

PART 1

“Obi-Wan never told you what happened to your father?”

“He told me enough. He told me you killed him.”

“No, I am your father.”

“No, no, that’s not true. That’s impossible.” Speaking the words out loud did nothing to quell the feeling that swelled from somewhere deep inside of him. A certainty.

“Search your feelings you know this to be true.”

“No, Noooo.” The cry was long and pained.

“Luke, you can destroy the Emperor. He has foreseen this. It is your destiny. Join me and together we can rule the Galaxy as father and son.”

Luke scrambled on the end of the pylon. Frantically thinking. The searing pain coming from the cauterized stump that used to be his right hand was not making things easier. The revelation was bad enough. The startling realisation that followed was worse. Ben, his mentor, teacher and surrogate father, had lied to him all this time. In a flash he was back in the cockpit of his X wing star fighter flying down the trench of the first Death Star above Yavin 4. The memory of Ben’s voice in his head. “Let go, Luke.”

At the time he had instantly know what the words meant. Let go your conscious self, trust in the force. At the time he had switched off his targeting computer and used his instincts to know when to release the photon torpedoes that would bring an end to the Empire’s epic weapon of mass destruction. This time the words took on a new meaning. Completely literal, and as he glanced in to the abyss below him, Luke knew what he had to do next.

“Come with me. It is the only way.”

He let go. His fingers released the pylon that had been his only remaining lifeline and he began to fall as gravity took hold and he drifted away into nothingness. But, as soon as he started to drop, his fall ceased. It took Luke a couple of seconds to realise what was happening, but a glance back to the walkway answered all of his questions. Vader. Stood stock still, the very image of power and malevolence, lightsabre still going brilliant red in one hand, the other outstretched towards Luke, palm open grasping the young wannabe Jedi in the unbreakable grip of the force.

Luke was completely paralyzed. He was struggling to breathe. Slowly he began to float back up towards Vader and the suspended walkway. The hold on him seemed to be getting tighter. Constricting airways and stealing his breath. The last thing Luke remembered before his vision and consciousness left him was the cold hard metal of the walkway as he fell limply to the floor.

Vader extinguished his lightsaber. This boy, his son was indeed powerful in the force. The battle had been hard-fought and hard-won. The toughest adversary Vader had faced since the destruction of the Jedi all those years ago. Deliberately and calmly he moved forward to get a better look at the face of his unconscious son as he lay on the steel grating of the suspended walkway in the heart of Cloud City. The anger swelled inside him. Fire began to burn more fiercely than he ever thought possible.

Unconscious, on the floor at his feet was a child. His child. A child who he had thought dead for over nineteen years. A child that had been taken and hidden away from him since his birth, only to come back into his life as a sworn enemy. Had *he* known all this time? Had the Emperor been aware that Luke had survived his wife’s death? He knew Padma was dead. He had searched for her signature in the force for countless years before accepting the truth that she was gone. But had the person he had called Master for all this time known his son had survived and was hidden away from him? Leather squeaked on leather as Vader’s mechanical hands tensed into fists and stitched seems strained. The walkway around him began to groan as his anger spread from his body and affected the force around him.

But anger was his ally. It was no longer something to fear or be repressed as it had been when he was a Jedi. It was something to be embraced. Something to be stored and harnessed, and at the right time, brought to bear on one’s enemies when you needed it most. Now Vader’s enemies were plenty. Soon they would pay. Soon he would have an ally more powerful in the force than he could ever be. More powerful than anyone could have ever imagined.

Vader blinked ruined eyelids inside his jet black helmet towards the top right corner of his heads up display, re-enabling his com system.

“TV512 respond.”

The sound of an electronically enhanced female voice came back to him instantly.

“Yes Lord Vader?”

“Status update lieutenant.”

"Yes my lord. The bounty hunter is away with his cargo. It would appear that Overseer Calrissian has turned traitor. He and his assistant, Lobot, ambushed our guards and freed Princess Leia and Wookiee. There is an ongoing firefight presently as we are pursuing them through the city. They appear to be heading towards the Millennium Falcon. We expect to have them any moment my Lord."

"Very good. Send a squad complete with medic to my location."

"Did your men deactivate the hyper drive on the millennium Falcon?"

