



**DESTINIES ENTWINED  
JAINA'S JOURNEY**  
**BY  
PADMELEIA JAINA**

# Destinies Entwined: Jaina's Journey

By PadmeLeiaJaina

**Disclaimer:** I am in no way affiliated with Lucasfilm Limited. I have used several scenes of dialogue written for the film the AOTC screenplay in writing this story. These scenes were used exclusively to help forward my story along. I am not profiting from this story in any way.

**Rated:** PG-13

**Intro:** This is my first story I've written for these boards. It's the first in a three part planned trilogy.

To me the heart of *Star Wars* has always been the themes of self discovery and redemption. The mythology of the films pulls at my heart more than all the space battles and duels combined. I quit reading the EU many years ago as I felt it was moving too far from this original premise of the films. My father has spent the last several years heavily researching our families heritage in recreating our family tree. Inspired by his quest, and by the latest SW epic film AOTC, this story is my version of what would happen if the Skywalkers and Solos actively started hunting down their family roots.

This story is set in an Alternative Universe completely outside of EU. Chewie and Anakin Solo are still alive, and the Galaxy appears to not be in turmoil. The Vong will never appear in this tale.

Jaina is the central figure in this tale. She starts to receive vivid visions of her grandparents through the Force, leading her on a quest to find out more about them. Along the way, she discovers the woman within her mechanics body and meets the love of her life, a handsome podracer from a familiar planet, named Marxx Racees.

Sit back, and enjoy the show! I have two more stories planned to follow this one. If the feedback is good- I will commence with writing the next segment.

Please enjoy and all comments are welcome.

If you read a few posts and are interested in reading the story without slogging through all of my pages- feel free to PM me your email address and I will gladly email the chapters to you via Word file. or visit my website to read this trilogy w/o having to wade through a ton of posts [Click here](#) 😊

(Click here to access Part 2: [Destinies Entwined: Family Skeletons-The Nubian Son](#))

(Click here to access Part 3: [Destinies Entwined: Roots of Evil: Unmasked Soul](#))

Part I

## Destinies Entwined: Jaina's Journey

### Chapter 1

Jaina threw off her boot and flung herself onto her bed. After two long grueling weeks of patrolling borders in the Kathol sector, Jaina and her crew returned to the home base on Orion Four for ship maintenance and re-energizing. She pushed a hand through her longer than usual straight brown hair.

Jaina lived to fly, and loved being the best of the X-Wing Rogue Squadron pilots, however she'd been feeling restless lately. Unable to place a finger on the core of her anxiety, her life seemed imbalanced. She'd seen plenty of action in the past year with her flying, and had garnished four accommodations and advancements in the ranks in Rogue Squadron. Professionally her life flourished. Personally, her life didn't exist.

She got up. Full of pent up energy, Jaina changed into swimming gear and headed for the pool on level 4. Relieved to find the pool empty, she dove into the warm water and started to swim. She completed lap after lap, allowing her mind to clear, to become one with the Force. She rarely meditated into the Force any longer, choosing piloting over Jedi training. With each stroke images flashed in her mind, from her Jedi training days on Yavin, to recent battles, and dog fights.

An unfamiliar image flared in her mind's eye captivating her attention. Green hills embraced a sparkling lake. Two young people swam towards a small island located in the center of the lake. Out they climbed from the water and collapsed laughing onto the soft sand. Jaina thought the girl to be a preteen and the boy probably a teenager.

*"See I told you I would get here first, Paulo!" The girl said breathlessly playing with the complicated twisted knots on the top of her head.*

*"Yes and you also leaped into the water a good minute before me! I say you cheated!"*

*"Me? Cheat?" her eyes opened wide in disbelief.*

*"Yes you! I think I should report you to Head Mistress Sulfrom, I'll bet she would be very interested to know her top student cheats!"*

*The girls face became very serious, "Oh Paulo, you wouldn't, would you?"*

*Paulo burst out laughing, shaking his head full of dark curls at her, spraying her with water, "Oh my stars, Miss Padme, your expression was priceless! Trust me, your indiscretion is safe with me. The last thing I would want is to be the one who managed to stop a future Queen from being elected."*

*Padme looked at Paulo incredulously, "Queen? You think I will be elected Queen?"*

*"Oh please, you can stop that innocent act, I know you want the job. You live and breathe politics Padme. And I may add, you will be the best Queen Naboo has ever elected."*

*The girl smiled, blushing slightly then shook her head, "What about you? Shall I appoint you Senator? I doubt Senator Palpatine would like that very much, but I could use a friendly face in the Senate."*

*"Me? No," Paulo stood up and looked seriously at his swimming companion, "I actually have been thinking of dropping out of the youth legislative program."*

*"What?" Padme bolted upwards, her face flushed, "you can't leave me, I, I mean the program. I thought you liked debates and politics."*

*"Well I do enjoy arguing politics with you," Paulo said, his eyes smiling, then more seriously he added, "but I don't have the heart for it. It was my father's idea for me to go into the program. But my mother*

*always tells me to follow my bliss. And I want to be an artist. I spend half of my lectures drawing instead of taking notes. I think that should be my clue as to what I should be doing in life."*

*Padme nearly in tears threw her arms around the boy. "I will miss you terribly."*

*"I'll miss you too Padme."*

Jaina pushed off the wall in the pool, her eyes readjusting in the dull florescent light. *Who were those people?* she thought. The vividness and completeness of the images left her surprised. She wondered if by ignoring her Force talents for so long- that her abilities had suddenly magnified. She paddled in the water and fell back into the Force and discovered herself again to be in that valley. This time her view flew back across the lake to a resort located on an island that rested directly across from the small island from her previous vision. The same girl floated along the balcony with a different young man closely following in her wake. Jaina strained her mind's eyes to the couple. Padme wore the most incredibly delicate dress she'd ever seen. Its silky layers wove into the colors of the rainbow, and the back appeared to be missing entirely. That however didn't nearly distract her as much as the young man walking next to her. Tall, blond, with luscious blue eyes, Jaina couldn't pull her eyes from the man. She then looked at his clothes. He wore a long black cape with dark apparel underneath. She shook herself, then focused on what the two were talking about.

*"We used to come here every day on retreat. I love the water, we would swim over to that island, lie in the sand and let the sun dry us -we would try to name the birds singing."*

*"I don't like sand, it's rough, course, and irritating, and it gets everywhere," The man said, tossing something aside. He then looked deeply into Padme's eyes, chewed on his lip nervously and with the slightest hesitation, "Not like here, here everything is soft and smooth," he reached out a gentle, probing finger towards her back and stroked it.*

*Padme stared back at her suitor. The young man smiled and slowly lowered his head towards her and the two kissed. After a few moments Padme pulled abruptly away, "No I shouldn't have done that."*

*The blond man looked around clearly confused, "I'm sorry. When I'm with you my mind is not my own."*

Jaina snapped back to reality. She suddenly felt very flustered. Why in the Force would she be shown something that intimate between 2 people? Who is this Padme woman? Who was that man? Feet treading water, she kept reviewing the image of the man in her mind's eye, over and over. He seemed familiar. What was it about him? She examined his outfit several times. And as she replayed their walk towards the balcony she detected a slight flash from his belt. Jaina focused her mind on that flash, then things swung into clarity. He carried a lightsaber. She recognized that hilt anywhere. His outfit was quite old fashioned, so she figured she must be seeing something from the past.

A secret rendezvous with a Jedi and a Queen? Jaina thought back on her lessons from the Old Republic, and recalled that the Jedi were forbidden to form personal attachments. The young Jedi kissing Padme would likely have been taboo. Her Uncle Luke was much more lenient on that rule, having recently wed himself. Then again, the New Jedi Order wasn't yet as organized as it had been in the days of the Old Republic.

She pushed herself up out of the pool, picked up a rehydro towel and headed back to her room. No

more time for swimming, she had some research to do.

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## Chapter 2

She changed into bedclothes and Force flicked on her computer terminal. She searched the computer files for a complete map of the galaxy and plugged in the word Naboo. No records. Then she shifted to another search and looked up any information on the planet in the database. Zero records came up. Hopelessly she typed in Padme, and again came up with no results. She threw her hands up in frustration and shoved away from her terminal.

Jaina paced her room; she looked at the time and decided to take a chance. She sent off a call to the Jedi Academy. Master Tionne's image answered her hail.

"Jedi Jaina, so wonderful to hear from you! How are you?" The silver haired woman asked.

"Actually I'm rather confused Jedi Master Tionne. Have you ever heard of a planet called Naboo?"

"Naboo?" she scrunched her face up contemplating the name. "Not off of the top of my head, hold on a moment." Jaina saw her former Master wander out of the visual scanning range. Jaina tapped her fingers impatiently.

"Jaina," a voice asked from beyond the image.

"Yes?"

"Do you have any idea of its location?"

"No Tionne, I have no idea."

"Hold on?" Jaina jumped back as Tionne popped back into the visual field. "Only thing we have is that it was the home planet of Senator Palpatine, prior to the Clone Wars. There appears to be no data though as to where it was located. That information appears to have been lost."

"Hmm, is there anything else there about the planet itself?"

"Politically it looks like they were a matriarchal democracy. The people elected Queens to rule the planet. Culturally Naboo was known throughout the Galaxy as being the epicenter of creative endeavors. They produced some of the finest art, sculpture, handcrafted furniture in the entire Galaxy."

"But there's nothing recent about them?"

"I'm afraid not Jaina. It almost appears that Naboo ceased to exist."

"Right. OK Thanks Master Tionne."

"Good night Mistress Jaina, don't be a stranger."

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"Thank you Master Tionne, I'll try not to." Jaina turned off her terminal and holo-emitter and headed for bed.

Jaina lay undercover and began to breathe deeply, clearing her mind of her thoughts. She fell into a deep meditative Force sleep.

*In sleep she saw a stone room bathed in the warm glow of flickering firelight. Padme and the young Jedi sat together, closely on a couch. A volital fire raged behind the nervous couple.*

*The Jedi started to say something, then stopped. Then he finally started speaking, "When I first met you, all those years ago, a day has not gone by that I haven't thought about you. And now that I'm with you again I'm in agony. The closer I get to you, the worse it gets. I can't breathe! I'm haunted by the kiss you should never have given me, my heart is beating, hoping it will not become a scar. You are in my very soul, tormenting me. What can I do? I will do anything you ask. If you are suffering as much as I am, please tell me."*

*The whole while he talked Padme writhed on the couch in obvious discomfort, her eyes flickered to the young Jedi's full lips. Jaina sensed her emotional confusion. "I can't, we can't."*

*"Anything's possible Padme, listen?" the Jedi said, his blue eyes smoldered in the firelight.*

*Padme bolted off of the couch and stood in front of the roaring fire, "No YOU listen. We live in a real world, come back to it. You're studying to be a Jedi, and I'm a Senator. If you follow your thoughts through to conclusion they will take you to a place we cannot go...regardless of the way we feel about each other."*

*"Then you do feel something!" the Jedi said, eyes filled with exasperated confusion.*

*"I will not let you give up your future for me," Padme replied stoically.*

*The Jedi got up and slowly, methodically approached Padme. Tilting his head slightly he said, "You are asking me to be rational. That is something I know I cannot do." He flung his arm passionately away from him, "Believe me, I wish I could wish my feelings away. But I can't."*

*Tears threatened to cascade down Padme's face. Determination set on her brow and she said, "I will not give in to this."*

*The Jedi slouched his shoulders and started to walk away. Padme's eyes widened slightly, apparently surprised that her suitor gave up so easily.*

*The Jedi paused and turned and faced Padme.*

*"Well it wouldn't have to be that way, we could keep it a secret," the knight replied looking at her with deep, hopeful eyes.*

*"We'd be living a lie, one we couldn't keep even if we wanted to. I couldn't live like that. Could you? Could you live like that Anakin?" Padme passionately said, tears now approaching the surface.*

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*Anakin's eyes turned from hope to defeat. He swallowed and said, "No you're right. It would destroy us." He looked at her, then head down he left the room. Padme collapsed back onto the couch and started to cry.*

Jaina stared at confusion at her clothed self. In a state of half sleep she had dressed. She threw a bunch of things in a bag and headed out the door. Padme's image and voice burned in her mind. Jaina heard her mother's voice speaking through that woman. In all clarity, she knew the true identity of Padm- the identity of her suitor solidified that knowledge. She chimed at General Antillies door several times. She wasn't aware of time. Wedge opened the door yawning.

"Jaina, what is the matter?" he said suddenly alert.

"I'm sorry to have awoken you General. But I need to leave," Jaina stated.

"Is everything alright? Is it your family?" Wedge asked, head cocked.

Jaina paused for a moment not quite sure how to answer that, "Sort of."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really, it's actually more Jedi business than family business," Jaina said unsure of how to reply.

Wedge crossed his arms across his chest, now concerned. Jaina spent a lifetime shying away from her Jedi duties, opting for a life as a pilot instead. Jaina fought hard to earn the top spot in his squadron. He sighed, fearing this would one day come to pass. He said, "Well I knew this day would come at some point. It was too good to be true that I could keep a fully trained Jedi in my ranks. It's been an honor flying with you Solo. You do your family proud."

Jaina glanced at Wedge confused. But in a span of a few seconds she realized she had shoved all of her personal belongings into her bag. She had no intention of coming back as a pilot again.

Flashing him a lopsided smile, she said, "It's time I grew up."

"Well if you do decide to come back, there will always be a place for you in our ranks, you've earned it. And before you even ask, of course the ship is yours," Wedge offered.

Jaina let out a sigh of relief. "Thank you Wedge." She threw her arms around her long time family friend.

"Best of luck to you Jaina, and May the Force be with you."

"And to you. Thank you!"

Jaina headed to her ship, yelled at her R4 unit to fire up the engines, then she shot out of the hanger like a gundark on fire.

R4-Z8 asked her for her destination. Smiling she said, "I think I'll leave it on manual for a while, R4." Jaina fell into the Force and let her instincts guide her fingers over the navigation controls, setting a

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## Chapter 3

When Jaina awoke from her Force sleep she glanced at her navicom. Her ship now circled an angry red planet called Geonosis. In her mind's eye a wild array of images, imprinted from the past, sprang to life. Anakin and Padme kissed and declared their love while being lead towards certain death. Padme's words whispered through the waves of the Force *"I truly, deeply, love you, and before we die, I wanted you to know."* The 2 lovers and an older Jedi fought to free themselves from terrifying creatures in an arena. Jedis by the hundreds appearing to save them, and then army of droids closed in on them. Huge battles sprung into her mind. And she saw flashes of lightsaber battles. In one of the duels Anakin lost an arm. She buried her fingers to her temples. The images flared painfully through her mind. Gasping she disconnected herself from the Force and the images receded.

She decided not to land on the planet. She again punched in some co-ordinates and sent her X-Wing into hyperspace. When she fell out of it a short time later, she found herself orbiting a barren sandy planet of Tatooine.

"Home again, home again," She said, not really certain why the nursery rhyme appeared in her mind. She blasted over the planet and instinct led her to land in Mos Espa. Upon landing in a rental hanger, she switched on her holo-emitter and searched for her Uncle Luke. She knew she was over her head here and would need his assistance.

A holo-image of her groggy Uncle appeared before her in her cockpit. Yawning he asked, "Jaina?"

"Good morning Uncle Luke, sorry to have bothered you," Jaina said.

Luke looked down at his holo-emitter controls with a frown on his face, "Jaina, what's wrong? Why in the blazes are you on Tatooine?"

"I'm not really sure. I've had the strangest visions from the Force lately and they seemed to have lead me here," Jaina explained.

"To Tatooine?"

"Yes."

Luke sighed. "What images are you seeing that lead you there?"

"They are images of, of my grandparents, your parents."

Any traces of sleep left Luke's face immediately, "What? What do you mean?" Jaina quickly recounted to him the images she saw, the conversations between them, and the conversation between young Padme and her friend Paulo. Luke stared on rapt with interest.

"And you're certain that this Padme is my mother?"

"Yes. She sounds exactly like Mom. And she was head over heels in love with Anakin," Jaina said with certainty.

Luke scratched his head and said, "That's fascinating Jaina. As you probably know, I have no memory

of my mother, and Leia has very few memories of her. She died when we were both very young. We don't even have a holo image of her."

"She's beautiful, very poised, and looks a lot like Mom."

Luke smiled, "And probably like you as well."

Jaina started back, she never particularly thought of herself that way. "Possibly."

"What do you need from me Jaina?"

She asked, "Could you see if you can find out anything about this planet Naboo? And anything on a Senator Padme from that planet? I don't have her last name, unfortunately. I think if you find something, you'll find a wealth of information about your mother."

"That seems reasonable. What else?" Luke asked.

Jaina hesitated, "You wouldn't be interested in coming to Tatooine would you? I don't know my way around here, I'd like very much to see the old homestead, something tells me I might get better readings from there."

Luke replied, "You know, I don't think my father ever actually visited the Lars homestead. At least I never picked anything up from there. However, it appears the Force seems to be leading you there for a reason." Luke looked over his shoulder, "Tell you what, Mara and I have some business to finish up here, then I'll go to the main library archives here at Coruscant to see if I can get any information on Senator Padme. We'll be there tomorrow morning. Where are you?"

"I landed in a town called Mos Espa."

Worry etched Luke's face, he said, "Mos Espa, that's not too far from Mos Eisley and where I grew up. Jaina, be careful. Tatooine is not a safe planet. It's a haven for smugglers, and the lowest forms of life."

Jaina laughed, "Sure Uncle Luke, I'll be sure to stay away from any scruffy looking scoundrels wanting to fly me to Alderaan as well."

Luke grinned, "Now you've got the idea."

"I'm at docking bay 1123, I'll leave a message for you there so you can find me. I'll also have my transmitter with me."

"Great, see you tomorrow Jaina. And May the Force be with you."

"May the Force be with you, Uncle Luke." Jaina signed off and looked on in despair as the holo-emitter sputtered off. She flicked the controls and the holo-emitter now appeared to be dead. She'd intended to change the responder gauge when she got back from her tour but forgot all about it in her flight to leave last night. *"Oh well, I will just have to pick up another one here somewhere. At least Uncle Luke knows where I am,"* she thought to herself.

Jaina popped the hatch on her X-Wing and fumbled around in her bag. She found a large off white

poncho that she put on to cover her dark flight suit. The poncho not only helped to deflect the rising intense sun, but also helped to conceal her lightsaber. She then stepped out into the blazing Tatooine morning sun. R4 detached himself and followed her as she exited the docking bay.

She walked into the sandy streets feeling for some indication of where to go and what to do. She figured all the junk shops were still closed at this early hour, so instead of seeking a new responder she listened to the call of her grumbling stomach. She wandered around until she reached a small cantina that sent out a cloud of delicious smelling aromas. She bought a local news pad and walked inside. Most tables were already occupied. She parked herself at a table towards the back of the room so she could watch the traffic coming and going from the cantina door.

A female green rodian came over to her and asked in Huttese what she wanted to order. Jaina looked over the menu, ordered a mug of Jawa Juice and the daily special poached dune skyling eggs with a side of baked dewback shank. She started flipping through the daily newsbriefs when the 2 people behind her heated their discussion, making eavesdropping impossible.

"Look Angulba you know I can do it. I've been practicing for the past two moon cycles. I've shaved a minute 45 off of my time in Corsdune Canyon course."

"Yes but that's without Charzarck hot on your tail trying to flog you off course. Face it, you don't have the reflexes. You're a damned good pilot, but no human will ever win a Pod Race."

"Really, forget your history already Angulba?"

"Oh please, no more talk of Skywalker. That was what 70 years ago? Hardly what I would call a long time tradition for human victories in the Pod Races." Jaina nearly choked on her Jawa Juice.

"It was 60 years, and you know, as well as I do, that I have the reflexes for Pod racing. Same as he did all those years back."

"Skywalker was a freak. I also understand he was a Jedi. You now saying you have Jedi reflexes? Prove it to me, and I'll give you the credits you need." Silence followed. "That's what I thought. Here, this should cover the tab. Good luck, Jedi!" Cackling laughter followed as a gray skinned Dug sauntered out of the Cantina. Jaina continued to cough and choke on her drink.

