

Chapter 4

Puppets

Naboo is a funny place to hold a funeral. Voldemort knew that these events were supposed to be dampened by mist and underscored by the plaintive strains of bagpipes. The rain was supposed to meld with tears, turning the ground into a sodden black muck that sucked at everyone's Sunday shoes.

But not on Naboo. The fairy-tale planet refused to mute its colors despite the sadness. The mourners wore their usual technicolor garb, which seemed far gaudier given the circumstances. There was rain, but the rich blue of the raindrops only accentuated the deep green of the cemetery grass and the massive tree above. Even the headstones performed a vibrant symphony of marble and granite.

Voldemort was the only one wearing black. He had fashioned a new cloak out of the banner he removed from the grand court. He was still carrying the colorful quill.

As Senator Ovaltine and his wife's caskets were lowered into the ground, nobody cried. Instead, the throng cheered and threw colorful berries and flowers into the graves. Naboo's sun broke through the pure white clouds and cast the airborne offerings in silhouette against a brilliant rainbow.

It was, by far, the most unsatisfying funeral Voldemort had ever been to.

Funerals are supposed to suck, Voldemort thought. He never failed to enjoy them, even after causing so many. But

these people could make him lose his taste for a good burial. Maybe if he put them through a few more, they'd learn better. As it was, these people made him want to toss breakfast.

Voldemort had planned his mission. He had made sure to stay away from the new Senator, which wasn't hard. The kid was always being ferried around within a cloud of staffers. Voldemort had already introduced himself to them, pretending to be a political consultant. On Earth, he had always wanted to try it. The job seemed to be a good match for his personality.

The way Naboo's politics worked, the boy could serve the last year of his father's term, and then would have to run on his own, for a maximum of two terms. Voldemort planned to teach him dark magic, and make him so effective in his one year that the people would remember him decades from now.

All Voldemort had to do was get the boy under the Imperius curse, and he could get started with his training. Soon, he would have his chance, when the staff would leave the boy to mourn his parents alone. Voldemort had gleaned this by listening intently to the thoughts of several staff members.

Finally, the ceremony broke, and the crowd lined up to hug the boy. Voldemort shuffled away quietly to find a place where he could keep an eye on young Palpatine.

"Pity we haven't found the killer," said a voice.

Voldemort turned around to face an opulently-dressed young woman whose hair was done up like a plate of nachos. He recognized her immediately as the Queen. He had never

met such friendly people. He was used to muggles running and screaming, not trying to chat him up.

“Yes. Pity,” replied Voldemort.

“But wasn’t it a splendid funeral?”

“No, they should have been buried alive in a box full of tarantulas,” Voldemort said, sweeping a hand through the air.

“Yes, that would have been perfect,” said the Queen, walking away with her confused handlers in tow.

Voldemort found the Jedi mind trick a very useful tool, though it wasn’t as thoroughly manipulative as the Imperius curse. He was astounded by how rare magic actually was on Naboo. Nobody else seemed to have it, though his own powers were increased. If all he wanted was to take over the planet, he could probably accomplish it within days, without bloodshed.

But where was the fun in that?

The boy Senator obviously had to have powers if he was going to become the bolt-throwing fiend Voldemort knew he would be. At this point, he had to determine exactly how powerful the brat was.

Finally, the last of the crowd got into their little hovercars, while the staffers retreated into the nearby chapel. Voldemort saw his chance. He apparated into the huge tree and swung upside down just above the boy.

“Hello again,” Voldemort said.

Palpatine opened his mouth to scream, and Voldemort put a finger to his lips and passed his hand through the air. The boy fell silent, but tears began to stream down his cheeks.

“You remember!” said Voldemort with a broad grin. He looked down at the grave, with the two caskets side by side, floating in a sea of flowers and berries.

“Do you miss your family?” Voldemort asked. The boy nodded tearfully. “Of course you do. Want them back?”

Palpatine’s eyes widened as Voldemort pulled out his quill and aimed it at the caskets. They opened. The two bodies rose and started to dance a foxtrot in midair like ghoulish marionettes. Palpatine stared in disbelief, looking like he was about to run, but he could not. Voldemort’s mind trick kept him silently rooted to the ground with tears flooding his eyes.

Voldemort grinned at the boy’s silent hysterics. He brought the bodies closer and opened their eyes.

