

In a moment, he was alone.

Ezra looked around, feeling the familiar warm, soothing, and open sensation of the Force. It reached out to him, almost hesitantly, before latching on, the feelings of warmth suffusing him. He had experienced this before, too many times to count, enough that he had learned to recognize it as well as his own limbs. Of course, that was before his time away, before his time under the heel of Thrawn.

Now he had new limbs, the gentle embrace of the Force saving him from suffering through that process.

The young Jedi, the young Force-sensitive, let out a breath, releasing the echoes of his time at the hands of the cold, merciless despot into the Force. In truth, despite the horrors that had been done to him, he did not bear the emotional scars one would imagine.

As they burned his face, he sought shelter in the Force, and it welcomed him with open arms. When they began to slowly destroy his leg, inch by inch, he smiled as the Force had set him free. Every bit of pain and torture that had been piled onto him was nothing, as he was one with the Force, and the Force was everything. How could one feel pain when one was so distant from oneself, so removed.

He took a deep breath and pulled himself back, focusing on the moment, on the present. He resisted the call to submerge himself again, refusing to be lost on the winds of the Force. Instead, he reached out felt himself, pulling himself back.

At one point, that would have been a herculean task, centering himself back on his body, pulling away from the oneness he had felt with the Force. When Ahsoka and Sabine had first rescued him, he barely even registered their presence, that he was no longer in his cell. He was one with the Force.

Everything and everywhere.

Nowhere.

It had taken Ahsoka considerable effort to pull him back, to guide his mind back to himself. She had done that not just once but several times, his mind slipping to the flow of the Force, following its currents without even realizing it. Thankfully, eventually, he had learned to pull himself back on his own and even to resist the pull in the first place.

He still lost himself, as he had just done, but now he would only occasionally mislay a conversation or lose track of time. Sabine was helping with that, having gotten good at spotting an "episode," as she called it. Often, her touch or his name on her lips was all it took to call him back.

But now he was alone, and the Force reached to him, called to him.

"It is strange," A man's voice said from behind him, forcing Ezra to turn around. "I don't believe I have ever met someone with a connection to the Force like yours."

The man was older, with short, graying hair and a clean-shaven face. He was wearing simple Jedi robes, his hands folded behind his back. His demeanor was calm and confident, with serene smile on his face even as he studied Ezra.

"You, more than anyone I have ever met, truly connect with the Force," He said. "You're not the strongest, nor are you by any means weak. But... you understand. The full spectrum of the Force flows through you. It welcomes you with open arms as you understand its depths. Dark and light. It is... remarkable."

"Who are you?" Ezra asked, looking around, the cave now completely empty, its sounds muted. "I know this is a vision, but I don't recognize you."

"I'm... nobody," He explained with an almost satisfied smile. "A Jedi, old, ancient even. One of thousands, maybe even hundreds of thousands. My name is lost to time, as it should be."

"Helpful," Ezra commented, looking around at the clusters of crystals around him, trying to figure out which one called to him. "I hardly think I am that special. Plenty of Jedi know the darkness."

"Oh, of course. I know that better than some," The man admitted, walking past Ezra to touch a white lattice of crystals growing from the wall. "But none seem to connect to it as wholly as you. People have predications to the dark or light, or are sometimes driven to one or the other, either from their own addictions or seemingly by fate. But few can straddle the line, and even fewer accept everything beyond it."

"Well... Thank you?" He responded, not sure how to react to the unnamed Jedi's words. "I think I could honestly do with being a bit less unique and special at the moment."

The man chuckled and nodded. Ezra couldn't help but feel that he really did understand as well.

"Being unique is not all it's cracked up to be," He agreed. "Why do you think I enjoy being nameless?"

Ezra nodded and began to walk around the chamber, running his fingers over the different colors. The cave was a fantastic rainbow of Kyber crystals, more colors than he had ever known to exist, in various shades.

"You know... I've done this before," Ezra said, looking back at the man, who had somehow followed after him, as soundless as a ghost. "I know how this works. I need to be worthy, I need to prove myself."

"Maybe," The man responded. "Or maybe the Force just wants to make sure you're okay."

Ezra snorted and shook his head.

"I'm not sure if I'll ever be okay," He admitted, looking up to the roof of the cave. "I survived, but I'm afraid... I'm afraid I'm not me anymore."

"How so?"

"I submerged myself into the Force. I was one with it, completely separated from my body. I was gone for years... but it felt like days. Maybe a week. I lost myself in the Force... embraced it wholeheartedly... I let it in, and I'm not sure I'm me anymore. I'm not sure I can ever be Ezra again."

