



**DESTINES ENTWINED  
NUBIAN SON**

**BY  
PADME LEIA JAINA**

## **Destinies Entwined: Family Skeletons- The Nubian Son**

By PadmeLeiaJaina

Prologue:

Welcome to part 2 of the Adventures of Jaina and Marxx. Part one focused on Jaina and her quest to find out about her family roots. With that now being pretty well established, it is time to delve into the mystery surrounding the Racees family, and specifically the riddle of Marxx Racees. If you thought he was fascinating before, you haven't seen anything yet!

I've always believed that Tatooine is the nexus or spiritual Vergence in the Star Wars Universe. People don't end up there without reasons. And if interesting things happen to the characters, it is because destiny will come knocking at their door one day- seeking a high admission price for freedom.

Eighteen months have past since the time of *Jaina's Journey*. Our young lovers are apart from each other working on their own individual goals in the Galaxy.

Meanwhile Luke Skywalker feels the tremors of a disturbance in the Force... uncertain of whether this "Vergence in the Force" Marxx Racees is the cause he begins a quest to uncover the developing mystery.

(I forgot who the other Jedi Master was on Yavin 4- so I created my own!)

## **Destinies Entwined: Family Skeletons- The Nubian Son**

Chapter 1

Marxx Racees glided though the dense forested floor on Yavin 4. His heart beat steady as he raced through the brush. He inhaled the wonderful earthy scented mixture of pine and composting leaves as his feet trod over the soft soil. Effortlessly jumping over fallen trees, leaping up and grabbing vines, he flew deeper into the never-ending undergrowth on the green moon. Nothing bothered him as he ran. His mind clear and focused- he was one with the Force. He darted past a gorseed tree and spotted his destination ahead.

The eighty-foot tall pellanberry tree beckoned him. The luscious fruit that grows only in the top most branches had now ripened and was ready to be picked. Barely breathing after his fifteen mile run, Marxx wiped a hand over his bare head removing the excess sweat. Upon arriving on Yavin, Marxx found his worst enemy not to be the poisonous lumernier snakes, endless mosquitoes, Yavinese Lions, or Frayt lizards, but the humidity. Growing up on an arid desert planet, it took him nearly a month to acclimate to the muggy air on the moon. Marxx examined several options with his hair, he tried tying his thick curly hair back and then he cut it shorter. However these changes did not alter the fact that his hair made him even hotter, more miserable, and unable to concentrate on his lessons. So he shaved it all off.

He chuckled remembering the first time he sent a holophone message to Jaina on Naboo. He turned his back to the holophone so all she could see was the back of his head. In a mirror behind him, he saw Jaina jump at the large oval shaped head. When he turned around, he lowered his face into view so she could just see his eyes, to assure her of his true identity. She looked at him puzzled, then laughed realizing immediately why he did it. In response, she reached up to the top of her head, plucked out a hairpin, and her hair fell down in flowing curls well past her shoulders and half way down her arms. She'd never worn her hair long before, and found a strange new pleasure in styling it up into intricate twists. After several viewings, Jaina decided she liked Marxx's new look. She told him that he had an attractive shaped head. The lack of hair projected out his pool blue eyes and accentuated his thick eyelashes.

Marxx readjusted his backpack and leaped twenty feet straight up, grabbed a branch, and started weaving his way up through the limbs towards the fruit. Upon reaching the top fourth of the tree, the uppermost limbs all leaned over, heavy with the hard crusted fragrant sweet fruits. Marxx sat down, and readjusted his backpack so it faced him in the front. He pulled out his carving knife, stood up and started selecting the sweetest smelling fruits. After nearly filling his backpack, he pulled one close to his face. The fruity scent of the pellanberry reminded him of an ingredient used in Jaina's shampoo. He felt an overwhelming rush of warmth pass over him as he savored its heady scent. He put it in his pouch, grabbed one more, and determined he could not fit it in his bag. He sat down and carved away the hard rind. He attacked the pulpy sweet fruit with blissful joy, gently kicking his legs against the smooth tree limb. On Tatooine, such things as fruit trees were non-existent. He took pleasure in the freshly picked pellanberry fruit believing it to be a true wonder to the world.

Marxx looked out across the green canopy of trees and felt contentment in his pleasant surroundings. He listened as a large flock of owlgrets flew overhead, softly calling to each other. From deep in the forest he heard a mating roar of a Yavinese Lion. He just couldn't drink in enough of the sight of trees. The only thing that could have made this moment sweeter would have been if Jaina were there, sitting on the tree limb next to him. His heart yearned and ached for Jaina.

Back on Naboo, construction of Theed kept her too busy for making trips to Yavin 4. She'd only managed to come once to visit him seven long months ago. And even that trip was cut short by a frantic call from his father Rowlon concerning some building fiasco. Marxx found himself daily longing to return to Naboo, to be with her, to help her with the Reconstruction of Theed. At times when he saw her tired expression from her long days of work over the holophone, he wished he could be there to massage her neck and help erase her tension. Jaina enjoyed fulfilling her promise to rebuild Theed, but it was obvious the strain of her duties were wearing on her resolve and spirit.

Marxx also felt a longing to return to Naboo. The planet spoke to him; it churned in his blood. He loved the simple, elegant beauty of the land. Each tree seemed to represent the four principles of the planet, beauty, truth, art and love. He loved the people and the wonderful cool breezes that blew into the Lake County from the many surrounding lakes. He couldn't wait to return to Naboo. He had a secret surprise for Jaina. He couldn't wait to see her expression when he showed it to her.

Marxx gazed at the glowing red gas giant of Yavin that loomed along the horizon. He contented himself with being on Yavin 4, because he wanted desperately to become a Jedi Knight. He reasoned that by being patient, the day would come that much sooner in which he would be released into the Galaxy, fully trained, and back into the arms of the woman he loved.

Placing the pit in his bag, Marxx readjusted it on his shoulders and threw himself down the tree, limb by limb. When he reached about forty feet he took a deep breath and dropped, landing on his feet, knees bending to absorb the shock. He bounced the pack firmly into place and ran back towards the Temple.

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In the depths of the Temple Jedi Master Tionne and Jedi Master Rodersuin looked at Luke Skywalker in the holo-emitter. Luke sat in his meditation chamber back on Coruscant as the Jedi Masters gave him their weekly updates.

“Honestly Master Skywalker, I don’t see any reason to keep him here. I know it’s only been eighteen months, but really there is nothing left for us to teach him. The boy has exceptional skills and talents. He has surpassed everyone here in his abilities- present company included,” Jedi Rodersuin said.

“How would you rank him for peace and calmness with the Force?” Luke asked.

Tionne spoke up, “Master Skywalker, if Marxx was any calmer we’d have to prod him awake. The boy just exudes calmness and confidence with his abilities. I can’t explain it. Nothing bothers him. He just doesn’t get impatient. A few weeks back we sent all of our students into individual chambers to see how long they could last in solitary confinement, most were screaming to come out after a few hours. We completely forgot about Marxx. He was in there for over 40 hours! When we finally got him out he just said, ‘Oh that must be why I’m hungry.’ I’ve never seen anyone like him.”

Luke chewed on that for a moment, “And you both seem absolutely certain there is nothing to worry about the boy.”

“Should there be?” Jedi Rodersuin asked, scratching his cocoa colored hand. “I wish all of my students were as quick and qualified as he is around here. My job would be a lot simpler. He does go through bouts of loneliness, and misses his family, and especially your niece. But overall he seems content with finishing his training and is able to put his emotional bonds aside.”

Luke nodded his head, “Give him another month of training. Let me know if anything suspicious arises, and then forward him through the trials.”

Tionne bowed, “Yes Master. And thank you.” They shut off the emitter. “So what should we do with Marxx for another month?”

“We’ve got a whole pack of five year old younglings he can work on beginning saber techniques to. That’s more than enough to get anyone’s temper flaring. If he passes the day without losing his patience once, we should just grant him the title of Jedi Knight on the spot,” Jedi Rodersuin said smiling.

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## Chapter 2

Marxx raced through the forest when he felt a jolt of terror and pain in the Force. He stopped, closed his eyes and extended his hearing. From somewhere to the west he heard screams. He zeroed in on the exact location of the distress and flew with Force-assisted speed deep into the forest towards the pain.

As he surged forward, he sensed he would never reach them in time. He closed his eyes, focused completely on the pain, threw out a hand and vanished.

Three preteen Jedi cadets, Trenton, Brandssi, and Carloos stood nervously around their injured Togruta friend, Shuma-Tu. Valiantly she kept her eyes open, reaching up through the pain, trying desperately to stay focused and conscious. Her leg throbbed. She held her hand tightly over the gushing wound but could not stop the pain, or the bleeding. She threw her head back, black and white tentacles flailing in the grass, as she screamed.

The three standing cadets nervously swayed their lightsabers as the three Frayt lizards closed in on them from three different directions in a vast open field, drawn to the pungent smell of fresh blood and fear.

Brandssi turned his head and glanced to his right. In a flash Marxx Racees appeared behind the lizards. Marxx didn't run into the field or fall out of a tree, he simply appeared. Marxx dropped his backpack and took full measure of the situation. Frayt lizards, indigenous to the planet, can grow up to 20 feet in length and their tails contain rows of deadly spikes. Marxx suspected that one of the creatures had attacked Shuma-Tu. The lizard in front of him neared dangerously close to the cadets as the other two stalked towards the young Jedi to the creatures right.

Lightsaber in hand, finger poised on the activation switch Marxx raced towards the lizard in front of him. In a fluid movement he leaped straight in the air, activated his green blade with a snap hiss, landed on the closest beasts shoulders and thrust the lightsaber right through the beasts skull, killing it instantaneously. The two other lizards bellowed in anger, shaking the meadow with the vibrations from their screams.

The center Frayt charged straight towards his fallen companions. Marxx took off after it, leaped high in the air, vaulted spinning over its head and landed squarely on its back. He jumped up as the creature whipped around mid run, throwing its tail towards him. Marxx kicked his legs up and straight out to avoid the tail, and threw his lightsaber into his left hand and slashed the crackling blade through the air severing the tail mid flight and threw him off his back. Marxx fell with a thump and an audible groan onto his stomach, sending up dirt. He pounced up, shirt covered in grass stains and dead leaves. The creature roared out in rage, sending a wave of rancid lizard breath in his wake. Marxx reached out with his right hand and Shuma-Tu's lightsaber leaped up into his hand. He charged the creature once more. Stepping lightly on its head Marxx spun and landed on its back. Marxx ignited the second blue saber with a snap hiss, reached down diagonally with both sabers and sliced the lizards head clean off.

Marxx stood on top of the carcass of the beast, heart racing, and turned to fac the last Frayt lizard. It snorted and snarled at him. The children, bolstered by Marxx's actions, raced on either side of the carcass, their lightsabers alit and humming, ready to assist with the last creature. The female lizard looked down at its fallen mate, then back at the glowing swords. She pawed at the ground, kicking up clouds of dust and dirt clods, nostrils flaring. Her black mottled flesh heaved as it readied its charge. Marxx poised himself for the attack. Then he sensed something from the beast and changed his mind.

Marxx closed his eyes and pointed his left arm towards the woods. The trees started to rustle, and large thumping sounds echoed. The eighteen-foot creature looked over alarmed. From across the meadow came a hunting scream of a Yavinese Lioness. In a split second the Frayt lizard turned tail and charged wildly into the brush, crashing through the forest and out of sight.

“A Yavinese lioness is out there? We need to get out of here!” Carloos said, now more worried than before.

“Relax boys, that was just me. I imitated the lioness cry to fool the lizard. What happened?” he said turning off both sabers, and thrusting them into his belt. He ran over to the fallen cadet, and placed his fingers on her neck, checking her vitals.

“They came out of nowhere, we were out here practicing our jumping and Jedi reflexes and they just charged. The tail caught Shuma in the leg.” Marxx looked at the large open gash in the cadet’s leg. He ripped her pants leg and quickly made a tight tourniquet to stop the bleeding. The bright red coloring on her face had paled to a dull pink and he realized that she was fading fast.

“Trenton go get my backpack- I dropped it over there.” The boy raced across the meadow and fell back on his knees moments later. Marxx reached inside and from the front compartment he extracted a first aid kit. He slathered on some anti-biotic cream right into her wound, causing the unconscious Togruta to groan and flutter her eyelids. Marxx then pulled out an expandable thermoblanket, and wrapped it around the girl to keep her warm.

“Trenton can you carry that?” the boy nodded as he lifted the heavy backpack on his shoulders. “You’ve got everything else?” Marxx asked as he slowly and gently picked the young girl up.

“Yes Jedi Marxx.” The three boys said in unison.

Marxx briefly looked at the cadets, wondering about the salutation he just received, but shook it off. “Come on let’s get her back to the Temple, time is running short.”

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Master Tionne stood on the Temple stairs, sensing a wave of distress in the Force. She gasped in horror as Marxx and the three cadets all raced towards the large temple. Marxx blasted past her and took the fallen Jedi into the infirmary. The medical droids sprang into action as he barked out the root of her injuries to them. Marxx and the children were then pushed out of the room as the droids got to work.

Marxx sat down on a bench outside and the children crowded around him. He looked at them all, flashing a confident smile, and said, “She’ll be alright guys. 22-D and 21-T will take care of her. Masters Tionne and Rodersuin will want the full details of what happened. Tell them everything. I’ll be by to give my account as well,” he took a sniff of himself and made a grossed out face, “After I take a bath.” The boys giggled as he retrieved his backpack, and headed off into the Temple.

Marxx stopped by the kitchen and dropped off the fruit he’d picked earlier. Carmellio, the Twi’lek chef looked up at him, and seductively massaged one of her green tentacles. “What did you bring me today, Marxx?”

“A whole bag of pellanberries.” He leaving all but two. “Gotta go, will chat later Carm.”

“Thanks Marxx.” She sighed as the handsome young man jogged off down the corridor.

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Marxx emerged from his quarters clean and wearing fresh Jedi clothes, long brown coat swirling like a dust devil in the cool evening breeze. He hummed softly as he walked down the hallowed halls,



absently twirling Shuma-Tu's lightsaber. While showering he sensed through the Force that Shuma's recovery was progressing properly. He headed to the assembly hall and found Master Tionne, Master Rodersuin and the three children there. Marxx walked up the long hallway towards them.

"Sorry I'm late, I just felt the need to clean myself up before giving a full report," he said, footsteps softly echoing through the cavernous, high vaulted ceiling room.

Master Tionne smiled at the young man, aware of his habit of cleaning several times a day from the humidity and exercise. "It's no problem Marxx. Please have a seat. Cadets, you can leave now."

Marxx nodded as the boys waved at him on their way out. Brandssi, stopped and gave Marxx a quick hug. Marxx returned the embrace and smiled at the boy. Tionne continued, "The children have told us their side of what happened, can you please tell us your view of things?"

"I was out running, picking palkanberries, when I felt a jolt of pain, fear in the Force. I heard the children scream and raced towards the sound," Marxx began. He then proceeded in giving a detailed explanation of the events.

"Cadet Brandssi said you appeared out of nowhere. How did you get there?"

Marxx shifted uncomfortably under his Master's black-eyed gaze. "Honestly? I'm not sure. I ran through the forest and I felt Shuma-Tu's pain increasing. I...I focused on the pain and then appeared on the edge of the field."

Tionne looked at him, eyes narrowed. "You don't remember how you got there?"

Marxx shook his head, "One moment I was running through the woods, the next I was right behind the lizards. I can't explain it."

Rodersuin rubbed his dark mouth, clearly confused and decided to go onto other things. "Why did you scare off the last lizard instead of killing it?"

"I realized she was pregnant. I know they are predators of ours, but we are only guests on this planet. I killed two of the beasts, she deserved to give life to her young."

Tionne shook her head. The young man never ceased to amaze her.

"Shuma's going to be fine right?" Marxx asked, suddenly worried. He realized he was still holding her lightsaber and put it down.

"Yes. Luckily you got that tourniquet on in time. She lost a lot of blood. Much longer she either could have bled to death, or lost a leg," Master Rodersuin said, rubbing his long gray beard.

"You showed tremendous grace under fire today Marxx. Not only that, but you thought clearly completely the entire time of the event. You didn't even think of your own life, you only thought to save the other children. What was running through your mind?" Master Tionne asked.

"Honestly, I don't much remember. I just acted completely on instinct. The Frayts were closing in on the children, and I just had to take care of them. The children were torn between protecting Shuma and

attacking the beasts”

“You could have been killed,” Tionne said.

“True, but my death I suppose could have given the children time to escape. I don’t foresee my doom anytime soon, so I wasn’t really worried,” he said with a small smile. “Besides in the ways of the Force, death is only the beginning, correct? Doesn’t Master Skywalker tell us repeatedly, *luminous beings we are, not this crude matter?*”

Master Rodersuin leaned back in his assembly chair and studied the boy. “*Master Luke is crazy to think he needs another month of training.*” He looked over at Tionne, and they shared a knowing glance.

Marxx looked at them worried, “What?”

“We want you to go into deep meditation for a week. Then we are going to start you on the Trials,” Master Rodersuin said.

“But I’ve only been here eighteen months! There’s got to be more for me to learn about the Force,” Marxx said, visibly upset.

“There is always more to learn about the Force Marxx. Always. But you are ready, trust me. There is little more that we can teach you here. Life will be a better teacher for you in the end,” Tionne smiled brightly, her silver skin glowed with pride.

Marxx realized the finality of their decision, stood up, and bowed deeply to them, “As you wish Masters.”

A setting sunray bounced brightly off of Marxx’s bare head, casting him in an ethereal, radiant, light. He stepped out of the light and into the shadows. Marxx reached his chambers, grabbed a sleeping roll and his fruit and retreated to the meditation chamber to await his trials and to set forth on the next leg of his journey in life.

Rodersuin leaned over to Tionne, “Get Master Skywalker on the holo-emitter. I think this latest incident is the kind of information he is looking for.”

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### Chapter 3

Jaina paced in her office, fuming at her datapad as it listed a myriad of problems that contributed to her pounding headache. She tossed the pad down on her desk, sending off a cloud of dust that permeated her life from construction. She coughed and sulked in her chair. She thought back to that day eighteen months ago when she declared in front of family and friends her noblest of intentions to rebuild Theed.

“*Idiot,*” she cursed at herself.

Jaina had spent a lifetime shirking responsibility from becoming a slave to protocol, agendas, and decision making. In short becoming her mother. Yet here she was the head liaison for the entire Theed Reconstruction project. She found rebuilding a city a lot more complicated and frustrating than



rebuilding an X-Wing's engine. Half of her time, Jaina battled with regulatory issues and reports dealing with parts deliveries, labor disputes, broken machinery, national protests, and every inconceivable problem that could arise from rebuilding a capital city from complete destruction. She found herself missing the carefree, thrilling life as the Captain of Rouge Squadron. She didn't even have her X-Wing around for quick flights to relieve her tensions and frustrations. She had traded ships with Marxx, as his Nubian Yacht boosted local morale and had extra cargo room.

Today one of the three towering demolition droids, assigned to pulling wreckage off of the left capital wing chambers broke a main assembly belt. The belt breakage caused a chain of destruction throughout the entire droids mainframe. Waiting for either a replacement droid, or parts will put them at least a month behind schedule.

Jaina supposed she should be somewhat pleased. The main capital building, and courtyard that extended out in front of it, were nearly completed. Artisans from all over the planet descended with glee to recreate the amazing tiled mosaics that lined the Theed courtyard. Plants flourished in large raised gardens and beds.

Also, thanks to the efforts of the best soil scientists in the galaxy, the surrounding scarred miles were again green with life. After many tests of the soil's ph levels, the scientists dumped raw nutrients onto the soil. They brought in tractordroids that hoed the soil, balancing it. Then the scientists reseeded the whole area with native grass seed. Saplings of many varieties of local trees, flowers, and shrubs were sparsely planted to give the area a more natural appearance. The surrounding miles around Theed no longer looked like a barren wasteland. Debris had been removed from the lips of the surrounding waterfalls and they now flowed vigorously, with deafening regularity.

With the influx of people coming to the planet to assist with repairs, the surrounding city of Theed also started to regenerate. Stores, homes, restaurants, and churches all began sprouting up as the Nubians cleared out the rubble. Remapped roads allowed for access in and out of Theed.

The vision of Padme's Theed became more focused in reality. From out of her office window Jaina could see saplings and flowerbeds sprouting to life along the newly formed streets, perfectly blending nature and manmade construction.

Even though her project appeared to be on schedule, Jaina felt depressed and lonely. Gloomily Jaina picked up a holograph that rested on the corner of her desk. In it, Marxx held her tightly, both brightly smiling, happy, and carefree. She gazed at his dark curls and grinned, thinking of his now bald appearance. She rubbed the holograph frame and wondered how he was doing. She'd spent the last several days trying to reach him on Yavin 4, only to be told by Master Tionne that he was in meditation. She missed him terribly. Her heart ached for him, mostly because at certain times of the day, she could feel him reaching out to her through the Force, longing for her touch as well. Marxx completed her, with him not around, she felt like only half-alive.

Jaina bolted up as her door burst open. Covered in dirt, pearly whites gleaming, Anakin leaned into her office. "Hey sis, you've got to come see this."

"Now what?" She said, pushing herself up from her desk.

"Trust me. You want to come out here."

“Why do I have a bad feeling about this?”

Anakin flashed her a cocky smile. “With you lately everything is bad, isn’t it?”

“Give me one good thing to be happy about.”

“Hey, you get to see my gorgeous face everyday.”

Jaina headed to the door. “I’m still waiting on a valid reason.”

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“So exactly what am I looking at?” Jaina asked, placing a hardhat on her head, as they approached the part of the nearly cleared left capital wing. “Why are the demolition droids turned off? You know it takes three days to recharge them!”

“Patience sister, patience!” Anakin said, his bright blue eyes flashing with delight, a soft wind rustled through his straight, dark sable hair.

Anakin lead her to a large hole in the ground. “The demolition droid blasted through the roof a few minutes ago. When the dust settled, we looked inside to see what was in here. Upon investigation, we turned off the droids, knowing you would want to see for yourself.”

Before approaching the hole, Jaina called out to Sruga Munn the Ithorian hammerhead in charge of demolition. “Sruga, get this thing moved down to the right wing, so we can at least get some work accomplished, ok?” Sruga nodded and barked out orders to the crew below.

Anakin extended a hand out to her, Jaina crawled on her knees and peered into darkness. But in the blackness, mysterious forms and shapes solidified. She looked at her brother questioningly, moved around, and dangled her feet in the hole. She then plunged in, landing on a hard marble surface below, sending up clouds of dust. Jaina coughed and wiped dust from her face. She the wiped her hands off, reached up and turned on her hat’s lantern. She found herself in some kind of storage facility, filled with statues, furniture, paintings, trunks, rolled up rugs, and every other kind of antiquity one could imagine. Jaina jumped when Anakin landed beside her.

“See I thought this would brighten your day.”

Jaina closed her eyes, testing the air; it smelled dry and stale. “Does this feel temperature controlled to you? You notice the lack of humidity in here? There must be some kind of backup power system rigged up to this room. Even after power was taken out in the Clone Wars the generators are still working. Help me find the controls.”

“Of course, there are priceless antiques in the room and what does my sister the mechanic concentrate on? The mechanical environmental settings in the room.” Jaina’s glower could have melted a glacier on Hoth. Anakin threw up his hands, “Fine, fine, I’ll look around.”

The two wandered around the room in opposite directions. Try as they might, they couldn’t find anything to explain the even temperature. “*Maybe it’s the stone itself.*” Jaina thought. She put her ear and hands to the smooth, cool marble wall trying to determine if she could sense anything mechanical

behind the stone. She felt and heard nothing.

Dejected, she yanked a canvas sheet off of a large ornamental chair and sat down in it, staring blankly at the walls. Her vision swam. "*We must rely upon negotiation.*" Jaina shook her head as the image of her grandmother in full on Queen regalia faded. She gently stroked the luxurious armrests. Her grandmother must have sat in this very chair.

Suddenly she found herself completely intrigued by all the objects in the room. In the enormous room, Jaina could barely make out the other end in the dim light.

"Anakin? Where are you?"

She didn't get a response. "Anakin?" Jaina got up from the chair, turned a sharp corner, as a grotesque Shalubian monkrat jumped out from behind a wardrobe. Jaina screamed. She clutched her chest, as the monkrat doubled over with laughter. Jaina bubbled up peels of laughter from inside of her. She plucked the fanged mask off of her brother's head. Anakin collapsed on the ground unable to speak in a fit of hysterics. Jaina allowed herself a good hard laugh as well, desperately needing the emotional release. She swatted him playfully on the shoulder. "Don't do that again."

Anakin rolled to his feet. "That was excellent Sis." Jaina half-heartedly scowled at him. "So what do you want to do with all this stuff?"

"I don't know. Hold on a second." She reached down to her belt and pulled out a portable holophone and laid in a call to Coruscant.

Randolla, the Senate secretary answered the hail. "Hello Jaina, what can I do for you today?"

Jaina looked at the older woman, "Hi Randolla, any idea where my mother is? I need to talk to her."

"She's in a means committee meeting right now. The session started a while ago, but I don't know when she'll be out."

"Can you go get her?"

The stern woman shook her head, "You know she doesn't like that."

"Yes but she doesn't mind when it's one of her *children* who calls her out of a meeting," Jaina said sternly.

"Alright, hold on." Jaina collapsed back into the chair, waiting for her mother. Anakin wandered around pulling canvases off from objects, sending up clouds of dust. He barked out happy exclamations at the various wondrous things he uncovered. Jaina ignored him.

"Hi Jaina." Leia said as she moved into the holo-phones range.

"Sorry to pull you out of your committee meeting Mom."

"You know very well I'm willing to leave a meeting to talk to you. What is it?" Jaina gave her a rundown of Anakin's discovery. "I have no idea what to do with all of this stuff."

“Well maybe you should think of constructing some sort of museum on the capital grounds. And I’m sure you can probably fill the halls of the capital building with a lot of those sculptures.”

“Ok but what do I do with them now?” Jaina said.

Leia chuckled, “I doubt they are going anywhere dear. I’d advise constructing a large door to cover the hole created, and lock it up until you are ready to remove anything. You may want to find some local scholars and historians to see if they could help you to catalogue the items in there.”

“Good ideas Mom. Thanks.”

“I’m proud of you honey,” Leia said noticing the forlorn expression on her daughters face. “How’s Marxx doing?”

“I don’t know, he’s been in meditation for the last several days.”

“Well I’d think that’s safe to assume he’s probably fine then.”

“Yeah, I guess so. I’d better let you go Mom. Thank you. I love you.”

“I love you too sweetie. I love you too Anakin.”

“I love you too Mom,” came the muffled cry from deep within the chamber.

“He said he loves you too.” Jaina said and she signed off. “Anakin, let’s see if we can find the doorway that they got all this stuff in here with. Then let’s call it a day.”

Anakin stopped his random searching and the two set about on their new mission. “*At least this gets me away from paperwork,*” Jaina thought. Mood brightening she set about her new task with renewed vigor.

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## Chapter 4

Thirteen parsecs Northwest of the Rishi Maze a lone Imperial II –class Star Destroyer named *The Vengeance* lurked inside an uncharted ion cloud. Its crew diligently worked on bringing the aging relic back into full running order.

Captain Hydin marched, head erect, through the corridors, datapad in hand. He entered a turbolift with two guards and hailed for level 11. The guards shared a nervous glance. The doors opened and Hydin strode purposely out of the doors, never bothering to acknowledge the two cowering men behind him. He walked down a long empty hallway, smoothed his tunic, and straightened his cap. He stopped at the only door on the entire level and chimed.

The door opened. Captain Hydin stepped into the reception hallway of the Admiral’s main quarters. The walls, painted in rich earth tones, held many expensive and rare pieces of art, purchased and stolen from all over the galaxy. The side table, created by the late great Oron Welkis, sold at last auction for

30 million credits.

“Come in Captain Hydin,” hailed a metallic voice from living room. Hydin again smoothed his tunic and stood at attention behind the high-backed Rangoolian lounge chair. A single, gloved hand reached out, clawed palm upwards, seeking the datapad. Hydin stepped forward and quickly delivered it. The hand slinked back behind the chair. Hydin swallowed deeply as he waited for some word, any word regarding the progress of repairs. An even, rhythmic respirator breathing sound filled the silent void. Calming Walsenian incense, 2000 credits an ounce, wafted through the room.

After several excruciating long minutes, the hand curved back around, extending the pad again. Hydin reached forth and took it. “Excellent progress. How much longer before the hyperdrive can be brought back online?”

“Admiral, the engineers tell me it should be online within two weeks.”

“Two weeks? Tell them one week.”

Hydin swallowed, as he saw two long, leather-bound legs sweep over to the side of the lounge. The Admiral stood up.

“Yes, I will see the engineers double their efforts.” He felt his mouth go dry as the Admiral, walked towards him.

“I hope so, for their sake, Captain.” Hydin stared, lip quivering. “Do I make you feel uncomfortable?”

“No. Of course not. Sir.” Hydin tried to control the tremors in his legs. Admiral Darkglider rarely ever stood before him. He swallowed, knowing the Admiral has been rumored to dabble in the Jedi arts. Intimidating and tall, the Admiral wore a menacing dark full-faced gray helmet, which connected with a broad metallic chest plate. The chest plate covered a breathing apparatus. Underneath the metal the Admiral wore a tight fitting black leather jacket and pants, with a sheer black long skirt over covering that hugged a slim female form. From a utility belt hung a lightsaber.

Satisfied that the man was properly terrified the Admiral said, “You may go now.”

“Thank you Admiral.” The captain couldn’t leave fast enough.

Admiral Darkglider pulled off a glove, revealing a long white hand with sickly blue fingernails. Darkglider stroked a finger across the Welkis table, enjoying the feel of the slightly flawed, natural wood grain against her bare skin. Slowly and carefully with measured mechanical breaths Darkglider walked around the living room chamber admiring all of the objects of art. A Tubukian stained glass lamp brightened the southern corner, as it sat upon a Nubian end table. She paid dearly for each item. The price paid had been her innocence.

Darkglider reached out a bony finger and through the Force turned on a Sullustian opera from the stereo across the room. The soothing music washed over her briefly transporting her to a time when her cares were limited. Back when she felt safe and loved.

She glanced at a large wooden panel, lighted softly with dayglow lights. The Nubian painting topped her collection of valuables. She loved Nubian art and furniture for their beauty and rarity. Since the

planet was wiped out in the Clone Wars, any piece of Nubian art has increased in value a thousand fold. Intuitively picked it up years ago for pennies, the painting was now worth a fortune. She admired the painting. A Queen stood looking downcast out a sunlit window, of some great royal hall. Darkglider gently massaged her neck wondering if that palace still existed. No matter, Naboo was of not of any concern to her.

Darkglider felt a coughing fit come over her. She threw open the frontal portion of the face plate, clutched the corner of her lounge wheezing, and then coughed until blood flew from her oxygen deprived, blue lipped mouth. She cursed as she wiped away the blood. She slowly regained her breath, then lowered her facemask again, deeply breathing in oxygen, calming her spasms. She cursed her frail body. But more than anything, she cursed her mother. She loathed the woman who abandoned her so many years ago, merely because she was a frail, sick, little girl.

She purposely strode over to her office, Force opened the safe, and pulled out the holograph. In the image she saw a sea of happy healthy faces, and one very pale, sickly little girl in the center. She felt the hate swelling in her, as it swelled, her internal organs shriveled, closing any and all holes that may cause another coughing fit.

“One day you will pay, one day you will pay for abandoning me.”

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## Chapter 5

Deep in a Force meditative trance, images swirled in Marxx's mind. Flashes of his days as a pod racer, to dancing with Jaina, to working at Watto's shop, to lightsaber practicing sessions all raced in front of his eyes. Seeing that they were all recent memories, Marxx decided to see how far back he could look into his past. He flashed back through his grade school years, remembering moments of joy, humiliation, and friends long forgotten.

He sensed a fluttering of a memory, beckoning him. He reached out to the tendrils, latched on and pulled deeper into his mental web. *Blurred at first, he saw his living room on Tatooine, from a very small perspective. His mother, father, and Tanella snapped into focus. They were all sobbing uncontrollably. Marxx felt tears on his face and he heard himself say, "Where's Rayran? I want to play with Rayran."*

*Chariss glanced down at her son, "Oh my precious boy, come here sweetie. She's gone baby. She's gone. Her little heart gave out and she flew away." Chariss picked Marxx up and snuggled him. Marxx cried loudly, not because he understood what his mother just told him, but that he couldn't stand her being in so much pain.*

Puzzled and fascinated, Marxx gently jerked on that memory cord, twisted it, and journeyed further into the abyss. A new image flared behind him. *His mother Chariss sat in a rocking chair, softly singing and rocking a sickly baby. The baby coughed and spat all over her, sobbing in pain. Chariss cleared away the gunk and continued to sing, her eyes filled with love and concern. The image then morphed He saw himself sitting calmly on the living room floor playing with toy speeders. Sitting next to him was a girl, probably the same age as he. The dark-haired girl looked very unhealthy with bright blue eyes, and pale skin. "Come on Rayran, this is your speeder, where do you want to go?"*

*The girl looked at Marxx adoringly, and with deep labored breaths. "Do you want it to go here?" Marxx asked moving the toy off to the left. She scrunched up her nose, stared at the speeder and moved the toy around on the floor with the Force towards the right. The girl smiled. Marxx turned his head as a cackling laugh and clapping of hands erupted behind him. He glanced up to see an older woman who stared at the girl, "Excellent my girl, excellent." The girl beamed.*

The door to the meditation room swung open and the image vanished from his mind's eye. Master Tionne was startled by the expression on Marxx's face. His pool blue eyes clouded over and appeared haunted, as if he had just seen a ghost.

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Luke Skywalker stood with his hands on his hips, legs spread apart, staring out the window of his Coruscant apartment. The constant afternoon traffic sailed by, obscuring any full view of the skyline. Luke felt uneasy. He'd received word from the Academy of Marxx's recent escapade and the decision of the Masters to forward him through the Trials. Luke didn't blame them. The boy did appear to be ready. He wondered if his concerns over Marxx were prejudiced by the memory of what happened to his father.

Luke found himself focusing repeatedly upon the puzzle of how Marxx just appeared in the field. It didn't make sense. He had witnessed this same occurrence with Ben and Yoda. However, both of those Jedi became one with the Force and did not reappear again into the material world.

Recently Luke had settled into a deep meditative state and felt the first tremors of a disturbance in the Force. He sank deeper into the trance and realized the vibrations were not coming from Yavin 4, but somewhere deep in the outskirts of the New Republic. This only heightened his concerns further. He tried to decide the best course of action to tackle this new threat. For the moment, no answer came to him.

Behind him, he heard a small, happy, giggling laugh. Luke turned around and saw Mara walking through the apartment, bouncing their new baby, Ben in her arms. The boy reached out a pudgy arm and pulled on a lock of his mother's fiery red hair and squealed with delight.

"Did we disturb you?" Mara asked; concern etched on her face.

Luke smiled, "No, you could never disturb me." He reached out his hands and took his son from Mara. He marveled at the little boy before him. Bright titian hair crowned his head. Luke smiled and merrily chattered baby talk to his boy. Luke danced in happy circles with his son, making him squeal merrily with delight.

Mara sat down in a chair and watched the bliss that washed over her husband, erasing the worry lines from his ruggedly handsome face. Reveling in the security of his family and the joy that they gave him, Luke momentarily forgot about his oppressive thoughts of that far off disturbance.

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## Chapter 6

Day five of Marxx's trials came quickly. Having already completed the tests of dexterity, levitation, dueling techniques, and endurance, Marxx faced the formidable mental calisthenics match up with



Master Rodersuin.

Marxx closed his eyes and felt Master Rodersuin testing his mind. Looking for an opening, Rodersuin pushed against Marxx's mental walls. They played a game of cat and mouse for several minutes. Rodersuin would test one mental region, then try a completely new area. Each move, Marxx matched perfectly. This went on for an hour. Rodersuin found himself increasingly frustrated. Marxx put up shields in the exact spot he was headed. His choices, completely random, should have made it impossible for Marxx to predict where he was going. Marxx just appeared to know where Rodersuin planned to attack, even before he did.

The Jedi Master ended the trial and let the young man out of the room. As Marxx left, Rodersuin couldn't help but pity the person who ever tried to mind torture Marxx.

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"Master Rodersuin is this really necessary?" Jedi Tionne asked. She looked down in the practice chamber below. Marxx became a whirl of movement against an increasing barrage of stun shots fired out at him from all corners of the room. His green lightsaber blurred as Rodersuin flicked up the speed and number of shots.

"You're going much higher than we ever have done to a cadet in trials. Stop this! If he gets hit by those things at that velocity, he could be seriously hurt."

Rodersuin shook his head, "I don't think we have to worry about that. Watch him." He further increased the speed, dangerously close to the highest setting. Rodersuin dropped his jaw and Tionne pressed her hands against the glass. Marxx spun in the room deflecting shot so quickly it appeared as if he wasn't even there.

Tionne reached over and turned the simulator off. Marxx held up his lightsaber, looked up at the window, "Well that was invigorating!" he said with a savage smile on his face.

"Well done, you can come out now." Rodersuin said. Marxx shut off his saber, strapped it to his belt and exited the open door.

"Go get cleaned up. After dinner please meet Master Tionne and I in the main assembly hall," Rodersuin said. Marxx bowed to both Masters and trotted off.

"I've never seen anyone move like that, have you?" Tionne asked.

"No, I am beginning to think there may actually be a reason Master Luke is so worried about the boy," Rodersuin said.

"And what reason would that be?" Tionne asked.

"Marxx could quite possibly be the most powerful and gifted Jedi we'll see in our lifetime."

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Marxx walked into the great assembly hall to find it completely alit and filled with all of the cadets

attending the Jedi Academy. Master Tionne smiled at the young man as he looked around the assembly room with a puzzled expression. He nervously tugged on the cuffs of his Jedi robe.

"Come up here Marxx," Tionne said.

Marxx walked the full length of the room. He looked straight ahead, nerves tightening with each step. He felt the oppressive weight of dozens of eyes falling upon him as he passed the rows of cadets of all ages and species. He realized the magnitude of what was about to happen. In his eighteen months on Yavin 4 he had witnessed this ceremony only one time. He reached the steps, walked up three, then kneeled, bowing his head.

"Rise." Marxx raised his head and stood up.

Master Rodersuin sternly looked down at Marxx. "You have successfully passed the tests to becoming a Jedi Knight. Do you vow to use your training to further peace and order in the Galaxy?"

"Yes Master."

"Will you use your talents to further your own ambitions?"

"No Master, the Force is to be used for the purpose of good and not self gain. I am but a humble servant to the Force."

Tionne smiled, "Then let all be witness here today, that from now on Marxx Racees will be known to the Galaxy and the universe as Jedi Master Marxx Racees!"

Marxx tilted his head slightly, puzzled by the title. He expected only to be named Jedi Knight. He beamed and bowed, "Thank you Master Tionne, and thank you, Master Rodersuin."

The assembly hall erupted in applause. He looked out over the crowd. His eyes fell on Shuma-Tu, as she stood clapping merrily beside her friends. Trenton whistled loudly. Shuma's recovery was nearly complete. The girl grinned at Marxx with eyes that were filled with gratitude. He bowed to the crowd and smiled broadly at the young Togruta, making her smile even brighter.

The next day, after saying his goodbyes, Marxx climbed into the cockpit of Jaina's X-Wing and set in a course home to Naboo.

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## Chapter 7

Jaina scowled at the door as her frustration grew. Two days ago in the process of cataloging the objects in the underground chamber, they had moved aside a heavy mosaic tiled sculpture of a Gungan, an extinct species from Naboo, at the far northern end of the room; behind the sculpture hid a door that would not open. Jaina spent hours trying to manipulate the mechanisms on the lock, but could not get it to unravel its mystery. The mechanic within screamed in despair.

Head cocked and out of options, she fingered her lightsaber. "*I guess I could just cut my way through it,*" she thought.

“And what would that accomplish? Who knows what lurks behind that door? You might slice through something priceless.” Jaina’s heart soared. She whirled and in one swift motion found herself in Marxx’s waiting arms.

“Are you really here? Why are you here?”

“Don’t I even get a hello kiss before the interrogation?” Marxx asked grinning.

Jaina smiled slyly, and peeked around the room. Junay and Doolin, two of the curators working to catalogue the antiques smiled at the couple and moved out of sight, giving them privacy. Jaina jumped down, and yanked Marxx behind a large mirror and kissed him. Jaina and Marxx wrapped their arms tightly around each other, sinking deeper into their kiss savoring each other’s touch and closeness. Marxx felt something he hadn’t felt for a long time, complete contentment. Training had been necessary for him, but all he really wanted was to be on Naboo with Jaina. Jaina pulled her lips from his, and ran her hands down his strong muscled arms.

Jaina’s eyes sparkled with desire, her breath quickened. Marxx gave her a lopsided wicked smile and raised an eyebrow, “I hardly think this is the appropriate place for such thoughts M’lady, unless you wish to really give these people some juicy gossip about the boss.”

She pouted at him longingly. “I guess you’re right.” A twinkle set off her brown eyes and she kissed her finger, then seductively brushed it down his neck towards the opening in his shirt. “Besides, I have work to do.” Marxx felt his whole body jolt with desire and then scream out realizing all yearnings would be unfulfilled.

He closed his eyes, forcing himself under control, as she walked away from him, “So how are we going to get this door open?”

“I don’t know. I’ve tried everything. I’ve had R4 down here trying to decipher the mechanisms. Even Anakin can’t figure it out, and he can figure *anything* out.”

Jaina stood in front of him and pointed out the series of switches, levers, and catches. Marxx stared at the controls, and then found his attention waver as Jaina reached down, fingers lightly tickling, tracing the top of his legs. His body responded to her touch.

“Thank you. Eighteen months of intense emotional control have just gone down the drain. You really do know how to torture a man, don’t you?” he whispered into her braided hair. As Jaina gazed up at him, he bent down and kissed her. While they kissed, he arched a hand over the controls. His mind’s eye flared and he envisioned a flash of a hand reach up and open the door. Marxx abruptly broke apart from their kiss, and ticked off the series of switches and catches that triggered the door open.

Jaina’s mouth dropped open as the door screeched and rumbled open. “How did you do that?”

“Remember, you’re not the only Jedi Knight around here.” He smiled at her, blue eyes sparkling.

She caught what he said then and threw her arms around him. “I’m so proud of you. You went through with the Trials and they Knighted you?”

“They did M’lady. You can now call me Jedi Knight Marxx Racees. Actually... for some reason they named me Jedi Master,” Marxx waved a hand, “I think they just said the wrong title. Don’t you even try calling me Master!”

Jaina laughed and then pouted, “Yes *Master* Marxx. Anything you say *Master*.”

Marxx reached out to tickle her, “Stop that! You know I’ve spent my whole life dreaming of earning that title, now that I have it, I don’t know what to do with it.”

“Trust me, Uncle Luke will find plenty for you to do!” Jaina said laughing.

“Ahem... so do the two of you actually want to see what is behind this mystery door?” Anakin asked rubbing a hand through his dark brown hair. Jaina and Marxx glanced over and saw the group of workers surrounding them, anxious to see what wonders the second room held. They blushed and walked to the open doorway.

Anakin sent a group of levitating lights into the room. As they illuminated the length of the room, the contents plunged the observers into a pit of confusion. The whole room contained file cabinets, thousands of them. Each one was about 15 feet high floor to ceiling with drawers. Levitating ladders magnetically clung to the cabinets throughout the room. Jaina walked over to the closest cabinet and opened one of the drawers. She moaned.

“For the love of the Force. Welcome to the bane of my existence, they are filled with files. *PAPER* files.”

Anakin poked his head over Jaina’s shoulder, “Files of what? Committee meeting minutes? Phone numbers of gorgeous Nubian girls? What?”

Jaina recognized that the files were alphabetized. She stood at the A’s. She looked at the headers on the files and she pondered the contents, confused, “I think these are files on Nubian citizens.” She flipped through the files, reading names. She pulled the first file and opened it up. It contained individuals birth date, health records, family ties, marriage certificates, economic status, and job titles and history. The particular document she held was over two hundred years old. The corners of the paper where her fingers touched a document disintegrated at her touch. She looked up and saw Marxx racing off down the files. He stopped about twenty rows down and feverishly searched each drawer. He pulled over a ladder and climbed up it to the top.

“What are you doing?”

“Just checking something.” He pulled out a drawer, farther and farther.

“Don’t let that thing fall out! We’ll never get that mess cleaned up!” Jaina said placing her hands on her hips.

“Have you lost all faith in me M’lady? Do you really think I would want to give you extra work? I can think of better ways for us to spend our time together,” he said, wiggling his eyebrows at her. Jaina let out a small laugh. Marxx pulled a pile of files out, placed them atop the dusty cabinets, shut the drawer, grabbed them, and descended the ladder.

“What did you just take?” Jaina asked, looking over at the files in his hand. All said Brannoush at the top of them. She raised an eyebrow at him.

“I don’t see there being an organized government on this planet to stop me from taking these. I’ll return them,” he leaned in towards her, “Besides, I think I know the lady in charge around here.” He moved in for a kiss, and Jaina stepped away, all business.

“Well don’t openly advertise what you did. The last thing I need is for everyone left on Naboo to descend upon this place and demand their family files.” Everyone evacuated the room at her command, and Marxx closed the door.

The sun began to set outside and the workers all called it a day. Jaina and Marxx left the storage chamber into the waning afternoon Nubian sun. Jaina looked closely at her love. Dark stubble spiked up all over his head.

“You going to let that grow out again?” She said tickling the stubble.

“I was thinking about it, it’s up to you M’lady.”

Anakin rolled his eyes at his sister and Marxx after locking up the storage room. “I’ll see you two later. Hey Marxx...”

Marxx ripped his eyes off of Jaina, “Yes?”

“Why don’t you take her away somewhere for a while? She hasn’t had a day off in months.” Anakin smiled broadly at both of them and then winked at Marxx.

“Trying to get rid of me, eh?” Jaina said. “You really want me to leave you in charge around here?” When her brother didn’t answer she relented, “Remember, you asked for it. Just don’t go into that file room ok? And don’t let anyone else in there.”

“Well considering he’s the only one who knows how to open that door, I don’t see that as being a problem. Later.” Anakin jogged off towards the town to hang with the workers.

“I know just the place we need to go to M’lady.”

“Lead on Jedi *Knight* Marxx Racees.”

Marxx held Jaina’s hand and the two climbed aboard *The Nubian Hope*.

Marxx kicked the ship’s engines to life and lifted off of the ground. He laid in a course for the Lake County.

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## Chapter 8

Jaina and Marxx stopped briefly at each of their homes. Jaina changed into dinner apparel and picked up an overnight bag. The brief time gave a chance for Marxx to check in with his family, let them know

about his Knighthood, and pick up a particular item his Grandfather had acquired for him.

All breath escaped from Marxx's lungs upon seeing Jaina exit her bungalow. She wore a straight long sky blue dress that perfectly hugged her curves. The strapless gown with plunging backline seemed to magically cling to her body. She pulled her milk chocolate brown hair up into a delectable series of buns and spirally curls. She completed the look with one of her grandmother's silver headdresses, silky long white gloves, and silver bangles that jingled on her wrist. Marxx devoured her with his eyes, he thought she resembled a living goddess. He placed his Jedi robe over her shoulders to protect her from the early evening chill. Jaina delighted to see him wearing a new brocaded golden vest, natural cotton long-sleeved shirt, and brown trousers. He wore his dancing dress shoes.

They drove to the lake in Jaina's landspeeder that she kept in the Lake Country. Marxx helped Jaina step into the rented hydroboat and the captain directed them across the lake. Jaina wondered why they were headed out across the lake. Desperately she had wanted to update and rebuild her grandparent's special resort, but it took low precedence over Theed.

She luxuriously leaned back into Marxx's broad chest. Marxx wrapped his arms protectively around her as they flew across the lake with the cool breeze caressing their faces. Jaina stroked his forearms, and raised his right hand up to her face. She gently pressed it to her lips and kissed each of his knuckles. Marxx closed his eyes and drank in the quivers of pleasure that her lips produced in his body. The royal blue sky blackened as the last traces of daylight raced from the skyline. Stars emerged from their daily hibernation, dotting the sky with their awakening brilliance.

The hydroboat turned a corner, and Jaina bolted upright in her seat. The resort glimmered and gleamed with life. Fully restored and rebuilt, even in the dark, Jaina could tell it looked exactly as she remembered it from her visions.

"When did this happen?" She asked.

Marxx smiled behind her, "Do you like your surprise?"

She turned around. "You did this? How? When? How?"

Marxx chuckled at her reaction. "Always full of questions M'lady. My father is responsible. He put a lot of our family savings into rebuilding it. The result is the Racees now own the resort. Grandfather helped with providing details about the inside since he used to visit here a lot when he was in the Legislative Youth program."

Recalling the exchange between Marxx and Anakin, Jaina asked, "Wait! Did Anakin know about this?"

"Yes, he did. In fact he helped arrange many of the cargo deliveries up to the Lake County. Jace spent a lot of time helping with assembling construction crews. He helped negotiate a large labor dispute that would have prevented the resort from being finished on time. Even your goofy brothers knew how important this was to you. And considering the hard work you've put into restoring Theed, they wanted to help bring this into reality for you," Marxx caressed her neck, "It was my idea though."

Jaina shook her head in disbelief, and in the blanket of darkness, she turned her face up towards him and whispered, "Have I told you recently that I love you?"

Marxx cupped a hand on her chin, his pinky etched the contours of her full lips, "I know you do... I love you too. I will do anything, and everything to make you happy Jaina." She threw her arms around him to hide her tears. The captain docked the boat. He then stepped out, and took the couple's overnight bags and headed up the stone stairs. Marxx stepped up and offered to Jaina his hand in assistance out of the boat.

In the starlight Jaina studied the balcony and courtyards of the resort. All traces of destruction were erased. Fragrant vines of white moonflowers opened, sending out sensual wafts of floral sweetness. Jaina couldn't wait to see the resort in the light of day. She gripped Marxx's hand and guided him over to the part of the balcony where a year and a half ago in the rubble they had first declared their love for each other.

Tears swelled in Jaina's eyes as she admired at the fully restored balcony complete with wonderfully detailed cherubs. "I don't know how to thank you all. It's just perfect."

The moon silently rose over the surrounding valley's hills, and sent glittery sparkles of light over the lake's waves. Jaina face glowed white in its brilliant radiance.

Marxx cleared the tears from her eyes. "I'm just following through with my pledge."

Jaina clasped her hands behind his head, brought him down towards her. The two shared a long tender kiss. They broke apart, and Jaina rested her head contently against his chest. She whispered, "I've missed you so much. I just didn't feel complete without you around."

"My heart ached for you as well. Nothing can keep us apart now... Nothing...I...I have something I want to ask you... and I think now is as good of a time as any," Marxx said, holding her tightly for just a moment longer, he took a deep breath. His nerves rattled, and his legs started to quake. "*So much for Mr. Calm, Cool, Collected Jedi Knight,*" he thought. He gently pulled Jaina off of him, withdrew something from his pocket, and bent down on the ground on one knee.

Jaina appeared rather confused, and noticed with a start that he was shaking. "What are you doing? What's wrong?"

"I'm fine," blue eyes swimming with love, Marxx took a deep breath and began, "Since the day you stepped into my life, practically any and every dream I ever fantasized about as a young boy has come true. However there was always one thing I dreamed of, but never really considered could ever really happen to me. That dream was to meet the most amazingly wonderful woman in the Galaxy and fall head over heels in love with her... and hope she felt the same way for me," He gave a small smile and continued, "I still have one dream left. Only you can realize that dream for me. I can only hope that my dream would also be your dream."

Jaina shook her head, liking what she was hearing, but still unsure what he was talking about.

Marxx nervously wet his lips and caressed her hand. "There's only one thing left that could make my life absolutely complete. I want to spend every day of my life making you happy... I love you... more than I ever thought it possible to love another person. You complete me... Jaina Solo, the love and light of my life," Marxx gulped and caught his breath, "Will you marry me?"

Jaina stared down at Marxx, suddenly lightheaded, black spots appeared briefly before her eyes. She



couldn't speak, she forgot to breathe. She reached out to the balcony to steady herself. Her heart dropped violently into her stomach. Try as she might, no words could escape her lips as she started crying. She vigorously nodded her head up and down.

Marxx nervously glanced up perplexed and worried, he squeaked, "Is that a yes?"

"Yes, YES!" Jaina blurted out.

Marxx let out a big sigh of relief and beamed. He glanced at her gloved hand. Jaina rolled her eyes at herself and tugged on the fingers. The glove wouldn't budge. Frustrated she grabbed it from the top with trembling fingers and ripped it off.

"That was really elegant, wasn't it?" she said giggling.

"We can just forget about that moment when we retell this to our grandchildren some day," Marxx laughed and slipped his ring on her finger.

Marxx stood up and the two wrapped their arms around each other tightly. The crescent crickets broke into song, a convoy of ships overhead launched into hyperspace, leaving long glowing vapor trails across the sky, and the stars glittered in a harmony of festive overhead lights, as the young couple basked in the glory of their love.

