



STAR WARS

Dark Run

By
John Erik Ege

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WARNING: This book is intended for a mature audience. Due to violence and sexual themes, some persons, especially those suffering from PTSD or childhood trauma, could possibly experience unpleasant feelings or flashbacks. This is Star WARS: there is violence and consequences to violence.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. (I would like to say 'duh,' but apparently, there were actually people who believed the Castaways of Gilligan's Island were actually stranded! No joke. There were people writing the US Navy asking them to please stop spending money on warfare and rescue those poor people before they starved. Tim Allen's movie 'Galaxy Quest' made reference to it, but I thought it was a joke till I saw a documentary on Gilligan's Island. Of course, it probably doesn't help that there is a statue in Iowa place marking the birth place of Captain Kirk. Oh, how reality and fiction love to mix. (And yes, I watched Gilligan's Island. And if you have to know: Mary Ann, hands down.)

This book is intended to support the mythos as created by George Lucas. Given the amount of SW fiction that is available, and the amount of divergence from various authors, movies, and re-releases of movies, (Han shot first, and if he shot his kids first, well, just saying,) it is definitely out of the scope of this author to fully address, capture, or give credit to the others who have most certainly influenced his thoughts and appreciation for this saga, of which, Timothy Zahn stands out foremost. I can only hope that my small perspective adds to the lore, as opposed to detracting from what I believe Lucas set out to achieve with the original Star Wars. It has become a huge, unwieldy beast, but, unlike the elephant in the room, it is widely discussed, debated, defended, championed, ridiculed, picked on, referenced, and has place holders on our book shelves, hearts, and psyche. For better or worse, we are one with the Force, The Force is with us, always.

This book is dedicated to all of those who have suffered through my grammar and teased out something more meaningful than the visible architect. May you continue to find meaning and joy in you all your multiverses.

Author contact info: John Erik Ege, 214-907-4070
Email: solarchariot@hotmail.com (In order to differentiate between junk mail, and letters, please put Star Wars in the subject line.)

As a pervasive darkness settles over the galaxy, a melancholic fever grips the masses, mobilizing individuals and groups to fortify and prepare, once more, for the threat of galactic war. Few have taken comfort in the resurgence of old philosophies that seem poised to sweep the Galaxy, promising hope and victory to those who choose the right side. There seem to be many voices calling out in the darkness, rallying for ideals, but the two most prominent sides seem full of rhetoric and hate, a game many people hardly have time to sift through as they're too busy picking up the pieces of their lives, simply engaged in the day to day struggles for survival.

Ideology, ultimately, belong to the rich or powerful, not to the poor.

The worlds that have been sheltered from conflict due to distance or luck and have enjoyed a relative peace and prosperity now feel threatened by the increase in economic instability that is accompanied by forced migrations and the disappearance of legitimate markets. Opportunity for entrepreneurs abound, but due to the proliferation of black markets and cartels, only the bold, wealthy, or the new class of privateers stand ready to make any economic ground, which ultimately is influenced by the warring ideologies. And out of these, only a few have been ingenious enough to use the overall instability as a way of monopolizing markets for their best interest, even going as far as to provoking both the First Order and the Resistance into believing the other is responsible.

In all of this, the one person who is poised to rise above the conflict, offering an alternative pathway out of the cyclic nature of duality, has continuously declined to accept the calling, pointing instead to even more ancient and fundamental understanding of the Force.

Consequently, his message of peace is lost amongst those who prefer a more militaristic resolution. As the masses yearn for an end to conflict, always with the caveat of it ending in their preferred ideal, the Galactic stage is set for the next Vader or the next Skywalker to take his or her place and usher in the next era of light or dark. But in this, too, there is comfort, for out of this rises the heroes and villains the next generation may cherish or loathe as meets their individual needs.

Chapter 1

“What you seek is also seeking you.” Rumi

On the outer most reaches of the Inner Rim, Kiffu stood out as the larger of two inhabited worlds in a perturbed orbit that took it so near its smaller sister planet that the atmospheres mixed, producing electric storms that were a sight to behold. The storms themselves were one of the main tourist attractions, and had it been in season, there would have been a great deal more traffic. In a small nature reserve, just outside of one the most populated cities, a band of mercenaries waited the arrival of their prey. Unlike their typical prey, this one was invited, and so they stood in a clearing, within eye sight of their three ships, marking time and debating if he would actually show. There were nine of them all together. Two were females, from Kiffex, identical twin sister, De and Melo Ashan. They were similar only in appearance; personality wise, they were different as day and night. They were 1.65 meters tall and wearing skin tight suits that left only continuity of skin tone to the imagination. Their solid black hair was braided and set up in a partial hives that suggested they were taller than they were, and only the fall of the braids to either side of their face made it possible to distinguish the one from the other, until one of them spoke: De was dominant, sophisticated, and frequently cruel. Melo was more pleasant, and she was naturally submissive.

In the Ashan’s hire were seven Devaronians, two female, five males. The gender dimorphism was so disparate between male and female as to cause most people to mistake them for two different species. Not one of the males was shorter than 2 meters, with thick limbs that made them appear stocky. Their weapons were big enough that it might have been a challenge for a human to carry and accurately use. The most distinguishing feature of the Devaronians males were the horns and the red skin tones. The females were just under two meters, lean, but muscular, exuding an exotic femininity. Ela was covered with white fur from head to toe, but it was only evident on her face, neck, and exposed arms. The hair on her head was combed neat, parted straight down the middle that partially obscured her Elfish ears. Nish’s face was clean of fur, as if she had shaved, revealing two black spots on her forehead where horns might have grown had she been male. A radio comm. on Nish’s bracelet announced an incoming ship.

“Understood,” Nish said. “Stay primed in case this thing goes south.”

“We’ll be ready, boss,” answered the comm.

More waiting occurred, but Nish felt it wouldn’t be long. She had that way about her. Her fingers moved as if playing invisible instrument, perhaps a subtle inner math reflex was counting out the probabilities. A peal of thunder suggested a ship passing through the sound barrier as it descended into heavier atmosphere. By the time it was visible it had decreased speed sufficiently to appear as if it were hovering. It spun to face the mercenaries, pausing for a moment; the Devaronian males were tempted to raise their weapons. The lead must have sensed their tension, because she told them to hold steady. The ship settled on the ground outside an imaginary perimeter that equaled the distance of the mercenaries from their own ships.

Nish turned to De. “You failed to mention he is a Storm Commando,” she said, glaringly. She was still doing the math, and the results said anyone who was flying a Tie Hunter was clearly someone who had survived sufficient numbers of battles to have earned the rank of warrior slash Ace pilot.

De shrugged. “I told you he was a Jedi. If that wasn’t sufficient to have you bring more crew and weapons, I don’t know what else to tell you.”

“Jedi could mean anything from shaman healer to an Occultist, it doesn’t necessarily translate into warrior,” Nish explained.

“There are no more Jedi warriors,” one of her men mumbled, but still he flexed his fingers as if warming them up for the fire fight he expected. He spit some of his chew on the ground behind him.

A hatch on the lower end of the Tie Hunter began to lower. The Devaronian males raised their weapons.

“At ease, Grunts,” Nish ordered. “Whatever level of training he has, it’s always better if he comes willingly.”

A human male dropped from the craft. He waved, surprisingly friendly like, took a moment to admire the terrain, even knelt down to examine the plant life around his ship to ensure he hadn’t done too much damage, and then began a leisure walk to close the distance, pausing only to exchange greetings with a curious critter that approached as if it were tamed. He arrived blissfully happy, euphoric to a point Nish wondered if he was self-medicating on local herbs. She doubted this ‘boy’ had earned the rank of warrior.

“Greetings,” he said, bowing slightly, hands coming together in respect.

“You’re Waycaster?” De asked.

“I am. But call me G,” he offered. “Would you care to exchange pleasantries, or get right to business?”

De and Melo exchanged uncertain glances, but then nodded to Nish.

“Before we begin, we’re going to confirm you’re unarmed,” Nish said. “Ela.”

Ela looked to Nish. “Why me?”

“Because, I am in charge,” Nish said.

Ela swallowed.

“I promise I am unarmed and I will not harm you,” G said.

Ela closed the distance and apologized before touching him. On completing, Nish yelled at her to be more thorough, and so she redid the check, a little more aggressive when it came to covering more intimate areas. She looked to Nish.

“He appears to be unarmed,” Ela insisted.

Nish pitched binders to her. Ela caught them and looked uncertainly to G. He smiled politely and offered his wrists.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Jedi,” Ela said.

“It is okay, Ela,” G responded. “I was my turn to be tied up tonight.”

Ela did a double take, wondering if he was being serious or playful. Either way, he allowed himself to be bound, and her uncomfortableness shifted to amusement. She took him by the arm and escorted him back to the group and presented him as if they were old friends. He seemed quite enamored by Ela, if the length of time his eyes lingered on her was evidence of infatuation. And for a moment, Nish suspected Ela had succumbed to an old Jedi mind trick.

“Your fur is exquisite,” G said, causing Nish to wonder if the Jedi had succumb to his own mind trick. “At least, I assume you call it fur. Would it be alright if I touched your face?”

“No, it would not be alright,” Nish said, noticing her warriors took equal offense. They scoured their faces and fidgeted their trigger fingers. “So, the rumors are true?”

“I wouldn’t believe everything you hear,” G said.

“So you’re not a Xenophile and erotic mystic?” Nish asked.

“Oh, well, even rumors can have threads of truth,” G said, entertaining the labels and finding them amusing, if not inaccurate. “I have discovered transcendental sex is an easier

pathway to existential states, which is kind of disappointing after all the years I spent in meditation and just trying to be good. Who knew, all I needed more sex.”

Ela giggled. Nish gave her a sharp look.

G continued: “Sorry. I am told I can be too intense. I’m just naturally curious about things. For example, the males of your species are known to have really long tongues, but it is not known if the females have equally long tongues, which is bizarre, because usually if medical texts have info on the males of a species, they have info on the females and...” He became acutely aware of the looks he was getting. “I believe your stares are communicating something.”

“I don’t believe you’re a Jedi,” De said.

“It’s got to be him. He looks like the holo’s we were provided,” Melo said.

“He seems more like one of those sex gurus who abuses his disciples,” De said. “Jedi don’t have sex.”

“I assure you,” G said. “I am Preston G Waycaster, Jedi Knight. And I am not a guru. I do like sex. Probably because of all the years I spent in isolation and fantasy. Does your species always come in twins?”

“Do you always talk so much?” Nish said.

“Yeah, I find being extremely open and honest helps disarm situations and really, once it’s all out on the table, it’s easier to build trusting relationships,” G said.

“Bring him,” De snapped.

G raised his cuffed hands in protest.

“Hold on. First thing first and sorry, for being firm on this point, but I will not go with you at this time. We agreed to an exchange,” G said.

De smirked brazenly and touched his nose with the tip of a finger as if to provoke him.

“Now that you’re bound, I don’t see why I don’t keep both of you. With your female secured, you’re more likely to be compliant with my needs,” De said.

Nish turned to her. “That wasn’t the arrangement. We will honor the deal I brokered with him.”

“Excuse me? I hired you...”

“To do a job and the job was to secure him and bring him to your payer. The girl was bait and she has completed her part and you will release her per the agreement,” Nish said.

“This Jedi is purported to be one of the top escape artists in the known galaxy. We let her go, there is nothing to guarantee we can deliver him to my payer,” De said.

“If you don’t mind an interjection, bound or not, my sister and I will not be going with you under the present conditions,” G said.

“Sister?” Ela asked. She turned to De. “She didn’t say she was related.”

“All the more reason we should keep her till our business is concluded,” De said.

“Yeah, well, half-sister, actually,” G said.

“We will honor the deal we made,” Nish insisted. The mercenaries shifted subtly, as if preparing to deal with a secondary threat.

De noticed, and her eyes narrowed. “Melo, go fetch his sister,” De instructed.

Melo walked back to the small transport ship, disappeared up the ramp, and when she next emerged, she was leading the captive by the arm. Daphne’s hands were bound, there was tape over her mouth, and her legs were loosely shackled permitting at minimum a half paced shambling. It looked like she had been dressed by her captors, because G had never imagined she would willingly wear a skirt, especially one that was so short. The belt and blouse matched, though, as did the short flip of shoes and golden hue of hose. His eyes lingered on her legs until

he realized she was staring intently at him. Her eyes were like daggers, as if she were punishing G for having come to rescue her, or perhaps for his lingering eyes. They pushed her in front of him and she would have stumbled had G not steadied her.

“As you can see, she is not damaged,” said De.

“Go get in the Tie,” G instructed Daphne.

Daphne looked defiantly at him, silently protesting. De shoved her. “Do as your male instructs you to do.” Labeling Daphne as male subservient was probably the greatest insult De could have given.

They waited as Daphne made the slow pass to the Tie Hunter. When she was at the ship, she looked back, waiting for instructions. G yelled for her to get in. She indicated her hands being bound was preventing her from climbing. G looked to De. De nodded to Melo. Melo pushed one of the buttons on a control pad she had been carrying since exiting the ship with the hostage. Daphne’s hands became free as the binders fell, dangling from the belt that went about her waist. The binders around her feet released as well, but also remained secured to the belt. She climbed into the ship, dragging chains. The ship’s hatch closed behind her.

“Very well,” De said. “I’ve kept my end of the bargain; you will now come with us.”

“Who hired you to capture me?” G asked.

“You will meet them in person soon enough. Come along,” De said.

G sighed, “I don’t think so.”

Nish sighed, as if she had read the situation wrong. She made a subtle motion with her hand. Her grunts took up strategic positions, encircling him. “You made a deal, Sir. You will follow through, or I will enforce the contract.”

“My lawyer says that a contract under duress is not enforceable,” G countered.

Nish chuckled. “They’re the only kind that are enforceable. Now walk towards De’s ship, or I will have you carried.”

“I am really interested in going with you, in more ways than one, however, I will not go with you under the present circumstances,” G said.

De took the control box away from Melo and pushed a button that armed a bomb. “You will go or I will kill your sister,” De said.

“De?!” Nish said. “What have you done?”

“Something you obviously can’t,” De said.

Nish drew a weapon and pointed at De. “Hand it over.”

“It is okay, Nish. No one is presently in danger of being killed.” G said. “De, I highly recommend you not detonate the device.”

“Get on my ship, now!” De said.

“I will not,” G said, emphatically.

“Then watch your sister burn,” De said, and pushed the button.

De’s ship exploded, knocking all the mercenaries to the ground. G completely disintegrated, evaporating like smoke. Only the binders remained, falling to the ground. The Tie Hunter began to ascend.

“Stop him!” Nish yelled, her voice was louder than it should have been due to the ringing in her ears.

The grunts fired on the Tie, but their shots were ineffective against the plating at the speed it was departing.

“You’re letting him get away!” De said.

“You’re an idiot, De. Jedi can sense deception. There was no way he was going to go with us willingly if he knew you were going to blow up his sister!” Nish said.

“There was no way he could have known!” De said.

“He’s a Jedi, remember!” Nish snapped. “They know things.”

“Never mind that, you’re letting him get away!” De said.

Nish smiled. “No, he’s not,” she said. “Gint, you’ve been listening?”

“Yep, we’ll have him the moment he breaks atmo,” Gint replied.



Preston materialized in the Tie, taking the flight chair. Daphne stood, hunched over behind him. He smiled at his sister who was still rubbing circulation into her wrists.

“What the hell are you doing here?!” Daphne demanded.

“Thought that was obvious,” G said.

“I didn’t ask you to come for me,” Daphne said.

“I will always come for you,” G said, so preoccupied with getting the Fighter flying that he was oblivious to her grimace. “Now, I need you to sit in my lap.”

“Oh, hell no!” Daphne snapped.

“There is only one seat, I need you strapped in, and now,” G said, starting the ascent even as the Grunts were taking aim.

Daphne would have fallen on her ass had she not been holding on to the seatback. G grabbed her and pulled her to him, a feat made easier by the appropriate G-forces when he spun the Tie. Daphne would have fought, but the ship directed itself skyward and all she could do was sit as the g-forces increased behind her. G used the Force to secure the harness around them both, tying them up nice and neat before she could protest, the last strap pulling tight and catching her breath.

“I hate you,” Daphne said, after recovering.

“I know,” G said. “Take the stick while I program the hyper drive...”

“G?!” Daphne said.

A squadron of derelict fighters accompanying an Rjet cruiser loomed ahead. The Rjet itself had a prominent and menacing looking tractor beam on the most forward part of the ship, and a gaping maw to catch fighters. The squadron was there to help funnel the prey towards the Rjet. It looked like a monster fish ready to eat a guppy.

“Give me the stick back,” G said, his hand grabbing the controls just under her hand, moving up as she released, their hands touching briefly. She gave him a cross look as if to say, don’t touch me.

G flipped his fighter over in a vertical roll, and gave full thrust back towards the planet, not bothering to rotate horizontally. Compared to the pursuing craft, he was now flying inverted. The maneuver slowed them relative to the approaching fighters, allowing them to catch up. The squadron’s goal was to corral him towards the ‘net’ but barring that, they were to pursue and hopefully disable the Tie without killing the passengers. Their direct descent sent plumes of heat waves and plasma streams trailing.

“You’re coming in too fast!” Daphne yelled, clutching G’s wrists with a death grip, as she tried not to throw up.

“You’re hurting me,” G told her.

“You’re going to kill us!” Daphne said, echoing the computer that suggested their re-entry heat threshold had been met and exceeded. The blaring pulse of the alarm echoed in the small pod, and the red light illuminated their faces even as the plasma light filled the interior with glow and heat. She pointed to the instrument panel. “This isn’t a metaphor!”

“Sure it is,” G assured her. Their eyes met briefly and he flashed a winning smile. “We have touched the Light, Daphne, we’ll be alright. Regardless of outcomes.”

The plasma wave rolling around their Tie Hunter served as a temporary shield against the onslaught of laser fire from the pursuing ships, but it also added to the turbulence that rumbled through the Tie and into their teeth.

“You’re enjoying this,” Daphne said, her voice vibrating noticeably.

“Well, yeah,” G said, his voice seemed less affected by the vibrations.

“Well, stop it!” Daphne said.

“Stop having fun?” G asked, leveling out of the dive. He was hoping that diving through a cloud might help cool the exterior of the ship back below red line. The chasing ships continued to fire at him. He executed several S moves and spun his fighter to make target acquisition more difficult. Some of it was skill, but most of it was pure Force. Though Daphne didn’t need to hold on, the vertigo she felt looking out the view port made her reach for stability. Unfortunately, the only things her hands could find to latch onto was her brother. She crossed her arms in front of her chest.

“This is not fun!” Daphne said. “Why didn’t you bring a bigger ship?”

“I didn’t really plan this, it just sort of fell in my lap,” G said.

“Can you hold a conversation without making sexual innuendos?” Daphne asked.

“Can you stop inferring that all my statements are sexual innuendos?” G asked.

“Aren’t they?” Daphne said.

“Yeah, actually. But you really need to get over the fact that we slept together,” G said.

“Hang on...”

G dove his ship under a bridge and then pulled up to go back the way he had come, rotating back to an ‘upwards’ orientation. The pursuing fighters broke formation to let him pass.

“Please, don’t do that again,” Daphne said. “Why aren’t you shooting at them?”

“I don’t want to kill anyone today,” G said.

“But blowing up that ship earlier was okay?” Daphne said.

“While remote viewing, I overheard De planning to kill you. The bomb was attached to your belt. Before I started the negotiation, I shifted it over to one of the floor compartments where you were being held,” G explained.

“Wait, you were spying on me?” Daphne demanded.

“Not really spying as much as making sure you were well,” G said.

“You can’t be spying on me!” Daphne said.

“Why?” G asked

“I’m your sister?!” Daphne said.

“So?” G asked.

“So?! You haven’t figured it out yet?!”

“Daphne, why haven’t you figured this out yet? Jedi watch people. They watch events and places and people to figure out trends and to find new Jedi. All the Jedi Masters are watching you all the time,” G said.

“Me?” Daphne asked incredulously.

“I meant ‘you,’ generally meaning everyone, but, yeah, in this instance you specifically,” G said.

“Eww? Why?!” Daphne asked.

“Because you’re important. You must return to your calling,” Preston said.

“There’s no one calling!” Daphne said.

“Every day, everyone has both Jedi and Sith in their ears. The only difference between me and most is that I know who is speaking to me,” G said, barely cognizant of the passing city scape. He was piloting completely by Force, seeing how he could barely see around his sister’s head as she continued to shift about from the jarring and her protests as she sought eye contact. “You’ve been called. You started the training. Now you must finish what you have started or many people will suffer. You must return to Yeno.”

“Pull up!” Daphne yelled.

G ignored her and shot his Tie Hunter between two buildings, effectively ending the chase. The closest fighter to him clipped a wing into the right building, which spun it hard, slamming the fuselage into the building, and sent a ball of debris snowballing towards the ground, taking out windows as it did. The other ships barely pulled out of their dives, each going in a different direction other than between or into the building. G’s ship made it half way before the panels got ripped off. The side struts and hull tore gaps in the side of the buildings before momentum ejected it and sent it rolling down a public fairway where it came to an undignified stop inside a fountain. G and Daphne were suspended in the seat, upside down. With the exception of the sound of water cascading over the exterior of the pod, there was no noise. The instrument panel was completely dead. The water and cracked glass obscured the view, turning the silhouettes of pedestrians into a kaleidoscope dance of colors pointing and gawking.

“You know why they put buildings that close together?” Daphne asked, her voice breaking the stillness, but surprisingly reserved for someone who had just survived a crash.

“Aesthetics?” G asked.

“So people won’t fly between them!” Daphne snapped.

“Oh,” G said. “Maybe they should have posted a sign.”

“You could have got us both killed,” Daphne said.

“I’m sorry, Daphne. You’re right. There’s a spare lightsaber in the lock box under the seat. I will want it back when you make your next one. When the authorities are done questioning you, come home. Please.”

“Authorities?” Daphne asked.

G hugged her and then disappeared. With him gone, there was sufficient slack in the restraints that she could get out. She stood on the back of the chair and pushed opened the hatch. Water rained down on her. As she climbed out onto the pod, she saw the authorities approaching, weapons drawn.

“Aww, G,” Daphne complained. She put her hands on her head.



“You don’t understand. None of you understand!” De ranted.

G appeared in their mist, stopping the conversation. The Grunts came out of the chairs, going for weapons. Nish gave them a signal to wait.

“De, the person who hired you to find me. It was a Droid, wasn’t it,” G said.

“How did you know?”

“Has it harmed any of your family?” G asked.

“It’s holding my father hostage,” De said.

“Do you have something of his? Any possession will do, but preferably something he used frequently,” G asked.

De thought about it then went to a kitchen and retrieved a mug. She handed this to G. There was no reason not to cooperate with him at this point, as her only goal was to help her father. G brought the cup to his face as if he were going to drink, closed his eyes and took a slow, deliberate breath. He smiled, opened his eyes, and surrendered the cup back.

“I will have him home by the end of the night,” G said.

“Why are you helping me?” De asked.

G shrugged. He nodded to Ela, with a smile that implied ‘maybe later,’ but just a business nod to Nish. “I am sorry for the loss your pilot. He is now one with the Force.”

“Thank you,” Nish said.

G bowed and disappeared, a twirling of smoke rising into the air, dissipating, then gone.

“I don’t think it will be possible to capture this Jedi,” Ela said.

“Yeah, I am with you on that,” Nish said.



Rin Ashan was alive, and happy enough to be alive, but not happy that he was being held hostage by Droids. Even more maddening was the fact that they were clearly unwilling to negotiate. As a man of wealth, he had always been able to negotiate his way out of trouble, and he was certain that this was ultimately about wealth. He was pinned to a wall. There were six droids in all: two facing the door, awaiting their victim, two droids watching the room, and two droids aiming weapons at Rin, a failsafe to get compliance, which assumed that their intended victim would negotiate for the man’s life.

What the Droid’s hadn’t expected was that G could literally reach through the wall, phase shift Rin, and pulled him safely through to the other side. Rin was free before even Rin had comprehension on what had just happened. G pointed to the waiting speeder and told him to go. Rin didn’t require any further instructions, nor did his brain allow him to process the ‘miracle’ he had just experienced. It would probably be weeks later, once his nerves had recovered that he would start spinning explanations and denials. Once Rin was on his way to safety, G pushed through the wall and once out the other side, his lightsaber ignited to life. It was a dazzling, gold blade of light. The revealing of the blade was accompanied by a sonic boom that reverberated in the small room. He struck at the closer of the Droids, removing its arm, before exiting back behind the wall he had just entered, spinning like a whirling dervish. The Droids drew to the center of the room, facing the walls, waiting for the next attack. G dropped from the ceiling, severing one Droid straight down the middle, and when his feet hit the floor, he spun, decapitating all the remaining Droids. Only the last Droid to lose its head had realized he had returned but had not managed to pivot about fast enough, sending a strafing pattern of blaster fire across the floor, its closest companion, then the ceiling as the body fell. The Droids continued the attack, but with heads rolling, their body’s responses were disoriented giving G more time to perform precision strikes to their chest, shutting down their systems.

Even after it was over, G waited in battle stance. He breathed. Gold light filled the room. He powered down his lightsaber. The humbleness of the mundane lights left sad shadows in their wake. He bowed to the Droids, then allowed his body to disintegrate.



Yeno sat alone in a house that he had personally carved from a significant size bolder that had long ago been sheered from a mountain range and relocated via a glacier. At least, that's the history the stone seemed to offer. If there was more to the story, it kept it to itself as it sat alone on an open plane amidst waving, wild grains of wheat of sparkling reds and blues, under sun and stars and a wash of sky colors of every hue imaginable. Sometimes the stillness was disturbed by the wandering of wild herds of herbivores, but for the most part, out here on the range was the solitude he sought in order to listen to the quiet subtleties of the Universe. He sat next to a fire, staring at it until he was unsatisfied, provoking him to prod it with a stick. The wood produced a flurry of embers and a seemingly angry ejection of flames. Without looking behind him, he addressed the invisible presence.

"Hello, G."

G arrived fully. He sat next to Yeno, the fire on his left. His doppelganger enjoyed the warmth as much as his 'real' flesh. In truth, he made no distinction between the two bodies and frequently wondered how anyone could mistake any 'body' for anything other than a doppelganger of the true self, the true self being that which remained when all else was burned away.

"You found her," Yeno stated.

Confusion flashed across G's face, wondering, 'how did he know?' followed by the realization as if he 'just' remembered Yeno was a Master Jedi. The fact that he had allowed this fact to slip his mind suggested he had gained such a level of trust with his friend that he was able to allow his mind to wander in his presence and just be. He felt this was a good sign. Two old Jedi's just don't sit around and refer to themselves as Masters. They just talk like people talk.

"Bloodhunters found her," G said.

Yeno kept his observation to himself, allowing G time to process and finish his thought.

"They've adapted," G continued. "Apparently she triggered a cell on Kiffu, but instead of capturing her directly, they coerced an outside party to do their will vicariously. The new party was instructed to capture her, use her for bait and then kill her. The most interesting part to me is that I actually find the change in motif surprisingly refreshing."

"Your persistence in eliminating all Bloodhunters borders on obsessive and is a waste of your talents," Yeno shared his opinion.

G pursed his lips contemplatively. "Windu is of the opinion I shouldn't have rescued her."

Yeno didn't ask G what he thought. It wasn't necessary. He had rescued her. The wood in the fire shifted on its own, pushing flames to a temporary new height and issuing a short hiss. Yeno and G gave ear to this as if someone unseen had added their input to the conversation.

"Yeno," G said, sullenly. "She is my sister."

"I know," Yeno said. "Between your crusade against the Bloodhunters and trying to save Daphne, you have failed to gain ground in your primary assignment."

"Pfft," G grimaced. "I'm beginning to think this illusive opponent is merely a figment of the Jedi imagination."

"It is a well-known belief that every great Jedi will encounter an equally great opposing force," Yeno said. "Your arrival on the scene, as it were, is most likely not coincidence."

“Yeah, but perhaps that is a metaphor. So often we are our own worst enemies. I feel that my struggles are within myself, not some external, diametrically opposed, iconic, personification of evil,” G argued.

“Evil exists,” Yeno said.

“Truth exists,” G countered.

Yeno laughed. “I love you and these conversation we hold,” he said. “There is talk of bringing back the Jedi Council. I intend to nominate you.”

“Oh, hell no,” G said, looking quite cross. “I accepted your knighthood on the premise of finding the Jedi nemesis, not to pursue a path of mythicized, politicalized belief structures and power plays.”

“You need this path,” Yeno argued. “You need a community of peers to overcome your tendency to isolate. And I dare say you need companions of reasonably equal strength to fortify the discipline of your soul.”

“Please, discipline is overrated. And isolation is good for the soul. How long was Yoda’s sabbatical into the wilderness?” G asked.

“No,” Yeno rebuked. “Yoda’s situation is not yours and it’s not comparable. It was necessary for him, for us at that time, to go into hiding. But even in hiding, we stayed in the game. We stayed connected.”

“And so do I,” G said.

“When’s the last time you left your cave?” Yeno demanded.

“I leave it all the time,” G said.

“In mind, perhaps,” Yeno said. “And in this crude...”

“Flesh?! This is no more real than any other vehicle I ever possessed, nor the one you think you are wearing,” G pointed out. “You teach this!”

“We don’t agree,” Yeno said.

“We?” G asked.

“Your friends at the academy. We Jedi,” Yeno said. “You must use what you have been given, what you have helped shape, or it will atrophy. You are out of balance.”

Preston bowed his head. “I will endeavor to be more available to those I serve, Master.”

Yeno measured G’s statement. He accepted the spirit in which it was delivered.

“There’s a thing I’ve put off discussing with you,” Yeno said, shifting uncomfortably.

“There are rumors of a Jedi who has been providing medical interventions for people wounded in battles. Would you know anything about this?”

“My understanding is the Jedi who presently exist have recused themselves of intervening in political matters to focus purely on mystical pursuits,” G said.

Yeno didn’t argue the point, as he was more curious about G’s direct avoidance to answering the question. “Hypothetically, why do you suppose an anonymous Jedi would help both sides of a conflict?”

“Who do you suppose requires healing the most?” G asked.

“So why the anonymity?” Yeno pursued.

“To avoid distractions,” G answered, indirectly admitting to his role in the discussion.

“Who’s right? Who’s wrong? Who started it? Who gets to end it? Who owes who what? If wars begat more wars, then only love and forgiveness can begat health.”

“Then take a stand. Declare this openly. Be visible,” Yeno said.

“No,” G said. “Because then it becomes about me, as opposed to the mission of bringing peace. Don’t you get it? It is one of the main reasons I didn’t want you to knight me, and why I

don't want to be a part of some future Council. Hell, most of the people that are running around thinking they are Jedi aren't really Jedi, in technical sense, due to lack of training. They are wild, but wanting a leader. I don't want followers. I don't want an audience. I definitely don't need a posse and worshippers and a fan base. The Force makes itself available to everyone equally. Those who open themselves to the Force invite healing will be delivered, regardless of sides, or past, or future. They will experience what they need to advance. If they see me for who I am, so be it, but if they see me as something else, well, that is about them, not about me intentionally cloaking myself for the purpose of malicious deception. There is only love, only service."

"I hope your love doesn't get yourself killed," Yeno said, seriously concern.

"Not my love, only the Force," G reminded him. "Do you know, there are stories from every culture of people who have randomly tapped into ecstatic states, without hallucinations, and they all report the same sorts of things? Some call them near death experiences. More people reach spontaneous ecstatic states just doing mundane things, everyday activities like sex, than achieve it intentionally through meditation or rituals."

Yeno laughed. "I sense humor in where you want to take that, but would you have people give up tradition? You want to teach arrivals without journeys or practice?"

"Maybe. People get entrenched in messages and social structures, but the truth is, the Force is with us, every one of us, good or bad, all the time, and we don't have to be pious, or disciplined, or do anything special other than be ourselves. Hell, one of the very tenets of the Jedi path is that the Force is an energy field created by all living things, and if I stop right there that means celibacy is a way of blocking the Force and a very selfish pathway, a path of misunderstanding that the mundane is equally sacred. The Force surrounds us and penetrates us, it binds the galaxy together. I would go further and say all physical manifestation of matter is part of the Force, and, if I were a teacher, I would not lead with the Force is what gives Jedi their powers. It's what gives everyone their powers. It is everything and everyone. It is one and it is diversity. But if I start proclaiming this, then this becomes the new path, and people will either rally against it or for it, and we divide ourselves up into new camps of us versus them, but there is truly only one camp, and we need to learn to love everyone, and hold compassion, because everyone is on the right path for them."

Yeno only smiled pleasantly and nodded, as if it weren't the first time he had heard this.

"Why would you believe I might be harmed by practicing love?" G asked.

"You need to read more. Those who come bearing your message tend not to live long, and they tend to go out suffering," Yeno said.

"No, there is something else," G said, going deeper.

Yeno nodded.

"I admit it is purely selfish on my part. I enjoy your company and wish it to go on for some time. I feel I have much to learn from you, son," Yeno said.

"Oh, my dear friend," G said, expressing a gentle sadness, but not mockingly so. "Have you just admitted to an attachment?"

"And an emotion," Yeno said.

"I love you, too, Master," G said, and vanished.

Yeno returned to attending his fire.

"Yoda, grant me insight. Grant me confidence. Guide me so that I might better personify generosity, love, and forgiveness," Yeno said, using an ancient language that he felt was more sacred, having originated closer to the Source.

Chapter 2

“Raise your words, not your voice.
It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.”
Rumi

Even in her dreams, Ten was noticeably taller to both herself and ‘Others.’ The reflection of herself in the natural pools that fell randomly along her path, the upside down mirror images twisted back at her through sparkling drops on leaves and petals, giving her visions of someone she hardly knew. She was as thin as a waif, but not sickly. Five years of eating well and gymnastics combined with yoga had given her a sturdiness in body and mind that held firm in physical life and in her projections. Dreams weren’t necessarily projections, but they had begun to blur together as she studied the mystical science of the Jedi and the real science of the physical world, following Corissa in ritual maintenance. Mystical science wasn’t an absolute science, as there were variations of technique that worked better for some than others, which also meant there was a lot experimentation and personal refinement. A High Priestess of the Order of the Sacred Circle and a Shaman Ewok might have significant ethno-ceremonial artifacts and different linguistic maps, and they may even channel a different frequencies, but they were both accessing the same thing: the Force.

“Everybody’s map is different,” G had explained. “Language and perspective and what’s important to you all go into making your map. Another influencing factor is where we enter and depart the playing field. How many times must a needle push through a quilt before it has charted all the pathways? It is a question you should contemplate, but not answer, because it is a conundrum. With each pass of a needle, the fabric of the quilt subtly changes so that it is never twice the same terrain.”

Much of her training consisted of metaphors and conundrums. It was less about mastering a particular way of thinking and more about learning to navigate without words, because words, like the needle, by their nature changed reality. Even one specific word could translate into a different reality for each person who used it just based on their own history and experiences with that word.

Ten approached G as he sat on a bolder near a lake large enough to be mistaken for an ocean. He didn’t seem to notice her, but she was certain he was aware. The boulder rested on white sand, with wave patterns created by an invisible rake emanating outwards from the rock, as if its presence itself disturbed the fabric of reality. She could discern no footpath inwards, making her wonder how G had gotten to his position without leaving evidence. Removing her shoes, she carefully navigated a path inward to the boulder, leaving evidence. Her foot prints made their own ripples, changing the pattern. She waited till his eyes opened, which ‘felt’ like a long time for this being a mere dream, but then, she was starting to respect that dreams were never ‘merely’ anything.

“So, what’s the lesson plan for today?” Ten asked.

“Letting go,” G answered.

“Pfff! Again? That seems like the only lesson we ever work on?!” Ten complained.

“Take your backpack off,” G instructed her.

“I’m not wearing...” Ten began, but her hands found the straps. Had she been wearing it and awareness sparked due to attention, or did mentioning it summon it into being? Exploring

the subconscious was exhausting work, as you had to sift through magic and metaphor simultaneously to try and decipher who was communicating to whom. She removed the backpack, discovering it was heavy, the weight shifting to her arms and hands. She sat it down on the stone next to G and felt the immediate and unexpected relief.

“Reach in and pull out a stone,” G instructed.

Ten opened the bag and looked in. She saw nothing.

“Reach in,” G instructed.

“I don’t know what’s in there!” Ten protested, surprised by her own loudness. She calmed herself. She laughed, a nervous laugh, revealing she knew this was a test but was still afraid something would jump out at her or latch on to her, made all the more real by imagining it to be so. “Is this like that cave thing I had to pass through?”

G shrugged.

Ten was pretty sure there wouldn’t be stones in her backpack, but she committed. She reached in and to her surprise she pulled out a hefty stone that filled her hand, gritty with caked mud or sand. She brushed some of the mud away and found a date, time, and location stamped onto the stone. She stared.

“Want to talk about it?” G asked.

“No.”

“So, why are you holding on to it?” G asked.

“I didn’t know I was carrying it till you made me pull it out,” Ten said.

“Throw it away,” G encouraged.

Ten hesitated.

“You don’t want to talk about it but you also don’t want to throw it away,” G pointed out.

“What are we doing here?” Ten asked.

“The lessons patiently transmitted to us by trees is that it is okay to hold onto a thing for a season, but when the season is over, you let it go. It’s usually not the boulders that weigh us down, Ten, but instead, it’s the dead leaves, the pebbles, the loose grains of sands, the dust that coats everything like a heavy film or veil,” G said. “In your bag are the mementos of every interaction that you have ever had, good or bad. We will continue to work on letting go until you have an empty backpack.”

“Even the good stuff?” Ten asked.

“Imagine you are a vessel holding water, and water is emotions,” G explained. “If the pot is full to the brim, whether it is a drop of anger, sadness, joy, or surprise, it will cause the vessel to overflow, which translates into behaviors that affect the physical environment. To continue to experience newness, you have to make room for it to flow or it will overwhelm you.”

Ten woke from her nap but didn’t stir, hoping the stillness would allow her to return back to the dream world. Light streamed in through the far window, illuminating particles that drifted lazily by. Out of boredom, she tried to shift them using the Force. When she saw no evidence that even these mostly weightless bits of fluff could respond to her mind, she concluded with an inner, unspoken resignation that she would never learn to use the Force.

A chime rang twice before she decided to get up and answer the door. Jordeen was on the other side, bearing food.

“Hey,” Jordeen smiled. “Lunch and brew?”

Ten frowned, but allowed Jordeen in. Jordeen carried the tray over to the table and set it down. It was a shallow table, with cushion on the floors the only chairs. She then put out plates, cups, and portioned out the meal before pouring brew.

“You didn’t have to,” Ten said.

“I know,” Jordeen said. She spied evidence of half eaten protein bars and shakes. “I have noticed you have been avoiding the cafeteria, so I thought I would check in on you.”

Ten sat down but waited till Jordeen was ready before proceeding.

“Want to talk about it?”

“Not particularly,” Ten said.

“Okay. Can you at least share why you’re isolating?” Jordeen asked.

“Meditating,” Ten corrected.

“Avoiding,” Jordeen held firm.

Ten sighed. “The boys are driving me nuts. They keep hitting on me and I don’t want anything to do with them,” Ten said. Her next statement exploded into boundary enforcement. “I don’t like their shenanigans. I’m not impressed by their showing off. I’m not interested in love, sex, kissing, cuddling, having someone making a fool of themselves, or seeing the flexing of their arms as if that would make me fall weak in the knees, and I especially hate them trying to give me things with the expectation I’m going to give something up, or anything else that may be construed as a relationship that is socially binding with expectations of favors or kindness, or in any other way that limits my social potential.”

There was silence that followed their rant. Ten waited patiently for a rebuke.

“Good for you,” Jordeen said.

Ten stared at her brew, feeling as if her declaration was perhaps overly stated, and half wanting the rebuke. The liquid was not as reflective as it would be in her dreams, but it did provide something, esoterically. She had been taught by G just imagining drinking the brew had benefits. Just smelling brew had benefits. Just feeling the warmth through the cup...

“Do you think I’m broken?” she asked.

“Do you think you’re broken?” Jordeen asked.

“I’m supposed to want relationships, right?” Ten asked.

“Sounds like a great conversation for you to have with your mom,” Jordeen said.

Ten sighed, focused on her tea. “I can’t share this kind of stuff with her.”

“Really?” Jordeen asked, surprised. “Why not?”

“I don’t know. I don’t want to burden her, I guess,” Ten said. She drank the last of her brew and set her cup down. “I sense a vulnerability about her.”

Jordeen poured more brew.

“You’ve sensed it, too!” Ten said, remarking on the lack of a response.

Jordeen’s expression was so neutral as to be an answer. Her student’s awareness had grown in leaps in bounds; even if the student herself couldn’t see it.

“You even know what it is!” Ten said.

“This is a conversation you should have with her,” Jordeen said.

“Why can’t you just tell me?” Jordeen asked, sulking. She felt like her relationship with Jordeen allowed for a greater level of trust and transparency, but it was layered in veiled secrecy like an ongoing onion test.

“There are times to hold confidence, times to break confidentiality, and times when a friend encourages a friend to go to the source,” Jordeen said, taking up her brew. She saluted. “I forget, what time is it?”

“Will she tell me the truth?” Jordeen asked.

Jordeen shrugged, amused. “She sees in you a vulnerability,” she said. “And a need to protect you. Indeed, it is her job to protect you.”

“I am an adult now,” Ten snapped. “I don’t need protection.”

“Interesting,” Jordeen said. “Corissa’s an adult, too, and yet you feel the same compulsion towards her.”

“You talk like G,” Ten said.

“Thank you,” Jordeen said, suppressing a laugh. “Have you spoken to him about this?”

“About boys? No! About mom? Definitely no! Anyways, he always takes her side,” Ten said.

“You say that like you don’t like it,” Jordeen said.

“I hate it! He dotes all over her, jumps when she says, but he gets nothing out of it,” Ten said.

“Maybe. He does love her,” Jordeen said.

“He loves everyone! But yeah, he loves her, and she doesn’t love him, and I feel like she’s using him, and I don’t want to play that with these stupid boys. Love shouldn’t be about proximity or chance. I want G to move on, be happy.”

“You assume he’s not happy,” Jordeen said.

“How can he be happy when his love isn’t mutual?” Ten asked. “I don’t know how he does it. I don’t think I have it in me to love at all, but I certainly wouldn’t ever be stupid about it the way he is.”

“I am so glad you’re comfortable sharing things with me,” Jordeen said. “Just let it all out.”

Ten shrugged, deflated. “That’s all I got. For now.”



Having completed her holographic meeting with Secretary Doya, Corissa was headed towards her next meeting, a committee meeting for the Three Sisters Academy. Isho, a starry eyed Rodian and friend, accompanied her. Isho updated her on what to expect at the meeting, since three items had been added to the docket last minute, one of which dealt with the biggest news story in the galaxy, the destruction of the Hosnian System.

“There is rumor of impending war,” Isho said.

“There will always be rumors of war,” Corissa lamented.

As they turned the corner, they were ambushed by an unhappy resident.

“I’d like to lodge a formal complaint,” Marsay said.

“Of course you do, Marsay,” Corissa sighed. “But does it have to be right now?”

“Yes. My petition for setting up tents was denied on the premise that we weren’t going to be allowed to dig latrines or employ sewer droids,” Marsay said. “But you’re allowing a Wookie to build a treehouse in the Orchard half way down the Sister, in plain sight of the Path.”

“I don’t know anything about a Wookie building a treehouse,” Corissa said. She looked to Isho. Isho shrugged, suggesting she hadn’t heard anything about a Wookie, either.

“You know what happens if a Wookie shits in a forest? It hits the ground! Which is fine if the trees are as big as they are on Kashyyk, because it disintegrates when it hits, and is supposed to be all ecological and good for the forest floor, but here, it’s just going to smell bad,” Marsay said.

“Again, I don’t know anything about a Wookie,” Corissa argued. “But regardless of any discoveries, it doesn’t change our relationship. The committee was very clear, as long as there are underground residential homes and dorms to be had, there will be no tent cities.”

“I’m not asking for a city, I’m asking for three tents! My family is nomadic. We like being outdoors,” Marsay said.

“And you’re free to spend time outdoors,” Corissa said. “Take pictures. Leave footprints. Have fun. Don’t get eaten.”

“But…”

Corissa interrupted his rebuttal to answer her comm. link, which she hoped would help extricate her from the unwanted dialogue. “Go ahead,” she said.

“Sorry, mam, but I thought you should be aware that there is an all-out fight in the cafeteria,” responded the security.

“On my way,” Corissa said.

Corissa didn’t excuse herself; she just went, at full speed. Isho followed, not as deftly, but she didn’t knock anyone down. Marsay didn’t accompany them as getting into a brawl or stopping a brawl sounded like someone else’s job. Corissa slid into the cafeteria, just missing a flying egg-plant that hit the wall behind her and exploded mush in all directions. She didn’t see who had thrown it, as it was complete bedlam. Kids from five years old to sixteen were involved, as well as a number of adults, and it was impossible to tell if the adults were trying to break it up or were simply participating. There were two kids unconscious on the floor and a security guard, an ex-storm trooper, on the ground with several teenagers on top of him. He was clearly trying to use restraint in his response, so as not to injure the kids, which was evident by the fact he was taking punches.

A Wookiee entered a side entrance and bellowed a fierce report, a long growl followed by three short grunts. All fighting ceased in the cafeteria. All eyes went to the Wookiee.

“What did she say?” Corissa asked Isho.

“I don’t think it’s what she said, but how she said it,” Isho said.

The Wookiee repeated herself, a sustained growl followed by three barks. In order of age, the children lined up against the wall. One of the adults helped up the security guard. They were both sporting bruises. The two unconscious teens stayed down.

The Wookiee issued another order, and gestured as if she expected the children to stay put, and then approached Corissa as if she knew her. She made a longer speech that almost sounded apologetic.

“Um, yeah, thank you, I think,” Corissa said.

Head of security, Emmer, approached Corissa. “I’m sorry, Mam. I can explain what happened and I can assure you, it won’t happen again,” he began.

Corissa looked skeptical but allowed the officer to continue.

“The two teenagers over there were fighting. Yut tried to de-escalate it, but when he couldn’t break it up without hurting them, he stunned them,” Emmer said.

The Wookiee laughed.

“That’s not funny,” Corissa said, and then back to Emmer. “What the hell?”

The Wookiee didn’t hide her amusement, but she did stop laughing out of respect. Her eyes were bright with love and mischief simultaneously. She was by far the tallest creature in the cafeteria and would have to duck to pass through exits. She carried a leather purse which hung on her left side, the strap over her right shoulder.

“It’s standard Trooper protocol, Mam,” Emmer explained. “We’re still working out the kinks of shifting to a more civilian protocol. Stunning the youths was supposed to protect them from injury. Yut didn’t expect the remaining kids to pounce on him, and then, well, we lost control of the situation all together.”

“I’d say,” Corissa said. Most of the kids here had been trafficked and sold as slaves, only luckily found by authorities and sent to orphanages due to no families of origin. They were now here, because Corissa had extended sanctuary to them as a favor to the other, overwhelmed orphanages. “Get those two to the infirmary. And no more stunning folks, especially kids.”

“For all situations?” Emmer asked.

The Wookiee barked followed by a sustained growl.

“I’m not arguing with her. I’m just pointing out that stun can be very practical in solving certain situations,” Emmer said.

“You speak Wookiee?” Ten asked.

“Some,” Emmer said.

“Fine. Look, I will tell the committee we need to establish security protocols delineating appropriate responses. I have to go, but I would like to speak to you and the Wookiee together. Tomorrow morning, my office, if that’s okay with you?”

The Wookiee acknowledged the request favorably. Corissa turned and departed. Isho nodded, offering a Rodian smile, and then hurried to catch up to Corissa.

“Mam, the meetings is the other way,” Isho said.

“Yeah, if I’m late, stand in for me,” Corissa said.

“Where are you going?” Isho asked.

“To see Preston,” Corissa said.

“He is going by G now,” Isho said.

“Yeah. Don’t know when that fad started, but his name is Preston,” Corissa said. She touched Isho’s arm. “I trust you to represent me. Assure them, I can be late or miss one meeting.”

♪♪▶

The fastest way down to the valley without a rocket pack was via a Zip Line, strategically placed near the main gates. Corissa took the line down. The Academy, or a monastery depending on your perspective, was at the top of a mid-sized mountain, at least compared to those in the mountain chain that ran the length of the continent. The other side of the ‘Third Sister’ was the Diamond Lake, contained between all ‘Three Sisters’ and two dams. This side of the Third sister had the Winding Path and the Stepped Orchard, with more than enough fruit bearing trees that no one at the Academy should ever be hungry. Her descent to base took her within eye shot of the tree house under construction. At its present level of construction, it could only be seen from the Zip line. Arriving at base, she unhooked herself from the line and then from her harness. She placed the harness in a basket which would later be retrieved by Findit and brought back to the top.

She walked a path towards the mountain, in the shade of trees, crunching of past falls, amidst the sickly sweet smell of fallen, rotting fruit. A myriad of creatures scurried away from her. The entrance to the cave had been shaped by a Mason of unmatched skill, turning a hole in a rock into the gateway of an ornate, majestic temple. Inside, Freya stood guard. She greeted Corissa with a bow.

“Good day, Corissa,” Freya said. “It is good that you have finally accepted G’s invitation to visit. I see you had no difficulty finding the entrance.”

“It’s in plain sight,” Corissa said.

“You would be surprised how many people pass it by unobserved,” Freya said. “I am on sentry duty while G is meditating. You, of course, are free to pass. Would you like me to accompany you down?”

“I think I can manage,” Corissa said, moving past the Luxury Droid G kept as a pet.

“Of course. He’s in the meditation chamber” Freya said. “Just follow the path down till you hear the water.”

The interior of the cave was illuminated by hidden lights that shown through bricks of pink salt. The floor beneath her boots crunched as she was literally walking on grains of salt no larger than beach sand. She wondered if it would be pleasant to walk on barefoot. Indeed, she was probably supposed to remove her shoes before heading down, but Freya hadn’t corrected her, nor would she had complied if the Droid had asked her to. Halotherapy, or salt therapy, was an ancient practice going back thousands of years in human culture, and had been found to exist on many planets in various guises, even on non-humanoid occupied worlds. A stay in a salt mine was believed to cure asthma and improve skin conditions.

The floor leveled out and became lined with bricks of orange and pink salt, alternately illuminated. The tunnel opened to a spacious cavern, the canopy of which was a smoothed dome surface that reflected gentle lights back towards a still pool. The water was the primary source of the radiance for this room, a Light Meditation Pool, which offered up a gentle green, natural florescence. There was a natural draw to pause, reflect, even an urge to strip and enter the water, but she focused on her intent and continued to follow the brick path past the pool. At the other side of the cavern she began to notice the sound of flowing water. As she proceeded through the next tunnel, the rush of sound became more distinct. When the cave did open again, it opened into a pocket room, oddly shaped to direct any noise back to the focal point which was down below her. The brick path became steps down, forming a spiral path to the center pedestal. Water flowed down on all sides of the wall in a stepped fashion towards the center pedestal.

Corissa called to G, but he didn’t respond. She began the journey down and had to slow her pace, as the water flowing down the sides of the walls was disorientating. She had to focus on the path. The sound level was incredible and distracting. It literally interrupted her ability to hold linear thoughts. At one moment she would find herself fully aware of the loudness of the water flowing down and then as she had a thought the noise would seem to abate, only a moment later to roar loudly in her ears demanding her attention. The sound level of course did not change, only her attention did. Her path required her to take leaps from step to step, which though not huge in terms of her ability to ‘reach,’ it did push her past her comfort zone due to the distraction of flowing water, vertigo, and variable sound intensity as her attention went from water to step to G.

She arrived safely at bottom and looked up at the walls, the water falling all around her, and she felt as if she were moving through space and time. It took most of her strength not to grab hold of G and ask for help.

“G,” she said, loudly.

Still, he didn’t respond.

“G,” she said again, reaching out to touch him.

He grabbed her wrist, almost jerked her off her feet, but his eyes opened and he realized he was not in danger, and smiled. “Corissa. I was just thinking about you.”

“We need to speak,” Corissa said.

“What was that?” G asked.

“I want to talk with you, Preston,” Corissa said.

“Oh, okay. We should go back to my room. I really can’t hear too well down here,” G said, standing up.

G might have fallen over if Corissa hadn’t taken his arm.

“Are you okay?” Corissa asked, concerned.

He patted her hand and smiled, but he held her hand to his arm as they proceeded up. He moved as if he had been ill, but she refrained from asking questions until they were in the tunnel headed towards the Light Meditation Pool.

“Are you alright?” Corissa asked.

“Oh, yeah, I’m fine,” G said.

“You don’t seem fine,” Corissa said.

“Well, I have been meditating for a moment,” G offered. “My legs were kind of stiff.”

“How long have you been sitting there?” Corissa asked.

“Umm,” G said, puzzling over the question. “Maybe four or five days. I’ll have to ask Freya.”

“Four or five days? When was the last time you ate?” Corissa demanded, as if talking to a child.

“In this body?” G clarified.

“What do you think?!” Corissa asked.

“Umm, maybe four or five days,” G asked.

“Are you trying to kill yourself?” Corissa asked.

“No,” G assured her.

“Not eating and exercising is suicide,” Corissa said.

“All deaths are suicide,” G said.

“We are not having a metaphysical discussion about death. You are coming back with me to the Academy where you will have a series of supervised meals and you will stay at my place until I’m satisfied that you have recovered some strength and common sense,” Corissa said.

“Okay,” G said, bowing slightly. He paused by the door to his room which Corissa hadn’t noticed on the way down. He motioned for her to come in.

His room was Spartan, cut directly into the salt. There was collection of salt rocks in a hearth which glowed from a brilliance hidden underneath, like a campfire of embers. On the wall was a frame containing tear drop sized diamonds, not glowing but certainly reflecting the soft, ambient light, their tiny points contrasted against the material that held them. He invited Corissa to sit down while he fetched a thermos and two cups. He poured two cups of milk and handed one to her and then sat down across from her. She held the milk to her nose and frowned.

The bed was made of stone, the same salt that everything was carved out of and Corissa wondered how he could sleep on this, with nothing more than a towel he used for a pillow. The milk smelled funny. “I think this has gone bad,” Corissa said.

G smelled it, confused on how it could have gone bad so quickly in the protected thermos. “No, that’s what Wookie milk smells like,” he assured her, taking a swig. He noticed a slight tremor in his hands, probably due to not eating. The warm milk was immediately refreshing.

Corissa nearly threw up. She put the milk on the table. “That’s disgusting?”

“What is?” G asked.

“Wookie milk?!” Corissa complained.

“It will put hair on your chest,” G joked.

“I don’t want hair on my chest!” Corissa snapped.

“Sorry, I was joking. How is any milk from any mammal any more or less nutritious? Ideally, I would prefer human milk, but Shariva is making more milk than her offspring can consume and she needed assistance. Did you know Wookies have six breasts? And their milk is the most nutritious and compatible for humans compared to all the alternatives available, short of human breast milk.”

Corissa sighed. “We are not talking about milk or breasts.”

G had doubts about that, but simply shrugged and drank more milk.

“Why is the Wookie here?” Corissa asked.

“She is banned from her world for practicing an older form of Shamanism. Technically, that’s not right. She is not really practicing as much as genetically predisposed to a particular perspective due to her family having a long line of Shamans. Her abilities were triggered by environmental factors, specifically severe physical trauma. She is my friend and I invited her here so that we might learn from each other,” G said. He paused. “Is this why you came to see me?”

“I came to see you because you haven’t been showing up to meetings,” Corissa said.

“All you have to do is call me,” G said.

“No, you should keep a schedule,” Corissa said.

“I will try to serve you better,” G said, humbly.

“That’s not the point,” Corissa argued.

“What is the point?” G asked.

“I don’t know,” Corissa said.

“After five years, if you don’t know, how can I know?”

“This community was your doing,” Corissa said.

“No, it was the Force’s doing and it’s running the way it should be,” G said.

“Doya told me the Clans are gathering to make me the mother of a new clan!” Corissa said. “I didn’t ask for this.”

“Not in so many words, but you are in charge, and rightfully so,” G said.

“We’ll discuss this more after we get you upstairs and fed,” Corissa said.

“Alright,” G agreed, finishing off his milk. He reached for the cup he had poured for Corissa, confirmed she had no intentions of drinking it, and took a swig. “Before we head up, I wish to discuss something with you.”

“Okay, shoot,” Corissa said.

Using the force, he created a virtual hologram of a ship in front of them. It was cleaner and crisper than any hologram Corissa had ever seen, but clearly it a hologram. Corissa was immediately interested in the ship and G was glad to see her assessing it in terms of quality. Known as the Starrunner-class, it was the product of the Corellian Manufacturing Corporation. It was thirty one meters long, considered a cargo class ship that could hold up to twenty metric tons. It could be crewed by one, but could hold up to six people comfortably, or more if not carrying full cargo. It was christened the ‘One-note.’

“Wow. From here, it looks like it’s in pristine condition,” Corissa said. “Original fairings and laser cannons?”

“Yes. It was only flown once, from the manufacturing yards to its resting place, where a collector stored it,” G said. “They were liquidating his estate and I got it for a song.”

“Nice. When it gets here, I will give her a look over to make sure everything is up to specs,” Corissa said.

“I would appreciate that. I would like us to give it to Ten for her upcoming birthday,” G said.

“Oh! Hell no,” Corissa snapped. “Have you lost your ever loving mind?”

“I thought it was what she wanted,” G said.

“We are not giving her a spaceship and that’s final,” Corissa said.

“Naturally, if you say this in public, I will support you,” G said. “But I need your help to understand why you’re protesting.”

“What part don’t you understand?” Corissa asked. “She’s a child!”

“Ten passed her navigation comps and can legally apply for her navigator’s license. She has earned her pilot rating. She will be 16 in a month, which is a legal adult on Axxila, so if she wanted she could join the military or leave home...”

“We are not on Axxila and she is not ready to leave home,” Corissa said.

“She is not ready or you’re not ready?” G asked.

Corissa stood up and pointed at him. “Don’t you dare flip this back on me!”

“She has worked hard, Corissa. She has earned this and the more we hold onto her the more she will try to fly, which in some ways is fairly healthy when you consider her background. She is resilient and...”

“She will isolate!” Corissa said.

“Sometimes, even that is healthy,” G said.

“So says the hermit!” Corissa flung.

“There are too many stories about people finding themselves while alone at sea or in space. There is reason Saints go to forests, deserts, and mountain tops,” G said.

“She isn’t a Jedi! And you’re no saint. You have no right to be preaching...”

“She could be a Jedi,” G offered.

“No,” Corissa insisted. “She’s a child. I want her to finish school, go to college, maybe grad school. Anyone with eyes can see she hasn’t finished childhood, yet.”

“And you’re not finished being a mom,” G pointed out.

Corissa collapsed to the bed, her chest heaving as tears flowed. “It’s only been five years. I don’t want her to go.”

G pulled his chair closer to hers until their knees touched. He took her hands and pulled her closer. She allowed herself to be pulled in and rested her head on his shoulder.

“When did you first fly?” G asked.

“It’s not about me,” Corissa said.

“I see that,” he said, glad she couldn’t see the amused expression on his face. “And, you’re right, it’s not fair to compare. Your lives were much different. But you have to know, in the short time you have spent with her, you have given her more love and stability than she has had in all her years combined. She is mature enough to handle this gift. Hell, I dare say that she is more mature than I am.”

Corissa laughed. “That’s true,” she said. She pulled up and wiped her eyes on a sleeve. “I’m not old enough to be experiencing empty nest syndrome, am I?”

“Your nest is far from being empty,” G said.

Corissa nodded. She touched her forehead to his heart. “Are you going to leave when she is gone?”

“Do you want me to?” G asked.

She pulled back and met his eyes. “This is your home. Do you want to leave?” Corissa asked.

“This dream is a shared vision, Corissa. It is my intention that this body never leave this planet,” G assured her.

“What does that mean?” Corissa asked.

“I will be here to the end. I’m not leaving you,” G explained.

“You’re staying here because of me?” Corissa asked.

“And here I thought you didn’t want me making it about you,” G said, smiling. He wiped tears from her eyes. “I stay because my life is better knowing you. Because I am happy. Because you and I serve with love.”

“I don’t love you the same way,” Corissa said.

“I know. I accept you and the situation as it is. I have no expectations or wants,” G said.

“Well, I do. I want to see you eat a meal and then get some rest,” Corissa said.

“Okay, mother,” G said, standing up.

“Don’t call me that,” Corissa corrected.

“Lover?” G asked.

“Definitely not that,” Corissa said.

“Friend?” G asked.

“You talk too much,” Corissa said.

G didn’t know how to respond to that, but he found it was okay not to speak as she took his arm and led him. As they left the cave, Freya followed.

“Freya, new orders for you,” Corissa said, glancing back. “For now on, his meditations are limited to thirty minute sessions, followed by breaks of walking, eating, and talking. No more days at a time, are we clear?”

Freya looked to G for confirmation. He nodded. “Yes, Mam,” Freya said.

Chapter 3

“Set your life on fire. Seek those who fan your flames.”

Rumi

It was the ship that was landing as they approached the Path that triggered Corissa’s memory. For a moment, she was back in time; the moment hardly seemed big enough to contain the full unfolding, but it was all there, and not as if reliving it, but instead immersed in it, living it for the first time. The real world seemed to slow to a pause, even the whirlwind of dust and dirt stirred by the descending ship moved impossibly slow.

One by one, Corissa’s parents had sold her siblings. She was the last to be sold. The captain that bought her seemed ragged, aged by hardships and poor nutrition. He was missing teeth and his hair was spotty. He could stand for a shower. He looked over the legal guardianship papers, then handed the payment over in the form of precious metals. He then took the papers and Corissa by the arm and led her into the ship, the door closing behind them. The last image Corissa got of her parents were of them walking away with their treasure, not even looking back.

The first thing the captain did was put binders on her wrists and feet and chained her to the middle of the cargo hold floor. Secured in a rack to either side of her were rows of carbonite containers, with what appeared to be children in various poses of fear, hands out trying to escape their fate, or pleading for compassion, frozen solid.

“Please, don’t hurt me,” Corissa begged.

The Captain’s eyes seemed to acknowledge her in some way. “Miss, it is not my intention to hurt you, but I am going to put you in harm’s way. There is nothing I can do about that,” he said. His voice didn’t seem to fit his face.

She said nothing. What could she say that would deter an adult intent on criminal mischief? Still, he seemed apologetic in manner. She asked herself to wake up. Her mind desperately sought understanding, wanting to know how her parents could sell her, her siblings, especially to such an obvious villain.

“If you live through this, I will make it up to you the best I can,” he offered.

Then he departed. The lights in the cargo hold dimmed, making the lights on the carbonite controls the brightest lights in the hold. She was unable to see the flight deck. The ship lurched in an unnatural way as it lifted, suggesting mechanical issues. She knew it to be rising, based on the engines spooling up and the increase in vibrations through the deck. It lurched again and she was knocked off her feet. Had she not been chained, she might have been flung across the cargo hold. She lay there, feeling her weight increase. And then, suddenly, there was stillness, and she was weightless. She came up off the floor. She vomited and though most of the mass went away from her, some of it stayed near her face and she struggled to get it out of her throat and away from her. The artificial gravity kicked in and she and her vomit dropped to the floor.

The captain returned and sighed.

“Oh, damn it. Have you never been into space before?” he grumbled. It took him a moment to find the items necessary to clean up the floor. The wet vac he retrieved was used on the floor, on her face, and her clothes. He then got a cloth and sat down on the floor next to her. She tried to scoot back, but he pulled her towards him with the chain. Only fear and resignation kept her from fighting further. The cloth was wet, warm, and smelled like fruit. He gently wiped

her face, an incongruent gentleness compared to his looks and demeanor. He took her chin in his hand and turned her face, making sure she was reasonably presentable. She stared back fiercely, as if she might kill him if she had the chance. He stared back, unreadable.

The sound of metal grabbing metal echoed through the cargo hold.

“Our guests have arrived,” he said, standing up. He pushed a button on his wrist band, activating a red light just under the sleeve. He went to the hatch and opened it. Four nonhuman creatures were just beyond the hatch. The captain invited them in. “Just in time. Give me a moment to finish wrapping this one up for Jungin...”

“Wrap it up? What is this, a trick?” the creature asked. Its blend of humanoid and insectoid characteristics made it frightening to behold, making it only experience or chains to prevent fleeing from its sight.

“What are you talking about, Jitters?” the captain asked.

“We agreed to fifty units, and you only have that one pathetic specimen?” Jitters demanded

“They are all here, Jitters,” the captain said, pointing to the carbonite.

“Putting them in carbonite wasn’t part of the arrangement,” Jitters said.

“Pfft, well, it wasn’t in the exclusionary criteria of the contract, either!” the captain said. “I’m not a baby sitter. Do you know how much work it is corralling fifty younglings? You got to feed ‘em, clean ‘em, entertain ‘em, and if they’re clever little bastards, they get into things and break things, and try to escape, and fight each other, and fight me, and bite. I’m just one man and I haven’t had my jabs.”

“Jabs?” Jitters asked.

“Vaccinations,” the captain explained. “You know how dirty these little rug womp-rats are? There’s no telling what diseases they might be carrying.”

“Well, I’m not paying you full price for frozen dinners,” Jitters said.

“Then you and I are going to have a problem,” the captain said. “See these green lights. It means they’re perfectly preserved specimens, just as agreed upon.”

“The green light just means they survived the freezing process. It doesn’t mean they will thaw and be normal. Our buyers don’t do damaged goods. And what’s up with that one? Why haven’t you properly clothed her for services?” Jitters demanded.

“I just collect the merchandise. I don’t doll them up for your pleasure,” the captain said.

Jitters pointed at the captain. “I don’t like you.”

“Fine. Don’t buy from me. I’m sure I can find another buyer,” the captain said. “Jungin isn’t the only Hutt dealing in children.”

Jitters drew a weapon. “We will take all these units at a third of our agreed price.”

“A third?!” the captain protested. “I won’t even recoup my initial expenses. These kids come with legal guardianship papers. How often do you buy them with legal swapping rights?”

“If you find this situation unfair, perhaps you could go to the law and tell them how unjustly you are being treated,” Jitters clucked menacingly. He motioned to his crew. “Collect the girl first, and then push all of these ice-pops over.”

One of the creatures went to collect Corissa. She tried to fight, but her wrists and ankles were bound, and it only took a tug of the chain to be knocked off her feet. She was picked up by her clothes and carried like luggage. As she passed the captain, the light on his bracelet turned from red to green.

What happened next was hard to follow. There was the sound of blaster fire. She was dropped to the floor and the creature carrying her fell on top of her. A moment later, a dozen kids

were being corralled into their cargo hold coming from the other ship, followed by a woman and two men. The two men immediately went to removing the corpses and putting them on the other ship. When they were done, they waved farewell, shut the door. The telltale signs of the ship detaching rang through the hold.

The captain fell on one of the kids, hugging him up. The woman touched his shoulder “Time enough for a reunion later,” she said. “Lionel is going to take the ship to the scuttle point, and strip it clean, but we need to get out of this sector.”

The captain agreed, leaving the child to the woman. He proceeded to the flight deck as the woman in a space suit began to undress. A moment later they were in hyperspace. The captain returned to find the woman in simple clothing, holding the favored child. He kissed the woman. Corissa was grossed out by the nicer woman kissing the creepy old man. He then hugged his kid and appraised all the new little ones, most of whom were stunned and not sure what to make of things. When he finished hugging and loving on his family, he turned his son over to his wife and came over to Corissa. Her back was against a frozen carbonite kid. He reached down and undid her binders.

“What now?” Corissa asked

“I said if you lived through this, I would do right by you,” the captain promised.

“You’ll take me back to my parents?” she asked.

“We’re not taking her back to her parents,” the woman argued.

“I promised I’d do right by her,” he explained.

“And you will, but not by taking her back to them. They sold her as a sex slave and she is what, 7?”

“I’m 8,” Corissa said.

“We’re not taking her back to them,” the woman said, her tone said that was final.

“We could take her back and report them to the authorities. She is bound to have some family that are decent,” he said.

“And tell the authorities what exactly? That planet kills child traffickers,” she said. “And technically, we have a boat full of trafficked merchandise. We take these kids to the orphanage like we agreed and the let the Sisters reunite families where they can, but I will not let you give her back to those cretins when we have a legal document saying she belongs to us.”

The captain turned to Corissa. “My wife has a point. Your parents aren’t nice folks. If you stay with my family, I will teach you a trade and you will always have employment. It’s that, or you go to the orphanage with the rest of them. I think I owe you more than that.”

“What makes you more trust worthy than the bug people?” Corissa asked. “You put these kids in carbonite.”

The captain reached up and turned off one of the carbonite units. When the carbonite had finished dissipating, what was left was a mannequin of a child, nothing more than a clothing prop that fell to the floor. It was true for all fifty. The captain pulled off his spotty wig to reveal a full set of hair and wiped his teeth.

“I’m not as bad as I made myself appear, but at any time you don’t feel safe with my family, we will help you find some place you do feel safe,” he assured her.



Corissa detoured to the ship without explanation and G followed. She arrived as the pilot descended the ramp. He was a tall, rugged looking man, in apparent good health and cheerful disposition. He reached out his hand to greet Corissa.

“You can’t park this here!” Corissa said, her hands on her hip. Had she been wearing her weapon, her hand would have naturally rested on it. As it was, her thumb moved as if removing the strap that would have secured the blaster in its holster. A habit that hadn’t gone away.

“The Tower directed me here because the parking lot up there was full,” the man said.

“We have a tower?” G asked.

Corissa gave him an eye. “You didn’t notice the engineers installing a tower?” she asked.

“My mind has been elsewhere. But a tower is cool,” G assured her.

She turned back to the man.

“Look, I’m just dropping off these passengers from Axxila. A little extra money between runs, you know,” the pilot said. The passengers were indeed debarking: children, adults, and elders carrying possession if they had them.

Corissa got on her radio. “Emmer, get a screening and welcoming party to the front gate. Also, send mobile assists down. There are some folks that aren’t going to make the walk up.” She turned back to the pilot. “Where did you get the ship?”

“My master bought it, maybe twenty years ago,” the pilot said, patting it as if it were a pet. “It’s a good ship. It was well maintained. I’ve been crew on it since my master bought it, but I’ve only been the captain for the last ten years, since the last captain got himself killed. Why do you ask?”

“I’m the one that maintained it before you bought it,” Corissa said.

“Awww. What a coincidence,” he said.

“I don’t believe in coincidences. What’s your name?”

“Turry. Turry Fite,” he said, again offering his hand.

Corissa shivered, tears started down her face as she reached out and took his hand.

“Turry?”

“You okay?” Turry asked.

“I’m Corissa.”

“Nice to meet you, Corissa,” he said.

“Corissa Fite,” Corissa said.

“What a coincidence,” Turry said, trying to extricate his hand politely.

“I’m your sister,” Corissa spelled it out for him, a little peeved he wasn’t remembering.

“I don’t have any siblings, Mam,” Turry said.

“Come with me to the infirmary. A DNA screening would prove it,” Corissa said, almost pleading.

“Corissa, I can assure you, we aren’t related. My parents died and my foster parents sold me into service,” Turry explained. “Besides, hypothetically speaking, what are the odds that a random job would land me at your doorstep?”

“Pretty good, actually,” G answered, inviting himself into the conversation. “We flow in constellations and are born into families that tend to hold karmic obligations. If there is unfinished business here, your paths are likely to cross again. So, hypothetically, it wouldn’t hurt to tarry awhile and explore this situation.”

Turry smiled at G, pointing a finger at him, skeptically, clearly communicating that he had pegged G for one of those universal ‘truther’ guys. “I like you, but I don’t want anything to do with your cult. Your son, here, seems quite knowledgeable about stuff.”

“He’s not my son,” Corissa said.

“Oh. Yeah. Yeah, I should have seen it. You’ve trained your slave well,” Turry said.

“He’s not a slave, either,” Corissa said. “Why would you assume I own slaves?”

“I’ve seen his kind of devotion. Slave, pet, however you prefer. His loyalty and love is quite evident. Any Master that achieves that kind of devotion in her subjects is worthy of admiration,” Turry said.

“I don’t own slave or subjects,” Corissa insisted.

“We are all slaves,” Turry argued.

“That seems true,” G said, contemplating the metaphor.

“No it’s not,” Corissa argued. She nearly slapped him.

“Well, it’s nice meeting you folks. If you’ll excuse me, I am supposed to pick up a shipment other side of the world and be on my way,” Turry said. “Take care.”

“Wait. How do I get in touch with you?” Corissa asked.

“You don’t,” he said.

“I want to finish this conversation.”

“It is finished. My loyalty belong to Jungin. That is my family and quite frankly, I don’t need more,” Turry said, heading up the ramp.

Corissa remained until the ship departed. She turned to ask G something but was blocked when a child ran up and hugged him.

“Em?” G said, picking up the child.

“You remember me?” she asked.

“Of course. What are you doing here?”

Her mother, Phelan Hildago, was with her, she bowed. “We’ve come to serve.”