"Are you alright?" She heard the second man ask. Jaina coughed louder.

"Grenda water!" Jaina started tearing up as she tried to catch her breath. Suddenly a large glass of clear water appeared before her eyes. "Here drink some of this." Jaina gladly accepted the glass and took a deep swallow of the cool liquid. After a few more deep drinks, her throat started to calm down and cease its constrictions.

"Thank you," she whispered as she turned and glanced at her savior. She almost forgot to breathe. Her savior appeared to be in his mid twenties, tall, well muscled, with a mop of dark curly hair, piercing blue eyes, chisled cheekbones, and a disarming smile. He looked vaguely familiar.

"Is this seat taken?" he asked as he wheeled himself around to sit on the opposite bench of her table. "If you have a party coming, I'll just keep the seat warm for them. I want to make sure you are fine." Jaina took several large gulps of water and continued to stare at the handsome young man. "Feeling better?"

Someone should have warned you about Grenda's Jawa Juice, it'll put hair on a Hutt's chest."

Jaina smiled and found her voice again and said, "Yes, I feel fine and no, no one is coming. I'd appreciate the company."

Grenda stopped by, "You want this?" She asked pulling a nearly full plate off the table from behind them and showed it to the man.

"Uh..."

"Feel free to take it, mine should be coming along any moment," Jaina said.

"Thanks Grenda," he said taking the plate he filled his fork with eggs.

"Yours will be ready in about 3 minutes," Grenda said to Jaina.

"Thank you," Jaina called after the retreating waitress.

Jaina's new companion scrutinized the young woman seated across the table. His eyes took in her straight, shoulder length hair, and deep brown eyes. She carried a confident, honest air. Although, she wasn't conventionally beautiful, he found the woman disarmingly attractive. He asked, "You're not from here, are you?"

"How can you tell?" Jaina asked.

"2 things," her breakfast companion said, pointing his fork in her direction, "1, you have a bit of Corellian in the way you speak, and 2, I would definitely remember you if I'd ever seen you before."

Jaina glanced quizzically at the young man, smirked and asked, "Why do you say that?"

"What? You think I can't recognize a bombshell when I see one," he asked, picking up his mug of Jawa Juice to take a drink.

Jaina balked and then started to laugh. The young man furrowed his brows in confusion, drink forgotten. *"Women usually enjoy compliments about their looks, what's this about?"* He thought.

Peaking an eyebrow, he asked, "What did I say? Don't tell me you don't know you're gorgeous." Jaina laughed harder.

"Let's start over again shall we," the man said, wiping his hands on a napkin, "I'm Marxx Racees, pleasure to meet you. And you are?"

Jaina wiped a stray tear from her eye and held out her hand, "Jaina Solo."

Marxx shook her hand, then stopped mid pump, "Jaina SOLO? As in Captain Solo of Rouge Squadron?"

"Formerly, yes."

"Formerly?"

"Apparently I just quit," Jaina replied, much to the amazement of her companion. Grenda showed up and placed a huge plate of food before the starving Jedi. Jaina dug in. She shoved a fork full of shank in her mouth and chewed with a scrunched up expression.

Marxx hooted with laughter, "Yes Dewback is an acquired taste around here."

Jaina swallowed and chugged down more water, Grenda popped by and refilled the glass without her asking. "I've had worse, not much worse though. So what do you do Marxx?" She asked, taking a bite of the more palpable eggs.

Marxx leaned back in his booth seat and lightly stroked the top of the bench with his calloused and tanned fingers. He said, "I work in a parts shop for a Toydarian. I also Pod Race. You ever seen a pod race."

Jaina shook her head.

He leaned forward and planted his elbows on the table. He said, "Pod racing takes great skill. Most humans can't do it because the Pods usually require one set of hands always on the driving controls, species with multiple arms have the advantage of being able to fix any problems that may appear during a race while still driving."

"What kind of problems?" Jaina asked between bites.

Marxx grinned, realizing Jaina actually seemed interested in his racing. Unlike most girls who politely asked questions then averted the conversation, Jaina seemed interested in his expertise on the subject, he replied with gusto, "Well Pod racing is pretty brutal. There are no rules. Your opponents can throw stuff at you, slam aside your racer, pretty much do anything to try and get you away from them. Also with a the power couplings used in the racers are highly volatile, if the racer isn't built properly, it can explode any time on it's own."

"Sounds dangerous," Jaina said, peaking an eyebrow.

"It is," Marxx replied. His pool blue eyes bore disarmingly towards Jaina.

Jaina felt her heart leap into her throat as she stared into his soulful eyes. Coughing slightly she broke free from his stare and said, "And you said you're the only human who races these races? Ever?"

Marxx leaned back in his seat, grinning wildly. "Not ever. Once about 60 years back a young kid named Anakin Skywalker drove the Bunta Eve and won the whole race. I've watched that race over and over, he was amazing. Did credit to our species...are you alright?" Jaina again choked in disbelief and spilled water on the table. For some reason she was certain he had been talking about Luke and just got the dates wrong.

"Did you say ANAKIN Skywalker?" she squeaked.

"Yes..." Marxx replied, furrowing his brows in confusion.

"Anakin was here? On Tatooine? Do you have a copy of this race?" Jaina asked, excitedly.

"Of course. He's a legend. You know of him?" Marxx asked, as he handed over a napkin to Jaina to clean up her mess.

Jaina cleaned up the water on the table, then drank another long swallow of water, deciding what to say to him. Finally she opted for the truth, "Yes I know of him."

"How?"

Jaina shoved another mouthful of food in her mouth. She studied Marxx. His hands belong to that of a mechanic, tanned, course, knotted, and grease stained. His eyes showed no malice, only frankness and fun. From the Force she felt nothing but decent intentions emanating off of his presence. She shifted uncomfortably in her seat. She swallowed and met his eye. Flatly, she said, "Anakin Skywalker was my grandfather."

Stunned, Marxx looked like someone had just hit him over the head with a bulkhead door.

"What?" he whispered.

"He was my grandfather. I never knew him. He died long before I was born. I've actually come here to Tatooine to find out anything I can about him," Jaina explained.

"You came here looking for information on him, but you didn't know he had ever been here?" Marxx asked, kneading his fingers over his forehead in confusion.

Jaina closed her eyes, "I know, difficult to believe, but yes. My Uncle Luke grew up here, I guess I was hoping that I would be able to find something from his having lived here for a long time? What?"

Marxx's mouth dropped open, his face alit with sudden understanding. He said, "That's right, you're Luke Skywalker's niece."

Jaina ate more of her breakfast. Spending so much time in the air made her forget that she came from a famous family. Marxx slammed his hands down on the table and made Jaina jump slightly.

Smiling brightly he said, "M'lady I am at your service. Your wish is my command. I will take you anywhere, to see anything you can possibly wish to see on this forsaken planet."

Jaina gave him a sideways look. "Don't you have to raise money for an entry fee?"

Marxx's face fell, and his cheeks turned bright crimson, "You heard that?"

"Yes."

He said, "Well, yes. I have most of it. I just need 1500 more credits."

Jaina thought about things for a moment and said, "Ok, here's what I propose. Let's go see your Pod Racer, if it meets my specifications, I will give you the money for the race." Marxx started to object, Jaina raised her hand. And continued, "When you win, you can pay me back. But the Pod must meet

my specifications."

"Yes M'lady, whatever you say. You'd do that for a total stranger?"

"I'm not usually a risk taker, but I like to think I can trust a fellow mechanic," Jaina replied. She also couldn't help but think, *"And because you're probably one of the only people in the galaxy who doesn't know my Grandfather was a monster."* She threw down her napkin and sought out some credits to pay her tab.

"Ah, put that away, compliments of Angulba," he said taking out a handful of credits, he threw them onto the table. He stood up and tilted his head towards his new friend, "Come on." They walked out into the blinding, blistering Tatooine sun. R4 chirped a happy greeting and followed behind them as they exited the restaurant. Jaina's eyes travelled appraisingly over the entire length of Marxx Racees, tall, lean body. Her heart fluttered in her chest as she gazed at the young man.

Marxx sensed her roving eyes and flashed her a wolfish smile.

Smiling Marxx said, "I need to pick up a new power coupling belt and a power converter plug for the Pod before racing tomorrow. I need to stop off at Wattos. Can we go see my racer first before heading out on a quest for your Grandfather? I need to get the entry fee in before noon today if I want to race tomorrow."

Jaina nodded her head enthusiastically, "Sure no problem. I have all the time in the galaxy. You think this Watto'll have any responder gauges for an X-Wing? My communications system just went dead on me this morning."

Marxx grinned at her with renewed appreciation for her mechanical expertise. He said, "Yeah, Watto has everything. He never throws anything away. And by the way," Marxx flashed her a sly grin, "he can talk your ear off about your Grandfather. I'll let him explain it to you."

Jaina's breath caught in her throat as she grinned at Marxx. The more he talked, the more she believed that somehow, somehow, the Force seemed to have thrown this man in her path. Gladly, she followed after Marxx.

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## Chapter 4

Marxx and Jaina wandered through a maze of streets in Mos Espa. Marxx intently asked her about her many missions with the Rouge Squadron. Jaina felt herself gladly opening up to her new companion. She didn't quite know what to think of the different emotions that seemed to surge through her. Why was she laughing at every silly joke of his? Why the sudden urge to impress this young man? Why did she keep stroking and playing with her hair?

Suddenly they showed up in front of a doorway. Jaina stopped and stared at the outside of the hut, an image from the Force flashed before her eyes. She saw a blue flying creature talking to Anakin and a hooded Padme.

*"Mi boska di Shmi Skywalker," Anakin said in Huttese.*

*"Ani, little Ani? Nahh," the blue creature said. Anakin put something down that whirred to life.*

*"You are Ani! Sheesh you certainly have sprouted, eh?" The creature flew up eye level with Anakin.*

*"Hello Watto."*

*"A Jedi! Waddya know? Hey maybe you couldda help wit some deadbeats who owe me a lot of money--"*

*"My mother."*

*"Oh yeah, Shmi. She's not mine no more. I sold her."*

*"Sold her?" Anakin said.*

*"Years ago, sorry Ani, but you know business is business. Sold her to a moisture farmer named Lars. Least I think it was Lars. Believe it or not, I heard he freed her and married her. Can ya beat that?"*

*Anakin leaned in threateningly towards Watto, "Do you know where they are?"*

*"Long way from here. Someplace over on the other side of Mos Eisley, I think."*

*"I'd like to know."*

*"Sure, absolutely, come wit me!"*

Jaina snapped back to the present. She shook her head, Anakin stood practically right next to her in her vision. For once she got a mental image of how tall he had been, and imposing. Her confusion magnified as she realized Anakin seemed more menacing, than her last image of him.

"Marxx, my great grandmother was a slave?"

"What? I don't know about that, but I know your Grandfather was one. Watto owned him until a Jedi came along and won Anakin's freedom after his pod race victory. As a result, Watto doesn't trust human pod racers, he lost a lot of money on that race," Marxx leaned in conspiringly towards her, "Idiot bet against Anakin. I'm his best mechanic, and he still won't loan me the credits for the pod race because of his own past bad judgment."

Not quite knowing why, Jaina reached out and touched Marxx's arm. She closed her eyes, and could almost see an energy glow around him. "He is an idiot then. Because you are strong with the Force."

When she opened her eyes and looked up at Marxx, he stared down at her in disbelief. "How did you know that? I've often wondered, but out here in the outer rim, we don't get many Jedis who'd be able to recognize my abilities. I want to win this race so I can afford to buy myself a ship and head to Yavin and see if they would be willing to train me. To see if I had what it takes," he then slapped his forehead, "Oh my stars, I'm so stupid. You're a Jedi. I forgot about that." His face glowed with renewed appreciation.

Jaina burst out laughing. "Relax, its not like I'm some heavenly creature or something. I've just been trained to use the Force effectively. I actually don't really practice being a Jedi much. I've kind of shied away from my responsibilities I guess."

Marxx looked at the young woman in front of him. Her rich brown honest eyes drew him in. He slightly bit his lip and reached up a hand and brushed away an errant hair from her face. "You've spent your whole life living the life I've only dreamed of."

Jaina felt her stomach drop and flip and a slight blush rise to her face. "What in the Force is wrong with me?" she thought. "It's not as glamorous as it seems. I've spent a lifetime battling unknown forces and enemies. I have a feeling that by now accepting my path as a Jedi, my life is only going to become more complicated."

Marxx felt outside himself and heard himself say, "Complicated in a good way?"

"I don't know," Jaina said, she realized Marxx was slowly leaning in towards her, and she felt herself tilt her head ever so slightly...

"Marxx! Whad ya doing here on yar day off, eh?" Jaina turned her head and saw a now grayer Watto from her vision fly out of the door of the shop. Marxx scowled at his boss.

"I need a couple parts for my Pod," Marxx slouched off his foul mood as he excitedly grabbed Jaina's hand and brought her over towards Watto. "Watto I'd like you to meet someone, this is Jaina Solo. Jaina Solo, this is Watto."

"Nice to meet you," Jaina said examining the Toydarian.

Wattos eyes got big, "Ya did good with this one, eh? She's quite a looker."

Marxx rolled his eyes, "You will be most interested in knowing who she is I think. Jaina is Anakin Skywalker's granddaughter!"

Watto's wings sped up, "Really? How is Anakin? We haven't heard from him over here in a long time!"

"He died many years ago," Jaina said. "I'd love to hear anything you can tell me about him. I also need a new responder gauges for my X-Wing, do you have one in stock?"

"Absolutely, no charge!" Marxxs mouth dropped. "Anything for a relative of little Ani. Come on inside." Jaina stepped into the cooler shop and let her eyes fall all around the room. She had a flash of a toe headed young boy sitting on the tall counter, cleaning a part. She turned around and saw a young version of Padme standing inside the doorway.

*"Are you an Angel?" the boy asked.*

*"What?"*

*"An Angel, I overheard some pilots talking about them, they said angels are the most beautiful of creatures, they come from the planet of Diego, I think."*

*"You're a funny little boy."*

"Anakin was one of the most amazing mechanics I've ever met. And he was only a child when I owned him." Jaina snapped out of her vision as Watto started talking to her. "He could fix anything. I think that Jedi tricked me somehow into losing him. My business went down a hill after he was gone for a while."

"What was he like?" Jaina asked.

"He was a good sweet kid, always thinking of his mother and ways he could help her and others out. He didn't even mind me too much. He was a skilled pilot too. Good kid."

Jaina thought about that for a moment, "You saw him again years later right?"

Watto looked at her with complete suspicion. Marxx who had been wandering around the shop gathering up parts popped his head up, "You never mentioned that before Watto!"

"How'd ya know that? I'da nearly forgotten that."

"Please tell me about it," Jaina said, leaning towards the Toydarian.

Watto's eyes got big, "Ya sure are his granddaughter aren't ya? It was about 10 years after he left Tatooine, he came looking for his mother. He was a Jedi Knight and tall. He looked rather concerned, wasn't even interested in helping or talking to me. Just got the info about his mother and left here."

"Anything else?"

"He had a woman with him. She was all covered up though, so I didn't get a good look at her. There was something else though?"

"What?"

"Well it was a couple days after he left, I read that Shmi, that was his mother eh, had been killed by a band of Tuskin Raiders. I read the obituaries, ya know to see if anyone who owes me money has died or been killed! Deadbeats, I could've expanded my business years ago if they did?"

"Shmi?"

"What? Oh yah, the interesting thing was there was also an article that talked about a whole tribe of Tuskins were butchered. Do ya have any idea how impossible that is? They found a boulder sitting on top of one of the Tuskin huts, filled with dead Tuskin women and children. All the Tuskin warrior men were decapitated. I wouldn't have thought much about it 'cept for the fact that Shmi was killed by Tuskins and Anakin had just been here."

"You think Anakin killed all the Tuskins?" Marxx asked incredulously. "Why would he do that? Even better, how?"

Jaina saw flashes in her mind of *Anakin riding a Swoop bike against a blood red Tatooine sunset, eyes full of pain and anger. The twin suns set behind him like angry eyes. She saw him crouched on a hilltop overlooking a camp of huts at night. He falls, cape billowing above him towards the desert floor below.*

*She sees him enter a hut, free his wounded mother and watched her die in his arms. Jaina felt an intense wave of pain and anger wash over her, she lunged towards the counter and cried out, "NOOOOoooo" as she watched Anakin's eyes change from disbelief and sadness to rage. He steps out of the hut, dawn is breaking over the valley, and he greets the day with a grimace, lightsaber ignited, he starts chopping off heads of the creatures before him.*

Jaina shook all over as Marxx ran over grabbed her by the shoulders then pulled her close to him in a tight embrace, "Jaina, are you alright? Jaina? Jaina?" She reached out and wrapped her arms tightly around Marxx sobbing into his arms.

"Pain, he was in so much pain. It consumed him entirely."

"What are you talking about?" Marxx asked, gently stroking her hair.

"Anakin, it's why he did it. They killed his mother. He loved his mother more than life itself, and they took her away from him. That's why he did it."

"Little Ani killed all the Tuskins single handedly?" Watto asked. Jaina looked over at the Toydarian, realized she was in Marxx's arms and gently pulled away.

"Yes." She looked down. "That must have been his first step." Marxx reached down and lifted her chin up so they looked at each other in the eye. He brushed aside her tears.

"First steps to what?"

"Towards the Dark Side of the Force." Both Watto and Marxx looked at her puzzled. She decided there was no point in hiding the truth. "Have either of you ever heard of Darth Vader? The Dark Lord of the Sith?" Watto and Marxx both nodded, clearly confused.

"He was Anakin. Anakin became a Dark Lord of the Sith and purged himself of his original identity. He brought destruction, death and chaos to the galaxy during the time of the Empire." Marxx looked like someone just kicked him in the stomach.

Watto narrowed his eyes. "I sensed something was wrong with the boy when he came back, he seemed?. disturbed."

Marxx raced around the room gathered up his parts and threw them in a box. "Take these out of my wages, Ok Watto? I've got your responder gauge as well Jaina. Come on."

"It was nice meeting you Watto," Jaina said as she was pulled out of the shop. R4 buzzed after them.

Marxx dropped his box on a table outside and pulled her into his arms. "I'm sorry about that. I had no idea he was going to say all of that about Anakin. He never mentioned any of that to me. All he ever did was tell me how talented and wonder Anakin was as a pilot. I'm so sorry."

Jaina rested her head against Marxx's strong chest. Suddenly, she no longer felt uncomfortable being so close to him, she drank in his clean smell. She wrapped her arms tightly around him feeling him tremble slightly in her arms. Acutely aware that Marxx's image of his perfect hero had just been shattered, Jaina hoped her strength could calm him.

Jaina glanced up at Marxx, and looked deeply into his blue eyes, "It's alright. That kind of information is what I am here looking for. Hey, why don't we go look at that racer of yours. The morning is rapidly disappearing."

Marxx smiled brightly at her, gently let go, picked up the box, offered her his arm, "Follow me M'lady."

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## Chapter 5

They arrived at the back of Marxx's home and immediately flipped open the hoods on the racer for inspection. Jaina threw off her poncho and unzipped her coveralls, stripping down to her tank shell so she could more readily move around to look over the engine. She tied her hair back and started feeling the ship over and over with her hands. She felt and saw several places inside where the mechanics needed some fine tuning. She offered expert advice to a very surprised and delighted Marxx.

Marxx settled into the inspection with glee. He found himself more and more intrigued by this young woman. Usually he had his pick of any female on the planet. He knew he was attractive and most girls willingly threw themselves at him regularly. Sometimes he would catch one, but never did one of them actually enjoy fiddling with converters and knew the difference between a fan belt and an engine belt. He watched Jaina's lean body with admiration as she gracefully moved around his racer. He felt something going on inside him that he just couldn't explain. The desire to protect and get to know this young woman better grew stronger by the moment. She wasn't some simple woman wrapped up in shallow looks, she exuded intelligence and wisdom. And she understood ships.

Jaina stood up and placed her hands on her hips. A large grease mark smudged her face from nose to cheek. Marxx thought it made her even more beautiful.