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## Chapter 9

Jaina couldn't remember what they ate or talked about at dinner. Her head still swam from the amazing events of the evening. She struggled not to gawk at her ring. Being a mechanic, she'd never gotten into the habit of wearing jewelry. She thought the ring felt blissfully out of place on her hand. Marxx also felt that they weren't getting much across to each other, but he just couldn't take his eyes off his gorgeous fiancée. He pushed back from the table and led her onto the balcony. Marxx caressed Jaina's tight brown curls that pranced around her neck and down her back. Soft music filled the air and they waltzed in time to the slow beat. After a while they came off their emotional high and simply enjoyed being close to each other. While they danced, staff swept into their quarters, removed the remains of their dinner and lit a fire in the fireplace.

Jaina thought of something and questioned Marxx, "You didn't by any chance ask for my father's approval did you?"

Marxx chuckled, "Bless the Force, that man terrifies me. I did actually. He came to deliver some supplies on Yavin 4 and I managed to ask him for your hand. Boy, that was the most nerve-wracking day of my life! Masters Rodersuin and Tionne both felt waves of distress coming from me and had to check to see what was the matter."

"How did he take it?"

Marxx thought back to that day on Yavin and gave Jaina the details. *Marxx spent the morning working with the younglings on jumping techniques. When he heard of the Falcon's arrival he ended the class. He raced out of the temple and ran smack into Han. Two large cargo boxes of plates soared in the air.*

*Han let out an annoyed yell, and Marxx threw up a hand stopping the boxes from crashing to the ground. He lightly set them down with the Force.*

*"Sorry about that General Solo. Here, let me help you."*

*Han squinted his eyes, "Marxx?"*

*"Yes sir?" Marxx said.*

*"What did you do to your hair, or should I say lack there of?" Han said, grinning.*

*"Oh, you know the humidity. It's cooler," Marxx said, smile emerging across his face.*

*"What does Jaina think about that?" Han asked, eyebrow raised.*

*"She doesn't mind it. In fact she told me she liked it," he said leaning down to pick up a box.*

*"Never trust anything a woman tells you regarding your looks, kid. They'll tell you one thing, but secretly, they are thinking another. Well unless you're married to a woman like Leia who has no problem speaking her mind on....anything!"*

*Marxx smiled, on edge, silently wondering about Han's sudden pleasant demeanor, "Thank you sir, I'll keep that in mind."*

*"Stop that."*

*"Stop what?" Marxx said, worry creeping into his voice.*

*"Calling me sir, it makes me feel like a decrepit old man," Han replied.*

*"Sorry. What would you prefer that I call you?" before he could suck the word back in he added, "Dad?"*

*"Dad? Now why would I let you call me Dad? You ain't an orphan you know," Han said, with a lopsided grin.*

*Realizing his error, Marxx decided he couldn't backpedal. "Actually, I would not presume to be able to call you that now. However I would hope that someday I could get the blessing from you to call you that."*

*"Marxx, you're talking in riddles. Out with it."*

*Marxx tried thinking of a how to properly phrase what he wanted to say, he blurt out, "I want to marry your daughter sir, and am hoping I can get your blessing before I ask her."*

*Any look of civility left Han's face. "You want to **marry** my little girl?"*

*"I...I wanted to ask you properly, before proposing...you know?" Marxx said, as Han's ears changed to an unflattering shade of maroon. Marxx squeaked, "Are you alright General?"*

*Blood boiling, Han pointed a finger in Marxx's face, "She's just a kid, you're just a kid! What do you know about marriage? You've got no job prospects. You're in training. How are you planning to support her? Huh?"*

*Marxx tripped over one of the fallen boxes, regained his footing and started taking backwards steps inside the temple as Han stalked him. Marxx yammered, "We are both in our twenties. I... think we are old enough to make rational decisions regarding our lives. I love Jaina, more than anything! I'll never let anything happen to her. As to my training I wouldn't dream of proposing until after I have been knighted."*

*"You think marriage is easy? You think being married to a daughter of Leia will be easy? Jaina's as bull headed as her mother."*

*"I know marriage is not something to be entered into lightly. I would never, ever ask her if I didn't believe that I could properly provide for her and for any childre..." Marxx watched in horror as Han's face turned murderous.*

*"Children. Why did you bring them up? Oh...so that's it, huh? Is that what brought this whole little conversation up? You got my little girl.."*

*Marxx waved his hands furiously, "No SIR! I haven't touched your daughter. I would never dishonor her that way. Bless the Force! I was speaking strictly in a future context only," Marxx suddenly felt hard cold stone against his back. Nowhere left to run. Sweat trickled down his forehead and back, his palms were clammy. "Please, I have nothing but the purest of intentions for Jaina. I love her and want to spend the rest of my life with her."*

*A low questioning growl came from the door as Chewie arrived with an armload of cargo. Marxx glanced to his left and saw Masters Tionne and Rodersuin watching on with bemused expressions.*

*Han stared long and hard at Marxx. He remembered the way Marxx and Jaina looked at each other at the Ryoo's house. He also recalled how his usually stoic and coolheaded little girl wept on and off for days after Marxx left her to come to Yavin 4 to start his training. It dawned on him that Jaina would never forgive him if he refused Marxx. Losing his only daughter, ultimately, would be a hell of a lot worse than gaining a smart son-in-law.*

*Han snarled at Marxx with a lopsided smile forming, "You know, I just can't seem to escape Jedis in my life. Every time I turn around I seem to be surrounded by more and more of 'em. I never even believed in the Force when I was young. And now it's like I'm a magnet for Jedi." Marxx looked on patiently, unsure of what to say. "If she accepts your proposal, I won't object."*

*Marxx let out a huge sigh of relief, "Thank you sir."*

*Han let out a long sigh as all anger left him. He smiled at the nervous young man, "I said stop calling me that. If you're eventually going to become family...call me Han. Come on kid, we've got a whole cargo bay of supplies to unload."*

*"I don't know why he doesn't like you," Jaina moaned.*

Marxx drowned in her soulful brown eyes. "He doesn't like me because I have replaced him as being the most important man in your life...At least I hope that's why."

Jaina grinned. "Well he'll just have to get over it. I'm no longer a little girl."

"You most certainly are not," Marxx said. Biting on his lower lip, he reached out an inquisitive hand towards the top of her dress line. Nervous fingers delicately traced the raised patterns on the fabric of her dress, and lightly danced between fabric and skin. Jaina tingled as his warm fingers fluttered over her cool bare skin.

Marxx bent down towards her, face hovering. His long eyelashes fluttered as he etched every contour of her heart shaped face into memory. Jaina chased his lips as he moved around. She let out a small laugh as he dodged her, teasing, taunting. He moved in and held a position just out of reach above her lips and smiled, eyes sparkling. Jaina gazed into his turquoise eyes and pouted.

She quickly reached up and crashed his face down to hers and kissed Marxx passionately. Marxx felt reality blur around him. His arms circled her cool, bare back. Jaina's fingers caressed his head, gently massaging his scalp. She broke off their kiss, leaving him breathless. She led him into the living room by his vest. Marxx noticed a particular twinkle in her eye.

"M'lady, what is going on in that mind of yours?"

She touched her full lower lip. "Why don't you read my mind, Jedi Knight, and tell me?"

Marxx didn't need to read her mind to figure out her intentions. He glanced over to a table, "Look they brought in dessert for us."

Jaina snaked a finger through the buttons on his vest and released them from their holes. With a throaty voice she said, "That's not exactly the kind of dessert I was hoping for."

"I reserved a suite with two bedrooms here M'lady, don't you be getting any funny ideas."

"I think you wasted your credits. Afraid to give the cleaning staff something to gossip over?" Jaina asked, her body pressed against him as she pulled off his vest and let it fall to the floor.

Marxx felt himself shake, breath deepen, as her dress slipped, exposing a bit more skin and cleavage. Jaina's fingers worked down towards the fastenings on his trousers. Now absolutely certain of her intentions, he grabbed her hand and took a step backwards away from the main bedroom door. Marxx felt his mouth go dry, "M'lady, we are not married yet. Such thoughts, ideas are...are unacceptable. I finally gained the confidence of your...very scary father. The last thing I'm going to do is... well... anything to jeopardize that trust."

Brown eyes narrowed, Jaina looked at him sharply, "You're not a prude are you Marxx?"

"What? What!.. No. I just...just...don't you want our wedding night to be special?"

Jaina sashayed away from him. She climbed the steps leading towards the master suite door. She slid her hand down the back of her leg, removed a shoe, and dropped it with a thump on the floor, "Don't you think it will be more special if we knew what each other likes and dislikes?" A second shoe came

off. Thump.

She stepped into the shadows of the room. Marxx sucked in breath as he heard a match flare up, and a series of candles burned to life, sending flickering shadows on the room's ceiling. He heard Jaina blow out the match. A soft fruity fragrance filled the room.

Marxx rubbed a hand at the back of his neck, mind racing for any excuse, "Don't you want me to have a full head of hair?" No response came from the bedroom, "Your father will *kill me!*"

"Sorry sweetie, that won't work this time. We are engaged after all." Marxx looked on helplessly as a bracelet bounced down the stone stairs towards him, jingling to a stop by his boot.

He walked over to the bottom of the stairs and called in towards Jaina's silhouetted form, with more conviction than he felt, "We cannot do this."

"If you are still worried about my father, I will take full responsibility and bear his wrath."

"Ha...It doesn't work that way M'lady," Marxx said defiantly, fists on waist.

"You know, had you not been away for eighteen, *long* months, we would have likely been married long ago. I'd say we're just catching up on lost time, wouldn't you?" She said, leaning now at the doorway, long hair flowing down her back.

Marxx walked up the stairs and towered over Jaina. He traced his finger along her chin, then brushed a hand through her long hair, savoring its softness. "You are beautiful," he whispered. Jaina rested a hand on his chest and pulled him down closer to him, their faces nearly touched, as their chests moved rapidly with heightened breaths. Marxx felt all decorum walls and barriers falling rapidly around him, as he stared into Jaina's willing eyes.

Marxx closed his eyes, releasing himself from her spellbinding glance, and inhaled a long, deep breath. He released himself from her hold and gently held her hands. "Let's get married as quickly as possible. Then we can do whatever we wish and nothing can stop us..."

Jaina interrupted, "You mean so *you* can't stop us."

Marxx pleaded, "...I know we may feel ready- but I think we should wait. Do you have ANY idea how hard this is for a man to say? Trust me this isn't easy for me- you are irresistible..." he leaned his head towards the balcony and smiled, "Come on, the night's still young. I hear a waltz playing out there- let's dance some more."

Jaina felt tears forming in her eyes. "What white Bantha did you come riding in here on?"

Marxx flashed her a brilliant smile, "One that said if I tried to do even the slightest thing to dishonor you, it would ride me straight to your father for immediate execution."

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Chapter 10

*The oppressive air stuck to Marxx like glue. The surrounding engine room pounded with deafening noise. Lightsaber ignited, he called out into the thick steamy fog. Sensing danger, he turned quickly and raised his sword in time to counter with a fiery red lightsaber. The two blades crashed violently in a flurry of parries and twists. The steam obscured the identity of his opponent. All he could hear emanating from the figure was mechanical rhythmic breathing. From the darkness came a shining purple blade as Jaina joined in the fight. The dark figure twisted and turned, feet lightening fast. From above, Jacen dropped down into the melee. Outnumbered three to one, the dark figure snarled and leapt out of sight.*

*Jaina, Marxx and Jacen all stood together back to back, waiting for another attack. From out of the cloud the red lightsaber flared and skewered Jaina in her middle. She screamed in agony as she dropped to the floor. Marxx felt waves of panic and despair wash over him. A cackling laugh filled the room. Jaina gazed at Marxx, her eyes glassed over; then she stopped breathing. Jacen let out a deep mournful wail as he felt his twin's spirit leave her body. Marxx felt his rational mind snap as he screamed out in rage. Lightsaber raised like a club he attacked.*

Marxx bolted upright drenched in sweat, desperately trying to catch his breath, and suck back his screams. He focused his eyes into the unfamiliar environment confused. Marxx felt the now wet silky sheets below him and he remembered that he was at the resort. Heart racing from terror, he pulled off his covers, and walked out of the room and through the living room. He stopped in front of Jaina's slightly ajar door and stared at it. He silently crept up the stairs and peered in her room. Jaina lay curled on her left side hugging a pillow.

From somewhere in her subconscious she felt his presence and stirred. Marxx tried a rapid retreat, "Marxx? What's the matter?"

Too late. "I just wanted to make sure you were Ok. I heard a noise is all."

Nearly wide awake, Jaina asked, "Is everything fine?"

Marxx smiled, "Yeah. I'll head back to bed now."

"Wait." Jaina sensed there was something else wrong.

He stopped mid turn. "Yes?"

"You want to come in here?" She smiled, patting her bed, "I promise, your precious virtue is safe with me. Besides it's kind of cool in here."

Marxx didn't feel much like returning to his empty bed. Jaina flipped over the sheets and he climbed in with her. She snuggled back into his strong arms. Marxx nestled his face into her downy hair and inhaled its comforting fruity fragrance. He gently caressed the soft skin on her arm, and laced his fingers with hers. Jaina pulled their hands down by her chest, closer to her heart. Marxx encircled her in a warm embrace. Jaina sighed. Any and all tension he'd felt earlier vanished as they drifted blissfully off to sleep together.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the early morning prior to dawn, Luke strode with purpose through the maze of Coruscant's

underbelly landscape. He briefly stopped and consulted with the coordinates on his datapad. He then resumed his course. He stopped minutes later and verified his surroundings. His brown Jedi cloak swirled as he descended a flight of stairs, leading him far below the Galaxy Quest Shopping Mall. He opened the locked doors. His footsteps echoed through a series of long gray empty corridors, established for delivering stock to the thousands of stores above.

Luke thought it ironic that in the same spot where the mighty Jedi Temple of Coruscant had stood for nearly a thousand years, there now existed a multiplex shopping center. One religion replaced another.

He found another series of stairs and descended deeper into the bowels of the building. Twelve flights down, he came upon a thick steel door. Casually, he opened the lock with the Force. Greeted with absolute darkness, Luke pulled out three levitating lights from his robes and sent them out into the blackness. Mounds and mounds of musty smelling debris greeted his eyes, debris long forgotten on Coruscant to all. From in the room he heard the rhythmic sound of water dripping.

Luke only discovered this place after recently spending hours pouring over ancient maps of Coruscant at the local library archives. In a city that constantly builds on top of buildings, one forgets quickly what the original landscape looked like months ago, much less decades ago. With the chaos involved with building the New Republic, Luke never found much time to try and find this place. Knowing he likely wouldn't get to talk to Ben again, he had a valid reason now to search through the ruins.

Silently Luke removed his robe and began to sift through the miles of ruins.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jaina woke to the warm caresses of the Nubian sunbeams on her face. She stretched her toes and arms luxuriously, allowing herself the pleasurable feel of the silky sheets. She then realized Marxx wasn't in the bed anymore. Grinning, she snuck her hand out from under the covers and stared at the large sparkling diamond ring on her finger. Tiny kaleidoscope rainbow drops glittered around her as the Nubian sunlight danced off of the stone. She'd never felt so alive and happy before in her life. She sat up and saw her robe neatly set out on the end of the bed. Her slippers rested neatly side by side on the floor and a cup of palkanberry juice sat on her bedside table. Her heart swelled with love at Marxx's thoughtfulness.

She took a long drink of the sweet juice. Then she begrudgingly hopped out of bed and then gave herself a once over in the refresher's mirror. Her once dazzling coiffeur spiked out in all directions. She grabbed a brush and worked through the knots. Satisfied with her more manageable appearance, she wandered out of the bedroom yawning.

Marxx sat in sleeping trousers on the couch in the living room. The room smelled of spent fire, jawa juice, and untouched breakfast. As she neared him she noticed all his family files lay out on a low table in front of him. She saw that the more recent files had replaced papers with datapads. A barely touched cup of Jawa juice sat beside him on an end table. She smiled; practically overnight his hair had grown a half an inch.

Marxx didn't move or acknowledge her arrival, as he continued to stare deeply reading the papers before him. Jaina snuck up behind him and lightly moved her fingers over the tips of his spiked hairs, tickling them. Marxx shook his head slightly. She suppressed a giggle, and ever so lightly tickled the tip of his earlobe. In a movement faster than she could register, Marxx reached up behind him, and



drew her down into his lap, sending her slippers flying. Her foot knocked over the cup, sending it shattering to the floor. Their lips locked together in a kiss. Marxx eased her onto the couch and lay on top of her, holding her arms far above her head.

“You didn’t really think you could sneak up on a Jedi, did you M’lady?” Marxx asked, eyes bright and full of vigor.

Jaina pouted, “Well a girl can always hope. I see I have you at my mercy.”

Marxx laughed shaking her hands firmly, “Exactly how are you the one in charge of this situation, M’lady?” Jaina smiled deviously, and moved a foot down his leg and started to gently pull the bottom of his pants leg up with her toes. Marxx shifted, lopsided grin forming on his face, and looked down at what she was doing. As he did so she moved her foot up and down his leg, then she bent up and captured his lips in a kiss.

Jaina broke apart and asked teasing, “Do you surrender?”

“Long ago M’lady, long ago.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Luke sliced a large wooden arch in half with his lightsaber. He then lifted the heavy pieces off of a pile of debris. Instinct drove him to this spot. Stripped down to his black tank shell, Luke removed mountains of stone and wood, until his dirt crusted and bloody fingers fell upon the item he believed called for him, a datadisk. He Force pulled over one of the lights and looked it over, it appeared to be intact. He carefully placed it on his Jedi robe and found more files the more he dug around. Many of the datadisks had damage to them. Many did not. He climbed out of the hole he created, put his shirt back on, and yanked out a storage bag he’d hidden in the depths of his robe’s pockets and stashed away the disks.

He gathered the lights, locked the door, and headed back up to the now jumping and bright streets of Coruscant.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Before you so rudely interrupted me...”Marxx began.

“Rudely? Rudely? I hardly heard you complaining, Jedi.” Jaina said, barely able to believe what she heard.

“Touchy, aren’t we?” Marxx said. He flicked a long mass of newly tousled hair from Jaina’s face. “I was kidding, M’lady.”

“Sorry.” She said sitting up. She wrapped her arms around his chest, and he circled her shoulder.

“Accepted. Where was I?”

“I have no idea,” Jaina said, admiring his strong jaw and profile.

“Oh I was looking through my family files and was just about to look at my grandfathers before you came over here.”

“So what’s in it?” She asked.

“What’s in what?”

“Your grandfathers file.” She let go of him as he leaned forward.

“Let’s look and see shall we?” Marxx pulled out the datapad and flicked through the particulars, birthdate, age, profession, marriage certificate... his heart dropped into his stomach, “Oh my Force.”

Jaina frowned with concern as Marxx lost all color from his face. She gripped his arm, “What is it?”

Marxx felt tears form in his eyes and his body started to shake, “Oh my Force. No... No... This can’t be...this just isn’t possible.”

“Marxx! What is it?” Marxx abruptly stood up back turned to Jaina. He placed a hand on his neck. Jaina jumped up, “What is the matter?” He turned around; his eyes hollow and haunted. “Marxx? What is it? TALK TO ME!”

“I need to sit down.” He collapsed on the couch, dropping the datapad, clattering on the floor. He buried his head in his hands, “Why?... Why did they lie to me all these years?”

Jaina stooped down, picked up the datapad, set it on the table and wrapped her arms around him. “Who lied to you? What are you talking about?”

Marxx sat silent for the longest time, Jaina regarded him helplessly as he tried to form words. Tears streaked down his face. Marxx sat up, fingers on his temple. “You shouldn’t marry me.... I’m poison.”

“WHAT?”

“I’m poison. I’m poison.” He repeated himself over and over as he rocked back and forth. Completely confused, Jaina reached out and picked up the datapad. She flicked through the list of particulars about Paulo, when her heart stopped. The marriage certificate revealed the name of Marxx’s grandmother’s maiden name: Gwynalyn Palpatine.

Jaina felt a small laugh bubble of inside her. She then trembled with laughter. “This is just perfect.”

“I hardly think this is something to laugh over. This is horrible.”

“Honey, Marxx, look at me,” Jaina grabbed his strong jaw. Marxx’s blue eyes glistened, hang-dogged. “You accepted me, even though I’m *Darth Vader’s* granddaughter. Do you think I’m going to let one little thing, like you being a Palpatine, stop me from wanting to be with you?”

Marxx smiled through his tears and pain. He crushed her in a tight embrace. “Thank you, I needed that.... I love you.” He broke free, “Pack your things. We need to leave.” He gathered together all of the files and stood up, determination building in him.

“Where are we going?” She said, drinking in the sight of his strong back.

“Back to the records room to find out exactly how closely I’m related to the Emperor. Then we are going to pay a little visit to my family. I’ve got two things to bring up with them now.”

“What’s the first? Our engagement?”

His features softened, “Well Ok, three things. No, a couple weeks ago I had a vision that has lead me to believe that I may have had a twin sister whom nobody has ever bothered to mention to me.”

Jaina sat on the couch mouth agape, not sure how to respond to that startling revelation. Marxx approached her and kissed her gently. “Come on, I’ll tell you all about it on our way back to Theed.”

Jaina stomped her foot, stood up and muttered, “So much for a tour of the grounds here.”

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## Chapter 11

*The Vengeance* moved slowly through the hazy pink ion cloud. Captain Hydin argued with the engineering crew, as they spewed out a flurry of excuses for their delays. Hydin pinched the bridge over his nose in frustration. He started to sweat profusely from tension and fear. The Admiral grew restless below. He felt her wrath building with each session he approached her with more disheartening news.

“Tell me exactly how many days before the hyperdrive will be back on line. I need a definite answer.”

“We are expecting delivery of the main reactor for the drive today Captain. When installed, it should be ready before evening.” Corporal Arving said.

Somehow, Hydin did not feel reassured. He’s been told this before. He hated relying upon smugglers. He turned and stalked out of the engineering department and headed back to the bridge. He sulked down into his command chair, staring without seeing, the pink mist that swirled outside the windows. Suddenly his heart stopped. He heard loud footsteps, clanging along the bridge’s gangplank, followed by a quickening metallic breathing.

Terrified Hydin leaped to his feet, in time to find himself lifted off of his feet, suspended five feet in air, airwaves constricting. Surrounding crewmen either busily typed away at their terminals or fled from the bridge.

Darkglider stood far below him, right hand pointed upwards, left on her hip. “Captain Hydin, why are we still in this forsaken Ion Cloud? Where is my hyperdrive?”

Hydin clutched at his neck, and squeaked through his increasing lack of breath, “The engineers tell me it will be activated tonight, sir.”

“You told me this same answer five days ago. I do not like incompetence, Captain.”

Hydin’s vision clouded as the lack of oxygen started plunging him blissfully towards the abyss.

Darkglider growled, lowered her hand, and the Captain fell in a heap on the deck. He gasped, sucking in precious air. He regained his vision only to find himself face to face with Darkglider's hideous mask.

"Take me to these engineers of yours. Perhaps my powers of persuasion can finally motivate them." She turned around, long black skirt swirling.

Hydin pushed himself up massaging his neck. He briefly wished she had just finished him off. "Yes Admiral, right away."

\*\*\*\*\*

Mara walked with Luke to the landing pad, baby Ben in her arms.

"I won't be long, I just need to drop these off at Yavin 4 and do a little research," Luke said taking his son from Mara. Ben squashed up his face and bellowed sensing his father was about to leave. Luke grinned.

"Sure you can smile because you're not going to have to try and calm him down," Mara said unhappily.

"I'll be back before you know it." Luke kissed his son on the forehead, handed him back to his wife. He then bent over and gave Mara a long tender kiss.

"May the Force be with you." Mara said.

"May the Force be with you both," Luke said, gently caressing his son's hair before heading up into the cockpit of his X-Wing. He locked himself in, put on his helmet, fired up his engines, waved to his wife and son, and lifted off into the Coruscant atmosphere.

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Admiral Darkglider sat in the command chair and gazed into the pink haze. Out in the void of space, three bodies floated after being unceremoniously dumped with the trash from *The Vengeance*. "Is the hyperdrive back online?"

"Yes Admiral," Captain Hydin gladly reported, grasping his collar.

"Good, lay in a course, for Tatooine."

Without flinching or hesitation, Hydin replied, "Yes, Admiral."

The ion cloud disappeared into a sea of streaking white lines.

\*\*\*\*\*

During his flight, Luke felt tremors of anger and pain in the Force. Anger came from one side of the galaxy, pain from Naboo. He furrowed his brows, uncertain what these shock waves meant.

Luke landed his ship and then strode purposefully, Jedi robe swirling, into the depths of the Jedi Archives in the Great Temple on Yavin 4. He flicked through the datadisks looking for something, anything that would give him new insight into the riddles of Marxx Racees. He hoped he had pulled enough files from the rubble on Coruscant.

His fingers moved over the disks, sensing one calling to him. He reached into the bag and pulled one out and plugged it into the terminal. Suddenly before him, a disk unraveled a history lesson to him. He read rapt with interest. Phantom mysteries began taking form.

*Long ago, a millenium before the birth of the Old Republic, the Force was discovered by a few enlightened souls. The Force, being a necessary component of all living things, through its inherent intelligence, occasionally found women of honor and goodness and bestowed upon them the gift of child. That child would be strong with the Force. It was from these initial women that the Force planted its seed into the lives of those it felt worthy of enlightenment. Oftentimes, these women would give birth to twins. One twin would usually be stronger and the weaker would perish. Survival of the Force fittest was born. These great survivors became the ultimate champions of light in the Galaxy, the founding Jedi Knights. In time when enough Jedi lived and breathed in the Galaxy, the Force stopped impregnating women. Then the Prophecy of the Chosen One came into existence, as the Force's only means of reintroducing its will upon mankind.*

Luke stared at the ancient text and began to wonder if Ben's take on Marxx's birth could be correct. Could, the Force be working to again replenish the Galaxy with Force Strong children? Luke had noticed in recent years a surge in the numbers of new Jedi cadets. He had to wonder, if this was the case, how many other children like Marxx and his long dead sister Raven were out there?

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## Chapter 12

Chariss realized something was wrong when Marxx barged into the house without acknowledging her. Jaina sailed in on his storming wake. Having just spent several hours trying to calm Marxx, she found her victories failing.

"Where's Dad? I need Dad, Grandfather and you in here, NOW! And make sure Tanella is here too!" Marxx paced the living room snarling like a caged rancor monster.

"Hold on, I'll go get them dear," Chariss said, she glanced at Jaina. Jaina gave her a sympathetic smile, but offered no insight.

"Marxx," Jaina said, grabbed his arm, stilled him mid pace. She couldn't believe it as she heard herself spouting Jedi wisdom. "Don't let yourself get taken over by anger. Clear your mind." Marxx resisted. "Marxx, look at me! Do it, NOW!"

Marxx stared down at Jaina and let out a deep long breath of air. She threw her arms around him. Visions of Marxx tearing through the file room, pounding on the file cabinets, screaming out in anger filled her mind. She'd never seen Marxx nearly lose control and be so upset over anything. He had shook from his building rage. Jaina nearly had to slap him to snap him out of his state. His words rung in her mind. "You know, I can handle the fact that they didn't tell me I had a twin who died long ago.

*I'm sure that was painful for them. But to not tell me I was related to Palpatine? I asked them repeatedly if I had Jedi blood in me and they flat out denied it. How can I ever trust a word any of them tell me again?"*

Marxx closed his eyes and drank in the calming smell of Jaina's shampoo. He fingered the tight twists that scattered all over the top of her head.

"Remember you love these people and they love you." Jaina said pushing herself deeply against his broad chest.

"I know." He continued to play with her hair and felt the rising heat in his cheeks dissipate. He glanced over as Tanella and Krishta tiptoed into the room.

"Hey Sis, hey Krishy," Marxx said, still holding Jaina.

"What's wrong Marxx? Jaina is he alright?"

"Just take a seat," Marxx let go of Jaina, "You want a drink?" he asked her as he wandered off to the kitchen.

"What's going on?" Tanella whispered to Jaina.

"You'll find out soon enough."

Marxx returned shortly with a pitcher filled with ice water and glasses for everyone. Assembled in the living room at his bidding, his family now stared at Marxx with confused expressions. Marxx rubbed a hand nervously across his neck, then up through his stubbled hair, unsure of how to begin.

He let his eyes fall on each of his family members. They rested on his dark haired mother and he spoke, "You told me growing up that no one in our family had Jedi abilities. Why did you say that?"

Chariss stared at her son, "Because it's true. You are the only one in our family to have Jedi abilities Marxx."

Marxx turned his eyes towards his grandfather, "Grandfather, you know that's not true, don't you?"

Paulo looked around startled. Hands covered in dry paint, he asked, "What are you talking about boy?"

"So no one is going to fess up?" he pulled out Paulo's datapad and handed it to his grandfather. "Does that maiden name ring any bells to you?"

Paulo looked at the file, "Where did you get this?"

"Does that really matter? I think the facts speak for themselves. You all didn't bother to ever mention that I have Palpatine's blood running through my veins. I think that's a big indication that we have Jedi in our family tree. No wait, even better, we have *Sith* in our family roots."

"Your grandmother was a good woman. She never had any Jedi powers," Paulo said. "She was a true Nubian woman, a great artist who loved culture..."

Marxx felt his cheeks get hot again as his temper flared, “But she was Emperor Palpatine’s youngest sister. I know. I just checked her files as well. You can’t be a sibling to someone and get completely bypassed for Jedi abilities. It’s not possible.”

He walked over to Tanella and placed a finger on her forehead. He felt around to the back of her brain and pushed. He jolted slightly back. He then moved to Krishta and did the same, and got the same reaction. He then walked over to his mother, and pushed. He nearly fell back from the force of the push. “See we all have the ability. For some reason, it’s stronger with me though than all of you. I could have been training as a Jedi long ago had you ever bothered to mention this little fact to me. I could have gotten off of that backworld planet and been exploring the Galaxy!”

“Would you really have wanted that? What about Jaina?” Chariss asked.

“We would have met eventually. I’m not too worried about that.” Marxx said, frustration bubbling.

Jaina sensed his conflict and took his hand. She reasoned, “Let’s not worry about what could have been, Ok? Let’s concentrate on the here and now.”

Chariss seemed to squirm in her seat as she gazed at her son’s obvious distress. “Is that all?”

Marxx narrowed his eyes and snarled, “Well actually no. Who’s Ray-ran?”

Everyone in the room gasped. Krishta looked on with confusion. Chariss said in a small voice, “How did you find out about Raven?”

“Raven,” he let her name linger over his tongue, “I think I’ve always known about her, I had just forgotten. It’s funny, that’s what happens when someone dies and nobody ever mentions her again, never even having a holo-image around to remind you of a loved one long gone. She may not even have ever existed. What happened to my twin?”

Rowlon stood up, angry, seeing his wife shaking with tears, “Is this what you wanted boy? To see your mother upset? If it is, you succeeded. Yes you had a twin sister. We named her Raven.”

“What happened to her?” Marxx asked, oblivious to his mother’s pain.

“The girl was frail and sick. She died at the hospital in Mos Espa of a heart condition. We loved her dearly. You in fact, were the light of her life. But she was sickly and died. We all still miss her tremendously. We actually did have a holo-image of us all together, but it disappeared.”

“Rowlon stop it. It’s time he knew the truth. The whole truth. We knew this day was coming.”

Tanella looked on with distress, “What are you two talking about?”

“Are you sure, do you want me to tell him?” Rowlon asked Chariss.

Chariss looked on with vacant eyes and stilled her husband, “No let me do it. Marxx sit down. Your pacing is making me nervous.” Marxx reluctantly collapsed on the floor, Jaina beside him. “The three of us fled Naboo during the attacks of the Clone Wars. We ended up alone, and near penniless on



Tatooine. Your grandfather got work and began saving for us to leave the planet. My mother hated Tatooine, passionately hated it. She hated the dust, the scum, the gambling, she hated everything about it.”

Paulo chimed in, “She would be gloomy for months, even years. I couldn’t shake her out of her funk. Even worse, she grew angry and course over the years. The loving woman I married years ago vanished before my eyes the longer we stayed on that planet.”

“When I married Rowlon, she got irate. She couldn’t believe I had fallen in love with a man who appeared to never want to leave Tatooine. That wasn’t true- Rowlon said he would follow me to the opposite end of the universe if I requested it.” Chariss smiled and gave her husband’s hand a squeeze, “When I gave birth to Tanella, I had hoped a granddaughter would help lift her from her depression. It didn’t. Rowlon then wanted a boy, we tried for several years to no avail. Then one night, after another failed results test came back, I asked the stars to give me a son. And they granted my wish,” Chariss said.

Rowlon looked at her strangely.

“Marxx, you and your sister were conceived by some greater power. That is why you are stronger with the Force than any of us and why Palpatine’s blood means nothing.”

“What do you mean, you think the Force conceived Marxx? That’s impossible, he’s my son!” Rowlon asked.

Tanella stared at her parents closely, then looked at Marxx, “No he’s not Dad. Look at him. He doesn’t look like us much except for his coloring.”

Jaina held tightly to Marxx’s arm as he stared blankly at his parents. “Marxx? Are you alright?”

“So I’m a child of the Force?” Marxx sat contemplating that bit of information for a moment, “Jaina, surprisingly yes. Did you ever mention that to Master Skywalker?” he said.

“Yes, he asked me about your abilities and I told him.”

Marxx smiled and let out a small laugh. He felt his anger abating, replaced by curiosity. “That explains why he seemed so keenly interested in my training. Go on.”

“Your sister was born with a weak heart. Your grandmother suddenly found a cause and nursed that child devoutly. For two years we suffered watching Raven wither away before our eyes. Raven’s heart gave out and she died. With Raven gone, your grandmother vanished at that time as well. We never saw or heard from her again.”

Marxx glanced around the room, “Is that it?”

“What you need more?” Rowlon asked, clearly agitated.

“No, I guess that’s fine. So you buried Raven somewhere and that was the end of it.”

“We never got her body from the hospital. There was some kind of mix-up and she was cremated.”

Rowlon said.

“Did you ever see her body?”

“What? No. Why would the hospital lie about that? She died son, accept that.”

Marxx stood up and started pacing again. “What were her symptoms?”

“She had a defective heart, it wouldn’t pump blood properly throughout her body- areas like her lips, toes and fingernails would be blue from the lack of oxygen. She’d also cough constantly. One of her lungs didn’t work properly.”

“So how did you keep her alive? Why wasn’t she given implants?”

“She had a respirator that we would hook her up to. But she was too young and small for surgery. The medics couldn’t fit her with a lung implant due to the fact she would still be growing,” Rowlon said, “Marxx why do you need to know this?”

“I’m just curious. I still don’t understand why wouldn’t you have told me that I had a twin? And why keep the Palpatine lineage from me? What would either fact have hurt?”

“That’s just it son, the memories of both things hurt too much,” Rowlon said, he walked over to Marxx. He smiled lovingly at Chariss seeking approval, she nodded her head, “After the baby died and then when Gwynalyn walked out, your mother had to be hospitalized for stress, for quite a long while. We don’t talk about Raven or your grandmother, because they bring up a very dark time for our family. We are sorry to have ever kept this from you.”

“And you didn’t know about our ‘special’ birth?”

“No this is the first I’ve heard of it. Not that I’m surprised. If there was a more noble young man in the galaxy, I’d like someone to show him to me. I doubt he’d hold up next to you,” Rowlon said.

Marxx felt a tear fall down his cheek. He hugged his father tightly. “I’m sorry for the way I just acted. Mom, can you forgive me?”

Chariss stood up and joined the embrace, “Of course dear. We should have told you long ago.”

Marxx glanced over at Jaina, wiped the tears from his eyes and extended his hand out to her. Jaina wrapped her arms around his chest and he circled her shoulder tightly with his arm. Marxx breathed out and smiled brightly for the first time all evening. “Well you may have lost a daughter years ago, but you are about to gain a daughter-in-law. Jaina and I are engaged.”

The Racees welcomed the happy news and all congratulated the couple. Marxx and Jaina were embraced warmly by Marxx’s family. After a bunch of happy chatter and dessert, Marxx and Jaina left.

“Where are we going now?” Jaina asked sensing Marxx had no intention of letting matters rest.

“To Tatooine. I need Raven’s hospital records.”

“Well if we’re going to do some covert work, we’ll need help,” Jaina said stopping mid walk and placed her hands on her hips.

“Who’d you have in mind?” Marxx asked turning around to face her.

“Jacen, he can charm a Gamorrean guard out of his double sided axe.”

“Any idea where he is?” Marxx asked flicking his hand upwards.

“Yeah he’s on the other side of Naboo in the marble mines handling a border dispute.”

“Let’s go get him then,” he said reaching out for her hand.

“Why do you need Raven’s records?” Jaina asked as she held his hand tightly and turned her face upwards to him.

Marxx smiled down at her. The setting sun brightened his excited face, “Because I don’t think Raven is dead. I don’t think she ever died. I’m more certain than ever, she’s alive.”

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## Chapter 13

Jacen rested, head downcast, on the galley seat in the dining quarters on the *Hope* nursing a mug of steaming Jawa Juice. Marxx wandered in after leaving Jaina alone in the cockpit verifying their flight course to Tatooine. She found a fluctuation in the life support system and busied herself to find the remedy. She also wanted to send in a call to Anakin to check on how things were going at Theed.

Marxx peeked in at Jaina’s twin. Over the past year and a half the two had become as close as brothers while they worked together in secret to get the resort built without Jaina’s knowledge. Marxx found it refreshing to have a close male pal with like- minded ambitions. Having grown up in a household of women, Marxx found it refreshing to be entering into a family with a couple of males his age. He had friends on Tatooine, but none of them ever wanted to leave, or seemed to have any dreams of bettering their lives. He often found that aside from conversations about mechanics and podracing, he had very little in common with his Mos Espa friends. He always believed he was meant for a life outside of just being a junkyard worker, and now with those dreams realized, he couldn’t be happier.

Marxx noticed Jacen seemed rather depressed, when they picked him up from the marble mines. And it appeared his mood hadn’t changed much. Marxx grabbed a couple snack packs out of a cupboard, chucked one at Jacen and sat down at the table. He opened the pack and tossed back a handful of nuts and dried fruits.

“Thanks Marxx,” Jacen said, ripping open the pouch with his teeth, he spit out the corner onto the table.

“Jace,” Marxx said ripping into his packet. “What’s up?”

“Huh?” Jacen said drinking from his mug.

“What’s up?” Marxx flung a nut at Jacen’s head.

Jacen swatted at his brown hair, and the nut fell onto the table, he immediately chucked it back at Marxx. It missed its intended mark and whizzed over his shoulder, clattering off onto the floor.

“Come on gloom and doom out with it!”

Jacen peered towards the cockpit, Jaina nowhere to be seen. “Did you do it?”

“What? Oh yea.” Marxx said knowing his friend had just diverted the conversation.

“And....?”

Marxx gave Jacen a sly smile, “So you want the job as best man or what?”

Jacen pounded his mug down on the table and extended his hand. “Congratulations, welcome to the family.”

Marxx shook Jacen’s hand and beamed. “Thank you. Who’d have thought me, a former outlander pod racer, would be marrying into the famous Skywalker and Solo family? Not me, that’s for sure!”

Jacen rubbing his chin and batting his eyes, he teased, “So was it *romantic* like you had hoped, with the crickets singing, full moon rising?”

“Honestly?” Marxx chuckled, “I can’t remember. I was too blasted nervous. All I remember is Jaina. She looked amazing. She nearly made me pass out though, took her long enough to answer my question. Guess she wasn’t expecting the proposal.”

Jacen laughed. “All that planning we put into things and you don’t even remember? You nerf-herder! Did she like the resort at least?”

“Yea, I’ve never seen her happier.”

“And I suppose you, her man, took all the credit?” Jacen asked, eyebrow raised.

Marxx pointed at himself indignantly, “Who me? Hey I told her you and Anakin contributed. Fair’s fair buddy.”

“Uh huh. Right.” Jacen studied his friend closely, brown eyes narrowing.

“I did, just ask her,” Marxx said pointing towards the cockpit, blue eyes indignant.

“Alright, I believe you.” Jacen said, throwing a bunch of nuts in his mouth.

“So what about you?” Marxx said, lopsided grin forming on his mouth.

“Wha abou me wha?” Jacen asked chewing.

“When are we going to hear wedding chimes for you?” Marxx lifted his eyebrow.

Jacen hacked and choked on a nut. He coughed and grabbed his drink, swallowing mightily, tears flowing down his face. He squeaked out, "Me?"

"You alright there, Jace?" Jacen nodded sucking in breaths. "So?"

"So what?" Jacen scowled. "You have to have a potential bride before you can propose, don't you?"

Marxx's eyes sparkled with bemusement. "Oh come on what about your one armed, Hapesian Warrior Princess?"

"Tenal Ka sees me as a *friend*, I don't think she'll be interested in me in any other way."

Sensing this was the reason for Jaina's twin's unease, Marxx asked, "And whose fault is that? Hey Jace, what have I said before?"

Jacen rolled his eyes and parroted back, "*You're never gonna get anywhere with the girl unless you tell her how you feel.* What about you?"

"Me? What about me?" Marxx asked.

"How long before you told Jaina how you felt about her?"

Marxx thought about it, "Second day after meeting her, I told her I was falling in love with her."

"Great Mr. Calrissian himself," Jacen fell back in his chair and crossed his arms.

"Well you can't get what you want, if you don't put yourself out on the line. Sorry, pal. Women like to be swept off their feet. They like to feel like they are the center of your universe. You have to say something in order to get things going. What's the worst that can happen?"

"She'll laugh in my face," he said turning his face aside.

"I thought you said she had no sense of humor."

Jacen scowled. "You know what I mean. Then where would I be then, huh bud?"

"Free to move on," Marxx said.

"Move onto what?"

"Who knows, maybe the girl of your dreams is out there somewhere, just waiting for you to land at her feet and be her dream Jedi Knight, ready to rescue her from a nightmarish existence... Like your sister did for me."

Jacen stared gloomily at his sister's fiancé. "Oh sure having every gorgeous girl on Tatooine throwing themselves at your feet was such a nightmare."

Jaina waltzed into the room and settled herself into Marxx's lap, wrapping her arms around his broad

shoulders. “Forty five more minutes until we reach Tatooine. And the life support is fully functioning again.”

Marxx grabbed a napkin and wiped engine grease off of Jaina’s forehead, then tapped her nose. “Thank you M’lady. How’re things on Naboo?”

“Going fine, Anakin’s groaning about the joys of paperwork. He tried begging me to come back.”

“I bet he wants you back. Our little brother isn’t exactly the king of patience. So are you going to show it to me or what?” Jacen asked.

Jaina glanced back and forth at the guys, “Is that what you two were in here talking about? I thought only girls sat around talking about such things!” she said, extending her hand across the table for Jacen to examine her ring.

“Yikes I think I’m blinded!” Jacen said covering his eyes.

“Excuse me for being a happy man, Miss Solo,” Marxx said tightening his grip around her waist.

Jaina planted a kiss on his forehead. “That’s soon to be Mrs. Solo-Racees to you! You guys want to come help me clean the thermal intake vents?” Marxx and Jacen shared a glance, realizing that wasn’t really a question.

“After you M’lady,” Marxx said, setting her on her feet. She bounded out of the galley towards the engine compartment.

Jacen stood up and pushed Marxx, “Hey Marxx, you know once you marry her, you won’t ever get to win another argument.”

Marxx shot Jacen a lopsided smile, “What difference would that make. I never win any arguments with her.”

“I’ll remember that!” Jaina shouted from across the ship.

The two soon to be brothers smiled. Jacen pounded Marxx on the shoulder, and Marxx pushed Jacen into the table. The two then headed off after her laughing.

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## Chapter 14

“*They’re going to owe me big time,*” Jacen thought as he leaned over the emergency room front desk batting his eyes at a blue six hundred pound Twel’ik. He sent a “*Coast’s clear*” message off to Jaina through the Force as he commented on the Twel’ik’s black eyes.

Marxx hid inside the medical emergency speeder with Jaina strapped to the emergency hoverboard. Fully dressed in Healers gear he pulled up the dust mask and exited the speeder and bust open the doors of Mos Espa General. He sent the hoverboard careening through the emergency room doors and directed it down the hall. Jaina let out a painful moan. Jacen waved his hand in front of the desk clerk,

clouding her mind from viewing the wayward duo.

Jaina tilted her head upwards when they crashed into a recovery room. The hoverboard knocked over a large bottle of cleansing alcohol sending it clattering to the floor. The stinging, pungent scent brought tears to their eyes. Marxx pulled down all the blinds, and lowered the lights.

“Marxx!” Jaina whispered from the hoverboard.

“Sorry,” he said and released Jaina, while shucking his disguise. Jaina bounced over to the computer terminal, and began looking over the database structure. She placed a hand on the terminal.

“Come on, come on. They’re going to find us in here,” Marxx said, blue eyes darting around the room.

“Patience, Marxx. Blast I wish Lowie was here- he lives for this kind of computer hacking.”

“What you don’t think you can figure it out?” Marxx asked.

“Hey, it’s me.” Marxx gave her a somewhat suspect look at her confidence.

Jaina allowed her mind to connect with the maps of code embedded in the database. She sifted through the large mass and web of security blocks. She triumphantly squealed when she located the mainframe password. She typed it in and found herself face to face with a client search page.

Frantically her fingers flew over the keys, entering the name Raven Racees. Four pages of files appeared. She plugged her datapad into the connection port and selected “Open, download all” and waited for the commands to process.

Jaina sensed waves of distress coming from the lobby. “Oh no, I think Jacen’s losing control out there.”

Marxx walked over to the blinds and peeked out in time to see the large blue Twi’lek gripping Jacen on the face and planting a huge sloppy kiss on his lips. Jacen’s brown eyes grew huge with horror.

Marxx’s face writhed with disgust, and then he laughed, “Nah, he’s fine.”

The computer screen beeped in completion. Jaina went back to the front page and intuitively typed in the name Raven again. Two more pages appeared with the name Raven Palpatine. Smiling triumphantly, she downloaded those files as well.

“Are you done?”

“Almost.” She drummed her fingers rapidly against the desk. Her eyes flitted over the information that scrolled on the screen. She found herself glad to have decided to download the second set of files.

Shouting could be heard in the lobby. Marxx peered out and a bunch of Nikto security guards surrounded the front desk. Jacen managed to wiggle his way through the throng of people and headed out the door, casting a worried expression in their direction.

“Time’s up.” As if on cue, the terminal beeped, and Jaina removed the datapad, slipping it into her gray

flightsuit pocket. She then typed in a bunch of commands.

“What are you doing?”

“Just covering my tracks.” The screen went black. Then the characters all began to morph and change. “A little trick Lowie taught me once. I planted a temporary bug in the system. Let’s go.” Hospital personnel screamed all over the building and in the emerging chaos, Marxx and Jaina slipped out unnoticed.

Jacen raced up behind them as they all wandered the crowded, dusty streets of Mos Espa. He frantically wiped his face. “I think next time you both ask for my help, I’ll pass on it.”

“Jacen’s got a new girlfriend!” Jaina said in a singsong voice. Jacen’s eyes grew murderous and he gave her a hard shove. Jaina howled with laughter.

“Come on you two, let’s get back to the ship and away from this hellhole,” Marxx said, suppressing a laugh.

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Jaina guided *The Nubian Hope* out of the Tatooine atmosphere, and began laying in the coordinates into the hyperdrive system for Naboo.

“Well, will you look at that,” Marxx asked as he flipped through the files for the second Raven Jaina had downloaded.

“When I was copying the files for your sister, it occurred to me that if your sister was still alive, that she may have been brought back there under a different name. I found these files for a Raven Palpatine.”

Marxx scanned the contents of the file, “Gee, my Grandmother wasn’t all that original in concealing Raven’s identity was she?”

“Lucky for us she wasn’t.”

Jacen, sitting in the navigator seat behind the co-pilot’s seat, let out a shout. Jaina and Marxx looked up to see an enormous Imperial Class Star Destroyer appeared in front of them. Jaina pulled back on the throttle and sailed them out of a direct collision course.

“Where in the galaxy did that thing come from?” Marxx said.

Jaina studied the readouts in front of her, “More importantly, why are they scanning us?” As if to answer her question, the destroyer opened fire on them.

Marxx flung himself into the co-pilot seat, and strapped himself in and pounded on the hyperdrive controls. “I think now is a good time to get those co-ordinates set.”

“Why are they firing on us?” Jacen yelled. Another ear pounding barrage of laser fire burst around their outer hull, deflecting off of their shields and shaking the ship. Jacen pitched forward and felt



excruciating pain blossom in his forehead after slamming it into the navigation controls. Jacen moaned in pain.

“I don’t know, and really don’t feel like sticking around to find out. How long for the lightspeed coordinates to set?” Jaina asked.

“Four minutes,” Marxx said checking the scan.

“Four minutes? We’ll be dead in four minutes,” Jacen said, still holding his forehead.

“I think it’s time to show us those fancy flying skills of yours, Captain,” Marxx yelled back. Jaina plunged the *Hope* into an inverted tailspin past the laser canons.

“Jacen, push all power to the shields,” Jaina shouted.

“Already on it. Blast!” They stared out the window as a convoy of battered Tie-Fighters flew out of a western shuttle bay.

“Oh this is not good. Where are the targeting systems on this ship?” Jaina asked.

Marxx pinched his forehead. “Uhhh....there are no artillery guns aboard this Yacht.”

“*WHAT?*” Jaina and Jacen screamed in unison.

“It was designed for royal members of the Nubian Courts to arrive on diplomatic missions. They usually had armed escorts.” His last words were drowned out as the Tie-fighters opened fire at them.

“I think we’re in trouble!” Jacen said turning pale. A group of three Tie-Fighters swooped in from the left and blanketed them with fire *The Hope* shook in protest.

“I don’t suppose this relic has a cloaking device does it?” Jaina asked as ship shook from the laserfire. She sent the ship into another spin, narrowly avoiding a barrage of laser fire.

“Shields down 92 percent!” Jacen shouted.

“What do you think?” Marxx said with raised eyebrow.

“Remind me that when we get out of this mess to install weaponry on this ship,” Jaina said. She sent the ship into an inverted tailspin to try and shake the fighters.

“Yes M’lady,” Marxx said, turning slightly green as the stars spun in dizzying circles from Jaina’s flying techniques

Jaina pushed forward with the starboard engines and moved in closer to the Star Destroyer.

“Why are you going closer to that thing?” Jacen asked. From behind them they heard two explosions as two inexperienced Tie-Fighters crashed into the hull of the large cruiser.

“That’s why.” Jaina said, wicked smile appearing on her face. Jaina felt her adrenaline pumping as

battle fury starting surging in her veins. She then plunged the ship into a ninety- degree nosedive and sailed under the destroyer, right through another convoy of oncoming Tie-Fighters. She smiled when she heard an explosion of as two Tie-Fighters crashed into each other. Green laser fire sprayed all over the *Hope* as it bounced through a swarming mass of ships.

“Shields down to 84 percent!” Jacen yelled. Boom! More laser fire commenced from behind them as they all pitched forward in their seats, "Make that 77 percent. Shields are failing rapidly.”

“Why are they firing on us? We didn’t do anything!” Jaina asked as she soared through space. “And why isn’t anyone coming to assist us?”

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Aboard the command deck of *The Vengeance* Admiral Darkglider watched, legs apart, hands clasped behind back, as the Nubian vessel maneuvered, effectively evading capture. From the moment they fell out of hyperspace, Darkglider recognized the make of the ship and issued the order to attack, wanting it captured.

“Is the tractor beam ready Captain Hydin?”

“Yes, Admiral.”

“Good. Engage.”

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The hyperdrive computer chimed its readiness.

“Punch it!” Marxx shouted as relief washed over him.

The ship jolted and the engines whined at an alarming pitch.

“Blast it! We’re caught in a tractor beam!” Jaina yelled.

“Full forward engines!” Marxx shouted. Suddenly the cabin filled with the stinging stench of burning wire and fuses.

“I can’t do that, the engines are overheating, I’m going to have to turn them off,” Jaina shouted.

“You mean we’re just going to give up?” he asked looking over at her helplessly.

“That’s right Marxx, unless you want me to fry your ship,” Jaina yelled and activated the escape pod.

“What did you do that for? Do you have any idea how much one of those babies fully restored cost?” Marxx asked standing up and staring at the pod decreasing in size out the window.

“I think we have other things to worry about than your precious escape pod. Where are the secret cargo holds on this ship?” Jaina asked.

“Lower deck,” Marxx said, slumping his shoulders, then raced after Jaina’s retreating form.

“Come on, time to hide,” Jaina said as she threw herself down the stairs.

“Why does this all seem familiar?” Jacen asked as he chased after Marxx and Jaina.

“Well you know, trouble always manages to find us Solos.”

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## Chapter 15

Admiral Darkglider paced outside the Nubian vessel. The initial scanning party she sent aboard came back with nothing to report. Contrary to reports, she knew that the crew did not abandon ship in the escape pod. That was a decoy tactic. She could feel their presences still on board the craft somewhere. Anger swelled around her, tainting the air.

*“The pitiful creatures are hiding,”* she thought.

“Wait them out, then alert me when you’ve captured the crew,” she barked to the underlings. She slid her gloved hand over the shiny hull of the Nubian ship. *“What a fabulous addition to my collection this is,”* she thought. She then turned heel and left the docking bay.