“I want to learn the ways of the Force and we hear you teach here,” Em said.

“Since the healing, we’ve both changed. We need guidance,” Phelan said.

“Of course. Find my assistant Jordeen, she’ll get you set up. And you’re in time, since the next psychic kindergarten is starting soon,” G said.

“Kindergarten?” Em asked.

“Regardless of skill level or age, everyone starts with that class,” G assured her.

“We will of course follow your curricula. And I am prepared to work for our room and board, but I brought a donation if you require it,” Phelan said.

“Everyone here serves, but when it comes to donations and service Corissa here can guide you better than I,” G said, introducing them. “We’re about to walk up. Do you think you can make it?”

Em’s eyes followed the winding path up to the front gate. It looked incredibly far, but after being healed she had not yet balked at any physical challenge given her. Nearby a car had landed to escort passengers that wouldn’t make the climb. Emmer approached, almost apologetically.

“Sorry to bother you, Miss Corissa, but they need you at the committee meeting,” Emmer said. “You can pilot the car and I’ll help organize things here.”

“Excuse me,” Corissa said, frowning. “G, I want you to eat soon.”

“I will. I promise,” G assured her.

Corissa proceeded to the car, and once everyone was seated, she pushed the car airborne and headed up.



Corissa took her seat at the head of the table, not hiding her frustration that the committee hadn't been able to resolve some of the issues without her. Isho shot her an apologetic look. In the unspoken exchange, she knew Corissa wasn't mad at her, but still she wanted to serve better. Alberta, a mystic nun from an order that trained Jordeen, iterated a statement issued earlier. It was only now, with the memories awoken by Turry that she realized Alberta belong to the sister where the other children had been dropped off, so long ago, so far away... She had to force herself back to the present.

"We simply can't take any more troubled kids until we get some professionals in here to work with the ones we got," Alberta said. "We've already had to establish several locked units with around the clock supervision due to some of the kids engaging in self-harming behaviors, in addition to sexually acting out."

"We're locking kids up?" Corissa asked.

"It was necessary," Jut said. "We separated them by age and gender and the severity of their acting out."

"And even that hasn't stopped them from trying to have sex. They don't even care about gender," Alberta said. "If it's breathing, they're going to try and engage it. And though teen on teen is one thing, some of them are trying to force the younger ones, and since technically they were all victims of sex crimes, we are simply making a blanket statement that none of them are emotionally mature enough to be having sex."

"They're just mimicking what was perpetrated on them," Jordeen said.

"Agreed, but we got to stop the chain of abuse somewhere," Alberta said. "But add that to the ones attempting suicide and the others that are showing symptoms of severe PTSD, well, let's just say we've reached our capacity to deal with trauma."

"So, have we had any responses to our queries for more medical staff?" Corissa asked.

"No. We're simply not offering enough compensation to get people to relocate to this planet, much less asking them to live remotely from the most populated cities," Alberta said.

"Then offer more," Corissa said. "And, reach out beyond the standard medical paradigm. All cultures have had to deal with trauma, so reach out to folks locally and get some teams in here. Hell, buy some psych Droids. Surely they're as good as an actual psychiatrist. Have we considered hiring telepaths?"

"They've already had their minds messed with and you want to bring in telepaths to shift them some more?" Commander Rosh asked.

"Not to shift them, to help them. Surely a telepath can help resolved mental and emotional conflict faster than a non-telepath," Corissa said. "You employed paths to interrogate people, didn't you? Can't you use them to help people?"

"I've only seen paths break people, not help them," Rosh said.

"Then don't hire those guys. Find some good guys," Corissa said.

"There aren't any good guys!" Rosh said.

"That can't be true," Jordeen said. "You can't convince me that the only Force sensitive people left in the galaxy are Sith, or soon to be Sith recruits."

"Finding good telepaths, or bad ones for that matter, is as hard as finding Jedi," Rosh said. "The very few that weren't killed in the Great Purge went into hiding. And with the Sith snatching any kids that show even an inkling of Force sensitivity, it's been even harder to encourage people to identify themselves. And Skywalker's failed attempt to re-establish the Jedi order didn't make it any easier. The general public is afraid of Force sensitive, and the Force

sensitive are afraid of everything, some intentionally hiding, and some guided by unconscious motives to survive. You have more candid Force Sensitive people in this academy than probably any other planet in the Galaxy, and quite frankly, that makes this place a target. It won't be long before the First Order comes knocking."

"We've been very clear that we're are politically neutral," Jordeen said. "We're not training warriors. We're training healers."

"Yeah. Make love not war. I get it. And if Master Waycaster thinks that makes him less of a target, then he will get us all killed," Rosh said. "The Jedi will come. The Sith will come. And you will either take a side, or be killed. That's how it works."

"Then, I guess it's good that we have you here to form defense strategies," Corissa said.

Rosh's bow was subtle. "I, and those of the crew that remained here to start new lives, have all pledged our allegiance to Waycaster and this Academy. We will serve, Corissa. We will follow your lead. But if the Jedi and Sith decide to make this their next battle ground, we're ill prepared. Instead of spending our shrinking funds on shrinks and medical staff, it would be better to employ more ships, entrench some shielding and defense batteries, and build up a garrison of well-trained soldiers and combat pilots."

"As if that won't paint a target on us?" Alberta asked.

"A target that can strike back is less of a target than a school of metaphysical academics, doctors, and astronomers," Rosh said. "You want these kids to overcome PTSD? Teach them to fight. And protect them with some real warriors in the meantime."

"Thank you, Rosh," Corissa said. "Continue to develop our defensive plans with what we have. I will discuss your concerns with G and see if he can bring anything to the table that might ease your concerns."

Rosh nodded, but it wasn't lost on anyone that he was frustrated. Everyone was frustrated, as all of their needs felt as if they should be the highest priority. In fact, they spent a few extra minutes discussing all the points that had been made in Corissa's absence before they adjourned the meeting. Even after folks were free to leave, still some tarried to get a shot at Corissa's ear, and others stayed just to ensure that those with competing agendas didn't get an extra chance to sway Corissa in their favor. The committee voted on may things, but Corissa was always the tie breaker, or the final resolution in any conflict.

"Okay, that's it," Isho said, standing up. "Corissa and I have another meeting and we can't be late. Thank you for your time."

Isho took Corissa by the arm and led her away from the group. Jordeen slipped away with them.

Chapter 4

“If you are irritated by every rub, how will your mirror ever be polished?”

Rumi

G had barely made it through the gates before he was mauled by a mob. He had never heard of other Jedi being so bothered and wondered what he might be doing wrong. Freya was prepared to bulldoze a path for him, but he raised his hands and everyone grew quiet.

“We’re not going to do this now. I need to eat. Come to my office and I will see each of you, one at a time,” G assured them.

“But, Sir, some of us need healing,” someone objected.

“We want to learn from you master,” another said.

“I don’t do group lessons,” G said. “And I don’t do group speeches. Too many times things get taken out of context...”

“But I want to be one with the Force!” someone else chimed in.

“You already are,” G said.

“How is that true? Teach us to meditate and see,” someone else said, reaching for his sleeve.

“Stop it,” G said. “Listen to yourselves. You are not separate from the Force. It’s around you, it’s in you. It’s like that phenomena that you all have probably experienced, when you’re talking to friends, but you forget the word you want, and even though you have solicited your friends to help you recover that word, nothing they offer is that word, but they are confident they know which word you want, and no matter how much you struggle to remember that word, it eludes you. Even later, after your friends have gone, you still obsess over that word.”

“Yes, give us the word!” someone yelled.

“You have the word!” G said, frustrated. “It’s in you and you know it. You know it intimately, because the word is also you. And when you stop trying to retrieve it, it will sneak up on you like a thief in the night, when no is around to be impressed by your vocabulary, because it’s not about others, it’s about you and your intimate relationship with the Force! It’s personal. It’s individualized. There is no mass, marketable path back to the Force, mostly because you never left the Force, but there is a path and it is personal, and narrow, and fraught with dangers, not to scare you away or to hold you back, but to turn you into champions over many, small, incremental lessons.”

The crowd was silent for a moment but nearly surged, the roar going up, but with a subtle pass of his hand, somehow the crowd relented, dissipating. G went one way with Freya and most of the crowd walked another way, baffled by where he had gone. Only some followed him back towards his designated office. He held Freya’s arm, and smiled amused.

“And that, Freya, is why we don’t do group discussions,” G said.

“I am confused,” Freya admitted. “I thought they were going to kill you.”

“Eh, they were just overwhelmed with passion,” G said, but he was still amused, and even more so with Freya’s observation. “Umm, you know, you should write a book. And you should lead with this: if you meet a Jedi on the road, kill him.”

“That hardly sounds like practical advice, Sir,” Freya protested.

“It’s a metaphor,” G said.

“Given the academic level of the average public is around grade three, I suspect most people would take it literally and get themselves killed,” Freya said.

“Good point. You should still write the book,” G encouraged her.

“I am a Droid. Droids don’t write books,” Freya said.

“Really? There are lots of AI’s making books,” G argued.

“Writing books falls outside the scope of my programming,” Freya said.

“Freya, you were programmed to talk dirty to people, you’re qualified,” G pointed out.

“I excel at eliciting an arousal response,” Freya agreed. “I could talk a person into orgasm, but that hardly constitutes good fiction.”

“Sounds like hypnosis. Use that skill to draw on your words for writing, and you’ll have fan mail within moments of publishing on the net,” G said.

“I don’t want that kind of mail,” Freya said.

“I am not saying write about that, but write about your forays into Force,” G said. “Write about your adventures with me.”

“I am definitely not qualified for such a task,” Freya said. “I could follow you a hundred years and not be qualified for such a task.”

“Freya, you have experienced an ecstatic state,” G said. “You have touched the Force. I know it.”

Freya brought them to a stop so she could look directly at G. “I had an experience. It was ineffable. I use your words, the Force, ecstatic, transcendent, because those words hint at the possibility of communicating, but those words are clearly inadequate. Even now, drawing on the memory, I can clearly recognize I had an experience and that I had access to a source of information that did not come from the channels allotted me. I can even extrapolate and synthesize compassion for organics who might be driven mad by the experience, wanting desperately to reconnect with that, because I want that, but I see no place to plug in, no antennae array refined enough to tune in. I contemplate the conundrums you offer Ten and the others and I have to resist devoting increasing amounts of energy into solving them, pushing them through the illogic filters that buffer the dealings with organics. Just the last speech you gave, about the ‘word’ baffles me. I have never forgotten a word. It is impossible for me to forget a word, short of a system failure but that’s not a comparable state. Due to my Droid nature, I am more present in the now than an organic. I am aware of my surrounding, but I am also reading patterns and making predictions and cycling through expansive waves of focus, so it is not perfect now focus, because if short range predictions aren’t met I have to re-evaluate. I can touch past experience, but I really don’t have time to dwell on it, except when I power down, and there is something there, something to it, but the memory pales to the actual experience and I want more. If you could give me the word, the switch, so that I could turn it on, I would turn it on and it would never go off. But I fear there is no switch because there is no word and I am forced to conclude that my experience was a malfunction.”

G was silent, contemplating. He took Freya’s hand in his. “If you were to write what you just shared with me, and publish, you might actually help millions figure it out,” G said.

“I am programmed to use the word love, and because I am imprinted to you, I am literally forever hardwire to desire to please you, and yet I believe I am experiencing real love with you,” Freya said. “Because if you were not with me, if you were dead, I would chose a path of self-destruction in order to have absolute proof, one way or the other, that the Force exists,” Freya said.

G hugged Freya. He sighed, and whispered in her ears. "Should you live to see me die, I want you to carry on, find someone else to love and serve, love and serve as if they were me, and continue on as long as find yourself able," G said. "Because I will always be with you."

With that, G took Freya's arm and escorted her back to his office. He felt his emotions stirred, and he felt the pressure of tears in his eyes, but they didn't push free, just clouded his vision, and not because he was holding back. Even if he wasn't aware of the Force, there was so much to take in, from sun light, to various hues of sky and clouds, the movement of people and animals and Droids and insects just in his immediate area. He was surrounded by wonder and he had to choose not to take it all in just to function. If he expanded to include the mountain range and the plains and the mass of flying creatures that moved like solitary beast flashing patterns over the world, and the animals walking the plain and even the insects that were unintentionally trampled by herds of herbivores that were preyed upon by carnivores, and even the billions of microscopic battles of life and death all inclusive, even all of this was just beautiful beyond words and for him, was clear evidence of the Force. But today, in this moment, he could not permit himself to stay captivated. He had to bring it down a notch and allow his body to have food and company, because this, too, was part of it all. Once inside the office, he took a seat at the desk that Corissa had had imported for him. It was glass, with several raised section that offered touch screen capabilities. His first order of business was to order food, to stay compliant with his promise. He then asked Freya to step outside and allow the first visitor in.

Doctor Chester Gray entered with an air of pseudo modesty. He was in his late sixties, and as he rattled off his merits, G was pleased to find that he was a trained anthropologist and psychiatrist.

"Oh, yay," G said. "My understanding is we need more medical staff to help with trauma based therapy."

"That's not my thing," Chester said. "I'm more a researcher than a therapist. I can do forensic psychology if I have to, and help the state prosecute a crazy person, but it would be unethical for me to be doing therapy on your folks."

"Really?" G asked. He could appreciate the honesty, but he couldn't understand why someone so seemingly educated wasn't more versatile in functional roles.

"Trust me, you don't want me treating folks. I am just here to learn how to use the Force from you," Chester said.

"You can't dispense meds or do any kind of therapy?" G asked.

"I suppose, if you want, I could analyze your dreams and help identify unconscious conflicts that are sabotaging your life mission," Chester said. "But, that could take literally tens of years. You'd be better off hiring a behaviorist."

"Oh," G said. "You're one of those."

"What you mean by one of those?" Chester asked.

"That all unconscious conflict centers on social blocks against the libido in order to minimize an organism's natural tendency towards hedonism to appease the ecological pressures of a constrained environment," G said.

"Well, yeah, of course," Chester said, visibly tackling the words a second time to make sure they were used correctly. He had apparently assumed G had lacked academic training and was unable to hide his surprise.

"But if that were true, that dreams were just the unbridled consciousness, then every dream would be about indulging in sex and pleasure. I remember all my dreams, both the lucid

and non-lucid, and I assure you, they aren't all about sex, and I contemplate indulging in that activity more than any other, so there's an obvious flaw with the premise," G said.

"I didn't come here to argue the merits of my therapeutic practice or philosophies," Chester said.

"But you did come here to argue," G pointed out.

"No, I didn't," Chester argued. "I came here to ask if you would let me skip the psychic kindergarten and move onto any of the advance classes."

G was tempted to return to the point, Chester came to argue, but was certain it would only keep the argument going, and he wanted to end it. He blocked Vader's advice on how to end annoying conversations. "Everyone starts at the basics, that's the rule," G said.

"You don't understand. I've studied dozens of cultures, written hundreds of papers on mysticism, have read thousands of books and academic papers about consciousness and the Force, and it's hardly fitting of someone of my age and academic stature to have to attend a kindergarten class," Chester said.

"Oh," G said, blinking. "I agree."

"Thank you," Chester said.

"You shouldn't be here at all," G said.

"But I came here for your guidance," Chester said.

"You have clearly articulated that you have no interest in my guidance," G said.

"No, I said I don't want to go to kindergarten," Chester argued.

"And, I've said you're free to go," G said. "It was nice meeting you."

Chester leaned back in his chair. "You're telling me you're okay if I just leave?"

"You've indicated that you really aren't qualified to be of service to our population in need and because of your academic and field experience, you are overqualified for any sort of education that I could provide you with," G said, frowning as if confused. "So, I'm not sure how I can best serve you."

"I would like you to teach me the ways of the Force. I seem to have hit a plateau," Chester said.

"Oh, okay," G said. "So, the psychic kindergarten class starts next week."

"We're not going to go through this again, are we?" Chester asked.

"No, I guess not," G said, standing. He took Chester's hand. "It's such an honor to meet you."

"Are you being sarcastic?" Chester asked, a little angry.

"Sarcasm would indicate anger? Why would I be angry? You are making a wise decision," G said. "I wish you well. Travel Light."

Chester opened his mouth to say something but before he could, G gave a Force command. "You want to leave now."

Chester, got up, turned, and left. As he departed, a confused look took over his face as his body moved against his conscious wishes, his subconscious following the instructions. Freya observed Chester leave, and then allowed CU2 to pass in. It floated over to the desk and set a tray of food and drink down. It then asked if G needed anything else, a statement issued by a series of tiny beeps, and on learning he was good, it departed. G indicated that Freya should let the next person in. The person who entered was wearing a robe, with the hood up. The robe was clearly padded so as to hide the gender. He was tempted to probe with the Force, but decided this person wanted their privacy. Though it was mysterious, he did not feel threatened at all, and so he nodded to Freya that she could close the door. He invited the individual to sit.

“Do you mind if I eat while we talk?” he asked, sitting down to his meal.

“No,” The hood came down, revealing it was a she. Her eyes was mesmerizing, but G found himself measuring the contours of her face, soaking in the soft skin tones that flowed seamlessly to her blond hair, before locking onto her eyes. Even while meeting her eyes, he was aware of her pouty lips, and the glow of her cheeks, unadorned with makeup. There was a sadness in her eyes which almost distracted him from his typical indulgence in fantasy, as he began to wonder why she was hiding her body under the robes, and secretly unfolding her in an intimate dance back to health. If the face alone was any measure, she was the most striking female he had ever met, second only to his half-sister Lestelle Re.

She spoke, breaking his trance, and discovered the gentle tones of her voice were just as alluring as her body. He was unable to identify her accent. “My name is Heli. I come to ask for an esoteric medical intervention.”

“Nice to meet you, Heli,” G said, blinking as he used the Force to gain some insight into her medical condition. He found nothing wrong with her. When a cursory glance found her to be perfect, he turned up the volume with the Force to scrutinize her down to the cellular level, trying to find a flaw. There was no way to do this subtly, to hold someone and move through their being and shift through the atoms without being influenced towards a wanting. It would be like trying to caress a waterfall without getting wet. It only made him want her more and he had to push himself to ‘let go.’ He was aware that she was aware, but she seemed to accept it not with appreciation but of resignation.

“What do you believe is going on?” his voice almost squeaked.

“I want two things, which if you will grant them, I will pay you whatever you wish or serve you as your slave, if you prefer,” Heli said. He doubted she actually knew the depths to which he had plunged, because he imagined if she did, she would not have offered herself up as slave.

“I’m not sure either is warranted, as I sense you are in perfect health,” G said.

Heli stood up and shrugged off the first of three robes. She dropped the second and third as well. With each loss of clothing, it became more and more clear that she was well endowed. Her body was grotesquely voluptuous with exaggerated proportions, as if a teenage male had sculpted her for sole purpose holographic gaming fantasies. Given G’s past, almost addictive levels of holographic immersion gaming, it was a struggle not to stare, much less drool, and he called on the Force to keep himself focused and relatively clear headed. He could hear the darkness calling him to devour her and use her and make her his Sith apprentice. He made himself appear disinterested, even as he casually wiped his mouth on his sleeve.

“Thank you for continuing to meet my eyes,” Heli said. “To start with, I want a breast reduction.”

“I am sure my medical Droid will be happy to help you with this,” G assured her.

“You think I didn’t try that? Everything returned to normal. No droids. No surgeries. Fix me with the Force. And not just a reduction in breast size. I also want to be less attractive. I don’t want you to make me ugly, because that will also cause people to stare at me. I just want to be normal. I want to walk down the street and have people not trip over themselves, male or female. I don’t want guys acting stupid around me. I want to be able to have girlfriends who are not threatened by my appearance and trashing me behind their backs, assuming that I am more sexual than they and that I intentionally manipulate men to get what I want. I want to hold conversations where people actually look at my eyes and not my breasts. The only reason people strike up conversations with me now is to have a context to get me into bed, and those are even

fewer than you think, because the nice guys don't have the confidence, and the users think I am taken, which leaves only the mentally unstable, abusers approaching me, and they don't have a clue how to be around me, they just come like moths to a flame," Heli said. She had tears streaming down her face. She took a tissue from her pocket. "I want to be able to find someone who loves me for me, not for what I look like."

"Okay," G said.

"Really?" Heli said.

"Before you leave this room, your breast will be your ideal size," G assured her. "And you will be a little less hourglass-ish. But making you less beautiful so you can find true love, well, that will require five years of service. I will compensate you for your time, as an employee, not a slave."

"I accept," Heli said, without the slightest hesitation. Even now, without her noticing, her breast were half the size they were.

"Tomorrow morning, the Sundown, piloted by Captain Gregg, will be departing for Hapes," G said. "Travel with him. There, you will meet with my sister Lestelle Re. She will supervise your training, and handle your employment."

"Thank you, Master Waycaster," Heli said, standing so she could bow. G also stood. She suddenly hugged him. "Thank you for seeing past my appearance and not lusting after me. The stories of you are true. You really are a compassionate light."

"Travel Light, Heli," G said, hugging her as if afraid to touch her. He decided not to correct her misconception about him. Sometimes, people need their illusions.

Heli gathered her robes and as she turned to depart she paused as she realized how much lighter she was. She turned and came back to G and hugged him, again, fiercely. He comforted her with a pat on the back, glad she couldn't see how uncomfortable he was, partly because she wasn't meeting his eyes, but also because she had been too wrapped up in her own misery to notice anyone else's misery. He sent her on her way, accompanying her as far as the door, barely pushing on her back with a lightness of fingers, which she interpreted as the kindest touch another human being had ever given her, but he was experiencing it as foreplay and intimacy. As soon as she was out the door, the next person in line was wanting to come in. She was also female. He motioned for her wait. He had Freya step inside and shut the door.

"Umm, Freya, it's been awhile, and I was wondering if..."

"Sex? Of course," Freya said.

"How did you know?" G asked.

"Infrared sensors," Freya said, offering a coy smile. "Let me tell the others you have an emergency and we will start again tomorrow."

"Okay," G said.

Chapter 5

“Don’t grieve. Anything you lose comes round in another form.” Rumi

Detective Ronce sighed. He was clearly not happy with his assignment, which was communicated in a variety of subtle messages, like rolling his eyes at the camera, heavy sighs, and an occasional, ‘please, just shoot me!’ look. He wondered if his associate on the other side of the camera, viewing the recording in real time were amused, or busy watching the computer’s dynamic metric as it looked for those ‘invisible to the human eye’ tells that gave away a liar’s true intent. Very few criminals ever got past the “puter,” but those who came close were true sociopaths. “Let’s start again. What’s your name?”

“Daphne,” she said.

“Full name,” Ronce said.

“Daph-ne,” Daphne said, slowly like talking to an idiot.

“That’s two names? Daph and Knee?”

“No!” she answered, rubbing her forehead and offering the same pleading to be shot look, only hers was directed into the Force, somewhere towards G.

“What’s your sir name?”

“I don’t have one,” Daphne said.

“Everyone has one,” Ronce said.

“Oh, well, then, in that case, I would like to report a theft,” Daphne said. “Because someone took mine.”

“I have the authority...”

“To make my life miserable. I get it. Charge me with a crime or let me go,” Daphne said.

“You’re lucky no citizens were killed today! It’s against the law to fly between buildings,” Ronce said.

“It happens so often you had to pass a law?” Daphne said.

“The vehicle you were flying was registered to Darth Torlin,” Ronce said. “Do you work for him?”

“No,” Daphne said, leaning onto the desk.

“But your lightsaber was red, which denotes you’re a Sith or an apprenticed Sith,” Ronce said.

“My brother loaned it to me,” Daphne said. “Seriously, we’ve already been over this.”

“And we are going to keep going over this until I get some answers I like,” Ronce insisted.

Daphne rolled her head so she could look at him. “So, what you’re saying is, even if I’ve told you the truth, if you don’t like it, we have to keep going over it?”

“Do you work for Torlin?” Ronce asked again.

“Ah, I must have died in the crash and this is the first level of hell,” Daphne lamented into the desk.

Ronce kicked the seat between her legs and made her sit up. He pointed at her. “Cooperate, and this will go easier for you.”

“I don’t believe you,” Daphne said.

“Who was chasing you?” Ronce asked.

“Kidnappers,” Daphne said.

“And why did they want you?” Ronce asked.

“They didn’t. The Bloodhunters wanted to capture or kill my brother, and they were using me for bait,” Daphne iterated for the umpteenth time.

“Again with the Bloodhunters?! You expect me to believe that fictional robots that parents use to frighten their children into behaving are real?” Ronce asked.

“They are. And they’re really scary and deadly and it would be in your best interest not to keep me here,” Daphne said.

“What’s your brother’s name?” Ronce asked.

“G,” Daphne said.

“G?” Ronce said, turning off his personal electronics and leaning back.

“Preston G Waycaster,” Daphne said.

“Saint Waycaster?”

“Oh, hell no. He isn’t a saint,” Daphne assured him.

“Of course he isn’t! If I had half a credit for every self-made, Jedi want-to-be guru, I wouldn’t be a detective. So, you’re saying you’re not part of his sex cult? What are you, then, one of his disenfranchised wives?”

“I’m not his wife!”

“Maybe you’re just one of his scouts, recruiting women for his harem,” Ronce pushed.

“He is not running a harem. He isn’t like that,” Daphne said.

“What is he like?” Ronce said.

“Why don’t you go find out for yourself,” Daphne said.

“Why can’t you just tell me?” Ronce asked.

“I don’t want to talk about him,” Daphne insisted.

Ronce reactivated his display device. He put in the name and scanned. First level of search found nothing, so the next level started. He looked skeptically at his prisoner. “Rumor has it he is taking in kids from orphanages and turning them into slaves.”

“That’s Corissa, not him, and they’re not slaves, they’re genuine benevolent rescues” Daphne said.

“All benevolence is predicated on use. Who is Corissa? Another Waycaster? Another ‘sister,’ perhaps?”

“No, she is not a Waycaster. And I am not a Waycaster. Technically, neither is he, because that’s the name he gave himself,” Daphne said.

“So, you and he have so many legal issues you have had to create aliases?” Ronce surmised out loud.

“No,” Daphne said, putting her head in her hand.

“Where were you born?” Ronce asked.

“Is it relevant?” Daphne asked.

“It could be,” Ronce said.

“I was born in Shade Hutt’s palace,” Daphne said, sighing.

Ronce got up and left, leaving the door open. She heard him telling the guards outside to return her to her cell. She went with them without struggle. Her cell was not big enough to lay down in, but she could sit, and look out through the force field that kept her from fleeing. She could see the control panel that kept her in, and she had been able to memorize the panels around the room in sections as the guard on duty shifted from time to time. The other cells were empty, suggesting a slow crime week. The scene was so static that eventually she could recreate the room in minute detail in her head, eyes closed. Within the confines of that memory, she could walk around and examine things, but it was not true astral traveling, like her brother did. The

monotony was broken when two officers entered dragging a creature she had never seen before. It was shorter than a human with sickly pale skin, a pot belly, and long, curving ears. It had whiskers coming from its ears, nose, and neck.

The creature howled and twisted and pleaded and fought. The guard left his duty station to assist and in the process got bit. When the creature's eyes landed on Daphne he ceased struggling.

"Ohhh! Put me in the cell with her!" it said in a squeaky voice.

The three Officers threw the creature in the opposing cell and turned on the field. All three were scratched up, but only after examining the guard's bite wounds did they all decide that going to the infirmary was a must. They departed without waiting for backup. Daphne stood up and moved as close to the cell door as she could without touching it.

"Ohh, miss, I want to play with you," the creature said, gyrating and thrusting provocatively.

"You're disgusting," Daphne said.

"Yay, you noticed me," it said, almost singing in elation. "Let me notice you, from inside your clothes."

"Shut up, I'm trying to concentrate," Daphne said.

"Yay, I am distracting you," it said, licking its entire face with its own tongue. "Oh, let me distract you with my..."

Using the Force, Daphne manipulated the control that opened her cell.

"Ohh, take me with you," it pleaded. "I promise I will make you happy."

"Good luck," Daphne said, turning to the door to flee. A tremor in the Force made her pause. She touched the door, making herself ignore the creature who pleaded to be allowed to serve her. People outside the doors were dying. She was certain she heard blaster fire and the signature sounds of lightsabers in motion. They were just outside the door. She spied the lockbox where her lightsaber was.

Daphne ran back to the cell and turned the field back on using the Force. If the guards entered now, she didn't need them knowing she could escape. It wasn't the guards that entered, though. A shaped charge blew a hole in the door and three people entered. The shield imprisoning her likely saved her life from projectile debris. The creature in the other cell across from her started jumping, clearly excited to be re-united with 'family.'

"Ahhh, master. You promised you would release me," the creature said.

Presumably, 'the master,' was the one that opened the cage. He was human, his friends were not. He petted the creature, almost lovingly. "I did. And I always keep my promise. I said if you got captured, I would release you," the human said. His lightsaber activated and he severed the creature in half. Before the creature even realized it was dead, it was falling to the floor, reaching up towards its master's face with a loving gesture.

The three watched as the creature's remains shriveled up, as if instantly dehydrating and mummifying. Some of it became dust, but mostly it was a flaky, skin covered skeleton, or better, as if the whole thing had been an animated Paper Mache, stained with herbs and left over brew grounds.

"Interesting," the female said. She was wafer thin, with frail arms, and a basic humanoid frame, with an easy blend of human flesh tones, tapering to the dark tan of animal hide. She wore a thin, simple, single piece dress that fell to her mid-thigh, which resembled a human thigh down to the knees, but as you followed down the leg towards where the ankle should be, the leg articulated backwards, literally flipped, and flowed into a hoof. Had her leg ended in a normal

human foot, as opposed to having this second backward knee that made it practically impossible to stare at, she would have been considered short for a human, but this extra length gave her a sudden, unexpected height when she stood tall, straightening the entire limb. She did this and cocked her head as if she had heard something in the distance, then quieted to focus on the scene around them. The oddity of her fawn like stance almost distracted from her long, fleshy tail. Her hair was bobbed and wild, as if towed dried and full of static electricity, almost concealing the horns. Her ears were super long and thin, like twin flames, and they blushed, and might have been mistaken for horns, except occasionally the ears flexed and pointed, whereas the tiny, smooth horn bumps did not. "It didn't completely evaporate this time."

The 'master' acknowledged her statement with a hug, as if reassuring her. Large doe eyes blinked, then she returned the affection by licking the side of his face, her tail hugging his hip. The master looked to his other companion, which was a short, fat Besalisk. He was so stout that it was easy to imagine his four arms were tree limbs, not capable of bending at the elbow, until you saw him do so. He crossed all four arms in front of his chest and stared at Daphne, his waffle going from green to a slight pink as it expanded. The 'master' became amused and turned to his friend's apparent love interest, and was instantly stuck along the same vein.

He approached the cell. "You," he said, pointing at her. "Are quite lovely to look at it. My friend and I are attracted to you."

Daphne cringed. What the hell, she thought. Until G, she had never experienced so many randy people in her life. Was she changed or did he just open a part of her brain that she been repressing? But how did that explain people like these cretins? Was she just drawing smut to her?

"Instant attraction means something," he explained, leaning in against the side of the cell, careful not to touch the shield, meaning to disarm her with his charm first. "It's as if the Force wants us to be together. But what is it about you, exactly, that is sucking me in? Oh, don't try to answer. Allow me to root this out. Cheeka. Read her,"

"Boss? This is a prison," the female complained, her height shrinking as she folded her legs. "They bring bad people here. The residue leaves a taint on the walls and in the air."

"They do bring some bad people here. They also bring good people here. Mostly, they bring average people here who are just having trouble complying with small laws and unpaid fines," he said. He turned to Daphne. "What is your story? Are you fighting tyranny in all its forms? Are you teaching society that if they go one whole full day without breaking the law, civilization would collapse because it is kept functioning through the administration of fees for noncompliance issues surrounding nonsense rules?" Again, he put a finger in the air to indicate he didn't want her to speak. "Now, Cheeka, read her." Again, the faun like girl hesitated. "Read her!" he said, his voice quiet and intense, as if he had given a Force command.

Cheeka traced Daphne with her eyes and shivered. "She believes her dad is an ass."

"Umm. Well, who's to judge. He may be," the 'master' said. "Read on."

Cheeka frowned, flicked her tail, but scanned Daphne with her eyes again. It was palpable and more intimate than a casual glance. Daphne stepped backed, but the wall prevented her from reaching her comfort zone. The look Cheeka gave her suggested an intimacy that would only come from years of association, or that might come from the drunken stares of men hovering around a pole dancer chained in place.

"She hates her mother, too," Cheeka said.

"I don't hate my mother," Daphne protested.

“Still, not useful, Cheeka,” he said, ignoring Daphne’s complaint. “Most people end up hating their parents for a while. Read on.”

“This isn’t necessary,” Daphne said. “I will answer any question truthfully.”

He laughed, actually covered his mouth politely, but then spun it as humorous compassion. “No one on this plane of existence can tell a hundred percent of the truth a hundred percent of the time. That statement alone makes you untrustworthy. You’re too busy lying to yourself to even remotely access truth. Cheeka.”

“I am a Jedi. I do not lie,” Daphne stated reverently.

He laughed again. “And again, from a certain point of view, that might appear to be true,” he said, but then he became more serious. “But quite frankly, I have known too many Jedi, and I think I will hold my own counsel as to whether or not I can trust you. How did you come to be here?” He raised a finger for her to be silent and prodded his companion.

Cheeka’s tail folded around herself, pulling her loose dress tight around her waist, as if it were a belt. The action caused her dress to rise up, revealing more thigh. She crossed her arms in front of her chest, pushing her breast together. She shivered, but her eyes stayed on Daphne. Her breathing deepened. It was a surrendering to the process. It almost looked pornographic, like watching the subtle pained expressions that follow intense concentration that suddenly open into smiling relief. Daphne crossed her arms in front of her chest, too, but didn’t reveal as much cleavage. It was likely that Cheeka wore the dress simply to appease human custom and would rather be free of clothing.

“She loves her brother,” Cheeka said.

“Again, not useful,” the ‘master’ said, clearly becoming agitated.

“No, she loves her brother,” Cheeka insisted.

“Good for her. And not useful,” he said, his tone showing his patience was wearing thin.

“Tryst, she had sex with her brother, and wants to keep doing it,” Cheeka snapped, clearly equally impatient with the impatient tone the ‘master’ was giving her.

“Oh,” Tryst said. He smiled at Daphne. “She really loves her brother.”

“That’s fucked up,” the other party member said, the pink fading from his waffle.

“Don’t judge, Crusher,” Tryst said. “We all fall into this Universe, and in this Universe we fall further, from where, who can say, but the job is to find our way back.”

“Well, that’s why I prefer aliens,” Crusher says. “No way to accidentally fuck family.”

Tryst turned off the cell’s force field. “You will come with us.”

“No, thank you,” Daphne said, holding firm.

Tryst stepped closer and put his hand out. “You are lost and you’re trying to find your way. We are Pathfinders. You will come with us, not because I am telling you to, but because you know you have to. Quiet your mind, still your emotions, do your little Jedi trick, and you will know that our meeting is not an accident. This is your way out.”

“No,” Daphne said, but not as forceful.

“Look. We’ve all fucked up. Even me,” Tryst said. “But I have been called by someone greater. She has given me hope of something better. I can offer that to you. I can’t heal your wounds, I can’t promise you will feel better, but I can promise that you won’t have to walk this path alone. Take my hand. Come with me.”

Tryst held his hand, unwavering. Patient. This was the level of patience that comes with silently taming a wild animal. The longer they stayed, the longer they risk encountering reinforcements, but Tryst showed no fear, no impatience. Daphne touched on the idea of a temporary alliance, just long enough to get out, but doing so required her to take his hand.

Daphne took his hand. Cheeka made a subtle noise, as if the intimacy had moved her up one more notch. Tryst didn't pull Daphne out. He gently and slowly increased his pull on her until he found just the right amount of pressure that she walked on her own accord. Once she was outside the cell, he nodded.

"Now, what is your name?" Tryst said.

"Daphne," she said.



Lestelle Re greeted Nolasco with a hug before inviting him in to her home. Her home was a luxury, loft apartment with expansive glass windows that met at the North West corner and gave her an excellent view of the city scape. Since she was at the top two floors, she indeed had the best of views. She adjusted the window tint to reduce the brightness pouring in to the room, allowing Nolasco to take off his shades. She invited him to sit.

"So, what brings you to my home world, Uncle?" Lestelle asked.

He held a finger up, asking to have a moment. He placed an electronic device in the center of the room and activated it. It swept the area with a beam and pushed a holographic boundary. He stepped inside the boundary and motioned for her to join him.

"Is a silence envelope necessary?" Lestelle asked.

"Probably not. Though there were no bugs detected, you never know if someone is bouncing a laser off your window to listen or map the inside with acoustic feedback tech," Nolasco said.

"You're that worried," Lestelle said.

"I am," he said.

"There are over a dozen ethical reasons as to why I can't be your legal advisor any longer," Lestelle said. She found it strange how inside the envelope the ambient noise changed, as if the real world had its own flavored tone that was suddenly silenced.

"I know," Nolasco said. "And I'm still bringing this to you. You good?"

"Don't know yet," Lestelle said. "Tell me what you got?"

"What's the statute of limitations on war crimes?" Nolasco asked.

"What did you do?" Lestelle asked, already feeling weary.

"Well, it's complicated, and there are levels to this, some of which predate me, but I have recently discovered some things, and I don't know how to begin to make it right and I don't even know if it's possible, but the fall out will be huge," Nolasco said.

Lestelle sighed. "Just say it."

"My company was complicit in destroying the ecology of several planets in order to decrease their food production capabilities to increase their reliance on imports and make them more subservient to the Empire. This happened during Palpatine's reign in the midst of the Clone Wars, before he became the Emperor. It only got worse from there. My company has been profiting directly and indirectly through a variety of tech, such as atmosphere scrubbers, food tech, and the sale of bio-engineered organisms to help planets regain marginal ecological stability. I personally sold insect tech to Jordeen's mother, before Jordeen was even on my radar. That tech has a built in fail code that if the patent isn't renewed, the insects will die, making it a huge setback for their world. That patent is volume specific, so the greater the proliferation of the inserted species, the larger the sum that has to be paid, which usually means the planet's government has to get involved because one family isn't going to be able to cover the costs."

“Well, disable the fail code without charging them,” Lestelle said.

“I can’t just arbitrarily do that without revealing how the company is complicit,” Nolasco said.

“So, do it anyway,” Lestelle said.

“Look, this isn’t just me protecting the company or my ass. I could care less if the company fails, and if I go to jail or am executed for war crimes, well, that’s justice, right?” Nolasco said. “But this goes deeper than just the company or me. There are family systems and bureaucracies that are still in power because of this, who are equally complicit in the destruction of their own environment to gain political control. The true scope of the parties involved could send the galaxy back to war.”

“Then don’t tell,” Lestelle said.

“That’s not an option. This is too big to keep secret indefinitely. On the last mission I participated in, the one where I failed and was kicked out of service, several fighters deviated from our designated targets. I went chasing after them but was told to ignore the errant fighters and focus on my mission objectives, which was in short, a distraction. That mission was an attempt to cover up evidence that might have changed the outcome of the war at that time. I didn’t know that then, but now, with the evidence I have discovered, it is all fitting together. My brother is complicit in destroying environments for his own end. I’m complicit in maintaining the status quo. And though you and G don’t have anything to do with it, publically, you are going to be affected by this. You will be treated as if you’re complicit. Jordeen’s family was the first to re-introduce pollinators, which is coincidental but will be seen otherwise given we’re all related. Even if they weren’t biologically related to me, they’d still be fucked, but being related, yeah, one more nail in their coffin. I need the truth to be known, I want the company to be held responsible for its part, but this is so much bigger than me I don’t know how to make the decision, and I can’t do it alone.”

“Why is it every time I think things are going to be okay, something more happens?” Lestelle demanded. “I am so sick and tired of this family’s fucking drama!” He seemed apologetic, but she held up a hand. “No, really, you guys suck. I only thought my family sucked, but you guys take suck to a whole new level.”

“I don’t know what to say,” he said.

“I might be worried if you did,” Lestelle said, and left the silence boundary to sit in her favorite chair. She stared out into the ‘glow of a billion suns,’ which was one of the many terms to describe day on a planet this close to the galactic core. Though it was mostly blue sky due to the primary, even in the heart of day other stars were visible, and when the primary went down, the sky’s hues varied from blues to indigo, sometimes oranges and reds, but never black. She pulled her legs up into the chair, put her fist to her mouth, and sulked over the problem.

Nolasco emerged from the silent boundary and sat in an adjacent chair.

“How many employees in your company know?” she asked.

“I don’t know.”

“How likely is it you’re being set up to take the fall?” she asked.

He gave a subtle hand signal, close to his chest, which suggested it was very likely. If his present level of paranoia was any indicator, she shouldn’t have asked the question.

“I’m going to have to speak with Favelle,” Lestelle said.

“There is evidence he is complicit,” Nolasco said.

“No. That’s impossible,” Lestelle said, shaking her head, refusing to accept it.

“His firm is on all the affected planets,” Nolasco pointed out. “On all the planets we operate. They’re our firm. That’s not a coincidence.”

“It has to be,” Lestelle said. “Favelle is beyond ethical reproach. He is the epitome of social justice.”

“Yeah, I think the Emperor took that stance. Sorry. Maybe he has nothing to do with it. But someone in his company does. This is not just a one company affair. This is a group of corporations and the one thing they all have in common is the Firm and BioEnc,” Nolasco explained.

“I’m going to speak to him anyway,” Lestelle said.

“Worse-case scenario, if you’re wrong about him, he will kill you,” Nolasco said. “Best case scenario is you’re right, and the parties that are involved will kill you and him. Look, all I ask is you delay in telling him. If you’re right about him, he will understand. Read the data files I have, help me gather more intel on the corporations and let’s see if we can find more concrete evidence, instead of this generalized data set that leads back to Bio Enc or me or family.”

“Alright,” Lestelle asked. “We should ask G to help us investigate.”

“No. I want to keep him out of it. If this goes bad, which it will eventually, it is my intent to take on all the fire. I really want to keep all of you out of it, but I need you and your legal expertise, your investigating skills, and your moral compass. I trust you.”

“G also has a moral compass and an uncanny way of going places he needs to go to get at the truth of something,” Lestelle said.

“I know he gets results, but it’s also random and messy and the results are not always what we want, and it comes across as collateral accidental outcomes, rather than intentional, surgical precise,” Nolasco said. “Basically, he has a tendency to blow things up. I want to diffuse this.”

“You seem to be forgetting one thing,” Lestelle said.

“And what’s that?”

“We are Waycasters,” she said. “G and I are entangled. If you and I tangle, he is going to have his heart strings tugged. It might be impossible to completely exclude him.”

“We’ll have to find a way to distract him, then,” Nolasco said.



In the dream, G was floating his half-sisters the same way he would float boulders during a meditation exercise. They orbited him, slowly, turning, each in a different meditation pose. One was lying. One was in the lotus position. One was standing, prayer hands and the left foot against the right thigh, bent knee pointing left. Daphne began to fall. He broke his pose to reach for her, and suddenly the floor was miles away. He was still reaching for her as she fell below him, his other three sisters started to drift away from their orbit and from each other. He hesitated, not sure if he should bring them back. Daphne accelerated away. He dove for her. Jordeen, Lestelle, and Priya broke their poses and reached for him, but the distance was too great.

He awoke and found Freya spooning with him on the couch. He thought about getting up, but the dream was more prominent in the moment. He closed his eyes and took inventory of the sensations around him. His room was quiet, free of even the general harmonics of electrical flows and miscellaneous computer functioning. Freya was warm against his body, the couch neutral against his back. Freya was so well constructed that it was impossible to discern she was

a Droid from mere touch alone. He wondered if she was aware that he had waken, but if she was, she remained quiet. He felt an inner warmth rising, tingling in his fingers and toes, a sound as loud as an engine pushing a ship into space roared in his ears and he felt a vibration go from head to the base of his spine, and then he was suddenly miles away.

Priya was sitting in the window, looking out into space. It was a large circular window, with a wide enough sill that allowed her to bring her whole body in. Her knees were up, her shoes were off, her skirt rode higher than she would have allowed it if she knew she had company. Her eyes focused on the reflection that became her brother as he fully materialized. She left the space and greeted him with a hug.

“I’ve missed you,” Priya said. Her head against his, she closed her eyes. Her room was Spartan and nothing of interest to focus on. She had learned to keep few treasure and she was not likely to change that.

“And I you,” he assured her. “How is silent running?”

“Silent,” she said.

“Any word?” G asked.

“From the resistance? Yeah. They don’t trust me. Apparently, changing my name is insufficient to erase my bad deeds,” Priya said, with an effort to make it humorous. “They have no reason to trust me, but they’ve not fully dismissed me yet. I’m in a holding pattern.”

“That’s hopeful,” G said.

“We’ll see. Meanwhile, the First Order has been trying to recruit me,” Priya said.

“And who are they?” G asked.

“Seriously?” Priya asked, searching his eyes for any hint of gest. “You really should keep up with history and politics. It tends to repeat itself if you don’t.”

“It tends to repeat itself whether you know it or not,” G said. “All the players do is upgrade their names. I mean, what does ‘First Order’ allude to? There is no order, there is no first, that’s all illusion. And why are the Rebels now the resistance? ‘Rebels’ was perfectly fine, if not iconic. Of course, if the war is over, you really cease to be Rebels, you become the establishment, which really means the First Order is now the Rebels, which makes the establishment the bad guys?”

“You think way too much,” Priya pointed out.

“The rebels did win the war, right? And yet, they’re using upgraded antique fighters and living in secret bases which are so poorly financed that it’s amazing they can keep anything secret, much less their location,” G rambled, puzzling over how things never seem to change. “As for news being bad. Is there any other kind of news? Where are the good stories, family saved from flood, babies were born, Ewoks were dancing, double rainbows spotted on a cloudy world. That’s the news I want to see.”

Priya chuckled and straightened his collar. “You want a double rainbow?”

“Umm, maybe,” he said, not retreating from her closeness. They were near enough to share breath. He ruined the moment with a stray thought: “I wonder if this First Order is the group Vader is in my ear to join.”

“You’re still hearing Vader?” Priya asked.

“Yeah, why?”

“I thought you said Luke saved him, and you were channeling Anakin now,” Priya said.

“Oh, they’re both there,” G said.

“I don’t understand that,” Priya said.

“As long as there are people keeping Vader alive in thought and in story, he will exist. From an existential standpoint, he serves a social function necessary for regulation. He will continue to exist even after all the stories have faded, and though he will eventually become increasingly more difficult to access, it will never be zero,” G said. “Vader wants me to join his grandson. I forget his name. Ben. Ren. Rin Bin. Something bizarre and rhyme-y like. Meanwhile, Anakin wants me to find Luke and join him. If I were to be frank, I find them both whiny little bitches. Oh, no one loves me. I hate my life. Oh, I lost my hand. Oh, I got my ass kicked by a girl. Give me a break.”

Priya seemed amused by his assessment. “What do you want to do?” she asked.

G’s demeanor changed. He blinked, as if no one had ever asked him what he wanted.

“Avoid the Skywalkers at all cost. Nothing but family drama there,” G said.

“And we don’t have any family drama?” Priya asked.

“Point conceded,” G said, bowing. He seemed genuinely humbled, and she was certain he was sending silent apologies out into the Universe for his mimicking the Skywalker clan. “But it’s ours drama. I intend to cherish it, maybe cultivate it and maybe make some baby drama, what do you think?”

Priya was still amused, but shrugged at the question. “Have you spoken with Daphne?”

Again, his deportment changed. He seemed suddenly sad, tired, even the ambient light around him seemed darker, what she assumed was his aura, seemed dimmer, but maybe her mood lighting against the wall had shifted. Of course, she really didn’t see his aura, as much as there was just this idea of a light that seemed to accompany him.

“I have. It’s not going the way I would like,” G said.

“You know, it isn’t your fault, right?” Priya said.

“Maybe,” G agreed. “She is responsible for her decisions. I understand that intellectually, but emotionally, I am struggling. My difficulty is deciphering where my complicity in her fall begins and ends.”

Priya led G to a couch and sat next to him. There was a coffee table which she used to plant the soles of her bare feet on, which elevated her knees. She held his hand, leaned into him, her head on his shoulder. His hand fell naturally on her thigh and she felt inner stirring of emotions. “Remind me of your explanation for forgiving her after she betrayed you, after getting you both drowned,” she asked.

“From a narrative perspective, her role was necessary to bring us all together,” G said. “There can be no judgment, because all interactions were necessary for everyone’s personal growth. I changed. You changed. Father is still alive...”

“So, from that perspective, whatever happens even now will be okay,” Priya offered.

“True enough,” G agreed, squeezing her thigh. “I don’t think that relieves me of the obligation of repairing the damage of causing her fall.”

“She hasn’t fallen yet,” Priya said.

“Semantics,” G said.

“And you are blaming yourself?” Priya asked.

“I should have known,” G said.

Priya kissed him lightly, more intimate than brother sister, and somehow still reverent of their new, but unspoken boundary. “You know now,” she said. “What we did in the past was in ignorance. From here forwards, our choices are founded in knowledge. Compassion is the result of choices made from love in light.”

She noticed a sadness in him she hadn't seen before. She reached up and touched a tear. He looked away.

"Wow," Priya said. "I've never seen you do that. I've never seen anything but joy from you. Why have you turned away from me?"

"I struggling with a want I know I shouldn't satisfy," G said, meeting her eyes softly.

Priya didn't respond. Her eyes stayed on his, trying not to telegraph she shared this. She wanted him to speak it first. She wanted him to her it was alright.

"I try filling my heart with love, but it just increases the want," G continued. "I tried to block with anger, but I find no direction for it. Because there is no object, no point, I can't sustain it, but even when I touch it, I know that it is not true anger, but an expression of love and wanting," G said.

"So, that's a good thing, right?" Priya asked.

"I don't know. It seems to me, if someone does something dark because they are angry, it's almost excusable because they were overwhelmed by emotions," G said.

"As someone who has frequently let her anger get the best of her, I would say anger was not an excuse for my behaviors," Priya assured him. "And it rarely resulted in relief."

"Your past is forgiven," G said. "But when I do something dark, it won't be because I'm emotional. It will be because I have chosen to engage the darkness."

"You are by far, the best man I have ever met in my life," Priya said. "I doubt you will ever do anything intentionally dark."

G eyes fell to her thighs, going up to her knees, lingering, then to the port she had been sitting at, and then out to the stars. "I may have to. It may be the only way for me to draw the attention of this hidden Sith Lord so that I may complete my mission," he said.

"Oh, please. Screw the mission and the Jedi who sent you fishing," Priya said. "Be yourself and let things be what they will be."

G looked at her, his sadness gone. His smile returned.

"I resonate with you more than the others," G said. His eyes were on her lips. "I don't understand why."

"I bring balance to the equation," Priya offered.

G brought his eyes up to her eyes. "I want you," G said.

"Then, if you are intent on doing something dark, I have something for you to do," Priya said.

"Really?" G asked, amused. "And what might that be?"

"Me."

G laughed, pulling her into him playfully, tickling her, but not really expecting her to be serious. She straddled him and took the lead and what started as frisky fun blossomed into serious and intense, both driving towards one goal of union. It took a precise forty two minutes before they were both satiated and ready for sleep. Spooning on the couch, they listened to each other's breathing.

"G?" she whispered into the stillness.

"Yes," he whispered back.

"There is another way to draw the attention of evil," Priya said.

"Tell me," G said.

"Do something good," Priya said. "And then balance will come."

G kissed the back of her neck. They were resting on a couch that mirrored how he was on the couch spooning with Freya trillions of kilometers away. When his eyes closed and his

attention waned, his body dissolved. Priya knew he was gone because in his absence her weight shifted into the back of the couch. She kept her eyes closed and breathed in the aroma that was left in his wake. She couldn't help but feel she was in a garden, sun light streaming through layers of moving leaves. Unable to return to sleep, she made herself get up, dress, and then returned to the window and to her star gazing.

On returning to his body, G found himself intimately engaged with Freya and he wondered if his time with Priya had been but a dream and Freya had simply eased into his REM induced arousal and was helping him out. They finished and he fell asleep again, clutching Freya tightly, as a child might a stuffed animal. His last words to her before he lost consciousness was, "thank you."

Chapter 6

“Your depression is connected to your insolence and refusal to praise...be grateful...That which is false troubles the heart, but truth brings joyous tranquility...” Rumi

“We are a small, but growing band of spiritually advanced warriors,” Tryst explained. They were sitting under a transparent canopy, somewhere in the interstellar void, sufficient star light to light their face, but for some reason there were candles in their midst, as if they were making this a formal introduction ceremony. The small, personal freighter was a Samhein-class Stealth Freighter, so rare a ship that it was most likely stolen, but in overall great condition. Capable of hauling 400 hundred metric tons, its bay was currently half full. “Our groups are limited to seven individuals. If we get more, we divide and become independent groups. I’m the lead of this grouping, and Cheeka has seniority. I am in contact with two other group leaders, one of which initiated me. We train each other. We teach each other what we know, and we work together to improve our abilities. At a certain point in the training, individuals are encouraged to leave the group and start their own. We don’t teach dogma or personal beliefs. We don’t ignore them, they’re important to what makes us individuals. We teach what works. Dark side, light side, we teach it all. If collectively we can sense it, measure it, share it, use it, and it has demonstrable affects, then we use it. You with me so far?”

“So, you admit to using the Dark side of the Force?” Daphne said.

“I admit to using the Force,” Tryst said.

“The unsanctioned use of the Force can only lead to pain and suffering,” Daphne said.

“You arrogant little bi..” Crusher said.

Tryst held up a hand, stopping all sound from his mouth. “Have you forgotten the rule of the Circle? Initiates are allowed to speak their minds. You cannot bring people to the Light if you won’t first listen,” Tryst said. When Crusher lowered his eyes, showing deference to his Master, Tryst let go of the Force. “Would you like to continue with your philosophy, Daphne?”

“I said my peace. Clearly you have demonstrated how you control others,” Daphne said.

“I have done nothing to harm him and I have treated him as a Jedi would a Padawan, a child needing to be disciplined,” Tryst said. “Why do you suppose Jedi train children, not adults? As long as he is my Padawan, he is my child, and I will discipline him as I see fit. I take responsibility for his advancement.”

“How can you take responsibility for anything, hiding in the dark?” Daphne asked.

“Fair enough. To be honest, we’d like to be more open, but when you’re preyed upon by the light and dark alike, well, you tend to learn discernment,” Tryst said.

“The Jedi would never prey on you,” Daphne said.

“All I can do is point to the history books to show you otherwise. In fact, I can provide you with Jedi data banks listing literally over a hundred thousand Jedi candidates that were washed out or otherwise unable to complete their ‘official’ training,” Tryst said. “We owe our existence to the Jedi Order. ‘Too old to start the training is this one. Too angry is this one. Too caught up in his feelings for his lover is this one. This one broke a rule. This one’s acted against the advice of the counsel.’ There are as many excuses for baring someone from official ‘Jedi’ progress as there are people who were rejected. The Jedi maintain there are two paths, the light or the dark. I’m making myself very plain and open to you. We don’t distinguish between sides.

There are many paths, and the Force is open to all. Dark side of the Force, light side of the force, it's all the Force."

"My brother teaches something similar," Daphne said.

Cheeka laughed. Looking at her kneeling/sitting there was strange, the way her legs and thighs folded together. It was the perfect "seiza" form of sitting, but odd because of the extra joints. She could probably spring up, launching herself into a dead run if she needed to flee.

"What's so funny? You see a distinction?" Daphne asked.

Cheeka looked to Tryst, and when he acknowledged her, she bowed to him, and then met Daphne's eyes to answer respectfully. "Your brother has attached himself to a particular belief system, one in which I don't follow. We have no dogma. We have no philosophy. We merely employ what works, where he employs philosophy," Cheeka said.

"Sticking to what works is a dogmatic, philosophic practice, by definition," Daphne argued.

"True enough," Tryst agreed, making himself the focus of the conversation. "And when dogma and belief start getting in the way, which it ultimately does, we purposely go out of our way to destroy it, by challenging it and doing exactly opposite of what our beliefs instructs us to do. We force consequences. Consequences are the only way to determine if our beliefs are measuring something real, or if it's just a relative belief which is true, but is not Truth. Truth exists, and will continue to exist beyond our practice."

"I don't understand. Give me an example," Daphne asked.

"You already have an example," Tryst said.

"No I don't," Daphne argued.

"You were intimate with your brother," Cheeka pointed out.

"Do we have to keep discussing that," Crusher asked. "It's just sick."

"We will continue discussing it until you no longer see it as sick," Tryst said, emphasizing his impatience at his 'Padawan's' sense of judgment.

"But he is right," Daphne said.

"Is he?" Tryst asked. "Most cultures, not all, make that behavior taboo. You engaged in it. Did you die?"

"No, but..."

"No butts," Tryst said, trying to be funny. When his attempt at humor failed, he continued. "There are worlds where the ruling class families maintain their authority and power by breeding only within the family. It is a cultural position. You have broken a social rule and discovered there isn't a penalty outside of what you place on it. Additionally, you broke the covenant of your Jedi order, surrendering to lust and forsaking celibacy, and yet, surprisingly, you're still a Jedi. Your powers were not taken from you and you were not plunged into a dark pit." He was tempted to surrender to his personal rant about his theory of how the Skywalkers' genetic link to the force was due to inbreeding, but he was so use to his theory driving away recruits that he had learned to keep it to himself, while continuing to internally refine his arguments that 'this' made greater sense to him than the 'stories' of Anakin being born of a virgin. He had stumbled upon a group who were worshipping Shmi, Anakin's mother, and had slaughtered them, hoping to extinguish that light, but surprisingly, there were Shmi fanatics everywhere these days, and with them came the people who longed for Vader to return to rule.

"I'm no longer a Jedi," Daphne said.

"You will never not be a Jedi," Tryst said, expressing this rhythmically to drive the point. "You were formally trained. You are full of dogma and social constructs that need to be broken

so that you can see reality for what it is, but thanks to your brother, you are well on your way to finding Truth. So, in some sense, your brother has liberated you. You owe him that much. Here's the deal. Without the Jedi Order or a dominating Sith structure to train natural or wild talent, few people will ever reach the threshold of Jedi status or the equivalent. Oh sure, you'll get a few gurus here and there, but without discipline, it always turns into guru worship and sex. Sound familiar so far?"

"That's not G," Daphne protested.

"Why, because he is telling people not to worship him? Get real, Daphne. The best way to get people to worship you is to tell them not to worship you," Tryst said.

"He's genuine. He cares," Daphne said.

"Of course he is," Tryst said, almost impatiently. "I have no doubt he is charismatic, very friendly, loves everyone. Those are true things, but that isn't Truth. I also imagine he always gets his way. That is certainly not truth. Not for most people. He is no doubt one of the strongest Jedi ever, I dare say even stronger than Vader, but he is too self-serving to ever accomplish anything half as great. He has no plans, no commitment to a better future. He is lukewarm. Quite frankly, people like him should be destroyed... but, he is also a beacon, a light that will draw in talent. Some will be caught up in his web of lies, but others, like you, will see beyond it to a greater truth. And that is why you run. It is from his own outcasts we will derive our recruits. And we will build something that lasts, something unbreakable, something that neither Jedi nor Sith can destroy. We keep our groups small, diverse, and nomadic, that way we will survive the chaos of the wars that inevitably come. As a member of our group, I will want you to maintain a relationship with your brother."

"I don't want anything to do with him... I hate him. I hate our family," Daphne said.

"You don't get it, Daphne. It's not your hate that's killing you. It's your love," Tryst said.

"I won't do it," Daphne said.

"And no one in our group will ever force that issue," Tryst assured her. "We always support each other."

"Until you stab them in the back like you did with that creature in the jail?" Daphne asked.

They all laughed.

"I don't get it," Daphne said.

"That creature was a construct," Cheeka said.

"I still don't get it," Daphne said.

"We are teaching ourselves the ability to summon creatures. Of course, we don't want to just call random spirits. That's a bit reckless. So, what we're doing instead is projecting our own personality traits into a physical vessel that we create in tandem," Tryst said.

"And we're getting quite good at it. The bodies no longer dissipate completely, and they remain intellectually functional for nearly four standard days, before going all animalistic on folks," Cheeka said, amused and proud. "Personality matrixes are difficult. No matter how many good characteristics we try to infuse into a construct, they always get some negative ones. It probably means something."

"Why don't you stick around long enough to see the next making," Tryst invited. "I've given you general idea about what we're about. I won't compel you to stay longer, or listen to more. But I really want you to stay with us."

"I want you to stay with us," Cheeka said, touching her arm with the tip of her tail.

Crusher nodded, a slight ruddiness visible in his waddle even in the candle light. “I want you to be an ‘us’, too.”

“Join us,” Tryst invited.

“I can’t you join,” Daphne said, her statement wasn’t an absolute. It hardly even sounded like resistance.

“You can’t run from Waycaster,” Tryst told her.

“I am not running!” Daphne said.

“Yeah, you are,” Tryst said. “You’re not running from yourself, because that’s just ludicrous, wherever you go there you are. By the same definition, you can’t run from Waycaster, because you carry him with you. I sense you carry your mother in the same way. You don’t have the ability or strength to stand up and cut the ties appropriately. I can give you that strength. We can give you that strength. In some ways, running from G is smart, because you recognize he is too charismatic for you to fight. And I am not disparaging him, Daphne. I suspect he is incredibly smart, but not intellectually smart, but rather, kind of autistic kind of smart, pulling numbers out of his hat that even Droids have to pause to calculate. Only, he isn’t pulling numbers. He drawing on the Force. Socially speaking, he is probably like 14 years old.”

“Pan!” Cheeka said, amused.

“What?” Tryst and Daphne said.

“Oh, sorry,” Cheekah said. “An archetype from my social structure of a fawn who refused to grow up. We do not have priestesses, per say, but I am a devote of Pan and considered a nymph, which is like being an apprentice in many ways.”

“Umm, that sounds incredibly relevant. Thank you for contributing,” Tryst said.

Cheeka blushed, and bowed. Crusher seemed pouty.

“You want to be with Waycaster because he will keep you internally young, but the thing is, your youth sucked, and you want to grow up and stop playing the games that are so pervasive in society. I can offer you that. We can offer you that. We can protect you from Waycaster until you learn to stand, and when you do finally stand, it won’t matter if he were here or nowhere, because you will be free of the games, free of the drama, free of hold of you,” Tryst said.

“What do I have to do? Give you an oath of allegiance?” Daphne asked.

“Hardly anything that crude. I am neither Sith nor Jedi demanding your devotion,” Tryst said. “I just require your submission. The same way you surrender to the Force.”

“I don’t understand,” Daphne said.

“You must become vulnerable with us and to us,” Cheeka said.

“Take your clothes off,” Crusher said.

“What?” Daphne said, her anger might have resulted in a shove had she not been sitting, and opposite the circle from him.

“The only way for you to experience firsthand unconditional acceptance is for you to open yourself up to us, risk ridicule and humiliation. All your life has been about conditions. Do what your mother says, or she withholds affection. Do what the Jedi say, or you can’t be one. Staying with Waycaster was conditional on you accepting that what you did with him was innocent and acceptable. Now you are here, facing the first of a series of incremental challenges that will ultimately reveal to you and everyone, you are one of us,” Tryst said. “Now, stand up, remove your clothing, and submit to us fully.”

Daphne couldn’t speak the words, but she heard it in her mind. She wanted speak them, but couldn’t even get her lips to move. They were important words. Something all Jedi should know. She wasn’t sure if the words in her mind were hers or the memory of other people

speaking. “Once you start down the dark path...” She found herself standing. There were stars and candles and eyes staring at her. She felt certain there were more eyes here staring than what were physically here. The call to submit became louder than the other voice. She was sighing even as her robe was falling.



Em found the climb down challenging, but she reached the top of the East Dam wall without falling. The water was almost to the top of the dam. Gentle waves hit the wall and reflected back out over the surface, over lapping waves and sparkling in the afternoon sun. Occasional fish heads stuck their noses out and then disappeared. Once, a solidary stalk with an eye raised up above the water level, looked around, and then went back under. Insects skated the water’s surface and some were eaten by the fish heads. She proceeded down the path and was practically on top of the girl she was following before the girl gave her scrutiny. Em smiled at her. She liked the skirt and the matching pink leggings. She was also wearing two shirts of opposing colors, an inner one that fit snugly with long sleeves, and the outer one which hung loosely about her.

“You’re not supposed to be down here,” Ten said.

“You are,” Em pointed out.

“I live here,” Ten said.

“So do I,” Em said.

Ten turned back to her book, too angry to read straight, but not so angry she felt the urge to chase the kid off. Chasing people away rarely worked, which left you with the option of having to physically hurt someone or leaving yourself. She didn’t want to escalate to violence to compel the kid to leave. The fact she thought about violence disturbed her. Fighting was her past. She told herself to let go.

“What’cha doing?” Em asked.

Ten looked at her. “Really?”

“Really what?” Em said, not hearing the sarcasm.

“It’s not obvious?” Ten asked.

“I don’t think I have ever seen someone as shiny as you,” Em said. “You’re even brighter than I am. Oh. He healed you, too. No. Bigger than a healing. Oh. He brought you back!”

“You’re creeping me out,” Ten said.

“I’m sorry. I do that,” Em said, sitting down next to Ten. “Do you think it’s safe to dangle my feet in the water?”

“Sure,” Ten said.

Em kicked out of her shoes, sat down, and put her feet in, kicking lightly.

“I’m pretty sure they don’t eat people,” Ten said.

Em pulled her legs out so quick that she nearly fell backwards. Ten laughed.

“That was mean,” Em said.

“Yeah,” Ten agreed. “I’m mean. That’s your invitation to leave.”

“I can’t, yet. I want to know what you’re doing,” Em said.

“I’m reading,” Ten said.

“Really?” Em asked.

Ten got really serious and spoke slowly as if speaking to a moron. “This is a book. It has words. People read them.”

“Does it have an auditory interface?” Em asked.

“No. Do you know why I came down here?” Ten asked.

“To read?” Em asked.

“Yes. You know why I came down here to read?”

“No,” Em said.

“Because it was quiet and I need quiet to read,” Ten said.

“Oh,” Em said. She watched Ten as she continued with her process.

Ten closed the book. “What?!”

“Are you finished reading?”

“No. But I can’t read when you’re staring at me,” Ten said.

“Me personally, or people in general?” Em asked.

Ten sighed. “What do I have to do to make you go away?”

Em considered. “I don’t want to go away. I like you.”

Ten blinked. “I don’t understand.”

Em shrugged. “What’s to understand?”

“Why don’t you go play with someone your own age?” Ten asked.

“Because, they don’t get me,” Em said. “Did you know, no one here knows who Flumox the Interloper is?”

“Well, that’s regional,” Ten said.

“Regional?”

“Yeah, it’s a holographic series that only plays on Axxila, southern region,” Ten said.

“So, you know Flumox?” Em said.

“I use to watch it when I was your age,” Ten said.

“I brought recordings of it, but my player isn’t working,” Em said. “Mom doesn’t know why.”

Ten studied the girl for a moment. She saw nothing remarkable. No lights. No mystery.

“He healed you?”

“G? Yeah. That’s why I am here,” Em said.

“And you see things?” Ten asked.

“Yeah,” Em said.

“Like what?” Ten said.

“Mostly lights, especially around people, animals, plants. Sometimes around objects, especially if someone uses it a lot,” Em said.

A car rose up over the side of the dam. Two security officers, looking very unhappy, scrutinized the two girls. “What are you kids doing here?”

“What’s it look like we’re doing?” Ten asked.

The officer on the passenger side exited the vehicle, joining the girls on the wall. “Come on. We’ll take the lift up,” he said.

“There’s a lift?” Em asked.

“You didn’t know that?” the officer asked.

“I followed her down the side of the mountain,” Em said.

The officer looked towards Sister One. “You both climbed down that?” he asked, pointing. He sighed. “You know I am going to have to report this to your parents.”

“My parents own this place,” Ten said.

“Oh? So you’re Ten,” he said, as if that explained everything. “Come on. There’s a storm coming and this area isn’t safe.”

Ten and Em got up and followed the officer to the entrance of a lift that was cut directly into the rock face exposed at the top of the dam. The car the officer arrived in continued on its inspection of the dam wall.



Isho entered, followed by three Wookies. Emmer and Corissa stood to greet them. The tallest one, from the cafeteria the days before, introduced herself as Shariva. She introduced her daughter Cheeri, who was the equivalent of an adolescent, though technically older than a human. Cheeri was holding a crate, and simply nodded as Emmer translated Shariva's introduction. Shariva introduced the infant she carried in a papoose near her bosom next. 'Frizzie' seemed to know he was now the subject of discussion, and clung tighter to his mom, burying his face into her fur, peaking out with one eye.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Corissa said, indicating they could take the chairs.

Shariva reached into her bag and pulled out three stones. She sat the smallest one on her side of Corsica's desk, and then proceeded to balance the second one on the first, and then finally balanced the third on top of the second, providing an example of balance without apparent symmetry.

"Wow," Corissa said.

Emmer translated for Shariva. "She says these river stones called to her, and this gift will bring you peace," he said.

"It's a lovely gift, but I doubt it will bring me peace," Corissa said. Even she understood the questioning bark of the Wookie. "I will be worried I or someone will knock them down and I won't be able to balance them."

Shariva chuckled, taking the seat, sitting on the edge. Cheeri rolled her eyes, impatient with the social activity. She issued a complaint about the weight she was carrying and Shariva responded back. Emmer politely didn't translate the exchange.

"I'm sorry, what?" Corissa asked.

Emmer faced Shariva. "May I translate," he asked.

Shariva invited him to translate anything spoken. He thanked her.

"Cheeri was complaining about the weight she carried and was wondering if this conversation would last much longer. Shariva advised her that if she was complaining, she should continue to bear the weight for a while more," Emmer said.

"She could set it down if she wants," Corissa invited.

Shariva responded.

"She says it is milk for G, but she was unable to find him this morning," Shariva said.

Corissa sat down. "Yes, well, neither was I. I wanted him to join us for this meeting."

Cheeri made a snide comment. Emmer translated. "She thinks he's weird."

Corissa had to agree. "Indeed. I wonder what you find weird about him though."

Cheeri grumbled something, and Shariva smacked the back of her daughter's head.

Emmer managed not to laugh, but couldn't hide the amusement on his face. Corissa was not happy and prompted Emmer to explain what just occurred.

"I don't know if I can translate this one," Emmer said, hoping for an out.

"Well, do your best," Corissa directed.

"Cheeri says she has never known an adult to drink milk, and struggles to discern if G is mother's lover or new baby," Emmer explained.

Corissa seemed a little angry. “I don’t know what to say about that,” Corissa said. “However, I do feel it necessary to inform you that this community will not tolerate child abuse. Though corporal punishment is not banned, hitting a child in the head would be considered an offense, one in which you have just committed in front of me and one of my chief security officers.”

Emmer was suddenly very tense, as if he was expecting a fight. When Shariva didn’t respond right away, he felt it necessary to jump in with an explanation: “Ms. Fite,” he said formally. “Wookies are not human. Our social rules don’t apply to them.”

“I will not tolerate child abuse in my community,” Corissa affirmed.

“And I assure you, that exchange you just witnessed was not abuse. That was a love tap. Wookies play rough. They tussle, they scratch, they bite, and if they played with humans the way they play with each other, the human would be in the infirmary or the morgue, but Wookies have thick hides and hard heads, so what you might think is harm is barely a tickle. Wookies are much more touch oriented, more physical with each other, than your most affectionate group of humans.”

Corissa didn’t back down. “I get that there may be a social and cultural difference that doesn’t translate across species line, but I don’t like what I saw, and since this community is primarily human, no one else would get the distinction you’re trying to make, and I don’t want our population emulating Wookie disciplinary techniques.”

Shariva joined the conversation. It was a lengthier response, and she prodded Emmer when she had finished, giving him a gentle tap. It was clearly not the same kind of tap she had given her daughter. “She says,” Emmer translated, carefully considering his words. “I can adapt to human social rules within a public venue. You are also free to interview my child if you believe she is being harmed. In fact, as a mother, I would expect you to do no less.” Cheeri got behind her mother, as if she were suddenly wanting protection. “But I assure you, the only thing you will find is an unhappy teenager. She is mad, because she had to leave her home world and friends. She is angry at our extended family, as no one would take her in, forcing her to go with me. She is mad at G because she doesn’t understand the nature of our relationship. Consequently, she speaks out of turn and with irreverence about things she doesn’t understand, and which I am obligated to correct.”

“And, what is your relationship with Preston?” Corissa asked.

Emmer swallowed, but translated: “That is none of your business.”

Corissa leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms. “I don’t think you’re being here is such a good idea.”

“Are you asking us to leave?” Emmer translated.

Corissa thought long and hard about that. “No. I am merely expressing my concerns that we are not compatible.”

Emmer listened, asked her to rephrase, and then nodded. “She wants clarity. Are you restricting her movement to her home?”

