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Accepting the Shadows of the Past

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Luke sat up in his bed with a start, remnants of a dream fading as he did so. Feeling the light breeze brush against his bare arms and chest, he instantly remembered that he was on Endor and not some Alliance ship or base. Although Endor had practically become a base since the defeat of the Empire and the death of Palpatine. Wondering what had woken him, bits and pieces of the dream floated back into his mind and he quickly realized that it had been more of a nightmare than a dream. He'd been having nightmares ever since the evening of the Rebel victory and Vader's death. His father's death. The mere thought of Anakin's redemption and subsequent death still saddened him deeply.

Finally opening his eyes, Luke groaned as he instantly closed them once more and fell back onto the small bed the Ewoks had provided even as he brought his arm over his face to shield his eyes from the light. Shivering as he felt a strange tingling feeling in the Force he realized that he must have forgotten to turn off the light Wedge had brought to his room from the survival pack of his X-wing. He'd have to recharge the thing before he returned it.

Moving his arm, Luke slowly opened his eyes to let them adjust to the light. They were only half open when he bolted upright in his bed once more. The blue light was a dead giveaway that the light in his room wasn't coming from the lamp Wedge had leant him. Indeed, he had seen this particular glow only a few times before.

"Who?" Luke questioned as he blinked.

"It's me, Son," a soft but deep and rich voice replied.

"Father," Luke said as his eyes adjusted and he smiled at the glowing, ghost-like image of his father which was standing in the middle of his room. "How long have you been here?"

"Only a short while," Anakin informed his son with a smile.

"You should have woken me immediately," Luke said as he swung his legs over the side of the bed.

"I was enjoying watching you sleep," Anakin replied as he sat down on the only chair in the room.

"Oh," Luke responded, not sure how to reply to that. "Is something wrong?"

"No," Anakin stated. "I simply came to discuss a few things with you."

"Okay," Luke responded, relieved that nothing was wrong. "Tell me, what are you now exactly? I mean, I know that physically you're dead, and yet you're still here. How does that work?"

"Once a Force sensitive individual dies, their spirits become one with the Force," Anakin explained, smiling sadly as he thought back to when Obi-Wan had taught him these lessons after Qui-Gon's death. "Once this happens it is possible for the person to appear to other Force sensitive individuals for a few more years."

"And then what happens?" Luke inquired, eagerly taking in this new knowledge.

"No one is sure," Anakin stated. "After all, there is no one who has experienced it that can tell us. The Jedi Masters of the past believed that the person so totally merges with the Force that they can no longer communicate individually. Several Jedi have felt the presence of comrades after they no longer appear visually."

"You said this happens to Force sensitive individuals," Luke began. "Does this mean that Palpatine is like you are now?" he continued, shivering at the thought.

"No," Anakin replied. "Sith tend to vanish after their death and the Jedi believed that their spirits are consumed by the Dark Side. Which brings me round to one of the things I wanted to do. I never did get to thank you for saving me."

"There was nothing else I could do," Luke said, still nervous about the events that had taken place on board the second Death Star. "And you saved me to."

He had come so close to falling to the Dark Side that it still bothered him immensely. Upon returning he had told only Leia exactly what had transpired on board the Death Star. No one else knew, not Han, and not the Alliance High Command. Both had tried to pry it out of him, but he had refused to budge. The things that had occurred in the throne room during the Battle of Endor had been personal and he needed time to sort through his emotions before telling the galaxy that he, and Leia, were actually the children of Darth Vader. Han had let the matter drop when he had seen how important it was to both him and Leia that it remain a secret for a while longer. The man hadn't liked it, but he understood and respected their wishes.

The Alliance High Command had been a different matter altogether as they had wanted the details on what had happened and why he had left the shield team. General Madine had even hinted at the fact that his actions, from what they knew, bordered on betrayal. Seeing no other way out, he and Leia had informed them of the fact that they were twins. The news had shocked the members of the Council, but they had finally decided to give him some more time before his debriefing when Leia had sworn that what had transpired couldn't harm the Alliance.

"Still," Anakin replied, bringing Luke back to the present. "If you hadn't done anything then I might never have been able to break away from the Darkness."

Even as he smiled, Luke felt a shiver make its way up his spine. The Darkness. He had come so close to falling himself. Indeed, he had not only used the Dark Side to fight his father, but he had also ruthlessly cut off his father's hand. Feeling his smile fade, he tried to block out the thoughts of what could have been if he hadn't realized what was happening to him before it was too late. But even as he did that, he was unable to push aside the fear of the fact that he could still turn to the Dark Side. Who knew when he would encounter it again? In Palpatine's throne room he had known that the Emperor and Vader wanted him to turn. He had known and had taken the necessary steps to prevent it from happening and yet he had very nearly been turned. What would happen if he wasn't prepared? Would he turn?

