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## Epilogue

by [Martha Wilson](#)

Alone in a twilight clearing of the great forest on the Endor moon, Luke Skywalker watched his father's body burn in its funeral pyre. The forest was quiet except for the distant cacophony of music and voices from the rebel celebrations, and the cool evening breeze moving through the green leaves of the canopy high overhead. As the darkness deepened and the black smoke mingled with the gathering shadows, the largest of the logs cracked and split in the heat, shifting into the ashes and obscuring what little remained of the human form within the pyre. Luke took a deep breath of relief mingled with loss. Anakin Skywalker's spirit was free. It was finally over now, and he could go.

He turned away. Flickering orange-red light from the fire lit the trees behind him, abruptly showing him that he wasn't alone. For a moment he didn't recognize the man standing there, leaning against the massive bole of one of the trees and watching him thoughtfully. Instinctively, Luke reached out with the Force but felt nothing. No, there's something there, Luke thought, It's like walls, a shield, a barrier... A barrier that was giving way now, as his eyes focused on the figure and all the levels of seen and unseen illusion dropped away.

Emil Arandu said, "I thought the least I could do was come to the funeral."

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Lando Calrissian, walking along the torch-lit path between the giant house-trees of the ewoks, didn't see Luke Skywalker until the young Jedi materialized out of the shadows and grabbed his arm.

Lando yelped and almost went for his blaster, before he saw who it was. "Dammit, Luke, watch it! What are you doing out here?"

"Sorry," Luke whispered. "Go get Han."

"Huh?"

"I can't go through the party because I'll attract a lot of attention and I don't want to have to explain anything to anybody else right now. Just go find Han and bring him here. And Wedge too, if you can find him."

"What for?"

Luke looked worriedly over his shoulder. "Please, Lando, just do it. I'll explain later, all right?" With that, Luke faded into the shadows again with unnerving ease.

"No, it's not all right," Lando said to the empty darkness, miffed. But he went to find Han Solo anyway.

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"If this isn't important, you're dead," Han told Lando. He and Leia had been in the middle of a very intense discussion, and he was going to make up for the badly timed interruption by being as difficult as possible.

"Take it out on Skywalker." Lando was unimpressed by the threat. If Han didn't offer to kill him at least two or three times a day, he would've wondered what was wrong. "He didn't bother telling me what it was. Seemed important, though," he admitted.

"Important, huh?" Han muttered. I hope it's not what I think it is. He knew what Luke had gone out into the forest to do, though Luke didn't know he knew, and at the moment Han wanted to keep it that way. The Corellian didn't remember when he had first started to suspect that Darth Vader might be Luke Skywalker's father. Years ago on that first trip with Luke on the Falcon, something about the way Kenobi had talked about Luke's father just hadn't rung true. Kenobi had given so little detail about the man's life and death, hardly any reminiscences, no funny stories, nothing like what an old man would usually tell his best friend's son. At the time Han had assumed Kenobi hadn't known the kid's father all that well, that he was pretending a closer relationship to string Luke along. He hadn't thought much about it; it was none of his business, after all, and Luke would probably figure it out soon enough anyway. Then Kenobi had been killed and it hadn't seemed to matter anymore.

Then there was Bespin, where Vader had been so willing to do anything to get Luke, to let the rest of the Rebellion go its merry way as long as he got Luke, and got him alive. And Luke had come back from that confrontation a different person. And he had stopped speaking about his father the Jedi Knight.

Add the way Leia had reacted to finding out she was Luke's sister. Personally, Han had been relieved. It didn't effect anything for her, as far as he could tell. She was a senator in her own right and her Alderaanian title came from her mother's side of the family. There shouldn't be anything inherently devastating in discovering that instead of a Senator-General your father was a Jedi Knight. Unless you already had a history with that Jedi Knight.

It also fit in perfectly with something Arandu had said on the Subjugator. Han hadn't thought much of it at the time -- if you thought about everything Arandu said you went quickly crazy. But in hindsight it made perfect sense.

And now Luke was out in the Endor forest giving Darth Vader a secret funeral. At least, Han hoped it was still a secret and that wasn't what Luke was so frantic about. He wouldn't have known about it himself if Chewbacca hadn't been out having a nice stalk through the forest and seen what Luke was doing. The Wookiee had reported it in detail to Han, and Han had impressed upon him the need not to tell anyone else. If somebody else had seen it...

