

The Dark Side Is Everywhere

by Sienn'rha

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Short Summary:

This story takes place directly after The New Rebellion. Luke is about to recover from the incident on Almania when a civil war on the planet of Lor Areo requires the assistance of the Jedi as well as from the Chief-of-State. But nothing is as it seems and Luke doesn't know that there is someone waiting for him, ready to launch his evil plans.....

Author's note:

Mara Jade is in this story, too, but it is NOT a Mara/Luke romance.....well, at least not really. Perhaps there's a little tension between them, but certainly nothing more. I'm already working on a romance, so be patient if you like Mara/Luke stories as much as I like them. Ah, and I'm sorry for grammar faults or something like this. Please understand. I'm a german writer and this is also my first story I completely wrote in english. I'd like to hear your opinions about this story. Please mail me (english or german doesn't matter at all) and put the name of the story in front, for I will know what the mail is about. I will answer it sooner then, I think.

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Prologue

The sunset let the Golden Seas of Lor Areo shone that brightly, one almost wasn't able to watch. But she forced her eyes to stay on the water and not to wince. She wanted to feel the pain it caused. Pain fed anger. And anger fed hatred. And the more hatred she had in her heart the more she would be able to fulfill her task. She smiled and whirled around, her wide, tan coat covering the huge window for an instant. This planet would soon be under her control and the whole system would follow. For her, it didn't matter how many beings would die between her raise of power. She didn't think of any other people than herself. Fools and idiots. Needless for her cause. Well, she smirked, not entirely needless. Many people would die and someone of the New Republic would have to do something against it. And just then, when the galaxy would learn about the huge injustice that happened on Lor Areo, the plea for help would reach the Senate of Coruscant. They would ask some Jedi to mediate. And, since there weren't many Jedi able to handle such a thing, the Senate or, more probably, the Chief-of-State Princess Leia Organa Solo herself, would sent the strongest Jedi existing - her brother, Jedi Master Luke Skywalker.

Exactly the man she wanted to be here. Of course she had heard the rumors about the struggle in the Almania system, about Organa Solo and Skywalker being somehow involved in it.

Noone could tell her for sure what was true and what not. But this too, didn't really matter. If Skywalker was really a little bit weaker than usual....well, it could do her and her tasks nothing but good. If not....she would be able to handle him anyway, so why worry? He would help her to gain control over this system. It had been complicate to gather all the things she would need to....persuade him to cooperate with her. But now, everything was prepared for him. She took the stairs down to the cave of her stronghold. There were many stairs and it was cold, dark and damp, but she enjoyed it. She liked the darkness and the cold. Despite of this, it was just practical to build her little facility in the cave where noone could accidentally stagger about it. Not that any citizen of this planet would only imagine to spy on her. She was a member of the high society and beyond any doubts of treason. What did they know! She reached a huge durasteel door and punched her accesscode in the keypad. The doors swung open and she entered a cavern almost as large as her entire compound...only in the deep caves under the earth. She had discovered this caverns as a little child and had loved it to play in them.

Her little sister had gotten lost a few times in the dark tunnels. That had everytime been very amusing days for her. She had never understand why her sister had been that much afraid of darkness. Childich, darkness was her life! "Kumo!" she cried. "Kumo, come here!" A tall, thin

human appeared. His grey hair whirled in dirty curls around his pale face. He looked like he were already dead. Well, she must admit, he hadn't seen the sun for quite a time. But it was only a fact. She knew, any other person would have had pity with this guy. Again something she could barely understand. She wished she could stay forever in these dark caves. Unfortunately, that was impossible.

Perhaps later, if her plans would have succeeded, she would be able to stay longer here. Hopefully. "What can I do for you, madam?" the man asked, bowing his head. "How are my little babies doing? I hope they are getting stronger. Soon, I will need them, you know." He smiled weakly. Kumo was all but a happy servant to his "Madam". He was a scientist, the best in this sector, and that was the only cause he was here. Here, imprisoned in this dark, stinking and damp cave, forced to work for this devil witch. "They're as ready as they can ever become. You already know that. Why keep you asking me?" He mumbled darkly. She only grinned and looked around: "What about the throne for my beloved guest I will soon have here? Is it ready?" "As I said to you yesterday and the day before and the day before that yes, madam, it's ready. But I don't understand what you're up to. What a guest? And what do you want with...." "Ah, Kumo. A little bit curious, are we? You haven't to know. Just keep it working. If I think about it....probably you will be happy to be here after all. If you see what I will make with this planet, I mean. " Kumo's head snapped higher and he glared at her, fear in his eyes. "What do you mean by that? You've promised me my family would be..." "Your family will be fine. As long as you do what I want you to do. I thought I had made myself clear, didn't I?" "Of course, my lady." "Good. Indeed, very good. I have to leave you now, Kumo. It's time for me to begin with the hard work. Ah....the animals I've sent for....are they already here?" "If you mean this funny, long...." "Yes. Are they here?" "Sure. Twenty of them, as you wanted." She smiled, turned around and began the walk upstairs. Soon. Really soon, indeed.

Chapter I

Luke watched 2-1B nervously as the droid prepared an infusion. "Do you have to do that, 2-1B? I mean, I'm feeling really good. I don't think I need another..." "Master Skywalker, you may feel good at the moment, but you aren't fully recovered yet and you know that. Please lay down!" Luke sighed and did as he was told. He hated it. There shouldn't be hatred in a Jedi Master's mind, but he did hate bacta. He could do nothing about it. But he could also do nothing against it this time. His back wasn't healed yet and needed the liquid. At least he could take care of his "clothings" this time. If one was unconscious before being putted into the tank, it was possible that he would be strapped of all his clothes. Medic-droids didn't mind if the patient was naked or not and if any visitor would see him like that....well, Luke really didn't want this to happen. A sharp pain let him gasp in shock as 2-1B pushed the needle through his skin. He mused to cut 2-1B's needle-arm with his lightsaber which lay only a few meters beside him on a nightstand.

And then came the sleep.

When Luke woke up again, he stared right in his sister's lovely face. "Hi." she said softly, taking his left hand. "How are you feeling?" "Tired." he answered, trying to sit up. He didn't succeed and gave up. "Slow, Luke. That was your last treatment but you still have to rest. 2-1B said you are in a really bad shape, considering minerals and that stuff. You haven't eaten anything down there on Almania, have you?" she pushed a few hairs out of his face. "I have eaten the ration bars on the Falcon, you know." he mumbled. Leia smiled weakly: "Oh yeah. Perfect food for someone badly wounded like you. How could I forget!" she waved a hand and a servant droid came into view. It helped Luke to sit up and put some steaming dishes in his lap. "Uh, Leia, I...well, I'm not hungry. I will eat something later." "You will eat now. Jedi Master or not, you need some food." Luke sighed: "Leia, I'm a big boy. Trust me, I know..." "Oh, c'mon Luke. Stop it, will you? You are not healed. Why don't you understand that? You're pale like a ghost and thinner than ever I remember. Stay here, rest and eat." Luke watched his sister closely. She was right, he knew it. But he didn't like sitting around and doing nothing. That just wasn't he. And that was something she knew. Leia took his hand again and caressed it softly: "Luke, please. I'm worried about you. You have to recover fully. I want you to. Can't you understand me? I don't know why you always do that to yourself." He leaned back, closed his eyes and enjoyed the feeling of Leias soft fingers against his hand. Perhaps she was right. Perhaps he should really do as she said. He concentrated on her and her fingers and gave in to his weakness. His mind wandered away, his body relaxed.....

The Force came to him, it was all around him and he reached to the far ends of the galaxy to

find his strength back in the calm of the stars and suns there, of the life of every planet. The Force guided him, as usually in this state of mind, to a certain place. It was a little planet. The most beautiful planet Luke had ever seen. Instead of the deep blue of large oceans, there were areas of pure gold there, wonderful to look, glittering in the light of a sun not much larger than the planet. Luke lost himself in the sight of this wonderful ball of life and beauty. But slowly, the planet changed. No...something materialized from the deep golden seas and the rich, green continents. A shape....a shape of a being....a human being. The being opened its mouth and laughed, an evil laughter that made Luke shudder. And then it murmured something, back in his head. "Luke...come to me....you'll help me....come to me..." And Luke fell in the being's mouth, in the deep, cold darkness there. He tried to use the Force in order to stop his body from falling deeper in this pit of evil but it didn't work. "No, Luke...come to me....I won't harm you....come to me..." the voice was different now, almost sirene. His dream body turned around and stood at the same moment in a huge cavern. Only one light shone, mirroring in some kind of glass cylinders. "I'm here, Luke. Come. You will help me now." He whirled around to face a shadow. It wasn't big. He tried to figure out who it was, tried to see the face of this person, but there was nothing but tan darkness. "Why shall I help you? And how?" Luke's dream ego asked. "Dont'worry. Everything's alright and ready. Ready for you. Come to me, Luke. Come." The voice was so beautiful. Luke made one step to the being and another. In the next moment, Luke found himself lying on some kind of hard underground. Something was around his ankles, his waist, his wrists....He knew this feelings. But from when? Or from where? He wanted to go away.

He didn't want to help this being. He didn't want. His left arm ached terribly. The being laughed again, almost hysterically, and then Luke had the horrible feeling of his soul leaving his body. His entire body ached and he cried in agony as he fell deeper and deeper into the darkness which appeared around him....

Leia smiled when she took the dishes from Lukes lap and put them on the nightstand. At least he rested. He could eat later, if he was awake again. Everything was better than a Luke who nervously paced through his quarters and had to be tranquilized. She watched his face as he drifted of to sleep. His mouth fell open a little bit and Leia grinned.

He seemed to sleep very deep. Well, she didn't mind. She could do her paperwork for this day here as well as in her office. And she wanted to take care of Luke eating something when he would wake up. She didn't know how long she had concentrated on her work when Luke started to groan. Her head snapped higher and she approached his bed. He moved and tossed his body in the covers and continued to groan and to murmur. Leia bent down concerned and lay a hand on his forehead. Cold sweat covered his skin and his face was a mask of fear, horror and pain. "Luke? Luke, wake up. Come on, wake up! Luke!" when he began to scream she screamed almost herself. "Luke, please! Wake up!"

she took his head in both her hands und caressed his damp cheeks with her thumbs. Luke's eyes blinked. He stared at her for a moment, not recognizing who she was, and pulled anxiously away. "Luke, what's the matter? What's wrong with you?" Leia reached again for his cheek. He breathed heavily, his eyes wide with panic. He was obviously scared to death. The lifiesensor beside his bed started to beep and after a few seconds 2-1B stormed into the room and to the side of his frightened patient. "What happened, your Excellency?" he asked with his cold, mechanical voice while he reached with an instrumental arm for Luke. Luke whined in fear and it seemed as if he would faint in the next moment. "I don't know. Probably he had a nightmare or something." she stammered, trying to hold her brother's shakening body close to her in order to calm him down as much as possible. "One of this visions Jedi Knights are used to have?" the droid asked casually while controlling Luke's life signs. Leia's mouth fell open with shock. If this really had been a vision....a vision which could frighten Luke Skywalker half out of his mind....she didn't want to think about the possibilities of many, really big problems that could mean. "Help me.....please...help me..." Luke stammered, staring at the ceiling. 2-1B prepared to stunn Luke in order to prevent him from fainting, but Leia shook her head firmly: "No, 2-1B. I will take him back." "But, your Highness, this is...." "Quiet, 2-1B!" she hissed. Leia closed her eyes, concentrated and searched for the Force in her mind. It came to her and she began to enter Luke's mind. It was a really strange thing. He seemed to be far away, focussed on something hidden deep in the future. Leia knew she had to find out what had Luke scared that much to take him back into consciousness. All what she could see was a dark shadow, leaning over Luke who lay somehow paralyzed on a table or something. It

seemed vaguely known to her, but she knew she had no time to think about it. She had to free Luke from this nightmare or vision or whatever it was. If not, he would need another treatment in the bacta-tank, that was for sure. It wasn't really complicate. She build a wall of protection around her brother and send him calm thoughts. And it worked. The nightmare vanished almost instantly and Luke's mind blinked confused. Leia opened her eyes again, to look straight in those of her brother. He had stopped to shake and breathed normally now. His eyes flew from one side to the other and focussed on Leia. "Leia! Why.... What happened?" he asked surprised and set up carefully. "You tell me. You groaned and screamed in your sleep and almost fainted. I had to intrude in your mind to wake you up. Otherwise you would have come to in a bacta tank again. Was that a simple nightmare or....?" Leia didn't finish her sentence. The look on Luke's face told her all what she wanted to know. He lay back down and closed his eyes. Probably he was still somewhat frightened. "It's all right, 2-1B. You can leave us now. Luke will be ok in a few minutes." Leia said, smiling nicely to the droid. "I don't know, your Excellency. Are you sure your brother don't need any further treatment? Perhaps some pills to let him come down again?" "Yes, 2-1B, I am sure. He won't need any pills, so leave us alone now. Please. You can check on him later, ok?" "As you wish, Madam Chief-of-State." the droide left the room, a little bit annoyed. Leia sat down beside her brother and asked softly: "What was it about?" Luke sat up again: "The vision?" he asked sheepishly. Leia nodded, took an edge of the bedcovers and wiped the sweat from his face. "I can't remember that much. There was a small planet and a being....a dark being...evil. It asked me to help him and then...I don't know. It was as if my soul would leave my body." he shook his head, trying to remember more, but there wasn't anymore. "Like back there on Yavin IV, as Exar Kun and Kyp attacked you?" Leia asked. Her voice was very serious, yet very soft. He felt as if it would caress his soul. Luke calmed down entirely. "No. Like....like someone who controls my soul. I know he does and I don't want to obey, but I have to. I can't defend me. It was....horrible." he added slowly. Leia kissed his forehead and stood up: "I suggest you take a shower, then we go get you some dinner. I'll search for Han. I think we should talk about this." Luke nodded. After Leia had left, he pulled himself up and went slowly to the small bathroom he could use. He hoped that wasn't a vision. Perhaps it was only something that had to do with his imprisonment on Almania and the death of millions of beings he had felt in the last couple of weeks. Yes. Probably it was this. He had felt so helpless when the pain of these beings had reached him through the Force. He had wanted to help them, to prevent the extinction of a whole race, but he couldn't. Kueller had been to strong at this time and Luke hadn't known it was him who had done all this terrible, cruel things. Leia was right. He would take a shower, eat something and discuss the dream with her and Han. That would help him. After all what had happened to him in the last time, it was surely not very strange to have frightening nightmares of helplessness and pain.

Chapter II

The sunset of Coruscant was something Luke loved alot. All buildings shone like great, big volcanoes. Everything was deep red or orange and it just was a wonderful experience if you saw an almost fully technical oriented world without many natural places turn into a caleidoscope of rich colors. All of a sudden, the huge Imperial City looked like a warm, little town. He sighed and leaned back in his bodyform chair on the terrace of the Ambassador's Inn. The Ambassador's Inn was a little, but exclusive café only two floors beyond the council chambers. Usually, Luke avoided places like this, where senators, ambassadors and aides whirled around, crying, debating, discussing. He could barely maintain calm and it usually cost all his concentration to stop himself from eavesdropping the talks of senators he knew were against Leias politics of freedom and integration of many, many alien species. The former Imperials stood for this opinion, particularly. But this evening, Luke watched only Coruscant's sunset and enjoyed himself. He had indeed taken the shower Leia had suggested and after that he had meditated. Now, he felt comfortably tired and content. This night, he would surely sleep really, really deep. "Hey, kid! That's certainly the wrong place for an afternoon nap." Han Solo sat himself down across from Luke and grinned. Luke smiled and sipped from his hot cocoa: "I was just thinking about how much I like this sight, up here." Han gazed around and nodded: "Yeah. It's because of this sunsets that I still live here." Luke laughed: "It's because of Leia killing you if you would move away that you still live here." Han looked somewhat hurt, but his eyes showed a grin: "Well, that's part of it." Quite a time neither of them said a word,

until Han finally spoke: "So, boy, Leia's told me you had a really bad nightmare back there in the hospital. Want to talk about it?" "Dunno. Rather want to forget it." mumbled Luke. "Leia said it was a vision. If I remember the past...well, I think we should take it very serious." Luke snorted disgusted: "Hey, it had nothing to do with you, Leia or the kids. It was just about me. And if I don't want to take it serious, so you haven't to either, ok?" Han watched him closely, a concerned look on his face. "Luke, why are you so closed all of a sudden? I thought you wanted to talk about it. And if I see you, I would say that would be really good for you." Luke stared at him, aware of his uncharacteristical rudeness against his best friend. "I'm sorry, Han, really. It is only that...I'm afraid of this vision becoming true. It was so...so terrible and it hurted so much." his voice trembled slightly and Han felt a lot of pity. Lukes abilities in the Force made him a great man with a big heart, but they were also a heavy burden. "It's okay, kid. I think this vision only means that I have to lay an eye on you. Usually, you attract chaos and trouble like a negative pole a positive one." "I'm afraid I don't agree with you. My brother, Jedi Master Skywalker, is in no condition to accompany the delegation and myself in this case. After the incident on Almania, he needs rest and calm." "Your Excellency, the government of Lor Areo asked for at least one Jedi to support the negotiations with this terror organization. And it's more than obvious that only Master Skywalker has the abilities and the knowledge of years to handle this situation. His Jedi trainees might be powerful, too, but I doubt they would reach any success in this case. I'm sure, the Chief-of-State knows and understands this and is only worried about the well-being of her brother. But I suggest you come back to professional discussing." Leia's eyes narrowed, but she remained calm. Anger was the only thing Senator Fey'lya wanted from her right now. And she would never give Fey'lya anything he wanted. "Senator Fey'lya, it's also obvious that you don't think carefully enough in this case. What can Master Skywalker do if he's in this bad shape? I doubt it would be that impressive if he'd make negotiations from a bacta-tank in the Lor Areo medic-center, wouldn't it?" A few senators laughed lowly and Fey'lya muttered something unaudible to Leia. Certainly, it wasn't an agreement. "Your Excellency, I have to agree with Senator Fey'lya. I mean, I know the condition Master Skywalker is in, but who can we ask instead of him? Who could only hope for a success in a case as delicate as this one?" Bro'rin, a Senator from Ryloth, asked with concern. And with a little too much pity in his voice. Leia knew that Bro'rin and Fey'lya were close friends and it was surprising that Bro'rin had waited that long to oppose against her proposals. But she was used to the both of them and had learned to ignore everything but the core of their words. "I was going to propose Jedi Knight Kyp Durrone. He has proven himself a very capable Jedi." "You can't be serious! This guy has stolen the Sun Crusher and destroyed the Cauldron Nebula and the Carida System! The people of Lor Areo will be furious if we send HIM to this negotiations!" Fey'lya exclaimed enraged. The entire council had began muttering and mumbling and Leia knew that, for this time, Fey'lya had won. The votes were clear. Only one against sending Luke with her to Lor Areo. "Well, so shall it be." Leia sighed resigned. "I will ask my brother immediately. But I hope you all are aware that we can do nothing if he don't want to go." she added hopefully. But then, she knew full well that Luke never would avoid his duties and would follow her to Lor Areo to do all he could. Fey'lya grinned, knowing what she was thinking: "Surely, we're all aware of this, Madam Chief-of-State. If Master Skywalker wishes to stay on Coruscant and rest, we will accept this of course. We aren't the Empire, as you say so often and say so well." Leia wanted to punch him in his grinning face. Instead, she smiled sweetly, nodded and left the council chamber. She didn't like this. Not a bit. But at least, she would be able to take her husband, her brother and her friends from Rogue Squadron with her. It wouldn't be that bad. The kids would stay with Winter and Cilghal on Yavin IV and perhaps Luke would agree to take Tionne or Kam Solusar with him to Lor Areo. Leia would feel much more comfortable if someone that loyal to Luke and that capable of fighting and Jedi-likes like them would accompany her brother. He was weak, that was a fact. And he needed support. Leia herself would need all her negotiation skills to persuade him but she would succeed. If she mentioned this vision, Han would help her and then Luke would resign. At least, Leia hoped it.