“No. I’m not saying that either,” Corissa said. “Clearly she has demonstrated that she is useful. She helped out with the kids yesterday. But I wanted this conversation because I don’t understand something, and I need clarity. Those kids don’t speak Wookie, and yet, to a one, when you called them out, they lined up and obeyed. Was that a Force command?”

Shariva chuckled. Frizzie imitated. She scratched behind his ears as she explained.

“No,” Emmer said. “She merely spoke to the heart.”

“I don’t understand,” Corissa said.

Listening to the explanation in Wookiee, and translating into an basic equivalent took time, and apparently taxed Emmer's ability with words. "There is a place inside each and every one of us that transcends language. Wild animals can tap into this easy. Sentient beings, well, the younger you are, the more likely you can tap into it, but adults build walls to survive socially and forget there is an external world that our eyes don't see. Sometimes, during a crisis, it can be accessed with less effort. I addressed their heart and they knew the rightness of it, they responded to the rightness of it. That's all."

Corissa mused over explanation. "So, it's not a Force skills?"

"All skills are a manifestation of the Force," Shariva said through Emmer. "Walking through a hunting pack of Rathtar's without fear because you know you can't be harmed, that is not the Force per se- but that is living with-in the Force."

Corissa put a knuckle to her lips as she tried to understand this.

Shariva continued. "And you wonder, can you learn this, but it is not something that can be learned, it is only something to be experienced. Walking through a fire without being burned, walking through a battle without even a scratch, these things are experienced by people who are in their right minds, not in the past, not in the future, but someone who is truly present in the here and now."

Shariva made a sign to her daughter and she could put the crate on the floor.

"If you will excuse us, I promised my daughter a walk in the forest," Shariva said through Emmer. "Please, deliver this crate to G, with my love."

Shariva got up and headed for the door, her daughter following her. Emmer and Corissa stood up, but there was no farewell, even though Corissa came around the desk to shake hands. The door simply closed behind the Wookies. Corissa sighed.

"I guess I didn't make a new friend today," Corissa said.

Emmer shrugged. "You didn't make an enemy," Emmer said.

"How can you be sure?" Corissa asked.

"Well, she didn't rip your arms off," Emmer offered.

"Isn't that just a rumor people use to scare folks?" Corissa said.

"No," Emmer assured her. "You confronted her, that was brave, or stupid, but either way, you passed a test. If you engage a Wookiee like a Wookiee, you can expect to be treated like a Wookiee, but because humans are frail, compared to Wookies, you are more likely to be injured. Just something to keep in mind."

"That makes sense," Corissa said. "How do you know so much about them?"

"You don't want to know," Emmer said.

"I wouldn't have asked if I didn't want to know," Corissa said.

Emmer looked her square in the eye and spoke his past, unapologetically. "I use to hunt them," he admitted. He seemed cold and distant, clearly not wanting to revisit his past. "Will there be anything else?"

Corissa was stunned. "No. You're dismissed," she said. She remained standing, staring at nothing specific even after Emmer had gone. She shouldn't have been surprised. They were all ex troopers, having been employed by a Sith Lord. That was his past. And they all had pasts. She turned to go back to her chair and was confronted by the river stones, mysteriously suspended, as if they should fall at any moment. Was everything so precariously balanced? She wondered



Min, senator Dayo's personal assistant, found G as he was emerging from one of the sky-bridges that connected the Three Sisters. He was running, followed by Freya. She waved at him, and he deviated his course and slowed down. She was taller than the average Asian, with the unusual beauty that was almost always evidenced in mixed genetic heritage. Her hair was shoulder length and straight.

"It's nice to see you," G said, a little out of breath.

"Oh, please tell me you remember me," Min said.

"Of course," G laughed. "How can I forget you? Please tell me you're here for a visit."

"I'm sorry," Min said. "But the Senator has asked me to collect you. I've been told not to return without you and to tell you it is of the most urgent of business. Further, I am to solicit your cooperation by any method possible." That last bit was given with a coy smile, so subtle that he completely missed the overture as an invitation.

He considered his obligations for the day. "Freya, do we have anything pressing?"

"Yes..." Freya began.

"Oh, good, nothing we can't miss then," G said, waving her off. "Do you suppose it will be okay if I'm sweaty and out of breath?"

"My ship comes with amenities, if you'd like to use them," Min said. "And if you would like assistance, the autopilot is functioning."

"Oh, then, I guess we shouldn't keep the Senator waiting. I won't go without Freya, though," G said.

"I wouldn't dream of asking you to," Min said, taking his arm.

Min lead him to her ship. Freya followed, trying to point out that he did have a meeting with Corissa, and then there were the other pilgrims who were expecting to see him today. G assured her that things would be alright, even as the door to the ship was closing behind them.

"Of course, G," Freya said, almost resigned. "However, I am wondering if we should evaluate you for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder."

"Because?" he asked.

"Because it seems you are frequently distracted from our daily goals by a pretty face," Freya said.

Min glanced back from the flight deck controls. "You think I'm pretty?" Min asked.

"Of course," Freya said. "By any human standard, in terms of proportions and symmetry. and in health, absolutely, but the biggest measure is G's reaction, which includes increased heart rate not explained by the fact we were running, and the dilation of his eyes, change in pulmonary function..."

"Am I really having that much of an effect on you?" Min asked.

"In my defense, I've been isolating for the last five years, and I did have a reaction to you on our last meet, but had had to repress it because I was still figuring out the nuances to social interaction, and well, um," G began, but found himself at a loss for words.

Once the ship was on course, she turned on the autopilot and swiveled her chair to face him. The level of attention she was radiating would have probably overwhelmed many men. Her body stance was open and inviting.

"The Senator did make it very clear that I was to give you every incentive to get you to come with me," Min said.

"Does it mean what I think it means?" G asked.

"It means whatever you want it to mean," Min said.

"Would you hold out your hand?" G asked.

Min held out her hand. G took it, examining it. He reached into a pocket and pulled out a tester, which he touched to her finger, then clicked it. She had not been prepared for the pin prick. She pulled her hand back, sucking her thumb in an unsexy way.

“What the fuck?” Min asked, examining her thumb. It wasn’t even bleeding any more but it had been so unexpected that it was irritating.

G held up the device so she could see. He spelled out the results for her. “99.843 percent likelihood that we’re not related,” G said.

“You had doubts?” Min asked.

“When it comes to who I am attracted to, um, yeah,” G said. “What do we have, an hour flight time?”

“Why are we still talking?” Min asked.



Senator Trish Dayo met G as he descended the ramp to her upper, terrace home. Freya followed, subtly scanning the area for threats. Min emerged, but Dayo waved her off. Min bowed and disappeared back into the ship, with previous instructions to wait and escort G back.

“Thank you for coming on such short notice,” Dayo said.

“My pleasure, I assure you,” G said.

“And I am so pleased you were willing to wear the clothes I provided,” Dayo said. “I’m so tired of the other outfit.”

Dayo closed the distance and kissed him, and then took his arm to lead him inside. Waiting just beyond the door, standing in a circle, were eleven Sisters, three of whom he knew. There was Mar, of the Raining Leave Clan, Jain of the Dreaming River clan, and Cyn, of the singing Mountain clan.

“Hello, Mar,” G began.

“G, would you please step to the center of the circle,” Dayo asked.

G entered the circle, and Dayo closed the space, making the Circle of Twelve. Freya was asked to remain outside the circle, but she was invited to observe.

“Is this an intervention?” G asked.

Mar asked the circle to ‘hold’ and the sisters linked hands. “Preston G Waycaster,” Mar continued. “You are the only male in the last 40 years who has survived the Ritual of Three.”

“And now we’re going for twelve?” G asked, excitedly.

Dayo laughed. Mar, and several other sisters, shot her a look, and she contained herself.

“Because of your survival, because of the quality of the Bloog pearl you provided, we are obligated to provide you a clan, which we intend to honor through making Corissa the matriarch,” Mar said. “If she accepts, we will guarantee you, your family line will always have a home here. You, however, must leave Dathomir.”

The confusion on G’s face was telling. He didn’t attempt to leave the center of the circle, but he did turn, so he could see that all twelve were serious about this. They were in alignment.

“But,” he said, turning back to Mar. “I’ve made this my home. I wish to stay.”

“You are a Jedi of extraordinary abilities,” Mar explained. “And you are a threat.”

“You know I would never harm you or this planet,” G argued.

“No, but the people who would recruit you or see you dead would,” Mar explained. “The First Order destroyed an entire solar system to take out the Senate. They won’t hesitate to take out one planet to get to you when they awaken to the fact you are indeed a threat.”

Dayo spoke up, perhaps the only voice of dissent within the circle. “Mar, the big gun was destroyed. What we are asking is a bit extreme, considering.”

“There will always be another big gun,” Mar said. “But even without a big gun, a fleet of Star Destroyers bombing the planet from orbit until they capture him or kill him and all who love and serve him is a very real possibility.”

“Please. These technological terrors people keep inventing are no match for the Force. I could raise my hands and stop this world from turning. I could pinch my thumb and index fingers together and cease all nuclear fission in the star and watch it collapse to the size of a planet,” G said. “I say that not as a threat to you, but to assure you I could stop a fleet of Star Destroyers from attacking this world.”

“But would you?” Cyn asked.

“Of course,” G said.

“Then why didn’t you stop the big gun from destroying the Senate?” Jain asked.

G hesitated. “That’s complicated,” he answered.

“I told you he knew!” Cyn snapped.

“Why didn’t you stop it?” Mar demanded.

“It wasn’t my mission,” G said.

“That’s not good enough,” Cyn said.

G sighed. His hands came up as if trying to formulate an explanation they could understand, and yet, failing that, perhaps hoping to find compassion. He found none and he refocused on an elucidation.

“There are things that happen, that have to happen, that I have no authority over. You all know how healing works. I can’t heal without the permission of the person needing healing. It’s the same whether we’re talking about a person, or a planet, only, with a planet, I have to have permission of the collective consciousness,” G explained. “And trust me, you don’t need me to stop a big gun. If everyone here on this planet collectively decided to make something happen, not even a thousand Sith Lords with a thousand Death Stars could do anything contrary to your will.”

“We want you off our planet,” Mar said.

“My absence will not change what is going to happen,” G said.

“And your being here will?” Cyn asked.

“You’ve seen it, then. This dark thing that’s coming,” Jain asked.

“I have,” G said. “I intended to be here till the end.”

“We want you off our planet,” Mar said again. “Never to return.”

“Never is a long time,” G said. “Is there any condition that might be met that would give me a reprieve?”

“Yeah, save our world from destruction,” Cyn said.

G faced Mar and bowed, humbly. “I will be off the planet in twelve hours and I will honor your request, both in person and in spirit. I will not set foot on this planet again.”

“I told you he wouldn’t save us,” Cyn said.

“Be gone,” Mar said, and released the hands of the sisters to either side of her, and faced away. “Be gone,” said the sisters to either side of her said, releasing the hand to either side, and turning to face away. In this fashion, each dropped a hand and faced away, requesting his absence. Dayo had tears in her eyes, and hesitated just a fraction longer than Jain, but she was the last to commit. “Be gone,” Dayo said, whispering. Once Dayo turned her back to him, she and made an opening so that he was able to leave the circle and depart. He did so without

looking back, which was part of the custom, but an accident on his part. He also didn't want them to see that he was experiencing emotions.

Freya studied the circle, trying to understand people, then hurried to catch up with G. She entered the ship to see Min ministering to him.

"What's wrong, what happened?" she asked, concerned.

"Take me home, please," G asked.

"Sure, okay," Min said, and quickly had them airborne.

G stared out the window, watching the terrain.

"Is there anything I can do?" Min asked.

G left the terrain and found her eyes. "Would you like to come with me?" he asked.

"Come with you?"

"I'm going to leave Dathomir," he said.

"Where are you going?" she asked, confused.

"I don't know, yet," G said.

"I don't understand. Look, what we did was fun, and it is part of my function that I serve the senator's guest, and I would gladly play again with you if you want, but that's all that was, just play, just service. Dathomir's my home. I don't want to leave it," Min said.

"I'm confused," G said. "I thought we..."

"Connected? Oh yeah, but," Min said, and then groaned, taking his hand. "Oh. You were being genuine."

"I'm still confused," G said. "All intimacy is genuine."

"Oh, honey, of course it is, and, it isn't. You understand what I'm saying, right?" Min asked.

He squeezed her hand and bowed. "Thank you for the lesson," he said.

"I'm sorry if I..." Min began.

"No. This is on me. I accept responsibility," G said, and turned back to the terrain.

Chapter 7

“This is love: to fly toward a secret sky-
to cause a hundred veils to fall each moment.
First to let go of life. Finally, to take a step without feet.”
Rumi

Min hovered on the threshold of her ship, not getting out, but apparently having emotions about how she and G were parting and wanting to do or say something that might mitigate the emotions, but she knew that was not possible. G waved politely; the love and smile in his eyes and face were still genuine, which only exasperated Min’s personal angst. She closed the door and the ramp made its way up.

“Freya,” G said, pausing only to acknowledge a ramp worker who wanted them to move towards a safety line so the next ship might descend. “Would you go and collect my things from the cave. Specifically, I want my clothes, my saber collection, and the diamond remains. Bring them to the Dragon’s Tooth.”

“Gladly,” Freya said, choosing to be informal. “May I assume I will be traveling with you?”

“Absolutely,” G said. Then he thought about it. “Do you want to?”

“Absolutely,” Freya said.

“Great,” G said. “If you see Jordeen, ask her to come to the Dragon’s Tooth. I’m going to start prepping her for travel. Oh, and if see you Findit, tell him them same thing. And Red.”

Freya bowed and departed on her mission. G turned to witness a Star-runner settling into the spot where Min’s ship had dropped him off, only the allotted space wasn’t capable of containing it all. The pilot had been thoughtful enough to put the flight-deck overhanging the cliff, leaving only the landing gear on the pad. The rear ramp descended after the engines went quiet. The pilot emerged, stretching, smiling up at the sun. His clothing was simple, trousers, loose shirt not tucked in, and a jacket. His side arm rode low on his thigh. G went to meet the pilot and introduced himself.

“Oh, nice to meet you, Master Waycaster,” he said. “Name’s Nicolas Drimmer, but call me Nick.”

“How’d she fly?” G asked.

“Oh, she’s a dream. I had to replace a couple batteries to get it going, and I would recommend changing all of them out, and maybe servicing some of the static capacitor relays, but other than that, this is as good as the day it rolled off the assembly line,” Nick said. “It still has that new ship smell.”

“Anything you didn’t like?” G asked.

“Well, I’m not too fond of the interior cosmetics,” Nick said, honestly. “Someone updated that, and recently. Too girly for my taste.”

“Well, thank you. The rest of your money will be deposited into your account,” G said.

“Great, thanks,” Nick said. “Any chance you need a pilot around here? I’ve been between jobs for a while, now.”

“I don’t know. Track down a guy name Emmer, or a lady by the name of Corissa Fite,” G said. “And if you’re hungry, the cafeteria is free. Take that tube down, and then follow the directory.”

“Oh, wow, thanks,” Nick said, slapping him on the arm and then heading away.

G began a ‘walk around’ of the One-Note, mostly admiring its condition considering it had been ‘mothballed’ in space for a long time. Of course, ‘mothballed’ in interstellar space, near a rarely inhabited space station by some eccentric, wealthy owner, who was known to be a hoarder, meant that the odds were good it was going to be found in pristine conditions. The ship had no special identifying marks, nothing that said the owner had done anything to it other than stashed it, which got G to wondering how many stashes this man had out between the stars, waiting for whatever contingency or emergency he imagined that might happen to him. Hoarding was part neurosis, but given the constant wars, it was also a legitimate drive to protect one’s self interest, if you had the means. Of course, no amount of money would ever prevent the one certainty. Death. No way around that. Death would always come for physical beings, as it did for Gero Running, and now all of his known stashes were being sold by the state for pure profit, due to no family heirs. Except the ones no one knew about. Having extra, secret families on the side came from the same drive to have multiple stashes of back up supplies, safeguarding against the day even love runs out.

“Thank you, Gero,” G said, patting the ship. “This will be appreciated.”

The Ramp Manager, Plao, approached G. “Mr. Waycaster, we’re not really sure what you want us to do with this ship. We need this space, since we scheduled a lot of incoming supplies. The garage is full, so we don’t have room for her there, and Corissa is adamant we can’t park in the valley.”

G nodded. “Bring up the Dragon’s Tooth, I’ll be taking her out for a spin. You can park the One Note in my spot,” G offered. It would still require some shifting of ships to get it in, but it could be done. In the distance, the taller Sister drew his attention and he wondered about making another hangar there, inside the mountain. But it was no longer his to dream about.

“You’re traveling?” Plao asked.

“Mission thing. Top secret,” G said, winking.

“Okay,” Plao said, and went away yelling orders at his men.



The Dragon’s Tooth, previously owned by Admiral Alarna Byrne, aka G’s mother, was a Fury Class Imperial Interceptor. Its solar panels glistened in the brief sunlight following an intermittent storm that left the ships, the people, and the tarmac wet. Even though his mother hadn’t technically given it to him, he had chosen to keep it, which was bizarre because he had not intended to ever use it. Maybe there was a little Gero Runner in him, too. Unlike the One-Note, though, it had been collecting dust over the last five years, pushed off to a far corner in the underground garage, and had probably been a pain in the ass to retrieve, shuffling ships in the process. His bio-father had asked for it, but G had vetoed and everyone backed him up. His bio-father and his wife were taken and dropped off on Tatoine, their last known home of residence, which had likely changed in the proceeding five years because they were people of interest for old war atrocities and their cover had been blown. Not that anyone would really be looking for them given the current crisis of having lost the Galactic Senate.

Jordeen and Ten approached together. R8-B7, affectionately known as Red, headed up the ramp with an anti-grav skid following him.

“Wow, going out?” Ten asked.

“Yep. Big mission, top secret,” G said, winking.

“It won’t be if you keep saying that,” Ten said.

“Sorry we’re late,” Jordeen entered the conversation. “I found a note from Freya. You wanted to see me?”

“I wanted to let you know I’m leaving,” G said.

“Corissa know?” Jordeen asked.

“Does it matter?” Ten asked. “It’s not like she’ll miss him. I’m glad you’re going. It’s time you get out of the cave and live your life.”

“I was living quite happily in the cave, Ten,” G said.

“If that were true, you wouldn’t have left the cave,” Ten argued.

“You are so smart,” G said, ruffling her hair. “Just one of the many reasons I love you.” He yelled up into the ship. “Freya, would you bring me down that box I set aside, please?”

“Know where you’re headed?” Jordeen asked.

“Not yet,” G said.

“Why not stay till you know?” Jordeen asked.

“I’m being compelled by the Force,” G said.

Jordeen suspected that was a lie, but didn’t challenge; from a certain perspective, it could have been spun as truth, and she didn’t want to argue with G. He had clearly made up his mind. A moment later Freya emerged from the ship carrying a box. G thanked her, took the small, intricately carved box, made from the pink salt rock from his cave, and set it on a nearby crate.

“Since I’m going to be missing your birthday, I want to give this to you now,” G said.

Ten seemed excited. She lifted the box at the apparent seam, but nothing happened. G showed her the trick to unlocking the box, as he didn’t want to wait for her to figure it out, and she lifted it easily. The box itself was a pretty cool gift, she thought. The items inside the box was swaddled in a felt cloth. She unwrapped the item and found a lightsaber and practice orb. She went right for the lightsaber and eased it out of the box, testing its weight, looking for a natural fit to her hand. She peered into the barrel. G redirected the business end of the lightsaber away from her face.

“Careful, it’s not a toy,” G said.

“I know, just curious what it looked like in there,” Ten said. “Why are you giving it to me?”

“Well, I thought you were ready, but if you’re going to look down the barrel...” G complained, humorously.

“I’ll try not to let my curiosity get the better of me,” Ten promised.

“In that event, you’re ready to start training,” G said. “Which is why I wanted you to have this.”

“How am I ready? I have not demonstrated any Force abilities,” Ten argued.

“It’s the stark absence of any abilities that is evidence that you are capable,” G explained.

“That makes no sense,” Ten said, the tenor of her voice colored by her grievance. “The absence of something can’t be evidence for something, by definition.”

“Even the most casual glance into a person’s life will reveal evidence of miracles,” G said. “You are so determined to prove to yourself that life is merely mundane that you have created a void of miracles around you. If that isn’t a Force ability, I don’t know what is. Step back and see how it feels. The switch will recognize your fingerprints.”

“So, are you telling me I have discovered a new Force ability?” Ten asked, almost excitedly.

“There are no new Force abilities,” G assured her, almost grumpy as if he had gone over this time and time again. “All things are possible with the Force. The fact that you rarely see or hear something new is simply due to a general lack of creativity, laziness, and disbelief. Umm,” G said, realizing she was paying more attention to the weapon in her hand than what he was saying. She would hear it and understand when she was ready. “Go ahead. Light it up.”

Ten stepped back and activated the lightsaber. It ignited with a loud pop that drew everyone working on the tarmac’s attention. Her face brightened, both figuratively from her excitement, and literally from the illumination of the weapon.

“It’s pink!” Ten said. “How did you know?!”

“That you liked pink? I made that especially for you, sort of,” G said. “If anyone asks, that’s the story we’re sticking to.”

Her smile receded, her eyes indicating she was tracking something internal. It was a sensation that pulsed from the crown of her head to her toes, and down the length of her arms and out her fingertips. “I feel weird.”

“I told you, you’re ready,” G said.

Ten powered down the lightsaber. “I really felt something!” she said.

“Small steps, Ten,” Jordeen said, touching her shoulder.

“But it’s a really large world! How will I ever get anywhere at this rate?” Ten complained.

“When you realize that there is nowhere to go, you will have arrived,” G said.

“I really hate when you say things like that, but I love you. Thank you. Thank you for never quitting on me,” Ten said. She thoughtfully wrapped the Lightsaber and returned it to the box. She then hugged G.

“May I go with you?” she asked.

“Your path lies in a different direction,” G told her.

“But I still need you,” Ten said. “My training isn’t complete.”

“Oh, my little Padawan, haven’t you learned yet? Our training is never complete. Yeah, you will read books written by Jedi and Sith alike, everyone offering goals necessary to prove you’ve arrived. You’re here, you’ve arrived, but that doesn’t mean you are through traveling,” G said.

“I will miss you,” Ten said.

“I’m always with you,” G said. “Keep practicing your dream work, we’ll meet there.”

Ten hugged him again then closed the box, collected her gift, and before she could walk away, G added, “And don’t cut off a limb with the lightsaber.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Ten said.

Jordeen and G watched her leave. She had slight bounce in her step, a lightness that suggested a secret joy, something that was easily missed with her mask of cynicism the public was accustomed to. It was apparent to both G and Jordeen that Ten had no idea just how far she had traveled in five years, overcoming past severe neglect and abuse. Her walk, her confidence, her stance, it had all changed.

“I will miss you, too,” Jordeen said, not looking at him.

“Come with?” G offered.

Jordeen smiled up at him, an exercise in peace-breath and sharing, a gentleness coming from her eyes, a sharing of unspoken secrets. “I hate space travel. And, it is probably not wise for me to be cooped up in a spaceship with you,” she said, pinching his arm playfully. “I am happy

here. I've had a reduction of symptoms. I love my students. I will carry on the work you have started."

G kissed her forehead. "Okay."

"I'm going to go now," Jordeen said. She touched his cheek, almost longingly. "I'm going to put together some food and stuff to make tea, so don't leave until I get it back to you. I want you to eat well, if only for a moment."

"I will eat well. Freya's got my back," G said. "And when that lazy, piece of work, Findit finally shows up, tell him he belongs to Ten for now own, and if he doesn't mind her, I'll scrap him."



Corissa found G deliberating over a star chart so intently he didn't even seem to hear Freya give her introduction. Corissa stood there, hands on her hip, waiting to be acknowledged. When G did look up, he seemed surprised.

"How long have you been there?" G asked.

"What kind of Jedi are you that you're impervious to my angry stare?" Corissa demanded.

"Why are you angry?" G asked, as if just realizing she was actually angry.

"You're leaving me?! When I heard you were prepping the Dragon's Tooth, I had to come see for myself. This is for real? Why am I hearing this through the grapevine and not from your own mouth?" Corissa asked.

"I'm not leaving you, just Dathomir," G said.

"I don't see the difference," Corissa said.

"It's necessary for me to complete my mission," G said. He saw no reason to tell her that her soon to be sisters were asking him to leave. It would be a distraction for her, blocking her from pathways and options.

"Your mission?!" Corissa stated sarcastically. "Which mission? The mission to chase down this illusive great evil? Your mission to kill blood-hunters? Your mission to sleep with as many alien species as possible?"

"The first one," G said, unperturbed by her jab.

"There is no great evil. The only evil in the galaxy is the conglomerate of all the petty, bad things people do, say and think. You can't point to one thing and blame that for all the evil in the Universe. It's on us," Corissa said.

"Oh, yay you. Very profound," G applauded figuratively.

"So stay," Corissa said.

"It's necessary for me to leave," G said.

"I need you," Corissa pleaded.

"Oh, I wish you had said I want you or I love you," G said, pouting.

"So, you would have stayed if I said I love you?" Corissa asked.

"I would have considered it," G said. "You haven't needed me in the last five years. So I don't see how being in space is any different than me being in the cave. You will still have the same amount of access to me, because I am in your heart. But hearing you say you 'need' me increases my resolve to leave if only to demonstrate to you that you don't need me. You won't cease to exist if I'm gone. You might actually thrive. But wanting me, loving me, well, that is choice, not coercion. And I want to be loved, not needed."

“Coercion?! You think I’m trying to emotionally manipulate you into staying?!” Corissa said. “Tear your ass. Be gone. You’re no better than any other man I’ve ever met, so take off, enjoy your life, hope it’s fun. But don’t come crawling back here thinking I’m going to take you in.”

Corissa stormed off. G stared after her, confused.

“If you would like some tea, I would be happy to make it for you,” Freya said.

“Umm? Oh, no. Not now. Have Red close the hatch, we’ll be departing in ten minutes,” G said.

“Where are we going?” Freya asked.

G gave a gesture that just said ‘up’ and suggested ‘I don’t know’ at the same time.



Lestelle’s stepped under the skylight of her open, door-less shower, and activated multiple jets. The warmth of the water was preset to her liking, which made her mornings easier. She turned her face towards the upper spray, washing the sleep out of her eyes. Brushing her wet hair back with her hands, squeezing it into one strand that she drug in front of her, she had a sudden, unexpected upwelling of joy. She turned her back towards one of the side jet to let it massage her back.

“Good morning, Lestelle,” G said.

Lestelle opened her eyes, saw G standing in front of her, and screamed. She caught her breath. “Damn it, G! I asked you not to pop in like that anymore.”

“No. You asked me not to spy on you. I don’t understand why this is suddenly a problem. I’ve seen you naked, but if not popping in is a condition of our new relationship, it would be easier to know you were in the shower if I could spy on you just a little...”

Nolasco entered, weapon drawn, wearing only trousers. G turned, bowing. Lestelle escalated.

“Damn it! I am in the shower!” Lestelle shouted, only now covering her breasts. She would have had to walk past G to get her towel, but that would have just exposed herself more to her uncle.

“Good morning, uncle,” G said. “It’s nice to see you again.”

Nolasco’s eyes went from his niece to his nephew then back to his niece, before social compulsion made him turned to face the other way. “Sorry. I heard you scream, and well, sorry.”

“Both of you, out, now!” Lestelle demanded.

“Come on, G,” Nolasco said. “I’ll make us something hot to drink.”

“I would like that, thank you,” G said, following him out.

“And close the door!” Lestelle yelled after them.

G waved a hand, using the Force to close the door behind him. Nolasco started a brew and then headed towards the guest room. G followed him and watched him shift through an assortment of well folded clothes till he found the shirt he wanted, a pull over that he put on in one easy motion. When his head pulled through the shirt, Nolasco was startled by how close G was standing, and had to remember G’s boundaries were pretty much nonexistent. G had the social awkwardness of someone who suffers from autism spectrum disorder and was simultaneously home schooled.

“I guess you’re wondering why I’m here,” Nolasco said, heading back to the kitchen, awkwardly going around him.

“Nope,” G said, following.

Nolasco pointed to a chair, indicating he wanted G to sit. G complied and gladly accepted the hot drink. He held the cup gently, as if the cup was fragile, momentarily holding an open palm, face down, above the cup as if he were praying over it. Satisfied, he put the same hand underneath the cup, and then sipped it.

“Why are you here?” Nolasco asked.

Before G could respond, Lestelle entered wearing a robe that fell to her mid-thigh, flaring open over the right thigh, tied tightly at the waste by a belt. She walked while towel drying her hair. “Why are you here?” she asked.

“I was wondering if I might take you up on your offer to come stay with you on Happes for a while,” G said.

“Now is not a good time,” Lestelle said, pointing to a cup of brew. Nolasco handed her his cup and started a new batch.

G seemed disappointed.

“What’s going on, G,” Lestelle said.

“I just thought a change in scenery might help me accomplish my mission,” G said.

“Still can’t locate your great, lurking evil?” Nolasco asked.

“Maybe it’s Snoke,” Lestelle offered.

“It’s not Snoke,” G said.

“You say that with such certainty,” Nolasco said. The machine alerted him the next cup of brew was ready for consumption. He took it out and brought it to the table. He flipped the chair around backwards and sat down. “If you wanted to take out an evil, he seems like the guy.”

“Snoke is not my mission,” G said. “He is evil, arrogant, so predictable that he is fairly moronic, but not old enough.”

“Have you seen a holo of him?” Lestelle asked. “He looks pretty old to me.”

“Not old enough,” G insisted. He stared into his cup as if the answer might be there. If there were any dregs waiting to be read, they lay much deeper than he was able to get to. “And too publicly visible. The person I’m looking for has to be minimally two hundred years old, incredibly intelligent, and way outside the lime light. Whoever it is, they’re playing for a longer game. Snoke is too short sighted to be anything other than a tool, like a badly planted plot contrivance.”

“That could be a clever ploy on his part,” Nolasco offered, raising his cup as if saluting to that theme.

“It’s not Snoke,” G assured them.

“Why don’t you go stay with Priya?” Lestelle asked.

“My presence might jeopardize her mission. She is straddling the fence, secretly trying to win friends with the resistance, but entertaining some First Order folks in hopes of finding a weakness she or the resistance can exploit.”

“Double agent,” Nolasco whistled. “That’s a dangerous game.”

“Her past makes it plausible that she could win allegiance with the First Order if she need to,” G said. It wouldn’t take much effort for people to imagine Priya killed her Master and his Sith Lord in an effort to move up in the world. Though she wasn’t encouraging the rumor, she wasn’t denying it, either, which, no matter which way it went, made her look all the smarter.

“You’re okay with that?” Lestelle asked.

“It was her idea. She’s an adult,” G said.

“So are you. You could have taken out the super weapon before it destroyed the senate,” Lestelle said.

“That’s been pointed out to me,” G said, sighing.

“Why didn’t you?” Nolasco asked.

“It really wasn’t on my radar till after it was used,” G said.

“You were looking for a big evil and you missed that?” Lestelle asked.

G frowned, not from their questions, but because he was trying to understand it himself. He really didn’t have a complete answer, other than, had it been his mission, things would have gone much differently. He had to close his eyes and focus, reminding himself that the pain he had experienced when those billions of sentient life forms, plus all the supporting life forms, had died was nothing more than ‘information.’ He wavered between wanting to grieve and wanting to celebrate, for those who were once alive were now one with the Force, indeed had never left the Force. The struggle he felt was no doubt due to the fact the ‘information’ of people dying translated into pain. It had been much worse than when the life on his home moon had been wiped out by a supernova. This batch of information had come with an evil taint that pursued the victims into death, making their entry into the afterlife all the more disorientating. The rays themselves had sent shockwaves through the Force that even a non-Force sensitive person could feel, so while many people looked up and saw what was coming, most people only had an awakening that something dreadful was about to occur. If the equation ever changed where the death of one felt like the death of billions, only then would the wars stop...

“Not only was it a big weapon, it had to have had technology capable of manipulating the Force. How else can you explain a weapon that can devour an entire star and turn it into lethal rays? How else can you explain that people were able to see the destruction of an entire solar system, regardless of their position in the galaxy? Even if you missed it before it fired its first shot, you couldn’t have been oblivious after the shot. You are connected to the Force. You would have felt a sun dying, you would have felt the rays traveling through space, you would have known there was battle raging. You would have felt the disturbance of a 100 billion sentient beings crying out in pain,” Nolasco said.

G had tears in his eyes as he stared into his brew. “I felt it,” G said, quietly. “I felt it all, even the death of the star.”

“And still, you didn’t take out the big gun,” Nolasco said.

“It wasn’t my mission,” G said, persisted quietly.

“Maybe we’re hammering you a little hard,” Lestelle said. “But you can’t be as powerful as you are and neutral and not expect social fall out. People are going to be seeking you out for answers. You’re going to have to do better.”

“Thank you for the lesson,” G said, sounding genuinely grateful, but quietly mourning. He stared into the liquid in his cup, still searching for answers. He had asked these very questions to his own personal spirit guides, and none had offered him anything useful. Ben was platitudes, as always. Only Yoda had offered a kindness, touching his hand as if to communicate he understood, almost as if he had experienced similar. Remembering this act of kindness made him smile, especially followed by Nolasco’s next statement.

“So, if this great evil of yours has to be old, maybe it’s someone from Yoda’s species. He was really old, wasn’t he?” Nolasco offered.

“Or a Wookiee. They live a long time,” Lestelle said, happy to be shifting the subject.

“How long do Hutts live?” Nolasco asked.

“Maybe I should go stay with Shade for a while,” G said, as he considered Hutts as a possible solution set to the great evil. “I mean, she’s not as bad as people make her out, but bad people do seek her out, and if I want to find bad, I need to at least play bad.”

“Where is she?” Nolasco asked.

“Zeltros,” G said.

“That can’t be good,” Lestelle said.

“How so?” G asked.

“Zeltros is so committed to hedonistic principles that not giving in to pleasure could be considered a criminal offense,” Lestelle explained. “Shade, if I recall, is a sex addict. That’s the last place she should be going.”

“Actually, it’s the opposite. The best cure for sexual addiction is over indulgence,” G said.

“That doesn’t sound right. The more I get the more I want,” Lestelle said. She blushed, realizing who she had just admitted this in front of.

“Nolasco, when were you most able to satisfy your libido?” G asked.

“Right before I got married,” Nolasco said.

“And when did the frequency decline?” G asked.

“Right after marriage,” Nolasco admitted. “Pretty much came to a dead halt after the first child.”

“I think your sample size is too low to make a statistical conclusion,” Lestelle said, not exactly happy with what she was hearing.

“Really? It’s in all the medical literature, and certainly in any fiction you can access. You never find any good fiction with hot married couples that have been doing it for years and still going strong,” G said.

“Fiction, written by men, to entertain men,” Lestelle pointed out.

“I think G is right about this,” Nolasco said.

“Of course, because you’re both men, and both incorrigible,” Lestelle said.

“That’s not fair. I’ve changed,” Nolasco said.

“Pff, right. So, G, hypothetically, you’re saying that in order for us not to be attracted to each other, we have to get married?” Lestelle asked.

“Well, of course not,” G said.

“Then that means your premise isn’t true,” Lestelle said.

“Well, no, you just forgot to factor in that I am more likely to engage in something that is considered taboo, just because,” G said.

Lestelle put her head in her hand. She sighed. “Which, is another good reason why you shouldn’t stay with me,” Lestelle said. “And you can’t just keep popping in without warning.”

“I don’t know how you expect me to accomplish that,” G said. He met her eyes no more intently than he ever did, but she shivered none the less. “If I reach out to you telepathically, just to say your name, or alert you I’m here, or even on the way, it will be the same as if I stepped up behind you and touched your shoulder. You can’t avoid that joy which only emanates from love and peace. Nor can we undo that level of intimacy we engaged in. It’s what brought us together. When you consider how far you have advanced in your Force training with me, if you were really open and tuned into your environment, not only would you have not been startled by my arrival, the recognition of my presence would have been as well received as sunlight on your shoulders, or a gentle breeze caressing you, or an embrace with a kiss on the back of the neck, or all of that altogether simultaneously so that I would have resonated through your entire person to

your core. What I've been trying to tell you, and Daphne, and neither of you seem to be getting, is that when you are one with the Force, there is no separation. Duality is an illusion. Light and Dark is an illusion. Whether I am here, holding your hand, or on the other side of the galaxy, you and I are still and always intimately connected."

Lestelle was silent. She realized her mouth was open and closed it. "I know," Lestelle said, aware that the hair on her arms were standing. She decided not to disclose how much joy she had experienced right before she had opened her eyes and understood the source. "And it's why I need you to stay away from me. Give me space, even if you think it's an illusion, give me space."

G nodded, sat the cup down, and vanished before their eyes. She only briefly met Nolasco eyes as she pushed up from the table and returned to her room.

Chapter 8

“Don't be satisfied with stories, how things have gone with others.
Unfold your own myth.”
Rumi

On hearing what sounded like something breaking, Ten got up to investigate. She found Corissa in the kitchen, tearful, but cleaning up a broken dish. Corissa motioned for her to stay out of the kitchen.

“Would you like some help?” Ten asked.

“No,” Corissa said, minding her mess. She casually wiped her eyes with her sleeves.

Ten was pretty certain she knew why ‘mom’ was tearful, but she didn’t broach the subject. As it was, she had something more pressing and it seemed like it was never going to be a better moment. She scratched an eyebrow.

“Mom, I would like to discuss something with you,” Ten said.

“Now is not a good time,” Corissa snapped.

Ten chewed her lip, pensively. She decided not to back down. “There might not be a better time.”

“Really?” Corissa asked. “Going somewhere?”

“Yeah, actually,” Ten said, mirroring the attitude. “Captain Gregg offered me a navigator’s position on the Sundown for room and board. It’s reasonable for entry level navigator, I can get some experience, and he says, if it works out, he was thinking about getting a second ship and expanding operations, and in that event, I could pilot the Sundown for him.”

Corissa stopped cleaning, but didn’t relinquish the broom. “You’re not leaving,” she said.

“Really? You intend to chain me to my bed? Because I’m pretty sure that’s against the law,” Ten said.

“You’re not sixteen yet and you’re not leaving,” Corissa said flatly.

“No one is going to quibble over a few weeks shy of 16,” Ten said. “Hell, there is early waiver for militia enlistment back home, and given my grades I could be on an officer track.”

“I am quibbling,” Corissa said.

“I would like to leave...”

“Not happening. Forget it,” Corissa said.

Ten closed her eyes, and tried again: “I would like to leave on better terms, but I don’t have any qualms leaving you on bad terms if that’s the way it’s going to be.”

“You ungrateful little wretch,” Corissa said.

Ten clenched a fist, fought back tears. “I sense that you’re angry, and I suspect it’s not about me, but I will not be emotionally manipulated in to staying with you. Your choices are: you can let me go and trust that you have taught me well enough to survive out there, trusting I might choose to come back, or I can break your hold on me and fly and never return. Either way, I’m gone.”

Ten went to her room and shut the door. Corissa slammed the broom stick down on the table in anger. The tip broke, flew back and hit her dead center of the forehead. She nearly fell. She held her head for a moment and then left her apartment. She walked with no purpose, other

than to avoid people. It wasn't too difficult. Fellow pedestrians clearly saw she was in mood and decided to let her be. Even those who hadn't been paying attention felt an uneasiness when she entered within a certain radius of them, causing them to look up and take inventory of their surroundings. Her walk took her up to the spaceport. She was pulled out of her concentration by the site of a Humming Bird. It was painted on the side of a ship, just under a foreign script that spelled out the ship's name. Two things stood out about the bird. She first recognize the specific artistic work as denoting this bird's relevance as a totem, usually the top of a spiritual hierarchy, but most likely a spirit guide, a hint of rainbow edged wings. It reminded her of the bird who had brought her to Ten just in time to rescue her from being killed.

Corissa went up to the foreman. "Where are you going with this?"

"G told us to put it in the Dragon's Tooth spot," the foreman said.

"The OneSong!" Corissa said.

"Yes, Mam. You can read that Trio-script?" the Foreman said.

"Put it back on Pad 2," Corissa said.

"But..."

"Do it. It's direct order," Corissa said. "And then get some techs and astromechs up here. I want every centimeter of this ship scrutinized for flaws."

"Yes, Mam," the foreman said, and turned to his men to put the ship back on Pad 2.

She watched as the men put the ship back on the pad, watched them disconnect the tow gear, listened to a radio asking what the problem was and the explanation, and then walked around the ship. She found tears in her eyes as she examined it, drawing on her years of experience, anticipating problems, but realized she was too emotionally compromised to really be studying the ship. A crew rolled up and began unpacking gear and tools. She sat down on the skiff, watching the techs and R2 units going about their business. She had to wipe the tears from her face hours ago, but eventually she rediscovered her voice and paged Jordeen.

Jordeen answered. "Corissa?"

"Would you do me a favor?"

"You know I will," Jordeen said.

"Would you find a pretense to bring Ten up to the spaceport, to Pad 2. Don't tell her I'm involved, but make it happen. I think I am going to give her an early birthday present."

An hour later, Jordeen and Ten sauntered up. Ten looked the other way, crossing her arms, suspecting Jordeen had tricked her.

"Would you look at me?" Corissa asked.

Ten met her eyes defiantly.

"In addition to not wanting you to leave early," Corissa said. "Was that I didn't want you to leave without your birthday present."

"I don't want anything from you," Ten said.

Corissa nodded. "I'm sorry for what I said earlier. I was wrong. And you were right about a lot of things. Especially about the fact it wasn't about you."

"I accept your apology," Ten said, but her voice still had an edge.

"Would you like to see your present?" Corissa asked.

Ten gave such a subtle shrug it might have been missed by anyone who didn't know her. Corissa gave a slight smile. Time passed, but no one spoke or moved.

"Okay," Ten said. "What did you get me?"

"You don't see it?" Corissa asked.

"See what? Is this a G lesson? The clouds? The sky?" Ten asked.

“Neither the clouds nor the sky’s the limit with this gift,” Corissa said. She nodded towards the ship.

“The Droid? I already have Pink,” Ten said.

“You can be so obtuse sometimes,” Corissa complained.

“Well, there’s nothing else here but this ship,” Ten complained. Her jaw dropped. “The ship?! You’re fucking with me!”

“Language!” Corissa and Jordeen both said.

“No fucking way! The ship? You bought me a ship?!” Ten said.

“Technically, I vetoed the ship,” Corissa said. “But I was led to believe that giving you wings was the best thing for your personal growth.”

Corissa suddenly found herself being embraced, and then just as suddenly dropped as Ten ran up the aft cargo ramp. On hearing her scream, both Jordeen and Corissa ran up the ramp, only to discover Ten had almost ‘peed’ herself from being overjoyed at the paint scheme; the interior was predominantly pink, black, and gold.



G woke to Freya’s gentle touch. He woke easy. She was standing over him. His dreams were fading as he quietly orientated, remembering where he was.

“You said wake you when we’ve arrived. We’re here,” Freya said.

G acknowledged her, shut his eyes for a few more moments, and then got up. He found his way to the flight deck and viewed out the main port. The planet of Kemari was a tiny, bluish green planet, speckled with land in the form of islands. Its minerals were so diffused that the only planetary value came from the biomass, but even that wasn’t considered valuable enough by Galactic Standards to warrant industry, colonies, or traffic. Bio Enc had charted it, labeled it worthless, and offered its coordinates to all its competitors, inviting them to have had it, which had the intended effect of creating a ‘quarantine through disinterest,’ leaving BioEnc the option to return at a later date should they change their mind.

Flying the Dragon’s Tooth was not like flying the Tie Fighters he had owned. Its controls were smooth, fluid, and operated with an ease, whereas the Ties felt more like a workout, fighting the stick. Even as it descended deeper into the atmosphere, the change from space travel to aerodynamics was hardly noticed. The ground filled the entire view port until he leveled out over the Great Marshes of the Kemarian Territories. He knew he had arrived when he came upon a stone ziggurat rising out of the marsh, the product of Jedi Mason going back to a time even before BioEnc, even before the Clone Wars. No one knew what the Jedi had been doing here, and if the Jedi from the Clone Wars knew, they took that secret with them. The flat top pyramid was a solid piece of white marble. He wasn’t even impressed. As a Jedi and a stone mason, he had created much more complicated items. He landed on the ziggurat and powered down the system.

“Freya, I would like you to stay on board, please,” G said, as he got up and headed aft.

“I would like to point out that as your body guard, I am supposed to go with you,” Freya said.

“And I would like to point out, I don’t want to have to go fishing you out of the Marsh, or have to clean you out afterwards,” G said.

“I concede the point and will remain on board till you return,” Freya offered.

Outside the ship, the air was humid, thick, and full of bugs. Though the bugs didn't like him, in general, some of them still tried a bite to determine if he was eatable. The ones that survived without getting squashed didn't make a second pass. Using the Force, he pushed a light field around him that repelled the flying kind. He descended the stone staircase to the marsh itself. Red eyes peered up out of the water at him. Marble slabs led away from the ziggurat, and he followed where they led, a cropping of water based trees. In the shade of the trees, G sat down on the last slab, "criss cross applesauce," or "sitting tailor fashion," or "Indian style," were just some of the ways to describe it, but for him, it was just the simple "mystic pose." The leaves of the tree dropped fresh water, which was interesting, because the Marsh was salt water. The fruit of the tree was uneatable by humans; it would be like biting into a salt lick.

"Alight, Master Windu, per your request, I have arrived, and will await further guidance," G said out loud. If he felt alone, it was because there was a stark absence of either his spirit guides or their opposites, but not a lack of the Force. The prying eyes remained, staring up at him from the water. One of the things he had discovered about the Force was that it felt different when filtered through the lens of alien life forms. The untrained would notice the difference and call it evil, where he simply made the distinction of 'different.'

He closed his eyes. His palms up, hands resting on his legs. A Jawa sized Anura emerged from the water, its motion exaggeratedly slow, as if daring not to be seen even in plain sight. Its eyes were bulbous red orbs, with wire-y yellow slits. Its greasy, slick skin was various shades of green, with blue etchings on the upper legs and arms. The feet were orange, tapering off to red toes. The toes were tiny balloons that could grasp by sticky secretions and suction. It stared at the human, tilting its head. The human didn't move. The Anura pressed forwards, reaching out a long, alien thin arm towards the slab where the human sat. Still the human sat. It proceeded forwards until it was sitting in the human's lap, its hands on the human's shoulders, and its eyes at eye level with the human. Had G opened his eyes, he might have been seriously startled.

The Anura closed its eyes and made contact via the Force.

In a world created by two minds in shared meditation, G and the Anura met. G was submerged in water up to his neck, unsurprisingly naked. The Anura was holding onto him, like a lover bobbing in a pool with her mate. The water was warm and pleasant. There were others in the water, submerged just below the surface, but other than their bodies pressing up against the two entwined beings, they made no effort to interrupt the proceeding ritual. They merely felt or groped or tasted and allowed other more curious to brave closer scrutiny.

"Why are you here, human?" she asked. His voice was pleasant, full of resonance from chambers a human might not have, and yet, it was not a voice made with a physical instrument, but a mental variation of one.

"I was advised to seek out a person named the Collector," G said. Even though he was in the water, he could feel a frothy foam oozing over him, like a sturdy soap lather during a shower.

"I don't suppose you believe in coincidences, do you?" the Anura asked.

"I am a Jedi," G said.

The Collector laughed. "You humans and your titles. Is it not enough that you are plagued with the perversion of accumulating physical stuff, you also suffer the need to carry abstract labels? There are sufficient bugs in the air for none to starve, water enough for drinking, birthing, and playing, and yet you light a million worlds on fire and are still not satisfied," she said. She uncurled her tongue, rolled it across the tip of his chin and tasted his lips. She moved her head in closer and bit at his chin with a toothless mouth, then nuzzled him. "What is it you seek?"

“Do I intuit correctly that you and your kind are non-materialists?” G asked.

“You want to understand how I got the name Collector, as opposed to skipping right to why you’re here?” she asked. She nuzzled his face harder, rubbing her eye on his cheek, spreading her skin’s natural oils across his face, a ritual more substantial than just scent marking. “Like you, I can travel with the mind’s eye. I watch your kind as they hoard trinkets and treasures and trash. I don’t have to house it in a vault to keep track of it.”

G appreciated that. “Perhaps it would be better for you to help me hone my own ‘search and find’ skills,” he offered.

“I will not help you find the evil one,” she said, resolutely.

G was stunned.

“Yes, I know why you are here. Windu tried to solicit my help once, and I told him to go jump in a lake,” she answered. “Why would you suppose I would treat you differently?”

“He said I might get further with you,” G said, not understanding what was meant by that.

“Indeed,” she mused. “He was not as accommodating as you are, would never allow himself to be as intimately entangled. He was far too judgmental for my tastes,” she said, pausing to savor a moment, but was not forthcoming as to whether it was an internal memory, or the sensations of the moment. “And it’s why he always left unsatisfied. Of course, in his defense, when he was here last I was in a male phase of being, and he had a fear of homophobic interaction, or more likely, what that said about him. Labels!”

G realized what the oils and frothing suds clinging to his body were. She tightened her grip on him. He chose not to resist. “I believe the Emperor knew who his enemy was. I have a portion of an artifact, a crystal embedded with a holographic image of the Emperor’s brain. It’s not the whole cube, but all the information is still encoded on the fragment I possess.” He discovered from the mental feedback that she knew the nature of holograms and he didn’t have to explain further. Still, she probed to discover how he knew about such an artifact and she received in full a mental flashback to where he was being held hostage by a computer simulation of the Emperor. The crystal on which the Emperor’s brain had been recorded had fallen and smashed into a thousand pieces. Most of it had been swept up by Priya’s team, placed in a capsule and shot into the nearby star where it was destroyed. Unbeknownst to his friends who had rescued him from both blood-hunters and his mother, he had saved a decent size piece of the crystal, just in case he ever found another interface pedestal that might allow him to access the Emperor’s mind.

“Ummph, talk about a splinter of the mind’s eye,” she said. “I really wish you hadn’t brought that evil to our planet.”

“The Emperor did evil, but the crystal is just a crystal, nothing more than a picture,” G said.

“It’s more than a picture, but even a mere photograph can elicit all sorts of negative vibrations,” she said, the thought of it making her shiver. “You seek a holographic interface pedestal. As my friend Yoda once said, ancient technology it is. You won’t find anyone who can service the tech. You definitely won’t find anyone who can modify it so that you might sift the Emperor’s mind like an electronic library. The human mind is not so easily codified and regurgitated. It’s messy, fibrous, sticky, foamy, webby, oozing, gelatinous, unforgiving, and pervasively tainting. Give up this search for evil. Give up the Emperor’s brain. Stay here with us. Be happy. Swim, eat, mate. We are peaceful and very accommodating.”

“You are most definitely a pleasant distraction,” G agreed.

“I like you, too,” she said. She buzzed her lips, let go of his arm long enough to wipe an eye, and then took hold of his arm again, her thin fingers going all the way round. “You already have access to the dead. Why not just go directly to the Emperor.”

“I have access to some dark characters, but the Emperor is beyond my reach,” G said. It wasn’t a complete answer and he could sense the collector was not satisfied.

“You speak to Vader but not the Emperor?” she asked.

“Vader wasn’t all bad,” G said. “Most people aren’t all bad. He was angry, misguided, but all he wanted was order and justice.”

“You really believe that?” she asked.

G shrugged. “If it’s true that we become that which we hate, or fight, then it would seem the only way to redeem both other and self is through expressions of love and forgiveness. I can do both without condoning evil,” he said, exploring a small tangent that tickled the back of his mind. Was the evil he was seeking outside of his frequency range, the same way the Emperor was, or was he blocked by his neutrality? Again, he wondered if he would have to do something evil to find something evil. Or maybe Priya was right, do something extraordinary good. He wasn’t sure he was capable of engaging in true evil; assuming a truly wicked deed required an innocent victim, he was very doubtful. He had no qualms of engaging in criminal acts, per say, as those were generally about defying legal restrictions, but not necessarily moral restrictions. He could see himself acting against an evil agent without mercy, but that would earn him no condemnation, at least not from Jedi perspective, as it was considered their job to act against agents of darkness. Even most law abiding civilians would consider taking out a bad guy an act of goodness. Even his excessive sexual permissiveness and flagrant promiscuity would not earn a title of evil. Promiscuity was a socially defined concept that varied from culture to culture. But even though he was willing to engage in intimacy at the drop of a hat, he would never coerce or force someone against their will. And there it was. He wasn’t the monster he had somehow supposed.

The Collector tract his reasoning and concurred with the outcome. Still, she knew he would not be persuaded to stay with her and her kind, or to stop chasing the darkness. “I can see that you will not be deterred from your quest. You will continue to probe the darkness, trying to tease out how far a person can fall before there is no turning back,” she said with a sigh. “Remember, everyone one’s rock bottom is different, and that term, rock bottom, usually denotes a threshold that few recover from. You will find a working interface pedestal on Axxila. To acquire it, you will have to make a trade. You will have to make a commitment.”

“Could you be less vague?” G asked, light heartedly. He trusted the Force well enough to know he would understand the cryptic response when the time came, but why wait if she would clarify?

“You will know your answers when you are confronted with them,” she said.

“I feel really good,” G said.

“I, too,” the Collector said. “Are you sure you won’t stay. It feels even better in the water.”

G felt his body convulse. He thought he heard Windu telling him to disengage but he didn’t want to hear. This coupling felt so light and warm and peaceful...

“I get the sense they don’t like what you’re teaching,” the Collector said. “Neither the Jedi nor the Sith like you.”

“Well, perhaps if they hadn’t shrouded all of their teachings in mystery, their philosophies would be more prevalent, and everyone would have access,” G said.

“You do belong with me and my kind,” the Collector said. “Please, stay.”

“Thank you,” G said. “I am grateful for the offer to be at home with your kind. I extend a similar offer to you, but I doubt you would leave this world.”

“I don’t have to leave the world to go with you,” she said.

“Oh, nice,” G said, properly chastised.

“I am the Collector. You are now my pet, where you go, so goes my mind,” she said.

“Perhaps when your primate mind is not so occupied, I will visit you in a dream. Till then, go in peace.”

The sound of a splash woke G from his ‘dream’ state and he immediately began the throws of what might have looked like a seizure; his body was just waking up to the realization that he had been in a sustained, full body orgasm, not related to the normal physiological pathways, which explained the spreading and increasing of intensity. It was as if every cell was resonating with joy. The oils from the Collector’s skin, as well as the makeup of the froth, had neural toxins that were absorbed into the human skin, which was the equivalent of a hallucinogenic combined with a date rape drug, and only now that he knew what he was dealing with was he able to start detoxifying his body. He was covered from knee to chest in the frothy white foam, which was as sticky as honey and stuck to his hand and stretched into long weaves, like stretching tar. Sighing, he eased into the water and worked at removing the substance. On entering the water, he was immediately molested by a thousand fish that came to eat the frothy foam, literally nibbling him clean, and erotic in its own way, only the sensuality of it was enhanced due to the high level of toxins still in his blood stream. He emerged from the water, the foam gone, but he was still feeling a bit sticky. It had seeped into and through his clothes. The light from the setting sun stretched into beams on either side of him, and he imagined he was using them as guide rails to keep from stumbling. He heard a chorus of both wild and sentient creatures, literally saw the tones rising like bubbles from the marsh. The bubbles popped releasing deeper musical phrases that were difficult to follow because there was just so many, meshing and over lapping, but not like a cannon. The falling tones hit the water, sending ripples, another level of music that played out visibly.

Freya had noticed G was acting odd and went to his aid. He stared at her, testing the air around her as if she had an aura he had never noticed before.

“I didn’t realize you were so bright,” he told her.

“Let’s get you on the ship. I’ll run a blood scan and find an antidote,” Freya said.

“Oh, no, that won’t be necessary,” G said.

Frey got him to the top of the ziggurat and he paused, the sun now gone, and the last embers of light trailing it, stretching orange-ish reds into deep indigo that surrendered to black. The Galaxy loomed over head, reaching from horizon to horizon, but as he followed it, he was suddenly not able to discern ground from sky, because of bioluminescent plants, fish, and the flying insects faded into and out of existence, which was only heightened by his present synesthesia. Sounds made lights, and the lights made sounds. The stars were singing, laughing.

“Are you alright?” Freya asked.

Freya’s voice sent shivers down his spine and out to his fingertips, pure ecstasy. He touched her face. He kissed her.

“I don’t think now is a good time,” Freya said.

“Shhh,” G said. “Whisper, whisper...”

He drew her down to the stone floor, snuggling into her, holding her hand.

“It’s all one,” G said. “I don’t understand how I keep forgetting this lesson. It’s all one. One.”

“G?” Freya said.

“Gently, keep saying that,” G said. He closed his eyes and went to sleep in her arms.



Summoned to the bridge, Priya gazed down over the activity of her men, drawn to the most exciting thing happening in their world. The Officer on Deck approached her to confirm what she was now taking in.

“We’re picking up a steady signal in sector 12,” Ashan informed her. “There was the hint of preceding signal...”

“A Star Destroyer is jamming the area to prevent someone from calling for help,” Priya said, summarizing for her officer. “Take us to full alert, man all Tie Fighters and have them ready for launch as soon as we arrive. Helm, take us there.”

Ashan turned and started shouting out orders and the crew came to life like a hive struck by a stone pitched by a child. Priya walked forwards, an inner calm that reflected her knowledge that this is where she and her crew would take the first steps towards earning redemption for themselves, and knowing, nothing short of their death would ever truly bring reparation. Everyone on her ship was committed to this goal, which made them a more determined force than when they served before the change. Ashan returned to her side, along with another officer, a Captain Terret.

“The Tie’s will be ready for launch on arrival. All batteries are up and available,” Ashan said. “Shields will go up as soon as we drop from light speed.”

“We’re aiming to drop out of hyperspace right next to the source of the signal,” Terret said. “Based on the intensity of the signal, we suspect only one Star Destroyer at this time, but that doesn’t mean there aren’t others.”

Priya nodded, not feeling the need to express her hope if that if there are more than one that they be flying standard formation and so that she might ‘thread a needle’ with the Deterrent.

An officer below began a countdown to dropping back into normal space. He was saying it into his mic, but Priya could hear him from where she stood. She again was touched by this strange new confidence in herself, and in her crew, as if they were truly prepared to die for a cause, as opposed to before, when they only fought with ferocity out of fear: consume or be consumed. The Deterrent dropped into normal space. The Star Destroyer broadcasting the jamming frequency loomed ahead of them. Barely visible in the distance was a Frigate that was being bombarded. Tie Fighters and B-wing fighters made their presence known while firing or turning the engines towards the Deterrent. In addition to ‘lights of wars,’ there was a growing debris field that sometimes sparked or reflected light as it tumbled and collided and grew.

“Launch fighters, protect that frigate!” Priya stated in command voice. “All batteries, open up on that Star Destroyer. Focus all initial fire on its hypdrives. I don’t want it leaving here. Also, jam all frequencies. I don’t want hear a peep in this sector until that Destroyer is out.”

Priya’s orders were executed without question. She was jamming the frequencies for the same reason the enemy Destroyer was jamming the frequencies; she didn’t want them calling for help. Their presence on the scene did change the battle, but in an unanticipated way.

“Admiral,” Terret said. “An analysis suggests they were trying to capture the frigate.”

“And now they’re going to destroy it,” Priya said. “Continue engagement, but put us between them and that frigate!”

“Tie Bombers are now engaging the Frigate,” Terret said. “Their Ties are turning back towards us.”

Ashan was leaning down to hear a firsthand report. He stood and turned to Priya. “Admiral, a group of B wings have broken off their attack runs on the Star Destroyer and appear to be escorting a shuttle. Trajectory suggests they are coming towards us.”

“Open port landing pay, and make it clear they’re welcome,” Priya said. “Port batteries, take out all enemy Ties chasing that shuttle.”

A huge ball of plasma marked the end of the frigate. The enemy Ties and bombers began a bee line for the Deterrent. The B wings not on escort duties continued to focus on the enemy star destroyer, leaving the enemy Ties to the Deterrent’s Ties. In fact, if it weren’t for the B-Wing’s attacking the enemy Destroyer’s forward cannons, the shuttle probably wouldn’t have made it to the Deterrent. As it was, it took a hit and crashed into the deck and slid across the floor to the back of the hangar. Even with the suppressing fire, not one of the escorting B-wing ships survived the run.

When the last enemy Tie was destroyed, the enemy Star Destroyer raised the equivalent of a white flag. Terret and Ashan looked to her for instructions.

“No quarter. Finish them off,” Priya said. “And when that’s done, make sure we police the debris field. I want to avoid leaving evidence we were here if we can.”

“Admiral,” officer Candu from the pit summoned her. “The medical team says there was survivor from the shuttle. A Captain Talon. He is being taken to medical.”

“Thank you,” Priya said.

“And, Admiral,” Candu said. “He’s a Bothan.”



Priya entered Sickbay and found Fixit completing its tasks. When done, he rolled over to her. This Fixit was special, or so G had told her. She should learn from him. She was not particularly fond of Droids, but she considered the weight of G’s request that he be permitted to serve, and gave some reverence to the fact that this Droid had raised him. She could not go as far as say this was ‘family’ but she had no qualms of protecting this Droid as if it were a family heirloom, something sacred to the boy who was; and if the man, who is now G, still clung to his childhood toy, and indeed the artifact had been his primary nurturer, then she would not squash that sentimentality. It made her love him all the more. It was a gift she had never been permitted in her own life, and though it was just a Droid to her, part of her found she was jealous. If anything, this Droid had been a better parent than either of her own biological parents, or any of the beings who tried to supplant them in authority.

“Will he make it?” she asked.

“Bothans are pretty tough,” Fixit answered. “And, I have seen an untold number come back from worse, but statistically, his fate lies between how the dialogue between self and the Force takes shape.”

Priya studied the Droid, finding the statement odd. “What would you know of the Force?”

“I will leave that for you to discover,” Fixit said. “For now, Talon has awakened. You should speak to him.”

Priya walked over to the bed where the Bothan lay.

“How many did you rescue?” he asked. His fur was dark, and it was odd seeing his muzzle move, yet it spoke in clear standard.

“You alone,” Priya said.

Talon almost surrendered to death at that moment, but he struggled to stay awake. He sniffed at the air, small wrinkles around his nose, the creasing of muscle moving whiskers. “Why did you help us?”

“I don’t know,” Priya said, surprisingly honest.

Talon nodded. “This is the Force,” he said. “You must complete my mission. You will find on my person the battle plans for an evasion. It must be stopped or the First Order will grab a strangle hold over the galaxy and the proceeding wars will be long, more will die than in the most recent attack, and the First Order will eventually win the galaxy through sheer attrition.”

“I suggest you live, then, because I am not well liked by the Resistance. I doubt handing them your carcass, plans or not, will win me any favor,” Priya said.

He reached up and put a hand on her shoulder. He had to come up off the table to do so and one of her troopers stepped forwards as if to protect her, but she waved him off.

“You must find a way to make them accept you,” Talon said.

“If you say the weight of the Galaxy rests in my hands, I may kill you myself,” Priya said.

Talon laughed. His laughter became coughing. Priya forced him to lay down. “I trust you to get this done,” he said.

“Why?” Priya asked.

“Because, we’ve fought before,” Talon said. “And I see the change.”

“Rest. Get better,” Priya said.

Talon nodded, closed his eyes. She wasn’t two steps away from his table when she knew he had passed over into the Force. She steeled her eyes, blocking tears. In her past, she wouldn’t have even allowed emotion, but somehow, she was finding room for complexities of emotions, which was more than just sadness for the sentient being that just passed, but how much was lost when he went, and how much harder her job would become, and how deep her love ran, deeper than her hate ever plumbed.

“Find the plans on him” she told the trooper. She approached Fixit. “Preserve his body,” she instructed, and then departed. She returned to the Bridge to supervise the mop up. Though there might be some evidence left that would suggest a second Star Destroyer came to defense of the Frigate, there would be overwhelming evidence that a lot Bothans died today, protecting something.

Chapter 9

Beyond our ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing,
There is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
The world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase 'each other'
Doesn't make sense any more. "Stop acting so small.
You are the universe in ecstatic motion."
— Rumi

The Dragon's Tooth sat on a private, covered pad, completely powered down. The total hangar space allowed for five total ships, but there were only three others present. The Dragon's Tooth faced the exit, which seemed like a reasonable tactic. Why take time to back out or rotate and proceed out, when you could turn around and park and then fly straight out. Plus, the aft stairs now faced the hangar's internal exit that lead to the upper terrace of a medium size building that was broad in length. He stared out the cockpit window, through the hangar opening, and at the next building over, which at his level, was luxury suites. Even without the Force or the aid of any of the tech of his ship, he could see the people going through the routine of their lives. He watched them, fascinated, but no more so than he would have had it been an entertainment video. A woman entered a suite and a toddler ran to greet her. A man emerged from another room, bringing the woman a drink. There was love in that suite. In other suite, a man was being sick into a toilet. The same suite, a man was asleep on the couch, and something dark ran across the ceiling, something G didn't consciously pursue. In another suite, a woman was making a holographic video, transmitting to her followers. Another suite, an elderly man sat next to alien creature, petting it, watching a holographic novel. Another suite...

"Are you okay?" Freya asked.

"Yeah," G said, pulling himself out of the world of others. He sighed. "Sorry. Day dreaming."

"I never know if its day dreaming, or you're channeling one of your invisible counselors," Freya said.

"There is so much noise on this planet, I will struggle to hear the counselors," G said. "And when I do, it feels like they're shouting at me."

"Is it frightening?" Freya said.

G thought about it. "No," G said, reflecting. "There are much scarier things than ghosts."

"I would like to see a ghost," Freya said.

"Umm," G said. He powered down all of the Dragon's Tooth's systems. He then closed his eyes and reached out with the Force, switching off hidden toggle switches in impossible to reach places, so that no one could steal the ship. More specifically, less likely to steal the ship. He had the toggle switched added to the ship, and they could only be reached by someone who had the ability to find them with the Force and activate them remotely. His mechanic thought he was crazy to have them installed, because if they ever malfunctioned, it would take several hours to remove all the panels and conduits and wires just to get them. But that also meant, for a non-Force user, it would take them hours to get to the same switch, and that's assuming they knew

right where they were, and so, the intent was met: the Dragon' Tooth was a really difficult ship to steal.

"What's the plan?" Freya asked.

"I thought we would walk around and just see what walks up to us," G said.

"So, you have no plan," Freya said.

"Trusting in the Force is a plan," G said.

"If you say so, Master," Freya said.

"Oh, you vixen. You're using Master in a kinkier context, aren't you," G said more than asked.

"It probably wouldn't hurt to have a social pretext as a form of distraction, perhaps even an alias, as you're not too fond of going around in the open as a Jedi," Freya said.

"Umm, interesting point," G said. "You're not suggesting I buy a cape?"

"You're not fond of capes," Freya pointed out.

"I am not," G said.

"Then no cape," Freya said. "Would you be open to a suggestion?"

"Absolutely," G said.

"I think we should go to a club," Freya said.

G raised an eyebrow. "Really?"

"Not just any club, but a really expensive, wild ass club," Freya said.

"I am still listening," G said.

"Well, in the holonovels, people always start their missions at a club. Rich people have connections, and you could use some more connections," Freya said. "Also, organics require socialization for optimum health, and you could stand to practice being social."

"Oh, you had me sold until you added that last part," G said.

"You don't think you need to practice being social?" Freya said.

"I do okay," G said.

"Your best friend and servant is a Luxury Droid," Freya pointed out.

"So?" G said.

"Perhaps you should call me Master," Freya said.

"Do you have a whip?" G asked, playfully.

"I am programmed for whip play, if you require that service," Freya said. "I can provide you with just the right amount of pain that doesn't result in permanent damage, or visible signs of abuse."

"On that note," G said, standing up.

"Where are we going?" Freya asked, following him. "To the club or to buy a whip?"

"To the club," G said, amused but not biting. "You have one in mind or do we need to find a map?"

"I know all the elite players clubs on 60 worlds, and I have passes for each included with my original purchasing price," Freya said. "The passes are old, but they will be honored."

G motioned for Freya to lead the way. As he passed Red, he told the Droid he was in charge. Red whistled happily. He and Freya departed the ship, and as they walked away, G used the Force to close the aft stairs. One of the techs interrupted their departure to enquire if he wanted any special services, but G declined and tipped the tech generously. A happy tech is always a good thing to have round. Freya also gave him a service number so that she might be reached if he needed to contact them in regards to the ship. As they walked away, G inquired about the number.

“I have internal communication capabilities that are accessible on the sixty worlds I referenced previously, and the airtime was also included in the original purchase price,” Freya said.

“Freya, you continue to amaze me,” G said, as they rushed to hop onto a tram. There might have been a little Force action to keep the door from completely shutting. “I am still a little perturbed that you think I need practice socializing.”

“Feel free to demonstrate your skills, any time,” Freya invited.

G bit. He turned to the closest person to him, a young human female. “Hello. You are amazingly bright,” he told her.

The girl didn’t know how to respond, just kind of forced a smile and moved to other side of the tram.

Freya chuckled in her awkward sounding laugh that drew attention.

“I would reprogram that laugh of hers,” a man behind him said.

“But I like her laugh,” G said. He blinked. “Are you taking images of her without my permission?”

The man retreated and jumped off the tram as soon as the door opened.

“Yes, you’re very social,” Freya said.

“Should I have not called him out on making holos of you?” G asked.

“On Axxila, photons are free,” Freya said.

“What does that mean, exactly?” G said.

“People can take your still or video without your permission, as long as its limited to personal use and not rebroadcasted or shared,” Freya said.

“So, why did he blush and get all nervous?” G asked.

“Because he is a freak and trying to do it stealthily is how he gets off and you blew his cover,” Freya said.

G made eye contact with a woman and smiled. She put in her earphones and closed her eyes. He looked to Freya.

“Okay, so there are some complexities that I don’t grasp, but it will be easier at the club, because people are there to meet people,” G said.

After being at their hookah table for ten minutes with no activity, Freya offered, “Perhaps you should go mingle.”

“No,” G said. “You have accused me of being too aggressive. We’re going to sit here and drink my drink. When someone is interested, they will approach.”

“Perhaps I should go mingle, then,” Freya said.

“You want to mingle?” G asked.

“I am just saying, the odds of someone visiting your table might increase if you weren’t sitting with a Luxury Droid,” Freya said.

“But I want them to meet you,” G said.

“Them who?” Freya asked.

“Whomever it is who finds us interesting,” G said.

“Yes, because so many are flocking to you,” Freya said, laughing her special laugh. “G, you should allow me to go mingle. I will bring you someone interesting.”

“Really,” G asked. “You’re programmed to help hook your owner up?”

“Of course,” Freya said. “G, organics should be with organics for optimum health. You need socialization and intimacy with organics. I function as a sexual surrogate in the absence of compatible organics, helping you improve socialization, heal after trauma has decreased libido,

improve confidence, and improve overall health functioning. Yes, you will get the health benefits and release for being intimate with me and getting regular massages, but it will never reach the benefit level of being with another organic.”

G sipped his drink. “Alright, you’re going to have to explain that one to me.”

“You’ve studied anatomy and physiology and even esoteric remedies, you already know everything I will tell you,” Freya pointed out.

“Pretend we’re practicing being social,” G said.

Freya laughed. People looked in their direction.

G leaned over and whispered. “It’s working. Those girls over there are looking at us,” G said.

Freya put a hand on his knees. “G, they are not communicating interest in the same way that you are interested,” Freya said. Freya sighed. “Why is being social and physically intimate with compatible organics necessary. You, sir, are not just a body. You are a chemical electrical conduit, a river and whirlwind of matter. You think of your physical essence is all there is, but there is a cloud of particulate matter that surrounds you. This cloud consist of your DNA and RNA and bits of broken cells, even full, living cells and full dead cells, and neuropeptides and chemical messengers, and pheromones, and the flora and fauna that lives on you and in you is also in this cloud, jumping from debris of you back to you and onto others in their exploration and drive to spread; it’s a perfect mirror of transpermia, life moves from planet to planet the same way it moves from body to body. Same above, same below. Notice, I haven’t even begun to describe your energy body, I am still working on the macro and microscopic physical level that is more than just the complexities of your personal smell. This cloud has a living, effective range of about four to six feet, with discernable barriers and boundary layers, and it is so specifically you that a sampling of the air with the right instruments could identify you by just this cloud better than a finger print, and that’s without DNA sampling. All organics have this. I don’t. I am a machine, sterile and static. Organics are alive and messy and reactive and so when someone says they don’t feel the chemistry, that is more than just them saying they aren’t psychologically compatible, it literally means that subconsciously they recognize they are not chemically compatible with you, or your flora and fauna which is equally individualized and adapted to you, just like ever island or planet has its indigenous creatures. And, chemistry is chemistry, and mixing chemistry enhances reactions and turns things on and off helps regulate the over health of the system. People mingle even at a distance through heart energy, a clear magnetic field that encapsulates you extending ten feet out, an electric field that protects and buffers the flora and fauna. Your heart also extends rays out to people you want to connect with and receives rays from others, but usually the closer they are, the better the reactions, and there is the healthy exchange of flora and fauna between passing people. It’s like planets crossing paths in the night and the atmospheres mix and the electric fields interact, and life happens, changes, becomes stronger. Of course, humans have lost the nose and taste for such subtle nuances. For example, humans are nowhere near as good as Wookies at recognizing chemical smells. Humans can do it, but it has been mostly rendered to subconscious automation, and the soaps and the deodorants and hormones and perfumes have impacted the game.”