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On Yavin 4, the archival room in the Great Temple’s walls were made entirely of brown granite that reached heavenwards by over sixty-feet. Luke sat in front of his terminal contemplating his findings. His gentle finger strokes on the keys echoed in the room, void of any other activity. Luke discovered that many of the datadisks he recovered from Coruscant included embedded layers of secret coded extra material. Upon much manipulation with his computer, he used a descrambler and decoded the text. He found a wealth of previously unknown information regarding the older Jedi Order. He determined that these files were most likely protected due to their highly sensitive content.

After this discovery he revisited the first datadisk he had read and found it had coded files embedded on it as well. He activated the decoder and found another ancient text appear on his terminal. It told of a founding Jedi named Draptua-Raag who could manipulate the Force with great ability.

*Draptua-Raag managed to glide in and out of the Force. On the doomed planet of Trottana, Draptua-Raag rescued the last two hundred wolf-like Trottanians by carrying them through the Force. The dying planet, exploding in volcanic activity made landing a craft on the planet impossible. Somehow Draptua-Raag, managed to grab three to four of the residents at once, step into the Force, deliver them to his ship above the planet, then return back to the planet below until all who remained of the species were nestled safely on his ship, ready for relocation.*

Luke leaned back in his chair and chewed on his thumbnail. This was exactly the kind of story he had hoped to uncover. Unfortunately, it shed no light on how such feats were accomplished. Nor did it explain why this particular story should have been heavily coded and hidden from the general Jedi community.

Luke closed his eyes and could hear a pair of Yavinese tickie birds chirping merrily near the high window in the chamber. Their song reverberated lightly, filling the air with calming, natural song. Luke turned around as Tionne approached him carrying two mugs of warm spice tea. Luke took one. "Thank you Master Tionne."

"How is the research going, Master Skywalker?" Tionne said sitting in the chair next to him.

"Better than I had hoped. However, I just have a feeling though, that this particular riddle I'm trying to uncover, may not have an answer. We may end up being the ones to record any historical events."

Tionne regarded Luke, his disheveled sandy brown hair and dark circled eyes spoke of much needed sleep. "Marxx is a good man. I don't know why you are so worried about him. He has great power, but he uses it always for good."

"The problem is though, he's never really been tested. He grew up in a very sheltered, loving environment. I don't think he's ever experienced real pain or anger. I guess... I guess I'm just worried what could happen. There's something you don't know about him." Knowing Tionne would never divulge of the information to anyone, Luke told her about their former student's birth and how it related to his father.

"From what I understand of your father, he had issues with weakness. Marxx does not have any weakness in his spirit or character. I believe he will always choose the path of righteousness, when presented to him two options. You must know that as well. That's why you wanted us to name him Jedi Master, correct? Why don't you take a nap? You look like you could use the rest."

Luke yawned, "I think I'll do that. And then I think I'll head back to Coruscant. I'll leave these here for you."

Luke showed her how to decode the secret files and asked her to contact him if she found anything new that might enlighten them on Marxx's newfound abilities with the Force. He then headed off and found a room to catch up on some sleep before returning to his family.

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"Jacen, I think your foot is in my face," Jaina complained in complete darkness.

"Sorry Sis, it's a bit crowded in here," Jacen responded.

"Do you hear anything?"

"That angry presence outside seems to be gone," Jacen said.

"What do you think Marxx?" Jaina asked.

"What?" Marxx replied. His mind focused on a tremor in the Force.

"Do you think we can get out of here now?" Jaina asked.

"Yes," he replied, reached up and pulled open the cargo door. The three Jedis blinked at the light and

crawled out of the tiny dark compartment, sucking in clean air.

“We need to get to the controls for the Tractor Beam and disable them,” Jacen said.

“Right, level 6,” Jaina responded.

“Great, and how do you know that?” Jacen asked.

“I’m a ship junkie, remember?” Jaina said straightening her jumpsuit.

“Right, my sister the mechanic, always up on Imperial ship designs.” Jacen said, rolling his eyes.

“Well it’s a good thing, isn’t it?” Jaina replied and balled her hands on hips.

“Shhhh, you two,” Marxx said, listening intently towards the upper levels of the ship.

“We go together,” Jaina said

Marxx saw a flash of memory, a vision from his dream, before his eyes, “Jaina you should stay here.”

“What? Right, like I’m going to stay here ready to be captured. I’m going with you.”

“You could check and see if you can upgrade the shields, we’ll likely need them at full maximum when we leave here,” Marxx argued weakly, eyes full of concern.

“And how do you plan to find the tractor beam controls? I know the readouts from these starships inside and out. I’m going with you,” Jaina said, hands on hips, shaking her head. “Don’t even look at me like that. You are not leaving me behind.”

“Marxx, she’ll be more help to us on the mission than staying here,” Jacen said.

Marxx cupped a hand on Jaina’s chin and stared deeply into her determined brown eyes. “Jacen, I want you to watch her back at all costs.”

“What is wrong with you?” Jaina asked noticing the concern etched on his face. “Tell me.”

“I...I just have a really bad feeling about this.”

Jaina closed her eyes and felt out with the Force. She sensed a darker presence on board the ship, but nothing to make her feel mortally worried. “I can take care of myself you know. I’ve gotten out of worse situations than this in the past. Besides I have the both of you to watch my back, same as I will watch yours.”

Marxx didn’t say anything. Jaina found herself squeaking for air as Marxx crushed her into a tight hug.

Jacen readjusted his lightsaber, “You know the sooner we get to those controls- the faster we can get off this cruiser.”

“Right. Let’s go,” Marxx said leading the way up to the top level of the ship towards the exit ramp.

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Jaina readjusted her hair up into a tight bun at the top of her head as she covered it with the cap. Marxx, Jacen and Jaina looked each other over.

“Here goes nothing,” Jacen said.

They picked up the scanning equipment and left the ship wearing the uniforms of the three privates sent aboard to try and locate the hidden crew. The privates were knocked unconscious and unceremoniously dumped into their soundproof cargo holds.

Jaina, Marxx and Jacen marched out with a determined gait past a couple crewman. Marxx shook his head towards them, hoping to indicate they found nothing. The three headed over to farthest point in the shuttle bay and snuck around the corner. They found a storage room and stashed the scanning equipment. Jaina readjusted her hair and they took off down a long corridor, heads high. They came to a turbolift and were relieved to find it empty. They descended to level 6.

“So far so good,” Jacen said smiling.

“Don’t let your guard down.” Marxx countered.

“You need to stop worrying.” Jaina said.

Marxx turned around and looked down sternly at her, “I’ll stop worrying once we are all safely off this ship and headed into hyperspace.” As the turbolift passed level 11 Marxx felt something wash over him, a familiar sensation, a tremor in the Force.

“Hey Marxx, you Ok?” Jacen asked as Marxx started to weave a bit.

Marxx licked his lips, “Straighten up folks, we’re here.” The turbolift doors opened into a steam filled engineering room. Deafening noise from compressors and engines masked the sound of their shoes as they stepped onto the metal railing. Thick, sticky air swirled in clouds around the catwalks.

“Where to?” Jacen yelled into Jaina’s ear.

She pointed her finger right and the three marched along through a series of grated metal catwalks about eight feet wide that traveled deep into the control room. The steam built up in the room, blanketing it with humidity. Marxx swallowed hard at the sickening sensation of déjà vu washed over him, the palpable smell of oil only heightened his nervousness, as they twisted deeper and deeper into the belly of the cruiser.

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## Chapter 16

Darkglider paced anxiously back and forth in her quarters. Her eyes fell upon a purple Alderannian vase of hers and the sight of it, slightly calmed her nerves. She clicked on a holo-emitter as it chimed.

“Yes, Captain?” she sneered, already knowing the answer.

“It appears whoever was on the ship eluded capture, the third scanning crew located the previous scanning crew hidden in some smuggling compartments. The ship’s crew are disguised as the scanning crew sent on board their ship.” Darkglider groaned at the incompetence of her crew. Hydin nervously stared at the monitor.

Darkglider lifted her head, and suddenly felt something shimmer in the Force.

“Install a tracking device on that ship,” she said as she flicked off the monitor, clutched her lightsaber at her belt, and raced out of her quarters. She watched the turbolift as it chimed off the levels as it descended to level 6.

“The tractor beam controls,” she thought as she raced towards the doors and pressed the call lift button.

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Jaina peered through the steam and spotted the round control center for the tractor beam. She ran towards the console and moved her hands over the controls, seeking, searching. Then she laid her hands on the deactivation switches. Marxx stood behind her, fingers poised over his lightsaber hilt. Jacen peered over the guardrail towards the large cranks and mechanisms for the ship’s engine fifty feet below.

Jacen wiped his forehead on the sleeve of his gray uniform, leaving a dark smear. He said, “I hate humidity.”

“Keep on your guard, Jacen,” Marxx said closely to Jaina’s twin.

“For what?”

Jaina finished the proper sets of procedures to shut off the beam and turned around. “All set, let’s go.”

They raced about a hundred feet back along the catwalks towards the turbolift when Marxx stopped dead in his tracks. A presence from his past, a presence that seemed to be a part of him, stood between them and the turbolift. From out of the mist came the familiar sounding *snap hiss* of a lightsaber igniting, followed by a lengthening flare of glowing red light. Marxx powered up his saber with a *snap hiss* at the same moment, green clashed against red.

Marxx and his dark opponent danced in a perfectly choreographed tango of swirling parries and thrusts. Darkglider’s skirt swirled as she blocked and matched her Jedi opponents thrusts. Darkglider shifted her saber towards his head, and Marxx perfectly deflected it. She swung her arms outward to the left slashing down towards his knees. Marxx let instinct counter her saber mid slash. The two lightsabers sizzled and hissed as they remained locked. The opponents stared at each other, locked in a stalemate. Marxx felt sweat trickle down his face and back.

“A Jedi? What is a Jedi doing on my ship?” called out a metallic voice, rhythmic breathing added to the cacophony of deafening noise in the engine room.

“Better question than that is, what are three Jedi doing on your ship?” Jacen asked, igniting his green lightsaber, Jaina activated her glowing amethyst blade.

The mist cleared revealing the holder of the red lightsaber. Jaina and Jacen both gasped at the sight of the mask, although not exactly the same- it was similar enough to Vader’s in design to throw them off slightly. Raven flipped backwards, landing ten feet away from Marxx.

“Do you not like my mask? Not all of us are fortunate enough to be able to breathe on our own without one. Nor fortunate enough to be able to show their pretty faces to the world without worrying about dying,” Darkglider sneered at Jaina.

Darkglider sprung at the trio lightsaber violently slashing towards their necks. Each Jedi fended off her attacks. Marxx started maneuvering them so Jaina and Jacen could flee towards the turbolift. Darkglider sensed this and leaped backwards, landing again between the three Jedi and the turbolift, preventing escape.

“You think you could outwit me? On *MY* ship?”

“Well you were always a quick thinker. Unfortunately for you, I was always quicker on my feet,” Marxx rushed her, hissing green saber swung towards her midsection. Darkglider matched his charge, twirled and swung towards his head. Marxx’s shoe met a patch of oil and found himself falling backwards as he slipped and crashed onto the metallic grating with a loud thud. Marxx grunted with pain. He briefly saw stars when his head crashed against the grating floor. Marxx’s lightsaber clanged back towards the twins. Marxx yelped as he felt something bash into his face as pain erupted in his jaw. Black spots swam before his eyes. Darkglider laughed after completing her kick and raised her lightsaber triumphantly over him.

“I see overconfidence is your weakness.” As she swung down to put Marxx out of his misery, simultaneously, her blade crackled and snapped as it met Jaina’s purple blade, and then Marxx, grinning triumphantly, kicked her legs from out of her. Darkglider let out a loud “Ooaf!” She watched the lights from above blur and then landed hard on her backside. The metal from her respirator loudly clanged against the catwalk.

Marxx pushed his arms backwards and somersaulted, catching and ripping his oily dirty shirt sleeve in the floor grating. On his feet, Marxx Force grabbed his blade back into his hands.

Darkglider found herself staring at two sizzling, green and purple Solo lightsabers. Marxx approached them from behind. He activated his saber again *snap hiss*. Darkglider growled and threw up a Forcefield at the three Jedi, giving her just enough time to bounce to her feet and ready her lightsaber again.

“Well that was impressive,” Marxx said smirking and lightly massaging his chin. “But hardly enough to dissuade us.”

“What did you mean that you know I’m a quick thinker, JEDI?” Darkglider spat as she carefully watched the three as they flanked the sides of the catwalk.

Marxx taking the middle said. “You just had health problems that got in your way. They always slowed



down your reflexes. I see that's still a problem."

"What are you talking about Jedi? How dare you presume to know who I am!"

"I know all about you. I believe I even know who taught you the dark arts of the Force...."

Jaina tensed from her left position. And her twin looked on confused. Darkglider stopped dead in her tracks and momentarily lowered her lightsaber. Tendrils of fear crept into her mind, sending tingling shivers down her arms and back. Marxx then felt a mental finger race towards his brain, seeking entry.

"That won't work, my mental shielding skills always far exceeded yours," Marxx said grinning widely.

"Who *ARE YOU?*" Darkglider screamed, lightsaber up again.

Marxx's face turned serious, eyes full of concern, "You don't want to do this. Once, long ago, you were a little girl, with nothing but love in your heart. Let go of your hate."

Darkglider fumed, "Hate keeps me alive. I have no idea what you are talking about..." Recognition hit her like a dewback on a rampage.

"I don't want to fight you. Just let us go," Marxx said calmly, in a soothing voice. A wave of mist swirled between them, briefly obscuring their view.

"Let you go?" her quickening metallic breathing filled the void. "Why would I do that? Not interesting in catching up with lost family members?"

Marxx smiled, realizing she'd finally caught on, "Why would you want to keep us here? We've done nothing wrong."

"Nothing wrong. Nothing wrong?" Jaina's senses heightened realizing the boiling rage under the mask. "I have to live inside this damned metal coffin- while you, you live a free and healthy life! You got all the advantages in life and I have had nothing! What could there possibly be right about things?"

"Hey I'm not the one who sided with a bitter old woman... I think we'll just let you calm down for a while, nice seeing you again, Raven."

Raven Palpatine Darkglider poised her lightsaber high ready in an attack position. Marxx turned off his saber, attached it to his belt. Marxx reached out grabbed both Jaina and Jacen's arms. As Raven's blade crackled and swung violently from the right to the left, it carved through the air aiming right towards Jaina, Marxx took a step back. In the course of a second, Raven's saber sliced through Jaina's left forearm and left side of her torso. Marxx grabbed onto Jaina as she fell screaming, and Jacen released himself from Marxx's grasp. The next second, Jaina and Marxx vanished in a swirl of mist.

Jacen found himself now left alone with a very angry dark Force wielder. The acrid scent of burnt fabric and flesh permeated the air, as the only reminder Marxx and Jaina were ever there. Green blade still activated, Jacen matched in a sizzling clash the end of Raven's charge.

Jacen reached out with the Force, wondering what happened to Marxx and Jaina. He felt them elsewhere on the Destroyer. But more specifically he felt Jaina's intense pain. Never taking his eyes off

Raven, the two slowly circled each other, sizing up the competition as their sabers sizzled and crackled. He sent a single thought through the Force to Jaina and Marxx, "Go..."

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## Chapter 17

"NOOOOOooooooo!!!!!" Jaina shouted as her call changed into a mournful cry in pain. She glanced up and found herself on the main deck of the *Hope*. Marxx tore into the cockpit. He set the engines on low frequency, then reconfigured the hyperdrive co-ordinates and then raced over dropping into a squat over Jaina. Floating in a sea of concern, Marxx gently picked Jaina up and carried her into the medical quarters. He fitted her with an oxygen mask and as quickly as possible checked over the cauterized wounds. Her whole arm was inflamed, and radiated heat. He slathered it with smelly anti-bacterial ointment and bandaged the arm. He then quickly pulled up her shirt and fitted her with a wrap around bandage, he thought she probably had a couple broken ribs and torn muscles. The red wound throbbed. He touched her forehead and she was burning up. He sealed off the bed and put on the coolers to try to bring her body temperature down.

"What do you want me to do, Jaina? You need real medical attention. I don't know how long it will take to go get Jacen."

Groggy, she asked, "How did we get here so fast?"

"I'm not sure how I did this. I don't know if I can do it again and get Jacen."

Jaina closed her eyes as she repeated the message from Jacen,. "Go..."

"Go get him?"

"No. Get out of here. He wants us to go. He's fine."

"Jaina, I can't leave your brother. Not in the state I left things. Raven'll kill him."

Jaina closed her eyes and whimpered in pain. "Do you think I want to leave my twin behind? He wants us to go. Marxx- we'll come back for him. Neither of us will be that good for him if I die." Marxx's eyes opened wide, Jaina passed out from the pain.

Marxx pulled up her surrounding shielding, buckled her safely into the bed, kissed her quickly on the forehead, then reactivated the cooler. He raced to the ship's entrance and closed the entry hatch. Marxx flew into the cockpit, and glanced at the time elapsed from when he altered the co-ordinates for Coruscant, 2 minutes. He threw himself into the captain seat, and engaged the engines full throttle. Surprised crewmen working in the shuttle bay lifted their blasters and shot at the *Hope* as it sprang to life. The shots bounced effortlessly off the shields. As Marx lifted the ship out of the docking bay- he pushed a message through the Force to Jacen, "*We'll be back for you, don't worry. We'll be back with reinforcements.*"

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Jacen and Raven danced lightly around each other.

“I see my cowardly brother left you all alone here,” Raven taunted, the lights from above highlighted the curves on her helmet. “Guess he knew I was too much of a match for you all.”

“Hardly. Marxx is no coward. You maimed my sister, and he had to get her out of here.” Their green and red lightsabers sizzled and crackled as Jacen felt the tension rise.

“How exactly did he *‘get out of here?’*” Raven asked as a mist cloud swirled between them.

“I don’t know.”

“Tell me!” Raven shouted, skirt swirling around her legs.

“I said I don’t know- and that’s the truth! You’re his sister, maybe you should be telling me!” Jacen spat.

“In case you didn’t figure it out, we’re not exactly close. Tell me where they went!”

“You think if I knew where they went, I wouldn’t be following in their footsteps?”

“Oh so you’re afraid of me as well?” Raven cackled, delighted by her newfound powers.

“Actually I’m more concerned about my sister than fighting you,” Jacen said, sarcastic grin spreading on his face.

“Really? Well then I guess I’ll just need to give you something to worry about.” Raven spun and sliced her lightsaber high in the air swinging towards his neck. Jacen twirled and blocked it perfectly. Both lowered their sabers in a perfect arched dance. Each parry and slash matched and deflected in a whirl of sizzling green and red flashing lights.

Raven angrily slashed her saber chest level and Jacen rolled on the ground, popping up in a crouch position, lightsaber swung up matching and meeting the end of her swing. Raven growled. She leaped high in the air, somersaulting over his head and attacked. Jacen grinned as his saber hissed and cracked, blocking her advance. She swung again towards his knees and Jacen flipped backwards avoiding her flashing sword.

Raven snarled, “I see the womprat can jump. Two can play that game.” Raven jumped high in the air, triple flipped and would have landed practically on top of Jacen had he not rolled out of the way. He bounced up, shirt covered in oil stains, hair now slick from perspiration.

“Hee-YA!” she shouted as she slashed her saber towards his squatted head. Jacen jumped straight over her swing and landed lightly on the right side of the guardrail. Jacen leaped up and twisted and flipped behind her, arms out, fingers wiggling, laughing, and emerald blade crackling as he swung it gently in taunting circles.

Under her leather, Raven felt her body cover in sweat from exertion. She dug deep into her anger to channel and feed more much needed energy as she could feel her strength failing. She threw out her left hand. Jacen crashed with a pounding crunch into the left guardrails. The sound of tearing fabric filled the air as his pants leg and back of his shirt caught on the wire in the railing.

He grunted from the impact and then savagely grinned. “Can’t wait to get me out of my clothes I see.”

“What?” Raven said, off guard. She stared quizzically at the dark eyed young man in front of her from safely behind her shielded mask. Her eyes flitted to his exposed, muscular thigh.

Jacen chose her moment of confusion to charge and issue a full roundhouse kick right into her stomach. Raven’s stomach imploded with pain as she crashed down the ramp towards the tractor beam. Her lightsaber clattered out of her hand. Jacen hissed off his lightsaber and raced towards the turbolift, boots pounding on the metallic catwalk.

Raven swallowed a deep breath of air, then staggered to her feet, looked around and Force removed a large emergency medical kit off of the wall behind Jacen and flung it at him. Jacen’s neck snapped forward as the box smashed into the base of his skull. Flying off his feet, Jacen watched the metal grate catwalk rapidly approach the left side of his face and meet it with crunching precision. His teeth rattled from the impact and he tasted oily metal as pain exploded in his face, upper chest, and arm. Through blurring vision, as his left eye and bottom lip started to swell and throb in pain, he watched in horror as his lightsaber twirled down off of the guardrail down into the engineering pit below.

“*Nod good,*” he said as he rolled over, feeling sticky hot liquid seeping from the back of his head.

Raven picked up her lightsaber and strode over to him. She gruffly picked him up by the scruff of his shirt, and lifted him onto his feet. “Hands over your head. Get moving womprat. You’re getting blood all over my engine room.”

“So much for being *your* hero knight,” he muttered as he painfully raised his hands behind his head and forced his unsteady feet forward towards the turbolift.

“What?” Raven said, poking him hard in the back.

“Nothing. Nothing.”

They entered the turbolift and Raven commanded, “Detention level.”

Standing behind her prisoner, Raven gave him a look over. Tall, lean and muscular, the Jedi certainly kept himself in shape. Her eyes flitted to the rips in his clothes. The tear at the back of his shirt revealed a well-muscled tan back, with a couple moles dotting its surface.

Oblivious to Raven’s wandering eye, Jacen closed his eyes and smiled. Through the Force he heard Marxx’s words, “*We’ll be back for you, don’t worry. We’ll be back with reinforcements.*”

Raven threw her eyes forward and noticed her captive’s grin in the shiny lift doors. “What do you have to smile about?”

He glanced at her reflection and thought for a moment that he glimpsed a pair of angry light colored eyes behind the eye shielding on the mask. The quickening lack of blood to the brain made him say, with a cocky smile, “You. You’re pretty cute when you’re angry.”

Jacen smashed forward into the steel door, inflicting further pain to his eye, as Raven kicked him hard

in the calf with her steel- toed boot tip.

Jacen stopped smiling and started wincing in pain.

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## Chapter 18

Marxx flew out of the hanger and pushed forward full speed on the forward thrusters. He wanted to get as far away from the tractor beam and the Destroyer as possible. The Tie-Fighters again chased after him. He glanced at the hyperdrive reader one minute 23 seconds. He jolted forward in the captain's chair as the ship got pounded from behind with laser fire.

He stared out the cockpit window and saw three Tie Fighters on a direct collision course. He threw the *Hope* into a ninety degree free fall and the fighters from behind him crashed directly into the oncoming fighters. Marxx smiled and glanced at the hyperdrive chronometer -20 seconds. The *Hope* quaked with another barrage of laser fire.

*"For the love of the Force, just leave me alone!"* Marxx seethed. He aimed the ship towards the darkest part of space and started the mental countdown. The ship shook one last time and Marxx let out a sigh of relief, as the stars turned into streaming lines.

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Jacen stumbled as Raven pushed him out of the turbolift. The normally bored detention block guards surged to their feet as the ship's commander brought in their first charge. Raven prodded Jacen on and opened a cell block door.

Jacen glanced inside to see a room with single long permacrete bed. Jacen commented sarcastically, "You know, I paid for the luxury suite. I demand to speak to the concierge, I think he got my reservation mixed up."

Raven shoved him into the room. "Be glad I don't chain you to the walls, womprat."

Jacen turned around, and took a swaggering step forward. Though his face ached with every action, he grinned at her and wiggled his eyebrows, "You know, I might just like that."

Raven let out a snarling moan and slammed shut the door, cutting off Jacen's bubbling laughter. The adrenaline from the fight started to wear off on Raven and she felt her strength depleting. She walked over to the guard station. She said to the men, "He's a Jedi so don't go in there unless it's absolutely necessary. He will use a Jedi mind trick on you and try to escape."

"Yes, Admiral."

Raven stared down at the floor, "And send a medical droid in there to tend to the prisoner's wounds.... And then get him some fresh clothes."

"Yes, Admiral," the guard replied, eyebrow raised.

She opened the turbo lift doors and headed back to her personal quarters. She realized belatedly that in capturing the Jedi, she forgot to reactivate the tractor beam. She hoped her incompetent crew actually installed the tracking device on her brother's ship. Somehow she doubted it.

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Marxx glowered at Randolla in the holo-emitter. "I'm sorry but Ex-Chancellor Organa- Solo is in a very important Senate meeting."

"Look her daughter has been injured! And her son is missing! I need to talk to her immediately."

"I'm sorry I have a short list of names of people she willingly lets me interrupt her meetings for, and you are not on that list," Randolla snipped.

Marxx closed his eyes. He felt Jaina's pain in the other room and could smell himself sweating from stress. "I'm Chancellor Organa- Solo's future son- in- law. Wait if I don't talk to her that won't happen because Jaina could die! Will you please take her my message?" Marxx cursed at himself that he couldn't long distance Force assist in making her comply.

Randolla glanced at Marxx with a perturbed expression. "When they break for recess I'll take her your message and ask her to contact you."

"Thanks.... For nothing," Marxx added after ending his transmission. Tears of frustration fell down his face. Although Naboo was closer than Coruscant, he knew the best medical facilities in the galaxy were located on the Capital planet. They would be better equipped to dealing with Jaina's injuries. Waves of guilt rushed over him as memories of his dream blended with the moments of reality. He ran a hand through his hair, knowing there was only one other person who could help him out, who in fact would jump across the stars to help him. He sent in a call to the *Falcon*.

Han answered on the holo-emitter. "Hey Marxx, what's up?"

"I need your help General Solo, I tried contacting your wife, but that secretary Randolla wouldn't put me through to her."

Han noticed the tears on the boy's face and said with concern, "What's the matter, Marxx?"

"Jaina's been injured and needs medical attention."

Han's face turned to panic, "What does she need medical attention for?"

Marxx wiped away his tears. "Lightsaber burns..."

"Lightsaber burns? Lightsaber burns? How'd that happen?" Han cried.

"...She was injured in a duel. She's got a deep burn in her left arm and her left side, I think she's got a severed muscle and some broken ribs. She's burning up. We're on our way to Coruscant right now- we should get there..." he glanced at the hyperdrive chronometer, "in about two hours forty minutes. I need to know where to land so we can get her to medics immediately."

“Where are you?”

“We’re in my ship *The Nubian Hope*,” he gave Han the codes on how to contact him again.

“I’ll get you the information in 10 minutes, Ok?”

“Ok,” Marxx said looking down, choking down a sob. “I’m sorry, Sir. I tried protecting her...and Jac....”

“Hey Marxx...”

Marxx glanced up, eyes red, “Yes?”

Han gave him a lopsided smile, “I’m sure you did your best. I know you’d never let anything happen to my little girl. You did good contacting me. Go check on Jaina. Don’t let her see you’ve been crying. She needs to know you’re feeling strong for her. I’ll get back to you shortly, Ok?”

Marxx smiled, “Ok, General Solo, and thank you.”

“I said to call me Han and I meant it,” Han said pointing a finger at him. He then ended the transmission.

Marxx wiped his eyes. After the adrenaline of escape and battle wore off, Marxx found himself confused and deflated. He had no idea what to make of his sister. It certainly appeared she lacked any self control or discipline. He failed to sense any vibes of the sweet loving little sister he played with as a child. She'd grown hard and cold. He decided he'd have to worry about Raven later, he had a wounded fiance to attend to. He took a deep breath and headed off to check on Jaina.

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## Chapter 19

Raven collapsed on her lounge, her breath labored. She removed her gloves and boots. Raven desperately needed to sleep to recharge herself, but she was too emotionally keyed up still for bed. She sat up as a coughing fit wracked her body. After her spasms died back, she flicked on the Holo-net and surfed through the channels. She briefly checked the sports network and checked to see how many credits she won today on races. She smiled seeing all her bets paid off. She never loses, Ryzano and her grandmother taught her the price one pays when you predict incorrectly. She unconsciously rubbed her scarred wrist. She surfed channels then stopped onto the galactic travel channel. An image of a gorgeous capital building popped up. She got comfortable on her chaise, stared at the image and turned up the sound.

A reporter merrily spoke: “*The planet has had a wave of activity in the past year, thanks to the unwavering Senate support by former Chancellor Organa-Solo.*” An image of Leia appeared on the screen, “*After the devastation of the Clone Wars, Naboo is in the process of being restored. The once devastated capital city of Theed is in the process of reconstruction, headed by former Chancellor Organa-Solo’s daughter Jaina Solo.*” An image of Jaina flashed on the screen, causing Raven’s mouth to drop open. She turned up the sound further.

*“Across the planet the spirit of rebirth is alive and new. Recently, a large collection of Nubian artifacts have been found, much to the delight of those closely involved in the Reconstruction project.”* Images of some sculptures and paintings flashed over the screen. *“Many of the items will be housed in the capital building, and a museum is planned that will also be built to showcase many of these priceless pieces of Nubian art. There has been talk in Theed, of selling some of the items in order to help raise credits to further supplement the generous funds provided by the New Republic Senate in helping to restore Theed and Naboo back to it’s Pre-war glory.”*

An image of a resort on a lake appeared. *“Locals in the Lake County of Naboo have rebuilt the once exclusive Lake County Resort. Destroyed during the Clone Wars, it is now ready for vacationers, having been rebuilt by the Racees family.”* An image of a happy Chariss and Rowlon flashed on the screen. A reporter spoke into a commlink, *“What made you decide to rebuild this resort?”* Forgetting about her breathing problems, Raven flipped open her faceplate, and stared hard at the faces of the two individuals on the screen.

Chariss spoke up. *“This resort has great sentimental value to my family and many of our close friends who grew up in this region. To lose the resort was a devastating blow to local morale. We only hope with it restored that it will increase tourism and help revitalize the local economy.”* The broadcast droned on about the agriculture of the planet. Raven didn’t hear a word of it. The only thing she paid attention to were the planetary co-ordinates that they listed for Naboo at the end of the broadcast.

Raven replayed the scene with her parents and paused on their image. She stared long and hard at them. She’d flown to Tatooine to pay them a little visit, but got distracted by Marxx’s ship. As she stared at Chariss and Rowlon she felt her body quake and shake. She dropped her faceplate back down and inhaled her oxygen. Tears welled in her eyes and she started sobbing uncontrollably. For years she’d thought if she ever confronted them that she would be able to release her full anger at them, and make them suffer for abandoning her. Seeing them alive, well and happy, coupled with seeing her brother again created a strange feeling inside her... longing.

Her holo-emitter chimed. She flipped up her mask, shoved her palms hard under her eyes wiping away her tears, blew her nose, and flipped the mask back down. The emitter chimed again.

“Yes, Captain?”

Hydin shifted uncomfortably, his eyes filled with fear as he said, “The ship escaped Admiral.”

“Did your crew install that tracking device?”

“Yes.”

Raven found herself completely surprised, “And where is the ship headed?”

“We have extrapolated that its trajectory course is set for Coruscant. Do you wish for us to pursue?”

Thinking of the young woman she injured, dread filled Raven’s stomach. “No. Get us out of here.”

“Where do you want us to go Sir?”

“Anywhere outside the borders of the New Republic. I need to think and will get back to you on the



next course of action. I'm going to rest, please do not disturb me."

"Yes, Admiral."

Raven turned off the emitter and stared at her Nubian painting, realizing its value will drop now that Naboo was back up and running as a viable planet. She then headed to her bedroom. She now knew where she wanted to go, but didn't want to do anything, until she regained her strength.

Her four hundred year old Stanpilian canopy bed sat inside a large rectangular oxygen tank, located next to a refresher. Raven removed her helmet, chest gear, and peeled off her sticky, sweaty clothes inside the chamber and put on a robe.

Without her breathing equipment on, she slowly walked, with measured steps into her refresher and stared at herself in the mirror. She released the tightly held fasteners on her hair, and it fell down in long spirally, dark brunette waves past her shoulders. Her haunted pool blue eyes watched over a desert of pale, sickly white skin. She rubbed her midnight blue lips, wondering what they would ever look like healthy and red. She'd tried putting makeup on them to see if she could tell, but she always seemed to smear it, not knowing how to properly apply it. It never looked natural anyway. The bright color glared artificially against her face. Her face was heart shaped, rounded at the sides yet with a strong triangular jaw line.

*"You. You're pretty cute when you're angry."* For some reason those words, spoken obviously in jest and spite found their way creeping back into Raven's mind as she scrutinized herself. She wondered what that Jedi meant. Could he actually see what she looked like behind her mask? Can a Jedi do that - see through metal? Or was he in fact just being a smart mouth? She wondered what he would think of her without her mask. Would he think she was attractive, or would he think of her as a freak like so many before had? Images long suppressed surfaced in her mind.

*On the far side of Tatooine, a six- year-old Raven slowly walked forward, dropped into a squat to catch her breath. Four school bullies approached her. Woonti, a leathery- faced Weequay, roughly grabbed a handful of her hair and pulled her to her feet. "What's the matter? Raven broke a wing?"*

*"Leave...me...alone..." she said gasping for breath.*

*"Why should we? You're nothing but an ugly, good for nothing womprat, who'll never be anything."* One of the other bullies, Luganto, a tiny, snaggletoothed Snivvian, reached into her pocket and pulled out her lunch credits. Raven felt every bone in body crunch as Woonti threw her to the ground. The four bullies stalked off howling with laughter.

Raven's eyes darkened and then a small smile formed on her face when a new memory formed in her mind.

*Raven sat alone on a bench in the school mess hall a year later, slowly savoring her meal, laboring with each bite. Her meal consisted of spicy sweet smelling leftovers from a special meal from the night before. Thanks to Raven's predictions, Grandmother and Ryzano Darkglider won a huge bet on yesterday's podrace. For once they allowed her to join in on the celebration afterwards.*

*Four shadows covered her. She swallowed deeply to see Woonti and his friends standing over her. Children on surrounding benches scattered from the area, and then turned to watch what happened.*

*“Look Raven brought us something delicious to eat today,” Woonti said, pounding a fist on the table. Raven narrowed her eyes. Last thing she was going to allow were the bullies to take her Dewback stew.*

*“This is mine. You can’t... have any.”*

*Woonti’s eyes widened, “Looky here, the womprat is talking back to us. Give me that...”*

*Raven absorbed all the fear emanating from the other children in the room, and felt power surge through her body, as anger welled inside her. Woonti felt blinding pain shoot up his arm. He looked on the table to see Raven’s fork skewering his outstretched hand. Woonti screamed in rage. His thugs raced around the table to pin her. Raven jumped to her feet and grabbed her bowl. Feeding off Woonti’s pain, she raised a hand towards the incoming bullies. A large maniacal smile graced Raven’s face as she let the hate swell and fill her. She threw a huge Force field at them. The three bullies suddenly found themselves unexpectedly staring at the ceiling as they flew through the air, and landed painfully onto the tables across the room. Children screamed all over the room.*

*Woonti’s eyes grew large as his three friends sat up covered in lunches.*

*“You’re going to pay for that!” he screamed blood pouring from his leathery tan hand.*

*“I don’t think...so,” Raven said, eyes cold. Woonti stomped up on the bench and climbed up on the table. Raven snarled and bared her teeth. She pointed her hand towards him, and squeezed her fingers shut. Woonti realized he couldn’t breathe. His eyes grew large as he clutched his bleeding hand frantically to his throat as he tried to breathe.*

*“You and your friends are never going to bother me again, right?” Raven asked coolly. His friends all nodded their heads. Raven tightened her grip. Woonti gasped feeling penetrating, invisible fingers crushing his lungs. “ARE YOU?”*

*Woonti nodded his head. Raven pushed her hand backwards. Woonti felt his breath return, only to end in a scream as he flew head over feet across the room and landed with a sickening crack of broken bone onto the floor.*

*All of the children poured screaming out of the mess hall. Raven sat back down at her table and enjoyed her meal. The adrenaline rush allowed her to finish her meal without much in the way of breathing problems.*

*Woonti’s left arm had broken in his fall. Raven was suspended from school for two weeks. She didn’t care she needed the time to regain her strength. Her grandmother couldn’t have been more pleased with her.*

From that time, anger had been her only real ally in life. Never having friends, and with a lot of guidance, she learned to feed off her darker emotions. By doing so, she no longer cried. She no longer cared...about anything. Being cold hearted, she always determined was better than being a victim. It made her self-sufficient and when people feared her, they no longer treated her like a freak.

Raven ran a bath for herself, dropping soothing, herbal essential oils into the water that helped to

cleanse her lungs. She removed her robe and slipped into the steaming, bubbling water. Her tub was a deep pink in color, when she lay in it her skin took on a warmer, more natural appearance than its natural sickly white. Deeply breathing in the essential oils, and seeing her skin pink up from the tub and the hot water, Raven almost felt like a complete, normal human. She pulled a mirror close to her face. The warmth of the water always helped her blood to better circulate. Her lips and fingernails turned from blue to a more purple color. Sometimes she would stare for hours, hoping upon all hope they would turn red. They never did.

Raven closed her eyes as she shut off the water with her toes and sunk deeper into the water, inhaling the wonderful Borealis sage, and let the water's warmth caress her body working out the spasms and tightness in her muscles. Her stomach had a small patch of purple on it where the Jedi had kicked her. She briefly thought about her prisoner and how he would probably need a nice warm bath as well. He must certainly be in pain. Her mind wandered back to standing behind the Jedi in the turbo lift. His shoulders were so broad, back so healthy, tan, and wide and that thigh...

Her eyes flew open what was she thinking? Then a new memory pranced into her memory as terror stilled her heart. "*Oh no, he mentioned that girl was his sister. That means he's former Chancellor Organa-Solo's son.*" The implications of holding a high ranking elected New Republic's son prisoner sent jolts of terror through her.

"What have I done? What have I done?" She asked to the empty room. She suddenly felt a lot like that lonely, picked on little girl again, and started to cry.

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## Chapter 20

Jacen winced as the blue, four armed, medical droid rubbed the stinging astringent directly over his swollen eye and lips. The droid had effectively closed up the gash in the base of his skull, without the use of any pain medication. Jacen had plunged himself into a meditative trance to try to distance himself from the pain the droid inflicted while closing up the wound.

The droid examined Jacen's chest and arm. "These wounds are superficial. They will clear up in time. Do you have any other injuries?" The droid asked. Jacen's upper chest and left arm seared with pain and were covered with bruises. However he knew of no other wounds that would need tending to.

"No, thank you." Jacen smirked at himself for his automatic courteous response, directed at the unfeeling droid. The droid turned around and left his chambers.

A guard poked his head in and glimpsed at the prisoner. Terror filled his eyes. "Compliments of the Admiral." Jacen barely got his hands up in time to grab onto the flying clothes that the guard had thrown quickly into the cell before slamming the door shut.

Jacen held up the fresh and clean Imperial issue clothes. "The Admiral wanted me to have these?" he muttered. He thought of Marxx's sister...Raven was her name, right? He wondered if she was the "Admiral" in question. Jacen allowed a large painful grin to form on his face. Even though every muscle in his face and upper body hurt, he'd enjoyed his little dance with Raven. He thought of her long legs and quick reflexes. She had bested him in the fight, yet for some reason, he didn't mind losing. He slightly cringed at some of the comments he'd thrown out at her, wondering where they'd

come from. He wasn't one to taunt women in a suggestive manner. There was just something about her that brought out a new level of self-assuredness in himself. Jacen grinned broadly, then started chuckling at himself. "*Sure Jacen, you just love finding the most difficult women to be interested in,*" he thought. He started to think he actually may enjoy his time on this ship.

He briefly stood still in his cell and sunk into the Force to search for his twin and Marxx. Their energies grew dimmer as they moved farther away from his present location. He could feel and sense Jaina's pain and Marxx's worry. "*At least they were safe,*" he thought, "*for now.*"

His shirt lay in a shredded pile on the floor after the medical droid unceremoniously ripped it apart to attend his wounds on the back of his head. He moaned as he touched the angry purple bruises on his shoulder and chest. Then he slipped into the fresh shirt. He stood up, groaning, as pain shot through his body. He removed his dirty and ripped pants and put on the new ones. He picked up the pieces of the destroyed clothing, ripped the pants in half. He stuffed all the pieces of fabric into the one intact pants leg, tied up the ends, set it on the bench, and laid down on his back, and used the pants leg as a pillow.

Jacen closed his eyes and sunk himself into a healing trance. Through the fog of the Force one vision swam before him. A female face loomed in a sea of rapidly moving clouds. The face possessed pair of bright turquoise eyes, set against creamy, pale skin. Dark, delicate eyebrows framed the eyes and brunette hair swirled seductively around the face. Jacen smiled in his sleep, somehow comforted by those watchful eyes, he drifted deeply into the abyss.

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The brilliant, billowy orange sunset on Coruscant went unnoticed as *The Nubian Hope* landed on the raised platform. Medical teams roared up the ship's descending ramp. Han and Chewie stood by the door waiting for the ship's arrival. The team streamed out of the ship, attending to the unconscious young woman strapped aboard a hover board, fitted with life sustaining tubes. Marxx raced alongside the board, holding Jaina's limp hand.

Han grabbed the frazzled and worried young man's arm. "Come on kid, give them room to take care of her."

Han and Marxx followed the medical team as they raced into the building, taking Jaina into a closed secure clean room. Leia wearing a simple white jumpsuit, hair arranged in a pile of braids, paced in the waiting room. Her eyes fell on her daughter's tall boyfriend. His swollen red eyes, disheveled, ripped clothing, bruised chin, and haggard features, made her stop mid pace.

"Marxx, are you ok?" she asked the boy, mother's instinct taking over. He turned his head away from her imploring eyes, fell to his knees and started sobbing. Guilt over his failure of protecting the Solo twins finally started wearing on his soul.

"I'm sorry...I'm sorry..." he said rocking back and forth. Leia pulled aside a nurse and quickly spoke to her. Han glanced down uncomfortably at Marxx. A healer came out from the corridor and stood waiting.

Leia placed a cool hand on Marxx's chin and lifted his face up to meet hers. "Honey, why don't you let the healer take a look over you?"

“What? No, I’m fine. I need to tell you both what happened,” he said, lip quivering.

Leia’s eyes softened, “That wasn’t a suggestion Marxx. Let her look you over. Chariss would never forgive me if you were wounded and we didn’t tend to it.”

Marxx nodded and sucked back a sob. He stood up, shaking. Leia wrapped her arms around the young man. He leaned over and cradled his head on her shoulder. “I tried to protect her... I tried... and Jac....”

“...I’m sure you did everything you could Marxx. Go on now, see the healer, Ok? We’ll talk a little later.” Marxx headed after the healer and disappeared down the hall.

“What’d you do that for? He looked fine. We need to know what happened,” Han pointed out to her, placing a hand on his hip.

“Yes, and Marxx is obviously in shock. We’re not going to get anything constructive out of him at this point. Let the medics give him some medication and attention. He may even need some time to rest. He’s not going to hold anything back from us. I’d rather he was well rested before he gave us a complete rundown of what happened,” Leia responded. “Why don’t you go contact Anakin and Jacen and tell them Jaina’s been injured.”

Han nodded his head, knowing it does no good to argue with his wife. “Did you notice they were wearing Imperial clothing?”

“Yes, I did notice that. All the more reason to make sure Marxx is completely coherent when he gives us a report of what happened,” Leia’s brown eyes filled with concern.

Han nodded, “Come on Chewie, let’s go call the boys.”

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Leia stood in front of the large pane of glass that separated herself from the clean room that held the bacta tank that housed Jaina’s body. An FX-12 medical droid sat beside the tank and recorded the progress of her recovery. Jaina opened her eyes several times in the healing fluid and barely made out her mother’s form. She seemed to realize vaguely where she was and allowed herself to fall unconscious again.

Han approached his wife from behind and wrapped his arms around Leia. He stared at his daughter and her dark wounds. He moistened his lips, unsure of how he was going to tell his wife what he’d just found out.

“Did you get in touch with the boys?” Leia asked leaning back against Han’s strong chest.

Han hugged his arms tighter around her, sharing his strength before he spoke, “Anakin’s on his way. Jacen apparently went off with Jaina and Marxx. Anakin doesn’t know where he is.”

Leia turned around and searched Han’s concerned face, “What do you mean?”

Han shrugged, “All Anakin knows is the three took off for Tatooine yesterday, and this is the first he’s

heard of them since then.”

“Where’s Jacen?” Leia asked, panic building.

“I don’t know. I sure hope Marxx feels well enough to talk soon. He’s got a lot of explaining to do,” Han said, feeling somewhat hopeless. Leia felt a shiver of fear run through her spine. She desperately clung to her husband and felt tears wet her eyes.

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## Chapter 21

Luke landed his X-wing and noticed the immediately the panicked look on Mara’s face through her billowing red hair. He threw open his cockpit and tossed aside his helmet.

“Jaina’s been injured! She’s been brought to Coruscant for medical attention,” Mara yelled up to him as he cut off his engines.

“Any idea how she was hurt?” Luke asked as he descended his ladder.

“In a lightsaber duel,” Mara said as he approached her. Luke took Ben from her arms as they quickly walked towards their apartment.

“Lightsaber duel?” Luke asked.

“Jacen is missing as well. Come on. Let’s get to the medical center. Marxx is about ready to explain what happened.” Luke sensed his sister’s distress and the Skywalkers raced off to join their family.

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The Skywalkers and Solos all sat on large circular cushioned couches in the dark blue waiting room enthralled with the story Marxx unraveled for them. C-3PO offered a few distressed comments throughout the story. Marxx felt as if a huge weight had been removed from his chest after updating Jaina’s family of their adventure. His audience stared on with expressions of mixed horror, concern, and confusion. Leia furrowed her brows, mind working in overdrive. Leia then bounced up and made a holo-call.

“Oh dear, I hope Master Jacen will be quite all right,” the golden protocol droid said, waving his arms. R2-D2 whistled a hoot of encouragement as well.

“Are you sure your sister won’t harm Jacen?” Han asked worry etching his face.

“No, I’m not sure. In fact I was stupidly taunting her before we left. She was probably three sheets away from full-blown rage. Jaina insisted we take off and leave him there. She was in so much pain...then she passed out. Jacen told us through the Force to leave. I consider him my best friend, the last thing I wanted to do was leave him behind. I made the choice to come here after seeing Jaina’s infections rising,” he stroked the back of his neck and looked over the concerned faces. Anakin sat holding his little cousin in his lap, having arrived in Jaina’s X-wing, part way through Marxx’s explanation of what happened. Ben happily slapped at the folds in Anakin’s Jedi robe- blissfully

unaware of the brewing concern around him.

“Why didn’t you try this little ‘moving through the Force’ trick to go get Jacen?” Han asked with a small snarl, as his temper started to flare up.

Marxx pounded his hand on his own chest and replied, “I didn’t want to leave Jacen, trust me- I would have gone back and grabbed him, but I don’t know how I did what I did.”

“What do you mean you ‘don’t know how you did what you did?’ ” Han spat back.

“Han, let it go. Marxx has abilities that Jedi’s haven’t used in over a millenium. If he knew how he could do that- he would have done it,” Luke turned and stared at Marxx as he continued, “However, I think he really does know how to do it, he just needs practice.” Marxx furrowed his brows over what Luke had implied.

“We need to send a fleet out there to save Jace!” Anakin said.

Leia returned back to the group, “Sure, that would be great except the Destroyer left Tatooine shortly after Marxx did. Nobody seems to know where it disappeared to.”

Han stood up and gazed down at his wife. “Leia, can you sense Jacen?” She, Luke and Mara all closed their eyes and focused on the Force.

“I don’t know. I suppose the only one who would really know is Jaina,” Leia said. As if on cue, Moura Tynia the head healer overlooking Jaina’s surgery emerged from down the hall. Han and Leia raced to her side. Mara grabbed Marxx’s hand as she felt his stress levels rise. Han and Leia embraced each other, and Han shook the healer’s hand.

Han turned around, lopsided grin across his face, “She’ll be alright. The medics want to keep her under observation for a week, to allow time for her wounds to heal.”

Marxx ran a hand through his hair with relief. “When can we see her?” he asked.

Leia hugged her husband tightly and smiled at the young man. “Marxx why don’t you go in with her? She’s resting, but I’m sure you’d be the first person she’d want to see when she wakes up.”

Marxx turned around and gave Mara a hug and let go of her hand. He ran over to Leia, hugged her, and shook Han’s hand. He then shot off down the hall without further invitation.

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*Mist playfully kissed the green hillside. The girl’s bare feet raced over the soft, spiked grass. She wore a pale pink silk- layered dress, dark hair billowing behind her in the wind. Wildflowers swayed in the wake of her skirt, filling the air with their floral fragrance. The girl shrieked with laughter as she peeked over her shoulder. From behind her a young man chased her, brown Jedi robe swishing in the wind, the mist obscured his face. Waterfalls crashed in the distance, deafening the area with their vibrating natural sound.*

*The girl squealed and giggled hysterically as a pair of strong arms wrapped around her waist, lifted*

*her up off her feet, and swung her around in a circle. The girl laughed as her suitor threw her up in the air and caught her in a cradle position.*

*The girl stared deeply into the dancing brown eyes of her captor and brushed aside an errant clump of brown hair from his face. The boy gazed with eyes full of love and desire into the girl's intoxicatingly beautiful turquoise eyes. He lost all control and lowered his head closer to hers. The girl offered her lips to him and the two kissed, breathing life into each other with love and passion.*

*From the distance a shout could be heard and two figures loomed in the mist. A one armed, titian haired girl wearing a reptilian hide dress glowered at the happy couple. And the other figure, an older man, stood cloaked in a black Jedi Knight robe, his green eyes stared longingly towards the girl.*

*The boy let the girl down. Tension stung the air. The boy said to the girl, "Now what?"*

Simultaneously Raven sat upright in her bed, and Jacen awoke in his cell. Both pressed their fingers to their lips, gasping from the phantom tingling traces of the powerful kiss from the dream.

Raven's fingers brushed her silk sheets and smiled remembering the look in her captive Jedi's eyes before he kissed her. That gaze sent shivers of pleasure down her spine. She felt blood surging through her face. Even in her sleep she could almost feel the softness of his lips. She touched her lips and briefly wondered at their color. She snapped on her light and picked up a mirror. She gasped as she noticed her lips were maroon. As the effect of the dream wore off they became purple. She frowned, put the mirror down, turned off the light, and fell back under her sheets. As she tried to get back to sleep, she wondered whom were the other people standing off in the distance.

Jacen wondered who the amazingly beautiful girl was he had shared the magical moment with in his dream. Why wasn't he kissing Tenal Ka? He'd been in love with her for years. He remembered her standing off in the distance in the dream, and she looked angry. He shook the sleep from his head. He'd never experienced a dream of Tenal Ka that held such a grip of realism over him. He could almost still feel traces of the girl's silky dress on his arms. His body still tingled with excitement and his heart raced. He could almost still hear the girl's giggles bouncing off the walls of the cell. He lay back down and stared into complete blackness of his cell and wondered, "*Why, of all people, was Kyp Durrion in my dream?*"

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## Chapter 22

Jaina awoke to the annoying sound of a rattling heater vent. She then noticed the warm sun on her face. Jaina opened her eyes and looked around her unfamiliar surroundings. She was in a medical recovery room. She shriveled her nose as she smelled of bacta. To her right, Marxx sat slumped over her bed's guardrails, sleeping in a chair and holding her hand. She gently removed her hand from his grasp, and stroked her fingers through his short, tightly curled hair. Her fingers wandered down to his left earlobe. She tickled it then jumped slightly as he bolted upright.

He let out a huge sigh of relief at seeing Jaina's open brandy brown eyes. Jaina placed a hand on Marxx's stubbled chin and smiled. "Where are we?"



“Coruscant. Your parents, aunt, uncle, and Anakin are here,” Marxx said, and grabbed her hand and kissed it lightly.

“You don’t look so hot,” Jaina commented, touching his stubble.

Marxx laughed, “Thank you for that observation M’lady. You know I always put you before myself. How do you feel?”

“I’m sore and my side itches like crazy. But the pain’s not too bad. Have they heard anything about Jacen?” Jaina’s eyes filled with concern.

“Not as of last night. Apparently my sister took off and left Tatooine shortly after we did. That’s all I know of right now. Can you feel if he’s alright?”

Jaina closed her eyes and relaxed. Marxx soaked in the sight of her. Her hair lay in soft, slightly messy layers around her serene face. Wearing a white hospital gown, she appeared angelic. “He’s very far away from here. I can feel him though. He’s alive.”

“Well that’s good news. Your mother and uncle couldn’t sense him,” Marxx gently stroked Jaina’s fingers. His eyes rested upon her wrapped arm and he felt a fresh wave of guilt wash over him.

“What about you? Can you sense Raven?” Jaina gazed hopefully into Marxx’s azure eyes. “It’s a twin thing you know.”

“Yea, but I haven’t been around my twin in years. I don’t even know her.”

“That doesn’t matter. The twin connection is strong. You knew she was alive before meeting her on that ship, remember? Try it –besides you are stronger with the Force than I am,” Jaina squeezed his hand.

Marxx flashed her a smile, “Right, I’m a genuine son of the Force, I can do this. Actually, I’ll probably have better luck if I try to find Jacen.” He rolled his eyes and took a deep breath.