Leia found her brother sitting with Han on a balcony in the Ambassador's Inn. The small café wasn't her favorite place, but she knew Luke loved the hot cocoa being made here. Without doubt, it was the best you could get in the whole palace. For all she knew, Lando was somehow involved in making this new drink common and very loved. Satisfied, she noticed the

empty dishes before Luke when she sat down in a chair beside her husband Han Solo. "Hey, what are you guys talking about? Some men stuff?" she asked, also noticing their words had stopped when she came near. "Not really." Han replied. "So, have you two discussed Luke's vision?" she asked, tipping her orders for a drink in the table terminal. Luke was about to say yes, when Han interrupted him: "Your brother was a little bit shy, concerning this theme. He thinks we haven't to worry about it." Leia rose an eyebrow and Luke felt eager to make clear his point of view. "See, Leia, I think it's just something caused by this mass-murders Kueller has committed. I don't want anyone to worry about it, including me, too. So, let's forget this damn dream, ok?" "I don't know, Luke. It looked very serious. I really feared for you, a few seconds at least. You sure it was just a dream?" Luke sighed: "No, I'm not sure, but I don't want to have this thought in my head all the time. It isn't that funny to sit and wait for a horrible vision becoming true, you know." he snarled. Leia backed unconsciously away at this reply and stared at her brother. He was really losing his temper about this thing. And that didn't make her feel any more sure about his opinion. Luke felt her thoughts and grew slightly pale. "I'm sorry, Leia. I'm really sorry....but, well...it's just so unnerving. Every dream could be a vision. But it could also be just what it seems...a simple dream. Sometimes it drives me nuts. I mean, I'm not able to say what actually is a dream and what's a vision. I can't take every dream that serious. I would get a heavy paranoia, I think. I read something about some Jedis becoming paranoid over her dreams. It can happen! And I don't want it happen to me." Leia just continued staring at her brother, shocked about this little outburst of emotions. To her and Luke's surprise, Han seemed almost happy about it: "Well, you CAN actually be a human. Boy, I'm glad you can. And it's just what I've ever said, isn't it? Don't let this Jedi-stuff go to deep into your life! It'll do you no good. And if I think over the past few years, I would say I'm right." he nodded affirmatively and emptied his glass. Luke said nothing, he just wasn't able to. Was Han right? But that couldn't be! He had to be a Jedi Master. He had to! The galaxy and his trainees on Yavin IV needed him. Suddenly, he didn't feel able to continue talking with Han or Leia, nor with anyone else. He just wanted to be alone and to think. He was barely aware that he had left the café. He knew the way to his apartment full well and so he didn't need to concentrate on it. He had to consider many things.

"Luke!" Leia said, standing up, ready to go after him. Han lay a hand on her fine-boned shoulders and forced her back in her seat. She stared at him, sorrow and fear for her brother in her big, brown eyes. "But Han, I've to talk to him!" "No, Leia. He must think about what I've just said. Sweetheart, don't you understand what happens to Luke?" Leia freed herself from his grasp and looked at him furiously: "I understand that he needs someone to talk to. And I understand, that you hurted him." Han sighed: "Perhaps I did. But Leia, I had to. You see as well as I do that this whole Jedi Master-stuff is eating him up. He makes himself responsible for nearly all things going wrong in this damn galaxy. And it's mainly because all others expect HIM to make things well again. They make mistakes and he shall put them in order again. That's neither right, nor does it any good to Luke himself." "He IS a Jedi Master, Han." Leia objected, but only mechanically. "Oh, yeah, sure he is. All others can see him as a Jedi Master, for her sake. But I see him as my friend, Luke Skywalker. And I see Luke Skywalker ceding away in face of the burden we all lay on his shoulders. He can't smile anymore, make jokes or do full normal things for a man in his age. He's alone, but how should he find someone? He's always grounded on this damn jungle moon. He isn't the same anymore and this already for years! Don't you see that?" Leia said nothing. She knew Han was right and she was shocked. There weren't only the others who wanted Luke to do all these things. It was she herself, too. If there was some crisis, some problem with her kids, something she couldn't handle...she relied on Luke's abilities, on the fact that he sure would be there if he would be needed. Who or what gave her the right to expect this from him? Certainly not her position as Chief-of-State. In fact, her faith was, nothing would ever give a being the right to expect this from another being. She had fight for this faith over and over in the last ten years and hadn't remarked that she did it herself to her own brother. Han noticed the way her thoughts took. He knew her face well enough to read in her expression. "No, Leia, you certainly are not guilty. Noone is guilty. The way things have gone is fully natural. Luke let himself being putted into this situation and only now he sees that he wants other things in his life, too. He has to decide what's important to him and what solution he will find for this question I can't imagine. But I know, I will help him. I'll go to him this evening and talk to him, I promise. But you'll do

nothing. Perhaps it's the first time in your life, but this time, you won't be any help for Luke. Got it?" Leia seemed all but happy about this, but she nodded. "All right, I won't go after him. But I hope you're right, Han." Han hoped this, too.

It was already night when Han stood before Luke's apartment-door and triggered the door-anunciator. The door slid open and Han was greeted by a fast series of beeps and thrills when R2 rolled over to him. "Calm down, little one. Where's Luke?" the little astromech made a sad sound and turned around to give him the direction. Han nodded: "Don't worry, R2, I'll talk to him." he followed the direction R2 had given him and found Luke sitting on his balcony, staring right on Imperial City. "Hey, kid! How ya doing?" Luke didn't answer and so Han sat down beside his friend. He was still a little bit angry. Leia had just said him the Senate would expect Luke to accompany her to a small planet named Lor Areo. Some civil war was araised there and the enemy-parties had pleaded for a Jedi negotiator, along with the Chief-of-State. For Han, that was the last thing Luke could need right now. A vacation would be good. A nice vacation without any problems or struggles. Perhaps with the kids. Han knew how much Luke loved his niece and nephews. Suddenly, Luke spoke. "Han, do you think I shouldn't be a Jedi anymore?" he asked lowly. Han was caught slightly off guard with this question and chosed his words carefully. "I wouldn't say that, Luke. But it's obvious that you can't live this way anymore." Luke turned his head and looked at Han. His blue eyes were wide and sad. 'I really got him to think.' Han thought. "I know. But I have to. They need me." the young man said. "Oh, c'mon, Luke. You know that's wrong." "But my trainees..." "You already have some Jedis who could train the others...and who would WANT to train the others." Han replied. "But I also want to..." "Luke, that's not true and you know that." Han said calmly. "What are you talking about?" Luke asked, confused and obviously more than a little bit unsure. "Well, I admit, in the first couple of years you seemed to have fun teaching your trainees. But now....Luke, you aren't happy back there on Yavin IV. Perhaps you can't see it yourself or you don't want to see it. But I SEE it. What is there for you to do anymore?" "Well, I give lessons in the way..." "Oh, yeah. The whole time of your live you want to sit in this jungle and show jedi trainees how to meditate, levitate and who knows what. Is this really what you want?" "Well, I AM the only Jedi Master left and noone of my pupils is ready to being one." Luke stated, sounding stubborn. "I know you are. But I also know that there's no need for a Jedi MASTER to train other Jedi. Kyp, Tionne, Streen, Kam Solusar...choose one. They're all able to teach your trainees and they would all do it with fun and would be happy. But you....I'm sorry, Luke, but I think you're not one of these persons who would be happy grounded on a moon far away from the galaxy's pulse, with nothing to do than waste your abilities on little pupils. And without your close friends and family." Luke's head snapped higher: "But I have friends on the academy, too." "Sure you have. Just like me, they all call you Master, right?" Han snarled sarcastically. Luke was really a stubborn one. Luke said nothing for a long time, than murmured shyly: "You think I waste my abilities? The Republic needs new Jedis." "Yeah, she does. But she don't need the strongest ones isolated on a little moon in a system as far away as Yavin. I have studied a little bit Jedi history by myself..." Luke stared at Han in surprise. Han muttered: "Just for knowing what the rest of my family is dealing with." then continued: "And it seems the Jedi traveled throughout the galaxy to help with their abilities. And the Jedis had friends and were not grounded." "There was a Jedi Temple." Luke mentioned weakly. "Yes, but they left it as soon as they were ready. And boy, you're more than ready." Luke sighed: "So, what do you suppose me to do? Just say bye and have all the fun I didn't have in the last ten years?" he growled. Han was loosing his temper: "You're so ridiculous, Luke! I don't recognize you anymore. Where's the Luke Skywalker who can laugh with me, make jokes and just enjoy company and his life?" Luke backed away, a shocked expression on his youthful face. Right now, he looked as boyish as when Han had first met him on Tatoonie. "I...I..." he stammered, not knowing what to say. "You aren't Luke anymore. You just are Master Skywalker. And, kid, I speak open to you - I don't like Master Skywalker." Luke backed away more, sort of horror replacing the shock on his face. And Han was determined to use this moment. Someone had to say this to Luke. "Shall I tell you how Master Skywalker is like? Oh, I can tell you: no emotions, cold and serious, only theme: Jedi, Jedi, Jedi. You just have to look in Master Skywalker's room. It looks like a monk's cell. I doubt he knows how to spell the word fun. Or happiness. He forbids himself all the things he loves: flying, fighting, joking. Doing things with his friends. Visiting his family and going on some excursions with them.

Becoming angry about something or doing any small mistake which's fully normal for a human being. He don't allows himself to be a human." Han stopped. Perhaps he had just been to hard, but it was all true and Luke had to come out of this stupor he lived in. Good gods, the boy was just around thirty! He couldn't live like an old eremit who had already lived his life. "Leia...does she...also think so?" Luke's voice trembled and Han felt again this pity. "Dunno. In fact, she is a lot like you. But she has me and her children to take her back in real life if she is about to become something like you are. You could have this, too...but not on Yavin." Luke was totally shocked, Han could see that. His hands trembled and his eyes didn't dare to look at Han. "You...you say you don't want to be a friend to me anymore, yes?" he asked almost unaudiable. Han sighed again: "No, I say I don't want to be a friend to this certain Master Skywalker anymore." he tried to sound smooth. Finally Luke looked at him, eyes wide with helplessness and a certain fear. "But...but I am Master Skywalker." he whispered. Han watched him hardly. He stood up. Han really didn't know whether he did the right thing or not. He did it instinctively and hoped that his luck didn't leave him just now. He felt he had to drag Luke out of this life he thought was right for him. "If you think so...then you're right." Han said calmly and left. He didn't turn, knowing he had to be hard now. Perhaps Luke would finally see his errors. Yes, he would see them...and change his life. Han had been so determined to just go away, not to turn. He had been determined to ignore Luke's anger, his arguments...but he wasn't ready for what happened then. Behind him, all was calm. No sound, just nothing. Han grew nervous while walking slowly in the door's direction. Had he been to hard? He stopped and touned lowly around. Luke had pulled his legs up, embracing them with this arms, hiding his head down between his knees. Slowly, he motioned back and forth, back and forth. R2 rolled over to his Master, whistling softly at him, but Luke didn't react. "Sith." Han murmured, pacing back to the balcony. "Luke?" he said tentatively. Luke jumped to his feet, looking disoriented around him. Was it really possible? Didn't he feel Han's presence? He stared at Han: "I thought you were already gone." he said. His eyes were distant and empty. He thought his own things and Han wasn't sure at all whether that was good or not. "I wanted to...but I feel like we have to talk more." "You haven't to say anymore, Han. I've done all things wrong who one can do wrong. And now I have to live with the consequences." "Luke, that's Sith spawn and you know that. Just be yourself. Don't you understand what I'm saying?!" Luke turned his back to Han to hide his trembling hands and his being very near to tears. He didn't know why he couldn't get a hold of himself. His head hurted and together with the pain Han's words and her very core caused in his soul, it was almost not to bear. But why? He had seldom felt that helpless and weak...yes, it seemed the words would make him weak, one by one, each a little bit more. "But I always thought that IS me. I tought, I AM this way." he whispered. He didn't want to whisper and he didn't want his voice to tremble, but he felt weaker every moment he stood there. His hands closed around the railing of his balcony, his arms searching something to lean on. "I know, Luke. But I also know that YOU know like everyone else that you only have done the things the whole galaxy expected from you. In the beginning, you had to do this. But now...now there's no need for this sacrifices anymore. Do you understand me?" Luke nodded: "Yes...yes, I understand. I've just to be Luke, right?" Luke almost laughed out loud. It seemed all so clear! He had thought and thought why he had felt that empty all these years, despite of his success in bringing the Jedi back. And now came Han Solo, said these few sentences and Luke saw full well where his problems lay. Han was truly his very best friend. He turned around, opened his mouth to thank Han. It was so dark all of a sudden. He heard laughter. Was that Han? No, Han stood there and stared at Luke. The darkness grew all over Han's face and Luke's head swam. The darkness turned like a living being and came to Luke. He tried to back away, but it caught him and his world went entirely tan. In the force, laughter could be heard, a satisfied, evil laughter.

She had succeeded. She had shown it to him. "Now, you will take me serious, Luke Skywalker. You WILL take me serious." she laughed, and the dark side of the Force took her laughter through the depths of the galaxy. It even reached Coruscant.

Chapter III

"But that's not the right way to solve our planet's problems!" Karaya almost shouted to her sister. "And what IS the right way? How would you know? You're just a girl, Karaya. You have to trust ME! I know what's right for us." "I'm not sure about this. I only know that a civil war is

no solution, Aleesha." "Shut up now, you stupid, little baby. Two months ago, you said my plans were good. And now you suddenly don't want to support me? Spare it, little sister. You are involved in it as deep as I am, and you know that full well." Karaya breathed deeply, then said calmly: "What is this curious chair in the cavern for? And these creatures? What do you want with them? And why, if you want this civil war, have you asked for a Jedi negotiator and the Chief-of-State?" Her sister's deep tan eyes narrowed: "You were in the cavern? I haven't allowed you to go there. How can you dare...!" "Aleesha, that's my house, too. And I want to know what this chair is for. And why you keep Kumo prisoner. I thought he were at home for weeks now!" Aleesha staid silent for some while. Finally, she sighed: "Ok, I tell you this, because you're my sister. I have great plans with this planet, Karaya. He will belong to me, as well as this entire system. And then I will change everything. Everything will be...better. Everything will be just fine." Karaya's eyes grew wider: "How want you do that? The entire system?! How?" "I say only one name: Luke Skywalker." "The Jedi Master? You can't really believe he would help you with such a plan! With a civil war! You're crazy." Karaya whispered. "Oh, I don't expect him to help me...us. It's what the chair is for." "I don't understand." "Karaya, with this chair and the drug Kumo has made for me, Luke Skywalker will do everything I want him to. I've studied the Alliance history to find a weak point and discovered some data about a reptilian race named Ssi-ruuk. They have used these chairs to drag a being's life energy out of his body. I have stolen the design plans from the computer center I was in and gave them to Kumo. He has created a new chair for me and a new drug. It will force Luke Skywalker to obey my wishes. With his Force abilities, he will steer my clone army. They will be perfect soldiers with a will and a force as great as his behind them." Karaya was shocked. This plan was...was evil. Horrible. She didn't even find a word for what she wanted to say. "You can't do this to him! To noone!" she shouted. "Oh, I can, little sister. Believe me. He is arrogant and not interested in anything concerning us or our world. He only wants more glory than he already has. He deserves it and he will do something really good." Karaya remained silent. Of course, she didn't know Luke Skywalker, had never seen him. Perhaps her sister was right? "Have you ever met him? Do you know him, that you judge over him like this?" she asked seriously. Aleesha barely covered her grin. Now, her sister was in her hands. "Sure. He is exactly like I said. You'll see it when he comes here. But he will help us and do something good in his life. Now go in the senate again and prepare everything for the following week. The freedom and liberty will soon be on Lor Areo. No aristocracy anymore." "True democracy." Karaya said with shining eyes. "Sure." Aleesha smiled. Karaya would be surprised. And Luke Skywalker would be surprised, too.

Leia ran into her brother's chambers just about to watch Chewbacca lifting him. Han had called the Wookiee right after his wife and the medic-droid. Chewie took Luke's limp body into his strong arms and carried him back in the living room, laying him down on the couch. Luke was pale and didn't move when Leia sat down beside him and took his hand. "What happened, Han?" she asked. Han also looked slightly pale and stared at the unconscious form of his friend. "We've talked and he was just about to understand what I wanted to say. He turned around to face me, then just said no, backed away and fainted." "By the dark moon of Onderon, what have you SAID to him?" Leia stared at him questioningly, putting a smooth pillow behind her brother's head. "Nothing. Well, I just talked about what I don't like on this Jedi Master he thinks to be and we had a little discussion about our friendship." Leia's eyes narrowed. She could imagine very good what THIS discussion had been like. Han lifted his hands defensively: "Hey, it wasn't my fault, Leia. When he fainted, we had already made all things clear. He agreed with me and he even laughed. I'm sure he didn't faint because of this friend-to-friend thing." "So, you are, yes? And why then, my dear Captain Solo, fainted he? Just for fun?" she hissed. Han snorted and crossed his arms before his chest: "Think what you want to think, Princess. I know what happened so far. And Luke will say the same." "When he awakes." Leia added darkly. Han snorted again. He knew he wasn't responsible for this breakdown. No. He didn't know. He only hoped he wasn't. To speak true, Han didn't want to think his talk had caused Luke that much pain and trouble. R2 rolled in the room, followed by the medic-droid 2-1B and a very nervous 3PO. "Oh dear! R2 just informed me about Master Luke's breakdown. I hope it isn't something serious. Poor Master Luke." Leia said nothing. It was best to ignore 3PO if he was in this mood. She stood up to make room for 2-1B and took her husband's arm: "Hey, don't be angry with me. He's my brother. I'm allowed to worry about

him." Han's tensed face exploded in a little smile: "Sure you are. It's just that I really don't know why he's fainted. And I feel really uncomfortable with the thought that I am responsible for it." Leia squeezed his biceps: "I'm sure you aren't. But I don't know if I wouldn't feel better if you HAD been the cause." Han swallowed: "Yeah, I know what you mean." he murmured, then asked aloud: "So, what's wrong with him, 2-1B?" "It seems to be a rather simple breakdown, Master Solo. No disease. Probably, he just was too weak to be up that long. I'll give him something to wake up first and then something to calm him down...if you allow, that is. Your Excellency, I heard rumors Master Skywalker is expected to go to a planet named Lor Areo in a diplomatic mission tomorrow evening. Is that correct?" "Yes, it is. Do you think he can make it?" "Sure he can. If he rests now. Are I allowed to tranquilize him?" Leia shifted uncomfortably and looked uncertain at her husband. "What do you think? I mean, he hates to be tranquilized." she murmured. "Well...2-1B, have you this drug as a pill, too? We can try to put him into bed first and if he decides to be stubborn we can give him this pill."

Leia grinned: "That's your first good idea for today, Han Solo." "I'll do as you wish, Madam. Now I'll give him something to wake up." 2-1B pushed his needle arm in Luke's forearm and only seconds later, Luke began to stir. He groaned and his eyes opened slowly. He saw the medi-droid and groaned again: "Oh no. Don't say I'm in the clinic again." "No, you are in your apartment." Leia said. Luke sat up carefully, leaning heavily in the couch and trying to adjust his vision. He registered Leia for the first time, then looked baffled at Han and at himself sitting on the couch. "What am I doing here? And what are YOU doing here? I'm sure you wasn't here when I..." he stopped, his eyes widened: "What happened here?" he asked. "Well, kid, you really scared me this time. At one moment, you're laughing and saying you understand me, and in the next moment, you faint before my eyes. I hope you won't do this more often in the next time." Han said and sat down next to Luke. "I fainted? Really? Strange." Luke murmured. "Depends on your point of view I'd say." Leia said sharply. Luke lifted his head and looked at her: "Hu?" "What hu?" Leia asked back. Luke stared at her, then looked at Han: "What is she talking about?" "I said it depends on your point of view." Leia repeated sourly. "Oh...you've asked me something. Sorry." Luke mumbled, scratching his head. Han laughed: "Boy, I think you're ready for a good, long nap!" Luke looked at him again, his eyes tired, but somehow...strange. No, not strange, but...and then, it hit Han. There was no Jedi Master expression in this eyes. Luke grinned as he saw the expression on his friend's face. "Well, I didn't forget our discussion, Han. And I think you said a lot really true things." Han grinned back: "I hoped so, kid. So you're not angry with me?" "Why should I be? Because of you saying me the truth? I considered saying the truce as part of true friendship. You do, don't you?" "Uh, yeah, I think." Han smiled. "Good. Then I can say you that: if you ever scares ME again the way you did this evening, I'll kill you. Got it?" Han smiled more broadly. He knew what Luke meant and he knew Luke wouldn't want to say it loud before his sister. As well as Han didn't want to say it loud before his wife. Just for hazard that was the same person. "Got it, little one." "And don't call me little one." Luke added. Han laughed. Just now he realized how much he had missed this part of Luke. "Really funny. But now we stop this chit-chat and Luke goes to bed. He needs his sleep before we're leaving for Lor Areo." Luke, who already was on the way to his bathroom to get ready for sleep, stopped and turned to his sister: "Lor Areo? Leaving? Obviously I missed something here." "Yeah. The great republican Senate is worried about a civil war on this small thing of a planet. They have asked for mediators and the Senate has suggested Leia and you. I'll come along as a babysitter for you, Junior, just to ensure you don't break our deal." "I can't remember any deal and I don't need a babysitter. I've never needed one." "Sure. Believe what makes you happy." Han chided. "Ah, eat my lightsaber, Solo!" Luke growled, a happy edge in his voice. He vanished in his bathroom. Leia stared at Han: "Was that...that was...he has chided you! He has react like...like..." "Like Luke Skywalker, farmboy, pilot and beside this a Jedi Master. Hey Leia, I said I would succeed, didn't I?" "Yeah. But you say lots of things if you have much time, you nerf herder. I'm used in not believing a quarter of it." she replied and left the apartment. "Hey, I feel like we have to work on this lack of trust between the two of us." Han shouted, following her fastly. "And I feel like you have to work on your brain. It doesn't work well enough." Han grinned mischievously: "Well, about this time of the night, other things of me are working." Leia grinned back: "So? Well, I am tired. You think they'll work tomorrow evening again?" "Tomorrow evening we are on the Falcon...along with Luke." "Ah, yeah, I forgot. What a pity." she chuckled and ran down the stairs to avoid his angry pull.

