?”

There was a pause, then that feeling of jealousy twisted until it felt like an inferno, “Or your tutor?” Even though he was radiating his hatred and bitterness towards Luke and her parents, his tone remained even. “He’s trying to be polite,” her mother’s voice whispered.
Leia’s jaw clenched at that self-inflicted reminder of what her mother would think of her actions here. She would tell Leia that this wasn’t the way to handle this. That Leia was being rude. Well, Leia had tried being polite last time. She had nicely asked him to leave and he had refused. She had also tried yelling, and that had also gotten her nowhere with him. Time to try a new tactic. If she didn’t react, she wouldn’t give him what he wanted. Maybe that was the key in getting him to leave. She had patience, she could outwait him.

Again the silence descended on them, broken only by the sound of his breathing, and the occasional crunching of snow under his boots as he shifted side to side. Then he offered, in a as casual manner as the vocoder would allow “I would advise not to eat anything Obi-Wan cooks for you.”

“Why?” she hissed, responding before she could think better of it. “Afraid he’s going to poison me?” Okay, clearly he knew what soft spots to hit to get her to react. She needed a new plan.

“Yes.”

She whirled on him, irritated that she was falling for this, but unable not to rise to the older Jedi’s defense. “Really? You think Obi-Wan Kenobi would deliberately try to harm me with his cooking?”

Instead of the usual mix of anger and hate, she got when that name was mentioned there was the slightest glimmer of...amusement? His head cocked “You’ve never eaten his cooking have you?”

This had just taken a very strange step into the surreal. “What!?!?”

He kept going on “I would advise you never to eat anything that man cooks for you. Your stomach will thank me.”

She blinked, her mind unable to keep up with the frankly bizarre turn this conversation had taken. “I eat ration bars without complaint. It can’t be that bad.” she found herself saying. Was she really standing here defending Obi-Wan’s cooking? To Vader!?!?

He huffed. “I grew up poor and starving. I was used to eating anything I could get my hands on. It is that revolting.”

Leia stilled at that admission. He had no particular emotion attached to what he said, but she had a feeling his nonchalance was just as fake as hers had been. There was a word that he wasn’t using here. He hadn’t just been poor, he had been a slave. Leia knew that about him, Luke had told her. But did he know she knew that? She couldn’t remember mentioning it to him. So why use poor instead of slave?

It definitely would have been the obvious ploy. To play upon her sympathies. That she couldn’t possibly understand the hardships he had endured, the pain he had suffered, and so on and so on. Not that it would have worked. Leia had met plenty of people who had been former slaves, Chewie among them, and they hadn’t decided to take their anger about that on the galaxy. As Luke as so succinctly put it, he had used his freedom to enslave others.

But why hadn’t he mentioned it? Why not go for the saddest sob story in an attempt to manipulate her? Leia’s head began to throb from the stress of trying to understand his reasoning here. No, she wasn’t going to waste the time. This was a subject best left alone.

Leia said nothing to him, but she didn’t return to staring outside either. That deep black mask merely looked her up and down, taking her appearance in. “I could give you my recipe for zatib
soup. My mother said it could cure anything.”

Leia’s eyes widened. Her favorite soup? Vader knew the recipe for her favorite soup? She didn’t even know the recipe. Luke had frustratingly refused to tell her. He always said that what her poor cooking skills would do to their grandmother’s recipe would dishonor their family legacy. Then what he actually said sank into her mind.

Oh, no. This was not a subject she was touching, for all that it actually did fall within the parameters of ‘normal behavior’. His mother was a subject best left alone. She had gathered that much from their conversation on the Death Star. For a moment she did admit to the temptation to say yes to his offer. She could finally make the stuff for herself, take that Luke, but her rational mind overrode that childish impulse. This would encourage him in so many ways that didn’t bear thinking about. She swallowed and with as much genuine sincerity she could muster she whispered “Thank you, but no.”

There was a wash of regret and pain, then it was chased by indignation. He felt insulted, but not for himself, he had surprisingly been restrained in her deliberate snubbing of his presence. No, this feeling was for his mother. Leia thinned her shields just the tiniest bit to see if she could grasp how her polite refusal meant disrespecting Shmi Skywalker. The answer made her blink in surprise.

He thought she was disparaging his mother’s cooking. She found herself suppressing a giggle. So little boys with loving mothers seemed to grow up everywhere with the impulse to defend them. Even Darth Vader.

Not your son.

She shoved that thought aside, it wasn’t relevant. But she also had no grudge against her grandmother so she compromised with herself. There was no need to let him think she was insulting the woman. She could bend this much, for all that he was being unreasonable. Besides, she really did love that soup. “I’m afraid I’m not much of a better cook than Obi-Wan allegedly is. I would botch it horribly.” she offered.

Vader nodded, taking her concession for what it was worth. Leia had a panicked moment when she thought he might take the next step and offer to cook it for her. Thankfully he didn’t, his poor socialization skills saving her from trying to find a polite refusal. But it did cause her brain to conjure up an image of him, standing over a stove, wearing an apron, as he patiently stood there waiting for the pot to boil. She stifled a giggle as the thought struck her.

It did leave her wondering why he had learned that skill? Stupid question, probably back when he could still eat solid food. In self-defense of Obi-Wan’s apparent attempts to indirectly poison him. It was so hard sometimes, looking at that black armor, and distinct profile, to remember that there was a flesh and blood man under there.

He slowly took in the frozen figures around him. “Where are we?”

This was something she was much more comfortable in dealing with. He was fishing for intel. “At a base which we will now never be using,” she said snottily.

That death head mask swung back to look at her, “Leia, that’s no-” he started to say.

Leia’s frustrations with him rolled over her, breaking her control, and she cut him off “Why won’t you leave me alone?” she asked exasperatedly.

“Why won’t you come to me?” he shot back.
“You know the answer to that!” Leia snarled.

His hands came to rest on his hips again. “I’m sorry. I thought we were asking questions the other already knew the answers to.” Sarcasm. Wonderful.

She threw her hands up in frustration. “Is there anything I can say to get you to leave?”

“No.” Well, at least he was honest. She huffed in irritation.

“If you won’t tell me where we are, will you tell me who is out there?” his hand pointed out, past Threepio and R2.

A smirk crossed her face and she answered him honestly. He wanted to know. “My family.”

The raw pain that cut through her shields almost had her regretting the words, but she refused to back down. He stood there, jealousy dancing around him, then abruptly it cut off. He shook his head. “No.”

“No what?” she demanded.

“No, you don’t mean the Organas. There is no reason for them to have gone outside. Especially in a system like this.” He stared at her. “They aren’t the ones out there.”

Dammit, why couldn't he be stupid? “No, they are not,” she said but refused to elaborate more than that.

There was a long pause, “Your face in this dream doesn't look much older then it currently is.” His helmet fell slightly down, bringing his gaze away from her face directly, “They were dead by this point in your original timeline, weren’t they?”

Leia closed her eyes. Why the hell couldn’t he go away? Why did he insist on doing this to both of them?

She felt the mess of his emotions. Worry, self-recrimination, and overwhelming anxiety. She opened her eyes to stare at him, standing awkwardly in front of her. He still wasn’t looking at her, but he pressed on, asking the question “Leia, did my alternate kill them?”

She shifted a bit at the amount of raw emotion in his tone, even through the vocoder. There was a part of her, a very large part of her, that wanted to scream yes at him. She could make him believe it too. For so long that had been her truth, that he had killed her parents, her family, her world. That it had been all his fault. Tarkin was dead, and beyond her reach. The Emperor was someone she didn't have the skill set to kill. He was still left, and was constantly making her life a misery in the process.

It had taken her years for her to come to grips with this. That he hadn’t been the one to give the order. That by all accounts he hadn’t thought it was a good idea. That he was against building the Death Star itself. He might not have stopped it, but he was only one person among many who that was true of.

But it was so tempting. Even if these emotions he was projecting everywhere were a lie he was telling himself, she could use that old truth to hurt him, like he hurt her.

“He was nine,” that voice said again.

She sighed in defeat. Dammit, she wasn’t Palpatine. She wasn’t going to hurt him just because she
had the power to do so. She was better than that. She was the daughter of Breha and Bail Organa, and they had taught her that justice and fairness were the cornerstones of how you treat any sentient. Even Vader. Especially Vader. Morals couldn't be abandoned just because they were hard. She couldn't hurt him with a version of the truth she long ago abandoned.

She cleared her throat and uttered the hardest sentence in her life. “Not directly, no.”

There was a small sigh from him, then he grasped what she had actually said. His head came back up slowly. “But indirectly?”

She shrugged “You-” No, that wasn’t diplomatic. She corrected to “He was there. He might have been able to stop it, but he was no more responsible than anyone else in the Empire.”

“I see.” His hands came to his belt and then he asked “Did they live?”

Leia frowned “Did who live?”

“You family,” he gestured out to the snow. “The one you built. Did they survive this?”

The one she built. What an interesting way of looking at that. Had he built another family after his mother’s death? Who had he considered in it? “Why do you care?” she wondered.

“Because you do.”

She swallowed. Again, nothing but complete sincerity. “Yes, they did.”

“I am glad to hear it.”

He meant that. There was nothing but truth ringing in the Force. Confusing, this was all so confusing.

Leia actually flinched when the sound of the metal door closing all the way echoed throughout the base, Chewie’s howl of anguish following. Dammit, she had lost control of the dream while she had been distracted by this charming little conversation.

Threepio continued on as if he hadn’t been paused. “Of course R2 has been known to be wrong.” She sighed as Threepio turned away. She let the irritation go at Vader hearing even this much. What harm could it do? Without any context it was impossible to glean anything from this.

Threepio stopped his trek back to R2 and looked back to her, trying to give her hope “From time to time.” There was a pause “Oh dear, oh dear.” he said sadly. She concentrated and froze everything again, ever mindful of her uninvited guest.

There was a flare of shock and surprise in the Force. She started to turn to ask him what had him so rattled when he sped past her. He was moving so fast she barely caught the sight of the edges of his cloak as it whirled past her.

He stopped in front of Threepio’s frozen form. A black glove reached out, almost touching the droid’s golden cheek. “C3-PO,” Vader murmured in a wondering tone.

Leia’s back stiffened. “How do you know this droid?” she demanded.

He didn’t seem to hear her. Horrifying answers to that question began spinning through her mind. Papa had long been suspected of being one of the leaders of the Rebel Alliance. It wasn’t outside the realm of possibility that during one of his stays in the Senate, Threepio had been grabbed and
forced to have a spying program loaded into his software. Vader, or possible Yularen, would think nothing of reprogramming the droid in this manner.

“How do you know Threepio?” she demanded, starting to stalk up to him, trying to think of how to save Threepio without resorting to a memory wipe. Terrified for her oldest, if most annoying, companion. "Answer me!” she yelled.

Vader finally seemed to hear her and he trained his head to meet her angry stare head-on.

“I built him,” he said simply.

Leia stopped in her tracks, angry rant at him forgotten. There seemed to be only white noise in her mind as she tried to understand what he had just said. It was an appropriate reaction. Reality had just leapt to its side and started to dance right in front of her. In all her many wonderings about Threepio's creator, Vader had certainly never come to mind.

After a long moment of her trying to bring her whirling mind to some sort of sense of sanity, she sputtered out. “You? You built C3-PO?”

He nodded again. There was no way this was the truth. She didn’t care that the Force was confirming every word. The Force was wrong.

“The fussiest, prissiest, most clingy droid I have ever met was built by you?” It seemed very important to emphasize that point. She couldn’t think of two beings in the galaxy who were more diametrically different from each other.

Vader’s tone was exasperated. “He was for my mother and meant to last. I was nine and built him out of scrap parts. What would you expect?” Actually, that information was the only part that made any sense. She could easily see how a bright nine-year-old would give a droid all of Threepio's traits and consider that useful. He wouldn’t know it would leave the poor droid a neurotic mess, with an overabundance of caution due to the amount of calculating he could do on his way too many processors.

Leia startled herself by laughing. She never thought she would ever have a conversation with Vader that ended up with her laughing until her sides ached, but there it was. She sank to the cold frosty floor after a while, unable to stand.

The thought of the most terrifying enforcer the Emperor ever had, building what had to be the most annoying protocol droid in the galaxy was just too much. Every time she began to get control of herself another ludicrous scenario would roll through her mind. She imagined him looming over Threepio, trying to fix the droid with his large hands. Of Threepio trailing after Vader, crying out “Oh my!!” every time Vader did something as impolite as to leave a dead subordinate on the floor. The droid whining about how Vader wasn't respecting his skills. She rolled on the ground, laughing, knowing he was probably getting more and more offended, but unable to stop.

When she finally got control of herself and pulled herself upright to sit she was somewhat surprised to see him still standing there. She half expected him to depart her dream like a sullen child, or lash out at her in anger. She had just rolled on the floor laughing like an undignified child at his boyhood creation. But the Force around him only held a deep sense of wistfulness and longing.

“You have your mother’s laugh,” he said as quietly as he could. There was a hushed reverence in his tone that Leia had never heard before. The words bounced off the stark walls of the cavern, creating an interesting echo effect, that only added to the profound sense of grief that accompanied those words. Leia froze in the act of rising to her feet. She looked at him, really looked, with
everything she had.

“You still miss her,” she said surprised.

He didn’t get indignant, or protective. “Of course.” Like this was a fact of his universe he long ago accepted. Water is wet. Sand is irritating. Vader misses his wife.

"And he still killed her" that horrible practical side whispered in her ear. "So don’t assume anything when it comes to his regard."

That was true, but somehow she hadn’t expected him to still care. To remember the sound of his wife’s laughter and nineteen years later see it in her daughter.

Leia thought of that sad-eyed woman who had haunted her youth, and her dreams now. She believed that dream had been real. If she could time travel, why couldn’t a dead Han from another timeline pop into her head? Or an impromptu visit from her dead birthmother?

Vader, taking her silence for confusion, reached out into the Force and did something, and a woman appeared in front of Leia. She was sitting on the cold hard ground, but she was dressed for a bright summer day. There was a yellow corset, surrounded by a frothy paler fabric for the skirts. Her hair was done into elaborate braids, not an Alderaanian style but pretty nonetheless. Leia sank back onto her knees as the woman’s bright eyes, the same color as hers, if not the same shape, filled with laughter.

“You’re making fun of me!” she insisted, a glow to her cheeks, and a teasing smile playing on her lips.

Leia was too caught in this vision to hear what the next set of words were, but whatever it was sent her mother into gales of laughter. Leia watched, fascinated, as a stranger’s face twisted into an expression she had only seen in holos of herself. And Vader was right, their laughs did sound exactly the same.

“I’ve never seen her this happy,” she said unthinkingly, as the image came to a frozen halt, that summer day outfit so at odds with the cold breath Leia could see coming out of her mouth.

“You’ve seen her before?” Vader’s voice was eager and broke the spell this woman cast.

Leia looked up at him, “Only in my dreams,” she said. “Papa and Mama didn’t discuss her much.”

The landscape around her wavered at the words, Papa and Mama. That quiet eager mood was gone as quickly as it had come, leaving only rage in its wake. Leia berated herself internally. She couldn’t afford to be distracted when talking to this man, no matter how tempting the bait he put in front of her.

“They are not your parents!!” he roared.

Leia shot to her feet, furious at the insinuation. “Of course they are. They love me! They raised me! They protected me!!”

“They kidnapped you!!” he yelled his finger jabbing at her.

“Well a version of you tortured me!” she screamed “If I acknowledge you as my father, I don’t see how ‘kidnapping’ me” and she put as much disdain as she could into what she thought of that word choice, “to keep me away from you, at all disqualifies me from calling them my parents!”
His emotions stilled at that. His finger slowly started to lower “You acknowledge you’re my daughter?” he asked in a much softer voice.

Leia rolled her eyes, “Of course I do.” It had been years in the making, but she wasn’t that stubborn. She turned and looked down at the image of her frozen smiling mother “And I acknowledged her,” she said, in a soft tone. She hadn’t sought any further knowledge of her, but Leia had acknowledged her.

It was so strange. For years Leia had wondered about this woman. Who she was, what had happened to her, why she was so sad? It never occurred to her, when she was growing up, and desperate for answers, that one day she would willingly try to avoid the answers to those questions.

After Endor, she had found herself in the oddest position. She had just unlocked a major clue to finding the identity of her birth mother, and she had found she hadn’t wanted to know anymore. For her mother to love Vader, it clearly showed massive errors of judgment. Learning her biological father’s identity had cured her of all curiosity regarding her mother.

Luke was the one who had pushed, and Leia followed along because she didn’t want him to walk that path alone. She wouldn’t help him in regards to uncovering Vader’s history, but she would help with this. He only had Aunt Beru, who loved him as fiercely as any mother, but very clearly had made herself his Aunt, not mother. Titles, especially ones you instruct others to call you, are important.

It had been Mon, of all people, who had told them about the rumors surrounding the friendship of Anakin Skywalker and Padme Naberrie. One holo viewing of the Senator later, they had both been convinced that they had found their mother. A trip to Naboo, along with a long afternoon searching through a dusty warehouse looking through marriage certificates, had revealed the two had been wed. It had been the final proof they were looking for.

Mon had told her stories about Padme, they had been colleagues in the Republic Senate after all, but the older woman confessed that they had been political allies, not close friends. Beyond the woman’s political beliefs, Leia had no clue to who she had been. Her maternal side of the family tried to fill her and Luke in, but given they hadn’t even known Padme was pregnant, let alone married until she died, Leia felt justified in thinking they hadn’t known her all that well either.

Breha was Mama, she had always been Mama, and Leia was content with that. But now, standing here in the vast shadow this man cast both literally and figuratively, she wondered if she had inherited anything else from this woman besides her laugh, looks, and good aim with a blaster.

“I look so much like her,” she whispered, as she walked around the woman, taking in all the details she could. This was more real than any holo, she could see every detail.

There was a long pause, then “Yes, you do.”

“That petulant voice muttered in her head “I’m only her spitting image and strong in the Force. Luke, you believed the moment you heard his name, but me, me, you ignore.”

Leia shoved that thought away, it was beneath her. Besides she was grateful that he hadn’t made any such connection between them when she was young. As badly as she was handling this now, she had years to come to terms with this. If he had somehow survived Endor, if they had encountered each other, she shuddered to think what she would have done. And if they had discovered the truth when she was a teenager, there was no telling what would have happened.
Finally able to tear her eyes away, she looked up to see Vader peering at her intently, Threepio standing a bit to the side.

“He doesn't remember you,” she said, pointing to the golden droid. “Given his tendency to run off at the mouth he would have mentioned it years ago if he had.”

“Organa wiped his memory?” there was a host of bitterness and resentment in his voice.

Leia cocked her head. It was standard procedure for most droids. Frankly, it was a miracle that Threepio had apparently only had it done once. “You never did?”

“No, he was meant to be a friend. You do not wipe the memory of a friend, simply because they develop traits you find annoying.”

“No, you just kill them instead,” Leia bit her tongue on that remark.

Vader did one of his dramatic swirls, clearly intent on starting to pace to burn his energy off, when he stopped mid-motion, the cape swirling around him.

“What?” Leia demanded. He ignored her and walked several feet over to R2, who was still at the nose of the X-Wing. That large black hand came out and was laid gently on the silver dome.

“Did Organa take you as well?” he asked the frozen droid.

“You build him too?” Leia shouted, exasperated. Gods, the coincidence involved in all of this was all a bit much, but that dark figure simply shook his head.

“No, R2 belonged to your mother.”

Leia felt her breath catch, but Vader went on, reciting in an almost detached manner “During the Clone Wars I didn’t have much use for a protocol droid, so she and I switched them. I took R2 and she took on Threepio,” There was a long sigh “It was a beneficial arrangement for both of us.”

“Don’t you dare mock him!” Leia snapped “Force knows Threepio can be trying, but he always, always, goes above and beyond what is asked of him. And he has always been loyal.”

Those blank eye shields met her eyes “You misunderstand me. Threepio saved her life several times.” He shook his head “She often found herself in situations she had no business being in. I was grateful he was there.”

At the gentle note of fondness in his tone, Leia relaxed, although she marveled at the fact that Vader could be fond of anything. Especially Threepio. “I know about that.”

“You do?” he sounded surprised.

She shrugged, aware she was stepping on an emotional landmine, but also aware it could buy some goodwill towards Rex. “About the fondness for dangerous situations. Rex mentioned that about her too.”

“She preferred words to a blaster. But she went where she felt she was needed.”

“And a lot of those places required blasters?” Leia asked.

“They were dangerous times.”

These are dangerous times, mostly because of your Empire, but Leia let that thought go.
He went on, in a faintly reminiscent tone “R2 was my astromech droid when I was flying one of
the fighters.”

Leia snorted. “I bet that wasn’t the only missions he tagged along on,” she said before she could
think.

There was a wash of warmth from him. It was such an odd feeling in this cold space. It wasn’t
cloying or superior, just simple wonder. “You do know him.”

Yes, yes, she did. She also knew that unlike Threepio, Luke had found no evidence that R2’s
memory had ever been wiped. Well, she and that overqualified screwdriver were going to have a
little chat when she woke up.

“Despite the circumstances surrounding it, I’m glad they ended up in your care,” he offered.

So was she, her and Luke’s, but hell if she was going to tell him that.

He gave the droid one last caress and moved back towards her. She steeled herself from taking an
instinctive step back, but she couldn’t contain the minute flinch his action caused.

He noticed because he stopped. “I wish you believed that I mean you no harm.”

Well wasn’t that a tricky way for him to phrase that. I mean you no harm, not, I won’t harm you.

“Vast experience says otherwise.”

He made a frustrated noise in the back of his throat, almost a growl. “I didn’t do any of that.”

Leia didn’t like the fact that she was afraid, and that she couldn’t hide it from him. So she did what
she always did when she felt fear, she went on the attack. “I’m sorry, was there someone else in
that cell who was choking me to death?”

Frustration was laced in his tone “You almost killed me with that punch you landed, so I suppose
we are even.”

Leia blinked, “I did what now?”

“The punch you threw,” he explained, then he tapped the hardware laying on his chest “it knocked
out my primary respiratory system. I was on the secondary system for the rest of that
conversation.”

Oh. Leia felt her mind whirling. Just how out of control and desperate had she been in that cell?
She was going to have to think on that later. Now was not the time to deal with this sudden
overwhelming urge to panic.

“So as you see, I am no threat that you can't match.”

Uh-huh. One unexpected punch did not in any way make them equals in their ability and training in
the Force, and she was in no way deluded enough to think otherwise.

She switched to a more relevant line of thinking. “Even if that were true, you threaten the people I
love,” she told him “Or do you think that I would be selfish enough to ignore that?”

His fists began clenching and unclenching, and he spat out “I have no intention of killing the
Organas.”
No, that would be too kind. Torturing them seemed to be more his style. “You think they are the only ones I worry about?”

His head cocked at that and there was a long moment of baffled silence. “You think—” he started to say, for all the world sounding aghast, but he broke off before he could finish. “Of course you do,” he muttered petulantly. “Why would you think otherwise?” His arms wrapped around himself.

Leia’s eyes narrowed, not sure if he honestly wanted her to answer that question or was just thinking out loud.

That rhythmic breathing continued on in its strangely hypnotic terrifying way for several moments as he stood there, gathering his thoughts. Finally, he said, “Leia, I understand that you only think the worst of any of my actions. But given what I know of you, how do you think I would be foolish enough to try to kill your husband? I only sought to capture him. I see how it is tearing you apart that your son did it, and you loved him.”

Leia’s blood ran cold. This was worse than she thought. “What?” she demanded, “When did you meet my husband?”

His arms dropped and the feeling she was getting from him was surprise. “On Cymoon 1. Didn’t he tell you?”

No, he had not. Han hadn’t mentioned running into Vader at all. Her eyes narrowed. No, wait, that wasn’t true, Han had been by her side the entire mission. She would have remembered seeing Vader. And he hadn’t seen Han after she was shot either. Luke’s version of events made that very clear. Vader had only seen and spoken to...Luke.

“My tutor!!” she shouted.

“Yes, him.” Jealousy bitter and black swirled in the air. “Obi-Wan’s star pupil.”

Leia felt guilt and revulsion swamp through her. Unfortunately for her Vader wasn’t so wrapped up in his own emotions not to feel that. “Leia?” he demanded.

Dammit, if she had been thinking she would have known this was the conclusion he would come to. Hell it was the one she led him to, in an effort to obscure Luke’s identity. But there was no way to cover that flicker of emotion he just witnessed. “That wasn't my husband,” she said tiredly, berating herself for failing Luke in this.

“He isn’t?”

“No,” she said tiredly.

“But you love him.” He seemed confused.

“Of course I love him!” she snapped back “But that doesn't mean I married him.” He only stared at her, “This may come as a surprise to you, but I don’t necessarily marry every person in the galaxy that I love.”

“Did your husband know how much your tutor meant to you?”

“Means,” she corrected. “And yes, he knew. Because we discussed it. Like adults.” Well, half the time they discussed it. The other half of the time they had yelled it at each other. But either way, communication was had.
“And it didn’t bother him?”

“No, because he trusted us.” And it became a moot point when Han learned that she and Luke were related. “My husband loved my tutor too.” There was a wave of non-comprehension from him. Was he playing stupid, or did he really not get this?

“Love isn’t a zero-sum game,” she said, exhaustion hitting her hard. She had asked Luke, as a thought experiment, how do you explain sight to the blind? She was living the practicalities of it now. How do you explain love to a Sith Lord? “You can love and trust more than one person at a time.”

“That has not been my experience.”

“Why am I not surprised?” she asked.

“So are you pursuing a relationship with him again?”

“What?”

“Your husband,” he clarified. “Have you met him yet?”

Leia couldn’t believe he actually had the nerve to bring this up. “I am not discussing this with you. We are enemies! Do you understand that?”

“You should embrace this second chance,” he continued on as if she hadn’t spoken, “There are many people who would give much to have such an opportunity.”

“Like you?” she shot back, trying to provoke his temper so he would leave this subject.

“Yes,” he said, the amount of grief and regret in his voice shouldn’t be so clear. Not through that vocoder and not in such a short word.

“But you killed her,” she whispered confused.

He flinched “That was not my intent. I will swear on anything you like I did not mean for that to happen. I loved her. And even through all the pain it causes me now, there is nothing that could tempt me to trade those memories away.”

This was real. It had the feeling of something old and tattered, while incredibly sharp in its ability to draw pain from him. She was too familiar with old grief and pain to dismiss this as a mere ploy or a lie he was telling himself.

“I see,” she whispered.

There was a pause, then a rush of comprehension from him. “You do, don’t you?” he breathed “He was there.”

“Who was where?”

“Your husband. You took the shot for him,” Vader said, his words coming out quickly, “You took that shot on Cymoon 1 to protect him.”

Leia’s eyes widened. Up until now, the Empire had no idea Han had been there. They had done a fairly good job of obscuring his identity. She swallowed the fear, she had just ensured that Vader would tear the remains of that base apart looking for Han’s identity.
“You shouldn’t have done that Leia,” he lectured.

Leia gritted her teeth at his presumption. “Who are you to tell me what to do?” she said, “There was no way I was watching him die in front of me!”

“Leia, it wasn't worth your life.”

“Oh you hypocrite!” she shouted, forgetting caution in her anger. “What would you give to have her back?” and she pointed to the still frozen image of her mother behind her.

Vader’s emotions went worryingly blank for a moment. Then in a hoarse voice he whispered “Almost anything.”

“So don’t you dare tell me you don’t understand the choice I made.”

“All too well,” he said. And the pain and grief in his voice made Leia feel sorry she had even brought it up. She should have stuck to her original plan and just kept her mouth shut. But he made it so hard.

“Please go,” she said, rubbing her forehead, her shoulders slumping. She was tired, and she wanted him to leave.

“Why?” he asked

“Because I want to sleep,” she said. “And I can’t if you are here.”

“Very well,” he said.

Wait, what? “Excuse me?” she said, her head shooting back up to stare at him.

“You’re sick, you need your rest.” he gestured behind her “And this hangar bay is turning grey.”

She turned and sure enough, the white snowy walls were leaching of color. She turned back to him.

“It’s really going to be that easy?” she asked dubiously.

“I think both of us would rather avoid what happened last time.” He sighed at her incredulous look “I told you, I have no intention of harming you.”

Leia really wanted to let this go, let him go without further conversation, but she needed to know what she was dealing with “You aren’t ever going to stop trying to enter my dreams are you?” She didn’t even bother asking if he would stop trying to capture her, but maybe she could get at least this amount of respite from him.

There was a very long pause before he answered her. “Did you ever stop trying to reach your son?” he asked in a soft tone. Leia could only gape at him, and before she could think of anything to say he disappeared.

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer and Acyancat
Translation into Russian available: [Translation] Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Hi guys!! So it's a little over the deadline, but, eh, close enough! It's officially been one year and a day since I put the first chapter up. I wanted to thank everyone who has left comments, or kudos, or simply silently squealed. When I started this I had no idea how much it would consume my life, or how much fun I would have. So kisses and loves to everyone. There is a small spoiler for Aftermath: Empire's End, but you won't have to read the book to understand what's going on. As always I hope you enjoy.

“Your Highness?” a voice said in her ear. Leia grumbled and rolled over, hoping whoever it was would get the hint and would go away. The only thing she wanted right now was to sleep.

“Princess Leia, are you awake?” the voice asked again. Whoever was speaking clearly was not understanding her subtle suggestion to go away.

“General,” she mumbled correcting the speaker on her title.

“Excuse me, Your Highness?” Threepio, that was Threepio who was talking. There was something about him that she had learned, something that was niggling at the back of her mind. She had been dreaming about Hoth, and Vader had come and -

Leia’s eyes flew open and she bolted straight up in bed.

“Oh, my!” Threepio said, his arms flying up in shock. Leia just stared at him in mute fascination. Then a creeping blackness began to tunnel her vision. She heard him distantly say “My apologies Your Highness. I didn't mean to startle you.”

Leia put an arm down on her bed to brace herself as she waited for the blood rush to fade. Her own fault for being so foolish. She was still not feeling well, and if she remembered yesterday correctly she only ate half a bowl of soup. As her vision slowly came back she turned her head to look at the droid. He was still there, radiating anxiety, for all that his face was frozen in that permanent blank expression.

Vader. Vader had built him. She swallowed the giggle that thought produced. Gods above, fate had a perverse sense of humor sometimes.

“Your Highness?” he asked anxiously, as she continued to say nothing.

“It’s fine Threepio,” she said soothingly, scooting back so she could sit with the bed’s headboard against her back. She was feeling better, much better, but there was no reason to push it. “I was just dreaming and you startled me, that’s all.”

“My apologies,” he said, “but Master Luke and their Majesties were all called away. They wanted to make sure that you were doing all right, and that you ate.” He gestured to the chair next to her bed. There was a tray on it, covered with a lid.

“Called away?” she said, trying to get her fuzzy mind to focus beyond the repeating refrain of,
Vader built him. Oh, my gods, Vader had built him. “Was it an emergency?”

“Thankfully no. Master Luke is in the flight rotation this morning, and their Majesties simply had a meeting they couldn't miss.”

“And Han?” she asked.

She couldn’t be sure, but she thought she heard Threepio give a small harrumph. “Captain Solo was with you most of the night. He is currently sleeping on the Falcon.” There was something faintly disapproving in his words. Was it because he still hasn't warmed up to Han? Or was it about the supposed impropriety of Han in her room all night? Hard to tell with him, and from long experience, Leia knew he would avoid answering the question if she asked him outright. He didn’t like upsetting people, and he had figured out she cared for Han.

He gestured to the tray. Leia leaned forward, a bit eager. Threepio actually wasn’t all that bad of a cook. The droid couldn’t taste anything he made, but he was always precise with any recipe you gave him that didn’t have “season to taste” in it. He had the patience for it too, and Leia knew he could make a mean bread. “Are you hungry?” he asked.

Her stomach chose to let out a loud growl at that. “Starving apparently,” she said. He bent down and picked the tray up, and placed it carefully in her lap. When he removed the lid the familiar scent of zatib soup hit her nostrils.

“Master Luke said it was your favorite,” the droid explained. “He made it before he left on his flight.”

“I could give you my recipe for zatib soup.” Vader’s voice echoed in her mind. Threepio and zatib soup. Not once in her life had she ever thought there could be anything that Vader gave her that she was grateful for. How often had she walked through the wreckage he left in her life and cursed him? Unaware that he had left her with two things she had found so much comfort in. Granted Threepio could be a giant walking pain in the ass, and she could never make the soup for herself, but even with that, these were two legacies she didn’t mind having.

Threepio carefully moved the lid back to the chair. She caught his arm before he could leave. “Princess Leia?” he asked, worried.

“Thank you Threepio,” she said, looking straight into his visual receptors. “For everything.” More than he knew. More than he could possibly remember, from a memory wipe and a timeline that was now gone. For the decades of loyal service. For the fact that he had been caring for her family long since before she was born. For being her friend.

“You should stay,” he said. “I am always happy to be of assistance,” there was such pleasure in his voice. It didn’t take much to make him happy, she should remember that in the future.

“Please stay,” she said. “Tell me how your day is going so far.”

His voice was animated as he went into detail about his argument with the maintenance droid that oversaw the cleaning of the kitchen, his bafflement of some joke Wedge had told Luke, and on and on. She ate her soup and listened, content to let the babble sweep over her.

It was later in the afternoon when Luke came to see her. Leia wasn’t sleeping, she was much more awake today, but she was curled up on her bed, rewatching The Lost Princess of Corellia holo
again.

She felt him coming up the corridor and she reached out “I’m decent, come on in.”

Her door opened and she sat up as she spotted the tray in his hands. She had been thinking about walking to the mess hall to pick something up when the holo was done. Luke was the best brother ever, now she didn’t have to.

“Want to share a late lunch?” he asked her.

“Love to.” She grinned and scooted back to Luke could put the tray on the bed. She reached out with the Force and turned the holo off as he hopped up to the bottom of the bed. Crossing his legs, he then pulled the lid off the tray.

Leia looked down and gave a pout “No zatib soup?” she whined. There was scrambled eggs, bread, and some green steamed vegetable she didn’t immediately recognize.

“Leia that is all you’ve eaten over the last two days,” he said, “Time to be a big girl and eat something else.”

“Fine,” she huffed. But she brightened when she realized he had brought her Alderaan Jasmine tea. Given the embargo placed on Alderaan goods, it was getting harder and harder to find the stuff.

They ate in companionable silence for a few moments. Luke’s hair was damp, and he wasn’t wearing his uniform. Must have just come off of his rotation, showered, and grabbed them some food.

“Anything exciting happen on your shift?” she asked, reaching for the bread and tearing off a chunk.

He shook his head. “Pretty boring.”

“When we’re done do you want to watch the holo?” she gestured to the projector. “I can start it over again if you want.”

“That would be fun, but I can’t,” he said regretfully. “I’m meeting Obi-Wan in the jungle after this.”

She looked at him critically “So you are resuming your training.”

He nodded “With some conditions.”

“Like?” she pressed, putting some eggs unto her fork and eating them.

He scowled at her. “No more lies, I don’t care how painful he thinks it will be for me to hear, I want to know.”

Leia swallowed her food. Well, clearly that conversation between Luke and Obi-Wan had brought some of the wounds between her and Luke back up. She nodded firmly, letting him know she understood he was talking about Obi-Wan and her. He relaxed at that and she followed up with a soft “What else?”

Luke chewed his own food thoughtfully, then swallowed. “We are taking this slow. Only two nights a week for now. And I’ve pulled back from the lightsaber training to focus on my shields.”

“You weren’t before?” Leia frowned. Obi-Wan had pulled her in to help him strengthen them. Obi-
Wan should have known how important this was. Luke was young, he hadn’t grasped the importance of a good defense. But Obi-Wan knew better.

“They weren’t the priority,” he said. She looked at him flabbergasted “Okay I didn’t think they were the priority.” He looked uncomfortable as he admitted “I thought once I was able to keep Obi-Wan out of my mind, I knew everything I needed to keep Father out.” He gave a sarcastic laugh “Cymoon 1 showed me what you were talking about by saying Father is overwhelming.” Well, at least he learned this particular lesson without paying too large of a price.

“Sounds like a plan,” she swallowed nervously. Aware she was trending into an area he had not invited her into “You don’t have to answer this but-”


“Yes,” she confessed. “The last time we talked about this you looked like you would rather try to take down the Empire by yourself rather than train with Obi-Wan.”

He got a thoughtful look on his face. “The holocrons convinced me.”

“How?” she wondered.

His mouth twisted “Not in any way you would think. There were no training vids on them, well there were some stretching exercises and meditation techniques, but nothing practical on about how to be a Jedi.”

“Then what was on them?” So he had come to a dead end, and decided to reconcile with Obi-Wan? She felt a sliver of fear in her heart, that was in line more with her kind of thinking, not Luke’s.

“They were history lessons,” he said, wonder soft in his tone “songs, and fables. I think a whole section of fairy tales that were told in the creche.” He looked so sad “The Jedi weren’t just an order were they? It was an entire culture.”

“Yes,” she said.

“And it was our blood that wiped that out.” Leia opened her mouth to argue, they were not responsible for Vader’s actions but he cut her off “I know, I know. We didn’t do anything. Father made his own choices.”

He sighed and rubbed his head “Here’s the thing though, from what I can see the Jedi played a really important role in the Republic. Since this is the “Alliance to Restore the Republic”, and not the “let’s throw whatever we can pull together”, I think anything that we choose to rebuild is going to need the Jedi or something like it.” He wasn’t wrong, but she wondered where he was getting his history lessons from. If it was from anyone here on base, you could get widely differing accounts of the Jedi. Most sentients on base held them in great reverence, but the groups who were from the Separatist's side did hold nearly as favorable of an opinion.

“It’s all well and good to say something must be done, but I’m actually in a position to do something about it.”

“Okay,” Leia said, “but you should know that there were serious problems with the Jedi before all this happened.”

Luke grimaced “Yeah, I’m catching on to that. I think that is why the Republic stagnated and fell. And even if I wanted to I couldn’t rebuild the whole thing, it’s gone.” He looked so sad, “The people who knew those stories, who grew up on those fables, sung those songs to comfort
themselves, they are gone and there's nothing I can do to bring it back. I can only pass it on and hope the next generation chooses to remember it.”

Leia swallowed hard and nodded. It still had the power to hurt her, even after three decades, and with the fact that Alderaan still stood.

He looked up then, remembering what might have been. “You know what I’m talking about don’t you?”

She nodded. She did. The citizens of New Alderaan had tried to hold onto who they were. But certain aspects of their culture could not survive the trauma of that catastrophe. The loving and just attitude that the people of Alderaan tried to approach everyone with had faded away. They had forgotten the maxim that children are not responsible for the sins of their parents. At the first moment, they had turned on the daughter of the one they had held responsible for their pain. No matter her rank or position within their culture.

Luke looked so sad “That’s why.” he murmured

Leia pulled herself to the present. “That’s why what?”

“Why you are so soft on Obi-Wan.”

She snorted “You are the only person in the galaxy who thinks that.”

“I know you,” he said “or at least I am beginning to. You don’t forgive people you don’t love. You can let it go, but you don’t forgive. You like Obi-Wan, but you don’t view him as family. And you said it yourself, he placed me in danger and took away my choices.”

“I could have said something too,” she pointed out.

“Yes,” he agreed “And you haven’t forgiven yourself for that either, but that’s not my point. My point is that you and Obi-Wan have a lot of similar experiences. You cut him a lot of slack because of that.”

Leia’s hands flexed for a moment “I could have become him,” she whispered, “I know what it’s like to have your entire world murdered in front of you.” She blinked hard “But I had you, and I had Han. He had no one.”

“I’m not criticizing you, Leia,” he said softly “This is just me trying to understand your thinking. I’m a bit behind the curve on your life experiences.” He leaned forward and softly kissed her forehead “But that doesn’t mean I’m not impressed. Can I be like you when I grow up?”

Leia closed her eyes at that statement. That was flattering, but not anything she wanted for him. “I’d rather you be you,” she said, opening her eyes and meeting his as he pulled back. “Are you okay with doing this? With being a Jedi?”

“Worried about my happiness?”

“Happiness is fleeting,” she said seriously “I’m worried about you being content.”

“I want to help,” he said, “And this is the best way I know how to do it.” Again, he was saying words that would sound more at home in her mouth then his. What effect was she having on him? And more to the point did she have the right to try to change him to who she remembered? Leia’s heart lurched painfully for a moment at that thought.
But then he went on. “But I also know Obi-Wan does love me. It doesn’t excuse what he did, but he did it out of love.” He gave a soft huff “Aunt Beru always said people do the worst things possible out of fear, but the really damaging things were born of love.”

Maybe she was worrying about nothing. The foundations of Luke were built long before she met him, both times. “I wish I had known her,” Leia said sadly.

“Me too,” Luke gave her a sad smile “Although I probably would have regretted it when you two ganged up on me.”

“Your Highness,” Healer Banok said, “What brings you here?”

Leia scowled at him “Do you ever leave?”

“How do you think I recognized you as a workaholic?” he said smoothly back. “Come here for an all clear?”

“That would be nice,” she said. She was trying here. She felt fine, tired but fine. But if she showed up without a Healer's reassurance it would worry everyone. So do the simple thing and spend five minutes in this place.

“Well, I'll take the fact that you are here under your own power as a good sign, and that no one had to order you here as personal growth.”

“Ha-ha,” Leia said as she jumped onto one of the biobeds.

He pulled a cart over to him and picked up a small tool.

“This might sting a bit,” he said as he placed it on her finger.

Leia didn’t even flinch at the small pinprick. Medical equipment had never really bothered her. Han, on the other hand, was a weenie and hated needles. He was unflappable with a blaster pointed at his head, but draw a little of his blood in a sterile environment and the man was likely to faint on you.

Banok waited for a few moments, then placed the device down and picked up his pad. “Hmmm…” he said, “Your blood sugar is a bit lower than I like, but not dangerous.” He scrolled through several lines of data then met her eyes squarely “As long as you sleep well tonight, and get plenty of food, you’ll be ready to go back to active duty tomorrow.”

“Really?” she said.

“Yes,” he placed the pad back on the tray “but do your system a favor and keep the exercising to a minimum. Stretches and moderate movement is fine, but try to avoid anything that requires cardio.”

She scowled, she liked running with Luke in the morning. Since he still wasn’t coming to breakfast, it was the only time during the day she was guaranteed to see him.

“For how long?” she asked

“About three days. Then gradually bring it back in.” He took in her frown “Don’t look so glum. It’s not that long.”
“Fine,” she said.

He gave her a beaming, if false smile, “Good.” He reached to the tray again and grabbed something from a container on it. “And here is some candy for being such a brave patient.”

She scowled at him. “I am not five,” she said petulantly. But she did take the candy he offered. She wasn’t that much of a prideful fool and sweets were hard to come by.

Leia was just about to turn into the hallway that led to her quarters from the infirmary when she saw him. R2 was rolling down the hallway. For once he was alone, no Threepio at his side. At the sight of that familiar dome, she was surprised by the wave of hurt and fury that rolled through her. He had known. For decades he had said nothing, all the while playing at being Luke’s faithful companion. Her companion. He had said nothing when Luke walked into that trap on Bespin. He had said nothing as Luke had searched desperately for the identity of their mother. For any shred of the deeds and thoughts of Anakin, and not Vader.

“R2?” Leia called out. The droid stopped and turned to look at her.

“May I have a moment?” she fought to keep her voice even as she gestured to the door in the corridor they were in. There was no sense in alerting him to her anger. Knowing R2, he would take off and she really would rather avoid chasing him through the halls of the temple, playing a very public game of hide and seek.

[Of course Leia]

Leia walked behind him as they entered the little room. This was only one of the many storage rooms scattered across the base. Because of its proximity to the personal quarters, this one had racks of shelving units containing hygiene products and cleaning supplies. She did a quick scan to make sure they were alone. Satisfied she closed the door behind her. There was no lock, but it was late, she didn’t think anyone would drop in now.

She stared at it for a moment, taking a deep breath in. There was no point in starting off by yelling at the droid.

[Leia?] He chirped, an anxious wobble in his tone as she focused on centering herself.

She turned around and made sure that she was between the door and him as she paced up to the droid. About four feet from him, she stopped, planted both feet firmly, and placed her hands on her hips.

“Tell me what you know about Padme Naberrie and Anakin Skywalker,” she said, failing to keep her voice even.

R2 rolled back a few inches before he caught himself. [She was a Senator in the Old Republic and a founding member of the Alliance. He was a Jedi Knight.]

She took a deep calming breath. “I know you know more than that.”

His main central light on his panel went from blue to purple, a sign that he was upset. [They are gone. Why do you request this information?] he asked.

“Because I know they're my birth parents,” she said as calmly as she could, trying not to snap at him. This was something she should have known years ago and he was still stalling about it.
R2 let out a huge wail at that, and Leia caught herself before she took a step back. [You’re not supposed to know that!]

Leia didn’t back down, “R2,” she said calmly “I just want to know about them. And why you haven’t said anything about this? What harm can that do?”

[Because you’ll be in danger!]

“In danger from who?” Leia asked, trying to reign in her impatience. R2 was an odd droid, and as much as he seemed to understand organic beings better than Threepio, that didn’t mean he thought like one. Of course she was in danger now. Both Vader and the Emperor were dead in the future, and that R2 had also maintained his silence. So what danger was he talking about?

The droid’s wailing abruptly ceased. He stood there, on his two legs, before he rocked forward extending his third. He gave a determined little beep, and then he was moving at full speed, dodging around her and heading towards the door. Leia was shocked for a second, then she used the Force to run and place herself directly in front of it.

R2 gave a wail of fright and pivoted to avoid her. He miscalculated and started to tip over on his side. Leia, without thinking, reached out with the Force and caught him. He hung there for a moment, then she pulled him back upright, placing him gently back on the ground.

R2 said nothing for a moment, then his dome turned to her, [You aren’t supposed to be able to do that.]

“Why?” she asked, “You had to have noticed that I inherited Anakin’s abilities.”

[Don’t say that name!]

“Why?” she asked

[It puts you in danger!] he insisted.

Leia gritted her teeth, tired of this. “My entire existence has always been in danger R2.”

The droid’s dome moved back and forth frantically as he tried to see a way out of this room without running over her.

“R2,” she said firmly, putting her hands back on her hips. “I am not letting you out of this room until you’ve at least told me why you won’t say anything.”

He let out a defeated be-boop noise. [It’s classified.] he said.

Okay, that wasn’t completely unexpected “By who?”

She needed to know who had done this. Hopefully, it wasn’t anyone who was dead, so that they could remove it.

[By me] R2 said petulantly.

Leia blinked. Even for R2-D2 and his strange interpretations of his operating code, this was quite the leap. He was telling her he was keeping it a secret upon his own command. That was going to be much trickier to get around. She looked for a logical loophole in his reasoning. “You have to have a rank of at least Commander to classify something in the Rebellion R2.”

[I am a Commander.] he beeped.
“Of who?” Leia asked, exasperated with his continuing evasion.

[I am the Commander of the protocol droid C3-PO.]

“No, you are not,” Leia said reflexively. Then she thought of how R2 protected Threepio, herded him, and generally speaking made sure he stayed on mission “Ok maybe you are,” she conceded “but that is not how this works. What do you know about Anakin, R2? I know you were his droid during the Clone Wars.”

But did the droid know about Vader? It suddenly occurred to her that he might not. Nobody had gone into depth with Leia about the details of Mustafar and her mother’s death. Did R2 even know Vader was Anakin? That could partially explain his silence at Bespin.

His lights dimmed momentarily and there was a whirring noise from his servo motors. [I require an update.] he announced.

Leia’s eyes narrowed, “There hasn’t been an update for your model in at least a decade. Padme and Anakin, R2.”

The droid whirled in a circle, frustration coming through clear. [Bad code] he announced.

Leia crossed her arms over her chest. “You do not have bad code.” she gritted her teeth in frustration. Why did everything she learned about her past have to be so bloody difficult to get?

The droid merely continued on his frantic whirling. [Infected with a bad code. A virus.] he insisted.

“R2, I know Luke checks for that sort of thing.” She let her arms fall, and her hurt poured out of her and into her voice. That R2 hadn’t said anything to her or to Luke about this. She could care less about Vader, but Luke had. At any time during their searching R2 could have said something about their mother. “R2, please. I’m trying to understand why you haven’t said anything.”

The droid stopped his frantic motion and came to a full stop. She could hear his eye receptor whirling as it contracted and expanded several times, very quickly. A sure sign that the droid was nervous and debating with himself. Then in a soft pitch, that she could barely hear he said. [No, Leia, not me. Anakin was infected with a bad code.]

Leia took a step back, surprised. Well, that was the oddest way she had ever had falling to the dark side explained to her, but from the droids point of view, she could see how that analogy worked.

“All right,” she said. “But I don’t understand how that translates into you not saying anything to me.”

[My fault.]

Leia started. “How was it your fault?” she demanded.

[I shouldn't have stayed on the ship.,] he said [I should have gone with him. He was infected with the bad code in that building. He was my friend and I should have protected him.]

“What building?”

[The refinery. On Mustafar]

Vader had taken R2 to Mustafar? Leia rolled her eyes at her own stupidity. Of course, he did. It’s not like he used the Force to teleport himself to that planet. Vader said it himself, he used R2 as his
astromech, but to take R2 to that volcanic world? Come to think of it why was Vader on Mustafar in the first place? You didn’t go to the incredibly hostile lava planet just for fun, even if you were a Sith Lord. Maybe Obi-Wan knew why, R2 clearly didn’t.

[I stayed with the ship. Then Padme arrived.] Now his voice was getting stronger and more agitated. [He came out to greet her. Something happened, and then he hurt her!!! Anakin wouldn’t hurt Padme. His software had become corrupted.]

Of all the people who took the blame for Vader’s fall, it was a damn shame the person who actually did it was still living in denial about his culpability in the act. Leia knelt down and place a hand on the droid’s dome “R2 it wasn’t your fault.” she said gently.

[It was my fault!] the droid cried out [They were my friends. They trusted me with their lives and I failed them.]

“R2,” she said, “You didn’t fail them. Any of them.” If anything they had failed R2.

[SHE DIED!! HE BECAME VADER!] and he dissolved into a series of incoherent wails and short static beeps. Well, that was one question answered.

“R2, R2,” Leia said, soothingly, worried that he would hurt himself. He was rocking back and forth so violently she was afraid he would tip over. Or fry a circuit. “Please believe me when I tell you this wasn’t your fault.”

She was so busy trying to comfort him she didn't hear the door open, but she definitely heard Draven’s voice behind her exclaim “I’ve caught you...now?” his voice dropped in his confusion.

Leia looked up from her crouch and saw the man looking on the scene in bafflement. It must certainly look odd. The small astromech wailing and rocking back and forth on his two legs. She was crouched down in front of him, trying to reason with him. Leia just gaped at Draven, not understanding what he was doing here. Then her temper rose as she realized what he was implying.

“Seriously,” she said, gesturing to the shelves and boxes full of no communications equipment, “You think I’m trying to contact the Empire? In a supply closet?”

He ignored her very reasonable observation and pointed at R2 “What’s going on here?”

The man was a paranoid lunatic. There was no other explanation for his dogged determination in this. “None of your business,” she snapped.

”Is he broken?”

“No, he’s not broken, he’s upset.” Leia turned back to R2 as he let out another gurgle, a bit quieter than the last one. “If you don’t have useful advice on how to calm him down I suggest you leave,” she said, not even bothering to look back at Draven.

“I’m keeping an eye on you,” came the warning, but there was a hint of unease in his tone.

Leia had already dismissed the general from her mind. He wasn’t important here, calming R2 before he hurt himself was.

“Hey,” she said. “I’m sorry.” She placed her hands on his leg struts, “I’m sorry I asked R2. I didn’t realize how painful this was to you.” No, she had been too focused on her own sense of betrayal.

[He left me with Threepio!!!] R2 cried out. Well, it was a good sign they were back to words
instead of rambling.

“You like Threepio,” she pointed out.

[Only fifty-three point four percent of the time,] but his warbles and beeps were a bit more steady now. Apparently, the way to calm him was to ask him to calculate.

“It wasn’t your fault R2,” she said. She laid her head on the top of his dome, wrapping her arms around him in a hug “None of this was your fault. He was infected with the ‘bad code’ before you ever arrived on that planet.”

[Really?] he asked. Had anyone bothered to explain this to him? Leia felt a surge of annoyance at her father and Obi-Wan. But mostly her father. He of all people knew how unique R2 was. Papa had used it to his advantage in his years in the Senate. Using the droid as his point man in his role in the Alliance. R2 was loyal and protective of any organic he saw as his. Papa should have taken the time to explain what had happened that terrible day.

She pulled back and looked straight into his visual lens. “I promise.” She ran her fingers down his side in a fond gesture. “Is that why you didn’t say anything before this?”

[Bail asked me not to talk about them,] he admitted.

”And you are always are so obedient,” she said dryly.

There was a long pause. [I don’t understand how organics transmit a virus,] he confessed [Anakin became infected. I was unclear how that infection spread. So if I didn't pass the information to you I lessen the chances that you could be compromised.]

That wasn’t how any of this worked. But R2 didn’t know that. To him, a virus was passed by droids communicating data to each other. He had said she couldn’t know because it would put her in danger. Droids passed viruses by talking to each other. He had been trying to protect her and Luke. If she had to guess it was probably the reason he hadn't said anything in the following decades. And after Ben fell, and R2 figured out that his assumption was incorrect, he had shut down everything in order to search his own vast data banks for the location of the Jedi temple that Luke could have fled to. He hadn’t had time to mention any of this. She sighed. Was there anyone in her and her brother's life that didn’t think they needed protecting? Neither of them were exactly helpless, even when they had been nineteen.

“And Padme?” Leia asked, “Why didn’t you say anything about her?”

[Could be a corrupted file too, had to be sure,] he gave a soft warble [She would have wanted the variant copy of her safe before anything else.”]

Yes, given what little she knew of the woman that was probably true. Leia sighed and sat down on the hard cold floor. She had been so furious with him it had never occurred to her he might have legitimate reasons for denying Luke knowledge of his mother. Wait, R2 had said variant copy, not copies.

“You include Luke in that assessment too?”

R2 let out a surprised squeak [You know about the other variant copy of Anakin and Padme?]

R2 was fairly fluent in the terms used to describe family members to each other. If he was still using this formal code to talk about her and Luke, he was still upset. She said softly “Yes.”
He rolled forward and bumped her gently. [Did guardian Bail tell you? He said he would someday.]

The droid had revealed his darkest secret, it was only fair she do the same in return.

“No he didn’t,” she said. She gave a semi-hysterical laugh “Luke did actually. Four years from now.”

R2 let out a concerned whistle. [I don’t understand. Is your internal time clock broken?]

She shook her head “No, R2, it’s not,” she rubbed her hands over her face, exhaustion hitting her “The Force brought me here from the future.”

The droid was quiet as he processed that. [Overwrite of the original Leia file? With a more advanced copy?]

That was actually a rather good explanation. “Something like that.”

The droid let out a warble of understanding then asked [Classified?]

She nodded “Yes. To me, Obi-Wan, Luke and my parents.”

[Can I ask a question about future copy Leia’s experiences?]

“Sure,” everyone else wanted to know about the future, why not R2? She wondered if she would ever tell someone who didn’t want to know anything. “As long as it isn’t about yourself. It’s too dangerous for anyone to know too much about their own future.”

There was a calculating beep, as he thought about this then asked [Is Threepio still functional?]

Leia let out a laugh. “Yes, and aggravating as ever.”

[Good. That means I’m still functional. His odds of survival without my assistance are astronomically small.]

She grinned. Sneaky droid, he had gotten more information out of that answer then she intended. “Probably not,” she agreed.

[Am I still your friend?]

She nudged him a bit with her shoulder “Always.”

[Good.] There was a small pause, then cautiously he offered. [But you should be careful.]

“Oh what?” she said, wondering what warning he would see fit to give her.

[Anakin always said the Force was a damn nuisance when it got into a “bother.”]

Leia thought of her current circumstances, the absolute randomness, and cruelty of it. But beneath all of that the hope that was built into it as well. That she could make everything better. “I can safely say that is one of the few things I can agree with him on.”

ABA - Day 104
Leia found herself at her parent’s door that morning. Since she had been forbidden cardio of any kind, she figured she might as well catch up with her parents. She had some questions she wanted to broach with them and now seemed as good a time as any.

She knocked softly on the door, only to have Threepio answer it “I’m sorry,” he started to say “but their Majesties—oh, Princess Leia.”

“Hi Threepio,” she said. “I know I’m a bit early, but are my parents here?”

“Your mother is,” he said. “Your father has already been called to an early meeting with General Madine and Mon, and he doesn’t expect to be back before breakfast.”

“Can I come in?”

“Of course.” He said and moved out of the way so she could enter. “Your Majesty,” Threepio called out “Princess Leia is here.”

“Leia?” a voice called from the closed bedroom door.

“Morning Mama,” she cried out so that she could be heard through the door.

“Come in, come in.”

Leia walked through to see her mother at the edge of the bed, a deliberately calm look on her face. Leia frowned.

“Why are you worried?” she asked, coming over in haste.

“Why are you here so early?”

Leia blinked “Healer Banok said I couldn't do strenuous exercise for several days. So instead of running with Luke, I thought I come see you and Papa.”

“Oh,” her mother’s posture relaxed slightly, and Leia felt the guilt creep up. Was it really so unusual for her to drop in on her mother for no other reason than she wanted to see her? She hadn’t been given this miracle of her mother’s presence for all that long, and she was, already treating it like it was not extraordinary and wondrous.

“Stop it, Leia,” her mother said, reading her face “these are my fears, not a reflection on you. We all have our duties and responsibilities, and I did not raise you to neglect either.”

Leia chuckled, then sat down. Her mother’s hair was still unbound.

“Can I?” Leia asked shyly, fingerling a tress.

A real smile crossed Mama’s face “Of course.”

Leia pulled herself further up on the bed and her mother sank to the floor gracefully. Leia tapped her mother’s shoulder and wordlessly the woman handed back her brush.

Leia began to brush the waist length hair, making sure that she didn’t tug too hard.

“Any preference on style?”
“Nothing piled on top of my head,” Mama answered. “I have meetings with several bankers and industrialists to beg for money, and I don’t want my head to ache any more than it needs too.”

“The glorious life of a rebel,” Leia said, sympathizing. She had placed too many of those holo calls herself over her life.

“Mmhmm,” Mama murmured. “I also have another meeting this afternoon with the rest of the Alliance leadership council. They are being told about Palpatine being a Sith.”

Leia paused her strokes. “Is it really that important?” she asked.

“Yes and no.” Mama said “No, in the fact that we were all aware of his corruption and power lust, it’s a little hard to miss. But if Obi-Wan is right about the history of the last Sith Empire it brings some of his more puzzling decisions into a framework we can understand.”

“Such as?” Leia asked.

“He doesn’t rule as if he wants to keep things together forever.” Mama said, “The Death Star for example. It only really works if you are willing to destroy every planet that even gives the hint of opposition. Which will be a lot. Why build it, knowing you are going to have to decimate at least a tenth of the planets in the galaxy, some of them Core Worlds, and bring about the economic ruin of the Empire you are trying to build? Especially since the way he was controlling the Senate worked just as well?”

Leia continued to brush her hair, trying to think this through. “Ruling isn’t his goal?” she asked.

“No, sowing as much fear and confusion is. I don’t follow all of it, the intricacies of the Force aren’t something I ever understood, but essentially what Obi-Wan is saying is that he wants more fear and anger in the galaxy because it makes the Dark Side stronger.”

Leia stopped brushing Mama’s hair at that. She had always thought that Gallius Rax and the Contingency plan was just spite on Palpatine’s part. If he couldn’t have the galaxy, nobody could. But what if that wasn’t the only reason? He was a Sith Lord after all. What if it was also to make sure the Dark Side remained ascendant for centuries?

Leia thought about that but put it aside. It could wait. She had come here for a reason and she wasn’t going to let the admittedly thorny issue of Palpatine’s motives distract her.

“Mama?”

“Yes?”

“What can you tell me about Padme Naberrie?”

Leia could feel the tension snap into her mother’s spine. “How do you know that name?” she said.

Leia frowned, puzzled. Why shouldn’t she know that name?

Her mother, releasing that inanity of that question moved to shake her head and hissed as the movement caused the chunk Leia was still holding in her hand to be pulled.

“Sorry,” Leia said, dropping the hair she was brushing.

“No,” Mama said “it’s my fault. On both counts. Of course, you know that name, it’s just,” she waved her hand about helplessly “habit to shut such conversations down.”
On one hand Leia was glad she couldn't see Mama’s face. It gave her the courage to broach this. On the other hand, she dearly would like to know what her mother was actually thinking, and she would not find any answers on the back of her head.

Leia reached forward and grabbed the hair again. Restarting her task, she tried to find the words to go on.

She settled with “Did you know her well?”

There was a pause. “I thought I did. She was much closer to your father then me, but I thought we were friends.” And Leia knew how much Mama valued that term. She had many acquaintances, allies, and contacts. But they were by their very nature, transactional relationships.

There was family of course, by blood or other means. People to stand with you against the world. A friend wasn’t family, but was still someone you trusted. Someone who wanted nothing from you but you, and was not tied into your web of alliances. Mama had few people she trusted or liked enough to call friend.

“But after Bail brought me you…’” her voice trailed off. “There were rumors of course, about her relationship with Anakin, but your father and I never directly asked her about it. We didn't want to put her in a position where she would have to lie to us. We never thought that she would hide a pregnancy from us though. I thought she would have confessed to that. Come to us for help. And if not both of us, at least to Bail.” There was a long sigh “She was a woman of many secrets.”

And they killed her, Leia thought bitterly. She separated her mother’s hair into two sections, throwing the left one to drape over her mother's shoulder. She separated the remaining side into three sections, fingers on autopilot.

“Besides someone who could keep secrets, what was she like?”

Her mother made a thoughtful hmm. “If I had to pick one word it would be idealist. Even after the invasion of Naboo, and the failure of the Republic to deal with it, she still retained her faith in the institution.” Leia had been taught about that incident. It was used as proof of the corruption of the old ways of the Senate. That a sovereign world had been left to the devices of the Trade Federation, who had used their money to buy off any consequences. Leia frowned. The Trade Federation had moved from covertly supporting Dooku to openly supporting him in the last year of the Clone Wars. Which meant Palpatine had been the one pulling the strings leading to that invasion. Had he really arranged the invasion of his own homeworld to propel himself to the Chancellorship? How deep did the rot he had created in the Senate go?

She focused back in on Padme. Those were all questions for another time, and probably should involve Papa, since he had been there for so much of it.

“Did you know her then, when she was the Queen?”

“No, we met later.” There was a fond note in Mama’s tone “Don’t misunderstand me. The Naboo invasion shaped her in ways that weren’t very apparent, but were very deep.”

“Such as?” Leia wondered.

"For one thing she was one of the most trained civilians I had ever met.”

“Trained in what?”

“Hand to hand combat. Blasters. Picking locks. Slicing. Flying. She even had a basic understanding
of how battle tactics worked. If it had anything to do with defense, she learned how to do it. I think it was her way of seizing back control.”

That made a great deal of sense to Leia, especially given how young her mother had been to live through that kind of violence and upheaval. But there was the faintest hint of censure in her mother’s voice.

“You didn’t approve.”

“Not then,” came the rueful admittance of her mother, “I thought she was being paranoid. Yes, the invasion was horrible, but surely something like that could never happen again.” There was a bitter laugh from her. “How wrong I was.”

“The Republic stood for a thousand years, it wasn’t unreasonable to expect it to stand for another thousand.”

“No, but it was arrogant.”

Leia finished the first braid and gently tugged on it to emphasize her point. “A very wise Queen once told me that hindsight is the greatest weapon you can use to prevent yourself from taking action now.”

Breha harrumphed “Well, who am I to argue with such sage advice?”

“Indeed.” Leia grabbed the other chunk of hair and started to braid it.

There was a lull in the conversation, but eventually, Mama said “Padme was such a romantic. That’s part of the reason Bail and I never confronted her about Anakin. Even with everything that was going on, she looked so happy.” There was a pause “She was someone who had so much love to give. She had sacrificed so much for her people simply because they asked. We didn’t think whatever happiness she managed to find should be taken away. There was so little during that time that brought joy. To any of us.”

This was nothing like the portrait her maternal grandparents had painted. The idealist yes, but not the hard-headed realist who trained ruthlessly to make sure that she would never feel helpless again. And it certainly bore no resemblance to this woman Mama was describing. Who broke every cultural norm, if not possibly the law at the time, to engage in a forbidden love affair. It sounded more like a teenager who fell in love for the first time, rather than a grown-up woman with practical realities to deal with. Passion was fun, if very distracting. Love was certain essentially. But trust and companionship were the cornerstones of any stable relationship. They couldn’t have been together in any practical terms for all that long. What had they been thinking?

Leia thought about this as she finished the second braid. She was weaving the two braids together, to sit on the back of her mother’s neck, it would not put any further weight on her head. Her mother reached back and placed a hand on hers, stopping her.

“You never asked anyone about her?” There was a controlled neutrality to that innocent question.

“I asked,” Leia said. “Mon had some interesting anecdotes from the Senate. And her family on Naboo certainly had some flattering stories. But that’s all they were. Stories. There was no sense of who she was.”

“She was extraordinary,” Mama said.

Any person who would fall in love with Vader, *Vader* of all people, was not someone who sounded
all that extraordinary to Leia. Foolish and gullible, but not extraordinary.

“Did you ever wonder what your life would have been like if she had lived?” Mama asked. If she had lived, but not the question of what your life would have been like if Vader hadn’t fallen.

Leia stilled. She swallowed hard and gave her the truth “Sometimes.” There was no reaction that she could see to that statement. But that deliberate non-reaction told her everything she needed to know about her mother’s heart.

She resolutely picked up the braid, to finish her work and said in a casual tone “But it has more to do with me wondering what it would have been like to grow up with Luke. I also wondered what would have happened if I grew up on Tatooine with him. Or Luke had grown up with me on Alderaan. I think he would have made a fine Prince. His temperament is certainly more suited to it then mine.” She finished the braid and leaned forward, wrapping her arms around her mother.

“I have a mother,” she said, fiercely “And I was lucky enough to get her back.”

Mama’s arms came up and clasped hers “She would have been very proud of you Leia. But I have to admit, selfishly, that I’m glad you don’t have any regrets.”

“It doesn't make you selfish,” Leia said “It just makes you human.”

Leia went to the gym. She was bored and restless. It had been a frustrating day with lots of work with very little reward. She wasn’t going to work out. She just wanted to punch something very hard.

When she got there she was surprised to see Evaan and Rex sparring. She stood to the side as she watched the two trade blows with each other. Evaan was doing pretty well until she overreached and Rex grabbed her arm and used that as leverage to pull her in against him.

“And this is not where you want to be,” he said.

Evaan hissed in frustration.

“That’s a blow that would have worked on me,” Leia said “but most of the people you’ll be fighting aren’t that short.”

Both turned their heads to look at her.

“Leia!” Rex said happily, as he let Evaan go “Want to spar next?”

She shook her head, “Can’t, healers orders.”

Evaan went to the corner of the mat and picked up a canteen of water “You feeling better?” she asked.

“Physically yes,” Leia said, “Mentally I want to hit something until it bleeds.”

“Fun day?” Rex asked.

“So much,” she said bitterly. She turned to Evaan, “I certainly didn’t expect to come here and find you cheating on me with Rex.”

Rex let out a putter of indignation, but Evaan only gave her a slow challenging smile “Well, I’ve
learned how to wipe the floor with you, figured it was time to move on to a new challenge.”

Rex snorted and Evaan shot him a puzzled look. Evaan was correct, she was capable of kicking Leia’s ass. But only because Leia didn’t use the Force. Which meant Rex had picked up on the fact that Leia sometimes cheated and used it. When had she done that in front of him? She couldn’t consciously recall doing anything like that. Rex didn’t matter as much, he was aware of her parentage and her potential. But there were others who didn’t. And if she slipped in front of him, were their other people who weren’t as friendly to her that had noticed?

Evaan gave her a bright smile, distracting her from her gloomy thoughts. “I’m glad you here though.”

“Why?” Leia asked.

“Because I just learned I’m in the running to get my money back and I wanted to get your take on it?”

“This again?”

Evaan frowned “You haven’t heard?”

Leia shook her head “Heard what?”

“Luke and Nakari are no more,” Evaan gave a sharp grin”Which means the odds on you and Han or you and Luke are back to even.

Leia frowned, Luke hadn’t mentioned anything like that, and she hadn’t felt any turmoil or pain from him. Perhaps his shields were getting better.

“I know you said you and Luke aren’t happening-” the blonde said

Rex interrupted Evaan by coughing very loudly to cover up his astonished shout. Evaan turned to him, “Okay, I have the feeling you know something I don’t,” she complained.

Rex shook his head ”No, just wondering how you misread that situation.”

Leia sighed “If I give you twenty credits and have you place a bet on Han and Luke will you let this go?”

“How is that going to help?”

“If you place the bet and make sure that everyone “knows” I’m the one placing the money, the odds on me and anyone else go down. Then place another bet on me and Han.”

“Is that what you’re confirming?” Evaan said, curiosity in her eyes. Rex merely looked troubled. Great, another person in her life that didn’t approve of Han. Well, she loved Rex, and acknowledge him as family, but in this instance he could piss off.

Leia shook her head “No, I’m saying that is the only scenario possible.” She felt her gut clench at that. She needed to talk to Han. Vader was a wrecking ball through anyone’s life and Han needed to be warned that he had locked onto him. Which meant confessing, everything. But she was so afraid that afterward, he would want nothing to do with her. That he would take one long look at what he was in for and run to the furthest reaches of the galaxy to avoid her. “But I don’t know how likely it is,” she said.
The teasing on Evaan’s face disappeared and she reached forward and touched Leia’s shoulder. “Hey, what’s wrong?”

Leia sighed, “Nothing.”

Evaan and Rex both gave her a look of disbelief.

“Nothing yet,” she amended.

“Well, if you want to talk about it,” Rex offered.

She gave him a smile “Thank you but no. I’m still trying to figure out how to approach this.”

“Go with your gut and be honest,” Evaan said. “Usually works for me.”

ABA - Day 105

Leia still was under advisement not to run, so she didn’t actually catch up with Luke until after lunch. She stalked the hanger bay, aware that he and his squadron came back twenty minutes ago. She planted herself in front of the pilot’s changing room, arms across her chest, and glaring at anyone who gave her a funny look as they passed her by.

It was only about a five-minute wait before Luke came out, his hair still damp from his shower. He looked surprised to see her standing there. “Leia?” he asked

She came over and looped her arms through his, “You have a few minutes?”

“Yes,” he said, looking puzzled.

“Good,” she said firmly “Let’s take a walk.”

He looked surprised, then wariness overtook his face. “Should I set up boundaries with you too?”

“Depends,” she said lightly. “On whether or not you want to talk about Nakari?”

They started heading out of the hanger, heading for the exit on to the tarmac. “Oh, you heard about that?”

“Yes.”

He looked a little guilty, and Leia noticed several faces turn, marking their passage.

“I meant to tell you,” he said. “But-”

“Luke,” she said, cutting him off “I am not mad about you not telling me. I just wanted to know one thing.”

“Oh.” He didn’t look all that reassured.

“Did this have anything to do with me?”

“No!” he said shocked “Of course not!” They were on the tarmac now, there were still a few people about, but certainly a lot less than in the hanger bay. The fact that she and Luke were
headed out to the jungle for a private talk would reach every gossip in a matter of minutes. The whole base in under an hour. Good. Not that she didn't want to talk about Nakari, but she also didn't want to draw any attention to what the real subject of their conversation would be.

“Does Nakari think that?”

“Yes,” Luke said. She gave him an unimpressed look, “Okay, maybe she does.” He whined slightly “But I did tell her, this had nothing to do with you.”

If she was in Nakari’s place she probably wouldn't believe that either. Leia did a quick scan, they were closer to the jungle and she could see that there was no one in listening distance. “You could tell her that we are related if that will make things easier.”

Luke shook his head “That's the problem. I couldn't see telling her any of this.”

Leia cocked her head “Well, it’s early yet in your relationship. Give it time.”

Luke stopped their walk and turned to face her. “No, I mean yes, maybe. She’s an incredible woman and I really do like her, but I couldn't get past the part where I felt like I was using her.”

“A hand to hold for comfort?” Leia suggested. This wouldn’t be the first or the last relationship forged in the Alliance. When every day could be your last, when people you cared for died around you constantly, you found comfort where you could.

“We did more than hold hands, Leia.”

She put her hand up, gesturing for him to stop “No, you are my baby brother and as far as I am concerned you only frolic about merrily holding hands.”

A sly look crossed his face “This is where you become a prude?”

She glared at him, hands coming to her hips “If you want I can get into detail about how Han and I hold hands.”

He blushed, “Point taken. Everyone here only holds hands.”

“But about Nakari?”

His face sobered. “I don’t have it in me right now to get into anything serious Leia. I have so much going on, and half the time I felt like I was only partially there. Which would have been fine, but I could tell that things were getting more serious for her than me.”

Which was all perfectly reasonable and true. But this didn’t read like Luke. He was emotionally honest in his dealings with people. What you saw was what you got. It was one of the main reasons people were drawn to him. She could see him withdrawing from a relationship he felt he couldn't reciprocate, but unless she was seriously misreading him, there was something else going on. He said he felt like he was using her. How could you be using someone who was told that you were only looking for a bit of fun?

“And?”

“And what?” Oh yes, she was onto something. He was looking defensive.

“And what else?”

His gaze shifted, just enough so that he was looking a little to her right, instead of directly into her
eyes. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“Luke, I think you have our roles reversed. I’m the one who is reluctant to talk about their feelings and you are the one who analyzes them to death.”

He sighed “I didn’t like the reason about why I latched so hard onto Nakari.”

Leia frowned “Because you like her?”

“Well, of course, I like her.” Luke said, “but she was also something that the other me never did. She’s someone who died and he never knew.”

“You were fighting your fate,” she whispered.

He nodded, a miserable guilty look on his face. Luke’s emotional integrity was admirable, but it was exhausting.

“You did like her right? This wasn’t all built on some weird send off to your alternate?” And how odd was that? Was Luke jealous of himself?

“Yes,” he admitted, “but I can’t see myself telling her any of this.”

“Why?” Nakari hadn’t struck her as someone who would have gone running off to tell everyone she knew.

“Because it would be so easy for her to tell me to kill my father.” He rubbed his forehead, “Or that I should put aside my concerns about Obi-Wan. Or a million other things. I like her, and she means well, but she doesn’t even try to understand someone else’s viewpoint.”

Simple, Rex had said. Things were very simple for her. Well turned out the old soldier was right. She pondered that for a moment. To be fair she really didn’t know Nakari. The woman clearly felt threatened by her and Luke’s relationship, and since she had made no overtures to Leia, Leia left her alone.

“Leia?” Luke asked, breaking into her thoughts.

“Hmmm?”

“Why did you walk us out into the jungle?”

She sighed, she wasn’t the only one in this relationship who could read her twins quirks. Time to confess “Well, I can guarantee you that everyone heard me talking to you about Nakari so that’s the reason they think we are out here.”

“Okay, so what’s the real reason we are out here?”

Leia put her hands behind her head, cupping her neck. “Because I need to talk to you, and what I’m about to say is going to make you very upset, and I rather you not do another Force tornado in front of everyone.”


She had thought he hadn’t been aware of what he was doing. This particular piece of information wasn’t going to go over well. “When I told you about Vader, you created a Force tornado.”

He paled “I did what?”
She allowed her hands to drop and waved the matter away “It’s fine. I wasn’t in any danger.”

“You don’t know that.” he said panicked “I’m extremely powerful. Obi-Wan has said it again and again that I can’t lash out like that.”

She gave him a flat look “One, I’m just as powerful as you. Two, it wasn’t something you were doing on purpose.”

“She-”

She cut him off “If you want to have a freak out over your loss of control, that’s fine. But don’t for one moment let Obi-Wan into your head. You weren’t trying to hurt me. You were upset. That’s okay, what I was saying was upsetting.”

“So it’s okay I placed you in danger because I was mad and you thought you could handle it? Leia that is not okay.”

“I could handle it.” she insisted. She did not need a Luke who was afraid to deal with her honestly.

“What if it had been someone else?” He countered “And not you?”

She doubted anyone else in this galaxy would upset him as much right now. She also knew, better then he did, the real amount of damage he could do. That little tornado was nothing in comparison to some of the things she had seen. But he didn’t know that, so she nodded. “So, lesson learned, move on.”

He gave her a dubious look “Half the time you talk about the Force like you are afraid of it, the other half of the time you act like the things we do are no big deal.”

“They are no big deal to me Luke, this has been my reality for a very long time.”

“You can get used to anything?”

“Yes.”

He scrubbed his hands over his face. “Okay, What did you want to talk to me about that you know I won’t like.”

She swayed back and forth a little bit, betraying her nervousness. He really wasn’t going to like this. “Remember how I asked Obi-Wan for more training on my shields?”

His eyes narrowed “Because Vader is very loud in close proximity.”

“Yes, but that’s not the whole reason why I asked for help.” Luke looked pissed. She put her hands up “It’s partially true. He is loud, deafening even.”

Luke scowled harder “Yes, I know.”

Right, Cymoon 1 and that disaster of a conversation between him and Vader. “But the real reason I asked Obi-Wan is because Vader slipped into my dream.”

“He did WHAT!??!” Luke was yelling. She winced, this was not good. Luke almost never yelled at her. It was a better reaction than randomly flying objects but still not good.

“He slipped into a nightmare I was having. I was upset, and the shields slipped.”
Luke was silent, his face almost bloodless. “And you didn’t think to tell Obi-Wan?” he said, voice tight.

“Not then no.”

“Why?”

“Because I didn’t know him Luke.” she said tiredly “All I knew was that I would do something and he would be afraid of me, and I didn’t know why. Besides, what he gave me was enough. I thought I had it handled. The layering technique worked.”

Luke pinched the bridge of his nose “You thought you had it handled?”

Her shoulders slumped “He got in again after I was shot.”

He crossed his arms over his chest “There’s more isn’t there?”

“Two nights ago when I was sick,” she confessed.

Luke let out a loud string of curses, half of them in languages she didn’t speak. Some of them were in languages she didn’t even recognize. He had been spending a lot of time with his fellow pilots and picking up horrible habits.

She was standing there, some what in awe of the quantity of what he was spewing out, when he stopped abruptly and did a quick glance around.

Picking up on what he was probably thinking she said brightly, “No tornado. Your control is better than you think.”

He gave her a flatly unimpressed look, and asked “Why tell me now?”

“Two reasons. The first is because he showed me something I thought you should see.” she corrected herself “No, this is something that is also yours to see.”

Luke frowned at her. “What could that possibly be?”

She tapped gently on his shields. He scowled at her, but he let them fall. She didn’t go far in, she didn’t need to, not for this. His anger was pricking uncomfortably on her own shields, and she didn’t like the fact that it reminded her of being in Vader’s presence. She recalled the image of their mother in that summer dress and projected it into Luke’s mind.

All his anger vanished and was replaced by pure astonishment. She played the memory out, as Vader had shown it to her. “Is that our mother?” Luke said, eyes closing as he focused in on the image.

Leia nodded “Yes.”

There was a faint smile on his face, “She’s lovely,” he said.

“Yes, she was.” Leia agreed.

His eyes opened. “He showed you this?”

Leia nodded.

“Why?”
“Because he wanted me to see that we laughed the same.”

“Father was in your mind, and you were laughing?” Now he looked puzzled “Why?”

Leia couldn’t stop the grin that crossed her face.

“And now you’re smiling?” He leaned forward, peering intently at her “What? Is he secretly really funny?”

She shook her head, trying to contain the giggles that were threatening to erupt, so she could get this out.

“Leia?” Luke was beginning to look very irritated, so she took a deep breath in.

“He built Threepio!” she blurted out quickly before the laughter overtook her again.


“Threepio,” she said “About this tall,” she gestured several inches above her head, “golden, really annoying? He built him.” then her laughter escaped her again.


“Yes,” she said back “By all the gods I swear I’m telling you the truth.”

Luke stood there, mouth agape, then he joined her in helpless laughter. “Okay, that is really funny.”

“I know!” she hissed, trying to catch her breath.

“And the second reason?” Luke asked after they both had calmed down.

“The next time I have need I would like your help reinforcing my shields. I don’t need it every night, just when I’m sick or weak for some reason.”

He looked at her, both thoughtful and a little afraid. “There is another solution.”


He shook his head “Not what I meant. We could give him another thing to focus on.”

Leia stared at him for a beat, not understanding what he was saying. Then her blood ran cold.

“No,” she said automatically.

Luke got a mulish look on his face. “I can’t let you face him alone.”

“No,” she said. “I am not telling him. Bad enough he knows about Han.”

“I don’t need your permission, Leia. I’m perfectly capable of figuring out how to reach him on my own.” Leia felt her world spin sideways for a moment. Luke had no idea, none, of what he would be inviting inside his head. Luke said warningly “I have every right to protect you like you protect me. Do you think for one moment I’m going to let you face him alone-”.

Leia didn’t say anything, simply pushed against Luke’s shield’s, hard. They held for about a second, then folded under her barrage. She got the overwhelming feeling of surprise and anger
before she pulled back. She was just trying to make a point, she didn’t want to accidentally pick up on anything private.

“He’s stronger than I am at that and better trained.” she said flatly her arms crossing across her chest, “I have enough trouble making sure he doesn’t learn anything important. How well do you think you will do?”

He looked at her mulishly, then his shoulders slumped in defeat. “Alright. Alright, I see your point.” He looked at her “You really think he’d push that hard?”

She opened her mouth to say “Yes,” then shut it closed. She wasn’t sure. She thought about his deliberate movements, being as close as he could to her, but not close enough to touch. His endless questions, but not about the Rebellion, at least not directly about the Rebellion. His deliberately letting her feel his presence before he came into her last dream. At the time she had tried to pass it off as sloppy, but here, standing in the bright light of day, Leia knew that wasn’t true. Vader didn’t do sloppy, he was methodical and almost hyper-focused. He wanted her to know he was showing up.

Then there was the fact that he was paying attention to the background of her dreams to know when it was time for him to leave. He wasn’t leaving her alone, and that's what she really wanted, but within the confines of that, he was trying to respect any boundaries she put up.

As much as it puzzled her as to why he was doing this, he clearly was.

“No,” she said reluctantly “I don’t think he would deliberately push against you like that. But you know how intimate a connection that is Luke. What you can let slip if you aren’t constantly on your guard, and the other person isn’t polite enough to put their own guards up in place to prevent it.”

“So you’re saying he won’t going looking for it, but if he hears it, he will use it.”

“I guess?” She never really thought about it. She would rather not frankly. Vader had dominated her life enough when he was dead, she was actively trying to avoid analyzing anything he did now that he was alive.

He looked thoughtful, “What is he like? Really like face to face?”

Of course Luke wanted to know this. “How should I know?”


“Talk is a stretch. There was a lot of yelling.”

“Well in that regard he fits right in with this family.” There was a bitter irony in Luke’s face.

“We only yell when it’s necessary and we’re upset,” she countered.

“And talking to your kidnapped child who's been brainwashed against you isn’t a time to get upset?” Luke asked.

“I am not brainwashed!” she hissed. “Anyone with a common sense of decency and morals would be horrified by what he has done.”

“Yes,” Luke said, “but that is probably not how he sees it.” A flicker of pure rage welled up inside of him “You’d be surprised how many slaves are conditioned to hate or encouraged to “forget”
their family ties. It’s a tactic used to keep them separated.”

“He is not a slave!” she spat back hotly.

Luke looked at her for a long moment, sorrow in his gaze, but he offered no defense of that statement. He chose a different tack. “But he was one until he was nine. That is the mindset he is coming from Leia. That worldview does not go away. Sith or Jedi teachings could have mitigated it, if they tried, but it’s never going to go away completely.”

His kidnapped children. Taken from him and given away without his knowledge or consent. For a second Leia tried that thought on. For the brief second, she could hold that thought, without the other aspects of his history. The feeling of anger and righteous fury that action must surely have brought. But then she thought of what he had done before that decision had been made. Obi-Wan had said that he had murdered children in the Jedi temple. Children. She dismissed the sympathy. It was useful in understanding his mindset, but she couldn't fault her parents or Obi-Wan for deeming him unfit.

But Luke wanted to know, and anything she could do to encourage him not to reach out to Vader should be done. “He’s a pushy possessive bastard with little understanding of the words ‘go away’” she said.

Luke blinked “Okay.” he said “Anything else?”

Leia felt the words come out of her almost involuntarily. She had kept these visits to herself for so long, and now every complaint and issue she had with him came pouring out of her.

“Surprise! We inherited his temper. Which he has less control of then I did when I was twelve! He’s really bad at small talk. Like really bad. Obi-Wan had spent the last twenty years in the desert with virtually no contact and he is better at it!”

She turned to him, on a roll now “The man has spent most of his life under the apprenticeship of Obi-Wan Kenobi, and the Emperor. Palpatine is a horrible nightmare, but no one could accuse him of not knowing how to wield words. How is he so bad at this?”

“I don’t know?” Luke said hesitantly.

“He has no patience. He has no idea of the concept of ‘compromise’. He thinks that he can order me around and I’ll comply!! He has the emotional understanding of a rock. He’s obsessed with my well being and kills anyone who he thinks is a threat to it!”


Leia opened her mouth, intending to give him a resounding no, but thought better of it. Luke was looking for connections. Why she would never understand, but then again it wasn’t her place to tell him how to deal with this. Just help him find some peace with it. “He loved our mother,” she said softly. “I’m not sure how healthy their relationship was, given that he ended up killing her. But there is no doubt that he still misses her.”


“He’s smart.” she conceded. “Stupid about human emotions, but in everything else, he puts things together frightfully fast.”

“How so?”
“Well he realized fairly quickly that my husband was the one I took the shot for on Cymoon 1.” Leia thought about that, then confessed “Once he realized that you aren’t my husband.”

“He thought I was your husband?” Luke looked ill.

She gave him an apologetic smile, “On the Death Star I might have given him that impression?” Luke looked shocked

“Look I was trying to obscure your identity.” she defended “It seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“Okay, but still…”

“Protecting you is worth some icky feelings Luke.”

Luke didn’t look like he agreed, and Leia wondered if she should have even gotten into this. Then he looked concerned. “He knows about Han?”

She nodded, and felt it was only fair to give him a warning “And that you and I aren’t married.”

“Good.” If he wasn’t her brother she would take offense at the fact he was so relieved about that.

“Not good Luke,” she corrected “He was only trying to ‘capture’ you on Cymoon 1. He wasn’t going to try to kill you.”

Luke’s eyes widened “That was him on a ‘not kill’ mission?” he asked, voice high.

She nodded her head. “Yes, and now that he knows that, I don’t know how he’ll treat you if we run into him again. He may still want to capture you. I clearly care about you, and you would make very good bait. He also might decide it’s not worth the risk to leave a Jedi apprentice alive and kill you.”

Luke’s face was very pale. “Okay then, not too different then what we thought he would do before.” Then he blanched “But that means he’s now focusing on Han.”

“He doesn’t have a name,” she said, “and yes I know that won’t slow him down for long.” Unlike Luke, the Alliance hadn’t gone to great measures to protect Han’s identity. There were some steps taken, he was valuable because he could get supplies and intelligence through the Hutt’s networks, thanks to his affiliation with Jabba. If it was widely known he was working with the Alliance those contacts would dry up. But it was not nearly the amount of precautions that taken with Luke. Hell, half of the people on this base didn't even know Luke's real last name. They thought it was Dameron.

“Leia, you have to tell him,” Luke said.

“I know,” she said miserably. “I just wanted to talk to you first and give you a heads up. He might be furious at you too.”

Luke’s eyes widened “You’re going to tell him everything? I thought you were just going to stick to the whole me, you, and Vader being related.”

She rocked back and forth in her agitation. “I thought about confining it to just that,” she said “but, he’s in love with me,” she admitted. “And it happened so much faster this time. I wasn’t expecting it.”
“Did it happen faster?” Luke asked.

“What?”

“Did it happen faster? Or were you not paying attention?” she looked at him, eyes narrowing at the implied insult. Luke put his hands up defensively “You lost your parents, and your world, Leia. I’m not saying you are oblivious, but you were grieving and angry and you might not have noticed.”

Oh, that was actually a good point. She thought back to that first year after the Death Star. About how she vacillated between grief and anger, and only Luke’s presence gave her any peace. Because he felt like home . She remembered Han at that time being a cocky pilot who constantly was teasing her, wouldn’t leave her alone, and flirted badly with her. Maybe he had been, maybe not. It wasn’t like he was around for her to ask.

“Doesn’t matter,” she said “this one is. And the moment I tell him you are not competition, he’s going to say something.”

“He still thinks-” Luke said.

Leia shook her head “No. At least not on my end. He may think there’s something on yours, so he’s moving cautiously, but he is moving.” She thought of that soft look in his eyes he gave her in the corridor before she got sick. She thought of the fact that he stayed up half the night with her, just to make sure she was okay.

“So where’s the problem?”

“Building a relationship on a foundation of lies is not exactly a good idea.”

Luke looked at her and said softly “No, it’s not a lie. You actually aren’t obligated to tell him anything beyond the immediate danger he is facing.” She opened her mouth to protest and he held his hand up “I know you don't see it that way, and I understand why, but I’m going to have to disagree.” He shrugged “It’s your choice though.”

“Any advice?” she asked.

“Eat beforehand?”

Her eyes narrowed “Cute.”

He gave her a sassy smile, then it faded. “In all seriousness though, take dinner to him. Do this in the Falcon. He feels safe there, and you are going to need every advantage you can.”

Leia sighed, “Yes, I am.”

Leia did actually end of up taking Luke’s advice. After she was done with her work for the day, she went to the Falcon, tray in hand with food, around dinner. Just as she was starting to walk up the ramp, she surprised Han, who was making his way down.

“Leia,” he said, looking pleased. Then worried. “What are you doing here?”

“Brought dinner,” she said. He still didn’t look relieved “I didn't cook it,” she said defensively.

“And it’s not ration bars.”

“Oh,” he said, sadness filling his eyes..
“Did you have plans?” she asked. “Because we can meet up tomorrow if that’s more convenient to you?”

He swallowed hard, “No, now’s fine. Chewie’s not here, we have the Falcon all to ourselves.”

“Good,” she said, giving him a bright smile. But he still only looked anxious, and Leia wondered what he had actually been thinking.

She followed him to the dejarik table and sat the tray down “Where did Chewie go for the night?”

“He’s at a sabbac game,” he said as he slid into the bench. “I was just about to go look for you, and see if we could have dinner together.”

“Well isn’t that a happy coincidence.” she said, not liking this strange mood he was in “Because I happen to be free.” She removed his plate from the tray and set it in front of him. Then she placed her own on the other side of the table. She the tray on the ground behind by the bench. There wasn’t enough room on the table for it and their plates.

She slid into the bench and caught Han studying her intently. He looked down at his food after their eyes met. There was an awkward silence as they both ate. Leia was nervous and trying to tell herself to calm down. She had no idea why Han was so quiet.

Leia finished her food and put her fork down. “We need to talk,” she said firmly.

A look of disappointment crossed his face “This is about Luke isn’t it?”

She blinked. “A little bit yes.”

He sighed and rubbed his forehead “Don’t worry about me Princess,” he said. “Look I get it. It will be a hell of an easier time with Luke, Your parents adore him, he doesn't have a criminal past and shady friends. It’ll be easier. If Luke is what you want, I won’t stand in your way.”

Leia blinked. They had discussed this already, where had he gotten this asinine idea from? “What are you talking about?”

He looked at her surprised “Luke broke up with Nakari. Didn’t he tell you? I thought you two shared everything?” Han couldn't quite disguise the jealousy in that.

“Yes he told me,” she said, “But what does his love life have to do with this?”

Han shifted in his seat uncomfortably. “I thought you were letting me down easy.” Then a fake smile crept across his face “I just wanted you to know that there were no hard feelings.”

Yeah, she wasn’t letting him walk out of this that easily. She folded her arms down, across the table and gave him her sunniest smile. “Bantha shit,” she said pleasantly.

“I’m sorry?” Leia almost never cursed, out loud at least, and Han looked like she had just started flying around the room.

“Bantha shit,” she said again. “If I chose Luke you’d be heartbroken.”

That protective mask descended over his features “Little heavy on the ego there aren’t you? Look I like you, and I think you and I could have had a lot of fun together, but I’m not the serious type-”

“Liar,” she said in that false pleasant tone.
He stopped for a moment, clearly thrown off and then went on “-and Luke is. You and I would have had some fun, but it wasn’t ever going to be serious.” His face was nothing but smarmy honesty, but his hands weren’t still. They were restless, playing with his fork as he twirled it in his hands. Sure he wasn’t emotionally involved at all.

“So if Luke is what your heart desires, then I’m not going to hold a stray thought during a late night conversation against you. We can still all be friends-”

“Shut up you stupid nerf herder.” He gaped at her, and she let her head fall into her hands. Sith be damned. Here he was again, laying himself bare and letting her see his heart and the only thing he wanted was her happiness.

She badly wanted to reach across the table and pull him to her. To kiss and bite those lips that had always been a temptation for her. To show him how much she cared, because Han was a man who believed in action above words. It just happened to be convincing him of her love would be pleasurable for her too.

She didn't though, as fun as that sounded. He needed to know. He needed to make this choice with both eyes open. It wasn’t fair otherwise. She lifted her head from her hands and met his gaze.

“I love you,” she said simply.

His eyes widened. “Excuse me?” he asked, voice embarrassingly high.

“I love you,” she repeated “You are the one I want. Have for a long time,” And oh they’d be getting to how long “long” was soon enough, but first things first.

“I don’t-” He looked panicked, then he backtracked “I mean, I lo-”

“Don’t” she warned, “Don’t say it. At least not yet. Not until I’m done.”

Han looked offended “Look Your Worship, I get to decide what I do and do not feel.”

“Luke is my brother,” she said rushed, cutting him off. She wasn’t ready to hear that from him, not yet. Not until she had laid everything out. She couldn’t begin anything with him until he fully understood who she was.

Han’s mouth actually dropped open in shock. He stared at her, gaping like a fish before he managed a strangled “What!!?”

“We’re twins,” she added helpfully. If this whole situation wasn’t so dire, Han’s face right now would be hilarious. He looked like he had gotten his fondest wish, as someone punched him in the solar plexus.

He closed his mouth, then shook his head a few times, trying to clear it. “I don’t understand.” he finally said. “What is this about?” he sounded so bewildered.

“You aren’t in any competition with Luke, Han. I need you to understand that before I continue.” He was silent for a long time. Leia resisted the urge to poke him, and demand to know what he was thinking. Rushing this would do her no good. “You’re twins?” he finally asked.

“Yes,”

“Okay.” He nibbled on his lip. “I knew you had a lot of secrets, but I have to say I didn’t see this
one coming.”

“That was rather the point.”

His blue eyes sharpened at that reminder. “You can do that Force thing too, can’t you?”

“Yes,” she didn’t give him time to ask more about it, just twitched her finger and his cutlery started slowly moving around his head.

He watched it, wide-eyed with wonder. “You going to be a Jedi too?” he said, his hand coming up to lightly touch the fork floating right in front of him.

Leia snorted. “No.”

His eyes focused back in on her. “Yeah, you don’t strike me as the serene monk type.”

Leia brought the cutlery back down onto the table. He stared thoughtfully at them.

“How long have you known? About Luke?” He wasn’t looking at her, still staring at the table.

“Since I met him on Alderaan.”

He did look up then, “But he didn’t know about you. There was no way he did. Not with the way he was acting around you.”

Now it was Leia’s turn to squirm. While that wasn’t as bad as it could have been, in retrospect, it was pretty clear Luke had been flirting and trying to stake a claim on her. Again, she knew it could have been worse, but if Obi-Wan hadn’t kept his mouth shut, she and Luke could have avoided all of this. Both times.

“No, he didn’t. I told him after the battle of Alderaan.”

“How.” Han scratched his jaw absently, thinking it through. “Well, that explains a lot.” Then he straightened, his face going white as a sheet. “This is why Vader is after you isn’t it? Because you’re a Skywalker.”

He would put that together. First and foremost Han protected what was his. “Yes, but it’s more complicated than that.”

Han gave her a teasing smile, trying to lighten the mood a bit. “What like he’s your father?” Leia felt her face pale. Of all the times for him to accurately put his foot into his mouth. Han waited for her to laugh, but as her silence continued, that smile slipped. Then horror crossed his face and his eyes went wide.

“Kriffing hell!” he cried out, “Vader is your father!?!” Han looked flabbergasted.

Leia breathed in through her nose, desperately trying to maintain her control. She had gotten used to people not knowing that about her. Of not having it said in quiet murmurs when she entered any room. This was a reminder of things she would rather have left buried. “Yes.” she said, “He is Luke’s and my birth father.”

Han gulped, that quick mind running through all scenarios, “So you aren’t Skywalkers?”

“Oh, we are.” she gave a sharp dismissive wave “Anakin Skywalker is Darth Vader.”

Han blinked at that simple straightforward statement. “Do you know how many people in the
Imperial Armed Forces, nevermind the members of the Emperor’s court, that would kill to know that?”

Leia shrugged “Never thought about it from that angle. I’m more concerned about anyone finding out we’re related.”

Han looked thoughtful “Alive, no significant damage,” he quoted. Leia scowled, that stupid bounty. If Vader wanted to keep their relationship discreet he certainly was going about it in the worst way possible. “He knows about you,” Han said slowly “but he doesn’t know about the Kid.”

She shook her head “No, he doesn't. And I like to keep it that way as long as possible. Luke’s not ready to face him

Han’s eyebrows went up. “Well, that’s cold. Expecting him to kill his own father.”


“Do? No. But I wouldn’t put it past the old wizard to ask it of him.” He looked pissed “Is that what you two were fighting about? Did you think Luke would do something like that?”

Leia’s eyes narrowed “Do I look like someone who doesn’t do her own killing?”

He grimaced “No” he admitted. “But then what were you two fighting about?”

“Because I didn’t tell him about Vader.”

“You knew before he met you?”

She nodded “I knew.”

“And Kenobi was encouraging Luke to kill him.” Han looked pissed

Leia sighed, now was not the time to go into the riddle that was Obi-Wan Kenobi’s mind. Besides, from a simple look at the situation that is exactly what Obi-Wan asked Luke to do.

“And you didn’t say anything?” Leia shook her head. Han whistled. “No wonder he was so mad.”

“Yes,” Leia said, shivering. She didn't like to think about how close she had come to losing her relationship with Luke. “But that wasn’t what I was talking about Han. I was referring to the fact that Luke doesn’t have enough training to keep Vader out of his mind and thoughts.”

A panicked look crossed his face “Nobody ever mentioned Jedi could read minds.”

Leia shifted in her seat, she didn’t like it when he was afraid. Especially on this subject. Because it was only the smallest of mental leaps from the Jedi could read minds, to Leia can read my mind. Han had never been afraid of her, she had no desire to see that look aimed at her. “Could but didn't. Prying into another person’s mind like that is...not good.”

“Not good.” Han looked incredulous “The only thing keeping them out of people’s minds was that it was faintly disapproved of?”

Leia hissed through her teeth, her instinctive rejection of what he was suggesting the Jedi did. That organization had its problems, yes, but they wouldn’t have sunk to that. “To do that, to break into someone’s mind like that, is to use the Dark Side.”

“Well, that isn’t an ominous sounding name at all.” His face scrunched up “I take it that isn’t a
“Good thing?”

“No.” She let her irritation with him go. He lacked the context to understand what he had suggested. “I could give you a lecture about the dangers of it if you want.”

“Put it in simple terms.”

“The Dark Side is...” she closed her eyes, trying to put into words something that could only truly be understood when felt. “It’s fear and rage, unchecked and untamed. It’s like the wildfire that sweeps away the forest. It’s seductive, and tempting, but consumes everything in its path. It’s unbridled and passionate and if you let it, it will eat everything you are from the inside out.”

“Okay then.” There was a pause as he tried to digest this.

“But you can,” he stated. She raised an eyebrow at him “Keep Vader out.”

No more lies, Leia reminded herself. Even if he doesn’t have enough knowledge yet to ask the right questions. “Mostly.”

He looked relieved, then a deeply suspicious look crossed his face. “When?”

“Excuse me?”

“When did you learn this? Doesn’t sound like it’s easy, and unless there was a Jedi hiding in the Alderaan palace, there is no way you are ahead of Luke in that regard.”

Leia took in a deep steadying breath. “This is where things get odd,” she said.

He gave her a deeply incredulous look “This is where things get odd? You’re telling me you’re the daughter of Darth Vader, who was Anakin Skywalker, and that you and Luke are long lost twins, and what you are about to tell me now is odd?” He shook his head.

“Yes,” She swallowed and battled down her nervousness. There was no telling how he would take this. This Han vacillated between the man she first met and the man she knew he could become. It was hard to predict on any subject where he would land between those two versions of himself. She did feel the need to offer some reassurance “Before I start though, I want you to know you can verify everything I’m about to tell you with Obi-Wan, my parents, or Luke. They all believe me.”

“And now you are scaring me.” He leaned forward, reached out and grabbed her hand, and looked her straight in the eyes. “It can’t be that bad can it?”

She looked down at their locked hands and squeezed it back in return. Then she slowly withdrew from the contact and laced them in her lap. “Oh, it can be.”

“Who knows about this?” Han waved his hands in the air, “Not just about what you are going to tell me, but all of it?”

She looked down at their locked hands and squeezed it back in return. Then she slowly withdrew from the contact and laced them in her lap. “Oh, it can be.”

“Who knows about this?” Han waved his hands in the air, “Not just about what you are going to tell me, but all of it?”


“Rex! And the droid! You told them before you told me?”

Leia shifted uncomfortably “Okay, one, I didn't tell Rex about me and Luke. He figured it out. And he doesn’t know about Vader being Anakin. He also hasn’t a clue about what I’m about to say either. And as to R2...I had some questions for him.”
“About what?” Han looked genuinely hurt.

“About my father and mother.”

“Why didn’t you ask them then…?” his voice trailed off. “You don’t mean your parents that are on this base do you?”

She shook her head. “No, I didn't mean Papa and Mama. R2 belonged to my mother.”

Han was quiet for a moment. Then he blurted out “That’s it! That’s everyone who knows?”

“Yes.”

“You're telling me the Alliance leadership doesn't know any of this?” He looked so scandalized.

She shook her head. “No. The fewer people who know a secret the easier it is to keep.”

“And you decided to tell me?”

“Yes.”

Pure astonishment was on his face “Hell of a risk you took there, Princess.”

“No, it’s not.” He opened his mouth, probably to tell her he wasn’t to be trusted, but she cut him off. “Do you remember the day we met?

He frowned at her, puzzled about the abrupt subject change, but he answered her. “When you came sailing through and ordering everyone around? Yeah, I have a vague memory of that.”

“You like it when I order you around,” she scoffed automatically, then shook her head. It was too easy to give into the temptation to sit here and flirt with him and avoid this all together. She couldn’t though, she needed to warn him. She needed to tell him everything. “But that wasn’t my point. That was the day you met me, but that wasn’t the first time I met you.”

Han’s eyebrows furrowed. “I think I’d remember you your Worship.” he said, “You are really hard to overlook.”

She gave him a saucy smile “I should hope so,” she said, then berated herself. Stop flirting, and focus Leia. She met his eyes and let the smile drop from her face. She couldn’t let him for one second think that was she was saying wasn’t the absolute truth.

“Han I’m not referring to random encounter in a some tucked away dive bar. Or a chance meeting across a crowded room. I knew you because I have met you before. As in we had entire conversations and arguments.”

He opened his mouth to contradict her or call for help Leia wasn’t sure, but she firmly went on, in her best commanding tone. “I only look nineteen Han. I’m actually fifty-three years old, and this is my second time living this life.”

There was a very long pause. Leia felt her leg start to jitter under the table, betraying her nerves, but she was proud to note her face and arms were still.

Han’s face underwent so many contractions as several reactions crossed his face. Denial worry, fear, and finally a blank mask, hiding everything from her. He stared at her, watching her intently. When she merely returned the gaze calmly, he took a long slow blink “Nobody ever mentioned that Jedi time traveled either.” he finally offered.
Okay, that was a bit more of a flippant answer then she was hoping for, but he wasn’t dragging her to the infirmary for a medic to do a scan on her brain, so this was better than the alternative.

“They couldn’t,” she said “Obi-Wan doesn't know how this happened either. I don’t know how this happened. I went to sleep, everything was normal. I wake up, and I’m nineteen again.”

“Okay,” he said in a long draw, clearly trying to wrap his head around this. “So you said Obi-Wan believes you?”

She nodded.

“And you’re parents?”

She nodded again.

“Why?”

“Because I knew things that I shouldn’t.”

“Like?”

“Like Vader is my father. That Luke is my twin. That wasn’t something my parents ever confided in me.” He still looked dubious. She went on “I knew Tarkin’s personal passcodes. That the Death Star did actually contain a weakness in it. Should I go on? Because I can tell you quite a few things about your past if it will help you believe me. Like I know what really happened in that bar on the Florrum system.”

“Okay, okay,” he put his hands up in a placating gesture. “I get it.”

“Do you?” she pressed.

“Yeah,” Then comprehension dawned on his face “Son of a bitch! I introduced you to Maz, didn’t I?”

She looked at him, flabbergasted “That’s what you are focusing on here?”

“You threatened to shoot me,” he said, but there was a gleam in his eyes that told her he was teasing “I take threats against me pretty seriously.” Then he looked puzzled “Wait, does that mean we actually did end up in a trash compactor? What were we doing in a trash compactor?”

“Han!” Leia said, “Focus.”

“Right, you’re from the future. Got it.” He looked concerned “Why are you telling me this now?”

She felt her hands tighten into involuntary fists. “Vader knows about you.”

Han didn’t look concerned, only puzzled “He knows I’m working with the Rebellion? Why would he care? I’m just the hired transport.”

“No Han,” Leia said, trying to take this gentle and slow, knowing the bomb she was about to throw his way, “He knows I married you.”

Pure astonishment bloomed across his face “You married me?”

She nodded.
“Sober?”

She nodded again.

He leaned back into the bench “How the hell did I pull that off?”

Of all the times for his self-esteem issues to pop up “I told you,” she said firmly “I love you. You drive me absolutely crazy sometimes, but I love you. More importantly, I trust you.”

His face took on a dopey grin. Leia’s traitorous heart picked up speed. This wasn’t his charming rouge smile, or the I’m so clever smile. This was the smile Han had when he was truly and deeply happy about something. It had been a long time since she had seen it, even before the time travel. “Really?” he asked shyly.

Leia uncurled her hands and reached across the table. She gently caressed his cheek, “Really,” she confirmed. Those blue eyes sparkled for a moment, then worry took their place as their earlier conversation crowded back into his mind.

“Vader knows about me.” Now he did look anxious.

Leia leaned back from him, giving him space. She tried to offer what reassurance she could. “Not your name, what you look like, or what you do, but he knows you exist.” She paused then took a deep breath in, aware of what she was about to say would open her up to another set of questions she didn’t want to answer. “And that you were on Cymoon 1. He knows that I took that shot to protect you.”

He stilled at that but didn’t go where she thought he would with that information. “Does he blame me for that?”

Leia frowned “Why would you think that?”

“I don’t know him, Princess. I have a right to be concerned if Vader has a personal vendetta against me.”

It was a reasonable question. A few days ago her answer would have been an automatic no. Vader would be angry that he lost his best card to play against the Emperor, but he wouldn’t be upset. That wasn’t a lie she could sell to herself anymore. If she had died on Cymoon 1 there is no telling what Vader would have done in his pain. And it would be pain, her death would hurt him. And that was something she would have to come to terms with. But she hadn’t died and he had shown a frightening bloodlust in regards to her well being. Would he blame Han for her injury?

But she thought of his grief and pain in regards to her mother. His agreement with her that he would give almost anything to have her back. And he knew she had taken the shot for her husband, not some random passerby. She scowled, not liking that she wasn’t sure anymore about the answer to this question. She went with “Not as far as I know.”

“Well, that is a small relief.”

“Don’t be too relieved. He still probably wants to capture you.”

“But that means he wants me alive, and that means he can’t bring his best weapons to that pursuit.”

“And what would those be?” she asked, genuinely curious.

“If the rumors surrounding him are right?” She nodded “An absolute single-minded focus to plow
through anything that gets in the way of what he wants.” A grimace crossed his face “On second
thought that sounds just as bad.”

She gave a helpless shrug, “Welcome to my world.”

“When did he find out?”


“Well, now I’m even more impressed with your escape.” A shadow danced across his face, but he
hid it and leaned forward, a roguish grin crossing his face “Did I ever tell you I’ve always had a
thing for competent older woman?”

She knew him too well to get angry. He was worried and trying to needle her on purpose. She
knew his tells too well to think he was taking this as well as he seemed to be. “Spit it out.”

“What?” He said, leaning forward even more “You never picked up on that fact?”

She rolled her eyes, “This is not a fight you are equipped to win Han.”

He smirked “You sure about that?”

“I’m old enough to be your mother,” she said flatly and that cocky look was wiped off his face. She
had told him her age, but clearly in the midst of everything else he hadn’t thought that little fact all
the way through. “Now tell me what is bothering you.”

He squirmed in his seat “What did I do?”

“Excuse me?” What was he talking about now?

“When you first got here,” he said “You were running hot and cold with me. I, or older me, clearly
did something to you.”

Leia’s heart broke in her chest, and she could feel the tears building. Furious she blinked rapidly,
trying to stop their fall. She shook her head. “You didn’t do anything Han.”

“See I might not have the years of experience reading you like you read me, but I know you’re
bluffing.”

“I am not bluffing.”

His teeth gritted “Please don’t lie to me.”

“I am not lying,” she said defensively.

“Well, you sure as hell aren’t telling me everything sweetheart.”

She slapped her hands down on the table in frustration “You were murdered!” she howled at him.

His face instantly went pale, and Leia felt her anger dissolve. Dammit! Dammit! Dammit! There
were a million better ways to have handled this.

He tried to speak a few times, from almost bloodless lips. He finally managed to croak out “By
who?”

Leia tried to find a way to backtrack. To regain control of this conversation. “Look I’ve dumped a
lot of information on your head all at once. You should think about what I said.”

“Don’t dodge the issue, Leia, I have a right to know who killed me.”

Yes, he did, but he wasn’t going to like this. “Just trust me. You don’t want to know the answer.”

“It was Lando wasn’t it?” he snarled “That slick bastard finally did me in.”

“No, it wasn’t Lando,” she said sadly, not aware that the rift between them had gotten so bad Han would think Lando would kill him. “Why would you think it was Lando?”

“Well clearly it was someone close to me, or you would have already killed them.”

It was both flattering and horrifying that he thought her capable of that. “Let it go, Han,” she advised.

“Tell me!” he insisted “You’ve already informed me that I apparently have the two scariest father’s in law in the galaxy and the craziest man I’ve ever met as a brother. How bad can this possibly be?”

So bad. This answer would play into some of the worst fears and doubts Han harbored about himself. But it also wasn’t fair to leave him in the dark like this, worried about every friendly face.

“It was our son,” she said softly.

Han reared back so fast Leia was surprised he didn’t hit his head on the Falcon’s walls. “What?”

“Our son killed you,” she repeated tiredly.

“Why?” It was a quiet and broken word “What did I do to him that made him hate me so badly?”

“I loved being a father ,” that older Han had told her. Well, she was pretty much killing that path right in front of her. “Nothing,” she said fiercely, tears slipping down her cheeks, “You did nothing to deserve that. He fell Han, he fell to the Dark Side.”

He was quiet and more worryingly, still for several long moments. “Yeah, should have listened to you. You were right, I didn't want to know that.”

“Han,” she said reaching for him. He moved his hand away, deliberately avoiding her touch. Leia recoiled, she couldn't help it. She could never recall Han, any Han, avoiding physical comfort from her.

Han jerkily got out of the seat. “I’m sorry.” he said “I need some space to think.”

She swallowed hard. He had said that to her once before. Then he disappeared from her life for seven years. Not this Han, but a Han. She knew what this meant, and this time she couldn’t even blame him. “Of course,” she whispered softly “I’ll just go.”

As she exited the familiar halls of the Falcon, Leia wondered if she would ever be back here. Or if she had somehow inadvertently managed to solve the problem of Ben by killing everything between her and his father.
Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakvkampfer and Acyancat

Translation into Russian available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Chapter 19

Hi guys, I'm so sorry this one is a little late. Pretty much from Thanksgiving to New Year's is insane for me in RL and it cut into my writing schedule. Should be back on track now. There is a small spoiler for the comic series Vader Down in this chapter. Also shout out to Drika16, yes it turned out that was super helpful. And to persistent-bookworm-disease, who got me thinking on the subject of Alderaan mourning customs. As always, I hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ABA - Day 106

Leia was meditating in her quarters. It was late at night, or possibly really early in the morning, and she should be asleep. But she had found that every time she closed her eyes, her mind would be caught in the cycle of Han, Ben, Luke and every mistake she had made. Both times. Finally, she gave up and sat up in her bed, hands resting lightly on her knees. She sank into the Force, using that current of energy to replenish her own. It wasn’t the same as true sleep, but she had used this trick several times in the past. She wouldn’t be at her brightest tomorrow, but she wouldn’t be falling over dead tired either.

She floated along that current, for who knew how long, when she felt the lightest of touches across her mind. Surprised, and a bit relieved to be honest, she could use the company, she brought herself back to her body.

“I’m awake,” she told Luke, as she opened her eyes.

Her door slid open and he walked in, looking as tired as she felt.

“So,” he said lightly, sitting on the chair that she still hadn’t bothered to remove from her room, “when you told me you were going to tell Han, I should have asked for a specific time.”

Leia winced at that blunt statement “I’m sorr-”

He cut her off “My fault, not yours. You did warn me.” He sighed heavily and said “I was walking with Chewie back to the Falcon”

Leia blinked, surprised. Han said Chewie had gone gaming for the night. “You were playing Sabacc?” she asked. Luke wasn’t much for that game even when he couldn’t use the Force to cheat.

He shook his head “No, just hanging out with Wedge, he was playing Sabacc.” His face grew grim, “We found Han in the Falcon.”

“Oh?” she said cautiously. There were several scenarios they could have walked into, none of them pleasant.
“He was very drunk,” Luke said neutrally.

Leia felt her spine stiffen. “Do you blame him?” she asked heatedly.

“Given what he was babbling?” Luke shook his head “No.” Which meant Chewie knew now too. Or at least he knew the bare bones of it. Han had never been a very focused drunk. Not that he drank all that much. Maybe that would change now. Given what she told him, she wouldn’t be surprised if he decided that the life of an alcoholic would be preferable than to a life spent with her.

Leia’s lips pressed together at that unhappy thought. “What did he say, exactly?”

Luke gave her a flat look “That isn’t your business Leia.”

Leia flinched. She was just doing so well with her family tonight wasn’t she? “Sorry,” she muttered, “You’re right.”

He shook his head. “It’s alright.” Then he looked at his chrono, and frowned back up at her. “Why aren’t you asleep?” he asked cautiously.

Leia twirled her finger around her head “Too much up here,” she said.


“What?” she asked, puzzled.

He hesitated for a second, then in a rush said “I thought you were staying up on purpose.”

That cleared nothing up for Leia “Why would I do that?”

He gave her a baffled look and said, as if it was the most obvious thing in the galaxy, “Because Father might be able to get in.”

Leia’s mind froze. “Get in?” she whispered.

He gave her a very patient look “You are upset Leia. And you’re tired. You aren’t going to be at your best right now on your defenses.” He looked a little guilty “That’s why I came. I wanted to be here in case something happened. When I saw you were awake I thought you were trying to brave it out on your own without asking for my help.”

That doesn’t mean I don’t check every night. Vader's deep baritone voice echoed in her mind.

“No,” she said, face paling at the depth of her stupidity and arrogance, “It didn’t even occur to me.” It should have though. But she was in such turmoil over Han every other thought seemed to flit from her mind. Even Vader.

Luke gave her a long assessing look, but all he said was “Want me to stay?”

Leia looked at him “Please,” she croaked. She didn’t have it in her to deal with a visit from Vader tonight. She already felt like she had been flayed to her very core, the last thing she needed was to engage in the delicate balancing act an encounter between the two of them required.

“You should lay down,” he said, “you need to sleep.”

Leia looked into his face, noting the tired eyes and slumped shoulders. Luke had never done well with no sleep. Then he learned that trick with the Force. She was too tired to try to teach him tonight, so she said “So do you.”
He shook his head “I’m off rotation tomorrow. I can sleep then.”

Leia frowned. Was he really trying to push his way through this? Well, there were subtler ways to convince him then yelling and calling him a fool. She gave him a wan smile. “I’d probably sleep better if I wasn’t worried about you trying to stay awake in that chair.” She patted the bed beside her “Come on, I promise I don’t snore.”

He gave her a deeply skeptical look, but their staring match was cut short by a wide yawn coming from him.

“Fine,” he grumbled. He stood up and pulled his boots off, and stripped off his outer shirt. He had an undershirt on, of course he did, and Leia would bet everything she had he had on thermal leggings on under his pants. Luke and his layers. Even on Yavin, which was uncomfortably hot by most standards, he still got chilled at night. Hoth had been a nightmare for him.

“We skipping our morning workout?” She asked as she got up to let him take the side of the bed closest to the wall. She trusted Luke with everything she had, but she knew from bitter experience she wouldn't be sleeping unless she had a clear line of sight to the door. She removed the blaster from under her pillow and placed it on the chair.

Luke looked at her funny for a second, and she gave him a shrug in return. It wasn't like she had a nightstand of any kind here. She didn't think she was going to be attacked on the base, but she had spent too many years the target of too many people to feel comfortable without a weapon in arms reach.

“Yeah,” he said, side-eyeing the blaster, before shrugging, “I don't think it would be the best idea. We’d probably both run into the walls if we tried.”

“Probably” she agreed. She had been looking forward to it. It was supposed to be the first day she could get back to a full workout after she had been sick, but her reputation as being competent would never survive her tripping over her own feet in exhaustion.

Leia waited until Luke climbed into the bed before crawling into it. It wasn't exactly designed for two people, but neither of them was that large. He flipped so that his back was showing to her and he was facing the wall. “I snore if I sleep on the other side,” he explained.

“Yes,” she said, side-eyeing the blaster, before shrugging, “I don't think it would be the best idea. We’d probably both run into the walls if we tried.”

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“Yes, I know,” she said, rolling so that her back was to him, and she was facing the door.


Leia did and eventually, she wasn’t sure when, drifted off to sleep.

Han was in front of her. The older one, not this new younger one. He was standing on a bridge, that was across an enormous chasm. Leia was standing on the cliff’s edge, a few feet from the bridge itself. She looked up to see the night stars of Alderaan hanging in the sky. Below the bridge was an enormous black abyss. She looked at Han wondering what he was doing here. She could see his lips moving, but she couldn't hear what he was saying.

“What?” she cried out, stepping unto the bridge. He looked frantic, and that never boded well. He shook his head, lips still moving. Leia tried to speed up, to get to him faster, but the more effort she put into moving, the slower she became. It was like trying to run through water.
“I’m coming,” she shouted, pushing herself as hard as she could “Just hold on.”

He shook his head. When she was not twenty feet from him, he opened his mouth to try again, when the blade of a red lightsaber came protruding out of his chest.

“No!!” she screamed in denial, almost falling to her knees.

Han looked down, puzzled, and put a hand on his chest, as if to confirm that he had indeed been impaled. When he looked up, his face had melted into that of the young Han. There was sorrow and regret reflected on his features as he looked at her. Then that blade retracted and he collapsed to his knees.

“Han,” Leia whimpered, still desperately trying to reach him. She was pushing against that invisible resistance with everything she had, and it wasn’t enough.

He gave her a sad smile and mouthed clearly, “I love you.” Then he was gone, falling off the side of the bridge into that bottomless pit.

Desperately she reached out with the Force to catch him, but it did not come. There was only an empty void in her head where that wild song should be. She watched, helpless, as he fell away from her into the inky blackness below.

She turned to face his murderer, and the mask of Kylo Ren stared back at her.

“Isn’t this what you wanted Mother?” he asked calmly. It wasn’t a complete distortion of his voice, not like Vader’s vocoder, she could still hear Ben underneath it. But there was an odd mechanical tinge to his tone “For the decision of my existence to be taken out of your hands?”

“Leia?” a sleepy voice asked from nowhere and everywhere.

“Ben, no.” she protested, as she looked straight into those black eye shields, searching hopelessly for some hint of her son. “This is not what I wanted. This is never what I wanted.”

“Liar,” he said calmly, “If you didn’t want me gone, why tell Solo about me?”

“Leia?” that voice asked again. Whoever was talking wasn’t completely awake. She felt someone reach into her mind, full of power and purpose. But it was a hasty gesture, filled with its own cobwebs of dreams. Confusingly for a second, the blackness below them was filled with fire and lava. Leia could feel the heat of it lick her skin.

“You see how easy it is to do?” Kylo Ren asked her, gesturing to where Han had fallen. He began walking to her “How love just falls away.”

Leia felt tears burning in her eyes, and desperately she reached out a hand to him. “Please come back,” she said, “You’re breaking my heart.” She heard her words echoed by someone else. A woman, whose voice Leia could almost place.

There was a swell of blind panic, grief, and pain at Leia's voice. Or was it because of what that mysterious other woman was saying? It riled the Force around her, cutting into her mind with its sharp edges. The sound of mechanical breathing suddenly was everywhere.

Kylo Ren looked up, interested in that noise. Leia took the opportunity that distraction afforded her, and began backing away from her husband’s killer. She needed space. She needed to get off this bridge. He wasn’t listening to her, and she needed time. But she wasn’t moving any faster then she had been in her first rush to reach Han. She whimpered in frustration and fear.
Her movement caught Kylo Ren’s eye, and he turned his head back to focus on her. He continued to follow her across the walkway, that damn patched together lightsaber in his hand. Thankfully it was still unlit.

“Ben,” she pleaded “Please. You don’t understand.”

“No,” he shook his head “Ben Solo didn’t understand. He was weak. I killed him,” this husk that was once her son told her gleefully. He gestured to behind him “He would understand why I did this.”

Leia’s eyes followed to where her son was pointing. Improbably there was a woman now standing on the bridge. She was dressed in a light beige uniform of some sort, and Leia could see, even from this distance, that she was heavily pregnant. The woman was backing away from some tall shadowy figure that Leia couldn’t quite make out, tears in her eyes. She gasped suddenly, and began to frantically clutch at her neck. Leia could hear the woman beg, in a breathless voice “Anakin, no.”

“Anakin, let her go!” Obi-Wan’s commanding voice boomed and echoed across the cavern. At those words, Leia could suddenly move. She scrambled off the bridge, onto solid ground.

Kylo Ren continued his slow walk towards her, and the Dark Side was everywhere. “You turned her against me!!” he howled.

Leia blinked. Those words had come from the figure of her son, but they weren’t said in his voice. That was Vader’s voice, his real voice, not the vocoder. What the hell?

She was dreaming. This was a nightmare, it had to be. But as that woman on the bridge collapsed to the ground Leia felt her blood turn to ice. This wasn’t just her, it was Vader’s nightmare too. She looked on helpless, at that prone figure laying out on the ground. Was that her mother? Leia took a step forward, to help, to attack that shadow, to do anything. The tall figure of her son stopped her in her tracks. It would do her no good, these were events from long ago and she couldn’t change any of it.

Gods above, Vader wasn’t even awake and he was somehow this far in her head. She needed to focus. She needed to shore up her walls. She needed to remember that this was a nightmare and she had control.

Then the sound of a lightsaber igniting caught her attention.

“It’s time to let the past die,” Kylo said, but it had gone back to being his voice, not Vader’s. “I’ll kill it if I have too.” He swung that blade, clearly getting ready to attack her with it.

Leia tried to back away, but again she was caught in that strange hold that wouldn’t let her move. Panic filled her as she realized that she was completely at the mercy of this strange shared delusion of her’s and Vader’s mind. She could fight one, but not both.

Leia screamed, out of fear, out of frustration, for help, she honestly wasn’t sure. The sound of her cry seemed to temporarily halt her son as it echoed across the giant space they were in. For a second everything held in breathless silence. There was a sharp ripple across the Force as she felt Vader’s mind suddenly snap to attention.

“Leia, what is wrong?” Oh, now he chooses to wake the hell up. There was nothing but concern in his tone. Then a wounded sob came from him as he realized what was going on. Abruptly Leia felt like a giant hole was left in her as Vader pulled everything back. The sound of his breathing,
the heat of the lava, and the laying figure of her prone mother winked out as if they had never been.

Leia took a deep breath in, her own thoughts settling now that she wasn’t caught in the same feedback loop as Vader. She cast her sense of the Force out, looking for the weak spot he had wiggled his way through. She intended to throw everything she had into that hole in her defenses, and worry about the damage her fake son could do when it came. Vader was the bigger issue here.

She felt a pair of arms encircle her from behind. For one blind second she thought it was Vader, then a voice whispered in her ear “I’m here Leia,” as a feeling of warmth, love, and protectiveness descended down upon her.

Luke. Luke was here. She closed her eyes for a moment, drawing in as much strength as she could from her brother. This was a nightmare, this wasn't real, and with him by her side, she could do anything. She opened her eyes and Kylo Ren faded away.

Vader’s voice was full of suspicion “Who is there?”

Luke’s mind curled around hers, and the sense of her, of Leia and Luke, faded. It was just them, as it had been in the beginning. That horrible bridge and all the pain it had brought them was gone. They were floating in an empty space, no walls and floor, just the Force, swirling around them.

They looked up, to the spot where he was trying to slip in again. He reached in and skimmed their mind.

“Leia?” Vader sounded surprised “I thought there was someone else…” his voice trailed off. “Are you alright?”

They didn’t answer, merely pushed against that intrusion. It was by the thinnest threads he was here, and together they were strong enough to cut that cord. They reached out and firmed up the wall until it was thick and impenetrable.

That voice howled in frustrated anger from the other side, muted but clear. “Leia,” he said, “Leia, don’t shut me out.”

There was a stirring of pity at those words. Part of them was curious, they had never heard that mellow voice before. They reached out, hesitantly, touching the side of that wall.

They should attack from here. They didn't want to hurt him. They didn't want him here. But they wanted to know. There was a tremble and a slight cracking at their foundation as the two sides of themself conflicted over what they should do.

“Leia,” the voice cracked in anguish “Whatever you saw...whatever you heard...it was a mistake. I didn’t mean to hurt her.”

He had regret. They hadn’t expected that, either of them. There was a part of them that knew only loss and helplessness in that presence. That there was nothing good that could come from this. But the other part, the younger one, listened and heard.

“Leia I only want to help.” It was muffled, but they could feel the true worry and concern.

They debated with themselves. But they were safe here, and that voice, for all some part was curious, the other half only knew pain from that presence. That was something neither would tolerate. They could compromise though. They wouldn’t attack, they wouldn’t make him leave. They would wait, to see what he would do.

And that is how they spent the night, that dark forbidding presence bleeding pain, but a determined
type of persistence they couldn’t but help admire. He never spoke again, but he didn’t leave them either, which was the most surprising part of all of it. Hadn’t he done so before?

There was a banging on her door. Leia groaned as the sound reached her. She shivered against the cold and rolled over, looking for the blanket to pull back over her. She smacked her hand against someone’s head instead.


Leia frowned at him, and all the blankets he stole from her. No wonder she was cold. Then the banging began on her door again, and she pushed herself up to glare at it. Who the krieffing hell was out there? And what did they want? If they hadn’t brought her caf she was going to shoot them dead. Her blaster was right there.

“Come in,” she shouted, voice hoarse with sleep. If they came in it would be easier to shoot them.

Han stumbled into the room.

Leia blinked, trying to get her mind to understand just what the hell was going on. Han looked like hell warmed over and…

Oh, right. She had told him about Ben last night.

“Leia,” he said, then noticing her brother “Luke.”

“Hey Han,” Luke said. He sounded way too coherent for Leia's tastes. Farm boys and mornings, they never seemed to be able to break the habit.

“What’s his name?” Han demanded. Leia looked at him head on, desperately wishing he thought to bring caf with him. She felt like her brain was operating at least two seconds behind where it needed to be for this conversation. Whose name did he want?

“Who?” she said, voice thick with sleep.

“Our son Leia.”

Leia froze in the act of rubbing her face. Surely she had told him...no she hadn’t. In all the revelations of last night somehow the most basic of them had slipped her by. She swallowed the sudden grief and pain as the echoes of her dream last night came flashing through her mind. Han impaled on that blood red lightsaber.

“He’s fine,” Leia reminded herself sternly, “He’s standing right in front of you getting angrier by the minute.”

“Ben,” she said simply, sitting all the way up, “His name is Ben.”

Han frowned “Why the hell did we name him after the old wizard?”

Luke started to crawl out from the blankets he had wrapped himself in. “I think I should go,” he said.

Han scowled at him, pointing his finger at Luke “You are staying right where you are ‘twin’. I got questions for you too.”
Luke froze for a second at the harsh tone “Okay,” he said slowly. His eyes were very wide, and his tone cautious. He pulled himself free from all the blankets and sat upright. Leia sighed and swung her self further back onto the bed, sitting next to him, back leaning against the wall.

Leia took in Han’s disheveled appearance, and still red-rimmed eyes. That finger he was still pointing at Luke was none too steady. “Are you still drunk?”

“Probably,” Han confessed, swaying slightly on his feet, “I had a lot to drink.” At Leia’s and Luke’s stare, he straightened up defensively “Like I didn't have a good reason?”

“Yes,” Luke said. “But are you sure you want to have this conversation now?”

“I need to be properly analyze. No that’s not right. Anthe-” Han’s tongue stumbled over the word. “Anete-”

“Anesthetized?” Leia offered.

Han snapped his fingers “Yep, that’s the one.”

Well, she couldn’t blame him on that one. In fact, it sounded like a really good idea to her too.

“Why Ben?” He muttered, confused “What the hell did Kenobi do for us that was so special we named our kid after him?”

“Nothing,” Leia said softly, “The first time I met Obi-Wan was on Alderaan.”

Han frowned. “You mean from before?” he asked.

Leia shook her head “No Han, I mean three months ago.”

Han looked shocked “That was the first time you ever met Obi-Wan?”

“Yes,” she said softly. “He died before I ever met him on the first go around.” Beside her, Luke tensed, and she laid a gentle hand on his arm in comfort.

Han looked at her puzzled “I don’t get it. Why not name the kid after your father?”

“Because it’s considered bad luck on Alderaan to name a child after a dea-” Leia cut herself off. Han didn’t need her tale of woe right now. This was about him and the questions she had left him grappling with.

Han’s eyes grew wide. Luke reached down and squeezed her hands in reassurance.

“After a dead person?” Han asked hesitantly.

Leia swallowed, of course, he wouldn't have left that subject alone. “A dead family member to be more precise. At least if you knew them. It’s considered bad luck.”

Han thumped down onto the chair “There are a lot of dead people in this past of yours.”

Leia choked out a “Yes.”

“Well that answers that question,” Han muttered, “Figures you wouldn’t have the answer.”

“The answer to what?” Luke’s tone was bewildered.
“How to get Bail to like me!” he wailed.

Luke just blinked but Leia sighed. Han always did get a bit loopy when he was drunk.

Han rubbed his forehead, and went to the crux of the matter “Why did he…” Han’s voice wobbled and he corrected to “Ben. Why did Ben fall?” He paused and swallowed hard “Was it dear old grandfather?”

Leia bit her lip on her instinctive ‘Yes.” That wasn’t true, at least not in the sense Han was asking in. “No, he was dead by that point. The Emperor too.”

An incredulous look crossed his face “Are you telling me this barely held together group actually manages to bring down the Empire?”

“Yes,” Leia said.

Han looked amazed “Really?”

Luke huffed “If you don’t believe we can, then what are you doing here?” he asked.

Han waved his hands to the both of them “Watching your backs,” he said like this was the most obvious thing in the galaxy “Because you both have the common sense of a tauntaun.”

Luke’s tone was exasperated “You know I managed to reach the age of nineteen all on my own.”

Han scoffed at that “Sheer luck,” he insisted “Or your Uncle and Aunt were even scarier then Bail.”

“They were not scary!” Luke protested.

Han snorted, “Sure Kid, whatever you say.” Then he frowned. “And stop distracting me.”

“I’m not distracting you!” Luke muttered under his breath.

Han ignored him, “Why did Ben fall Leia?”

Leia took in a deep breath. This was not the easiest subject to broach. Then there was that dream last night and seeing the murder of Han reenacted in front of her, along with Vader’s visit. Her control was in shatters.

“Oh like you had any control in this situation General” her cynical side muttered.

“It started with a man named Snoke,” she said cautiously. Beside her, Luke sat up to full attention. He had never asked, but she could feel his curiosity about this. She couldn't blame him, the few details she had given him was enough to pique anyone’s interest. This involved his life too. Luke had never taken his relationship with Ben lightly, even outside his being Ben’s Jedi Master. Uncle wasn’t a title he held in any casual sense.

Han’s eyebrow quirked “What the hell kind of name is that?”

“Han,” she warned. She wasn’t sure she could tolerate his humor right this second. She felt like she was about to split into a million pieces at the smallest push. “He’s a dark side user.”

Luke frowned “A Sith?”

Leia shook her head, “No, he was...something else.”
Han’s eyes narrowed “Are you not telling me because you don’t want to, or because you don’t know.”

Leia nibbled on her lip “Because I don’t know all the details,” she confessed. And oh how that galled. Even with every resource she had, there were huge chunks of Snoke’s history she was missing.

Han gave her a long considering look “Why isn’t he dead yet?”

“Because I currently don’t know where he is,” she said simply. Luke’s breath came in with a sharp gasp.

Han looked at her flatly “And when you do?” he asked tonelessly.

She gave him a stare for a stare “As I said, I do my own killing.”

Luke whispered “Leia, no”

She shook her head “He’s a threat to my family Luke. I will not tolerate that.”

“He hasn’t done anything to you yet,” Luke said “You are the one who keeps saying that what you remember might not come to pass. How can you kill someone based off what they might do?” This Luke was so young sometimes. He hadn’t learned yet. But Leia had. If anything this second life was reinforcing it. She would pay the moral price to eliminate Snoke.

“This is completely different. I will not let the First Order rise again out of the remnants of the Empire.” she hissed “Or I will see everything I fought and sacrificed for fall, again.” She was trembling she was so angry. How could he not understand this?

Luke’s face was pale “How many others?” he asked.

“What do you mean?” Leia hedged.

Lukes face hardened at her evasion “How many others do you plan on assassinating Leia?”

Leia looked at him in the face “As many as I need to.” she said flatly.


Han’s voice broke through “It’s a war Luke. People die in wars. I think Leia just wants to make sure that certain people meet that fate in battle.” He frowned at her “Unless you are talking about running around the galaxy in the dark and slitting people’s throats as they sleep.”

Leia looked at him, surprised. “Would it bother you if I was?”

He shrugged “No. But I think Bail would find a way to blame me for your actions.”

Leia sighed and rubbed her forehead, “No, I’m not talking about running around the galaxy like some freelance assassin.”

“No, assassins get paid,” Han mumbled, but Luke looked relieved as he understood what she was actually planning to do.

“Told you, Kid,” Han’s look was triumphant. Then a scowl crossed his face as he realized he was still mad at her.
“What have you changed?” Han demanded. “There is no way you haven’t changed something already.”

Leia kept her sigh to herself. So much for making this conversation about him. He was always tenacious about the subjects that caused the people he loved pain.

“Alderaan,” she said.

“What about it?” Han asked.

“It’s still here,” she said tightly.

Han looked at her then let out a “Kriffing hell.” He rubbed his hands over his face and let out a semi-hysterical laugh. “That’s it, isn’t it?” he said tiredly “That’s how I did it. You were grieving and alone and I took advantage of that.”

Leia stared at him. Even with her years of experience dealing with him, she had no idea how that logic jump worked. “What are you talking about?”

“That’s why you married me,” he said tiredly “I used that to my advantage and I tricked you.”

“One that’s an insult to my intelligence. Two that isn’t why I married you,” she shot back.

Han harrumphed “You wouldn’t even have considered a guy like me if that hadn’t happened. Don’t deny it.”

“Of course I wouldn’t have,” she said, sitting up and leaning forward “Because I would never have met you if it hadn’t happened”

Han’s face scrunched up in confusion “Huh?”

“You rescued me. You and Luke were on the Death Star. I was scheduled for execution and you came and busted me out of my cell.”

“Where we didn’t have a plan to get out of the hallway,” Luke said, trying to break the tension.

Comprehension crossed Han’s face “So we went through the trash compactor.”

Leia nodded her head. “Yes.”

Luke let out a sudden laugh. She and Han both turned to stare at him. “Sorry,” he said, “it’s just so” he waved his hand around the three of them “...us. I go barging in without a plan, Han follows me to watch my back, and you’re the one who actually tried to deal with the reality of what we were facing.”

Leia felt a smile tug on her lips “Yes, especially when you take into account that the walls started closing in on us and it was R2 and Threepio that ultimately saved us.”

Luke giggled “Of course they did. And just in the nick of time?”

Leia nodded.

Even Han smiled at that, but then Luke’s laughter slid away. “Obi-Wan died on that station didn’t he?”

Leia bit her lip, but she whispered. “Yes.”
Sorrow passed through his eyes “Father killed him didn’t he?”

Leia nodded. Luke slumped as if the answer was too much to bear.

Han cleared his throat, “Not that this isn’t fascinating, but I come back to my original question.”
Like he hadn’t been the one to pull them off topic. “Why Ben?” Han asked.

Leia sighed and brought her knees up under her chin “Well if he had been a girl we were planning on naming him Jaina.”

Han’s face contracted in pain for a moment, before he said hoarsely “That’s my mother’s name.”
She gave him a small smile “I know.”

A muscle in Han’s cheek twitched, “Thought it was bad luck to name a child after a dead parent.”

“My tradition,” she said fondly “not yours.”

Then her smile faded. “Obi-Wan was my only hope. When I was captured on the Tantive IV, I knew who was chasing me. I sent R2 in the desperate hope that he could somehow” she waved her hand “do something. Papa had told me so many stories about how during the Clone Wars Obi-Wan seemed to achieve the impossible.”

“You were hoping he would rescue you?” Luke asked.

She shook her head “No, I was hoping that he would get the Death Star plans to my father and make my death worth it.”

Luke sucked in a harsh breath of air. She rocked lightly, and gently bumped their shoulders. “Fortunately for all involved, you found R2. And well…” she trailed off. Then she looked at Han, straight in the eyes “Ben was born shortly after the signing of the Galactic Concordance. The surrender of what was left of the Empire.”

“He was our hope,” Han said.

“Yes,” she let out a bitter laugh “that was a lot to put into one person, but we really did think that everything was going to be okay. That we could make it better, that he would have a better life than us.” She looked at Luke “That’s why we went with Ben instead of Obi-Wan. Because we didn’t want to recreate the past, but we did want to remember it.”

There was silence in her room for a moment, before Han asked “How many times did you know what was going to happen?”

Leia blinked “A few. I knew Grakkus had that loot of Jedi artifacts. That he had an imperial spy in his ranks. Although,” and here she scowled “I didn’t know he was a member of the 501st.”

Han looked at her, face unusually serious. “And Cymoon 1? Did you know Vader was going to be there?”

Leia closed her eyes. Would that decision ever stop haunting her? “Yes, I knew there was a good chance he would be there. But I didn’t get shot last time, I swear it Han.”

“Oh course you didn’t” he muttered darkly “And it never once occurred to you to walk away?”

Leia opened her mouth to defend herself, but he shook his head.
“No, I don't want to hear whatever excuse you have. You knew, thought you could control it and walked straight into a situation that blew up in your face.” His face grew dark “A situation you had no business being in, and you dragged the rest of us into it. You placed all of us in danger. Me, Chewie, Luke, hell even Rex and the old wizard. And for what? What’s the point of bringing down the Empire if the rest of us aren’t here to enjoy it?”

“Han-” Leia whispered, horrified that was how he had seen what she had done.

Han made a noise of disgust and got up. “I’m done,” he announced and walked, none too steadily out the door.

Leia watched him go, heart in her stomach. Well if he wasn't going to leave before, he had plenty of reason to now.

Leia felt all the energy drain out of her and she slumped back, her back hitting the wall.


She waved her hand, cutting him off. “I need to get dressed.”

“Leia, he’ll come back.”

She shook her head, too tired to even argue with him.

Luke hesitated, then haltingly asked “About last night…” his voice trailed off.

Oh yes, Vader, and his wonderful nightmare of a visit. Both of their nightmares. How much had Luke seen? Had he seen their mother fall? Had he seen Kylo Ren? She felt tears well in the back of her eyes. “No Luke,” she said, “I don’t want to talk about it.” He opened his mouth to protest and she held up a hand to stop him “Not right now, ok? I promise we will discuss it, just not right now.”

A look of disappointment crossed his face, but he nodded.

“I’ll leave you to change then.” He crawled out of the bed, and picked up his shirt, put it on, and grabbed his boots. He hesitated for a second, then leaned down and kissed her lightly on the forehead.

“I love you,” he whispered, sending her a wave of strength and affection in the Force to back that up.

“I love you too,” she whispered.

He walked out of her room, and Leia grimly set herself to getting on with her day. Just because her world had fallen apart on her, again, didn’t mean there wasn’t work to be done.

After breakfast with her parents, Leia met with Mon in her personal office. The data that she, Luke, and Han had retrieved from the Whilforains had been decrypted, and Mon wanted a second pair of eyes to look it over with her.

When Leia walked into the office she encountered a section of the galaxy lit up, and projected across Mon’s office. The woman was leaning on her desk, thoughtfully staring at the lines that represented the Empire’s movements.
“Hello Leia,” Mon said as Leia came in. “What do you think?”

Leia looked at the crisscrossing lines bisecting the galaxy like chains. “I think they have more ships than we do,” she said dryly.

Mon burst out laughing. “They do indeed.”

Leia walked around the perimeter, trying to take in as many details as she could. She was long used to Mon’s method of putting reams of data like this into a graph or holo like this.

“The red lines represent Imperial Navy ships,” Mon said “The blue are military supplies that are shipped with Imperial ships, and the green are the independent contractors. The more the route is used, the darker the line.”

Leia looked around, “And the yellow?”

“Private companies and citizens,”

Leia hummed under her breath. Made sense that the Empire was keeping an eye on that. Idly she tapped one of the planets, and it expanded, revealing its name, dominant species, major imports and exports, and population size.

“What do you see Leia?” Mon asked.

“They don’t know where we are,” Leia replied back automatically. She pointed to a cluster of thin green lines. Spiraling out from one central location in at least five different lines. They crossed back over each other, creating an almost spider web effect. “This is them searching for us, in a pattern. I’m sure there are more, but they are lost in the other colors.”

Mon’s mouth twitched. “Any other reason to think that?”

Leia pointed to Yavin, “There would be more supplies and men being moved into sectors around us if they knew we were here, or somewhere in the general vicinity.”

“That’s what I thought too,” Mon said. “Draven agreed with me.”

Leia turned and looked at her “You’ve already looked at this?”

Mon nodded “I did.”

“Then why ask me here?” Leia wondered, her back coming slightly up.

“I really did want another set of eyes,” Mon said. “But look at it as a training exercise.”

Mon looked far too amused. “I’m not the only one being asked to do this am I?”

She shook her head. “No. Every member of the Alliance High Council has been given a copy of this data, and asked the same thing.”

Leia blinked. “Why? They can’t have much military experience with reading things like this?”

“No,” Mon admitted “But I thought it might help them understand the position we are in. The civilians and the military heads are-”

“Ready to tear each other’s throat out?” Leia suggested.
“At loggerheads,” Mon offered diplomatically. “The civilians want more aggressive action, and the military wants small, quick strikes, with maximum damage, until we rebuild some of the fleet we lost. I’m trying to facilitate...understanding.”

“How has this not come up before?” Leia wondered. She would have thought this problem would have manifested years before.

Mon shrugged “Most of our civilian leaders are from the Senate Leia. They weren’t living here.” Her face twisted “It’s adding a personal urgency to their requests that weren’t there before. In addition, we managed to destroy a major military asset, through what they see as a small cost.”

“Small cost?” Leia gaped at her “We lost half of our fleet between Scarif and Alderaan.”

Mon shrugged “As I said, different perspectives.”

“And what are you having the military leaders do in return?”

Mon arched an eyebrow, “Who says I’m doing anything?”

“Facilitating understanding requires at least two sides Mon.”

Mon’s eyes gleamed in appreciation “I’m having the military heads read the missives and personal letters from the Senator’s homeworlds, about what the Empire is doing.”

“The Empire has always had a heavy hand, especially on the Outer Rim.” Leia pointed out “That isn’t anything new.”

Mon’s face grew tight “But they are now going after Core Worlds as well.” She waved a hand “It isn’t just Alderaan. The Empire is tightening its grip everywhere Leia. They have to. The whole plan behind abolishing the Senate was to replace the governing bureaucracy with fear of the Death Star. Now there is no Death Star.”

“They need to tighten the screws,” Leia whispered.

Mon nodded “Exactly.”

Leia looked at the holo with more interest “Is there any way to see just the Imperial Navy, and it’s supply ships?”

Mon nodded and pressed a few buttons. The yellow and green lines disappeared. Leia studied the remaining lines. She frowned as she saw a concentration heading off into an empty sector in space.

“What’s that?” she asked, going up to the planet they were all converging on “That is an awful lot of activity away from the major lanes.”

Mon shook her head “We don’t know. Draven hasn’t heard anything from his spies about anything that could be out there.”

As she came closer to it, dread started building in her stomach. The Force started humming along her skin, escalating her sense of foreboding. She knew this system. She was very familiar with it. With a feeling of dread, she tapped on the space where the planet was. It obediently enlarged, with the name “Endor” hanging over it. Leia felt the blood drain from her face. They had already started building it.

“Leia?” a voice asked.
Leia barely heard her, her attention caught on that innocent looking blip on the map. It was such a simple name. It should be more ominous sounding, she thought distantly. Endor was such an innocuous name.

“Leia?” Mon asked. “Leia!?!?”

Leia snapped her attention back to the redhead. “Yes? Sorry?”

The older woman’s eyes narrowed “You thought of something.”

Leia swallowed. Thought? No. Knew? Yes. But that was not something she could confess to Mon. For starters, she didn’t want to have the hours-long conversation it would require to convince her that Leia wasn’t stark raving mad. She looked at that planet again, hanging there. Leia closed her eyes. So if she couldn’t tell the truth, there were other ways to get the result she wanted. No matter how much it burned to manipulate a friend.

“I could be out on a limb here,” she hedged.

Mon looked around the room “It’s just you and me Leia.”

Leia forced herself to look at the map “I was just thinking what kind of major construction project the Empire would want to build this far from known shipyards.”

Mon just looked at her blankly for a moment, then shock replaced that non-comprehension. “No,” she whispered, her eyes moving to Endor. “They can’t be starting it again so soon.”

Leia forced herself to shrug “It’s just a thought,” she said.

Mon look shaken “There is no way they have re-engineered that, that, thing,” and she spat the word out “so quickly. According to every analyst we have, it would take at least a year to redesign around Erso’s deliberate weakness.”

Leia nodded, “True. But there are other considerations to take into account. They need some sort of shield to protect the Death Star while it’s being built. There is the base they will need to guard the shield itself. Then there is the frame of the Death Star, that they can start that now. They also could be getting surplus supplies there, so when they are ready they can start immediately. In fact, from their perspective, it is imperative they begin this as soon as possible. You said it yourself, once Palpatine dissolved the Senate he needed that weapon to keep the systems in line. Fear will work for a while, but they need the Death Star to make this new system of ‘governance’” and there was a bitter twist to her mouth at that word “to work.”

Mon swayed on her feet. “I thought we’d have more time,” she whispered.

Leia gave her a small grin “We do. At least a year if our analysts are to be believed.” Actually closer to four, but she had no way to explain that timeline away. “Besides we don’t know that is what they are building there.”

Mon nodded, steel sliding back into her gaze “You’re right. But I should let Draven know of our suspicions.” Leia started to open her mouth and Mon waved her away “I’ll say it’s my idea, not yours. At the very least he has to admit this looks suspicious. They are doing something out there, best if we find out what it is.”

Leia nodded and went back to studying the holo, as Mon sat at her desk, beginning to write out various memos and drafts of how they were going to confirm the existence of the new Death Star. Leia wished her luck. It would require a major reworking of the focus of their networks of spies,
and that was not something that could be done quickly.

After a few minutes of looking at those lines, Leia frowned. “Mon?” she asked.

“Hmmm?” the woman said.

“Can you drop the Imperial ships, and bring up the contractors?”

Mon looked up from her datapad, “Why?”

“Just a hunch,” Leia said.

Mon did as she asked, and Leia studied the green lines. She whistled under her breath. Yes, she had seen that right. “The Empire is pulling a lot of supplies from the Hutts,” she remarked, looking at the multiple lines of travel into that region of space.

Mon nodded. “Yes, we came to that conclusion as well.”

This hadn’t happened last time, at least not as far as Leia was aware. It looked like the death of Grakkus had fractured more than she thought between the two of them. Palpatine wanted to make a point, and he would bleed the Hutts dry almost to the breaking point to prove it.

Why so aggressive? Leia wondered. This didn't happen last time. But last time, the galaxy knew that the Empire had a weapon that could destroy planets and the will to use it. Yes, the weapon had been destroyed, but everyone knew it was only a matter of time before they replaced it.

They didn’t have that here, in this time. Alderaan still stood. Tarkin had threatened to blow it up. And yes, some giant space station had been blown up, shown across the galaxy on the holonet, but there was no proof that this planet killer would even have worked. It was all talk, no action. And if you were going to use fear to rule, not being able to back up your threat was fatally detrimental.

This was a unique opportunity, from Leia’s perspective. The alliance between the Empire and the Hutts hadn’t broken in its entirety until the signing of the Galactic Concordance. Even before that it had been fracturing. Jabba’s death had left a huge power vacuum in the Hutt syndicate, and as they had all fought over it, none of the factions having the power to openly defy the remnants of the Empire. Or the New Republic for that matter. They had ended up consuming themselves. That region of space had gone through a few hopeful years when there had been a rough, but provisional government there. Then the three crime syndicates, the Black Sun, the Kanjiklub, and the Guavian Death Gang had seized control of that area of space and destroyed anyone who had stood in their way.

These three factions had established their bases of power and had begun warring with each other periodically. The New Republic had refused to intervene, saying that if the Outer Rim had wanted help, they should have joined the New Republic at the beginning. Leia scowled in remembrance. Like there had been any government to speak of in those early days. And when they had tried to join, several senators in the New Republic had denied them entry, based off the confusion that the crime lords were beginning to sow in earnest. For the people living in those regions of space, it had been a betrayal of the highest order.

There were those who began to flee, refugees pouring into New Republic space. Then there were the ones who didn’t have the resources, or the option, to leave. They had begun to appeal to the First Order for help as that organization's strength grew. It had been a fatal weakness to leave the Outer Rim so chaotic.

“We could put more pressure here,” she said “Focus on hitting their supply lines and stations. The
Hutts are in control of every single one of these operations. It means they won’t be as heavily guarded as Imperial ones."

“To what end Leia?” Mon didn’t look all that interested, but she was paying attention.

“To get the Hutts to rebel. As they fall short of their mandated goals, the more pressure the Empire will put on them to meet them, and the thinner their profit becomes. It’s all about money for them. There is no other ideology. Cut them close enough, and they will rebel against the one wielding the knife.”

“They don’t have a chance against the Empire,” Mon said, “And they know it.”

“But they are arrogant.” Leia argued, “They live for what, two thousand years?”

“If they die of natural causes, yes,” Mon agreed. “You can imagine how often that happens though.”

“Not the point. Palpatine is just another short-term obstacle to them. And the Empire has mostly left them alone until this point. But if we pressure the Empire’s supply lines, especially in that region of space, then they will turn up the pressure on the Hutts.” And here a smile of satisfaction crossed Leia’s face. “And we all know what a delicate hand the Empire wields. The Hutts won’t stand for it for long. Not from someone they regard as a temporary nuisance.”

“It could work,” Mon admitted. For a second Leia wondered if it would be that easy to convince the woman. Then she shook her head, “I’m not comfortable with making that decision.”

Leia scowled “We can’t take the Empire head on, you know that. We have to pick away at the edges and thin them out. Making them take out the Hutts is the best way to do that.”

“There are billions of people who live in that section of space Leia. They have no infrastructure, and we have no way of helping them pick up the pieces of the collapse of their only form of government. And we could be blamed for the Empire replacing the Hutts.” Mon leaned back in her chair, hands steepled in front of her “Is that really the better option?”

The Empire was a hell of a lot more logical, and that was saying a lot. Leia shook her head “I’m not suggesting we set up any kind of government in the aftermath Mon. I’m saying we give them the tools to do it.”

“They don’t have-” she started to say.

Leia snorted “If you think there aren’t organized groups there fighting against the Hutts you are more core-centric then I thought.”

Mon was taken aback for a moment at the open criticism, but then a thoughtful expression settled on her face. “So what do you suggest?”

“We put them on the Alliance Council,” Mon opened her mouth to protest and Leia waved her hand to stop her “Just one. I can see the security concerns if it’s a group of people, but one perspective from the Outer Rim. They are all in loose contact with us anyway, why not make it official? Give them some sort of voice at our table?”

Leia started speaking faster, as she thought through the implications “And they can build their own contacts with our allies. And see, in action, how we choose to run our rebel group, and see what they want to take from it. They have to be aware they will need some sort of provisional plan in place if they succeed. And, to speak directly to your concerns, we can ask them what they want us
“to do.”

Mon frowned “They aren’t elected by anyone Leia. They are essentially terrorists.”

“Isn’t that what we are?”

Mon stiffened in her seat “All of us on the council, at some point, were elected by our respective systems to be the voice of our people.”

“But how can you know what they want any more? Are you going to go out into the streets of Chandrila and talk to them? Ask for a poll? And if they disagree with your decision, let’s be realistic here, there is no practical way to replace you.” Leia pointed out “And telling these systems, that you will only help them if they had a system like your’s in place, is the height of arrogance.” She gestured to the Outer Rim “They haven’t had a choice, not in almost a thousand years. They were left to the mercy of the Hutts.”

“Not all of them,” Mon protested “The Hutt empire wasn't always this big.”

Leia snorted “And who allowed it to grow? You’re blaming them for a system the Republic allowed to fester.”

Mon looked pensive as she stared at the map. “Who would you suggest?”

“Trehhipoi,” she said without even having to think about it, “At the very least he would put the word out to the groups that won’t talk to us and float the idea.”

Mon arched an eyebrow ‘Not you?”

Leia had the feeling Mon was testing her rather than thinking Leia would ever be foolish enough to suggest such a thing. “No.”

“Why not, you are a powerful symbol out there. The Princess who single handedly defeated Darth Vader.”

Leia looked at her in surprise. So that rumor had spread rather far. It was amazing no one beside Trehhipoi had bothered to tell her. Probably Draven’s influence. He was already wary of her, probably thought she would use that position to build a bigger power base. “I’m a royal from a Core World. What the hell do I know what they have suffered over the years?”

“Alderaan is now an occupied planet.”

“And being treated with the gentlest of touches,” Leia argued. She shook her head “It can't be me.”

Mon cocked her head in thought “If we could use one of our own people this would be a lot easier to sell to the council.”

Leia bit back the groan of frustration with Mon’s conservative outlook on this. “No, the whole point is to get an outside perspective. We cannot impose this from the outside. That’s what the Empire does.”

“Lt. Skywalker is from that region,” Mon said “And he is also a powerful symbol.”

“We need leaders these people know, not symbols.” Leia argued “Yes, Luke’s from Tatooine, and he is intimately aware of the Hutt’s grip on that area. But he is also training as a Jedi. While as a symbol of defiance to the Empire, that isn’t a problem. Asking these people to trust him, to follow
him, when they remember the Clone Wars and the costs that imposed on them?” Leia shook her head “They see the Jedi as the spear head of a useless, and former government. Plus, they are never going to follow someone who is operating under an alias. We would have to disclose Luke’s real name.”

For one terrifying second, Leia thought Mon was actually going to suggest Luke do that. But then the older woman shook her head “Too high of a price to pay,” she muttered.

Leia let out a sigh of relief “Yes,” she said. “Can’t you sell it to the council as giving these people a voice in their fate. Isn’t that what we are fighting to restore?”

Mon looked at her, sadness crossing her face “That voice can be quite capricious,”

That was a lesson Leia knew all too well. “But isn’t it better than the alternative? Or are we to be no better than the Empire? Making decisions for all those people thinking we know best?”

Mon was silent for a long moment. Then she nodded. “I’ll bring it up to the Alliance Council. They aren’t going to be happy.”

“When are they ever?” Leia wondered.

Mon smirked “Of that I am aware. We are moving too fast. We aren’t moving fast enough. We need more money. We are sitting on too much money.” She sighed and rubbed her forehead.

Leia shrugged “They are looking for control in a very uncertain world,” she said, trying to be mindful she had just one her point.

Mon’s smile was amused “You aren’t going to call them cowards?”

Once upon a time, she might have, but not now. She had lived too long to despair of those who were too frozen by fear to fight back. It was what it was. “They're civilians,” she said.

“We’re civilians.”

No, not anymore, but from Mon’s point of view, she could see how the older woman thought that.

Leia returned her gaze to the still-lit holo, thoughts wandering. These groups that were aligned against the Hutts would be very suspicious of them at first. Probably for years, given all the history involved. But even if her plan fell through, and they never joined the New Republic, or even the Rebellion in full, at least she had set into motion actions that would help them when the Hutts fell. They would have some ideas on how to run and more importantly keep a government. This was something she would have to keep an eye on in the future. This time she would use every resource at her disposal to make sure that the Outer Rim flourished, and on its own terms.

Mon’s hand was waving in front of Leia's face.

“Hmm?” she asked, bringing her attention back to the woman.

“Leia, are you alright?” Mon asked.

“I’m fine.”

Mon gave her a dubious look, “That is the second time you’ve drifted off in the last hour.”

Leia felt her face flush. “My apologies,” she muttered.
“Does this have something to do with Captain Solo and Lt. Skywalker leaving your quarters this morning?” the woman asked an amused twist to her mouth.

Leia just gaped at her, “You know about that?”

“Oh, it was quite the subject of interest this morning,” she said, then clucked her tongue in disapproval at Leia’s startled look. “Oh, don’t look so shocked Leia. I’m older than you, not dead.”

Leia shook her head. “No. I mean yes, I know you’re human and just as curious as anyone else. I’m just surprised anyone had the nerve to bring this up near someone in command.”

“Who said they did?” Mon’s mouth twitched in amusement. “I have my ways.”

Yes, she did. If there was anything that Mon excelled at, it was networking. And making people feel at ease. It was a skill Leia envied. She worked her own strengths in leadership but she had always wished she had the soft touch her mother and Mon displayed.

“Seriously Leia, I would have thought with the gossip concerning the three of you, you’d be looking happier this morning.”

Leia flinched. “No, it wasn’t that.”

“I see.” Mon let the word dangle for a moment, inviting Leia to confess. Leia only stared back at her, not saying anything.

Finally, Mon sighed, “You are of no use to me here.”

“I am,” Leia insisted stubbornly.

“No you are not,” she looked at the spot where Endor was. “I can understand being rattled by this Leia. You of all people know what this thing could possibly do.” Leia blinked, no there was no possible about it. She knew. She quelled the urge to run out of the room and check on her parents, to reassure herself they were still alive. Gods, what was wrong with her today? Mon’s sharp gaze came back on her. “Take the rest of the day off Leia, that’s an order.”

Leia was sitting at the edge of the tarmac, meditating. She had tried watching holos in her room, but the itch under her skin wouldn’t go away. She had gone to the gym, but none of the options available there appealed to her. She thought about waking up Luke, but she didn’t want to disturb whatever rest he was getting. Her parents were both busy with their own tasks. Evaan and Rex were nowhere to be found, and Obi-Wan was off planet.

In desperation, she had finally come out here. The press of people, the friendly hellos, the curious looks, all of it was too much for her right this moment. She needed to be alone, but since leaving the base wasn’t an option she had come out here. Maybe if she cleared her head, she would feel better.

So she had sat down, and done something she really did in her life. She immersed herself in the Force as fully as she could. As soon as she opened herself to that vast ocean of everything, she immediately began to feel better. Perhaps it was counterintuitive, but she took great comfort in feeling like the smallest insignificant flicker in that great cacophony. The noise and chaos, that often confused her the other times she had gone this far, was strangely soothing to her battered senses. As she sat there, feeling the great dance between the light and the dark, life and death, hope and decay, it was the starkest of reminders that in the long run, all of this would pass. Sometimes
she needed to be reminded of the big picture, of the horizon.

She was following the ebbs and flows of the Force on this planet when one of those small specks caught her interest. It was determined, angry, and heading straight for her physical self. Leia watched, detached curiosity making her wonder who this was. Then a name came to her mind. A ripple of worry and anxiety broke through this calm that she had built for herself. She wanted to stay here, lose herself for a bit longer, but she owed him this. For the friendship and love they had/will/might share. And also, for her own sense of fair play. She sighed and let herself sink into her skin as that presence grew ever closer to her.

“Hello Chewbacca,” she said, when he was within hearing distance of her, not opening her eyes.

She heard him come to a stop. Then in a low voice he asked <I taught you Shyriiwook, didn’t I?>

Leia slowly opened her eyes and allowed her posture to slump a bit. So Han had told him all of it. Not that it was a surprise. After what he walked into last night Chewie would have demanded answers from a sober Han. “Yes,” she said, staring out into the bustling airfield, not wanting to see the wariness in the eyes of a friend.

Chewie gave a woof of confusion and sat down right in front of her. She was grateful for the small gesture, that meant she could look him in the eyes as he gave her a piece of his mind, without putting a strain on her neck.

Chewie was silent for a long time, just sitting there, eyes far away as he gathered his thoughts. Then in a low threatening growl, he hissed <Why the kriffing hell did you wait this long to tell him?>

Leia flinched. The Wookie was nothing but a gentleman. In the thirty plus years, she had known him she could count on one hand the number of times she heard him use profanity. And it had never been directed at her.

“Arrogance mostly,” she admitted. “I thought I had it handled.”

Chewie’s eyes narrowed. <You were wrong.>

“Yes, I know.”

<He’s hurting> Chewie pressed on <You hurt him.>

There was a lump in her throat that was incredibly hard to talk around. There had never been any doubt in her mind that Chewie would come to Han’s defense. Of everyone on this base, he was the one who would look after Han’s interests before anyone else. She knew that, accepted it. But to have a loved one of so long be so bitterly disappointed and angry at her hurt her already bruised heart. “I know that too.”

Chewie thumped his fists against the ground <Stop saying that! You don't know him! He is not your husband!>

“He’s just as easy to love,” she whispered.

Chewie let out a long mournful sob at that truth.

<Why?> He demanded <Why tell him at all? Why not leave him in his happy ignorance?>

Leia felt the first lick of indignation at that question. “I should have left him in the dark about the
danger Vader poses to him?’

Chewie snarled <Don’t play coy with me, Your Highness!> he spat, Leia lowered her head as her title from those lips hit her like a blow. <You know that wasn’t what I meant. Why did you tell him he was a failure as a father?>

“He was not a failure!” she hissed, swinging her head to look up at him “ Han adored Ben. He loved being a father. He—” but that sentence broke down into a sob before she could finish it. She stopped and took in a couple of deep breaths. “He was a good father,” she said firmly “It wasn’t his fault.”

<Then why tell him about the boy at all?>

Leia’s mouth trembled. “Because he asked.”

Chewie let out a bitter laugh <So now you decided to be honest? Why not when we first met?>

“Would he have believed me?” she countered “Would you have?”

<No.> Chewbacca admitted reluctantly. <Probably not. But that doesn’t excuse you later. When you could see he was falling in love with you, and you hid behind your brother. >

Leia hissed under her breath, but it’s not like she could deny that. “I didn’t expect—”

<What,> Chewie cut her off <for him to care?>

“No,” she said.

Chewie let out a low dangerous growl <You think that little of him? Why did you even bother to let him get to know you again?>

Leia shook her head, frustrated. “I thought so little of myself.” Chewie opened his mouth to say something but this time she cut him off, determined to have her say. “It didn't occur to me that he would fall in love with me again. I’m very different than who I was when I was nineteen.”

Chewie let out a snort of disbelief.

“T’m arrogant,” she said, “opinionated, a control freak, and I’m not the friendliest person on a good day.” She looked at the Wookie, silently pleading with him to understand.

Chewie was silent for a long time at that pronouncement, then he sighed heavily <Your Highness, you're smart, loyal, good with a blaster and know when to take him seriously and when he is throwing bantha shit your way. You look at him like he’s worth something—>

“He is worth something!” Leia hissed.

<I know that. You know that. Luke knows that, but most of the galaxy doesn’t know that. And that is what he is used to seeing from people. Contempt and dismissal. But not you.> Chewie gave out a self-mocking woof of derision. <And you understand Shyriiwook. He couldn’t have designed a woman he was more likely to fall in love with.>

Leia sat there, mouth hanging agape. It was all so simple when Chewie put it that way. She had been so focused on the fact that she was no longer that girl, it had never occurred to her that she had changed in ways that would make her more appealing to Han.

“Oh,” she finally whispered.
He snorted in derision <And you two have that in common. You both are very bright, but so stupid when it comes to love.>

“I know,” she whispered, thinking of her and older Han’s dream conversation about how everything had fallen apart on them “Believe me I know.”

Chewie shook his head in disbelief <Frankly I’m surprised you two got your act together long enough to have a son. If you are this bad at this in middle age I can’t imagine how inept you were when you were younger. And Han is a walking disaster when it comes to courting.>

“Part of his charm,” she said defensively.

<Really?> He asked dubiously <I’m given to understand that is not what human females want in a mate.>

“Yes,” she said hotly “Because I always know where I stand with Han. He has no artifice and no deception when it comes to love. He says what he means, even if he isn't the best at articulating it.

<Unlike you,> Chewie remarked dryly.

Leia flinched at the accusation, but she couldn’t deny that truth of what he was saying “Yes, unlike me.”

<I don’t understand.>

“Understand what?” she asked, tired.

<Why didn’t you send him away?>

“Oh like Han ever listens to anyone when you tell him what to do,” Leia said snottily.

<You could have found a way to encourage him,> Chewie argued <You know him well enough to know what buttons to push.>

“I never forced him to stay,” Leia protested hotly. She knew that about Han. Try to trap him, even with the best of intentions, and you would kill his spirit. He would turn himself inside out trying to please you, and both of them would have ended up miserable.

<No, but you didn’t discourage him either.>

“I couldn’t bring myself to hurt him,” she protested.

Chewie let out a harsh laugh. <You know what your problem is, Your Highness?> He didn't give her time to answer, <You speak so well that you confuse yourself.>

“No,” she said, then withered under that glare “I never confuse myself. Lie to myself, but never confuse.”

He leaned forward, sharp teeth bared <Then why?>

“Because I was selfish,” she whispered, tears flowing down her cheeks.

<In sharing your pain? Did it lighten your load somehow?>

“No,” she said, shaking her head “Because I wanted it all back!” Angrily she wiped away the tears from her face. “I wanted him back. And I couldn’t if he didn’t know who I was!” she thumped her
She felt Chewie move and he crouched right in front of her. *He’s my family.*

“I know,” she whispered, looking into that angry face.

Tears formed in his eyes *I loved that boy too didn’t I?*

Leia nodded. Rey had told her what had happened on Starkiller base. That Chewie had shot Ben, but it hadn’t been a fatal blow. Leia was too familiar with Chewie's skill with his bowcaster to doubt for one second he had not pulled that shot. Even with Han’s murder committed right in front of him, Chewie couldn’t kill her son. Chewie growled and pulled his hands through the shaggy mane on his head, pulling at it.

He dropped his arms in front of him, staring at them helplessly. Then he asked, in an almost resigned way *And what about the Empire?*

Leia frowned, “What about it?”

He looked up at her and pointed one accusing hand. *In that head is all the knowledge we need to bring it down.*

“One of the ways to bring it down,” she clarified.

*That’s more than anyone else in this galaxy has. And you are keeping this all to yourself! Do you know what that information could do? How many worlds it could help?*

“It could also make it worse!” she shouted back. “It’s too dangerous.”

He sneered *But not too dangerous to save your own world.*

So Han had told him about that. She could see how that perceived hypocrisy would rankle Chewie. He was as dedicated to the protection and survival of Kashyyyk as she was to Alderaan.

“I didn’t have much choice in that change,” she said gently.

*Really?* He looked dubious, and oh how that hurt.

“Yes,” she said. “It was destroyed right in front of me when I was less than cooperative about the location of the Rebel base. Even when I told him we were on Dantooine, Tarkin decided to destroy my home as a “lesson” to the galaxy.” She continued on in a neutral, detached tone “And probably to punish me as well, before he had me executed, for my defiance. He made sure I had front row seats for the whole thing.”

*Leia-* he whispered horrified.

She went on, “And yes, I am aware of the issue of Kashyyyk. I’m very aware of all of them. Ryloth, Whiforla, Jedha, and all the countless other worlds too numerous to mention. All of those the planets and systems that the Empire has in its grip. But if I change too much, or push us too hard, it will all fall apart. We got lucky last time.”

She thought of Luke surrendering to Vader on Endor. What was Vader going to do here, with her as the child? She wasn’t Luke, forgiveness wasn’t what she had in her to offer him. And what else could she possibly give him that he would consider worth the effort? She wasn’t being self-pitying when she said Luke was easier to love than her. It was the truth.
“So all I can do is go forward, using what I know to the best of my abilities. Just like everyone else in the galaxy,” she said firmly.

Chewie was quiet for a second then he said <I>h</I>ope for all our sakes you are right about this Leia. Or on your head is all the fate of those billions of people.> With that, he got up and stalked away.

Leia stayed out on the edges of the tarmac until the sun began to set. She would have stayed out there longer, but her stomach let out a furious growl, and she realized that she had forgotten to eat lunch. She came to her feet and headed back towards the temple. It was dinner time, she should find food.

As she entered the mess hall, she heard Threepio’s voice call out, “Princess Leia. Princess Leia.”

She stopped, sighed, and turned around. “Yes, Threepio.”

“Your parents would like to see you in their quarters.”

“Now?” she whined, looking longingly at the line of food being served.

“They did say it was of the utmost urgency.”

Leia stifled a groan. Her parents weren’t in the habit of summoning her for no reason. If they sent Threepio to find her, it had to be something important.

“Alright,” she said. Hopefully, this wouldn’t take long, and she could come back here and get something to eat shortly.

Leia entered her parent’s room hungry and frazzled. She stopped at the threshold as she took in the formal picture they were presenting her as she entered. Her mother was sitting at the table, her father just behind Mama’s shoulder, like they were in the Throne room in the Alderaan palace, instead of the rock walls of this long abandoned temple. Leia tried to push down her temper.

“I was called?” she asked, wondering if this was personal, or royal business.

Her father came forward, passing her mother by. He would never have broken protocol like that if this had anything to do with Alderaan. It was personal then.

“Yes Leia,” he gestured to one of the empty chairs, “Please sit.”