"Luke," Anakin said firmly as he read his son's thoughts. "The Dark Side is always present, that is an unchangeable fact. The Dark Side is a part of the Force as much as the Light Side is. You stand a much better chance of not falling than most of the Jedi of the Old Republic did."

"How is that?" Luke inquired as he studied the ghost-like appearance that was his father. Although he couldn't see the color of his hair, he found a striking resemblance between Anakin's features and his own. Had Vader not worn a mask, then there would have been no missing their relationship.

"The Jedi, although trained more completely in the ways of the Light than you, did not have the experience you now possess," Anakin explained. "And, although they didn't know it until it was nearly too late, there were constantly Sith present. Now that is not so, for the first time since the rise of the Jedi and the Sith, there are no more living Sith Lords. Before there were always two, and during the Sith Wars much more."

"Oh," Luke said as he took in this information. "Can you still read my mind?"

"Only because you let me," Anakin informed him as he smiled faintly.

"I let you?" Luke wondered, not remembering having done that.

"Yes," Anakin confirmed, feeling a stab of pain, but hiding it. "When you accepted me, you subconsciously opened your mind to me. If you don't want this than you can simply close me off once more."

"Oh," Luke replied as he reached out and saw that his father was correct. When he left the link open he felt relief rolling off of his father and realized that the link worked both ways. The emotion itself, however, puzzled him. "Father, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," Anakin stated as a smile graced his lips. "I just thought you were going to shut me out for a moment. That was another thing I needed to say. Thank you for believing in me."

"No, thank you for being there when I needed you most," Luke responded, uncomfortable with the praise he had always desired.

"But that's just it," Anakin declared as his face darkened and guilt leaked into his voice. "I wasn't there when you or your sister needed me. Instead I was off making your lives and those of countless people in the galaxy miserable."

"Father. . ." Luke began, unsure of what to say as the things his father had done as Vader couldn't simply be brushed aside, nor could he simply forget the yearning and emptiness he had felt for years on Tatooine. As an uncomfortable silence fell between them, Luke instinctively reached out to place a hand on his father's shoulder, only remembering that he was a vision-like apparition when his hand went through him, and he felt a tingling sensation. "Whoa!" Luke exclaimed, startled, as he pulled his hand back, causing a chuckle to escape his father's lips.

"I'm sorry," Anakin finally whispered. "I didn't come here to spoil your evening. I came to see if you had any questions you wanted answered."

"Well, I have a few," Luke admitted before he hesitated, wondering if the questions would bring back any bad memories for his father or not.

"Don't worry about that," Anakin stated, sensing his son's thoughts. "You deserve answers."

"Thanks," Luke said with a smile as he tried to decide what question to ask first, he had so many. "Who was my mother? Leia vaguely remembers her, but only images and emotions."

"Leia?" Anakin questioned and shook his head when his son nodded. "So that's where your mother hid; Alderaan. Anyway, about her. Her name was Amidala and she was from the planet Naboo."

"Naboo," Luke repeated, searching his memory for where he had heard that name before. "Wasn't Palpatine also from there?"

"Yes," Anakin confirmed. "Palpatine was the Senator of Naboo and Amidala was the Queen. He had to call your mother '*your majesty*' for years."

"Queen?" Luke inquired, stunned even as he tried to picture Palpatine acting inferior to anyone, let alone his own mother. "And why do you say of '*the Naboo*'? Is there another race on the planet?"

"Naboo's government was slightly different from most. They had an elected monarchy," Anakin explained as old memories he'd suppressed for years surfaced once more. "Your mother was first elected Princess of Theed, their capitol, at the age of twelve, and then Queen at the age of fourteen."

Whistling, Luke shook his head in amazement. "I guess that political leadership runs down the female side of the family. What with Leia having been the youngest Senator ever at the age of eighteen."

"True," Anakin agreed as pride shone bright in his eyes. "Have you talked with her yet?"

"Yes," Luke said as he looked at the floor, suddenly finding it extremely fascinating. "She said that what you did on board the second Death Star doesn't mean anything. She's glad you did what you did there. . . but. . . it's simply that. . . that. . ."

"Hey, its okay," Anakin hurriedly said as he reached out to touch Luke, but stopped his hand just short of doing so, knowing that it was no use. It deeply saddened him that he couldn't touch his boy to comfort him. He could only hope that the gesture and the intention behind it was enough for his son as it was all he could do now. "I understand. After all that transpired between us I know why she isn't willing to look past what I did and either forgive or accept me. That you do, after what I did to you, is already a great gift and more than I would have imaged or deserve."