Luke watched himself in the mirror above the sink in his bathroom. How long had it been since he had chided Han? How long had it been since he had felt like this, so free and light? He didn't know it. But he knew he had lived totally false. And it had to change now. What Han had said about the Jedis back there on the balcony.... Luke had never seen it that way. But Han was right, he could understand this now. The shock was still somewhere inside him. The shock of Han saying he didn't want to be Master Skywalker's friend. In the first moment, Luke had felt like dying. The thought of losing Han's friendship, and along with this his other friends too, his sister, because of being a Jedi, the very core of his life, was horrible. If he hadn't come to himself moments after that, if Han hadn't come back... Luke didn't know what he would've done. He had felt totally empty after Han had turned away from him. Empty and alone. But all was good now, he said to himself, making himself comfortable in his bed. Yes, all was good.... Someone dragged the cover over him, but Luke was already half asleep.

R2 whistled softly and was relieved when his Master sighed contently in his sleep. When Han Solo had turned away and gone to the door, R2 had thought his Master would totally break down. Not his body, but the thing humans called soul. R2 imagined it like a failure in his inner systems or something like that. But Master Luke was all right, now.

Luke awoke by a soft sound beside his bed. Sleepily, he opened his eyes and stared right into R2's red optical sensor. "Why, good morning, R2." he said, pulling himself up on his elbows, scratching his head. The little droid beeped some question and Luke smiled. "Don't worry, I'm fine." R2 watched him closely with his sensor, then thrilled another question. Luke shrugged: "Well, I think I'm just breeding about this talk I had with Han, yesterday night. You think he's right?" R2 beeped and whistled quite a time, then bowed himself back and forth. Luke laughed: "So, we've decided to make blood brother with my best friend and to spring in my back, he?" R2 shrieked indignantly at this comment and Luke laughed a little bit louder. "I know, I know. I think I agree with you two. And that means, I have to think for some way to change my life and to solve these problems. Hu.... somehow I'd like it better to fight against a clone emperor again. You think there is one somewhere in the palace?" R2 chattered, his way to laugh and Luke grinned: "Well, yeah...that actually was funny, wasn't it? Perhaps it's not that difficult to become myself again." Luke looked out the window. Coruscant's sun was about to rise, a really beautiful sight. Not as beautiful as the sunset, but beautiful. "I think I go for a little bit morning practice, R2. Could you call Leia and ask her if I might come to breakfast? I have to make some announcements." The astromech beeped affirmatively and Luke left the apartment. The Imperial Palace provided many rooms for him to make his morning round and the corridors that high up in the private levels of the highest politicians were deserted that early in the morning. The movement helped Luke to think clear. Yes, there were quite a few things he would change. Without abandoning any of his duties. He would show it to Han: Luke Skywalker still was there.

"Well, I really don't know, Wedge. It's just a bad feeling about this mission. I mean, there are lots of civil wars in the Outer Rim Territories. And no planet has ever called for a Jedi to play mediator. In fact, I didn't think any planet there would want to have a Jedi near his diverse "organizations". And then Luke. I mean, it's quite obvious what he can do to people like that. You just have to think on the tan Sun. And back then, he still wasn't fully trained." Corran Horn mused, changing the energy pack of his balster. He and his formally commander and present friend, Wedge Antilles, stood in a little terrace garden in the Imperial Palace, challenging in the art of shooting. Not that Wedge had any chance against Corran, who had worked years for the Corellian Security Police and therefore was much better in aiming than he. "Is that some of these Jedi things or do you just not want to leave Mirax that soon?" Wedge asked amused. Corran looked at him a little bit furiously, then smiled mischievously: "Well, at least Mirax lives in my apartment and I can see her every day. But don't worry, Wedge. To see Qwi, you just have to walk something around 2000 stairs and go through only thirty or so security clearance procedures. That's nothing if you love someone." "Yeah.... Corran, you do know that I'm the commander of this mission, don't you? I mean, I could send you as scout into enemy territory. So I wouldn't have to kill you by myself. And it would be fully legal." Wedge mumbled darkly. The red-haired, Corellian pilot laughed: "Oh, your moral wouldn't let this happen. But, serious now, don't you find this whole thing curious?" Wedge shrugged: "I'm not force sensitive, Corran. For me, it's just a mission. And a simple one, too. I mean, just

flying as escort for Lei...er, the ship of her excellency, the Chief of State, isn't that thrilling, you know." "Oh yeah, I know." Corran snorted. "Ok, ok. But I think, if there is really something, Luke would feel it quite in time to make preparations. " "Luke would feel what quite in time?" a voice asked. Corran and Wedge turned, just to see Luke Skywalker leaning against the doorframe of the terrace. "Oh, hi Luke. How ya doing?" Wedge asked, surprised to see Luke this early in the morning in the palace corridors. "Oh, I'm fine. You've talked about me. May I ask what the conversation was about?" He came to the both of them, and just then it was that they realized his perspiration soaked shirt...and his shirt, that was. Usually, Luke showed himself only in his Jedi robes if he was in the Palace. For quite a moment, Wedge found himself thrashed into the past, when Luke and he had first been trained as warriors in the hangars of Echo Base. Despite the cold of this world, the training had always led to 20 men or so being wet like after a shower and cursing about their trainer. "What do you do here, at this time of day?" Wedge asked curiously. "Oh, isn't it obvious? I'm jogging." Luke answered, seeming amused. Wedge suddenly realized his jaw having dropped open and fastly closed his mouth. "Oh...er...sure you are." he mumbled somewhat sheepishly. "So, what were you two talking about? In fact, I heard hardly more than my name." he continued, swinging himself on the railing of the terrace. "We talked about me feeling bad about this mission to Lor Areo, Master Skywalker." he answered the Jedi Master's question. Luke made a grimace and seemed somewhat disgusted. "Probably it's just imagination." Corran added hastily, surprised about this reaction. Luke stared at him, blinked, then laughed: "Oh, no, Corran. I didn't mean your feeling." Wedge raised an eyebrow and took a close look on his friend. Luke seemed to have changed. "You really feel good, Luke?" he asked carefully. Luke turned his head, looking Wedge straight into the eyes: "Oh yeah, very good, indeed. Say, Corran, would you mind to call me Luke, too? I mean, you're not my pupil and we know each other quite a time now. There's no cause for you to call me Master or something like that." Corran stared at Skywalker baffled. He had taken it for granted to call this man Master. He just was a Master, a Master of the Force and a great war hero. Perhaps the greatest one. It just was to show his respect for this man who had sacrificed that much for his faith and for the Republic. "Ah...sure, if YOU don't mind." he answered. Luke shook his head affirmatively: "Not at all. I wish you to do so. I'm not your Master, so don't treat me that way. OK? Just treat me like Luke." Corran nodded: "Key...Luke. So, what's about my feelings?" Luke frowned: "That's the question, isn't it? You're quite force sensitive, Corran. We should talk about your feelings. But not now. I have to go - take a shower.... Wedge, would you come to Leia, in half an hour or so? I want to make some announcements to all of my friends. I'd invite you, too, Corran, but I'm afraid Leia'll be surprised enough about Lando and Wedge. I'll come to Rogue Squadron Base this afternoon. Then we can talk. See you." he turned and sprinted down the corridor. For a while, the two men left on the terrace stood still. Then Corran piped up: "So, who was that? And where's Skywalker? " Wedge looked at him, smiling: "Oh, Corran, that WAS Luke Skywalker. It was just not the Jedi Master. Well, I never realized how much differences the both of them have. Perhaps this announcements will be very interesting."

When Leia opened the door to her brother, she only could stare at him, totally surprised ... against her will, that was. "Hi, Leia. Am I to early?" he asked happily, storming into the apartment. "No...no you aren't. Luke...what's the matter with you?" Leia practically exploded. Luke turned to her, looking questioningly. "What do you mean?" "Well, you look...you look.." Leia searched for the right word, inspecting Luke's clothings. He wore a simple brown jeans and a khaki shirt, looking like part of his old flight uniform. The odd thing was the blaster hanging on his belt beside his lightsaber. "...just not like a Jedi Master." she finished her sentence. Luke grinned: "Good. I chose my clothings exactly to get this reaction." he said, satisfaction in his voice. "But why?" Leia led him into the kitchen where breakfast was waiting. "Because I've decided to let the Jedi Master stay on Yavin. Han was right, Leia. I have to change things. I wasn't myself anymore." Leia just looked at him, an odd expression on her face. Luke shifted his feet unsure, wondering if Leia wanted him more being the Jedi Master and less being himself. For him, it was totally unexpected when Leia throw herself into his arms and embraced him closely. "I've hoped that much you would take Han's words to your heart, Luke. I'm so glad you are here again." she whispered, sobbing quietly. Luke smoothly pulled her away and looked shocked at her tears. "Why do you cry? I can't have been that bad all the time." Leia laughed, caressing his cheek softly with the back of her hand. "No, not bad.

But always serious, always sad. That wasn't the brother I wanted to have beside me, you know. I was very worried about you. In fact, since the encounter with the Clone Emperor. Since then, you've been so...so odd. You seemed to be always depressed or something and I didn't know how to help you. Han was worried, too, but we thought it would be periodically and so we left you alone with it. But then happened the thing with Callista and it became even worse. We just didn't know how to talk to you because you obviously just wasn't aware of the way you lived. Yesterday, Han thought the possibility were as ideal as it could become, because you've said these things about visions and dreams yourself. He thought you would perhaps listen to him now and even understand what he wants to say. And now...oh Luke, I'm so happy." she practically flew into his arms again, hugging him. Luke hugged her back. He really hadn't been aware of his sister's feelings concerning him. Of Han's feelings concerning him. He had really been totally blind in face to the change he had undergone after this incidents. "I don't know what happened, Leia. Really. I wasn't aware of it. I didn't even want it, I think. It just happened to me." Luke said lowly. Leia lifted her head and smiled: "I know. Perhaps it just was to much. I mean, your fall to the Dark Side, then Jem's death, then Callista leaving you...and the responsibility after Kyp's turning to Exar Kun. You've never talked to me about your personal things since you've lost Kyp for a time. You still let me in your mind, I know, but I felt fears you didn't talk about with me." Luke closed his eyes: "I'm sorry, Leia. Perhaps I should have talked to you. Perhaps I hadn't changed that much then -- I still can't believe it. I've just met Wedge down there on the terrace. He stared at me as if I were a rancor or something." Luke sounded somewhat lost, shocked and really irritated. Leia pulled him close to her again. "He probably just was surprised. I mean, usually you wear just your Jedi robes if you're here." she explained. "And Corran's behaviour was odd, too. No, for him, MY behaviour was odd. I don't know, somehow, I can't hear him address me with Master Skywalker anymore. So, I said to him he shall call me Luke. Just Luke. He was so, so..." Luke shook his head. "Surprised. Like Wedge. Hey, your friends have tried to deal with you in the past few years and we have succeeded. We have taken you as you wanted to be taken. But we didn't want you to be so. We just sort of waited until you would come out of your cocoon again." "A cocoon, hu? Yeah, if I think about it...the Academy was quite an excellent cocoon, wasn't it?" Leia chuckled: "Oh yeah, it was. But now, you're out of it. And I'm glad about it." she repeated and, standing on her tiptoes, kissed him on his chin. "Glad about what, mommie? Hi, Uncle Luke." six year old Jacen went into the kitchen, sat himself down at the table and watched his mother with curiosity. "Nothing, deary." Leia answered. "Uncle Luke? Uncle Luke!!" with shouts of joy, Jaina Solo rushed into the kitchen, prepared to jump into the arms of her uncle, but stopped cold and stared at him, mouth opened wide. "Unlce Luke...you look like on the old holotapes 3PO has shown us." Luke sighed. Even his niece! It was really unnerving. "And what exactly does this mean, little lady?" he asked casually, kneeling down in front of her. Jaina grinned, patching her little hand into his face and ruffling his hair: "You look younger." she mumbled, finally jumping into his embrace and letting herself being lifted up from him. "Oh, really?" Luke grinned now, too. "I'm flattered, little princess." he chuckled. "Flattered? That was a compliment I made, right?" Jaina stated, biting her lower lip. "Right." Luke affirmed, sitting down on a chair, letting his niece made herself comfortable in his lap. "Hm...well, uncle Luke, in these holoivid soaps.." Luke rose an eyebrow: "I thought you would disgust holoivid soaps, Jaina." Jaina blushed slightly, leaned over to his ear and whispered: "But I have to look them. To learn about really important things. " Luke smiled: "And what could these things possibly be?" he wanted to know. Jaina looked over to her brother, but Jacen was eager to eat his breakfast. He didn't matter about his twin sister right now. "Well, to learn about boys." Jaina finally said. Leia's eyes widened and she choked desperately on the clor eggs she was eating. Luke tried to cover his amused grin: "Oh yeah, really an important thing for a young lady as beautiful as you are." he said seriously. Jaina's little, sweet face exploded into a smile as shining as Tatoonie's twin suns: "You think I'm beautiful, uncle Luke?" she asked eagerly. Luke nodded: "Sure you are." "As beautiful as mommie?" Jaina continued. Her uncle laughed: "Well, I'm certain you'll be if you are in her age." Jaina seemed to grow a whole bunch of ten centimeters or so and crawled on the chair beside Luke. She began to eat her breakfast while Luke silently laughed about his sister who was trying her best to ignore this little dialogue. After a few moments, Han, Lando and Wedge joined the siblings and the kids, followed by a very sleepy four year old Anakin Solo. Usually, Anakin woke up an hour or so later, but he knew his uncle would come to breakfast. So he had to be up as early as

possible. Anakin looked around through half closed, icy-blue eyes, then groaned something like "Mornin." He spied Luke, whined an happy: "Lukie!" and tapped over to his beloved uncle. "Hi, little Jedi. How ya doing?" Luke asked, lifting his little nephew up. "Tired. You have coming this early morning?" he asked, roling himself together in Luke's lap. Luke caressed the cheek of his youngest nephew and whispered: "Yeah. Want to have a nap, little one? I can bring you back to bed." "No. Wanna stay with uncle." Anakin grumbled, closed his eyes and was fast asleep only seconds later. Luke smiled happily, shifting slightly to make Anakin more comfortable in his lap. "He's a lot like you." Han said suddenly, sipping on his cup of coffee. Luke looked at him suspiciously: "Positive or negative?" he asked. Han grinned: "Both. But I think the positive side is more present." "So, Luke, what about these ominous anunciations you wanted to make?" Wedge finally blurted out, open curiosity in his look. "Well, I just wanted you to know, that I'm going to move to Coruscant and..." Luke couldn't finish his sentence. Anakin, always curious and never really deep sleeping if in one room with interesting adults, jumped to the floor and shouted: "Lukie gonna stay here?" Luke smiled: "Yeah. That's the point, Anakin." The twins joined her brother in a wild dance of joy, forgetting about her breakfast. "Uncle gonna stay, uncle gonna stay!" Anakin sang happily, suddenly all but tired. Leia smiled broadly, like Wedge, Lando and Han. "I wondered when you eventually would come up with this idea." Lando said slyly. Luke made a face in his direction, but decided to continue as long as everyone was listening to him...well, except the kids. "And I've also decided to make a few changes in my Academy." "Now the interesting part." Han muttered, fixing eyes on Luke. Luke didn't let himself become irritated: "I've decided to go only to the Academy to greet new pupils or to test older ones to give them the title of Knight. And perhaps all three months or so, to look whether everything's alright. I've already talked to Tionne, Kyp, Kam Solusar, Kirana Ti and Streen. They've agreed to train the others. As I know until now, Kam Solusar and Streen will stay permanently at the Academy. Tionne will go on some excursions to find ancient Jedi treasures and the like from time to time, Kyp will train the best of the trainees and Kirana Ti will go regularly to Dathomir to select potential Jedis from her people. If there should be a very skilled trainee, I'll train him or her by myself, as well as I want to know anytime everything about the trainees there. In order to maintain this stand of information, I have talked to General Rieekan this morning. He has given me and my academy a secret channel to talk without anyone being able to eavesdrop on us. Well, at least he is very sure noone will be able to. From time to time, I'll give some lessons, too. Every pupil shall have some lessons with me and shall know me. For they know they can ask me anything anytime and can trust me." he paused in order to let the words sink in. Finally, Leia spoke: "That's quite a good order you have given." "Oh, no Leia. I've noone ordered anything. They are all deliberately there." Luke said, somewhat shocked. Leia nodded, slightly surprised. "So, and what will you do with your free time?" Lando asked curiously. Now, Luke seemed somewhat unsure: "Well...actually, I don't know. I'll let it come to me, you know. I think there'll always be enough to do." "Exactly. Someone that skilled and versatile like you, Luke, will always have lot of work if he stays here on Coruscant." Leia stated, chewing on her marmelade bread. "That's what I want." Luke nodded. "OK. That explains a lot. Will you still search for Jedi candidates throughout the galaxy?" Wedge asked. Luke shrugged: "Sure. We still haven't enough Jedi. There aren't enough to cover at least three or four planets well, at the moment. It has to continue." Everyone nodded and Luke relaxed. They agreed with this change. That was good. "Except of this, I wanted to spend lot more time with my family, if they agree." he said smiling. Han grinned, still listening quietly. Three light voices shouted a: "Yeaaaaah." and the kids threw themselves on him, hugging him. "Well, that was really time, old buddy. You seemed like an old eremit to me, in the last few years." Lando said, lifting his glass of juice slightly. Luke blushed and looked down on his dishes: "Yeah." he said lowly. "So, and there's still something, isn't it? I know you, Luke." Wedge threatened jokingly. "Yeah...well, I...I wondered if you would mind if...if I, from time to time, ... would fly with Rogue Squadron. Or perhaps Wraith Squadron. It doesn't matter. I just want to fly." Now, Wedge grinned. "It would be a great honor to me and my fellows, Luke. You're a fantastic pilot, perhaps the best we have in the whole Republic." Luke blushed again: "I'm certain, there are better ones than me." he murmured. "Well, if there are, I've never met one." Wedge replied dryly. Luke grinned, then said: "So, that's it. Any complains?" Noone said a word and Luke laughed happily: "That's it then. Here's it, my new I. You're content now, Han?" "It was never because of myself that I

wanted this changes, Luke. They are only for your sake. And I’m really glad you finally made them."