She saw the serious look on both their faces and shook her head “I’d rather stand,” she said.

Papa looked a little taken aback at her clipped tone, but Mama’s gaze sharpened in on her face.

“Leia is everything alright?”

“I’m fine,” Leia said dismissively “What is this all about?”

Papa looked concerned “We wanted to talk to you about Captain Solo.”

Leia waited, she wasn’t going to fall for this bait. They had trained her to well to give out information for nothing.
When she maintained her silence, Papa went on “Leia Han was seen leaving your quarters this morning.” He paused and hesitated “According to what I heard he was very drunk.”

Leia felt her back stiffened “So?” She wasn’t a child. Hell, even if she was nineteen it wasn’t anyone’s business who she had in her room. Just for once she wished she was some anonymous face on this base. That she was an ordinary nobody, so that every activity and person she came into contact with wasn’t a source of interest and fascination. Then maybe, just maybe, she wouldn’t have every movement she made be reported back to her parents. It was like being a teenager again, with servants and courtiers hen picking her every move and tattling to her parents.

Papa’s face contorted, as he bit down on several comments he would like to make to that flippant statement. Mama was the one who asked. “Why?”

“I told him about when I am from,” Leia said flatly, hoping they would leave it at that.

Mama looked startled “I see,” she said slowly. She nibbled on her lip in thought. Papa just looked disappointed.

“I’m sorry he didn’t live up to the man you remembered,” he said.

The words themselves were sincere enough on the surface, but Leia heard the implied insult to Han. Her face flushing with anger, she hissed “What do you know?”

“Leia,” Mama said “we are just concerned. We are just starting to get to know him.” She was trying to soothe, to play mediator. Leia didn’t care. She had enough of Papa’s judgments and sly innuendos.

“You might be,” she snapped, then she swung her head to meet her father’s gaze “he is not.”

“That’s not true,” Papa said, anger rising in his own voice “but I am allowed to be concerned about my daughter's choice in partner. How much can you rely on him if at the first sign of trouble he gets drunk?”

Leia snarled “You dare-” then she cut herself off. She felt the tears well in her eyes against her will, as the unjustness of what Papa was accusing Han of boiled over. And as so often as it did, her helplessness transformed itself into anger. But she was still aware enough to realize what a bad idea it was to stay “I don't want to talk about this. I’m leaving.” She turned around, intent on being anywhere but here.

Papa’s voice followed her stiff and stern. “No Leia, we are going to talk about this.”

Leia whirled “I’m not a child you can order about,” she hissed.

Papa didn’t back down “That may be the case, but if you think we aren’t going to discuss that man and his abominable choices and how they impact your life you are sadly mistaken.”

Leia’s eyes narrowed. “I think he reacted in a reasonable fashion to the news that our son murdered him.” she spat.

Mama gasped, but Leia’s eyes were locked onto her father. His skin paled so much he almost looked grey.

“What?” he whispered.

“Ben,” Leia said, aware of the trembling in her voice, but unable to control it “My son’s name was
Ben. And he fell to the dark side, murdered all of Luke’s students that wouldn’t join him, and he helped an evil man tear down everything I spent so much of my life building.”

She heard her voice rising in volume, but she was in too much agony to stop it as the future came slipping out of her “The New Republic fell Papa. Or close enough,” she admitted. She hadn’t been there to see the fallout, but given how fractured that government had become the loss of the Hosnian system was enough to scatter whatever cooperation existed between the systems. “The capital world was destroyed by the First Order’s version of the Death Star. I couldn’t even keep that from happening again.”

“And when Han confronted Ben, he killed him.” Leia felt the air whoosh out of her lungs. “He killed him,” she repeated. Papa was standing stone still, horror written across his face. Mama had a hand to her mouth, but Leia was unable to stop herself from speaking. This had been inside her all this time and her grief would no longer be denied. Dimly she was aware that the table in the room began shaking, the Force reacting to her pain.

“He killed Han,” she whispered, “My baby boy killed Han.” She felt her body begin to wobble, and was surprised to feel herself sinking to the ground. “Why?” she asked, looking up at her father, “Why would he do that?”

Papa fell to his knees in front of her. His face crumbled in confusion “Leia, love, I don’t kn-”

“I failed him,” She cried out, cutting him off “And I failed you! You told me there wasn’t anything I couldn't deal with. Well I didn’t deal with this.”

Papa looked confused for a moment, then comprehension broke out on his face. “Before Scarif.” He breathed “No, Leia that wasn’t meant-”

“I failed you too, Mama.” She looked up, and even the tears pooling in her eyes weren’t enough to disguise the look of fear and wariness on her mother's face as she looked at the table, still rattling in place. “I failed Han and Luke. I failed Mon and everyone in my life.”

She took a deep breath in, trying to stop the sobs that were pouring from her, “And I’m failing again. I was given a second chance to fix all of this, and I keep making it worse.”

The tears were now completely blurring her vision, but she felt her mother sink down next to her, arms wrapping tight around her. “I tried to get them to listen, Papa, I swear I did. I tried to stop the New Republic from ignoring the threat.”

“Shh, Leia,” Mama said, pressing kisses to the top of her forehead “We know you did. We know you did.”

“Why?” she wailed “I don’t understand. I loved him. I loved them both so much!”

“Leia, Leia,” her Papa whispered horrified, cradling her in his arms.

Distantly Leia was aware of the door opening and both her parent's attention wavering from her to the intruder. But she was too lost in her own sins and grief to care who saw her.

Then there was a hand on her back, and the feeling of love and reassurance came pouring into her. Luke, another one of her failures. She should never have expected him to straighten Ben out. She should have been there. She should have stopped this on her own.

“I’m sorry Luke,” she whispered “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry he killed them all.”
“Leia,” he whispered, placing his hand on her head “It’s not your fault.”

“She burned everything to the ground,” she said “All our hopes and dreams. I should have been a Jedi. if I had been a Jedi I could have helped him. I could have helped you and the New Republic. I wouldn’t have lost Han.”

“And the worse part is I want him back!” she said, bitterness and self-hatred at her own weakness ripping into her conscience “After everything he did, everyone he betrayed, I want Ben back!”

“Leia,” Mama said “that is not weakness. That is being very human.” she whispered “Of course you want him back. He’s your son and you love him.”

Leia’s words left her and great racking sobs burst from her. She didn’t deserve any of this comfort. Didn’t they understand how badly she had failed them? All their hopes and dreams had been killed by their own grandson.

Her mother started singing then. Words of comfort wrapped in a lullaby that she used to sing to Leia when she was little and had suffered a nightmare. After the first iteration, Luke started humming the tune along with her.

Leia could only cry. She realized at some point she would have to stop, have to pick herself up and start the fight again. Even the thought of leaving the comforting cradle of her mother and brother’s embrace seemed to be too much for her right now. Slowly though that great wellspring of grief ran dry, and her tears slowed, and finally stopped. She laid there, exhausted, eyes staring at the floor. She felt hollow inside like nothing would ever move her again.

There was a long silence, in which Leia was content to float alone, but it was broken by her father’s hoarse voice. ‘You knew.” he said accusingly.

Behind her, she felt Luke stiffen “Yes, I did.”

“And you didn’t think to tell us?” Papa’s voice was stark and unyielding.

Luke’s temper rose to meet his “How does it feel to be on the other side of secrets?”

Leia whimpered. Another thing she had destroyed. If she hadn’t had panicked at Luke’s encounter with Vader they could have all told her brother together.

Mama’s voice was sharp and annoyed “Enough, both of you.”

Luke’s shoulders slumped, and he pressed himself to Leia’s back “Not your fault Leia,” he whispered in the Force “I’m the younger bratty brother who doesn’t know how to let this go. Not for one second is this situation between me and your parents your fault.“

Of course it was, everything she had touched in this time had turned to ash hadn’t it?

“No it has not,” Luke said firmly out loud, “Yes, some things haven’t worked out the way you wanted, but we aren’t beaten yet. There is still hope Leia.”

“But I should have-” she started to say, voice hoarse.

“Shh,” Papa said “You picked your own path. That is all you can do.”

“Besides Leia,” her mother said fondly “Hope is like the sun. If you only believe in it when you can see it-”
“You'll never make it through the night” Leia finished for her.

Mama ran a hand down Leia’s hair “Exactly.”

There was a knock on the door, but before any of them could get up Obi-Wan burst into the room, his lightsaber lit and in his hand.

“What’s wrong with Leia?” the words came flying out of his mouth before he was fully in the room. He looked slightly out of breath and panting like he had run the whole way here.

They just all stared at him, and he stared back at the strange tableau before him. Luke and Mama embracing her, and Papa off to the side.

“Well I suppose I should be gratefully you didn’t cut the door down in your haste to get in here,” Papa remarked, breaking the stillness they all seemed to be caught in.

Obi-Wan blinked and looked down at his hand. With a shake of his head, he disarmed the saber and clipped it back to his belt. “There was no need,” he said ruefully, “The door was unlocked.”

Then his face sobered as he took them all in “What’s wrong?” he asked again, in a much quieter tone.

Luke asked in a bewildered tone “I thought you were on a mission?”

“I was, I landed about a minute ago.”

Luke cocked his head “You felt that when you landed?” he asked.

Obi-Wan’s face blanched “Luke, I felt that the second I entered the system.”

Leia paled, shaken at the loss of her control. Between the table moving in the Force and the bleeding of her emotions all over the place, it was a wonder Vader hadn’t reached out to her.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, “I should have had better control.”

Obi-Wan approached her slowly, “Anakin thought that too,” he said.

Leia turned, fuzzy and bewildered “What?” she asked.
His face was so sad, but there was a fond smile dancing on his lips “Anakin thought that too. He thought that he could solve the galaxies problems on his own.” Obi-Wan let out a soft huff of self-deprecation “To be fair, it was an arrogant thought that almost all the Jedi believed. Myself included.” He reached out a hand and gently stroked Leia’s forehead “It’s not true Leia. You are responsible for your choices, and your choices alone.”

“Like how you blame yourself for his fall?” she said brokenly.

Obi-Wan’s smile became wry “I said it was the truth, not that it wasn’t hard to believe.”

Luke snorted behind her at that.

“I don’t know what this is all about, but I do know you, Leia. You tried. If there is anything I can believe is that you never lost faith and that you did your best.”

“But what if that is not good enough?” she asked in a lost voice.

He shrugged “As the Force wills,” he said “But you can’t say that you didn’t give it your all. Despite your unique circumstances, you are not all-knowing. You can only do the best with what you have.” And here he gently grabbed her hand and gave it a firm squeeze “And you have all of us to help you.”

Well if anyone had reason to lose faith, it was Obi-Wan Kenobi. If he could cling to it, then she should at least try.

“Oh okay,” she whispered.

He gave her a wide grin, “Now if you’ll excuse me, I have a debriefing I need to attend and an excuse to make up as to why I ran out of the ship like that.” He stood and winced, “And clearly I need to practice more in running in the Force.” He shot both Leia and Luke an exasperated look “You two make it look so easy,” he murmured. Then he stiffly left the room.


“About what?” Leia wondered.

She felt her mother tug her braid gently as she said "That you are not alone. Let us help you.”

“I’m not sure how,” Leia confessed. She had thought that was what she was doing. Seeking their advice, their company. If that wasn’t what they were talking about, she didn’t know what was.

“Let us in Leia,” Papa’s voice was soft and sad “There was no need for you to carry that burden alone.”

“I didn't want to break your heart,” she said mournfully, looking into his soft brown eyes.

“I thought we agreed to protect each other?” he teased gently, “Not one looking solely after the other?”

Leia nodded. “We did,” she said.

“So let us help you,” Mama said firmly.

“With what?”

Mama looked at her sadly and ran a hand over Leia’s hair “Well for starters, there is no mourning
braid.”

Leia shook her head “There is no one to mourn,” she said. “He’s here. I can go talk to him if I wanted to.”

“Leia love,” her mother’s face was composed and sad “You know that’s not true.”

Leia gulped, but with this wave of emotion she had just ridden she couldn’t hide behind this younger Han anymore. She had been so desperate to avoid thinking about what Ben had done. For so long she had hope that he could be saved. Vader had been saved, and her baby boy was nothing like that cold monster.

“But Vader isn’t the the machine of evil you always thought him to be,” her practical side pointed out. She had always thought that if he knew of her existence, he wouldn’t care. She was too strong-willed, to openly defiant, to make a good apprentice. Luke wasn’t a good candidate either, but he did look like it on the surface. But that initial assumption wasn’t true, was it? Vader cared, she wasn't sure how much, or if she could trust it's steadfastness, but he did.

“I don’t know how to mourn him,” she whispered “I don’t know how to grieve for someone I can talk to.”

“Well that certainly is a problem,” Mama admitted ruefully. “And there certainly is no body for you to return home.”

Leia flinched. On Alderaan, your body or ashes were always returned to your families home. There were no graves of course, at least not marked ones. There were fields or forests where you were laid to rest, to become once more of your home, and enrich the life of all those who would follow you. These were places of sacredness and quiet, with sections to be understood to be in current use, and the others marked for when they could be used again. One of the minor noble families had even created a garden for their family.

Of course not everyone had the money, or the desire, for such a long term process. She knew that a lot of the people who lived in the mountains who pooled resources together and marked an area as where they would put their dead, and that was that. No one came to visit, there were none who walked the ground.

But all of that had changed when Alderaan was destroyed. There had been no home to return to. And in the final years of the Empire, all access to the Alderaan system had been denied.

There had been no consensus reached on what to do. Even thirty years later, the survivors still squabble about what the “true” Alderaan way would have been. That had not been the only thing they had fought about.

Leia shoved that thought aside. It was done, over and gone. Alderaan stood, and her exile from her people was a thing of the past.

Leia’s stomach let out a loud growl, and Leia felt herself blush. Mama let out a loud laugh at that.

“This is a problem for tomorrow,” she declared.


Mama nodded “I’m Queen and I’m making it a royal decree. We will have dinner, and light conversation, and then we will all sleep. I think a fresh perspective tomorrow will do us all good.”
Papa rose to his feet, “I’ll go get the food” He turned to face Luke “Will you be joining us?”
Leia felt her brother nod. “Yes, I think I will.”

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Of course, Mama might be Queen, but she was incapable of ordering the universe about.

They were eating breakfast, all four of them. It was awkward, but they weren’t yelling at each
other, when Evaan entered in the room.

“My apologies,” she said, “I didn't mean to interrupt.”

Mama shook her head, “No, Evaan. It’s fine. Who do you need?”

Evaan sent an apologetic look to Luke, “Your Majesties and Princess Leia. Mon requests you be in
the red briefing room in an hour.”

Luke look like he would insist he wanted to come, but Leia said evenly “That will be fine.”

Evaan bowed again, and swiftly exited the room. Luke looked at her, forehead wrinkled in
concern.

“You have to be in the air in less than an hour,” Leia said. “Besides it probably has to do with
Alderaan.”

He shot a worried look at her parents, then turned his focus back on to her “You sure you don’t
need me there?”

“Luke,” she said, tone gently chiding “we can not live our lives never leaving each other’s sight.”

“Not forever,” he mumbled, then he flicked her a worried glance “just for a while.”

She understood that feeling, oh how she understood it, but it was childish to indulge in what-ifs.

Mama gave Luke a small smile “We will watch after her,” she reassured him.

Leia scowled, her breakdown aside yesterday, she wasn’t some fragile flower that needed coddling.

“C’mon,” she said, scooting her chair back so she could stand “I'll walk you to the hangar.”

He sighed, but he got up and the two of them headed out.

Luke’s face was putting as the strode through the corridors. “If it will make you feel better we can
gossip about it when you land,” she said, trying to lighten his worried mood.

“How about when I am flying?” he said.

She shook her head, “Yeah, because that won’t be distracting at all.”

“We should practice that anyway. We may need to talk in the heat of battle,” he wheedled.
She laughed at his blatant manipulation. “No, but nice try.” The laughter died in her throat as they
walked through the entrance to the hanger bay.

“Leia?” Luke asked, then he saw the empty space where the Falcon was usually parked. “Oh,” he said.

Leia stared for a moment longer, then shook her head and faced her twin. “Be safe up there,” she said.

Luke nibbled on his bottom lip “He could be on a mission for the Alliance,” he offered.

“Not going to think about it,” she said.

“Leia,” he said in a warning tone.

She shook her head “I have a meeting in less than an hour to attend. I’ll cry in my room later about this.” She really hadn't thought he would stay, had she? Foolish old woman.

“Okay,” he agreed reluctantly “but only because it would look bad if you walked away from me bawling your eyes out.” He leaned over and brushed a kiss across her cheek. “I’ll meet up with you when I land.” He leaned back and gave her a large wink “I’ll even bring hot chocolate.”

“Sounds good,” she said, trying to keep up a placid front.

He walked away from her, heading to the pilot’s changing room. Leia allowed herself one last look at where the Falcon should be, and then she hurried out of the hanger.

When she entered the briefing room, she wasn’t surprised to see her parents already seated around the conference table. Mon was there, along with Obi-Wan, Madine, Draven, and Senator Pamlo. Leia sat down next to her parents and wondered what this was all about. It seemed to be a strange combination of people. While Draven wasn’t a surprise, he seemed to be at every meeting she was, Pamlo wasn’t someone she had much contact with. The woman gave her a regal nod, her traditional head cowl temporarily hiding her deep brown eyes from Leia’s gaze.

“Good morning Leia,” Mon began.

“Is it?” Leia said, flicking her glance to her parents. Mama gave the slightest shake of her head. She didn't know what was going on either.

“Obi-Wan?” she sent out.

“I have no idea,” he said, “Draven wanted me here, not Mon.”

Mon sighed “No, it is not.”

Draven’s face broke out into a hungry smile “Depends on who you are asking.”

“Draven,” Madine hissed.

“What is this about, Mon?” Papa asked.

Mon inclined her head to Draven. The man cleared his throat and said “Yesterday I found a spy in the rebellion's ranks.”

Leia stiffened, a sense of foreboding filling her.
Obi-Wan’s voice was mildly interested “How do you know this?”

“Because I caught the perpetrator acting suspiciously a few days ago. I used one of the slicing programs that Drusil gave us to crack their personal computer. And I found this.” He brought out a datapad and placed it on the table. Then with a careless flick, he pushed it over to Leia.

“Take a look,” he invited.

Leia reached over and pulled the data pad to her. What had he done now? There was no way he would openly confront her like this if he didn’t think he had proof. Was he really that focused on her that he would manufacture evidence against her? Quickly she glanced down at the pad, starting to skim it, and felt all the blood drain out of her face.

Draven had caught a spy alright, but it wasn’t her. No, she was the one being spied on. Numbly she flicked through page after page of a full dossier on her comings and goings. There were notes full of speculation about what she appeared to like to eat, what holos she was interested in, whose name was connected to hers in the gossip around the base. Han’s real name was listed there, but thankfully not Luke’s.

Her medical file was listed here, and oh when Banok found out about that he was going to have some poor technician’s head for the breach. There were even surreptitiously taken holos of her. Short things, but all of her. Her eating with Luke or Han. Her talking to Rex on the shooting range. There was even one of her sparring with Evaan. It was a thorough and complete report, and not one bit of it had to do with the Alliance.

“Leia?” her mother asked, concerned. Wordlessly Leia handed the datapad to her.

“Who?” she croaked out.

“Who paid for all this?” Draven’s eyes were probing and searching. “According to the data we pulled it was Vader.”

Papa let out a sharp gasp, and Obi-Wan straightened in his chair.

Mon’s gaze was searching. “You can see why we are concerned.”

Leia nodded, numbly, unable to comprehend any of this. This was insane. Even for Vader, who was the very definition of overkill, this was too much. What had he been thinking? He went to the trouble of planting a spy into the Rebellion, not an easy task given Draven’s paranoia, and the only thing he wanted was information about her. Why spend the resources like that? What value did he find in the information about what her favorite outfit might be?

“You’re looking at this the wrong way Leia,” Luke’s voice, older Luke’s voice echoed in her head. “Stop thinking like a strategist and start thinking like a parent.”

His brainwashed child. One he was desperate to reach out to. One he was apparently desperate to know. Hadn’t she tried to do something similar? Plant a spy in the First Order, just to track Ben?

“Did you ever stop trying to reach your son?”

No, she hadn’t. But she had stupidly never thought to marry those words with what Vader would do to reach her.

“You are afraid,” Draven sounded a little surprised.
“Vader is *stalking* me,” she said, trying not to shout. “He’s trying to pull my life apart, to the smallest detail, and I don’t know why!” Well, she had a good guess, but a misdirection was called for here. Maybe she could get Draven to back off. “I’d be a fool if I wasn’t afraid.”

Draven sank back into his chair, some internal decision made. “That’s not the worst of it.”

“How is that not the worst of it?” Mama demanded. Obi-Wan took the datapad from her, and began reading it for himself, his gaze somber.

“The spy is under strict instructions not to report the location of this base to Vader.”

“Why not?” Papa demanded.

Pamlo spoke up “We think it’s a safety measure.”

Draven snorted “No, you think it’s a safety measure.”

She went on, ignoring him “Vader knows the first thing we would do when we found this spy is feed him a false location of this base in an effort to trap him. Clearly, that isn’t going to work.”

“Does the spy know he’s been compromised?” Leia asked.

Draven shook his head, “No, he doesn’t,” he gestured to the datapad, “And Vader doesn’t have any of this intel yet either.”

“How long has he been here?” Leia asked.

“Two months,” Draven's eyes were sober as he looked at her. “He’s one of the new recruits we scooped up from the Empire after the Battle of Alderaan. Vader is valuing thoroughness over speed. Our spy was supposed to do a dead drop the first time he was let off the planet.”

“But for the Imperial recruits that’s six months!” Papa said.

“Yes,” Draven said.

“Safety measure,” she murmured. Then she looked at Draven. “You disagreed.”

“Your Highness?” he asked.

“Pamlo said it was a safety measure. You disagreed. Why?”

“Because he isn’t interested in us.” Draven said, “Or at least not in the destruction of this base as long as you are on it. And I know this because our spy has orders to contact Vader immediately if you are in danger, on this base, or on a mission, from any Imperial forces.”

Leia’s head spun. She found her breaths starting to come in short sharp gasps. Papa laid a hand on her arm, concerned, and she looked up to meet his warm brown eyes. It was okay, she was safe. The spy hadn’t even gotten the first report out. Vader knew *nothing*.

Draven’s gaze was nearly hungry as he looked at Leia, “I don’t think you are seeing the bigger picture,” he told them all.

Was he still focused on that spy business? Even after all of this?

“Which is?” Senator Pamlo asked.
“Vader wants her,” Draven gave Leia a sharp smile, “So we should give him the opportunity to take her.”

There was dead silence around the room. Then Papa asked in his frostiest tone “Explain.”

Draven shrugged “We set her up on a deserted planet, have her activate a distress beacon, and this spy will inform Vader. When he comes we will be ready. Ships, troops, whatever it takes to bury him.”

And people accused Leia of being arrogant. “No,” she said. “I refuse.”

Draven’s eyes narrowed, “I don’t deny there is some risk to it,” he said trying to be reassuring and failing “But he is going to extraordinary lengths to retrieve you. This is our chance.”

“You think I’m worried about myself?” Leia scoffed, “I don’t care how many people you put on this. They will all die.”

Draven didn’t back down “He’s only one man.”

“He’ll kill them all,” Leia said flatly, recalling Vrogas Vas. Vader had taken out the Blue, Yellow, and Grey Squadrons on his own, in a non-modified TIE. The only reason Vader had even crashed the ship was because Luke had rammed his X-Wing into his. Then on the surface, he had mowed through an entire commando group like they were droids. No, they hadn’t been prepared for him to be there, but that kind of wanton destruction left an impression. “And then, incidentally, he’ll get exactly what he wants and they will have all died for nothing.”

“You can’t know that,” Draven argued.

“But I can,” Obi-Wan said firmly “And she’s right. It will be a slaughter. Of your men.”

Draven smirked, “Then why don’t you come and do it?” And the reason he wanted Obi-Wan in this meeting became abundantly clear.

Obi-Wan flushed, but he responded in an even tone. “I fought Vader once before, and it cost me everything I loved.”

There was a long silence at that pronouncement. Even though his grief was genuine, and his words were correct, Obi-Wan was manipulating them. It was for her benefit, Leia knew, but she also understood that he all but screamed Vader had killed Anakin Skywalker. It was no secret how close the two of them had been during the Clone Wars.

Madine’s face was turned away in shame as if he too had been wondering too why Kenobi wasn’t the first to volunteer to kill Vader. Pamlo and Mon were only looking at him with pity. He ignored all of them, focused on Draven.

“What about Skywalker?” Draven asked finally.

Obi-Wan didn’t roll his eyes, but his contempt was in every word he spoke. “Luke isn’t ready, he will be, but we are not there yet.” Leia hoped this was the truth from a certain point of view again, or Obi-Wan was seriously deluding himself on Luke’s malleability on this topic.

“And why isn’t he?” Draven said, “because he broke off from his training without a word of explanation and then resumed it with so much as an explanation.”

“Even he hadn’t taken that break, he still wouldn’t be ready,” Obi-Wan’s eyes narrowed “And the
incident you refer to is a personal matter between myself and Luke”

“And her,” Draven said, pointing a finger in Leia’s direction.

Obi-Wan shrugged “As you say.”

Draven turned to Leia, frustrated “And you, what role did you play? Find out that the Jedi were celibate and thought it would interfere with your love life?”

So the Jedi weren’t only forbidden marriage, but also any kind of sex? That couldn't be right. If it was, there were some serious issues she had to discuss with Obi-Wan because that was a dangerously unbalanced worldview. Never mind the detrimental effect on a standard human psyche, there were races in the galaxy that was a death sentence for.

“Draven that is enough!” Madine said.

Draven sneered “We need to kill Vader and this is the best way to do it. The man has had nothing, and I do mean nothing, that has interested him other than doing the Emperor's bidding and hunting down Jedi. For two decades he’s been an impenetrable fortress as far as motivation goes. He can’t be reasoned with, bribed, or frightened into abandoning his master.” Draven pointed to Leia, “And now we finally have a hook on him, and you all are throwing that opportunity away.”

Pamlo shot to her feet, “Aren’t you the one constantly arguing to the Council that we don’t have the people to spare in foolhardy attempts at heroics?”

Draven stood too, leaning forward until he was practically nose to nose with Pamlo, “This isn’t foolhardy. This is our best, and probably only chance, to take down the most valuable weapon the Emperor has. We have the bait,” he gestured to Leia, “so let’s reel him in.”

Obi-Wan remarked acidly “If you are so eager why don’t you put yourself on the line?”

Draven sneered “He doesn’t want me. He wants her! Although I can’t for all the fates figure out why. In all this time I’ve had her followed, nothing out of the extraordinary came up about her.”

Leia wasn’t sure if she should be flattered that she had fooled Draven so thoroughly, or insulted that he just called her boring.

Mon, however, heard something very different. “You did what?” she hissed.

Draven, strangely for him, misread the room “I was having her followed,” he explained “that’s how I discovered the mole. He let me know she was in a closet in the personal wing and told me he saw communication equipment in her hands. When I realized she was in there simply to see to her droid, I got suspicious as to why he wanted me out of my office.” He shrugged “Turns out I had a good reason, all my files pertaining to the Princess had been tampered with. That’s when I asked for permission to search his personal computer.”

Papa’s face was red with anger but before he could say anything Pamlo said in a clipped tone “You have all of us followed?”

Draven looked confused “None of your loyalties are under question.”

Mon rose to her feet, shaking “Neither are Leia’s.”

“Well not now,” Draven said.
“No, not just now,” Mon corrected “You were given your chance to prove her collusion and you failed. You were ordered to withdraw your surveillance.”

“But I was right,” Draven said, face going pale as he realized his misstep. “There was a spy.”

Madine also rose “That Leia is the victim of, not the perpetrator. You were purposely in violation of a direct order Draven.” He shook his head “We are not the Empire. There are rules in place for a reason.”

“But-”

Leia also rose to her feet. She should feel a sense of vindication, of relief. Draven would no longer be dodging her footsteps, but all her mind could focus on was Vader. And Draven was right, she had helped flush out a spy. Not in the way he intended, but he had found him. And Vader only hired the best. The Alliance couldn’t afford to lose Draven’s talents. “I knew what he was doing,” she said.

Everybody in the room turned to stare at her.

“Leia?” Mama said, questioningly.

“I knew,” she repeated, “Well perhaps know is perhaps too strong a word. I suspected.” She looked at Draven “And while I didn’t know he was under orders to stop following me, I certainly could have said something to any of you.”

“What didn’t you?” Draven asked. She could see his point. If she wasn’t a spy, why tolerate his behavior without complaining? What he didn’t understand was that while she wasn’t feeding any information to Vader, she most definitely had secrets that couldn’t come to light. If she had reported on Draven, there would have been a covert operation to catch him. And that would have put her life under more scrutiny.

She decided to play the most powerful card she had here. Her supposed youth. “I didn’t think it was the right thing to do,” she asked, looking from face to face, for guidance. “Isn’t that what the Empire does? Encourage its people to turn and give information on each other?”

Mon started rubbing her forehead in vexation. Mama and Papa were carefully keeping their faces in disapproval. At least that was what she was hoping they were doing, and not actually buying this line. She most definitely wasn’t that naive.

Obi-Wan certainly wasn’t. “While this is all horribly enlightening, I do have a lesson plan to get ready for Luke. Do you need me anymore?”

Mon shook her head, “You are dismissed. You too Leia.” She drummed her fingers against the table. “I would like to ask that you remain quiet about what was discussed here until we determine what kind of punishment General Draven will receive.”

Both Leia and Obi-Wan nodded and left the room.

“Well that was fun,” Obi-Wan said dryly.

Leia scoffed “That was nothing compared to the power games and public humiliations in the Imperial Senate.”

“Good to know that august body continued to degrade until it’s dying day.”
“Hmm.” Leia agreed. “Thank you for coming to my side in there.”

“I only spoke the truth,” Obi-Wan replied. “Going after Vader like that would be suicide.”

They walked down the path a bit longer before Leia asked haltingly “Were the Jedi celibate?” she asked.

He stopped in the hallway and turned to look at her, arching a disbelieving eyebrow in her direction.

Leia felt like shuffling her feet in embarrassment over that chastising gaze. “I needed to ask,” she mumbled, “there is a lot I don’t know.”

“No, we were not,” he said firmly “We believed in non-attachment, it’s where most of the confusion on that front comes from.”

Now it was her turn to raise an eyebrow. “Really?”

He nodded “Yes.”

“And you are such a sterling example of that,” she said ruefully, thinking of his inability to kill Vader when he had the chance.

He gave her a shrug “I never said I was any good at it.”

She thought of him storming into her parent’s room, lightsaber lit, ready to defend her from any threat. On the pain and loneliness that brought him to her door, trying to make amends after their fight in the jungle. She thought of how so many people on this base looked at him like he was a legend, instead of a human being. Of how he was remembered in her own time as a martyred legend.

“Obi-Wan, do you want to die?” The question came out before she could think better of it.

He didn’t look offended or angry, merely curious. “Why do you ask?”

“Because I’m fairly certain that your alternate did.”

He frowned “What brought you to that conclusion?”

“Your fight with Vader on the Death Star,” she confessed.

He looked a little ill “You saw that?”

“No all of it.” she admitted “But I did see you bring up your lightsaber and fail to parry what had to be the most telegraphed blow in the history of fights.”

Obi-Wan hummed “And if I was?”

Leia shifted on her feet “Then I would ask you seek therapy.”

“Why?” His mouth twisted in a wry sad smile “Because I’m needed? For duty? I’m a relic Leia, of a time long past. You and Luke are the future.”

She shook her head “No because I think the galaxy is a better place with you in it.” She reached out and gave the old man’s hand a squeeze. “That’s all.”
There was such a fierce joy in his eyes at that simple statement. It occurred to her, rather belatedly, that Obi-Wan was lonely. And probably touch starved. She was going to have to talk to Luke about that. She would do what she could, but he had always been more natural about that kind of thing than her.

“No Leia, I am not suicidal. I was not when I left Tatooine with Luke, nor when I landed on Alderaan. While I can’t speak to exactly what was on my alternates mind when he landed on the Death Star, or what he was feeling when Alderaan was destroyed, I think I can fairly state he wasn’t either.”

“You sure?” she pressed.

“I could be wrong.” he admitted, “But his decision probably had more to do with the fact that I couldn’t bring myself to hurt him again.” Then he gave her a shy smile “Or that my death would save you and Luke.”

That wasn’t right, or fair to him, but it was his choice. Just like it had been hers to take that shot for Han.

His eyes grew serious “And now I ask the same of you. Do you want to die?”

She gave a small huff “Mama asked me the same question too.”

“That’s not an answer Leia.”

Hmm, he was really concerned, if he wasn’t letting her evade giving him an answer.

“No,” she said softly “I do not.” But she gave him a bitter smile “But just like you, there are things I would rather not do again and would pay any price to avoid.”

He sighed “That is a feeling I am all too familiar with.”

She looped her arm in his, and continued to walk them down the hallway “Well then, we are both fairly smart people,” she said. “I’m sure we can find another way.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfjkampfer and Acyancat

Translation into Russian available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! Tiny spoiler for the SW novel Lords of the Sith (seriously, you blink and you'll miss it). As always I hope you enjoy!

ETA - I forgot to mention there is also a tiny spoiler for Bloodlines, and a slightly bigger one for Aftermath: Empire's End. In no way do you need to read those books to understand what is going on here though.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After such an exciting start, Leia was rather glad the rest of her day turned out to be mundane. She was still feeling a little shaky and hollowed out from the events of yesterday. Inventory, while boring, was not likely to lead her to any more painful self-realization.

At least this time she was cataloging supplies being brought in, as opposed to wondering how they were going to make what they had last. No supplies were not their problem, and neither were credits if Mon was to be believed. No, what Leia was puzzling over was personnel. Unlike the credit situation, she remembered well how many people had flocked to the Rebellion after the destruction of Alderaan. They were falling short in this timeline. Of not of people, the amount was roughly the same, but the composition had changed. Last time they had gotten a huge influx of mid-level officers, who were disgusted with what the Empire had done, and weren't willing to lie to themselves about it. That group of people had not shown up here and now. Oh, they still had some, her spy among them, but not as many. More stormtroopers, but not the officers.

Leia would have thought that there would have been more, especially defectors, now that there was no way for the Empire to cover up what it had tried to do to Alderaan. But that wasn’t the case. So why had they stayed? What actions, besides Alderaan itself, could she have done that would ripple out this way? She was lost in her own head, trying to reason out why that was, heading down the hallways to the dining hall. She nearly missed the firm voice call out “Leia?”

She brought her gaze back to this world, and spotted Mon, standing in the hallway.

The woman smiled as she realized she had her attention and called out calmly, “A word?”

“Of course.” Leia walked over to the woman, curious. It wasn’t like Mon to go searching for people. She had others do that for her.

Mon waited until Leia came up to her and in a quiet undertone asked “I was wondering if I could borrow you for a meeting the day after tomorrow.”

Leia blinked, this seemed like a lot of effort to secure her attendance to a meeting “I’m always happy to help. What is it about?”

Mon gave a satisfied smirk. “Trehhipoi has agreed to come here.”

Leia’s eyebrow went up at the thought of the Whiforlan agreeing to leave his base of operations “The council agreed to giving him a seat? Already?”
Mon let out a laugh “No, but I thought we should start with him first. Given my experience he’s eminently more reasonable than the council.” Given the reception and paranoia Trehhipoi had shown them on Whiforla, that was saying a lot about Mon’s current frustrations with the Alliance leadership.

“I don’t want to push the council hard on this only for it to fall apart from his end.”

Leia opened her mouth and Mon waved her hand “No Leia, there are a dozen reasons, most we haven’t even thought of, about why he would refuse this idea. There is no guarantee he feels he can trust us with information regarding any other group he is in contact with.”

“With good reason,” Leia pointed out, thinking of Trehhipoi’s bitterness at the “help” the Alliance had offered in the past.

Mon sighed “Yes, for good reason.” She gave Leia a conspiratorial wink “But I feel this is a conversation that is better to have in person about what he thinks.”

That was a lot of effort for something that could be accomplished through an encrypted holo call. Then she thought of the bevy of supplies that she herself had just moved into inventory “And if you offer him something to compensate him for the inconvenience?” she asked slyly.

Mon’s face was perfectly calm “It’s the least I can do. We certainly have enough to spare for him.”

Leia hummed thoughtfully “Not that I mind, but why do you need me there?”

Mon’s face lost its expression of false innocence and fell into solemn lines “One of the conditions of his attendance is that you and Lt. Skywalker be there.”

“Oh,” Leia’s mouth dried a little at that. Mon didn’t look angry or upset, but she had one of the best sabbac faces Leia had ever come across. It had to be upsetting to her, for an ally that she had been carefully cultivating for years, to turn around and demand that some young aide, who as far as Mon knew was only nineteen. “I didn't think I made all that much of an impression.” she hedged.

Mon shrugged “He feels that he can trust you, or feels he as a good read on you. Either way, it wasn’t that unreasonable of a request to grant.” Leia relaxed fractionally. Whatever she felt about it personally, Mon would never let her pride interfere with the well being of the Rebellion. It was one of the reasons she had been such an effective leader here, and later in the New Republic.

*Only because your father wasn’t there to compete with her.*

Leia shoved the thought away. Mon and Papa weren’t rivals, and his survival might help provide balance to point out the flaws in the system that Mon’s political skills had help conceal when they originally formed the New Republic.

“No, it wasn’t,” Leia agreed. “Would you like me to ask Luke for you?”

Mom shook her head, “I would like to handle this personally if you don’t mind.”

Leia shrugged, “What time?”

“Trehhipoi is arriving tomorrow, but it will probably be late. I thought we should give him time to rest from his journey. So the meeting will be ten o’clock, local time.”

“I will be there,” she said.
Mon nodded her head, then hesitated. “Leia...” she began, then trailed off.

Wondering if this conversation was about the spy Vader had set on her Leia felt her back stiffen.

“When you come to the meeting, I would ask that you dress more on the practical side then diplomatically.”

Leia frowned, momentarily caught off guard by the subject “Why?”

“My sense is that Trehhipoi will respond better to that.”

Leia shrugged “Well since I don’t really have any ceremonial outfits here, that shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Of course you don’t,” Mon said. Leia’s eyes narrowed. Mon’s voice was neutral, but there was something there, but what, Leia couldn’t tell.

Mon gave her a head nod, “Well I’ve taken up enough of your time, I will let you get back to what you were doing.”

Leia was about to agree with her, but noticed, for the first time, the bags under Mon’s eyes, and the fine lines of stress around her mouth. “Nothing big,” she said “I was just going to the dining hall to eat dinner. Would you like to join me?”

There was a look of startlement, chased by pleasure, then regret “Thank you, Leia,” she said, “but I am afraid I am going to have to decline.” She gave Leia a polite smile “People tend to tense up when I eat in the hall.”

Yes, Leia remembered those days too. When she would sit in the Resistance’s dining hall to eat and suddenly things became quiet and tense. In this time, the whispers about her had died down, mostly, but she didn’t register as someone that everyone had to be on their best behavior in front of.

“We could always get food there and eat in your office,” she offered. Mon opened her mouth and Leia gave her a bright grin “I promise, I can talk about other things then work for more than half an hour.”

“That sounds delightful,” Mon said.

Leia, despite her boastful statement, actually wasn’t sure if she could not end up talking about work. It was a pleasant surprise when she and Mon conversed the entire evening, and not once did the subject of the Rebellion come up. Mon was surprised to learn of Leia’s newly acquired appreciation of Corellian holo dramas and remarked wistfully on how long it had been since she had seen a Chandrilan dance recital. From there the conversation had gone on to bits of art they both enjoyed, with a list of recommendations for both.

She was reluctantly about to wrap things up when she felt the softest whisper of “Leia?” in the back of her mind.


Mon let out a yawn, and Leia seized the excuse “I’ve kept you long enough,” she said. “You need to sleep.”
Mon’s voice was full of irony “The question is, when do I not need to sleep?” But she got up from her desk. “Thank you, Leia. I had a lovely time.”

Leia gave her a grin back “Me too,” Mon bent down to grab her tray and Leia waved her off as she stood. “I’ll take it back to the dining hall,” she said. “It’s on the way to my quarters anyway.”

Mon gave her a grateful smile. “We should do this again,” she said.

“We will,” Leia promised. She gathered both trays and headed out the door.

“Luke?” she sent back the minute she was clear from Mon’s office.

“Where are you?”

“Heading to the mess hall,” she sent back,

She could feel his admonishment “You haven’t eaten yet?”

Leia scowled “For your information, I just finished a lovely dinner with Mon, and I’m taking the plates and trays back.”

He sighed “Did you talk about anything but work?”

He was so tenacious when he was in nurse mode “Yes, we discussed how dumb racing is ,” she said.

“It is not!” was his immediate reply, followed by a sheepish “You’re teasing me, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” she said, not sorry at all.

“I deserved that,” he said, “but I wanted to know if you were still interested in that hot chocolate and talk?”

Want to? No. Need to? Probably. Leia sighed. “Sure. I’m going to the mess, I’ll pick us up the hot chocolate and we meet in my room?”

“Okay.”

When she arrived at her room, it was to find Luke standing by the door. She handed him his cup.


“Enjoy it while you can,” Leia cautioned, “The quartermaster said we are running low.”

“I can just get Han to-” he stopped mid-sentence and gave a guilty look to Leia.

“It’s alright,” she said, opening her door. “I’m not going to burst into tears at the mere mention of his name.”

“He just needs time to think,” Luke said, sitting at the head of her bed. He dragged the chair over and put his cup on it.

“That getting involved with me will bring ruin and destruction down upon him,” Leia quipped.

Luke shot her look “Leia, that is not true,” he said.
Yes,” she said tiredly and sat down next to him on the bed. She took a sip of her drink, enjoying the sweetness of it. Then she too placed it on her chair and brought her legs up so she was sitting cross legged, facing Luke.

“So what was the meeting this morning about?” Luke asked.

Leia grimaced, Luke was trying to find a less sensitive subject to talk about. It was unfortunate he picked this one. “Draven found a spy.” Luke’s head came up sharply in concern.

“Oh it’s not me,” she said “Or at least Draven didn’t manufacture evidence against me. This spy, he wasn’t here to report on the Rebellion.”

Luke gulped, and a look of dread crossed his face “What was he for then?”

Leia gave him a flat look.

Luke closed his eyes in defeat. “You, he was sent here to spy on you.” He picked up his cup and took a sip, buying time. When he put it back on the chair, he looked her straight in the eyes, “Father sent him?”

Leia snorted “Who else?”

Luke let out a long breath “Okay….” His hands rubbed up and down his legs in a nervous gesture. “So how much does Father know?”

Leia reminded herself that panicking would not be helpful in this conversation. “Nothing yet.”

Luke’s face broke out in relief, then puzzlement. “Why not?”

“He was here as an Imperial defector” she explained, “He was supposed to do a dead drop the first time he was allowed off planet.”

Luke whistled “That is a long time to wait to see if an operation paid off. So Father wasn’t going to learn anything until six months from now?”

“Four,” Leia corrected “He’s been here for two months.”


“I don’t know. They didn’t tell me.”

“Two months? He’s been here for two months?” Luke’s voice grew concerned “How did they catch him?”

She stopped and took a deep breath to steady herself “Draven was suspicious when this spy told him some false information. He got permission to slice into the man’s personal files and found a dossier focusing on me. The spy…he had files…” her voice wobbled.

“Leia?” Luke scooted forward and took her hand in his “Leia, it’s okay.”

Her control vanished “It’s not okay Luke!” she shouted, pulling her hands out of his. “The tiniest detail of my life here was in that file. My food preferences, what outfits I wore, my medical history. Rex, Evaan. Han!” She stood up and began pacing, pulling her braids in frustration. “Han’s name was in that report! Along with how much I was around him. Vader almost had Han!”

Luke stayed sitting on the bed, watching her with wide eyes. “Okay,” he said “What could Father
do with that? You think he would hurt Han?"

"To get me to obey?" she said, whirling to face her brother "Yes!"

Luke’s face filled with confusion. "That wasn’t the sense I got from him last night." Leia snorted her derision at that conclusion. Luke’s patient voice kept going "I understand you’re scared, but you said it yourself he’s obsessed with your well being. Why would he hurt someone he knew you loved? Father is a lot of things, stupid isn’t one of them. He would have to know that you would never forgive him...." His voice trailed off, and comprehension filled his face, as he finally made the connection.

He looked at Leia, worry in his eyes "This isn’t based off of speculation. This is based on knowledge. Father did this before."

Leia nodded miserably. "Only it was me and Han who were used against you." She shivered as she recalled that long ago cell on Bespin, with Chewie and Han. Knowing that Luke was coming, and being unable to do anything to stop it.

Luke bit his lip "Was he trying to get me to fall to the Dark Side?"

"Probably," Leia shrugged. "You never really went into the details of what happened." Ever. Not directly after, not in the long years that followed. Luke would only talk in the broadest sense of what happened between the two of them on Bespin. Leia knew Vader had cut his hand off, although she didn't know when in the fight that had happened. She knew Luke had ended up on an antenna on the bottom of Cloud City, but how he got there was a mystery to her, even now. The only things she knew about that fight were the subtle hints Luke had left when comparing the Vader of Bespin to the one he encountered on Endor.

"I know he offered you the chance to rule the Empire, and you turned him down." she said, rubbing her hands over her face, "I don’t think he planned to kill us, even after he captured you. I know he wanted us on his shuttle to Coruscant." Everyone but Han, but she shoved that away. It was fine, it wouldn’t happen here, Han had paid off Jabba and there was no need for any of them to end up at Cloud City with Vader chasing them.

Luke worried his bottom lip for a moment "Do you know how he found out about my existence?"

Leia shook her head "No, I don’t. But based on his behavior, I would say he learned your name about a year after Yavin."

"Yavin?" Luke asked.

"The battle of Yavin," she said, waving her hand "that was when you blew up the Death Star."

"Wow, we were really cutting it close, weren’t we?" Luke breathed out through his nose, "But really, only my name? I know you wanted to keep it from the Imperials, but do you think he would hear the name ‘Luke Skywalker’ and think, oh I have a long lost son?" Luke sounded doubtful. "Even if he knew I was from Tatooine, Skywalker isn’t the most common name, but it’s not that rare either."

Leia knew it bothered him to deny his identity, even if it was for the best of reasons. "Ahh, but you were the pilot who destroyed the Death Star," she said gently "And Vader was up there last time too. He would have felt you in the Force." She gave him a self-deprecating smirk "None of us are exactly ‘subtle’ when we use the Force."

Luke looked troubled. "That trap, how did he know I would come?"
Leia snorted “Probably used the same methods as now. Planting spies to report back to him about you.” Leia’s teeth bared, “He knew you loved us, so he tortured us.” Her face slipped into a fond look at Luke “He knew you would come to save us.”

“So does understand love,” Luke muttered. Leia frowned, but before she could ask Luke what he meant he said “I’m surprised he wasn’t deafened by your screaming in the Force.”

Leia arched an eyebrow at him, Luke put his hands up defensively “You are very loud.”

“I think that was the point,” she said bitterly “He knew from our first torture session on the Death Star that I was a Force sensitive. He knew my screams would reach you.” Which given that she now knew how rare it was to be able to communicate over such a distance, even if it was just emotion, this had become another mark against Vader. How, with her looking so like her mother, and with the abilities and strength she had, had he not seen her?

Luke’s head cocked, and his voice brought her back from her pointless wanderings. “What exactly happened in that cell, Leia?”

“Which time?” she said bitterly, wrapping her arms around herself.

“The first one.”

She took in a deep breath “He came in, pumped me full of drugs, and proceeded to tear my mind apart looking for the Rebel Base.”

Luke said softly “That’s it?”

“Isn’t that enough?” she demanded.

Luke blinked. Then an abashed look crossed his face. “Of course it is.” She breathed out in relief, but he went on “But that isn’t all of it. He wasn’t trying just to hear you scream.”

Leia opened her mouth, but he cut her off “Please, I’ve heard the stories. If it had been anyone else conducting your interrogation it probably would be about how much pain they could put you through. But that’s not what he did, is it? He drugged you to make you more compliant, he went through your mind-”

“And I should be grateful for that?” Leia snapped, cutting him off “That it could have been so much worse?”

Luke’s eyes gleamed, the first sign of his temper all night, but all he said was “Don’t try to provoke me into changing the subject. That isn’t what I meant and you know it.”

Leia hissed through her teeth, but Luke wasn’t done “By your own account, this was done from purely,” Luke’s face twisted into distaste “professional reasons. But when you talk about it, it feels…” he closed his eyes, and Leia could feel the lightest of touches in the Force swirling around her “personal.”

“This is deeply personal for you, this hatred. I can sense it all around you.

Shaken by how similar Luke sounded to Vader at that moment Leia snarled “Torture is personal.”

Luke’s eyes flew open at her vehemence, “But it wasn’t for him, it was the definition of impersonal, and…” his voice trailed off and his expression was of dawning horror. “That isn’t all he did,” he whispered, mostly to himself.
“What are you talking about?”

Luke focused on her with that too clever mind of his. “You told Obi-Wan that the only reason you ever agreed to have any training was to be able to keep people out of your head. You asked him if he had ever had anyone tear through his core, who he was, and say all of it was unimportant?”

Leia’s anger quickly morphed into panic “Well, it’s true,” she said.

“Yes,” and there was a look of understanding sorrow on his face “But you aren’t nobody, you aren’t unimportant. He went through everything you are and decided you were nothing. You are his daughter and he didn’t see you.”

“I didn’t want him to notice me!” Leia screamed. Luke’s look of comprehension vanished, and a startled one took its place. Leia reigned herself in and said, much more quietly. “Do you know how much worse my life would have been if he had?”

“I never said you did,” Luke said, “But that doesn’t mean it doesn’t hurt that he missed you, but believed about me.”

“No, what hurts is that he should have -” Leia cut herself off.

Luke’s eyes narrowed “Should have what?”

Leia looked at him dead on. He wasn’t going to let this one lie. She sighed, and came back to the bed, sitting beside him. “Do you know what my oldest secret is?” she asked.

Luke looked startled at the non-sequitur, but he answered her. “No,” he said, “You keep so many, do you?”

She gave him a slight grin “Cheeky,” she pointed out.

He gave a slight huff “Always.”

She leaned away from him a bit so she could look directly into his eyes. “It’s the face of our mother.”

Luke’s eyes widened and he breathed a reverent “Oh.”

Leia looked down at her lap. Her hands were flexing in a nervous tick “It’s my oldest memory. And I always knew it was my birth mother. My parents tried to dissuade me. Said there was no way it was possible for me to remember her.”

Luke reached out and caught one of her hands “The Force?”

Leia shrugged, staring at their joined hands as if that was the most important thing in the galaxy. “Probably. It’s not much.”

She looked up at him and gave him a wistful smile “She had kind eyes and a sad face.” Then that smile slipped “And that was a secret that slipped in that interrogation.”


“She didn’t even look,” she whispered, “Just told me I shouldn’t have bothered to protect a dead woman.” She let out a helpless laugh “That she wasn’t important.”

Luke’s face twisted “I thought you said he loved her?”
Leia thought of that last dream, the tangle of emotions that ghost he had brought forth, with her summer day dress, and laugh. Of his grief, even now, nineteen years later so cutting and sharp. Of his rage and fury as he saw that image of her mother slip by his alternate.

“He does,” she confessed.

“He was careless,” Luke whispered. “So careless with what he should have protected most dear.”

“Yes,” Leia felt the tears stream down her cheeks “And you’re right. I am furious about it,” she angrily wiped the tears away “and I don’t know why.”

There was a long moment of silence between the two of them. Then hesitantly Luke asked, “Can I see her?”

Leia looked up into his eyes. Even now, decades later, it was hard to let go of her instinctive reaction to bury that face, to not talk about it. She gave Luke a small grin and showed him the memory, of their mother’s face so filled with love as she whispered “Leia.”

He closed his eyes, absorbing the image. “Did he kill her?” Luke finally whispered.

Leia thought of her mother, collapsing on that bridge from Vader’s actions. She thought of his panicked reaction in the Death Star cell to choking her. That scream of, “Not again” over and over.

“What did Obi-Wan say when you asked about our birth?” she asked instead.

Luke’s eyes opened, and a small frown appeared between his eyebrows. “That Vader hurt her. She died as a result.”

Leia breathed through her nose “Is that exactly what he said?”

Luke’s head titled “I think so.”

She shook her head “No, Luke. Be absolutely certain.”

“You think Obi-Wan would lie about this?”

Leia’s mouth twitched “Lie about this? No. Misdirect? Most certainly.”

Luke’s frown deepened, and his eyes went distant. After a moment he shook his head “I don’t remember.

Leia sighed, so much for that avenue. “To answer your question I think he did.”

Vader’s anguished statement of “*That was not my intent. I will swear on anything you like I did not mean for that to happen. I loved her.*” rang in her mind.

She looked up to Luke “And I’m pretty sure he thinks he did too.”

Luke’s looked troubled “But are we sure?”

“Why are you so sure he didn’t?” she asked, exasperated “If you are looking for a light, I can assure you, it is buried very deep.”

“My alternate found it,” he said calmly “you saying I can’t?”

Leia’s mouth snapped shut. Sneaky little…. 
He gave her a rueful grin “Besides, there is anything I’ve learned over the last few months is that assumptions will get you killed, and you are most likely wrong.”

Leia let out a small huff of amusement at that. “True.” She squeezed his hand and moved so that she could lean her head against his shoulder.

“What is the harm in asking?” Luke said.

“None.” Except to unearth old pain “But is it alright if we wait a bit?”

Leia felt Luke’s head move as he looked down at her. “Don’t you want to know?”

Confirm what she already knew? She didn’t see the need. But if the answer was what she thought it was, she didn’t have the strength to see herself and Luke through any turmoil right now. “I do” she admitted, pulling away to meet his gaze “But I think I’ve hit my quota for personal revelations for this week.” At his guilty look, she tried to lighten the mood “At the very least I need a day to recover from the last one.”

A bashful look crossed his face “Yeah,” he said reluctantly “It can keep.”

Leia looked at him concerned. “If you want to know, you are more than welcome to ask on your own.”

He looked at her “What? Me know something you don’t?”

“I’m not that much of a control freak” she muttered petulantly.

He shook his head in fond exasperations “You really are.”

“I’m serious Luke,” she said stubbornly “If you want to know, just ask.”

“I’ll think about it,” he hedged.

She gave him an unimpressed look.

He sighed “The last time I went on a tear, certain I needed to know everything that was going on I found out my father is not dead, but the right hand and enforcer of an Empire that I despise with all my being.” He gave her a long look “So I think I should heed the lesson and take this a bit more slowly. Besides, I want you to be there when we hear it.”

That was Luke, hoping for the best, planning for the worst. He knew the answer as well as she did, but if he wanted to cling to that hope a bit longer, who was she to stop him?

Luke’s face grew hesitant “Leia...” She braced herself. When Luke said her name like that he usually started asking questions she didn't want to answer. “About that dream last night?”

Leia felt her fists clench at her sides, and she made a conscious effort to relax them. There were so many things that happened in that nightmare and none of them were things she wanted to talk about sober. “What about it?” she asked cautiously.

Luke’s eyes dropped, and his hand started pulling on a loose thread on his pants “Is that what you look like?”

Leia blinked “What?”

Luke rushed on “When I entered your mind, I didn’t recognize anyone who was there.” So, he had
seen Ben. Or, if she was going to be honest with herself, Kylo Ren, “It took me a few seconds to realize that was you on the cliff.”

His eyes came back up and met hers. “Is that what you looked like?” He frowned “Look like?”

Leia burst out laughing. He looked so worried about offending her because she had looked old in that dream. Of all the ridiculous things. Leia had mourned much as she had gotten older. Her knees, her ability to function on four hours of sleep, the slow loss of her family, hell even the battering of her optimism. Her looks had never been one of them. Luke’s face quickly morphed into offended.

“I’m so sorry that you find me trying to be polite-” he started to say. Leia waved her hand in his face, cutting him off.

“I’m sorry,” she said trying to gasp for air. “I know you were trying to be nice,” she broke into helpless laughter again. He gave her a dubious look. She reigned herself in and managed to say “I am sorry. It’s just your face.” She snickered again.

Luke huffed. “Glad you think it’s so funny.”

Leia’s voice became contrite at his obvious petulance “Yes,” she admitted in a somewhat calmer tone “that’s what I looked like,” she smiled ruefully “Grey hair, wrinkles, and all.”

“Still beautiful,” he said, giving her a smile.

She shook her head “Biased.”

“Truth,” he frowned “I don’t get it though.”

“Get what?” Leia asked.

“You didn’t look like that before.”

Leia cocked her head “Before?”

Luke nodded “When you walked into my mind during my nightmare that first night on Yavin. That wasn’t what you looked like.” He frowned “Or when you came to talk to me about Nakari.”

Summoned to him was more like it, but she only asked “I didn't?”

He shook his head.

“Odd. I wonder why?”

“You really don’t know?” He looked so disappointed.

How many times did she have to say this? “We’ve been over this. Not a Jedi.”

“Of course,” he said. Leia looked at him sharply. That was his ‘I’ll let you think that’ tone. She didn’t remember the other Luke starting that particular irritation until they were in their late twenties. Clearly, this Luke was accelerating both his bad and good traits. She let it go, his mind was already moving on to a different subject “Ben might know.”

“He might,” Leia agreed. Personally, she didn’t care enough to probe further into it.

He hesitated for a moment and asked softly “What did I look like?”
Leia blinked. His alternate was a touchy subject for him, for reasons she didn’t fully understand “You sure you want to know?”

He nodded.

She hesitated a bit, “You have to understand this was from seven years ago.” Realizing that wasn’t the clearest answer she clarified “My time.”

Luke frowned “He left you alone for seven years?” his face darkened “I will never understand him.”

_I hope you don’t have too_, Leia thought, but she didn’t offer it aloud.

She gently brushed Luke’s mind, projecting an image of the older him the last time she had seen him in person. It was a few months before the fall of the temple. She had been there, on one of her too infrequent visits. Luke had looked tired, but not too terribly stressed. Not like the holo calls she and him exchanged later. He had been in the main hall of the temple, saying his goodbye to her before she did the same with Ben. He had been standing there tall and proud, the light of the sunset pouring over him. He was wearing his Jedi robes, with his dark beard, beginning to grey, and that reserved smile.

Luke frowned at the image and took issue with the last thing Leia expected. “I grew a beard?”

Leia nodded and gently touched his face “I think you did it to look older. Got tired of everyone not taking you seriously because you looked so young.”

Luke’s face scrunched up in distaste “I don’t like it.”

“Then don’t grow one,” Leia said, not understanding what the big deal was.

Luke looked at her, his jawline settling into tight lines “I can’t be him, Leia.”

She felt the muscles in her shoulders tense in response “Was I asking you to?” she said.

He looked at her “Not directly.”

She hissed through her teeth “I don’t know what you want from me, Luke. All I want for you is to have a choice.”

“Yeah, but every time I do something different from him you draw back. Or look disappointed.”

Leia wanted to deny that. Of everyone on this base, with the exception of Han, she was the only one who only wanted Luke to be himself.

Yes, but what does that self include?

Did she look at him and expect that older Luke? Did she cut him off because of that? Or because he was so young? Leia was the first to admit she could be judgemental. But she hadn’t thought she would ever do that with her twin of all people.

“I don’t mean to Luke,” she said, looking into that pained face “You just take me by surprise sometimes.”

“What that I’m not perfect, like he was?” he said.

“Perfect? Oh, you were never perfect.” she scoffed “You are too stubborn and willful for your own
good. When you think you are right there is no stopping you, even when what you are proposing is suicide. And the really annoying part of that is, usually, you come out on top. You have a temper and you tend to withdraw when you lose an argument. You can be petulant and take everything so personally. And your feet are cold.”

“You are one to talk about that,” he muttered

“I never thought he was perfect, Luke. I’m sorry I left you with that impression.” She leaned forward and cupped his jaw. “It’s just sometimes I see the Luke I first met, the Luke you could be, and the Luke you could have been. It’s a bit disorienting sometimes.”

“Leia do you see me?”

“Do you see me?” Leia demanded in return “That wrinkled face was one thing Luke, but I’m so much older than you.” He opened his mouth to protest and she said gently “I’m only four years younger than Obi-Wan, and probably have seen just as much of war as he has.” His eyes slid away at that. Leia’s heart ached, “I know it can be easy, with this face, but I can’t even begin to tell you how different it is to be fifty-three, rather than nineteen, without sounding condescending.”

“It’s not fair,” he whined. “It’s not fair that so much was stolen from me.” His eyes came back up to hers “And yes, I know how old you are, Leia. The reason I try to forget that fact isn’t because I want some idealistic nineteen-year-old version of you. It’s because you’ve lived so much that I will never know.”

She opened her mouth and he shook his head “This isn’t about you keeping secrets. This is about inside jokes we will never make. Celebrations I never attended, shared experiences we’ve never done, but he did. A lifetime of moments that even if you wanted to tell me you couldn’t because there isn’t enough time.”

His hands twisted at his sides “And I try to bury it all, because it’s not anyone’s fault, and there is nothing to be done about it. But-”

“It’s not fair,” she finished for him.

“Yeah,” he admitted.


“So yes, Leia, I see you,” his smile was sad and tight “but I also wonder about the Leia who could have been greeting me on Alderaan.”

That would never have happened, not without a lot of different choices being made. But Leia understood the appeal of the fantasy.

“Why didn’t you say anything?”

He looked at her startled “Because you were so happy to see me,” he said. “Every day. Even when you’re irritated with me because I’m annoying, you’re happy to see me. How could I resist that?” Then his face grew grim “What kind of selfish person would I be if I tried to take that away by telling you about impossible wishes?”

Leia sighed, “Yes, I get that.” This Luke lamented the lost opportunities, the things he would never now. But all Leia could see when she looked at this younger version of her brother was everything that hadn’t gone wrong in her and Luke’s relationship. A chance to make things better for both of them. She missed older Luke, like a missing arm, but that had been true for seven years. She had
been so focused for so long on finding him, of keeping the Resistance afloat, of silently reaching out to Han, that even now, she had a hard time acknowledging how absolutely furious she was with him. Not for Ben, but for abandoning her to the fight alone.

“And last night,” he gulped “he wouldn’t have hesitated. He would have know who you were.” Luke gave out a bitter laugh “He wouldn’t have taken several seconds to recognize his twin.”

“Or he still might have frozen precisely because he did recognize everyone,” Leia said without thinking.

Luke sat up straighter at that, and Leia found herself mirroring him. “The guy in the mask?” he asked “The one threatening you? Was that your son?”

Leia closed her eyes. She fought her first instinct, which was to close this conversation down as fast as she could. But if the events of yesterday had shown her anything, the strategy of suppressing all of this wasn’t working anymore. If it ever really had. “That was Ben,” she admitted, “Or Kylo Ren as he started calling himself.”

There was a strained silence for a moment. “Oh,” Luke bit his lip, mind whirling on what to say. “He’s very tall,” he finally offered.

Leia let out a shaky laugh, appreciating the effort he went into giving her this moment of levity. “Everyone in this family is tall, except me.”

Luke shook his head. “I’m not tall.”

He was to her, but she could see his point. “You are not short either,”

Luke pondered that for a moment then nodded his head “I am average. I can live with average.” He swallowed hard “Why is he in that mask? Did the other Luke-”

Leia cut him off before he could finish that thought. “No.” He gave her a baleful look “No,” she said more firmly. “You, I mean he, he didn’t-” she trailed off and rubbed her forehead “Ben doesn’t need to wear it. There is no underlying injury, it’s not like Vader.”

“Then why does he wear it?” Luke asked. “Never mind that it cuts down on his lines of sight, it can’t be that comfortable.”

“In homage to his grandfather? To hide?” Leia gave Luke a bitter smile “I don’t really know. After the fall of the temple, we didn’t really stay in touch.”

Luke bit his lip, “And the woman on the bridge?”

Leia had really hoped Luke hadn’t seen that. “You saw her too?” she asked.

“Just for a second,” Luke confessed “I heard you scream, and I walked in. Like I said, there were a lot of people there I didn’t recognize. It got easier when half of them disappeared.”

“That was our mother,” Leia confirmed. “I’m pretty sure that was when she was injured on Mustafar.”


“Not on purpose,” she assured Luke. If you had asked her even a week ago if she would ever find herself in the position of defending Vader she would have laughed herself sick. But he was also a
subject she needed to be very careful with in regards to Luke. He needed to see Vader for what he was, but given her past behavior, even shading the truth the slightest would undo all the trust Luke was just now starting to show in her. It was helpful that in this case, she would bet almost anything that Vader would never have voluntarily shown her that memory.

“He was still sleeping.” And wasn’t that a fun realization. That he could walk into her mind half aware. She had been a mess last night but still…

Luke cleared his throat, bringing her back to the here and now. He had been there, they had kept him out, it was fine. Leia went on “Every other time he walked into my head he was conscious of what he was doing. But last night,” she trailed off as she thought of her mother collapsing on that bridge. She talked past the lump in her throat. “I’m pretty sure he wasn’t aware of where he was until I screamed.”

Luke looked at her, pale “How much do you think he saw from your mind?”

Leia grimaced “I don’t know.” Ben had identified himself by name in that dream. Han had been in that dream. An older Han, but Han. Had Vader been aware enough to get a look? Had he heard what Ben said? Had he seen Kylo Ren?


Leia made a face “Pass.”

Luke gave a wry grin “I don’t think he would lie to you.”

Leia felt her spine stiffen. He was uncomfortably echoing his alternate here and that Luke’s attempts to make her understand Vader. “And how do you know that?” she demanded.

Luke only looked puzzled “Has he yet?”

“Yes,” Leia hissed back “All the time.” When he promised Lando that none of them would be harmed. When he placed his need for power over them. When he-

Luke blinked “This Vader?”

Leia reared back “Excuse me?”

“Has this Vader lied to you? At any point?”

Leia opened her mouth, but no examples sprung immediately to mind. She shut it closed and glared at her twin.

He only looked thoughtful “He hasn’t, has he?”


Luke’s shoulders slumped “Look I get it. You hate him. And I can see why.” His head ducked and his voice trailed away “Some of the stories I’ve heard…”

Leia started. She had been so wrapped up in her own troubles it occurred to her she hadn’t once asked Luke how he was dealing with all of this. She reached forward and squeezed his hand “You can be angry at him,” she said.

Luke’s head came up “Oh, I am,” he said “Believe me I am, but I am not discussing it with you.”
Leia drew her hand back like he had slapped her. Luke was cutting her off. He might be worried that she didn’t see him, instead of the other Luke, but this behavior was echoing her owns Luke’s. He had known that Ben had been escalating out of control months, possibly years before the fall of his temple. In retrospect, it was easy to see she should have pushed him then, demanded to know what was going on. Instead, she kept her silence. And this Luke wanted to shut her out as well. “Why?”

“I’m not ready to talk to you about it,” he shrugged “or anyone really.”

Leia bared her teeth “Hypocrite.”

Luke looked at her sharply “You’ve had decades to come to terms with this Leia. Decades.” She reared back at the censure in his voice “Forgive me if I keep my own counsel for a few months.” “But-” she started.

“I don’t even know what I’m angry about Leia,” he hissed, his eyes narrowing as he pushed his face into hers “I’m still trying to wrap my head around all of this. I haven’t even begun to understand what questions I want to ask.”

He pulled his hair in frustration “On top of that, I have my duties to my squadron, learning to be a commander and my Jedi training. Oh, let’s also not forget half the time I wake up on this base thinking this has all been some very strange dream, and I expect Uncle Owen to tell me to get out of bed.” He looked away “And somewhere in there I fit in you, and Han. Please tell me what else I should do.”

“Luke I-”

“And even when I do know how to see this, you are probably the last person in the galaxy I want to talk to about this.”

“You can tell me anything Luke,” she protested “I can take it.”

“Even if you break yourself in the process?” he asked wryly. His anger slipped away, as quick as it had come. “No Leia, I talked to your mother, and this is about the last thing you need.”

He had done what? And, oh, she would be having a discussion with Mama about coddling her. Leia snarled “She has no right to interfere-”

“Really?” The sarcasm was thick and strong in Luke’s voice “So you didn’t have a breakdown yesterday? Or was that my other time traveling twin?”

Leia gritted her teeth, “It’s my choice, not my mother’s.”

“And it’s also mine.” Luke’s chin jutted out, a sure sign that he had made his stand, and was perfectly willing to die there, if necessary. “Besides, you give Breha too much credit. I was only looking for confirmation of my own opinion.”

“What? That I’m overwhelmed?” She crossed her arms over her chest.

He smiled gently and reached out tracing her cheek “That you have been given too much to bear, and you need a small rest.”

“I don’t-“
“And that you would deny that until every star in the universe died.”

She snapped her mouth shut.

“Besides, even if you were in a place to help on this…” his voice trailed off, and his smile was bitter and knowing, “I think you are angry enough at him for the both of us. And if I started talking this out with you we’d end up in a spiral I don’t think either of us would come out of.” He looked her straight in the eyes “I need to know what I think. Not the other Luke. Not Ben. Not you.” He hit his chest with a fist to emphasize his point “Me.”

Leia opened her mouth and Luke shook his head, “But that is off topic,” Oh no it was certainly not “My point was that if you can see me, and not the other Luke, you need to do the same for him.”

“Why?” Leia snarled “Out of compassion? To be a better person?” She gritted her teeth “My anger is my own, and I will not run from it. Not when it was incurred at such a heavy price.”

Luke looked at her like she had just grew a new head. Then he burst out laughing. “What?” Leia demanded.

He gave her a crooked grin “I never thought I would have to teach you this lesson ‘General’” He leaned forward and pressed their foreheads together “You and I are too stubborn for our own good sometimes, you know that?”

“What the hell are you talking about?” she demanded, almost but not quite pulling away from him.

Luke pulled back and tapped her lightly on the cheek with a finger in mock admonition “Tactics, Leia. If you base him on what the other one did, you will never understand this Vader at all. And therefore everything he does will be a surprise to you.”

That had to be the nicest way anyone had ever called her dumb before. “Well hell,” she breathed. “Yeah,” Luke’s grin was rueful. “That about sums it up.”

ABA - Day 108

After their morning workout, which Leia was relieved to finally be getting back to, Luke joined her for breakfast with her parents. She wasn’t sure if yesterday she had been so out of it she had missed all the tension in the room between her parents and Luke, or if in their concern for her well being they had all agreed to cease hostilities. Whatever fragile peace there had been, was gone. Everyone was tense and on edge, and Leia didn’t know how to break it.

Leia wondered why Luke even bothered to come if he was still this angry, but halfway through breakfast his reasons became abundantly clear when out of nowhere he asked “So what’s happening to the spy?”

Both her parents looked at him, startled. Papa looked at Leia, who only shrugged.

“He asked what the meeting was about,” she said, “And nobody said I couldn’t say anything about that part.”

Luke’s chin came up “I have questions.”
“Such as?” Papa asked cautiously.

“Who is he?”

“We don’t know either Luke,” Mama said gently.

Luke’s eyes narrowed, and Leia could feel the Force flicker around him as he tested the veracity of their statement. It hurt her that he was still so cautious and angry around them, but her pushing for a solution would only end up with bruised hearts for everyone.

“Alright,” Luke said, “Do you know why he didn’t alert Father after Leia was hurt on Cymoon 1?” Both Papa and Mama flinched at the word “Father” coming from Luke’s lips.

Papa shook his head “No.”

Luke banged his hands on the table in frustration, “Then what do you know?”

Mama said hesitantly “While I don’t know the answer, I can make a good guess.”

“Which is?” Luke asked.

Mama shrugged “He probably figured Vader already knew.”


Her mother gave her a tight smile “Both your missions off-world have been very last minute Leia. So much so that the last one you took, your own parents didn’t know you were going until you had already left. The spy would have had no way to alert Vader, or plan in advance to let Vader know, on both occasions.”

She tapped her mouth thoughtfully “Also when you returned from Cymoon 1 everyone on base knew Vader had been involved.” Her mouth twitched and her voice was thick with irony “Personally I think it only added to your legend. The Princess who destroyed a base right under Vader’s nose, and who he failed to kill.”

Had everyone known about those rumors except her?

Luke looked slightly mollified by that answer, although Leia wasn’t sure why. Being rescued by Vader in any scenario was her worst nightmare come to life.

“Why don’t you know all this for sure?” Luke demanded, “Why haven’t you asked him?”

Mama finished swallowing her food and said calmly “The spy is being left in place for now.”


Papa’s mouth tightened “Because no one can agree if it would be more useful to let him continue on, make the dead drop, and try to bomb Vader from orbit when he comes for the intel,” Leia snorted in derision at that plan. Slightly better than trying to take Vader out with troops, but not by much. “Or if we should scoop him up now and put him on trial.”

“What does Draven want to do?” Luke asked “He’s the head spymaster, isn’t he? He always has an opinion or a plan.”

Leia tensed up and Luke seeing it asked concerned “Leia?”
She shook her head “I can’t talk about it. Mon asked all of us in that room to be quiet about it for now.”

“But we can,” Papa said, “Draven caught the spy by disobeying a direct order from the council on leaving Leia alone.”

Luke’s face paled. “What’s going to happen to Draven?”

Bail gave him a tight smile “He’s being demoted.” He shook his head “Not enough if you ask me.”

Leia looked at him “He did catch a spy,” she said.

“By tailing you.” Papa shot back. “By disobeying a direct order, and violating every rule we have in place to govern such behavior.”

When he put it that way it did sound bad. “Yes,” she said slowly “And I understand all of that. But I’m the victim here, don’t I get a say?”

“You do,” Mama said “That’s why he was demoted and not put on trial for insubordination.”

Leia gulped. Many of the military leaders of Rebellion had been former Imperials, with a small scattering of former Separatists. The ex-Imperials didn’t hold much value with the Empire’s method of doing things, they wouldn't be here if they did. But the one thing almost all of them still adhered to was the Empire’s zero tolerance for insubordination. It was something that didn’t come up all that often in the Rebellion. Mostly the trials were for Imperial spies they caught in their midst, the ones Draven hadn’t found first, but in most cases the penalty was execution.

The civilian leaders didn’t like it, but the Rebellion had few options when it came to punishment outside of demotions. If the insubordination was great enough, there was no prison available to put them in. They also couldn’t just cut the person loose. There was no telling what deal they would cut with the Empire, what information they would tell.

And that was the best case scenario. Without the resources of the Rebellion to protect them, the Empire was perfectly capable of arresting someone and torturing them to death for the information. It wasn’t a pretty solution, but it was the practical one.

“That would be a waste,” she said as neutrally as she could.

“He was spying on you!” Papa said indignantly “He was questioning your loyalty!”

“Because he knew I had a secret,” Leia shot back “Don’t get me wrong, the man is a paranoid lunatic, and the last few months have not been fun. But he is no more paranoid than any other spymaster we would put in his place.”

Papa sneered “Have a lot of experience with spymasters do you?”

Leia took a deep breath in, fighting the urge to lash out at him. He was worried and was forgetting her actual age. “Yes,” she said firmly, letting the weight of years at war color her voice.

Papa opened his mouth to contradict that, then snapped it shut. He started rubbing his forehead.

Leia went on, in a much calmer tone “He has contacts and a network. Replacing him would take months, if not years!”

“Does this sudden defense of the indefensible have anything to do with the uptick in Imperial
activity in the middle of nowhere?” Her mother asked softly. Leia looked over at her mother sharply “Mon mentioned your theory to me and your father yesterday.”

“No,” Leia said instinctively, looking to hide what she knew. Mama just gave her a patient look. Leia’s shoulders slumped. They knew the fate of the New Republic, why was she still fighting this battle? “Yes,” she said sighing, allowing herself to fall back as far as she could into her chair. “The second Death Star is being built out there.”

“The second one!” Luke said “They built another one?”

“Yes,” Leia said tiredly.

“Were you ever going to mention that?” Papa asked tightly.

“Yes,” Leia said firmly, looking into his eyes. “when I knew it was there. But almost all of the classified records pertaining to that project were removed from all Imperial archives just before the fall of the Empire. We thought they had been destroyed.” Instead, they had been squirreled away and used to create Star Killer base. Leia focused back in on the here and now “I knew at some point it would end up at Endor, I just wasn’t a hundred percent sure when.”

Mama grasped her point first “You didn’t want to waste the resources looking for it.”

Leia nodded. “In my defense, the first Death Star began construction above Geonosis, and then it was moved to its final construction site in deep space. I didn’t know if they followed the same pattern here.” She shrugged “But I did know that you can’t hide that amount of shipments.”

“Is that why you were so dead set on retrieving that data from the Whiforlans?” Papa asked.

Leia shook her head, “Yes and no. It was helpful last time, from a tactical standpoint. It gave us a much clearer idea of what targets to hit, and what would be the most devastating to the Empires’ supply lines.”

She started drumming her fingers on the table “But the construction of the second Death Star wasn’t even past the planning of logistics at this time. That’s why we didn’t even have a hint of it, until about three years later.” She gave them all a faint smile. “It was actually the Bothan Spy network who showed us where it was being completed, not this data.”

“Why the change?” Papa wondered “Why push everything up? There is no way they have fixed that design flaw yet.”

“Because they need to prove it works,” Luke interjected. “Right now it’s just a possibility, no proof. If you are going to rule a galaxy with fear then you need the threat.”

All of them turned to look at him, and he blushed “Well, it’s how the Hutts do things,” he said defensively.

“That’s exactly right,” Leia said.

“Does this have anything to do with Captain Solo going to retrieve that cell leader?” Papa asked puzzled.

Leia turned and looked at him, startled. “Han went to Whiforla?” she asked.

Papa frowned “Of course he did,” he said carelessly “he should be back sometime today.”
Leia felt like she could breathe again. Han hadn't left. Well, he had, but not forever. “Doesn’t mean he wants anything to do with you, just means he had a paying job,” said that bitter cynical part of herself.

“He didn’t tell you before he left?” Papa asked.

Leia shook her head. “I’m surprised you know about it,” she said.

“I was in the room when Mon offered him the job. He asked if he could take Threepio with him,” Papa said. “I thought you knew.”

“No,” Leia said. “I just saw that his ship was gone,” she swallowed. “I thought…”

“That he left,” her mother said.

“He is so mad at me,” Leia whispered.

Papa frowned “For what? Not telling you when -” he cut himself off, then took a deep breath in. “No,” he said mostly to himself. He looked her straight in the eyes “Leia why is he mad at you?”

“Because of Cymoon 1,” she whispered.

Papa frowned “What?”

“Because I knew there was a good chance Vader would be there, and I didn’t warn him,” she gave Papa a bitter smile “Almost everyone in the galaxy he loves was on that mission and I didn't warn half of them of the possible danger.”

Papa’s head fell into his hands and he gave him bitter laugh “The one time I actually agree with the man, and he isn’t here to hear it.”

Leia shrugged.

“Why do you want that cell leader here Leia?” Mama asked.

Leia blinked at her “I thought Mon would have told you.”

Mama nodded “She gave me the reasons that you told her. Now I want to know the real ones.”

Leia looked back and forth between her parents. If she couldn’t delegate and confide to them, who could she? She knew them. She trusted them. Hell, they had taught her almost every foundational thing she knew about politics. Was her need for control that great that she really had convinced herself she could steer the galaxy into doing what she wished?

They were all looking at her, and she could see the light in Papa's eyes dim as he thought she wouldn’t trust them with this. That she would refuse to answer and open up to them about what was driving her so hard. “I’m trying to kill the First Order,” she said.

Luke’s voice was interested “You mentioned them before.” Mama and Papa gave him sharp looks, but he ignored them, choosing to focus on Leia “Who are they?”

“It’s the government that grew out of some of the remains of the Empire after the Galactic Concordance,” she said.

They all looked at her expectantly, and Leia backtracked a bit in her mind. Nothing in that sentence was anything they had context for. She took a deep breath in and started from the beginning. “The
Galactic Concordance is, was, the treaty between the New Republic and the remnants of the Empire. It called for the immediate cessation of hostilities between all parties. That the Empire would surrender Coruscant, all Imperial Academies, and all remaining Imperial forces would be confined to a small section of space in the Inner Rim.”

Papa looked interested and leaned forward “And?”

Leia gave a bitter smile “There was a section of the Empire, higher brass mostly, but some true believers that were in the ranks as well, who instead of retreating with the others, fled into the Unknown Regions.”

Mama’s voice was troubled “And how does the Outer Rim fit into this?”

Leia’s eyes narrowed “They sat out there for thirty years, rebuilding their forces. Quietly at first, and subtly, but no one could accuse them of not having patience. When they were strong enough they started raiding the Outer Rim. By that point, the provisional government there had collapsed, and that area of space was controlled by three rival gangs, who periodically went to war with each other.”

Leia rubbed her forehead “They first started with kidnapping children from the edges of the Outer Rim. Since the slave trade was flourishing again by this point, most of us in the New Republic didn’t put together that this wasn’t slavers, but a coordinated effort to drum up recruits.”

“I only had snatches of what their training process was like, but that was enough,” She swallowed at the memory of those holos she watched. “As their ranks ‘grew’ they started venturing further and further into the Outer Rim. They conquered and harvested resource rich worlds.”

“They didn’t confine themselves to just military actions. They would have infiltrators come into a political system and sow chaos and anarchy. They would often start fights between rival planets. They provided money and weapons, to each of the three major gangs, but never out in the open. Soon the chaos became so bad the populations there were willing to accept any government, as long as it promised some semblance of order. Then they would swallow that system whole and move on to the next.”

“That does sound familiar,” Papa muttered darkly.

Leia gave him a questioning look. Papa gave her a tight smile “The Clone Wars weren’t pretty from either side Leia. This tactic was used time and time again, on both sides, for strategic purposes.”

Leia wanted to howl. Why, oh why, had he never told her this? All the stories she had heard of the Clone Wars was of the gallant, but ultimately doomed Jedi Knights and the few honest senators who tried to curb Palpatine's power. Was it his discomfort with the realities of what war actually was that influenced him? Or was it that he thought she was too young to understand the lesson? All she knew was that she, and the New Republic, had been badly prepared for the tactics that the First Order used. To find out it was something that had happened before, in living memory no less, and no one thought to tell the younger generation what had happened was infuriating.

“This would have been nice to know thirty years ago,” she said, trying, and failing, to keep the censure out of her voice.

Mama leaned forward, “Leia, I understand your anger, but if we can focus on the problems now, instead of then?”
Now is *then*, Leia wanted to scream, but she swallowed it. They needed to know what they were up against. No, what they were possibly up against. Of course, this was all a moot point if they couldn't defeat the Empire *now*.

Leia nodded “I’m thinking of a strategy with an eye on both problems, the First Order and the Empire.”

“How?” Mama asked.

Papa’s eyes widened “By putting pressure on the Empire’s supply lines in that region of space.”

Leia nodded “Yes. The Empire is even more vulnerable then they were in my original timeline. They *need* that weapon. And desperate people make mistakes. By putting so much pressure on the Outer Rim, that they can’t deploy in other regions yet, they’ve made themselves vulnerable to disruption.”

“What is the end goal, Leia?” Mama asked, “Why set the Hutts and the Empire against each other? Why suggest putting someone from the Outer Rim on the council? We aren’t at war with the same enemy.”

Leia swallowed “The Hutts and the Empire are allies, shouldn’t we coordinate for the same reasons?”

Mama looked thoughtful at that. Leia went on “I want them to have a functional government when this is all over. For too long those people have been ignored and been left under the boot of the Hutt’s. I want to make sure that the Hutt’s control of that region falls.”

Luke, surprisingly was the one who brought it up, “From that standpoint wouldn’t it be better to leave the Hutts in place? They would be more than capable of repulsing any attack from the First Order, especially in the beginning. Say what you want about them, but they do not suffer rivals easily.”

Leia looked at him, betrayed “And leave those millions, possibly billions, of sentients to their control?” She shook her head vehemently “Never. And even if you want to look past the humanitarian aspect of it, look at history. Trouble to the Republic, any form of the Republic, has always, *always*, come from that region of space when it was in turmoil. This is doable. We can kill those gangsters, and break their hold on that region forever. I can’t believe….,” her indignation faded away when she saw his beaming face.

“Testing my argument?” she asked him flatly.

He gave her a beaming smile “I learn from the best.”

“I don’t understand,” Papa asked, “In your timeline, didn’t those systems want to join the New Republic?”

“Oh they did,” Leia snorted “But the New Republic wasn’t as “enthusiastic” at the prospect.”

Papa looked troubled “Why?”

Leia ticked off the reasons on her fingers “Too remote. Too poor. Of too little strategic value. Too wild. And then as the First Order started their work, too volatile.”

Papa’s voice was a mere whisper “The New Republic just let this happen?”
“As I said, at first we didn’t realize what they were doing. It was lost in all the other chaos going on. Then the rumors came, but there was no concrete evidence. Then as the pattern emerged, too many were all too willing to turn a blind eye.” Leia’s lips flattened in annoyance “It was a combination of greed and arrogance.”

Mama spoke up then “And I imagine there was also those who had a genuine desire to avoid pulling the galaxy into its third civil war in less than a century.”

Leia nodded, conceding her point, “Them too.”


“Shouting at the top of my lungs about the threat we were all under,” Leia admitted. “Once I had proof, I tried to get them to listen,” her voice trailed away as she remembered those last few days in the Senate, and how the revelation of her heritage had destroyed her political career.

She cleared her throat “I was called a war monger, paranoid, controlling, a Palpatine in the making.” She shrugged “I didn’t get far.”


She nodded “Yes.”

Papa looked trouble “Your colleagues really believed that about you?” he asked.

“Are you surprised?” Luke said snidely. Apparently, the control of his anger at her parents was slipping.

Papa flushed “What is that suppose to mean?” he demanded.

“Well, you did raise her to be a weapon,” Luke said.

Papa stiffened “That is not true. She is our daughter.”

“Who you wanted to kill her father.”

“I am her father!” Papa shouted. Leia flinched. Luke had no way of knowing this, but Papa even raising his voice was a rare thing. She bit her tongue though. They needed to work this out on their own.

“Because you stole us!” Luke shouted right back, coming to his feet, “You stole us and you separated us! What gave you the right?”

We weren’t stolen! Leia wanted to shout. We are people and we can’t be simply taken like things. Then she thought of Tatooine, of the culture that Luke had grown up in. This wasn’t her history and baggage, this was being driven by his. Luke was less than five months out of that culture, too short a time for him to realize how Core Worlders would react to the thought that people could be stolen. But he had grown up seeing it happen, there was no sugar coating it for him. And as far as he was concerned, that was what had happened to him and her.

“Because your mother was dead, and we thought Anakin had joined her.”


“Obi-Wan thought Anakin was dead,” Papa explained tiredly, slumping back into his chair, all anger draining away. “It wasn’t an unreasonable assumption to make. He did cut off three of his
limbs, and left him on fire.”

Luke paled at that pronouncement. Leia sighed to herself. Obi-Wan had been coy again about details. Then again, Leia wasn’t sure she could blame him for not wanting to go into the specifics of that with anyone, nevermind Luke.

“We couldn’t take you to the Nabberries.” Papa said rubbing his forehead “We didn’t know how aware Palpatine was of the depths of Padme and Anakin’s relationship. We couldn't risk…”

“Him finding us?” Luke asked, still stubbornly clinging to his anger “Turning us into weapons?”

“I won’t lie. That was a consideration.” Papa’s eyes filled with tears “But it’s also true I couldn’t stand by and do nothing to protect the last bit of my friend.” He looked at Luke. “Think what you will of me, but I loved your mother. She was a dear friend and that is rare for me in this galaxy. As for separating you two…” Papa trailed off. Mama leaned over and gave him a reassuring squeeze to his hands.

Papa flashed her a grateful smile, then turned his head so he was facing both Luke and Leia “If I thought for one moment Yoda and Obi-Wan would have allowed it, I would have taken you both.”

She and Luke together? She had wondered what would have happened if they had switched places, and she had indulged in the daydreams of growing up with Luke at her side. The loneliness of her childhood abolished by the fact that Luke would have been there. To find out that dream had almost become a reality if not for two shattered men.

Leia found her voice, “And what right did they have to forbid that?” she demanded.

“None,” Papa said “But they did understand how Force users sense each other, which is a subject I lack much information on. They thought it was too much of a risk to have you both together on Alderaan. That we might be able to hide one of you, but not both.”

“So I was taken to Tatooine,” Luke said flatly.

Papa nodded “Yoda was the one who suggested it. That you be raised with your family.”

Luke frowned “Who is Yoda?”

Mama stiffened “You don’t know who Yoda is?” she demanded.

Luke looked back and forth at the two of them “Should I?”

Mama let out a string of curses under her breath. Leia blinked in surprise. “Mama?” she asked.

Mama began rubbing her forehead in agitation “Obi-Wan Kenobi is going to be the death of me. He hoards secrets like, like…” she grappled for an analogy.

“Like me?” Leia suggested.

Mama glared at her “You say you never met him before? Are you sure?”

Leia nodded “Yes, I am very sure.”

Mama slumped back into her chair. “Yoda is-”

But Luke cut her off “My teacher,” he said, looking at Leia. “He’s the one who taught the other me? The one you wouldn’t tell me about?”
Leia nodded. Luke looked eager, and asked, “Who is he?”

“The Grandmaster of the Jedi order,” Papa answered for Leia. “And no one, and I mean no one, can hear you say that name Luke.”


Mama, however, was focused in on Leia.

“And speaking of the other secret holder in my life,” she said.

Leia resisted the urge to squirm and blurt out that she hadn’t done anything. One, she was fifty-three years old, and it would be patently ridiculous to crumble like that. And two, she had done something wrong, at least in her mother’s eyes.

“Yes?” she asked meekly.

Mama wasn’t fooled “We need to discuss how you’re going to mourn your husband.”

Leia flinched. “Do we have too?” she whined.

“You need to grieve him, Leia,” Mama said gently.

“How?” Leia demanded. “You think I haven’t wondered about this? Any formal ritual I do will be noticed by the Alderaanians on base and they will want to know why!” Horrified she realized there were tears gathering in the corner of her eyes. Quickly she brushed them aside.

Mama nibbled on her lip, then turned to her brother “How do you handle your dead on Tatooine?” she asked Luke.

Luke, completely taken by surprise went “Ahh…”

“They don’t talk about it for starters,” Leia said, coming to her brother’s defense.

Mama looked apologetic “I’m sorry. I didn't realize it was a taboo.”

Luke shook his head “It’s alright. You couldn’t have known,” He gave her a tight smile “Even with all your diplomatic training I doubt the funeral preferences of the settlers of a backwater world would be something you would need to learn.”

Mama looked at Luke critically then said firmly “I would say it’s Hutt infested, not a backwater.” She gave him an apologetic smile “Everyone’s home is the center of the galaxy. My apologies Luke.”

He shook his head “It’s alright. It’s not like I’m ever going back there.”

Leia tried to contain her wince. The Force had a funny way of taking such statements as a challenge.

“If you want to kill Jabba, you are going to have too,” Papa said.

“If we kill Jabba,” Leia interjected, “I think it would be better to give the locals the means to do it themselves.” She grimaced in remembrance. “There was so much confusion and chaos last time simply because the locals weren’t prepared for it.”

“I choked him to death with a chain,” Leia said simply.

There was a dead silence in the room.

Luke stuttered out “You did what⁈!”

“I choked him to death.” Leia said, “Seemed only fair, he had chained me to him with it after all.”

Luke's face flushed in anger “He did WHAT?”

Leia backpedaled “It was fine. You, well he, was there.”

Luke’s face flushed in anger “I let this happen? I let you go near him?

“Excuse me!” she protested “You do not, in any timeline, get to tell me what to do. I decided to come along. And it’s not like this was the first plan. All of our other plans for rescuing Han had fallen through and -” she cut herself off and looked at her father. He had a dark scowl on his face.

“On second thought, let’s go back to the funeral idea for Han.”

“Leia…” Papa asked, “I won’t demand an answer, but I would like one all the same.”

She sighed “Han owed some money to Jabba, and had a bounty on him as a result.”

“Jabba isn’t known for being merciful Leia,” Mama whispered, “Was he sane when you rescued him?”

Leia grimaced “Small mercies. Han was frozen in carbonite to be transported to Tatooine, and no I won’t get into how that happened because it’s another long story,” she said, waving away all of the questions on their faces.


She ignored him “Jabba decided instead of unfreezing him, he would hang Han on his wall for decoration.”

Papa closed his eyes “Small mercies indeed Leia.” He opened them up “Well, I’m glad for your sake it worked out.”

“Thank you.”

“I’m not,” Luke muttered “Getting you involved. What was he thinking?”

“On the upside, I got a very cool nickname and you got to threaten Jabba in the politest most passive-aggressive way ever.”

Luke didn’t look happy. But he let it go. Leia looked down at her chrono and swore, “And now I’m late,” she said to all of them.

“Go,” Mama said, standing up herself “But don’t think this is the last time we are going to discuss this.”

“Of course not Mama,” Leia said. Was it wrong to hope for some catastrophe to happen in the next few days so she could put this off?
Leia entered the conference room to find most people milling around, Obi-Wan, Dodonna, Madine, and a few of the other higher-ups. Pamlo was the only civilian present, Leia was interested to note. Luke was already sitting at the table looking very nervous.

Leia sat in the chair next to his and gave him a smile. “Relax,” she said under her breath “you look like you are about to vibrate out of your chair.”

“I don’t even know what I’m doing here,” he said back in a whisper. “I’m just a pilot.”

“And a Jedi,” she said.

“Jedi in training,” he corrected. Then he looked at her “Talk to Han yet?” he asked.

Leia’s face didn’t lose its smooth composure but she snapped in the Force “I really don’t need you to play matchmaker, little brother.”

“Oh yes you do,” he sing songed, “You are soooo bad at this.”

Like he was one to talk. She was about to inform him of that when Mon entered the room, followed by Papa, Threepio, and finally Trehhipoi. Hastily Leia rose to her feet and kicked Luke’s chair. He shot her a puzzled look, then his eyes widened, and he came to his feet.

“Good morning,” Mon said diplomatically. There were head nods all around. “Do we have Ackbar on comms yet?” she asked.

Madine spoke up “Should be just a minute.”

“Alright then.”

Trehhipoi made a noise and immediately headed over to Luke and Leia, Threepio trailing behind him. Leia could hear several mutterings in the background about the lack of manners, but she gave him a wide grin.

“Trehhipoi,” she said, extending her hands in greeting “I am so happy to see you.”

She waited for Threepio to translate, and not even by a flicker of an eyelash did she reveal that wasn’t necessary. As soon as Threepio was done with her greeting in the Whiforail’s musical tongue, Trehhipoi gave out a long whoop noise, and then bent low and took one of her hands in his, brushing his lips against it.

Leia felt her eyebrows go up in surprise, and Threepio let out an indignant squawk of “Oh my! Your Highness, that gesture is not one used on Whiforial. I’m afraid I can’t give you an accurate translation.”

Luke laughed and came up next to Leia, “That’s okay Threepio. I think we all got that one.”

Trehhipoi came out of his bow and extended his hand to Luke. Luke looked down, and reached out to grasp the hand.

After Threepio’s relaying of Luke's statement, Trehhipoi responded. Threepio offered “He is glad to see that you are as clever as ever. He also wishes to extend to you the invitation to come back to Whiforial and have some real fun.”
Luke bounced on his toes “Does this fun include explosions?”

“What fun in public does not?” was the response. Leia grinned, she knew she had liked him.

There was a clearing of Mon’s throat and they all turned to face her. Ackbar’s holo hung in the air, above one of the empty chairs. “If you are ready?” Mon asked.

Leia and Luke took back their seats, with Trehhipoi taking the seat next to Mon, Threepio standing behind him.

Mon introduced Trehhipoi to everyone in the room by name, and he gestured politely to each in turn. When Mon finished, she turned to Trehhipoi.

“I’m sure you are curious as to why we invited you here,” she said pleasantly.

“No,” Trehhipoi said.

Madine’s head shot up, “Excuse me?”

“No, I am not interested.”

Obi-Wan’s face didn’t lose its smooth lines. “Then why did you come?”

Trehhipoi pointed to Luke and Leia “To see them.”

There were murmurs around the table, and Leia could see several suspicious looks shot her way. As flattered as she was, she had to wonder what game Trehhipoi was playing here. There was no way he was stupid enough to walk into this base with the clear goal of making the leadership of the Alliance look foolish and subtly imply that she and Luke were working with him.

She leaned forward “While I enjoyed our time together, I am afraid I am not in the market for a husband,” she said pleasantly.

Not understanding where she was going, but willing to play along, Luke said “The same goes for me.”

Leia could see the feathers ripple across Trehhipoi’s head, and she got the distinct impression he was trying to smother his laughter. The rest of the people in the room were looking at her like she was mad.

As soon as Threepio was done with his translation, Trehhipoi let out that strange gear grinding noise. He slapped the table in his amusement. Then carelessly he spoke to Threepio.

“While I don’t doubt you both wouldn’t make fine spouses, I’m afraid I am not looking either.”

Then why come all this way just to see us?” Leia asked pleasantly “You are no fool Trehhipoi and quite the busy man. I could think of no logical reason to single us out among our peers. You know how dedicated we are to our cause, and the only reason I think you would go to such lengths was because you had fallen in love.”

Trehhipoi’s eyes narrowed as Threepio offered Leia’s response. He let out a sigh, “I am here because of you and him.” Trehhipoi said “I was not lying about that.”


“Because you came to my world and did not demand, but listened. When Mon told me that this
meeting was your idea, I knew it would be something important. You both are too practical to waste my time on anything else.”

Mon didn’t show her offense but she countered lightly “And I do not listen?”

“Oh you listen,” Trehipoi said, “but I do not think you hear. You are a politician, they are warriors.”

Leia cleared her throat. That was true, but not from the point of view of everyone here. “While I am flattered Trehipoi, and I do know how to fight, I am not a soldier.”

He bared his teeth at her, in anger or as a copy of a human smile Leia wasn’t sure “Senator Mothma uses words to lead, you use them to fight. You are a warrior.” He leaned back “And you may not call yourself a soldier, but no one walks away from Vader alive who is helpless.”

Leia shifted in her chair. That was true, but only because Vader didn’t want her dead “Luck,” she said.

“Which you took advantage of,” he looked around the room, “So why was I asked here?”

“The information you gave us,” Papa said.

The feathers on Trehipoi’s head fluttered “What about it?”

“We cannot conduct an all-out assault on the Empire,” Ackbar said, his voice echoing in the way long distance comm calls always did “We analyzed the data to find what supply lines to cut. Where the weakest pressure points are.”

Trehipoi whistled through his teeth, agitated “Yes, I figured that was what you would do with it. You were in a better position to follow through then my people. That is why I gave it to you.” He gave Papa a bored look.

“Sold it to us you mean,” Dodonna said tightly.

Mon cleared her throat and sent the general a pointed look. Threepio hadn’t translated the general’s words, and Trehipoi wasn’t visibly reacting in any way, so Leia kept her internal wince to herself.

Ackbar went on as if he hadn’t been interrupted. “We found a supply line to cut. A big one, in a volatile area of space.”

Trehipoi didn’t shift position, but Leia got the distinct impression that his feathers flattening like that wasn’t a good sign “And what do you need from me and my people?” he said.

“Your opinion,” Mon said.

Trehipoi managed to keep his look of startlement until Threepio translated. His high pitched concerned whistle was “Excuse me?”

Mon raised her hand, and a holo projection of the Outer Rim filled the room. She pointed and good three-fourths of it changed to a dark blue color. “This is the boundaries of the Hutt’s criminal organization.” Her mouth twisted in bitter amusement. “What the Empire lets them control.”

Trehipoi sat straight up, head craning as he studied the map “Yes,” he said.

Mon waved a hand and the contractor supply lines popped up “And this the amount of Imperial cargo coming out of those territories six months ago.”
Trehhipoi just looked at it “So?”

“This was two months ago.” The lines tripled. There was a shuffling of people at the table, Luke included. It was quite the effect to see it so plainly. Mon kept her eyes fixed on Trehhipoi “What we want to know is what you would like us to do about it?”

“That area of space is not my concern.” Trehhipoi said, his gaze locked into Mon’s “My concern is the liberation of Whiforial.”

Mon’s mouth twitched slightly “True, but you are in contact with the groups that are there.” Trehhipoi opened his mouth to protest and Mon waved a hand “I do not assume you are an idiot Trehhipoi, please do me the same courtesy.”

His mouth closed, and his eyes sharpened.

Ackbar leaned forward “We would like to cut these lines. The Hutts aren’t nearly as hard of a target to hit that the Empire is. But if we do this, it will mean trouble for the people living in that area of space.”

Trehhipoi snorted “They already know trouble.”

“Not like this,” Luke said, “The Empire will squeeze the Hutts and the Hutts will squeeze even harder then they are now.”

Trehhipoi waved a hand dismissively.

“No,” Obi-Wan said, “You know that the people in the Outer Rim have no idea what the Empire will do in order to make sure that those supplies are delivered.” He paused, then added cautiously “And we cannot predict what the Hutts would do in return.”

Trehhipoi’s head cocked “There must be other points that are equally as vulnerable as this one. Why pick it? Why involve the Outer Rim at all?” He looked at Luke and Leia’s set faces. He sat straight up in surprise, and he looked around the room “You are looking to start a revolt among the Hutts? Against the Empire?”

Pamlo nodded “We are hoping that will happen, yes.”

Trehhipoi sank back into his chair. He crossed his arms over his chest as he surveyed all of them. His gaze finally landed on Leia. “You would like me to pass this question along?”

“Yes,” Leia said, glancing at Mon, who gave a subtle nod of her head. “And if you would consider a place on the Alliance Council.”

This time Trehhipoi didn’t wait for Threepio’s translation. All of his feathers immediately stood straight up, and he almost came to his feet he straightened up so fast. He stared at Leia in dumbfounded shock, and then a series of long angry sounding flute noises came out of him.

Leia didn’t take her eyes off him, but she heard the gasps of several people as they realized Trehhipoi had reacted before Threepio could say anything. Trehhipoi went on for quite a while.

Realizing he wasn’t going to stop, Threepio shifted on his feet uncomfortably and said “While I understand what he is saying, I don't feel this venue is the appropriate place for such langua-”

Trehhipoi waved a hand cutting him off. Leia was almost sure the words out of his mouth were don’t bother. Threepio fell silent, and the rest of them stared at the Whiforialan.
“You understand Basic,” Ackbar said.

Trehhipoi nodded.

"Can you speak it?" Dodonna demanded, his white hair standing in very visible contrast to his furious red face.

Trehhipoi looked at Threepio and muttered something. "No," Threepio said, "he cannot."

Mon hummed at that, no anger on her face. So she had suspected and said nothing either, interesting. “Well, that will make things definitely easier.” She looked at him straight in the eyes, “I understand you might have some concerns, and this isn’t a decision you would take in anyway lightly.”

Leia thinned her shields just the slightest, to get a taste of Trehhipoi was thinking. Pure shock and astonishment were rippling off him. He truly hadn’t been expecting any of this. Well given the relations between the Alliance and him, Leia wasn’t sure why she was surprised.

Papa spoke up then “You will not be required to be here all the time. And if this is an offer you feel you can’t accept, we understand.” He leaned back a bit “This position doesn’t necessarily have to be filled by you, but we would appreciate a recommendation of someone you trust or have vetted from that area of space.”

“You are serious?” Trehhipoi asked, turning to Luke.

“Deadly,” her brother said.

Trehhipoi took in several deep breaths. “So this is to be some honorary position? A title, and no power?”

“No,” Papa said, “We intend for you to have an active vote on any and all actions the Alliance chooses to take.”

“Intend is not a guarantee,” Trehhipoi said “And out of everyone in this room, yours is the word I trust the least Senator Organa.”

Leia opened her mouth, to assure Trehhipoi it wouldn’t only be her father, but her as well fighting to make sure that his seat was real, but Papa leaned forward and cut her off before she could say anything.

“Why me?” he asked pleasantly. “There are several others here who I would think you would have a more bitter attitude towards.” He gestured to Obi-Wan “General Kenobi sits right there, and the Jedi were not kind to your planet during the Clone Wars. Many of our generals are former Imperials. I have never lifted a hand against your people, why is my word the one most suspect?”

“Because the Jedi were just the tools of the Republic. They went where they were told, and knew no better. But you,” Trehhipoi leaned forward and showed Papa his teeth “You were part of that body that set this all in motion.”

“So was Mon,” Papa said pleasantly, “And I don’t see you questioning her word.”

Trehhipoi’s back stiffened “I will not be lectured by a man who did nothing as world after world was swallowed whole by the Republic.”

Dodonna, his face red, sputtered “The Empire, not the Republic.”
Trehhipoi stopped speaking and hissed his tongue out. Threepio shot a nervous look at the general, and said, “I’m really not comfortable translating that gesture into Basic.”

“No,” Dodonna spat “by all means do. Let’s hear what this Separatist has to say.”

Trehhipoi’s face twisted, and his words were no less brutal coming in Threepio’s nasal voice “The Empire, the Republic, what difference does it make? They are the same to us. The only difference we could see was that one was backed by lightsabers and the other with blasters.”

Obi-Wan’s face was pale as he said “That is not true. The Jedi were nothing like the Imperial Army.”

“Hard to tell what the boot looks like when it’s pressed on your neck.” Trehhipoi’s voice got louder and louder, forcing Threepio to speak up in compensation “Where were the Jedi when the Trade Federation shut us out of all viable shipping lanes and our economy collapsed? Where were the Jedi when the Banking Clan got permission to raise our interest rates astronomically because of the poor economy that the Trade Federation created? Where were the Jedi when the Hutts and the slaver syndicates performed raids and stole away our people? Nowhere, General Kenobi, they were too busy attending to the “real” problems of the Core.”

“They didn’t have the authority,” Papa whispered, “The Senate had taken it away from them.”

“Ahh yes the Senate,” Trehhipoi was practically hissing. Leia saw Luke shoot her a questioning glance, but she shook her head. These were old grievances, and Trehhipoi had the right to speak them. He hadn’t tried to hurt anyone, he was only talking.

“That body couldn’t be concerned with anything unless it was the Core. And I see nothing here that leads me to believe you have changed.” Trehhipoi’s gaze bored into Papa’s “You only now join this fight when your own world is in danger.” He pointed at Mon “She has been in this since the beginning. She has been talking to us for years. And when the time was right she openly declared. She-”

“Was a symbol to you all,” Papa said, a muscle visibly clenching in his jaw “Coordinated with you all. I am aware.”

Trehhipoi’s hands slapped down on the table in frustration. “And you did nothing!” His voice stopped but Threepio went on, “The context of that statement is questioning your honor, Sir.”

Papa smiled bitterly “Yes, Threepio, I think I got that.”

Leia flushed, and then opened her mouth to defend her father, but Papa only shook his head.

“Yes,” he said, bitter regret lacing his tone “I did play the coward very well, didn’t I?” He looked at Trehhipoi, “You, of all people, should not judge on what seems to be.”

Trehhipoi bared his teeth, the feathers on his head standing straight up “I see a man who only takes risks when it is in his self-interest to do so. I see a human who is now concerned because the atrocities that have always existed are now being inflicted on the Core. I see someone who comes to the Outer Rim and demands our help. I see a man, from a soft world, a wealthy world, who has never seen a day of conflict in his life. I see-”

“The only living witness to a purge of a Jedi Temple,” Bail said quietly, interrupting the Whiforlan.

Trehhipoi stopped mid-sentence “What?” he demanded. Leia felt like the air had come to a standstill, everyone at the table staring at Papa in astonishment.
“I was there, the night the Temple on Coruscant fell.” Papa turning haunted eyes to Leia, and she sucked a breath in. She hadn’t known this about her father. He had told her about his work during the Clone Wars, the few conflicts he had found himself in, but not one word of this had he breathed.

“You mean you saw it from your cozy home,” Trehhipoi spat, but unless Leia’s ears were deceiving her, his voice now contained a wobble in it that hadn’t been there before. Palpatine and Vader been quite thorough on this, and she had never heard a whisper of there being a witness to what happened in any of the Temples, much less their main one.

Papa looked back over to him “No, I mean I was there.” He gave a small huff “You are right though, I did see that the temple was on fire from my home. Unlike everybody else with sense, I flew over there to help.”

His eyes grew distant, lost in a memory “I don’t know what I was thinking. I only had a personal blaster, no medical supplies, no training. All I could think was that someone needed to help them.”

“I was greeted on the landing pad by a troop of clones. When I asked what was going on, they told me that they had just put down an insurrection.”

Papa snorted in derision “Insurrection. Most able-bodied Jedi were in the field. The only ones left in the temple were the old, infirm, and the young.” His eyes closed “There was no glorious battle that night, just a slaughter.”

A slaughter led by Vader. Luke must have come to the same conclusion because she could feel his distress radiating in the Force, and under the table, she grabbed his hand and squeezed it in reassurance. He gave her a grateful look. Leia’s gaze slipped to Obi-Wan, but the man was hiding everything he was thinking on his face and in the Force. This probably wasn’t anything new to him. She let him be, it was the kindest thing she could do for him right now.

“I realized immediately what I had just stepped into in my haste, and I turned around to leave, thinking I could get help, or hide some of the Jedi, or warn the ones still in the field.”

Trehhipoi let out a high pitched whistle.

Papa didn’t even wait for Threepio’s translation, “Yes, I know. It was horribly naive of me to do that. To think they would let me go. No witnesses. Only the clone troopers and Vader.”

Grief caught on Papa’s face, “As soon as I had my back to them, they must have raised their blasters because that was when I heard the sound of a lightsaber igniting. I turned around and saw a Jedi,” his voice broke, and he shook his head “no, not a Jedi, he was just a boy. He was so small, standing in front of those troopers. That’s what I most remember about that night. How huge they looked compared to him.”

His hands came down flat on the conference table as he fought for control “He jumped between me and the troopers, and brought up his lightsaber, deflecting the shots meant for me.”

He gave Trehhipoi a sad smile “They had no idea he was there. If I hadn’t so foolishly rushed to the temple, he might have been able to escape. He gave his life to save mine.”

Papa swallowed hard “That was not my first brush with combat. I got caught in several such situations during the Clone Wars.” He gave Trehhipoi a bitter look “The Republic isn’t the only one who used dirty tactics. But that night is the one that haunts me the most.”

“So yes, I played the doting father, the career politician, only looking out from my interests and my
peoples. The power broker, who did what little he could to stem the Empire because there was nothing else he could do.” He gave a hard glance around the table, to all of them sitting there “I was already under suspicion for being a known political ally to the Jedi. Everything I did was all a lie the Emperor would believe.”

His gaze then fell into his lap, “Maybe even for a while it was true. Or at least I wanted to believe it was true. Perhaps I am somewhat of a coward. I so desperately wanted to avoid this.” He gestured to encompass the base in general “I didn’t want another war. I saw too much what open warfare has brought to the galaxy.”

“Some of us don’t get that luxury,” Trehhipoi said, but his tone was softer.

Papa nodded “I know. Which is why in the middle of the first year of the Empire I started slowly funneling money into various shell corporations on Alderaan, then into other, much harder to trace accounts off world.” He gave the Whifolrian a sad smile “Yes, Alderaan is a rich world, blessed with abundance and many resources. And much of what I personally had, I funneled into this Rebellion.”

Trehhipoi made some sort of choking noise.

Mon gave Trehhipoi a small smile “In those first years I was the voice, he was the money and the logistics.” Her smile slipped “And Senator Amidala was the flame who sent us all to our tasks.”

Luke’s attention narrowed in on Mon, and Leia wondered if anyone had bothered telling him that.

Papa went on “I used my time in the Senate and my mercy missions to suss out who would be receptive to our cause, and who would sell us out. I gathered allies who could move where I could not, who could speak when I could not. This was going to be a hard long slog either way we chose and I wanted us to be prepared.” Papa’s face darkened “I didn't want to end up like Cham Syndulla and his rebellion on Ryloth, who spent everything they had in one futile effort. If we were going to fight, we needed to be ready to do so for years.”

“But that took time, and in that time so many people suffered.” Papa looked at Trehhipoi “I understand why you are upset with me, and if that influences your decision so be it.”

Trehhipoi looked at Papa for a very long moment, then his gaze darted to Leia.

“There is no way your council has gone along with this,” Trehhipoi protested.

Palmo leaned forward, her dark eyes intent “It’s true there are a lot of recalcitrant members, some even in this room,” she acknowledged. Trehhipoi shot a glare at Dodonna, who at least had the decency to look abashed about his earlier comment “But this is a viable path forward.”

Mon nodded to the Senator, then addressed Trehhipoi “Before I went to war I wanted to see if the battle was even worth fighting. If you don’t want the position or think it isn’t a good idea to bring in anyone from the Outer Rim, we will drop it now.” She gave him a determined look “We will find another avenue of attack.”

Trehhipoi shook himself. “Am I to understand you are asking my opinion about the very existence of this seat?”

“Yes,” Papa said.

Trehhipoi looked at Luke, Leia, Obi-Wan, and then finally Papa. “The return of the Jedi and Core Worlders who are willing to listen. Who says miracles don’t happen?”
“Does that mean you’ll think about it?” Leia asked.

Trehhipoi did that awkward head nod of his, “That means I’m in, Your Highness.”

Leia gave him her fiercest smile. “Good.”

“To the overthrow of the Empire,” Trehhipoi said. ”And freedom for the Outer Rim.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer and AcycanCat

Translation into Russian available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Hi guys, first off, my apologies for the week delay in publishing this chapter. RL came up and bit me in the ass.
Second, I wanted to let you all know I've done something I thought I wouldn't do, outside of correcting typos. I went back to a previous chapter and changed the dialog. It's not a big thing, it happens in chapter 19 when Leia is listing off worlds occupied by the Empire, and she mentions Lothal. That is no longer canon complaint anymore. Since the Rebels finale gave me a solution to a plot problem I have been having, I figured it was easier to go back and change one word, rather than twisting myself in knots trying to explain why Leia thought Lothal was occupied when it wasn't. So I changed it to Jedha. It's not the biggest deal now, story-wise, I got that wrong, but I promise you, it will become one later. So, now that I've told you all that, as always I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In Leia’s mind, the meeting went downhill from Trehhipoi’s startling agreement to join the Alliance. Oh, nobody punched anybody, although there were several points were voices were heated. Dodonna was especially stubborn. Even with what he had learned, about how both the Republic and the Separatists had been manipulated by the same Sith Lord, old habits, and old mistrusts died hard.

Trehhipoi, to his credit, managed to mostly ignore the older general. Probably because they were seated on opposite sides of the circular table. And helped by the fact that the rest of the military leadership there was proving to be much more reasonable.

From Mon’s perspective, the meeting went perfectly. Leia found it all so boring. She knew that it was necessary, vital even, but still boring. There was the long explanation of what having a seat on the council actually meant. That segued into what Trehhipoi’s responsibilities would be. This was a clear area of contention, on all sides. The Council never had a member whose first loyalty lied so clearly and pointedly elsewhere.

“I will not take such an oath,” Trehhipoi said.

Dodonna’s grin was triumphant “So we cannot trust you to put our interests first.”

“We can trust him to put the destruction of the Empire first General,” Obi-Wan’s calm voice said. Trehhipoi looked over at the Jedi.

“That’s not enough!” Dodonna protested.

Leia didn't remember the old general ever being this unreasonable. Then again they hadn’t tried to incorporate representatives from the Rim into their leadership at this high of a level. Even other Luke, after his Jedi training with Yoda, hadn’t been given this much power. By his own choice. He was listened to, oh yes, but at the time he felt that he needed to focus on refining his training and working on rescuing Han from Jabba. Upon reflection, Leia also knew that other Luke was still reeling from the revelation of who Vader was to him, and thought he was in no place mentally to
assume responsibility for anything else. Not only had he refused a council seat, he had also
resigned as the leader of the Rogue Squadron.

“My first loyalty is to the Jedi,” Obi-Wan remarked simply “That was true during the Clone Wars,
it is even more true now. Does that make me an ally that you cannot trust?”

Dodonna snapped his mouth shut. “No,” he muttered.

“Then perhaps we should allow that Trehhipoi will see to the interests of his people before he sees
to ours, just like so many of us here.” Obi-Wan gave Dodonna a gentle nod.

“Like myself,” Leia added giving the General a disappointed look “I can’t say the freedom of
Alderaan isn’t my highest concern. As one of the royal family, it would be treasonous if that were
not true."

“And I as well,” Papa said.

Dodonna’s eyes darted around the table, taking in everyone's nod of agreement. He would find no
allies on this point. She heard Trehhipoi give out a small trill of thanks.

“Now that we have that settled,” Mon said, “Perhaps we can work out the logistics?” She turned to
her left and addressed Trehhipoi directly “What kind of encryption equipment do you have access
too?”

And then it was an in-depth discussion of the logistics of coordinating with a member who would
be off world most of the time. There was some talk of giving him a ship capable of lightspeed, but
Ackbar was the one who shot that idea down.

“We don’t have anything to give him Senator Mothma,” the Mon Calamari said. His shoulders
slumped “We don’t have enough ships now to cover our own needs. Perhaps in six months, but
realistically we are looking at a year.”

Trehhipoi’s teeth bared. She could feel his rolling disappointment and wondered why. They were
only offering him a cargo ship, to get him here to Yavin. What other use could he have for it? It’s
not like it would work as a bomber, and given how interspersed the Imperial personnel were
among the native population of Whiforla, an aerial bombing wasn’t something he could pull off
without endangering his own people.

“Could we steal one?” Luke asked.

They all turned to look at him. Leia wasn’t surprised, Luke had been quiet through the entire
meeting. He hadn’t drifted off, quite the contrary. He had watched it all, face absorbed. She was
glad one of them was interested. She couldn’t quite muster up the same enthusiasm. This was like
every other meeting she had attended in her life. The only difference was the names and the fine
details. It was all about who got the power, who got the credit, and who was actually going to do
the work.

Madine cocked his head “Not a bad idea,” he said, “but an Imperial ship would only draw attention
to him when he’s using it.” He shot the Whiforlan a sorrowful look “Given the Empire’s
reluctance to hire non humans, who would you suggest would pilot the ship? Because one of his
own people piloting an Imperial vessel will definitely draw attention. Not to mention they wouldn’t
be able to speak to any other Imperial vessels that could potentially hail them.”

Papa leaned forward “And we don’t steal from civilian targets. For practical reasons obviously, we
don’t want to anger the populace we are trying to help. But from a public relations standpoint, it
doesn't work out well either.”

Luke shook his head “I wasn’t thinking of either of those options. I was thinking we could steal one from the Hutts.”

Everyone got quiet, even Leia. Why the hell hadn’t she thought of that?

Luke stared back at them defensively, face slightly reddening “Well, we are about to go to war with them aren’t we?” he asked “Why are we so worried about pissing them off? They tend to have fast and armed ships, which are designed to run blockades. So why not take one of those?”

“Now there is an idea,” Madine said, looking at Luke with new respect. “I would hold off until we actually start hitting them in earnest.” He gave Luke a small smile “I would hate for the element of surprise to be thrown away over a single shuttle, but it is certainly something we should look for an opportunity to do.”

And steal some for the Alliance too, Leia finished in her head, although Madine didn’t say that part out loud.

Trehhipoi slapped the table “Excellent,” Threepio said. “He said when you think it would be strategic to do so he will be more than happy to help.”

Mon raised an eyebrow.

“It is to facilitate my relationship with the Alliance,” Trehhipoi said, “It would be selfish of me not to offer my assistance.”

“True,” Mon said neutrally. Leia frowned. Mon’s tells were only apparent to people who had known her for years. She shot a look at her father, but he only shook his head. So he had seen it too and had no more idea then she did. What had Mon just realized about this that she had missed?

Leia thought the negotiations about Trehhipoi’s responsibilities to the Alliance were a bit harsh, but the talk about revealing his contacts in the Outer Rim got downright nasty.

“No,” Trehhipoi warbled, standing up and putting both hands on the table “I swore to these people I would not give their names to anyone. I keep my word.”

“We need to know,” Dodonna said, “If we don’t know who they are, or where they are, how will we know what they are capable of doing?”

Ackbar cleared his throat “I hate to admit it, but Dodonna is correct,” he said. “If we are in anyway going to coordinate.”

“You mean order them,” Trehhipoi snapped.

“No, I mean coordinate,” Ackbar said.

Trehhipoi shook his head “No, I have heard this spiel before. They will do the dying, and you will reap the rewards.”

“All of us here are willing to die,” Senator Pamlo sputtered, her mouth tightening. “Just being here is a death sentence for all of us.”

Trehhipoi’s feathers drooped, and he tapped his fingers on the table “I didn’t mean to insult your courage Senator,” he said finally looking to his left, past the people sitting between him and her
“But you and Mon are too young to remember the Republic ordering countless local forces to go in and deal with the Hutts, or the pirates that came in and seized what they wanted.”

“After the local armed forces expelled the invaders, the business and banking clans came in. They petitioned the Republic and legally seized control of what was left of the planet’s resources.”

Trehhipoi practically spat the next words “For the planet’s own good. Of course, they couldn’t be trusted to manage their own affairs peacefully. And anyone in a position to stop them was gone.”

Leia shot her father a horrified look. Had the Republic done that? Countless times? She could read nothing in his expression. How had she not even heard a whisper of this?

She wondered how much of this history had been erased by Palpatine. That wasn't his way. He didn't even bother with waiting until a system was weak, the Empire just came in and took.

But that did lead to the question of how much of this information had been erased by members of the New Republic? Maybe not for malicious reasons. After the horror that was Imperial rule, even the mismanagement of the Old Republic must have looked very appealing in retrospect. The Old Republic had its problems, but they had never designed and built planet killers. They at least gave lip service to abolishing slavery, instead of actively encouraging it.

“Perhaps reciprocation is in order?” Obi-Wan suggested in a cool tone.

Trehhipoi looked at him “What do you mean?” he asked, retaking his seat.

“If you give us access to your network, we will give you access to ours.”

There was an immediate chorus of no’s from almost everyone at the table. Obi-Wan waited until Mon called them to order, and gave them all a bland smile “I don’t see the problem,” he said reasonably “It is after all what we are asking him to do.”

“Our network was years in the making,” Madine sputtered.

“And his was not?” Obi-Wan countered.

“If he slips even the slightest, has even the smallest break anywhere along his command structure—”

Dodonna whispered horrified “the Empire will slaughter all of our spies in the most horrible ways imaginable. And probably live on the holonet.”

Leia thought it was doubtful that would happen to all of them. The Empire liked to maintain the illusion that the people in its ranks were all loyal, patriotic and self-sacrificing. Admitting that spies existed, some who were very high up in the Imperial bureaucracy, in public no less, could shatter that image. They would still die horribly, but in a dark cell somewhere, not on the holonet.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said “and does not his network also run the same risk? More so even. Not everyone in the Outer Rim is rebelling against the Hutts. The Empire does directly control a quarter of that area of space. So not only does his network have to contend with that enemy finding his people, they also have to worry about the Hutts.”

Obi-Wan’s voice slipped into a lecturing tone “The Hutts may not have all the resources that the Empire does, but they do live a long time. I’m sure what they lack in their ability to reach a wide audience, can be more than made up for with their experience when it comes to painful executions.”

Leia leaned back in her chair. The Negotiator, her father had called Obi-Wan. He wasn’t wrong. That was the most polite way she had ever heard anyone be taken out at the knees. All while
appearing to be reasonable and not taking sides. She wanted to stand up and applaud him.

She chose to speak up instead. “Trust must be earned.” All heads swiveled towards her. “I think we can all agree on that. Perhaps we can revisit this issue in six months?” She leaned forward “Meanwhile, if we find something of interest to the Outer Rim, we pass it along, with our suggestions of what to do with it, but no orders.” She turned to Trehhipoi “And we will hold you to the same bargain with your people and contacts. The amount of damage that internal leaks and traitors could cause will be minimized, and we can all get a feel for what we want this relationship to entail.”

“No other council member had such concessions made for them,” Pamlo argued.

“No,” Leia agreed “And I’m apparently in the dark of much of what happened during the Clone Wars,” and oh she would be having a chat with her parents about that, “but it’s clear there are old resentments, on both sides. We need a way forward. We don’t have to seal any deal now.”

“So you propose a trial period?” Mon asked.

Leia nodded her head, “Yes. It will help alleviate the valid concerns both sides have.”

There was a long pause at that, as everyone thought about what she said. They weren’t done, not by a long shot, but Dodonna’s stomach let out a loud gurgle in that silence.

There were a few nervous titters at the sound. Trehhipoi’s feathers went straight up. “What was that?” he asked, Threepio’s translation adding a condescending quality to the question “Are you sick?”

Mon looked amused, and Dodonna flushed bright red.

“No, it means he’s hungry,” Mon explained. She glanced down to the chrono on her wrist “We should eat,” she said. “No sense in letting hunger destroy what progress we have made. We all have a lot to think about.”

There were nods of assent, and Leia pushed her chair back and stood up gratefully. She began stretching out the kinks in her neck. Before the end there, she had been so close to just twirling her chair and declare everybody there an idiot, just to get them to stop. Well, not really, but she certainly had thought very hard about doing it.

“That wasn’t so bad,” Luke said, as he stood up too.

Leia snorted “A lot of talk about what should be obvious to anyone.”

Luke’s grin was openly mocking “Weren’t you the one who said establishing boundaries was important?”

She didn’t like it when he used her words against her.

Fortunately for Luke, Trehhipoi came over, Threepio trailing in his wake before she could cut his ego down to its correct size.

“Later,” she growled at her twin and turned to the Whiforlan. “Care to eat with us?” she invited.

He bowed “I would be honored.”

Leia looked at him critically “Preferences?” she asked, “Any restrictions we should know about?”
“No, we can eat the same things as a human,” Trehhipoi swayed slightly from side to side “Do you have anything besides ration bars?” he asked eagerly.

Luke grinned “You are in luck,” he told Trehhipoi “There was a raid a week ago on an Imperial depot. We have the finest food stolen from Imperial troops.”

“A step up from my usual fare,” Trehhipoi said.

Luke clucked his tongue “Now, that is sad.” he said, as they started to walk to the mess hall. “Maybe not for Leia,” he said thoughtfully “She likes those things.”

“I never said that I liked them,” Leia countered, “I said I didn’t mind them.”

“I don’t care if you serve me the blandest food here, as long as it’s something different.” Trehhipoi declared.

Leia grew concerned. She stopped Trehhipoi with a gentle hand on his arm. “You all are doing okay aren’t you?” she asked. Trehhipoi’s group was bound to one planet. She had heard no whisper of them having a ship capable of leaving orbit.

It suddenly clicked in her mind why Trehhipoi was so interested in a ship capable of lightspeed. What Mon had figured out in that meeting room. Currently, his options for food were to pay for it, a problem since he had admitted they needed money. Or they could go raiding. The only targets he had were the Imperials or his own people. Leia knew Trehhipoi would probably starve before he tried the latter option.

That left stealing from the Empire. Trehhipoi and his group had been at this for a long time. In consequence, those depots on Whiforla were probably heavily fortified, even more so than the standard ones on other planets. With a ship capable of hyperspeed, he could cast a further net out. He didn’t want a ship to bomb targets, he wanted one so he could steal.

Trehhipoi stiffened “We’re fine,” he said, voice going high. Wonderful, in her concern, she managed to insult him. “It’s just the same food day after day can get boring.” His feathers flattened “We have enough.”

Leia wondered how many times Trehhipoi had gone without food. How many times they sacrificed what they did have for their families.

“Mon set aside some food for you to take back with you,” she said softly. Trehhipoi gave a little chattering noise, and she held up a hand. There was pride, and then there was stupidity. “I believe you when you say you are doing fine. But I’ve seen what the Empire does to occupied worlds. If your group doesn’t need it, there is no doubt in my mind your people do.”

“You would just give it to us?” he asked suspiciously “To do with as we see fit?”

Luke’s face was sad “Has that happened before? Strings attached to offers of help?”

Trehhipoi’s teeth clicked together several times in agitation.

Leia closed her eyes, keeping the rant inside of her head. Damn the Alliance for their high handedness. Also, damn Draven for his paranoia. If not for that he would have been in that meeting, presenting his full support for Trehhipoi. He had been right about this whole situation, and she and Mon could have used the support.

She opened her eyes and said gently “It’s meant to be compensation for your time,” she said. “This
is not contingent on you taking this seat. We know it was a huge effort to get you here. And to leave your people was not a small thing to ask. As it is payment, what right do we have to tell you how to spend it?"

Trehhipoi’s eyes widened. He shuffled his feet for a second then asked in a low tone "You really do not need it?" Leia got the sense of dubiousness from him.

She gave him a small smile “Despite the surge in our recruits lately it has not been enough to replace all the personnel we lost.” She shrugged “Frankly we have too much. It will go bad if you don’t take it. That’s why we chose the food over money, even though I am well aware you need that just as much."

He gave out a low whistle “Then why take it?"

Luke snorted “Don’t leave any supplies in the hands of your enemy. We were there, it wasn’t too much more work to grab it all.”

That was true, but it was also true that the raiding group had forgotten they didn’t need as much food anymore.

Trehhipoi looked serious “If I asked, would you tell me how many you lost at Alderaan?”

Trehhipoi would die before he would tell the Empire anything. You didn’t engage in a guerilla war for as long as he had, one that started against a different enemy no less, no matter how little difference he saw between the Republic and the Empire, without being incredibly stubborn. The information he was asking for was something she was sure the Empire’s analyst had already made a guess at. A little bit of information for the goodwill it would build.

“It wasn’t just Alderaan,” she said. “It was the raid on Scarif as well.” Her voice grew tight “We lost a little over half our fleet in about a week between those two actions.”

Trehhipoi was quiet at that, and they started to walk again to the mess hall. “Why were you on Scarif?” he finally asked, “I heard about it, but nobody knew why the Alliance decided to raid it.”

“That’s where the plans were.” Luke explained, “The full schematics for the Death Star were held at the installation there.”

His feathers went up “We could only dream of having such a high-level source.”

“And he died for his efforts,” Luke said grimly. “All of the galaxy owes Galen Erso a great debt.”

“Erso?” Trehhipoi squawked “Galen Erso? The top weapons designer for the Empire?”

Leia understood his anger. Erso was a name that had been a target for years. Even before there had been anything close to a formal Alliance, just independent cells, names were traded. They were still given out, even in the climate that nineteen years of Imperial rule had fostered. Where there were so many groups rebelling, with so many different agendas, and so much mistrust between them.

The Alliance tried to make sure the more radicalized groups didn’t get the information directly from them. Those groups tended to kill civilians in their effort to kill the target. But other then that, the informal network was still in operation today. This person needs to be stopped. This governor takes slaves. This Admiral will automatically kill a tenth of a rioting population. For the last decade or so, Erso had been one of those names traded.

“He was working for them!” Trehhipoi said, voice clearly agitated. Several people’s heads turned
in curiosity to look at them. “From the beginning he was there! He-

“Ran as soon as he understood that,” Leia said almost yelling. “He took his wife and daughter, and with the help of Saw Guerra he ran to where he hoped they would never find him.”

Trehhipoi’s mouth clicked shut. Leia was sorry for cutting him off so rudely, but Erso had given much, and his name deserved to be remembered. He had done his best in a bad situation.

“Of course we know how the Empire responds when it’s denied something it wants,” she said darkly, as they entered the bustling dining hall.

“They take it.” Trehhipoi said. “And what did that mean for Erso?”

“His wife was killed right in front of him,” she said. Luke looked fascinated. Leia wondered if anyone had explained just how those plans ended up in R2. She knew she hadn’t. Then again most of this story, especially what happened to Erso’s family, was something she learned about years from the original event. “They didn’t get his daughter, but they got him. They pressed him into service, exploited that brilliant mind of his.”

“He could have chosen to die with his wife,” Trehhipoi said flatly.

“He knew they would just find someone else to design it,” Leia said hotly.

Luke snorted “Probably ten someone’s.”

“For money, there is much a lot would do,” Leia agreed. She gave a small laugh “Even then, they hadn’t beaten him. He could slow the construction down. He could make the process last fourteen years instead of only a few.”

She looked Trehhipoi straight in the eye “And he could put a flaw in for someone to exploit. He deliberately made that thing vulnerable to attack. Then he risked everything to make sure we knew about it.”

“He wasn’t a warrior,” she said “or even a soldier. But he fought with the only weapons he had. My people, my planet, owes him a great debt.”

Trehhipoi’s eyes fell away “And the daughter?” he asked, “What happened to her?”

“She died on Scarif when the Empire used that weapon against their own base.” Trehhipoi let out a surprised squawk. Leia smiled grimly “Tarkin,” she explained “He was trying to keep us from getting those plans.”

“He failed,” he said.

“He almost succeeded,” she countered. “I got away from the initial battle, but I was caught soon after.” Then a wry grin twisted her mouth “It was just luck that Luke was the one who found the droid I had placed them in.”

Luke blushed at the compliment. Trehhipoi waved his hand “Then I offer my apologies. If what you say is true, then we all owe him a great debt.”

She bowed to him “Thank you for listening,” she said. Then she grinned “I know I can get a bit intense.”

“Aren’t we all your Highness?” he asked in response, waving his hand to encompass the whole
Leia didn’t argue with him. It was the truth.

“Please call me Leia,” she said.

Trehhipoi’s feathers on his forehead went up, but none of the others on his head did. “Of course,” he said.

Luke’s stomach growled then, cutting them both off. Trehhipoi turned to him. “How does your kind survive if you make this much noise?” Trehhipoi asked.

Luke asked “Are there large predators on your world where that would cause issues?”

Trehhipoi said “Yes, they are called zimpalions.” He gestured to Leia “They grow to be as tall as her at the shoulder, and they have a large prehensile tail they wrap around their prey.”

“Well, doesn't that sound like fun,” Luke muttered.

“Let me guess,” Leia said dryly “They hunt by sound?”

Trehhipoi made his odd jerky nod. “Their range of hearing is similar to human’s.”

That made sense then why half of what he said was hidden from her.

“I wish I could hear the full breadth of your language,” Leia said without thinking.

Trehhipoi gave a high note squeak “Why?” Threepio asked for him.

She smiled “When you were talking right now, it was like a song. If even that limited amount is beautiful, what would the full thing be?”

Trehhipoi paused for a moment, considering. Then he laid a hand on Leia’s cheek. Threepio let out a startled “Oh my!” But Leia was too caught in the emotions rolling off Trehhipoi to pay much mind to the droid.

He whistled something, and Threepio said, somewhat breathlessly “He says, ‘thank you’.”

Leia frowned, “For what?” she asked puzzled.

Trehhipoi’s hand dropped from her cheek, and he responded. But Threepio didn’t translate, just answered him back in his own language. Leia picked up her name said by Threepio several times, but nothing else.

Finally, Trehhipoi fell silent and Threepio turned to address her “He wishes to know if you would reconsider your stance on marrying him.”

Leia blinked, her mind trying to play catch up on the one eighty this conversation had taken. Then she had to swallow a laugh. It wouldn’t do. All she was getting off Trehhipoi was a deadly earnestness.

“What did you ask Threepio?” she inquired to Trehhipoi.

Trehhipoi looked at her for another long moment, then looked at the droid. He gave a noise.

Threepio cleared his throat nervously “He asked if you were real, Your Highness.”

Leia blushed. There was no other word for it. All her diplomatic training abandoned her at that
straightforward compliment. She could feel it spread across her skin, her cheeks warming.

Trehhipoi gave an inquisitive noise, and leaned forward, examining her face.

“Can I ask you a question?” Trehhipoi asked.

Leia smiled nervously. Oh please, by any god who is willing to listen, don’t let it be a straight out proposal of marriage. She had received several proposals in her youth, mostly done for political purposes. That had all stopped when she married Han. But she was severely out of practice in turning someone down gracefully. “Of course.”

He pointed to her face. “Does that hurt?”

Leia frowned “Does what hurt?”

“When your skin changes color? I had always wondered but I wasn’t in the...position to ask.”

The simple question saddened her. There was no question in her mind of how badly his people had been treated by the Empire. She had seen too much of that form of violence. But how fraught was his relationship with most of the Alliance, if he was so worried about asking about such a common human physiological reaction?

Maybe it wasn’t that bad, Leia tried to reason with herself. Perhaps he hadn’t asked anyone here for fear of giving offense or looking stupid. The relationship between the two groups was difficult enough without indulging in curiosity.

“No,” she told Trehhipoi “it doesn’t hurt. It usually means embarrassment or..” she trailed off. Some cultures had very conservative views about talking about sexual matters in public. She wasn’t familiar enough with Whiforlan culture to know what their stance on that was. She didn't think Trehhipoi himself would be offended, but it was best not to risk it.

He gave an inquiring noise at her sudden trailing off. She shook her head, “Personal,” she said firmly.

Trehhipoi made a noise at Threepio, and the droid just huffed. Apparently, that was enough for the Whiforlan, because he gave Leia a sly look.

“Not that this isn’t fun,” Luke remarked, “But I am very hungry.” He gestured to the serving line “Shall we?”

Trehhipoi’s gaze fell back on her brother. “Of course.”

True to his word, Trehhipoi sampled everything. He took a small portion of each offering, bringing it up to his nose to smell, and if it passed muster, placed it on his plate. He really must be bored with the food he had, Leia thought. She could only stare in astonishment at the amount of food he was able to pile onto his plate.

They made their way to the tables. Curious looks were being sent their way by the people already here. It was probably all over the base Trehhipoi was here, and since none of them were hostile, Leia chooses not to say anything.

They made their way to a table that was mostly empty. She hoped that the others would take the hint, and not crowd them. Trehhipoi kept shooting nervous glances all around him. It had probably been a long time since he had been in a room this crowded, and Leia knew well the itchy feeling that still sometimes produced under her skin.
They began to eat their food. Trehhipoi took his time, savoring each bite. Leia was done before him and Luke. She still was in the habit of eating her food as fast as she could. While she waited for the other two to finish, she looked around the room. She saw Mon, Madine, and Dodonna, also isolated from the crowds, sitting together. They all seemed to be talking very animatedly with each other, and Leia had a feeling that Dodonna was only going to dig his heels in even more when they got back to the meeting.

"Who are you looking for?" Luke’s voice drifted across her mind.

"Obi-Wan," she answered.

Luke frowned “I think he went to his quarters to eat. Why do you want to know?”

Dammit.

“I think he isolates himself too much,” she said.

She felt a wave of startlement from Luke, followed by understanding. “What do you want to do about it?” he asked.

“Encouraging him to eat among the general populace might be a good place to start,” she said wryly.

He was alone for a very long time,” Luke pointed out and he nodded his head subtly to the half-filled room “I think that eating here would be a bit overwhelming for him Leia.”

“True ,” she bit her lip “Maybe we make sure he doesn’t eat alone?”

“We could start there,” Luke agreed. "I'm sure Rex would be happy to get involved."

Leia smirked. Rex could be quite the mother hen when he focused in on someone. She was sure her parents wouldn’t mind either.

“When is your next training session with him?” Leia asked.

“Tomorrow. Why?”

She hesitated, an unable to find a subtle way to phrase it asked bluntly “Can you touch him?”

“Excuse me?”

“I mean can you touch him more often,” she elaborated. “You’ve always been very free with physical affection. I will too,” she hastened to add “It’s just I think you can pull it off more naturally then I can.”

“Why?”

She thought of the longing in Obi-Wan’s eyes when she reached out to him. “I think he’s touched starved. Insanely so.”

Luke thought about that “You’re probably right. Sure, it’s not a problem.”

The silence went on until Trehhipoi let out something that was close to a sigh. He pushed his nearly clean plate away from himself.

“Good?” Leia asked, amused.
He patted his belly “Very,” he said.

“I’m glad,” she said lightly.

He regarded her with solemn eyes “You surprised me when I arrived.” he said out of nowhere. He turned his head to Luke “You both did.”

Leia frowned, “How?”

“Because you told no one I understand Basic.”

She and Luke exchanged glances. Then they looked back at Trehhipoi. “Why would we?” asked Luke. “It has no relevance to the Alliance, nor is it a threat to us. You went to great lengths to hide it, so why would we tell anyone?”

He looked back and forth between the two of them. “The pilot, Solo. Him I understand. He works for money, and the Alliance did not pay him to tell them my secrets.” He pointed to the two of them “But you two. I have no frame of reference for you two.”

He swung his finger to Luke “I know you grew up under the Hutts in the Outer Rim. But most of the people who join the Alliance from there, try to pretend they never came from the Rim. Especially if they are human.”

Luke shook his head “I think you are over generalizing.”

“Am I?” And Leia wondered how true that perception was. She didn’t really pay attention to where most of the ex-Alliance people had settled after the Galactic Concordance. Had most of the Outer Rim recruits settled in the Core. Or was Trehhipoi only seeing a very small section of the people from here? Then his finger swung into Leia’s direction.

“And you,” he said. “You came up with this idea. To put me on the Alliance Council. Me?!?”

Her mouth twitched “No good idea is the product of one person.”

Trehhipoi whistled through his teeth. “But you were the start. You remembered us.”

Leia squirmed “Luke did too,” she protested. She wasn’t comfortable with the credit he was giving her. She hadn’t remembered last time. No, that was her not fully facing her responsibility of what had happened to the Rim.

It wasn’t that she hadn’t remembered the Outer Rim. It was that she thought it was something that could wait. That the New Republic needed to get on its feet, then extend a hand to the Rim. So many of their soldiers had come from that area of space. Surely the debt owed to them was enough? The Alliance wouldn’t abandon them.

She had been wrong. So bitterly wrong on all fronts. The New Republic had forgotten what was owed. In the chaos that was left in the wake of the destruction of the Hutt’s empire, they had hesitated. As if the dissolution of that criminal empire had just somehow happened. As if the New Republic had not sought just that event to help cripple the Empire. As if it hadn't helped bring it about.

They had tried, oh how the people living in that area of space had tried. Even Tatooine had a provisional government in those first years. It had had its problems, what government didn’t, but it was there. And those worlds had turned for membership to the Republic and had been turned away. After that is had only been a matter of time until each government collapsed. They didn’t
have the resources or infrastructure they needed. What they had was long rotted away from years of neglect, or outright stolen by the Empire. Their farm worlds had been stripped of everything they had, and they were reliant on the Core for food. They needed the protections that membership to the Republic would have offered them. Without them they were easy pickings for the industrialists from the Core, looking to exploit them further. Then the criminal gangs had come, and finally the First Order.

Luke had warned her that would happen. That the attitudes to the Outer Rim were too ingrained too deep in too many in power. That unless they were pushed, they would never see the need to look beyond their own problems. Leia had been guilty of that too. She had thought it could hold for a little while. There was just so much to do in those first frantic years. She had thought they had time, and that those governments could survive longer then they had.

It was naive of her. There were too many in power that hadn't wanted to see that particular status quo challenged. From the Core, yes, but also the gangs left scrambling to replace the Hutts. This was something she couldn't lay at the feet of the First Order. They had exploited the situation they had found there, but they hadn't created it. No, that had all been greed and short sightedness.

The Outer Rim didn’t need the Core to show them the way, or whatever such nonsense she had thought in her youth. They did need supplies, ideas, connections. But they should decide for themselves what they wanted. Leia knew, even here with all the foreknowledge she had, she wouldn’t be able to steer the New Republic to help them. But maybe, just maybe, she could swing enough so that the Outer Rim was at the mercy of no one, including the New Republic. She was aware this was something that several Senators had argued against because it would create a government that was hostile to them on their own doorstep. That strategy hadn’t bought them much and cost them everything. A hostile government had appeared, but it had sucked up the resources of the Outer Rim, and all those people there had paid the price.

“You think this will work?” Trehhipoi asked.

“I wouldn’t have suggested it if I thought it wouldn’t,” she said.

“Ahh, we just need to talk out our differences, and everything will be fine?” Trehhipoi asked mockingly.

“No, because both sides have something the other wants,” Leia said reasonably.

Trehhipoi’s eyes widened, “You are far more practical then I first thought.”

“Thank you,” she said pleasantly.

“And what do you want Leia?” he asked.

“The Empire to be gone,” she said automatically.

He waved his hand “No, that is your goal. What do you want?”

Leia thought about it, really thought about it. “My loved ones to be safe. My planet to be free.” She looked at Trehhipoi “I want a fair and just government to rule us all.”

“And who is us?” Trehhipoi asked.

“Every sentient in the galaxy.”

“So you would replace one order with another?”
“No,” she shook her head.

“Excuse me?”

She looked at him “I would like a galactic government if only to prevent recurring wars between systems. The Republic had its flaws,” and she would be asking a lot of pointed questions about that in the coming months “but for over a thousand years the galaxy avoided wide-scale conflict.” She held up a hand “Yes, I know, not for everyone, but for many. And the Outer Rim wasn’t always as vulnerable as it became in the later centuries of the Republic.”

“And if the Outer Rim decides to form its own government?” Trehhipoi’s question was pointed.

“Then I wish you well,” she said. “But I don’t think you can do it alone.”

“Because the Core knows best?” he asked, his hands tightening to fists on the table.

“No,” she corrected gently “because the Core has stolen every tool you will need to do it.”

His eyes widened, then he leaned forward “It would be much easier if you agreed to an alliance.”

Leia’s mind scrambled to come up with a polite refusal. She was pretty sure Trehhipoi had no interest in her physically, at least she didn't get that sense from him, but he was intrigued by her mind and connections.

Luke’s voice was puzzled “I thought that was why you were here?” he asked.

“He doesn't mean the Alliance Luke,” she hissed.

Trehhipoi’s head bobbed back and forth, and he turned to Luke “Although you are not as experienced in politics, I can’t argue that you don’t have a brilliant strategic mind. I wouldn't mind an alliance with you either.”

Luke’s face turned bright red as he understood what Trehhipoi was saying. “Oh,” he said weakly “that kind of alliance.”

“What kind of alliance?” Han’s voice asked from behind her. Leia felt her back stiffen involuntarily.

“Captain Solo!” Threepio proclaimed. “Trehhipoi was just asking her Highness-”

“My opinion on what makes a strong government,” she said smoothly. She hadn’t known he was still here. She didn’t have the heart this morning to go to the hangar bay and check. “I didn't realize you were still on base.”

He looked at her, then quickly away. He sat down next to Luke, “Trehhipoi” he said.

“So was this meeting worth your time?” he asked, pulling Luke’s plate towards himself “You done with this Kid?” he asked belatedly.


Han looked around, “Everything okay?” he asked

Leia gave him a false smile “We’re fine.” The last thing they needed was him to hear a marriage
proposal to her, from another man.

Han looked at her briefly, then his glance quickly fell to Trehhipoi “So when do you want to leave?”

Trehhipoi shook his head “It turns out this might take longer than I initially thought.”

Han’s eyes again flicked to Leia’s then away. If she hadn’t been studying him so intently she would have missed it. “Really?” he asked, then shoved a forkful of food into his mouth.

“Is that a problem?” Trehhipoi asked, leaning back.

Han swallowed his mouthful of food “I get paid either way,” he said. He turned to Luke “If I’m still here, you want to work on the Falcon tonight?” It appeared that one of them had been forgiven.


Han frowned “You sure you’re alright?”


“Okay,” Han walked away without even saying hello to her.

Leia’s eyes followed Han as he walked out of the hall.

“I see,” Threepio said.

Leia turned back, “See what Threepio?” she asked.

Threepio’s voice was shocked “Oh that wasn’t me, Your Highness. That was Mister Trehhipoi.”

She turned to face him “See what?”

Trehhipoi’s eyes were crinkled as he studied her. “That you were being polite when you said you were not in the market for a husband.”

Wonderful, Trehhipoi, who had known her for at best two days, had picked up on her feelings for Han.

“No,” she said firmly “I am not.”

Luke snorted, and she glared at him. Then she turned to Trehhipoi, trying to salvage this. “But I won’t deny that he has a certain appeal.”

Trehhipoi let out his grinding laugh. “We should all be so open for such chances,” he proclaimed. “Is there nothing I can do to convince you?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“Ah, well. I had to try.” He turned to Luke “And you young Dameron?”

Luke shook his head. “No. I’m afraid too much of my life is wrapped up here. I can’t be what you would need in such a partnership.”

Trehhipoi clicked his teeth together. “That is a shame,” he said simply. Then he leaned back “Shall
we return to the meeting room? If a personal alliance between us is impossible, let’s see if we can forge a more political one?"

It took two more meetings to settle all the details, they ended up having to break for dinner too. The last one winding down in the wee hours of the night. In the end everyone was not exactly happy but they had an agreement everyone could live with. Mon offered Trehhipoi a bed to sleep in for the night, but the Whiforlan waved the offer away. He wanted to go home. Mon agreed, and then the newest provisional member of the Alliance Leadership Council walked into the Falcon.

ABA - Day 115

Leia was in the hanger bay. She was off to the side of the pilot’s changing room, waiting for Luke to come out and join her for lunch. Rex was eating lunch with Obi-Wan. And Evaan’s shift in the CAP was coming up.

Luke had told her he would meet her here. She watched the various pilots start coming out of the room, heading off to their own quarters, or just blending into the general chaos that was the hanger bay. She was just about to stomp in there, looking for Luke, when she heard a low voice rumble behind her <Why are you avoiding Han?>

She stiffened and turned around to face Chewbacca. “I’m not avoiding him,” she said defensively. ‘He knows how to find me if he wants to."

Chewie huffed at that. <If you know him half as well as you claim too, you know he won’t.> He bared his teeth in a vaguely intimidating gesture <And I don’t see that changing anytime soon.>

He wasn’t wrong. Han had never run from a problem. Oh no, he’d say it was a strategic avoidance. Leia bared her teeth back at him in frustration “I wanted to give him time.”

<To do what?> Chewie asked <Let his mind come up with the worst possible scenario?>

“No,” Leia protested. “I thought he should set the pace. I think I’ve taken away enough of his choices don’t you?”

<No. I think you wanted to avoid the subject,> the Wookie countered.

Leia’s temper snapped “He’s a big boy,” she said “Why do I have to be the one who makes the first move? Communication is a two-way street.”

<Because you are older.> Then mindful of the fact they were hardly alone in the bustling bay, he gave her a light mocking bow, snidely remarking <In spirit if not in flesh.>

Leia flinched. As he came up from his bow, he added solemnly <And because your silence is ripping him apart.>

That was the last thing in the galaxy she was trying to do. Han needed space and time to lick his wounds when he was dealt a blow. But Chewie wasn’t one to exaggerate. If he said Han was in pain, then Han was in pain.
“That’s not fair,” she whined

<Life isn’t fair,> He said flatly

She narrowed her eyes “Why are you encouraging me?” she asked, “I would have thought you would have wanted me as far from him as possible.”

<I do,> Leia gulped as the pain lanced through her at his open hostility to her. He had every reason, she knew that. It didn’t take away the pain that it caused her. <But that is not what he wants.>

“Oh, he’s talked to you about it has he?” she countered, defensive.

<Don’t have to.> Chewie gestured to hustle around them. <We’re still here, aren’t we?>

Leia acknowledged the point with a tilt of her head. “I’ll think about it,” she said.

<I never took you for a coward, Leia,> he scoffed and stomped away.

Leia found herself walking to the Falcon later that night because she wasn’t a coward. She might have sent Luke in earlier to check on him, that was gathering intel, not avoidance. Her anxiety had spiked when Luke caught back up with her. Her twin’s face was openly worried, although he didn’t go into specifics of what the two of them talked about. Luke told her that Han said he was going to be working on the Falcon for the rest of the day. Then he “suggested” she bring him something to eat.

“I don’t think he’s eaten today, Leia,” Luke said gently.

Leia snorted, but she didn’t contradict him. Luke had good reason to be worried. When Han was working on the ship to block out pain, he could very easily lose track of time and push himself past all reasonable limits.

This conversation was going to be awful and painful, but putting it off would do her no good. She brought a light dinner and some water for Han. She didn’t have any food for herself. Her stomach was in too many knots to even think of eating.

She walked up the gangplank and headed into the main hold. As she entered the room, she could see the grate for the maintenance pit pulled back. She could see the top of Han’s head. He was looking down at something and cursing under his breath. For a moment nostalgia and longing washed over her. This sight was something she had seen so many times in her life. And had thought for the longest time she would never see again. Leia briefly wondered if there were actual repairs that needed to happen or Han was “improving” his ship again.

She made no effort to be quiet as she crossed the room. The curses trailed away as her footsteps echoed. She saw his shoulders hunch for a moment, then his voice, wary and distant asked “What do you want, Leia?”

It wasn’t a surprise he knew it was her. Footsteps echoed loudly across the floor, and her steps could never be mistaken for Luke’s, or Chewie’s. And nobody else would enter the Falcon this late.

“Brought you some dinner,” she said lightly.
“Thanks, but I’m not hungry,” he said, still not looking up from whatever he was doing.

“Luke said you hadn’t eaten when he left.” She saw him glance briefly towards her, and then back down, deliberately hiding his face. This was ridiculous. She wasn’t his wife, well she wasn’t *this* Han’s wife, and he was a grown man. He could take care of himself.

She set the tray on the ground, near the opening, making sure that it made a loud clatter as she placed it on the floor. “I didn’t come here to force you to talk,” she said, “I was worried when Luke said you hadn’t eaten.” He didn’t even look at her.

Leia straightened up. She should have trusted her own instincts, and left him alone, no matter how many names Chewie called her.

“I’ll just...go,” Leia offered lamely, not knowing what else to tell him. She spun on her heel, heading back the way she came. This was so stupid, why had she listened to Chewie and Luke?

“It’s not that I don’t want to talk to you,” his voice caught her just as she was about to step into the hatchway.

Leia turned around and brought herself back into the hold. Han was looking up now, a lost look on his face. He sighed and then boosted himself out of the maintenance pit. As he stood, he pulled a rag from his back pocket and wiped his hands on it.

Leia watched as he twisted that rag over and over his hands, staring at it like it held the secrets to his existence in it. Chewie was right, she was the older of the two of them. She didn't want to talk about this, but standing here, and watching him flounder, was not something she was willing to endure.

“Then what is it, Han?” she asked gently.

Han shuffled a bit, then brought up his head to meet her gaze. “It’s that I don't know what to say to you,” he confessed.

“Try the truth.” Leia suggested, “I find that usually works the best.”

“And what would that be Leia?” he asked, throwing the rag away in a small fit of temper “I don't even know where to start.”

He was lying. She couldn’t tell if he was lying to her, because he wanted to spare her feelings. Or to himself, because he didn’t want to face it. “That you’re mad at me,” she said.

He ran his hands through his hair “No, I am not. Look I get it. I don't like it, but I get it. There is no way I would have believed you if you had told me in the beginning.” His hands dropped, “Hell, I’m not sure I believe you now. The whole thing is crazy.”

“No,” she said shaking her head. “Not for the time-traveling wife part. That is not why you are mad at me.”

He scowled “Then why exactly?” he said challengingly.

“For the hiding behind my brother part. For knowing exactly what Vader wanted from me part. Because I lied to you about the danger, we were in on Cymoon 1.” She gave him a helpless shrug.

His face slid into astonishment, then wariness, and finally that blank mask of his “Why would I be mad about that?”
“Because I put people you love in danger.” She gave him a bitter smile, “And you thought I would never do that to you without warning.”

Astonishment rippled across his face. “That’s pretty on the nose,” he admitted. He let out a shaky breath. “This is...weird.”

She swallowed nervously “Because I’m so much older,” she ventured to guess.

He looked exasperated “No, because you know me, and I don’t know you.” She opened her mouth to dispute that, but he moved quickly until he was standing right in front of her. He laid his finger over her mouth before she could speak. “No,” he said firmly “I’m talking right now. You are listening.”

She glared at him until he dropped the digit. “You know I hate it when you do that,” she groused. Han’s face filled with frustration “No, I didn’t. Not hard to guess, but I didn’t know.” His hands came to his hips, “And that is part of my problem.”

She didn’t believe that for a flat second “Only part?” she said sarcastically.

He gave her an exasperated look “Yes, yes,” he huffed “I’m still pissed about the you putting everyone in danger part. And I’m scared witless of the son part, and the being murdered part, but here and now,” he stopped, closing his eyes. He rubbed his forehead and opened them back up, his blue eyes troubled “I don’t know you, not like you know me.”

Leia shook her head in denial and Han went on “Decades, Leia. You’ve known me for decades.” He stopped and shook his head, “And it shows.”

“What do you mean?” she demanded.

“You are too easy around me,” he complained.

Leia frowned, “And that’s bad?” she asked, not understanding what he meant.

“For a Princess who grew up on Alderaan?” he asked incredulously “Yes. Your father’s treatment of me isn’t fair, but it’s a hell of a lot more rational than yours.”

Leia opened her mouth, and he shook his head cutting her off. His arms folded across his chest and he glared at her “Tell me that the first time you met me, the real first time you met me, that you instantly liked me.”

Leia bit her lip “Not exactly,” she confessed.

He gave a dismissive huff. “You thought I was an idiot, didn’t you?”

“Yes,” she said, “But in my defense, I thought Luke was an idiot too.”

“Uh-huh,” he said, sounding doubtful.

Leia’s eyes narrowed “You both hadbroken into a highly guarded detention area, to rescue me, and you had no plan on how to get us out. When I complained about it, you told me that Luke was the brains.”

He looked sheepish “Right. Then we went down the trash compactors.”

She gave him an unimpressed look “Yes, that. Which was my idea, by the way.”
“Okay,” he admitted “Not the best introduction. But I’m guessing you changed your mind very quickly after about ten minutes in Luke’s company.”

“Yes,” she said. “But I did think you were very brave to come to the Death Star in the Falcon.”

“You love my ship,” he said, “Don’t try to distract me.” He shifted on his feet “So how long did it take you to think I wasn’t a waste of space?”

“About half a day,” she answered promptly.

Han shook his head, “Don’t rewrite history for my feelings Leia.”

“I’m not,” she said. He didn’t look like he believed her “I am not, Han,” she said firmly. “Yes, I thought you were a selfish mercenary only out for yourself. That all changed when you came back during the battle of Yavin and saved all our skins.” She gave him an encouraging smile “Just like you did here.”

His face twisted and he paced away from her, then came back “See!” he said pointing a finger in her direction “See! That is what I’m talking about!” He pointed the finger at his chest “I know who I am. I’m a thief and a smuggler. Who grew up poor and fast. I don’t have the morals you and Luke seem to enjoy carting around. And I was doing just fine.”

Leia gave him a flat look, thinking of huge debts to ruthless gangsters. “I was doing okay,” he amended. “Then you,” he pointed a finger at Leia “You walk into that stateroom in Alderaan, and you took one look at me, and decided you trusted me!”

Leia opened her mouth, but Han was on a roll “Not just with your life, which you should hold in higher regard, but with the Rebellion! With the location of this base! With everything you believe and fight for! And from what I know now, you guard that more violently than you do yourself.”

She abruptly understood by what Chewie meant when he told her Han was stewing over everything in his head. She was only thinking of Ben and the revelation of a possible life. She hadn’t understood that Chewie meant *everything*. She had come up and neatly knocked aside every preconceived notion Han had about himself at this age. That would be a hard revelation for anyone.

He gave her a helpless look “You looked at me like I was a good man.”

“You are a good man!” she protested

“Shush,” he said, coming up to her quickly and putting that damn finger back across her mouth “I’m talking. You are listening.”

She glared at him, but she nodded her head, indicating she understood.

“I could be a good man,” he admitted “Or, well, at least your and Luke’s version of a good man. That is something I actually understand.” He started pacing back and forth. Leia watched him warily, paying attention to every word, but also worried about the tray. He seemed to have forgotten that she left it on the floor. “But you,” he turned lost eyes on her “You treat me like I am one already.” He tugged his hair in frustration, then started his pacing again.

“You still treat me like one even when I open my mouth and offend everyone in the room. What is that? What is wrong with you?” He turned accusing eyes at her “I am offending people! You are a politician! Isn’t that like the opposite of what you are trying to do?” He shook his head and stopped moving, hands coming to his hips. Then he looked at her, expectant. “Well?”
“I’m listening,” she said.

He scowled at her, then started moving again. “That is not an answer.”

She sighed and waited until he was safely away from the tray, then bent down and picked it up. Han was still muttering to himself. She went over to the dejarik table and placed it down. She turned around, and he was still there, looking aggrieved.

“It’s because I know you,” she said, “I know what you are trying, and failing badly, to say.”

Han swallowed hard, a look of terror on his face “I believe you,” he confessed “About everything. I’m probably just about as crazy as you and the Kid.”

He gave a rueful smile “Hell, everybody here is a little mad to think you can take on the Empire. But I believe every crazy thing you’ve told me. About the time travel, Vader, Ben,” he scuffed his foot on the floor, and his gaze fell from hers “About me and you being married.” Then he straightened up, and his haunted eyes met hers “Do you know why?”

Leia sat down on the bench, shaking her head. She didn’t know. Because Han had always been more than willing to follow her and Luke down the craziness that was their life. But he didn’t do it because he believed in the same things they did. Han was too grounded in practicality and reality to ever dream for that much. To hope for that much. He followed them because he loved them. Blind faith was not in his nature. He needed a reason to follow.

He looked at her through those long eyelashes of his, looking incredibly young and vulnerable. “Because from the moment I met you, you were comfortable around me.”

Leia cocked her head, thinking of how she avoided him in those early days, haunted by the nightmare of Han’s death. Of how he confronted her about it, hurt, but wanting to know why. “I was under the impression you thought differently.”

Han waved that away “Oh, I was comparing how you treated me to how you treated Luke.”

“Jealous?” she asked, amused.

“Insanely,” he said without missing a beat. He let his shoulders slump, and he came over to the booth, sitting on the opposite side to her. “And don’t play games with me. You knew that.”

You used that, was his unspoken accusation, but he had a different point he wanted to make. “But looking back over that time...” His voice trailed off and he rubbed his hands over his face. Then he straightened, and looked her squarely in the eyes, “I think on most days you were more comfortable around me than you were your parents.”

Leia swallowed. “We might have had some adjusting to do,” she admitted.

“Some?” Han snorted “I can’t even imagine what it’s like to be as old as you and have my parents still treating me like I was nineteen.”

Han was delicately sidestepping that his parents had been long gone by the time he was nineteen, but she wasn’t going to poke that old wound for no reason. “They were worried,” she said defensively, hands crossing her chest.

“I don’t blame them. You do dangerous things like it’s nothing.” He pointed his finger at her “But that wasn’t my point. You always responded like you knew every quirk and tic I had. You knew how to calm me, how to distract me, how to get me to laugh.” He let out a rueful chuckle “The
only time we really butted heads was over you going to Rodia. And I think that happened because you were tired and worried about Luke.”

Leia sucked in a gulp of air. From that angle, she could see how incredibly off-putting her behavior towards him had been. He must be beyond creeped out “Han, I’m so sorry-” she started to say.

He cut her off, looking baffled “For what? Lov-liking me? For knowing me and still wanting to be around me? For caring about me enough to do what you thought was best for me?” His face grew puzzled “Leia, why would you be sorry?”

“It’s invasive,” she whispered, “You said it yourself You don’t know me, and I know all your deepest secrets. Han, you didn’t tell me any of that.”

A mulish look crossed his face, and he crossed his arms over his chest “A version of me did. And even here,” he gestured between them “I can’t say it was the wrong choice.” He gave her long, thoughtful look “If there is one thing you do well, it’s keep secrets.”

Leia let out a laugh. “Long-standing habit I’m afraid.”

“Getting that.” He shifted a bit and looked at her pensively “Were we happy?” he asked.

“For a long time we were,” she said.

He thought about that “So there were no fights?”

Leia shook her head “I didn't say that.” She gave him a fond smile “But I like the fact that you argue with me.”

“Someone needs to,” he griped “Otherwise you’d just roll over everyone in your way.”

“Probably,” she admitted. “But on the whole, I would say we were both pretty content.”

Han’s face clouded “And then Ben fell.”

“And then Ben fell,” she agreed. She rubbed her hands over her eyes, trying to rub away the tears. They needed to finish this, not have everything derailed by her bruised heart.

There was a long silence after that. Han sat there, biting his lip. Leia waited as long as she could, but finally growing weary of his questioning looks she said bluntly “Ask.”

His eyes grew suspicious “Ask what?”

“Anything you like Han.” He still was regarding her with that suspicious look, and she threw her hands up in the air “What do you want to know? I will tell you everything you think you can handle.”

“Says my wife of how many years?” he asked, face serious.

Leia let out her frustration in a breath. None of this was his fault. Counseling herself in patience, she answered him “Thirty years.”

Han looked flabbergasted, “That’s longer than I’ve been alive,” he whispered. Leia winced. She knew she was old enough to be his mother, but that unpleasant angle hadn’t even occurred to her. He looked at her, straight on, face pale. “I think you might have a better idea of what I can and can’t handle then I do.”
Leia bit her lip “Possibly,” she allowed.

His eyes fell away from hers. He took a deep breath in, and his hands started fidgeting. Still not meeting her gaze, he asked in a voice so quiet she almost didn’t hear him “What was he like?”

She cleared her throat, and asked softly “Ben?”

“Yes,” he said “Ben.”

“He was…” her voice trailed off. She thought of the toddler who would follow Han around the Falcon. The child who would endlessly ask “Okay, but why?” The smell of his dark hair, and the curve of his smile. How could she explain their son in something so small as words? “He was tall,” she said.

Han’s eyes flew up to meet her’s “What?” he asked.

“He was tall,” she repeated, “He favored you more than me.” She closed her eyes and allowed the memories, the good ones, to come flooding back. “He had a curious mind and a sharp wit. He could be moody,” she allowed “but no more than I am.”

Her eyes slid back open “He was so strong-willed, even as a baby.” She felt a fond smile twist her lips. “When you first held him, you had him facing your chest. He didn’t like that very much. He kept trying to hold his head up, so he could see. Two hours old, and he knew exactly how he wanted things to be.”

“Wonder who he got that from?” Han’s tone was mocking, but his eyes were wide with wonder.

Leia laughed. It had been such a long time since she had allowed her thoughts to dwell this much on Ben. At least of the Ben before.

“You love him,” Han said.

She nodded, “Yes. I still do. Despite...everything.” She looked at Han “He’s my son.”

Han’s face darkened “When did he fall?”

Leia’s voice was flat and emotionless “Seven years ago.”

His hands kept restlessly moving “How old was he? When he fell?”

“Twenty-three.”

Han’s jaw tightened, and he looked away. “What did he do?”

Leia took a deep breath in. “When he started losing control, when his moods became more than just teenage rebellion, I knew we didn’t have the tools to help him. We, no I, sent him to Luke.” She looked away from Han’s face “I never wanted much to do with the Force, once I learned where that particular talent came from. I learned enough to protect myself, but I didn’t have any way to help Ben. I thought Luke did.”

Her eyes came back up to meet Han’s “I was wrong.” She stopped, and took a deep breath in “He tried to kill Luke,” she whispered “He did kill Luke’s students, at least the ones that wouldn’t join him. Then he burned the temple to the ground.”

“Kriffing hell,” Han whispered. His face fell into his hands, and he rubbed them on his face. His eyes came back up “What did we do?”
Leia gave him a helpless look “We broke,” she said.

Han frowned, “What do you mean we broke?”

Leia shrugged “I did what I always do. Which is throw myself into my cause to run from the pain. And you did what you always do when you are hurting. You left.”

“Well, yeah,” Han sat up straighter “But what happened when I came back?”

Leia’s throat went dry, and she tried several times to speak, but nothing came out. He looked at her, waiting for an answer. Then his face darkened. “I did come back, didn’t I?”

She shook her head. “No.” She huffed then allowed “Not on purpose anyway. You stumbled into some intel I needed.” Now was not the time to go into how she also was searching for older Luke. “You were trying to get it back to me when the First Order found you.”

Han’s mouth quirked “So you swooped in and saved my ass?”

She shrugged “Something like that.”

“So we did see each other before Ben killed me?” Han’s voice wobbled.

“Yes,” Leia closed her eyes, “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I should have gone with you. I should have been there when you confronted him. I never thought-”

Han held up a hand “Then you might be dead too.”

She wanted to protest, she could handle herself. She had nothing to fear from Ben. But she hadn't thought he would hurt Han either. Ben had adored his father, when had that changed? What lies had Snoke put in Ben’s ears to turn him away from Han? Her, she could understand her son’s anger at her, but Han? Rey told her, he had approached Ben unarmed. Ben didn’t even have the excuse of defending himself.

Han’s mind went other places though “So that’s why you were so surprised to see that I was still here now?” Han said suspiciously. The man wouldn’t give up.

“I thought you ran,” she said, “Anyone with sense would have.”

Han looked offended “You thought I would leave you? Without at least saying goodbye?” His face clouded with anger “I guess you don’t know me that well after all.”

He abruptly got out of his seat and started to leave. Halfway to the exit, he stopped. His shoulders slumped, and he asked tiredly “That’s what he did, isn't it?”

Leia let out a bitter laugh ‘Oh no, he said goodbye. He always did before he left. I just didn't realize that he meant forever that time.”

“Always said goodbye?” Han turned around looking confused. “Forever?”

“Han,” she said getting up and walking over to him. She placed a hand on his arm gently “I know you. Do you really think we would have stayed together for twenty-three years if I didn’t know that you have a massive case of wanderlust?”

“That didn’t bother you?” His face was nothing but bewilderment.

Leia cocked her head “Why would it?”
“Your parents-” he started to say.

“My parents spent half of their marriage physically apart,” she corrected him gently “My father on Coruscant, my mother on Alderaan.” she said, “And their marriage is not our marriage.”

He just looked at her “I just thought-”

“What, that I would demand you sit around and be my trophy husband?” Leia’s eyebrows arched

“Well I don’t know what the duties of a Prince Consort are, but I’m pretty sure it’s nothing I know how to do.”

Leia’s smile fell. “There was no need for a Prince Consort,” she said flatly, all amusement gone “Not after-” she cut herself off.

“Not after the destruction of Alderaan,” he finished. Leia nodded. “So you weren’t made Queen?” Then an outraged look crossed his face before she could correct him “The survivors blamed you?” he gritted out, indignant.

Leia shook her head “No, Han. Nothing like that.” At least not then. No, that particular pain would fall two decades later. She sighed, and she grabbed his hand, giving it a tight squeeze.

“After the destruction of Alderaan, I wasn't crowned immediately, mainly because I didn’t know how. There are ceremonies and rituals to observe, and for obvious reasons, I couldn't do any of them just then.”

She looked him full in the face “Then it became a badge of honor. I wouldn’t be coronated until my people could gather and decide what should be done.”

“And your people?” he asked gruffly.

“The few survivors went to ground,” she said. “They were a symbol, a rallying point, and the Empire couldn’t allow that. Not the least which because they were lying about what happened.”

“I thought they would have been crowing to the skies about it?” Han asked.

“I’m sure they would have if they still had the Death Star to use to frighten people.”

Han actually gave her a real smile. “You blow it up in that time too?”

She gave him a fierce grin in return “Damn right we did.” Then even that fierce joy faded “The Empire told the galaxy at large a “natural” disaster had befallen Alderaan. And that it was seeking all remaining survivors who were off-planet to see to their needs and provide them with a new home.”

“They didn’t want any martyrs,” Han breathed. “Even with the lie they were trying to sell.” He whistled “Damn that’s cold, even for the Empire.”

Leia nodded, grief tightening the corners of her mouth “Not too many of my people believed that lie of course. The few that did-”

“The Empire killed them,” Han finished for her.

