

I stared into the cell turned hospital room for quite some time. Ahsoka left after around ten minutes, as the lack of the Force was starting to make her agitated. I was also pretty sure that the sight of someone she once considered family, who had then murdered everything she held dear, lying in bed as nothing more than a burned, scarred lump, was not sitting well with her.

I couldn't blame her for wanting to get away, as I had none of those attachments, and I still felt like I wanted to pretend this wasn't happening.

Unfortunately, I couldn't. So, as I stared into the room, my mind was a whirling dervish, desperately trying to puzzle together what our next step was, what we could do, and if there was anything we could do to mitigate the rather significant problem we now had.

Capturing Darth Vader, in a vacuum, was a really good thing. Luke got to try and redeem his dad, without him being on his deathbed, while we got to test the validity of my anti-Force treatment for those Tainted by the Dark Side. Meanwhile, the rest of the galaxy gets to enjoy a Vader-free existence. The problem was that this was not happening in a vacuum, and while the benefits were many, the negative effects were deep and terrifying.

The Emperor was going to flip his shit.

The narcissistic bastard did not take losing his toys well, and we had just stolen his greatest creation. He has spent so long fostering Darth Vader, poisoning Anakin's mind, and breaking him to fit the mold he wanted. And now he had been whisked away and hidden from his sight. There was absolutely no doubt in my mind that there was going to be an extremely harsh blowback from this, not just for us, but for the Rebellion as well as any group that stood up against him.

Or anyone who even slightly annoyed him, really.

If Palpy took the kid gloves off, started treating the Skyforged and the Rebellion as legitimate threats...

Things could get very bad, very quickly.

Heavier patrols, more resources focused on finding us, updated security, warnings about our presence, all of it was possible, not to mention anything extra that Palpy's demented mind could think up.

The Rebellion was in even more danger, as while I didn't think they were completely infiltrated, there were undoubtedly *some* Imperial assets in their ranks. The Emperor probably knew quite a bit more about their activities and operations than they understood, which he ignored because he wasn't threatened by them, and because he had some sort of Machiavellian plot in place. But now he had ample motive to slam the hammer down on every little bit of intel he knew.

I didn't think we would suddenly be invaded, or that we were completely doomed, as while Palpy's reach was long, and he was likely very, very angry, I knew he wasn't all-powerful. But we needed to be a lot more careful going forward, as the consequences for slipping just got a lot less forgiving.

Of course, there was one possibility. Sure, Palpy was likely furious, but there was one way I could get him to calm down. I could let Vader go.

We had medical units that could keep him alive, and a way to get him to Imperial-held worlds. Dropping him off somewhere, calling for paramedics or the planet's equivalent, and leaving Vader with a note explaining who he was would get the Emperor's attention real quick, and may mitigate the oncoming storm.

After all, the Emperor would undoubtedly know *why* we would do that, as it would be pretty obvious why we would let him go in such a way. If there was anything that calmed Palpy down, it would be feeling superior, and knowing that he had scared us into obedience without doing much to us at all would likely go a long way to calming him down.

I considered the idea for a long moment before shaking my head. As much as it was tempting, I knew it wasn't actually possible. Not only would Ahsoka, Luke, and the Jedi as a whole never forgive me, but letting Vader go after having beaten him would only piss him off more, and while it would be better than the Palpy's temper tantrum, it would still be bad. Not to mention the other positives of capturing him.

Plus... despite only coming out on top by the skin of my teeth... I had still beaten Darth Vader. I was not about to let something like that go, even if it meant weathering a storm or five.

After another minute or so of looking into the room, I finally moved, tapping on the door controls and entering an access code. As the door opened, it released a puff of air, blasting me gently with the smell of antiseptic, sterilizing liquids, and medicine. Ignoring the various protests coming from the droids, I raised my hands, using Repair Body in one and Heal Critical Trauma with the other. First, I fixed the stab wound I gave him, the wound sealing in just a few seconds. I then moved on to fix the damage to his lungs and his other organs. Lastly, I sealed off a few dozen sores that covered his torso.