"I love you, Father," Luke suddenly declared as he looked up at the man who had sired him.

"And I love you, Son," Anakin responded. "And you're right, there were also the Gungans."

"What?" Luke inquired, confused.

"You asked whether or not there was another race on Naboo," Anakin explained. "And there was one. The Gungans."

"Oh," Luke replied. "What did she look and act like? Mother, I mean."

"A lot like Leia, actually," Anakin stated. "Brown hair, brown eyes, a fiery temper and determination. But, beneath it all, great compassion and understanding. She was a strong woman and she looked like an angel," he continued as his mind strolled back to that faithful day in Watto's shop when he had first seen and talked with his future wife. "I fell in love with her the moment I saw laid eyes on her. Puppy love, true, but I was only nine at the time and she fourteen. However, over the years, that worship-like love grew and changed."

Observing his father, Luke could see fondness on his face and feel the love that he had felt for Amidala over their link.

"I built C-3PO," Anakin suddenly announced as he remembered how the droid had sometimes annoyed his wife.

"What?" Luke exclaimed, startled and stunned. "You built him?"

"Yes," Anakin confirmed before his humor fled and the smile was wiped from his face as surely as if it had never been. "I built him for your grandmother, Shmi Skywalker, to help her with her work. You see, we were slaves."

"Slaves?" Luke demanded, aghast. "But I thought that the Old Republic didn't have slavery."

"Your mother was just as astonished when she learned of it," Anakin replied. "In the Republic itself there was no slavery, but outside of it there was. And since Tatooine and several other Outer Rim Territory planets weren't in the Republic, they did have slavery. Anyway, one day, Obi-Wan, his master Qui-Gon Jinn, your mother, and several others got stranded on Tatooine. While helping them get the necessary parts to repair their ship, Qui-Gon sensed my potential and managed to free me in order to take me back to Coruscant to be trained."

"Tatooine," Luke said softly. "I assume its more than simple coincidence that I was raised there?"

"Yes," Anakin confirmed. "Obi-Wan knew I hated the planet, thus it wasn't likely that I would return there. Which made it one of the safer places to hide you."

"Well, that explains that," Luke stated before he sensed a disturbance ripple through the Force. Reaching out he found that it was Leia who was subconsciously sending them as she was trapped in a nightmare. Giving her mind a small nudge, Luke gently awakened her.

"I think you'd better go to her," Anakin suggested as he sensed his daughter's distress as she got up.

"Yeah," Luke agreed reluctantly, feeling torn. On the one hand he wanted to make sure his sister was all right, but on the other hand he didn't want to cut short his time with his father.

"We can talk more later," Anakin reassured his son.

"Great," Luke said as he got to his feet and smiled at the older man. "I'll see you later than."

"Indeed," Anakin replied before he faded into the Force.

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Breathing deeply, Leia stepped out onto the small balcony adjoining the room she and Han had been given by the Ewoks. Another nightmare. She'd had yet another nightmare. She'd been having nightmares ever since Alderaan's destruction and then the events which had taken place on Bespin, but they had seemed to stop after Han's rescue. But now they had started once more and she could guess why.

Vader. Ever since Luke had told her the truth about her heritage she had been unable to think of anything else once the battle was over. Even during the battle it had been hard to keep herself focused, which was probably why she had been shot in the arm by that stormtrooper. But the worst part of all was the fact that Luke wanted her to accept Vader, or Anakin as he insisted on calling him, as her father and perhaps even forget all that he had done. However she steadfastly refused to even think of doing either.

Bail Organa was her father, he had raised her and provided her with everything she had needed. He had been there when she needed him and he had always been a steady pillar of comfort and support. It had been he who had taught her all that she knew, all the values that she believed in and had fought for. Vader had done nothing but bring her pain and to take away that which she loved. So what if he had been her biological father? He was a monster and she would never acknowledge nor accept him.

But the look Luke had given her when she had voiced this opinion had caused her to pause while the actual look itself had eaten away at her heart. Suddenly, Luke had looked like a small boy who had just learned that his hero wasn't infallible. It had been the first time in months that Luke had made her think of a young child. Before Bespin his manner and innocence had been that of a child, after the ordeal on Cloud City, however, all that had vanished without a trace and

had been replaced by a realism and knowledge of life's often cruel twists. If she hadn't been mourning so for Han, she probably would have attempted to get him to talk about what had happened between him and Vader instead of letting him keep it all in. In hindsight, however, Leia knew that even if she had tried, she probably wouldn't have gotten Luke to talk about it. Considering just what he had learned he would have probably felt threatened to talk for she knew that at the time he did not know about their relationship yet.