She nodded. Even so many years later she had trouble controlling her rage about that. There were so few of her people left, and the Empire was determined to wipe out the precious few that remains simply to hide their mistake.”Most went to ground,” she whispered.
She looked at him, eyes haunted. “After the Empire fell, I was able to use my position in the New Republic to find us a sustainable world to colonize. To rebuild. The survivors came.”

“How many Leia?”

“About sixty thousand,” she confessed.

Han’s face paled “Alderaan has a population of a billion, doesn’t it?”

She swallowed around the clog in her throat “Closer to two actually.”

He looked at her, horrified. He came forward and swept her up into his arms. “I’m sorry sweetheart,” he murmured “I am so sorry you had to experience that.”

Leia took this moment for all it was worth, soaking up all the strength and comfort she could. Standing here in Han’s arms, without an imminent battle coming? This, this, was a place she hadn’t been in for far too long. She ducked her head under his chin and closed her eyes. She felt him tilt his head, and he nuzzled his face on her hair, crooning nonsense words under his breath. She could feel herself shaking, and she just rode that wave of emotion for a moment. This was a very old pain, but even with Alderaan still here, still shining, it wasn’t something she had learned to let go of yet.

Slowly she withdrew from that embrace. As lovely as it was, they needed to finish this.

“So it was decided that we needed a new form of government. A direct democracy was the choice the people went with,” she told him.

“A vote,” Han sounded dubious “in a monarchy?” Damn Corellian’s and their suspicions of monarchical systems. Like representative democracy didn't have its own set of problems? Not that Corellia really had that anymore. Any candidate put forth was approved by the Empire. There was no one in power now who didn't support Imperial policy.

“I called for it Han.” she said “All the noble houses were gone. Every custom and tradition we had built up to rule ourselves had been swept away. I was the only member of any governing body left.”

She swallowed hard “There wasn’t even a mayor of a small provincial village left.”

“There was just you,” Han said. “So your people decided to cast you aside?”

“No,” Leia said, a little touched he was so defensive of her, “It was decided that I would be the Senator to the New Republic for the rest of my life. I didn’t fight it.” She gave him a tight smile, “And I was recognized as the last Princess that Alderaan would ever have.”

“Keeping your title without needing to rule,” he stated.

Leia shrugged “It was what my people wanted.”

“And me?” Han asked.

Leia gave him a saucy smile “Not that it isn’t appealing to think of coming home every night to a home cooked meal, but you would have have been climbing the walls in months out of boredom.”

She gave him a sad smile “After Ben was born, you did stay home with him for a few years. Said trying to keep up with him was challenge enough. But after,” she shrugged “You set up an import business.”

“Smuggling.” Han looked doubtful “I went back to smuggling? And you were okay with this?”
“Transportation of delicate and rare cargo,” she corrected. “You were good at it too, had a fleet of ships. You always had a knack for finding talented people,” she told his dubious looking face.

“Really?” he asked “Me? A successful and respectable businessman?”

“Successful? Oh yes. Respectable?” A wicked smile crossed her face “You once showed up to a diplomatic function I was attending dressed as you are now. I was talking to the Ambassador to the Tinnel system about a trade deal I was trying to set up.”

Her mouth quirked “You came into the banquet hall, spotted me and marched right over. Without a word to anyone, you bent me over backwards and laid a huge kiss on me. When you were done, you pulled us both up and told the Ambassador that you were taking me home. It had been a few weeks since we’d seen each other, and you were sure he would understand.”

“When all he did was sputter in outrage, you told him, and I quote-” Leia deepened her voice, and changed her tone to match Han’s slower drawl. “Hell, you are going to end up giving her what she wants. I know that, you know that, and she definitely knows that. So let’s cut all the word games, so we can all go home and enjoy the next few hours.”

She stopped her imitation of Han’s voice and looked at him in fond amusement. “You then shoved a bottle of Corrilean brandy in his hands, told him ‘Have a good night sweetheart’ with a wink. and we walked out.”

“One, never imitate me again, you are terrible at it. And two,” Han looked sheepish “how mad at me were you?” His hand went up to rub the back of his neck.

Leia laughed “I wasn't. My head was killing me, he was being a dick, and you had just neatly solved my problem.”

His hopeful smile faded “So I was there a lot for Ben?”

She nodded.

“No wonder the kid turned out to be such a mess,”

“Don’t say that!” she hissed, pushing herself into his face “You were a good father!”

“So Chewie said,” he looked doubtful “But if this wasn’t my fault why did I stay away?”

“I know you saw him when you looked at me.” Han’s voice floated through her mind.

“That’s what you felt you had to do,” she said.

“Did you want me to stay away?” he asked.

“No,” she said, pulling away from him and wrapping her arms around herself. “No, I didn’t.”

“I don’t understand,” he said. “If it wasn’t me, and it wasn’t you, what happened?”

His faith in her abilities as a mother was heartening. Most people only saw the frigid bitch. Even now, with as short a time as he knew her, Han thought the best of her.

Leia felt tears pricking in her eyes, but she straightened and turned to face him “I don’t think it was one thing.”

His face darkened “Was it because of Vader?”
“I told you, Han, he was dead by that point.”

Han shook his head “No, I mean was it because he was too like Vader?”

“There’s too much of Vader in him,” Han had said on D’Qar. She had agreed with him then. Did she now? She thought of that brutal, frightening figure of her past, and contrasted it with the obsessive, almost desperate creature who was haunting her now. Too many facets and too many things to think about. She didn't dwell on Vader, in fact, she would be happy if he just poofed out of existence, to trouble her no further. But in moments like this, when thoughts of her son were so close to the surface, it was hard not to. Hard not to see the similarities between the two of them. Hard not to see the differences too.

Obi-Wan’s voice, sad and broken “I look at you, and Luke, and all I see was the great man he could have been.”

“No,” she said, slowly “I don’t think so. I did once, but now…” her voice trailed off.

“What do you mean now?” Han’s hands came to his hips. “You have one conversation with him in a cell and suddenly everything's different?”

“It wasn’t just one conversation,” she responded absently. Thinking of Vader’s...vulnerability around her. Was that even the right word? His weakness? His humanity? She could hurt him. With nothing more than words. That implied that he cared what she thought of him. She knew that, hell, she used it against him. She hadn’t bothered to think it through, until right this second, to understand what that actually meant.

“WHAT!?!?” Han’s loud shout brought her squarely back to here and now. “When?” he stuttered “How? Why????”

Leia grimaced. Han was right, she was comfortable around him. So much so she didn’t guard her tongue as she should. No help for it now. “Remember when I said I could mostly keep Vader out of my head?”

“Yes???” he asked suspiciously.

“Well it is definitely mostly,” she suppressed the urge to squirm “emphasis on the ‘mostly.’”

“What does ‘mostly’” he mock quoted “mean?”

“It means he got into my head.”

“How many times Leia?” he gritted out.

“Three,” she said.

“You talked to him three times!??!” Han’s face went slack with his fear.

“He talked,” she said, “I mostly yelled.”

“You yelled at Vader !!!!” He startled her by letting out a long hysterical laugh “Do you have no sense of self-preservation?”

Leia frowned. She had plenty of self-preservation.

“So what did you two chat about?” he said snidely “The weather? Career advice? The latest Corellian holo drama?”
“There is no need to get snippy,” she said, back coming up.

His face went red, “You are telling me that Vader has been in your head three times, and your main concern is my tone?”

Leia winced “Actually it was four, if you count the time Luke helped me expel him.”

“Luke knew too?” Han looked like he was about to march out of the Falcon and drag Luke here so he could yell at him too.

“Recently,” she confessed. “I told him recently. And I already had this lecture from Luke.” Han didn’t look any calmer, but his face did return to its usual tan color. ” And we did keep Vader out last time. It’s fine Han. I have it under control.”

His eyes narrowed “Is the old man going to agree with that assessment?” Then he went in for the kill “Or your parents?”

Leia fought from shuffling her feet across the floor “They don’t know?” she offered weakly.

“Leia,” he growled.

“They don't know,” she insisted “And they don’t need to.”

He pulled his hands through his hair “By all the gods, why not?”

“Because Obi-Wan is a mess as far as Vader is concerned.” Han opened his mouth and she snorted “The man really did believe Vader killed Anakin. That was his truth for two decades.”

Han’s mouth snapped shut “What?”

She nodded her head “I cannot trust him to keep a clear head about this.”

“Oh, and you are so calm and rational about it.”

“Well, no,” she admitted “But I know I am not calm and rational about it, which is a step up from Obi-Wan. And as for my parents,” she trailed off “They already have enough to worry about in regards to me. I don't want to add to it.”

“Leia,” he said “they’re your parents, and they love you. It’s their job to protect you.”

“Something I’m well aware of,” she said “But what good would telling them do? What can they do? Place a holo-call to Vader? I can see it now. Please, Lord Vader, we know we kidnapped your daughter nineteen years ago, but the only thing she wants from you is to be left alone. Would you do us a favor and oblige?” she sneered.

“That would be a fun conversation,” Han muttered.

Leia ran a hand over her face. She gave Han a helpless look “They can’t help. All they could do was worry and fret.”

“Isn’t that what parents do?” Han asked, “Worry and nag their children?”

Leia snorted “You have no idea. My mother keeps pressing that I need to have a funeral, or some kind of mourning ritual, for..” her voice trailed off as she realized the awkwardness of what she had just said to Han.
“For me,” Han hissed through his teeth, and leaned against the Falcon’s wall, exhausted “This is never something I thought I would agree with my in-laws about.” He grimaced, then his face froze as he looked back at her. “Possible in-laws,” he corrected too.

That stung. She wondered what he saw on her face that made him change the wording. She didn’t have the strength right now to straight up ask. She was worried he would tell her and she wouldn’t like the answer.

“I do see their point.” she said, returning to the previous topic “I know I need to do something. Closure.” She waved her hands in frustration “I just don’t know how.” She looked at him “There is no body.”

He didn’t answer her with words, but his face was practically screaming “Obviously.”

She corrected to “There wasn’t a body then. Anything I do, here and now, that has meaning to me, will be noted by the other Alderaanians on base. I don’t want to alert them to anything or have to dodge awkward questions. Any other ritual I do, won’t have any meaning.”

Han hummed slightly, then asked, “What about the Lost Pilot’s Rite?”

Leia gaped at him.

“Do you not know what that is?” he asked.

“Oh course I know what it is,” she snapped. Corellians had a specific funeral for pilots lost in space. Where there was no body to recover, or it would be deadly to retrieve it. It said something about their culture, that this happened often enough they had come up with a ritual to deal with it.

“What?” he said defensively “Yeah, it doesn’t have meaning to you, but it does to me. And it’s not something even the other Corellians on base would ask you about. There are enough people who’ve been lost in the Rebellion.”

“No, I mean yes, that would work,” she said “it’s just that you aren't very religious. That didn’t change.”

Han’s face twisted “Naw. But I am Corellian. I might not go back there any time soon, but it is who I am.” He looked at her and then shook his head. “If it's what you need to find peace, go for it.”

Lost in the deep. Or lost in time. Yes, that would work.

Gratitude filled her. She went up to him and laid a hand on his chest “Thank you.”

He looked down at her hand, “No problem,” he said hoarsely, covering it with his own. His fingers began rubbing her hand slowly.

She peered up at him “What do we do now?” she asked.

He looked troubled “I don’t know. What do you want Leia?”

“This isn’t about me,” she protested.

“No, but I still want to know.”

“Sometimes I need actual words, not things thought at me really hard.” If her Han, the one who knew her inside out? The one that had seen her at her best and worst for years, needed it to be said, what did this younger Han need? This Han with his insecurities, and doubts still hanging on him
like persistent mynocks.

The tears she had been battling all night welled up. This wasn’t fair, she knew this wasn’t fair to him. This Han had no idea what to do with her crying. But he wanted honesty, and this was the most honest thing Leia could show him.

“Don’t go,” she whispered, tightening the hand still on his chest, gathering the fabric on his shirt in her fist. As if that one act alone could keep him here. “Be my friend. Or my lover. Or my husband, anything you want. Just, please, please don’t go away. Don’t leave me, alone again.” The tears streamed down her cheeks “I don’t, I can’t, I’m not strong enough-” her words dissolved into incoherent wailing.

His face registered shock at her open vulnerability, then it quickly morphed into concern. “Hey, hey, hey,” he said, his free hand coming up to cup her cheek “I’m not going anywhere alright?” His hand slid down to her chin, gently pushing her face up to look him straight in the eyes “I’m right here,” he crooned “I’m not going anywhere, okay?”

Leia sniffed but didn't answer him.

He gave her a crooked grin “I don’t have the sense to run away.”

She gave a watery chuckle, “Probably not,” she agreed, trying, and failing to keep her voice light.

He watched her intently, then he lifted the hand that was over her hand on his chest, to gently wipe her tears away. “I just need time Leia, that’s all.” He looked at her seriously “I lo-” he faltered, then started again “I don’t want to mess this up. I just want to take things slow, that’s all.”

She blinked, she had told him not to say it last time, not until he knew what he was getting into. Could she really blame him for wanting to think about this?

Seeing the doubt in her eyes, he said softly “I don’t make the same mistake twice. I’m not leaving you.”

“It wasn’t your mistake,” she said.

“Me, him, I don’t see the difference.” How strange his reaction was, especially in contrast to Luke’s. Maybe it was because, except for the being murdered by his son part, Han’s future held everything he had secretly wished to have. Luke’s only held every nightmare.

“Thank you,” she whispered, allowing her eyes to fall shut. She reached up with the hand not currently resting on his chest to pull at his hand still holding her chin. She brought his hand to her mouth, and placed a small kiss in his palm, then she nuzzled her cheek into it.

“Don’t thank me.” he said, voice a little shaky “I’m still incredibly selfish. You’re here. Luke’s here. Where else would I want to go? There’s even work. Incredibly low paying work, but plenty of it. It’s not a problem.”

Leia opened her eyes, trying to come up with some sassy retort to that incredibly dense statement. Han’s face was right in front of her, relaxed, and a little arrogant, like he knew she was about to protest.

She took in a deep breath, and the scent of him hit her hard. He smelled like engine parts, oil, and grease. He smelled like home. And by the gods that smelt so good.

She took note of their position, only inches apart, her hand still clutched to his chest, his hand still
cradling her head.

In an instant, all her worries and apprehension faded away, replaced by an all-consuming lust. It had to be this body, she thought distantly, eyes focused on his lips, this nineteen-year-old hormonal body, that was prompting her to do something so stupid.

Han’s eyes dilated, and his gaze fell to her lips. “Ahhh,” he said.

“This is such a bad idea,” she whispered, moving closer to him.

“Why is that, exactly?” he murmured.

“You said you wanted time,” she reminded him.

“I’m an idiot,” he countered “You know that.”

“Yes,” she said, “but-”

“Princess Leia!!” a very familiar, and annoying voice proclaimed loudly. “I am so happy I found you.”

Han let out a long groan, his forehead falling on hers. “That droid has the worst timing,” he grumbled.

Leia patted him on the chest “You have no idea,” she whispered, and then pulled back from him. She could feel the reluctance in Han as he allowed her to slip from his grasp.

“Yes, Threepio?” she asked pleasantly, amused no matter what timeline she found herself in, Threepio would always be Threepio.

“Who was built by Vader,” she reminded herself. That part was new, she would admit. And she worked hard to stifle her laugh. The droid wouldn’t understand, and Han would think she had lost what was left of her mind.

“Your parents are looking for you, Your Highness. They request your presence in their room as soon as you can.”

“Thank you Threepio,” she said.

“Yes, thank you,” Han growled.

“Oh, you are most welcome Your Highness,” he chirped, utterly oblivious to the fact that Han would cheerfully take him apart right now if he could. The droid went on his way, presumably to find some other poor soul to bother.

Leia turned to Han “I should go,” she said.

“You could stay?” he offered.

It was tempting, oh so very tempting. Leia bit her lip for moment, then shook her head “That is such a bad idea, and you know it.” She wanted more than just a tumble. She wanted everything, and by all the gods she could be strong-willed enough to walk away from the temptation he was putting in front of her.

“Yeah,” he said, sheer want written across his face. “Doesn’t make it any easier to let you out that door.”
She arched an eyebrow. Now he was pushing it into the obnoxious “That sure of yourself are you?”

“Of me?” he asked, pointing a finger to his chest “Not at all. Of my ability to read you?” A satisfied smile crossed his face “Oh, yes.”

She blew him a kiss, “Hope you dream of me then,” and walked out of the Falcon to his dramatic groan of “Now that is playing dirty!”

She was humming to herself as she walked to her parent’s quarters. Tomorrow, oh tomorrow, she was going to be berating herself up and down for what she almost allowed to happen, but for right now she was going to ride this wave of satisfaction.

She palmed the door open, and her good mood instantly vanished when she saw her parents. They were standing by their small table, both wearing careful neutral masks.

“Who died?” she demanded, coming into the room almost at a full run. She suddenly felt her heartbeat pounding in her ears she flicked through all the possibilities. It wasn’t Luke or Obi-Wan, she would have felt that in the Force. She had just left Han, and both Rex and Evaan were still on base. Her blood ran cold. She hadn’t been to the communications center tonight to check on things. This could only have to do with Alderaan.

Her mother shook her head, “Nobody we know,” she said softly. She gestured to one of the chairs “Leia, please sit.”

Leia shakily did as she was asked. “Papa?” she whispered.

Her father swallowed hard, he leaned forward until both his hands rested on the table. He looked her straight in the eyes as he solemnly told her “There was a riot today on Alderaan.”

Leia felt the breath whoosh out of her lungs “Where?” she whispered.

“Sanctuary Coast,’ her mother said gently. She came over to Leia and kneeled in front of her, taking both of Leia’s hands in hers. “Reports vary, but somewhere between fifty to a hundred people died.”

Leia closed her eyes “What happened?” She had hoped something like this wouldn’t happen. Hoped, but knew it was only a matter of time. Even with the “gentle” hand, the Empire was using on her home, it was still a weighty and oppressive thing.

“Apparently the security forces have been making a point to harass and target several local families in the area,” her father explained.

Sanctuary Coast wasn’t just a pretty name, it’s what it was for so many lost people of the galaxy. “You mean the refugees,” Leia snarled, her eyes flying back open to stare angrily at her father. The Empire had tried this on world after world. Divided the galaxy into us and them, and now they had tried it on her home.

“No,” Papa said firmly “our people.”

Of course, they were Alderaanian, no matter what the Empire did. They had come needing help, from all over the galaxy. Alderaan might never have involved itself in the physical fight against the Empire, but for anyone who reached there, and needed help, Alderaan gave it. If they stayed, and
not all of them did, they became Alderaanian. It was that simple. It was who they were, and most of her people would not surrender that easily.

Leia’s hands curled into fists. “So there was a riot?”

Mama nodded “It lasted several hours,” she gave Leia’s hands a firm squeeze, and rose to take the chair closest to Leia. “There were quite a few people who apparently objected to the Empire’s singling out of these families.” There was sorrow in her face, but pride too. “A mob attacked one of the troopers. Reinforcements were called in, but it took quite a while for the mob to be pacified. The whole city is under military curfew.”

Leia wondered about how many troops were now going to be stationed on her home. The Empire looked at Alderaan and saw a peaceful world. They didn’t understand peaceful didn’t mean weak. Peaceful didn’t mean they wouldn’t rise up to defend.

“What’s going to happen?” Leia wondered.

Papa shook his head “Uncertain. So far, Governor Shale seems more interested in asserting control than retribution.”

“That won’t last,” Leia muttered.

“No,” Papa admitted, “but there is nothing in her background that suggests she will go to ‘unreasonable’ measures in her retaliation.”

“And Vader had made sure of that,” her conscience piped up “he made sure that the best person he could maneuver into that position got it.”

Yes, he had. But that decision had also involved him decapitating someone at a public banquet, so she wasn’t sure how many points she could give him for that.

“We thought you should hear this from us,” her mother said, “We were hoping to catch you before you got your daily private report.”

“How under the radar is this?” Leia asked.

“Very,” her mother said. A wry twist to her lips “The only reason the Alliance knows anything is because we have an agent in the area, and they were able to slip us word before the jamming went into effect. There was no mention of anything on the official holo nets, galactic or planet.” Mama gave a delicate snort “I wouldn’t be surprised if the Empire tries to pass this off as a natural disaster of some kind.”

Leia looked at her mother, surprised “Why would they even bother?” she asked.

“Alderaan is being watched by many people,” Papa said, “Including those who don’t care about the Rebellion, but are looking nervously at how the Empire might treat them in the future.”

“Like the Outer Rim isn’t enough proof?” Leia asked bitterly.

“No, it’s not.” Papa said, “They got what they deserved.”

Leia opened her mouth, and he put up a quelling hand “You know I don’t believe that. But these people, they do. And they are powerful in their own right. Not enough to take Palpatine on, and they know it. But they have enough power to make the Empire even more unstable then it is now.”
Leia gave a small chortle of amusement “Agreeing with me now about Tarkin and the cost of his absence?”

“I think the public destruction of the Death Star helped,” he said, smiling “But, yes, you were right about the destabilization Tarkin’s absence would have on the Empire’s day to day function. My apologies for doubting your assessment, I should have known better.” Then his smile slipped. “Although I am now curious to where you were. Usually by now, you’ve already got your briefing.”

“I was talking to Han,” she said.

Her mother’s eyes brow went up, and Papa’s face darkened. Mama only had open curiosity on her face as she asked “About what?”

Personal things that she didn't want to get into with her parents. So she went with the answer that would distract them “We were talking about how to do his funeral,” she said.

Papa’s mouth dropped open, then he shut it. Closing his eyes, he began rubbing them hard “You actually talked to the man about how to have a funeral for an alternate version of himself?”

Leia frowned. That hadn't been the reason she had talked to Han, but who better to ask? “Yes?”

“I will never get used to how surreal your life is,” he muttered.

Mama only looked inquisitive “Did he have any ideas?” she asked.

“He did,” Leia said, “Or at least he told me what he would have wanted if this had happened to him.”

“I see,” Mama said. Mama looked like she had a great deal more to say then that, but she was going to keep her own counsel for the moment.

Leia squirmed in her seat “I can do it. It’s not a complicated ceremony. But I was wondering…” her voice trailed off as she looked at her parents. Mama would come she knew, but her father? She was aware enough of her fragility right now to know that she needed as much support as she could get. She looked beseechingly at her Papa “I know you don’t like him, but please, could you come?”

Papa’s face melted into concern and he came to Leia. Pulling her out of her seat he wrapped her in his arms “Of course Leia,” he murmured “Of course.”

Not tomorrow, Leia thought distantly. I can’t do this tomorrow, and we need to wait and see what the fall out on Alderaan is going to be. But soon.

ABA Day 116

Leia was firing almost mindlessly at the target. Her nerves were nothing but a tangled mess. Luke was on a CAP rotation, so for her workout this morning she had forgone using the Force, and pushed herself as hard as she could. So many things were swirling in her head. The look in Han’s eyes as she left him on the Falcon. Her worry, and heartache over the fate of her people. Her pride that so many had chosen to do the right thing. Her fury that they had done it in the way that was sure to bring down the full might of the Empire on their heads. Her weakness in the fact that she
was so tempted to storm into the Falcon and use the distraction Han could, and probably would willingly provide, for just a few hours of relief.

This was, unfortunately to her way of thinking, one of her days off. Unless the base was attacked, there was no reason she could give to her parents, or Mon, that would justify her doing a single thing for the Rebellion. Especially today of all days.

So she had come here, to the firing range. Maybe what she needed was some practice at destruction.

She paused for a second, lowering her arms to relieve the ache that was starting to build when a hand landed on her shoulder.

She turned her head and saw Rex standing there. His lips started moving, but between the noise of the other people also shooting, and her ear protectors, she couldn’t hear him.

Leia lowered her blaster all the way down and pushed her ear guards off her right ear. “Excuse me?”

Rex waved a hand at the target “Are you shooting someone who has personally frustrated you or politically?”

Leia felt a smile break out on her face “Who says it can’t be both?”

Rex’s grin was teasing in return “I don’t think so. You are too much of a professional to let those two interfere too often.”

Leia reholstered her blaster, and stepped towards him “Why do you think that?”

“Draven,” he said.

Leia froze for a second at that name, then looked up to stare into those golden Mandalorian eyes. She stepped as close as she could so he could hear her. “Mon made the announcement?” she asked in a low voice.

Rex shook his head. “Not to the base at large. I only know because she approached me about taking on some of his duties temporarily.”

Leia arched an eyebrow. Mon must be desperate if she was asking Rex for help.

Rex shrugged “I said no. I’m a soldier, not a spy.”

“I think that would be reassuring to most people,” she said softly.

“Maybe,” Rex allowed. His face hardened, and he looked at her sternly “Especially after the abuses he committed and against who.”

Great, Mon had told him about that too. And by the scowl on his face, he wasn’t happy with Draven, or her handling of the situation.

Leia looked around nervously. The target range was loud, but that didn’t mean people wouldn’t overhear what was being said. “Let’s take this to my room,” she suggested, removing the ear protectors fully from her head. She headed over to the bin where they were stored. “It’s a little loud in here for a talk.”

As she placed them in the bin, Rex cleared his throat and said pointedly “You didn’t answer my
question.”

She brought her focus back on him, “Sorry, what?”

“Personal or political?” he asked as they exited the noisy target hall and entered into the hallway.

She sighed and rubbed the tense muscles on her neck. “Political.”

“Uh-huh,” She didn't deserve all the doubt in his voice. “Did you hear about Alderaan?” she asked.

Rex’s face lost all gentle teasing “Yes,” he said, “Was quite the talk this morning in the mess hall.” He looked at her, contrition clear in his voice “I’m sorry Leia. Wedge told me you were seen leaving the Falcon last night. I thought—” his voice trailed off.

That more had happened then did. Why had she left again? Oh right, because she was giving Han “time.” If she was just a tad more impulsive she would say screw it, and tell him that she would give him all the time he needed, but in the meanwhile, would he mind terribly if they could be friends who occasionally saw each other naked?

“Oh no,” her conscience whispered, “that won’t complicate things at all.”

So the gossip had her leaving the Falcon with a satisfied smirk on her face. Why couldn’t the Force have let her enjoy something for more then five minutes? She would have beat herself up plenty today for that impulsive decision, without also having to battle this deep bone numbing fear for Alderaan.

“There is nothing I can do,” she said, “And even more frustrating, we don’t know anymore then we did last night.” The communications block was still in effect. All their other contacts and agents on Alderaan didn’t know anything either. It was all so frustrating. She hated this feeling of waiting. And to be held in this suspense about her home. It was something she hadn’t had to do in a long time.

“It’s better than the alternative,” she reminded herself “It is there to worry about.”

Rex shot her a sympathetic look “That’s the worst part of any war,” he said grimly “The waiting. I wish I could tell you it gets easier as you get older.”

She looked at him startled, then berated herself. Dammit, she really needed to tell him. It said something that half the time she forgot she hadn't. There were few people in her life Leia had bonded to as fast as she had to Rex. And every single one of those people had brought great joy and strength into her life. She should trust her instincts and stop dithering about this. He could keep his mouth shut.

His face grew guilty “And I am sorry for the teasing. It’s not the right time. Sometimes I forget that civilians don’t have quite the gallows humor old soldiers do.”

He was just compounding her own guilt, while wallowing in his. She couldn’t confess to anything in the hall, but she could ease this mood of his. He was right, she had a pretty gallows sense of humor herself, sometimes it was the only way to stay sane.

“I find a good joke helps lighten the mood,” she said. He didn’t look reassured. She stopped and put a hand on his shoulder “Really Rex,” she said “I’m not mad, or even hurt. You have a lot going on, same as me.”

She gave him a rueful smile “And you weren’t so far off the mark.” She returned to walking down
the hall. Rex took a moment, then hurried to catch up with her.

“So it is personal?” he asked.

“No,” she said. Then sighed. “Yes. Maybe? I don’t know.” Rex only gave her a patient look “I am angry at a person on this base,” she admitted

“Captain Solo,” he said gruffly.

She glared at him. “At someone,” she stressed.

“Okay,” he agreed “Someone named Solo.”

“I do not need you beating him up for me,” she warned, poking him in the chest for emphasis.

“You never let me have any fun,” he complained.

Leia laughed “I’m not the one who forbid you to come to Nar Shaddaa. I think we would have had a blast.”

Rex grinned at her “True,” then his smile slipped “You two fight?” he asked concerned.

She gave a bitter laugh “No, we didn’t. No yelling at all.” She sagged “It’s..” she waved her hand around “complicated. And I’m not being fair to him. I know that. I’m acting like a small child who was denied a treat.”

Rex grunted at that, thinking. He was quiet until they turned into the corridor that led directly to Leia’s room. “Did you take it out on him?” he asked.

Leia blinked “No,” she said.

Rex shrugged “Then you’re doing fine. No matter his reasons, or your understanding of them, you are allowed to be hurt and mad Leia.”

“But-”

“No buts,” he said firmly, sticking his finger up “Take it from your wise old Uncle, and listen to your elders.”

Leia frowned “Aren’t you the one always saying despite your looks you aren’t an old man?”

“Do not use my own words against me. That isn’t fair.”

She grinned. “Only if you don’t take it out on Han.”

Rex frowned “No promises.”

“I thought you liked him?” she asked. She had thought Rex would be the most reasonable person to talk about this. Papa had a hard time with Han and everything he represented. Luke was too romantic. Evaan didn’t know most of the particulars, so her advice wouldn’t be that useful. Leia couldn’t even begin to think about approaching Obi-Wan. He liked Han, but talking to a Jedi about her very complicated love life didn’t strike her as the best idea.

“I do,” he agreed. “Once I got over how often he puts his foot in his mouth.” The clone gave her a sly look “But Leia, you are my favorite.”
Luke’s voice interrupted them “I thought I was your favorite” he mocked whined. Leia looked up in surprise. Where had he come from? Then she noted, they were standing in front of her door. She had been so lost in conversation she hadn't even noticed.

Rex shook his head “That was yesterday. Today she is.”

To her shock, Leia felt herself blush out of embarrassment. That was twice in one week. Rex was sincere. Oh, not about the part where Luke wasn’t his favorite. She had the feeling they both were, but it wasn’t often she met someone who didn’t prefer her easy-going brother to her. Especially this much younger, not as burned out Luke.

Luke gave her a bright smile and wrapped his arms around her shoulders “That’s okay. She’s my favorite too.” Then his smile fell, and Leia felt him test the mood with the Force “What has got you two so serious?”

“Jedi,” Rex muttered under his breath.

Leia knew Luke knew her moods. It didn't take much effort on her part to read him either. This Luke was still fine-tuning his approach with her. Too hard of a touch, and he could see more than just what was on the surface. Which is how he had picked up the seriousness of the conversation moments ago. Under her surface pleasure, he could feel her roiling emotions.

But he had also picked up Rex's, a non-force user. It hadn’t occurred to Leia that Luke could do this when he was younger, and not trained. She always thought it was just who Luke was, the Force only enhancing it. He saw things.

It never once occurred to her to wonder if that was something the Jedi frequently did. It was a little spooky, put in that light. And could easily have been twisted into the tales of the Jedi manipulating emotions. Palpatine's PR people certainly could have easily spun that. Especially given how few Jedi there were, even in the heyday of the Republic.

She pulled her mind from that dark avenue and stepped forward to open her door. “What are you doing here?” she asked Luke, as the door opened.

“Alderaan,” came the reply.

“Not now. Please Luke,” she sent back pleading “Talking about now will make it worse. Not until I know what I need to worry about.”

He didn’t answer her mentally but gave her a sunny grin. “Came to see you,” he said out loud, “A little bird told me that you were seen leaving the Falcon last night, with quite the satisfied look on your face.”

Leia groaned “Little bird,” she snorted over Rex’s amused laughter “A little bird called Wedge maybe?”


Wedge had many excellent qualities, she reminded herself. She couldn’t shoot him because one of his faults was a love of gossip.

She was still muttering to herself as she walked into her room, and sat on her bed. Luke and Rex came in after her. She frowned at the small space. She was spending far too much time here lately with people, and the room was really too small for that.
Luke sat with a considerable oomph on the bed beside her and Rex sat in her one chair, looking way too amused.

“Antilles is tenacious isn’t he?” Rex asked.

Luke shrugged “I think he has a lot riding on those bets.”

Rex’s eyebrows went up “I thought he confined his daring stunts to the air?”

Luke shook his head “Not money,” he said “Pride.”

“Ohh,” Rex shook his head “That’s worse.”

Luke grinned “Tell me about it.”

Leia snapped “Are you two done?”

“She’s very grouchy today.” Rex mock whispered.

Luke focused in on her “No,” he said thoughtfully, “She’s not grouchy.”

Leia’s eyes narrowed “No,” she agreed sweetly “I’m rapidly heading towards mad.”

“She looked like she was about to crawl out of her skin when I found her on the firing range,” Rex told Luke.

Luke didn’t reply, too busy trying to sift her mood “No, you are not mad,” he said thoughtfully “But you are frustrated,” he murmured out loud. “About…..” She could feel just the slightest strengthening of his touch in the Force, as he tried to determine why she was frustrated.

Leia glared, then dropped her shields fully, so he could get a full feel of what was uppermost in her mind at that moment.

Luke let out an indignant squawk and fell off the bed. “Ahhhh!” he said, his face turning beet red, “Why the hell did you do that?”

“You wanted to know,” she shot back.

“Ick!!,” Luke frantically rubbed his hands over his head “I am never going to get that out of my mind!!” He looked at her betrayed “You could have just said something,” he whined as he pulled himself back up “I didn't need to feel it.”

“Feel what?” Rex asked, looking confused.

“If you weren’t such a busybody,” Leia snorted, “I wouldn't have had to.”

“I thought we all agreed everybody only held hands!” he said.

“Children!” Rex roared. They both turned to look at him “Care to fill in the person who doesn’t have access to the Force?” he asked.

“Leia’s…..” Luke ducked his head, words drying up.

“Frustrated,” Leia finished dryly for him.

Rex just stared at them. “Yes?” he said, “Thought we already covered that.”
Leia huffed “Let’s say there is no winner to all those bets yet,” she said.

Rex’s eyes widened. “Oh,” he said comprehendingly “That kind of frustrated.”

Luke shuddered “And there is another word that has all new kinds of horror for me.”

Rex looked at Luke, then Leia. He tipped his head back and he roared with laughter.

“I’m glad my pain is so amusing to you,” Luke grumbled as he sat back down on the bed.

“I’m sorry,” Rex wheezed “It just seems to be a Jedi thing. Why is it you all flail about hopelessly when it comes to stuff like that?”

Leia frowned “I thought Jedi were forbidden to marry?” she asked

Rex’s smile died, “Yes,” he said, “They were.” He gave her a serious look “Then again I didn't exactly hang out with Jedi who were much into the non-attachment thing.”

Luke stiffened at Rex’s subtle invitation. He glanced at Leia, who gave a small nod. It couldn’t hurt to hear something from the perspective of someone who wasn’t her parents or Obi-Wan.

“Were there bets on our parents?” Luke asked softly “Like there are on me, Han, and Leia?”

Rex let out a hearty chuckle. “We didn’t need to take bets,” he said, “Everyone knew something was going on with those two.” He looked thoughtful for a moment “Although there were people who speculated that Obi-Wan was involved somehow.”

“Obi-Wan?” Leia asked startled.

“Hmmm,” Rex agreed. “Nobody who had ever seen Anakin and Padme in a room together could doubt they had something going on.” He looked thoughtful “But I could see how people threw Obi-Wan in there too. He and Anakin were...close.” The clone shook his head, frustrated “That’s not the right word. I don’t think there is one in Basic to describe them. The closest I can think of is riduurok, without the sex part.”

“Riduurok?” Luke asked

“A love bond,” Leia explained. She was a bit familiar with Mando’a. She couldn’t speak it fluently, but she did know several phrases. “Usually that word is used in the context of a marriage.” She turned to Rex “You said no sex, but you didn’t mention anything about not the married part?”

Rex looked uncomfortable “I knew Anakin and Padme had a thing. I didn’t know they were married.”

Luke looked puzzled “How do you know they were married?”

Rex looked at him “Obi-Wan told me that night when I saw you two for the first time.” He looked at Leia straight on “I don’t mean to disparage the marriage or bond between your parents, Leia. I was raised in a cloning facility with only my brothers, and holovids for an education and even I could see they were crazy about each other.”

“But Anakin and Obi-Wan...” He shifted in his chair, looking uncomfortable “They were married. At least in how I understand the term. They were a partnership. Where one was, the other was soon to follow. They looked after each other, they worried about each other, they pushed each other to be better,” he looked at Luke “They loved each other. I don’t know any other way to describe it.”
If this was all true, then what the hell had happened between the two of them? When had the breakdown occurred? How? What event, or events, had chipped away at so significant of a bond?

She had heard the tales told of course. Of the legendary partnership between Anakin Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi. But she had never met anyone who knew them. Who had spoken to them. She had chalked it up to propaganda and nostalgia.

But here was someone who had known them. Spent a great deal of time with them. Rex wasn’t one to delude himself. If he was remarking on its strength, it was there. Would she ever get an answer to how it all fell apart?

She thought of Obi-Wan’s still fractured mind about Vader. She thought of Vader’s seething hatred and contempt. Probably not.


Rex gave him a fond smile “She did, yes. I think he was on a very select list of people she thought of as a friend. She loved him Luke, not the way Anakin did, but they were friends.”

And now she was gone. Obi-Wan didn’t talk about Padme, or at least he didn’t to Leia. Maybe it was time to change that.

Rex gave a rueful smile “But they weren’t the only Jedi I was talking about,” his voice was fond, but his eyes were sad “Kanan was utterly devoted to Hera, but sometimes he wasn’t the best at showing it.”


Rex looked at him startled “Nobody has told you about Ezra or Kanan?” he asked surprised.

Leia started. Those were names she hadn’t thought of in a long time.


“Kanan was a padawan in the old order,” Rex explained “He survived Order 66. Ezra was his student.”

Luke looked surprised “I thought Obi-Wan was the last Jedi to survive.”

Rex’s smile dimmed “He might be,” he admitted “Kanan died a few months before Scarif. And Ezra-” The man’s eyes looked tired “We don’t know where Ezra is.”

Leia wanted to be able to take that haunted look out of Rex’s eyes. But she didn’t know either. She knew Wren had gone looking for him. If she ever found him, Leia never learned. Lothal had slowly withdrawn from the galaxy after the founding of the New Republic. It didn't have an abundance of natural resources that anyone would be interested in. It was far out on the Rim, and the only reason the Empire came to that world at all was because of the Jedi Temple that had been located there.

If Luke knew of any other surviving Jedi, he had never told her about it. She hadn’t known Ashoka was trained as one, and she knew he had met her at least once.

“Oh,” Luke’s voice was lost.

Leia cleared her throat, and both men looked at her. “I actually wanted to talk about Draven, Rex.”
She needed to get his take on this before he became too distracted by the time travel thing.

Rex’s face darkened “Why the hell didn't you say something to someone about him following you?” he spat.

“I had it under control,” she insisted.


“You say that a lot.”

“I do not!” she protested. He and Rex just stared at her. “Well, in this case, I did have it under control,” she insisted “Until Draven lost his mind.”

Rex shook his head “You did not, at anytime, have General Draven under control.” he said, “And even if you did that doesn’t mean you can’t ask for help.” He looked at her beseechingly “Do you think the rest of us like seeing you work yourself to the bone?”

“You sound like my mother,” she said.

“Good,” Rex shot back “Maybe she can pound some sense into your head.”


Leia flinched. She had been alone for a long time. She knew she tended to take on too much, but the habits of seven years didn’t disappear overnight.

“I am trying,” she said looking at both of them “I don't mean to cut everyone out. It’s just for a long time I only had myself to rely on.”

Rex looked slightly mollified “I know you were a spy in the Senate, Leia,” he said “but that’s not what you are doing anymore. You need to learn you have people to watch your back.”

Luke looked guilty. Great, in her defending her own bad habits, she had reminded him of just how truly alone she had been.

“We can start here and now,” she said cheerfully “I feel partly responsible for what happened to Draven.”

“Why? You're not a traitor?” Rex asked.

“No,” she said “but I am keeping a rather big secret. Can you blame a spymaster for getting paranoid about that? And about Vader’s reaction to it?”

Rex’s face darkened “Vader knows you’re Anakin’s daughter?” he demanded.

Leia cursed herself. She hadn’t told him that? She nodded “Yes.”

Rex sighed “Well, I can see why you didn’t want that bandied about,” he said, shoulders slumping “It explains his interest in you.”

Luke shot her a disapproving look “I’m going to tell him,” she said.

“When, Leia?”

“As soon as we’re done talking about Draven,” she said. She chose to ignore the surprise on his
face. “I really do want to know what’s going on, and the minute I let this out we are all going to become distracted.”


“So besides you who are the candidates to replace Draven?” Leia asked brightly, trying to bring the conversation back to the subject at hand.

Rex shook his head “I don’t know all the candidates. We can’t just throw someone in and hope it works. We need someone who knows what they’re doing.” Rex grimaced “And get Draven to obey.”

“Draven is a professional.” Rex gave her a disbelieving look. Leia amended “Draven hates the Empire enough to swallow it.”

Rex looked doubtful “There is swallowing it, and then there is respect. You know you get better results with respect. Complicating matters is his spy network. The higher ones, the ones that have been there the longest, some of our most valuable ones?”

Leia nodded. Rex continued “They have known him for years. That is a rare commodity in his line of work. They only trust him, and introducing a new handler, will set the usefulness of that network back considerably.”

Which was the point she made to her parents. Dammit, why did the man have to let his paranoia get the better of him?

“Why didn’t you tell Mon the truth?” a snide voice asked in her head “She could have headed this off. And now the Alliance wouldn’t be down a spymaster.”

She shoved that thought away. Her reasons were solid. Draven’s were not.

Luke piped up “So he has to stay because he has access to something valuable.” He frowned “Doesn’t seem like much of a punishment.”

“Do we really want to cut our noses off to spite our faces?” Leia asked. “Is it worth it?”

Rex looked surprised “I thought you of all people would understand. He broke the rules, Leia. If we had a functioning government, what he was doing would be unlawful physical surveillance. That would make us no better then the Empire. If we embrace their ways, we are no better than them.”

Leia sighed. She did know that. It just made things so unnecessarily complicated sometimes.

“So, Mon is looking for someone who Draven will defer to, or at least trust enough to listen to and knows what they are doing?” Luke asked.

Rex nodded “Exactly.” He slapped his knee in frustration, “That is a limited number of people. If Cassian was still alive—”

Leia shook her head “No. That would never work. Cassian was too loyal to Draven personally. They would be at loggerheads for months trying to sort that out.”

Rex frowned “Maybe, but I don’t think you are giving Cassian enough credit.” Leia shrugged. It was possible, Rex’s memory of Cassian was certainly more clear than hers. He had been an instructor to Leia, showing her the best way to spy in the open, but he had died over thirty years
ago for her. She might not be remembering him correctly.

“It doesn't matter either way,” she said. “He’s not an option.”

Rex nodded “So Mon is sending me to Lothal.”

Leia gasped. That was risky. The Rebellion was trying hard not to draw attention to that planet. So far Lothal had remained free of the Empire, and the Alliance would like to keep it that way. There was also the politics to consider. Sabine Wren had made it her personal mission to defend that world. If she felt the Alliance was unnecessarily endangering it, there would be hell to pay. General Syndulla's ship wasn’t called the Ghost for nothing, and the Lothal cell still spent time here on Yavin to help. But the Alliance had never sent a ship to them.

Complicating everything was the Mandalorians. They were embroiled in their own civil war right now, the independents versus those who had pledged loyalty to the Empire. Sabine had a lot of clout and pull with the independent faction, she could easily sabotage the Alliance's relationship with the independent faction. The Alliance was sending what resources they could to help, but Mon was wary of doing more. Mandalorians had a long memory, and none of them had forgotten what happened last time an outside force had gotten involved in one of their civil wars.


“Alexsandr Kallus,” Rex explained, “He’s former ISB, he’s been trained in the way Imperials think and was a spy himself for a while.”

Leia frowned. She had forgotten about him. He had assumed the role of Fulcrum shortly after Ashoka had vanished.

Leia shook her head “Draven doesn't trust him,” she said, “he’s too new at this.”

“New at this?” Rex said “Look he’s an arrogant asshole, but he’s been working with us for going on three years. He was critical in freeing Lothal. By the Force, Thrawn tried to kill him!”

“Could be a long plot,” Leia pointed out “Especially since he was under Thrawn's command. That was a man who had the patience to set up a long game like this.”

Rex waved his hand irritably “Thrawn’s gone.”

“I don’t doubt Kallus’s loyalty and commitment,” Leia said gently, “I’m just saying Draven will.”

Rex slumped “Yeah I know. But we can’t let things coast for too much longer. Whispers have already started among the personnel. We need someone.”

“Yes we do,” Leia remarked. She didn't have an answer either. They were all lost in their thoughts for several minutes. She felt Luke gently push at her mind “Leia,” he reminded her.

Leia looked at him, then looked at Rex.

“Rex,” she said hesitantly.

“Yes?” he looked at her expectantly.

Rex’s chrono let out a loud beep, cutting her off. He looked down and swore at it. “Damn,” he muttered, “I’m late.”

“Late?” she asked.
He nodded “I have a briefing with Mon. Then I’m leaving directly from there to the ship taking me to Lothal.”


Rex shook his head “Too risky,” he looked at Leia “I’m actually taking the Lambda shuttle you stole. It should draw less attention until I reach Lothal.”

“They expecting you?” Leia asked.

Rex nodded “It will be good to see them,” he said. “Especially Jacen. I didn’t realize how cute babies were.”

Luke stood up, “How long are you going to be gone?”

“Somewhere between one to two weeks. Three at the most.” Rex got up from his chair. “What were you going to say?”

Leia shook her head “It can wait until you get back,” she said.

“You sure?”

She gave him a smile “I’m sure.” She stood up and went over to him. Leaning forward she brushed a light kiss across his bearded cheek “Stay safe,” she said.

“Of course,” he looked at her, then shifted his gaze to Luke “And you two stay out of trouble while I’m gone.”

“I don’t go looking for trouble,” Luke protested. “It finds me,”

“Uh-huh,” Rex said. “Your father used to tell me that too. I didn't believe him either.”

He gave them both a jaunty salute and walked out of the room.

Luke sighed “I should go,” he said.

Leia reached down and grabbed his hand before he could get far. “Can I ask a favor?”

He looked at her, caught off guard by her serious tone “Of course.”

She took a deep breath in “I’ve reserved the small chapel room for tomorrow morning.”


She let out a long breath “To say goodbye,” she said quietly.

ABA - Day 117

For being a former temple, there were only two rooms on the entire base that were set aside for religious purposes. Leia had requested the use of the smaller one, the personal one, with the operations officer. He had given her a funny look, but he hadn’t questioned why.

Mama and Papa were already there when she and Luke arrived, R2 trailing behind them. Leia
needed all the loved ones she could get, and the little droid already knew she was from the future.

Except for them, the room was empty of people. It was a bare space, with a few chairs in two rows in front of a large bare altar. Leia supposed it was so that it could easily be decorated for a variety of religious ceremonies. She just found the bare stone walls cold and uninviting.

She gave them a nod, and Luke peeled from her side to join them. She went to the bare altar, placing the candle she brought with her, and a lighter next to it, on its smooth stone surface.

She went back to her family, all of them staring at her with worry in their eyes. R2 came up and bumped her leg, giving a sad little warble. She patted him on the head.

“What do we need to do Leia?” Papa asked.

She looked at him, then looked at the altar. "If you could stand in a line,” she waved to a spot about six feet in front of it. They did as she asked.

“I’m the only one who needs to speak,” she said. “As I am the only person here who knew him...“ her voice trailed off. There should be so many other people here with that privilege. Chewie, Lando, Maz. Hell, even Finn and Rey. Chewie had told her that Han had taken a real shine to both of them. But it was just her, all those events swept away by the Force. "I’m the only one who can speak.”

“So we are silent witnesses?” Mama asked. Leia nodded.

She stared at the altar. She could do this. She had done so many hard things in her life and loss had been the defining feature of it. What was one more?

Leia took a deep breath in and moved so she was standing directly in front of the altar. “We are gathered here today-” she started to say, then Han came through the door.

She stopped, and all of them turned to see what had caught her attention.

“How are you doing here?” she asked, “What are you doing here?” How had he even learned she planned this? Her first thought was Luke, but he looked as surprised as she was, as was Mama. Papa didn’t though. In fact, he seemed relieved. He had told Han.

Han came up to all of them, a slight smirk on his face “I always wanted to attend my own funeral.” That cocky facade faded as he came directly up to her. He reached out and cupped her cheek “I thought you could use the support.”

“I-” she started to deny it. Then she stopped herself. She loved this Han too, and he wanted to help. Didn’t everyone keep telling her she wasn’t alone, and she could accept their help? “Yes I do.” she said. “As long as you are okay with it.”

He reached down and pulled her into a hug. She squeezed back, hard, then gently pushed him to stand next to Luke.

She waited until he was settled next to Luke, and looking at her. She started again. “We are gathered here today to ask for the release of a lost loved one. I call on all of you to witness these rites.”

She paused for a moment then said in a louder voice “I call on the nameless goddess of the eternal night. I call on her for her help and mercy for one lost in her depths.”
She turned around and lit the candle. Strictly speaking, she should have a small pyre for Han, where an object of his was burned. She didn't have anything that Han owned, and they couldn’t light a fire indoors. That was asking for a smoke-filled room very quickly.

She stared at the flame for a moment, the words she had so carefully memorized last night slipping away from her. She paused, and let the soft flickering flames soothe her. She traced it’s dance with the Force, seeing how it waxed and waned as her breath hit it. She was but a small speck in everything. This pain was a terrible searing thing, but she would get through this. Her Han deserved this ceremony. And Leia never failed to give the people that she loved what they deserved.

Then the words were back “We are gathered here to set free the spirit of Han Solo,” she began, the words falling from her lips. “He was a smuggler, a thief, a Captain, a General, a friend, a brother, my husband, and a father.” Her throat closed over that word. She broke out of the ritual wording, and whispered brokenly “He was such a good father.”

The flame became blurred as the tears she had been fighting since she entered the room filled her eyes. Faintly she thought she felt someone brush her shoulder. So low, she could barely hear him, she heard Han whisper “You got this sweetheart.” He really shouldn’t have broken protocol like that. He hadn’t known the other Han, he wasn’t supposed to speak. But she was so grateful for the support she let it go. The sound of his voice gave her the strength to continue.

“He was lost at Star Killer Base,” she said, going on, reciting the place of his death “He died trying to save his son. If his spirit remains there, please oh mighty nameless one, show him the way home. We beg you, let him have the rest he deserves.”

She looked up from the candle and slowly turned around to face the witnesses.

Han was right where she had left him, standing next to Luke, a solemn look on his face, his hands were folded in front of him. He hadn’t moved.

That light hand on her shoulder, squeezed. “That’s my girl,” she thought she heard. Or maybe it was the Force whispering to her in that much loved gruff voice. She didn't care. “I love you,” he whispered in her ear.

“I know,” she thought automatically. And swallowed her sob. She would never say that refrain to him ever again.

She cleared her throat. “We are here to say goodbye,” and she continued with the rest of the ceremony, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer and Acyancat

Translation into Russian available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! Some small notes, there is a spoiler for the novel, Leia - Princess of Alderaan in this chapter, but it's a teeny-tiny one. I also feel compelled to warn you this chapter is long, even for me, it's a big one. I know almost none of you are going to listen to me when I tell you to go to sleep, read it in the morning, but I feel I should warn you about what you are getting into. As always, I hope you enjoy!

ETA - for those who need to avoid such things, there is a LOT of drinking in this chapter. Just an FYI, and keep yourself safe loves.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Han wasn’t here. Leia had come out to the Falcon to talk to him, more specifically to thank him for coming to the funeral earlier. It couldn’t have been easy for him to attend, jokes about missing his own funeral aside. She had already thanked Papa for telling Han about it. Papa did look like he had bitten down on a sour fruit, but he hadn’t said anything negative.

Leia looked around and called out his name. When only silence met her call, she shrugged. It was a little past dinner time, maybe he was still in the mess. Either way, he would make his way back here soon. She settled herself at the dejark table to wait for him. There was a large decanter on the table, filled with a golden hue liquid. It was accompanied by three large tumblers.

Leia uncorked the decanter, brought it up to her nose and sniffed. A grin broke out on her face. Corellian brandy, and not the cheap knockoff stuff. This was the forty-year-old classic brandy that Han preferred. The alcohol that was dear and very expensive to get, even for a smuggler of Han’s skill.

Leia pulled one of the tumblers on the table towards her and took note of the other two sitting there. This Han may claim he didn't know her all that well, but he apparently knew her well enough to figure she would be stopping by this evening. Given the presence of three glasses, Han was expecting Luke too after his CAP shift. That third glass wasn’t for Chewie, he couldn’t stand the taste of brandy. He preferred Twi’lek sweet wines. Leia poured herself a very generous helping of the brandy into her glass. It had been a very long week for her, no matter how she looked at it.

She sipped the cup steadily over the next few minutes, lost in thought as she stared at the Falcon’s walls. Leia’s mind wandered to everything that she had done in this old ship. She thought of her and Han’s desperate flight to Bespin. Vader had been hunting her then too. Not because he knew who she was, she hadn’t even known, but because she could be used against Luke.

A fond smile broke out on her face as she recalled the kiss between her and Han that Threepio interrupted. She had been so scared back then. Scared of admitting how much she cared, terrified if she voiced it, Han would be taken away, like everything else she loved in her life. But just because she refused to name the feeling, it didn’t stop Vader from swooping in and separating her from Han.

She thought of the flight back to the Rebel Alliance after they had rescued Han from Jabba. How Han had peered into her face, his vision still a little blurry, and how he had cried. How they had
laid out on his bunk, him holding her tightly and shaking from a combination of fear and exhaustion. He had been so convinced he would never see her again. Except Chewie, who was smart enough to put it in terms Han wouldn’t balk at, everyone who had ever claimed to love him had abandoned him, one way or another.

She thought of their flight from the first Death Star when she had been running on nerves and adrenaline. His cocky grin as he assured her there was no way the Empire was tracking “his” ship. She had thought Han was handsome, even then, but had the depth of a mouse droid. She had been so on edge, her senses tangled up from her torture, the destruction of Alderaan, and the unexpected rescue, she hadn't looked beyond the surface. She usually had a good read on people, but Han? Han had blown her expectations away within hours of their first meeting. Both times.

As her gaze wandered over the familiar walls of the Falcon’s galley, she thought of the other trips they had taken through most of the galaxy on various missions, pleasure trips, or just because they were restless and felt like it. Of Luke’s laughter as he told them to take the “kissy stuff” to their own quarters. Of Chewie’s indulgent smiles. Or Threepio and R2’s constant friendly bickering. So much of her life was wrapped up in these dingy walls. They didn’t look the same, not exactly, but she was used to seeing the differences now. She wondered how long it would be before that other Falcon blurred in her mind.

Leia was surprised when she lifted the glass to her lips to find it empty. Frowning, she put the glass down on the table. Leia pondered the decanter thoughtfully for a moment. It wasn’t like she was going anywhere tonight, she could afford two drinks. Just enough to give her a buzz, but not enough so that she would lose control of her tongue. She may look nineteen, but she wasn’t an amateur at this, she knew when to cut herself off. She poured herself another full glass and returned to her reminiscing.

She wasn’t sure how much time passed. She wasn’t lost in the Force, as she so often found herself as of late, just in her own mind. The engines weren’t running but other than that, this could have been one of a thousand nights she had spent here, enjoying the peace and quiet this ship offered her. So she was startled out of her reverie when a voice that never spoke in that past, called out from the bottom of the gangplank of the Falcon.

“Captain Solo?”

Leia cocked her head. What was Obi-Wan doing here? Maybe the third glass was for him? But why would Obi-Wan come drinking with her and Han?

She heard Obi-Wan’s footsteps coming up the ramp, but before she could call out that Han wasn’t here, he appeared in the doorway leading to the Falcon’s main galley.

“Leia,” he said, looking surprised to see her. Then he noticed the decanter, with its accompanying glasses. A slight look of embarrassment crossed his face. “I’m sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt anything. I was looking for Captain Solo to see if he was interested in providing passage for me.” So no drinking with Obi-Wan then.

Leia shook her head “Han isn’t here,” she said.

Obi-Wan frowned, and came a step closer “Leia, are you alright?” he asked, concern in his voice.

“I’m fine,” she assured him.

His eyebrows went up “You’re slurring your words,” he remarked, slightly amused. Leia followed his eyes as he glanced pointedly at the glass, still in her hand.
She frowned, insulted. “I’m fifty-three years old Obi-Wan. I think I’ve learned my limits on how much alcohol I can drink.”

His hands crossed in front of him “I’m sure you do,” he said, a grin trying to break out on his face “but can I ask you a personal question?”

“Sure,” she chirped.

“How much did you drink when you were nineteen?”

Leia waved her hand in the air “Not a lot,” she said “Mostly at diplomatic functions. Those always had a lot of alcohol at them.”

“I remember,” he said wryly. He came up to the table and slid into the booth so that he was sitting on the opposite side from her. He folded his hands over the table, with that damn amused smirk still on his face.

“I didn’t really drink all that much at them,” she said. It was important that Obi-Wan didn't think she was some sort of alcoholic “Just made it look like I was.” She gave him a conspiratorial wink “It’s amazing what people will say in front of you when they think you’re a cute drunk.”

“I have no doubt,” he gestured to his own face “Not a ploy I could use, unfortunately.”

Leia pshawed his statement “You aren’t bad looking Obi-Wan, even now after twenty years in the desert. I’ve seen holos of you in your younger days,” she leaned forward “you were very attractive.”

“Thank you?” He sounded embarrassed. It was delightfully cute. Obi-Wan was a lot of things, but he was rarely cute. She thought about pinching his cheeks and the look on his face if she told him that.

“I would also use those parties and functions to pass along information to other members of the Alliance,” She sat up straight, proud of her achievement. “I was operating right under the Emperor’s and Vader’s noses, and they didn’t even notice.” Then she frowned, and muttered, “Wasn’t the only thing Vader didn’t notice.”

Obi-Wan blinked, but before he could ask any questions, Leia let out a loud burp, “Oh,” she said, putting her hand up to her mouth to cover it “excuse me.”

“You’re excused,” he said. “So you didn’t really drink all that often?”

“I just told you,” Leia said, with what she thought was extreme patience, “No.” Leia gave him a bitter grin “Changed when I was with the Alliance full time. Lots of drinking then.”

Sorrow filled his face “Because of Alderaan?”

She shook her head “No, couldn’t go that way. Besides, there wasn’t enough alcohol in the galaxy to drown that pain away.” She bared her teeth at him “Had to make the Empire pay. Can’t do that from the bottom of a bottle.”

“I see,” he said, looking troubled.

Leia slumped into the back of the booth. “Not this again,” she complained.

He looked at her questioningly. She waved her glass at him “There you go again,” she said, “I just
said something he would say, didn’t I?”

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said, sounding troubled. “He wanted to make people pay for the injustices that they committed too.”

“Well, in this case, I have to agree with him. Alderaan was destroyed, Obi-Wan. You can’t just roll over and show your belly after that. I had to make the Empire face the consequences,” she proclaimed.

Comprehension dawned on his face “You have to make them pay the price for what they did so that they won’t do it again.”

“Exactly!” she said, taking a long sip. “Justice, not revenge.”

“A place of protection,” he murmured “not anger.”

Leia tilted her head “Who says it can’t be both?” she asked.

“Anger leads to the Dark Side, Leia,” Obi-Wan said.

“No,” Leia shook her head. “It can lead to the Dark Side. But a planet killer Obi-Wan? A planet killer is something that you should be angry about. It’s an abomination, her tongue slid over the word, “amoebo. No, that’s not it. An...abbreviation. No, not that. It’s,” she floundered for a different word “It’s a very bad thing!” she settled on.

He looked pained “I’m not saying that I like the idea of a Death Star. And you are right, every thinking sentient should be horrified that such a thing was even conceived of, never mind built. And yes, they should be angry about it.” He leaned forward “But we are not everyone. The Force can react in, unpredictable, ways to your emotions. That’s why it is imperative you control them.”

She looked at him. Everything he just said was in Basic, but she had the feeling they were talking about two different things. “What does controlling them mean?” she asked.

His face grew slightly relaxed, “It means acknowledging them, especially the negative ones like anger and hate, and then letting them go. Into the Force, through a physical task, meditation. The how doesn’t matter, only the act. Then, and only then, can you proceed with your work.”

Leia gave one long slow blink. Was he really that dumb about this? “Bantha shit!” she said.

Obi-Wan reared back slightly “I beg your pardon?”

“That is complete and utter bantha shit,” she said, plopping her glass down.

His face grew flushed “Anger leads to rage, possessiveness, and muddled thinking.”

She nodded her head “It can,” she acknowledged “but it also leads to resolve, passion, and it is the very foundation of the feeling of injustice.”

He looked startled “I-well, yes, I suppose you can look at it that way.”

“What do you see as the basis of injustice?” she asked curiously.

“I never really thought about it,” he said, a thoughtful look on his face “I suppose a sense of basic decency and fairness.”

“Ha!” she said, pointing her finger at him “No, that is outrage. Injustice is the acknowledgment
that what you see is unfair, and doing something about it.”

She took another sip of her drink, “And here is where you are wrong Obi-Wan. Anger, by itself, isn’t the problem. Hell, even rage by itself isn’t the problem. Feeling them, being guided by them, isn’t inherently wrong. Being controlled by them is.”

“Which the Force makes easier to have happen,” he said swiftly.

She nodded her head “That’s true,” she said, “but then again the Force makes the lighter emotions easier to spin out of control too, and I don’t see you saying dire warnings about that.”

He settled into the booth. ”What do you mean?”

She started ticking them off her hands “Righteousness can lead to self-righteousness. Contemplation can lead to inaction. Detachment can lead to dissociation. Knowledge can lead to rigidity.”

“Can?” he asked,

Leia shook her head, “This is true for both sides Obi-Wan. There is a big difference between can and will.”

He said nothing for a moment. “So what you are telling me, is that to you, any emotion can lead to problems.”

“Of course,” she said.

He swallowed hard “And that you are not angry about the Death Star-”

“Oh, I am angry about that,” she said.

He nodded his head “Alright, you are angry about that. But instead of allowing it to fester into rage, you fuel into a sense of injustice?”

“Sure,” she said. “That sounds about right.”

He looked at her, haunted. “The weighing of balance,” he whispered. The Force shivered along her skin. Leia scowled into air around her. She had no idea what that was all about. If the Force wanted her to so badly understand what was so important about what Obi-Wan said, why didn’t it just come out and tell her? Stupid mystical energy thing.

“Why are we talking about the Death Star?” she asked Obi-Wan, trying to get her mind off of the things the Force had made very clear to her. “It went boom!” she slapped her hand on the table and let out a loud giggle “Twice!”

Obi-Wan’s face went from pensive to amused “Because you were telling me you didn’t crawl into a bottle after Alderaan.”

“That’s right!” Leia said, snapping her fingers “I didn’t! But I did drink,” she confessed. Honesty was important in any relationship “Mostly for bonding experiences. You know, someone died, we’d have a drink for them. We just got back from a mission, and everyone is alive, let’s have a drink to celebrate. Stuff like that.”

Then she frowned, thinking of those long ago years. “Mostly I drank with Han and Luke. Because we stuck together.” She took another sip. Maybe that's where things went wrong. Because instead
of staying together, they had fractured apart.

“Han would always show up if I was there, whether he was involved or not. Sometimes Luke came too. Even if one of us wasn’t on the mission, we came.” She plopped her head on her upright hand “Han watched out for me and Luke,” she said fondly, then thought about it. “Huh, maybe Luke is right, and Han was in love with me then.”

“There were entirely too many tenses missing from that statement for me to make any sense of it,” Obi-Wan said pleasantly “But Leia, do you remember what your tolerance for alcohol was when you were nineteen?”

“Wasn't much,” she said cheerfully, waving her glass again to emphasize her point. “Told you. That came later and….” she trailed off. Later, that had come later, not when she had been nineteen. She looked at the glass in her hand. It was empty again. “Oh,” she said stupidly.

“Fifty-three-year-old Leia has more tolerance than nineteen-year-old Leia,” he said, sounding remarkably amused. “It’s good to know there are some drawbacks to finding yourself younger.”

She stopped scowling at her glass and turned her glare onto him “There are a lot of drawbacks,” she informed him primly.

His face grew serious, “Yes. Bail told me about the funeral you had today.” He reached out, and gently squeezed her free hand. “I am so sorry for your loss. I didn’t know your Han had died.”

She had told him this, hadn’t she? She looked into his thoughtful eyes and tense lines on his face. No, she hadn’t, and now he was hurt. Leia’s throat clogged “Happened the day before I arrived here.” She put the glass down very carefully “I didn’t like talking about it. I only told Papa and Mama about it a few days ago.”

Something in him seemed to relax at that, and his face grew less tense, even as his hand withdrew.

“He’s really gone, isn’t he?” she whispered, haunted “I know he’s still here, and not in the people you love will never leave thing. There is a Han here. But my husband Han, the one I was married to for thirty years. He’s gone.” The thought of it still hurt, even through the numbing of the alcohol, but she didn’t immediately burst into tears. She did reach for the decanter again, filling her tumbler back up.

“Yes, he is,” Obi-Wan’s voice was full of sympathy, but there was something withheld in those words. She looked up at him.

“What's wrong?” she said.

“I don’t like seeing you in pain,” he said, “And there is nothing I can do to help you.”

She frowned “True, but that’s not all of it.”

“It’s nothing Leia,” his face was only a pleasant mask.

“You’re a bad liar,” she told him.

There was something in those pale blue eyes, but all he said was “I am a very good liar.”

She snorted “Only to yourself.”

His face fell, and she immediately felt bad. “Sorry,” she said, reaching out and taking his hand in
apology “I don’t have much of a filter when I drink. Say stuff I shouldn’t, you know?”

“Apparently,” he looked at her hand, then twisted his own to return her grip. Staring at their joined hands, he asked in a very soft voice “Why didn't you ask me to come to Han’s funeral, Leia?”

She blinked, startled “You didn’t know him,” she said, puzzled.

“No,” he said, his haunted eyes coming up to meet hers. “But I know you. I would have liked to have been there to give you my support.”

Obi-Wan was acting like she had rejected him. She scrambled for the words to explain. “I thought it would be cruel to ask you,” she said.

He frowned “Cruel? I don’t understand.”

“Obi-Wan you’ve seen all the death.”

Obi-Wan sat up straight at that, looking confused.

Leia cursed, “Kriffing hell, that’s not what I meant. People die around you.”

Obi-Wan’s face paled and she shook her head “No, that’s not right either. You’ve had too many people you know die in your life. You’ve probably attended more funerals than I have. And that's saying something. I’ve been to lots.”

She hiccuped, worried he wasn’t understanding her mangled thoughts “If I had a choice, I wouldn’t go to another funeral ever again. So I thought, why put you through the agony of another one? For the sake of a person you never even met?”

His face softened “I see,” he said. Leia frowned, something wasn’t right about that. It was true, but not. She reached out with the Force, trying to get a read on the room.

Obi-Wan hissed, and his hand tightened painfully around hers. Leia looked at him in alarm.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Shields,” he said across the Force.

“Someone is attacking you?” Leia started to try to get up, determined to find whoever was doing this and make them stop. Obi-Wan’s tight grip on her arm stopped her mid-motion, preventing her from leaving the table.

“Your shields,” he gasped, pain echoing in every word directed at her.

Leia looked at him, completely confused as to what he was talking about. Then she realized she hadn’t just reached out in the Force. No, Leia had dropped every shield she had. She was broadcasting everything at him. Horrified, she concentrated on bringing back those gossamer layers, the method Obi-Wan himself had taught her.

They wouldn’t come. Every time Leia tried, they became tangled and twisted in her mind. She finally gave up and threw up her old reliable one, that thick wall that had protected her from most of her life. Obi-Wan’s face immediately broke out with relief, and he took a shaky breath in. The grip on her wrist slackened, and Leia withdrew her hand from his.

Shaken, Leia sat back down all the way in her seat. “I’m sorry,” she said miserably.

He waved a hand, eyes still closed, and deep breaths coming in and out “It’s alright.”
She shook her head “No it’s not. I was curious about what you were hiding, but I should have let it be.”

Obi-Wan’s breaths resumed their regular rhythm, and his eyes opened. He regarded her thoughtfully for several moments. Leia just stared at him, feeling guilty that she had hurt him.

Finally, he said, “I thought you were being polite.”

She frowned confused. “What?”

“About not asking me to be at the funeral.” His face was a mixture of wariness and embarrassment “I thought you were trying to spare my feelings.”

Leia stared at him, guilt replaced by exasperation. “No filters,” she said, “I have no filters right now, and you still don’t think I like you.”

“You have to admit, our relationship has been, fractious, to put it mildly.”

“Well, yeah.” she said “but that had to do with you putting Luke in danger. And you thought I was doing the same thing. If there is anything I can forgive someone for, it’s trying to protect Luke.” She stuck her finger out, and leaned over, poking him in the chest “You were wrong. Completely wrong, but your heart was in the right place.”

He looked bemusedly down at the spot she had just tapped “I still think you are wrong about telling Luke about Vader, but what’s done is done.” he said, as she leaned back into her seat.

“See?” she said cheerfully, “You think the same thing about me, and you still like me.”

“Yes, Leia. I care about you quite a bit,” That was an understatement. The reading she was getting in the Force, even through her thick mental wall, was a fierce possessiveness and protection. Obi-Wan would die for her, Leia realized, the alcohol muzzling that thought. Good thing she was slightly tipsy. Sober she would be handling this all really badly. She had lived her life, maybe not well, but she had lived it. She didn’t want or need anyone in her life making that sacrifice to save her.

“I like you,” she said firmly “Shouldn’t, but I do.”

“Shouldn’t?” he asked.

“You’re an arrogant snob who thinks he knows better than anyone. Also,” she swirled one finger around her temple, “I think you’re a little mad.”

Obi-Wan frowned “How charming,” he said.

Leia laughed out loud, “But you are sassy. I do like that. And how you made the members of the Alliance Council look like hypocrites? But politely?” She gave him a wide grin “I almost clapped. It was beautiful.”

He looked almost bashful “Thank you?” he said, sounding like it was nothing.

She shook her head “No, I know how hard that is. People think running around fighting is hard, but doing that?” She blew a raspberry at him “That takes talent.” Then her face grew sober “I am sorry I hurt you just now. That’s never happened before.”

“You getting drunk, or deafening someone?”
“I’ve been drunk before, even when I was nineteen. I meant deafening someone,” she frowned “Why is that?”

“You’re strong in the Force,” he said.

“I’ve always been strong in the Force. But I’ve gone my whole life without visions of the future. Or seeing dead people.” She looked at him critically “Answer me that, Obi-Wan, why did I hear Han at his funeral?”

He looked confused “Because your father ordered him to be there?”

“Not that Han,” she said, waving her hands around “the other Han. Old Han. My Han. He was there.”

Obi-Wan’s mouth dropped open, but she went on “And after I got shot, he showed up then too.” Remembering that incident, and Obi-Wan’s words to Luke about entering deeper into her mind, she scowled. She pointed a finger at him “And just for your information I was aware of who Luke was, and I would never hurt him.”

Obi-Wan looked puzzled for a moment. Then remembering the incident, he paled “When I was healing you?” Oh, so that was what he had been doing in her mind, not just being overprotective of Luke. She should thank him. “You heard me?”

Leia nodded, “You weren’t exactly being quiet,” she pointed out.

“Leia, I wasn’t speaking to you. I was deliberately speaking to Luke.”

“Great another freaky thing I can do,” She rested her forehead against the table, “I think I liked it better when I didn't know how weird I am in the Force.”

“Ignorance does not change what is,” he said, sounding for all the galaxy like one of her tutors.

“I know that!” she whined into the table. “That doesn’t make it any better.” She brought her head back up “Mother said I was opening doors.”

“Breha is a wise woman,” Obi-Wan said, “I’ve always found her advice helpful.”

“Not Mama,” she said “ Padme. My mother. She showed up once too.” She looked at Obi-Wan “I thought ghosts were supposed to be blue and transparent?”

“Leia,” Obi-Wan’s voice was very tight “Are you telling me that you’ve been seeing dead people who were not Force sensitive?”

“Yes,” she said, “What did you think we were talking about?”

His mouth opened and closed several times “You saw Padme?” he whispered.

Leia nodded.

“And you are sure it was her?” he croaked, his eyes closing in pain. There was hope and doubt equally intertwined on his face.

Leia nodded again. “Pretty sure. I mean, I time traveled. Why can’t the ghost of my mother show up in my dreams?”

Obi-Wan’s eyes opened, and there was such grief in them. “I don’t know Leia,” he confessed. “I’ve
never heard of a non-Force sensitive reaching a person in their dreams.”

“No, no, no,” she said emphatically “I was not asleep during Han’s funeral. He was there Obi-Wan. I heard him.” She reached up and touched her shoulder, remembering that comforting hand. That touch that gave her the strength to finish. “I felt him.”

He looked at her, eyes full of sympathy. “I don’t know Leia,” he said “I’ve heard stories and myths on countless worlds about ghosts haunting the living. But they were just that, stories.”

Leia snorted at that “Uh-huh. And time travel is a cheap trick used by hack writers,” she gestured to the Falcon, “but here I am!”

“Here you are,” he agreed. He leaned back into the booth, rubbing his beard in thought. “There is nothing I can concretely point to and say, there, that is why, or even how.” He looked at her, and was it the brandy or was there jealousy in his eyes? “I’ve certainly never experienced anything like that.”

Leia frowned. What non-Force Sensitive did Obi-Wan want to talk to? He pulled himself back from wherever he had gone. “And as far as I know, there was nothing in the Jedi archive about it.”

He gave a rueful shake of his head “That doesn’t mean the Jedi at one point didn’t know the answer to your question. It wasn’t until Qui-Gon managed to bring himself back with the Force anyone knew that was possible.”

Leia cocked her head “I thought that was a thing you did. You all just went ‘poof’ when you died. That it was part of being a Jedi.”

Obi-Wan laughed “No, not even close. Qui-Gon was the first to achieve in a very long time, from what he told me. And he most certainly didn’t go ‘poof’ as you put it when he died.”

“Oh, he gives you straight answers,” she muttered bitterly.

Obi-Wan sat up straighter in his seat, looking interested. “He’s spoken to you again?”

“Yes,” she said bitterly, and took another long swing, finishing her glass, “He told me I need to listen!” She shot Obi-Wan a hurt look “I listen!”

Obi-Wan just looked at her.

“I do listen,” she protested “It’s just most of the time what people are saying is dumb.”

“Of course,” he said soothingly.

She scowled and muttered to herself “Shows what you know.”

He frowned thoughtfully “You’ve been opening yourself more and more to the Force,” Obi-Wan said. “It’s like exercising a muscle. The more you use it, the better it responds.” He looked at her “And you have so much potential muscle you can build. You also weren’t taught what was, or was not possible.” Wonder passed over his face “If you were talking to Padme, that might be what she meant. You are opening doors that I would have thought impossible.”

“Maybe that’s why,” she said darkly.

“Why what?”

“Why the Force brought me back. So I would have too.” He looked surprised, and Leia let out a
bitter laugh “I am not stupid Obi-Wan. I know what the Force wants from me. But I don’t want it.” She reached out and filled her cup again.

“Leia?” Obi-Wan said, “Is that such a good idea?”

“This body is nineteen,” she said hotly, “it can take the abuse.”

“Alright,” he said cautiously.

Leia didn’t want to talk about the Force anymore, or it’s very blatant desire for her to be a Jedi. So she focused in on Obi-Wan and said the first thing that came to mind. “You were alone for too long,” she said. “You need people.”

His eyes narrowed “Do you have anything to do with the fact I suddenly don’t eat my meals alone anymore?”

Alcohol was great, Leia decided. If she had been sober, she would have tried to dance around admitting that. Then Obi-Wan would get mad, and the two of them would be snarling at each other again in no time. Brandy made talking to him so much easier. “Yes,” she said bluntly “You need company.”

“So you ordered your parents, Luke, and Rex to accompany me?” He sounded pissy.

“I didn't order anybody to do anything,” she said hotly, back coming up “As if I would order my parents to do anything. I might be older, but I’m still their daughter. Order them to do something,” she pshawed that notion and took another sip. “I merely mentioned I thought you spent to much time alone to all of them, and they all agreed with me. They want to help you. They care about you Obi-Wan.”

“I noticed you never had a meal with me,” he said.

“Actually, I was going to look for you tomorrow for lunch,” she said hurt. Of course, she was going to spend time with him. “I told you, I like you.”

He rubbed his eyes “Leia you didn't have to do that. Any of it.”

“Yes,” she said “I did. You are even worse than I am in admitting you need people. And that is saying something, I’m terrible at it.”

“I have the Force,” he said, starting to rise from the table.

“So do I,” she said “As of yet, the Force has never laughed at one of my jokes. Or given me a hug. Or told me everything was going to be alright. It’s not a replacement for people.”

He stopped his movement and looked at her, then sat back down slowly.

“Humans are social creatures Obi-Wan. We need to be touched, we need to interact with others. You spent nineteen years in the desert with minimal contact, with anybody,” she emphasized.

“It was too much of a risk-” he started to say, but she waved him off.

“Yes,” she said “I know. I’m not condemning your choices Obi-Wan,” She gave him a wide smile “In fact I’m grateful. You protected Luke. I’m just saying that you aren’t acknowledging the price you paid for it. And what you need to do to get better.”

His face closed off “Do as I say, not as I do?” he asked snidely.
“I’m too drunk to get mad,” she said pleasantly. She took a long sip of her brandy “Funny enough, I’m a pretty carefree drunk. It takes a lot to get me going right now. So you digging at my temper? Won’t work.”

His face flushed “I’m sorry,” he muttered, hands rubbing his eyes “That was a low blow.”

“Yep,” she said “more so because it’s true. I’m terrible at letting people in. But Obi-Wan,” she leaned forward making sure he was paying attention to her “I at least know I should. You seem to be operating in this fantasy where you can shoulder on through everything, by yourself.”

His hands dropped from his face. “This is something I’m not used to doing.”

Leia frowned, “Have conversations with drunken time traveling know it alls?” she asked confused.

“No,” he said “Live with civilians. I lived in the Temple for as long as I could remember. And while the Temple encouraged us to learn and embrace as many of the customs and mores of our homeworld as we felt comfortable with, we all grew up together. I understood what was expected of me, and where I fit in. There was…” his mouth had a bitter twist “well, order.”

He sighed, “Then I was thrust into the Clone Wars. The Clones, they were soldiers. They were trained to deal with us.”

“Indoctrinated,” Leia said mildly.

He looked at her, guilt in his eyes. “Yes,” he acknowledged. “Indoctrinated. Nevertheless. I understood them. They understood me. We had shared experiences. There was…”

“Order?” she said.

Obi-Wan nodded. “Yes. This…” and he waved his had around, meaning to encompass not just the Falcon, but all of Yavin. “interacting with politicians, soldiers, bureaucrats, I just don’t know how to…” his voice trailed off.

“Make friends?” Leia shook her head “You talk to them Obi-Wan. You talk to people, and if you find something you like about them, you talk some more. This isn’t hyperspace physics.”

“Talk about what?” he said, pulling his hand through his hair in frustration. “Battle tactics? Strategy? The fine nuisances of how annoying sand is? How crappy the food is here?”

“That would be a buzzkill,” she murmured “Hobbies? Interests maybe?” she looked at him, a horrible suspicion dawning in her mind “You do have those, don’t you?”

“I-” he said. He thought about it for a minute, then said firmly “I like listening to music.”

“There you go,” she said, “find a music friend.”

“Should I take out an ad?” he asked. He ran his hands through his hair “Walk up to every random person who crosses my path, and ask ‘Do you like music and want to be my friend?’”

Leia blinked “That’s one way to do it,” she said.

“People don’t approach me, Leia,” there was vulnerability on every line of his body “Outside of meetings and requests for help, people don’t come near me. They don’t see a person when they look at me, they see-”

“A legend,” she finished softly.
He nodded “Exactly.”

She could relate. She knew this one. On D’Qar, there were very few people that felt comfortable approaching her. Besides the people she had known for decades, she had very few friends on base. It was one of the reasons she was so fond of Poe. He had never looked at her and seen her legend. He saw her, Leia.

He shook his head “No, this is not a good idea. I’m fine with the way things are.”

Time to do something different. She gave him very wide and watery eyes. “I don't like that you are sad.” She brightened up “I could find you a friend!”

“I have friends,” he said dryly “I’ve been having many meals and conversations with them over the last few days because of you.”

She shook her head, inspiration hitting “No, no, no, not just a friend. A naked friend,” then she frowned “Unless you don’t like having naked friends. Some people don’t.” She looked at him earnestly.

Obi-Wan turned a deep red color “Uh,” he stuttered.

“We are all adults here Obi-Wan. I am fifty-three-years old. You can tell me if you want to have a naked friend.”

“I don’t-” he started to say, then his words faltered.

“It is perfectly normal to want one,” she said, giving him an encouraging smile.

Obi-Wan only stared at her, blankly.

“Oh, come on! If you want one, you should say something!” She leaned forward a bit on the table “Han really liked it when I told him I wanted to be his naked friend.”

“Leia!” Obi-Wan said, shocked.

Belatedly she realized Obi-Wan had never said anything about being someone who didn’t want a naked friend, she reached out and took his hand. “I’m sorry,” she said, “I shouldn’t have assumed you wanted a naked friend. I don’t care if you don’t,” she told him reassuringly, “I will admit, it's rare, but it’s perfectly normal not to want one! But you shouldn't have to hide who you are Obi-Wan, you could have told me.”

She frowned at him “Is someone giving you a hard time about it? You just tell me, and I will make them cry.” She nodded her head “I’m good at that. Just ask Sgt. Riker.”

Obi-Wan finally managed to find his voice “That is very generous of you Leia,” he said, “and I take it in the spirit it was offered. But I do in fact like having sex. I'm just not interested in it right now. It is too distracting, and I need to focus on Luke’s training.”

Leia just looked at him expectantly. “No naked friends?” she said “I’m not saying you have to marry anyone, just you know,” she waved her hands ”endorphins. Feels good.”

“Leia, I don’t think this is the most appropriate conversation to have with you right now.”

Leia pshawed that “When your drunk is the best time to have that conversation.” She brightened “This is a military base, despite all the Senators on it. There is bound to be someone who wouldn't
mind a romp.” She gave him an encouraging smile “I’m certain I will find you a naked friend! But just a friend,” she amended at his shocked look “I told you, you are very attractive.”

“Oh, that is…” he trailed off, and he was looking everywhere but her, “That is to say,” he tried again “I don’t think it would be appropriate for you and I-”

Finally understanding what his babbling words were hinting at she burst out laughing “No, not me, you are not my type!”

His blush deepened, “Well I,” he fiddled his hands in front of him “That is to say, you are very aesthetically pleasing-”

“Stop!” Leia commanded, giggling so hard through her teeth. “I’m not insulted Obi-Wan. You don’t need to apologize. Besides,” she grinned lazily at him “I know I’m very attractive.” She took another sip of her brandy.

“I don’t need a naked friend. Han is going to be my naked friend,” she said resolutely “I will do a lot to make you happy, but not that.” She sipped her drink and tried to figure out the math. “You were protecting Luke for how long?”

“Since he was born.”

“Huh, that’s a long time to go without a naked friend.”

“I couldn’t-”

“Risk it, I know.” She took another sip. Then her head cocked as another thought struck her “Aren’t you worried about the gossip?”

Obi-Wan frowned “Why would I worry about gossip?”


He grew still “What gossip about Luke and I?” he asked in a very dangerous voice.

Leia frowned “There is none, as far as I know.” She leaned forward “Why, did you hear something? I’ll set them straight if anyone is saying anything.”

Obi-Wan’s mouth flattened into a thin line, and Leia got the distinct impression when was counting to ten in his head “Leia, why would you think there will be gossip about Luke and I?”

“Ohhhh,” she said, comprehending “Because of the gossip about you and Vader.”

Obi-Wan’s mouth dropped open “The what about who?” he asked in a squeaky voice.

“Rex said there was a lot of gossip about your relationship with Vader. I just thought, you know, new apprentice, same flapping mouths,” she waved a hand dismissively, “I told you most of what people say about stuff is stupid and not worth listening to.”

“Leia, back up for a moment? What exactly did Rex say about my relationship with Anakin?”

“Rex said you were married to Vader,” Leia said.

Obi-Wan’s face immediately went white with anger “I knew Anakin since he was a child. He was my responsibility for more than a decade. I would never -”
She put her hands up “No, no, no,” she said quickly “Rex specifically said no sex. Vader was not your naked friend. Rex was very clear on that. He said he didn’t know a better way to explain your…” she waved her glass around in the air “relationship.”

“And he picked married?” Obi-Wan sounded dubious.

She shrugged “He said you were inseparable. That you made the other better. That you trusted each other.”

Obi-Wan’s face fell “I thought we did too,” his eyes grew distant, as his thoughts wandered away. Then he snapped back “As long as we are clear about the nature of our relationship.”

Leia cocked her head “I’m not.”

“Excuse me?”

“You said you knew Anakin since he was a child. That he was your responsibility.”

Obi-Wan frowned “Yes?”

Leia’s mind was fuzzy, so she wasn’t certain she was hearing everything Obi-Wan wasn’t saying. “That is a very complicated way to say you raised him Obi-Wan.”

“I didn’t-” he stopped “Anakin was not my son. He was -” he stopped. “He was my padawan.”

“What does that even mean?”

Obi-Wan’s voice slipped into a lecturing mode “That was a word the Jedi used to denote an apprentice-”

She waved her hand “I knew that. I meant what does that word mean to you?”

Obi-Wan looked at her, panic in his eyes. Without a word, he grabbed the decanter and empty glass. He pulled both over to himself and poured himself a large drink. Then he quickly started drinking it, if it had been anyone but Obi-Wan, Leia would have said he was chugging it down.

Leia watched, with wide eyes, and a little bit of amazement. “Han’s going to be pissed,” she remarked, “That is very fine brandy you’re drinking like it’s cheap wine.”

Obi-Wan slammed his empty glass down on the table. “Then we won’t tell him,” he said as he poured another drink. He proceeded to chug that one too.

Leia nodded. That seemed like a good solution. She didn’t like it when Han was upset.

“Why are you chugging it like it’s cheap wine?” she asked as he filled his glass again.

“I need to be very drunk to have this conversation,” he said as if he was confessing a very shameful secret.

“I get that,” she proclaimed.

“Do you?” he asked.

She nodded. “I have to be drunk to talk about what Luke and I almost did in the other timeline,” she confided. “Hey! I’m drunk now! What to know?”
“No, I do not want to know.” Obi-Wan grimaced “Another one of my sins.”

“Yes,” she said “Part of the reason I was mad at you. Could have saved me a lot of trouble if you just told Luke who I was when he got my message. Both times.”

Obi-Wan grimaced “I hadn’t thought of it that way.”

She shrugged “Well, no one is perfect.”

He let out a sad little laugh “Especially me.”

Leia cocked her head “Well, you didn’t fall to the Dark Side and enslave most of the known galaxy, so there’s that.”

“No, I didn't,” Obi-Wan said “Cheers to that!” He lifted his glass up and delighted, Leia tapped her own glass against his.

“Cheers!” she echoed. Then she took another long drink “Vader was perfect at that.”

“He didn't use to be,” Obi-Wan said morosely. “He cared so much. I don’t know what happened. I go away to handle General Grievous, and suddenly my men are turning on me. Then I manage to make my way home, and the whole Temple is on fire.” He stopped for a long moment, and then took a deep breath in “And I learn that Va-” His eyes closed, and he corrected “No, I learned that Anakin did it.”

“I’m sorry,” Leia whispered.

“He was fine,” Obi-Wan lifted haunted eyes to her “Before I left he was fine. He came to see me off and tell me goodbye before the mission. He even gave me a hard time about going alone. Said that every other time we were separated bad things happened.” Obi-Wan snorted “He was right about that.”

He lifted his glass again and almost spat “Cheers!”

“Cheers,” Leia said, meeting his glass again. They both took a drink.

Then Leia frowned “He was fine?” she asked.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said “I mean he was tired. But we were all tired. We were fighting a war after all,” and here he glared at her “With only the clones and no help from anyone else.”

Leia ignored his dig at the old Republic Senate. She hadn’t been there, it wasn’t her fault, and she knew she didn’t know everything about it. “That doesn't sound right,” she said, trying to think it through. “People don’t go from fine to homicidal that fast.”

“Well, cheers to that too!” Obi-Wan proclaimed, and Leia automatically raised her glass when he said that word. The glasses tinkled in the room as the met “Because he did.” His face tightened in grief, “He always was exceptional at whatever he put his mind too.”

He took another long swig of his drink, then slammed the glass back down on the table. Leia saw a tear slip down his cheek, as he muttered. “I miss him so much.”

Leia didn’t have anything to say to that. Not because she didn’t understand. Well, Leia didn’t understand the Vader part. But she did understand the pain of missing someone you loved. Someone who had done horrible things, would continue to do horrible things, and yet you still
loved them.

“He was my friend,” Obi-Wan muttered, words slightly slurred. The alcohol was hitting him hard now. “That was what Anakin was to me. A friend.”

Leia frowned “Just a friend?” she asked. Obi-Wan glared at her, “Not the naked thing,” she said, waving her glass in his face. Honestly, she was drunk, not stupid. “But you said, before, when you wouldn’t admit that he was Vader. You called him your brother. That sounds more like he was family.”

“Yes, he was.” Obi-Wan looked miserable “Wasn’t supposed to be though. The Jedi weren’t supposed to have families. We had to be above that.”

She frowned “Wasn’t the Jedi, your family?” she asked.

“No,” he said, “I told you. We were an Order.”

“That sounds really unhealthy,” she remarked.

He glared at her, “We had the Force,” he said “We had tradition. We were the peacekeepers of the Republic. We couldn’t take sides. We needed to look out for the galaxy.”

“Who looked out for you?” Leia said.

Obi-Wan looked confused “The Senate?”

“No, Obi-Wan. Not who held the purse strings. While you were all running around dumping your emotions into the Force, and taking care of the galaxy, who was looking out after you? After your interests?”

“Uhhhh….“ he looked at a loss for words “The Force?” he ventured.

Leia closed her eyes. “Seriously?” she said, “You relied on the Force to look out for you?”

“And we used it to see what we should do,” he added helpfully.

She shook her head “Nope,” she said “Not buying it. The Force can be vague sometimes, but when it wants to be, it can be very clear. And even when it is, that doesn’t absolve you of not thinking things through.”

“Well you ended up time traveling because you kept denying the Force what it wanted, so I’m not sure your way is better,” he muttered.

Drunk Obi-Wan was really sassy. “At least I thought about what I was doing. Instead of falling back on tradition, instead of trying to evolve.”

“Well if you had been there, maybe you could have solved all our problems for us.” he said snidely “It’s easy to see where things went wrong in hindsight.”

“Yeah,” she agreed “I know.”

“You do, don’t you?” he hiccuped. “I thought about what I would do if I found myself in your situation.”

“Fighting the Force?” she asked.
“Time travel,” he said.

“Oh, that. What would you do?”


“Ohh,” she said happily “That would be fun.”

“I have no idea if it would work,” he said, face somber “If it would save Anakin, but it would make me feel better.”

“You know that's anger right?” Leia asked.

He nodded “I know,” he said miserably, “I thought I had gotten rid of this. I thought I had come to terms with it. But then you,” he glared at her “kept hammering away at me. You wouldn’t let me lie anymore.”

“It really wasn’t healthy Obi-Wan,” she said gently.

He hiccuped “I know,” he said “I do know that. But it was the only way I could live with it.”

“With what he did?” she asked, “Kriffing hell Obi-Wan, you are not responsible for his actions.”

“No,” he said “what I did to him. He was my apprentice. He was my brother. I wasn't supposed to think of him like that, but that’s what he was.” Obi-Wan swallowed hard “I loved him, and I watched.”

“Watched what?” Leia asked as she brought the glass to her lips.

“As he caught on fire,” Obi-Wan confessed.

Leia froze “What?” she said, certain she could have not heard what he just said correctly.

“We were fighting, over a lava river,” Obi-Wan said. He shook his head “So stupid. But neither of us were exactly thinking straight.”

“I jumped from the repulsor skiff I was on to the bank of the river. He followed me. He was standing on a collection droid.” Tears streamed down his face “I told him not to do it,” he said, voice cracking. “I told him I had the high ground and not to jump.”

“He did it anyway,” Leia said softly.

Obi-Wan nodded. “And I cut off three of his limbs while he was in the air.” He looked at Leia, haunted. “I mutilated him.”

“Obi-Wan…” she said, trying to find the words.

“And he was clinging to the bank. To the soft ground that was crumbling beneath his one remaining arm.” Obi-Wan laughed bitterly “It was the mechanical one, the one Dooku cut off at the first Battle of Geonosis. I could see he was falling closer and closer to the lava. You were right, I should have killed him. It would have been the merciful thing to do.”

He stopped and took a long swig of his drink “I wasn't feeling very merciful.”

“So you watched him burn, and did nothing,” she said.
He nodded. “I put him in that suit. He’s been in constant pain and agony over the last nineteen years, and I did that to him.”

“I-” Leia didn’t have the words. No wonder Obi-Wan had retreated into his lie. She couldn’t even begin to imagine the guilt he was wrestling with. Obi-Wan thought he was a good person, a moral one, but good people didn’t do what he had done to Vader, and Obi-Wan knew it. It didn’t matter what Vader had done, what mattered to Obi-Wan was that in a moment of weakness, he had failed his own code.

“So I would stab Palpatine,” he said finally. “Just on general principle. Maybe it wouldn’t save Anakin. Or Ahsoka. Or Padme. Or the Clones. Or the Republic. Or the Jedi, but it would make me feel better.” He looked at her “And I’m not sure how I feel about that.”

Leia cocked her head “Actions,” she finally said “not feelings. If you ever do find yourself in the past, then you can worry about it.”

He let out a bitter laugh “Cheers to that!” he said.

“Cheers,” Leia responded, and they clinked their glasses together and they both drank.

Obi-Wan twisted his glass in front of his face, watching the liquid tumble about. “He was, you know.”

“Was what?” Leia asked.

“Extraordinary,” He put his glass down on the table and looked at her “Like you. Like Luke.”

Leia blushed “No,” she started to protest “Luke is the special one. I’m just the one too stubborn to quit.”

He shook his head “Both of you,” he said firmly. “Just like he was.” He stopped, took a deep breath “No, he is still extraordinary. In destruction, in pain, in evil, but still extraordinary.”

“Cheers to that!” Leia said “Because he is most certainly an extraordinary asshole now!” They clinked their glasses again and drank.

“I just wish I knew what happened,” Obi-Wan said, rubbing his forehead “Why he turned to Palpatine. I know he trusted the man, but once he knew he was a Sith Lord, why not tell someone? Why not tell me? What possible thing did Palpatine offer him that I wouldn’t?”

Leia blinked. “That’s not what he said.”

Obi-Wan looked at her, bleary eyes “What who said?”

“Vader. In the cell. He said it was for her,” she said frowning. “He said he saw her death everywhere, and that the Jedi told him to let her go. Let her die.”

Obi-Wan blinked “Her who?”

“Padme,” she said “My mother. He said Palpatine told him he could save her.”

Obi-Wan’s mouth fell open “He said what!??”

Her frown deepened “He couldn’t have been that stupid, could he? A Sith Lord offers you a way to save your wife? Sounds suspicious to me?” She looked at Obi-Wan “You said they were friends? Maybe that’s why he believed him?” She shook her head “No, that can't be right. Sith Lords don’t
have friends, do they? Both of you said Sith try to kill each other.”

“Leia,” Obi-Wan said, hands gripping the sides of the table tightly “Can you repeat that please?”

She looked at him puzzled “Sith Lords don’t have friends?”

“Not that,” he said through gritted teeth “About Padme.”

“Oh! He said that he needed a way to save her. That his mother had died, and he couldn’t stand by
and let the same thing happen to his wife.”

“Like his mother?” Obi-Wan’s face paled. “Who did he talk to about that?” he murmured to
himself. Then he gave Leia panicked eyes, “He never mentioned he saw Padme die to me, I swear
it. I wouldn’t have brushed him off like that. Not after what happened to Shmi.”

Leia frowned “Wait, wait, wait,” she said, “I thought Tusken Raiders killed her. Luke was very
specific about that. He said Tusken raiders killed his grandmother Shmi.”

Obi-Wan’s eyes narrowed at that “*His* grandmother?” he asked.

She waved her glass around “He told me about this before we knew we were related.”

“Oh.”

“So how is, *our* grandmother, Shmi’s death Vader’s fault?” That sounded pretty far-fetched to
Leia’s ears.

Obi-Wan’s face blossomed with shame “He saw it before it happened.”

“Huh?”

“He dreamed about it before she died.”

“Oh,” Leia said. “Oh . And he thought he should have done something.”

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said “another sin of mine. I told him that it was just a dream.”

She frowned “Why would you tell him that?” she asked, “He’s strong in the Force. It’s not outside
the realm of possibility that what he was seeing was true.” She looked at him puzzled “You’re the
one always saying ‘Trust the Force’”

Then she scowled “Or was it because this was about his family, and Jedi weren’t supposed to have
those?”

“I thought it was anxiety!” Obi-Wan said “I thought he was letting his fears for his mother
overwhelm him again. I never, for one moment, thought she was in actual danger! Jedi don’t see
that far into the future, even in a dream.”

“But he did,” she whispered. “Luke can too.” She recalled him, the other him, telling her that he
had “remembered” Dagobah. That he had seen it in dreams, years before he ever stepped foot
there. Leia, so far, had been spared that little ‘gift.’”

“Yes,” he gave a snort “Skywalkers, you all confound expectations at every turn.”

“Freaks,” Leia muttered.
Obi-Wan shook his head “Unique,” he corrected.

“But you didn’t treat Vader that way,” Leia said. “You didn’t treat him any more special than an ordinary apprentice.”

“No,” he admitted. “I did not.” And then he was quiet for a while as he took several more sips. “Someone else,” he said sadly “they should have given him to someone else. I was newly knighted, and I didn’t have the first clue what I was doing.”

Leia’s mouth dropped open “Your first apprentice? He was your first apprentice?”

Obi-Wan nodded. “And my only. My Master was dead, and I couldn't turn to him for advice. I was too scared to confess to anyone else older.”

“Why?”

He looked up at her, straight in the eyes “They didn't want to train him. Said he was too old and too dangerous.”

“They were right about that,” she muttered.

Obi-Wan ignored her, too lost in the past “But I made a promise, and I intended to keep it.” His eyes grew distant “I suppose I did. Anakin did become a Knight before he fell.”

Then he came back to the here and now, and he said bluntly. “The Jedi Council would have thought you would make a terrible Jedi.”

Leia felt herself flinch. She agreed with him. She would make a terrible Jedi, but to hear it put so plainly... “I know,” she whispered.

He shook his head, and took another swig of his drink, finishing it off. When he was done, he plopped it on the table, and rose. He came to her, a little unsteady, but more straight then she would have expected from someone who had downed that many drinks.

He knelt in front of her “They would be wrong,” he said, voice clear and words being firmly enunciated “You care Leia Organa. You care so much it takes my breath away. For your family, your people, for justice. You have a temper, but you focus it and use it, you are never overwhelmed by it. You try to protect those who in your care. You make mistakes-”

“A lot of mistakes,” Leia said.

“Not as many as you think,” he whispered gently. “But you try, to the best of your ability to learn from them.” He cupped her cheek, “In every way, you embody every ideal of what the Jedi were supposed to be.” His hand fell from her cheek, and he looked so lost and confused “And you do it by embracing everything we tried to control. And if we couldn't control it, we ignored it. You and Luke, you both rely on your hearts so much.”

His voice broke “I thought for so long if I had only been a better Jedi, a more faithful one, one who really could maintain his distance, I could have taught Anakin better. Seen the problem and stopped it. I thought I was too invested in him, too blinded by my love for him” He swayed slightly on his knees “I now think I was wrong.”

Leia frowned “What you mean?”

“That I should have done the exact opposite. Anakin wasn’t meant to be a Jedi like we were. He
was meant to show us how we had strayed off the path. He was a gift and a warning, and we ignored it.”

“That’s a lot of meaning to put in one little kid. Even if he was strong in the Force.”

“He was the Chosen One,” Obi-Wan said, waving her frankly very sensible words away.

“The what?” Leia asked.

But Obi-Wan didn’t answer her “I see you, Leia, here and now. And do you know what I think?”

“What do you think?”

“I think you would make an exceptional Jedi.”

Luke said the same thing to her, but he was biased. “Really?” she whispered.

He nodded “Really.”

She basked in that thought for a moment, then shook her head “Can’t risk it,” she said “Can’t risk it. I’m too like him.”

“Maybe,” Obi-Wan said. “But don’t forget, you are also Princess Leia, and Luke Skywalker’s sister, and the daughter of Breha and Bail Organa.”

Obi-Wan reached out an clasped her hand “We broke him, Leia. Me, the Jedi, Palpatine, all of us. You are so many things, but broken isn’t one of them.” Then a true smile broke out over his face, one that lifted years from his face. “And Luke is well on his way too. Not a Jedi I, or the council, would consider a good Jedi, but maybe that’s what the Force is trying to show me. That we were wrong. You both,” his voice trailed off “you both will be so much more than we ever were.”

Leia reached out with her free hand and cupped his cheek, “Thank you Obi-Wan,” she whispered.

<Am I interrupting something?> Chewie’s powerful voice rumbled into the Falcon.

They both looked over to the galley entrance to see Chewie standing there, arms crossed over his chest. Leia frowned. He was glaring at both her and Obi-Wan like they had personally offended him. Then she looked at the pose they were in. They were leaning so close together, Obi-Wan kneeling at her feet, holding her hand. In return, she was holding his face like it was the most precious thing in the world.

She let out a wild burst of laughter “Obi-Wan is not going to be my naked friend!” she proclaimed loudly.

Obi-Wan nodded in agreement “We have decided it’s a bad idea.”

Chewie’s hostility faded, and his face grew puzzled. <Then what is going on here?> he asked, but Leia’s mind had already jumped ahead.

“Do you know anyone who would want to be Obi-Wan’s naked friend?” she asked the Wookiee seriously.

“I do not need a naked friend!” Obi-Wan protested, coming to his feet.

“Yes, you do!” Leia shouted back.
“A naked friend!” Leia said cheerfully “I would ask you, but you have a wife. Also, you don’t wear clothes, so you are always our naked friend, just you know, not our *naked* friend.”

“Exactly!” Leia said, delighted. He understood she wasn’t trying to poach.

The Wookie started backing away very slowly <I’m going to get Han>, he said <You two stay here.>

“Okay!” Leia chirped, “You bring my future naked friend!” Obi-Wan finally managed to pull himself back into the booth. He let out a soft groan as he sat back at the table. He was still for a moment, then hauled himself upright.

“Want some more?” he asked Leia, raising the decanter by its neck and shaking it.

She shook her head. “I’m good,” she said, raising her still half full glass.

“You sure?” Obi-Wan said as he filled his own glass again. “Chewbacca is going to bring Han, and they are going to make us stop.”

“I like Chewie,” Leia said thoughtfully, “He hates my guts, but I like him.”

“Leia,” Obi-Wan said, “I have a question.”

“Oh!” Leia said brightly, sitting up straight “I like questions.” Then she pointed her finger at him “Unless they are about the future.”

“No, no, no,” he said shaking his head “Do you think Wookies have dressed friends like we have naked friends?”

“Huh?” Leia asked.

“You said it yourself,” he said slowly, thinking the words through “Wookies are always naked. So for them, logically, the opposite of naked would be dressed. Ergo, that means their dressed friends are their naked friends.” Then his face grew terrified “I’m one of Chewbacca’s dressed friends. Does that mean we are naked friends?”

There was something wrong with that logic, but damn if Leia could figure it out. “I think Chewie’s wife would look good in a dress,” she said cautiously “but wouldn’t that get hot?”

Obi-Wan stared at her blankly “You know,” she said “because of the fur?”

“That’s right, they have fur!” Obi-Wan sipped his drink “Maybe it’s not dressed,” he said, “Maybe it’s their shaved friends!”

Leia frowned “Do Wookies shave?” she said.

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I don’t know. But can you picture that?”

Leia did, and she roared with laughter. “Exactly!” Obi-Wan said triumphantly. “So it’s decided. I don’t want a shaved naked Wookie for my friend!”

“What in nine bleeding hells are you two doing?” Han’s voice cut across the Falcon’s galley.
She and Obi-Wan looked at each other. “Oh we are in so much trouble!” Leia whispered.

“Speak for yourself,” Obi-Wan said, “Everyone who cares about me being drunk is dead.” He frowned “Or became Sith Lords.” He lifted his glass “Cheers!”

“Cheers!” Leia said.

<I found them like this,> Chewie said.

Leia let out a hiccup “We need to find Obi-Wan a naked friend,” she told Han earnestly. “But not a naked Wookie friend. And not you. We both agreed it can’t be you.”

“I agreed to no such thing!” Obi-Wan said hotly.

Leia glared at him “I agreed for you.”

“I-” Han looked at a loss for words. Then he spotted the almost empty decanter. “Did you drink all of my brandy?” he said, coming up to them.

“He did it!”

“She did it!”

Han’s hand came up to pinch his eyes “That was a full bottle!” he said.

“Was,” Obi-Wan said solemnly “But I needed to drown my feelings.”

“He’s a Jedi,” Leia whispered to Han “He has lots of them!”

“Okay,” Han said, “I think you two have had enough.”

Leia pouted at him “Why don’t you join us?” she offered, and reached out and pulled on his arm, a mischievous smile breaking out on her face “I know you have more somewhere.”

“That is a very bad idea,” Han said. “Chewie?

Chewie came forward. <I’ll take Obi-Wan back to his quarters,> he offered.

“Great leave me to explain this to Bail.” Han reached down and pulled Leia to her feet. The Falcon dipped for a moment, and then it steadied itself. Leia leaned into Han.

“You smell great!” she told him very earnestly.

“And you smell like a distillery,” he informed her. “Come on, time for all little drunk Princesses to go home.”

Leia took offense to that. She pulled her arms directly out of his and said hotly “I am not little!”

“She isn’t,” Obi-Wan remarked, still sitting in the booth. “She is a General! We all are fierce and mighty!”

“Cheers!” Leia said, and before Han could stop her, she grabbed the decanter and drained the rest of it.

“You are going to regret so many of your choices in the morning,” Han remarked.

“Drink water!” Obi-Wan wagged a finger in Leia’s direction “Lots of water before you go to bed.”
“Yes,” she said pleasantly “that’ll help. But won’t that wake me up in the middle of the night?”

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said sagely, “but you won’t have a hangover.”

“Okay,” she said “that’s a good point.”

“Are we all done now?” Han asked, then not waiting for them to reply said, “Good, let’s get going.”

Leia started walking toward the personal quarters, and again the Falcon dipped on her.

“Whoa!” Han said, catching her arm, and then putting an arm around her, guiding her to the exit.

When Leia realized that he was taking her not to their rooms, but somewhere else, she turned her head up and frowned at him “I don’t want to leave the Falcon,” she whined.

“No,” he said firmly, trying to keep them moving. “I think you have done enough damage to my liquor for one night.” He tightened his grip on her arm “I’m taking you home.”

Leia’s lip wobbled “The Falcon is my home,” she whispered.

Han abruptly stopped trying to move them to the gangplank. He turned a face that was utterly astonished to face her “It is?” he asked

She nodded “Are you kicking me out of my home?”

“No, Leia,” his face crumbled “I just think someone should watch you tonight. And it would be a terrible idea if it’s me.”


“Uh...your parents?” Han asked.

“My parents!” She slapped his chest in delight “That’s right. They’re not dead.” She gave him a wide happy smile “You are so smart. I keep forgetting that.”

<Han,> Chewie’s voice came from behind them <Not that this isn’t all horribly sad and depressing, but Obi-Wan needs to get to his quarters too.> Then there was a mild squeak from the Wookie <And he’s getting frisky.>

“I told you you needed a naked friend!” Leia shouted behind her. She couldn’t see Obi-Wan, he wasn’t in her line of sight, but she knew he was there.

“I do not!” his voice floated back “But Chewbacca is warm and cuddly. You said I needed to touch more people!”

<I don’t think this is what she had in mind,> Chewie grumbled.

“C’mon Leia,” Han said, guiding her down the rest of the gangplank. “Let’s go see your parents.”

“I’m going to tell them I love them!” she said.

“Yes, let’s do that.” Han agreed, grunting as he tried to keep her upright.

Han led Leia through the hanger. It was mostly empty, but she did see a few people gawk at the two of them. Or maybe it was Obi-Wan and Chewie, who were close behind them. Obi-Wan’s
voice was loud as he kept insisting that Chewie be his “snuggle friend.”

Then they entered the main corridor that lead further into the base. Han went down the hallway on the right. Chewie must be going down the one on the left because Obi-Wan’s voice grew more and more faint.

“Han?” Leia asked, after they turned down another corridor.

“Yeah? He grunted.

“Why are you taking me to my parent’s room?” She knew why she wanted to go to her parents, but why would Han? Papa scared him.

“Because I like living,” Han muttered. “And if I took you to your quarters without someone to watch you, Bail would kill me in my sleep.”

“Papa wouldn’t kill you!” Leia said.

Han’s laugh was bitter. “No, you’re right. He’d have an underling do it. No need to dirty his hands with my blood directly.”

She stopped moving her feet. “He wouldn’t do that!” she insisted.

“Why not?” he said, huffing a bit as he tried to keep her from falling into a wall with her abrupt stop “Every other person who has had authority over me could.”

Leia was aghast. She didn't know Han’s fear was this real. Well, she knew it was real, but not this real. “No,” she said, trying to comfort him. “No, he wouldn't. He’s just playing. I’ll tell him-”

“Nothing,” Han said gruffly “You’ll tell him nothing.”

“But-” she protested.

“Leia,” he growled.

“No!” she said, pushing him away “You don’t get to be a stubborn gundark about this! I don’t care about your pride Han. He’s hurting you!”

He looked at her with a bemused expression. “And that’s enough for you?” he asked doubtfully “To go toe to toe with your father?”

“Yes!” she said, exasperated. Then she pointed her finger at him “I’d do the same to you if you were hurting him.”

Something passed over his face. Something vulnerable, and scared. “Okay, Leia. Let’s talk about this tomorrow, okay?”

Leia’s eyes narrowed “You think I’m going to forget aren’t you?”

“You are really drunk,” he said casually.

“Hmph,” she grumbled, but she allowed him to take her arm, and lead her onward.

They got to her parent’s suite without any more incidents. Papa answered Han’s knock, and his face went carefully blank when he saw Leia.
Papa’s voice was frigid “Captain Solo?”

“I found her this way,” Han said, panic in his eyes as he looked at Papa.

“That’s right,” Leia said, “He did! Cheers!” she raised her hand in salute, but no one met it. “No cheers?” she asked.

Bail opened the door “Bring her in, she can sleep on the bed. We never did get around to returning the cot from when she was sick.”

Han maneuvered her in, and Leia spotted Mama, sitting at the table.

“Leia,” she said, rising up.

“Mama!” Leia said cheerfully “I really missed you! I don’t tell you that enough.” She hiccuped “And I love you.”

“Oh Leia,” Mama said, coming up and cupping her cheek “I know that.”

“Good!” Leia turned and faced Papa “I love you too, Papa!” she said. Mama disappeared from her line of sight, and Leia could hear her footsteps walking away from her.

Papa looked bemused “I love you too Leia.” he said.

“But you have to stop threatening Han. He thinks you mean it.”

“Leia!” Han exclaimed.

She turned her head and looked up at him “You’re right,” she said ruefully “I’m really drunk, and I’d forget this in the morning.” Then she turned to Papa “You have to stop, he thinks you mean it.”

Papa looked at her face, then to Han’s beet red one “Oh,” he said.

“Please ignore her sir,” Han said, trying to regain his cool “it’s fine.”

“No,” Bail said softly, “I don’t think it is.”

Mama was back then, holding a nightgown in one hand, a glass of water in the other. “Oh!” Leia said delightedly “that’s mine! What is it doing here?”

“You left it here when you moved back into your quarters,” Mama said, a small smile on her face.

She held the glass towards Leia “Now drink up.”

Leia looked at the water, then back at Mama. “You know that trick?”

Mama blinked “You don’t?” she said.

Leia nodded. “Of course I do! But you never told me!”

“Leia, love, why would I tell my nineteen-year-old daughter the best way to avoid a hangover?”

Leia thought about that for a moment “Cause I would get drunk more often?” she ventured.

“Exactly,” Mama sounded amused, then placed the glass against Leia’s lips “Drink,” she said.

Leia gulped it all the way down. When she was done, Mama took the glass away. She handed Leia’s nightgown to Han and headed back to the table to refill the glass with the pitcher that was
“Is that why you didn’t tell me the truth about the Clone Wars?” she asked.


“What happened during the Clone Wars, to the Separatists. To planets like Whiforla. What the Republic was really like. Was it because I was too young?”

Mama looked at her, then her lips pressed into a thin line. She came back over “If your head isn’t going to try to jump out of your skull, we will discuss this tomorrow,” she said firmly. “Drink some more.”

“No,” Leia said, pulling herself out of Han’s grasp “We have to discuss this now.”

“Leia,” Papa said, voice firm.

She shook her head “Don’t you see?” she asked “You thought you had time last time too! And you died.” She hiccuped “And the New Republic ended up repeating all the mistakes the Republic did. Because there was no one who remembered what really happened.”

Papa’s face was pale. “I do understand that,” he whispered “And I know you paid a heavy price for those mistakes. Your mother and I just think that perhaps this would be a better conversation to have when you are sober.”

“Oh,” Leia said, swaying slightly on her feet “that makes sense.” She felt Han’s hand touch her back, steadying her. She turned her head and gave him a grateful smile.

“Leia,” Mama said, and Leia turned back around. Mama pressed the glass to Leia’s lips again, and she dutifully drank it all down.

“Captain Solo, could you help Leia to our room?” Papa said neutrally “I find I need to talk to my wife.”

Han’s eyes went wide “Uhhhh…” he said.

Leia swapped his shoulder playfully “He’s trying to show that he trusts you not to take advantage of me. I can change in their fresher,” she whispered. “Don’t screw it up by sticking your foot in your mouth.” She was trying to be quiet, but by the amused look on Mama’s face and the pained one on Papa’s, she hadn’t succeeded.

Han’s adam apple bobbed up and down as he swallowed nervously. “Alright,” he said, clutching the nightgown still in his hand. “Leia?”

“Han?” she asked back.

He looked a little exasperated “Do you want to walk to the room? Or should I carry you?”

“I can walk,” she announced with great dignity.

A challenging gleam came into his eyes, “Prove it.”

So she did. Leia was walking just fine on her own, thank you very much. She was doing absolutely fine, she had even managed to get halfway into the room before the floor came up and tripped her. She gave a small “Oh!” in surprise, but caught herself with the Force, before she face planted onto the floor.
Han’s voice was amused, and she heard the door click shut “You know Luke did that too when he got drunk. But he fell to the floor after about thirty seconds.”

“Uhhhh!” Leia whined, and used the Force to flip herself over, “I don’t want to be a Jedi,” she told the ceiling petulantly.

“Ok,” Han said, “but you do know that you’re still floating right?”

“Fine!” Leia huffed and lowered herself to the floor.

Han’s voice was wondering “Luke couldn’t manage that. He dropped right to the floor and gave himself quite the bump on his head.” Han’s footsteps sounded across the room as he came closer to her. “He said it was because he was a bad Jedi.”

Leia snorted “No, it’s because he’s a bad drunk.” She pointed to herself “I can handle my liquor.”

“I can see that,” there was a hand in her line of sight. She reached up a few times before she successfully made contact. Han pulled her to her feet.

“Bed?” he asked.

“Fine,” she whined, and immediately started stripping her clothes off.

“Leia!” Han cried out, and then he spun quickly around. “You were supposed to get changed in the fresher!”

“You’ve seen me naked,” she said, trying to remove her top, and getting stuck.

“I most certainly have not,” he said. She could hear the blush in his voice. Baby Han was being surprisingly prudish.

“Help!” she said, trying to wiggle free of the shirt.

She heard a sigh, and then gentle hands coaxed her arms out of the knot she had made of them. The shirt came over her head, and Han was there, resolutely staring into her face.

“You don’t want me?” she pouted.

“Leia,” he said, impatience in his tone “You are drunk, your father is not twenty feet away, and there are a lot of blasters on this base,” he gestured to the door. “Does this strike you as the best time?”

“Oh,” she said “Good point.”

“Can you take your pants off?”

Leia pointed her chin in the air “Yes,” she said with as much dignity as she could summon “I think I can manage.”

“Good.” His face took on a teasing quality “How about your boots?”

Leia looked down at her feet. The boots were her stiff ones, the ones that came up all the way to the knee. They were well worn in and provided a lot of support, but they were a pain to get off, even when she was sober.

“Thought not,” he gently pushed her to the bed. She sat down with a small “oomph!” escaping her.
She looked around at where she was and started whining “I don’t want to sleep in my boots!”

Han got to his knees in front of her, “Give me a second,” he grumbled. Then she felt his hands pull her leg up, and his hand grabbed the heel. “On three,” he said. “One, two, three,” he pulled, and Leia pulled her leg back, trying to wiggle it free. With a pop, the dreaded object came loose.

She laughed and wiggled her toes. Han reached out and removed the sock from her foot, stuffing it into the boot. “I should go barefoot,” she said. “Why do I wear those things?”

“So you can stomp on men’s souls,” Han grumbled. “Ok, Princess, one more,” his hands came up to her left leg.

She put her hand through his hair, “I love your hair,” she said.

Han groaned and leaned against her leg “Leia,” he said.

“Sorry,” she murmured and withdrew the hand “Sorry. I don’t mean to push.”

He gave a wry laugh “It’s alright. You can touch me. It’s just-”

“Papa is in the other room,” she whispered.

“And your mother.” She felt his hands firm their grip on the boot. “Ready?”

“Yes,” she said, and he got the other one off. He stood up and grabbed her nightgown off the bed, where he had tossed it before helping her removed the annoying footwear.

“Can you manage the rest?” he asked.

Leia nodded, clutching the nightgown to her chest. “Thank you,” she said, keeping her eyes firmly on her lap. She had said no, and she had kept pushing. She knew better, alcohol impulses aside. “I owe you one.”

He laughed, and she felt his fingers brush her cheek. Hesitantly she looked up to meet his eyes “Not how this works,” he said fondly.

Leia’s joy almost felt like it was going to burst through her skin “No,” she said happily “It’s not.”

He smiled back, then deliberately turned his back. Leia removed her other sock and tossed it vaguely in the direction of her boots. She wiggled out of the pants and threw them too. She then pulled the nightgown over her head and attempted to crawl to the top of the bed.

Han’s hands were suddenly there, helping steady her. “Need some help?” he asked.

“Yes, please,” she said.

He pulled the light cover sheet down. Safely tucking Leia in, he leaned over and kissed her forehead “Goodnight Leia,” he said.

“Night Han,” she said. She frowned at him, certain she was forgetting to tell Han something, but sleep claimed her before she could remember what it was.

ABA - Day 118
She was on Hosnian Prime, sitting at the dining room table in the apartment she leased near the New Republic’s Capitol Dome. Despite the many efforts to call it something else, that name, one that had survived through the Republic, and the Empire, had stuck. Even though this one looked nothing like the old one on Coruscant.

On a normal day, she wouldn’t be home this early. She would be in the Dome, or at some tedious party, cheeks aching from the fake pleasant smile she was forced to wear. Not tonight though. Tonight was for her and Han. It wasn’t every day you made it to your twentieth wedding anniversary after all.

They had gone out for a nice meal. Not to one of the “exclusive” restaurants that had popped up around the Capitol over the last few years. The ones where you paid exorbitant amounts of money for sub-par food, for the privilege of being “seen.” No, they had gone to a less popular, but perfectly pleasant restaurant, that served the best Corellian food Leia had ever had. And she had been to some of the best restaurants Corellia had to offer.

She and Han had too much to drink, she admitted to herself ruefully, as she stared out the balcony door of her apartment. It was a nice place, but not large, not "fashionable". Since Han was only here half of the time and Ben was training with Luke, she hadn’t seen the need to spend the credits for some large monstrosity of a living space. It’s not like she spent all that much time here herself. But there was no beating the view. The Senate Dome was in full view, and Leia took another sip of the brandy in her hands, as she stared at the elegant structure.

Han’s voice warbled from the refresher, and she let out a fond chuckle. When they had come back home from dinner in a rented cab, Han had fallen into a rather large muddy puddle that was at the front of the building. Laughing as they came in, she had tried to persuade him, to the best of her not so inconsiderable ability, that a little mud didn't bother her. He had laughingly pulled himself out of her arms and insisted that he wanted to take a shower before the more private festivities began. And as soon as he was done, she was definitely going to show him how very much she missed him over the last two weeks. And how much she still loved and appreciated him after twenty years.

The balcony door was open, and Leia got up and walked over there, savoring the cool breeze for a moment longer, before she would retire to her room to slip out of her dress when the sound of heavy breathing filled her home. Leia froze for a second, and then a voice, no not just a voice, *his* mechanized voice asked, from nowhere and everywhere “Leia?”

Leia spun around and quickly scanned the room. She had left the lights off. It was a cloudless night, and the two full moons of Hosina provided more than enough light to see by. She didn’t see anything or anyone. She quickly hurried into the room, placing her glass on the dining table that was in the middle of the main living space. Maybe he had slipped into the bedroom?

There was a loud knock on the door. Leia swayed as she realized she was *unarmed*. She frantically tried to remember where she had stashed her blaster. Then the door whooshed open, and Vader, tall, intimidating, with that damn mechanized breathing, was *there*, standing in her doorway.

For a second Leia was sure she was going to throw up. Then her indignation rose up. How dare he? This was not how she wanted to spend her twentieth wedding anniversary. Leia looked at the ghost and said in a dismissive tone. “Oh, it’s you.” She waved her hand in his direction “I’m busy. Go away.”

He merely stood there at the threshold for a moment, and then asked in a rushed voice “Are you alright?”
How in the bleeding hells had Vader gotten to Hosnian Prime from his grave on Endor? And had he really come all this way to ask her how she was?

“I was fine until you showed up,” she told him firmly. Of all the nights to pick to start haunting her, he chose this one? Her anniversary? Not her wedding, or the signing of the Galactic Concordance, ensuring the destruction of his life’s work, or the birth of her son. No, it had to be now, when she had just finally managed to put him behind her.

Then Han started singing again. Vader’s head turned at the sound, intrigued, and Leia snapped “Don’t you dare! Haven’t you hurt him enough?”

Vader’s head snapped back to her very quickly, and he strode into the room “Leia? What’s wrong?”

Nausea rolled her stomach, between the fear she felt in his presence, and the lights on his chest causing her to feel vertigo. Her eyes closed involuntarily as she took a deep breath in.

Those heavy footfalls of his stopped. That was weird. Vader seemed pretty solid for a ghost. “Leia,” he said, trying to sound soothing. She wasn’t going to believe that for a second “Tell me what you need.”

She swallowed, trying to keep from puking at the sound of his voice. “I need the room to stop spinning,” she said. He was a ghost. Honestly, besides scaring years off her life, what could he do to her physically? Luke never mention Force ghosts being able to manipulate the physical world in any significant way.

There was a long pause. “Leia, this is your mind. If the room is moving, you have the power to make it stop.”

Her mind? No, this was her apartment, her home, and he had just invaded it. Okay, not invaded, he had knocked. If he were invading, he would have used his lightsaber to cut the door down. And why had he just used a door to get in? Why not just poof into the room? Or walk through the walls? Why knock? It was almost like he was… Alive.

Her eyes snapped open, and the walls of her apartment wavered for a moment as it all came back rushing to her. Time Travel. A living Vader. A Vader who knew she was his daughter. A Vader who stalked her mind like a crazy obsessed person. A Vader who checked every night for vulnerabilities, and she had just handed him the most blatant one she could.

“Kriffing hell,” she whispered, massaging her temples “I knew I was forgetting something.” Luke, she had forgotten to tell Han to get Luke.

“Are you drunk?” he asked, sounding scandalized.

“Yes!” she snapped, hand falling away from her face. “Because I knew my limits when I was fifty-three!” She shakily started to walk to him. He actually took a step back, then he stilled himself as her words grew louder and more exasperated.

“But I’m not fifty-three anymore am I?” she demanded, stopping about a foot from him, and looking up into his mask. He said nothing.

“Am I?” she demanded, poking him in his chest plate.
He looked down at her finger, then back to her face “Physically no, you are not.” he said.

“Exactly! But my tolerance for alcohol was less in my nineteen-year-old body. So I ended up drunk!! On accident,” she emphasized, poking him in the chest again “Because the stupid Force dropped me here with no explanation! Didn't even ask. Just went to sleep and bam!!” She clapped her hands together, and the noise gave a sharp crack in the small space. “I’m in that damn shuttle again. With you!!!”

He said nothing for a moment, merely stared down at her. Then he offered in what was almost a meek voice “That must have been disorienting.”

She snorted “You have no idea.” She turned around, suddenly exhausted, her tirade wearing her out. She went back to the table and sank wearily into one of the chairs. “Half the time I don’t feel like this body is mine.”

He didn't follow her, just remained standing where he was. “That is a feeling I’m familiar with,” he said.

She looked at the body armor. Yes, Obi-Wan had said he had removed three of his limbs, and left him on fire. She couldn’t even begin to imagine the amount of synthetic parts he had under all that armour. “I can see that.” She wagged her finger at him “Want some advice?” she offered.

“Of course,” she could feel his focus sharpen in on her.

“If you ever find yourself in the past, cherish your knees.”

Vader cocked his head, puzzled “My knees?”

Leia nodded sagely “Uh-huh,” She bent over until she was sitting almost folded in half. She squeezed her legs “I love them so much,” she told him. She raised her hands, and stroked the back of her legs “I promise I will take better care of you this time,” Leia whispered to them.

“Are you talking to your knees?” Vader sounded amused.

Right, he was still here. She sat up straight, then had to wait a minute for the blood rush to fade. Gods, this was her own mind, why was she experiencing blood rushes? Not the point. “You should go,” she told him.

“You say that to me a lot,” he observed. She scowled at him. Because it was true. He should go away, and never bother her again. “What is your reason this time?”

She huffed “Because I have no filters when I drink, and you have no impulse control. It’s bound to lead to tears and things being set on fire.”

“You often set things on fire?” he asked.

She scowled at him “No!” she said “Why do you have to take everything I say so literally? It's just an expression. I’m not a pyr-” her tongue slipped out from underneath her. Great. Wonderful. This would convince him to leave. Her sitting here, at her dining room table, drunk, and babbling like a small child “A pyro-” she tried to say again.

“A pyromaniac?” he suggested.

She nodded, “Yes. Like that.”
“You did set Grakkus’ arena on fire,” he pointed out.

“I did not!” she protested. “That was someone else!”

His hands came to his hips “And who was this someone else?” he asked pleasantly.

She ignored the question, and focused in on his insult, “And like you’re one to talk. Rex said you would have used explosives to get out of that mess.”

“Yes,” he agreed “I probably would have.” Then his glimmer of amusement faded away. He shifted on his feet uncomfortably. His head moved so it was looking at the glass, still half full, sitting on the table. He looked back up at her face. “I’m assuming you have questions?” he sounded like he would rather be tortured then answer them though.

Leia frowned “About what?” she asked, puzzled.

There was a long pause at that. Vader pointedly looked at the glass again, disapproval radiating off him. Leia wanted to take a drink from it just to spite him, despite the fact it wasn’t real, and couldn’t get her any drunkier. Or could it? This was her mind after all. Could she use the Force to make herself drunk on remembered brandy?

“About what you saw in my nightmare.”

Leia pulled her mind back to Vader. In his what? Oh, right, their shared nightmare. So much had happened to her since then, it had completely slipped her mind. “No, why would I?”

He jerked back “Why would you?” he roared. Leia flinched as the loud sound of his voice echoed painfully in her head. He noticed, of course he did, because he was an obsessed, crazy person.

But, because he noticed, his next words were much softer “What you saw must have been upsetting….” his voice trailed off at her non-comprehension. Then his helmet moved so he was staring at the glass again. “I felt that wave of pain from you later that day, and now you are sitting here,” he waved his hand around “drunk.”

Was that the slightest bit of contempt in his voice on that word? Well, he could go to hell. They were long past the point of their relationship where he could tell her what to do. “I’m an adult,” she said firmly “I can get accidentally drunk if I want to.”

He completely ignored her very valid point and said “I thought you might—” he stopped, sighed, and actually brought his hand up to his mask. It stopped right in front of his head, and he dropped it to his side. Did he just try to rub his eyes? Through his mask? Then he started speaking again “You saw me kill your mother,” he said, the shame and guilt almost swamping her in its intensity.

Ohhhhhhh. Well, from that perspective Leia could see why Vader thought she might be upset and have questions. “Yes,” she said, slumping back into her chair “I did. But it wasn’t anything I didn’t already know.” He only stared at her, that guilt surrounding him making her head pound.

She rubbed her forehead, her mind too fuzzy to phrase this better. This was exactly what she was trying to avoid. She shrugged to herself. She had warned him. If he lost it, and they tried to kill each other here, it was on his head.

“I’m sorry she’s dead,” she said, raising her head and looking straight into that dark solid helmet. “I really am. I think the galaxy is a poorer place without her. But I didn’t know her. I can’t mourn someone I never even met.”
She thought of that sad face that had haunted her childhood. “Well, for someone I didn’t spend more than five minutes with,” she conceded, “when I was a baby,” she emphasized.

His pain rolling off him made her grit her teeth, but she went on, needing him to understand this. “Padme Naberrie is my mother, she will always be my mother, but she is not Mama.”

“I-” he started to say. Leia looked at him, numbly curious as to why he was suddenly so angry. Every object in her room not nailed down suddenly began vibrating with alarming intensity.

“Leia?” Han’s voice called out, concerned.

The shaking in the room stopped, which was great. The fact that Vader had swirled his head, to stare at the door leading to the fresher, his interest sharp and focused in on Han, was decidedly not.

Frantically Leia reached out, trying to freeze the dream she was in.

“Leia?” Han demanded again.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” she thought, as Vader took one step towards the fresher. Why, oh why did her dream Han have to have so many of the traits of the real Han? He wouldn’t let this go until he knew she was alright, even if he was a figment of her imagination. Let’s try something else.

“I’m fine,” she called out. Vader stopped his stalking towards the door and looked at her.

“You sure?” Han asked.

“Stop being an overprotective nerf herder,” she shouted, eyes never leaving Vader’s mask “I was just startled by something I saw. It’s nothing.”

“Okay,” Han said, and his voice resumed its singing. Leia closed her eyes, to block out all distractions and thought frantically “Freeze, freeze, freeze.”

If she had been just a touch more sober she would have felt ridiculous. She felt like she was hiding under her bed, chanting to make the monster go away. But of course, she wasn’t sober, and apparently her out of control mind accepted this logic because Han’s voice abruptly cut off, and the sound of the shower stopped.

Leia sighed in relief and opened her eyes. Vader was still standing where she had left him staring at her.

“Who is that?” he demanded.

Leia rolled her eyes “My mechanic,” she said deadpan “I invite him up here when I’m bored. He’s a great naked friend.”

“What!??” he demanded, shocked.

Leia just shook her head. He was too easy sometimes. “Who do you think that was?” she asked pointedly.

“Oh,” he said. He looked at the door, and cautiously took a step closer.

Leia thought about yelling, but she hadn’t been lying to Obi-Wan. She was really a rather mellow drunk. She couldn’t quite muster enough anger, or focus, to yell. But her anger had never been her only line of defense. So she went for another weapon. “I know you want to know who my husband is, and what he looks like,” she observed as casually as she could manage, “but I don’t think you
want to see all of him.”

Vader stopped “He’s naked?” he asked.

“Do you often take showers clothed?” she asked curiously.

“I don’t-” he looked at her, then back at the door. “Perhaps you’re right,” he conceded. He looked at Leia. “Would you at least give me a name?”

Leia waved her finger in his face “Oh, I will never be that drunk.”

He shrugged, seeming to accept her answer. He took a step away from the fresher door, closer to her.

“If seeing me…” he stopped. Leia just waited as his wave of sorrow washed through him. This was the most human she could recall him acting, and in no way was she going to mock his grief. “If what you saw in my nightmare didn’t upset you, then why-”

“Why did I have an epic meltdown later?” She finished for him, too astonished at his blindness to even be bitter “Let’s think about that for a second.”

“What you saw-” he stopped. “I-” he tried. Then he fell silent. Leia could feel his mind whirling in useless circles.

“Oh for fuck’s sake!” she said, exasperated, annoyed by the fact that this simple concept was escaping him “Not everything is about you!” She leaned forward, “Did it ever occur to you that I was having a nightmare too? That I relived things,” she pointed her finger at him “things that had nothing to do with you, that I found upsetting?”

He stilled “Oh,” he said.

“Yes,” she said “Oh.”

His arms moved up, crossed over his chest, then fell back down as he realized that wasn’t exactly the friendliest move he could make. Then they fell behind his back. He took an aborted move to pace, then stopped. He was looking everywhere but at her.

Leia just watched him and wished she was the tiniest bit more sober so she could make another glass and decanter of brandy appear. Maybe if he had a couple of drinks, he would start talking again instead of standing there looking ridiculous?

“Was the man in the mask your son?” he finally asked. Leia stilled. Damn, damn, damn. How the hell had he put that together so fast? Gods, when he wasn’t blinded by his own ego, he was scarily smart.

“Yes,” she said, “That was him.”

He took one step closer to her. “And the man he killed? The one I saw fall into the abyss? That was your husband?”

Leia gritted her teeth. Oh, Han was right, she was regretting so many of her life choices right now. Because she was too drunk to stop her tongue from saying “Yes.”

“I see.” He rocked on his heels a bit.

She cursed herself, but she had to know. She had to protect Han “Did you see his face?” she asked.
“Or hear his name?”

He stared at her, for a long moment, thinking. “No,” he finally said. “His back was to me. I only saw a body fall. And I didn’t catch much of what was said, no names.”

Leia let out a long sigh of relief. Vader still didn’t have a face. He still didn’t have a name. He had a voice, but it wasn’t like he make could make a recording of it here in her mind. Han was safe.

“My intention is not to hurt him, Leia,” Vader said, taking another cautious step forward.

She snorted “Your intentions and what you do, are two vastly different things.”

He stopped at that, head tilted. “Yes,” he said slowly, “I think I see why you see it that way.”

“Congratulations,” she told him sarcastically. “You’ve achieved some basic human empathy.”

He finally reached the table she was sitting at. He was on the other side, not standing next to her, but it was a lot closer to her then she could recall him being towards her in one of these dreams. At least not since the one where he had grabbed her, and she had pulled them both into her flashback. There was a small voice in the back of her mind chattering away in terror at having him so close, but the alcohol soaking in her system made it seem very faint, and far away.

He very deliberately pulled out the chair that was on that side of the table. When she made no protest, he sank into it slowly, mask intent on hers. She wondered what he was waiting for? Her to yell and scream? Throw her drink in his mask? Oh, that was a good idea, she should throw her drink at him.

No, she chided herself. That would not be a good idea. She slipped her gaze to the glass on the table and focused in on it. It took her a few tries but it did eventually vanish, removing it from temptation.

The chair groaned ominously. Leia looked back up to see that Vader had fully situated himself into it. The chair wasn’t happy, by the sounds it was making, but for now, it was holding. Maybe she could use the Force to snap one of its legs? That would be funny. One minute she had a Sith Lord at her table, the next he would be sprawled out on the floor.

“I care,” he told her solemnly.

Leia blinked and brought her mind into focus. He what now? Oh right, his newly acquired empathy.

“Selectively,” she told him. She studied him for a moment. “Obi-Wan said you once had a big heart.”

His hands clenched into fists “Obi-Wan?” he said dangerously.

“Oh-huh,” she said, “He is a surprisingly chatty, and sassy, drunk.”

“Obi-Wan got you drunk,” he sounded like he was about to reach through her mind and throttle the old Jedi.

Leia pulled herself out of the slouch she was in “Don’t be ridiculous,” she said “I got Obi-Wan drunk,” she smiled and tapped her chest “I’m a bad influence,” she proclaimed proudly. She let out a loud hiccup “Cheers!” she raised her hand, then frowned as she found it empty. “Where did my drink go?” she asked Vader. She looked at the table, sure enough, the glass was gone. Did Vader
make it disappear? In her head? How had he done that?

“I imagine you left it in whatever bar you just crawled out of?”

She let out a surprised bark of laughter “A bar?” she said “You think I can go to a bar? I can barely set foot off our base! You,” and she pointed her finger at him “have made my life very difficult with that bounty. Twenty-five million credits? If you wanted to keep the nature of our relationship a secret, that was not the way to do it.”

“I might have...overreacted,” he admitted “But I was desperate to find you. And it seemed that was the best way to do it at the time.”

“Oh there is a shock,” she muttered, “You overreacting to something you don’t like.”

He shook his head “Your existence is nothing but a blessing to me Leia, don’t ever think otherwise.”

Leia looked at him. “You mean that,” she said.

“Yes.” Just that one word. Vader was always terrifyingly direct when given a choice.

“Even though I want you dead,” she pressed.

The objects in her room started vibrating again. “You want my alternate dead, not me.”

Leia slapped her hand down on the table “Will you stop that?” she hissed. “If you break my landscape paintings of Alderaan, I don’t care how much of a mellow drunk I am, I will hurt you.”

He stilled “Your paintings?” he asked.

She nodded “Yes. Some of them are the only surviving images of places on Alderaan.” She felt tears form in the corner of her eyes, and she hurriedly wiped them away.

He was very still for a long tense moment. “The only surviving images?” he asked.

She nodded, “Yes. So if you break them in one of your fits, I will take it out of your hide.”

“What happen-” he broke off. “The second worst day of my life,” he said quietly. Leia frowned. What was the second worse day of his life? Then he laughed bitterly. Leia blinked, not understanding what was so funny. When that harsh noise faded away, he said “You are quite correct.”

“Oh of course I am,” she said haughtily. Then she undercut her own position by asking “About what?”

That death head’s mask just stared at her intently “Not everything is about me.” Leia frowned, yes that was true, but it wasn’t exactly illuminating as to what he was talking about.

“Leia,” he said softly, leaning forward just the tiniest bit “Alderaan is fine.”

“No,” she said “it’s gone. You should know, you-” then her voice trailed off. Time travel. She had time traveled. “Yes,” she whispered “it is. It’s still there.” She shot him a triumphant look “Your precious Empire failed.”

“Yes,” he said quietly.

“I did that,” she said, still half in awe.
“Yes, you did.” Why did he sound so sad? “You handled that just fine on your own.”

She shook her head “Won’t last,” she said.

He cocked his head “And people say I am a pessimist.”

“Did you hear about the riots?” she asked.

He stilled at that “Yes,” he said, “I did.”

Right, crazy obsessed person, who knew she would be following any news out of Alderaan. “They did the right thing,” she said.

“Break the law?”

“No!” she protested “Protecting those families. Yes, it got out of control, but nothing would have happened in the first place if those damn stormtroopers hadn’t targeted the refugees. No, not refugees, they were refugees, they are Alderaanian now. We protect our own!”

“A planet full of virtuous people,” he remarked drolly.

She snorted “Oh please. I’m sure my planet has the same number of assholes as any other. I’m not that idealistic. And I’m sure there were even people in that city that agreed with what the Empire was doing. But they were a small number. More disagreed.”

Then her smile fell “I’m so proud of them,” she said “So proud of my people. And I also wish they had done nothing at all at the same time because I know what price the Empire is going to extract for this.” She looked at him “Do you know what that is like?”

“Yes,” he said.

She waited, but he didn’t elaborate. Instead, he asked, “So that’s why you’re drunk?”

“No,” she told him, “I told you, my tolerance is different now. I wasn’t intending to get drunk.”

“So why did you feel the need for a crutch?”

“Seriously?” she asked, “The Sith Lord is going to give me a lesson about the morality of using mind-altering substances?”

“My childhood showed me the perils of such behavior,” he sounded uncomfortable.

“What do you think the Dark Side is?” she shot back “Or the Force in general for that matter? It takes everything you are feeling and magnifies it! What is that if not a mind altering substance?” She waved her hands around “What do you think all that meditation was for? Sitting around and falling asleep? It’s so you don’t get caught in a feedback loop.”

He just stared at her. Her hands lowered “Didn’t anyone tell you that?” she asked, puzzled.

He shook his head “No. At least like that. Because that wasn’t how they understood it.”

“Why not?” she said, “The Force isn’t exactly quiet.”

“It is to them,” he said.

“Them?” she asked.
“Almost every other Force user in the galaxy.”

“Hah,” she said, “We are freaks!” Then she shook her head “No, not freaks. Unique!” she remembered Obi-Wan's words.

“Who called you a freak?” Scary voice now.

“I did,” she said, looking at him. “Cause I can do this!” Then she dropped every shield she had, and let all of her emotions pour out of her. His helmet fell back like she had just thrown a fist into his face, and he let out a small “Omph!”

Having made her point, Leia cut it off. “Huh,” she said, “you handled that a lot better then Obi-Wan did.”

He said nothing for a moment, just shook his head, trying to clear it. “Did you kill him?” he asked.

Leia gritted her teeth “Why is ‘make it dead,’ your solution for everything?”

“No Leia,” he said “you misunderstand me. I genuinely was wondering if you killed him with that stunt. My shields are much more powerful than his, and you nearly flattened me. Obi-Wan is no longer a young man.”

“Hey,” Leia said, taking offense “He’s only four years older than me! That is hardly decrepit, or falling into your grave!”

He twitched as if he had forgotten. Which was beyond ridiculous, because in this dream, right now, Leia was forty-three, and she looked it.

“My apologies,” he said “I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“Apology accepted,” she said, settling back into her seat.

“So what else did Obi-Wan say?” he was trying, and failing, at sounding casual.

“Don’t try to be casual,” she told him “You are a lot of things, but casual is not one of them.” Then she shrugged “If you really want to know, he was mainly denying the fact that he needs a naked friend,” she said carelessly.

All his anger dropped away and was replaced by shock. “A what?” he asked, in a very distorted voice. If Leia didn’t know better, she would have classified it as a squeak.

“A naked friend,” she said cheerfully “That man is way too uptight.” She leaned forward to lean on the table “You knew him back in the day. What’s his type?”

“Type?” Vader asked.

“He said he liked sex. I’m assuming he didn’t mean with just himself. So I’m on the hunt to find Obi-Wan a naked friend!”

“Please stop saying Obi-Wan’s naked friends,” Vader said.

Leia looked into that mask. No anger, just embarrassment. “Are you blushing?” she asked, delighted. She got up and came around to his chair. He was so damn tall, even sitting, the top of his helmet was almost parallel to the top of her head. She reached a finger out and tapped the line that was appropriate to where his cheekbone was.
There was a soft ping ping noise as her fingernail hit the hard metal of his mask. “It feels like you’re blushing. It’s hard to tell with the mask on.”

“I am not blushing!” he insisted.

“Liar,” she said, but there was no heat in it. Instead, she rapped her fingernail on the mask again, intrigued by the sound it made.

“Leia?”

“Mhh?” she said. Ping, ping, ping went his mask as she tapped it.

“What are you doing?”

“Wondering if I can play the Alderaan Royal Procession March on your mask,” she did a quick one two three rhythm. She pulled back so she could look straight into his eye mask “The sound is in the right chord,” she chirped.

“I see,” he said in a voice that showed he did not in fact see.

Realizing she was being rude, Princesses did not go around wondering if they could play musical numbers on Sith Lord’s masks, she looked him up and down. “Why are you letting me do this?” she asked.

“Because you are close to me,” he answered honestly.

She was, she suddenly realized. Oh gods, she was touching him. Slowly, so slowly, she dropped her hand away from his mask. Then she began to back up. He didn’t reach out, didn’t try to stop her, but she could feel his rolling disappointment with each bit of distance she put between them.

“Sorry,” she muttered, not retaking the chair she had been sitting in, choosing to continue to back further away “That was really rude.”

“It is not a problem,” he said.

“Yes, it really is.” she said, “That is not behavior befitting a princess.”

He huffed “You sound like that droid of yours.”

Leia stopped her movement. While Threepio had lots of opinions on how people should behave, he never would have put it that plainly. What droid was Vader talking about...“TooVee?” she said, shocked “You met TooVee?”

“Yes,” he said mildly, folding his hands over the table “She is currently running amuck at my base on Mustafar.”

Vader took her? Why? “What use do you have for a personal droid?” she asked.

“None,” he said “it is the fact that she knows you.”

“TooVee would never tell you anything about me!” Leia said confident of the droids loyalty.

“Of importance?” He sounded almost amused “No, you are quite correct there. She is remarkably tight-lipped. She does, however, indulge in storytelling.”

“She does what now?” Leia asked.
“Apparently you presented quite the challenge to her programming when you were a small child. I especially liked the story of you escaping your bath, and running wet and naked into the throne room, in front of the several hundred guests that were there.”

Leia closed her eyes and felt the blush creep up her cheeks. This was TooVee’s revenge on her for not taking the droid with Leia to the Alliance. Oh by all the gods, she was telling Vader every single one of her embarrassing baby stories.

“I really think you should go now,” she said, covering her red face with her hands, “before I die of embarrassment.”

He said nothing to that, then very softly she heard him say “Satine.”

Leia refused to drop her hands from her face. “Whazzut?” she asked.

“That was the name of one of Obi-Wan’s naked friends. Satine.”

Leia dropped her hands from her face, and looked at him “Really?” He nodded. Leia grinned broadly “I knew you would have an answer to that. What was she like?”

“Tall, blonde, and commanding.”

“I can work with that,” Leia said happily “I will get Obi-Wan a naked friend.” Vader made a pained noise at that. “Don’t be such a prude,” she told him.

“The man practically raised me. Do you like the thought of your parents having naked friends?” he asked sarcastically.

“The only naked friend my parents have is each other,” she said, “Also, ew.”

“I also doubt you are going to remember any of this conversation.”

Leia let out a loud yawn “Betcha I will,” she said “I’m pretty stubborn.” She repeated the name in her head several times, she would show him.

“I hadn't noticed,” his voice was as dry as the desert.

“You can be funny,” she said, “Never would have expected that.”

“I lost all my reasons to laugh long ago.” He stood “But you of all people should understand the power of sarcasm.”

“Must be hard to pull it off through the vocoder,” she said.

“Somehow I get my meaning across.”

Leia could hear the shower start again. She was about to freeze it again when a really, really evil idea suddenly occurred to her.

“Well, this has been all highly entertaining, but I do have plans for the rest of this night,” she told him.

“Do you?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said “And you would definitely get in the way. So, I bid you goodnight.”
“I’m not going anywhere Leia,” he crossed his arms over his chest “Whatever happened this night, you can shift it to accommodate me.”

Leia looked at him, then dropped her shields. Not with everything she was feeling, she didn’t want to knock him to the floor. Just the predominant emotion that was in her mind before he knocked on her door.

Vader actually gave out a disgusted wail of “Ugh!” and clapped his hands over his helmet, approximately where his ears were.

Satisfied that she had made her point, she threw her shield back up. “No,” she said, “I don’t think so.”

“Why did you do that?” he wailed, yes wailed.

“It is my twentieth wedding anniversary,” she said “I have plans, I’m drunk, and I haven’t had a real naked friend in my life in quite a while. So, again, I ask, please leave.”

There was a long silence. “If I don’t leave you’re going to do that again aren’t you?”

She slowly started to let her lust flood into the Force as an answer.

“Don’t” he cried out, putting his hand up in a stop gesture “Don’t. I just- I will leave.”

“Alright,” she said. “I would say it’s been a pleasure, but it wasn’t.” She tipped her head thoughtfully “Not as bad as it could have been though, so there’s that.”

“Bad as it could have been?”

“I thought this was all going to end with both of us trying to kill each other,” she told him “So, go us!”

He flinched but didn't contradict her. “I will leave you to your rest.”

“My fun,” she corrected.

He shuddered, “Please don't remind me. Goodnight Leia.”

“Goodnight,” she responded. Then he was gone, and Han was walking out of the fresher.

Leia’s stomach was killing her. That was the first thing she was aware of. The second was that she really had to pee. She opened her eyes and was greeted by the sight of a stone ceiling. Okay, good news, she was still on Yavin. She wasn't in her room, but she was still in the temple, on someone’s bed.

She rolled to her side. Luke was sitting on the bed next to her, legs stretched out, as he perused the holo reader in his hand.

“Good morning,” he said, not looking at her directly “how’s the head?”

Leia closed her eyes, and desperately tried to block out last nights carousing. Nope, still there in her memory.

“It’s okay,” she said, moving slowly as she inched her way down the bed.
“Where are you going?” he asked, amusement in his voice.

“Fresher,” she said “gotta pee.”

She reluctantly opened her eyes. The light hitting her eyes wasn’t too bad, but her stomach was in open revolt at the thought of moving. She let out a whimper.

“Need help?” Luke’s voice was amused.

“Yes,” she said, begging. His hands came to her arms, and he gently helped her sit up.

“Ughh,” she said as soon as she was vertical.

“Thought you said the head was okay?” he asked.

“Head’s fine,” she said “My stomach feels like I was drinking acid.”

“Oh,” he said. Then he gently pulled her forward on the bed, “C’mon,” he said, “Let’s get you to the fresher, you can pee, and take a shower and get dressed.”

“Can’t I just go back to bed?” she whined.

“Pee first,” he ordered, “we’ll take it from there.”

So Leia let her twin help her off the bed. She refused his offer to lean on him as she walked across the room. She wasn’t some old lady, well she was old, but her body wasn’t. She could make it there on her own, incredibly slow, power.

She noticed that the cot that her parents had used when she was staying her recovering from being shot, was once again laid out at the foot of the bed. Great, not only had she gotten drunk, but her parents had seen it, and to top it off one of them had ended up sleeping on that uncomfortable thing.

Luke was right though, she did feel better after she peed. She eyed the shower longingly for a minute, then called out in the Force.

“Luke?”

“Yeah?”

“Do I have a change of clean clothes here?” Even the thought of putting the clothes she had on last night, and the accompanying smell of brandy on them, made her stomach roll.

“Yes,” Luke’s thoughts danced with amusement. She was so grateful she didn’t care.

“You are my favorite brother,” she told him sincerely.

There was a knock on the door, followed by it opening slightly. Luke’s hand thrust in, holding a bundle of clothes in his hand.

“I’m your only brother,” he said.

“Doesn’t mean you still aren’t my favorite,” she said, taking the clothes from his hand. “Give me about ten minutes.”

“Ten minutes?” he sounded dubious.
“I’m going to skip washing my hair,” she said. “I don’t have the strength to deal with it this morning.”

“Alright,” the door clicked shut.

Leia emerged from the fresher, feeling vaguely more human. Luke was sitting back on the bed, but as soon as she emerged, he put his holo reader down and swung his legs back into the floor.

“Did you really offer to find Ben a naked friend?” he asked, looking at her with unhidden delight.

Leia groaned “Yes,” she said, rubbing her eyes.

Luke howled with laughter “Oh, I wish I could have seen his face,” he wheezed.

“I love you,” she said, dropping her hands and looking back at him “but why exactly are you here?”

His face sobered. “I ran into Han after my CAP rotation. He told me you had gotten pretty drunk. So I spent last night monitoring your dreams from my quarters. When I knew your parents would be up, I came over to check on you.”

Leia felt the blood drain from her face “I -”

Luke shook his head “It’s fine Leia. I was in a light sleep, but I did get some rest.” He shrugged “You were in a pretty good mood for most of last night. Some flashes of annoyance, but nothing alarming. Then around the middle of it, things got…. ” he blushed bright red “frustrating?”

“Frustrating?” Leia asked.

He rolled his eyes through the blush “You were really “enjoying” whatever you were dreaming about.” Oh, that kind of frustrating. “I didn’t want to eavesdrop, so I pulled back further. I figured-”

“That wouldn’t be my reaction to Vader,” she finished, scrambling to remember what she had dreamed about. She knew Han had been there, and they had been drunk and laughing, but the rest of it stubbornly remained out of reach.

“You remember anything about last night?” Luke asked.

She closed her eyes, thinking about it. “I remember most of it. Then after Han and I left the hanger bay things get really blurry,” she confessed. “I can’t believe I was that stupid.”

“Maybe Father forgot to check?” Luke said.

Leia shot him a look. “Not likely,” she muttered.

“Alright, maybe he was busy.” Luke pushed himself off the bed “He is the second in command of the Empire isn’t he?”

Leia nodded “Yes,”

“So he couldn’t make the time. No harm done.”

Leia groaned “No, not okay Luke.” she said. “If he had come, if I hadn’t gotten lucky-”

“Hey,” Luke said coming up to her “yeah, it wasn’t the smartest thing you could have done, but it was an accident right? At least that was what Han was saying. Something about different
tolerances?”

She nodded. “Still—”

Luke groaned “Let it go Leia. You had a bad day, you had a drink, you made a mistake. Nothing bad happened because of it. You know better now, let it go.”

“Alright,” she said.

“Hungry?” he asked.

Leia made a face “No.” She rubbed her stomach, “I can remain upright, but the thought of food just makes me queasy.”

“Come on,” Luke said, taking her hand and pulling her towards the main room of her parent’s suite. “Some tea and toast will help with that.”

“Can’t I just go back to sleep?” Leia whined, letting herself be pulled along.

“Well, I thought you might want to see Han,” he teased.

Leia pulled on the hand that was holding hers bringing them both to a stop “Han’s here for breakfast?” she asked.

Luke nodded “Your father invited him.”

Leia felt her eyes widen “What happened last night?” she whispered.

Luke shrugged “Don’t know. And we won’t find out until we go in there.”

He was right, damn it. “Lead the way,” she groused.

Leia walked out of the bedroom, and true to Luke’s word, Han was sitting there, with a plate full of food in front of him, with both of her parents. She gave them a distracted wave and then sat down next to Han.

“Are you feeling okay?” she asked in a whisper, leaning toward his ear.

He smirked, but he could see his nervousness in the restless fingers dancing on his thigh “Shouldn’t I be asking you that?”

“Caf Leia?” Mama asked, interrupting them.

Leia made a face. “Ugh,” she said “no thank you. It’ll just upset my stomach more.”

Luke slid a plate of toast over to her “Here,” he said. She scowled at it. “It will help,” he insisted.

“How would you know?” she demanded.

“Last time I got drunk, Hobbie and Wedge made me eat the same thing,” he said.

“When did you get drunk?” Leia asked astonished.

“When you told me Vader was my father,” he remarked calmly.

Oh, that was fair. If there was any time to drink, it was then. She picked up her toast, and reluctantly started nibbling on it. She knew Luke was right, but she really didn’t feel like eating.
Breakfast continued on in that vein for some time. Papa kept shooting glances at Han, who was pretending to ignore him, and picking at his own food. Luke was too busy nudging her in the Force every time she put her toast back on her plate, to talk to Han. Mama seemed lost in thought. It wasn’t the most easy going breakfast she had ever attended, but given the people here it could have been a lot worse.

Papa cleared his throat, “Governor Shale made an announcement today about Sanctuary City.”

Leia stopped her half-hearted eating and looked up at him. Everyone at the table was looking at him, but Mama had nothing but serenity painted across her face. Whatever he had to say, she already knew it.

“What did she say?” Leia asked, fear tightening her already unsettled stomach.

“That given the recent ‘unrest’, she has no choice but to impose sanctions on the city. There will be a strict curfew enforced, and all trading on the dock is to be limited from sunup to sundown.” Papa’s voice was full of fury.

Leia blew out a long breath of air “That’s it?” she asked.

“That’s it?” Papa was astonished “Leia, Sanctuary Coast is the main port of entry of supplies for the northern part of the continent of Alderia. This will cause massive economic hardship. Not only in the city, but across most of the continent. More than likely this will induce a recession.”

Leia blinked. Was he really that naive? “Yes,” she said “it will. But Shale could have shut the ports down permanently. She could have had every refugee and immigrant in the city dragged into the street and shot. She could have held massive show trials, and executed everyone who was even near the riots, regardless of whether they participated. She could have announced she was going to build a garrison in the middle of the town and sent every resident to a work camp. “ Then she gave him a bitter smile “Or it could have been destroyed in totality.”

Papa’s face was ghost white “Leia-” he whispered.

“Maybe I’m not the best to ask about this,” she said “My standards of what bad is are catastrophically high. But even given all of that, it could have been so much worse.”

He blinked, “I-,” he cleared his throat “You are right of course,” he said “we should be grateful that none of that happened. It’s just-”

“Not fair,” she said, a bitter smile on her lips. “That our people are being punished for doing the right thing.”

“All hail the mighty Empire,” Luke said bitterly “may it reign for a thousand years.”

Han said nothing, but he reached over and squeezed Leia’s hand.

There was a pause, and Leia started to relax. Now that she knew what her people were facing, the whisper of “what if” would stop playing in her mind. They could plan now. Not that they could do much from Yavin, but they now had a path forward.

So Leia was completely taken aback when Mama’s voice cut through the room. “Leia do you blame us for what happened in your future?” she asked pleasantly.

Her voice was so mild, it took Leia’s brain a few seconds to catch up with what she said. Leia, who was in the middle of bringing the last bit of toast to her mouth froze “What?” she squeaked.
“Do you blame your father and I for what happened to the New Republic?” Mama repeated.

Leia blinked and lowered her toast back to her plate “You died,” she said. “How can anything be your fault?”

Mama’s lips pressed into a thin line “Because we withheld certain things from you about the past.”

Leia stilled, “You weren’t the only ones who were there,” she said neutrally.

“No, we weren’t,” Mama agreed. Papa leaned back in his chair and glanced between the two of them. “But it was our job to teach you about our mistakes, so you wouldn’t repeat them. We failed in that.”

Leia felt her fingers tighten in her lap “It doesn’t matter.” she said.

“No, I think it does,” Mama said.

“I don’t blame you for anything!” Leia said. Luke turned his head, looking at her frowning.

“I don’t think that is true Leia,” Papa said.

“No,” Luke said softly, “it’s not.”

She scowled at him, of course at the most inconvenient time, he takes their side. Beside her Han slid his hand into her lap, lacing his fingers with hers. Well, at least one person her was on her side.

“What does it matter?” she said, “It’s done.”

“It is now Leia,” Mama said. She folded her hands over the table “You have every right to be angry at us. You trusted us to tell you the truth. You’re learning we didn’t.”

Leia dug her nails into Han’s hand “I’m not mad,” she said.


She gritted her teeth. “I am not angry with you,” she said, impatience dogging every word “I do have some questions about the Clone Wars, and the Republic. Questions I would like answered, but that doesn’t mean I’m upset.”

Mama sighed “Leia, you are doing us no favors by lying to us.”

“I am not lying!” she said, dropping Han’s hand. He gave a startled noise as she quickly shot to her feet. “Now if you will excuse me, I have work to do.”

“Leia-” Papa called out, but she refused to listen as she stormed out of their room.

ABA - Day 122

“Pack your bags,” Luke said, “We are going off planet tomorrow!”

Leia snorted and returned to studying the plans in front of her “You are maybe. But there is no way
Mon is letting me off this base.”

Luke’s voice was smug “This is approved by Mon herself.”

“And Draven would never…” Leia’s voice trailed off. Luke’s grin was smug. No, Draven wasn’t a factor anymore.

Leia looked up, instantly hopeful. “What’s the mission?” she asked.

“Just recon,” he said, taking the seat in front of her. The communications center was it’s usually dull roar of machines humming, droids moving about, and people talking in the background. “We have a list of planets to check out for potential new bases.”

Leia leaned back in her chair, “You mean it’s a week in space,” she said drily. “Looking at planets from orbit.”

“Yes,” Luke said, but his grin was sly “A week in space, on the Falcon.”

“Han is taking us?” she said.

He nodded. “Obi-Wan was ordered to come along too.”

Leia frowned “Why?”

“Mon wanted to make sure that someone with the Force got a ‘feel’ for the place.”

She cocked her head “Isn’t that something you could do?”

He nodded, “Yeah, but he needs to get out of here as much as you do.”

“Nobody is forbidding him not to go off-world,” Leia grumbled.

“You mean besides Rex?” Luke asked. He leaned forward “I don’t think he wants to go off-world if he can help it.”

Leia frowned “Because of the bounty?” It was the second highest in the Empire after all. She could see how Obi-Wan didn’t want to risk capture, not unless he had a really good reason to be exposed out in the open like that.

Luke nodded “Partly. Also because I don’t think he wants to fight.”

Leia blinked “He didn’t seem to have a problem on Nar Shaddaa,” she said, thinking of his quick moves has he removed Grakkus’ legs.

“No, that isn’t the right word,” Luke frowned “I don't think he minds fighting, I think he is desperate to avoid battle.”

Leia thought about what happened the last time Obi-Wan found himself in a battle. It was only one enemy, but the consequences had been horrific. “I think you’re right,” she murmured.

“And you are about to jump out of your skin, you are so restless,” he said. “And I thought maybe some space from your parents might do you some good.”

Leia scowled. Mama and Papa hadn’t brought up the rather ridiculous notion that she was angry at them again, but the easy cordiality between them had been replaced by a forced air between the three of them.
“If they weren’t being so stubborn,” she groused

Luke let out a bark of laughter “Your one to talk.”

She transferred her glare to him “You would think you would be on my side about this.”

“I’m always on your side Leia,” he said solemnly.

She huffed at that. “Not this time.”

He didn’t say anything to that, just gave her a disappointed look.

She sighed “How long are we going to be out?”

“Oh about ten days,” he said.

“I’m in,” she said, pushing her chair out.

He scowled at her “You were just messing around with me weren’t you?” he grumbled, “You were in the moment I mentioned you going off planet.”

She leaned down and pinched his check “What are siblings for, if not to annoy?” she said laughing in the Force.

ABA - Day 128

Surprisingly the trip so far had been going well. Leia wouldn’t have thought so, given that the Falcon wasn’t the largest ship. When you threw five strong willed individuals into its small quarters, things could get dicey. Add the droids, and that was asking for some sort of petty fight to break out.

But so far nothing of the sort had happened. She and Luke were fine of course. They could read each other’s minds if they felt like it after all. Obi-Wan started out withdrawn from the rest of them on that first day, but eventually he started coming out more and more. While they were playing increasingly ridiculous versions of Sabbac, or watching the holos Leia had borrowed from Evaan, or the racing one’s for Luke and Han. Even Chewie started dropping his hostile attitude towards her by the second day. He wasn’t friendly, by any stretch of the imagination, but he was distantly polite. It was a step up in Leia’s opinion.

And then there was Han. Han, who was constantly staying near her. Han who was joking with her, and asking her questions. Not about their possible life together, but about her. Her likes and dislikes, her opinions, stories from her childhood. And he kept touching her. A hand on her shoulder, in the small of her back. When they settled to watch the holos he would put an arm around her, and she would snuggle up to him. They weren’t flirtatious touches, not really, and there wasn’t even the hint of kissing, or even the offer of kissing, but Leia was enjoying it nonetheless. Han was a tactile person, and she had forgotten how much he would reach out to her in a normal day. It warmed her heart to see this Han starting to do the same thing.

They had seen three of the five planets so far. Leia vaguely remembered all of them as possible sites for the Alliance. The Resistance too, now that she thought about it. None of them had been chosen for one reason or another. She had laughingly stated all the reasons why, as one of them,
usually Obi-Wan, prepared the probe droid to survey the planet.

Then they arrived at their fourth destination.

Leia felt all the blood drain out of her face as a very familiar wintery world appeared in the view screen as they exited hyperspace.

“Is this Hoth?” she whispered.

Han swung the captain's chair as far as he could, so he could peer at her “Familiar with it?” he asked.

Leia nodded, lips pressing in a tight line “We had a base here,” was all she said.

Luke looked as horrified as she was. Of course, being from Tatooine, his reasons were very different then hers. He stared at that wintry white world. “I willingly stepped foot on that planet?” he asked.

Leia managed a laugh, though there was an edge of panic to it. “We had been without a permanent base for going on three years at that point. You just wanted something besides a spaceship underneath your feet.”

Luke grimaced “How long did it take me to learn how to sleep on a starship?” he asked.

“About six months before you could do it consistently,” Leia said, “but you never really embraced the space faring life.”

Obi-Wan came into the cockpit “The probe droid is ready to go,” he said. Then his eyes widened “Is that whole planet covered in snow?”

“Yes,” Leia said “Think after nineteen years on Tatooine you are ready for some cold Obi-Wan?”

“No,” he shuddered “just no.”

Leia laughed “Don’t worry, I don’t think this will be even considered a viable option this time. We were desperate when we landed on this site.”

Han looked at her “Yeah, it’s cold,” he said “but it’s uninhabited, and near a major hyperspace lane. But it’s also far away from any planet that has any major commercial activity on it, or is heavily populated. There is a huge asteroid belt that would hide most of your comings and goings from any space probe launched into this system. Why wouldn’t you select it?”

“It’s not just the cold Han,” she snapped. “If it was just the cold, the fighters could handle it. Space is after all colder. There is also all the snow, and snow storms, that we had to deal with.”

“So?” He asked.

“What happens to snow when it gets warm? Say, when it encounters a running ship?”

His face lost its smug reassurance. “Water,” he whispered.

“Around a lot of delicate, and only partially waterproofed systems, because every snub fighter we have was designed to fight mainly in space. They can do atmosphere, but it wasn’t what they were designed for long term use.”

She kept going “And it isn’t just the fighters. Nighttime temperatures are well below freezing, even
if you have shelter, and don’t have to factor the wind into it. All the equipment we use would need extensive modifications to even function. That is a lot of money to sink into a base.”

Han’s eyes grew thoughtful “How desperate is desperate?” he asked.

She shrugged “We completed the move before we finished the full modifications to the snub fighters. We couldn’t patrol at night.”

Han whistled, and Luke looked troubled “You mean you had no eyes for half the day?” he asked. She nodded.

Obi-Wan nodded “Still the Alliance did send us out here to do reconnaissance. I’ll send the droid out.”

He exited, heading to the back to help Chewie.

Leia leaned to get closer to Han “You have to argue against using this base,” she said.

“Why?” Han said, “I think it’s a good choice, even with the upfront costs.”

Leia bit her lip, and very aware of Obi-Wan’s presence, she whispered “Vader’s seen it in my head.”

Beside her Luke stilled in his chair. Han looked out the viewscreen to the cold expanse below, “In one of his nightly calls?” he asked in an equally quiet voice.

She nodded. “And the dream took place at night. Granted there was a snowstorm, and he only got a glimpse of the night sky, but we can’t risk that he saw enough to triangulate Hoth’s position.”

Han nodded thoughtfully “Yeah, I can see why.”

“No argument from me,” Luke said. “I haven’t spent three years in space. We’ll find another planet.”

ABA - Day 131

“Leia,” Luke’s voice was soft, and the hand shaking her shoulder was gentle “Leia wake up.”

“Huh?” she mumbled, opening her eyes. Luke’s bright grin met her gaze.

“We’re here,” he said happily.

“Okay,” she yawned. She had fallen asleep on her bunk, a midday nap. Not really like her, but it wasn’t like she had anywhere to be or anything to do.

She sleepily followed Luke into the cockpit, and let out a soft “Oh,” when she caught sight of the planet below them. It was a lush tropical world, with only one continent on this side. The pure, pristine water was a glorious blue close to the shore.

“I don’t recognize this one,” she said, sending Luke a puzzled look.

“No,” he said smugly “I didn’t think you would.” He bounced on his seat a little bit.
Leia, suspicious, sat in one of the passenger chairs and reached over to bring up the Falcon’s database on the reader screen. She frowned as she looked at the coordinates. “We can’t use this world,” she said. “It’s too far from any hyperspace lane, big or small.”

“I know,” Luke said smugly “That is not why we are here.”

“Then why are we here Luke?” Obi-Wan’s voice was behind them, and Leia turned around to see the man standing in the doorway of the cockpit. His voice was full of suspicion too. Oh good, she wasn’t the only one who had been left in the dark.

Luke held up a hand “We really were on a mission to survey those worlds,” he said earnestly “but before Trehhipoi left, I asked him if he knew of a good place to spend a day. Isolated, out of the way, but temperate.” Luke's grin was infectious “He suggested this world.”

“To do what?” Leia asked.

“To have a damn day off!” Han grumbled. He leaned forward, “And there is a beach down there calling my name.”

“We can’t-” Leia protested

“Luke, we are far too busy-” Obi-Wan started to say.

Luke shook his head “Nope,” he said “This is a direct order from Mon Mothma herself. You both are ordered to relax for one day. She promised me the Rebellion wouldn’t fall apart in your absence.”

Leia knew how much she had been running around, but she wondered briefly, besides Luke’s training what Obi-Wan had been doing to draw Mon’s concern. She looked at the Jedi, and he looked back at her.

Han huffed, “We are landing on that planet. If you two want to stay in here and sulk, that is your own concern.” He flipped a switch, and started their descent.

Leia looked at Luke, who was still sitting in the passenger chair beside hers. “Really?” she said, exasperated.

His grin was infectious “I figured if I was going to get you two to take a break, tricking you was the only way.”

Leia shot a look at Obi-Wan “What would we do without Luke to run our lives?” she asked the Jedi dryly.

“I haven’t the faintest notion,” Obi-Wan said in response. He eyed the viewscreen, and the beach that was coming closer and closer “Let it never be said I don't know how to accept a gift, graciously given.” He turned his head to Luke, “Thank you, Luke,” he said warmly.

“You are quite welcome,” Luke said, face beaming.

The whole day passed in a warm haze. When she thought back to that sun-warmed beach, Leia could never quite recall the details of what happened. All she remembered was the feel of the sun, the coolness of the water, the laughter in the air, and the feeling of being surrounded by those she loved.
Rex was waiting for them as they disembarked from the Falcon. He glared at all of them as they descended the gangplank, arms folded across his chest. He waited until they all hit the ground before he spoke.

“You all went off planet,” he said, disapprovingly. “Without me.”

Leia shrunk back a little. “It was just a recon mission,” she said. “We weren’t in any danger,” she mumbled.

Rex just continued to glare at all of them.

Luke piped up, offering their defense “We did spend a day on an unoccupied world with beautiful beaches.”

“Did you have fun?” Rex asked.

They all nodded, even Chewie and Han, who by all rights shouldn’t be in trouble with the clone trooper.

“Good,” he said approvingly, “You all needed the break.”

Realizing she wasn’t going to get a lecture, Leia slipped her hand into Han’s. He looked down at their joined hands, then his eyes met hers. He gave her a shy smile. Luke, who was beside her, didn’t say anything. Out loud anyway.

“Ahhhh ,” he projected across the Force. “That is so cute!”

“Bite me, baby brother ,” she returned pleasantly.

Obi-Wan however, went up to Rex, to do his own inspection. “How was Lothal?” he asked mildly.

“Interesting,” Rex said.

“Oh?” Obi-Wan’s eyebrow arched. “Interesting how? In, my what a pleasant surprise? Or, we all need to run for our lives now?”