I could hear the medical droids announcing his rising vitals, but the moment I healed the worst damage, assuring his survival, I stopped. I did nothing for his missing limbs or the tremendous amount of scar tissue on his body. I did just enough to make sure he didn't drop dead without access to the Dark Side to sustain himself.

When I was done, I left, getting out of the room before I did something stupid, making my way out of the *Quiet Ark* and out of the hangar. I quickly made my way up to the bridge, where I had one of the crew call for Tatnia. She showed up just a few minutes later, with Julius trailing behind him. He looked haggard, like he hadn't been sleeping, and as they approached, he

stepped forward. He clearly realized that what he had done would have some pretty serious effects, and it had been eating at him.

"Deacon, I-"

Before he could continue, I stepped forward, putting my hands on his shoulders and dumping a pair of Respites into him, the man standing up taller as his energy returned. I patted his shoulder before miming to both of them that I couldn't talk. We moved to a corner of the bridge, where we had a modicum of privacy, and where I could use a datapad to talk. I quickly explained why I couldn't talk, briefly outlined the situation, and then moved on to addressing Julius.

"It's not your fault, Julius," I typed, doing my best to assure him. "You were trying to do right by Luke, and as far as I'm concerned, that exonerates you from any wrongdoing. Not to mention that I've been training you guys from day one to steal everything not nailed down. Not like I can blame you for listening to me."

The younger man let out a long breath, relieved but not completely convinced either. I patted his shoulder and told him to head to his quarters and get some sleep, since he clearly needed it. My Respite spells would only last so long, after all. He apologized again before heading out, leaving Tatnia and I alone in our corner.

"Is he going to be okay?"

"I don't know," Tatnia admitted, worry clear in her voice. "If the blowback ends up hurting people... What do you need?"

"I need you to be my voice," I explained, gesturing to the nearby holoprojector. "We need to contact the Rebellion and warn them.... And we need to figure out some way to get Luke here without revealing his secret."

"I can do the first one," She agreed. "You're gonna have to think of something for the second."

I frowned, considering the problem. Then, after a moment, it came to me.

"He needs to be there for deliberations concerning Vader's fate," I typed out. "As the man responsible for his father's death, and a Jedi, he has a particularly important voice in what we do about him."

"That... yeah, that would probably work," She admitted. "Though others might feel they have a claim on that as well."

"Maybe," I agreed with a shrug. "But they aren't personal friends."

"I know, just putting it out there," she explained, hesitating for a moment before continuing. "Do we actually know what we are going to do with him?"

"No," I admitted easily. "I have no fucking clue."

Tatnia nodded before making her way onto the main walkway of the bridge. She called out to the comms officer, who turned and nodded, typing into the computer. Tatnia didn't usually order the troops around, either on the ground or on board the *Hope*, but she was well known to everyone as my second in command and responsible for a lot of things happening in the background. When she did give orders, people jumped to obey.

Within a few minutes, we had connected to Alpha Base, and in just a few minutes after that, General Syndulla appeared on screen. Tatnia and I stood side by side, the holoprojector set to display both of us together.

"Admiral Deacon, Tatnia, it's good to see you," the green-skinned Rebel said with a nod. "What can we do for you?"

"You're not going to be saying that in a moment," Tatnia pointed out, gesturing to me. "Deacon tangled with some untested magic, and he's being forced to heal slowly from an injury to his throat. For now, he cannot speak, but we have a warning that is too important to wait for him to heal. This is a big one, so hold on to something. We have captured Darth Vader."

The general's eyes went wide, and her jaw dropped. For quite a long pause, she was silent, simply staring. Eventually, Tatnia decided to move on rather than wait for her to break out of her stunlock.

"We were on a mission and were betrayed, most likely someone from the government we were working with," my second in command continued. "Vader ambushed us, and both Ahsoka and Deacon held him off while we secured a way off the planet. They easily defeated him."