Chapter IV

"But why can't we go with you, mommy? We had only one day with uncle Luke. That's so unfair." Jaina stamped her little feet on the floor of her room, watching how her mother packed her stuff. "Jaina, please stop stamping! I've explained the causes to you. The planet your uncle and we are going to is a really dangerous place right now. We can't risk to take you with us. And now quit this theme, ok?" Leia folded her daughters blouse carefully in her bag, then closed it and put it to the others in the room's edge. "No. I want to go with you. If it's dangerous there, then you could need my help. With the Falcon, for example." "Jaina Solo, you're a six year old, little girl. We certainly won't need your help, especially with the Falcon. Remember how angry Chewie was when you tried to 'fix' the portside shields. He almost strangled you." Leia mumbled, lifting Jaina onto her bed. She began quietly making her daughter's hairs all right. "Ah no, mom. Chewie's really smooth. He was a little bit angry, but it lasted not long." "Jaina, please. You'll go with Winter to Yavin IV. I thought you'd like to be there. I thought you'd like Cilghal, Kirana Ti and Streen." "Yeah, I like'em. But I like uncle Luke more." the little girl snorted. Leia put her back onto the floor and gave her a hard look: "Jaina, you still have plenty of time to say goodbye to uncle Luke. If I were you, I would make something with this time." Jaina's innocent, young face blushed when she strode angrily outside of her chamber. "Uncle Luke surely isn't that mean!" she shouted back to her mother and began searching for her uncle. R2 showed her the direction and Jaina ran as fast as her more or less short legs would allow her. In the garden, she met 3PO, who was, like always, severe and fully unable to understand her. "Well, well Mistress Jaina, what do you want here in the garden, alone?" he asked with his scratchy droid voice. "I want to see uncle Luke. I have to speak with him." "I'm afraid you can't, little Lady. Master Luke is sleeping right now. Master Han has given order not to disturb him under any circumstances." Jaina snorted and ran past the golden protocol droid, whose cries vanished into the sky without being heard. Jaina bent around a hetch and stopped. Her uncle lay on a large garden chair in the sun, with his eyes closed. She knew uncle Luke had been very ill and she knew that he still was weak. He had to rest, her daddy had explained to her. But she wanted to say goodbye at least. She climbed onto the chair and lay down beside her uncle. Her uncle stirred and opened his large, blue eyes. "Jaina? Hey, what's the matter, little princess?" he asked, smiling. "I'm sorry, uncle Luke. I didn't want to wake you up." Luke lay an arm around her small form and Jaina leaned in this embrace. "It's all right, little one. So, what do you want?" he repeated, closing his eyes again. "Well, I...I wanted to ask you whether...whether I perhaps could go with you? I've missed you really much. And it was only one day. Anakin will also be sad." Luke's eyes popped open again and he looked at his niece with deep love. "Jaina, your mom has explained to you why you can't accompany us. I can't just say now that's not right, do you understand? It's really to dangerous. Besides, we adults won't have any time to play with you or something. We'll have plenty things to do and little children could not help us." Jaina made a sad face and sat up: "You don't want me to come along, right?" she mumbled. Luke laugehd and hugged her intensively: "Jaina, that's nonsense. I would be glad if it were possible. But it's not. Please, be a great girl and try to understand it, yes?" "But, uncle Luke, you've been away so long. I want you to stay longer." "Jaina, I can't. But if I come back, we'll have plenty of time to be together. I'll move to Coruscant, remember? I won't be all the time on Yavin IV." Jaina still looked suspiciously: "But mom said it would be dangerous. What if you don't come back? I'll never see you again." she said seriously, with a hint of fear in her voice. "Jaina, please. It's not soo dangerous there. It's a diplomatic mission and it could become a civil war, yes, but I'm not gonna be involved in it. If there is any violence, your mom will come back to Coruscant, along with your daddy and me." "Jedi Master Promise?" she asked with big, brown eyes. Luke smiled: "Jedi Master Promise." she lay her short arms around his neck and moved close to him. "Don't worry, little one. I'm a big Jedi, I can take care of myself." "But mom said you had bad dreams when you were in the hospital." Jaina murmured on his shoulder. "Yeah, but they weren't that bad." he replied, feeling worse all of a sudden. Jaina laughed with her light voice: "Unlce Luke, you always say that. And then it becomes bad. Worse than bad....Uncle Luke? Uncle Luke, you're shaking! What's with you? Uncle Luke?" she shook her uncle fearful, calling his name. After a few moments, his eyes focused on her again. But he was so white in his

face: "I'm fine, Jaina. Really." he said hastily and put her down on the grass. "Oh no, uncle. You're so white. I go call daddy." Jaina was away before Luke could say no. After three or two minutes, she returned, dragging her father behind her. "There he is, daddy. Look, he's still white. He has shaken really bad and did not answer me." Jaina's eyes were wide with fear for her uncle, who waved her concern away: "It was nothing, Han. Nothing to worry about." "You sure? Well, you haveto know. Go look for Anakin, deary, will you? He's hiding somewhere again. I'll stay here." Han said to his daughter, his eyes locked suspiciously on the face of his brother-in-law. When Jaina was away, Han sat down beside Luke and watched him closely: "So, what was this all about? Jaina almost cried! And you know that she can stand alot." Luke bit his lower lip and shrugged: "I'm not sure. It sounds a little bit crazy, but when Jaina laughed....I did remember something. Somethig that happened yesterday night. The very last thing I remember before waking up in my living room." he grumbled. Han rose an eyebrow: "Interesting. And what did you remember?" "The laughter, Han. Someone laughed about me while I was about to faint. I remember laughter just before I lost consciousness. I suppose you didn't hear anything, did you?" Luke rose and scratched his head. "Nope." Han shook his head, then continued: "That's really strange, Luke. Perhaps it was a vision, after all." Luke looked at him, a hint of fear in his eyes: "Han, this vision...I'm really afraid of this one. I never felt this way about a vision." "Never? Think of it, Luke. Perhaps it's a trace to something." Luke sat down again, closed his eyes and searched his Force enhanced memory. "Well, there were many visions, but none which was that... wait! This vision...I was sure I felt this once. But I couldn't remember and so forgot it again. But now...Han, I know where I felt this way...no, where I felt others feeling this way. I mean, soul dragged out the body. Obeying wishes without will." "Where?" Han asked tensely. "Bakura." Luke whispered, shocked. Han backed away, eyes wide with disbelief: "You mean...you mean the entechment procedure?" Luke only nodded. "But...that's impossible. The Ssi-ruu territory is under high survey by a whole fleet of ships. They can't be in this galaxy, Luke, you know. They are in their system and live their life there, without being allowed to come across the space borders. A Ssi-ruu is allowed to cross from time to time, but always alone. It's impossible for one to bring such technology with them. Or to catch prisoners and bring them into the Lwheek system." "I know that, Han." Luke mumbled, sounding absent-mindedly. "So, how does this fit then? You dream being enteched without Ssi-ruu and entechment chairs? That's a little bit odd, isn't it?" "All my dreams are a little bit odd, Han." Luke replied, still sounding far away. Han snorted: "That's a fact. So, that's the proof, isn't it? We haven't to worry about your 'vision'. It's just a nightmare from once a time. Probably your subconscious stumbled over it while you were tranquilized in the bacta-tank. You know, feeling helpless and a little bit claustrophobic." Han sounded not that happy and Luke finally looked at him: "Yeah, that would be probable. But Han, what if someone has found the plans for an entechment chair and built a new one? The laughter I heard wasn't Ssi-ruuvi. It was human." Han said nothing for a long time, then sighed: "I don't want to think about THAT. That would be terrible, Luke. Really terrible. Besides, who would dare to fly into Ssi-ruu territory? Noone with a little bit of a brain would do that. They're still very violent against humans, our reptilian friends, you know." "You only need enough firepower, Han. The Ssi-ruu have old machines. They aren't on our tech standards." "Enough firepower, he?" Han growled: "Perhaps like a Star Destroyer?" Luke nodded his agreement: "Yeah. A StarDestroyer. Or a Super Star Destroyer." "A Super...You're kidding, Junior. Where should they have get a...oh, Sith, you mean the Imperials from the Koornacht-Cluster?" "Exactly. They have hijacked Viceroy Spaar's Super SD. It has been only two or three years. Hiding in some nebula, repairing systems and making plans, jumping into Ssi-ruu territory, getting a chair, jumping out again. And now, they are ready to move. But we're not." "That would be really like the Imperials I know. But then..it's not likely, Luke. We have the Imperial systems under survey, too. Such a big mission....we would've heard about it, I'm sure. Madine'll say you the same, if you have in mind to talk to him." Luke stared into the sky for about five minutes, obviously thinking very hard about something. Finally, he rose again: "I don't believe either it's an imperial offensive. But I'd feel a lot better if I would talk to Madine about this thoughts. Just in case it's some truth in it. But that raises some questions, doesn't it?" Han followed Luke back into the apartment: "Yeah. Who would be that crazy to get his hands on such a chair? And what does this fellow want from you?" "Exactly again, General Solo." Luke smiled ironically: "Any suggestions how to get to some answers?" Han frowned, then grinned: "Oh yeah, I have some indeed. I only know two persons who could help us. One who could get

the information and one who could accompany us to maintain a link with the first one." Luke looked questioningly. Han laughed: "Well, the first one is Talon Karrde. I'm sure, he'll be able to help us one way or the other." "And the second one?" Luke asked, his voice something between dark foreseeing and happy lust to adventure. "That can only be Mara Jade. I'm sure she'll do everything to accompany you on this adventure." Han stated self-satisfied. Luke stared at him in innocent surprise: "With me? What do you mean by that?" he demanded to know. "Nothing, little one. Absolutely nothing." he chuckled, vanishing into his living room. "Han, wait! What do you mean? And don't call me little one!"

"You want me to do what?" angry emerald-green eyes stared at the three of them, still intimidating despite all the lightyears between them and her owner, Mara Jade. "See Mara, we would owe you something and it's really important." "Important, yeah? How important can a little civil war on a backwater planet be for me, Solo, he?" "It's not just this civil war, Mara." Luke interrupted calmly. Mara's head turned and her piercing eyes stared right into his face. Luke replied her stare with his clear, ice-blue eyes and continued: "In fact, it has nothing to do with the civil war. I don't believe it has to do with Lor Areo at all." Mara raised an eyebrow and seemed to try to look right into his head. Of course she would never be able to do that. "How funny. So you ask me a favor and lie to me at the same time?" she spit out. Obviously, they had get a really bad time for calling her. "I've never lied to you, Mara. Han said these things about Lor Areo." Luke stayed calm, staring right into her eyes. "Oh, fine, now it's my fault again." his friend muttered beside him. "Quiet." Leia's voice hissed. Luke gave them a quick look with raised eyebrows and turned again to Mara. She seemed to be quieter now: "Ok, Skywalker. I'm hearing. Why should I accompany you to maintain this link with Karrde? You could easily use a comm unit. I suppose there were some even on Tatooine." "Oh yeah. I even had my own. The subject of this problem is nothing to be discussed over hypercom, Mara. I'm sure you can understand that. I'm afraid you have to trust me." Mara snorted, but it sounded smoother...a lot smoother. "All right, farmboy. I can be on Coruscant in four hours. We'll meet and you'll explain everything to me." Luke nodded: "That would be great, Mara. We'll be already in space by then, so we have to meet on board the Falcon...or the Fire, if you'd prefer that. I'm waiting for you then." "Ok. I hope you've a really good cause for this action, Skywalker. I have had a bad day. Bad buisness, you know." she growled. Luke smiled: "I'll armor me. Bye. And Mara..." she looked at him, suspiciously: "What?" "Thank you." he only said. Mara snorted lowly and her image faded. "Seems I'm loosing my grip on woman." Han shook his head disbelieving. "No, Han, not at all. You just never had one on Mara." Leia smiled ironically. Han made a face to her, then turned to Luke: "You really want us to meet in space? That's a little bit complicate, you know. Besides, I don't trust Mara that far." "Oh, cmon Han, you're just angry because she has not react on your 'charming'." Luke chuckled. "What do YOU know of charming women, little one? Perhaps you're good with banthas or dewbacks or something like that, but woman are MY resort." "Oh, are they? I didn't know that. Would you please try your charming on me? I feel like you could need it." Leia said happily, vanishing into the childrens' rooms. Han stared at her back, then to Luke and murmured: "Why do I think it's not just Mara who got a bad day?" "Han, oh Han. Perhaps your charming skills are a little bit out of practice? I could train you. Perhaps Mara then wouldn't bite your head off when you two met later." Luke still chuckled. "Oh, can it, Luke. Perhaps I made a mistake yesterday. I liked you better when you didn't chide me." Han growled. Luke laughed out loud.

"I'm glad you've finally decided to do them this favor." Talon Karrde said. Mara stared at him furiously: "I won't do them a favor. I only will hear what Luke has to say and then I'll vanish again." "Luke?" "I mean Skywalker. Remember, his first name is Luke." she hissed. Karrde grinned: "Yeah, I know, Mara. I wasn't aware that YOU know." Mara turned around: "What do you...ah, doesn't matter. I have to go. And move the Wild Karrde soon. If someone has eavesdropped on this talk, they'll soon know where you are." "Mara, I'm no beginner. What's wrong with you?" Mara bit her lower lip, sitting down on his desk: "I don't know. I've just a bad feeling about this. Something will happen to Luke. Something bad. I've dreamed about it. Nothing special, just a nightmare. And after this nightmare, he was dead." she said darkly. Karrde watched her closely. She had just called Skywalker twice by his first name. Interesting. "Ah, that's the cause. I already wondered...well, then why don't you want to accompany him? Perhaps you could help him with whatever it is that awaits him." "I owe him nothing." Mara

replied hardly. "Really? And what's with his death you've dreamed of?" "It doesn't matter to me if he's death or alive." "So?" Karrde looked at her, grinnig knowingly. Mara snorted and stormed out of his office. Skywalker didn't mean anything to her. Not a little bit.

Chapter V

Mara watched her counterpart closely. Luke Skywalker was sitting in the small lounge of the Jade's Fire and sipped on his R'alla Mineral Water. He looked slightly pale and seemed to be tired, but Mara was resolute not to feel any pity or concern for him. Why should she anyway? She had nothing to do with Luke Skywalker. Nothing. "Well, Skywalker, what did you want to tell me? My time's rare, you know." she finally said. It just sounded to smooth, she thought to herself. Why couldn't she snarl at him anymore? Was SHE getting sick? "Well, I wanted you to accompany me...well, I felt....no, I dreamed..." he stopped, inhaling deeply before speaking again. "I had a dream about myself. Someone or something has...enteched me." he eventually could blurt out. Mara seemed to be totally calm and cold, but inside, she let out a surprised cry. Enteched? She never had met a Ssi-ruuk nor had she ever seen someone being enteched. But she had heard lots of horrific stories. And, to her own surprise, she registered that she didn't want this to happen to Luke. Of course he would never learn about this feeling of fear and concern for him that she felt right now. She would never tell him that she had ever felt this way towards him. And Mara also couldn't explain these feelings to herself. "Mara? Are you ok?" Luke's voice sounded worried and she became suddenly aware of him staring at her. Why hadn't she answered faster? Sith, now he would possibly think something she wouldn't him to think about her. "Uh---I was sort of baffled, I think. I never had experiences with Ssi-ruuk, you know. Just heard these stories going around in republic cantinas. You...they already tried to entech you once, didn't they?" she asked casually, trying not to let her concern leap into her voice. Luke seemed to grew slightly paler: "Yes." he simply answered. Well, I'll not release you that easily, Skywalker, she grumbeld silently. "What experience is it?" she asked aloud. Luke blinked and for a little moment Mara thought he wouldn't answer to this question. But then, he cleared his throat. "Well, I wasn't actually enteched, but I got a view on the procedure. The...instrument is a chair. You are bound on it and then there are tubes. They are stuck into your throat. Some drug puts your brain-waves on the same frequency as their battle droids or whatever. In my case, they wanted to keep me surviving. They developed stun sensors into the seat so I couldn't move my limps. If I were helpless, they wanted to force me to entech beings, even over a huge distance. I could have done it..." he trailed off, staring into emptiness. Then he focussed back on the reality and finished: "They had also developed aspecial mind control drug in order to keep me obedient. Thanks the Force that they weren't able to inject it in my body. I would have been totally without will." he whispered. It was obvious that this theme moved him deep in his soul. Mara had never felt that much fear coming from him, barely controlled panic eating his composure away if he thought of this past event. "I'm sorry. I didn't want to hurt you." Mara said, meaning it really genuine. Luke smiled: "Doesn't matter. Talking is as good as everything to get over with such feelings." Mara smiled back. Perhaps she should really accompany him. Perhaps she wanted to take a look on him, to watch him and to make sure he wouldn't get into any danger. Perhaps she just wanted to be his friend. He always had trusted her, even when she had vowed to kill him. He had always been her friend, a very friend. Perhaps now was the time to repay something of this debt. Despite of the words she'd said to Karrde, she owed Luke Skywalker much. She owed him her friendship. And her help. Somehow she just knew he had never talked about this to Han or Leia before. "I...I'm the first one you've talked to about this, right?" she asked carefully. Luke nodded, a shy farmboy-grin on his face: "Well, you asked me." he murmured. "Yeah." Mara agreed. "Why?" Luke seemed taken offguard. He looked at her, searching for words to explain his thoughts. He wasn't good in it. It had lasted to long since he had talked about his very feelings to someone. Even during the talk with Han, he hadn't said much about his feelings. He had listened and changed his life, but he had not talked to Han about how he felt deep within his soul. "I...I just feel I can trust you. And..that you'd listen to me." he finally managed to stammer. "And that you really want to know." he lowly added. Mara suddenly felt very attracted to this man. He wasn't always this powerful, invincible Jedi Master. Sometimes, he just was a frightened, unsure farmboy who couldn't get ahold of his feelings and his life. And this farmboy was the part she really liked the most on Luke Skywalker. She rose and slipped beside him on the seat. "Well, I just felt a friend needed to talk without knowing it."

she said softly. Luke’s big, blue eyes didn’t even try to hide his surprise and certain amusement: "A friend? You consider me a friend, dear Miss Jade? I never imagined." Mara shot not so amused glances at him: "Why not? You always say you’re my friend. And I thought Jedi Masters don’t ever lie." she scolded. Luke smiled faintly. "Well, perhaps I should not always be a Jedi Master." Mara rose an eyebrow and watched him suspiciously: "Luke, I ask you this as a friend: What’s going on with you?" He backed away, his eyes growing darker. His face showed rage and anger: "Why does everybody have to ask this? I’m fine!" he snarled. Mara felt herself getting angry: "Yeah, it’s really obvious." she hissed back. Luke jumped to his feet and paced through the small compartment she called lounge: "I don’t understand why everyone treats me like this. I’m just being myself, Mara! And I feel like all people around me don’t know me anymore because of this. They act as if I were a complete stranger to them, guffawing, staring..." suddenly, he sank back beside her on his seat, hiding his face into his hands. Mara stared at him for some seconds, then put hesitantly a hand on his shoulder: "See, Luke, I don’t pretend to be a good friend, but I want to try my best. Just tell me what’s wrong with you. It’s not just this vision. You’ve faced greater dangers in the past, I know." For long minutes, Luke didn’t make any sound, then he straightened, leaning against the back of the seat. Mara’s heart ached when she looked into his eyes. Pain, fear, irritation. Something had troubled him very deeply. And, to her surprise, she really wanted to know what. Mara Jade wanted to help Luke Skywalker! Later, in privacy, she’d had to think about the causes of this emotions, she decided determined, carefully shielding this thoughts from him. "You know, after this vision, I had a talk with Han. A really serious talk. He...he talked about my life and about the things he doesn’t like within it." "HE?" Mara asked smoothly, moving closer beside his form. Luke smiled even more faintly than before: "Yeah. It was just a statement, nothing more. I never was aware of the way he, and obvious all of my friends, felt towards me being a Jedi Master." he stopped, then looked at her: "How do you feel about that, Mara? Please, be genuine." Mara hesitated. She knew somehow that this was dangerous floor. Luke wanted to hear something she didn’t want to say. He didn’t want to be hurt by her, too. But at the same time, he asked her to be genuine. And she would be genuine. That was also something she owed Luke, because he had never lied to her. "Well...I always thought you could be somewhat more open-minded. You always stood on your academy and all the people around you could see, was this Jedi Master face. Honor, invincibility, purity...all this things. I must admit, I didn’t like this much. You were always so reserved concerning all things except the Jedi and the Force. Above all, you never had really fun, or relaxation, that is. I always wondered whether a human could be happy this way." "And you think he couldn’t." He added almost unaudible. Mara swallowed. He sounded hurt and sad. "Luke, I don’t want to hurt you, but I also want to be genuine. Because you’re my friend, as I already said. Why do you ask me such a question? What has happened between Han and you?" Luke sighed, his eyes showing a distant, depressed expression: "Oh, it wasn’t between Han and me, really. In fact, I came to the conclusion that Han was right...as you are right now." Mara frowned: "Well, so what’s the problem?" "The problem is, that I know you are right but I can’t find the border between the Jedi Master and myself. I always tried to persuade myself I’d be this Jedi Master. And now...Mara, I don’t know where the Force ends and where Luke Skywalker begins! Everytime I try to act like I think Luke Skywalker was like, once a time, my friends and family stare at me as if I were a huge spider or something. I just don’t know what to do." his voice was so desperate and the feeling of helplessness radiating from him was almost overwhelming. Following a sudden flash of emotion, Mara huddled close to him, laying her arms around his shoulders and trying her best to calm and comfort him. She felt Luke’s surprise about this sudden action and his impulse to back away. But then, he obviously decided against it, leaning in her embrace, weaker than she had ever seen him. "Perhaps," she began with a low voice, "perhaps you see everything from the false point of view. I mean, probably you can change faster into your old selve than they can change their behaviour against you. They have to replace a Jedi Master for life with a young man who’s still the Master but more and more the human again." she stopped, fuming inside herself. That wasn’t exactly what she wanted to make him understand and she felt his irritation growing. And in this moment, she decided to let her guard down. There was a friend who needed help. And she knew Luke would never eavesdrop or intrude in any memory of her she didn’t want him to know about. She inhaled deeply, went inside her mind and opened her barriers wide. 'There,' she thought, 'try to sort it out for yourself.'. Luke had already been surprised when Mara laid her arms around him and

for a moment he had wanted to back way, to flee from that much intimacy. He had never had this since Callista had left him two years ago. And then he discovered something: he liked it. He wanted Mara to never let him go again. She was strong, had ever been strong and it was like a bacta-bath after an longlasting disease. He could feed from her strength and gather some for himself. When she let her guard down and her entire feelings rushed over him, begging entrance into his mind, he was caught totally offguard and overwhelmed by the moment. His barriers dropped without withstand and Mara's mind flooded into his. The strange thing was, that he didn't feel afraid. It was wonderful to give the strength he had to present to everyone away. Without thinking, he gave himself to Mara and let his thoughts flew back into her mind. Her emotions passed over him, anger, past hatred, friendship, her wishes and the things she wanted to say him only minutes ago. Suddenly, he did understand exactly what it was she wanted to make clear to him. He was Luke Skywalker. But this had happened quickly, from night to morning, and his friends, even his family, did need some time to get used to it. That was fine with him. Right at the moment, he would give them all time they would ask for. Everything he wanted was to sit here with Mara and being embraced the first time in two long, lonely years. In fact, he mused, he wanted to be never separated from her again. This feeling came without warning, a feeling he didn't know he had towards Mara and it flew through her forcebanding before Luke could even think stopping it. His surprise was even greater when he felt Mara's feelings rise in answer to this emotion and when her joy, anxiousness and hidden desire rushed against his mind, he couldn't maintain his composure anymore. He embraced her back, pressing her against himself as close as he could without hurting her and then he was lost in feelings, emotions and a mind-connection he never had experienced before. Han tipped a button and one of his dejarrik-figures moved, killing one of Leia's. But his wife didn't even remark it. She sat in front of him, frowning slightly and staring in nothingness. "Hey, sweetheart, what's up? That was a really bad move. You're even worse than 3PO!" "Hu? What?" she seemed to wake up and looked at him irritated, then snorted when she saw the move his figure had made. "That was unfair!" "Nonsense. What was you thinking of?" "Luke... I felt some odd feelings coming from Luke. But now, he has shut me out." she murmured. "You think he has a little...disput with Mara?" Leia's face grew somber: "Don't know. Han, I'm worried. I don't trust Mara this far." "Don't worry, Leia. I'm sure, Luke's alright."