“Relax,” Jaina said.

Marxx closed his eyes and squeezed her hand. Anyone walking by the room would have thought they were both either asleep or praying.

He focused on the softness, and smoothness of her fingers. He pressed them to his lips. He then extended himself beyond Jaina’s room and felt a flurry of different minds working in the surrounding rooms. He absorbed the energy of all the people in the building, from each potted plant, from each glass of water. He then extended himself to the surrounding floors of the building, then the buildings around the block, and then on the planet. His consciousness soared above Coruscant, out of the atmosphere and into the darkness of space. Stars twinkled around him. He scoped out with his feelings and absorbed in the power from asteroids, ships, and the life forms on surrounding planets and planetary systems. His consciousness swelled and shifted across the galaxy, searching, and searching. He waited patiently to find the connection through the Force with his friend, and brother. Then as if Jacen’s consciousness sensed Marxx’s quest, he unconsciously responded and Marxx was guided towards two threads of pain and loneliness

The door of the recovery room opened, and Marxx opened his eyes with a start and gasped from a sudden head rush. The nurse sent in to check on Jaina shook her head, she thought she'd just seen a bright flash of blue light vanish in the room.

"Did it work?" Jaina asked as he placed a hand on his forehead.

"Sir, you need to leave, we need to check her vitals. You might want to tell her family that she's awake," said the day nurse.

Marxx smiled at Jaina, reached over and lightly brushed a scruffy cheek against hers, then kissed her forehead.

"I'll be back. Don't worry about anything." He got up, leaving Jaina mouth agape, grasping out her hand, seeking an answer.

Marxx headed down the hall, determination building. He tried to smooth his rumpled shirt, and threw his fingers through his messy hair. He figured he probably looked like a mess. He sniffed the air and realized he didn't smell so fresh either. He strode into the waiting room to find Leia, Han, Anakin, Chewbacca, and their droids bustling around, recently arrived from a good nights sleep at home.

"She's awake and appears to be OK. The nurse is in there with her right now. Any word on the Destroyer?" Marxx asked.

Leia smiled at the young man and his ragged appearance, "No. We don't know where it is."

"It's hanging outside the border of the New Republic in the Cereses System. However, I don't think she's going to be there for long. We need to move quickly," Marxx said.

Han stared at the young Jedi with guarded suspicion. "How'd you figure that out?"

"I stretched out with my feelings, and found them," Marxx said. Keeping his head high, Marxx placed his hands on his hips and stared right back at Han. "We're going to get him back, Han."

Leia nodded and smiled at Marxx, "Thank you Marxx. We'll start organizing the rescue detail. You, however, need to get cleaned up. We've moved your ship over to our family home. C-3PO will take you there. Go clean up and get something to eat. I brought in some clothes from your ship for you to change into. Rest and come on back.... That's not a suggestion young man, that's an order."

Marxx grinned happily at the suggestion, adrenaline pumping in his veins. "Not a problem. Thank you! Come on 3PO, lead on."

The golden protocol droid threw up his hands, "Follow me Master Marxx!" He merrily wandered after the exuberant young man, happy to take care of a new charge.

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## Chapter 23

The guards threw a container of dehydrated meat and a bottle of water into Jacen's cell as his wakeup

call.

Jacen's head throbbed in pain from the swelling. He walked over to the tiny basin and washed his face gently. He stared at his reflection in a tiny mirror and cringed. Today he could at least open his puffy and purple eye. He then groaned when he bent over to pick up his so-called food. It wasn't much, but it would help him get his strength up.

After finishing his measly meal, Jacen removed his shirt to examine his other injuries. The bruises on his chest had blossomed into a brilliant borealis of dark colors.

Slowly Jacen started some flexing exercises to try and work through some of the pain. As he relaxed and slowly lifted his arms up and down, images of his dream flared in his mind.

*"Jedi don't have dreams, they have visions,"* Jacen thought. *"So what does that mean then?"* He wondered if possibly Marxx's comments about letting go of Tenal Ka could lead him to another love, a true love, not one he'd just fabricated in his mind for years. He certainly felt light, alive, and happy being with that girl. His heart raced at the thought. And the dream girl laughed. Tenal Ka never laughed, well she did once, that hardly counts. The dark haired girl's giggles intoxicated him. He briefly recalled a pair of bright blue eyes watching him before he drifted off to sleep and realized there must have been a connection.

Jacen shifted his pose and his mind wandered to the puzzle of Raven. She was something else. *"How could sweet Chariss have given birth to something as spiteful as Raven?"* he wondered. Of course, he realized that Marxx's twin had been separated from her family for a long time. Who knows what could have happened to her during all of those lost years?

Jacen always had an affinity for dealing with injured animals and beings. He seemed to understand, and empathize with their pain. As peculiar as it seemed, even though Raven gave all appearances of being tough and hard, Jacen sensed vulnerability in her. Oddly, this came out when he taunted her. She seemed to falter a bit, and he could sense her bravado front slip, revealing a confused, lonely young woman. He knew he had his work cut out for him to break through her iron clad mental barriers.

Jacen had a strange feeling with Raven living behind a mask, that nobody had ever really treated her like a human being. He supposed that knowing about and understanding the internal conflicts of his own grandfather, that maybe he had an edge on understanding where she was coming from and could possibly be of some help.

He only hoped he was right.

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Raven, restored and energized headed up the turbolift to the detention level. She'd just given the orders to Captain Hydin that in one hour he was to lay in a course for the ship. She also gave him the duty to select a recovery crew for their covert mission.

Cobwebs from that dream still clung to her consciousness, clouding her focus as she rode in the turbolift. She glanced at her reflection in the shiny doors and smoothed out her skirt nervously. She kept thinking of the Jedi and his strong arms, and soft lips and wondered how closely similar they would feel in real life. She wondered just what it would feel like to be held by someone as handsome as

the Jedi in the cell. The image of his chiseled cheekbones and warm brown eyes lingered in her mind's eye. Her breath quickened.

*"Idiot, that was just a dream. He thinks you're a freak and probably hates you,"* she cursed to herself and thought of their fight the other day. *"He'd certainly have a valid reason for thinking that way. Besides why should I care what he thinks?"*

Raven exited the turbolift and the morning detention crew stood at attention. She asked for a status report, they told her that the prisoner received medical attention, new clothes, and breakfast.

She nodded her head and stalked over to the door. She placed her finger over the button and paused. Her palms started to sweat in her gloves. The image of the Jedi's tan back flared in her mind and her heart began to pound. She licked her lips because they were dry. *"Oh stop it already,"* she thought as she pushed the button to his cell.

Jacen stood, mid stretch, with his back to the door when it opened. He sensed immediately who opened it and smiled.

"Good morning, gorgeous," he remarked.

Raven braced herself against the doorframe as she saw Jacen's broad, lean, bare back covered in a light sheen of perspiration. Her mind stopped functioning as her eyes traced and absorbed every detail of his powerfully built back. She briefly wondered how in the galaxy she'd managed to overpower this muscular man. She then snapped out of her reverie and cleared her throat, "Put your shirt on womprat and come with me."

Jacen turned around. Raven gasped under her mask when she saw the huge angry purple bruises on his arm, chest, face, and shoulder. Part of her desperately wanted to reach out and try to heal those purple welts that marred his otherwise perfect features. The reality of the welts on his face reminded her of her actions the other day. A wave of guilt washed over her. She mentally restrained herself from surging forward.

Jacen narrowed his eyes at the masked girl, reached behind him and scooped up his shirt. He'd heard the gasp, was that guilt? Regret? He held the shirt by the collar and stared at his "captor" from top to bottom. She nearly matched him in height, and appeared to have an iron spine that forced her to stand erect all of the time, it spoke of her self-confidence. She was thin and wiry, however deceptively strong to be able to support her heavy respirator. Her respirator covered much of her upper body, so he could really only see her long legs and slim waist. He grinned slightly, wondering if somehow he had managed to get under her skin.

"Jacen," he said stepping towards her.

"What?" Raven asked, eyes moving from chest to face.

"As opposed to womprat, my name is Jacen.... Jacen Solo," he said and flashed her a disarmingly charming grin.

*"Oh no, he is who I thought he was,"* Raven thought uncomfortably. She also found herself swooning from his smile. She gulped down a wave of nausea, and managed to say, "Come on, what are you

waiting for?”

Jacen licked the inside of his mouth, wrinkled his brows, and stared at the woman. Her gray helmet gave the illusion of a flip hairstyle from the top covering. The face shaped in angular spikes, marking out facial feature. The area for the mouth formed the shape of a frown. Jacen approached her, and gazed straight in towards her shielded eyes. He examined the tinted glass on the mask, seeking, wondering, what colored eyes hid behind the visor. He desperately wanted to connect with the human inside. Slowly he put his shirt on, without taking his eyes off of Raven. He noticed her mask had a patch of grease on one of the cheekbone areas. He reached out a finger and touched the cool, smooth metal.

“What are you doing?” Raven asked, alarmed.

“Sheesh, don’t get all excited,” he gave her a lopsided grin and pulled his finger away revealing the grease on his fingers. He turned around and washed his hands. He fastened up his shirt, decided to leave the top couple fasteners open, and then tucked it into his pants.

“I’m an Admiral, I rarely ever get excited,” Raven said, hands balled on hips.

“I’m sorry about that. You must find your line of work exceptionally boring then,” he said with a smirk.

“That’s not what I meant,” Raven said.

“Really, what did you mean?” he asked wiping his hands on his pants.

Raven felt blood rush to her cheeks not wishing to answer his question. “Give me your hands so I can cuff you.”

Jacen obediently placed his wrists together in front of him and leaned in towards her, eyebrows wiggling, “I bet you do that to all the guys, don’t you?”

“*What is he talking about?*” Raven felt her face get hotter, as she grinned maliciously as she slammed the stun cuffs on him. Jacen sensed her confusion and grinned. “Don’t try anything foolish. Now move.”

“Where are we going?” Jacen asked leaning into the doorframe over her. Raven glanced up at him. His hair disheveled from the night before made him look rugged, and the slight bit of stubble on his chin, gave him a sensuously, scruffy appearance; even if his face did look like it’d been rotated through a meat grinder.

She stepped aside, grabbed his shirt and dragged him into the hallway, “Get moving and you’ll find out.”

Jacen stumbled over his feet. “Anything you ask, Raven.”

Raven felt her heart skip a beat, “I hate that name, don’t call me that again.”

“Why not? I like it. It’s dark, mysterious, and freeing- like yourself,” he said staring at her sensing the

lie that had just escaped from her lips.

Raven shoved him against the wall and seethed, “What exactly is that supposed to mean?”

Jacen laughed aloud, “Oh come on, like the whole mask thing isn’t a good enough indicator that you’re dark and mysterious?” He wiggled his fingers around in the air to emphasize his last point. His gesturing earned him a series of shocks to the hands. He grimaced down the pain.

“No the other part of it. Why did you say it was *freeing*?” Raven asked, arms crossed over her chest.

Jacen stared long and hard at her, then he stepped towards her and raised his hands gently to prevent them from stunning him again. He tapped her chestplate. “It’s freeing, because that name represents a part of you that you have long ago suppressed. It is your true identity. If you were to embrace it, and everything it represents, you could be free.”

Raven felt the heat rise in her as the truth of his words stung, “That name means nothing to me, it never has, never will. Now move it!” She pushed him towards the turbolift.

Jacen sighed at the two guards who’d watched the whole exchange with veiled interest. “Women,” he said to them with raised eyebrow.

The turbolift doors opened and Raven thrust him inside. She turned around and as the turbolift doors were closing, she saw flickers of smiles itching on the faces of the guards.

She turned on her captive, fury rising. “If you ever, EVER insult me in front of my men again, I will kill you.”

Jacen sensed her rising anger, and realized that probably wasn’t an empty threat. He decided to opt for diplomacy, rather than continue to taunt her. “Whatever you wish, Admiral.”

She turned around and said, “Good. Level 11.”

She pouted under her mask and felt a slight twinge of regret that he didn’t call her Raven.

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## Chapter 24

Marxx walked down the hallway purposefully towards Jaina’s recovery room. After one hour of C-3PO’s constant chattering he was ready to speak again with a human, any human. Even if the great Anakin Skywalker did build C-3PO, he couldn’t figure out how Han and Leia put up with that droid.

He briefly stopped to examine his reflection in a large mirrored wall. Neatly shaven, wearing his Jedi robe and in fresh linen shirt and brown trousers, he felt like a Jedi Knight again and less like a dirty moisture farmer. He entered the blue waiting room to find it alive with activity. Apparently Leia, Han, and Luke opted for this place to become their control center.

“Intelligence reports confirm the location of that Destroyer in the Ceresses System, kid. Good call,” Han said, slapping a hand on Marxx’s shoulder.

“Thank you Si... Han,” Marxx said, catching himself. “What’s the plan?”

Before he could get an answer, Han wandered away from him to talk to Anakin, Leia and Chewie. Luke sat talking on a holo-phone to someone. Mara was deeply involved with changing baby Ben’s nappies.

Marxx wandered over towards the hallway, ready to go visit Jaina, when he heard the sound of the medicenter entrance doors swishing open. Two figures strode purposefully in and out of the shadows of the overhead lights. One, a male, wore a long black Jedi robe, the other was a very muscular woman with one arm. A flash of a smile spread across Marxx’s face. He faced them as they approached.

“You must be Tenal Ka and you...” He stared at the man with dark hair and greenish eyes, “you must be Jedi Master Kyp Durrón. Marxx Racees, pleasure to meet you both.” He extended his hand.

“The great Marxx Racees, we finally meet,” Kyp slightly smiled and shook his hand. His black hair lay in shaggy layers atop his head.

Marxx laughed, “I don’t know how ‘great’ I am.”

“You must be something special if Masters Tionne and Rodersuin named you a Jedi Master right at graduation,” Kyp said, green eyes twinkling.

Marxx blushed, “Jury’s still out on why they did that.”

“Greetings. Nice to make your acquaintance Marxx Racees,” Tenal Ka said in a very monotone voice that seemed to completely contradict what she’d just said.

Marxx sized her up. She wore an unusual dress made of some kind of reptilian hide. Her copper hair stuck out in snaked braids all over her head. He thought she was pretty, in a somber kind of way. Her gray steel gray eyes spoke of a lifetime of serious contemplation. He wondered what his wise cracking friend saw in her.

“How’s Jaina?” Kyp asked, crossing his arms.

“Recovering. She’s got a little stinging and soreness. Otherwise she’s fine. The medics want her to stay here for a week,” Marxx said smiling.

Kyp rocked gently on his feet and smirked at the new Jedi. His eyes twinkled, “Yeah, I’d like to see them try to keep her here a week. I guarantee you, she’ll be flying with us to rescue Jacen in her X-Wing, mark my words. She’s a tough one. A couple beatings with a lightsaber aren’t nearly enough to take down the mighty Jaina Solo.”

Marxx thought of her helplessly passed out in his ship, “Well she’s not all powerful. She had luck on her side.”

“Are there any leads on where Jacen is?” Tenal Ka asked.

Marxx sensed real concern coming from the warrior Jedi. He replied, “Yes, they are in the Ceresses System.”

Kyp nodded, "So when are we going after him?"

"You'll have to ask Han and Leia. They haven't enlightened me yet."

"Do you think we can see Jaina first?" Tenal Ka asked placing her one hand on her hip, next to her belt lined with throwing darts.

"Sure, let's see if she's awake." Marxx lead them down the hall towards Jaina's room. He peered through the glass and they saw she was sleeping. Marxx smiled blissfully and placed a hand on the glass.

Kyp noted the adoring expression on Marxx's face. He felt a slight jealous twinge at Marxx's happiness. Master Luke had informed him that the two were dating, and it appeared their attachment was very strong. He clapped a hand on Marxx's shoulder and said, "We'll come see her later." They returned back to the waiting area.

Luke corralled the trio. "Kyp, Tenal Ka thank you for getting here so fast. Did your ship ever get completed?"

"Yes, it's outside waiting Master Skywalker," Kyp said, breaking a wide grin across his face.

"Excellent. Let's go see it. I'll explain the plan on the way out there. Come on Marxx." The four Jedi moved out of the building and onto the visitors landing platform.

Marxx looked over a relic Imperial Shuttle rather dubiously. He said with a raised eyebrow, "This hunk of junk is what you all are excited about?"

Kyp and Luke shared a grin. Kyp aimed a control key at the ship and said, "Nope, but this is..." he clicked the button and the entire ship morphed and changed into a sleek golden ship with a long nose and two short wings.

"Whoa, what is that?" Marxx said, completely impressed.

"Welcome to the future of space travel... holo cloaking technology. I found this guy Kendu Rewgun, on Bogdon. He's an engineering genius. He came up with this design and was more than happy to have a Jedi Master be the first to test his product. If the ship meets my specifications, he's willing to talk to the New Republic about an exclusive contract to outfit our military with them as opposed to selling to the general public," Kyp glanced at Marxx with a smirk. "Apparently he has an old beef with the former Empire and is willing to do anything to keep the New Republic in working order. Anyway...the ship has a central processor that emits a perfect holo-image over the hull of the ship. I've got the designs of over twenty different ships in my databank. Once the holo-image has been activated, that will also trigger the cloaking system to cover the original ship design. She makes 1.2 over lightspeed and is fitted with stealth engines. *The Fiery Phoenix* is the perfect ship for covert missions. She packs a lot of firepower as well," Kyp started laughing at Marxx's utter wonderment of the ship. "She's a beaut isn't she?"

"Yeah- think this Rewgun guy would be willing to trade a Nubian Royal class Yacht for one?" Marxx asked as he pressed his hands onto the cool, smooth metallic hull.



"I doubt it- but who knows," Kyp said laughing. "So what's the plan Master Skywalker?" The three younger Jedi turned to Luke as the Jedi Master laid out the rescue plan for Jacen.

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Jaina ripped off her covers, in order to get dressed and join in on the rescue mission.

Marxx hooted loudly at her and tucked her back in. "You're not going anywhere M'lady."

"It's not fair! You need me along – I can sense Jacen better than anyone!" Jaina said as she pounded her right fist on her leg.

"I want you along as well. But you need to rest. Remember what you told me in the *Hope*?"

"What?" Jaina's eyes grew large with merriment as she reached for her covers again, "That you'll always let me win an argument?"

Marxx flashed her a lopsided grin and rolled his eyes, and lightly slapped her hand, "I'm going to regret the day I ever let you overhear that little comment, aren't I? No. That you aren't any good to us dead..."

"I'm not dying. And you all need me..." Jaina said, pleading with her dark brown eyes.

"...And you need to recover...completely. The last thing you want is to further injure yourself. Do you want to be permanently scarred? Your mother is staying behind with you to make sure you do get your proper rest," Marxx said, staring long and hard at her.

"You need me," she said sticking out her lower lip in a pout.

Marxx gazed at her with a charming smile. He picked up her hand and lightly kissed it. His voice grew husky as he replied, "Yes. I do need you.... to be safe, and ready to get married as soon as possible."

Jaina threw up her hand in defeat. "Fine. Whatever."

Marxx caressed her cheek and cupped her chin in his hand, "I love you... you know that, right?"

"Yes," Jaina said blinking back tears.

"Let me do this for you... for us. Once we get Jacen back, we can start our lives together," Marxx said with a smile. He brushed the back of her hand against his cheek. "Nothing will ever keep us apart. Think about everything we have to look forward to, our wedding...." he glanced at her heat rising in his eyes, "our wedding night..."

Jaina stared into Marxx's pool blue eyes and felt herself drowning. She loved the way he looked at her.

"We really should tell everyone," Jaina said fingering her ring.

"Let's wait until after we get Jacen back. Something tells me we wouldn't get the same kind of happy

response we'll get when everyone is together safe and sound," Marxx said.

"Ok. You will be careful won't you?" Jaina asked, her eyes pleaded with him.

"M'lady, you can count on that. I'd like to see someone try to prevent me from returning back to you in one piece," Marxx replied confidently.

"That's not funny- look at me. If I got injured, you can too," Jaina said, thinking of her relatives who've always managed to get injured when they headed off on dangerous missions.

"I will return to you. You are my reason for living.... I love you." Marxx said, he stood up. "I have to go."

Marxx leaned over and Jaina pulled him towards her. Their lips softly brushed against each other. Then Jaina opened her mouth and sucked his lower lip seductively. Marxx gasped and they fell into a deep, long goodbye kiss. Jaina massaged the back of his neck. Marxx broke apart from her embrace breathless. Marxx ran his fingers through her soft chocolaty hair.

"Remember, you'll only get more of that when you come back," Jaina said with a pout.

Marxx raised an eyebrow and smiled broadly, "Well then, consider me on my way back home already, M'lady."

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"I don't know how I do it Master Skywalker. Truly, I don't," Marxx said unhappily, as he stared at Luke in the galley of the *Phoenix* while they cruised through hyperspace towards the Ceresses System. He had felt uneasy ever since Luke revealed that they would fly disguised as a Corellian waste transporter close to the destroyer - and Marxx would teleport onto the ship and then return with Jacen. The *Falcon* followed behind to help take care of enemy fighters.

"You have some insight on how it works- that is why you turned off your saber and grabbed Jaina and Jacen on the Destroyer. You knew you could get them to your ship in the shuttle bay. Now think about it. What makes your teleporting through the Force possible?" Luke asked wearing a simple black spacesuit he arms crossed.

Marxx sat down, rubbed his neck, and closed his eyes. "Both on Yavin and on the Destroyer there were intense moments of emotion, pain and anger. On Yavin I focused completely on the pain and fear of the cadets and I appeared where I felt that emotion. On the Destroyer, Raven's anger had built up and I was able to feed off of it to fall back onto my ship."

"So you need great moments of distress or rage to do this?" Luke asked, eyebrow up.

"Maybe," Marxx said. "I can't just wish I was somewhere and I will appear. At least I don't think I can. It's as if those intense emotions open a portal for me to pass through."

"Or a Vergence..." Luke said, chewing on his lip.

“What’s that?” Marxx asked, cocking his head.

Luke sat down opposite the young Jedi, “A Vergence is the transition point for the Force and physical world. It is the door where the two worlds, spiritual and physical meet. I saw this kind of transition happen once. My former mentor Obi-Wan, or Ben Kenobi was fighting his former apprentice Darth Vader, Anakin Skywalker, my father... Vader swung at Ben with all of his hate, and Ben vanished. He ceased to exist in the physical world and became one with the Force... He of course didn’t return though. He sacrificed himself so my friends and I could escape the Death Star. His last words were to Vader ‘*If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine*’ and he did. He could be with me anywhere that I was in the Galaxy simply by travelling through the Force on a spiritual level,” Luke sat back and had a bit of a melancholy expression etched on his face.

“That’s interesting. That goes with us being ‘luminous beings and not crude matter,’ but why can I pass through it? And why can’t anyone else?” Marxx scratched his head.

Luke glanced at the confused young man. “Well you *can* bring others with you, remember that. Long ago some of the first Jedi’s could do what you did. There are reported stories of their feats.” Luke proceeded to tell him about Draptua-Raag.

“Did the story mention anything on how he did it?” Marxx asked, hopes rising.

“No, and even worse the story was encrypted. For some reason the elder Jedis didn’t want his tale to be made common knowledge to the general Jedi Order,” Luke replied shaking his head and then brushed aside a lock of his sandy blond hair.

Marxx stared long and hard at his mentor, “In other words, my ‘talent’ could possibly have dire or dangerous consequences.”

“I don’t know. Maybe they just didn’t want their Padawans disappearing at lesson time. I found the records from old Jedi archives. Many of those archives were destroyed during the Clone Wars. If there is an answer, it’s probably long gone. Only time will tell I suppose,” Luke replied, shrugging his shoulders.

“And I’m the test subject... wonderful.” Marxx said as he sat gloomily back in his chair. “What if Jacen is peacefully asleep on the ship? I won’t be able to get in.”

Luke smiled at the young man, “I have faith in you, Marxx. You do know this little talent of yours is why you were named Jedi Master, don’t you?”

“It is? I thought they made a mistake,” Marxx replied feeling slightly queasy.

“They only did what I requested of them,” Luke said, staring long and hard at the young Jedi.

Marxx felt his mouth drop open. “Well I guess we need to get to practicing, don’t we?”

Luke smiled broadly, “Absolutely.”

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## Chapter 25

Raven opened the door to her apartment and pushed Jacen inside. She had no intention of giving him a grand tour of her quarters. She just needed to get him through the room into her private interrogation room.

Jacen glanced at all of the art objects in the room. He had to admit Raven had exquisite taste. He detected a light, calming scents of incense and herbal oils in the air. As Raven prodded him on, his eyes fell on the Nubian painting on her wall. He stopped dead in his tracks and stared at it. He stepped onto and over her priceless chaise, leaving an oily footprint on the silky coverlet and stood in front of the painting.

“Hey! Come back here,” Raven cried.

“Where did you get this?” Jacen asked, pointing at the painting.

“At a junk shop on Ord Mantell. Why? You interested in buying it? It’s worth oh around 10 million credits,” she said snidely, walked around her chaise and stood beside her captive.

Jacen’s eyes fell on the brushstrokes and the queen in the image. “You really have no idea who this is or who painted it, do you? You probably own it and like it just because it’s rare and valuable.”

Raven suddenly became intrigued with Jacen. She was passionate about art, and the thought of talking art with someone piqued her curiosity. She decided to see what exactly he could tell her about her painting. “It’s unsigned. I don’t need to know the artist, all I know is it’s Nubian and I picked it up for a bargain. Why? You an art critic? You know who the artist is?”

Jacen smiled, “Yea. The woman in the painting is Queen Padme Amidala, she was the Queen of Naboo about ten years before the Clone Wars broke out. She was only 14 when she ruled,” He turned his face towards Raven, “She was also my grandmother.”

Under her mask, Raven stared at Jacen with a look mingling shock and confusion. She then giggled. She stared at Jacen and envisioned a huge crown sitting on his head. She doubled over laughing.

Jacen glanced down at her with a bemused expression. Her laugh echoed through her helmet, and danced off of the walls in the room. Through her eye shield he saw her eyes alit with merriment. Jacen smiled broadly, catching the infection from her laugh. “What?”

Raven straightened up, and still smiling broadly under her mask, she pointed at him, “You are royalty? A royal pain in the backside maybe...”

Jacen listened closely to her laugh and thought it delightful, he even felt slightly lightheaded and his heart swelled while hearing it. He grinned, “Well I’ll agree on that one. Actually the Queens of Naboo were elected. Her title was much like Supreme Chancellor or President.” He reached out his hand slowly, to avoid shocks and took one of Raven’s hands. The merriment left her eyes- replaced with fear. She tried to jerk it away from him, causing both of them to get shocked. Jacen flinched at the pain but he held fast. He brought their hands up towards the painting, “Do you know who the artist is who painted it?”

“Let go of my hand,” Raven said trying to move away from him.

“Do you know who the artist is?” he massaged her gloved hand between his and calmly tried to read her eyes behind the shield.

“I said let go...” Raven tried desperately to squirm out of his grasp. She wondered if shooting him with a Force field would be overkill.

“Why?”

“Why what? You’re making me feel... uncomfortable. Let go!” Raven said.

“You haven’t answered me,” Jacen said, brown eyes twinkling.

“Please, let go...” Raven said. She wondered why he wouldn’t listen to her.

Jacen smiled softly and massaged her palm, “I like it how you just said ‘please.’ Shows I was right.”

“Right? Right about what?” Raven spat as she stopped squirming. She focused on his deep brown eyes and felt all willpower to fight seep out of her.

“Raven is still there, inside that metal.” He slowly brought his hands up to his face, and twisted her hand around so he could gently kiss the back of her hand. Raven didn’t feel the touch of his lips against her glove, but her body responded as if she did. She sucked in a deep breath and felt slightly faint. Jacen pulled her hand up and gently rubbed it against his cheek all the while never taking his eyes off of her eyes- they were large and full with surprise.

“I have no idea who the artist is,” Raven croaked, feeling she needed to try and regain the advantage in here.

Jacen smiled broadly, “That was painted by your grandfather, Paulo Brannoush. He did a whole series of paintings of Queen Padme Amidala. They were good friends when they were young. He even said he would’ve married her if she’d been interested.”

Raven suddenly felt glad that he held her hand, for she felt like she was about to fall over from fainting. “My grandfather?”

Jacen grinned, “Yes. He’s a wonderful man. Creative, funny, you’d like him a lot.”

“He’s still alive?” Raven asked in a small voice.

“Yes, your grandfather and your parents,” he turned his back on the painting and looked directly at Raven. “It’s not too late you know. They would love to be with you again.”

Jacen realized he just stepped over some unseen boundary and sensed her anger rising, Raven ripped her hand away from Jacen’s hold- leaving him cringing in pain from several jolts of shocks. Raven distanced herself from him and spat, “Would they now? They ABANDONED me. I was sick. They couldn’t afford to take care of me, so they dumped me at the Mos Espa hospital. My grandmother took pity on me and stole me away from there and raised me herself. I guess my loving family was plenty

wealthy without a sick little girl around with extra hospital bills to pay.”

“It’s not like that. They were told at the hospital that you had died. They mourned your death. All they wanted was to have their little girl back, but they were told you had died...” Jacen walked up to her, tilted his head down and gazed into her visor, “You died and then your grandmother disappeared. That’s what Marxx told me anyways, and he’s the most decent guy around. He doesn’t lie.”

“Oh yes, my brother the Saint. He was always the good, healthy perfect one and I was the burden.” She sat down with a flop onto her chaise seething, “I really don’t need this right now.”

Jacen suddenly felt the ship shift and move into hyperspace. He glanced out the window, “Where are we going?”

Raven stood up and poked him, and prodded him around the chaise, “Follow me and you’ll find out.”

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Tenal Ka sat in the main quarters on the *Phoenix* patiently waiting for Marxx to magically appear in the room. So far nothing has happened. From outside she can hear Marxx pacing and arguing with Master Skywalker. Something told her that she was an illogical choice for this exercise. Jacen is a very emotional young man, even in his sleep he would often thrash around in fits of discomfort. She folded her legs under her body and took deep relaxing breaths. She focused on herself, maintaining her composure. Jacen Solo had been there many times over the years to help her, and to fight along side her. She owed a lot to Jacen.

She remembered back at the Jedi academy, Jacen always tried to get her to laugh. It wasn’t that she didn’t appreciate his efforts. She simply didn’t understand jokes. On her home planet of Dathomir the women ruled the planet as warriors. They were warriors and keepers of the peace. Combine her added heritage as a Hapian Princess, and her childhood left little time and room for play and fun. Tenal Ka was born to the royal family and fun was replaced with duty.

The thought of her jovial friend, being held prisoner, made her upset. She never admitted her true feelings for him to anyone. Whenever she would see him, her heart would skip a beat. In her own somber way she adored Jacen, since he represented everything that she was not. He was only responsible for himself. He did not have to worry about “royal family obligations.” His free spirit beckoned her, and enticed her away from a life of imprisonment under the duty of Rule. Although rarely one who allows her mind to enter the fantasy world, Tenal Ka often wondered what it would be like to marry Jacen. She sensed that he loved her, and although it terrified her to admit it, she loved him back. Jacen was an excellent negotiator, but she just didn’t know how he would last against a dark Force user. She hoped and prayed that he was fine. Tenal Ka began to seriously worry for her friend.

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“Marxx, you’re not concentrating,” Luke said.

Marxx paced back and forth and scratched his head. “You really think I can jump between ships?”

“Well not this second, but yes, you will be able to do so. That is what Draptua-Raag was able to do,” Luke explained to the young man.

“Tenal Ka is too relaxed. I’m not feeding anything off of her except peace. I have no reason to go in there. I don’t think I can use this ability flippantly, Master.” Marxx felt a trickle of sweat run down his face as worry set in.

“The problem is that you are thinking too much about it. The two times you did this, you didn’t think about it, except for a couple split seconds. That is the mindframe you need to get in,” Luke said pointedly.

“Alright, I’ll try Master,” Marxx said, turning his back.

“No. There is no try. Do it or do not do it,” Luke explained. “And remember if you choose failure, Jacen’s life could be on the line.”

“Great. Thank you, Master Skywalker, no added pressure there,” Marxx said grabbing his neck. Marxx did realize though that Luke was right. He needed to figure this out, and quickly. He reached out towards Tenal Ka, closed his eyes, felt her presence, and sensed her worry. He fed upon her worry, absorbed it, threw out a hand, and vanished.

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Had Tenal Ka’s eyes not been open she would have never believed that Marxx had just appeared in her room, and had not walked in on his own. She believes what she sees.

“Give me your hand please,” Marxx said, smiling. Tenal Ka unwrapped herself from her sitting position and stood up. She gave him her hand. Marxx took a step back and the two vanished and appeared in the galley.

Luke’s smile could have lit up a galaxy. Marxx let out a joyous whoop of joy, and Tenal Ka stood by impressed by Marxx’s miraculous feat.

Their joy however was short lived as Kyp stepped into the room. “I hate to be the bearer of bad news. We’ve just arrived in the Ceresses System, and the Destroyer isn’t here. And I have no idea where it disappeared to.”

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## Chapter 26

Jacen glanced around the dark room with a mixture of curiosity and dread. Something told him that he wasn’t going to like what went on in there. Mostly dark, the room contained very few objects, no windows, apparently no refresher facilities; only a stark table with hand and foot restraints at each corner, black panels overhead and on the walls, and a clean tile floor. The few lights overhead were swallowed by the blackness of the room. The center of the room held a large drain, to make cleanup, possibly of blood, easy.

Raven moved him over to a large table. “Get up there and lay down.”

“Why?”

“Because I said so,” Raven said, the twinges of a headache started to form in her head from the Jedi’s constant bickering.

Jacen licked his lips and started to sweat. The only two sounds in the room were Raven’s mechanical breathing and his own thumping, racing heart. The room smelled stale and clinical, with the faintest scent of old human sweat that now combined with his own. He knew that he really didn’t want to get on that table. If he did, he would lose any advantages he might have gained with Raven. That is if he had actually managed to gain any ground with her.

“You really don’t want to do anything to me, you know that don’t you? You know who my mother is, ex-Chancellor Organa- Solo? She will not look too kindly upon you torturing me,” Jacen said. He turned towards her, “What will that accomplish? Let’s go back into your quarters and talk like civilized human beings. You can even keep the cuffs on me.”

“Gee, thanks for your permission. I really don’t have time for this Jedi. Please get onto the table. Don’t *make* me put you up there,” Raven said, hands on hips.

Jacen advanced on her, “Why are you doing this? What have I done?”

“I won’t ask again,” she said with ice in her voice. A large part of her wanted to do what he asked, however she knew time was not on her side.

Jacen listened to the tone of her voice, stopped dead in his tracks, turned around and hopped up onto the table. He laid down slowly, “You are going to regret this.”

Raven unlocked his right hand stun lock and chained his hand into a restraint in the top right corner of the table. She stalked around the table, skirt swishing. She then unlocked his left handed stun guard and locked his left hand into the left restraint.

“You worry too much, Jedi,” Raven said.

“Jacen.”

“Jedi... I have no interest in harming you any further. I won’t get much of a reward for you if you are wounded or injured,” Raven said, tilting her head. She gently extended a hand and ran her fingers seductively down the side of his face.

Jacen found her touch oddly stimulating. “So you’re going to ransom me? Hate to break it to you, my family isn’t all that wealthy, you may be stuck with me for a long time,” Jacen said smirking. “Then again, maybe that’s been your plan all along. Plan on keeping me as your slave? Or maybe your *love* slave?”

Raven snatched her hand away from his face and felt her hands turn clammy and her mouth go dry at that little barb of his. She swallowed then spoke, “Actually, if you are not worth much to me alive, then I guess your death shouldn’t mean much, should it?”

Jacen stopped grinning and squinted at her, “You don’t mean that. I can feel it. There’s a battle waging inside your head. You know this is wrong. You, like your brother, are very strong with the Force. You



could be an amazing Jedi. I can feel the conflict within you, let go of your hate!”

Raven let out a long breath. Images of her running free in her dream sprang into her mind. Could she really be that free? The Jedi was trying her patience and resolve, “And what good would being a Jedi be? I can’t imagine it’s much fun being good all of the time.”

“And being full of hate is? I don’t see you partying and enjoying your hateful ways. All I see is that you are miserable. How many friends do you have, Raven? When was the last time someone gave you a shoulder to cry upon? Or a hug?”

“I don’t need friends!”

“Everybody needs friends. You even have it best, because you have a family who would welcome you back with open arms if you let them. Raven, they all think you are dead! Well except for Marxx- who now knows you are alive. They would be thrilled to have you back again. What have you currently got? You have priceless antiques to keep company with. Possessions are all good and fine, but ultimately, they can’t bring you peace and true happiness,” Jacen said, chipping away at her stony exterior. “You need people. You’re just afraid to let anyone inside and see the real you. I know it’s hard to trust when everyone’s turned their backs on you during your life. But trust can be earned, you just have to be willing to open yourself up.”

Raven’s lip started to quiver. Mechanical breathing filled the void of silence. Behind her mask, her eyes locked with Jacen’s. She whispered. “Nobody wants to know the real me. They never did and never will.”

“That’s just not true. You just don’t let anyone in. I would love to get to know you. I believe there’s an amazing woman under that metal and hiding behind that mask. You’ve obviously taken charge in your life. You’re resourceful, spirited, funny, and compassionate. What’s not to like?” Jacen asked biting his lip.

Raven grabbed onto the table, completely befuddled by Jacen’s words. Did he really mean them? She laughed slightly, “Compassionate? You think *I’M* compassionate? Where’d you get that from, when I hit you on the head with the emergency pack, or kicked you in the turbolift?”

Jacen’s eyes grew soft, “No. It was when you had the guards give me clean clothes, and sent in a medical droid to tend to my injuries. I know you’re not going to hurt me anymore, because you know it would be wrong.”

Raven found herself wheeling from Jacen’s tender gaze. She knew she needed to take control of things again and said, “Well you are right about that. I have no intention of harming you. Contrary to your beliefs, you are not my main priority at this moment. We’re about to reach our destination. I need to go. This room, unlike the detention level cells, is heavily shielded. I doubt that any of your Jedi friends who come looking for you will be able to sense you in here. When I leave the room, the restraints will unbuckle. There is a small refresher over in the far corner. I recommend you shower... Even through my respiratory ventilation system, I can tell that you need it.”

Jacen admitted he didn’t smell all that sweet. He knew she wanted to leave; he tried anything to get her to stay. “Where is our destination? Come on, you said you would tell me.”

“Naboo.”

“What do you want with Nab...” Jacen felt terror sink in his heart but he tried not to let that fear reach his brown eyes. “What do you want there?”

“It’s family reunion time.” Before Jacen could respond, she turned around, strode out the door and locked it. As the door shut behind her, Raven leaned against the door to steady her shaking knees.

True to Raven’s word, the cuffs unlocked on Jacen’s wrists. He lightly massaged them, after his adrenaline rush, he now felt all of his aches and pains return. He closed his eyes and sunk into the Force. He couldn’t sense much though. He glanced at the panels in the room and wondered what they were created from, realizing they were likely blocking him from using the Force.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” he moaned as he lay back down on the table in despair.

After a few moments he realized something, if he couldn’t use the Force in here, neither could Raven. He felt a small smile form on his face. He’d be ready for her the next time she showed up. He climbed off of the table and decided to take her advice and shower.

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*The Vengeance* dropped out of hyperspace over Naboo. Raven’s mind spun in circles. She suddenly felt very conscious of her actions and the possible consequences for them.

“*Blasted Jedi, making me doubt myself!*” She thought. However, it was too late now to change her mind. The wheels were set in motion, and Raven could not stop the course she had set. She could not show weakness or indecision to her men. She’d worked very hard to earn their respect, the slightest sign of weakness and she knew that they would all turn on her. She’d never last a mutiny.

Raven marched in front of her troops. They may be incompetent mechanics, but that wasn’t what the men were originally hired for; they were excellent thieves.

“You will all have one hour total for flight time and time in the storage vault. I only want paintings. They are the lightest and quickest of objects to move. I do not want ceremonial items. I do not want furniture. I do not want statues. I don’t even want jewels. Is that clear?”

“Yes, Admiral.” The men all shouted in unison.

“Good. Get to your ships,” Raven said, holding up her arm. The twelve men fled to their three modified Imperial Shuttles. The Shuttles were fitted with larger cargo room for storage.

Raven purposefully walked towards a nervous Captain Hydin. “I will only be forty five minutes. When I arrive back, if the men are not here in exactly one half -hour, I want this ship out of orbit and into hyperspace. Is that clear?”

“Yes, Admiral.”

“There possibly may be an attack on the ship, ready the Tie-fighter pilots, just in case,” Raven said

pointing at the nervous man.

“Yes, Admiral. Already done.”

“Good, I’ll be back in forty five minutes.” She synchronized her wrist chronometer. Raven raced to her small shuttle and raised it out of the hanger. Upon reaching the atmosphere of the planet, she sunk into the Force and felt an old presence. She touched in some co-ordinates, and laid in a course for the Lake County.

\*\*\*\*\*

Everyone in *The Phoenix* began talking at once. Marxx couldn’t concentrate with all the voices.

“Kyp, can you please get us close to a heavily life- formed planet?” Marxx shouted over the din. He then stormed into the bedroom. He sat down on the bed and closed his eyes. He felt a moment of confusion between the three Jedis and Kyp raced to the captain’s seat. Kyp laid in a course for Juano 12, a heavily wooded, yet uninhabited moon of the planet Barabi.

Marxx reached out and absorbed the energies of Tenal Ka, Luke, and Kyp. He the extended himself towards the planet. Luke stepped into the doorway of the room and stared at the young Jedi. Luke leaned against the doorframe and crossed his arms while he watched Marxx meditate. He sensed a tremendous swelling of Force power around him. As Marxx sank deeper into the Force, Luke noticed the boy seemed to start to radiate a blue light. Luke wondered if he was imagining things.

Pool blue eyes flared open and the light diminished. Marxx sprung to his feet, eyes full of worry, “They’re at Naboo.”

Shooting off a holo-emitter message to *The Falcon* of the change in course, laid in a new course towards Naboo. Marxx then tried to call his parents.

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## Chapter 27

Raven’s shuttle glided over the treetops. She watched in amusement as a herd of bloated flea-looking creatures bounced around in a field below. The peaceful, beautiful, planetary landscape was in complete opposition to the turmoil brewing inside her mind. Much like the Jedi had said, a war waged. Her conscious screamed at her to turn her ship around. Yet years of pent up pain and misery called for vengeance. She kept hearing the words from both Marxx and Jacen circling in her head. Could her parents really not have known that she was alive? Did they think that she was dead? Did her grandmother deceive them all, including herself? Could she really become a Jedi? She felt the very foundation of her beliefs start to quake. She gazed longingly at the soft green hills and realized, living a life aboard her ship, she would never experience the feel of grass under her feet. She began to see that she wanted more out of life.

She found herself more determined than ever to go through with her plan because she desperately needed answers.

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Junay and Doolin, the curators in Theed, watched in horror as a crew of men wearing black from head to toe descended into the storage room from grappling hooks and ropes. One of the men, wearing night-vision goggles, raised a blaster and shot both of them with a stun blast. Both Nubians fell unconscious to the ground.

The men worked furiously attaching paintings to the levies and sent them cruising up and out of the hole. Four of the twelve men lifted out the paintings, and filled up the Imperial Shuttle cargo bays.

One of the thieves raced around the room gathering paintings. In his excursions his eye fell on the far end of the room. He saw a door. He raised his blaster and shot out the lock mechanisms. The door creaked open. He pried the door open and looked inside. The room, filled with file cabinets, beckoned him. He raced to one of the drawers and opened it. Files, paper files. He wondered if maybe there were other things hidden in the drawers. With the time constraint, he didn't have time to look through hundreds drawers.

With a running start he crashed himself into the closest cabinet with a loud thud. At first it appeared nothing was going to happen. Then the cabinet teetered and leaned on its side and crashed into the one next to it. And like dominos, the cabinets crashed with ear shattering precision down the row. The man then ran to the other side and did the same thing. In a few moments the entire room filled with flying paper that likened falling snow. After all the cabinets fell over, he raced down towards the center of the aisle, picked up a handful of files, satisfied that they were only filled with paper and datapads, he left to continue rounding up paintings.

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Chariss purposely worked in her flower garden. The sweet perfumed smell of stargazer lilies filled the air as insects lazily sipped nectar and collected pollen. Pruning sheers zipped and snipped quickly in her capable hands as she meticulously clipped and shaped a bush into a round ball. Her dark hair, piled high on her head, rested under a straw hat. The sun pleasantly warmed her, however cool breezes that blew in from the lakes prevented her from overheating.

Chariss loved gardening. She decided she would never get sick of seeing green and flowers. After living on Tatooine, where houseplants cost more than jewels, she just couldn't get enough of them. Paulo, her father, teased her that their home was turning into a living jungle from all the plants she brought indoors, as well as out.

Her mind wandered to her conversation with Marxx the other night. She was glad that he finally knew the truth about his sister and his grandmother. She had never intended to keep anything from Marxx; it's just that as time wore on and the pain subsided, she forgot to mention those things to him. She thought briefly of his anguished expression when he entered her home. She'd never seen such dark emotions mar her son's handsome face. She was glad that he came to his senses and forgave her for the things long kept buried in their family's closet.

She tilted her head and heard the chime of the holo-emitter inside. She knew she'd never reach it in time, and her father, upstairs working, would never hear it, as his hearing wasn't as good as it used to be. "Oh well," she mused, "If it's important enough, they'll leave a message."

She stopped her cutting and stepped back to examine the bush. She walked around the bush, seeking imperfections and bumps. She clipped here and there to smooth out errant branches. As she gazed at the bush, she experienced a sharp, biting sting on her neck. She cried out and threw a hand on the base of her skull. She fingered her neck and pulled out a protruding, foreign object. She yanked it out and looked at the tiny metallic device with curiosity. Her vision blurred and her muscles became heavy. Chariss fought to keep her eyes open, then she collapsed to the ground, her forehead crashed against the hard bricks. From out of the shadows of the surrounding flora, a dark figure emerged. Raven lifted the hat off of Chariss' head and examined her mother's face. Satisfied that she targeted the correct person, she gently lifted her mother's limp body up and over her shoulder, and shrank back into the darkness.

\*\*\*\*\*

Paulo sat upstairs in his workshop adding the finishing touches to a new painting. He gently rubbed his brushes clean with a soft rag and examined his finished work. This painting would be a special wedding gift for his grandson and Jaina. It depicted the couple standing at the balcony of the newly restored resort, arm in arm looking out over the Nubian Lake. The trees were shorter, reflecting the change the valley underwent after the Clone Wars.

He then sensed a numbing sensation run up his arm, towards his heart. Paulo's breath became shallow and labored as his heart constricted in his chest. He stumbled towards the stairs, looking for a glass of water, and slowly descended them, breath wheezing with each step. As he reached the last step, clutching his chest, sweat drenching his face, Paulo collapsed in a heap on the floor.

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## Chapter 28

Four Imperial Shuttles lifted out of the Nubian atmosphere and raced towards *The Vengeance*. They docked aboard it without any kind of a pursuit or resistance from the Nubians.

Raven noted the return of all the ships, and spoke into her comlink, "Captain Hydin, get us out of here."

"Yes, Admiral." The captain replied. Outside the stars turned into streaming lines.

The mission was successful, yet unlike ventures in the past, she felt hollow, empty and... common. She turned in her captain's seat and stared at her unconscious mother laying blissfully unaware of anything around her on the floor of the ship. Raven found herself confused, unsure of what to feel upon seeing her mother again. For years she'd always thought she'd feel anger and hatred towards Chariss. Now uncertainty gripped her like a vice. She needed to talk to her... but not yet.

Raven activated the rear hatch and stepped over her mother and walked down the ramp. She yelled at two underlings. They scurried over to her. She directed them to take Chariss to the detention level and asked them to put her into cellblock 4382. The men raced into the ship and carried her mother's limp body out. Raven approached the woman and gently brushed her hair away from her eyes. She then stepped back and watched the men carry Chariss off towards the detention level.

Her legs started to shake and from inside her mask, she fought back a tear of self-loathing.

\*\*\*\*\*

Leia opened the door to Jaina's room to find her daughter standing tiptoed on a chair trying, with her right arm, to pull off the heating grate in her ceiling. Her left arm rested in a sling.

"What are you doing out of bed, young lady?" Leia scolded.

Jaina's heart leaped, let out a squeak and pinwheeled her arm as she lost balance. Leia raced up behind Jaina and placed her hand on her back to steady her.

Jaina eased off of her toes and turned around. She clutched her chest. "You scared the living daylights out of me, Mom!"

"Sorry honey, but you are not supposed to be out of bed. Get off of there this instant!"

Jaina pouted and stepped off of the chair, "The heating grate is making an annoying rattling noise. I just wanted to fix it. I can't sleep with that thing bothering me."

"I will ask maintenance to come in and fix it. You don't need to further injure yourself, young lady." Jaina stalked over to her bed and climbed back in. Leia pulled the covers over her and sat down in the chair next to her.

Jaina stared gloomily at her mother. Around her the overpowering scent of flowers nearly made Jaina want to gag. For the past several hours Jaina had been receiving non-stop deliveries of flowers and baskets of fruit sent to her room. Some were from family friends, but most were from political hacks, trying to garnish bonus points with Jaina's mother.

Unconsciously, Jaina caressed her ring. She noticed her mother wore her hair in those scary Alderaanian buns that she'd once tried arranging on her own head, and dressed in a silky teal pantsuit. Her face was drawn and haggard from worry.

Leia pushed a clump of soft hair out of Jaina's face. "You know you need your rest. I understand that you wish you could have gone with them, but that is just not an option. You need to get your strength back."

Jaina fought back tears, "I know Mom...it's just that..."

"You miss Marxx already?" Leia smiled. "Well that's love for you. No matter if he's even in the next room, your heart will ache until he returns."

"What if he doesn't come back, Mom? And what if something happens to Jacen? I'll never be able to forgive myself if I could've been there to help them," Jaina's lip started to quiver as she felt a bawling fit brewing.

Leia held her right hand tightly, "Jacen's got the best rescue team in the galaxy headed after him. He's got, what five Jedi Knights and your father and Chewie racing off to find him. Trust me- one lowly Imperial Star Destroyer has nothing against that rescue team."

Leia noticed Jaina fingering her ring with her left thumb. She gave her daughter a sly smile and asked, "Do you have something you'd like to tell me?"

"What?" Jaina said, still wallowing in self-pity.

"What's that on your finger?" Leia said raising her eyebrows.

Jaina started to cry and showed her hand to her mother.

"So, you two are engaged?" Jaina nodded. "Congratulations, honey!" Leia wrapped her arms tightly around her daughter. "Why didn't you tell us?"

"Beca.." Jaina fought back her tears, "because we felt with Jacen missing, it wasn't really appropriate to mention it. We wanted to wait until everyone was back together again."

"Do Chariss and Rowlon know?"

Jaina nodded her head.

"Well I think since we have nothing else to do but wait around for the mission to be completed, that we should contact Chariss and start planning your wedding. What do you say? I'm going to go get us some bridal holomags, and bring in a holophone so we can plan things with Chariss. What do you say?.... And before you say anything else, they are coming back, all of them," Leia raised an eyebrow at her daughter.

Jaina smiled brightly, "Good idea, Mom. Thank you."

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Marxx sat in the co-pilot seat of *The Phoenix* and started to shiver. There was no response from his home on Naboo. He knew something was wrong, dead wrong. Firstly, he seemed to have lost his connection with Jacen. And secondly, he sensed something terrible had happened back on Naboo.

"Is this thing going as fast as it can?" he asked in a whisper to Kyp.

Kyp glanced over at the young Jedi and was startled by his haunted expression. "Yeah we're at top speed, why?"

"Something terrible has happened. Terrible."

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## Chapter 29

Chariss' senses returned to an unfamiliar environment. First she could no longer feel the warm Nubian sun on her face. Then she found herself resting on a very hard surface. She opened her eyes and stared at a dull gray ceiling, filtered with recessed lights. She examined the 7 foot by 7 foot room without windows. She swung her legs off of the bench and threw her hand against her forehead, fighting off a

head rush. Her hand met a huge lump on her forehead. She stood up and looked for a door control, but was unsuccessful in her quest. She glanced at her reflection in the tiny mirror that rested over the tiny sink and saw a huge goosebump on her forehead from where she collapsed in the garden. Surprisingly, it didn't hurt too much.

She approached the door again and started to pound on it and yelled for attention. Her shouts fell upon deaf ears. She cradled her now smarting hands and retreated to her bench. She clenched her jaw and refused to cry.

\*\*\*\*\*

Raven paced in her quarters. She found herself unable to think clearly. Normally she would be down in the hanger looking over her spoils. Today she could care less. She wondered what was the matter with her. She didn't think she was ill, nor was she tired. She felt nervous, tense, and ...something else. A memory surfaced in her head. Once during grade school she swiped a pallenberry from a fellow student's lunch after Woonti had confiscated her own meal. The child never knew who took it. Even though she was starved, Raven couldn't eat the fruit and eventually returned it to its proper owner. Raven stared at her Nubian painting. She knew what else she was feeling, guilt.