“Depends on how you view the arrival of unexpected friends,” a new voice said, sharp amusement in every word.

Leia hadn’t been paying much attention to Obi-Wan’s conversation. She had just been about to ask Han if he wanted to go get lunch in the mess, and leave the two old friends to catch up. That absolute wave of shock that rolled off of Obi-Wan at that the sound of that voice got her complete attention. She and Luke turned as one to look at him.

Obi-Wan was as pale as a ghost, staring into the direction that voice had come from. “Ahsoka?” he asked, his voice sounding very lost and young.

Ahsoka? Ahsoka Tano? Leia spun her head to see the tall Togruta woman emerge from behind one of the mobile entrance ladders for the X-Wings. What was she doing on Yavin?

A small smile played on her lips “Hello Obi-Wan,” she said.
He just stared, his whole body visibly shaking. One moment he was in front of Rex, his mouth opening, and closing, with no sound emerging. The next he was in front of her, brought there by Force enhanced speed, and sweeping her into a tight hug.

“Ahsoka,” he sobbed. He rocked her back and forth, and her arms came up to encircle him just as tightly. “Ahsoka,” he repeated over and over again.

Leia wanted to look away. Obi-Wan didn’t do this, he wasn’t that openly affectionate. She couldn’t even begin to imagine what was going through his head. Rex had said Ahsoka was Vader’s apprentice, but Obi-Wan clearly knew her, clearly loved her.

No, Vader hadn’t killed her. In either timeline. But this, this was a major deviation from Leia’s original timeline. Ahsoka wasn’t supposed to be here. Not here on Yavin, none of them were supposed to be on Yavin. But with the Rebellion. She had never come back after she disappeared on Malchore.

“Obi-Wan,” Ahsoka murmured back. “You have got to stop faking your own death.”

He gave a wet chuckle “You first,” he said. He pulled back, and he started lecturing her, “I thought you were dead,” Obi-Wan said. Leia could see his fingers, tight on the Togruta's shoulder. “I felt you disappear.” His voice dropped to a whisper, “I thought he killed you.”

Ahsoka let out a hysterical laugh. “Not quite,” she said “I’m fine, I promise.”

Obi-Wan shook his head “Ahsoka, you never were a good liar.”

She let out a small sob, “It’s a long story,” she said, “one I will tell later” She put a hand up to cup his face “Look at you,” she breathed, tears rolling down her face. “You’re really here.” There was the slightest pause in her words. “Rex said you were alive, but I was afraid to believe.”

Leia stiffened. Ahsoka was lying. Not about being afraid to hope about Obi-Wan’s existence, that rang true. No, Ahsoka was lying about who told her about Obi-Wan. Luke, picking up in her anxiety said “Who is this?”

“Vader’s Jedi apprentice,” she said.

“WHAT?!”

“Quiet,” Leia told him, “I need to focus on eavesdropping.”

Obi-Wan grabbed the hand, still lying on his cheek, and pulled it down so he could wrap his arms around her again.

“When did you get taller than me?” he complained.

Leia was about to interrupt the pair when a loud wail sounded from behind them. She, Luke, and Han all turned around, to see Threepio at the entrance to the Falcon. Waving his arms frantically and demanding “R2! Come back here at once!” before the little astromech hurled himself down the gangplank

[AHSOKA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!] The droid squealed, as he headed at top speed towards the woman. Leia blinked. What did R2 think he was doing? He was going to hurl himself off that gangplank if he didn’t slow down.

Obi-Wan didn’t let Ahsoka go, and from all appearances didn't hear the racket the droid was
making. R2 made it to the ground in one piece, and he hurled himself forward. Hastily all three of
them got out of his way. He didn’t look like he was going to slow down, and the droid was heavy.
Leia didn’t particularly want the bruises he would give her if he hit her.

R2 reached the pair, and let out another loud cry of [Ahsoka? Is that you?]. When neither of them
responded to him, he let out desperate wail [Ahsoka?]

Leia cursed to herself. R2 had been Vader's astromech, of course, he knew Ahsoka. And the little
droid had never been shy showing his affection to anyone he loved.

Ahsoka blinked and pulled herself back from Obi-Wan arms.

“What the-” she started to say, looking down to see what all the fuss was about.

[Ahsoka,] R2 cried out, visual lens going a light purple [it’s me!!!]

A look of wonder crossed Ahsoka's face. “R2?” she whispered.

[Yes! Yes! Yes!] The droid said happily. [I am so very glad to see you were not terminated!]

Ahsoka laughed, “I’m glad you weren’t terminated too.” She knelt down and wrapped her arms
around the little droid “It’s good to see you again too.”

[Ahsoka,] the droid practically purred, swinging back and forth on his two feet in utter delight.

Obi-Wan’s hand came down on Ahsoka's shoulder, like he was afraid the woman would disappear
if he wasn’t touching her.

[Obi-Wan!] R2 demanded, [Remove yourself! This is my time with Ahsoka. You had one hundred
and thirty-three seconds, it is my turn.]

“You have to share R2,” Obi-Wan said. Leia frowned. She wasn’t jealous, she wasn’t. R2 was
allowed to love other people other than her family.

The droid let out an angry beep, [Step away, I need to do a full visual scan to make sure Ahsoka is
operating at maximum efficiency!]

Obi-Wan didn’t move. He muttered, “She’s fine, take my word for it.”

R2 let out a long angry beep. Behind them, Threepio cried out “R2! Language!”

Ahsoka, laughing, came up to her feet, “It’s okay R2. I’m going to be here for a while. We can talk
later. I have a lot to tell you that I don’t want Obi-Wan to overhear.”

[Really?] R2 chirped, visual sensor going bright blue.

She nodded “Yes, in fact I think I’m going to have a mission for you.”

[I GET A MISSION!] the droid said happily. [It’s been so long.] And he rolled away to Threepio.

“Obi-Wan?” Luke asked, heading over to the duo, questions written all over his face. Without a
word, Leia followed her brother. Han, still holding her hand, trailed after her.

“Luke,” Obi-Wan brushing the tears away from his face “I would like you to meet a very dear
friend of mine.”
“Variant,” Leia thought to herself, “not variants.” Then her eyes flicked to the gangplank, where Threepio was standing next to R2, watching all of the commotion. And the rather large crowd of mechanics and pilots who had gathered a respectful distance away to gawk at the reunion. More than likely some of them understood binary. Probably for the best R2 hadn’t gotten into specifics, no matter how much Leia wanted to yell at the Togruta, “My droid.”

“Of course,” Ahsoka said, coming forward, the beginning of a smile starting on her lips.

“Ahsoka,” Obi-Wan said, “I would like you to meet…” his voice trailed off, as he noticed how many eyes were on them. He smoothly went on “Luke Dameron.” But in the Force, Leia heard him say the name “Skywalker,” as Obi-Wan gestured to her brother.

Ahsoka’s warm smile completely disappeared “I’m sorry what?” she said.


“Really?” she asked.

Obi-Wan nodded his head, “Yes.”

Ahsoka looked back at Luke, then past him. That’s when her gaze fell on Leia. Those sharp blue eyes widened in recognition, then narrowed in thought. “And her?” she said in a tight voice.

“This is Leia Organa,” Obi-Wan said, a puzzled look on his face. Ahsoka looked at Luke, then she looked at Leia.

Every other major change to the timeline that Leia had witnessed had originated from her, and actions she took. But here Ahsoka was, standing on Yavin, looking like she recognized Leia, and hadn’t expected Luke. But Leia wasn’t the only one who was doing radical things to change the timeline, was she?

Ahsoka seemed to gather herself, realizing that they had an audience. “Hello Luke,” she said, stepping forward and offering her hand. Luke took it automatically. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.” She then shot Rex a fierce look. Clearly, the old clone hadn’t chosen to warn her about this. He only gave a shrug in return, but his sly smile revealed how much he was enjoying her surprise. “You are certainly not who I expected with the last name of Dameron.” There was no missing the sarcastic twist to those words.

Leia felt the blood drain out of her face, and her hand tightened her around Han’s. This was not good. Whatever had prompted this change in the timeline, whatever had brought Ahsoka here, it wasn’t going to be anything as benign as the Togruta had a vision in the Force. Oh, please let it be time travel, Leia could deal with time travel.

Ahsoka withdrew her hand from Luke’s, and her gaze fell to Leia. “Hello Leia,” Ahsoka said gravely, “It’s nice to finally meet you.”

“And you,” Leia responded warily.

Ahsoka smiled sadly, and stepped forward. In a whisper that Leia could barely hear over the noise of the hanger, she said “Your fathers have had nothing but good things to say about you.”
Fathers, not father. Well fuck, what the hell had Vader done now?

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer and Acyancat

Translation into Russian available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Hi guys! Quick note, I will be going on vacation this Friday, and the internet is not so great where I will be staying. In the short term, this means it will take me longer to answer comments, but I will get to them all I promise. Long term, it probably means that Shifting Sands next chapter more than likely won't be available in three weeks. I'm still going to be writing when I'm gone, but I doubt I will be keeping up the pace required to turn out a full chapter. All other business complete, as always I hope you enjoy!

It took all of Leia’s considerable skill to keep her face smooth and pleasant at Ahsoka’s words. She knew Han was aware something was wrong, given she was gripping his hand so tightly she wouldn’t be surprised if she was hurting him. But not by a flicker of an eyelash did he give that fact away. In fact, Leia was distantly amused to note, he gave the Togruta a rakish grin.

Leia cleared her throat and made an effort to keep her voice calm. “I’m not sure you should believe everything you heard,” she said cautiously. “My father is not the most...rational when it comes to me.”

On her other side, Luke tensed up. It had to be the words, Leia was fairly confident she wasn’t bleeding anything in the Force, or else he would be peppering her with questions. She just hoped that his face wasn’t revealing anything too damaging. Luke had always been a terrible liar when he had no notice. He was really good, scarily so, when he walked into a situation where he was expected to, but when he was ambushed liked this, he tended to flounder.

Ahsoka’s smile was just as tight as Leia’s “Oh, it was all good if a bit...fantastical.” A rueful smile crossed her lips “Fortunately I’ve lived a few fantastical things myself and had an easier time than he expected believing him.”

Damn, damn, damn. What the hell did that mean?

Ahsoka’s eyes flicked down, noticing the hand Leia was currently gripping so tightly. There wasn’t even a hint in the woman’s body language or in the Force what she was thinking. Leia felt a small pool of cold sweat gather in the small of her back. Had she, in one impulsive gesture looking for support, inadvertently exposed Han to Vader?

“Ahsoka!” Obi-Wan called out, “come over here and correct Rex’s memory of what really happened on Mandalore. I’m afraid he’s letting nostalgia blind him.”

Ahsoka’s face broke out into genuine happiness at the sound of Obi-Wan’s voice. Leia paused at that. Whatever else the woman might be doing here, she seemed to be genuinely pleased to see Obi-Wan alive.

“It was very nice to meet you,” she said to Leia, and pivoted slightly to look at Luke “You as well, no matter how much I wasn’t expecting it.” She gave them both a small bow and went back over to Obi-Wan, who had gone back to having a very animated discussion with Rex.
Leia watched her go, and ruthlessly squashed every impulse she had that was saying that she needed to give warning, and give warning now, that Ahsoka wasn’t everything she pretended to be. It was an irrational fear, and Leia knew it. Ahsoka didn’t have to tell Leia who had sent her, even as obliquely as she managed, or even this soon. They had barely spoken three words to each other before the woman gave her fair warning. But the thought that Vader had sent another person on this base to spy on her….

Beside her, Han leaned down and whispered in her ear “What’s wrong?”

Leia shook her head “Not here,” she said.

Han opened his mouth to protest, then noticed the curious faces still surrounding them in the hanger and shut it.

He wasn’t the only one who noticed the still large crowds. At that very moment Rex’s voice boomed out “Did we suddenly defeat the Empire, and no one told me?” There was the sound of shuffling feet, and a low chorus of shamefaced “No sir.”

“Then get back to work!” Rex shouted out in his booming voice.

It was amazing how quickly Rex could put the fear into anyone, Leia thought distractedly. Especially since, technically, he didn’t have any authority over the mechanics or the flight crew.

“Leia?” Luke asked worriedly over the Force, as the various onlookers dispersed.

“Vader is involved with her being here,” Leia sent back, not even bothering to hide her worry or fear from Luke.

Luke’s eyes widened, “Was she working with him before?” he asked. “In the other timeline?”

Leia frowned. That was the other part of this that wasn’t making sense to her. Why Ahsoka would even be willing to entertain the possibility of working for Vader. “No,” Leia said thoughtfully “she didn’t. In fact, until a few years from now, the Rebellion thought he killed her.”

Luke swallowed hard “He killed his own apprentice?”

“Thought he did Luke,” Leia gently corrected. “I don’t know the details, but I do know after Malachor Ahsoka never rejoined the Rebellion.”

Luke bit his lip, then his head turned to look at Ahsoka, who was laughing at something Rex was telling her. Obi-Wan still had that relaxed smile on his face.


Leia looked at the happiness and joy on the older Jedi’s face. She thought of him, wondering the halls of this base, of being seen as a legend, instead of a person. Of the impossibility that was even now, standing in front of him, laughing. Of him being reunited with an old friend, alive and well. There was probably nobody else in the galaxy that fit that description for Obi-Wan. And Ahsoka might be a very talented actress, but Leia got the feeling from her she was truly happy to see Obi-Wan.

“No, not until we talk to her.” Leia decided “I don’t want to take this away from him until I have to.”

“We?” Luke arched an eyebrow.
“Of course, we,” Leia said.

Luke shrugged “Usually your so protective of me when it comes to anything to do with Father, I’m surprised you aren’t trying to shove me out of the room.”

“She already knows you are a Skywalker,” Leia pointed out, “It would do no good to keep you away. Besides,” and her the puzzlement over Ahsoka’s actions came back “she didn’t have to tell me Vader sent her. Let’s repay a courtesy with a courtesy.”

Luke nodded in agreement. Leia started to walk towards the trio, but a small tug on her hand, made her stop.

Han waited until she turned around fully, before he said quietly, “Not that it isn’t fun to watch you and the Kid have an entire conversation with your eyebrows, but for those of us lacking in those skills, what is going on?”

Leia looked up into that face, and for the briefest second wished for her Han to be here. He knew, by this point, to follow her and Luke’s lead when things like this happened. But asking this Han, out loud anyway, if he trusted her was the surest way to complicate this already fragile dance between them.

“Divide and conquer,” she said, “Without breaking anyone’s heart.”

Han’s eyes flicked to Rex, Obi-Wan, and Ahsoka, still merrily talking away. Leia watched as those blue eyes narrowed as he considered what her words meant. Han knew there was no need for subterfuge with Rex and Obi-Wan. If Leia wanted to talk to them alone, Han knew she would simply ask them. This was about Ahsoka, and getting her alone.

His eyes came back to her “Okay,’ he said.

Leia felt a small look of triumph cross her face. It was completely the wrong time for this, but the fact that he had one of the quickest minds she had ever met was one of the most attractive things about him.

She brought his hand up and kissed his knuckles quickly “See?” she said, as she started to turn away “Who needs eyebrows?” Han started sputtering behind her as she pulled him along with her. Luke, who had caught the whole exchange, just shook his head in fond amusement.

As they approached Ahsoka, Leia fought to keep her manner pleasant. Not so much for the Togruta’s sake, but for Obi-Wan and Rex. These two knew her. They trusted her. They had spent years fighting a war with her. Leia had a few conversations with the woman in a future that was never going to happen. They knew Ahsoka better than she did. Then again, Leia wasn’t blinded by love in regards to this woman either. For the sake of these two men, she would tread carefully.

Rex spotted her first, but he didn’t say anything to interrupt the conversation between Obi-Wan and Ahsoka. Obi-Wan let out a laugh, and Leia allowed herself to marvel at the sound. It was so rare to hear him, out in the open like this, express joy.

“Catching up on old gossip?” she asked, mildly curious.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said, turning his head towards her, eyes shining with delight. Leia found herself smiling back at him unthinkingly, a part of her so pleased to see him without the sadness in his eyes. So much so, she hadn’t realized up until this moment, that it wasn’t something that had always been a part of his personality.
“So Lady Ahsoka-” Luke started to say.

“Just Ahsoka,” she said, face going agog once again as she was confronted with Luke’s existence.

“Ahsoka,” Luke said. “How long have you been on base?”

“Not long,” she said easily “about a day. Rex, Kallus and I arrived late last night.”

Right, Kallus. The one who Draven would throw a fit about if he was made the head of intelligence. The whole reason Rex went to Lothal in the first place and brought this complication back with him.

“Where is Kallus?” Leia asked.

“In a meeting with Mon,” Ahsoka answered. Then she gave a wry chuckle “I had to say, when I arrived on Lothal and found out he took my place as Fulcrum, I was pretty shocked.”

“Wedge speaks highly of him,” Luke said defensively. Oh, Leia had forgotten about that. Kallus was the one who originally recruited Wedge.

Ahsoka hastily explained. “It wasn’t an insult to his abilities Luke. It’s just that he was one of the most loyal Imperialists I knew of. He gave Kanan and Ezra quite the chase.” Her eyes flickered in grief on those names.

Leia knew she couldn’t hide every reason she had for what she was about to do directly from Obi-Wan. That didn’t mean she couldn’t fool the wily old man to all of the reasons. She didn’t want the two of them interacting any more than necessary, no matter how much she loved that happiness around him. Until she was satisfied as to why Ahsoka was here, she was going to limit the damage.

“Fulcrum,” she said, “would you mind terribly if I borrow you for a moment?”

As expected, Obi-Wan stiffened “Why?” he asked, good mood gone.

“I just have a few questions for her, that’s all,” Leia said easily.

Obi-Wan’s eyes sharpened, and his jaw tightened “Going to interrogate her?” he said. “Trust me, there is no reason to.”

“I prefer to think of it as a preventative defense,” Leia countered back smoothly.

“A defense of what?” he asked.

Ahsoka laughed at that and shook her head “You are still very oblivious to people’s affection for you Obi-Wan.”

Obi-Wan just looked at her, eyebrow arched in question. “You,” Ahsoka said, leaning forward and giving him a light poke in his chest. “She wants to defend you.”

“Me?” Obi-Wan looked shocked. Leia wasn’t sure if it was at the thought that Leia wanted to protect him, or he thought that needing protection from Ahsoka was ludicrous. That bought the Tortuga woman a little bit of trust in Leia’s eyes. Obi-Wan, with one glaring exception, usually had a really good read on people. But that exception did exist, and like Vader, Ahsoka was someone he loved. He couldn’t be fully trusted to see her as she was now.

Obi-Wan sputtered “Don’t be absurd. I don’t need-"
“General,” Rex said, breaking in “why don’t we let them talk?” Bless the man and his understanding of paranoid princesses. “I’m sure Luke also has a lot of questions for Ahsoka.”

“It’s fine Obi-Wan,” Ahsoka said and gave the man a huge smile. “I’ll meet you in about an hour for lunch?”

Luke cleared his throat, “Might I suggest you meet in Obi-Wan’s room?” They both turned and looked at him puzzled. Luke only gave them a bashful smile. Leia was well aware it was an act, but she was betting Obi-Wan and Ahsoka didn’t. See, when he had time to think, Luke was a really good liar. It was his babyface, Leia thought grumpily, and that stupid sunny smile.

“Unless you want every person in the mess hall trying desperately to overhear your conversation, I think privacy would be a good idea.” True, but it was also a graceful way to make sure Obi-Wan wasn’t forced into a large crowd. They had been working with him, but he still had problems with it. Ahsoka had no way of knowing that, and Obi-Wan was terrible at articulating when he was overwhelmed. He just became a monosyllabic lump.

Both nodded, and Obi-Wan reached out and hugged Ahsoka. She squeezed him back just as hard. When he withdrew, he discreetly wiped his hand over his eyes. Leia wondered if the last time they had seen each other, they had hugged. Or even said goodbye? Wars were chaotic places, and sometimes words went unsaid. And if her understanding of the Jedi Order was correct, they probably didn’t do hugs.

He turned and gave Leia a pleading look “Please, play nice,” he asked, close to begging.

Leia looked at him, “I always do,” she said. He didn’t look reassured and sent a worrying glance between her, Luke, and Ahsoka. Han remained quiet, but Leia could feel his mind whirling as he tried to piece together what was going on.

Leia let go of Han’s hand, and walked up to Obi-Wan. “Please,” she said when she got close to him, looking straight into those pale blue eyes. “Indulge me.”

He shook his head in bemusement. “You are very protective. Rabidly so.”

Leia shrugged. Then on impulse, she stood up on her tiptoes and kissed the man on his cheek. “I told you Obi-Wan,” she said impishly “I do care. And I protect what I care about.”

As she drew back, Leia was delighted to see the small blush on Obi-Wan’s cheeks. “Well, I,” he said. Then he laughed out loud. He tapped her on the nose playfully “Ridiculous” he said fondly “you are absolutely ridiculous.”

“I never denied that,” Leia said easily.

Still shaking his head, Obi-Wan walked away, Rex at his side.

Ahsoka watched him go, nothing but fondness on her face. It all slipped away when she looked back at Leia. “Is this a conversation we can have here?”

Leia walked up to the taller woman and got as close as she reasonably could without it looking suspicious. “What did you mean by ‘fathers’?” she hissed. Behind her, she felt Han start.

“Definitely not here,” Ahsoka muttered. She spun on her heel and started walking to the exit. A little abrupt, to Leia’s thinking, but a clear enough invitation for her to follow Ahsoka.

“Want me to come with you two?” Han asked her. Beside her, Luke was tense as a wire. Leia
nodded.

“Please,” she said, as she started to follow the older woman. “I'm going to need all the help I can get reading this one.” Complicated by the fact that right here was the scenario she had been dreading the most. Someone, whose loyalties were never in question in her original timeline, was doing something completely unexpected in this one. No, Leia didn’t know Ahsoka well, but she had never once doubted the woman was on the Rebellion’s side. Her being here and now, threw all of that in doubt.

She didn't think Ahsoka was here to hurt her. At least that wasn’t the sense she got off of her, but she was almost certainly here on Vader’s orders.

*He doesn't want to hurt you either.*

Leia shoved that thought away, and stalked forward, following the Togruta.

Ahsoka seemed to be a minor celebrity on base. At least that was the sense Leia got from the people the passed in the hallways. Everyone, kept looking at her or doing a double take as she walked by. There was awe, wonder, or just plain curiosity on their faces. Gossip traveled fast, but Leia wondered what the source of these mixed reactions was. Was it the lightsabers on her belt? The fact that she was the legendary first Fulcrum, miraculously back from the dead? That she had survived Vader when so few others had?

Leia was also wondering if it was Ahsoka's idea not to have Rebel Command immediately comm the Falcon when she arrived, to inform Obi-Wan that she was here, hell that she was alive. Did the woman count on his overjoyed greeting to overshadow the questions her presence would ordinarily stir up? If Obi-Wan had time to think about it, would he be wary?

Leia chided herself for the paranoia. Given how Rex had failed to mention Luke’s existence to Ahsoka, it could very well have been the clone's idea not to warn Obi-Wan. Or maybe it was something everyone decided on since the Falcon would be arriving soon anyway, and it would have been cruel to have Obi-Wan sitting on the Falcon vibrating in anticipation. Or it could be some other innocent explanation that Leia wasn’t thinking of, and she was overthinking all of this in an effort not to dwell on the unpleasant conversation she knew was coming. Leia didn't like it when she had to deal with anything to do with Vader.

Their destination turned out to be one of the many small rooms that were used as informal meeting places, scattered throughout the temple. This one was half-way between the hanger bay and the main communications rooms. It was one of several informal meeting rooms scattered throughout the base. After poking her head in, satisfied there was no one else there, Ahsoka strode confidently into the room. Leia followed and was surprised when she spotted the table. Most of these rooms only had chairs in them. This one was different in the fact that the table was part of the construction of the original room. It was a large table for a room this size, dominating everything with its light brown stones, and scroll work along the side. The cheap flimsy chairs that someone had stuffed in here looked even more ridiculous set against this bemouth. Leia shook her head. Now was not the time to be distracted by interior decorating.

Ahsoka bypassed the chairs altogether and sat directly on top of the table. She didn’t seem too surprised when Luke came in behind Leia, but she did cock her head when Han brought up the rear. He closed the door behind him, but like every common room on the base, there was no lock.

Ahsoka looked him up and down as Han casually leaned against the wall right next to the door, arms crossed. He was there to tackle her if necessary to stop her from leaving the room. Not that Leia thought that would do any good against someone who was trained as a Jedi, but she was
delighted that he had started wordlessly anticipating her and Luke’s play and backing them up. It had been over a year in her original timeline when that started happening with Han.

Leia looked at her brother, and wordlessly they came to stand slightly to each side of Ahsoka, flanking her. Their deliberate placement wasn’t lost on the woman, as she casually turned her head to look at the configuration they had all set themselves in.

There was a sad smile playing on her face as she observed “I understand why you all are wary, but I’m no threat to you. Any of you.”

Han’s voice was light and breezy “We’ll see,” he said, shifting the leg that his holster was attached to. His arms remained against his chest, but that little movement told Leia how on edge he was.

Ahsoka nodded her head, and then she turned slightly so she could look Leia up and down. Leia crossed her arms over her chest. “How freely can I talk?” Ahsoka asked, her eyes lingering on both Luke and Han.

“As freely as you want,” Leia said evenly.

Ahsoka’s smile went from sad to genuine in a moment. “You are very much Bail’s daughter.” Then the amusement fell away. Ahsoka rolled her shoulders and let out a long sigh. It was the first thing she had done that betrayed her own nerves and tension. Leia wondered briefly if it was real or being put on for a show.

Ahsoka gave a long look at Han. “I imagine he” and she pointed to Han “is the dead husband?”

Han stiffened a bit, and Leia shifted just the slightest so that she could still reach Ahsoka if she needed to but blocked the woman from getting a full view of him. Ahsoka had started this, so Leia came right to the point. “Are you here to spy on me for Vader?” she demanded.

Ahsoka blinked and brought her focus back to Leia. “Am I what?” she repeated.

“How to spy on me?”

Ahsoka looked genuinely baffled. But Leia was getting nothing from her in the Force. That didn't mean she was deliberately hiding something, Leia reminded herself. The woman had been hidden for a long time, and more importantly, she had done so successfully. It made sense that Leia wouldn’t get too much of a read on her.

Ahsoka looked at Leia, concern on her face. “No,” she said slowly, “why would you think I was?”

Luke crossed his arms, “You wouldn’t be the first one Father sent.”

Leia kept her wince to herself. Never give someone more information then they need in an interrogation. If he wanted to play it that way, fine, Luke had always been more direct than her. But she had a feeling this was a mistake made in ignorance, not a deliberate choice. She would let him know later, now was not the time to speak to him mentally and distract him.

Ahsoka, to Leia’s surprise, let out a semi-hysterical laugh. “That word,” she said, “is going to take some getting used to.”

Luke didn’t laugh with her, if anything his glare deepened.

Ahsoka sighed “No,” she said, shoulders slumping “I’m not here to spy on Leia. I didn't even know he sent anyone else besides me.” She looked thoughtful “Makes sense though. Not only as a back-
“up but to keep eyes on me too.”

“Why bother?” Han asked. “Aren’t you here under his orders?”

Ahsoka ignored him, and the reason that they were all in this room. She peered intently at Luke “Are you from the future too?” she asked him curiously.

Leia bit off a curse. Dammit, of all times for Vader to start talking to people, he picks now? And specifically, *that*?

Luke immediately dropped his intimidating act “What?” he yelped “No. Why would you think that?”

“She is,” Ahsoka said, waving in Leia’s direction, but not taking her eyes off Luke “Given that you are twins, it was a fair guess.”

Leia gritted through her teeth “Vader told you,” she said.

Ahsoka nodded “Yes, he told me about that.”

Han’s voice was low and menacing “So who are you to him? Exactly why would he trust you with this? And why didn’t Leia shoot you immediately on site?”

“She was his apprentice,” Luke answered Han. Han straightened up, terrified.

Leia hastily added. “When he was a Jedi, not now. That’s how she knows Obi-Wan.”

“Still doesn’t explain why you didn’t shoot her when she mentioned Fathers, instead of Father,” Han observed, sinking back to his slouch against the door. Leia noticed he was no longer even pretending to be calm, and his hands had dropped back to his side. The right one was inching to his blaster as if he was deciding if he was going to shoot the woman himself.

“Ahsoka never joined up with Vader in the other timeline Han,” Leia said, taking her eyes off Han, and returning them to Ahsoka. “In fact, General Syndulla’s report on the incident was very clear that the Ghost crew was sure he killed her.” Ahsoka’s wince was subtle, but it was there. Interesting, that was a sore spot. Was it the mention of the Ghost’s crew, and the members who were no longer there? Or did that pain have to do with her former Master trying to kill her?

“You learned otherwise?” Han’s voice broke into Leia’s musings.

Leia nodded, but she didn’t go into the details. Just gave Han one last look, to confirm he wasn’t going to shoot the woman before Leia got her answers. Satisfied that he was somewhat calmer, Leia turned back to Ahsoka and asked the most obvious flaw in the woman’s story so far. “And you believed Vader when he told you I time traveled? Just like that?”

“You’re not?” Ahsoka asked, “I time traveled too.”

Leia’s mind came to an abrupt stop. What had Ahsoka just said? There was a long silence in the room. Good to know everyone else was as thrown as Leia was.

“I’m sorry you did what?” Han sputtered.

“I time traveled.” Ahsoka said simply like this was a normal thing. “Not as far as Leia did, it was roughly about two years, best I can guess. It’s how I escaped from Vader on Malachor the first time.” Ahsoka looked around the room at their stunned faces. “You didn’t know that?” she asked,
directing her gaze to Leia. “I would have thought older me would have said something to you.”

Leia shook her head “You said nothing. But you and I didn’t have that type of relationship. You knew Luke better.” And given her attitude having anything to do with Vader at that age, it wasn't a great mystery why that Ahsoka chose to say nothing to Leia.

But this one had, and if there was even a chance she knew how Leia got here, or even why Leia was here, Leia had to know. She marched forward until she was right at the edge of the table where Ahsoka’s long legs were swinging down. “Do you know why I time traveled? Or how? Is there a way to get back?”

Leia heard the gasps behind her, but she was too focused on the possible answers in front of her to pay them much mind.

Ahsoka’s eyes filled with sorrow “I’m sorry Leia,” she said, her voice quiet. “But I didn't do what you did. I never changed bodies. I was just pulled through time.” A ghost of a smile crossed her lips. “And I know who did it."

“Who-“ Leia started to ask, then stopped herself. There was only one other Jedi she knew of from that time, “Ezra,” she breathed, thinking of that bright boy she had met so long ago.

“Yes, Ezra,” Ahsoka’s eyes went distant. “He pulled me through a door, or gateway of some kind into this…room.” She grimaced “No, that isn’t quite right. It wasn’t exactly a room. But it wasn’t space either. It was this… place, built out of time and the Force. I could hear and see so many things.” She looked at Leia “What was, what is, what could have been.”

Leia whispered, “Do you know how to get back there?” She could return to her own time. She would still look nineteen of course, but she could return.

Ahsoka’s eyes became shadowed “No Leia,” she said, and there were traces of regret in her voice, “But Ezra got there through the Jedi temple on Lothal. “

Leia’s shoulders slumped “And the temple was destroyed,” she whispered.

“Or moved itself to where it needed to be,” Ahsoka said gently. “I’m not sure any place that strong in the Force could ever really be ‘destroyed’”

“Oh,” Han’s voice was unnaturally high “Of course. This all involves a mysterious temple, that moved itself. Because there are different ways to time travel. That makes sense.”

“In the Force, all things are possible,” Luke and Ahsoka said in unison. They blinked and then looked at each other askance.

Leia felt like she had been punched in the gut. “So, you don’t know any more than Qui-Gon does,” she said bitterly.

Ahsoka’s voice contained an element of shock “Qui-Gon? Qui-Gon Jinn? Obi-Wan’s training master?”

Leia didn’t answer her, too dejected at the sudden hope of having answers, then have it all crash down around her. Luke’s voice was worried as he answered Ahsoka ”Yeah, that one.”

“But he’s dead!” Ahsoka protested “He’s been dead for decades!”

“Oh, so ghosts are where you draw the line at plausibility?” Han’s voice was openly mocking.
“First time I’m hearing of this too, and you don’t see me running around insisting on what is and is not possible.”

Ahsoka opened her mouth and then shut it. “Well,” she said thoughtfully “when you put it like that, it does sound ridiculous.”

“All of this is ridiculous,” Han said firmly “The Force, time travel, ghosts, long lost twins. Pick one thing, and I would have told you six months ago you were living in a badly written holo drama.”

“And now?” Ahsoka asked, her gaze narrowing in on Han. Leia got the impression she was testing him, although why she was even bothering, eluded Leia.

Han shrugged “Still not sure if I believe,” He nodded his head to indicate Luke and Leia, “But they do, and I’m perfectly happy to follow their lead.”

Leia wondered if one of the things Han would have put as impossible six months ago was the possibility of having a family that loved him. That liked him. She wondered how her nineteen-year-old self-had missed this. She had discovered, later, how insecure Han could be about certain things, but she hadn’t realized how deep this ran for him.

Luke’s voice was rough, “That still doesn't answer the question of why you are here Ahsoka?”

Leia looked up at Luke. Something was bothering him, something that had nothing to do with Ahsoka. She started to walk back over to him, but he didn’t even look her way. Stung, Leia resumed her place across from him no matter how stupid she felt doing so. Ahsoka wasn’t going to run, she had proved that already. And she couldn’t press Luke on what was bothering him, now was not the time to get distracted by asking questions about it.

Ahsoka’s gaze fell on Leia’s face. “I was sent to protect Leia.”

“Only that?” Luke’s voice was tight and controlled.

Ahsoka turned to look at him, and again astonishment rolled over her features. “And you,” she acknowledged. “Or at least I think he meant you. All he called you was Leia’s tutor.” Then distaste flashed across her features “And husband.”

“Why does he think Leia married…” Han trailed off, and then looked at Leia “You misled him,” he said, turning to Leia. “You misled him when you were in that cell.”

Leia shrugged “I had to. He wasn’t going to let the identity of who taught me my shielding technique without something.” She shrugged “I figured what was the harm in blurring the lines a little?” She gave Luke a conspiratorial grin “It’s not like I don’t love Luke to.” Luke didn’t return the smile, just gave her a frosty stare. Leia’s smile slipped away.

Han grinned “Not bad, your Worship,” he said, breaking into Leia’s worry about what was bothering Luke.

“Thank you!” she said, turning around to give Han a grateful smile. At least someone here acknowledged that had been the right thing to do.


Ahsoka thought about that for a second and then looked at Leia. “In this other timeline, Vader found out about Luke, but not you?”
Leia nodded.


Leia nodded again.

“Wait,” Han threw his hands up “That doesn’t make any sense. Up to this point, the guy has been rabid about protecting her. Why did he hurt the Kid?”

Luke looked over at Leia, and Leia shrugged “I don’t know,” she said. “Some of the things he’s done are the same. That bounty for starters. Both then and now it is the same, twenty-five million, no significant damage. But as far as I know, the other things he’s done…” her voice trailed off.

“Like?” Han demanded. Dammit, he wanted to get into this now?

“Protecting Alderaan,” Ahsoka said lightly. Leia looked at her agape, how did she know about that?

“He asked me for advice on how to manage the governor to make sure nothing too terrible happens to the people on the planet,” Ahsoka gave a rueful shake of her head. “He had to be desperate. I don’t know any more about political maneuvering then he does.”

Okay, there was protecting Alderaan to gain favor with Leia, then there was making yourself vulnerable and admitting there was something you didn’t know. Just exactly what was going on in Vader’s head?

Then Ahsoka gave a winsome grin “Although I can explain the difference there. Obi-Wan was on Tatooine for the last nineteen years, so I’m guessing that was where you were too?” she asked Luke.

Luke nodded. Ahsoka shrugged “Explains that difference. He was never fond of his homeworld, and I’m not sure what it would take for him ever to do anything to try to protect it.”


He gave her a hard look, “Father is from there, he gets to be disparaging. You are from a Core World, you don’t.”

Okay, Luke was starting to verge into the cruel. What stick found its way up his ass? But she didn’t want to start a fight in front of Ahsoka, so she nodded.

Luke accepted the apology with a nod of his own head, but then his eyes grew thoughtful. “He did hurt you, Leia,” Luke observed. “He choked you in that cell.” Then anger filled his voice “I remember those bruises.”

Leia shrugged “I don’t see where that would make a difference,” she said. “He cut your hand off, but that didn’t stop him from dueling you again.”

Ahsoka looked troubled. “Are you sure you can’t think of any other difference?”

“No,” Leia said “It’s not like he doesn’t choke people all the...” her voice trailed off as she thought of her and Vader’s shared nightmare. Her mother, she realized, he had choked her mother, and shortly after that, she was dead. And Leia was her living image in so many ways.
Not again. That was what he had screamed in the Force. Not at her, Leia wasn’t sure Vader was even aware enough at that point to remember she had been in that cell with him. But that was what he said, no, not again.

Leia felt her blood turn to ice, and against her will, she felt sorry for him for a moment. Vader had loved his wife. It might have been turned into a twisted mockery of itself over the last two decades, but he still clearly adored her. Missed her. In a life full of horrors and atrocities, this one thing was the only act Leia knew that he regretted. And then in that cell, he had done the same thing to Leia. Lost his temper, and in a fit of rage, choked her. He had repeated the worse moment of his life in that tiny cell. Was that enough to account for the differences in how he approached Leia versus how his alternate had approached Luke?

“What?” Han demanded, interrupting her train of thought. Leia looked at Luke, who was staring at her puzzled.

“Did you see what he did to our mother in his nightmare?” she sent to him.

Luke’s brows furrowed in thought, and then comprehension crossed his face.

“Hey!” Han said, snapping his fingers “For those of us who can’t talk to other people with our minds, can you explain what is going on?”

Ahsoka's shock washed over them. Leia blinked, it was the first time since she met the woman she had felt anything that loud from her in the Force.

“You two can talk mind to mind?” she said, looking between Luke and Leia “Consistently?”

“Yes,” they both said in unison.

“But,” she sputtered “neither of you has the level of training required to do that.”

Leia frowned, and Luke also looked confused, but he stepped forward, trying to be reassuring. “I’ve been working on it,” he said “It was far too useful for me to wait on. I’m sure there are plenty of things you were taught before this that I don’t know. And I wouldn’t say it was easy. It took me a month to communicate consistently with Leia.” He grimaced “I still drop out on Obi-Wan sometimes.”

“A month?” Ahsoka repeated. “It took you a month? Luke, there were Jedi Masters who worked years on being able to do what you do.” She turned to Leia, “And you?” she demanded, “How long did it take you?”

Leia shifted a bit on her feet. Obi-Wan had said what she and Luke could do was unusual, but he hadn’t made it quite this explicit. “To talk to Luke, about four months. To talk to other people? About a year,” she shrugged “Not that I did that all that often. And when I did, I was much more inconsistent.”

But not lately. One of the side effects of her increasing meditation and training in her shields. Leia could talk to any other Force-sensitive she wanted, not that there were that many around, and she was fairly confident she would be heard. Also, that meant Vader, whatever he had told Ahsoka about Leia, hadn’t disclosed the talks the two of them had mind to mind. Leia wasn’t sure on the timeline of when he retrieved Ahsoka from Malachor, but the very least they had the first “chat”, when he walked into her nightmare of the ruins of Luke’s school.

Han didn’t look surprised. “Yeah, so you two are outside of the norm, what else is new?” he grumbled.

“That shot above the Death Star, Luke? Remember that? Remember you saying it shouldn’t be,” and Han used air quotes here “that difficult.” Luke grimaced. So he had figured out by now his version of easy was no way comparable to anyone else’s.

“And you,” Han said, pointing a finger at Leia, “you think nothing of walking into one of the most fortified weapon bases in the galaxy, and blowing it up.”

“Well I knew it could be done,” Leia said defensively.

“Yeah,” Han drawled “because you were crazy enough to try it the first time.”

Ahsoka watched the interplay between all of them, saying nothing. She had become quiet in the Force again, more in control. It made Leia uneasy. As Fulcrum, Ahsoka had spent a large portion of her life hiding and being a spy. It made her a professional liar, and that little fact made it very hard for Leia to trust her instincts. They were saying she should trust this woman, but Ahsoka had a lifetime’s practice engineering that exact response in people.

“What do intend to do with anything you learn about the Rebellion while you're here?” Leia demanded of the woman.

Ahsoka shrugged “Nothing.”


“Really,” Ahsoka confirmed. “Vader wants Leia safe. He wants Leia’s husband safe. He was willing to trade a lot away to see that someone he deemed ‘adequate’ would do it.”

“Adequate?” Leia asked. That seemed a little harsh.

Ahsoka grimaced “His words not mine. I’m still a little pissed about that phrasing.” Then her face grew serious, “I also got another condition out of him, although he was really not happy about that one.”

“Which is?” Leia asked.

“That you had the final say if I stayed here, or left.”

“What do I have to do with anything?” Leia asked, confused “I'm not on the Alliance High Council.” Yet, but she was working on it. Made all the faster by the fact that Draven wasn’t actively sabotaging her anymore. “I have no authority over whether you stay.”

Ahsoka looked her full in the face “I told Vader that I wouldn’t stay here unless you were told why I was here and if you were alright with it.”

“And he agreed to that?” Han’s voice was high pitched.

Ahsoka nodded solemnly “Took some screaming, but yes, he did.”

Leia didn’t understand any of this. “Why didn’t he want me to know? You appearing here suddenly was bound to raise some alarm with me.”

“Which was the point I made.” Ahsoka looked at her hands for a moment, then looked back up at Leia, “He was worried that you would reject me out of hand. I countered that he had no idea if you knew me before, and that if I showed up at his behest, that was almost certainly a deviation from
what happened last time. I didn't know if you would reject me out of hand if I told you the truth. But I did know if I lied to you, and it fell apart, you would be a fool not to turn me in, and I would have lost all the friends I still have, and be seen as a traitor to a cause I believe in. And you would still be vulnerable.”

Ahsoka bit her lip. “He’s lost, Leia. So very, very, lost. I think the Dark Side has eaten away everything he once understood about love. But he isn’t so delusional not to understand that you have very strong negative reactions to everything he does in regards to you.” She stopped and then looked at Luke and Han, eyes worried. Then her gaze fell back to Leia, and there was nothing but sympathy and grief there. “And I know that you have good reasons why you see everything he does with suspicion.”

So, add that to the list of things Ahsoka knew about her. That Leia had been tortured by her own father.

“Does Papa and Mama know about your deal with Vader?” Leia asked, trying to push that unpleasant thought away.

Ahsoka shook her head “No. They know something isn’t quite right. But I wanted to spend as much time with them as I could before you made a decision Leia.”

Leia just looked at her trying to understand what was going on in Ahsoka’s head. “How are you so calm about this?” she said.

Ahsoka looked back at her “What makes you think I’m calm about any of this?”

“We are not getting anything off you in the Force,” Luke said. “Even Obi-Wan bleeds around us sometimes.”

“Obi-Wan was living on an isolated planet that Vader would rather stab himself through the heart then step foot on again.” Ahsoka said dryly “I was out in the galaxy. Slipping in my shielding in any way meant Inquisitors on my head.”

“Or Vader,” Leia said.

Ahsoka looked at her, “Or Vader,” she agreed. “I knew the name, I had heard it for years, but I had never personally run into him until about four years ago.” Her gaze was steady on Leia’s face, but her hands started moving in restless motions up and down her legs “It was then I started having suspicions of who might be under that mask.” Her mouth twisted in disgust “Malachor was finally where I was confronted with a truth I couldn't run from.”

“You were close?” Luke asked, “When you were his padwen?”

“Padawan,” Ahsoka corrected his pronunciation, “And yes, we were. He was my Master. The only reason I am alive today is because of the lessons he taught me. If I had been anyone else’s padawan, I think I would have been dead within a month of Order Sixty-Six, even if I survived it in the first place.”

“I’m sorry,” Luke said.

“It’s not your fault,” she said, “Any of it.”

“So, you are only here because you still care about him?” Leia asked.

“Of course not,” Ahsoka snapped. “But he wasn’t the only friend I had from that time that I
desperately miss. A friend who also had a child that needed protection.”

“Who?” Han demanded, but Leia had a pretty good idea of the answer.

“Our mother,” Leia breathed.

Ahsoka nodded. “After I left the Jedi, she helped me. We were friendly before that, but I always thought it was because I was Anakin’s padawan. She was nice to me because she was so clearly in love with him. But she loved me,” Ahsoka's eyes filled with tears “She loved me for me.” She took a deep breath in “I don’t know if he had asked only for him, what I might have said. But he also asked for her.”

“So, you don’t care about him?” Luke asked, a frown of puzzlement between his eyebrows.

“I-” Ahsoka bit her lip “It’s complicated.”

“Complicated how?” Han pressed.

“Oh, I don’t know!” and that calm veneer slipped off the Ahsoka’s face. There was the rolling anger there that Leia expected to see, but it was firmly wrapped up in jealousy and hurt “He was my master! When the Jedi thought I bombed the temple, he was the only one who believed in my innocence. Who fought for me! He promised he would never let anyone hurt me.” The anger disappeared, and exhaustion filled her face. “And then I was cleared of all charges. But I couldn’t stay. So I left him.”

Leia’s eyes narrowed. Great, here was someone else blaming themselves for Vader’s own decisions.

She looked at Han, “I spent sixteen years thinking that he had died during Order 66. Thinking that if I had only been there …,” Her voice trailed off.

“Then you learned what happened was worse than if he died,” Luke said gently.

Ahsoka nodded, “I almost reached him,” she said, her hand clutching into a fist “For a second, he almost let the darkness go. It was almost enough. Then…” her fist unclenched and fell into her lap “Then he came at me, harder than before. I failed.”

She got further than she realized, Leia thought. In fact, she might have been the first crack into the wall around Vader’s conscience that Luke would shatter right through. But then again Luke had the ability to draw the best out of people. It was why Leia was so certain he could help Ben.

Pulling her mind back to the here, she caught the end of what Ahsoka was saying, “Then, of course, he rescues me off a planet I would have died on, and demands I protect his child!”

Leia gritted her teeth “I am eleven years older than him. Where does he get off calling me a child?”

“Leia,” Luke muttered, ”not the point.”

Ahsoka looked at Leia “I thought I understood what I agreed to. He warned me about Obi-Wan, and that you would prove to be a difficult challenge.” Then she turned to Luke “So I came here, thinking I knew what was going on. But then I meet you, and once again I’m floundering.”

Han shifted, “Yeah, they have that effect on people.”
Ahsoka ignored him “He doesn’t know about you, Luke. At least he didn’t when he set me free. As far as he is concerned you are Leia’s husband, and that means you need to live. Even though you are training to be a Jedi. With his old master no less.”

Luke cocked his head “Why would he care that Ben is training me?”

Ahsoka looked at him pityingly, but ignored his question. “He has no idea you’re his son. And when he finds out,” she grimaced “It’s not going to be pretty, for anyone.”

“We are going to keep Luke a secret for as long as we can,” Leia said flatly. “That is not negotiable Ahsoka. If you are going to run off and tell him, I’ll-“

“Kill me?” Ahsoka looked amused.

Leia bared her teeth “You think I can’t?”

“No,” Ahsoka said, “I think you have a better chance than most. But it isn’t necessary. I’m not going to tell him. I just know that the truth has a way of finding itself free.”

Leia laughed bitterly “Oh, I am well aware of that. But I can handle Vader, Luke isn’t ready for that, at least not yet.”

Ahsoka looked surprised, then thoughtful, “You don’t think you can hide him forever?”

Leia shook her head “No, but I can damn well make sure he’s not a sitting target when Vader does learn about him.”


“She isn’t wrong kid,” Han said gently.

“So, Leia,” Ahsoka asked. “Now that I’ve disclosed everything I will and will not do for Vader, and you have properly threatened to kill me if I screw up, what’s your decision on me staying?”

Leia looked at her, and then away. Vader, damn him, was right. Her first instinct was to shove anything to do with him, as far away from her as possible. But nothing Ahsoka said rang false in the Force. She was only here to protect Leia. Not spy on her, not report on the Rebellion, just protect. And Han, Leia realized, Han fell under that umbrella too.

And Ahsoka was a trained Jedi. Well, she might not call herself a Jedi, but she certainly had enough of the skills. Another teacher for Luke, one who had more experience in the galaxy then the rarefied air of the Jedi Temple, or extreme isolation. And there were those skills she could bring to the rebellion. Unlike Obi-Wan, Leia didn’t get the sense that Ahsoka would turn away from a fight.

There was also Obi-Wan to consider. The man himself, and what Ahsoka’s presence here would mean for him, and the lessons their strange friendship had shown her. Obi-Wan had always had her and Luke’s interests at heart. She vehemently disagreed with how he went about it, but there was no denying he cared. She had caused them both more pain then she had too, because she had been so hostile to him at first. Was she really about to repeat the same mistake here? Was it the same mistake?

“It’s up to you,” Leia said finally. “I’m not going to protest if you stay here. I would advise you to tell Obi-Wan the how you ended up here, so he isn’t hurt when he finds out later.”
“Great!” Ahsoka said, slapping her legs. She suddenly looked much younger, and for a second Leia could see that fiery, headstrong apprentice Rex spoke of, instead of this controlled woman. “Well, I don’t know about you, but I’m starving and I have lunch date to get to.” She nodded her head at all of them and walked out of the door. Leia watched her go, fairly confident that the little voice in her mind that was whispering this was all a mistake was her paranoia talking.

Han looked at Leia “If you’re really uncomfortable with her here, don’t say yes on account that she is also here to protect me,” he said finally.

Leia glared “That wasn’t the reason!” she protested. Han arched an eyebrow “It wasn’t the only reason.” she admitted.

“Would you leave us that easily?” Luke asked from beside her.

Leia frowned and turned to her brother. “What are you talking about?” she asked.

He raised his eyes to her, and Leia could see that simmering anger there, the one that had been there for so much of this conversation, “When Ahsoka said she was a time traveler. You asked her if she knew how you could go back.”

Leia opened her mouth and then shut it. Damn, she had asked that. “I-” she started to say, trying to put this into words. It wasn’t something she thought about that often. There was no way to get back, so why dwell on it? But for one brief moment, she had thought it was possible. She hadn’t thought beyond that when she asked Ahsoka. “I don’t know,” she confessed.

“Why? Because we are only pale copies of what you knew?” Luke said snidely.

Leia’s head shot up, horrified that was what he thought. “No, Luke,” she hissed back “because I had responsibilities there. And I don’t know what happened to everyone! Did I die? Or disappear? Or even worse, nineteen-year-old me is running around in the future? Or did it all collapse, and everyone I knew winked out of existence, and now only are remembered here?” she tapped her head.

Luke looked aghast “Why haven’t you said anything before about this?” he whispered.

“Because there was no one to ask,” Leia said. “There is no one to blame, there is no way to undo it. It’s done. And worrying about things I can’t change will do me no good.”

“That is easier said than done,” Han muttered. “Especially for you.”

“I know,” Leia said “but this was something I didn’t ask for and can't wrap my head around most days. The Force itself did this, I think, and there is nothing I can do about that. Even for me and my overdeveloped sense of responsibility, I can’t twist this into something I can change.”

Luke’s face underwent several emotions so fast Leia couldn’t keep up with them. But it was Han who spoke up.

“Ghosts Leia? You tell me about my son murdering me. But ghosts are where you decide to draw the line?”

Okay, that wasn’t fair. She thought longingly of the beach she was on not even two days ago and the peace she had found there. Then she let out a long sigh, “I have to admit, this is an adjustment for me,” she protested. “Once you knew everything I stopped guarding my tongue. That’s when I started forgetting there are things you don’t already know,” She rubbed her hands over her face ‘I swear I’m not trying to keep anything from you Han. I just sometimes forget that I didn't tell you.”
“Alright,” he said. Leia wondered if she could flee the room now when her stomach gave a loud gurgle. In sympathy, Luke’s went off too. Han just looked at both of them then laughed.

“We are done for now,” he said firmly. “Let’s go get something to eat.”

Lunch was a quiet affair, at least quiet in the fact that there were no more emotional bombs thrown Leia’s way. The dining hall itself was never quiet during lunch. Han and Luke, for once, finished before she did because they had places they had to be. Leia didn’t want to court heartburn, so she finished her meal at her usual pace, alone.

Evaan found her as Leia walked into the hallway leading into the interior of the temple. Leia looked the blonde up and down. She had a satisfied smirk on her face, and that meant trouble for someone. Leia just hoped she wasn’t the someone in question.

“Hello Evaan,” Leia said, “You are looking very pleased with yourself.”

“I am,” Evaan said, pushing herself off the wall she was leaning on. “Where are you headed?”

Leia’s eyes narrowed “The communications hub. Why?”

“I’m headed that way too, I’ll join you.” She fell in step with Leia.

“What do you want Evaan?” Leia asked.

“Can’t I just want to spend time with my good friend?” Evaan asked, widening her eyes in an exaggerated fashion.

“With that look on your face?” Leia snorted “No.”

“It’s nothing much,” Evaan assured her “Just a simple question.”

“About?” Leia asked.

“So, you know how you and Kenobi got completely wasted, and you promised to find him a naked friend?” Evaan’s face was full of delight.

Leia groaned out loud, “Let me guess, people are taking bets?”

“Got it in one,” Evaan agreed “And since you and Captain Solo clearly seem to be winning me the last betting pool I got involved in, Wedge has declared revenge upon me. I’m here to get the inside scoop on who you have your eye on.”

Leia shook her head, “Nobody Evaan.”

“Really?” There was a wicked gleam in the woman’s eyes as they turned the corner.

“Yes really,” Leia said. “I don’t know-” then she broke off as she really caught the full look at Evaan’s face. “Evaan!” she proclaimed “The man is old enough to be your father!”

“Doesn’t make him any less attractive,” Evaan said confidently “Especially since her Majesty burned his old robes from Tatooine and presented him with a new wardrobe.”
Leia stopped “Mama did what?” she squealed. She had noticed that Obi-Wan had taken to wearing clothes that were newer, but she hadn’t realized it was because Mama burned his old ones.

“Burned his poor tattered twenty-years in the desert clothes.” Evaan said “I mean, she did warn him. Well, gently suggest that he should get new ones. He demurred for so long her Majesty took things into her own hands and as soon as she had new outfits for him, burned his old ones right in front of him. Told him he looked like a sad old man, and that she didn’t care how determined the droids were, there were certain smells that were never coming out of them.”

Leia burst out laughing. “That is one way to handle it,” she said. “But really Evaan, Obi-Wan?”

Evaan’s grin turned lusty “I’m not looking for the romance to end the ages, Leia. He’s single, attractive, and I bet he knows all kind of interesting uses with the Force in bed.”

Leia’s mouth dropped open. “That’s-” she sputtered “I-“ she tried again “That is not how the Force works!” Leia wailed.

“Why not?”

“Because-,” she started to say, then stopped. Come to think of it, why not? It would require a lot of focus, but with practice, Leia could see the possibilities. Nope, not going there, there was no sense in indulging in fantasies when Han wasn’t ready. Yet.

“You’re thinking about it too, aren’t you?” Evaan whispered conspiratorially.


The woman gave her a mock pout “What? You think I’m not his type? He doesn’t like tall, blonde and commanding?”

Leia opened her mouth to say she had no idea, but something about those words struck a chord in her. She closed her mouth shut, as she tried to place where she had heard that phrase before. There was something important about it...

“Leia?” Evaan asked, stepping forward and touching her shoulder “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Leia said, shaking her head too clear it. “Just...I’ve heard that before. Can’t remember when though.”

Delight entered Evaan’s eyes. “You mean I have a shot?”

“I-” Leia started to say, at that was when Ahsoka came out of Mon’s office, a look of complete fear on her face.

Evaan followed Leia’s gaze, “Met her yet?” she asked.

Leia reoriented herself quickly “You mean you’re behind on that gossip? I’m shocked that your skills are slipping Verlaine.”

Evaan bared her teeth at Leia “Smartass.”

“I was there when we came back for the big reunion with Obi-Wan,” Leia said.

Evaan nodded her head. “Heard about that. You weren’t mentioned though. You are going to have to do something drastic if you want to keep your place as the base’s favorite person to gossip about.”
Leia made a face “Pass.”

Evaan touched her shoulder lightly “This is my stop,” she said, “but please keep me in mind if you were serious about finding Kenobi a naked friend.”

“Eww,” Leia said, but her heart wasn’t in it. She was still keeping Ahsoka in the corner of her eye. The woman was still outside Mon’s door, leaning against the wall, looking like she didn’t know what to do.

Leia waited until Evaan was a safe distance away before she headed over to Ahsoka. Evaan was a friend, and a good one, but she was a huge gossip. She could keep a secret if you asked, but Leia wasn’t sure if she could give Evaan a good enough reason too in this case. At least not yet.

“Ahsoka,” Leia said cautiously as she approached the woman. “Are you okay?”

Ahsoka’s eyes fell on Leia “No,” she said simply.

“Okay,” Leia wondered what Mon could have possibly said that had the woman this rattled. “So how did your meeting go?”

“Mon wants me to take over for Draven,” Ahsoka mumbled.

Leia blinked. “Take over what exactly?” she said.

“Everything!” Ahsoka gasped. “Head of intelligence, the spy network, Draven!”

Leia’s mouth dropped open. Then she shut it as it occurred to her she should have seen this coming. From Mon’s point of view, Ahsoka was perfect. What Mon didn't know was that Ahsoka was here at the behest of Vader. And partially for Leia herself, but Vader was the one who had set her free.

“What did you say?” Leia demanded.

“That I’d think about it,” Ahsoka said. “I didn't expect-” She gulped “Leia-”

“I know,” Leia said soothingly. “But right now, I need to you to walk with me.”

“Why?” Ahsoka asked.

“Because this spot is one of highest traffic areas on the base. If you don’t move, and move now, in about two minutes, it’s going to be all over the base who reacted “negatively” to Mon’s offer.” Leia said patiently “If you come with me now, you can explain it away as shock, but you stay here looking like someone is going to shoot you any second, we won’t be able to talk that away.”

“When did you start trusting me?” Ahsoka said.

“What, you mean personally? You haven’t even taken me to dinner yet,” Leia teased, pulling on Ahsoka’s hand to help her stand back up. Ahsoka didn’t even laugh.

In a more serious tone, Leia said softly, “When you had a panic attack in the hallway about the fact that you were offered one of the most sensitive positions in the Alliance. If you really were here to give Vader intelligence about the Rebellion, that would not have been your reaction. I don’t know if I should trust you about tattling on me, but the Rebellion?” Leia shrugged, “That I’m fairly confident you aren’t interested in betraying.”

Getting Ahsoka somewhat on two feet, Leia looped an arm through the taller woman’s. It was slightly awkward, given the height difference between the two of them, but manageable.
“Why does everyone in my life have to be so much taller than me?” Leia grumbled as she started walking them both through the hallways.

Ahsoka let out a small laugh, Leia didn’t mind, it was good the woman was starting to react. “Obi-Wan used to complain about the same thing.”

“Really?” Leia said, “Why? He’s not that short.”

“No,” Ahsoka agreed. “But he did spend most of his life with people who were much taller than him.”

They meandered through the hallways. Leia kept the conversation as light and breezy as she could, until Ahsoka started to really respond, instead of giving rote answers.

“What am I going to do?” Ahsoka whispered as she looked around them, at the hallway full of people. “Leia, I thought I was just here to protect you. Now you have a brother, and Mon wants—“ Ahsoka took a shuddering breath. “I don’t want to start a conspiracy inside the Rebellion, which is what will happen if I do this.”

“I don’t know Ahsoka,” Leia said. Then biting her lip, she offered “Maybe make it a bigger conspiracy?” she suggested

Ahsoka started “What!?!?”

“Tell everything. To Mama, Papa, Obi-Wan, all of us. We can meet in my parent's room tonight.”

“And that won’t look a little suspicious?”

Leia shook her head “You were a spy Ahsoka, you know better than that. We aren’t meeting for nefarious purposes. Just a group of old friends that want to catch up with each other.”

“And you?” Ahsoka asked.

“Just meeting a good friend of my parents.” Leia said soothingly “We’ll figure out what to do.” Leia said.

“Okay,” Ahsoka said. “That’s a good first start.”


“And Han,” Ahsoka said quietly.

“Why?” Leia asked, not objecting, just wondering about what Ahsoka’s reasoning was.

“He’s involved in all of this too Leia,” Ahsoka said mildly.

“Don’t I know it,” Leia grumbled.

Leia woke up with a start and did a quick look at her chrono. Dammit all to hell, she had overslept. She had only meant to take a short nap after dinner, and now she was precariously close to being late to a meeting that she had called.
A knock rapped her door again, and Leia looked at it. That was what had woken her up, the sound of someone at her door.

“Yes?” she called out sleep still clogging her voice.

“It’s me, Leia,” Rex called through the door. “Can I come in?”

“Yep,” Leia said rolling out of bed and pushing her covers to the side.

Rex walked in and took one look at her rising from the bed “Sorry, you were sleeping,” he said, remorseful “I’ll just-”

“No, no it’s fine Rex,” Leia said, running a hand over her head. Little messy, but the braid felt like it was holding “I needed to wake up anyway. I have somewhere to be in about,” she looked at her chrono again, “five minutes, and I overslept.”

She frantically started looking around the room. “Have you seen my boots?” she asked Rex.

He gave her an amused look “You mean the ones by your bed?” he asked.

Right, that made sense. Leia knelt down and grabbed them. Coming back up, she sat on her bed and pulled the right one on. “What can I do for you, Rex?” Leia asked, pulling her boot up.

“I clearly caught you at a bad time,” Rex started to say.

“Always have time for you Rex,” Leia said lightly, and then started to put the left boot on.

“Ok then,” he said. There was the sound of him shuffling a bit, but Leia was too focused on trying to get her boots on. She liked these shoes. They were practical, formed a sort of armor when she was on unfamiliar ground against possible poisonous plants, and they really did look rather fetching on her. They were just a massive pain to put on and off.

“Leia?” Rex finally asked.

“Yes?” she answered, only half paying attention, she almost had the damn thing on…

“Was what you wanted to tell me before I left for Lothal…” he cleared his throat “Were you trying to tell me that my General became Darth Vader?”

Leia froze for a moment, her leg halfway into her boot. She took in a deep breath, and pushed her foot all the way in. The boot slid on, and she wiggled her foot to make sure her sock was lying flat. She needed to pay attention to this conversation and having her footwear half off would be a bit distracting.

Leia steeled herself and looked up at Rex. He was not two feet from her, staring down at her with an unreadable expression on his face. His soldier's mask. Leia realized. The one where he knows he wasn’t going like whatever he hears and was bracing himself.

“Yes,” she said softly. “That was what I was going to tell you.”

He closed his eyes. For a moment he did nothing else, and then his hands came up to cover his face. He was not two feet from her, staring down at her with an unreadable expression on his face. His soldier's mask. Leia realized. The one where he knows he wasn’t going like whatever he hears and was bracing himself.

“Yes,” she said softly. “That was what I was going to tell you.”

His hands fell away from his face, and Leia didn’t remark on the tears she could see falling down
his cheeks. “I knew,” he said, voice thick with emotion “I mean I figured it out. But I had hoped…” his voice trailed off, and those golden eyes slid away from her “Stupid I know.”

“No Rex,” Leia said, standing up and quickly making her way to him. She laid a gentle hand on his arm. “It wasn’t stupid.”

He gave a bitter laugh “How can you say that? After what he did to you? What he did to all of us?”

And Rex didn't know the half of it, Leia thought, but she kept her words soothing “You loved him. I always knew that.” Rex’s face filled with recrimination at that.

“You meant no harm,” Leia insisted “You never tried to insist he was my ‘real’ father. You loved him, you missed him, and you wanted to share that with someone who had a connection to him. You wanted someone to remember him, not the legend.”

“I wish I didn’t know,” he muttered bitterly.

Leia arched an eyebrow “Really?” she asked. Rex was a soldier. He was bred to be a soldier and setting aside the horrifying implications of that, it was the core of who he was. And no soldier liked not knowing who the enemy was.

He shook his head “No, not really. But I do hate the fact that everything he did is now warped by me knowing this.” Rex’s hands balled into fists at his sides. “So much good. He did so much good, and now it’s all tainted.”

“It’s not tainted, Rex,” Leia said firmly. “All his evil acts doesn’t erase the good he did. That’s not how this works.”

“Isn’t it?”

Leia shook her head. “No Rex,” she said. This was something Leia herself was currently try to wrap her own head around, so she wasn’t sure she was convincing Rex of anything. So, Leia changed the subject. “How did you figure out?” she asked, as she stepped back slightly from the clone.

“When I saw Ahsoka on Lothal,” he said ruefully “Or at least when she told me how she escaped Vader on Malachor. I put it together then. All of these odd things I had noticed about Vader’s behavior towards you, your silence on the matter, and Obi-Wan’s pain, suddenly it all made sense. Why Vader is so obsessed with you. Why Obi-Wan was shattered by that battle. Why Vader even survived that battle.” He shook his head “Why Ahsoka is alive.”

“She said he tried to kill her,” Leia pointed out.

Rex’s eyes met hers, “Try is very different than did.”

“Only because Ezra saved her,” Leia pressed.

“Maybe,” Rex allowed. His voice was still troubled though “But how many other Jedi do you think walked away from him? Ahsoka is good, damn good, but she’s not Vader. She’s alive because he did care if she lived.”

Leia opened her mouth, thinking that Vader had no problems killing Obi-Wan once upon a time, and that fight she had seen so long ago replayed in her head. Something about it caught in her mind. Yes, Obi-Wan failed to block the most obvious parry of all time. But as she thought about that fight, a new question occurred to her. What was Vader even doing making such an obvious move
in the first place? She knew he was still an excellent duelist, the limitations of that armor aside. Luke had been very clear on that. So why had he stumbled around on the Death Star in that duel like a drunk old man?

Longing, that had been the dominant emotion in him when she mentioned Obi-Wan’s name in the cell. Not anticipation, anger, or hate, but *longing*. Longing for what? Obi-Wan’s presence? Given how the last time they met ended that was unlikely. Then what did Vader long for most in the galaxy? At least what had he longed for before he had found put about Leia? What was the one thing that only *Obi-Wan* could give him?

“*Release.*”

Leia swayed. What was the only thing Obi-Wan Kenobi had managed to do that no one else had? Defeat Vader. Not by a little, or by luck. No by the sounds of it, Obi-Wan had thoroughly beaten Vader in a fight that was fought under circumstances that would have killed a lesser skilled fighter. She felt a hysterical laugh tickle the back of her throat. By all the gods, had both of them gone into that fight trying to get the other to kill them? It would have been ironic if it wasn’t all so profoundly sad.

Rex frowned at her, and looked concerned, “Leia, are you alright?”

She nodded, “I’m fine. Just a small personal revelation,” she finally let out the hysterical laugh bubbling in the back of her throat. “Seems like today is full of them.”

Rex gave her a dubious look. “Uh-huh.”

She looked at him “You’re right.”

“About what?” Rex looked doubtful.

“Vader,” Leia said, then clarified when she saw his puzzled look “About Vader and Ahsoka.”

“What brought this on?” Rex didn’t sound like he believed what she said.

“Take the win Rex,” Han’s voice said behind Leia “It’s not often she admits she’s wrong.”

Leia stiffened and let her glance to fall behind Rex. Han was standing in the doorway, leaning against its jam, a small smirk on his face. Leia had been so focused on Rex, and what they were talking about she hadn’t even noticed the door to her room had opened.

Rex turned around so that he could address Han “No she doesn’t. That’s why I am worried.”

Han grinned “Good. You should always worry when Leia decides to do something.”

Leia rolled her eyes at Han “Like you don’t love the fact that I’m decisive and dangerous,” she pointed out primly to him.

Han’s grin morphed from wickedly amused to his much softer fond one. “I’m not even going to try to deny that one Your Worship.” Then he straightened up and asked, “Ready to go?”

“Oh,” Rex said, looking between the two of them, “Leia did say she had somewhere to be. I’ll just-”

“We are going to my parent’s room,” Leia said, shaking her head at the clone’s flustered manner all of a sudden “It’s not a date Rex.”
Rex relaxed, “That would be a strange date,” he agreed.

“You should come with us,” Leia announced.

Rex blinked “Sure, but why?”

“Because we are going to have a very long and drawn out discussion there, mostly about Vader. And I think you should be a part of it.” Leia said matter of factly.

Han’s face instantly lost all amusement, “You told him?” Han asked Leia.

Rex piped up, “No, I guessed.”

“You guessed,” Han’s voice was incredulous “How did you guess that?”

“Not hard when you know all the players,” Rex said, looking offended that Han was insulting his intelligence.

“He guessed about Vader being Anakin Skywalker, Han,” Leia interjected, before the two of them started snarling at each other. “Not about the other thing.”

“Ohhhh,” Han said. “That makes sense.”

Rex’s head sound from one of them to the other “There’s more?” he asked wearily. “More than Vader’s identity?”

Leia nodded “Yes,”

“Why tell me this now?” Rex looked puzzled. “I get waiting on the Vader reveal. But what could you possibly be hiding that I would care about?”

Leia gave a fond shake of her head “Because you wouldn’t have believed me.”

Rex reached forward and gently touched her shoulder “Leia, I think at this point I’d believe anything you say. Trust me it can’t be any more outlandish then how Ahsoka escaped Vader on Malachor.”

Han groused from behind them “You know who she is and you still say that?” he complained “Things can always get weirder with this family. Always.”

Leia glared at Han, but there wasn’t a lot of heat in it. Mainly because she knew he was right.

“Well?” Rex asked, “What is it?”

“No here,” Leia said firmly “In my parent's room. Too many unseen ears here.”

“Alright Leia,” Rex agreed, turning so he could head out the door, “but I doubt anything you have to say will surprise me.”

If only, Leia thought ruefully and followed both men to her parent’s quarters.

It was already crowded when they entered her parent’s room. Mama and Papa were already there,
of course, sitting on one side of the table, with Obi-Wan at the head. Luke was sitting on the other side, and there were two empty chairs beside him. Ahsoka was sitting at the foot of the table.

They all turned to look at her, and Mama frowned “Leia,” she said reproachfully.

Leia blushed “I’m sorry I’m late,” she said coming into the room “I overslept, and then I ran into Rex.”

“Oh?” Obi-Wan’s voice was mildly curious, “And what did he have to say?”

“That you and I are going to have a very long talk General after this little meeting,” Rex’s voice was cold and firm. Leia winced at the sound. Rex might forgive her for not saying anything, but it didn’t sound like Obi-Wan was going to get the same gentle treatment.

“Ahhh,” Obi-Wan sputtered. Then he looked at Leia reproachfully, “A little warning next time?” he asked.

Leia opened her mouth to defend herself, but Han piped up first “He figured out on his own Kenobi.”

“Oh,” Obi-Wan looked at the still glaring Rex. “I’m sorry old friend,” he said, “Truly I am, but I-”

“Later,” Rex growled “We will discuss your idiotic tendencies later. In great detail.”

Obi-Wan looked relieved. Leia wasn’t sure why. If Rex was going to dress her down, she would much prefer it be done in public. The clone was circumspect, and in front of an audience, he would go easier on someone. Not easy, but easier.

Papa frowned “We don’t have enough chairs,” he said looking at Mama.

“We’ll this involves these two idiots, so I’m definitely not leaving,” Han said. He went over to the wall closest to the open seats. “I don’t have a problem standing.”

Papa looked up, “No Captain, that wasn’t what I meant. I just thought we should get another one.”

“Oh,” Han blushed slightly “Sorry” he mumbled.

Mama only shook her head “A reasonable assumption to make, given the circumstances. We can still-”

“No, ma’am,” Han countered “I’m fine where I am.”

Leia rolled her eyes at Luke at the ridiculousness of both Papa and Han. She took the seat next to her brother, and Rex sat next to her. It was a bit crowded, this table was only designed to hold six people, not seven, and with the chairs, it was a bit of a tight fit. But everyone could see each other, except Han, but Leia didn’t have a problem with him at her back. It was probably driving Rex crazy, the old clone was very particular about who he had at his back.

“So Rex,” Mama said calmly, “What else do you know about Leia?”

“Your Majesty?” he asked confused.

Ahsoka gave a light laugh. “Didn’t guess everything did you?”

Rex frowned. “What else was I supposed to guess?”
“Well today is the first day I met her,” Ahsoka said lightly “but you had to have seen there was something odd about her.”

Rex frowned “The first time?” he asked, looking at Leia puzzled. “But I thought you said you already met her,” That long ago, she had been confusing things that long ago with Rex. Sometimes her instincts were much more on point and direct than her conscious mind.

Leia cleared her throat and said “I did meet Ahsoka. Several times in fact. She just hasn’t met me yet.”

Rex looked at her, “Excuse me?”

Ahsoka looked at Leia solemnly “Leia’s from the future Rex.”

Rex let out a laugh, then looked around the room. When all he was met with were solemn faces his mouth dropped open. “Really?” he whispered as he looked at Leia.

She nodded. “About thirty years,” she added helpfully.

Rex gaped at her for a few more seconds, then shook his head “Jedi,” he muttered, pointing at Ahsoka, then Leia “you never make things simple.”

“I am not a Jedi,” Leia and Ahsoka said at the same time. They both looked at each other startled.

Obi-Wan, looking concerned, leaned forward. “Ahsoka how did you know that about Leia? She is not the most forthcoming with that information.”

Ahsoka broke her gaze from Leia’s and met Obi-Wan’s eyes “Because Vader told me.”

Obi-Wan became very still, “What?” he whispered.

Ahsoka nodded “He was the one who got me off of Malachor.”

Papa came to his feet and put both his hands on the table as he leaned to loom over Ahsoka. “Why?”

“To protect Leia and her husband,” Ahsoka said.

Papa swore, “Of all the bleeding hells of the galaxy and the ones beyond, why didn’t you tell us this the moment you set foot on this planet?”

All of them looked at him, shocked. Papa never swore, at least not in public. Mama raised a hand and caught his sleeve. “Bail,” she said, “We should hear her-”

“We trusted her!” Papa shouted. “She has the location of this base Breha. She knows about Leia! About Luke! We didn’t even think to-”

“Ahsoka isn’t here to spy on me,” Leia said, interrupting before he could really get going. Papa didn’t lose his temper often. In fact, Leia could count on one hand the number of times she had seen it herself, but once he did, he couldn’t be reasoned with until he calmed. Which usually happened about a day later, and they didn’t have time for that. Mon would expect an answer tomorrow.

“Why did you wait to say anything Ahsoka?” Obi-Wan looked drawn and tired.

“Because I only stay here at Leia’s discretion,” Ahsoka said, her eyes not quite meeting Obi-Wan’s
“I made that very clear to Vader, Obi-Wan. Leia gets the final say.”

Everyone looked at Leia. She shrugged “She isn’t reporting to him on my activities or on the Rebellion. She’s a useful agent, and she’s skilled. The Rebellion could use her.”

“So, this is why you called us here?” Han asked from the back.

Ahsoka shook her head. “No, I wanted to tell you that Mon offered me Draven’s position in the Alliance.”

Papa sat back down on his chair, all his righteous fury drained away. Obi-Wan’s face could be set in stone for all the emotion he was showing. And Rex, Rex only looked puzzled.


Ahsoka shook her head “No, I told her I had to think about it.”

“Wait,” Rex said, “I thought she was going to offer the position to Kallus.”

“She did,” Ahsoka said. “She thought it was only fair since he got dragged here for that very reason. But he turned her down. He told her there was no way Draven would ever trust him, with anything, and it would be detrimental to the Alliances spy network, and the relationships we are trying to maintain, to have the two of them always at cross purposes. For the good of the Rebellion, he told her that Mon should offer it to me. Mon did confess once she saw that I was here, I immediately became her first choice.”

The irony wasn’t lost on anyone in this room. Draven would have fought Kallus’s appointment with everything he had. But, Ahsoka? No, not her. Draven knew her, if not well, then he knew of her. He would have no questions about the loyalty of someone who was a Rebel before there been an Alliance. Someone who had done much of the building of the Alliance, and its current networks. It was just unfortunate that she, unlike Kallus, happened to be an Imperial agent currently. Well, Vader’s agent, Leia amended. She doubted that this action was something the Emperor was even aware of.

“You are about to be put in Draven’s place, and knowing what I know about you, how can I let that happen?” Papa asked.

“I haven’t accepted anything Bail,” Ahsoka said “And I understand if you all are uneasy about it. I’m uneasy about it. It makes me vulnerable to blackmail or being discovered. I have no idea if Vader even told anyone what he has done.”

“Probably not,” Han muttered.

Luke, Leia, and Rex all turned their heads to look at him. “Look,” Han said defensively, putting his hands up, “I might not understand much about intergalactic politics, but I’ve been up close and personal to power struggles among violent people. Vader isn’t going to tell anyone about this, because Leia is a vulnerability, his first real vulnerability. He can’t afford for anyone to know about her, or what he has set in motion to protect her.”

“What else did you promise him Ahsoka?” Mama’s voice was tight.

Ahsoka sighed “Nothing.”

“Nothing?” Papa looked incredulous “He just rescued you from an inhospitable world where you would have died, and all he wanted was you to look after Leia and Luke?”
“With my life, if I needed to,” Ahsoka said grimly, “and he thought Luke was Leia’s husband, but in all other particulars that is correct.”

Papa shook his head “I don’t believe you.”

Leia frowned. On one hand, Papa was right. It made no sense for Vader to let Ahsoka go for so little. On the other hand, the Force was ringing in her ears that the woman wasn’t lying.

“Whether Ahsoka is lying or not, can I ask a question?” Everyone’s eyes swiveled to Rex.

“What is it, Rex?” Obi-Wan asked.

Rex pointed a finger at Leia “Why in all the sith bleeding hells didn’t you do anything to free Ahsoka from Malachor yourself?” he asked, voice shaking with anger. “Why leave her there to be put in this impossible position in the first place?”

Everyone’s eyes swung back to her. Leia sighed, it was a fair question “Because I didn’t know that was where she was Rex. Yes, I knew she was alive-”

“And you didn’t tell me,” Obi-Wan said bitterly. “More secrets?”

Leia slapped her hand down on the table “One, until about a month ago, I didn’t even know you knew her.” She glared at him “And two, I didn’t know she was Vader’s-”

“Anakin’s,” Ahsoka said calmly.

“Whatever!” Leia hissed “Anakin’s apprentice. Or that she was even a Jedi.”

“No a Jedi,” Ahsoka said, her voice hard and unforgiving. Leia was briefly thrown out of her rant at that nonsensical statement. Who did Ahsoka think she was fooling? She was running around with a pair of lightsabers, was trained to use the Light Side of the Force, and fought the Empire. But oh, of course, she was most decidedly not a Jedi.

Then Leia thought of that conversation with Rex, up on the watchtower. Of him telling her that Ahsoka had been betrayed by a friend in the Jedi Order. That the Jedi Council had left her at Tarkin’s mercy. Maybe her reluctance had nothing to do with what she was, but how she saw the Jedi.

Filing that away to ponder later, Leia amended “Trained as a Jedi.” Ahsoka nodded her head, accepting that label. “All I knew about Ahsoka Tano, before I arrived in this time, was that she was the first Fulcrum of the Rebellion, and that Papa considered her trustworthy. The older Ahsoka I met,” and she tapped her chest for emphasis “never told me any of that the few times I met with her.”

“Why was I meeting with you?” Ahsoka asked.

Leia shrugged “You needed a ship capable of deep space exploration. There wasn’t a lot of us left who remembered the identity of the original Fulcrum by that point. You probably thought I was your best bet for getting it.” Although now that she was thinking about it, why not go to Mon? The woman had known who Ahsoka was, hence the offer to her now to replace Draven.

Luke, Leia realized, it was about talking to Luke, about finding Luke. And that was something Mon couldn’t help with at that time. Leia wondered how much her brother had known about the woman, and what that version of Ahsoka had told him about Anakin Skywalker.
“Deep space?” Ahsoka asked, her voice breaking into Leia’s thoughts.

Leia brought her focus back to the here and now. She nodded “You were heading into the Uncharted Regions. If memory serves me correctly, you and Sabine Wren were going out there to look for Ezra Bridger.”

A thoughtful look passed over Ahsoka’s face. She closed her eyes, and Leia felt a shiver run across the Force. “Yes,” Ahsoka murmured “I did promise him I would find him. I didn't think it would involve me spending years in deep space though.”

Ahsoka’s eyes opened and looked at Leia “Did I find him?”

Why was a possible future anyone ever wanted to ask her? Leia looked into her pale blue eyes and thought about giving her standard answer that she didn’t answer such questions. Then her periphery vision caught sight of Rex. The man was leaning forward, eagerness to hear her answer. There was no harm in saying this, mostly because it wasn’t an answer of any kind. “I don’t know.”

Rex’s look faded into a troubled one.

“Oh, that you will answer,” Obi-Wan said.

“Because it’s not an answer!” Leia threw her hands up in the air. They had been doing so much better lately. Why did he have to revert to being a stubborn gundark about this? “I don’t know any more than you do, at this point and time, about where Ezra is. I don’t know if he is alive. I don’t know if Ahsoka found him. So, my answering this question changes nothing.”

Obi-Wan’s face became shattered “Anything else of importance you are failing to disclose?”

Failing to disclose? Failing to disclose? Leia opened her mouth to give her opinion on that little swipe when she caught her Papa’s face. He was looking at her like he didn't recognize her anymore. Leia shut her mouth closed and took in a deep breath. No, no, she wasn’t going to fall back into being suspicious and resentful to everything Obi-Wan said. They had both come too far for that.

Obi-Wan was hurt that she hadn’t told him about Ahsoka. Never mind that the man had never once asked her who the possible survivors of the Purges might be. But was that fair to him? Leia understood all too well that sometimes it was better to live in ignorance. Well not better, but easier on the heart.

There was also no denying that Leia had kept many secrets from this man, deliberately, and he knew it. It was no wonder he was jumping to the worse conclusion. She didn’t need to do the same.

She took a deep breath in. “I don’t know,” she said in as an even tone as she could manage.

Obi-Wan’s voice was tight “Then can you tell me what happened in the future that has you so on edge about what we are doing now?”

Leia bit her lip. She looked around the room. Oh hell, it’s not like everyone here, save him and Rex, didn't know this already.

“My son fell to the Dark Side,” she said flatly “And he joined forces with a man who tore down everything we were trying to build.”

Obi-Wan’s face didn’t immediately change after that statement. It was still angry and defiant. Leia was just about to snap at him that he was the one who asked, when sudden comprehension filled
his eyes. That wasn’t the answer he had been expecting to hear. Leia had no idea what he thought she was going to say, but that had clearly not been it. Then his anger fell away, replaced by a sympathetic sorrow. Everyone else in the room maintained their silence, and it was Rex who spoke first.

“I’m sorry,” he said, voice filled with disbelief “who did what?”

Leia turned to answer him, but Ahsoka’s voice cut her off “You have a son?”

Leia started at that. She looked at the Togruta, whose mouth was hanging open. “What, Vader didn’t mention that little detail?” Leia sneered.

Ahsoka shook her head vigorously. “No,” she sputtered “he didn’t mention it at all. In fact, he was remarkably tight-lipped about you. Said that he wasn’t about to tell me your secrets.” Then a grimace crossed her face “Except for the time travel one. He wanted me to understand just who I would be protecting.”

Well trying to protect a nineteen-year-old was certainly different than trying to do the same with the bitter, battle-hardened, fifty-three-year-old version, Leia admitted to herself. Her anger drained away.

Luke’s voice was tight and controlled “You told Vader about Ben?”

Obi-Wan looked up at that “Leia already told me that,” he said, confused. “She told Vader that I was still alive.”

Everybody looked at him. Luke looked confused for a moment, then said softly. “No, I wasn’t talking about you.”

Obi-Wan’s face remained confused for a moment longer, then comprehension dawned. “You named your son after me?” he asked in a hushed whisper.

Leia slumped in her seat. “Yes,” she admitted, “I did.”

“And you told Vader the name of his grandson before us?” Mama’s voice was full of vibrating hurt and fury.

Leia looked up. “No!” she protested "I didn’t tell Vader his name. But…” and her voice wavered as she realized what exactly she had done. “Yes, he knew about his grandson before you.”

“Why?” Papa asked. Not angry, just full of disappointment and hurt. That was worse, Leia knew what to do with anger.

“I lost my temper with him,” Leia said, looking at both of her parents, trying to make them understand. “He wouldn’t tell me why he fell to the Dark Side, and when he asked me why I cared at all, it slipped out.”

“How could you be so foolish?” Mama asked.

Leia shook her head, “I didn’t want to talk about Ben,” she said, those wounds still raw and aching.

“Well, I can certainly understand that,” Mama said “but you are fifty-three-years old Leia. You should know the difference between not wanting to talk about something and understanding when people need to know something. We” and she gestured to herself and Papa. “needed to know this.”
“Why?” Leia said sulkily “It’s not like he cares?”

Mama’s face tightened in displeasure “You are not a fool,” she said, nothing but deadly calm in her voice “Don’t pretend otherwise. He very clearly does.” She gestured to Ahsoka “He told her to protect a Jedi.”

Leia opened her mouth, but Mama cut her off “He thought Luke was your husband. He knew Luke would become a Jedi, don’t try to dance around that Leia. He gave Ahsoka very clear orders to protect your husband, with her life. I don’t see any other reason that he cares about who you married, other than to ensure his grandson’s existence.”

Obi-Wan looked like he had swallowed ashes, but he said softly “I’m afraid I’m going to have to concur with Breha’s opinion Leia.”

Stung Leia rounded on him. “He’s a Sith Lord!” she protested “You, of all people, should understand they don’t work that way. Why would he care about any grandchild, never mind one who hasn’t been born yet?”

Luke’s voice was quiet, “Because he might be a Sith Lord, but he’s from Tatooine. That doesn’t go away, and I don’t think the Emperor would even bother to understand why it’s dangerous to leave that mindset alone. Not in this case.” He raised his eyes and looked Leia full in the face. “Ben is blood, just like you are blood. You are the family that was stolen away, but he has found you again, and there is nothing, and I do mean nothing, he won’t do to restore his family to him.”

Mama’s voice was cutting “Even Vader understands family. Which is a lesson you seem to be skipping here. We raised you better than this.”

Leia felt like her mother had reached into her chest and ripped the foundation of who she was out from her. Not understand family? Everything she did do, will do, all of it, had everything to do with protecting her family. All of them, both alive and unborn. “What?” she whispered.

Mama’s eyes narrowed, “You kept this from us. This is information we needed to understand what Vader is thinking, and you kept it from us. This is information that he thinks we know and will plan accordingly to deal with it. You heard Luke, he thinks we stole you. He thinks we stole his grandchild from him.”

Mama didn’t know. She didn’t know that Vader damn well knew that her parents had never lived to see Ben be born. That Ben never had any living grandparent.

“And even the little information we have, we had to pry out of you,” Mama said, “Do you only tell us important things when you are upset or mad?”

Leia’s mouth dropped open. She felt like she was about to burst into tears at any moment, and they thought she was angry? She wasn’t the one pounding away at someone who was clearly upset.

“Yes,” Leia said sarcastically, ignoring the tears in her eyes “As you can see I’m furious.”

Papa spoke up, and his tone was serious “We are aware of that Leia.”

“I am not angry with you!” she shouted and slapped her hands down on the table. Everyone jumped a little bit at that. No, not at that, at the objects in this room that had started vibrating with alarming violence. Leia took a deep breath in and closed her eyes as she tried to pull the Force back into herself. She was upset, she wasn’t angry. They were ganging up on her, and...

“Leia,” Luke’s voice gently crossed her mind “you won’t be able to reign this in, unless you
confront what is driving it.” She opened her eyes, and looked straight into her brother’s face “Brutal self-honesty, remember? Either learn to let it go, or accept what you are feeling, and deal with it.”

He was right, Leia thought dimly. She was mad at her parents and hiding behind that lie was starting to actively harm her. She might have been willing to leave that delusion in place. Every time she thought of the rage that lived under her skin when they told her about the Clone Wars, no, when they started telling her about what really happened back then, her heart rebelled against the emotion. It was so ungrateful. She had them back. They had been gone for so long, and now they were here. What kind of ungrateful daughter was she that she couldn’t move past this like an adult?

She couldn’t keep this lie up anymore, and the evidence as to why was still all around her. Luke was taking the brunt of it, but even so, she could have so easily accidentally harmed someone in this room just now, Han, Rex, and yes, even her parents. Even now, she could feel the Force snapping and clawing around her, eager to shred anything apart for her. Leia took a long moment, and let the real reasons for her anger flow into her mind, and then from her lips.

“Alright, yes, fine!” she shouted, turning her head to face her parents “You want to confront this! Let’s confront this!” She pointed a finger at both of them “I’m so furious with you I don’t know what to do with myself.”

“About what?” Papa asked mildly. His reasonable tone just stoked Lea’s ire, but she noted with relief that the objects in the room had stopped moving on their own.

“Because your silence cost me everything!” Leia howled, “No, not your silence, your lies. Why did you feed me that fairy tale of the Republic? Of its greatness and justice? Because from the sound of what you are telling me now, it was rotting long before Palpatine got his hands on it.”

“Yes, it was,” Mama said. “And yes, we kept it a secret, like you and your time travel.”

“I have good reasons for that!” Leia protested hotly.

Mama looked at her sadly “So did we.”

Leia bared her teeth “Why? What possible reason could you have?”

“Because we were ashamed,” Papa said quietly.

Leia looked at him startled, momentarily knocked out of righteousness. “What?” she asked.

“We were ashamed it took us so long even to realize there was a problem.” Papa said, “We didn’t want to admit to our complacency and blindness led to the downfall of every ideal we held.” He looked away from Leia “It is not the best reason-”

“No,” Leia said coldly “It is not. So, your solution was to hide everything?” Leia’s hands balled into fists in her lap. “Do you understand how arrogant you sound?”

“We didn’t mean never to say anything,” Mama said gently. “We didn't expect we would die.”

Leia’s mouth fell open “You are fighting an insurgency war against a ruthless tyrant!” she bellowed “Not only that, he is a Sith Lord! Which you both knew. How could you be so blind to the risks involved in that?”

Papa rubbed his forehead “Because if we focused on that, we would have done nothing. We are not soldiers Leia, we were never trained for this. Political assassinations, yes.” Leia snorted at that.
There hadn’t been such a move for thousands of years on Alderaan “Yes, I know,” Papa said ruefully “Unlikely, but then again we thought the fall of the Republic was unlikely too.”

Leia’s eyes filled with angry tears “Do you understand what your shame did? You left any government we hoped to build vulnerable to those same mistakes.” She hit her chest with her fist. “You left me vulnerable.” Both Mama and Papa looked stricken at that “Thirty years, just thirty years, and we all found ourselves in the exact same place that we started at.”

Leia hastily wiped at the corner of her eyes, trying to brush away the tears. “Only this time it was in a galaxy that had seen almost a half-century of bloodshed and wanted nothing more than for it all to go away. Ideals were tossed aside. You think people are cynical now?”

Leia let out a bitter laugh. “Try to imagine the disillusionment among people who for one brief shining moment believed that they would finally get a future worth building. A future that wouldn’t be stolen from them for the greed or pleasure of another. And imagine how bitter they would be when the promise of something better than the Empire or the Republic, never came.”

“Instead we doubled down on the Core worlds and let the rest of the galaxy essentially fend for itself. And I,” she pointed to herself, “didn’t have enough clout, or enough understanding to know what danger we were heading into.”


Leia turned and looked at him. Luke had enough issues with his alternate. He didn’t need to add this to his list of grievances. “You were worried about the Outer Rim being cut off. I was the one who reassured you otherwise. That your fears were ludicrous, that we wouldn’t abandon all those people who fought for us.”

“Leia,” Luke said gently “I’m a grown man, and I make my own choices. He chose not to get involved. He chose to abandon where he came from.”

“But-“

“Leia,” Luke said firmly “If you are responsible for the whole of the galaxy spinning out of control, then so am I.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Leia protested “You are just one man.”

“And you are just one woman,’ he said, the corners of his mouth ruefully turning up. “And I think you and I need each other to remind the other of that sometimes.”

“So the Alliance leadership wanted to punish everyone but the Core?” Mama asked quietly.

Leia shook her head. “I don’t think that is quite the right term.” Leia thought of Dodonna, and the ugly views he still held that she had been completely unaware of until she arrived here. “At least for most of them. But most of the civilian leadership were trained under the Empire. They had no idea how to advise the Outer-Rim and yes, some of the Mid-Rim worlds, on the political structures that a government needs to actually make it truly functional. They didn’t understand that open trade with those worlds wasn’t giving away “resources” but a way to exert influence and help bring economic stability to the areas.”

“The Empire does that,” Papa murmured.

Leia glared at him, “No the Empire steals what it wants, and gives token payment. I meant trade, actual full trade, as in we get much needed natural resources, and those worlds get finished goods
They need, until they build their own infrastructure to do it themselves. Prosperous worlds, where the bounty is shared, are *stable* worlds. And a network of stable worlds, which are economically and culturally tied tighter form—" 


“But there was too much resentment to wade through, especially with the older military leadership. They didn’t want that part of the galaxy to fall into chaos, but all they saw was an endlessly unstable region that had been a military quagmire for almost fifty years. They thought that they should build up the Core, especially since the loss of…” Leia trailed off.

“The loss of Alderaan,” Mama finished. Leia nodded. “And the thinking was when we were stable, then we could go in and make them stable.” Leia snorted “I thought it was stupid at the time, but there were too many entrenched interests who wanted to protect the system they had. And not enough people knew the real history to understand it was those very systems that brought the Republic down in the first place. So, we just duplicated the whole damn mess again.” Then her anger came back “Only worse, because we had the First Order, and they started using Separatist tactics to peel away those vulnerable systems. Which almost no one in the New Republic understood what they were doing, until it was far too late. Because nobody ever bothered to teach us what happened, and any of the people who had any political clout and did understand what was going on were dead.”

“How did Mon let this happen?” Papa asked, horrified. “She was there, she saw—“

“Mon was only in the Republic Senate for three years before it all fell apart.” Leia defended her mentor “She understood how Palpatine tore it apart, but not how the foundation was weakened.”

“Even more reason for you to tell us what they did build so we can avoid it,” Papa said fiercely.

“Aren’t you listening?” Leia hissed back at her father, irritated he was still on this. “Why do you need to know that? The New Republic was a copy of the old. You should know what it looked like, you were there for the first one!”

“Look,” Han’s voice broke in “I’m not a General, or a Jedi, or even Royalty. I’m just an above average smuggler. But I think Leia's right on this.”

“Oh?” Mama said, and Papa shot him an irritated look. “Why?”

“Because I’ve never seen Leia back down from a course she has set out for herself if she thinks she’s right. And knowing her, she’s thought about this from every angle she can. Is she seeing all of them? No, but I trust her judgment.” Then his voice became harder “And I do know badgering her like this is not the way to change her mind.”

Ahsoka’s voice was calm as she said, “I think I’m going to disagree.” They all turned to look at her.

At Han’s glare, she amended “Not about the part about badgering Leia, Captain Solo—”

“Han,” he said.

“Han,” she corrected to, not even skipping a beat “but about Leia not saying anything about what she knows.”

This was unexpected “You’ve time traveled,” Leia protested. “You saw what *could be*, remember? You know the risks or revealing what I know. And you think I should tell?”
“Yes,” Ashoka confirmed “only if because if you die, we are without a map. You have changed things, Leia. I can feel it rippling all across the Force. That old possibility is gone.”

“Then you would be in the same position that you have been in if I hadn’t come back.” Leia snapped.

Ahsoka’s smile was amused “But don’t you understand? That can’t happen. Your very presence here has made that impossible.”

“At the very least we should tell Mon,” Rex interjected.

“What good would that have done?” Leia asked exasperatedly.

“She would have been able to corral Draven into behaving. She would have known you were hiding something and been able to fend him off at the pass.” Rex said levelly.

“Or she would have thought no matter what we do we are destined to win, and we are not,” Leia shot back. “And even with Mon’s intervention, Draven wouldn’t have let it go.”

“Would it have been so bad if he learned about the time travel?” Leia gave the clone a flatly unimpressed look “Ok, bad example,” Rex admitted “the man would have never left you alone if he knew you had intel on the future. But if he had known about your identity? About you being Vader’s daughter?”

Leia made a face of disgust, Rex put his hands up. “I know you don’t want everyone to know, but it would at least explain Vader’s interest in you to Draven. Say what you want about the man he can keep a secret. And he would have backed off from you, and we wouldn’t be facing a crisis now.”

“No, it would have led him to press the Alliance Leadership even harder to use me as bait to kill Vader,” Leia snarled.

Luke shot her a look “Having second thoughts about killing him?”

Leia didn’t need to think about that one. “No, just all the Rebels who would die in the attempt.”

Han’s voice was sharp “Oh, that is the stupidest idea I’ve ever heard. Draven thought you guys could take Vader?”

Leia shrugged and turned to look at Han “He thinks he could throw enough people at the problem,” she explained.

“Nobody can control Vader. Only the Emperor.” Then a thoughtful look crossed his face. “And maybe you.”

Leia reared back “What?” she yelled “No!”

“Leia,” Ahsoka said. Leia turned to look at the woman. She cocked her head, and then she asked, puzzled. “You haven’t figured it out yet?”

“Figured out what?” Leia snapped back.

Ahsoka looked around the room. “None of you?” she asked, disbelieving. “But it’s so obvious?”

“What is so obvious Ahsoka?” Obi-Wan asked, shoulders tense.
Ahsoka looked around the room. “He wants to put Leia on the throne.”

There was a long beat of silence at that pronouncement. Leia broke it by laughing out loud. “I think you are seriously misreading the situation here Ahsoka,” she said, chuckles still escaping her. “Use me to kill Palpatine, sure? But me, ruling?” She snorted, “Not likely.”

Nobody said anything. Leia felt her amusement slip, just a bit. She did a scan of the faces in the room, expecting to see the others also grimly amused at the thought of Vader looking to *Leia* to be his new master. Instead, all she saw was thoughtful looks.

Leia’s laughter died away completely, replaced by a sudden dread. This was ridiculous. Luke, *Luke* was the one Vader thought he could mold. Luke was the one he had seen. Luke was the one he wanted to rule by his side. Leia was too old, too stubborn. She didn’t even want to learn about the *Force*. What good would she do Vader?

“That…makes sense,” Mama said thoughtfully.

“No, it most certainly does not!” Leia shouted. “There is no way he would think I want *that*.”

“No,” Ahsoka said, “But I was under the impression he thinks he can change your mind.”

Luke's voice was filled with disgust “You think all he wants from Leia is a ruler for the galaxy?”

Ahsoka looked thoughtful for a second. Then very slowly she said “No Luke. I think he wants a ruler he loves.”

Obi-Wan shook his head “What does a Sith know of love?” he asked bitterly “You were taught better than that Ahsoka.”

Ahsoka’s pain was suddenly there in the Force. Like a writhing twisting thing, and it was laced with jealousy so deep Leia took a sharp gasp as it hit her full on. Beside her, Luke’s face twisted to. If this was what the woman was hiding beneath that calm facade…And just what could there possibly be in this situation that Ahsoka was jealous of? Leia didn’t know her all that well, but she was fairly certain the woman didn’t want someone offering her a galaxy and being able to *deliver* it.

Then that storm of emotions was gone, and Ahsoka looked at Obi-Wan sadly. “I can only tell you what I think he’s thinking Obi-Wan,” Ahsoka said, “And what he has told me.” Her eyes fell on Leia’s face, “And he told me, flat out, that I needed to protect Leia until he killed Palpatine and had enough political support to put her on the throne and keep her there.”

Leia felt like she couldn’t breathe. This was a nightmare, and she was going to wake up any moment. There was no way that what Ahsoka said could be true.

A bitter smile twisted Ahsoka’s lips, “And I would point out, there were those in the Republic who would have asked the same question about the Jedi.”

Rex snorted “That wasn’t true. Anybody who spent more than five minutes with any of you would have known that you all loved. Probably too damn much.”

Ahsoka’s mouth twisted “Including Krell in that statement?”

Krell? Who was Krell? But by the sudden darkening of Rex’s face, and the paling of Obi-Wan’s now was not the time to ask. Besides, there was a much more important issue to address.
Leia let out a hysterical laugh, and pushed herself away from the table, standing up. “Whether Vader thinks he loves me or he’s just deluding himself is not the issue here. My issue is where he ever got the asinine idea that is anything I want! He’s met me!” her voice was really too high pitched, and when had she started backing away from the table? “Look I appreciate that I have a lot of power, and he thinks he can use that to take down his master-”

“I don’t think that’s the point Leia,” Luke said softly “if he wanted to take Palpatine out, he would have done it years ago. He doesn’t want to rule.”

“Of course, he does!” Leia snapped.

“No,” Obi-Wan said thoughtfully “I don’t think so.” His voice grew rough, but his eyes never left Leia’s “He did make the offer to kill Palpatine to your Mother.”

He had done what? Leia understood that Sith Lord’s killed each other, but Vader could have only been a Sith for at most two days at that point. What had he been thinking?

“You were trained to rule,” Papa said softly.

“A planet,” Leia whined, “not a galaxy.” They were getting further and further from her, as she realized that her feet were not obeying her and moving her away from them.

Then she ran into someone behind her. She panicked for a second ready to fight her way out of this when the scent of Han hit her nose. She relaxed, and his arms went around her “Leia,” he whispered in her ear “breath.”

“I can’t-” Leia realized she was shaking. “I don’t-”

“He’s moving against Palpatine,” Mama said. “He’s been involving himself in politics.”

“He is doing his best to protect Alderaan.” Luke pointed out.

“And he set Ahsoka free,” Obi-Wan said quietly. “With the only purpose to protect you and your husband.”

“Luke,” Leia insisted, trying to stop her shivering. “Luke is who he saw. I was standing in front of him for years, and he never noticed me.”

“He sees you now Sweetheart,” Han said, voice still so gentle “And maybe we can use this.”

“Use this!??!” Leia’s voice was hysterical “He’s not a weapon Han. He’s not some blueprint we can just pick up and use to our own purposes. He’s Vader!”

“Yes,” Han said “he is. And he wants to put the galaxy at your feet.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer and Aeyancat
Translation into Russian available: [Translation] Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Hi guys! First off a quick note. So, given the fact that my chapters now regularly break 20,000 words (and higher!) I'm afraid I'm going to have to change my publishing schedule to every four weeks, instead of three. It is just not feasible to turn around chapters that long in that short of a time frame. Well, not feasible, and do all the boring adult shit I have to do. I don't object to the chapters being as long as they are, I think it's more important they be the length they are meant to be, but I cannot keep writing these beasts, and maintain my old schedule.

Second note, even with the new four-week schedule, this one still would be late. I didn't get stuck, just this one was *exhausting* to write, and I'm giving you fair warnings for angst in this chapter. Seriously, all of the feelings. Also a shout out to cheshirejaden and pink-fuchsia for inspiring one of the few outright jokes in this chapter.

In this moment, all there was, all Leia could hear, was the sound of her breathing as she frantically tried to bring in more air. Her parents, Luke, Obi-Wan, this room, all of it was completely drowned out by the sound of her heart beating in her ears, and her lungs desperately trying to pull in more air. Everything else, the voices around her, the walls of this room, even the Force, all of it was lost as she tried to focus on breathing.

"He wants to put the galaxy at your feet."

No, that couldn't be right. This wasn't possible. Vader didn't see her. Vader didn't like her, he barely respected her. Vader didn't value her. She was a weapon, to be picked up and used against Palpatine, then put away when he was done with her. It had always been about Luke. Vader had loved Luke. Every good thing Vader had done in her own past was to save Luke. Because that was who Luke was. He inspired people to be the best versions of themselves. Because he had such faith in people, and so often it was rewarded. And why not? Everyone loved Luke. He was very lovable. Unlike her. Leia was too bitter, too angry, too distrustful, too powerful, too restless, just too much of everything.

Leia was the afterthought. She was the one that Vader hadn't seen. The one that had been in front of him for years, the dead ringer for her mother, and powerful in the Force. Vader hadn't bothered to care then, why now?

"He sees you now, Sweetheart."

That voice was still murmuring to her. It wasn't speaking of impossible things anymore though. It was just quietly going on next to her ears, it's tone was low and soothing. Leia clung to it with all of her might. She knew this voice. She loved this voice. And more importantly, right this second, she trusted this voice. In some of her darkest hours it had been there, and it had never flinched away from the ugly truth that was her existence. She focused in on that voice like her life depended on it, knowing it would show her the way back.
“One, two, three,” it was saying. “C’mon Your Worship, I will never stop making fun of you if you pass out on me now.”

Leia shuddered, part of her responding instinctively to the challenge in those words. Maybe it was petty and said something about her nature, but at the moment she was only grateful that Han understood her well enough to know that soothing words would not get through to her. And he was right, if she didn’t start breathing in a regular fashion, she was going to hyperventilate her way to passing out in his arms. And no, he would never let her live that down.

Leia pulled in one long breath to that soothing count. Then she exhaled to that same steady rhythm. If she just focused on those words, and nothing else that was trying to intrude on her concentration, she could do this. It didn’t matter where she was anyway, Han was here, and that was all that mattered.

There was the lightest touch flickering across her mind in the Force. Someone wanted her attention, but even that feather touch sent her mind scrambling, trying to loop back into the whirlwind she had just clawed her way out of. Leia withdrew as far as she could within the walls of her own mind, trying to escape both that mind and the Force itself. She couldn’t handle any other sensation beyond Han’s voice right now.

“That’s it,” Han said, his heart beating steady and reassuring underneath her ear. At some point, she seemed to have laid her head against his chest. “Now exhale. One. Two. Three.”

Leia focused on that count. All that existed right now in the galaxy was that count. Those three numbers were the heartbeat that she would contain everything in. Her lungs tried to seize up on her, her subconscious mind insisting that they needed to pant as fast as they could. Leia ignored it. She didn’t trust her mind right this second, but she would follow Han to the end of time if he asked.

Gradually she became aware of the strong arms wrapped around her, holding her up. Han’s thumbs were tracing gently up and down on her back, in time with his soft voice. She could feel the sensation through her thin shirt, the one that she had worn in deference to the humid air of Yavin. Then Han’s scent filtered into her brain. He smelled like he always did, mechanical grease, leather, and underneath all of that something that was just…Han. Next to come into her awareness was the fact that her eyes were closed, and she was only upright by the strength of Han’s grip. Her legs, the disobedient things, felt limp as overcooked noodles underneath her.

“You back with me?” Han murmured in her ear. So quiet, he was being so quiet. She nodded her head into his shoulder and firmly ordered her wonderful young knees to lock themselves. It only took about two attempts, but she longer need to lay all her weight on that familiar embrace, but the motion did cause her to straighten up slightly. A movement that did not go unnoticed by the other occupants of the room.

Leia heard a chair scraping across the stone floor as someone came to their feet. “Leia—” Papa started to say.

Han didn’t even let him finish, “Back off!” he snarled, his voice suddenly loud in her ears. Leia whimpered, both at the unexpected volume of Han’s voice, and the pure rage that was underneath it. She felt that precarious calm she was clinging to wobble underneath her. She tried to focus in on her breathing again, tried to ignore the anger and hurt battering her from all sides in the room, but she couldn’t manage to focus enough. Her thoughts kept scattering into a thousand directions all at once.

“Captain Solo,” Papa started to say, his voice coming nearer.
“I said back off!” Han’s arms tightened around her, and she felt him take two steps back. Leia didn’t fight the movement. She wasn’t even sure she could try without falling over. She didn’t say anything either. She was too busy trying to understand this strange reality that had exploded into her head after hearing Han’s assertion that Vader wanted her to rule the galaxy. No, not just the galaxy, him too.

The emotion she identified feeling first was denial, of course. There was a part of her, a very large part, that was still having trouble believing that this wasn’t all a fantastical, weird, and painful dream. That was shouting that this couldn’t be true. There was no way that all the people in this room were correct about Vader. They had all hit their head, or maybe they were drunk, and she hadn’t noticed. Perhaps they had time traveled from the past all at the same time and weren’t understanding the situation as it was.

But underneath that panicked first reaction, there was acceptance. As if the hardest coldest part of her, the part that had been created in the wake of dealing with Alderaan’s destruction, had seen the actions Vader was taking and understood what he was doing. And more importantly why he was doing it. Leia knew she wasn’t stupid, far from it. But she really hadn’t thought that her perception of Vader was this skewed. That one part of her would know what was happening, but her own blindness would leave her stuck in her earlier, and apparently wildly incorrect, view of Vader. So much so, that it took the very forceful argument from so many people she trusted to shatter it.

The denial and the acceptance didn’t surprise her, not really. At least not to the part of her that was always thinking, always calculating, always judging. No, what surprised Leia was the outright fury this idea had prompted in her.

“How dare he see me now. How dare he see me now. How dare he see me now,” was being repeated over and over again in her mind. A mantra Leia couldn’t control. Now he chooses to finally see her? Now, when it did no good? Now, when there was too much between them? Now, when everything and nothing had changed about him?

Those words were beating in time with the anger that had lived in Leia’s heart for so long she no longer truly remembered what she had been like without it. And of all things, he wanted to put her on the throne. He wanted her, if Ahsoka was to be believed, to remake the galaxy according to her vision.

“Han-“ Luke’s voice was cautious “Maybe-“

“Nope,” Han said, voice deadly serious, “Besides Chewie, you are the closest man I will ever have as a brother. But you come any closer right this second I will shoot you.”

Leia shivered. Han meant that. She didn’t need the Force to tell her that. By his sharp gasp of pain, Luke understood that too.

Han’s voice softened, just a bit. “Don’t look so hurt Kid,” he said, “I wouldn’t kill you. Just a warning shot. But you would definitely be feeling it for a few days.” He shifted Leia in his arms “What you all need to do is back off. Leia needs a second.”

A second? A second? If she had a lifetime, she wouldn’t be able to wrap her head around this. Every time she tried to fit this into everything she understood about herself, about Vader, about everything, her thoughts took off like a flock of birds, flying every way except where she needed them to go.

But she couldn’t hide behind Han forever, as tempting as that sounded. She couldn’t allow him to threaten someone he loved on her behalf. Han couldn’t, wouldn’t, stand long with a divided heart
and loyalties. Hadn’t she learned that from the whole mess of herself, Ben, and Luke?

Leia took a deep breath in, trying to make her voice steady. It didn’t crack, but it was much quieter then she would have liked. She didn’t even try to move her head off his shoulder, as she murmured “It’s alright Han.”

“That is not all right,” Han said back fiercely “They all just drove you into a panic attack.”

Leia didn’t bother to dispute that. It had certainly felt like one. She didn’t even have the strength to put up a token protest, for all the good it would have done her. Her limbs felt rubbery, and she felt strangely detached from her body, like she was controlling it, but wasn’t in it. Even with her locked knees, Leia doubted she would be standing if Han hadn’t been supporting her weight.

Mama’s voice was thick with indignation, “We did not,” she protested. Leia could hear the scrape of her chair across the stone floor, as she too came to her feet. Leia kept her eyes firmly closed, and her face pressed into Han’s chest, using that loved heartbeat and scent to ground her. She couldn’t look at them, not yet. It was taking all of her will just to track this conversation at all.

“Really?” Han’s voice was more respectful then it had been with Papa, but there was a thread of incredulity in it. “Then what do you call what just happened? Is there some fancy word I never learned?”

That light feather touch in the Force suddenly returned with a vengeance, suffused with panic. Leia, for one horrible moment, was convinced that touch was Vader. Vader was reaching out because he felt her panic. Vader would want to know what was wrong. Because, apparently, he cared. About her. Not Luke. Not power. Her. Her wellbeing, her happiness. The whole thought made her want to laugh hysterically. If he really cared, he wouldn’t be trying to give her a galaxy. If he cared, he would have seen her long before she had been shoved for the second time in that cell on the Death Star. Hell, the first time she had been in that cell. If he cared, he wouldn’t have killed her mother.

“If he cared, he wouldn’t have abandoned me.”

Leia almost retreated fully back into her own mind, and the cacophony of chaos there. Anything was better than letting Vader see anything of her heart. Then the feel of that presence broke through her panic. She knew this mind, almost better than her own she knew this mind. Leia knew fighting him was pointless. She could no more keep Luke out of her head, then he could her, if they really pressed. They were the same in the Force, one. The only way to really keep the other one out, beyond manners and an understanding of boundaries, was to cut themselves off completely from the Force. And Leia could never bring herself to do that.

“Not like the other Luke did.”

But that Luke wasn’t the one who was frantically trying to reassured himself that she was alright. That wasn’t the Luke that was sitting in this room, for all the ways they were so similar it made her heart ache.

Not willing to inflict that pain on him and bring Obi-Wan and Ahsoka’s attention to what he was doing, Leia let her guard down enough for Luke to come in with no resistance. She understood Luke’s need to access for himself where she stood, even if Leia wasn’t quite sure herself at this moment. Frankly, she was surprised he hadn’t accidentally barreled into her mind before this. His control was growing by leaps and bounds under Obi-Wan’s teachings.

He took a moment, reigning himself in, then he reached out, and Leia felt his presence quickly run through her mind. He wasn’t looking at her memories, at least not directly. It was more like he was
tasting the air, trying to get a sense of where she was emotionally. But because they were so close, there was no hiding the wash of guilt he felt in the small role he played in sending her spiraling out of control. That emotion, more than any other, convinced her panicking mind that this was Luke, not Vader. Vader didn’t feel guilt.

“That is not true,” the Force whispered in her ear. Leia scowled. She wanted to bat that truth away. She was comfortable with her understanding of Vader, she didn’t need, or want, it expanded.

“You’ve seen his regret,” that voice that was more a feeling than anything else whispered in her mind. Yes, she had. She had felt his regret, and grief, as he looked at the perfectly preserved memory of her mother, laughing in a warm field somewhere.

And this led to another problem she had been so very carefully not thinking about. Leia had spent most of her life ignoring the Force as much as possible. She had been fine with it trying to direct her life with small nudges, and pushes. She could take those small whispers as they came. Because, for most of her life, she could ignore them when she didn’t want to listen. And, she had to admit, on more than one occasion her rudimentary Jedi skills had saved her life. But over the last few months, because of Vader, because of when she was, she had to accept more training to keep him out. With more control, she found herself sinking further and further into that chaotic power, and the Force was becoming louder and louder to her. How did that even make sense?

“Han’s right,” Luke said, voice filled with pain, pulling her out of her thoughts.

“But,” Papa sounded so confused. “that isn’t how Leia has panic attacks.” Leia frowned. She didn’t remember ever having panic attacks of any kind when she was younger. After Alderaan was destroyed, yes, she had them, but not before. How did Papa know what Leia looked like when she was having one?

Han’s voice didn’t lose its gruff edge “What are you talking about?” he demanded, voicing Leia’s unspoken question.

Papa’s voice took a pleading tone “When Leia was younger, she would have panic attacks occasionally.”

“Not just occasionally Bail,” Mama said gently.

Papa shook his head, “Yes, when she was a child, she had them quite frequently. But she did outgrow them around the time she turned twelve.”

Obi-Wan’s voice cut in “Was it during times where there were lots of people there? Or when they were people around her who were highly emotional?”

Mama’s voice was firm “Yes. At the time, we thought it was because Leia was nervous about being in front of so many people. As heir to the throne, there were many public functions she was expected to attend.”

Leia didn’t remember any of this. Oh, she remembered not liking the public occasions she had participated in as a child, but that had more to do with the dresses TooVee would put her in, and the fact she had to stay still for long periods of time.

Mama’s voice became contrite “It was because Leia is sensitive to the Force wasn’t it?”

Obi-Wan’s voice was regretful “Yes, it was.”

Luke cut in “But I never experienced anything like that!” Then sensing Leia’s uncertainty about
her own memories, he asked in a quavering voice “Did I?”

Obi-Wan’s voice was reassuring “No, I would have felt that. But you were also isolated Luke, there weren’t as many people leaking their emotions into the Force for you to feel.”

Ahsoka’s voice was cutting and bitter “Yes, perhaps you should have warned them about that Obi-Wan.”

Obi-Wan’s voice was filled with frustration. “I tried to tell everything I could think of to Bail that he might need to know before I left for Tatooine. But it was so chaotic after they were born, and I didn’t have time.” Obi-Wan sounded frustrated and grieved. That would have been right after Mustafar, Leia realized. By his own words, her mother had been his friend. And that had been, at most, three days after Order 66. No, Obi-Wan would not have been thinking clearly, not with his entire world shattered around him, and almost everyone he loved dead. “We needed to separate them as soon as possible so that-“


“No, Luke,” Obi-Wan countered, the lightest sense of frustration in his voice, “I thought Anakin was dead by that point. I was terrified that the Emperor would.” Luke fell silent at that reminder. Despite his outplaced size in their own personal lives, Vader wasn’t the threat to them that the Emperor was.

“As I said,” Papa said into that strained silence, “Leia had panic attacks. But she would become a whirlwind. She became incapable of sitting still, she would be constantly moving and talking, all of it with a frantic edge to it. Even when she could barely walk herself. We would try to contain her, but she would fight us.” Papa sounded so sad, and lost then, not like his usual self “Sometimes she could be directed at a task, but most times we had to let her wear herself out.”

Ben had never done anything like that with her. Not even in adolescence, when his energy and emotions were such a whiplash, Leia was afraid he would hurt himself. Had she been unconsciously shielding him? And if she had, why hadn’t that been enough to keep out Snoke?

At the thought of Ben, the Ben with the angry eyes, instead of the laughing ones of his childhood, her control wobbled for just a second. Not now, she was too tired and worn to think of her son now, but she would remember this and ponder over it later.

Ahsoka sighed, and the sound of it landed heavily in the very quiet room “She couldn’t control the Force, so she was feeling the excitement, or confusion, or whatever emotion was around her. Her mind was too young to process it, and it would have caused an adrenaline surge.” She sounded tired. “It wasn’t a panic attack Bail. I’m not even sure why you would think that-”

“The healers we consulted,” Mama said. “They said it was presenting unusually, but that everyone was different, and given that Leia was so young, that might be affecting how she manifested.”

Leia could hear the frustration in Ahsoka’s voice “You mean they didn’t have a clue but wanted to offer you something.” There was a long pause, and Leia heard the sound of Ahsoka’s fingers tapping an impatient rhythm on the wooden table. “You should have told me Bail. You should have told me about Leia.” There was so much hurt and pain in the woman’s words. “I could have helped her.”

Papa’s voice was defensive “It’s not like we weren’t aware these episodes could be because of Leia’s heritage.” The meditation lessons, Leia realized dimly. She had started the meditation lessons when she was twelve. Around the age when these “panic attacks” stopped.
“We didn’t neglect our daughter, Ahsoka,” Papa’s voice was firm “And despite your low opinion of them, every healer we consulted ran every test they could. They all assured us there was nothing physically wrong.”

“That is a thing that happens with Force Sensitives?” Han asked into that fraught silence. “They pick up on everyone’s emotions?”

“The powerful ones, yes,” Obi-Wan said softly. “Until they learn control.” Then his voice became sad “Or they learn to cut themselves off from the Force.”


“Yes,” Obi-Wan said, voice sharp and demanding “The Force is part of you Luke. Amputating yourself from it, with no training,” his voice was filled with horror. “It will lead nowhere good for you.”

Just what had that other Luke, the older one, done to himself to hide from Snoke? From Ben? And what price had he paid in cutting himself off from Leia? Because that was the only way to really hide from her and be able to not hear her. She had called out to him for years after Ben’s fall, and he had never once answered her. Luke would have been shattered by the destruction of all his hopes and dreams, but there was no way he had changed so much that he would ignore her crying out in pain for him. She knew her brother, and it was not in him. So, the only conclusion she could come to was that he cut himself off from the Force and never once heard her.

Ahsoka’s voice was cutting and direct, breaking into Leia’s useless wonderings about the motivation for someone who didn’t exist for her anymore. “Which is why you should have sought my help Bail.” Leia could hear the disapproval in that voice, “You knew she was a Force-sensitive. Did you not trust me?”

“I-“ Papa said, but Han cut him off.

“Not that I’m not enjoying seeing you getting yelled at for once,” he said “but can we please return to the part where you all failed to see the obvious and not notice Leia barreling towards a breakdown?”

“As I said Captain,” Papa said, frustrated “Leia would become frantic when she was younger. After the hyperactivity passed, then she would become exhausted. But she never shut down like this.”

Not his daughter. She wasn’t his daughter, just a stranger that was wearing her face. Leia had changed so much he didn’t recognize her. That remote part of her pointed out she wasn’t thinking logically about any of this, and that was not what Papa meant, but Leia wasn’t much for logic right now. All she could hear was that Papa would prefer the nineteen-year-old version of Leia. The one who was still convinced that she could make everything right. The one who didn’t keep secrets, who was still capable of trust. The one who had known exactly where she stood.

“Leia,” a voice whispered, cultured and somewhat wry “You know that isn’t true.” She opened her eyes and met Obi-Wan’s face. “You are loved, for who you were and for who you are now.” While his tone was reassuring his words were not. Just how tattered were the shields in her mind if Obi-Wan was picking up on her thoughts, not just her emotions?

Her stomach tightened in fear as she realized that if Obi-Wan was getting that much, Vader must be aware of the state she was in by now. He would reach out, he would look for her, and she wouldn’t be able to keep him out. He would see everyone here, and she would have failed everyone, again.
“Leia,” Luke’s love and strength brushed up against her mind “I’ve got this,” he said.

Relief filled her, followed immediately by guilt. He shouldn’t have to have this, she should have more control,

“Leia,” Luke crooned in the Force, and then his love was wrapped around her. “Shush, I have you.” And for one selfish minute, Leia wrapped herself in his love and certainty like a warm blanket that she could use to keep the chill away.

Han snorted at Papa, and just like that Leia’s mind was pulled back into the physical world. “I’ve known her for less than six months, and I could see where she was headed.”

Obi-Wan’s voice was soft. “People change Bail.”

“Leia-“ Mama started to say.

Han’s hands tightened around Leia, “Begging your pardon ma’am,” he said, “but I think you’ve done enough.”

“We didn’t-“ Mama started to say, then Leia heard her take a deep breath in. Leia turned her head so that she could see her. Mama was standing beside Papa, her face paler than normal, and twisted with profound guilt.

The second Leia’s eyes met hers, she could see Mama’s face retreat into an expressionless mask “That was not our intent.” She said, her voice falling into the Queen’s tone, remote and neutral. A formal apology from Queen to her heir, not mother to daughter. “I didn’t realize that was where Leia was heading.”

Was she offering this apology in such formal terms because it was the way to properly address what she had done? Or was it because she felt this was the only way to connect with Leia? By falling back into her oldest training. Leia couldn’t even begin to make sense of what her mother was doing. Every time she thought she might know, her mind jumped to a previously abandoned possibility.

“Meant to do and what happened are two different things,” Han snapped.

Papa’s voice was rough “You think we would intentionally harm our daughter?”

“I don’t care,” Han snarled. “I only care about what happened to her.”

“Bail, Breha, please sit down,” Obi-Wan’s voice was firm, “You are upsetting Leia.”

Leia merely buried her face back into Han’s shoulder, unable to deny it. She felt raw, stripped and vulnerable. Her heart rate had slowed so that it was no longer pounding its rhythm in her ears, but her limbs felt like they weighed the same as a cargo ship. She felt didn’t know what to do, what to say, or how to make them all stop tearing into each other. Every time she tried to make a decision, a thick cloud of exhaustion muddled her mind.

“Yeah,” Han said “That’s it. The day Leia turns away from a fight is the day she’s had enough. It’s time to leave.”

He wasn’t wrong, but there was too much still left to do. It wasn’t the first time her life had been torn apart right in front of her, and it wouldn’t be the last. She would see to her duty. She had to, it was who she was.
“No,” Leia managed to croak out. She doubted anyone else heard her, but she didn’t need them to. She needed to convince Han first that she had to stay. She didn’t, couldn’t, fight him on this right now, and she needed his strength and support.

Han’s hands left her sides and came to her shoulders to push her just a few inches away. Enough to see her face. Leia kept the whimper at their separation to herself. She would never convince Han not to fight her on this if she let him know how unsteady she really was. She kept her eyes firmly on his chest, afraid of what he would see in them. His hands left her shoulders, and came up to gently frame her face. Slowly he turned her head up so that she was looking him straight in the eyes. His own eyes were wide and panicked, but his voice was calm as he said “Leia, you’ve done enough. Here and now, you have done more than enough.”

Leia shook her head “Ahsoka,” she rasped, and why did her throat feel like she had been screaming for hours? “We need to decide what to do with Ahsoka, and the Rebellion.” Because there was no getting around the fact that Ahsoka’s loyalties were divided. “Vader,” that little voice in the back of her mind muttered hysterically. “Vader sent her to protect me.”

Han snorted “Whatever.” His thumbs caressed her cheek. “You should come back to the Falcon with me to rest.” He gave her a hollow echo of his usual wheedling smile “I’m sure you know by now I give great back massages.”

Dimly Leia heard Papa give an undignified squawk, and then the very distinct noise of someone hitting him. She wondered if it was Mama or Obi-Wan who had done that to get him to shut up. Han’s voice was persuasive, and his face pleading “Let them handle this on their own.”

Han wasn’t wrong. He gave great back massages. And that was all he was offering, just a massage, to release the tension that even in this weird state Leia was in, she could feel tying her back into knots. His hands felt so good, large and warm on her pale face, with those hypnotic rubbing motion of his thumbs.

Just for once, could she let something go? Excepting Ahsoka, there was no one in this room she wouldn’t trust with her life. But was that the same as trusting them with her fate? With her duty?

Even in this fogged state, she knew better. Oh, it would feel great now. But later, later, she would cut herself to pieces over this. This was a problem, while not of her making, definitely involved her. Han’s face grew concerned as he saw the decision she had come to even before she said a word. Seeing what she was going to do, he tried one more line of attack “Princess, you can let this go. You are not just your cause.”

This, this was at the foundation of her love for this man. Han didn’t see the last Princess of Alderaan, the General, Vader’s daughter, or someone who the Force wanted to be a Jedi. All he saw was her, Leia. All he cared about was her, and that was something Leia could say about very few people in her life, most of them now currently sitting in this room. Because he loved her, all her glaring flaws and all, and accepted her for it. And because he loved her, she found the strength to do what she must.

Sighing, she relaxed the walls in her mind, and drew great greedy gulps of the Force, directing it into tired muscles to counteract the adrenaline surge brought on by her fight or flight response in her panic attack. She used it to clear the fog in her mind, using the methods Obi-Wan had shown her to strengthen her own neurochemistry to bring a sort of equilibrium to the stew of chemicals in her brain. All around her, the physical world seemed to pull back, and Leia could feel the Force swirl around her, the power and perceptions laying over everything in a fine sheen of a filter.
Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Ahsoka come abruptly to her feet, knocking the chair she had been sitting onto the floor “What?!?” she breathed.

“Quiet,” Luke said, firmly but not loudly. Leia noticed as if from very far away, he sounded vaguely irritated “She’s still working out the kinks with this one. You break her concentration, and she could overdo it.”

“Overdo it!!!” Ahsoka’s astonishment was causing a chaotic storm in her shadow in the Force. Leia watched with eyes that weren’t her physical ones, marveling on how any Force-sensitive would be astonished by this. This was the easiest thing in the world to do. It was just a matter of letting that flow of power in. Keeping it out was the hard part.

“This isn’t possible!!!” Ahsoka insisted.

Obi-Wan’s sense in the Force was a mixture of resigned and baffled. “You’ll find between Luke and Leia’s unique approach to the Force that many of the things we thought are impossible are in fact very probable,” he said.

With an audible click, Leia came back to herself, feeling refreshed and energized, mind cleared. She was still angry, still worried, and hurt, but her mind felt like the cobwebs had been swept away. Like she had gotten a good night’s sleep. She wasn’t exactly ready for what was to come, but she also wasn’t going to collapse on the floor at the very thought of confronting this.

Han was looking at her sorrowfully “Not going to walk away huh?”

Leia shook her head. “I can’t. There is too much going to being decided here that has a bearing on my future.”

Han glared at her. “We haven’t made a decision about what Ahsoka is going to tell Mon.” His mouth tightened into an unhappy line, “And frankly it can wait.”

“No,” Leia said, “It can’t. Not if we don’t want to make Mon suspicious about the real reason Ahsoka is here.”

Han’s eyes flicked to the Togruta, “She’s an adult, I’m sure she can come up with some sort of lie.”

“Oh, Han is right,” Ahsoka said airily “If there is anything I learned how to do when on the run from the Empire, it was lie.”

Leia shut her eyes, grateful for the out Ahsoka was giving her, but knowing she couldn’t take it. This wasn’t just about deciding Ahsoka’s fate within the Alliance. There were so many other threads that had been pulled in this room. They couldn’t go back to the careful state they had all been in before. Ahsoka’s arrival had set into motion too many cascading events and revealed too many long-buried hurts, and conflicting agendas. If they were was any hope of defeating the Empire, they couldn’t bury all of this and promise they would address it “tomorrow”. For some of them, tomorrow might not come, and even if they somehow all miraculously survived this, Leia knew that it wouldn’t be addressed. There would be one more “pressing” problem, one more battle to fight, one more something. It was what happened the first time.

They also couldn’t afford to be openly arguing among themselves. The wounds that had been reopened here, weren’t going to go away, and they could no longer be bandaged over. The time had come for a cleansing of the air. Leia knew that, hated it, but she had been the leader of too many wars to think that any of this were small enough issues to wall off to be dealt with later.

This all needed to be resolved or hurt feelings, more like hurt hearts, would keep getting in the
Leia knew that, she had been the leader of too many wars to think that this was small enough to wall off.

And the revelation about Vader frightened her. She badly needed to get a reality check outside of her own head. She wouldn’t tell them a blow by blow of the last thirty years, she still thought it would do more harm than good, but she would loosen her tongue about more of what happened. If she was this off about Vader, what else could she be missing?

“I need to do this,” she said, bringing her hands up to cup that worried face.

Han scowled, “No, you don’t,” he countered.

Leia shook her head “Han,” she started to say.

“You do not need to justify anything you have done since you got here to these people, “Han said fiercely, and Leia’s heart both sank and rejoiced. He knew this wasn’t about Ahsoka, not really. This was about every other thing Leia had been avoiding. Han, this Han, knew her well enough to know that she was going to put out everything she had in order to get everyone past this. “They claim to love you, so they should trust you. It really is that simple.”

She pushed herself up to her tiptoes so that her forehead was resting against his “Not how this works,” she said.

“Well it should,” he muttered petulantly.

Leia let out a small huff, “Maybe if you’re five.”

“Who says I’m not?”

Leia laughed. Even here, even with everything that was swirling around this room, Han could make her laugh. She caressed his cheek fondly “I need to.”

“Then why not wait?” Han asked. “Even with whatever magical mumbo-jumbo you just pulled, you still aren’t at your best.”

Leia shook her head “I’m afraid if I don’t now, I won’t ever.” She was feeling brave. That was a lie. She was feeling more like she had been stripped down to her foundation, all her normal tactics, and mental armor laying uselessly around her. In this stable, but precarious state, she could no longer ignore the pain she was causing others with her silence. But that state of affairs wouldn’t last long. Leia knew herself, all of this was things she would rather not think about, and she would go to great lengths to avoid if she was a just a tiny bit more steady.

Han sighed, and pulled back slightly so he could kiss her forehead “Alright Leia,” he said. Leia sank back until her feet were flat on the floor, but she never broke eye contact with him. Han’s eyes narrowed, “But I’m warning you now. You fall apart like that again, I don’t care what you say, or how hard you fight me, I will drag you out of this room.”

Leia didn’t even fight the goofy grin on her face. Han would always always, put her welfare above all considerations. Even if it meant he would have to fight her. It was his most endearing, and annoying trait. That he met her head to head, and never gave an inch. “I love you,” she said happily.

Han blinked and then shook his head “You are the strangest woman,” he muttered.

Leia leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek. She could feel the heat of his blush under her
lips, and she wondered if it was the confession of love or the rapt audience behind him that made him embarrassed.

Slowly, she turned around to face said audience. Papa definitely wasn’t happy, but the rest of them didn’t even try to hide their fascination.

Leia could feel Han start to move back to his spot on the wall. She wavered with herself for one moment, then thought, screw it. It wasn’t like everyone in this room didn’t already know how embarrassingly in love with Han she was. She reached behind her and grabbed one of his hands before he could move out of her reach. She gave a gentle tug, not even looking at him, but giving him the choice to walk away if he wished.

Han didn’t say another word, just came up behind her, and firmly wrapped his arms around her waist. She might be feeling steadier on her feet, but that didn’t mean she wasn’t aware that she could use Han’s support quite literally at her back.

She stared at the Togruta, whose was looking at the two of them with a fond look on her face. Perhaps Leia should start with something easy. And frankly, she didn’t understand how Ahsoka thought anything she had just done was all that “off.”

“What do you mean by impossible?” Leia asked. “I just used the Force to reinforce my energy levels.”

Ahsoka’s fond expression melted away, and her forehead furrowed in confusion. Comprehension came quickly, and the Togruta’s face filled with awe and not a little fear.

Obi-Wan had that look on his face the day he caught her and Luke running in synch for the first time, so Leia tried not to take it too personally, for all that she didn’t understand why this seemed to upset Ahsoka so much. But as the silence went on, and Ahsoka didn’t answer, she grew annoyed. Alright, no answers from that quarter.

Leia swung her gaze to Obi-Wan “Explain,” she demanded, “What I just did was similar to what Luke, the other Luke,” she clarified as everyone’s gaze swung to the Luke that was in the room. She really needed to start using nicknames or something. It was entirely too easy for everyone to assume she was talking about the wrong version of someone. “This is something he taught me. How to use the Force to stay refreshed if I didn’t get enough sleep.” She frowned at Obi-Wan “I know that was part of his formal Jedi training.”

Obi-Wan shook his head “No Leia, that is not the problem. The fact that you accessed the Force when you could barely think was.”

Now Luke was frowning “What do you mean?” he asked.

“You used the Light Side of the Force,” Ahsoka said, voice trembling in awe. “As upset and angry as you were, there was no trace of the Dark Side in what you did.”

Leia looked at Luke, who should have more grounding in the technicalities of Jedi training then she had at this point. He looked just as baffled as Leia felt.

“Why would there be?” Leia asked.

Rex cleared his throat, and spoke up “For those of us who are not Force-sensitives,” he gestured to Papa and Mama, “and feel like we’ve just stumbled into a language we don’t speak, can someone explain what you all are talking about?”
“A Jedi accesses the Force when he is calm,” Obi-Wan said, his voice falling into a cadence suggesting this was something that he had said many, many, many times. Knowing what she did of Vader’s stubbornness, it didn’t surprise Leia that this was a lesson that had to be repeated often.

“At peace.”

“Which Leia was not,” Rex said “Okay, so what? She is very powerful, isn’t she? Wouldn’t more power mean that connection to the Force is wider, therefore not require as much effort to get to it?”

Obi-Wan just stared at Rex, “Uh, yes,” he said finally, looking as if Rex had just shaken his world upside down.

“But Anakin was as powerful, if not more so, then Leia,” Ahsoka protested, “He couldn’t, or didn’t, do anything like what I just felt.”

Leia frowned. “But that doesn’t make any sense. It’s just a matter of letting the Force in,” she said. “I don’t need to call anything. If anything, I need to concentrate to keep it out.” Obi-Wan and Ahsoka stared at her. Leia waved her hand in the air, “The Force is all around us,” she said. “It’s not like it’s a pet that has a long way to come and won’t hear you if you speak softly. It’s sitting at your feet, begging to be played with.”

Luke let out a bark of laughter at the analogy, but neither Obi-Wan or Ahsoka looked like they understood what she was saying. Leia sighed “I see why you need to be centered if you want to do something complicated, or a task that requires a lot of power. If you aren’t focused, and calm,” she said tipping her head to Obi-Wan to acknowledge his previous point “you are channeling a lot of power, with no real way to control it. You could really hurt yourself, or someone else. But that wasn’t what I was doing.”

She frowned at Obi-Wan, were they speaking of the same thing and using different words again? “I am understanding what I did correctly, right?” she asked him “Most Force sensitives can pull on the Force for energy? Hell, the way Luke explained it to me, even people who are mildly sensitive to the Force, and not trained, can do it without realizing it.”

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said slowly “It can be an instinctive thing.”

“So, what’s the problem?” Leia asked, “I don’t see why you need to be calm to let something that wants to be let in.”

“You can’t do that!” Ahsoka insisted. “You can’t separate the mind and the body like that.”

Leia frowned “I don’t understand,” she said. “I did no such thing.”

Ahsoka looked frustrated, but it was Luke who spoke up “I think Ahsoka is confusing letting your anger go into the Force and using the Force to calm yourself.”

Mama asked, fascinated “What’s the difference?”

Ahsoka turned to Mama “A Jedi can let their emotions go into the Force. It’s something we do regularly during meditation. A way of purging excess, and allowing ourselves to hear the Force without the interference of our own wants and needs influencing our perceptions.” She looked back at Leia, “But you used the Force to calm yourself. I would have said that was impossible. That if you tried to do it that way, instead of releasing all that emotion into the Force, you would create a feedback loop.”

Leia looked at Luke “I never looked at it that way. I just thought it was using the Force to return my body to my baseline state.”
Luke looked back, startled, “Neither did I,” he said.

“I guess I did do that,” she said wonderingly to Ahsoka, “Although that wasn’t what I was trying to do. I used the Force to stabilize the chemicals in my head to counteract the after-effects of the adrenaline surge.” Ahsoka blinked at her “I wouldn’t say I used the Force to find “calm.” It’s just that one of the happy side effects was that my mood immediately stabilized.”

“You weren’t trying to find calm?” Ahsoka asked.

Leia shook her head “No, I know better than that. I’m still angry, but I’m in a better position to control it.”

“You can’t just control it,” Obi-Wan insisted. “Anger leads to chaos, and poor decision making. The Light Side of the Force resists chaos.”

Leia frowned, “No it doesn’t.”

Ahsoka shook her head “Obi-Wan is right, the Dark Side is chaos. The Light is order.”

Now it was both Leia and Luke’s mouths that dropped open “I’m sorry?” Luke asked, voice going high.

“The Light Side of the Force,” Ahsoka said, gesturing behind her. Leia felt Han’s breath catch as the chair came up and righted itself with no hands visibly moving it. “Oh, it’s not a perfect order,” she allowed as she sank into her now upright chair, “But there is a logic to its rivers and eddies. A pattern if you wish,” She shuddered, “But the Dark Side, there is no pattern. There is no logic. It is just chaos and destruction. That is why it is in opposition of the Light Side.”

Leia blinked “What Force are you listening to?” she asked. “Because that is not what I see. All I get is a massive rolling ocean that moves to its own whims. It’s nothing but chaos.”

“For me too,” Luke chimed in. “I feel it more like a giant storm on the horizon, but there is nothing calm about it. Maybe if you were looking at it from far away, it would look small, but up close.” Luke shuddered, “It’s nowhere I would venture too deep in without a voice to call me home.”

Leia’s eyes narrowed at the back of Luke’s head. And just how had her baby brother learned that lesson. What was he doing on his own, without Obi-Wan’s observation?

“But Anakin never mentioned anything like that.” Ahsoka insisted, looking at Obi-Wan for confirmation “We meditated together many times. He didn’t feel anything like what Leia just did.”

Obi-Wan’s voice was very small “Oh.” They all turned to look at him. Obi-Wan’s eyes closed, and Leia was surprised to see a tear slip down his cheek.

“Obi-Wan?” Ahsoka asked.

Obi-Wan didn’t say anything. Leia didn’t understand what conclusion the old Jedi had drawn. Her twin, on the other hand, was looking at the older man in horror.

“He didn’t feel that way with Ahsoka because you taught Father that was the Dark Side,” Luke whispered, voice dawning in horror, “Because he did meditate with you when he was younger, and you didn’t understand he was hearing things you couldn’t. Seeing things, you couldn’t. Because the entire Jedi order said it wasn’t possible.” Luke’s voice was rising in both volume and intensity “You taught him to cut himself off from the true depth of the Light Side of the Force. No,” and now Luke’s voice was shaking “even worse than that, you told him it was the Dark Side.”
“Yes,” Obi-Wan whispered. “I did.” His eyes opened, and he looked Luke full in the face “The Light never felt like that for me. I thought it was because he was raised outside of the temple. I thought it was because he carried so much anger and had never been taught to control it.”

“What he understood of controlling his anger is beyond anything you know,” Luke spat. “Do you have any idea what it is like to know that everything you are, your talents, your time, everything, belongs to another? To not be able to choose anything. The food you eat, the clothes you wear. To know that any day your owner could sell you away from your family?”

Luke’s back had gone rigid, and in the Force, Leia could feel him standing on the edge of a dangerous chasm. She sent a flow of love and support to him, reminding him he wasn’t alone in this.

Luke’s voice didn’t lose its fiery edge, but in the Force, Leia could feel him step back from saying something that would break something permanently in Obi-Wan. “Children need love. Children need stability,” Luke said, “And what he had was knowing every day could have been his last because of someone else’s whims. Do you have any idea what that is like?”

Obi-Wan had gone very pale “No,” he whispered.

Luke’s voice was tight “I don’t either. Because I was fortunate enough to be born free, if really poor. But Uncle Owen never let me forget the cost someone he loved bore because of slavery.” Leia could feel Luke’s contempt roll around him “And unlike you, I wasn’t given the option of hiding in the deserts of Tatooine and ignoring the look in people’s eyes who were controlled in such a manner.”

He leaned forward, “So, I ask you, Ben, all those years ago, when you meditated with Father, was what you felt in the Force, did it feel like the Dark Side?”

Obi-Wan’s face contorted through so many emotions Leia couldn’t even begin to identify them all. He then said in a small voice “No.”

“So, because it never occurred to you that perhaps because you didn’t understand a thing, you taught him to doubt his own senses?” Leia’s voice joined Luke.

She didn’t care about the Vader of now. But even she couldn’t look away from the horror of this. To be a child, and to be taught by the adult he trusted the most, that how he saw the Force was wrong, shook her to her core. Leia had spent most of her life ignoring the Force, but she had never once, been told to doubt what she was feeling. To be told something that was so much intertwined into her life, whether she wanted it to or not, that it led to Darkness. No, not only that but, evil. What had it cost him to cut himself off from the Force like that? She couldn’t even imagine what that had done to Vader’s perceptions of wrong and right.


“As Han said, I don’t care about meant, I care about what you did,” Luke’s voice was full of cold fury.

Obi-Wan slumped in his chair, “I did ask Luke,” he said “I was young, and just days out of my own apprenticeship. Nobody disagreed with my assessment.”

“Oh great,” Han muttered from behind Leia “Not only did Vader think it was wrong, he knew everyone else knew it was too.”

“Did you set him up to fail?” Leia’s voice was furious. And yes, she was angry at Obi-Wan for his
blatant disregard of sense, but she was also furious because she was angry on Vader’s behalf.

“Of course not!” Obi-Wan said, almost shouting. “There is nothing I wouldn’t have done to help Anakin.”

“Did he know that?” Leia prodded.

“Of course, I-“ Obi-Wan said hotly.

Luke cut him off, challenge in every word “Did you use your words, Ben? Or did you leave it to baffling actions and vague platitudes? Because I can tell you now, I’m nineteen, and I find them confusing.”

Obi-Wan stopped speaking. He closed his eyes briefly for a moment, thinking. Then in a grief-filled voice, he said “I mean I always assumed-”

“That would be a no,” Han said.

“You set him apart from his peers Obi-Wan,” Mama said gently. “You isolated him from every support group except yourself.”

“And Palpatine,” Leia hissed. “Let’s not forget that.”

“I knew he had trouble making friends,” Obi-Wan looked at all of them “But I thought it was because he was so different from everyone else. That his life experiences weren’t anything any of the other children understood.” His hands flexed nervously “But he wasn’t ostracized. He wasn’t. The Jedi would never have condoned cruelty to him in any way.”

Obi-Wan was being remarkably naive about children, Leia thought bitterly, and how clever they are from hiding things from the adults around them. “Children are children,” Leia said “And I don’t care how advanced they are in whatever you were teaching them, they need to be shown manners. And since it appears a good deal of the Temple was reacting to Vader like he was a freak, they took their cue from the adults.”

Ahsoka looked away. So, she was aware of Vader’s isolation in the Order. If her uncomfortable look was anything to go by, it carried over to Vader’s adulthood. Even if Obi-Wan seemed to have blinded himself to it.

“I-“ Obi-Wan shook his head “We had to be careful,” he said, putting up both hands in a pleading gesture, “He was the Chosen One.”

Luke’s fury didn’t abate with those words. Mama, Papa, and Rex only looked confused. Ahsoka looked bitter, but Leia, Leia had heard that term before. When Obi-Wan was drunk, he had said he thought Vader was destined to destroy the Sith because he was the Chosen One. “Explain that,” she demanded.

Obi-Wan looked at her, helplessly, “There was an old Jedi prophecy, from at least a hundred years before the Sith Wars, but probably older, that a Chosen One would be born. That he would bring….” His eyes slid to Luke, and there was such a haunted look there as he looked at her brother “balance to the Force.”

Leia frowned “Balance meaning what?”

“That he would destroy the Sith,” Obi-Wan said.
Luke shook his head “Did it actually say that he would destroy the Sith, or was it interpreted that way?” It appeared Luke was taking to heart her warning to be careful when interrogating Obi-Wan.

“Interpreted,” Obi-Wan said.

Ahsoka shook her head, “Not everyone believed that Obi-Wan,” she said.

Obi-Wan turned to her, startled. She gave him a sad smile “I was very young at the time,” she said, “But I remember it being talked about. The creche masters were very divided on the subject.” She frowned “And so were a lot of the Jedi initiates.”

Mama blinked “Didn’t you ever take him to a mind healer Obi-Wan?” she asked, looking at him concerned.

Obi-Wan shook his head, “There was no need. We have the Force.”

Papa looked askance at him “Obi-Wan,” he said “Dealing with a trauma like that, it’s not something you can just release into the Force. In this case, people are people, and trauma is trauma. It takes years of therapy to undo something like that. And that was nothing the Jedi were equipped to deal with.”

“We dealt with plenty of slaves,” Obi-Wan’s voice was cutting, “Despite what it looked like, we weren’t staying in the temple doing nothing. Even before the war, we were dangerously stretched thin.” His voice became bitter “And there were so many problems the Senate didn’t want to deal with, so they sent us, instead of trying to address the root of the problem.”

Papa shook his head “I didn’t mean to imply that you were living in ignorance Obi-Wan. But you just said it yourself, the Jedi didn’t deal with the long-term issues. The Order might have freed a good deal of those people, but that was where your involvement ended. It was left to others to pick up the pieces, you can’t just set a group of people free who have been living in bondage, and expect it to go well.”

“So, what you are saying is that the Jedi were useless,” Obi-Wan spat.

Mama’s voice was soothing, and she reached up to touch Obi-Wan’s shoulder “You were not useless,” she said gently “But what those people needed was beyond your ability to provide.”

“Have a lot of experience with ex-slaves?” Luke’s voice was cutting as he addressed Mama and Papa.

Papa looked at him, “Yes,” he said simply “We have quite a large population of them on Alderaan.” His mouth twisted bitterly “Although the Empire would insist that there is no such thing as slavery anymore.”


Papa looked at him sadly “There is a lot in my life that I didn’t do well,” He nodded in Leia’s direction “But that work, that is something I can look back on with pride.”

“At least you did something,” Luke muttered bitterly looking at Obi-Wan pointed “Instead of hiding in a hovel.”

“Luke-“ Ahsoka started to say, but Obi-Wan put a hand up stopping her.

“I couldn’t help anyone on Tatooine Luke,” Obi-Wan said softly. “I had to blend in.” His eyes
looked haunted, “And you will never know what that cost me.”

This was a decision that Leia would defend with everything in her. Yes, it was rooted in the personal, but if you weren’t willing to care about the people around you, how would you be able to care for the nameless billions in the galaxy? “He was protecting you, Luke,” Leia whispered into the Force.

“So I could rebuild the Jedi order,” Luke shot back, an edge of whining in it.

He really was nineteen sometimes. Leia gently raked his outer most shield, the closest thing she could do in the Force to thwacking him on the head. “No, because he loved Vader. You and I were all that was left of his friend. He wanted to protect that. And then he grew to love you, and wanted to protect you for you.”

Han cleared his throat “Share,” he demanded, tightening his arms across Leia’s waist, bringing her back into the physical world “because the rest of us can’t hear you.”

Ahsoka looked at her and Luke “You were just now talking to each other? Mind to mind?” she asked them breathlessly.

“Yes,” they both said in unison.

“But I didn’t feel anything in the Force,” Ahsoka whispered, “It was always obvious when one of the Masters did it, even if you couldn’t hear what was being said.” She turned her head to look at Obi-Wan “Are they for real?” Ahsoka breathed.

Obi-Wan’s grin was quick and sudden “Yes, they most certainly are.”


Ahsoka shook her head “The council would have had fits.”

“Forget the council,” Obi-Wan muttered “Jocasta’s head would have exploded. She would demand to know why nobody, in the entirety of the Jedi order, thought to write this down.”


“How easy you two find it to communicate with each other,” Obi-Wan said, “According to every record the Jedi had, the Force doesn’t work this way.”

Luke’s voice was confused “But it does work this way. And aren’t you the one who is always saying I should trust in the Force? That anything is possible.”

“Yes,” Obi-Wan’s face became sad, “Easier said than done I’m afraid. And a lesson I learned later in life.” He looked thoughtful “And knowing the two of you, and hearing what the other Luke taught his students, I think that part of the reason the Jedi Order had so much trouble with this, is because we believed that it should be difficult.”

“Like me using the Force to calm myself down?” Leia asked.

Obi-Wan’s expression went immediately from thoughtful to disappointed. “What you did was dangerous,” he warned, “At some point, you have to confront this.”

“I am, Obi-Wan,” she gestured to the room around them “Why do you think I am here, instead of enjoying one of Han’s frankly amazing back rubs on the Falcon?”
“It doesn’t work that way,” Obi-Wan insisted.

“As long as my anger doesn’t leak into the Force, why not?” Leia challenged the older man “Yes, I have a temper, but that doesn’t mean I’m helpless in its path. As long as I don’t use the Dark Side of the Force, I don’t see the problem.”

“But that’s why you need to release it into the Force, because one day it will consume you,” Obi-Wan insisted.

“Why not just go to a mind healer?” Han’s voice asked, “Why make things more difficult with all the mystical stuff?”

Obi-Wan shook his head “We can’t. The Force makes processing emotions very different for those who can hear it. The traditional methods mind healers teach can, in fact, be counter-productive in reaching balance.”

Leia arched an eyebrow at him. “Really? I’ve found them nothing but helpful.”

Everyone in the room swiveled to look at her. Even Han, who moved enough so that he was now essentially peering over her shoulder to look her in the face.

“What?” Leia asked.

“You?” Rex asked in a voice that was strained with incredulity. “You went to a mind healer? Were you ordered to?”

“Or did you lose a bet?” Luke asked.

“Neither!” Leia snapped, her shoulders hunching defensively.

“Quiet,” Mama said, her voice deadly calm. Immediately all the teasing in the air fell away. Leia wished, for the millionth time, she could command room in that cold, polite way. The only way she ever seemed to capture people’s undivided attention was when she was yelling.

“Leia,” Mama said, her hands coming up to clasp together in front of her face. She took a deep breath in and let it out slowly. “Are you saying that would go to a mind healer now, in this time?”

“Yes,” Leia said, chin coming up “If not for the small problem that the second I confess that I am a time traveler, the poor soul would think I was mad. And even worse, I would be removed from active duty.”

“Oh, that’s the worst of it,” Han muttered so quietly, Leia doubted anyone else could hear him. She lightly stepped on his boot. Not enough to hurt him, but enough to make sure he understood she heard what he said, and was not pleased.

“Perhaps you could omit certain things?” Obi-Wan suggested.

Leia rolled her eyes, “That would defeat the purpose of going Obi-Wan. The whole point is to be honest, as much as you can, and get an outside perspective on ways to cope.” She laid her hands over Han’s, still wrapped around her waist, wanting the reassurance of his touch, “Provided that you are seeking relief from a temporary problem. I don’t know what long-term healing of that kind entails.”

Leia glared at him, “Contrary to what you all think, I do actually know how to take care of myself.”

Rex gaped at her “With what evidence are you claiming that?”

Leia threw her arms up in frustration “I know it doesn’t look it, but trust me, I aware of how….precarious my mental health is these days.”

“Really?” Mama looked like a terrible burden had been lifted from her shoulders. It suddenly occurred to Leia that perhaps a lot of her mother’s worry over her was her belief that Leia didn’t understand how fragile she really was right now.

“Yes,” Leia said softly, gulping as the guilt hit her “I didn’t say anything, because there is no point in complaining about something that I can’t fix. I can’t see a mind healer, and it would do no one any good if I had a breakdown in the middle of the base. All I can do is put one step in front of the other, and focus on my work.”

Mama didn’t look terribly reassured by that, neither did Papa. “Why did you go to a mind healer Leia in your past?” Mama asked, her eyes serious.

Leia looked at her, then her shoulders slumped. “After Ben was born,” she confessed “I was having nightmares every night. I kept dreaming that someone would come into my room and steal him, and I was paralyzed and couldn’t stop them. Some nights it was Vader, sometimes the Emperor, sometimes just a faceless creature.”

She rubbed her hands over her face “Then I would have dreams that I was back on the bridge of the Death Star watching Alderaan explode, only this time I knew, I knew, that both Han and Ben were on it.”

Ahsoka gave a long slow blink “Alderaan exploded?”

Leia looked at the woman, voice grim “In the original version of my past, it was destroyed before we could strike at the Death Star.”

Ahsoka’s orange face paled to an almost tan color, “Oh,” she breathed.

Leia shrugged “Between the nightmares, and the fact that Ben was a fussy baby, I wasn’t sleeping.”

“That’s when the other Luke taught you isn’t it?” Luke asked, turning around in his chair, so he could look her straight in the face “How to combat tiredness with the Force.” He leaned back a little “I had wondered about that.”

“Why?” Leia asked, “It’s a very useful trick.”

Obi-Wan snorted, “Leia, even I know you are, at best, ambivalent about using the Force in any way. I imagine everything you did learn was done in the interest of control, and anything you found useful in your day to day life. It never would have occurred to you to ask Luke about using the Force that way, unlike say, the ability to move quickly, or move objects.” His lips twitched “You are a very practical woman, and watching Luke use such skills in battle, it would have been very evident to you the usefulness of it, and you would want to learn it. Using the Force to combat tiredness, while useful, is not nearly as flashy.”

Leia nodded, it wasn’t like either of them were wrong. The only reason she was even further now than she had been then, was because of Vader. If he had been conveniently dead when she came
back to this time, she wouldn’t have bothered. “But that was only a temporary solution, and I knew it. So, I sought a mind healer.”

She looked at Mama, “I saw her for about a year,” She grimaced, remembering her comment to Obi-Wan about honesty “I didn’t tell her that Vader was my biological father—”

“There is a surprise,” Luke muttered, and Leia shot a glare at him.

“I came to terms with it,” she hissed.

His face was nothing but patient resignation, “Leia, you are still coming to terms with it.”

Leia opened her mouth to dispute that, and then thought of what prompted this fresh wave of honesty from her in the first place. She gently shut her mouth. He was right, she was still grappling with this. But she hadn’t been living in denial in the future with what she had come to terms with. She hadn’t been.

“I came to terms with it as much as I could with him dead,” she allowed “When he was beyond my ability to scream at.”

Luke’s eyes crinkled in thought for a moment, then he gave a short nod of his head “Fair enough,” he allowed.

“Anyway,” she said, trying to steer this conversation away from that particular subject “While I didn’t reveal my relation to Vader, she did know that Anakin Skywalker was my father. I could pass a lot of my fears about Vader and the Emperor, of being very afraid for my Force Sensitive child.”

“And Alderaan?” Mama asked. “Did you ever come to accept that it wasn’t your fault?”

Leia looked at her Mama and wondered at how well the woman knew her. Thirty years of experience Mama had missed in Leia’s life, and she still managed to see right through Leia and cut to the heart of the matter. Family wasn’t just blood, it was also people who knew and saw the core of who you were.

“On some days,” Leia confessed “And some days I couldn’t breathe for all the guilt. But as time went on, the bad days became less and less frequent.” Then she gave Mama a wide happy grin, “And then I got the chance to change it all.”

“No matter the cost to yourself?” Papa asked voice worried.

Leia looked at him, “I didn’t ask for this,” she said “I didn’t seek it. I don’t even understand how it happened. It’s done. And I will take what I can out of all of this and make the best out of it.”

Papa looked worried “What I’m hearing is that you sought help because you were failing someone else. You didn’t seek it for yourself.”

Leia glared at him “Does it matter why I did it? Only that I did.”

“You have to admit Leia,” Obi-Wan’s voice was dry as the desert “your version of ‘fine’ is very skewed.”

Leia glared at him “You’re one to talk.”

Ahsoka looked back and forth between the two of them. “What does that mean?” she asked.
Leia shut her mouth. She wasn’t going to be the one who blabbed.

Rex though, Rex had no problems ratting the old Jedi out “He can’t stand to be in crowded spaces. He wakes up screaming from nightmares. He will help plan, but won’t join in any battle. He can barely be persuaded to leave this base because he is terrified of encountering strangers on another planet—”

“Wait,” Han broke in “he came to Cymoon 1 with us. And Grakkus’ arena.”

Rex shrugged “Grakkus was to save what was left of the Jedi holocrons. Cymoon 1 was to protect Luke and Leia.” Rex glared at Obi-Wan “For a purpose, he will leave if he has a mission.”

“You found holocrons?” Ahsoka breathed in amazement. “As in plural? In the last nineteen years, I’ve only come across two.”

Obi-Wan shook his head, “No, Leia was the one who told me where they were.” A small smile twitched his mouth “Also part of the Jedi archives, and quite a few lightsabers were there.” Then he glared back at Rex, “And I told you, I don’t leave this planet because it’s not safe.” A mulish look crossed his face “I will allow no one to die trying to protect me, Rex.”

Luke started “What do you mean?”

Obi-Wan looked at Luke sadly “I’m the last Jedi Luke,” he waved his hand before Luke could dispute that, “You are an apprentice, and yes, you are on your way to becoming a Jedi, but you are not there yet. But as far as the Alliance is concerned I’m the only one that has survived,” he looked thoughtfully at Ahsoka “At least the only one who survived who is willing to call himself a Jedi.”

“You know why I don’t Obi-Wan,” Ahsoka said, face drawing in on herself.

“Another failure on the part of the council, but yes, I am aware why.” Obi-Wan’s bitterness surprised Leia. He normally wasn’t this forthright about the problems that the Order had.

Rex’s voice grew demanding “What do you mean, as far as the Alliance is concerned” he looked at Ahsoka, “Who else is there?”

Ahsoka shook her head, “No one I know of.”

“General?” Rex said softly. Leia bit her lip, wondering what Obi-Wan was going to do. He stared at Rex, then slid his eyes to Ahsoka.

“Yoda,” he said softly “Yoda is still alive.”

Ahsoka’s eyes closed and she rested her head on the table. Rex had the opposite reaction, and jumped out of his chair, beginning to pace back and forth. “Yoda!” he demanded, still walking back and forth. “Yoda is still alive? Are you sure?”

Obi-Wan nodded his head “I’m sure Rex. He’s the one I gave what we recovered from Grakkus to.”

Ahsoka lifted her head “I saw him,” she said sadly “I saw a vision of him in the temple on Lothal, but I thought it was just the Force, taking a form I would trust, I never thought—“ she bit her words off.

“Why isn’t he here?” Rex demanded “Why is he hiding on,” he looked between Obi-Wan and Leia “wherever he is?”
“He fought Palpatine Rex,” Obi-Wan looked tired. “The day I went to confront Anakin on Mustafar, he went after Palpatine.”

Rex’s face contorted, and he came back to his chair, sinking into it heavily “He lost,” he said tiredly.

Obi-Wan nodded “Yes, he was lucky to escape with his life. Between that and Order 66….” Obi-Wan shook his head. “Something broke in him, Rex. Something I’m not sure has healed, even now.”

“And even if we ignored that, I still think it was wiser for you both to go into hiding,” Papa said. He looked at Rex “You remember the first years of the Empire, Rex.”

Mama shook her head “Most people were so relieved that the fighting was over, they were willing to accept any government as long as they restored order.”

“The Core and Mid-Rims did,” Ahsoka said sharply “but I spent a lot of time on former Separatist worlds, they were not nearly as happy.”

“Yes,” Papa said, “The Empire was happy to go after those worlds first to get what they wanted.” He leaned back in his chair, “The Alliance was only a handful of people, if that. There were some rebel groups still fighting.”

“Like Cham Syndulla,” Rex muttered darkly.

Papa nodded his head towards the clone, acknowledging the point, “But they had no reason to trust me, or any of us.” He looked at Rex, “As much as I hate to say it, there is no way we could have protected Yoda or Obi-Wan in those first days, even in those first years. We needed to withdraw, take stock, and make plans. You saw the resources the Empire brought to hunt down the rest of the Jedi, imagine what would have happened if it was known two council members survived.”

Mama shook her head “It took us years to get to the point where any of those fringe groups was even willing to trust us with the most basic information.”

“And I did much of that work,” Ahsoka said “I’m not questioning why Yoda, or Obi-Wan went into hiding. What I want to know is why he is staying there now.”

Obi-Wan looked at Ahsoka, “In case I die,” he said. “There needs to be a backup teacher for Luke.”

“Which is why you say you won’t leave the planet,” Rex growled. “And I’m not saying that isn’t part of it, but it’s not the whole reason either.” Leia wondered when this conversation had gone from her issues into Obi-Wan’s. Not that she minded, but Rex would be beating his head against that particular wall for a while.

“Why does it matter?” Obi-Wan asked.

Rex’s eyes narrowed “Because I don’t just want you to survive Obi-Wan, I want you to thrive. And you aren’t doing yourself any favors by lying to yourself about why you won’t leave Yavin.”

Obi-Wan opened his mouth to speak, but Rex didn’t let him “I know things went crazy on Cymoon 1, but you can’t blame yourself for that. It’s not like you knew Vader was going to show up.”

Obi-Wan’s eyes flicked to Leia. If it had been anyone else but Rex, that small motion would have gone unnoticed. But Rex had been trained to deal with Jedi, and he knew Obi-Wan’s tells.
Rex turned his head, and those golden eyes landed on Leia. Leia couldn’t contain the flinch from the accusation in them. “You knew that Vader was going to be there?” he asked in a very dangerous sounding voice.

“Not exactly,” Leia muttered.

“Explain, ‘not exactly’” Rex pressed.

Leia felt Han squeeze her hands, “The Cymoon 1 mission happened in my original past, and yes, Vader was there that time. But,” she stressed “this time it happened months earlier. There was a good chance Vader wouldn’t be sent to do the negotiations because he was still in disgrace with the Emperor over the destruction of the Death Star.”

Rex just stared at her, jaw clenching and unclenching.

“Okay,” Ahsoka said, staring at Leia in disbelief, “I think Vader might be right about you needing someone to protect you.”

“I’m not dead!” Leia protested.

Ahsoka shook her head “You know he is after you to an obsessive degree. You knew there was a chance he could be there? And yet you still went?”

“It was for the Rebellion,” Leia protested. “I knew how important it was for that facility to be destroyed!”

Ahsoka looked around the room, “I would bet my life that no one in this room agrees with you on that.”

“I still didn’t die!” Leia said again, and Han’s grip immediately tightened around her.

“By the grace of all the Gods,” Papa said, “Only by the grace of all the Gods, and Captain Solo’s quick thinking. If you had been delayed medical treatment even by an hour, you would have died. As it was, you spent three days in a bacta tank and two more after that in an artificial coma. So, don’t you dare brush this off as nothing.”

Papa’s face was bitter, and drawn in. Leia swallowed hard. “I’m not the only one who has been sitting on my anger have I?” she asked softly.

“No,” he said softly “Apparently you are not.” He flexed his fingers for a moment, then looked her in the eyes “And if even Vader can see that you are being reckless, I don’t understand how you are missing it.”

“It’s not that,” Leia said, trying to reassure them.

“It’s not?” Mama looked dubious. “Then why did you think it was a good idea to conceal from us that Vader knew about Ben?”

Leia couldn’t keep her wince to herself. Mama’s eyes narrowed. “That is all you are keeping from us regarding that conversation isn’t it?” she asked.

Leia almost said “Yes,” automatically, then frowned. She didn’t like thinking about what happened in that cell. She didn’t like remembering she had been that physically close to Vader again. But Mama deserved a truthful answer, more than that, a thoughtful answer. She rubbed her forehead, trying to recall about what they “talked” about. She told him she was from the future, her refusal to
name her tutor, Obi-Wan’s survival on Tatooine, Ben, Han’s death, Vader’s death at Palpatine’s hands. But Mama already knew all that.

“He knows his alternate tortured me,” she said through the thick clog in her throat. She shivered, and on instinct let her head fall back onto Han’s chest, reveling in the fact that he was here. “He knows Ben killed Han, but he doesn’t have either of their names.” And that was something that wasn’t going to last forever. Vader was on the search for Han now. Hopefully, he conducted this search with a little bit more finesse than his manhunt for her.

“That explains the orders to protect the husband,” Ahsoka muttered, “he knew what it would do to you to lose him again.”

“And that’s it?” Mama’s voice was sharp. “Nothing else happened in that cell?”

“I almost killed him,” Leia bit her tongue. That wasn’t anything that Leia had known then. At least not from any conversation in that cell. Leia had learned that later. From Vader himself.

“Leia….” Mama’s voice was deadly soft, “What else are you hiding?”

Leia jumped a bit, “Nothing,” she said, “That’s everything I told him in that cell.”

Mama’s eyes narrowed “You are no better at lying to me now than when you were fifteen. What aren’t you telling me?”

“Leia?” Luke’s voice was hesitant. “Now is not the time to play coy.”


“Then what are you hiding?”

“Things that Vader told me about that conversation afterward.”

“Oh,” Luke’s mental voice was tinged with understanding and guilt. And those feelings showed enough on his face to get Obi-Wan’s attention. His eyes narrowed in on Luke. Luke, who was a terrible liar, and never really learned how to keep his thoughts off his face in the moment.

“Whatever she is not sharing, Luke is well aware of it,” Obi-Wan’s voice held a hint of accusation. Behind her Han hissed through his teeth, “Do any of you have any manners?” he sputtered, “This conversation was supposed to be about Leia, not interrogating Luke.”

“Solo knows too,” Rex said, arms crossing over his chest.

“And just what are the three of you so desperately trying to conceal?” Papa asked, his polite tone doing nothing to hide the worry and fury in his eyes.

Leia could feel Han tensing behind her, and Luke’s shoulders slumped.

“Tell them, Leia,” Luke’s voice was gentle in her head.

“What good would that do?” she hissed back.

“Leia,” his voice was sad, “Isn’t this what brought us all here in the first place? Secrets and lies?” He flicked a glance at Obi-Wan and her parents, sitting across from him, then his head turned to Rex. “You value your relationships with all of them too much to lie to them now.”
Leia felt her back tense, and Han leaned forward, murmuring in her ear “You going to back down now Princess?”

She let out a long sigh, no, no she was not. “I almost killed him in that cell,” she said, voice emotionless. “I lost control of myself in the Force, and I almost killed him.”

All of them, including Ahsoka, looked at each other in confusion.

“All not good,” Obi-Wan said slowly “it is an understandable action. I fail to see why this was considered such a secret.”

Mama’s head cocked, “Why didn’t you tell us this on the Falcon when we were coming to Yavin? Obi-Wan is right, it makes no sense for you to conceal this. You have made no secret of your contempt for Vader.”

Leia shifted her gaze away from her mother and stared intently at the table. “Because I didn’t know I had hurt him that badly when we were on the Falcon.”

Papa’s voice was sharp “And how did you find out?”

Leia took a deep breath in, “Because Vader told me,” She looked up, and met Obi-Wan’s horrified face “He has gotten into my head.”

Obi-Wan blinked, and so help her if he told her that was impossible, she was going to throw something.

It was Ahsoka who asked “How many times Leia?”

“Fully?” Leia asked, “Three.”

“More training,” Obi-Wan muttered, “You said you wanted more training because he was so loud.” He shook his head “That wasn’t the real reason was it?”

“He is very loud,” Leia said, “I wasn’t lying about that. He nearly deafened me over the Death Star with his shouting.”

“Leia,” Papa warned.

Leia gulped hard, “No,” she admitted, “That wasn’t the only reason why.”

Mama’s face was nearly white “What did he want?” she whispered.

Leia shrugged “The first time all he wanted was to ask questions about my “kidnapping.” That was when I realized I couldn’t consistently keep him out.” She nodded her head to Obi-Wan “Your shielding technique worked though.”

“No well enough,” Obi-Wan looked at her. “That is the first time Leia. You said he got in three times.”

Leia went back to staring at the table, “After I was shot on Cymoon 1,” she admitted, “He was trying to make sure I was still alive.” She looked up and gave Papa a grim smile, “He wasn’t any happier then you were about what happened there.”

Papa shot to his feet, and paced, his hands clasped behind his back. He stopped looked at her, then apparently thought better of whatever he was going to say. His eyes closed, and he sighed heavily, “Please don’t joke about this Leia,” he pleaded.
“I have to,” Leia said, “Or I will go mad.”

“The third time?” Mama’s voice was hushed.

Leia shifted “When I had the flu,” she said.

Ahsoka looked away, and then back at Leia, “What does he know?” she asked.

Leia shifted on her feet, “Possibly the location of a future Rebel Base, and the planet I was using for the Resistance.”

“Not about the Rebellion Leia,” Ahsoka’s eyes were grim “That is an afterthought for him. What does he know about you? And everyone in this room?”

Leia closed her eyes, thinking about the things she had let slip, and the questions she had answered. “He knows how old I am,” she said “That Han and Luke are two different people. He knows that Mama, Papa, and Obi-Wan died in my original timeline.” She met Mama’s eyes “That you never lived to see your grandson.”

Mama’s eyes closed “He knows about what happened to Alderaan?”

Leia shook her head “No. At least I didn’t tell him, but he is very familiar with Tarkin’s methods. It’s not outside the realm of possibility that he guessed.”

“The second worst day of my life.” Vader’s voice rumbled in her mind. Leia frowned, he had never said anything like that to her. In fact, she had said it to him. Where was this coming from?

“Leia?” Rex asked, pulling her mind to the present.

She looked at the clone, “He knows you’re here too,” she said.

Rex grimaced “I can’t imagine he took that well.”

“No,” Leia said, “But he did feel better about you when I told him that Obi-Wan lied to you and said that he killed Anakin.”

Rex shook his head, “How did I even come up?” he asked.

Leia shifted on her feet, “That’s my fault,” she said guilty “He mentioned Hondo, and I asked him who that was. That you had mentioned him too.”

Ahsoka let out a loud laugh “Hondo?” she asked, bewildered “He is still alive?” Oh, look, someone else who knew the mysterious Hondo. Who was this man?

“Unfortunately,” Rex grumbled.

“Okay, who is Hondo?” Leia demanded.

“Leia,” Papa’s voice cut in “Is there anything else?”