"...Names are confusing," The man said after a long pause. "They can describe you, in the way you use the name of an element to distinguish it from others around it, but they aren't really you."

"So, what, I'm not Ezra, that's just my designation?"

"Do you still care about Sabine?" The man asked, shifting the subject.

"Of course!"

"And Hera? Little Jacen?"

"Yes!"

"Do you still live by the lessons of your Master?"

"I... I try to," Ezra responded. "I try to act in a way that would make him proud."

"Oh, he is, Ezra," The man said confidently. "He is incredibly proud."

The pair were silent for a while, exploring the cave more, mainly as an excuse to walk and think. Eventually, the nameless man spoke again.

"Would you ever abandon those you care about?"

"Never," Ezra responded without hesitation. "They never abandoned me, and I won't ever abandon them."

"Then maybe... you should trust them." The man responded. "They welcome you home with open arms, they take care of you, they do everything they can to help you heal. Do you think that they would just abandon you if your time with Thrawn changed you?"

"I... No. They would never," He admitted, shaking his head.

"If they will accept you, then does it matter if you are different?" The man asked. "If your name is still yours, even if it describes you differently from what it did before, does it matter?"

For a long moment, Ezra was silent, staring at his hands, ignoring the crystals around him. Eventually, he looked up, turning to meet the man's eyes.

"No... It doesn't." Ezra agreed, realization flowing through him, obvious to some but hidden from himself. "They would never leave me. They are my strength, my home. I will always return to them, and they will always support me."

"Then, Ezra Bridger, it seems like you are still you, even if you have changed."

Ezra took in a deep breath, feeling the Force swirling around him. It swelled and crashed through him, but he resisted the current. The dreamlike quality of the vision ended, and as he opened his eyes, he found himself standing in front of a grand growth of deep orange Kyber Crystals. His fingers were already resting on a singular crystal, and with a gentle tug, it came free, falling into his palm.

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In a moment, she was no longer alone.

Felia had stepped down off of the initial rise along the crystal cave entrance, doing her best to seem confident and strong. Part of the act was for her brother, who she knew looked up to her and drew his own confidence from her, while the other was just a natural reaction.

As she stepped down onto the final foot of the rocky decline, she blinked, and suddenly, she was back on the streets of Foless. She frantically looked around for any signs of her brother, but there were none.

She started to run, following the flow of people but using her small size to dodge and weave between them. Claron knew better than to push against the flow of a crowd. It drew too much attention and slowed you down. Whenever he was, he would be forward.

Eventually, she reached an alleyway, empty save for a [single man](#) sitting on a crate. He spotted her immediately, and he nodded for her to come closer. She hesitated for a moment before taking a few steps, approaching him, but maintained plenty of distance.

"Have you seen my brother?" She asked, putting on her best-lost kid pout. "He is younger than me, with short hair the same color as mine?"

"Yeah, he is safe," He assured her. "Why don't you have a seat, kid. I think we got a lot to talk about."

She frowned, not liking the implication. Did this man have Claron? Would he give him back if she talked? He was unarmed, but that didn't mean much with the difference in size and strength.

Reluctantly, she stepped further into the surprisingly well-lit alleyway. Her instincts were screaming that this was a trap, but if this man had Claron, that didn't matter. She would trip whatever trap it took to get her brother back.

The man snorted at her suspicious, slow walk to the crate he had nodded towards, pushed against the alley's opposite side. She sat back on it, staring at the man with eyes harder than any child's should be.

"Who are you?" Felia asked, her eyes locked on the older man, her lost child routine long gone. "What is going on here? Claron was right beside me..."

"My name is [Atton](#)," the man responded. "As for what's going on... you tell me short stuff. This is your vision."

Felia narrowed her eyes at his response. It was nonsense...

No, something was wrong. Her thoughts felt distant, her memories were faded... but she... She hadn't been on Foless in weeks. They were...

"We were in the Crystal Cave!" She said, looking around wildly. "What happened? Is this really a vision?"

Rather than waiting to hear his response, Felia closed her eyes and tried to replicate what Ashoka and Luke had taught her. If she could just focus-

"Felia! Help!"

Claron's voice called from further down the alleyway, and Felia was up, chasing after it before she even registered what the sound. She could tell it was coming from on the street. She just needed to catch up.

"Hey, Wait! Where are you going?"

The man, Atton, called out after the young girl, but she ignored him. Why would she trust some random stranger? She had to find her brother! The young orphan made it back to the street, once again weaving between the crowd, trying to catch up to her brother. Just as she was losing hope, she would hear him call out again.