She had a cargo bay full of priceless paintings, her mother held in the detention level, and a Jedi who would be unable to use the Force all at her mercy. A week ago she would have been delighted by her victories. Today, Raven didn't care. What was it that Jacen said about objects? *"Possessions are all good and fine, but ultimately, they can't bring you peace and true happiness. You need people, you're just afraid to let anyone inside and see the real you. I know it's hard to trust when everyone's turned their backs on you during your life. But trust can be earned, you just have to be willing to open yourself up."*

She stared at an Alderaanian vase that she 'acquired' several months ago. The long fluted crystal neck curved gracefully into its swirled purple belly. Due to Alderaan being long gone, the vase, which was once common, was now worth around 50 thousand credits due to its rarity. For weeks, she experienced thrilling joy just to behold the vase. Now she felt nothing, nothing except nauseous shame for being in possession of it. It was supposed to be on display in a museum on Coruscant.

A tremor erupted in her throat. She threw open her faceplate and started to hack and cough until she cried from the tightening pain in her chest. She collapsed in a ball on the floor of her quarters and rocked herself back and forth into a state of numbing nothingness.

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The communications systems on *The Fiery Phoenix* lit up the night as reports filled the cockpit of the attack on Theed. Kyp wanted to land his ship at the capital, but Marxx wouldn't let him. He insisted that they go directly to the Lake County. Luke agreed with Marxx's request.

Kyp sent a message to the *Falcon* and asked them to check on Theed and the theft. Marxx gave Kyp the co-ordinates for the Lake County.

Marxx paced nervously as the ship soared over the Nubian landscape. Luke approached the young Jedi. Marxx's hair stuck out in all directions, his clothes sat disheveled on his body from worry.



“Marxx, you have to relax,” Luke said.

“How can I relax? I know something’s wrong. I can feel it,” Marxx said.

“I’m sensing a great amount of fear coming from you Marxx, fear along with your worry. You do not want to allow fear to consume you, Marxx. Fear can lead to other darker emotions: anger and aggression. Anger leads to suffering,” Luke said, grabbing the young man by the shoulder.

Marxx examined the floor, “Yes, Master Skywalker.” Marxx closed his eyes and inhaled a long deep breath. He slowly let it out and cleared his mind of doubt. From somewhere, outside of himself he felt his worries slowly start to extinguish and were replaced with calm, loving thoughts.

“Marxx, look at me,” Marxx glanced up into Luke’s concerned blue eyes. “Whatever we find at your home, you need to prepare yourself for it. Fear and anger only foster the Dark Side. You have to accept that sometimes bad things happen.”

Marxx stared at his Master and whispered, “Can you see what happened?”

Luke closed his eyes, “No. I don’t see anything.”

“I fear what my sister has done. She hates my family, I think,” Marxx said.

“Marxx...”

“I’ll be fine, Master Skywalker. I’m just really worried. When I see my parents safe and sound, then I’ll relax.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Jaina waited for her mother to return to her room. Her bed, side tables, and trays were filled with a myriad of parts removed from her bedside chronometer. This is how Jaina the mechanic beat boredom.

As she connected a couple parts back together, she sensed waves of anguish and fear through the Force. She closed her eyes and sensed her fiancé’s distress. She reached out and absorbed some of his pain. She then shot out into the Force rays of hope and love to Marxx, in order to strengthen and calm his soul.

*“If I can’t be there physically, at least I can be there with him in spirit,”* she thought. Sensing Marxx had calmed down some, she resumed her task at hand.

\*\*\*\*\*

Tanella and Krishta burst into the house, arms full of bags of groceries.

“Come on, let’s get the food put away Krishy. I’ll give you that Smoothery bar then,” Tanella said, smiling at her daughter.

“Yummy!” Krishta said as she juggled her bags. Through the gap between her two large bags she saw something on the floor by the stairs. She screamed and dropped the bags- their contents scattering

everywhere.

Tanella jumped and scowled at the mess her daughter created, “What is it?”

“Grandfather!” Tanella glanced over to the stairs and immediately forgot about the groceries. They raced to the other end of the room and Tanella turned her grandfather over. She placed her fingers on his wrist looking for a pulse. There was none. She felt his face and neck- his skin was cold to the touch.

Krishta started to cry as she grabbed her grandfather’s hand.

“Come here, sweetie,” Tanella wrapped her arms around her daughter and the two began to cry together. “Grandfather is one with the Force now.”

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## Chapter 30

Anakin, Han and Chewie walked out of the ramp of the *Falcon* into a churning sea of chaos. Workers from the Reconstruction project still busied themselves with demolishing the wreckage left of the older wings of the Capital. The droids filled the air with the continuous pounding sounds of construction and blanketed the surrounding air in a layer of powdery dust. The storage room area swarmed with people.

With his brown Jedi robe rustling in the warm Nubian breeze, Anakin walked casually over to the crowd of onlookers who consisted mostly of reporters. He pushed out his hands and the people parted a path for him. Han and Chewie exchanged glances.

Anakin stood before a throng of Republic reporters and waved his hand, “There is nothing to report here.”

The reporters all stared at their cameramen, “There is nothing to report here.”

“Move along to another planet, another story,” Anakin said waving his hand again.

“Come on, let’s go,” came the replies of dozens of reporters. Anakin suppressed a grin as the group dissolved and headed off for their ships.

“Remind me to have you around when the *Falcon* needs it’s yearly inspection,” Han said, resting his arm around his son’s shoulder. Chewie guffed his seconding of that motion.

“Well you know, Jedi mind tricks only work on the weak minded. Don’t they usually send in droids for the *Falcon*’s inspections?” Anakin replied.

Han’s face fell, “You’re right.”

“Excuse me a moment,” Anakin said. He stepped over to the underground chamber, peered down to make sure nobody stood below him and jumped. Junay and Doolin turned around at Anakin’s arrival.

Junay brushed her fingers through her blond hair, “Anakin, we are sorry to have failed you. They came

out of nowhere.”

Anakin glanced around the room. The thieves left the place in shambles, once neatly catalogued furniture, statues, and boxes spewed chaotically all over. Anakin felt his stomach drop. “Did they only come in this room?”

Doolin closed his eyes and flinched, “No, Sir.”

Anakin threw himself over the mess and cursed several times as his cape got caught up in fallen objects. His blue eyes brimmed with tears as he peered into the records room. Every single file cabinet lay on its side. Paper and datadisks scattered about the entire room, blanketing it in foot high drifts of paper.

He heard the curators approach him noisily from behind. “I want you both to order up about twenty, no thirty filing droids and get them here as soon as possible to start cleaning up this mess. I can’t let my sister see this... her fury would be enough to make a Sith Lord cringe in fear.”

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Chariss sat upright as the door to her cell swished open. Two men coldly entered her room and gruffly lifted her to her feet. They put stun cuffs on her and walked her out of the cell. She looked around her strange gray surroundings. The men took her into a turbolift and hailed level 8. Chariss determined that these men were underlings and didn’t bother to talk to them or ask questions.

When the elevator reached its destination, they directed her to a room that held a table and a couple of chairs. On the table rested a glass and a decanter.

“There’s water in there if you are thirsty. The Admiral will be with you shortly,” one of the guards said, removing her cuffs.

They shut the door behind her. Chariss regarded the pitcher with suspicion. She decided if someone wanted her dead, they already had plenty of opportunities. She doubted they would have moved her in here simply to poison her. She poured herself a glass and gladly took a long drink.

From across the table a holographic image shimmered into view and Chariss found herself looking at a blue figure wearing a mask.

“I see you are a trusting sort of person,” Raven said seeing the glass in her mother’s hand.

“Why are you holding me? What have I done? Who are you?” Chariss asked placing the glass down in front of her.

“You’re full of questions, aren’t you?” Raven asked.

“Wha... do you expect me to just sit here silently and not care that I’ve suddenly been made a prisoner? How would you like to be taken somewhere against your will?” Chariss felt the heat rising in her face. “Aren’t you going to answer my questions?”

Raven stared at the holo-image of her mother in her quarters. She watched her mother pushed back

from her seat, placed her hands on her hips and started to pace in the interrogation room.

“You are aboard my ship *The Vengeance*. I am holding you, because I have a few questions I would like answered.”

Chariss stopped her pacing, held onto the back of her chair and stared coldly at the holo-image with her brown eyes. “Go ahead. I have nothing to hide.”

“Please state your name.”

“Chariss Racees.”

“And do you have any children?” Raven asked and added, “What are their names?”

“I have two children, Tanella is my eldest daughter and Marxx is my son.”

“And that is all?”

“Yes,” Chariss said, placing her hands on her hips.

“Are you sure?” Raven asked. She felt her heart sink, realizing that her mother did consider her to be dead.

Chariss let out a small laugh, “Admiral, is that title correct for you? I think I would know if I had more than two children.”

“You may wish to rethink that statement.”

Chariss licked her teeth and narrowed her eyes at the image in front of her. She stared at the image and listened to a rhythmic breathing that came from the holo-emitter. Chariss grabbed onto the chair and tilted her head. Closing her eyes, she stretched out with her feelings. Sensing a presence from her past, she opened her eyes again. Her eyes grew haunted. She raced around the table and got as close to the holo-image as possible. She stared at the mask and tried to trace its edges in the static air. Ravens image jumped and snapped loudly as her mother’s fingers brushed through the image.

“No... this isn’t possible. They told us you were dead,” Chariss whispered. “My sweet little Raven is all grown up.”

Raven’s eyes burned as tears stung her eyes. She gasped as emotion welled inside of her. Nobody, that she could remember, had ever called her sweet.

Chariss dropped into a chair, and raked her fingers through her light brown hair. “I can’t believe that you are alive. We were told you were dead. How could they have lied to us?” She glanced up at the holo-emitter, her face wet with tears. “I knew you were alive. Nobody would listen to me. They all thought I was taking your death horribly and had snapped with reality. They had me institutionalized.... I gave up on you. What kind of mother am I?”

Unable to find any words, Raven watched her mother rip herself apart.

*"I KNEW IT!"* Chariss slammed her hands down on the table and pleaded with the image, "You must HATE me! I gave up on you. My precious little girl...how could I have given up on you?... Do you know that I had moments where I thought for sure I could sense your presence? I'd be doing something in my house, and I could hear your little soul crying out for me and for my help. I'd tell your father and he'd just shush away my instincts... I'm not worthy of anything... do to me whatever your wish." She threw her head down on the table and started weeping uncontrollably.

Raven's lips trembled and she began to cry as well. She turned off the emitter, flicked up her mask and cleared her eyes. But the tears wouldn't stop. Sitting on her chaise, Raven pulled her legs tightly against her chest. Sitting in her fetal position she rocked gently back and forth as she burst into body wracking sobs. Any and all hatred that she may have felt for her mother over the years dissipated completely.

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## Chapter 31

Kyp landed the *Phoenix* on the landing platform at the Racees estate. Marxx flew out of the descending ramp, his Jedi robe billowed behind him. He stopped short when his eyes fell upon the Coroner's shuttle, which had just started up its engines and then sped off into the Nubian evening. His breath became shallow and his vision blurred.

Luke placed a calming hand on the young man's shoulder. "Clear your mind, Marxx. You've been preparing yourself for the worst."

Marxx didn't hear his Master. He shook free of Luke's grasp and raced towards the house. Krishta ran towards her uncle and threw herself into his open arms.

"Oh Marxx!" Marxx ran his fingers through his niece's soft, curly brown hair. He looked over her face. Krishta's brown eyes were bloodshot, her nose red from crying. "Grandfather's gone."

Marxx felt a wave of confusion wash over him. "Grandfather?"

Rowlon and Tanella emerged from the house together. Rowlon had returned home shortly after Tanella and Krishta had found Paulo and called for assistance. Rowlon's eyes fell on his son, then beyond to Luke and the two other individuals who deplaned.

"Marxx, I'm sorry, but it appears Paulo had a massive heart attack and has passed on." Rowlon said with tears in his eyes.

Marxx looked around. Confusion gripped him like a vice. Out of all the possible scenarios, this was one he had not planned. "Where is mother?"

Rowlon and Tanella exchanged worried glances, "We don't know, son."

"You don't know?" Marxx said, placing Krishta down on her feet.

"She wasn't here when we came home," Tanella said, brushing aside her tears.

Marxx heard a voice from outside. He shifted his gaze and saw Tenal-Ka gesturing at him out into the garden. "Excuse me." He stalked out to the garden.

"I found these items sitting out here on the ground," Tenal- Ka said as she pushed aside a clump of gold-red braids.

Marxx and Tenal-Ka both squatted on the ground. Marxx fingered a pair of gardening sheers, and a straw hat.

"These look like they were haphazardly thrown out here, don't they?" Marxx said.

"That is a fact," Tenal Ka replied.

As the sun set, Maxx saw a metallic object shimmer under the box hedge. He gently poked a hand under the bush and amongst the mulch and extracted the dart.

"What is this?" Marxx asked, holding it up into the light.

Kyp approached the two Jedis and took the dart from Marxx's hand. He examined it closely then gulped, "It's from Kessell. It's a stun dart. They used to use these on us when we'd try to revolt in the spice mines. They hold enough sleeping potion to keep you knocked out for a good two to three hours."

"My mother is missing... Nubian art is missing... and my grandfather is dead... Oh Raven, why?" Marxx caressed his mother's hat. His mind lingered on his sister in her ship. She was so full of rage. Marxx tried again to connect with Jacen, but he couldn't. He then imagined his grandfather walking through the house, seeing Chariss kidnapped, and then having his heart give out.

Marxx crushed his mother's hat in his fist and closed his eyes, fighting back the sting of tears as the pain and loss due to death consumed him. He clenched his teeth and his eyes flared from despair to blinding rage. Marxx seethed, "How could she have done this?"

Both Kyp and Tenal Ka stepped back from the nearly physical blow that Marxx's change of emotions created. Marxx threw out a hand and vanished before their eyes, leaving only a faint trace of blue light.

Before Kyp and Tenal Ka could react they heard the deafening roar of the *The Fiery Phoenix* as it surged to life. The ramp of the ship closed as it lifted off like a glowing asteroid into the Nubian sky.

Luke, Kyp, and Tenal Ka, and Marxx's family stared up helplessly at the sky as the ship changed into the shape of an Imperial Shuttle, and then, in a flash, the Nubian son and the *Phoenix* disappeared into a flash of lightspeed.

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Leia smiled at her daughter as the holo-phone rang up the Racees on Naboo. Jaina flicked through a series of photos of wedding gowns that altered from the scanty and scandalous to frumpy and frilly. All she knew was that she couldn't pick something too revealing, otherwise she pictured her father freaking out and make a fool of himself during the ceremony.

Jaina's eyes fell upon an advertisement for some skimpy lingerie. Her eyes fell upon a gorgeous sheer georgette nightgown. It was long, and form fitting. The mint green fabric left very little to the imagination, with sequins arranged in intricate watery wave patterns placed strategically over certain areas of the body. She felt her heart drop. Back on Naboo, she'd tried, unsuccessfully to consummate her relationship with Marxx. Her cheeks blushed with pride when she thought of his noble efforts to prevent their union. She realized now, glancing at the photos that she wasn't ready and probably would have changed her mind at the last moment had Marxx given in to her advances. In fact, she realized she was terrified by the prospect of what would happen on their wedding night. She loved Marxx with every ounce of her heart and knew he would never hurt her, and she wanted to give herself entirely to him, however the power of the unknown clenched her heart. She did like the nightgown, however, and marked the page. She quickly flipped to the next page, all the while peeking at her mother, hoping she wouldn't notice her selection and pass judgment. Jaina suddenly felt an overwhelming rush of pain and anger. She glanced up at her mother confused.

Leia frowned as the holo-phone rang unanswered. Then right before disconnecting the call the image connected. Leia looked at the holo-image confused.

"Leia?"

"Luke? Did I call you by accident?"

"I'm at the Racees home, is that who you were contacting?"

"Yes, we were trying to contact Chariss. Why are you there and not off looking for Jacen? Or have you got him already?"

Luke pinched his forehead. "The ship Jacen is being held upon came to Naboo. They sent down some crews who stole a bunch of the Nubian artwork from the storage vaults in Theed." Jaina gasped and bolted upright in her bed.

"Oh no, that's terrible!" Leia said, reaching out a hand to calm her daughter down.

"That's not the worst of it. Marxx felt that his sister did something horrible to his family. We arrived here and his Grandfather has passed away, from a heart attack it looks like... And his mother is missing," Luke said absently cracking his knuckles. He stared at Leia with a concerned raised eyebrow.

"What else?" Leia asked nervously. Jaina gulped, bride holomagazines completely forgotten.

"Marxx just stole Kyp's shuttle and blasted out of here. He was... very... angry," Luke said, his eyes grew large. "I'd just come in here to call Han, Chewie, and Anakin to come pick us up so we could go after him."

"I'll let you go then. May the Force be with you, Luke," Leia said. She disconnected her link with Luke and realized Jaina had flown out of her bed, thrown off her sling and locked herself in the refresher.

"Jaina!"

“You can’t stop me, Mom! You heard Uncle Luke, Marxx needs me. I’m fine,” Jaina burst out of the refresher fully dressed.

“Jaina! You’ve got to rest,” Leia said blocking the door.

Jaina placed her hands on her hips and glared at her, “You’re not going to keep me in here. You know as well as I do that they all need me. I will be careful. I’ll just be flying -no physical stuff. See I’m fine!” She said lifting her left arm up and swirled it around in a circle. Then she bent over from her left side.

Leia winced and let out a long breath. “Fine, don’t do that again! I’ll sign you out.”

“Thank you, Mom!” Jaina threw her arms around her mother. “Is my X-Wing at our apartment?”

“Yes. It’s all fueled and ready for you.”

Jaina narrowed her eyes at her mother and wagged a finger, “You knew I’d be leaving, didn’t you?”

Leia glanced at her wrist chronometer, “Well your father and I made a bet. He said you wouldn’t last through today- I said at least tomorrow. Guess I lost.”

“Sorry.”

Leia kissed Jaina on the forehead. “May the Force be with you.”

“May the Force be with you, Mom.” With that Leia stepped away from the door and Jaina raced out of the medicenter.

Upon lifting out of the Coruscant atmosphere, Jaina laid in a course for Orion Four. She sent out a holo-image message to General Antillies.

When he answered her hail, Jaina pulled on a pair of black leather gloves and said, “General Antillies, Captain Solo reporting in. I need a large crew assembled, and ready for flight in oh-one hundred hours.”

Wedge smiled, his star pilot was coming home.

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## Chapter 32

Jacen paced in his room, running a hand nervously through his sandy brown hair. He’d thought for sure that Raven would have returned by now. He’d showered, then sat for several hours waiting for Raven to show up. When she didn’t arrive he forced himself to take a healing nap. The swelling in his face had gone down. He only had some purple reminders from his fight with Raven. Now refreshed, he found himself hungry, grumpy, and lonely for company.

As he grew more restless, Jacen convinced himself that he’d started to get through to Raven. He could feel her inner blockades collapsing. He found a part of him starting to seriously like Marxx’s sister. She



was a complicated riddle of which he enjoyed trying to solve. It occurred to him that the greatest wedding gift he could possibly give his best friend, would be to bring his sister back into his life. Jacen believed he'd been really close to getting through to Raven; then she stuck him in this room and fled.

Jacen had one main worry. If his family were out searching for him, they wouldn't be able to sense him through the Force in this room. They may think he was dead. He snorted as Tenal Ka's favorite catch phrase entered his mind, "*This is a fact.*"

"*I've got to get out of here,*" he thought. He started to consider trying to break through some of the panels on the walls in order to make a portal where he could feel the Force, when the doors opened.

Raven walked into the room holding a tray. Her shoulders were slumped, her posture wilted. In the brief moment the door was open, Jacen felt complete sadness emanating from Marxx's twin.

"I brought you something. I'm sorry I was gone so long, that was rude of me. You must be starved." Raven placed the tray on the table. Jacen felt a bit off kilter by her change in demeanor. She seemed to have lost her spark. She appeared...broken. Jacen knew something drastic must have happened while she was gone. He decided to not let her leave until he uncovered what caused this change. Yet, at the same time, the prospect of food called to him. Feeling somewhat like a caged animal Jacen leaped up onto the table and checked over the food of rolls and stew. Raven turned to leave.

He picked up a roll and broke it in half and offered it to her, "Would you like to join me?"

"I...I'm not hungry," she said, crossing her arms in front of her chest.

Jacen patted the table, "Then at least come over here and keep me company. I don't exactly have a lot of visitors in here. You made sure of that! I'm the kinda guy who likes to talk a lot," he took a bit of his roll and then pleaded through his chewing, "You left me bored out of my mind. Please... indulge me." He then munched away at his food without tasting it and raised an eyebrow at her.

Raven felt torn. She knew she should leave, but she didn't want to. Jacen's hair sat slicked back on his head from air drying after showering. He looked rather dapper, even if he was digging into his food like a starved Gamorrean. Through her respirator she could smell his soapy clean body. She couldn't refuse his request.

Raven climbed onto the left side of the table and lay down. She stared at the ceiling. Jacen glanced at her with the slightest hint of a grin and continued eating.

"So was your mission on Naboo successful?" He asked between bites and slugging down some liquid.

"I suppose. We plundered, we pillaged. Hurray," Raven said, staring at the blank ceiling.

Jacen frowned at her lack of enthusiasm. Now suddenly confused Jacen asked, "Wait, are you in charge here or is someone else?"

"I am. Why?" Raven said, turning her head towards Jacen. She gazed at his puzzled expression. She noticed he had a bit of sauce clinging to the left side of his mouth. She licked her lip as a way to try to communicate to him that he needed to remove it. Then she realized he'd never see her do it through her mask. She rolled her eyes, and felt her cheeks burn at her own stupidity. She restrained herself from

reaching up and removing it.

“Well if you just successfully completed your own mission, why aren’t you happy?” Jacen asked shoving a large spoonful of stew into his mouth.

Raven shook her head to get herself back into the moment. Tired from crying, she threw her left arm up over her head. Raven choked as more hateful tears framed her eyes, “Maybe I’m just getting tired of my life.”

Jacen gulped down his bite and placed the tray on the ground and laid down next to Raven. He saw an opening and decided to lunge for it. “What’s the matter? Tell me.” Jacen tentatively, gently picked up her right hand in his.

Raven stiffened for a moment, wondering what Jacen was planning. He laced his left fingers into hers and cradled her hand on his chest. Raven’s respirator continued to fill the room with sound, however she momentarily forgot to breathe. She stared at their entwined fingers. “*Why is he doing this to me?*” She wondered. “*Why is he being kind and nice? Why does he keep touching me? And why am I letting him do it?*”

Then Jacen heard a small frustrated sob escape from under the mask. Jacen desperately wanted to throw his arms around Marxx’s sister to give her someone to cling to. Raven desperately wanted to wrap her arms around Jacen, but knew she absolutely could not show that much weakness; he was her captive after all. It was bad enough he held her hand and heard her cry. She glanced into Jacen’s open and caring eyes they reminded her of her dream. She felt so happy with him there. His eyes spoke volumes to her as he continued to patiently wait for her to respond. Raven trembled, as she decided to take a plunge into unknown waters. She had already showed a side of herself to him that she’d buried for years, she decided to entrust Jacen with her worries. And suddenly she felt lighter by lifting her burden.

“You were right,” Raven said closing her eyes, as the image of her mother’s breakdown jumped before her eyes.

Jacen gently removed her glove from her hand. Raven froze again and clenched her fingers tight so he couldn’t see their blueness. She suddenly felt naked and exposed. He didn’t look at her hand; he just traced the contours of it with his fingers. Softly, he danced his fingers over each knuckle, and under each pale white finger pad. Raven sucked back yet another tear as she tried desperately to remember the last time anyone touched her bare skin. She couldn’t remember. Even before she got her respirator system her Grandmother made her wear gloves, and never touched her face.

“What was I right about?” Jacen asked as he shifted onto his elbow. His eyes wandered over her tall, slim form completely entombed in leather clothing and metal. His heart beat quickly when he realized she wasn’t pulling away from his touch, nor his gentle caresses. Jacen found it oddly soothing and relaxing lying next to Raven. He also found her easy to talk to. The fact that she covered her face with a mask didn’t bother him. Tenal-Ka rarely ever showed emotion on her face. He learned over the years to read more in people’s words and body gestures than in simple facial expressions. He waited patiently for her to open up to him.

“My parents thought I was dead. They didn’t abandon me.... My mother even sensed and knew I was alive, but no one believed her,” Raven said. Without realizing it, she tenderly started to move her

fingers along with Jacen's. Both experienced the tingling joy of feeling the softness of each other's bare skin connecting. Jacen felt his breathing catch. His palm began to sweat, and he realized hers had also. Inside he began to tremble with a strange new feeling of elation.

"Did she say why they didn't believe her?" Jacen asked, his voice getting slightly huskier from the sensations created when her fingers lightly traced across the back of own hand.

"Everyone was convinced I was dead.... Oh Jacen, I've done something horrible!" She said, placed her left hand on the top of her helmet, and tightened her grip on Jacen's hand.

Jacen had a flurry of different sensations and emotions run through him all at once, he winced under her unyielding grip, he experienced a flush of pleasure at her calling him by his first name, and felt utterly terrified by what she was going to tell him. He asked through clenched teeth, "What did you do?"

"I kidnapped my mother! And I sent a group of my men down to Naboo and they stole a bunch of paintings for me. Why did I do that? Why?" Raven stared at the ceiling and tears flooded her eyes.

"Is your mother alright?" he asked, barely able to breathe from the pain of her grasp. He watched as his fingers turned bright red.

"Yes, she had been in a cell block. I just moved her to a guest quarters suite. I'm going to have to face her, aren't I? I'm going to have to return her to Naboo. I could just let the two of you go with a ship of the paintings and return them for me," Raven babbled.

"Raven..." Jacen said as his fingers started to go numb.

"It's all my fault. I'm an idiot! Why did I do that? Why? Because, I'm greedy. Because I needed the paintings to pay my men. Oh there's no good reason for what I did," Raven groaned loudly.

"*Raven!*" Jacen cried.

"What?" she asked turning her face towards him.

"You're killing my hand, sweetheart," Jacen said through gritted teeth.

"Oh no! I'm sorry. I can't do anything right," she said letting go and pulled her hand far away from him. Her cheeks flushed when she realized he'd called her "sweetheart." Jacen let out a sigh of relief, and gently wiggled his fingers to get his blood circulating again. Raven sensed a bawling fit about to erupt in her again. She couldn't believe she'd just hurt him like that.

Jacen glanced at Raven. In the dim light of the room his gaze explored her eyes under the face shield. He couldn't tell much about them, since the shield was tinted a deep gray. All he could tell was that her eyes were filled with tears. He smiled at her and placed his throbbing hand on her helmet.

"It's not too late to change things Raven. You can correct your wrongs and start a new life. A better life. Admitting that you want to change is the first step and I think you're already there," Jacen said softly. He wished he could see her face and run his fingers through her hair. That is if she had hair. Bless the Force, he wanted to see her face and kiss away her tears.

“Why are you being so nice to me?” Raven whispered.

“Because...I... like you and admire your courage. I think you can be more than you are though. You have great potential. I can tell life has so far given you the short end of things. But you deserve to be happy. And there are plenty of people who would love to have you in their lives...I think...know...that I am one of them,” Jacen said, gulping. His heart dropped and he felt a pounding in his ears as the last comment escaped from his lips. He’d never been able to be this open and frank with his feelings before to Tenal Ka. What was it about this woman? Was it the fact he couldn’t see her face that made him feel so bold?

Raven didn’t know what to think of what Jacen just said. She felt numb and blissfully happy at the same time. She then moved her hand up to his lips and wiped away the sauce from his mouth with her exposed finger. Jacen bent his head forward and gently sucked away the sauce. Shivers of pleasure trembled through Raven’s body as he lightly ran his tongue over her finger. Raven’s mouth opened and a slight, involuntary sound escaped from her throat, and her body quaked as Jacen’s eyes seemed to say something...the look disappeared. He began caressing her hand again.

“You would?” Raven squeaked as she looked up at him. Inside her mask, more damning tears fell down her face as suddenly the prospect of altering her lifestyle flittered into her mind. And for once, she didn’t find anything wrong with wanting that. In fact she found the prospect of changing her life to be refreshing. The memory of the meadow from her dreams flashed in her mind. As she gazed into Jacen’s sumptuous brown eyes, her heart warmed. A tiny smile dared to spring across her lips as her body still quaked with pleasure.

Jacen kissed her hand and grinned at her with sparkling eyes. “Yes. I would. And you can have a happy life. Your life is not worthless. You have a lot to offer the world. As I mentioned before, you just need to trust someone. I want you to trust me. Trust in me. I will do everything in my power to make sure you get the happiness you deserve out of life. Can I tell you something?” Jacen said as he stretched out his left arm towards her across the top of the table.

Raven nodded meekly.

“I do know where you’re coming from. The Force has always been strong in my family. The strongest was my grandfather, Anakin Skywalker...”

“Skywalker... Why do I know that name?” Raven said, furrowing her brows.

“You probably know of my Uncle Luke Skywalker, Jedi Knight, best known for destroying the first Death Star and being there when the Emperor died,” Jacen said. Raven stared at Jacen with a look mingled of fear and awe. “Anyway, my grandfather was the bravest of Jedis as a young man. And was a hero during the Clone Wars. However, in time, he let pain, fear, and anger control and ensnarl him to the point where the good man of Anakin Skywalker ceased to exist. Do you know what he became?”

“No,” Raven said in a small voice.

“He became Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith, right hand man to Emperor Palpatine.” Raven’s eyes grew huge with horror. She then thought of her grandmother and her own familiar tie to the Emperor. A shudder ran down her body. Jacen continued, “All because he gave into his darker emotions and he

refused to trust anyone. He lost his faith in mankind. I don't want that to happen to you," Jacen said. He kissed her hand and gazed at her with eyes full of hope and possibility. "In fact, I will make it my mission in life to make sure that doesn't happen."

Raven's breath deepened and her heart swelled. She wanted to weep and laugh at the same time. However, she couldn't breathe. No one had ever been so generous and caring towards her before. She choked out, "I never wanted to live in a world consumed by hate. My grandmother encouraged that emotion in me growing up. Since I never had friends, and I didn't have anyone... I never had any choice." Tears stung her eyes, "I don't want to live like this anymore...." Quietly she added, "I need you."

Jacen's heart leaped in his throat as tears threatened to reach his eyes. Jacen let go of her hand and placed his right hand on the small of her waist, he gently rolled her onto her side and wrapped his muscular arm around her back. Raven lifted her neck on his outstretched arm. Raven let her fingers gently trace the folds in his shirt and lightly outline his strong chest underneath. Laying so close to him, her mask's respirator filled with his masculine, clean scent. She glanced up at him completely uncertain of what to do. He moved his hand from her back and took her hand lightly and glanced at her long delicate fingers. The skin under her nails was an odd bluish color. She folded in her fingers to hide them from his examining stare. Jacen pried her fingers out of their retreat and gently kissed each nail.

That did it. Raven wrapped her arm tightly around his waist. She started sobbing uncontrollably. Jacen stroked her back, whispered reassuring nothings, and let her cling to him for support.

Eventually Raven grew spent from her crying and fell asleep in Jacen's protective arms. As Raven drifted off to sleep, Jacen stared deeply into her grayish visor. He saw a pair of eyelids closed with a fine semi-circle of long dark eyelashes.

Raven sighed inside her helmet as sleep overtook her. She entwined a long leg around his legs as she snuggled in closer towards her Jedi Protector. Jacen's heart soared when he heard that sigh. It was a sigh of complete trust. He tightened his warm embrace with her, as a small trail of tears traveled down his face. And in a blink of a second all of his unrequited feelings he'd had for Tenal Ka disappeared. Jacen's heart found a new home, and he gave it completely, without strings, to the unaware woman in his arms.

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## Chapter 33

The streaming stars and the black void of space served as silent witnesses to Marxx's anguish. He sat in the pilot chair of Kyp's vessel, knowing that he not have left the other Jedi on Naboo. However, for a fleeting moment as he crushed his mothers hat, he felt her presence through the Force, located it and acted. He berated himself for allowing his anger to briefly consume him. He knew better than that! Marxx kept thinking of how calmly and coolly he reacted to the children's plight while on Yavin 4. He tried very hard to distance himself from the fact that this time, this crisis, the possible victims were people he loved but the death of his grandfather lingered and amplified his pain. He began to understand why the Jedi's of the Old Republic forbade personal attachments: they cloud sound judgment.

He stood up and paced restlessly in the cabin, left hand massaging the small of his neck. The intense

anger that had overpowered him had now dissipated, replaced by a growing sense of worry, pain, and a thirst for truth.

Marxx knew his New Republic history and had to laugh at the irony; his sister's ship was hiding on the far side of the moon of Endor. After taking flight, he'd sent a message to the *Falcon* and left Han an urgent message letting him know they would have to pick up Luke and the others. He also gave them the co-ordinates of where Raven's ship was located.

Marxx flopped down on the floor and focused on finding Jacen. He knew where the ship was located because of his connection with his mother. From there he worked on trying to pinpoint Jacen's location. A big part of him didn't want to admit that Jacen might be dead. He firmly believed though, that Jaina would have sensed her twin's death and she would have gotten word to him. Plus, Marxx believed that he would have known it as well. The thin hope that Jacen still breathed and was alive, was all that prevented Marxx from losing control completely.

He breathed in deeply, crossed his legs and shrouded his body in his robe. As the ship flew past planets, he captured pieces of their energy and absorbed their life-forces. He focused completely across the galaxy to the Destroyer. Meticulously he felt over the ship with his mind, level by level. He reached level nine and located his mother, sobbing. Sensing her tears were from sadness as opposed to pain, he shot a soothing feeling of love towards her presence. Then he continued his quest.

He moved methodically over each floor of the ship and stopped at level eleven. There was a dead, empty space on that floor. That space he could not penetrate or see into using the Force. He grinned thinking that must be where Raven is hiding Jacen. Then the corners of his mouth dropped into a frown. Or it could be where Raven has stashed Jacen's body. He then realized in his sweep that he didn't sense his sister either. Maybe they were in that room together. Or she was dead as well.

He only hoped that they were both alive and well.

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Jaina swung out of her X-Wing onto the top step of the ladder and removed her helmet. Long brown hair floated down around her shoulders and down her back. She shook her head and was greeted by loud catcalls and whistles. She glanced down into the hanger and saw a large group of pilots gathered on the floor below. They all smiled boldly at the pretty pilot.

"Greetings boys!" Jaina said with a smirk as she dropped to the floor below.

She fought off the deafening roar of greetings from her former Rogue Squadron friends. She shook hands, pounded on shoulders, gave quick hugs, as she moved through the mass of people. The large gray hanger, alit with florescent lights, smelling of engine grease, rumbling with droids, filled with crates, brought back a surge of pleasant memories for Jaina. She stopped dead in her tracks when she finally came face to face with her former wingman, Jagged Fel. The tall dark haired man from Chiss smiled at his friend. Jaina returned the smile and gave him a large hug.

"I never expected to see you here again," Jag said, his green eyes twinkling.

"I didn't expect to come back either. I need to talk to you for a second before I brief the pilots," Jaina said pulling away from him. She cocked her head and the two moved off into a corner of the room.

Long suppressed memories of an unrequited affection with Jag resurfaced. The two used to bicker constantly due to their bull headed natures. Though their arguing there always existed an underlying amount of sexual tension. They never acted upon their deeper feelings though. Seeing Jag again, she realized how far removed she was from the girl who used to command here. Looking at him now, all she felt was pure friendship as she knew her heart solidly and completely belonged to Marxx.

“What are you doing here?” Jag said. “Uncle Wedge said you’ve got some sort of mission for all of us.”

“I do have a mission that I need help with. It’s quite personal in fact,” Jaina said. “I just wanted you to know what we’re doing before I announced the mission before the whole squadron.”

Jag stared at her and furrowed his eyebrows, crinkling the scar on his forehead, “What is it?”

“We’re going off to retrieve a bunch of stolen artwork, my brother is missing and I need to make sure my... fiancé gets plenty of coverage to assist with the recovery,” Jaina said nervously.

Jag’s heart dropped, he gulped down rising bile, and then forced a smile, “Well congratulations.”

“I wanted to tell you I was engaged before you heard me announce as much before everyone,” Jaina said to him.

“Thanks for that consideration,” Jag said sarcastically, blocking back tears. He stared at her closely. She barely seemed recognizable. Her long hair softened her features and made her appear completely feminine, and even regal. He saw very little of the tomboy pilot he’d fallen for who desperately hated her hair to grow beyond the length of her shoulders. “So who is this guy? Some great pilot somewhere? He must be something if you even let your hair grow long.”

“He’s a Jedi.”

“Oh... great,” Jag responded. He looked over the top of her head and nodded, “General Antillies is signaling over to us. We’d better go.” With that said, Jag stormed off towards the other pilots.

Jaina’s heart briefly fell. She’d hoped he wouldn’t take the news so hard. Then she fingered her ring. She couldn’t worry about Jag and his broken heart, her fiancé and brother needed her help.

She walked confidently over to the men, her lightsaber slightly bounced at her hip as it hung off of her utility belt. She climbed up onto a pile of boxes. She whistled loudly and all the men ceased talking and looked up at her. “Many of you have flown with me before. Some of you, I can see, are new and have not. I’m Jaina Solo- I’d flown with the squad about a year and a half ago. I helped put a lot of dings in the fighters around here with my *creative* evasive maneuver techniques I forced the squad to learn.” She beamed as her former squad members all hooted and hollered in deafening cheers and groans.

She paced back and forth on the boxes and silenced them with a hand signal, she continued, “I’ve come here to ask your help. There is an Imperial Class Star Destroyer that is on a rampage. The crew on the destroyer has stolen a large number of Nubian paintings from a storage facility on Naboo. Considering I’ve been in charge of the Reconstruction project there for the past year and a half, I’m taking this action personally. The Destroyer is armed with Tie-fighters and of course, fully armed laser turrets. My brother and future mother-in-law are being held captive on that ship. We need to go there to assist with

the rescue team that is on its way to reclaim the stolen artwork and rescue the prisoners. The Destroyer must not be destroyed! If it is, we could lose the artwork, and my brother and future mother-in-law.” Her eyes swept over the crowd and locked with Jags. She couldn’t read his expression, other than it was blank. “The pilots of the Tie-Fighters are relatively inexperienced. They, as well as the ion cannons on the Destroyer, are our main targets. There are a lot of fighters. They will be our primary targets.”

“Gentlemen, you all will take orders from Captain Solo exclusively,” Wedge said to the crowd. He flashed a smile at Jaina, “And that includes me.”

Jaina grinned at her family friend, “Thank you, General. Any questions?”

“Where are we going?” Mon Shumpta, a Mon Calamari pilot asked. Others snickered and laughed around him.

Jaina blushed slightly, “That information would help, wouldn’t it? Hold on a moment.” She closed her eyes and stretched out with her feelings. She felt Marxx drop out of lightspeed and smiled as she zeroed in on his co-ordinates. “Gentlemen, set your navicom co-ordinates for Endor. Move out!”

As the pilots raced to their ships, Jaina jumped off of the boxes. Jag walked straight up to her. She jolted to a stop in her tracks. As the hanger filled with the mechanical roar of the ships, as the smell of engine oil intensified. The wind from their engines sent Jaina’s hair swirling around her head and into her eyes.

Jag stared at the woman he had loved, he said, “Your wingman is reporting in, Captain.”

Jaina beamed as tears lined her eyes, “Still friends then?”

“Yeah, still friends. Just do me a favor, Ok?” Jag said biting the inside of his lip.

“What’s that?” Jaina asked as her fingers gathered her hair and twisted it up into a flat bun.

“Just don’t send me a wedding invitation,” Jag said, his usually jovial green eyes, stared at her coldly. Inside he fought to maintain his professional composure as his inside an emotional war waged.

Jaina felt her heart break for her friend, “You’ve got it. Come on, we’ve got a fleet of Tie-Fighters to tangle with.”

The Red and Gold teams of Rogue Squadron reported in as they all waited for their Gold Leader, Jaina, to signal the jump. As she counted down and then marked their jump, the group of twenty fighters shot off into hyperspace towards Endor.

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*The Falcon* raced through space towards Endor.

“I’m gonna *kill* that kid for abandoning you all,” Han said fuming.

“That won’t solve anything Han,” Luke replied as he watched his friend pace around in the recreation area on the Falcon.



“How could he just leave you like that? What am I supposed to think of him now? Huh? You know he wants to marry Jaina? What’s to say he won’t just race off and leave her somewhere?” Han felt his blood boiling as he placed his hands in the pockets of his navy blue cargo pants.

“He is worried about his mother,” Tenal Ka replied. “That is why he left.”

“Yes, but he shouldn’t have left you all,” Han spat back, hands now out of pockets flailing around in the air.

Anakin looked up from his holo-game he played with Chewie, “Hey, he did leave us a message on where to go. And he did apologize for leaving us.”

Han locked gazes with his blue eyed son, “That’s hardly good enough, Anakin. Would you do that to me? Or your mother? No. We raised you better than that!”

Anakin narrowed his piercing blue eyes, “If my mother was kidnapped and being raced across the galaxy and I thought I could get there a few minutes faster to save her... yes I probably would run off and leave people behind. Marxx has his reasons for what he did. I hardly call loving your mother so much that you momentarily lose your senses as being a character flaw, Dad.”

Luke glanced up at his father’s namesake and replied, “Unfortunately, that is exactly what I am most worried about.”

A brief confused look crossed Anakin’s face, then he understood what his Uncle was thinking as he replayed the scene Marxx and Jaina played out on Tatooine in his head. Suddenly, he found himself more worried about his friend, and wished he could speed up the *Falcon*.

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## Chapter 34

The *Phoenix*’s hyperdrive beeped it’s readiness. Marxx settled into the pilot’s chair. He flipped through the catalogue of ship designs and activated the holo-image of Corellian waste transporter. Easily recognizable and often reviled, the waste transporters roamed throughout the galaxy transporting and removing hazardous and biological waste from planets. Where they dumped their cargos remained a mystery that few wanted to know. Marxx smiled at the ingenuity of the ships designer for incorporating a holo-image of that ship. All ships avoided the waste transporters like a plague. He knew no one aboard Raven’s ship would bother questioning him. He maneuvered himself closer to Endor and started to circumvent the glowing blue and green moon. When he got within sight of *The Vengeance* he put the ship into steady orbit.

Marxx stared with his bright blue eyes, at the large triangular ship out of the cockpit window apprehensively. The distance between the two ships was great. He figured though that it wasn’t any further than a high orbit over a planet’s surface. He wrapped his brown cape around himself and sank into the Force. He connected with the teeming lifeforces on the forested moon. He felt his connection with the Force increase, and before him a tunnel opened calling to him. The other end of the tunnel held despair and sorrow. Marxx took a step forward and vanished in a blue flash.

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Chariss wandered about her comfortable, yet locked, quarters. They consisted of three rooms; a main room, a refresher, and a bedroom. She then sat on a comfortable tan nerfhide couch overlooking the decorations in the room. They were far from sparse, or simply functional. She noted many finely crafted pieces of natural wooden furniture throughout the room. The plants that brightened the space were all endangered and lovingly cared for. The walls painted a soft creamy yellow, brought a bit of joy to an otherwise dreary ship. Her eyes fell upon the many decorative pots and pieces of iron sculpture that decorated the room. Intrigued by them, she wondered how her daughter came into possession of such items.

Her daughter. Raven. She'd spent much of the day thinking about her. Her little girl consumed her thoughts.

"*Raven's alive,*" she kept thinking in her mind. From the moment she realized who the person was in the holo-image, she'd been an active rider on an unending emotional rollercoaster. She would flash from joyfully happy, to sad, to guilt-ridden, to angry, and back to happy again. At the moment, sadness washed over her like a wet blanket and she couldn't help but concentrate on the years they spent apart.

*She remembered the last time she held her little girl. In the middle of a sandstormy night, Chariss awoke from a restless sleep to hear Raven coughing uncontrollably. Marxx started bawling in his crib. When she got in the room, Marxx had managed to crawl out of his own crib and climbed in with his sister. He sat directly behind her, and had his little hand on her back, gently rubbing it, trying to ease the pain and pressure from her lungs. Raven's whole face had turned an unhealthy bluish hue from overexertion. She had screamed at Rowlon to wake up. They bundled up the child and raced out into the driving sand towards the hospital. Gwynalyn had stayed behind with the other children. In the morning the trio showed up for moral support. A couple hours later the healer announced Raven had died.*

Chariss had never felt such intense sorrow or agony in her life when the healer spoke those words. There was no consoling her. For weeks and months she lived the life of the walking dead, not feeling, or caring, about anything. The worst thing about that time was that she could almost feel her little girl crying out to her. She wondered if Raven's haunting spirit remained behind. Chariss buried that time in her life deep in her heart, never really wishing to revisit it. Now she had no choice. For her daughter's sake, she could not allow herself to become consumed with grief again.

Chariss thought about that mask with the respirator that Raven wore. It bothered her immensely. Even when Raven was two years old, the healers had informed her that her birth defects were repairable. She only needed to fully grow. When she had matured beyond infancy, her heart defect could be corrected and she could be fitted with a new artificial lung.

She stood up from the couch and wandered over to the large window that overlooked a glowing green-forested moon. She watched as a storm below circled over the moon. She wondered where they were located in the galaxy, and how far from Naboo she had been taken. She really didn't care. She had accepted the fact that her fate was now in the hands of her daughter.

From behind her a light flashed blue, and in a reflection in the window, she saw a hulking form wearing a cape behind her. She gasped and turned around. The figure reached up and pulled back the hood. Chariss frowned then smiled when she saw her son.

“Marxx, what are you doing here?” Chariss said, rushing over to him.

He threw his arms around her. “I’ve come to rescue you.” Then he tilted her head up slightly and groaned at the bump on her head, “How did you get that?”

“Get what?”

“That bump on your head. Did she hurt you?” Marxx asked, eyes narrowed with a determined set to his jaw.

Chariss felt the lump on her head and shook her head, “No honey, Raven didn’t hurt me. I think I got this when I fell down in the courtyard. You still haven’t answered my question.”

“Wait, you know Raven’s alive? You’ve seen her? How did she seem?” Marxx asked.

“We spoke briefly through a holo-image. She didn’t say much. I have a feeling I upset her though.”

“*You* upset her? Mom she kidnapped you... and...”

“And nothing young man. I don’t care what she did. My little girl, your twin, is alive! She’s alive!” Chariss said grasping his arms. “We can get her back!”

“Yeah well, not until later I’m afraid. There are a few things you don’t know about Raven yet Mom. Look I’ve come to get you off of here. I don’t feel safe standing in this room. Give me your hand,” Marxx said.

Chariss frowned at him and crossed her arms, “What do mean you don’t feel safe here? She moved me from a dingy cellblock to a guest quarters.”

“And the door is locked, right?” Marxx said raising an eyebrow.

“Yes.” Chariss admitted.

“Give me your hand and we’ll talk about this some more, ok?” He flashed his mother his most disarmingly charming smile he could muster.

Chariss groaned and gave him her hand. He took a step backwards and the two suddenly appeared aboard another ship.

“What just happened?” Chariss asked completely befuddled.

Marxx shrugged, “Apparently, I can travel through the Force.”

Once safely upon *The Fiery Phoenix*, Marxx sat his mother down in the galley and proceeded to tell her about his experiences upon meeting up with his sister, ending finally with Paulo’s death. The whole while he spoke to her, his fingers twitched, as if they had fallen asleep. Marxx frantically flicked them to try and ease the painful prickling sensation that started creeping up his arms.

Chariss sat in a stunned stupor gazing at her son, “I don’t know how to respond to all of that. I think I’ve had information overload today. Poor Dad!” Chariss felt the sting of a fresh wave of tears brewing. She then noticed her son’s twitching. “What’s wrong dear?”

Marxx finally felt the pain subside and his nerves returned to normal. He breathed a sigh of relief, “Nothing, I’m fine. Mom, I hate to do this to you, but I have to go...”

“Go where?” Chariss asked as she grabbed a napkin and blew her nose.

“Back on the ship, I have to try and find Jacen,” worry traced Marxx’s pool blue eyes.

“What are you going to do about your sister?” Chariss asked.

“What should I do with her?” Marxx asked with a disgusted expression marring his face. “She doesn’t seem to care about anybody except herself and her own petty needs.”

“No. I don’t believe that. If she had felt nothing upon seeing me, she would have thrown me back into that gloomy cell. There is good in her, son. She used to love you so much.” Marxx looked away from her. Chariss placed a warm hand on his cheek and turned him back to face her. His dark brows hung gloomily over his eyes. “She loved you, and you loved and protected her from any and all harm that came her way. She worshipped you for that. My little Raven is still in there somewhere Marxx. I want YOU to bring her back to me.”

Marxx felt his stomach drop and tears welled in his eyes. He squeezed his mother’s hand. “I’ll certainly try Mom. I will try.”

Marxx stood up and walked to the center of the room. He closed his eyes and again fed off of the lifeforce energies on Endor. He still couldn’t sense either Raven or Jacen. So he focused elsewhere on the ship. One person, located on the main deck, seemed to emit a large aura of fear. Marxx focused on that fear and vanished.

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## Chapter 35

Captain Hydin stared at the large glowing moon before him. Endor was a pleasant planet to view. He sat in him commander’s chair and found his mind drifting back to their recent visit to Naboo. The mission, a complete success, had seemed to warrant no praise or accommodations from the ship’s commander. His thoughts fell upon the Admiral. She didn’t seem like her frighteningly confident self today. In some ways her lack of shouting and tearing around the ship barking orders, terrified him more than when she Force choked him. She issued the raid and then headed off of the ship alone. She never left the ship. When she returned she brought back a civilian woman. The Admiral who loved antiques, hadn’t even bothered to come back down to look over the spoils of their raid.

Hydin started to wonder if she was plotting something secretive. A wave of fear crept through him, invading his senses. He placed a hand on his neck and gently rubbed it. He most certainly did not enjoy being kept in the dark of her devious plans.

Suddenly he noticed a flash of light reflected in his window. He turned around to see a tall man wearing

a brown robe standing in the middle of the command deck. The man squinted at Hydin, dismissed him with his eyes, then started searching the faces of those around on the command deck.

Hydin stood up, “Who are you? What are you doing here?”

Marxx grimaced as his entire body burned from the prickling sensation, surging through his nerves. He focused on the man before him instead of the pain. “I’m looking for someone. Raven Palpatine. Any idea where I can find her?” Marxx asked the frightened man.

“Who?” Hydin asked, completely befuddled. His fear intensified as he recognized the robe belonging to that of a Jedi.

Marxx took several steps closer to the captain and waved his hand slightly, “I want to know where Raven Palpatine is located on this ship.”

“I don’t know a Raven Palpatine,” Hydin said.

Marxx stopped his approach and realized the man was telling the truth. The pain still surged and writhed throughout his body, clouding his vision some. “What’s the name of the commander on this ship?”

“Why should I tell you?” Hydin replied and tried to casually look around the room to signal the deck hands to capture the intruder.

Marxx smirked as he glanced out the window behind the captain, “If you value your meager existence, you’ll tell me who the commander is and where she is located.”

“Or what will you do?” Hydin asked crossing his arms.

“Oh I might just order those ships out there to attack your vessel,” Marxx said. Hydin whirled around and watched as the *Falcon* started cruising alongside the ship, and ship by ship the two squads of Rogue Squadron fell out of hyperspace. Marxx felt a surge of joy and then apprehension as he realized Jaina had arrived in her ship.

Marxx suddenly tensed and dug into the Force. He threw out his hands, deeply bent his legs and flipped straight up and over the heads of two security guards who had been inches from grabbing him. As Marxx landed on his feet with a pounding thud, his lightsaber ignited with a *snap hiss*. The startled guards spun around and Marxx casually swung his emerald lightsaber forward and it sizzled as it sliced their blasters in half. The barrels of the blasters banged to the floor below. The guards dropped their useless weapons and ran out of the way. Marxx twirled, robe swirling, as four more guards approached him. He laughed, threw out a hand and yanked their blasters from their hands. He directed the blasters in front of him, then slashed through each weapon as it dropped rendering them useless to the floor.

Marxx turned around again, pain forgotten. Blue eyes flashed from adrenalin as he faced the Captain. “The name and location of your commander, please.”

Hydin clutched at his throat knowing what happens if you do not answer a Force wielder correctly, “A...Admi.. Admiral Darkglider is who’s in charge of this ship.”

Marxx spun and moved his lightsaber up in front of his head, deflecting a blaster shot fired by another approaching guard. The shot careened off with a loud zing into the back of Hydin's chair. Hydin squeaked in alarm as the room smelled of burning fabric. The guard ran behind a command consol and continued firing. Suddenly two more guards located in hidden positions began to fire as well. Marxx sank into the Force and began to calmly spin and deflect each shot with lightning fast reflexes his green lightsaber strummed out an electric zinging song as it perfectly matched and deflected each shot. The command deck filled with the stinging scent of smoke and the deafening roar of blaster fire. Marxx's lightsaber cracked and sizzled as he deflected his shots. He felt beads of sweat popping up on his forehead. He then realized that he wasn't going to get any further answers from the Captain. He sent a message through the Force and began focusing elsewhere on the ship. Down below on deck fourteen he felt a man in a jaunty mood. Marxx focused on the man's happiness and vanished off of the deck in a bright flash of blue light.

