

Fallen Order: Daughters of Dathomir

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Fallen Order: Daughters of Dathomir

by [DeusExValerate](#)

Summary

The Mantis has been flying across the Galaxy since their escape from Nur, but Cal has become distracted by internal struggle. As his near-failures use up all the Dathomirian Ichor Merrin had stockpiled, the Jedi and the Nightsister must venture together into the caves under the Nightsister temple to find Merrin's Magick and the source of Cal's distress.

A Hair's Breadth from Catastrophe

Cal ran up the ramp of the *Stinger Mantis*, expertly deflecting the incoming blaster bolts as he did. “Greez, let’s get out of here!”

The Latero pilot waved one of his arms in what Cal was sure was a vulgar manner on one world or another as he took off, the entry ramp still open. Cal dispatched the last few stormtroopers before closing the ramp as the ship gained altitude. That mission had been a hair’s breadth from catastrophe, though it felt more and more like every mission fit that description.

“We cut it too close!” Cere was shouting from her comms station, clearly dissatisfied with the younger Jedi’s performance though unwilling to say it directly. “Merrin, mind giving us a hand on getting away from these TIEs?”

The Nightsister of Dathomir stood up from the lounge and stretched. “I can do as I did over Nur, but I will need to replenish my ichor if we want to do this again.”

The pale witch strode to the front of the ship as Cal slipped into the co-pilot seat and BD-1 onto the console. Though he tried to focus on the task at hand, Cal couldn’t help but be distracted by his newest companion’s incantations. The way she moved, the songlike tones in her voice, she was enchanting in more than just the literal sense. Not for the first time, Cal found himself jealous of Merrin. Originally, he had ascribed this to a jealousy for power, born out of dancing with the Dark Side in his quest for the Holocron. However, repeated meditation didn’t support that—while the Dark did hang heavy upon him, it was only the specter of death and despair waiting to pull him back in as on Bracca or in the Tomb of Kujet. And he didn’t think that this was born out of attraction, though he did have to admit that the Nightsister was beautiful. No, Cal could not place the root of his jealousy for Merrin’s graceful form and calm confidence despite his attempts.

In short order, the *Mantis* was invisible and slipped out from the sensor range. Cal handed over the data he had collected to Cere and went over to the navicomputer. “So where to now?”

“I’ll need some time with the data before I have a good answer.”

“As I said, I need more magical ichor. Perhaps we could go to Dathomir.”

Cal had already started punching in Dathomir’s coordinates. He figured some time alone on the ship (or at least sans Merrin) could be a good chance to ponder his feelings. “Dathomir it is then.”

Greez sighed as he navigated to the insertion coordinates. “Someday I’ll get to fly away from that death world for the last time, and that day can’t come soon enough.” BD-1 let out a series of angry chirps, prompting him to look back at Merrin, who was reclining near the Holotable. “Uh, no offense.”

Merrin shrugged. “I cannot argue with calling it a death world. I take no offense, Greez Dritus.”

Cal smiled as the ship entered hyperspace. Merrin was so confident, cool under fire, sure of her abilities and her worth. Cal never felt sure of his abilities, or even his identity, ever since he was a youngling, even when his performance said otherwise. He’d always felt like he was doing things wrong, like everyone else was given a script for how to behave and he just hadn’t. Maybe that was why he felt uncomfortable when people called him “young man” or “sir—” same as with his discomfort over being called “Master Jedi,” they were honorifics he hadn’t earned. And the way Merrin talked about her lost sisters, especially Ilyana, made Cal wish someone would talk about him that way. Cal went to meditate and get over the feelings of unidentifiable jealousy.

By My Side

“Hey kid, grab some seat. We’re about to land.”

Greez’s warning broke Cal from his reverie. With no further movement on his lingering jealousy, the young Jedi was slow to stand back up. The corner of the ship had quickly become his home, more so than Bracca or any bivouac he’d inhabited during the war. Cal felt safe there, probably too safe given his increasing reluctance to leave its relative privacy. He felt so exposed lately, like the entire galaxy was out to get him. Not that it wasn’t—the Empire had made sure a constant barrage of Purge Troopers followed his movements—but even around allies he felt like he was out of place.

He eventually made his way to the cockpit and sat in the copilot’s seat just as the streaks of hyperspace coalesced into pinpoints across the sky. The red planet hung in the space before them as they drew in for a landing.

Cal hadn’t been on Dathomir since he’d left with Merrin and the Zeffo Astrium some time earlier. He was glad he wouldn’t have to face the wildlife of this planet this time.

As the *Mantis*’ wings swung into landing position and the ship touched down, Merrin finally got up from her seat. Cal thought she seemed a bit nervous, like she was unsure of what to do.

“Cal,” Merrin started, turning to the young Jedi as the ramp lowered behind her. “Without my ichor I cannot use my magick to avoid the wildlife. I would enjoy having you by my side. To help me get to the magick well, I mean.”

So much for time away from Merrin. But she seemed to be truly asking for his help, and no matter his personal feelings Cal knew he had a duty to his friend. “It’s a plan. BD?” He held out his arm and let the diminutive droid climb up to perch on his shoulder.