Suddenly, Palpatine screamed. Voldemort nearly fell out of the tree in shock. The boy had broken through his mind trick. This was unnerving and gratifying at the same time.

Voldemort looked toward the chapel to see the doors opening. He had only seconds to raise his quill and cast his curse. Then he disappeared.

The staffers came running from the chapel. They approached Palpatine and saw his two parents lying on the ground next to him.

“What happened here?” they asked him. “Are you okay?” The question was multi-leveled. The staffers expected the Senator to be upset, but this behavior appeared insane.

“I’m sorry,” Palpatine cried loudly.

“Oh, Palpie, what did you do?”

The boy Senator stood there bawling, when Voldemort came running from behind a nearby tomb. “Please, please don’t be angry with him,” he said. “Clearly he’s distraught.”

The staff members glared at him. “You should not be-“
“I’ve seen this before,” Voldemort said. “Separation anxiety. Misses his parents so much. You understand.”

“What do you know of it? You’re just a consultant-”

“Yes, yes. Politicians. Seven-year-old boys. Same thing,” Voldemort said as he patted the boy on the shoulder. “He needs guidance to navigate this crisis.”

“From you?” demanded the chief of staff angrily.

Voldemort ignored him and turned toward Palpatine. “Senator, allow me to be chief advisor,” he said. “I will help you deal with your new responsibilities.”

Palpatine looked up at Voldemort and nodded, barely perceptibly. The staffers were aghast.

“What? Senator?” one staffer yelled.

“You can’t be serious!” yelled another.

“You heard him,” said Voldemort, then he turned to Palpatine. “Senator, we must begin to work on your agenda.”

“What? He needs to mourn-” said the chief of staff.

Voldemort cut him off with his hand, chuckling. “I’m sorry, did you hear the Senator? Who do you work for now?”

The staffer stared at him angrily.

“I said, who do you work for now?” Voldemort yelled, pointing a slender white finger at the man’s head.

The staffer answered grudgingly, “You, sir.” Back on Earth, he would have been trembling before the Dark Lord.

“Good,” Voldemort said, barely able to contain himself. Normally, he would have zapped the staffer out of existence. He backed away and they all stood there looking at each other.

Now that he was boss, Voldemort took stock of his crew. There was the chief of staff, who was clearly an idiot. He would be annoying, but not a threat. There was a technology staffer who was probably a genius, but could be easily manipulated if one pretended to be his friend. The fundraising guy was a complete phony, nothing more than a smile and an ego. Voldemort actually liked him. His only problem would be the woman, a communications consultant. She was fairly smart and meddlesome, and Voldemort figured it wouldn’t be long before he had to turn her into a rodent.

“Well, then. The Senator and I have a lot of work to do,” Voldemort said. Then he gestured to the two bodies lying at his feet. “The rest of you, clean up this mess.”

Voldemort led Palpatine away between the gravestones. The staffers watched them go and then started to return the dead parents to their caskets. They were unsure what really happened, but they could not believe they would now be working for this skinny, white, snakelike stranger.

As soon as Voldemort and Palpatine were out of sight, they disappeared. Voldemort figured his enhanced power could cover the great distance required. The boy’s training in the ways of politics and dark magic could now begin.

Voldemort and the boy appeared out of nowhere in the middle of a beautiful, lush village. Children ran around with giant lollipops and balloons. A miniature train ran through the middle of the street, loaded with laughing kids and smiling parents. Giant furry cartoon characters bounced around with their disturbing perma-grins, hugging the boys and girls who gathered around them.

Nearby, families gorged themselves in front of a restaurant called the Cantina. A familiar tune emanated from within the building.

Voldemort chuckled. He knew where he had taken the young Senator to begin his magical training, but did not expect it to look like this. He could still train the boy here, but would need a different approach. Palpatine wore a look of scared surprise, as if he wanted to say something. Voldemort suddenly remembered he had put the boy under the Imperius curse.

“Go ahead, Senator. Speak,” Voldemort said.

“Where are we?” asked Palpatine.

Voldemort was just about to answer, when a woman dressed as a puppet in a ball gown skipped toward them, laughing. She crouched to meet Palpatine at eye level and handed the boy a stick of pink cotton candy. As she embraced him, another cartoon character snapped a photo of the three.

“Welcome to Mos Eisley,” said the clown-faced woman. “You will never find a more perfect paradise of joy and tranquility!”

“Well,” Voldemort answered. “We can fix that.”