Chapter VI

"I can't believe we really did this." Mara murmured. "Hmm...it's strange. But wonderful, too, isn't it?" Luke moaned sleepily. Mara moved up to her elbows and looked at Luke. His eyes were closed. She blew a perspiration soaked strand of his blonde hair out of his forehead and huddled close to him. "Yeah. In fact, that's the cause I'm worried." she laughed, caressing his bare chest. Luke only giggled. The two of them lay in the small sleeping bunk of the Jade's Fire, Mara cuddled next to Luke, her head on his right biceps, her face resting in the curve of his neck. "Well, I'm not sorry because of it." he finally mumbled, sounding half asleep. In the next minute, his breath came regularly and deep, indicating deep slumber. "I'm neither." Mara whispered, kissing his lips. She still couldn't understand what just had happened. After Luke had thrown her into this embrace, into this kiss, she had lost control of her feelings as well as of her body. They really had slept together! Mara had never imagined there could be that much passion, love and smoothness between the two of them. She never had imagined she would want to know him this way. That she would long for his kiss, for his touches. But one hour ago, she had given herself to him, as well as he had given himself to her, and it was the most wonderful thing Mara had ever experienced. The side of Luke she had just seen, she never had thought was there. His body she suddenly wanted to touch again and again. His passion towards her, without calm and Jedi peace. Just feelings and passion. She had seen the human Luke Skywalker...and she had fallen in love with the human Luke Skywalker, she suddenly knew. Before she went to sleep, she wondered how long these feelings had been there yet and why the hell they had come out just now Luke awoke slowly and when he remembered the last hours, he moaned contently. Although the situation was quite ridiculous. Two friends talking about something vital important and in the next moment they lay in each others arm, kissing, caressing, making love... and then, the feeling of Mara's small form in his arms, next to his naked body was something he hadn't even had with Callista. True, there had been strong feelings, certainly a love between them...but Mara was different. The love he suddenly felt for her was so deep, so powerful, he wondered how he could've ignored it all the

time until now. And he was sure it had been there for a long, long time. Perhaps even since they had first met on Myrkr. He looked down at her sleeping form in his arms and smiled. She was so beautiful. Mara stirred and opened her eyes. She looked at him, surprised for a little moment, then smiled broadly and lay her arm over his stomach. "Well, finally awake." she said lowly. "Why, Miss Jade, you have slept quite a time yourself." he chided, motioning towards his chrono, lying between shoes, lightsaber, jackets and diverse other clothes on the floor before the bunk they lay in. "You've exhausted me, farmboy." she laughed, kissing his breast. He remembered how she had taken his clothes off him, how she had clung to him, caressed and kissed him... "Why, Master Skywalker, what are you thinking of? It has to be quite...nice." she giggled, patching the covers just above his delicatest body part. "Yeah. I just was thinking that I'm not THAT exhausted. Farmers have good conditions, you know." he grinned mischievously and traced her body line with his left hand. "Oh, really? So I choose good quality?" she asked innocently. "You have already experienced me from my best side. Any comments?" he mumbled, kissing her neck and shoulders. "Well....what would I've to pay for a second round to affirmate my opinion?" she groaned when he rolled on top of her, still kissing every part of her body he could get a hold of. "For you, Miss Jade, I do it without asking any money." he grinned. "What a honor." Mara laughed, swinging her legs around his waist and losing herself into the embrace of his well-muscled arms and breast. Luke stood something around six meters away from her. Suddenly, a cry could be heard. Leia stumbled in her brother's direction. Leia? Uh, just a moment, what's Leia doing in my ship? It lasted exactly seven seconds until Mara understood that she was dreaming. Or, more probably, having a vision. A shadow, lanky and fast, approached Luke from the left. He didn't remark it, concentrating on something Mara couldn't see from the point she was standing. The shadow laughed. It sounded crazy and Mara suddenly remembered C'baoth, the mad Jedi clone. Luke turned that fast, she almost couldn't see it. His eyes widened with fear and horror and in the next moment, something flew through the air. It had to be quite small for Mara couldn't see anything at all. Luke groaned in shock, his hand clutching his breast. But only a second later, he had found his composure again and ignited his lightsaber. The green blade shone and suddenly Mara became aware that it was dark all around her...it was night. But how was she able to see the shadow then? The dark figure just stood there, unmoving. Somehow Mara thought it was grinning. Didn't it see that Luke was about to hack it in pieces? The shadow had nothing more than a few seconds left of his life. Luke would...Mara's mind froze in shock when her entire vision became tan. First, she thought she would wake up. But then, she heard a cry. Luke's cry! He seemed to be in agony, his voice sounded deep in her bones. Then, calm. No sound. His voice had stopped amidst this cries. As if he... "Luke!" Mara was wide awake, staring at the ceiling of her small sleeping bunk, breathing heavily. Luke's eyes flew open instantly and he reached instinctively on his hip to grasp his lightsaber. Just a moment later, he relaxed again somewhat, turning his turquoise gaze on her. "Whoa. What's up, Mara?" She could only stare at him, still panting for air. Luke seemed to finally see what was wrong with her and moved closer to her. "A vision?" he whispered, softly caressing her forehead. She nodded, closed her eyes and tried to focus enough in the Force to calm down. "Wanna talk?" he asked, still with this incredible soft and low voice of his. She shook her head: "Just hold me, please." her voice trembled. "Of course." he mumbled. Mara thanked him silently. She would just concentrate on something other. His calm breathing perhaps and his heartbeat. Yeah, that wasn't bad. It lasted not long until she was fast asleep again.

Chapter VII

"Luke's behaviour's strange, isn't it?" Leia asked her husband lowly. Han rose an eyebrow, but still concentrated on the terminals of the Falcon right before him. "Dunno what you mean, honey." he replied absent-mindedly. "Well, I can't explain it, but since he has come from the Fire....he's somehow different, don't you think?---Han? Hey, Solo, I'm talking to you!" "Huh? Sorry, I was preoccupied with the landing preparations. What is it you wanted to know?" Leia snorted, but became serious again: "I said, Luke's somehow different since he came back from Mara." "You think? Well, he only seems to be a bit happier than before." Han yawned and leaned back in his seat. "And that is exactly the point which worries me." Leia stated darkly. Again Han's eyebrow rose and he gave her one of his typical Han Solo frowns. "I don't know whether I understand you." "Well....this vision he had. I mean, I have thought about that and perhaps...he said to you the laughter was female...female and human...." "He never said it

was female." Han grumbled. "But..." "Leia, please. That's totally ridiculous. Why should Mara do that? And why should Luke be happier than in weeks if he comes back from her if she would have something like that in mind?" "Well, there's still this vow she gave Palpatine once. And for the second thing...we don't know what he has eaten back on the Fire...or what he has drunk." Han gave a short laugh: "Boy, Leia, now it becomes really crazy. You can't possibly think Mara would drug him!" Leia's eyes grew darker and narrowed: "But that's exactly what I think." she hissed. "Huh, and I think you're acting a little bit overprotective, my dear wife. Luke's a big boy. He can take care of himself. He would have remarked it if Mara had wanted to drug him.... it sounds more and more ridiculous, I have to object." "Bah....you're just to..to....I'm worried about him." Leia seemed to explode in the next moment. Han shrugged: "That's your right, as his sister. But that doesn't mean you always have a cause. For instance, I think this little talk to Mara has Luke done more good than the one he had with me. Mara's more the person to tell him to be himself than I am. She has not to fight the friendship...well, I mean the fact that I don't want to hurt him any further than all this women in his life have already done." Leia said nothing and stared at the door which lead to Luke's bunk. Han sighed: "Oh no. Please tell me you won't do this." "I really don't know what you mean. Am I not allowed to have a little talk with my brother?" her big, brown eyes grew huger than he had thought would be possible. Gee, she looked so sweet and beautiful.... "Sith. But try not to hurt him, deary. He's so sensitive, the last few days." "I KNOW that, Han. And I would never hurt him." Leia objected. "Leia, perhaps noone has ever said it, but you really CAN be annoying if you are in certain moods." "And which moods would that be?" she growled angry. "The one you're in right now." he mumbled after her when she went to find her brother.

Leia found her brother lying in his bunk, eyes closed and breathing regularly. Why was he that tired? He hadn't done much in the past three days when they had been in hyperspace. In two hours, they would drop out and by afternoon they would have arrived on Lor Areo. He was supposed to be fully healed then. He had promised to her to meditate as much as possible in order to heal his body. But that was sleep, not trance. Perhaps she wasn't a Jedi Master, but she knew the difference. She sat down beside him and waited. He knew that they would arrive soon and usually he was awake quite a time before, to make preparations concerning culture and the like. But he didn't wake up, just stirred and turned to face her. Leia frowned. Why the hell was he so tired? If Mara had drugged him, then Leia would... "Leia? Are you mad with me?" she came back to reality and lowered her gaze. Luke's eyes looked sleepily at her. She smiled: "No." He smiled back: "Good. But you're angry at someone. Han?" he sat up. Leia became more and more worried. He still looked tired. "Again, no. I just thought about something." "Ah.... it had to do with me, right? Or do you do this more often? Watching me when I'm sleeping, I mean." "Of course not. I....I just wondered why you're so tired." Luke rose an eyebrow. That was the only moment he looked a little bit like Han...a little bit. "Well, it's boring...hyperspace, I mean." "Yeah, sure." Leia mumbled, looking straight at the wall behind him. Luke frowned: "Leia... if there's something you want to tell me... don't hesitate. Just say it." "Well, I just was surprised by the way you was when you came back from Mara..." Luke paled: "Surprised?" he asked cautiously. Leia frowned now, too. "Yes, surprised. And it seems I have all causes to do so." she said calmly. Luke's eyes narrowed: "Pardon me?" "You're pale, Luke. Have you already thought about Mara being this guy from your vision?" Luke's cheeks flushed with anger when he jumped onto his feet. Leia did take this the wrong way: "So you've seen it, too. I knew I was right. We can't trust her. I'd say we go see a medic as soon as we land on Lor Areo. Noone will find this curious. Actually, it's known that you was ill. Hey, don't blame yourself. Everyone can be cheated." Luke's shoulders trembled when he turned around to face her again: "Don't you dare to ever say such things about Mara again." he spit out towards her. Leia backed away, shocked. "Luke? I don't understand..." "Of course you don't understand. Because what you know is nothing. Nothing. Nothing about me and nothing about Mara. She would never do such a thing. Got it? Never." he was obviously more furious than Leia had ever seen him. "What are you talking about?" Leia asked alarmed. "What am I talking about? Leia, how can you only think this way about her? What gives you the right to judge her?" Leia stared at him, totally baffled and worried beyond imagination. Now, she was entirely sure that Mara had done something to him. "What do you mean? I just made my conclusions out of the obvious." she said calmly. Luke stared at her, anger in his eyes. She could see how he fought against it. "The obvious? I won't allow you to talk about her this way.

And I don't want you to watch every step of mine." he hissed. Leia's worry was replaced by a certain fear. Luke seemed really out of control. What had Mara done to him? "Luke, I think you should lay down." she said. Luke, who just wanted to hiss some more words, stopped short and stared at her totally baffled. "What?" he blurted out. "I said I think you should lay down. You're not well." Luke shook his head irritated: "Leia, I'm perfect. What are you...." "Come on, brother, lay down. It's better that way." she said smoothly, pushing him softly on his bunk again. Luke was so surprised, he let himself being forced down. Leia covered him and patted his hand like the one of a child. "I'm back soon. Just getting Han here." "Leia, are you crazy? I'm fine!" Luke sat up again. Leia shook her head: "What has she given to you?" she mumbled. Luke finally got her thoughts straight and cried out: "You think she has given me some sort of drug? Leia, what has gotten into you?" "Calm down, Luke. All will be good again. We have a medkit here." she assured him, sounding so worried, he had to laugh out loud: "You really think..." he giggled. Leia stared at him frightened and triggered the intercom button: "Han, please come here. And bring the medkit, yes?" then she turned to Luke who was about to stay up again. "Luke, please lay down. I beg you." Luke shook his head, grinning: "You really think...I don't believe it. This is....this is....---Leia? Leia! Don't..." the stun shot cut his words down and Luke sank back on the bunk, unconscious. Leia lay him right and caressed his forehead when Han entered the bunk: "Leia, what the hell----oh no. Broke he down again?" "No, he didn't. I stunned him." Han's jaw dropped open: "You did WHAT? Why?" "He behaved like a...like a...totally crazy, Han. I'm sure he's under some drug's influence." "And what now?" "Now," Leia rose and straightened, "now, I will call Mara and talk to her. And you'll stay here. It was high stun setting, but he's after all a Jedi Master."

"That is quite a story, Princess." Mara grinned amused at her counterpart at the holocom. "Don't act, Mara. I know what you've done. Just say me what you've given to him." Mara laughed out loud. "I've given nothing to him. Well, I have indeed, but something other than you have in mind, dear Princess. Perhaps we could get Luke to join this discussion. He will explain all to you." "Luke can't come to us right now." Mara suddenly frowned: "Why? Isn't he well?" Leia's eyes shot blaster bolts at Mara: "He's in his bunk. I have taken care of him being calmed down." Mara jumped to her feet: "I'll come to you on the Falcon as soon as we come out of hyperspace. I want to talk to him." "I certainly won't allow that." "He's not your little brother, Leia, he's an adult. You can't take him prisoner!" Leia's anger rose: "I don't hold him prisoner, Miss Jade. I protect him from you." "You have CALMED HIM DOWN. YOU have drugged him or who-knows-what. Your accusings are ridiculous. I'll come to you when Luke's awake again and we'll make this childish thing clear. I'm looking for your apologies, Princess Leia." the comm went tan and Mara paced the Fire's lounge, fuming. She wasn't angry at Leia, not really. Mara had never thought there would be much trust between the two of them, only respect. And she knew that the princess really loved her brother and tried to protect him. Well, but to stun him was a little bit out of question, even for Mara who was known for her quite radical methods. But then, if Leia had thought he had been drugged and he had acted like someone whose lover had just been attacked...well, perhaps Luke had seemed a little bit crazy, she had to admit. He always seemed so if he got angry, just because it happened not often. She would bet that many people in this galaxy couldn't imagine that Jedi Master Luke Skywalker was actually able to show emotions.

"That's the most curious excuse I've ever heard." Luke grumbled, rubbing his forehead. Leia sat beside him on his bunk, looking like one of her children when it just had done something wrong. Her whole sense in the Force begged his forgiveness and together with her blushed cheeks, she looked not a bit like the proud Princess of Alderaan. "I'm so sorry, Luke. I really thought you had been drugged. And when you began to laugh...I just didn't know..." "It's ok. At least you have done it as smooth as possible. Although, my headache..." "I'm so sorry." Leia repeated. Luke laughed and Leia's eyes widened in disbelief. He grinned: "Leia, I said it's ok. It was a misunderstanding, nothing more. Don't blame yourself anymore. It happened and I have accepted your apology." She relaxed a little bit: "Thank the Force. It was just that you were acting different when you came from Mara. You seemed so...so...relaxed...and tired." she tried to explain. Luke shook his head: "I can't understand why you mistrust Mara this much, sister, but I think you can make your apologies right now again...to her." Leia jumped to her feet and turned. Mara stood in the lounge of the Falcon, arms crossed before her chest,

waiting. "Oh...hi, Mara." Leia stammered, fighting to gain her dignity back. "Hi, Leia. I see you have finally seen your mistake." she stated in her cool voice. Luke, behind Leia, just stared at her, remembering how close he had been to her only two days ago and feeling the longing to kiss her. "I..." she cleared her throat and was again Princess: "Mara, I'm sorry for my words. I had been worried about Luke already for over a week and he acted strange when he came from you. I think I just overreacted. My apologies." Mara rose an eyebrow: "He acted strange? You're soon with stunning your family members?" Leia blushed again: "He was more happy and a lot more tired than before. The signs were clear for me." Mara grinned: "I already said I have given something to him. But it wasn't a drug." Luke's eyes widened and he shook his head frantically, only to smile sheepishly when Leia turned to him. "Luke, you think you could explain the words of this female riddle to me?" He stared at her, then at Mara. 'Why have you done this, Mara? I don't know if I want her to know this yet.' 'So? Luke Skywalker, are you in love with me?' Leia looked at Luke, then at Mara, knowing they talked through the Force and fuming in face of the fact that she was shut out. Luke made a grimace. 'You know I am, Mara. But Leia'll not agree with it. I don't want to have such a discussion with her.' 'And I don't want to be Luke Skywalker's secret affair. Decide.' Luke sighed: "Leia, you know, we...that means Mara and I...well, we...we are..." "I'm waiting." Leia said cool. Mara snorted: "Just drop it, Skywalker, before you're strangled by your own words." she passed Leia and swung her arm around Luke's waist. "We, that means your brother and me, are engaged, Madam Chief-of-State. That's all he wanted to say." Leia's jaw dropped open like Han's when he had seen his stunned friend. "What?" she whispered. Luke cleared his throat: "Leia, Mara and I are a pair. That's the whole secret. No drugs, no intrigues." "So...you two have decided to work together on this mission?" she said. Both Luke and Mara could see that she practically begged to get a positive answer to this question. And Mara felt surprised, that Luke was about to lose his temper again. Boy, he really was over with this 'sister protecting brother before all this evil, evil women who want to grab and hurt him' thing. "Leia, please listen more carefully. We're not partners, we're lovers. Fully normal lovers." Leia paled and Mara stared at her 'boyfriend' unbelieving. She never had expected he would talk that rude to his sister. Leia had ever been some sort of...of divine being in his life. Perhaps, Mara mused suddenly, that was the cause Leia had become that overprotective against Luke. She didn't want to lose her place in his heart to some other woman...well, at least not to one she didn't approve with. And she certainly didn't approve with Mara. Mara separated from Luke, although she had to admit that she practically longed to be near him: "I think I go back to the Fire and ask for my landing permission. See you, honey." she said, kissing Luke fastly on his lips. Leia sunk in a seat, just staring unbelieving at her brother and this woman who kissed him just at the moment. Mara left, pacing an unknowing, innocently smiling Han Solo. Han came into the lounge and in the next second, he knew something was wrong. "Oh no, what's that again? Is something in the air that causes disputes between siblings or what's the matter with the two of you recently?" he sighed. Neither his wife nor his brother-in-law answered. "Leia, can't you just accept it?" Luke begged calmly. "No, no, I can't. Mara Jade! Why Mara Jade?" she almost shouted at him. "Because I've finally seen that I love her, Leia. I love her already for a long time, I just never was aware of it. Until two days ago, that is." Luke declared, still calm. "Two days...oh my godness...say that's not true..." she stammered. Now, Luke seemed to be hurt, really hurt: "Leia, please. I love her. I beg you to accept it. You haven't to love it or even agree with it, but please accept it." Leia didn't hear his words. She jumped to her feet and hissed: "Say that's not true. Say that you haven't slept with her." Luke backed away and stared at her with disbelief: "Leia, that doesn't concern you in any way." "By the Force...you have...you really have..." she shook her head, pacing the lounge. "Hey, does I understand this all right...Luke... you and Mara are...engaged?" Han asked cautiously. Luke nodded: "I love her." he repeated. Han stared at him for a few moments and Luke prayed silently. If his best friend had the same opinion as his sister...he didn't know whether he would stand this right now. Then, his best friend grinned broadly: "Ha, I knew it. I knew it at the moment I saw your face when she was gunned down during the battle for the Katana fleet. I just knew it." he giggled. Luke's cheeks flushed: "Yes, I think I even felt this way back then...I just didn't understand what my heart was trying to show me." "Stop it!" Leia shouted. "Leia, please! Why do you react this way? What has she done to you that you're acting like this?" "Oh, Luke, the question isn't what she has done to me. The question is what she has done to you! She has made her profit in face of your loneliness and your problems in the last weeks. That's what she has done. I don't want to

imagine...." she grumbled. Luke was barely able to cover his shock. Han's expression was concerned and worried. Sad, if you want so. "Leia...," Luke stammered: "you aren't serious, are you?" probably Leia didn't even hear the desperate hope in his voice. Han was getting angry. Didn't his wife see how she hurt her brother with this words...with her entire reaction? "I'm fully serious, brother. And I won't accept that this witch plays her damn plays with you and all of us. Got it? I won't accept it. And I won't admit that you cheats yourself." "Leia, you have to accept it. I know what I feel. I love Mara Jade and I'll be together with her. You can accept it or you can not accept it, but no matter what you choose, I'll love her and stay behind this." Luke said. Han could see how he begged her with his eyes to take this last chance, to accept it..to not to destroy what happiness he had just found. Leia didn't see it...or didn't want to see it. "Then there's nothing to say between the two of us." she said coldly and left the lounge. And Han saw something break in Luke's eyes. He wanted to talk to him, to show him that he approved with Mara, that he was happy for Luke, so happy. "Thank you, Han." Luke said almost unaudible: "If you don't matter I'll switch to the Fire. We'll see each other down on Lor Areo." "Sure, little one." Han said smoothly. Then he turned and went to find Leia. Now she would see him really angry.