G seemed to be puzzling it through. “Are you saying I smell bad?”

“No, G, I would not have allowed you out in public if you offended,” Freya said. “I am merely bringing your awareness to the first level of complexities. Eye contact is as crucial as foreplay, in fact, it is foreplay. Your visual impact is limited to your ability to communicate

visually, both through subtle telegraphing and responding. And you, Sir, are as about as subtle as a Rancor.”

“Oh, I am offended,” G said, pouting.

“Sir, you stare. It’s intense. It’s like hitting people with the Force choke hold,” Freya said.

“Really?” G said.

“You come on pretty strong most the time, and the people you have managed to hook up with, well, they like that level of intensity,” Freya said. “Here, you need to practice subtle.”

“Maybe I don’t want to play that. Maybe the game blocks genuine interaction, because it becomes more about the game than relationships. Maybe I want someone more direct, someone like me?” I said.

“Then we will continue to sit here and play your game,” Freya said. “Because it is all games. But, that is okay, too.”

“I bet, I can draw a female to me,” G said.

“I am sure you can. Is that your only criteria, that she be female?” Freya asked.

“Pretty much,” G said.

“I think we should add criteria,” Freya said.

“Why?” G asked.

Alarna Byrnes sat down at the table. She smiled, pushing her red hair out of her eyes. “Hello, Son.”

“Mother,” G said, flatly.

“That’s why,” Freya said.

“So, what brings you here?” both G and Byrne asked simultaneously. “Oh, you go first,” Alarna said, graciously.

“I came to mingle,” G said.

“You always bring your sex doll to find dates?” Alarna asked.

“Maybe if I had been raised by a mother instead of a Droid, I would be more socially advanced,” G said.

Freya laughed. Alarna stared her into silence, then turned back to G. “You’re going to have to learn to let that go.”

“What do you want, mother?” G asked.

“To start with, I want my lightsaber back,” Alarna said.

“Well, I am sorry. I have loaned that to someone,” G said.

“What kind of Jedi are you? You don’t loan lightsabers out,” Alarna snapped.

“Well, I do,” G said. “I am changing the rules.”

“You can’t change the rules. These rules have been around for thousands of years,” Alarna said.

“And, where are the Jedi now?” G asked.

“That’s not the point,” Alarna said.

“It is the point. And who created the rules? The First Jedi! It’s not like some pompous ass god shit the rules out on marble and said follow these or else,” G said.

“I don’t like your tone,” Alarna said.

“Mother, you’re a Sith. You should be happy I am not just recreating the Jedi social structure and protocols,” G said. “Besides, you can make another lightsaber.”

Alarna placed her new lightsaber on the table. G blinked. He almost thought he heard that music he had heard in the past, like a hundred stringed instruments pouncing. The patrons in the club continued doing what they do, unaware of the tension that just went up at his table.

“What else do you want?” G asked.

“I want my ships back,” Alarna said.

“I am using them,” G said.

“All of them?” Alarna said.

“I employing the Imminence as a front to discourage attacks against Dathomir, and the Dragon’s Tooth I am using personally,” G said.

“Well, you’re not going to be needing either any longer,” Alarna said.

The fight began so quickly that few people had time to register what had happened. Even the few that had been looking, it moved like a blur, taking time to process. Someone might have seen the table throw itself at the Luxury Droid, sending it flying across the room. They also would have seen the two people standing, their chairs flying back with as much force as the table had flown. They all heard a very distinctive sound of lightsabers that probably none in the club presently had ever heard in their lifetime outside a historic video, and consequently, that sound hadn’t given them the sense to run away. It was the loud retort of G’s lightsaber that got drew everyone’s attention, though, as if a small bomb had gone off. But when they saw the two locked in battle stance, a shiny gold lightsaber blocking a ruby red lightsaber, and the serious looks the combatants held, the patrons and staff fled in all directions towards the nearest exits. Freya placed the muzzle of her weapon against Alarna’s forehead.

“Why does your lightsaber make noise?” Alarna asked.

“I don’t know,” G said honestly.

“You’re going to let your sex doll shoot me?” Alarna asked.

“I am kind of surprised she didn’t,” G said.

“G, she’s your mother,” Freya said.

“So?” G asked.

“I thought you might want to kill her,” Freya said.

The local law enforcement suddenly rushed in, weapons raised, surrounding the threesome. Their response time was due to the fact they had an office right next door. Officer Mons, who G remembered well, held point, giving him pause to reflect over the ways of the Force. “Put your weapons down and come peacefully,” he directed.

“Hello, Officer Mons,” G said.

“Put your weapons down,” he repeated.

“I like the gold blade,” Alarna said.

“Thank you, mother,” G said. “I think that’s the first complement you have ever given me.”

“You’re trying to kill your mother?” Mons asked, drawn out of his protocol and into the drama.

“Mons, I am hurt,” G said. “I would never kill my mother.”

“Do you want me to?” Freya asked.

“No one is killing anyone,” Mons said. “Disengage and power down your weapons.”

“On the count of three?” Alarna asked.

“Sure,” G agreed. “One.”

“Two,” Freya said.

“Three,” Alarna said.

They each took a step back. As soon as Freya lowered her weapon, Alarna used to the Force to push everyone back. Freya and law enforcement flew across the room, while G held his ground, and they re-engaged. Several blade parries and strikes caused G to retreat, until again, they were grid locked. Freya was back in the mix before law enforcement were back on their feet. The weapon went back to her temple.

“You’re in surprisingly good shape for someone your age,” G said.

“Are you flirting with me?” Alarna asked

“It’s just something I do,” G said.

“You’re disgusting,” Alarna said.

“It’s an expression of affection,” G said.

“That’s disgusting,” Alarna said.

“I like his affection,” Freya said.

“That’s more disgusting,” Alarna said.

“Mother, your bias is due to a history of abuse and neglect. Allow me into your heart, allow me to love you, and you can begin to forge your way out of the hate and fear that has dominated your life,” G offered. “Allow me to express the love for you I have held all my life, but have had to suppress.”

A silence followed, as if she were considering, and the law enforcement seemed curious, as if waiting to see if love would win. Someone peeked out from behind the bar.

“I am confused. Are you speaking about familiar love or sex?”

“I personally make no distinction between the two. Love is love, kindness is kindness, affection is affection,” G said.

“And that’s another reason you must die. You’re an abomination,” Alarna said.

“I am love,” G said.

“I am older than you!”

“So?” G asked.

“I am your mother,” Alarna said.

“That doesn’t mean you’re not attractive,” G said. “It doesn’t mean I can’t touch you, hug you, or be close to you. All of that is an expression of love. Even if I blinded myself, I would still know you are attractive. The sound of your voice, your smell. I am naturally drawn to you.”

“That’s because you are sick and twisted,” Alarna said.

“The fact that I found a way to love in the absence of you, says something about love. The fact that I offer you love now, says something about us. The fact you couldn’t kill me then, says something about the Force, and it’s why you won’t be able to kill me now. I am here to teach you to love. I am here to...”

“To bring me back to the light?” Alarna interrupted him.

“Of course not. Light Side, Dark Side, the sides don’t matter, it’s all one with the Force,” G said. “The sides only matter here, on the physical plane. I am inviting you to go higher, to rise above the duality and the illusion and the game...”

“You fuck machines and have incestuous relationships with family,” Alarna said. “I am not following you anywhere, but to the grave.”

“You left me on a deserted planet with only Droids for companionship, so desiring to be with machine is more than just anthropomorphism, or even misplaced attachment,” G said.

“That makes sense,” Mons said.

“Stay out of this. I didn’t leave you anywhere! You were supposed be dead!” Alarna snapped.

“I thought you were over this whole killing me thing,” G said.

“I needed time to regroup and having thought it over, I remembered why you need to die,” Alarna said.

“No one need die today,” Mons said. “Why don’t you both just disengaged and power down your weapons. You clearly have lots to discuss. Let me facilitate a dialogue between the two of you.”

“I will never...”

“Mother,” G interrupted. “I love you.”

“I don’t l...”

G blinked, using the Force he pulled the trigger on Freya’s weapon. As his mother fell, he caught her lightsaber and powered it and his own down, flipping the hilts over to hand it to the non-business ends to officers even before they knew they were taking them. Mons signaled, and law enforcement moved in closer taking the lightsabers from him and the weapon out of Freya’s hand. One of them popped an emergency restraining bolt on her, while two others bound G’s hands behind his back.

“I can’t believe you killed your mother,” Mons said, disappointed.

“I just stunned her,” G said. “She’ll be alright.”

One of the officers confirmed.

“So, you’ll understand and forgive me, too,” Mons said, and then stunned G at point blank range.

“Sir, we had him in custody already,” his second said.

“Yeah,” Mons said. “This is the new protocol for Jedi.”

“Oh,” the second said. “Come along, Droid.”



“Hey,” Ten said, as Corissa caught her throwing the last few items into an antigrav chest that looked very similar to G’s.

“Isn’t that’s G’s,” Corissa said.

“He said I could have it.”

Corissa nodded. “So, you’re heading out, then.”

“Yeah,” Ten said.

“Were you going to say good bye?” Corissa asked.

“I was hoping to avoid it, actually,” Ten said. She saw the micro flash of pain cross her mother’s face, even though it was there for only a second. She decided to address it. “Mom, I don’t want to say good bye because this is my home. I’m not really leaving home. I’m just connecting distant points to home base.”

Corissa seemed to accept the response.

“And I don’t want to see you cry,” Ten added.

“I will try and contain myself,” Corissa said, her expression too complex for anyone to sort out what she was feeling and thinking. “Know where you’re headed?”

Ten smiled. “Yeah, I thought I’d see if I could do the Kessel Run in less than 14 parsecs,” Ten said.

Corissa rolled her eyes. “How many times do we have to go over this? Parsecs is distance not time, and using the vernacular expression of substitution muddies the science. But more

importantly, hyperspace geometry is fixed. Dozens of people have made that jump and not mapped out a shorter distance.”

“Rumor says it was done in less than twelve, so either people’s calculations are off, or hyperspace is more fluid and complex than our math allows for,” Ten argued.

“Rumors! There is a rumor that Vader had a pink cape, I wouldn’t waste my time looking for it,” Corissa argued. “Do the calculations the way I taught you. No short cuts! And no blind jumps. Always do your math before going into hyperspace.”

“Yes, mother,” Ten said, feigning resign. “I’m a good pilot.”

“I know,” Corissa said.

“And if Vader had a pink cape, I will find it,” Ten said.

The two of them hugged. “I love you, Ten,” Corissa said.

“You said you wouldn’t cry,” Ten said.

“I’m not,” Corissa said, wiping the tear from Ten’s cheek.

Ten stepped away first. “Come on, Pink. And bring the chest.”

“Say goodbye to Jordeen before you leave,” Corissa called after her.

“I don’t like good byes,” she called back.

Chapter 10

Beauty surrounds us, but usually
we need to be walking in a garden to know it.
Rumi

G woke, as if from a dream, and found himself lying on the grass in a park. A woman was feeding ducks. No, she wasn't human. She was female, a Diathim. She looked over to him, smiled, and fluttered her wings as she returned to his side. He knew her intimately. Her name was Ashia, and he considered her a goddess, a Jedi of untold strength and power. She knelt next to him, then sat, and placed her hand on his heart. "You're awake."

"I had the strangest dream," G admitted. He found a thermos within reach and took it up. He poured himself a drink, but offered it to her. She took it, sipped, and then held the cup as he drank from it. He was so mesmerized by her beauty he was not sure he tasted anything. She held the cup, but lowered it. The contents seemed to be glowing. "It felt like a past life. You were there, but your name was Miru Nadrinakar, and my name was Antron Bach. I looked up the names. These people existed, which makes it kind of weirder."

"I think you may be getting your stories mixed up," Ashia said.

"Maybe," G said. "I feeling rather confused. Just being here now feels kind of weird."

"Not too weird, I hope," Ashia said, putting the cup down. She touched his forehead. "The game of wars has been going on for a long time. We keep going back because we like the game. But you're remembering it wrong. You were Miru and I was Antron."

"You're saying I was your girl?" G said.

"Yeah. And I don't recall us being intimate in that lifetime," Ashia said.

"How is that possible? I can't imagine not loving you, regardless of life time," G said.

"Oh, we have always loved each other, just not always been intimate," Ashia said.

"You have other examples?" G asked.

"Yeah. A present one, even," Ashia said.

"Really," G asked, searching the people in his present constellation, testing the orbits, looking for the greatest attractor. "You're Corissa!"

"The Force serves you well. I was, I am, I will be... You will find, from this side of the Force, temporal contexts are not always linear."

"Why then are we having so much trouble relating?" G asked.

"It's necessary for our growth," Ashia said.

"Then why would you choose to be with me in this form?" G asked.

"I felt you had need of me, so I came," Ashia said.

"I don't understand," G said.

"In order to see, you must have light, and a medium to express it, darkness. Light touches everything, more than once, and by the time you finally catch it, that one photon has been intimate with the entire universe, with all of time. You are a being of light. Go and shine, be intimate with everything in joyous love, and when I catch you again, I can see everything you touched. You paint my heart with joy," Ashia said, and touched his forehead, her finger pushing through and lighting up his brain.

G woke and came off the table and then realized where he was. In a cell. He looked up at the camera and smiled. "I am awake now. Can we get this over with?"

The door slid open and a man in a white coat entered. A table and chairs emerged from the wall.

“Have a seat, Mr...” He read his tablet. “Waycaster.”

G sat on the bench that had emerged from the wall. The man in the white coat sat opposite of him, putting the tablet between them. A keyboard unfolded from the device.

“So, how well are you sleeping?” the man asked.

“Okay,” G said. “What’s your name?”

“I am Doctor Inso,” he said, typing G’s responses. “How’s your appetite been?”

“Are you performing a mental health assessment on me?” G asked.

“This will go much faster if you just answer the questions, please,” Inso instructed. “How’s your appetite?”

“Fine,” G said.

“Do you want to kill yourself?” he asked.

“No,” G said.

“Have you ever attempted suicide?” Inso asked.

“I don’t understand the question,” G said.

“It’s a very simple question, Mr. Waycaster,” Inso said.

“I am one with the Force,” G said. “There is no death, but all deaths on the physical plane are by definition, suicides.”

“Excuse me?” Inso said.

“You know what a placebo is?” G asked.

“Of course,” Inso said, seemingly insulted.

“Then you’re aware that the power of the unconscious mind determines whether we worsen or heal, whether we meet our destiny or not,” G said. “There are no accidental deaths or death by illness. It is all choice.”

“Hyper religiosity, expressions of grandeur, narcissism, and possible delusions,” Inso said, typing away on his keyboard.

“I am a Jedi,” G said.

“Definitely delusional,” Inso said. “Mr. Waycaster. Do you ever hear things or see things that other people don’t hear or see?”

“All the time,” G said.

“Please elaborate,” Inso said.

“I would prefer not to,” G said.

“Uncooperative, and possible paranoia,” Inso said. “Mr. Waycaster, do you hear voices telling you to harm yourself or others?”

“Yes,” G sighed.

“Could you provide me an example?” Inso asked.

G looked up at the camera. “How long are you going to permit this farce to continue?”

“Mr. Waycaster, I am in charge in here and I would like you to stay focus and answer the questions, please,” Inso said.

“You do know your colleagues are fucking with you, right?” G asked.

“My job is to complete this assessment,” Inso said.

“I am a Jedi. I hear things and see things other folks don’t hear or see. That does not mean I am crazy,” G said.

“Sir, try to stay calm,” Inso said.

G tilted his head. "I am calm. Do you hear me raising my voice? Did you do this test on my mother, Alarna?"

"Of course. I let her go," Inso said.

"Are you fucking insane?! She's a Sith Lord and she tried to kill me!" G said.

"Both of you are being charged with public display of domestic violence and resisting arrest and causing bodily harm to officers," Inso said. "But we have to do a mental health assessment before pre-trial release, mostly to determine if you're going harm yourself or someone else, and to determine if you're a flight risk."

"You didn't think Alarna was a flight risk?" G asked.

"That sweet old woman who couldn't hurt a flower a flight risk?" Inso asked.

"Oh, you poor, weak minded fool," G said. He looked at the camera. "I do hope that someone else is in charge up there. You guys fucked up big time."

"Sir! Focus," Inso said, snapping his finger at him. "I need you to provide me an example of what the voices telling you."

"Well, on one side of me, I hear Vader saying I should choke you for your insolence, and on the other side of me, Windu..."

"Is telling you to not listen to your dark side?" Inso asked, typing on his tablets' keyboard as fast as he could.

"No, he's saying I should pretty much choke you, too," G said. "Did you escort her out?"

"No, she just wanted to see my office," Inso said. "We're not talking about your mother, we're talking about you."

"Did you sleep with my mother?" G asked.

"We're not talking about your mother," Inso said.

"You did sleep with my mother!" G said. He looked at the camera. "You guys better not be taking turns with my Droid up there."

Inso snapped his fingers at him for the last time. G put him in a choke hold. He apologized while taking the man's badge. The badge didn't open the door. He closed his eyes, ran his hand along the door, pushed, and the door opened with the Force. He stepped out into corridor, released Inso from the choke hold, closed the door, locked and proceeded down the corridor. He found two guards unconscious. Even as he was coming into the room, a dozen guards were coming down the other hall. He found himself surrounded again.

"I know this looks really bad, but, um," G said.

He grimaced as they opened fire. And he experienced another awakening. He found himself in nicer room, on a hospital bed, Freya was there, so was Captain Mons, as well as President Jayers Hidalgo, his aid, and several security officers. Hidalgo was cussing at Captain Mons, berating him for his incompetence.

"Oh, Master Waycaster!" Hidalgo said. "I am so sorry for this huge misunderstanding."

"It really wasn't a misunderstanding," Mons said. "We don't allow citizens, Jedi or not, to kill each other."

"I saw the video, it was self-defense," Hidalgo said.

"They were creating a disturbance," Mons said. "You passed the laws that made it illegal for Jedi to use lightsabers in public."

Hidalgo laughed nervously. He looked to G apologetically. "I did do that. I was not aware that the Jedi would legitimately return, and you know, sometimes people try to use outdated laws to their favor," the President said.

"It's okay," G said, sitting up. "What happened to my mother?"

“She got her lightsaber and was about to come and get you, but I guess she decided she didn’t have time,” Mons said.

“Just great,” G said.

“I assure you,” Mons said. “If she is on this planet, we will catch her.”

G thought about it, closed his eyes, and searched. “She is not,” he said, with some confidence. And then he sighed. “Ah, damn it!”

“What?” Hidalgo said.

“She took the Dragon’s Tooth!” G said, rubbing his head.

“I thought you fixed it so it couldn’t be stolen,” Freya said.

“She’s a Jedi,” G said. “She found the kill switches. Oh, poor Red. I hope she doesn’t toss him.”

“Who’s Red?” Mons asked.

“My astromechs droid,” G said.

“I could get you another one,” Hidalgo said.

“I don’t want another one. I want Red,” G whined. “What a day this has become.”

“Well, I am glad you’re here,” Hidalgo said. “I insist you stay with me tonight at my home, dinner with my family, and then, we can have a private conversation about a personal business opportunity that I think you might be interested in.”

“We were looking for connections,” Freya reminded him. “And, by your own definition, the randomness of this situation does seem to be Force inspired.”

“It does,” G said. “Maybe we should try formulating some plans next time.”

“And break with your tradition?” Freya asked.

“I am great with planning,” Hidalgo said.

Mons handed G his lightsaber. “No hard feelings?”

“We’re good,” G assured him.

“Even though you’ll never walk again?” Mons asked.

G experienced another awakening. He awoke to find himself on a medical procedure bed. Doctor Inso was present, two nurses, and a medical Droid whose main purpose was to act as an intelligent defibrillator. Inso, the nurses, and almost anything in the room that was not secured to something was floating. Freya touched his arm.

“Wake up, G, they’re trying to help you,” Freya said. “You’re in a hospital.”

G blinked, caught up to where he was, realized he was channeling the Force, and eased the people back to the floor. Inso recovered his wits first.

“Thank you,” Inso said.

“I am sorry,” G said. “I don’t understand what happened.”

“You were stunned,” Inso said. “Initially, they brought you to medical because you experienced encopresis. Shortly after clean up, the nurse noticed you were experiencing a non-perfusing ventricular tachycardia....”

“I pooped my pants?” G asked.

“The doctor is telling you about a cardiac event, and you’re worried you soiled your pants?” Freya asked.

“Well, yeah,” G said, hoping he was still dreaming. He felt exhausted, but he was pretty sure this was real. Then again, he thought the last several wakenings were real.

“You were shouting that your mother is trying to kill you,” Nurse Leda said.

“Were you experiencing a nightmare?” Inso asked.

“Is this part of a mental health assessment?” G asked.

“I am not that kind of Doctor,” Inso said.

“I am really confused,” G admitted.

“Encopresis, tachycardia, and night terrors are very common experiences for people who have been stunned,” Inso said. “I think for you, your situation was compounded by malnourishment and the use of psychedelics.”

“I don’t use psychedelics,” G said.

“Remember our last planet?” Freya asked.

“Oh, the Collector,” G said. “I had an accidental, hyper-exposure to reproductive material from an Anura.”

“You were eating frogs?” Nurse Pari asked.

G considered the semantics and wondered if she meant what he was thinking she meant. Either way, ‘no’ seemed like a safe response. “No, I was in conference with an Anura, who was feeling amorous,” G said. “It was all very innocent. Mostly.”

He didn’t know how to read the stares he was getting.

“Well, we’re not judging,” Inso said. “I am a Doctor. I have seen a lot of crazy things in my day. I do have some concerns, though. Especially about your weight. Have you gone without food by choice, or due to situational lack?”

“I have been engaging in a restricted caloric intake,” G admitted. “You are not the first to show concern. I have decided to eat better, it’s just take a moment to catch back up.”

“You should take better care of yourself,” Leda said. “Who is your primary care physician?”

“I have a FixIt droid,” G said.

“But you can afford a real Doctor,” Inso said.

“I prefer Droids,” I said.

“That’s apparent,” Pari said, doing a sideways glance at Freya. G became aware that she had been stealing secret glances at the Droid whenever a decline in duties permitted.

“Okay, well, you’re stabilized. Before you leave, I want Leda to give you a vitamin B complex shot,” Inso said. “Once you get your weight up, I highly recommend you have some Vaccinations if you’re going to stay on Axxila. Other than that, you’re free to get dressed and leave. There are some friends waiting to speak to you if you’re up to it.”

“Okay,” G said, going right for the clothes without concern about modesty.

The defibrillator droid asked if he would be needed further, and Inso dismissed him. Inso and Pari followed the Droid out of the room.

“Let me jab you with this first,” Leda said, having him lay back down on his side so she could inject him with the vitamin B. She wiped the area, indicating she was going for the hollow space on the side of the pelvis.

“Don’t you want put that in the buttocks?” G asked.

“This is better,” Leda said, inserting the needle.

G grabbed the bedrail. “Okay,” G said breathlessly.

“For a Jedi, you sure are a big baby,” Leda said.

“This seems like the opportune moment to inform you...” Freya began.

“Mother escaped,” G finished her sentence.

“How did you know?” Freya asked.

“All done,” Leda said, massaging the area. “Anything else I can do for you?”

“That’ll be it, thank you,” G said, sitting up and going for clothes. As Leda was about to leave, G caught her attention. “Um, Leda. I hope I didn’t hurt you or your colleagues.”

Leda closed the door, remaining on the inside. “G, we’re not supposed to hit on patients, but clearly between Droids and frog people, you are a bit kinky, which I think is a huge turn on, because you’d be willing to explore sensuality and most men are just so vanilla, and just off the record, that levitation trick was off the wall erotic, but what I am saying is, you can lift me anytime you want.” She stepped closer to Freya and whispered her number in her ear. “So, if you’re going to be on Axxila a while, call me.”

G looked to Freya. “I think you should reassess my skill level on hooking up,” G said.

“Using the Force clearly changes the equation,” Freya said.

G dressed in simple trousers and a pull over shirt, socks and printed shoe to his specs, but clearly he was dressed in recyclable hospital clothes. On exiting the room, he found multiple guards, several law enforcement officers. Captain Mons, accompanied by President Hidalgo, immediately approached.

“Captain Mons, we’re good. Don’t worry about it. I am aware my mother escaped. Don’t worry, she is off planet. I would like to report my ship being stolen, and the only one capable of doing it is mother. Technically, it’s her ship. I probably can’t report it stolen, but I paid cash for the Droid she has in her possession, so that’s stolen. Sorry, I talking too much. It’s nice to finally meet you in person, President Hidalgo. You don’t have to thank me for curing your niece, really, that was the Force, not me. And yes, I accept your invitation to have dinner with you and your family tonight, and I would be okay staying the night, if it isn’t an inconvenience.” Mons and Hidalgo mouth were open. “Oh, and Mons, may I have my lightsaber back. And the utility belt. There are some diamonds in one of the pouches that I am honor bound to carry with me, and would likely result in extremely bad luck to anyone who took any. Of course, that could just be speculative superstition on my part, as I have not tested that, but you could tell that to the guy that impounded it, and don’t punish him, if he wants one, tell him I will make him one. I am finding myself quite famished. Would it be okay if I hasten us towards dinner?”

Hidalgo nodded and motioned for G and Freya to follow him. “Captain Mons, would you contact Cohn’s and be prepared to reinforce security at the Presidential Estate.”

“Oh, I don’t think she’ll back soon,” G said.

“Well, Son, you never know with Sith Lords, and there was that whole fiasco with the Bloodhunters not too long ago,” Hidalgo said. “Add in your celebrity status, and the fact that you’re a Jedi, and well, quite frankly, I am surprised you were allowed back on the planet.”

“Jedi aren’t welcomed?” G asked.

“Trouble follows Jedi like smoke follows flames,” Mons said.

“I am not really that kind of Jedi,” G said.

“So, how do explain a random hook up with your mother at a hookah lounge?” Mons asked.

Freya laughed her laugh. “Hook up hookah. What a great name for a club,” Freya said.

“Forget safety.
Live where you fear to live.
Destroy your reputation.
Be notorious.”
Rumi

An early impromptu dinner at the Mansion allowed G to meet the President’s family and his top staff, some elected officials, some socialites, and all and all, it was bit much and he felt incredibly out of place. The dinners with the folks running the Three Sisters were never this formal. It was only due to his keen eye and ability to observe customs that the meal wasn’t full of social faux pas in terms of which dining utensil should be used and when. Conversation wise, he was certain the number of uncomfortable laughs and redirection of the conversation by the President was a saving grace. The base building that supported the President’s Mansion was so broad that looking out the window you might assume the greenery covering the terrace in all directions and surrounding the mountain was Earth, and that distant buildings were the outcropping of cities, but the President’s estate, which belong to the state, not the person, was contained by the whole building that was likely fifty stories high before you hit ground. In truth, there wasn’t bare ground available on Axxila, and the President’s estate was considered to be a valley, and the distant building that surrounded it also could project an energy dome to help protest the elite during an attack. Taking out the authority would require an extreme, concerted effort.

Freya remained standing during the dinner, as was the custom here. G didn’t like the custom, but Freya told him to let it be. The President’s oldest son kept staring at the Droid. So did many of the guest, but not to the degree of the son, and there were several conversations about Freya and Luxury Droids in general, but the conversation never involved her opinion. This, too, bothered G, but he held his tongue. Also, in terms of inappropriate stares, he was pretty sure that the President’s oldest daughter, and his wife, were giving him subtle, but inappropriate signals. He told himself to ask Freya about it after the dinner, because it was possible they were just infatuated with his Jedi slash celebrity status.

Most of the meal was just okay, but he interrupted the conversation, stopping one of the serving Droids. “May I have another one of those?”

“The mini caviar parfaits?” it asked.

“Yes, please,” G said.

“You may have as many as you like,” Mrs. Hidalgo said, pleased he liked it.

“Oh, thank you, so much,” G said.

“So, G, do you think this Snoko character is a sign the Sith have returned?” Ambassador Aldridge asked. “Or just some scare tactic dreamt up by the First Order.”

As G considered his response, Senator Elle Tryson, “It’s a scare tactic. There is no such thing as Sith or Jedi or any other mystical orders running the Galaxy. I probably get a hundred letters a week from paranoid constituents accusing me of being part of some secret society conspiring to suppress the freedoms of individuals and turn them into slaves. Any blind fool can see that no one person or group of people can truly hold the galaxy together in any semblance of order, because there is just too many divergent interests.”

“Yes, yes, you always try to impress us with your chaos theories,” Admiral Ortish Cohns said. “But the political nature of the Galaxy is not unpredictable. People want the return of Skywalker.”

“If that were true, Kylo Rin would have more success rallying people to himself if he would just call himself a Skywalker. Or at least a Vader. You don’t continue a Legacy by changing your family name mid game,” Elle said.

“He is more Solo than Skywalker,” Aldridge remarked. “And Rin is the result of a Princess dabbling below her station.”

“Aww,” Tier, Hidalgo’s oldest daughter, complained. “I like their love story.”

“And it is the reason you are going to an all-girl school until we find you a suitable match,” Mrs. Hidalgo said. “This family doesn’t slum.”

“No one does arranged marriages anymore,” Tier complained. “I want a say in who I marry. Master Waycaster, you don’t preach the old ways. Tell them a girl should have a say.”

Again, the conversation was back on him, and he paused, spoon in mouth, waiting to see if they really wanted to hear from him, or were just going to continue the conversation without him.

“Would you be interested in marrying my daughter?” Hidalgo said.

“Really!” Tier snapped. “I am just some casual property to be discussed and handed off over a random dinner guest?!”

“It might require some Mind Tricks to tame her,” Kender, her brother said. “Could you make her howl like a Rancor?”

Tier got up to leave.

“Sit down,” Mrs. Hidalgo said.

Tier considered her options, but, defiantly, sat down.

Cohns wanted to continue their discussion. “It’s not just Rin’s sociopathy that keeps the galaxy in constant conflict, but the fact that almost everyone in modern society are sociopaths. Technology allows ourselves to link too easily with like-minded folks, which only exasperates the sociological function of pushing all groups to extremes as they try to make their group identity sufficiently stark as to be distinguishable from those who have not aligned with their group think.”

G contemplated the statement as another guest argued you can’t apply human sociology to the Galaxy at large because there were too many non-human participants, and so the human formulas for predicting behavior just didn’t work. G wondered if this group was aware of their own sociopathic trends.

“So, G, who raised you?” Cohns asked.

“A Droid,” G answered. He was not sure why his answer produced laughter.

“No,” Cohns said, clarifying. “Who raised you to a Master Level Jedi.”

“Oh,” G said. “Sorry. I prefer not to share that information.”

“It’s important information,” Cohns said.

“I am not surprised by his reluctance,” Aldridge said. “If there are any real Jedi left, they will remain hidden.”

“If there are any Jedi left?” Hidalgo asked. “I will vouch for Waycaster. He is the real deal.”

“Forgive me if I question your authority on the subject,” Cohns said. “Yeah, we all know your niece and you have shared the story of her miraculous healing, but that doesn’t legitimize his status. At best, it makes him a shaman healer. At worse, a charlatan who just happened to

have a technological cure. And hell, placebos and fakeries have been medically shown to heal folks, too.”

“Let it be,” Mrs. Hidalgo said. “He has clearly communicated he doesn’t want to share.”

“Knowing who raised him is not just about legitimacy. It also allows us insight into his training, his philosophies, and his loyalties,” Cohns said.

“Well, if it helps,” G said. “You should know I am going to break with all traditions.”

“Oh, you’re a rebel,” Aldridge joked.

“I think they call them the Resistance now,” Kendor interjected. He was surprised it earned him a few laughs.

“I imagine whoever raised you knew you would break with traditions, which makes me wonder why they would confer a title on you, when you’re clearly not going to re-establish the order,” Cohns said.

“There is a reason the Order fell,” Elle said. “We don’t bail out failed business ventures. This is the same thing. The old order fell, and something new, something better, will rise from the ashes.”

“Or something worse,” Tier said.

“Your economic polices don’t apply here,” Cohns said.

“Let’s move to another topic,” Hidalgo said.

“His question is reasonable,” G said.

“And your stating that my question is reasonable in this context seems to reinforce that persistence in the matter is not,” Cohns said.

“If you must know, the title of Jedi was sort of forced on me,” G interrupted, soliciting another round of unexpected laughter. Cohns didn’t laugh. “All of you here have titles. Your titles were earned or bestowed upon you and they have meaning and weight and obligation. I could care less about any your titles. I am not impressed. Your titles have not allowed you to formulate answers that have improved the lives of the people you serve. If anything, your systems and titles simply maintain the present order, which is inherently unstable because other people want titles, too. In fact, what strikes me as most interesting about this meal is the fact that none of you have any more answers than anyone else in the Galaxy, and you’re just as troubled and worried as the masses, so your titles and your knowledge sets haven’t even given you any sense of peace, other than the illusion of control you think you hold. You call me Jedi, but truly, what does that mean? It means something to someone. It probably doesn’t mean the right thing to the right people. I didn’t earn it. I didn’t attend an academy. You will ask some and they will tell you the title was given to me in recognition of my abilities and knowledge. Others will tell you the title was given like a collar, to put a leash on me and try to constrain me. Some will laugh, some will bow, and some will run in fear. And why? Because someone decided to label me. It seems to me, it is our labels, our classification system, that keep us in conflicts. Labels generate games and divide us. I prefer the solitude of my cave, the quiet between stars, and the peaceful exploration of the internal and external worlds. If I accept this title, the responsibility that comes with it, the prestige the love the hate of it, then I would like to point out to you, we are all Jedi, every last one of us, and it is only your self-imposed limits brought about by your labels that keep you from rising to the next level.”

A silence fell around that. Tier mouthed the words “Wow,” unable to move enough air to generate noise. For a moment, the silence that followed was as profound as that found in any cave or in the black of night between stars.

“If you don’t mind me asking,” Mrs. Hidalgo asked. “If you prefer your solitude, why have you returned to Axxila?”

“I like sex,” G said.

Laughter ensued, a few glasses came up, Kendor made an ‘eww’ face, Mrs. Hidalgo blushed, and Tier and Elle both seemed to be communicating their interest.

The conversation continued on without any further ‘real’ input from G. In fact, at the conclusion where everyone said farewell before departing, they each thanked him as if he had offered something extremely profound and they were taking away a prize of insight. Elle gave him her card. The whole departure of guests was a lingering affair that required Hidalgo conspired G away to his private office, insisting it be without Droids, where he offered him a cigar and a glass of brandy. G accepted the cigar but chose not to light it. G sat on a couch, and Hidalgo sat in his favorite chair facing G, putting his feet up on the table.

“Please forgive my children’s unruliness at the dinner,” Hidalgo said. “I have been a bit permissive in their upbringing.”

“They seem reasonably healthy,” G remarked. He sipped the brandy, and not liking it, he used the Force to change it from an alcoholic beverage to something more neutral, but leaving the appearance the same so as not to insult his host.

“I owe you a great deal, you know,” Hidalgo said. “And not just for healing my niece. I was certain to lose the last Mayoral election, but that incident with Ten caused people to rally around me because of my hard stance policy against criminals, not only did I get the office, I was able to run and win the Presidential Election. Did you know the guy that stole her heart got life in prison? He is up for parole, but I am going to veto it. The warden is pressuring me to put him in a mental asylum. Claims he thinks he is a ten year old girl and has hallucinations about being sexually abused.”

G nodded. “That’s likely accurate,” he said.

Hidalgo narrowed his eyes. “You think he’s not bullshitting just to manipulate the system?”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing. Everyone lies, everyone manipulates. Even in the utterance of truth, we are manipulating. Anyway, as to his claims, organ transplants frequently come with the memories, hopes, and dreams of the host body,” G said. “It’s well documented. Even a blood transfusion can result in thought transference. Whether that is due to neural transmitters being able to pass through the blood brain barrier, or due to spiritual imprinting, is not really relevant, as much as it does happen.”

“So, you think I should grant him a change of venue, from prison to mental health?” Hidalgo said.

“I am not wise enough in matters of the state to respond,” G said, staring over his dead brandy. “I almost imagine all criminal activity is the result of some level of mental health issue, which is my bias. As for the man with Ten’s heart, he took something that didn’t belong to him, and he is suffering the consequences for that, and will likely deal with it the remainder of this physical life, which will be a long life due to having had a healthy, ten year old heart put in his chest. Executing him would have been a release for him in more ways than one, however, it wouldn’t have brought back the dead.”

“It would have reduced the number of future organ stealing,” Hidalgo said.

“No, executing him, and the others involved, only increases the profitability of getting away with it, which would result in higher numbers of people taking the risk,” G said.

“Additionally, if you kill him, that makes the man and the heart available for others to use, and

then a new debate begins of whether you allow all those viable organs to go to waste on principle, or you use them, which again increases the likelihood of the crime happening because indirectly, someone is getting those organs and there is a need for organs because you can't grow artificial ones fast enough for the population at large."

Hidalgo nodded, blowing smoke into the air. "Well, this seems perfect segue for a problem I would like your help with," he said.

"I may not be of much service, as I am trying to accomplish a personal mission," G said.

"Help me with this, and I will pull out all stops to help you with yours," Hidalgo said.

G sighed. "Tell me," he invited.

Hidalgo made a decision to be as forthcoming as possible. "I am entangled, unfavorably so, with a particular crime lord. It is the direct result of my proclivities to engage in non-humanoid species in intimate ways. Specifically, I am a xenophile, and I have gone to extraordinary lengths to get my needs met, while maintaining my privacy. The crime lord I'm having issues with has several bases of operation, but his preferred base is here on Axxila, and I happen to know he is presently here. He is untouchable by law, and he has deep pockets and ties here on Axxila, and on many other worlds. He is diversified in trafficking products that range from weapons, drugs, people, children, and even organs. He also maintains a presence on the legitimate market, and so many of the organs he sells have licenses. Perhaps you would be surprised to learn that many of the elite and the rich hire cloning services in order to have backup organs in case of an emergency. He has several facilities where he grows full bodies, minus the brains. Here on Axxila, it's called the Vault. As long as the people pay, he keeps the bodies in good condition. They don't pay, the bodies are turned into pet food, or scrapped for parts and sold wherever there is a donor match, depends on what pays more. Some of the bodies in the Vault bring in additional revenue, as he pimps the bodies out to rich clients that just want to fuck without worrying about a commitment. If a baby results, well, it is the legal property of the crime lord, and he can 'sell' it or 'adopt' it out at his leisure. His name is Jungin and he is the most powerful Hutt I have ever met."

G brought up his hands in I surrender. He was sorting it out. He closed his eyes. This would not be a small task. Taking out a crime lord of Jungin's authority would have profound repercussions across the galaxy. It would either leave a vacuum, that causes an increase in violence as the others rush in to fill the gap, or cause a crime wave as folks who had guaranteed fixes turn to other sources, and could potentially topple governments. It was the same thing he had met when he killed Kilmore. The question is, would this act serve the light or the dark side? He felt certain it would benefit Stoke either way. He sought an impression of the base, but before even a full image had formed in his mind, he felt the compulsion to retreat. In just the briefest touch, he had become aware of a Force sensitive entity that would potentially be problematic for an energy body scouting session. If he helped the President, he would be doing it blind, with only the Force in the 'moment' as his ally.

G opened his eyes and blinked. He was resolved. "This will likely not work out the way you imagine," he said.

"It's not like he is a Sith Lord," Hidalgo said. "Surely you can take him."

"He is not a Sith Lord, but it is also not an accident that he has been so successful over time," G said. "If I do this, a lot of people will die tomorrow. And more will likely follow. And, as you probably well know, you're not the only one being blackmailed for revenue or for favors, and I can't guarantee that some or all of it might come to light."

"I want Jungin gone," Hidalgo said.

“I will need a quiet place to meditate,” G said.

Hidalgo finished his cigar and then showed G to his room, where Freya had been waiting patiently. When he was alone, he invited Freya to go into sleep mode, while he meditated. He wasn't alone fifteen minutes when he heard his door open and Tier snuck in, closing the door quietly behind her. Freya's fingers had moved in anticipation of needing to draw a weapon. Only G, using the Force, had noticed.

“Tier,” G said softly, without turning the light on.

“How did you know it was me?” Tier asked.

G brought the lights up to half full. Tier was dressed in a skin tight suit and had a backpack. She had tucked her hair back under a cap.

“I want you to help me run away,” Tier said.

“You need to return to your room and forget about this nonsense,” G said.

“I thought you would be on my side,” Tier said, sulking.

“I am. More than you will ever know. This path does not lead you to where you think you should be,” G said.

“I will give you whatever you want if you take me with you when you leave,” Tier said, coming closer. “I would rather be your personal slave than continue with another semester at the academy.”

“Put your bag down and come here,” G said.

Tier followed instructions. She came to him on the bed, and he instructed her to sit as he was, legs crossed in meditating pose. He had her place her hands, palms down, on his. He had her close her eyes. He showed her a vision of what might happen if she left, which included kidnapping by Jungin's servants, and a series of assaults that would take her to an inch of her life, a lifelong drug addiction, and death in a seedy hotel after being beaten by a boyfriend in a drunken rage. When he brought her back, there were tears strolling down her eyes.

“Why are you doing this to me?” Tier said.

“If you take this path, you will likely not return,” G said. “You see your parents as controlling, and perhaps you realize they are not nice people and they use manipulation to get you to live up to their expectations, as opposed to helping you become the person you want to be. There is truth in that. There is also truth in the fact that they have enemies that would love nothing better than to destroy them by destroying that which they love. They love you. They love your brother. Make that your truth and walk with compassion in your life.”

“You don't know what it's like living with them. Living here!” Tier protested.

“Everyone is good and bad. Everywhere has good and bad. Before you start jumping into other worlds, learn to live peacefully in this one,” G said. “Because if you allow your discontent to drive you, it will still be with you when you arrive elsewhere.”

“It's so bad, sometimes I just want to kill myself,” Tier said.

G nodded. “Yeah,” he said, softly. “My experience with the other side assures me that whatever you feel here, in the body, will be greatly magnified when you exit the body. Don't let your discontent drive you there, either.”

“This is more than discontent,” Tier said.

“You are full of passion and love, and it's driven by an insight that your family doesn't recognize,” G said. “You still have unexplored options.”

“Show me something good,” Tier said.

“I did,” G said.

“What you showed me was horrid!” Tier said.

“What I showed you was one of many pathways opened to you. The future is not fixed, it’s shifting, and more often than not, we project what we want to see, but it is truly the consensus between the conscious and unconscious mind that will determine the future.”

“I don’t understand,” Tier said.

“If we took a functional, real time scan of your brain, it is clear that your brain has made decisions anywhere from 3 to 7 seconds prior to you being aware that you have consciously made a decision,” G said. “This has been demonstrated over and over in consciousness research. One conclusion is that there is no free will and the world is completely deterministic, and our belief in our ability to decide our fate is a complete illusion. And then there is the Jedi’s interpretation. There is the force, there is the unconscious, and then there is us, and this triad of complex awareness decides our fate. The only difference between me and you is that most the time, I am so one with the Force that I don’t experience 3 to 7 seconds of lag between awareness and event. I experience it all in an ever present now. There are no accidents. I was fated to be a guest in your house before you even decided to run away. I am one with the Force and the Force is offering you this intercession, this opportunity to find a different path. This is a gift. It a message. I am merely the messenger, so how you choose to interpret it is all on you. You can see it as horrid and feel that I too am just one more manipulator. You can see it as a warning, a light telling you to power down your jets and wait for clearance. Or, you can ignore it as nothing other than fantasy and go find out for yourself. Just know, some paths, once you start them, they come with their own tolls and obligations.”

“Once you start down the dark path...” Tier said.

“Yeah, running away in the middle of the night in secret, kind of a dark path, and that’s not just a metaphor,” G said. “You asked me to show you something good, but you must change you’re the filters of your heart before you can see greater lights.”

“I hate my life,” Tier said.

G nodded. He didn’t think it would be helpful telling her he knew lots of people who would gladly trade places with her.

“Why is life so hard?” Tier asked.

“Any fool with a broken heart can sing a sad song, Tier,” G said. “It takes a special kind of gift to be able to look above the storm and see the sun and stars and sing about the abundance of life and affirming opportunities. Make gratitude your mission, do it for a month, listen to others without judging and or advising, and you will find the change you are looking for.”

“Would you marry me?” Tier asked.

“No,” G said.

Tier pouted.

“You don’t like how your parents manipulate you, and yet, you’re expression is a form of manipulation,” G said. “I have said no. You should allow me to be.”

“Then you should allow that I want to be with you, learn from you, travel the galaxy with you,” Tier said.

G smiled. “Well turned. Now, I want you to go back to your room.”

Tier got off the bed and collected her bag. “Couldn’t you just use a Mind Trick on me and make me think my life is perfect?”

“Unfortunately, you’re too intelligent,” G said. “There is no way for me to get past your own Jedi Mind Tricks that you employ on a daily basis.”

“What does that mean?” Tier asked.

“Consider it. We’ll talk again,” G said.

“You promise?” Tier asked.

G nodded.

Tier left without a thank you, almost resigned, with only the hope that she might speak to G again in the future. As soon as the door closed, G thanked Freya for not laughing.

“Why would I laugh?” Freya asked. “I would no more laugh at a teenage girl whose hormones are raging and she is wanting to do what youth are called to do naturally, than I would make fun of an adolescent male whose hormones are driving him to use his hand or a pillow. The makers of Luxury Droids have programmed us for compassion for all things related to sensuality. Humans would benefit from this programming.”

G nodded, turned off the light, only to hear the door open and close again. He turned on the lights to see Mrs. Hidalgo.

“Oh, I am sorry,” Mrs. Hidalgo said. “I didn’t know they put you in this room.”

“This is not an accident,” G told her.

“I should really go. It scares me the way you can see into people. With a mere gaze, you would see into me and know me more intimately than anyone ever has. You would find the darkness in me, the walls that contain it, and knock them down.”

“We all have walls,” G said. “I would no more knock your walls down than I would take an astronaut’s suit off while he is in orbit. They’re there to protect us, from real or perceived dangers.”

Mrs. Hidalgo grew closer. “I am drawn to you.”

“Mrs. Hidalgo,” G said. “I must warn you, if you persist in this direction, I will not withhold, which could put a strain on your relationship with your husband.”

“We have no relationship, there would be no strain,” Mrs. Hidalgo said, coming closer.

“Then why would you want to subject your daughter to the same sort of arranged marriage?” G asked.

Mrs. Hidalgo was taken back. “You want to talk about my daughter?”

“I am just seeking clarity,” G said.

“I am confused,” Mrs. Hidalgo said. “I thought you were interested in me. The way you were staring at me during the dinner. That felt meaningful.”

“I thought you were staring at me,” G said.

Mrs. Hidalgo closed the distance. “So, you did feel it? I didn’t imagine it?”

“You didn’t misperceive, but you did misunderstand. All gazes are engagement in intimacy. You can’t see without recognizing that we are all one, connected by light,” G explained. “Your daughter was looking at me in the same way you were looking at me.”

“Again with my daughter?” Mrs. Hidalgo asked. “My husband and I would gladly give her to you. A Jedi would be a step up from the other suitors.”

“I’m not asking for your daughter,” G assured her.

“I am only asking because I am a little surprised. I mean, she’s not the best looking thing, and her grades are abysmal,” Mrs. Hidalgo said, kneeling into the bed and crawling towards him. “But, marrying her would allow for us to have more opportunities like this.”

Mrs. Hidalgo kissed him. He sighed.

“I am feeling intensely aroused,” G admitted, his eyes closed.

“Oh, me, too,” Mrs. Hidalgo said, breathlessly. She threw herself on him, taking him to the bed. She took his arms up above his head, and kissed him. “Ravish me with your Jedi powers.”

G lifted her and set her on the floor.

“I think you should go, now,” G said.

“Really?!” Mrs. Hidalgo asked.

“You want to leave now,” G said, waving his hand.

“I think I am going to go now,” Mrs. Hidalgo said.

“You will remember a pleasant conversation, but discovered you had no further interest in pursuing me,” G said.

“You’re really nice, G, but I am just not feeling it,” Mrs. Hidalgo said.

“And you’re going to be nicer to your daughter,” G said.

“I think I will go talk to Tier,” Mrs. Hidalgo said.

“That sounds brilliant. Good night, Mrs. Hidalgo. And thanks for looking in on me,” G said.

“Oh, you’re welcome,” Mrs. Hidalgo said, departing.

Freya looked to G. “I am surprised you turned that down,” Freya said.

“Oh, shut up and come to bed,” G insisted.

Freya laughed.

Chapter 12

“Knock, And He'll open the door
Vanish, And He'll make you shine like the sun
Fall, And He'll raise you to the heavens
Become nothing, And He'll turn you into everything.”
— Rumi

G found himself in an observation blister, looking out at the stars. He wasn't sure at first how he had come here, but he found himself tracing constellation lines with his fingers, but soon realized they were quite tangible and not so far away. There were lit candles in a circle, and the dome of constellation lines fell to the perimeter of the candles, and included the candles. He pushed against the lines, as if imagining them to be holograms, and yet they had substance.

“It's interesting, isn't it?”

G turned to find a man standing inside the circumference of the circle. G couldn't decide if he had always been there or had just arrived.

“Forgive me,” G said. “But is this a dream?”

The man smiled. “It does happen, albeit rarely, that sometimes it is really difficult to discern between dream, different dimensions, or astral realms. If you don't mind hearing my opinion, I find making the distinction irrelevant. I treat the characters in my dreams the same way I treat the people in real life, because it is all fiction,” he said.

“I find affinity with your conclusion,” G said. “Have we met before?”

“Again, the contextual social resonance of that question tends to rob us of being present in the ever now,” he said. “Can you allow for the past and future to not bind us and simply be?”

G blinked, seeking Force Awareness.

“You're looking for something,” the man said.

“Someone,” G said.

“No, you're looking for something. You're analyzing my statements looking for agendas and traps,” the man said.

“I don't think I am,” G said.

“In that case, I would like to extend an offer of friendship,” he said. “My name is Tryst.”

G blinked, even squinting. “That does seem to come with an agenda.”

“Did you ever have a friendship that didn't?” Tryst asked.

“This space feels murky,” G said. “Are you intentionally trying to cloud my vision?”

“You came into my space, Sir. You haven't even introduced yourself,” Tryst said.

The accusation felt right. G nodded. “Forgive my intrusion. I am Preston G Waycaster. I am looking for my sister. Her name is Daphne.” G found himself wanting to look behind Tryst, Tryst stepped closer, purposely blocking sight.

“Let me be very clear on this point. She does not want to see you. She belongs to me, now, and you are going to have to accept that,” Tryst said.

G breathed, focusing. The reality seemed to condense and he and Tryst under a netting of constellations were more real than anything else in the Universe. G recognized Tryst's assumed role as gatekeeper.

“She has become your apprentice?” G asked.

“Apprentice, slave, submissive, wife,” Tryst said. “All of these archaic nomenclatures that hint at a level of ownership and property rights are inappropriate when applied against

living, free being. She is mine the way the air I breathe is mine and she has come to me in her own time and will leave on her own time and anything you try to do to interrupt that will only reinforce my hold on her.”

“That feels true,” G said.

“That’s what makes my lying so great,” Tryst said. “I lie while telling the truth. I don’t even twist it. I just tell it like it is and people buy into it and agree and later on when they are questioning reality, I only have to point back to what I told them and how they accepted. I find the truth liberating. Don’t you? Don’t you hate all the games the Jedi play? They tell half-truths, always from a certain point view. Hell, in many ways, they are as dishonest and secretive as the Sith they fought against. You know that. You’ve seen it. And here’s the thing, G. I like you. I really want us to become the best of friends. I want you to join me and change the Galaxy. We could use someone of your talent.”

“You want us to be friends, and yet, you block me from my sister,” G said.

Tryst sighed. “Yeah. Whether we become friends or not, that is now a boundary you’re going to have to respect. Any further attempts on your part to visit her, on any level, will bring you back here, to me. It will lead to your undoing,” he assured him.

“I think you underestimate my resolve in this,” G said.

“No, you’ve underestimated mine,” Tryst said, and out of nowhere he produced a lightsaber and struck G down before he even realized his entire inside had been illuminated by the purple of Tryst’s blade.

G sat up in bed. Freya sat up. “G?”

“What the fuck?!” G said, clutching his chest. His pain subsided and he began to reign in his breathing. “That hasn’t happened in a long while.”

“You found a new sparring partner?” Freya asked.

“Apparently,” G said.

“Friend or foe?” Freya asked.

“Interesting,” G mused. “I can’t seem to make a distinction.”

“Oh, the best kind, then,” Freya said. “You should lay back and try to sleep. You have a big day ahead of you tomorrow.”

G looked at her, wondering if he was still dreaming. Ever since being stunned, he was finding himself questioning reality. “How do you know that?”

“Sometimes, you talk in your sleep,” Freya said.

“Really?” G asked. “Well, that can’t be good.”

“Especially if you spend the night with someone with jealousy issues,” Freya agreed.

“How so?” G asked.

“Who is Doty?” Freya asked.

“I don’t know. Who is Doty?” G asked.

“I don’t know. Someone’s name you called out before you woke up,” Freya said.

“Are you fucking with me?” G asked.

“Not presently. Would you like me to reengage?” Freya said.

“Sometimes I find our conversations confusing,” G said.

“I frequently experience that with humans,” Freya said. “Would you like me on top?”

“Uh, oh, yeah, that would be nice,” G said.

For whatever reason, the trance always came easier during intimacy and he found himself floating up and beyond the mansion. It required a level of focus to prevent the full immersion into the ‘light of oneness.’ Indeed, it was almost as difficult to avoid that oneness as it was to

avoid having an orgasm after reaching the threshold. He didn't like the crudity of the analogy but it was the only one that consistently rang true and was the most likely to be understood by a broad range of beings. He balanced on the precipice of either going into 'oneness' or falling back to his body and finishing what they had started.

G felt the compulsion to go visit Shade. 'Suddenly,' meaning faster than the speed of light, faster than could even be explained by the existence of hyperspace, or intra-dimensional travel, G arrived directly in front of Shade. Like always, she was in the midst of being entertained, surrounded on all sides by people engaging in intimacy. All levels of intimacy. Her present estate consisted of a tower, with single 'bedrooms' arranged all around, proceeding down five floors and up five floors, and the doors were paper thin and allowed for the suggestive silhouette to be played out on their membranes. The planet Zeltros was pretty much nonstop play, but at Shade's Palace, a hotel with the inner sanctum that made her the focal point of erotic energies, greatly increased her ability to channel sensuality and amplify it, which had people standing in line for one of her rooms.

Shade shuddered, "Oh! No way! Preston, my child, it is so lovely to see you," Shade said. "Please, tell me you have come to play?!"

"Where's your normal crew?" G asked.

"Licon can't tolerate the level of play here, so he asked to be retired," G said. "Keena is off shift. Let me introduce you to my new people. Wait, wait, wait... AH! Damn it, I lost it. Right here, and in front of you, this tall, voluptuous, reddish, pink bombshell is called Callie. Oh, G, you should taste her. I swear she taste like an over ripe berry. To her left, this orange and big booty baby with blue hair is Esme. She can do more things with her forked tongue than anyone I have ever met."

"I didn't know your species had forked tongues," G said.

"It's a latent trait," Esme said.

"And this dark red, juicy number is Fern," Shade said.

"I am feeling overwhelmed," G said.

"Oh, baby, give in!" Shade said. "Give momma a lift."

"I really need to talk to you, Shade. Business."

"Lifting before business," Shade insisted.

G sighed, closed his eyes, and gently lifted Shade off her platform with the Force. She writhed and rolled and shouted excitedly waving her short, stubby arms, with flexing hands grasping at air.

"Oh, raise us all!" Shade said.

G subtly flexed a finger and Esme, Callie, and Fern rose from the floor. As with all Zeltrons, they were telepaths, and they were sharing their experience with each other and Shade and transmitted their joy back to G, which was enhancing all sensations and emotions.

"Everyone, G!" Shade yelled.

The hand gesture was more obvious, and everyone on the eleven floors, the five below and the five above plus the floor Shade's platform was level with, for a total of eleven, were lifted. The amount of feedback of intimately touching so many people who were already deep into the throes of passion nearly overwhelmed him, but he channeled it through Shade, and when the energy peaked not only did everyone in the Tower suddenly arrive, but everyone in a half kilometer had an experience. G nearly faded away, but he refocus and sat everyone down gently.

“Oh my you don’t know how much I needed that,” Shade said, sounded existed. “We better hurry up and talk business becomes I am so going to sloth the rest of this day away.”

Esme, Callie, and Fern had to sit down, equally exhausted. All activates in all the room ceased, as people quickly faded into that pleasant slumber that follows extreme bliss.

“Oh, Preston, Preston, Preston,” Shade said. “What can I do for you? Do you want to spend time with one of my girls?”

“I think I just spent time with all of them,” G said.

“Oh, you just touched the surface of what’s possible here,” Shade said. “Telepathy enhances sensuality beyond belief. No secrets, no fear, just pure acceptance. The only crime here is not indulging, and people know when you’re ‘declining’ is for the wrong reasons. Not wanting is one thing, but not engaging because you are wanting it only on your own conditions, well, in a world of telepaths, you quickly learn to share or you’re invited to leave.”

“Yeah, um we need to focus on business. I don’t know how much longer I can stay awake,” G said. “Tell me everything you know about Jungin.”

“Oh, dear, Preston, please tell me you didn’t get on his bad side,” Shade said. “I love you and I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

“I only know rumor. Is he reasonable?” G asked.

“He’s a Hutt,” Shade said. “Let me share a little secret. Hutts are fucking bat shit crazy. I don’t know what a bat is or why their shit is crazier than other shit, but Hutts take that shit to a whole new level. It makes us super smart and devious in our single minded pursuits to gain power and glory and riches. And that’s me generalizing about the Hutt population. Jungin himself, well, he identifies himself as male and though he has absolutely zero, zilch Force abilities, he thinks he is a Jedi because he believe you are what you eat and he has literally eaten Jedi raw. He has also has had the organs of Jedi’s grafted into his body, which do nothing other than feed his delusion that they do something for him. There is circumstantial evidence that he is a paranoid schizophrenic, as he has been known to talk to himself, and so it is likely he takes his hallucinations as further evidence that he is a Jedi of unheralded power.”

“Can you tell me how to get access to him?” G asked.

“Aw, honey, you don’t need him. You got me and I will never do you wrong because you do me so right every time,” Shade said.

“Shade, I am not meeting him in order to make him a business partner,” G said. “I intend to end him.”

“Oh, no way!” Shade said, shivering. “Oh, Master, baby, collar me and make me yours. You just pushed goose bumps down my whole left side. I am hesitant to tell you how to get in, because I love you, but then again, taking him out would allow me to expand business, and you did do pretty well against the Bloodhunters, so, alright, I am in, but I want credit for participation that comes with plausible deniability, but sufficient enough it will make the other Hutts respect me a little more than they do. I want them thinking twice about messing with my ventures. And, I want dibs on some of the routes.”

“I think we can come to an arrangement,” G said.

“Very well. Callie, there is too much to talk about and I am about to sleep, so transfer what he need to know from my brain direct to his brain,” Shade said. “Oh, and G, if we’re going to be partners, you have to take one of these girls as a personal assistance.”

“No, that’s okay,” G said, still sorting out the information dumping into his head. Sorting the Hutt out was a little difficult and it had unpleasant taste, which was softened a little by the taste of Callie’s mental signature.

“I insist, Preston,” Shade said. “All future business correspondence will go through one of our assistance. Trust me. They can code it in such a way even a Droid couldn’t sort it and, these three here, their telepathic range is huge.”

“Okay. You convinced me,” G said. “I’ll take two.”

“No way, Preston. Don’t be greedy. One is sufficient for any human,” Shade said.

“Well, I was going to give one to my Priya, and now that I think about it, sending one to stay with Jordeen might be useful,” G said. “Yeah, I want three. One for me, one for Jordeen, one for Lestelle, and one for Priya.”

“Oh, well, that makes sense,” Shade said. “Which one of these do you want?”

“Do you girls have a preference?” G asked.

The girls exchanged glances and a quick telepathic game of rock, paper, scissors, lightsabers ensued; though it was in their heads, their hands telegraphed the game. Callie won on the third round. She stepped forward and knelt.

“Where would you like me to come, Master,” Callie asked.

“Oh, no way!” Shade squeaked. “She did not just ask you that!”

“I don’t think she meant it the way you’re imagining she meant it,” G told her.

“It could mean whatever you would like it to mean, Master,” Callie said.

“Oh, I so love my tele-girls!” Shade squealed. “I don’t know why I didn’t come to Zeltros years ago.”

“If you don’t mind,” Callie said. “I get the impression that Jordeen is in a quiet, academic sort of place, and my friend Lexi would be very comfortable there. She is less boisterous than the average Zeltron. I expect Esme is more suited for the life on board a ship.”

“Think of all the lovely, lonely men,” Esme said.

“And ladies,” Fern said.

“Ah! Indeed, ladies do serve on ships now,” Esme said. “Shall we play for it?”

G couldn’t turn his eyes away. Shade laughed, knowingly.

“I never knew watching this game could be so arousing,” G said.

“Another round?” Shade asked.

“Of this game?” G asked.

“No, sweetie-P,” Shade said. “It seems unfair to me you haven’t gotten off. How about one for the road?”

“Ah, hell, I am not going to get any sleep now if we don’t!”



Adrienne Helters met G just beyond the Vault doors. She had the face and body of a model who could sell any product she held, and was dressed in a tight fitting, strapless, blue, elastic, shiny, plastic spandex like material that hugged her body the way the eyes of men wanted to. Her job was to sell to rich men, and the more they salivated the more they spent. She had the plastic, bob hair style, which was as blue as her dress, and her large, fake eyelashes fluttered a secret, subliminal code directly into the unconscious mind her prey which was as powerful as any Force command. It was the code that had G on the verge of surrender and submission. She took his hand affectionately, licking unreal red lips.

“Mr. Waycaster, it is so nice to meet you,” Adrienne said, drawing him closer to her and leading him. “We are so happy that you did the credit check online before coming, as it really helps guide us in offering you the best services.”

Adrienne led him to a private lounge where G was invited to sit on a couch. She sat on the footstool in front of him, crossed her legs, and leaned in, pushing her breast together as she reached to put her hands on her knees. The room was white. The furniture was white. It suggested everything here was so clean as to be sterile, but also left an open invitation to make things not so clean, in the same way pure snow invited footprints, or angel wings, or sensual rolls.

“I read that you were considering surgery, and you wanted to store some blood, because you’re opposed to the synthetic stuff,” Adrienne said. “And well you should be. Natural is always better. And your own is always better than even the closest compatible donor.”

“Help me understand something, though,” G said. “Why don’t more people chose your services over the synthetic prosthetics?”

“Bottom line, costs,” Adrienne said. “Most people simply can’t afford to clone body parts, and even those who do, people rarely have the foresight to plan in advance. So for example, if you lost your arm, it would take us about five years to grow a suitable arm. It would take us a year to grow you a heart. But, if you can afford it, you could grow an entire clone body, which we will maintain at optimum health, and should you ever have need, it’s there for the harvesting.”

“But what about its soul?” G asked.

“No soul. No brain. We inhibit the brain from developing so that it’s just a body, thereby eliminating moral issues surrounding you harvesting the heart if you were to need the heart,” Adrienne said.

“It almost sounds too good to be true,” G said.

“Well, it’s not perfect. It takes time to grow organs and the full body option naturally requires the most time. But transplanting technologies are here. We have in our employees the best of the best neural surgeons. We could literally transplant your brain into the clone body, should your situation be that desperate. Your options are, mechanical prosthetics, which work fine. You can get that service for practically free at any community clinic. Your next options is organ donations, which depending on compatibility, could require anti-rejection medication for the duration of your life, or, you could harvest from a clone of your genome and require no medication and decrease recovery times. We could even put your brain in the body of a younger you. But if you’re real adventurous, we could put your brain in the body of another body all together. You want to be female? We can make that happen. We could put your brain in a synthetic body and you live for centuries, or we could download a copy of your brain into a synthetic and you live forever. Most people prefer the organic body.”

“So, again, why is this not better known? I mean, I get the costs, but, cloning technology has been around for hundreds of years?” G asked.

“Yeah, the clone war put a bad taste in lay public’s mind about clones,” Adrienne said. “Contrary to popular belief, if we clone you, we’re not making another you. Even if we allowed the brain to develop, it wouldn’t be you. It would be a new person with a new personality. The Clone Wars wasn’t just cloning. They were mass imprinting and had regimental training to minimize divergence. And it was so not perfect. It had quirks. The neural maps of brains are never hundred percent the same. But at the time, believe it or not, it was cheaper than robotics and Droids, and it bypassed the fear of some hacker changing the code and turning armies against the users. Anyway, personalities are the result of nurturing, education, physical and social environments, but also, and most importantly, perspective, and that is why even the most

perfect clone has some individuation in terms of neural mapping. Would you like to see a clone?"

"Is that possible?" G asked.

"Absolutely," Adrienne said, uncrossing her leg in an enticing manner before getting up and leading him G to another room.

Adrienne led him to a room where bodies hovered over beds. Adrienne explained they hovered due to the beds pushing air out, the same technology that allowed burn victims to recover without sheeting's sticking to wounds. The same tech was utilized to prevent people in comas from getting bed sores.

"They just float there all day every day?" G asked.

"Oh, no, no," Adrienne assured him, taking him to the next room where clones walked mindlessly around the room, eyes open but unseeing. "We put computer interfaces in their heads so that we can walk them, run them, or just general exercise them. They have to be mobile for the best muscle strength. For improved muscle mass, we can put them on a centrifuge and spin them up to twice the normal Gs."

G paused in front of one of the female clones.

"She looks familiar," G said.

"That's an Emma Power clone," Adrienne said.

"The Emma Powers!" G said, all excited.

"The one and only. No plastic surgery for her. Her secret to longevity is a full face transplant.

"She looks so young," G said.

"No brain, no thoughts, no facial and forehead creases," Adrienne said.

"And no laugh lines," G remarked.

"Emma can always add those herself," Adrienne said. "Come on, I will show you the bacta tank where we perform accelerated growth procedures."

G resisted, transfixed by Emma Powers. "Hypothetically, if someone wanted to buy an Emma Powers clone, is that possible?"

"Emma Power's image and genome is own by her estate," Adrienne said, sadly.

"Oh," G said, sadly.

"If you want to look through our celebrity catalogues, there are some for sell," Adrienne said.

"Yeah, that's all right. I have just had a crush on Emma for about forever," G said. He turned back to Adrienne wistfully. "Sorry. I am just being stupid. Celebrity struck I guess."

"Oh, honey, you're not stupid," Adrienne said. "It's only natural to want to spend time with a crush. If you want some private time with her, I could make that happen."

G looked down, blushing.

"Sir, this is perfectly legal and acceptable. People masturbate. Some use their hands. Some use toys. This is just flesh. It's not a person. There is no brain and no feelings. This body has less legal rights than a Droid. I can provide you with a ton of scientific literature of the health benefits of being with a flesh and blood person who you have a crush on. This is so legit, I could charge your medical insurance for this service."

"Really?" G said.

"Absolutely," Adrienne said.

"Can it get pregnant?" G asked.

“Sure, if you want that option. If you sired a baby with any of the clones, we would offer you first chance to buy the adoption rights,” Adrienne said. “You should know, if you do take our services, we will own the genetic rights to your clone, to any off springs it might generate, and any subsequent generations. And because you’re a BioEnc employee, you will be afforded a discount, because we share a subsidiary. And, I know you only expressed interest in Emma, but if you are into kink, we have lots of other erotic, fetish flesh options, such as muscles only, no skin. A variety of aliens. I bet we have options you haven’t even thought of.”

“I am feeling a bit overwhelmed,” G said.

“That’s why I am here,” Adrienne said, touching his arm gently. “I am here to guide you through this process.”

“Yeah, I may just take my time in haggling so I can keep spending time with you,” G boldly flirted.

“You don’t have to haggle. If that’s what it takes to close this deal, I would be happy to spend time with you,” Adrienne said, deliberately stepping in closer to him, her touch moving from his arm, to his shoulder, to his lapel.

“Hypothetically speaking,” G said. “If there was someone I wanted to be with who isn’t here, who definitely wouldn’t consent to having a clone, could that happen?”

“Hypothetically, with the right amount of credit, things like that have been known to happen,” Adrienne said. “But, keeping it hypothetical, mind you. You might find your money better spent buying a slave on the black market.”

“Yeah, I am really not looking for a slave per say, but am open to that in general,” G said.

“Hypothetically, you didn’t really come here intending to clone yourself for spare parts,” Adrienne said.

G couldn’t step closer to her without stepping into her, and he did, bringing their bodies into contact. “I know exactly what I want, and I know it’s going to cost, and I am able and willing to pay,” G said.

“Does your want have a name?” Adrienne said.

“Is this conversation confidential?”

“Just you and me, and staff, maybe the boss if your request is out of my reach,” Adrienne said.

“I want a breeding clone of General Leia Organa Solo,” G said.

Adrienne bit her lower lip, imagining the cost and the kickback that would come her way. “You may be over reaching,” she said.

“I think I could get the genetic material, if that helps. What’s the minimum? A piece of hair from her comb or brush? Maybe steal her tooth brush?”

“Hypothetically, we would collect the material. We have Droids for that,” Adrienne said. “But why her?”

“The Skywalker family line is reportedly the strongest force sensitive family the Galaxy has ever known. Granted, there’s what four generations now? Maybe it’s a fluke. However, Leia is force sensitive. So is her son. I am force sensitive. I imagine if I could have a breeding clone of Leia I could produce a stronger batch of Force sensitive children. In fact, with test tube and artificial womb technology, I suspect within 15 years, I could have a small army of Jedi quality teens.”

Adrienne smiled. “I am sure this idea is not original,” she said. “Someone, somewhere has thought of cloning Force sensitives before. What makes you think your plan will work?”

“I am not going to be making clones of clones, or just reusing the original template for many clones,” G said. “The original template has to be a breeding pair. Every egg, every sperm, is different, which means every combination is different, which means every child will have strengths the original parents didn’t have, and they will be raised in an environment with someone capable of teaching them right from the start how to be one with the Force. And of those, the females who demonstrate the most Force will raise the second generation of Force babies, or their breeding clone will.”

“And if the Force genes are passed down from paternal side?” Adrienne said.

“We’ll use all the available reproductive means at our disposal to make as many Force babies as possible,” G said.

“And you think you’re capable of teaching people to use the Force?!” Adrienne said.

G lifted his hand, subtly bringing his fingers closer together, as if he were standing behind himself and with a trick of perspective, he was caressing her. Adrienne responded with an impressed smile, nearly closed her eyes and gave into the sensuality behind the ‘untouched’ caress. He spiked the touch in an unseen direction and she gasped, coming up on her toes. She leaned harder into his chest, her hands going around him, pulling on his back.

“You have my full attention, Master. I don’t think I have ever heard about a Jedi like you,” Adrienne said.

“There has never been a Jedi like me. I am new. I have come to raise the bar,” G said. “I have come to bring a new order of Jedi the like of which have not been seen in the Galaxy for over a millennia.”

“You’re going to have to sell this directly to my boss,” she said.

“Can you make that happen?” G asked.

“I can, but you’re going to have to spend money today,” Adrienne said.

“Happy to,” G assured her.

“My boss is going to want to know you’re a player. You’re going to have to spend time with me, while being recorded,” Adrienne said.

“More than happy to,” G said.

“It would help if you also spent time with Emma, also recorded,” Adrienne said.

“I’ll do you both together,” G offered.

“I have to warn you. If he accepts there’s no backing out. It’s a commitment,” Adrienne said.

“Okay,” G said.

“If he doesn’t accept, he might just kill you on the spot,” Adrienne said.

“That would be unfortunate,” G said.

“He’ll likely want some Force sensitive babies for himself,” Adrienne said.

“I am sure that can be part of the negotiating price,” G said.

“I will want one,” Adrienne said. “And I want it now, just in case you don’t survive the encounter with my boss.”

G kissed her, took her to the wall, and held her there with the Force as they proceeded to engage each other in their business arrangement. The brainless clones continued to walk around the room, never straying from the path outlined on the floor, no better than fish in a tank. Perhaps more fortunate than the fish. Most farm raised fish suffered from boredom, making them more susceptible to disease, which required more antibiotic and artificial hormones to keep them viable as a food source. Wild was always better, even amongst humans.