They came to the bend in the trail where Luke had vanished, and Lando stopped, looking around hopefully. The trees towered overhead, screening them from most of the rebel camp. "So where is he?" Han said through gritted teeth.

"Well, this is where..." Lando began, when Luke stepped out onto the path.

Lando jumped again, startled, but Han, more used to Luke's abilities, folded his arms and said to his Jedi friend, "If this isn't important, you're dead."

Luke looked as if he was holding onto his temper with difficulty. "He's here," he said to Han.

"Who?"

"And he called me disgustingly self-righteous," Luke continued.

The Corellian stared. "Who are you talking about?"

"I don't want to say his name, because I think that might let him pinpoint where I am right now." Luke ran a hand through his hair and paced a few steps away. "I've put up some barriers to the force around the camp, but I don't know if they're going to hold. The way he uses the force is different, subtle, it's not like anything I ever came up against..."

"Oh." Han leaned back against the bole of a tree. There was only one powerful force sensitive who would call Luke Skywalker disgustingly self-righteous. "Oh, no."

"Who are you talking about?" a frustrated Lando asked.

"What does he want?" Han demanded. His worries about the funeral being discovered by other rebels were forgotten. This was worse.

"I don't know!" Luke threw his arms up in frustration. "We can't ever get that far! I need you to come and help me talk to him."

"Me?" Han made an effort to lower his voice. "Are you crazy?"

"You're the only one who ever got any sense out of him. And he likes you."

It was Han's turn to pace nervously. "Luke, he likes me a little too much. He wanted to keep me around permanently, remember?"

Lando's ego didn't take well to being ignored. "If one of you doesn't tell me what's going on..."

"Han, I need you to do this," Luke persisted. "We have to find out what he wants here, why he came back now after so long..."

Han pulled his blaster out of the holster and handed it to Lando. "Here, just put one right here," he said, pointing to his temple. "Might as well get it over with now."

"For the love of..." Lando shoved the weapon back at him hastily. "You're both crazy! Who is this guy you're talking about?"

"An old enemy," Luke said.

"Sort of," Han amended, without thinking.

They looked at each other for an uncomfortable moment in silence, and Lando folded his arms and pointed out, "You might want to get a consensus on that before you go see him."

"Hey, what's going on?" Wedge Antilles was coming down the path toward them, looking worried.

Luke turned toward him. "Wedge, I need you to put out an alert. We might have an Imperial infiltrator. Tell the perimeter guards to be extra cautious."

Han snorted. "Like that'll do any good."

"Do you have a better suggestion?" Luke demanded.

Han shrugged irritably. Wedge looked from one to the other, then inquiringly at Lando, who spread his hands to show that he had no idea either.

"Please, Wedge," Luke said.

"Sure, right away." Wedge bolted back down the trail to the command post.

A moment passed when nobody said anything, though Lando badly wanted to.

"Well, I'm going," Luke said finally, still uncomfortable. "Come if you want to." He started back into the forest.

They watched him for a moment, then Han said to Lando, "I don't want to go down there. I have a life now."

Calrissian shrugged helplessly. He hated to offer advice when he had no idea what was happening. Especially as this was starting to seem a good deal more serious than he had first supposed. "Want me to cover you while you take off?" he offered finally.

"No." Han sighed and followed Luke.

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The path Luke had taken seemed to be one of the Ewoks' hunting trails; it was just well-enough marked for them to find it in the dim light. The immense trees stretched upward like pillars in a giant's hall, and it was unnervingly quiet. No insects, no nightbirds' calls; the subsentient inhabitants of the forest were making themselves scarce. Han thought that it was too bad the sentient ones couldn't do the same.

"So who is this guy?" Lando whispered, tramping through the brush behind Han. He had followed, because it seemed serious, whatever it was, and it also seemed the only way he could satisfy his curiosity.

It was a more difficult question than it sounded. "He's a Sith Lord," Han said, after a moment. Of all the things Arandu was, that was definitely one of them.

"That's not funny."

"It wasn't supposed to be."

Lando stopped. "Are you serious?"