"I feel pretty safe on loaning you the credits. I don't think this rig will fall apart on you," Jaina said with a smile. "I do think I might need a demonstration prior to the race. But I can wait until after you have paid your admissions. You ready?"

Marxx walked around the pod to her, pulled out a clean rag and cleaned the grease smudge off her face. Jaina's face blossomed bright red. "Don't worry, engine grease looks good on you. You want to wash up before we head out?"

On her way down a long hall she stopped dead in her tracks. She happened to glance into the living room and something caught her eye. Captivated, she walked towards the most amazing mural she'd ever seen. The artwork itself would have been brilliant enough, except that wasn't why she noticed it. She stared in disbelief at the scene in the painting. The mural depicted the balcony on Naboo where she saw Padme and Anakin kiss in her vision. However the only person there was a quite noticeably younger version of Padme.

Marxx came inside rolling up his sleeve when he saw Jaina leaning against the wall looking at the mural in the living room. He noticed Jaina stood in the exact same pose as the young woman in the painting. Practically his whole life, Marxx viewed that woman in the painting to be his dream woman. She always seemed just perfect, wistful and beautiful. Suddenly she paled in comparison to the woman

standing in front of him. Marxx felt the overpowering urge to walk up to Jaina and wrap her up in his arms. Instead he just walked up right behind her, not daring to step over an unseen line of etiquette. Jaina felt his presence rather than heard him, so she did not jump when he started to speak.

“Do you like the painting?”

“Yes, who did it?”

“My grandfather. That’s a scene he painted from his home planet before it was destroyed.”

“Your grandfather? The planet was destroyed?” Jaina said whirling around.

“Yes, during the Clone Wars I believe. You can ask him all about it later at supper,” Marxx’s face flushed, “Well that was presumptuous of me wasn’t it?”

Jaina smiled, “I’d love to have dinner with you and your family.”

“You need a place to stay also, right?” Marxx asked, he added quickly. “We have a spare room, of course it’s yours.”

Jaina smiled at him, “Thank you. Sorry, I still haven’t used the facilities.”

Marxx moved aside and she headed towards the refresher. As she glanced back at the tall man, she now knew why he looked so alarmingly familiar, and why she felt so comfortable with him. She shot him a radiant smile and closed the door behind her.

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Jaina and Marxx arrived later in the day at her X-Wing after submitting the entry fees for Marxx to enter the race. Jaina and Marxx both climbed up on the ship. Marxx jumped into the cockpit and Jaina popped the engine covering to fix her holo-emitter.

"I can't believe I'm actually sitting in a Rouge Squadron X-Wing!" he looked around and had to smile, the cockpit smelled like Jaina's shampoo. He would definitely feel comfortable flying in here.

Jaina groaned and she pulled out the blackened responder. "Well it's amazing this thing even worked this morning." She tossed it down and started to manipulate the new one into place. R4 below picked up the defective part and threw it into a recycling container. "Thanks R4." Jaina yelled below. He whistled merrily back at her. She pushed the part in place and moved around to look into the cockpit. "Hey can you test the holo-emitter and see if you get a signal?"

"Sure," Marxx reached up and pressed a button. Suddenly an image popped up on Jaina's dashboard. A very confused Han Solo looked at Marxx. "Who in the Force are you and what have you done with my daughter?"

Marxx stammered, "Ah she's..."

Jaina swung her head into the emitter range, "I'm right here Dad. This is Marxx Racees, he's a new friend of mine."

Marxx smiled nervously and waved at Han. "It's an honor to meet you sir, I've read all about you and your exploits over the years." Han shifted uncomfortably.

"What's up Dad?"

"We just got this disturbing message from Wedge that you up and quit Rouge Squadron last night. Just wanted to make sure everything was ok with you." Han looked at her concerned.

Jaina flashed him a big smile. "I'm fine Dad. Is Mom there?" Marxx reached out, grabbed her arm and whispered, "Chancellor Leia Organa-Solo?"

Jaina smiled at him, "Yes."

Han's image in the holo-emitter suddenly turned very angry. "Don't lay a hand on her!"

"DAD! It's fine. He's my friend."

"Yeah, well I know that look you just gave her pal, keep your distance. No fresh stuff!"

Marxx turned pale, "No sir, I wouldn't do anything to hurt your daughter."

"Dad stop torturing Marxx and please get Mom!" Just to make her Dad squirm more, Jaina made Marxx move over and she dropped down and joined him in the cockpit.

"Leia, get in here, your daughter wants to talk to you." Han looked at her, "You ah, need us there with you sweetheart?"

"I'm in good hands Dad, really," Jaina said, placing a hand over Marxx's. "Besides Uncle Luke will be here tomorrow."

"Luke, great." Han muttered. Leia moved over into the picture.

"Hi sweetie everything alright? I talked to Luke he told me what was going on there, have you found out anything new?" Han looked visibly disturbed that he was kept out of some information loop.

Jaina recounted her new findings and her meeting with Watto. Leia looked on and frowned. "I don't remember much of my mother, nor do I know anything of my father, besides what he became. Although he did contact me once through the Force, tried to make amends. I only slightly remember mother, just fleeting images. You actually remind me a lot of her."

"Well I don't see that, but who knows," Jaina said.

"If she was beautiful, then you certainly look like her," Marxx mumbled. Leia craned her head to look at who was speaking. Jaina introduced them, and explained why they were both in the cockpit. "Can you tell Uncle Luke to find me tomorrow at the Corsdune Canyon racecourse" I'll still leave a message here for him in case you miss him."

"Sure Jaina. Anything else?"

"No, I'll talk to you later. I love you both."

"It was an honor meeting you both," Marxx said with a wave and a smile.

Leia smiled back, "May the Force be with you."

"May the Force be with you too. Bye Dad."

Han still looked unconvinced that there wasn't something funny going on, "I love you too sweetheart. Bye."

Jaina turned off the emitter and turned her head to look at Marxx. "Sorry about that. Talk about timing huh?"

Marxx grinned, "I thought your father was going to reach through the emitter and strangle me!"

Jaina laughed, "Well you're lucky he doesn't have any Force abilities. Believe it or not, he's actually quite sweet." Jaina stood up and threw her legs over the ladder. She reached over behind her seat and pulled out her bag. "Grab my helmet ok?" Marxx looked at her questioningly.

"I am going to get to ride in your racer aren't I?"

"Absolutely." Marxx reached over and grabbed her helmet. He gently caressed the Rouge Squadron emblem and looked down at Jaina. She stood below with her hands wide open. He fleetingly thought, maybe she awaited for him to come down into her open arms. Then he foolishly realized she wanted him to toss down her helmet. He dropped the helmet down to her waiting hands. He then gladly followed after it.

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## Chapter 7

The two pilots stood looking out across the beige, barren landscape of the sandwater flats. The actual Corsdune Canyon course had closed for the day for security purposes. So Marxx decided to take Jaina out towards Beggars Canyon to test his pod. He moved things around in his racer. He'd never built it intending for 2 people to sit in it. He did have a large storage section built in behind his seat for storage of his tool chest. He pulled that out and stuck it in his X42S landspeeder. He then moved his seat backward and hopped in to see if he could get comfortable. The fit was tight, but he could still maneuver in it. Besides he didn't plan on doing anything dangerous with his companion aboard. Jaina brought over a couple blankets from the speeder and she placed them under the seat to help extend it out. She placed her helmet on her head, and then hopped in behind Marxx. She reached up behind her and swung over the restraining belt that smashed the two in tightly together. As a result Jaina had her head squished on his shoulder, her arms tight around his waist.

"I can try something else if you are too uncomfortable," Marxx said.

"No, I'm fine, get going fly boy."

Marxx grinned, “Yes M’lady. Anything you ask. Just to let you know, this ain’t your Grandfather’s pod racer, these now have built in magnetic fields that allow for more, CREATIVE racing techniques.” With that he revved up the engines. The noise deafened any sounds for miles. Jaina laughed uncontrollably, reached down and tickled Marxx’s stomach. He slightly jumped and yelled something.

“Come on, show me what this baby can do!” Jaina yelled in his ear. With that, Marxx pushed full throttle onto the racer’s controls and they shot off across the desert. Jaina laughed as the pod devoured the desert floor. Huge monoliths of rock passed under a blink of an eye. Marxx expertly guided the craft close enough to the rock formations to give Jaina the thrill of collision. Marxx delighted when he’d feel her heart race faster into his back. He also found himself consciously aware of her strong arms gripping him tightly. Having Jaina in the pod with him heightened his enjoyment of the ride, something he never would have thought possible. They flew along through the valleys of Beggars Canyon, hugging walls at ninety-degree angles. Jaina watched the passing scenery but also watched Marxx and his flying skills. Before long they were back at the landspeeder. He slowed down to a stop.

“Was that the fastest it would go?”

“You a speed menace or something?”

“Just wondering.” With that Marxx flew out across the desert again, this time turning on the turbo engines. Jaina had to cling to Marxx for dear life, the force of the speeder in flight nearly sent her flat against the back of the seat. She suddenly felt grateful for the harness. Jaina felt a rush of joy and wonder pass over her as she flew across the desert. As the pod raced across the sandy flats, she became consciously aware of the man she had her arms wrapped around. She savored the tingly feeling that spread throughout her as their legs touched. Marxx cut the ride short at that speed, not wishing to over exert the ship the day before the race. He slowed to a stop and killed the engines.

“No funny ideas lady,” he said as he released the harness, “I know you’re a big shot pilot, but I can’t risk anything happening to my racer before tomorrow.”

Jaina pulled off her helmet and looked innocently at him, “What?”

He stepped out of the racer and gave her his hand, “I saw you watching me use the controls. After I win tomorrow, you can race it all you want, OK?”

Jaina smirked and snapped her fingers, “I hoped you wouldn’t catch that.” The two worked together at hooking the racer back up to the trailer and headed back towards Mos Espa.

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## Chapter 8

Marxx placed Jaina’s bag on a table and showed her around the spare room. He pointed out the refresher so she could clean up before supper. Jaina thanked him. Marxx stood at the door and gazed longingly at her before shutting it, her face slightly sunburned from their day out and about, seemed to glow with light, he etched her image into his memory.

She flopped onto the bed, grateful for the cool air that circulated. She felt exhilarated after the test drive in Marxx’s pod. The speed, the noise, and Marxx’s expertise with the controls made the experience

perfectly entertaining. As she rode behind him, she felt warm, alive, and free.

Yet something else stirring inside her that she couldn't explain, she felt an overwhelming urge to trust him. Being the child of important political leaders, and having constantly lived worrying about the motives of others, leaves little room for one to openly trust someone, especially shortly after a first meeting. In Marxx she has found something she couldn't quite place a finger on yet, although the word comfortable comes to mind. All she knew for sure was that she wanted to get to know him better.

Jaina then got up and looked over her clothes and found that she really had nothing appropriate for meeting Marxx's family to wear. She shrugged her shoulders and took a refreshing sonic shower. She found a robe in the closet and put it on when she heard a knock at the door. She looked at herself in the mirror quickly to see whether she was well concealed or not.

"Yes?"

"Jaina?" called a woman's voice from the other side of the door.

"Yes?"

"I'm Tanella, Marxx's sister. Can I come in for a moment?"

"Sure," Jaina said feeling rather confused. The door opened and closed and a woman a several years older than Marxx walked in. Pretty with dark hair Tanella looked a lot like Marxx, yet she was shorter, stouter and brown-eyed.

Tanella sized up the young woman standing in the room, clenching her robe tightly together. Jaina wasn't the normal raving beauty that Marxx usually dated, although she was attractive. Tanella wondered at Marxx's interest in this girl. "Marxx thought you might need something to wear and he asked me to bring in a couple dresses. He requested that the whole family dress up for dinner tonight. Do you have ANY idea how odd that is?"

"He doesn't really seem like a 'dress up' kind of guy."

"He's not. Nor has he ever requested this of us. Mother and I dug through her old trousseau and found these. Tell me if you like any of them." Jaina stared in disbelief at the gorgeous gowns Tanella laid out for her to inspect.

"I couldn't wear any of these," she whispered.

Tanella looked her over, "I think they are about your size, they should fit."

"I mean they are way too beautiful to wear."

Tanella smiled, "Well I haven't seen you with your hair dry, but I get the feeling you'll do the dresses justice. By the way what are you going to do with your hair?"

"Do with my hair?" Jaina asked uncomfortably.

Tanella groaned, "Oh dear lord, my brother's found himself a tomboy to fall in love with. Come on I'll

take care of you.”

“Fallen in love with?”

“My dear girl, the day Marxx agrees to put on dress shoes willingly is the day he falls in love with a woman. Trust me. He wouldn’t even wear those things to any of our funerals. If he actually dances with you, I will know it’s time to say our prayers, the universe is about to implode. He flat out refuses to act civilized.”

A half an hour later, Tanella sauntered out the room very proud of herself. Jaina stood staring at herself in the mirror in complete disbelief. She heard Marxx’s words rush through her head, “If she was beautiful, then you certainly look like her.”

The dress she wore fell off of her shoulders with layers of gorgeous lilac silk. Tiny silk flowers dotted the bodice. She felt foolish and gloriously feminine at the same time. She didn’t recognize her hair either. With much effort, Tanella forced it into spiraling ringlets that gathered atop her head and fell down in cascades around her neck. A tiny silver headband resting across her forehead finished the look. She then pulled up the dress a bit and peeked at the delicate silver slippers on her feet.

“That can’t possibly be me,” she said looking questioningly in the mirror.

She then heard a knock at the door. “Come in.” The door opened and Marxx stood outside the door looking very nervous. She turned so he could look at her completely. His face turned nearly white and he got very still. “*He’s going to faint,*” Jaina thought.

“I look that bad, huh?” she said jokingly.

“Baaa, what? Bad?” Marxx seemed to snap out of his daze, “My stars you are gorgeous, I think your beauty would outshine Tatoo 1 and 2.” She looked him over from toe to head as well. He in fact did wear nicely polished dress shoes, pressed leggings, and a flowing white shirt covered with a tailored silver and blue vest. He looked the perfect gentleman. He’d even managed to control his mass of curls.

“And you look like a man of great wealth and prestige.” Marxx smiled dizzily at her, glowing from her compliment, and in three large steps stood over her. She looked up at him, heart racing, mouth dry. He reached out and took her hands and brought them up to his lips, where he gently kissed the tops of her knuckles. He then brought them towards his heart and rested them there.

Marxx chuckled, “I can’t believe it, I’m at a loss for words. Do you know how rare that is for me?”

That broke the tension and Jaina laughed. Marxx raised an eyebrow and asked “Are you ready to face the execution squad, I mean my family?”

Jaina smiled and feeling slightly lightheaded, said, “With you, I think I can face anything.” Marxx sucked in his breath, then offered his arm and the 2 walked towards the living room.

“Oh hold on a second,” Marxx reached up a hand, aimed it towards the living room and flicked a couple fingers. From around the corner soft music turned on. He looked at her and laughed outright, “I guess that’s not too impressive for a Jedi, huh?”

“Impressive, most impressive,” Jaina said with a twinkle in her eye, she reached out with the Force and made a bouquet of dried flowers lift off of a table and spin around the room. He grabbed her hands and spun her into the room leading her into a Bardallian Waltz. Jaina lifted more objects off tables and made them dance merrily over their heads as the young couple swirled and glided to the music. Marxx joined in the Force fun and flickered the lights on and off. They laughed with glee. Jaina started to put the objects down one by one, as she started to lose control of her senses. The young couple gloried in the moment of joy, and expressed their delight by dancing their hearts out. The music ended and the 2 stared breathlessly into each other’s eyes.

From the doorway came huge bursts of applause and hoots of approval. Both Jaina and Marxx blushed and looked over to see five faces staring at the exuberant couple. The biggest smile came from a very young girl with tight brown curls. “How did you do that?”

“Alright, everyone line up and lets have introductions,” Marxx said. “Everyone this is my friend Jaina Solo, Jaina this is my family, my mother Chariss, my father Rowlon, you met Tanella, my grandfather Paulo, and that is my niece Krishta.”

“You are beautiful,” Krishta said from behind her mother Tanella’s skirt. Jaina guessed she was about 5 years.

“Thank you, but I think you can thank your mother for that. This dress is hers, not mine.”

“She can’t be,” Jaina bolted her head upwards and looked at Marxx’s grandfather Paulo. “No it can’t be, Padme Amidala died a long time ago.”

“Padme Amidala?” Jaina said, testing the last name over her tongue, “Senator Amidala of Naboo?”

Each member of the Racees family stared at her and suddenly everyone started asking questions at once, “How do you know of Naboo?” “How do you know Queen Amidala?” “Have you ever been to Naboo?”

“Whooooaaaaa!” Marxx yelled over the noise, “Everyone why don’t you all sit down, and one question at a time.”

“Come on everyone, this sounds like good dinner conversation,” Chariss said ushering everyone into the dining room. Short, round, and bald, Rowlon Racees sat at the head of the table and pulled his wife down towards him, bussing her lightly on the cheek. Chariss, equally as short in stature rebuffed her husband jokingly for his lack of manners. Looking at his parents, Jaina briefly wondered where Marxx got his height genes from as he towered over them before sitting down next to her. Everyone sat down and food was passed around, then all eyes fell on Jaina. She shifted slightly in her seat, but accepted the duty of the dinner guest to entertain.

“I think I’d better start from the beginning. I am the daughter of former Galactic Senate Chancellor Leia Organa Solo and former General Han Solo, niece of Jedi Master Luke Skywalker,” She looked at Krishta, and lifted a dinner roll from a basket with the Force and sent it over to her plate. “I can levitate things, because I am a trained Jedi Knight. My grandfather was Anakin Skywalker- whom I’m sure you’ve all heard about.” Everyone nodded- but Marxx’s grandfather went pale. “Padme Amidala was my grandmother. Sometime around the birth of the Empire, my mother and her brother were separated after they were born, as a result, we don’t know much about my grandmother. She died not long

afterwards.”

“And your grandfather?” Paulo asked.

Marxx, sitting next to her, reached over and squeezed Jaina’s hand, “It’s ok, we’ve all come to terms with him a long time ago. Well mostly. My grandfather Anakin was very strong with the Force. He was a great Jedi who turned to the Dark Side of the Force. He became a Dark Lord of the Sith known as Darth Vader. My Uncle Luke brought him back to the light and Anakin killed Emperor Palpatine. He then died shortly afterwards.” Everyone started talking excitedly at once. Jaina looked over to Paulo, “Please tell me about my grandmother. I know you two were good friends growing up.”

That silenced everyone, as they seemed startled by Jaina’s knowledge of personal family things

Paulo seemed not to notice though, “Padme was the most brilliant woman I’d ever met. She radiated intelligence. We studied together in the Legislative Youth Program on Naboo. She had the highest moral ratings of any student in years. I dropped out of the program to study art and met my future wife Gwynalyn. Padme went on to become elected Queen at the age of 14. In her first year of rule, the Trade Federation invaded and occupied our planet. She escaped capture, returned and initiated a three pronged attack on the invaders that ended up saving planet. The key battle took place on the plains of Naboo, where the local species of Gungans drew fire from a droid army. The droids were controlled from a Trade Federation ship that was circling the planet. Do you know who destroyed the Trade Federation ship?”

Jaina shook her head. “It was your grandfather, Anakin Skywalker. He destroyed the Trade Federation ship and he was only 9 years old.”

Jaina remembered her vision of the boy from Watto’s shop. “Did any Jedi assist in this battle?”

“Yes I believe so. I don’t remember their names.”

“Obi-Wan Kenobi?”

“Possibly.”

“Anything else about Padme?”

“After her terms as Queen were up, she became Senator of our planet. Several attempts were made on her life and Skywalker was assigned to protect her. Apparently they fell in love and married. Rumors flew around Naboo about them and their love all during the Clone Wars. It was quite the scandal. Then one day, Naboo came under attack. Everyone who could evacuated the planet. My wife and I arrived here and never left. I’m afraid I don’t know what happened to your grandmother. I never heard about her again.” Jaina nodded settled into her meal.

“So Jaina, are you able to use any of your Jedi skills to talk my son out of flying in this crazy race tomorrow?” Rowlon asked changing the subject.