Hydin ordered the cease-fire and stared frantically around the command deck for the Jedi. Except for the stench of blaster smoke, it was almost as if the man had never been there. Sweating profusely through his sticky clothes, Hydin reached over to his holo-emitter and tried to hail the Admiral. No response. He tried her comlink. No response.

He glanced out hopelessly out the window and decided to take command. He changed his call for the hanger, "Ready all 7 squadrons of Tie-Fighters and engage the ships outside."

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After her crews all reported in, Jaina, felt a connection with the Force and whipped her head up towards the main deck of the Destroyer. She grabbed a pair of Macrobinoculars and saw a flurry of blaster fire and the slashing movements of a green lightsaber through the window.

"Marxx!" she shouted.

Jag winced at the volume of Jaina's shout through his headpiece. He'd forgotten how loud she could get, "What was that Gold Leader?"

Jaina shook her head and refocused on the mission at hand. "Nothing, Gold two." Just as her vision cleared the docking bays on the Destroyer spewed forth waves of unending Tie-Fighters.

"Enemy fighters coming straight for us," shouted Red 2.

Over eighty fighters came out blasting green laser fire.

"No, this isn't overkill! Gentlemen, lock in beta delta attack formation, let's get ready to dance! Engage!" Jaina shouted.

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Leia glared at her holo-net as it droned on the Senate channel, in her Coruscant apartment. Mara sat across from her on the floor playing spaceships with her son.

"We should be out there with them. I don't like staying put," Leia scowled.

Mara made a silly face at her son and laughed at him causing his face to erupt in a volcanic flurry of giggles. She said through a smile using her baby voice, "I don't like sitting around either, but battle," she picked up Ben and jiggled him above her head, causing him to shriek in laughter even louder, "is no place for a baby!"

Leia looked on at her sister-in-law with envy. She missed the days when her children were tiny. When she held Ben, just the sweet smell of his skin would launch her into rounds of nostalgia, when the twins could barely totter around. Kids grow up so fast. She didn't wish for Mara to miss a single moment of her son's childhood.

Suddenly her holo-emitter chimed. Leia unfurled her legs and marched over to it. A confused frown changed to a smile when she saw who was calling.

"Hello Master Tionne, how can I help you?" Leia asked. Mara put Ben down and listened in on the conversation.

"Do you know where Master Luke is? I cannot seem to locate him," Tionne asked. Her silver skin glowed with concern.

"He's off on a mission. Is there something I can do to help you?" Leia crossed her hands across her chest.

"Can you get a message to him? It's concerning his Jedi Master Marxx Racees and his strange Force ability," Tionne said.

Mara bolted to her feet and joined Leia to watch Tionne. Mara said, "We can get a message to him. Go ahead and tell us what you've found out."

When they ended the conversation with Tionne, near frantic with concern, Leia immediately tried hailing *The Falcon*.

"Blast, I think they're too far out of range," Leia said chewing her nail. She looked over and saw Mara throwing a jacket on her shoulders and bundling up Ben.

"You gonna just sit there? Come on let's get to the *Jade Saber*. Maybe if we get out in the middle of the galaxy, our signal will get through to them," Mara said.

Leia grinned, grabbed a jacket. "We need to order up a medical transport to come with us as well! Wait! Mara, leave Ben with the Droids. 3PO can take care of him."

Mara stared dubiously at Leia. "Trust me, he used to take care of the twins when we'd go out. Besides it should only be for a day at most. I'll call Winter from space and ask her to drop in and check on Ben," Leia said straightening her coat.

Ben laughed as C-3PO reached out his arms and took the baby from his mother, "Remember Mistress Mara, I was designed for etiquette and protocol. I am well versed in how to react in over three million possible emergencies..."

Mara rolled her eyes, "Ok, let's go Leia." She quickly kissed Ben on the forehead then followed her

sister-in-law out the door.

As soon as the door shut, Ben began to wail. "How do I get myself into these messes?" C-3PO asked to a rather amused R2-D2.

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Han stared out the window in complete confusion as the two fleets of Rogue Squadron X-Wings fell out of hyperspace.

"What are they doing here? Better yet, how'd they know to come here?" Han asked as everyone crowded the cockpit.

"Maybe Leia asked them to come," Kyp replied, pushing a chunk of black hair out of his green eyes.

"Yeah but I hadn't contacted her to let her know where we were coming. How'd she know we were here?" Han asked.

Chewie bellowed an inquiring question.

"I doubt Wedge has suddenly developed Jedi skills, pal," Han replied.

Tenal Ka sensed a familiar presence in the Force just as the waves of Tie-Fighters flew out of the Destroyer. "I know why Rogue Squadron is here."

Han changed the comm frequencies so he could hear the chatter of the Rogue Squadrons. As if needing to confirm Tenal Ka's suspicions Jaina's voice boomed throughout the cockpit, "*Gentlemen, lock in delta beta attack formation, let's get ready to dance! Engage!*"

Han cringed at his daughters commanding voice. Han shouted into the comm. system, "Jaina why aren't you back on Coruscant in the medicenter recovering?"

"Red 7 you've got a fighter on your tail, Gold 6 can you assist?" was Jaina's response.

Anakin raised an eyebrow at his father, "You didn't honestly expect my hotrod sister to miss out on combat did you?"

"Hoped is more like it," Han replied. "Better get into gunners guys I'm going in to help out."

Kyp took the topmost gunner and Anakin climbed below. Tenal Ka and Luke stood behind Han and Chewie in the tight cockpit quarters, ready to shout up warnings to the Jedis in the gunner shafts. Tenal Ka glanced out the cockpit window and pointed to the southeast, "There appears to be a large concentration of Tie-Fighters down there, we should offer our assistance there."

"Good idea. Chewie let's go," Han said. Chewie bellowed a low growl.

The *Falcon* plunged into a seventy-five degree freefall, right past one of the Destroyer's main gunner turrets. The *Falcon* shook from a heavy jolt of laser fire sending the four in the cockpit rocking.



Han glanced up at the shield's reader and smirked, "Shields holding. She'll hold together."

Luke rolled his eyes as Han, knowing he'd heard that promise before, as they approached a convoy of five Tie-Fighters. "Kyp, Anakin, they're coming right at you!" Luke said into the comm system.

The clumsy fighters had nothing on two fully skilled Jedi gunmen. Kyp, not even watching his targeting system, fell into the Force and swung to the left and fired. Just out of the line of sight a Tie-Fighter emerged in time to meet with his laser fire. A second wave of shots sent the Tie-Fighter into a plume of fiery debris. He then threw his gun to the right and shot at another Tie-Fighter that appeared firing green laser fire. Just as it escaped Kyp's view, one of his last shots sent the Tie-Fighter into a tailspin. "Wooooooohoooooo!" Kyp shouted merrily, enjoying the rush of adrenalin.

Anakin also turned off his targeting system and swung his gun downward and started shooting up. He hit the ship that emerged from below, blasting it into oblivion. Suddenly twelve Tie-Fighters flew straight towards the *Falcon*. Kyp and Anakin picked off two and disabled one of them as the remaining nine sprayed the *Falcon* with a shower of laserfire. Tenal Ka fell backwards; titian braids flying, into her chair as the ship rocked and swayed from the barrage of hits.

"Better strap yourselves in sweetheart," Han retorted as he swung the ship upwards and flew in and out of an inverted spiral to chase after nine escaping Tie-Fighters.

Tenal Ka strapped herself in, "This is a fact." She looked over at the shields reader, "Shields are now down five percent,"

"Any idea how many fighters are out there?" Luke asked as he watched the sky littered with fighters.

"No idea Luke, but after we're done, there'll be a hell of a lot less of them," Han replied confidently. As if to mark his father's point, Anakin destroyed another Tie-Fighter.

"Ah-ha! That's my boy!" Han flashed Luke a lopsided grin, "See I told you, nothing to worry about."

Right after saying that the *Falcon* rocked from a powerful, close range blast from *The Vengeance*. Han stopped smiling as shields dropped another ten percent.

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## Chapter 36

"Red five, gold ten, gold two, and red six follow me. We need to take out those ion cannons on that Destroyer. They're pounding on the *Falcon*," Jaina said coolly.

"Copy, Gold leader," Red five responded. Together the five X-Wings flew in a V attack formation. They cleared their path with laser fire and flew alongside the Destroyer. "I'm setting for torpedoes, you all clear my path and watch for enemy fighters."

"Copy, Gold Leader," Red six replied. As Jaina zeroed in on her target she sensed enemy fighters approaching from behind.

"I'm on it, Gold leader," Jag responded before Jaina could say anything. Jaina smiled, knowing although Jag was not Force sensitive, in battle, he always seemed to be able to read her mind. It's partly why they always made such a formidable pair in the flight.

Jag flew out of formation and looped his ship upward then dropped behind the two fighters that had just dropped from above, splaying the X-wings with laser fire. Jag coolly zeroed in on the wingman and destroyed the ship in perfect precision. He sailed through the debris and chased after the leader. The Tie-Fighter moved behind Red six and fired. Jag watched in horror as his friend Owen Rendet's X-Wing disappeared in a cloud of fiery debris. Jag scrunched his face together in solid determination and bore down on the fighter. With fury and precision backing him, he sent the Tie-Fighter to its death.

"Thanks, Gold two," Jaina replied. She zeroed in on the gun and let instincts control the timing on her release of her torpedoes. Then she fired. The Destroyer's foremost starboard ion cannon exploded in a fiery plume of debris. Jaina and her remaining wingmen let out happy battle cries in order to try and drown out their loss. Jaina stared at her holo-reader and four other Rogue Squadron fighters had been destroyed. She winced and focused her energies on saving the remaining fifteen.

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Raven awoke startled, as the floor of the Destroyer rocked. Disoriented, Raven glanced up at Jacen and realized their limbs were tangled together. Raven experienced a brief moment of contentment at her present position and then moaned as she realized why they were being disturbed.

"What was that?" Jacen asked shaking his head awake, he grabbed for Raven's hand but only met air.

She pulled her legs apart from his, threw herself over the side of the table. She felt the ship rock again. She recognized the resonating strum of the Destroyer's ion cannons firing.

"I think we're under attack, and apparently we are fighting back! Who issued that command to fire?" she asked as she raced to the door. Jacen sat on the side of the table unsure of what to do. She opened the door and glanced back at the confused Jedi. "You gonna just sit there? Or are you coming with me to see what's going on?"

Jacen smiled, jumped off of the table and raced beside her, "Absolutely, Admiral."

Raven punched him in the arm and smiled, "Don't call me that again, I hate that name." Jacen grinned broadly. Another barrage of firepower struck the Destroyer and Raven lost her footing falling right into Jacen's waiting arms.

"See, I knew you were falling for me," Jacen said as he lifted her gently upon her feet. Raven laughed and grabbed his hand. "Come on, let's see what's going on."

They dashed into Raven's living room and stared out the window. Jacen immediately recognized the Rogue Squadron ships and counted off fifteen of the ships. The Tie-Fighters swarmed by the dozens. In the middle of the writhing squirmishes flew the *Falcon* both of its gunners fired at the masses of Tie-Fighters, expertly picking them apart.

"It appears my rescue party has arrived," Jacen said as he watched the ships flying in full battle mode outside. He reached out through the Force and connected with his twin, letting her know he was fine.

He then reached out to the Falcon and found Anakin. He wondered briefly where Marxx was out there and why he couldn't sense him.

"You should be glad to know that it appears my sister is fine. She's out there leading the X-Wings in battle," Jacen said holding Raven's hand tighter.

Raven growled, gently let go of Jacen's hand and ran over to her holo-emitter. She called the bridge.

Captain Hydin appeared in the emitter range, "Everything appears to be going well, Admiral. Our troops greatly outnumber the enemy fighters. They have destroyed our starboard turret, but I am confident that our fighters will pick off the few enemy fighters out there."

"You fool! Who gave you permission to engage the fighters out there?"

Hydin felt his smile turn into a frown and he began to sweat, "I... wa...was unable to reach you Admiral. You do leave me in charge when you are...unavailable."

Raven felt heat and anger rising in her. "I do not give you the authority to fire on New Republic battalion ships!"

"Raven, don't," Jacen said from behind her as he stepped into the holo-emitter range, his hand gently stroked her back. "Let go of your hate."

Captain Hydin stared at the new person behind the Admiral and felt confused. *Who was that man? Was he exerting some kind of influence over the Admiral?* He thought that name Raven sounded familiar. He then remembered the Jedi on the bridge. "Who is that man? Is that the Jedi who was on the bridge?" he demanded.

"What? He's no one that concerns you. I want you to call back all of the ships, NOW! And cease firing on the ships out there," Raven commanded.

Jacen stretched out with his feelings and felt Marxx aboard the Destroyer. A smile etched on his face.

Hydin paled, "You want us to do what? They fired on us, Admiral." His stomach queased at his lie, "If we disengage them, they will destroy our ship."

"Do you honestly think a handful of X-Wings and one ancient Corellian cruiser can take out a Star Destroyer?" Raven said, fists on hips.

"One destroyed The Death Star, Admiral," Hydin retorted. Jacen felt a grin a mile wide plaster his face remembering that it was his Dad and Uncle who were responsible for that little feat.

Raven smiled thinking about Jacen's little family tie to that event, "Do what I say, Captain. They are not going to destroy our ship."

Hydin straightened his back and glared back at her, "I think your judgment has been compromised. I will not call back the fighters."

Raven balked as he shut off his connection with her. She tried hailing the Captain again but he did not

respond.

“Idiot! He’s having delusions of grandeur. I need to get up on the command deck,” Raven said.

“I think I may need my lightsaber if I’m going to help you any,” Jacen replied. “We also need to find Marxx, he’s wandering around on the ship somewhere.”

“He is?” Raven asked. She stretched out with her feelings and sensed him lurking in the upper levels of the ship.

“Yes, he’s probably looking for me. Good news is, he should be able to sense me without a problem,” Jacen replied.

Raven turned and glanced at him. She placed a hand on her own belt and noticed her saber had been exposed, available for him to take if he’d wanted to while she slept. As if struck by lightning, she realized Jacen was the real deal. He had no interest in harming her and wanted nothing more than to help her and be her friend.

“We need to get to the engine room then, come on,” Raven said. The two friends dashed out of Raven’s quarters.

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Marxx popped into existence and felt a fresh wave of sweat bead upon his forehead. He glanced down at his hands as they started quivering, shooting bolts of pain up his arms and throughout his body. He realized that this likely is what it probably felt like to be electrocuted. He crouched down low and stifled a groan, as he realized with horror where he appeared.

Before him stood a shower, luckily with heavily frosted doors, that inside held a very large, very naked, man loudly singing while bathing himself. The man’s back was turned from the shower door. His white flesh pressed and squeaked against the glass as the ship shook from another blast. Marxx shielded his eyes from the sight. He slowly cringed from the pain as he grasped the refresher door handle and slipped out of the room. He closed the door as quickly as he could and then closed his eyes tightly to try and rid the horrible image of the man’s pale body from his mind. He shivered with disgust and sucked down the pain, then headed to the door. “*I’ve got to learn to better control where I end up,*” he thought and opened the door. He peered out into the corridor. Empty.

He exited the man’s chambers and strode purposefully down the hallway. His muscles quivered from his face to his toes. Marxx didn’t know what was the matter with him. As he twisted through the numerous gray corridors he felt the floor quake and shake below his feet. He fought to keep his balance. Three armed guards rounded a corner and stared at Marxx.

“That’s him! That’s the guy who was on the bridge. Get him!” One of the guards shouted as he pulled his blaster.

Marxx whipped out his lightsaber, igniting it with a *snap hiss* as the three men opened fire. Lowering and raising his lightsaber in perfectly matched arcs, Marxx deflected the blaster shots. The blasts pinged down the hall blackening the walls with their soot. In a deafening roar he directed the shots away from the guards and himself. He sunk into the Force to absorb more energy to continue his fight.

Each time a shot reflected off of his lightsaber, he winced in pain. One of the guards fell, screaming in agony, as an errant shot deflected back and hit his arm.

Positioning himself further down the hall, Marxx turned and continued fending off the laser blasts. One guard raced towards him. Marxx leaped high in the air and kicked the man in the chest, felling him to the floor in a groaning heap. The third guard stared at his downed friends and his anger began to rise.

Marxx waved his hand in front of him as he panted for breath. "You want to take these men to the infirmary. You do not want to continue to fight."

The man's expression changed from anger to concern, "I need to get you two to the infirmary, let's stop this fight."

Marxx waved again, "Move along sir, move along. We won't stop you."

The man waved at Marxx as he tried to pick up his fallen friend, "Move along sir, move along. We won't stop you."

Marxx bowed to the men, turned off his lightsaber, and headed down the hall. His breathing became more labored after that last encounter. Worry plagued Marxx as he tried to figure out what was happening to him. He headed directly for the closest turbolift.

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## Chapter 37

As the two Force-sensitive women flew by the planet of Corellia they both dropped into the Force to search for their husbands. Almost at once Leia and Mara both sensed their men at the moon of Endor.

Mara switched over some of the shielding power to the communications system to help magnify their signal. Leia contacted the medical frigate and let the pilot know of their altered course. Leia then lay in an SOS call to *The Falcon*.

The *Jade Saber* and the medical frigate barreled through hyperspace towards Endor, in the hopes that they would not arrive too late.

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Raven and Jacen tore out of the turbolift into the steaming engine room. Jacen raced down the guardrail to approximately where he had dropped his lightsaber earlier. He held onto the railing and stared down into the mass of deafeningly moving black machinery below. He couldn't see his lightsaber anywhere due to all the steam, plus the floor was some fifty feet away. Raven stood beside him and held his hand. She realized she'd forgotten to put her gloves back on.

"Do you see it?" She shouted over the cacophony of noise.

"No. I need to go down there to get it. I can't just call it up if I have no idea where it is. Can you?" Jacen asked glancing at the masked girl.

Raven shook her head. “No, I can’t do that either. There’s a ladder over at the end of the catwalk down there, we can take it to go down there.”

“No. You stay up here. It shouldn’t take me long,” Jacen shouted over the roar of the engines. Raven started to object. He placed a finger on her mask’s mouth location, making Raven grin. “No arguing. It’s hot and really steamy down there. It could mess with your respirator system. You most likely shouldn’t even be in here.”

Raven smiled broadly at him, her blue eyes twinkled and her cheeks flushed, “You are right about my respirator, I’ll wait for you here.”

Jacen squeezed her hand, then headed to the ladder and descended into the mechanical pits of the ship.

Raven walked over to the guardrail and tried to watch Jacen’s movements from up above. However, the steam and ear shattering poundings made it hard for her to concentrate and try to find him. She thought how lucky she was to find such a man: caring, compassionate, and brave. She wondered if she really deserved his affection. Somehow she doubted it.

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Jaina yelled into her comm system, “Dad! Jacen’s alive on that Destroyer! He’s alright! Have you got any way to contact Marxx?”

She heard her father’s voice crackle through the hull of her ship, “Sorry sweetheart. He doesn’t seem to have a comlink on him. You think he’s aboard the Destroyer already?”

“I saw him on the bridge. I can still feel him in there. He’s really tired though and needs reinforcements, I think. Can you guys go help him?” Jaina asked. Her brows crinkled with concern as she felt Marxx’s energy through the Force throbbing from exhaustion, and pain. A few seconds passed as Jaina raced after a Tie-Fighter and casually blasted it into oblivion.

“Affirmative, honey. We’ll go get him. Can y’all clear a path for us to the landing bay?” Han asked.

Jaina grinned, “Sure Dad. Red 10, Gold 2, Gold 7, let’s make way for the rescue party.” The four X-Wings flew in front of the Falcon.

“Hold on a second Jaina, I’m getting a call from Mara,” Han said.

Han and Luke crowded around the holo-emitter as Leia’s image appeared on the deck.

“What’s up Leia? We’re a little busy,” Han said. Out the window Han cringed as a Tie-Fighter barreled towards them, only to be blasted loudly into oblivion by Kyp. The sounds of laser fire permeated the void of space. Already the blackened sky was littered with debris from the many casualties of battle.

“Luke, how’s Marxx doing?” Leia asked getting to the point.

“We don’t know. Jaina just reported that she thinks he’s tired and is on the Destroyer. Why?” Luke asked clearly puzzled why Leia felt the need to ask this now.

“Tionne called to our apartment looking for you,” *The Millennium Falcon* rocked from laser fire, from the back cabin they heard tools falling pinging and clattering to the floor. “She found out something about Marxx’s Force ability. She said that she discovered another secret coded file concerning that Jedi, Draptu-Raag. Apparently he wasn’t as successful as the original file you found indicated he was with his mission,” Leia said adjusting her braids on her head.

Luke expression turned to concern, “What happened?”

“He got two hundred of the aliens off of the planet, but there were about thirty left. Luke, after his multiple trips through the Force, he ceased to exist! Apparently the reason the Jedi didn’t want this ability used is that the more times someone uses it, their life-force diminishes and they eventually just become one with the Force!” Leia said, eyes full of worry.

Luke’s mouth went dry and his eyes grew large. He placed a hand on his forehead, “Oh no! And I encouraged him to utilize that skill! He figured out how to do it and has probably used it...” Luke counted on his fingers, “around four to five times already today!”

“You’ve got to stop him! Mara and I are coming in the *Jade Saber*,” Leia put up a hand to prevent Luke from protesting, “We’re going to stay on the far side of Endor. We’ve got a medical frigate with us, just in case. Hopefully Marxx will be fine. I also don’t know if the medics would be able to help him or not if he...”

Han’s stomach tightened with guilt as he realized he’d also tried to encourage the boy to use his talent as well, “Leia, we’re about to go aboard the Destroyer now. We’ll find him and stop him from using his ability. We’ve gotta go if we’re going to stop him. Thanks Hon. Love you.”

“We’ll be there in about twenty minutes. Love you too, bye,” Leia said and the transmission ended.

“Not a word of this to Jaina, Ok guys?” Tenal Ka and Luke nodded vigorously. Chewie nodded and growled in agreement. Han gulped and spoke into the comlink, “OK sweetheart clear that path for us.”

“Gotcha Dad!” Jaina replied, blissfully unaware of the possible danger to her fiancé. Jaina and her fellow pilots blasted through a writhing mass of Tie-fighters as *The Falcon* moved towards the hanger.

Luke shouted up to the two Jedis in the gunner turrets, “Anakin, Kyp come on back here when we’re in the hanger, we’ve got to rescue the rescue party!”

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Marxx watched the turbolift doors close as he leaned against the soothing, cool, metal walls. His face, now bathed in sweat was afire. His arms, fingers and spine shivered from pain. He tried to think of somewhere he could go on the ship to try to regain his strength. He decided to opt for the only place he remembered on the ship.

“Deck 6,” Marxx said. The turbolift gently moved downward towards the engine room. As it silently thundered on, Marxx thought about his sister and his mother’s request. He didn’t have the energy to fight her, nor did he want to. He hadn’t felt Jacen’s presence when he arrived on the ship and now, his ability to sense things through the Force seemed to be diminishing, or at least his focus had become

foggy as he grew more tired and the stinging pain magnified. He closed his eyes and breathed out deeply. He stretched out to the surrounding people on the floors he passed, and then reached out to the fighters and then towards Endor. Slowly, surely, like an engine beating back to life after having been recharged, Marxx felt the Force flow through him. He allowed it to envelop and caress him, to enhance his strength to fight the pain. His face twitched and he felt ripples of prickling pain cruising up and down his neck. Marxx's mind drifted to Jaina, his love, his life, and he smiled. The turbolift stopped and Marxx sensed Jacen's presence faintly, in the engine room. He sighed believing his mission almost completed.

Feeling partway refreshed, Marxx stepped out of the door into steam.

Raven sensed the turbolift doors open and nonchalantly glanced over in that direction. Her heart turned ice cold when she recognized the person emerging from the lift. She whispered, "Marxx."

Marxx snapped his head up and found himself staring at Raven. She stood casually rested her forearms on the guardrail, her foot rested upon a bottom rail. Marxx scratched his chin, uncertain of what to do and how to approach his sister. "*How do you make amends with someone whose moral ideals seemed at complete polar opposites of your own?*" He thought. She didn't seem combative or defensive. She actually appeared relaxed. Marxx felt a sharp pain of anger rise in him when he thought of the things she had done. He took a deep breath; determination set in his eyes as he made his way down the catwalk.

Raven tensed as her brother's face remained in a scowl. She sensed that he had not forgiven her for what she'd done during their last encounter. "*How in the galaxy, can I make amends for hurting his friend? Can I make him believe me that I've changed and that I need him?*" she wondered as terror made her stomach churn.

"Where's Jacen?" he challenged her.

Raven could barely hear his question above the clamoring of the equipment. "What?"

"Where's Jacen? You know, the guy I accidentally left behind? I know he's in here," Marxx repeated shaking his left hand to try and ease the stinging sleeping feeling.

Raven smiled under her helmet, turned her head and pointed down into the shaft, "He's gone down there looking for his lost lightsaber."

However, with her head turned her voice became muffled, Marxx heard, "*He's down there after I hit him with my lightsaber.*"

"You did what?" Marxx shouted. How could she be so calm after attacking his best friend? In one swift movement, he threw open his robe and his lightsaber soared into his awaiting hand. He activated the emerald blade with a *snap hiss* and stood in a loose battle stance.

Raven bounced back off of the guardrail and held her arms out to her sides. "*What's wrong with Marxx? Shouldn't that have made him happy?*" Raven asked herself, her heart began to race as she tried to remain calm. To Marxx she yelled, "What are you doing?"

"Why'd you hurt Jacen? And why did you kidnap our mother? What did she ever do to you to deserve



being kidnapped?" Marxx said, fury rising within him.

Raven licked her lips and stared at her twin perplexed. She sensed his rising heat and anger and her lips grew dry again. She noted the perspiration on his forehead, then saw his face appeared to be... rippling. She realized there was something wrong with him.

She let out a long breath and relaxed. She then shouted, "Jacen's fine, he's down there below! And I was going to turn the ship around and return mother home. I just needed to talk to her."

Marxx's lightsaber hummed in his hand. He sneered, "And what about Grandfather?"

Confusion ensnarled Raven completely, "What about Grandfather?"

Marxx sensed a power greater than himself controlling his actions. He swaggered closer to his twin, fire burning behind his pool blue eyes. He spat, "He's dead! He had a heart attack... because of you."

Raven's mouth dropped open, her heart fell in her chest and her palms started to sweat, "What?"

"He must have seen you kidnap my mother. He was healthy and fine, then BAM! You come along, kidnap my mother and he has an attack and dies!" As Marxx spoke the words he believed with every fiber of his being that he was correct. Rage consumed him, he no longer felt his physical pain that began to cloud his judgment, nor did he notice Raven's distress.

"He's dead?" Raven squeaked. She took several steps backwards as tears burned her eyes, "I never wanted that to happen! You have to believe me!"

"Why should I believe anything you say? You're a kidnapper, a murderer, and a thief," Marxx replied coldly, a battle brewed beneath his icy eyes as he confronted his sister with all of her misdeeds.

The reality of his statement hurt her more than a blow from a fist. Guilt invaded Raven's senses, briefly clouding her vision as tears welled in her eyes. She stared at the floor shamefaced, "Bless the Force, you are right about me."

"What am I supposed to do with you, Raven?" he asked and pointed his humming lightsaber towards her, as the emerald blade crossed near his face, it took on a greater, unhealthy glow.

Raven licked her lips again and tried to think of anything to say to Marxx to make him stand down. Raven's entire life, she'd barricaded her emotions into mental walls, locked so tight, even she had long ago forgotten the combination to access the painful memories from her horrifically lonely and twisted past. She sensed the war waging inside her twin's head. When they last met, Marxx's mental barriers were stronger than durasteel, now his emotions burned like mental flashes of lightning, as his rage continued to swell inside of him, she read his thoughts as clearly as her own. He wanted revenge. Furiously her mind wove through her mental cobweb, seeking the combination to access her past, in order to save her future. She replied, "I don't want to fight you, brother."

"Why not?" Marxx asked, as he thought of his kidnapped mother.

Raven's mind spun faster and faster, as she tried to unlock the gates to her past. Jacen had seen the good in her causing even herself to believe that she could change. In fact, she felt she had begun to

change already. Now Raven just needed to show that to her brother. She grasped for anything to prevent them from fighting, “Because you don’t want to do this either.”

“It’s too late for that. Your fate must be decided,” Marxx said. In a swift moment, fueled by anger, he charged. Raven grabbed her crimson lightsaber and activated it with a *snap hiss* and blocked his wild attack. Their swords crackled and hissed as Raven fended herself from Marxx’s thrusts. His anger and pain powered his blows, as his physical strength seemed to weaken from whatever illness had gripped him. Raven instantly understood Marxx and the battle that raged inside of him; feeding off your darker emotions to make up for your physical limitations. She’d spent her entire life waging that same war.

Raven noted the perspiration on his brow and his writhing facial features. Marxx’s eyes seemed to drift out of focus. “What’s wrong with you? You don’t look well!”

“Why should you care?” Marxx asked, as their lightsabers sizzled and crackled, sending off fiery sparks. Power fueled his reflexes. He sensed his sister’s concern and fought with his darker emotions. He focused his eyes deeply into her eye shield. In her eyes he saw no deceit, no malice –only concern. He sensed a chasm appear before him with two paths beckoning to him: one held power, darkness, and rage, the other hope, light, and joy. For a fleeting second he acknowledged that chasm. From deep below him, in the belly of the engine room, the shouts of his best friend went unheard under the cacophony of noise.

Jacen, having seen the sparking lightsabers furiously continued his quest for his own saber. Panic engulfed him as he realized Marxx was attacking Raven. He had to stop them. He scooted around a large boiler and saw his lightsaber wedged between two power conduits. Jacen squeezed in closer to the boiler and tried to reach the lightsaber. It was out of reach. Panic gripped him and the Force wasn’t obeying his calls. He closed his eyes as the shouting and sounds of the twins above blurred into the background. Calmly he called his lightsaber to his hand. It jumped into his waiting hand. Heart racing, Jacen quickly wormed his way through the endless maze of machinery to get back to the ladder.

“I don’t want to fight you! I want you to help me!” Raven shouted. She leaped backwards and shut off her lightsaber.

Marxx’s saber swung wildly now that it had nothing stopping its intended path and he nearly fell to his knees. He staggered back to his feet and held his lightsaber downwards. He furrowed his brows at her. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes and hope crept into his voice as the path towards the Darkside began to close. “You want my help? With what?”

Raven saw his features soften slightly. She took advantage of the situation and collapsed to her knees, “Help me...to become a better person! To become a Jedi, like yourself. I’ll give all this...” she said, waving her arm around to encompass her ship, “to the Republic, or whoever wants it, just so I can be with my family again.” Raven swayed on her knees and she extended her hands palms up. “Help me to end this pointless battle. My fate is in your hands...”

With her declaration, Raven closed her eyes and the doors to the safe burst open. Raven gasped as images long forgotten flared in her mind. She raised her hand towards Marxx and directed towards him an overwhelming rush of her memories: from their brief time together as twins with Marxx as her protector, to her years of loneliness, to her childhood tormenters, to her grandmother’s teachings, to Ryzano’s abuse, and her decent into hate.

The engines whined and the twins rocked on the catwalk as something large hit the outside hull of the Destroyer. Marxx suddenly saw his sister's life flash before his eyes, and with each painful memory, he felt himself falling, falling into a pit of despair and hopelessness. It was a place with no trust, no love, and no joy. Finally the images of Raven's time with Jacen surged forward. He saw in clarity that his best friend had brought his sister back from that empty, soulless, void of an existence. Any malice in her was no more. Marxx dropped his lightsaber and collapsed onto the floor into Raven's lap. He threw his arms around her slim waist and began to sob. Raven clung to her brother, digging her fingernails deeply into the folds of his Jedi robe. Marxx's sobbing released his pent up darker emotions as they dissipated and vanished. Raven smiled brightly under her mask as tears flowed freely down her face.

Something passed between the twins. Although it wasn't until recently that Marxx received confirmation that he had a twin, he always felt that something was missing in his life, leaving him incomplete. Raven, who had nobody, always felt the same way. Suddenly both twins realized that they had found the missing half of themselves. A cleansing wave of contentment and completion washed over them as they reunited, leaving them stronger, united. Their twin links, separated by fate yet created in the womb by the Force, again merged and entwined locking back into a permanent bond.

From the other side of the catwalk, Jacen climbed quickly up the ladder. A large grin plastered his face as relief surged through his body, releasing all tension that had built up in his muscles upon seeing his best friend and Raven embracing. Jacen sensed the overwhelming sense of contentment coming from his friends and he whooped out with joy.

Marxx glanced up from his hug and saw Jacen walking towards him, grin plastered across his face.

"Hey Marxx," Jacen said.

Marxx let go of Raven, stood up, and embraced his lost friend fondly. Jacen hugged him back with equal fierceness. Marxx said, "Thank you, Jacen."

Jacen pulled away from Marxx and gave him a lopsided smile, "For what?"

"For bringing her back to me," Marxx said, as he brushed away the tears that trailed down his face. He squeezed Raven's hand. Lightening the mood, he then changed the subject and added, "Do you know you've got your whole family out here to rescue you?"

"Yeah I saw the fleet outside," Jacen commented as the ship rocked.

"We don't have much time, come on!" Raven shouted and let go of Marxx's hand. The steam swirled around her, dancing with a new mixture of smoke. "Let's go up and end this once and for all."

"After you, sweetheart," Jacen said with a waving her forward. Marxx raised his eyebrow and gave his friend a lopsided grin as he watched Jacen's eyes follow Raven towards the turbolift. Sensing the heat of Marxx's stare, Jacen turned to his friend, "What?"

"Sweetheart?" Marxx asked grin forming.

Jacen pointed a finger in Marxx's face when he realized Raven was well out of earshot range, "Just be glad you didn't do anything to hurt my girl." Jacen hooted with laughter as Marxx's mouth dropped to the floor in wonderment.

“Are you two coming or do I have to save this ship, and all of your friends and family by myself?” Raven shouted, head tilted, left hand balled on fist, while holding open the turbolift.

“We’re coming!” Jacen yelled, to Marxx he said, “I never win arguing with her anyway.” He ran towards the waiting and open turbolift. Marxx chased behind him, grinning, shaking his head, and biting down on his lip from the growing, stinging pain surging through his body.

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## Chapter 38

Luke stopped in the middle of the landing bay causing the rest of his party to come to an abrupt, halting stop. The rescue crew noticed that the cargo bay was completely void of crewman. This would make racing around the Destroyer easy, but they couldn’t help but feel a bit uneasy by the lack of resistance.

Kyp said, scratching his ear, “I sense it too.”

“What? What do you sense?” Han asked hating to be left out of the Force insight merry-go-round.

“Marxx has found Jacen,” Luke said he looked on perplexed.

“I think Marxx’s sister might be with them,” Anakin responded from behind as he straightened the lapels on his Jedi cloak.

Luke smiled, “Thank you, that’s what I was sensing. Maybe Jacen befriended her. Let’s all head to the bridge, I think that’s where they are going. Let’s put an end this conflict once and for all.”

“Lead on Master Skywalker,” Tenal Ka said.

Chewbacca muttered a low growl to Han. Han replied, while rolling his eyes, “Delusions of grandeur? Luke’s always having those. Come on we’d better catch up with the *mighty* Jedi.”

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The *Jade Saber* and the medical frigate dropped out of hyperspace and began circumventing the moon of Endor.

The two women gazed out the window and saw a Corellian Waste Transporter holding steady orbit over the forested moon.

“What is that thing doing here?” Leia asked. “Those waste transporters know that dumping waste on Endor is illegal!”

Mara studied the ship closely. “It’s not venting any exhaust. It may be empty of cargo.”

“Well that doesn’t mean it’s not scouting Endor looking for a place to dump future loads,” Leia refigured the frequency on the comm. system and spoke out a broadcast message to the freighter.

“Unidentified Waste Transporter, please identify yourself and your intentions, this is a representative of

the New Republic Senate. Please respond.”

Mara grinned at her sister-in-law, “Didn’t want to scare the daylights out of them with your true identity, huh?”

Leia smiled back, “I want answers, not give them a one way ticket to hyperspace.”

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Chariss sat in the captain’s chair of *The Fiery Phoenix* and watched the battle being performed before her with fascinated horror. Feeling very glad that her ship has appeared to go unnoticed, she watched as the small group of X-Wings seemed to be making good work at destroying the vast numbers of Tie-Fighters.

As she witnessed the destruction out the window, her mind kept lingering on everything her son told her before he disappeared off of the ship.

A dull aching pain rocked her body when she thought of her father’s passing. Marxx didn’t seem to have a lot of information on what happened. She’d stared over the confusing communications systems on the ship in hopes she could call home for more information, but she was unsuccessful in determining how to get the ship’s holo-imager to function.

She swung from grieving from her father to intensely worrying about her daughter. Raven injured Jaina and possibly Jacen. She was a thief and a kidnapper. Chariss shook her head. She’d known that her mother had grown resentful and spiteful the longer they remained on Tatooine, however she had once been a loving person. She found it hard to believe that her mother would foster such traits in Raven. However the truth be told, Gwynalyn always kept to herself. She rarely offered any insights into how she was feeling. The woman bottled up her emotions until she would explode with rage. Chariss hated to think what kind of warped mentality Gwynalyn could have imposed on her daughter over the years.

Chariss bolted in her seat, and let out a frightened yelp when a voice suddenly boomed throughout the cabin, “Unidentified Waste Transporter, please identify yourself and your intentions, this is a representative of the New Republic Senate. Please respond.”

Heart racing from terror, Chariss glanced around the cabin trying to identify who had spoken.

“Please respond,” came the insistent voice.

Chariss poked around at the ship controls and noticed a flashing red light with a switch next to it. She clicked on the switch and said meekly, “Hello?”

“Please identify yourself Waste Transporter,” the woman demanded.

Chariss began to panic, “I don’t know the name of the ship I am on. I’m sorry. And I don’t think it transports waste.”

There was a pause in the communications. “What is your name?”

“Chariss Racees,” Chariss responded seeing no reason to conceal her true identity.

“Chariss! It’s Leia... I’m sorry if I scared you. I forgot about Kyp’s ship and it’s special modifications. Is Marxx there with you?” Leia said with obvious relief coming through her voice.

“No, he went back to the ship to find Jacen and Raven,” Chariss replied feeling much happier knowing she was no longer being interrogated, but talking with a friend.

“Did he disappear on his own off of the ship?” Leia asked.

“Why yes, he did,” Chariss said, frowning her brows. “Why? Should he not have done that? I thought it’s something Jedis learn to do.”

“Did you notice anything odd about him physically?”

“Odd physically? Like what?” Chariss asked, scratching her head.

“I don’t know.”

Chariss thought about it for a moment, “Wait when he arrived in my room- he arrived in a flash of blue light. And when we got back to the ship he kept flicking his hands. You know like when your hand falls asleep and you want to get blood circulating again?”

On the *Jade Saber* Leia sucked in her breath and stared nervously at Mara. Mara’s face turned white and she gulped.

“Chariss, have you ever flown a ship before?” Leia asked. “I want you to move the ship and attach yourself to the medical frigate that is behind me. Mara will walk you through the steps you need for flying if you don’t know how. Han, Luke, and some others are aboard the Star Destroyer now and will be bringing Marxx over to the medical frigate for help.”

“What? What’s the matter with him?” Chariss asked, panic filling her voice.

“Don’t worry at the moment. I’ll fill you in when we get you aboard the frigate, Ok?” Leia said.

“Ok,” Chariss responded.

“Chariss, this is Mara. Now tell me what the controls look like around you...”

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Jacen and Raven stood across from each other in the turbolift with Marxx standing in the middle. Raven couldn’t take her eyes off of Jacen. His blue/purple welts had reduced to almost nothing on his face, leaving a faint twinge of yellow. His appearance looked nearly normal again. Jacen felt the weight of Raven’s stare and he had to smile back. Marxx began to shake his hands violently and he then pushed his hands up his face to try and sooth his the spasms that surged over his facial features. Jacen pulled his eyes off of Raven and examined his friend. He sensed Marxx’s discomfort and pain and suddenly he was gripped with worry.

“What’s the matter, Marxx?” Jacen asked moving in front of him. He glanced over Marxx’s face and

stepped back in alarm as he watched the muscles tighten, twitch, then constrict repeatedly up and down Marxx's face. He grabbed Marxx's arm, pushed up his sleeve and saw that his entire arm seemed to be constricting and pulsating the same as his face. Raven looked on and gasped.

"What's happening, Marxx?" Raven asked. She placed a hand on his forehead and it felt clammy and hot.

Marxx closed his eyes, "I don't know. Maybe I'm coming down with a cold. I was hanging out in the medicenter with Jaina, you know? Maybe I picked up something there."

"I hate to break it to you buddy, but this isn't some virus," Jacen said. "It looks like something is waging war on your nerves and muscles. Why would this be happening to you?"

Before Marxx could respond the turbolift chimed as it reached the outside of the command deck. Raven placed a hand on her lightsaber and stepped out of the turbolift first. Across from them another turbolift chimed to reveal the *Falcon's* crew. Raven stopped in her tracks as she faced the group of strangers. Jacen raced up behind her, gently grabbed her arm and whispered, "It's alright, they're with me."

Han's face broke out into a big grin as he reached over and tousled his wayward son's hair, "Hey there buddy, we were worried about you. You alright?"

"Hi Dad, yeah I'm fine. Hey Anakin, Chewie, Luke, Tenal Ka, and ....Kyp," Jacen said. For some odd reason seeing Kyp brought a bad taste in his mouth, as a pang of unprovoked jealousy hit him. He pulled Raven closer towards him. Raven stared, startled at the two people she recognized from her dream. Tenal Ka frowned at the way Jacen seemed to be behaving with the masked girl. Marxx stepped out of the elevator and approached Luke.

"I'm so sorry for leaving you all Master Skywalker. I know better than that, it won't happen again," Marxx said from the bottom of his heart.

Luke witnessed with horror the writhing muscles in Marxx's face. "Marxx, you and I are heading back to *The Falcon* we'll let the others end things around here." Luke glanced at everyone, "We'll be waiting for you in the shuttle bay." Marxx wanted to protest, but in reality, he was glad by the possibility of getting off of his feet. They walked into the open turbolift.

"Take care of her, ok Jace?" Marxx said indicating his sister.

Jacen took her hand and smiled, "With my life."

Marxx lifted a hand to his friends and sister and the doors closed.

"Again, Master Skywalker I'm so sorry, I know it was impertinent, disrespectful, and well, wrong...." Marxx began.

"Shuttle Bay," Luke said to the turbolift as it began to descend back down the lower levels of the ship, "I'm not worried about that Marxx, you are forgiven. Now stop your worrying." Luke placed a hand on Marxx's face and felt the constant pulsing of the young man's nerves. He watched with growing concern as Marxx's eyes seemed to drift in and out of focus. "After you jumped on the ship on Naboo, how many times did you move through the Force?"

Marxx focused on his Master puzzled, “What?... Let’s see....” Marxx ticked off the number of times on his fingers, as he was too tired to trust his memory to retain the information. “Four, plus what three times before that. And then of course the other two times...why?”

“Master Tionne found out that the Jedi I mentioned to you who could also walk through the Force, died as a result of his little trick.” The turbolift doors opened and Luke placed a guiding hand on Marxx’s elbow, leading him down the long hallway towards the shuttlebay. Luke continued, “If you had done this trick a couple more times, you may have become absorbed back into the Force. I think what’s going on with you is similar to what happened to me once. The Emperor Palpatine struck me with bursts of Force lightening. Every nerve in my body screamed and writhed in agony from the shock. It took years before my nerves completely healed from that encounter. Even still I occasionally feel twitches. I think that your jumping through the Force is slowly affecting your body the same way as that lightening did to me.”

“So I could have died if I’d kept doing this?” Marxx said, stopping in his tracks.

“Yes. It’s a good thing you didn’t do it more... I’d hate to imagine what would have happened to you. I’m so sorry for encouraging you to do this Marxx, I just didn’t know,” Luke said.

Marxx waved his apology off. Then he stared at his mentor and suddenly his eyes grew large with terror.

“What?” Luke asked, very concerned.

Marxx gulped, “You um... don’t think I’ll be permanently damaged from this nerve damage do you?”

“I don’t know Marxx...”

Marxx leaned in close to Luke, “What I mean is, do you think I’ll be damaged?” Luke stared at him completely puzzled. Marxx took a deep breath, “Jaina and I may want to have children someday...”

Luke’s face changed from confusion to comprehension and he laughed, “Well, if I managed to reproduce, I would like to think you’ll be able to as well. Let’s worry about getting you fully healed first before you start worrying about that.” Marxx still didn’t feel completely satisfied with that answer as his nerves continued to wage a painful war on his body. Knowing Luke wasn’t a healer, he didn’t feel like harping on the subject any longer.

The shuttle bay echoed and crashed from the battle sounds raging outside. They reached *The Falcon* and climbed up the ramp.

“I just want to go to sleep,” Marxx replied as he headed for a bunkhead.

“No Marxx, I don’t want you losing consciousness!” Luke replied. Marxx thought about that and had to admit sleeping would probably be a bad idea. “Feel free to just sit back and relax. Hopefully they won’t take long.”

Marxx lay down on a bed and tried to clear his mind and distance himself from the unending, surging pain that ripped through his body. He only hoped that Luke was right, and that the effects could be



reversed. Marxx's mind lingered to Jaina. He felt her out in space chasing down Tie-Fighters, doing what she loved most. He grinned and gave thanks that soon he would be back in her warm arms.

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## Chapter 39

After he had cut off from his conversation with the Admiral, Hydin ordered all remaining guards and personal to come to the bridge to protect his orders. Hydin couldn't understand why Darkglider hadn't stormed the bridge by now. That worried him more than the alarmingly small number of Tie-Fighters still battling outside.

He glanced out of the main window and watched as the fifteen X-Wings picked off his Tie-Fighters ship by ship. He marveled at the skill in which the X-Wings evaded the hordes of Tie-Fighters attempting to destroy them. He counted and the once seven squadrons of fighters were reduced to a mere thirty ships. His useless squads had only taken out five of the X-Wings. At the rate the X-Wings kept picking them off- they would be attacking the Destroyer in no time.

As he stared uncertainly out the window, the locked bridge doors flew open. Hydin turned to witness a disturbing sight. Admiral Darkglider strode into the command deck, hand on lightsaber, followed by a group of civilians and a Wookiee.

Raven called out to Hydin, "Call off the attack now!"

"No. You no longer have any authority on this ship," he bristled as he stepped behind his chair. "Kill them!" he shouted on the deck.

A flurry of shots from all areas of the deck singed and burst through the air towards the door. A unified loud *snap hiss* echoed as the Jedis ignited their lightsabers. Raven, Jacen, Anakin, Kyp, and Tenal Ka formed a barricade in front of Han and Chewie. As the shots surged towards the group of seven people, the Jedis deflected the shots back with their sabers. At least thirty guards fired upon the group. Han and Chewie each picked off two guards. Chewie roared as his bowcaster hit its mark into another one of the guards. Multiple guards fell in screaming lumps to the deck floor. The command deck filled with smoke and deafened out any voices over the din of blaster fire.

The Jedi redirected the shots back towards the shooters. Anakin dropped his shoulder as a shot soared past his lightsaber and burned a hole in his robe before pounding into the wall behind him.

Hydin stared at the battle on the command deck, from the relative safety behind his command chair. His knees shook as the five Jedi picked off his guards effectively one by one. The guards fell in writhing, painful masses to the deck floor.

Jacen yelled to Raven, "We've got things under control here, get to the comm. system and call off the attack. We'll cover you." Raven fought beside him a few more moments, then slowly broke free from the group. Jacen and Kyp moved closer together to keep their front unified without break. Raven sidestepped and deflected the blasts that were now directed at her alone. She twisted and turned, sinking deeper into the Force to heighten her reflexes. Knowing the bridge by heart, she bent deep in her legs, jumped high in the air, flipping, and deflecting with her crimson glowing lightsaber as she

landed across from Hydin's chair. Lightsaber crackling and zipping off blasts in one hand, she grabbed the control deck comlink.

"This is Admiral Darkglider, effective immediately, cease fire and all remaining ships report back to *The Vengeance*," she commanded. On the bridge the blaster fire nearly ceased as the subordinates realized Darkglider had taken command again of the ship. Raven stared out the window and watched as the Tie-Fighters disengaged the X-Wings and began returning to the ship.

From behind his chair, Hydin raised a blaster at Raven. He shouted, "I'm in charge here, not YOU!"

Raven sensed a large force pound on her chest as she flew backwards towards the glass pane window. Her last conscious image was of Hydin staring maniacally in her direction. Her limp body bounced off of the protective energy shield that protected the glass and she into blackness and fell into a lump on the floor.

"NOOOOOOoooooooo!!" Jacen wailed, Force picked up a blaster switched the setting to stun and blasted Hydin square in the chest. Hydin fell screaming, then slipping unconscious to the floor, completely disabled. Tenal Ka raced over, kicked aside the fallen captain's blaster and stood over him, turquoise lightsaber poised over his exposed neck.

Jacen flew to Raven's side. Han followed in his son's wake to offer a hand as the remaining group of Jedi and Chewie watched over the guards.

"Drop your weapons! And hands behind your heads!" Kyp commanded to the guards on the deck. The only sound to be heard was the clattering of blasters onto the deck floor.

Anakin pulled out a comlink from inside the folds of his cloak and called out to Jaina, "Hey sis, we've got the command deck under control, send in your guys to help us to secure the ship."

"I copy, Anakin," came Jaina's crackled response.

Jacen examined Raven. Hydin's blaster shot hit her square in her respirator. Completely destroyed, the metal and wires in the respirator crackled and burned, shooting out sparks.

Jacen winced at the heat from the metal, "Dad help me get this off of her! I'll get you out of here, you'll be ok sweetheart, just hold on for me, ok?" Jacen mumbled as tears clouded his eyes. Han glanced up with surprise at his son. Tenal Ka stiffened from her position as she heard the terms of endearment that he directed at the unmoving girl.

Raven's normally methodic breathing sound no longer filled the cabin air. The silence disturbed Jacen more than the noise from her breathing apparatus ever did. Frantically he lifted her limp body up and Han found the locking mechanism for the top of her helmet. He removed it and tossed it clanging aside. Jacen then clicked open the face shield, and pulled the surrounding helmet off. Raven's long dark brunette hair fell in sweeping masses down her back and onto the floor. Her blue lipped mouth hung open and her eyes were shut. Jacen's heart pounded as he observed her skin had turned to an overall bluish tint. Together Han and Jacen removed the burning respirator, leaving her bare of all metal, wearing only her leather jumpsuit. She looked so small and frail Jacen thought.

Wasting no time, Jacen laid her down and tilted her head back, placed his finger on her neck and an ear

to her lips. From her neck he felt a weak pulse, however he did not feel any breath, nor did he see her chest rise and fall from breathing. Jacen tilted her head back, squeezed her nose shut and covered her mouth with his as he breathed deep breaths into her empty lungs. Han positioned himself by her chest in case he needed to assist with compressions. Jacen breathed in deeply again, and again. By the third breath, a weak cough came from deep inside Raven. Jacen gently lifted her up and she spat out blood, eyes still shut as the response seemed almost involuntary.

“Bless the Force,” Jacen said, tears cascaded down his face as he stared at the red sticky substance that splattered on his hand and sleeve. He glanced at his father, pupils dilated with fear and face ashen white, “Dad, did you say Mom brought a medical frigate with her?”

“Yes, come on, let’s get to *The Falcon*,” he said. Jacen gently placed Raven’s left limp arm around his shoulder and cradled her small frame in his strong arms.

“Let’s go!” Han and Jacen raced out of the command deck, leaving Chewie and the remaining Jedi to take care of the ship and its crew.

As Jacen roared out of the doors, Tenal Ka’s gray eyes burned with tears and her heart constricted in her chest upon registering the concerned expression on his face. He barely even acknowledged her when they arrived outside the deck. His tears for this girl bothered her more than anything. She couldn’t remember ever really seeing him cry, nor seem that concerned for anyone outside his family members.

Hydin moaned loudly on the ground. Tenal Ka glared down at the pitiful man and stepped roughly on his chest to keep him quiet. She attempted to detach herself emotionally and concentrate on her job at hand, but somehow she knew that wouldn’t be possible.

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Jaina and her crew stepped out of their fighters on deck of *The Vengeance*. Jag threw his helmet into the cockpit of his ship and watched as Jaina glanced around the hanger. She then zeroed in on the Imperial Shuttles that sat in the back of the hanger. Jag’s heart fell as he realized she didn’t acknowledge the crews, nor did she seem to be interested in finding him for their usual victory handshake. It sunk in completely to him that she was a different person than she was from a year and a half ago and no longer immediately thought of him first. His heart burned in agony.

Jaina lowered the ramp on one of the Shuttles and was delighted to see it filled with the Nubian paintings.

“I see you found your missing artwork,” Wedge said as he stepped up beside her on the ramp.

“Yeah, we’ll have to get these ships back to Naboo,” Jaina said. She stuck her head out of the shuttle when she heard shouting. She looked over and saw her father and Jacen racing towards *The Falcon*. Jacen appeared to be holding something.

“Go, I’ll see to everything,” Wedge told her before she could ask. She threw him a thankful smile and raced up the closing ramp on her father’s ship.

“Hey, where’s the fire?” she yelled.