Leia looked at him, “He knows you wiped Threepio’s memory,” she said.

Han snorted “Vader cares about a droid? That droid?”

“He built him,” Ahsoka said simply “Anakin always had a soft spot for him.”
Behind her, Han stiffened, “I’m sorry, he did what?”

Leia slapped his hand, delighted. “That was my reaction too,” she said.

“Mine as well,” Luke said with a little laugh.

“I think we are getting a little off topic here,” Papa said. “And I don’t even know how this is relevant.”

Leia swallowed hard “He was pretty mad about it,” she said softly, “In light of the fact that he thinks you kidnapped me, it is pretty minor offense, but he was angry.”

“Why?” Han asked, baffled.

Leia’s voice went soft, recalling Vader’s gentle touch to the Threepio in her mind, “He said Threepio was meant to be a friend, and that you didn’t do that to a friend.”

Papa’s voice was sarcastic, “Well isn’t it nice to know that Vader considers the feelings of droids.”

“You’re one to talk,” Leia muttered.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Papa frowned at her.

Leia straightened in Han’s arms “R2. He deserved to know the truth.”

Papa looked at her frowning. “The droid?”

Ahsoka looked at Bail “You didn’t tell him?” she whispered. “About what happened to Anakin?”

“He blames himself for what happened to Vader. He thought he should have protected him better.” Leia snorted “And knowing everything you know about R2, why didn’t you explain to him what happened?”

“I didn’t—“ Papa started to say, sounding defensive. Then he shook his head and took a deep breath in. “It never occurred to me to tell him otherwise. I never would have left him wondering.”


“And you?” Leia asked Obi-Wan, “Why didn’t you say anything?”

Shame filled his face “You’re right,” he said mournfully “It didn’t occur to me.”

Leia felt a twist of satisfaction at that but stomped it out. She had her own guilt when it came to the little droid. She had known about this for weeks and hadn’t confronted her father about it. All because she had been afraid that if she did, it would open the conversation into her anger at her parents about the lies they told her surrounding the Republic, and the Clone Wars. She wasn’t sure why she was clinging so hard to her self-righteousness here. Everyone in this room had made mistakes that someone else had ultimately paid the price for.

Feeling unsteady, Leia squeezed Han’s hands and loosened them from her waist. She walked back to her abandoned chair at the table and gratefully sat down in it. Han didn’t return to his spot on the wall, instead came up behind her, placing his hands on her shoulders. Sighing she leaned her head down and placed a light kiss on his hands, thanking him for the support.

"I will apologize to him in the morning,” Papa said, following Leia’s cue and sitting down in his own chair.
Leia looked at Ahsoka, thinking of R2’s extreme reaction to her appearance on base. “Please tell me R2 knew you survived Order 66.”

Ahsoka nodded grimly “He knew. He helped me several times in my service as Fulcrum.” Her eyes grew haunted, ‘It was after Malachor where he thought I was dead.”

“Where we all thought you were dead,” Rex said in an a hoarse voice. Ahsoka reached over and squeezed his hands. Rex looked down at their interlocked hands, and gave a grateful smile. Then he turned to Luke and Leia, scowling “I don’t care what these two tell you, you are not allowed to fake your own death.”

Leia’s eyes widened, “I haven’t,” she reassured the clone.

“This is something that happens a lot?” Luke asked, gaze bouncing between Obi-Wan and Ahsoka. Obi-Wan grimaced, and Ahsoka glared at Obi-Wan.

“I only did it once,” she said.

“Twice,” Rex countered.

Ahsoka turned and glared at him “The first time doesn’t count!” she protested “You were there!”

Papa, Mama, and Obi-Wan looked as baffled as Leia. It was Han who spoke up. “Okay, I’ll bite, what are you two talking about?”

“On Mandalore,” Rex said gruffly “After Order 66 went down, and I very clearly wasn’t affected,” he tapped the scar on his forehead “We decided it would be best if we faked our own deaths and went to ground. We buried one of the clones who died that day, and left Ahsoka’s lightsabers there.”

“So, you are telling me that you have also faked your death?” Han asked.

“Maybe,” Rex grunted.

Leia’s life had been filled with drama, horror, and yes, a large element of the ridiculous. This scenario had never happened to her though. Given the hurt looks all around the room, she was rather glad she managed to skip this one.

“And the second one wasn’t my fault,” Ahsoka said, “Ezra pulled me through time itself. I couldn’t come back immediately even if I had a ship that could get me off Malachor.”

“A ship Vader provided,” Papa said darkly.

Ahsoka’s shoulders tensed for a moment, then she straightened up, and met Papa’s gaze head-on “Yes he did,” she said.

“And how did you know to go to Lothal?” Papa asked in a tight voice.

Ahsoka took a deep breath in. “Vader told me,” she admitted.

Papa shook his head in disgust. “I don’t see how we can let you stay.”

Leia looked back at him, surprised he was letting his hurt feelings get in the way of the rational choice here. “And I don’t know how we let her leave,” she said. “She solves almost every problem Draven’s idiot actions have caused. That she is a clear asset is just a bonus.”
Ahsoka looked at her levelly “You want me to stay,” she said.

Leia frowned at her “I told you that before,” she said.

Ahsoka shook her head “No, you said it was my choice if I wanted to stay. I didn’t know your thoughts on it one way or another.” She folded her arms across the table, “And that was before you knew that Mon wanted to put me in such a sensitive position.”

Leia nodded. “It would make my life easier, yes.”

Ahsoka’s head cocked “How?”

“You already know why Vader is obsessed with me,” Leia said “you won’t spend your time chasing down false leads on trying to figure out that connection. And you can focus on finding real traitors.”

“The spy who was set on you is a traitor,” Rex growled.

Leia shook her head “Not to the Rebellion,” she said.

Ahsoka looked grim “Do you have any names?” she asked. “Or some sort of hints to any spies that might be here now?”

Leia shook her head “No, I don’t. Draven always played his cards close to his chest. Any problems that we had, I wasn’t far enough up in the chain of command to learn about it.”


“Yes,” Leia said, “But that happened after….” Her voice trailed off as she realized that was perhaps not the best thing to bring up right at this moment.

“He died didn’t he?” Rex finished the thought for her.

Leia nodded. “Yes,” she said.

Behind her Han’s voice rumbled “So?” he asked, “Sure you weren’t a general before he died, but you had to be far up enough the chain of command before then to hear that information. Nobody just “becomes” a General.”

Leia grimaced, thinking of the state of the Alliance leadership after Hoth, and their tendency to make anyone who even had a shred of knowing what they were doing into General’s. Leia adored Lando, but there was no reason to have given him that field command title if they hadn’t been desperate. And this was all completely irrelevant now and had all happened years after Draven died. Although it was funny to think of the look on his face if he ever found out who the Alliance started promoting to its upper ranks.

“That didn’t matter to Draven,” Leia said ruefully “I was a prop to be used against the Empire. That I was competent in the field was just a bonus.”

“Charming,” Mama muttered, “Why defend him?”

“Because he was really good at seeing those issues,” Leia explained “About examining everything from every angle. And I never once have doubted his loyalty to this cause.”

“And after the war?” Obi-Wan asked, “Nothing came out then?”
Leia shrugged “If it did, I never heard anything about it.”

Papa looked at her disapprovingly. Leia scowled at him. He had no right to judge her for this. He hadn’t been there, had he? “I had no interest in becoming a scholar on the Galactic Civil War,” she huffed. “I was too busy recreating all the mistakes that led to the downfall of the Republic.”

Papa paled at the accusation, but he didn’t say anything in his defense. Leia gave him a bitter smile “And funny enough, I never thought I would be back here again where it would be useful for me to know.”

“Leia,” Mama said cautiously. Leia looked at her an arched an eyebrow.

Luke shook his head “You wanted her to be honest about what she was feeling,” he pointed out to Mama “I hardly think she will continue to do so if you keep scolding her about it.”

Mama looked taken aback to be publicly rebuked like that, then her face softened. “You are right Luke,” she said, shaking her head “I just hadn’t realized how much Leia was holding back.”

Leia squirmed uncomfortably in her chair “You mean I’m like a stranger.”

Mama looked at her seriously “No Leia,” she said softly “You always had a sharp tongue. But it’s been honed down to a fine knife’s point now.” She gave Leia a sad smile “I just wish that life could have been softer on you.”

Leia blinked back tears. She almost said it wasn’t Mama’s fault. But that wasn’t true, was it? Oh, it certainly wasn’t all her fault, and Leia wasn’t even close to angry enough to delude herself that way. But Leia’s ignorance had been, and she had paid a heavy price for the mistakes, and the concealing of those mistakes by her parents.

“None of this addresses my concerns about Ahsoka now,” Papa said, frustration tight in his voice “And the last time I checked I was on the Alliance High Council, and a founding member of this Rebellion, so my opinion does mean a lot.”

Leia scowled at him, but Ahsoka only calmly looked at him. “I’ve been here since the beginning too Bail,” she said, “What is your concern?”

“I don’t know how I can trust you Ahsoka,” Papa whispered.

“I can ask you the very same thing,” she answered back smoothly.

“What?” Papa and Rex said at the same time.

Ahsoka pointed to Leia “You hid her from me,” she said, and she made no effort to hide the pain in her voice. “She is the daughter of my dearest friends, and you deliberately went out of your way to hide her from me.”

“But-“ Papa started to say.

She dropped her hand. “Yes, I know. Her safety was of more concern then my feelings. But I cannot stress to you how lucky you were that Leia figured out on her own how to control the Force, even rudimentarily. And to say nothing of the fact that you let her within feet of Vader.”

Papa’s face twisted “Leia is my daughter Ahsoka, not my prisoner. I wasn’t going to keep her on Alderaan just to keep her safe.”
And it’s not like Vader even noticed her anyway. No, it took Leia knowing about their relationship for him to figure it out, so she wasn’t sure she could give him any credit on that score.

“Then you should have told her too,” Ahsoka said simply. “I understand why you didn’t, but that doesn’t erase the risk you took. And the fact that you lied to me about her.”

Her eyes flickered away for a second, then came back to land on Papa’s face. “And then there is the matter of Anakin.”

Beside Papa, Obi-Wan stiffened. He looked at Papa “What about Anakin?” he asked.

A muscle on Ahsoka’s jaw tightened, “Bail didn’t tell me what happened to him.” Her eyes met Papa’s “All you said was that he was dead.”

Leia blinked. Papa had done what?

“That was for your safety,” Papa protested.

Ahsoka’s face became grim, “No,” she said in a low, tight voice “it wasn’t.”

“You didn’t tell her?” Obi-Wan looked at Papa, “Why ever not?”

Papa shifted on his feet “Because I wasn’t sure she wouldn’t do the same thing that Padme did. Run off to try to save him and get herself killed in the crossfire.”

Leia knew this, Obi-Wan had said as much to her and Luke. But it was apparently news to Ahsoka because she let out a bitter laugh and her head fell into her hands. She muttered something that Leia didn’t catch.

When her head rose, she sent Obi-Wan a hard look “After this conversation is over, you and I are going to have a very long talk about what happened between you and Anakin.”

Obi-Wan’s face immediately became a blank mask. Leia knew he wouldn’t thank her for it, but she still reached out gently in the Force to Ahsoka

“Tread carefully on that subject,” she warned Ahsoka “If you press it too hard, I think he might slip into insanity.”

For a second Ahsoka looked startled at the strange mental voice whispering in her mind. Then she looked offended “You aren’t telling me anything I didn’t already know,” she snapped back in a mental voice that sounded terribly distant to Leia. She wondered briefly if Ahsoka knew how to talk mind to mind, or if this was her first try. “Given how much they love each other, that is not a surprise.”

She wasn’t understanding the real depth of the problem here. Given Obi-Wan’s reluctance to talk about this, Leia wasn’t surprised that he hadn’t disclosed everything in the one day the woman was on the base.

“Ahsoka,” Leia pressed, “Obi-Wan put Vader in that suit.”

There was a recoiling of shock, then a grief so deep it made tears well in Leia’s own eyes.

“Alright Leia,” Ahsoka said out loud.

Obi-Wan shot Leia a deeply suspicious look “What did you tell her?” Obi-Wan demanded.
“The truth,” Leia said, looking at him.

“At least someone is willing to speak it to me,” Ahsoka said, then she glared at Papa “I had to find out the truth about Anakin on my own.”

Luke hissed through his teeth, and Leia closed her eyes briefly. She didn’t know Ahsoka well, but she couldn’t imagine the woman had taken it any better then Luke had taken Bespin.

Ahsoka’s gaze fell back onto Papa “Keeping that from me wasn’t your decision to make Bail,” she said. “You put me in danger, and you knew it. The minute I started helping the Alliance, fighting against the Empire, he and I were always going to collide.” Ahsoka’s eyes grew distant as if she was seeing something in her mind’s eyes that the rest of them could not.

What exactly had Ahsoka seen in that room that wasn’t a room, made of Time and the Force? What had the Force shown her that she wasn’t saying anything about now? Leia felt a lick of sympathy for everyone in this room about her own tight lips. She desperately wanted to shake Ahsoka and demanded to know what she wasn’t saying, but that would be as useless as someone doing that to her. The only problem was, Leia didn’t know Ahsoka. Didn’t know how far, or with what she should trust the woman.

“Do you even want the position?” Rex asked Ahsoka. “Do you even want to rejoin the Rebellion?”

Ahsoka sighed “No, I don’t. At least not to this extent.” She gave her old friend a sad smile “But when has what I wanted ever come into it?”

Rex shook his head “I seem to recall a very eager shiny who only wanted to throw herself into battle.”

Ahsoka snorted “I was fourteen,” she said, “What did I know?”

Leia felt her world tilt on its axis for a moment, and she could feel her heartbeat pound in her ears. Very slowly she turned her head to look at Ahsoka. Who didn’t look like she had said anything out of the ordinary.

“I’m sorry?” she asked, praying more than believing she had misheard the woman “Could you repeat that?”

Ahsoka looked at her startled, then very wary. Just what was showing on Leia’s face right this second? “I was fourteen,” she said, “When I was apprenticed to Anakin.”

Leia blinked “I understand that part,” she said very slowly, every word carefully pronounced. Beside her, Luke turned to look at her, his alarm in the Force a blaring thing. “What I want to make sure is that I am understanding that you were fourteen when you were sent into your first battle?”

Ahsoka’s look taken aback “Well, yes,” she said “Padawan’s stayed with their Masters. My Master was on the front line.”

Leia nodded her head “I see,” she said calmly. She turned her head to look at Obi-Wan. There was no way he could miss how angry she was, but Obi-Wan only looked baffled as to the cause “Care to explain that?” she hissed.

“Explain what?” he asked, having the gall to sound confused. What was there to be confused about? He heard Ahsoka, as clear as Leia had. Hell, he had to have been there, or been aware that Ahsoka had been sent to fight next to Vader.
Leia shot to her feet, and she could feel Han take a hasty step back away from her. “You sent children into battle.” Leia’s rage was a withering thing living in her heart, and she could feel the touch of the Force as it answered that emotion. Leia was too caught up in her own indignation to pay it much mind. “Children!?” she said again.

Ahsoka’s voice was indignant “I was not a child!” she said.

“You were fourteen!” Leia shouted back, “You sure as hell weren’t an adult!” Dimly she heard her mother gasp. Beneath her hands, Leia could feel the table begin to vibrate. Stopping for a moment, she took in a deep breath. She couldn’t do this, not this way. The Force was too close to her right now, and it was feeding into every furious self-righteous thought that was dancing through her mind. She couldn’t, wouldn’t, let this go, it was far too important, but she couldn’t afford to lose control of her temper either. Her connection to the Force was too strong right now to break or even really thin out.

She drew the Force in, careful this time to pay attention to what she was letting in. The Dark Side was here, drawn by her anger, it’s insidious tendrils wrapping around that chaotic power. She knew better than to let that into herself.

She opened her eyes to find Obi-Wan frowning at her. “You shouldn’t do that too often,” he warned her.

Ever the teacher, or control freak, Leia wasn’t sure. “Why not?”

“It’s not real,” he said. “You haven’t really become calm, just masked it.”

Leia shook her head “More like I took the edge off my anger. I make my own calm.”

“Temporarily,” Obi-Wan commented a little snottily.

Leia narrowed her eyes at him, “Show me anything that lives in one permanent phase,” she challenged.

For a moment, those blue eyes looking at her weren’t seeing her, Leia was sure of it. But he wasn’t seeing Vader either. Who had she reminded him of now? Then a rueful smile broke out on his face “True,” he said.

Then his face grew serious, “I don’t understand why you are so upset Leia,” well at least he was asking her why she was so upset, instead of recoiling in fear from her temper and assuming he knew why. “You yourself were sixteen when you started this fight,” he pointed out.

And just like that, her anger was back, but its eddies weren’t quite as sharp as they had been the first time. Nothing in the room moved in time with her words, so Leia took that as a win. “First off,” she snapped, bring her hand up, pointing one finger in the air “There is a vast difference between someone who is fourteen, and someone who is sixteen. Which is the age I started at.”

She put up another finger “Second, I was a spy, not a soldier. Those are two entirely different things, and you know it.”

Another finger came up, “And third, I had to fight my father tooth and nail for it. It wasn’t standard operating procedure!!!”

Obi-Wan shook his head “I was the same age as Ahsoka the first time I engaged in combat,” he said, voice puzzled “It’s not like combat wasn’t something all Jedi Padawans weren’t trained to handle. We had the Force, I really don’t understand what the problem is.”
Leia sat back in her chair, stunned. He really believed every word he was saying. He saw nothing wrong with any of this. What had the Jedi taught its members?

Leia looked at Mama and Papa. The Jedi might not have known better, but those two certainly did. They were the ones who taught her this after all. “And everyone was okay with this?”

Mama and Papa shared looks with each other “The Jedi…” Papa started to say.

Leia slapped her hands down on the table in frustration. “The Jedi had been conditioned to think it was okay. I’m asking you, Papa, as a former member of the Republic Senate, an organization that had oversight over the Jedi, if this was something that was deemed acceptable.”

“There was a war…” Papa said softly.

Leia shook her head. He wanted her to be honest about her feelings, so she would be honest with him. No matter how much they both might come to regret that. “Not for him there wasn’t,” she said, pointing at Obi-Wan. “And you heard him, he went into battle too.”

Papa was looking very uncomfortable, and he squirmed in his chair “I never really thought about it?”

He never thought about it? What had he been doing while he was a Senator in the Old Republic? “No,” Leia snapped back “You were content to use them, and what they could do, for your own ends.”

“LEIA!” her mother snapped.

Leia glared at her. Mother or not, Queen or not, there was no way Leia was backing down from this. “Children.” She hissed “They sent children into active trouble spots, into battle.”

“They were more equipped than your average child to deal with it.” Obi-Wan said defensively “We would never willingly endanger our younglings.”

“Oh,” Leia sneered “so that makes it okay then? They had a better chance of survival!” She glared at Mama and Papa “The Hutts used child labor too, I don’t hear you defending that practice. As did the Zygerrians, if I recall my history lessons correctly,” and she sneered the next words “And they weren’t slanted for my own ‘good,’ it’s one of the reasons that the Old Republic crushed their empire.”

“Leia-,” Luke said cautiously “the Jedi weren’t the only ones who used children.”

Leia slumped “No,” she said tiredly “they weren’t. But that’s the point, Luke. You judge a government, an organization, by what choices they make.” She looked at him sadly, “Do they choose to help those in need? Or do they turn their backs? Do they try to apply their rules equally to everyone? Or are the powerful held unaccountable?”

“Do they allow children to go into battle to handle the problems they won’t,” Han said roughly.

Leia turned to face him “Yes,” she said, taking his hand, and putting it to her cheek, trying to use her touch to bring him away from those painful memories. This would be a sensitive spot for him, given his own rough childhood, and what he had to do to survive. “Governing isn’t just about collecting taxes, building an army, maintaining internal infrastructure, or the thousands of other practical functions governments engage in. It’s about choices, and making those choices based on what you deem moral and important.”
He looked at her, face so lost, then grabbed her hand and gave it a quick kiss into her palm. Looking at her with earnest eyes he said “I know you don’t want it. I swear I do, but Vader is right. You would make a great Empress.”

Leia gave him a sad smile. “Only because those who believe as I do, who would govern as I do, were all killed off.”

Han shook his head “Sweetheart, there is nobody like you.”

Obi-Wan cleared his throat “She isn’t wrong,” he said gruffly, looking at Leia with wonder “but Han isn’t either. There were too many people in the Senate, and the Jedi, who were more concerned with looking like they were right, rather than doing what was was just.”

Rex looked at each of them in turn. “Am I missing something?” he asked all of them.

“Which is?” Papa’s voice was tired.

“Why aren’t we seriously considering this?” Rex asked.

There was dead silence in the room. “Consider what?” Mama asked in a very low controlled tone.

“Collaborating with Vader, and putting Leia on the throne,” Leia immediately opened her mouth to protest even the thought of saying that idea out loud, but Rex put up his hand to cut her off. “Hear me out,” he said to her quietly “Please.”

Leia closed her mouth slowly. She trusted Rex, and more to the point the man wasn’t stupid. He knew that the throne was nothing she was interested in.

“I know even the thought of it makes you uneasy,” Rex said, “And I’m understanding that there would be a massive amount of issues this action would cause.”

Luke shook his head “The Outer Rim would see it as a betrayal.”

Rex nodded his head, “Yeah, that would be one of them.” He gave a rueful shrug “And there are probably a million other issues I’m not thinking of. The gods know the politics is beyond me. I’m just a soldier.”

“You are not just anything,” Obi-Wan interjected roughly. “You are a unique individual with his own talents.”

Rex flashed him a smile “Thank you General, but those pretty words won’t stop me from ripping you a new one about not telling me about Vader.”

Obi-Wan’s jaw clenched, but he nodded his head.

Rex turned in his chair so that he could look Luke and Leia full in the face “I’m not seeing why we don’t have Vader go ahead with what he is planning. He overthrows Palpatine, and puts you on the throne.”

At Leia’s horrified expression Rex hastened to add “I’m not saying that it has to be permanent. We;”

“You mean Leia,” Mama’s voice was cold.

“Leia,” he acknowledged “Could transition back to a democracy.”
“No,” Leia whispered, “No I can’t.”

“How?” Rex looked frustrated at her short answer.

Because it was everything that she was accused of being. Because this was why she had the title of princess stripped from her? Because she was too like Vader to walk away from power. She knew her own faults, she would use this to make the galaxy better. But what she saw as better didn’t mean that it actually was. And she would never see all the angles, not truly. Hadn’t that been proven, just tonight, with her missing the most obvious motivation to what Vader was doing?

“Does it have to be Leia?” Luke asked. All heads turned to look at him, he held his hands up. “I’m not saying I want it. At least not beyond the moments when someone is really irritating me.”

“I’m not sure that is a good idea,” Obi-Wan said “Your lack of education would mean Vader would make you the figurehead, and him the one in charge. That will limit what we can do.”

Rex spoke up “I’m not saying it’s the ideal situation. Just the one that is going to lead to less loss of life. On both sides.”

Leia finally found her voice, “No,” she said firmly. They all looked at her. “We are not doing this,” she said.

“Why?” Han asked. “Besides the fact that neither you or the Kid wants it?”

“Because then we would be no better than the Emperor,” She looked up at Han, “I told you, Vader isn’t some weapon we can pick up and use any way we wish.”

“Sweetheart,” Han looked at her seriously “He wants to be used this way.”

Leia shook her head, “And Obi-Wan doesn’t see anything wrong with children being thrown into battle. That doesn’t make it right.”

“You think he will betray you when you try to take the Empire back to a Republic?” Rex asked.

“No,” Leia said, tears coming down her cheeks, “I think it is a betrayal of everything I am. I was accused of this before. I will not actually do it.”

Mama’s head snapped up “What do you mean accused?” she said.

Leia sighed. All ghosts, she reminded herself, time to purge all of these ghosts. “In the New Republic, I was running for First Senator. At the confirmation hearing, it was revealed that I was Vader’s daughter.”

“That was when they said you were a warmonger,” Papa breathed.

Leia nodded. “Yes. It didn’t help that I deliberately hid the knowledge.”

Rex snorted “Politicians,” he said, “always looking for a weakness to exploit.”

Leia flashed him a tired smile “And enemy soldiers aren’t?”

“Well yeah,” Rex said, “but they call themselves my enemy.”

“What happened after that Leia?” Mama asked voice quiet.

Leia looked away “I resigned my Senate seat. There was nothing more I could do there. Then I
formed the Resistance.”


“No,” Mama said, “that isn’t all of it is it?”

Leia bit her lip. This was going to break her mother’s heart, “No,” she whispered. “When the news broke that I was the daughter of the Destroyer, the government of Alderaan convened a special session and stripped me of my rank.”

“They did what?” Papa’s voice was shocked.

Leia shook her head, unable to answer. Mama’s voice was very withdrawn, “That is why you prefer General, isn’t it Leia?”

Leia nodded.

Mama’s voice became a whiplash, “They deliberately rejected their Queen over something she had no control over?”

Leia looked into those beloved brown eyes, but the words wouldn’t come. Surprisingly, it was Han, who came to the people of Alderaan’s defense. “Princess ma’am.”

“I beg your pardon?” Mama’s voice was as cold as the winds of Hoth.

Han cleared his throat “Leia was never made Queen, she was a Princess.”

“I see,” Mama’s eyes were pure fire now.

“Ahh, no I don’t think you do,” Han said hastily, “Leia said that she was never coronated. And that there weren’t enough survivors from Alderaan to make a monarchical government work. I don’t think it was done in disrespect.”

“They still…” Mama’s hands clenched into fists, “They had no right,” she said, eyes glittering with her anger, “Leia was invested as Princess of Alderaan. She completed all the required training and tasks.”

Leia, hurting for her, reached across the table and covered one of those fists with her own hands, “Mama,” she whispered, “they were grieving, and looking for someone to blame.”

“The sins of the parents have nothing to do with the child,” Papa said hoarsely.

“You don’t understand,” Leia said, frustration in her voice. She leaned back into her seat. “I can tell you that Alderaan was destroyed, and you think you know what that was like for the survivors.”

“Home is gone,” Obi-Wan’s voice was raspy “The touchstone of your entire way of life has been obliterated,” he met Leia’s eyes “And all you feel is lost, and there is nowhere you can stand.”

Lea nodded, of everyone at this table, Obi-Wan would understand best what she was feeling. Ahsoka came close, but she had left her home of her own accord before it was destroyed. It hadn’t been taken out from right underneath her.

“Yes,” she said. “And lost people do whatever they can to make themselves feel safe again. To make sure their next home is not taken from them.”
“And this is what our people did?” Mama’s voice was broken and hurt. This, this was why she hadn’t wanted to tell Mama about this. Because she wanted to protect her, and Papa.

But she had acknowledged all those months ago, that they all needed to protect each other. This was a pain that she had lived with for so long, and had spoken to nobody about. The second loss of her home. Of her people. “Yes,” Leia said.

Mama’s eyes met hers, “Leia love, I am so sorry,” she whispered, “I wish there was a way I could take this pain from you.”

Leia shook her head “It’s done,” she said, “And also undone.”

“That doesn’t make it less real for you,” Papa whispered. “How can you possibly forgive them?”

“Because the people who did it, were a small minority of who is alive now,” Leia said “Alderaan still stands. And I will do everything in my power to make sure our people are never made that desperate again.” She looked Papa in the face “So Ahsoka being here is nothing but an asset as far as I can see. Yes, she didn’t tell you about who sent her, but she never lied about why she is here.”

Papa cleared his throat and looked away. “I don’t understand how you can overlook that she is guilty of betrayal. To Vader of all people.”

Leia gritted her teeth, “Not one of us are innocent in this room. We have all betrayed those we loved, or the ideals we once held in service to the fight against a greater evil. If there is no room for forgiveness, what hope do any us have?”

There was a long pause then Han let out a bark of laughter.

“Captain Solo? Papa asked coldly.

“Nothing,” Han waved his hand around, “Just. That isn’t true.”

He looked at Leia, a grin of true delight on his face “When it comes to all of this,” he waved his hand to encompass everyone in the room “The fall of the Republic, the foundation of the Empire, the fate of the Jedi. All of it!” Han put his hands to his chest, looking gleeful, “For the first time in my life, I can say I am completely innocent and mean it.”

Papa looked completely flabbergasted. Leia looked at Han’s beaming face, and she couldn’t help it, she started laughing too. Luke joined in next, and the three of them were soon cackling.

When Leia managed to get control of herself, she noticed the odd looks the rest of them were sending them. “Sorry,” she said, waving her hand, “it’s just the thought of Han being innocent of anything.”

Papa shook his head. “Yes,” he agreed, but there was no malice in his tone.

Han, also by this time, had gotten control of himself. “Well, so what are we you going to do Sir?”

“Do?” Papa asked.

“About Ahsoka,” Han said.

Papa looked at Ahsoka for a very long moment, then he took in the gazes of everyone around him. He gave a long sigh.

“Oh goody,” Han muttered, “more fighting.”
Ahsoka shook her head “It’s why we are actually here,” she pointed out to Han. “This question is what we are all doing in the room in the first place.”

There was a long lull as they all took that in. Leia herself had forgotten. Some many accusations and hurtful words had flown around this room tonight, she had forgotten the original reason they were here too.

Luke let out a giggle. They all turned to look at him, and he waved a hand “Sorry,” he said, then followed that by a long guffaw.


“It’s just—Luke wheezed, and waved his hand around the table “Four trained diplomats in the room, and every single one of you forgot the rules about setting up boundaries before we talked.”

Mama’s mouth dropped open, and then she let out a quiet chuckle of her own. Papa looked at his wife, and joined in her quiet laughter. Obi-Wan looked proudly at Luke, and Leia felt her mouth twitch “At least we all ate before we got here,” she said pointedly to her baby brother.

Then, behind her, Han’s stomach let out a large gurgle. They all looked at him “Hey!” Han said, putting his hands up defensively, “I didn’t know it was going to take this long! And no one told me about rules before conversations.”

Leia looked down at her chrono and swore as she saw what time it was. “If any of us want to get any rest, we need to come to a decision quickly.”

The quiet laughter was gone as quickly as it had come. There was a long, pregnant pause, and then as one, all of them looked at Papa.

He looked back at them, definitely. “Leia, can you answer a question about the future for me?”

Leia shifted in her seat uncomfortably. "Depends on the question," she said.

Papa looked at her “Did Ahsoka ever rejoin the Rebellion?”

Leia wasn’t sure if this would hurt or help “No, she didn’t. But she never worked for the Empire either.”

Papa looked at Ahsoka, who only looked calmly back at him. “I won’t say anything to Mon,” he said.

Leia shifted in her seat, it was what she wanted, but she was uneasy with how hurt he was “Papa—” she said.

He shook his head “No Leia. I trust you and Obi-Wan’s judgment. If you say that she isn’t here to betray us, then I believe you.”

“I’m not,” Ahsoka said firmly. “I am only here to protect Leia and her loved ones.” She let a grim smile cross her lips, “And since my Master always taught me to follow the spirit of a command, not the actual words, I’ve decided that includes you as well Bail.”

Leia just stared at Ahsoka, Vader had taught her what?

Obi-Wan shook his head, “Of course he did,” he said, fondness in his voice. “If he does find a way to contact you Ahsoka, please be sure to remind him of that when he wants to know why you
expanded the parameters of your mission,” he said breezily.

Leia looked at Obi-Wan. Had he just made a joke? About Vader? Leia let her gaze fall on Ahsoka. Even beyond what she could do for the Alliance, Leia would have fought to keep her here, simply for this. Her mere presence seemed to steady something in Obi-Wan. The man frustrated, baffled, and annoyed her. He was also loyal, dedicated, sassy, and a wonderful verbal sparring partner. He had sacrificed much to ensure that she and her brother were kept safe. Leia disagreed with the particulars of how he did it, encouraging unknowing patricide was at best a very morally dubious decision, but his overall goal was nothing she could argue with. She was with Rex, she didn’t want Obi-Wan merely to live, she wanted him to thrive.

“So everyone is okay with this?” Han asked bluntly, sending Papa a very pointed look.

Papa nodded his head “All jokes aside Ahsoka, if Vader does contact you, I want to know.”

Ahsoka nodded “Of course,” she said. Then she shot Leia a pointed look “As long as Leia lets us know when Vader does manage to get through to her.”

Leia scowled, “I can keep him out,” she muttered, hands crossing across her chest “It’s only when I’m tired or sick I can’t. And then I get Luke to help me.”

Obi-Wan’s eyebrow arched “And that works?” he asked pleasantly “How do you know that?”

Damn it! She took back everything she said about enjoying him as a sparring partner. “Because we tossed him out the last time he tried,” she said.

Papa leaned forward “I will accept Ahsoka’s terms if you accept hers, Leia.”

Leia breathed in through her nose “Fine,” she said, “It won’t happen again, but yes, I will tell you if Vader gets into my head again.”

“And immediately,” Papa said.

Leia shook her head, “When it’s safe to do so,” she countered, “If I ever do get to leave this base again, and it happens off world, I am not comming you to tell you this.”

Papa nodded his head “Acceptable,” he said.

“We done?” Han asked, “Because I’m starving.”

Luke shook his head “One quick question,” he said. Leia bit back a groan, they had been so close . If Luke just had a but more experience with meetings like this, he would have understood that when you were given an out, you took it.

But that wasn’t exactly fair to him. He looked troubled by what he wanted to ask about, so Leia settled herself in for another half an hour at least of uncomfortable talking.


“Why was there doubt about Father being this “Chosen One” of prophecy?” Luke looked at both Ahsoka and Obi-Wan “If everything you have said about me and Leia being far outside what a “normal” Force user is, that means he is even more so. Why the doubt?”

“Because most of the Jedi were convinced that the Sith had been eliminated a thousand years ago,” Ahsoka said softly.
“And since that was the case,” Obi-Wan’s voice was bitter “they didn’t think a Chosen One was necessary.”

Papa’s voice was very quiet, “But you believed?” he asked.

Obi-Wan nodded “I saw a Sith kill Qui-Gon on Naboo. I didn’t have a choice but to believe in the prophecy.” He looked frustrated “Most of the council was wrong about the Sith not being back,” he said tiredly “I spent years trying to make the more stubborn members see ….” He sighed and rubbed his hand over his face. “It doesn’t matter now,” he said, voice cracking in grief.

Rex cleared his throat “If that was the case, why train General Skywalker at all?”

Leia looked at him questioningly. Rex shrugged “I was his commander for three years, Leia,” he said, “When I asked him why the council didn’t seem to like him he told me it was because most of them didn’t think he should have been trained because he was so old when he came to the Temple.”

“He was nine,” Leia whispered, her eyes went to Obi-Wan “Nine is too old?” What did that mean for Luke? Or her for that matter? Luke had never mentioned anything like this. In fact, he refused to take children into the Order at all.

“It was done after the Russian reformation,” Obi-Wan said, “At least that was what I was taught in the Temple.” He gave Leia a wan smile “I learned it was done so that we could teach control early, and would decrease the chances someone would fall.” He leaned back in his chair, looking troubled, “I was never much a student of history, so I can’t tell you what all the factors were in making that decision. Or even if what I was taught was the truth or was accepted as the truth later on.”

“Don’t know,” Han muttered “Seems to be on the mark with Vader,”

But Vader wasn’t the only Sith from that time, was he? Leia’s eyes narrowed on Obi-Wan “But Dooku was raised in the Temple?” Leia asked.

Obi-Wan nodded. “He was.” A bitter smile crossed his face “He was Master Yoda’s last padawan in fact.”

“Yoda trained him?” Leia shook her head in surprise. “How many others fell?” she asked, “Since the rule was put in place?” She was looking Obi-Wan straight in the eyes.

He looked at her, face pale, and it was Ahsoka who answered “Too many,” Leia looked at her. Ahsoka shrugged “I don’t know how many Leia, not since the rule was put in place. But I do know during the Clone Wars,” her mouth tightened. “There were many who fell to the Dark Side.”

“Krell,” Rex muttered darkly.

Ahsoka nodded “And Barris.”

“This was something the Senate needed to know Obi-Wan,” Papa’s voice was frosty and remote. “Bad enough you hid the fact that Dooku was a Sith, but now I learn that even more members of the Order were falling? We had authority over you.”

“Why?” Obi-Wan snapped, “So you could hamper us with more relegation and oversight?” His eyes narrowed “We were already under enormous pressure trying to fulfill an impossible task. Our resources were being stretched thin. We were given very little support outside of the Clones, and we weren’t sure how much we could trust the Senate with.”
Papa’s mouth tightened “Which we wouldn’t have had to do, if you actually reported to us like you were supposed to. Instead, the Order as a whole got more and more secretive, more and more visibly unhappy with the current political climate, to the point where it was openly wondered if you were going to start a coup.”

Obi-Wan’s mouth dropped open “We would never,” he hissed.

“Oh,” Papa’s voice was snide, “And I suppose that it wasn’t Master Windu who walked into the Supreme Chancellor’s office and tried to kill him?”

“Palpatine was a Sith!” Obi-Wan howled, “Mace was only doing his duty!”

“Then he should have come to us!” Bail protested.

Obi-Wan’s face twisted into something sharp and bitter “And how many Senators weren’t under his control Bail?”

“At least 2,000,” Bail shot back, and Leia drew in a deep breath at that. That was a part of the history of the founding of the Galactic Empire that was glossed over in all the official documents. It didn’t surprise her that Obi-Wan had no idea that Palpatine’s support was much shakier then he liked to pretend it was at the time.

Luke’s voice was puzzled “That is a really specific number.”

Papa looked at Luke, “That was the number of Senators that signed the Petition of 2,000, registering a formal complaint on the abuses of power Palpatine was committing, and demanding that he return the emergency powers he had been granted at the beginning of the Clone War.”

Luke’s voice was very serious, “When did they submit this?”

Papa’s smile was bitter “Within hours of the Senate learning that General Grievous was dead.”

Obi-Wan shook his head “I didn’t know Palpatine’s support was even in question.”

“Did any of you bother to ask, Obi-Wan? You and I were friends. Did it not occur to any one of the council to come talk to me? Or Padme? We were your known allies.” Papa ran his hands through his hair, “If Mace had come to me, we could have worked together, especially if he had proof Palpatine was a Sith. As it was, most of those Senators were arrested the day after the foundation of the Empire.”

“We didn’t involve ourselves in politics,” Ahsoka said automatically.

Obi-Wan shook his head, “And that was the least of our mistakes.”

“And maybe if the Emperor had decided to become a pilot instead of a politician you wouldn’t be having this argument,” Han sounded bored as he cut through the shouting. Everyone blinked and looked at him. Leia could feel Han shrug behind her “He set up the trap, and as far as I can tell through all the yelling, both the Senate and the Jedi walked right into it.”

Mama’s voice was tired “We don’t know why Master Windu decided to do what he did Bail,” she said gently “There was no witnesses to what happened.”

“Only what Palpatine testified to in the Senate dome,” Papa muttered bitterly “We don’t even know who accompanied Mace into that office. All Palpatine would say was a “group of Jedi.””
“Yes,” Han muttered darkly, “He’s a trustworthy source.”

No witness to one of the most consequential actions in the fall of the Republic except Palpatine, and dead Jedi. Well maybe not, Vader might have been there. In fact, thinking about it, Vader most probably had been there. If Leia asked him, would Vader tell her what actually happened?

Obi-Wan looked exhausted “I should never have left to track down Grievous,” he said “I should have stayed on Coruscant. I could have talked Mace down.”

Ahsoka gave him a dry look “Yes because Mace was well known for being willing to listen to reason when he set his mind on a goal,” she said sarcastically.

Obi-Wan shook his head, but he didn’t argue with Ahsoka. “Why did he confront Palpatine on his own? Anakin was supposed to be the one who destroyed the Sith, and Mace knew that.” He looked pained, “And Anakin was one of the most talented duelists in the Order. It would have made sense to bring him along as back up.”

Leia snorted “Well, Vader did manage that, in a very roundabout way.”

Obi-Wan in the Force went very very still. No, not just him. All of the Force had gone quiet. Like it was waiting for something. Something was hovering on the precipice and whatever was said in this moment would change everything. “What do you mean?” Obi-Wan asked, voice low.

Leia grimaced, this was a subject he hadn’t wanted to know about. She respected his wishes, truly, for all that she thought over the long term it would do him good to know this. Maybe she should find a way to deflect the question that had been raised by her wayward tongue.

“No. Tell him.” Leia flinched, as did Luke. The Force had gone from a waiting stillness to a loud and demanding shout. Obi-Wan didn’t react at all, his blue eyes fixed very intently on Leia, but Ahsoka cocked her head as if she heard just the faintest echo of that command.

For a moment, Leia felt like not saying anything, just on principle. She had entered into battles with other foes where it was considered foolhardy, even suicidal. Arguing with a vaguely sentient force of the galaxy wouldn’t be that much different, would it?

Then she really looked at Obi-Wan’s face. No, she wouldn’t say anything because the Force told her to. But she would because Obi-Wan wanted to know. He had asked, and Leia valued this strange friendship they had too much to risk it on another lie. Especially since this wasn’t anything she was keeping secret from him for any other reason than he asked her to. He wanted the truth now.

“Vader killed Palpatine,” she told that tense face.

He didn’t even twitch. “No,” he said in a very remote voice, “Luke did. That is what you told me.”

Leia shook her head, “No I didn’t. I said Palpatine killed Vader. I never said who killed Palpatine.”

Mama opened her mouth to dispute that. Then shut it closed with a click. She shook her head “She’s right Obi-Wan. She never said Luke killed Palpatine.”

Obi-Wan’s jaw clenched “Why?”

Leia stared at him, there was something going on here, something she didn’t understand. All around her in the Force there was the feeling of “Yes, yes, yes.” What had she stumbled onto now?
“Why what?” she asked, puzzled.

Obi-Wan slapped his hands down on the table, “Stop playing games with me Leia!” he shouted, pale face becoming very red.

Leia instinctively leaped out of her chair, stepping back from the unexpected slap of anger in the Force from Obi-Wan. What was going on here? He never let his temper get the best of him. Unless it had to do with Vader and that weird schism in his head about his identity as Anakin. “I’m not playing,” she said, trying to aim for soothing, even if she didn’t understand why he was so upset. “I don’t understand the question.”

“Oh-Wan,” Ahsoka murmured softly. Leia dared to take her eyes off the very angry Jedi Master in front of her to look at Ahsoka. The woman was looking at her, with a hope in her eyes that Leia didn’t understand. “She’s telling the truth.” Well at least someone at this table believed her.

Obi-Wan let out a harsh laugh. “Oh no Ahsoka, if it’s one thing Leia knows how to do, it’s dance around what she doesn’t want to talk about.”

Leia, stung by the unfair accusation, in this case, swung her head back to Obi-Wan “I’m not trying to keep anything from you Obi-Wan. I will swear on my son’s life. I don’t understand what you are asking.”


For a moment that angry storm remained on Obi-Wan’s features, and then as her words sank into him, Obi-Wan’s face just broke. Everything, his face, his body language, even his sense in the Force shattered. It was terrible and wrenching to see on that normally composed face.

“General?” Rex murmured.

Obi-Wan didn’t answer him, just looked at Leia, as betrayal replaced grief. “More secrets?” he demanded hoarsely, accusation everywhere.

She looked at him, baffled. She knew he would take this badly. That Luke had managed to do what he could not, reach Vader, but she hadn’t expected he would take it this badly. “You were the one who said you didn’t want to know how he died!” she exclaimed. “I offered to tell you, and you refused.”

“Because I didn't want the gory details,” he snapped back “I most certainly never told you not to tell me he had achieved the impossible!”

Leia swayed, feeling like someone had just punched her in the chest. There was no way that she had just heard Obi-Wan correctly. “What do you mean impossible?” she demanded, “I understand it is hard, yes, but-”

“If what you’re saying is right Leia,” Ahsoka said gently

“Of course it’s right!” Leia cut her off, not understanding why everyone was staring at her “That is what Luke said what happened. Vader let go of the Dark Side and saved him.”

Ahsoka’s voice broke “That has never been done in the entire history of the Jedi order, never mind
the Sith. There has never been a Force user who fell that far, and came back.”

“No,” Leia whispered in denial, “No, that’s not right. It is possible. Luke said….” and her voice trailed off. Luke hadn’t lied to her, not about that, never about that. But he had never said Vader was the first to do it. Luke had never said that.

Then the horrifying thought occurred to her. Did Luke even know? So much of the history of the Jedi order had been lost and destroyed. It was entirely possible he had gambled everything on his blind spot about what was and was not possible in the Force. Did Luke ever understand the true depth of that miracle he had performed all those years ago?

And Vader? What did this mean for Vader and what he understood about himself?

“It is not possible to return.” Those words he spoke to her all those long months ago in the cell came back to her. She had brushed it off at the time, telling herself that he was lying to himself to stay on the path he clearly wanted more. But what if that wasn’t the case? What if Vader himself didn’t know, and in fact truly believed it was impossible?

And what did that mean for Ben? For so long she had pinned so much of her hope on Ben finding his way back to the light because of course, he could do anything Vader had managed to do. But with this information, something she had seen as simply hard, became almost impossible.

“Your Highness, this is not a case where you can apply your will and make it happen. It is not possible.” Vader’s words rang in her head. He had been wrong, it was possible. He himself had proven it. But not because she willed it. Not even because Luke had willed it. It had all come down to Vader. Vader had made the choice to save Luke. It had been done for selfish reasons, but as she asked Papa earlier tonight, did it really matter why he had done it? Only that he had.

Which meant no matter how much hope she had clung to in the past, no matter how much she pleaded and wanted, it meant that in order to save Ben, it was a choice he had to make. And given what Chewie had told her about what happened on that bridge where Han had died, it was clear what choice Ben had made.

Had every hope she had clung to for her son been a lie?

“Leia,” Papa’s voice was harsh, “Why didn’t you tell us this?”

Leia blinked, and brought herself away from the pains of the past, to the pain of the present. “You didn’t ask,” she said simply.

“We didn’t-!” Papa cut himself off. He turned away from her, and Leia felt a bolt of pain lance her heart.

“Didn’t it ever occur to you to say something because this was important?” Obi-Wan’s voice was full of scorn.

Leia felt her back stiffen, “I knew it was important Obi-Wan,” she snarled back, “Luke was alive because of what Vader did. Don’t ever think I would overlook that.”

Obi-Wan’s smile was mocking “Yes, clearly you understood the gravity of what happened.”

Leia scowled “And whose fault is that?” she snapped “Luke didn’t know either,” she pointed to the one in the room “Either of them! What are you teaching him?”

“That the Dark Side will forever dominate your destiny,” Obi-Wan shot back. Then as one, they
both looked at Luke, who stared back defiantly.

“Yes,” he said, “but dominate is not the same as never change.” He told Obi-Wan pointedly. “I thought you meant that if you fall to the Dark Side, and do manage to come back, you will never escape the consequences of your actions. I never thought you meant that means you never escape the Dark Side itself.”

Tatooine, Leia thought bitterly, Luke is from Tatooine, where the desert can drive a person to do something they will bitterly regret later, in order to survive. Everyone can fall, so everyone needs to be offered forgiveness. But forgiveness didn’t mean one’s sins were washed away. Forgiveness didn’t even mean forgetting what had been done to you, or even redemption for the one who had wronged you. Forgiveness was just an acknowledgment that you were offering someone grace.

Maybe Leia hadn’t understood how important this all was, and oh she was not going to think on the consequences of that. Ben, and that pain, was for another time. But she didn’t need to aggravate this situation either.

“I’m sorry Obi-Wan,” she said softly, allowing her defensive posture to drop, “I’m sorry I didn’t press you about this. But on the subject of Vader, you are very…” she trailed off, trying to think of a kind word.

“Foolish?” Obi-Wan’s voice could have cut durasteel, “Only I am not as foolish as I once believed, am I? He did redeem himself.”

That was going a step too far, “He didn’t redeem himself Obi-Wan,” she tried to keep her words as calm as she could, “Because redemption requires you address your wrongs, and he never did that.”

At Obi-Wan’s crestfallen face, Leia’s own heart broke Just what the hell did she think she was doing? Maybe her hopes for Ben had been born of ignorance, and was foolhardy, but it had given her something to cling to with all of her might over those long seven years. Obi-Wan hadn’t even had that, and now she was cruelly cutting into him, because he suddenly saw a glimmer of light, and hope, for someone he loved, where before all there was for him was darkness.

Deflated, she muttered, “I wasn’t going to say you were foolish Obi-Wan.” She gave him a weak smile “Hard headed perhaps, stubborn and willfully blind, but never foolish.”

She watched as he reasserted some control over his features. “Fragile, Obi-Wan. I was going to say when it comes to Vader, you are very fragile.” She looked him in the eyes, “And the last thing I wanted to do was cause you more pain on that subject. So when you asked for ignorance, I gave it to you.”

He looked away from her.

Then Papa’s voice filled the room “Did it ever occur to you that maybe for strategic purposes, I needed to know?”

Leia swung her head to look at him, “Why?” she asked, puzzled.

“Because if I had, I wouldn’t have been so taken by surprise by the revelation he wants to put you on the throne.” Papa’s eyes were wild.

“How-”

“He was willing to do anything to protect Luke.” Papa stated, “You are also his child, and therefore, he will be willing to do anything to protect you. Combine that with the political moves
he is making, what he is doing would have become obvious to me months ago.”

Leia gaped “You can’t seriously be considering going along with that insane plan, can you?” she asked Papa horrified.

“Of course not!” Papa snapped “But we are in the middle of a war, Leia. We need to understand what game the other side is playing. We need to understand their weaknesses, and the fact that Vader can be peeled away from the Emperor, for you, is a very big weakness. Why did you conceal this?”

“She told me,” Luke said, his voice furious, “when I asked her how any version of me could commit patricide she told me what happened.” He deliberately stood up, and positioned himself beside her, “It is not her fault that all of you heard what you wanted to hear.”

“Yes,” Papa said, his voice lashing out “because she has been so forthcoming with what she knows,”

“With all due respect Sir,” and Han’s voice was dripping with contempt, “Maybe it had to do with the fact that you were ordering her to tell you what she knew, instead of asking.”

Papa’s face flushed. “Quite frankly Captain, I don’t see how it’s any of your business.”

Han bared his teeth “You are definitely the scarier possible father-in-law, but don’t let that fool you into thinking I back down from a fight.” His hand grabbed Leia’s “Especially for someone I love.”

Leia was so caught up in the indirect confession, she missed what Han was saying. Papa didn’t though.

There was a long pause, then Papa blinked. When he spoke, his voice had a slight note of hysteria to it. “Captain Solo, are you telling me I scare you more than Darth Vader?”

Han nodded “He’ll just kill me,” Ahsoka snorted at that, but Han ignored her “But you, you, can make my life a living hell.”

Papa looked astonished, anger gone “You think I’m capable of that?” he asked, baffled.

“You hid Vader’s daughter from him,” Han shook his head in bewilderment, “No, you didn’t just do that. You hid her right in front of him. For years their paths crossed,” Han said, he dropped his hand from Leia’s to cross them in front of his chest. “I lie to Hutts regularly for a living, and I think that’s insane. What’s more, you pulled it off.”

Papa’s eyes widened, and then he looked at Mama “I-” he started to say “Leia is our daughter,” he said looking back at Han “What else were we supposed to do?”

“From what I’ve been told about good parenting? Exactly what you did,” Han said, “But the fact that you didn’t even hesitate to do that?” Han whistled through his teeth, “Look I don’t like you very much right now,” and his eyes slid to Leia. While she hated the fact that Han was furious at her parents, there was a part of her that reveled in the knowledge, that he would take on anyone because he wanted to protect her. Most people looked to Leia for protection, they didn’t offer it. “But even I have to admit, that takes more smarts and guts then I will ever have.”

“Not true,” Leia, Luke, and surprisingly, Obi-Wan said at the same time.

Han started at the unexpected chorus. Then he peered into Obi-Wan’s face “Really?” he asked,
“Those two, for some reason, have it in their heads I am worth something, but I’m surprised to see you agree with them.”

Obi-Wan’s face was still sad, but he managed to give Han a small smile. “I am well aware of the trouble both Luke and Leia are capable of getting into. I am also well aware” he looked at Luke and Leia, and swallowed hard, his voice dropping, “now more than ever, that what they think is possible is not what the rest of us do-”

Han snorted, interrupting with a “You’re a Jedi, your standards are pretty high too.”

“Yes,” Obi-Wan agreed. “But you are not, and yet you still manage to keep up with them. Not only that, you actively enjoy it. Trust me when I tell you, the ability to deal with a Skywalker, any Skywalker, shows that you have a spine of durasteel.” His stare suddenly became very distant “They will always surprise you,” he muttered, mostly to himself. Leia didn’t like the feel of guilt that was starting to twine around the man like a vine in the Force. Just where was Obi-Wan’s head at?

Han looked pleased for a moment, then his eyes slid away in embarrassment “Nah,” he said, “Just too stupid to let go of what’s mine.”

Leia reached out and took his hand back. His gaze met hers for the briefest moments, then slid away. Stubborn nerf herder. He still had trouble believing she loved him. Well, the Force willing she had time to change his mind.

Han looked at there joined hands, and then he cleared his throat. “So Vader wasn’t outside the norm?” Han’s voice broke through the tense silence “He was just scooped up by a Sith Lord?”

Obi-Wan slumped “I don’t know. If you had asked me, before Mustafar, I would have said that I would have fallen before he would.” He looked Luke in the eyes. “I knew he wasn’t happy in the Order. I knew he was only staying because of Ahsoka, me, and what he thought was his duty. But I swear to you, I had no idea that he was teetering like he was.”

“Then what did you think was happening?” Luke asked. “Because from what I’m hearing he was isolated, ignored, and fighting in a nasty civil war with no love to ground him.”

“That he was tired, but we were all tired. The council wasn’t unaware of the problems in the galaxy,” Obi-Wan shot Leia a pleading look. “We thought we had more time,” Obi-Wan’s face was pale and drawn, “We thought if we just muddle through, got through the war, we would have time to fix everything later.”

Oh, she knew the power of that thinking. Despite herself, she felt her anger at Obi-Wan drain away. She was as guilty of this as he was. It was what led to the flaws being built into the foundation of the New Republic. And she knew how that had turned out.

Leia looked at him sadly “But later never came did it?”

He shook his head “No, it did not.” He rubbed his hands over his face. “It’s not just your parents you should be angry with for the Fall of the Republic. The Jedi had more than its share of what happened.”

Rex’s scowl was fierce. “You didn’t deserve what happened to you,” he said tightly “None of you.”

“We accepted a slave army,” Obi-Wan said softly.

Beside her Luke stiffened “What?” he whispered in a soft, deadly voice. Leia stiffened in alarm, all
around the Luke the Force immediate tightened around him.

Obi-Wan looked at Luke. "The clones,” he said softly “They were for all intents and purposes slaves.”

“We were not!” Rex protested, coming to his feet.

“Weren’t you?” Ahsoka asked gently.

“No!” Rex said.

“Were you not made for us?” Obi-Wan’s voice was a bitter “Weren’t you trained to serve us? Wasn’t it illegal for you to leave the Grand Republic Army?”

“If you think for one second me, or my brothers stayed because of some law,” Rex’s face was flushed with anger “We loved you!”

“You loved us because a chip in your head told you to,” Obi-Wan said dully “And you slaughtered us all because of that same chip.”

“I-“ Rex said, face ashen. “I never-“

“No, you did not,” Obi-Wan agreed. “But Mon told me about Wolfe and why he refuses to leave Lothal.” His eyes met the man, who was the same age as Han but was physically as old as Obi-Wan. All because he had been “designed” that way.

Leia would never know where that conversation would have gone. If the two men would have settled out their differences, and Obi-Wan’s guilt, because that was the moment that Luke choose to speak.

“The Jedi just accepted an army of clones that were made for them?” Luke’s voice was all the more dangerous for the reasonable and soft tone he was using.

Leia immediately took a step towards her brother. Underneath that thin veneer of calm, there was a storm brewing, “Luke-“ she said.

“Are you telling me that not only did the Jedi ignore the centuries-long practice of the Hutt’s using slavery in their territory, they actively accepted millions of sentient beings?”

This conversation was supposed to be about Leia, about the secrets she was keeping and her anger at her parents. How had they gotten to this? Not that the existence of the Clones was a secret, and she honestly thought Luke already knew about them.

In those horrible weeks when he had been so coldly furious at her and Obi-Wan, he hadn’t been shy in asking around about opinions on the Jedi. Leia thought someone would have mentioned the history of the clones to him. Then again, maybe not. The former Separatists would have no love for them, and the more core oriented people would hold them responsible for the slaughter of the Jedi. The clones had become nothing more than a footnote in the history of the Empire, despised by both sides of the Rebellion, and discarded by the Emperor.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said.

“No!” Rex pushed his chair back “You only did that because the Senate ordered you too!” Rex protested.
“And we could have refused,” Obi-Wan said sadly. “We, the council, the Knights, the Masters, we were all thinking people. We weren’t soldiers.” He looked at Leia, “We had a duty to serve the Force, and we failed miserably.”

Ahsoka looked at him, sadly “You think Bariss was right?”


Luke was so still, “How can you sit there, tell me that, and expect me to rebuild the Jedi Order?” he whispered.

“I don’t,” Obi-Wan said, “I expect that you will build something far better.”

Rex cleared his throat, “General,” he said softly, “You are laying yourself bare for sins that weren’t of your making.”

Luke turned his head so fast, Rex took a step back in shock “He was on the council!” Luke hissed, “If it wasn't his decision, whose was it?”

Rex looked at him “I don’t know,” he said softly, “I’m just a soldier, and I wasn’t there in the council room. I wasn’t there when the Senate approved our use.”


“Because it involved slaves, or because Alderaan is a pacifist society and he objected to an army in general?” Luke shot back. Leia couldn't hide her guilt, and Luke turned away contemptuously in the Force.

Rex’s voice was still gentle going on, “But I do know, even if the Jedi were guilty as you seem to think they were, does that mean it was right for my brothers to march on all the Temples and kill all the children and younglings? And the junior padawans who were serving by their Masters side-”

“You mean the children who the Jedi threw into war zones?” Luke asked coldly.

“Yes,” Rex acknowledged with a nod of his head “But should they have paid the price for the sins of their elders?”

Luke looked away, “Then who is to blame?” he asked.

Ahsoka looked at him sadly, “All of us,” she said “And none of us. The Jedi never claimed to be perfect Luke,” she tapped her fingers nervously on her lightsabers, “But I can't argue that we didn’t lose our way. We became convinced that what the Jedi wanted was what the Force wanted.”

Leia wondered how long it took Ahsoka to come to that realization, and really understand it.

Mama shook her head “Enough,” she said.

Luke’s back straightened, “I don’t think-“ He started to say.

Mama held her hands up, “Too much Luke,” she said “There has been too much said tonight. If we keep going, we are only going to wound each other, instead of fixing anything.’

Luke glared at Obi-Wan “Maybe we should,” he said darkly.
Obi-Wan only hunched his shoulders.


“But a slave army,” Luke hissed. Leia winced, Luke was well and truly mad now. Leia couldn’t think of anything that would knock him out of this without screaming involved.

Rex shook his head “I am standing right here,” he said, “And while I can’t speak for all of my brothers, I am more than capable of speaking for myself.” He gave Luke a commanding stare, “And I don’t want to talk about this anymore tonight. Or are you going to disregard my wishes on the matter simply so you can vent your anger on a target who won’t fight back?”

Well, that was a neat little maneuver to knock Luke out of his self-righteousness. Leia leaned back so that Luke couldn’t see her and mouthed “Thank you,” at the clone. Mama was right, they were all done.

Ahsoka rose from her chair, “I’ll inform Mon of my decision to accept Draven’s position tomorrow.” She looked around the room, “And maybe we should reconvene tomorrow night to continue this?”

Luke shook his head, “I can’t.”

"Luke-,” Ahsoka said warningly. “We all need a break, but by no means does that mean everything is settled.”

“No, I mean I can’t,” Luke said, “My CAP rotation is after dinner tomorrow.”

“Oh,” Ahsoka said, a little surprised. “Right.”

“Perhaps we can schedule something some other time tomorrow?” the bags under Obi-Wan’s eyes were more pronounced than usual. “Perhaps in the morning?”

Leia shook her head “No,” she said. “No group meeting. Not like this.” She flexed her fingers “It’s too easy for it to become a free for all on one person.”

“Leia-“ her Mama warned.

“It really is all or nothing with you people isn’t it?” Han muttered. “Look, everybody is tired, nobody is thinking straight. Why don’t you all meet one week from now?” They all looked at him. Han waved his hand “Gives everyone time to process, and for more individual conversations to happen. Then we meet all back here.”

“Wouldn’t that look suspicious?” Ahsoka said, “We are trying to keep things normal looking for the Alliance leadership.”

“To protect you, and Leia, yeah I get that.” Han’s voice was sarcastic, “But can’t you say it’s some scheduled thing. Group of friends do that don’t that? Schedule a weekly get together?” He looked at the blank faces surrounding him. “Or is that something the holos lied about to me?”

Leia blinked, she had no idea. At no point in her life had she ever been living a “normal” life. Her Mama and Papa had also been raised in royal households. Obi-Wan and Ahsoka had been raised in the Temple, and that was a whole set of issues Leia wasn’t even going to get into. Luke was the closest, but given how few people were around him, it wasn’t something that he could feasibly engage it.
“No,” Papa said, “It was something that one does. Although in the last two decades I used that very excuse to plot against the Empire.”

“Great,” Han clapped his hands together “And we are still doing that.”

“You mean against the Alliance,” Papa sad darkly, looking at Ashoka.

“No, I mean against the Empire,” Han said, “You can’t be a hundred percent honest about what you know, and what you are doing, but that doesn’t mean you are trying to sabotage anything.”

Papa looked uncomfortable “Yes, but-“

“Enough Bail,” Mama said. She looked at Leia, Luke, and Han. “If you want you and I can continue this conversation, but I don’t think we need everyone here to go over this again.”

Leia walked over to her Mama and gave her a hug. Yes, she was mad, and a bit unsettled, but tonight’s conversation had been a powerful reminder of how easily she had once lost everything. She wasn’t so mad that she wouldn’t show her love.

“Goodnight Mama,” Leia murmured into her hair, “I love you.”

Mama leaned into the embrace “I love you too Leia,” she said. Leia felt her Papa lean over her head and kiss Leia’s head. His arms wrapped around both of them.

Leia luxuriated in that feeling then broke out of the embrace. She walked over to Luke and Han, and all three of them walked out of the room.

They were halfway to the hanger bay, and the Falcon before Han spoke up, “Well that was fun,” Han muttered, “remind me the next time someone invites me to a meeting to decline as fast as I can.”

Leia was too tired to argue with him. “Luke?” she asked as her twin, worried.

Luke blinked and brought his focus back in on her “Are you okay?” she asked worried about the deliberate blankness that he had wrapped himself in.

“No,” he said. He looked at her “How do we even begin to fix this?” he asked. “How do we even start?” He ran his hands through his hair, “You tried before and failed. The other Luke tried and failed.”

“Luke,” she said, wanting to give him comfort. He was tired, and had just been hit with one hell of a revelation. This situation wasn’t as bad as he was seeing it right now. Yes, she and the other Luke had failed. But all of their mistakes had been made in ignorance. They had never lacked the will or courage to take this on. And ignorance was something they were fixing right now.

Leia went forward to hug him, and Luke stepped back, shaking his head. Leia stopped her approach, stung.

“No Leia,” he said. “I can’t-“ he rolled his shoulders, “I need to think. And right now, our walls are too thin. I’m going to hit you with my anger, and you can barely stand.” He flashed her a wan smile.

“You don’t look much better Kid,” Han remarked.

“I’ll have you know I am still prettier than you,” Luke shot back easily. Leia blinked. This was a
dynamic that her Luke and Han never had. Maybe it was the rumors of their involvement. Maybe it was the knowledge that Luke really wasn’t in competition with Han for Leia. Maybe this Luke was just sassier, and that was saying something.

She turned to Han, “Can I stay with you tonight?” Leia asked.

Han shifted uneasily on his feet. “I don’t think-” he started to say.

“Not for sex,” she said hastily.

Perversely the man looked hurt. “You saying I’m not a good distraction?” he asked.

Leia shook her head “You are always a distraction. I just, it’s not appropriate right now.” She sighed and waved in Luke’s direction indicating she was asking for him too. “I would sleep better with you. And if you aren’t comfortable with that, I would still sleep better in the Falcon. It’s the place I have called home most often.”

Han looked down at her. “You said that before,” he said wonderingly. “When you were drunk, you said that the Falcon was your home.”

Leia gave him a smile “It is,” she said.

“Really?” Han looked dubious “Even over Alderaan?”

“Alderaan is my home,” she said.

“Even after they threw you over?”

“Han,” Leia warned.

“Wasn’t right,” Han muttered.

“No,” she said “but it was understandable. But my point being, Alderaan was nowhere I could be for the majority of my life. Somewhere I still can’t be, but the Falcon has always been safe.” But she could. Oh, the throne had no appeal to her, not really. Even the thought of how many meetings it would require to efficiently run the bureaucracy that was the Empire made Leia shudder, never mind the public functions on top of that.

But to be able to turn to Vader and say yes, and be able to go to her childhood home. To go to the Royal Palace and sit in her room, looking out the window and see Appenza Peak. To walk through the city of Aldera again, and marvel at its beautiful architecture. To stand and once again allow the site of the Istabith Falls to inspire her. That was a temptation.

“Well this is my exit,” Luke said, and Leis brought her focus back in on where she was. She had been so lost in thoughts of home, she had completely lost track of where she was.

“Where are you going Luke?” she asked.

He looked at her, surprised “To my bed,” he said.

Leia couldn’t keep the hurt look off her face. “Why?” she asked, behind her Han placed a gentle hand on her back.

“To sleep,” Luke said, still looking at her like she was mad.

“But-“ Han said, and stepped fully behind Leia, placing a hand on her shoulder.
“But what?” Luke looked between the two of them.


He looked at her surprised, then a small smile crossed his lips. “Yeah, we’re just fine.” He said, then there was the briefest touch along her outer walls. It was filled with love and acceptance. “It’s me I’m not sure about.”

“Then why are you rejecting my offer to sleep on the Falcon?” Han asked.

“Did I miss something?” Luke looked between the two of them.

Leia felt Han tug her braid playfully “Leia, did you tell Luke he was included?”

“No,” Leia said, frowning, “I thought it was obvious when I said no sex.”


“Where one of you goes, you find the other one not far behind,” Han grumbled, then his face softened, “And you are always welcome on the Falcon. Even if one day you tell me you have had enough and want to run away from all of this madness. Especially on that day.”

Luke’s face broke out into a relieved smile, then it shuttered away. “I don’t want to be in the way.”

“You won’t be,” Han said.

Luke didn’t say another word, just started to walk off and Leia reached out and grabbed his hand. He was right, he was a roiling mass of emotion, but it wasn’t anything Leia herself wasn’t feeling. “No,” she said.

“No?” Luke asked, looking down at his captured hand.

“She’s right Kid,” Han looked Luke up and down “The last thing you need is to be alone and stuck in your head.”

“I have plenty of roommates,” Luke said, “I won’t be alone.”

“Yeah, putting on a brave face and pretending everything is alright. That will do you no good.” He reached out and grabbed Luke’s shoulder. “Falcon,” he grunted.

“Han,” Luke protested, then started struggling in earnest against both of them as they started to pull him to the Hanger Bay. It was late at night, but there were people still in the corridors. They gave the three of them funny looks as Leia and Han corralled a protesting Luke to the Falcon. Leia wondered briefly what the gossips would make of all of this in the morning.

“You don’t need me,” Luke protested.

“Yes, we do,” Han and Leia said at the same time.


Han grinned at him “Really.”

“You just threatened to shoot me,” Luke pointed out.
“Only to make my point,” Han waved his hand. “And that kind of threat is what it takes to get through your thick skull.”


Things were fine until they actually got into the Falcon.

<Hello Luke,> Chewie’s voice was open and friendly. That pleasant mood didn’t last for more than a few seconds when the Wookie spotted Leia. Chewie growled <What is she doing here?>

Right, Chewie was still furious with her. Another consequence of her decisions. Leia felt tears well up in her eyes, and she hastily scrubbed them away. Tomorrow, she would mourn and rage about this tomorrow.

“Not now pal,” Han muttered.

Chewie bared his teeth at Leia, looking to argue with Han about her presence, but then he got a good look at Luke’s beaten expression <What happened?> He demanded.

Leia really didn’t want to get into that, but in these chaotic times, she didn’t want Chewie to assume the worse either. “Nobody is dead,” she reassured Chewie. Then hitting on a brilliant idea to distract him from probing further, she offered helpfully, “Han’s hungry.”

“I’m not-“ Han started to protest, and then his stomach let out a loud gurgle.

She shook her head “Stubborn gundark forgot to eat dinner.”

Chewie rolled his eyes. <Of course, he did. You get involved, and he loses what little sense he has.>

“Hey!” Han said. “I have plenty of sense.”

“No, you don’t,” Leia and Chewie said at the same time.

He glared at both of them. “Fine,” he huffed, and headed over to the galley to get something to eat.

<We don’t have any ration bars left Han,> Chewie pointed out.

“Okay,” Han rubbed his hands over his face. Then he pointed to Luke and Leia, “You two, bed, now. Take the second crew quarters. I will go with Chewie to the mess and fill him in on all the latest drama.”

Leia felt a momentary pang, as she realized that Han wouldn’t be sharing his bed with her, but he was the one who was setting the pace they were moving at. She and Luke nodded and headed to the second crew quarters. Leia managed to get her shoes off, before she toppled into her bed, falling immediately asleep.

Sometime during the night, Leia jerked awake as she felt the bed dip. For a second she wondered if it was Luke, then the scent of Han filled her nose.

“Shh,” she heard him whisper, “It’s just me. Go back to sleep.”

Han crawled into the too small bunk with her, his arms curled around her. On the other bunk, Leia could hear Luke’s soft snores. Content, she allowed herself to slip back into sleep.
Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation] Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer and Acyanca

Translation into Russian available: [Translation] Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Hello loves! First off, thank you for all your patience regarding this chapter. Between the holidays, and having to work insane hours at my grown-up job in January, and most of February, this chapter is terribly late. Good news for your patience, it's the longest I've ever written.

So, you've been warned. This chapter is 63,000 words. Go to sleep if you need to, don't forget to drink water and pee, or completely disregard my advice, and read like a mad person. As always, it's up to you. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ABA – Day 133

Something wasn’t right. Leia came up from a deep sleep aware of the feeling of danger tapping along every inch of her skin. She burrowed her face into a warm chest and heard the lub lub sound of a beating heart beneath her ear. Han was here, Han was safe. Leia grunted, and tried to fall back into the dreamless void she had been in when she heard a small pained whimper of “No.”

Leia frowned, sleep-muddled mind unsure if she heard that with her ears, or her mind. Not even thinking about it she reached out into the Force, and

She found herself standing in the desert, looking at the devastated Lar’s farm.

Leia blinked, and shook her head, trying to ground herself and wake up. No, everything was still wrong. This wasn’t right, this wasn’t the dream Luke, both Luke’s, had over and over again. Leia knew Luke, this younger Luke, had it repeatedly, for all that she hadn’t seen it again in his mind since that first night on Yavin. She could always tell by the guilt in his eyes the next morning when Luke had this nightmare.

Which was why the changes to what was around her worried her. Everywhere she looked she could see open flames licking along the walls of the above-ground structures, even this far away she could feel the heat of them warming her face. This wasn’t the sight that had greeted Luke when he had come back to the farm. The fires had been long gone out, only smoke and charred ruins everywhere. Leia had been in this nightmare enough to know what it should look like, even half awake, which thanks to her panic, she no longer was.

She frantically looked to the spot where Luke should be standing, staring at the carnage in horror, but he wasn’t there. She shivered under those brutally hot twin sons. This abrupt change to a long-standing nightmare was not a good sign.

“Luke?” she called out. He didn’t answer her, but she almost fell to her knees, staggered by the wave of grief and failure that was suddenly surrounding her. Leia’s eyes widened, if he was overpowering her this easily, she must be much further in his mind then she originally thought.
Well, standing here, frantically worrying would do neither of them any good. Leia started to walk around the perimeter of the large dug out hole that formerly contained the living quarters. She got as close as she dared to the billowing smoke, pulling her shirt up to cover her mouth and nose. She couldn’t see him anywhere.

“Luke,” she called out, dropping her makeshift mouth guard for a few seconds, “Where are you?”

Again, nothing but silence answered her, and there was no ripple of any emotion that indicated that he had heard her. Luke must be deeply caught in this nightmare if he wasn’t aware of her presence.

Leia completed an entire circuit around the burning buildings, stopping every few feet to call out his name and to hear nothing in return. It wasn’t until she completed the circle that she saw him. Luke was standing in the exact spot where she had been when she entered his mind, his back to her, and staring at something at his feet.

Leia stopped walking, all worry and concern melting away into annoyance. Had he been hiding from her? Why? All he needed to do was tell her to go away, and she would walk out of this.

Leia took several steps towards him, calling out “Luke, if you want me to go, just say so.”

He didn’t say anything, just continued to stare at whatever had caught his attention. Leia frowned and looked at his feet. There was nothing there. Her gaze slid to where his Aunt and Uncle had been left out to be bleached in the Tatooine’s harsh sons, and yes, they were right where they were supposed to be.

This was all verging on the bizarre. It occurred to her that Luke might not want to upset her anymore then she had already been tonight. And that his subconscious was taking that deep desire to protect her to extremes. “Luke,” she said as loudly as she could, “If you want me to leave, that’s fine. I won’t be upset, somethings should be private.”

Luke didn’t react to her voice at all. He just continued to stare at the desert sand at his feet. Leia felt the first stirrings of dread. This was worse than Luke not knowing how to politely tell her to butt out. He wasn’t hiding from her, at least not consciously. Maybe she shouldn’t be so surprised, last night was brutal for all of them. Clearly, Luke hadn’t been exaggerating when he said he was feeling unsettled. So much so he had retreated so far into his own head that he couldn’t even feel her.

She was about ten feet away from him when Luke whispered desolately, “I failed them all.”

Leia stopped walking. What was he talking about? He hadn’t failed the Lars. He hadn’t even been there. And while his Aunt and Uncle had been his family, his world, they hardly constituted an all, and Luke wasn’t egocentric enough about himself to think otherwise.

Her son, dressed head to toe as Kylo Ren, appeared out of the smoke to stand next to Luke. He was also examining whatever was at Luke’s feet that Leia couldn’t see. “Yes,” he agreed calmly, in that false mechanized voice “You did.”

Leia took several steps back, her instinctive rejection of who had just appeared in front of her.
What was Ben even doing here? With Luke of all people? Not just Luke, but this Luke, the one that had never even met him? Leia’s blood ran cold. Was Luke somehow caught in a Force vision? Was he seeing a possibility of the future play out?

“But it wasn’t just them, was it Uncle Luke?” There was nothing but condescension and scorn in that voice, even through the voice modulator. Ben still sounded like Ben, at least to someone who had heard his natural voice.

Leia took in the lines of that mask, with its blank eyes, like and unlike his grandfathers. He had been trying so hard to mimic Vader’s voice. It was one of the reasons he had taken to wearing that blasted thing on his face. To emulate in every way the man he aspired to be.

That thought was not a new one for Leia, but for the first time, it didn’t create a wave of hurt and grief at Ben’s rejection of everything she stood for. No, the whole thing struck her as profoundly sad. All of what Ben was doing, the clothes he was wearing, the mask on his face, even the red lightsaber, for all the fact that her son was not a Sith, it was done in an effort to grasp for something Ben could never be, because it was all based on lies.

Vader was not the suit. It was easy to forget that. Hell, that suit was designed to make you forget that there was a real person underneath all of that armor. By mimicking the more visual elements of what his grandfather wore, Ben had been grasping for reassurance. No not that, he had been grasping for power. Vader’s voice out of his mask was authoritative and commanding. But it wasn’t real.

Leia knew that now. She had heard what Vader’s voice really sounded like. He had been all but screaming at her mentally above the Death Star with it. It sounded nothing like that iconic voice she had always associated with him. It was considerably higher in pitch for starters, and if Leia hadn’t known who it belonged to, she would have called it soothing. But Ben didn’t know that. He thought Vader’s voice had only needed volume enhancement after the damage Vader had taken that landed him in the suit. Ben had thought that Vader’s natural voice was really that commanding. Well, why not? It’s not like anyone in the First Order would embrace the image of Anakin Skywalker. There weren’t many surviving holos of him, outside of the suit, but there were enough. If Ben wanted to, he could still see them. But that wasn’t the image he wanted, or more precisely the image of what Snoke had sold him. Ben wanted the legend of Vader, not who he actually was. And that image most certainly did not include Anakin Skywalker in any way.

Leia had never bothered to watch those holos in any depth, but she knew Luke had. That had been a mistake, she realized. Because she had done the exact same thing Ben had done, only to a lesser degree. She had made the same assumption her son had, she had thought the voice was real, that blank face was somehow the totality of who Vader was.

That was an assumption she could no longer afford to make. It led her to having panic attacks in front of everyone she knew about the rather obvious conclusion that Vader was planning a coup against Palpatine for her. All because she refused to see what he was doing, clinging to that image of him in her head, and not accounting for different circumstances. Tactics, Luke had reminded her, you need to know him because you cannot predict what he will do until you do. Well, in that she had failed miserably.

Leia looked at her son’s mask and felt that familiar dragging stew of shame, grief, and rage at it. She had done everything she could think of to protect Ben from the legacy of where she came from, and it had all been for naught. Then her eyes fell on Luke. Young Luke, not Jedi Master Luke Skywalker, the one who had walked through fire, and came out the other side battered and
wise. This was the Luke who was still figuring out who he was.

“Uncle Luke,” Ben had called him. That was not a title Luke took casually in any way, and her son, damn him, knew that.

Leia broke off that train of thought. One, she couldn’t afford to let her rage out, not here. She was standing too far in Luke’s mind and could hurt him badly. And two, this was not Ben. This was just a copy of what Luke had seen in her nightmare about Ben killing Han. This was a nightmare, quite literally. Luke was in pain, and he was using his own mind to cut into himself.

Leia shook off the paralysis that had engulfed her the second this image of her son had appeared. “Luke!” she cried out, trying to get his attention.

Both figures ignored her. Ben, no Kylo, this was definitely Kylo, or at least Luke’s representation of him, gestured to the landscape beyond the burning farm. “You failed us all.”

At his words, the sky went from the pale blue of the desert in daytime to a vivid blood red. Leia let out a gasp as suddenly the ground beneath her feet started to rumble and mountains appeared everywhere around her. In the distorted perceptions of nightmares, they were both too close to her, and far away in the distance, at the same time.

Leia took a step away from the mountain she was suddenly standing at the foot of, and the white of the sand shifted to a blood red color. No, not sand, it wasn’t sand, but blood, splayed across white body armor.

Leia looked around her, horrified as she released what all those mountains were made of. Corpses, thousands upon thousands of corpses, all dressed in Imperial stormtrooper armor.

Leia put a hand to her mouth, trying to still her instinctive gagging at the sight of this much death. Was this how Luke saw himself? As the killer of all these men? She tried to move towards Luke, to reassure him, to tell him that if he hadn’t destroyed the Death Star, billions of innocent civilians would have died on Alderaan. That billions more across the galaxy would have as well. Yes, it was a tragedy that these men were dead, but they were soldiers. They had known what they were getting into, just like Luke knew the risks every time he climbed into his X-Wing.

Leia’s motion to her brother was cut off, by something snagging on her foot. Her path had been clear a moment ago, but Luke’s mind was apparently throwing obstacles in her way. Leia looked down to see that a stormtrooper was splayed out, and her foot was caught in the sharper edges of his shoulder guard.

Leia scowled down at it, this was an annoyance, but she would move a million of these things out of her way if she needed to. She kneeled and pushed the body so that it rolled out of her way. As she did so, the helmet rolled off the trooper’s head.

The stormtrooper was wearing Rex’s face.

Leia gave an instinctive cry of grief and fell back on to the ground as that familiar face stared up at her. There was a gray cast to that lovely olive skin, and the eyes were clouded over. All motion and personality was gone from that expressive face, like it had never been.

“Rex?” Leia whimpered. Why would Luke be seeing Rex like this? She looked around and noticed the helmets vanish from all of the bodies lying around her as if they had never been. And every single one of those troopers was wearing the exact same face.

This wasn’t about Rex, Leia realized with sinking horror, this was about the clones.
Understanding where this was going, and what was driving it, Leia instantly went to her feet and tried to run to her brother. She hadn’t gone more than two steps before she collided into an invisible wall, as Luke’s mind reflexively pushed back against her. That barrier stilled her. What was Luke doing?

Or perhaps, the better question was, what deep-seated fear was driving him to keep her away? And if that was what was going on, she needed to tread very carefully. She was deep in his mind, and given how the Force sang between them she could hurt him very badly with any serious attempt to push against that wall. If she was going to get past it, Luke was the one who needed to bring it down.

“Just like the Jedi of old,” her son sneered, and Leia’s attention was drawn back to Luke. He was stumbling away from Ben, as her son continued to slowly advance on him. “Too caught up in the greater good to see the harm you were causing,”

Luke shook his head vehemently, “No, I didn’t,” he stuttered “I wouldn’t!”

“Look around you Uncle,” and there was so much venom in that tone. Leia’s heart broke as she saw the look on Luke’s face. Uncle was never a title that either version of Luke would take lightly. Luke had loved Ben, even as he feared the influence Snoke was having on him, but he wasn’t the only one that had feared that.

Was that something that all of them had failed to make Ben understand? Leia was well aware that her parents were afraid for her, that they always had been. But there was a vast difference of being afraid for someone and being afraid of them. That difference made all the more stark for Leia by Obi-Wan’s reaction to her when she first arrived here. He had been afraid of her, or more precisely, who she reminded him of.

For the first time, it occurred to Leia that maybe Ben hadn’t understood the difference. Leia was having her own education on the secrets and failures even the most well-meaning parents could conceal from their children. Perhaps love wasn’t the problem, but one of communication? Had Ben really thought that she, Han, and Luke feared him?

This fake Kylo went on, words sending Leia’s realization scattering to the corners of her mind as the whiplash of pain they caused Luke caught her attention, “You are nothing but a peasant from an Outer Rim territory,” he told Luke, who was backpedaling so quickly, he wasn’t paying attention to the obstacles on the ground. Luke tripped on one of the corpses, and he fell without a sound, eyes never leaving Kylo’s face. The tall figure kicked a bit of sand in her brother’s face, “Did you really think you could fix anything?”

Kylo paused for a moment, head cocked thoughtfully, then squatted down next to him. “Or perhaps this was your solution?” Kylo asked, gesturing to that blank spot they had both been staring at earlier, “To ensure that I was never born?”

Leia frowned, what was he talking about? She still couldn’t see anything. She squinted hard and brought all of her focus to what Luke was trying so hard to hide from her. And then, like they had always been there, a pair of skeletons appeared. Leia frowned. That wasn’t anything new. Luke’s Aunt and Uncle were always part of this dream, if not in that particular location.

Then her eyes slid to the dome that led to the entrance to the Lar’s home. Two skeletons were still there, undisturbed. Leia’s eyes went back to the sight that Luke had hidden from her. Still two skeletons, but for the first time, Leia noticed that one was very long, the other short. Owen and Beru Lars had been almost the same height. These two skeletons were not.
Leia felt her heartbreak as she finally understood what Luke meant by *all*. The clones, his Aunt and Uncle, her and Han, they were all here, in the mountain of the dead. She was surprised that she didn’t immediately see Obi-Wan somewhere in this mess too. Or was Luke still too furious and disillusioned with the Jedi to integrate him into this?

“You failed,” her son told Luke, who was pale, and said nothing to the accusation, “You did exactly what the Jedi did. You forgot who you were.”

Leia snarled at that untrue accusation, took a step forward, only to hit that damn barrier *again*. She stopped fighting when she saw Luke curl around himself in pain, an instinctive reaction to her as she flayed against that invisible wall. Dammit, she was hurting him fighting against him but he needed to wake the hell up, and let her *help*.

Then Vader’s voice boomed all around them, “I told you I would kill you if she died boy.” The mechanized breathing causing the red sky all around them to pulse in time with it. Around them the wind picked up, starting to whirl the smoke and debris. Leia bit bag a gag as suddenly the smell of all those corpses was very present all around them.

“No,” Luke said, looking up into that red sky, “Father no, I would never- “

There was the sound of a lightsaber igniting all around them, harsher and louder then they were in real life. Luke gave out a scream of pain, and Leia joined him as her right hand felt like it had been burned by fire. It took everything she had not to lash out at Luke, to free herself from this by any means necessary.

Leia collapsed to her knees and tried to remind herself to breathe. She looked at her hand, which was shaking, but it was there, whole and untouched.

With the visual reminder that it was Luke who was in pain, not her, Leia looked back up to see her brother curled around himself, whimpering.

“This is the price you pay for failure,” Kylo told Luke, “Grandfather understands that.”

Luke just looked up at this image of her son, his right arm tucked under his left. Because Vader cut it off, Leia realized, just like the Vader in her past had done to Luke.

Vader’s voice again was all around them, “You are no son of mine. You are nothing but weak!”

Enough of this. Leia was aware that Luke had grown up desperately wanting a father, and that Vader’s identity was something he was still grappling with, for all that he refused to talk to her about it. But there was no way that she would allow any version of Vader, even a nightmare version, to call Luke *weak*. Luke was the strongest of all of them.

“Luke!” Leia called out, coming to her feet. But instead of throwing herself at that barrier again, trying to break it, she took a cue from her own past history with Vader. Much like he had done so long ago she enveloped this barrier with everything she was, feeling along its edges for the cracks and small fault lines. But instead of hammering away at them, like he had done so long ago, Leia filled them with every bit of her love for Luke and her faith in him that she could.

“Luke!” she cried out again. “I’m here, let me help you!”

Abruptly the wall that had confined her vanished as if it had never been. Leia stumbled a bit and then righted herself. Luke still wasn’t looking at her, he was staring at Kylo Ren, but some part of him recognized that she was here.
Leia used the Force to run over to where he was still sprawled out on the ground. She fell to her knees beside him. “Luke,” she practically screamed in his ear, “I am here. I am not dead!”

Kylo Ren turned to stare at her impassively, but Luke only whimpered and shook his head, “I failed,” he whispered to the charred skeleton she assumed was hers.

“Luke,” Leia said and grabbed his left hand, the one that hadn’t been cut off, in her own, hoping her touch would ground him. Their connection flared to life along her skin, and Leia let out a small gasp as she was caught in the vortex of emotion filling his mind. She brought her shields up just the tiniest bit so she could think.


“You died, you died, you died,” Luke murmured, rocking himself ever so slightly. He had reacted to her voice though. He wasn’t looking at her, but he had answered her.

“I am right here Luke,” Leia said as soothingly as she could, sending a steady stream of the feeling of “I’m here, I’m here,” through the Force at him. There was a part of him that knew she was real, or she would still be standing on the edges of this tableau, helpless to intervene. Now she just needed his conscious mind to catch on to that fact.

“You shouldn’t comfort him, Mother,” the ghost of her son said.

Leia wanted to snatch that mask off of him. If he was going to say such things, then he should do it to Luke’s face, not hide behind that durasteel facade. She even began to lift the hand not holding Luke’s, to use the Force to call it to her and crunch it-

What was she thinking? This wasn’t Ben, this was only Luke’s version of him. And that thought gave her an idea on how to break Luke out of this. Instead of letting her hand fall back to her side she brought it up decisively and used the Force to call that hated mask to her. It took but a second, and it was there, dangling from the edges of her fingers. With a growl of disgust, she flung it into the sand. Even in a dream, she really didn’t want to touch the thing.

Then she turned her attention back to Luke. “Luke!” she commanded to her brother, who was still staring at horror at her false remains. She grabbed his head between her hands, forcing him to look at Kylo. “Look!” she commanded.

For a moment, Luke did nothing. He just stared blankly up at the tall figure of her son. Leia’s heart sank, he was too lost in whatever horror he had gone through before she arrived to focus on anything. Then he blinked, and his eyes slowly took in that figure still squatting beside him.

Luke let out a horrible shriek, and Leia winced at the loud sound so close to her. Not that she blamed him. Because Luke didn’t know what Ben’s face looked like, underneath that black mask, there was nothing but a faceless blob. It was disturbing to feel the Dark Side swirl all around them and to have this faceless creature being the one doing it.

Then another voice, irritated and cranky boomed across the landscape, “What the hell are you two doing?”

Luke must have uttered that scream out in his sleep, into the real world. It wasn’t going to be long before Han was going to shake her awake, and Leia didn’t have enough control to override her body’s instinctual response to that. But just because they were short on time, didn’t mean that she couldn’t do one last thing.
She looked down at the mask still stuck in the sand, and she made a fist with her hand causing it to crumble into a small metal ball. It wasn’t real, but it still felt wonderful to do so.

Luke flinched at the noise of crunching durasteel, then his eyes focused in on her. “Leia?” he asked, confused.

She gave him a smile, “Yes, it’s me.” She said, reaching forward to cup his cheek. “You’re dreaming. You need to wake up.”

He frowned, “No,” he said, voice lost, “Not a dream. This is the future, can’t you see that?”

She paused, it was possible after all. Some of what she had seen happen here had happened in the future she had lived.

Leia let her sense of what was around them fill her mind. This didn’t feel like the Force, it only tasted of his fear. She shook her head, “No, it isn’t Luke.”

“Leia,” Han demanded, “Wake up!”

Luke frowned up at the sky, “Han?” he asked. Then his face came down, staring at Leia puzzled, then his gaze fell deliberately on that tall skeleton not three feet from him.

“He’s probably freaking out in the bed beside me,” Leia quipped, trying to use humor to ground Luke.

“But he’s dead,” Luke no longer sounded grief-stricken, only confused. Leia could see that he was starting to understand that this wasn’t real. Unfortunately, she could feel herself start to be pulled back into her own mind, into her own body.

She felt Han shaking her shoulders, and she cast a frantic look at Luke. She grabbed his one hand in hers, the other still missing,

“Luke,” she said urgently, and then Han’s voice joined in hers, causing the fading landscape around them to tremble with their words, “Wake up!”

Leia’s eyes flew open to see Han looming over her, braced on his arms, staring intently down at her.

“Luke!” she cried out into his worried face. She turned to her side, to look for her brother. He was still in his bunk, huddled under his blankets, eyes open, but wide and unseeing.

Han’s voice was panicked filled “Leia, what’s wrong? Was it Vader? Did he get in?”

Leia shook her head “Nightmare,” she told Han, arms coming up to push him so he would move off of her.

Han obligingly went to the side closest to the wall so that she could sit up. Leia put her bare feet to the cold hard floor, but before she could stand, Han laid a hand on her shoulder. It wasn’t meant to be confining, but only a reminder that he was here. “Leia are you alright?” he asked.

She didn’t bother to look back, for all that she took strength in the emotion of support being conveyed by that small gesture. She allowed the hand to slip off her shoulder as she scrambled over
to Luke, who was watching her with confused filled eyes, still caught between being asleep and awake. “Not my nightmare,” she said in a rushed voice over her shoulder.

Leia knelt by Luke’s bed and took his hand, the right one, not the left, hoping that would help Luke come all the way to wakefulness. She found herself murmuring under her breath and in the Force, “I’m alive, I’m alive, I’m alive.”

She heard Han’s bare feet padding over to them, and he knelt behind her, a steady strength at her back. He didn’t reach out to Luke though, only asked in a cautious voice, “Kid?”

That seemed to call Luke back from wherever his mind had gone, he took in a deep shuddering breath “Han?” he asked, then his gaze fell on her “Leia?”

“Yeah Luke,” Han said gently, reaching around Leia too lay his hand over hers, “We’re here.”

Luke frowned up at both of them, “What?” he croaked, and flexed the hand both of them were holding. He frowned down at it and opened his mouth to ask something.

He didn’t get the chance, because that was the exact moment Chewie burst into the room, his bow caster in hand, up, and ready to be fired.

<I heard screaming>, he growled, and then he came to a very sudden stop as he took the tableau in front of him. <Oh,> he said, as the details registered with him, a hint of embarrassment in his voice.

Leia looked down. She was wearing one of Han’s shirts that she had stolen from his closet. He was so tall, or she was so short, that it fell about mid-thigh on her. But there was no disguising that it was Han’s. Han was only wearing a pair of loose-knit sleep pants, with no shirt. Leia was lucky that Luke’s presence meant that Han was even willing to wear clothes to bed, he usually preferred to sleep in the nude.

Han’s hair was a mess, the brown locks flying every which way. It looked like she had been running her hands through it. Luke’s face was hidden from Chewie’s view, but he would know that her brother was here. He had seen her and Luke head off to bed, and there weren’t that many places to sleep on this ship. Besides, Luke’s scream was too deep to belong to Leia, and Chewie, with his better hearing, would know that the voice crying out didn’t belong to Han.

<Am I interrupting something?> Chewie’s voice was almost painfully neutral.

Han shook his head, “No, it’s fine,” he said, standing back up. He gestured to the bow caster, “You can put that down. It was only a bad dream.”

Chewie looking at the three of them, said slowly <I see.> He leaned the bow caster against the wall next to the door. As he stretched back up, he gave Leia a very pointed look. She reluctantly moved out of the way so that Chewie could see Luke. She didn’t relax her grip on her brother’s hand though.

<Luke,> Chewie asked gently <Are you all right?>

Luke looked at him, and blinked, confused “Am I sick?” he asked, looking at Han for clarification. Luke was learning Shyriiwook, but he was only at the basics, and it wasn’t a surprise to Leia that after that nightmare, he was muddling even the phrases he did know.

Han shook his head and moved away from both Leia and Luke so that Chewie could see Luke better, “Close Kid. He asked if you are alright.”
“Oh,” Luke flushed, “I’m fine,” he said, slowly pushing himself up so that he was sitting up. He gave Chewie a not very reassuring grin. “It was just a nightmare.”

Chewie looked down at Luke’s hand, which was still clasping on Leia’s like he would drown if she wasn’t there.

<Just a nightmare?> Chewie asked voice dubious.


Leia wasn’t a hundred percent sure Luke had correctly translated everything Chewie had said, given the confusion she could feel lingering in his mind over the Wookie’s growls, but he knew Chewie well enough to know the general gist of what the Wookie would say in a situation like this. Luke blushed slightly, “I’m sorry I woke you,” he said.

Chewie cocked his head, and then he took two strides into the room, and gently cuffed Luke over the back of his head.


Chewie loomed over him <You are not this stupid!> he growled, pointing a finger in Luke’s face. <Do not pick up Han’s and your sister’s bad habits.>

“Hey!” Han shouted indignantly. “I didn’t do anything here!” Leia wisely kept her mouth shut.

Chewie turned and looked at Han <Don’t start!> he warned. Then he looked back at Luke, and his face softened just a bit. He gave a long sigh and sank so that he was sitting on the floor, to better meet Luke’s eyes.

<Do not hide behind your pride young one,> he said, <You are safe here, and you are in pain.>

Luke looked at Chewie, then he asked, “I’m a fish?”

Leia felt a small giggle escape her lips, and she immediately clamped down on it when everyone turned to look at her. “Sorry,” she said to everyone. She sent to Luke, “You are in pain.” She mentally recreated the noise for pain. “You were confusing it with this word,” She made a slightly lower growl in her mind, so that Luke could feel the difference.

“And that word is fish, right?” Luke asked back, “I didn’t get that wrong?”

“More accurately it’s the food that is caught on the hook, but yes, fish works as a general translation.”


Chewie looked back and forth between Luke and Leia, <Han said-> he cut himself off with a shake of his head.

“Han said what?” Luke asked.

Chewie looked him straight in the eyes <Han said you two talked mind to mind. I wasn’t aware that was something Jedi could do.>

Chewie waited for Luke to say something, but Luke only looked back at him slightly defiantly. Seeing nothing in that face, the Wookie transferred his gaze to Leia. She only stared back at him, showing him nothing. She didn’t really have anything to add to this, if Luke wanted to get into it,
he would. And she didn’t want to contemplate a world where Chewie was afraid of her, and what
she could do.

<Can you translate for me?> Chewie asked her seriously, <Luke is being especially stubborn, and I
want to make sure he understands everything I’m saying.>

“Of course,” Leia said, looking at Han in confusion, “but why not Han?”

<Because Han cannot talk directly into his mind.> Chewie said patiently, <And if he could, Luke
would very quickly become a spice user to drown him out.>

Han offered no protest to that.


Leia nodded her head to Chewie, indicating that he should begin. He took a deep breath in <Han
told me what passed between you and Obi-Wan tonight.> he said.

A look of pure delight crossed Luke’s face as Leia provided him the meaning behind the words
almost the second Chewie said them. Then his face darkened as he realized what the Wookie was
saying. <It’s understandable you would have any number of nightmares after that conversation.>

Luke shook his head, “No, it was stupid,” he said, “I knew Obi-Wan wasn’t perfect. I knew he had
a tendency to withhold things, I just…”

<Love him,> Chewie said, <And to have another blow to your trust hurt.>

“Yeah,” Luke rubbed discreetly at his face, and Leia squeezed his hand. She felt him flex his
fingers back, but he said nothing out loud to her, or in the Force.

Chewie looked between them, and there was awe and wonder in his voice, <You really are
translating as fast as I speak aren’t you?>, he asked Leia. Both she and Luke nodded their heads.

Chewie gave a long whistle, <This wasn’t something the Jedi could do was it?> Leia saw Luke nod
his head. Chewie shook his head, <You are constantly full of surprises young one,> he said,
<Although I suppose I shouldn’t be too shocked. He might not have talked mind to mind with
anyone, but I know Yoda felt the death of all the Jedi.>

She had forgotten that Chewie knew Yoda, or at least had served with him. Although she was
wondering now how he knew that Yoda could perceive even that much.

Then Leia’s blood ran cold as she processed his words. Feeling Han die had been bad enough, but
for the entire Order? Yoda’s entire world had disappeared in a few minutes. And he would have felt
them all deeply. As Force sensitives they would be much louder in the Force than Han was in
death.

She had her issues with Yoda, and what he and Obi-Wan tried to get Luke to do, but she was
frankly surprised that he hadn’t been driven insane by that. Or perhaps more insane. Obi-Wan had
said it himself, Yoda had never recovered from that awful day. Come to think of it, it explained a
lot about Obi-Wan too.

Luke’s mind must have been on the same track, because he let out a soft, “Oh,” his eyes going
wide. He had never felt anyone die in the Force, at least not consciously, but Leia was well aware
of how it affected him when she had been shot on Cymoon 1. “That’s horrible.”
“Really Kid?” Han’s voice was curious, “Because the sense I got last night was that you thought they deserved what they got.”

Luke’s look of comprehension faded away, and then was replaced by indignant anger, “That is not what I said.”

“Oh, really?” Han crossed his arms over his chest.

“I wasn’t that mad,” Han gave him a pointed look. Luke flushed slightly, but his chin came up, and he let go of Leia’s hands to cross them over his chest, mirroring Han. “I wasn’t,” he insisted “What happened to the Jedi, that wasn’t justice Han. What happened was a slaughter.”

Han’s face didn’t twitch, “You said it yourself, they held slaves. Isn’t that what they deserved? Just like the Hutts?”


“No,” he said, voice tired, and he made a fist with his right hand, rolling it in a tight circle “I know the Jedi were nothing like the Hutts.”

Han gave Luke a skeptical look, “I do know that.” Luke protested “I might not know much about their history, but I do know they tried to do good, which is more than the Hutts ever did.”

“Maybe you should explain that to Kenobi,” Han said, his arms coming down “because I think it would have been kinder to knife him through the heart.”

Luke’s guilty look immediately wiped away, replaced with a terrifying blankness, “He lied to me Han, again.”

“Maybe. Looks more like he lied to himself, both times.”

Luke whined, “Whose side are you on anyway?”

“Yours,” Han answered without hesitation, “Always yours. But here’s the thing, I know you. You are too soft-hearted not to beat yourself up for what you said to him.”

Luke gave a dismissive snort, and Han’s eyes narrowed, “Listen to me Kid, I give it three days, tops, to when you cool down enough to realize what you actually did to him last night, and start beating yourself up about it.”


Han rolled his eyes, “Talk to me in three days, and let’s see what you say then.”

Han was right, Leia knew, Luke would regret it. Oh, not what he said, he believed he was right. But in how he said it, and that he had hurt Obi-Wan. It didn’t matter how much he believed he was right, Luke didn’t easily forgive himself when he allowed his anger to guide him, and he hurt someone. Luke, when his temper wasn’t riding him, had the softest heart of all of them.

“It was wrong what they did,” Luke said, “Regardless of what happened to the Jedi later, that doesn’t change the fact that what they did was wrong.” And his face darkened, “The clones were their slaves, but even when they turned on their masters, they were still the victims.”

“How so?” Han asked.
“You heard Obi-Wan, they did it because of a chip in their head. They didn’t choose any rebellion, they were programmed for genocide, and that makes it even worse.” Then Luke looked accusingly at Leia, “And why was I only hearing about that for the first time last night?”

No wonder Luke had gone off the deep end, Leia thought. Even a slave had the thoughts in their head, their master couldn’t take that away from them. They might scrape and bow and pretend to be happy with the lot in their life, but in their own mind, they knew different. The clones didn’t even have that refuge.

Chewie looked at her in surprise <You didn’t tell him?>

“No,” Leia whispered, “I forgot he didn’t know yet.”

Luke looked at Leia, judgmental and pissed, “What happened to them, Leia?” He swung his legs so that he was sitting on the edge of the bed, and he leaned over so that his face was practically nose to nose with hers. His blue eyes were as cold as Hoth right this minute, “There were millions of them, but Rex is the first one I’ve ever met. Where did they all go?”

“After Order 66-” she started to say, but Luke cut her off.

“Order 66?” he asked.

Leia swallowed her dismay. By all the Gods, did Luke not even know about this? But then again who would tell him? Obi-Wan, who she was pretty sure lost a lot of his sanity on that horrible day? Any of the other soldiers on this base? They wouldn’t, because it might spook the possible Jedi away from being a Jedi.

Chewie answered the question for her, <That was the name of the Order given to the clones to kill all the Jedi.> He gave a sad woof <Including the children in the Temples.>

Luke’s face was still frighteningly remote. "Did they ever realize what they had done?"

Leia very carefully did not break eye contact with Luke as she answered, “Some of them, yes.”


Leia sighed and shifted so that she was sitting more comfortably on the floor. She knew Luke, and he was settling in for a long argument. She brought her knees up, and wrapped her arms around them, resting her chin on them, “Logic and paperwork,” she told him.

That ice demeanor Luke had retreated behind faded away as he looked at her confused, “Huh?”

Leia shrugged, “After the foundation of the Empire, there were huge recruiting drives across the galaxy for the Imperial Armed Forces. Especially in the Outer Rim.”

Luke nodded, “Biggs’ father served for five years. It’s how he got the money to buy his farm.”

Unusual for that to happen, most of those Outer Rim recruits never returned to their homeworld, but it wasn’t unheard of. “But if you study the paperwork, the attrition rate of the soldiers stayed at Clone War Levels for at least another three years.”

“Maybe those soldiers left after the war was done?” Luke suggested.

Leia shook her head, “No, I thought of that at the time. I also looked into the medical records and discharge papers. There was an uptick in medical discharges from the armed forces, and there were
people who left the Imperial Forces, but nowhere near the numbers to explain where all those soldiers had gone.” She swallowed hard, “At least they didn’t leave the service alive.”

Luke paled, and Leia went on. “There were some Separatist groups who continued fighting, but for the first three years of the Empire, there were no major enemies that would account for those kinds of losses.”

Actually, it wasn’t until about the fifth year that anything that could be considered a “loss” even occurred. And Cham Syndulla had put the work of the Rebellion back years with his premature effort to kill Palpatine. But that was ancient history.

“So, who was dying?” Luke asked, but Leia could see the answer in his eyes.

“The Clones mostly. Some of them were sent on suicide missions,” she allowed. Then she bit her lip, “Most volunteered for them.”

Luke’s eyes went distant, “You think the chip failed at some point for them?”

“I don’t know Luke,” she said, “How the Kaminoans did what they did, has been lost to the galaxy. All I do know, is over that period the Empire sustained personnel losses that weren’t repeated until the Alliance blew up the Death Star.”

“Who’s Wolffe?” Luke asked, leaning back up. His anger was morphing into a determined and surer thing now. He was going to tear this apart until he received a satisfactory answer. Unfortunately for Leia’s sleep patterns, she was pretty sure she didn’t have the answers he was looking for. “Obi-Wan mentioned someone named Wolffe, and that he would never come here.”

Leia shook her head, “Another clone I presume, but I never met him. You are going to have to ask Rex about that.”

“What happened after three years?” Luke looked at her. “You said that the attrition rates dropped back to more reasonable levels then.”

“Most of the clones were dead by that point,” Leia said, “And the recruitment drives were successful enough that the remaining ones were phased out of the Imperial Army,” she added gently, “They weren’t “stable”’

“The Empire just let them go?” Luke’s sounded so bitterly cynical.

Chewie answered that one <They were beginning to age past peak performance Luke. They were of no use anymore.>


“I’m not sure that there were that many left in any case,” Leia said.

“How many of them are left now?” Luke asked.

“I don’t know Luke,” Leia said.

His eyes narrowed, “You mean you don’t want to know.”

She shook her head, “No, I mean I don’t know. The Empire isn’t exactly forthcoming of how many, if any, are left in their ranks. And any records about where the survivors did retire to were destroyed in the purges of the Imperial bureaucracy shortly before the Alliance retook Coruscant.”
“There had to be other record depots where that information was stored,” Luke said.

Leia nodded, “There were, for other veterans of the Imperial Army and Navy. But the records on
the clones were only stored on Coruscant.”

“Why?” Luke looked at all of them, “What was the Empire trying to hide?”

“I don’t know,” Leia said tiredly.

“Someone had to pay the Kaminoans to create them. Who did that?” Luke asked.

Leia shook her head, “That is also something I don’t know. The Empire claimed it was the Jedi,
but that is very unlikely.”

“Because it was against their moral code?” Luke asked sneeringly, “They didn’t object to them
once they appeared.”

“No Luke,” Leia said patiently, “Because any payment that big would have to go through the
Senate first for authorizing. And that is something my father would have heard about. He never
once mentioned it to me.”

A nasty look crossed Luke’s face, “I don’t know Leia, it seems to me he hasn’t been telling you a
lot of things. Wouldn’t surprise me to learn he lied about this too.”

Leia flinched, and Han’s voice was cutting, “Back off Luke,” he said, voice tight, “She’s not the
one to blame for this.”

Luke’s face twisted for one moment, then remorse filled his eyes. “I’m sorry,” he said, rubbing his
hands over his face, “I know that Leia. But I’m used to you knowing the answers.”

“I’m afraid in this case I don’t,” Leia said.

Luke got up and paced to the door. For a second Leia was afraid that he was going to leave the
room, but he swung around and stared at Leia, and his jaw clenched, “Did the Senate place the
initial order for the clones?” Luke asked in a tight voice. “Or the Jedi?”

Leia shook her head. “I don’t know,” she said.


Chewie looked taken aback at even being asked. <I have no idea,> he said.

“Really?” Luke looked dubiously at both of them.

“Don’t bother asking me Kid,” Han said, trying to divert Luke’s anger. “I sure as hell don’t know.”

Luke didn’t take the bait, “How do you not know Leia?” Did you not care enough to look into it,
was the unspoken question.

“I told you, Luke,” Leia said, aware that her impatience was creeping into her voice. She lifted her
head from her knees and threw her arms up in frustration. “The records about the clones were
destroyed. And before you ask, the Kaminoans didn’t leave anything behind either.” She gave him
a bitter mocking smile, “Shortly after Order 66 the Kaminoans destroyed every record they had on
the Clones and abandoned all the facilities. Nobody knows where they disappeared to.”

“They saw they were probably next,” Han said.
Leia nodded, “And if there were any records in the Senate about it, they were destroyed long before I ever got to them.”

Luke frowned, “Then where did the orders, and the payment come from?”

Han’s voice was firm, “Well, there are people on this base who possibly know the answer to that.”

“Like who?” Luke looked frustrated, and he started massaging his right wrist.

“Bail,” Han parried back easily “He was pretty high up in the Republic Senate. Kenobi was on the Jedi Council, whatever that means, and he might know too.”

Luke shook his head, “You were there, you heard him, he wasn’t on the council at the beginning of the war.”

That was true, and that meant that Obi-Wan Kenobi had been put on the Jedi High Council sometime in his mid-thirties. Just what had the attrition rates for the Jedi been during the Clone Wars that someone that young ended up in such a position? She didn’t like the answer she was drawing from her own life experiences. Leia knew that Obi-Wan was talented and that his reputation as a fierce fighter wasn’t in any way exaggerated. She had seen him in action herself. Even the Empire acknowledged how dangerous Obi-Wan was, with the refusal to say he was dead in his long years of exile.

But even with all of those factors, what had he been doing on the ruling body of the Jedi that young? If her own life, and very young promotions that she had been given, were anything to go by, it was because there wasn’t anyone else. Just how stretched thin had the Jedi become during the Clone Wars? How stretched had they been before? And how much of that was Palpatine’s doing, and how much of that situation existed before he came along?

“That doesn’t mean he didn’t learn later where they came from Luke,” Leia said.

Luke frowned, “You think he was hiding behind words again?”

Leia thought of Obi-Wan’s drawn and tired face, “Normally yes, but last night…” she trailed off, and shook her head “No, I don’t think he was doing that. By the end of that conversation, he was like the rest of us. Not thinking, just reacting.”

“Maybe,” Luke didn’t look convinced

“And if he was hiding it, when was he supposed to say something to you?” Han asked. “When you were accusing him of abusing your father? Or maybe when you were about two words away from breaking what was left of his heart?” Luke looked at Han startled.

Han shrugged, “Look, I don’t get him. I’m not even sure I like him, but I do know that he is only human, and that means he makes mistakes. We all make mistakes, and he actually seems to genuinely want to fix them, which is more than you can say about most people.”


Han winced, and rubbed his hand over the back of his neck, “Yeah, you got him there Kid. But all I can think hearing you go on and on right now is that none of us can ever try to make right what we did wrong.” He shifted on his feet, “And I’m not the only one here that has done things in their past that they regret now.”
“You can’t undo anything,” Luke said, “It’s done. What you can do, is not do it again, which is the point Obi-Wan seems to be missing.” His shoulders slumped, “I don’t know, maybe it’s better if I let the Jedi die out.”

Chewie let out a roar at that, and all of them looked at him startled. <That is by far the stupidest thing you have said tonight young one!>

Luke gave a shake of his head, “What am I supposed to do? The Jedi-“

Chewie cut him off with a growl. <You said Obi-Wan was leaving it to you to fix his greatest mistake. Did it ever occur to you that you do not have to do it the way he tells you?>

“What do you suggest?” Luke shot back, ‘Because a version of me already tried, and failed. I’m sure that he thought he was fixing what was wrong too.”

“I don’t know about that,” Leia said softly.

They all looked at her, “I don’t think he knew how deep the problems went,” she explained.


“Because everyone who could have told him was dead,” she said.

“Except for Yoda,” Luke said stubbornly, “He could have told him.”

Chewie let out a startled yelp, and Leia broke the staring contest she was having with Luke to stare at the Wookie.

<Yoda is still alive?> he asked.

Sith take it, that wasn’t something Chewie knew. She shot a look at Luke, who looked aghast that he had let that slip.

Chewie barreled on, <Where is he?>

Leia blinked, there was real grief in that voice, it spoke of more than just a passing acquaintance. And he hadn’t asked how Yoda was alive. He hadn’t asked in the future either. That wasn’t something that had occurred to Leia until just now.

“Yes,” she said cautiously, then shot Luke a reproachful look. “He is.” Chewie looked at her wonderingly, and Leia added warningly “That is not something that the Alliance High Council is aware of though.”

<Why?>

“Security, mostly. It was a secret only my father and Obi-Wan were aware of,” Leia said.

<That’s…> Chewie shook his head. Then his gaze sharpened, <Are you telling me that Yoda taught the Luke of your past?>

“Yes,” Leia said.

Chewie gave an odd harrumph. <Then Luke’s right,> Chewie said, crossing his arms over his chest in irritation, <Yoda should have taught him where the Order went wrong. He was there for most of it.>
“You are presuming Yoda even understood what went wrong in the Order he was leading,” Leia said. She found it doubtful. Both Yoda and Obi-Wan had focused in on killing Vader as solving the problem. But the Emperor was Vader’s puppet master, and he was the one person that the Empire couldn’t survive the death of. Something both Yoda and Obi-Wan had overlooked.

“Also, I don’t think you are factoring in the time element. Luke’s formal training, was at most, six months. He was more interested in learning as much about controlling the Force as he could. Not the history of the Jedi Order.” She stopped speaking, thinking about it, “Luke knew there were problems, of course he did. The Emperor being able to rise to power, right under their noses was definitely a sign that they had lost touch with the Force, and the galaxy around them. But I don’t think he understood what the problems actually were.”

“Who cares what their problems were?” Luke asked, withering scorn in his voice, “It’s a legacy that has been too corrupted. If we bring it back, we bring back an organization that used slavery. Better to let it die.”

<If that is the case, then what are you even doing here Luke?> Chewie asked in a scathing tone.

“I’m sorry?” Luke looked at Chewie, shocked.


Luke frowned, “I knew that,” he said slowly, not sure where this was going.

Chewie shook his head, <You know, but I don’t think you understand what that means Luke> He looked away from all of them for a long moment, gathering his thoughts, <I fought with those troopers,> he said, <With the clones. The Separatists had invaded Kashyyyk, and they were there to give us support to fend them off.>

“Okay,” Luke said, “but there were a lot of battles they were involved with.”

Chewie nodded, <There were. But this one was unique. Because Master Yoda was on the planet. The Jedi thought that we were important enough to send the Grand Master of the Jedi order there. And I was there when Order 66 was given.>

That explained Chewie’s cryptic remark about Yoda feeling the death of the Jedi and how he knew that Yoda had survived Order 66.

Luke looked at Chewie, “You were there? When the Order was given?”

<I was,> Chewie remarked. Han looked a little too interested in all of this. Leia wondered if this was anything he had ever pressed Chewie on. If he had only ever heard about the vaguest of details when Chewie was drunk. Even in the future, this was something Chewie almost never talked about, except in the broadest of terms. Leia had always thought it was because of the trauma of what happened to Kashyyyk after the fall of the Republic. And that was certainly a factor, but maybe that hadn’t been all of it. Maybe Chewie, like Obi-Wan, had been ashamed of the fact that at the time he hadn’t questioned the status of the clones either.

“What happened?” Luke asked the question they were all thinking.

<Yoda was clutching his chest,> Chewie said, voice matter of fact, <I was worried that he was having a heart attack. I was standing near him, trying to help him. His two clone guards were taking a comm call. I couldn’t make out what was being said, but I recognized the voice as belonging to the Chancellor.>
He gave a long sigh, "The call ended, and I thought they were coming over to help Yoda. Instead, they both drew their weapons. Before they could shoot him, he killed them both."

“So, they were killed and discarded,” Luke’s voice was bitter.

“Should Yoda allowed himself to be killed?” Chewie asked back reasonably, “For that matter should I have been fighting alongside them? Accepting the clones support?”

“He was the head of the Jedi Order,” Luke snapped back. ”He knew better!”

“Should I be held in as much contempt as well then?”

“You couldn’t have known-“ Luke protested

Give me more credit than that Luke,” Chewie scoffed "It was called a Clone Army, even then. Stood to reason those people were bred to fight and die."

“But-“ Luke whispered, confused and looking gutted, “You were a slave. How could you stand by and do nothing? Worse than that, accept it?”

"Later, that happened later." Chewie sighed, and let out a mournful huff "If you think that every republic world that accepted help didn’t know where that help came from, you are wrong."

“But slavery was illegal in the Republic?” Luke looked at Leia, betrayed, “Wasn’t it?”

“For sentient creatures, yes.” Leia looked at him, “The clones were considered a grey area.”

“But Rex is a person. He is not a thing!” Luke protested hotly, “Anyone can see that!”

She gave him a sad smile “Morals are always the first casualty of any war Luke.”

"This wasn’t something the Jedi just unleashed upon the galaxy Luke." Chewie looked at him sadly, "It wasn’t a mass conspiracy that the Jedi plotted. They were ordered to accept them by the Senate, by the government itself. The Senate were the ones who authorized the use of the Clone Army against the Separatists."

"So again I ask, if you feel the Jedi should die, what are you doing here?" Chewie gestured his arms wide, indicating the whole base, "This is the Alliance to restore the Republic. The Republic is the one who used the Clone Army. By your own logic, none of us should be here, trying to restore it."

Luke looked at him, and Leia could feel him fighting to hold onto his anger at Obi-Wan “But the Jedi were the ones who were in charge of the troops,” he said.

"Because they were ordered to" Chewie repeated with more patience then Leia would have.

“They could have refused,” Luke muttered petulantly, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Perhaps," Chewie allowed, "But they were the defenders of the Republic. That was their role, and a responsibility they took seriously. If they had refused, they would have abandoned the Republic to its fate."

“Slaves,” Luke hissed, “The clones were slaves. Are you really saying it was okay for the Jedi to use them that way?”

Chewie shook his head, "No Luke I am not," he looked at him sadly, "But I am saying it was
more complicated than that.>


<No,> Chewie agreed, eyes looking very far away. <They were not.> What exactly had he seen when Yoda defended himself? There were very few people who had ever seen a Jedi in action up close and personal, even during the Republic, if her father was to be believed. Leia was surprised to learn that Chewie was one of those people. <But I think that was the problem. They frightened people> His eyes came back to Luke <Just as you do.>


He looked at her gravely, <Not everyone,> he said, <but Luke does make people uneasy. That shot above the Death Star wasn’t possible, not unaided by a targeting computer. But Luke did it. And the more he trains in the Force, the scarier he becomes for people.>

“People are stupid,” Leia said dismissively.

<I agree with you there, if only because those same people don’t understand that you are just as deadly as he is,> Chewie said evenly. Leia wasn’t sure if she was flattered Chewie thought she was scary, or sad that he held such a view of her.

“Scary?” Han’s voice was incredulous, “They both forget to eat if someone doesn’t remind them. How does anyone think they are scary?”

Both Luke and Leia looked at Han, who returned their gaze, baffled. Leia gave him a wide beaming smile. She couldn’t help it, even now, even with everything he knew about them, and the destruction they could wreck, Han saw them as people first.

<It was the Senate Luke,> Chewie said. <It was the people of the Republic who wanted to keep it together but weren’t willing to pay the blood to see it done.>

“Or manipulated by Palpatine,” Leia muttered.

<Yes,> Chewie admitted.

“That doesn’t make any of it right,” Luke said, arms crossing his chest. “Using the clones like that against the Separatists was wrong.”


Luke lost some of his belligerence, looking confused at Chewie’s line of questioning. “But they were just droids?”

<So, you would be fine with sending R2 to die for you? He is not his own personality and creature? Easily replaced with another of his model?>

“Of course not!” Luke said hotly, and then flushed, realizing Chewie’s larger point. “So what, I’m a hypocrite too?” he asked Chewie petulantly.

Chewie shook his head, <No Luke. You are just very young. And things are very simple for you. You lack the experience, and the mistakes, to understand that doing what is right is not always obvious.> Chewie said tiredly. <And I think you are overlooking the obvious. That millions of people, and droids, died for one man’s whims.>
Leia shook her head, “One man’s power play,"


Yes,> Chewie said, The spider in the middle of the web.>

“So, it’s all his fault?” Luke said.

Chewie shook his head <No, stop looking for one thing or person to blame. Life does not work that way. He only exploited what he found. But it was there to use.> He looked at Leia <I think the Republic was dying long before he got his hands on it.>

Chewie would be in a position to know. He had been rather high up in the Kashyyyk government before the planet was seized and placed in the “care” of the Empire.

“This whole argument is ridiculous,” Luke protested, returning to their earlier topic “The order to create the Clones had to come from somewhere. And they had an army.” He looked at Leia seriously, “If I have learned anything over the last few months, it’s that the logistics and training of a fighting force are a nightmare. Armies don’t just come out of nowhere.”

“No,” Leia said softly, “They don’t.” She hadn’t thought about it from that angle. Luke was right.

“Well no one here has answers to that question Kid,” Han said, looking tired.

<The Jedi were flawed,> Chewie’s said, looking at Luke, <I’m not saying they weren’t. But they were a large part of why the Republic stood for as long as it did. Why there was peace for as long as there was.>

“For the Core maybe,” Luke muttered.

Chewie bowed his head, <In the end, yes, that was one of the sins you can lay at their, and the Republic Senate’s feet, but it wasn’t always that way.> Chewie pointed a lecturing finger at him, <And can you really stand there and argue what replaced the Republic and Jedi was better? Not even taking into account what Leia has already seen in her future, just the past twenty years alone? Did things get better for the Outer Rim?>

“No,” Luke admitted, “They did not.”

<Well, you can either complain about the past,> Chewie reminded him <Or you can get to work and make it better.>

“That’s your suggestion?” Luke asked snootily, “Just continue with my Jedi training like nothing happened?”

<Well, maybe for starters, you should have a talk with Rex,> Chewie suggested.

“He’s been indoctrinated,” Luke started to protest, and Chewie cut him off with a growl.

<You are the son of a slave young one,> Chewie said, real anger in his voice, <but you yourself were never one. You are closer than most to the effects, but you have never lived through them. Give Rex the respect and dignity he deserves, and actually talk and listen to what he has to say.>

Luke’s mouth snapped shut, and his face paled, “I didn’t mean-“ he started to say, and Chewie’s shoulders slumped.

<I know you didn’t,> he said and reached out draw Luke into a bear hug. Luke was startled, then
returned the gesture as best he could. <And having been to Tatooine many times, I understand why you hate the practice so much.> Chewie said, <but take it from me, and all I have seen. Things are never so simple as we would like them to be.>


Chewie gave a gruff huff and then withdrew, <And if we are all done with the histrionics, may I suggest you all go back to sleep?> he advised.

Luke and Leia nodded, and Chewie rolled his eyes, <They won’t listen to me.> he said, <See if you can get them to bed before we are all supposed to get up?> And with that he got up and headed to his own bed.

“Why do I feel like I’m fourteen every time he gives me a talking too?” Luke muttered, running his hand through his already disheveled hair.

“That never goes away,” Leia said, coming up from the floor.

“Yeah,” Luke muttered, heading over and sitting back on his bed.

“Chewie’s good at that,” Han said, making no move to head back to the bunk he and Leia had been sharing. Instead, he was eyeing Luke “But he didn’t notice that you are favoring your right hand all of a sudden. Care to explain why?”

Luke froze, and Leia snapped her gaze back to him. She had noticed, of course she had, but then again it didn’t register as odd for her, because Luke did that all the time. Not this Luke, Leia realized, that hadn’t been this Luke.

Luke looked up at Han, “Nightmare,” he said, voice quietly pleading with Han to drop it.

Han either didn’t hear it, or chose to ignore it. “What happened in that dream that had you two so spooked?”

Leia looked at Luke. It was his dream, and she wouldn’t say anything if he didn’t want her too.

“Oh, you know, the usual,” Luke said tiredly, “Mountains of corpses, you and Leia dead. My father cutting off my own hand.”

Leia felt a wave of shame roll over her. She wasn’t paying enough attention to Luke. She had been angry with Vader, and by extension Ahsoka. She had been at a fit of low-level simmering anger with her parents for weeks. Both for what their shame had cost her, and because she felt they were unnecessarily prying into things best left alone. It had all led to the perfect storm of her blurtting out that Vader had mutilated Luke’s alternate. To make matters worse, she hadn’t followed up to ask him how he felt about that. It had to be a blow, even knowing your father was Darth Vader, to learn your father, the father Luke had longed for his entire life, had mutilated him. Well, could mutilate him.

And after the conversation last night, she still hadn’t pressed him to make sure he was okay. She knew how he felt about slavers, the revelation about the clones was bound to bring up old fears and haunts. The only bit of sense she had shown was insisting that he stay here tonight with her and Han.

“Okay,” Han didn’t look all that surprised, “So, that sounds horrible. Want to talk about it?”

“I-“ Luke’s voice trailed off, as his eyes flickered to Leia. He wasn’t going to say anything, she
realized because this had to do with Vader and his anger at him.

“I’m going to make us something to drink,” Leia announced loudly. Han looked at her puzzled, but Luke gave a grateful nod. She went up and kissed Han on the cheek, “You stock anything except liquor on this ship yet?”

“Yeah,” Han said, looking confused, either by the display of affection from Leia or by why she was beating a hasty retreat. Well, Luke would probably explain it to him the second she was out of earshot. “There is some Corellian kian tea in the galley. It’s good for-“

“Nightmares,” Leia finished, “I know.”

Han looked at her, something like wonder in his eyes.

Leia walked out of the room, somewhat resentful that she couldn’t help Luke because of her own inability to deal with Vader. After thirty years, you would think she would have a grip on this, but no. She couldn’t muster enough objectivity with Vader to see what he had been doing, as opposed to projecting her own preconceptions on him.

And that thought, her as Empress, was enough to claw at the fragile peace she had found this evening. She shoved the thought away. It was for the morning, or rather a lot of mornings. This was going to take some getting used to.

She walked into the galley and started opening and closing the cabinets, progressively getting angrier and angrier as she couldn’t find what she was looking for. Nothing was where it was supposed to be.


“Nothing,” she sent back.

“Leia,” and there was a hint of worry in his mind.

“I’m not mad at you,” Leia said, taking care to slowly close the cabinet she was rummaging through, “I’m mad at myself. For being stupid, and not being able to help you because I can’t let go of my anger to see clearly.”

“You shouldn’t talk that way about someone I love,” he said chidingly, but there was a wave of relief in his mind that she wasn’t angry at him.

“Go back to talking to Han,” she said, “I’ll continue to look fruitlessly for the damn tea.”

There was a pause, then Luke said, “He says it’s in the uppermost cabinet furthest from the stove.”

“Why is it up there?” she squawked. “It doesn’t live there. It should be…” her thoughts trailed off.

No, not where it should be, but where it would be. Han had renovated the Falcon’s galleys after Ben had been born so that he could cook for more people. That meant that where everything was stored had changed. She had stayed out of it, cooking was Han’s thing, not hers. The only thing she asked, was that the foods that she liked, including the Corellian kian tea, be kept in the lower storage units. Because of his and Chewie’s height, Han had a tendency to store the things he used the most in cabinets she couldn’t reach, because they were no problem for him.

“Oh, Leia,” Luke’s presence was nothing but love and reassurance.
She shook her head, “Talk to Han,” she said

“But-“

“It’s fine Luke. I’m tired, I just forgot.” She let him withdraw reluctantly from her mind, but he did withdraw. Good, she might not be able to help him, but Han could. Luke was forming the habit of focusing in on her problems and issues to ignore his own.

She looked at the cabinet that Han said the tea was in and blew out a long breath. She had a feeling the step stool was buried somewhere in the engine room. She could use the Force to float anything down of course, but she couldn’t use it to read the labels, more was the pity. She ended up floating everything out of the cabinet, feeling faintly ridiculous as all the supplies floated around her head, but she did find what she was looking for. Muttering under her breath about unreasonably tall people, she pulled the kettle from its resting place. That at least was where it was supposed to be, and put water in it, and set it to boil.

Drumming her fingers against her arms as she waited, she finally became aware of the ache blooming across the top of her head, originating from her braid. Frowning she reached up and felt that she had left her hair in a large looped braid, pulled into a knot, on the top of her head. She must have been so tired when she crawled into bed, she hadn’t bothered to re-braid it into something more comfortable to sleep in.

Well, it’s not like she had anything better to do while she waited for the water to come to a boil. And now that she noticed it, there was no way too unnoticed it when she finally did get back to bed. Quickly she undid the hair tie, and pulled all the pins out of her hair, piling them up on the counter. She uncoiled the length, and let it fall to her waist. Humming under her breath, she started to comb her fingers through it. It wasn’t as good as using a brush, but it would get the larger knots out of her hair so that when she put it in a simple braid, the thing wouldn’t be too unwieldy.

<Leia?> Chewie’s voice came from behind her. <What are you doing?>

Leia let her fingers fall from her hair, as she turned to face him. “I’m sorry,” she said automatically, eyes going to the cabinets that she had been banging in her childish fit of temper. It hadn’t just been Luke and Han who was on the ship to overhear her. “I was just looking for some tea for Luke. I didn’t mean to keep you up.”

His eyes flickered over her, as he took in her disheveled appearance. He opened his mouth, and then abruptly clamped it shut and shook his head. She wasn’t sure what he wanted from her, but she hoped it wasn’t going to take a long time. She wanted to fix this tea, and go back to bed. If the gods were in a merciful mood, that would be enough time for Luke to get off his chest some things to Han.

As she waited for him to finish whatever evaluation he was doing of her, she went back to braiding her hair. At first Chewie was lost in his own head, but eventually, his attention was caught by the movements of her fingers as she combed them through her hair. She separated the strands and quickly braided them off so that her hair was in a single long braid that fell down her back. She made a face, it was messy, but if she went to bed with her hair unbound it would be a nightmare to untangle in the morning.

Chewie waited until she was done before he asked , <Is it true? That Ahsoka Tano is on Yavin?>

Leia frowned, wondering about this tangent. That wasn’t what he originally wanted to ask her, Leia knew that as well as she knew her name, but why did he have to go with such an obvious ploy? Chewie, unless it involved the rampant gambling swirling around the base, didn’t care much for
“Yes,” Leia said, wishing he would get to the point.

Chewie blinked, then let out a small huff of amusement, <She always was a survivor,> he said, respect in his voice.

Leia’s frown faded away, replaced with astonishment, “Wait, you know her?”

Chewie nodded, <Yes, we met a lifetime ago.>

And what were the odds of that? That Chewie would personally know two of the few surviving members of the Jedi Order. At least enough to be on a first name basis with both of them. Well, one surviving member and an ‘almost’ Jedi? Was that accurate? What title did Ahsoka go by now?

*And what was the likely hood that Vader would build the most annoying, yet loyal droid in the galaxy? What were the odds of R2 and Threepio finding their way to the Lars farm, and to Luke?*

Her more logical side pointed out. The Force moves in mysterious ways, Luke, older Luke was fond of saying, and math has very little to do with its will.

Leia really needed to stop wondering at all the coincidences and convergences that were involved in her life. That made her life. She was standing in her nineteen-year-old body again, so perhaps she might want to stop scoffing at impossibilities and accept that there were things she couldn’t control or understand.

“I didn’t know that you knew her,” Leia said lamely.

Chewie didn’t say anything to that, he just continued to stare at her. Leia heard the whistle of the kettle and turned around to turn it off. She reached into the cabinet containing the mugs, they were in the right place, thank all the gods. She set three mugs down, and a large pitcher to steep the tea in. She had a feeling all three of them would need this tea tonight. She hesitated slightly, then pulled a fourth one down. Leia could tell by the prickling feeling on the nape of her neck that Chewie was still staring at her.

She scooped the tea out of its container into the tiny tea ball and poured the hot water over it in the large pitcher. She eyed the mixture, wishing that the laws of physics would turn on its head, and make this part go faster. Sadly, the Force was of no use in this case.

She took a deep breath in and turned around to meet Chewie’s eyes. Even with that preventive measure, she still had to bit her tongue on her instinctive “What?” that she wanted to yell at him. Yes, he was allowed to be angry at her, but that didn’t mean he got to lurk in corners and glare at her.

“Is there anything I can help you with Chewbacca?” she asked, holding onto dear life to the reigns of her temper.

<You didn’t flinch> he stated in a matter of fact tone, arms coming to cross over his chest.

“Excuse me?” Leia asked, not understanding where he was going with this.

<When I entered the room, you didn’t flinch.>

“Should I have?” she asked, “I know you know your way around that canon you call a blaster. Even half-awake I knew you weren’t going to accidentally shoot one of us.”
He seemed surprised at the straightforward compliment, then he shook his head. <I didn’t mean then. I mean now.> He gestured towards her, <When I came in, you were half dressed, and your hair is down. You didn’t flinch when you saw me. And I know enough about human women that they like to be fully clothed when encountering someone they don’t trust.> He hesitated <And I know what it means to an Alderaanian of your standing to have your hair down in front of someone.>

Yes, Leia realized, it had been down. And no, she hadn’t flinched, because Chewie was family, and he had seen it down a number of times before. It never even occurred to her. And he had put together what that meant for her and how she saw him.

“No,” she agreed softly, “I didn’t.”

<What do I mean to you Leia?> Chewie asked.

She turned back and started looking for a tray to put the mugs on. “What does it matter?” she asked directing the words in a half angry huff over her shoulder as she manually started pulling everything out of the cabinet next to her “I’m practically a stranger to you.” Her hands clasped over a beaten-up tray, that probably had in its former life been a cover for something on the Falcon, but would work for her purposes.

<Coward.> Chewie barked, an edge to his voice.

Leia hissed through her teeth at the unexpected attack, and she slapped the tray down hard on the counter. Angry and hurt she whirled to face him. “What do you want from me Chewie?”

<Did you walk this easily away from your Chewie of the future?>

“Of course not,” Leia said aghast, “We were friends.”

There was a hurt look in those blue eyes <And we are not?>

“You don’t know me Chewie,” she said back, not understanding where he was coming from. “And even if we were close, you would never choose me over Han.”

<What are you babbling about?> he demanded in a small roar.

“I hurt Han!” she snapped at him, “I told him that some of his worst fears came true about himself and broke his heart into a thousand small pieces.” Chewie opened his mouth, and Leia stuck her finger up, “Don’t you dare deny it. I know what telling him about Ben would do to him. Which was why I went to such lengths to avoid talking about it. But I screwed up, I ended up telling him anyway, and I hurt him.” She felt her anger dissipate away, and exhaustion replaced it, “I know that is something you can never forgive, of anyone. I know how much you love him.”

<Yes,> Chewie agreed crossly, <You hurt him, but that didn’t stop you from staying away.>

Of all the damn nerve. “You are the one who told me staying away was causing him pain! I would never have gone near him otherwise. I would have-” Leia’s voice broke as she even thought about walking away from Han “let him be.”

Chewie stared at her and then shook his head <How are you still alive with a head this thick?> he asked.

“Why are you so mad at me?” She demanded, “If it’s not about Han, then what?”
He shook his head, <You really don’t know?> he asked.

“You have no reason to trust me;” she said, “I actually do understand that. I was giving you space.”

He folded his arms over his chest, <In every other part of your life you barrel ahead with no thought of the consequences. Yet you expect me to believe that in this, and this alone, you exercise restraint?>

Leia snapped her mouth shut. Chewie just continued to stare at her, waiting for her answer. He deserved to know, he did. If not this Chewie, then for the one that she had loved so dearly. But that didn’t mean she had to face him directly. Her eyes slid to the floor as she mumbled, “Gambling with my life is easier then gambling with my heart.” Luke was right, Chewie really had a way of making Leia feel fourteen again, with all its awkward interactions.

There was a long pause from Chewie at that. Leia waited, tired and aching, and wanting nothing more than to crawl back into bed with Han. There had been too many revelations tonight, and this conversation was the last thing she needed. She turned around and moved three mugs into the tray and filled them with the tea. She would leave the fourth on the counter for him. It was up to him if he was willing to take food or drink from her, but she wasn’t sure she could take seeing the answer. She wasn’t sure how he knew about the customs about her hair, but she had thirty-three long years to learn Wookie customs. And they never took anything to eat or drink from someone they didn’t trust.

<Why did you tell Han to pay off Jabba?> Chewie asked her back.

Leia’s head was beginning to hurt from all the unexpected questions Chewie was throwing at her, and she badly wanted to end this conversation and go back to bed. “Because it is a really stupid idea to owe him money?” she said tiredly as she turned around to face him, the tray balanced in her hands.

He shook his head, <No, you made sure that Han would pay him off. It is the first thing you made sure he did.>

“I didn’t order him to do anything,” Leia said hotly.

<No.> Chewie agreed <But you played to his ego, and my vulnerabilities regarding him to make sure it was done. Why?>

Leia barely managed to keep her wince to herself. Yes, from his side, it would look like that. “Because I had no desire to sneak into Jabba’s palace and rescue him again. That was enough fun for one lifetime.”

Chewie’s mouth dropped open. <You did what?> he asked in a much higher pitch than he usually spoke.

“I rescued Han from Jabba,” she said. “And since you were there too, I suppose that was also an experience you can skip now. You’re welcome.”

Chewie said nothing, just stared at her, mouth hanging open. “What?” she demanded.

<You snuck into Jabba’s palace and rescued Han?> he asked disbelievingly.

“Technically I walked through the front door,” she pointed out, “I was posing as a bounty hunter at the time, but yes, the mission was to rescue Han.”
"Are you insane?" he howled, "Even if you got Han out, Jabba would spend your entire lifetime trying to kill you. You would never know another moment of peace for the rest of your life."

"How fortunate for me I killed him first," Leia said back, a bit miffed. Honestly, she wasn’t some damsel in distress. She started to feel her arms ache from holding the tray in her hands. But she wasn’t going to put it down and look like an idiot.

Chewie just stared at her for a long moment, "You killed Jabba?" he asked.

"Yes," Leia said. "And even if I hadn’t, I knew the risks when I walked in there."

"The Hutts live even longer than Wookie’s do,> Chewie said <You have no idea->

“Oh,” Leia laughed “Luke was very clear on that. Lando too.”

"Lando was there??> Chewie looked aghast. "Why?"

Leia opened her mouth, then shut it. Best not get into the guilt Lando felt about Han ending up in carbonite. “It doesn’t matter,” she said, “Because it’s not going to happen.” She gave Chewie a false sunny smile, “Han paid Jabba off, there is no bounty issued of for him, therefore you, me, Luke, and Lando will have no need to be walking back into that cesspool.”

She started walking towards the hallway leading to the guest quarters. “Are we done?” she asked rhetorically, given the fact she was already leaving the room, “Luke’s tea is getting cold.”

"You…> Chewie’s voice trailed off, and Leia looked up to see him drag his hands through the mane of fur on his head, "You went to war with Jabba?" he said, "For Han?"

Leia stopped at that, and snorted, “Jabba is no worse, and no better then other foes I’ve taken on. He was just a lot older.”

Chewie seemed to have run out of words, so Leia took his silence as her chance to leave this whole messy conversation. She was right beside Chewie when he put a heavy hand on her shoulder to stop her.

She looked up into those serious blue eyes, "Was this before, or after the Empire fell?" he asked.

Leia stilled. He looked far too worried for such an obvious question. “Before,” she said in a soft voice, understanding something important was riding on this, but not sure what.

Chewie drew in a deep, sharp breath, "You really love him."

Leia found herself frowning, “Of course I do,” she snapped back, “What did you think all the grief and heartache on my side was about? Me amusing myself?”

Chewie shook his head, "I knew that you cared about him. I knew that you relied on him. I didn’t know that you would place his welfare over your cause."

Leia felt her fingers tighten over the edges tray, “If he wasn’t there to share it with me, what would be the point?” she asked. “After Alderaan," her voice trailed off, and she shook her head, “It wasn’t about ideals, and building a better galaxy anymore. The hypothetical had become very real to me. And I had a choice.”

"And what would that be?> Chewie asked, voice gruff.

“I could choose to fight for vengeance, or for the people I loved.” She allowed her gaze to fall to
the tray, and she watched the steam rise from the mugs, pretending this was the most fascinating thing she had ever seen. All to escape his understanding look.

“Even before,” and she found her words faltering, as the vision of Alderaan exploding right in front of her was suddenly in her mind. She swallowed and said firmly, “Before,” she said again, knowing he would understand what she was referencing, “I saw what fighting for vengeance does to a person.” She gave out a helpless laugh, “And even with that, and all my parents, my culture, everyone I loved who was gone, taught me, I was on that path. I would burn the Empire down to pay for my pain, and I was so close to not caring who got in my way.”

Then she let her eyes drift up to meet Chewie’s “But then there was Han,” she said wonderingly, “Han wouldn’t let me be. He annoyed me, he challenged me,” she felt a fond smile across her face, “He made me laugh when I thought I never would again.” She met Chewie’s surprisingly understanding eyes, “And he wouldn’t let me retreat from him, and what was between us. He and Luke, they saved me. I couldn’t outrun my heart, although the gods knew I tried.”

She shrugged, “You cannot be consumed by vengeance, and have people in your life you love. Because you can’t see what the people you love need from you. And in the end, your vengeance doesn’t even protect them, because the wake left in the storm you create,” she swallowed hard and thought of how similar she and Vader were. So much so that Obi-Wan had called her by his name. She was just as capable of Vader of leaving the galaxy reeling in her wake. “It will destroy everything.”

She looked at Chewie, “So I chose love,” she said firmly, “And I have never once regretted that.”

Chewie was silent for a long moment, and then his hand fell away from her shoulder, <You should take Luke his tea,> he said, <before it gets cold.>

Leia was unsure what he thought of her impromptu speech, but she was too tired to mull over it.

“There’s a mug on the counter for you too,” she told him, then scurried out of the room before she could see if he would drink it.

Luke was already lying in bed when she knocked, but he sat up and drank the tea gratefully. Leia expected to have a hard time getting back to sleep, but the moment Han’s arms encircled her, she was out like a light.

Leia was staring into the fresher’s small mirror and sighed. The simple braid that she had done last night was holding, vaguely. Wisps were escaping everywhere, she looked like she had slept in it. Well, she had, but she didn’t see any real opportunity to fix it.

There were brushes in the Falcon of course. Han’s hair didn’t get that swoopy on its own, and Chewie required an entire grooming kit to keep his fur straight. But those options weren’t great for dealing with her hair. Han’s brushes were too soft to be effective, and more than likely would snap in her hair if she tried to use them. Chewie’s on the other hand, would break too many of her hair strands, and probably leave her hair in an even more frightful mess than it already was.

Scowling, she undid the braid, ran her fingers through it as best as she could, and then quickly re-braided it. She finished the simple braid with quick, efficient moves, and let it swing back until it was hanging down her back. She leaned over to stare into the mirror on the wall in the fresher and studied her reflection critically. It would have to do. It still wasn’t neat, and she would probably get a few looks from the few unfortunate souls who had to be up this early, but it was better than
before.

She was doing a last-minute check of her face when Han appeared in the reflection of the mirror. He leaned against the door, looking sleepy and adorable. “What are you doing up?” Han asked, a frown on his face.

Leia turned her head, and flashed him a smile, “I was going to my parent’s-“

“It’s so early,” Han whined, cutting her off before she could finish. He shuffled over to her, wrapping her in his arms, “Breakfast isn’t for another couple of hours,” he said, nuzzling the top of her head “Come back to bed.”

“Yes, it is early,” Leia said, returning the gesture, and laying her head on his chest, breathing in the scent of him, “but I’m not going to eat breakfast with my parents.”

“Then why are you up?” he sounded grumpy, “I was comfy, and then you left, I wasn’t anymore.”

Leia grinned, “Flattering,” she told him, giving him a light squeeze around his waist, “It’s always been my goal in life to be your security blanket.” Then the teasing fell away from her voice, “I need to tell my parents I won’t be eating with them because I’ll be joining Obi-Wan for breakfast.” If he didn’t throw her out of his room.

“He’ll be there,” Han grumbled, then, not letting go of her, started walking backward, heading toward the fresher’s door, presumably so that they could crawl back into bed together.

“He never has before,” Leia remarked, and how was it that none of them had thought to invite Obi-Wan to these breakfasts? That was something they were going to have to change. “And even if he did have a standing invitation after last night, you think he’ll show up?” Leia dug her heels in, and resisted against Han, not letting him pull her out of this room. “I don’t like where his head was at. Someone needs to check on him.”

Han tried to tug her again, “The man has other friends.”

Leia thought of Obi-Wan’s confession of how alone he felt here, “No,” she said, “No he doesn’t.”

“Figures,” he grumbled, leaning back so he could glare at her “I knew the second after I wake up and you were gone that you were going to do something foolish,” he tightened his arms.

“It’s breakfast Han, not a duel at dawn,” she said surprised, looking up into Han’s eyes. “You make it sound like Obi-Wan is going to attack me.”

Han’s face was still worried, and Leia was shocked by what she read in his expression, “Oh,” she breathed, “you’re worried I’m going to attack him.”

Han didn’t look away from her, “You and the Kid went pretty hard on him last night.”

“Yes,” Leia said, “I know that. Which is why I feel like I need to go check on him.”

“It can wait,” he complained. He leaned his head down so that he could rest his forehead against hers, “Stay,” he pleaded.

“You are the very definition of temptation,” she admitted, and allowed herself to revel in the sight of him, sleepy, rumpled, and vulnerable looking, “But Obi-Wan isn’t as strong as he thinks he is.”

Han harrumphed, and placed a kiss on her forehead, “Still looking out for everyone?” he asked.
Leia snorted, and came a bit up on her toes so she could lightly butt his head with her own
“Ridiculous,” she muttered. “You are being ridiculous, me checking up on Obi-Wan isn’t
something to be worried about.”

Han shook his head, “That is not how this works,” he chided her lightly.

Leia crossed her eyes in aggravation, “I know,” she admitted in defeat. Then she lightly slapped
him on his shoulder, “It’s not like you have any room to talk.”

“You,” he said in a very serious voice, “need looking after. The Kid too. If I wasn’t here, you’d
both run yourselves into the ground.”

“Probably,” Leia admitted. Despite her need to leave soon, if she had any hope of catching anyone
before they started their morning routines, Han was enticingly warm. She rested her head against
his bare chest, bringing both of her hands to rest on his hips.

“You going to be around today?” she asked.

She felt a light huff into her hair, “Yeah, thought I would do some work on the Falcon. Leaving
early in the morning tomorrow though. Got a job from Mon.”

“Okay,” she whispered, leaning back so she could meet his eyes. “Can I come by and have dinner
with you?”

His eyes lost some of that sleepy look, “Leia,” he said seriously, “I told you, you’re welcome
anytime.”

“Yes,” she agreed. “I remember.” He hadn’t put a shirt on when he had come looking for her, and
it was all terribly distracting, especially since she hadn’t had any caf this morning. Horrified, she
realized that her fingers were making large circles on the skin that was just above the waist of his
sleep pants. She ordered her wandering fingers to stop that. “But I shouldn’t just barge in. This is
still your ho-”

“It’s your home too,” he assured her through a very large yawn. Then he cocked his head, “Is it
possible to barge into your own home?” he asked, voice teasing, but eyes so serious.

She closed her own eyes, to block out the sight of him rumpled and adorable. It made concentrating
on what she was saying very hard. All she wanted to so in this exact moment was kiss him for
saying such wonderful things.

”Do you know how difficult you make it for me to think when you say things like that?” she asked,
not opening her eyes.

She could hear the smirk in his voice, she didn’t need to open her eyes to see it. “Flatter.”

Leia shook her head, “I enjoy spending time with you here,” she told him, voice serious, “but you
said you wanted to move slow. Jumping straight to calling the Falcon my home is a bit quick.”

Han’s hands came up to her face, “Leia,” he said, voice exasperated.

She finally opened her eyes to look at him so he could understand how serious she was about this.
“You know what I mean, Han,” she said.

He shook his head, and Leia bit back on her frustration that he choose this to be obstinate about.
“Yes,” she said, “I do consider the Falcon my home.” She tried to gentle her tone, knowing that he
really wasn’t going to like what she had to say next, “It’s been my home longer then you have been alive Han,” she stressed.

Han blanched a bit at that reminder. Leia was aware of how to easy it was for everyone to forget how old she was. Sometimes she had a hard time believing it herself when she saw her reflection.

“It’s very sweet of you to offer,” Leia said, and it was, if incredibly painful at the same time. He wanted to make her feel better, but he wasn’t awake enough, or aware enough to understand what he was offering her, “But it’s not true from your end. I’m someone you meet six months ago Han.” He eyes fell away from her at that reminder, and Leia moved her hands, so they were resting on his upper arms. She wasn’t rejecting anything permanently, and she needed him to understand that. Touch had always grounded Han. “My feelings aren’t some obligation you have to honor.”

He was quiet for a long moment, then his voice came out scratchy and stiff, “That was a load of bantha shit. But I am not awake enough yet to argue with you.”

Now it was Leia’s turn to shake her head, “We are not arguing,” she said hotly, and if this was what this Han thought was them arguing, he was in for a very rude surprise. “It’s a fact. The Falcon, in this timeline, is not my home. And you are moving much faster into this relationship than you are comfortable with.”

Han’s mouth twisted. “You do not get to tell me how I feel,” he snapped, and Leia could feel the fingers resting on her waist tighten.

Leia blushed, “You’re right,” she said, “I don’t get to tell you that.” But worry for him prompted her to repeat, “It is very fast though.”

His mouth folded into unhappy lines, “Is not,” he said petulantly.

Leia really didn’t like that he had been happy when he walked into this room, and now was not. She was aware that she was annoying him with her stubbornness about this. But she was trying to do the right thing here, and not use his love for her to trap him into anything he wasn’t ready for. Loving someone was very different than being in a relationship with them. Leia was greedy, she wanted everything. If it involved waiting a bit more, then she would wait. She had done harder things in her life. She couldn’t think what they were right this second, but she knew she had.

Han, when he had been a bit more clear headed, and fully awake, had said he wanted to move slow. She wasn’t going to ignore that just because he was saying something she desperately wanted to hear. If he repeated the offer later on, then she would seriously think about it. But she was pretty sure that he wasn’t awake enough to be fully conscious of what his offer sounded like. Offering Leia the option to move in whenever she felt like it, was not, in any timeline she would find herself in, the definition of “slow.”

Leia let a light flirtatious grin cross her face, “Sounds like you are awake enough now to argue with me.”

“I am not,” he grumbled, but there was a teasing glint in his eyes, that said otherwise.

“Really?” Unable to help herself from playing this game, she asked coyly, “That’s a shame. Are you awake enough for anything else?”

She never thought he would take her up on it. In Leia’s defense, every other time she had offered anything physical, Han had backed off. Or Threepio had interrupted them, as he seemed destined to do, no matter what timeline she found herself in.
But she had never dared him before. And Leia knew, if there was one thing Han couldn’t resist, it was a dare.

His eyes darkened, and his annoyance was wiped away by a very focused intent. His eyes dropped down to her lips. “Just enough,” he said, and then so slowly he brought his mouth down on hers.

For one moment, Leia didn’t respond. The kiss felt off somehow. It had been a long time since she had kissed Han, and she wondered, traitorously, whether it was her memory failing her, or did this Han kiss differently?

Then Han’s slight hesitation vanished, and he angled his head just the tiniest bit so that their lips were better aligned. Leia made a low, needy moan in the back of her throat and pushed herself to the top of her toes, her hands coming up to run themselves through his thick hair. Han made a slightly startled noise, then his arms tightened around her, and her internal hesitancy vanished. He was kissing her back as frantically as she was him. No. There was nothing off about this kiss. Han was just not used to compensating for their height difference. They should practice that more often, starting now.

His hands stayed on her hips, but Leia took the opportunity to run her fingers through that lush brown hair and mold herself to him, relishing the feel of all that lovely skin against her. She should take her own shirt off so she could feel more of it. But that would mean breaking away from this kiss, and Leia certainly didn’t want to do that either. She should have worn a shirt that could be buttoned from the front, then she could have had it both ways.

That internal debate was playing out in her head when Han’s hands gentled on her back, and he pulled back from her. She almost followed him, as he straightened to his full height, almost used the tricks she knew to keep him in engaged. His eyes were hungry as he stared down at her, but she was put off by the slight hesitancy in his face.

“Okay?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he said, a small goofy grin coming on to his face. “That was more than okay.” Then that bright, happy emotion was chased away by...something. It worried Leia that she couldn’t quite read it, before he put on a friendly mask to hide what he was feeling “You should get going though,” he gave her a boyish grin, “You’re going to be late.”

Leia wasn’t fooled for a second. Han had never really cared about punctuality unless it involved money. She didn’t let him go, as she asked worried “Han are we okay?” She had pushed him too far dammit, all because he had felt so good under her hands. Stupid hormones on this nineteen-year-old body, and the ways it ate at her control. She had ignored her own instincts about pushing him too fast, and now he was retreating.

He leaned down and kissed her forehead, “Yeah, we’re fine Leia.”

That was not reassuring in the least. But he had that look on his face that said he wasn’t going to talk about this. At least not until he was damn good and ready. Leia could probably get it out of him, but that would involve him learning just how “spirited” their fights could really get. She was too bruised from last night to even really think about trying that this morning. She would leave this alone. For now.

She closed in on him, and gave him a quick hug, then backed away. “You’re right,” she said, “I am running late. I’ll just leave you so you can shower then.” She backed away, convinced that he had bought her fake acceptance of his evasion.
She was somewhat surprised when he grabbed her hand to stop her from leaving the fresher. So, not oblivious to her then. Dammit, when it came to her, he really was too observant.

“We really are okay Leia,” he said, looking her straight in the eyes, voice low and serious.

Leia snorted, “Sure we are.” Looks like they were going to have that fight after all. “Because you look so thrilled right now. That’s the look every girl wants to see after just been kissed senseless.”

“Senseless huh?” For a second he looked so very pleased with himself. Leia scowled at him, he did not get to look like that, when he was the one who had stopped that rather enjoyable activity and then lied to her about why.

Noting her scowl, Han’s face lost its look of pleasure, and he shook his head, “This isn’t about you.”

“Then what’s it about?” she asked, feeling a little defensive.

“Me,” he said flatly. What the hell did that mean? “You should go,” he said, letting her hand go, “Make sure the old wizard hasn’t done something stupid. And please say hello to your parents for me.”

“Alright,” she said, worried about that self-loathing she saw flare briefly in his eyes. Just where was his head at? Leia flashed him a grin, “I’m not going to be there for breakfast, but I’m sure my parents would love to see you this morning.”

Han gave her a disbelieving look, “You think you’re funny.”

“I’m hilarious,” Leia said, triumphant that Han seemed much more relaxed then he had been a moment ago.

He gave a shake of his head, “I’ll let Luke know that you aren’t going to be there.”

“He is more than welcome-”

“Leia,” Han looked at her, “He knows that. I also know that he still pretty pissed right now, and fit company for no one.” He waved his hand like it was nothing, “Give it a few days, and he’ll be back to his usual charming self.”

Han was right. Letting Luke cool off for a few days was probably the right way to go. It just made Leia sad that the people she loved most in the world where still uneasy around each other. The few times she had allowed herself to daydream what it would be like if Luke had met her parents, she certainly had never factored in the messy realities that life had found a way to introduce into it. Luke and her parent’s relationship hadn’t been restored to what it had been before he found out that they had lied to him about Vader. It was better, so much better, but nowhere as friendly as it had once been. Last night’s events probably hadn’t been any help in that regard.

“You’ll be here later so we can have dinner together?” she asked, hating the small note of vulnerability in her voice. Why was she asking, he had said yes earlier, he wasn’t mad at her, she was feeling as jittery as a new recruit before their first battle. “I’ll bring the food,” she offered.

Han gave her a small smile, “Wild banthas couldn’t keep me away.” Leia felt something relax, whatever was haunting Han they would get to the bottom of together.
When Leia got to her parents' door, she wasn’t too terribly surprised to find that it was Threepio who let her in. It was very early, even though she had arrived later than she had wanted to. She found that she didn’t mind, Han’s strange behavior at the end of their interlude aside. Her blood was humming nicely, and she could still taste him on her lips.

“Your Highness,” Threepio said, “I regret to inform you that your father is not here.”

Leia paused, that was unexpected. She hadn’t felt any waves of alarm last night coming from the base. But then again, Luke had drowned everything out with his nightmare, so unless the Empire had appeared in the system, a minor emergency wouldn’t have registered for her. “Do you know where he went?”

“He did not leave that information with me,” Threepio said in his most aggrieved tone. “How am I to keep track of his schedule, and inform people who want to find him, where he is, if he will not tell me anything?”

Leia reached out patted the droid’s arm. “I’m sure he was just tired Threepio,” she said. “It is rather early, and he was annoyed at being called away.” Threepio gave a put out sigh, and Leia squeezed his arm, “I can talk to him if you like, and let him know your concerns.” The droid would never directly confront Papa about it, but he was right. Papa was making his job more difficult. There was also the fact that it made him anxious when he couldn’t fulfill his duties. Leia wondered how much of that was part of his programming, and how much of it was just Threepio.

“I would appreciate that most heartedly Your Highness,” he said relieved, “But I’m happy to inform you that your mother is here.”

“Thank you Threepio,” she said, and thinking that she didn’t want to cause him even more anxiety, she informed him, “Luke, Han and I won’t be here for breakfast.”

Threepio gave a small stiff bow of his head, “Then I will be sure to only gather enough food for their Highnesses’,” Threepio’s voice was much more cheerful “Thank you for letting me know your schedule, Your Highness.”

“You are quite welcome Threepio,” Leia watched as the droid hummed happily to himself as he walked out the door, and she shook her head. He was so annoying, yet the simplest things gave him pleasure.

Vader was responsible for that. For the most loyal companion of her life, and Vader built him.

Leia shoved that away. She didn’t want to think about any debts she might owe Vader. It didn’t matter much anyway. The balance of what he owed her far outweighed any small gifts he involuntarily left in her life.

“Is Threepio such a small thing?” her conscience whispered to her.

No, he was not. He was the most faithful companion of her life, even over R2.

“Threepio is not a small thing. Saving Luke’s life was not a small thing,” that inner voice continued to chide her.

But this Vader hadn’t saved Luke’s life.

“This Vader didn’t torture you,” that little voice was beginning to sound a lot like her mother’s
Leia cut that thought off. This Vader hadn’t done any of that, true. But only because he hadn’t had a chance to. And the only reason he hadn’t had that chance, was because she had badly managed a situation that she should have controlled. But he had done what he always did, no matter what timeline she was living in. He entered her life and brought her entire world down crashing around her ears. This Vader’s destruction was more of the emotional variety, rather than the physical, but that didn’t lessen Leia’s conflict over it. This Vader brought forth a lifetime’s worth of feelings and emotions that she had never wanted to examine all that closely. Especially after last night’s revelations.

Leia shook her head and moved decisively through the room. She wasn’t here to talk about, or even think about Vader. She was here to see her mother.

She came to the interior door to her parent’s bedroom and gave a quick knock. “Mama?” she called out. Leia was aware that her mother might not be dressed yet. Out of bed certainly, or Threepio wouldn’t have let her in, but not dressed.

“Leia?” came through the door, and then “Come in, come in.”

Mama was sitting on the edge of the bed, still in her sleeping robe, but her hair was braided in a crown style over her head, and she had already applied her make up for the day. She looked down at the chrono on her wrist frowning, “You’re early,” she said to Leia.

“Yes,” she said, “Threepio said Papa left?”

Mama nodded, “He had an early meeting with the Alliance Council about Ahsoka,” Mama said.

Leia blinked, “I thought Ahsoka was going to wait until this morning to talk to Mon,” she had distinctly remembered hearing Ahsoka say that.

Mama fingered the edge of her robe, and made a face “She was,” she acknowledged, “But Mon happened’ to be near Ahsoka’s quarters last night as she was heading back to her room.”

Mon’s own quarters were nowhere near the rooms they kept on base for the occasional visitor or allies that came to Yavin. The woman had been lying in wait for Ahsoka.

“Why is Mon moving so fast on Ahsoka’s appointment as head of intelligence?” she asked as she sat next to her mother on the bed.

“Partially because Mon sees the need to integrate the Outer Rim more fully into the Alliance, as quickly and as seamlessly as possible. And that is something Ahsoka agrees with,” Mama looked thoughtful, “Partially because she had too.”

“Things are getting that bad?” Leia asked. She knew that most off-world missions had been canceled, not that there were that many to begin with. That was in line with what had happened in Leia’s past. Draven’s idiotic self-sabotage actually hadn’t made all that much of a difference in what the Alliance was capable of doing right now.

In fact, the Alliance was in better shape then they had been the last go around. They still had their base and were not burning resources and money to keep the fleet in constant motion in an attempt to stay one step ahead of the Empire.

The problem was, and had been, the massive amount of resources that went into securing the
victories at Scarif and the Battle of Alderaan. They were short on weapons, ships, and medical supplies. The only thing they weren’t currently short on was food, for all the fact that it was ration bars.

They didn’t have the resources to follow up those surprise victories with anything looking like a full-scale battle. And they were reliant on what people were willing to give them and support them with. They weren’t a government, there was no populace to tax. On one hand that was something that worked to their advantage. There were no people they needed to defend or resources to spend on maintaining civilian infrastructures. It meant that the Alliance was incredibly mobile, and could, and had, abandoned bases with an efficiency that gave them a lot of flexibility.

On the other hand, it hampered their efforts to quickly ramp up their supplies when they suffered such huge losses like they had on Alderaan and Scarif. They had no ability to build their own weapons, or mine their own supplies, even growing enough food to reasonably be able to feed the entire base was out of the question. They had to buy everything or steal it from the Empire, which wasn’t the easiest of tasks. The only missions that had been accomplished were intelligence runs, and small strike force operations meant to gum up the supply lines of the Empire, like the one to Cymoon 1.

Then there was the influx of personnel. They needed to be vetted, then trained, or untrained of bad habits they picked up in the Imperial Forces, and then integrated into the existing command structure. Sending out half trained forces would be a disaster and do more harm than good in their longtime fight against the Empire. But it grated Leia that they couldn’t strike back at the Empire right now. And Draven, in his own small way, was hampering that effort because he couldn’t control himself.

“Yes and no,” Mama put her hands behind her neck and started rolling her head, trying to relieve the tension. “It’s mainly the gossip floating around about Draven that has Mon nervous. Some of it is spot on, some of it outlandishly false. But it has spread to our allies, and to the groups we are aligned with, but have no formal relationship with. What Mon is hearing is that they are getting very nervous that our head spymaster might be compromised in some fashion.”

As relieved as Leia was to have someone else in a position of authority who knew the truth around her circumstances, she still wanted to punch Draven for his idiocy. He had unnecessary caused Mon, Mama and Papa a lot of headaches with his stunt.

“If you could have told Mon the truth,” her inner voice whispered. “And she would have handled it.”

That was a useless thought, as well as counterproductive. Leia had her reasons for why she was maintaining her silence with Mon. Yes, if she could go back, and do it for the third time, she might well consider telling Mon from the start. But she hadn’t, and from the position she had been when she arrived here, Leia couldn’t fault herself for the decision she made. She had never been all that great at predicting the future, and there was no way she could have known Draven was going to spiral like he did over her. As for telling Mon now, it would cause more harm than good.

“What are we telling them?” Leia asked. “They are bound to have questions.”

“That Draven is voluntarily stepping down due to the strains this is all putting on his heart,” Mama gave Leia a flat smile, “It helps that it happens to be the truth, if a bit exaggerated.” Leia started a bit, she had no idea that Draven was anything but in good health. That smile slipped off Mama’s lips, “He’s being allowed to keep his rank,” and her voice was radiating polite disdain at that fact.

“Let me guess?” Leia asked, amused that even in the Alliance, image was everything, “For
appearance's sake?"

Mama nodded, mouth compressing into a tight line. She was more upset then Leia was about all of this, “What are we telling everyone about his replacement?” Leia asked.

Mama brushed a small piece of lint off her robe, “That Fulcrum, the original Fulcrum is taking his place.”

That sounded all a bit flimsy to Leia. “And when they ask where Ahsoka has been for the last three years?”

Mama shrugged, “We are going to tell them the truth. That she was stranded on Malachor.”

Leia felt an eyebrow arch, “And that is going to work?” If she was in their position, there was no way that she would be so accepting. In fact, Ahsoka’s remarkable return had all the ear marks of a trap laid down by the Empire.

“It should,” Mama said lightly, patting Leia on the arm, “At least it did when she was talking to the council.”

Leia blinked, “When did that happen?” she asked.

“Last night,” Mama said, and for the first time, Leia noticed Mama’s makeup was laid much thicker than it usually was. Probably to hide any dark circles she had under her eyes. It occurred to Leia, that after Ahsoka told Mon her decision, if Mama was right about the need to get approval, and fast, Mon would have started immediately. Leia was all too familiar with Mon’s drive to get things started as quickly as possible. She had far more patience then Leia when it came to waiting for things to come into place. But once they did, she was just as capable of making people and events move to her liking as Leia was.

“It was rather impressive,” Mama said, “Watching Ahsoka calmly meet the Council’s questions about where she had been.”

Ahsoka could be quite persuasive, Leia had firsthand knowledge of that, but still, her story had as many holes as Leia’s escape from the Death Star “They bought it?” Leia asked disbelieving, “That she survived Malachor and Vader?”

“Yes,” Mama gave Leia a mischievous grin, “Especially since she was wearing her blade hilts the whole time in prominent view.”

Leia let out a long whistle. The Jedi were held in almost semi-reverent status by the members of the Alliance High Council. Especially since there was no member of the Outer Rim, or former Separatists to counterbalance those rosy views. But even those groups would acknowledge that any Jedi would have no love for the Empire and were very unlikely to be colluding with any of its agents.

“Sneaky,” she said. “Do they know that Ahsoka doesn’t consider herself a Jedi?”

Mama shook her head, “No, I don’t think so. At least none of them asked her about it. They were all trying to wrap their heads around the fact that the first Fulcrum of the Alliance was still alive, never mind that she is a Jedi.” Mama was grimly amused, “To their way of thinking it explains how she survived Malachor. And her loyalties can’t be questioned, at least regarding the Empire. Obi-Wan vouched that she is not a Dark Side user, although he neatly dodged the question about her belonging to the Order.” Mama looked at Leia, “Even so, for everyone in that room, they were very impressed she has survived as long as she has.”
“Obi-Wan did too,” Leia pointed out.

“Yes,” Mama agreed, “By hiding in the outer reaches of the galaxy. Ahsoka was doing the exact opposite of that.”

Leia mulled over that. Ahsoka had been rather prominent in the Alliance, and although the woman was discrete, she also hadn’t been fully hiding either. It wasn’t possible with the company she had been keeping before she vanished.

“It couldn’t have been that much of surprise?” Leia asked. No, she herself hadn’t known, but she had been sixteen at the time. It was safer for her not to know, even aside from the messy history Ahsoka had with Vader and Leia’s mother. But not everyone in the Alliance could have been that ignorant? Could they?

“She was on several missions with Ezra and Kanan, and it was no secret they were Jedi.” She gave Mama a probing look “The Ghost crew was infamous for not liking to take anyone outside their inner circle with them on missions. Even before Wren drew a line in the sand about Lothal, the fact that Ahsoka was welcome among them should have been at least a hint.”

“Mon knew,” Mama allowed, “But that woman is very good at keeping secrets, even when there is no perceived need anymore. And I’m almost positive Commander Sato did too. He was the military contact she dealt with the most. And it probably was an open secret among his crew.” Then her face took on a slight cast of grief, “But Leia, he died years ago. And if there are any surviving members of that crew, they wouldn’t have talked about it.”

“Why not?” Leia asked.

“Because Ahsoka was presumed dead, and she would be considered just another lost Jedi.” Mama tapped her lips thoughtfully, “Ackbar didn’t look surprised, he might have known. But the rest of them?” Mama shook her head, “No, Leia, they didn’t have a clue.”

Leia pondered that. Ahsoka had spent a long time hiding who she was, even among those she could count on to be allies. Was she doing it to buy instant credibility with the Alliance? Or was it so she could fulfill her mission to protect Leia more openly, and with all the tools she had? And did it really matter to Leia why Ahsoka was coming out like this? Only that she was.

It would matter to Vader though. Word of this was bound to spill outside of the channels of intelligence he could control. And that meant within a very short amount of time, the Emperor would know that Ahsoka was with the Rebellion again, and not dead. There was no question about if he knew who she was. There was no way he was as involved as he was in Vader’s life as a Jedi and not know who she was. The real question was how would he react?

The precious little intelligence that the Alliance did have on him, said he was furious about Obi-Wan’s survival. Vader wasn’t paying as much attention to Obi-Wan with his networks, but the same could not be said of Palpatine’s. How would he react to another Jedi, or presumed Jedi, surfacing? Had Vader understood what he was doing sending Ahsoka here? Or had his desire to “protect” Leia overridden his good sense? Or perhaps he didn’t care what happened to his former student and considered her an acceptable loss? Even as of yesterday, Leia would have chalked it up to indifference, now, now she wasn’t so sure.

“Ahsoka is coming out fully then?” Leia said slowly.

“Yes,” Mama agreed. “I’m not sure if she’s doing it to make a point, or she is tired of running. Or perhaps I’m overthinking all of it, and she saw this as the easiest way to get the position as fast as
she could.”

“Revealing a long-held secret for a position she didn’t even want?” Leia asked dubiously.

“She wants to protect you,” Mama said, “I don’t know if it is because of Padme, or because Vader asked her, but she does want to do that.” Mama looked at Leia with level eyes, “And she sees this as her best way of doing it.” An amused smile danced on Mama’s lips “Ahsoka has always had a flexible definition of what fell under her preview of any mission. It drove your father to distraction quite a few times over the last nineteen years.”

Leia took that under advisement. Because Ahsoka would apply such flexibility to anything Leia asked of her too. If the woman was willing to defy Vader on that point, there was no way that Leia would be able to keep her in line, unless Ahsoka wanted to be.

“That doesn’t explain why Papa isn’t here now.” Leia said, “This meeting couldn’t wait until later in the day?”

“It was so Trehipoi could participate,” Mama explained, “The time difference between Whiforla and Yavin is a bit extreme.”

Leia whistled, surprised that his acceptance onto the Council was moving so fast. “He’s getting a say?”

“His advice is being sought,” Mama corrected, “but he is still only a probationary member of the council,” Mama looked tired, “If I had my way he would already be a full member, but-“

“Dodonna,” Leia said darkly.

Mama shook her head, “It’s not just him Leia, or even the remnants of the military that fought in the Clone Wars. He’s the one who is the most vocal about it, but trust me, there is a lot of resentment on the civilian side of the council too, at letting a former Separatists into such a high-ranking position.”

“Oh, but they are fine with former Separatists dying for the Alliance, as long as they don’t ask for any say in their fate?” Leia sneered, irritated with the short-sightedness of the council. If they wanted peace, truly wanted peace, they needed to let go of their notions of how they thought the galaxy should be and deal with it as it was now.

“It’s not that simple Leia,” Mama said pleadingly.

Leia shook her head, “It should be,” she said, “Palpatine is the greater threat, and whatever former issues existed need to be set aside, or we will all perish.”

Mama rubbed a hand over her face, “It does help that more people are aware that Palpatine was on both sides of the war, orchestrating the whole thing,” She looked at Leia, “But what you have to understand is that the tensions between the Core and the rest of the galaxy existed long before he came along. And the wounds that were inflicted in the intervening years has only deepened it.”

Leia opened her mouth, Mama held up her hands, “On both sides,” she said firmly.

Leia sighed, “This has to do with how the Empire treats the Outer Rim now isn’t it?”

Mama nodded, “Yes. And that the Core wasn’t willing to do anything, as they saw it, to stop those abuses until trouble landed on their doorstep.” She sighed, “All things considered Trehipoi isn't unreasonable in his caution, but I don’t think many of his allies will be willing to listen to us.”
Leia shook her head, frustrated. “They aren’t wrong to be skeptical.” Leia was just all too aware that the best time to heal this rift was now, while there was still a greater enemy to focus on. And Palpatine was certainly very obliging in being a tyrannical despot, who only seemed to care about his own power. But if they didn’t make serious progress now, then Leia would see this problem rise anew in her lifetime, again.

