

Chapter 5

An Old Song

Now that there was coffee again, the line for the kitchen stretched halfway down the corridor. Darth Vader had to get pretty nasty with the supplier to make it happen. He got nowhere with his angry email to the lying rep, and the sales director blew him off. He finally had to talk to the quadrant VP. It was the first time he had choked someone long distance.

It happened by accident. Vader thought about what he would do if the VP was sitting in the room with him, and he suddenly heard a choking sound through the speakerphone. Before he figured out what was going on, the line, and the VP, went dead.

When three pallets of coffee arrived the next day, Vader didn't feel so bad. The mug full of dark roast sitting on his desk was testimony to the importance of being a dedicated customer.

With the Emperor gone and the Grand Moff at a conference, Vader was the only one in charge. He decided he was going to find out why his Master was taking so many vacations. He headed down to Administration, where his contact Corinda might be able to dig up a classified itinerary or two. Vader imagined all the items he would find. Golf, massage, tequila, deep sea fishing, more tequila. He wondered what porn flicks the Emperor would order in the hotel.

Vader was getting better at keeping Palpatine from reading his mind. Just a few months before, he would never

even dream of looking into the boss's travel plans. As he opened the door to the Administration office, Corinda looked up and smiled broadly. She was an attractive young woman with fair skin, deep red hair, and four arms.

"Whaddaya need, big guy?" she asked. A visit from Vader was obviously the highlight of her day.

"Hello, Corrie, I need to see the Emperor's agenda,"

"Anything for you, my... Lord," Corinda said in a breathless, sultry voice that made Vader raise his eyebrows.

"Nobody can know of this," Vader warned her.

"Honey, it'll be our little secret," she whispered as she twirled over to the file cabinet and rifled through the drawer.

"Oh! That's right, these are in the classified files," she said scandalously, looking over her shoulder at Darth Vader. Then she bent over, reaching for the bottom drawer.

Vader looked away and took note of the walls, which were the faded blue color of a robin's egg. His heart still ached for his dead wife, and using Corinda for a few bits of info felt like it somehow violated Padme's trust. It seemed wrong.

On the other hand, he was Darth Fucking Vader. His conscience was a huge problem if he was going to be the right-hand man to Emperor Palpatine. He tried mightily to suppress it using meditation, but there was no relief. He was sure the Emperor could sense this, and it was holding him back.

Corinda handed over the itinerary, making sure to feel Vader's synthetic hand. He read it, memorizing every detail.

“Thank you, Corinda,” Vader said, handing it back to her. “This never happened. I was never here.”

“Our secret, baby,” Corinda said with a grin as she took the document. Vader turned and left, and she practically skipped back to her desk, giggling.

Darth Vader walked the halls quickly, thinking of the itinerary. What did the Emperor need on Tatooine? This was the third time he had gone there in as many months. The desert planet was no place for a relaxing respite. People did come from nearby systems for the Bantha hunt, but the season was now over. This time of year, the planet was closest to its two suns, and at its hottest.

The Emperor had met with Jawas, an irrelevant species that scraped out a meager existence as scavengers. There was no need for the leader of the Galactic Empire to do business with them, unless he was looking for something. Maybe they had found it, whatever it was. Vader decided to do some hands-on investigation. He quickly packed a bag and headed for his galactic transport.

The men scattered as Vader entered the hangar. “Ready my ship,” he demanded. The attendants scrambled to fuel up and charge Vader’s fighter prototype, painted black to meet his requirements. He had demanded a great deal from the engineers on this one. It had two laser cannons on the end of each wing, and the wings could separate in combat, providing stability and “greater fire radius” according to the engineers.

This meant it could incinerate an awesome number of people for such a small ship. It was only about 13 meters long.

Most importantly, it had just been fitted with a Hyperdrive, which made the thing infinitely more useful.

There was only one problem. If Vader left, nobody would be in charge of the facility. Six more prototypes were due before the Emperor returned, and Vader was sure that none of the dolts at the facility were competent enough to handle it. He needed a scapegoat.

Vader handed his bag to one of the attendants, and it promptly opened, spilling Vader’s personal gear all over the deck. There were batteries for his breathing system, a spare light saber, a resealable bag full of cheese puffs, fungicide cream, and several pairs of brightly colored speedos. Everybody looked and immediately turned away. The man who dropped the bag’s contents knelt and stared at the floor.