Han didn't stop. Luke was too far ahead, and he didn't want to lose him. Lando was going to have to wait for explanations. "Yes."

Lando hesitated a moment, then swore under his breath and took a couple of long strides to catch up with the Corellian.

They came to the edge of a clearing where one of the great trees had long ago fallen and still lay in the brush and undergrowth, smaller logs and branches tumbled about it. The pyre was still there, but burnt down to an anonymous heap of blackened wood and ashes. Reflected light from the surface of the planet filling the sky overhead washed everything colorless, and showed them the man who was standing there alone, looking up at the stars.

Luke was waiting for them to catch up, impatient and jumpy, though Han was one of the few people who would have been able to tell it by looking at him.

From the clearing, Arandu said, "You're back. I'd nearly given up hope."

His voice was dry and amused, and hearing it, Han's nerves stopped jumping. Whatever reason Arandu was here, it wasn't anything to do with him. He caught Luke's arm. "Kid, listen to me." Luke paused unwillingly and Han whispered, "He believes whatever he says when he says it, whether he knows it's true or not, and he can sit here and argue with you until the system primary's a cold dead cinder and not get rattled. Don't let him string you along."

After a moment, Luke let out his breath and nodded.

They walked into the clearing together.

Arandu didn't look away from his study of the sky, until he said, "I told you, Han, you would have been better off to trust yourself to me."

He is also, Han thought to himself, the kind of person who crosses half a galaxy to enter a war zone where both sides are ready to blow him away on sight, just for the opportunity of saying "I told you so." He said, "Yeah, you told me." He sat down on one of the broken logs, since he had the feeling this was going to take a while. Lando had stayed back at the edge of the clearing, within it, but with a good enough view to cover them.

Luke stopped about twenty feet away from the Sith Lord, folded his arms and asked, "Can we try this again?"

"I don't know; can we?"

Luke didn't bother to answer that. Should've warned him about asking rhetorical questions, Han thought ruefully. He had seen Arandu pull this act on Imperial generals and other Sith Lords, and it wasn't pleasant to see him pull it on Luke. But the young Jedi was making a supreme effort not to let it get to him. Luke asked, "Did you come here with the Imperial fleet?"

Arandu looked at Lando long enough to let the gambler know that he had been seen and that Arandu wasn't much worried by his presence. Then he finally turned his attention to Luke. "Do you mean in some official capacity? No. I parted company with the interests of the Empire some time ago."

"Then how did you know we were here?"

"I was on Tatooine." He smiled at Luke. "Interesting tactical maneuver, allowing the Hutt to feed you to a Rancor. That's certainly typical of the Jedi, I thought at the time..."

"What were you doing on Tatooine?" Han interrupted, unable to help himself in spite of his resolution to stay out of it.

Arandu looked at him, pointedly. "Once I let someone in, I never let them down; I don't let them out, either, usually, but I never let them down."

Looking away, Han wished he hadn't asked.

Quietly, Luke said, "Why should we believe you?"

Arandu smiled at him. "Why should I care what you believe? You're the one who keeps insisting we have this conversation; if you don't want to talk to me, then go away."

Luke bristled, and before he could reply, Han asked, "So, Emil, how are the kids?"

Arandu sat down on one of the sections of the broken tree trunk, apparently completely at ease. He said, "Better, at this point, than I expected them to be. Karel talks more often, and occasionally what she says even makes sense. She remembers you."

*Karel*, Han thought. He said, "Is that her name? I never knew it."

The interruption had given Luke a moment to calm down, and the conversation between Han and the Sith Lord was unnerving him. He said, "Palpatine's dead. You could go back to the Empire if you wanted to. Is that what you're here for, to rejoin the Imperial fleet?"

"It's a thought," Arandu replied, treating the question seriously. Talking about his daughter seemed, odd as it sounded, to put him in a more receptive mood. "Eventually I suppose I'll become bored with this little sabbatical and want some other occupation. But I'd have to be invited back, of course. And if there are any commanders left who remember me, that would be unlikely. But I could probably manage it, if I really wanted to."

He didn't sound terribly excited about the prospect. Luke didn't know whether to be reassured by that or not. Curious in spite of everything, he asked, "Why wouldn't they want you back?"