She expected a bear hug from her twin, instead she heard her father rev up the ship. She neared the cabin and overheard Han yelling into his comm. system, “Leia I’ve got two injured parties coming to the medical frigate. Marxx appears to be alright for now but he’s got some serious nerve damage. His sister is in bad shape. She’s barely breathing and spitting up blood. We’re on our way...”

Jaina raced out from the door of the cockpit back into the private quarters, as she felt *The Falcon* take off. She threw herself into the doorway next to Luke, to see Jacen and Marxx both sobbing over a young woman.

“What happened?” Jaina asked. Marxx turned around at the sound of his fiancée’s voice. Jaina gasped when she saw his face contorting. “What’s going on? Honey, what’s the matter?”

Marxx walked over to her and crushed her into a tight embrace. Marxx sobbed into her shoulder, “I just got her back and she may be dying.”

“She’s NOT DYING!” Jacen yelled as he cradled Raven’s limp hand. He brushed aside tears from his eyes, “she can’t be dying...Raven, hold on honey...” Jaina watched from Marxx’s shoulder as her brother gently kissed Marxx’s sister’s forehead, and then lightly on her lips. Her skin had a ghastly blue tint to it. Jaina shared her twin’s heartbreaking anguish and felt tears forming in her eyes. The girl looked so frail and was obviously sickly. If Jaina had ever even thought of holding a grudge against Marxx’s twin for her lightsaber injuries, they vanished as she stared at the ailing girl. Compassion filled her heart.

Jacen gazed upon Raven’s face and listened intently to her rasping breaths. Her delicate features reminded him of someone, but he couldn’t place her face. At the moment, he couldn’t think all that rationally anyway, as worry gripped him completely.

“What’s wrong with her?” Jaina whispered to Marxx.

“Apparently some idiot on her ship shot her and killed her respirator,” Marxx tensed up. “Oh no.”

“What?” Jaina asked glancing up into his worried eyes. She snaked an arm up to his face and tried to soothe his tumultuous facial features.

“My mother, she’s stuck on Kyp’s ship!” Marxx grabbed Jaina’s hand and the two raced out of the room and down the corridor, into the cockpit.

Han jumped back when Marxx and Jaina appeared. “Whoa, where’d you come from, honey?”

“Dad, you really need to start checking the ship for stowaways before taking off! Over there- what is that?” Jaina said as she pointed out the window. Kyp’s ship appeared in the form of a Gamorrean nerf cruiser. The ship rammed itself up against an access tube on the medical frigate and missed its mark. Marxx wanted to leap over to the ship to help his mother park the ship. He could sense his mother’s frustration building as the ship changed into an Imperial Shuttle, then a Kessel Spice freighter.

Marxx felt a firm hand grip his shoulder. Luke said, “Don’t even think about it.” Marxx gritted his teeth as he watched his mother bash the ship again into the access tube. Marxx grabbed Jaina’s hand and closed his eyes. He visualized the ship and the mechanics in the captain’s chair. He gently took hold of

his mother's hand and placed it on the holo-image button, she flicked through the options until the ship snapped back to its gold form. Then he positioned her hand to the throttle and slowly directed the ship perfectly against the access tube. The ship slightly rocked as it locked into place. Marxx sensed his mother's overwhelming relief, and he smiled.

Luke issued a small smile realizing what Marxx did, which then turned into a look of panic as Marxx collapsed into his arms.

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## Chapter 40

Seven days had passed and the Skywalker, Solos and Racees were all on Coruscant. Kyp, Anakin, and Tenal Ka had arranged for the return of the stolen artwork back to Naboo. And by order of the Senate, the crew of *The Vengeance* were to be turned over to the newly elected Nubian authorities and put to work on the Reconstruction project as their sentence.

In Raven's quarters, they had found perfectly kept records of every hijack and theft that she had orchestrated over the years. The items in her room and surrounding chambers were all returned to their rightful owners. Three items remained unaccounted for: the painting of Queen Amidala, a delicately intricate Nubian bracelet, and Raven's Stanpilian canopy bed. These three objects were boxed up and forwarded onto the Racees home on Naboo as they were finally revealed to all be Raven's own personal possessions. *The Vengeance* was then turned over to the ship building foundries on Corellia for parts, or reconstruction.

Han had picked up the rest of the Racees family and brought them to Coruscant. Paulo's body remained at the local mortuary until they could return for a proper burial. Paulo's sister Julillia and her husband Marckos worked on arranging aspects of the funeral, including the creation/ delivery of a mausoleum, while the Racees all concentrated on the status of the twins.

The Coruscant medicenter again became an epicenter of concerned family members as now two lives hung in the balance and hands of the medical staff. The Solo twins had become distant and mostly unresponsive to the gentle probes of their parents and friends, as they each swam in their own seas of worry for the Racees siblings. Jaina shared in her brother's heart crushing anguish as he stood by helplessly as the medics worked to bring Raven back to health. And Jacen gave his sister added strength as Jaina helplessly watched the medics scratch their heads and discuss the best courses of action for Marxx's recovery.

Marxx had spent part of his week inside various bacta tanks as the medical crews worked to regenerate his lost nerve cells. After multiple treatments, the medics determined they had successfully repaired all that they could in his body. Marxx still had about ten percent damage to his nerve center throughout his body that either would never heal, or would have to repair on its own.

Sitting on his recovery bed, only in trousers, Marxx listened as Moura Tynia, the head healer who watched over his progress, told him of prognosis. Healer Tynia's cocoa skinned hands gently massaged Marxx's bare neck and back, checking for anything they might have missed. "You will most likely still have the occasional twitches and pangs from the nerve cell damage, possibly for the rest of your life. I can't tell you what long term effects your experiences may cause for you, as we've never seen anything quite like the symptoms you came in here with."

Tynia moved around the bed and shined a light into each of Marxx's eyes. The pupils responded. Marxx blinked several times, seeing spots. Moura's rich dark eyes smiled brightly at him, "We did a bone density test on you, and several cardio exams. It appears the damage seemed to centralize just in your nervous system." She gave him a stern look and said, "I highly advise against your doing your little trick anymore. I cannot guarantee that we would be able to repair any further damage to your nerves. Is that understood?"

Marxx charmed her with a large smile and replied, "Don't worry, I have too much to live for to further risk injury to myself. Umm there is one other thing I'd like to ask about...."

She tilted her head and glanced at him, "Yes?"

Marxx took a deep breath, "Did this incident, do anything to..." he licked his lips, "did it affect me in any way?"

Tynia scrunched her eyebrows together. She said, "I'm sorry Marxx, you're going to have to be more specific."

Marxx rubbed his left hand at his neck and asked nervously, "Do you think I'll have any problems... reproducing?"

A smile formed across Moura's dark lips. "Master Skywalker mentioned you were concerned about that. We did obtain a sample from you while you underwent your treatments. And it appears to be fine. I do believe there will be young little Racees children running around, terrorizing you one day."

Marxx briefly wondered about how they 'obtained a sample.' Letting out a long sigh of relief, Marxx closed his eyes, "Thank you."

Healer Tynia returned his smile. "You are free to go. I believe Raven is three floors down in the ICU ward. I'm sure you are anxious to see her. You also have some people who've been outside anxiously waiting for you, I'll let them in."

"Thank you, Healer Tynia, for all of your hard work," Marxx said, gently swaying his feet off of the side of his bed as he gripped the mattress.

"You did all the hard work in recovering, Marxx. Just stay out of trouble, Ok?" Moura said.

"I'll try," Marxx replied. Marxx craned his neck as the healer spoke to someone in the hallway. Krishta burst into the room and threw her arms around Marxx's legs.

"Hey Krishy," Marxx said, brushing a hand through his niece's mass of brown curls.

"They say you're all better!" Krishta said, throwing her big eyes upon her favorite Uncle's handsome face.

"You've got that right, kiddo," Marxx replied. He placed his hands under her armpits and pulled her up into his lap on the bed. Krishta squeezed him in a tight bear hug. Marxx gazed through the mess of her hair and saw his sister, Tanella, Rowlon, and Jaina leaning into the doorway. Marxx reached out a hand

and squeezed Tanella's hand tightly. She leaned in and they kissed each other on their cheeks.

Tanella's round face shined from a fresh wave of tears. "It's good to see you up and around Marxx. We were all so worried about you."

Rowlon crushed both Marxx and Krishta into a large bear hug, "No more scaring us like that, ok son?"

"You got it, dad," Marxx replied.

Krishta placed a small finger against a mole on Marxx's neck and pushed on it.

"What are you doing, Krishy?" Marxx asked, fingers slowly working at his niece's sides to tickle.

"Pushing your all healed button," Krishta replied in all seriousness as she tried to contain her giggles. Everyone laughed, as Krishta glanced at the adults with a confused expression.

"Where's Mom?" Marxx asked, however as soon as the words were out of his mouth, he knew her location.

"She hasn't left Raven's side since she's been here," Rowlon said.

"How're they doing?" Marxx asked.

"Your mother is exhausted, but just try getting her away from your sister... won't happen. Raven's out of her final rounds of surgery. Her heart's been repaired and she's been fitted with her new lung. She's still resting after the surgery. The healers have just said she's strong enough to leave the ICU and they're moving her to a recovery room as we speak. She's a fighter," Rowlon said, heart swelling with pride as tears formed, then rolled down his eyes.

Marxx smiled, stared off into the distance, and found it hard to speak, "Raven'll be fine. I can feel it. She's completely recovered. I'll go visit them in a little while." Marxx then glanced up at his so far silent fiancée and his heart swelled and raced as he drank in the sight of her.

Tanella felt the charge in the air as the two young lovers locked eyes. She cleared her throat, and scooped up a pouting Krishta from Marxx's lap. "Come on you, and Dad, let's go get something to eat. Marxx, you and Jaina want to meet us at the Gamorrean Blast BBQ?"

Marxx nodded his head and called out to them, "Sure, we'll meet you down there. Thank you for coming." Tanella noticed he hadn't taken his eyes off of Jaina as he spoke to them. She smiled, shook her head, figuring they would never make it to dinner, and closed the door behind them as they exited the room.

Marxx stood up and walked over to Jaina. She wore a two piece red silk outfit. The top was short and revealed her creamy mid-drift. The skirt was long with slits down the sides to allow easy mobility. Both pieces were decorated with intricate beading of exotic flowers. Jaina's chocolaty hair sat atop her head in a series of twists, held together by two long sticks. Marxx cupped her chin. His thumb lightly danced across her soft cheek. He delighted that he could sense and feel the softness of her skin, as his nerves were mostly healed.

Jaina wrapped her arms around Marxx's bare, strong back and rested her cheek on his broad chest. She inhaled his familiar, masculine scent and sighed with contentment. Marxx lowered his cheek and rested it against her soft hair. He inhaled its fruity fragrance and his spirits lifted and soared.

"How are you feeling? Are you still angry over the lose of your grandfather?" Jaina asked, worry creeping into her voice.

Marxx caressed her back and smiled atop her head, "No. I'm sad, I have bouts where I remember he's gone and I just start crying. But I guess that's how the grieving process works. I have accepted that he's dead and there was nothing I, or anyone could have done to prevent it...it was just his time. He lived a pretty good and full life... I'm just glad that I was proven wrong and Raven had nothing to do with his death. I feel truly guilty for thinking that."

"How exactly did you figure that out?" Jaina asked staring up into Marxx's big blue eyes.

"She sent me all of her memories at...a very crucial moment. I almost gave into the Dark Side. I couldn't control my rage," he squeezed Jaina tighter, and smiled. "My sister saved me, same as your brother saved her."

Jaina grinned recalling her brother's recent devout attention to Raven this past week. She said, "He does seem quite taken with her, doesn't he? You know he hasn't even left here all week?"

"I got the impression from Raven's encounters with him that Jacen was... enamoured with her, to say the least," Marxx replied with a small laugh.

"You think we'll have a double wedding?" Jaina said, her voice rising with excitement.

Laughing Marxx replied, "I think my sister has a long road ahead of her before she can ready to marry. I don't know about you, but I have no intention of waiting for them for us to get married."

Jaina grinned. "I don't feel much like waiting either," her face turned serious, "I was so worried about you. Nobody told me what was going on with you while I was fighting. When I saw your face contorting, then you passed out, I felt so lost and confused. I didn't know what was going on... and... I thought I was going to lose you. I don't know what would have happened to me if that had happened," Jaina said as she felt the burn of tears rise in her eyes.

A spasm rippled down Marxx's back as he caressed her soft cheek. He gazed lovingly down into Jaina's brandy eyes. "I'm just glad they found out that I shouldn't be doing that moving through the Force thing, anymore. Last thing I would ever want is to just vanish on you. We may only be 'luminous beings,' but I'm pretty particular to my physical form, you know? Know why?"

"Why?" Jaina asked, arching an eyebrow.

"Because spirits can't do this," he said. Marxx tilted Jaina's head to the left and captured her soft crimson lips with his own. Jaina pressed her hands tightly against his back as she melted into the light-headed, time-stopping sensation of pleasure, produced by their kiss. Marxx gently fell backwards onto his bed and lifted Jaina off of her feet. She began to giggle and they broke free of their kiss. The silky fabric on her outfit made her slide awkwardly over his body. She flicked her feet upwards, plucked her hands out from underneath him. She sat up, placed her hands on her hips and cocked her head.



“Even though the healers have given you a clean bill of health, I think I need to thoroughly examine you myself, to make sure your nerves are healed,” Jaina said, raising an eyebrow.

Marxx quizzically stared at her and asked, “What did you have in mind M’lady?”

Jaina responded by mercilessly tickling his bare sides and stomach. Marxx issued out peels of joyous laughter as Jaina’s tears vanished from her eyes, to be replaced by devilish merriment as she laughed. Jaina’s hair fell out of her twists and spiraled into brown drifts down her shoulders and onto Marxx’s bare skin; tickling his chest further. His laughter intensified. Marxx somehow managed to reclaim and still her hands and save his aching sides from laughter. Breathlessly he said, “My stars, I love you woman. I never feel more alive then when I’m with you.”

Jaina broke free of his grasp. She bit her lip, eyes twinkled, and seductively traced the muscled outlines on his chest with her fingers, and through the few soft drifts of dark hair that lined his chest. Softly she kissed his stomach just above his pants line. Her lips trailed slowly up to his chest, and she heard Marxx let out a deep sighing moan.

“Ummmm... you’re right, feels all human and alive to me... I’d better check up here,” Jaina said eyes alit with delight. She thrust her hair back over her shoulders, straddling his body and kissed her way past his pectorals and up to his neck. Her lips and tongue explored the gentle curves in his neck, tasting the lightest hint of salt. Now the spasms surging through Marxx were from pleasure, not pain. He placed his hands on her shapely hips and laughed lightly as Jaina moved up to his chin and gently bit on it. Marxx twisted himself over and pinned Jaina to the bed. Marxx traced the floral pattern on her tunic with his fingers, starting from her stomach, over her ample breast and up to her neckline. Jaina felt pleasurable shivers run through her body as she enjoyed his closeness. Marxx nuzzled her neck, earning a slight gasp from Jaina’s lips. He then kissed his way up to her ear that he nibbled. Giggling, Jaina’s right hand danced across his chest then moved around his back, then she turned his face back towards hers. Their eyes met and then lips joined and locked into a deep probing kiss. Their legs twisted and entwined together as they kissed each other passionately, enjoying the reality of their youthful existence and love.

Jaina pulled away from him, and glanced at his dark curly bangs. She then mapped a finger over his deep red, throbbing full lips from which quickened breaths escaped. “I love you, Marxx Racees. You are my life.” Jaina grabbed his lips once more with hers, then sat up and vaulted off of the bed, no longer trusting herself to not give into her physical desires. She pulled her red tunic and skirt back down into place. “Come on, we should go meet up with your family for dinner.”

Marxx lay on his side on the bed, resting up on his elbow. He picked up Jaina’s hair sticks and twirled one lightly in his nimble fingers. He flashed her a lopsided smile, “Sure, mention my family to kill the mood.” His smoldering eyes however, spoke exactly the opposite of his words. Marxx stood up and placed the hair accoutrements in her waiting, open palm. Jaina raised her hands up and expertly worked her hair back into twisting knots. She thrust her fists to her waist and smiled up at him, “Exactly what are you waiting for.... Get dressed, Jedi.”

Marxx snatched her up in his muscular arms, and dipped her low. He pulled her back up and kissed her one last time, grabbed her hand, and sent her twirling away from him. Jaina laughed as her blood spun. Her cheeks flushed from excitement. Marxx then located his white shirt and finished dressing. After gathering his things, the two young lovers left his recovery room arm in arm.

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## Chapter 41

The days passed in agony for Jacen as he watched Raven move in and out of surgery after surgery. Then she would be moved into bacta tanks to help seal the incision marks from her operations. Jacen and Raven's family often stood side by side silently watching her progress from afar.

Finally on the seventh day Raven was out of danger and was healed. The medics declared her heart and lung replacement surgeries as successful. They moved Raven out of the ICU and into a recovery room. Jacen sat in the waiting room down the hall as the medicenter personal settled Raven into her new room.

Leia, dressed in a freshly pressed in a tan jumpsuit, hair woven into a single long braid, approached her bedraggled son. Jacen's light brown hair stuck out in all directions, his brown eyes were framed bloodshot, and his shirt and pants were wrinkled beyond hope. She sat down next to him and rubbed her right hand across his drooping shoulders. "I think it would be wise if we all head to Naboo."

"Ok, I'll meet up with you there," Jacen said, eyes drifting back down the hallway towards Raven's room.

Leia gently turned Jacen's face towards hers, "No, sweetie, that includes you..." Jacen opened his mouth to protest. "Listen to me. Raven needs her family right now. They all need to get reacquainted and they have a lot of emotional wounds that they need to heal. Chariss appreciates how much you care for her daughter, but I really think it would be best if we all left them alone." Jacen's lower lip trembled. "I know you care deeply for Raven, but she needs time alone with her family. Marxx is going to stay behind, so she will have a friendly face around. We are all going to help them out by heading to Naboo to assist with arranging Paulo's funeral."

Jacen hung his head, "So you don't think I should be here at all. She'll think I abandoned her."

Leia smiled at her son's obvious heartache, "You can leave her a message and explain why you left. If she cares about you as much as you care for her, she'll understand. Besides the Racees will be returning to Naboo in no time. You can be there to support Raven at the funeral."

Nodding his head slightly, Jacen saw the logic in what his mother had said. He glanced up at his mother with red eyes. "You're right. She needs to be with her family. I'd just be in the way of her bonding with them. I need to make her a message, maybe get some flowers for her...." He stood up suddenly filled with purpose.

Leia smiled at him, "You also need to rest, get cleaned up, and change your clothes. We can get the bouquet and message to her tomorrow. Come on, let's go home."

Jacen stared strangely at his mother, then looked down at his clothes. He realized he probably hadn't really slept or left the medicenter for days. He nodded his head and let his mother led him back to the family apartment.

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Holding a large bouquet of lilies in a crystal vase and a blue box with a holonote attached to the outside of it, Jacen opened the door to Raven's recovery room. Rowlon had somehow convinced Chariss to leave for the morning, allowing Jacen to have a few moments alone with a resting Raven.

Jacen felt human again after a good night's sleep, now wearing clean clothes, and thoroughly scrubbed, shaven, and cleaned. He set the flowers and blue box down by her bedside table. He settled into a chair next to the bed and drank in the sight of an unmasked, healthy Raven.

Raven's freshly washed, dark brunette hair billowed around her porcelain white face that was kissed with the warmth of a healthy rosy glow. Jacen stared at her features, burning the details and contours of her serene profile into his memory. Her dark eyebrows perfectly framed her long dark eyelashes. Her perky nose rose over softly curving cheekbones. Jacen stared longingly at Raven's full red lips, slightly parted as she breathed peacefully in and out while she slept. Jacen lightly picked up her hand and stared at her long, delicate fingers; her nails were now pink and healthy. He noticed peeking out from the top of her nightgown the top of her scar from where the medics had opened her chest to repair her heart and lung. To him that scar was beautiful, for it meant that Raven was alive and healthy.

Jacen's heart swelled, throat constricted, and tears threatened to cascade down his face as a realization struck him like lightning. Raven was the woman from his dream. Her laugh, her height perfectly matched the girl from his vision. He silently cursed himself for being so blind. "Bless the Force," he whispered as the tears began to fall.

Raven's beauty in his dream didn't nearly compare with how gorgeous she was in real life. She reminded him of the statues he'd seen of the ethereal angels of Iego. Those women bore the striking resemblance to goddesses. Gazing upon Raven, he couldn't see the difference, and he didn't think that was just because he was biased. His heart pounded. He only wished he could see her eyes, held captive behind her delicate eyelids. Then again, he thought that if she did open her eyes, he'd probably end up swooning in a very unmanly manner.

He knew his time was limited, as his family was readying themselves to depart for Naboo. Gulping hard, Jacen placed her hand on her chest, stood up and leaned over her. He brushed his fingers through her soft hair, releasing a spicy sweet fragrance. He closed his eyes, inhaled deeply, and smiled. Her shampoo and the sweet smell of lilies, would forever remind him of Raven.

Apprehension gripped Jacen's heart. He raked his fingers through his sandy brown hair. He hesitated slightly and peeked up at the observation window on the left wall. No one stood out looking in. He licked his lips, then blotted them together, trying to make them not too wet or too dry. His palms began to sweat. Jacen hovered over her thick, ruby red lips and gently pressed his lips against hers for a few seconds in a sweet, chaste kiss. His heart thundered in his chest; he feared its sound would wake his sleeping beauty from her slumber. Then he lifted himself up and away from her face certain that is what happened. A small smile formed on Raven's lips, yet she continued to sleep.

The tears flowed freely from Jacen's eyes. He gazed down at Marxx's twin and gently held her hand again. He brought her palm up to his lips and kissed her hand. Then barely above a whisper, Jacen mouthed, "Sleep well my goddess, I think I've fallen in love you."

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Silence. The first conscious thing Raven sensed and heard was blinding silence. Aboard her ship, her

bedroom had been fitted with a large throbbing air circulation system. The silence terrified her. From somewhere in her surroundings, Raven smelled flowers.

Raven then felt warmth brush her bare arms and the light behind her closed eyelids was bright. She slowly opened her eyes and squeezed them shut from the overpowering blinding light of her recovery room. She pried her right eye open and adjusted to the glowing white walls. Then she opened her left eye. Always living behind a tinted shield, her eyes didn't quite know how to react in direct light.

Raven then noticed her chest rising and falling steadily on its own. She listened for the rasping sound that usually accompanied her breathing. Fright crept into her mind as she realized she could breathe silently. She placed a hand on her chest, and stared at her fingers. Her mouth fell agape as she threw her hand up in front of her face. She raised her other hand up as well and stared in wonderment at her fingernails; they were pink and rosy in color. Raven examined her skin and noticed that overall her tone appeared healthier, pinker, the sheets were not even red. The sheets were white, and her skin appeared to glow on its own.

Turned her head to the right, Raven saw a blue box sitting on the bedside table next to a large flower bouquet of lilies. For some reason, they reminded her of Jacen. Her eyes lingered on the flowers and a confused smile graced her lips looking at them. Her fingers flitted to the holo-note. She turned it on and a tiny holo-image of Jacen stood before her eyes. He grinned at the camera, *"When you wake up I won't be on Coruscant. My family is returning to Naboo to assist your extended family in preparing for your Grandfather's funeral."* Jacen shifted uncomfortably, ran his fingers through his hair, and bit on his lip. He continued, *"I hope you enjoy your gift I left for you, so you can see the beautiful woman that I see whenever I look at you. Of course, you're even more beautiful, on the inside....I will be waiting anxiously for your return. I miss you already."* Raven's heart swelled at his words. She watched him breath in and out uncomfortably for a few seconds, trying to form words, it was as if words had caught in his throat that he could not get out. Finally he spoke again, *"Take care, I'll be waiting for you."*

Raven grabbed the box excitedly and opened the lid. Inside held an antique tortoise shell bedside mirror. She gently let her fingers brush against the smooth outside frame. The mirror was beautiful, and must have cost Jacen quite a few credits. Her cheeks blushed. Licking her lips nervously, Raven closed her eyes and raised the mirror to her face. She counted to three, then she opened her eyes. In the mirror she saw an unrecognizable face. The girl in the mirror's cheeks glowed with a healthy reddish pink hue. Her eyelids were light peachy pink. But she could only stare at her lips, they were a deep natural cherry color. She pressed her fingers to her lips and felt heat radiating from them, whereas for years they would be ice cold.

"What's happened to me?" Raven whispered. She nearly dropped her mirror and jumped out of her skin when she detected movement from the peripheral vision of her left eye. From a couch, her mother stirred. Chariss drank in the sight of her full grown, bewildered looking daughter. She moved over to the chair that rested next to Raven's bed.

"How are you feeling, sweetie?" Chariss asked nervously lacing her fingers together. She wanted to envelop her in her arms, but knew better than to force herself upon her fragile daughter. Raven stared at her mother. Her wrinkled clothes looked like she hadn't changed them in two days.

"I'm feeling... great, actually. What happened to me?"

"You've had open heart surgery to repair the hole that was in your heart. You had the hole ever since

you were born. What it did was, it didn't allow for your blood to flow properly throughout your body. That's why you had problems breathing and your lips and fingers were blue. We had always planned on having that hole fixed, but the healers on Tatooine didn't want to do it when you were so young. They feared that when you grew the repairs would get damaged," Chariss gently brushed a clump of rich chestnut hair out of Raven's face. "You've also been fitted with a new synthetic lung, so you'll be able to breathe perfectly on your own. My little Raven is no longer broken, but whole."

Raven's eyes turned red as tears welled then fell down her face. She dropped the mirror in her lap, placed the back of her hand against her mouth and tried to stifle her rising sobs. She gazed upon her disheveled mother through her waterfall of tears and gasped, "Can you ever forgive me, Mother?"

Chariss had thought she was cried out this past week, however fresh tears burned her eyes and traveled down her face. She choked out, "Forgive you? Forgive you? My little girl, my angel, can you ever forgive *me*?"

Raven's chin began to twitch and quiver. She openly began to bawl. She held up her arms and caught her mother in a tight embrace. The mother and daughter issued their silent forgiveness to each other and began their long road to emotional recovery.

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From out in the corridor, Luke and Kyp silently watched the Racees mother and daughter embrace.

"You understand why it must be done this way?" Luke asked.

"Yes, Master. She will be imprisoned if she is not trained to be a Jedi," Kyp replied, his deep voice rumbled down the corridor.

"Do you think you can handle what I'm requesting of you, Kyp? Let me know now, because otherwise I'll take care of this myself," Luke said, staring at his young friend in the eye.

Kyp turned away from Luke's burning gaze and watched the dark haired girl. Her face, buried in her mother's shoulder hid her beauty that he'd only briefly glimpsed while she peacefully slept. Kyp scratched his strong, straight nose, "Master Skywalker, you know I no longer have any desire to use the Dark Side. Raven will need to learn to use the Force differently. I think I am the perfect candidate you could have selected to be her Master." Kyp's stern green eyes locked with Luke's. "She will learn to be a proper Jedi under my watchful eye."

A smile crept across Luke's lips. He good naturedly pounded Kyp on the shoulder, "I knew I could count on you."

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## Chapter 42

Jacen nervously paced across Jaina's rented bungalow's living room in the Lake County on Naboo. Raven was coming home...today. Jacen stared at himself in Jaina's long mirror. He wore a pale blue dress shirt, a golden embroidered vest, navy slacks, and polished black boots. On his broad shoulders rested his black Jedi robe.

“Is the cape too much?” he asked Jaina.

Jaina sat on her plush couch with an amused expression on her face. She’d never seen or felt her twin so at ill-ease before. She unlaced her legs and stood up, and walked behind him. She peered around his reflection in the mirror and from behind, wrapped her arms up to the clasp on his cape and readjusted its collar. Her hands then settled on his shoulders. “You look gorgeous, Jacen. She’ll love your Jedi cape. Keep it on.”

Wheeling around Jacen looked over his sister. She wore a long straight royal blue dress, complete with her brown Jedi robe covering it. Her hair rested in two small buns on either side of her head, covered with golden baskets. The rest of her hair fell in cascading waves down her back.

“When are you guys going to tell everyone you’re engaged?” Jacen asked, hoping for something to distract his attention.

“Marxx and I discussed this last night over the holo, if the mood is light at the wake, we will announce it there. If it’s really somber, we’ll probably wait until dinner tomorrow night. We’d prefer though tonight when both of our extended families will be there,” Jaina said. She grinned devilishly, “Mom knows, she didn’t tell Dad yet. This should be fun!”

“You’re rotten to him, you know that?” Jacen said folding his arms and flashing her a lopsided smile.

“That’s the job of daughters, to make their fathers worried sick. I hope that you and Raven don’t have a gaggle of girls one day. They’ll drive you insane!” Jaina said, eyes twinkling.

Jacen’s heart pounded as the thought of how children were conceived flashed through his mind. He felt light headed and unsteady on his feet. “Uh, that’s a little...presumptuous of you, isn’t it?”

Jaina giggled, “Meaning what brother? Come on, I know you’re in love with her.”

Closing his eyes, Jacen nodded slightly. Then he flashed her a comical smile, “Possibly. You know what you’re going to get?”

“What?” Jaina said placing hands on hips.

“Nothing but daughters who all want to play dress up in pink frilly dresses, and play with dolls, and who all want nothing to do with engines!” Jacen said. He howled with laughter at his twin’s shocked and horrified expression.

Images of being bored stiff playing with dolls with little laced and puffy girls flashed through Jaina’s brain. She muttered, “Bless the Force, let me pray for sons.”

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The Lake County Resort’s outdoor patios filled with somber members of the Brannoush and Nabierre families. The Solo twins had arrived well before the Racees arrived back on Naboo in order to help their mother greet all the guests. Dozens of water skiffs waited for the arrival of the Paulo’s immediate family before the funeral would begin. Jacen wove his way between the funeral guests and raced to the

back of the resort every time he heard a new skiff arrive. Anakin watched his brother in amusement.

Each time the new skiff would not bring the Racees, his face would fall. Anakin nudged him after about the tenth time. “A watched pot never boils, right?”

“What?” Jacen said glancing at his younger brother in annoyance.

“She’ll only show up when you don’t run over here. Just relax will you?” Anakin said, folding his arms on his chest, blue eyes twinkling.

Jacen arched an eyebrow at Anakin and wiped excess sweat from his brow, “Just wait until the bug bites you my brother. Then trust me, you’ll be as insane as I am.”

Anakin broadly smiled.

“What?” Jacen asked, rolling his eyes.

“I told you so,” Anakin said as he began to chuckle. Jacen whirled around and saw three skiffs arrive carrying Rowlon, Chariss, Tanella, Krishta, Marxx, Raven, Han, and Chewie.

Anakin pinwheeled his arms as Jacen plowed into him and raced to the top of the stairs. His heart pounded in his chest. Jaina arrived at his side and placed a calming hand on his shoulder.

From below, Marxx hopped out of the skiff and offered a hand to his twin to help her out of the gently swaying boat. Shrouded in a hooded robe, Raven grabbed her brother’s hands and unsteadily ascended to the dock. Raven felt slightly nauseous at the prospect of being around so many people so soon after her surgery. She worried what people would think of her and her actions.

Marxx turned around and shielded his eyes from the lowering, blinding sun in the sky that sparkled through the canopy of leaves towering over the resort. He saw Jaina and Jacen waiting for them above and waved. Jaina smiled as she saw Marxx wearing her favorite blue vest over a silky white shirt.

“He’s here, waiting, just as I told you he would be,” Marxx said to Raven. She peered up from under her hood and felt her heart skip a beat, and her mouth went dry as she caught sight of Jacen. She feared what he would think of her outside her mask. She had replayed his holo-note message over and over until she accidentally hit the wrong button and erased the message. Marxx spent several hours trying to console her after that mishap.

Jacen’s words, burned into her memory, haunted her “*I hope you enjoy your gift I left for you, so you can see the beautiful woman that I see whenever I look at you...*” She doubted he meant that. He was gone long before she came out of her surgery, right? He didn’t know what she looked like. As she and Marxx slowly and cautiously climbed the stairs behind her parents, sister and niece, she could feel Jacen’s apprehension and nervousness.

A cool breeze swooshed over the lakes, lifted the scents of flowers and salt, through the air, and rustled Raven’s hood, bringing it in tighter around her face. The golden sun sent bright flashes of light sparkling all over the stone walls.

As the Racees parents and Tanella crested the stairs Jaina and Jacen embraced each family friend.

Chariss, Rowlon, Tanella, and Krishta found themselves swept in a sea of open embracing arms from their friends and families.

Han and Chewie stood at the bottom of the pier and watched as the Racees twins finally arrived at the top of the stairs. Han stared at Marxx as he reached out to Jaina. Marxx spent a large part of the ride back to Naboo groveling to Han after abandoning his fellow Jedis. Marxx had even offered to personally clean out the *Falcon's* thermal exhaust ports. Chewie bellowed at Han as he had sat scratching his chin, considering taking Marxx up on his offer. Han scowled at his first mate and finally agreed to let Marxx off of the hook.

Marxx wrapped his arms tightly around Jaina and watched his sister and best friend with curiosity. Raven stood before Jacen with her head down hood obscuring her face. Terror caused her heart to thump wildly. Jacen furrowed his eyebrows and he peeked a questioning glance at Marxx. Marxx and Jaina stepped away from them, wide grins plastered across their faces. Raven's anxiety hit Jacen full force so he opted for the easy way to ease her worries. Gently he wrapped his arms around her cloaked form and together they softly swayed in the wind. Tears lined Raven's eyes as her arms snaked around Jacen's broad back. She dug her fingers tightly into the folds of his robe. Raven inhaled Jacen's warm, clean, masculine scent and felt her worries slightly lift.

Jacen gently kissed her head, still shrouded in her hood. His heart pounded with joy as he held Raven in his arms. Around them swirled the soft, quietly reverential voices of the family members. The only occasional break in the quietude was from the high-pitched cry or giggling laugh of a small child.

Raven rested her head on Jacen's shoulder and sighed with contentment when she felt him kiss the side of her head. She figured she'd better put him out of his misery. She carefully let go of his waist and stood apart from him. As her long fingers laced around the sides of her hood, a brisk breeze ripped through the valley, pushing her hood off her face and blasted apart the branches of the canopy of trees above them. A bright flash of golden sunlight illuminated her heart shaped face. Jacen couldn't breathe as he stared at Raven's gorgeous face. Although pretty before, her ice blue eyes, her glorious eyes, positively radiated her beauty. Jacen believed that a goddess had suddenly materialized in front of him. The wind sent her long, dark, unbound hair crashing about her head like waves onto rocks and the prickling coolness stung and brightened the pink in her cheeks.

Marxx and Jaina shared an amused smile as they watched Jacen's legs nearly buckle. Anakin stood off in the distance with his fist in his mouth, desperately containing his laughs. Jacen threw a hand out onto the carved balcony to support himself. Jacen feared he would fall down the stone stairs from swooning. Raven's brows crinkled with concern as Jacen's face turned pale and he shot a hand up to his face as sweat beaded up on his forehead.

Tears welled in her light eyes. Raven said chin quivering, "I knew it, I'm ugly."

Jacen barely heard her at first, as his ears seemed to only register the distorted sound of being under water, as he was truly drowning in Raven's beauty. He tried desperately to regain his senses, "What?" He shook his head and color returned to his face. He placed his hands on either side of her face and stared deeply into her tear brimmed eyes, "Raven, you'll have to excuse me for being an idiot. I...I ... you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen in my life."

Raven didn't know how to respond to that, her heart felt like it crashed down into her shoes, then soared up to her throat. Before she could reply everyone started milling together back towards the stairs



to begin the funeral. Jacen pulled Raven aside as Chariss, Rowlon, Tanella, and Krishta headed down the stairs. Marxx, large grin etched on his face, signaled for Jacen and Raven to go down next. Jacen offered Raven his arm and the two floated down the stairs with Marxx and Jaina following behind. Julillia and Marckos and their sons followed behind. The rest of the Brannoushes filled the next rounds of skiffs, followed by the Nabierres and Solos. The foremost skiff held Paulo's body in his coffin. The next of the skiffs followed somberly behind it.

Jacen cradled Raven next to him and noticed her eyes squinting at the bright glare of the sun shining off of the waves. He cupped her chin and raised her face to greet his. Jacen licked his lips, desperately wanted to kiss her, but knew that would be entirely inappropriate. Instead he flashed her a large smile. Raven felt a smile caress her lips as she sensed the turmoil brewing in Jacen's mind. She turned her head and rested it against his strong shoulder. In the seat behind them, Marxx and Jaina cuddled and shared a smile as they watched their twins get closer.

The skiffs rounded the resort and headed towards Paulo's favorite small island. As Paulo's skiff neared the water's edge, four Nubian acolytes from the local monastery greeted the boat, and gently lifted the coffin up out of it. They placed it upon their shoulders and walked through the sand. Each skiff unloaded its passengers and the funeral parties all followed the acolytes. In the center of the small island the ground was firmer and in the center of it rested a newly constructed, finely decorated, large mausoleum tomb. The acolytes rested Paulo's intricately carved coffin on a raised platform that rested outside of the tomb.

The local holy man blessed the family and friends and then Paulo, consecrating his body and soul to the heavens and stars. He gloried in the accomplishments of the man in his life and his exemplifying the Nubian principals of life: Beauty, love, art, and truth.

It was discovered by the coroner's office that Paulo had clogged arteries and died of natural causes. When the holy man reminded this to the crowd, Marxx felt a deep stab of guilt and shame that he had ever believed that his sister could have been responsible in his death. Raven sensed his distress and squeezed her twin's hand. Marxx turned and faced his sister and offered her a small smile of thanks through his tearing eyes.

As the Holy Man wound down towards the end of the ceremony, from across the lake the bells at the monastery began to chime, echoing their joyous sounds throughout the valley. The wind snatched up a flurry of leaves and sent them sailing off across the lake from the island. Overhead a flock of songbirds flew merrily chirping in time with the bells. It seemed as if the wind and the birds carried away Paulo's spirit and soul.

Chariss and Rowlon approached the coffin and placed their hands upon it. Tears streamed down Chariss' face as she whispered her goodbyes to her father. Rowlon held her tight in his strong arms. Tanella and Krishta approached the coffin, Krishta's small hand held tightly into her mothers.

"Goodbye, Grandfather Paulo, I will always love you," Krishta said, causing her mother to burst into a fresh round of tears. Paulo's sister Julillia and her husband Marckos approached the coffin next and each issued their own quiet goodbyes.

Marxx and Jaina walked up to the coffin next. Jaina's hand brushed against the smooth Nubian oak wood and silently gave Paulo thanks, *"Thank you for being such a great family friend, and leading me to the love of my life."*

Jacen gripped Raven's hand and lead her towards the casket. Her drawn face stared at the coffin. She placed both hands on the coffin, then rested her cheek on the wood. "I never got to know you, grandfather. That will be something I will regret for the rest of my life. Thank you for taking care of my family and keeping them safe all these years. I promise...promise, pick up your flame and make you proud." Jacen gently took her hand and pulled her away as the acolytes moved in around the coffin.

The acolytes picked up Paulo's coffin and delivered it into the mausoleum. From inside it's marble walls they began to chant and sing. The strong young male voices echoed eerily in the chamber then lifted and filled the valley with their heart-wrenching, soulful song.

The sun crested over the ridge and bathed the valley in one last shining bright ray of light, before it descended towards its nightly journey. The funeral party turned and silently left as the door on the tomb closed, leaving Paulo forever in the center of his favorite valley, embraced by the hills of his youth and the waters of his most remembered and enjoyed carefree days.

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## Chapter 43

Although the occasion should have been somber, once the funeral attendees returned to the resort, the mood brightened considerably. The resort housed a large hall where all the guests amassed. On the walls hung dozens of Paulo's paintings. His family and friends celebrated his artistic life, by enjoying the evening with laughter. Soft music echoed through the room off of the marble walls, adding the final element of joy to the occasion.

Jaina and Marxx stood out on the balcony overlooking the calm lake, bathed in moonlight.

"This is where we got engaged," Marxx said as he took Jaina's small creamy hands in his and stared down at her serene, beautiful face. His eyes lingered to the small buns that rested on her head and smiled.

"I know," Jaina said. She beamed and let her eyes linger over Marxx's strong, handsome facial features.

Marxx enfolded her in his arms and inhaled the sweet fruitiness of Jaina's shampoo: her scent, his Jaina. "That seems like a lifetime ago instead of a only a couple of weeks, doesn't it?"

"Yes, and so much has changed in our lives... in your life," Jaina replied, rubbing her chin against his soft robe. Marxx's aftershave tickled and embraced her nose. A cool breeze flew throughout the valley sending a shiver through Jaina. Marxx embraced her tighter to maintain their warmth.

"I can't believe I have Raven back. It's so bizarre. You are right about that twin link thing though, I have a feeling that even if she was all the way across the galaxy I would know what she was thinking and feeling," Marxx replied.

"As do I with Jacen. Course," Jaina said grinning, "I think they're both feeling pretty much the same thing right now."

“Fear?” Marxx said.

Jaina pinched him lightly through his robe. “No silly. I think they’re falling in love.”

“Oww,” Marxx said rubbing his stomach. “Actually, my sister is feeling fear at the moment. I wonder what’s wrong.”

“Sorry,” Jaina said, biting her lip.

Marxx laughed, “M’lady, I’m actually just glad that I was able to feel that.”

From inside the reception hall, an overwhelming sense of claustrophobia, crashing towards full blown panic blanketed Raven as she sifted through the throngs of well wishers. Although her extended family seemed nice enough, she didn’t feel ready for this kind of a gathering. Jacen noted the frightened look in her eyes, the paling of her skin, sensed her unease, and suggested they head outdoors. Jacen and Raven walked past Marxx and Jaina and sat down outside on a stone bench overlooking the sparkling lake. Raven gulped in the clean air. Jacen sat several inches away from her in order to give her room to breathe. He gazed at Raven as the pale moonlight illuminated her alabaster skin.

“You better now?” Jacen asked.

Raven exhaled deeply, “Yes. Thank you.”

Raven’s light eyes glowed in the moonlight as she looked down at the distance between them on the bench. With a small smirk, she scooted over beside him and rested her head on Jacen’s shoulder. Jacen’s breath puffed quickly into the crisp air. He fought a battle with his sleeve and gently pushed Raven aside. He then extended his right arm out. Raven stood up and sat down in the folds of his robe. They snuggled together into the folds and quietly sat together. The chattering from the room behind them blurred into a muted hum. Raven concentrated on the gentle rise and fall of Jacen’s chest. Her anxieties melted away as she deeply breathed in Jacen’s masculine scent.

“It’s so bright,” Raven said, staring up at the moon.

“What is?” Jacen replied.

“The moon. I lived the last six years of my life living behind a tinted shield. I didn’t remember how *vibrant* things looked on their own,” she said and turned her face towards Jacen. Their eyes locked, “I don’t think I’ll ever take anything for granted again.”

Lips slightly parting, Jacen’s eyes etched the contours of Raven’s face into his memory. With nervous, tentative fingers, he gently brushed a stray clump of hair from her face, resting it behind her ear. Raven stared into his dark eyes, and felt her senses drown. Raven’s eyes drifted to his open generous lips, inviting to be kissed. Jacen stared longingly at Raven and experienced a flash of goosebumps break out across his skin. Her eyes spoke to him of her interest, and desire as her breathing quickened.

Jaina nudged Marxx as they spied on their siblings. Both seemed to be stuck in time, poised perfectly over each other’s face, ready to be kissed.

“Kiss her you fool,” Jaina whispered, as she wrapped her own arms tightly around Marxx’s waist.

Jacen and Raven stared at each other, their eyes searching each other's face with uncertainty.

"You are beautiful, Raven... inside and out. How did I ever get to be so lucky as to find someone as amazing as you?" Jacen said as he brushed his quivering fingers from his left hand against her cool, soft cheek.

Raven's heart pounded in her chest as tears welled in her eyes. She thrust up her right hand to brush them away. Jacen took her hand lightly and softly kissed away her salty tears.

"I don't deserve you," Raven said, voice quaking.

Jacen gazed at her shimmering eyes as he pulled away from her face. He gently caressed her long fingers, "What is that supposed to mean? I'm not anyone special, I'm just a guy who wants to be in your life. If anything I should be the one saying that I don't deserve you. How could I? What did I possibly do to deserve the company of the most beautiful angel in the galaxy?"

Raven squeaked an unbelieving laugh. Determined she said, "I'm not beautiful."

Chuckling Jacen watched her blue eyes as they searched his face. "No you're not beautiful. There's no word in the whole of existence that describes you... luminous maybe, radiant, gorgeous, breathtaking. My heart constricts in my chest when I'm around you. It's almost overwhelmed by how closely you resemble a heavenly creature."

Snuggling close to him to hide the flush in her cheeks Raven said, "Oh stop it."

Jacen grinned and crushed her tightly towards his chest, "You know I had a dream once that showed me that it was my job to make you happy."

Raven smiled quizzically at him, "What do you mean?"

"You were running away from me in a field and I rescued you," Jacen said, lopsided smile on his face. "Course I didn't know it was you until I finally saw you without your mask on..."

"What?" Raven said, her heart pounding.

"What, what?" Jacen asked, thrown off by her question.

"What was I wearing?" Raven asked, eyebrows knitted together.

*"Blast it, looks like she's already turned into a typical woman, asking about her clothes,"* Jacen thought unhappily. He furrowed his brows, desperately reliving the dream, "Ummm... you were wearing a long, flowing, pink dress and... you were barefoot!"

Raven narrowed her eyes at him and got very excited, "I had that same dream! It was because of that dream, I sensed, knew, that I could trust you."

"We shared a dream? Guess the Force is telling us something, isn't it?" Jacen said, flashing her a lopsided smile. Jacen wondered if she also experienced that kiss in her dream as well.

“Maybe...this?” Raven asked, peaking an eyebrow.

“Wha...” Before Jacen could finish his sentence Raven swooped in, cradled his chin in her hand, and captured his lips. Jacen slightly squeaked in surprise, causing his mouth to open slightly as he smiled. The swapping of their lips positions resulted in them falling into a deeper kiss. Jacen tightened his grip around Raven’s waist and pulled her tighter to him, not wanting to let her go. Raven grinned, blissfully shutting out the entire world around them as they explored each other’s lips and mouths. Her heart raced. Jacen lightly reached down and cradled Raven onto his lap. Raven’s eyes opened wide, her heart pounded with a surging feeling of euphoria as their lips continued in their quest and journey. Jacen wrapped his robe around them both, hiding them from prying sibling eyes, to allow them the joy of their first kiss in private.

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Hair arranged in a tall pile of braids and dressed in a long deep eggplant pantsuit with black lace overcoat, Leia mingled through the crowd looking for her children.

Anakin stood in the corner of the room, carbonated drink in hand talking to several of Marxx’s young female cousins. His bright blue eyes sparkled at the overwhelming attention the giggling girls bestowed upon the handsome, unattached Jedi. One of the girls, blond haired Layla placed a hand on his arm, leaned in and whispered something to Anakin. Anakin bent forward, captivated by her words. Leia shook her head as she thought gloomily, *“I suppose his time will be coming as well.”*

Out on the cool balcony Leia found Jaina and Marxx. They stood side by side on the balcony deep in conspiring conversation.

The light from the cheery room silhouetted Leia’s slim form. From behind her, Han embraced her in his strong arms.

“They’re going to be married and have kids of their own some day soon, won’t they?” Han’s rich voice spoke into her ear.

“Yes. They will be married, and we will be old and gray,” Leia said, as she thought of Sola, her family’s matriarch and realized one day she would take her place.

“Well they can’t stay young forever, and neither can we,” Han said. His mind wandered to how increasingly hard it was to get up each morning without hearing his bones creak.

“It’s the natural order of life, I suppose,” Leia replied.

Leia turned her head and noticed a lump sitting on a bench far off in the patio. Jacen’s head jerked up and out of his robe as he felt his mother’s stare. *“Oh oh, how are we gonna get out of this one?”* Jacen thought. Suddenly, Jacen and Raven fell backwards off of the bench in a pile of flailing legs and arms. A sickening thud of flesh meeting stone filled the air.

“Oww,” Jacen cursed. When his head met the hard stone ground he briefly saw an explosion of stars. He placed fingers behind his head, and they came back clean. No blood.

From atop of him Raven's eyes filled with concern and merriment, as she unsuccessfully fought back a case of the giggles, "Are you Ok?"

Jacen chuckled, as his cheeks turned a bright crimson, "Sure, no problem." They detangled themselves and tried to regain their dignity as they stood up. Jacen plucked a leaf out of Raven's now messy hair.

Leia, smirked and shook her head at her son and his new girlfriend. She walked away from Han, leaving him alone in the doorway. He watched his wife approach Jaina and Marxx and gesture towards the crowded room. Marxx and Jaina grinned. Marxx called over to Raven and Jacen to join them inside. Raven and Jacen laced fingers and followed behind. Han cuffed his son on the ear as they passed into the room.

Marxx gulped and stood before Han, "Good evening, sir. We...ah..."

Before he could say anything further, Jaina pulled him deep into the room and away from her father. Marxx threw back an apologetic smile to his future father-in-law. At the far northern wall of the room sat a raised platform that would normally hold a band. Tonight it held a microphone and a couple of Paulo's paintings, including Raven's rarely seen painting, and several large floral bouquets. Marxx glanced around the room. The walls reached sixty feet high, cascading up into a peaked, domed center. Climbing trumpet vines darted up the walls, dotting with bright orange flowers as a natural decoration. Tall stained glass windows encircled the outside of the copper domed roof, their images, now dark and hidden in the night. The tan stone walls helped to maintain the sound in the room, without muffling it.

Jaina turned on the microphone and blew into it. Electronic feedback echoed throughout the room, instantly causing everyone to cover their ears, and cease talking. Jaina quickly changed the frequency on the mic, "Sorry about that." She glanced at Marxx. His heart skipped out of its normal rhythm as he realized the magnitude of what he was about to say to a room crushed full of people. He cradled Jaina's arm protectively.

"I'd like to thank you all for being here today. My grandfather, was the most kind-hearted, compassionate, caring, creative...and loving man I'd ever had the privilege to know." His eyes fell upon his twin, merriment etched her face, as Raven stood enshrouded in Jacen's protective arms. She raised a questioning eyebrow at him. Marxx continued, "He would have been pleased that you all have chosen to make this occasion a happy one, instead of a mournful gathering. Although we are saddened by our loss, his legacy will always live on in his paintings and in his daughter, grandchildren, and great-grandchild." Raven smiled. Tanella hugged Krishta off to the left. "Because this occasion is a time of celebrating, I would like to... to add another reason for us to celebrate."

Marxx felt Jaina grip tighter to his arm. He gazed into her love filled eyes that offered him all of the encouragement that he needed to continue. "This crowd represents two of the greatest, oldest families on Naboo, the Brannoushes and the Naberries. Although our families have always been close friends, strangely, we have never had any unions between our two great familiar lines, to permanently tie our family chains together." A ripple of excited noise spread through the crowd as people began to guess what might be coming up next. Marxx, licked his lips, as he felt his brow and armpits begin to sweat. In the back of the room, Leia clung to her husband's arm and offered him a bright smile as it began to dawn on him what Marxx was about to say next. Han felt a small smile etch his lips as he realized that very moment he'd just discussed with his wife was at hand. Although he liked to give Marxx grief, he secretly liked the boy and couldn't have picked a better mate for his daughter.

As the noise ended, Marxx gripped Jaina's hand tighter into his own and surged forward, "I know that my grandfather would be very pleased that I am about to announce this on his day. Family always meant everything to him. Today, I am pleased to announce that in the near future, date still to be decided, our families will merge, as Jaina Solo, granddaughter of Padme Nabierre and I... are engaged to be married!"

Cheers and hollering erupted in the room. Marxx smiled dizzily at his fiancée. Turning away from the microphone, Marxx threw his arms around Jaina and lifted her off of her feet. He swung her around in a circle, then gave her a long kiss. Their families laughed merrily and cheered even harder. Even Han couldn't help but smile at the joy that Marxx brought to his daughter. By their declaration before all their loved ones, the young lover's destinies and fates became sealed as they began to envision their special, upcoming day.

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The four months that followed blurred together as both Jaina and Marxx prepared for their wedding at the beloved Lake Country Resort. However other duties called to them, and they allowed for their mothers, Best Man, and Maid of Honor to work out many of the finer details in the wedding planning. Together Marxx and Jaina traveled all over Naboo fostering goodwill with the people on the planet. Together they listened to the concerns of the citizens as the capital continued to be rebuilt into a new era of Nubian glory. Together they assimilated the ideas of the people into forming the ideals into a new Nubian Constitution that would work with the political structuring of the New Republic. They worked to lay out a plan for the planet, to help it to thrive for many future generations to come.

To the people of Naboo, the happy, loving couple of Marxx and Jaina, represented the four principles of Naboo, and given both of their lineages, the Nubian citizens had no problem opening up to them. For Marxx and Jaina nothing kept them apart. It was as if their spirits had already merged, forming into a singular bond, only to be formally performed and solidified by the Holy act of Matrimony.

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## Chapter 44

"*The guys wouldn't be around for a couple of hours,*" Marxx realized as he stared at the wood paneled ceiling in his room at the Lake Country Resort on Naboo. He ran his fingers through his curly hair and sat up in his bed. As the reality of the date sank in, his entire body began to quiver and quake as his nerves responded to his growing apprehension.