“I know that Leia,” and Mama’s voice was harsh. Leia looked at her in surprise, and Mama sighed, “Forgive me,” she murmured in her usual quieter tones, “It has been a long night.”

Leia nodded, “If this is how everyone feels, why bother to invite Trehhipoi at all?”

A small smile of triumph touched Mama’s face, “Because not everyone is too worried about fighting the last war to see the problems that are in front of us now.” And Leia had a pretty good idea who had managed to sway those people into offering more than empty gestures to Trehhipoi. Leia let her frustration go. No, things weren’t moving as fast as she wished, but they were moving. The last time there had never been anyone this prominent from the Outer Rim who was even close to sitting on the Alliance High Council, provisional or not. Even Luke hadn’t been made this offer.

Granted it was because he was a Jedi, and they weren’t given such positions in the Old Republic, not because he was from Tatooine. But Leia had to wonder about that decision now, with her new jaded views of the council. That was another area where the New Republic had made a horrible mistake. Luke’s Jedi Order couldn’t even begin to fulfill the duties of the old one, for the simple fact they didn’t have the numbers to do it. Hell, as Leia now knew, the old order hadn’t had the numbers. She wondered about how much Luke’s being sidelined had to do with old habits, and how much it was influenced by old prejudices, even when it was clear to anyone with half a brain that a new system needed to be in place.

Mama went on, “It’s meant as a goodwill gesture to mean that we are serious about our offer.”

“And whose idea was that?” Leia asked, bringing her mind back from an old problem to her new one.

Mama blinked, “It was yours, Leia.”

Leia shook her head, “No. It was my idea to put him on the council itself, I mean whose idea was it to make this goodwill gesture?”

“You father and I,” Mama said, eyes falling away, and then coming back up to meet Leia’s, “You’re right. I knew you were right before I knew…” She swallowed hard, and then continued, “I knew that the Core needed to restructure it’s relationships and alignments with the Outer Rim if we were ever going to have a lasting peace. But what I learned of the future——”

“Possible future,” Leia corrected automatically.

Mama gave a nod, “Yes, a possible future. We are changing much right now.” Her eyes became shadowed and worried, “But I fear it won’t be enough. Your father and I are both in agreement that we must do everything we can to ensure that fracturing of the galaxy you saw, never happens.” She gave Leia a small, sad smile, “I am no good with a blaster, and I have never been in a battle, but I will lend you what aid I can.”

“You weren’t before?” Leia asked puzzled.

Mama reached out and cupped her cheek, “Before, I didn’t realize how heavy of a price you paid for my mistakes,” Her hand slipped off Leia’s cheek, “We cannot become so focused on the fight
with the Empire, that we lose sight of why Palpatine was able to grab power in the first place. And I will not let us recreate all the mistakes of the past so that our children will suffer for it.” Her eyes met Leia’s “No matter how painful I find it to review all my mistakes.”

Leia was taken aback by the ferocity in her mother’s tone. And by the hints to how much Mama and Papa had really concealed from Leia. She hadn’t come here this morning to talk about last night’s fight.

“I’m not ready to talk about this,” she said quickly.

Mama looked at her, troubled, “Leia,” she started to say.

“Not never,” Leia said, “Just not this morning.” She gave Mama a tired smile, “I didn’t end up sleeping all that well last night either.”

Perhaps last night had truly frightened Mama too, because instead of pressing Leia, like she had been doing over the last few weeks, she stood up, and walked over to her wardrobe. She absently ran her fingers through the gowns, trying to decide on what to wear “Why are you so early today Leia?” she asked.

“To let you know I wouldn’t be making it to breakfast,” Leia said, trying to bring the fear that sprang into her mind unbidden about even thinking about talking about her anger at her parents under control.

Mama immediately dropped the gown she was holding, and turned around to show a stricken face to Leia, “If this is about last night-” she started to say.

Leia shook her head, cursing the fact that she had phrased that all wrong, and that she hadn’t hidden her emotions nearly well enough. ”No, it’s not,” she assured her mother, getting up and grabbing the dress off the floor.

Mama didn’t look convinced. Leia amended her statement too “Well, not in the way you mean. I want to eat breakfast with Obi-Wan.”

“Obi-Wan?” Mama asked surprised. Then her eyes narrowed, “Why?”

She probably thought Leia was going to bring him food so that she could yell at him again. Leia kept her sigh to herself. She had thought that she hadn’t gone too far last night. But if both Mama and Han were feeling the need to probe Leia’s motives, then Leia had done far more damage than she meant to. She was aware that she had definitely joined the fray in piling in on him last night. But to be fair, before that started, he had landed a few good blows of his own, mostly on Papa, but Obi-Wan had cut into her too.

“I don’t like where his head was at, when we all left last night,” Leia explained, as she handed the dress to her mother, who began swiping off imaginary dust off it. “And with Ahsoka, and I imagine Papa as well, in meetings all day long, I wanted someone to check on him.”

Mama arched an eyebrow, “So you volunteered yourself?”

“Is there someone else?” Leia asked.

“I can-“ Mama started to say.

Leia shook her head, feeling a slight blush stain her cheeks. “No, Mama. I owe him an apology about my behavior last night.” Leia’s temper wasn’t something she was ashamed of, it was too
much a part of her. She was sorry that she had lost control of it so thoroughly in front of her mother. For years, there had been a quiet voice in the back of her head that would admonish her when she flew off like that, “What would your mother think of this?” She never dreamed her mother would see it, and Leia found herself embarrassed by the whole thing. That shaky, scared woman last night was not who Mama raised her to be.

Mama cupped her cheek, “Leia,” she said gently, “You are only human, and you are not the only one who reacted badly last night.”

Leia looked at her “You wouldn’t lose control like that.”

“Didn’t I?” her mother mused, “Or did you miss the fact that I was so caught up in my anger about what our people had done to you that I was ignoring your pain?” She gave Leia a sad smile, “It became about my feelings, not yours.”

“The galaxy does not revolve around my broken heart,” Leia said.

“No,” Mama agreed, “But mine does.” Her eyes filled with tears, “You are my daughter, before you are my heir, and in the heat of the moment I lost sight of that.” She tapped Leia’s nose, “You had quite a few revelations dropped on you unexpectedly too, so no, I can’t say I’m surprised on how you reacted.”

Leia caught that hand before it could be pulled away, and gave it a light squeeze before letting it go, “Yes,” she said, “But that was no reason for my tone.” She gave Mama a watery smile, “A wise woman once told me that yelling at someone doesn’t fix the problem. It only shows someone that you are mad. If you’re lucky, they only get defensive. If aren’t lucky, you create a wound that will never heal.”

Mama sighed, and shook her head, “My mother got irritated when I quoted her own words back to her too,” she said fondly and took a few steps to slip into the small fresher.

“Are you sure it’s a good idea to talk to Obi-Wan now?” Mama called through the partially open door. “Perhaps you should let him cool off.”

Leia leaned against the wall, “No, I don’t. But someone has to. You weren’t the perpetrator against him last night, Luke is still too furious, and Obi-Wan would completely disregard anything personal Han has to say.” Leia shrugged, “Either I’ll get through to him or get him so riled up he’ll emerge from his guilt trip.”

“You think he doesn’t have anything to feel guilty for?” Mama sounded disapproving as she re-emerged from the fresher, dressed.

“I didn’t say that,” Leia said, “But the man also takes too much responsibility for other people’s choices.”

Mama looked at her critically, “You don’t say,” she said drily.

Leia shifted on her feet, “It’s completely different for me,” she insisted.

Mama only hummed, and Leia narrowed her eyes. Then she glanced at her own chrono, noting that she was running far later then she wanted to be. There was a chance, a small one really, that she might miss Obi-Wan if she didn’t leave now.

Then Leia thought about old wounds, and things she had missed. About last night’s heated words, and how shaken she was feeling this morning.
She didn’t have time for this, not really. But hadn’t she been saying that for the last few months? She needed some grounding, and she could think of no better way to get it outside of meditating in the Force. For reasons she didn’t want to examine too closely, Leia didn’t particularly feel like opening herself up to that right now.

Leia hesitated, “Mama?” she asked.

Mama blinked, and looked at Leia, caught off guard by the seriousness of her tone, “Yes?”

“Will you braid my hair?”

A smile of true pleasure blossomed across Mama’s face. She reached out and tugged the simple braid Leia had. Even after putting her hair in the braid not an hour ago, Leia could feel the small wisps escaping from it. “Of course,” she said.

Leia looked at her, at that simple yes, even with the harsh conflicts of last night. Things were so fragile between them now, and Leia hated that. She couldn’t talk to Mama about this, she had more than reached her limits on this for now, but she could talk to Mama about why she didn’t want to delve into this.

Leia walked forward and swept her mother into a hug, “I missed you,” she said.

“Leia-“ Mama said startled, but her arms came around Leia without hesitation.

This was easier to say with her mother’s arms around her, and where Leia didn’t have to meet her eyes, “That’s why I didn’t want to talk to you about the Clone Wars, about what happened in my past,” she said, making sure that she didn’t mumble. Saying this once was going to be hard enough, she didn’t want to have to repeat herself.

“It wasn’t just about the grief and pain. That faded over time. I missed you. Your strength, your wisdom, your humor, your insight.” Leia tightened her arms around Mama and breathed in the scent of jasmine tea, and the light herbal fragrance of the shampoo Mama liked to use in her hair. “There were so many times in my life I just wanted you beside me so that we could talk, where I needed your advice, and you were gone.”

Leia took a deep breath in and pulled slightly back from her mother. But she couldn’t raise her eyes. “That’s why I didn’t want to talk about my anger,” Leia said, eyes firmly fixed on her feet. “About the Clone Wars. About everything that you and Papa didn’t tell me. I missed you, and suddenly you were here, and it seemed ungrateful to press you on things long done. Mistakes that couldn’t be changed.”

“But those consequences you lived through, the reemergence of old divisions and lines in the galaxy, they can be changed now Leia,” her mother’s voice was firm, “But we need to know more then you have been telling us in order to do that.”

Mama’s hand came up and touched Leia’s cheek. Leia raised her eyes slowly to meet her mother’s serious brown ones. “I would give anything to change the fact that you suffered so much because of the choices your father and I made. But I can’t. All I can do is fight with everything I am to change this present.”

“I know,” Leia admitted, “And I never doubted you would do everything you could to help me. But telling you exactly what I needed, meant I needed to tell you what happened.” Leia felt her shoulders slump, exhausted, “I didn’t want to fight, and that was where it was going to go if I opened my mouth.”
“Leia-” Mama said chidingly.

Leia gave out a bitter chuckle, “I think it was conclusively proven last night Mama. These are very old hurts, for everyone.”

“That isn’t the only reason is it Leia?” Mama’s voice was very gentle.

Leia shook her head, “I wanted to protect you. You sacrificed so much, and it all fell apart again.” A tear slipped down her cheek, “And I was the one who let it happen.”

“You are not a god Leia, you cannot control everything.” Mama’s hand came up and wiped the tear off Leia’s face, “It’s not your job to protect me.”

“Doesn’t stop me from wanting to,” Leia said, “Because if I told you anything but the broadest outline of what happened, you would know how it had all gone wrong for me.” She looked at Mama, “And I knew that I was mad at you. I did. But if I admitted it out loud, that meant how I saw you, how I remembered you, would change.” She reached forward and gripped her mother’s arms, “That you weren’t perfect, that you messed up, and somehow I thought, if you messed up, how was I ever going to make anything right?” Leia was aware that her sentences weren’t making much sense, but all these feelings just kept pouring out of her.

Mama seemed to understand what she was mangling so badly, “Leia,” she whispered, and her hands came up to cup Leia’s face, “You know that is foolish, right?”

“Yes,” Leia hiccupped, “But that doesn’t make it any less real.”

“No,” Mama agreed, and a tear slipped down her cheek, “It does not.” And she wrapped Leia in a fierce hug, “But you are my daughter, in every way. And as my daughter, you should know that I want to help you. But to do that, I need to know what happened.”

Leia tensed in her mother’s embrace, and she felt Mama shake her head, “Not the specifics Leia. Not about the politics and the events. I agree that is too much for one person to know. But I need to know what happened to you. I didn’t understand half of why you were acting the way you were, and if I had known,” Mama’s voice broke, “I never would have pushed like I did,” she whispered, “I thought that you were angry with your father and me because we lied to you about Vader.”

“But-“ Leia started to say, horrified to think her mother for one moment thought that.

Mama pulled back and looked Leia in the eyes, “We are a family that knows how to divide the personal and the political Leia,” she said, voice hoarse, “I never for one moment thought that you didn’t love us, or miss us, or grieve us. But I thought,” she took a deep breath in, “We raised you as Alderaanian. But that doesn’t mean those are your only ties. You clearly love Luke, and I thought,” she cleared her throat, “I thought that you loved us, but resented us from keeping you from him. That you couldn’t reject us, because of that love. But the Queen of Alderaan was something you could walk away from.”

“Mama,” Leia protested, “Never, I would never-“

Mama put her forefinger on Leia’s lips, “Tell me you don’t blame your father and me, just the tiniest bit, for denying you your brother until you were grown.”

“It was to protect us,” Leia said, “I know that.”

“Leia, what you know, and what you feel are two different things. Be honest.”
Leia slid her eyes away from those all too knowing ones, “A little,” she confessed, “But I know it’s ridiculous.” She huffed, “I’m also angry that I am once again dealing with a nineteen-year-old Luke, for all the fact that I am grateful too.”

“Yes, but it is there,” Mama said, “And since it never occurred to me our people would reject you,” and there was such anger in her voice. Leia looked at Mama shocked, she never lost her temper like this in front of Leia. “It was the only logical conclusion I could come to about why you wanted to be called General.”

“I-“Leia started to say, realizing that by keeping her silence, she had still managed to wound her mother.

Mama shook her head, “We live, and we learn,” she said, a favorite maximum of hers, and she looked Leia straight in the face, “But so that I don’t draw the worst conclusions again, may I ask a question?”

Leia nodded.

“Why did you tell Vader about Ben?”

Leia’s mouth dropped open. That was not at all what she would have thought her Mama would have started with. “Because I was angry,” she said, “I told you that.”

Mama shook her head, “I don’t understand the answer, Leia. Even when you are angry, your wits never desert you. This is something that you withheld from me and your father with everything you have. But you told him, why?” Mama looked so lost.

Leia closed her eyes and took a deep breath in. “It really was because I lost my temper with him,” she said, opening her eyes.

Mama opened her mouth, and Leia put a hand up, “Please let me explain.”

Mama nodded, “Alright Leia,” she said.

Leia gathered her courage. She didn’t like remembering what had happened in that cell. “I needed to buy time,” she said, “For obvious reasons, I couldn’t have him prying into my head. Even the most cursory information would be a disaster if he learned it.”

Mama nodded, Leia gave a small huff, “So, the first thing I told him, as soon as he sent the guards away, was that I was from the future.”

Mama nodded, Leia gave a small huff, “So, the first thing I told him, as soon as he sent the guards away, was that I was from the future.”

Mama nodded, “Yes, I remember you mentioning that on the Falcon as we came to Yavin.”

“It was to get him engaged, to stoke his curiosity.” She shook her head, “No, that was all justification. Honestly, it was the only option available to me. The minute he touched my mind, to verify anything I told him, he would know something was wrong.”

“Obi-Wan said last night, that he taught you more shielding techniques,” Mama murmured, “That what you had wasn’t enough to keep him out.” Her eyes sharpened in on Leia, “That means that you did have something though. Luke, the other Luke, he taught you?”

Leia nodded, “And Vader would know that it was a Jedi technique I was using. So, I went with the truth.” Her lips twitched, “It certainly did catch him off guard.”

“I can imagine so,” Mama said.
“I was…playing with him, I suppose. But the topics were veering wildly, and I needed to keep him away from so many things.” Leia’s voice broke, “What you have to understand is that for me, Han died just hours ago. He tried to reach Ben, and he failed. And the only reason I thought it was possible to bring Ben back was because Vader had done it. And now he was very inconveniently standing in front of me, but he was there. I thought, I need to buy time, why not ask him why he fell?”

Mama’s face filled with amazement, “What did he say?” she asked, genuinely curious.

Leia snorted, “A load of self-justifications and statements of grandeur. He kept circling around it, and he wouldn’t give me a straight answer.” Leia’s hands curled into fists “He asked me why I was so interested in the past. As if I didn’t have any right to know!” She looked at Mama “He ripped my entire life apart, multiple times, and he wouldn’t tell me why!”

“Leia,” Mama’s voice was cautious, and faintly, Leia could feel several objects in the room begin to vibrate. She took one steady breath in and firmly locked her anger away from the part of her that was in the Force.

“When he asked why I cared, it just…slipped out that my son fell.” Leia looked at Mama and gave her a helpless shrug. “It wasn’t about trust Mama, just anger.”

“Really?” Mama didn’t look convinced.

“You think I trust Vader?” Leia couldn’t keep the incredulity from her voice.

Mama shook her head, “No Leia, I would never think that. I think you are furious at him for abandoning you.”

“I didn’t want to be raised by him!” Leia snarled.

“By Vader?” Mama’s voice was pained, “No, you don’t. But Anakin Skywalker? Especially if it meant you got to grow up with Luke? That, I think, is something you resent him for.”

“Sometimes a slip of the tongue is just a slip of the tongue,” Leia protested.

“And is that the only time Ben has come up?” Mama asked nothing but patience in her voice.

Leia opened her mouth to deny that, then slowly shut it, thinking about the difficulty she had about keeping quiet about Ben around Vader. No, she had never consciously brought him up, Vader was the last person in the galaxy she wanted to talk to about Ben. But she would allude to him or reference him off hand. And why was that?

“I wanted to hurt Vader,” she whispered, horrified that she hadn’t even realized what she had been doing. Her subconscious had been very aware of what was going on, and she had used that knowledge. There was a part of her that was very aware of how vulnerable Vader was to her. If not in the Force, then certainly with her words. “I wanted him to know how much he cost me.”

Mama looked sad, “Yes,” she said, “You did.”

Wanting to hurt Vader was nothing new to her, it was a feeling she had been dealing with most of her life. But the weapon she had chosen, that was new. And the fact that part of her had known it was a weapon, that was even more frightening. How much of what she had done in regards to Vader had actually been a conscious choice on her part?

This was something that she did know, that she didn’t want to look into now. Leia shook her head,
“I don’t want to talk about Vader anymore.” One day, couldn’t she go just one day without some wrenching realization that shifted her view of him?

Leia fidgeted, then flashed her mother a pleading look, “I would like my hair braided please.”

Mama studied her for a moment, then gestured, “Sit on the bed,” she instructed, heading to the small table that held her hair supplies. “I don’t think you have time for something really elaborate, but we can make something a tad more complicated than what you are wearing.”

Was that the slightest note of censure in her mother’s voice? “There is nobody in the hallway Mama,” Leia pointed out as she sat on the edge of the bed, cross-legged, her back to her mother. “Everybody who is sensible is either asleep, or at that their stations.”

“Hmm,” Mama said lightly, which meant she wasn’t agreeing with what Leia was saying as Queen, but as Mama, she could understand the need to get ready quickly when circumstances demanded.

Leia felt those warm hands deftly pull the band out of her hair, and start the process of unwinding the simple braid she had it in. Then the brush was pulled through the long locks, so gently that Leia barely felt a tug on her head. She closed her eyes and savored every moment of this. She couldn’t remember when the last time her mother had done her hair.

Two years after Alderaan was destroyed she had given Han a tongue lashing that had the man sputtering because he had made a half jesting comment about her current lack of peasants to do her hair. Leia had been about to retort that nobody touched her hair except her, TooVee, and her mother. The retort had died on her lips when she had been hit unsuspectedly with the understanding that she couldn’t remember the last time her mother had done her hair.

Leia was sorry to say that she had vented every feeling of grief and pain at Han for what had only been a teasing remark for him. She knew what he had meant, but she hadn’t known what to do with the simple fact that she couldn’t clearly remember the last time her mother had braided her hair for her. All Leia had was a mishmash of the hundreds of times Mama had done this collapsing in her mind. And that was all she would ever have, because Mama would never again braid her hair.

And she had been here for months and hadn’t once asked her mother. What the hell had she been thinking? Well, she had been busy, then she had gotten shot, then sick, but still.

It had been a long time since anyone had done her hair. Han had gotten quite skilled at this over their marriage, but he had been gone from her life for years. And this younger Han would certainly be willing to try, but Leia knew from experience that the first few times were going to end in disaster. Besides, she wasn’t sure that he understood, yet, how intimate an act this was for her. He was the one who asked for time, and she, foolish woman, was giving it to him. No matter how tempting his kisses and offers of home were. And especially no matter how good he felt lying next to her in the bunk last night, his scent following her into sleep.

“Care to share your thoughts?” Mama asked, as her fingers started separating the strands on Leia’s head.

“I was thinking about how nice Han smells.”

Her mother’s fingers paused, and Leia was worried for a moment that Mama was offended somehow. Then she heard a low chuckle, and the fingers resumed their delicate weaving.

“Well, I have certainly never noticed,” Mama said, voice light. “But that is good to know.”
Leia’s shoulders didn’t relax. After last night, she wasn’t going to take anything her parent’s said at face value anymore. She was as much as a problem as they were, reading subtleties and innuendoes where there were none, and missing the broader hints until they had to hit her on the head with them. Thirty years was a long time to forget the nuances of someone, no matter how much you loved them. Leia knew her parents were relearning her, it was long past time she admitted that the same applied to her as well.

“Really?” she asked, trying to curtail any judgment in that one word.

Mama sighed, “I was surprised by the subject matter, Leia. It’s not that I disapprove of Han.” She felt a small tug on her head in a reprimand “You rarely talk about anything mundane lately, and certainly nothing that puts such happiness in your voice.” There was the smallest of pauses. “It’s been a long time since I’ve heard it. It was good to hear.”

How much was she worrying her mother with her relentless drive? It was long part of who Leia was, who she forged herself to be. But Mama had missed all the events that had driven that change in her, and of course, of course, it would worry her. Leia felt her shoulders come down as she realized it was concern for her, not reservations against Han, that was prompting Mama’s questions. “Alright,” she said.

“And how are things progressing with you and Han?” Mama asked.

Leia thought about that answer, “Slowly,” she said. “Which I understand is for the best, but I don’t know if it is for the right reasons.”

“How so?” Mama asked.

Leia let out a sigh, “If he is taking his time because he is trying to adjust to who I am, that’s fine,” She felt a small ball of worry grow in her stomach, “If he’s worrying in his own head that he’s not good enough for me, I’m going to take a blunt instrument to his head.”

“That is a strange courtship ritual,” her mother noted.

“Suits us,” Leia said, “Neither of us likes to play games.” Well, she had, in the beginning. But that had been her lying to herself. She hadn’t wanted to get hurt again, make herself vulnerable to pain again. Han had the easiest ability to break her heart, and her nineteen-year-old self knew that. Instead, she had run from everything she was feeling and made them both suffer for it. Never again. When Leia made mistakes, they tended to be huge, but she never made the same one twice.

If he didn’t want a relationship with her, she would be alright with that. No, that was a lie, she would be heartbroken. But she knew she had been honest and open with him. She could tell herself that she had tried and hadn’t run away from him again.

“There,” Mama said, breaking into Leia’s thoughts, “All done.”

Leia got up and looked into the mirror in the fresher. It was two braids on each side of her head, that were put into a loop in the back. Not elaborate, but professional looking, and with the weight of her hair at the bottom of her head, a style she could wear for hours without having to change it.

She turned around and gave her mother a hug, “Thank you,” she whispered

“You are most welcome Leia,” her mother said back, and Leia fixed this memory in her mind to savor for the rest of her days.
After quickly swinging by her room to change her outfit, and the mess hall to pick up a tray of food for both of them, along with a steaming hot cup of caf for herself, Leia found herself in front of Obi-Wan’s door. Aware that he was probably still quite peeved with her, or retreated so far into his guilt that he might not be up yet, Leia opted not to reach out into the Force to alert him that she was here. Carefully balancing the tray in one hand, she reached out and knocked on his door.

“Yes?” asked a tired sounding voice.

“It’s Leia,” she called out.

There was a very long pause, then the door swooshed open, to reveal a very haggard looking Obi-Wan. He was dressed, and it wasn’t the outfit he had been wearing yesterday, so there was that. But his hair was a white mess around his head, his beard looked unkempt, and the circles under his eyes were very pronounced.

Obi-Wan peered at her suspiciously, “What do you want?” he asked in a brusque tone.

Leia held up the tray, choosing to ignore his open hostility. “Breakfast?” she asked in a cheerful voice.

The look of suspicion was replaced by bafflement, “Excuse me?” he asked.

“Breakfast,” Leia repeated, waving the tray under his nose. “It’s only ration bars, but there is caf.”

Obi-Wan very deliberately looked at the tray, then looked up to meet her eyes. “If you are using me to avoid your parents,” he warned sternly.

Leia shook her head, he would think that. “No, Obi-Wan. I already saw Mama this morning.” she said cheerfully, “And now I am here to see you.”

Obi-Wan’s face didn’t lose its distrustful cast. “Why?”

Leia kept her wince to herself. Ahsoka was right, Obi-Wan did have a hard time seeing that people cared about him. And to be fair to him, based on her behavior last night, it wasn’t an unreasonable conclusion for him to come to.

“To make sure that you are alright Obi-Wan,” she said.

He looked baffled, and then his stomach let out a large gurgle.

“Are you going to make me stand in the hallway,” Leia asked teasingly, trying to lighten the mood enough so that he would hear what she was saying, as opposed to what he thought she was saying. “Or are you going to let me in?”

He gave her one of his long assessing looks. For a second Leia was worried that he would outright refuse. That what she had said last night in her panic and anger had killed this strange relationship between them. Then he gave a long sigh and moved aside to let her in.

As she walked in, she noticed that nothing had really changed since the last time she was in here with Luke, all those months ago. There was nothing personal anywhere. Even Leia, who lived a fairly spartan lifestyle, had some personal things around her room. Several of the holos she saved from Alderaan were displayed. There were a few gag gifts from Evaan, the small collection of Corellian holo dramas she had started collecting, and her precious stash of Alderaan jasmine tea.
Obi-Wan had nothing.

Obi-Wan didn’t even have an extra chair, and that really made no sense. Luke came to this room for lessons sometimes, so Obi-Wan didn’t even have the excuse that he never had visitors. If it weren’t for his clothes, hanging off several hooks drilled into the stone wall, she would think that this was a room made up to be temporary quarters. Leia wondered if that was just his personal aesthetic, or an indication of a deeper problem.

Who was she kidding? Even if he liked living in clean spaces, there were a plethora of deeper problems with Obi-Wan.

Leia put the tray on the middle of the bed and sat cross-legged at the end of it. She supposed they could sit on the floor, but she thought the bed was the more kind gesture, in deference to Obi-Wan’s knees and back. It wasn’t like there was much to spill on his bedsheets. Ration bars were designed to be eaten quickly, and with as little mess as possible.

She grabbed the lidded cup with her caf. Thankfully they hadn’t run low on that yet. Leia knew she wasn’t the only one on base who needed it to function. She watched Obi-Wan, as he regarded her. He couldn’t be that surprised, he knew her well enough by now that she wouldn’t just drop off the food and leave. At least she hoped he did.

“Sit Obi-Wan,” she said, nudging the tray with her hand towards him, “I know you are hungry.”

He sat at the head of the bed, still wary, but not as hostile. He reached out for the other lidded cup and took a cautious sip. His face broke out in surprise, and he looked at her questioningly.

“I know you don’t like caf,” she said, “So I had the mess crew make you some of my Jasmine tea when I picked up breakfast.”

He sipped it in silence for a few moments, then gave a weighted sigh, and looked at the tray mournfully.

“Wishing won’t change them into something else Obi-Wan,” Leia said lightly. She would give him a few moments to collect himself, and hide behind polite courtesies. She had somewhat ambushed him after all.

“I know,” Obi-Wan said, lifting a bar, and unwrapping it from its packaging, “I’m just very tired of eating them. It was all I could find yesterday for lunch with Ahsoka too.”

Leia nodded her head, and reached for a bar “There should be some raids next week,” she said cheerfully, “And hopefully we will be getting better food.”

He looked at her, concerned. “Are we running out?”

She laughed “No,” she said. Then she noticed the tightness around his eyes and moderated her tone. Obi-Wan had lived on Tatooine, where having reliable access to water and food were a real concern. This wouldn’t be something he would brush off lightly. Leia sometimes forgot the realities of that. She had lived rough, especially over the last seven years, but that was nothing compared to what Obi-Wan had to deal with.

Leia said gently, “We have plenty of food,” and she took a bite out of her own bar. She didn’t comment on the intense relief on his face, but merely swallowed her food and offered “We are only out of anything anyone likes to eat.”

“You don’t seem to care,” he observed mildly, watching her eat her bar.
Leia shrugged, too used to people looking at her funny for not minding the bars. “A combination of too many state dinners over my life, where what they served was nothing I would call ‘food’, and too many years on the run. If I ever had been a picky eater, I couldn’t afford to be through those circumstances.” She looked at him seriously, “They are not my favorite, but they don’t seem to bother me as much as they do everyone else.”

He looked amused as he took a small nibble of his bar, “What are your favorites?”

“Food?” she asked.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said,

“Well, you’re drinking one of them now,” she nodded her head to the tea.

He looked surprised for a moment, “I would have thought you run on caf alone,” he said.

She gave him a rueful smile, “That is true,” she admitted, finishing her own bar, and picking up her own cup filled to the brim with caf. She took a sip and allowed a fond smile to play on her lips.

“Jasmine tea is the drink Mama would always prepare for me when I was sick,” She looked at Obi-Wan, “And when I got older, it was what I would drink when I was feeling stressed, or homesick when I was in the Senate.”

She allowed the old memory to flow over her, both the pleasure and pain of it. She could feel the shape of that old emotion, it had been there most of her life. The thought of Alderaan always brought a potent mix of wistfulness and the sharp cutting edge of her anger.

The anger wasn’t there.

Leia blinked. The wistfulness was there. The longing to go home was there. But that seething rage was strangely absent. That old taste of grief and regret wasn’t there anymore. Or more precisely Leia was remembering that she was angry about Alderaan, but the actual rage wasn’t there.

“So you associate good moments with this tea?” Obi-Wan asked, putting his bar down, and taking another sip.

“I did,” she said, not thinking, still pondering this revelation that one of the most defining aspects of her life seemed to be gone, and she hadn’t even been aware of it. Perhaps the smell of her favorite drink permeating the air was reminding her of the fact that she wasn’t dreaming. Perhaps it was finally sinking into every stubborn part of her that was forever looking for traps, that this was real. Or maybe, just maybe, with Alderaan still standing, she had learned to let this one go. “Then for the longest time it was-“ Leia stopped talking when she realized where she was going.

Obi-Wan stopped drinking the tea, and his eyes grew thoughtful, “This tea is from Alderaan isn’t it?”

She nodded, “It was one of the many things that were destroyed on my world,” She closed her eyes, “I longed for it for years,” she whispered, fingering the rim of her own cup. “But it was rarer then Kyber crystals, and considerably more expensive.” She opened her eyes, and met his very understanding ones, “There were enough plants that were off world to create a hybrid with a similar plant, but it never tasted the same.”

Obi-Wan was silent for a long moment, then said softly, “I know it’s still not easy to get now, with the embargo placed on Alderaan, so thank you for sharing it with me.”
She gave him a smile, “I thought you could use some soothing,” she said.

He looked at her startled, and she wondered about that genuine surprise. He was being awkward around her, but Leia didn’t think it was because he was mad at her. Not that he wasn’t mad at her. He was, furious even, she could feel it simmering in the Force around him. But that didn’t explain his sudden loss of those smooth diplomatic manners she had seen him use on others.

Perhaps he was genuinely surprised that she was reaching out to make sure he was alright? Had he never had a fight with anyone before? On a personal level? That was ridiculous, he lived in a large community for Force sake.

Then Leia thought about what she had learned about the Jedi Order over the last few months, more specifically about how they viewed interpersonal conflict in their own ranks. It was quite likely that Obi-Wan had never had someone he loved come to him after a fight, trying to settle their differences, and find a way to mend and move on. The thought struck her as sad and insolating. Maybe she was overthinking this. It was possible he had been close to someone outside of the Order.

No, this was all too surprising to him. Besides, he had never mentioned any close friends who weren’t Jedi. That meant then any close relationships he had were with fellow Jedi, and more than likely they were encouraged to let their anger “go” and move on. That was a recipe for disaster as far as Leia was concerned. If you didn’t address what was wrong, it would happen again, and nothing would be solved. You would only be caught in an endless cycle.

As Leia thought of people Obi-Wan loved and would have had fights with, her mind instantly jumped to Vader. And gods, he was violate enough now, Leia shuddered to think what he was like as a teenager and under the influence of hormones. She couldn’t expect a lot of soul searching there, even from the most emotionally healthy of adolescents. With Ahsoka, at the time, it would have been the same problem. She had been a child, or a very young adult.

Yoda perhaps? But he had been the head of the order, not a friend. Maybe he was now, but Leia didn’t know if that was because of the war, or the fact that Yoda was one of the few survivors of Obi-Wan’s people. And Qui-Gon struck her as someone who was too reluctant by half with things that were important, and most needed to be said.

No, this was something Obi-Wan probably didn’t have a lot of experience with. It struck her that in a lot of ways Obi-Wan was very much like Han right now, for all that he had decades on him. They were both trying to figure out how to communicate with the people they loved, because neither of them had been taught how to do so.

“What else?” Obi-Wan asked.

“Hmm?” Leia said, bringing her wandering mind back to the present.

“What other foods do you like?”

“Zatib soup,” Leia answered. “Luke, the other Luke, used to make it for me all the time when I was feeling blue, or sick.”

Obi-Wan paused, then looked at Leia with real interest, instead of the polite chit chat he had been engaging in, up to this point. “Luke knows how to make Zatib soup?” Obi-Wan asked.

“Of course he does,” Leia said, arms crossing over her chest, irritated anew with her brother. “He won’t tell me how to cook it, so don’t look for me to provide it for you.” Vader was willing to
teach her, but not her own brother, how was that fair?

Obi-Wan looked thoughtful, “I haven’t had good Zatib soup in years,” he said fondly, “The canteen in Anchorage sold it, but it wasn’t the same.”

“I’m not surprised,” Leia said casually. “If you are talking about a soup Vader made, it’s our grandmother’s recipe,” Obi-Wan looked at her sharply, and Leia looked back into those shocked blue eyes.

“And you didn’t know that,” she said slowly. She swallowed hard, just how much did Vader feel the need to hide from this man? And why?

“No, I did not,” Obi-Wan closed his eyes, and rubbed the line that formed between his eyebrows. “I never asked him where he got the recipe from.” He flashed Leia a very pained look, “He used to make it for me when I was ill. He said it-“

“Could cure anything,” Leia joined with him, repeating the refrain Luke, and Vader had used.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan agreed then his small smile slipped away. “Anakin only ever told me that it was a local soup.” Regret filled his eyes, “I should have pressed for more of an answer.”

“Why didn’t you?” Leia asked. She knew what that soup meant to Luke, and surprisingly it was something Vader held in value as well. At least that was the assumption she was making, if only for the fact he remembered how to make it twenty years after he lost the ability to eat it for himself.

“I-“ Obi-Wan took a deep breath in, “I didn’t press him on his past because I thought it would be cruel,” he said, shifting a bit, and leaning back a bit, “And not only because of his mother. He was a slave Leia.” Obi-Wan’s eyes grew distant and haunted, “I can’t tell you the number of times he woke up screaming from nightmares about it.” He looked at her, “I tried to tread gently, and encourage him to let it go.”

That was the dumbest advice Leia had ever heard. Let it go? For Vader, yes, that was possible, with adequate mind healing, and non-vague advice. He was in a safe place, but his mother was not, and he knew it. She didn’t voice that opinion though. It had already been said, multiple times last night, that the Jedi, and Obi-Wan, had been poorly equipped to deal with the child that Vader had been.

She confined her question to their actual line of discussion. “Why the silence about his mother?”

“Anakin was so much older then any of the other initiates coming to the Temple. I’m sorry to say that none of us understood his attachment to family.”

That was bantha shit. The Jedi might have preached non-attachment, but if Obi-Wan and Ahsoka were anything to go by, they seemed pretty damn attached to their order. But again, that wasn’t a helpful line of thinking. There was nothing Obi-Wan could do about it now, and there was no point of beating him over the head with his mistakes. She had done enough of that last night. But that didn’t mean the decisions of the Jedi Order should go unchallenged.

“Obi-Wan, what was the order thinking? He was nine. You could not have been so removed from the galaxy that you didn’t understand the importance most people place on family.”

“It was something that was theoretical to us Leia. We thought,” he gave a harsh bitter laugh “Well, we were rather arrogant as an organization weren’t we?”

He said it, not her.
“I do know how badly I handled him at that age Leia,” Obi-Wan looked down at his lap, avoiding her gaze.

“Do you?” she asked. She wouldn’t be pressing if not for the fact that Luke’s welfare was at stake here. If this was something Obi-Wan was still failing to understand, Luke would react very badly to the suggestion that he let all his emotional ties “go.”

“Yes,” he said firmly, “I won’t make the same mistake again.” He looked her straight in the face. “It was a mistake to counsel Anakin to let his mother go. Much as it was a mistake that I suggest that Luke do the same with you.”

Leia felt her anger rise. She wouldn’t let Luke go anymore then he would let her, but Obi-Wan had admitted as much. But the thought that Vader had been told that his love for his mother had been dangerous. She battled back her temper at the fact that once again she was feeling sorry for Vader. She took a deep breath in, and one out, imagining herself shedding this useless feeling into the nothingness it had come from. It wasn’t rational, and she knew it.

“Why are you here Leia?” Obi-Wan asked, tired and beaten. That was the last thing Leia wanted for him.

“Because I’m worried about you.”

“That wasn’t what it sounded like last night,” Obi-Wan said mildly, folding his arms into his sleeves. “Or right now.”

Leia crossed her eyes, “One day,” she grumbled, “One day I am going to learn to control my tongue when I am angry.”

Obi-Wan wisely didn’t remark of the probability of that happening.

Leia sighed, “I’m angry Obi-Wan,” she said, “But not at you.”

He snorted in derision, and that disrespectful noise caught Leia’s attention. Just how off balance was Obi-Wan if he was responding like a sullen teenager, instead of with his sharp wit?

“No, really,” she said softly. “I’m not angry with you. Or at least not directly.”

The mulish look didn’t leave his face, but he did look at her with some curiosity. Leia felt herself slumping, suddenly exhausted. How could she be this tired this early in the day? “What you and Ahsoka said last night, I-” Leia stopped and started again, trying to put this into words, so she didn’t sound ridiculous. “I don’t like thinking of Vader as..” her voice trailed off.

“Human?” Obi-Wan asked.

Leia shook her head and shucked any embarrassment. Obi-Wan’s piece of mind wasn’t worth more than her pride. “A person really,” her hands curled around her cup, knuckles going white “Which given that he is my biological father is beyond ridiculous.”

“No,” Obi-Wan was looking at her, understanding dawning “No more ridiculous then what I did. You didn’t spilt him into two different people to deal with him.”

Leia looked up, grateful that he understood, “For years he was just the nightmare of my existence. The source of so much that had gone wrong in my life. He was the only one alive that I could blame for the loss of my world, my family.” She let out a bitter laugh and placed her caf back on the tray.
Leia looked Obi-Wan directly in the face. If there was one person in this galaxy who could understand Vader bringing their world down around them, it was Obi-Wan Kenobi. “I was unmoored for so long. I had my cause, and that was it.”

A small smile graced her lips, “But Luke and Han, they are stubborn, no matter what timeline you find yourself in, they wouldn’t let me go. They reminded me that I was more than my cause, more than my anger. That it was okay to laugh again. To love again.” Leia swallowed hard, “And just when we were on the cusp of making sure that the Empire could never again do what it did to Alderaan, Luke tells me he is going to surrender himself to Vader.”

She allowed her gaze to fall into her lap, “When I asked him why, he told me that Vader was his father.” Her fingers plucked a loose thread from her pants, “And that I was his sister.”

Obi-Wan’s voice was very neutral “That must have been hard to hear.”

Leia nodded, “I had been given my dearest friend and my worst enemy as family all in one go.” Leia ignored the pain and misery that fact still caused her, “Before I could confront Vader about it, about what he did to Luke, what he did to me, he was dead. He was dead because he chose to save Luke.”

Tears fell from her eyes, “And I was nothing but grateful.” She hurriedly wiped her tears away, “Grateful to the person who had ripped my life apart, and so many others, the galaxy as a whole, just because he saved someone I loved.” She looked at Obi-Wan “What kind of selfish monster does that make me?”

“Nothing of the kind Leia,” he said gently, “Only someone who loves fiercely.”

Leia’s jaw clenched, “I wish I could see it that way.”

“Leia,” Obi-Wan said chidingly, hand reaching out to squeeze hers in comfort. “We are not the sum of our mistakes.”

Leia squeezed that hand back, “I’d be more inclined to take that advice if I thought for a moment that you believe that for yourself,” she said gently.

“I try,” he said, “On a few rare days, I actually believe it.”

Leia gave a watery chuckle.

He withdrew his hand, “This was all things I knew Leia.” The now was unsaid, but it hung in the air, despite his best efforts.

Leia nodded, “I know, but it bears repeating, and expanding so you can understand why I reacted the way I did yesterday.”

“That you have complicated feelings for Anakin?” he asked, “I am aware.”

Leia shook her head. Her feelings about Vader weren’t complicated. At least they never had been before. It had been all rather straightforward, she hated him, and everything he represented. Almost everything that had gone wrong in her life had been at his doing, or an indirect consequence of the choices that he had made. But now….

Leia’s right hand tightened into a fist, she didn’t want to say any of this, explain any of this, but she owed Obi-Wan an explanation for last night. She wasn’t one to hide behind a half-truth or take the easy way out.
“Yesterday, what you and Ahsoka said, about how he was treated in the temple. How alone and isolated he was, how the Order neglected his needs,” she ran her hands up and down her legs, letting Obi-Wan see the nervous gesture, even if she wouldn’t look at him. What did it say about her, that she hated what she was about to say? “I felt sorry for him,” she murmured.

Obi-Wan’s voice was gentle and understanding, “And you didn’t want to.”

Leia nodded. “And I’m sorry you got caught in the crossfire of that, I truly am.” She looked up at him finally, and gave him a ghost of a smile, “I have a hell of a temper, but I do try to aim it at the right person.”

“I was his Master. Wasn’t I responsible for his wellbeing?” Obi-Wan asked, face grim.

Leia tried to think of the child Vader must have been. Nothing came to mind except a shorter version of him in the suit. She shook her head “What were you supposed to do? Yell at everyone to treat him fairly?” He opened his mouth, and Leia put her hand up to stop him.

“No, Obi-Wan, he was set apart from the moment he started at the temple. But you weren’t the one who did it,” Leia felt a scowl cross her face. No, Obi-Wan hadn’t made it better, by Ahsoka’s account or by his own, but he hadn’t created it. “It was the council who did it. As Yoda is the only one left, I suppose I’m going to have to settle for giving him a piece of my mind about what exactly he thought he was doing if we do ever meet.”

Obi-Wan gave a long slow blink, then let out a burst of genuine laughter. “I’m not sure who I would side with, in that argument,” he said, amused, “But I must admit, it would be vastly entertaining. Do you mind if I watch?”

“You can sell tickets,” Leia growled.

Obi-Wan’s humor faded away, and he said somewhat defensively. “It wasn’t all his doing,” he warned her “Yoda didn’t want to train him. He said he was too old.”

“To learn your way, yes, I agree.” She looked at Obi-Wan, “But you all did agree to train him.” This was the one thing she was sure of, how the Jedi chose to train Vader was a mistake. And this couldn’t be laid at Vader’s feet. Or Palpatine’s. No, this one fell firmly on the Jedi.

“Did it ever occur to any of you that perhaps instead of breaking him to fit your method of training, you should alter the training?” she asked him seriously.

Obi-Wan’s face grew somber, “Yes. But when I asked—”

“They shut you down” Leia finished for him. Too young. Obi-Wan had said he had been too young to train Vader. But maybe he wasn’t just speaking about his level of experience in the Force, or with a student, but the surety of knowing when to stand, and when to fall back.

“There was really no one else?” Leia asked.

“Qui-Gon would have,” Obi-Wan said, “but he died shortly after he found Anakin.”

Qui-Gon found Vader? Obi-Wan made it sound like he hadn’t been involved in that at all. Leia found herself very aware that how Vader had come to the Jedi temple was all somewhat of a mystery to her. If she had been asked even a week ago, she would have assumed that it was Obi-Wan who had brought him to the Temple.

Perhaps she should rethink that. If you had asked her before she landed here, she would also have
said Yoda taught Obi-Wan, and that was certainly not correct. She only had the broadest outline of what had happened, but until she had landed in this timeline, she hadn’t even been aware of how old Vader had been when he started as a Jedi. Somehow, she had always imagined some surly man, just out of boyhood, too arrogant in his beliefs, and too powerful to be properly trained. The image of a scared small child had certainly never factored into any of her imaginings, the few times Luke had tried to get her to listen about their families history.

“He’s only forty-two years old,” she reminded herself. Vader had always been this ageless thing to her. The fact that he had an age, hell he was younger than her, as she kept having to remind him, was something she was having a hard time remembering.

“So, let me get this straight,” Leia said, trying to fit this new fact into the timeline of events in her mind, “The Jedi Council, in their infinite wisdom, gave a newly promoted knight, who was dealing with his own grief—”

“I am a Jedi, we knew—“

“You said you weren’t any good at non-attachment,” she reminded him with biting sweetness in her tone. He snapped his mouth shut. At least he was willing to acknowledge that. Although, at the time, younger, and more unsure of himself, he had probably been in denial about the depth of his grief. Non-attachment in itself wasn’t a bad philosophy, especially given how the Force reacted to emotions. But the Jedi’s stringent interpretation of it left Leia puzzled as to what they thought they were doing. True non-attachment meant you cared for nothing. And how were you to protect anything, never mind the galaxy, if you didn’t care for it?

“A grieving knight,” she said again, and Obi-Wan didn’t refute the charge, “a difficult and unprecedented padawan?”

Obi-Wan said nothing to that.

“Did they set you up to fail too?” she whispered, horrified on his behalf.

“I’m not the victim Leia,” he said gruffly.

“All of you were,” Leia said, “And Ahsoka was right. You all were to blame, and none of you.” She shook her head, the entire system had been set up against them. And since they were a product of that system, hell they were indoctrinated into it, none of them could see its fatal flaws. “It sounds like you all needed keepers. Or a good whack upside the head.”

“Perhaps,” Obi-Wan allowed.

“No perhaps,” Leia said firmly “You all were terrible at taking care of yourselves.”

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said, “You would be in a position to know.”

Leia glared at him, and he only gave her a secretive smile in return. “So why was Yoda overruled?” Leia asked, returning to the earlier conversation.

Obi-Wan shook his head “I promised I would see Anakin trained as a Jedi. And I would do it with or without the council.”

“And they wanted to keep you?” Leia asked.

“Partially,” Obi-Wan said, “But after Anakin destroyed the Trade Federation’s control ship during the Battle of Naboo, the council couldn’t deny the depth of his abilities.”
“When he did what?” Leia shrieked, sitting up straight to look at Obi-Wan in horror “He was nine Obi-Wan. What was he doing in a battle?”

“He wasn’t there to fight,” Obi-Wan put his hands up defensively “I swear to you on everything I am, we did not bring him there to fight.”

But they had brought him there. By every god in the galaxy, Obi-Wan said that they cared for their younglings. Leia didn’t care how “advanced” the Jedi younglings were, they had no place in a battle at nine. And Vader wasn’t even trained at that point.

Leia opened her mouth, and shut it close. No, she had not come here to yell at Obi-Wan. She wanted answers, railing against him for his arrogance and oversight wasn’t the way to encourage trust. And he had said we, not I. “Why did you bring him at all?” she said, trying with all her might to keep her anger out of her voice.

Obi-Wan looked very wary, “Qui-Gon thought…” his voice trailed off as Leia felt her rage twist into a living thing in the Force. Qui-Gon, why wasn’t she surprised? But there was a target that wasn’t as fragile, that she could vent some of this onto.

“Thought what?” Leia said, trying to keep her voice under control. These were all events that were decades in the past, and Obi-Wan wasn’t the one that was even responsible for Vader being at Naboo. She didn’t want him to think this anger was directed at him. She had done enough of that. But Vader had been nine. “I’ll bring the incredibly powerful Force-sensitive to an occupied war zone in the hopes that he’ll bring us luck?”

Obi-Wan rubbed his forehead, “I’m saying this wrong,” he muttered mostly to himself. He rolled his eyes to the ceiling, “A little help please?” he asked no one in particular. Leia wasn’t too terribly surprised when Qui-Gon didn’t answer him. The man did have the most convenient excuse to avoid awkward conversations.

“Why?” she asked Obi-Wan again.

“We thought-“ Leia glared at him. By all the gods, she was going to stop him from blaming himself for the mistakes and actions of others.

“Qui-Gon thought,” he amended, “That since he assumed responsibility for him, that it was on him to take Anakin with us.” He hesitated, “Anakin didn’t feel very safe at the temple.”

Leia frowned, “Why?” she asked. Vader had been freed by this point, hadn’t he? He had just come from Tatooine of all places, what could there possibly be at the Temple that would frighten him?

Obi-Wan hesitated, just fractionally, and Leia’s inner alarms started ringing “A variety of factors,” he hedged.

“Obi-Wan,” Leia growled.

Obi-Wan looked at her, “He didn’t know anyone there. They were all strangers. Qui-Gon felt that he had enough adjustments to go through without Anakin feeling as though he had abandoned him.”

So, a war zone was better? How unsure had Vader been? Or had that been Qui-Gon lying to himself? Trained or not, Force Sensitive could greatly alter the outcomes of situations. It’s why so many of them were prizes on the slave markets. The more powerful they were, the more they affected those around them. And no one could deny Vader was powerful.
“Qui-Gon had only freed him from his master a day ago. Anakin was still adjusting to that fact,” Obi-Wan grimaced. “Your mother and Qui-Gon were the only people he knew on any deeper level.”

But not Obi-Wan? There was a much more important question that needed to be answered before that one. Leia put a hand up, stopping Obi-Wan there “What do you mean Qui-Gon freed him? Luke told me that Vader won his freedom in a pod race.”

Obi-Wan’s eyes did the briefest flicker away from her demanding stare. Oh, this was not going to be good. “Not exactly.”

Leia waited patiently for him to finish. Frankly, Obi-Wan looked like he wanted to run from the room, but that only made Leia more curious as to what he was hiding. Whatever it was, he knew she wasn’t going to like it.

Finally, in a very clipped tone, Obi-Wan said, “Qui-Gon won Anakin in a bet placed on the outcome of the pod race.”

Leia’s mouth dropped open, “I beg your pardon?” he said. “Are you telling me that the Jedi Order was in the habit of buying, no I’m sorry, winning, slaves?”

“Of course not!” Obi-Wan looked indignant, “But Qui-Gon felt that it was the will of the Force that we bring Anakin to the Temple.”

Leia couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Never mind that, did Obi-Wan hear what he was saying? Or was he too caught up in defending someone he loved? “No matter how?” she asked incredulously.

“Well, he-” Obi-Wan looked for a defense, but Leia shook her head, cutting him off. Qui-Gon’s actions she would grill Obi-Wan about later, or better yet, if he ever deigned to show himself again, Qui-Gon. But this wasn’t Obi-Wan’s decision to answer for. And she wanted other answers.

“I’m sidetracking you. Why didn’t Vader feel safe at the temple?”

By the look on his face, Obi-Wan wanted to return to the previous topic. He looked her straight in the eyes, but his fingers tapped nervously on his boot. “The council didn’t react…well,” he finally allowed.

“Didn’t react well to what?” Leia asked, suspicious.

“Oh, where to start? To the fact that Qui-Gon told the Council he probably fought a Sith on some nowhere world on the Outer Rim? And as if that wasn’t fantastical enough, Qui-Gon’s proclamation that he had found the Chosen One? To the amount of power flowing in the blood of one angry, lost slave? To the fact that a member of the Order had won said boy in a pod race.” Obi-Wan’s shoulders slumped just a bit, “If it weren’t for the desperate situation we had found ourselves in, Qui-Gon would have been pulled off the mission for that alone. As it was, he died before any formal investigation could begin,” Obi-Wan gave a derisive snort, “At the hands of the Sith that the Council insisted wasn’t real.”

That was a lot of information to sift through in those densely packed words. And Obi-Wan sounded like he had his own grievances with the council with some of those decisions made so long ago.

Obi-Wan looked Leia in the eyes, “I’m afraid Anakin misinterpreted their hostility to the situation Qui-Gon placed them in, as hostility to him.”
“Wonderful,” Leia rubbed her head. He had to have been hyper-aware of it too. Slaves didn’t survive by being oblivious, no matter how useful to their master they were. “They were the adults, he was a child, they should have known better.”

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said, “They should have.” His face clouded over, “I should have,” he admitted.

“Did anyone bother to explain that to Vader?” Leia asked.

Obi-Wan shook his head, “No, but we were in quite the hurry since your mother decided that she was going back to Naboo. Unbeknownst to all of us, she found an army to fight the Trade Federation.”

“How do you find an army?” Leia asked. Just how many of them were popping up in the Old Republic? First the clones, and now this? Didn’t anyone think that was strange at the time? Then she shook her head, and put her hand up to stop him from answering, leading this conversation further away from the answers she was really seeking. “No, that is not what I want to know. Please continue on why Vader went with you to Naboo.”

He nodded, “Later I figured out that Qui-Gon also interpreted, probably correctly, that Anakin would react badly to being left behind.” Obi-Wan looked thoughtful, “It was the will of the Force that he be there.”

“Oh, and never mind the consequences? Or morals? As long as everything turned out okay? Completely overlooking the fact that it was a nine-year-old who saved the day?” Leia’s voice was scathing.

“You fought the Force most of your life and found yourself involuntarily transported into your past,” Obi-Wan said, “So I’m not sure that is an argument in your favor.”

“Maybe,” Leia said, “But my conscience is clear. I certainly never brought a child, a nine-year-old child, to a battlefield because the Force told me too.”

“And maybe if you had listened to the Force, your life might have been easier,” Obi-Wan countered. Then a thoughtful look came over his face. “Might I ask how long?”

“How long what?” Leia asked.

Obi-Wan’s voice was nothing but a vast ocean of patience. “How long you were on the run for?”

He had never shown much interest in future events before. But she had said she would be more forthcoming about her past, within limits. “I was with the Resistance for seven years,” she said coolly.

“And the Rebellion?”

She shook her head “I’m not telling you that.”

“Why?” But unlike Papa he didn’t sound annoyed by it, just curious.

“Because it will set up either really unrealistic expectations, or depress you with the amount of time we have left in this fight,” she explained.

He looked grimly amused “I’ve been on Tatooine for almost twenty years Leia, I doubt that.”

She nodded “Point. But I’m still not telling you. Because while I think you will take it well, the
same cannot be said of Luke, Mama, or Papa. And if I tell you, I have to tell them.”

“Family is a tricky thing?” he sounded wistful.

She looked at him, “You would know,” she said.

He looked at her blankly “I don’t have any family Leia,” he said.

“Then what is Ahsoka? What is Luke?” He opened his mouth, but Leia added warningly, “If you say only your Padawan, or …” what would be the best descriptor for Ahsoka in Jedi terms? “Grand-padawan,” she settled for, “I will laugh in your face.”

“They are….” His voice trailed off, and Leia studied him closely. He looked confused and very unhappy about it. “I don’t know,” he finally said.

Such a simple question shouldn’t be this hard to answer. The Jedi hadn’t done this man any real favors. She had met so few people in her life that were capable of the devotion that Obi-Wan showed the ones he loved. It was a rare and beautiful thing, and he saw it as nothing worth giving. Even worse, he lacked the language to truly express it, to himself or others. All he did was fumble around leaving cryptic remarks and confusion behind him.

“Family,” Leia said firmly “They are your family. Because no one else can encourage you, or gut you so easily with only a few words.”

Obi-Wan puzzled over that for a moment, then he looked up at her apprehensively, “Then you are leaving yourself off that list, Leia.”

Leia paused, then looked back at this man who for so much of her youth was nothing more than a legend and tale to give her hope. Here in the flesh, he was a much more frustrating, snarky, and broken man then Leia could have ever dreamed of. But she could honestly say that he pushed her in ways that no one else had ever managed to do just by being his obstinate self. Telling Obi-Wan in direct words what she felt would do no good. The man wouldn’t hear her, but perhaps if she approached him from a more oblique angle, he might get it.

“You make me question so much of what I thought I understood,” she said. “I’m not sure if I’m more grateful, or angry about that.” She gave him a soft smile, “But it’s rare that I meet someone who can make me rethink a position.”

He looked completely taken aback for a moment, then a smile of true pleasure broke out on his face. “Likewise,” he said.

Pleased that he had heard both what she had said, and what she was implying, Leia reached out for the last ration bar.

“Aren’t we the pair?” she asked, amused with herself and him, as she started to unwrap it.

His lips twitched in amusement, “That is the politest way of putting it, yes.” He studied her as she finished off the ration bar, “Leia, if you don’t mind, I have another question for you.”

Leia looked at him, “About what?”

He was looking at her seriously, “About your past.”

Leia thought about that for a second. Obi-Wan had never even hinted that he wanted to know what the future held. That little fact made it so that she wasn’t as defensive if it had been someone else.
“You can ask,” she said, leaning back to study him, “But I might not answer.”

He nodded, then took a moment to find his words. When they came, they were slow and hesitant, “When I went to Dagobah, before I was allowed to land on the planet I had a vision,” He frowned, “Several visions actually. Of the past, of what might have been, of the future.”

“Of the future?” Leia wasn’t sure how this even related to her past “Are you sure?”

“Yes.” Obi-Wan looked her straight in the eyes, and there was no doubt in his voice “I saw Ahsoka standing in the hanger bay, asking me how I felt about the unexpected arrival of old friends.”

Leia closed her eyes at that perfect description of what had happened yesterday. He was right, that was no vague allusion or symbolic dream. There was a lump in her heart. It was never good when the Force showed you true visions. She opened them back up to look at Obi-Wan’s serious face “You said you had these visions when you went to Dagobah?” she asked, needing to confirm.

He nodded his head. If she understood the sequence of events that Ahsoka related to her yesterday, that meant that vision had happened before Vader went to recover Ahsoka. The Force wasn’t even trying to be subtle.

“What else did you see Obi-Wan?”

Grief and fondness passed over his face, “A wish of the heart,” he murmured, and Leia wondered, out of all the tragedies in Obi-Wan’s past, which one the Force had shown him that had been averted. She didn’t ask though, that was an unnecessary intrusion into something Obi-Wan held very dear.

Then he shook his head, pulling himself back from that pleasant place “Some of them were allegorical. I think.” This was much more dangerous waters to be in. Luke had been wary of placing too much stock in the interpretations of those type of visions, both others and your own. Too often you only saw what wanted you wanted to see.

“What else?” Leia asked.

Obi-Wan’s face went haunted, “I saw Anakin, an older Anakin with grey in his hair, sitting at a long table. He stood up, and he was yelling at someone that his way didn’t work. When I turned to see who he was shouting at, Vader was standing in the doorway.”

One Vader was enough, but two of them? Leia wasn’t sure her mind could hold the thought. But no, that isn’t what Obi-Wan had said. Even with the weird schism Obi-Wan had in his head about Vader versus Anakin, he had said that Anakin had hair, which meant he wasn’t in the suit. Which meant that it was Anakin Skywalker yelling at Darth Vader.

Banishing the ludicrousness of that scenario, Leia had to concede that that did seem rather obvious as an allegory or warning. But a warning for what?

Obi-Wan went on, “And one was of what I believe was Kanan Jarrus’ death. At least it matched the details Rex told me about what happened.”

“Rex was there?” Leia asked surprised.

Obi-Wan shook his head, “No, he heard about it from Sabine Wren, who was.” Then his face frowned, “There was a vision that didn’t make any sense. Either as an allegory or as something that happened or could have happened.”
“Like what?” Leia asked. That seemed rather unlikely, at least according to what Luke told her. He said sometimes it would take you a while, but the Force always had a logic, and a point, when showing you what it wanted you to see.

“I saw you,” he said, “Standing under the suns of Tatooine, older than you are now.”

Leia made a tsking noise, and he gave a weary chuckle, “My apologies, I mean you looked the age you actually are. Or at least that is what I assume…” He trailed off, as if trying to reconcile the grey-haired version of Leia that he had seen, to the one sitting in front of him.

He shook his head and went on, “And Anakin was there, but the boy I first met.” Obi-Wan gave her a puzzled look, “I was young too, still a padawan. You told me that it was nice to finally meet me.”

“I was standing next to Vader?” Leia repeated dubiously, “On Tatooine?” Obi-Wan was right, this didn’t make any sense. What could the Force possibly be trying to tell him with that?

Obi-Wan nodded, then rubbed his beard thoughtfully, “Yes, I am quite sure.” Then his voice grew halting, and his eyes grew haunted, “And I saw Luke, a few years older then he is now, standing in front of a pyre, crying.” Obi-Wan met her eyes, “He was in the middle of a glade, surrounded by trees that looked like they stretched into the sky.”

Leia stilled at that description, and Obi-Wan’s voice grew rough. “Leia, did that happen in your timeline?”

She bit her lip. She would tell him, he was asking, and she would. But this was going to break his heart. “It’s possible,” she said. “I didn’t attend the funeral, but if what you are describing is right,” she took a deep breath in “That sounds like a planet I am very familiar with.”

Obi-Wan’s eyes slid away from hers, and he took in his own deep steadying breath, “Leia,” he asked, still not meeting her eyes “Who was on that pyre? Who was Luke mourning?”

He knew the answer to this, probably had suspected it the minute that vision had ended. But even after everything, he still didn’t want to hear that someone he loved died. Never mind that it was in an alternate timeline, and Vader was still very much among the living here and now. “Vader,” Leia whispered, “It was Vader.”

Obi-Wan’s shoulders sagged, and he let out a long ragged sob. Leia waited in silence, as the man’s pain and grief bled into the Force, saying nothing. Leia didn’t understand it, but then again, she didn’t need to. Obi-Wan loved Vader. Just like she still loved Ben. And she could argue that he had been just as destructive against her as Vader was against Obi-Wan. There were plenty of people who would hold her in judgment and contempt for that feeling.

“He really died to save Luke?” Leia could barely hear Obi-Wan, he was talking so softly.

Leia gave him a firm, “Yes.” It was the one thing in Vader’s miserable life that she honestly could say she was grateful to him for. That he had found within himself enough love, enough light, to save Luke.

“I didn’t think-“ Obi-Wan’s voice trailed off.

“That he could achieve the impossible?” Leia finished for him, thinking of his disbelieving words last night.

Obi-Wan looked at her sharply, “No,” he said, a rough edge to his voice, then his eyes grew
distant. “I did once though. He had done so many other impossible things. Even after what I saw at
the temple, I hoped that he could find a way to break free of the Dark Side, of Palpatine,” He
looked at Leia, tears in his eyes, “And I thought if anyone could reach him, it would have been
your mother.”

It wasn’t an unreasonable assumption on his part. Leia didn’t know why her mother had failed, and
Luke had succeeded, but it said something that even nineteen years later, after being immersed in
the Dark Side for that long, Vader still missed Padme Naberrie, still loved her. Leia didn’t think
what was left of that love was very healthy, if it ever had been. But there was no denying that it
was real and there. “But she didn’t,” Leia said.

“She did not. She tried, and maybe if I hadn’t been there…” His voice broke, and he stopped for a
moment, gathering himself. “All hope died for me when I saw him reach out into the Force and,”
Obi-Wan’s eyes widened, and his voice was breathless on the next two words “choke her.” Obi-
Wan’s face was very pale, and his voice was hoarse as he stated, “Like he did with you.” he
whispered.

Leia nodded. She figured that he would put this together, when he had a moment to think,
especially since he had implied that he had seen Vader hurt their mother. “Luke and I came to that
conclusion too,” she said. “We think that might explain some of the differences between what he
did in my past and what he is doing now.”

His eyes closed, lips moving slightly. Whether he was praying, or simply talking to someone Leia
couldn’t see, she wasn’t sure.

When he had gathered himself, those pale blue eyes opened, and there was nothing but single-
minded focus in them. Leia suppressed a shiver. Obi-Wan hid behind the personas of the doddering
old man, the crazy fool, and occasionally the suave diplomat. Here was the General, who had been
feared by his enemies, for his focus and drive.

“You said, when he figured out who you were, he had a panic attack?”

Leia nodded, “He was screaming in the Force, ‘Not again’, over and over again.”

“Guilt,” Obi-Wan’s brow furrowed, and his face was troubled, “I’m not sure if that is a good sign
or not.”

Leia snorted, “Applying reason to Vader’s actions is pointless,” she countered, “He just plows
through everything until he gets what he wants.” She crossed her arms over her chest, “Trust me I
know of what I speak.”

Obi-Wan’s eyes sharpened in on her, “You said he had gotten into your head?”

Leia nodded.

“What did he want?”

“Everything,” Leia spat, “He is the pushiest, obsessed, unobservant-“ she broke off when Obi-Wan
burst out laughing.

“I’m so glad you find this all amusing,” she said, somewhat offended.

He shook his head. “No, no,” he said, but the mirth still in his voice made it hard for Leia to take
his denial seriously. “But I find it deeply funny that those are all character flaws I am intimately
familiar with.” He gave her a slight grin. The usual tinge of grief was in it, but none of that aching
sadness, so Leia was content to let it go. “Does he still have the most remarkable ability to say exactly the wrong thing?”

Leia blinked, “Yes,” she said. Complaining, her face scrunched up, “You raised him, couldn’t you have taught him better?”

“One of the many mistakes I made with him.” There was nothing Leia could say to that. By his own admission, Obi-Wan hadn’t been the mentor that Vader had needed. Between Obi-Wan’s youth, Vader’s traumas, and Obi-Wan’s blindness to them, it had been a situation asking for a disaster. But listening to what had been said last night, it left Leia with the unhappy suspicion that there was no one in the Order who was fit to train the scared little boy Vader must have once been.

“He is responsible for his own choices Obi-Wan,” she said, shoulders straightening.

“And I am responsible for mine,” He looked back at her calmly, “As you are responsible for yours.”

He would, of course, pick up on the one argument that she couldn’t fight against. “If I am going to avoid making the same mistakes with Luke, I need to be honest with what happened with Anakin.”


Obi-Wan looked at her with sad eyes, and Leia felt her temper melt under that understanding gaze. “He is more like his mother,” Obi-Wan allowed, “But you and I both know the traits that are most worrying about him are the ones you both share with Anakin.”

“So, are we lost causes Obi-Wan?”

“No,” he said, “Because I see you, and everything that you have endured, and you haven’t slipped yet.” He gave her a grin, “It’s something that we can find a way to teach Luke.”

Leia scowled at him, “I am not a Jedi,” she reminded him.

His mouth twitched in amusement, “So you say,” he allowed, “But you don’t have to be a Jedi to fall Leia. Anymore then you need to be a Sith to lose yourself in darkness.”

Her own son being the perfect example of that.

Leia shook her head, “Luke showed me how,” she said.

“Then it will be fitting that you show him the path he already figured out once,” Obi-Wan said lightly. Then he frowned, “You said there are differences between what that past Anakin did and what this one is doing?”

Leia nodded.

“Like?”

“Offering me the throne,” she hissed.


“No, he offered the chance to kill Palpatine, and they could rule together.” Leia said dismissively, “Besides, Luke was a Jedi apprentice. Luke could be of value to him.”

Obi-Wan’s eyes grew sharp “And you think that you have none for him?”
Leia glanced away, “Not in any way I thought he understood,” she hedged.

Obi-Wan didn’t sound very convinced “I see.” In an almost casual voice, he asked, “Does he ever mention me?”

Leia looked at him, at the hope and longing, and pure fear on Obi-Wan’s face. “You don’t come up much,” Leia said cautiously. “He is not the most reasonable about you.”

“I see,” Obi-Wan said, looking disappointed, Leia thought about if she was in his place, asking someone about Ben. She would want to know.

The parallels between the two situations made her uncomfortable, but she did offer the one thing that hadn’t been drowning in violence and hatred on Vader’s part “He did warn me not to eat your cooking,” she said.

“He did?” Obi-Wan looked completely baffled by that. Leia imagined he was trying to come up with a scenario where that subject would even come up. Then a self-deprecating smile crossed his lips, “He isn’t wrong,” he admitted.

Leia rolled her eyes, “Are you telling me that I defended you for nothing?” she asked.

“I only learned to be a barely tolerable cook because I was living in a desert alone for almost twenty years,” Obi-Wan said, without a hint of shame, “I am no good at it, and civilization created restaurants for a reason.”

Leia arched an eyebrow and Obi-Wan looked at her, “Let me guess, you can create culinary masterpieces out of stale food and leftovers?” he asked.

Leia let out a bark of laughter, “No, I’m about at your skill level. But I have to say I’ve never met anyone who was as bad at cooking as we are and was proud of that fact.”

“Embrace your flaws,” Obi-Wan told her gravely, “It’s what makes you interesting.”

Leia’s eyes narrowed, “Whose saying is that?” she asked, “Yoda or Qui-Gon? Because there is no one who is a harsher critic of yourself than you.”

“My lack of cooking skills doesn’t bother me,” he said, then his light mood vanished. “My other sins are piled so high as to make them insignificant. Starting with last night.”

“I owe you an apology,” Obi-Wan looked at her, eyes clear and troubled, “You did offer to tell me what happened to Va-Anakin,” he swallowed, “And even by then I knew you well enough to know that you aren’t one to gloat in a dead enemies face. I should have let you say what you were going to.”

Leia let out a long sigh and then shook her head. “You love him,” she said

“I love who he was,” he protested.

“You love him,” Leia said pointedly, “You are horrified and disgusted by what he has done, but that in no way means you have stopped loving him.” She gave him a long look, “Trust me, I know of what I speak.”

He looked back at her, face full of sorrow, “Yes,” he said, “I imagine you do.”

Leia didn’t want to talk about Ben, so she went on, “Besides, in your offensives against me, that
one doesn’t even rate.”

“And what do you hold me responsible for Leia?”

“I offered to tell you when I was drunk,” she pointed out, “You told me that you didn’t want to know what Luke and I did in my past.”

Obi-Wan grimaced, “Yes, you have me there on that one. But in fairness to myself, I was telling Luke a lot of information at once. I didn’t want to shock him too severely.”

Leia gave him a flat look, not buying that line of bantha shit in the slightest. “You had to know why he was so interested in me,” she said.

“Because the Force was urging him to,” Obi-Wan said, looking confused. Leia just looked at him. He couldn’t play the doddering old fool with her. She was only four years younger than him, and she damn well knew that interest in sex didn’t go away when you got older. Became less intense, but certainly didn’t go away.

“Not buying that are you?” he asked.

“No,” Leia said.

He sighed, “Luke did have a lot of shocks throw his way in a very short amount of time Leia. I also didn’t want to say anything, because I didn’t know how you would take the news. I wanted to talk to Bail and Breha, and see what they thought. I thought I would have time to explain when things weren’t quite so full of danger.”

He said that a lot. But then again, he had been on Tatooine for almost twenty years, and nothing had happened. War was a lot of hurry up and wait. And that was one hell of a wait.

Grief crossed his face, “And I never in my wildest imaginings did I think Bail and Breha would die before I even reached them. Or that I wouldn’t survive much longer than them.”

“Did you really?” she asked, keeping her eyes fixed on him.

“Did I what?” Obi-Wan asked.

“Intend to survive,” Leia said.

“We’ve been over this. I am not suicidal Leia,” Obi-Wan said.

“No, you are not,” she agreed, “But from what I remember of that fight, you barely put up any defense at all.”

Obi-Wan grimaced “I’m not sure I can bring myself to fight Anakin again. Even with not having to look into his face, only that mask.”

Yes, that wound was deep. Even with all the confrontations Leia had forced on him, and time, this Obi-Wan was still trying to come to grips with it. That other Obi-Wan, he had no chance to purge it at all. And even Vader had probably found no closure, or satisfaction, from that fight on the Death Star. Obi-Wan’s death was not what he had been seeking. “You weren’t the only one,” she said out loud.

“Hmm?” Obi-Wan asked, attention coming back to her. “I wasn’t the only one who what?”

Leia grimaced, she had been deep thought, and hadn’t meant to say that out loud. Leia looked at
Obi-Wan for a long moment, Papa’s barb last night of withholding information he needed to understand Vader was echoing just a little bit too loudly in her head. But she didn’t know if this revelation would help him or harm him.

And withholding this, wasn’t her choice to make. Obi-Wan had made it very clear that he wanted to know everything about that other Vader. This one too. And this revelation she had, it was important to both versions of Vader.

“The only one fighting at half measure in that duel.”

“You think Anakin couldn’t bring himself to hurt me?” Obi-Wan sounded very dubious.

Leia swallowed, then went on, explaining herself. “No, Obi-Wan, I’m saying that before he learned of my existence, or Luke’s for that matter, Vader was probably suicidal.”

Obi-Wan paled so quickly Leia was afraid he was going to pass out. “I could be wrong,” she said hastily, not liking that stricken look on his face.

Obi-Wan looked away, “You probably aren’t,” he muttered, and rubbed his hands over his face. “If what you are saying about his return to the light is tru-“

“It is,” Leia said emphatically. “It was the defining moment of Luke’s life, and led to Palpatine’s death, there is no way I am wrong about it.”

“Then that means there is part of him that knows what he is doing is wrong,” he looked at Leia, face still pale. “And he’s trying to punish himself for it.”

Leia couldn’t bring herself to care. “I suppose,” she allowed, “Vader is the master at deluding himself.”

Obi-Wan’s head cocked, “And how do you know that?” he asked.

Leia snorted, “Me? Empress? How cut off from reality is he to think I would ever accept that?” She shook her head, “Never mind the fact that doing so would be a betrayal of everything I am, the tedium alone in that job would kill me.”

Obi-Wan’s lips twitched in grim amusement, “Yes, you do seem to rather enjoy hurtling yourself into dangerous situations.”

Leia's eyes narrowed, “I do not,” she huffed, crossing her arms over her chest, “But I hate meetings. And that is what being Emperor is. Meetings, all of the time. There are even meetings about meetings. And everyone around me is also having meetings about what to say in their meetings with me.” She rolled her eyes, “I bet half the people Palpatine kills in those sessions is just because he’s bored.”

“You will get no argument from me on that,” Obi-Wan’s amusement faded away. “And as entertaining as it is to imagine you banging your head against the Imperial bureaucracy, I don’t think you quite understand what Ahsoka said last night.”

“Oh, I remember that really clearly. He wants to give me the throne.”

Obi-Wan looked at her patiently, “Is that the cause Leia, or the effect?”

Leia frowned, “What do you mean?”
Obi-Wan’s voice took on a lecturing tone, “Why is Ahsoka here?”

“Because Vader has the delusional idea that I need protection,” Leia grumbled unhappily.

Obi-Wan nodded, “We’ll argue about your self-preservation instincts later, but even you have to admit it is not delusional for him to think the Emperor is a threat to you.”

Leia sat straight up, “So he wants Ahsoka to protect me from Palpatine?” she asked. “Then why send her here? Why not keep her with him?”

Obi-Wan shook his head, “You’re thinking like a politician.”

“I am a politician,” Leia snapped back.

“Yes General,” and there was the slightest emphasis on that title, “but Anakin is not. He wasn’t when he was young, and nothing I have heard now about his moves within the Empire has shown me otherwise.”

Leia rubbed her forehead, “Spit it out Obi-Wan, I’m not your student, and I’m too tired to try to work out what you are leading to.”

“Putting you on the throne involves removing the Emperor from it Leia,” Obi-Wan said.

“Yes, I understand that,” she said through gritted teeth, wondering why he felt the need to repeat that over and over again.

“Do you?”

“Yes, I do,” she snapped back, “it’s not like Palpatine is going to share it because Vader asks him nicely. He has to kill Palpatine to…” her words went soft as it suddenly occurred to her what point Ob-Wan was trying to make, ”to make that happen,” she finished lamely.

This wasn’t about giving her the throne. This wasn’t about Vader ruling the galaxy through her. This wasn’t even about power. This was about Vader killing Palpatine to save Leia. Just like he had done for Luke. Only this time it wasn’t a spur of a moment decision on Vader’s part. Giving her the throne, that was the effect, not the cause. The cause, the why, was because Palpatine was a threat to her. And Vader would remove all threats to her, Emperor or not.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan looked satisfied. “He is looking for a solution to a problem he is going to cause.”

“Oh, by all the Gods,” Leia whispered.

“Again, I’m not sure if it is a good sign or not that he is aware he would be a disaster at ruling.”

“He never wanted to rule,” Leia said absently, trying to fit this new understanding into her mental map of Vader. The pieces still wouldn’t fit for her, but she was trying.

Obi-Wan’s face looked deeply skeptical, “Leia,” he said “That was why he fell. Because he wanted power.”

“To save my mother,” she reminded him, bringing her focus back to the conversation at hand. “At least that is what he believes, and what he told me. I don’t think he ever wanted to rule. It’s why he never made a move against Palpatine in my original timeline.” Even though he had offered to Luke, that they could rule together, she had heard nothing of him moving against Palpatine like he was doing now for her.
“Perhaps,” Obi-Wan sounded doubtful.

“No,” Leia shook her head. There might be a lot of information that she didn’t have regarding her past, but this, this was something she would have heard of in the long run up to Endor. “Sith Lords try to kill each other. But I’ve never even heard a hint of him ever making a move against Palpatine.”

“Maybe he did it subtly?”

Leia gave Obi-Wan a frankly disbelieving look. Vader? *Subtle*? Obi-Wan shook his head, “I withdraw that,” he said, “That was a stupid suggestion.

“Well, at least he is putting more thought into this then you did,” Leia said.

Obi-Wan frowned, “What do you mean?”

Leia looked him straight in the eyes. “Why focus Luke on Vader?” she asked, “The Emperor was the bigger threat.”

Obi-Wan shook his head, “I wasn’t sure that Luke could survive Anakin. If he could, the Emperor would be the next one.”

Strategically that didn’t make a lick of sense. “No,” Leia said. “By killing Vader, you remove a powerful ally of the Emperor’s, but it wouldn’t fatally cripple Palpatine, or the structure that is the organization of the Empire.”

Obi-Wan’s voice was frosty, “You think killing Vader wouldn’t have repercussions?”

And he was back to calling him Vader again, that was not a good sign. Despite how far he had come, Obi-Wan still wasn’t able to face the consequences of plotting out the death of someone he loved.

“Of course not,” Leia scoffed, “Much like killing Tarkin it would weaken the top structure of the Empire. But Obi-Wan, it’s not *enough*. And it would be temporary, Palpatine would soon find someone new to replace Vader as the Imperial boogeyman.”

“There is no one who is as big a threat as Vader,” Obi-Wan insisted mulishly.

“Which is why the Emperor had a planet killer built,” she said, “Because that *is* enough of a threat.” Obi-Wan blanched at that reminder, “And if you think us blowing up his first one is going to stop Palpatine from building another, I have a shipyard I can sell you on Corellia.”

Obi-Wan’s eyes went frantic, “What do you know?” he asked sharply.

Leia sighed, she had gone too far. “Nothing I can tell you.”

“Leia-” he started to say.

Leia shook her head. “No Obi-Wan, *Mon* told me not to say anything.”

He fell silent at that, “And did she get the idea from you?” he asked cautiously.

Leia gave him a bitter smile, “She was on the right path, I just sped up her realization.”

Obi-Wan rubbed a hand over his face, “By the Force,” he whispered. “How many atrocities are you hiding?”
Leia looked back at him calmly, “How many are you?”

His hands dropped from his face, and he looked at her seriously, “More then I care to remember.”

“War is an ugly thing Obi-Wan. I will do what I can to avert them as they come up, but can you blame me for not wanting to go into excruciating detail about it?”

Sorrow filled his eyes, “No,” he said softly, “I cannot.”

Leia shrugged, “Then trust that I will do everything I can to avert them.” She gave him a shy smile, “And that I will ask for help.”

“You have whatever you need of me Leia,” he said, much more seriously than her light reprimand of herself demanded. No, Obi-Wan wasn’t suicidal. But he was also too like her, more then willing to trade his life away, if it meant he wouldn’t have to see one more loved one die.

But he would respond as well as she would if she tried to give him a lecture on the subject. Time to put this in the practical. “Obi-Wan,” she said and reached out taking his hand, squeezing it between hers. “You do me absolutely no good dead.”

He looked down at their joined hands, then gave a light bemused laugh, “I regret that I wasn’t able to undo the damage I helped inflict on the galaxy and that you and Luke were left to put the pieces back together.”

He raised his eyes to meet hers “But I cannot regret the woman that those experiences forged you into. You are a remarkable leader General Leia Organa,” A true smile touched his lips, “And a good friend.”

Leia felt her cheeks heat slightly at the compliment, “And you are a remarkable pain in my ass,” she said, “But I have to say I wouldn’t trade this friendship for anything.” She gave his fingers a light squeeze and withdrew them. “Even if you are a horrible strategist.”

“I have many defeated enemies who would beg to differ with that assessment.”

Leia rolled her eyes, “The most important gamble of your life, and you didn’t think it through,” she complained, “You just stuck to your first decision, no matter how the circumstances changed.”

“How was I to know Anakin would throw off Palpatine for his child?” he asked, but there was no hostility in his tone. He was genuinely curious about how Leia thought he was wrong.

“You couldn’t,” she agreed, “And that was not what I was talking about.”

He looked startled, “Then what?” he asked, genuinely baffled.

“I’m talking about Luke,” she said, “More specifically the decision to give him to the Lars.”

He frowned, “Prophecy was never my strong suit Leia. And I already explained that how families worked was somewhat of a mystery to me. I never anticipated that the Lars would refuse to let me train Luke.”

She gave him a long look. “You are being deliberately slow Obi-Wan. Even if the Lar’s had allowed you to train Luke from an early age, they were still his,” she almost said parent, but no that was her word for what they were to Luke, not Luke’s ”guardians. Are you really telling me that you were so naïve to think they wouldn’t have great influence over him?”
“Well, of course, I did.” He said haughtily. “I never would have left Luke there if they weren’t good and kind people.”

“Good and kind people who grew up on Tatooine. Who are products of that culture, much as you are of yours, and I am of mine.”

“Leia this is basic psychology,” he said patiently.

“So, it never occurred to you that Luke would have vastly different ideas about the morality of committing patricide?” she asked, knowing the answer to this already.

“Of course, it did,” he said, “That is why Yoda insisted we not tell Luke, because it would cause him pain.”

“And you?” she asked. “What did you think?”

His eyes slipped, “I didn’t want to think about it,” he said.

Leia wasn’t here to berate him for how he had altered reality in his own mind to keep what was left of his sanity. But she needed him to understand what she was saying, not get defensive. In a gentle voice she said, “Let’s put aside, for the moment, that killing Vader in the long term does nothing about removing the Empire. My original point is that having Luke kill Vader would solve one problem, but it would create a whole new one when he learned what he had done.”

“You are assuming he would find out.”

Leia looked at him flatly, “Obi-Wan, aren’t you the one who is always telling me I can’t fight fate?”

“You don’t know that it was fate that Luke would find out,” he countered.

“It’s the Force Obi-Wan, it would have found a way,” she gestured to herself, “I am the first person in the galaxy who would do anything to make sure that Vader doesn’t find out about Luke in this time, but even I am aware that it is going to happen.”

Obi-Wan regarded her warily, “You are sure about this?” He didn’t ask how she knew. Leia wasn’t sure she could really explain the feeling she got about this, only that in any reality where Luke and Vader existed, they would always discover each other.

“Yes,” she said softly, “I don’t know when, but I do know it will be sooner than I like.”

Obi-Wan looked away, troubled. “You think that if everything had gone according to Yoda’s and my plan, and Luke killed Vader, it would cause Luke to fall?” Obi-Wan shook his head, “I think you are underestimating him, Leia.”

Did he really not get this? “Luke isn’t much one for the “greater good,”” Leia said, “But here is where I think you are missing the consequences of letting him grow up on Tatooine. That scenario you just described, where someone unknowingly kills a blood relation? It is a thing that Luke grew up watching happen on Tatooine. The Hutts like to do it as punishment, and entertainment, with their slaves.”

Obi-Wan looked sickened and shocked. It surprised Leia he didn’t know about this. Granted it wasn’t something that happened every day, but it wasn’t a rare occurrence either. She had spent at most, a week on that miserable dustball of a planet, and she knew this. “It serves as a horror story and a warning, among the free people of Tatooine of what slavers will do to you. And it is
especially pressed hard by those who were former slaves to their free-born family members.”

“Owen and Beru were not slaves,” he said.

“No,” Leia said, “But my grandmother was. And from everything Luke has ever told me about the man, Owen loved his stepmother, and she would have told him about it. And he made sure her grandson, the first member of her family to be born free, knew it too.”

Obi-Wan looked troubled, “Are you saying this is why if Luke had killed Vader he would have fallen?”

Leia looked at him, “Yes,” she said, “I think he would have. Once he learned that some of the people he most trusted in the galaxy lied to him, and had him recreate an event that is an anathema to everything he is, and everything he represented for his family. He is the first free-born son of a family of slaves. And he was tricked into killing his father by someone he called Master.”

Obi-Wan’s voice grew indignant, “That word does not have the same connotation in Basic that it does in Huttese—“

Leia cut him off, “I know that. You know that. Hell, Luke knows that. Nevertheless, his heart would not have known that.”

Obi-Wan was silent for a long time, “You think he would join the Emperor?” he asked.

Leia let out a laugh. Obi-Wan in this case was thinking far too small. “No,” she said, “I think he would kill the Emperor.”

“Anakin didn’t,” Obi-Wan said.

“One, Luke isn’t Vader. Two, Palpatine has been conditioning Vader since he was nine, not to.” Obi-Wan just looked at her blankly, “What do you think all that interest in Vader as a child was about Obi-Wan?”

“To turn him to the Dark Side,” Obi-Wan said firmly.

Leia shook her head, “Stop thinking like a Jedi, and start thinking strategically about what you do to develop an asset.”

Obi-Wan’s voice was soft, and very tightly controlled, “To make Anakin dependent on him.”

“Also to know his weaknesses,” Leia looked at him thoughtfully, “Palpatine probably put some of those weaknesses in.” Obi-Wan looked at her sharply, then he nodded, his lips in a tight line.

Not liking the guilt around him, Leia added lightly, “For good reason as it turned out. I will say this for Vader, he is not someone who is easily persuaded.”

“He never was,” Obi-Wan said, “Stubborn as a gundark.”

“Family trait,” Leia said carelessly.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan remarked, and there were a host of emotions in that soft voice, “And the fate of the entire galaxy has pivoted on that truth several times.”

Leia really had nothing to directly contradict that. He was right. Between Vader, her, Luke, and Ben, the Skywalker family had brought down three galaxy-wide governments, in a span of less than sixty years. Four, if you counted the Separatists. At least Leia assumed that Vader had
handled killing off the remaining leadership after Dooku had been killed in the Battle of Coruscant and Grievous on Utapau. It was what he had spent the last twenty years doing, killing any messes Palpatine left behind.

But just because she didn’t have anything to refute that statement, it didn’t mean that she did have anything to add. “If Luke had found out that Vader was his father after killing him, there would have been no First Order,” she said softly.

Obi-Wan frowned, “What do you mean?”

“Luke would have killed Palpatine. Fallen or not, he would never ally himself with that man.”

“Even if Palpatine dangled knowledge of the Sith ways in front of him?” Obi-Wan asked.

Leia gave him a tight smile, “I told you, Luke isn’t much one for the greater good, even if it is in his own best interests. All Luke would have seen was a Master, and there is no negotiating with a Master. You survive them, or you kill them. But if he was fallen, he would take the reins of power himself.”


Leia scoffed, “Of course he does.” Obi-Wan frowned, “But it’s the goal, Obi-Wan,” she said, throwing his own words back at him, “not the cause. Luke would rule to make things better.”

Obi-Wan paled, “Yes,” he said, “That I can see.” He cleared his throat, “But for all of Luke’s intelligence, he doesn’t know how to control a group of people yet, never mind the behemoth that is the Empire. He is unused to interpersonal politics, to say nothing of the ones that are played with deadly intent. He could be ruthless enough, and he learns fast, but that doesn’t mean he wouldn’t be taken out by a more experienced opponent very shortly after taking the throne.”

“You are making a fatal flaw in your reasoning there Obi-Wan,” Leia said softly, “You are assuming he would be alone.”

Obi-Wan only stared at her blankly, then shook his head vehemently “No.” he protested, “you wouldn’t join him,” he said firmly.

“Wouldn’t I?” Leia asked.

“Oh course not,” Obi-Wan’s voice was much less sure now at Leia’s calm tone.

She shook her head, “Where Luke goes, I follow. And the same holds true of him.”

“Leia-“ he said.

She put up a hand to stop him, “When I learned that Ben fell, and what he had done, I thought I would lay down and never get up again,” she said, voice cracking just a bit.

“But you didn’t,” Obi-Wan said, “Even though your son fell, you got up, and you continued to fight. Not only against falling into despair, but against the Dark Side, and allowing darkness to once again consume the galaxy.”

“Yes,” Leia said, “but Luke isn’t Ben.” She looked at him, “I told Vader that Luke was the other half of me. We’re twins Obi-Wan, we are twins who are powerful in the Force, and that connects us in ways that I don’t think you understand.”
“Even here, in this time, with thirty-four years difference in our ages, he understands me on a level no one else can. Even Han.” She took a deep breath in and let it out slowly. He wasn’t going to like what she was about to say, and Obi-Wan lashed out when he was afraid. “Did you know that in the Force, we can merge ourselves so completely together, that we feel like one person?”

“No,” Obi-Wan said, voice barely audible, “I didn’t.”

She gave him a grimly amused smile, “Even we can’t separate ourselves. It’s how we threw Vader out the last time he was in my head.” The smile slipped off her face, “And he didn’t even know there were two of us there. Because for all intents and purposes, there weren’t.”

She looked him squarely in the eye, “So believe me when I tell you, if Luke falls, I will follow him. And the same is also true of him.”

Obi-Wan’s face was very pale, “I’m not trying to scare you,” Leia said, “Or lecture you. Consider this a warning from a friend who knows herself very well. And that your blindness in regards to Vader, not only in his training but how you chose to stop him, very nearly left the galaxy in worse shape than it currently is in. Because Palpatine, while very effective at keeping the reins of power through fear, would be nothing compared to how Luke and I would rule.”

“You think you would be worse than Palpatine?” Obi-Wan looked horrified.

“Oh yes,” she whispered, seeing the scenario spin out all too easily in her mind. “Because he uses pain and fear to keep people in line.” She met Obi-Wan’s horrified gaze, “Luke and I would use love and worship. There is nothing as dangerous as someone who is filled with righteous fury, and is willing to inspire, and use it, in others.”

“That doesn’t sound as bad as Palpatine,” Obi-Wan said cautiously.

“For everyone who bows their heads in subservience, no, it would probably be a lot better. Having a mostly content population is easier to rule. And Luke and I would want to make things as smooth and easy as we could.” Leia admitted, “But for those who don’t fall in line?”

Leia gave a vicious smile, “Things would be so much worse. Luke and I wouldn’t be interested in keeping a few convenient scapegoats around to use as an outside enemy to scare our subjects into obeying. They would be hunted down Obi-Wan, those who won’t serve us, they wouldn’t just be enemies, but heretics. Because all we offer is warmth and protection, and how can anyone not want that?”

Obi-Wan’s face was twisted in horror, but Leia kept going, “And the ones who won’t live in this galaxy Luke and I want to create, they would have a hard time convincing anyone of the peril they were all in. Because it would be wrapped in love and concern.” She let out a long sigh, “The happiness of someone shouldn’t depend on what they are willing to fall to their knees for Obi-Wan. The worse thing you can do to someone is take away their choices, and make it think that it was their idea.”

“This is only a worse case example,” Obi-Wan breathed, “Luke knows about Vader here. That won’t happen here.”

Leia shrugged, “That exact set of circumstances, no. But it is a possibility.” Obi-Wan didn’t look all that reassured, “But there is the other side of that weakness Obi-Wan, and it is a great strength. I think it’s why neither Luke nor I fell, despite the life we endured, and the tragedies we weathered.”

“How can there be any strength in this?” his voice was incredulous.
“Because we are less likely to fall because we know the other is there. To support us, to guide us out of the hole we have found ourselves in. And yes,” she gave him a serious look, “We might be so lost to think that the Dark Side will provide everything that we need. But the consequences of that fall wouldn’t only happen to us, the individual, but also to the other.”

“You will do for the other what you won’t do for yourself?” Obi-Wan sounded puzzled.

“Han used to say we had a bad risk calculus when it came to ourselves,” she looked at him, hoping that he would get this, “But that we were the fussiest most overprotective busybodies when it came to risking those we love.”

He drew in a sharp breath. “Oh,” he said wonderingly

She nodded. “Love is our greatest strength. It is also the sharpest weapon that can be used against us.” She met his eyes, “And I think that is something the Jedi forgot. All they saw was the peril, and none of the advantages.”

“No,” Obi-Wan said slowly, “That was not something the Jedi considered.”

Leia shrugged, “It’s all about balance Obi-Wan.” He looked at her sharply, “I am well aware that the way Luke and I embraced comes with its own perils, but so did the Jedi’s way. The difference is that I don’t think my way is the only path to remaining in the light. I’m sure there were plenty of members of the Order your way worked for. But not all of them.” No need to name the most obvious failure of that system.

“Perhaps,” Obi-Wan said softly, “You have given me a great deal to think on.”

“And scare you?” Leia asked,

He nodded, “Yes. But having many of your assumptions challenged is always scary.” He looked at her, and his voice turned shy, “Thank you for coming by to check on me, Leia.”

She grinned back, “I can’t say it was a pleasure, but it definitely wasn’t boring.” She uncrossed her legs and swung them to the side. “And if you really want to be entertained, you should eat breakfast with all of us in my parent’s rooms and watch Han and Papa circle around each other.”

He let out a light laugh, with no hints of sorrow or pain in it, “I just might have to take you up on that.”

Leia used her lunch break to quietly slip into the infirmary. If there was anything she needed to be cautious about, it was this. It had only been a kiss, and a brief one at that, but Leia knew where this was heading. She couldn’t afford the distraction of a pregnancy right now, and if there was anything her accidentally drunk incident had taught her, it was that for all she felt ancient, there were some serious downsides to finding yourself nineteen again.

There was a medical aide there, sitting behind a wide table that Leia assumed was serving as a desk, and he gave her a wide beaming grin, “Good afternoon Your Highness,” he said. He looked vaguely familiar, but Leia had been fairly out of it during her stay here, so she wasn’t too surprised that his name wasn’t immediately coming to mind.

“Good afternoon,” she said back.
“How can I help you today?” Well, he was a cheerful sort. What was he doing working in the infirmary of the perpetually dour and sarcastic Healer Banok?

“I need to do a follow-up,” she said, leaning against the counter “For an appointment I made six months ago.” She was a little early, but better safe than sorry. And she was being discrete because the last thing she needed was any patients in the room that she couldn’t see, blabbing all over the place that she was getting shots to control her period.

The aide hummed, and looked down, tapping the data pad laying on his desk. “Oh yes,” he said, “It’s right here,” he said, looking up at her, and rising. “If you could just-” he gestured to one of the curtained off rooms behind the desk.

“Do my ears deceive me, or do I hear the lovely voice of my favorite patient?” Healer Banok’s voice boomed from behind one of those curtains.

Leia crossed her eyes, she had hoped to avoid him. He was a good healer, a brilliant one if the state of her arm and shoulder was to go by. But he was a bit too bossy for her liking.

It was too late to deny it, he had already popped his head out of the curtain that was three rooms in. “It is,” he said and brought a finger up to wag it at her, “Were you trying to avoid seeing me by coming at lunch?”

“Yes,” Leia said, folding her arms over her chest, “I thought you might be eating, like a sane person.”

“A workaholic knows another workaholic,” he replied. Then he frowned as he looked at her. “Are you dying?” Healer Banok’s voice was dry, but Leia could feel a slight hint of concern from him in the Force.

She gave him an arch look, “Does it look like I am?” she responded.

He gave her a fierce grin, “Well, no. But I thought that was the only way you would ever find yourself in this infirmary again.”

Leia gave him a sweet grin, “With your charming bedside manner, how could I stay away?”

“I’ll take this Mican,” Banok told her very friendly medical aide. “Put her in room four.”

“Of course, Healer Banok,” Mican said, and the sunny face was gone as if it had never been. Clearly, the man didn’t bother to play nice with his boss, only the patients.

Mican led her to the little curtained-off room that was at the back of the larger stone room, and gestured for her to sit on the medical exam table that was there, “Healer Banok will be with you in just a moment,” he said, the friendless back in his voice, “But if there is anything you need in the meantime, don’t hesitate to call me,” he gestured to where his desk was.

“Thank you Mican,” she said, and the man gave her a beatific smile.

It was several minutes until Healer Bank appeared. Leia found herself falling into a light meditation into the Force. When he entered, she brought herself out of it. It wasn’t even something she even bothered to worry about anymore. It was restful, and somewhat relaxing to immerse herself into that great power. Fighting it was getting her nowhere, and she could see the benefits.

“Well,” Healer Banok said, “What brings me to my infirmary if you are healthy and hale?”
Leia crossed her arms, all peace she had found immediately vanishing. “I need an update shot for my menstrual cycle.” She said.

A speculative gleam entered his eyes, “Does this have anything to do with Captain Solo or Lt. Dameron?”

Leia rolled her eyes, “Don’t tell me you’ve placed money on those bets as well.”

He waved a hand, “Oh no, just an interested bystander. I felt it would be unfair to participate in most of those since I have so much access to everyone’s personal life.”

“This has nothing to do with that,” Leia said. “It’s just more convenient to not have to deal with my periods.”

“Yes, in your extensive fieldwork,” he remarked dryly, “Because it always goes well when you leave this base.”

Leia only glared at him.

He gave a light chuckle and turned to address the medical droid who was just outside the curtain. “Can you please get me the HFO booster?”

“Of course sir,” the droid’s wheels squeaked as he rolled away. Leia winced at the high-pitched noise, and the Healer only shook his head, “He needs an oil bath in the worse way,” he explained to Leia, “But the astro mechs tend to get the priority.”

“Do you need me to yell at someone?” she offered.

Banok shook his head, “No, but thank you. He’s due for one tomorrow, it’s just he is the only medical droid on base, and he is constantly running.”

Leia frowned, “We could buy you a new one?”

“Why?” Banok didn’t even sound angry, “They are expensive, and even if we did get another one, I would make sure that they were placed with the other medical droids in the fleet.”

Leia cocked her head, “Why would you do that?” she asked, “Do you not need more help? I thought we had a scarcity of healers?”

“We do, and I could,” Banok admitted, “But any medical droids we have on base is quite likely to be left here when we evacuate. And I don’t know about you, but I don’t like destroying droids just because we find it convenient.”

“Destroy him?” Leia looked at him puzzled, “Why would we do that?”

Healer Banok’s eyes became interested, “Because we can’t leave the medical information of the people on this base for the Empire to find.”

The droid came back, and his long thin arm poked between the gap in the curtain. “Sir,” he said.

“Thank you,” Banok said, taking the booster. “So, do I need to distract you? He asked, reverting to the gruff man Leia was much more comfortable with.

“No,” she rolled her sleeve up, and Banok wiped the skin down with an anti-infection cream. A moment later, and it was done.
“Any other problems I should be aware of?” he asked, as Leia rolled down her sleeve.

“No,” she said, hopping off the table.

“Would you tell me if there were?”

“Maybe,” she said.

He wagged his finger in her face, “I don’t know why I tolerate you. All my other patients treat me with the proper awe and respect due to a man of my learning.”

“Maybe if you were as friendly as Mican, I might be more inclined to come here,” Leia chided him.

“Mican?” Banok looked at her, red eyebrows going up in surprise “Friendly?”

“He has been nothing but helpful,” she said.

“Well, then the boy must have a crush. He’s nothing but a grouch most of the time.”

Leia didn’t get that sense off of him, but then again, she tended to be really bad at reading when people were interested in her. She shrugged, “You could still stand to take lessons.”

“Unlike Mican, you are not my type,” he said, “I don’t need to be nice. I only need to keep you healthy.”

Leia mocked saluted him, “Then I will leave you to torment whatever poor souls are stuck in here.”

She walked out before he could reply.

Leia was in the main communications hub, trying to make herself focus as she read report after report about Alderaan. Her mind kept drifting to later, when she was done, and could join Han in the Falcon. It didn’t help that the pile she needed to get through was a bit more extensive than what she usually faced.

Communications Specialist Jhina had been gracious enough to gather them all up for Leia while she was gone. The entire communication staff was on very familiar terms with her by now. None of these reports held any information that was worth risking their security to send to her while she had been on her trip checking out the planets that could be potential bases for the Alliance. But it also meant there was a large stack she now had to make her way through. She had meant to come here last night, but she had been in no state to, after leaving her parent’s quarters.

Leia fought her yawns as she flipped through dry report after dry report. Thankfully, things seemed to be settling down on Alderaan for now. Leia wasn’t fooled, she had seen too many angry and riotous populations, this was only a lull. But hopefully, Shale was using the time to build up goodwill and was not plotting on ways to crack down on the population.

But it had been a long day, and yesterday had been even longer, and as she forced her eyes to focus in on the last report, she found herself yawning again. She was tired, not just physically, although that was there too, but mentally. She could plan an insurgent war, become the leader and symbol for a ragtag band of radicals for years on end, but dealing with all the swirling pain and emotions of the last few days was apparently enough to knock her out, even in this wonderfully energetic
body.

Had it really been only three days ago that she had been frolicking with Luke and Han on that isolated beach? Mon was right, she really had needed that day of rest and fun. Perhaps she should return the favor. Leia grinned to herself, she was sure Papa and Mama would be more than willing to see that Mon got an enforced day of relaxation. It was only fair after all to repay the woman for her kindness, and sneakiness. And perhaps she should swing by Mon’s office tonight. No, Leia couldn’t ferret her away, but she could remind the woman to eat before she joined Han in the Falcon.

She was so involved in her internal plans, she almost missed Evaan, who sided up to her. “Hello Leia,” she practically purred.

Leia looked at her cautiously, “Hello Evaan,” she replied. She looked entirely too pleased with herself.

Evaan’s grin only grew wider, doing nothing to assuage Leia’s worries about what she wanted. “How are you today?” Evaan asked.

“I’m fine,” Leia said, lowering the report in her hands. “Just fine?” and the blonde gave her a naughty grin, “After what I heard about last night, I would have thought fine wasn’t the right word.”

Leia frowned. No, fine wasn’t the right word. Rough, brutal, tiring, those words were much more accurate to describe the argument that had exploded last night. But how had Evaan even heard about that? Her parent’s room was nowhere near the general quarters. And the thick stone walls of Yavin meant that sound didn’t really carry all that well.

And then Leia realized Evaan wasn’t talking about the fight. She was talking about what happened after. Leia rolled her eyes. “This is about Han and me dragging Luke into the Falcon isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is,” Evaan rolled up a bit on the tips of her toes, reminding Leia of a child excited for a treat.

Leia looked at her suspiciously, “I thought you had most of your money betting on me and Han now, not the trio happening.”

“I do,” Evaan gave her a wicked grin, “But Wedge is convinced that last nights events mean that he has won.” Evaan tipped her head to Leia, “And since I know you would never lie to me about you and Luke, that means as soon as I get confirmation from you that nothing happened, I can go rub his face in it.”

This competition between the two of them was getting out of hand. Leia was only half surprised that she hadn’t been locked in a closet with Han, or Luke, or hell, both. Wedge could be very underhanded when his pride was on the line. She just hoped, rather than believed, that most of the other residents on this base weren’t as caught up in all this madness. Or at least had the good sense not to get between Wedge and Evaan.

“So, Leia, my good friend,” Evaan said, looping her arm through Leia’s “Tell me all the details of how you all played cards, or did something else equally boring into the early morning.”

Leia thought of how nice it had been to curl up with Han, in that small bunk, on the Falcon. How Luke had been there too, in easy distance for her to reach, in case of nightmares, hers or his. It had been a long time for Leia since that had been true, and oh she had missed them.
Evaan’s arm fell out of hers, and she peered into Leia’s face, mistaking the meaning of that fond look. “Or maybe I should yell at you?” she asked, seeing more than Leia wanted to share at this exact moment.

Leia shook her head, bringing herself back to this moment, not the ghosts of her past. “Nothing happened Evaan.”

Evaan didn’t look convinced, “Really?” she asked. “That didn’t look like a nothing face.”

Han’s hands, as he gently held her like she was the most precious thing in his world, his lips moving across hers, flashed through Leia’s mind.

“So not just about proving Wedge wrong, but proving to him you were right,” Leia laughed. “Sorry to disappoint you Evaan, but nothing happened.”

“We come after Han I will gut you,” she said pleasantly, “But I’m sure Luke could be persuaded.”

Evaan’s mouth dropped open at Leia’s threat. Pleased with herself, Leia once again resumed her walk down the hallway, heading towards Mon’s private office. Leia knew that the woman had been in there all day, and would need a gentle reminder to take a break. If it wasn’t for her prior plans, Leia would ask to join her.
The fact that Leia was also leading Evaan into the more isolated parts of the base at this time of night was just bonus. Leia was having fun, but there was only so much of her personal life she wanted out in the open right now.

Leia wasn’t all that surprised when Evaan reappeared at her elbow again, “As if Han has eyes for anybody but you,” she huffed.

“Oh, I am aware,” Leia said pleasantly, “But I think open communication is important in a friendship, and I didn’t want you to misinterpret where I stand in regards to him.”

Evaan was silent for a moment, keeping in step with Leia’s meandering walk. “Luke isn’t my type,” she said finally, “Otherwise I would take you up on your offer.”


Evaan looked a little cross, “Nothing,” she said, “As I said, a fine specimen of a human male. But he is far too…” Evaan waved her hand in the air, looking for a word

“Stubborn?” Leia suggested.

“Idealistic,” Evaan finished.

Leia frowned, “So am I,” she said.

“Yes,” Evaan agreed, “But not in the same way. You are far more practical about it. Also, I don’t want to sleep with you either, so that proves my point about that not being a trait I find appealing in my bed partners.”

Leia shook her head at Evaan’s casual attitude. She understood well the comfort and fun that could be had in a quick tumble. But Leia had never really been very good at being casual in any of her relationships, sexual or platonic. It was one of the things a lot of people found disquieting about her. She was never neutral about anyone.

“I can’t tell you how delighted that makes me,” Leia replied deadpan, “Since I really don’t want to sleep with you either, and if you were interested in me, it would make things terribly awkward.”

Evaan narrowed her eyes, “Don’t get huffy with me,” she said primly, “You were the one who said open communication in a friendship was important.”

“I did, didn’t I? I’m glad we’ve cleared that up,” Leia said. “Because I was seriously thinking you were asking about last night because you were jealous of my affections.”

Evaan crossed her arms across her chest. “Well after what I heard, can you blame me for thinking something happened?”

“What did you hear?” Leia asked curiously. It’s not like anyone besides Evaan ever really told Leia about the gossip surrounding her.

“Well,” Evaan tapped her chin thoughtfully, “By the time it got to me, it was of course wildly exaggerated.”

“Evaan,” Leia said, “Either tell me or quit with the foreplay.”

“You used to be more fun,” Evaan complained.
“I was never fun,” Leia said, “I was born to destroy all the joy in your world.”

“Fine,” Evaan let out an exaggerated sigh, “What I heard was that you declared that your love for both Han and Luke in the middle of the main hallway to the hanger bay. You passionately declared that you couldn’t live without either of them.”

Leia blinked. Evaan taking note of her expression went on gleefully. “Tragically, Luke didn’t believe you. Coming from such a backward, and provincial planet like Tatooine, where he was raised on stories of how you find your one true love, live together forever, and die in each other’s arms, he said that such a thing wasn’t possible. And being the kind and humble soul he is, tried to tell you that you should be with Han.”

“I—“ Leia tried to find the words.

“But Han, he had enough. He told Luke that he was being ridiculous. That Luke’s home was with you both. Then he threw Luke over his shoulder to take him to the Falcon.”

Leia opened her mouth to dispute that, then shut it. No, actually that was the general gist of what had been said. Widely exaggerated, and she would hardly call Tatooine provincial. Wild, chaotic, and likely to kill you, but not provincial. Luke had probably seen things that would make forty-year-old men on this base blush with embarrassment, or alternately puke their guts out. The Hutts were not merciful, Jabba in particular, and they did love a good show.

Leia chuckled, pulling her mind to happier thoughts. Put in that light, she could see why people thought the three of them were going to end up together.

Evaan’s interest sharpened, “That really happened?” she squeaked.

Unable not to tease in Evaan in return, Leia gave her a sly grin, “Most of it yes.” She turned around to walk away, and called out over her shoulder, “I’ll leave it you to figure out which part didn’t.”

“Your Highness!” Evaan sounded scandalized, then she scurried after Leia.

Leia laughed, but she wasn’t willing to draw this out anymore, “The general gist of what was said, yes, that happened, But there was no throwing Luke over anyone’s shoulder.”

They turned the corner into one of the more deserted hallways. Evaan reached down and put a hand on Leia’s arm, stopping her.

Leia looked up, curious as to why Evaan looked so serious all of a sudden.

Evaan’s eyes flicked up and down the hallway, and after confirming they were alone, asked in a much more serious and quiet voice, “Why were you two so insistent Luke come with you? Is he alright?”

Evaan had been her mother’s student, Leia forgot that sometimes. No, not was her mother’s student, was still her mother’s student. Even if this Evaan was much lighter and laughed more easily than the other Evaan that Leia had known, that didn’t mean the woman didn’t still have that serious and practical side to her. Yes, she had been having fun teasing Leia, and being teased in return, but the whole reason Evaan had even started the conversation the way she had, was to get Leia alone, in a way that no one would feel the need to remark on it. For all the fact that Evaan had an almost pathological need to know what was going on with everyone on base, she also had an aversion to anyone prying into her business. It was another tenet of Mama’s teachings.

“It’s handled Evaan,” Leia said.
“Are you sure?” Evaan didn’t release Leia’s arm. “Because Wedge said Luke came back to the pilot’s quarters this morning looking like death warmed over. But he wouldn’t talk about it.”

Leia never thought to worry if Wedge and Evaan would team up on her and Luke to make sure they were properly “looked” after. That had been a very foolish oversight on her part.

Love and concern, this was all being motivated by love and concern, and Leia’s heart warmed at that thought. It had been a long time since anyone had seen the need to look after her. Not as the leader who everyone relied on, but because she was a friend.

So, it made Leia a little less caustic then she normally would have been into someone prying into her life like this. After all, Evaan wasn’t the only one who had learned at Mama’s knee the importance of discretion. But Mama had also taught Leia that a misdirection founded on the truth always worked better than a lie. Especially in this case, because Luke wasn’t good at lying on the fly, and Leia didn’t want to make him remember more than he was already was, with the juggling of all her secrets. If he flubbed an explanation both Wedge and Evaan knew something was up.

“Nightmares,” Leia said. “That’s why Han and I were so pushy about it. We knew that there was a good chance that Luke was going to have a nightmare, and we didn’t want him to be alone.”

Evaan’s hand fell away from Leia’s arm, and she frowned at Leia. “And how did Evaan know that? Was she keeping up with Mama’s schedule? Or subtly stalking Obi-Wan? “What could cause nightmares after that?” she sounded skeptical.

Leia looked Evaan straight in the eyes, ”The history of the clones came up.”

Evaan’s frown deepened, “Is he afraid Rex is suddenly going to shoot him or something?”

Leia wanted to sigh, she did. Evaan was as dedicated to freedom as anyone on this base, but she had very limited exposure to the realities of life outside of the Core, and it was showing badly now. “How much do you know about Tatooine?” Leia asked her patiently.

Evaan shrugged, “I know it’s where Luke grew up. It’s a desert planet, if his endless fascination with the rain is anything to go by.” She looked at Leia quizzically “What does that have to do with anything?”

“It’s one of the planet’s the Empire left to the Hutts to run.”

“Okay,” Evaan didn’t look enlightened, “So he grew up with gangsters as the local power? I’m still not seeing the connection.”

“Slavery,” Leia said, “The Hutts allow slavery,” Leia’s lips tightened, “And they have allowed it as long as they have been on Tatooine, which is long before the Empire seized control of the galaxy. Luke is the first one in his family to be born free, and he has very strong feelings about a slave army being made for the Republic.”

“What slave army?” Evaan just looked blank. Leia blinked, completely taken aback that Evaan didn't see this.

“The clones?” Leia put just a hint of impatience in her voice.

“But they weren’t-“ and Evaan’s voice trailed off. Leia could see the minute it all became clear to her. “Oh,” she said, hand coming up to her mouth “Oh, I feel very stupid for not seeing that.”
Well, at least there was that much. Leia tried to let her bitterness go. Evaan was very young, well young to Leia. And Leia was now so much more aware of how much of the history of the Clone Wars had been glossed over. It also showed her another way it was possible that Luke hadn’t even heard a whisper of this, and had been so badly blindsided last night.

Most of the Core’s population didn’t think of the clones as slaves. Tragically misused tools, or weapons perhaps, but not slaves. It was too ingrained into the Core-aligned members of the Alliance that the Republic had been a beaming light in the galaxy, and that slavery was illegal, therefore it hadn’t existed. That this was an ancient horror Palpatine had resurrected, as opposed to just being more open about acknowledging its existence.

Leia couldn’t even be all that surprised that so many of them were willing to overlook where the clones came from. That event is what had essentially started all of this, but she was too cynical. After the deliberate blindness of the New Republic to see the old threat that was re-growing, nothing really shocked her about what people were willing to convince themselves wasn’t real, even if it was sitting right in front of their faces.

“How did that even come up?” Evaan asked.

That question could lead to trickier ground. Leia, feigning nonchalance shrugged, “Old war stories, between Obi-Wan and Ahsoka about Luke’s father.”

“Oh,” Evaan looked interested, “Fulcrum knew General Skywalker?”

Leia looked at her, surprised that Evaan hadn’t managed to ferret that out yet, “What have you heard about her past?”

“Her name is Ahsoka Tano,” Evaan said promptly, falling into parade rest like she was giving Leia a report. Leia hadn’t thought she had asked the question like a command, but Evaan was apparently feeling a little raw in overlooking the obvious in regard to what the clones really were. “She was the first official head of the spy network for the Alliance. She was in that capacity before there was even an official Alliance. She was also instrumental in the expansion of the networks and intelligence assets we have today.”

Evaan’s formal recitation faded a bit, and a look of curiosity entered her eyes, “She is a trusted ally of your parents. And given what I heard about how he greeted her yesterday in the hanger bay, she has a personal relationship of some kind with Obi-Wan.”

“Oh, it’s Obi-Wan now?” Leia asked, surprised at the use of his first name.

Evaan blushed, actually blushed, “Yes,” she stuttered a little nervously, “he said I could call him that.”

“And when did this happen?” Obi-Wan had been with Ahsoka all of yesterday, and before that he had been on the Falcon for ten days before that. Evaan hadn’t called him “Obi-Wan” before Leia went on that trip.

“And when did this happen?” Evaan asked, blush still there, but Leia was attributing it to annoyance now, rather than embarrassment.

“Please,” Leia invited. As much as she did want to see the blonde blush bright red, Leia recognized it was probably wiser to find out what the gossip surrounding Ahsoka was. She wasn’t very comfortable with that fact, it smacked her as too close to actually engaging in a conspiracy, but that didn’t make it any less true.
“She was declared dead about three years ago by the Ghost crew,” Leia nodded, “She has been involved in the Rebellion since the beginning. When she vanished, she was working on establishing permanent lines of communication between the various Rebel factions, especially the ones in the Mid-Rim, and even several in the Outer Rim. She also had started negotiating how to permanently bring together those factions and cells into one cohesive fighting force. That work was taken up by General Draven after she was declared dead. He was the one who completed it, so that we are now the united alliance of today.”

Leia snorted, “We still are fragmented.”

“Not as much as we were in the past,” Evaan countered.

“I’m surprised those groups were even willing to talk to her in the beginning,” Leia mused, “She was an unknown quantity, and at the beginning of the Empire, they were justifiably paranoid about anyone who approached them.”

“Saw Guerra vouched for her,” Evaan said, “That carried a lot of weight with them.”

Leia frowned at that, she wouldn’t have thought that was a recommendation that would have been considered all that seriously.

Evaan shook her head, “He wasn’t always as radical as he became Leia. For what I’ve been able to learn, in the beginning, he was much more willing to listen to reason. But as the years went on, and things weren’t progressing as fast as he wanted,” she trailed off and shook her head, “Point is, even the groups that didn’t agree with his tactics, understood that he would rather die than betray any of them to the Empire. If he said Ahsoka Tano could be trusted, she could be trusted.”

Saw Guerra had been a paranoid lunatic. Leia wondered if he had known Ahsoka was formerly a Jedi. That would explain his absolute conviction that she stood against the Empire.

“And that’s it,” Evaan said.

“Just that?” Leia was surprised. She would have thought Evaan with her connections, and easy-going manner would have learned more than that.

Evaan’s eyebrow twitched, “She’s only been on base for a day Leia. That is actually a lot of information about someone who has been gone for three years.”

“But she was the first Fulcrum,” Leia said.

“Yes,” Evaan nodded her head, “And that is about what most of the people on this base know about her. A lot of the old guard who interacted with her, and actually knew her, not the image she used to contact them, are dead.” Evaan gestured to the base in general, “And you know that most of the people here are recruits that have joined us in the last three years. Most of the people who have been in the Rebellion proper for longer than that, are assigned to the fleet.”

Leia did know that. Because they hadn’t had a proper base until Atollon, most of the early Rebel recruits had their own ships, or were confined to making trouble on their homeworlds, like Trehhipoi. Even now, with a base where they could stay, the armed forces the Rebellion had were tiny in compared to the numbers of the rest of their forces. But sometimes it was hard to remember the details of these years. They stood in both stark relief, certain incidents seared into her mind, and one long big blur.

Evaan paused, and there were so many questions in her eyes as she very hesitantly added, “It also hasn’t escaped anyone’s attention that she wears a pair of lightsaber hilts on her belt. She never did
Leia looked back at Evaan, wondering where she was going with this. Evaan forged ahead, “No one has had the nerve to ask her why yet.”

This wasn’t her secret to tell, but Mama had said Ahsoka had worn them in front of the entire Alliance High Command when she accepted her old position. Ahsoka was making a declaration. Perhaps Leia could help her along a little bit. If there was anyone who could get the information through the grapevine, it was Evaan. Perhaps Wedge might have done it faster, but Leia was never going to tell Evaan that.

“Ahsoka was Anakin Skywalker’s Jedi apprentice,” Leia said, “That is how she knows Obi-Wan.”

Evaan’s eyes grew wide and worshipful. Leia was surprised, she hadn’t known that Evaan had that attitude about the Jedi that was so prevalent among the rebellion. Between her down to earth attitude with Luke, and her flagrant lust over Obi-Wan, Leia would have thought that Evaan wouldn’t fall into that way of thinking. “So, she is a Jedi?”

Leia shook her head “No, she isn’t.” Evaan opened her mouth, and Leia put up a hand. This wasn’t something Ahsoka had said anything about, intentional or otherwise. “And before you ask, I don’t know why.”

Not in the strictest sense. She knew it had something to do with Rex’s vague explanation that Ahsoka had been betrayed by a friend.

“Well,” Evaan looked delighted with that bit, “Is this something I can share?”

Leia waved a hand, “I wouldn’t have told you if I didn’t want you to know.”

Evaan’s face grew serious, “I do know how to keep a secret Leia. I won’t breathe a word about the real reason you and Han wanted Luke on the Falcon.”

Leia patted her arm, “I know that too Evaan.”

“I am curious though,” Evaan said, looking relieved, “Why ask me about Ahsoka? She’s told you more than she has said to anyone else.” Evaan frowned “Or did your father tell you what you do know?”

“She told me,” Leia said, “I was just curious about what the gossip was,” Leia gave Evaan a wide, flattering smile, “And you are the best source to learn that from.”

“Damn right I am,” Evaan said.

Leia felt her grin fade, “Papa wouldn’t have told me anything about her anyway. He knows when to talk and when to be quiet.” Although he had erred too much on one side of caution in a rather glaring way.

Leia shoved that aside. Her anger at her parents was a long-term issue that she was going to have to address. But it was a long-term issue, which meant she wasn’t going to solve it right this second. All she would do was work herself into a foul mood, and Evaan had done nothing to deserve the sharp side of her tongue.

“True,” Evaan looked at her, “I was about to go to the mess to get dinner, care to join me?”

Leia shook her head, “I would love to, but I have plans with Han tonight.”
“Ohhhh,” Evaan said in a sing-song voice, “plans.” And how did she put that much lasciviousness into one word?

Leia could feel the heat on her cheeks, “Shut up,” she muttered.

Evaan only laughed, but then she frowned, “You do know that the hanger bay is that way?” and she pointed in the opposite direction to the way Leia had been heading.

Leia nodded, “Yes, but I wanted to swing by and check on Mon while I was over here. She’s been in meetings all day, and I think she’s forgotten to eat again.”

Evaan nodded, “Well then, I wish you luck on trying to pry her away,” she said.

Leia watched as Evaan walked jauntily down the hallway, shaking her head in bemusement. She turned and continued her way to Mon’s office. It was late, and the hallway was as deserted as it had been through the entirety of Leia’s and Evaan’s conversations. It was only when she turned that final corner that she spotted anyone. And the sight of him was enough to make her stop dead in her tracks.

Draven was leaning against the wall opposite to the door to Mon’s office, looking as if his feet would no longer support him. His expression was such a mix of resignation, defeat, and sorrow that Leia found herself instinctively looking away. This wasn’t her place, she didn’t need to look on this, and it would infuriate him to know that she had seen him in this moment of vulnerability. She should go back down the hallway, and head to the Falcon. Mon was a big girl, she knew how to take care of herself, she didn’t need Leia nagging her.

Leia turned as quietly as she could, to head back the way she came. She hadn’t gotten more than two steps away when Draven’s voice came floating over her shoulder, “Your Highness,” he said, voice reserved.

Draven wasn’t in espionage for nothing, and Leia crossed her eyes in frustration. Why did he feel the need to call her back? She really wasn’t in the mood right now to dance around him, and his paranoia about her. Even if he was no longer the head of Alliance Intelligence, there were still many varied and subtle ways he could hamper her efforts to guide the Rebellion. Leia had a hard enough time with the fact that she once again was a “Princess,” not just in name alone. It made people very leery of dealing with her or fawning to the point of obnoxiousness. She didn’t need Draven stirring the waters around her more than he already had.

But he was the one who had called out to her. He had something he wanted to say, or he would have let her slink off. Leia was many things, but she wasn’t a coward. She would hear him out.

She turned around, and the defeated look was wiped away as if it had never been. He was standing at parade rest, studying her intently. “General Draven,” she said respectfully.

He snorted, “In name only.” Leia understood both the political and practical reasons as to why he was being allowed to keep his rank. She was just surprised that he sounded as bitter about as Mama had. Did he not understand the gravity of what he had done? Or was he too focused on seeing Leia as a threat to the Alliance to consider that?

“Why are you here?” he asked, eyes locked on hers.

Why are you here, was what Leia wanted to ask in return, but she wasn’t the defeated party here. Mama had taught her to be gracious to those she had a won a victory over. It was something even Obi-Wan had understood about her, even in those first few rocky months of their relationship. Not
that she had been actively fighting Draven. He had been more of an annoyance than anything else.

“An annoyance that could have discovered the truth about you,” her conscience whispered.

Leia shoved that thought away. She hadn’t planned any of this. Draven’s demotion was on his own head. She hadn’t even set up the circumstances of who was selected to replace him, for all that it benefited Leia personally. And it wasn’t just because Ahsoka knew the truth about her. It gave Leia one more person on the Alliance High Council who would listen to what she had to say about what the Rebels should and should not do, and understand the true value of what she offered.

Yes, this was all resolving into a solution that Leia could mostly live with, but she hadn’t planned it this way. Hell, even Vader hadn’t seen this coming, and he was the one who sent Ahsoka here. If he had, Leia doubted Ahsoka’s primary mission would be to protect Leia. If Vader had known that Ahsoka would be used to replace Draven, he would have demanded Ahsoka inform him of everything.

“You really need to stop lying to yourself General,” that cold, practical part of her whispered. “Vader doesn’t care about destroying the Rebellion, if he ever really did. He cares about you.”

That was a thought that was going to take time to absorb, for all that Leia knew it was true.

It was pointless anyway. Even if Vader had an interest in using Ahsoka to destroy the Rebellion, she would have refused. Leia didn’t know much about the woman, true, but she did know that Ahsoka had nerves of durasteel. She had gotten Vader to agree to something that he hadn’t wanted to have happened.

Ahsoka hadn’t said anything directly about it, at least not to Leia, but Leia was intimately aware of just how unreasonable Vader could be about her safety. The last dream that he had entered, the one on Hoth, he had been on a rampage, and looking for someone to kill.

He wasn’t throwing a temper tantrum or deliberately trying to hurt her. His murderous mood had been provoked by the fact that he thought someone had hurt Leia, but he had tried to keep it contained. Leia could allow, grudgingly, that Vader tended to be cautious when he was in her mind. At least that was the impression she got off him. And that probably had more to do with respecting the boundaries she put forth, then trying to avoid finding himself in another one of Leia’s flashbacks by touching her.

Even in that instance, Leia could allow that he had only approached her to stop her from falling to the ground. If Leia had managed to stay on her feet, she doubted he would have even tried to touch her. She had made it clear that she didn’t want him near her, and he was listening. Not enough to stay out of her mind, but enough that he didn’t get close to her once he was there. And wasn’t that the strangest thought?

That being said, even when he was trying to exercise restraint, he was a brutal tornado in the Force. Everything he was just leaked everywhere. Without even the small bit of control he showed around her, there was no telling how he would react when denied something to do with Leia. And Ahsoka had denied him. In fact, she had argued with him, and probably had put her own life on the line to ensure that Leia was told at all who freed her from Malachor.

Leia couldn’t imagine that Vader had given in gracefully to Ahsoka’s demands. She had said there was a lot of “yelling,” but knowing Vader it was probably a lot more than a mere raising of his voice. Threats were what he used to get what he wanted, and Leia was willing to bet there had been quite a lot of those.
And that wasn’t taking into account the Force, and its sensitivity to his moods. More than likely, there had to have been at least one, if not several, uncontrolled outbursts like the one in her cell on the Death Star. Leia had enough strength to weather such storms in the Force, she wasn’t sure Ahsoka did, at least not directly. Although Leia could admit to a small bit of relief that Vader seemed to be finally aware of how much contempt she held him in, if he was that adamant that Ahsoka keep her rescuer to herself.

But Vader wasn’t the problem immediately in front of her. He was only the very unlikely source of the solution to the mess that Draven had caused. Leia regarded Draven with cool eyes, he had no one to blame about his current predicament but himself. “I’m here to check on Mon, and see if she needed anything from me,” she said, keeping her tone polite, but pointed. He had no right to demand any answers from Leia.

Draven’s eyes narrowed fractionally, and Leia could see that mind whirling as he calculated all possible reasons why Leia would really want to talk to Mon. Too bad the simplest one, that they were friends, would never occur to the man. It just wasn’t how he saw the world.

“Mon’s in a discussion with Fulcrum.” He gave her a polite smile, “I doubt they are going to be done anytime soon.”

Leia looked at the door, then back to Draven. Informative and polite, this was certainly new. Leia preferred open hostility. At least then she wouldn’t be standing here wondering what Draven was up to.

Maybe that was the wrong way to look at this. She felt at the very least she should clear the air between them. Draven wasn’t a loved one, and Leia didn’t owe him any answers about anything, but she was also aware that she had enough real enemies to deal with. She didn’t need to add Draven to the list. Or perhaps take this opportunity to get herself off his list of enemies. “This wasn’t my idea,” she said.

He frowned, “What wasn’t your idea?”

“This,” she gestured to him, and the door, “You, losing your position. It being given to Fulcrum.” Leia very carefully stuck to using Ahsoka’s title. She was pretty sure that Draven knew Ahsoka’s real name, but what she wasn’t sure of was if he knew who Ahsoka was before the Empire.

Despite Ahsoka’s declaration with her lightsaber hilts, and what Leia herself had confirmed for Evaan, Leia was feeling just petty enough to make Draven wait a day or two to have confirmation about Ahsoka’s background. Besides, if she did tell him, he would want to know how Leia had learned that. And that would reveal far too much to this man about how intimately tied Ahsoka was into Leia’s life.

Draven’s face cleared in understanding, “I do know that,” he said. Leia felt her eyes widen, and how exactly did he know that? Had the arrogant fool learned nothing?

Draven noticing the look on her face before she could wipe it clean, and he grimaced “No Your Highness, I’m not still spying on you,” he said ruefully, “It was explained to me, in great detail, by your father, mother, Knight Kenobi, and Mon, that if you had your way I would still be in charge.”

Lea relaxed fractionally at learning that he no longer had his fingers digging through her personal life. “Yes,” she said. “You would.”

He looked at her for a very long moment, and he didn’t look at all convinced that she was letting this go so easily. Truth be told, if he had done this to anyone else in the Alliance, Leia would have
been calling for his head. But he hadn’t, and she was well aware that she was keeping a rather large secret from him. Draven was good at what he did, and that is why he knew she was hiding something. She never thought he let his paranoia grow so out of control that he would contradict a direct order though. That was troubling.

Draven looked at her for one long moment, then shook his head. “You are not what I expected. I would have thought you would have been calling for at the very least the stripping of my rank, to say nothing of my execution.”

Leia shrugged, “You were wrong.”

But he had a point, nineteen-year-old Leia would be all fire and brimstone about this. He needed some reason to accept her nonchalance about this. He seemed to be letting this go, but Leia needed more than that. She needed him to believe that his worry over her was for nothing. He was in a funk now, but when he came out if it, old fears would rise again.

Leia didn’t like lying, which she was sure would come as a surprise to those closest to her. But she did, however, find it very useful to shade the truth. To use her words like a weapon, as Luke so eloquently described it. Perhaps she could finally give Draven a reason he would understand now that he seemed to be willing to listen.

“No, what you did wasn’t right, or fair. But it is something I can live with.” She let her hand come up and rubbed at her throat, “I have endured worse in order to see to the Empire’s fall.”

Draven looked confused for a moment, then comprehension dawned. In all his wonderings about why that first meeting between her and Vader had provoked Vader’s obsession with her, it seemed to have slipped to the back of his mind that Leia hadn’t exactly walked away from that encounter unscathed. Compared to Vader’s other victims she had gotten off lightly. Hell, compared to what she herself had endured at Vader’s hands she had, but that didn’t mean what he had done to her was anything to brush aside.

Draven fidgeted in place, “Yes,” he agreed “You have.” He turned his attention to the door. “I don’t know why you are trying to comfort me,” Draven said, voice sounding suddenly so old, “but you can stop. I deserved to lose it.”

“I beg your pardon?” Leia asked, her hand dropping from her throat. This wasn’t the conclusion she would ever have thought he would have come to.

“I was wrong about you,” Draven said. “You aren’t Vader’s plant.” He gave her a long thoughtful look “I still haven’t figured out why he is so interested in you, but it’s not because you are spying for him.”

“No, the person who most recently had contact with Vader is currently the one replacing you,” Leia thought, with a little resentment. But that was an unfair thought. Ahsoka had been brutally honest about why she was here, and who sent her. At least she had been to Leia, her parents, and Obi-Wan. Ahsoka was also supremely uneasy about taking this position because she was sent here by Vader. But she hadn’t created this opening, Draven had with his own actions.

The Alliance didn’t have much of a choice. Rex had said it. Mama had said it. They needed a spymaster, one who was a known quantity, and Ahsoka certainly fit that bill. It didn’t hurt that she openly carrying lightsabers, for all that she hadn’t told anyone why she did. Another “Jedi” in their midst couldn’t hurt morale.

“No,” Leia agreed softly, “I am not spying for Vader.”
He shook his head, and said nothing more. But he also didn’t look like he had finished what he wanted to say to her either. Well, this was all horribly awkward. Leia released a bit of her nervous energy into the Force. All she wanted to do was leave this fraught situation, and barring that, start pacing to burn off her energy. But both of those options would expose more than she was willing to show this man.

To hell with it, “I think you made a mistake General Draven,” she said, “One you made with the best of intentions. I cannot fault you in your overriding desire to protect the Rebellion. And I certainly don’t think you deserve to lose everything over it.” She nodded her head in a regal bow, and turned to leave.

“Why?” he asked, voice following her. “Why, of all people on this base, would you think that?”

Leia turned back to face him, “Because you are very good at what you do. You have managed to keep the Alliance one step ahead of the Empire’s spies and saboteurs.” Draven’s gaze dropped from hers, “And say what you want about the Emperor, he is not a stupid man, and he doesn’t leave incompetents in charge of his intelligence bureaus either.”

“You could make the argument that Fulcrum also outwitted all of them as well, with far fewer resources than I did.” His eyes met hers searchingly.

Wondering what game he was playing at Leia said slowly, “Yes, Papa mentioned that she had been involved with the Rebellion’s founding.”

He snorted, “She was here before we even had a name. I think the only people who have been involved longer, that are still alive, is Mon, and your father.” His eyes grew distant. “She nurtured most of the networks I rely on the most.” His eyes came back to Leia’s “I have no idea who trained her in insurgent tactics, but they were damn good.”

Vader most likely, and wasn’t that a wonderfully painful irony? “You would have to ask her,” Leia said.

“I have,” Draven gave a rueful smile, “Repeatedly. She told me they were dead. Ahsoka Tano doesn’t give her secrets easily.” He studied her, and Leia allowed him to see that she had no reaction to that tidbit of information. “And you already knew that was her name.”

Leia still didn’t let her face twitch “Yes, I did.”

He paused for a moment, studying her. “If I ask a question, will you answer honestly?” he asked.

“Possibly,” Leia allowed.

“Who told you her name? Her real name? Your father or her?”

Leia frowned, not understanding why he cared. The answer was neither, in both timelines. Originally, it had been Mon who had introduced Leia to “Fulcrum” after the war ended. Yesterday it had been Obi-Wan. “Obi-Wan did,” Leia said. Draven frowned, and Leia clarified, “Yesterday, in the hanger bay. Obi-Wan introduced her to Luke, Han, and me.”

He looked troubled, “She wasn’t the one who told you?”

“No,” Leia said, “But then again, Ahsoka didn’t ask Obi-Wan to keep to her code name either. Although,” she tapped her finger on her chin thoughtfully, “I suppose she could have overlooked that detail in the joy of reuniting with him. They seem close.”
Draven didn’t comment on that, just pressed his lips together in a tight line, “You never met her before yesterday?” he pressed.

Leia shook her head “I heard of Fulcrum, of course, she is a legend in the Rebellion,” She flashed him a smile, but by the lines in his forehead growing deeper, it didn’t seem to have the reassuring effect she had hoped for. Leia leaned into Obi-Wan’s version of the truth, that it all depends on where you stood. “No,” she said softly, “I never met her before yesterday.”

Draven looked at Mon’s door. “She could have called the Falcon anytime the night before and asked to speak to Obi-Wan privately over the hyperspace frequency.” He looked back at Leia “And if she wanted to show him that she was alive, but in person, she could have approached him in a much less public place then the hanger bay.” Draven shook his head, “You’re right, if she hadn’t wanted Obi-Wan to introduce you to her by her real name, she would have found another way to approach him.”

Leia said nothing to that. She still wasn’t sure where he was going with this.

He gave Leia a bitter smile, “She always had great instincts on who to trust and who not to. It was uncanny,“ His eyes drifted back to the door, where she was sitting on the other side “It wasn’t until I saw her this afternoon I understood why,” he said in an almost whisper.

That was one question answered. Draven hadn’t known who Ahsoka was before the Empire. He knew the name, but he had no idea, until today, she was a former Jedi. And just what precisely did that have to do with trusting Leia with her name?

Unless Draven bought more into the myth of the prowess of the Jedi’s mystical abilities then Leia thought. He hadn’t trusted Obi-Wan’s assessment of her, but then maybe he thought Obi-Wan was blinded by loyalty to Papa.

“Perhaps it’s better that she takes over,” Draven murmured, “She is even better than I thought to help found the Alliance, and avoid the Empire being as wanted as she was.”

“Yes,” Leia agreed, “She is very good at what she did. And that couldn’t have been easy as a former member of the Jedi,” Draven’s head snapped to attention, and there, there was the suspicious Draven she had come to know.

“How do you know that?” he demanded.

Leia gave him a patronizing smile, more comfortable that they were now back on familiar ground. The man had all but screamed at her that she had come to that knowledge illicitly. “She is carrying two lightsaber hilts, and Obi-Wan embraced her like a long last family member,” She allowed a hint on condescension to seep into her voice, “It isn’t that hard to put together.”

He slumped into the wall, “No,” he agreed tiredly, “It’s not. And Ahsoka is the last person besides Kenobi who would be working with Vader, I don’t care how preoccupied he has become with you.”

“Vader is acting bizarrely,” Leia said carefully, dancing away from this subject as fast as she could “But it’s as you said, for almost two decades you had nothing on him. It’s understandable that you would jump to the easiest conclusion to draw.”

“That wasn’t the only thing I was wrong on.” Grief shadowed his face.

Leia frowned, “What do you mean?” she asked.
He looked at the floor and took in a deep breath. Then his eyes came back up to meet hers, and Leia was surprised to see such open grief on his face. Was this part of a con he was trying to play on her? Using her sympathy to get her to relax her guard? Or was this an honest emotion on his part? Knowing Draven, probably both.

“I was wrong about Galen Erso, and the sabotage he built into the Death Star.” Draven looked away, “Cassian paid with his life to get those plans. Plans I didn’t believe even existed.”

Cassian had been Draven’s protegee, Leia had known that. It occurred to her, that from everything she remembered Draven had genuinely mourned Cassian in her original timeline. Which meant that he was grieving here as well. This might not be a ploy on Draven’s part after all. They had been close and had known each other for years. Cassian was probably also the reason that Draven had a sympathetic ear to the Separatists at all. The older general had fought in the Clone Wars too, but there was no denying that he had loved Cassian like family. Leia could see it in every inch of his tall frame.

“Nobody is right all the time,” she said cautiously. If this was real, and the Force was telling her it was, then this wasn’t a ploy on Draven’s part. This was about his pain and guilt. This was Draven questioning every move he had made over the last few months and having a reckoning with himself. He wanted to know what Ahsoka’s opinion of her was. That was why he asked if she had told Leia her name. Not because he was digging, but because right now he trusted Ahsoka’s instincts more than he did his own.

Draven slumped against the wall and looked at her, and there was a slight sheen of tears in the older man’s eyes, “If I had believed Jyn Erso, when she was here pleading that we send everything we had to retrieve those plans, would he still be alive?”

Leia looked at him. There were a great many things that she knew that this man did not. Many of those things he would find of great interest, and most certainly valuable to use. It saddened her to realize, that the one question he wanted answered above all others was one she couldn’t give him. “I don’t know,” she whispered.

Draven gave a self-deprecating smile, “And Jyn also paid with her life,” He closed his eyes, and banged his head against the wall lightly, “Erso gave everything to destroy the Death Star, including his life, and we couldn’t even protect his daughter.”

What was with everyone today and blaming themselves for the choices of others? The last thing Leia or the Alliance needed, was Draven having a crisis of faith in himself. “You didn’t force her to go,” Leia said.

“No, but I got her involved in all of this.”

“You made her an offer,” Leia countered, “One she was more than free to refuse.”

Draven straightened, and Leia could see the banked anger in his eyes, “If there is anything I have learned about you in the last few months Your Highness, it is that you are not that naive,” he spat, “I don’t know how a cosseted Princess from Alderaan came to understand so many of the more grey areas of the galaxy, but I know you do.”

Leia kept her mouth shut.

The anger drained away, replaced by defeat. “She was trapped by us as surely as she was imprisoned by the Empire. If we had thrown her back into the galaxy at large, she would have been caught within a month by Imperial forces. She had no safe identification, no money, and no access
to any reliable allies.”

He gave a long sigh, “Only instead of being labeled a petty crook, now the Empire knew that the Rebel Alliance had rescued her, and they would want to know why. Without the promise of a new identity, she was trapped into helping us the moment we freed her from that prison on Wobani, and what’s more, she knew it.”

Leia gave a long sigh. He might be right, but Leia had never met Jyn, she couldn’t say if his assessment of her was correct. “You offered her a way out if she arranged a meeting with Saw Guerra for Cassian. Which she did. After that, her choices were her own.”

He shook his head, “I knew that by mentioning her father she wouldn’t be able to walk away until it was all done.” He gave Leia a low mocking bow, his voice bitter as he came out of it. “As you said, I am very good at what I do.”

Leia nodded her head, acknowledging his point. Draven’s voice grew hoarse, “I knew that girl’s history, and had her pegged the minute she stepped foot on this base.”

“You made a guess,” she corrected, “One that happened to be accurate. But as you said,” her mouth twisted into a helpless smile, “You were wrong about me. Perhaps you were wrong about her as well.”

He opened his mouth to disagree, but Leia cut him off, “You didn’t kill her General Draven,” Leia hope the use of his title would snap him out of this knot of despair he had found himself in. “And you most certainly didn’t kill Cassian. Tarkin did.”

“It was my call,” he insisted stubbornly.

“I didn’t know Jyn,” Leia admitted, “But I did know Cassian.” Draven looked up at her in surprise. Had he forgotten that Cassian was the one who had given Leia her training on how to conduct her spy work in the Senate?

“I know he chose to go to Scarif, even knowing you had ordered him not to. He went, knowing the risks because he believed he was right. And by assuming responsibility for both of them, you rob their deaths of any meaning they would have wanted it to have.”

He looked away at that. “Their work saved Alderaan,” Leia whispered, her hands forming into fists at her sides. She took a deep breath in, as she forced herself to remember that Alderaan still stood. That the memory of her planet being destroyed right in front of her, with only Vader’s mechanical hands keeping her from clawing out Tarkin’s eyes, was just that, a memory.

“They saved the Rebellion,” Leia whispered, so grateful for all of those who went on that mission, “And they saved countless of billions of lives in this galaxy. They knew what they were up against, but they also knew what they were after. You don’t get to decide to take their choices away from them because you are feeling stupid right this moment.”

He said nothing to that, but she could see the doubts and recriminations everywhere on his face. She felt herself soften towards him despite herself. She had questioned the many decisions in her life, choices that had led to people being killed, and wondered about them in some of her long sleepless nights. She told him what Luke had told her so long ago, “You shouldn’t let your regrets eat at you General,” she said softly. “Soon there will be nothing left.”

He snorted, “You’re too young to understand this, but eventually all the weight of your mistakes become ghosts that you can’t walk through.” Oh, she knew that feeling. She was talking to one of
her ghosts now. Draven’s shoulders drooped “Maybe I’ve been at this for too long. Maybe I’ve become warped by shadows and intrigue.”

“Maybe you made a mistake in anger and grief,” Leia suggested lightly.

Draven looked at her, “I still don’t understand why you aren’t calling for my head?” He shifted on his feet, a rare show of vulnerability from him. “You certainly have enough influence on this base to see it happen.”

So, he wasn’t so unaware that he understood he could very easily have found himself on trial for insubordination. That was relieving to know, that he wasn’t that lost.

Leia shook her head “I don’t like that you pried that far into my personal life,” she said. “It makes me very uneasy. And I had no idea you were disobeying a direct order. That makes me wonder about a few things.”

“But you thought you were doing what was right,” Leia had too often in her life been in Draven’s position. Screaming to the skies, and no one had listened to her. The only difference between the two of them was that she had been right, for all that she wished she hadn’t been, and Draven couldn’t have been further from the truth, for all that he tried to warp reality to conform to his views. But it did mean she understood where he was coming from. She looked at him sympathetically “I have never once doubted your commitment to seeing the overthrow of the Empire.”

“And Ahsoka may have nurtured the networks the Alliance needed to survive, but you were the one who kept them safe after she vanished,” Leia nodded her head to him, “You are who we needed, someone who doesn’t think like a politician or a soldier, but a spy. Something we are desperately in short supply around here. At least ones we know we can trust.”

Draven shifted on his feet, seemingly embarrassed. Leia went on, “You are also the only one on the Alliance High Council who for the longest time considered the Outer Rim, and how we can help each other. Not dictate how they can serve us.”

“Yes,” he looked amused, “I do. And yet you are the one who got Trehhipoi on the council.”

Trehhipoi had originally been his contact, one Draven had worked hard to woo. Although Leia sincerely doubted Draven ever received a marriage proposal from the Whiforlian. How much had it struck his pride that Leia was the one who had gotten his ally something he couldn’t? “Mon did that,” Leia corrected. “And it’s conditional.”

“It was your idea,” he looked thoughtful, “And conditional or not, it’s more than I ever managed to achieve.”

Leia said nothing to that. Sometimes it took a new voice added to an older one agitating for a change for it to happen. Sometimes it was just the right time, and the weakening of the alliance between the Hutts and the Empire wasn’t a strategic opportunity that anyone on the Council could overlook, no matter how they felt about former Separatist worlds. The trick was to make sure that Trehhipoi wasn’t burned from helping them.

“And you are being too easy on me. Alderaan could have so easily paid for the miscalculation I did on Erso,” he said, not willing to let himself off, “I haven’t made your life on Yavin easy.”

Leia hadn’t really noticed. She wondered what that said about her. Either Draven was incompetent at his job, which was very unlikely, or she really did have very skewed standards of what
‘acceptable’ was. Then again, she knew what it was like for everyone to know she was Vader’s
dughter. She knew what it was like to have people that she had known for years, turn away from
her in fear and disgust. To have every move she made, questioned for possibly sinister motives. To
be compared to him. That did put what could be considered “uncomfortable” in a very different
light.

“I was wrong,” he said, squaring his shoulders, “And it could have cost you more than just the cold
shoulder here on Yavin. If I hadn’t discovered the spy when I did, you could have been….” He
trailed off.

“Tried and executed for being a traitor?” Leia felt her eyebrow go up “My, you were certain,
weren’t you?”

“I was,” Draven admitted, “So much so I missed the spy right in my own ranks.” His Adam’s apple
bobbed up and down as he confessed, “And I almost did something unforgivable.”

He meant manufacture evidence against her, for all that he refused to say the thought out loud.
Although Leia had to wonder how much that spy had been turning up Draven’s paranoia. Vader
didn’t tolerate stupidity. It was well known within the Imperial ranks he tended to kill first, ask
questions later. And for the spy to get as much information on her as he could, it would make sense
to make that play. Make Draven as focused on her as possible and use the old spymaster as a way
to ferret out information about Leia. It wasn’t anybody who could access her medical records after
all, and that was something this spy had gotten access to.

She sighed, “But you did catch them before they could do real damage,” she said. “I understand
your regrets General, but don’t let yourself get bogged down in what if’s. They will drive you
mad.”

“And what would you know of what ifs?” he asked, weary.

“What if Vader had never caught me?” she parroted back “What if he hadn’t decided I should be
moved, and left me an opportunity to escape? What if I was on the Death Star, but instead of
Tarkin demanding the whole Alliance surrender, it was just asking me where the Rebel Base was?”
she flashed him a tired smile, “There are a lot of things that could have gone disastrously wrong.”
And that was only the start. It was all complicated by the fact that Leia was playing a real-life what
if, only she didn’t think she would get a third try.

He paled, “Yes,” he said, “There were.”

Leia straightened her shoulders and addressed him in as firm a tone as she could. “You aren’t a
good man,” and he looked at her in surprise, “But you are a decent one, and you are brilliant at
what you do. Don’t let your self-doubts drown that out, General.”

This time when she turned to leave, he didn’t call her back.

ABA Day 135
Leia found herself somewhat at loose ends. She hadn’t set out to climb the watchtower spire she had taken to thinking as hers, it’s just where she found herself. She wasn’t trying to avoid anyone, just taking this rare moment to be able to do nothing but look up into the expansive night sky. She found her eyes drifting towards the star that Alderaan orbited by old habit. It comforted her to know, that here and now, she was no longer looking at the ghost of what once was. That her home was still orbiting that light. She might have screwed up so much when she arrived here, but that fact, that her world still survived, that was a clean victory.

“Do you mind some company?” Ahsoka’s voice came from below her.

Leia looked over to see the woman hanging onto the ladder, not fully up on the floor yet, but up high enough that she could see Leia.

Leia studied her for a second, wondering what she wanted. Ahsoka’s face was open, and there was nothing that suggested to Leia that she was here to interrogate Leia in any way. But Ahsoka was a spy, for longer then she had been a Jedi, and this could all be a ruse. But Leia was curious enough to why she was here not to send her away. “Sure,” she said, patting the space next to her, “as long as you don’t mind tight quarters.”

Ahsoka grinned, “Spent most of my life living in them,” she said and quickly pulled herself up, and sat down next to Leia, dangling her much longer legs over the edge.

Leia waited for the questions, but Ahsoka didn’t say anything. She merely looked up into the night sky. Leia watched her for a few moments, then went back to her own stargazing. They sat that way for quite a while, maintaining their silence. Perhaps it was because Ahsoka was trying to think of what she wanted to say. Or maybe she was just as caught by the beauty of the sky, with the soundtrack of the night time birds calling out into the night, as Leia was. Either way, she would get to her point when she wanted to. It wasn’t an awkward silence, by any means, and Leia didn’t feel the need to rush her.

“I can see why you like it up here,” Ahsoka said quietly. Leia noticed with interest from the corner of her eye that the woman started swinging her feet back and forth in the open air. It was a very childlike gesture from the legendary Fulcrum.

“How did you find me?” Leia asked, turning her gaze from the stars to the woman sitting next to her. She hadn’t felt Ahsoka reach out in the Force to look for her.

“Rex mentioned you liked coming up here to think,” Ahsoka said, her eyes not looking at Leia. So, this wasn’t a whim on her part.

Leia should take offense. She didn’t like it when someone was so interested in her life, especially because Leia knew Ahsoka was so invested because of Vader. But she was still feeling hollowed out from the fight two nights previous. Maybe, for once, Leia could choose not to pick a battle when she was feeling vulnerable. There wasn’t a need, not really. Leia wasn’t sure what to make of the woman, but she knew with every instinct in her, that Ahsoka wasn’t here to spy on her.

And even if Leia was wrong, why she was up here wasn’t all that interesting. “Han is still out on his run for Mon. Luke is on duty tonight flying a CAP rotation. Rex was eating dinner with you when I checked in the mess hall. Mama and Papa are in meetings with the Council, and Evaan apparently found someone to ‘play’ with.”

Out of habit, and aware of how long she had been sitting, Leia stretched her hands above her head. She was pleased anew when there was no accompanying aches and pains, and it all rippled smoothly for her. She still found herself forgetting occasionally that she was nineteen. She hoped
that this marvel, that she could sit on a metal floor for long hours at a time, and not really face the consequences, never faded for her. “I thought I would come up here and enjoy the quiet,” she said, bringing her arms back down, and turned her head to look at Ahsoka full in the face.

She wasn’t facing Leia, but she was no longer looking up at the sky either. Her voice was quiet and remorseful, “And I’ve interrupted you.” Her body tensed as if she was getting ready to get back up.

Leia shook her head, “If I wanted to be left alone, I would have told you to go away.” She flashed Ahsoka a smile, “I’m not exactly reserved in my opinions.”

That caught Ahsoka’s attention, and she finally turned to look at her, giving Leia a shy smile. “No, you are not,” she agreed. She leaned her head against the safety rail surrounding the spire, and asked “So why let me stay?”

Leia wasn’t sure if Ahsoka was talking about now, here on the spire, or was still puzzling over Leia’s motives about letting Ahsoka remain on Yavin. Leia went with the less fraught interpretation of that question. “Curiosity mostly,” Leia allowed.

Ahsoka gave a small huff, “Well there is that.” She looked at Leia seriously, “Do you have any questions for me?”

Wondering if this was a test or a fishing expedition of some kind, Leia responded quietly, “I rather think you came here because you have questions for me,” she said.

Ahsoka laughed, “Oh, so many. But I know better than to ask,” Some shadow passed in her eyes, “And I know better than anyone on this base, that is aware of your,” Her mouth twisted on the word “unique circumstances, on why you won’t answer them.”

Leia really wanted to know what Ahsoka had seen in that void. She knew the woman would refuse, and it was for the same reasons Leia did herself. But that fact in no way took away Leia’s intense desire to know.

“Luke always said Yoda cautioned him to be careful about how he interpreted the future,” Leia said.

“He wasn’t wrong.” Ahsoka’s voice was lightly amused, “But I think you can agree that you and I are not exactly what Yoda was talking about.” Her voice lost some of its playfulness, and grew serious in tone, “I didn’t just see one future. I saw many, branching out all around me.” Ahsoka’s voice grew almost wondering, “And you, you actually lived one.”

Leia nodded, “True,” she said, then tapped her forehead, “but it’s all gone now. It only exists here in my head.”

“No,” Ahsoka said, eyes going distant, “No, it still happened. It’s still happening, you are just one version.” Leia shuddered. Ahsoka was the one speaking, but in time with her words, Leia could feel the Force echoing everything she said. Then Leia realized just exactly what that meant.

“Are you telling me that in my future, my nineteen-year-old self is running around in my fifty-three-year-old body?” Leia asked, horrified. By all the gods, the Force couldn’t be that cruel? Could it?

That Leia would be walking into a galaxy she wouldn’t be able to recognize and a body she didn’t know. Leia was still sometimes caught off guard by her reflection, but at least it was one she was familiar with. Her nineteen-year-old self would be looking at a stranger. She would also have to deal, all at once, with the blows of the loss of Mama and Papa, Alderaan, the stripping of her title,
and the revelation that Vader was her father. And that wasn’t even considering Ben, Luke, a dead husband she had never even met, and the state of the Resistance without older Leia to guide it.

Ahsoka’s eyes snapped back to Leia instantly. “No Leia,” she said, sitting up straight from the bar, “That wasn’t…” She shook her head, montrals quivering a bit in her agitation, “I didn’t see anything like that. I merely meant,” She closed her eyes, trying to find her words, “I think there is a timeline where you are still in that future,” she said slowly. Her brow furrowed in concentration, and Leia could feel that steady presence reaching into the Force, trying to find confirmation of what she was trying to say, “A timeline where you never came to the past.”

“How do you know that?” Leia asked.

Ahsoka opened her eyes, “I heard Luke talking to…” she shook her head, “Well, I don’t know who he was talking too, but he said…” she trailed off.

“He said what?” Leia asked.

Ahsoka shook her head, “It doesn’t matter,” she said firmly, “Because this now, this when that we are currently in, that is what we have to deal with. The choices that we made,” and was that just the slightest bit of irony put into the word choice? “The ones that led us here, they cannot be undone.” She looked at Leia seriously.

“You’re saying no third chances for me?” Leia asked, trying to cover her impulse to yell at Ahsoka, to demand that she tell Leia what Luke said. He was her twin, her other half, and she suddenly was struck by an aching grief to see him again. To bask in the presence of the man who knew her better then she knew herself, not this boy who was a familiar stranger.

Ahsoka looked at her sadly, “You only get this one,” and the Force was again speaking with and through her. Then a slightly mocking smile crossed Ahsoka’s face, “But you already knew that.”

Yes, she had, but it was nice to know she wouldn’t be unexpectedly yanked through time again.

Then the shadows, and that otherworldly presence, was gone from Ahsoka’s face as quickly as it had come. “But I was looking for you to ask some questions.” She regarded Leia with serious eyes. “Which one would you like me to ask first, the easy one or the hard one?”

“The hard one,” Leia said promptly. Might as well get the uncomfortable part of this conversation over with first.

Ahsoka took in a deep breath and let it out with a rush. “How did Anakin come back to the light?” she asked, and once again there was the feeling of jealousy layered in every word she spoke.

Leia bit back on her instinctive “Why do you care?” That wasn’t fair, and Leia knew it. Leia didn’t understand why Obi-Wan, Ahsoka, and Rex, loved Vader. But that didn’t mean she needed to be cruel about it. Hadn’t she learned that from her repeated confrontation and hostility to Obi-Wan? Much of what they had butted heads about in the beginning had been about Vader, and her refusal to see that he was someone that Obi-Wan loved. She wouldn’t make the same mistake with Ahsoka.

It was still a very loaded question though. Leia knew she had to be more open about what had happened in her past, but before she answered Ahsoka, she had a question of her own. “Why do you want to know?” Leia asked.

Ahsoka frowned “Are you really asking me that?” she asked, her voice incredulous.
Leia waved her hand in the air, and clarified, “Is it because you are hoping to recreate it?” she asked that baffled face, “Or because you are looking for something Ahsoka?”

A thoughtful look came over Ahsoka’s features, “A little of both I suppose,” she said, “I know I abandoned him when he needed me.”

Leia cut her off “Stop. Just stop.”

“Aahoka asked. “I am so very tired of everyone blaming themselves for his fall,” Leia’s finger shot out “You, Obi-Wan, R2. None of you did it. It was his decision, not any of yours.” She let the finger drop. “I don’t know why none of you see that.”

Ahsoka was silent for a long time, then she asked very hesitantly “When you arrived here, in this time, how….together were you?”

Leia paused. That could mean a lot of things.

“Mentally I mean,” Ahsoka clarified.

“Well, my immediate thought was that I had lost my mind,” Leia said.

Ahsoka laughed, “Yes, that would have been my response too, in your situation. Myself, however, I thought it was the ship’s nav-computer that somehow had gotten confused. I can’t tell you how many times I tried to “correct” the problem.”

“Ship’s nav-computer?” Leia asked.

“Yes, Maul left it there when he came to Malachor.” And there was that name again. The Sith Lord who had left the Sith, but not returned to the light. As far as Rex knew. Leia really needed to ask Obi-Wan and Ahsoka what the whole story on that was. “I was in the process of trying to fix the shuttle so I could leave when…” Ahsoka’s voice trailed off.

“When Vader showed up,” Leia finished for her. That must have been a horrifying moment for the woman. To think she might be able to escape that hell world, only to find her former Master there, with his improbable demands. Leia sincerely doubted Vader bothered to ask Ahsoka anything. Just ordered her to protect Leia.

It also explained how that other Ahsoka made it off Malachor without Vader’s intervention. Although not why Ahsoka had chosen to remain away from the Alliance.

“You are assuming that Ahsoka came back the same time as this one did,” the tactical side of her pointed out.

Well, yes. Why would that change?

“Why indeed?” And now that voice sounded irritatingly of the older Luke.

Ahsoka’s voice broke into Leia’s thoughts. “Yes,” she said, looking straight into Leia’s eyes, face haunted. “Imagine my surprise when I learned he wasn’t there to kill me.”

Rex had told her that no one walked away from Vader. But Leia had. Ahsoka had. Maybe, just maybe, Vader was starting to regret the costs of what he had done.

And this was just as foolish a line of thinking, as Leia’s previous one that Vader only wanted to use
her as a weapon against Palpatine. Just because that was what happened with Luke. But things were
different here.

Leia’s eyes flicked to the sky again, and to Alderaan. Leia herself had changed things, but in her
arrogance had never considered that one of the things that could change was Vader. He didn’t
change, he was just a force of nature that stood at the Emperor’s side, leaving chaos and death in
his wake.

And that wasn’t at all true, was it?

Leia let out a short sigh. It irritated her that she was having trouble with this, for all the fact that she
understood why. She was trying to undo more than thirty years of her understanding of Vader. It
wasn’t going to be undone by one unexpected revelation and only a day to try to grapple with it.

“Leia?” Ahsoka’s voice was gentle.

Leia flicked her gaze back to Ahsoka, startled. But the woman didn’t look offended that Leia had
just drifted off in the middle of their conversation. She only looked mildly concerned, “Are you
back now?” she asked.

Leia nodded. Ahsoka hesitated for a second, then reached out a hand, and placed it on Leia’s
shoulder. “Did you go somewhere painful?”

Leia bit her lip, then shook her head. “Confusing,” she said, “but not painful.”

Ahsoka nodded firmly. “All right then.”

Leia cleared her throat, “I’m sorry,” she said. “I seem to have lost track of what we were talking
about.”

Ahsoka withdrew her hand, “I was asking you how you were, mentally, after you realized you had
time traveled.”

Leia took a deep breath in, “Well, my first thought was to save Alderaan. Then get away from
Vader. Then it became blow up the Death Star. Then try to figure out the best way to use what I
know. Then Vader got pushy, and it was getting more training in my shields. Trying to get used to
having my family alive. Mourning my husband while he was standing in front of me.” Ahsoka
frowned, “Oh, and the usual business of running an insurgency against a tyrannical government.”
Leia said dismissively.

“You got shot somewhere in all of that,” she pointed out. “According to Bail and Anakin, you
almost died.”

Leia grimaced, wonderful, now the woman was going to join the rest of them about harping on
that, “Yes, and there were my attempts to outrun a breakdown, but all things considered, I think I
handled things all right.”

Ahsoka leaned back, her eyes studying Leia. “And everyone believed you, when you told them you
were from the future?” she asked,

“T ook some doing, for some of them, but yes.” Leia wondered where she was going with this.

“And they tried to help you?” Ahsoka pressed. “Your parents, Luke, Han, Obi-Wan?”

"Of course.”
“And you never doubted that they loved you?”

Obi-Wan was a mix of trying to help, and actively fighting Leia, but she understood what point Ahsoka was trying to make. “Yes,” Leia said, “They were here, every step of the way. No matter how much sometimes I wished otherwise.” It was an adjustment, one she was still trying to balance, as recent events so clearly showed. She was so used to doing it alone, that asking for help was not her first response for anything. For far too long there had been no one there to ask.

Ahsoka nodded “Now imagine you were that worn down by fighting, but surrounded by people, who instead of reaching out clearly, and trying to get you help, trying to help you, they told you that what you were feeling was wrong, because you hadn’t learned the ‘right’ way to deal with all of this. Then they continued to throw you into battle after battle? What would happen to you then Leia?”

Leia knew her limits, or at least she had skirted dangerously close to them many times in her life. She had never broken past them. Because there was always someone, for the darkest days of her life, who caught her before she could fall into a pit of helplessness and despair. Han, Luke, Chewie, Poe, Amlyn, Lando, Threepio, R2, they had all at one point or another reached out, and offered help and support when she needed it the most. She had only gotten to her feet because of them. To have no one…

Leia thought about what she had learned last night. That Vader had people who had loved him, who still loved him, but were incapable, for a variety of reasons of not being able to tell him. There was Obi-Wan, and Han had better emotional communication skills, and he had been raised by a street gang. There was also Ahsoka. But she had been his apprentice, and so very young, certainly in no position to be the one who offered someone for Vader to lean on. And Rex? Vader had been his general, and Rex would not know how to confront what was bothering him.

There was her mother. But Leia didn’t know enough about her to make a judgment on what she could, and could not, offer. She wasn’t there all the time though, that was obvious enough. The secrecy around their marriage would have prevented that.

Looming over all of this was Palpatine. Leia shuddered at that thought. That Hutt, in a human skin, who had preyed on Vader’s mind since he was a child. Vader had been very isolated in the temple, and how much of that, she thought with brutal clarity, had that isolation been Palpatine’s doing? Like Snoke had done with Ben, turning every loving gesture and word against the ones who loved him.

“Oh,” Leia breathed.

Ahsoka nodded “I don’t know how R2 thought it was his fault, and Obi-Wan…” she sighed “I can’t figure out if Obi-Wan is angrier at himself for hurting Anakin, or for not killing him.” She looked at Leia, “But for me, it’s not that I blame myself for his fall. It’s that I blame myself for not being there.”

“You were a child,” Leia hissed “That wasn’t your place!”

“It’s not your responsibility to save the galaxy, yet you seem pretty bent on doing it,” Ahsoka remarked calmly.

“That’s different!” Leia insisted.

“How?”
“I’-“ Leia scrambled, looking for a reason, any reason. “It just is!” she shouted.

Ahsoka shook her head, “Anakin thought the same thing. You both hold yourself to too high a standard.”

Leia’s anger swirled all around her in the Force. She ignored the desperation that even she could hear in her voice. “I was given this chance,” Leia said, “Not Luke, not Han, not Vader, and not you,” she pounded her chest in emphasis, “Me!”

Ahsoka’s eyes were sad as they regarded her, “You said it yourself. You didn’t ask for this. It was done against your will.”

“That doesn’t mean it was unwelcome!” Leia shot back.

“Wasn’t it?” Ahsoka’s eyes were nothing but sympathetic. “It was your life Leia, and it was taken from you.”

What did Ahsoka know anyway? She had time traveled yes, but she had reentered a galaxy that while different, was recognizable to her. Leia’s life before she came here was nothing anyone would call ideal. Leia should be grateful she had been given the chance to fix all of this.

“Leia,” Ahsoka said gently, “You are allowed to be angry about what has happened to you, no matter how pleased you are to get back that which you lost.”

Was Leia really being lectured by a Jedi about the appropriateness of her anger? As if Ahsoka knew anything about the forging and intricacies of the rage that burned in Leia’s heart.

Lashing out, she gritted, “Why are you so interested in making me comfortable around you? I agreed to let you stay. If this is in service to a dead woman you needn’t bother.”

Ahsoka’s eyes went alert, “No, not just for her,” she said.

Leia sneered, “Oh yes, Vader. Don’t worry about it,” and Leia gestured to the base at large “If I turned you in now, I would be damning myself as well as you.”

Ahsoka’s face tightened in anger, “Is everything about the practicalities of the Rebellion with you?” she hissed.

The anger Leia could deal with. The hurt that was lapping under the words and in the Force wasn’t something she was equipped to handle. If Ahsoka was slipping in her shielding, it meant she really had cut into the woman. Leia felt her shoulders slump, and she leaned forward, resting her head against the bar. Hadn’t she learned anything from the last few days? Or her entire life?

“I’m sorry,” she said, turning to look at Ahsoka, “That was uncalled for.”

Ahsoka paused, then shook her head, “Yes,” she agreed “It was. But I appreciate the apology.”

Leia was silent for a moment, then said softly, “You do know that I care about more than just the Rebellion, don’t you?” she asked, a little hurt by the accusation.

Ahsoka looked at her, then looked away, shame coloring her voice, “Yes,” she said, “I do know that. You do make exceptions, it’s just…” her hands tighten into fists, and Leia felt the jealousy twisting around the younger woman’s heart.

“Why are you jealous of me?” Leia asked. She needed to understand this woman if only for the fact
that she was now in a rather prominent role in the Rebellion thanks to Leia’s actions.

“Because you reached him,” Ahsoka’s gaze swung back to Leia, and there were tears in her pooling in those blue eyes. “Without even trying you reached him.”

Leia wouldn’t trade away the people she loved for anything, but it never ceased to surprise her that something that gave her, and so many others strength, could cut into you so deeply. “And you didn’t,” she said, voice soft.

“No,” A tear fell down her cheek, “And I nearly paid for that foolish decision with my life.”

Yes, she had. If not for the miraculous intervention of Ezra she would have paid the same price Han did when confronting Ben. “You did what you thought was right,” Leia said, voice suddenly tired. She didn’t want to think of Vader as someone who had people who loved him. Who were willing to risk everything to save him, like Han had tried with Ben. But wishing didn’t make it any less so, and so many of those people, the ones who loved Vader, were people that Leia cared for too. Luke, despite himself, Obi-Wan, R2, Rex. It was an intertangling web of feelings and relationships, and Leia could see no way out of it. Not without severing those connections to herself, and that was something she could never do.

“Yes,” Ahsoka said, “And I still failed.”

The defeat in that tone worried Leia. Just like Draven, Ahsoka was questioning everything she understood about herself, and that could also lead to dangerous paths. Again, like with Obi-Wan Leia didn’t know if this would hurt or help, but she had to try.

“I don’t think you failed,” Leia said cautiously, “Either time.”

“Oh?” Ahsoka snorted, “He would have let me go about my merry way?”

“No,” Leia conceded, “But I don’t think he walked away from that encounter on Malachor unscathed either.”

“Well I did drop him through a floor,” Ahsoka bragged a bit.

“Good for you,” Leia said feelingly, “But not what I meant.” Was this a betrayal of Vader’s secrets? Did he really even understand this about himself? Was she even obligated to keep those secrets? She had told Obi-Wan, but he, well a version of him, had been involved.

Then she looked at that pained face, and that decided it for her. Ahsoka deserved to know that she had reached some part of Vader. That the love that she felt for him was returned, and on some level, answered. “He wanted to die Ahsoka.”

She frowned, “Excuse me?”

“He wanted to die,” Leia repeated.

Ahsoka let out a bitter laugh, “That wasn’t the impression I got off him when he was trying to kill me.”

Leia shook her head, “Not then. But when I was in the cell-”

Ahsoka cut her off, “That is the second time you’ve mentioned that. What cell?”

“The cell on the Death Star,” Leia answered, “He caught me fleeing Scarif. I woke up in the shuttle
just as it arrived there.”

Ahsoka’s mouth dropped open, “And he didn’t tell you any of this did he?” Leia asked her.

Ahsoka shook her head. Leia rolled her eyes. That would have actually been helpful for him to mention, “That man has the strangest version of what is considered ‘private’,” she grumbled. Tell Ahsoka that he has a time-traveling daughter, of course. The fact that he caught said time traveling daughter because she was a rebel insurgent was apparently off limits.

“So, he was there to interrogate you?” Ahsoka asked.

Leia nodded, “And, in a desperate bid for time, and so that he wouldn’t start whacking away at my mental walls, I told him Obi-Wan was alive.”

Ahsoka’s face instantly went angry “Why would you tell him that?”

This wasn’t an unexpected reaction. But even though Leia knew Obi-Wan now, and cared for him, it still wasn’t a decision she would change. “Because it was the least damning thing I could tell him,” Leia said back evenly. “And I knew it would distract him from questioning me further.”

Ahsoka only regarded her with displeasure.

“Would you have preferred I tell him that I was his daughter?” Leia asked, “Or about Luke? Or that he killed the Emperor, and that the Empire fell?”

Ahsoka’s face hardened, “So you set him on the path to Obi-Wan?”

Leia shook her head, “I knew that Obi-Wan wasn’t on Tatooine for him to find.”

Ahsoka’s voice was accusatory, “I don’t like that you put Obi-Wan in danger.”

“It was the least of my very bad options,” Leia said, nothing but patience in her voice. She knew that if she had been in Ahsoka’s place, she would be reacting a lot more forcefully then this to some stranger endangering someone she loved.

Ahsoka’s voice was doubtful, “I don’t think you understand how irrational Anakin is about this. Even on Malachor, he was barely coherent when he mentioned Obi-Wan. And nothing he said made any sense…” her voice trailed off, and she gave Leia a questioning look.

“It’s Obi-Wan’s place to tell you what happened between them,” Leia said softly.

“I know,” Ahsoka rubbed her hands over her face, “I just don’t know how to ask him without hurting him more.”