Leia was pretty sure, however, that it was Luke's urging that prevented her from simply putting the whole matter with Vader behind her and going on with her life. Why couldn't he just leave her alone? Whatever he said wasn't going to change her mind, wasn't going to make her accept the fact that Vader was her father. He was a monster. Why couldn't he just accept her opinion and leave it at that?

Even as the questions raced across her mind, Leia knew the answer. Luke didn't understand. He had never had a father figure in his life. Sure, he had had Owen Lars, but she knew that while Luke liked and respected the man, he wasn't what Bail Organa had been to her. He hadn't been a father; he had been an uncle. This fact had always left Luke looking for more, for something to fill the void that he felt in his heart and she knew that it was probably this yearning that had caused him to accept Vader despite all that he had done.

To be honest, she couldn't truly know if Darth Vader had been redeemed from the Dark Side or not. Sure, Luke swore to the fact that he had, but there was the possibility that his longing for his father had caused him to misinterpret the Dark Lord's actions. For all she knew, Vader could have killed Palpatine simply because he saw the perfect opportunity to do so and to gain his son's trust and loyalty at the same time. Perhaps he had planned to turn Luke to the Dark Side. Indeed, he could have had endless motivations in mind when he had saved Luke. Who knew what they were? If he hadn't been fatally injured by Palpatine, countless things could have happened.

Descending the stairs that led from the bedroom she and Han had been given, Leia walked down to where she and Luke had talked before he had departed to seek out Vader. Sitting down on the railing she found herself unable to pull her mind away from the Dark Lord. From the moment she had first laid eyes on him at court she had known that he was Evil. She hadn't needed anything else to prove to her all that her father had told her, the aura of power and Evil had seemed to roll off of him in waves. Her hatred of him and what he stood for had only been strengthened as she learned of the acts he committed in the name of the Empire.

True, it had been Grand Moff Tarkin who had ordered the destruction of Alderaan, but the Sith Lord had done nothing to stop it; to prevent it. And it had been Vader who tortured her both onboard the first Death Star and on Bespin. Not to mention what he had done to the others and how he had frozen Han in

carbonite. Indeed, it was he more than any other single person in the Empire that had brought her all the pain she had felt over the years. How Luke could so easily look past all that, and all that Vader had done to him, was beyond her. If she didn't know any better she'd think that he was an Imperial.

"Having trouble sleeping?" Luke inquired causing her to jump to her feet as she turned to him. "Sorry," he quickly apologized.

"That's okay," Leia replied as she looked at her brother, not sure whether she was relieved or annoyed to see him. "And yes, I'm having nightmares again. How about you? Nightmares woke you too?"

"Yes and no," Luke responded with a smile as he moved to stand next to her. "I'm having nightmares, but that isn't the reason I'm awake now."

"Oh?" Leia began curiously. "And why are you awake?"

"I was talking with Father," Luke stated, watching his sister carefully as he said this.

"Vader?" Leia questioned, unable to hide her anger even as panic began to rise in her chest. "I thought you said he was dead. How can you be talking with him if he's dead? Or is he still alive?"

"No, he's dead," Luke confirmed and flinched before looking away when he both saw and felt his twin's relief.

"Luke. . ." Leia began, unsure of what to say to his obvious pain at her reaction. She wanted so much to say something that would comfort him, but she'd have to lie in order to get the words right out and he'd pick up on that straight away.

'Just like Vader did,' a small voice in the back of Leia's mind whispered. Briefly she froze in place at the thought. If she looked at it like that, than there were a lot of similarities between Luke and Vader. Not wanting to go down that path, she shoved the very idea aside. There was no way that Luke was like Vader. He was kind, compassionate, understanding, and had a big heart (sometimes too big for his own good), all things that Vader was not.

"That's where you're wrong, Leia," Luke declared as he turned to face her and then blinked, realizing that he had said those exact same words to her several days ago just before he had left. "Darth Vader may not have been all of those things, but Anakin Skywalker was. Where do you think I got those traits from? I didn't exactly pull them out of thin air."

"What. . . ?" Leia questioned before she realized what he was talking about. "Could you stay out of my mind please?"

"I'm not in your mind," Luke replied as he realized what she meant. "You're simply projecting your thoughts and feelings into the Force. I can't help but hear and feel them. You're like an open datapad and that is due to your own potential in the Force."

"Oh," Leia said, not sure how to react to that. "How do I prevent this from happening? The projection?"

"I'm not sure," Luke stated honestly. "Other than training you as a Jedi."

"You mean you will simply be able to tell whatever I'm feeling or thinking whenever you're near me?" Leia demanded, not liking the idea at all.

"No, no," Luke hurriedly assured her. "I am only aware of your more focused thoughts, the ones about me that you have when I'm around. You seem to be subconsciously aiming them at me."