I put my hand on Tatnia's shoulder and gave her a look, the woman rolling her eyes but easily understanding my intent.

"They barely managed to defeat him, and because of a miscommunication, Vader was taken with us as we escaped."

"Wh... how? I-"

General Syndulla seemed baffled by our claim and seemed ready to deny that it was possible. I didn't think she wanted to say we were lying, but the Rebellion feared Darth Vader almost as much, potentially more so than the Emperor himself. Hearing that he was captured would be like hearing that someone had managed to stuff Satan into a bag.

Luckily, I had foreseen this issue and had called Ahsoka. Not only would she never joke about something like that, something the Rebellion would know, but I had her grab proof. Between the wait for Hera to arrive and her complete lock-up, Ahsoka stepped onto the bridge carrying a large bag. I stepped to the side, letting Ahsoka momentarily take my spot in the holoprojector.

She opened the bag, reached inside, and pulled out Vader's helmet. She held it up for Syndulla to see before passing the black piece of armor to Tatnia and reaching back into the

bag, pulling out his lightsaber. She did not look like she was enjoying carrying either, but she had taken responsibility for the bits of his armor we hadn't incinerated, so it was her job for now.

Hera's string of expletives lasted a full thirty seconds and stretched several languages, most of which I could not identify, but Tatnia seemed to. When she was finally done, she was noticeably out of breath. We were all silent as Ahsoka put the armor and helmet back into the bag, stepping out of the holoprojector range, allowing me to step back in.

"...This is, gods, this is insanity," she finally said, shaking her head. "Killing him would have been crazy, but capturing him alive? How are you containing him? We have records of him tearing apart entire starships with the Force."

"A special method that we cannot discuss at the moment," Tatnia responded, taking the initiative to keep ysalamiri secret for now. "However, we are confident he is confined."

"... what do you want from us?" she asked after another long pause. "Why was it so important to let us know?"

"Because the Emperor is not going to be happy that we took his favorite toy," Tatnia explained. "You need to seriously consider pulling back any away missions, people embedded under cover, and any assets you aren't sure are a hundred percent safe and hidden away. He is going to be hungry for blood."

"Hells, you're right," She admitted, running her hand over her forehead. "Yes, okay, I will start reaching out to people immediately and putting our cells on high alert. I will spread the word and get people moving to safe areas."

"Good. We also need to borrow Luke Skywalker," Tatnia added smoothly. "Considering Darth Vader is responsible for his father's death, and he is a Jedi, he will be particularly important in deciding what his fate will be."

"You're going to put him on trial?"

"We don't know what we are going to do," She admitted. "But Deacon seems to think Luke should have a say in it."

"... I will inform him of this, and explain why Deacon wants him to be involved," Hera finally agreed. "What he does with that is up to him, but he will be given time if he so wishes. He is currently on a mission, but he will be informed when he returns."

I nodded, and after a five-minute-long conversation that left Hera looking a bit ragged, the call was ended. The ball was in the Rebellion's court now. It was up to them to take our warnings seriously.

Ahsoka, still carrying the bag with Vader's helmet and lightsaber in it, leaned against me for physical and emotional support. I wrapped my arm around her and held her close, using my free hand to tug the bag from her. I silently passed it to Tatnia, who nodded and carried it away.

"What are we going to do? I don't know if I can face him once we wake him up," she admitted. "He hated me so much... how much of that was the dark side? Why do I care? He did so many monstrous things... why do I want him to wake up and be Anakin again?"

I wrapped my arms around her tighter, doing my best to hold her close as we looked out of the viewports, into the star-filled blackness of space. I didn't have any answers for her, none that would actually help, at least.

We stood there for some time, taking solace in each other's company, before eventually leaving the bridge behind to meet with the rest of my crew. We needed to discuss what to do next, and I didn't want to move on until I had heard what everyone thought.

Before that, however, I needed something to eat. It had been days since my last meal, and Respite could only do so much.