“He’d better not drop out, I loaned him credits to fly in the race!” Marxx grinned at the shocked look on everyone’s faces. “He took me out of a spin in his racer, I think he’s a capable enough pilot.”

“Jaina has been a Captain of the X-Wing Rouge Squadron. They only allow the best of the best pilots in that elite squad. Her praise of my skills means a lot to me.”

Tanella settled back with a satisfied look on her face. “Well let’s see, her grandfather was Anakin Skywalker, Marxx’s racing hero. Luke Skywalker is her uncle, he’s Marxx’s Jedi hero, and Jaina is an accomplished pilot and Jedi, even I couldn’t have thought up that kind of a recipe for a perfect dream girl for Marxx.”

“I think it’s more than that,” Paulo said with a twinkle in his eye. “Years ago before I met my wife, I would have married Padme in a heartbeat. Maybe our two families were destined to join together. I didn’t realize it wouldn’t be until a couple of generations down the road though.”

“Grandfather, Tanella will you two relax! We just met each other. You can stop making wedding plans for us.” Marxx looked apologetically at Jaina. She just said nothing, gave him a broad grin, took a bite of food, and enjoyed watching him squirm.

“Sure they just met, and already he’s turning into the perfect gentleman,” Tanella mumbled.

Jaina decided to turn the heat off Marxx and looked at his mother, “Mrs. Racees when did your family move to Tatooine? And why here of all places did you decide to settle?”

The dark haired woman looked at Jaina, “Dear call me Chariss. As my father mentioned, we left Naboo during the Clone War battle that decimated most of the cities on our planet. We actually grew up in the Lake Country, far away from the capital of Theed. My parents were in Theed at the time of the attack working on a large art project that chronicled the history of Naboo in the capital building. My father is a painter. He was painting the most beautiful mural, that represented the motto of Naboo, ‘Beauty, truth, art, and love.’ My mother Gwynalyn was a sculptor. She had just finished casting these 2 gorgeous Nubian bronze sculptures that would sit on either side of father’s mural. Then the attacks began.”

Paulo picked up the tale, “We had to get out of there. Queen Jamilla called out to us and offered us transport off of the planet. We had nothing to take with us per se. We left with basically the clothes on our backs, a couple random trunks, that dress you are wearing was in it, and my box of paints. We made it off planet on the first civilian transport we could get on. It took us to Tatooine. With no money or way to contact any friends or family at home, we stayed here until we could earn enough money for passage home.”

“In time, I grew up and fell in love with Rowlon. Rowlon is a very successful builder here in Mos Espa. As time has worn on, we have thought still about going back to Naboo. But times are hard in the outer rim here. With the amount of money we have saved over the years, it might gain us passage home, but if there is nothing left there... we may not be able to come back. So we haven’t left Tatooine,” Chariss said, reaching over and taking her father’s hand.

Paulo looked off into distance. “Naboo was the most wonderful place to live. Our family was proud, affluent, Aristocratic people. My father Appaulo Brannoush headed our local government. I suppose that my siblings and their offspring may still be there since they were in the Lake Country and not at the capital. But who knows.”

“I really hardly remember it, I was so young when we left. I was only a small child. All I remember in

my dreams are green hills, tall trees, and fields,” Chariss said.

“I hope one day you all can return there. I really do.” Jaina said.

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After a long lively dinner the family engaged in a few word games and spirited conversation. Marxx also brought out his video of Anakin’s race for Jaina to watch breathlessly. Watching the race gave her a vivid sense of how dangerous the sport could be. Afterwards everyone went off to his/her own bedrooms to retire.

Jaina snuck back into the living room after changing out of her formal clothes. She picked up a holopad filled with holographs of Naboo that Paulo had brought out to show her earlier. She stared, fixated at 3 images in particular. Each contained images of a young Padme, smiling, full of free spirit. Marxx came out of his room debating whether he should knock on Jaina’s door to see if she wanted to talk. He felt his throat go dry at the thought of talking to her. He then saw the living room light was on and went in to investigate. He looked in and saw Jaina curled up on the couch with the images.

“Do you want to be alone? Because I can go if you need to be alone,” he said, ready to retreat down the hall at her bidding.

“No,” Jaina looked up at him and extended her hand, “Please come sit with me.”

“You somehow recognized this place when you saw the mural earlier, didn’t you? How did you know it was Naboo?” Marxx asked sitting respectfully apart from her.

“I’ve been having visions of my grandmother recently. And I saw that place in my vision. It’s where Padme and Anakin first kissed, at least I think it was a first kiss. It was pretty awkward. I also saw Padme and your grandfather swim out to the island that’s in the center of that lake. Naboo is so beautiful.”

“Was beautiful.”

“Is it completely gone?”

“I don’t know.”

“Would your grandfather know the co-ordinates? I’d like to try and visit the planet.” Marxx felt a brief wave of panic rise over him “*She wants to leave me!*” he thought.

“Possibly, probably.” Jaina noted the tightness in his voice.

“I need to go there.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. I feel that Padme is calling for me for some reason, leading me there.”

“Well I’m sure my grandfather will be glad to help you out.” They sat together in silence for a few moments. Marxx moved closer and glanced at the holograph Jaina was looking at.

“You have her profile,” he said looking at her face, etching its lines into his memory.

“She was so beautiful.”

“And you don’t think you are?” Jaina looked up at Marxx and gazed into his dancing pool blue eyes, they spoke to her, whispering promises of ...what? She looked at his delicate long eyelashes, chiseled cheekbones, and full smiling mouth.

Uncomfortable and not trusting herself with a response, she shifted the conversation topic. She cleared her throat, “You should probably think of going to bed soon, we have to get up early for the race.”

“I don’t know how much sleep I’ll get tonight.”

“I’m sure you’re excited about the race,” Jaina said.

He looked at her with a mischievous smile, “That’s not exactly what I was referring to.”

“*Now what do I do?*” She thought, realizing she’d never been in this kind of situation before. She knew what her heart wanted. She wanted, desperately for him to swoop in and kiss her.

“I’m totally confused,” he said, backing away.

“About what?” Jaina asked, her heart pounding.

“Does it feel like we’ve known each other longer than just one day?”

“Yes.”

“Do you believe in destiny?”

“I believe your destiny is what you make of it. The future is always in motion. The decisions you consciously make help shape and mould your destiny.”

“So you don’t think it’s preordained?”

“No. If I believed that, I would have to admit that Grandfather Anakin was destined to become a monster. I can’t accept that someone or something wanted him to become a monster,” Jaina looked up at Marxx. “From what I’ve seen my grandparents *loved* each other, they defied all laws and conventions of their time to be together. Back in the day, Jedi were not allowed to marry.”

“Are they now?” Marxx asked alarmed, his blue eyes opening wide.

Jaina smiled slyly, “Yes. My uncle does not forbid it. In fact he recently married himself.”

“Thank the Force,” Marxx said, relaxing.

“I don’t know if we’ll ever know why Anakin turned completely.”

“I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For any uncertainty in your life.”

“Well I suppose if everything was certain, there would be no surprises, or point of living, would there?”

Marxx grinned, completely intrigued by his fascinating companion, “No I guess not. But you are right. If I don’t get some sleep, I can probably assure you I will not be fit to race tomorrow. Feel free to take those into your room, I’m sure Grandfather won’t mind.”

They both got up, and Marxx turned off the light. They stopped in front of her door. Marxx nervously bit his lip and ran a hand through his curly hair.

“Sleep well Jaina Solo.”

Marxx looked so vulnerable standing there, unsure of himself and what to do. Jaina felt all of her emotional barricades fall as she looked up at the handsome young man. She thought back to the tears in Padme’s face as she outright rejected Anakin. Anakin’s words rushed through her mind, “*And now that I’m with you again I’m in agony. The closer I get to you, the worse it gets. I can’t breathe! ... You are in my very soul, tormenting me.*” If the visions of her grandparents revealed anything to her, they spoke of the fact that moments of happiness in life are fleeting, embrace them while you can.

Jaina threw the holopads onto her bed and wrapped her arms tightly around Marxx’s waist and nestled her head against his strong chest. He smiled delightfully and returned her hug with equal fierceness.

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## Chapter 9

Jaina awoke to the unpleasant chronobuzzer barking before dawn. She dressed and readied herself to prepare for the race. She walked out of her room, right into Marxx. He grinned at her.

“Let’s hope your investment pays off today M’lady.”

“Is there anything I can do to assure success?” She asked hands behind back, rocking back and forth softly on her feet.

He wiggled his eyebrows and leaned in towards her, “What did you have in mind?”

Jaina laughed, “Oh I don’t know, engine tests, forms to fill out, things of that nature?”

“I know one test you could assist with.” The look in his eyes spoke of ulterior motives.

Jaina looked up at him shocked, “What...?”

He reached down and grabbed her hand and dragged her outside, “Tell me what you think of my new

paintjob?”

Jaina looked over at his pod racer, which yesterday had been a dull gray with red insignias on it, now suddenly was gloriously green, it looked like a canopy of leaves. “When in the Force did you have time to do this?”

“I didn’t. I woke up and found it this way. I think Grandfather must have been awake all night and did it for me. Look at the name.”

Jaina tilted her head and looked at the side of the racer, “*The Nubian Dream*. Well here’s to hoping the spirit of the people of Naboo will be with you today.”

The whole family helped with preparations for the race. Within an hour a Racees family convoy carted the pod off to the racetrack. Inside the prep hanger, odd visions flashed in Jaina’s mind. She saw little boy Anakin and Padme sitting atop a creature together, and a Jedi talking with Watto. Not sensing anything important about the images, she shoved the images aside and helped Marxx with the pre-race systems check on the ship. About a half an hour into prep a large buzz of activity caught everyone’s attention as a new arrival entered the hanger.

“Who’s that?” Jaina asked.

“Charzarck- he’s a Dug,” Marxx placed his hand over his neck in worry. “He...ahh... has never lost a race here. He’s the dirtiest player in the book. Don’t let him near my pod- he’ll try and disable it somehow.”

“He’s never lost? Until today, right?” Jaina asked, working on Marxx’s confidence.

Marxx flashed a lopsided smile at his pit mate, “Absolutely.” The two got to work testing the engines and fell into a nice quite routine.

Another large amount of noise erupted from within the hanger. Jaina craned her head from around the Pod and looked over to see six people, a wookiee, and two droids walking her way. She strained her eyes, and once they moved out of the glare she looked expectantly at Marxx.

“Well you’re opponents should all be in the fear of the Sith when they see where this bunch of people are headed.” Jaina waved and shouted out to the new arrivals. Marxx rolled out from under his pod, looked up at the party, and proceeded to lose all feeling in his body.

From across the hanger, Charzarck watched the newcomers with interest, wondering if they had heard of his amazing racing abilities and were here to wish him luck. He slammed a fist on the floor when he realized they were heading over to the pit area for that human Marxx Racees.

“Jedi Poodoo,” he cursed as he reached up and relieved an itch on his drooping blue face.

“Dad are you responsible for this?” Jaina asked, hands on her hips, head cocked.

“Don’t look at me, when you told your mother you were going to be at a Pod Race track, she decided you’d gone off the deep end. She was worried you quit the Rouge Squadron to become an outland racer. Right Chewie?”

Chewie looked at him and growled back rather unconvincingly.

Leia scowled at her husband, "I said no such thing. It WAS your father's idea for this entire family outing." Marxx stood up, desperately wiped the grease from his fingers. He twitched nervously behind Jaina, took a deep breath and tried to still himself.

"Sure Dad, you were worrying about me racing," Jaina said knowing full well where his real worries laid. "Alright everyone time for introductions. First thing, I'm not the racer of this Pod, Marxx is." She stepped aside and Marxx smiled as confidently as possible to Jaina's family of Galactic heroes.

"Marxx, this is my mother, Leia Organa Solo, you met briefly yesterday, this is my twin brother Jacen Solo, my younger brother Anakin, my Aunt Mara Jade Skywalker, Uncle Luke Skywalker, and my father Han Solo. That is Chewbacca and the family droids R2-D2 and C-3PO. Everyone this is my friend Marxx Racees."

"Hello everyone," Marxx bowed. "It's an honor to meet you all." Leia smiled at the nervous, handsome young man. He reminded her of a certain scoundrel she fell in love with years ago. Han looked at the boy with mixed feelings. He noted the easy way Jaina stood beside Marxx, and wondered exactly what was going on with them. The boy had manners, but Han recalled that once upon a time, he could turn on the charm when necessary as well.

Anakin bounced over and immediately stuck his head in the engine of the Pod racer for a quick look around. Marxx's family came out of hiding and introductions again were made. Jaina told her mother about Paulo's knowledge of her mother and the two wandered off to talk.

Jaina pulled her uncle aside. "Did you find anything out about grandmother Padme or Naboo?"

Luke shook his head in frustration, "It appears all records of the planet have been purged from the Galactic archives. I could find nothing about either of them, beyond that the planet was once the epicenter of artistic endeavors prior to the Clone Wars."

Jaina thought about that for a moment then changed the subject. "Uncle Luke, I think Marxx has Force abilities. Well in fact I know he does. Would you be willing, after the race, to test him? He would like to be trained as a Jedi if he has the ability."

"Why do you say he is strong with the Force?"

"He can levitate objects, and I can sense it from him."

"Well I can definitely use his racing skills as a test. Humans don't pod race. They usually aren't dexterous enough."

"Grandfather Anakin did it. He won a race years ago. He was a brilliant racer."

Luke looked at his niece closely. She wanted something from him. He then got it. "Want me to give him a Master to student pep talk?"

Jaina beamed. "Would you?"

“Sure,” Luke said, resting an arm around her shoulder as they moved towards the racer.

They found Jacen and Anakin laughing hysterically with Marxx.

“What?” Jaina asked. The young men all sobered up briefly then broke into more peels of laughter. Jaina cocked her head at her brothers, “Can you both come over here for a moment?” The Solo boys winked and gestured at Marxx and walked off towards their sister.

Marxx looked up at Luke and nervously rubbed his neck, “Ah we were just having some guy talk.”

Luke waved and smiled, “Well I may not look it, but I was once a young man and I do understand such things. I was also fairly decent bush pilot myself. I once clocked the fastest time racing through Beggars Canyon in my T-16.”

“Really? Those are antiques you know.”

Luke slightly winced, “Yes well, it was when I owned it as well. Jaina mentioned to me that you have Force abilities.”

“Ahhh, well I think so. Do you need a demonstration?”

“No, not yet. Why do you believe you are strong in the Force? What Jedi traits do you exhibit?” Luke asked gingerly leaning against the racer.

“Well I can do parlor tricks- move small things with my mind. But I guess the main thing is that I can usually see when things are about to happen. Once my niece Krishta was out playing in the street, and I saw a swoop rider plow right into her. I raced out, grabbed her and flew across the street just as the swoop came out of nowhere.”

Luke smiled. “That’s the kind of proof I was looking for. The ability to see things before they happen is a Jedi trait. Do you mind if I try something?” Marxx shook his head. Luke reached up with his fingers and gently touched Marxx’s forehead. Marxx suddenly felt a jolt run through him, and Luke fell over onto the floor.

“What was that?” Marxx asked, “Are you alright?”

Luke chuckled standing up, “I’m fine. That my friend was your first test that you passed in becoming a Jedi.”

Marxx looked at Luke completely confused, but didn’t question the Jedi any farther. Luke started to give Marxx a brief lesson on how to delve into the Force and to use it to enhance his race performance.

From across the hanger Tanella had Han cornered. “You should have seen them dancing together last night. They looked as if they made for each other.”

“*Dancing?* Jaina doesn’t dance! I don’t even think she knows how to. She’s a pilot, a mechanic, a Jedi, she’s not into all that fancy cultural nonsense,” Han fumed.

Tanella's eyes sparkled, "I don't know, she definitely knew where to place her hands and feet. You know my brother highly resented all the dance lessons I put him through as a child. Guess there's something about your daughter that makes him want to impress her. Excuse me."

Tanella turned tail and headed over to her mother. Han placed his sweating palms into fists and placed them on his hips. He looked over and saw Jaina hanging out with her brothers. He took a deep breath and approached his children. "You know I met Luke here on Tatooine. I swore I would never come back to this backward planet again. I don't have the best memories of this place. Explain to me why exactly we are here Jaina?"

Jaina glanced at her brothers. Both looked at her, apparently as in the dark as their father. She told them about her visions and her desire to have Luke take her to the old Lars homestead. "I didn't expect this to become a whole family outing," she added.

"Well we don't get to spend a lot of time together, so let's all try and make the best of things, shall we?" Han said clearly irritated with his daughter. "You got a problem with my being here? What're you all upset over? Afraid we're going to break up you and your new boyfriend?"

Anakin pulled up his hand and covered a snicker. Jacen grinned at his twin. "Oh sure, make fun of the girl in the family, that's really mature guys." Jaina turned tail, spotted Mara and decided to go talk to her.

"Sure walk away," Anakin said doubling over with laughter.

A siren sounded from inside the bunker with a 10 minute warning. Jaina, her brothers, and the droids helped Marxx get the pod out onto the course.

Booming over the loudspeaker, the race emcee, an overzealous Tweel'ik squealed, tentacles wagging wildly atop his head, at the sight of the visitors around Marxx's pod, "Ladies and gentlemen, I certainly hope you didn't put your bets on anyone other than human Marxx Racees. It appears he has the Force and the power of the Jedi behind him today. Tatooine's most famous Empire era son Luke Skywalker is down there now giving Marxx some last minute tips. And look there- former Chancellor Leia Organa Solo and her husband General Han Solo with the mighty Chewbacca are also here to watch this race!"

Luke, Leia and Han looked on baffled as the crowd suddenly reached a roaring crescendo with their shouting. The three Galactic heroes looked up to see their faces plastered all over the screens surrounding the racecourse.

Han turned bright red. He looked appraisingly at Marxx. Marxx squirmed under Jaina's father's stare. "Come on, let's go. Good luck kid, you'll need it," Han said.

The Racees, Skywalker and Solo families then all proceeded to a special tower reserved for family members of the racers. Jaina gave Marxx a big smile as he strapped himself into his seat.

She leaned over and kissed him quickly and tenderly on the mouth. He looked up at her happy and surprised. "For luck. May the Force be with you Marxx." He reached out of his pod and grabbed Jaina's hand. He wanted to say something dashing, but couldn't think of anything.

Jaina fought back tears and whispered into his ear, "I don't care about the credits, just come back safe

and sound.” That said she raced off towards the tower. Marxx watched her get smaller into the distance. He turned his focus back on the race. He revved up his racer’s engines and secured his helmet tightly on his head, goggles down.

He closed his eyes and let some of Luke’s words flow over him, “A Jedi feels the Force flowing through him, allow the Force to control your actions, obey your commands, trust your instincts.”

The Corsdune Canyon race consisted of 2 laps with 24 racers battling for first place. The course covered a vast open range, then turned into the hilly, and often rugged Eislean Formations course. Traveling through the Eislean Formations involved maneuvering over and under approximately 20 hills and rock formations, to go outside of the mandatory course settings, will earn immediate disqualification. Then after finishing the Eislean course the racers speed through the Corsdune Canyon. This involves an immediate 120 foot drop into a large canyon riddled with caves. The racers expertly must maneuver through each cave without crashing into the many rock spires that hide in the caves. Then it’s a sharp 50 foot climb out of the canyon which leads through to Sendars 6 curves, across the flats and back to the starting line.

The klaxons counted down and the race began! Marxx blasted his speeder forward, concentrating on the course ahead. He moved into the bottom of the top third of the racers allowing Charzarck and several of the racing regulars to duke it out in front. They would concentrate on taking out the first series of racers who chased their heels.

Half way through the flats Marxx swung off to the left as the first 2 racing casualties careened into each other, spraying pod debris all over the course in front of him. Unfortunately the racer directly behind Marxx did not move fast enough and found himself slammed with one of the flying power converters. Marxx blasted his accelerators to avoid getting hit.

The crowd roared as all of the screens displayed a chain reaction of not just 3 but a total of 8 racers being taken out within the first 45 seconds of the race. A new record!