"Oh, I can't say I understand," Leia began. "But I'm glad that its not everything. I do, after all, like to have some privacy."

"Anyway, Father came to see whether or not I had any questions for him," Luke said, hoping to steer the topic of conversation back to what they had originally been talking about.

"And?" Leia prompted, not really interested but not wanting to hurt him anymore. He obviously wanted to talk about it with someone and right now she was the only one he trusted enough. After all, it had been Luke who had spent hours with her after Han had been frozen in carbonite. She couldn't even remember the number of times he had simply held her and comforted her while she had cried.

"Well, first off, he wanted to thank me," Luke said as he looked into the dark forest, suddenly wanting to take a walk and simply relax. "He also told me about mother and grandmother."

"What?" Leia asked, instantly interested. Although she didn't want anything to do with her father, her mother was another matter all together. The memories of her true mother alone were enough to make her want to know more. She had been so beautiful and kind.

"This may take a while," Luke stated as he turned to look at his sister, hearing the sudden interest in her voice. "Why don't we go take a walk?" he suggested.

"Isn't it dangerous at night?"

"Yes," Luke admitted before he smiled slyly. "But that's never stopped us before, now has it?"

"No," Leia agreed as she followed him to the ladder that would bring them to the forest floor even as she looked at his belt and saw the lightsaber hanging there. Seeing it, she knew that neither of them would be in any true danger as there was no night creature prowling the forest that was nearly as dangerous as Vader had been. "So tell me."

"Well, it seems that mother was a lot like you. . ." Luke began as he started walking into the undergrowth.

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"What about grandfather?" Leia inquired a while later as Luke finished telling her about Shmi.

"I don't know," Luke admitted. "Father didn't mention his own father at all. Funny that I didn't pick up on that at the time."

"Maybe he didn't want to talk about it," Leia offered as she shivered at the thought that entered her mind. "Grandmother was a slave after all. . ."

Looking to Leia, Luke felt his eyes open wide with disgust as he saw where she was heading. "Perhaps," he said, not wanting to even think about that particular possibility.

"Where are we?" Leia finally questioned, breaking the uneasy silence as she looked around.

"Huh?" Luke asked before he realized that he had unknowingly been leading his twin as they walked. "I'm not sure," he admitted as he looked around before he suddenly caught sight of a familiar dead tree which had been stripped of its bark. "Take that back, I do know where we are."

"Where?" Leia pressed when she saw that her brother wasn't about to give anymore explanation.

"We're where I. . ." Luke began before he hesitated, pain evident in his voice, and reached for her hand. "Come, I'll show you where we are."

"Luke, are you okay?" Leia inquired as she followed him. "Luke?" she continued when he didn't respond. Reaching the edge of a clearing she followed his gaze to the middle of the open space. Seeing what he was looking at, she felt her breath catch in her throat, wondering if the black ash was what she thought it was. Luke hadn't told her what he had done with Vader's body and now that she

thought about it she doubted that he would simply have left it behind on the Death Star.

"Master Yoda once told me that Jedi were cremated," Luke said, forcing the words past the lump that had suddenly formed in his throat. "It seemed only right that I do the same for Father."

Biting back the comment that came to her tongue, Leia turned to study her twin's face. "What is it?" she demanded as she momentarily saw a flash of fear cross his face only to be drowned out by his grief.

"What do you mean?" Luke nearly shouted, angry that she didn't seem to care less about her own father's death. "I'm looking at all that remains of my father and you ask me what's wrong?!"

"Luke," Leia replied even as she felt surprised and hurt at his reaction. Did he really think that simply because she didn't feel the way he did that she couldn't see that he was hurting? "I didn't mean it that way. I want to know what else is bothering you as I know that there's something else eating away at you."

"Sorry," Luke whispered softly before he caught sight of a log a few paces to the right. Walking over to it he seated himself.

"Luke?" Leia pressed as she too sat down.

"You're right," Luke stated. "Ever since the Battle of Endor, I've been. . ."

"Been what?"

"Been afraid," Luke told her, as he looked up at the sky which was just starting to lighten as dawn approached.

"Afraid?" Leia repeated, surprised. This was the last thing she had expected him to say.

"Yes," Luke confirmed. "The events which transpired in Palpatine's throne room only showed me how truly powerful the Dark Side actually is. I. . . I nearly turned, Leia, and it keeps bothering me. I went up there prepared, knowing what Vader and Palpatine would try to do to me, and yet they nearly succeeded. What will happen if I'm not prepared? I. . . I just don't know what to do."