Arandu smiled to himself, and didn't answer. Han said, "Because he is not a team player. He makes trouble. In fact, making trouble is his life's work."

"True," Arandu admitted, still smiling.

They were still talking like old buddies, and that was beginning to worry Luke a lot. "No more games," he said. "What do you want here?"

"No more games? You are an optimist. I could never tolerate optimists." Still amused, but more serious now, Arandu's eyes went to Luke. "I came to find out your intentions."

Luke was surprised, and managed not to show it. "My intentions?"

"Your intentions toward me. It's only natural. You've destroyed the Emperor, or at least you think you have, since he's probably cloned himself..."

Luke exchanged a look with Han.

"It's inevitable that your thoughts should turn to the last of the Sith."

"That depends on what you do."

"Oh, that could lead us in a merry circle."

Luke took a deep breath, but didn't rise to the bait. "I can't speak for the Alliance."

"Then speak for yourself. Can you do that?"

"I already did. I said, it depends on what you do. If that's not answer enough for you, too bad." Luke lifted his chin. "And you're wrong, I didn't destroy the Emperor. Anakin Skywalker did."

Arandu was silent for a long moment. Suddenly there was a great rushing noise like a fast transport racing by, and Han looked up, startled. But it was only a sudden gust of wind tearing through the heavy branches high overhead.

The sound gradually died away, and Arandu said, "It didn't surprise me when he took a new name. I thought he meant to forget the past. I didn't begin to worry until he started to refer to Anakin Skywalker in the third person." He was standing up. "Han, my offer is still open. If the Alliance is ever foolish enough to reject your services, you'll know how to find me."

"Thanks," Han said. "That's such a comforting thought." At least they knew why he had come here now. It made sense, in an odd kind of way. Even Adarin had known Arandu was sentimental.

Arandu had almost reached the edge of the clearing before Luke realized this wasn't a bluff. "You're leaving?" he said in disbelief.

"I've learned everything I needed to know."

"And what was that?" Luke challenged.

Arandu stopped and faced him. "That I can provoke you, but not to violence, that you'll keep your word, that though you have lamentably fallen far under Kenobi's influence, you will not slavishly follow all his directions, that you are unlikely to come after me or my people out of some vague notion of revenge, and that it is possible, at least to a limited extent, to talk to you. What else did I need to know?"

Luke didn't answer. Han added, "And you know how Vader died."

Arandu smiled at him. "Yes, and that." He turned again to go.

"Wait," Luke said suddenly.

Arandu hesitated, just at the edge of the trees, one step away from disappearing.

Luke looked uncertain, as if he hadn't expected Arandu to listen to him. Then he said, "You knew my father better than anyone. You can tell me the one thing Ben Kenobi couldn't. You can tell me why he did it."

Han was aware he was holding his breath. He had hoped Luke wouldn't think to ask anything about his father. Arandu had a terrible habit of answering whatever question you asked him, regardless of what the answer was.

Arandu said, "You already know why. Because for him, at the time, it was the right course of action to take. You can argue morals and semantics all you want, but he believed that, most sincerely."

Luke bit his lip, perhaps restraining the impulse to argue. It was more of an answer than Ben Kenobi had ever given him, even if it wasn't what he wanted to hear. He asked, "Is that why you did it?"

Arandu paused, just within the edge of the deep shadow, and smiled back at them. "Oh, no. I've always been the enemy within the gate, and an anarchist at heart," he said, and stepped into the darkness.

After a moment, Luke said, "I'm going to make sure he's really leaving."

As he vanished into the brush, Lando let out his breath and said, "Holy shit."

Han looked up at him, as the gambler came further into the clearing. "That's what I like about you, Calrissian; you always know just what to say."

"How did you meet up with that guy?" Lando took a seat on the log next to him.

"It's a long story."

"Tell me."

"Not right this second, okay? Later."

Lando snorted. Han had said "later" in a way that meant "never." Well, he'd get it out of Luke. Still, he persisted, "He acted like he thought you were a friend of his."

Han was silent a long moment. Finally, he said, "Maybe I am. As much as anybody could be."

Lando shook his head. "You are one crazy son of bitch, Solo."

This was an opinion Lando expressed at tediously regular intervals. Han said, "So what else is new?"

