

The day after I started practicing the Thu'um, the time came when we couldn't put off dealing with Vader any longer. Luke had arrived at the security checkpoint, gone through the necessary checks, and would arrive at Nirn within a few hours. Meanwhile, as if it was fate, the droids keeping an eye on Vader sent me a priority message, informing me that he was showing signs of waking up.

Rather than subject Ahsoka, and Luke when he arrived, to the constant effects of being inside the anti-Force bubble, we brought the *Petrichor* down to hover over the ocean, just outside the bubble's range. Its hangar was big enough for Luke to land inside, and we could ferry people back and forth as needed. I would have used a ship from the 1st Fleet, but they had already left to go on their own mission. As tense as it was waiting for Palpatine to enact whatever fury he was no doubt feeling, we couldn't afford to put a stop to our missions, not with the shipyard under construction.

Rather than force Ahsoka down into the prison to wait for Vader to wake up, I went in first, with promises to call her in when he woke up. Honestly, I was probably for the best that he didn't wake up seeing her, as usually he had a pretty poor reaction to seeing people he knew as Anakin.

Then again, I didn't really expect him to react any better to me, but I was hoping I could mitigate that conversation. I also didn't want to expose Ahsoka to a raging Vader any more than we had to. She had suffered enough and would be going through more, so I wanted to mitigate what I could.

I made my way down into the underground prison, finally arriving at the super secure cell. At this point, it wasn't necessary to keep Vader in a super sterile environment, since I had healed his internals, his skin was bandaged and clean, and he was on a cocktail of medications to prevent infections. He was as healthy as he was going to get, as healthy as he had been since Mustafar, and even without the Force, he wasn't going to drop dead at the slightest infection or issue. After looking him over, I sat down in the corner of the room, preparing myself to wait.

I was only there for a few minutes when, suddenly, Vader gasped, a surprisingly normal sound coming from the horribly scarred body. He wiggled and shifted, trying to push himself up in his bed, eventually managing to get himself back up onto the pillow more, propping himself up. He immediately spotted me, and he snarled.

"YOU! What-!" He shouted, only to stop, his own voice shocking him into silence.

From there, whatever fog had been keeping him from realizing all of the things that were wrong from his perspective faded.

"What...Why can't I... Why-"

His words sounded surprisingly normal, a man whose first reaction to confusion and change was annoyance and anger, an unfortunately common problem. As he tried to figure out just what he was feeling, working his way through the confusion, I spoke up.

"Welcome to Nirn, Darth Vader," I said simply. "If you're wondering why you can talk and breathe so easily, and why your body isn't in constant pain, I healed you up a bit, and had some medical droids treat you properly. Palpy had purposely healed you with inferior methods in order to cause you more suffering. Not sure if you knew that or not."

"Why... where is it?"

"Your suit?" I asked, being intentionally obtuse. "We threw most of it away already. I've healed your lungs enough that-"

"No! Where is the Force!" He shouted, rocking and flailing around, almost managing to roll himself off the bed. "Where! What have you done to me!"

His shouts and snarls continued, his flailing and shouting taking over the room for a moment. Eventually, he slowed, his voice dropping down a notch in volume as he realized I was just sitting there, watching him make a fool of himself.

"You're under the effects of a family of ysalamiri," I explained simply. "I'm sure you know what those are?"

"Ysalamiri?" He asked, his brow, which was devoid of hair, furrowed. "How did you get them off of Myrkr?"

"We managed to replicate their biome enough that we could transport them off-world," I revealed, though I didn't mention the details. "We have a whole forest of them right above us."

Vader looked at me, anger in his eyes, but after a few moments, he collapsed back onto his bed, staring up at the ceiling. I had a feeling he was rather acutely feeling the distress of not having a connection to the Force, but he was doing his best to hide it from me.

"You will get nothing from me," he said. "I do not care that you have healed me, I will not betray my master."

"Whatever," I responded with a shrug. "I don't particularly care about that. I already know about the second Death Star, plus a chunk of Palpy's other plans. Hell, I probably know more than you do."

That got a reaction out of him, his head whipping to stare at me with wide eyes. I couldn't help but chuckle, though I noted his eyes, which had been a disturbing yellow with a red outline, had faded in intensity.

"Vader, didn't you wonder how I knew all those specific insults to throw at you?" I asked. "I have a reputation for knowing things I shouldn't, and sometimes even couldn't."

"The Force imparts knowledge that-"

"Except I'm not using the Force," I explained, raising my hand, and it glows golden, casting a heal on myself to prove I still had access to mojo while he did not. "Not to mention that Force visions are hardly clear enough to pull details from, and [Psychometry](#) isn't much better. And yet I could tell you the color of Padme's clothes when she first met you, disguised as one of her handmaidens."

The mention of his long-dead wife sent waves of emotion through his face, shifting almost faster than I could see them. Anger, disgust, self-loathing, loss, and even a hint of something that might have just been a bittersweet moment.

Honestly, the fact that he was cycling emotions at all, and that at least one of them wasn't complete rage, was actually pretty startling. Getting him out of the cycle of hate and rage by cutting him off from the Force appeared to be at least working a bit. Having him off step without the Force was probably helping.

"If not the Force, then what?" He asked, his tone showing a sliver of curiosity under his frustration.

"Magic," I explained, continuing through his eye roll. "Considering that you are currently enjoying the fruits of that magic, I would think you'd be at least tempted to listen. Healing others with the Force is a rare talent, and while we have quite a few Jedi here, none of them are skilled enough to do what I did to you. Not that any of them would do anything to help you. I'm still on the fence about what I did, but go ahead and take a deep breath, feel it for yourself."