"Oh, Luke," Leia said sympathetically as she reached out and pulled her twin into an embrace. "I can't say that I know anything of the Dark Side, but. . ." she began as she desperately searched for something to lay his worries to rest, for something to say. Ironic how she could give speeches before the entire Senate and then not know what to say when it came to comforting her own brother. "But

aren't you more prepared for the Dark Side now? You have fought it off once, surely that counts for something."

"That's more or less what Father said," Luke declared as he placed his head on her shoulder, breathing in the soft fragrance of the perfume she wore. It only served to remind him once more that this was his sister, his twin; someone whom he could trust. True, he had trusted her before he had learned of their relationship, but the fact that they were related by blood had only strengthened that bond and caused it to grow stronger than that of any friendship.

"Well. . . he would know what he's talking about. . . wouldn't he?" Leia commented, knowing that was probably the best way to get him to release his groundless fears. For she knew in her heart that no matter how bad the Dark Side was that Luke couldn't turn. From what she had seen the Dark Side was everything he was not, besides he had already rebuffed their offers when his father was one of those tempting him to turn. How could he possibly turn if his father hadn't managed that feat? "Besides, Luke, you can't live in fear of what can be for the rest of your life. You've defeated that Darkness once, you can do it again. You need to believe in yourself or you'll get nowhere. Indeed, where would we be if we all worried about what ifs? I'm not saying that you should simply forget about the Dark Side and all that it can do to a person, but don't spend the rest of your life worrying about it either. Just remember that it's out there, what it can do, and why you don't want to turn. But don't let it occupy your every waking moment for, if you do, then you are letting it dominate your life. You are letting it win."

Slowly, Luke lifted his head from his sister's shoulder and looked at her face. Giving her a light probe with the Force, he found that while she didn't believe what she had said about Anakin, and that her thoughts on the Dark Side were wrong, she meant every word about living in fear of the Darkness. And, he had to admit, she was right. Indeed, where had he gotten by worrying over what could be in the past few days? Nowhere. Even as he saw the logic of what Leia was saying, he couldn't help but think back to what had happened when he had attacked his father. The power and strength that he had summoned from the Dark Side to use in battle had come so easily.

"Luke," Leia said, drawing his attention once more as she saw doubt and fear begin to swirl in the depths of his ice-blue eyes once more, clouding them and dimming the normally bright light that shone within them. "Think of piloting. Every time, and especially during the Battle of Yavin, you risk your life when you climb into the cockpit of your X-wing and lift off. And yet, despite this obvious and very real danger, you and countless other pilots did it on a constant basis. You guys didn't let the deaths that resulted from practically every mission pull you down. Instead you stood up and fought it, not letting the Empire dominate you."

"The Dark Side can hardly be compared to combat piloting," Luke countered even as he felt his fears begin to fade.

"No, but they both have risks involved," Leia stated. "In fact the risks of dying during a battle were far greater than you turning Dark Side and you never hesitated to go up and fight the Empire instead of letting it drive you into hiding. Its the same with the Dark Side, its a risk that is present, but letting it dominate your life would be like going into hiding from the Empire and looking over your shoulder for the rest of your life wondering if you are truly safe."

Luke opened his mouth to protest, but found that nothing came out. Although Leia didn't know the true strength of the Dark Side, nor how seductive and tempting it could be, her reasoning was correct. If he continued the way he was going, he would let the Dark Side control him even while he didn't turn. A slight shiver ran up his spine at the thought, but he quickly dismissed it.

"Thanks," Luke finally said aloud and received a dazzling smile from his sister in return. "That really helps."

"Good," Leia declared. "Glad that I could be of assistance."

"I'm glad for it too," Luke stated before he grew serious once more. "Now it's my turn to help you."

"Help me?" Leia repeated. "I wasn't aware that I needed any helping."

"Neither was I," Luke countered before he took a deep breath. "It's about Father."

"What about him?" Leia demanded as her smile instantly faded at the sudden turn the conversation had taken. "I don't need any help there. I've got my mind all made up already."

"Do you?" Luke questioned. "Then why do you still have nightmares like the one you had tonight? From what I sensed it was pretty bad when I woke you and you were far from waking up by yourself."

"The nightmares come from you bringing up the subject the whole time," Leia stated. "If you would drop the matter then I wouldn't be getting reminded of that Sith the whole time and I would be able to forget it all and the nightmares would stop."

"I doubt that," Luke said. "If you were so sure of yourself you'd simply be able to put it behind you, reminders or not. After all, you managed to put it all behind you before and then he was still alive and an ever present threat. Now Vader is dead and can no longer harm you in anyway. If you were truly over it then you wouldn't

be plagued by nightmares. The topic is bothering you even if you are not consciously aware of it."

"That is not true," Leia argued. "My mind is made up on the matter."

"Well, if you're so sure, then you wouldn't mind talking with Father, would you?" Luke asked as an idea came to him.