Chapter VIII

When Luke entered the lounge of the Jade's Fire, Mara knew instantly that the talk with Leia hadn't gone right at all. Her lover/friend/Jedi Master was fuming and obviously fighting to maintain his famous self-control. "She's ridiculous. Totally and completely ridiculous." he paced the small cabin. "Would you PLEASE tell me what she has said." Mara demanded to know, more and more losing her patience. "Well, she hasn't even said some clear words. She's just said she wished it hadn't happened. And when she learned that we have slept together..." "You told her we slept together?" Mara frowned uncomfortably. Luke raised an eyebrow: "Exactly speaking, YOU told her. Besides, every normal human can get to it himself." Mara sighed and Luke continued: "I can't understand why she reacts this way. I mean, what's the problem with you and me sleeping together? I'm not a monk." "Well, at least for two days you aren't one anymore." she mumbled. "Oh, please. Just because I'm not going into bed with every nice woman I met I'm not a monk. If I would do this, she would react like this, anyway." "And I would kill you." Mara added darkly. Luke smirked at her: "Oh, you would? Nice to know. But that doesn't help me to understand my beloved sister at all." Mara caught his arm when he stormed again past her and dragged him beside her on the bunk: "Luke, no one expects from you to understand female beings. Especially female beings you're related to." Luke snorted: "Right now, I don't need your sarcasm, Mara Jade." "That's no sarcasm, Skywalker. That's the truth. Leia's just jealous." Inside, Mara laughed out loud. Luke's eyes became wider than she had ever seen them. Innocence of men, she thought. They never got the obvious straight in their brains. "Jealous? But...she's my sister! Why should she be jealous?" he asked totally baffled. "Because she fears that she never...Luke, until now, she was by far the most important woman in your life, true?" Luke scratched his head: "Well, yeah...I think she was the most important woman for me, yes." "And that's why she's worried. Because you already use the past tense...was. Do you understand what I want to say?" Luke shook his head: "Not really." Mara smiled: "She fears that she'll lose you. That...well, that she won't be important to you anymore. That I'll take her place into your heart." "But that's..that's nonsense. She's my sister! I'll always love her!" he exclaimed. "I know. But she doesn't. You've to talk to her again. And say her exactly these words." Luke still shook his head: "I'll never understand women. Why do you make all things that complicate? The love for a sister is something other than the one for a ...well, lover, wife....you know what I mean. I always thought Leia would know this. I always thought she'd like me to have a girlfriend." Now, Mara laughed out loud: "Yeah, Luke, a girlfriend. But not a lover." Luke's expression showed complete helplessness: "What do you mean by THAT now?" "I mean, that Leia can't imagine you having sex with a woman." Mara giggled. Now, Luke seemed to be hurt in his male pride: "Oh, wonderful." he growled. "Hey, sweetie, don't overreact, yes? You understand me full well. Leia has never seen you as a man. Always as her brother or as the Jedi Master. She has never seen you like I do. Your body, or your face...or the way you kiss. That never meant anything to her. She sees your soul and your behaviour. It doesn't matter to her how you look. Besides, she want to protect you. You hurt her really much after Callista had left you. That hurt her as well. Now she don't want me to do the same to you again. For her, you just are her little brother who

doesn't know what women are. And the little Luke always runs straight into every emotional mess he can catch." "Well, Luke isn't that little anymore and can take care of himself." he mumbled, still sounding hurt. "And that's the fact she'll have to accept. But she only will if you go back to the Falcon and talk to her. Right. And it would be better if you don't mention any details of our love-life." she grinned and kissed his chin. Now, he grinned back: "Why, but it's the only thing I can think of for the last three days." he dragged her onto his lap and kissed her throat. Mara smiled mischievously: "Perhaps our little princess can wait for a while." "She'll have to." he pushed her onto her back and slid over her body.

"Hey, Leia! The Lori Ambassador has called. He said we'll get landing permission in three hours. He sounded quite nervous. I bet they have some sort of problem down there they don't want us to know about." "Hmmm..." his wife mumbled. Han turned to her. She sat beside him on the copilot seat of the Falcon and stared down on the planet, biting her lower lip and pounding her fingers on her legs. "Leia, is it possible that you're thinking about your brother?" "Nonsense." she spit back. Han turned again in order to hide his wide grin.

Leia was breeding. Now, that she had had a few hours to herself, to think, she saw her behaviour against Luke in a much more critical point of view. In fact, she liked Mara. She liked her a lot, to speak true. But that this woman throw at her brother....that was a totally different situation. And then, she felt Luke's joy, his happiness, the love he radiated....it would be so wonderful for him to find someone finally. She just couldn't sabotage this. But Mara Jade! Why her? What did he see in HER? Leia sighed lowly. Perhaps she should talk again to her brother. And to Mara. Yes. That would be alright. But it had to be soon. In three hours they had to concentrate on the problems of Lor Areo.

"Hey, honey, what are you thinking of?" Mara asked softly, caressing his bare, strong chest. "Huh? Nothing special." he said, sounding absent-minded. "Oh. I bet its name is Leia, right?" "No, it isn't." Luke said, robbing deeper under the covers and pressing his body against hers. Mara smirked: "It won't work." "What?" he asked casually, kissing her throat softly. "To disturb me." she giggled when his lips wandered down her body. "I really don't know what you're talking about. You're beautiful, do you know that?" he murmured, still preoccupied with her soft, silky skin. "Luke! I try to have a serious talk with you! Gee, please listen to me!" A sigh came from beneath the covers and Luke's head came into view again. He lay his cheek onto her shoulder and sighed again: "Want not to talk about it." he whined. "Won't work either. Pity, I mean." she said, kissing his forehead, then the point between his eyes, then his nose. "You're really mean, Emperor's Hand." he moaned contently when her lips reached his chest. "I know. But I've always learned what I wanted to learn. So, talk to me, Skywalker!" she said demandingly. Luke sighed for the third time and sat up. Mara moved to him and began to caress his stomach. "Well, it's....I'm only thinking that...well...back then, when the Clone Emperor manipulated me...when I was under his control, the control of the Dark Side, Leia was the only one who stood by my side, all the time. She was there, she believed in me, she was willing to sacrifice herself, even her baby, in order to get me back. I....I can't understand why she's this way now. I could have understood if I had lost her because she detested someone being on the Dark Side of the Force. But I can't understand that I shall loose my sister because I'm just in love!" "Luke, you won't loose your sister. I'm sure she'll be calmed down if you talk to her again. And then, the two of you will make peace again and everything will be fine." Mara stated, thinking about how sweet he looked when he was irritated by something. "I'm not so sure. Leia's as stubborn as a kowakian monkey lizard. She will either bite my head up or strangle me." Mara giggled: "I always liked your sister." The Jedi Master snorted and slid again under the covers: "But I don't like you anymore." his mumbling came to her ears. She laughed out loud: "Hey, I'm on YOUR side, farmboy! You think I would give you up already?" "Who knows." he chuckled. "I certainly won't. You're too cute." He mocked detesting: "Cute?! Men aren't cute." "I think they are. But no matter, you have to go now. Pack your stuff for Lor Areo and speak to Leia. We'll see each other down on the planet." "I'm already looking towards it." he kissed her passionately, then rose and vanished into the refresher unit. Mara could see his lanky shadow through the pale, milky glass and thought about joining him. But no, he had to go now and make this brother-sister disput clear. She would have enough time to enjoy him down on Lor Areo.

The atmosphere was as thick as the snow planes on Hoth and Han thought about catching their heads and banging them together. Instead, he cleared his throat: "Okay, guys, I'll go now down into the cargo hold with Chewie. We'll play a few nice rounds of sabacc and when we come back again, you two will have no disputes anymore. Okay?" No answer. Han shook his head, sighing. That would be a really long sabacc game.

"Well, how...how are you, Luke?" Leia asked nervously. "Oh, I'm fine." he answered instantly. Then he shook his head and looked sadly at her: "No, Leia, I'm not fine. Would you please explain to me why you're treating me like this?" Leia stared at her brother, not knowing what to say. She couldn't even explain why she acted like she did. "I...I.... Luke, it was so surprising for me. I mean...I didn't even think at Mara and you being somehow...friendly involved. And then, love...a pair? It struck me like a fist in my stomach, can you understand?" "Of course I can understand. But I don't understand why you said to me there would be nothing between the two of us anymore." Leia looked ashamed onto the floor, still. "Leia, these words struck me very hard. See, I don't want to have to choose between you and Mara. I can't do this. I can't! I love Mara, I truly love her. But I love you, too. I couldn't imagine a life without Mara anymore. I know, this is coming very soon now, but it's a fact. And I also can't imagine a life without my sister....without you. Please, Leia, I beg you...don't demand a choosing from me. Please." he said lowly, desperately. Leia watched her brother, saw his loneliness, his fear for her answer. And suddenly, she became aware that she could destroy her brother's life with one word. Never had it been that clear to her, that the two of them had a relationship as close as she had never seen another pair of siblings. All the years they had fought side by side against the Empire, all the crises and the dangers they had faced...all this doomig and hopeless situations they had handled because they had stood together.... Luke and she, they had grown together that near, it was totally unimaginable to separate them. She knew for sure that she couldn't possibly live without him. She just couldn't. And Leia knew that he would choose Mara. He would go with his love, but he would never be entirely happy because he'd know that she hadn't wanted him to find his luck. But she wanted him to find someone he could love...someone who loved him. All the years while her relationship with Han had grown, Luke's loneliness had hurt her very much. He had been so alone. Before Callista and then after Callista, too. And now, only now, she finally saw that her behaviour was totally ridiculous. She swung her arms around her brother's strong shoulders and whispered: "I'm so sorry, Luke. Really. Please, forgive me. I didn't want to force you to choose between me and Mara. I never wanted to. If you love Mara, then be with her." She felt like Luke relaxed into her arms and soon, he hugged her back. "Thanks, Leia. I was so afraid of you detesting Mara so much. I never thought it would....would inflict you in that way." he said, smiling happily. Leia smiled back, but somehow it seemed to be ashamed again. "I think I was just jealous, Luke. And egoistic. Still, I feel like I don't want to distribute you. I want you all for me. It's a strange feeling to know that there's another woman who claims you." she mumbled. Suddenly, Luke giggled. The giggle became a laugh and finally, he barely could breathe. Leia was totally baffled by this change of behaviour. "Luke! What the hell....?" "I...I was just thinking, that there were times I wished nothing more than to hear such words from you, Leia. The times I truly loved you as I love Mara now." He looked at his sister who sat totally irritated beside him and embraced her softly. "Leia, you haven't to distribute me. I love you, I always will. You'll be part of my life forever, a very big part. Do never forget this. I'm now together with Mara, but that doesn't mean I won't come to you anymore. Nothing will change between the two of us. Nothing. In fact, it was YOU who always said I should be a little more braver concerning women. And now I am. Gee, I've never flirted with anyone as I do with Mara." he giggled again, slight red painting his cheeks. Leia laughed and caressed his face: "Apparently, you really love her. I've never seen you that happy. Even with Callista you weren't that relaxed." Luke smiled faintly: "Yeah, I know. I'm wondering all the time what my feelings for Callista really have been. I mean, the ones I feel for Mara are love, that's clear, I know it. I'm longing for her, even when I'm sitting here. I've never longed for Callista in this way. It frightens me. I mean, I really thought I would love Callista. If that wasn't love, what was it? Have I lied to myself?" Leia forced his face down on her shoulder: "Perhaps, perhaps not. Who knows? Feelings are not really understandable. They're there and that's it. Accept them." "I'll try. Besides, I think you should talk to Mara, too. You have to see that she doesn't want to hurt me. She loves me. Oh Leia, she really loves me." his eyes glittered like the stars. "I'm so happy for

you, Luke. You’ve deserved it, really. Go back to her again." Leia kissed him softly on his forehead. He grinned: "No, that’s not such a good idea. I have to concentrate on my duties down on Lor Areo. If I go back to her when I’ m that happy as I am now...well, I certainly wouldn’t come to think about Lor Areo." he said shyly. Leia cleared her throat and then giggled: "Huh, I think it will take me some time to get used to such discussions with you." Luke laugehd: "Now you know how I feel when you’re talking about your romantic nights with Han." Leia blushed like a supernova: "Was it that bad for you?" "No, not bad. I just was jealous, I think. Because I had noone. But now, I have someone. Besides, I’ve enjoyed it when you proved that much trust in me. Really. Don’t stop with it, yes?" "Ok. Let’s pack our stuff, brother." she rose, taking his hand. "As you say, sister."

Chapter IX

"Are they suspecting anything?" Aleesha asked calmly. "No...no, they don’t. But..but...you didn’t say he would be killed during this. You said noone would be injured." Karaya stammered, still shocked about the cruelty she just had seen. Aleesha smirked: "I can’t foresee everything, little sister. Sometimes, such things just happen. You’ve to learn to handle it. It’s nothing special. Noone cared about Hukali, you know. Especially not me. Did you?" her sister’s eyes glowed dark when she focused them on Karaya. "Of...of course not." the young girl whispered frightened. Her sister had changed very much during the last few weeks. It frightened her beyond imagination and she had no idea why Aleesha had become this way. Now, standing within the ruins of the king’s chambers in the Palace of Lorianu, she knew for sure that her sister’s wish wasn’t to save Lor Areo. She just wanted to rule it. And Karaya had been that naive to believe her words. She had helped place the bomb into the king’s chambers. And now, King Hukali was dead. Somewhere under this ceiling’s parts he lay, crushed with over two tons of heavy permabeton. A terrible death. And a useless death. She became aware of Aleesha staring at her and straightened. Her sister mustn’t remark her thoughts. Perhaps she could preserve the system and her planet from falling under Aleesha’s influence. Everything she had to do was warn Skywalker and tell him about Aleesha’s plans. "Take care of the press being informed about this, Karaya." she barked violently. Karaya just nodded, feeling overwhelmed by the power radiating from her sister, dark power. It had something to do with the old holovids Aleesha had found only two years ago. Then, it had started. She was glad when she finally got out of the destroyed chambers and ran to the security HQ. Not long anymore. Perhaps she would be a traitor to her sister, but now she knew that this would save thousands of Loris from a terrible death through her sister’s forces...and probably her own hands.

"Why has it taken so long to get landing permission?" Luke asked curiously while Han steered the Falcon in the planet’s direction. In five minutes, Lor Areo would come into view. According to the pleas of the Loris, the two ships had stayed at the system’s edges, so it was quite a distance they had to fly. "That’s a very interesting question, isn’t it?" Han muttered. "Han, I don’t like your hints on this." Leia hissed, then she turned to her brother sitting behind Han: "The Loris said they had a few small problems. But now, they seem to have handled them. Probably just a few logistical delays." she explained. "Logistical delays? One should think that a world with more than three spaceports of class 1 should have no problems with her logistical systems." Luke said, frowning slightly. His force senses were tingling and his stomach rumbled like he had eaten a living dianoga or something. "Everything alright, flyboy?" Mara’s voice came over the com. The Fire flew only three lightyears behind them, to give the Falcon a little bit of fire protection, if needed. "Yeah. I’m just..." "... having a bad feeling about this, right?" Han interrupted. "No. I’m just feeling a bit nervous." Luke finished darkly. "Whatever. I HAVE a very bad feeling about this." Han stated stubbornly. "Han, you’re unnerving. The Loris are a very peaceful and cultural developed race. I assure you they don’t plan an assault on us." Leia sounded more than a little bit annoyed and Luke got the feeling that there had been discussions about this matter already before the landing permission had been delayed for a second time. "Right. Civil Wars are a really valuable cultural tradition." Han spit back to his wife. Leia blushed furiously: "As I already tried to explain to you, Solo, this civil war was started by an illegal underground organisation and less than the sixteenth part of the people are involved in it." "How many people live down there?" Mara piped up. "Oh, just seven milliards." Han said in mocking laughter. Leia’s eyes shot blaster bolts at him: "Han, you’ll

lower yourself down there, ok? I don't want you to attack our negotiation partners. Nor the king. Have I made myself clear?" Han snorted, but nodded: "Ok, ok. I won't insult your precious Loris, Madam Chief-of-State. But I'd like to know why you like this birds so much." he muttered. "Birds?" Luke echoed. "You've never seen a Lori?" Leia asked surprised.

Her brother shook his head: "No. Never. Are they really birds?" "You'll see it." Han giggled and added lowly: "Especially the female birds you'll like, I promise." "I've heard that." Leia hissed, smiling sweetly. Luke laughed when Han suddenly concentrated very hard onto the Falcon's controls. 'Don't laugh to hard, Skywalker. I'll watch your gazes down there.' Mara's spiritual voice echoed in Luke's head. He subconsciously perched an eyebrow, as if she would sit right beside him. 'Jealous, Jade? I'm really looking forward to meet a female Lori now. I've always been a very curious man.' Mara's ghost voice snorted and Luke giggled silently. "Besides," his sister continued, "my father, Bail Organa, often had dinners with the Loris. They're wonderful and intelligent beings. I'm sure this civil war is easy to deal with. They honor heros very much." "They do, yes? I can't remember any occasion in which THIS fact has saved us from any mess." Han said casually, then he smiled: "Well, we're coming in on Lor Areo exactly....now." The planet came into view and Han made an appreciating sound. "Huh...at least it looks nicer than it really is." he mumbled. Luke, who'd just had had a little disput with his securing belts, lifted his head to look at the new planet he would visit when he froze in motion and stared in shock. The planet was a ball of rich colors and his large seas were....golden.

Leia sat straight up at the moment she felt the wave of shock coming from her brother. He sat stiffly in his seat, staring down at the beautiful globe which was Lor Areo. "What's wrong, Luke?" she asked irritated. Han turned into his seat: "Hey, everything alright, kid? You ok?" Luke had become pale from one second to the other. "I....I don't know. I only know that this is the planet of my vision." he said with a hoarse voice. Leia's mouth gaped open wide: "What?" she said shocked. "I just...." Han began. "Don't even think about saying this." Leia interrupted him hissing and then lay a hand on Luke's forearm: "You're sure? I mean, you said you couldn't remember much." Luke didn't answer. He was fighting against the feeling of dread and fear menacing to overwhelm his thinking. "Well, that's no big problem. Just ask your droid brain and say me how many planets with golden seas there are in our galaxy." Mara said, choosing exactly the right moment to drag Luke out of his shock. Along with her voice, a feeling of comfort and love poured into his conscious and after a few seconds, he was able to calm down. "Point." Leia sighed. She hadn't to ask 3PO. She knew that there weren't any other planets with golden seas. "Well, I'm sure you'll appreciate my feelings in the future, Princess." Han stated self-satisfied. "Of course. But first, I'll appreciate you shutting your mouth closed." she said coldly. Han made a face in her direction, but soon he grew serious again: "So, what do we do now? If I think about this vision I'd consider it better if we'd bring Luke back to Coruscant. He's in danger here." "I agree with you." Mara said calmly. This words dragged Luke totally out of his daze. "Nonsense. This vision means that I'm needed here. There's some Dark Side user down there and he's expecting me. He even wants me to help him. I'd say it would be rather good to know why." He hoped his voice sounded confident enough to persuade his accompanies. Mara sighed. It sounded not very happy: "Ok. Luke's right. The three of us can't face a Dark Jedi alone. I'm not that skilled with my Jedi abilities." "Besides, the Loris would be very insulted if Luke would let them down now." Leia added. "You really can't imagine how important THIS is to me." Han said sardonically. "Ah, shut up, Solo." Leia growled. Then she turned again to Luke: "And we're still not sure whether this wasn't a dream. I mean, there weren't any reports about something unusual down there. It has not to be true. In fact, the last reports I've seen stated a much better situation than two days before. The Loris seem to have their civil war under control. We just have to clear the rests of them." At that moment, a red light began blinking on the Falcon's comm unit. Han opened the channel and a whistling, soft, but obviously frightened and very nervous voice said: "Millenium Falcon, this is Royal Ambassador Kian Liao from Lorianu. Do you copy?" Leia frowned and bent forwards: "Affirmative, Ambassador Liao. This is Leia Organa Solo, Chief-of-State of the New Republic and Princess of Alderaan. What can I do for you?" The following sigh was filled with relaxation: "Oh, your Excellency, you can't imagine how glad I am to finally get through to you. First, they didn't let me speak to you because I have not the newest clearance codes.