“Be gentle,” Leia advised, “And if Obi-Wan starts acting defensively, back off.”

Ahsoka looked at her, “Did you?” she asked.

Leia’s mouth twitched at the rebuke, “No. But I already knew the broad outlines. And why I was pressing was for Luke’s sake. Otherwise, I would have let Obi-Wan be.”

Ahsoka looked disbelieving, “No.” Leia protested, “I would have.”

“If you say so,” Ahsoka’s voice was filled with doubt.

Leia shook her head, “We have wandered off the subject. When I told Vader that Obi-Wan was
alive in that cell, his first feeling was longing. Not hatred, not fury, longing.”

Ahsoka frowned, “That doesn’t make any sense.”

Yes, it did, but Leia couldn’t fault her for not seeing this yet. Not without some context. “Vader killed Obi-Wan in my past,” Leia said flatly.

Ahsoka’s face, even in the dim light of Yavin’s parent planet, paled.

“Han, Luke, and Obi-Wan were on the Death Star while I was being held prisoner there,” Leia explained, “I learned later from Luke, that Obi-Wan had peeled off from the rest of them to disable the tractor beam so that the Falcon could leave.”

She looked into that frozen face, “He managed to do that. But somewhere between that, and coming back to the hanger bay, he ran into Vader. When we got to the hanger bay ourselves, the stormtroopers all walked away from their posts to go look at something.”

“Obi-Wan and Anakin,” Ahsoka whispered.

Leia nodded. “I saw that fight, or at least the end of it.” Leia said, “I know now, that Obi-Wan wasn’t giving his best.”

“No,” Ahsoka whispered, “That is not a surprise at all.”

“In retrospect, what was surprising, was how Vader was fighting.” Ahsoka’s pupils contracted, and suddenly her focus was very sharply intent on Leia. “He was telegraphing every move and barely blocking. He was also moving much slower then he could.”

“The armor is slowing him down,” Ahsoka muttered, “He used to be faster.”

Oh, wasn’t that terrifying to envision? “Luke said he had enough trouble keeping up with Vader the first time they encountered each other.” Ahsoka cocked her head, and Leia shook hers, “It won’t happen that way here, too much has already changed. But my point was, given what Luke has told me, and what I’ve seen myself of what he is capable of, that Vader on the Death Star wasn’t fighting at his best either.”

“What are you saying, Leia?”

“That both the Vader in my past and the Vader that I encountered in my cell? They both wanted to find Obi-Wan because they wanted Obi-Wan to kill him. And he was the only being in this galaxy that has ever beaten him in a fight.”

“And what does that have to do with me?” Ahsoka asked, voice hoarse.

Leia put her hand gently on Ahsoka’s arm. “You said it yourself. He wasn’t suicidal on Malachor when he faced you. You didn’t reach him, not all the way, but I think you put a crack in his facade.” She gave Ahsoka a reassuring squeeze, “And Luke is very good at worming his way through any such crack.” He certainly had with her after the destruction of Alderaan when all she wanted to do was push everyone away, “But it was only there because of you.”

Ahsoka blinked furiously for a few moments, and Leia wisely didn’t say anything about the tears she was trying so hard not to shed. “In the Void, I saw…” Ahsoka’s shoulders slumped, “I knew that him leaving the Dark Side was a possibility.”

“You saw that he came back to the light?” Leia asked, fascinated despite herself.
Ahsoka shook her head, “Not exactly,” she said, “I just heard…” She reached out a hand, then clenched it, snapping the stars beneath her hand “Words, things he was saying.” She looked down at Leia “I knew he was talking to someone, and that he loved them. But I couldn’t see who had reached him. When he came to Malachor and told me he had a daughter, I thought it was you.”

Leia shook her head “All Luke,” she said. “I can’t even imagine a time where I meet Vader with anything but seething hostility.”

“I can’t either,” Ahsoka said softly.

Leia felt herself stiffen a bit. Ahsoka wanted something from Leia. She wasn’t sure what the woman was looking for, but it wasn’t something Leia was used to. Most people who wanted something from Leia were looking for leadership, hope, or a martyr. Ahsoka didn’t want any of those things from Leia, and it made her uneasy.

It was also completely irrelevant to the discussion at hand. “Luke was the one who reached him,” Leia repeated.

“And how do you feel about that?” Ahsoka asked. “That Luke reached him, and he didn’t see you?”

Leia looked over at her appraisingly “I don’t think you have the qualifications to be a mind healer,” she remarked, dodging the question.

Ahsoka grinned, “Oh, no” she agreed. “When I was younger, I could barely sit still for the class on the basics.”

“Hmmm,” Ahsoka agreed, “not schooling like non-force users had.” She frowned “At least I don’t think so. We studied our own biochemistry, what to expect given the different hard-wired senses and instincts of our own race.”

She gave Leia an amused look, “Speaking of which, I don’t know if you knew this, but Togruta’s have very good hearing. So, if you want to whisper around me, you would probably be better off waiting for me to leave the room.” She flashed a smile again, and Leia noticed for the first time that the canine teeth in her mouth were much sharper than a human’s. Not as sharp as a Twi’lek male, but sharp enough to rend flesh if she chose.

“Predator species? Leia asked.

“Yes,” Ahsoka said.

“Thanks for the warning,” Leia said, leaning back so that she was supported by the wall. “You learn anything else in those classes?” she asked, curious.

“How to use the Force to release your emotions. That sort of thing.”

Of course, they did. “And you thought it was boring.”

“I always wanted to move when I was younger,” Ahsoka said, looking back into the star-filled night “I needed to be doing, not thinking.” She shook her head “I don’t know what Yoda was thinking assigning me to Anakin. He was the last Jedi who could teach anyone to stay still.”

“You seemed to have managed alright,” Leia remarked.
Ahsoka’s smile turned sad, “I’ve spent too many years on the run, and without a home.” She brought her hands up, so that her arms were curled around the safety bar in the middle of the fence around the spire, resting her chin on her hands. She looked achingly young in the silver light reflecting off the planet Yavin was orbiting, “Right now standing still in one place sounds rather appealing.”

That was a feeling that Leia was very familiar with. And even now, when home was somewhere she actually could go to, it was still out of her reach.

“Say the word,” her selfish side whispered, “Just one word and Vader will give it back to you.”

And how much of the galaxy would burn because of that? No, that was not the way, no matter how much she wanted to rest.

“Well, I never would have never been able to guess,” Leia said, “You have remarkable control.”

Come to think of it, Leia should ask Ahsoka to help Obi-Wan in his training with Luke. She had spent close to two decades interacting with the galaxy, for all that she had been raised in the Temple. She might serve as a good translation between the two of them.

Knowing her brother, and how furious he was with Obi-Wan again, he would approach Ahsoka to ask for help. Leia had a feeling that Ahsoka’s own complicated past with the Jedi would mean she would flatly refuse to train Luke to be a Jedi. Help him keep control, but not train him to be a Jedi. Not that Leia could blame her, the Order, from what she could gather, had failed Ahsoka too. At the very least Luke could find out what not to do by talking to her.

Leia had no doubts Luke would continue his training, even if it was with Obi-Wan. He had been angry and hurt last night, but Han was right, given enough time he would cool down. And he was far too practical to walk away from something that would let him help the galaxy.

What Leia didn’t know is if the strained relationship between Luke and Obi-Wan would survive this. Her Luke had forgiven Obi-Wan, but she wasn’t sure how much of the history of the Clones that Luke had known. It was also much easier to forgive a dead man, who only popped up occasionally, then someone you were forced to interact with day in and day out. Either way, Leia had the feeling that whatever Order this Luke built, it would look nothing like what the Luke of her past had done.

“Is that such a bad thing?”

Leia shoved the thought away as disloyal. That other Luke wasn’t here to defend himself. And it wasn’t like she had room to criticize what he had done. She had refused to help him too.

Rebuilding the Jedi order was a large burden to place on one man’s shoulders, no matter how strong and wise.

They both sat there in silence for a long moment, then Leia asked, “Do you mind if I ask a personal question?”

“Seems fair,” Ahsoka said, somewhat amused, “given that I know a lot about you that you didn’t particularly want disclosed.”

Leia allowed a small smile to briefly touch her lips. Then in a more serious tone asked, “What are you going to do with the spy Vader sent?”

Ahsoka’s face became guarded “I’m not telling you who it is, Leia.”
Leia let as smile twist her lips “Good,”

One of Ahsoka's montrals twitched “A test?” she asked.

Leia narrowed her eyes at her “Like you didn’t test me?”

Ahsoka bowed her head in acknowledgment “True.”

“I only look young,” Leia said, “In reality, I’m older than you are.”

Ahsoka had the decency to look sheepish, “That is hard to remember.”

“You aren’t the only one that forgets that,” Leia mumbled to herself, thinking of how many times she had to remind everyone about her. Except for Luke. He was all too bitterly aware of how old she was, and the difference in their ages.

“Excuse me?” Ahsoka said

“But on the other hand, I can’t let them leave with what they have gathered either.”

“Can you destroy the data?” Leia asked, “Before they are supposed to make the drop? I’m sure that they wouldn’t want to leave nothing for Vader? At the least, it would buy you time to try to find another solution.”

“Ahsoka allowed “But chances are good if that happens, the spy will probably know something is up, and try to find a way off planet. Or worse, contact Anakin to let him know their cover is blown.”

“I thought Vader specifically told them not to tell him that.”

“Unless it is an emergency,” Ahsoka gave her a twisted smile, “And I think, ‘The Alliance is about to catch me,’ qualifies as an emergency.”

“Not to Vader,” Leia scoffed.

“Maybe they’re hoping that revealing the location of the base will buy them something? Maybe they won’t be thinking rationally. Who knows?” Ahsoka shook her head, “There are too many variables to account for, and I never liked missions with that many possible outcomes.”

Ahsoka let out a long sigh, “I’m being ridiculous. No, worse than that, sentimental. There really is only one way to handle this, and in the long run, it’s more merciful.”
“Merciful?” Leia asked, “An execution is more merciful?”

There was worry, grief, and pain on that face, but Ahsoka’s voice was steady as she asked, “When this spy fails in his mission or deviates from what Anakin wants in any way, what do you think Anakin will do to them?”

Leia fell silent at that. Ahsoka was right. Whatever the Alliance did would be merciful in comparison to that.

“It’s stupid to avoid this because of my feelings.”

Oh, look more Jedi bantha shit. “And Rex is right,” Leia said conversationally, “In the short-term taking Vader up on his offer to put me on the throne would save a lot of lives. But I won’t, because I know the costs to myself, and I experienced something too similar for me to ever be easy with it.”

“And you like power just a little too much,” she acknowledged to herself, “And want to make things right a little too fervently.” Nobody else seemed too concerned about that little catch on Rex’s insane suggestion. But Leia knew herself. She would have a hard time walking away from such a position. Not because she wanted it, at least not at first, but because she couldn’t trust what would follow her, would be better.

And that was how the lies to yourself began about keeping power. It was a slippery road and one that Leia knew better than to truly tempt herself with.

“Our experiences help define us Ahsoka,” Leia said, “You are not letting your feelings ‘rule you’. You have a perspective the rest of us don’t.”

“But you think we should execute them?” Ahsoka asked, surprised.

“Yes,” Leia gave her a grim smile, “but that is my experience talking. I’ve been betrayed too often in my life to take it as rationally as you seem to be doing.”

“Starting with Anakin,” Ahsoka said, and Leia tensed.

“I don’t-“ she said, then cleared her throat. “He’s my enemy. I don’t expect anything from him but betrayal.”

“He is your father,” Ahsoka said calmly, and Leia just contained the flinch. Nobody said it that plainly to her, not even Luke. “He was supposed to care for you, love you and protect you. That is the most basic of betrayals Leia, leaving your children, no your newborns, defenseless and alone in an indifferent galaxy.”

Oh, so Ahsoka understood how families worked. Wonderful. Maybe she could get it through Obi-Wan’s thick head.

“He abandoned you, and I can’t even begin to understand how that feels.”

First Luke, then Mama, and now Ahsoka. Why wouldn’t they let this go? “He was your master,” Leia shot back, “And he abandoned you too.”

Temper flashed in Ahsoka’s eyes, but then it faded, and a smirk replaced it. “You can look at it that way. But I handled it,” Ahsoka said, “I am a professional.”

Leia arched her eyebrows. She was long out of practice with someone using humor to swat away her barbs. But that didn’t mean she didn’t remember how to play this game. “A professional like
Mama is a professional where you deal with it later? Or a professional like me and Obi-Wan where you run from breakdown to breakdown by the seat of your pants?"

Ahsoka’s smile grew luminous “I will say this about you, you are very self-aware.”

Leia rubbed her hands up and down her legs, “I am. But as I said last night, I don’t see a way to fix it.”

Ahsoka laid a hand over hers, “I’m here if you want to talk,” Leia looked at her sharply. The woman gave her a fierce grin, “I’m not saying you have to, but out of everyone in your life, I’m probably the most aware of what seeing the future does to affect it.”

There was something she wasn’t saying. The shape of it hovered in the Force, just beyond Leia’s reach. Ahsoka knew something, or suspected something, about Leia’s future. But she had been surprised to learn about Leia, and the fact that she was Vader’s child. Leia’s eyes narrowed. What had Ahsoka seen in that void?

“I will keep that in mind,” Leia said seriously, “But I think I would like to hear the easy question now.”

Ahsoka’s grin became mischievous “Would you like a mission?” she asked.

Leia sat up straight, “I beg your pardon?” she asked

“A mission,” Ahsoka said, “I can understand if you want to stay on Yavin-“

“Are you being serious?” Leia asked in a rushed voice.

“Yes,” Ahsoka said, “But I have to warn you, it’s rather tame as far as these things go.”

Leia blinked “You’d let me go?“ she asked wonderingly “On another planet?”

Ahsoka’s face was wryly amused “You have decades of experience Leia, I would be a fool not to.”

As much as Leia longed to be out there, doing something, not running logistics, or keeping track of paperwork, she was painfully aware of who would voice very loud objections to this. “And what is Vader going to say about that?” she asked softly.

“He can dance on the surface of a star naked,” Ahsoka said sweetly.

Leia felt an eyebrow arch “He can what?“ she asked.

Ahsoka laughed “A saying I picked up on the Outer Rim,” she explained “Obi-Wan wants to blame Rex for the degrading of my vocabulary, but I have picked up all sorts of fun expressions in my career as a spy.”

“It’s very….colorful,” Leia said diplomatically, trying to banish the thought of Vader naked out of her mind. It was a phrase that stuck to the mind. “But you promised you would keep me safe.”

Ahsoka shrugged “I did. And I meant it. But he doesn’t get to dictate the choices you make. This is your life Leia, and you are very clearly choosing how you want to live it. It’s a milk run for someone of your experience.”

Leia tried to keep her joy to herself, “What is it?” she asked.

Ahsoka pointed a finger at her, “No explosions,” she said firmly, “This is reconnaissance only. I
want no explosions."

“I can do that,” Leia reassured her.

“Or setting things on fire.”

“That was Luke!” Leia protested hotly.

Ahsoka looked at her reproachfully, “And you wouldn’t have done that?”

“Well-“ Leia hedged.

“Don’t bother to evade that one Leia. Rex gave me quite the summary of what happened on Nar Shadda and Cymoon 1, and his opinions on it.”

“Rex is a lot more fun when he’s tattling on Obi-Wan,” Leia said resentfully.

Ahsoka laughed, “Oh, don’t worry. He does that with everyone he cares about. The man learned strategy from the best.” There was the smallest wobble in her voice, but Leia didn’t push. No doubts on who that strategist had been.

“So, what is the mission?” Leia asked.

“It’s reconnaissance,” Ahsoka said, “I need you and Han to take a look at the Nimbanel shipyards. I need a full account of the security measures they have, how many ships, and more importantly, if there is an Imperial presence there.”

Leia frowned. That had never been a target in her past. “The Nimbanel shipyards? Those are civilian controlled. We don’t go after civilian targets. Besides they are in the Outer Rim…” Leia’s voice trailed off as she remembered where in the Outer Rim Nimban was. “They are controlled by the Hutts aren’t they?”

Ahsoka smirked, “Yes,” she said, “And funny enough, they seem to have a huge backlog of ships right now. They have been running at full capacity for the last three months, but the ships just keep piling up.” She gave Leia that sharp predator’s grin again, “Know of any large organizations in the galaxy that can afford to buy that many ships from the Hutts at once?”

Only one came to mind. But it didn’t make any sense. “Why is the Empire buying ships from them?” Leia asked.

Ahsoka shrugged, “I don’t know. I’m hoping you two can figure that out. Which is why Han is going. He’s a known smuggler and an affiliate of Jabba’s. His presence there won’t raise any flags. And despite what Han would like the galaxy to believe there are good ships that are not made on Corellia. The Hutts are known for wanting speed in all their vessels. The Nimbanel people are known for their problem-solving skills so they would have found a way to make it happen.”

“So we are doing reconnaissance, and putting together a shopping list?” Leia asked dryly.

Ahsoka looked at her levelsly, “Well, we seem to be in need of ships, for a variety of reasons.”

Yes, they did. And not just for the Alliance. “Trehhipoi gave you this intel.”

Ahsoka nodded, “Yes he did. And I thought since he seems to trust you, having you handle the mission personally shows that we take his information seriously, and if it all goes sideways, he’s more inclined to believe that if you tell him.” She looked at Leia seriously, “It outweighs the risks
of letting you leave Yavin Leia.”

As if a twenty-five million bounty on her head was something that Leia was going to forget. “Rex isn’t going to be happy about this either,” she pointed out. “He really doesn’t like it when we leave Yavin without him.”

Ahsoka shook her head. “I know. But I can handle Rex. Besides, he is going to be engaged with his own side project, and he can’t be in two places at once.”

That was going to drive him nuts. “Do you have double motives for everything?” Leia asked.

“I’m a practical kind of girl,” Ahsoka said easily, “Why confine yourself to one action, when you can do two, and have fun at the same time?”

“You have a very interesting definition of “fun”,’” Leia remarked.

The woman’s grin was made all the more fierce by her sharp teeth, “And you don’t think striking at the Empire isn’t fun?”

She had Leia there. “Yes,” Leia confessed.

“Then why are you arguing with me?” Ahsoka asked a gentle gleam of teasing in her eyes.

“Habit,” Leia said, “I argue with everyone.”

“Oh,” Ahsoka said breezy, “I hadn’t noticed.”

Leia looked at her, and Ahsoka burst out laughing. “If anything,” she said, “It is interesting to see someone capable of going head to head with Obi-Wan. That alone was worth the price of admission.”

“So glad I can amuse you,” Leia grumbled, but her heart wasn’t in it.

Ahsoka’s mirth faded, “You are not what I expected Leia Organa,” she said thoughtfully.

“I hear that a lot,” Leia said.

Ahsoka snorted, “I bet you do.”

“If it makes you feel any better, you are the most well-adjusted Jedi, well, former Jedi, I have ever met.”

Ahsoka only looked amused, “And met a lot of Jedi have you?”

Leia’s heart constricted as the faces of Luke’s students passed through her mind, but she forced her tone to remain light and breezy, “Vader certainly isn’t. Obi-Wan is like dealing with a well-mannered sarcastic minefield. And Ezra was a sixteen-year-old. No sixteen-year-old is ever well adjusted.”

Ahsoka roared at that. “I would take offense on Ezra’s behalf,” she said, “But I have met too many sixteen-year-olds to disagree with you.”

Leia grinned, glad that she could make the woman laugh. Then her eyes returned back up to the sky. A chance to leave Yavin. A chance to be doing something. The galaxy wasn’t going to stop just because Leia’s personal life was a mess right now. As she told Mama, It didn’t revolve around her bruised heart. The Empire wasn’t going to fall apart on its own, and Palpatine wasn’t going to
just conveniently go away or drop dead. It was time to get back to work and use this improbable chance the Force had given her for all it was worth.

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfievkampfer and Acyancat

Translation into Russian available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

First of all, loves, thank you all for your patience with this chapter. I hit a serious case of burnout, along with a rather disruptive summer, where almost every major appliance in my house died. So that was fun.

Second, here be my warnings about length, that very few of you will listen to. This chapter clocks in at about 69,600 words. Even for me, this is a *long* one.

Third, there are *minor* spoilers for The Mandalorian, the Star Wars comics Issues 6 and up, and the Aftermath Trilogy. ETA - because I'm a forgetful goober, spoilers for the Ahsoka book

Fourth, as all ways, hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ABA Day 137

Leia was humming to herself as she made her way to the hanger bay. Han was due back today, and while that fact alone would put her in a good mood, his arrival represented something else today.

_Freedom._

Leia knew that the work she was doing here on Yavin was necessary. Vital even. Rebellions didn’t just happen through hoping, will, and climatic battles. They required planning, logistics, meetings, and surprisingly, a _lot_ of begging for money. Thanks to her upbringing, the training she received from her parents, her years with the Rebellion, then her years with the Resistance, these were all skills she had. And they were in desperate need now, most of the people who were drawn to an armed insurrection didn’t. Those cold hard facts didn’t make her enforced stay on Yavin any easier to bear. Especially, since this confinement was another thing she could lay at Vader’s feet, with that outrageous bounty he had put on her.

There was also Draven and his insane paranoia. But all of Draven’s actions had stemmed from Vader’s, and his inability to do _anything_ with a degree of subtly. It was a miracle of all the gods in the universe, that Palpatine, _so far_, hadn’t put together yet that she was Vader’s daughter. At least, from what Leia had heard about his actions, she didn’t think he had.

Of course, the Emperor had to know _something_ was going on, but as ever, he was keeping his own counsel. The spies they had in the outer circle of his trust didn’t know what he thought about Vader’s actions, in regards to Leia, despite it being a subject of open speculation in the Imperial court.

Being confined and grounded to a base wasn’t something that had happened to Luke. By the time Luke’s bounty had been upped to this much, he had already been leading Rogue Squadron for a
year. He was a trained and experienced fighter. As far as the Alliance was concerned, he could handle any and all trouble sent his way. Well, not Vader himself. But that was true for anyone in the Alliance, and it had no bearing on the decision to keep Luke on the front lines.

In fact, when that bounty had been made known, Luke had found it to be something of a relief. He, hell, all of them, had known that it was only a matter of time before the identity of the pilot who blew up the Death Star became known to the Empire. Luke didn’t like dealing with uncertainties and having that dangle over his head nibbled away at him. The worst had come, and now he could get to dealing with it.

Luke also had the advantage over Leia that no one questioned Vader’s motives about the reward for him. It hadn’t come out of nowhere as far as the Alliance leadership was concerned, leading people to question why Luke was so important.

Perhaps, with the wisdom of years and reflection, the fact that it wasn’t a surprise, hadn’t been all that much of an advantage for Luke. Well, it was an advantage in the fact that it hadn’t caused Draven to suddenly start stalking him. But because it made so much sense, it hadn’t occurred to any of them, Luke included, that Vader didn’t care about the pilot who destroyed the Death Star. He was far more interested in Luke Skywalker.

Hindsight was perfect, Leia knew. It wasn’t something she acknowledged at the time, or even years later, when the personal connection between them had been revealed, but she had known Vader had been apathetic about the Death Star. For all she knew, he had privately celebrated it’s, and Tarkin’s, destruction. She had also been struck by, even then, about the single-minded focus Vader brought to his search for Luke. It was more energy he had shown in anything for more than a decade. And she could back that analysis up by all the research she had done on Vader, looking for a weakness, so that she could kill him.

She just never thought to put those two facts together at the time. If she had questioned it, just a little bit more, was it possible that the confrontation on Bespin would have gone differently than it had? Would Luke have not ended up as shattered as he had been?

Leia shook her head. There was no way she could have known. It was the smallest thing at the time and easily brushed aside. Han was right. Vader’s former identity was a closely held secret. She was fairly certain that there were only a few people in the upper echelons of the Imperial Navy, who even suspected who Vader had been. And that was only because they had actually worked with the Jedi during the Clone Wars. They weren’t stupid enough to air those suspicions in public though.

Even among the Alliance, she had to wonder about the people who had interacted with Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker, who sometimes might wonder. Mon had to have thought it was possible, especially this Mon, who had more information simply from Obi-Wan’s reactions to Vader. Ackbar had served with him at some point, hadn’t he? And Dodonna? She vaguely remembered him mentioning it to Luke.

She was certain Draven never had. His mind was certainly twisted enough to go for that possibility. The man saw shadows everywhere. But if any of them had suspected, they had certainly never mentioned it to Luke.

Leia was willing to bet good money that Tarkin had figured it out. Even if he never had gotten official confirmation, he had to have known. The man had been many things, but stupid and unobservant had not been one of them.

Leia was fairly confident, that except the Emperor, no one knew for certain. It was part of Vader’s legend, and used to make him more frightening. He was this thing, with no will but the Emperor’s.
No desires but the Emperor’s. No loyalty, but to the Emperor.

“And he wants to put the galaxy at your feet,” Han’s voice echoed again in her head.

Leia shuddered. Another reason she wanted off this base. So she could stop her mind from circling around that. She was accepting, slowly, that it was the truth. But that didn’t mean she knew what to do with it.

It was Vader’s fault that she couldn’t use physical action to clear her head. Luke hadn’t had to deal with this. Even if everyone had known that he was Vader’s son, by the time Vader realized it, the Alliance wouldn’t have pulled him back from the front anyway.

The Alliance had made Luke into the poster boy for the existence of the rebellion. Even before his name became public knowledge, the people who were in charge of the public image of the Alliance made sure that it was widely known that the pilot who took out the Death Star only joined the Alliance because his guardians had been killed by the Empire.

Even if grounding him had been considered at the time, there was nothing Luke could do if he was confined to the fleet. He wasn’t like Leia, with the training in diplomatic matters and tactical logistics. He was very charming, but he was not a seasoned politician or had the nature of one.

Luke, for his own sanity, and the Alliance’s need, had to be on the front line, leading the charge.

Which wasn’t a line of argument that Leia could use, here and now. She couldn’t exactly tell Mon that she had decades of experience in the field and would be fine. All Mon saw was someone who had the basic training of all spies, some extra physical combat training provided by her parents, and an injury from one of the few missions she had been allowed on.

Perhaps this enforced stay was grating so hard on her now, because what she remembered of this time was that she had always been on missions. Or at least always moving, traveling with the Fleet.

Maybe that wasn’t a fair comparison? She had a bounty then, but it had only been ten million, and she, like Luke, was an important rallying cry. She was the leader of a pacifistic people, who had been forced to take up arms to defend what was left of her people. The Alliance couldn’t afford to keep her in reserves, anymore then they could keep Luke.

But in this reality, Mama and Papa were here to fulfill that role to a large extent. People had the strangest reaction to royalty, and a couple, who were well known in galactic politics, made better cover than an untried and untested Princess. In this time, Leia wasn’t the sole survivor of a catastrophe, but the “extra” surviving member of the Royal family in exile.

This hadn’t been the first time in her life that she had to watch where she went. She couldn’t recall being this restless during the Resistance, where her movements had been just as curtailed for her safety. No, that was an exaggeration. She did go off their base on D’Qar. It just wasn’t something she did frequently. Much like the position Mon was in now. That had been her choice though, not imposed on her by others.

This was ridiculous. She had gone years without throwing herself into danger when she was a member of the New Republic Senate. It had been less than three months since she had been sent to Whiforla with Luke and Han, so why was she filled to the brim with impatience to get off Yavin? Why did she feel like she had been put into a prison?

There had been some relief in the occasional flights that she had taken in the CAP rotation, when she was needed, but as more and more of the defecting Imperial pilots were cleared, she was being
gently pushed out of that duty. Which meant she was left to sit through endless meetings and handle mountains of paperwork.

Was this something she could blame on this younger body? The one that didn’t tire as easily? That hadn’t accumulated all the aches and scars the old one had? Where she once again was filled with so much energy, she barely knew how to funnel it?

Leia was good at logistics, at talking to people. Perhaps not as good at being soothing and compassionate as Mama, but she could inspire people in her own way. Too often, it was with her actions, not her words, but she could use them.

It was also irritating because Leia knew she was good in the field, the shot she had taken on Cymoon 1 withstand. She had the lifespan to prove it. Too many of the people on this base hadn’t lived to see their next birthday, never mind reach fifty-three, as she had done.

Leia was grateful that the Rebellion was still on Yavin. She was. She knew that there were those among them, especially the new recruits, who felt that they were moving too slow to capitalize on their victory above Alderaan. There was no one on this base, no one, that had any idea of how much more precarious their position could be.

Leia had lived with the Rebellion after they had been forced to flee from Yavin. She knew in that first fragile year, how close everything came to falling apart. She could imagine, all too easily, how in this time, they could find themselves back there if they didn’t exercise some caution.

They needed to rebuild. The current situation with the food supplies was only the most obvious sign that they were growing faster than the leadership had anticipated. They were fast approaching having more pilots then ships for them to fly. But those facts didn’t change the restless hum under Leia’s skin.

“The trick,” she reminded herself, “is to know when to strike. Too early, and you waste everything. Too late, and all you have is bitter regrets.”

But no matter how grateful she was that she was here, that the Alliance was still here, and not stuck on a cruiser, Leia felt like the walls themselves were closing in on her. She could argue with logic all she wanted, but she was starting to feel that old familiar restlessness haunting her thoughts, that she was not doing anything. Which is why she was grateful, even outside of being free of Draven’s watchful eye, that Ahsoka was giving her a chance to get off this humid hell hole, and contribute in a meaningful way.

The mind could lie, even to itself. Leia knew she wasn’t doing nothing. The work she was doing was important. Boring, but important. Supply lines didn’t come out of thin air. Logistics needed to be handled by someone. And money, money was always needed.

Leia could find some small comfort in that aspect of her new life. Mama had taken on the brunt of the pleading and fundraising that Leia had done in her past. She was also better at it, as Leia knew she would be.

Leia was surprised though that she had been requested for some of those calls. Her mother was a much better-known figure on the galactic political scene at this point in time. It wasn’t until her first meeting with Trehhipoi, and his misunderstanding about her “defeating” Vader that those requests begin to make sense. For a certain set of donors, there was an appeal to meeting the woman who defeated Darth Vader.

Leia snorted to herself. Defeated, what a joke. He had walked out of that cell alive, hadn’t he?
“He almost didn’t,” her mind reminded her. “You almost killed him in that cell, remember?”

Leia took a deep breath in. She didn’t like being reminded of how out of control she had gotten in that cell. Yes, she wanted Vader dead. That wasn’t something that had changed for her since she had landed in this time and learned more than she had ever wanted to know about him. But it was also true, that when she found herself standing in that cell, confronted with the man who had warped so much of her life, all she had been focused on was surviving, and him learning as little as possible about her.

It hadn’t even occurred to her to attack him. Well, she amended, attack him with nothing more than her words. Leia was no Jedi, and she had been unarmed. Even though she had the advantage of surprise, Vader had no reason to suspect she had as much training as she did in the Force, she still wouldn’t be able to take him. Not there.

Even with these new skills she had honed in the last few months, in her effort to keep him out of her head, she wasn’t able to beat him.

What worried Leia, was in that moment, when she had tried to free herself, she hadn’t been trying to hurt him, never mind kill him. All she had been thinking, as much as she could think with oxygen rapidly becoming an issue, was that she wanted him to let go. The fact that she had nearly committed patricide, on accident, made her very wary of her abilities in the Force.

Leia had never thought she was stronger than Vader in the Force. Luke certainly wasn’t, he had told her as much. It made sense. Vader was the source of that strength, being their biological father, it was highly unlikely they would be stronger than him. Maybe if they had confronted him together, but certainly not alone.

Until she spoke to Obi-Wan, she had never had any context to their potential. Leia knew that she and Luke were strong in the Force. Both Vader and Palpatine’s actions in regards to her brother made that very clear. The smart play would have been to kill Luke, once they were aware of his existence. Instead, both of them had wanted to turn him into a weapon to use against the other.

But as Obi-Wan, and now Ahsoka, had made very clear, Leia and Luke were capable of feats in the Force that were considered far outside the norm. Ergo, Vader hadn’t just been taken by surprise by her skills in that cell, but by her raw power. He had been expecting her to be wielding a blaster, and instead, she brought a laser cannon. Of course, if she followed that analogy to its logical conclusion, it meant that she had been carrying a far deadlier weapon then she had realized for most of her life.

All Leia wanted to do with that information was push everything she knew about the Force into the back of her mind and forget everything. The Force was unpredictable at the best of times. Yes, those who could channel it, could do incredible feats with it, but that power came with huge personal costs. There was a strong part of her urging her to run away from all of this, as fast as she could.

Which wasn’t a healthy, or very mature attitude, but Leia couldn’t think of anyone to talk to about it. Mama and Papa had no context when it came to the Force. As far as they were concerned, it was something she could choose to embrace, or not embrace, which certainly wasn’t the case. If that was an option, Leia would have forced this all away decades ago by sheer will.

Leia knew that Han and Luke had enough to deal with. Luke was currently grappling with his own issues regarding the Force, which left Obi-Wan. It didn’t take but a moment to discard that as a very bad idea. He would have the same problem as Mama and Papa. Only the context he would be missing was from the other side. As far as he was concerned, there was no need for her to cling to
her old life, and that she should follow the path the Force had laid out for her.

Mind Healers were a rare resource on Yavin, for all that they were desperately needed. Even if they had been drowning in them, Leia couldn’t think of any, that were currently here or would be here, that she could trust enough to talk to. Either to believe her story, or worse, believe her and go running to the Alliance High Command and let them know that not only was Leia Vader’s daughter, and had the potential to be a Jedi just as powerful as Luke, she also had a road map in her head of how to defeat the Empire.

It didn’t matter. Much like paper pushers, mind healers weren’t inherently drawn to this life, unless they had been grievously wronged by the Empire. She didn’t need to talk to someone. She needed, as Poe would put it, “To blow some shit up.”

At the thought of Poe, Leia felt a warm smile cross her lips. He would be so flustered and embarrassed that the alias Luke was operating under here and now, was his name. She could see him now, in her mind’s eye, looking down bashfully while she had her eyes on him.

But the second she was out of sight, not hearing mind you, just sight, he would be shouting out gleefully to his squadron, “Hear that? The Empire wants me dead or alive for ten million! Are you worth ten million, Snap?”

Snap would shake his head, and tell him that he had actually been there during the Rebellion, while Poe was still in his diapers. And the two would dissolve into their familiar pissing contest that Snap had technically never been a member of the Rebellion. That his mother, Nora Wexley, was the one who held official rank. And that Snap had been brought along, because he, in Poe’s succinct words, “was too stupid to stay out of a battlefield, when the war was already won.”

Snap had been fourteen, bright, curious, and part of his mother’s retrieval squad that had gone after high ranking Imperials after the Battle of Endor, but before the signing of the Galactic Concordance. Leia had objected to his inclusion, but Nora was afraid that her son would follow her if she outright forbade him. If she brought him along, at least he was more likely to listen to her, and her orders, instead of running around trying to “help”.

It was too close to the arguments that Papa had made against allowing Leia’s inclusion into the Rebellion at sixteen to Mon, for Leia to really argue against. But she had watched that whip-smart boy grow into a fine man. Leia could hardly wait to meet him again.

Of course, that was dependent on if Nora even came to Yavin.

Leia felt her breath hitch. It hadn’t occurred to her, until right this second, that would be the case. Nora had a passionate heart and a firm sense of justice. But now that Alderaan hadn’t been destroyed, would her husband even be arrested for broadcasting “false information”? That had been the event that sent Nora to the Alliance in the first place. Otherwise, the woman would never have walked away from her family.

And if Nora didn’t join the Alliance, looking for what happened to her husband, did that mean that her son would never cross paths with Leia?

Or Poe? Leia knew that Shara and Kes had been married before they joined the Alliance, so Poe could still possibly be born. But that date was three years in the future, right before the Alliance had settled on Hoth. Would the war even last that long? Things were changing so fast from Leia’s timeline she had no guarantee that she would ever meet the Dameron’s before everything came to a stop, one way or another.
If there was no flight from Hoth, there would be no need for Leia, Han, and Chewie to seek refuge in Cloud City. Lando would have no reason to join their crusade at all. For all his flashy ways, and scoundrel’s heart, the running of Cloud City, was something he took seriously. He wouldn’t leave, no matter how hard Han tried to persuade him to. Not without a good reason.

Without the experience of war to forge them together, would Lando ever become something more than an old friend of Han’s? No, not friends, Leia remembered with a sinking heart. Currently, they weren’t even *that*. They were not speaking to each other. This was the fight, the one that neither of them would ever discuss with her.

So, chances were, if, by some miracle, they did run into Lando now, at best, he would treat Han as someone to be wary of. At worst, as an enemy. Lando would never know who Han grew into being. He would never know who *he* could grow into being.

Would he be someone who would see Leia, and just treat her like "*Her Highness*"? And Luke like a Jedi? Not the people they were, but the titles they wore?

Leia picked up her pace, trying to outrun her own thoughts. This was all ridiculous, and maudlin speculation. It was not a thought for today. If Leia started counting all the costs of those she *might* lose, she would never get going. For the safety of everyone she loved, or would love, the Empire needed to be destroyed, the sooner, the better. Because once that beast was dead, she could bring all her concentration on destroying the bastard child that grew up to replace it. Focusing on what she *could* lose was ridiculous.

“*Or perhaps you should focus on those you have gained.*”

Leia’s feet immediately froze to the stone floor of the temple. That had *not* been her thought. Leia was intimately aware of what her own inner thoughts sounded like. They came in a variety of voices and tones. There were the ones that sounded like loved ones. There were the ones that sounded like her, only five. The ones that sounded like the best version of her, and the ones that were thoughtless and spiteful. That thought had been in *none* of those familiar sounds.

She was vaguely aware that she got a disgruntled look from the one lone soul in the hallway, that had to swerve to avoid her, but she paid them little heed. She focused on her breathing and tried not to start screaming. That had been the Force, clear as a bell, whispering in her mind.

She closed her eyes, and concentrated on solidifying her shields, of disappearing from everyone’s sight. Of becoming so small and insignificant, that *no one* would find her of interest again.

“Leia?” a shaky voice shouted across her mind, shattering the shields she had been trying to bury herself in.

Leia’s eyes flew open at the feel of her brother’s panic and worry. Damn, she had gone too far.


“That didn’t feel like nothing. It felt like you suddenly disappeared.” His voice was sliding from concern into irritation.

She had really worried him. Why? What did he possibly think could happen to her here, on Yavin? Or maybe it wasn’t about that and was instead about the new fears he had. For Luke, the last time she had disappeared so suddenly on him in the Force, she had been shot.

“I’m sorry,” she sent back and opened herself back up to her normal reception in the Force. “I got startled by something and brought my walls down hard on instinct.”
Leia could feel Luke weighing the truth of that, along with his worry. “Was it Father?” he finally asked.

Leia shook her head, even though he couldn’t see her. “No,” she said, hoping her tone would keep him from asking further questions. “It was nothing.”

Leia could feel his doubt through their link, but he didn’t press her further. “Okay,” he said grudgingly, “I’m here if you want to talk though.”

“I know that,” she said back. And she did. But just exactly what was she supposed to say? The semi-mystical energy that has played games with us, for our whole lives, is getting pushy?

But that snide question, even if it was in her own head, helped Leia realize that she was acting in fear and panic. So what if the Force had managed to speak to her? It’s not like she hadn’t ever heard it before. Granted, all those times had been when she reached out, but that didn’t mean it had never happened. And it was right. She had regained so many things she thought lost to her forever. Mama and Papa. Han. Luke. Chewie, if he ever forgave her for bruising Han’s heart.

There were also the people that she had never known before. Obi-Wan, nothing more than a legend for most of her life, but now before her, in all his complicated, broken self. But a friend, for all the troubles and rough edges to that friendship.

And then there was Rex. Who was even more of a miracle. Someone who wasn’t a younger version of someone she knew. A stranger, but who was intimately connected to so many facets of her life, that she had somehow missed the first time. That she had been granted the privilege of meeting and getting to know. Someone who was not only a good ally, clear-headed and loyal, but a good friend, and that was a rare thing in Leia’s life.

The Force only knew who she would encounter going forward. Yes, she would mourn those relationships that might never come to be, but that didn’t mean that whoever came into her life now would be somehow less. Just different.

She shoved a petulant “So there,” to the Force, and could swear, the Force laughed back at her.

“Still not listening, are we?” it whispered, the words echoing in her bones. For one brief moment, all of Leia ached, and she felt like she was cold and hot all at once as the roar of all creation sounded in her ears. Then that overwhelming sensation faded away, the point being made.

Leia reached out a shaky hand and braced herself on the wall closest to her, trying to catch her breath. The human mind wasn’t meant to feel this, experience this, deal with that full and intense connection. No matter how powerfully the Force was connected to her family, it wasn’t something she would ever be able to understand in its entirety, and she didn’t understand why it insisted that she try.

Like for instance, what the hell was that supposed to mean? Who else had she supposedly picked up as an ally that she hadn’t noticed? Or was the Force just going to randomly start showing her things that could be?

Leia fervently hoped that wasn’t the case. She was having enough trouble balancing two timelines in her head, she didn’t need the fragments of more, and started seeing all the possible allies and friends she could have.

The sound of chuckling laughter caught her attention, and she looked to the end of the hallway to see some pilots dressed in those gods awful orange uniforms. She was pretty sure among the
crowd, she recognized Wedge. Hell, that meant that the CAP flight shift was happening. Which meant that soon much of the base would be getting up. Which meant there would be more witnesses to her roaming the halls of this base, looking lost.

Leia took a deep breath and shoved all of this aside. All of this was a problem that could plague her at another time. Today she was going to focus on the fact that Han was going to be here, and the sooner he got here, the sooner she could get off-world. She had long ago learned how to find the joy and satisfaction in the moments she could, and not let other problems steal those tenuous emotions away. If she hadn’t, she would have gone mad long ago.

She gave a firm shake of her head. Standing in the middle of this hallway was going to get her nowhere, other than people start to question her sanity. It was early in Yavin’s day cycle, but that didn’t mean no one was up. Besides, she wanted to catch Han, if he was here, before he had to give his report to Mon.

Because he was considered an ally, not a full member of the Alliance, those briefings weren’t as long as if Leia was the one who had to give them. However, that didn’t mean he got out of the act entirely, much to his very vocal displeasure.

She made it to the intersection just before the entrance of the hangar bay, when in the corner of her eyes, she caught a flash of orange. Leia turned her head, expecting to see more pilots, as they headed into the hanger bay.

To her surprise, it was Ahsoka. The woman was too good at hiding herself in the Force. Leia hadn’t even sensed she was on base, never mind this close.

She was standing in the mouth of the intersecting hallway that led to the main entrance to the hanger bay. She hadn’t caught sight of Leia yet if her intense focus on the tall human woman standing in front of her was anything to go by.

Leia weighed whether she should go over and say hello. This was another person from her past, that while she had known a bit more about than Rex, hadn’t understood the full importance of. Ahsoka was an ally, Leia was pretty sure about that. But it remained to be seen if she would become a friend.

Leia reminded herself that standing there gawking at Ahsoka, dithering about whether she should say a simple “Good morning,” wouldn’t help her make that decision either way.

Leia took a step towards Ahsoka, just as the woman she was talking to reached out a hand, grabbing Ahsoka’s in her own. Whatever pleasant greeting that Leia had been about to shout out, died on her lips. Even in the brief time Leia had known the woman, she knew Ahsoka was very much like Obi-Wan in this regard. She didn’t invite touch. Whoever this person was, Ahsoka knew them intimately, to allow this level of familiarity.

Leia couldn’t make out what was being said, they were too far away for that. That didn’t mean she couldn’t glean anything. The two of them were having a serious conversation based on the way they were slowly moving closer to each other, the sustained eye contact, and hushed voices. Leia would feel bad about spying on what was clearly a close moment between them, if they weren’t having it in the middle of one of the main hallways on the base.

Leia didn’t recognize the woman. She was human, as far as Leia could tell from this angle, tall, with her dark hair intricately woven into small braids, and skin that was darker than Papa’s.

Ahsoka looked down at their grasped hands, and there was something there. Not in the Force,
Ahsoka was ever her reserved presence, but in the way she was standing so still, her sharp gaze focused with intense concentration. Whatever their relationship, it wasn’t casual, by any means. This woman meant something to her. Ahsoka hadn’t even noticed that Leia was here, she was so wrapped up in this conversation. And Ahsoka wasn’t someone who let her awareness of her surroundings escape her notice. She had been alive too long for that to be the case.

The unnamed woman came forward and hugged Ahsoka. The Togruta didn’t hesitate, just grabbed back as fiercely. Leia broke her gaze off. This was private and personal. Whoever this woman was to Ahsoka, she meant a lot, and it wasn’t Leia’s place to pry. It was foolish to go to the hanger anyway. Han hadn’t been all that clear on when he would arrive, and even if he was here, he was probably stuck in Mon’s office, giving a report to the woman.

Leia turned on her heels and started down the hallway leading to her parent’s room. As she walked, she allowed her mind to ponder over what she had just seen. By her own admission, Ahsoka had a rough leaving from the Order. Undoubtedly those experiences did lead to her current reluctance to call herself a Jedi. But Leia had to ask herself, if maybe some of Ahsoka’s resistance to being a Jedi, had anything to do with their strict adherence to non-attachment, and that woman she was talking to.

Leia made it to her parent’s room on autopilot, lost in her own head, mulling over what she had witnessed. She gave a quick rap of her knuckles, letting them know she was here.

Instead of Threepio opening the door, as he usually did, she heard a grateful, “Leia!” from the other side of the door.

Leia blinked, not sure if she had heard who she thought she had. She palmed the door open, and her startled gaze immediately fell on Han. He was sitting at the foot of her parents table, in direct sightline of the door. As soon as her eyes met his, his face broke out in a wide welcome smile. Despite how foolishly young it made her feel, she couldn’t stop the goofy smile that crossed her own face.

Without even bothering to greet her parents, she walked over to him. “Han,” she said warmly, leaning down and brushing a light kiss on the cheek. “You’re here,” she remarked wonderingly.

“Yeah,” his eyes looked into hers, and she could see the small wrinkles form in the corner of his eyes. It was his real smile, and he was giving it to her in a room where her parents were sitting. Some progress on that front then. But she didn’t overlook the lingering tension that was even now, fading in his shoulders. So not anxious before she arrived, but not comfortable either.

“I got here about ten minutes ago,” he explained, as if she could ever think that he was here just to visit her parents. Well, if it had only been Mama maybe. Han liked her, and she was amused by him. Nervousness filled his gaze, and his eyes flicked behind Leia, to Mama and Papa. “Thought you would be here already,” and his gaze returned to hers. “Oversleep?” There was a small hint of concern in that question.

She gave him a fond smile and shook her head. “I went to the hanger to see if you had arrived yet.” Han looked surprised, then an expression of shy pleasure came over his face before he ducked his head to hide from her.

Leia cupped his cheek, trying to reassure him through touch that he didn’t need to hide from her.
But her words were softly chiding, to give him an out if he wanted it. “You didn’t give me an exact
time of when you would arrive.”

Han’s face came back up, and it was open and warm. But he met her cool tone with an insolent
shrug. “Turns out, I’m even more impressive than I thought. Got done early, and Mon had a
meeting ongoing when I got to Yavin. She told me to go eat breakfast and come back later.”

Leia rolled her eyes at his boasting. “Your ego is going to get you into even more trouble one of
these days.”

“Oh, but I like trouble,” he grinned and leaned forward. “I like the Kid, don’t I?”

She was about to point out that wasn’t exactly the way to lead a long life, when Papa pointedly
cleared his throat. Leia didn’t miss the quick flicker of Han’s eyes as he looked at Papa behind her.

She turned to face Papa. He was sitting at the head of the table, with Mama at his right side. If this
was an official meeting of some kind, it would be a horrible breach of etiquette for the Prince
Consort to take the rightful place of his Queen. Since it was only Han, and Leia doubted at this
point in his life he even knew there were protocols to who sat where, and it was the seat with the
clear line of sight of him, Leia had a pretty good idea why Papa was not sitting in his normal place.

But those dark brown eyes weren’t looking at Han. No, his stern gaze was currently fixed on her.

“Good morning Leia,” he said very pointedly.

Leia felt a slight blush grace her cheeks at her lack of manners. She had been taught better than to
enter a room and ignore the other occupants in it. Unless, of course, that was the point. Leia knew
her parents weren’t all that useful with conventional weapons, but they had honed their manners
into the finest cutting knife.

“Good morning Papa,” she said and nodded her head to Mama, who was looking amused at
everything. “Mama. Did you sleep well?”

“We slept fine,” Mama answered. “And you?”

“I did too,” Leia answered. It wasn’t an exaggeration. There had been no nightmares plaguing her
sleep last night, as had been the case for her over the last week or so. And because Luke had the
night shift on the CAP rotation, she hadn’t been pulled into one of his nightmares either. It had led
to a rare morning well she felt fully rested.

Now that the pleasantries were dealt with, Leia could address Han’s mood when she walked into
this room. Well aware of which parent was most likely to blame, she asked, “Papa, anything
happen before I got here that I should be aware of?”

Papa, to his credit, didn’t play dumb. He shook his head. “No,” he said, sipping from the mug
cradled in his hand. “I have not had enough caf this morning yet to function, never mind indulge in
my new favorite hobby of tormenting your suitor.”

Behind her, Han made a strange noise at the word “suitor”.

“Are you alright, Han?” Papa asked, voice full of solicitous concern.

Leia turned to face him, worried that Han had choked on his food. “I’m fine,” he croaked, red in
the face, waving her help away. “Water went down the wrong pipe.”
“Well, that’s good to hear,” Papa said lightly. “It would be terribly inconvenient if you died at our breakfast table. Think of the paperwork.”

“Papa,” Leia said, glaring at him.

Papa looked at her, amusement crinkling the small wrinkles around his eyes. “Oh, no, Leia. This is not my fault. Han’s current mood is all on your mother.”

Leia found herself plunking down into the chair to the right of Han, her legs suddenly refusing to work, as she stared in astonishment at Mama. That didn’t make any sense. Mama liked Han.

“I was simply asking Han a few questions,” Mama said, a wicked twinkle in her eyes. “Nothing nefarious. I assure you.”

Leia’s eyes narrowed. “Uh-huh,” she said, but before she could press further, there was a knock at the door. A second later, Luke’s head popped in.

“Luke!” Mama said, surprise and happiness equally clear in her voice. She stood, and took one step forward, like she was going to go over and greet him with a kiss on the cheek, like she had done in the past. Leia could see when Luke’s guarded face registered for her, and she came to an ungainly halt. There was disappointment on her face, before it was all covered with her Queen’s mask. “What a pleasant surprise,” she said in a welcoming, but reserved tone. “Won’t you please join us?”

Mama wasn’t the only one surprised to see him. “Luke?” Leia sent.

“Han was in the hanger when I came back from my CAP rotation. He asked for back up,” was his terse answer. And why hadn’t he mentioned that Han was here in her parent’s room earlier, when she had been talking to him? And how had she beaten him here?

“What took you so long?”

“I wanted to take a shower.”

That made sense. Luke never missed a chance to take a bath or shower, still luxuriating in the ability to bathe with water, instead of sonics.

Luke’s gaze fell away from her, and his eyes met Mama, who was still standing, hand out to the empty spot. Luke looked at it for a moment, then at Leia, and finally, his eyes fell on Han. Leia could feel his emotions bounce back and forth between his desire to stay, to eat breakfast with people he considered family, and his lingering resentment at Papa and Mama.

Or maybe something else was going on? Leia wasn’t sure. The subject of her parent’s wasn’t like Vader. It’s not that Luke had told her he wouldn’t talk to her about it. It’s just that they hadn’t.

She was a terrible sister. She had been so consumed in her own pain, that she hadn’t put much thought into his. She wasn’t the only one who had several emotional wounds ripped open over the last few months.

Leia had no idea what Luke thought about her parents now. He had been furious that they hadn’t told him about Vader, but so many other issues and betrayals had come up since then, it was very possible that he had let it go.

She took note of the resentment in his eyes and marked that down as wishful thinking on her part. Luke could hold a grudge just as fiercely as she could. His anger was fading, but it was still there.
He was over it enough to come here, to help Han, but Leia doubted he thought he would be staying here after she arrived. Hell, it was probably why he chose to take a shower before showing up, to limit the amount of time he needed to be in this room with both of them.

As much as she wanted him to stay, Leia knew Luke. He always had a temper, and time had passed since the revelation that had sundered the relationship growing between him and her parent’s. But he had also taken several more blows since then. Her parents weren’t the ones who had dealt them, but they were the ones here.

And it was breakfast. Luke didn’t argue at the breakfast table. It was a family tradition with the Lars, and Luke held to it as much as he could. At least the breakfast’s Leia had with him. It was something he hadn’t liked when he was living with them, he had told her once, back when they were both twenty. He had thought it was irritating and confining, too young, and too impatient to understand the lessons they had been trying to teach him. But once they were gone, it was a way to hold on to them, and the wisdom they tried to pass on to him.

Luke had no holos of them, no keepsakes from his childhood. All he had was the lessons they gave him, and he tried to keep to them as much as he could. Staying here, and now, would be pushing his limits. If he gave in to his anger now, no matter how righteous he was feeling about it, he wasn’t in the best frame of mind to forgive himself later, after he cooled down.

Luke had enough going on now, without adding the guilt of feeling like he was betraying their memory. Not when family was such a complicated subject for him.

But her brother surprised her. His face took on a thoughtful air as he noticed the tension as quickly as Leia had.

“Are you okay?” he asked Han, taking a step into the room. To protect Han, or start a fight, Leia wasn’t sure.

Han waved a lazy hand. “I’m fine,” he said breezily.

Luke’s eyes narrowed and swung his gaze to Papa, who rolled his eyes at Luke. “I, unlike everyone else at this table,” he grumbled, “did not get enough sleep last night. All I want is to drink my caf, and not speak for an hour.”

Han and Luke both stared goggled eyed at Papa.

Leia settled back into her chair. No, Papa didn’t do well when he slept poorly. Of course, neither Luke nor Han could possibly know that about him. But Leia did. It made Leia relax about Papa and Han being in the same room without her in the future. Even when he was tired and irritable, Papa wasn’t this easy to rile unless he felt comfortable being around the people in the room. He might not trust Han to show him all of himself, but it was something that he showed him this.

Papa’s defense of himself also had the benefit of giving Leia the verbal opening she needed to push further.

“What did you ask him?” Leia demanded, perhaps a bit sharper than she should have.


Oh, by all the gods, no wonder Han was internally freaking out. He had never had to deal with a concerned parent, prodding into their child’s potential...husband? Lover? Whatever. The point was that Han would view this as an interrogation, about his fitness to be Leia’s husband, not polite
conversation in order to get to know him better.

Luke’s frown deepened, as if he too didn’t understand what about those questions would set Han off. He knew Han had lived rough, but Leia was almost sure Luke had no idea what the true extent of what Han’s childhood was like. That wasn’t her secret to tell Luke. Han would tell him when he was damn good and ready.

“Sit, Luke,” Han said, waving a hand at one of the seats in the small living space.

Luke looked like he was debating with himself for one long moment, then he let out a sigh. He came in, eyes wary as they looked at Leia’s parents. Mama only gave him an encouraging smile, and Papa was focusing on drinking his caf.

Leia almost told him to go. It wasn’t that he wasn’t still angry at Mama and Papa, but he could feel Han’s need for him to be here, for Leia’s need for her whole family to be here. Luke had always had a hard time saying no to the people he loved. It had led to some disastrous consequences to him in the past.

It was the whole reason he agreed to train Ben after all, because she asked for his help.

Or maybe she was overthinking all of this. It was only breakfast after all, not the war for someone’s soul. Luke was an adult, and if he wanted to stay, then she wasn’t going to say anything. The fact that she had missed seeing him here in the morning was inconsequential to her reasoning for keeping quiet. Really.

Luke went into the small seating area, and grabbed one of the chairs over there, bringing it to the table. He set it so that he was beside Leia, with Papa to his left at the head of the table. Mama was sitting directly across from Leia, and she cleared her throat before she asked. “Have you eaten?”

“No,” Luke said, with a shake of his head.

Mama looked down at the table and frowned. She resolutely picked up her plate. It still contained one ration bar on it, along with the wrappers for about two others. She reached across the table to hand it to Luke.


“I insist,” Mama said with a smile, the plate now in front of Leia’s face. She couldn’t see Luke’s face, but she could feel his shock roll through him.


Leia’s eyes flicked over to Mama, whose face tightened just the slightest. “It’s not a problem,” she said.

Luke actually put a hand up and pushed the plate away from him. Papa looked like he was about two seconds from giving Luke a lesson about manners. Han looked like he wanted to crawl under the table to hide from the fallout. Leia was about to kick Luke under the table, when it occurred to her just what was going on here.

Leia cleared her throat to get everyone’s attention. In the normal course of events, she wouldn’t even consider playing mediator between Luke and Mama. They needed to find their own way, and Leia playing the peacemaker between them wouldn’t work in the long run, and would just lead to hurt feelings for everyone. But since it looked like a small war was about to break out over what was a cultural misunderstanding between the two of them, it was probably for the best she break
that rule, just this once.

“Luke,” Leia said softly, turning to face her brother and grabbing the hand he was still using to keep the plate from him. “It’s fine. You are not taking the last of her food.”


“You are not,” she said firmly. “Good food has been scarce, but I’ve seen the rations we have, and it’s enough to feed this entire base for a good long while.”

Luke flicked his eyes to Mama, then back to Leia. He could feel that she was telling the truth, but the scars of his childhood ran deep. Obi-Wan wasn’t the only one who had issues with food security.

Papa, using his years of experience in diplomatic settings, or his kind heart, said softly, “When we realized Han was going to be eating with us, we sent Threepio to get enough food for three more people. Breha has already had one bar, and she didn’t want you to wait hungry until Threepio brought more.”


Papa looked amused. “Well, I knew if Han was here, you and Leia weren’t going to be that far behind. Where one of you goes, the others soon follow.”

“Please take the food Luke,” Leia whispered across his mind. She could feel him wavering between his trust in her and the conditioning of his childhood.


His stomach chose to let out a loud gurgle right then.

Leia went in for the kill. “No matter what you do, she’s not going to eat it, Luke.” At his shocked look that someone would turn away perfectly acceptable food, Leia followed up with, “On Alderaan, it is rude to eat while someone at your table is hungry.”

Luke looked at the plate and then at Mama. He stiffened, and Leia could see when he realized his refusal to take the food meant something different then he intended. “My apologies,” he said softly to Mama, “I meant no insult.”

Mama’s face was full of concern, and Leia could practically feel all the questions she wanted to ask. But all she said was, “It’s alright.”

She waved the plate, so it was under Luke’s face, and this time, he reached out and took it, slowly lowering in front of him.

Leia relaxed as the tense mood melted away. Luke looked at his plate, then looked at Leia’s, then Han’s, and did the math. “Why did you have four plates on hand?” Luke looked puzzled.

Mama kept her face deliberately calm and pleasant. “We always have four plates delivered with breakfast, Luke.” He only stared at her blankly. Mama looked surprisingly hurt at Luke’s still questioning face. “One of them was meant for you. We hoped you would come back and join us regularly.”

Luke’s eyes flicked to Leia, a look of betrayal on his face.
“Pressuring your parents to accept me?” he asked, tone snide. If it wasn’t for the hurt she could feel lurking under those words, Leia would have given him a tongue lashing he would remember.

But she could feel the pain that Luke felt feeling that he wasn’t wanted for himself. She shook her head. “I didn’t know,” she said. “It doesn’t surprise me they did, but I didn’t know.”

He looked at her suspiciously. “Leia, you notice everything.”

She glared at him for being a stubborn gundark about this. “Not before my caf, Luke.”

Luke had the grace to look a little abashed at that reminder. Then he turned to look at Mama and Papa. “You wanted me to come back here for breakfast?” And there was just the smallest note of vulnerability in that question.

“Of course,” Mama said.

Luke’s face clouded. “Because I am important to Leia,” he said, his hands balling into fists under the table. “And no matter your flaws, or what I think about what you’ve done to me, I don’t doubt you love her, and her happiness is important to you.”

Mama frowned. “Because we love you, and you are a part of this family.”

Luke looked gobsmacked. “I—“ he shook his head. There were several long moments, as they all maintained their silence as he tried to find his words. “But I’m not anything to you,” he finally managed to get out. “I’m the child you didn’t take.”

Leia stiffened. There was more going on here than just anger at her parents. Luke was a riot of hurt, jealousy, and self-loathing. Was that why he was having a hard time letting his anger go? Because he had looked at Leia’s parents, and seen something he wanted. And felt like that was a betrayal of the love he felt for Aunt Beru and Uncle Owen?

This wasn’t what happened last time. Not the part about growing up together. Once they had known they were related, that had been something that both of them regretted bitterly. But there had never been any envy for the other’s parents. How could they? They had never met the other set.

But this Luke had. Not only that, he had met them not after four years of training to be a Jedi, but days after his family was slaughtered. When he had been desperate and alone, an orphan, suddenly there was a sister, with parents of her own. Parent’s that he had liked and respected, before everything between them went to hell.

Mama looked over to Papa, and Leia was shocked that there were tears in her eyes. “Luke,” she whispered, and her voice failed her.

Papa cleared his throat and said in a hoarse voice. “That was done for your safety, Luke,” he said, voice rough. “It was never because you wouldn’t have been loved by us.”

Luke looked at both of them, expression lost.

A tear fell down Mama’s cheek. “I don’t think I’ve ever envied the Lars more than I do right this moment.”

“Envy them?” Luke’s voice was incredulous. “For what?”

Mama slumped in her chair, looking defeated. “For starters, they got to raise you.” Luke blinked at
the pure envy in Mama’s voice. “And for another could have called Leia their niece, and no one would have batted an eye.”

“You can’t acknowledge who I am to Leia,” Luke said in a wavering voice. “It would put her in danger.”

Mama gave him a sad smile. “I know. But that doesn’t make not acknowledging who you are any easier to bear.”

“And what am I to you?” Luke looked like he was teetering between hope and despair.

Mama looked sad. “There are no words for it, not in any language I know, Luke.”

“So nothing then?” Luke muttered bitterly.

Papa shook his head. “Just because a thing has no name doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. It’s just that Leia is our daughter, but you are not our son.” Luke visibly flinched at that. Papa started to get up, and Leia realized he was about to go over to Luke and pull him into a hug. She shook her head. Luke would not respond well to that gesture, right this minute.

Papa caught the motion of her head, and his mouth flattened into an unhappy line, as he sat back into his seat. “It’s not because we don’t want you to be. But rather, we think you have enough fathers at the moment.”

Luke looked up, shocked. “I only have the one,” he whispered.

Papa’s mouth twitched in bitter amusement. “And I would argue he comes with enough issues to qualify him as two.” Then Papa’s smile slipped off his face. “But, I was referring to your Uncle Owen.”

“He was my Uncle,” Luke said.

“And he raised you, like a father should,” Papa said gently. Leia desperately wanted to tell him to stay off this subject. Luke wasn’t nearly ready to reconcile his grief with what he had truly lost when the Lars had died. But she wasn’t here to mediate between them.

Mama wasn’t nearly as blind as Papa. “Perhaps that is a discussion for another time?”

Papa nodded. “But, regardless as to what words you want to use, know this, we consider you part of this family. No matter if there is no word for it, we love you.”

Luke didn’t look like he knew what to say to that. Han also looked a bit embarrassed, over what Leia couldn’t begin to guess. That Papa had guessed, and accurately, that Leia and Luke would follow him here? The fact that he was seeing something so vulnerable from two people who he knew didn’t trust him? For all she knew, it was the abundance of emotion that was causing him discomfort. Han was much more comfortable with sarcasm, and heroic gestures to show he cared. Leia would never learn how Luke would have responded to that offer, because at that moment, there was a soft knock at the door.

Han scowled. “Does that droid have a sensor or something that tells him when the most awkward moment is to show up?”

Leia shook her head. “That isn’t Threepio.” Because he would knock, his protocol programming was too deep for him to do anything else, even if Mama and Papa ordered him not to. But he would
call out his name, and then enter in. Whoever was at the door, wasn’t Threepio.

The knock repeated, but softer this time.

“I’ll get it,” Han offered, but Papa put up a hand to stop him.

“Don’t,” he said, pushing back from the table. “It’s probably for me or Breha.”

The person at the door definitely wasn’t there on official business.

“Good morning, Bail,” a very familiar cultured voice said. Leia’s eyes went to the door, and she caught a glimpse of Obi-Wan’s face. It was placid and calm, but as his eyes slipped past Papa’s shoulder, she felt the flash of envy and longing slide across her shields in the Force. Leia took an instinctive breath in as those emotions played a little too close in harmony with hers.

No, she wasn’t the one on the outside looking in anymore. She wasn’t the one whose loved ones were all dead, or so far from her, she could barely feel them. She was the one who was eating breakfast, surrounded by miracles on all sides of her. But she had lived with those feelings for years, and what she was getting off Obi-Wan was a painful memory spike of all the times she had felt cut off from the crowds of people who surrounded her in the Resistance.

These few precious months had been more than she ever thought was possible, and they had been healing in ways she didn’t have the words to explain, for all the other emotional costs she was paying. But that didn’t mean she didn’t understand, on a level she didn’t think anyone at this table did, the depth of Obi-Wan’s loneliness.

Which also meant she was now more worried then she had been when she issued the invitation. She had thought it would take Obi-Wan at least a week to work up the nerve to come here. His loneliness must be even deeper than she thought, if he showed up this quickly.

Beside her, Luke stood up, his chair clattering to the floor as he threw his napkin on the table. “What is he doing here?” he growled. He wasn’t yelling, not yet, but that probably had more to do with it being breakfast, and old habits, then any real grip on his temper. All along her shields, his anger made tiny slices into her mind.

She kicked him under the table, and he let out a sharp yelp.

“Hey!” he sputtered, turning outraged eyes to her. “What was that for?”

“Knock it off,” she groused, and rubbed her hands up and down her arms to emphasize her point. “I haven’t had enough caf yet to deal with what you’re leaking everywhere.”

He continued to scowl at her for another moment, until what she said sank into his thick head. A look of sheepishness entered his eyes, and Leia felt those pinpricks of pain go away, as he retreated behind his own shields.

He continued to scowl, though, turning irritated eyes to Papa. “So, all that talk of being part of your family is your way of manipulating me into resuming my training?” he shot at her parents. Mama and Papa both looked taken aback and then hurt.

Well, Luke was in a fine mood this morning. That was alright, his unprovoked attack against her parents meant Leia was now in a fine mood herself. Family was important to Mama and Papa, they would never use such a ploy to trick him into doing anything. They had exposed a vulnerability to Luke, and now here he was using it to hurt them. She sent him the equivalent of a flick of her fingers across his shields, making sure it was sharp enough to hurt.
Luke didn’t turn to look at her, but in the Force, his irritated voice complained, “Will you stop that?”

“When you stop being a brat,” Leia shot back, allowing him to feel her anger and hurt. “Mama and Papa had nothing to do with Obi-Wan being here.”


Leia did the equivalent of a push against his shoulder, only she was doing it against his mind. That didn’t mean there weren’t physical effects. Luke stumbled a bit, catching himself on the table. He turned betrayed eyes to her.


They wouldn’t have had a problem with it, of course, if she had remembered to tell them. Mama’s actions with Obi-Wan’s wardrobe showed how concerned she was. In the normal course of events, she wasn’t given to burning people’s possessions in front of them.


Han snorted. “Give ’em a minute. They are fighting it out.”

Papa’s voice was incredulous, “They haven’t said a word until just now.”

“Not out loud, Bail,” Obi-Wan’s voice was soft, as if he was afraid that if he drew too much attention to himself, Luke would immediately throw him out.

The look of betrayal melted from Luke’s face, and it turned into a mutinous glare to Obi-Wan. “It’s rude to eavesdrop,” he hissed.

Obi-Wan put both hands up. “I can’t hear what you are saying, Luke,” he said, voice still whisper soft. “I am just aware that you are talking.”

Luke’s eyes narrowed, but as Leia was well aware, there was no hint of deception in him in the Force. Luke huffed, then trained his angry gaze on Leia.

“Why invite him here?” he demanded, crossing his arms over his chest, and those pinpricks along her shield were back, but more intense now that he was doing it deliberately. He wasn’t hiding his anger away anymore then she was.

What was wrong with him? He was acting like some moody, hormone driven…teenager. Leia’s anger deflated, as she cursed her own foolishness. Of course, he was. He still was one.

Leia sighed, and she made sure that she withdrew all the emotions she had been battering him with, safely into her own mind. There was a ripple of shock in Luke’s emotions, and then he repaid the gesture by reigning himself in.

She couldn’t make Luke pay for her own forgetfulness. She had been reacting like it was the same Luke that she had known for decades standing in front of her. The Luke, whose compassion took her breath away, even if it made her fear for him. That wasn’t this Luke.

It could be though. Hell, for all she knew, this was how her Luke first dealt with the revelation that Vader was his father. He had confided nothing in her, between Bespin and Endor. She knew something was eating at him, but she had thought it was a combination of his failure in his fight against Vader, along with the trauma of his lost limb. How none of what he had done, had made a
damn bit of difference, because Leia was the one who ended up rescuing him. To say nothing in his failure to keep Han away from Jabba.

This wasn’t something she could help this Luke with, because she didn’t know how the other one had ever regained his footing. If all that had happened to her... well, it was for the best it hadn’t been her in that situation.

Regardless of what happened, what was going on now needed more than words to explain. She owed it to Luke for him to see everything, especially for how out of proportion she had reacted to his anger. Leia gently tapped on his shields. He frowned, but he nodded his head, giving permission.

Leia showed him Obi-Wan, as she had seen him that morning she went to his quarters. The exhaustion and beaten air about him. Several moments in time, where she had seen him around the base, the feeling of isolation and loneliness around him. Obi-Wan in the Falcon, on the night they had both gotten drunk, telling Leia that people didn’t see him, only his legend.

Luke blinked, and some of his hostility faded. Leia said nothing, giving him time. This Luke was much less in control of his temper, and in the midst of her own, she had forgotten that. But his heart was still as generous as it always had been. He was still angry at Obi-Wan, there was no denying that. But that first white-hot fury had faded, and it was now more disappointment than rage.

Luke might not be all that forgiving at this moment, but he wasn’t cruel. He turned his head, to look at Obi-Wan, who was still standing in the doorway. As he took in the older man’s features, he could see the hunger in Obi-Wan’s eyes as he looked into her parent’s room. His longing for a connection.

And so much of Obi-Wan’s isolation in his life had been done for Luke’s sake and wellbeing. No matter how Luke looked at it, kidnapped from Vader or not, he understood that he and Leia needed to be hidden from the Emperor at all costs. What Obi-Wan had initially done, the action that had set so much of Leia and Luke’s life into motion, had been a decision based on that fact. He really had thought Vader was dead, and that his children must be protected.

What Obi-Wan should have done when he learned Vader was alive, that was an issue that Luke was still grappling with. That wasn’t taking into account tricking Luke into involuntary patricide, or that by all technical definitions of the word, the Jedi had been slave overseers.

Leia didn’t fault Luke for his anger. Hell, from where she was sitting, he deserved to be furious. But just because he was angry at Obi-Wan didn’t mean he still didn’t love him. And that was what was tearing her brother apart about this, she realized. Life hadn’t handed him this lesson yet. He thought, because someone hurt you, or made mistakes that hurt you, that the love should die with it. That wasn’t how any of this worked.

Love wasn’t easy. Forgiveness wasn’t easy. But this Luke had never been tested yet on those concepts. Leia wanted to guide him, but he hadn’t asked for her help in any way. She had offered, but he wanted to keep his own counsel for now. Luke had the right to choose who he wanted to be, not the man she remembered him growing into.

Luke’s eyes met Obi-Wan’s, who was still standing there, very still. Leia could tell by the tension in his shoulders how nervous he was.

That deafening silence went on for a long moment, until Han snorted, “In or out Luke. No sense for all of us to sit here like statues when there is food on the table.”

Obi-Wan gave a nod of his head. “Of course,” he said smoothly.

Luke only scowled harder and very aggressively sat down and started picking his ration bar apart.

Obi-Wan grabbed one of the unoccupied chairs that was in the small sitting area and brought it over to the table. He chose the empty spot next to Mama. It was a tight fit, especially since they were all trying to eat, but Leia certainly didn’t mind scooting as close as she could to Han.

Sitting that close to him, though, Leia found she was having a hard time concentrating on anything but him. Now that Luke wasn’t bombarding her with his anger and frustration, she found that watching Han’s hands as he tore the wrapper off his ration bar, was suddenly something she couldn’t look away from. She was close enough to smell him, and she wanted to run her fingers through his hair. Touch his skin everywhere. It had been so long since she could indulge in even casual touches with him, now that he was sitting right beside her, she found she was a starving woman set in front of a feast, and told she could only have a bite.

Idly, she wondered if she should suggest eating in his lap. It would certainly free up some room at the table. It might even be worth it, to see the looks on everyone’s faces, for the waves it would cause between Papa and Han. At the very least, it would break up the tense air between Obi-Wan and Luke. They were both a bit too fond of the deliberate pushing of boundaries to be anything but amused at Papa and Han’s verbal dancing around each other.

The knock on the door this time was Threepio, because his ability to interrupt anything with Han was legendary to Leia. Even if it was a fantasy in her own mind. Huh, maybe she should have suspected Vader was his creator after all.

“I have returned!” he announced in that excessive cheerful voice of his, carrying the tray in his hands. He spotted everyone at the table and went, “Oh my! I did not bring enough plates for everyone.”

“It’s okay, Threepio,” Leia said, sliding her plate over to Obi-Wan. “I’m done.”

She had been in this time long enough that Mama and Papa didn’t protest this, especially since she had very clearly eaten all the bars on her plate. Leia ate fast, and quickly, it was a habit she couldn’t seem to break. Especially since she knew, here, on Yavin, she would be the last person to be called into any battle situation.

Obi-Wan gave her a small smile of thanks. Threepio carefully set the tray down, maneuvering between all the plates and cups.

“Caf or tea, Knight Kenobi? He asked Obi-Wan.

“Tea,” Obi-Wan said.


“Tea as well.” Leia looked at him in surprise, and Luke grimaced. “After this, I’m going to bed. These night shifts are killing me.”

Threepio poured the drinks from the pitchers on the tray, refilling Leia’s in the process without her even having to ask. The droid was well aware of her preference.
That done, he gave more bars to Mama and Luke. When the droid placed them in front of Obi-Wan, though, he gave a long sigh.


Obi-Wan ignored her little prat of a brother and poked the ration bar sitting on his plate. “Again?” he asked, in a voice that coming out of a less dignified face, could be called a whine.

Luke blinked, irritation fading as he realized that Obi-Wan’s mood had very little to do with him. “You don’t like them?”

Obi-Wan scowled at them, like they had insulted his honor. “No one likes them,” he groused.

As one, everyone at that table looked at Leia. She glared back at all of them. “Oh, by all the Gods,” she said, for what felt like the millionth time. “I do not like them. I just don’t mind them.”

Obi-Wan looked across the table at her. “You are a very strange woman,” he said.

Leia transferred her scowl from everyone at the table, to him, specifically. “And what does that say about you?” she asked haughtily. “You like me.”

“Oh, I passed odd decades ago,” he told her cheerfully. Then he made a face and took a reluctant looking bite of the bar.

Luke looked between her and Obi-Wan, curiosity on his face. Leia hadn’t talked much about Obi-Wan to Luke. He vacillated so much between anger and love with the man, even in the better moments between the two of them, she hadn’t said much about him. Luke might not know that she and the Jedi were friends. Combative friends, but friends.

“You need to get out more,” Luke told Obi-Wan. “Leia liking ration bars isn’t the oddest thing about her.”


Luke sputtered, “They’re good. And they are everywhere. Meat isn’t the easiest thing to get on Tatooine.”

“Yeah, and if you don’t prepare them right, they are poisonous, Luke,” Han huffed.

Luke smirked, “They’re easy to prepare. As long as you know what you are doing.”

“They aren’t that bad, Captain Solo,” Obi-Wan said. Then his nose wrinkled. “Especially compared to this.”


Obi-Wan looked startled. “I was only speaking the truth.”

Luke’s voice was biting. “That would be a first.”


“Fine,” he shot back, annoyed.

Into the fraught silence, Han said, “Yes, taste. That is something to bet your life on.”
Mama put her tea down, a look of curiosity in her eyes. “And how many people know how to prepare them correctly?” she asked.


Mama wasn’t fooled. “Outsiders and those aligned with the Hutts not being told a crucial bit of information?” Mama knew as well as Leia did it didn’t matter if the Hutts ate the creatures. Their physiology made it so they were naturally immune to most poisons, natural and synthetic.

Luke just looked at her, but his silence spoke volumes.


Luke frowned. “I thought you were pacifists.”

Leia looked at Luke in amazement. Yes, they had been. They still were, in their hearts, Leia was sure. But Papa and Mama were here, weren’t they? And the Alliance certainly wasn’t going around asking the Empire to surrender peacefully, was it?

Mama blinked, and then her eyes grew thoughtful. “Because I could afford to be,” she said lightly, but her eyes remained fixed on Luke’s face, studying his reactions to her words. “And it was useful to use that as a shield, for others to stand behind.”

“A shield for who?” Luke asked, his tone almost disrespectful. It was the almost that saved him from another kick in the shins.

Papa gave Luke a weary smile. “For our people, of course,” he said smoothly.

Luke’s suspicious face turned thoughtful. “And who are your people?”

“Whoever was born on Alderaan,” Mama said lightly. “Physically or spiritually.”

Luke’s defensive posture dropped, and he shot a quick glance at Leia before returning his attention to them. “Spiritually?”

Mama gave a nod. “Of course, Luke,” she said. “Just because one is not born physically on Alderaan, that doesn’t mean you aren’t Alderaanian.” She gave him a tight smile. “Of course, until twenty-three years ago, it wasn’t something that happened often, but it has been an accepted practice for centuries. Some of our greatest artists and politicians were born somewhere else and found their home with us.”

Luke’s eyes lit up. “The refugees,” he said. “The ones that your people were rioting over.”

Mama looked at him proudly. “Bringing people into our culture is something we take seriously, Luke.” She nodded her head towards Leia. “It’s well known that Leia was not born on Alderaan, and it has never been questioned that she is Alderaanian.” Then a shadow passed over her face. “Or at least it wasn’t.”

Han reached under the table and squeezed Leia’s hand, and she squeezed back. It was sweet of him to be concerned, but it was done. Or not done, as the case may be.

She cleared her throat. “Even then,” she said, fighting to keep her voice even. Mama was on edge enough about this subject as it was, Leia would not add to that fire by breaking down about this. “I was stripped of my title, but not my citizenship.” She nodded her head to Mama and Papa. “That isn’t something we do unless the person involved asks for it.”
Mama’s face became implacable as stone. “Nevertheless,” she said in her frostiest voice of the Queen, “children shouldn’t be held accountable for the sins of their parents.”

“No,” Luke said, looking at Mama, “but in an ideal world, children wouldn’t be asked to clean up their parents’ mess either.”

Dammit, up until this point, he had been hearing them. Even better, part of him was listening. But the bigger part, the part of him that hadn’t grown up yet, was looking to pick a fight.

Whatever Mama was going to say was lost at the sound of a knock on the door.

They all looked around at each other.

Han let out a long groan. “I just wanted to eat breakfast,” he whined. “What new problem is going to walk in, now?”

“You don’t know that,” Leia said. “It could be Chewie, or someone looking for Mama and Papa.”

“I’m eating with you all,” Han muttered. “It’s not going to be that simple.”

Threepio went to answer the door. Han was right, it turned out to be a complication.

Ahsoka came three steps into the room and paused. She took careful note of everyone there, and remarked dryly, “I feel like I’ve entered into a hostage situation.”

“There is no fighting at the breakfast table,” Leia and Luke said at the same time.

Everyone looked at them, but Leia couldn’t pay them too much attention. Luke was looking at her like she had revealed the most important truth in the galaxy. “He told you that one too?” he asked, for once the bitterness and envy about his alternate gone from his voice.


Obi-Wan leaned forward, catching Leia’s attention. “Please explain what you mean by that,” he said. Leia blinked, Obi-Wan looked desperate to have an answer to what she thought was a rather simple thing.

Luke shot him a dirty look, and all softness was gone from his face. “It was Aunt Beru’s rule,” he said, voice bordering on snotty. He muttered, “Not that you would know that.”

Leia winced at the guilt-stricken look on Obi-Wan’s face.

Threepio made a tut-tut noise. “I certainly didn’t bring food for you, Mistress Tano. If, in the future, you could inform me of your plans, I would be most appreciative.”

Ahsoka gave the droid a gentle smile. “My apologies, it was a last-minute decision on my part. I’ve already eaten, but if you wouldn’t mind, I would love some caf.”

Threepio sighed but turned and walked out the door. Leia watched him go, but didn’t say anything about how Ahsoka just imperiously ordered the droid away. It was probably for the best, given Threepio’s inability to keep anything to himself.

As soon as the droid cleared the room, Han cleared his throat. “Wanna explain for the people who don’t know what you are talking about?” he asked Luke.

Luke sighed. “Aunt Beru had a rule that there was no fighting at the breakfast table. It was the first
time you would see each other for the day, and it might be your last.” He shook his head. “She knew that people fight. But there, at breakfast, that is a place of peace. So you could-“

“Settle your mind for the day,” Obi-Wan chimed in with him in unison. He was staring at Luke, astonishment on his face. Luke blinked, and the rest of them stared at him, surprised.

“Thought you weren’t welcome at the Lars?” Han asked suspiciously.

“I wasn’t,” he said hoarsely, and beside him, Ahsoka was staring at Luke in shock as well.

“But…” he cleared his throat, “Anakin had a…rocky adolescence.” His eyes grew distant. “And there was conflict, especially once he got comfortable around me. But the first time we had a disagreement over breakfast, he was visibly shaken.” Obi-Wan let out a long sigh. “Later, after I had cooled down, I asked him why this fight had affected him so badly. He said, almost word for word, what you just did, Luke.”

Vader, according to what she understood about his history, had only met Beru Lars once. And it had been after he had joined the Jedi. This rule predated his meeting the Lars. This rule wasn’t Aunt Beru’s. It was Shmi’s rule. Leia’s grandmother’s rule. A rule that Leia had incorporated into her own life with her loved ones. It had made sense to her, and while her parents had never so clearly made it a declarative sentence, it certainly was understood that same feeling applied to their family breakfasts as well.

Leia had also incorporated it because it was a way to honor the family she had never gotten to meet. But they had both shaped so much of what she loved about Luke.

Luke had done the same with her tradition of everyone eating breakfast together if they were on the same planet, for the same reasons as she had adopted his traditions. Back when they had been together enough for that to happen. When had they fallen out of practice with it? When she sent Ben to Luke? Or further, when Luke had left them all to found his school? And neither she nor Han had gone out there enough to keep the ties as strong as they should have been?

Luke’s face went pale. “Oh,” he whispered. “I didn’t know it was grandmother’s rule.”

Obi-Wan looked nervous. “I didn’t either,” he confessed. “I thought it was a local Tatooine custom,” he said, almost pleading to Ahsoka’s astonished face. And how screwed up was the Jedi Order that he felt the need to explain that he had inadvertently let Vader keep a part of his mother? No matter how much sense it made, or the fact that it had been decades since the Jedi Order had existed.

He turned back to Luke. “And it was a wise one. Your father and I,” he trailed off, and a bitter smile crossed his lips. “We had a lot of disagreements.”

“You mean fights,” Ahsoka said, face tightening with her disapproval. “They were fights, Obi-Wan.”

Obi-Wan shook his head. “No, fight meant we-“

“Hurt each other?” Ahsoka interrupted gently. She sighed and walked over to the sitting area to grab the last chair and brought it so that she was next to Obi-Wan. She swung into it so that she was sitting perpendicular to Obi-Wan, not sitting properly at the table.

“We didn’t fight,” he said, an almost desperate edge to his voice.

Ahsoka just looked at him calmly.
Obi-Wan’s face twisted, as he wrestled with something. Then his shoulders slumped. “They weren’t all fights,” he protested, somewhat weakly. His look was pleading that she agree with at least that.

A small fond smile played on Ahsoka’s lips. “No,” she said. “They weren’t. Sometimes you both were just playing.” Then a frown crossed her forehead. “But I think you and he had very different ideas of when you were playing, and when you were hurting each other.”


“I know,” Ahsoka said. She reached out and took his hand in hers. “That doesn’t mean you didn’t,” her voice was soothing and gentle.

Obi-Wan looked away from her and cleared his throat. “I would have done anything to avoid what happened on Mustafar, Ahsoka.”

Ahsoka cut him off before he could flail about more. “Rako Hardeen, Obi-Wan.”

Obi-Wan flinched and took his hand out of hers. “That’s what Rex was talking about?”

She put a hand on his cheek. “I know why you did what you did,” she said gently.

“I was ordered to,” Obi-Wan said, and there was nothing but misery on his face.

“I know,” Ahsoka said.


Ahsoka sighed. “Fake his own death.”

Han looked from Ahsoka to Obi-Wan. “That’s what Rex was talking about?” he asked. “When he said Luke and Leia weren’t allowed to fake their own deaths?”

Both of them nodded.

Han leaned back in his chair. “And you didn’t tell Vader?”

Obi-Wan shook his head.

Han whistled through his teeth. “That was a shitty thing to do,” he said.

Obi-Wan looked uncomfortable. “It was war,” he said.

“Doesn’t make it any less shitty.”

“No,” Obi-Wan admitted. “But there was a reasonable chance that if the mission was a complete success, we could end the war.” He closed his eyes. “I could see what the war was doing to all of us, especially Anakin. I thought he would see the necessity of it, especially if it got us Dooku.”

“That blew up in your face,” Han observed.

Leia wouldn’t have put it so crassly, but she couldn’t help but agree with Han. It was a minor miracle that Vader had been willing to work with Obi-Wan at all after that. If Luke and Han had done the same thing to her, she wasn’t sure she could ever trust them again.

But maybe, that had been the point.
“Why?” Leia asked, leaning forward.

“Why what?” Obi-Wan asked, sounding defeated.

“Why were you ordered to fake your death?”

Ahsoka snorted. “So he could pretend to be the bounty hunter who murdered him.”

“And why would you want to do that?” Han asked when she didn’t go any further than that.

“Because we were trying to break up a plot to kidnap the Chancellor,” Obi-Wan rubbed his forehead. “It was thought that the ringleader would trust someone who was infamous for “killing” a Jedi. Rako Hardeen was human, and my height.”

Luke’s eyes narrowed. “Who was trying to kidnap Palpatine?”

Obi-Wan’s smile was very bitter. “Count Dooku.”

Luke cursed, and Han looked taken aback.

“Hell,” he said. “I thought Jabba liked plots within plots. The Emperor is playing on a whole different level.”

It was as Leia had suspected, but she wanted to be sure she understood all the details here. “Who actually gave you the order Obi-Wan?”

Obi-Wan looked tired. “The Council,” he said. “And they were the ones that forbade me from telling Anakin. They thought his obvious grief would help sell the ruse.”

“They weren’t wrong,” Ahsoka said.

“I warned them he would not take it well,” Obi-Wan defended himself. “But they said that if he was really a Jedi Knight, he would let it go.”

Ahsoka let out a laugh, and there was a tinge of hysteria to it. “Obi-Wan, I was raised in the temple, and I didn’t take it well.”

Obi-Wan stiffened. “If you are still angry about it-“

Ahsoka shook her head. “No,” she said firmly. “I don’t have enough loved ones left to throw people out of my life over things that happened decades ago.” She gave him a soft smile. “Besides, I did come to peace with it. It was many years later, but I did.”

“It’s easier to forgive a dead man,” Obi-Wan said softly.

“It is,” Ahsoka agreed. “But it is also easy to become lonely on a mountain of self-righteousness.” She leaned forward and put her forehead to his. “And I missed you too much to not stay here now.”

Obi-Wan looked at her speechless. “How can you forgive me?” he whispered.

Ahsoka drew back. “Maybe because I was there, and I know how much what you did cost you? Maybe because looking back, as an adult, I could see how much the war was wearing you down, just as much, if not more, than Anakin?” She gave his hand a squeeze. “Or maybe I’m too old to hold grudges anymore. That is best left to the young.”

Ahsoka could think what she liked. Leia had at least ten years on her, and she held on to her
“Or maybe because, despite the fact your orders came from the Council, it sounds suspiciously like something Palpatine dreamed up and ordered them to do.” Her face became fierce. “It’s like Han said, we all walked into the trap. And even if it wasn’t his idea in the first place, Palpatine had to know in the aftermath, what that would do to you and Anakin’s relationship.”

Obi-Wan looked away. “You heard that fight?” he asked in a strangled voice.

“I think the entire Temple heard that fight,” Ahsoka said dryly.

“So, if Father failed the Jedi’s test of his control,” Luke asked, “why did they keep him in the Order?”

Obi-Wan looked uncomfortable. “They wouldn’t have kicked him out of his home, Luke.”

Ahsoka snorted. “Of course, they would have Obi-Wan. It’s what they did to me.”

“You left,” Obi-Wan protested.

Ahsoka bared her teeth at him. “After the Council threw me on Tarkin’s mercy.”

The two of them stared at each other fiercely for a moment, then Papa cleared his throat. “I’m pretty sure I have a good idea as to why Anakin was allowed to stay,” he said.

All of them looked at him. “Oh?” Obi-Wan asked.

Papa nodded. “It was before you were on the Council, Obi-Wan. The Jedi were under enormous pressure to deliver victories.”

“That didn’t change after I was made a counselor,” Obi-Wan responded bitterly.

Papa nodded. “That is true. But you also weren’t ever put in the hot seat with the Senate Finance and War committees either. Because you had a record of delivering victories. Other council members, the ones who weren’t on the front lines, got much more pointed questions about that.”

Obi-Wan’s mouth dropped open. “They all served on the front,” he said. “As much as they could. For Force sakes, Yoda was almost nine hundred years old, he had no business being in a war zone in the first place.”

“Oh, but it was okay for the fourteen-year-old,” Leia said pointedly.

Obi-Wan flinched, but Papa only looked grave. “I know,” he said. “But my point was, that even by then, Anakin’s record was impressive. The Jedi couldn’t afford to throw him out. Not without weakening their political position even further.”

“Probably best they didn’t,” Leia murmured, thinking out loud.

“I beg your pardon?” Obi-Wan asked.

She grimaced, she actually hadn’t meant to say that out loud, but since she had, she might as well explain her reasoning. “If he had left the Order Obi-Wan, who would he have gone running to?”

“Padme,” Obi-Wan and Ahsoka said in unison.

“I-I hadn’t considered that,” Leia admitted. If he had been thrown out of the Order, that meant his
marriage would no longer be a problem. It was an interesting point, but Leia shook her head.

“Even if he had, there is no way Palpatine would leave him alone,” she said. “If only for the fact that he was a powerful weapon that could have been used against him. If he had been expelled, thrown from the only support he knew, he might have fallen faster.”

“Or he might not have fallen at all,” Luke said angrily. “Since the system he was relying on was part of the problem.”

Ahsoka shrugged. “Possibly,” she allowed. “But not withstanding my, and Leia’s, unique circumstances, it’s pointless to argue about what-ifs.”

“Ahsoka is right,” Leia said, then gave her parent’s a stern look. “Which is not the same thing as withholding what actually happened so that we can recreate all the same mistakes from before.”

Her parents looked slightly taken aback, but Leia wasn’t going to let them think that just because she didn’t see the need to rehash what might have been done, didn’t mean she didn’t need to know what had been done.

“You’re one to talk,” Luke said darkly.

Leia transferred her glare to him. “What is that supposed to mean?” she demanded.

Luke huffed. “It means that every time you hear anything that would explain how Father ended up where he did, you brush it aside as unimportant, because you hate him. But anything else about how the galaxy ended up in this mess, you listen to with patience and understanding.”

Leia’s mouth dropped open. “What good does it do me to learn about Vader’s past?” she hissed back. “I’m trying to stop the galaxy spinning itself out of control. For the third time.”

Luke’s eyes narrowed. “And learning how Father fell isn’t at all relevant to rebuilding the Jedi Order better this time?” He leaned forward, so that he was practically in her face. “Tell me if you had known what happened between Father and Palpatine, the conditioning and warping that man put Father through as a child, you wouldn’t have handled Ben and Snoke differently than you did?”

Leia reared back, stunned that Luke would even dare to compare the two.

“Kid,” Han said softly in warning.

Luke flushed, as if he realized he had gone too far, but then his chin went up in stubbornness, and he squared his shoulders. “No,” he said firmly. “I’m right, and she knows it. That’s why she’s so mad.”

There was nothing but a tense silence at that proclamation, as Leia could feel everyone else in the room watching her, waiting to see what she would do.

It might have started with Luke, or more accurately with their grandmother, but no fighting at breakfast was a rule Leia held to. She took a deep breath in, and closed her eyes, focusing on that swirling rage in her mind, trying to find a way to submerge it, tame it, or best of all, let it go. But underneath all her efforts to master it, was the chant of her inner five-year-old going, “It’s not the same. It’s not the same. It’s not the same.”

“Isn’t it?” asked Luke. The Luke in her mind, not the one sitting beside her that she desperately wanted to lash out at. The Luke that had tried to tell her about what he had learned about Vader, and she had argued with and refused to listen to.
Gods, was this Luke, right? Had refusing to listen to Luke damned her son? Like her parents, had she refused to learn from the past? Worse yet, cripple any chance Ben had to fight back?

The Force whirled around her, scooping up her guilt, her helplessness, her fear, and anger, and offered it all up to her. She only needed to drop her control just the tiniest bit, and that coldness would seep into her bones. It was there, begging to be used, and to take all this pain away.

It was a choice she had made once before. After Alderaan, and being plagued by what if’s and internal doubts, she had embraced that cold to keep going, to keep moving. It would stop this pain, right now, and let her think.

She could feel the strongest of her walls, start to thin, just a little, when a startling warmth was suddenly cupping her face. It made Leia shiver, as that internal frost she had begun to embrace was suddenly bathed in love and care.

“No,” a voice echoed across her mental landscape, and she found her eyes fluttering open. Oh, it was Luke’s hands that was the source of all that heat. He was holding her chin and forcing her to look at him. “Leia, don’t.”

Leia felt her temper rise at that question. How dare he question her? He was the reason she was even in this position in the first place. That cold icy blankness existing outside the walls of her mind, suddenly became a hot fire that was dancing along her skin, promising her everything, if she just used it. Just this once, that is all it wanted.

“Why not?” she asked, only half interested in his answer, more entranced by the power that was just outside of her reach.

“Because I will follow you,” he said simply.

And that was all she needed. The thought of Luke embracing this rage, and that was what this was, rage, left her frightened enough to realize what she was doing. Leia felt her breath leave her in a whoosh, as she deliberately turned away from those false lies the Dark Side was offering, and let the pain of Luke’s accusation wash over her. Pain wasn’t anything new to her, she had spent her whole life with it as one of her constant companions. She wouldn’t run from a burden she knew how to bear, if it meant endangering Luke.

Leia took in one long breath, and held it for a moment, trying to ride the eddies and emotions in her mind. On the out breath, she let the pain and confusion hit her in a wave. Then she took in another deep breath, rising above her feelings, and on the out, embracing them in turn.

After several of these, she felt more herself, and not a raging riot of poorly controlled impulses. Her logical side, the part of her not gibbering at her in panic at what she had just almost done, was pointing out no matter if Luke was right or not, she wasn’t responsible for Ben’s fall.

“No, Ben was.”

She took another breath in and fought back that traitorous thought. Snoke had corrupted her son. He had eaten at the foundations of the person Ben could have, should have been, and left someone who was consumed by his own emotions.

“And the Emperor didn’t do the same to Vader?”

And now that voice sounded too like Mama for Leia to so easily dismiss it.

Now was not the time to think about this. Not until Leia was calmer, more at peace. And definitely
not when she could feel the bitter copper taste of the Dark Side lingering in the room. She focused on the physical world around her and opened her eyes. At some point, she had closed them again, although she couldn’t recall when.

Luke was still in front of her, his hands cupping her face.

“I’m alright,” she said softly.

He gave her a worried look. “You sure?”

She nodded. “The intensity of the feedback took me by surprise, that’s all.”

He looked like he wanted to argue, but his hands did slip from her face. Obi-Wan was very pale, and Leia could see the fine tremors along his hands. She couldn’t really blame him. She hadn’t accessed the Dark Side, not really, but it certainly had been drawn to her. And given what happened the last time he was that close to the Dark Side, she couldn’t fault him if he was reliving some very horrible memories.

Then she got a good look at his face. There was fear there, no question, but there was also a good deal of awe. Leia was getting very tired of that look being aimed at her.

“Now what did I do?” she asked him, aware of the snappishness of her voice, but unable to keep it from coming out.

“Proving that you know yourself very well, Leia.”

Leia frowned, not understanding what the hell he was talking about.

Obi-Wan’s eyes slid to Luke and then back to her. “Where one of you goes, the other follows.” Something like pain flashed in his eyes, but his voice was steady. “As to what you did, why only withdraw from the Dark Side. Because of your attachment. Something that flies in the face of a thousand years of Jedi doctrine.”

Well, that wasn’t the answer she had been expecting. But Leia supposed that it was better than sending him into a panic attack about how very much like Vader she really was. Not that she thought for a moment that if she had accessed the Dark Side in this room, she would have immediately started killing her loved ones and seeking galactic domination. But it would make the next time she was upset or angry, just that much easier to rely on it.

“Not to minimize the two of them doing the impossible again,” Ahsoka’s voice was deliberately light, “but can I ask a question?”

Leia waved her hand. “Sure, why not?”

“Who’s Snoke?”

Leia debated with herself on what to say to that, but Han beat her to it. “Best as I can tell, he was who replaced the Emperor.”

Leia opened her mouth, that wasn’t quite right, but before she could contradict that, the door slammed open.

As one, everyone at the table’s head swung towards it, to see Rex standing there, chest heaving, and face red. Leia immediately stood, her chair clattering to the floor, echoed by both Han and Luke’s chairs as they surged to their feet as well.
“Rex,” Leia asked in a fast voice, “what’s wrong?” She hadn’t sensed anything in the Force about there being a cause for alarm, but she had spent most of the morning consciously ignoring it, in an effort to keep out Luke. Then she had become too lost in her own emotions to accurately read anything, good or bad.

Rex ignored her and stalked up to Ahsoka, who, along with Obi-Wan, had remained seated. She calmly watched as he approached her, anger coming off him in waves.

When he was almost on top of her, he pointed a finger in her face. “You are sending Leia off-world?” he demanded in a bellowing voice.

“Yes, Rex,” Ahsoka said calmly. “I am.”

Everything in Leia relaxed at that. Oh, so that was what this was about. She reached behind her, and with a wave of the Force, brought both her and Han’s chairs back to upright positions. Luke did the same thing with his, and the three of them took their seats.

But Mama and Papa were still sitting. As she watched, both of them slowly unfroze.

They had training. Leia knew they had combat training. It was mostly self-defense, but they had had it. Alderaan was a pacifistic society, but Mama and Papa weren’t stupid. It was better to be able to defend yourself, and choose not to use it, then to be completely vulnerable.

But they still froze when an unexpected person, body language screaming murder, walked into a room they were in. That was a major weakness in a battle. Not that either of them had ever seen a battle. Well, perhaps Papa had, or at least the tail end of ones. He had certainly seen the aftermath of what had been done to the Jedi Temple, and he had done a lot of relief work during the Clone Wars.

It was still a vulnerability, though, for their own survival, and Leia’s sanity. From the moment Leia entered this time stream, they were a spot for an enemy to strike at. Especially since she knew now that they weren’t the untouchable giants she had always seen them as in her youth. They could be taken from her, and she knew exactly what it was like to live without them. She would never forgive herself if something happened to them again.

As her gaze flowed to Obi-Wan, she had to wonder how he had managed to stay so calm and keep his seat. Perhaps the answer lay in the small amused smile on his lips. Rex on a rampage could be something he was very familiar with.

Or he was enjoying that for once the tirade wasn’t aimed at him. Leia had to wonder how many “lectures” Rex had given his old General when Leia wasn’t there to see it. If the amount of glee Obi-Wan was showing at the prospect of Ahsoka getting one, quite a lot.

“With only Solo as her backup?” Rex protested.

“Hey!” Han sputtered. “I do just fine.”

Ahsoka didn’t look ruffled. “And Chewbacca,” she pointed out.

Leia cleared her throat, and both Ahsoka and Rex looked at her. “If you don’t mind, Luke,” she said, “I would like to bring R2. Provided he wants to come along.”

“Why?” Ahsoka asked.

Leia stiffened. Ahsoka knew R2, and she had the audacity to ask that? Then she caught the intent
gleam in the woman’s eyes. A test. Well, it wasn’t like Leia wasn’t doing her own tests of Ahsoka’s abilities and loyalties. “He’s one of the best slicers I know. Better to have him there, and not need his help, then need him, and him not being there.”

Ahsoka gave a satisfied smile, pleased with Leia’s answer.

Luke nodded. “Sure, if he wants to,” he said.

Leia really didn’t think that was going to be an issue. If he had been an organic, she would accuse the droid of being an adrenaline junkie.

Apparently, neither did Ahsoka. “See Rex,” she said breezily. “Leia is taking Chewbacca and R2. She’ll be fine.”

Rex did not look mollified. “R2 is worth a small army,” he said through clenched teeth. “But I want to know why I’m not going?”

Ahsoka didn’t answer him, choosing instead to reach out and grab Obi-Wan’s mug. She scowled at him after she took a sip. “Tea, Obi-Wan?” she complained.

“It’s my drink,” he pointed out. “I don’t need to drink what you like.”

She shoved it back at him. “There is something wrong with you that you can function this efficiently without caf.”

Another thing Leia agreed with Ahsoka about.

“Ahsoka,” Rex growled, clearly at the end of his patience.

Mama looked between the two of them, tension on her face. “Rex, why don’t you take a s-“ her voice trailed off as she realized there were no seats to offer. “We are definitely going to need more chairs,” Mama murmured to herself. “Possibly a bigger table.”

“No, thank you, Your Majesty,” Rex said in a frigid voice. “I’m good with standing.”

Ahsoka looked up at him. “You aren’t going with Leia to Nimban, because I need you to go to Lothal, Rex.”

Leia blinked. She knew Ahsoka had said that she had a plan for dealing with Rex. She had just figured it would be babysitting Luke, or some other made-up chore. She hadn’t realized that Ahsoka would actually send Rex on his own mission. Leia felt a pang in her heart at the thought of Rex off-world, where someone she didn’t know, would be watching his back.

Leia didn’t like the thought of Rex trying to get to Lothal. Oh, Lothal itself, was fine, Rex would be in no danger there, but getting there was another matter altogether. The Empire might have relinquished its hold on that planet, due to its physical position in the outer reaches of known space. Currently, the amount of effort it would take to reel it back in wasn’t worth the cost. They had declared the planet lost to a natural disaster on the holo net, and with its remoteness and lack of strategic value, what average citizen of the Empire would even want to go there in the first place?

Leia supposed the long-term plan was to use the Death Star, when it was completed, and have the planet taken out so that the lie could become truth. Of course, Lothal wouldn’t have been the only planet to suffer such a fate. Any system, where there was even a hint of resistance, would have been obliterated.
That had never come to pass, not in Leia’s past, or the present that she found herself in. The Empire had no Death Star, and because there were so many other planets in quiet revolt, the Empire didn’t have the resources to spend on such an insignificant issue as bringing Lothal back into the fold.

That didn’t mean that the Empire wasn’t watching Lothal. They were well aware of the close connections between the planet and the Rebellion, for all that it wasn’t anything approaching a formal alliance. The hyperspace lanes in that sector of space were heavily patrolled, and there were remote spying droids, littering the system. Any and all ships heading to Lothal the Empire attempted to destroy or capture.

It was a two-prong approach. The first, and most obvious, was trying to blockade any and all supplies heading to Lothal, and doing everything it could to sabotage the planet. Fortunately, the ecological damage done by the Empire wasn’t severe enough to endanger their ability to feed themselves. From what Leia recalled, the first year had been lean, but manageable. But there were no facilities on Lothal capable of manufacturing medications. The fight to free Lothal had also destroyed several of the factories that could have been used to manufacture materials for computers, buildings, and ships. What they could produce to support their own infrastructure was very limited. These were also facts that the Empire was aware of, or would make a good guess at. So, the blockade was there in order to make life that much more difficult for them. It was cruelty, simply for the sake of being cruel.

The second, and more sinister reason, was the Empire was making sure that the Rebellion did not use Lothal as a staging ground. It would take a lot of effort to bring that planet back into the fold. It was an effort that the leadership of the Imperial Navy and Army didn’t want to expend. Well, the smart ones anyway.

The deepest irony was, the Alliance wasn’t stupid enough to even try. The logistical nightmare of trying to move there, undetected no less, was beyond the Alliance’s capabilities. Plus, it’s remote location, which made it such a tricky thing to bring back into the Empire, also made it so the Alliance would have a hard time hitting any targets quickly in the Mid-Rim and Core worlds. The headaches it would cause them wasn’t worth the temporary advantage it would give them to go there.

But that didn’t mean it wasn’t a risk to send Rex to Lothal. It had been one to go get Kallus. It was why Hera, for all that she was a general in the Alliance, wasn’t often here. The communications between them was fraught for other reasons besides Sabine Wren's declaration that Lothal was staying out of the Rebellion. Any increase in chatter between Yavin and Lothal would bring added attention to the hyperspace lanes around Lothal. The Empire would use the existence of those communiques to figure out when high-value target’s were coming or leaving the planet.

And Rex certainly was a highly valuable target.

Rex, voicing Leia’s own thoughts, hissed. “Why am I going back to Lothal?”

“Well, Kallus needs to go back,” Ahsoka said. “Hera wouldn’t like it if we kept him.”

Rex folded his arms across his chest. “Kallus is a big boy, he can fly his own damn ship there.” His golden eyes narrowed. “Why am I really going, Ahsoka?”

“I need you to get Sabine,” Ahsoka said smoothly, as if this wasn’t the oddest request to come out of nowhere.

Rex snorted. “If you think Hera would be mad about us taking Kallus, she would be downright furious if you are trying to woo Sabine away.”
“I wouldn’t even bother. Sabine wouldn’t come,” Ahsoka said, waving her hand in the air. “But you aren’t coming back to Yavin. At least not directly. You, her, and Obi-Wan are making a trip to Mandalore.”

At the name of that planet, Leia stiffened, then forced herself to relax before the others in the room took notice. Mandalore was one of the planets she had been keeping a close eye on, aware of what the Empire had done to it in her past. But so far, she hadn’t seen the buildup of military forces in that system that would be a cause for concern. But she wasn’t given access to the level of intel Ahsoka had now. What had the woman seen that Leia wasn’t aware of?

Obi-Wan gave an undignified squawk at that. “How did I get pulled into this?” he demanded. “And why would I even go to Mandalore?”

Ahsoka gave him a sweet smile. “Because I am asking you to.”

Obi-Wan gave her a sharp look. “I know you too well to take that on face value.”

“I learned from the best,” Ahsoka said back calmly.

Obi-Wan’s face fell into his hands. “Anakin was a horrible influence on you,” he complained.

Rex snorted. “Yes, because you were the model of following orders to the letter.”

Ahsoka looked interested. “He wasn’t?” she asked.

Rex shook his head, and Obi-Wan sighed and pulled his face out of his hands. “No,” he said ruefully. “I wasn’t. Especially after the Rako Hardeen incident. I just never did it in front of you, or Anakin.”

“Hmmm,” Ahsoka looked thoughtful. “Yet, as I recall, there were plenty of lectures, even after the fake murdered incident, about listening to the wisdom of the council. Do as you say, not as you do?”

Leia leaned back in her chair, enjoying the show as someone else was now here, to call Obi-Wan out. At least willing to do it in front of her. Mama burning his clothes showed that neither of her parents were going gentle on him either, but they never would do so publicly. It wasn’t their way.

Obi-Wan’s mouth opened and closed soundlessly for a few moments. “In the beginning, perhaps I was more…zealous then I should have been,” he admitted. “But it wasn’t the same. I was an adult and knew what the costs would be for disobeying orders.”

Ahsoka’s eyes narrowed. “That may be. But I’m hardly a child now.”

“Ahsoka,” Obi-Wan’s voice was full of warning.

And just like that, the woman gave him a saucy grin. “You need to be teased more,” she informed him, reaching over and grabbing a ration bar off his plate. Leia noticed he didn’t complain about that being stolen. “Nobody outside of this room has called you on your bantha shit for far too long. Did you really think I would start ordering you around now, just because I could?”

Leia could feel Luke’s fascination at the casual way Ahsoka wound Obi-Wan up and down. She was right, Obi-Wan did need more people to challenge him. Not that what Ahsoka said was strictly true. Obi-Wan didn’t work for the Alliance. He…well, if truth be told, his position was a lot like Han’s. And wouldn’t that fact just horrify Han? But it was true, Obi-Wan held no rank, and couldn’t be ordered to do anything. He merely was consulted and asked for advice. Come to think
of it, was Obi-Wan being paid? Or compensated in some way for his work? Or was a safe harbor something the Alliance Council had decided was compensation enough?

Obi-Wan let out a long groan, and Leia brought her attention back to him. He was rubbing his forehead. “None of this explains why I need to go to Mandalore.”

“Because you are very familiar with their culture, and I need you to talk to Bo-Katan,” Ahsoka said.

Obi-Wan didn’t look like that cleared up anything for him. “Why?”

“Because you are about the only person on this base she will listen to,” Ahsoka said calmly.

Papa’s voice was sharp with his incredulity. “Ahsoka, are you sending an envoy to Mandalore?”

Leia agreed with Papa, but not for the same reasons she knew he had. He couldn’t see the sense in making such a move, especially with the risk of Obi-Wan, Rex, and Sabine being captured thrown into the bargain. Leia was worried about why out of nowhere, Ahsoka was making this decision.

Obi-Wan sputtered. “Bo-Katan isn’t going to listen to my pleas to get the rebel faction of Mandalore to join the Alliance.”

“Of course, she isn’t,” Ahsoka agreed calmly. “But that isn’t why you are going. I’ve been going over the reports and intel we have. It’s shameful how much the Alliance was pressuring these outside groups to give up their autonomy. But as Trehhipoi has shown, there is a great deal of knowledge and intel to be gained if we just make the smallest effort to talk to them.”


Ahsoka nodded. “From certain angles, yes. And although the Empire has stayed out of Mandalore’s civil war-”

“For now,” Rex muttered darkly.

“For now,” Ahsoka agreed. Then quick as a nexu, she looked at Leia. “But by the look on your face earlier, I don’t think that is a state of affairs that is going to last much longer.”

Leia winced, as all eyes turned to her. Foolish of her to think Ahsoka wasn’t paying close attention to every reaction Leia had. “Maybe,” she said. “Maybe not.”

Ahsoka cocked her head. “I can’t force you to tell me anything, Leia,” she said. “And I assume you have your reasons for keeping your silence. But I would like to know if I’m sending people into a trap.”

Leia bit her lip, weighing the possibilities and probabilities in her head. She looked at everyone in the room, staring at her expectantly. She had promised that she would let them help her. Excepting Ahsoka, whose abilities Leia didn’t doubt, she trusted every person in this room with her life. More than her life, the survival of the Rebellion. But she didn’t want to influence their thinking too much.

“Not that I am aware of,” she said slowly.

Leia looked at Ahsoka. “Has the military presence hovering on the edges of that sector increased in the last few months?”

Ahsoka tapped her fingers on her arm, her own mental calculations going on. “No,” she said at last. “In fact, the presence of that fleet has shrunk, as more and more ships are pulled away to deal with other situations occurring in the galaxy.”

Leia let out a sigh of relief. “That’s what my understanding of the situation was too.”

Papa leaned forward. “Leia, why were you paying attention at all to Mandalore?”

Leia looked at him. She was afraid of influencing his viewpoint too much. He simply regarded her patiently, no demand in his eyes. He wanted to help her, Leia knew that, and there was simply too much going on for her to see to every problem that was going to crop up. Besides, the Alliance had been watching that fleet, long before Leia had made her arrival into this time, because everyone knew that the Empire was going to get involved sooner or later in Mandalore.

“Because in my original timeline, at this point, the Empire was gearing up its forces to purge Mandalore of all seditious elements.”

Papa paled, and Mama whispered, horrified. “The Empire did what?”

Obi-Wan only frowned. “Why wait so long?” he asked. “I was given to understand this war started well over a year ago.”

Leia gave him a bitter smile. “They didn’t get involved in Mandalore before this because they thought they would have the Death Star to level the planet. Why spend the resources to subdue it, when you could obliterate it with a flick of a button? When that fell through….” Her voice trailed off.

“I don’t understand,” Luke said. “Why is it considered so bad that the Empire purged this planet? They do it all the time in the Outer Rim.”

Han snorted. “You ever met a Mandalorian?”


“They consider war their religion,” Han hissed. “It’s not so easy to just roll over them.”

Obi-Wan looked tired. “Not all of them,” he corrected. “And even for the ones that do, their faith is a bit more complicated than that, Captain Solo.”

“You and I have met some very different Mandalorians.”

Rex snapped his fingers and pointed at Ahsoka. “You weren’t planning to send Obi-Wan there just as a goodwill gesture,” he breathed. “He’s taking what intel we know about those armaments with him.”

Ashoka nodded.

Mama looked confused. “I don’t understand,” she confessed.

“Thin the line,” Leia and Luke said in unison, as why Ahsoka was taking this insane gamble became clear to both of them at the same time.

Rex’s voice was flat. “Ahsoka is hoping that with more actionable intelligence, the Mandalorians in rebellion will notch up their efforts and draw even more resources to that planet.”

Mama frowned. “Why?”

“Because I want the Empire fighting as many wars as it possibly can, on as many fronts.” Ahsoka leaned forward and placed her chin in her propped up hand. “The idea to put pressure on the Hutts and rupture that alliance is a good one. But it isn’t the only weak point that we can put pressure on.”

“Why involve Mandalore?” Luke asked. “And not some of the other groups that Trehhipoi is trying to bring in?”

Ahsoka’s smile was grim. “You heard Han. For many of them, war is their way of life. And because of that, they have an army Luke, not a guerrilla force.”

Luke opened his mouth to protest, but Ahsoka put her hands up to stop him. “I am not saying that those Outer Rim groups don’t know what they are doing,” she said firmly. “And that they haven’t done damage to the Empire and the Hutts. What I’m saying is that Mandalore has the capability to build their own ships. Even better, they have weapons designers, so they can improve them on a mass scale operation, not ad hoc.”

She gave him a rueful grin. “I would also like to point out that they are ahead of the Alliance in that regard as well.”

Luke frowned. “The Empire let them keep factories that build weapons?”

Han, surprisingly, was the one who answered that question. “Of course, they did, Kid. Because they also build weapons for the Empire.” He scowled. “Just like what happened on Corellia with their shipyards.”

“Also, the Mandalorians would have rioted if an outside power tried to impose disarmament on them,” Ahsoka pointed out. “Especially after the chaos of the Clone Wars and their second civil war.”

Luke paled. “How many civil wars have they had?” he asked aghast.

“Three in the last forty years,” Obi-Wan said grimly. “And the first one was fought because one of their own tried to disarm them.”

“She succeeded,” Papa pointed out.

Obi-Wan looked pale. “No, she didn’t. She only temporarily halted the insanity.”

Mama looked grave. “That is not nothing, Obi-Wan. She did more than anyone else has in that regard for centuries.”

Obi-Wan’s face twisted. “She died, Breha, and it was all for nothing. The Mandalorians went right back to slaughtering each other.”

Ahsoka sent Obi-Wan a sympathetic glance. “Not all of them,” she said softly as she gave Obi-Wan’s hand a hard squeeze. “But those wars are why early in the Empire’s formation, picking a fight with Mandalore wasn’t a battle the Empire wanted to wage. Far easier to install a pro-Imperial force to rule them, and in the meanwhile, co-opt the ones they could, taking their best and brightest away to work for the Empire.”
Luke rubbed his forehead. “So, what happened? Why is Mandalore in a civil war again?”

“Sabine Wren happened,” Rex said proudly. “She found the Darksaber—”

“Yes, I’ve been meaning to ask,” Obi-Wan interrupted, muscle in his jaw tense, “how did you pry that away from Maul?”

“Long story,” Rex said, “which I will tell you another time. But Sabine had it, Kanan trained her to use it and challenged Gar Saxon, the Imperial Viceroy and Governor of Mandalore. When she defeated him, she created a power vacuum on the planet. One that she convinced Bo-Katan to fill.”


“Former regent of Mandalore,” Mama said. “And considered by many to be the rightful ruler of that world. A position that she has made more secure by having possession of the Darksaber, since Sabine gave it to her.”

“Her position got stronger because she has a black sword?” Luke sounded dubious. “They aren’t that hard to make, you know. Having one doesn’t sound like it should make your political position stronger.”

Obi-Wan blew a breath out. “The Dark Saber is a lightsaber, Luke. It belonged to the first Mandalorian Jedi, a man named Tarre Vizsla. After he died, Vizla clan stole it from the Jedi. Shortly after that, Clan Vizla cemented their hold on ruling all of Mandalore. They hold great store by it.”

Luke only looked flabbergasted. “And Core Worlder’s think the Outer Rim is backwards?”

Ahsoka huffed lightly. “Oh, they think Mandalore is backwards too,” she said. “But given the long history of Mandalore trying, and almost succeeding in destroying the Republic, they have learned a lot of caution.”

Luke sobered at that. “They that good?”

Ahsoka nodded. “The clone’s training was based on their methods.”

Luke looked thoughtful, instead of outraged like he usually did when that subject was brought up.

“It would create a hell of a pressure point for the Empire,” Ahsoka said. “There is all the history involved, and they could do a lot of damage, for all the fact that they are outnumbered.”

Papa looked troubled. “They went to war with the Empire in Leia’s past, and they lost, Ahsoka. I don’t want to help them along to the same fate.”

Luke looked confused. “But you just said they were fighting each other.”

“Between the forces that the Empire has propped up and those who want Mandalore to be free,” Mama explained.

“So, they can return to their glory days in the Republic?” Luke asked with a bit of bitterness.

Mama looked surprised. Luke learned things so fast, he was so smart and eager to learn, that sometimes it was easy to forget how lacking his basic education had been. The Lar’s had done their best by him, but all they could afford to provide was remote learning modules. Provided by the Empire, for free, to the citizens of the Outer Rim. Leia sometimes wondered whose idea that had
been. It was one of their better propaganda moves, making sure that all the history that anyone in
the Outer Rim learned was the one the Empire approved of.

“No,” Mama said. “Mandalore was never a member of the Republic.”


Obi-Wan snorted. “No. Neither Mandalore’s ruling clan nor the Core members of the Senate
would ever have approved of Mandalore’s admission.”

Ahsoka looked at Bail. “Despite the fraught history between Mandalore and the Republic, I would
like them to avoid wholesale slaughter if we can help it.”

“Why such a desperate gamble?” Papa asked. “It’s a long shot, at best, that you can get them
involved. Especially since we can’t tell them anything of the future.”

“Possible future,” Leia corrected. This was why she was so reluctant to share what she knew. It
became fact, not speculation. “It’s not set in stone, Papa. Things are different now.”

“And why didn’t the Alliance help them in your past, Leia?” Luke was bristling with
defensiveness. “Because they don’t matter, like the Outer Rim?”

Leia forced herself to think about Luke’s question, not simply snap at him. “Because there was
precious little we could do to help, Luke.” She sent Ahsoka a thoughtful look. “Looking back, we
should have given them the intel we had on the armaments surrounding their system.”

Luke let out a sigh that was bitterly resigned. Leia turned to him and cautioned. “But frankly, I’m
not sure it would have saved them.”

“Oh, and sending help was out of the question?” Luke grumbled.

Leia leaned forward and hissed. “Yes, it was. Because we were barely surviving ourselves.”

Luke opened his mouth to say something else, but Leia didn’t let him talk. “I get it,” she said. “I
do. Luke, I have spent a good portion of my life in the Outer Rim, for one reason or another. But
believe me when I tell you that not every decision made about that region of space is about the
Core looking to screw it over.”

Luke waved his hands in the air, encompassing the whole base. “We could have helped,” he
insisted.

Leia’s mouth dropped open at his sheer stubbornness, when suddenly it occurred to her what the
hell he was talking about. “Now?” she said. “Possibly. And before you get all defensive again, we
are low on ships Luke, you know that. We lost a good portion of our fleet above Scarif and
Alderaan.”

Luke nodded, reluctantly conceding her point.

“But helping Mandalore wasn’t possible for the Alliance of then. We had all the same problems we
do now, only it was worse because we had no base.”


Leia’s mouth dropped open. Had he really not put this together? “Because the Empire knew where
we were. We blew up the Death Star above Yavin, Luke, not Alderaan. We were all crammed into
our too-small fleet, trying to stay ahead of the Empire and keep the coffers full enough to pay for the fuel to do so.”

Luke blinked, and then his face went white. “Oh,” he whispered. Worried, he reached out a hand to her. “Leia, I’m sorry, I forgot that happened. I was thinking—”

“That the Alliance then and now were the same,” Leia finished for him. “This, this is why I wanted to keep your information about the future limited. Because it affects your thinking in ways I can’t predict, and could prove devastating.”


Ahsoka let out a loud laugh, and Leia turned on her, glad to have a target for her irritation that wasn’t Luke.

“What is so funny about that?” she demanded.

Ahsoka shook her head. “Not a damn thing,” she explained. “I just think it’s very ironic that I’m running into the same problem.”

Leia blinked. “With knowing too much about the future?”

“No, with people who think they know everything, and have very rigid thinking.”

Papa leaned forward. “Ahsoka, what do you mean?”

Ahsoka let out a long sigh. “The Alliance has some brilliant generals. But some of them…” Her voice became frustrated. “This isn’t the Clone Wars. We don’t have the resources to go head to head with the Imperial Navy, never mind the Army. Not by ourselves. We are limited to surgical strikes and sabotage. And even that has been severely restricted over the last few months.”

Ahsoka tilted her head to Leia. “Which is a problem I’m hoping your mission will help solve, so we can take advantage of the opportunity put in front of us.”

Mama looked intrigued. “What do you mean?”

“Those battles cost the Empire, and dearly. They lost many men, resources, and quite a bit of their military leadership with the destruction of the Death Star.” Her eyes grew distant for a moment. “The competent ones, anyway.”

There were a lot of veterans from the Clone Wars among the upper echelons of the military leadership, both in the Alliance and the Empire. It suddenly occurred to Leia that Ahsoka might have known quite a few of the ones that had died on the Death Star, and her relationship with them could have been much more friendly than the one she had with Tarkin.

Ahsoka shook her head, eyes focusing back in on the people in front of her. “Either way, that was a lot of resources to lose, even for the Empire. If we can just get over what happened two decades ago, and work together, we can use this to our advantage.”

Luke leaned forward. “You have a lot of ground to make up, Ahsoka.”

Ahsoka made a face. “I know. Believe me, I know. Just like Leia, I have spent a long time on the Rim. But I have to start somewhere.”

Papa drummed his fingers on the table. “It’s a risk,” he said. “And I don’t just mean sending Obi-
Wan to Mandalore.”

Ahsoka looked shocked. “You think Bo-Katan will turn traitor on us?”

Papa shook his head. “No, whatever Bo-Katan’s issues with the Jedi and the Alliance, I highly doubt she would turn him over to the Empire. But sharing this intel Ahsoka, among all these groups. That information was hard-won by us, and there is always the chance it could fall into Imperial hands. There is a lot we stand to lose.”

Ahsoka nodded. “I know the Empire has plenty of spies littered in those groups. But their intelligence network is currently in shambles. They are facing a very similar problem that the Alliance was until I conveniently appeared on Yavin.”

“Which is?” Mama asked.

“Yulren was on the Death Star,” Ahsoka said flatly. “He was the head of their network, and like Draven, he wasn’t one to hand things off to subordinates. Not that it would have mattered if he had, because most of them were on the Death Star as well.”

“He was the only one who had access to the entire network,” Leia breathed.

Ahsoka nodded. “It’s going to take the Empire months to decode his files. More so, since Draven snatched Drusil from them. That was the problem she was working on for them when she defected. All those spies, on all their missions, making reports no one is hearing.”

“That still doesn’t answer the question of why you want me to go to Mandalore, Ahsoka,” Obi-Wan said flatly. “There are plenty of people here that could do it just as well.

Ahsoka gave Obi-Wan an incredulous look. “Bo-Katan knows you.”

Obi-Wan’s face twisted. “We’ve only met twice.”

Ahsoka snorted. “She knows about you, Obi-Wan.”

Obi-Wan looked hurt. “Yes, how could I forget? The legend of the Obi-Wan Kenobi, General of the Clone War, and the first Mandalorian Civil War.” He sneered at Ahsoka, “In case you haven’t forgotten, Bo-Katan ended up on the other side of that conflict. She has no reason to trust me, or what I stand for.”

Ahsoka was looking at him like she couldn’t believe he was being this stupid. “She joined Death Watch years after you left Mandalore, Obi-Wan. It’s not like you fought her there.”

“But-“ Obi-Wan started.

Ahsoka cut him off. “If you think for one moment that Bo-Katan didn’t hear an earful from Satine about you in those intervening years before they had their falling out, you’re delusional. She knows you, Obi-Wan. From someone who, as I recall Anakin telling me, never saw the legend.”

Obi-Wan scowled. “There is no way he would have-”

Ahsoka tapped a finger against her lips. “What did he say Satine called you? A collection of half-truths and hyperbole?”

Luke let out a shocked laugh, and Obi-Wan’s head sank into his hands. “Of course, he chose to pay attention then,” he grumbled. He looked up at Ahsoka wearily. “And he chose to tell you about it.”
Satine. Something about that struck a chord in Leia’s mind. She knew that name, but from where?

Ahsoka’s face became sympathetic. “I’m not saying she’s your friend, Obi-Wan. Or even an ally. Not yet. But she does know where you stand. More importantly, she knows you have no love for the Empire and the will to fight it.”

Obi-Wan opened his mouth, probably to argue, but Ahsoka only gave him a flatly unimpressed look, and he closed it very slowly.

Someone named Satine, who was connected to Bo-Katan, …and all the pieces fell together in Leia’s mind.


Obi-Wan transferred his glare from Ahsoka to Leia. “It was a lifetime ago.”

Leia swallowed hard. Satine Kryze had died during the Clone Wars, so yes, in many ways, it was a lifetime ago. And given his words earlier, lamenting her death, she was someone Obi-Wan deeply mourned the loss of.

“But she knew you well enough to tell her sister about you,” Leia pressed.

Obi-Wan only scowled harder. “We were friends,” he insisted, but there was an almost desperate plea in his voice for her to leave it at that.

Sore spot for Obi-Wan. But neither Ahsoka or Rex had much use for his denial. They both snorted in derision in unison.

“Sure, General, you were just friends,” Rex said mockingly.

Obi-Wan flushed and looked away. There was more here than he was saying.

*That was the name of one of Obi-Wan’s naked friends. Satine.*

Vader’s voice rolled through her head, and it took every ounce of control Leia had not to scowl. What was with the Force, and its meddling ways today? She pushed her irritation into that well of power, aware that it would be as effective as a mosquito biting a Sarlaac.

“Why won’t you just tell me what you want me to know?” she thought at it. “Instead of giving me mysterious hints and might have beens?”

Luke, catching the tail end of what she was saying, blinked, and looked at her.

“Tell you what?” he asked Leia.

“You should listen,” the Force said loud enough for both of them to hear.

Obi-Wan and Ahsoka’s heads both swung to look at them.


Obi-Wan’s eyes narrowed. “That didn’t feel like nothing.”
Luke shrugged. “Leia being Leia,” he said. “She’s picking more fights, then she knows what to do with.”


Luke gave her a bitter smile. “Leia, I think you would pick a fight with the Gods themselves, for designing a universe so unfair, if you could.”

Leia sniffed. “That’s not picking a fight,” she said. “That’s me pointing out where they went wrong.”

Han let out a long rolling laugh at that. “Yes,” he said. “And you would be very proper and dignified about it. Until you weren’t and just try to roll over everyone in your way.”

“Not saying anything is a form of complicity,” Leia hissed. “There are times when it isn’t wise. Times when it would cause more trouble than it’s worth. Times when it’s best to lie to your enemies until you can strike. But in those cases, I’m still doing something. I’m not standing by and keeping my head down.”

Han’s face was amused. “And yet, you don’t pick fights.”

She gave him a saucy grin. “Only for fun,” she promised him.

“Not that you two aren’t entertaining to watch,” Obi-Wan said tightly. “But I would like to stay on subject. Bo-Katan isn’t going to listen to me, Ahsoka.”

Ahsoka gave a shrug. “Maybe, this all will come to naught. But maybe it won’t. At the very least, she knows we are willing to listen to her.”

Ahsoka tilted her head to Leia. “And given what we have learned about what is possible, both good and bad, don’t you think we should give them all the data we have so they aren’t fighting blind?”

Obi-Wan only pulled on his beard, clearly uncomfortable of just cutting Mandalore loose to its own fate.

Luke gave a bitter laugh. “You think the Alliance High Command is going to listen to you, or anything this Bo-Katan has to say?”

Ahsoka’s grin grew mocking. “I don’t know. But Mandalore has a long history of fighting, and the Alliance leadership knows that. They are not so easily brushed aside.”

“Start with someone easier to believe then the Outer Rim?” Luke’s voice was bitter.

“Yes,” Ahsoka said. “And no. Because we are going forward with that too. I told you, Luke, I want to thin out those lines as much as I can.”

“You really think this has a chance?” Mama asked. “There are a good many councilors who are still trying to make sure that this experiment with Trehhipoi’s temporary seat fails.”

“Not all of them,” Ahsoka countered. “And I got the impression that several of them have come to our way of thinking because of you and Bail.”

Luke gave Mama and Papa a startled look. Leia tried not to think too badly of him that he hadn’t known that. Why would he? By his own admission, Luke found political maneuvering boring and tedious. And he wasn’t stuck here every day, attending endless meetings after endless meetings.
“But I do know I will get nothing if I don’t try.” She gave Luke a mischievous grin. “Besides, I have leverage Draven never had.”

“Such as?”

“It’s amazing how much the Core-aligned representatives just give in when confronted by a Jedi.” Luke looked slightly taken aback by that. Then his face grew thoughtful.

“Wouldn’t that have been nice to have before everything went to hell?” Obi-Wan muttered darkly.

Surprisingly, it was Mama, who answered him. “It’s all about degrees of comparison Obi-Wan. The Jedi were flawed, yes,” and she shot Leia a guilty look. “But when faced with the actions of the Empire, it’s quite easy to romanticize them in light of what we have now. Perspective is a wonderful thing.”

Obi-Wan looked at Ahsoka. “But you don’t consider yourself a Jedi,” he said dryly.

Ahsoka gave him an impish grin. “I never said I was a Jedi. I only might have implied I was.” Then her face grew serious. “This is something that needs to happen, Obi-Wan. Even before Leia came back, showing the consequences of where this path would lead, the abuses between the Outer Rim and the Core is something that hasn’t been addressed in far too long.”

Obi-Wan rubbed a hand over his face. “I am not disagreeing with you, Ahsoka. I’m simply stating that it might be harder than you think.”

Ahsoka leaned back in her chair. “Harder than dislodging Palpatine from his throne in the first place? Harder than someone who was seeped in the Dark Side for decades coming back to the Light?”

Obi-Wan arched an eyebrow at her. “I think your scale is a bit off,” he said dryly.

She smirked. “I’m not saying it will be easy, but it’s not impossible. And we get nowhere if we don’t at least try.” Then that self-satisfied smile left her face, and she waved at Leia. “Especially since we know what will happen if we do nothing.”

Rex’s voice cut in. “Do, or do not, General. There is no try.”

“But now is when you choose to quote Yoda?” he squawked. “You know he only meant that as a teaching lesson. That if you go in expecting defeat, that is exactly…” Then his voice trailed off, and a sheepish expression crossed his face. He cleared his throat. “Yes, well said.”

Rex only smirked at him.

Luke was looking at Rex, but his voice was cautious, and by his words, he was clearly addressing Obi-Wan. “I don’t know. Sounds to me like the Jedi were destroyed partially because you only tried before, you didn’t do.”

Obi-Wan scowled at Luke, and that was when Leia knew the man was actually angry. “We gave everything to the war effort.”

Luke didn’t back down. “No, you tried to play it safe. You tried to restore the status quo. What you didn’t do is look at what would have actually won the war.”

“There was no winning that war,” Obi-Wan growled.
Han’s voice cut in, confused. “Then why were you fighting it?”

Rex let out a small laugh. “He’s right,” he said. “It was all pointless and stupid.”

Obi-Wan turned to look at the clone in astonishment. “You’re agreeing with him?”

“I am,” Rex didn’t look happy about that. “It was something I figured out years ago. That war couldn’t be won. Not on the terms it was presented to you.” He leaned forward. “I learned from the best General. You don’t like the battleground, change it.”

Papa cleared his throat. “You’re saying the Jedi should have refused to fight?”

Rex shook his head. “I don’t know,” he said. “That involves more political calculations, then a simple soldier is capable of making.”

“Just a soldier, he says,” Obi-Wan muttered under his breath.

Luke gave a frustrated growl. “And I think you are missing my point. You told me that the Jedi were peacemakers. Or was that just a lie, like how my father was a good man?”

Obi-Wan’s face paled. “He was a good man,” he said. “I never lied about that. And the Jedi were keepers of the peace.”

Luke sneered. “What kind of peacemaker goes around making peace at the end of a lightsaber?”

“They are a close-range combat weapon,” Obi-Wan protested. “We needed something to defend ourselves. It’s not like we had tanks rolling across worlds.”

“Oh, yes,” Luke said, sarcasm dripping off every word. “You’re right, Rex and the other clones, they magically appeared on worlds. And as soon as they appeared, the droids willingly surrendered, every time. And of course, it was never on Core Worlds that battles were fought.”

Papa cleared his throat, “That is not true,” he said firmly. “Towards the end, there were quite a few battles fought in the Core. I don’t think you understand how close the Republic came to losing.”

“Oh, and their suffering was anything compared to the damage the Outer Rim took?”

“And those civilians who died, or were mutilated in the Core, is their pain any less real than the Outer Rims, Luke?” Mama asked quietly.

Luke opened his mouth, then shut it, his shoulders slumping. “No,” he said wearily.

“And that,” Ahsoka said firmly, “is how we win. And, more importantly, the first step to fixing all of this.”

They all stared at her, and she gave Luke a fierce smile. “Because nothing unites old enemies like a new foe,” she explained. “And despite the negligent mismanaging of the Outer Rim by the of the Republic, what they did is nothing compared to the Empire. Or do you disagree with that?”

Luke opened his mouth, then closed it, thoughtful. “Yes,” he said slowly. “But it doesn’t look that way to most citizens of the Outer Rim. The Empire is worse, but they have never cloaked what they are either. They didn’t pretend to care or hide what they are doing, like the Republic.”

He turned and looked at Leia. “They do the same thing to us that they do to Mandalore and Corellia, don’t they?”

“Biggs,” Luke’s voice failed him. He gave a cough to clear his throat, and on his second try, his voice didn’t falter. “My friend, Biggs. His father served in the Imperial Army for ten years after the Clone Wars.”

Papa nodded. “Yes, a great many recruits came from that area of space. Especially in the beginning of the Empire when the clones were being phased out.”

Luke nodded. “There was a bonus attached. Bigg’s father, he came home and purchased a farm with it.” Luke turned his eyes back to Leia. “But that wasn’t the norm, was it?”

Leia shook her head. “No, most of those recruits never went home.”

Luke scowled. “Why fight, when you can lure them away?”

Mama looked at him, grimly. ‘Yes,” she agreed. “It is more efficient that way.”

Luke shook his head and addressed her. “It’s still going to be a hard sell to the Outer Rim. The Empire doesn’t care and doesn’t pretend it ever did, but if you are willing to risk your life, there is a chance you can escape and build a better one. The Republic never did that.”

Mama looked at him, coolly. “Are you quoting from experience, or is this what your Uncle told you?”

“Him. Bigg’s father. All fifteen people who lived in Toschi station. And the much bigger population in Anchorhead.” Luke’s face grew pained. “There is nothing on Tatooine. Not to build a life. To scrape by, to survive, maybe. If you want any kind of life for yourself, buy any independence, you need to leave. Of all my friends that I grew up with, only two are still there. And it’s been a few months, they could have left by now.”

Mama didn’t react, only kept that calm, pleasant façade. “Then what do you suggest we do?”

Luke took in a deep breath. “I’m not saying that the Empire doesn’t need to be stopped. Uncle Owen wasn’t someone who took unnecessary risks. If those stormtroopers had shown up, demanding the droids, he would have given them to them.” Luke’s face crumpled in on itself in grief. “But he would have asked for payment for them. And that is probably why they killed him. Because it was easier and more efficient to do that, then just giving him, what to them, was nothing.

Luke’s gaze came up to meet hers. “And any government that does that needs to be dismantled. Any government that is willing to kill billions of innocent people to get one person to talk, isn’t worth keeping. The only reason that didn’t happen here and now, is because the Force intervened.”

A small smirk twisted his mouth, but his eyes, they only radiated belief and sincerity. “And Leia is very quick on her feet.”

Leia felt the need to point out that she hadn’t exactly walked away from that battle unscathed. “I failed Luke, in what I set out to do. Vader still found out about me.”

Luke gave a wry shake of his head. “It’s bad enough you set impossible standards for everyone else to live up to, but that you hold yourself to them as well, that really isn’t nice, Leia.”

Leia opened her mouth to protest, but Luke cut her off. “Trehhipoi said it. Ahsoka said it. Half of this base has said it. Even the barest whisper of it has half the galaxy living in hope. Hell, even Draven said it. You walked away from Father, alive. That is no small thing.”
“But—”

“And yes, Father knows about you. But he still doesn’t know who Han is. He doesn’t know about me. He doesn’t know Palpatine was killed by him.” And something flickered in Luke’s eyes at that statement. “He doesn’t know that the Empire fell.”

Han snorted. “Good luck convincing her that she did better than anybody else would have in that cell.”

Luke nodded. “I know. But it still needs to be said.”

Then his eyes slid from hers, fell on Papa, Mama, and finally Obi-Wan. “You walked right into the trap set out for you. All of you. If you had actually bothered to look around you, you would have seen that. Palpatine didn’t create the Separatists out of thin air. But as far as I can tell, you completely ignored the fact that the system you were defending had long ago disappeared for a good many of the people. You were trying to restore something that wasn’t even there to begin with. That was fundamentally broken.”

Obi-Wan’s face was decidedly neutral. “So, you think we should throw everything out? Start from scratch?”

“Yes,” Luke said, just as Leia said, “No.”

Luke looked at her startled. “What do you mean, no? You’re the one who keeps going on about how you recreated all the problems of the past unknowingly.”

“Yes,” Leia said. “But I’m also old enough to recognize that burning down the galaxy, in order to save it, doesn’t work. It only leaves you with the people you were trying to save dead. Better to co-opt those systems.”

Ahsoka rapped her knuckles on the table. “While I do believe this is a question that does need answering, I do think you all are getting a little ahead of yourselves. We need to keep focus on bringing down the Empire.”

“Oh, so it can all wait?” Luke asked snidely.

“No,” Ahsoka said firmly. “I can walk and chew at the same time, Luke.” She looked down at her chrono. “But I have somewhere to be in half an hour, and this isn’t going to be solved now.”

Luke crossed his arms over his chest. “Then when?”

Ahsoka looked at him seriously. “We’ve already started. Steps have been taken that the other Alliance never did. Bringing the Rim in on this, and on their terms. I know you don’t want to hear this, but right now, we need to go slow. Because we are all fighting a war, and to do that effectively? That takes trust. And trust takes time to build. So, let’s get through today, shall we?”

Luke nodded his head reluctantly.

“Great,” Rex growled. “Speaking of today, let’s talk about your insane plan to send Leia to Nimban.” Leia was hoping he would have forgotten about that. Didn’t expect him to, but had hoped.

“Have you thought this through at all? How exactly are you going to hide her identity? It’s not like she can wear a mask on her face the entire time she is on Nimban!”
“Why not?” Ahsoka asked. “It worked on Whiforla, didn’t it?”

Rex’s face was disbelieving. “Because the Empire has run Whiforla into the ground and everyone knows it. It wouldn’t raise an eyebrow if you step on that planet with some kind of filter to combat the pollutants. That is not the case on Nimban. She’s human, there is no need, and it will look suspicious.”

Yes, it would look suspicious. For a human. Leia turned to Han. “Do you know where Boushh is?” she asked.

Han’s face was blank for a moment, as he tried to keep up with the abrupt subject change. Then his eyes narrowed. “Why?” he asked suspiciously.

Leia grinned. “Because I fit in his armor. And I speak Ubese. We take him out of the game for a while, and I can impersonate him.”

Nobody, except Han, looked like that explained much to them.


“He’s a bounty hunter,” Leia explained. “A fairly well-known one, in the Outer Rim.”


Han sighed. “He wears a breathing mask over his head, Kid. It’s part of his armor, but all Ubese wear something over their head.”

Mama frowned. “I’m not familiar with that race.”

“Most of them are on the Outer Rim,” Han said. “They are a pretty insular lot, but they like money, so they tend to stick to jobs and careers where they can stay on the edges.”

Ahsoka looked intrigued. “Now that’s a solution,” she said. She looked at Han. “Do you know where he is?”

Han shook his head. “No.”

Leia gave him an encouraging smile. “But I bet you know who does.”

Han ran a hand through his hair. “Yeah, I might.”

Ahsoka hummed to herself. “I don’t know when those ships are scheduled to be delivered to the Empire.”

Papa arched his eyebrows. “What does that have to do with anything?”

Leia stared at him. Papa had been instrumental in the founding of the Alliance. He was a master of political and logistical planning. And the man still had no clue to military strategy.

Ahsoka didn’t look shocked at his question, though. Perhaps she had been the one to explain this to him in the past, when there had been so precious few of them. “It makes the timeline tight,” she said. “And I don’t know if we have enough time to do a search for him, and set up a situation where he is unaccounted for.”

“I believe you mean kidnap him,” Obi-Wan said dryly.
Ahsoka scowled. “I was trying to be diplomatic.”

Mama leaned forward. “Does it matter?”

Ahsoka looked at her. “What do you mean?”

“Bounty hunters aren’t known for being the most stationery of individuals. They follow the work, and that means moving around a lot. It also means that sometimes it is hard to take into account exactly where they are.”

Papa’s voice was just this side of scathing. “Are you saying that this Boushh won’t notice someone else is using his name?”

Han snorted. “He’s an idiot. Good at his work, really bad at calculating the odds.”

Leia nodded her head. “Yes, he is. He tried to blackmail the Black Sun crime syndicate. That’s how he ended up dead last time.”

“And why do you know any of this?” Papa asked, voice baffled.

Leia smiled. “I told you. We needed to rescue Han. Impersonating Boushh is how I got into Jabba’s palace.”

All of them stared at her. Well, Obi-Wan and Rex were staring at Han, as if they were wondering why Han needed to be rescued from Jabba. It’s like they hadn’t met him, and his ability to piss people off.

Han surprised her. He jumped from his seat and started pacing. “Chewie said,” he started to say, then broke off, muttering to himself and running his hands through his hair. Leia wondered if he was refraining from yelling because it was so early in the morning, and she wouldn’t react well, or because Papa was in the room.

Han took a deep breath in and stated flatly. “I thought he misheard you.”

Leia gave him a satisfied smirk. “He did not.”

Han paled. “Are you telling me you actually did that?” he barked at her.

“Yes,” Leia said blandly and took a sip of her caf.

Han whirled and pointed a finger at Luke. “Did you know about this?” he demanded.

Luke only blinked. “I’m going to need a few more words than that, Han.”

“About her killing Jabba, Luke!!” Han’s face was turning a very interesting shade of red.

Luke got a satisfied look on his face. “Yes,” he said, and there was such a vicious joy in those words.

Han put his face in his hands and let out a high-pitched nervous laugh. “Of course, you did.”

Obi-Wan cleared his throat, drawing Leia’s attention. “You killed Jabba?” he asked her. “In your past?”

Leia nodded. “With the chain he used to tie me to him,” she elaborated. She was quite proud of that fact and a little sorry that she probably wouldn’t have the opportunity to do it again in this time.
She was rather fond of the title “Hutt Slayer.”

Rex gave her a beaming grin. “Excellent.”

Ahsoka cocked her head. “Interesting,” and there was a faraway quality to her voice. Leia could see that mind whirling. Not reveling in the victory, Leia realized. Thinking through all the scenarios of how that fit into the future Leia had laid out.

Han dropped his hands from his face, and one of them came to point at Luke. “You went too, didn’t you?”


Han threw his hands up in the air. “Why am I not surprised? Is insanity hereditary in your family or something?”

Obi-Wan shrugged. “Depends on what you mean by insanity, Captain Solo. The vision to see things differently and the will to carry them out often seem outlandish by those too timid to try.”

“You, zip it,” Han said, turning his irritation on the older Jedi. “You may be less flashy about it, but you are just as crazy as they are.”

Ahsoka snorted. “He has you there,” she told Obi-Wan.

Papa’s voice was very controlled. “I’m agreeing with Han,” he said, voice not wavering, but Leia could see his hands shaking slightly as they gripped his mug. “Was it part of your plan to become that close to him?”

Leia instantly sobered. “No,” she said. “It was not. I was supposed to free Han and get both of us out of there. But Jabba caught me. According to Lando, someone told him that Boushh was dead before I got there.”

“I see,” Papa didn’t look remotely reassured by that. “And who, pray tell, is Lando?”

Leia frowned. How was it possible that she had never mentioned Lando to Papa? “A friend.”

Han snorted. “He is,” Leia insisted.

“To you,” Han said. “Lando always did have a type.”

Leia glared at him.

“Why were you in Jabba’s harem, Leia?” Rex was frowning.

Leia blinked. That was a stupid question, and Rex didn’t ask stupid questions. It was one of the reasons she liked him so much. Jabba’s proclivities were well known by anyone who knew of him. “Because I’m apparently his type?”

Rex shook his head. “No, I mean, why not turn you over to the Empire? From everything I’ve heard from you, and what your parents have told me, you were fairly high up in the Alliance’s leadership in this other timeline. There had to be a bounty on you.”

Oh, that. “It was ten million,” she said. “And Jabba was being stupid.” She thought about it and
shrugged. “Or maybe he thought he would keep me until he got bored and turn me over to the Empire for the money? I never did get the chance to ask him.”

“How did you get out?” Mama asked.

“Luke was our back-up plan,” Leia explained. She looked at Han, “I know I can come off a reckless, but we did try multiple ways to get you out. None of us rushed into this, Han.”

Han scowled. “Walking into Jabba’s palace was the very definition of reckless.”

Leia looked at him steadily. “It was non-negotiable to me, Luke, Chewie, and Lando. That was where you were, so that was where we were going.”

Han’s face shattered, and he sat back into his chair, hard. He looked like he had been given his deepest wish and greatest fear, all in one go.

Ahsoka drummed her fingers on the table. “Jabba is slipping,” she said. “He never would have made such a mistake twenty years ago. Not about something that wasn’t personal for him.”

Obi-Wan also looked thoughtful. “What are you saying, Ahsoka?”

“That we need to be very precise in our next steps,” Ahsoka said.

“Are you suggesting we not bring down Jabba?” Luke asked, the resigned disappointment clear in his voice.

Ahsoka blinked in surprise. “No, I think we should do it sooner. If we play this right, we can bring down the entire Hutt alliance.”

There was a long-stunned silence in the room at that proclamation. Until Han’s voice, shaky and wobbly said. “Okay, you are no longer the sane one.”

Ahsoka shook her head. “This is the most opportune time the Outer Rim has had in centuries.”

Leia felt the need to caution her. “That happened in my past too,” she told Ahsoka. “Jabba’s death led to a series of cascading events that lead to the reduction of the Hutt syndicate. But the peace didn’t last long, within a few years there were new gangs to take their place.”

Ahsoka looked at her, eyes bright. “That’s why we need to move now.”


Ahsoka gestured to Leia. “Given what you’ve already told us, I’m guessing Jabba died around the time the Emperor did? That’s the only reason I can think of why the Alliance didn’t get involved when a major ruling entity collapsed along its borders. It was because they were too busy building their own government?”

Leia nodded in the affirmative.

“So how likely is it going to be, that if the Hutt’s collapse now, well before the Empire does, that the Alliance will be able to ignore the situation?” Ahsoka asked triumphantly.

Luke looked stunned, and Leia wanted to slap herself for overlooking this possibility.

“Or,” Papa pointed out, voice grave, “the Empire will step in and do it themselves.”
“Not possibly,” AhsOKa said fiercely. “Will. And that will also give us what we want, because again, they will thin their lines.”

“And the other gangs?” Luke looked like he wanted to believe so badly. “Who’s to say the Empire won’t just set one of them up to replace the Hutts so they don’t have to rule the area directly?”

Ahsoka nodded her head. “It’s a risk that might happen,” she allowed. “But I don’t think it will. The Empire doesn’t suffer rivals. The Hutts are useful and are far too entrenched to be easily moved from their positions of power. It’s why the Empire hasn’t moved against them. But any other criminal group?” Ahsoka shook her head. “The Empire will respond to a vacuum in power the way it always does.”

“That might not be better for the people living there, Ahsoka,” Mama murmured.

“Maybe, or maybe it will just be a new form of cruelty. But the Hutts aren’t going to be dislodged without some blood being shed, Breha.” Ahsoka lectured. “And doing it this way, will give them the kick in the ass, the more stubborn members of the council need to get involved. Because it won’t be a war against the Hutts anymore—"


Ahsoka nodded. “Exactly.”

Han whistled. “Okay,” he conceded. “Maybe you aren’t that insane.”

Luke leaned back. “You should bring this up with Trehhipoi,” he said. “This is going beyond what we told him we were planning. He has talked to them about pressuring the trade routes, but I doubt they are going to appreciate coups being plotted by Core Worlders without their input.”

Han let out a semi-hysterical laugh. Papa turned to him. “Is there a problem, Han?” he asked coolly.

Han waved a hand to encompass all of them. “That’s it? You all just decided, at breakfast no less, to overthrow a group that has been ruling the Outer Rim for a thousand years?”

Papa frowned. “How do you think such things are decided?”

“I dunno,” Han said. “A bunch of meetings, where there are lots of charts, and people with more education then they know what to do with?” He waved his hands helplessly in the air. “Not like this. Not with a smuggler, a farm boy, a soldier, a spy, and…” His voice trailed off. “Okay, the Jedi and royalty do fit into those mighty meetings. But I certainly don’t.”

Leia laughed, she couldn’t help it. “Oh, I’ve been in meetings like you are describing,” she told Han’s baffled face. “Trust me when I tell you, you are far smarter than most of the people you are describing who ‘belong’ there.”

Han’s mouth gaped. “I don’t know if I find that flattering or horrifying.”

Obi-Wan cleared his throat. “I think you are missing a crucial step, Captain Solo. Deciding and getting it done are two very different things.”

“Not apparently to you all,” Han grumbled.

Ahsoka laughed. “Nobody ever accused me of not being bold, Captain Solo.”
Han scowled at her. “Gee, I never would have guessed that, given who your friends are.” Then he pointed a finger at Obi-Wan, while still addressing Ahsoka. “And will you two stop it with the Captain Solo? It’s Han.”

Ahsoka nodded her head in his direction. “Han,” she agreed. Then she turned to Luke. “And you’re right, Luke. Trehhipoi needs to be told, so he can ask those groups what they think. Lucky for me, he’s coming to Yavin in a week.”

She gave him a sly grin. “And while he’s disappointed that he is probably going to miss Leia, he is very interested in seeing you again, Luke.”

Luke turned red to the roots of his hair. “I told him he wasn’t my type,” he muttered.

“You sure, Kid?” Han asked. “You could do a lot worse.”

“Oh, like you’re one to talk,” Luke muttered. “You and Leia are still gazing at each other longingly.”

Han’s face shuttered, and Leia glared at Luke, kicking him under the table. “I do not need you to play matchmaker,” she hissed.

“Says you,” he retorted. “If you had a naked friend, you would be in a much better mood.”

Leia sneered. “Same goes for you. Even Ahsoka has a naked friend.”

Everyone at the table looked in Ahsoka’s direction. For the first time since she had entered the room, she looked surprised.

“I don’t-” she started to say.

Leia just gave her a satisfied smirk.

“It’s not-“ she stuttered, then gave up, and glared at Leia. “How did you know?” she demanded.

“Saw you talking to her this morning in the hallway on my way here.”

Ahsoka’s glare deepened. “We were just talking,” she insisted.

Leia nodded her head, sagely. “Yes,” she agreed. “Han and I talk a lot too.” Han let out a pleased sound at that, and underneath the table, Leia felt him give a small squeeze to her knee.

Obi-Wan’s gaze was sharp and interested. “And just who is this friend?”

Ahsoka’s shoulders straightened. “A friend,” she said, a touch of defensiveness in her voice. And why would she be so defensive about that? Oh, right, he helped train her, and the Jedi were forbidden attachments.

Clones, on the other hand, hadn’t had any such strictures. Rex leaned forward. “But?” he pressed.

Ahsoka’s shoulders slumped. “But once she was more,” she admitted with a guilty look at Obi-Wan.

“Oh,” Obi-Wan said softly, voice remote and detached. “I see.”

_Something_ rippled across Ahsoka’s shields in the Force. It was there and gone so fast that Leia didn’t have time to identify it. But the fact that she could sense _any_ emotion out of her was
worrying.

“Do you?” Ahsoka snapped. “Because, as I recall, you did a lot of pointed ignoring about Padme and Anakin.”

Leia looked between the two of them. Something had shifted, something in their tone suggested they had gone beyond playing with each other and were moving into areas that were very tender. The question was, why?

Obi-Wan’s face went blank. “If I had, he would have been kicked out of the Order, you know that.”

Ahsoka snapped to attention so fast Leia was surprised that she didn’t hear the woman’s back crack. If she had been standing, she would have been in perfect parade rest. For the first time since Leia had met her, she could see the soldier that Ahsoka had been so long ago. It wasn’t just her posture that was screaming her defensiveness. Her voice was guarded and full of hidden meanings.

“Maybe Luke is right. Maybe it would have been better if he had.”

“We can’t know that,” Obi-Wan protested.

Ahsoka thumped her chest. “His training saved me,” she said. “Everything he taught me. It saved me during the last nineteen years. Do you really think, if he had a moment to rest, he would have done what he did? Obi-Wan, even I could see he was falling apart during the siege of Mandalore.”

Obi-Wan’s voice rose. “We were all under stress,”

Ahsoka sneered. “He was the only one who’s Master faked his own death, and used that grief.”

He glared at her. “I had good reason to. And it’s not like you didn’t do the same thing.”

“I never promised I wouldn’t,” Ahsoka said primly. “You did.”

“Because you faked your death, I didn’t think I had anyone left to tell that I survived Order 66,” Obi-Wan said, folding his arms over his chest.

Ahsoka’s eyes narrowed. “You have some nerve-“

“Do Jedi always have to be so difficult?” Han’s voice sounded bored as he inserted himself into their conversation.

Both of them turned to glare at him, but Han didn’t back down. In fact, he rolled his eyes at them.

“Say you’re sorry to each other,” he said, exasperated. Neither Obi-Wan nor Ahsoka so much as flicked a covert glance at each other.

Han leaned forward, placing his hands on the table. “Look, I don’t understand half of what the hell you two were cutting each other to shreds about. All I do know, is that I sincerely doubt that you woke up this morning looking to pick a fight with the other.”

Ahsoka and Obi-Wan exchanged looks, but both kept their silence.

Han shook his head. “Look, it was a crap situation, followed by even more crappy situations. It all sucked, everybody made mistakes, everybody feels bad about it. Somebody said something this morning that was taken the wrong way, and everything came flying out of your mouth. You didn’t mean to hurt each other. Back then, or now. Say sorry and move on. It is not that hard.”
“As if you would know anything about it?” Obi-Wan asked snidely.

Leia immediately straightened, and beside her, Luke tensed too, both of them ready to come to Han’s defense, but Han only laughed. “You have part of your family back,” he told both of them.

“The Jedi didn’t.” Obi-Wan started to say.

Han waved a hand, cutting him off. “No,” he said. “No, I don’t want to hear you twist yourself into denying what everyone, including me, can see. And you’re right, I don’t know much about families, but I do know how much I wanted one.” He leaned back in his chair, studying both of them.

“And in this galaxy, given who you two are, the fact that you both survived is miracle enough. Either agree to never speak to each other again, or let this fight go.”

There was a long silence in the room, then Rex said grudgingly. “Okay, I might see now why Leia married you.”

Papa cleared his throat. “I must admit, when I find myself agreeing with Han on emotional maturity, I’m afraid you both have sunk very far indeed.”

A muscle in Ahsoka’s jaw twitched. “I’m sorry I got defensive.”

“And?” Han prompted.

She sighed. “And that I used you faking your death against you. Especially since I told you I had let it go.”

“It’s a hard thing to forgive,” Han said.

“You are not helping,” Leia hissed at him.

“I am too,” Han looked entirely too delighted with himself. “Bail even said so.”

Obi-Wan shook his head. “I am sorry, Ahsoka.”

Ahsoka gave him a shaky nod of her head.

Obi-Wan looked at her, eyes troubled, as he stroked his beard. “And I did get your meaning,” he said voice soft. His hand dropped, and he leaned forward, almost touching her. “I didn’t mean it as a judgment of any kind.”

She looked at him, eyes searching. “Really?”

He nodded. “Quite the opposite, in fact. I was just surprised.” He gave her a fond smile. “Part of me still sees you as that brash padawan on Christophsis. It’s hard for me to remember that you are all grown up now.”

A shy smile crossed her face, and for one moment, Leia could see the girl Ahsoka must have been so long ago. “Not so old that I don’t need you in my life, Obi-Wan.”

Obi-Wan smiled. “And I do want you to know how delighted I am to know you found some measure of happiness in all of this.”

Ahsoka’s eyes met his. “Honestly?” she whispered.
He nodded, and then Ahsoka’s face darkened. “It doesn’t matter,” she muttered.

Obi-Wan blinked. “Why not?”

“She thought I was dead for three years,” Ahsoka swallowed hard. “She mourned me and moved on. She is very happy that I’m alive, but…” her eyes closed in defeat. “That is a lot to ask a person to sort through. It’s messy,” she said, voice sounding very young in that moment. “And I don’t have time right now for messy.”

Obi-Wan very gently reached out and cupped her face. “Take it from a very old man,” he said softly. “It is better to deal with the messy while you can, rather than live with your regrets for everything you didn’t say.”

Didn’t understand families, Leia’s ass. He might not have the words to define what he was feeling, but he sure as hell knew how to do the actions.

Ahsoka stared at him for one long moment, looking for what, Leia didn’t know. Then she cupped the hands that were still on her cheek. “Thank you, Obi-Wan.”

He cleared his throat. “Anytime,” he said, his fingers slipping from hers, and returning to his lap. “But other than that, I am afraid I’m useless when it comes to advising someone on their love life.”

Ahsoka snorted. “Tell me something I didn’t know,” as she slipped back into that breezy persona she had.

Obi-Wan looked mock hurt. “I don’t know what you mean.”

Rex snorted. “Not that I’m not delighted that you two have finally learned how to use your words with each other, but we still haven’t figured out how to keep Leia’s identity concealed on Nimban.”

“Do you want to know where Boushh is?” Han looked at Ahsoka. “I can ask around.”

Ahsoka shook her head. “I don’t think we have time to find out where he is, never mind detain—”

“Kidnap,” Obi-Wan said pleasantly.

“Kidnap him,” Ahsoka growled. “And I don’t like sending you to Nimban without knowing where he is. Too many variables and too many things could go wrong.”

“Then what do you suggest?” Leia asked, heart in her throat. If Ahsoka changed her mind now, about letting Leia off-world, it didn’t matter how much she loved him, she was going to kill Rex.

Ahsoka turned to Han. “How common are the Ubese on the Outer Rim?”

Han blinked. “I have no idea,” he said.

“Would it be hard to get an outfit that looks like something an Ubese would wear?”

Han frowned. “Shouldn’t be. The helmet’s are pretty distinct, but the rest of what they wear is pretty standard gear.”

“Hmmmm,” Ahsoka looked thoughtful.

“What are you thinking?” Rex asked.

“Even if we knew where Boushh was, right this minute, I don’t like kidnapping him. Too many
variables, too many things we can’t control for, and too many things can go wrong. I’m thinking we create a new identity for Leia,” Ahsoka said. “Han said it himself, the Ubese are fairly common in that area of space.”

“Nobody is going to trust some stranger,” Han protested.

Ahsoka looked at him askance. “Of course they are, because you are going to vouch for her. And the Alliance will create the digital trail she needs to back that up, in case anyone does bother to go looking.”

“You can do that?” Han asked flabbergasted.

“For the Outer Rim? Of course.”

“Then why haven’t you been trying to slice into the Empire’s data networks?”

Ahsoka gave him an incredulous look. “Because they have more resources to protect themselves?”

Luke crossed his arms over his chest. “The Hutt’s aren’t too bad about keeping their data secrets either.”

“Yes, I know,” Ahsoka said patiently. “The Empire also has more people it can pull into handling the task.” Ahsoka gave Luke a sharp grin. “But that is an advantage they might not have for much longer. We are a lot closer to entering their more sensitive networks since Drusil has defected and gave us access to her work.”

Luke looked thoughtful. “She’s that good?”

Ahsoka nodded. “She’s brilliant. It was quite the coup that Draven was able to convince her to run.”

Papa looked uneasy. “This is a lot of effort to send Leia.”

Ahsoka nodded her head. “It is.”

Mama’s mouth tightened, and she looked at Leia head on. “Are you sure that there isn’t someone else here on base that could handle this?”

“Maybe,” Ahsoka allowed. “But I don’t think you understand it’s not just about the ships.” She nodded her head to Leia. “This didn’t happen in your past, did it?”

Leia shook her head. “No, not that I am aware of.”

“This is a deviation and a worrying one. Besides the tactical advantage, it would give us to get those ships-“

“If they are even worth anything,” Papa muttered.

“Keeping them away from the Empire is key. And yes, there are people here that might be capable of pulling this off, but I think Leia is the most qualified.”

“And how would you know that?” Papa asked, voice rising, as he shot Leia an accusing look. Leia opened her mouth to defend herself. She hadn’t told Ahsoka more than she had told Papa, but Ahsoka got there first.

“Because in her past she escaped Anakin. Twice.” Leia blinked. That was a rather interesting way
to look at that she had been caught by him twice. “That alone tells me how good she is.”

“You have another reason,” Rex growled.

“I do,” Ahsoka swung her gaze to Luke. “Sending Leia shows Trehhipoi that the Alliance is taking him, and any information he is willing to share with us, seriously.”

Luke sucked in a breath. “This tip came from Trehhipoi?”

Ahsoka nodded. “And before you ask, no, it wasn’t in the data his people stole either. One of the groups he is affiliated with told him.”

“So we are trusting, not Trehhipoi, but someone else?” Papa looked uneasy.

“Trehhipoi likes Leia,” Ahsoka countered. “It might be half in jest, but I do think he is serious about marrying her if she would agree to it. Or at least that was the impression I got when I introduced myself to him.” Ahsoka certainly hadn’t wasted any time. She had been here what, four days? “He wouldn’t deliberately send her into a trap. More than likely, he had other groups verify this intel.”

Mama looked thoughtful. “You’re showing him that you trust him. Because he is as aware as we are of what a high-value target she is. We wouldn’t send her, unless we thought this was important, and that we could trust the intel he gave for us.”

Ahsoka grinned, and Rex spat out, “Politics. Why does it always come down to politics?”

“Sadly, not everything can be solved by blowing it up,” Ahsoka said.

“When did you start believing that?” Obi-Wan demanded.

Ahsoka’s smile turned sly. “Since I was no longer under your dangerous influence.”

It hadn’t been just Obi-Wan. Vader’s tactics tended toward the explosive as well, and it wasn’t his fall to the Dark Side that caused that either. Anakin Skywalker was well known for leaving things on fire behind him.

Turning to her parents, Leia tried to reassure them. “This can’t be any riskier than the time Luke, Han, Chewie, and I stole a Star Destroyer by convincing the Empire it blew up.”

Mama paled, and Papa looked taken aback, but it was Han who squawked, “You convinced me to do what?”

Luke looked interested though. “Why did we need to steal a Star Destroyer?”

“To ram it through a blockade on Tureen VII.”

Rex laughed. “And you said explosions couldn’t solve everything,” he told Ahsoka gleefully.

Mama looked worried. “Tureen VII is an important ally to the Alliance.”

Leia nodded. “I know, that’s why the blockade was there.”

Mama shared a look with Papa. “And you pulled it off?”

Leia nodded solemnly, no fanfare needed. Yes, they had gotten through, but a lot of good men and women had died on that mission. And that was even before Vader had shown up, chasing Luke
like he always did.

She folded her hands in her lap, to address Mama directly. No, neither of them was her direct commanding officer, and couldn’t order her not to go. At least not as far as Alliance business went. But Leia just wasn’t a soldier in the Alliance anymore. She was also the heir to the throne of Alderaan. It had been so long since that had been true for Leia, it was a fact she no longer took into consideration automatically. Outside of Vader, and his reasons for wanting her, if Leia was caught by the Empire, the first thing they would do was try to torture and break her so that she could be installed onto the throne of Alderaan as a puppet of the Empire.

And when that didn’t work, she would be executed live on the holo net in order to break her people’s will.

“It won’t come to that.” And Leia could feel that future in her bones. Not to say that the Empire wouldn’t kill her, but if they did, it wouldn’t be in a staged production. If Vader had any warning of such a plan, he would stop it.

“Vader would burn down the galaxy first,” the Force promised her. Which wasn’t as reassuring a thought as it seemed to think it was.

But in Leia’s role as Princess of Alderaan, Mon would be willing to listen to anything Mama had to say about what missions Leia could and could not go on. As Mama’s heir, she had a vested interest in keeping Leia alive.

Even outside those cold hard facts, these were her parents. They loved her, and they worried for her. Could she really blame them for wanting to wrap her in a cage of comfort and safety?

“I know you’re worried. I don’t blame you. But please, believe me, this mission isn’t something I consider all that difficult.”

“Even though I want no explosions,” Ahsoka remarked dryly.

“Even with no explosions. I can do this.” Leia kept her voice firm.

Mama and Papa exchanged a look, and then Mama nodded her head at Ahsoka.

“Great,” Ahsoka said. “Give me about a week, and I’ll make sure you have everything you need.”

ABA Day 142

Ahsoka wasn’t kidding about her ability to get what they needed. It was less than a week later when Leia found herself in her room, staring into her mirror, dressed from head to toe in an armor that was an eerie ghost of her past.

There were differences from Boushh’s uniform, which helped keep Leia’s mind in the present she was in. For one, this set was black and grey, instead of tan and brown. The visor had been modified, so that the words spilling across Leia’s viewscreen were in Basic, not Ubese, which she
was grateful for. She had studied hard to learn the language in her past, and had spent the last few days in Threepio’s company, refreshing herself. But she had never learned to read the damn thing. Now the constant scrolling data would be helpful, instead of an annoying distraction.


Leia pulled the helmet off, there was extra padding at the back, to make it more comfortable for her hair, but the damn thing was hot. She had forgotten about that. There were so many other things that had been scary and frightening about rescuing Han, that somehow the detail of how hot she had been the whole time had slipped her memory. She was remembering it now, in all its sweaty aching detail.

“Tomorrow,” Leia said.

Luke shuffled his feet back and forth. “You know, I’m only a call away,” he said.

She looked at him askance. “Yes, I’m sure your commander would love that. You, stealing an X-Wing and abandoning your post, because of a “summons” in the Force.”

“Leia,” he whined. “Be serious.”

She sighed. Beneath the attitude, there was a well of fear building in Luke, and she could feel how close he was to drowning in it. She wasn’t too surprised that the fear was there. It was the first time since he found out they were related that she would be going on a mission without him. Leia herself hadn’t been all that happy when he had been sent to Rodian without her, to say nothing that she had been forbidden from joining Han in the rescue mission. What did surprise her was how close he was to losing control over his fear. Hell, she thought her biggest problem would be Rex. How wrong she was.

She came up to him and laid a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “It will be fine Luke.”

“You say that now,” he grumbled.

She gestured down at the outfit she was wearing. “Ahsoka is good at what she does, Luke. I’m sure the records she has created for this persona are just as detail-oriented.”

He didn’t look convinced.

Leia gave him a winsome smile. “This can’t be any harder than impersonating a real person.”


She gave him a kiss on his cheek. “Yes, I did. But I also escaped.”

“Because I was there.”

Leia wasn’t going to correct him. He had such a twisted view of his alternate that any positive outlook was worth encouraging. She gave a slight laugh. “This isn’t Jabba’s palace, or Nar Shadda, Luke. It’s a slightly seedy port. It’s nothing I can’t handle.”

He looked worried but only asked. “Want to have dinner with me?”

“Of course,” Leia said. “Let me change, and we can go.”
Because this was them, as Han was so fond of saying, even walking to get dinner came with a complication. As soon as Leia and Luke exited from her room, Obi-Wan came around the corner. He was getting better at hiding himself, Leia noted, she had no idea he was so close to her. Or perhaps he was falling back into old habits from his time in the desert. That thought made her sad, although she understood why he would suddenly not feel as secure on this base as he once did. Luke tried to keep his feelings to himself, but it was hard to miss his distrust and anger radiating in the Force when Obi-Wan was anywhere near him.

Obi-Wan stopped a few feet away from them and gave a nod of greeting to them both. “Leia,” he said quietly. “Luke.”

Luke stepped so that he was in front of Leia. Protecting her, Leia thought bemusedly. As if she needed protection from Obi-Wan.

“Why are you here, Ben?” Luke practically growled.

The man didn’t take his gaze from Leia. “To wish her luck on her mission,” he said. His voice was calm, but his hands were turning something over and over in them, betraying his nervousness.

Luke didn’t relax. “And?” he demanded. “There was no way you didn’t know I was in that room with her. You could have waited until I left.”

Well, at least he was starting to think about people’s motivations

“I did want to see you as well,” Obi-Wan said firmly. “Because I am leaving for Lothal the day after tomorrow, and I knew if Leia was here, chances were better that we could keep things civil.”

Luke scowled at him and crossed his hands over his chest. “Really?” he asked, sarcasm dripping from the word.

“I was only hoping you were here with her, not expecting it,” Obi-Wan clarified.

Leia stepped forward. “Here I am, Obi-Wan,” she said quietly.

Obi-Wan’s gaze met hers and relaxed. He gave her a small smile. “Did Ahsoka find everything you needed?”

Leia nodded. “Yes, she is very thorough. I have your training to thank for that?”

“Anakin mostly, but I like to think I contributed a small part into the woman she became.” His eyes grew sharp. “It would be useless to counsel you on being cautious.”

“I am always cautious,” Leia protested.

Both Luke and Obi-Wan snorted at that.

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“Leia,” Obi-Wan lectured half mockingly, “your version of cautious is not how most people define the word.” Then Obi-Wan’s amusement faded. “For an old man’s sake, do try to come back, will you?”