Marxx hit the first hill in the Eislean flat full throttle, passing 2 racers expertly, vying for a closer spot and drafting off of the leaders. Off the hill came a sharp right under a series of 3 rock formations that you had to fly under, over, under. Marxx pushed forward throttle as he blasted over the second rock, pulled down and sped up under rock 3. He veered sharply left through the next course of 10 rock formations, expertly he moved his racer as close to the formations as possible to save time. Ahead he spied the leaders flying over the rest of the hills. He counted 10 leaders. It was still too early to try and catch them, he coasted over and through the rest of the Eislean hills, planning his next takeover to be after Corsdune Canyon.

Charzarck, the leader, found 3 new racers biting at his sonicpod’s heels and he felt uncomfortable with their heat. In a swift move, he threw several spare parts behind him as he plunged down into the Corsdune canyon wall. The parts flew straight into the engine of one racer, another hit the second racer, square in the helmet and the third fell, failing to hit a target. The 2 affected racers crashed into each other, spewing fiery debris down into the canyon below. Charzarck looked behind him and laughed mightily.

Marxx approached the canyon wall and hit his turbo engines. He just witnessed Charzarck’s move and could just see him entering the caves below. Now there were only 8 racers ahead of him. Turbo engines down, Marxx passed an older racer, Scandarez. He then blasted into the caves, lights on full max. Up

over and around boulders, he expertly avoided all obstacles in the cave. Unfortunately one racer, new to the sport, Unilanx smashed into a spire, exploding on impact. "6 to go," Marxx thought as he soared through the smoldering remains of the pod. He shot out of the caves and coasted up the incline into Sendars Curves. He felt, rather than saw the object heading right towards him, Marxx altered his course sharply to the left and avoided a seat from hitting his pod. Upon reaching the top he saw 1 more downed racer. 5 racers left as he hugged the Curves.

This was where Marxx excelled as a pilot. The racers fell into one of two categories, safe or reckless in the curves. Safe drivers drove the course low on the wall trajectory. Reckless racers would fly farther up the walls, speed up and then fall down over the racers below them to gain position. Marxx excelled as a reckless racer.

Marxx shot up the wall, clinging at a 70 degree hug up the walls, in his sights he saw Charzarck 2 curves up with the four other racers between them. Marxx decided to pass one racer in this round and settle to take out the last 4 in the final lap of the race. Charzarck tends to get desperate if he senses someone on his tail for too long. 20 feet in front of him and 25 feet below sped Ragloo's blue racer. Marxx looked simply ahead and hit the accelerators. In the canyons, his deafening engines roared and echoed. Into curve 3 he looked down to see Ragloo far gone and suddenly realized he was gaining on Tratched. Marxx blasted through the last 3 curves, and free fell just in front of Tratched's racer. Tratched apparently didn't realize Marxx had been cruising the walls, saw the speeder nearly land on him, threw up his hands and spun into a mass of spinning parts.

Marxx cringed as he then focused on the top 3 leaders, in his sights across the flats. Charzarck sensed a change coming up the rear and chanced a glance at the cocky human advancing up the field. He did not mind. Humans always blew it in pod racing. Charzarck flew through the starting line and waved to the roaring crowd. As Marxx crossed the line, he felt rather than saw a blast of joy and good will aimed at him. He smiled and kicked up the throttle, sending a bit of extra noise towards his family and new friends.

From up in the stands Jaina watched the race through the Force. She felt herself sitting right behind Marxx, experiencing the speed and drama of each twist and turn. Flushed with the speed of the race, she failed to notice her father's sideways glances.

Across the flats most of the earlier debris had been cleared. Marxx watched Charzarck be openly challenged by his nearest opponent, Qualtree. The Dug crashed right into the Qualtree's ride and the two continued to jockey for the lead position. Falestro the racer in third place, used this momentary lapse in Charzarck's attention to speed past the 2 struggling racers. Marxx saw Charzarck gesture wildly, screaming in rage at Falestro's gumption. The racers then hit the Eislean Formations. Upon the first curve, Charzarck's opponent dropped back to avoid missing going under the tight formation. This left the new ranking Falestro in first, Charzarck's in second, Qualtree in third, and Marxx in fourth.

The ride through the formations did not change the standings. Marxx heard a loud ping against his outer hull, and realized he'd taken a pot shot from a Tuskin Raider. His racer started sending out smoke. He relaxed and let his fingers fly over the controls as he flew in and out of the hill formations. In no time, the smoke stopped, he was passed by one other racer, Sharrecc, and Marxx fired on his throttle to regain on the leaders. Sharrecc cocky in his new standing failed to hit the last mark in the Formations and DQed himself. Marxx smiled savagely. And as the riders collapsed into the Canyon, Marxx watched Charzarck take over Falestro before heading into the caves. Marxx settled in through the caves and planned his next takeover of Qualtree in the Curves.

The four leaders blasted out of the canyon and into the curves, Marxx again flared up the walls tightly maneuvering to take over Qualtree. He punched on his accelerators and flew past the racer. Through the curves he narrowed the lead of Falestro and dropped over him as they exited the curves, landing him in second. Charzarck looked behind him with disgust and threw more items out of his rig. Marxx easily avoided each piece and punched on the turbo thrusters, full blast. From his left Falestro quickly approached him, gave the *Nubian Dream* several harsh slams, Marxx held onto his position, though and did not veer off course. Falestro decided no longer to bother and passed Marxx to tie with Charzarck. Marxx noticed his coolant ratings started to climb, his engine was overheating. He quickly executed some more commands to his system to buy himself a few more minutes before meltdown.

Charzarck looked over, saw the 2 speeders and hit his turbos. Suddenly Qualtree appeared in a second, right on Charzarck's tail. Each rider jostled for the lead position. The leader was not clear as they approached the finish line. Suddenly an image flared in Marxx's mind, he saw a huge fiery pileup of racers right before the finish line. He cut back on his thrusters and fell back, just in time to watch as Qualtree smashed headlong into Charzarck's Pod, Charzarck spun right into Falestro and all three leaders spun wildly out of control into a deafening mass of flying parts and sparks. Marxx pulled up on his thrusters, sailed right through the rolling mass of metal and soared over the finish line in first place.

The crowd roared with a mixture of disgust and delight, most realizing the amount of credits they'd just lost. Marxx came to a stop, and killed his engines near his family's tower. He looked up as the 40 foot observation deck slowly descended. From the top, he saw Jaina climb onto the railing and jump straight down. His heart climbed into his throat until he saw her perfectly absorb the shock of the fall and hit the ground running towards him.

Jaina heard the startled cries from both families as she threw herself out of the observation tower. During the race, she focused on Marxx and felt him sense the danger points in the race. She felt him utilizing the Force. Pride swelled in her chest, and she wasn't going to wait for the deck to land to let him know how proud she was of him.

Marxx jumped out of his pod, threw off his helmet. And lifted Jaina high in the air, spinning her happily in circles. Jaina reached down and rubbed his dusty face.

She giggled as she slid down his body so they looked at each other in the eye, she bent forward and pecked him on the lips. Jaina said, "You'll have to clean up before I give you a proper congratulations kiss!"

Marxx flushed, "Anything you ask M'lady. Wait on second thought..." He reached out and gave her a long sweeping kiss.

"You're gonna get it now," Jaina said, as she glanced out of the corner of her eye and saw their families heading towards them. Han glared at the young couple. Leia scowled at her husband, and pinched him for torturing the boy. Krishta raced towards her favorite uncle and threw herself at Marxx. He picked her up and swung her in big arcs. Jaina moved aside as Marxx's family crushed in to congratulate their victor.

Elsewhere bets were paid up, fortunes gained and lost, and futures changed forever.

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## Chapter 10

Jaina pressed at the buns at either side of her head, "Mom you've got to joking."

Leia glanced up at her with a mixture of amusement and surprise, "What? That is a very traditional Alderaanean hairstyle."

"Yes and Mom I'm sorry to say this, but Alderaan has been gone for many years. Perhaps certain customs of theirs should die along with them."

Leia chuckled at her daughter, "Oh fine. I never really liked wearing my hair that way anyway." Leia pulled out the buns and reworked her daughters hair aboard the Falcon. "I like you hair a bit longer."

"Yeah it's hot and gets in the way." Leia worked on her hair more and Jaina took over. She molded her hair into a crescent and wove silver ribbons throughout it. Leia looked at the style and thought it interesting, a little harsh maybe, but it accentuated Jaina's profile.

"Where did you find that hairstyle?"

Jaina slicked back a stray hair, "From Grandmother Padme."

Jaina studied herself again in the mirror. After the race the families all decided to go to a celebration dinner later that evening. Leia took Jaina begrudgingly away from the Racees and they shopped for a new dress. Even in the middle of this back world there existed a few stores with fine clothing. Jaina appraised her reflection. She selected the dress herself. The long royal blue dress decorated with silver sparkles had a square neck and sleeves that flowed at the elbows. Clasped at the nape of her neck the dress dropped down to reveal most of her bare back. The skirt flowed long with a gather that swept across the front of the dress into a bit of a bustle on the back, and there were 2 dramatic slits up each side.

"Dad is not going to like this," she said with a grin.

"No he's not," Leia said with a laugh. "I guarantee Marxx will." Jaina deeply blushed but didn't comment. Leia placed a light shawl over her daughter's shoulders and they headed to the front of the ship. The men and Mara all sat around waiting for mother and daughter to arrive.

Han regarded his wife. Leia's hair was pulled back into a single long braid. Her dress red and simple hugged her womanly curves nicely. He then gazed at Jaina. He's used to seeing engine grease on her face, but makeup? Had he seen her in a room filled with dignitaries, he probably wouldn't have recognized her. She appeared to be much older than her 23 years, and resembled her mother when he first met her; gloriously feminine and regal.

"Well I am certainly honored to be escorting two of the most gorgeous women in the galaxy to dinner tonight." He said, giving them both his signature lopsided smile. Jaina smiled at her Dad. Jacen and Anakin both seemed to be at a loss for words. Luke and Mara both shook their heads.

They hired transportation to take them to the restaurant of the Racees choosing. Windwhispers sat in the wealthier section of Mos Espa. When Jaina's party arrived, the Racees were waiting for them.

Marxx wore the same outfit from the night before. Tonight Jaina's dress matched his vest perfectly. Marxx walked up to her and helped her to remove her shawl. Jaina heard her father suck in his breath and grumble to Chewie. Leia cornered her distraught husband, and wheeled him over to the table, trying to distract him and calm his nerves.

"How could you let her wear that thing? She's practically naked!" Han said pointing at her backless dress.

"She is not naked! She picked that dress out herself. It's very flattering on her."

"Flattering? Flattering? I've known some of Jabba's slave dancers who were more covered than that. I can't believe my hard earned credits paid for that thing!"

Leia looked sideways at Han and raised an eyebrow, "You credits didn't buy it. Jaina bought it herself with her winnings from today's race."

Chewie barked something at Han and then gruffly laughed.

"Sure take her side, furball."

Oblivious to the turmoil at the table, Jaina smiled at Marxx as he offered her his arm.

The restaurant held them a table that overlooked Corsdune Canyon. The suns started to set filling the room with a rosy glow.

Marxx gazed at Jaina, completely blown away by her beauty. He lost all ability to speak. Her brown eyes sparkled with joy realizing Marxx obviously couldn't decide what to do or say.

So Jaina decided to help Marxx out. She placed a cool hand on his cheek, and seductively stepped backwards onto an open dance floor. Marxx followed, a sly grin forming on his lips. The orchestra softly began to play a Sullesta Tango, Jaina and Marxx danced. This time they did not laugh, but stared deeply into each others eyes, pulling each other closer, allowing their bodies to brush against each other, where before they danced more loosely. Together they moved fluidly as one, training and instinct took over their legs and arms as they strutted and swirled in time to the rapidly building music. Marxx spun his dance partner outwards and yanked her back towards his muscular form. Jaina crashed into his body, and from a slit in the side of her dress, Jaina wove a leg seductively up his thigh. Marxx's eyes widened, his heartbeat quickened at her touch. She then stamped her foot down and outwards as she slid down his body, her hands caressing his legs. He reached down, placed hands on her shoulders, swung her around, lifted her to her feet and thrust her twirling away from him. The crowd gasped, as she turned her head from her partner. She threw her leg out again, and extended her arm. He rushed her, grabbed her and lifted her off of the floor. She raised a leg at the knee and wrapped her arms around his neck. The music came to a crashing end as he reached around, cradled her down into a dip and she dramatically threw her head and arm back. The people in the restaurant cheered mightily.

He leaned down forehead to forehead, "Where in the universe did you learn to dance like that?"

"The Jedi Academy!" She answered with a sly grin.

"What?"

"Just kidding! You can't be the child of an intergalactic leader and not be forced to take a few cultural courses now and again."

"And you?"

"Blame my sister and mother, they'd spend hours trying to civilize me, usually while we were trapped indoors during sand storms," he flashed her a lopsided smile, "Good thing I paid attention huh?"

They suddenly looked out over the crowd and bowed. They returned to the table. Han miserably poured himself a glass of wine. Chewie patted Han on the head.

Han realized watching Marxx and Jaina dance seductively across the floor that his baby girl had grown up.

He had looked down the table at Krishta who stood on her chair watching the dancers with rapt interest, swaying happily with the music. Images of Jaina standing on his shoes, tiny hands in his, as he danced her around their suite on Coruscant flared in his mind. He also saw her small body wiggling around beside him on the Falcon, feverishly assisting with the hyper drive. He found it very difficult to see that greasy girl in the woman before him. He took a long swallow of his drink.

Leia sensed the turmoil brewing in her husband. She reached out a cool hand and placed it on his own meaty fist. She turned his face towards hers, "She'll always be your little girl."

"I know," Han said gloomily.

Jacen stared at his twin with a look of complete puzzlement. He mouthed, "Who are you?" Jaina smiled and sipped from her water. She then returned her attention to Marxx. She drowned into his blue eyes. Tentatively, Marxx held her hand and gently massaged it, kissing each of her finger tips. Jaina felt her body respond at his touch. He then simply held her hand and rested his cheek on their entwined hands and stared straight into her soul with his piercing blue eyes.

"Ahem," Rowlon said. He repeated himself a couple times before Jaina and Marxx ripped their eyes off of each other. They dropped their hands and both blushed. Everyone laughed at them, causing them to deepen their embarrassment. "Now that I have everyone's full attention. I have an announcement. Something told us all that today's race would be special, that it was Marxx's turn to shine. As a result, Chariss and I placed a sizable wager w/ the Hutts on the race." Tanella looked on frightened, the Skywalkers and Solos looked on curiously at the robust man. "The odds were 80 to one. Fortunately for us very few out there wanted to bet on our son! We placed our entire life savings into the race, 150,000 credits."

Marxx sprayed water over the table, and did some quick calculations, "Dad that means you won 12 million credits? Wait a minute- you had 150,000 credits and you wouldn't give me 1,500 for my entry fee?"

Rowlon smiled, "Well you know your mother and I don't like to encourage you racing in that reckless sport. You should be pleased we showed such faith in you. And yes your calculations were correct. It is enough for you to get your ship, and for us to return to Naboo, at least for a visit. If the planet has started to recover, we would like to move back there."

Clearly annoyed at his father, Marxx turned to his dinner companion, "Jaina have you seen any visions of Naboo as how it stands now?"

"No. All I keep seeing are visions of it in the past."

Paulo looked at the young woman. "Well we'll just have to see, won't we?"

"I think so," Jaina said with a smile. The three families settled into the meals. The Racees delighted in the tales told by their notorious dinner guests. They in return shared many wonderful insights into the land where Padme grew up. After dinner and some more subdued dancing, they left the restaurant; new friendships formed and cemented. Jaina returned home with the Racees, since her personal items were still all there. Decided amongst friends, tomorrow Marxx, along with Jainas family would all head out to the Lars homestead.

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## Chapter 11

Jaina walked outdoors from the Racees home and looked up at the 3 moons. The night only slightly chilled her. She wondered how many times her Uncle Luke looked up at the same moons growing up. She then wondered where Padme's journey would take her. Marxx gently reached out and laid his hands gingerly on Jaina's shoulders. He then started to rub and massage her neck.

"You know, I should be the one doing that for you," Jaina said. "You did win a big race today after all."

"Being near you is enough to sooth any aching muscles I may have. You look beautiful in the moonlight," Marxx said.

"Thank you," Jaina said. She turned around, slid her arms behind Marxx's strong back, and looked up at him. "I don't generally see myself that way."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," she said, resting her cheek on his chest. "I've always felt more like one of the guys than as a girl, I guess."

"Well I'm certainly glad you're NOT one of the guys," Marxx said, smiling.

Jaina looked up at him and laughed, "You know what, I am glad of that as well."

Marxx reached down and gently caressed her cheek. He bent down and kissed her tenderly on the lips. Jaina closed her eyes, savoring the warmth of Marxx against her and the pleasure that the kiss started producing insides her. Sith lightning seemed to activate every nerve inside of her body. She gasped and the two sank into a deeper, delicious kiss. Jaina's head swam. She snaked her arms up and around his shoulders, drawing him closer to her. Jaina's knees weakened. Marxx sensed his consciousness blur, and he gently pulled apart from their kiss.

He looked at her and said in a husky voice, "I think that counts as a proper congratulations kiss."

Jaina responded by grabbing and pulling him down to her again for another kiss. She sank her fingers through his soft hair. Marxx started to lose touch with reality as he gave into the sensuous massaging of her fingers. He hugged her tight to him. Marxx reached down and picked her up and carried her into the house. He brought her into her bedroom and kicked the door controls shut with the Force. He sat her on her bed. Jaina reached up and undid her hairstyle, letting her hair fall in curls below her shoulders.

Marxx stroked his fingers through her hair, releasing the gentle fruity perfume of her shampoo. He stared deeply into her eyes and saw approval. Jaina reached up and yanked him crashing down on top of her on her bed. Hungrily they kissed each other. Jaina threw her head back and he kissed her exposed throat, gently exploring, feeling his way with his lips. Jaina's breath came fast and furious. She closed her eyes as Marxx moved back up to her face and they kissed again, deeply, searching, tasting. Her fingers reached down and she blindly tugging at his vest. Marxx broke from their kiss, looked at her hand, grabbed it, then abruptly broke away and rolled over on the bed away from her.

"What, did I do something wrong?" Jaina asked breathing heavily.

"No," Marxx said deeply. "I did."

"What do you mean?"

"I should never have let things get that far, I'm sorry," he sat up and looked at her.

Jaina's body screamed for more. "I don't understand," she said sitting up.

"Gentlemen don't treat ladies in this manner, I'm sorry."

"Did it look or feel like I was objecting?"

"No. Jaina..." he looked at her, clearly conflicted. "I just can't do that to you, we don't know each other well enough. And I couldn't dishonor you that way. I just...won't, can't. Besides, I think... no, I know your father would kill me." He said with a sly grin forming on his face.

"Sure mention my father to kill the mood," Jaina said as she flopped back onto the bed. Marxx laid down next to her and she rolled over, wrapping her arms around him. They snuggled together. Jaina absently still played with his vest, looking for an opening.

"The thing is, I've never really been serious about a woman before. I've had girlfriends, but I never really cared for any of them." He reached out and stilled her exploring hand. "You're different. You're the first woman who I can't wait to see everyday. Who I want to protect, and get to know better."

"What exactly are you trying to protect me from?" She asked, raising an eyebrow. She broke free of his grasp, and let her fingers get to work again. She found an opening in his vest, she reached inside and started to gently tickle him. Marxx giggled, "Stop it." She tickled harder.

"You know two can play at that game," Marxx said as he reached out and tried to get in a shot at her, Jaina deflected his hands. She climbed on top of him and had him at her tickle mercy as he laughed

hysterically.

“Do you surrender?” Jaina pulled her arms up to her hips and asked with mock seriousness.

Marxx tried to sober up from his laughing. “I willingly surrender to you completely Miss Solo.” He sat up, wrapped his arms around her and kissed her deeply.

Marxx rolled over and Jaina let go of him. He sat up and walked over to the door. He looked at her, face bright and alive from all of their tussling. He debated whether he should say it or not, and decided he had nothing to lose, and everything to gain. “I think I’m falling in love with you.” He pressed on the door lock and stepped out into the hall. “Goodnight sweet Jaina, pleasant dreams.”