Something terrible has happened. His Royal Highness, King Hukali...he's dead! He has been killed!" Leia paled and Han snorted lowly. "So much for your reports." he muttered.

Luke looked down onto the city of Lorianu, the capital of Lor Areo, when the Falcon approached her landing site. The city was wonderful. The buildings were artworks, real artworks, built from a white stone which shone in mother-of-pearl color when the sunrays met it. He saw almost no speeders driving the streets, but lots of busy, little points. Obviously, the people of Lor Areo didn't know yet about the death of their ruler and were preoccupied with their proper business. Han followed a sensor beacon, leading them to the Palace of Lorianu and Luke had to admit that he had never seen such a beautiful building before. It wasn't great, but his filigranity was overwhelming. So much towers and small wings, glittering with some red-gold metal...he could imagine how breathtaking THIS had to look by sunset, when the golden seas shone brightly as well. Leia was right. This people were very developed concerning culture and arts. He closed his eyes, letting the Force flew down there. He felt the usual caleidoscope of feelings. There was peace and happiness....sometimes a little bit of a storm, but only normal disputes.... And still, somewhere, he could feel the presence of the Dark Side. As if it were down there, IN the planet itself. Really strange. He had to let his guard up, so much was sure.

When they emerged the Falcon, Kian Liao already expected them and Luke finally understood what made the Loris special. Liao was a tall being, almost Han's height (well, for Luke, that WAS tall). He looked powerful. His skin was a chocolate brown, his hairs and eyes a darker sort of this color. Besides, this eyes were big and round, but had no pupils. Luke felt like looking at a blind man and forced himself not to stare at them. But he wondered how Kian actually saw through this colored balls. "Welcome and greetings, Exalted Ones. I hope your landing was well. I'll show you to your quarters. You've to understand: at the moment, the palace is under curfew until the circumstances of King Hukali's death are clear." "Of course we understand. And we would be honored if you would accompany us to our quarters." Leia said, giving him her best smile. "Would we?" Han whispered, smiling that faintly, one almost couldn't see it. Leia ignored him and followed the Ambassador. As Liao turned his back to Luke, the young Jedi could see a pair of two tan, small wings emerging from his shoulders. But it looked not like a bird. It looked...rather ridiculous. "It's really a rarity that a male Lori is allowed to deal with outsiders." Mara's voice whispered into his right ear. He perched an eyebrow. "Why?" "Because of this wings. The usual, male Loris have only this little things there, back on their body. Only the king owns real wings....great ones, I mean. For this, he's the king." she explained lowly. "And what about the women?" Mara grinned: "You'll see. And I'm looking forwards to see your reaction, farmboy." "Me, too." Luke murmured, his curiosity raising. "Master Skywalker? Are you Luke Skywalker?" a high, soft voice asked some meters behind the little group. Luke turned instantly, seeing the breathtaking view of a female Lori talking to some of Liao's accompanies. The being who stood their was barely Leia's height, but incredible lanky and fineboned without being thin. Her skin was a soft, light violet and her hair flooded into heavy, wine-red locks down her body. But the most fascinating thing on her were her wings. She really had wings! And they were huge...well, at least bigger than herself and glittered in the same deep red her hairs were, too. He cleared his throat and called: "I am Luke Skywalker." The girl turned, looked baffled at him, then rushed before him. "Master Skywalker?" she asked uncertainly. Luke nodded. She smiled: "Thank the Winds that I've found you. You've to come with me, at once." she grabbed his wrist and tried to drag him along with her. Luke freed himself softly and lifted his arms: "Calm down. What are you talking about? And, besides, who are you?" The girl's huge red eyes flew through the hanger, as when she expected something. "My name's Karaya. Please, come with me. Now. It's important. You're in a very great danger." "Girl, I'd suggest you vanish instantly. We've a meeting in the Palace. Our guide is waiting." Mara said, laughing. Luke looked back, expecting to see Leia, Han and the Ambassador waiting for them. Instead, he saw closed hatches and doors. And noone but themselves. "Uh-oh. Mar, I think the girl's right." he murmured, his hand sinking to his belt, gripping his lightsaber. Mara followed his gaze, frowned, then murmured: "This still could be a misunderstanding, you know." it didn't sound very confident. "Sure." he answered. He felt them...beings, at least twelve, very close, waiting. But where? They came nearer. He looked around, spying into every little edge of the bay, but he didn't see anything. "There!" Mara shouted. Luke turned around, seeing a huge, male Lori standing inside a maintenance

hatch, blaster ready. A shot flew through the air, missing Mara with at least three meters. Her eyes hardened and before Luke could stop her, she stormed in the Lori's direction. But this Lori hadn't wanted to shoot her. "Mara! Wait! He just wants you to...!" Luke began, but it was too late. Mara had reached the Lori and throw herself onto him. Cuddled together, the two of them roled into the maintenance hatch. Instantly, the hatch closed and shut them both out. "Sith." Luke growled and, igniting his lightsaber, ran towards the hatch. But before he could reach it, a soft whistling, then two, then three caught his attention. It lasted notlong until Luke knew what it was. Gas. And surely not to make the bay smell any better. Obviously, it had no color, for Luke didn't see anything, but soon, he felt it. Already while he was running to the hatch Mara was behind, breathing became difficult. He stopped, trying to get enough oxygen, feeling already the dizziness of lack of air clouding his mind. 'Mar?' he called through the Force, panting for air. "I'm alright. This guy was pretty bad. But I'm sealed in here. Can't get through to you." "Ok." Luke simply answered, calling the Force to him. Slowly, his vision cleared more or less. It was not that difficult for him to breath only the oxygen and letting the poison outside. The girl! He looked around, with his lightsaber humming at his side. A tall, female Lori stood next to the girl and tried to drag her away. Well, he owed the girl something. "Hey! Let her go!" Karaya's big eyes looked at him and she shouted: "No! Run! Go away! Please! I'll be ok!" The taller woman clashed her hand into the girl's face and Luke decided to believe his eyes more than the girl's words. With one wide jump, he was behind the female alien, green energy blade raised. "Let her go! Now!" He suddenly remarked that twelve male Loris stood around him, all staring at his saber above their leader's head, uncertainty in their eyes. The woman turned her head. Yellow eyes stared at Luke, wild, furious, bordered by a flood of deep, tan hairs. She was a lot taller than Luke. But then, most of his former enemies had been much taller than Luke. "Alright. Away with your weapons." her voice was a low, deep growl and Luke felt like she was planning something. The Dark Side flooded around her. Was it the woman from his vision? The male Loris seemed to be irritated, but they did as she said and even stepped back at least ten steps. "Very good. See, there's no need for violence." Luke murmured, surprised about his own victory. That was way to easy. And still, he felt like something was going very wrong here. "I'm giving up." the tall woman said, still growling. Her thin, big wings trembled. Karaya's eyes widened: "No, don't believe...." Instantly, Luke knew someone would attack him. But he had never imagined it would be the woman who held Karaya. And he hadn't imagined it would be the way it was. Her wings moved to her body and then extended again, hitting Luke all over his body...especially his forehead. He was totally surprised and flew across the hanger, clashing cruel against the wall and bumping onto the hard floor. Instinctively, his mouth gaped open in shock and pain. He heard steps approaching him, but it lasted long until he could see clear again...and then, his cloudy mind became aware that he was breathing fast and heavily. The gas still was there! Two strong arms packed his robe and dragged him in a sitting position. The gas did his job already. The last thing he heard before he fainted was the deep voice of the woman: "Never underestimate me, Jedi Knight."

Chapter X

Mara had fumbled quite a time to short circuit the door of this damn maintenance hatch. Through the Force, she could feel Luke's uncertainty and his tension. Fight. On the other side of the door, beings were fighting. And Luke was alone. Finally, after at least six or seven minutes, the hatch slid open. She ignited her lightsaber and rushed forward. Fear and shock flooded into her anger. A huge, female Lori turned to her. She was at least twice her size. But that wasn't the thing whitch shocked Mara. She had killed beings twice the size of this alien. What she was shocked by was the fact that this Lori held Luke in her arms. He was obviously unconscious and injured. Blood covered the left side of his face and streamed out of his nose. Because of her size, the woman could hold him like a child into her arms. In fact, Mara thought to have read something about Lori children being Luke's height. Mara met the Lori's gaze and growled: "I'd strongly suggest you let him go. I can't guarantee for my good manners if you don't." For a second, the Lori watched Mara, then she turned silently and walked in the bay door's direction. Mara heard a giggling: "He can't go, human." "Ok. You did want it that way." but when she began to run after her, she knew she would come too late. The Lori extended her huge, broad wings and jumped down from the hangar bay. "No!" Mara tried desperately to inflict her with the Force, but the only thing she heard was laughter when her poor abilities poured down a wall of the Dark Side she had last experienced by Kueller. The Lori's form

vanished soon when she flew over the golden seas. Only sometimes, Mara could see Luke’s head or his legs, sloshing around like the ones of a doll because of the unsteady flying moves. No...no, that couldn’t be. She had accompanied him in order to help him. And now she stood there, helpless, watching like he was taken away right under her nose. The girl! Were was the girl who had tried to warn them? She knew something. She had to. Mara clutched her still activated lightsaber and turned again. Noone was there but traces of at least a dozen beings. "I’d wish you’d come. I need something to hack it in pieces." she muttered to herself. Then, she tried to remember where the girl had stood when she last had seen her. A low grown lead her to the little Lori who just came to her feet again. Karaya. Yes, that was her name. Karaya saw Mara and came to her, as fast as she could. "Master Skywalker? Where’s he?" she asked frightened, looking around. "Your big friend has hijacked him." Mara said coldly. The girl bleed, but that didn’t matter now. Luke did matter. Karaya seemed to be near to tears: "She’s not my friend." A loud banging from the doors leading into the palace caught Mara’s attention. The girl had a shock. She would talk to her later. Now she would let in the others and try to explain to Leia and Han what had happened. How she knew Leia, the Princess would accuse her to be somehow behind it.

Aleesha had to admit that she was tired when she finally reached her compound. The Jedi Knight was a little being, compared with her, but his weight was not to be ignored if you had to bear it over a distance like the one she had crossed right now. He still lay limp and unconscious into her arms and anew, rage and anger let Aleesha growl. Karaya, this traitor. She had warned him. If she hadn’t been, than she wouldn’t have had to injure Skywalker. The chair could only be used on healthy beings. Aleesha didn’t know much of human bodies, but she was sure that his head was not healthy at the moment. Perhaps he had broken bones, too. She growled again. If she got her hands on Karaya, she would strangle her with satisfaction. Kumo approached slowly. When he got a clear view on the form she was holding, his eyes widened. "Miss Aleesha, what...that’s Luke Skywalker, the Jedi Master!" he exclaimed. "Really? Your eyes are really exceptional good, Kumo." she hissed. It took Kumo several seconds to regain his courage: "Ah...Miss Aleesha, may I remember you that the chair only can be used on..." "Healthy beings, I know. You think I’m outraged because of fun?" she shouted. "O...of course not, Ma’am. But...we have no cells here. And you can’t held a Jedi in an usual chamber." She extended her wings in a furious gecture. This let her look really, really intimidating: "I KNOW." Kumo trembled and stammered: "It’s...not gone well, right?" "No. Not at all. Our plans have to be delayed. Take care of it. I’ll take care of this...this little thing there." she shook her head. She always had imagined a Jedi Master would look different than this one here. He had the features of a Lori, but his skin was almost white and his hairs short and very pale. And he had no wings. Even not the little ones of a male Lori. For her, he looked helpless. A being to protect. Like a pet. She giggled. Well, he would be her pet. A pet with whose help she would conquer the planet and the system. "It doesn’t hurt much. As soon as you give up, it won’t hurt at all."

"I’m afraid I don’t get this straight. What happened exactly?" Han asked tensed. "I don’t know, Han. I was in this maintenance hatch and fought with this male Lori. But she was there." Mara motioned to the little, female Lori who cuddled frightened beside Leia. Her wonderful red wings trembled although they lay around her thin shoulders. "Okay. What was your name again?" Han asked, trying to sound smooth. "Karaya." she whispered. "How old are you, girl?" Leia asked, caressing the soft cheek of the girl. "I’m sixteen." "Pretty young for a Lori to be alone in the town." Mara murmured. Karaya sat up straight: "I had to. I mean, I had to warn Master Skywalker." "From where do you know Luke?" Han asked suspiciously. Karaya’s skin color deepened: "I don’t know him. I’ve never seen him. But my sister...she has told me all she knew about him...althought now... . Now I’m not sure whether I should still believe her words." "And who’s your sister?" Leia’s voice was soft and low. Probably she was using the Force to calm the girl down. "The one who took Master Skywalker away." Karaya’s voice was barely understandable. "What! How can you dare to even come near Luke if your sister..." "Mara, please. You frighten her. Calm down." Han said. "Ok, ok. But she should talk pretty fast now. Who knows what this bitch does to Luke." "Very simple. My sister’s name’s Aleesha. I...I don’t know what happened to her. She’s become bad and perilish. It began two years ago. I don’t know why." "And what does she want from Luke?" Mara asked, as calm as she could.

"She has somewhere found these things one calls cloning cylinders and a chair. Aleesha has taken a scientist from the neighbour planet prisoner and has given him some plans. He has built this chair and created a drug....I don't know how it works in detail, but Master Skywalker will obey her. She...she has also killed His Highness, King Hukali. She's bad....really bad. I finally saw it and wanted to save Master Skywalker. He wanted to rescue me from her and...and she struck him. Then she struck me and I fainted." For a long time, noone spoke. Then, Mara said with a hoarse voice: "The entechment chair. The mind drug. We have to get him back. Soon." "I agree." Han said. Karaya straightened: "I can lead you to our compound. But it won't be that easy. It's amidst the sea." "It's no Death Star." Han murmured.

Luke came to and the only thing he felt was pain. Pain and cold. His head ached like hell and he didn't feel his left hand. Slowly, he sat up and tried to adjust his vision. It took him long minutes to reach a success, but finally, he was able to look around. Not that there was much to be seen. But what he saw let fear raise inside him. Water. All around him. Luke had grown up on a desert world. That much water was really intimidating for him. He inhaled deeply and let the Force flow through him. The fear didn't vanish, but he could control it. Like a Jedi Master should be able to do. "Ok, Luke. Now look around and judge your situation." he murmured. He sat on some huge stone or something, perhaps four meters wide and eight meters long. All around him, he could only see water. Only water. He shuddered. It was cold and damp. The walls were built from permabeton, no possibility to climb. And he would've to climb, because the only door he could see was more than a hundred meters above his position. "Doesn't look good." he sighed and tried to stand up. The world began spinning around and he crumpled down on the floor again. His head obviously got some serious damage. He concentrated and tried to remember what had happened. This huge Lori woman had struck him with her wings. He must have lost consciousness or at least a very big part of it. The only thing he could remember was salty, cold air and a smell he didn't know. He had come to one time, but all he had seen was glittering gold and tan shadows coming into his view and vanishing again. Then, some very cruel moves had pushed him back into unconsciousness again. He crumpled together on the floor in order to maintain his body warmth and focused on the Force. He had to heal his head soon. And then he had to find a way out of this mess. He didn't know how many hours or minutes he had laid there when an air movement let him slowly sit up. "So you're awake, finally, Jedi Knight." He knew this voice. The tall Lori woman stood before him. For her, there was no problem in reaching this stone and flying back to the door. But he was trapped inside. The first really Jedi secure prison he had ever seen. "Who are you?" he asked. "There, eat!" she said demandingly and pushed some bread to him. "I'm not hungry." Luke lied, overwhelmed by the aura of darkness radiating from her. She grinned. Her teeth looked like the one of a vampire. "That doesn't matter to me, Jedi Knight. Eat. I need you healthy." "Why?" he asked, not even glancing in the bread's direction. "You'll see." She came towards him, kneeled down, broke the bread and held him something before his mouth: "Eat, Jedi. It's usual bread. I don't know what Jedi Knights eat, but most creatures eat bread. If you say me what you want, I'll perhaps give it to you. Come now, eat." Luke could only stare at her. She talked to him as if he were a...a...pet. Yes. Jacen talked to his little ballon mouses in this way. "What.." amidst his question, the Lori dragged the bread into his mouth and gave his chin a little, soft struck. Coughing, Luke had to choke the bread down. She smiled and patched his head: "See, it tastes good. It's not poisoned." Furiously and feeling humiliated, Luke jumped onto his feet, but his head didn't allow such a fast movement yet. Darkness ate his view away, he felt when he fell down and knew that the water would catch him. He would faint and couldn't swim. As if through thick clouds, Luke felt something strong but soft catch him and lay him down on the stone again. Luke wasn't unconscious, but he also wasn't able to move or react. "Stupid, little thing." the Lori muttered beside him. "I want to have you healthy." Wings were to hear, then calm. And Luke was caught into this condition of dizziness and weakness. When he got his senses clear again, he was alone, wondering how this situation could possibly fit with his vision. Firstable, he had thought the being from his vision to be a human. But this Lori woman was all but human-like. "The planet was right, at least." He muttered, feeling depressed. Even on his visions he couldn't rely anymore. What did she want from him? And why, by the Force, did she treat him like he were a stubborn pet which didn't want to eat? Luke had never felt that humiliated as now. He sighed. "Ok. Stop mourning and start thinking." Luke said aloud, trying to get back his faith that every problem

could be solved. You needed only time and a few good ideas. Hundred meters were definitely too high to jump, even with the Force. His lightsaber wasn't on his side anymore and even if he still had it...with his wrist, he couldn't possibly climb. Shaking his head, Luke guided the Force into his wrist, trying to find out whether it was broken or not. When pain shot through his arm, he cried out in surprise and stopped short. Anger began to appear in his thoughts. "Really great, Luke. If it isn't an emotional mess you catch, you surely find a worse problem to deal with." he grumbled. Well, ok. Climbing wasn't possible. Swimming neither. With a broken wrist, he would dread after two hundred meters or so. Besides, he neither knew if there were any predator fishes down there in the depths, nor he knew how far away dry land would be if he once was out of this cave. Besides, he didn't even know whether he COULD get out of this cave. He bit his lower lip in order to oppress a curse. Calm. A Jedi maintained calm. Always. "At least, I'll have plenty of time to heal my head." he said to himself, sitting down into meditation position and closing his eyes. Perhaps he would even eat the bread, later.