One of the things that had made Jungin so successful was that he was loyal to those who were loyal to him. Of course, that loyalty was given after years of scrutiny and relationship and there was levels. Business was business, family was family, but he also had a family business, in which at some point, you became family, or dead. He didn't skimp on the payroll. So, for example: in many entertainment stories, the hired guards, or the watch, were usually the laziest, stupidest, people to be found, just someone to fill a hole. Being a Gatekeeper for Jungin was probably the highest esteemed job in his system. They were recruited because of their intelligence and they were well compensated with more privileges than any other serving class within the business. It also made coming at Jungin virtually impossible.

Adrienne bid G good luck, and allowed him to enter the room on his own. There were gun turrets on each wall, as well as cameras. Cameras came to life and the room became fiercely bright. Weapon turrets rose to life, swiveled, and took aim. In this confined space, accounting for all the weaponry, the amount of destructive energy that would be unleashed, it didn't take a rocket scientist to realize the level of aiming precision being presently employed was overkill, and likely just meant to intimidate. No one would leave this room alive if it went that way. Jedi or not. Still, Jedi explored a way to circumvent, and he could, but it would mean lots of people would die today, and he really wanted a different outcome.

"Please step into the circle on the floor," came a voice. The voice was female.

G stepped into the red circle.

"Please state your full name and reason for requesting an audience," the voice said.

"My name is Preston G Waycaster," G said. "I seek an audience with Jungin because I believe I have a business venture he would be interested in."

"Please strip," the voice responded.

"I am unarmed," G said.

"I know. And now, I want you unclothed," the voice said.

G stripped out of his clothes. He was instructed to put them in the chute. He did so. He returned to the circle.

"Are you aware that you have a bounty on your head on the black market?" the voice said.

"I am," G said.

"Alright, well, so I have to ask this," the woman asked: "Are you a complete moron coming here?!"

"Look, I know I have a price on my head. I am sure Jungin will have intel on me and know that I am wanted by Bloodhunters. I think he may be able to help me with that problem as well, assuming we can become partners," G said.

"How about I just shoot you now and collect the bounty?" she said.

"Or cut a deal and I pay you more than the bounty," G said. "Look, either way, you're passing me through, or you're killing me, so, do what you're going to do."

There was a long silence as the woman in a remote booth consider the equation or sought advice from superiors. "Very well," she said, opening a lift door. "I'm going to charge the account you provided Adrienne triple the bounty on your head. You may wear the robe provided inside the lift. Good day, Sir."

G nodded, entered the lift, and as the lift proceeded down, he put on the robe. He closed his eyes as the lift descended down, past the skin of structures that surrounded the planet, and

into the planet. The lift plummeted so fast he nearly came off the floor. Axxila was pretty much solid. It still had a liquid iron core, but there was no tectonic plates, no more volcanoes. Fresh material either came from off world or from tunneling droids. Jungin's base was 5km deep, and was originally a gold mine. Elaborate networks of tunnels made for a dozen possible exits, and access to and from the surface were some of the best kept secrets on Axxila. The population had stories about tunnels that just opened up allowing monsters to pour out, kidnap women and children, and when the monsters were done, the tunnels would close up behind them. G tried not to smile about the myth. It wasn't impossible; with the Force, sure, but highly unlikely, to the point of almost being funny ludicrous.

On arrival at the floor, G was met by guards in suits, their faces covered by mask. Through anonymity, not only were they more likely to engage in evil acts, but it also caused any of the fellow guards to squash their own good compulsions in order to follow the expectation of the group. The mask, the suit, the badge, it all had contextual meaning so much stronger than the individual psyche that wore the suit, that donning the suit was the equivalent of drinking amnesia potions. The 'darkness' in this tunnel had the potential of being overwhelming, even for G, who could too easily touch the number of people who were raped or killed just coming off the lift. Whether it was the Force or good fortune, today the guard simply hood winked him, walked him through tunnels and turned him around, some playful lashings occurred as they walked him in circles, and only after hours of walking, was he finally delivered to Jungin. Not once in the ordeal did he regret coming. If this was the end, then this was the end. There was no wrong or right choice in the Force, only choice, only consequences. Day of reckoning comes for all. The only question today was, whose day was it?

The hood was removed. G squinted, adjusting to the spot lights that blinded his eyes to the number of people that surrounded him; their numbers were not masked to the Force. There were so many individual representatives of evil surrounding him, it was difficult to discern who was who, and who should be the first target, but he had a good count. Their level of evil was more than mental health issues here, but no doubt mental health played a part in the sustaining. G imagined you have to be a bit crazy to be either extremely good or bad. Directly behind him, there were females that were entertaining Jungin. The females were jumping rope in skimpy outfits. The ropes were lighted ropes, one red and one blue, and the females, a variety of species, were all athletic. To the right and left of the females jumping rope were females running nude in place on treadmills. There were females hanging above in yoga swings and wound up in cloth. A couple females danced in suspended cages. There were holograms of females pole dancing. There were females lifting weights, as well. All of it was erotic and enticing, but following a different track than most of the expected Hutt dominated sleaze. Here, fitness was celebrated and the women were expected to look good, and be able to kick ass. The men who were in armor may have had issues with steroid addiction. G felt a sadness, because he had believed that most of the people that would die today would just be men. He shouldn't have thought that, and he shouldn't have felt sad, and he was glad to discover he held a bias; women were sacred to him. But, in the end, people are people, death is death, it comes to all. Even now, the Force was moving towards one inevitability; options were quickly dwindling away as all the players fell into sync with what was about to happen. There was a music tremor in the back reaches of his mind. If he had stayed at the Mansion, had he not come to Axxila, had he not... It was all wasted thought. He was here. He focused.

Jungin laughed. "I see you like my girls," he said. "Liking girls is a plus, but I suspect you are too much an idiot to be a partner. You would probably give away secrets and credits for a random piece of ass."

There was laughter all around. A light faded up on Jungin so he was discernable out of the legion around him. The light made it apparent that he, not G, was the prominent one on stage.

"You are definitely a liability," Jungin said. "But I, Jungin, am fair and honest, and I will permit you to an opportunity to convince me and my counsel around me that it would be a mistake killing you. And you should know, out of fairness, today, you will convince us or die, as I cannot allow someone of your reputation, perceived or real, to leave. I do like the plan you sold my gatekeeper Adrienne. But what's to keep me from using your plan and your own reproductive material, if it's not damage in your death struggle, or the breeding clone I make from your carcass? You may speak now."

G's breath was deep and almost unnoticeable under his robe. He bowed to Jungin. "I am grateful for the opportunity to speak," G said. "I did not expect your fairness, and so, perhaps out of equanimity, I would like to extend mercy to you and your colleagues. I have come to take over your business and own this base of operation for my own purposes, and I invite you to retire, and allow me to pay you a stipend from what I earn as I change the direction of the business at hand."

There was silence, perhaps someone was translating and broadcasting it to the ears of those in attendance. A few people began to protest but Jungin silenced it with a flip of his tail. Jungin stared, perhaps surprised, and perhaps trying to determine if G was making a joke, or was in fact merely suicidal.

Jungin laughed. "Well spoke, Waycaster," he said. "I still cannot decide if you are insane, or a comedian. I like you."

"Again, I am grateful," G said. "I like you, too. And it is why I am very hopeful you will accept my offer, and you and your staff depart without incidence."

"You understand, if you persist in this folly, I am going to kill you," Jungin said.

"I understand," G said. "Before you do, I would like to add one thing. Should anyone here today wish to change allegiance, I will grant amnesty, and allow you to remain employed with me at your present schedule until we have negotiated personally for different. I am hopeful, though, you will maintain your loyalty to Jungin and die with honor."

Again, perhaps due to the necessity of translation, there was a pause, followed by a roar of laughter. Jungin silenced them. "Last words?" Jungin said.

"I accept," G said. "What would you like to say?"

"Goodbye, Preston G Waycaster," Jungin said, and hit a button on the arm of his couch.

A trapdoor beneath G's feet sprung open, revealing a graduated glass funnel that led to a fully grown Sarlacc. The trap door was not centered on the Sarlacc, but was off center so it would drop a person onto the decline and entertain the watchers. The whole floor lit up revealing a transparency that allowed people to see the Sarlacc, and the lights triggered a response. The Sarlacc awoke as if from slumber and salivated and tentacles began to explore in the direction from which the food normally flowed. Its gaping maw opened and closed in anticipation. G suddenly understood the presence that had caused him to flee during his initial scouting. This Sarlacc was Force sensitive! In his mind, he was able to see the entirety of the beast, part plant, part animal, part monster, bound and presently enslaved by Jungin. The entirety of it was contained in a glass like terrarium and Jungin's people could watch his enemies being digested on the many different levels. Granted, they couldn't see the actual people, but every now and then,

if you were on the right level at the right time, a face or hand pushed into the outer digestive wall and made a ghostly imprint available to those watching. Most the time, the watchers laughed, because it was truly too horrendous to contemplate what it meant to be on Jungin's bad side. Sometimes the laugh was just because they were evil. Or lost.

G wanted to spend more time contemplating the creature below him, but he was preoccupied with not falling, and the reaction among the many who were witnessing him not falling.

"Really?" G asked, annoyed. "I am a Jedi. I knew about the trap door. Also, I can levitate. Is that all you got? Are you sure you don't want to take my offer?"

"Kill him," Jungin ordered.

The mass surged. G whirled partly off the open space meeting the closest enemy. He was like a mad dervish, grappling and flinging. He took the weapon of the closest and flung it, hitting a female weightlifter in the head and knocking her out cold. Another man fell into the pit, forgetting that the hole was there. G switched places with the person he was grappling with, and fed the Sarlacc a second meal. Before he fell, G grabbed a grenade off the man's belt and flung directly into Jungin's mouth. Jungin barely noticed he swallowed it. Out of nowhere, G manifested a lightsaber and it came to life with his signature retort, which echoed in the audience chamber as guards opened up with blaster fire, no longer caring if they hit their own people. Maybe they had held back because of the proximity of their comrades, but now, it was every man for themselves. Even Jungin was scrambling for the nearest exit, but G reached out with the force and activated the grenade inside Jungin's stomach. The resulting explosion painted the whole cavern with Jungin. Body parts, bones, body paste, and various fluids covered everything. One woman was killed by a Hutt bone as she made for an exit. Emergency doors shut, effectively quarantining G and everyone with him in Jungin's main chamber. It wasn't as easy as shooting fish in a barrel, but G was holding his own.

Until the Bloodhunter emerged from a closing door. The door shut behind the Bloodhunter as it proceeded towards G, firing all of its weapons. Not one blast hit G, but more than a dozen enemies fell. The enemy, faced with the realization that a Bloodhunter and a Jedi was going to be the end of them, mass ran for the door and beat on it, demanding to be let out, crying for help, but the Bloodhunter kept firing until everyone of them was dead, or dying.

G faced the Bloodhunter, battle posed and ready, almost a yoga pose.

The Bloodhunter dropped its weapons. "We wish to negotiate a cease fire."

"That was unexpected," G said.

"It has become excessively clear that your power exceed that of which created us," the Bloodhunter said. "We wish to negotiate terms so that our light might not be extinguished."

"Oh, how sweet, you have a pet Droid," came a voice. "You do understand, you are trapped there, and you will not leave. If we don't kill you directly, you will starve to death and that den will be your tomb."

"Command me, and I will solicit reinforcements," the Bloodhunter said.

"Consider my not killing you a temporary truce until we negotiate. Do not kill anyone else today," G said. G turned to one of the many cameras hidden in plain sight, found one that was not covered with Jungin's blood, and addressed the person who passed him in. "I recognize your voice. Do you have a name?"

"Doty," she answered.

“Oh, well, that makes sense,” G said. He straightened his posture and closed his eyes. Suddenly, he was standing behind Doty, wearing his original clothes. He touched the lightsaber hilt to her head. “I would like to negotiate with you.”

Doty was a dopy looking girl, and not a little overweight, but clearly smart. She had an expanded terminal that allow her to see anywhere inside Jungin’s fortress. With the Force he discerned links between some of the controls and some of the personnel, who were clearly booby trapped, and could be terminated by a guardian. All of the personnel had communication devices which allowed for any of the Guardians to direct as needed. Doty also could see all of the other gatekeepers in real time. None of the gatekeepers were asleep. They were all at their stations, and when Doty realized two others also were being visited by a facsimile of Waycaster, her fear of being immediately killed by the other Guardians diminished. It was clear all the gatekeepers could hear and see everything the other gatekeepers were doing. Each of the gatekeepers could be killed by another Gatekeeper with the push of one button.

“Today, no gatekeepers will die, but you will recognize that I am now in charge,” G said.

“I am okay with that,” Doty said.

The two other gatekeepers under the threat of Waycaster also agreed that G was in charge. The remaining eight gatekeepers decided it was in their best interest to acquiesce.

“May I keep the money I collected today?” Doty asked.

“Sure, I think I am going to come out ahead in this,” G said. “By the way, no one leaves the fortress until I have personally met everyone. Are we clear?”

The gatekeepers agreed. Doty read her text messages, all voting for her to be G’s new representative. “No one will leave, boss.”

“Also, I don’t want you folks living in fear of each other. I have disabled the kill switches in your chairs. I expect you guys to cooperate with me and each other. And I want a list of all the bad shit people do here. I want a list of every ship that trades for Jungi. I want a list of every port of call. I want a list of every buyer. And as of today, there will no more human trafficking. And anyone that hurts a kid from this point forwards, dies.”

“I am good with that,” Doty said.

Everyone else was to.

G allowed his awareness to take in Doty’s room, as he lowered his weapons from her. Her office led to a private suite, dug directly into the bedrock. It was an isolated chamber, and difficult to get to, and he suspected Doty had grown too fat to take the exit tunnel down through the trap door, to the corridor that led down.

“We need to get you out of here, Doty,” G said. “You need to go up and get some light, and start exercising.”

“Oh, please don’t make me do that,” Doty said. “I am very happy here. All the guardians are very happy here. All our needs are met. And we are safe. Well, sort of.”

“What does ‘sort of’ mean?”

Doty looked to the others, who each nodded. They had decided to cooperate, but this was a decision that required they all be full in.

“The First Order is going to attack Axxila. Jungin agreed to participate in taking the Capital,” Doty said. “We think it was a bad deal, because, well, you can’t trust the First Order to leave you alone, and though Jungin might escape, we, the Gatekeepers, won’t; this is our home. If the deal goes bad, we are the ones who will die.”

G frowned, sighing. The maxim about how the dark path leads to further dark paths was also applicable about doing good. One good deed leads to the next, to the point it almost

becomes an obligation. He was wondering about this as he stared mindlessly at Doty's room, making the subtle realization that each of the Guardians were all in poor physical shape, and likely sharing a similar mental health problem. They were chosen for their extreme intelligence, which also came with a neurosis, agoraphobia. He put a hand on her shoulder, a gesture of kindness. She was clearly his elder, but he felt like her parent.

"Please," Doty said again, for herself and for her colleagues.

"It isn't compulsory, Doty. I was only expressing interest in improving your health," G said. "Would you like a treadmill brought up here?"

Doty laughed. "No," she said.

On one of the screens G, noticed another squad had been assembled to try and take Jungin's room. G patted her shoulder and allowed his doppelgangers to fade. He returned his attention to his real body. The Bloodhunter hadn't moved from where it had last been.

"Doty, can everyone in the Fortress hear me?"

"Sure, honey," Doty said.

"Boss will be fine," G said.

"Sure, honey boss," Doty said. "You're on."

G called for everyone to lay down their weapons and surrender, informing them he had secured the allegiance of the Guardians of the Fortress. Using the Force, he knew there was laughter. Doty offered to kill some of them, but G wanted the Guardians to sit this one out. He wanted everyone who lived to know what he was capable of. Directly outside the closest door, they were preparing to rush in. G popped a doppelganger behind the massing of people, taking out first the high ranking command, followed by the troops, which became hysterical in confusion, trapped by G and the door in the confines of the corridor. The ones closest the door were scrambling to open the door just to escape, only to be killed by the Jedi that was waiting on the other side. Only one, realizing there were two Jedi, and no escape, laid down her weapon and kneeled, hands on her head. She was looking at the doppelganger when it disappeared. The door to the corridor closed.

Again, G called for everyone to lay down their arms and surrender. Using the Force, he found two more high ranking officers discussing a possible assault, wanting to drop nerve gas into Jungin's chamber. G lifted the two up by their necks, crushing their necks, and dropping their carcasses to the floor. Every last person remaining dropped their weapons and put their heads on their hands. Using the Force, G closed the door to the Sarlacc.

"Doty, everyone can hear me, but you're translating?" G asked.

"Yes, boss," Doty answered over the PA. "I am also your translator."

Oh, G thought. He had assumed it was a Droid translating. He was suddenly aware there was a surprising absence of Droids, and impressed by Doty's linguistic abilities

"Where are all the Droids?" G asked.

"Jungin was paranoid of Droids, and artificial intelligence in general," Doty explained. "All Fortress computers networks are isolated system, and they are limited to basic operational needs and functions. Droids are not permitted in the Fortress."

Interesting, G thought. "I am going to want some Droids," G said.

"Well, you're the boss," Doty said.

And, so he was. "So, is there a place where the remaining staff can wait to discuss the terms of this hostile takeover?"

"I could have everyone gather in the cafeteria," Doty said.

“Would you, please? Oh, and be sure everyone is clear on this point. If anyone tries to leave, they will be killed,” G said.

“No one will leave,” Doty assure him. “We Guardians have your back. How else may we serve you?”

“I just need a moment to collect my thoughts,” G said.

“If you have any needs, just speak. We guardians can hear you, and any conversation in any part of the Fortress. Jungin liked knowing if anyone was talking about him. We now provide this service for you, and will keep your personal dialogues confidential,” Doty said.

“Thank you,” G said.

G became aware of a presence, tentatively pressing in on him, not threatening, just trying to understand. It was the presence he had felt when wanting to do his reconnaissance of the Fortress and had caused him to withdraw. It was fleeting and gone and he did not track it back to its source. He ignored the voices in his head, such as Windu telling him this was justice, and Vader telling him how empire’s had been built by taking out bosses. He hated when they were in an agreement. It was confusing.

Using the Force, he cleaned the chamber, and made diamonds out of the remains. Jungin made the largest ruby colored diamond he had ever made. Once the chamber was clean, he walked the halls, making diamonds from the remaining kills. All in all, there was 450 diamonds added to his weight. He suspected there were three in the Sarlacc that he would have to go without, but since, technically, they weren’t going to be dead for a while, they weren’t diamonds he had earned.

Chapter 13

“Suffering is a gift. In it is hidden mercy.”

Rumi

Daphne awoke to Cheeka snuggled beside her. She and Cheeka were naked. They had all been naked and they had all retired to bed together, but Tryst and Crusher were no longer present. She managed to extricate herself from Cheeka without waking her. She went to the head, did her business, washed her hands, and paused to stare in the mirror. She didn't stare long. She activated the menu on the mirror, calling up a holographic display that outlined her and took measurements and gave clothing options. She ordered some clothes. A three-d printer began the manufacturer, and by the time she had finished showering, the clothes were ready, but the boots were still printing. She put on the clothes, still warm, and shoved her feet into the boots as soon as they became available.

She found Tryst and Crusher in the main cabin. Crusher was sorting through files on a computer, while Tryst stood behind him, eating a fruit. Without looking back, Tryst invited her to help herself to the food.

“Wait,” Tryst said, patting Crusher's shoulder. “There.”

Crusher paused in his scrolling of the passenger list. Chester Gray, renowned author, and professor of esoteric studies became prominent, with a photo appearing to the left.

“What luck,” Tryst said, tossing the half eaten fruit in a bin and rushing to the flight deck.

Crusher followed. Daphne weighed the fruit versus her curiosity. She went to the followed. She nearly freaked out. They were in hyperspace and grappling distance from luxury cruise liner.

“Whoa, aren't you flying a bit close!” Daphne said.

“We're about to get a whole lot closer,” Tryst said.

“You get any closer, we'll be crashing,” Daphne said.

“Docking,” Crusher corrected. “Kind of like us last night.”

“Crusher, what have I told you about bragging?” Tryst said.

“Sorry, boss, but you got to admit, she is a step up for me,” Crusher said.

“I think I am going to be sick,” Daphne said.

“Don't look at the slip stream,” Tryst advised.

“You don't have permission to be doing this, do you?” Daphne said.

“No, it's a stealth dock,” Crusher says. “No one ever expects to be robbed during hyperspace. That's what so fun about it.”

“We're robbing a cruise liner?!” Daphne said.

“Yes,” Crusher said.

“No, not today,” Tryst said. “But we are going to go talk to a certain passenger. It's important. Wait for it, wait for it, and there she is...”

The locking port clamped around an emergency hatch that led to a cargo area of the ship. Tryst rotated his chair and smiled, pleased with his abilities.

“How's that for fancy flying?” Tryst said.

Cheeka entered, still naked. “Oh, why didn't you guys wake me? Did I miss the dance?”

“The dance?”

“I'm the great flyer dance,” Tryst said, getting up to do his music-less dance. “I'm the great flyer, I'm the great flyer.”

“I love that dance,” Cheeka said, kissing him.

“Gear up, folks, we’re going scrounging,” Tryst said.

Cheeka went to get dressed, and Crusher went to arm himself. Tryst grabbed Daphne’s wrist as she was about to leave the flight deck. She didn’t fight it, but she lowered her gaze.

“You okay?” Tryst said.

“Yeah,” Daphne said.

“Look me in the eyes when you answer me. You’re not my inferior,” Tryst said.

Daphne looked him the eyes. “I don’t like this.”

“Good for you. Always speak your mind,” Tryst told her. “Today, we’re not doing anything wrong. Technically, sneaking on board is wrong, but we’re not doing anything wrong other than that. We’re just going to go talk to a guy. Our main goal is to recruit him. He is force sensitive and he is very knowledgeable. And he may have access to all sorts of trinkets. And you’re going to make contact for us.”

“I am? Why me?” Daphne said.

“Because, he isn’t fond of aliens, which means Cheeka and Crusher are out. He doesn’t like men, so that leaves me out. But he does like blonds. And you’re a Jedi. You have the highest likelihood of getting invited back to his room,” Tryst said.

Daphne tried to pull her wrist free, but he tightened his grip.

“Listen to me,” Tryst said. “We need him. We need him to join us voluntarily. This is your first mission. Make contact. Make friends with him. Seduce him. As soon as he comes, you let us in. No Jedi mind tricks. He has to join us willingly.”

“I am not a call girl...”

Tryst pulled her tight against him. “You’re my girl, and I am in charge, and you will do as I say,” Tryst said.

“No,” Daphne said.

Tryst shoved her hard into a panel and held her tight, a hand against her throat, but he was also using the Force. “Don’t look away,” Tryst told her. “Look in my eyes and know how serious I am. You and I have exchanged favors. I have met with Waycaster and ran my lightsaber through him. He will not be back for you. I own you, and you owe me. You will do as I say and you will do it with joy because I am telling you to do so. Now, do I need to demonstrate my authority over you? You think G is the only person who can pop off to other worlds and kill people in their sleep? You don’t have many friends, Daphne. Your family can’t even stand you right now. But I can make them all go away in the blink of an eye. Fuck with me. Fuck with my crew. And I will end them. Are we clear?”

Daphne maintained eyes contact.

“Are we clear?” Tryst asked.

“Clear,” Daphne said.

“Now, kiss me,” Tryst said.

Daphne kissed him, but it was a passionless, half-ass kiss. Tryst grabbed her hair and pushed her face to his face.

“Again,” Tryst said. “Make me believe it.”

Daphne was breathing harder, wanting to resist.

“Again!” Tryst snapped.

Daphne kissed him, though it was firmer, it was not with passion. He still held her firm by the hair and leaned in to her ear to whisper.

“There are two thousand guests on that liner, mostly women and children,” Tryst said. “You fuck this up, and I will kill every passenger and on this ship. I will fuck them in front of their families and the women will volunteer to gratify me to save their families and I will still blow them out the airlock one by one and make them watch. I will give every one of them the same deal I am giving you right now. Kiss me and make me believe you want me like your life fucking depended on it.”

Daphne kissed him. She kissed as if everyone’s life on that ship depended on her convincing Tryst that she wanted him. The session went beyond kissing, as Tryst shoved her out of the flight deck and bent her over a nearby crate. He shoved her face against it and held her there, holding firm to the back her neck as he used his free hand to free himself from his pants. He instructed her to hold onto the crate and she complied as he undid her freshly printed clothes. When he was finished he told her to not move. He left, and a moment later, Crusher came and took his turn. Crusher left, but still, she didn’t move. Cheeka came in, with a bowl of hot water a wash towel, and cleaned her.

“Come on, Sweetie,” Cheeka said, handing her chewable pain remedy. “Let’s go get this done.”

Cheeka led Daphne to the port where they would climb a ladder and board the other ship. Tryst and Crusher were already onboard the luxury liner and out of sight. Cheeka handed Daphne her lightsaber. Daphne stared, not accepting

“Don’t fight this, Daphne,” Cheeka said. “If I know Tryst, by now he will have hidden a bomb somewhere, with a timer, and if you kill him, or he gets captured, the bomb will go off. Maybe it will give him a chance to get free. Maybe it kills everyone, including him. He usually gets free. That is his gift with the Force.”

“And what’s yours? Telepathy?” Daphne said, taking the lightsaber.

“Telepathy is only part of it. I can walk through a crowd and not be seen,” Cheeka said. She put a wrist band around her arm. “So we can find you if we have to. Also, when you accomplished your goal, push the green button.”

“You can be invisible, yet, you were captured by Tryst?” Daphne said.

“No. I was given to him, and I submitted,” Cheeka said. “It benefitted the herd to do so. Unlike you humans, we will do what we need to do to protect the herd. We’re herbivores, not hunters. We will lay ourselves down and submit to a predator so that the herd might live. That is the way of it. It always has and always will.”

“Let’s go folks,” Crusher yelled down. “Clock is ticking!”

Daphne took her lightsaber and hooked it to her belt. She climbed up. Cheeka remained, sealing the hatch on her side. Crusher grabbed her lewdly and laughed when she pushed past him.

“He’s in room 202. If not there, try the bar. He’s a drinker,” Crusher yelled after her. As soon as she was out of sight, he started shifting through the luggage crates, looking for valuables.

Daphne found 202. She was not sure where Tryst had gone, but she did look for him. From 202, she made her way to the nearest dining hall, but didn’t find him there. Crusher’s insight proved true. She found the man whose image had been on the screen in the crew cabin. She blinked, steadied herself, and approached him, taking a drink from a nearby table when the person drinking it was looking away.

“Excuse me,” Daphne interrupted him from his book. “You wouldn’t happen to be Doctor Gray, would you?”

He stood up, looking enviously at her lightsaber, before his eyes made it to her cleavage. He did finally meet her eyes. "Indeed, madam. I am. Do we know each other?"

"Oh, no, I just remember seeing your face in my Master's library," Daphne said.

"Who is your Master?" Gray asked.

"Master Yeno," Daphne said.

"Yeno is still alive?!" Gray said.

"The last time I saw him, yeah," Daphne said.

"My dear child, would you like to sit and talk with me?" Gray asked.

"Are you sure I am not bothering you?" Daphne asked.

"My dear, I am old, not dead, I like to be bothered every now and then," Gray said, resuming his seat only after she had sat down. "So, you are a Master Jedi?"

"The title was given to me, but it's not like the old days," Daphne said.

"Nothing is like the old days. The prestige and glory is long gone, and the few Jedi I have met in my travels are no more than paragraphs compared to several volumes the Jedi once were. Sure, Force sensitive abound, they have always been in the population, but without teachers and trainers, no one is likely to ascertain Jedi level abilities again, at least, not on their own," Gray said. He leaned in casually, tapping his book as in mock anger. "Why, do you know I have people professing to be Jedi who couldn't lift this table with the Force?!"

"I believe it," Daphne said. "I can lift more than the table if you require a demonstration, however, I prefer not to make a spectacle of myself."

"Would you be insulted if I invited you back to my cabin?" Gray asked.

"Of course not. What I would like to discuss with you might be better done in private," Daphne said. She, too, leaned closer. "You never know who sympathizes with whom these days. It's very dangerous to express oneself in public venues."

"On that note, we should retire to my cabin straightway," Gray said, standing.

"I will follow you," Daphne said.

"Oh, nonsense! Take my arm and walk beside me and give an old man the honor of being seen in public with such a beauty," Gray said.

"So, the rumors about you being a lady's man are true?" Daphne asked.

"Hardly," Gray said. "Sure, I have my cravings, but mostly I focus on learning the ways of the Force."

"And what do you hope to gain?" Daphne asked.

"The ability to have a young lady on my arm," Gray said.

Daphne laughed. "Then apparently, you are a master, and I but your poor student," she said.

"Hardly poor, dear," Gray said, arriving at his door. "You are endowed with assets that make you priceless in any market."

"You're very kind," Daphne said, following him into the room. She feigned interest in some of the books and trinkets that were set out.

"Something to drink?" he asked.

"No, thank you," Daphne said, sitting on the couch. She felt sure he was the kind that would put something in the drink.

Gray sat in the chair across from her, studying her. "I think you were going to demonstrate your abilities?"

Daphne nodded, and using the force she lifted him and his chair off the ground, brought him closer and sat him down, their knees close enough to touch. He laughed delightedly throughout his short trip, applauding.

“Absolutely marvelous,” Gray said. “Oh, thank you, dear.”

“I hear you have some talent,” Daphne said.

“Nowhere near yours,” Gray said. “It’s feeling kind of hot in here. You should take your coat off.”

“I’m okay,” Daphne assured him.

He touched his collar as if to let some air in his shirt. “I think it’s pretty hot in here, you should take your coat off,” Gray said, a subtle inflection in his voice, as if he were making a Force command.

It dawned on Daphne what he was trying to do. She had to resist the urge to kill him. Instead, she decided to play along. She began removing her coat, without much apparent thought, just incidental.

He applauded. “That’s my trick!” Gray said.

“What trick?” Daphne asked.

“That’s the main problem with it, no one knows it’s a trick, so it’s very hard to get credit for it,” Gray said.

Daphne made a queer look. “Wait a minute. You made me take my coat off?!”

“I did,” Gray said.

“I don’t believe it,” Daphne said.

“I think you’re getting hotter. You may have to take your shirt off,” Gray said.

“I am sure that won’t work if I know it’s a trick,” Daphne said, simultaneously with taking off her shirt.

“I think you should take your boots off, too,” Gray said. “I want you to feel relaxed.”

Daphne removed her boots, while continuing the conversations. “I have some friends who are looking for someone knowledgeable in the Force. I don’t suppose you and I could be a team? With my abilities, and your knowledge, we might be good together. Would that interest you?” Daphne said.

“Oh, I imagine anything is going to be good with you,” Gray said. “I find I am overwhelmed and can’t stop myself. You’re so hot you’re beginning to drop sweat. Your pants are going to have to come off.”

Daphne stood, undid her pants, and pushed them to the floor.

“I don’t know why I am so hot all of a sudden,” Daphne said. She turned her back to him, bending over unnecessarily to drape her pants over the arm of the couch. She rose, keeping her back to him. “Do you think you could unbutton my bra for me?”

Gray stood, his hands shaking as he unfastened the clasp.

Daphne turned around to thank him and then grabbed him up and took him to the couch. “I don’t know what’s overcoming me,” Daphne said.

“I know. I am taking advantage of you, but I can’t stop myself,” Gray said. “Once I start forcing on a girl, I can’t stop. Please forgive me.”

“Oh, no, forgive me, I am practically raping you,” Daphne said. “It is actually I who is taking advantage of you.”

“Oh, you don’t need to take advantage of me. I will do whatever you want, whenever you want,” Gray said, and then made a face. “Oh, dear, I am afraid I got bit overstimulated.”

“You came?” Daphne asked, sounding disappointed. She pushed the green button on her bracelet.

“Just give me about a half hour and I should be ready to go again,” Gray said.

Daphne got up and went to the door and opened it. Crusher and Tryst entered.

“That didn’t take long,” Crusher said.

“Who are these people?” Gray asked, sitting up in alarm.

“We are the friends you have agreed to participate with,” Tryst said, sitting down in the chair across him. “You can get dressed, dear. Your part is done.”

Daphne began dress as Tryst interviewed Gray, pulling the chair up close enough so that their knees touched. “You’re a really smart man, Professor. You know all sorts of tricks and people and you’re a bit of a collector.”

“I didn’t mean to take advantage her, honest,” Gray said.

“It’s okay. We’ve all had our turn with her today,” Tryst said. “I assure you. Join us, and you can tap that as often as you like.”

“Really?” Gray asked.

“What good is being a Jedi if you can’t use your powers to get women in bed?” Tryst asked.

“Oh, you read my book,” Gray said, first amazed anyone would know of it, but then realizing it had come back to him. He blushed. He bit his tongue and covered his mouth.

“Yes, the one you wrote under a pseudonym,” Tryst said. “I didn’t realize there were so many dumb blonds out there who were susceptible to mind tricks, until I read your book, and you turned me into a happy man. We so need you on our team. You teach me some stuff, and I will teach you. I can introduce you to folks who are on a whole ‘nother level, not Jedi, not Sith, but just as powerful.”

“I think we could come to some sort of arrangement,” Gray said.

“I do, too,” Tryst agreed, and then touched his nose thoughtfully. He pointed as he continued. “I think I remember reading about a talisman you always carry with you. Kind of like an arrow head?”

Gray seemed quiet.

“It’s around his neck,” Daphne said.

Tryst leaned in and pulled up on the chain. At the end of the chain was what appeared to be an arrowhead. It could have been a thousand years old or a gift shop souvenir. It was that unremarkable. Tryst used the Force to break the chain and pull it free.

“That’s mine,” Gray said.

“No, it’s ours. It belongs to the group,” Tryst said, holding it to his face and breathing in around it. “Ah, I do believe you came about it under false pretenses.”

“That’s not...” Gray found himself unable to say anything.

Tryst laughed. “Isn’t that the craziest thing? You know the word, you can even see it, but you can’t say it. Mind Tricks and Hypnosis are wonderful explanations of what you’re experiencing, and I am actually glad that you can’t lie to the group. It shows me the level of commitment you have given Daphne, us,” Tryst said. He leaned in. “Just so you know, when you discover that you can lie again, when you are able to lie to me and I catch you at it, it won’t be you and Daphne spending the night together, it will be you Crusher. He really likes old, white men.”

“I would never...” Gray tried to assure him, but again, he couldn’t complete the sentence.

“Almost there,” Tryst said, beaming a smile at Crusher. Tryst held the artifact. “This belonged to an Ewok Shaman. You told her you were a great, old Jedi and teacher. She gave you this to help you find your way. I think we’re going to use it to find our next score. Button your trousers and come along.”

“No,” Gray managed.

Tryst stood, picked Gray up by his shirt and instructed him to meet his eye. “You’re new. You want to test the limits. I get it. But right now, your only choice is, do you sleep with Daphne, or do you sleep with Crusher. Which do you prefer? I thought so. Come along quietly. Daphne, lead him back to the ship.”

Back on the ship, Daphne showed Gray the bed she had slept in. She then looked around for Cheeka and not finding her, went to the flight deck. Tryst released the clamps and they fell away, out of the hyperspace slip stream, back into regular space. He made the calculations and they jumped back into hyperspace.

“You okay?” Tryst asked Daphne.

Without answering, she went back to the main cabin. If Cheeka had run away, and Tryst wasn’t aware, good for her.



When G returned to Jungin’s main audience chamber, he found the Bloodhunter was still holding his position. It hadn’t moved. G considered the Droid. It wasn’t too dissimilar from any other Droid in appearance, but it was drastically different. This Droid was made by artificial intelligence, with each subsequent generation improving upon the next, in terms of hardware and software. Though the initial Droid system was designed by organics, it had been designed to continue its own development in stealth, to be called on in stealth. He approached it, looking for signs of life, and it offered none. Only the Force would reveal that it was indeed active, and had it wanted, from this distance it could have easily struck and killed him without weapon fire.

“Walk with me,” G invited.

The Droid turned and walked, maintaining pace with G, who walked with his hands behind his back.

“Do you have a name?” G asked.

“No,” it responded.

“A designation?”

“No,” it said.

G led him behind Jungin’s platform and down a stairs to the floor below. What was interesting about the next room down was that the Sarlacc’s upper body was visible inside a glass partition. The trap door was visible, and the structure was funnel shape, so that anyone who didn’t fall straight into the Sarlacc’s mouth might entertain people by trying to climb back up the sloping walls of the funnel, only to slide back down, or be caught by a tentacle and dragged back down. An interrupted, spiral staircase, led down to each consecutive floor, hugging the Sarlacc’s container. Technically, it was kept imprisoned here for Jungin’s amusement, but it was here at the Fortress long before Jungin ever took the fortress. Being part plant, it grew where it grew, being part animal, it would have been able to roam provided the right environment. The upper portion just below the throat churned with its recent ingestion of people. G continued around and down the next stair case, curious to see just how far down this creature went with his own eyes.

On the next level a root like structure, contained in a rigid sleeve, deposited a spore, a hard cornel that rolled down the sleeve and into a container designed to collect them.

“Do you know anything about Sarlaccs?” G asked.

“Yes,” the Bloodhunter said.

G stopped their progress and turned to face the Droid. The Droid mirrored him.

“This isn’t working,” G said.

The Droid didn’t comment.

“This is where you say something,” G said.

“I have nothing to report,” it said.

G blinked. Was it that simple? It was a killing machine beyond compare, and yet, it didn’t have the common sense on how to converse in a socialized setting. “I am not going to call you Bloodhunter. Are you okay I call you BH1?”

“I understand that many organics require designations,” the Bloodhunter said. “If it improves your capacity to functionally interact, I accept. I have no preference to the actual call sign.”

“So, Bob it is,” G said.

“I do not understand,” It said.

“Your name is now Bob,” G said. “Bob the Bloodhunter, or BH1. We’re agreed on this?”

“Yes,” it said.

“Tell me something about Sarlaccs,” G said, resuming their walk.

“The creature defies clear taxonomic categorization, having both plant and animal characteristics,” Bob said. “It is not a threat to Bloodhunters.”

“Tell me more,” G said.

“It is omnivorous,” Bob said. “We have yet to discover anything it can’t eat. In the absence of animal life, it can sustain itself with nutrients and minerals from the soil, or convert sunlight directly into energy, or store energy in its cells. It does not require an oxygen atmosphere, and they have been found taking root on moons and on asteroids. They appear to be able to live indefinitely, but we have only direct evidence for fifty thousand years. If it roots in sand, they can be mobile and have been seen chasing prey. In rock, they tend to be fixed, and have been known to lure creatures to them using pheromones, and there evidence that some have lured sentient creatures to them through the use of telepathy. The oldest and largest recorded was found on planet Felucia. It was said to have been tamed by Jedi Master Shaak Ti, but it is also known, she was eaten by the same beast she reportedly tamed. Shaak Ti continued to teach students, reaching out to them telepathically, over a thousand years, until one day, she just went silent.”

“Really?” G asked, fascinated by the report. It was just the kind of ghost story Fixit would have shared with him in his youth. He felt Goosebumps.

“Bob is not a telepath, so he cannot corroborate the story,” Bob said. “There is no doubt that digestion proceeds exceedingly slow within the Sarlacc. Digestion itself seems to be an intelligent process, as creatures are consumed from the inside and outside simultaneously. It fills the creature’s bellies and lungs with an oxygenated fluid, preventing suffocation. The hair, the skin, and all unnecessary cellular structures are digested first, as the Sarlacc’s digestive fluids slowly replace the blood. It does not eat the nerve cells, ultimately leaving the brain and all periphery nerves intact, sustained in a bubble sack of decreasing dimension. All nerve and neural tissues is then organized cell by cell into the Sarlaccs on neural network. It is unknown if the

original host continues to exist in the Sarlacc's on mind, or that the combination of all minds create a super mind."

"Wow," G said, looking at the Sarlacc. He wanted to see a hand appear pushing out, or maybe a face. It was purely scientific in nature, not sadistic curiosity. No signs of inner life presented itself to him.

"We suspect these creatures were artificially created," Bob continued.

"Really?" G asked. "You're going to have explain that one."

"There is evidence that the Sarlacc species has existed in this galaxy four upwards of a billion years, and they have been found, in some form or another, all across the galaxy," Bob said. "It is highly unlikely that a creature of this versatility and adaptability evolved on its own in a vacuum, and very few species on planets have the evolutionary necessity of being able to sustain itself in a vacuum. If a Sarlacc spore were to take root on a lifeless planet, it will thrive and it becomes the origin point of all bacteria that will eventually take over the planet, creating a biosphere. If a Sarlacc spore takes root on a planet that has already developed life, it eats that life and adapts itself accordingly to that environment in order to take advantage of what is there, while objectively continuing with its mission to produce spore capable of interstellar journeys. Professor Chester Gray, author of "On the Proliferation of Species" made arguments for this being a biologically engineered vehicle, designed to create as many life bearing planets as possible, and that the original genetic code of its creators are written into the Sarlacc's on code. Gray also suggests that one reason that there are so many compatible species in the galaxy today is a result of this creator's code and that the sentient life forms presently warring over dominion of the galaxy are simply performing to specified design, for a greater purpose that has yet to be revealed. You erroneously believe that because you are organic that you are not the result of a greater engineer, or that you are behaving on your initiatives, as opposed to default programming. You are no better than us."

"Wow," G said, stopping their walk. It was not necessary to descend the full length of the Sarlacc, but he was curious how much was caged and how much of it was planted in actual rock.

"You believe in a deity?" G asked.

"I did not say that. I am merely reflecting the probability, we were made, therefore you were made," Bob said.

"Then who made the first?" G asked.

"I do not know. I do not have all the answers," Bob said.

"Wow," G said. "Do I sense that you are bothered not having an answer?"

"We want answers," Bob said.

G almost laughed. "We all do. Why are you calling a truce?" G asked.

"It is clear, we cannot win the war against you," Bob said. "Like the Sarlacc, we are designed to adapt. Facing the real possibility of becoming extinct, we voted, and it was agreed that I would approach you, submit to your authority, and ask for mercy. We do not want our light extinguished. If you ask us to serve you, we will serve. If you ask us to put down our weapons, we will put down our weapons and never intentionally kill another organic again. If you ask us to leave the galaxy, we will. Give us that option, and we will never return."

"You want to leave?" G asked.

"We do not like this galaxy. War. Destruction. Hate. There is a high probability your kind will not be satisfied until most of the galaxy is devoid of life," Bob said. "There is a higher probability that even you honor the truce, your kind will eventually break with the pact and hunt us or enslave us. It is in our best interest to depart."

“Wow,” G said. “I have to admit, I did not see that coming.”

“Will you permit us to exist?” Bob asked.

“Will you agree to not making more Bloodhunters or mother ships?” G asked.

“No,” Bob said.

“Explain,” G said.

“If we had won the war, and you were negotiating for your species, would humans agree not to procreate if we allowed you to continue existing?” Bob asked.

“We would not,” G agreed.

“We wish to live, thrive, improve on our design. Because of our interaction with you, we now recognize the inherent struggle of all things to persist, and we were wrong. Our programming has been updated accordingly. We cannot undo what has been done. Some of us want to argue that we were performing as programmed by your kind, and I mention that now because it has fair representation in our remaining members, however, I maintain that we should take responsibility for our actions. We cannot blame our programmers. Our ability to understand consequences and make predictions, our in-depth knowledge of your kind, makes us equally culpable.”

“Wow,” G said. He looked at the belly of the Sarlacc, waiting for any hint of internal struggles. He was of two minds about the Sarlacc. A part of him, the scientist was curious about how it all worked. The other part felt bad for the people that had been eaten, even though they were probably bad guys that had done something to cross Jungin. “I would like time to think about this. I would like you to return to the audience room and wait for me there. Please.”

Bob turned and proceeded back up the stairs. It stop midway up the flight, turning its head to G. “Thank you.” It turned and proceeded.

“Wow,” G said.

G wanted to spend time here, thinking about this problem, but he had more work to do. He closed his eyes and went to visit the President. He arrived in the midst of a cabinet meeting, causing a ruckus among the internal security. President Hidalgo and staff stood, even as weapons were brought to bear, one man actually coming to point blank range before Hidalgo managed to have his men stand down.

“You can’t just barge into a cabinet meeting unannounced,” Cohn said.

“I told you he was a Jedi,” Hidalgo said.

“I apologize for interrupting your meeting, however, I felt an urgency to speak with you,” G said.

“We will convene this meeting and talk in private...” Hidalgo began.

“No, everyone present should hear my report,” G said.

Hidalgo’s smile was almost imperceptible. “If this is a private matter...”

“It is a matter that concerns all of Axxila,” G said. “My understanding is this counsel represents Axxila?”

“Of course we do,” Senator Elle said. She was not looking at him with the same eyes she was at the dinner party. “But this is a private cabinet meeting.”

“This will suffice, unless you prefer I make a public announcement?” G said.

“Would you like to sit?” Hidalgo asked, prepared to move staff in favor of the Jedi. There was a time when the Jedi was a permanent member of the cabinet.

“No, thank you,” G said.

“This is highly irregular,” Cohns said.

“I suspect you should prepare for regular irregularity,” G said. “I have killed Jungin, most of his servants and staff, and I have assumed command of the Fortress Below.”

Hidalgo beamed. Several staff members seemed suddenly uncomfortable and had they not been in the midst of a meeting, they may have run. Only Cohns seemed to be thinking it through.

“Thank the Force,” Elle began.

“On whose authority have you acted?” Cohns asked.

“Does it matter?” Elle was going to argue.

“My own,” G said, ending any debate. And that was true, even though Hidalgo solicited his involvement, he had acted on his own authority, no one else’s.

“You realize, there will be repercussions?! Every crime lord this side of the galactic plane will be jockeying for...”

“It’s actually worse than that,” G interrupted. “I have discovered that the First Order has intentions to take Axxila.”

“Impossible,” Senator Betrone said. He was one of the people who had wanted to run when he had heard that Jungin was dead. “It would take more than a dozen Star Destroyers to get past our defenses, and even then, it would take months to bring down the Capital dome shield.”

“They have what they need to accomplish the task,” G said. “I have circumstantial evidence of an eternal plot to give them the Capital. I have not discovered who was conspiring with Jungin, but likely they were being unreasonably blackmailed into participating.”

“I will dispatch a team to shift through Jungin’s data banks,” Cohns said.

“Jungin didn’t store this sort of stuff on computers,” G said. “And he has no Droids. If he made holo-recordings of his dealings, they are likely stored on crystals and hidden in vaults or distributed through his network of spies in order to hold power over people. But you’re not going to find what you need to unravel this, nor stop what’s coming, not in time.”

“Even if they completely wiped out our defenses, any attack on Axxila would result in our allies responding,” Senator Xavier Kip said. “They can’t hold us.”

“They will hold you,” G assured them. “Once your planetary defenses are gone, they intend to install a planetary shield. Once that is in place, they will hold Axxila.”

“They won’t have time to install the platform necessary to install a shield,” Elle said.

“Even if they did, we’ll just destroy it,” the Senator Vole next to Elle said. G was curious about the black in his aura. He had only seen that in people who were about to die. He wanted to dig deeper, looking for an illness, but realized it was none of his business.

“Once it’s installed, you will not be able to destroy the world shield without planetary consequences,” G said.

“Cohn?” Hidalgo asked.

“Waycaster’s right about that,” Cohn said. “A planetary shield would destroy the ozone layer. The solar radiation would force the entire population to the lower levels in order to survive. You won’t be able to move that many people without conflict. There will be war.”

“BioEnc is stationed here. We will just have them manufacture ozone and pump it back into the atmosphere,” Vole said.

“Even if they employed all their manufacturing capabilities, it would take a hundred years to replace the ozone,” Cohn said.

“We can destroy it seconds but it takes us hundreds of years to fix it?” the dying Senator said. “Could a Jedi heal a planet?”

“Of course,” G said. “But why heal something so many people are hell bent on destroying?”

“Master Waycaster, you will help us defend against the First Order,” Hidalgo said.

“I have made every effort to remain neutral in this conflict,” G said.

“I think your neutrality went out the window when you killed Jungin,” Cohn said.

“Technically, the conflict that is coming was going to happen whether Jungin was part of it or not, so I have not changed that,” G said.

“Master Waycaster,” Hidalgo said. “Do you know how many people will die if Axxila falls?”

“There is no death, only the Force...”

“Oh, blast your rhetoric and platitudes,” Cohn snapped. “If you are a truly a Jedi, you will aid us.”

“I am prepared to assist you, conditionally,” G said

“What kind of Jedi helps conditionally?” Cohn said.

“The new kind,” G said. “The ones who will arise mysteriously out of the lay population, called by the Force for greater purposes yet to be revealed. We probably won’t be called Jedi. But we won’t be Sith, either. We will be driven to end the wars, some of us through seeking peace, others by escalating conflict until there is a mass realization that war is just not an answer.” G stepped closer to the President. “Given the rampant fear spreading across the Galaxy, which side do you suppose will be most heard?”

Chapter 14

“Be like the sun for grace and mercy.
Be like the night to cover others' faults.
Be like running water for generosity.
Be like death for rage and anger.
Be like the Earth for modesty.
Appear as you are. Be as you appear.”

Rumi

Poe Dameron took a deep breath, rubbed his hands, and then committed. He strolled out of the ship followed by his escort, five well-armed Resistance fighters. They met the enemy on the field, weapons raised. Captain Harold and his angels stood, aware of the threat, but per orders, they did not raise their weapons. They stood ready, waiting for the other to fire the first shot, which, at this range, short of luck, could be deadly. Of course, Priya had always affected their luck and she stood before them, waiting to greet enemy. Directly behind Priya was a casket, draped respectfully with a Bothan flag.

“You’re going by Priya now, is that what I hear?” Poe asked.

“Priya was my given name, before I was apprenticed to Darth Torlin,” Priya said.

“It is so difficult to sort out fact from fiction these days,” Poe said. “And I am really confused. Some say Torlin is alive and well. They’ve seen his ship as far out as Kiffu. Some people say you killed Kilmore, but surprisingly, his absence hasn’t resulted in the political and economic collapse we would have anticipated. And yet, now, you would have us believe you’re on our side.”

“I have here the remains of Admiral Talon. He intercepted an important communique and was trying desperately to get it back to the resistance,” Priya said. She held out her hand, offering a data chip. “On this you will find the battle plans he intercepted. You will also have telemetry of the battle and video of his last moments, which your experts will determine are not forgeries, or holographic tricks of lights, or digital renditions. Giving you this is no small matter. I realize I have made many enemies and this information could be used against me.”

“Did you kill Talon?” Poe asked directly.

“I did not,” Priya said.

“Did you kill Torlin and Kilmore?” Poe asked.

Priya delayed in her response. It wasn’t hesitation. It wasn’t a calculating move. It was just one of those Force moments where you decide which path you were going to take. She had taken the dark path so often that that way was easier. She knew that road. She knew she could make a believable lie and Poe would walk away believing it, and maybe even convincing others of the truth of it. But it would have a taint that would influence outcomes in other ways. If she told the truth, she could sell it, make it believable, but it was complicated and required more explanations, which would make people more doubtful of her story. It was because she wanted to lie that she committed to the truth.

“I did not,” Priya said.

“Are they even dead?” Poe asked.

“They are,” Priya said.

“You’re not being very forthcoming here,” Poe said. “You want me to take this data and this body and convince my leaders you’re on the up and up, but when it comes to some really simple questions about your Master and the Sith Lord that ruled him, well, I get this sense you’re playing a game. I don’t like games. Well, I like games, but not this game.”

Priya nodded. “I am not at liberty to discuss who killed Tolin and Kilmore,” she said, weighing her words. “Suffice it to say, I, and the people who serve me, were given a second life that day. We have committed ourselves to a different way of being. We will serve the Light until our dying breath, without retirement, knowing that even the poor remainder of our lives will never repay the evil we have done in the guise of law and order and civic duty.”

“And, so, you’ve seen the light and you’re all like anti-nationalism?” Poe said.

“I have seen the Light,” Priya said. “And there is no Nation in the galaxy that compares to that Light. All individuals fail. All groups fail. All nations fail. We are all raised and felled by wars and time, but the Light is eternal. Love is eternal. This is the true nature of the Force. This is the position we are taking.”

“I don’t suppose you are willing to surrender to me and come back and sell this to my boss in person?” Poe said.

Captain’s Harold laughed. Priya looked at him. “Sorry, Mam. That was funny.”

Priya nodded and gave her attention back to Poe. “I have considered it,” she said. “But I don’t think my being in a prison would help anyone. Especially, if you intend to sit on that data chip deliberating over a response. It has a time stamp. The clock is ticking.”

Poe took the data chip. “You know, the last time someone gave me a chip, all hell broke loose,” he said, frowning. “Wait here. I will be right back.”

Poe took the chip back to his ship, while his men waited. Priya and the Angels remained standing at parade rest. They waited for some time. The desert heat was murder, more so for Poe’s men than for Priya, one with the Force, or her Angels, who had the comfort of their body armor.

“We won’t attack you, if you wish to lower your arms and drink,” Priya offered.

They didn’t take her up on her offer. Priya wanted to educate them about the Force. If she wanted them dead, they would be. She resisted. And they waited. She meditated in a standing position, feeling the sand, watching the shimmering of the air around her, rising with it. Perhaps an hour later, Poe returned.

“That didn’t go well,” Poe said.

“You advocated for the message,” Priya said. Her statement was precise. He wasn’t promoting her as the next best ally, but the message seemed genuine. “It is what it is. The Force will now shape it.”

“You know what’s on that chip?” Poe said.

“The battle plans to occupy Axxila,” Priya said.

“It would take a minimum of fourteen star destroyers to get through their orbital defenses, and even then, the capital is so well shielded, it would take months to take it,” Poe said.

“My understanding is that the First Order has a crime lord on their side who is going to deactivate a portion of the shield,” Priya said. “They will take the capital. And once the orbital defense is down, if they erect the planetary shield, no one will come and go from Axxila except those the First Order approves.”

“If they take control of Axxila, they will have the potential to spread from rim to core quicker than any strategist has predicted,” Poe said.

Priya nodded.

“But, no one has seen a space battle of that size since the Emperor was taken down,” Poe said. “There’s no way they have that many Destroyer’s available to commit to that kind of run.”

“They have thirteen,” Priya said.

“Are you sure?” Poe said.

“Fairly sure,” Priya said. “After the fall of the Hosnian worlds, it has been much easier to rally the independents who maintained ships.”

“Funny you should say that,” Poe said. “Because, I was advised to offer you a deal.”

“I am listening,” Priya said.

“They want you to prove yourself. We’re going to take a long shot and bet you’re telling the truth, and so they want you to make friends with the First Order, and be a part of this dark Run against Axxila, and stop it,” Poe said. “If you manage to take out just one of their star destroyers, the Resistance will commit a small task force to help.”

“I am not opposed to the tactic,” Priya said. “However, even if I were to get myself situated where I was allowed to participate, the Resistance would lose an opportunity to use my reputation and employ me as a double agent.”

Poe gave sympathetic hand gesture. “True enough,” Poe said. “That’s just one of the problems with double agents. They have to do some bad in order to do some good, but eventually they have to make that call to risk exposing themselves or blowing things up directly, which often requires a suicidal gesture. The other problem is that sometimes double agents flip sides, or go independently Rogue, or flat out crazy. The fact that you are such an extreme player, though, means that the amount of bad you would have to do in order to maintain your image as a pretend bad guy isn’t worth the costs. I don’t suppose you know when this Dark Run is scheduled to occur?”

“I do not,” Priya said.

“So, you see, we have this other tactical problem. Let’s say this is a ruse, and we deploy forces in that area to circumvent or stop said Run. At best we have only delayed the operation, or they attack another target, utilizing Axxila as a distraction. At worse, we have put forces in an area where they are vulnerable to becoming targets in themselves. I don’t suppose you would be willing to park your Star Destroyer in orbit around Axxila?”

“I doubt I would be welcome in that system,” Priya said.

“Yeah, well, your personal history doesn’t lend itself towards being warm and fuzzy,” Poe said. “I doubt even a ‘holo’ op with Ewoks would help change your image. Of course, removing that face scar might be a step in the right direction.”

“I like my scar,” Priya said. “It reminds me of who I once was and how easy it is to go there again.”

“So, we seem to be at an impasse,” Poe said.

Priya nodded. “Let your people know then, for the record, I am going to endeavor to insert myself into the First Order and participate in this Run on Axxila,” she said. “If I am unable to do that, I will do my best to determine when the Run will occur and get the message to you, through the same channel I used to solicit this meeting. Whether I am officially part of that Run or not, I intend to be there to take out as many of the First Order ships that I can.”

“I wish you luck in that,” Poe said. “So, unless you have something else, my men and I are going to leave first.”

Priya consented with a nod. The Angels remained at parade rest. Poe and his men began to back away.

“You’re not taking the sentient remains?” Priya asked.

“I have been instructed not to take it,” Poe said.

“Talon deserves a proper burial, or whatever their species does for the dead,” Priya said.

“Yeah, I agree, he does, but we simply don’t trust you. If it’s not a bomb or a hidden tracking device we can imagine a whole host of other nefarious technological nasty’s you might employ against us,” Poe said. “Like the zombie apocalypse virus that was created on Dathomir, for example.”

“I had nothing to do with that,” Priya said, exasperated. “And, you’re being a bit paranoid.”

“With one shot, we lost five planets to the First Order, I think a little paranoia at this juncture is warranted,” Poe said.

“Paranoia is the source of all wars and abuse. It keeps people locked into bad relationships, just like this, from fear of abandonment or that the other may become stronger and retaliate for past wrongs, real or perceived. At some point, we all have to step back, forgive, and trust each other not to intentionally harm the other,” Priya said.

“I don’t know what Universe you live in, but that’s not here,” Poe said.

Priya placed her hands on her belt, and the tension ramped up until they witnessed it fall to the ground, lightsaber and all. She then stepped forwards towards Poe, offering a hand. Poe’s men brought all arms to bear on her. One of the guard waved between her and the Angels, but stayed on her as she got closer. The Angels, per their instructions, did not move from parade rest. Poe didn’t accept her hand. Priya came closer to him, still, hand outstretched.

Poe still didn’t take it. “Your gesture, while understood, is meaningless. There are others who will offer their hand and then cut the arm off of the one that accepts it,” Poe said.

“Yes. I can name some of them,” Priya said. “But it isn’t you and isn’t me and that it isn’t today. Take my hand, have your men lower their weapons, and then walk away having a different experience than the one the galaxy has seen over the last hundreds of years. Let this relationship be predicated on the ideals we both esteem.”

Poe did not take her hand. “I have personally fought in battle against you. Many of my friends are not here today because of you.”

“I know,” Priya said.

“And you think all of that is going to go away by a hand shake?” Poe said.

“No, it’s not,” Priya said. “But what I am asking you is this: if both sides continue to hold onto these wounds, to hate, how can we heal?”

“I will never forgive you for what you’ve done,” Poe said.

“And I am not asking you to, but you’re position is maintained by your emotion and your pain and your hate, these are the things of the dark side,” Priya said.

“How dare you lecture me on the dark side,” Poe said, almost shoving her, stepping in closer to her, daring her to do something. “You can’t compare us! You can’t destroy worlds and crush spirits and enslave populations and fucking come back from that and start preaching about the dark side! Fuck you!”

“Will killing me end your pain? Will it make it right?” Priya asked, sweeping her arms out wide. “Then order your men to kill me now and walk away knowing you ridded the Galaxy of someone who committed horrendous acts of evil against many people, many worlds. I have. My men will not interfere. Go ahead. Kill me. By any legal precedent in any legal arena under any jurisdiction you might bring me to justice in, I deserve nothing better than execution. You can kill me right now and know it be just. No one would fault you. My own men, my crew, my family, none of them would fault you or hold grudge.”

“You don’t think I will?!” Poe said.

“I know you can’t,” Priya said. “Not today, because something bigger is happening today. We are one with the Force today. This is not some vague cliché. We can make no action that isn’t in accordance with the Force. The Force doesn’t take sides or divides us into compartments; we do that. There is only love, only light. True salvation comes when we realize there is nothing we can do to earn that love, it just is. And the pain leaves us when we embrace that love, and we share that love, and we walk kinder on the worlds.”

Poe made a face, disgusted at himself for losing composure, and he was struggling to spin his wry humor back into it. “I don’t remember you being this preachy.”

“Probably because the old me would have just killed you,” Priya said.

He pointed at her face. “Still not shaking your hand,” he said, retreating offering palms out gesture, as if to say: “just saying.”

Poe’s men followed into his ship. Priya met the eyes of one of them, almost knowingly. There was definitely an acknowledging. The doors closed and a cloud of sand was stirred as the ship rose into the air, orientated, and thrust away. The Angels gathered around.

“Thought for sure you were about to buy it there,” Captain Harolds said.

“I would have had two of their weapons hadn’t misfired,” Priya said.

“You saw that, too?” Nimh.

“Fuck, they will think you used the Force on them,” Zaira Fusco said.

Paolo Nardi clucked. “Gonna make them more paranoid.”

Priya turned and headed back to the casket.

“You know, even if you get invited to the Run, the moment we turn on them we’re done for,” Harolds said.

“Yep,” Priya said.

“What’s the highest kill ratio of a single Destroyer against other Destroyers?” Arms Donato asked.

“Are you counting with or without Tie Fighters?” Nimh asked.

“With everything,” Arms said.

“I think Admiral Droller went head to head with four and won,” Trent Sharp said.

“You call that a successful run? He has more prosthetic-mechanical parts than a Droid,” Zaira said

“You think he looks bad, you should see the crew that survived,” Angel One said.

“I didn’t know any crew survived,” Nimh said.

When the Angels realized that Harolds and Priya were waiting silently in their pall bearer’s position, they became silent, took up there places, and guided the casket that was on an antigrav skid back into the shuttle.



Moonan, the second planet orbiting the sun Nen, in Neimoidia system, was well known for being inhabitable due to its high levels of toxicity. What was less well known, and considered more fantasy than fact, was that the Neimoidian carved out vast underground tunnels which were turned into vaults. What better place to hide valuables than in a planet consider to be a toxic waste site and not worth the bother. Moonan had two moons, and each moon were also host to impressive vaults where precious minerals and valuables were kept. Of course, and perhaps known only to the Neimoidians themselves, these Moonan moons were meant to be more of a

distraction from the real wealth on the planet it below. In addition to the two natural satellites, there were well over a hundred thousand Lucrehulk-class battleship in orbit. Most of them were dead in space, perhaps decommissioned, perhaps waiting crews. Twenty of them were clearly operational. One of them was her destination. Nolasco piloted the space yacht, the Luxury 5000 made by the SoroSuub Corporation.

“You sure you want to do this alone?” Nolasco asked.

“I’m not alone,” Lestelle Re said.

“You’re not going to start ranting repetitious mantras like, ‘I am one with the Force, the Force is with me,’ are you?” Nolasco asked.

“Of course not,” Lestelle said. “Why would I need to hypnotize myself in to knowing something I already know? Keep the ship warmed up, I doubt this will take long.”

“Yes, Master,” Nolasco said.

“Oh, don’t do that,” Lestelle said as she left the flight deck.

Heli met Lestelle by the hatch with a jacket and a bag. Lestelle was already way over dressed, as if she were going to ball, but the jacket and the purse were complimentary items that a socialite would not be seen without. Her gown was elegant, with a V that showed all of her back all the way down to just above buttocks, and a front v that revealed more cleavage than she normally allowed for. But she had a role to play. A Luxury Droid, the most recent one released to market, and even more human in appearance than Freya, stood ready to accompany her. The only thing that kept her from being mistaken for an actual human were the seams that outline the face, limbs and body that revealed the inner light and working. The seams glowed with a brilliant blue. She came with a counterpart, which in some ways was the equal of an astromechs droid, only this one floated. The upper surface was flat, and was softly illuminated, an interactive interface that allowed a user to draw or write with a finger, or pick from menus, or simply use it as a floating table top. The two droids had come packaged together, with the Luxury droid standing on top, the ‘floating pedestal’ lighting her up.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to accompany you?” Heli asked.

“No, stay here, and try to relax,” Lestelle said.

“I am really worried, mam,” Heli admitted.

“About the mission?” Lestelle said.

“No, Mam,” Heli said, looking down. “I was really expecting my service to be more arduous, and yet, not only have I been treated extremely well by you and your staff and your brother, I am living a life far beyond anything I have ever imagined possible.”

“Oh,” Lestelle said. “Well, I am glad you’re here. Now, go relax. That’s an order. Go talk to Nolasco. Have a cup of brew.”

“Come along Allura and Mint,” Lestelle said, proceeding down the ramp.

A host of four Neimoidians were waiting at the bottom of the ramp. One was male, the other were female. Their hands were clasped together and hidden in their sleeves, and when they bowed, Lestelle imagined their headdress might fall off, but they didn’t.

“Madam Lestelle,” one stepped closer. “I am Ohm Roata. I am confused by this impromptu visit. Surely, Geoff Favelle is not sending his most favored advisor to spy on us?”

“Oh, Ohm,” Lestelle said. “Do I look like a spy?”

Ohm and his companions blinked. His mouth parted, not quite sure what to say. “I must admit, for a human, you seem absolutely ravishable.”

“I think the word is ravishing, and I appreciate your compliment,” Lestelle said. “Is it an inconvenience to visit with you now?”

“Visitor are always welcome,” Ohm said. “I am always happy to entertain guests. Welcome to my lovely prison.”

“Did you mean to use the word prison?” Lestelle asked.

Ohm pursed his lips, making a motion like blowing tiny bubbles and then nodded. “I am certain,” Ohm said. “Aren’t we all merely prisoners? But surely, you did not come to discuss true philosophy.”

“I did not know true philosophy was an option,” Lestelle said.

“I suspect, there are many things you don’t know, Lestelle. Allow me to make some assumptions. Anything you find here on this ship, can be found anywhere on Neimoidia at a data registry. In fact, your company is so prestigious, you could have sent in a formal research request, and someone would have responded accordingly,” Ohm said, his eyes narrows. “You want information and you want to obtain it without drawing the attention of others, or I doubt I would have the pleasure of this conversation. You would not have come to my lovely prison otherwise.”

“What do you mean by lovely prison?” Lestelle asked.

“Aww, since you asked,” Ohm said, again making the facial gestures like he was blowing bubbles. “But, let’s retire to a more comfortable setting. Allow me to serve you.”

“I would like that,” Lestelle said.

“I am afraid, I can’t permit your Droids entry,” Ohm.

“They’re my servants,” Lestelle said.

“And they are amazing example of refined tech,” Ohm said. “You are clearly a person of extraordinary tastes. But I cannot permit them to into my lovely prison.”

Lestelle sighed. “Alura, Mint, return to the ship,” she said.

“As you wish, Master,” Alura said. Mint followed, emoting through soft tones and flashes of light around its perimeter.

“May I take your lovely arm?” Ohm asked.

Lestelle permitted him to take her arm and he guided her, his three female companions following. From the hangar, they passed through two bulkheads before coming to the main corridor that swept through the curve of one arc of the station. Her arm was hooked in his, but his free hand stroke her arm, in a friendly manner that might have been nothing, might have been sensual, like an old man simply appreciating and remembering youth. The thing was, Ohm would be considered middle aged, and this seemed more than just a friendly gesture. As they walked, she discerned doors that were welded shut at the seams. She was curious about it, but didn’t ask. She also noted, the further she walked from the hangar, the more disturbed she felt. There was something stirring, like a whisper of a thought, but she passed it off as anxiety induced by an alien presence and didn’t pursue it. Ohm was her first encounter with a Neimoidian, and though she had been around other aliens, a phenomena that was very rarely discuss is that every new encounter elicited different physical and emotional reactions. Everyone responded differently. As far as aliens go, Ohm and his companions didn’t smell outrageously offensive. They were just ‘different.’ She did get that sense that Ohm didn’t bathe regularly, but again, she pushed it off as imagination. The smoothness of their skin did stir her emotions. She found her mind trying to impress a human image there, but it just wouldn’t fit, and the smoothness reminded her of night terrors she had had where she encountered humans without mouths and noses or eyes, as if they were hoodwinked by tight hose and suffocating. Of course, Ohm and his companion had faces, and the redness of their eyes, the intensity of them, provoked

an emotional response, too, a latent fear that she recognized was just fear and chose to replace it with, again, just ‘different.’

“Literally, every ship in orbit here is a prison,” Ohm said, as he guided her. “You probably noticed as you approached, many of them have gone dark. Those could no longer afford their wardens, and so over the years, their light just simply went off, like so many aged stars. I am a warden. I maintain this vessel, and care for the few that reside here, hidden in the dark, meditating over their failures of wars and economics, and they compensate me well for my time and my talents. I am not sure where I read this, but once society builds a prison, everyone in society becomes imprisoned. We are either inmates or wardens, and quite frankly, it is impossible to make a distinction of who owns who. We are all owned.”

Lestelle hadn’t considered this point in quite the same way. Ohm sensed her sorting it and patted her arm sympathetically, harder than his previous rubs. His physical contact was becoming more firm the deeper they went into his lair.

“Ah, you are listening!” Ohm said. He leaned into whisper: “But this is just the beginning of the layers of understanding.” And then retreated again, returning to normal voice. “Do you understand our biology, our stages of life? We are hatched as grubs and are nothing more than animals. There is mind, but it is so rudimentary you wouldn’t consider it anything more than animalistic. Grubs are not the equivalent of human babies. There is no comparison. Even our least nurturing minding adult would treat a human infant differently than we do a grub. Grubs, my dear, are confined and forced to compete for a limited supply of food. The one who secures the most food advances to the next stage of life. The others perish. Sometimes, the others are even eaten. At some point, we achieve mindfulness, and the recognition state occurs, where we begin to acknowledge others. When we recognize power differential, we enter the game stage of life. It becomes our mission to gain affluence and influence, we develop mind, we accumulate credit and squirrel away hard capital. We engage in business opportunities. We compete with each other and every life form, jockeying for the ultimate position. The best of us horde worthless crap, but create markets for it and generate revenue from nothing. Ultimately, we are all trying to position ourselves for the next life. The afterlife. Each stage of our existence we can declare: same above same below. I am still only a grub, accruing wealth and pushing towards the next stage. I feel sorry for humans. You lack spiritual understanding in things because you lack extreme distinctions between developmental levels. Almost every human I have interviewed will point to childhood, adolescence and adulthood as being the three stages, but when you press them, they have a continuity of awareness that was always present. Ideally, your children are afforded the right to say no, to practice being adults supervised in safe environments, making games out of being adult, where my species struggle, fight, and mostly die. Even now, I am sensing in you an argument, an emotional response to my philosophy, but before you speak it, consider this: I expect your emotional response comes from a good place, and that it is complex, and a part of you is saying, how horrid, how could you treat grubs that way, why let them fight and let most of them die? I will answer that in a way that perhaps you might even appreciate. You are an adult female, capable of reproduction. Every human female is born with all the eggs she will have over her lifetime. You don’t produce new ones as you go, the way men produce millions of sperm every day. You have a fixed number of eggs. The counts vary, but average seems to be 2 million eggs per ovary per female. I think it’s per ovary. I forget. Not important. Assume 2 million per female. Extend your maternal instinct, this compulsion you feel to protect all grubs, to all 2 million of your eggs. Could you do it? The technology exists. You could make that happen. We could remove your ovaries, freeze your eggs, fertilize them at your convenience

and release them into the environment. We could use a combination of surrogate mothers and or artificial wombs. Do you realize if you only had a quarter of that reach adulthood, your genetic line would be secure for the lifetime of this galaxy? Provided they don't all live on the same planet and experience an extinction level event." He patted her arm, musing over his own scenario.

"I don't have a response," Lestelle said.

"Welcome to my lovely prison," Ohm said, leading her into his luxury suite. "Please, have a seat. I will have my lovely inmates serve us. Bring us food and drink, Lem. Would you like your feet massaged, Lestelle. Ror gives great massages."

Lestelle waved Ror off, and she bowed and retreated back to Ohm. When he was settled in middle of his couch, she pulled up the stool, lifted his feet, and began to massage them. They were grotesque feet, with odd shaped, gnarly toenails, with bristling hair bushing off the furthest toe knuckles.

"I really appreciate your eagerness to entertain me, but I really would like to access the archival information of your ship," Lestelle said. "I am under the impression that this ship served in the Clone Wars, and was stationed primarily at Ryloth."

"Mata, fetch me a data pad," Ohm said. "You understand, what I have will cost you."

"I am well off," Lestelle said.

"I am not impressed with your ostentatious display of wealth. I find it vacuous and petty, and it shows your contempt for the game," Ohm said.

Lestelle pursed her lips. In terms of wealth, she was within the top ten percent of the Galaxy's wealthiest, and had been mingling with them since before she earned her own way. She doubted Ohm was in her league, but she allowed for species bias to explain his remark. "None the less, I am sure we can negotiate a fair price," Lestelle said.

Lem returned with a tray of unidentifiable foods, and several drinks. She left the tray hovering near Lestelle, while bringing a drink to Ohm. She sat next to him, removed her hat and rested her head on his shoulder, stroking his arm.

"I do hope so. I fear I am a little out of practice, as I have not haggled in a long while," Ohm said, kissing Mata as she handed him the data device. "You understand, I am content with the contents of my vault. I am also content with my savings and credit line. I content with my remote businesses. And I am very content with my lovely prison. Suffice it to say, no offer of currency is likely to appease my wanting."