Jaina watched the door close behind him. She fell back on her bed confused and elated.

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## Chapter 12

The Skywalkers and Solos climbed out of a convoy of rented speeders onto a barren farm. Jaina and Marxx arrived in his landspeeder. Luke felt a wave of melancholy wash over him. Mara reached out and took his hand.

"I haven't been here in close to 30 years." He looked at the neglected vaporators that dotted the vacant landscape, remembering the hours he spent fixing them.

Jaina closed her eyes and felt pain. "Anakin was here." Marxx reached out and grabbed her hand. She looked off to the left and saw six half buried markers poking up out of the ground. She walked over to them, raised a hand at the first marker and sent wind at it, causing the layers of sand to push away from the base. Jacen and Anakin came over and did the same thing to the other markers. Luke, Mara and Leia came over and uncovered the rest of them.

The third marker caught Jaina's attention. She walked over to it and heard voices on the wind:

*"You were the most loving partner a man could ever have. Good-bye, my darling wife. And thank you."*

*"I wasn't strong enough to save you Mom. I wasn't strong enough. But I promise, I won't fail again. I miss you so much."*

*"R2, what are you doing here?"*

*"It seems he is carrying a message from someone named Obi-Wan Kenobi. Does that name mean anything to you Master Anakin?"*

Jaina snapped her head up and looked over at the droids who were brought along after spending last evening aboard the Falcon. "C3PO and R2 were here."

Luke nodded, "Yes, Uncle Owen purchased them, I discovered Leia's message R2 was carrying for Ben."

"No, before that. Long before that. 3PO called Anakin, Master," she turned to the gravestone and tried to make out the name.

"3PO come over here," Luke shouted. The droids wandered over.

"Yes Master Luke, how can I be of assistance."

"Were you and Artoo ever here?" Luke asked.

C3PO looked at his Master, clearly confused. He wondered if Luke needed maintenance. "Of course we were Master. It was when your Uncle Owen purchased?"

"Goldenrod that's not what he was asking, have you ever been here before then?" Han asked, clearly annoyed.

"Excuse me General Solo, but that is not what Master Luke asked me, he asked?"

Luke rolled his eyes, "3PO were you ever here before then? Years before?"

"I don't think so Master Luke. I would have remembered this place and this horrible planet." Artoo let out a long sad whistle.

Leia looked over at her brother and placed a soothing hand on his arm. "They probably had their memories erased."

"Shmi Skywalker Lars. Shmi was Anakin's mother. He thought he didn't have the strength to save her. Apparently Anakin didn't understand that sometimes people die," Jaina said over at the gravesite having figured out the sand blasted name.

Luke looked appraisingly at his niece. She dropped to her knees, picked up a handful of sand and let it fall through her fingers, "He vowed over her gravesite to never fail again."

"Never fail at what?" Mara asked.

"I'm not sure, being strong enough I guess."

Luke reached down and helped Jaina to her feet. They all walked over to the entrance of the house and descended the stairs. Jaina held back visions flaring to life on the farm landscape. *She watched Anakin step off of a speeder, holding the shrouded body of his mother. His eyes filled with grief, anger, pain and guilt.* She ran her fingers up through her hair. Tears clouded her vision. Marxx walked up to her and wrapped his arms around her tightly.

"Lean on me sweetheart. Lean on me."

"Why do I keep seeing Anakin's pain? Why? It hurts so much. Why can't anyone else feel this?" Marxx held her and closed his eyes. He breathed deeply, and let his mind clear, and a vision materialized, *he saw a young man wearing a long black cape step off of a swoop bike, reach back, pick up a shrouded body, and look at four people with immense sadness.*

Marxx gasped when he realized who was the woman in blue. "I can see them."

"What?" Jaina asked through her tears.

"Your grandmother was wearing a blue dress, grandfather Anakin a long black cape. He came riding a swoop bike."

Jaina looked up at him full of surprise, "Yes, exactly."

He looked over at the gravesites, saw them all standing over there, and saw Anakin collapse on his mother's grave. He also noticed a Nubian ship off in the distance. "This is very strange. Why am I seeing this and not your family?"

"I don't know." Jaina looked out across the desert. Something else flashed in her mind. *She saw a young Luke talking to an older man. Luke said "But I was going to go to Toschi station and pick up those power converters."* Jaina laughed at the very undignified image of the galactic hero.

"Come on, let's go in with the others." The homestead apparently stood vacant for years. Anything of any real value had stolen by scavengers long ago. The place was picked clean and filled with drifts of sand.

Jaina couldn't stand the sight of the dining table, sadness, resentment, anger, worry washed over her, *"before dawn...band of Tuskin raiders...thirty went out, four came back...I'd be out there now except I can't ride anymore, until I heal."* She raced through the hallway and came into a garage. Luke and the others all congregated there. Luke, R2 and 3PO seemed to be replaying where he heard his message from Leia.

Marxx walked into the room and felt a greater power take over his actions. He stepped over to one of the controls overlooking a rusted over oil vat. He felt a wave of sadness overtake him. Before he realized it he said in a small voice, *"The shifter broke, life is always simpler when you're fixing things. I'm good at fixing things, always was. Why did she have to die?"*

Everyone stood silent. Luke felt a chill run through his body, and his family vanished, to be replaced by two strangers. Ghosts of the past, a young man wearing a dark Jedi uniform and a young woman wearing a blue shawl and dress stood in the room.

*"Why couldn't I save her? I know I could have."*

*"Sometimes there are things no one can fix. You're not all powerful Ani."* Jaina heard herself say standing in the doorway.

*"Well I should be. Someday I will be."*

*"Anakin."*

*"I'll be the most powerful Jedi ever! I promise you! I will even learn to stop people from dying!"*

*"Anakin?"*

Marxx crossed the room, picked up an object, *"It's all Obi-Wan's fault, he's jealous, he's holding me back!"* With that he threw the object into the adjoining room with fierceness, causing everyone to jump.

*"Ani what's wrong?"*

Marxx looked down at his hands, weeping, *"I killed them...I killed them all. They're dead. Every single one of them."* He turned around and faced Jaina pain etched deeply into his face, *"And Not just the men, but the women, and the children."* His face turned to rage. *"They're like animals! And I slaughtered them like Animals! I HATE them! I hate them."* He walked over to the oil vat and collapsed, *"Why do I hate them?"*

Jaina collapsed on the floor next to him, running her fingers through Marxx's hair. *"Do you hate them or do you hate what they did to your mother?"*

*"I hate them!"*

*"And they earned your anger, Anakin."*

*"But it's more than that, I didn't...I couldn't...I couldn't control myself. I..I don't want to hate them- I know that there is no place for hatred. But I just can't forgive them."*

*"To be angry is to be human."*

*"To control your anger is to be a Jedi!"*

*"Shhh, You're human."*

*"No, I'm a Jedi. I know I'm better than this...I'm so sorry,"* Marxx collapsed into Jaina's lap.

Jaina whispered into his hair, *"You're like everybody else."*

Luke wiped the tears from his face. Shaking he realized he'd never seen his mother before, he could feel her goodness radiating like flashes of light. He thought his parents made a striking couple. And Anakin, Anakin was so grand, handsome, young and proud. Even in rage, he could sense the possible young hero in the man. He could hardly believe that young man who stood before him turned into Vader.

Luke looked at Leia, her face contorted with pain and overflowed with tears. Mara reached out and gave Leia a hug. Jacen and Anakin both looked around rather uncomfortable. Anakin in particular seemed quite shaken from the scene, never really imagining what his namesake was like in real life. Han reached out and placed a reassuring hand on his youngest son's shoulder. He looked over at the young man shaking with pain in his daughter's lap. He had absolutely no idea of what to think of the boy.

Marxx sat up and placed a hand on his forehead and stared at Jaina. "Well that was intense." He looked around to all of the startled and confused faces around him. Jaina wrapped herself into an embrace with him.

Luke wandered around, as the two young people played out the scene. The vision of his parents now had completely faded. Luke looked at Jaina's new friend with interest. How did he manage to pick up

on the energy in this room that no one else except Jaina did? Luke himself doubted that he would have seen his vision had the young couple not re-enacted the scene. He would have to meditate on this further. He crouched down next to Marxx, "Let that be your first lesson in Jedi training, pain leads to fear, fear leads anger, and anger always leads to suffering."

Marxx nodded, "Yes Master Luke."

"Can we leave this place?" Jaina asked. "I don't think I can take anymore."

"Sure. I have one last place I want to stop before we head back to Mos Espa." Luke said.

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## Chapter 13

The house barely seemed large enough for anyone to feel comfortable in. It existed far from any kind of modern day conveniences, up on a hill overlooking the lonely cavernous Tatooine landscape. Luke walked into Ben's old home and felt that rush of memories wash over him. He sat down on the same bench when destiny called to him, so many years ago. He reached forward and picked up a few circuits, leftover parts from when he reconstructed his new lightsaber, before heading off to save Han from Jabba the Hutt.

Leia walked around the room and looked at a trunk. Absently she opened it. Inside rested an old white Jedi uniform, a pair of boots and a small box. She picked up the box, closed the lid and sat down.

"You still miss him still, don't you?"

"Yes. He was my mentor, the man who told me of my destiny. Ben really was a great man." Luke looked over at her, "What is that?"

"I don't know. It was in the trunk." She extended her hand to Luke. "You want to open it?"

"You do it."

Leia tugged at the old twine and it disintegrated in her hands. She looked at the wooden box confused. "How does this open?" She pulled on it this way and that and could not get it to budge.

Anakin walked over to her, rested a hand on her shoulder, "Mom, let me do it, it's a puzzle-box." Frustrated she handed it up to her mechanically inclined son. He stared at it a moment, then pushed 2 sides in opposite directions. A hatch popped up and the box opened. He handed it back to her.

Leia reached in and pulled out a holo-pad. Leia called everyone around her. Luke sat next to his sister looking over her shoulder.

Leia activated the holographs. "That's Anakin," Jaina said. In the image, Anakin pointed at the holoimager, his face bursting with laughter and joy. Leia gasped, fascinated by her father's young, attractive face, seeing it for the first time.

The next image was of both her parents. "And that is mother. She had a lovely smile didn't she?" Leia

said. The image was taken apparently the same day as the first, Anakin's arm was up in the air and Padme's head rested now on his chest- they both appeared to be in a fit of hysterics- Anakin seemed to be the holographer holding the holoimager far above their heads.

The next image, the young couple smiled, looking up at each other with love in their eyes, taken on a balcony overlooking a gorgeous lake with green hills in the background. "And that is Naboo," Marxx said, recognizing the scene from the mural at home.

The next had Padme standing with Anakin kneeled in front of her, head resting on her large pregnant stomach. Anakin's face contained a happy, content smile. Padme gently caressed Anakin's hair.

Finally the last image was of Padme. She sat holding 2 bundles, her children. Leia thought she'd never seen anyone look sadder than her mother. She could even see the tears streaming down her mother's face.

Leia handed the pad to Luke, angrily stood up, tears flowing freely down her face. She threw open the trunk again. She shook at the boots, the clothes, hoping beyond hope there would be another piece of her mother in there. She stormed throughout the house, opening cupboards, looking under Ben's old mattress, seeking anything. Han came up behind her, placed his hands on her shoulders.

"Honey I think that was it."

"That can't be it. She should've left us a message or something. I know there's got to be something else." Leia brushed aside her tears.

"Hey at least you have something you didn't have before."

"It's not enough. It's not nearly enough," Leia said, raising her voice, "What the hell happened? How could he have gone from lovingly holding her stomach looking like a proud parent to be, to becoming, what he did? How could he have left my mother broken hearted? Why? WHY? Obi-Wan, WHY? " Leia collapsed into a sobbing mess on Obi-Wan's dusty bed. Han sat down and comforted her.

Luke looked down at the image of Anakin laughing. That merry smile on his father's face surprised him. He compared it to the only time in his life he ever looked at Anakin's face, right before he died. He couldn't even see the same man from the two images. He forced down a lump in his throat as he flicked forward to the last image of Padme holding the babies. He realized that was probably the last time he ever saw his mother. He glanced at Jaina. "Are you picking anything up here?"

"No. Anakin and Padme were never here," she said glumly, hating to hear her mother cry in the other room. Jaina looked at her Uncle's red eyes and heard Leia's sobs from the other room. She vowed to herself that she would figure out the mystery of her grandparents, in order to give them closure.

Marxx reached into the chest and pulled out the brown leather boot. He stroked his hands over the leather. *In his mind he saw a proud red haired Jedi, lightsaber ignited, yelling. He stood at the edge of a boiling pit of molten lava. In front of him, blue lightsaber ignited stood Anakin. Anakin's face raged with pain and anger, he yelled back at the other Jedi. Lightsabers clashed fiercely, the fight was long and balanced. Obi-Wan slashed hard at Anakin, causing Anakin to lose his left leg. Anakin lost his footing, dropped his lightsaber and rolled down into the pit. The Jedi screamed, but it was too late, Anakin was gone. The Jedi fell to his knees sobbing. He then reached over, picked up Anakin's*

*lightsaber, teary eyed and left.*

The image lingered, and Marxx saw *a shrouded menacing figure appear out of the shadows, it lifted its arms and levitated out a badly scarred Anakin from the pit, cackling maniacal laughter along the way. All Marxx could see of Anakin were his eyes. They flamed hatred.* Marxx threw his hands over his head, as more images flared, *images of cybernetic implants, Anakin's humanity stolen away, replaced with metal. He saw the formidable image of Darth Vader wearing his full suit, ordering the destruction of the Jedi Temple on Coruscant.* He threw the boot down and surged towards the door, racing outdoors breathing hard.

Jaina came running out behind him. "What's wrong?"

"I saw Anakin and Obi-Wan – at least I think it was Obi-Wan- fight. Anakin fell into a molten pit. Obi-Wan thought he was dead and left him. Some dark figure pulled out his charred body. Then Anakin was turned into Vader. Why did I see that?"

Jaina rubbed her hands across Marxx's back, and gently massaged his drooped shoulders. "I don't know."

"Shouldn't your uncle be seeing these images? Why am I suddenly seeing these things? I don't have any blood connection to your family. I don't understand," he sat down on a rock and looked absently up at the sky.

"I'm not sure either, but something tells me it's important that you are seeing these things."

He turned around and looked at her, "But you didn't see anything with Anakin and Obi-Wan, right?" Jaina shook her head. "Can you try picking up one of Obi-Wan's boots and see if you get anything from it?"

"Sure." Jaina reached down and stroked Marxx's face. She wondered what could possibly be triggering these visions for him. "*Why now?*" They walked back inside and Jaina picked up the boot. She stroked the leather on it. She noticed tiny scarred grooves in the leather. She closed her eyes, reaching in the Force, but saw nothing. She looked at Marxx and shook her head.

Han and Leia emerged from Ben's bedroom, arm in arm. Han looked over at Jaina stroking Marxx's arm, and he felt his blood start to bubble, "Are we ready to go?"

Jaina looked up at Marxx after the Skywalker and Solos vacated the hut. "I don't know why you saw those images, all I know is this, I'm happy you can tune into the Force like you can. I believe we were meant to meet and be together."

"What about after today? You'll want to leave here."

Jaina smiled trying to make light of things and said, "It's a family tradition for us Skywalkers to want to leave this planet." Marxx's face fell. She quickly added, "Well your family wants to go to Naboo, and that's where I want to go. Don't you want to go there? I'm sure my family will want to as well."

"Of course, but what about after that? I still want to train to be a Jedi."

"I think we'll have to wait and see how things are on Naboo before I can tell you where my future lies for the moment. Listen to me. I want you to go forward with your training. You need to learn to use and channel your abilities, and learn about the Force."

"I want to do that as well. I don't think I can do it without you there though."

Jaina smiled, "Of course you can, the Masters there will keep you plenty busy. Besides, it's not like you get shuttled off into seclusion. I can come visit you. And you can holophone me anytime." Marxx reached down and hugged her tightly. They looked up as the door opened.

Han stuck his head in the doorway, "Are you two coming back or what?"

"Yes sir," Marxx said nervously, as they left Ben's hut arm in arm.

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## Chapter 14

Preparations for the Racees family to ready for the trip to Naboo would take several days. Paulo provided Jaina with the co-ordinates to find Naboo, and the Lake Country and Theed. She decided to give the planet a flyby before everyone else left to go to the planet. She could report back her findings as to whether or not it was inhabitable or not.

Marxx and Jaina felt entirely miserable.

"There just isn't room for you in my X-wing, and your family needs to be able to load things on the Falcon- so we can't take that."

"I know, I need to pack anyway. I also have some things to take care of. Besides I know you'll be back in a couple days."

Jaina looked up at him, "A day. I will be back. Keep yourself tuned to the Force, I want to test and see if you're able to pick up on anything I'm seeing at the planet. I just hope it's hospitable enough for everyone."

"I do too. My family really wants to go back there."

Jaina and Marxx stared at each other, not quite sure what to say. Jaina reached her arms up around his neck and kissed him savoring the feeling of his lips on hers. She pulled apart, and rested her forehead on his. "I miss you already Marxx."

With that she broke apart from him and raced up her ladder to her X-Wing, fighting back tears. She threw on her helmet and looked down at Marxx, he closed his eyes, and in her mind she heard clear as day, "I miss you too Jaina Solo, come back to me safe." She smiled, waved and reluctantly flew out of the hanger.

Upon reaching atmosphere Jaina punched in the co-ordinates for Naboo and sent her ship into lightspeed.

When she fell out of hyperspace hours later, she found herself circling a spotted planet. In places, there appeared to be vast continentally wide barren regions, and in others it was lush and green. She turned on her mapping system to determine atmospheric levels, and life form readings. She surprisingly detected a couple million people scattered all over the planet, as well as many other indigenous animal life forms seemed to be flourishing down below. Encouraged she descended into the atmosphere. The atmospheric readings were also hopeful. The planet temperatures were hot, although not nearly as bad as on Tatooine, and breathable for humans.

Jaina flipped on her holo-emitter and sent a message to the Falcon. C3PO picked up the message, "Mistress Jaina, how good to hear from you. How are you?"

"I'm fine 3PO. Is Mom, Dad or Luke around?"

3PO looked around behind him, "I think Mistress Mara is here."

"Can you go get her please?"

"Certainly hold on a moment." Jaina continued her flyover as the image in the holo-emitter went blank. She flew over vast scarred regions on the planet, ravaged by war. Whole sections of land for miles lay in waste with broken trees and large craters dotting the surface below. Towards the outer rims of these regions and upon closer inspection, she did witness smaller growth surging through the devastation. The natural cycle of rebirth appears to be in full swing years after the ravages of war. Following Paulo's co-ordinates, she navigated her ship towards the capital city of Theed. As she flew along, she witnessed several flocks of birds migrating.

From out of her cockpit window, she observed a large herd of bloated looking indigenous creatures eating from a grassy field below. Jacen suddenly popped up onto her screen.

"Hey Sis, how're things? You at Naboo yet?"

"Yes, I don't understand yet why everyone left here in such a hurry, or at least never came back. There are signs of mass destruction to the planet from warfare, whole forests appear to have been either burned or blasted from missiles. But so far the planet looks to be slowly repairing itself. It's had what, 50 years to regenerate? The air quality is fine, flying over lakes, the water seems clear. Hold on a moment?"

Jacen looked at his sister. Flying over the land leading towards Theed all traces of life disappeared. Jaina gasped. "For the love of the Force."

"What is it?" Jacen asked.

As Jaina approached the co-ordinates of where Theed had stood, nothing remained. No tree, no grass, no road, no buildings stood. Everything lay completely to waste in rubble, with a large crater right in the center of the once glorious capital. The land showed no spark of life. A few tiny huts lingered along the perimeter of what obviously was once the great city. Jaina flew overhead and saw the waterfalls surrounding the city were still weakly flowing, but the water appeared to have no effect on giving birth to the surrounding landscape. Jacen closed his eyes and focused on Jaina. Flashes of the destruction surged through the Force.