"It's not that I don't believe you, girl. I just don't trust you." Mara growled. It had been very hard work to get the Loris to give them a little boat and she was hard at her limits of having a good mood. Karaya looked somewhat despaired when she said: "I can't give you any proof that I'm trustworthy. In fact, I understand your doubts, Miss Jade. But I am against my sister's plans and I want to save my world...and Master Skywalker. The fate Aleesha plans for him is really cruel and no being deserves this." Suddenly, the young woman smirked: "Besides, I'm the only one who can lead you to the place Jedi Master Skywalker is kept prisoner." "And that's the only cause you're sitting in this vehicle." Mara snarled. Karaya backed away and when Leia came into the boat, she soon went over to her. Leia sighed: "Mara, I wish you'd stop frightening her. She's our only way to get Luke back." "She wouldn't have to be frightened if she says the truth. But I'm thinking she doesn't say the truth." Mara answered darkly, making clear that her lightsaber was at her hip. A short pain arised in her heart when she saw Luke's lightsaber dangling besides her own. It was really unnerving not to be able to contact him through the Force. She had tried it at least a dozen times during the last hours and everything she could get in return was a mind which didn't answer her at all and didn't radiate any feelings. As long as he was unconscious, she wouldn't be able to find him, even with her Jedi abilities. But then, it had been three hours since she had least tried it. Perhaps, if he was ok and this curious Aleesha-woman had treated him properly (what could at least be a little bit possible), he would be awake now. Mara inhaled deeply and concentrated. She imagined Luke's face, his smile and his voice, trying to find his mind and show him she was there and on her way. 'Luke? Can you hear me? Luke? Please answer me, Luke.' 'Luke? Please answer me, Luke.' Luke's eyes flew open. The feeling of Mara's mind so near to his own was something he still found rather embarrassing. 'Mara?' he sent back questioningly. He felt that his call was very weak. He himself felt not so good. Instead of healing his head, his using of the Force even weakened him more than he already was. Luke wanted to sleep, but he knew that sleep was all but good in a room that cold and damp. He would get sick. He smirked to himself. He wasn't exactly healthy right now, but there was no cause to worsen his condition more than needed. Joy and surprise flooded over him. Mara's strength surprised him. She wasn't that trained. He had to be very weak if her abilities overwhelmed him so much. 'You're awake! Are you ok? Where are you?' her mind asked eagerly. 'I'm ok, I'm...' he wasn't ready for the wave of Dark Side energy which suddenly flooded over him, interrupting the talk with Mara and letting him cry in pain. "Isn't it obvious that you're a prisoner and not allowed to talk to anyone?" the now well known deep voice filled the cave. Luke fought to get control over his body again and succeeded in rolling onto his back. High above him, inside the only door out of this cell, the Loris woman stood. She extended her wings and landed right before him. "You're really stubborn, Jedi Knight. You like pain?" she asked in a nonchalant-voice. "Certainly not." he managed to growl into her direction. "Then I don't understand why you permanently long for it. Either you're totally stupid or totally arrogant." she said. Her wings lay themselves around her shoulders and she kneeled down in front of him. Luke swore that if she would try to feed him again like a baby, he would drag her into the water instantly. Jedi Master or not, there was a point when it was too much. To his surprise, she grinned: "You want to drag me into the water? Try it, little human. I think you'll be surprised. The women of your people may be weak beings, but female Loris are stronger than male Loris. In case you haven't remarked that fact yet, that is." she cooed. "You may be stronger concerning your body, but the Dark Side always

looses in face of the Light Side." he stated, struggling to get on his knees. His arms felt like jelly and now his wrist hurted even when he didn't touch it. Sith-spawn, this Lori really knew what she was doing here. "Ah, a misunderstanding, little man. Light Side, Dark Side...that doesn't matter to me. I don't want to revive the Sith or to extinct the Jedi. I just want to rule my homeplanet. And so, even you doesn't matter much to me. You're a tool. When I've succeeded in ruling my planet, I'll release you and even honor you when you visit me as an ambassador for your precious New Republic. In fact, I always admired your abilities. And wanted to beat you. To show you once that I'm better than you. See, I always want to win, to be better. What a pity that it was so simple to catch you, Jedi Master." she chuckled lowly, pacing around him, eyeing him. "I'm not conquered yet." he said calmly. "Right. But soon, you'll be. I've thought my plans through again. It would be perfect if you'd be in good shape, but I've decided that it will do when you're alive. The satisfaction of seeing you in pain is more worthy to me. For this, I'm able to wait with my plans." Luke raised an eyebrow. He would prefer it to stand before her, but he knew he would broke down again if he tried. So, he was content to sit and to be able to talk to her. He wanted answers to his questions and he could only get them from her. "What plans?" "You'll see, my dear Jedi Master. But as I already said, I want to see you suffer." She moved beside him, still on his height of eyes and smiled. "You don't look that bad that I'm frightened by it." Luke said ironically. She grinned more broadly and at the next second, her wings extended forcefully, shoving him off of the stone and into the water. He had to lay an eye on this damn wings. It became ridiculous how he always let himself being tempted to ignore the danger they embodied. The water was cold and thick. The next thing he had been tempted by. The water hadn't only the color of gold, it even was almost as thick as the fluent metal. Swimming was very difficult and cost much power. His wrist ached like hell when he surfaced some two meters away from the stone. There had to be some water flow down there. His situation became worse with every minute he was in this Lori's hands. She stood there and laughed amused. "Very funny." he coughed. "You sure you don't want to take your toys and play with a doll house again?" he shouted over to her. She laughed even more loud. "Pretty sure, Jedi. I only want to make you tired. In five hours, I will start my offensive and you'll steer my army. Until then...enjoy your bath." She jumped into the air, when massive duraglass walls emerged and enclosed the stone he had lay on only minutes ago. There was no possibility for him to climb on this piece of dry land again. "I think you're underestimating my abilities." he said. He could easily jump over the glass walls. And with the Force, he even would be able to swim five full hours. Some openings into the walls he had not seen before slided open and revealed some long, fuzzy, snake-like creatures. Luke froze in shock, almost loosing his rhytm of swimming. Ysalamiri! "I do, yes?" the Lori whispered and flew to the door. "I thought you'd delay your plans." he shouted, trying to make her stay. If he provoked her, then she would perhaps fly near enough for him to catch her foot or her wing. She laughed again: "Well, you'll soon see how loung five hours can be." with that, she vanished and left Luke alone with a growing fear clutching his heart. Without the Force, he had to rely on his condition in order to not to dread. And he really didn't knew whether he would be able to stay this five hours. The cold of the water, its thickness and his injuries weaked him already now. And his hurting wrist didn't make anything better. He didn't know how long he could bear the pain the swim movements caused. "Well, now you've reached it. You are in a really bad mess, Luke Skywalker." he muttered.

"Uh-oh. I think we should go there fast. Really fast." Mara suddenly said. Every face into the little boat turned to her. "What do you mean?" Han asked. "I mean that I was able to contact Luke. He was awake and he wanted to say me something. And then, the contact broke down." she explained, trying to hide her fear. "Aleesha soon will start with her plans. I'm sure. But she has no allies into the town...well, at least not anymore, because I work with you. That means the people are secure as long as Aleesha stays on our compound. Of course, if she gets Master Skywalker under her control, noone on this whole planet will be secure anymore." Karaya muttered. "Oh, you really know how to crack me up." Han grumbled. "Still! Disputes don't have any use for us. Karaya, beside of this clone army you have talked about...has your sister any other forces?" "No. She has relied totally on them because noone beside me knew her plan. So, noone would fight against her before her army would attack." "She's really a nice one, he?" Mara mocked. "I'm sure YOU'll like her." Leia hissed towards her. Mara shot angry glances at her, but didn't comment. After a few minutes in which only the water punching

against the boat could be heard, Han cleared his throat: "Karaya, how big is your compound? I mean, do you know where Luke could be?" "I'm very sure of it, yes. See, he was injured. And Aleesha needs him healthy. That means she has to search for a room she can keep him in while he's healing. And there's only one place into our house where a Jedi could be held for longer time." "Perfect. That makes it easier." Mara stated contently, but when Karaya suddenly stood up and extended her wings, she jumped to her feet and raised her blaster: "What will that be, little bird?" she asked growling. Karaya stared shocked at the weapon, then stammered: "I...you need at least six hours from now on to reach it. I'm much faster. I'll need only five if I hurry. I could look how the situation is." "Or warn your sister." Mara replied smiling nicely. "Mara, stop it now. She's on our side. Besides, I think that's a rather good idea." Han interrupted. Karaya smiled at him, then she jumped into the air and vanished soon. "She's really fast." Leia muttered. "Wonderful. Do we all trust a little bird who's related with the bad one." Mara spit out. Noone answered her.

Chapter XI

It was too much. He was finished. His left arm couldn't barely be moved and his legs and his right arm were totally exhausted. White points danced before his eyes and he felt when his legs refused to move more. For somewhat of two minutes, he maintained his balance, relying fully on his right arm and the few power his left arm could still provide. But at the same moment his view became tan, his arms gave up, too. When Luke opened struggling his eyes again, his view was filled with gold. It lasted full two seconds until he understood that he was under water. Two more seconds later he became aware that his mouth was open wide. In a futile attempt to come to the surface again, which he could see at least half a meter above his head, he dragged every little trace of energy he still had out of his body. His limbs didn't obey his brain anymore. The lack of oxygen made him tired and his thoughts became foggy. Desert boy dreads! He would have laughed if he had had the power to do it. Well, at least, he thought weakly, this Lori would never get him to help her. He would be dead in a few seconds. As far as he could concentrate, he was under the water for quite a time now. At the next moment, he had lost consciousness. Luke never felt Aleesha dragging him out of the water and carrying his limp body with her through the various floors of her stronghold.

Karaya panted for air when she reached the opening which lead to the cave she mused Skywalker would be in. She had flown as fast as she could and it had took her four hours and fortyfive minutes to reach her goal. It was her personal record, but this was not important now. Master Skywalker was important. She slid into the small opening and ran over to the second opening which went into the cave. It couldn't be seen from any point within the cave itself which was the cause that Aleesha didn't know about it. She waited until her eyes had adjusted to the sudden darkness, then looked around, searching the form of the human man she wanted to save. "Oh no." she mumbled when she saw him down into the water. He still was some hundred meters under her point of view and looked very small. He seemed to have to struggle in order to stay over the water's surface, but she couldn't be sure over this distance. However, it would be good if she would fly down and help him out. She just was about to start, when she saw her sister emerge from the only real door in the cave. Aleesha mustn't see her. She couldn't fight against her. Her big sister was much taller and stronger than she, Karaya would loose. All she could do was watch and later tell the other humans who would come to rescue Skywalker. Aleesha jumped down into the cave, flew directly above the water and fished the Jedi Master out, who was under the water for almost a minute now. She didn't remark Karaya when she flew back to the door. Skywalker coughed on her shoulder and tried weakly to push her away, but he wasn't able to. How long had he been into the water? Aleesha carried him away, probably barely remarking his weight.

Karaya followed her sister silently, hoping the Jedi Master would wake up. But he didn't. She couldn't see whether he was dead or just unconscious. Desperately, she looked around. Why didn't they come, Leia, Han and Mara? Aleesha would only need a few minutes to prepare the Jedi. Then, everything would be lost. At this moment, she heard the low humming of a boat coming in into the cave. Aleesha froze and her eyes narrowed. But the humming had stopped already, so she continued her path. Karaya waited ten seconds until she dared to breath again, then turned and ran back into the cave's direction. She swung herself into the air and soon landed beside the small group. "You have to hurry!" she shouted, breathing heavily. "Why all

of a sudden?" Han growled sardonically. "She's on her way with him. You have only minutes." The three of them froze: "But it will take time to get to this door above us." Leia said shocked. Karaya looked at her, seeming frightened, then she looked at Mara. She throw herself at her and pressed her at her body. "Hey, what the hell... Are you crazy?" Mara shouted enraged. Karaya didn't answer. Instead, she began to move her wings as fast and as strong as she could. Slowly, she and Mara were lifted into the air. Mara's eyes widened: "Oh...I see." she looked at Karaya's closed eyes, her tensed face, the perspiration appearing on her forehead. "Come on, little bird." she whispered softly. The Lori smiled weakly, but after two minutes, they had reached the door. Mara smiled thankfully: "Stay here and take Han and Leia, too. I'll take care of your sister." with this words, she began to ran.

Luke was barely awake. First, he was very surprised and very glad that he wasn't dead. But then, he felt that he was lying on something hard...well, at least harder then the water. The vision! The entechment chair! He had to stay up, now! It wasn't until this moment that he realized the restraining devices lying around his ankles, waist, his forehead and his wrists. He tried desperately to free himself, but his muscles still were totally exhausted from his indeliberatly five hour-bath. And after the first second he tried, he knew the Ysalamiri still were there. "Calm, Master Skywalker. If you're calm it won't hurt that much." a sad, male voice sad lowly beside his ear. Luke could finally open his eyes a bit and saw a thin human smiling pitifully at him. "Who..." he began, only to find out that his stand of oxygen still was too low. "My name's Kumo. I want you to know that I don't do this deliberately. She threats my family...my children." the man answered. "We...I...can help-" Luke coughed, feeling sea water in his lungs. "No, you can't. I' m really sorry." Kumo murmured and instantly, Luke felt the soft pain when the tube was being pushed into his throat. His conscious faded away again. Without the Force, there was no way to fight against the drug. Suddenly, it flew through him, strong and pure. The Force! How.... Didn't matter. He had to concentrate on the drug. In his condition, he would have really big problems to fight against it, but now, he had at least the possibility to try.

Mara stormed into the chamber in which the passageway ended, lightsaber activated before her. The huge Lori stood at the edge of the room, hissing like a predator in her direction. Then, she giggled: "Too late, human." Mara's eyes flew to the other side and widened in shock and disbelief when she saw Luke. He was totally wet and the tube already stuck into his throat. He didn't move and the glittering blue fluid streamed into his body. Pale, eyes closed and mouth open, he looked like he was dead. "No..." Mara whispered. Aleesha grinned, then motioned in Luke's direction. "In a few seconds, I'll be able to remove the Ysalamiri and he'll kill you." The Ysalamiri! Mara now saw the fuzzy creatures, sitting in her nutrient cages in the midst of the room. Perhaps it wasn't too late yet. With two wide steps, she was beside the creatures. "Sorry, but this is important."she muttered, cutting the animals into halves with one clear strike. Aleesha laughed, slightly hysterically: „You think that would help him? I will...ahh.“ Mara saw a thin human throwing and slashing with a vibro knife at the Lori woman. She didn't know who he was, but he had chosen quite a good time to participate in this play. Fastly, she went beside the chair Luke lay in. His eyelids trembled, giving sign of his fight to come to again as she mused. She concentrated and let her own strength flow into his mind while she opened the restraining devices. She carefully lay his arm around her shoulders and helped him to sit up. He coughed and finally looked at her, eyes still cloudy, but awake. „Mara?“ he whispered weakly. „Yeah. I said to you I wouldn't let you go that fast, didn't I?“ she said, smiling broadly. „Yeah.“ was all he managed to say. Slowly, she helped him to raise. He coughed a few times, then stood more or less firmly. „Can you move? We have to go out of here.“ Mara pushed some wet strands out of his face. He would see more and besides, the touches helped him to stay awake. "No...we've to destroy the cylinders." he said, freeing himself from her grasp. Now, that the Force was with him again, he could at least move. Mara sighed, but nodded. Her warm hand in his was a feeling he didn't know he could enjoy so much. "Nooo!" Aleesha cried. She succeeded in trashing Kumo off of her back. He flew trough the air and landed in Mara's arms, who stumbled back and fell into a bunch of nutrient packages used to fee clones.

Luke had to struggle a few seconds to regain the balance when Mara was ripped off of his side. When he stood straight again, the huge Lori woman stood right before him. He had succeeded

in conquering the drug’s influence, but he felt weak and very dizzy. Luke didn’t know whether he would be able to stand a fight. The Force would help him, but it would help her, too. "You’ve no chance, Jedi. The best would be if you lie down again and await your destiny." she hissed. "I don’t think so. Now, we’re equal. You’re injured." he motioned towards the deep wounds Kumo’s vibroknife had left onto her wings. "Little scratches, nothing more." she grunted, obviously lying. "Of course." he said smiling. Her left wing trembled in a steady pattern. If he could...now. Luke throw forwards, grasping her wing and hanging his whole weight on it. With a startled cry, the Lori went to the floor, right onto him. He swung his right arm around her throat and tried to roll onto her, but she obviously didn’t feel like giving up. Her wings moved fast and strong, hammering onto his head, his shoulders and he knew his power would fade soon. Even the Force couldn’t compensate too much exhaustion. He hoped that the Lori was weaker.

Mara was covered by heavy nutrient packages and it didn’t look like she could free herself soon, despite she tried desperately. She saw how Luke and Aleesha cuddled together on the floor, her wings moving steady and punching and beating Luke permanently. Mara could feel how the Force flew through him, but she could also feel that he was losing his strength sooner and sooner. Sith, she had to help him. At the next moment, blaster shots cut through the air and the first line of cloning cylinders behind Luke and Aleesha exploded. The Lori cried for rage and jumped onto her feet, freeing her wings with one heavy, incredible powerful move, thrashing Luke into the passageway, back into the cave. "Destroy the cylinders, Madam Chief-of-State! Destroy the cylinders and the chair!" the thin man beside Mara suddenly shouted and pushed Mara up with his legs. Leia and Han, blasters raised, hesitated. Luke was in the passageway and Aleesha, who saw that she couldn’t stand against two blasters and a lightsaber, blocked his way back to his friends. They could barely see how he stumbled to his feet to face the Lori again. "Do it! I’ll take care of Luke!" Mara shouted, looking around for her lightsaber. She didn’t see it and shrugged. "Well, let’s see how your weapon fits me, Skywalker." she murmured, igniting the green energy blade. "Aleesha! Our last meeting wasn’t finished when you decided to leave me!" Aleesha just hissed and began to run back into the cave. Luke followed her instantly after he had rose again. Aleesha just had pushed him away with her wings. Mara was soon beside him. "I definitely hate this wings." he growled. "To weak, Jedi Master?" Mara grinned. "Do I look that way?" He asked back, smiling mischievously. Mara watched him from the side. He was pale, wet and his eyes had dark rings under them. "Definitely yes." she laughed. "Don’t trust your eyes. Where’s the girl...Karaya?" Mara frowned: "Interesting question." she murmured. They reached the cave’s door when Aleesha just was about to jump into the air. Before Mara could stop her with her lightsaber, Luke jumped himself right onto Aleesha’s back and let his weight being dragged back from gravity. The Lori cried but it was obvious that she couldn’t maintain her balance for long. Mara didn’t also think long. She joined Luke and tried to hold the huge wing she clinged to still. "Give up! We have you!" Luke shouted. Mara thought that he didn’t look that confident, but of course she didn’t say anything about it. "If I die, then I’ll take you with me!" the Lori exclaimed. She stepped over the edge of the floor and fell down into the water. Neither Luke nor Mara were able to let her wings go in time.

The arrival was hard, very hard, but Mara was awake. She opened her eyes just in time to see the hand trying to grasp her throat. The vampire like face of Aleesha grinned to her. The Lori must have decided to die, really. But Mara had no wish to join her. Perhaps she wasn’t that tall as this witch, but she had been the Emperor’s Hand. And the Emperor’s Hand could kill with everything. Also with her hands and her body. She swung her legs around Aleesha’s waist, her arms around her neck and moved short, but forceful. Everything happened within seconds and despite the water, Mara was still powerful enough. She always took care of herself being in tip-top shape. Aleesha’s hand became powerless and her now dead body moved away with the stream at the bottom of the cave. Mara surfaced again and inhaled deeply. Well, twenty-five seconds. She became old. In the twenty-sixth second, the thought of Luke struck her. Where was he? He obviously wasn’t surfaced. "Oh, Sith." she swore. She gathered a little bit of oxygen and went under water again. An advantage of gold water was the light which always was there. Of course, if Luke was too far away she wouldn’t be able to see him.... There. He must have been under Aleesha when they had hit the surface because he had slid that deep

that the stream had caught him. Mara started to swim in his direction. He saw her and smiled weakly while thrashing and kicking to get out of it. 'Hang on, farmboy, I'm coming.' she smiled back, but she knew she would come too late. The water was too thick, she couldn't swim as fast as under usual circumstances. 'I can't....' his voice whispered only moments before she saw his movements stop. 'No, Luke. You can. Swim. Swim!' Mara shouted, but he didn't hear her anymore. The stream caught him entirely and he slid away. The water was too soon and Mara too slow. When she reached the place he had fought for his life, the shadow of his body was already ten meters away. 'No' Mara whispered shocked. Mechanically, she swam to the surface. Over there, Han and Leia stood at the door. "Hey, where's Luke?" Han shouted. Mara couldn't see his face and she also didn't want. She really didn't want. "He's down there." she whispered, trembling. Mara stared at the golden waves, imagining Luke's lifeless body being carried away into the open sea... Splashing behind her let turn her. The last she could need now was some meateating fish... "Oh good gods." she exclaimed. "You've lost something?" Karaya grinned. The Lori had no problem to stay on the surface with her wings and on her shoulders, a pale face rested....Luke's face. "Luke!" Mara swam over to the Lori, but Karaya was already on her way to the small boat resting at the cave's wall. When Mara reached the boat, the girl had already dragged Luke's unmoving body aboard. Fear clutched Mara's heart. He still could be dead. She pushed herself into the vehicle and kneeled down beside him. "Luke? Hey, come on, breath." she said, shaking him frantically, letting the Force flew through him. He coughed weakly. She doubled her efforts and suddenly, Luke exploded in coughing and panting for air, eyes opened wide. He saw Mara and smiled: "Well, if this is dead then it's not so bad." his voice was hoarse and he trembled, but he was alive. "Don't you dare to frighten me again in this way, you stupid Dinko-brain." she sobbed, embracing him strongly. "Well, if you believe it or not, I didn't choose it." he giggled, but soon had to cough again. Mara laughed. She saw Karaya bringing Leia down. Han would follow soon. "Let's get you home, Luke. You need warmth, I'd say." Luke only nodded and rested his head on her shoulder, closing his eyes.