"He's dead," Leia said as she felt slight fear come alive in her breast. "I can't talk with him."

"Yes you can," Luke stated. "You have the Force and while you have no training I'm sure that with a little help from me you'd be able to see Father as well. Why not try it? After all, if your mind is made up it can't do any harm."

Leia closed her eyes as she realized that there was no way out of this matter. Luke was correct, but why did he have to push so? But if this talk could get him to drop the matter once and for all, than so be it. "Very well," she said aloud. "But only for a short while."

"Great," Luke replied enthusiastically and Leia couldn't help but notice the expectation that shone bright in his eyes. This was more like the Luke she had met and had adored. This was the Luke from before Bespin. It was ironic how Vader had been responsible for both taking away and replacing that light she so loved in her brother.

'Father?' Luke sent out, not sure how one established contact with the apparitions of dead Jedi. 'Father are you there? Leia wishes to talk with you, as do I. Father?'

"I am here, Luke," Anakin said as he appeared before them.

"Oh my!" Leia exclaimed as she caught sight of the tall glowing blue holo-like image before her. "Vader?"

"Anakin," Luke corrected as he saw his father flinch at the name his twin used. "It's Anakin Skywalker, Leia."

"Anakin Skywalker was the name of the man my mother married," Leia declared as she found herself fascinated by the physical resemblance between the image before her and her brother. "Not him."

"Leia, Leia," Anakin said, his voice raw with grief and pain. "You are so like your mother at times. I can understand why you can not forgive nor accept me after all that I have done to you while I was Darth Vader. However, I hope that you will let me apologize."

"Why should I?" Leia snapped and shook off the hand Luke placed on her shoulder as she got to her feet. "Why should I sit here and listen to your useless apologies after all that you've done to me?"

"You don't have to," Anakin responded, feeling pain tear through him at the startled look his words placed on his daughter's face. That expression alone showed how demanding and uncompassionate he had been during the time he had been Vader. "I can't make you do anything, Leia, I can only ask that you listen."

"Please," Luke pleaded as he looked at his twin. "Just listen?"

"All right," Leia replied as she seated herself next to Luke once more. "I'll listen, but this had better be worth it."

"Thank you," Anakin said after he sighed with relief. "You do not know how much this chance means to me. As I told Luke earlier I know why it is that you can not look past what I did and either forgive or accept me, I have done nothing to deserve that. That Luke can accept me is a gift for which I am eternally grateful."

Hearing this, Leia couldn't help but feel confusion begin to make its way into her mind. Sure, she had expected Vader to sound very genuine in whatever he said as he had always been extremely good with words when he wanted to be, but this went a little beyond her expectations. And the emotion behind the words was alien to her as well. She had never heard any other emotion coming from the Dark Lord but anger and hatred. Her immediate response was to think that he was simply trying to manipulate her into believing what he wanted her to believe, but part of her rejected that idea. What did he possibly stand to gain through doing that? He was physically dead!

"Although I know that I can not undo all the pain that I've caused you in the past, I want to say I'm sorry," Anakin continued as he seated himself on a rock situated close enough so that he could look at his children, but far enough so that his daughter wasn't uncomfortable.

"You're sorry?!" Leia sputtered as her anger began to grow within her. "After all that you've done you're sorry?! How dare you?!"

"Leia," Luke said, trying to calm his sister by putting a hand on her shoulder. "Let him finish."

"Stay out of this, brother," Leia snapped as she briefly looked at him before turning her attention back to Vader and sent him a hate filled glare.

"I know that '*I'm sorrys*' don't always mean a lot, but it's the truth and I don't know how else to put it," Anakin stated as he lowered his eyes, unable to take the accusing look from his daughter. "If there was anyway for me to undo all that I've done to you and the rest of the people of the galaxy than, believe me, I would have done it already no matter the price. But the fact of the matter is that I can't do anything to change what has happened. Indeed, in my current state I can't even try make up for some of the suffering I caused."

"That's not true, Father," Luke cut in, unable to take the pain that was washing off of his father. "You have done something to make up for it. You killed Palpatine and you saved me. Those facts might not erase that which is done, but in killing Palpatine you freed the galaxy from his tyranny. And I know that I will never forget your saving me."

"Too little, too late," Anakin replied harshly. "If only I had never fallen for Palpatine's lies in the first place then the Empire might never have risen."

"Wouldn't the Emperor simply have gotten himself another apprentice?" Luke questioned.

"Perhaps," Anakin said. "However there is the possibility that he would have looked and not found one."

Listening to Luke and Vader speak, Leia frowned. What Vader was saying sounded so sincere, as if it truly came from his heart. But how could that be? The Vader she had known had been cold and seemingly heartless even if he had seemed to have a sense of honor at times. Could it be that Luke was right; that Vader had truly changed? But how could that be? Could people truly change to such a great extent?