Darth Vader grabbed the light saber at his hilt and powered it up. Its brilliant red beam lit the room, and its hum was familiar to most of the men in the building. He was just about to run the man through when he realized he had probably left the bag open himself. He had nearly forgotten his batteries and threw them in at the last minute. He powered down his weapon and beckoned the man to stand.

“You will certainly die, but not today,” Vader said to the attendant. “In my absence, I choose you to oversee the assembly of the prototypes.”

The man nodded, his eyes full of fear.

“Fail me in this task, which I presume you will, and I will destroy you then.”

“Yes, my Lord,” the attendant said, standing straighter now. He had accepted his task, though it was a likely death sentence. There was almost no possibility he would succeed.

Darth Vader knelt to put his belongings away himself, and then loaded the bag onto the ship. Within a minute, he was blasting out of the planet’s atmosphere toward Tatooine. He put on the autopilot and set the sound system to provide nonstop polka music.

After nearly a day’s travel, Vader arrived at Tatooine. He flew low over the planet’s desolate surface and looked down at his old stomping grounds. He saw the junkyard he worked in as a slave, the neighborhood he lived in, and the town where men from the village used to go to gamble.

The town had a story to it. It was built around some old starship wreckage, but before that it had been a kind of resort, full of lush trees and amusements. People came from many systems away to enjoy the gardens and luxurious baths that left people with clearer skins and rejuvenated libidos.

There was more to it than that, of course. Tatooine had no surface water because of the heat of its two suns. But as local lore told it, the earliest colonists found a spring from a vast aquifer, and built the resort around it. They hoped to find more springs like it, but never did. The novelty of the single oasis was enough to draw visitors. It was like getting a photo of the last Koritian Elk or licking the last bright blue Dorian Frog.

The death of the town came quickly when the ship crashed. The geyser that erupted afterward exhausted the aquifer, cutting off the last economic resource Tatooine had. By the time Vader was a boy, the place had already joined the rest of the planet as a warning to the rest of the galaxy.

Mos Eisley. It meant “Place of final waters.” There wasn’t a drier location on the entire planet. Whatever the Emperor had found, he would have to operate through the crime industry. Someone here would know how to track him.

Vader landed and entered the town. The place looked much like the hovel he remembered. People looked up at him, and then quickly looked down, realizing who he was. They parted in the streets to let him through.

He walked past the Cantina, and heard that familiar song, the only song ever played there. “Tatoo, Tatoo, Tatooine. How I love to come and hit the scene.” Vader chuckled. The words were a remnant of a bygone era, and could not have sounded more out of place in this smoking shell of a town.

“Run!” yelled a voice from around a corner. Several men came running, followed by Storm Troopers. It became apparent that they were not running from the Troopers, but all of them were running from something together.

Vader heard a loud crash, and a cloud of dust and debris rose from beyond a building. He then heard the familiar buzzing sound of the Emperor’s electric attack. There was another explosion, and black smoke began to burst into the sky. All around Vader, people scrambled into buildings and shut up

the doors and windows as best they could. Through the din, he could still hear the idiotic song from the Cantina.

Suddenly, through the rising dust, Darth Vader saw the Emperor moving backwards, still shooting bolts of electricity at something, or somebody. He had never seen the Emperor so furious, nor putting so much effort into his attacks.

Then Vader saw another figure emerge from the smoke. It was the creature from the photographs, a tall, thin, stark white being in a black cloak. He was waving a stick at the Emperor, and causing massive damage to buildings nearby.

The creature waved the stick and threw the Emperor's bolts back toward him. Palpatine deflected the bolts by throwing barrels and carts into their way. The white being blasted them to bits with his own attacks, creating balls of fire far larger than the materials they were made of should allow.

Vader had never seen anything like it. Who dared to take on the Emperor? Nobody left in the galaxy could have the power, or even the balls. There was no way the good side of the Force could meet the Emperor's skills like this.

“Master!”

The Emperor looked his way, only for an instant.

“Vader! What are you-” The Emperor screamed, deflecting a ball of flame from the white being. He threw it at a building and the explosion cratered the wall. The white being stood firm. “Never mind! I- Need- Your- Help!”

Vader powered his light saber and ran toward the battle.