"*Why am I so blasted nervous? I've been waiting over two years for this day to come,*" Marxx asked himself. A little voice whispered to him, "*She's going to call it off.*" Marxx violently shook his head. "No WAY is that going to happen!" He said as he threw off his covers and stalked out of his bedroom and into his adjoining living room area. He scratched his bare chest as he yawned. His eyes fell upon his wedding suit hanging from a peg on the wall. He approached it and removed the protective dust cover.

Marxx remembered the look on Jaina's face when he walked out wearing it after trying it on for the first time. *Her jaw dropped as her eyes absorbed the perfect way the suit beautifully hugged Marxx's fit form. Marxx recalled the devilishly delightful ways her eyes glimmered as she appraisingly looked him*

*over. At that moment, he wouldn't have cared if the suit was bright orange and made of nerfhide if it meant that he'd be able to evoke the same incredible response from his beloved.*

*The black jacket was designed to begin wide at the shoulders, then the fabric tapering down to a V towards his navel. The front of the jacket crossed over and buttoned from the left to the right shoulder. On the back, it again peaked downwards into a V. Then the jacket flared down into two long tails. The black tailored pants beautifully accentuated Marxx's muscular, long legs.*

*A small drift of pale pink fabric of his shirt perched atop the jacket, to match Jaina's bridesmaid's dresses. Marxx thought back to his discussion over the color choice with his fiancée. He'd raised an inquiring eyebrow to his future bride at her color choice as he fingered his shirt.*

*Jaina peaked an eyebrow at him and said, "This is officially the only time you will ever see me acting completely girly. Girls love pink, right? Your sister went out of her head when she saw the dress design I'd selected and she just fell all over herself for picking that color. So because it made her so happy, and I thought it was pretty, I decided to opt for that pink. You got a problem with that?" Jaina stood feet apart, fists on hips, head cocked.*

*"But it's PINK! You're the mechanic around here. I would've thought you'd be against the color," Marxx said, knowing he was fighting a lost battle. Inwardly he delighted when he realized how thoughtfully Jaina regarded his twin and her opinion.*

*Jaina scowled at him, puckering her lips. Her eyes lit up with fire.*

*He then laughed aloud at her defensive posture and threw up his hands, "Fine! M'lady, I will wear one of those dresses myself if that is what will make you happy. No need to get all defensive."*

*"Really?" Jaina said, arching her eyebrow. She spun on her heel and brought Tenal Ka's dress in front of him. Marxx slipped the hanger around his neck and smoothed the dress's fabric down in front of him. He plucked a sparkling tiara off of a display, stuck it akimbo on his head, and batted his eyelashes. "Does it bring out the color in my eyes?"*

*Marxx looked completely ridiculous. Jaina doubled over from gales of laughter. She then snorted, causing her and Marxx to howl. Their wedding coordinator, Prunaretta, rushed the room and frowned at the mischievous couple.*

*After sobering up, Jaina removed the tiara and dress and replied, "I think I'll let you stick with the suit." Marxx crushed her in a deep kiss but felt a sour presence in the room. He glanced up to see Prunaretta scowling at him for wrinkling the suit. More giggling ensued from Jaina as she backed away so he could readjust himself. Convinced the couple was done mangling the suit, the tiny, severe woman left the room.*

*"Are we ever going to actually reach our wedding day?" Marxx asked as he smoothed out his jacket and then tugged on his jacket sleeves as he looked himself over in a mirror.*

*Jaina wrapped her arms around him from behind and peeked around his broad back. Her cheery reflection appeared in the mirror and smiled up at Marxx. "It'll be here sooner than you can think... and then, you'll be all mine." That thought, earned Jaina a huge devilish grin, from Marxx.*



Marxx smiled remembering how they tussled together that night back at her bungalow. *“Only a few hours, then I’ll be all yours... forever, M’lady,”* he thought. A small spastic twitch itched his left cheek. He casually massaged it out and turned his head as he heard a knocking on the door.

*“Breakfast... not that I could keep anything down,”* he thought. He opened it to see his father, Rowlon standing outside carrying an armload of suits for all the men in the wedding party. Although the groom and the two Solo boys were trained Jedis, Jaina had decided that it would be best for the men to wear more traditional Nubian wedding suits and forgo their Jedi robes.

“How you feeling son?” Rowlon asked as he hung the suits up next to the one he had just uncovered.

Flashing his Dad a smile that seemed more confident than he felt, he said, “Nerves of durasteel, Dad.”

Rowlon chuckled, running a hand over his balding head, “Right, I suppose that’s not sweat on your brow then?”

Marxx lifted a finger to his brow and it came back damp. He smiled sheepishly at his father, “Ok, I’m as nervous as a womprat dumped on Hoth... I’ll admit it.”

Slapping his hand on his strapping son’s shoulder he said, “Every groom is nervous on his wedding day. Luckily for you, I can guarantee everything will go off perfectly.”

Furrowing his brow Marxx asked, “Why would you assume that?”

“Well, you were created by the Force, I doubt that whoever, or whatever created you would want you to have this day come off terribly,” Rowlon said, smiling wistfully.

“Does that bother you, Dad? You raised, loved, nurtured, and cared for me. You are my father... not... some invisible higher power,” Marxx said, throat constricting as he stared down at the smiling rotund man.

Rowlon grabbed Marxx’s arms and stared up into his eyes, “No son, it doesn’t bother me. If that ‘entity’ had a face, I would probably give it a large kiss for bringing you in my life, and now my little girl back into it as well. I love you, son. I could never love you any less than if you were my own flesh and blood. In my mind, that is what you are, and that will never change.”

Throwing his arms around his father, Marxx bear-hugged the shorter man. “Thank you, Dad. I love you too.”

“Can we sit for a minute? I’d like to give you a little fatherly advice on this special day,” Rowlon lead his son over to a couch and the two stared across at each other. Marxx’s eyes were open, wide and ready to receive his father’s wisdom. “Women like to think that their wedding day is just for their benefit. That’s not entirely true son. We men let them do all the planning, because they live for it. The reward of their efforts is that you get to give yourself to your bride, completely. By accepting her hand and experiencing and enjoying everything she planned for this today, you get to show her how much you appreciate her. This day is designed for the two of you to enjoy and remember for your entire lifetime. When your mother and I got married, our service was small. We had about twenty guests and married in a tiny, airless, hot chapel in Mos Espa. I was so nervous, I thought I’d blow a knee out from how much my legs shook!” Marxx laughed.

Rowlon continued, "Then your mother walked into the chapel on Paulo's arm. Her bright white dress glowed. She looked like a goddess. Do you know that today when I look at her, I still see that same, beautiful young woman? She took my breath away. She still does. When I married her, I knew I was devoting myself entirely to her. I knew Chariss' family wanted to leave Tatooine, the only home I'd ever known; I didn't care. All I wanted was to be with her, forever. I decided that nothing would ever come between my responsibility to my family and the love of my life. If she wanted to leave, I would go with her, anywhere, without question. On that day, that was the commitment that I agreed to enter into."

Marxx casually leaned on the bolster of the couch listening with rapt interest to his father.

Rowlon pointed at him, "You, my son, have quite a journey ahead of you. I believe that you are destined to be a great man, and one day the real reason for your special birth will be revealed. I also do not believe it was just blind luck that brought you and Jaina together. From the moment you brought that girl into our home, I knew the winds of change had roared into our lives. Seeing that girl, I knew I had to make that bet on your pod race. When she told us she was Queen Amidala's granddaughter, the granddaughter of the woman in the mural painted in our living room, I knew... well I just knew, the time for our lives to change had come. I could hear the chimes of your destiny calling to you. Part of that call, I believe was to bring your sister back to us. But I know that much more lies ahead for you.

"When we came to Naboo something interesting happened, you two consciously decided it was your mission to restore the glory of this planet. What you both do not know is that the people here have names for the two of you already. The musicians and songwriters on this planet have begun to write stories about you both. They call you the Nubian Son, and Jaina the Nubian Queen. With your combined dedication and love of this planet, you have brought back hope to a world that had fallen into despair. You are the founding leaders who have begun a Renaissance to bring a new generation back to the glory of old Naboo."

"They call us the Nubian Son and Queen? Why? Jaina's not a Queen," Marxx said, clearly puzzled.

"Maybe not in the official capacity, but to the people on this planet, Jaina, granddaughter of the great, late Queen Padme Amidala, will now forevermore be considered a great leader who single-handedly brought Naboo back into the New Republic fold. That's as good as being an elected Queen in their eyes. And you, her fair knight, are a descendant of the greatest families of Naboo, have returned to help assist his Queen to bring this planet back to life," Rowlon said, glowing with pride. Marxx sat in deep contemplation.

Rowlon continued, "For all that professional joy may come your way, the one thing you have to always remember is that by making the commitment you are taking today, you are openly declaring to everyone that you are putting Jaina above all other responsibilities in your life. Any other commitments, even to that of the Jedi Order, must come in second to the love of your wife. Marriage is the most sacred of vows. It is not easy. Love must be nurtured with time and must never, ever be taken for granted. For if it is neglected, love can die - just look at what happened to your grandparents for proof of that. If you work at it, and keep Jaina as your main priority in life, fifty years from now, when you are both old and gray, you can always think back on this day. When you look into Jaina's eyes you will again see that beautiful woman who stole your heart, and led you on the greatest, and most unexpected journey of your life, whatever that may be."

Marxx smiled at his father and took his hand. “Thank you, Dad. I promise to you, I will never lose sight of what is most important in my life. I also knew the instant I laid eyes on Jaina, that my life would be forever changed. She’s everything to me. I would give up everything just to be with her.”

The room door pounded. Marxx stood up from the couch and walked over to it. When he opened the door his face paled. A very stoic and upset, casually dressed, Han Solo stood outside the door. Suddenly feeling inadequate in his pajama bottoms Marxx’s face flushed.

“Good morning, sir,” Marxx said. Behind the older man, Jacen and Anakin peered at him. Both brothers appeared expressionless.

“I hate to do this kid,” Han said, head dropped.

Marxx’s eyes flew open wide with concern, his fingers absently tapped on the doorframe, “What?”

“She called it off... flew out of here last night to rejoin Rogue Squadron,” Han replied.

Pain shot through Marxx’s heart like a laser blast, his vision momentarily blurred. “What?” His eyes flashed to Jacen’s face. Jacen seemed concerned and sad. He then looked at Anakin...hard. Anakin stared back at him, a single twitch at the corner of his mouth gave him away and he started howling with laughter. Jacen began to crack up as well with Han flashing Marxx a huge lopsided smile. His father chuckled heartily as his son grew limp from relief.

Marxx let out a long sigh, “That was, really mean to do to a guy on his wedding day, you know?”

Han tousled his fingers through Marxx’s messy, dark curly hair. With merriment in his voice he said, “You deserved it, kid.”

“What? Why?!” Marxx asked, incredulously.

Han sat down on a couch and pointed at him, grinning from ear to ear, “I told you to call me Han, not sir.”

Groaning, Marxx watched the two Solo brothers as they wheeled in a large breakfast cart.

“Why do I feel this is going to be a really long day?” Marxx said, plucking a shurra fruit off of the table.

Anakin retorted, “Not nearly as long as you noosing yourself and forever becoming Jaina’s ball and chain.”

Marxx chucked the fruit at Anakin and closed the door, shutting out Anakin’s cackling laughter.

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## Chapter 45

The morning led into the afternoon in a blur for Jaina Solo. Hair, nails, makeup were all taken care of early in the day. Upon inspection, Jaina didn’t recognize her own face. The makeup flawlessly covered

any and all scars, and imperfections on her heart shaped face. She looked like a porcelain doll. Her nails, painted a soft pink, sparkled in the afternoon light. The overall effect: she felt gloriously feminine.

At her side, chattering non-stop over each new makeup application was Raven. Jaina couldn't help but laugh being around Marxx's twin. In the beginning, after Paulo's funeral, Raven sulked around her twin's fiancée, guilt chewing her apart. Jaina quickly made amends with Raven, showing her that her injuries were not permanent. She then floored Raven by asking her to be her Maid of Honor. From that moment on, Raven clung to Jaina like glue. The once stoic, moody girl had turned into a non-stop, goofy, chatterbox. Getting her makeup done seemed to be the highlight of her day. Raven desperately tried keeping one eye open to always carefully watch and see how Nella, their makeup specialist applied each stroke. Jaina's heart went out for the girl when Raven explained that no one ever showed her how to do these things growing up. Jaina supposed had she wanted to learn such things, her mother would have gladly shown her how. She realized how much she took for granted while growing up.

Wearing a large robe and dainty slippers, cup of Jawa Juice in hand, Jaina stood in the living room of her suite as her cousin's Sola and Ryoo rushed in and out of the room setting up last minute details. The hairdresser just finished with Leia. When she stood up, her hair was pulled up into a high spiraling bun that cascaded down into long ringlets. Jaina thought she looked gorgeous.

Leia held out a hand to her daughter and asked her to join her in the bedroom.

"What is it, Mom?" Jaina asked suspiciously as Leia shut the doors.

Leia smiled at her daughter. She inwardly sighed thinking how much her only daughter looked like a younger version of herself. Her brown hair was pulled up at the sides by tiny pearly fasteners then it was gathered at the top and drifted down her back in spirals. She had a smallish crown that would sit atop her head from which her veil would be connected. Leia shoved a hand under the bed and pulled out a couple of boxes. "I wanted to give you a couple things. First, Sola found these while cleaning at her house. And I want you to have them."

Jaina opened the tiny box Leia produced for her. Inside she found a pair of dangly pearl earrings. She held them and a vision appeared before her eyes. *She saw her grandmother Padme, wearing a low cut, silky black nightgown, sitting before a mirror putting on the earrings. From behind her Anakin appeared. Bare-chested, he placed his hands on her shoulders as his fingers gently massaged her neck. Padme finished tightening the earrings and smiled at her reflection.*

*"Oh Ani, they are beautiful. How did you ever afford them?" She asked as her slim hand reached up and caressed his long, delicate fingers.*

*Anakin closed his eyes and inhaled the floral scent of his wife's hair as he softly kissed the top of her head. He opened his eyes and smiled deliciously at her and said, "I bartered with the jeweler. I repaired his air ventilation system in exchange for the earrings. I just saw them and knew you had to have them." Padme jumped up and tackled Anakin. The two fell into a giggling and kissing mass of arms and legs onto a bed. The image faded.*

"These belonged to Grandmother Padme," Jaina said, gently fastening them onto her ears.

Leia grinned at her and sat on the bed, "Yes they did. And they are now yours."

“No. Mom you should have them. I’ll borrow them for today, but they were your mother’s. You should have them,” Jaina said, eyes full of love.

Tears threatened Leia’s eyes and she fought them back. “Sweetie, I want you to have them. I have plenty of jewelry. I want you to have something special of hers for your own.”

Jaina smiled and nodded, “Ok. Thank you, Mom.” Her eyes lingered over the larger box. Leia beamed devilishly as she handed it to her daughter. Her legs swayed gently off the floor.

Ripping open the top and digging through the tissue, Jaina gasped and stared at her mother with disbelief.

Leia smirked. “What?”

Being at a loss of words, Jaina stuck her fingers up to her furrowed brow. “How in the Force did you know I wanted this?”

“You did mark the advertisement in the holomagazine my dear daughter.” With that, Leia pulled and shook out a silky, sheer mint green nightgown. It was the same one Jaina had seen in the holomag while at the medicenter. “Marxx will love it.”

Jaina’s face turned bright crimson. Biting the inside of her lip she said, “Well he should. There certainly isn’t much to it, is there?”

Leia placed a hand on her little girl’s face and said, “After tonight, it won’t bother you, trust me. Are you nervous about your wedding night? Do you need to ask me anything?”

Feeling quite flustered, Jaina glanced at her mother unsure of what to say.

Misinterpreting her daughter’s silence, Leia said, “Of course, maybe you don’t need advice... it’s really none of my business what the two of you have done in private.”

“We haven’t... I just... I’ll be fine Mom, really. Thank you,” Jaina said. As the words came out of her mouth, she realized that she had nothing to worry about. She knew Marxx would not hurt her, and she felt no shame in wanting to give herself entirely to her husband after their betrothal.

Leia sensed a large wave of relief wash over her due to Jaina’s reply. Leia glanced over her daughter’s shoulder and peeked at the chronometer. “Time to get your dress on, one hour and counting.” Jaina threw her arms around her mother and the two shared a moment before the madness would begin.

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*“That girl never stops giggling. What is wrong with her? Is this why he likes her so much? I thought he was interested in women for their brains, not the lack of them. Maybe my opinion of Jacen has been too high over the years,”* Tenal Ka wondered as she watched Raven wiggle and squirm her way into her full skirted, light pink, bridesmaid dress.

“Jaina, you look so beautiful!” Raven shouted with glee as she raced across the room to grab Jaina’s

hand. "I can't believe I'm about to have another sister!" Tanella working in the corner on getting Krishta's dress properly smoothed, glanced up at her exuberant younger sister and smiled.

Jaina looked over herself in the long mirror and smiled at her reflection. She had thought of wearing her grandmother's gown, but it didn't fit right. Jaina's hips were broader than Padme's, she was a few inches taller, and much to Jaina's dismay the dress pulled too tightly around her bustier chest. The delicate lace on the gown had also begun to deteriorate with time and the delicate, crystal beads began to fall off, so she opted for her current choice of dress. Padme's gown now rested safely behind duraglass and hung on a wall in Jaina's bungalow, out of direct sunlight. Its beautiful design was as spectacular as any piece of art.

Chariss stared after her daughter completely frustrated. "Raven, come back here- I need to fasten up the back of the dress."

"It's ok, Chariss. Turn around," Jaina said to Raven. Raven hopped on the balls of her feet and turned around. Jaina's nimble fingers just pretended the tiny fasteners were screws and eyes and she zipped up the length of the dress. Raven sucked in her breath as the corseted top locked into place. Jaina smiled, "All done."

"Oh oh! Hold on, I want to give you something," Raven said as she flew across the room and pulled out a handbag. She rummaged in it and produced a small box. She came up to Jaina and gave it to her.

"What is it?" Jaina asked.

Grinning, Raven said, "Open it."

Jaina removed the top of the box and saw an intricate, pearl and gold bracelet. She gasped as quivering fingers picked up the wonderfully delicate piece of jewelry. "Wha... how? Why?" she stammered, being at a loss for words.

"I bought it years ago at a small junk shop in the Corellian sector. I knew it was Nubian the second I laid eyes on it. I figure it is only fitting that you should have it."

"Why is that?" Jaina asked as she brought the bracelet closer to a light so she could better view the intricacies of the workmanship.

Folding her arms across her chest, Raven smiled devilishly, "Well, you are the Nubian Queen, after all! And Queens should have lots of jewels."

"Nubian Queen? What? Oh, you mean my grandmother was Queen, right?" Jaina said, completely confused.

Tenal Ka spoke up, "Actually Raven is correct. The people on Naboo seemed to have decided that you are their current Queen. Even if this was not an official vote, it appears you are the Queen of Naboo."

Jaina stared incredulously at her two bridesmaids expecting one to be kidding. Knowing that Tenal Ka, who never jokes, said this suddenly made her stomach queasy.

Tapping her foot Raven said, "They're even writing folk songs about you and Marxx." She started to

giggle at Jaina's incredulous facial expression.

From across the room, Leia piped in, "They aren't joking, honey. I'm sorry, I would've told you but I thought you already knew."

"Oh I feel a headache forming," Jaina said as she steadied herself against a table.

"Now, now, we can't have the Queen getting ill on her wedding day. Here give me your hand your Highness," Raven said jokingly and fastened the bracelet to her wrist.

"I think I'm ok. Thank you, Raven," Jaina said as she beamed at her soon to be sister. She gave Marxx's twin a brief hug.

Raven now thrilled that Jaina had accepted her gift, squealed and ran over to Tenal Ka, "Let me fasten you up."

Tenal Ka scowled. "I do not require assistance. Ryoo has fastened me up." Raven frowned at the somber girl and raced around her to verify that her dress was properly tightened.

"You're right, Tenal Ka, you're all set. Your hair looks so pretty in all those curls!" Raven said, smiling from ear to ear.

Inwardly Tenal Ka groaned, she replied, "Thank you."

Outside the chimes began to sound. Each woman and girl in the room ceased speaking and moving. Ryoo brought each girl their bouquets and handed Tanella her basket of flower petals.

Leia, now dressed in her long straight pale yellow gown, approached her daughter and gave her a tight squeeze. Fighting back tears, Leia said, "It's time. I'm so proud of you, sweetie. I love you."

Fighting down a lump, Jaina said, "Thank you, Mom. I love you too."

Jaina smiled brightly as her fingers nervously fidgeted her bouquet's handle. Raven, Tenal Ka, and Krishta lined up by the door. Ryoo smiled brightly next to her cousin. With tears welling in her eyes she said, "Padme would have been so proud of you. And you're choice of getting married here- of all places, would have made her feel greatly honored."

"It didn't occur to me to get married anywhere else, Ryoo. I love this place. It called to me. And because of my quest to find Naboo, I met Marxx. This place means everything to me. It marked the beginning of my life," Jaina said.

Ryoo squeezed the bride's hand and then opened the door. As Jaina watched her mother, Chariss, Ryoo, and Tanella all leave the room, she sensed the magnitude of the moment. Krishta, Raven, and Tenal Ka all left as well. Raven flashed her a large grin before exiting the door. Jaina's heart swelled with joy as everyone that she loved in the galaxy were gathered outside to celebrate her special day with Marxx. She gently caressed her earring and knew deep down that her grandparents would be watching her as well. She closed her eyes and sensed a great wave of happiness and joy wash over her, bringing color to her cheeks. If she had any apprehensions about marriage, they were gone completely. She watched as one by one the ladies from her party left the room.

Jaina stood alone in the center of the room, waiting for the one man she knew she had always been able to count on, to come in and to take her hand, and lead her to the man she loved. When he stepped into the doorway, Jaina beamed. Han leaned against the doorframe wearing a suit similar in style to Marxx's. His shirt matched Leia's yellow dress.

Han's eyes filled with tears upon gazing on his little girl... no his grown-up daughter. Jaina's wedding dress spread out in a long cream colored, silk bell, without decoration. The bodice of her gown hugged her tightly on the chest, with a square neckline. The dress had three quarter length sleeves that flared out with drifts of sheer fabric. The bodice was covered in a lace fabric that matched the lace pattern from her Grandmother Padme's gown. It, like the antique gown, was dotted with sparkling beads. The tiny crown on top of her head made her look like a Princess, Han thought. She clutched her lily bouquet in her right hand and held out her left hand towards her father. A happy smile caressed her shiny pink lips.

"Are you ready to give me away, Dad?" Jaina asked, fighting back tears.

Han cleared a lump that instantly formed in his throat as he realized that his little girl had turned into a strong, independent woman who made him prouder than he ever thought possible. His little girl exhibited all the best qualities of her mother. It humbled him to think that he had any part in helping to create such a wonderful young woman. Han's heart went out to Marxx, his soon to be son, knowing what an amazing gift he was willingly giving the deserving young man today.

Han wiped his palm rapidly across his face, and in a husky voice said, "I don't think I ever will be ready for that, sweetie. But you know, I can deny you nothing."

Jaina stared into her dad's brown eyes, "And you have no more lingering doubts about Marxx, right?"

Han flashed her a lopsided grin, "Darling, the only reason I ever doubted that boy, or gave him a bad time, was because he reminded me of someone."

"Who was that?" Jaina asked, turning her large brown eyes towards her father. Han's heart broke as he recognized his little girl speaking that small question.

"Me. And if a scoundrel like me was ever worthy of your regal mother's hand, Marxx most certainly is worthy of yours, a thousand times over," Han replied his voice deepened with emotion.

Jaina beamed and hugged her arm tightly into the crook of her father's offered arm.

"I love you, Daddy," Jaina said, as she clung tightly onto his protective arm.

To prevent himself from breaking into a bawling fit, Han refocused himself on the door. "Come on love, your husband is waiting for you. I think he's been waiting long enough."

A sunny smile banished the cloudy tears on Jaina's face. The two walked out of the room, towards the bright shining afternoon light. The music began to play outside calling Jaina towards her destiny.

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## Chapter 46

The clear blue sky set as the perfect backdrop for the Lake County Resort. The spacious patio seemed miniscule as practically every inch of it was covered in seats for wedding guests. The crowd consisted of a virtual who's who of Rebellion heroes. Seated together, the Calamarian former Admiral Ackbar and the now graying, yet still distinguished, Mon Mothma sat together talking politics and reminiscing over old times. Chewbacca and his nephew, and good friend of the Solo children, Lowbacca, stood off to the far right side to observe the ceremony. The droids, C-3PO and R2-D2, shined gloriously and stood off slightly behind the left where Jaina would be standing. Towards the front of the rows Lando Calrissian sat with his latest, lovely, lady friend Nashurra, daughter of a very successful Agamarian imports czar. They talked with Mara as she bounced Ben on her lap. Wedge Antillies leaned forward listening in on their conversation. Most of the pilots of Rogue Squadron were present, wearing their polished and pressed dress uniforms. Absent was Jagged Fel.

Leia peered out from her place at the guests. Many of her longtime friends who helped to form the New Republic, sat out in the crowd. They had attended her own wedding to Han, years ago. Her eyes flashed briefly up to the nervous groom, and in her mind's eye her nervous, roguish husband replaced Marxx. She couldn't believe how long ago her wedding seemed to have taken place. As she scanned the patio, an overwhelming feeling of pride in her daughter emerged. The seats were not only filled with political figures and friends but actual blood relatives. Thanks to Jaina's quest to find information on Anakin and Padme they discovered and met her mother's family. Her eyes lingered on the white haired Sola and her daughters, Ryoo and Pooja. The women had almost become like sisters to Leia over the last year. She couldn't imagine her life without them now. Brushing away a tear- she raced back to the join the wedding party.

The air filled with tiny reporter droids snapping photos and holofilm of this historic event, hoping for the perfect shots to plaster all over the holo-net. To the entire galaxy this was a wedding of royalty. Although Han and others tried to get rid of the reporter droids, they found it impossible and decided to let them do their job. Besides, Han determined his daughter wouldn't find it very romantic to have the sound of blaster-fire erupting all over the lake's valley as he set up sharp shooters to take out each droid.

In front of the balcony only a few large floral arrangements consisting of pink and white lilies and yellow sun-torch flowers filled the area with their sweet fragrance. The picturesque lake valley view acted as the perfect background landscape for the event. The sun shined merrily, blessing the ceremony with its splendor. Marxx stood fidgeting up at the front of the balcony all the while staring at the long white train that ran down the center of the rows of seats waiting for his bride to arrive.

"Still worried Jaina won't be coming?" Jacen asked, flashing Marxx a grin at his side.

"What?" Marxx replied. He began to shift uncomfortably, "Is it suddenly hot here, or is it just me?"

Jacen's brown eyes flashed with amusement. He chuckled and pounded his friend on the shoulder. He said, "You're the one in the boiling pot Marxx, not me."

Anakin smirked beside his brother.

Suddenly the chimes from the Monastery began to sound off and the time for the service to begin had arrived. Marxx felt his mouth go dry, and his palms began to sweat as anticipation invaded his senses.

The Nubian Holy Man, dressed in his traditional long dark robes with brilliant red lapels appeared and the crowd quieted. To the far left of the balcony, a string and woodwind quartet began to play the traditional Nubian wedding march. Rowlon walked both Leia and Chariss down the aisle. Then Tanella followed, escorted by Luke. The music picked up in tempo and Krishta appeared at the back of the train. Krishta pulled out petals and could be heard audibly counting out her steps while she marched down the aisle. Marxx flashed her a large smile as the surrounding crowds began to chuckle at her youthful demeanor. She climbed up onto her seat next to her mother, feet dangling off the edge, and smiled brightly, white teeth flashing, back at her uncle.

Jacen's heart pounded in his chest. From out of the shadows Raven appeared. Her deep brunette hair, pulled back into long spirals, danced around her shoulders. From the crowd of onlookers most of the men in from Rogue Squadron all dropped their jaws as the magnificently gorgeous woman passed before their eyes. Their ogling went completely unnoticed to the dark haired woman as her pale blue eyes remained fixed on one individual only.

Jacen knew that pink dress and he now knew how delightful Raven's full, pouting lips felt and tasted against his own. Raven lightly bit her lip and raised an eyebrow as she walked down the aisle towards Jacen. Her heart thundered in her chest as her eyes caressed Jacen's tall, muscular form wearing his nice suit. She casually stepped on her invisible marker and stared at Jacen, a large happy grin blossomed on her lips. Jacen stared back at her with equal joy. Marxx watched the two with guarded amusement and wondered how long before Jacen would be standing where he was right now.

Tenal Ka walked down the aisle and inwardly scowled. Jacen hadn't even turned his head to see her come down the aisle. A stab of resentment surged through her as she again was reminded that Jaina had bypassed her for the Maid of Honor role, by giving the honor to Marxx's dimwitted sister. By the time she reached Raven's side, Jacen finally ripped his eyes off Marxx's twin and flashed her a smile. Tenal Ka read no comfort in that smile, only pity.

The music stopped. Marxx sucked in his breath. A refreshing breeze swirled in off of the lake and brushed apart the canopy of leaves overhead. A ray of light fell on the end of the fabric train as Han and Jaina rounded the corner, illuminating the bride in an angelic glow. A flurry of bright pink butterflies soared from behind Jaina, shot off towards Marxx, then they soared through the patio and headed off across the lake.

Everyone in the crowd stood to their feet as the music lifted up in tempo. They desperately tried to glimpse the bride and her nervous father. The music played softly as they headed down the aisle. Neither Jaina, nor Marxx heard a single chord of the bittersweet music. Their eyes locked on each other and the rest of the world disappeared into a cloudy haze. Shivers ran down Marxx from his lips to his toes as tears sprouted from his eyes. "*Women are always beautiful on their wedding day,*" he thought. "*But Jaina is positively glorious, goddess-like.*" A supernova of love exploded in his chest as his face flushed from excitement.

Jaina didn't know how she made it to the front of the walkway, her feet didn't walk, they floated. She felt nothing except the trembling warmth of her heart.

Suddenly a voice beside her said, "I do, her father and her mother." Jaina shook her head realizing the Holy Man had just asked who was to give her away. Jaina crushed her arms around her Dad as she noted the glistening trails running down his face.

“I love you, Daddy,” Jaina whispered, beaming.

Han nodded and gently stepped away from his daughter and walked over to the open seat to the right of Leia. Everyone sat down. Marxx and Jaina held hands and walked before the Holy Man. They faced each other as the Holy Man spoke in front of them.

“We are gathered here today to celebrate the loving, joyful union of this couple, Jaina Solo and Marxx Racees, in holy act of matrimony. If there is anyone who believes these two should not be wed, speak up now, or forever hold your peace.”

Marxx involuntarily glanced at Han and gulped. Han chuckled and flashed the nervous young man a lopsided smile, as Leia squeezed his hand. Leia’s left hand flitted up to her eyes as she wiped away her tears with a tissue.

When no one spoke up, both Jaina and Marxx relaxed. Neither of them heard the Holy Man go through his speech about the divinity of perfect love and how only true love enhances the beauty of the galaxy. They only saw each other and heard their beating hearts. Jaina fought the overwhelming urge to caress Marxx’s cheek and help wipe away the nervousness that flashed across his face. She squeezed his hand as a sign of her encouragement. Marxx couldn’t believe how calm Jaina looked. He then felt her squeeze his hand and she flashed him a brilliant smile.

They both turned to the Holy Man as they heard their names mentioned, “...have written their own vows for this occasion. Marxx...” He stepped back.

Marxx cleared his throat and nervously peered out towards the crowd. One hundred and fifty people smiled back at him, offering him encouragement. His eyes fell on his parents. Chariss wiped her brown, tear flowing eyes and flashed him a loving grin. Rowlon nodded his head as he squeezed his wife’s arm in order to help give her more strength. Encouraged by their timeless love he relaxed.

Turning his eyes back towards Jaina, the rest of the world melted away. “Jaina, from the moment I first laid eyes on you, I knew my life had changed. You were a breath of cool breeze in my desert storm. You rescued me from a life of hopeless drudgery, and showed me that dreams really can come true if you believe in them enough.” From beside him Jacen and Raven shared a knowing glance. Raven wiggled her eyebrows at Jacen and smirked. Jacen bit his lip to stifle a naughty giggle as Marxx continued. “Because of knowing you, I am a better person. My life is fuller, richer, and brighter.” Unable to restrain himself, he lifted the veil off of her face and felled it back over her head. Jaina issued a small laugh as he stepped closer to her, hovering his chiseled face above hers. He placed his hand on her cheek, “You filled a hole in my life... and completed me. You made me a whole person. I love you... with every breath in my body and with every beat of my heart. And I vow to devote every day of my life to making you happy... I promise you... I will never take you or your love for granted and will be true only to you for the rest of my life. You have made me the happiest man in the galaxy today. I will never forget this feeling.”

Jaina’s eyes grew liquid as tears threatened to fall down her face. His words embraced her heart, so tightly she nearly forgot to let it pound. She wondered why her lungs burned, and she realized she’d been holding her breath. She slowly let it out and she began to breathe again. She then knew it was her turn. Marxx stepped back to allow her room to gather her senses.

“How could I not fall in love with a man who unconditionally loved my grandfather? Who saw him as

a hero, instead of a monster? In the way you viewed Anakin, I knew I'd found myself a king among men. One who walked a different path of the norm and who understood me completely, even when I didn't know myself... Marxx, you've brought me more joy in my life than I ever thought it was possible that one person could bring... although my family life was rich and full before you came along, you only enhanced my life with the power of your love. You brought the woman out in me with your love. Proof of that is that I'm actually wearing blush instead of engine grease on my face today." Marxx beamed at her, as a light round of chuckles swirled from the crowd on onlookers. "Because of you, I learned of my family's past. And yet, because of you, I have complete faith in my future...our future. Your love restores and saves me everyday. I love you more than I ever thought it was possible to love another. I vow to always be true to you and love you and only you, until the day we part this life. I bless the Force every day that you are mine."

Marxx could care less that his face shined from his tears. He loved Jaina more than anything in the galaxy and her words, spoken before everyone they knew, only confirmed that she felt the same way for him. His heart swelled with an exhilaration that he didn't know could possibly exist.

R2 rolled over and extended to them a pillow that held their rings. Jaina and Marxx smiled at the chipper droid. Jaina handed Raven her bouquet and the two exchanged rings.

"You two have declared your love for each other and have exchanged your rings as a sign of your devoted love to each other. The circle of the ring represents the beginning and end of your life together. As a circle has no beginning, nor an end, neither will your marriage. For you two are no longer two individuals, but one soul, united by the power of love," the Holy Man proclaimed. With a broad smile etching his face, he shut his datapad and made a few hand gestures over the couple, "By the power vested in me, I now declare you husband and wife. To the onlookers, I am pleased to present to you, for the first time, Mr. and Mrs. Marxx and Jaina Racees."

Loud applause broke out from everywhere as Marxx took in a deep breath and swooped in and kissed his wife firmly on the lips. The wood and string instruments began to play their celebratory tunes. The sun shined brightly through the trees, highlighting the newlyweds. The crowd cheered even louder as Jaina threw her arms tightly around Marxx's shoulders. Jaina brought her husband closely towards her, bridging the distance between them until it practically didn't exist, for in this moment, they were no longer two people, but truly they were one person, united in the complete bliss of their love.

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## Chapter 47

Jacen tapped on his glass. Everyone in the reception room quieted down. Suddenly the floodlight flashed across his face. Jacen shielded his eyes from the blaring light. He blinked repeatedly, then picked up the microphone and gazed at his sister and her new husband.

"As Best Man, I get the honor of giving a toast to the Groom and his Bride. As you all know, Jaina and I are twins. The twin link is strong. It's also kind of odd. You suddenly find yourself having these euphoric waves wash over you when absolutely nothing is happening to you. You realize that your twin is in some blissfully happy place at that very moment. For practically two years, I've had to endure such feelings, and not personally enjoy the benefits. This got old pretty fast, let me tell you." He paused as the chuckles died down. "I will never complain though. Not only did these wonderful feelings show me how much happiness Marxx has brought into my sister's life, but they also showed me that true

love is possible to find. True love's not just some myth, reserved only for children's tales. Jaina's joy showed me that absolute pure love does exist." From down the table Raven gazed dreamily at Jacen, her pale blue eyes shined with admiration and love. Jacen's heart quickened when he read Raven's emotions. "I consider Marxx to be my brother and I could not be happier for either of these two today. They truly deserve each other. May the Force always be with them through their journey of life."

Jaina and Marxx smiled blissfully at Jacen as the room shouted and raised their glasses to the happy couple.

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"Is this on?" Raven cringed as her voice boomed throughout the room. She pulled the microphone away from directly in front of her mouth, "Sorry about that. Please excuse me if I babble, I've never done this before. If you'd asked me a year ago that I would be standing here, I would have said you were crazy. As many of you know, or may not know, I was separated from my family for most of my life. I grew up not understanding much about love. I never knew joy could exist in this galaxy." Raven paused and stared into the darkness, then looked at her twin helplessly. Marxx smiled encouraging his sister onward as Raven seemed to forget to speak. She continued, "Jaina befriended me, when she had absolutely no reason to do so. She had every reason to hate me, and yet she immediately offered forgiveness. I never knew such compassion could exist in the galaxy. When she forgave me and befriended me, I knew that my twin had found the most amazing woman to marry. I couldn't have been happier for either of them. I'm blessed and honored to be a part of their special day and can only hope that in my life, I can ever deserve to be as happy as they are today. To the happy couple." Raven raised her glass, then flashed a smile to Jacen as she toasted the newlyweds.

In his mind, Jacen thought, "*My sweet love, you know you deserve it, and are as equally loved.*"

From down the table, Tenal Ka downed her glass of Nubian wine and poured herself another glass, to the rim. Anakin watched her cautiously from the far end of the table, as she sipped from the nearly overflowing wineglass. A large drop of the red wine splashed onto the pink bodice and blossomed into an expanding blood red stain. Anakin sensed a searing heat coming from Tenal Ka as her gray eyes fixated with blinding hatred at the back of Raven's head.

Anakin decided he'd better keep Jaina's other bridesmaid occupied.

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The room darkened, a solitary spotlight made a circle on the floor. A small hand reached into the light, gold ring flashing. From the other side of the light, a stronger, masculine hand captured the offered fingers. Whispers and gasps filled the hall. A Sullustian waltz soared into the air as Marxx captured his wife close to his body. The light beam expanded, bringing the blindingly beautiful couple into focus. Jaina's hand wove up towards Marxx's neck and the two began box stepping together. Blue eyes locked onto brown and the entire room of people melted into nothingness. The blackness of the room, alit only by the glowing amber stained glass windows from above, and from the twinkling of candles lit on each table, made Jaina and Marxx feel they were dancing in space amongst the stars.

Gasps and light applause broke out from the surrounding tables that filled the reception hall as Jaina grabbed a handful of her large skirt and the two twirled faster in a flurry of fancy footwork. The music, sweet, high, and joyful tingled throughout the reception hall. In the luminous light, Marxx again found

himself reminded of how angelic his wife appeared in her white gown. She'd never, yet always, looked this beautiful. As he beheld his wife, he fell in love with her all over again. To Jaina, her husband never looked more breathtakingly handsome. She couldn't believe that once upon a time, Marxx didn't exist in her life. That time now appeared dull and gray. For now her future just seemed bright and endless.

Husband and wife flashed each other large smiles as they twirled and spun feverishly over every inch of the dance floor. The music wound down and Marxx dipped Jaina. As she lifted her head, her heart beating and breath pulsing in her lungs, Marxx captured her lips. The room filled with cheers. Marxx brought his wife up while never letting go of their kiss. When their lungs finally screamed for air- they released and Jaina melted into her husband's protective, warm arms.

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The room darkened, a solitary spotlight circled on the floor. Han entered the light and his daughter approached him from out of the darkness. The bittersweet woodwind and guitar music softly played in the hall as Jaina rested her cheek against her father's broad chest. Jaina inhaled the musk scent of her father's cologne. The smell evoked feelings of security and love. Han encircled his left arm protectively around his daughter, and captured her small hand with his right callused, permanently grease stained hand. The two began to dance. Han closed his eyes from the glare of the light and found an image beckoning at memory's door. *A grubby, engine-grease covered, four-year old Jaina stripped to her bather and raced into the Mon Calamarian sea. Han dashed in after her as Jacen roared past him and swam out to his twin. Leia stood on the beach watching and pointing to the twins and their father as she bounced a baby Anakin on her hip. His daughter climbed up onto Han's shoulders and giggled as he threw her off repeatedly into the glistening, salty water. She'd called him her hero on that day.* Han opened his eyes and through a layer of tears saw Jaina staring at him with a sweet smile gracing her lips.

"I guess you're no longer my little girl, are you?" Han asked, as he held his Princess lightly in his arms.

"Dad, I'll always be your little girl. However, it's up to Marxx to take care of me now," Jaina said, smiling.

Han gave her a bear hug. From the corner of his eye, he saw Leia standing in the shadows. Anakin stood behind her and had his arms wrapped tightly around his mother. Tenal Ka stood at his side. As they moved in a soft circle his eyes fell upon Jacen and Marxx's twin, Raven. The animated girl giggled in Jacen's arms. Han hadn't yet decided what he thought of the troubled girl, but it appeared Jacen adored her, so he decided to withhold judgment... for now.

Marxx leaned up against the table with a large, contented, lopsided grin on his face as he watched his wife dance with her father. Han slowly stopped moving his feet, and lightly pulled Jaina's arms away from him.

"You know what?" Han asked.

"What?" Jaina said confused as to why her father stopped.

"You're right. It's Marxx's turn," Han gently took Jaina's hand and limping, led her over to husband. Han stared Marxx in the eyes. Marxx's heart fluttered as he tried to figure out what his new father-in-

law was doing. Han raised a finger and pointed it at Marxx's nose. Marxx's eyes crossed as they looked at it. He then met Han's gaze. "You take good care of her. Ok, kid?"

Marxx began to babble, "Absolutely, Han. I'll never let her come to any harm. I'll willingly die before I let anyone hurt her...."

Han smiled, "Well, hopefully that won't be necessary. Here, finish the dance with your wife... my feet are hurting wearing these dress shoes."

Jaina then realized her father had been limping. She squeezed him tightly. "I love you."

"I love you too sweetie," Han said and lightly shoved the confused couple onto the dance floor. He then walked confidently, without limp, back over to his wife sporting a large lopsided grin and softly shaking his head.

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Soft grass whispered under bare feet, as the dark haired beauty raced across the meadow. Raven's giggles drowned under the crashing, deafening sound of the waterfalls. The late afternoon sun warmed her creamy skin. Strong arms lifted her lightly off of her feet and twirled her around in a circle. Peels of laughter echoed throughout the valley as Jacen tossed his girl in the air and caught and cradled her in his arms. Her long dress hung around his feet and Jacen tripped, sending both of them crashing onto the grassy, wildflower filled meadow floor. Raven felt the wind knock briefly out of her lungs and saw Jacen's large brandy eyes fill immediately with concern.

"Apparently my subconscious thinks I'm a lot smoother than I actually am. Are you alright?" Jacen asked, clearly upset with himself and his clumsiness.

Raven bit the inside of her lip and fought back a giggle, "What can I say? You take my breath away."

Jacen groaned as he gently swatted her arm at her silly joke. Raven wiggled over and nestled into the crook of his arm and stared up at the expansive blue sky.

"How long before we should go back in?" Raven asked.

"Oh I'd say we've got a good half an hour to kill before anyone misses us. Any idea of what we can do for a whole half an hour?" Jacen asked, arching an eyebrow.

"Cling to you and never let you go?" Raven said, her voice getting a bit smaller. "You know what happens tomorrow."

"I do know. I've been both looking forward to this day and dreading it at the same time," Jacen said, his fingers absently played with Raven's curls. "I don't understand why Uncle Luke thinks that you need special training. This is ridiculous."

Raven's jaw set into a determined pose, "No, it's not ridiculous. Actually Master Skywalker is a wise man." She perched herself up on his chest, folded her arms and gazed into Jacen's brown eyes. "I did a lot of bad things when I was left alone. I used my anger in... ways I shouldn't have. I'm not proud of my past. And I never want to repeat my actions. I need to learn to control my feelings, and learn how to

use the Force in a good way, not feed upon my darker, more aggressive tendencies. I have a lifetime of training that I need to be deprogrammed from. I also have recently... remembered things I've long ago buried that I need to face and conquer. As much as I love you, I don't want you to see that ugly side of me." She brushed her left hand across Jacen's strong jaw and cheek.

Jacen gazed into Raven's aquamarine eyes and said, "You know I can face anything, right? I'd willingly face whatever you have to in order for you to feel whole and complete. I'll take the bad with the good...that's what people in lo..." Jacen gulped and changed gears, "I know if you don't get trained, they have to throw you in prison. Course being stuck in near isolation with Kyp Durrone for six months might be an even worse sentence than being in a cell." A slight twinge of jealousy surged through him when he thought of the older man. Circling his arms around Raven's waist he gently moved her on top of him. Her weight felt comfortable on his strong body. Raven's curls hung around her head, swaying in the gentle Nubian breeze as she admired Jacen's handsome face. Jacen pouted. "I'll miss you... terribly. I wish they could at least wait to send you off after Jaina and Marxx get back from their honeymoon. I'm going to be lonely."

"Well we'd better give you some memories then to help you through the tough, lonely days and months ahead, shouldn't we?" Raven said, lifting an eyebrow.

Jacen smiled, "And what did you have in mind, Admir..." Jacen's question got cut off as Raven cut him off with a warm kiss. Jacen tightened his arms around her and gently rolled her on her side, pinning her to the ground. Raven wrapped her arms around Jacen's muscular back and felt her sensations blur as she focused entirely on the sweet, wet, warmth of Jacen's mouth that hungrily tasted and explored her own mouth and lips. She snaked a leg up around his thigh and gently pushed at his body. The two began to slowly roll down the gentle graded hill. They giggled as their lips detached. They rolled faster and faster until they felt gravity guiding them towards the cliff that would send them down into the lake, seventy feet below. Raven dug in her heel and skidded to a stop. Jacen did not. He continued to roll and Raven leaped, catching his hand as he plummeted off of the ledge. Jacen's heart thundered in his chest as Raven calmly grinned at her dusty companion from above. As Jacen dangled off the ledge, he watched a rock spiral and silently crash down into the churning waters below. He looked up and saw the large confident grin on Raven's face.

"You got me?" Jacen asked, worry squeaking into his voice.

Deceptively strong for her slight frame, Raven laughed, "You don't honestly think that I'm going to lose you, do you? Not after all we've been through. Give me your other hand."

Jacen grinned and threw up his other hand as Raven snatched it. Grunting, she forced herself to her knees and then to her feet and captured him into her arms. She led him away from the cliff ledge. Jacen regained his footing and wrapped his shaking arms around Raven's waist. They carefully climbed up the hill, away from the ledge, towards safety. Jacen then collapsed onto a rock, tears cresting in his eyes when he thought of how quickly and foolishly he could have been lost to Raven. Raven lightly sat on his lap.

"You know, you really didn't have to go to such extremes to tell me," Raven said as she laid her head on his shoulder and gazed sweetly up into Jacen's terrified eyes. She placed a calming hand over his pounding heart.

"Tell you what?" he asked.



Raven smirked, “That you’ve fallen for me.”

Jacen’s worried expression melted into a goofy smile and he began to laugh. They tightened their arms around each other and laughed until their sides ached. When they sobered up Jacen gently extracted several wildflowers from Raven’s hair and then traced a finger over her perky nose.

“I love you, Raven Racees,” he said, as his heart palpitated in his chest.

Raven beamed him a smile that would have brightened the darkest void of space. “I love you, Jacen Solo.” They melted into the softest of kisses that sealed their newfound love. Their kiss coupled with the wonderful event of the day solidified Jacen’s trust in his feelings for Raven. He knew that his love and trust in her could and would never be broken. For Raven, by declaring her love for Jacen, she realized a new chapter in her life had begun. Gone were her days of loneliness and pain. Her once broken and incomplete heart now flourished and strengthened by the power of Jacen’s love.

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The night air turned cool as the happy couple headed the large convoy of hydroboats across the Nubian lake. Marxx and Jaina cuddled in the folds of their Jedi robes. Both had changed into more comfortable travel clothes as they prepared to head off to Mon Calamari for their two week honeymoon. The trip was a gift from former Admiral Ackbar, as a way to help extend intergalactic goodwill to the future galactic leaders. They found the idea refreshing, as a great way to get away from prying family member eyes.

“Are you nervous?” Marxx whispered into his bride’s ear.

“About what?” Jaina replied, knowing full well what he meant.

“About when we get to Mon Calamari,” Marxx’s fingers laced with his bride’s.

Jaina smiled, “No. I’m not worried or nervous about anything. You mean everything to me. I can’t wait until we get there.”

In the pale moonlight, Jaina turned her face towards her husband and she offered him her full lips. They kissed as the cool Nubian lake breezes caressed and embraced their favored son and daughter.

As the convoy of hydroboats all arrived on the dock, everyone headed to the landing platform. Chewbacca and Lowbacca appeared and carried the newlyweds bags up and into *The Nubian Hope*. After many tears and hugs with all of their immediate family members and friends, the newlyweds’ headed towards the ramp of their ship, excited to begin their life together. Luke and Kyp exchanged glances and Kyp approached the happy couple.

“We have something for you, Marxx and Jaina,” Kyp said. From the folds of his Jedi robes, Kyp produced a control key and chucked it to the groom.

Marxx flipped the small gray control over in his fingers confused. Kyp and Luke both smirked. “Click on the activation switch,” Luke said.

Pointing it to the sky Marxx clicked on the switch and jumped. From behind him, *The Nubian Hope* changed into Corellian Spice freighter. Jaina's mouth dropped open, rapidly she asked, "What? How? When?"

Luke chuckled, "Marxx gave us the idea actually when he first saw Kyp's ship. While you were off roaming the countryside, we took the *Hope* to Kendu Rewgun and he was able to format it. Your ship is now equipped the same as Kyp's *Phoenix*."

Before they could ask, Kyp piped in, "Yes, it's even been updated with weaponry. You've got a whole new rig there. Enjoy it!"

Tears brimmed Jaina's eyes at the generosity of her uncle and Kyp, "How can we ever thank you?"

"Let's just hope things stay calm enough in the galaxy that the modifications won't be necessary," Luke said. "Course if that doesn't happen, at least we'll all feel better knowing that you two will be able to better defend yourselves."

Jaina crushed Luke in another hug and then hugged Kyp. "Thank you."

Marxx shook Luke and Kyp's hands. He looked over his shoulder at his sister, enshrouded in Jacen's long cape. "Take good care of her, ok?"

"You bet I will," Kyp replied and smiled.

"We'd better get going," Jaina said as she bit her lip. Marxx glanced at her and noted the twinkle in her eyes. He couldn't agree more.

"Right. Bye everyone!" Marxx and Jaina waved to the loud goodbyes from their families as they hurried inside the *Hope*.

Two sets of parents stood arm in arm as the ship revved its engines and began its ascent into the night sky. The ship flickered back to its Royal Yacht appearance. Rowlon and Chariss hugged each other tightly; joyful that they had not only received one daughter back into their lives, but that they now had just gained a second one.

Han tightened his grip around his trembling wife's waist as he gave her extra strength. Leia's eyes glistened from the tears that briefly highlighted in the red tail-lights of the ship before it rose up and into the atmosphere. Han glanced over at Jaina's twin as he clung to his girlfriend and he realized with terror that he'd probably soon have to shell out a bank account worth of credits again for another wedding.

Anakin stood alone on the edge of the dock staring up into the glittering stars wondering if and where the great love of his life may be hiding. He turned his head as Tenal Ka, now dressed comfortably again in her reptilian hide dress, glared at Jacen and Raven. His heart went out for the young woman as he tried, unsuccessfully, to absorb some of her anguish and pain.

Jacen and Raven held each other tightly, closed their eyes and gently swayed in the night's breeze, hoping that they could make their last evening together never end. Kyp watched the two young lovers with veiled interest. He wondered how easy or difficult it would be to train his new apprentice.

Mara and Luke smiled as Ben squirmed in his mother's arms. And Tanella held tightly to her daughter's hand. The youngsters represented a new generation of Solos and Racees, and the children's parents wondered how long before Marxx and Jaina would be contributing to that legacy.

For all on the landing platform, their futures, although linked before by friendship had now been cemented by the tie of blood. For the Skywalkers, Solos and Racees, their destinies were now forever entwined by the bonds of marriage.

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As Jaina and Marxx waited for the co-ordinates for Mon Calamari in the navicom to set, their eyes met across their captain and co-pilot chairs. Marxx swiveled his seat and Jaina moved over into his lap. They didn't need to speak, for their love closed their physical distance. They melted into each other into the sweetest of kisses.

Completely unaware when the Navicom beeped its readiness, the newlyweds enjoyed their freedom and first private time together as husband and wife. *The Nubian Hope* then shot off into hyperspace. The Nubian Son and his Queen disappeared, together into a sea of streaming stars, towards their united destiny and future, in the full glory of their perfect love.

So Ends **Destinies Entwined: Family Skeletons -Nubian Son.**