For a moment, I thought he might actually listen to me, but instead, he simply lay there, simmering. He refused to look at me for a long moment, so I decided to speak up.

"Your son is on his way," I said, the broken man once again whipping his head towards me to stare. "He thinks he can bring you back from the Dark Side."

"Then he is a fool, the Jedi filled his head with delusions," Vader said, though I could tell his emotions were swirling. "I am nothing but the Dark Side."

For being a powerful Sith, he was terrible at hiding his emotions. Maybe it was a side effect of only feeling anger behind his helmet for so long, either way, he was incredibly easy to read.

"Are you kidding me? The Jedi really don't think that anyone can come back from sinking that far into the Dark Side," I pointed out. "This is all him, naive as it may be."

"Perhaps, but he is still a fool," He said. "I have done nothing wrong, the Power of the Dark Side is far greater than the path the Jedi follow. The Jedi betrayed me, and I exacted my revenge!"

"They didn't betray you, idiot. You were just blinded by your rage. And they are actually working on that," I admitted, leaning back in my chair. "They recognize how broken the old order was, and are looking for a new direction. It looks like going forward, they will be preaching a

much more open, grey version of the Force, rather than the strict, rigid version they used to. Though only time will tell if they stick to that."

Vader stayed silent, so I continued, an anger welling up inside me that I honestly hadn't expected.

"Though that doesn't matter all that much to you. I don't know what the results of Luke's attempts to redeem you will do, Vader, but what I can promise you, is that no matter what does happen, it won't lead to anything even remotely close to your freedom," I said, meeting his glare. "Your son may think there is good in you, but I know the truth. I know you slaughtered defenseless younglings. I know you murdered untold thousands directly, and more at your orders. I don't care that Paply tricked you, manipulated you, from the moment you first landed on Coursant, perhaps even before that. Those actions are still *yours*, and for as long as I live, I will *never* let you experience freedom again."

I stood from my chair, making my way to his bed, leaning down so I could look into his eyes.

"The only good you could do in this world, the only action you still exist for, is to give your son closure," I explained. "I don't care about your Chosen One bullshit. You're nothing but a fucking ruined, broken man, and I plan on keeping you locked away."

He stared into my eyes, hatred swirling in them, despite the coldness in his face. His feature, just barely recognizable as the man he used to be, twitched, and I pulled back. I resisted the urge to shout, to scream, and even some worse things. Instead, I simply sat back in my chair, watching him closely, slowly tapping out a message to Ahsoka that he was awake.

Silence filled the room until Ahsoka eventually arrived about ten minutes later. I stood as she entered, wanting to support her without getting in the way of... whatever it was she wanted to do. I knew she had things to say, but I hadn't pressed her for what exactly it was. For a long moment, she stared at him, studying his scarred body.

"Anakin-"

"I am *Not* Anakin," He said, cutting her off, flailing a bit as he tried to sit up, falling back onto his bed when he failed. "I-"

I charged a Paralyze spell and fired it at Vader, the green energy wrapping around him, freezing him in place. It would only last a few seconds, but the fact that my hand was still glowing green as I charged another one would keep him quiet. Ahsoka nodded and whispered a thanks before focusing back on her old teacher.

"Anakin, I have spent a long time thinking about what I would like to say to you, should I get the chance to actually speak, rather than just fight," She admitted. "And I've spent even more time wondering what I could have done differently. Deacon explained that what happened to me before I left was likely a plan by Palpy to isolate you from your support, and while I know I shouldn't blame myself... I am sorry. I'm sorry that I wasn't there. That I left you to bear the

burden of everything by yourself. I'm sorry I wasn't there when everything started to break down. I'm sorry I wasn't there when the Jedi refused to make you a master, despite the fact that you saved most of their lives during the war at one point or another. I'm sorry that, for all the times you saved me from myself, that I wasn't there to save you from yourself."

The quiet hum of a nearby secure vent was all that filled the room, even Vader choosing to stay quiet. Despite the expression of anger, frustration, and even a little disgust on his face... he said nothing.

"But as sorry as I am for not being there... I have also come to realize that your actions during your descent, and after, fall on you and Palpy's shoulder, not mine," Ahsoka continued, picking up steam, standing up straighter and staring down Vader. "You are a criminal, a disgusting, child murdering killer who has done terrible, unforgivable things. I *pity* how broken you have become, Anakin. I pity how far you have fallen. Padme would have been ashamed, and while Luke holds out hope that you can be redeemed, your crimes will *never* be forgotten."

"I don't need your pity!" He shouted back. "I have risen above the Jedi, and I am stronger for it! They betrayed me, broke their promises, and looked down on me! And someday I will crush Palpatine and take control of the Empire! I will rule this galaxy and wipe out any that would rise against me!"

"And do you think it will be any different?" Ahsoka asked. "Or will you just be another insane, slaving, violent bastard crushing the galaxy beneath his boot?"

He barely paused his tirade, diving right back in after she spoke, whatever building emotions he had breaking his control as he started to flail and rage. I considered silencing him again, but after giving Ahsoka a look, I put my arm around her shoulders and guided her out of the cell. We didn't stop until we reached the surface, and the airspeeder circling the island picked us up, taking us up and out of the Anti-Force bubble.

When we finally stepped out of the speeder, standing on the open deck of *Petrichor's* large hangar, I reached out and snagged Ahsoka's arm as she was walking. I pulled her into a tight hug, letting her partially lean on me.

"I'm proud of you, Cinnamon," I said, rubbing her back as we swayed slightly. "I'm so proud of you for that."

That seemed to be the crack that shattered the dam, as she convulsed, letting out a deep sob.

We stood there on the bridge for at least a few minutes, with me whispering words of comfort as Ahsoka released a pressure valve that she had kept locked up tight for quite some time.