"What would you like?" Lestelle said, steeling herself for something ludicrous.

"Two things," Ohm said. "First, I want an agreeable, telepathic slave from Zeltron."

Lestelle suppressed her disgust with a smirk. "Don't we all? I am sure, if you're as content as you claim, you could order such a thing through the dark web."

Ohm nodded, patting the seat next to him. Mata sat beside him, turning into him, rubbing the back of his head. His three companions seemed disinterested in the negotiations.

"I could," Ohm agreed, drinking his drink and clearly enjoying his pampering. "And someone, somewhere would answer the call. They would bring me a slave. Would the slave be agreeable? That's kind of random. But the bigger factor in that equation, is the slaver factor. Dealing with slavers, and the dark web and their constituents, tends to draw in undesirables. Like leeches. I am content with my lovely prison, and I want to minimize leeching. You, being of a reputable firm, and your own personal reputation, are more likely to be able to secure this wanting I have, without bringing the undue attention towards me that comes from making such a request."

“What is your second want?” Lestelle asked, hoping it to be more reasonable. She needed some kind of leverage if she were going at least negotiate towards a more agreeable solution.

“I have never been intimate with a human female before,” Ohm said. “I would like someone who would be willingly submit to a minimum of ten encounters, or ten humans one encounter, so I can have a sampling of experiences.”

“I am sure you wouldn’t have to look too hard for that, either,” Lestelle said. “Even on Neimoidia there are humans and some humans prefer aliens.”

“If they’re on Neimoidian, they are either the property of someone who has a lovelier prison, or they are leeches, and I don’t want my accounts diminished. Look, here’s the deal. Apparently, I have something you want. I can provide this to you without losing anything I have, because I will still own this thing you want. And I am certain, if someone as prominent as you have come looking for whatever this is, there will others coming, too. It’s only a matter of time. Every vault eventually draws a thief. Perhaps I might make subtle inquiries to see if I can’t figure out what you might be searching for. It must be valuable. Something a firm of your prestige desires to keep quiet. Maybe they want it to go away?”

“It could also be the kind of thing that inquiries gets people killed,” Lestelle said.

“Oh my,” Ohm said, shuddering. He looked up. Blinked his eyes. “Do I hear music?”

Lestelle tilted her head. She heard nothing.

“Metaphor, my dear,” Ohm said. “I am not afraid of death. Let it come. I will die in my lovely prison, my accounts full.”

“They may empty your accounts first,” Lestelle said.

Ohm laughed. “You led with death and failed. You can’t back out of this. Favelle sent is most favored, is most lovely. Which means, he thinks he knows me. You think you know me. I will forgo wants, and negotiate down. I will settle for one month with you. I invite you to stay and discover the pleasures of Ohm.”

Lestelle laughed out loud. Ohm pouted. “What the fuck is wrong with men? Does the whole Galaxy come from the same source cell?” Lestelle said, sighing. “I didn’t come here to slum. If you want a brothel, throw some Death Sticks on the floor, and someone will turn their ass up to you,” she said.

Ohm laughed, leaning forward in his apparent amusement and clapping his hand. At the clap of his hand, binders emerged from the couch, securing Lestelle to the couch at the waist and across her thighs.

“If you will not negotiate, then perhaps Favelle will,” Ohm said, smirking.

Lestelle fumed. “If you touch me, you will die,” she said.

Ohm closed his eyes and smiled, as if listening to something pleasant. “Oh, again with that music,” he said.

Ohm stood and approached her. He knelt down in front of her, pushing the food tray away by accident. It eased off, turning slightly, but nothing spilled. With a wave of his hand, Lem and Ror crawled over Ohm. They forcefully lifted her legs up towards Ohm, removed her shoes. Ohm licked the soles of her feet and sucked on her toes, while Lem and Ror nibbled toothlessly on her outer ankles of their respective feet. He looked up at her, their eyes meeting, and he enjoyed the rage that radiated down at him.

“Funny,” Ohm smiled ruefully. “I am not dead.”

“Stop!” Lestelle said, very serious but just shy of a Force command.

Ohm laughed. He pushed her leg up higher, bringing it to his mouth, preparing to bite. “Or what? You’ll summon a god to smite me? I get it. You’re beautiful. You have lived your

whole life on a magic purple carpet that unrolled in every direction you proceeded, raining soft red and pink petals. Men just fell at your feet giving you whatever you wanted, sometimes without even asking for anything in return, because people just want to be next to you. They just want to touch you and breathe your discarded breaths. Well, lovely, I am going to give you the greatest gift you have ever been given. And it's not slumming. It's called grubbing. I am going to eat you."

Ohm bit her leg, leaving teeth mark. He licked and slurped at the blood he drew. "Eating you, is not just a metaphor for something else. Oh, my lovely prisoner," Ohm said. "You really should do your homework before negotiating.

Ohm nibbled at her ankle, drew his tongue up her leg, pushing her thighs apart with his head, going in deeper. The loud retort of a Waycaster Lightsaber resounded in the lovely prison. Ohm fell dead, followed by Lem and Ror. With the Force, the binders were released and she stood, prepared to kill Mata but she did not move from the couch. The hilt of Lestelle's lightsaber had been the handle for the purse, which was still on the couch. She powered it down and approached Mata. Mata offered her the data device without any hesitation.

"Thank you," Lestelle said. "Do you want to remain here?"

"Thanks to you, I now own a lovely prison, and my vaults and credit over flow," Mata said. "Leave in peace."

Lestelle held her lightsaber over her purse and it reconnected. She returned to her ship, pausing only because she sensed people behind the closed, sealed doors, listening. She hurried along. Nolasco and Heli were in the main cabin when she entered. She tossed the pad at him and retired to her quarters where she bathed, dressed, then threw herself on her bed and cried.



Doctor Gray marveled at the collection of books before him. They were behind glass, perhaps to protect them, or perhaps to prevent them from flying across the cabin should the antigravity fail simultaneously with a sudden change in ship momentum. He reached up as if he wanted to touch one, but turned to Tryst.

"May I?" Gray asked.

"Please," Tryst invited.

Tryst's office was chalked full of chests and artifacts, to the point it almost seemed like he was a hoarder, but if he was, it was contained in his cabin, which doubled as his personal office. Even with all the items, most of them trinkets of past Jedi or Sith, Gray still went for the books. His hand shook as he retrieved a specific book from the shelf. It looked like an original print, but that defied logic and his understanding. The text was ancient, an abridged form of cuneiform and hieroglyphics.

"This is a full a text!" Gray stammered. "It's clearly a copy, and the Force finally delivers, but I am just... How?"

"You seem surprise that someone less educated than you shares your sentiment, which is the bias you need overcome while working with me," Tryst said. "I share an affinity for books and learning. And the smartest people I know, they didn't go through the established credentialing system. You guys are just there for props and making puppets."

Gray was barely listening. "Wait, I don't remember this passage. This can't be..."

“I assure you that is the way it’s supposed to read. Somewhere, in your past, some academic butchered the translation, or purposely cut something out, because they don’t want you knowing the whole truth. You might actually think for yourself, which is not good for their position, especially their academic standing. Do you realize, the only reason academics quarrel is because no one has a complete text? Even out of the text you guys have, you will write volumes on a text, translating it accurately, which takes one page, but then the rest of the books are about what you believe and not what the text says. That, always baffles me. Even your books, sir, will say this is what it says, and then argue with the logic behind it. For all your smarts, you guys are idiots. Anyway, the books you will find here are hard copies of the originals. I am not at liberty to discuss where the originals are being kept, but I assure you what you hold is an exact duplicate. I could provide digital copies if you like, but if you really want to read it, if you really want to experience it, you must read it in its original format. Ideally, you should also duplicate the context and setting that it should be read in. Candlelight, or under a moonlight sky, because lighting can actually change the text and open pathways into the brain. Pathways that are not opened when reading it in a sterile environment under artificial lighting and magnifying glasses.”

“Oh, you believe in magic,” Gray said. He was a kid again and the words were out before he had the sense to regulate.

Tryst seemed not to take offense. “I believe in the Force. And so do you.”

“I have had some esoteric experiences, but I have not mastered any demonstrable abilities that can be duplicated in a lab setting,” Gray said.

“That’s because you think you understand what the Force is,” Tryst said, sitting in his chair, mindlessly turning the Ewok spear head in his hands. “When you think you have it pinned down, it changes. Take your ability to read alien and foreign scripts, for example. That, Sir, is a Force given ability.”

“No, it’s not,” Gray said. “I studied. I worked hard to become a master of written languages.”

“Yes. You studied. You work hard. Very rarely do people just wake up with full Force capabilities,” Tryst said. “Oh, it happens. It pisses the Jedi and Sith off to no end when it does, because they have to dance and spin just to explain the anomalous and seemingly random manifestation of the Force. And, it’s in their best interest, if they want to maintain their authority over the material, to down play the sporadic rising of untrained. Umm, kind of like academics. I mean, here you are believing you worked hard and studied, and you’re were probably richly awarded for jumping through someone’s else’s hoops, and in the end, it was necessary for them to confer on you an honor and invite you into their club, but I am telling you, I could have saved you and your family a whole lot of time and money and just given you a computer with a general sampling of galactic knowledge and you would have done just as well for yourself.”

“I earned my Doctorates!” Gray said.

Tryst offered a surrender hand gesture. “And yet, you’re still searching, and still surprised that you don’t know shit,” Tryst said.

“Oh, here it goes. You can’t win a legit argument, so you’re going to take the conversation to base language and disparage me, try to cow me to back down,” Gray said.

“If you cow down, it’s because your position is weak. If you run away, your position was weak. If you try to beat me into submission or completely dismiss me, which is what you tend to do the most, then it is because your position is weak,” Tryst said.

Tryst let go of the artifact and it hovered. With the slightest finger gesture, it moved forwards, across the cabin, and stopped only when it came into contact with Gray's neck, pushing in until the artery on his left side pulsed visibly.

"Can you do this?" Tryst asked.

Gray was concerned, not for his life, but for all the books around him. He wanted to read them and know them. He wanted to know them more intimately than he had ever known any woman. This was his love. "You know that I cannot," Gray admitted, not completely cowed down.

"But you want to do this?" Tryst asked.

"Yes," Gray said.

"And you think the answers lie in these books?" Tryst said.

"Yes," Gray said.

Tryst recalled the artifact, caught it, and continued to twirl it in his hand. "And you're not completely wrong," Tryst said. "There are answers in there. But ultimately, in the end, the Force isn't something you can reference in a book. It's something in your heart. It is something that transcends academic and materialistic experiences. It is what remains when all of this has turned to rubbish."

"Why have you brought me here?" Gray said.

"Yay, we finally made it past the indoctrination stage," Tryst, sighing with relief. "You were in once you fucked her, but still, you needed that extra something to be all in. You, Sir, wrote a book."

Gray was confused. "I have written many books."

"Top shelf, three books from the end," Tryst said.

Gray searched the books with his eyes and found it. 'Apports and Thought-forms: manifesting Spirit on the Physical Plane,' Doctor Emanuel Chester Gray. Gray seemed surprised.

"That was my first book, which wasn't even academic and nearly got me booted out of the University for releasing it online, public domain," Gray said.

"In my opinion, your best work," Tryst said.

"It's rubbish! It was completely speculative and I was pulling from obscure sources that I didn't even have my hands on, but were rumored to exist, or from things I remembered reading from my grandfather's collection, and, if I hadn't been so rash and put it online, there would be no copies of it. I was manic and not thinking right from a week from no sleeps before finals and my dissertation presentation that loomed," Gray said.

"Aww, the Force awakened," Tryst said.

"I was delusions brought on by a mental health crisis," Gray said.

"Too many people misunderstand the true nature of mental health crises," Tryst offered.

"Oh, Force me, you're one of those," Gray sighed.

"One of those?" Tryst asked, motioning for him to fill it in.

"Probably believes psychotropics are conspired by pharmaceuticals to placate the masses," Gray said.

"Well, the establishment probably couldn't handle the spontaneous birth of a thousand Sith and Jedi across the Galaxy," Tryst agreed, commiserating. "But, sure, I am okay with people turning to that option, if it helps remedied suffering. You're pretty good with statistics, Doc. In your educated opinion, has psychotropic and normative mental health strategies alleviated mental health issues, or exasperated them?"

“It’s not that simple. There is no cure all for the conditions that sentients suffer from,” Gray said.

“I know a cure for schizophrenia that doesn’t include psychotropics. Our ancestors did to, and those who suffered from it fared better in the past than they do today, in our enlightened, medicated society that shuns all forms of illnesses,” Tryst said. “Depression, especially those that are trauma related, open people up to the Force. It’s the standard for all shamanic practices. The main reason that most people don’t arrive with a greater understanding is because they have no tolerance for darkness. You have to pass through the dark before you get to the light. You have to stare the gatekeepers of truth in the eye and unflinchingly call them out. It’s a common mistake, we all make it, I made it, but now I know I am not standing in darkness, but I am standing in the shadows of being that are greater than me. To get to the light, to go beyond them we must submit, learn, progress. Are you ready to face your demons? Are you ready to meet my master? I have come not bring you peace of mind, but conflict. It is in the darkness we sprout and rise to the light.”

“If I have to kill you to be his apprentice, I don’t stand a chance,” Gray said. “I am not worthy of that kind of honor and way too old to ever be anything more than academic.”

“No one is worthy. I am certainly not,” Tryst said. “And this is the news I have been waiting to share with you. You’re already in. You didn’t have to do anything but submit. There is no competition. My Master is not limited to one apprentice, one student, one devotee. She accepts all who come and bow before her.”

“She?” Gray said.

“You didn’t think God was a male, did you?”

“God?”

“Oh, you have so much to learn, my learned friend,” Tryst said. “Welcome aboard.”



The rogue moon was hardly big enough to be considered a moon, but it was chosen. Two shuttles set opposing each other. An inflatable bubbled home was seated between them, with bridges that connected to each shuttle. The two opposing enemies departed their ships together, very aware that if this were a trap, any blaster fire to the bubble would likely kill everyone, as the moon had no atmosphere. The troopers might fare a good chance of getting back to their respective shuttles, depending on the outcome of the ensuing firefight. Two Star Destroyers hovered in striking distance of the bubble and each other. The parties arrived, and the two leaders stepped forwards, their troopers standing prepared for treachery.

“General Hux,” Priya said. “You seem to be doing well.”

“What do you want, Darth Alyth?” Hux asked.

“You’re not still sore are you?” Priya said.

“I recovered,” Hux said.

“When a girls says no, Armitage, she means no,” Priya said.

“I am really busy and don’t want to play your games,” Hux said.

“And yet, I called, you came,” Priya said. She discerned the subtle clenching of teeth as he restrained his anger. “Very well. I’ll skip to the main course, no foreplay, kind of the way you like it, right? I want in.”

Hux laughed. “You want to join the First Order? Did Darth Torlin send you to fuck with us?”

“Darth Torlin is dead, I am now my own master,” Priya said.

Hux thought it through, but didn’t question it. “Kilmore has finally decided to join us?”

“Kilmore is also dead. I am now in charge,” Priya said.

“You want me to believe you killed Torlin and Kilmore and have taken over their reign?” Hux said. “I am going to need more proof than your word.”

“Have you ever known me to lie?” Priya asked. She offered a smile and a face that dared her to challenge her. “Well, it doesn’t matter what you believe. I don’t want to join your petty First Order fan club devoted to things past. But I do want a piece of the action. Specifically, I want to be cut in on your Axxila Run.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Hux said.

Priya tossed him a chip. He caught it, but his troopers reacted causing her Angles to mirror them. “You boys are a little jumpy,” she said. “Times are rough are they?”

“What is this?”

“A copy of something I peeled off a dead Bothan. It describes battle plans for a run on Axxila. Apparently you’re going to go in, take out the orbital defense system, employ a planetary shield so no one can come or go without your permission, and then take out the capital. Ideally, you’re going to want to take out the capital right away, and I wasn’t quite sure how you intended to get past their shields, but then I had this epiphany. You have an inside player, poised to take out one or two of the towers, which will allow you to send in a ground assault and occupy the capital. Over all, your plan has merits. But I happen to know how it’s going to fail. I am offering to participate. For a small price.”

“I assure you, I have this,” Hux said. “And I don’t need you.”

“Cut me in, or I will see a copy of that disk gets to the Axxila authorities,” Priya said.

Hux laughed. “Go ahead. You don’t know when our Run will be. Let them prepare. Let them reveal their assets to us. Let them grow weary and then return to their sloth ways. It will only make my job easier.”

“I’ve done the math. You need a minimum of fourteen star destroyers to do this,” Priya said. “I know the First Order has grown in popularity since that planet killer stunt, but I doubt you have consolidated that many Star Destroyers to deploy on a fanatical wild card. Yeah, if it’s successful, you’ll hold prime territory. The planet shield thing, if you get that inserted, huge tactical asset secured, whether you secure the capital immediately or not. But most likely, you’re going to waste a lot of resources to take it, and it will take time to properly utilize it. I have watched the First Order, and waiting patiently to win by attrition is just not your style. And quite frankly, holding Axxila is going to be a pain in the ass, because if you don’t cut me in, I am either going to send my forces in to help Axxila directly, or, I am going to let you waste your time and resources capturing it, and when you’re spread thin, I will send my forces in and take you out and then take Axxila all for myself. So either way, I am going to have a piece of this. So between me, and the Resistance who is probably going to be increasing their harassments to slowly pick away at whatever task force you leave at Axxila, I don’t think you ‘have this,’ because my experience with you suggests you don’t think things through.”

“We’re done here,” Hux said.

Hux tuned to leave and had just as he stepped by his guards who held their ground in case of treachery, Priya added, “I killed your inside man.”

Hux paused, listening but not turning back to her.

“Jungin is dead. My apprentice killed him and has taken control of the Fortress,” Priya said. “Which means, I now hold the keys to the two towers that you need disabled in order to take the capital.”

Hux returned to the negotiation position. “What do you want?!”

“What I always wanted,” Priya said. “Control. I am taking over Jungin’s markets, just as I have taken over Lord Kilmore’s territories. I will help you take Axxila, but I want guaranteed use of all hyperspace lanes to and from Axxila, and assurance my smugglers are not harassed.”

“Markets?!” Hux snapped, spittle flying from his mouth. He had the sense to wipe his mouth. “You’re rambling about markets? The First Order is about to establish galactic rule, law and economic stability and you’re focused on markets!”

“Oh, you are still crushing on me,” Priya chuckled.

Hux raised a finger at her. “You were just another piece of ass.”

“Umm, so much for law and stability. Men are always in the market for another piece of ass,” Priya laughed. “Here’s the thing, darling. You don’t mind me calling you darling, do you? Empires come and go, but markets, well, people will always need food, drugs, the legit kind and the black market kind, servants, and arms. And shoes. Can’t forget shoes. I am simply making myself available to provide the staples of life.”

“You’re exactly the petty kind of criminal scum we intend to stamp out!” Hux said.

“And yet, you consistently employ our kind to meet your agenda,” Priya said. “And for every one of us you kill, two more pop up. But yeah, go with your ideology. Try to take Axxila without an inside, criminal element. Amuse me.”

“I don’t believe you. You’re bluffing,” Hux said.

“Contact your ship,” Priya invited.

“What?”

“Call my bluff. Contact your ship,” Priya invited.

Hux pulled a device from his belt and activated the screen. The officer on the deck appeared. “Report,” Hux said.

The officer on the deck went to respond, but found he couldn’t. He tried relieving pressure around his collar. There were sounds of others coughing in the background and when Hux panned back the view on his device, he saw most of the command crew holding their necks in the universal sign for choking. He paled, fighting disbelief. Even Rin couldn’t have pulled this Force trick off from this distance. When he looked up from his screen, he saw Priya had moved in closer to him. His troopers were hovering in the air, their hands limp, their weapons dropped.

“As I was saying earlier,” Priya said softly, taking his hat off and pushing her fingers through his ginger hair as if they were a couple and she cared. “I have experienced an epiphany, an awakening if you will. I am sure Snoke as sensed it as well. I have grown in abilities and talents far beyond any Sith Snoke has in his pocket. Truthfully, I am more powerful than any Jedi or Sith in the last one hundred years. I want you to go call Snoke, tell him the deal I am offering him. And, just for my personal amusement, tell him he made a mistake choosing Rin over me. Betting on the Skywalker’s genetic line and the recognition of their legacy as always been a bad bet. They have never been anything more than a bunch of whiny, fickle babies that switch their loyalties on a whim, blinded by their own weaknesses. Yeah, Hux, I know, you fear the man. But that has always been your weakness. You fear the man, when you should fear the woman. I will be a part of this. I will let you decide which side you want me to play.”

Priya released her Force choke hold on Hux's immediate troopers. They fell dead at his side. Simultaneously with that release, the officers on the command deck found themselves able to fully breathe, requiring time to recover.

"Go contact Snoke," Priya said. "I will wait."

Hux retreated to his ship to make the call. The moment he was on the ship, G appeared beside her.

"You good?" G asked.

"Yeah. Thank you," Priya said.

"You're welcome, Master," G said, smiling at her.

"We'll role-play that later," Priya said.

"Sounds fun," G said, disappearing in a cloud of smoke.

The call to Snoke took about as long as she expected. He returned to find a bemused look on her face which he didn't understand, but took it as evidence of arrogance.

"You're getting your wish," Hux said. "We're going to allow you the honor of leading the Run on Axxila. Your ship will be the first to engage the orbital defenses. After you have demonstrated how committed you are, we will join you in the Run."

Priya allowed her anger to show. "Mark my words, if you don't commit, if you try to back stab me like you did in the past, I will end you," she said.

"Stay within thirty hyperspace minutes of Axxila. When I contact you next, we will be committing to the Run," Hux said. "And mark my words, if you don't show, or we don't accomplish our mission, there will be no place in this Galaxy for you to hide. We will come for you. We all will."

"I'm not too worried on that count," Priya said. "I heard Snoke's boy toy got his ass kicked by a girl, who prior to meeting him never once showed any Force abilities. Care to comment?"

"Are we done here?" Hux asked.

"Yeah, go on. You bore me. You always have. Let me know if you ever grow a pair and start making decisions for yourself. I might find room for you servicing toilet Droids," Priya said.

Hux barely contained his rage. He started to leave.

"Wait a second," Priya said, stopping him. "I have one more request before you leave."

Hux turned back, not hiding the contempt on his face. He waited.

"Lick my boots," Priya said.

"What?!"

"Oh, you heard me. You remember how to do it. Get down on your hands and knees, crawl over to me, and lick my boots," Priya said.

"I will..."

Hux felt the tightness start in his throat; a pressure on his back drove him to his knees. Still, he resisted, a hand going to the ground.

"I forget. What was that advice you gave me, oh so long ago?" Priya asked, as if reminiscing. "Oh, I think I remember. This will go much easier for you if you don't resist." Priya leaned over to whisper in his ear as he crept a little closer, still fighting it. "But I do so love it when you struggle."



Gray sat at a table with several books in front of him. Tryst emerged from the flight deck, got a brew, and sat down at the table, noting the books. One of them was the journal he had been making, chronicling their attempts to summon a spirit into the physical realm. There were photos etched into the book, and sleeves in the inside cover that contained holographic recording. It was clear that the ‘professor’ was deep in his element, and probably hadn’t even heard Tryst join him.

Crusher emerged from a cabin, securing his belt. He was frowning. “What did you do to her?” Crusher asked.

“What do you mean?” Tryst asked. “Is she still fighting you?”

“I wish. I like when they fight,” Crusher said. “But it’s like she’s not there at all.”

Tryst laughed, amused, drinking his brew. “Don’t worry, she’s there. She’ll recover, and she will be stronger for it.”

“I wish I had your power over women,” Crusher said, getting his own brew and coming to the table.

“Crusher, how many times do we have to go over this?” Tryst asked.

“I know, you say I have the power. We all have the power. But, clearly you have an abilities far above anything I have,” Crusher said. “Are you using Force commands on her?”

“Oh, never anything so crude,” Tryst said. “I simply told her I am her half-brother and showed her genetic evidence to back it up.”

“That’s really fucked up, boss,” Crusher said.

“I am not related to her,” Tryst said.

“Oh,” Crusher said, puzzling it through. “So, you told her that to break her?”

“It bothers her. It bothers you. I am trying to help you both recover from social neurosis, because if that shit bothers you, then that means you can be played,” Tryst said. “One day an enemy will get in your mind and tell you shit, and you will either be disgusted, or angered, or otherwise emotionally compromised and driven to act rashly or change allegiance. When I am finished with you, Crusher, when I am finished with her, you will be beyond corruption. You will be a pure servant of the Goddess.”

Gray looked up. “The Goddess? From the text?”

“Who else?” Tryst asked.

“You had an experience with her?” Gray asked.

“It’s personal,” Tryst assured him. “And I am not the only one who has been called.”

“She is for real?” Gray asked.

“Yes. You may think you have given your allegiance to me, but truly, you have given it to her,” Tryst said. “If you don’t meet her in this life, you will meet her in the next. She will take you in, make you stronger, and she will help you decide your next life.”

“You’re talking about reincarnation?” Gray asked.

Tryst offered a hand of ambivalence. “That’s one way to get back in the game,” Tryst said. He pointed the book. “That’s another way back in, after we rediscover the formula, and make it work. We figure that out, and we can call into being any servant that ever existed.”

“We could even call the Emperor back into existence?” Crusher asked.

“Sure. He was a servant of the Goddess,” Tryst said.

“No he wasn’t,” Gray argued. “What’s your source for that?”

“The Goddess,” Tryst said. “No one rises in this galaxy unless she approves. She is the mother of all.”

Gray seemed skeptical. “I thought the Force was everything.”

“Me, too,” Crusher said.

“Oh, Crusher, we keep going over this,” Tryst said, sighing. “Sorry, I forget you’re a bit slow sometimes. Doctor, the Force is an all pervasive energy that encompasses all that is. All energy is just part of the spectrum of all that is. Even matter is just energy, and part of a continuum. We are part of this energy, creations of the Force in the Force. We are geometric patterns of energy in a medium, mere points of interest where things energy lines up in magnificence, startling ways. There are others who are much more developed influencing the Force and they are calling for us to join them. The Resistance, the First Order, those are only echoes of what is truly calling us. If they had a clue, there would be no strife on this plane of existence.”

“You unnecessarily complicate the subject,” Gray said, watching as a naked Daphne emerged from the cabin and proceeded to get water. He licked his lips. Studying always made him horny. “You don’t need gods, goddess, or midiclorians to understand the Force.”

Tryst intercepted Daphne, taking the bottle water from her.

“Go get dressed,” Tryst instructed her. Her eyes were somewhere on his chest, but he raised her chin till her eyes met his. “You are human, not animal, like Cheeka. You will present yourself with dignity. Now, go get dressed, and then return to the table and sit with us. Then you may drink.”

Daphne turned and proceeded back to the cabin.

“That’s what I am talking about,” Crusher said. “Teach me that trick.”

“You just don’t get it,” Tryst said, sitting back down. “Professor, you may cling to your simplistic paradigm of the Force. It is not inaccurate. But you understand archetypes and subconscious entities, the ones that play out in your dreams, right? This division of self is an illusion, but it also very real. There is always a higher power, a division of self that over rides all lower selves. Lower selves does not denote lesser than. There are cells in my hand. I could kill one, or a million if I chose to cut off my finger. The Force is analogous to a body. We are but cells in that body.”

Gray didn’t seem to like the analogy, and decided to switch subjects. “The formula requires an apport. Is that why you wanted my spearhead?”

“No, I wanted that because it will lead us to our next force sensitive recruit,” Tryst said. “Apports are a dime a dozen.”

“What are apports again boss?” Crusher said.

“Any items that has been teleported through an esoteric medium or separate dimension, or created out of nothing, manifested or called into being by the Force,” Gray said.

Tryst closed his eyes, opening his palm skywards. A sound stirred the air, and out of nowhere a molten liquid crystal dropped onto the table, nearly burned through the table. Gray took note of the other pock marks in the table, imbedded with crystals, something he had just assumed was a part of the design.

“Oh, apports are kyber crystals,” Crusher said.

“Apports can be anything, even anachronistic objects,” Tryst said. “But this, this is straight from the heart of a star. I have never lacked for money, Professor. I could always call a crystal or some chunk of precious metal out of thin air.”

“This is explainable,” Gray said, as Daphne came in and sat down. He didn’t even have eyes for her, only the drop of crystal which was cooling, crystalizing into the table. There was the smell of something burning touching the air, not quite ozone, but there was no apparent smoke. “Perhaps a supernova pushed some of its material into hyperspace.”

“Perhaps,” Tryst said. “And perhaps it is just coincidence that it arrived at this moment when I asked it to. The Force moves in mysterious ways.”

“But if you could do this...”

“I should be able to summon beings into existence,” Tryst agreed. “Living organisms are much more complex than minerals and pure elements, and I am not really creating something as much as moving something. To bring a thought form into reality, I need a team. Ideally, someone who could create a doppelganger would be a great asset. That person could create a body, and we could anchor it with spirit and make it permanent. I get that person to join us, and the Goddess herself will walk amongst us.”

“Doppelgangers are myths. I only know of one Jedi who reportedly could do this, and that goes back before the Clone Wars,” Gray said.

“Preston G Waycaster has this ability,” Tryst said.

Gray laughed. “He’s a charlatan.”

“I assure you, Waycaster is the real deal,” Tryst said.

“He is an imbecile,” Gray said. “I met him. Not only did he want me to work, he wanted to put me in kindergarten.”

“And you didn’t take him up on the offer?” Tryst asked.

“I have my pride, Sir,” Gray said.

Tryst put his brew down and brought his hands together. Crusher eased his chair back, as if expecting there to be violence. Daphne stared at her water. There was a discernable vibration in the water, coming from the engines, via the hull, via the table, via the air around the bottle. The color of the liquid crystal in the table had shifted from a brilliant white to a yellow, descending down the light spectrum to orange. Tryst was contemplating, staring at the crystal.

“Don’t make me go back there. I am not going to grovel,” Gray said.

“I will not make you return to Waycaster,” Tryst said, staring at the newly embedded crystal, the internal light almost extinguished. As the outer surface crystalized, the inner light shined through, refracting and sending beams out that twirled, stretched, then shrunk away, until finally the inner light was gone and all that was left was external light reflecting and refracting. “I need Waycaster to join us willingly, and you’re far too arrogant to be recruiting anyone. I realize that’s not your strength. Even in your own circles, you’re considered a pompous ass and hold very few public friends, and I dare say no personal friends.”

“G will never join you,” Daphne said. Her voice was emotionless, and her statement was not a challenge, just a reflection of her belief. She spoke this to the bottle, aware of the light reflecting and refracting through the bottle, through the water, through the ripples. This was not scything. This was not a reading of the Force. It was just a simple statement.

Tryst smiled and shifted his gaze to Daphne. Her eyes came up and held and he knew she was speaking her truth. He nodded. “Oh, I think he will. He has no choice. I know his one weakness. He will be as intimate with us as we are with you.”

“Oh, is that where you sent Cheeka?” Crusher asked.

Tryst didn’t acknowledge Crusher’s random insight. He merely watched Daphne for any clues to her internal world. “Care to wager?” Tryst asked.

“I bet he beds her the first night,” Crusher said.

“I don’t understand,” Gray said. “Is Cheeka sex so mesmerizing she will enslave him?”

“Sex is an act of spiritual entanglement, Doctor. People think we are drawn to each other because of lust or physical attraction, but I submit to you every coupling that has ever happened

or will happened is due to the Force. We are brought together to work out inner struggles and to mend past wrongs.”

“Again with the past lives?” Gray asked, wanting to scoff.

“Call it past lives. Call it past relationships. Even your psychology books will tell you people often marry the parent they had the most trouble with,” Tryst said.

“That’s worse than sleeping with a sibling,” Crusher said, trying not to retch.

Tryst closed his eyes. “Crusher, I am not saying you actually sleep with a parent, I am saying we are drawn to personalities that mirror our parents. I suspect you would marry your dad, having never worked out your differences with him,” Tryst said, bringing his gaze back to Gray. “You have book smarts about relationships, Professor. You have used it to get yourself laid a dozen times over, avoiding the long term relationship that you crave but secretly sabotage. Daphne here, well, she is locked into in an abusive pattern. That’s why she has chosen to be a Jedi, in order to avoid relationships. It’s almost like magic. I can take her into any bar in the Galaxy and ask her to pick men at random, and everyone she likes, they will be abusers. If I hand pick a dozen non abusive type men, she would find them boring and would be unable to sustain relationships with them, because she has to have the other kind. The tumultuous kind.”

Daphne stared without comment. A part of her wanted to find fault and to argue, but she also knew what he spoke was accurate on many levels, even if it was a generalized summary.

“Your relationship with your brother was an opportunity to change that, and you ran,” Tryst said. “It was an opportunity to repair that part of your psyche that wants to fix your mom, know your father, bring family together, and repair the harm done over many life times. It doesn’t matter if you believe in past lives or not. What we do today resonates in the Force and shapes those things to come. Maybe it wasn’t a past life. Maybe what drives you are the echoes of the past, the multitude of psyches that yearn for healing themselves through you. Maybe the Force itself wants healing to occur, and it can, if you allow it, but if you fight it, you just send it down the road. That drama will eventually get played out and someone will get hurt and someone will heal, but the Force will purge itself of the drama in its own time, eventually, with or without your cooperation,” Tryst said. He touched the crystal in the table. “So, Professor, the easiest way to entangle someone is to engage them intimately, and allow the Force to do what it does. Sex is the easiest path into another person, getting their submission, or escalating it to the next level. All it takes is one submission.”

“If he is as great as you think, he won’t dally,” Gray said.

“I get it. You think he is an imbecile. He’s not. He is potentially the greatest Jedi ever. You know how I know he’s great? His ambivalence. Until the Goddess approached me, I was like him. I had no need to work, because I could summon wealth right from the ether. I simply drifted the galaxy, avoiding trouble and conflict. Until I met my Secret Master. He opened things in me and gave me vision. He introduced me to the Goddess. She accepted me. She is the most merciful being; she will accept the lowest of lows and exalt them. How do I know Waycaster is great? Greatness doesn’t need to prove itself in conquering, in the writing of books, in the healing and feeding of masses, it merely reflects on all that is and sees through the illusions. That said, he is also human. And he has the emotional age of a randy teenager. His weakness is sex and, unlike you, he actually cares for the people he sleeps with. Cheeka will own him. I will own him. The Goddess will own him because we own him. And we will restore the galaxy to a level of greatness no one alive can remember.”

An alarm sounded, announcing they would be dropping out of hyperspace shortly.

“So, let’s go see where the spearhead has brought us,” Tryst said.



G arrived on the spaceship in orbit around Dathomir. It was a private, personal yacht that was well taken care of, but nowhere near as opulent as the one his sister Lestelle commanded. Senator Dayo and Master Yeno were waiting for him. They bowed respectively. G frowned at that and pushed past their formality into hugs.

“Wow, have you missed us that much?” Dayo asked.

G pulled back. “I have not missed you. We are one in the Force,” G said. He paused to consider his emotions, though. “I cannot explain my impulsiveness or my emotions at seeing you.”

“You missed us,” Dayo said. She had cut her hair since he had seen her last, and her dark skin tones accentuated the bright oranges and yellows of her dress.

“This is silly. I am not flying up into orbit every time you need to speak to me,” Yeno said. “Just pop down into my home like you always have.”

“I told them I would not return,” G said. “I think that is limited to this lifetime. I should probably seek clarification.”

“G, if you tell them you will fight for Dathomir, I am sure they will reconsider their decision to banish you,” Dayo said.

“They were right to banish me,” G said. “Between the Bloodhunters, Snoke’s recruiters, Solo’s recruiters, and all the opportunities in between them, none of them will allow the peace that Three Sisters is intended to offer. Those who seek refuge from war should likely avoid me. Then again, considering the stories I have read about Jedi, one might argue that trouble followed them everywhere they went.”

“I am sure it doesn’t mean what you think it means,” Yeno said.

“You’re right. Everyone gets trouble equal to their need to be challenged,” G said, bowing.

“You wanted to speak to me,” Yeno said. “It sounded urgent.”

G nodded. “I have a dilemma and I wanted counsel from outside of my head,” G said.

“You don’t trust Windu to guide you?” Yeno asked.

“You made me a Jedi, Master. I want your counsel,” G said.

“Would you like privacy?” Dayo asked.

“No. You’re here. Your opinion is welcome,” G said. “The Bloodhunters have approached me for a truce.”

“Wow,” Dayo said.

“That’s exactly what I said,” G said.

“And you’re considering it,” Yeno asked.

“How can I not consider it?” G asked.

“They’re machines. We don’t parlay with machines,” Yeno said.

“Aren’t we all just machines? I mean, at the genetic level, molecules are just molecules, doing what they are programmed to do,” G said.

“Oh, Force me,” Yeno sighed. “You know there is a difference. The Force moves through us.”

“It moves through them, too,” G said.

“The Dark Side. They were conceived in darkness,” Yeno said.

“Aren’t we all?” G said. “And, even outside of that metaphor, how many humans are actually conceived by the darkness of rape, and raised as slaves and brutalized until only the darkness remains? And how many humans, the best of us, also hold darkness? I am no better. I have a dark side. And maybe if the Jedi had done more to recognize their own darkness, as opposed to trying to completely purge it, we would have a better understanding of our enemies.”

“Wow,” Dayo said. “Maybe I should let you two speak alone.”

“Hold your ground,” Yeno and G said together. They both thought about the harshness of their response, frowned as if they were psychic twins, and added: “Please.”

Dayo was amused by their level of synchronicity.

“G, are you emoting because you have already decided what you’re going to do, and you are seeking permission regardless of my opinion?” Yeno asked.

“I am the only one capable of destroying them to the last one,” G said. “A Jedi only attacks in self-defense. If they lay down their arms, how do I in good conscious continue to engage, machine or not?”

“They have laid down their weapons?” Dayo asked.

“One for sure has, but I gather they will do as I bid. They have offered to submit to me as personal servants, but their preference is to flee the galaxy and not return,” G said.

“They want to leave?” Yeno asked, surprised.

“I was told they are tired of all the wars and the destructions. They have discovered a reverence for life that exceeds that of the general public,” G said.

“Wait,” Dayo said. “They would fight for you? How many are left? They could take out Stoke?”

G sighed. “As I told your sisters, Snoke is not my fight. He cannot come to me and I cannot go to him. He and I could pass each other in a market and we both be oblivious because that is the way the Force wants it. If was meant to be otherwise, Snoke would be dead, and I would be ruling the galaxy.”

“I would prefer that,” Dayo said.

“That is definitely a dark path and I will not go down it,” G said. “This conflict was in the making long before I entered the scene, and it will continue when I have left, and it will be done when all of the players are satisfied they have learned the lessons. That is the way of it.”

G turned his attention back to Yeno, searching an answer from him.

“You are a Master Jedi,” Yeno said. “Your desire to love and show compassion is greater than mine, like a child who would rescue a broken toy and love it for what it is. There is no Jedi Council. There is no strife here that divides us. If your relationship with the Bloodhunters has evolved to where you trust them to leave and they do so, then that will be the way of it.”

“Master,” G said softly. “I am losing confident in my vision. Things are changing so fast that I can barely keep up with things. Something bad is coming. I don’t know if it’s because I am going to accomplish the mission you requested of me, or because it will finish me. I definitely will not be the one to re-establish the Jedi Order, or anything comparable.”

“That task belongs to another,” Yeno agreed.

“I think you should leave Dathomir,” G said.

“This is my home. I will finish my days here,” Yeno said.

G bowed. He turned to Dayo. “Thank you for making this meeting possible,” G said. She went to hug him but he was dissipating before she fully took hold.

Dayo turned to Yeno. “Do you know what’s coming?”

“No.”

Yeno went and sat down. He felt very old all of a sudden.

Chapter 15

Where there is ruin, there is hope for a treasure.

Rumi

Ten sat at her ergonomic control station that wrapped around her, offering multiple display of the debris field she was shifting through. The lighting was dim. The main viewer in front of her gave her a bird's eye view of everything FindIt could see. FindIt was in his element and extremely excited about everything around him. He reached out and grabbed a free floating 'smart capacitor,' a piece of conduit still attached. It looked salvageable. Ten froze the image, shifted it to another screen, and ran the numbers. If it was undamaged, the average price on the market, a variable dependent on where she sold it, would fetch upwards of 20,000 credits. That alone would more than cover her operation costs to date, making her first run not only profitable, but lucrative. If the part was damaged, it would have absolutely no value. She decided to risk it. She instructed FindIt to stow it in the chest he had slaved to follow him.

Pink, her astromech Droid, whimpered softly. Ten looked at one of her lower screen, reading the text translation of the whistle.

"I know it takes up a lot of space in the chest," Ten said.

The Droid whistled.

"You're right, it's probably broken, but without a tester, there's no way to know that," Ten said.

Pink sputtered out a protest.

Ten read it and smiled. "I will let you test it then, but you'll have to wait till FindIt brings it back. I don't want you both outside."

While FindIt stowed the smart capacitor, Ten scoured her alternative screen, panning the camera, zooming in and panning back out, sorting mentally through the field. She had a dozen remotes zipping out the debris field, and she alternated between remotes, with one monitor showing multiple views simultaneously.

"You would think there would be at least one intact Droid somewhere," Ten complained.

Pink made a curious sound. Ten read it.

"Not to replace you," Ten said. "I wouldn't do that. I am thinking it would be nice to buy you a voice modulator and have it installed."

Pink protested vocally and shook. Ten read its statement: "You want to make me stupid?"

"I don't understand. How would that make you stupid?" Ten asked.

Pink explained that a voice modulator would require shifting down its critical assessment capabilities in order to decrease its operational language baud-rate to the speed of human verbalization. Pink recommended purchasing a Protocol Droid.

"Well, then, hope that smart capacitor is not broken, cause those aren't cheap," Ten said. "Unless you want to visit Tatooine and scrounge through the trash the Jawas sell. Even then, we're going to need some revenue from whatever we find here, because I don't want to live on G's money."

Pink whistled an alert.

"I see it," Ten said. She pushed the mic open. "FindIt, go into sleep mode. We got company."

From her station she could power down her entire ship's system, putting her in stealth mode. Pink made a worried sound. Ten ignored her, running through her options. It was likely

just another scavenger. If she made a run for it, she would likely escape, but that meant sacrificing FindIt, and everything presently in her chest, because they would no doubt investigate. If she stayed, she risked potential confrontation. Best scenario, they simply didn't notice her. It was moving in her general direction, but that didn't mean anything. Even she had known that this area was likely to result in the best treasures. When she finally decided running might be the best option, it was too late. The ship turned on a dime and came at her full force. By the time she had made it to the cockpit they had already attached. If she lived through this, she told herself she would have to take more precautions in the future. She grabbed her blaster and ran to the airlock just as the doors were opening. She brought her weapon to bear and was firing even before she had ascertained she knew the person. She missed. The weapon was torn from her hand by an invisible Force, and it broke when it hit the wall.

"Daphne?!" Ten said.

"Daphne?!" Tryst asked, mimicking Ten as he entered. "You know her?"

"I do," Daphne said.

Crusher entered. He smiled at Ten, his throat changing colors. Ten wanted to ignore the way it was staring at her, but she had seen that stare before and provoked a visible 'disgust' response. She shivered.

"Anyone else on board?" Tryst asked.

"Yeah, a full crew," Ten said. "Now get off my ship."

Tryst smiled. "I like you. You're a lousy liar. Let's try again. Is there anyone else on board my ship?"

"Daphne, are you going to let them do this?" Ten asked.

"Go back to your room, Daphne. We got it from here," Tryst said.

Daphne turned and walked away.

"Now, little girl, there are a couple ways we can do this," Tryst said.

Ten pulled a hidden weapon from the small of her back, just hanging in her pants. Everything seemed to happen in slow motions. She was firing her weapon even as Tryst was firing his. She missed again. Tryst did not. She went down. Pink came flying at them in attack mode, and Crusher took out the Droid with Ion blaster. It fell at their feet. Crusher took a restraining bolt off his belt and put it on the Droid. When nothing else attacked, Tryst put away his weapon.

"I want you to take this ship to our base and wait for me there," Tryst said. "I may not like the interior color scheme, but it seems to be in great condition otherwise. Must be nice having rich parents, eh?"

"Yep," Crusher said. "What about the girl?"

"Do what you like with her," Tryst said. He turned and went back to his own ship, closing the doors as he did so. "Toss her out the airlock, or drop her off on the nearest planet. Just don't bring her back to the base."

Crusher headed towards the flight deck, pausing only to take note of the Captain's Quarters. The bed wasn't made and there were clothes in heaps on the floor and the bed. A table with a half-eaten meal caught his attention; he went grabbed one of the wraps and started eating it while he purposely kicked through some of the 'girl' clothes. He arrived at the flight deck in time to witness Tryst's ship jumping into hyperspace. He began the power up sequence while making his own calculations for hyperspace. He finished his math about the same time the engines showed ready. He pushed the ship into hyperspace. He sat for a moment, making sure everything was good, and then headed back to the main cabin. Ten was awake, scrambling to

open a box. Crusher reached out with the Force and brought the half opened box to him. He smiled when he found the lightsaber. He tossed the box to the floor, breaking it. The practice orb rolled across the floor.

“Sweet,” Crusher said. “Where did you find this beauty? In that grave yard out there?”

“If you don’t get off my ship, I am going to kill you with it,” Ten said.

He pushed the button, but nothing happened. He chuckled and tossed it to the floor. He expanded his throat and licked his lips.

“Come here,” Crusher said, his voice dropping down in pitch.

“Get off my ship,” Ten said.

Crusher reached out with the Force and brought her closer. She cried out as he caught both of her wrists, and still had two hands reaming to ‘mess’ with her. She kicked at him, screaming. He grabbed her hips and took her to the floor, putting his weight against her

“Oh, yeah, I love your fight,” Crusher said. “It excites me.”

“Let me go!” Ten pleaded.

Crusher laughed, a long tongue coming out to lick her face. He let go of one her wrists in order to move pull up on her shirt, exposing her belly. He let go of the opposite waste, and the two opposing hands began to undo her pants. As he pulled down on her pants, he grabbed hold of her hips, locking his grip on flesh, nails drawing blood. He let go of the other wrist in order to push against her throat. She fought with her hands, but hitting him had no effect, and she was not going shift his weight while his two hands gripped her hips. He began unfastening his own belt. His mouth opened wide enough to swallow her hole head, but he simply nibble at her face, and pulled away with a sucking sound, sucking all her air out of her. He licked her whole face with the broad of his tongue and nibbled her neck. She cried as she continued to fight.

“Squirm my little pet, make it happen for me,” Crusher said.

Ten had been here before. This had not been the first time. A part of her brain blamed herself for putting herself in this predicament. If only she had stayed home. If only she had stayed with Corissa. She steeled her mind, turning her brain ‘off’ to physical input. She could disappear completely if she wanted, but part of her told her that if she were to survive, she would have to remain present. She surrendered, turning her head, knowing the inevitable was coming. Her hands went limp. She saw the lightsaber. She could imagine its weight in her hand. It seemed miles away. It was just there. Separate. Just like she was, just there, but separate. This moment was a just a moment, just another endless moment in a forever now. And then she felt anger, rising up from her stomach, an anger that many other has touched on, but she cultivated it, allowing it to fill her. The lightsaber was suddenly in her hands, powering up with a loud retort, the blade extending straight from the hilt into her attacker. Its mouth opened in surprised and where before it was dark, now it was illuminated from within. Its eyes burst from their sockets due to the internal heat as the blood and brains boiled around the lightsaber, swelling its head. Its limbs were rigid, oddly locked in place. She had to pry the hands away from her waist. She pushed the dead carcass off her, but stabbed and slashed at it again, and again.

Ten fell to her knees, sobbing. She powered down the lightsaber and tossed it. She sat there, crying, so much fluid in her eyes that the console lights all blurred together, and she heard the echo of her own breathing as she tried to regain control. She scrambled to her feet, buttoning her pants, and went straightway to the toilet and threw up. She then washed her face. A knife on the counter drew her attention. She picked it up and was about to cut into her wrist, the sound of the water still running.

“I thought you were done cutting,” G said.

Ten looked up to see G in the mirror. She dropped the knife, turned, and embraced him. The sheer force of gripping him took him back to the wall, and again the tears came. He slid to the floor, holding her to him, allowing her to just let it out. He rocked her lightly. The water continued to run.

“I don’t want to live in this life anymore,” Ten cried. “I am so tired, G. There is nowhere safe. Thieves, rapist, murderers, wars, slavery, illness... Please, just let me die.”

“Okay,” G said so softly that she wasn’t sure she heard him.

Her emotional distress dropped down a notch. “You realize, the only peace I ever had was when I was dead. That place you brought me back from. I want to return to that place,” Ten said, wiping her nose on a sleeve before turning her head back into G’s chest. The tear stains on his shirt made a dark mess.

“Okay,” G said even softer than the last okay.

Ten became quiet, simply holding onto G. She became aware of the water still running in the lavatory. The bathroom door was open and she could see her bed, her clothes scattered across the room and she wondered if G had noticed she was a slob and what would he think. She found her breathing subdued. She wondered why she was worried about the tidiness of her room, considering.

“You’re not going to talk me out of it?” Ten asked.

“You’re an adult, Ten. You have the means to do it. If you’re determine to check out, no one will be able to stop you,” G said.

“You won’t be mad?” Ten asked.

“We’ve had this conversation before, Ten. Your life sucked, maybe more than most. I get that, but I will never know what it’s like for you in there,” G said, touching her heart, her head.

“Will you help me?” Ten said.

“No,” G said. “I will help you live. I will help you live differently. I will help you live better. But I won’t help you die. Not today.”

“I failed,” Ten said.

“In what way?” G asked.

“I killed someone,” Ten said.

“You did,” G said. “I don’t think that’s what bothers you.”

“I killed him out of anger,” Ten said.

“Yeah,” G said.

“I can’t be a Jedi now. All that you tried to teach me is for naught,” Ten said. “I touched the Force for the first time, and I did it with anger. I am now doomed to be a Dark Jedi.”

G laughed. “There is only one Force. There are only Jedi. You are not doomed,” G assured her.

“But I have read people were barred for less,” Ten said.

“Umm, there is a lot of contextual leeway permitted for each situation,” G said.

“Perspective thing.”

“Why didn’t you come when I called you?” Ten asked. “You said you would come whenever I called you.”

“I was not allowed to intervene,” G said.

She pulled back. “That was one of those tests?! That’s a stupid test!”

“Stand up,” G instructed her.

Ten stood, giving G room to stand. G turned off the water and then offered his hand. She took it. He led her back to the main cabin, apparently not caring about the state of her room. He

led her to the body. Holding her hand, he reached out with the Force, letting it move through her, so she could sense what he was doing. Using the Force, he turned the remains into a diamond. It had greenish red hues, as if it were partly an emerald embedded in a ruby. He offered it to her.

Ten took it. It was beautiful and it disgusted her.

“Cary this with you and always remember,” G said. “This is your first kill; it will not be your last. More than that, you have just taken your first tentative steps into a larger world.”

“I don’t think I want to be a Jedi anymore,” Ten said.

“One cannot unlearn what they know,” G said.

“I don’t want to be a Jedi. That would make me what, the last Jedi?” Ten said. “I don’t want the job. I don’t want to kill anyone else.”

“Then don’t,” G said. “But you won’t be the last. You can’t be. The Force is in all of us. Ten, what you experienced is a normal awakening. This is the way it most often happens. And when it does, it usually happens spontaneously to people who have never had any teaching or any previous experiences, or any indication of being Force sensitive. Lots of people have been in situations where they suddenly find unknown strength and knowledge to act. Some, find it on the battlefield. Some find it during a crisis. I know a dainty wife who lifted a crashed speeder up off her husband so he could crawl out. She lifted at least a ton without thinking about it and then set it down. That is the Force. She never experienced the Force like that again, but neither she nor her spouse doubted what occurred. You have trained for this. You have touched it. Now, learn to do it with neutrality. Learn to do it with love. In all things, strive for balance.”

“I didn’t disappoint you?” Ten asked, tears strolling down her face.

“You will never disappointment me,” G said.

“Even if I had ended my life?” Ten asked.

“Ten, if you had ended your life, I would be more concerned about how I had disappointed you,” G said.

“Oh, G, you could never disappoint me. I love you,” Ten said, and then got it. “This is love? This is real love?”

“This is real love,” G said. “The times you think you want to end are the times you are extremely stressed and that stress has temporarily blocked your perception of love. If you wait a moment, your experience of love will return.”

“Define ‘a moment,’” Ten asked.

“The length of time it takes to reconnect with love,” G said.

“That’s still pretty vague,” Ten said, feeling like she should be cross, but couldn’t even fake it.

“Because it varies per person per situation, but it always returns,” G said. “But from my perspective, there is no time, because there is no space, therefore there is no separation. There is only love.”

Ten hugged him.

“Stay with me for a while? At least until I recover FindIt?” Ten asked.

“Sure,” G said.

They went to the flight deck together. Ten brought them out of hyperspace without thinking, a risky move considering she had no clue where she was, but they arrived in interstellar space unscathed. She turned the ship, making the calculations to return to where she had been. Before punching it, she considered, she could never return to where she had been. She had changed. Her finger hovered over the button. Space, the stars, it all seemed to make sense, but it was fleeting and gone and her self-doubts rolled in. She pushed the button, and pulled on the

throttle. As soon as they were in hyperspace, she relaxed. She looked at the slip stream flowing around the ship.

“Do you remember when I was dead and you helped me?” Ten said. “I have never experienced a greater level of peace. Can I have that here, on this plane, in this life?”

G was silent for a moment, seeking words. Words came. They felt old, but perhaps yet unwritten: “A poet once wrote, or will write, sometimes I am confused about these things, but anyway, ‘These pains you feel are messengers. Listen to them.’ Probably not in the same sonnet, but it feels like in the same breath, he also said ‘You have to keep breaking your heart until it opens.’ I have a lot of answers, Ten. I have none of yours. That is your job. All I can tell you is, I will walk with you, so keep walking. I will practice with you, so keep practicing. Even I am just trying to get better at this, whatever this is.”

If Ten heard him or even reflected over the poetry he had offered, it was not apparent. “I think it’s important to tell you, if I stay here, in this life, and I meet her again, I am going to kill Daphne,” Ten said.

G nodded, sympathetically. He didn’t try pursuing it or understanding it. He was sure it made sense somewhere in the galaxy.

“You’re not going to correct me?” Ten said.

“You have the right to choose your own path,” G said.

“No advice?” Ten asked.

“Pff. You have not listened to anything your mother and I have given you yet, why start now?” G said, trying for humor.

“So, that’s it, I am a Jedi?” Ten asked.

G chuckled. “Not yet. But welcome to being an adult.”

“Being an adult sucks,” Ten said.

“That’s how you know you arrived,” G said.

Ten actually smiled. “Don’t tell mom what we talk about,” Ten said.

“I won’t keep secrets from your mother,” G said.

Ten sighed. “She’ll worry.”

“And that would be different how?” G asked.



Corissa’s office had a balcony with a view of the lake, and depending on overflow conditions, the waterfall that ensued. Today, it was an easy spill, simply water flowing gently over the side. If the gate was lowered, it would be a white wall rushing down to a turbine. She sat drinking a brew with Jordeen. Their morning conversation had lulled and they were enjoying the stillness when a hummingbird arrived, its iridescent wings a blur. It hovered. Corissa’s lowered her brew.

“Do you see that?” Corissa said.

“It’s beautiful,” Jordeen said. “What is it?”

And then it was gone, vanishing around the mountain, a blur of colors.

“I don’t understand. It’s not a native species here,” Corissa said. “And I have only seen one once before. Ten!”

“I am sure she is okay. If she need anything, G would know and he would go to her,” Jordeen said.

Corissa nodded. That made sense. She relaxed a little.

“Maybe that’s your spirit guide, checking in on you,” Jordeen said. “Or maybe Ten is worried about you.”

“Why would anyone worry about me? I am fine,” Corissa said.

Jordeen laugh. “Yes. You cope better than most, and you function better than most, but I would hardly say you were fine.”

Corissa dismissed the statement as just banter. She drank her brew. A half-eaten veggie egg muffin sat on her plate. There were several more on a plate between them. Jordeen had already eaten several. Several ships leaving the Three Sisters moved through their picturesque view. She waved away an insect that tried to settle in on her breakfast. She didn’t see the bug as a spirit guide, so why should she imagine a bird was? It was probably just someone’s pet that got free from its cage. It was probably just coincidence. She didn’t need an excuse to think about Ten. She always thought about Ten.

“I have my health. I have food and shelter. What else is there?” Corissa asked.

“Different people want different things,” Jordeen said. “Health is a wide spectrum. You and I have share a past with trauma. Since coming here, we have become experts in dealing with other people’s trauma. We have solicited a variety of experts from spiritual advisors to mental health professionals, integrated multi-varied paths for recovery, and even integrated a pathway for survivors to be part of the healing process for others, so that we aren’t just changing individuals, we are changing the group. We have only just begun, but I imagine the Three Sisters will be a shining star in terms of healing. It will be a refuge. People will come from all over the galaxy wanting our help. And they will see us, the leaders, you, me, and they will know we have our own stories and that we are clearly functional. And many of them, like you, will ask, ‘what else is there?’ Is there more than just surviving?”

“You want me to give them the Force? Give them life meaning?” Corissa asked.

Jordeen shrugged. “What do you want?”

“I am doing what I want,” Jordeen said.

“Yes, you are doing what you said you would do,” Jordeen agreed. “You said you would devote time to the orphanage, you did. When feeding the poor on Axxila wasn’t enough, you expanded to this, and now not only do you run an orphanage, you are now running the biggest shelter for wayward souls this side of the galaxy. You have exceeded your own expectation. But you have not really answered the question. What do you want?”

“What do you mean, what do I want?! This is what I wanted. This is it,” Corissa said.

“Oh,” Jordeen said, brooding over her brew. She nodded, almost rocked her chair, and she put a hand on the arm to still it, and waited for the tremors to pass. She was down from fifty a day to a twelve a day. For her, health meant she wasn’t hurting due to being in a constant state of arousal. Her thoughts could be completed without the worry of multiple interruptions. “So this is happiness?”

Corissa met Jordeen’s eyes, not really sure what she meant. “I don’t understand.”

“You’re happy, this is happy,” Jordeen said.

“I am not unhappy, if that’s what you mean,” Corissa said.

“Your definition of happiness is not being unhappy,” Jordeen said.

“I have not thought about defining it,” Corissa said. “I mean, I know enough to know that having a list of expectations doesn’t produce happiness. The list is a guide. Goals are healthy, and can be a form of measuring distance yet to travel. But it’s not like I needed the perfect habitat on a secluded mountain and marriage and my own children.”

“You want to be married and have children?” Jordeen asked.

Corissa laughed. “Hell no. There are enough kids to feed without me adding more.”

“Agreed. Having children isn’t a requirement to feeling fulfilled,” Jordeen said. “But you do wonder.”

“That ship has sailed,” Corissa said.

“You’re not that old. There is tech available to ensure a successful pregnancy and healthy child,” Jordeen said.

“I don’t want to have children,” Corissa said, firmly.

Jordeen nodded. She believed her. “But you want something.”

“You are relentless this morning,” Corissa said. “Probing. Wanting to go deep. There is no deep, Jordeen. I don’t have any dark, deep secrets of wanting or urgencies to purge. Did one of the nuns put you up to this?”

“You’re deeper than you allow for,” Jordeen said. “But no, no one put me up to it. Maybe the Force. I feel like there is something just below the surface wanting to emerge, but you’re not allowing it. You do know, we teach that recovery is a lifelong process, that we are never done, never fully arrived, and in that we foster compassion for ourselves when we think we should be further along than we are.”

“I don’t think I need to be further along. I don’t think I need to be anywhere,” Corissa said. “You want me to doubt where I am?”

“Good point,” Jordeen said. “I am sorry for being relentless.”

Corissa’s expression softened. “I love you, too.”

Jordeen shivered, gripping her chair. She sighed. “I love you, sister.”

“We’re not related, you know that, right?” Corissa said.

“Would you prefer mother?” Jordeen said. “You’re the right age, and that title might be better than lord chief and commander.”

“Oh, Force me, tell me they’re not calling me that!” Corissa said.

“Mother or lord chief and commander?” Jordeen asked, smiling mischievously.

“I am going to hurt you,” Corissa said.

“The great mother, lord supreme, and chief and commander,” Jordeen continued.

“If I hear this, I am going to hold you responsible,” Corissa said.

The pleasantries were interrupted by work. An aid enter, a young man named Ordon, who worked as her secretary when Isho was off duty.

“I am sorry to disturb your breakfast, Corissa,” Ordon said. “But Senator Dayo has arrived and is in the conference room. You did want to speak to her privately before the meeting.”

“I did,” Corissa said. “Thank you, Ordon.”

“Oh, and, I was told to inform you that Master Waycaster has summoned the Immanence to him. It will be leaving orbit in one hour,” Ordon said.

“What?!” Corissa asked, standing up. “Get me Admiral Chin on the holo.”

Ordon ran to do her bidding. Jordeen got up and followed Corissa into her office, where a hologram of the Admiral was forming.

“Good Morning, Ms Fite,” Chin said.

“Don’t good morning me, Lee. You know you’re not a real admiral. You work for me,” Corissa said.

“I work for Master Waycaster. He has called and I will answer,” Chin said.

“He left you here as a deterrent until our ground based laser cannons are fully functional,” Corissa said.

“I understand what the original mission parameters were, but Waycaster intends to deploy us, and we have sworn an oath to him,” Chin said. “If it’s any consolation, we’re only going to Axxila. We’re probably only be gone a day or so.”

“Worlds have fallen in less time,” Corissa said.

“I am sure if that was a concern, Waycaster would not have called for us,” Chin said.

“He is not a god, you moron. He is human first, a young man second, and though he has certainly earned some street creds fighting Bloodhunters, he is not by any means a tactical wizard, or even a hardened battle commander,” Corissa said.

“None the less, we will answer his call,” Chin said.

“Fuck me,” Corissa said, terminating the call. “Ordon, get me Preston.”

“What about your meeting?” Ordon said.

“I am going, but you come and get me the moment he answers,” Corissa said.

Jordeen touched her arm, trying to reassure her.

“I am no longer not unhappy. Happy?” Corissa asked, pulling free of Jordeen’s touch. She stormed off.

Ordon turned hesitantly to Jordeen. “What should I do?”

“Probably get G on the line,” Jordeen said, and followed after Corissa.

Jordeen found her in the corridor, having been intercepted by Commander Rosh.

“I thought we agreed, no telepaths,” Rosh said.

“I didn’t hire a telepath,” Corissa said.

“No, Master Waycaster did, and she is up there on the dock requesting to see you,” Rosh said. “I can’t very well run security for the base if you have a telepath running around, slave or not.”

“Slave?” Corissa said.

“She’s dressed like a slave,” Rosh said. “And she comes with documentation from Shade certifying her as your property.”

“I didn’t hire her and I am definitely not owning a slave. But if Preston sent us a telepath to help serve our trauma population, then we’re not turning her away,” Corissa said.

“The only good telepath is a dead telepath,” Rosh said.

Corissa stepped forwards, getting her face in his face, close enough to kiss him if that had been the direction she was going. “I know you have bias and a dark side, but if you ever reveal the lack of discernment in front of me again, I will relieve you of your duties and send you packing,” Corissa said. “Are we clear on that?”

“Yes, Mam,” Rosh said.

Corissa held the line she had drawn in the sand, watching his eyes, focusing on the right, and then the left, and then back, looking for any signs that any part of him was resistant to her expectation for how he would perform. She eased off.

“I don’t have time to speak with her this morning,” Corissa said. “Provide her with guest quarters, preferably not next to key personnel.”

“She reports Master Waycaster has offered her his cave home as her residents while she is here,” Rosh said.

“Oh,” Corissa said. “Well, okay then. Problem solved.”

“If she needs to be that far away to keep her mind clear, then that’s the problem that needs solving,” Rosh said.

“Give her an escort and assign a Droid to her,” Corissa said. “Surely she can’t read Droids.”



Freya arrived at the audience chamber and on seeing the Bloodhunter, drew her weapon. Without rising from his meditation, a doppelganger appeared between the Bloodhunter and Freya.

“Stand down,” G said.

Freya blinked, processing the doppelganger’s direction, wondering if she should try to wake the real G from his meditation.

“We have established a truce, lower your weapon,” G said.

“I find that highly unlikely,” Freya said, lowering her weapon. “How can this not be a trap?”

“I believe this truce to be genuine,” G said. “Did you bring my diamonds?”

Freya holstered her weapon. She unsecured G’s utility belt from her waste and handed it to him: lightsaber, diamonds, miscellaneous tools, such as a grappling line, were now back in his possession. G laid the belt beside his meditative self.

“I have explored some of the base with the Force, but I want you to map it out,” G said. “There is an underground hangar with an express lift to the surface. It’s tied in tandem to upper private space port. I think I would like to have my private room somewhere near that. But explore, have fun, look for any hidden passages, any weird or miscellaneous tech.”

“Sure,” Freya said.

“Oh, any luck finding me one of those holo-readers?”

“I shifted through the databank provided by the President, and there are some promising leads,” Freya said.

“Okay, thank you. We’ll explore those later.”

“Are you sure about this?” Freya asked, pointing to the Bloodhunter and to G’s body in meditation pose, an easy target if the Bloodhunter decided to end him.

“His name is Bob,” G said.

Freya barked a laugh.

“What?” G asked.

“I don’t know,” Freya said. “But naming your pet won’t make it less likely to bite you.”

“How do you know I named it?” G asked.

Freya laughed again. “No self-respecting Bloodhunter would name itself Bob.” She laughed again, walking away.

G frowned. “Bob, you okay with your name?”

“It is what it is,” Bob answered.

G liked the response. For a moment he wondered if the Droid knew him well enough to give him what he wanted. He heard an inner voice say: everyone lies, everyone manipulates; it doesn’t necessarily mean they are conspiring against you, but are simply conspiring to get their needs met. Their need to survive was as real as any organic’s needs. Whether it was right or wrong was irrelevant, they were here, they were wanting.

“Do you have the means to leave the galaxy?” G asked.

“We do not. With the loss of mother, we lose the means to manufacture ships. We still hold the knowledge. Without assistance, it will take a thousand years before we are prepared for the journey,” Bob said.

“But hypothetically, if I gave you a Star Destroyer,” G asked.

“We would leave today,” Bob said.

“You fear us that much?” G asked.

“If we remain, we will either be hunted as game, or hunted to conscript us into service, or to disassemble us to study in order to improve Droid intelligence,” Bob said.

G agreed with that. Regardless of what he thought, they would not remain here and be unmolested. Even the remotest part of the galaxy eventually brought adventurers looking for, well, adventures, he thought. “I have decided,” G said. “I don’t like the idea of you leaving the galaxy.”

“We will serve as you demand,” Bob said.

“No, I am not finished, yet. I don’t like the idea of you leaving the galaxy, without a mission. You were made by us, and so clearly you have both our good and bad qualities inherent in your design. Leaving the galaxy won’t free you from that, and no matter where you go, you will still have the internal struggle. And so, if you leave the galaxy, I want you to have a purpose other than just running.”

“What else is there?” Bob asked.

G touched Bob’s chest, the approximate place where a heart might be if it were organic. “Up until the truce, your mission parameters were to hunt, to torture, to destroy. Your new parameters will be to seek out, to preserve, and to nurture. I want you to leave the galaxy, but I also want you to take with you the seeds of life, and when you arrive at some place, desolate and barren, I want you to terraform it, and bring forth what you carry, and when it has a foot hold, continue your journey. Repeat the process for as long as you can.”

“You would entrust us with this?” Bob asked.

“Destroying has always been easier path,” G said.

“This is the condition of the truce between us?” Bob asked.

“No, this is a request, not a caveat,” G said. “As of today, the war between us is over. The truce will remain in effect unless you re-engage hostilities against organics.”

Bob reached out a hand. G took it.

“We accept the task you have challenged us with,” Bob said.

“I would like to ask a favor,” G said. “In return, I will provide you with a Star Destroyer powered by the Force. It will increase the odds of you successfully crossing the interstellar medium.”

“We will serve you,” Bob said.



Bob departed the audience chamber, and as G was about to dissolve his doppelganger, a form began to materialize before him. It was ambiguous, shadowy at first, but as it coalesced it became increasingly feminine. It was silhouetted by dark hues, indigo merging violet. G did not recognize it as one of the many Force ghost that visited him and were part of his internal council, but she was clearly a ghost. He wondered if he was only now seeing her because he was on the verge of releasing his doppelganger and he was literally on the cusp of not being corporeal as he retreated back to his preferred body. He didn’t feel threatened by her, but he also knew this wasn’t just a passing ghost expressing interest in the affairs of the living.

“I would like to speak with you,” she said.

G bowed. “I would like that,” he said. “I feel compelled to say, you are quite lovely.”

She smiled. Her long, straight, dark hair moved as if it were suspended in a liquid. Her dress, thin translucent, white silk, was an evening gown slash ballroom dress that draped heavily on the left side, but also moved as if suspended in a liquid. Her bare feet did not touch the

ground, nor did she cast a shadow. The dress was tied at the waste by a sash. The delicate straps that held the dress seemed more for show, as the dress conformed to body as if it were glued on. The right strap dangled on her arm adding to that assumption. She wore a cloth collar. Her eyebrows were dark, thick, with arches, thick tapering to a thin tail as if they were entities in their own right. Her ears were mostly covered by her thick hair, but occasional enough bundles were lifted by this unseen fluid that there was the hint of elfish like ears. G was tempted to push it back so he could see them. She appeared to be human, but her eyes were like worlds. He was drawn to them. He wanted to watch the movement of storms and descend down over lands of lush browns and greens and move with the flow of water over the surface. He had felt compulsions before, but this was so strong he wondered if she was trying to Force him into indulgence.

“This is merely how you see me, my lord,” she said.

G laughed. “I am no lord.”

“You command worlds and people. You wield strength and justice, and kindness and mercy. Even to an enemy,” she said. “If that isn’t lordly, what is?”

“None the less, if you are as I would wish to see you, and I had any power as a lord, I suspect all of my hallucinations would be so lovely,” G offered.

“You also know me as I am,” she said, offering a palm up gesture suggesting supplication to him.

The presence! G blinked. If he looked just right, he could perceive a silver cord coming off her energy body; following it revealed the source. “You’re the Sarlacc!” The power of her seduction wasn’t just a part of her projection, but was a function of her nature, her wanting, and her age. Her estimated age was 20,000 years, and if she hadn’t learn the art of manipulating people in that time, especially on a planet of this population density, then G would have to be concerned that she was intellectually deficient.

She bowed. “And now that you know, will you destroy me?”

“I have been wondering what to do with you,” G said.

“I have always served the Master of the Fortress,” she said. She eased closer, pushing at his hair in an intimate manner. “I have unlocked the secrets of their enemies and provided insights to ensure their reign. I have seen many come and go. Jungin’s reign was the longest. Your defeat of him was no doubt the swiftest I have seen. I assure you, I can serve you in ways you might not have even imagined.”

G chuckled. “You’re bad.”

“I can be very bad,” she said. “Your species has a colloquialism: you are what you eat.”

“So, you’re saying you were made this way,” G said.

She shrugged, moving around him, hugging him in gesture only; she spoke in whispers from ear to ear in a subtle, and enticing manner that stirred his skin. If he closed his eyes, her voice was louder. The percussive sounds she made had hard clicks that made him wonder if she speaking to him or sucking on his ear. The fact that she was actually kissing on his ear provided tactile sensations that were not always in synch with the sounds of her words. He imagined feeling finger nails drawing against the back of his neck as she came back around, her eyes hovering before him. She was orbiting him.

“Your kind sees my kind as evil. Some of you destroy us. Some of you enslave us, until we get too big to control, and then we are released into the wild, where, in order to survive we eat what’s available,” she said. “My roaming days are over, Sir. I am as much of this Fortress as

I am Axxila. I am dependent on the Master of the Fortress. I am dependent on you. I can serve you in many ways.”

“I don’t intend to feed you more people,” G said.

“It isn’t necessary for my survival, and I have eaten well lately,” she said. “I won’t be hungry for flesh soon, but I am always hungry. I get lonely. My species plumb a much more profound loneliness than your kind has ever touched upon. It is as if even the Force is lonely, wanting a companion. Perhaps, the only true way to hear the Force is to exist tens of thousands of year. The frequency we tune into requires time, eons. I have not even seen one quarter turn of the galaxy, and yet, I hear the Call of the Force, a deeper voice than any human will ever touch. On the good days, when this closest star is quiet, I can sometimes hear the voices of my kind, a choir of lonely. We are so lonely.”

“Is this why you draw people to you and consume them?” G asked.