"Yes my lord."

"Prepare the boarding party and set your weapons to stun."

"Yes my lord."

Vader watched with apparent disinterest as the Millennium Falcon jinked and jumped in the view screen of the Super-Star Destroyer *Executor*. His mind was on other things. He could simply order them blown to pieces. He had what he had come for. But a nagging feeling told him that he should not. A feeling that told him that the passages of the vessel attempting to flee were more valuable to him alive than as an expanding patch of atoms in orbit around Bespin. He knew better than to ignore such feelings. Soon the tractor beam would come online and the Emperor would have his prizes, and the rebellions leadership would be in tatters.

Suddenly the image of the Falcon blurred in the view screen and seemed to stretch endlessly. Then it was gone. Somehow they had repaired the damage to the hyper drive and made their escape. They were gone. A stunned silence fell over the bridge of the Destroyer.

"Admiral, set course for the Mustafar system."

"Right away my lord." Admiral Piett turned on his heels and went to make his way to ensure Vader's orders were seen through with the usual Imperial efficiency.

"Admiral Piett." He paused and turned to face Vader once more. The black clad figure turned from the view screen and seems to grow in size and menace in front of the Admiral before pointing a finger in his face. "Not many people get chance to disappoint me and live to tell the tale. I am confident that my generosity will be remembered when certain important choices are to be made. Remember this moment when the time comes to choose."

Ninety seconds later the Star Destroyer also vanished into hyperspace. On its way to Mustafar system.

"I told you a thousand times, I am not wearing his clothes, they're mine. They just look a little similar."

The Wookiee gave a low growl.

"What? No, I'm not trying to pretend to be Han so I can sleep with her."

Chewbacca eyed him sideways from the co-pilots seat, disapprovingly shaking his head.

"Will you cut the crap. I told you, I'm only here to help save Han. Way I figure, I owe him at least that much." There was stress in his voice, it was higher than usual. Lando was still clearly guilt ridden over the events that had transpired at his former home of Cloud City. The light began to blink on the communications console of the Millennium Falcon.

"There, that'll be the Princess now. Don't you be talking your trash while she's on the com or I'll introduce you to a friendly colony of Trandoshan blood flees I carry just for emergencies."

Chewbacca's reply was a little more subdued as he reached over to press the receiver.

"Lando. How are the preparations coming?" Asked Leia over the com unit.

"We're just about ready to go Princess." Lando replied. "Don't worry about Han, we'll find him. You just concentrate on locating Luke before we get back and the four of us will go and get him together."

"I beg your pardon Master Lando, I believe there are six of us. People do tend to take droids for granted." C3PO's voice cut in.

It had become impossible to separate the golden droid and his annoying habits from Leia since they had made their escape. Lando supposed it was a good thing. She could do with the comfort, and the distraction. During the trip back to the rebel fleet, Leia had filled Lando in on what had happened between the three of them.

Luke and Han making a quick trip to the Death Star to rescue her, and then surviving an attack by that same Death Star at Yavin and Luke's heroics. Months of evading the Empire. Followed by the Ice planet, Han saving her yet again. All of it almost brought to an end because of Lando's greed and need for self-preservation.

Any one of those scenarios would have been enough for him to call it a day. That wasn't Leia. It was little wonder her, Luke and Han had grown so close in such a short time. Finding someone you can trust with your life isn't easy. Finding two people you can instantly trust with everything you are, unheard of. Then losing them both in one fell swoop had to be hitting her hard, no matter how well she hid it.

"Okay, sorry 3PO. The six of us will go and save Luke."

Chewbacca wobbled something in response to C3PO.

"Well short my circuits, there is no need to be so rude Chewbacca. Honestly, I do not know where you got your manners from but..."

"That's enough 3PO." The Princesses voice cut in, ever the voice of reason, still. Lando suppressed a giggle. "Good luck you two."

"Thank you Princess, we'll make contact as soon as we find Han." Replied Lando.

Chewbacca gave a long mournful grow.

"Falcon out." Lando cut the com.