"Girl, will you slow down?" Atton, who had been following her for a while, called out. "You gotta realize something is going on, right? You're smarter than this. You and your brother wouldn't have survived as long as you did if you weren't."

"Leave me alone!" She called back. "Why would I listen to some random stranger off the street?"

"That... you know that's fair," the man admitted sheepishly. "But this isn't the street, and I'm not random, though I am a stranger. And more importantly, we both know you wouldn't trust me even if I was Sheora."

That got the young girl's attention. She whirled around at the man, stomping her feet and looking up at him, frustration and anger clear on her face. Her glare was harsh, enough to make the man wince.

"I trust Sheora!" She shouted, taking an angry step towards the man.

"Really?" He asked, sounding somber. "Then why do you still barricade the door? Why do you refuse to fall asleep until you can hear that she already has? Why do you hide rations under your bed? Why did you steal that vibroblade?"

"You don't know what you're talking about," She fired back. "You don't know what it's like! What Claron and I have had to live through!"

For a moment, everything was silent, save the echoes of Felia's shouting. Atton looked sad but said nothing to deny her statement.

"You're right." He eventually admitted with a shrug. "But I do know a lot about trust."

He turned, walking a few feet away before sitting on a bench. For a moment, Felia stood there, watching him. The street, once bustling with a rough and rushed crowd, was now empty, nearly completely silent. No speeders passed, and no distant advertisements played. The illusion had faded, and Claron's calls had stopped.

"You and your brother got dealt a bad hand of [pazaak](#). But that round is over, and now you're stuck with a lot of bad habits," He guessed, letting out a chuckle. "I know a thing or two about that as well."

"How?"

"I made a lot of mistakes," He explained, shaking his head and looking up at the sky. "Hurt a lot of people. And then I was given a chance to redeem myself. I just had to trust someone."

"...What do I do?" Felia asked, slowly making her way to sit down on the far end of the bench. "I want to trust them, I do..."

"But it goes against everything you ever learned," He finished, Felia nodding in confirmation. "Short stuff, I wish there was an easy answer. The truth is, that trust doesn't work the same way people think it does. People like to think that you can trust people until they wrong you, but we both know that that's not true."

"Then how does it work?"

For a long moment, Atton was silent. When he eventually spoke, it was with a faint smile.

"I've broken a fair amount of people's trust over my life," He explained. "And in turn, I couldn't trust anyone. It got to the point where it was all I expected from the galaxy. You test

people, give them a chance, and when they mess up, even with the tiniest thing, you validate all your misgivings and all your doubts because, well, I guess they couldn't be trusted anyway, right? And then, one day, I met someone."

For a moment, Felia felt like they weren't alone, like someone very kind had just told her it would be okay. The sensation of the presence faded, but the promise of eventually being okay... that lingered.

"They were... troubled, broken, desperately trying to piece themselves together," He continued. "And yet, somehow, they were a better person than I could ever hope to be. Being kind and good came as naturally as breathing to them. I thought they were weak, so as usual, I put just the tiniest bit of faith in them, expecting them to fail. But they didn't."

He reached down and pulled out a lightsaber, rolling it around in his hands, eventually clipping it back to his belt.

"Every step of the way, when I was sure they would fail, when I was sure that this time they wouldn't keep their word, they came through," He continued. "I put more and more faith into them after each time, until eventually... I stopped keeping track. There was no reason to anymore. I trusted them."

He leaned back in his chair, looking out into the empty city, watching a nearby glowing holo ad blink through its list of advertisements. After a moment, he coughed, wiping his face and pointedly looking away.

"The point is that trust, it's not some sort of grand declaration. You don't find someone you like, slap them on the back and say, 'I trust you!'" He explained with a chuckle. "It's a small thing. You give someone your trust, and they nurture it, they protect it. There's nothing wrong with not trusting someone immediately. You just need to give them a chance to prove themselves."

Felia considered his story, his words. They made sense, even to her cynical mind. Eventually, she nodded.

"I... want to trust Sheora..." Felia said, standing up from the bench. "She has never doubted me for a second... she put her life on the line for my brother and I. I... I might not trust her yet... but someday I will."

"That's good, short stuff," He encouraged with a nod and a roguish smile. "Sometimes the need for change is the most important thing of actually changing."

Felia nodded, and for a split second, she blinked. The city around her disappeared, revealing the crystal cave once more. She was standing in front of a deep blue cluster of crystals, her hand already wrapped around a large chunk.

Gently, she pulled, and the chunk came free... breaking off into pieces, which she caught, one in each hand.