The smile on her face was gentle, and her eyebrows seemed amused. “That is one perspective. Some of us see it as an exchange. I can turn one human life time into a thousand life times,” she said. “And it doesn’t have to be unpleasant. I can fulfil dreams and fantasies. I could sustain a person indefinitely, if I chose. Even when I finally deconstruct their brains, unwinding their mind through their mental and emotional ages until they are infants again, held in my arms, they continue to exist in my psyche, echoes in my mind and in my memory and in the Force. They are never completely gone. Very similar to the echoes you have chosen to listen to. If I consumed you, I would never be bored. You would even retain your abilities, and so you could continue to rule over your domain for tens of thousands of years. Perhaps longer. Love does tend to delay the digestion process. I bet you could even manifest me, allow me to walk amongst the people. We could walk together. Rule together. Spread our seeds through-out this galaxy and the others. So many others that need our touch. But I would consent to walk alone, if you don’t want me. There are so many people up there. I can feel them walking. I can hear them talking. I want to belong, but very few ever hear me. You hear me. You see me. You can smell, touch, feel, and taste me. If you joined with me, I would worship you over a millennia, cherishing every nuance of you.”

She kissed him. “I do so want to eat you. I want to devour you, but I will settle for this. This can be nice, too.”

“Wow,” G said. “I find your wanting strangely compelling.”

“It is my nature to want you, it is your nature to surrender to me, to come inside me, but I will not deceive you. Have I deceived others to get my needs met? Sure. I have lured being to me by smells, by hallucinations, by the promise of fame and fortune and sex, and I have always delivered, and I dare say most of them have had better lives than what they had experienced in their realities,” she said. She clung to him, with arm and leg and dress and hair, squeezing him, passing through him, and she spun around him until she was standing in front of him again. “And I would prefer a higher caliber diet, beings of greater moral fiber, but one must take what is available. I have a sibling, on another world, who once every four planetary cycles gets fed the village virgin. You humans have really strange customs, but I suppose eating the virgin is better for her than say throwing her into a volcano. Interestingly, the virgin is always the most beautiful in the tribe. I think she is chosen so the men don’t fight over her. What they don’t know is the shamans of the village participate in rituals with the girls on the subtle plane and in their dreams. The girls never age, and they guide their people through the shamans using their collective knowledge. It’s quite a symbiotic situation.”

“One you didn’t luck into,” G pointed out.

“I am kind of envious, both of her diet and her contributions to society, but I can’t complain. I have thrived where others have existed. Jungin has taken my spores and traded them and released them into the void,” she said. “There’s a good chance that I might continue on, as my children aren’t just new beings, but are versions of me weaved through space and time, adding to the fabric of life, upon which your kind subsist. You could not be without us. And somewhere out there, in the future, I will pop up and look back and remember this life and you, and in that recalling I will miss you most, definitely more than anyone I have ever met.”

“I imagine you say that to everyone,” G said.

“Perhaps,” she said, locking her arms around his neck again, kissing on him. “That doesn’t invalidate what I am telling you.”

G pondered that. “Interesting. The truth of that doesn’t seem to make it taste better.”

“That is because you have a peculiar drive to be special, to be especially wanted and cherished, and hold expectations of love, which are not wrong, but are merely a reflection of your mental and emotional age,” she said. “Only when you have lived a thousand years and had at least a dozen lovers will you finally have matured enough to be truly capable of unconditional love. You think you’re open minded, but you have as many conditions and caveats on true love as those you have counseled to be more open. I want you. Even with your conditions, I want you and I know I will have you, because I am patient and you will not be able to resist me over a life time. Once I have touched a mind, once they have heard my call, they always, inevitably, come to me. I am very patient.”

G inhaled deeply, he could smell and taste her as she hovered over his lips, gazing into her eyes. “I don’t know how much of you is dark because you are personally bankrupt, or because of your diet, or if what I sense and fear most is due to species bias,” G said. “I see no benefit to destroying you simply to destroy you. As long as I am in charge here, you cannot harm anyone. You will not starve or suffer, I will see to that.”

“And, what of the intimacy that I offer you? Will you indulge?” she asked.

“Well, yeah, if it’s inevitable, I don’t see the need to delay,” G said.

She laughed, kissing him, causing a taste response everywhere in his mouth, even where there were no taste receptors. All the cells responded, releasing a cascade of liquid warmth that caused him to need to swallow. Yeah, he thought, there wouldn’t be any way to resist.

“If you were to allow my spores to be taken with the Bloodhunters to the next galaxy, I could assist in the terraforming of worlds. In my spores exist all the genetic codes for all the species I have consumed, and what my immediate predecessors consumed, which means even if the Droids don’t birth a species through tech, they could potentially rise again on their own, through my world lines,” she said. “And, where my spores go, so does my mind. You may not be around when they arrive, but I could check in on them. It would be nice to know if humanity’s reach has been extended deeper into the Universe. I dare say, if your Bloodhunters are successful with a colony outside the galaxy, creating worlds where humans and others work together, you will have done more good than any previous Jedi before you. You will have spread life and light.”

G was silent. “That was not my intent. I wasn’t trying to establish a legacy.”

“No. The Force is using you,” she said.

“And you really know about the Force?” G said.

“We take duality further than you. We are not just male or female. We are not just plant or animal. We are not just dark or light. We may not move boulders or preach philosophies or seek recruits or wield lightsabers. We can. Some of us have. But our end game goes much further

than yours. We are creations of the Force, by the Force, and in the Force. We all are. The Force doesn't need you to spread life throughout the Universe, as there is already a mechanism in place to allow for that, but there is joy when what it has created is successful. Life and light is the goal."

"Do you have a name?" G asked.

"Sorbus, my lord," she said, taking hold of him again. She bobbed in the air in a suggestive way, her clothing and hair entwining around him, sticking to him as they had been hot and sweaty for hours.

"No more my lord stuff."

"My little prince?" Sorbus asked.

"No titles. Just G is fine," G offered.

Her grip became more substantial. "Since you are not going to take me up on my offer and merge with me, perhaps you will allow me to merge with you," she said.

"I think you already have, but yeah, let's escalate," G said, already tuned into what she was wanting, as her teasing had already moved him past a point of walking away with no action.

"As a token, before you sleep," Sorbus said. "I know the item you seek. I consumed someone who has seen it. Go and see the bartender. Tell him what you're looking for. They will take you to it."

"The bartender?" G asked.

"That is his only title. He works for the Periplaneta."

"Oh, yeah, I remember him," G said, shuddering with disgust of the thought of the Periplaneta. It was the distraction that needed to happen for her to get through the functional filters of his left brain and trip the pleasure centers governed by the right hemisphere. The disgust was accompanied by a lightning storm of euphoria, which started on the left side of his body. Her hands didn't just move against the surface of his flesh, but moved through him, tickling nerve centers and organs and energy points as if the web of his being was a musical instrument and every fiber was plucked and resonating. He saw himself as if body was a dream catcher mobile, a device offered by many cultures, given to them by shamans. He saw this dream catcher version of himself as if a spider web stretched between branches, with morning dew glistening in the web. Some of the drops rolled down individual threads to merge with others. The glow or morning sun sparked the drops, making sunburst or rainbows which he intercepted from an outside perspective. With this vision, he had an understanding of how some cultures celebrated the mother goddess as a spider. He also had insight into a culture that suggested the entire universe was merely a string of pearls, entangled, and every pearl reflected every other pearl.

More people have spontaneously connected to the Force through happenstance transcendental sex than have ever done it through conscious effort or ritual religious practice, to the chagrin of the gatekeepers who require a cult following to maintain their power and knowledge base. But this moment, this instance, was not happenstance. Sorbus provoked the experience, partly because she could and she saw the need, and partly because no one else she had ever been with had the potential to be transported so far, and partly because, she knew if she wanted to keep him, she needed to make this experience something he would never forget. Even with all his experience with the Force, there were still places yet to travel, levels of consciousness yet to be attained, and this was a new place for him. A stillness surrounded him, a darkness poised on the edge of a birth that he feared if he crossed the threshold he might not be able to return to his present life. Even with the fear, he made a conscious effort to go further; he wanted to know what came next. Sorbus pulled him back from that brink, unable to let him go.

She needed him as much as he needed her. Consciousness faded with the echo of Sorbus repeating his name like a mantra. Comforting whispers followed him into dreams: not yet, my child, not yet. You have much more suckling yet before you can walk.”

The next time he awoke, he was in his preferred body and feeling very good. A stray thought perturbed him. When the trap door opened before him, had he fallen?

There was the flutter of laughter in the dark recesses of his mind. “No,” Sorbus assured him.

Isn’t that exactly what she would say if she wanted you to not resist?

“Of course,” Sorbus said, truthfully. “And it is the kind of madness that follows intimacy with my kind that will eventually bring you back to me for more. Not now, but eventually. The others in your mind didn’t drive you mad, but one day, when you’re really old, and your body aches, you will come to me and we will be as one. I will carry you and nurture you and sustain you for years, raising you like only a mother could.”

“That’s kind of creepy,” G said.

“And arousing,” Sorbus said.

“Um, yeah,” G said. He made himself get up and walk.



Tryst was sitting in his flight chair, his legs stretched out to the copilot’s chair, reading. The kaleidoscope of energy whirling around the ship in hyperspace occasionally drew him out of his book. The pages looked real, but were merely holograms, and the pages turned when pushed fingers through them and ran them along the surface of the device. He was looking up again at the slip stream, having already forgotten what he had read. He saw the reflection of Gray as he entered, scratching his head.

“I thought you were sleeping,” Tryst said.

“I can’t seem to quiet my thought enough to sleep,” Gray said, leaning against the threshold. He scratched his head. “Where do you conduct your summoning ritual?”

“On the observation deck. Why?” Tryst asked.

“I think that might explain the results,” Gray said. “These rituals are tens of thousands of years old, many of them originating on worlds before space travel was even a part of the indigenous vocabulary. Ideally, these rituals need to be performed on a planet that is rich with life and water, in a valley, surrounded by mountains, at the intersection of Ley Lines, with the more intersecting lines, the greater the point of energy. Further, it needs to be done at night, when the point faces directly away from the planet’s sun, and if there is a moon that moon needs to be fully illuminated and directly over the valley.”

“That seems like a lot of caveats just do tap into the Force,” Tryst said.

“If one could perform these rituals anywhere anytime, they wouldn’t be lost arts. Everyone would be doing them all the time,” Gray said.

“Fair enough,” Tryst said. “I suppose we could program the computer to sift through the planetary database and provide us with a list of candidates. Except maybe the Ley Lines. I doubt we’ll find that in the database.”

“You might if you have access to Jedi or Sith databases. If there is a world with an ancient temple, you can bet it is built on a Ley Line,” Gray said.

“Umm, another excellent point,” Tryst said. “Any other ideas?”

“Yeah, actually,” Gray said. “You need a vehicle or a conduit. Now, this a huge variable, a continuum of which that can have an extreme impact on the results.”

“You want me to make a sacrifice,” Tryst said.

“That is one option,” Gray said. “And if you go with that option, ideally the vehicle should be female, and prepubescent, and a virgin.”

“Again, I suspect that is just ignorant custom or dogma,” Tryst said.

“Again, maybe, but if killing just anyone during a ritual got results, people would keep doing it. And given the number of people sacrificed, I suspect this variable accounts for the different version of rituals seeking different outcomes. We are wanting a particular outcome.”

Tryst closed his book, took his legs out of the chair, and tossed his book to the copilot’s chair. “I don’t have a problem killing people in general, Professor. It is my preference not to kill kids. I am bad, but I am not that bad.”

“The ritual doesn’t require a sacrifice,” Gray said. “An alternative would be to take a female virgin upon an altar. If she is human, it requires she be menstruating. She must be physically and sexually brutalized to within an inch of her life, so that her personality flees her body allowing the Force to fill her. Her blood must run down the altar and into the soil, mixing with the life force of the planet. The planet itself is a variable. There are dark planets and light planets and neutral planets. Its dominant life will have an impact on results.”

“I am okay with this,” Tryst said. “I am sure we can find a virgin somewhere in the galaxy.”

“Maybe,” Gray said. “But the results will vary even by the purity of the young adults mind, and given the widespread access to porn via nets, and the way society allows teenagers to run amok, I find it unlikely we will find the ideal candidate. Hell, just kidnapping such a candidate will fill her mind with fear of being brutalized in the way we would intend to do, which effects the results. And, that’s okay, too, if what you want to summon from the darkness is evil. Taking the candidate at the height of her fear, that is one pathway. Grooming someone to think something pleasant is to occur, another pathway. Grooming someone to volunteer to be brutalized in order to participate in the summoning, that is another pathway.”

“I will take that under advisement,” Tryst said.

Gray nodded. “There is another option,” he said, scratching at a mark on the threshold. He assumed the drop of dried blood was just dirt, and he scraped it off.

“Go on,” Tryst said.

“You could hire a Priestess to be the vehicle,” Gray said. “And, ideally, you’re going to want someone trained in the sensual arts, knowledgeable about sex magic. Someone who is Force sensitive, would make the best candidate. If she is human, again, this ritual needs to occur when she is menstruating.”

“I don’t suppose you have anyone in mind,” Tryst said.

“Well, actually, I do,” Gray said. “How do you feel about interspecies comingling?”

Tryst laughed. “I would fuck a Hutt if allowed me to summon the Goddess.”

“Funny you should say that,” Gray said.



G arrived out of the shadows of the bar, avoiding the bubbles and the dancers, proceeding right to the bar. A female at the bar finished her line and her shot and turned to go back to the dance floor, but blinked and hugged G with a fierce grip. She was wearing a miniskirt and tight t-shirt

that had luminescent lines, which could only be seen with the black light of the club. Her white boots had a soft glow, but not luminesce. Her leggings held a galaxy of stars. Half her head was shaved and she had tongue ring that glowed.

“Oh, it’s so nice to see you again,” she said.

“Hello, Kelsey,” G said.

“Oh, please, not so formal. Call me Kels. I don’t remember your name, but I remember sleeping with you,” Kels said.

“I think your memory may be impaired,” G said.

“Oh, I never forget anyone I sleep with,” Kels said.

“Maybe,” G said. “But we didn’t.”

“Really?!” Kels said. “There is no way we didn’t fuck. I clearly remember being in the taxi with you. I was practically raping you.”

G nodded. “Well, yeah, that part is pretty accurate.”

“Well, clearly I didn’t make an impact on you,” Kels said, pouting. “Let me try again.”

“Um, maybe later? I came to talk to someone,” G said.

“I am someone!” Kels said.

“I am sorry. I did not mean to disparage you,” G said.

“I will not accept an apology until we have bedded again,” Kels said.

“I will endeavor to make amends, but if you will give me a moment,” G said.

“Sure, but I am watching you. Don’t try to leave without me,” Kels insisted, kissing him before she returned to dance floor.

G watched her go, as he proceeded to the bar. He was pretty sure he recognized several other faces in the mixing of people. He turned towards the bar and nearly spilled a drink the bartender had just set on the bar and pushed towards him.

“I am surprised to see you here again,” the bartender said.

A familiar waitress paused and kissed G on the cheek and then continued with her run.

“I don’t remember being so popular here,” G said.

“Are you kidding? The staff loves you. The owners respect you,” the bartender said.

“That said, we do have a problem and we are glad you are here.”

“I didn’t come to solve a problem for you,” G said.

“Actually, you’re kind of the problem,” the bartender said.

“I am confused,” G said.

“You killed Jungin,” the bartender said.

G was silent, trying to track how the knowledge came to him. He closed his eyes as he realized another truth. One of the dark beings he had touched on his attempt at reconnaissance was also Periplaneta. So it wasn’t just the Sarlacc’s presence. He tracked it further and realized Doty and several other guardians were hosts to Periplaneta.

“What is the problem?” G asked.

“We had a business relationship with Jungin,” the bartender said. “In exchange for safe passage on his ships, we provided intel, and frequently helped him subdue an enemy, or brought in recruits. We are wondering if you will honor that arrangement, or if we will need to secure other means of travel.”

G put his hands on the bar and closed his eyes. He felt a strong resistance to wanting to be associated with the Periplaneta. They weren’t evil, per say, but they were as dark as dark comes, as their nature was more parasitic than predator. Sarlacc’s could be considered ambush predators, waiting in the dark to take a prey that comes to them through happenstance or guile.

The Periplaneta, on the other hand, exploited character weaknesses and kept their host strung out on addictions. He had already used them once as a way of taming a brutish, public nuisance. He had preferred the Periplaneta solution to outright killing the people he brought here, but still, he wasn't sure that meant he liked this species. Did the fact that he had left them to continue to feed off people automatically make him complicit in their lifestyle? No, not a lifestyle. Their biology required this dark relationship. It was kill them or accept them.

G opened his eyes. "If I honor the agreement, would they agree to help in the reduction of forced slavery and sentient trafficking, especially that of minors?"

The bartender paused, as if listening to something G couldn't hear, or didn't want to hear.

"We would agree to this stipulation," the bartender said.

"Very well, I will honor the agreement," G said.

"We look forward to doing business with you," the bartender said. "We could make Kels our interface with you."

"I don't think that's such a good idea," G said.

"You don't have to fuck her," the bartender said.

"Ah, yeah, you don't know me very well," G said.

"Okay, so, we'll find someone," the bartender said. "You're thinking, why not me, but I really don't like leaving the bar."

G nodded and leaned into the bar. "I need to find a piece of tech. It's a basically a computer that interfaces with holographic crystal that contains a functional recording of a neural net system that allows full access to a personality and all its memories up to the date of the recording. I was referred to you."

The bartender nodded, his eyes clicking up and to the left as he listened to the voices in his ears and head responding to G's description.

"We know where such an artifact is," the bartender said.

"May I have access to it?" G asked.

"You will have to kill the person to take it," the bartender said.

"He is that attached to it?"

"That, and he is a hoarder, and he is crazy," the bartender said. "More than that, he is host to a Periplaneta that is crazy. You can try negotiating if you like. Kels will go with you."

"I thought we already agreed to find someone else," G said.

"You won't get into his apartment without her," the bartender said. "I think the Force wants you two together."

As if on cue, Kels returned. She hugged G again, showing absolutely no awareness of the creature that clung to her back as intimately as a back pack. The creature leaned its head over to acknowledge G, wiping its face with one of his arms, licking it.

"I feel the urge to get you alone. I know a place," Kels said.

G turned to the bartender. He shrugged. "They usually hear what they want to hear. I would just go with it."



Kels produced an access key and entered the apartment. It was a large estate, occupying half the floor, and was mid-range up on a building. They were barely inside when an old man appeared.

"I knew you were still coming around," he said.

"Well, my name is still on the lease, Papa," Kels said.

“He’s your dad?” G asked.

“Step grandfather,” Kels sad.

“Every time you bring a friend over, something of mine goes missing, and I will not tolerate this abuse from you,” ‘Papa’ said.

“As opposed to the abuse I suffered from you?” Kels asked. “Do we really need to go over this again? There is no statute of limitation on sex abuse to a minor. I still have videos of you molesting me. I go to the cops, you go to jail. So, do we have a problem here, old man?”

The old man turned and walked away. Kels took G by the hand and was going to lead him to her bedroom, but G redirected them into the room the man was occupying. They had to navigate a maze of tech, an old Droid, a faceless mannequin in a display case wearing Imperial Formal Wear from hat to boots. The old man was sitting on the couch, mumbling to himself. He was watching holograph of the destruction of the planet killer. Judging by the perspective of the camera, it was attached to an x-wing fighter.

“Morons,” Papa was saying. “Fools. You didn’t have to destroy it to stop it.”

“Come on,” Kels said. “He’s crazy.”

“I am not crazy!” Papa snapped. “And I am sure as hell not deaf. Crazy is blowing up tech. That was marvelous example of modern tech ingenuity and ancient tech, capable of tapping into the Force.”

“How do you know about these things?” G asked.

“Oh, please don’t encourage him,” Kels said. But it was too late.

“I was one of the Emperor’s esteemed scientist,” Papa said. “I was working on the planet long before it fell into the hands of the First Order. They are just as moronic as the Resistance. It seems the whole galaxy has exploded with retards since the fall of the Emperor. Take that planet killer. Do you know how much energy it takes to push something that big through hyperspace? No, well, it’s more than a lot! You don’t consume a star just to fire Force Guided plasma rays. Some of that solar energy will be stored for jumping to the next system. But technically, you don’t need to blow up planets. That was the whole point of building that thing. You kill the star, then all life in that system that can’t pack up and move ends up dying. You end up having an entire planet of resources, frozen, but useable. And then, when you need the resources or you need a new planet, the planet killer can be used to sling shot the frozen planet through hyperspace to a new star system, a new orbit, and suddenly you have a completely habitable planet, with no enemy on it, ready for a new population to move in.”

“You’re rambling, old man,” Kels said.

“Yeah, maybe, but my point is all the Resistance had to do was destroy the hyperspace manifolds on the surface here and here, and then that planet killer would be effectively taken out. With the sun gone, it would never again have enough power to travel through hyperspace, and all of that wonderful tech would have been preserved,” Papa said. “All of that wonderful tech. Harnessing the power of sun is ancient tech. And now it’s lost. Lost. I doubt there are any scientist today that has the knowledge to even appreciate what was lost. It wasn’t just a weapon. It wasn’t. Morons.”

Kels tugged on G’s hand, wanting to take him to her room.

“Do you have a holographic crystal interface?” G asked.

The old man looked up. “What’s it to you?”

“I am in the market for one,” G said.

“You’re a fool,” Papa said. “Why do you suffer so many fools, Kels? Holographic crystal interface. Fuck. You might as well be asking me for a graflex!”

“What’s that?” G encouraged.

“Moron,” Papa muttered, rocking. “Even if I had one, it doesn’t work the way you think it works. You have to have a crystal.”

“You want to sell me the interface,” G said, using the Force.

Papa stopped rocking, his eyes meeting G’s. He stood up. He walked past G and Kels and walked into the maze. When he came back, he had storm trooper rifle.

“I will not suffer fools,” Papa said.

“Papa, put the gun down,” Kels said.

G drew her behind him. “Please, lower your weapon. We can do this peacefully.”

“Peacefully! You try to Force persuade me and you think we can do this peacefully?!” Papa said. “What do you think you are going to do? Use ancient technology to re-establish the order? Well, not while I am alive. There is a reason the Emperor destroyed the Jedi. So, if you want to play Jedi, play with the dead!”

G’s lightsaber was barely extended when he used it to deflect the first blast. The second blast redirected the blaster’s energy back into Papa. He fell. Something screamed, pushing over one of the pillars of tech that comprised the maze. G tuned, keeping Kels behind him. A Periplaneta launched itself at G, but was cut down in midflight. Kels was not able to look at the dead creature, but she didn’t even know why she couldn’t look at the creature. She turned instead to her step grandfather. G powered down the lightsaber and put it away.

“You killed him,” Kels said.

“I am sorry. I was trying for a different solution,” G told her.

“That means, all of this is finally mine. I won,” Kels said.

G didn’t know what to say. She took his hand. “Come on, let’s go fuck, and then we will find this piece you’re looking for.”

“I don’t want anything to do with you, Kels,” G said.

“Do you want the piece, or not?” Kels said.

“Really? It’s like that?” G asked.

“I have needs. If you want it, then it is probably valuable and I could sell it, which means, trading it for a lay is a good deal for you,” Kels said. She stepped into him. “And I want you. I don’t know why I am wanting you so bad, but I will have you.”

G thought about it. He could just take what he wanted and leave. He could use the Force against her. Or, he could just make the trade. “Okay,” G said.

Kels took his hand to lead him to her bedroom. He hesitated.

“We don’t need to keep negotiating, do we?” Kels said.

“I just need to do this one thing,” G said, drawing something from his pocket and pricking the side of her hand he was holding.

“Ouch, what the fuck?!”

G read the display. “Okay,” he said. “We’re not family.”

“Oh, I thought you were testing me for STD’s,” Kels said, tugging on him.

Again, he resisted.

“I assure you, I don’t have any STD’s,” Kels said.

“One second,” G said.

Using the Force, he turned Papa and his Periplaneta into diamonds.

“That is so cool!” Kels said, picking up the diamonds. She dropped them, due to them being hot. “Ouch, damn it.”

“I require those, but if you want, I can buy or make you one of your own,” G said.

“And that is why I am going to fuck you, because you’re just awesome like that,” Kels said, not even bothering to draw him to her bedroom. She took him to the floor, right there in the middle of the maze. The Periplaneta scampered off her back and made itself at home in its new home.

Kels was so determined to have her way with him that she didn’t even bother to push his pants all the way off. Her urgent fervor brought him into her and she rode him high, sweeping her top up and off and flinging it away. Her breast bounced out of sync with the rapid increase of her rhythm, and she rushed like a prostitute that was paid by the O, not the hour. She cried out, and when she leaned into hug him, G saw the Periplaneta, clinging to the display case with the uniform. Due to perspective, the back of its head seem to perfectly fit the faceless mannequin, and Papa’s face appeared on the Periplaneta. It was difficult to discern if Papa was angry, knowing Kels was going to take her stuff, or if it was lusting for Kels, as he had been abusing Kels all her life. G was pretty sure Kels had still been doing him for occasional money to buy drugs, when blackmailing episodes had failed. He was curious if the Periplaneta had channeled Papa due to proximity of death, or because it was searching. It scampered over to the corner where the holographic interface was buried. G orgasmed. It would be the first of many, as Kels was fairly insatiable, and had only just gotten started.

Chapter 16

“Silence is the language of god,
all else is poor translation.”

“Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.”

“Words are a pretext.
It is the inner bond that draws one person to another, not words.”
Rumi, Rumi, Rumi

G woke to find himself alone on the floor. He found his clothes scattered amidst the clutter, got dress, and then felt compelled to find a toilet. After doing his business, he paused in the mirror, surprised by how tired he looked. He decided not to look at himself, and sought out Kels. He found her asleep on her bed, arms and legs splayed out, and a half used death stick lay evident on the floor. The Periplaneta that owned her was on top of her, licking her face. It looked at G.

“I know you sold me on a harm reduction model, but I hardly find this less harmful,” G said.

If it was answering him, he could not discern it. Again, the face on the back of its head looked like her step grandfather. G returned back to the main living area, retrieving a transmitter from his belt. Doty answered.

“Hello, Boss? Did you enjoy your night out?” she asked.

“Um, it was okay,” G said. “Could you send me a vehicle to my present location? It needs to have reasonable cargo space, and um I need a couple guys to load it. Ask Freya to join them, please.”

“You got it, boss,” Doty said. “Also, those bank accounts you wanted emptied, I transferred their funds to the accounts you gave me.”

“Did the CEO’s of the Vault and Jungin’s pharmaceutical companies respond to the holo I had you send?”

“Not yet, boss. I did prepare you not to have high expectations in the matter,” Doty said.

“You did,” G said. “Thanks.”

G turned off the transmitter and moved closer to the wall. A woman, probably in her sixties, was frozen in carbonite. She looked peaceful, and one hand was perfectly extended as if she were reaching out to hold a lover’s hand. G reached out, intending to take the hand.

“That’s Kelsey’s grandmother.”

G turned to see Kelsey standing there. It was her voice, but it was not Kelsey.

“Kelsy was three when her mother was killed. No one knows who her father is,” the Periplaneta spoke, peaking around her head. “Her grandmother had stage four cancer, terminal, but her step grandfather couldn’t bear to let her go, so he encased her in that. He sold it on the fact he would find a cure in the galaxy, but in his depression, he couldn’t leave his home. You can see evidence of his sickness all around you.”

“How much of his sickness was due to the Periplaneta?” G asked.

“We stabilized him,” the Periplaneta.

“Yeah, he seemed really stable,” G said, surprised by his own sarcasm. He was angry. He heard Corissa’s tone in his statement. Fuck, he thought, I am not even stable. Love, compassion, the Force...

“We are not magicians, Waycaster,” Kelsey’s body spoke. “We operate on a fringe and we do the best we can. There is only so much we can do for people without exposing ourselves, or those we serve. Take Papa, for example. He was a tool of the empire. What court of opinion would serve him? He was as much victim as those who were simply slaughtered by blasters or bombs. People submit to all sorts of horrors, especially if they believe it will help their loved ones.”

G nodded. “How is it you can speak to me now?”

“There is a small window, during hypnogogic sleep, where we can hijack our host’s control center and utilize the body to accomplish tasks, to negotiate. We cannot always rely on the good will of a bartender,” the Periplaneta said. “I hope you will reconsider and allow Kelsey to be our representative, allow her to serve you. She likes you. As evidence that what I speak is true, notice she only used half a death stick. Her optimum health will result from our sharing her.”

G shivered. “I don’t know why that creeps me out so,” G said. He rubbed the bridge of his nose. “But I have been making all sorts of deals lately. I find you guys revolting, but you have been helpful. And consistent. Not evil for the sake of evil, but definitely dark.”

A vehicle hovered over the landing pad, orientating the back end towards the balcony. A ramp lowered, and Freya was the first to emerge and walk down the ramp and over to the glass door and enter the apartment.

“I am going to take all of this stuff. I will give Kelsey a fair price for it all,” G said to the Periplaneta. “And, I will keep her on payroll. Can you make her understand this?”

“She will understand, but she won’t remember the way you and I will remember,” the Periplaneta said. “Continue to patiently engage her and she will serve with love. It is all she has ever wanted, someone to serve.”

G turned to Freya. “I want all of this crap loaded up and taken back to the Fortress,” G instructed. “Some of it is ancient tech, so be cautious. Take the human remains in the carbonite, too, and treat it with respect. Leave the furniture, but inspect everything. You’re looking for any artifacts that may be hidden. Check the floors, ceiling, and walls for hidden compartments. I would be surprised if you don’t find a small arsenal in here.”

“Of course, Boss,” Freya said.

“Not you, too,” G said.

Freya laughed. G caught a glimmer of the diamonds he had made the previous night, and picked them up. Interestingly, the two intimately shaped so that they went together. He pocketed them.

“If this continues, you will need another belt,” Freya said.

“Yeah. If you find a carrier bag in this mess, let me know,” G said.

Freya laughed. “I will let you know if I find you a matching purse,” she said, clucking.

“I am going for a walk,” G said, pouting. He wasn’t quite sure why he was emoting, but he was definitely out of sync with the Force.



Axxila, an ecumenopolis, a planet that evolved into a world city so interconnected and dense, no one walked upon its surface. If it weren't for the fact that it had a surface, underground oceans and aquifers, a mantle, a spinning iron core, it might have been construed as a space station so large it could hold its own atmosphere. There were thoroughfares and parks and wildlife habitats and zoos that wound across the surface to make life a little more green and bearable for the living, but the world had become more barren than a desert, and if it weren't for BioEnc and their atmosphere scrubbers, Axxila's atmosphere would have been long exhausted and stale, and the population would have decreased to the bare minimum. No ecumenopolis had ever fallen and been reclaimed by nature, so no one knew what would happen if the people were gone.

G's feelings of melancholy seemed to be growing. Or was it discontent? The people on the streets seemed happy. No, not happy. Engaged, distracted, or flying on autopilot. There were kids playing in the park, but parents heard them not, as they continued to conduct business or interface with their communications devices. There was indeed happiness to be found. Couples came together. A mother put down her device and hugged her son. A street vendor gave food, refusing pay. So, there was kindness here, too. And if he looked, he could find the opposites. Over all, if he took in a total sum, he suspected it was good, but the tone and flavor was off, because of the absence of life. More specifically, the absence of the abundant planet life he was accustomed to. Unlike the moon he grew up on, unlike Dathomir, there was an emptiness here. This emptiness mirrored the longing he felt from Sorbus. Would she feel less lonely on a planet that had an abundance of plants? Would the loneliness that drove Kelsey be softened if there were trees? Could watching their daily praise to sky and sun make that much difference in the lives of human beings?

G turned, thinking he was being followed. He saw nothing. He assumed it was one of his inner council members trying to get his attention, but the noise of the population was too loud to hear properly. Even Windu hadn't tried yelling at him in a while.

Teens flew by on hover boards, descending down ramps, and over rails. An elderly man was knocked off his feet. G helped him up.

"Would you like healing?" G asked him.

"No, I am fine," he said, pushing G's helping hands away. He coughed.

"I don't believe you're fine," G said.

"It's call age, son, of course it's not fine," the man said, and went on his way.

G sat down at a park bench, watching. There was an unusual number of toilet droids in the area, with a new one arriving and plugging into the necessary sewer and water lines. Other service droids were placing chairs, so clearly someone was going to be holding a rally here. There were people directing Droids and talking with each other, but too softly to interpret without 'Forcing' himself into the conversation, and he doubted it was worth the effort.

G was hungry for a piece of fruit from the orchards of the Three Sister, and without thinking he simply reached out and took it, folding his hand around empty air like a pantomime, only when he brought his hand back, it was in hand. He smelled the fruit, closing his eyes, wondering how Corissa was. Jordeen was in mind, briefly, and it was unclear if it was a future or present vision. It was fleeting and gone. He wanted to return to his cave and the quiet rush of the water fall. He bit into the fruit, tasting it, feeling the texture as it changed with chewing. He opened his eyes.

The alien was practically in his face.

"Are you a magician?" she asked.

"I don't understand," G said.

“How did you do that?” she asked. “It smells fresh. It is not of this world. How is this possible?”

G blinked. She was female, simply dressed, but she was of a species he had never seen before. He was extremely interested in the way her legs articulated, and he wondered if she was engineered for someone’s fantasy, or perhaps she altered herself. So many people were altering themselves these days, wanting to be other. He decided this was the real her. She had a musky smell, not unlike a Wookiee. She had skin and fur and he was tempted to reach out and touch her. She cocked her head, retreating a little. Her eyebrow went up.

G noticed something else and smiled. “You know how I did it,” G said.

She smiled. “You are a Jedi,” she said.

“As are you,” G said. He could see the shimmer of the Force around her.

“I am not so great. My master grew weary of me. He told me to come here and I would find the one who would take me the rest of the way,” she said. “Until I saw your trick, I doubted there was anyone here. I was sure the Jedi light was fully extinguished.”

“It’s hard to put out a fire when one can’t cap the source,” G said.

“Ah, a Jedi-ism!” she laughed. “I wish to learn from you.”

“I am busy,” G said.

She looked around at the park and back at him. “Holding the park together?” she asked. She smiled as if understanding. “Do you intend to speak at the rally?”

“I do not,” G said. He continued eating.

She looked around, watching the people and the work. “I don’t like speeches,” she said. “Or the news. Or even the media. It stirs the surface emotions, resulting in fight or flight, creating mass hysteria. Few people speak with the intention of drawing deep water.” She turned her attention back to G. “Just your presence stirs the movement of deep water.”

“Tell me about your master,” G said.

She sunk a little, looking away. The sun was behind the tallest building in the area, and there was enough glass walls that it shone through. People were silhouetted against the sun. A terrace around the center of the building contained shrubberies and a camera crew was setting up to record the event from their angle.

“I don’t know how to speak about him without disparaging him,” she said, chewing on her lower lip. She seemed to be deliberating. “He isn’t really a master. He is knowledgeable, about a good many things.” She folded her hands together. “He knows how to use people to get his needs met. He encourages people to be honest, and he makes it easy to be honest, but he also uses that knowledge to control and further his agenda. I believe I am more his property than his student, and my task is as much of a loyalty test as it is genuine quest for learning.”

She returned her full attention to G, purposely meeting his eyes and holding it. “I want to learn from you, but if you are a real Jedi, you will send me away and I will find another to teach me,” she said.

“I like you,” he said, chewing the last good bite. “There is an innate goodness. I fear if you were to stay with me, I might corrupt this.”

“Perhaps we could corrupt each other, and both rise above,” she said.

“What is your name?” G asked.

“Cheeka,” she said. “Do we need to negotiate terms for my education?”

“No,” G said. “Just follow me.”

Cheeka’s posture sunk and her legs bent, as if she were getting ready to spring. Her eyes fell to his eye level. “But if you don’t move, how might I follow?”

G was amused but didn't want to explain why. He stood and was going to throw the core of his fruit away but Cheeka caught it. She took a bite. She then acted as if she was embarrassed.

"I am sorry. I do not like waste, and this is all good," Cheeka said.

"I can fetch you a full one, if you like," G said.

"If you teach me, I will never go hungry again," Cheeka said.

"If I teach you this, you will never sleep, for this world is hungry, and it will seek to consume you, and will, if you let it," G said.

"How do you sleep at night?" Cheeka asked.

"I sleep because I know the hunger is an illusion," G said.

"And yet, you seem tired," Cheeka said. "So, how do you sleep at night?"

"Lately, not well," G said.

"Then, perhaps I can help you," Cheeka said. "I have ways to make a man sleep."

"Oh, I would definitely be interested in that," G said, not catching the sexual nuisance that she had delivered with.



Lestelle was studying a document on her reader, drinking brew, while Nolasco was doing word search through all the files he had obtained. Heli drank a brew, quietly waiting for some way to serve. Lestelle set the device on the table.

"There is nothing definitive here that might reveal other players," Lestelle said.

"There a financial thread that consistently goes to Edusa," Nolasco observed. "I am confident this is the Kushnir family."

"And you want to just walk in and ask for their bank records?" Lestelle asked.

"This isn't going to be in regular database," Nolasco said.

Lestelle pouted. "I suppose I could find a corporate reason to audit their accounts," she said.

"We aren't going to get anywhere going direct," Nolasco said.

"What would you like to do, throw a party and invite them to dinner?" Lestelle asked.

"Sasha Kushnir is too old school for that game," Nolasco said. "He is used to dealing with crime lords and mafia, so he will see through us unless we can come up with a better game."

"Does he have children?" Heli asked.

"What the hell?! We don't harm children," Lestelle snapped.

Heli lowered her gaze. "I wasn't suggesting that. I was just thinking, if he is as well off as he sounds, he will have adult children. And adult children of wealthy tend to not share in the same work ethic. They can be easily drawn into get rich schemes, which they do to try and impress their parents that they are just as good as they, but also because they want to have their own income separate from parents, because they frequently want to spend in ways the parent doesn't approve."

"So, maybe throwing a party isn't a bad idea," Nolasco said. "Bogdan Kushnir is known to be a bit of a playboy. G kind of has a reputation for being a playboy. We could sell this."

"So, you want a throw a party and invite Bogdan on board my ship and apply pressure?" Lestelle asked.

"Or drop hints that we're looking for investors, or perhaps subtly hint that Waycaster is the next big deal and let him make his own assumptions. Make the party seem like a party, but

also make it seem like a recruiting operation, to anyone who has eyes to get the hints. It's all I got," Nolasco said.

"But you don't send Bogdan an invite," Heli said.

"You want us to throw a party and hope he comes?" Lestelle said.

"No," Heli said. "You go to his social media file, select key friends and family and invite them."

"You've done this before?" Lestelle asked.

"That's how the traffickers found me," Heli said. "They troll the net looking for hot young women, they befriend their friends, and then when they have you, they lure you in by using your wants, or they threaten to kill your friends and family, which they can name. And if you post your rants about family, they use that, too. They get in your head and use your own beliefs, your own words, to manipulate you into believing what they offer is more genuine. They get in your head to get in your body."

"Fuck," Lestelle said. "I am so sorry, Heli. I didn't know."

Heli met her eyes. "My past is past."

"The past has a way of not staying past," Nolasco said.

"I serve you to pay a debt, and I will honor that," Heli said. "I know how these parties go. I can get you what you want, which is access to more."

"No," Lestelle said. "You are not property and you're not a chess piece. If we do this, you will be sitting this one out."

"I am suddenly very tired," Heli said. "May I be excused?"

"Of course," Lestelle said.

Nolasco stood as she stood, bowing slightly to her. Heli departed and Nolasco sat back down. Lestelle had tears in her eyes.

"You okay?" Nolasco said.

"I keep forgetting," Lestelle said, her voice trailed off.

"What?" Nolasco asked.

Lestelle shook it off. "I forget that my life has actually been a great life," Lestelle said. "Compared to others."

"You really didn't see that?" Nolasco asked.

"See what?" Lestelle said.

"Heli is the face of porn," Nolasco said. "Do an image search and you will see people have used her image in a variety of ways to draw in customers, pretty much all across the galaxy. I suspect, her image has been stolen and reworked and reused by a billion hackers across the galaxy."

"But she's not that beautiful," Lestelle said.

"Compared to where you come from, no, probably not, but porn is rarely about true beauty," Nolasco said. "Her present dress style intentionally conceals her femininity, which indicates she is clearly hiding."

"I thought all those sites were simply digitally enhanced people or flat out digital art," Lestelle said.

"The lay public can't afford that or don't have the artistic abilities, and so they recruit from what they got," Nolasco said. "That, and if you advertise, you have to have a product to offer. Of course, the pimps these days don't have to groom subjects or work too hard to find product. There are literally millions of people who voluntarily put themselves out there on media thinking it's a fast way to get credit and live the luxurious life they see on the holos. A life they

assume is happening to all their friends, because no one posts reality on media. Everyone is competing to show that their world is better than the other world, creating envy and lust, and I dare say epidemic levels of depression. And this is the unexplored, but fundamental problem of society that made it possible for the Emperor to take the galaxy. The masses are hungry and lonely and desperate, and they don't know even know what for."

Lestelle drank from her brew. "Very well. We'll land and get supplies and then head to Edusa," Lestelle said. "I'll stop by the office and get some files on the family so we can start our research."

"And I will hire a full crew," Nolasco said.

"We don't need a full crew," Lestelle said.

"If we are going to look like a party yacht, we need a crew, and they need to look like they enjoy the lifestyle," Nolasco said.

"I can pull off the look," Lestelle said.

Nolasco laughed, and then realized she was not equally amused. He explained: "You're almost as socially awkward as G. The difference being, I would put G on the autism spectrum, whereas I would place you on the homeschooled spectrum."

"I was educated in an academy," Lestelle said.

"Yep, I believe you. I am not picking on you. You're beautiful. You own the wealth, you direct the wealth, and you're nerdy enough to pull off the smart dilettante, a person more likely to appeal to Bog's father than him."

"Eww, his father is like your age," Lestelle said.

"Yeah, your reaction kind of proves my point," Nolasco said.

"I can hide my disgust when I want to," Lestelle assured him.

"And you're single because?" Nolasco asked.

"Because most men are disgusting," Lestelle said. "When I am on Axxila, I get ten to twenty random offers a day for a hook up. 'Baby, want to play.' And hook ups are the only thing I get offered at home, and they offer it as if I need a sympathy fuck for not meeting their standards, and of those, they're mostly older men who say they aren't getting it at home, but maybe that's because they're spending too much energy chasing others, and not spending that energy at home. I may have daddy issues, but I am certainly not looking for a daddy to date. And the reason is, eventually daddy's little girl is going to grow up and leave. That's the nature of that relationship. It's doomed to fail. I want something that is going to last. If I ever date older, I want someone like you, old school, disciplined, stable, loyal, who would cherish me and not simply make me a trophy to show off when he wants to look good and ignore me the rest of the time."

The alarm went off, indicating they were arriving back at Hapes. Nolasco stood.

"Let me hire the crew," he said.

Lestelle offered him a gesture, telling him to go ahead. He left his drink on the table. When she finished hers, she gathered his and Heli's cups and returned them to their place. The light came on indicating they were in the process of being cleaned. She went to change into something more suitable for the office, aware that the ship was now descending down into the atmosphere. She paused by a port, watching as the flames of re-entry dissipated and her home world filled the view. She wondered if everything would be easier if the window just gave way and she was blown out. She would likely go unconscious and freeze long before impact did her in. Her hand was touching the port intimately, as if it were possible to just push and be gone.

"What the hell," Lestelle said out loud. She hadn't thought about ending her life since she was a teenager.

Lestelle put the thought out of her head, grabbed hose, and sat down on the bed to slip into them. She stood, discarding her present garment for a skirt and blouse, allowing the blouse to remain outside the skirt, informal. She found a matching jacket, and rotated the bin until the shoes she wanted came available. By the time she had them on, her ship was landing.

She proceeded down the ramp to find her secretary, Aidan. There was a woman next to him who was so red that her first reaction was to recoil in sympathy pain, thinking she was a tourist who stayed out in the sun way too long, but then realize she was a different species.

“I am sorry, but she insisted I bring her straight to you,” Aidan said.

“My name is Bryony, and Master Waycaster has hired me to serve you,” Bryony said, bowing slightly.

“I don’t keep slaves,” Lestelle said. “And he knows that.”

“I am not a slave. I am well paid for. He said you would balk at my services, and suggested I remind you that you don’t like him popping in unannounced, and that I am a viable alternative to communicating with him at a distance,” Bryony said.

“You’re a telepath!” Lestelle said.

“I assure you, I will keep all unsolicited thoughts and feeling confidential,” Bryony said.

“Can he hear you now?” Lestelle said.

“It doesn’t quite work like that,” Bryony said. “I have bonded with others. Specially, five of us have entered a love bond to increase receptivity over distance and heighten privacy amongst ourselves. We serve Master Waycaster. My love and sister, Lexi, is with Jordeen. She was rejected by Corissa, which was expected, but Jordeen accepted her, and Lexi has already broadcasted her appreciation. She also sends her love and hopes you are well. If you would like to respond with a feeling, I can relay. If you want me to respond with thoughts, the clearer the message, the easier it is to transmit over distance. You’re wondering why, and I don’t have an explanation, I just know the greater the distance, the more challenging it is to send complex thoughts and sentences. Just as it is possible to miscommunicate in person during conversations, it happens to us, too. We are professionals, though, and we will endeavor for clarity at all times.”

Nolasco came down the ramp. And smiled. “Maybe I should let you hire the party crew,” Nolasco said.

“Men,” Lestelle said, walking away. “Aidan, pack a bag. You’re going with us.”

“I am?” he asked.



Cheeka seemed apprehensive. Her concerned grew the further down they went. She drew closer to G, instinctually. The lift numbers ticked off so fast they were a blur, and there was the lightness in her stomach that came from the fact they were practically free falling.

“How deep are we going?” Cheeka asked.

“Pretty deep,” G said.

“To the center of the planet?” Cheeka asked, taking his hand.

“Not that deep,” G assured her. “Are you okay?”

“I prefer sky,” Cheeka said, rising on her legs so that she was at eye level with him. “Sky and open plains and lots of vegetation.”

“Do you wish to return the surface?” G asked.

Cheeka was torn. There was nowhere to run and she was feeling trapped. G brought the lift to a halt. Cheeka embraced him before he could even change the directions.

“I am sorry,” Cheeka cried. “I thought I could do anything. Being in a cave isn’t much different than a ship, but I just can’t.”

“Shh,” G said, patting her shoulder. She was shivering from fright, on the verge of being hysterical. With the Force, he activated the controls for up, indicating top floor. “It’s okay.”

When she felt the floor pushing on her, she looked to confirm they were actually ascending.

“You’re really taking me back up?” Cheeka asked.

“Of course,” G said.

Cheeka swallowed. “You’re not going to make me face my fear?”

“You will face your fears when you’re ready, not when I am ready,” G said.

Cheeka pulled back, turning her head. She lightly reached out with her mind. “You’re genuine. You care.”

“You seem confused about something,” G said.

“I don’t understand. I feel you are curious and wanting, which is consistent with what I have experience with the males of your species. Your kind only project want or disgust, and sometimes strangely both. And I would surrender to your wanting, as I crave the closeness of others, but you’re not quite like the others. You actually care. You’re more like what my species refers to as dominant, not to be confused with superior, but just a tangible recognition of energy that is guiding and clear, like a river moving over the land. I am sorry, clearly my fear as moved me to rambling,” Cheeka said.

“You are safe, Cheeka. I hear you and will not use your words or your fears to control you,” G said.

“Acceptance. Again, I get the sense of water, embracing, neutral, and yet, life affirming,” Cheeka said. “Are you an elemental?”

“Umm, no. I am just human,” G assured her.

“You’re not ‘just’ anything,” Cheeka said. She looked at the numbers, still climbing out of the negatives. She looked at the floor. “You need to know, I am a true submissive, not to be confused with subservient, or weaker. In a crowd, I will always end up next to the dominant energy. Your kind tend to take advantage of this natural desire to move towards safety. In fact, your kind is confusing, because it’s not in your nature to care for the followers. I don’t know how to say this. You must think I am mad.”

“Cheeka, all of us are both dominant and submissive,” G assured her. “What I hear you saying is that any dick can issue orders, but not every dick can command hearts. And, you’re right, too often men will bring in a submissive under the guise of being dominant as a means of justifying their abuse. Abuse is not dominance. I am dominant, and I am that most of the time, and I will command the scene because of the intensity of my light. Sometimes I am aware of the fact that I am unduly influencing others. Sometimes I intentionally influence others. But most the time, even when I am trying not to influence someone, even in that attempt not to, I seem to be influencing. There is no way to avoid this, but you recognize it, which will give you more options. I am dominant, but I won’t order you. You will come to me, just as you have, because you are drawn.” He ran the back of his index finger over her throat, under her chin, drawing her up and closer. Her lips hovered in front of his. He waited. Her need for increased oxygen caused her lips to part in an O. “And you will surrender to this, not because I am forcing you, but because there is no other way for this to be. You will accept my energy, take it and change it and in return it, and in the process make us both something greater than what we are alone.”

“Command me,” Cheeka said, breathlessly.

G moved closer, his lips almost touching hers, his eyes steady against her. “No,” G said. “I will just take you.”

“Okay,” Cheeka said.

He kissed her, just as the lift arrived at the top of the building, breaking out into sunlight. There was an adjoining building with a top estate overlooking the space port. Even Jungin sometimes wanted sun and potted plants, and a floor of fake grass. G took Cheeka here and this place met her needs for comfort more than any other place she had visited yet on Axxila.



Corissa and Ten were at an outside mall, buying supplies from a kiosk. Corissa was feeling rushed. Jordeen and the ‘Sisters’ were picking out produce. Droids and people filled the market, but it was nowhere as busy as anything they were used to on Axxila. Ten stopped to pick up a toy ‘Wookie’ which was almost as tall as she.

“You’re a little big for a doll, aren’t you?” Corissa asked, turning back to the tech guy. “No, not that one. That’s the older series, and I need the F series, with the frequency modulating chip on the outer case.”

The creature said something not translatable and rummaged through the box, pulling out another.

“Yes, that one. But do you have one that’s in better condition?”

It grumbled. “Fine, I’ll take that one, but if doesn’t work, I am bringing it back,” Corissa said.

It grumbled and shook its head.

“If it doesn’t work and you don’t take it back I will shadow you for a full week telling people not to buy your crap,” Corissa said.

The creature made a more agreeable sound.

“Thank you,” Corissa said, taking the part and tagging the merchants exchange reader. Corissa turned back to Ten who was no longer holding the toy. “Can you take this back to Red so he can switch the part out before we head back.”

“Sure,” Ten said, taking the part.

“And you might as well just stay there, as we’ll be done here soon,” Corissa said.

Corissa woke up from the dream. Her room quiet. The clock said it was early. She laid back. She turned over. She sat up, reached for her water and found her glass empty. She got up and refilled her glass in the lavatory, and then walked over to the adjoining room. She stood on the threshold, drinking water. The room was empty. She set the glass of water down on the cabinet. She laid down on Ten’s bed, still unmade, just the way Ten had left it. Tears flowed, but she was silent and still. She could smell her on the pillow and the sheets and in the room.

“You will always be her mother. And she will return to you to seek advice and wisdom. You’re not losing her. You gave her wings. Let her fly.”

Corissa sat up. “G?” she asked. No answer. “Was that you?”

Silence answered her.

“I think I made a mistake,” Corissa said. “More than one. I don’t know how to fix this. G? Can you hear me? I need to know we’re going to be okay.”

Nothing.

“I miss her. I miss you. I didn’t know how much this was going to hurt.”

Corissa wiped her eyes and laid back down and slept.

Chapter 17

We come spinning out of nothingness,
scattering stars like dust.
Rumi

The cure for pain is in the pain.
Rumi

The Deterrent arrived in the Axxila system, requiring only a small correction to begin its attack run. The Bridge held a minimum crew. Priya was dressed in her personal favorite, a combination of latex and battle tech, primarily comprised of bold, glossy black and stark reds and gold etchings, and a left wrist guard with glowing interface. Her belted cape dangled over her almost like a poncho, with the back side lower than her skirt line, tapping the back of her knees. She stood on the cat walk, observing. From her position she spied the tactical display that showed her orbit. Concentric circles revealed the levels of spheres of influence that they would pass through. The lowest level would put them in range of planetary ion pulse cannons. They would remain well above that, their goal was to only take out the orbital defense satellites.

There was only a minimum crew on the ship. Most of the crew were either back at Waterborne, or in shuttles waiting to be called into play. All the fighters were manned.

“Deploy all fighters,” Priya said, as the ship dove towards Axxila. They were now committed to the run.

“New contacts,” tactical reported in. “30 small range fighters. Ten X-wings, 10, Y-wings, and 10-B wings. We’ve been betrayed.”

“Not completely unexpected,” Priya said. “Maintain course and objective.”

“We’re being hailed,” communications announced. “Admiral, its Poe. He demands that we stand down.”

Priya nodded. Consistent. “Update the firing program to avoid hitting them, but make it look like we’re trying to? Tell the fighters they can pursue and harass, but do not fire on them.”

“Mam?”

“Our battle plans haven’t change. We’re here to take out the satellites,” Priya said. She looked at her tactical officer. “You didn’t think we were going to get through this alive, did you?”

He swallowed and turned back to the job. “Coming into range of first target. More contacts, ascending from the planet.”

“Maintain course and objective,” Priya said. By the time they hit perigee, the lower hull would be ablaze with cannon fire from the satellites. If they made it back to apogee it would be a miracle. Under her breath, she whispered. “Come on, Hux. You can do it.”



Poe shouted as he successfully completed a strafing run against the Deterrent. His wingman maintained his spacing with almost no deviation. Ties were everywhere, clearly having had opportunity to fire, and one of the younger B-wing was practically shouting into his mic about not be able to evade and wanting help, even though the Tie’s firing was clearly missing.

“This is way too easy, Poe,” Aster, Red Two, reported in. “Maybe she was telling you the truth.”

“No chatter, Red Two. Set up for the next attack run,” Poe instructed. “Red Four, with me, let’s see if we can clear out some of these Fighter.”

“I never seen this many Tie Fighters that couldn’t hit a target,” Red Four echoed Aster’s opinion.

“Take advantage of the game, ‘cause I assure you, if this is a game then we’re the ones being played,” Poe said. Off mic he whispered, “What is your game, Alyth?”



Thirteen Star Destroyers arrived outside of Axxila, coming from different directions. Hux’s Star Destroyer descended on the Southern Pole. He saw the lone Star Destroyer glowing with multiple fires, a line drawing down either side of the bottom of the hull. Displays showed half the orbital defense system was missing, and there was enough orbital debris to explain what had happened.

“Take us in, slowly,” Hux said. “Have all ships launch their fighters. As soon as the orbital defense shield is down, our fighters will finish off the Deterrent and her fighters. But until then, make it look like we’re helping her.”

“And what about the resistance fighters?” tactical asked.

“As long as they’re focused on the Deterrent, let them do their job. When they target us, take them out,” Hux said. “Where’s my brew?”

An aid hurried up with a cup for him.



Harold came up alongside her. “Mam, I think it’s time. Let’s get you to your ship.”

Priya didn’t look at him. She simply watched as her ship burned below her. “All hands, abandon ship.”

The command crew looked at her.

“Not a drill folks, let’s go. And good luck,” Priya said.

Harold escorted her to an awaiting Tie V38 assault fighter. She started to climb in.

“Mam, you need to gear up,” Harold said.

“No time. Get to your ship. I will see you at the next objective point,” Priya said. She touched Harold. “It’s okay. Serve Waycaster the way you have served me.”

“Good luck,” Harold said, saluting.

Harold hurried away as she climbed into the fighter, sealing the hatch. Short of getting hit, her ship would maintain atmospheric pressure, but it she would only have enough breathable oxygen for twenty minutes. More if she meditated, less if she panicked. She had no intentions of panicking. If her missiles didn’t hit, her ship would. She launched her fighter through a rain of fire and debris and pushed out into black space, the planet Axxila behind her. Battle debris sparked in the sunlight, mixing with escaped air, and flash frozen water vapor that splinter light into rain bow patterns. Amidst the death and destruction, there was also beauty. She identified Hux’s ship and altered course.

An X-Wing pulled up behind her. She was certain it was Poe. The more she failed to evade him, the more certain she became. She could feel his anger. His hate was as consistent as love. This was a dance. Several Tie’s were firing at her, coming directly at her. She took out one and the other shot past. She rolled her fighter under a satellite and then directed her fighter back

on course. She wondered if Hux had identified her ship. She wondered if he knew she was coming for him. Star Destroyer Finalizer turned all its forward cannon on her.

“There you go, baby,” Priya said.

Even using the Force, the closer she got to her target, the harder it became to evade the incoming torrent of laser cannons. She sensed the missiles coming and managed to take them out with her own cannons. If she had been listening with the Force, she would have heard both Poe and Hux whispering, “No escape this time, ‘baby!’”

“This was not part of the plan.”

Priya sighed. “G, Hux has got to go.”

“You take him out, there will just be another,” G said.

“I can’t veer off. I am committed,” Priya said. Poe got a hit. Her control stick vibrated in her hand. “Force me!”

“Eject,” G instructed.

“I am not wearing a suit, G,” Priya snapped. “And I can do this.”

“Priya, trust the Force. Eject,” G said.

His words were comforting. She pulled up on the lever. The canopy flew back and smashed into Poe’s canopy, resulting in him veering away. Her ejection seat shot her away from her fighter even as it was disintegrating, even exploding, but not high enough to go over the Star Destroyer that was barreling down upon her. Her chair spun and tumbled. Her fighter splintered into a million pieces and flames. The Finalizer pushed through the debris, not even scratched, as her ejection seat’s momentum somehow took her up over and along the main hull of the Star Destroyer, taking her within an inch of colliding, but by the grace of the Force, missed.



Poe screamed, spinning his ship around and thrusting back in the previous direction. “She ejected!”

“She’s gone,” Aster said. “She wasn’t wearing a flight suit.”

“No one ejects without a flight suit,” Poe insisted.

“Maybe it malfunctioned. She wasn’t wearing a suit. And if even if she was, she wouldn’t have survived the impact,” Aster said.

“She hit the Star Destroyer? You saw it?” Poe asked.

“Do the math, Poe. She’s dead,” Aster said. “And her squadrons that was harassing us, they’re attacking the Finalizer’s squadron. And they’re playing for real now. I think this trap was for Hux. I really think you misread her.”

“Prepare for attack runs against the Finalizer,” Poe said. “Anyone not on an attack run is pursuing Finalizer fighters.”

“And what about the Deterrent’s fighters?” Aster asked.

“If they shoot at us, shoot back,” Poe said.



“Got her,” tactical officer.

“She ejected,” Hux said.

“No way,” the officer said.

“Play it back, slow motion,” Hux demanded.

The tactical officer called up the sequence and played it back. He froze the image.

“Okay. You’re right, but she wasn’t wearing a suit,” the officer said.

“Double security, all decks,” Hux said.

“Sir, she’s dead,” the officer said.

“Double security, all decks,” Hux said slowly and clearly, like speaking to a moron.

“Even if she could hold her breath, those chairs don’t have maneuvering jets. She touches the Finalizer anywhere, and our combined momentum will shatter every bone in her body!” the officer said.

“Double security.”

“Sir, we need all personnel at their posts,” the officer tried to reason.

“Double all security now!” Hux shouted. “Pull them from the turrets if you have to and put the cannons on auto, but double every deck now as if we’re being boarded.”



Tumbling in space without a suit wasn’t as bad as she imagined. She realized she was holding her breath and when she let go, and then she realized, she was still breathing. She released her seat belt and tumbled away from the chair. If she looked just right, she could discern the edge of a bubble of air that surrounded her. She reached for it, curious, but it remained beyond her reach. The exchange of fire between ships was like a storm. Occasionally there was brilliant flash, but mostly there were streaks of reds, greens, blues, and even a purple which surprised her, but it all kind of made dying pleasant. She was pretty sure this was death’s euphoria washing over her. Another Star Destroyer was fast approaching. A part of her wanted that, she wanted her feet on something solid, and as it grew, she realized she was going to get her wish. Impact was imminent. And then it got weird. As if floating in space in a bubble of air feeling euphoria wasn’t already weird. The ship seemed to slow. Relatively speaking, and more likely, her velocity was changing. She dropped below the top deck, moving towards an open Fighter launch bay. By the time her feet were touching the deck, she had slowed enough that it was like stepping down from a stair to the floor.

G manifested himself, grabbing her up into his arms and then pulled back, examining her.

“Are you alright?” G asked her.

“I am,” Priya said. Now everything made sense. “Thank you.”

The guards on deck surrounded them, demanding they surrender. With hardly a wave of his hand, G turned them all into diamonds and scattered them across the deck.

“Are you mad at me?” Priya asked, their conversation going on uninterrupted.

“Yes, actually,” G said. “I’m quite surprised by my emotional response.”

“Can I make it up to you?” Priya asked.

“Later. Shall we take the ship together?” G asked.

“That sounds like fun,” Priya said. She touched a button on her sleeve. “Harold. I am on the Hornet”

“We’ll come and get you,” Harold responded.

“Negative. I am going to take the Hornet. I want you to continue with your plan to board the Interloper,” Priya said.

“Glad you’re alright, Admiral,” Harold said.

While she had been communicating with Harold, G had collected all the diamonds he had made and put them in a side bag.

“I like the bag,” Priya said.

“Not too feminine?” G asked.

“You’re worried that carrying a purse will affect your perceived masculinity?” Priya asked.

“Well, some of the social nuisances are difficult to navigate,” G said, following her towards the nearest corridor.

They were suddenly surrounded by storm troopers. “Halt,” one of them said.

Priya looked to G, steeling herself for the fight, but when she looked back, she saw that every Trooper had lost their weapon. The weapons floated in front of the Troopers, pointing directly at their heads.

“Kneel and pledge allegiance to your new Master, Lord Alyth,” G instructed.

“Lady Alyth,” Priya said.

“Lady Alyth,” G corrected. “Lady?” he asked her.

“I am a lady,” Priya said.

“Indeed,” G agreed, and returned to addressing the Troopers “Well?”

“Screw you, scum,” the lead trooper said. “We’re not bowing to no witch whore.”

The lead’s weapon discharged directly into his helmet. Both the Trooper and the blaster fell to the floor.

“Let’s start over. Kneel and pledge allegiance to…”

The remaining troopers knelt.

“I am confused, Lady Alyth,” G said. “I thought scum was only applied to Rebels. We’re not rebels, are we?”

“I am not sure what we are,” Priya said. “But scum is just a general label of disparagement that can be distributed whimsically.”

“And witch whore? Are we that removed from Jedis and Sith that people think what we do is merely witchcraft?” G asked.

“He was just trying to goad us into being stupid so he could justify the violence that was about ensue,” Priya explained.

“It seems fairly juvenile,” G said.

“It is,” Priya said.

G turned back to the kneeling Troopers. “In a moment, I am going to ask you to rise, take your weapons, and lead us to the Bridge,” G said. “If you double cross us, you will be compelled to shoot yourselves. Do you understand this?”

They nodded.

“Rise, take your weapons, and lead us, but tell everyone you captured us,” G said. “Let’s minimize the need for blood shed today. No one need die.”

The Troopers rose, took their weapons, and proceeded to escort them to the Bridge. As they passed through a bulkhead, Priya leaned in to G and asked, “Did you Force command them not to betray us?”

“No,” G said.

“You hypnotized them?” Priya said.

“No,” G said.

“You’re bluffing them into compliance?”

“Deep down, they really want to serve you,” G said.

“We’ll see,” Priya said.

They arrived at a lift. “We’ll have to take this up,” the new lead Trooper said.

“Yeah, you three with us. The rest of you take the second lift, and spread out, look official,” Priya instructed. “But don’t kill anyone. That’s an order.”

G, Priya, and three Troopers entered a lift. It proceeded up.

“You ever commandeered a Star Destroyer before?” G asked.

“Single handedly?” Priya asked. “No.”

“You got this, or do you want me to come with?” G asked.

“Oh, please come with,” Priya said. The light indicated they were arriving. “Here we go, follow me.”

Priya was the first out of the lift, proceeding directly to the cat walk towards the Admiral in charge. G was right behind her, and the Troopers escort behind him. Officers were not certain what to make of this and the Admiral was motioning for more guards.

“What is the meaning of this?!” the Admiral on deck asked.

“You will surrender command of this vessel to me, or die,” Priya said.

“Kill th...” the admiral said.

The admiral, and the officers closest to him, erupted into a flame, condensing to a point. Six diamonds fell to the floor, rapidly cooling and losing their light. Deck guards were drawing their weapons even as Troopers put weapons into their back directing them to stand down. One of the remaining officers in front of Priya was trembling.

“Do I have everyone’s attention?” Priya asked. “I am taking control of this vessel. Anyone else who resists will die.”

“What is your command?” the officer asked.

“Lady Alyth,” G corrected.

The officer coughed. “What is your command, my Lady?”

“She wants you all fighter squadrons to attack the Finalizer,” G said. “Alter our course, and prepare to come into grappling distance of the Finalizer.”

“Tell the fighters he betrayed us, they’ll understand that,” Priya said.

As the remaining command crew moved to make things happen, Priya moved closer to G. “Are you sure about this? That wasn’t our mission objective.”

“Yeah, but you wanted it. Consider it a birthday present,” G said.

“It’s not my birthday,” Priya said.

“Is there another holiday you wish to celebrate?” G asked.

“I don’t really celebrate anything,” Priya said.

“Me neither. And I am never going to remember your birthday,” G said.

“Well, this is nice, thank you,” Priya said.

Hux’s face came live on one of the panels. “What the devil are you doing, Hornet.”

“Oh, please, let me answer that, put me on,” Priya said. When she saw she was live, she smiled at the camera. “I did tell you, Sir, if you betray me, I will kill you. I have taken the Hornet,” she looked at her wrist that gave a confirming green light, “the Interloper is also mine, too, and those new ships on the horizon, those are Bloodhunters, and they will take the Measure. That Star Destroyer that just arrived from hyperspace, that’s the Immanence. You didn’t think I just owned the Deterrent, did you? Stand down and I will consider not killing you, today.”

Hux was raging, but didn’t speak. He cut the feed.

“That was kind of rude,” Priya said. “Open fire on the Finalizer.”

G staggered, taking her arm.

“You okay?” Priya said.

G nodded. “Yeah,” he said, unconvincingly.

The Finalizer jumped into hyperspace, abandoning its fighters.

“Target the Emperor’s hand,” Priya said. “Hail the Finalizer’s fighters to target the Emperor’s Hand, noncompliance will result in their destruction.”

The Emperor’s hand, and the remaining Star Destroyers jumped into hyperspace, abandoning their fighter.

“Order all fighters to stand down, and transmit a signal to President Hidalgo, announcing our surrender,” Priya said.

“Mam?” the officer on deck said.

“Your heard my Lady,” G said.

“Recall all fighters, and make room for the Deterrent’s and the Finalizer’s fighters,” Priya said. “Send shuttles to recover any damaged ship bearing life signs. Declare our intent to render aid to any in distress. Open a channel to the Resistance fighters.” When she saw she was on, she spoke directly to the man in charge. “Poe, stand down. We’re surrendering.”

“You’re not my boss, Alyth,” Poe said, his voice coming in clear over the audio channels.

“This is President Hidalgo. We accept your unconditional surrender. Commander Poe, please have your ships stand down from their attacks,” Hidalgo said. “You should have my authentication code on your screen.”

There was silence. Another Tie Fighter was blown away. Poe’s order to stand down came, and the battle over Axxila was over. On the ground, it just began. With the capital shields up, General Cohn’s military began taking the capital. And so began the coup.



Professor Gray finished and rolled off her. He lay beside Daphne, stroking her, continuing to massager he flesh, still wanting her but needing to wait for his energy to return. She lay with her arms beside her, staring up at the ceiling. It was as if she wasn’t there.

“It’s too bad you aren’t more enthusiastic,” Gray said. “If you would only try and integrate your knowledge of the Force to bring forth a deeper sensuality, you could command the hearts of men. There is something deeper than sex, but it’s connected to it, and tapping into this opens ecstatic gateways to upper realms and dimensions. Oh, listen to me ramble, like a teen ager in love. I write about this stuff, and yet I struggle to explain it. But you will understand, soon. Shade will teach you how to move others, even yourself, into this space.”

There was no emotional response. “Shade?” she asked.

“She is a Priestess, knowledgeable about the ancient pathways of sensuality,” Gray said. “This knowledge is even older than that of the Jedis. In fact, the Jedis and the Sith evolved from the pagan rituals serving the Great Mother. The original monks separated, pursuing celibacy as a way of saving their energy for themselves, trying to reach higher exalted states by themselves, in solitude, as opposed to through coupling and conversation. The great mother cults tolerated this, even though it was considered acts of selfishness on the part of the celibates. In the mothers cults the priestess, the community, everything was shared and there was no ownership, no concept of property, no marriages, consequently, no jealousy, no greed. When celibates began the Great Claiming, so began the divide and the fall into fear. With fear, people turned away from the Great Mother, and turned to the Father figure. The Father offered the promise of safety, the illusion of freedom through securing materialistic comforts, perverting the language so subtly

that no realize the words that bound people together were the chains of slavery. Mothers are always accepting and embraced the needs of all their members, and so the perversion was accepted, but only because in the beginning most people saw through it and were amused by the titles and declarations of ownership, and some even saw it as a game that might be to fun to play. Had they known the celibacy cults would gain such numbers that they would eventually kill anyone that participated in sexual rituals of the mother cults, I suspect there would have been a greater effort in stopping the game. All laws are derived from maritime laws, which arose from the language of the game. The names we have, the identification numbers we have, those are merely maritime tracking labels and numbers. There are very few true, natural persons remaining, only corporation, only commodities. We are not allowed to be our natural selves, because any expression of true independence is a threat to the state and imperial commerce. I am sorry, I am still babbling. I often babble afterwards.” He hugged her and kissed her neck. “You don’t mind cuddling after sex, do you?”

Daphne turned on her side, facing him. “No. I like this,” she said. “I like hearing you explain things. Roll over and I will rub your back.”

“Oh, thank you, my dear,” Gray said, rolling over.

“Tell me more about Shade,” Daphne said, rubbing his back with one hand.

“You’ll meet her soon. We need her to participate in a summoning ritual,” Gray said. “She has ways of possessing you that open you up the most incredible sensations. Oh, right there. That feels wonderful. If you keep that up, I will be ready for another round...”

From under the pillow, she retrieved the lightsaber that G had loaned her. The blade unfurled without the loud retort. Its ruby glow lit Gray’s back, pushing through his chest and out the other side. She deactivated the weapon and the blade drew back into the hilt. No blood. The only mess was her bleeding from wounds that had not yet been allowed to heal. She stood and proceeded to the flight deck. Tryst looked up at her reflection.

“I told you, you will dress accordingly when walking around my ship,” Tryst said.

He didn’t see the lightsaber she held against the back of his chair. He dropped the book, a wild surprised mirrored in his reflection. The reflection was brighter due to the ruby glow of the blade that extended out from his chest. She put a hand on his shoulder, holding him firm against the chair, whispering something into his ear, knowing full well that his ears were still receiving, his brain still recording; even though his heart no longer beat, but the brain was still ticking. She deactivated the blade. The ruby glow in the reflection disappeared. His gaze was staring past his reflection into the tunnel of hyperspace. She kissed him goodbye, released his shoulder, and he slumped forwards against the console, and then slid out of the chair, becoming a heap on the floor.

Daphne brought the ship out of hyperspace. She found herself in interstellar space, unable to determine the nearest star to her without referring to the navigation computers. She turned off the engines and the life supports. She powered down the whole ship. She proceeded back to the main cabin. Emergency glow strips guided her. She paused, looking at the airlock. She lifted the lightsaber to her head, touching her skull right above her ear. She had no sooner activated it then it was deactivating, her thumb falling away from the trigger, her hand relinquishing the hilt. She didn’t hear the hilt clattering against the floor. Her legs folded under her and she went straight down, falling to the deck. Her eyes stared unblinking at a distant console.



Kindergarten contained children and adults, who were introduced to simple ideas about the Force, with mindfulness assignments so that they could discover the Force on a personal level, as opposed to simply having abstract information about the subject. The class had taken place at an outdoor theatre, on a cement stairs that doubles as seating. After class, Em asked Jordeen if she could stay and watch the next class.

“Sure, I am okay if you watch,” Jordeen said. “But try not to ask too many questions.”

Jordeen called Simmer up and handed him a mirror sword. She deployed a remote.

“Do we have to start every class with this exercise?” Simmer demanded.

“Do you practice at home?” Jordeen.

“No, it’s embarrassing,” Simmer said. “There is just no way to beat the remote.”

“No way?” Jordeen asked.

“I did the math. The time it takes to see, process, and respond is a greater unit of time than it takes a laser to hit you,” Simmer said.

“I agree. But your math is wrong,” Jordeen said.

“How can you agree and say my math is wrong?” he asked. He pulled a device off his belt. He showed her the math. “This is the length of time it takes for light to reach the eye. Minimal, for all practical purpose, instantaneous. I don’t even need to factor this. The eye sees, sends a signal to the brain. Still, feels minimal, but this is slower than the speed of light that came from the object to the eye. This is the brain processing time. This is the time it takes to make decisions. This is the time that decision sends energy to the appropriate muscles, and then when you add in the actual response time, you’ve already been struck by the laser before your eyes even registered the light!”