The only problem with saying 'no' to that last question was that it would mean that Vader, even as Anakin, had never been very good to begin with and that didn't seem to fit with what she knew of her mother. There was no way that Amidala would have fallen for a man who was even remotely as cold as Vader had been. Besides, her mother had been beside herself with grief in all the memories she had of her. So, was it possible that Vader had turned back in Anakin just as Anakin Skywalker had once transformed into Darth Vader? Was it possible for a Sith to become a Jedi? Or was it a one way process?

"Leia," Anakin said, drawing her attention back to him. "I can't think of any other way to express my remorse at all that has taken place between us and if you wish never to see me again I will not only understand, but shall honor your request. I would only ask one more thing of you. Could you give Captain Solo--"

"General Solo," Leia automatically corrected him.

"Been promoted," Anakin responded with a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. "Anyway, could you please give General Solo my humble apologies?"

"I will," Leia promised, ignoring Luke's look of surprise as she wrestled with another decision. She was beginning to think that her brother had been correct in saying that she hadn't fully made up her mind about her refusal to accept Vader as her father. "Although somehow I doubt that he'll believe me."

"I can understand that," Anakin replied. "And what of you? Do I get permission to come see you again or not?"

Looking at Vader, or was it Anakin?, Leia paused. Did she want to see this ghost-like image again? The answer to that question rested on whether or not she accepted him as her father. From the memories of how sad her mother had been at his loss to the Dark Side she knew that he must once have been a terrific man. Could she risk accepting him when there was still the very real possibility that Vader had not turned back into Anakin? But could she live with saying no now but never knowing for sure? And then there was the fact that Luke clearly trusted him. But what of all that he had done to her and others?

Taking a deep breath, she closed her eyes even as she reached up with her hands to rub her forehead. It wasn't like she wasn't used to making enormous decisions, indeed she had made many of them where men's lives hung in the balance, but none had ever been so personal. None except for the decision Tarkin had forced her to make on board the first Death Star. However then she had found an escape, an easy way out, or at least so she had thought. Pushing all thoughts from her mind, she concentrated on her emotions and her instincts, they had never let her down in the past and with what Luke had told her about her Force potential she was beginning to understand why.

"I can not forgive you for what you've done," Leia began, wincing at the pain filled expression that she saw flash across Anakin's face before it vanished and was replaced by a look of resignation. "However, I can accept you. . . Father."

It took a moment for Leia's words to sink in, but once they did so Luke felt joy sweep through his entire being as he embraced his sister even as he felt astonished relief flood him over his link with his father.

"Thank you," Anakin stated as Leia thought she could detect tears in his eyes. "Thank you, my daughter. Your acceptance means more to me than you can ever know."

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"Jedi Skywalker," Mon Mothma greeted Luke as he entered the conference room onboard the headquarters frigate where the Alliance High Command was

gathered. "Princess Leia has informed us that you are now ready to debrief us on what you did after you left the rest of the shield generator team on Endor."

"I am," Luke confirmed confidently.

After he and Leia had finished their conversation with Anakin they had gone in search for Han who had just woken up and was looking for them. Pulling him aside they had quickly told him the truth of their heritage and what had transpired in the throne room on board the Death Star. Needless to say, Han had been shocked and slightly disgusted when he had learned of their relationship to Vader.

As soon as they had told him the truth he had gone off to the *Falcon* saying that he needed time to think things over. Although Leia had feared that he might leave her, Luke had known that he wouldn't. The newly promoted General simply needed time to process what he learned and to come to terms with it, but he had known that there was no way that the Corellian would let it end his relationship with Leia. They simply loved each other too much for that. And, sure enough, he had been back the next day saying that it didn't matter.

"Good," General Madine declared as he frowned. "You have kept us in the dark long enough."

"That couldn't be helped," Luke replied as he seated himself in the chair provided for him. "My sister and I needed time to come to terms with a few issues that resulted from what happened on board the Death Star."

"I see," Mon Mothma stated, clearly not understanding but looking at Leia before turning her attention back to him.

"If you would please begin," Admiral Ackbar prompted, eager to learn just what the Imperials had wanted with the young Jedi before him.

"Very well," Luke said as he looked at his twin sister who smiled encouragingly at him, letting him know that she was behind him all the way. "It's a long story which truly starts on Bespin. Technically it started decades before that, but that's where I first learned of it."

"Get to the point," General Madine snapped.

"Darth Vader was born Anakin Skywalker," Luke declared, knowing from their startled and stunned looks that this meeting was going to take a long, long time.

end

June 2000

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