Leia cocked her head. “You saying you would miss me? I thought Jedi weren’t supposed to become attached.”

“I told you I was never very good at it.” Then a sly grin crossed his face. “And even if the Jedi
were around, I would only tell the council I think that the universe would be a poorer place without you in it.”

“You stole my line,” Leia grumbled.

“I only borrow from the best,” he said lightly, then reached forward and gave her hand a squeeze. “May the Force be with you, Leia, on your mission.”

“Thank you, Obi-Wan,” Leia said sincerely.

Obi-Wan’s face went terrifyingly blank, and then he turned to face Luke. “And I would also like to speak with you, if you have the time.”

Luke’s voice had a frigid quality. “The only reason I’m not yelling is because I know you meant what you said to her. But what makes you think there is anything you have to say that I will listen to?”

Obi-Wan’s face didn’t even twitch, and in the Force, all Leia could feel was a muted blankness around him. “Alright,” he said. His hands started playing with whatever he had in his hands though, betraying his nerves. “I can understand why you don’t want to speak to me. But I also came here to give you this.” He took two quick steps forward, thrusting the object he held directly into Luke’s hands, then quickly stepping back.

Luke was so surprised, he didn’t immediately give it back.

Leia looked down to see what had driven Obi-Wan here in a fit of desperation. Her mouth dropped open when she registered what Luke was holding. It was a book. An actual physical book.

“What is it?” Luke asked, frowning as he turned it over in his hands. Not an unreasonable question from him. At this point in his life, she was pretty sure he had never seen one outside of a holo before. And then it occurred to Leia just what she was looking at. It had been decades since she had seen it, but she knew what this was.

“A record,” Obi-Wan said.


“Of many things,” he said. “Philosophies and realizations-“


“No, Luke,” Obi-Wan said, as he took another step back. “This isn’t about you being a Jedi.” He looked at him sadly. “I wrote it for you. It’s a record, and the musings of an old man and his observations.”

Luke looked taken aback, “It’s a diary?” he squealed.

“You should have it,” Obi-Wan said firmly and turned on his heel to walked quickly away. Leia was interested to note, that he hadn’t exactly refuted Luke’s assertion.

“Typical,” Luke muttered. “He always has to have the last word.” He looked down at the book in his hand. “What am I supposed to do with this?” he complained.

Leia held out her hand, and he turned it over to her. She looked at the front and, sure enough, just
like before, Luke’s name was inscribed on it. “Read it.”


“It has meaning to him, Luke,” Leia tapped on the inscription on the top. “I can’t imagine it was all that easy to get a hold of on Tatooine, never mind the cost.”


Leia rolled her eyes. “When would he? Did he stroll back to his room when he was at the Jedi Temple, confronting the dead bodies left in Order 66’s wake to pick it up?”

“Well, it’s here on Yavin, isn’t it?” Luke shot back. “Why bring it along when you were just escorting someone back to their home?”

Leia frowned, that was a good point. Did Obi-Wan just carry this with him, always? He had never gone back to his home on Tatooine. In fact, she could still hear Han joking with Obi-Wan that he should have charged him more to retrieve his things...

“Han,” Leia breathed.


Leia looked at him. “When Han went back to Tatooine to pay off Jabba. Obi-Wan paid him to retrieve something from his house. I never got a look at it, but this is small enough to fit in the bag Han gave him.”


Leia hissed through her teeth, and grabbed Luke’s arm, to pull him back into her room. This was a damn foolish argument to have, but Luke clearly seemed to be in a fighting mood. She needed to get them out of a public space, where who knows who would be listening.

Luke let her drag him, until the door shut behind her, then he angrily jerked his arm out of hers.

“Seriously?” Leia demanded, placing the book carefully on her bed. “Is it that inconceivable to you that Obi-Wan did his best to retrieve something that if the Empire found it, would be disastrous?”

“Oh, because my welfare is Obi-Wan’s priority.”

“It is.” Leia hissed. “Disagree on how he is going about it, but that doesn’t change the fact that he loves you, Luke.”

“I thought that before,” Luke spat. “Who’s to say this isn’t another manipulation by him?”

Leia pointed to the book. “He spent a lot of money to get that back,” she said. “And a lot of time writing it.”

Luke’s eyes narrowed. “You recognize it, don’t you?”

Leia sighed. He could be so prickly about his alternate. “Yes.”

“Then I’ll have you just tell me what’s in it,” Luke said.

“I never read it,” Leia snapped. “It was for you.”
“And there was nothing in there you didn’t want to know?” he was looking at her with an intense focus.

“Of course not,” Leia said hotly back. “I am not a Jedi.”


“What is with you?

Luke pointed to the book. “Clearly, that didn’t do my alternate any good in rebuilding anything.”

Leia wanted to pull her hair out. “What does that have to do with anything. It’s a gift Luke, that’s all. It’s up to you with what you want to do with it. I was just making sure you understood the value of it, before you tossed it aside.”

“Oh, because he spent a lot of money on it, I should be grateful?”

“He went to a lot of effort to get a book so that he could write things down for you. Something that couldn’t be sliced remotely.”

“I told you, he had it on him when he got to Tatooine. You can’t get things like this on that planet.”

“Right, when he was busy being confronted with the atrocity that his friend perpetrated on their people, he went to his room to pick up some keepsakes for old times sake. Or maybe, he did it after Mustafar, when he was hurt, grieving, and trying to get medical attention for our mother, he stopped off at a rare antiques dealer?”

“Maybe Bail—” Luke started to say. Leia cut him off. She had enough of this deliberately childish attitude.

“Papa never contacted Obi-Wan in all the years he was on Tatooine.”

“That you know of,” Luke’s voice was beginning to take on a grating quality. He was a fine one to complain about other people always needing to get in the last word.

“It was too risky,” Leia hissed. “Need I remind you, Papa was being watched and closely, for any such behavior. Think what you want about him, but he would never endanger me, not to answer a request for a book.”

“I’m not you, he had no such desire to protect me,” Luke muttered, but it was a halfhearted defense at best.

Time to bring some reality into her brother’s thick head. She shoved him gently in the shoulder with one finger. “You too,” she said. “Need I remind you, if the Empire had gotten a whiff of where Obi-Wan was, who the Emperor would have sent to deal with him.”

Luke squared his shoulders. “So? What does that have to do with me?”

Leia rolled her eyes. “How long do you think it would take Vader to notice you were on the planet in the Force? And how long after that would it take him to find you?”

Luke shifted uneasily on his feet. “We don’t know that he would have found out I was his son.”

“Vader can be incredibly blind about certain facts, but a strong Force Sensitive living with his stepbrother, with the last name of Skywalker, and calling said step-brother Uncle?” Leia snorted. “Even Vader isn’t that deluded.”
Luke sneered. “According to you, he is, because he didn’t see you.”

Leia’s hands balled into fists at her side. “Fine, have it your way. He wouldn’t have put it together that you were his son. That wouldn’t have ended up better for you.”

Luke scowled. “You keep going on and on how bad it would be if Father found out about me. Are you telling me it would be worse if he doesn’t?”

“At that time, yes.”

Luke threw his hands up in the air. “That doesn’t make any sense.”

“Yes, because you as an Inquisitor would have been so much better,” Leia shot back.


“I thought Father hunted all the remaining Jedi?” Luke asked.

“Most of them, yes,” Leia explained. “But not all. They were also sent to retrieve any and all Force Sensitives that the Empire became aware of.”

“And do what with them?” Luke’s expression was becoming wary now.

Leia shook her head. “I don’t know what happened to most of them. A lot of them were children, Luke.” Luke paled at that. “I do know that some of the people they found joined them, but you would have to ask Ahsoka for more details. She had more one on one experience with them.

“They were Sith?” Luke asked.

Leia frowned. “I don’t think so. Dark Side users yes, but not Sith. Honestly, I’m not entirely sure on how they worked, or fit into the Imperial hierarchy, but the rumors I heard at the time were enough to know that you never wanted to be a subject of interest for them.”

Luke looked thoughtful at that. Then he shook his head. “It didn’t happen. And since I’ve never heard anyone mention them to me, they are all gone now, aren’t they?”

“For now,” Leia hissed. “It doesn’t mean that the Emperor won’t resurrect them. Especially since Vader is starting to move against him.”

“Oh, now you believe Father wants to protect you.”

Leia grimaced. “Yes, fine,” she muttered. “Vader wants to protect me. I get it. I think he’s going about it entirely the wrong way, but that’s what he’s doing. Happy?”

“No,” Luke crossed his hands over his chest. “Why was it so hard for you to believe that?”

“Because I spent years being his prey, Luke,” Leia hissed. “And that is not something you ever forget, not if you want to live.”

Luke looked stricken and nodded his head. “Okay, I can see how that would make it hard to see.” His eyes grew distant. “The stories I’ve heard about him, they are all true, aren’t they?”
Leia nodded her head. “I’d say about five percent of what you have heard is exaggerated, but yes, most of it is true, Luke. He doesn’t stop and he will bring everything he has against you.”


“He once used an entire fleet of vessels to chase me, Han, and Chewie on the Falcon. For months.”


“No, Luke, I mean a fleet. As in multiple Star Destroyers. And a Super-Star Destroyer as well.”

“For one ship? That’s insane.”

Leia nodded. “I know. And he did it because we could possibly lead him to you. So please believe me when I tell you, that him trying to ‘protect’ me, doesn’t in any way reassure me. Because I have no idea what that means to him, and what he considers ‘reasonable’ measures.”

Luke bit his lip, and his eyes slid away from hers. Satisfied that she had made her point, Leia pointed to the book again. “I think you should read this. Not because I want you to be a Jedi, or because I think you have to be this image you think I have of you in my head. But because I think it would bring you some peace if you at least try to understand where Obi-Wan is coming from.

“Why are you taking his side?” Luke whined.

“I’m not,” Leia said. “I’m just pointing out he’s trying.”

Luke looked at the book on her bed. “Your one to lecture me about letting go of my anger,” he remarked snidely.

Leia flinched, and just stopped herself from snapping back at him. It would only make this situation worse. And she didn’t want to fight with him before she left on a mission.

“And look where that landed me,” she told him. “I was alone and all by myself, fighting an impossible war.”

Luke looked up at her, a scowl on his face, “You are not alone,” he hissed. “No matter how irritating you are right this minute, I am not him. I will not abandon you. Ever.”

Leia looked into that so young face and wished she could believe him. He meant well, he really did, but he had no idea the pain life could throw at you, and what you would do to escape that. But that wasn’t an issue to discuss today.

“I didn’t mean now,” she said softly. “I meant then, Luke, before I got here.” She stepped forward and put her hands on his shoulders. “I meant that maybe I was too happy to cling to my grudges, because it was easier than letting people in.”

“Maybe,” Luke allowed grudgingly. “Or maybe you were cautious because he turned out to be weak.”

Leia sighed. It was all so simple when you were young. Sometimes she missed that. “It doesn’t matter. Because I am here,” she raised her arm up a bit, so she could see the chrono on her wrist, “for the next twelve hours at least. And I am hungry, so let’s go eat.”

“You really think I should swallow this, like I did everything else?”

Leia sighed, as she let her arms slide off his shoulders. So much for appealing to a teenager’s
bottomless stomach. “No, I think you need to talk to Rex,” Leia said.

“He can’t speak for all the clones,” Luke said.

“And you can’t speak for all the slaves in the galaxy,” Leia shot back. “But, you damn well seem comfortable doing so.”

Luke’s face twisted in frustration. ”Am I supposed to betray everything I was ever taught?” he asked. “Simply because it’s easier?”

“Never,” Leia hissed, getting right into his face. Luke actually took a step back from her, he was so startled by her ferocity.

Leia forced herself to calm down. “We don’t do easy in this family,” she said in a softer voice. “What I am saying is that you need to find a way to find peace with this. And soon.”


Leia looked at him, startled. “No,” she said. “Because of the Force.”

Luke only looked confused.

Leia looked at him, dumbfounded. “Didn’t Obi-Wan warn you that the Force can amplify what you are feeling?”

“Yes,” Luke said slowly, “but what does that have to do with anything?”

“Luke,” she said aghast. “You let this keep going, it will eat you alive. The Force tunes to your emotions and feeds them back to you. Without control, without balance, you could be consumed. By either side.”

“Then I will stop using the Force,” Luke said.

Leia shook her head. “It doesn’t work that way. You’ve gone too far in your training.”

Luke opened his mouth to protest, and Leia didn’t let him talk. “I told you,” she said quietly. “I told you when you started this, it wasn’t something that you could just quit, that it was who you would be, forever.”

He looked uncomfortable. “You seem to be managing ignoring the Force alright.”

Not nearly as well as he thought she was. As evidenced by her brush with the Dark Side a few days ago. And the increasing awareness of the Force, and it’s ability to make its point known, when before she could ignore it at will.

“I’m not saying you have to be a Jedi, Luke,” Leia said softly. “And you are right, I’m certainly not. But what you can’t do, is run around ignoring this. You need to confront what is making you so angry.”


“Are you sure about that?” Leia asked. “Have you actually thought about it?”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“He hurt you,” Leia acknowledged. “I am not arguing otherwise. But you seem awfully fixated on
a mistake he made before you were even born. A mistake he is sorry for and is trying to make right.”


Leia gritted her teeth. “Damn Tatooine fatalism.”


Leia’s blood turned to ice. Well, if he wanted to play rough, she was more than willing to indulge him. “And do you think, maybe, that attitude that it’s done, you can never make up for it, no matter how hard you try, is why Vader never broke free from the Dark Side in all those years?”

Luke paled, and he took a step back. “I…That isn’t…It’s different.”

“How?”


“It’s different because you don’t know Vader. He’s a concept, a figure in your head. And I’m not saying that’s a bad thing or a good thing, Luke. Only it’s easier to overlook the faults of something when it isn’t personal.”

“My father isn’t personal to me?”

Leia’s anger drained away. She closed her eyes and took in a deep breath. This was a stupid argument to have, especially when she was about to leave on a mission tomorrow. Not a very dangerous one, but Leia’s life had a tendency to veer towards nasty surprises.

She said in a soft voice. “I’m sorry.”

“Sorry you said it, or sorry it hurt me?”

Leia’s eyes flew open and then gave Luke a pained grimace. “Both. It was uncalled for.” She rubbed her forehead. “I might have inelegantly said it, but what I meant was that you aren’t personally invested in Vader. He’s only a series of facts, not a person. You know Obi-Wan. You are personally invested in him.”

Luke huffed. “In a slaver.”

“You know that wasn’t what he was, Luke,” Leia pushed right back.

“No, it’s just wasn’t what anyone called him.”

“And how is that any different then what Vader is doing now?” Leia demanded. “You seem to overlook that little fact.”

Luke’s face hardened. “You have no idea what you are talking about.”

Leia took two steps to get right into Luke’s face. “You think? You’re angry at Obi-Wan, but the person who you are most angry with, is yourself. Because despite everything you know, everything you grew up believing in, you still love him. And that is what you can’t forgive.”

Luke looked panicked now. “No, I don’t.”

Leia almost, almost, told him that if she wasn’t allowed to lie to him anymore, then the same held
true for him. But the whirlwind of emotion rolling off Luke still her tongue. It wasn’t that he
believed what he was saying, he didn’t. It was that he was desperately trying to convince himself
that he did.

“Just because you care about him doesn’t make you a bad person, Luke,” she said softly.


“No,” Leia corrected gently. “It just is.”

“Oh, like you know anything about it?”

Leia gave him a sad smile. “My son is a patricide, and a mass murderer to boot. He is bent on
dominating the galaxy to his will and restoring the government that took almost everything from
me. And I still love him and miss him.”


“Does that make me a bad person?” she asked.

Luke shook his head. “No, but he’s your son. Obi-Wan isn’t family.”

“That is for you to decide,” Leia said. “And only you. But you do yourself no favors by lying to
yourself about how you feel, Luke. Ruthless honesty, remember?”

anymore.”

Leia looked at him, and her anger bled away. This was so much to lay on one person’s shoulders,
could she blame him for lashing out like he had? She didn’t have any answers for him, on what to
do about Vader, Obi-Wan, or even being a Jedi. So, she settled for the next best thing. She drew
him into a hug. “I know,” she whispered into his shoulder.

Luke returned the embrace, arms tight. “I’m just so tired,” he said.

Leia let out a small laugh. “Me too, little brother.”

“I’m older,” he protested, but it was half-hearted at best.

They stayed wrapped around each other, trying to give the other strength, for a very long time.

ABA Day – 143

Nimban wasn’t anything special from space. It had two large continents surrounded by oceans.
There were mountain ranges, and by the look of it, a great deal of lush green forests. It was like so
many other inhabited worlds in the galaxy, nothing remarkable or unique. Average in every way.

Leia did notice that it didn’t have the stripped landscapes that other colonized Outer Rim worlds of
the Empire had. You could always spot those worlds easily, even from space. Both from the
devastated landscapes and the level of pollution in the atmosphere. Nimban lacked those features,
it looked unremarkable, but peaceful. At least as peaceful as any planet that had sentients on it
could be.

That impression changed the minute Leia’s boot left the gangplank of the Falcon and touched the
ground. Hopelessness and despair curled around her spine, and she almost jumped back onto the
gangplank at the unexpected sensation of being smothered with such intense emotions. No, the
Empire wasn’t here. But the Hutts, in their own way, were just as bad. And that said something,
that they could descend into the level of nastiness and cruelty of a Sith Empire.

Hastily, Leia thickened her mental walls. It didn’t help, those feelings, they didn’t abate.

“Not now,” she hissed at the Force. “You aren’t telling me anything I can’t see with my eyes.”

And she could, even if she wasn’t intimately familiar with what happened on Hutt controlled
worlds. From the bent, sunken posture of the people in the landing bay, to the furtive looks over
the shoulders, and the threadbare state of almost everyone’s clothes. She didn’t need the Force to
tell her this was a place of misery.

The answer she got wasn’t in words, images, or even a flash of warning. If she didn’t know better,
she would swear that the Force was blowing raspberries at her. Leia suppressed a shiver. As of
late, the Force had gotten more and more insistent on what path it wanted her to walk.

Desperate to get her mind off what a semi-sentient power was trying to tell her, she turned to Han.
“Wh-“ she cut herself off and quickly switched languages. {Where too?} she asked hastily, hoping
that no one around her noticed what she had started to say.

She had been so rattled that she almost addressed Han in Basic, which would have been a fatal
error in her cover. The Ubense didn’t have the vocal cords capable of the language, as far as
anyone could tell. Not that she thought any of the haggard people around her were paying
attention, but small mistakes are what got people killed in this line of work.

Han gave her a worried look. “You okay?” he asked.

Leia waved a hand in the air. {I’m fine,} she said.

Han didn’t look convinced. “You sure?”

Chewie’s voice came from behind Leia, as he descended the gangplank. <She said she is fine,
Han,> he snarked. <You don’t need to baby her.>

Wonderful. Any progress she and Chewie had been making in repairing their friendship seemed to
be gone. Although Leia couldn’t fathom what she had done over the last few days, that would get
Chewie angry with her again.

“I am not babying her,” Han shot back, hands coming to his hips.

<I for one, would like an answer to her question too,> Chewie said, neatly changing the subject.
Perhaps he realized that out here in the open, was not the best place for him and Han to get into
their personal lives.

Han blinked, surprised. Then a rueful look came over his face, and he scratched the back of his
neck. “Well,” he drawled, “the thing about that is-”
Chewie cut him off with a sharp bark, as he threw his hands into the air. <You don’t have a plan?>

Han’s face quickly morphed into anger. “Of course, I have a plan!” he hissed back, but Chewie wasn’t listening to him. He had already turned to Leia, pointing a finger at her.

<You are supposed to keep him from doing foolish things.> he spat, and before Leia could even think of a reply, he was storming to the door painted with the slightly faded words “exit”.

“Hey,” Han protested, scrambling to follow him.

Leia found herself running to keep up, and R2, who was still halfway down the gangplank by the sound of it, gave a panicked warble when he saw all of them take off.

<What?> Chewie barked at Han, pushing the door open, and exiting through it. <Wander around the planet asking everyone you meet on the street where the super-secret ships are?>

Leia followed them through the door, and the moment she stepped outside, she was temporarily blinded as sunlight hit her visors. She blinked a few times to clear her vision, just in time, as the computer in the visors finally adjusted to the brightness, and made it so she could see out of them.

The hanger bay exit door deposited directly out into what looked like a busy thoroughfare. Leia’s eyes took in all the people, who were walking past her, most at a fast clip. There was shouting and the sounds and smells of the various pack animals, being led up and down the street. Leia could see a few hovercraft and land speeders whizzing by, but they were vastly outnumbered by live transport.

Down the street, she caught sight of a pedestrian, who barely got out of the way of one ship cruising past. Leia felt someone bump into her back, and she whirled, expecting a fight, only to see the back of a Rodiarian. There were two large bags on his back, and that, not him, was what had hit her.

Han’s voice rose above the general noise of the crowd, temper hot. “What crawled in your throat and died?” he asked.

<You,> Chewie snarled back. <While you are running around trying to prove yourself to her,> one massive paw came up to point at Leia, <you dumped us in the middle of a mess. Again.>

Han pointed a finger down the road to the large building sitting at what looked like the edge of this town. Even from this distance, it was massive looking. “Yeah, like I need something other than my eyes to tell me where those ships are,” Han snarled. “And you would have noticed them too, if you hadn’t been so busy pouting the whole way here.”

Leia hissed through her teeth. Nobody seemed to be paying attention, but that wouldn’t stay that way for long the way the two of them were trying to rip holes into one another. This wasn’t their usual banter, and Leia had no idea what was going on between the two of them.

Whatever it was, it was bad. Because Han was right. Leia had noticed the warehouse too, as they had flown in. It was the only place near the shipyards that was covered, so that whatever was in them couldn’t be spied on by satellites in space. According to the remote probes the Alliance had sent here yesterday, the ships in the dock were still under construction. That large warehouse was too big for anything else that would be brought into this port. So, it stood to reason the ships that were completed were being stored in that massive structure. Chewie should have noticed too. It said something about his state of mind that he hadn’t.

Chewie bared his teeth at Han. <Then why are we here,> he said angrily pointing his finger to the
ground, indicating where they were standing, <and not there, doing reconnaissance?>

Han scowled. “I thought we should talk around and get some information before trying to sneak around what is probably a highly guarded area filled with trigger happy guards.”

<And where would that be?> Chewie asked, arms stretched wide, taking in the bustling street, and all the buildings lining it.

Han jerked his finger over his shoulder, in the opposite direction of the warehouse. “The bar down there.”

Chewie scowled, and peered down the street. His eyes squinted as he read the sign aloud. <Caleno’s.> He blinked, once, and looked down at Han. <Oh,> he said contritely.

Han just looked back at him, arms crossed over his chest.

It was too close to Leia’s reaction when she had heard the name too, for her to call Chewie out on it. Caleno wasn’t a name she recognized as one of Han’s smuggling associates. Of course, it could be someone who died before she had started paying attention to Han’s contacts the first time around.

On second thought, no, she was still going to be mad at Chewie. He had been there, in the Falcon’s galley, when they discussed this on the flight to this planet.

<i see,> Chewie shifted from foot to foot. <Why did he settle here?>

“Don’t know. Don’t care,” Han said, anger beating in every word. “But I did know he was here, and thought, hey, a bar is always a good spot to start if you want the local gossip.”

Chewie grumbled and rubbed the back of his neck <Sorry,> he said.

Han rolled his eyes. “I am not that distracted.”

Chewie shook his head. <Yes, you are.>

R2, finally catching up to them, gave a short whistle to Leia. [In case you all move past my maximum speed again, might I know what our final destination is?]

Leia patted him on the head. {The bar over there,} she said, {Han knows the owner} R2, let out an electronic snigger. [Of course, he does.]

Han narrowed his eyes at the little droid. “What did he say?” he demanded to Leia.

{Just wants to know where we are going} Leia said blandly. By the look on Han’s face, she knew Han didn’t believe her. R2 only had so much more time as a period of grace to keep those snarky comments from Han. Han was going to learn binary, and fast, if she knew anything about him. He didn’t like the feeling of people talking behind his back. And she knew how fast he could learn to make out the language, he had done it the first time around too.

Not that it would, or had, slowed R2’s insults down. Then again, knowing the droid’s contrary nature, he probably enjoyed it more if Han traded quips with him.

That was on the horizon, not what was in front of her. She squared her shoulders and addressed Chewie and his stunning lack of attention. {Han did tell us where we were going. Or were you too busy glaring holes at my head to pay attention?}
Chewie’s eyes slid away from hers. <It wasn’t you I was glaring at,> he said.

Leia tried to hold onto her irritation, but it wasn’t worth the effort. She sighed. That comment was uncalled for on her end, plus it wasn’t her place to get between whatever issue was going on between Han and Chewie. She was just on edge. She had already gotten used to knowing more than everyone around her. This was the first time, since she arrived in this time, that she was walking into a situation she had no prior knowledge of. It was making her uneasy.

{You trust this Caleno?} Leia asked, letting her nerves take hold of her tongue. If she had objections, she should have voiced them on the ship when they were going over their plans, not here on a busy street where anyone could overhear them.

Han cast her an incredulous look. “Of course not,” he said. “He is my friend.”

Leia shook her head, cursing to herself. It was too easy. Han made it so easy to forget that the man standing in front of her hadn’t experienced the lifetime of shared memories with him. She had just relied on a shorthand they hadn’t developed yet.

So, they would develop new shorthand. It wouldn’t be better or worse than what happened before, just different.

{I mean} she clarified, {do you trust him not to punch you in the face when he sees you?}

Chewie let out a startled bark of laughter at that.

Han scowled at him. “Oh, like you are so popular,” he grumbled.

Chewie gave a rueful shake of his head. <I’m more popular then you,> and now there was nothing but open affection in his voice.

But his eyes were all serious when he turned to look at Leia. <How many of our friends did you meet?> he asked.

Leia shrugged. {None.}

Chewie’s face grew angry again, and Leia realized that because of the mask and the vocoder distorting her voice, Chewie had completely misread her meaning.

{If I recall correctly, at this point in your life, neither of you have ‘friends,} she said, putting as much sarcasm as she could into that word. {Only associates who fell on a varying scale of wanting to kill you or sleep with you.}

Chewie looked thoughtful, but Han said, semi-indignantly, “That’s not true. No one wants to kill me.”

All of them looked at him, and R2 gave a long sniggering warble.

“They don’t,” Han protested. “I’m a popular guy.”

He wasn’t denying the fact that people wanted to sleep with him though, Leia thought to herself.

Those words broke Chewie out of his thoughtful gaze at Leia. <No,> he said, turning on his heels and starting to walk toward Caleno’s <You are not. Even less so, since you stopped taking jobs from our usual clients.>

Han scowled and quickly turned to follow Chewie. “Hey, I don’t see you complaining about the
jobs we are taking now.” This had the ring of a sore point with Han, and Leia wondered how many times they had this particular argument over the last few months. “The Falcon is staying in the air, and we have food in our bellies.”

This was a fascinating look into the problems between the two of them, but Leia wished, for a moment, they remembered how much taller than her they were. She was having to use the Force to keep up. And the Force did nothing to keep the sweat at bay. Nimban wasn’t as hot as Tatooine, but it wasn’t cold either, and sweat was starting to pool in the hollow of her back, and it wouldn’t be long before it started trickling down her face.

Chewie shrugged. <Yes,> he agreed. <There isn’t as much shame in what we do now.> He stopped and looked at Leia, who almost ran into him. <But you wouldn’t know anything about the choices we make when we are desperate? Would you?>

Leia stilled, not sure if Chewie was throwing that accusation at her, or himself. {There is nothing shameful about surviving Chewie,} she said cautiously.

Chewie bared his teeth. <Yes, I suppose that is a comforting thought from someone who has never been put in dire straits.>

Leia stiffened. She wasn’t about to judge Chewie for what he had done to survive the Empire. {My entire world was slaughtered in front of me,} Leia said quietly. {Do you really think I didn’t torment myself for years with the thought that if I had only given my torturers what they wanted, that wouldn’t be the case?}

Chewie reared back, as if he had forgotten about that. And he had, Leia realized with a sinking heart. Alderaan’s destruction was a theoretical to him. Or it was something he would shove into the back of his mind, because it was too terrible to contemplate. Leia didn’t have that luxury. Not for the Alderaan of now, or the planets that were in danger from the Empire’s determination to dominate the galaxy. Because of the second Death Star, that even now was in the first stages of construction. Or even further on the horizon, the First Order.

Leia had once said never again, and in her lifetime, the destruction of a planet had happened, with her son leading the charge. She wouldn’t screw up this miraculous chance to make it all right.

“Chewie,” Han said, true anger riding his voice. “Don’t take your anger out at me, on her.”

Chewie didn’t answer Han, just continued to stare at Leia. But it wasn’t anger in those blue eyes. Playing on a hunch, Leia took a step forward and laid a hand on his arm. {You’re not mad at Han, are you?} she said in the gentlest voice she could manage through the vocoder.

Chewie looked lost as he shook his head.

She nodded. {I’ve lived through as many battles as you, Chewie. I have survived the destruction of my home, my identity, and being thrown into a place I never expected to be. I survived all of it, and sometimes I wonder too.}

“Wonder what?” Han asked, exasperated.

<Why me?> Chewie ‘s voice was rough. <Why did I survive?>

“What kind of question is that?” Han asked, bewildered.

Chewie shook his head. <We need to get going,> he said, pulling back from Leia. <Now is not the time, and both Leia and I are far too old for such maudlin thoughts when there is work to be done.>
“What did I just miss?” Han demanded.

<Something I hope you never understand,> Chewie said, voice tired.

Leia looked at him sadly. {He will,} she said simply.

Chewie nodded. <I know. He will follow you wherever you go, and you won’t stay away.>

“I will know what?”

Chewie waved a hand in the air dismissively. <It doesn’t matter. You wouldn’t understand yet anyway.>

“I don’t follow anyone,” Han spat. “I am the captain of my own ship. My own life.” They both looked at him, and Han fidgeted just slightly. “I’m not saying that I wouldn’t go along, if we all happened to be heading in the same direction.”

Chewie and Leia both rolled their eyes at him, although Leia’s gesture was hidden behind her mask.

<It’s fine, Han,> Chewie said, starting to walk again, this time at a slow enough pace that Leia and R2 could easily keep up. <I just realized we have more true allies then I thought to watch our backs.>

Leia almost stopped in the middle of the busy sidewalk to gape at Chewie. He hadn’t named her as a friend, but she could live with being an ally. She had plenty of time to move herself into the friend category. If they all lived long enough.

[First, you were too fast, and now you are too slow.] R2 complained. [Are we going to stand here all day talking about your organic bioelectric impulses?]

Chewie nodded. <Yes,> he agreed. <We should get going.>

Han looked like he wanted to press all of them, about what they were talking about before, but of course, his mind decided that him being right was the important thing here. “Finally came to my way of thinking about her, huh?”

They all stopped to let a land speeder float bye. Lea could see Chewie visibly restrain himself from whapping Han across the back of his head. <No,> Chewie said. <Because I have no desire to mate with her, as you do.>

Han turned bright red. “CHEWBACCA!” he howled like some distraught dandy.

Chewie shrugged. <Are you insulted that I do not wish to mate you?> he asked Leia, completely ignoring Han, who was sputtering. <Because I got the impression you did not want to be my….how did you put it?>

{Naked friend,} Leia supplied cheerfully.

Chewie nodded. <Yes, naked friend.>

{No, I am not insulted,} Leia said. And she checked carefully for incoming traffic and crossed the street, Chewie and R2, on her heels, Han was still standing there gaping. It wasn’t until they got into the middle of the street that he broke out of his daze, and hurried to catch up with them.

“Okay,” he grumbled. “Ha-ha. You all had a good laugh at my expense.”
<I do not recall laughing.> Chewie said, face straight.

{Neither do I.} Leia agreed.

They came to the sidewalk, and Han put a hand on Chewie’s arm. “Seriously,” he said. “We good? Because walking into this bar fighting with each other is not a great way to stay alive.”

Chewie sighed. <We are fine Han.>

Han didn’t look relieved. “And her?” he asked, gesturing to Leia.

Chewie looked at Leia. <I was being stupid,> he said. <And I now realize that she is far wiser than you.>

Han straightened up to his full height. “Name in one way.”

<She handled Jabba for you, did she not?>

“Hey! That was me!” Han protested as they started walking again. “I paid him off, not her!”

<Only because she manipulated you into it,> Chewie said easily, head swinging side to side, as he took in the people around them. <Otherwise you would have ended up at Jabba’s mercy.>

Leia shook her head and leaned forward a bit so that Chewie could see her mask. {Not just at his mercy} she told him. {As a wall decoration.}

Han scowled at her as she leaned back. “Whose side are you on?” he demanded.

{The one that keeps you alive,} Leia informed him. And even through the distortion of the vocoder in her mask, and the guttural cadence of Ubese, she could hear the fear in the tone of her voice.

Han’s indignant look melted away, and he looked at her in wonder.

The moment was broken by Chewie’sexasperated voice, <Are we going into the bar?> he asked snidely. <Or are you two going to stare at each other longingly?>

Leia snapped her attention back to the here and now, and was fervently glad for a moment for the mask covering her face, hiding her blush. Han wasn’t so lucky, he was beet red, but he muttered, “Yeah, yeah,” as he swung the door open.

Bar was a generous term. Maz ran a bar. This was a dive.

The first thing Leia noticed was that there was almost no light in the room. The bar itself, located in the back, was outlined by a glass tube, filled with a green neon gas. It caused odd sickly colored shadows to fall everywhere. Some of them were of weird hues from the light passing through the liquor bottles on display. There was a tall Abyssin, standing behind the bar, washing a glass. Caleno, Leia assumed, and his one eye was watching the crowd lazily.

There wasn’t a live band, or a place for one to play from. Just some thumping music, pumped out over speakers, that made it hard to overhear conversations. And music was a generous term for the jangling notes that were being played, or beaten to death, if Leia was going to be honest. But then again, the music wasn’t here to make anyone happy, just give plausible deniability if the
authorities asked the patrons if they heard anything.

There were about a dozen tables, scattered through the room. Each one had their own dim holo light, but it was only enough to light the table it was attached to. Leia, with the enhanced vision of the visor, could make out structures that, once upon a time, had been windows. They were so caked with dirt, that no light was being let into them.

The only real source of full light was the open door, and it vanished as soon as the three of them walked into the bar. Leia noticed several heads turned to look at them, as the customers were now able to get a good look at them.

Leia wasn’t sure if Han was aware of their assessing audience. Her mask was filtering the lights. It dealt with changing from light circumstances to dark better than the other way around. But she was pretty sure he and Chewie’s eyes hadn’t adjusted yet. Beside her, Leia could feel R2 tremble just a bit, although he didn’t make a sound. She patted him on the head in reassurance.

Han’s eyes must have adjusted fairly quickly because he strode to an empty table that was in the middle of the room. Now that she was in the room proper, Leia could see the filth and grime everywhere. She wrinkled her nose as something went crunch beneath her boot.

The floor looked like it hadn’t been washed since the building had been erected. And she was thankful that the mask cut the smell to a minimum. As she passed several tables, she caught sight of faint wisps of smoke wrapped around several patrons’ heads, as they smoked their drug of choice.

<I’ll go get us some drinks,> Chewie said before they could sit down. <And let Caleno know we’re here.>

Now, why was Chewie so eager to make the introduction first? She shot an accusing glance at Han. {You said he wasn’t a punching friend.}

Han grinned. “He’s not,” he said casually, as he took his seat. “But he likes Chewie better than me.”

{Oh,} Leia said. She rolled that thought in her head for a moment. She turned to Chewie. {Is he pursuing you as openly as Maz?} she asked.

Chewie started. <How do you…> his voice trailed off as he realized who he was asking that question to.

He gave a rueful shake of his head. <No,> he said. <Nobody flirts with me as blatantly as Maz. Caleno just prefers the quiet type,> he said with a pointed look at Han, who blithely ignored him.

<You want anything while I’m up there, Leia?>

Leia looked down at the table and frowned. She ran a gloved finger across the table, her frown deepening when she brought it up to inspect it. She could see that the glove was now several shades darker. {You trust anything this place has to sell?} she asked Chewie dubiously.

He gave her a fierce grin. <Food, no. Drinks, yes. Caleno likes to smuggle the good stuff, but he doesn’t keep it out on the floor for the customers.>

Leia turned her head to look at Han, who tried to look innocent. “What?” he asked, a knowing smile playing at his lips. “How do you think I know him? We met at a garden party?”
<The usual?> Chewie asked Han, and he nodded. Chewie turned to her, and Leia shook her head.

{Can’t drink with this on.}

<S shame.,> Chewie said. <He really does carry the good stuff.>

“Oh, that’s what we need,” Han muttered, *just* loud enough for Leia to hear him. “Her drunk. She would get it into her head to burn the place down.”

{One time!} Leia hissed, as she took her seat, and Chewie wisely retreated to get his and Han’s drinks. {I got drunk *one time.*)

“Yeah, that one time was enough.”

{It was an accident.} She sniffed regally {And I didn’t burn anything down, that was Luke!}

“Uh-huh,” Han said, looking entirely too pleased with himself.

Leia shook her head. The flirting was fun and too reminiscent of old times that she hadn’t had with this Han. They were here to work. She looked around the room, trying to get a feel for the place and the people in it.


Leia gritted her teeth. Again, with the information she already knew. {So, now what?} she asked Han.

“Well,” Han leaned back in his chair and looked around the room. “We stay here for a bit. See what Caleno is willing to tell me and Chewie. Drink our drinks, see who else I know-“

“Solo!” a voice cried in a demanding tone. Both Leia and Han turned their heads to where that strident voice was coming from. There was a human-sized person, standing in the door. Leia could just make out that they were pointing an accusing finger at Han, not a blaster. They were keeping in the bright spot cast by the sunlight pouring through the door. If they knew Han, chances were good, that meant that framing wasn’t an accident. They had done it to intentionally blind Han.

There was a long pause, as whoever this person was waited for Han to answer. Han only squinted at the figure, trying to make them out. When he didn’t say anything in that fraught silence, the person came stomping towards their table, the light cutting out as the door swung shut.

Leia could finally make out that it was a human female. She was tall, with dark skin, dark brown hair, dressed in a practical jumpsuit, with knee-high boots, and armed with what looked like a rather nasty blaster on her left thigh. Leia couldn’t really tell through the red-tinted lenses what the color of the outfit was, but it fit her snugly.

As the stranger stomped over to them, Leia found herself frowning. This woman looked familiar, but the distorted version of her that Leia was seeing was throwing her off. And that voice. Leia could have *sworn* she recognized that voice. In her memory, she was screaming out Han’s name in annoyance, like she was doing now.

Han came to his feet, and Leia could tell by his squinting face, that he couldn't quite make out who was coming towards them either. Only it wasn’t a memory problem for him, his eyes still hadn’t adjusted to the sudden splash of light in the room.

"I think you have the wrong-“ was all that Han got out before there was a hand slapping him across
the face.

Leia jumped to her feet, hand falling to her blaster, but before she could do anything, the woman grabbed Han’s shirt and hauled him down for a kiss.

Han didn’t return the embrace, his hands were just flailing wildly at his sides. All Leia could do was stare, her mind whirling as she tried to put together just what the hell was going on. Shooting this strange woman seemed the best option, but corpses don’t give you answers. Besides, Ahsoka wanted this mission to be low-key. Even in a place like this, on a planet like this, killing someone in public was bound to attract some notice.

The woman finished the kiss, and pulled back, her hand still firmly wrapped around Han’s shirt. “Where is my cut from the Stenness job, you son of a bitch?” she growled into Han’s face.

At the mention of Stenness, everything clicked into place for Leia. Sana Starros. The woman who was currently spitting fire into Han’s face was Sana.

It had been decades since Leia had even thought of the smuggler. Longer since she had seen her. And what was she doing here, on Nimban?

Han, meanwhile, was openly gaping at the woman. “I? You? What?” he sputtered.

Sana snorted and pushed Han so he fell back into his chair. “Eloquent as always.” She looked at the empty chair next to Han. “Where is your sidekick?”

“Getting drinks,” Han said automatically.

Sana grinned, then her gaze fell on Leia. “New friend?”

Han blinked very rapidly and turned his head to look at Leia. Pure panic was written across his face. Leia just stared back at him, wondering how he wanted to play this.

“She’s not a friend,” Han said, turning back to face Sana. “She’s Le-…” his voice trailed off as he realized what he was about to say. Leia just kept herself from shaking her head. If she had known that Sana was going to show up, she would have brought Luke. He would have lied better than that, and that was saying something.

“She’s an acquaintance?” Han finished lamely.

Leia rolled her eyes. Oh, no, that wouldn’t get Sana’s attention at all.

“Oh really?” the woman purred and came over to Leia, a sway in her hips. Leia felt her eyebrows raise in surprise, and she almost took a step back. That was a much friendlier greeting then she remembered Sana giving to her the last time they were first introduced. Or ever.

“Hi,” Sana said, coming so close to Leia she almost knocked her over. “I’m this idiot’s wife, Sana Solo. And you are?”

Han’s voice was just this side of yelling. “You are not my wife!”

Sana didn’t even look at him, just smirked at Leia. “I have the paperwork that says otherwise.” She leaned forward, so much so she was practically kissing Leia’s mask. “Don’t believe a word this fool has told you. He may be useless, but even I have to admit he is one of the best liars in the galaxy.” She ran a hand down Leia’s mask. “You’re better off with me, sweetheart.”
This was definitely not how Sana had greeted her in the past. Leia was very bad at seeing flirtation, but Sana was being so over the top, it was hard to miss. Why? Did she have some secret fetish for non-humans? Or was she doing this to make Han jealous?

Didn’t matter either way. Leia put her hand out and softly pushed Sana back. {Shiok.}

Sana looked down at the space between the two of them bemusedly, like she didn’t get rejected that often. “I’m sorry?”

{Shiok,} Leia repeated firmly. {My name is Shiok}

Sana’s brow wrinkled for a bit. “Shiok?” she said, making a passable pronunciation at the name. Great, it seemed she spoke Ubese. So much for talking to Han in private in front of her.

Leia nodded in answer to her question. Sana reached out, took Leia’s gloved hand, and brought it up to her lips. She pressed a light kiss to it, and then looked through her lashes at Leia. “It’s very nice to meet you, Shiok,” she purred.

Leia sent a small prayer to all the gods, that she was wearing a mask, so Sana couldn’t see the absolutely flabbergasted look she had to be wearing. She, fortunately, didn’t need to come up with anything to say because that was the moment that Chewie appeared next to her.

<Han, what-> Chewie’s voice trailed off as he got a good look at their guest. <Oh. You.>

Han waved a hand at Sana. “Look who found us,” he said, voice still semi-hysterical. “My not wife, Sana.”

Chewie very carefully put the two drinks he was holding on the table. <You're not wife?> he asked slowly, as he took his seat.

Han only shot a panicked look at Leia.

Sana snorted, and thankfully let Leia’s hand go. She plopped herself in the chair next to Han’s and grabbed the drink he was starting to reach for.

“Hey!” Han protested.

Sana just took a sip and leveled a glare at Han. “Of course, you show up here,” she complained. “I have monitoring droids on all your favorite hidey holes, because you are nothing if not predictable. Then you walk in here, like you don’t have a care in the world.”

Han finally lost the expression that made him look like a dying fish, and sat up straight. “I am not predictable!”

Sana gave him a coy smile. “Of course, you aren’t, dear,” she said, voice saccharine sweet.

Han scowled, and threw her own words back in her face. “You weren’t expecting me here, were you?”

Sana frowned at that and put the drink back on the table. Chewie, so far, was saying nothing, just taking sips of his drink, looking between Han, Sana, and Leia. Leia wondered if he was enjoying the show.

Sana looked at Han thoughtfully. “Why are you here, Han?” she asked. “Nimban isn’t where you usually look for work.”
Han’s face contorted with resignation. “Jabba’s still a little pissed at me. Thought it was best to stay clear of Tatooine for a while.”

Sana snorted. “He’ll get over it. Especially since you paid him back for that spice you dumped.” She gave Han a mocking smirk. “After all, you are his favorite.”

Leia frowned. There were undertones here she wasn’t understanding the meaning of. Both from Sana, and the shuttered look on Han’s face.

“That’s only because I’m good at what I do,” Han told Sana stiffly. “It’s not like we’re drinking buddies.”

Sana shook her head. “Believe what you want,” she said, her fingers playing on the edge of the glass. “But you two, are too alike.”

“I have a fast ship.” Han said, leaning forward a bit. “And Jabba has need of it. Other than that, we have nothing in common.”

Sana didn’t dispute that statement but narrowed in on the Falcon. “Still telling tales, Han?” She clucked her tongue in disapproval, then looked over at Leia.

“Let me guess,” she drawled. “He told you about how the Millennium Falcon made the Kessel Run in twelve parsecs?”

Leia nodded. From the corner of her eye, she saw Han start, then cover it up. Oh, that’s right, this Han hadn’t mentioned it yet. Seriously though, did he think she didn’t know that? Leia was half convinced that a good portion of the galaxy thought that little fact was part of Han’s name, he mentioned it so often.

Sana didn’t notice Han’s start of surprise. She was too busy laughing. “Sometimes, I’m still amazed that cosmic flotsam is still space worthy.”

Beside her, R2 gave an indignant whistle. [The Falcon flies just fine. She just has standards about who she will transport.]

Sana started at the noise and craned her head to look down at R2, noticing him for the first time. “What is a droid doing here?” she asked.

[What are you doing here, you pushy organic?] R2 snarked right back, the hostility in his beeps unmistakable.

Leia put a hand on the droid’s dome, silently asking him to be quiet.

Sana’s lips curled. “I don’t like droids,” she hissed, hand starting to inch towards her thigh.

[I can’t tell you how disappointed I am] R2 beeped back. [Fortunately for me, my programming was altered for me long ago. Unlike my fellow units, I can harm an organic.]

Leia was pretty sure Sana didn’t understand binary, or at least not fully. If she did, she would have already shot him for threatening her. But even if she didn’t understand what he was saying, there was no mistaking R2’s tone. Sana’s hand was continuing to move towards her blaster, and Leia wondered if it would draw that much attention if she shot her.

Han’s voice cut through the tense standoff. “You shoot him Sana, you owe the money to replace him.”
Sana looked into R2’s visual sensor for one long moment, then her hand fell away from her blaster. “Why are droids’ eyes always so creepy?” she complained.

Leia rapped her fingers on R2’s dome, warning him to be quiet. They couldn’t afford to indulge in a brawl with this woman.

The droid let out a soft whistle, indicating that he understood, but he wasn’t happy.

Chewie cleared his throat. <Why are you looking for us, Sana?>

Sana waved her hand. “I’m not looking for you,” she told him. Then she shot a scathing look at Han. “I was looking for him.”

Han crossed his arms over his chest, “Why?”

Sana’s smile was sharply predatory. “Weren’t you listening when I came up to greet you?”

Han snorted. “Greet me? You slapped me, and then kissed me before I even knew who the hell you were.”

Sana sniffed delicately. “I’ll have you know there are many people across this galaxy who would be honored if I greeted them that way.”

Han rolled his eyes. “Whatever,” he muttered.

Sana’s smile grew brittle. “I told you, Han, you owe me money.”

“Says you,” Han shot back. “I’m just here looking for work. If I had known you were here, I would have gone somewhere else.”

Sana’s eyes grew calculating. “And why are you looking for work?”

Han shifted in his seat, giving a wonderful impression of a man who was this shy of desperate. “Things have been a bit slow,” he said, dropping his arms and running a hand through his hair.

Sana gave him a long assessing look. “That’s not what I’ve heard.”

Han’s eyes never left hers. “Oh?

“Mhhh.” She playfully leaned out and patted his cheek. “Word is that you have been taking less jobs with Jabba lately.”

Han batted her hand away. “I told you, he’s still pissed.”

She wagged a finger in his face. “Oh, that’s not true. In fact, he’s been upset that he hasn’t been able to get your services on several big jobs.”

Han tensed just the slightest. “And how do you know that?” he demanded.

She waved the drink in his face. “Where do you think I went first to find you?”

Han swore, then snagged the drink Sana had been waving in his face, drowning the rest of the contents. “How many other places have you been,” he demanded as he slammed the drink to the table, “screaming my name to the skies?”

“Enough,” Sana leaned back in her chair. “Gossip is that you found yourself a private client. Some
high and mighty businessman who wants to avoid Imperial entanglements.”

“And if I had,” he asked, “what of it?”

She gave him a calculating grin. “Then, you tell them that I am the better pilot named Solo, and my ship is infinitely more reliable than yours.”

Han snarled. “You are not my wife.“

Sana put a hand to her chest. “You mean those vows you gave me, that we would be together until our death meant nothing to you?” She widened her eyes to an almost comical width. “I’m devastated, Han.”

Han slapped his hands on the top of the table. “Stop saying that!” he hissed. Leia gave a start. What the hell was Han doing? Yes, Sana could be annoying, but she was a known quantity. There was no telling what they might learn from her. Or what trouble she would bring down on their heads if Han kept annoying her.

“But it’s so much fun!” she chortled, and there was an edge of meanness to her laughter. Then her face grew serious, and voice deadly. “You owe me for leaving in the middle of that mess on Stenness.”

“Sana,” Han growled. “I did not leave you anywhere.”

“You used to be less uptight,” she told him, pouting. Then she waved a hand in the air. “Fine. I’m not your wife. It was a fake and a con.”

Han relaxed. “Thank you,” he said.

Sana turned to look at Leia. “Or was it?” she asked.

By the look on his face, Han was about ready to shoot the woman. Time to put a stop to this and remind Han why they were here.

{I don’t care,} Leia said. {I care if there is any work on this planet.}

Sana pouted at Leia’s matter of fact tone, then she looked puzzled. “And just who are you?” she asked.

{Shiok,} Leia said.

Sana rolled her eyes. “Ubese,” she complained. “Always so literal.” She turned to scowl at Han. “If you are short on cash, how did you afford to pay her?”

“She owes me a favor,” Han said.

“Hmmm,” Sana tapped a finger on her lip thoughtfully. “Any good?”

<She has potential,> Chewie said calmly. <And skills we do not.>

Sana looked at Leia, and the playful flirt was nowhere in evidence now. “What favor could you possibly owe this loser?” she asked seriously.

Leia bristled at the insult to Han. {My business!} she snarled.

Sana leaned back, just the slightest, at Leia’s tone. “Alright, alright,” she said, putting her hands up
in mock surrender. “I was just curious.”

{Stop being that.} Leia said.

Sana looked at Han, “Prickly little thing, isn’t she?”

Han’s face twisted into a scowl. “You’re just mad because you can’t seduce her.”

Oh. Leia could feel the blush creep up her face. Sana had been mostly serious. Han wouldn’t be so grouchy if she wasn’t. Well, wasn’t that horribly awkward?

Sana shrugged nonchalantly. “You win some, you lose some.” She looked at Han. “So, what wild tale did you hear that brought you to look for work on Nimban?”

“Heard there was a fleet of ships here.” Han made to take a sip of his drink, and his expression grew mournful when he realized the glass was empty.

“Caleno!” he roared, loud enough to be heard over the crowd and the noise pretending to be “music”.

Leia turned her head to see the bartender, who apparently had very good hearing, calmly put down the bottle he had been holding.

“No, Solo,” he shouted back. “I’m not getting between the two of you. Sana has been nothing if not vocal over the last few days about you.”

“You told her I was here?” Han shouted, face growing red. The rest of the patrons grew quiet as they realized they might catch a free show.

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“Of course,” Caleno said. “She paid me too.” Then he leaned forward, his arms splayed across the bar, as that one eye looked Han directly in the face. “And you did not pay me not to.”

“Some friend,” Han muttered. Then he waved his glass. “Can I have a refill?” he asked.

“Your money’s no good here, Han.”

Han beamed. “I knew I could count on you!”

Caleno shrugged. “It’s mostly because I know you don’t have any.” Han’s face fell as Caleno went back to tending to his bar. Leia could feel the rest of the patrons lose interest as they realized there was no fight to be had.

Han slumped in his chair and gave Sana a dirty look. “How did you get here so fast?” he complained.

Sana grinned. “Because we are fated to be.”

Han just glared at her.

“Fine, ruin my fun,” she muttered. “If you must know, I was at a party nearby when Caleno called me.”

“Of course, you were,” Han said darkly. “Did you leave those poor saps any silverware when you left?”

“As if I would indulge in petty theft,” Sana said. “That was always more your way, not mine.”
“Yeah,” Han grumbled. “Always on the lookout for the big score.”

Sana flashed him a smile. “And you were always content to scrounge up any scraps that fell your way. Which makes me wonder what leavings you think are here?”

“Where there is a fleet of new ships, there is a need for pilots.”

Sana let out a delighted laugh. “Oh, honey. You are really out of the loop. The Hutts aren’t planning to use those ships. They are planning to sell them.”

Han looked aggravated. “Great,” he muttered, leaning back in his chair and crossing one leg over the other. His fingers drummed on his boots in agitation. “That is the last time I listen to Farmat. Probably had fun sending me on a wild goose chase.”

Farmat. That wasn’t a name Leia was familiar with either. But apparently, Sana was. She leaned forward and looked up into his face, her fingers slowly walking up his leg. “Or he was hoping to steal your well-funded client from you while you were chasing phantom jobs.” She gave him a flirtatious smile. “You can tell me their name, Han. Promise I won’t tell a soul.”

Han didn’t look away, only gave her a large flirtatious smile. But his hand started creeping down his leg. Not towards Sana’s hand, but towards his blaster. “Tell anyone else? Not likely. You want to steal them away.”

The flirtatious manner disappeared, and Sana drew back. “You, of all people, have some nerve saying that to me, Solo.”

Han made a pained noise, and Leia noticed that although the woman was now sitting straight up, she hadn’t moved her hand from his leg. Leia had a fairly good idea of what body part Sana had just grabbed. Her hand went to her blaster, only to have Chewie’s hand fall on her own, stopping her.

Sana’s face was twisted in fury. “I told you, Han, you owe me.”

Han shifted in his seat, just a few inches away from her. But it was enough for him to have the space he needed to bring his own blaster up. He pointed it straight at Sana’s head. “Let go,” he said, voice shaking in pain.

Sana looked at him for a moment, and Leia worried that she would only tighten her grip in response to that threat. She was just petty enough to do it, even if it would cost her, her life. Then she snarled, and Leia could see her hand come to rest on the table.

Han took in a long sharp breath, but his blaster didn’t waver at all. Sana gave him a mocking smile. “I’ll play nice,” she said. Han shot her a disbelieving look. “Promise.”

Han looked her in the face for several tense moments, then nodded his head. He re-holstered the blaster. With a small wince, he adjusted himself in his seat, but when he started talking again, his voice was even. “That’s wasn’t fair, Sana, and you know it. If I had stayed, we all would have gotten busted.” He gestured to her. “And I can’t see why your complaining. It couldn’t have been that bad. You’re here, aren’t you? All limbs attached.”

Sana gave a bitter laugh. “Yes, I suppose I should have known better than to expect you to risk your pretty skin. I know how much store you put by it.” She looked at Leia, and there was a bitterness there that surprised Leia in its intensity. “Unless he has some blackmail material on you, or holding a loved one hostage, I would suggest walking away now. He has no honor and no care for anything but himself.”
Leia shifted in her seat. Sana wasn’t saying anything about Han that Leia didn’t know. He did value his skin and was willing to sell out almost anybody to preserve it.


And not Ben.

In the end, that was what had gotten him killed. Because he hadn’t been willing to walk away from Ben. And their son had run him through the heart for that.

Next to her, R2 rammed into her gently. Leia brought her focus back to him and realized to her shock that the glass sitting on the table in front of Chewie, the one Sana hadn’t stolen, was tinkling ever so slightly.

Like it was being moved back and forth very quickly.

Hastily Leia pulled her mind from the past to what was right in front of her. She tightened her grip on the Force until it felt like a hand of durasteel encasing her head. If she didn’t reign this in, more than just that glass would start moving on its own. That’s all this tense situation needed, her to completely lose it.

She glanced around the table, fortunately for her, both Han and Chewie were too focused on Sana, and her on them, to notice that there were objects in their vicinity that weren’t obeying the normal physical laws of the galaxy.

Leia let her hand down and gently rubbed R2 on his side, in thanks and acknowledgement of what he had just done for her. There was another small push against her chair, and R2 settled back on his wheels.

<That’s not true,> Chewie said, leaning forward to look Sana in the face. <Han is perfectly capable of caring about other people more than himself. He just didn’t care that way about you.>

Chewie was right. Han’s selfishness wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. And she wasn’t saying that simply because she loved him. Leia had it brought to her attention, and not just here and now in this time, that she was all too careless with her own welfare and life. Han was selfish enough to remind her that he cared about her and didn’t want to lose her. It was something she used, often, to pull herself back from going too far.

“You mean from becoming your father,” a snide inner voice reminded her.

Sana reared back, and for one moment, there was only incandescent rage on her face. Then all that emotion was gone, like it had never been. “Believe what you want,” she told Chewie. “But one day you are going to look for him, and he won’t be there.”

Chewie didn’t twitch a muscle. At least not anywhere that Sana could see. Beside Leia’s leg, she could feel the hand that was closest to her, ball into a fist.

Leia wanted to shake Chewie senseless. Why in the hell was he taking Sana’s word on that? He really thought Han would *leave* him?

“Because he did,” the Force whispered to her, answering her unasked question about Chewie’s motivation.

Leia felt like her blood had been replaced with ice, and not just because the Force had gotten through to her again. It was right, Chewie *wasn’t* that stupid. He knew Han would never willingly
leave him.

But what he did know, from Leia’s own lips no less, was that one day Han would leave him. Not in the way Sana was implying, but more thoroughly than she could possibly imagine.

If this was the glory days of the Republic, that fact wouldn’t have been a surprise to Chewie. He was fairly young, as Wookie’s went. In a more peaceful time, not even a century ago, it was all but a guarantee that Chewie would outlive Han.

But that was then, not now. Then was the stability of the Republic. Now was the Empire, and perilous was an understatement of the danger they were all in. Now, it was just as likely that Han would die in a blaze of glory, with Chewie by his side. In fact, Leia would have bet, before he and Han had met her, that Chewie had expected that exact scenario and had made his peace with it.

Now he knew differently. That he, or rather, a possible version of him, had watched Han die right in front of him. Unknowingly, Sana had just probed at Chewie’s greatest fear.

Leia moved her hand as subtly as she could to under the table. She laid her gloved hand over his fist and gave it a squeeze. Trying to remind him that hadn’t happened. That together, she and him would do everything to make sure that it never happened.

Chewie didn’t say anything, he didn’t even look at her, but she felt that fist relax under hers.

“If that is true,” Han drawled, “why bother tracking me down?”

Sana gave him a flirtatious smile. “Maybe I wanted a ride for old times’ sake?”

Leia frowned. The Force was ringing with the truth in that statement. Sana meant that. This was unexpected. She didn’t remember Sana actually being interested in Han. At least nothing beyond the money he owed her. But that could be said about a lot of people.

Sana had rubbed Leia’s face in their supposed ‘marriage’, the first time they met. But that had all been about trying to drive a wedge between her and Han, so Sana could more easily take Leia in as a bounty to the Empire. It hadn’t been because she was jealous. Had it?

Leia’s past was rearranging itself in all kinds of interesting ways in her head. Which was massively inconvenient, because she needed to focus on the here and now. Sana was many things, but someone who was easily dismissed, was not one of them. Han really did have a type, didn’t he? Dark haired and dangerous.

Han leaned forward. “Yeah, no. Tell you what, you tell me what you know about this fleet, and I’ll think about what I might owe you.”

Sana cocked her head. “My, my. You seem awfully interested.”

Han didn’t look phased. “Tell you what, you tell me what you know about this fleet, and I’ll think about what I might owe you.”

Sana cocked her head. “My, my. You seem awfully interested.”

Han didn’t look phased. “Ships need pilots.”

“Not sub-par ones like you.”

Han gave a long lazy smirk. “Oh, you know I’m good for a ride.” Then he stiffened, and his eyes darted quickly over to Leia. Leia didn’t say anything, she was too busy fighting the urge to reach out and smack him. Seriously? Like there wasn’t any way she didn’t know that he slept with Sana?

“Only because I was bored,” Sana said slowly. Then she looked between Leia and Han. “But you seem awfully interested in this random nobody’s-“
Leia said, interrupting into the conversation, hoping to annoy Sana of focusing on her.

“My name is Shiok”

Sana just continued on, as if Leia hadn’t interrupted her “Opinion of you.” There was open curiosity in Sana’s face now, and Leia’s heart sank. She had done it now. Now Leia was interesting.

“I thought I knew your type, Han,” Sana was looking Leia up and down, taking in the breathing mask and full suit. “And that did not include Ubese. Branching out, are you?”

“I-“ Han looked desperate, and Leia could practically feel Chewie want to put his face in his hands in sheer second-hand embarrassment. What had gotten into Han? He was usually smoother than this.

Leia would worry about Han’s loss of wit later. She needed to head this off, now. Han did not have a thing for Ubese, and it wouldn’t take long for that quick, agile mind of Sana’s to realize that pretending to be an Ubese was a great way to hide one’s identity. Sana had almost gone to suicidal lengths when Leia’s bounty had been worth ten million. Who knows how far she would go for one of twenty-five? Along with the prestige of catching the highest imperial bounty ever.

“I would not procreate with this one even if he had a hundred kilberages to give me” Leia told Sana flatly.

Sana’s look of curiosity melted into outright confusion. “I don’t know what a kilberages is, but a hundred sounds like a lot.” Sana looked back to Han, considering. “Sounds like more than enough to tolerate his company for a while.”

{Humans and Ubese can breed. It’s rare, but it can happen.} Leia said. {Offspring inherit their intelligence from both parents. A thousand kilberages would not suffice as compensation to be burdened with stupid descendants.}

Sana’s face was blank for a moment, then she broke out into a loud, raucous laugh. “Oh Han,” she said, fist banging on the table in her amusement. “I see you’re still making friends wherever you go.”

Han was studying Leia intently. “Yeah,” he said slowly. “I’m a real popular guy.” Then he relaxed and leaned back into his seat. “Someone has to fly those ships.”

“Not you,” Sana said. “They are for some big client.”

Han smirked. “That you know the name of.”

Sana cooed. “I might.”

“How?”

“Oh, the director of the ship docks,” she said airily. “He’s a good friend.” She leaned forward. “But why are you so interested? Your client not as rich as you’ve been leading everyone to believe?”

Han rolled his eyes. “I’ve been leading no one, anywhere.”

“That money you got to pay off Jabba didn’t fall out of the sky.”

“No, it didn’t,” Han agreed. “Just a wealthy Corusantii who got in over their heads, and needed a
quick trip off Tatooine.”

That was actually not that far off the mark, and more importantly, plausible. Han’s mind was working again, praise be to all the gods.

“Oh,” Sana looked disappointed. “Why do you care so much? You can’t be that desperate? You know Jabba would have you back in a heartbeat.”

Han shook his head. “No. It’s a trap to lure me back.”

Sana snorted. “What? Did you insult his mother or something?”

“Worse,” Han hissed. “I paid back the money late.”

Sana swallowed hard, and her skin paled a bit. “Oh,” she said softly, genuine worry in her eyes.

“It was only one day,” Han said hastily. “I threw in some extra cash to make up for it. But he’s still pretty angry.”

Sana frowned. “That still doesn’t explain your new found obsession with those ships.”

Han sighed and rubbed his hands over his face. “Fine,” he spat. “Fine, you win. Yeah, I knew those ships were for sale to the Empire.”

Sana’s eyes narrowed. “What game are you playing, Han?”

“The one I hate the most,” Han grumbled. “Politics.”

“That is because you are a disaster at it,” Sana said.

“Well, I don’t have much of a choice, do I?”

“I have no idea,” Sana admitted. “Tell me what you’re thinking, and I’ll tell you how you're being stupid. Then I’ll fix whatever cockamamie idea you have rattling in that pretty head of yours.”

Han’s eyes narrowed. Then he gritted out. “The Hutts are currently in turmoil because of Grakkus’ execution.”

Sana covered her mouth, pretending to yawn. “That is old news, Han.”

“Will you let me finish?” he complained.

“Fine, but if you bore me, I’m walking out of here.”

<Without your payment?> Chewie inquired politely.

Sana breathed hard through her nose, irritation plain for all of them to see, that Chewie called her bluff. “I’m listening.”

“As I was saying,” Han said pointedly. “Grakkus has brought the careful dance between the Empire and the Hutts to a jarring halt. And Jabba was a close ally of his. Because of that relationship, Jabba didn’t get oversight of the construction of those ships.”

Sana snorted. “As if he would in any case,” she said. “He doesn’t leave Tatooine, and the Hutts are keeping a close eye on this one.”
“Gardulla rules this planet, doesn’t she?” Han pointed out. “And she rarely leaves Nal Hutta.”

“She leaves it enough,” Sana said. “As in, now.”

Chewie’s voice was worried. <Gardulla is here?>

Sana grinned. “Yep,” she said, popping the word at the end. “The Empire is not in a very forgiving mood as of late. The Hutts can’t afford to piss them off.”

Leia looked at Han, and she could see his thoughts running along the same track as hers. If they managed to either steal or destroy those ships, they would be putting even more pressure on that particular alliance.

“Besides,” Sana waved a hand dismissively. “There is no infrastructure on Tatooine to build vast quantities of ships. Nimban was always going to be the choice.”

“There’s logic, and there is Jabba,” Han said sharply. “So, when I heard that he was pissed that he didn’t get the job, I thought, if I come back with some actionable intelligence for him to use-“

“He might be in a more forgiving mood,” Sana finished. She tapped her lips thoughtfully. “Surprisingly, for you, that is not a bad idea.” Her hand dropped from her face to the table. “Still doesn’t tell me what I get out of this?”

Leia desperately wished she could talk to non-Force Sensitives mind to mind. She and Han hadn’t even discussed a budget of what they could spend. An oversight on her part. Leia just hadn’t thought that something like this would appear so fast. And from a known quantity as well. She thought they would go over it later tonight when they had a better idea of what they needed.

Leia might hate paperwork, but it did give her a good understanding of how much money the Alliance had, and what they could spend. There was no way Sana would demand as much as the Bothan’s were currently charging the Alliance to have access to their spy networks.

Hell, Leia would pay whatever they needed, out of her own funds. But she had a pretty good feeling that Ashoka would consider this mission cheaply acquired, for its speed and efficiency.

Leia discreetly reached out a foot and placed it on his boot. Offers like this didn’t just appear. They hadn’t even been on this planet ten minutes before an invitation to walk in the front door of what they needed, just appeared.

Han gave Sana a weak smile. “I’ll owe you one?” he offered.

They really should have had that talk before they set down on this planet. Han, this Han, wasn’t as familiar with what she was trying to tell him. He read her so well most days, it still took her by surprise that he didn’t always catch up with what she was trying to do. Of course, from his perspective, this was only the third mission he had ever been on with her. He didn’t have the rapport and experience that she had with his older alternate.

Although, to be fair to this Han, she and he were synching up faster than her and the other Han had. At this point in her past, Leia was still pretty heavily fantasizing about killing him. Preferably by smothering him, so he would shut up for once. At least, most of her fantasies were about that. Every once in a while, her mind would slip into other things that also didn’t require a lot of talking.

Sana snorted. “You already owe me.”

Han sighed and rubbed his hands through his hair. “Fine!” he spat. “You win. I’ll give you your
cut of the Stenness job.”

Sana laughed out loud. “And is this money going to appear out of nowhere?” She gestured at him dismissively.

Han squirmed in his seat. “I might have a job lined up,” he said. “Huge risk, but a big reward.”

“How big?” Sana asked.

“Big enough,” Han said. “But it requires me to go through the Outer Rim, and the last thing I need is one of Jabba’s little bounty hunters getting in my way, trying to bring me to him.”

Sana’s eyebrow went up. “Just how mad is Jabba at you?”

“Mad enough,” Han said flatly.

“So, you make nice with Jabba, you do this high paying job, and I get paid?”

Han nodded. “That’s the plan.”

Sana shook her head. “Your plans never go the way you want them too.” She turned to Chewie. “Do I have your word?” she asked.

Chewie barked out a laugh. <You’ll take mine, but not his?>

“He’s a great liar,” Sana said. “You aren’t. Do I have your word that there is money in all of this, and he will pay me?”

Chewie nodded. <You will be paid.>

Sana leaned back. “My cut from the Stennes job, and a twenty percent late fee on top of it.”

“Twenty percent!” Han howled. “That’s robbery.”

“Well, would you like to try your luck on your own?”

“Fifteen,” Han shot back.

Sana smirked. “You must be desperate. I would have settled for ten.” She stood up. “No time like the present. I’ll show you where the shipmaster lives.”

Han moved to get up, but Chewie laid a hand on his arm. <And what good would that do us?> he asked, eyes fixed on Sana. <Beating him up to get the information is going to alert Gardulla that something is up. The information then becomes useless to Jabba, because Gardulla will know he is coming.>

“You always were the brains,” Sana said. She gestured to Leia. “Fortunately for all of us, you thought to bring a slicer with you.”

Han stiffened. “What makes you think that?”

“You didn’t have a solid plan when you landed here, so she’s not here because you have a play that requires three people. Chewbacca said she had skills neither of you possess. She isn’t carrying a long-range weapon, that rules out sniper. The next set of skills that neither of you are an expert at is slicer.”
Han looked at Sana thoughtfully. “You’re good at this when you want to be,” he said.

“I’m always good at this,” she said. “And you are good at blowing once in a lifetime deal.”

“What other once in a lifetime deal are you talking about? Han grumbled.

“Why, me as your wife,” Sana said prettily, tossing her braids over her shoulder in an exaggerated fashion.

Han growled. Sana waved her hands. “Fine. I’ll let it go.” She turned to Leia. “So, slicer?”

Han answered for Leia. “The droid is. And the droid is hers.”

Sana’s smile was sharp. “Well, then, the arrogant fool is keeping the schematics of all the ships they are building, an inventory of them, and all the security measures around the docks on his personal servers. Which is located in his home. We just need to walk in and take them. Will that work for you?”

Han nodded. “Perfect.”

<And just how are we going to get into his home?> Chewie asked.

Sana rolled her eyes. “Oh, why didn’t I think of that?” she asked sarcastically. “Wait! I did. That is the house, with a party conveniently going on in it, that I just left, to track Han down. So, to answer your question, we walk in through the front door.”

Han grinned. “Good enough for me.”

Leia felt her breath catch. This had to be a trap. There was no way it was going to be this easy.

Chewie had the same thought. <Are you going to sell us out to this man Sana?> he asked.

Sana paused and looked at Chewie for a long, tense moment. “No,” she said slowly. “As long as I get my money at the end.”

Chewie looked at Leia, and she nodded her head. That was the truth.

Sana smiled. “I’m so happy we came to an agreement.” Then, quick as a nexu, she grabbed Han by the shirt and hauled him toward her face. “But you double-cross me again, Han, I will track you down, cut off your shiblas, and leave them out in the deserts of Tatooine to be picked over by scavengers. And no amount of money you try to pay me off with will stop me. Do you understand?”

Leia didn’t know what a shiblas was. Sana was speaking in a language she didn’t recognize. But given how pale Han had gotten, she had a pretty good guess as to what body part Sana was threatening.

“Yeah,” Han said.

“Good!” Sana let him go. “Let’s go rob, Kertha.”

Han frowned. “Whose Kertha?”

She gave him a very unimpressed look. “The man whose house we are going to?” Then she seemed to dismiss Han completely from her mind and came up beside Leia looping her arm into Leia’s.
“So, Shiok,” she said, as she dragged Leia towards the door, Han and Chewie coming behind them. “Is it true what they say about the Ubese?”

Leia felt her face flaming, again, and hoped like hell Kertha lived nearby.

Kertha did live nearby. Which Leia would have figured out on her own, if she hadn’t been so flustered by Sana, *Sana*, flirting with her. Leia, Chewie, and Han hadn’t been in the bar all that long before she had come storming in.

Kertha’s home wasn’t all that hard to spot. The loud music and murmuring crowd was one point in Sana’s favor. It was clear there was a gathering of some sort going on in there. The other fact that led credence to her claim, was that the house stood out like a sore thumb. Someone who was very rich, and wanted everyone to know it, lived here.

It was by far the largest home on the street, taking up an entire city block. Which by itself wasn’t so bad. Leia had seen larger homes, on worlds that were poorer than this. It was the fact that it looked like it had been plucked straight from Coruscant and deposited on this world of verdant green that made it such an eyesore.

Leia frowned as they came to a stop on the street across and down from the mansion. There had to be security droids around the house, as well as cameras, so Sana had brought them out of the sightlines of both.

Leia took in the durasteel columns, rigid lines, and extended upper levels. The harsh silver coating of the place was in contrast to the warm browns and exterior walls of its neighbors. He had to be using repulsor lifts to keep the top of it from collapsing the bottom levels of the house.

But it was just the *house* that was in that distinct style. Everything else Leia could see of the property, the small servants’ quarters in the back, the landscaping with its green lawns and voluminous trees, even the gate surrounding the property was done in the local style. If this had been a home on Coruscant, there would have been a garden, *not* a lawn. The servant’s quarters would be *under* the house, and there would be a deflector shield around the entire building.

Instead, there was a mid-sized fence, that could easily be climbed over, surrounding the property. Leia could see, even from this distance, that it was made of *wood*. Probably a local variety native to this planet. It was pretty, as fences went, but it wouldn’t hold up to a large-scale assault, and it didn’t match the home it was around at all. If you had enough money, you could buy *almost* anything. But good taste wasn’t one of those things that could be purchased.

The fence also had a large gate in the middle of it, the high ornately carved wood rising several feet above the fence it was attached to. There was a small building sitting just outside of it. According to Sana, it was the guard building, and there were always at least two of them in there, during the entire day cycle of this planet. You needed to be cleared by them before you could enter.

Leia watched as two people made their way up the street, and came to the building. Sure enough, two men popped out, and by the look of the weapons they were wearing, they were not there just for show. They inspected something that was in the couple’s hand, then the shorter one waved to the building. The gate started open, and that meant there were at least three heavily armed people at the front gate.
The couple stepped into the driveway, and was that *marble*? Why did Kertha have a driveway, on this planet that mostly used animals for transportation, paved in *marble*? It was a horribly impractical choice.

Han was also looking at the people as they entered the gate, but Leia was fairly certain that his scowl was for the guards, not Kertha’s choice in construction materials. “Looks like I’m not the only one who is popular,” he muttered. He gave Sana a suspicious look. “How exactly do you know this man?”

“Jealous, Han?” Sana asked.

“Hardly,” Han scoffed. He looked back to the gate. “So, who are we going in as?”

“Well,” Sana said, tapping her lips thoughtfully. “I thought I’d be Sana, and you be Han. Think you can handle that?”

“Funny,” Han snapped. “But that doesn’t explain how we,” and he gestured to all of them, ”are going to get in.”

“Oh,” Sana waved a hand. “I’m just going to walk to the gate with you, and the guards will let me back in.” She dropped Leia’s arm and walked towards Han. “They are very familiar with me by this point.”

Han scowled. “And Chewie and Shiok?”

Sana shook her head. “Oh, she is not coming.”

Han stiffened, and Leia perversely felt something inside her relax. This had been too easy up to this point. It said something about her life that she felt better when things went sideways on her. But the fact that there was no direct route into the house did, oddly, help reassure her that Sana wasn’t leading them into a trap.

“What the hell Sana?” Han snarled.

“Humans only,” Sana said with a shrug.

Han’s voice was scathing. “For a man who works for *Gardulla*?”

“I told you, the Empire is keeping a close eye on this project.”

Han paled. “There are Imperial officers in there?”

“Yes,” she said. “Hence, the no non-humans rule.” Sana frowned, looking puzzled at Han’s obvious fear. “Do you have a bounty with the Empire I don’t know about?”

“No,” Han said petulantly.

Sana turned around to address Leia. “Do you, Shiok?”

Leia found herself looking back over to that eyesore monstrosity with a new wariness. {No,} she said. Imperials inside certainly complicated things. {There is no bounty on me.}

Sana peered into Leia’s mask, but there wasn’t anything there for her to read, and Leia wasn’t so green that she gave anything away with her body language. She just stood there, loose and relax as if she hadn’t a care in the world.
Han’s voice was just a shade too desperate. “Are those Imps in there all the time, or just for this party?”

Sana rolled her eyes. “For the party, of course. Kertha is a slimy little weasel who has to pay people to keep them around him, but he is very good at being accommodating. It’s half the reason Gardulla put him in charge of this. The Imperial officers stationed here aren’t the most receptive to non-humans.”

Han didn’t look convinced. “Then we wait until the party’s over to enter,” he said, folding his arms over his chest.

Sana shook her head. “Oh love, you were being so smart, until you said that.”

“I am not your anything,” Han growled.

Sana waved her finger in his face. “Then don’t say stupid things. Now is the best time to do it, and you know it.”

Chewie growled, <You said they wouldn’t let Shiok in. What about me?>

Sana’s playful mood vanished. “Oh, Kertha would love for you to come in,” she said seriously. “You would be plied with good liquor and food, because everyone knows how many drugs it takes to knock out a Wookie. And tomorrow, you would wake up on a cargo ship, headed to a Mid-Rim world to work in labor camp.”

Chewie’s voice was practically biting the air. <I would die first!>

“I know,” Sana said, all hints of the playful woman gone. “That’s why I’m telling you.”

Chewie stayed tense for a moment, then his shoulders relaxed.

Han shook his head. “This is no good, Sana. How are we supposed to get Shiok in?”

“We take the droid,” Sana said back easily. “We don’t need her.” She turned around and gave Leia a lascivious wink. “In a professional capacity, of course. I’m sure she’s all kinds of useful in other situations.”

Leia had never been so grateful for wearing a horribly uncomfortable confining mask in her life.

Sana turned back to Han. “She and Chewbacca stay out here until we are done.”

Han snorted. “You think I’m going to walk in there, with only you as my backup?”

Sana’s eyes narrowed. “Fine, don’t trust me. But trust that I want to be paid.”

[No,] R2 protested. [I will not do this.]

Leia turned to the little droid, surprised at his objection. {R2?} she asked.

His dome head turned so that his visual sensor was staring directly at her. [My primary mission is to protect you.]

Leia huffed. As helpful as she found his ability to reason in unexpected ways, it could be a damn pain in the ass. {It will be fine R2,} Leia said. {Chewie will be here.}

The droid shook his head. [No,] he said. [I know what happens when I leave you, or anyone in your
family, alone on a mission. You find trouble.] Then his dome moved slightly as if he was considering. [Or start it.]

Leia hissed through her teeth, well aware that she had to watch what she was saying. She couldn’t bring up the fact that Luke was currently without any babysitters to watch him. {You are worried over nothing,} she tried to reassure the droid.

The droid shook his dome again. [I promised Rex and Ahsoka I would not leave your side.]

Leia scowled, but she knew R2 wouldn’t budge on this point. Especially since he knew Imperials were in there.

“What did he say?” Sana asked, suspiciously.

Leia focused back in on Sana, who was impatiently waiting for her to answer. {He won’t come without me,} she said.

Sana put her hands to her hips. “Well, even as charming as you are, you aren’t going to make it through the front gate, never mind the door. Order him to come with us.”

Leia gritted her teeth. R2 wasn’t her slave, to be bossed around like that. {He believes you will steal him.}

Sana rolled her eyes. “You can trust me.”

Leia straightened her shoulders. {I trust no one,} she said.

“Well then,” Sana folded her arms over her chest. “What do you suggest we do?”

Leia looked around, taking in what she could see of the fence. It was climbable, but more than likely, there were sensors all along it. If they didn’t alert the two guards out here, they definitely went to someone in that house. Kertha might have no taste, but there was no way he was stupid enough not to have security measures around his home.

As she tried to get her brain to think, a flash of movement caught her eyes. In the normal course of things, she would have ignored it. There was plenty of movement on this street, but in her bones was the feeling of, “Look, look, look.”

The gate hadn’t been closed yet, and from this angle, Leia could see two figures, both plainly dressed, come out through the side door of the mansion.

No, not a door. She was too familiar with this type of house to think that was an entrance guests used. That was meant for the servants. And she would bet anything that the baskets they carried had clothes in them.


{I will make my own way,} she told Sana, only partially paying attention to what she was saying, more focused on trying to listen to what the Force was whispering.

“And I’m supposed to trust that you can even get into the house, never mind not be spotted as you roam the halls?” Sana sneered.

Leia blinked and brought her mind back to this world. {I can,} Leia said. {I am very good.}

Han’s voice was harsh. “How do we know you won’t take the information and give it to Jabba
before we get out?” he asked. Leia looked at him, past Sana, and the anger in his voice was a lie. He looked terrified. It was a rather inconvenient time for him to guess what she planned to do.

Sana turned her head to look at him and frowned. “Did you hire another person who would betray you in a heartbeat?” she asked, hands thrown up in the air.

Han scowled at her. “You are one of those people!” he hissed.

Leia put a rough edge in her voice. {I will keep my word!}

Chewie, keeping his voice low, said briskly, <Keep your voices down! We do not want to attract attention.> Both Sana and Han flushed, and Leia just managed to contain her flinch at the deserved rebuke.

Sure that all of them were paying attention. Chewie said, <I will stay with Shiok, Han.>

Sana looked at him. “How? Is she going to sneak you in too?” gesturing to all seven and a half feet of Wookie.

Leia didn’t have time to argue this. Even now, those two were out of her sightlines, and she could feel the Force urging her to hurry. Time to cut this interference off at the source. She stepped forward and push Han in the chest. {You question my word?}

Han stumbled back a bit, she hadn’t been holding back at all. Then as he righted himself, she could see that brain of his whirling, trying to frantically counter her argument, without alerting Sana. “No,” he said. “Just your sanity.”

Leia snarled. {I will be fine. I do not need some prickly male, a human male, no less, questioning my skills.}

Han looked frantically at Chewie, but the Wookie only shook his head. <She is right, Han,> he said. <And if you don’t trust her, trust me to watch her.>

Han’s face filled with frustration, and for one horrible second, Leia was sure he was going to blow this entire mission just so he could yell at her.

Then he slapped his leg. “Fine,” he muttered. “Fine.” He pointed a finger in Leia’s mask. “Just don’t forget the consequences if you run off on me.”

She nodded her head. {Always.}

Han snorted. “No, not always. If you did, you wouldn’t be thinking about going in there, much less doing it. Because I’m going to be the one who pays if you get caught.” His face was ashen, but his voice steady as he said, “Or get hurt.”

Sana laughed. “That’s one way to inspire people, Han.”

Leia blinked, not quite following his warning. Oh, she understood the trouble they were all in, if an Imperial in there recognized her. And of course, she knew that Han would be upset if she was hurt. As well as Mama, Papa, Luke, and Obi-Wan. She would never hear the end of it from Rex. But did he really think any of them would make him pay? That they would punish him? She thought he was past thinking that about the people who had some authority in his life.

“Now that is settled?” Sana asked. “I’m assuming you are going to need a distraction of some sort while you sneak in?”
Actually, she wasn’t, but Leia nodded, playing along.

“Great!” Sana said and looped her arm through Han’s. “As I was saying, you get to be Han. Especially since everyone heard me curse your name to the skies when I tore out of there.”

Han’s eyes remained fixed on Leia. “So, why do I need to be me?”

“Because that is who you are best,” Sana said lightly. “And Kertha wants to sleep with me.”

Han finally looked away from Leia, to glower at Sana. “You think everyone wants to sleep with you.”

Sana’s smile became challenging. “That’s because they do.”

“I don’t,” Han and Chewie said in unison.

Sana’s smile became sharp. “You used to.”

Han sputtered, “That? That is your distraction? I’m supposed to make him jealous?”

Sana reached up and patted Han’s cheek condescendingly. “Just be your usual charming self, and it’ll be fine.”

Meaning Han will have insulted the man in the first three minutes of meeting him.

Han scowled at the insult but didn’t refute it. He pointed a finger at Chewie, “You com me the second Shiok is clear, do you understand?”

“Han, if I didn’t know better, I would say you were trying to avoid your loving wife,” Sana said.

“You are not-” Han started to say, but Sana cut him off by pulling on his arm, so he was forced to follow her.

“I am, in there,” Sana reminded him as they started walking across the street, heading toward the entrance to Kertha’s home. “Jealousy, remember? Fits, snotty behavior. We need the works, Solo.”

Han sent an uneasy look back over his shoulder at Leia. She shooed him, indicating he needed to get on with it. “Fine,” he huffed, turning around. “Fine! Everyone here as particular ideas on how things are going to be done. Why not go along, no matter how stupid?”

He and Sana stormed over to the gate. Leia spent a few precious seconds watching them. Sana didn’t seem like she was trying to walk Han into a trap, but she still breathed easier when the two guards waved them both in, looking bored.

Leia turned on her heels and quickly started moving up the street. R2 gave a squeal and immediately started following her. Chewie’s footsteps following moments after that.

<How are you going to get us in there?> Chewie asked as they rounded the corner of the cross street. He didn’t even sound out of breath from trying to keep up with her.

{You’ll see.} Leia risked going up another half of a block, then very quickly cut across the street. She immediately headed back down the way they came, hoping that she had gone far enough to be out of range of the security cameras around the property so that this would be the first time anyone who was watching those feeds would see her.

She came to the fence and immediately started following it to the back of the property. and where
she had seen that little house that was the servant’s quarters. Leia kept her eyes glued to the small gaps in the fence. She was trusting that the Force would tell her if there were any objects in her way on the street.

She had just spotted the far wall of the little house, and now that she was closer, she could see ‘house’ was a generous term. It looked like a small box with a door. But she did catch sight of the two figures. They were both dressed in grey shapeless dresses, one was a Twi’lek, the other human. And, no, the Force hadn’t misled her. Both of them were carrying baskets that were stuffed full of various colored clothes.

Leia breathed a sigh of relief. The Force could be annoyingly cryptic, and sometimes where it wanted you to go, wasn’t where you needed to be. But for now, it seemed to be aligned with her goals. She leaned forward, about to call out to the women, when a giant paw landed on her shoulder. She turned to face Chewie.

<Not here,> he said warningly. <This is too open.>

Leia frowned. {Someone is going to care that I’m going to buy a dress?}

Now Chewie was frowning. <Why are you buying a dress?>

{Never mind why I’m buying a dress,} Leia said hotly, because the longer it took Chewie to realize what she was doing, the more likely it was she could just railroad over him when he inevitably started voicing his objections. {What did you think I was going to do?}

Chewie leaned forward and whispered softly. <Use the Force.>

Leia blinked. {To do what?} she asked, genuinely baffled.

<How should I know?> Chewie growled. <Use it to jump over the fence? Or break it down?>

{Chewie, I can’t do anything like that.}

He crossed his hands over his chest. <Oh, so it was someone else who was moving the glass in the bar?>

He had noticed. He hadn’t said anything, but he had noticed. Foolish of her to think he wouldn’t.

R2 gave out a plaintive beep. [The organics are almost in the annex building,] he said.

Leia turned her head to look back through the gate, and sure enough, the two women were almost at the door. She shook her head. Later, she and Chewie could discuss this all later.

She rattled the wooden slats and called out. {Hey!}

The two women stopped and turned around to look at her.

There was just enough room between the slats for her to put her hand through. She did so, beckoning them to come over. Both women shook their heads.

Leia pulled her hand back through the bars, and reached into her pouch, withdrawing a gold coin. It wasn’t Imperial credits, it was a Wupiupi coin. And it was enough to catch both women’s attention. The Hutts did prefer their physical money to shine, and what Leia had in her hands was probably enough to feed them both for a month. She slipped her hand through the gaps again, holding out the coin for them to inspect.
The Twi’lek stayed where she was, but the human, she stepped forward. She was moving slowly, cautiously, and she held her basket in front of her, like she was going to use it as a weapon if she had too, but she did come closer.

Leia waited till she was close enough, and threw the coin so it would land in the basket. The woman looked shocked at the gesture, but Leia needed her to relax, and listen to what she was saying. The woman looked into her basket and then back up to Leia.

“What do you want?” she asked, voice suspicious.

Leia pointed to the basket. {One of the dresses, please?}

The woman frowned. “I don’t understand you,” she said.

Chewie repeated Leia’s question, but the woman still shook her head.

Leia sighed, this would be so much easier if she could address the woman in Basic. But she had no idea if the camera’s that she could see were wired for sound as well as images. It would blow her cover to start talking in a language that no one had ever heard the Ubense speak. She reached into her pouch, pulling out another gold coin. She pointed exaggeratedly at the basket, then held out the coin.

The woman snorted. “Don’t know what you want a basket for, but it won’t fit between the fence.”

Leia shook her head, pointed to the basket, and held up one finger.

The woman frowned. “You want just one?” She looked at the basket as if to make sure that in the moment she had looked away, something more interesting then clothes hadn’t appeared. “One item?”

Leia nodded.

The woman looked back at her companion, who was nervously looking around to see if anyone was watching them. The two women’s eyes met, and something passed between them.

“Two coins,” she demanded when she turned back to Leia.

Leia nodded and pulled out a second coin. The woman put the basket down, and quickly withdrew a long piece of cloth. Whatever it was, it was heavily embroidered. A table runner, or maybe a rug? Probably the most expensive thing in the basket. It was reasonable, for the amount of money Leia was throwing at her, for the woman to think that was what she wanted.

The woman held it out to her, and Leia shook her head and pointed to the basket again.

The woman looked puzzled. “You want a different one?”

Leia nodded.

“But nothing else in here is worth anything,” the woman protested.

“Kelish,” her companion hissed. “Hurry up.”

A bit rude, but the woman was right. Leia pointed to the grey scrap she could see peeking out of the corner of the basket. The woman, no Kelish, her name was Kelish, her eyes intently followed where Leia was pointing to.
She hastily pulled out something else, a white cloth, and Leia shook her head again. Kelish paused, and then swallowed, pulling out the grey dress.

She looked at Leia, and her hands were shaking. “You want this dress?” she asked.

Leia nodded.

Kelish looked at the dress and then looked at Leia. She seemed to be thinking, and beside her, Leia could feel Chewie hiss through his teeth, as he finally caught on to what she was planning to do.

Kelish’s eyes went to the coins, still held out in Leia’s hands, then she met Leia’s gaze. “You?” she repeated, eyes tracking up and down Leia’s form. Leia nodded and tried to stretch her hand out as far as it could, showing the woman the coins again.

Kelish’s eyes flicker to the coins, and then she seemed to come to some decision and put the dress back into the basket. Before Leia could voice a protest, the woman reached further into the basket and pulled out an identical dress to the one she had before. Standing up, she tossed it towards the fence. It landed in the dirt at Leia’s feet.

“The other one was too big for someone of your size,” she explained.

Leia nodded her thanks, and tossed the coins into the basket, and went down to pull the dress through the small gap in the slats of the fence.

When she got to her feet, she was surprised to see that Kelish was still there. “What ever you are up to,” she said, “you get caught, you didn’t get this from me.”

Leia nodded.

“Promise?” and there was the slightest quiver of fear in her voice. Leia wondered, what the woman wanted the coins for, if she was this desperate to have them. She nodded again, and Kelish sighed. Then the woman straightened her shoulders, scooped up the basket, with its coins hidden inside, and turned around to make a beeline for the door her companion had already gone through.

<Le-> Chewie started to say, but Leia cut him off before he could get her name out.

{Not here.} she hissed and moved as fast as she could down the street. She wouldn’t run, running would draw attention to her, but that didn’t mean she was taking it slow either. She needed to get away from this small clump of houses. There were too many security cams around them. If she remembered the trip over here correctly, there was a place not far from Caleno’s that would work nicely.

Her memory hadn’t betrayed her, not three blocks away from the bar, she spotted what she needed. There was a small alley in between two commercial buildings, and miracles of miracles, a large dumpster container within that alley. Perfect, she could use that to hide while she changed her clothes.

<Are you insane?> Chewie whispered as she ducked behind the dumpster, hiding herself from easy view of anyone walking down the street. <Are you really going to walk into that house?>

Leia took off the helmet and dropped it to the ground. She took in a long deep breath, glad to be free of the stifling thing. “Sana said no humans allowed,” she said. “And look, now I’m human.”

Chewie just stared at her.
“There is no other option Chewie,” she said firmly, as she reached down to remove her boots. She wasn’t wearing the ones she preferred, the knee-high ones. These only came to her ankles, offering less protection. But the one advantage they had over her regular footwear was that they were much easier to get off. “R2 needs to get into that house.”

R2 gave a low whistle. [I didn’t know-]

“Too late now,” Leia said, cutting the droid off. “And you won’t get into that house by yourself.” She turned to Chewie. “Now turn around.”

Chewie’s eyes narrowed. <Why?>

Exasperated, Leia spat, “I consider you a good friend, but not that good of a friend. Now turn around.”

<Leia…> he growled, but he turned around.

“It’ll be fine,” Leia said quickly shucking the outfit and pulling on the dress she had bought. “Nobody really looks at servants.” She ran her fingers over her hair, frowning. It was probably a sight after being in that hot helmet all day, but there wasn’t much she could do about it.

<Leia,> and Chewie’s voice was soft and low, like he was afraid he might frighten her. <They aren’t servants in there.>

Leia’s fingers paused for a moment, fingers just about to pull out the pins holding her hair in the loop around her head. She took a deep breath in and let it out slowly. “Wouldn’t be the first time I pretended to be a slave,” she said lightly, fingers plucking the pins out. Her looped braid fell to her back. “I’m done. You can turn around.

Chewie huffed as he turned, arms crossing across his chest. <This is why Han didn’t want you going alone, isn’t it?>

Leia waved a hand. “He’s just worried that if I get hurt, Papa is going to kill him or some such nonsense,”

<Bail wouldn’t,> Chewie said flatly.

Leia knelt and placed the pins in one of the pouches on the belt of her bounty hunter outfit. She was going to need to get back into it, and she needed those pins to redo her hair. She looked at the boots and sighed. They weren’t the type of footwear a slave would have, but Leia didn’t have a choice. It was that or go barefoot. The dress was a bit long, they would hide them, but she would have to be aware not to move too fast, so they didn’t peek through.

“I know that, can you convince Han?”

Chewie shook his head. <No, Bail wouldn’t because Rex would beat him to it.>

Leia rolled her eyes as she came to her feet. “No, he won’t. Rex talks a good game, but he is too reasonable not to understand we are fighting a war, and in wars, people get hurt.”

Chewie just stared at her for a very long moment. <You might be right about Rex,> he said slowly. <But he is not the only person Han has to worry about.>

Leia rolled her eyes. “You think Luke is going to blame Han? Or maybe Obi-Wan will let loose of that control of his and go on a rampage on my behalf?” She snorted in derision, “Hardly.”
<I rather think Han is more concerned with the other person who is vested in your welfare. The one who is not nearly as reasonable as everyone else in your life, and how he will react if you are hurt again.>

“What other person?” Leia asked, hands coming to her hips.

Chewie just stared at her, flabbergasted.

[Leia,] R2 warbled softly. [His code hasn’t been corrupted that much.]

Leia blinked, and then who they were talking about, snapped into place. She closed her eyes. Dammit, that was a foolish oversight on her part. They were right. There was no telling what Vader would do if she was hurt, or killed. She wasn’t hiding behind the lie he didn’t care about her anymore. That didn’t mean that his reactions were something she automatically took into consideration either.

“I can’t—” she started to say, and Chewie grabbed her by her shoulders.

<You damn well are going to start,> he snarled into her face. <No matter how uncomfortable it makes you. You are far too old to hide from this Leia.>

Oh, he thought it was so easy, did he? “I’m not hiding from anything, Chewie,” she snarled right back and gave him a shove. He went back with an oomph and almost lost his balance. “I was going to say I can’t live my life according to what Va-he wants. I can’t control what he does or does not do. No one can. All I can do is live my life, the way I see fit.”

Chewie’s face twisted in frustration. <And if the galaxy suffers for it?> he asked.

Leia snorted. “He was doing that before he ever knew of my existence.”

R2 gave a sad warble.

Chewie nodded. <You're right, he was. But his rage and anger would be worse now if you were harmed.>

Leia put her hands out in a helpless gesture. “What do you want me to do, Chewie?” she asked. “If he had his way, I would probably be in some cage, protected from everything.”

<You can’t know that.>

“Chewie, he sent a Jedi, a Jedi, to the Rebel Alliance, for the sole purpose of protecting me.”

<Ahsoka is not a Jedi,> Chewie said reasonably.

Leia glared at him. “Are you really going to play word games with that?”

<Yes,> Chewie said. <Because you require that I play them as well.>

Leia stiffened. “I am not a Jedi.”

Chewie’s gaze was filled with pity and sympathy, but his voice brooked no argument. <You didn’t just shove me with only your arms a moment ago Leia,> Chewie said softly.

Leia felt her internal control wobble, for just a moment. Then she shook her head. “We don’t have time for this,” she said. “I need to get in there, with R2, and get the data.”
<And I’m supposed to wait here, am I?> Chewie snarled.

“Yes.” Before he could voice another protest, Leia shoved her armor and helmet into his arms.
“And watch this,” she said.

<Leia,> Chewie growled threateningly, but Leia dodged around him.

“I’ll be back here, in about an hour,” she called over her shoulder. Chewie was too smart to go chasing after her on the street, drawing attention to them. Which was something Leia used ruthlessly to her advantage. She didn’t want to talk about Vader, especially right now, when she needed to focus.

She heard R2 come up behind her, and she took to the street, heading back to Kertha’s house.

Getting through the gate was surprisingly easy. Neither man looked at her, not really. Or R2. All they saw was the grey outfit of a slave and a droid. Leia and R2 had been reduced to background patterns in their life. Which was what she had been counting on, but it still made her furious that these men could treat anyone that way.

Leia walked up the main path to the front door, until her eyes spotted the fainter trail through the grass that led to the side door. The one she had seen Kelish and the other woman exit through. Given that the women had been carrying laundry baskets, Leia had assumed that this was an entrance to a hallway, or a small mudroom.

Leia had been wrong. She walked into complete chaos. All told there about a dozen people in the room. And, from what she could see, they were all women. Women of a variety of different species, Leia caught sight of a blue Twi’lek, a short Tortuga, and a very thin and sickly looking Nautolan. There was one other human woman, as far as Leia could tell. And everyone was wearing the same drab dress as Leia.

If the heat and smells were anything to go by, she had just walked right into the kitchen. While they were preparing food for a party. The only way this could have been a worse spot to enter this house was if she somehow entered into the main hall.

Leia blinked, trying to make sense of this whirling dance around her. There was no way she could walk through the room, without being spotted and put to work.

She frantically scanned the area, looking for anything, any chore that would get her out of this room, when a small gap appeared in the whirling mess, and her eyes caught the color black, instead of grey.

It was a human male, pale, with black hair. He disappeared from her sight again, as the Nautolan got in between Leia and him, but she could hear his voice bellowing.

“Is that soup ready yet?”

One of the Twi’leks, that was near the stoves, shoulders hunched, and Leia heard a mumbled, “Not yet.”

So, this man was the overseer of all this. Probably not a slave, but if he was, then Leia was screwed. A fellow slave would recognize a stranger in their midst. Leia hadn’t seen a weapon on
him, but the lack of it didn’t mean much. There wasn’t much call for shooting people in kitchens trying to escape.

Hell, even if he wasn’t a slave, it was best to avoid his attention. He wasn’t like those guards at the front gate. He was the overseer, his whole job was to watch every slave in this room. She needed to get through this mess, and out the door without him really noticing her. Or, if he saw her, dismissing her from his mind.

Leia looked around again, and her eyes fell on a set of tools by the door. She blinked in surprise. She had never even seen a broom before, outside of holos and plays. Why would there be one here?

Leia felt herself stiffen as she realized that was the point. Only the poorest couldn’t afford to buy a mouse droid to handle such things as vacuuming sweeps. But Kertha was only bereft of taste, not money. He didn’t need droids to do menial tasks. He had slaves, and making them handle such chores was the point. That he had a house this large, and he was flaunting his wealth by showing he could keep enough slaves to keep it clean.

Leia’s jaw tightened in anger, but she reached over and grabbed the broom and the accompanying dustbin. Whatever she thought about Kertha, these tools were the perfect excuse to walk through this room. With it in her hand, it would be clear she was heading somewhere else, to handle a different problem.

“Spilt up,” Leia hissed at R2.

He started to give a warble of protest, and Leia hurriedly shushed him. “We need to get through this crowd, R2. Better odds if we aren’t together. I’ll meet you at the south exit to the room.”

Understanding that they needed discretion, he gave an angry chortle, and went his own way through, staying to the far wall, away from the people who might not see him with the trays of food in their hands.

Leia waited for a beat, then headed in the opposite direction. The room was hot and stuffy, and she could feel the sweat starting to trickle down her face, as she weaved her way through the servants and cooks.

It couldn’t have taken her more than a minute for her to cross the room, but by the time Leia had gotten to the edge of the crowd, she felt like she had just been dancing straight for four hours at a royal function. But the large arch exit to the room was not ten feet from her. She was home free.

The hairs on Leia’s arms stood straight up, and she felt a cold breeze brush up against her neck. “Danger,” the Force whispered.

Then there was a hand clapped hard on her arm, and she was yanked backwards.

“And where do you think you are going?” a loud voice demanded in her ear.

Leia flailed for a moment, almost taken off her feet by the force of that grip. She righted herself, just in time, so that she didn’t sprawl out onto the floor.

She turned to face her attacker and caught the sight of the black uniform out of the corner of her eye. For one moment, the heat of the kitchen faded away, and she was standing in that ice-cold cell, Vader’s breathing mechanism filling the space with its eerie noise.

“Well?” a voice demanded.
Leia froze. For a moment, she was in both places at once. Then her fear dissolved, and resolve took its place. She called the Force to her, as she turned to that voice, ready to lash out. Ready to kill. He wouldn’t hurt her, ever again.

The arm fell away, and Leia was bringing her hand up to shove him away when her gaze met a pair of pale blue eyes.

Leia blinked, where was the mask?

“What do you have to say for yourself?” that sneering voice demanded.

That voice didn’t sound right. And where was the whoosh whoosh of his breathing apparatus that even now should be spilling into the silence?

Leia shivered, but that wasn’t right either. The room she was standing in was hot. It was cold a moment ago, wasn’t it? Leia’s eyes flickered, and instead of the black walls, she met the sideways glances of the slaves in this room, trying to covertly watch what was going on.

Leia shuddered, and like that, she was back in the moment. Her eyes moved up to meet the angry hard gaze of the overseer, and this time she saw his face, instead of that death head’s mask superimposed on it.

He was young, was Leia’s first thought, as unhelpful as that was. He couldn’t have been more than twenty-five. But his blue eyes were hard, and his mouth was in an uncompressing line. How did someone so young be so hard and heartless? But there was a face there, not the unreadable blank mask.

Through sheer force of will, she battened down on the instinct to punch the man who was even now gripping her arm hard enough to leave bruises.

“Not Vader,” she tried to tell herself. “This is not Vader.”

Her hindbrain wasn’t all that convinced and continued to chatter away at her that she needed to do something.

Leia closed her eyes, and immediately bowed her head down, grabbing onto the Force, and pulling hard. Immediately her heart rate slowed, and she could feel the edges of her panic melt away, allowing her to think.

She kept her head down, as she held out the broom in her hand towards the body in front of her. It had been a mistake to look directly at him. Slaves didn’t look at their masters, or the agents of their masters.

“Kelish said that someone dropped a glass in the library,” she said in a quiet voice. That wasn’t a hard guess on her part. This house was Coruscantii design down to every detail. And every large house on Coruscant had a library, if only for the status it brought to have a room in a house that wasn’t a necessity on a planet where every square inch was at a premium. “I need to clean it up.”

There was a hiss of anger, and then she was shoved towards the door. “Then what are you dawdling here for?” that voice demanded. “Get moving before one of the guests hurts themselves on it.”

“Of course,” Leia babbled, making sure she kept her eyes on R2, who was waiting in the hallway for her. The droid was a reminder of why she was here, and couldn’t lash out. “I’m sorry.”
That hand was back on her shoulder, and Leia was swung around before she could even catch her breath. She kept her face down, until another hand grabbed her chin, forcing her to look up.

He looked her up and down, and Leia fought not to jerk her head out of his hands. Then his fingers squeezed her chin, and she let out a grunt of pain. She didn’t feel any shame about it either. Given the delighted gleam in his eyes, that was precisely the noise he wanted to hear anyway. It helped focus her in on who actually was standing in front of her.

This man wasn’t as tall as Vader, but he was taller than Han. She could feel the edges of her control start to fray, but that sadistic gleam in his eyes helped keep her in this moment. For all his faults, Vader didn’t actually enjoy hurting people. He did it because they were in his way, or it was a faster way to get to the truth, but he didn’t delight in it.

Leia’s neck was beginning to hurt from being forced into such an awkward angle. Behind her, she could hear R2 extending his third leg. He was about to intervene, and that was something she couldn’t let him do.

Behind her back, Leia frantically waved the droid off, hoping that this one time, he would listen to her. This man wasn’t an Imperial, that was the only saving grace in this situation. He was studying her so closely that if he had been one, he would have recognized her by now. A droid coming to the defense of a slave would prompt too many questions. And Leia needed to get out of this house, with as few people noticing her as possible.

“You are sorry, what?” the man in front of her prompted, a leer in his voice.

That helped anchor her too. Vader wanted many things from her, in both timelines, but that had never been one of them. That still didn’t explain what the hell this man wanted from her now. She again let her emotions go into the Force, trying to make herself think.

When the answer came to her, Leia wasn’t sure how she managed not to spit in the man’s face. Hell, it was a battle to keep the anger off her face. She doubted she succeeded all the way, if the interested gleam in his eyes was any indication. It would be so easy to kill this arrogant fool standing in front of her. She didn’t even need the Force to do it. One quick blow to the solar plexus and he would be hunched over in shock, and then snapping his neck would be but a moment. Then he would never be able to harm anyone again.

But that would draw attention to her, and everything they were here for. So, Leia did allow a quiver of fear in her voice, along with her resentment. “I’m sorry, Master.”

He studied her for a moment, then a satisfied smirk crossed his face. He shoved her away, but this time Leia was expecting it and braced herself. “Get moving,” he smirked. “And the second you are done, I want you back here.”

If there was any way to kill this man before she left this planet, Leia was going to find it. She wasn’t like the other women here, she could fight back. She could make sure that this man never laid a finger on any of them ever again.

She gave him a nod and quickly scuttled her way to the hallway. She walked past R2, who was hiding out of the line of sight for most of the occupants of the kitchen. It wasn’t until she was a good ten feet in front of him, that the droid started to follow her.

There were several long moments, where Leia could practically feel the little droids’ internal motors whirling away. There weren’t many people in this hallway, and they were mostly harried-looking slaves, carrying trays of food to the main house, or empty ones back to the kitchen, but R2
was too wise to make a rookie mistake as talking to her where others might hear.

When they had a brief second of solitude, Leia said in a voice just above a whisper. “Any chance
you know where we can find a data port for you?”

The droid gave a sad whistle. [No.]

Leia sighed. A foolish thought, but it didn’t hurt to check. “Then we go into each room, until we
find one.”

R2 said nothing, waiting for a too thin Devaronian to pass them. [Leia,] he whistled, [are you
alright?]

“I’m fine,” Leia said briskly.

[Your hands are shaking.] R2 observed.

Leia kept moving, balling her hands into fists, trying to control them. “Adrenaline rush,” she said.

[Leia-] the droid whined, in a tone far more suited to Threepio.

“Not now,” she said, tone brisk. This was ridiculous. She had been threatened and stood up to
some of the vilest and most dangerous people in the galaxy. Tarkin. Jabba. Snoke. One tiny little
flunky in another flunky’s employ wasn’t anything compared to those men.

“But you didn’t see some flunky. You saw him.”

Not helpful. And irrelevant. Hell, that Vader was dead. And the second time she had ended up in
that cell, she had almost killed the current one.

That little fact should have helped calm her. It did not. Leia clenched her jaw, trying to keep her
teeth from chattering. What was wrong with her? Even accounting for the fact that she had for a
brief moment seen the wrong man, it wasn’t like she wasn’t used to people threatening her.

“Yes,” a voice that sounded like Mama whispered, “but Leia, it’s been decades since you have been
put into a situation where you haven’t been able to fight back.”

True, it had been. Apparently, this was a skill she had lost and given her current situation,
something she was going to need to work on.

R2, bless him, didn’t press her any further on the subject. He merely stayed behind her, as they
checked room after room, seeking what they needed. Along the way, they had to dodge drunk party
goers and other slaves, but those encounters were far and few in between. And none of them were
dressed in Imperial uniforms.

Most of the revelry seemed to be happening on the other side of the house. When Leia did finally
find a port, ironies of ironies, it was in the library. She quickly waved R2 in, and he wheeled up to
it, extending his scomp link, and Leia watched on the corresponding viewscreen as data whizzed
by, too fast for her to read.

She knew they had found what they were looking for when R2 gave an excited squeal. “Was Sana,
right?” she asked. “Was he really stupid enough to put all the data on his server?”

R2 made a warbling bleep. [He is,] the droid confirmed. [Some complex algorithms around the
data to protect it, but nothing I can’t handle.]
“How long?”

[Two minutes.]

Leia left him to his work, and went to the other side of the room, broom in hand, and begin sweeping, beginning a countdown in her head. If anyone came in here, she couldn’t be seen hovering over the droid like an anxious mother.

She had gotten to two minutes in her head, but R2 was still connected to the port. At four, Leia began to worry and risked crying out, “Is there a problem?”

[No problem.] R2 said, electronic voice satisfied, as he disengaged. [But it took me longer than expected to erase the security footage of all of us outside by the fence, and to find Jocan’s name.]

Erasing that footage was smart, but that didn’t explain the last half of that sentence. “Whose Jocan?” she asked, coming to the droid.

His top dome swiveled, and his visual sensor light turned purple as he answered her. [The man in the kitchen,] he said. [The one who threatened you.]

Leia paused. While it was nice to know the name, so she could find him later, she knew R2 too well to think the droid at left it at that.

“What did you do, R2?” she asked.

[Framed him for the theft of the data,] he said simply, and put his third wheel down, intending to leave the room.

“R2!” Leia hissed. “Why did you do that?”

[His operating program needs correcting,] R2 beeped primly. [And this way, he will get it.]

“The Hutts will torture him to death over this, R2,” Leia protested.

The droid let out a rude noise. [So? You were planning on terminating him yourself. Now you don’t have to.]

Leia closed her eyes. Not organic. His logic was not an organic’s, and it would do her well to remember that. “Yes,” she said, trying to keep her voice patient. “I was thinking along those lines. But that is very different than turning someone over to the Hutts.”

[Someone needs to be blamed for this,] R2 said practically. [Would you rather it be one of the organics here, the ones that are slaves?]

He made a good point.

[Leia, it is my mission to protect you,] he said. [And this does it, and fulfills the parameters of our current mission.]

She sighed, there wasn’t enough time to undo what he had done, and besides, he was right. She wasn’t comfortable with turning someone over to the justice that the Hutts practiced, but she couldn’t deny that it was better that it was Jocan, than some poor unfortunate slave Kertha would inevitably blame for this.

“I don’t know how I keep forgetting how bloodthirsty you are,” she said ruefully.
R2 regarded her seriously, and when he answered her, there was no lightness in his tone. [You are the variant,] he said. [It is in my code to protect you.]

Leia swallowed hard. There was a lot packed into those sharp little beeps. “Who changed your code?” she asked.

[I did,] R2 said. He spun around, so that he was facing the door, and started heading towards it. [And you should be thankful that I am not as vengeful as you think I am.]

Leia blinked. “Beg your pardon? You're turning him over to the Hutts. What could possibly be worse than that?”

R2’s primary visual sensor swiveled up, so he was looking her directly in the face. [It’s possible that the trail I created to lead to him won’t be found,] he allowed. [I don’t always understand how organics think and might have miscalculated.]

Leia snorted, “Unlikely.”

[And if he is blamed, there is always the hope that he would escape them before they correct his programming.] R2 started heading towards the door. Leia fell in behind him, still wondering how any of this was considered mercy. Even using a droid’s logic.

[But there would be no escape for Jocan, if I used the communication array in this house, and contacted Vader to tell him what he did to you.]

Leia stopped dead in her tracks. “You almost did what?” she whispered, horrified. If Vader executed his own men, because they shot a fleeing Rebel, what would he do to someone who laid hands on her?

R2 stopped and turned around. [It would have been a delayed feed,] he said reproachfully. [I would in no way endanger you, or the mission.]

It said something about her trust in R2, and his ability to get things done, that hadn’t even occurred to her. Leia swallowed, hard. “R2,” she said, coming up to the droid, and kneeling in front of him so that he had to stop moving. “You cannot sic him on people who make you angry.”

R2’s dome shook in the negative. [You are the variant,] he insisted. [I will protect you.]

“R2,” Leia whispered helplessly, overwhelmed by the strength of his love. “What happened, in the kitchen, that was not your fault.”

R2 gave a long sad whistle. [I failed Padme. I will not fail you.]

“You didn’t fail her,” Leia protested. “And you didn’t fail me.” She leaned forward and rested her head against his dome. “I don’t want you to sell your soul in an effort to avenge me.”

R2 let out a startled beep. [Most organics would say I don’t have one.]

Leia felt a tear track down her face at his matter of fact tone. “Most people are idiots,” she said dismissively. “In my long life, you have been one of my truest companions and friends.”

R2 gave a small humming sound at that. [Padme thought that too. And because she thought that, and you think that, that is why I choose to protect you in any way I can.] He backed up slightly, so Leia was forced to raise her head and look at him. R2’s normally confident tones were replaced by something much more hesitant. [Unless you wish to reprogram me otherwise?]
Leia closed her eyes in defeat. No, that was something she would never do, any more then she would consign any organic to brainwashing to make them ‘better.’

“No,” she said hoarsely. “No, that will never happen, not if I have anything to say about it.”

[Then we will have to disagree about my methods.]

“Yes,” she whispered. “I understand.” Whole heartily disagreed with him, and the methods he was choosing but understood. She was playing with time itself to save her loved ones. Could she honestly be surprised that R2 wouldn’t resort to equally drastic measures to do the same?

[Can we go now?] R2 asked, after Leia’s silence stretched on.

“Yeah,” she said hoarsely and stood up.

[I found another exit you can use,] R2 said primly, spinning on his wheels. [So, you are not forced to encounter Jocan again.]

“Of course, you did,” Leia murmured, but she followed the little droid out of the house.

Chewie was right where they had left him, looking disgruntled and angry. <Did you get it?> he asked Leia as he shoved Leia’s bounty hunter outfit into her arms.

“Yes,” she said, keeping her tone even.

R2 gave an affirmative sounding whistle. [I can’t decode all the data here though. Leia, I’m going to need those mathematicians’ algorithms.]

Chewie looked at Leia questioningly. “He says we can’t find out everything that is on it until we get back to base,” she explained as she walked behind the dumpster.

“Why don’t you carry Drusil’s programs on your processors?” she called out to the little droid.

[They’re too big.] R2 informed her. [She is a good mathematician, but her work is not elegant, or sparse.]

“Don’t see you writing a program that is able to crack those encryption files in hours,” Leia pointed out, taking her boots off so she could pull her pants on.

[I could write such a program.] R2’s beeps were clipped. [If I didn’t have to spend all my time watching out for you, your brother, and Threepio.]

Leia pulled her shirt on. “Be honest, it’s mostly Threepio.”

R2 made a rude noise. [He is merely needy. You are *unpredictable.*]

“That’s not a bad thing, R2,” Leia told him, as she started to wrap her braid around her head, pinning it in place.

Chewie’s voice cut in. <Is he complaining that you started a revolt while you were in there?>

Leia scowled and slipped her helmet on her head. {I did no such thing,} she informed Chewie
primly as she stepped out from behind the dumpster. She opened the trash receptacle and threw the dress in.

R2’s beeps no longer held that sly amusement. [No, she did not.]

Chewie noticed the droid’s change in tone, and his eyes immediately narrowed in on Leia. <What happened?> he demanded.

{Nothing,} Leia said. {Let’s go}

<You tell me now Leia, or I will tell your parents, Han, Luke, Obi-Wan and Rex something happened to you in that house.>

Leia hissed, {That’s blackmail!}

Chewie nodded. <It is. But I’m a smuggler. What did you expect?>

Leia huffed. ”Nothing happened, Chewie. Really.”

He crossed his arms over his chest. <Now I know you’re lying.>

Leia shook her head. “Oh, really? How?”

His gaze was steady as he said softly, <You started talking in Basic.>

{Nothing happened,} she repeated, making sure that her words were coming out in the correct language. {I was unexpectedly grabbed by a tall man, who was wearing all black. I was… confused, for a second, to where I was.}

Chewie’s expression softened. <Oh.>

Leia huffed. {Now that we have that out of the way, can we go?} She rubbed her hands up and down her arms. {This outfit is hot, and I don’t want to be in it longer then I have to be.}

<Of course.> Chewie dropped his arms and awkwardly offered, <My apologies Leia, I didn’t mean to push.>

Leia snorted. {Yes, you did.}

<Yes, I did,> he admitted. <But I know you tend to downplay all injuries to yourself. I was concerned that you had endured another wound in there.>

Liar. {You would have been able to smell blood if I was physically hurt Chewie,} Leia snapped.

<Not all wounds are of the body Leia,> he said softly, as he pulled out his comlink. Before she could even begin to formulate a response to that, he spoke into it. <Han, she’s out.>

Leia vaguely heard the sounds of shouting in the distance over the speaker. “Oh good,” Han said back. “Because this part just got a little too interesting for my tastes.”

“SOLO!” a voice that Leia didn’t recognize screamed.

“Might take us a while to leave,” Sana’s voice came over the channel.

“How did you get this frequency?” Han demanded. He sounded vaguely out of breath, like he was on the move very quickly. “And where the hell are you? Your boyfriend is about to pound my face
“Swiped your com and cloned all the frequencies on it when you were busy flirting with that Twi’lek,” Sana said. “And I’m in the fresher room off the dining hall.”

There were more grunts and muted shouting on the com for a second. “Oh, by the Black God,” Sana said into the com, voice full of scorn. “I told you to make him jealous, not homicidal.”

There was the sound of flesh hitting flesh, and something going thump. There was a beat of silence, then Han spat. “This is not my fault!”

Sana didn’t answer him, simply switched gears. “Did I hear you right, Chewbacca? Shiok’s out of the house?”

<Yes,> Chewie said. <And R2 has the data.>

“My, my, my,” Sana purred. “Shiok, darling, you weren’t kidding when you said you were good.’

Leia leaned in so Chewie’s com could catch her voice. {I don’t understand the point of jokes,} she said flatly. {And I am not some randy male, I see no need to inflate my worth.}

“Oh,” Sana was cooing, “you are adorable. Han, where in the galaxy did you find her?”

“Will you stop flirting and come talk your boyfriend down?” Han’s voice was exasperated.

<Should we wait for you outside the gate?> Chewie asked.

Something crashed in the background, and Leia could practically feel Han’s sheepishness. “No,” he said. “It’s too hot in here. Waiting outside the gates will just make the guard jumpy. Get to the Falcon. I’ll meet you there.”

Leia’s eyes narrowed. If Han thought for one moment, she was going to leave him in there, with only Sana as back up, he had another thing coming.

{I am not leaving you in there,} she hissed. Aware of their audience, she added. {If you die, I don’t get paid.}

“You have done enough,” and Han’s voice was all durasteel now. “Coming into this house was risk enough.”

Leia felt the slightest flicker of guilt, but dammit, she had been put into a corner by Sana and R2. What was she supposed to do? Sit outside and twiddle her thumbs? She had a way into the house, and she took it.

Sana’s voice was all business now. “I would like to remind you, I still haven’t been paid either.”

“After I give this data to Jabba, remember?” Han hissed back. “And that won’t happen if your boyfriend kills me.”

Leia relaxed fractionally. Sana was damn good at what she did. And she had to admit, the fact that Han owed her money, and more importantly, was promising to pay it, greatly increased the odds she would get Han out of that house.

“Don’t be so dramatic, husband of mine,” Sana said. “At most Kertha would bash that pretty face of yours. He has people to do the dirty work of killing you.”
“I AM NOT YOUR HUSBAND!” Han howled.

Leia looked at Chewie, and Chewie looked back at her. <I’m going to leave you two to it,> Chewie said after a moment. <Sana, do try to remember that no Han, means no money. I don’t owe you anything.>

She sighed. “Fine,” there was the sound of her walking. “I’ll get him out.”

{We will go to the Falcon,} Leia said, judging perhaps, that this was the better of two options. She didn’t like leaving Han here, but if he knew she was on the relative safety of the Falcon, he could focus and get out with Sana’s help. The only way Leia would be able to get into that house with a weapon was if she stormed it. And that would only make the situation worse. So, it was with great reluctance, she followed Chewie and R2 back to the hanger bay.

Once they were on the Falcon, Leia sat at the dejarik table.

Chewie gave her an odd look. < Aren’t you going to remove that helmet?> he asked her.

Leia shook her head. {Not until we are in the air,}

He contemplated her for a long moment. <And I thought I was paranoid.>

{Better safe than sorry.}

He shrugged. <Suit yourself. I’ll be in the cockpit, in case we need to get out of here in a hurry,> and he ambled away in that direction.

Leia looked at R2 and gestured at the table. {Want to play?}

R2 looked at the holographic board, then her. [Alright,] he said, as he wheeled over.

They were on their third game when the sounds of Han’s boots stomping up the gangplank hit Leia’s ears. She looked over to him and was alarmed to see that his eyes were wide, and his face was slightly flushed, like he ran the entire way here. Leia came to her feet in an instant as he ignored her, and shouted into the direction of the cockpit. “Chewie, get us out of here!”

Chewie roared back. <Anyone chasing us?>

“No,” Han said. “And I’d like to keep it that way.”

That was unusual. Unless they were being chased, or he was bleeding to death, Han would usually go to the cockpit, and fly them off-world himself. Instead, Han was in here, in the living area, muttering to himself.

R2’s domed head moved from Leia to Han. [I am no good at fixing organics,] he announced, as he shut down their game, and started making his way to the sleeping quarters. [I’ll leave that to you.]

Wasn’t it nice that he had such faith in her? Especially since Leia didn’t have the first clue as to
what could possibly be bothering Han. They had come to Nimban, gotten what they needed in a
day, and no one was bleeding. All and all, a very successful mission.

Beneath her feet, Leia could feel the Falcon’s engines roar to life. Now that they had taken off, and
no unexpected guests could show up, she removed the helmet off her head. Wisps of her hair flew
everywhere, and she used her gloved hand to irritably push them out of her eyes as she looked at
Han.

“What’s wrong?” she asked him.

Han stopped his pacing and gave her a weak version of his ‘trust me’ smile. “Who said anything
was wrong?”

Leia scowled and dropped her helmet at her feet. Han started at the noise. She put her hands on her
hips. “No, seriously,” she said. “What is going on with you?”

Han looked at her for a moment, and Leia took note of his pale face and shaking hands. “I know
what this looks like,” he said, the words coming out in one long rush.

Leia, now even more worried by his worry, walked towards him intending to take his hand in
reassurance. Han immediately backed away from her.

Leia’s first instinct was to keep going. To march up to him and demand that he tell her what was
going on. What stopped her was the look on Han’s face. He looked like he would shatter into a
million pieces if she touched him. The only other time she could remember him being this openly
devastated, was when she had come to him, to tell them that Luke’s school had been destroyed, and
who had done it.

“Han,” she asked, heart in her throat. “What happened?” He had said no one was chasing them, but
had Sana done something? Blown his cover somehow? Refused payment in the hopes of a bigger
score?

Han put his hands out in front of him, pleading in every inch of his frame. “This looks bad,” he
repeated. “I know this does, and you have no reason to trust me.”

“Han, I have no idea what you are talking about. What, what looks like?” Leia wished she could
have been a little less blunt, in the evidence of his obvious distress, but she knew this mood. If she
let him, he would babble at her for the whole trip, and she still would have no answers.

“She isn’t my wife.”

Leia blinked. That wasn’t the answer she was expecting. “Sana?” she asked him.

“Yes. Sana.” Han threw his hands in the air. “It was a con we pulled on Stenness. We were going
to rob this spice dealer because…” His voice trailed off, and he gave a disgusted little huff. “Well,
it doesn’t matter why. Only that we were. But for the plan to work we needed a big event to explain
why there was so many of us there-“

“Han,” Leia said, gently cutting him off, before he ran out of air. “I know this.”

Han stopped ranting, his arms falling back to his side. “You do?”

“Of course.”

Han shook his head. “You know about Sana?”
“I just said I did.” Leia looked at him, puzzled. Han usually wasn’t this slow on the uptake.

“He told you?” Han asked, flabbergasted. “Voluntarily?”

“Well,” Leia admitted, “that’s going a bit too far. We, I mean him and I, we ran into her unexpectedly. She introduced herself as your wife.”

Han’s face darkened. “I knew it,” he spat. Then he ran his hands through his hair again, scuffing it up, so it looked like he had stuck his finger in an electric socket. Leia so badly wanted to go over there, and smooth it down for him. Han loved to have his hair played with, and it had the bonus effect of helping him calm down. But he still looked like a nervous eopie, so Leia ordered her feet to stay where they were.

Han let out a bitter chuckle. “And let me guess, you didn’t leave me, I mean him, because of Ben?”

Leia was really getting tired of Han jumping to conclusions she couldn’t follow. “Ben?” she asked, voice sounding confused even to her own ears. “What does Ben have to do with Sana?”

“Because he’s the reason you stayed,” Han said, pointing a finger at her. “We were married, with a kid, and then you found out I had a previous wife, and that’s why—”

“She isn’t your wife,” Leia cut in, anger frosting her tone. Did he really think she was that stupid? Or lovestruck? That she would stay married to someone who failed to mention his first wife. Added to the fact that he spent the entire day denying Sana was his wife, only to say it now, just to get under her skin, really pushed her beyond the limits of her control.

“But—” Han protested.

“The documents were never filed with the Stenness’ authorities,” she informed him, taking a pleased delight at the stupid look on his face. “The marriage wasn’t considered legal under that planet’s laws, or the Empires. All you really had was a big party.”

Han’s mouth dropped open. “I’m sorry, what?”

Oh, now he chooses to think. Well, Leia was too pissed to care. All she wanted to do was ram some much-needed truths into that thick mass he called a head.

“You would know that,” Leia said snottily, “if you ever bothered to learn how marriages are actually done on most planets.”

“I never thought I would get married!” Han protested.

What kind of an excuse was that? A Han Solo one, that’s what. “Oh no, but it was perfectly alright to think you were married,” she snapped.

“She isn’t my wife,” he shouted back. “You just said so.”

Leia’s hands fell to her hips. “You didn’t know that. Not until I pointed it out to you. This is so typical of you. You just rush into action without thinking about the consequences!”

Han’s face twisted, and fury replaced confusion. He stomped up to her and leaned forward so he was almost nose to nose with her. “I think you might be confusing me for you,” he growled. “I’m not the one who is willing to trade my life for every sob story in the galaxy.”
Leia’s chin came up as she shifted her head so she could stare him directly in the face. “I always do my research,” she snarled. “Unlike you. Hell, you didn’t even bother to read the paperwork when we got married. For all you knew, I was robbing you blind.”

Han’s face remained furious for one more second, then it contorted into an expression Leia didn’t understand. He shook his head and took a step back from her. Hell no, he wasn’t backing away from this. He started this argument, and he was damn well going to finish it.

Han’s voice was very gentle and calm. “Not me.”

Leia’s mind blanked for a second, the non sequitur making no sense to her twisting rage. What?” she spat.

Han was still looking at her, and it was with a mix of pity and wariness. “That wasn’t me,” he repeated.

Leia gritted her teeth, of course it was him, who else could it possibly be? Leia wasn’t the one who had trouble figuring out if she was married or not. By all the gods, he had been there for their marriage ceremony. The one she damn well made sure he understood was a marriage because he had pulled this crap with Sana. And he had given her that stupid smirk of his, and told her…

No, he hadn’t said anything, because it hadn’t been this Han that had been there.

Leia felt all the blood drain out of her face, and she closed her eyes. For a moment, she was afraid she was going to pass out, as too many emotions and feelings clawed at her heart. Dammit. This was all so damn familiar, that for one horrible second she had forgotten. How could she forget something like that?

She opened her eyes and looked at Han, aghast. “I’m so sorry-“ she started to say.

Han gave her a rueful smile, cutting her off. “Don’t worry about it.”

“But-“ Leia said.

“Leia, seriously,” Han shrugged. “I told you. Me. Him. I don’t see the difference.”

That was a lie. “If that was true, then why bring it up?”

He looked at her, worried. “I wanted to make sure you knew when you were, Leia.”

Leia hissed through her teeth and moved to rub her hands over her face, only to stop when she saw the gloves that were still on her hands. She gave an aggravated huff and pulled them off, throwing them with as much force as she could into the helmet that was still on the floor.

“Leia,” Han said gently. “It’s okay.”

“It’s really not.”

Han gave a small reassuring smile. “Also, It’s not like I wouldn’t sign any paperwork you put in front of me without reading it.”

Leia looked at him helplessly, loving him for giving her this out, even when she had to have hurt him by confusing him for someone else. “You shouldn’t,” she said.

Han shrugged. “No version of me would have married you if I didn’t trust you.”
Leia bit her lip. “I am sorry, Han.”

He scowled and moved forward so he could put a finger over her lips. Leia resisted the urge to bite it, to make him withdraw. He knew she hated it when he did that.

“I know you don’t really listen to anyone when your mind’s made up,” he said, eyes serious. “But for once, can you save us both from a fight, and believe me when I tell you I don’t care.”

Leia wanted to argue, but he looked so sure. She raised her hand to push his finger off her lips. “Alright,” she agreed. “But only if you agree to read paperwork before you sign it. That is a horrible habit to keep.”

Han laughed and shook his head. “Yes, because the people I do business with, they are so fond of contracts.” He gave her a warm smile. “Besides, anything you give me to sign doesn’t count. I know you aren’t out to screw me.” He looked so inviting right that second, and he was close enough that Leia could catch his scent.

Leia gave him a wide, sassy smile. “Oh, I wouldn’t say that.”

Han looked hurt for a moment, then his eyes widened in shock as her meaning sank in. He turned bright red and sputtered, “Leia!”

Leia bounced on her toes, delighted with herself. It was rare that she could make him blush in embarrassment. Which was a shame, because in her opinion, he was always so adorable when he did.

“We are keeping to your pace Han, and I mean that. But I am long past the age of playing coy with what I want.”

He gaped at her. “Do Princesses talk like that?”

Leia grinned. “This one does. Lucky for you, because it also means I’m a Princess who wanted to marry a smuggler.”

Han’s face darkened in defeat, and he suddenly slipped back into that strange mood he had been in all day. “Yeah,” he muttered.

Leia’s worry intensified. Instead of looking pleased with himself that she had all but served herself up to him, he looked like she had punched him in the face.

“Han,” she said patiently. “What is going on in that head of yours? And don’t tell me it’s nothing. It’s clearly something.”

He looked away from her, and she could see him drumming his fingers on his leg. “When did you learn about Sana?”

Leia sighed and rubbed her forehead. Between wearing a helmet for most of the day, and this nonsensical argument they had somehow found themselves in, she was developing a massive headache.

“We ended up at your hidey-hole on Monsua Nebula.”

Han frowned. “Why?”

Leia glared at him. “We were hiding from Imperial scouts, because someone shot at them, even
after I told you that they had bought our cover story.”

“Hey,” he protested half-heartedly. “I did no such thing.” He gave her comically wide eyes as he laid both of his hands on his chest. “I’m innocent here.”

Leia scowled. “One day, that excuse is not going to work anymore.”

Han grinned. “Going to savor it till it does. I don’t often have the upper hand with you.”

He had all the advantages over her, but love wasn’t a competition. It had taken her a long time to really internalize that, but she had gotten there. Mostly.

“As I was saying,” she said with a pointed glare. “We were on Monsua Nebula, and Sana had remote droids looking for you. When we entered the system, they let her know you were there.” Leia shrugged. “We’d been there for about two hours, before she landed and introduced herself.”

Han’s face had lost its gleeful playfulness, and now he looked worried. “Oh,” he sat down heavily in the booth. “That’s why it was involuntary, me telling you who she was.”

Leia looked at him, fond amusement rising in her chest, despite everything. “Yes. Although I admit, I was pretty pissed the first time I met her.”

Something like amusement sparked in his eyes. “Did you shoot her?”

“No,” Leia huffed. “Almost shot you, though.”

A pleased look crossed Han’s face. “Why was that?”

Leia glared at him. “You know why.”

“Still like to hear it,” Han had a look of pure satisfaction to him now.

Leia rolled her eyes. “I was jealous. Happy?”

“Insanely.” And how did he manage to put a *swagger* into one simple word? That particular skill of his was infuriating as hell, not for the least bit, that much confidence was *very* attractive.

Leia sniffed. “Not that I would have given you the satisfaction of letting you know that at the time.”

“Oh, of course,” Han said mockingly. “Because you are so subtle when you are in a snit.”

“I do not have snits,” Leia informed him in the haughtiest tone she could muster.

Han didn’t look convinced, but he wisely didn’t try to argue with her. It was unfounded, anyway, she was a Princess of Alderaan. And the royalty of Alderaan would never do anything as undignified as have a ‘snit’.

“So, when did this all happen for you?” Han was drumming his leg. “The actual first time you met Sana?”

“Hmmm,” Leia closed her eyes, thinking, trying to line up the various timelines in her head. “About six months after the battle of Yavin, or thereabouts.”

“Six months after Yavin?” Han yelped.
Leia opened her eyes. “Yes?”

Han sputtered, “That means six months after the Battle of Alderaan in this timeline!” His voice became very high pitched. “Now, right now? That is when you met Sana?”

Leia felt irritation rise in her chest, but she tried to keep a reign on it. “Congratulations, you know how to read a calendar.” Alright, that might have been unnecessarily harsh.

Han’s mouth opened and closed several times, and his face scrunched up in total bewilderment. It wasn’t an attractive look on him. “But that means you knew about Sana before you married me.”

“I just said I did, didn’t I?”

“No,” Han corrected. His words were coming out in a slow, thoughtful drawl. “You only said that we ran into her. You never said when.”

Alright, he was right about that. Not about anything else, but he was right about that.

“You married me, knowing about her?” And look, there went all the goodwill she had been building towards him.

Leia, teeth grinding, said slowly. “As I have stated. Several times.”

Han didn’t say anything. Just stood there looking at her, total incomprehension on his face. There was no teasing or satisfied smirk anywhere to be seen. He really didn’t understand this.

Maybe he wasn’t being slow, Leia realized. It had only been months since she had entered into his life. Han had been such an integral part of her life for so long, it was hard to remember who she had been without him. But for him…

<He couldn’t have designed a woman he was more likely to fall in love with.> Chewie’s words from their conversation on the tarmac came floating up into her mind. Han believed in luck, and he had to be wondering how he, from his perspective, could have had enough good fortune to have someone come out of nowhere, and profess to love him. He rolled with it, seemed to delight in it, but could she blame him for being wary of it too? Of having something you always wanted, a family, dropped into your lap, with seemingly no effort on your part? Leia would be poking it too, trying to figure out what the catch was.

And now that she had a moment to think, Leia could somewhat see his point. He hadn’t known nineteen-year-old Leia. He was having a hard time believing Leia, especially a young Leia, would want anything to do with him after meeting Sana. The woman had her useful qualities, but she was a lot to take in.

“Han,” she said softly, trying to make this as clear as possible, as she approached the table cautiously, worried he was going to bolt if she moved to fast on him. “I found out about her before I even admitted I liked you. Never mind that I was attracted to you.”

Han’s mouth opened and shut several times, no words coming out. He finally managed to sputter, “That doesn’t make any sense.”

Leia took another cautious step towards him. Now they were getting somewhere. “Why?”

“Because I’m me!” Han looked at her, like she was stupid for not getting this. “I know who I am, Leia.”
“I do too,” Leia said quietly.

“How *can* you?” Han looked desperate now.

Leia’s marriage to Han was *older* than the version in front of her. He had no way of knowing what knowledge of another person thirty years of marriage would bring. But she had to admit, he might have a point. She would never have thought, at no time while she knew him, he would have *this* low of an opinion of himself.

She wondered if the older Han had too during this time. All she had seen was the cocky arrogance and unbelievable attitude. But maybe he had this streak of vulnerability then too. It was only after three years he had built enough confidence in his own worth to really push the issue with her. Or he had been driven desperate by lust. That was a possibility too. One Leia was in complete sympathy with now. When she didn’t want to strangle him, for his sheer stubbornness. Then again, she spent half of her marriage thinking that, so it wasn’t a new feeling for her to have around Han.

Some of her thoughts must have been showing on her face, because Han hastily added, “Look, I’m not saying I’m space garbage or anything.”

“Then what’s the problem?” Leia demanded.

He looked at her baffled. “You are *you,*” he waved in her general direction. “Even if you weren’t the Princess of Alderaan, men would be falling all over themselves to have you.”

Leia put up a finger. “Stop right there. That, *that* is one of the reasons, right there.”

Han only looked *more* confused.

“You don’t want to “have” me,” Leia explained. “You aren’t looking for a pretty thing to cart about on your arm. You actually care what I think, feel, and *believe.*”

Han blinked. “You aren’t exactly subtle about *any* of those things.”

Leia nodded. “Exactly. Which makes it doubly frustrating when it’s dismissed.” She took a deep breath. “I can’t be separated from being Princess of Alderaan, Han, it’s shaped too much of who I am, even if for the longest time, it was an empty title.” And then not even that, but now was not the time to remind him of that painful fact of her life.

Han shook his head. “So, what’s the problem? Princess or no Princess, you are still Leia.”

Leia gave him a bitter smile. “You would be surprised how many of those men were terribly interested in the Princess, but had very little use for Leia.”

Han’s face twisted. “I think you are underestimating your appeal.”

Leia shook her head. “I’m really not.”

“But I’m just…*me.* It just doesn’t make *any* sense.”

Leia was trying to be understanding, but if he didn’t stop saying the same thing over and over again, she was going to have to start beating her head against a wall. At least then, the pounding in her head would have a physical source.

“What doesn’t make any sense?” she asked.

“You should be with someone…. extraordinary.” Han looked so earnest, that it stilled her
immediate reply that Han was extraordinary. He wouldn’t hear her right now, not really.

“I don’t want extraordinary,” she said quietly.

Han threw his hands up in the air. “Then, someone powerful. Or rich.”

Leia shook her head. “I am powerful already,” she said, tapping her chest. “And rich.”

Han’s voice became harsh. “Then how about a good man?”

Now that, Leia was not going to let stand. “You are a good man!”

Han’s face for a moment took on a fleeting look of joy, then despair took its place. “You’re deluding yourself. It makes no sense that you love me.”

Leia felt her face flush. She had practically thrown herself at him, and he doubted the sincerity of her emotions? “You don’t believe me when I say I love you,” she stated in a tight voice.

“No,” Han answered without hesitation. Leia wasn’t sure what her face was doing, but Han’s face grew horrified. “I mean, yes! I do believe you.”

Trying to cover her hurt, Leia asked in a stiff voice. “Then what’s the problem?”

“I’m me,” Han said.

“Yes,” Leia said. “That has been established several times today. You are Han. I am Leia, and I love you. You drive me crazy, especially right this second on your insistence that I’m lying, or delusional about how I feel, but I do love you.”

“That!” Han said, pointing a finger at her in emphasis. “You could do so much better than a nameless Corellian pilot who only has one friend in the galaxy. You should be with some mild-mannered political type.”

Leia took an involuntary step back, shredded at what he had just inadvertently revealed. “We aren’t friends?”

Han looked at her, frowning. Then he paled, and his finger dropped. “No,” he said hoarsely, taking a step towards her. “We are.”

Leia wanted to believe him, but she wasn’t sure she could trust anything right this moment. This wasn’t her Han. He was a Han, but not her Han. Leia blinked rapidly, trying to keep the tears from falling. Han, any Han, never dealt well when she cried.

Han looked at her face and swore. “Stupid,” he muttered, running a hand through his hair in agitation. He looked at her pleadingly. “I am sorry I said that. I wasn’t thinking. It’s just,” Han waved a hand in the air. “Chewie has been the only one I could trust for the longest time. I forget that I have you.” His face grew wondering. “And the Kid too.”

Leia put her hands on her face and took a deep breath in, trying to bring her mind to some semblance of order. Trying to listen to what was being said, instead of reacting.

She still woke up some mornings, thinking her parents were dead, and Alderaan was gone. Some days she was still startled by the feather-light feeling of Luke brushing across her mind in the Force, because it had been so long since she had heard from him. There were times when she saw the X-Wing pilots horsing around in the mess, that she told herself that she needed to remember to
tell Poe about it, because he would think it was hilarious. Then her heart would sink, as she realized he hadn’t even been born yet.

Then there were the really bad days, especially in the beginning, when she woke up, remembered Han was dead, that she was technically a widow, and then she would run into him in the hallways of Yavin. She had run so hot and cold with Han, in the beginning, it was amazing he had stayed around at all.

So maybe she should give him, and herself, some slack. Habits were formed over time, and she had been in this timeline for less than six months. It felt like she had lived a lifetime in those short months, but it was still, relatively speaking, a rather short amount of time. She could forgive him for falling back into old attitudes.

She dropped her hands and said, “Okay, I believe you.”

Han looked suspicious. “Just like that?”

Leia nodded. “I, of all people, understand that sometimes your past is more real than your present.”

Han’s face broke out into a relieved smile.

“But I need to clear one thing up,” Leia said, bringing the conversation back to their original argument. “I don’t want what you think is better. I want you.” Han didn’t look that convinced. “Besides,” she stated firmly, “a mild-mannered husband would drive me mad.”

Han gave her a long look. “Okay,” he admitted. “That part I can see.” He sighed and rubbed his face. “But that’s about the only part.” Han looked so tired, and that wasn’t fair. Here he was being stupid, and Leia wanted nothing more than to go over to him and comfort him.

“But just because there is love, that doesn’t make it a good match. I don’t know much about marriage—”

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“But just because there is love, that doesn’t make it a good match. I don’t know much about marriage—”

Including how you get one,” Leia pointed out snottily, unable to help herself.

Instead of rising to the bait, Han gave her a rueful smile. “You aren’t going to let that one go, are you?”

Leia sniffed haughtily. “No,” she said. “I didn’t for thirty years, and look, here I am again, with a whole new lifetime in front of me, to mock you for it.”

“A lifetime, huh?” Han asked.

Leia almost snapped back, at the way he was going, his lifetime was going to be very short indeed, because she was going to kill him herself.

The hint of vulnerability she could see in his eyes, stilled her tongue. It was a look he didn’t often give, either Han. But that didn’t mean she couldn’t see it when it was right in front of her. Maybe Han wasn’t the only one in this conversation falling back into old habits and attitudes. She had been about to snap back at him, and do what she had always done with Han, deflect when things got too intimate.

He knew her too well to take it personally. Even this Han knew that. But a cutting remark right this moment wouldn’t exactly promote trust, or encourage Han to be this vulnerable with her ever again. Would it be so terrible to answer his question honestly? To give him the reassurance she could see that he so desperately needed, instead of assuming he understood her underlying
meaning.

“Sometimes, I need actual words, not things thought at me really hard.”

And that had been the crack in their relationship the last time hadn’t it? Her fear of vulnerability and his worry that he wasn’t good enough for her. They would have been fine if Ben hadn’t fallen. If Ben hadn’t turned into an echo of the nightmare that haunted both of them for different reasons, their marriage would have been fine.

Well, a lot of things would have been different if Ben hadn’t fallen, her marriage was the smallest of the casualties in that decision. It was useless to wish otherwise now. He had fallen, and that had led to a blow falling onto a weak crack in the foundation of their relationship.

Leia didn’t have to go the way she had. She had a second chance to build something with Han. And she could damn well make sure that she didn’t create the exact same mistakes she had before. It wouldn’t necessarily be better than what was before. Just different. Like the people she now considered hers, that she had never met before. They weren’t a replacement for the loved ones who had come before, but they weren’t in any way inferior to them either.

She swallowed hard and fought to keep her eyes locked on Han. She allowed everything she was feeling to actually show on her face. “I will take as long as you will give me,” her voice was shaking, despite her efforts to keep it even.

His face twisted into sheer surprise, and then it morphed into something complicated. Han dropped his eyes away from hers. Leia would have been more worried about that avoidance of her gaze if it wasn’t for the fact that his fingers started moving along the dejarik board. When Han was truly nervous, he was incapable of keeping still.

“I don’t know much about marriage,” he repeated, eyes still not meeting hers. “Apparently, including on how to even get one.” Then his fingers stopped moving, and he took in a deep breath and lifted his head to meet her gaze. “But I do know love isn’t enough to keep one together.”

Leia nodded. “That’s true,” she said. “And we had our rough patches.” No need to bring up their roughest patch. “But before you were my husband, you were my friend, Han.”

He gave out a disbelieving snort.

“No, really,” she said. “You were the massive pain in my ass friend, who kept annoying me and would never leave me alone. But you were my friend.”

“Wow,” Han said, “what a stunning description. That sounds like a wonderful start.”

Leia shook her head. “You don’t understand,” she said, trying to find the words. Why was it, when it came to political enemies who had been feuding for generations, she could find the right phrase or tone to convey every thought and feeling easily? Yet she stood in front of this man, and her legendary tongue deserted her, except for quips and sarcasm?

“You made me feel,” she blurted out, feeling stupid for the inadequacy of that statement.

Han guffawed. “Yeah, that’s hard. You are, without a doubt, the most passionate person I have ever met. You have opinions on everything.”

“Not everything,” she corrected. “And not always.”

Han looked at her. “Don’t lie to me to make me feel better,” he said, voice becoming irritated.
“There is no way you ever were the ice queen you sometimes act like.”

“I did, Han,” she said, her voice clouding with her frustration and anger at herself. She was losing him, she was losing him because she couldn’t find the right thing to say.

Or maybe it was because she knew what to say, but that she had confused who was standing in front of her again. He hadn’t been there. This Han hadn’t seen her two days after the destruction of Alderaan, sobbing in Luke’s arms, as she realized that everyone she loved was gone. He hadn’t watched her retreat into her work for the Rebellion, shutting out anyone who had known her from before. Hadn’t watched her almost trade her life, time and time again, in an effort to get the Empire to burn.

“It was after Alderaan,” despite her best efforts, her voice hitched. Han looked at her confused, then his face paled as he got what event she was referencing.

“After that happened,” Leia could feel her hands ball into fists at her side. “I didn’t want to feel anything, ever again. It hurt too much.”

She gestured at Han, who was staring at her with his mouth open. “You made that impossible. You wouldn’t let me retreat into my rage, wouldn’t let me live with everything frozen. You became one of my anchors, tethering me to the world.”

Leia had to wonder, if Han had disappeared from her life then, if he had been the mercenary smuggler he convinced almost everyone he was, and left the Rebellion, who would she have become? Would she have allowed herself to become so swallowed in her rage and grief, that she would have stopped taking into account the lives that were being spent to bring the Empire down? Would she have started looking at stormtroopers as pawns that needed to be destroyed, not remembering that they were people too?

And most horrible of all, would she have sacrificed Luke, even though she cared so deeply for him, even then, on Vorgas Vas, to kill Vader?

Han swallowed hard. “All that, huh?”

Leia nodded. “Granted, you did it in the most childish way possible, but I’m not sure any other way was capable of reaching me at that point.”

Han’s voice was disbelieving, “There is no way you and the Kid didn’t click immediately. I don’t care that you didn’t know you were related.”

“That’s true,” she admitted. “But with Luke, it was different.” She closed her eyes, trying to think of the words she needed to explain this, without going into the messy lusting after her own brother parts. “He was like finding a close friend from long ago, we just hadn’t seen each other in a while. But he was complicated too, because he felt like home, and there was a part of me that considered that a betrayal of everyone I lost.”

Han’s snort brought her out of her past. “Oh, of course, you take a good thing and make it hard.”

Leia opened her eyes and shrugged. “It’s who I am. But even outside of our closeness Han, Luke was too wrapped up in his own grief to pull me out of mine. It was when all three of us were together we balanced each other out.”

Han shook his head. “I think you are deluding yourself. I am no one important.”

Leia let out a small laugh. “You really don’t see what I see in you, do you?” She didn’t let him
answer. Anything he had to say would only piss her off.

“I see a man of incredible loyalty. A man that would follow me into whatever battle I led him into, as easily as he would follow me into a party. Someone who isn’t afraid to take me head-on. And nobody, nobody, has ever made me laugh as much as you do.” She cupped his cheek. “What else do I need?”

Han looked a little stunned at this impromptu confession. “Someone who won’t insult everyone he meets?” he offered.

Leia shrugged. “It’s a good test for people I’m unfamiliar with. To see how they react to you.”

“Someone who has an inkling of the political plays you are always running through your head?”

“You understand politics,” Leia countered gently. “You wouldn’t have survived in Jabba’s court as long as you did, if you didn’t.”

“Someone who can be your King?” he asked. “Because older me certainly never dealt with that.”

Leia shook her head. “Prince Consort,” she corrected. “And I hate to burst your bubble, but yes, he had the title.”

Han’s mouth dropped open. “He did not!”

Leia arched an eyebrow at him. “He was my husband Han, what else did you expect him to be?”

“See,” Han said garbled, “I didn’t even know that.”

“You’re a fast learner,” Leia said gently. “Han, I know you. And that includes every flaw.” He didn’t look like he believed her, so she tapped him lightly on the nose, trying to lighten the mood. “If it helps, I rather liked how you looked in the traditional uniform of the Alderaanian Prince Consort.”

Han went pale, and she laughed. “Yeah, that was the look on his face every time he had to wear it too.”

“It has tassels, doesn’t it?” Han asked in a very high-pitched voice. Leia was laughing too hard to answer him. His face grew even more horrified. “Or is it tights?”

Leia shook her head, still laughing too hard to answer him with words. Han let out a loud groan. “It’s some ridiculous hat, isn’t it?”

Leia clapped a hand over her mouth, but the giggles still spilled out. “No,” she finally managed to get out in a wheezing breath. “Alderaan is very staid and boring. No tassels.”

Han didn’t look reassured. “There is a hat, isn’t there?”

Leia nodded, and Han let out a distressed noise as his head fell into his hands. “I look stupid in hats,” he complained into them.

“No, you don’t,” Leia said fondly.

Han raised his head to look at her, and Leia’s laughter died. There was real panic there now, not the semi-embarrassed kind brought about at the thought of wearing fancy outfits. “Being Prince Consort to a few thousand survivors of a genocide is very different than being one to three billion people Leia,” he said in a hoarse voice.

Han shook his head. “You say that now.”

“I don’t need a prince, Han. Or some ambitious politician, who is a polished consort. I need someone who sees me.” Leia could feel her fists clench by her sides. “Who actually likes me.”

Han got an indignant look on his face. “You are very likable,” he insisted.

Leia snorted. “I’m really not.”

Han crossed his hands over his chest. “I like you, and I don’t like people.”

Or did you send people away before they could hurt you? But Leia wasn’t going to voice that thought, for all that it was true.

“I lived for seven years without being the Princess of Alderaan. Hell, I lived twenty-seven years with it being an empty title.” Leia felt her chin go up. “I will not live without you, not again. If it comes to a choice between the two, I choose you.”

Han swayed in his seat. “You can’t mean that,” he whispered.

“I don’t say things I don’t mean,” Leia retorted. “I owe my people a lot, but I do not owe them divided loyalties. I can deal without being Queen, but I don’t deal well without you.”

“You can’t give that up,” Han’s words were garbled in his panic. “Not for me.”

Leia crossed her arms over her chest. “Watch me.”

He got up and came over to her side of the table, kneeling in front of her. “No,” he said. “Be reasonable. This isn’t some holo drama, Leia, where the princess gives it all up for love. You don’t run. From anything.”

“I’m not running,” Leia said. “You presented me with a choice, my throne, or you. I choose you.”

Han’s face filled with deep frustration. He ran his hands through his hair. “You don’t understand,” he gritted out.

“Then explain it to me,” Leia shot back. “I’m fairly bright, I’m sure I can follow whatever logic you have.”

“There is no way you would make that choice if you knew everything,” Han looked into her eyes, pleading. It wasn’t often he had to look up at her, and she was entranced by the light dancing across his eyes.

“Know what?” Leia said, leaning forward, and only half paying attention to what he was saying.

“You don’t know what I’ve done,” Han looked desperate. “If you did, there is no way you would want to be anywhere near me, never mind touch me—“

Leia clapped a hand over his mouth as a horrible suspicion bloomed in the back of her mind. Han glared at her. She dropped her hand, although it did serve him right for all the times he had done the same to her.

“Is this why you pulled away from our kiss the other day? You think that somehow your alternate pulled a fast one on me?”
Han turned bright red, but he didn’t say anything.

“Han?” she demanded, when the silence became a little too pointed.

“No,” Han muttered.

Leia rolled her eyes. “You are a horrible liar. I don’t care what Sana says.”

He looked a little indignant as he got back to his feet. “I’m a great liar.”

“Keep your delusions, laser brain,” she told him as he sat down across from her again.

He flashed her a smile, then his face grew serious. “Yes,” he said, swallowing hard. “I thought—”

He broke eye contact from Leia and rubbed the back of his neck. “I thought, he tricked you. Or lied to you.”

“Lied to me about what?” Leia asked, trying to tread gently, and not scoff at Han’s obvious fear and apprehension. Hearts were fragile things, and he was risking his to a woman who had one hell of an insane story. He believed her, Leia had no doubt about that, but sometimes the enormity of when she was, struck her out of nowhere too. Was it any wonder that Han was going through periodic bouts of disbelief?

“About everything,” Han hissed. “Where he was from. What he had done. What kind of people called him friend.”

“You don’t call them friend,” Leia pointed out.

Han slapped the table in frustration. “That’s not the point, Leia. I am around them enough that they think that. He had to have lied to you. There is no way a girl like you, ends up with a guy like me.”

“Where did you get the idea that I don’t know anyone from your past?” Leia was past angry and was now sitting at confused. “I knew about Maz. Hell, I knew about Lando,” she pointed out.

Han looked at her sadly. “But, you had no idea about Caleno.”

“You led a life before I got involved with you, Han,” Leia pointed out. “Stands to reason that you know a lot of people I have never met.”

“Don’t play dumb,” Han said. “It doesn’t suit you.” Then he snorted, “And yeah, you knew about Lando. But he is tame. And, as much as I hate to admit it,” and his face twisted in disgusted envy, “he’s charming. He has nothing on Sana.”

“Sana isn’t that bad,” Leia pointed out. Han gave her a horrified look. “No, really,” Leia said. “Once you get past the obnoxious flirt persona that she presents, she is a good operative. The Alliance hired her on several occasions. She never gave us to the Empire, and she does good work.”

Han’s mouth dropped open. “How the hell did you pull that off?”

“It started when I saved her life,” Leia said. “After that, I think she felt she owed me. There is also the fact she liked the money.”

“She always did,” Han said tiredly, slumping a bit in his seat.

Leia needed to correct this misapprehension Han was operating under, thinking there was no way that she didn’t know him. “Han,” she said gently, reaching for his hand. “You were a smuggler
when I met you. You never hid that from me. And even when I was nineteen, I wasn’t as naive and pampered as you seem to think I was. I was well aware of the seedier side of the galaxy.”

Han shook his head. “Knowing it and living it are two different things.”

“I told you I walked into Jabba’s palace to rescue you. You don’t think I didn’t get a good look at the life you were leading?”

Han’s mouth tightened at the reminder. “There is no way-“

“Your mother died when you were young, and your father abandoned you when you were about ten years old,” Leia said firmly. She had quite enough of this dancing around. Time to tell him facts. “After he left, you joined the White Worms gang to survive.”

Han’s face was pale, and he looked away from her. “Bail had his people look into me,” he mumbled, still fighting her. “He could have told you all of this.”

Papa had done what? Not the point now, but she would be having a little chat with him about that. Leia took a deep breath in and tried to keep her voice gentle. This was a very soft spot of Han’s she was about to tread on. “Did they also find out you joined the Empire because you were trying to find a way to free Qi’ra?”

Han’s head shot up, face pale. “You know about Qi’ra?” he asked her hoarsely.

Leia nodded. “And I know you tell everyone that crap story that you joined so you could learn how to fly.” She felt a fond smile grace her lips. “I know why you do it to. It wouldn’t do for everyone to know you have a soft underbelly and are sentimental to boot.”

“I’m not-“

“Han,” she said gently, “a few hours after you met me and Luke, you were willing to fly against a planet killer in order to help us.”

Han’s eyes were wide and frightened. “Because I wanted you,” he protested. “Nothing more than that. And the Kid had nothing to do with it. Didn’t even like him.”

Leia wrinkled her nose, now he was being crass on purpose. “Really?” she drawled. “Try another one. I was there, when you offered him a job.”

Han shifted in his seat. “Because I knew he had talent. I work with a lot of people I don’t like.”

He was running scared now. Leia wondered when their positions had become reversed. Last time, she had been the one running, and Han pushing. Gods, had she been as transparent as this Han was in denying what she so clearly wanted? Surely, she hadn’t been that delusional?

She had a lot more sympathy for that other Han right now. He had been a lot more patient then she was willing to be.

“You forget,” she said mockingly. “I’ve seen you make that insane choice, twice. Two different circumstances, same choice.”

Han shut his mouth with an audible click. “I’m not like you. Either of you. I am not a good man,” he insisted. “I didn’t do it because it was the right thing to do.”

Leia let out a loud laugh at the sheer ludicrousness of that thought. “Of course not,” she said. “You
did it because Luke and I would be *there.*” She leaned forward. “Because you will follow those you love to hell and back.”

Han looked flabbergasted, “I-“ he started to say. He cleared his throat and tried again. “I temporarily lost my mind?”

Leia just looked at him.

“Yeah, fine,” Han grumbled. “Just don’t go spreading that around.” He looked at her critically. “And you are okay with that? That I won’t do the right thing automatically? That it will always be about my self-interest?”

No, not always, but she wasn’t going to contradict him directly on that. That was a realization that he would have to come to on his own.

Leia cocked her head. “Well, I can be just as selfish in my love too, or haven’t you noticed?”

“What are you talking about?”

“If I was truly selfless, I would have let you go,” she said softly. “I would have gently encouraged you to go about your way because I am nothing but complications.”

“What complications?” Han demanded.

“My family for starters,” Leia reminded him.


“But Papa scares you. More than Vader, and that is something I will never understand.”

“I know what to do with Vader,” Han said. “Run away, as fast as I can. Bail…” he spread his arms wide, “not a clue. But your scary ass fathers aside, I’m not seeing your point.”

Leia smiled ruefully. “I hurt you.”

Han sat up straighter. “You have not!”

“And telling you that your son killed you didn’t play into some of the worst fears about yourself?”

Han had nothing to say to that.

Leia sighed. “I’m not sure where you got the idea that I’m this noble, self-sacrificing martyr, Han.”

“When you jumped in front of a blaster bolt meant for me,” Han shot back.

“To save you,” Leia hissed right back, slapping her hands on the table. “Because I couldn’t bear the thought of you dying. *Again.* Do you understand that?”

Han leaned back, startled.

“It was only a few hours, and I don’t know how I kept standing,” Leia said, mortified at the tears that were forming in the corners of her eyes. “And then you were right in front of me, looking…” she trailed off. No need to go into how gutted she had been that Han hadn’t looked at her like she was anything.

“I am a tired, bitter old lady,” she said, voice a little bit more under control. “Who is old enough to
be your mother. It’s easy to forget that because of this,” she waved her hands around her face. “But that doesn’t make it any less true.”

Han’s jaw tightened in anger. “You think I’m that shallow? That I only care about your looks?”

Leia snorted. “Of course, you care. Just like I care. I forgot how tempting you were, at this age.”

Han preened at that a little bit, and Leia rolled her eyes. “Don’t pretend you aren’t aware of how attractive you are. But I keep bringing up my age because it isn’t just about my looks. I have traumas you have no clue about, and enough issues to keep a fleet of mind healers busy. And let’s not forget that I am the biological daughter of one of the galaxies’ worse walking nightmares.”

Han’s jaw tightened. “I don’t care about that. He is not you.”

Leia gave him a bitter smile. “I’m more like him, then you realize. But you’re right, at the end of the day, I’m me. But what I am, and what Luke is…” she sighed and rubbed the back of her neck. “I hate the fact that Obi-Wan separated us. That I spent a good part of my life missing something that I couldn’t name. But the reasons he did it, those I can’t argue with.”

Han frowned. “To keep you safe from Vader, not disagreeing with that.”

Leia shook her head. “No, not Vader. He thought Vader was dead. Given what he told me about what happened between the two of them on Mustafar, I can’t say I blame him.”

“Then why split you two up?” Han asked, puzzled.

“To protect us from Palpatine.”

Han paled at that name.

“The Empire isn’t just him.” Leia thought of the months-long struggle with the remnants of the Imperial Navy and Army after Endor. “Trust me on that. But he is the one holding it together. There is no way to take it down, without killing him. And as far as most people who understand what is going on, Luke is the best shot at that.”

Han leaned back in the booth. “What about you?”

Leia gave him a tight smile. “Like I said, ‘what most people understand.’”

“And people don’t know you’re a Skywalker.”

Leia blinked. It was rare that she heard that name in relation to herself. For most of her life, she, and those around her had referred to her connection to Vader as being his daughter. She wasn’t often called a Skywalker. That name, that didn’t bother her. That was Luke’s name, and she would rather cut off her own arm, then deny her brother.

“Yes,” she said. “But everyone who does know I’m a Skywalker, they are aware that I could, in theory, kill the Emperor.”

Han whistled, then shook his head. “But Luke didn’t kill him. Vader did.”

“Vader doesn’t know that,” Leia said softly. “And until very recently, nobody else, except Luke, did either.”

“Huh,” Han looked thoughtful. “While this is all interesting as hell, I still don’t see what this has to do with you being a bad bet for me?”
Leia gave him a grim grin. “You are so busy running future scenarios in your head on how you are going to be a failure for me, you haven’t come up with the most obvious one.”

“Which is?”

“Palpatine figures out exactly why Vader is so obsessed with me.”

Han sat bolt upright in his seat. “Leia…” he whispered, fear in his eyes.

She shrugged. “One of the few bits of luck I have had so far in this time, is that as far as I can tell, he hasn’t put it together. But once he does…” She looked Han straight in the eye. “I’m someone who can hurt him. He’ll try to convert me. If that fails-“

“If?” Han asked, voice incredulous.

Leia gave him a grim smile. “You have no idea how tempting and seductive the Dark Side can be Han. I rather be honest about it, then be arrogant, and confidently walk my way into damnation.”

Han said nothing to that.

“If he can’t use me, he’ll see me dead.” Leia let out a bitter laugh. “Vader is operating in his own reality at this point, but he isn’t wrong about Palpatine. He is a threat to me. I’m a rather important piece in this little game he’s playing.”

She looked away from Han, and took in a long breath, smoothing away all thoughts and feelings from showing on her face. She looked back up at him. “You said I deserved someone extraordinary, don’t you think you would prefer someone who was ordinary?”

Han said nothing, eyes very wide. Leia watched as he worked through everything she just told him. The longer the silence stretched, the more her heart sank. The other Han, he had been in too deep to walk away by the time all of this came to light. And the stakes had been much lower by then, both Palpatine and Vader had been dead. Han valued his own skin, and this was one hell of a situation he would be putting himself into if he stayed. Hell, if Leia had a choice, she would run too.

Then Han cleared his throat. “Well, I suppose we are both selfish assholes,” he told her, eyes finally meeting hers again. “Because you haven’t said anything that is going to cause me to go running.”

At those words, Leia felt her heart fill with a joy that bordered on incandescent. Then her mind, much like Han’s, had to go running for the trick or trap here. Her heart sank as she realized his loyalty was outweighing his brain. She appreciated his support. But he wasn’t thinking about what she said, only reacting. “Han, be serious.”

Han stood up from the booth. “I am,” he insisted as he came over to her.

“Really?” Leia drawled, tilting her head up, so she could watch his face carefully as he ambled his way to her side of the booth. “I just told you that if you stay here, with me, you are going to be in the crossfire of the most dangerous man in the galaxy, and your only reaction is, so?”

“Yep,” Han said, and put his hand down, offering to help her out of her seat.

Leia took it without hesitation, and she was pulled to her feet. “Han,” she sighed, mentally preparing herself to list every reason he should run as far away from her as he could.

Han didn’t let her talk, only leaned down and kissed her softly on the mouth.
Leia froze for a second. Then she found herself wrapping her arms around him, pushing herself up on her toes to fully return the embrace. Han made a pleased noise in the back of his throat, and Leia could feel his hands come down to rest lightly on her waist as he deepened the kiss.

Leia indulged herself in the feel of him for one long moment. It was foolish, and thanks to this very young body, the danger of becoming completely subsumed in the desire licking its way up her body was very real. That last kiss they had shared a few days ago on the Falcon had only whetted her appetite for Han.

But she knew him too well, to think it was only desire that was prompting this. She summoned all the will she could gather, and put her hands on Han’s chest, to push him away.

“What?” Han asked, as he was forced back. His hands didn’t leave her waist though.

“No,” she said, attempting to keep her voice firm. It came out in a high-pitched squeak instead. She cleared her throat and said more steadily. “No. You are not going to use sex to distract me.”

Han blinked, and then a goofy grin crossed his face. “That means you are susceptible to being distracted with sex,” he said happily.

Leia’s eyes narrowed. “You don’t know any of my weak spots, and I know all of yours. Who do you think is going to win that battle?”

“Both of us, hopefully,” he said, with a lascivious twinkle in his eyes.

“HAN!” she growled, caught between her own frustrated desire, and frustration with him for not listening to her.

His goofy smile disappeared. “Look, I don’t mean to be that guy, but I’m getting really mixed signals from you here.”

“Mixed signals?” Leia demanded. “Have you heard anything I’ve said over the last few minutes?”

Han had the audacity to look hurt. “I heard you.”

Leia snorted. “With your ears? Or was your ‘mini blaster’ doing the listening for you?”

Han blinked, and then a sneaky grin crossed his face. “The more frustrated you are, the cruder your language gets.”

Leia crossed her arms over her chest. “I am not frustrated,” she lied.

Han smirked and leaned forward to whisper softly in her ear, “Liar.” Leia shivered at the feel of air on her too sensitive skin.

“You are trying to change the subject,” she tried to say in a commanding tone. Instead, she sounded like one of those brainless heroines in Evaan’s holo dramas.

“Am not,” he said, trailing kisses down her neck. “I listened to what you said. Promise.”

“You aren’t acting like it,” Leia stomped her foot on his.

Han gave a yelp and pulled back. Leia gave him as serious look as she could manage, with her skin so flushed she could feel it. “I did,” he said, some of that lust fading, to be replaced by resolve. “And you are right. This is all bad, you are very complicated, and I should run for the hills.”
Leia stiffened. “So, what?” she demanded. “One last tumble for old time’s sake?”

“We haven’t had our first tumble,” Han grumbled.

“Your pace,” she snarked back.

“I am very stupid,” he said, grabbing her hand and placing a light kiss on her palm. Then he turned those light blue eyes on her, sincerity pouring off him. “You know that.”

Oh, that was not fair. There was no way he knew how appealing she found him when he was like this. Leia scrambled for something to say, before she jumped into his arms, and they started down a path that she knew would end in something weaker than what she wanted. “You just said you didn’t believe that I loved you.”

“I didn’t then.” He gave her a triumphant look. “But after listening to you, and what you had to say about the realities of your situation, I do now.”

Leia’s mouth dropped open. “That is what it took to convince you I’m sincere? That I’m going to be one of the most wanted people in the galaxy?”

Han grinned. “You are perfect,” he said.

Leia blinked, then her mouth twisted into unhappy lines. “That is not an answer to my question.”

Han leaned forward, leaning his forehead against her. “That was my problem. You are perfect.”

Leia blinked at the open love and sincerity in Han’s voice, not sure how to understand this, given what he just said, not even ten minutes ago.

Then a knowing smirk crossed his face. “And before your ego gets even bigger, you are also short-tempered, bossy, and you do have one hell of a martyr complex.”

Even by the standards of Han’s version of courtship, this was strange. “Love you too?”

Han brought those large warm hands of his up and cupped her face. “What I mean, is that you are perfect for me. And that Leia, that was what I was having a hard time accepting.”

Leia frowned. “I don’t understand.”

He gave a chuckle. “You came out of nowhere. I was only trying to get enough money to pay my debts to Jabba, and I thought, hey, these two desperate idiots are perfect. One quick trip to Alderaan, and I am home free.”

His thumbs started stroking Leia’s cheeks. “And then you walked into that huge room in the palace of Alderaan, taking control and giving orders. And you treated me like I could be trusted.”

His eyes grew intent. “I thought, maybe she’s desperate, I’m here, and have a ship the Empire won’t be looking for. Royalty are supposed to be good liars, right? But you kept doing it. Talking to me like I was somebody.”

“So, I stayed on Yavin, because I was intrigued despite myself. There had to be some catch. Some flaw I wasn’t seeing. But the more time I spent with you, the more I could see you were exactly who I thought you were. You’re smart, have a cool head in battle, and you are one hell of a shot. Then I learned that this woman I was already half mad for, a princess, who by all rights I shouldn’t even be allowed in the same room with, already loved me.”
Leia could only listen as the words soothed an ache that she had been carrying around since Han left her.

“It had to be a trick. Or somehow, this other Han fooled you into loving him. Either way, there was no way I could trust this. But just now, as you were sitting there talking, and laying out in your own logical way about how you are a danger to everyone around you—”

“I am!” Leia protested, and Han only gave her an indulgent smile.

“Yeah, you are. You are absolutely right. I should be running for the furthest corner of the galaxy. “

Leia was confused. Han’s words were saying one thing, but his face said he was right where he wanted to be. “Okay?”

Han bounced a bit on his heels. “Don’t you see?” he asked her, the look on his face the same one he wore just after he pulled some insane flying maneuver. “You’re right, this is as far from perfect as you can get.”

Leia blinked and then asked, “Because it’s not perfect, it’s real?”

“Yes!”

Huh, that was actually a good point. Leia stared at Han for a long moment, she was trying to understand his logic, but her lust addled mind was just this side of slow. “And the fact that I’m a time traveler, didn’t make it very clear this wasn’t ideal?”

Han shook his head. “Oh, that is weird and impossible. But compared to you loving me back, not the oddest thing in my life.”

Leia looked up at that happy grin and realized what he had just admitted to. There was really only one answer to that statement.

Han gave out a surprised noise, as she jumped up, but his hands came up to grab her butt as she wrapped her legs around his waist. At this height, she could look into that beloved face straight on.

“Uhh,” he said smoothly.

She gave him a cheeky grin. “You offered. Or are you just teasing an old woman?”

His confusion cleared, and he let out a low laugh. “Oh, I keep my promises,” he said in a husky voice.

Leia shivered and leaned forward, capturing his mouth with hers. “Prove it,” she muttered in between kisses.

She felt him start to walk towards his quarters. “Your worship,” he said, “it will be my pleasure.”

Chapter End Notes

Translation into 中文 available: [Translation]Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by isaakfvkampfer and Acyancat
Translation into Russian available: [Translation] Of Queens, Knights, and Pawns by Qeewi

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