"Theed is completely ruined, obliterated. The land looks like it's dead. Nothing seems to be growing around here. The water though still flows which leads me to think that's why there are still a few people living down there in that area. The capital is completely gone, nothing but rubble. The people must not have had any money to rebuild it after the Clone Wars."

"There are people there?"

"Yes. Some are still living around the capital- but not many. That leads me to think the water at least must still be ok. They appear to have moved mostly out away from the capital. I guess they relocated where they could grow crops. There are areas that are lush and alive. I've witnessed herds of wildlife roaming, and birds. So at least some of the planet's animals survived the war as well."

She noticed that as she flew overhead, people pointed at her ship, shaking their heads. "Hold on," Jaina reached down and pulled out some Macro-binoculars and looked at the people, their clothing was simple, peasant-like. "It's almost as if this place never was a once wealthy planet. I think this planet got blasted into the Stone Age after the war. The people appear to be very nervous of my ship."

Jaina circled the area and reported more findings, "I just flew over an old abandoned spaceport. It's cluttered with debris, and mostly destroyed. It looks like they haven't had any visitors here in years."

"That wouldn't surprise me, considering there appears to no longer be any records of the planet. You know Uncle Luke could find nothing about Naboo on Coruscant"

"Yes he told me."

"How much longer do you think you'll be there?"

"I want to land and at least see what it's like on the planet surface. I have a destination in mind. Once I've been there, I'll be on my way back. Feel free to report what I told you so far."

"Will do. Ah Jaina?"

"Yeah?" She said absently as she punched in some more co-ordinates.

"What is going on with you and Marxx?"

Jaina looked startled, "Isn't that obvious? Why? Is he alright?"

Jacen smiled, "To my knowledge yes, he's off packing with his family. Never mind. I guess, maybe I'm just jealous."

Jaina grinned back at her twin. "Well don't be. I have a feeling now that we found each other, we're going to be separated for a long time."

"You can always go to the Academy to teach for a while you know, and be with him."

"I think I'd just be a distraction. He needs to be able to concentrate while there."

Jacen smirked, "You're probably right. Anyway I'll let everyone know what you reported. Talk to you

later."

"Later," Jaina said. Her ship flew north for miles and miles over dry void landscape. Finally around the perimeter out of the barren land surrounding Theed, she flew over areas blooming to life. And then further into large lush valleys. In the green valleys she saw small villages with stately homes that appeared to be untouched by war. Perfectly arranged rows of agricultural fields filled the green valleys below. *"It's certainly feast or famine on this planet,"* she thought.

Later, an overwhelming feeling of déjà vu fell over her as she rose over a mountain range and descended into the lake valley of her visions. She flew over the valley and focused her macrobinoculars on an island that sat off to the edge of the lake. The resort villa from Jaina's visions and Paulo's mural appeared to have been victim of a large fire many years ago, as well as the surrounding hills. It lay in blackened crumbles. Jaina felt her heart tighten and tears form in her eyes. The entire valley appeared to have been victim of some kind of explosion, trees toppled and broken. The lake itself was about half as full as Jaina remembered from her visions. And there did appear to be new trees growing amongst the ruined forested land.

She closed her eyes briefly as she flew overhead and tuned in with imprints in the Force. *Waves of ships charged through the valley spraying it with missile fire. From the sky a huge concentrated blast roared right towards the villa on the lake. It missed and hit the surrounding hills. Fire burst everywhere and the trees on the island burst into flames like candles. The villa became engulfed with the inferno.*

Jaina opened her eyes and focused on the Southern side of the valley, over the next ridge of mountains. Somehow this area appeared to completely avoid being destroyed. It almost appeared as if the island resort had been targeted specifically. The homes only a few miles away appeared to be in tact, and the trees stood tall. She saw a town in the neighboring valley and saw a complete raised landing pad. She circled around and landed her X-Wing. When she threw open her hatch, the humidity smothered her like a blanket. She found herself reminded of the sticky jungles of Yavin.

From below she heard voices. As she stepped onto the platform she was greeted by a handful of curious onlookers. She looked over the crowd and saw a hunched over old woman staring at her with narrowed eyes.

"Who are you? What do you want here?" The woman demanded.

An older scrawny man standing nearby scowled at the woman. "Where are your manners Ryllia? We haven't had a guest here in, oh forty years and you are ready to chase the first one off." He threw his hands off in disgust at her, and tottered up towards Jaina, "Hello, my name is Punjaro, welcome to Naboo. How can I help you?"

Jaina smiled at the man, "I'm actually not sure. Some friends of mine are planning a trip here, I am just trying to get my bearings."

"That's a lie!" the old woman said, pointing a cane at her. "Nobody comes to Naboo to visit. It's the planet everybody forgot."

"My friends did not forget about it. In fact they are from here, this very region in fact. Maybe you could tell me if their family is still here?" Jaina said, hopeful.

"Well out with it girl, who are these people?"

"Ryllia, I'm warning you," Punjaro said.

"It's alright, my friends family name was Brannoush. Do you know the Brannoushes??"

Ryllia squinted her eyes, "What? Who did you say?" Jaina's heart fell.

"Oh you heard her," Punjaro said now excited, he appeared to want to jump out of his skin. "Did you say this person was a Brannoush?"

"Yes, Paulo Brannoush."

The old man yelled out in delight. "Paulo's alive! That boy represented everything Naboo ever stood for, beauty, truth, art and love. Everyone thought he was dead. And his wife and their daughter?"

"I believe his wife died a while back, but his daughter is fine, full grown and married with 2 children and a granddaughter."

"Your daughter?"

"What? No, I mean I'm not related to them. Are there any members of the Brannoush family still around here?"

"Of course. Look, over there, see that house," Punjaro said, pointing way across the valley towards a large white home resting on top of the hillside.

Jaina turned her head sideways and squinted her eyes, "Yes."

"That is where you will find them. They have their own landing pad, you can fly over there," Punjaro looked at her puzzled, "Who are you?"

Jaina smiled at the old man, "My name is Jaina Solo, thank you for all of your assistance Punjaro."

"You're welcome. You look familiar. Who do you look like? Who does she look like?"

Ryllia snorted, "I think she thinks she's Padme Amidala."

Jaina laughed, "Well I don't think I'm Padme Amidala, but I am her granddaughter."

Punjaro looked like he was about to fall over, "Padme's granddaughter, has returned to Naboo? We are saved everyone! We are saved! Oh Miss Jaina thank you. We have all been worried here for so long. Hope that Paulo survived during the War died a long time ago around here."

Jaina didn't quite know what to think of the townsfolk, she just knew, for the most part, they seemed friendly. She again offered her words of thanks and headed for her ship. She flew across the valley, and landed on the private landing pad. A door at the side of the house opened and several people walked out into the blinding sun. Jaina waved and smiled at her reception party, bristling with joy to be the bearer

of good news for the Brannoush family clan. Introductions were made, and Jaina felt herself swept away on a wave of love as Paulo's sister Julillia ushered her into her home.

Across the galaxy, Marxx sat on the floor of his room, legs crossed, eyes closed. A damp hot breeze washed over him and a flurry of images flared in his mind. Each image mingled with the touch of happiness that came from Jaina.

"Grandfather! Grandfather!" he yelled. Paulo shuffled down the hall to his grandson's room.

"Yes Marxx?"

"They are alive, all of them. They are alive!" He stood up and feverishly continued packing.

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## Chapter 15

Jaina stood on the veranda of Paulo's home, waiting anxiously for the arrival of the group from Tatooine. She stayed behind on Naboo and assisted the Brannoushes with getting Paulo's home open and ready for his family's arrival. In the nearly 50 years since the Clone Wars, the Brannoushes never let Paulo's home fall into disrepair. Punjaro, their family gardener worked on keeping the homes grounds in order, and his nosey busy body sister Ryllia assisted the family with housecleaning. They never lived in it either, certain that their artist son would return to Naboo. As time past, Paulo's parents passed away, but his youngest sister Julillia kept their dream alive, knowing in her heart that one day he would return home.

Wandering throughout the house initially seemed strange to Jaina. She felt like she was invading someone's privacy. Her first entrance into the home found her staring, slack jawed at the exact same painting that Paulo had duplicated in the living room on Tatooine. However the colors, painted on wood panels, seemed to glow more intensely, and brilliantly here than on the mural back in the desert. Padme seemed to jump off of the panels.

The room that fascinated her the most was the artist studio that covered the entire length of the top floor of the spacious home. Paintings and pieces of sculpture laid around in various stages of completion. She found herself looking at the paintings and sculptures in awe. Having a mechanical analytical mind, Jaina couldn't fathom the skill or incredible free thinking creativity that would be required to paint, or sculpt an object. She could only appreciate and admire the enormous skill required in creating the objects of art.

A few days earlier she had entered into the main bedroom downstairs to put new sheets on the bed. While changing the bedding, her eyes fell on an amazing colorful bronze sculpture resting on a table in the corner of the room. At first, she simply felt drawn to the intricate details in the exotic curved hairstyle, ostentatious headdress, and opulent gown. But upon closer inspection, she recognized the face as belonging to Queen Padme Amidala. She spent many hours afterwards staring at the bronze sculpture, willing it to speak to her, but only received silence. Jaina wondered briefly about all the images of her grandmother around Paulo's home and remembered his saying that he would have gladly married her had he been given the chance. She could feel his love and admiration for Padme in her representations around the house.

Jaina found the time with the Brannoush family to be delightful, yet she couldn't control her own inner turmoil with being apart from Marxx for a greater extended period of time than the day or two she planned to be away. They talked a couple times via holo-emitter but that could not replace actually being with him, holding him, feeling his lips on hers... She knew in her heart what these yearnings meant. And in a lot of ways that knowledge warmed and terrified her at the same time.

A soft breeze rustled the leaves on the surrounding trees. Jaina stood transfixed staring at the beauty of the land. She hadn't realized how much she missed greenery while on Tatooine. She felt calm and peaceful on Naboo. During her week of being with the Brannoushes, she could feel her grandmothers soothing presence nearby, especially while in Paulo's home. It took every amount of willpower for Jaina to not race out to the ruins of the resort that just over the hill. However, she contented herself that the ruins were not going anywhere and could wait.

She knew that it would still be hours before the arrival of the two ships. She enjoyed her moment of contemplation before the arrival of both family clans.

Jaina sensed the woman approaching behind her before she heard her. She turned around and narrowed her eyes, confused. The older woman had a delicate small frame, dark hair, brown eyes, wore a flowing apricot colored dress. She looked alarmingly familiar.

"You must be Jaina," she said.

Jaina felt startled as she heard her mother's voice coming from the woman. "Yes I am."

The woman burst into a happy smile, tears flowing freely from her eyes. "I am Ryoo Naberrie-Sallunus, your cousin."

Jaina's heart stopped, "My cousin?"

"Yes, my mother Sola is your great aunt, she is your grandmother's sister."

Jaina felt tears swell in her eyes, "That explains why you look like Padme, and sound exactly like my mother." Ryoo nodded and the two women collapsed into a happy embrace. Both cried openly.

"My family was on a bartering trip and just returned home. Julillia contacted me just this morning to let me know you were here. She mentioned that the rest of your family was coming as well?"

Jaina and her cousin moved over to a couple of outdoor lounges and sat down, "Yes, they should be arriving in a few hours. You can meet my mother Leia and my Uncle Luke. They are Padme's twins."

Ryoo couldn't stop her tears. She laughed at herself. "I can't believe this. We gave up hope of ever hearing anything about Padme or her children."

"So you knew she was pregnant and married to Anakin?"

Ryoo looked at her with a mixture of surprise and confusion. "What a strange thing to ask. What do you mean?"

"It appears that the fate of my grandparents was viewed only by the Force. My mother and my Uncle

Luke were separated shortly after birth. We know that Padme took my mother to the planet of Alderaan where she was raised in the house of Organa. Padme then died sometime afterwards."

Ryoo's face fell, apparently hoping Padme was still alive. "And your grandfather? Is he still alive?"

Jaina looked at Ryoo puzzled. "Do you mean to tell me that no news of what happened after the fall of the Republic ever came here?"

Ryoo shook her head. "We're totally in the dark. All external communications systems were destroyed during the Clone Wars, and unfortunately, most of the engineers on this planet became fighters and were killed. Survivors were so spread out over Naboo we really have never recovered. After the war there was no one left to fix things. It was odd, those who could leave the planet did, and they never returned. It's as if we were forgotten completely."

"You're not half wrong there. Nobody in the Republic even knows this planet exists, beyond that it was a victim of the Clone Wars."

"And your grandfather?"

"Right, sorry," Jaina explained her grandfather's fate to a very bewildered Ryoo.

"I only have a couple memories of him. He was very handsome. I had a crush on him as a tiny girl. He was tall with the most amazing blue eyes. He was very funny with a delightful sense of humor. And oh he loved your grandmother. He would have willingly given up his life for her. Padme and Anakin tried hiding their marriage, but my mother saw right through them. They couldn't hide their love from her. She even took a holograph of the two proud parents to be. Anakin was so delighted with the possibility of becoming a father. I can't believe he could ever turn evil. I don't understand," Ryoo said, truly confused.

"We don't know either. It may be something we'll never know unfortunately," Jaina said.

Ryoo stood up, "Well I have a lot of work to do before tonight, I should be on my way."

"I'm sorry?"

"We are going to host a large dinner for your family and the Brannoushes at my home down the road, as a way to reacquaint everyone. I know everyone will be weary from travel and moving, but I think they will all welcome some Nubian hospitality. What do you think?"

"Absolutely. Do you need any help Ryoo? I'd be glad to assist you?"

"No dear, just head over to Julillia's before sunset and she will direct you all where to come." Ryoo gave her cousin a huge hug. "I'm so glad you are here."

"Me too, Ryoo. Me too. In fact I almost feel like I've come home."

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The Racees sold and closed their house on Tatooine, vowing never to return to the desert planet. Marxx meanwhile searched Tatooine far and wide for a ship dealer who could find him the ship of his dreams. He finally found a dealer in Mos Eisley who knew about the craft and was able to acquire one. Marxx waited 3 days for it to be flown in for delivery. His new ship was a fully restored Royal class Nubian Yacht Cruiser. He named it *The Nubian Hope*. Once delivered they filled it as well as the Falcon with cargo. Marxx sold his pod racer and many other bulkier tools, knowing the next chapter of his life would involve paring down on possessions.

Both ships filled to capacity with cargo, exited Tatooine's atmosphere and laid in the course to Naboo. Marxx arrived before the Falcon. Jaina looked up into the sky as the sleek silver Nubian ship descended and landed on the platform at Paulo's home. From below and across the valley, Jaina heard all sorts of excited cries as locals pointed to the glorious sleek ship from a bygone era. Julillia's home had a much larger ship port for the Falcon to land on. Jaina's X-wing sat on a docking bay up the road at a large bungalow that she rented for her family to stay at while on Naboo.

Jaina's mouth went dry, and palms started to sweat as the ramp opened. Her heart fell as the first two people off were Anakin and Jacen.

Anakin laughed and pointed at his sister, "Boy your expression was priceless!"

Jacen punched his brother, "Leave her alone, you insensitive womprat. He's inside."

Jaina stuck her tongue out at her younger brother and raced up the ramp. She looked around the luxury liner with approval, but felt she would get a much better feel for the ship when all the cargo had been removed. She wandered around looking for Marxx.

Marxx sat at the controls of the ship, fingers lightly caressing the controls. The port engine failure light flashed on. He scowled at it, expertly punched in a bunch of commands and the light went out, then flickered back on again. Frustration bubbled in him. He didn't need technical problems, he just wanted to get out and be with Jaina. He let out a little breath, stood up, grabbing a jacket and looked at his dashboard, "Always wanting to get the last word in, huh?"

"That's quite impossible, I haven't even spoken yet," Jaina said smirking and leaning against the doorframe with her arms crossed.

Marxx turned around, his heart pounded with joy, and pointed at his consul, "Port engine failure light keeps coming on."

Jaina raised her eyebrows and squeezed in beside him. She punched in the same commands he had just done, and rested her hands on the dashboard, letting her fingers talk to the ship. "I just did that," he said. He reached out and brushed her hair to the side exposing her neck.

The light flared up again. "You didn't hit anything in flight did you?" She said turning away as he was about to lean in for a kiss, his lips only found air.

"No, and I did a complete systems test before leaving Tatooine," annoyance creeping into his voice.

"Of course you did, I didn't say you didn't," Jaina said, laid down under the dash, arms up, fingers

working with the wires. Marxx put his jacket aside, sighed and sat in the chair. He reached down and stroked her leg. Jaina fiddled a little with some wiring, pulled out a wire cutter from her pocket and sliced something underneath. "Ok try the commands again."

"Yes M'lady," he pulled up his hand and re-entered the codes. He waited and the light didn't come back on. "You did it."

Jaina slid out, stood up, and climbed into his lap, "Just a couple wires that were connected incorrectly."

"I could definitely get used to having you as my first mate around here. Course the other star pilots may snicker at me for letting a girl fix all of my mechanical failures on board," he said, caressing her hair.

Jaina smiled at him, moving in for the kill, "And the problem with that would be?"

"What problem?" Marxx surrendered and pulled her into a deep kiss.

The afternoon flew by furiously as the two ships were unloaded of cargo, and happy reunions and introductions were made all around. Later, Julillia, and her husband Marckos, their two sons, and extended families waited for the Solos, Racees, and Skywalkers to show up and all head over to Nabberie estate for dinner.

Han decided he definitely preferred his daughter's choice of apparel tonight. Jaina stepped out of the bungalow wearing the Chariss' purple dress. Marxx escorted her. She watched him as he would occasionally dart off from her and rub his hand over tree trunks, and then run his fingers through leaves, feeling their texture. She smiled at the wondrous expressions he would make at each flowering plant they passed, marveling at their beauty.

The evening passed with absolute delight for all. Ryoo offered up a large spread of food, and pleasant company. The sea of dozens of relatives from both families was staggering. The Skywalkers and Solos gave up trying to learn who everyone belonged to, knowing that in time, they would all be well acquainted.

Many of the extended Brannoush clan left shortly after dinner, not wanting to tire the guests of honor.

Ryoo's mother Sola and sister Pooja talked about Padme's adventures as a young girl to their long lost relatives. Sola told them all about the first time she met Anakin and accidentally referred to him as Padme's boyfriend. And then how a year later, she spotted the two together, while Anakin was on leave during the Clone Wars, she just knew they were married and confronted them with the knowledge. Ryoo and Pooja's children and grandchildren also sat around and listened fascinated by the stories of their mysterious and once famous Aunt.

Leia looked at her Aunt with great interest. "So you all only knew them to be extremely happy?"

"Yes," Sola said. "They breathed life into each other. They completed each other. My sister was a very rational and practical woman, who rarely gave into fits of personal fancy. Anakin was the light of her life. He made her alive as a woman. She positively radiated in his love."

Leia felt tears in her eyes, "I wish I could have known them as you did."

"Oh darling, I think we all would want that. My sister believed that she was invincible, I think. I can't tell you how many times people tried to assassinate her while she lived the life as a politician. With youth comes ignorant bliss of the limits of your own mortality though. Padme believed because of her inherent goodness, that she could never be killed."

Jaina saw the tears welling in her mother, "Do you know how she died?"

"No. Until you all showed up here, we were all still hoping that she was alive. Hold on a moment I have something I want to get for you." Sola lifted herself, with a grunt out, of the chair. In her late seventies, Sola still could command a room with her presence, but her aging body seemed to wish her to slow her pace some. Sola reached out a hand to Pooja's youngest son Carbal, "Come with me darling please. Help grandmother carry something."

Leia and her children passed around holopads filled with holographs of Padme as a young girl. Carbal and Sola returned carrying a medium sized trunk. They rested it on the floor in front of Leia.

"These things belonged to your mother. You should have them. We do not need them anymore."

Leia put aside her holopad and lifted the hood of the trunk. On top of the pile of objects in the trunk was a lace covered dress. Leia pulled it out and gently shook out the creases. Jaina stood up and held the dress in front of her so Leia could view it completely.

Sola smiled, "Look I think it would fit you perfectly Jaina. That was your grandmother's wedding dress."