"Why was Luke asking him about his father? Is he that Anakin Skywalker they were talking about?"

Luke must have forgotten he had an audience, when he had brought up his father. Or he had needed to know so badly that he hadn't cared. Han said, "What am I, the latest edition of Who's Who in the Old Republic? Ask Luke." Though he doubted Calrissian would care too much if he did find out that Darth Vader was Luke and Leia's father. The gambler was just too practical at heart to do more than wonder over it for a couple of minutes and then go on with his life. But there were others in the Rebellion who wouldn't be so unconcerned, and Han wasn't going to be the one who let the secret out. Hell, he wasn't even supposed to know, though Leia had tried at least a couple of times to work herself up to telling him.

Distantly, there was a low-grav engine hum. Han scanned the top of the trees, and an instant later spotted the telltale glimmer of planetlight off a reflective black surface. Too big for a TIE, he thought. Maybe it's Heart of Darkness. He remembered the little blockade runner was supposed to have some special stealth surveillance capabilities. "There he goes."

"Didn't see it." Lando frowned. "But what does...?"

Han was saved from the next question by Luke's return. The Jedi dropped down on the log next to him and said, "He's really gone. Did you see the ship? Some kind of fancy blockade runner."

Nobody said anything for a moment, and Lando decided it was time to make a diplomatic exit. He got to his feet. "I'm heading back to the camp; I've had about all the fun I can take for tonight. You two coming?"

"In a minute," Luke said. Han didn't disagree, and they watched Lando head back up the trail.

After a while, the chirping of insects in the brush resumed, as the surrounding forest settled back into the normal routine of the night, and Luke sighed. "I know I've been a jerk. I let him get to me, and I know..."

"Luke, you're one of the few people I know who's not a jerk."

Luke didn't seem very comfortable with that assessment. He shifted uneasily, and Han wondered if he was about to spill the big secret about his father. He was fairly sure Luke would tell him, but he was also sure it would take his friend some time to bring himself to do it. This was strange to Han, who didn't know who his own father was and couldn't have cared less, but he was willing to be patient with Luke's eccentricities. After a few moments of struggling with himself, Luke sighed, and said only, "Do you think he was just, I don't know, deluding himself about the Emperor having a clone?"

Han shrugged. "I wish I could say I did. But you know, I hate to tell you, I think that was the one of the main reasons for this whole song and dance. He wanted to find out how Vader bought it, he wanted to see if there was a chance of pissing on the Emperor's grave, and he wanted to warn you." Making sure Luke knew of the danger was a last gesture of loyalty to Vader, but Han didn't say that part aloud. A clone of the Emperor. Hell, he hoped it took a long time to make its appearance. Maybe until all of them were dead of old age, leaving somebody else to deal with it.

Luke was silent a moment, watching the sky. "I think you're right."

"Look at it this way. At least somebody else is watching for him too."

"Oh, that's so reassuring," Luke said dryly. He hesitated, knowing that he should tell Han who Darth Vader had really been. Keeping the secret too much longer would only make things worse. He hesitated, and found himself saying lamely, "Isn't there something you want to ask me?"

Han decided he didn't want to get into it right now. The way Luke was edging up on the subject they could be out here for hours, and now that Arandu was gone, all he could think about was Leia. "No," he said, trying to look dumb.

"Oh." After another hesitation, Luke decided it could wait. He shook his head. "I wonder what Arandu was like before... It's hard to imagine someone like that falling to the dark side."

Han snorted. "It's not hard for me to imagine. I don't think there was any 'falling' involved, though. He did it because he wanted to, and that's it. Just because he can turn on the charm when he feels like it, you better not forget that."

Luke bit his lip, considering for a moment, then looked at his friend. "For a while, I wondered if you forgot that."

"Me?" Han chuckled. He was beginning to see what had been bothering Luke. It was just a basic difference in the way they both looked at the world. Despite everything that had happened to him, trust still came easy to Luke. If Han had confined his acquaintance to people he trusted, he would've had to live as an almost-hermit for the past twenty years. Even now, he could still count the people he really, truly, bone-deep trusted on the fingers of one hand. "I got lots of friends I wouldn't trust to turn my back on. Calrissian, for instance."

Luke laughed, reassured. "Let's go back. Leia's waiting."

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