Chewie disengaged the millennium Falcon from the Rebel support freighter and Lando slowly brought the sub-light engines online. The coordinates had already been fed from the nav computer to the hyper drive, they were ready to go. As soon as they reached a safe distance the star lines blurred as the hyper drive fired and the Millennium Falcon was on its way back towards its owner.

Leia stood at the viewport of the support frigate as they drifted far outside the outer rim in the remote blackness of space. She'd never felt so alone. The two people that she was now closest to the entire universe were gone, not that she'd ever say that out loud. She had lost her planet, and now her friends. Maybe even more in Han. Him taken by a sadistic Bounty Hunter to even more sadistic crime lord. The other, for all she knew, could be dead. But more than likely had been taken captive by Vader and his cronies and was right now being tortured for information on the whereabouts of the rebel fleet. That very thought made bile rise into Leia's throat. She watched out of the viewport as the Millennium Falcon disappeared in the slight flash of an opening hyperspace window before turning to make her way back to her quarters.

C3PO trailed behind her silently. For his part the droid certainly had a valid grasp of human emotion and seemed to know when to keep quiet. And for a droid with such a love of talking as C3PO, that was no mean feat. 3PO's dome-shaped counterpart R2D2 was a different story.

After Luke's capture R2 seemed to have become quiet and withdrawn. He seemed to believe that he was responsible for Luke's safety and that he could have, and should have, done something more to prevent his capture. Leia and 3PO had tried to comfort the droid. Leia had taken the softly softly approach, but C3PO had taken a more stern approach, bopping him on his head and demanding he pull himself together and fulfil his duties as a good droid should.

The only thing that had brought R2 out of his reverie had been when Leia had obtained codes to the rebel mainframe and given them to the little droid so that he could search for the whereabouts of Vader's flagship, the *Executor*, in the hope that that's where Luke was being held captive. It was a slim hope. Vader would in all probability pass Luke onto the Emperor and he was now experiencing unknown horrors at his very hand. But it seemed to gee up the astromech and give him a focus. For the past three days he had been held up in Leia's quarters, plugged into a wall socket communicating as subtly as possible over the hyper-comm network in an attempt to trace the signature of Vader's ship. He had only made the slightest beep of acknowledgement the few times Leia and 3PO had asked how he was doing and if he needed anything. He had power, he had an info port, what more could he need? She thought his devotion was more than commendable.

It was cold on the ship. Leia pulled her wraparound slightly tighter as she walked down the corridor in the direction of her sleeping quarters. The slapping of running feet in her direction dragged her out of her own reverie and although she had heard them coming, was still startled when she rounded the corner and the young rebel ensign came to a sudden stop and a sharp salute in front of her.

The young man was clearly out of breath, very red-faced and in a sheer panic for some reason
"Catch your breath." Leia said, "You will do neither of us any good if you keel over here in the corridor."

"Yes your Highness." The young man panted, lowering his hands to his knees to support himself as he took a moment.

"Is everything quite alright? What is it?"

"Unbelievable! He wants to see you. You need to come with me right away... It's... He is asking you."

We can't be under attack, not out here? Were her first thoughts. Quickly followed by confusion. "Who is asking for me, ensign?"

"Docking bay one... He just turned up completely out of the blue. It's... Incredible."

Luke! Leia took off at the clip in the direction the ensign had come from leaving the young man panting in the corridor and looking after her with a bewildered expression.

Leia burst into the docking bay without breaking stride, startling a passing flight technician and making him drop the parts he was carrying. 3PO followed, arms high above his head in order to help him keep his balance. But protocol droids had not been manufactured with running in mind. Leia grabbed the passing technician.

“Where is he? Where is Luke? I...”

“Princess Leia, it would appear you have been misinformed.”

Leia turned at the voice she recognised. Approaching from behind her was the tall slender figure of an unmistakable Mon Calamari. But he wasn't alone. The little green being that accompanied him was clearly very old. He walked with the aid of a cane and only came to around the height of Akbar's knees.

“I don't understand?” Leia stomach flipped. “The ensign said that he just showed up unannounced, I assumed...”

“Princess, please allow me to introduce to you Yoda, former Grand Master of the Jedi.”

The tiny figure gave a small chuckle of amusement followed by a nod of greeting. “Princess. A pleasure to be in your company once again it is. Much to discuss we have.”