Jaina felt the blood rush to her cheeks as Marxx looked around rather uncomfortably. He flinched as his eyes met Hans. Han folded his arms across his chest, "No getting any funny ideas there, kid."

Marxx gulped, "No sir, at least not yet." He looked up at Jaina. She stared down at him with a questioning expression. Her heart jumped into her throat.

Leia reached in the box and pulled out the matching shawl. She placed it on Jaina's head.

Jaina saw flashes of Padme looking herself over in a mirror, nervously readjusting the shawl in place. Jaina handed the dress back to her mother and removed the shawl.

"What else is in there?" They pulled out several more dresses, including the red Queen dress that Jaina admired on the statue in Paulo's home. Leia pulled out a box filled with various exotic headbands and headdresses. The little granddaughters around the room reached out and started to place them atop their tiny heads, laughing with joy.

In the bottom of the trunk, Leia found a large oval decorated wooden box. She pulled off the top and found a collection of items. First she pulled out a long light brown braid of hair.

Sola started to cry, "That braid was your father's. He wore it to signify that he was a Jedi Padawan learner. He cut that off and gave it to Padme shortly before he left the planet for the last time."

Jaina took a hold of the hair and saw her grandparents. Padme was pregnant. *"Take this, and keep it close to you. I won't be gone long, I just need to return to Coruscant, per Master Obi-Wan's orders."*

*Anakin smiled. "It's completely overdue, but I think I'm finally going to get to take the trials."*

*"I'm so proud of you Ani. And I will keep this close to my heart. Come back to us safe my love."*

Leia found some dried flowers, another holopad that contained the same holographs as the booklet found on Tatooine, a couple commendation letters, and finally a datadisk.

Leias hands shook as she read the title of it, "To my husband Ani."

"Artoo come over here. Luke?"

Luke reached down and placed hands on her shoulders, "I'm here Leia."

Artoo beeped and received the disk, he pointed his spotlight on a table and a large image of Padme appeared before them. Her face looked pale, pained and frightened. She was still pregnant.

*"Ani- I hope things will turn out so that this message will be unnecessary. Naboo is under attack. I am leaving the planet shortly with the assistance of Master Jedi Windu. I only hope all goes well and I will escape and be able to give birth to our child in peace. If I do not make it, if we are killed..." Padme placed her hands on her stomach tears swelling in her eyes, she inhaled and began to speak again.*

*"I want you to know that I love you more than life itself. You are the best thing that ever happened to me. Your sweetness and love gave me renewed purpose in life. Anakin, Ani listen to me. I know you will be in pain. I know how hard you will take my, our, death. But you have to realize there is a reason, and that although you are now hurting, the pain will subside, and you will go on. Do not let yourself fester or wallow in your grief over losing me. Although we only had a couple brief years together, they were the best years of my life. You have so much love to give the galaxy. You must go on without me. The galaxy needs you. The Jedi Order needs you. Your mentors will be there to comfort you. They love you. I will always love you?" Padme kissed her fingers and reached out to the holoemitter. "I love you Anakin Skywalker, my darling Ani." Padme started to full on cry and the image ended.*

There wasn't a dry eye in the house. Sola blew her nose and looked up at Padme's children. "Anakin never got that message."

"Well obviously she didn't die, because we are here." Leia said.

"I'm sorry, I just don't know what happened," Sola said.

Han sat down next to his wife and comforted her. "Each time I think I'm starting to better see things that went on with my parents, things just get cloudier."

Jaina looked at her mother and said, "We've just started this quest Mom. I promise you. One day we will know everything that happened."

Han looked up at his daughter and saw something in her face he hadn't really seen in a long time: purpose and determination.

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## Chapter 17

Travel and moving fatigue started to affect the partygoers and Marxx hugged his immediate and newly extended family goodnight. He stayed behind with Jaina to assist the Naberrie's with cleaning up.

Luke caught up with Chariss as she headed up the road and asked her if he could talk to her for a few moments. Rowlon nodded, kissed his wife gently and let her wander off with the Jedi Master. The two walked over to a railing that looked out over the valley. Lights from only a few scattered homes were alit, blanketing the valley in a calming darkness, alit otherwise by a bright half full moon.

"Your son seems to be very in tuned with the Force. I've been observing him rather closely. His abilities seem to be growing, now that he is aware of them and utilizing them. Did you ever have any members of your family trained as Jedis?"

Chariss looked at Luke. She suddenly felt light, a burden she has carried for years, about to be removed from her shoulders. "There was one distant relative... But there's never been anyone in my immediate family who was Force strong, that I'm aware of at least."

"That's odd. You don't usually get children who are Force strong without having some kind of familiar ties."

Chariss shifted nervously besides him. She then reached out and took Luke's hand and looked up into blue eyes longingly, "If I tell you something, will you promise not to tell anyone?"

Luke frowned, "I will try to."

"Years ago when Tanella was born, Rowlon was the happiest father in the whole universe. He loved his little girl more than life itself."

"But..."

"But he wanted a son. We tried for years. I miscarried a couple times. We had begun to give up hope. One night, after I'd just received confirmation again that I was not pregnant, I walked outside and pleaded to the stars to give us a son, and that I would do anything for that child. The next day, I woke up pregnant."

Luke frown deepened uncertain what he heard.

Chariss looked at him. "I did not have relations with my husband that night. It would have been a complete impossibility for me to become pregnant."

Now Luke was really confused. "So you don't know who Marxx's father is?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," she lowered her voice, "He doesn't have a father, at least that I am aware of. He also wasn't the only child. I had a little girl, his twin, named Raven. Raven was very sick. She died at a local hospital when she was two years old though."

Luke scratched his head, completely at a loss of what to say or think. "I need to meditate on this. Thank you for telling me Chariss. And do not worry, I will not tell anyone."

Chariss smiled and gave Luke's hand a squeeze and headed back to her childhood home to sleep.

Luke stood staring out at the stars absorbing the information he'd just been delivered. Mara walked up to him from out of the darkness and wrapped her arms around him.

"What's the matter?"

Luke remained silent for a few moments, not quite sure what to say, "Have you ever heard of a woman giving birth to a child who has no father?"

Mara thought briefly of laughing at his joke, until she realized he was completely serious. "How can a child have no father?"

Luke turned around and looked at his wife, her red hair looked burgundy in the moonlight, "I don't know. Can the Force do that? Can it conceive a child?"

"The Force?" Mara asked incredulously. "I've certainly never heard of that."

"Me either," Luke looked deflated. "I really need to talk to Ben."

"Well why don't we go back to the bungalow, Leia's clan will probably still be at Ryoos for hours, maybe you can get in touch with him," Mara gave her husband a tight squeeze, took his hand and the two walked home for the evening. As they approached the door of the bungalow Luke got an idea and pulled apart from Mara, telling her he would meet her in a few minutes.

Luke headed over to the Falcon and placed a call through the holo-emitter to Tionne at the Academy. He asked her to search through all ancient scrolls to see if she could find any information concerning a child being created from the Force.

Luke sat in Han's pilot seat and looked absently out the window. He found himself thinking back to the first time he ever stepped onto this ship with Ben, the trip that would ultimately decide his destiny.

"I could use your help now Ben. Being the soul surviving Jedi linked to the Old Jedi Order isn't the easiest of tasks. What am I to make of this boy with no father?"

Chewbacca's co-pilot seat glowed, and suddenly Ben appeared sitting next to him. "The Child you speak of is the child of myth and legend. Long ago an ancient prophecy was spoken of a Vergence in the Force and that a child would be born. The child's destiny would be to restore Balance to the Force."

"Balance to the Force? But the Force is not imbalanced," Luke said.

Ben nodded, "Humm, the Dark Side tends to cloud things and you can usually not tell it is out of balance until it is too late. That is what happened the last time around."

"What do you mean? You think this prophecy has already been fulfilled?"

"Yes it was. You should know, you were there." Luke looked completely befuddled at his blue mentor.

“The last time a Vergence in the Force created a child, it was your father Anakin.” Luke must have looked like he’d just been tackled by a pack drunken of Gamorrean Guards. Ben chuckled, “My old master Qui-Gon Jinn recognized the potential in your father when Anakin was 9. He learned from Anakin’s mother that he had no father, and he assumed that Anakin was meant to fulfill the prophecy. Your father had a higher Midi-Chlorian count than any recorded Jedi ever, even more than Master Yoda. Your father succeeded in fulfilling the prophecy.”

“But my father hunted down and murdered all of the Jedi. How can that be restoring balance?”

“According to Yoda, many in the Jedi Order had grown arrogant. We all reveled in the good side of the Force, and completely shunned the Dark Side, never even allowing ourselves to explore it, to try to understand it. By refusing to face and explore the Dark Side, the power of the Sith grew. The result was that a Sith Lord capitalized on our weakness and destroyed the Jedi. He took over the Force, seduced and betrayed your father, and the Empire was formed. Your father’s becoming evil was possibly the best thing that could have ever happened to the Jedi.”

Luke placed a couple fingers on his furrowed brow feeling a headache forming, “And how could that be possible?”

“By succumbing to the Dark Side, Anakin learned of its power and strength. He traveled a path the Jedi refused to follow. Even Yoda would not allow himself to experience the Dark Side. He feared it too much. Anakin gained the confidence of the Emperor. Only by fully experiencing the Dark Side was your father able to eventually turn his back to it and then destroy the Emperor.”

“So his becoming an agent of evil is now viewed as a good thing?” Luke sighed not wishing to argue. “But why did he turn in the first place?”

Obi-Wan sighed and shifted uncomfortably in his seat, “Jedi were not allowed to fall in love. Personal attachments were forbidden for Jedi. Love can lead to darker emotions, jealousy, fear, pain, and anger. The result was we were taught to be compassionate, but not to fall in love. Your father broke that cardinal law for Jedis. He fell in love with a powerful, brilliant, and beautiful Senator from the planet of Naboo, named Padme Amidala. I knew his attachment to her was stronger than was allowed for Jedis and worried about it. But the Jedi Council had other things to focus on as the Clone Wars began. Anakin and Padme secretly wed. After the Clone Wars, Padme became pregnant and we learned of their marriage. Because your father was such a powerful Jedi, we didn’t expel him from the Order. Anakin was so happy to become a father. Then Naboo came under attack and word came back that Padme and her unborn child were killed. Anakin returned to Naboo, saw the carnage of war, believed your mother had perished, and challenged me to a duel. He had just slaughtered the man he thought was responsible for Padme’s death. Full of pain and hatred, he directed all of his dark aggressive emotions towards me in losing your mother, towards the Jedi, for not allowing him to become a full fledged Jedi sooner. He believed that he could have somehow prevented her death.”

Luke stared on with rapt interest, tears forming in his eyes “And then?”

“We dueled, I maimed your father, and he fell into a molten pit. I cried out to him, tried to find him, but I thought he was gone. I picked up his lightsaber and left. Apparently the Emperor had been lurking in the shadows. He found Anakin’s scarred and damaged body, and turned him into the Sith Lord Vader. Anakin, no longer believed that he had any reason to remain good, with no family left in the world and gave in completely to the Dark Side. He renounced his former identity completely. It wasn’t until I

caught up with Master Yoda that I discovered Padme was alive and had given birth to Leia and yourself. Anakin never even knew Padme was still alive and had given birth. Your father gave into the Dark Side because he believed love had left him. Without love he had no reason to remain a true Jedi Knight, and he succumbed to evil. It wasn't until your name started circulating in the Galaxy as the hero who destroyed the Death Star, that he realized the Emperor deceived him so long ago. Anakin started to fight back."

Luke sat in quiet contemplation for a few moments. "Do you think I'm wrong for allowing Jedi to marry?"

"Since I lived by the Jedi code my whole life, I don't have any personal experience to rely back upon to answer your question. It's been interesting to watch your family. They seem to thrive in their abilities, by having a stable, happy, healthy family life to counterbalance their Jedi duties. With the lack of Jedi now in the galaxy, you need to be able to produce offspring for future generations of the Jedi. So I would say you are right in allowing marriage. Yoda and I did not realize how important Anakin's love for Padme would be in his final redeeming act. To see you willingly give up your life, to sacrifice yourself, to willingly die, rather than follow his path of destruction, reminded your father of the good man he once was. He loved your mother more than anything and everything. And you were the living reminder of Padme and the life he had prior to turning. I don't think you usually have to worry about anyone being as strong as Anakin was to seriously worry about him falling."

Luke swallowed a lump, "Except possibly this Marxx Racees. According to what you just told me, he could be the next Anakin."

"I don't know if there is a big worry for the boy, however I would recommend you watch him with veiled interest. It is possible that the Force is simply working to replenish the lack of Jedi in the galaxy. But always be aware of the Dark Side. It may be growing and you will not be aware of it, until it might be too late. I'm sorry Luke but I have to go."

"Goodbye Ben, and thank you for everything." Luke watched his old friend fade away. Luke realized too late that he forgot to ask how Padme died. Marxx was also a riddle to uncover. But not now, Luke needed sleep. Luke got up left the Falcon and headed out into the Naboo night and into the waiting arms of his sleeping wife.

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## Chapter 18

Jaina and Marxx climbed out of the hydroboat, and stood on the bottom steps leading up to the decimated resort. Marxx held out his hand and helped Jaina up the last couple of wobbly steps. They walked along a long balcony, stepping over rubble. Visions of her grandparents walking along before their first kiss flared in Jaina's mind. She looked at the remains of the balcony. One lonely carved cherub defiantly remained intact while the rest of the railing laid in ruin. The large tree that stood next to Padme in Jaina's vision was now gone, replaced by a much smaller sapling. Marxx stood to her left and gazed down at Jaina.

Jaina felt a wave of despair wash over her. She turned her head and an image flared in her mind. *Anakin, dressed in a dark pilot outfit, desperately sifted through a large pile of ashes. From the ashes he pulled out a small white object. He looked at it and started sobbing uncontrollably, rocking back*

*and forth, wailing in pain. Anakin threw his hands over his head and started to yell over and over, "Padme, PADME!"*

*An older man in dark robes approached him, "I'm so sorry my boy, there is nothing you could have done. You got here as fast as you could. How were you to know this place would be hit in the attacks? Dooku must have had a reason for targeting this place. What that could have been though, I don't know."*

*Anakin glared up not hearing anything. His blue eyes, bloodshot, suddenly grew cold.*

*"Excuse me Your Excellency. I have somewhere I need to be." With that Anakin stood up gently caressed the white object, wiped away a tear, and angrily strode off.*

*The older man waited until Anakin was gone. Then a savage smile etched across his face, "Excellent. Everything is proceeding exactly as planned."*

Marxx regarded Jaina as the visions died from before his eyes. "That was Palpatine wasn't it?"

"I think so." He enfolded her in his strong arms. Jaina wiped away her tears, then gazed out over the lake. "I don't think I've cried so much in my life as I have over the last couple of weeks." She nodded her head out into the middle of the lake, "Your grandfather used to swim out to that island with my grandmother. They'd lie in the sand and talk for hours."

"I hate sand. It gets everywhere and is completely annoying." Marxx smiled down at her wolfishly, desperately wanting to lift her mood.

Jaina turned her head startled. "Did you just pick that up standing here?"

"Pick what up? You?" With that he reached down, cradled Jaina up in his arms, stepped away from the edge and twirled her around in a circle. Jaina laughed aloud, threw her head back and let the bright blue sky swirl in a spiraling mass over her head. In her swirling she saw a brightly lit meadow and Padme and Anakin rolled and tussled on the grass laughing with delight. Jaina lifted her head and looked at Marxx- she threw her arms around his neck.

"You know what?"

"What?"

"I may never completely know about my grandparents. But I think I know what I need to do with myself."

"And what is that M'lady?" He said gently placing her back on the ground.

"Not let another day pass without my telling you this." Jaina cradled his strong, square jaw with her hand, "I love you Marxx Racees."

Marxx crushed her tightly. "And I love you Jaina Solo, more than I ever thought I could love another human being. The thought of not being with you..."

“Shhhhh...” Jaina said ending his sentence with a long, deep kiss. Together with their lips locked, Jaina saw her grandparents get married on this very balcony, with the droids looking on as the only witnesses to the event.

Marxx pulled away and brushed a hair from her face. “We will have a better life than they did.”

“We will have that great life, because of them and their love.”

The young lovers kissed again, sealing their fate. Their destinies entwined and shot a bright wave of joy into the Force, that only true love could produce.

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## Chapter 19

The Racees, Brannoushes, Solos and Skywalkers gathered at Ryoo’s home again for dinner. Jaina looked around the tables fascinated. Prior to landing on Naboo, she could count the number of her family members on two hands. Now there were dozens of cousins to get to know. The happy loud conversations around the tables blanketed her with the most amazing feeling of happiness and completeness. It was as if a longing inside of her had finally been quieted.

Luke stood up and told everyone what he learned about Anakin from Ben. And Marxx and Jaina shared their more recent visions as well. Leia seemed somewhat contented with the news. She had no idea what to make of her father, but felt some ease realizing he fell because his love and loss for his wife was more than he could bear.

Conversations flared. Jaina stood up and banged a knife on the table to gain everyone’s attention.

“I have decided what I need to do with my life. My mission will be to restore Naboo back to its former state of glory. Theed needs to be rebuilt, the land surrounding the capital needs to be analyzed and reseeded. Life will again flourish there. The people on this planet were known for their great artistic ability and democracy. I believe it is our duty to give the people of this planet a sense of normalcy to allow them to continue to flourish again as leading artists in the Republic.”

Rowlon spoke up. “I have a complete architectural blueprint of Theed before it was destroyed, thanks to Paulo. I will willingly spend every penny we have to help to rebuild the city.”

Leia chimed in, “And I will get approval of the Senate to offer funds as well towards restoring this planet. We will engineering teams and supplies to assist with the reconstruction.”

Jacen said, “I will help any way that I can, if you need a negotiation liaison for parts, labor, or locate the scientists who can assist with land rebirth”

“I will help as well.” Anakin said, “It is our duty to bring Naboo back into the Republics fold and to bring these people back into the technological age.”

“Yes it is our duty. I believe that is why Padme and Anakin and the Force directed us here. Not only to find our family and to help heal the wounds that have been open for so long. But to give back to this planet what was taken away so long ago. We need to give Naboo back its heart, the heart that was

broken when Anakin believed Padme was dead.” Jaina said with conviction.

Leia stood up, “What’s more is I believe there are probably more planets like Naboo out there, long forgotten and destroyed from the Clones Wars. I plan to launch a galaxywide campaign to find these planets and offer them assistance in restoration as well.”

Chewie let out a loud long growl. Han said, “Alright pal, we offer to fly you around the galaxy in circles to assist you on this quest, Leia.”

Leia laughed and gave Han a kiss on the cheek, “I knew I could count on you, General.” Han smiled sheepishly and wrapped an arm around her waist.

Luke regarded the tall dark haired young man sitting next to his niece. Marxx still remained a mystery, but he wasn’t about to let him loaf around and waste his talents. Marxx felt the weight of Luke’s stare on the back of his head and faced him. “Marxx, you are going directly to Yavin 4 to start your Jedi training.”

“Yes Master Luke.” Marxx said, bowing his head slightly. He stood up and gazed at Jaina and declared before both of their families, “Once I become a Jedi Knight, I vow to spend the rest of my life keeping this remarkable woman safe from harm, and protect her with all of my heart.” Jaina jumped up into his open arms and the two kissed.

Han looked on helplessly. His little girl completely vanished before his eyes, replaced by a woman in love. Anakin rolled his eyes at Jacen. Other family members all smiled at the young couple. Then various other family members, both Brannoush and Nabierre agreed to assist with rebuilding of Naboo. All in the room felt a wave of happiness rush over them, as they all excitedly discussed the endless possibilities of the future.

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Unbeknownst to them all, two glowing figures stood out on balcony of a crumbling resort in the next valley. The couple watched as the sun began to set behind a hill. The blond young male wearing Jedi apparel, wrapped his arms around his petite brunette wife and kissed her. Contented with their completed job, the two witnessed the sun set over Nubian hills, signifying the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. As the sun reached the zenith, in a flash of green light, the couple vanished, absorbed back into the living Force.

The End

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