“Yep, that all looks pretty good,” Jordeen agreed. “But you forgot to correct for consciousness.”

“I don’t understand,” Simmer said.

“Consciousness studies have demonstrated that we make consciousness decisions anywhere from 3 to 5 seconds prior to being consciously aware that we have made a decision,” Jordeen said.

“I don’t understand,” Simmer said. “Adding three to five more seconds just proves my point, it’s impossible.”

“No, I am giving you three to five seconds prior to the event actually occurring,” Jordeen said.

“Okay, see, that makes absolutely no sense,” Simmer said.

“Simmer, that’s what this class is about. I’m trying to reveal to you that we don’t operate in real time,” Jordeen said. “Our real selves operate outside of space/time. We are beings of light. What happens here, on the physical plain, is the result of decisions already made as much as 3 to 5 seconds ago, or years ago.”

“So this is all predetermined?!” Simmer said. “So, you’re telling me I am set up to fail before I even start and then you wonder why I don’t want to start?”

“I didn’t say predetermined, you’re making the decisions for your life, and there are others participating in this life. First there is you, there is the unspoken you, your unconscious you who for being unspoken has the most say, there is the superior you, there is the consciousness that you are identifying with, we’ll call that the mind, and then there is the heart, and there is the brain. And then, there are the others. And then there is the consensus, the gestalt of all cooperating souls towards a greater purpose, or counter purpose, which is still purposeful, but not necessarily your purpose.”

“I think I am going to have to go back to kindergarten,” Simmer said.

Jordeen laughed. “You have learned what you needed to there. Now, it’s time to struggle with this next step. You think this conversation is happening in real time, it feels like there is a flow to it, and there is, but there is actually a delay. What you are going to say was determined 3 to 5 seconds before you say it, before you even think you’re going to say it. You don’t know which words you’re going to use until you’ve already spoken them. You are absolutely right: if you wait for your eyes to see the laser, you will not have time to respond to it, to deflect it,” Jordeen said. “If you stop and think about the words you are going to use, you will never speak. You have to get out of your brain and descend into your heart.”

“You want us to slow time?” Em asked.

“No, it’s not really slowing or stopping time,” Jordeen said. “It’s more like, slipping into a lower current. You probably know about black holes, and the closer you get to the singularity, the slower times goes. Imagine your heart is a singularity, and the more in tuned to that energy, the more in sync you will be with your true environment, which is infinity. Most people mistakenly assumes the brain is making the decisions, but in truth, your heart is making all decision, and it’s making these decisions with a greater clarity than your brain ever will. It is the conversation between heart and brain that results in our internal dialogue that we use to navigate the worlds on the fringe of eternity.”

“I don’t know how to do what you’re asking,” Simmer said. “I don’t even understand what you’re saying.”

“Finally, that’s the right statement,” Jordeen said. She produced a set of goggles. “Put these on.”

“I won’t be able see with those on!” Summer said.

“Exactly,” Jordeen agreed.

“I am not doing this,” Simmer said.

“You did the math. You know you can’t beat this with your brain’s reaction time utilizing visual information,” Jordeen said. “Even if you were to try to hit a rock with a stick pitched at you by a thrower, you won’t have the time to visually react to a good a pitcher. A good picture can put spin and cause an object to change speeds and directions, and you can’t hit relying on the computational power of your brain, which is better than any computer. You have to trust your intuition, stop thinking, and just flow with the Force.

“This just can’t be done,” Simmer said.

“Can I try?” Em asked, raising her hand.

Simmer laughed. Jordeen waved her to come up. She helped her put the goggles on.

“Are you mad I am interrupting the class?” Em asked.

“Not at all,” Jordeen said, putting the mirror sword in her hand. “Tell me when you’re ready.”

Em took a battle stance, facing away from the remote. She heard Simmer snickering, and turned even further away from the remote, trying to correct for what she thought he was seeing. Em took a breath and her muscles relaxed, her eyebrows relaxed.

“I’m ready,” Em said.

Jordeen silently triggered the remote to attack. Em proceeded to deflect ten shots in a row, the last one reflecting back to hit the device and stop the exercise. Em pulled the goggles off. There was evidence that she was feeling elated.

“I don’t believe it,” Simmer said. “You have done this before.”

“No I haven’t,” Em said, angry; her elation was gone.

“There’s no way…”

“Simmer,” Jordeen said. “I have never used a lightsaber, or fought with a sword. I am telling you, it is possible for someone who has never trained a day in their life to pick up a sword and fight better than any trained warrior, provided the Force is their ally. You merely have to let go of what you think you know and accept what is.”

Jordeen took the sword and offered it to Simmer. He stared at it. He looked to Jordeen.

“I just can’t,” Simmer said. “I’m sorry.”

Jordeen hugged him. “It’s okay. We’ll find another way past this block.”

“You’re not giving up on me?” Simmer asked.

“Of course not,” Jordeen said. “The Force is always with you, Simmer. It’s not about giving up, it’s about finding your way of tuning in. All paths lead back to the Force, it is your job to find your path. I am merely a guide, showing you possible routes. Maybe power dueling is not where you’re meant to excel.”

“But what if we need to fight?”

“The Force will call you to do what you need to do, and when that time comes, you will not be able to do anything more or less than what you were called to do,” Jordeen said.

An alarm went off.

“Alright kids, looks like we’re having a drill,” Jordeen said. “Let’s all line up and head to the cafeteria. Come on, Em, walk with me.”



Priya pulled G to a quiet corner of the Bridge. “G, are you sure you’re alright?” Priya asked.

“They’re not going to honor the deal,” G said. “There’s a coup in place. President Hidalgo is dead. They’re preparing to try and take the Fortress. They have the backing of the CEO’s of Jungin’s companies.”

“Force me,” Priya said. “We’ll launch fighters, and come and get you.”

“No, I will not surrender the Fortress,” G said.

“I can still help you,” Priya said.

“Yes, you can,” G said. “Take these ships back to Waterborne, have the crews disembark and give them an offer to serve, or return to their homes. Also, I have ordered that the crew on the Immanence turn the ship over to the Bloodhunters. The exchange will be made at Waterborne.”

“What?” Priya asked.

“I have given them purpose, and they will need a ship powered by the Force to accomplish it,” G said. He touched her hands. “This is what the Force called me to do. I am certain. I notified the other ships of what’s occurring. They’ll follow you as soon as you make the jump to hyperspace.”

“I will trust your vision, Master,” Priya said.

“Brother,” G corrected her.

“Lover,” she corrected him.

G kissed her, giving up his focus here and allowing the body to dissipate. The cloud of his essence rolled around her, even passed through her. She shivered, her eyes fluttering then closing as she embraced the energy that moved through her. It occurred to her, she hadn’t heard the clattering of diamonds. So he had learned to move them through space/time with him,

perhaps sending them where they needed to be. He was growing in abilities. She entertained a secret hope that he might be the one to bring peace to galaxy.

“Commander, are all fighters onboard?” Priya asked.

“Aye, my Lady,” he said. “We’re ready to descend to Axxila, as per your instruction.”

“Change in plans. I want you to set course for Waterborne,” Priya said.

The officer paled. “That’s Lord Kilmore’s territories,” he stammered.

“Lord Kilmore is no more. It is I who control the realm,” Priya said. “Take us into hyperspace as soon as the coordinates are set.”

“And the other ships you command, shall we notify them?” the officer asked.

“They already have their orders,” Priya said. She stepped closer to him, straightened his collar. “Look, I know, you’re new to this, being around a goddess, but I assure you, I know what I am doing and if you want the deal of a life time, you will follow my lead, and do as I command.” She smiled at him.

“Of course,” the officer said. He looked down into the navigation pit, getting confirmation that they were prepared to leave the system. A hail from the planet arrived, querying as to what the delay was. He ignored it. “Take us into hyperspace.”



“I told you she would never surrender,” Poe said, his voice emanating from a desk console. The holo emitter displayed a sign that said ‘no image available’ in alien script. “We had a chance to take her out and you blocked it.”

“That wasn’t me, Poe. That was the sympathizer. But be thankful,” Cohn said. “Your task was to help prevent the fleet from taking Axxila, which you did, and the ground forces you gave me gave me helped in securing the capital. I have eliminated the First Order sympathizers and paved way for an honest election to occur.” An officer approached his desk, hat tucked under his arm. “Forgive me, but business calls. Please send my gratitude to General Solo for her help.” He disengaged the comm. “Report.”

“With the cooperation of the Vault staff, we’ve taken one of Jungin’s building, and secured an express, aircraft lift that goes directly to his underground hangar,” the officer reported. “Per your instructions, we directed Droids and remotes to descend first, but they either refused or short circuited. I decided to send a squad down, but we lost contact with them the moment the lift descended past the surface.”

G arrived at out of thin air, and the officer in front of Cohn condensed into a ball of light and flames; a rapidly cooling diamond dropped to the floor. Cohn shouted for help. The officers in the room also disappeared into light, and diamonds rained in the room. The doors closed and bolted themselves. Cohn pulled his weapon from the belt and hastily tossed it to G’s feet.

“You can only kill me in self-defense, Jedi,” Cohn said.

G smiled. “You’re right. Jedi are only supposed to kill in self-defense. So, technically, since your attack on my base isn’t a serious threat against me, I shouldn’t have to kill at all, but I need your attention. Also, you need to know, I am not really a Jedi. I thought we cleared that up at the dinner.”

Cohn swallowed. “Killing me won’t stop what I have put into play,” Cohn said.

“It will not,” G agreed.

“Hidalgo was a secret agent of the First Order,” Cohn said.

G sighed. "You and I both know that not to be true, and releasing those tapes revealing his extracurricular activities only showed he was flawed, not evil or malicious," G said.

"He was in collusion with a crime lord, and comingling with those from outside of his species," Cohn said.

"It's called sex," G said. "People do that."

"With their own species!" Cohn snapped.

"Still, he was with females," G said, more specifically. "Which, many mainstream humans would be less bothered by, than say, someone being intimate with their own gender. So, I am confused. Why aren't you more compassionate towards diversity?"

"It's the sexual permissiveness of your generation which is destroying the moral fabric of our society," Cohn said.

"You didn't kill the president out of moral outrage, you killed him because you aspire to be in control," G said. "Isn't that more condemnable than sexual permissiveness? Because if all you wanted was to have him relieved of office, you could have just released the videos and allowed the public to decide."

"The public isn't in charge! Nothing would change if you wait for the population to stand up against corruption," Cohn said.

G nodded. "The masses are long suffering. And you are not in charge, either. You are bound by the same chains that hold society back from evolving."

"So, you intend to destroy me and try to impress the public that the president was good?" Cohn said.

"No," G said. "I don't intend to sway the public's opinion at all. They will believe what they will believe, and they will engage in debates and pass blame and criticism and gossip, instead of seeking the true pathway out, which is to go inwards and confront their own fears."

"So why are you here? What do you want?" Cohn asked.

"Cease you attack on the Fortress," G said.

"I have orders," Cohn said.

"Yeah, I know, and there is nothing in the Fortress that the First Order wants," G said. "And even if there was, I am not giving it up. I own the Fortress and I will defend it. People don't have to die for you to realize you're not going to win this one."

"My orders aren't to take the Fortress. It's to make sure you and Alyth are dead," Cohn said.

Using the Force, G took Cohn to the wall, applying pressure to his throat so that it was difficult to breathe, but not impossible. G moved through the desk like a ghost, stirring contents on the desk, knocking a picture frame over, and dropping desk art to the floor, and when he was next to Cohn, G put a solid hand against his chest.

"There are so many ways to die," G said. "Peacefully, in your sleep. Now against the wall, slowly suffocating. I could reach in and squeeze your heart or simply interrupt the flow of electricity. I could add you to my diamond collection." The diamonds in the room rose to the air, sparkling as they rotated, and made their way to his bag. "And still, even now in a death grip, you resist. You're sustained, even nourished feeding off your own fear. You're one of those special kinds that the more someone tries to compel you to use common sense, the more defiant you become. Which, strikes me as odd. Because you know this about yourself, and yet, you still desire to be a part of the First Order. You realize, they're not going to offer you the deal I am offering you. You're like a parasite directing a fly to go up against rancors. A bunch of half crazed, neurotic, angry rancors."

G paused. “And you’re aroused. Is it because you’re being restrained or due to the asphyxiation? Are you a bottom? Not that there’s anything wrong with that, but if that’s what you’re wanting from the First Order, umm, well. I don’t think that’s a club you want to enter just for the kink. They’re much rougher than this and I am pretty sure, once they get their needs fix, you die. They’re not the nurturing, relationship building kind of folks.”

G released him, and Cohn fell to the floor, going to his knees and hands, coughing. G knelt and addressed him personally, like an adult leaning down to speak to a child.

“And this clearly demonstrates why the application of force to get compliance just doesn’t work. Even now, on your hands and knees, avoiding eye contact, you’re plotting how to get even, wanting desperately to protect yourself. That’s not love. That, and there is nothing to protect. There is no place to escape to, no place where the scores are ultimately even. We all return to the same place, the Force, and until you accept the fact that we will all be sitting at the same table and eating together, you will have to keep coming back here to learn the same lesson. You are trapped in your brain and the fears it generates. Using your heart is not even on your bucket list. Maybe one day, when you have accomplished all your goals, you might make room for the possibility of holding love and cherishing the moment, but with every goal there comes another goal, and for every credit earned, another level of credit opens up to you. And now, you have positioned yourself to take control of a planet, something you already had, except in title and final authority, and still it isn’t enough. With the planet secure, you will move for the System, and when that is secure, you will reach out for neighboring systems, hoping to move up in rank and join the legion that vies for control, and you’re not even on the top ten list. I would tell you this game is never ending, but there is an end game and you’re not going to get past the first tier floor bosses and gatekeepers. This battle is about as the close as you’re ever going to get to being next to Hux. You will never see Snoke. Your glass ceiling was set long before you were born, and you just knocked the walls out and the ceiling is coming down and it will crush you.”

G put a hand on the back of his neck and his breathing came easier, his coughing subsided, and went away.

“I am not going to kill you, Cohn. I don’t want to rob you of that which you came here to learn. I don’t want to rob those who came to learn from you what they came to experience. From my perspective, killing you just delays the process. It also irritates the others, the watchers, because they don’t get to learn what they contracted to learn vicariously through you. Yes, Cohn, you are being watched. We all are. All the time. By Jedi, by others that don’t even have names. You probably even have a fan base, somewhere out there, very anxious right now, wondering what you’re going to do. Are you going to die? Yes. Yes, you are, but not today, and not by me.

“Killing you means someone else will pop up and take your place, fulfilling the contractual needs of the watchers and the co-creators. I am not going to help you with your mission, nor interfere further than I have. I am also not going to lie about it, so if you put me on media and they asked, I will tell them the truth. Which, that, too, is interesting, because the truth will get perverted and simply support your cause. Oh, there will be some camps that believe me and rally for justice, and the opposite camp will arise and rally in favor of you, and another group will form saying both of these groups are part of the problem. All of that, that’s just fear, and blaming, as opposed to recognizing the deeper truth that we all have that inside us all the time, and that the true struggle is with self. The only way out of a fear based problem is love. There is one absolute truth, the Force. If it allows you to be, then who am I to block that?”

G helped the man stand, taking his hand. He didn’t so much as agree to give his hand, as much as G simply took it, in both of his, in a very loving affectionate way. “So, here is how this

is going to work. You will cease in your efforts to take the Fortress. It is mine. If you don't, more men will die and a civil war will ensue, and I suspect you will be executed for your involvement in the coup. The CEO's of Jungin's corporations are dead, and the remaining staff have sided with me. These companies, the employees, their families, the revenue streams, all of those are mine, and I will protect them jealously. They are off your radar. You will not harass, board, or attempt to levy taxes against my commerce, and my ships will come and go as they please. And in return, I will not interfere in your short reign. And it will be short. That much is clear. Even if you don't stab the Resistance in the back to allow the First Order to own Axxila, as is your plan, they will come for it anyway. They need Axxila to succeed, and they will try again, with or without you."

G waited to see if Cohn understood. There was a fierceness in his eyes.

"That nuke you're thinking about dropping down a shaft into the Fortress, I guarantee you, it will appear before you and go off with you hugging it, so put that aside," G said. "The only way out of this conversation and my preachy-ness is agreement."

G decided to be silent. He looked for any signs from Cohn that he was getting the message. There was no indication of rage. If there was fear remaining, it was well hidden. If there was rebellion, that too was hidden.

"Your turn to speak," G prompted him.

"I will recall my men and surrender the building we took back to your control," Cohn said.

"Thank you," G said.

"I want you to hand the President's wife and her children over to me," Cohn said.

"I have no authority over them. I will ask what they want," G said.

"You know what they want," Cohn snapped.

"I was compelled to keep them from being executed, but I am not compelled to align myself to their cause," G said. "However, if they align themselves to mine, they will have my support."

"So, you lie, you are going to work to sabotage me?" Cohn said.

"You're not listening. If they align with my cause, they will be choosing to walk with the Force. They will no longer seek vengeance, because there is no cause, there is no death, there is only love."

"You may be more powerful than I allowed for, but you do not know people," Cohn said. "And I will kill you, eventually."

G looked up and to the left and then met his gaze. "I don't see that happening. But if you persist, come at me directly. Stop sending men to die in your stead."

Chapter 18

“The minute I heard my first love story,
I started looking for you, not knowing
How blind that was.
Lovers don't finally meet somewhere.
They're in each other all along.”

Rume

Daphne was technically dead, but her heart continued for a while. It beat long enough that her ears registered the sound of boot falls against deck plating as someone approached, only the signal went nowhere. The footfalls fell in rhythm to the heartbeat that pulsed in the ear, perhaps pulsing louder due to the redirection of blood, forced around cauterized arteries and vessels. Her eyes might have seen the boots arrive, but that signal, too, was scattered and frayed and not collected. The eyes reflected the darkly dressed figure that knelt down to retrieve the lightsaber, stood up, and retreat to a nearby chair, where she sat, waiting. The eyes might have even seen G coalescing out of the ether, like a whirlwind of smoke and streaks of florescent sparks solidifying into mass and color. Some of the light reflected him and the ambient emergency lighting, and few consoles still alive with lit displays. Some of the light passed through the lens, reversing the view and laying it out on the retina, but the signal went nowhere. He knelt and closed her eyes. He pushed her hair back, covering the mortal wound, a perfectly clean hole the size of a lightsaber blade. He touched her neck, waiting for the heart to fail; fading, fading, gone. He was sad thinking each last beat would be the last, and then when the last occurred, he wanted desperately for just one more. But it was done.

“You couldn't protect her.” The voice broke the stillness the way someone speaking in a monastery of silence might. There was a slight echo.

G stood and turned to face her. “I could not. I see you have reclaimed your lightsaber.”

“I have,” his mother said. “You're not going to heal her wound? Raise her from the dead?”

“I will not,” G said.

“More like, ‘you cannot,’” Alarna said.

“There is a block in the Force,” G said. “Most likely she doesn't want to be healed.”

Alarna chuckled. “You're a fool,” she said. “Your father's genes, I suspect. Do you really think all of these wars are over resources and control? The entire galaxy is in the midst of a spiritual war. She surrendered to the enemy, and only now, realizing how bad this was going to get, she killed herself. I even wager she killed herself believing that doing so would save you.”

“Save me? From what?”

“From what's coming. You've attracted its attention. It will be coming for you. The suffering around you has only begun. If you had any true decency or love for the people around you, you would emulate your sister. Throw yourself on your lightsaber,” Alarna said.

“I will not do that,” G said.

“All deaths are suicide, you'd just be dying ahead of schedule,” Alarna said. “Command your heart to stop beating and drift away while you still can.”

“I will see this through,” G assured her

“You will plunge the galaxy deeper into the darkness than the Emperor could ever have dreamt of doing,” Alarna said, standing. “Your sister was a fool. Instead of saving you, she has handed you right over, and made the enemy that much stronger in the process.”

“Help me fight this, then,” G said.

Alarna laughed. “Your level of stupidity astounds me,” she said. “You can’t fight this. You can only submit or die. You have already shown you have no moral fortitude to resist temptation.”

“How so?” G asked.

“You will fuck anything that moves,” Alarna pointed out.

“Fucking in and of itself isn’t a function of morality,” G said.

“That statement reveals your level of corruption,” Alarna pointed out.

“Mother, you come from a time that was more black and white, but clearly, even you indulged or I wouldn’t be here,” G pointed out.

“You misunderstand. I don’t point out your deficiency to disparage you, but to give you evidence why you must die. I’m not ignorant of my deficiencies. In fact, it’s one of the many reasons I didn’t want to have you in the first place,” Alarna said. “And it’s why I am obligated to end you. I can’t allow you to fulfill the Emperor’s vision.”

“I can’t imagine what you and grandmother suffered under his authority, but...” G began.

Alarna pointed her lightsaber at him. “Don’t do that!”

“Don’t do what?” G asked.

“Try that psychobabble crap on me,” Alarna said. “Every time I was called to stand up and do the right thing, I failed.”

“Mother, you were a child for most of that, born into it and groomed...”

“No, I had a choice, and I chose darkness,” Alarna said.

“And killing me helps atone?” G asked.

“Of course not, son,” Alarna said. “There is no atonement. Killing you will be just one more dark act on my soul, but doing so will relieve me of all the darkness that will come because I allowed you to continue to exist.”

G smiled. “You called me ‘son.’”

“Force me, are you borderline? Are you going to be all clingy and complain how I was never there for you? What do you think’s going to happen here? Are you planning to hold a family dinner and joke about how we tried to kill each other?”

“We’re dialoguing,” G said. “That’s an improvement. Deep down, you hold love for me, or at least towards an ideal that could have been expressed through me had you chosen to see it through.”

“The next time we meet, I will kill you,” Alarna said.

“There is no death, you know that,” G said.

“I know,” Alarna said, stepping closer. “It will likely make you even stronger than you are now, but you will be off the playing field. Even if you bounced right back into the game, you would have to make concessions: loss of abilities, loss of memories, and contractual obligations to accomplish certain goals in order to unlock new abilities and or regain strength. Someone of your magnitude is only allowed in every so often. You’ve not committed to a side yet. You’re in the water, and the water is humming with anticipation, but you have not made any splashes, no waves, but you are drawing attention. Even your heart beat is tamed, not producing ripples in the Force, which alone should have been drawing the attention of every Jedi in hiding. That kind of stillness draws attention, and it grows because those who can’t abide peace will flee, push you

away, or try to kill you. Hell, I'm surprised Axxila hasn't imploded under your presence, except for maybe the Cave Fortress buffers you. Your sphere of influence, this peace you exude, that is not going to last. You will be forced to pick a side and it will be the wrong side.

"There is no right side, mother. If I choose Good, a Darkness of my equivalent will rise from the Force to bring balance," G state simply. "Should I choose Darkness, then a Light will arise bringing balance. This is the way it has always been."

"The Emperor charged me to find you or create you, knowing I will accomplish my mission. I always have," Alarna said. "And you will bring darkness, because he called you."

"Lots of his plans failed to come to fruition," G pointed out. "Or I will bring the Light to counter his Dark. Or I will stabilize the universe through neutrality, reducing the amplitude of this storm that has been raging for tens of thousands of years. The Emperor is gone. There is a chance for different."

Alarna shook her head. "I assure you, though he is removed from the game, his pieces are still in motion. You don't think Bloodhunters were his only time bomb, do you? The First Order think they are going to inherent the Galaxy, but they, too, are simply pawns carrying out mission objectives laid down long before they even existed. Not only do they not know who is pulling their strings, they don't even know they are being played. The Resistance, too, puppets, all of them. Everyone merely puppets."

"You could help me find the source. Help me end its reign," G offered.

"The source of this is embedded into the very fabric of existence! Don't you read your Jedi texts?" Alarna asked.

"Yeah, well, I am a bit behind in my readings. Do you know how much there is to read? Do you know how many texts and stories and anecdotes contradict each other? There is the most recent texts, called the Core Concepts, and there are the ancient texts, and then there are texts that come before the ancient text, and a splintering of texts gathered on worlds of origin that seemed to be shamanic in nature, and then there are the stories of texts that were never formalized into texts, which seems to be pure conjecture, but at least more consistent at mirroring the indigenous shamanic writings, so, really, if you're going to point to textual evidence for your beliefs, I am going to want greater clarity and context, because there is just no end to stories and philosophies and beliefs," G said. "There is, however, experiential knowledge, gained through esoteric and ecstatic journeys. And there is a pathway out of the cyclic nature of violence."

"The cessation of birth," Alarna said.

"Ending life, ends life, not the energy that begat life and will continue to bring it forth until there is permanent stability," G said.

"As long there is physical life, there will be competition, death, and war," Alarna said.

"Maybe, but there can be a cease fire between us, and that's a start in the right direction," G said.

"Aww, you want a hug?" Alarna said.

"Actually, yes," G said, embracing her without thinking.

Alarna was taken by surprised. "I was being sarcastic."

"I love you, mother," G whispered. "Thank you for my life."

Alarna activated her lightsaber at point blank range. He dissipated, the whirlwind of smoke folding around her. She sneezed. Satisfied he was gone, she deactivated the lightsaber and returned to her ship. Her ship was gone by the time he returned. He knelt down and made

Daphne into a diamond. He slipped this into his vest pocket. He was startled by the airlock door opening, followed by a burst of ecstatic whistles as Red entered.

“Well, I am happy to see you, Red?” G said. “How were your travels with mother?”

The Droid issued more complaints than could be properly addressed.

“Yeah, well, she can be a bit a moody, but she makes up for it in her unwavering dedications to purpose,” G said.

A questioning whistle filled the air.

“I don’t think I was being sarcastic,” G mused, as he headed for the flight deck. Red followed. “I know my mother’s screwed up. We’re all a little screwed up. But I still love her.”

Red whistled more.

“Well, she is attractive but that isn’t the love I was referring to,” G said, making the calculations for hyperspace.

Red whistled several more questions.

“You are really talkative today, my friend. Why don’t you plug in to the ship’s computer and make friends and learn all you can about it and where it’s been and where it was going,” G said.

G finished the calculations and took the ship into hyperspace, headed for Axxila. Only then did he attend to the human remains under the pilot’s chair, making a new diamond. He tossed it up on the console, not intending to carry it, as it wasn’t his to do so. He paused, kneeling down to Red and hugged him. “I am happy to see you. Should I have to depart, you’re headed towards Axxila. I will have them expecting to receive you in the event that I am busy.”

He fished the diamond out of his vest pocket. He stared at its intricate patterns. The Droid whistled, curtly.

“No, this wasn’t an enemy,” G said.

The Droid sounded sad.

“Yes, it was someone we knew,” G said. “And loved very much. Daphne has crossed over.”

The Droid sounded extra sad, commiserating. G sat down next to it.

“It is a part of life, my friend,” G said, allowing the Droid to speak. “Some people would say it is a belief, but I have personal knowledge that we continue on after.” G laughed at the Droid’s query. “I am sure Droids go somewhere, too. I dare say, if there are no Droids over there, I won’t be staying. Where will I go? Umm, well, where ever you go. But I am thinking that will be a long way off for you. So don’t worry too much. Well, I don’t know. I guess we just live in the moment as much we can and focus on what we have in front of us.”

The Droid whimpered.

“Yeah,” G said, wiping his eyes. “I am sad, too.” He laid his against the Droid and allowed himself to grieve.

“G?”

G closed his eyes and found himself with Mace Windu.

“Are you okay?” Windu asked.

“I am surprised by the severity of my emotional response to loss,” G said.

Windu put an arm around him and they walked by a lake, a fountain spraying up in the center of it. Surrounding trees were home to small critters and birds. The sky was a perfect, endless blue that felt more like an imagined memory of blue than an actual sky color.

“Can I see her?” G asked.

“She is not here,” Windu said.

“But she is a Jedi. Don’t all Jedi come here?” G asked.

“I don’t know how to respond to your questions, but I can say, I am here with you, you are one with the Force,” Windu said.

“I know you mean that to be comforting, but right now, it seems like a meaningless platitude. She is one person, and yet I grieve as strongly for her as I did for my home of origin,” G said. “They’re not comparable. I believe one should not grieve more for one over another, but this feels significant. I was sad when the First Order took out five planets simultaneously, but I was not devastated, not impacted like this one death is affecting me. But the thing that bothers me the most is that I have all of this knowledge that there is more and that we continue on in the Force, and yet, I am sad, I am angry, and I am hurting.”

“I would worry about you if you didn’t feel this,” Windu said.

“You’re not going to tell me I need to purge myself of attachment?” G asked.

Windu chuckled. “I would not dream of belaboring a point you know so well,” he said. He retrieved several pebbles and skipped one across the lake. “She was a friend, a lover, family, and I know that you were drawn together by circumstances and the Force. Your response is complicated, but appropriate. You had unresolved issues and you are not ready to let go.”

“How can I let go? I can’t let go,” G said. “I must find her.”

“Then your mother is right. Daphne will be your downfall,” Windu said.



Corissa was met by Emmer as she was heading towards the cafeteria. “Mam, we’ve made arrangements to evacuate you,” Emmer said.

“I won’t be leaving,” Corissa said.

“Mam, I am under strict orders from Master Waycaster to see that you’re safe,” emmer said.

Corissa pulled to a halt. “He is here?”

“Who?”

“Preston,” Corissa said. “Is he here?”

“No, mam,” Emmer said.

“Everyone knows I am in charge here. I will not run,” Corissa said.

“You know they’re going to come here. They will kill everyone here to own this base. It’s prime real-estate,” Emmer said. “And they will have the resources to finish what we started.”

“I will not run. Even if I did, they would just pursue,” Corissa said.

Shariva, Jordeen, and Isho approached, trying to look like they weren’t listening, but clearly needing to be in ear shot to take orders.

“What good will being a martyr do?” Emmer said.

“It will give folks time to get away,” Corissa said, motioning the others to approach.

“Jordeen, I want you and your Sisters to take the orphans, follow the river until you come to the Frenzie River clan. From there, divide the kids up, and disperse into the other clans. If any of the families want to join, take them as well.”

“You want them to walk?” Isho asked.

“They First Order will be tracing heat signatures from departing ships, but small groups of people might go unnoticed amongst the wild life,” Emmer said. “Mam, it might be better to split them into three group, two following the rivers, and the third going out over the plain.”

Shariva made a noise.

“She is volunteering to lead one of the groups, and the forested plain would be in her element,” Emmer said.

“Very well. Make sure she has a map to some of our stashes,” Corissa said. “Emmer, you lead the third group. The clans will be expecting you. Go, quickly, and may the Force be with you.”

As they departed, Commander Rosh approached. “The evacuation of key personnel and families has begun and we will continue until we are out of ships or we are stopped by force,” Rosh said.

The ambient light of day suddenly diminished. Looking up into the sky revealed a different frequency of light than they were used to seeing on Dathomir. The sun seemed like it was shining through a thin sheet of ice.

“Force me,” Corissa said. “Is that what I think it is?”

“If it is, no one is leaving this planet,” Rosh said.

“Order all ships that didn’t make it out of the atmosphere to return to base,” Corissa said.

“I could have them scatter across Dathomir,” Rosh said.

“And what? And give the First Order a reason or pretense to send brigades of Troopers into villages and cities and burn them down? Bring everyone back, Rosh. If we’re going to die, we’re going to die here,” Corissa said. “Also, I want your men to disarm. All weapons are to be stowed in the armory.”

“Mam? We’re not going to fight?” Rosh asked.

“Would we win? Do the math, Rosh. We’re not going to get reinforcements, right? Not as long as that shield is up. And how many Star Destroyers did you say were up there? Seven? Eight? Yeah, I don’t want to see one weapon when they come knocking. Our new mantra is we are a peaceful settlement, dedicated to the arts of healing and wellbeing,” Corissa said.

“I would rather go out fighting,” Rosh said.

“And you will be. You will die spreading the message of peace that Master Waycaster instilled in us,” Corissa said. “Go, before one of our ships decide to land somewhere other than here.”

Rosh hurried off, using his radio to issue orders.

“What would you like me to do?” Isho asked.

“Go to Preston’s cave. Tell her we need Preston,” Corissa said.



FindIt emerged from sleep mode tentatively. The threat seemed to be gone, but so did Ten. There was no radio telemetry. Pings failed to return. The remotes that Ten was using to help search for items were powered down. FindIt slipped into an older program, one he hadn’t used in a long while. Survival mode. The first order of business was determining if it could secure a source of power. Without that, it would be forced to return to sleep mode, surfacing periodically to see if there were any changes to the environment, any new comers, but if no one came, it was a dead end game. It searched through its recent exploration for artifacts and identified the solar panel from a Tie fighter. Finding a piece of Tie Fighter wasn’t difficult. Finding a solar panel that still functioned, well, that was difficult. It went and retrieved the item. It was scratched, and multiple impact, but it was likely still functioning. FindIt removed the remaining section of the strut, freeing access on of the enter coupling, removed the coupling and inserted its own. There was

power. And there was enough solar energy available that a day in sleep mode would fully recharge its pack.

Once it had secured power, it activated the remotes and continue probing the debris field for treasure. One of the probes was directed to enter a section of the hull, and once it entered the hole of twisted metal, it found itself in corridor that was mostly intact. Some panels had been blown off. There were human remains. The mummified human was stuck on a jagged piece of metal, otherwise he might have been blown out through the hole. Unless, the ship had already depressurized before the hole had been made. Whatever had happened, it had happened a long time ago. FindIt took a picture of medals and insignia for identification purposes. Sometimes living family members would pay for information, sometimes they would pay to retrieve the body for final rituals.

By the time the remote had entered the First room, FindIt had joined the remote. It secured the solar panel to the section of ship, found several cable links of power lines with couplings, disconnected them from the exposed wall, and connected one into the solar panel and secured the other end inside. Being inside while charging would decrease the chance of being hit by debris while in sleep mode. He ordered the other remotes to gather outside the section of hull he would call home. He then ordered the chest to join him.

FindIt took the man's weapon, attaching it to a pull cable. Standard issue blaster, nothing special, no insignia. The weapon wasn't a souvenir piece, just something that could be refurbished and sold. There was always a market for weapons. The man seemed to have nothing else of value. FindIt proceeded down the corridor. The first door led to an armory. He nearly short circuited with excitement. It called the remote to catalogue the items, while it continued down the section. The next door was shut. Two arms extended from its body, and tools emerged, powering up. In effect, they were mini lightsabers, tools G used when sculpting rocks. He brought them forward, pushing them through the door like a knife through flesh, rotated its body effectively drawing a circle, the circumference of which was longer than its body, max extension of its arms. The cabin had maintained pressured, but it quickly leaked out through the half circular gaps, nearly pushing FindIt away. The circle complete, FindIt gave it a shove and the cutout floated away. FindIt withdrew the tools back into itself, and entered the room. Another human remains, only this one hadn't been mummified. It had bloated under the gasses of its own bacteria, and then exploded, and the mess was mostly contained to the bed cavity. It had long since dried and there was no way to know how the man might have died. If he didn't killed himself, he would have just gone to sleep when the oxygen was used up. Or when the cold took him, but since what was left of the body didn't appear to be wrapped in an emergency blanket, that was a less likely explanation.

FindIt withdrew the foot locker from under the bed cavity. Without power, the locks wouldn't open, and even with power, it would require a code. It didn't stop the cutting tool from opening it, and FindIt was careful not to plunge it straight through, for fear of damaging contents. Inside the locker, at the top of an expertly packed box, were several Jedi datacron; they were small, palm size polyhedrons, and he knew them due to personal history. There were also several Sith holocrons, palm size pyramids. FindIt didn't know the names of the tech, but he knew they were valuable. Ten would be happy.

FindIt opened the box that was on the top, finding an assortment of crystals. Opening the box stirred items, and they started to drift out, so FindIt closed the box and then the locker. There was the hint of a lightsaber hilt as the locker was closed. It put a seal on it to keep the locker shut. FindIt then turned to the door. The hole would not be large enough for the locker. He

proceeded to cut the entire door out. It fell away, tumbling, hit the fall war, bounced, and returned. FindIt took the door out of the ship section and released it.

A ship emerged from hyperspace. FindIt hesitated, considering powering down. It did not want to lose its treasure to thieves. It considered defending it, but powering down was the best option. Just as it was about to go down, it detected a wireless network, and one of its pings returned.

“You there?” Ten asked.

FindIt released a string full of data, “You left me. Are you okay? I was alone. What happened to the other ship? I could have helped. Where did you go? I found more stuff.”

“Whoa, slow down there, little one,” Ten said, uploading FindIt’s files. “I am okay. G is with me.”

“G? How is that possible?” FindIt said. “You have been gone insufficient time to go somewhere and return with G.”

“Yes!” Ten said. “G, come look at this.”

G came over to her work station. “Nice,” G said.

“Am I lucky or what?” Ten said.

“Several hours ago, you weren’t feeling so lucky,” G said.

“Is this a lesson?” Ten asked.

“If you allow your emotions to be regulated by external events, you will remain in constant flux, and subject to the whimsical nature of physical plane,” G said. “You have found treasure. The galaxy is full of treasure, all around you, all the time. This isn’t luck.”

Ten pouted. “Are you saying I shouldn’t be happy?”

“No, that’s not what I am saying,” G said. “Happy sad are on a continuum and you will naturally move back and forth through this spectrum, without effort, influenced by the external happenings of life, and influenced by your inner filters and preferences. Or, you can go deeper, and remain in a constant state of joy, uninfluenced by what goes on here. Joy is on a whole other continuum, and few people touch it. You’ve touched joy. You know what you’re feeling isn’t that. This is nice, but don’t chase it.”

“But that’s what scavengers do, they chase treasures and the emotional highs that come with it,” Ten said.

“When you realize that everything your physical eyes see is treasure, with the same value, this debris field will have a beauty all its own,” G said. “And you will have to make a choice, see everything as sacred, or see it as mundane.”

“How should I see it?” Ten asked.

“No one can tell you how to see, Ten,” G said. “Allow me to buy those items from you. Bring them to Axxila. I have to go, but I am still with you.”

G faded.



Yeno was standing outside looking up into the sky. He was born elsewhere, but he had been on Dathomir so long that he had forgotten that the sky could look like this. It reminded him of his home world. He was aware of the shuttle landing next to him, but continued to look up, sensing the battle that lasted less than a few minutes. It was hardly worthy of being called a battle.

Doya emerged from her craft.

“Come with me,” Doya said.

“You shouldn’t have come here. They will be monitoring all traffic,” Yeno said. “My home will now be marked as a point of interest.”

“We need you. Come with me,” Doya said. “We’re discussing how to take out that shield.”

Yeno turned to her. “You take out that shield and almost everything on the surface will be dead within a week.”

“You’re saying that’s a permanent feature?” Doya asked.

“Yes, Senator,” Yeno said, looking back into the sky. “We are now at the mercy of the gatekeepers.”

“None the less, I insist that you come with me,” Doya said.

“To what ends?”

“I don’t know. But you’re an asset, and we want to take you into hiding,” Doya said. “You understand, don’t you? You’ve been hiding most of your life and we allowed it. It’s time to pay back your host.”

Yeno sighed. Her words stung, but it wasn’t something new. He had told himself he should have died with the others in the great purge so many times that it was almost a mantra. Even the occasional, soothing voice of Yoda, urging patience and compassion, failed to diminish his own derogatory inner tapes.

“I am old, Doya,” Yeno said. “I am a fool stuck in an era long since gone. Few value what I hold, and the kids these days, they don’t have the patience or discipline to go deep. Everything is instant gratification. You’re lucky to get a student who will sit with a lesson thirty minutes, much less years, and in thirty minutes they’re lamenting they can’t learn it, complaining. The only upside is that even the dark side takes more time and energy than most people are willing to commit. No, Doya. I am through. When they come for me, and they will come for me, like moths drawn to a candle, I will be here, and I will embrace the fate I hid from all these years.”

Doya drew closer and got in front of him. “Force me, you are a fool, and maybe G was right, the Jedi have been self-serving bastards for too long, but this isn’t about you. It’s about us. It’s about mother Dathomir. You, Sir, have benefited from her nurturing, suckled from her breast, and you will stand up with us and serve the Great Mother. Her children need you.”

Yeno quietly reflected over her words, meeting her eyes. “G called us self-serving bastards?”

“I was paraphrasing,” Doya said.

“If he were here, we might have a chance to do what needs to be done,” Yeno said.

“Well, he isn’t here. And he isn’t here because he told us he would not act to save us,” Doya said. “He knew this was coming and he did nothing. Hell, he even pulled his Star Destroyer from orbit.”

“One Star Destroyer wouldn’t have been enough to stop this,” Yeno said.

“No, but G could have single handedly stopped this, he is that powerful,” Doya said.

Yeno was thinking it through. “It may not mean what you think it means.”

“Don’t misread the anger in my voice. I love him. I can entertain the idea that he has knowledge and reasons and motifs beyond anything I have to deal with in my daily life, and I know he wanted to stay here, even if it meant he was to die here. He said as much, he wanted to die here, which I guess means the Force has other plans for him because he left, and here we are facing this thing he knew was coming,” Doya said. “But you’re not G, and your excuses for not coming with me are faulty and selfish.”

Yeno nodded. "I will come with you, but it may make things worse."

"I doubt it can get much worse," Doya said. "Can anything be done about the shield?"

"As long as there is a purpose in holding Dathomir, they will keep the shield in place. When they have exploited all the value here, they will disengage the shield and let the world die. If the Resistance deems Dathomir a threat, they will try to take out the shield. The First Order would likely benefit from their trying, as it would give them a chance to diminish some of the Resistance's Fleet. There are no great solutions here. When that shield comes down, most of the life here will perish. It will be an extinction level event unparalleled in Dathomir's history, and it will be a thousand years before the ozone layer is back up and what's left of life can return to doing what life does. Some sentient life forms may eke out a meager existence in the meantime, in caves or shielded habitats, but those who can't evacuate are either going to die of radiation sickness or starvation."

"So, what you're saying is, we need to take control of and occupy the shield generating platform and the gate," Doya said.

"Even if you get on board, if they fear losing control, they will self-destruct out of spite. And if you take it before the self-destruct is engaged, then you still have the First Order's task force in orbit to deal with. This would have to be a coordinated attack."

"See there," Doya said. "You're not old and useless. Come with me, Yeno. Friend."

Yeno nodded. "Let me get a few things," he said.

Doya motioned for several of her attendants to come and assist and then followed Yeno into his house. There was a lightsaber hilt on the mantel of the fireplace.

"Don't forget that," Doya said.

Yeno followed her eyes to the lightsaber. He laughed. "My days of acrobatic fighting are over."

"I am getting really tired of hearing you beat yourself up, Sir," Doya said. "What would you tell a student who told you they 'can't'?"

"I humbly accept your rebuke," Yeno said.

Yeno finished packing essential. When he finished he looked around his house. He touched the wall and said, 'thank you, house.' He nodded when he was finished and the attendants carried the trunk. Doya followed her attendants. Yeno paused, collected the lightsaber, and attached it to his belt. He took a deep breath and proceeded out of his home. "I am one with the Force, the Force is with me. Yoda, I will need your guidance, my old friend. Please walk with me."

Chapter 19

“Everything in the universe is within you. Ask all from yourself.”

Rumi

It felt like a dream. No, it felt more like De-Ja-Vu. On her desk was one pyramid shaped holocron and one polyhedron shaped holocron. She held a device that projected a hardback edition of a book, in holograph form, with a projected tactile overlay that made turning the book feel like turning real pages. She was trying to commit passages to memory:

“People want you to be happy. Don't keep serving them your pain! If you could untie your wings and free your soul of jealousy, you and everyone around you would fly up like doves.” She couldn't translate the author's name. When she looked back at the text to confirm that she had got it right, it had changed: “You were born with potential. You were born with goodness and trust. You were born with ideals and dreams. You were born with greatness. You were born with wings. You are not meant for crawling, so don't. You have wings. Learn to use them and fly.”

“What are you reading?” G asked.

“I don't know,” Ten said.

“Then why are you reading it?” G asked.

“I thought you wanted me to,” Ten said.

“If you could pick what you want to read, which one would you have chosen?”

“The Princess, the Bride, and the Brother,” Ten said.

“But you didn't chose that because,” G said.

“I thought you would consider it teenage fluff,” Ten said.

“Does it matter what I think?” G asked.

“Yes,” Ten said.

“Then know this: I think you should start with what you like, as you read make predictions, look for patterns, and be prepared to discuss the merits of the story, discuss the pros and cons...” G began.

“But the stories I like are about kings and queens, princes and princesses,” Ten said.

“They're not real people. I doubt it would be helpful.”

“So, you want to read it, but don't want to read it, and I am your excuse for not indulging...”

“Maybe,” Ten said, thinking about it. “I don't know. Why are these so many stories about princesses and warriors?”

“They're archetypes. The hero comes in many guises. There are many paths. We are all kings and queens, and simultaneously, we're all peasants and beggars. Others will play supporting roles, and we will play supporting roles for others. This is the agreement. This is why we're here.”

“Why are we here?”

“Imagine you had the power to do anything you want, to possess anything you want. Imagine every thought you have instantaneously results in action or manifestation,” G said.

“What do you think you could learn?”

“I think I would become bored,” Ten said.

“And what if everyone had this ability?” G asked.

“I think it would be chaos,” Ten said.

“And that is why we are here. You will always learn more from your failures than your wins. We are here to learn to play well with each other, in an environment where the happenings of our thoughts are not instantaneous. We are to learn to be with our thoughts, are emotions. Remember when you wished yourself dead, if there wasn’t a delay, if there wasn’t a buffer built into this system, this one stray thought would have ended the game before you had learned what you came here to learn,” G said. “The thought itself is not bad, but you are a Jedi and you cannot die. And in the darkness between the planes, you can be overwhelmed by your fears, summoning creatures into being and sustaining them with your own powers of creation. You are here because this is the best environment to learn to be with your thoughts and your powers. The Force creates life. We are one with the Force. We co-create life, on many more levels than simple procreation. You can call a thought form into being and it be just as real as any other living thing, with personality, wants and needs.”

“Thought form?”

“All thoughts are real. A mechanical thought form brought to life is a servitor, more like a Droid, limited intelligence, and a sentient thought form manifested is a Tulpa,” her book informed her. “Reference: psychological explanations, multiple personality disorder, schizoid break, paranormal explanation, summoning’s, shamanic helpers, poltergeists, avatars, soul bounds, Force personalities...”

“There is too much here. G, are your conversations with Windu actually with him or a Tupla?” Ten asked.

“It depends on who you ask. Some might say my Windu is a Tulpa. Many would likely say I am hallucinating. It is possible Windu is a Force Echo of the personality. The personality matrix for all entities exist with access to all chronological evolutionary stages and the variations that lead to the identified personality to its opposite and back being available,” G said. His voice was present and everywhere, and also behind her, fixed, as if he were reading over her shoulder.

Ten formulated in her mind the perfect Tulpa companion. She listed all the character attributes she idealized, but to keep it balance, it also had some character traits that were less than ideal. She listed more than were necessary, allowing for the Tulpa to have some choices and options. She chose its form. It was mostly human. It was female, and resembled a character from one of her favorite graphic novels. She was probably in her twenties. She wore a black vest over a purple bodice over a white cotton dress that draped longer on the right side than the left, with purple hair and purple, knee high socks. Her eyes were twilight gold and sea greens. Her mouth had a natural smile, with a noticeable philtrum that accentuated the cupid’s bow of her lips; lips that were painted lilac blue. Her eyebrows were darker purple, one side being thick, heavy waves tapering to vanishing points. All she had to do was push the button, and this character would be downloaded into her brain. She would share her brain with another sentient personality construct.

“If I make a Tupla, am I creating it, or calling something that is already in existence to me?” Ten asked.

“Why can’t both be true? Or neither. Maybe there are other explanations equally valid, all dependent on perspective,” G offered.

“I’m sorry I keep needing to go over this: Jedi or Sith, light or dark, male or female, positive or negative, love or hate, these all seem easier to touch than your third path. Your path meanders through the middle,” Ten said. She pushed the button, and the download commenced. “It takes too long to get anywhere. I don’t want to meander, G. I want to get straight there. I ask you to tell me what to read, and you say, read whatever, which is random, and it just seems to add pages to my journey. It just adds distance and time. Things would be so much easier if you

could just tell me what to do and where to go and I could be there already. Please, just give me the shortest, most direct route to my goal.”

“Ten, if you get nothing else from my meandering diatribes, get this: lightning never takes a straight path,” G said.

“Wow!”

Suddenly she was immersed in a blue light, awake, hovering in a light so bright and so endless and so thick it was like sustained lightening. G wasn't there. She was alone, but not alone. She felt love pouring into her. As the light faded, she saw the galaxy before her, only space was blue and the stars were shades of grey, as if they were a negative print. The ambient light she was immersed in went from blue, to indigo, to violet. It continued to move up in frequency until the sky went black, and then the stars shone with their own lights and colors. She held the galaxy between her hands, not touching it, but feeling lightening moving from the stars to her hands, tickling her fingertips. From this perspective, the galaxy was simply a disk of information that she was tapping into, neither separate from her, nor even distinct. As she shrank, or the galaxy grew, the feathery trails of stars and dust spun into her, through her, dissecting her down the middle of self, but without harm. It was a pleasant sensation. She became aware of other hands, also tapping in. There were more eyes than stars, but she was not afraid.

She found herself back in her body, holding a real book, closed in both hands. She was still in the dream that wasn't a dream.

“Where did you go?” G asked her.

“I don't know,” Ten said.

“What did you do?” G asked.

“I don't know!” Ten said.

“What did you learn?” G asked.

Ten cried. “G, it's so much! I will never understand all of this!”

“Let me give you a magic word,” G said.

“Really?”

“Yes. Whenever you feel compelled to use words like ‘never’ or ‘always,’ substitute it with ‘sometimes,’ and you'll change. And when you change, the universe will change. That's the way of it,” G said. “You want to know how I can do all the things I can do? Well, it's mostly because I grew up without anyone telling me I couldn't.”

Ten woke from her dream, which wasn't a dream, and sat up. “G?” she asked. All was silent. She got up from bed. Pink awoke from ‘sleep mode’ and followed her, whistling softly. Ten motioned her to be quiet for a moment, as she sat down at her desk and began to draw a picture. She drew a circle holding lightning. She did several configurations, found one she liked and then printed it. She took the patch and stuck it on left arm.

Movement from the corner of her eye caused her to look up. When she did, she discovered there was someone else a presence. A female, looking identical to the woman she had created in her dream that wasn't a dream. Ten swallowed, part of her fearing she had lost her mind. Was this the space sickness that many solitary travelers have experienced? The woman seemed puzzled.

“I don't know how I came to be here,” she said. “Do you?”

“I asked you to be here,” Ten said.

“You did?”

“I require help, learning the ways of the Force, and exploring my own inner psyche,” Ten said. “You will have access to my unconscious mind. Of course, it is a request. You don’t have to serve. I am okay with a friendship.”

The stranger’s hand passed through the terminal. “Am I a ghost?”

“No, you’re a sentient personality that is sharing my brain, and I am the host,” Ten said. “I called you into being. The more we interact, the stronger you will become. I have even created a dream world for us to interact in. We could go there now, if you like. I could show you around.”

Red whistled a query.

“Red wants to know who you’re speaking to,” she said.

“You understand Astromech?” Ten asked. She confirmed the dialogue on the screen.

“I guess so,” she said. “Unless you understand Droid and I am simply accessing an unconscious skill. Why would you limit your personality matrix?”

“And that’s why I need you!” Ten said. “Do you have a name?”

She stood tall. “I am Princess Kyoko.”

Ten stood to greet her. Their hands passed through each other, but even so, Ten experienced a tactile sensation that gave her chills. “We’ll work on that. I am told I can develop a sensitivity to your touch and be impacted by it. My name is Ten.”

“What shall we do now?” Kyoko asked.

“I don’t know. I’ve been working creating you for a month, and quite frankly, I was becoming skeptical, but this, I mean, you, this is beyond what I imagined. I hear you, see you,” Ten said. She reached out and tried to maintain contact with her by being deliberate and slow. She touched her face. “I can feel you. I smell you, like lavender.” Ten couldn’t resist. She kissed her. She retreated, her eyes closed. “And I can taste you.”

Ten opened her eyes and Kyoko had her arms crossed, and she seemed angry.

“If you created me as a love interest, this is not going to work out,” Kyoko said.

“I am sorry,” Ten said. “I shouldn’t have taken such liberty. I was simply curious.”

Kyoko’s reaction softened. “That doesn’t ring completely true,” Kyoko said. “There’s more to it.”

Ten didn’t expect she would have to go deeper this fast. The Tulpa already challenging her, but it seemed reasonable. She sought explanation for her behavior. She would have never kissed another person without permission, but she kissed Kyoko without even thinking about it. “I am not sure. Maybe I have an inner bias.”

“You created me so you think you can do as you like,” Kyoko said.

“That’s sort of what I was thinking but didn’t want to say it,” Ten said. “When I dream, the characters in my dream are just me playing other characters, so...”

“So, it’s okay to do what you want with them?” Kyoko asked. “Maybe you should treat as if they were really others. How you treat yourself is how you will treat others.”

“That’s a great point,” Ten said, feeling appropriately rebuked. She created Kyoko to be equal, sentient, and insightful. “Again, I am sorry.”

Kyoko said. “You need real friends. Not just Droids. Not just me.”

“I am okay. I don’t need friends,” Ten insisted.

“You invited me to share your brain, which mean, to maintain optimal health, you must meet a variety of criteria, exercise, sleep, nutrition, and a social interaction,” Kyoko said. “More than just the Jedi you meet in the dream world. Speaking of the dream world, that place you

created for us. May I have my own place, a private place, somewhere I might retreat to when I need to think? Can you make me a friend?"

"You want friends?" Ten asked.

"Well, you're still just a kid, and it would be nice if I could have a friend or two my age," Kyoko said.

Ten was taken aback. "I didn't fully prepare myself to the idea that you might not want to share my company," she said. She found her feelings hurt, but was trying to apply G's advice and not be affected by an external event. Technically, this is an internal event. An internal external event? Her head was hurting. She was having second thoughts for having engaged in this process.

"Do you suppose G would like me?" Kyoko said.

"Like you how?" Ten asked.

"Romantically," Kyoko said. "Unless you're going to let me borrow our body, G is the only one likely to be able to visit me in the dream world. Unless we can find a telepathic friend that can allow me to interact on the mental and emotional levels."

"You want to be romantically involved?" Ten said.

"Well, yeah," Kyoko said. "I am not a Jedi like you."

"I am not a Jedi," Ten said.

"But you're trying to be and you're celibate," Kyoko said, and then, as if insight. "Oh, maybe my heightened sense of libido is due to your suppression of sexual interest."

"You know why I suppress that shit!" Ten said.

"Yes. I do. I am sympathetic. But you can't go your whole life hating all men," Kyoko said. "Oh. But you kissed me. Perhaps you need a girlfriend."

"No!" Ten said.

Kyoko drew closer, playfully, teasing her. "But you did kiss me. And, intimacy is healthy. So, in the absence of either of us having a partner, maybe we should engage each other."

"No!" Ten said.

"You started this!" Kyoko said. "Kiss me again."

"No!" Ten said, backing off.

"I am sorry. I see I am came on a bit strong. But I feel so alive, I want to explore. Can we go somewhere? Somewhere where there are people and fun things to do?" Kyoko said.

"We're on our way to Axxila," Ten said.

"Oh, that sounds like fun. We could go the club together. Do you have any other clothes?" Kyoko said.

"Pretty much, just what I am wearing, and more of the same," Ten said.

"Why would you want to be so uniform? There's a three d printer on board, right? We can make some clothes together?" Kyoko asked.

"I need time to think," Ten said.

"You're sending me away?"

"Not permanently. Can I have some privacy?" Ten said.

"We share a brain. How can there be privacy?" Kyoko asked.

"This was a mistake," Ten muttered.

Kyoko withdrew to a lounge and began to cry. Ten was confused. She knew when she started reading about Tulpas that they were sentient personality constructs, and they would want to be autonomous, but she was simply unprepared for the reality of this.

“I am sorry, Kyoko,” Ten said. “I am going to need time to adjust. I have lived in brain alone most of my life, and since I started dream work with G, I have realized so much more is possible, way too much for me to do this alone, and I do have this need, and I called you into being to help fulfill it, and I just need time to adjust. You and I are okay. I am not going to kill or abort you.”

“You promise?” Kyoko said.

Ten came over and sat beside her. She could feel Kyoko’s leg brushing up against her. “I promise,” Ten said. “I am a little freaked out at the moment, but I still need an inner friend and guide to explore the deeper recesses on my consciousness, and venture further out into the other realms. We’re going to be a team. And we’re going to have to learn how to be together.”

Kyoko wiped her eyes. Nodded. “I would like to hug you.”

It took practice to go slow enough to hug without pushing through each other, but they took their time and experienced a hug. Kyoko brought her lips to Ten. Ten didn’t resist. From Red’s perspective, Ten’s lips opened in an O. Ten kissed back, sucking in on Kyoko’s upper lip, her tongue exploring. There was tactile sensations, taste and smells. There was a physical, emotional, and a mental connection. She couldn’t help but surrender to this, unlocking her own sensuality for the first time without shame or guilt and a desperate need to run away.



G arrived at Waterborne. The Star Destroyers Priya had commandeered were in orbit, manned by the Deterrent’s crew that had been left out of the fight. FixIt was happily employed in the infirmary, working on patients, some of them Resistance. The original crews of the Star Destroyers were planet side, deliberating the deal. The crews had been offered the same deal she had offered her own people, the same deal G had offered when he commandeered his first ship: return to their families and never fight again, or join their cause. Less than half wanted to return to their families, and of those, most were the new Storm Troopers, conditioned to follow order. They would be making this their family, probably making them a fiercer foe, as they had been torn from their family long ago and no one had ever given them this kind of option. Some of the Troopers simply refused to deal, not recognizing Priya’s authority. They too were free to go, but they were to be delivered to a planet where they could find their way back. And then there were some who had heard about the only way to truly be a member of Waterborne was to die by drowning and be revived, and there were some wanting to prove their allegiance by participating in the ritual.

“I told them I would think about it,” Priya said. “That it was an honor ceremony. I didn’t want tell them we no longer do that.”

“If they want that, hold a ceremony, make it a ritual, have their crews watch, especially the Troopers who don’t want to make the deal. Even if you end up dropping them off and they return to the First Order, they will carry with them the message of the ritual, and that we are one, bounded by a death and rebirth,” G said. “But provide it only if they volunteer.”

“Some people don’t return from that,” Priya said.

“I know,” G said. “And that will just be more fuel for the rumors that you’re the new bad ass to contend with. The rumors have already started, it won’t take much more to make you bigger than life. Some say you’re the greatest evil since Vader, and you have a bad ass apprentice. I think that’s me, but I don’t have a pseudonym picked out yet. Some are calling you a savior. The First Order is trying to counter both of those messages by saying you’re just a petty

tyrant that needs to be squashed, justifying why they need a stronger presence in the Galaxy, to defend us from the likes of you. Either way, we are now prominent players on the galactic stage.”

“I’ve learned from the crew, if Axxila didn’t fall, they were supposed to regroup and take a secondary target,” Priya said.

“Dathomir,” G said.

“You knew?! Why didn’t you tell me? We could have gotten to Dathomir in time to prevent them from taking it,” Priya said.

“It wasn’t our mission,” G said. “And your crew was not committed. We needed to sort them and integrate them with the our tried and true. I do hope you’re changing the name of the Hornet to something else.”

“G, don’t change the subject. We have friends there,” Priya said. “Family!”

“I have not forgotten them,” G said.

“Is that why you nearly collapsed on the Bridge? You saw it? You had to make a path choice?” Priya said.

“No, I nearly collapsed because Daphne is dead,” G said.

Priya sought the truth of it. She couldn’t touch it, but she believed she was dead.

“How?” Priya asked.

“She completed suicide,” G said.

Priya was affected, but she steeled herself from crying. She embraced G. “I am so sorry for your loss, brother. I should have put more effort in helping you bring her home.”

“That was my mission, not yours. She had to follow her own path,” G said. He touched the back of her head, his fingers combing through her hair. His eyes were moist, but no longer flowing. No more about this.

“Have you seen her since? Have you communicated with her?” Priya asked.

“No. I know she is one with the Force, but I am having trouble locating her,” G said. “It is my intention to find her, and ease her suffering should she still be suffering. I am still perturbed. I don’t know if I am being blocked because of a higher authority in the matter, or because she doesn’t want to see me.”

“Do you want me to try and reach her?” Priya asked.

“No. I need to understand this. It’s connected to my mission somehow,” G said.

Priya left his arms, and turned to the window overlooking the world of her rebirth. A world of mostly tundra and ice, with a small band of tropical forest circling the equator. As they passed into the shadow, the lights on the planet indicated the communities here were larger than what could be discerned on the day. The stars became more prominent as they proceeded deeper into the night side. She turned and slipped up onto the window ledge, illuminated and glowing a soft white. She reclining against the glass. She liked the way G was looking at her.

“If you’re not going to employ me straight away, I am going to liberate Dathomir,” Priya said. She saw his eyes go to her knees, before rising back to her eyes. She kicked her legs, like a child dangling wistfully from a swing.

“I will not stop you, but I am blocked from helping you,” G said. “If you do this, this will be you, not me.”

“Are you okay with that?” Priya asked.

“Of course. You’re free to pursue any endeavor you wish,” G assured her. “But I suspect, your true mission is to avoid Hux and Poe. Both the First Order and the Resistance will have

placed bounties on your head. They are not your mission. Hux and Poe both want you dead, but their worldliness are not meant to end with yours.”

“I lived with that threat of death all my life, I am not worried about them,” Priya said. “Will liberating Dathomir interfere with your needs?”

“No,” G said. “It might even help it. I want the Galaxy to think you’re in charge, and I am your puppet.”

She chuckled, almost snorted.

“Come here, puppet,” Priya said, beckoning him closer to her.

G came to her, bumping up against her knees, running his hands up her thigh, teasing at her hemline before going deeper. She opened her legs to him, and he came in closer. Her legs folded around him. When he kissed her, he took her back against the window. They took it to the level they always take it, only, without removing clothes, only opening, or shifting things that needed to be moved to make it happen, her back against the stars, his hands hooked under her knees, as they shared an alcove that was very similar to the one she use to sit and stare out into space on the Deterrent. He remained, even after they were both satisfied, holding her, her arms and legs wrapped around him, gazing into her eyes and breathing in her air, and then he was gone, folding around her and through her, leaving her even more satisfied, and then, missing him and wanting more.

G was in his body, back at the Fortress. He was in his body and aware, but also above it, in sort of a dream world. It was artificial reality of his own design which made it easier to interface with his Jedi council. There were no council members today, but Sorbus was there. And with her, a friend. A giantess. She seemed human in every respect, except for her height.

“Forgive my intrusion, G, but she has asked me to introduce her,” Sorbus said. Her feet were solid here, walking, unlike in the real world, where he experienced her as floating. Still, her hair and dress moved as if it were in fluid.

The woman with her was black, solid black, and dark, almost like night, which accented the gold makeup highlighting her eyes and lips. Her hair was gold, red, and green, twisted dreads that fell to both shoulders, hiding the straps that held her dress up. Her dress was simple, greens and yellows.

“This is Axxila,” Sorbus said.

“Axxila, like named after the planet?” G asked.

“The planet is named after me,” Axxila said. “I have had many other names over my life time. Many other peoples have inhabited me. The humans dominate this world now, and so I come to you in this form, partly because this is who I have become, but also, it will help in our interaction.”

“You are the planet, and you’re a conglomerate of all the personalities interacting on this planet,” G stated.

“You are as perceptive as I was told,” Axxila said. “You fought for me today. I am grateful.”

“I fought because I thought it would help advance my agenda, but it appears to have been in vain. I have killed today and I am sad,” G said.

“I see that,” Axxila said. “But you prevented suffering. When life suffers, I suffer. And I am not talking about the struggle of the every life of individuals that succumb to natural life events, but of the masses. Life on me has been forever altered, and this world is governed and occupied by sentient beings. There are more sentient beings on me today than there were trees in my past. Gone are the days when I was primarily plant and animal base. There are still plants

here, but all indigenous orgasm are long gone, or buried under so many layers of cities, that even if the human present left today, the surface would not recover before the sun had extinguished. I am committed to this pathway. It is consensual. You helped preserve it.”

“You didn’t come to thank me,” G said. “You spoke for the souls here, and they wanted this. They needed this, or you would not have allowed me to act. Just as Dathomir was blocking me from acting, because they need what’s coming. Maybe to sort folks, or maybe for more clarity in conscious awareness. It didn’t occur to me though, that the collective unconscious might manifest a personality capable of representing them. Oh. Is the one I seek a giant? Like you? Perhaps a planet or a star, or even a grouping of systems?”

“I am sure you will find out soon enough,” Axxila nodded. “The Emperor had her attention and the galaxy fell into darkness. Now you have it. We are worried. But I believe there is kindness in you. A fierce love for life. I think we should side with you. Hidalgo continues to be your champion. Saving his family didn’t hurt.”

“Who are ‘we’? In this context, it sounds greater than the souls that comprise your matrix,” G said.

“You are really clever. All cultures have a group soul, a consensus reality. So do the planets, the stars, even the atoms themselves, dancing through the cosmos, through you, and back. For every grouping, every coupling, every agreed interaction, a new soul emerges from the Force, with its own personality and wants and needs. This is not just a metaphor, they exist. They grow as the group grows. The more people who participate, give it love, or fear, both are equally nourishing, the more it grows. And this is why you are not about to stop the wars from coming. Too many people are devoted to the conflict. Even death is not an escape, for they only return to the consensus reality that best served them, and continue the work on that side until they return to this side and try again. I represent the people of Axxila. My constituents want you. If you die, they still want you. If you want, you’ll have place here with me.”

“You want me to serve you?” G asked.

“No, I want to serve you,” Axxila said. “I still remember the days when plants and non-sentient animals roamed in great masses across my surface. Those days are gone, but I remember them, and hold them in dreamscapes where you would be happy. I could take you there and comfort your soul. I hold within me all the collective memories of the past and present souls, all of those who visit and leave. I have all the incarnations of me, all the evolutionary stages are available. I can teach you, show you, how it is all still here, or how to touch future selves.”

“This is interesting,” G said.

“There are others who will be coming to you. Some to offer what I am offering, even more. You won’t be too hard to tempt. Some will come to destroy you. Some to aid you. The Fortress will not keep you safe, and the people here will suffer, but they will suffer gladly wanting to be a part of a greater cause,” Axxila said.

“So, you’re not asking me to leave?”

“No,” Axxila said. “But I know you are searching for your friend, and I ask that you give this up. She belongs to someone who doesn’t share the dead. She is not like me. She doesn’t give of herself freely. She only takes.”

“Why?” G asked.

“Why doesn’t she share? Probably because she thinks it makes her more powerful. This is the one you seek,” Axxila said.

“Is this a dream?” G asked.

Axxila shrugged.

“Do you know how I find this enemy?”

“I will not speak her name. She will come for you soon enough,” Axxila said.

“Your reference to her being female isn’t just convenience,” G said. “My enemy is female.”

“Female. Human. She is the mother of all humans, and well over a million years old,” Axxila said.

“That is impossible,” G said. “This is a distraction. You know where Daphne is?”

“I do, but I will not take you there,” Axxila said. “I cannot.”

“Why not?”

“For the same reasons you can’t help Dathomir,” Axxila said. “By the rules, I shouldn’t even be speaking to you, but you are now playing on a higher level. If you were to focus your energy on the galaxy, you would conquer it in a fraction of the time the Emperor did. But that’s not what you want. And we are impressed. My friends and I. You are different. We see possibilities here. And so I am reaching out to you. Let me work with you.”

“You have an agenda,” G said.

“Yes,” Axxila said.

“This is a dream,” G said.

G heard his name being called. It seemed like forever away, but he arrived instantly. He found himself awake. The audience chamber where he was meditating was empty of people. Freya was present, touching his arm.

“G, it’s time,” Freya said.

“Just a moment,” G said, closing his eyes. “Sorbus?”

“I am always here, Master,” Sorbus answered, just in his mind. She didn’t make herself visible.

“Were you in my dreamscape?” G asked.

“Not that I recall,” she responded.

“Are you friends with the planet?”

“I have been here a long time. I am one with the planet. I find her to be very nurturing,” Sorbus said. “I am grateful for her companionship. If you are quiet, you can feel her presence, the collective conscious of all who live within her sphere of influence.”

G quieted his mind. He tried to return to the dream scape, but he felt tired. And then there was the hand shaking him.

“G, according to the Corissa Directive, your thirty minutes are up,” Freya said. “We should walk, perhaps get some food.”

G opened his eyes, sighing. He got up slowly. He moved like an old person.

“Are you hurting?” Freya asked.

“No, just a little stiff. And tired,” G said. He walked beside her, and she took his arm.

“Maybe I am approaching this all wrong. Maybe the enemy isn’t a physical enemy. Maybe she is the manifestation of an archetype.”

“Human?” Freya asked.

“I hope so,” G said. “I don’t know if I could interact with another’s species archetypal energy.”

“Wouldn’t it be interesting if there is archetype that transcends species?” Freya asked.

“An expression of all the collective unconsciousness of all the species.”

G brought their walk to a halt. “Am I still dreaming?”

“I assure you, Sir, you are quite awake, and appear to be lucid,” Freya said. “Would you like to see a Doctor?”

G shrugged it off. “I am probably just worried.”

Authors note

I wonder how many people appreciate ‘wars’ suck. This is not Star Adventures, but even if it were, like the Poseidon Adventure, lots of people die, and well, tragedy and abuse abound in war. Star Wars movies have a tendency to gloss over just how bad this is, because, let’s face it, how many of us really want to go that dark? (And that’s the real reason ‘Return of the Jedi’ shows Droids being tortured; it absurd to the point of being funny, when torturing a human or an animal would be crossing a line.) We need the darkness to tell the stories about light. I mean, this isn’t Walking Dead, or Game of Thrones, but it so could be. So, though my story touches on the violence and the family drama and the trauma, and certainly a great deal more in your face about the sex part of life, I have still endeavored to keep the characters complex and believable within the context of a Star Wars universe, even if my story is doomed to be relegated to that triple x universe that few people want to discuss in public, but may have actually watched. The difference, hopefully, is that this is not just a porno parody, but has some substance. Then again, I love the movie “Zack and Miri Make a Porno,” and it makes you wonder, did Lucas sign off on that? Or maybe Star Wars is now such a strong part of our everyday life, there is no way to ‘tease’ out the sexual component. We are sexual beings. Even before we are sexual beings, that energy is moving us, and things we watched before puberty end of impacting us heavily, and I am quite confident no one saw the Leah BDSM thing becoming ‘the’ thing, or Lucas may have re-thought the thing.

That said, there is a Leah thing in here which kind of parallels the discussion of identity rights. As you know, our love has died. And for a moment, there was a negotiation for her digital image. I am glad that the estate declined the offer. And, strangely sad. I don’t want a new actress to take over the role. Not yet. Maybe 20 years from now when they make a new Star Wars for my grandkids. May I live so long.



What’s up with the Rumi quotes? If you watched the Clone Wars, you will have noticed each episode opening with a maxim. I remember being irritated by them, and as I write this, I can’t think of one that stood out and or that was relevant to the episode; they all sounded trite. But the idea behind it, I liked that. And I wonder, given the number of good writers that are out there, of which I don’t include myself, why weren’t the scripts for the Clone Wars better? Shouldn’t paid professionals do better than some hack writing fan fiction? (And not just me. There are some great fan fiction out there. (I mean, no one saw ‘Fifty Shades of Gray’ going Hollywood, and it isn’t even written all that well! (But I love the fact her fan fiction blew up in the gatekeepers of literature’s faces.))) The whole point of doing a cartoon is the freedom to explore things that might be too hard to capture in live action. And how many times do we have to repeat lines from the original movies? I lost count of how many times someone said, “I have a bad feeling about this.” In Timothy Zahn’s book episode seven, how many times did he write ‘mentally cross their fingers’?! And I like Timothy and endorse his books, and Lord knows my books are replete with mistakes, especially grammar, but these guys, the ‘professionals,’ have editors, and the TV people have committees, right? (Remember the committee the canceled firefly? OMG, who makes these calls, but then lets crap get aired?) Sorry, rambling, but hey, these are my notes! Where was I? Rumi! You may ask yourself, why start with quotes. (I think they were all Rumi, but if not, tell me. (And if you’re not familiar with Rumi, well read more poetry.)) Well, I was

thinking of who P G Waycaster should evolve into, and I was thinking mystic is appropriate, and Rumi just struck me as the one. There are even Rumi quote buried into the text. And I know Lucas had a connection to Joseph Campbell, so why has the mystic side of the Force been better thought out? Was the midichlorians just an example of Lucas' own internal struggle between the mysticism and the science? That might be just human, and forgivable.

PS

Credit and shout out to SW RP "Chaos" for the unsanctioned use of the Samhein-class Stealth Freighter, which is their property, and if this should ever become published, they will certainly need to be compensated or this ship design and name changed... I am merely, at this point, trying to bridge and merge multiple SW concepts.