Merrin smiled. “It will be good to not be alone in the old caves for once. Having you with me will be like when Ilyana and I would go down together to collect ichor for rituals.”

Cal smirked to hide his immediate wince at the fallen Nightsister’s mention. Why was he jealous of the dead?

“Be careful out there, you two.” Cere leaned against the opposite wall as her two youngest companions disembarked. “We’re in prime position to monitor Imp chatter along the Hydian, so we’ll be here if you need us.”

“And don’t bring anything too dangerous back with you this time!”

“Greez Dritus, I promise you we will bring back nothing that is more dangerous than me.” Merrin smiled as she frightened the pilot.

With that, Cal, Merrin, and BD-1 made their way towards the ruined Nightsister temple. “I’m curious to see how much of this I missed,” said Cal as they climbed up the rope he’d left hanging in front of the entrance. “I had some serious tunnel vision when I was last here.”

Merrin looked up at him. “Yes, though I’m sure I contributed to that. Apologies for the repeated attempts to kill you.”

Cal laughed. “Apologies accepted. Now, some bane-backs like to roost up here...”

Like a Drunken Nydak

After some minor maneuvers and the use of some of Cal's hastily-made shortcuts, Cal and Merrin stood before a collapsed gateway Cal had ignored on his first visits to the world. "The way down is through here, though without the ichor my magick is not strong enough alone." She smiled at the Jedi. "It seems once again we are forced to work together."

Cal smiled. "With all this working together, does that make me an honorary Nightsister?"

Merrin laughed. "No, Jedi, men cannot be Nightsisters, and you're too kind to be a Nightbrother." For some reason that stung, but Cal couldn't figure why. He should be happy to not be considered a member of a Dark-Side wielding clan. Merrin claimed that the Nightsister way was to keep the Dark Side controlled rather than letting it control the wielder, but he was doubtful of the sustainability of that balance. Regardless, Cal thought it would be nice for Merrin to see him as she saw the Nightsisters.

Merrin leaned towards him. "Are you awake in there, Cal? We have rocks to move." Cal, back in reality, raised a hand and assisted Merrin in moving aside the boulders covering the tunnel. As the last large rock was moved, there was just enough space for them to squeeze through. BD-1 turned on his light on the other side, revealing a dark passage twisting into the rock. Cal elected not to light the way further with his lightsaber, as he knew Merrin was still apprehensive of the weapon that had slaughtered her kin.

"It has been a long time since I came down here. Watch your step." Cal heeded the young woman's warning, and followed her steps exactly. Matching her gait felt natural to him, very unlike his own somewhat clumsy stride. Merrin moved like a graceful fynnock on the prowl, whereas Cal felt he moved more like a drunken nydak. Yet another jealous comparison he couldn't make fit in his mind.

After an hour of walking through twisting caves, the three came to a robe bridge slung over a cragg in the rock. The ropes seemed old, even compared to those in the Nightbrothers' village, and Cal was uncertain of their strength. As if she'd read his mind, Merrin said, "This bridge is old, but it should hold if we move slowly and tread lightly. Do you think you can do this, Cal, or is it impossible to keep you from charging ahead like when we first met?" Cal shrugged, internally hurt by his self-judgement being confirmed, and moved to continue following the Dathomirian's carefully measured steps.

As they reached the halfway point in the bridge, BD-1 flashed his scanners red and beeped a warning to Cal. "Bane-back Spiders!" Cal's hissed warning was enough to get Merrin to stop in her tracks. Six of the acid-bearing creatures were coming out of the tunnel on the other side. Cal cursed under his breath. If he hadn't been so focused on his internal struggles, he would have heard or otherwise sensed them coming sooner. It was the same distraction that had gotten them into so many trouble spots and it had allowed the spiders to reach the bridge before he could react.

Cal reached out to push the spiders away, but the aggressive move prompted one spider to spit its corrosive cargo at him. The shot fell short, but almost instantly ate through the old and weakened wood and rope of the bridge. Cal had barely a moment to grab Merrin's hand as the bridge collapsed beneath them, the ropes from the other side snapping as all their weight was suddenly upon them. Merrin pulled herself against Cal as they fell, but the Jedi could only focus on finding something to break their fall.

Within seconds, the jagged bottom of the chasm was in sight, and Cal saw his chance: a gently sloping outcrop that could be used to turn their plunge into a tumble. Cal angled the pair towards the rock, and positioned himself to hit it first. As it drew nearer, Cal recognized he'd miscalculated the angle, but it was too late to reposition. He felt a crack in his right leg as he made contact, and the snapped shin bones bought enough lost momentum that the two survivors and the droid were able to roll to a stop.

"Cal Kestis, you saved my li... Your leg!" Merrin immediately began attending to the clearly broken leg. BD-1 offered up a stim, but Cal knew that a break like this would take time to fully heal. He grimaced as Merrin jolted his shin back into the right alignment, and again as she injected the stim on the spot to at least get the healing started. "If I had my ichor I could do more, but for now the droid's medicines are all I have. Let me help you stand."

Cal muttered a mantra about the force being with him as Merrin got him upright. The gravity-driven blood flowing into his leg consumed his mind, and he barely registered as Merrin supported his weight off his broken leg and led him away.

Someone I can Trust

Cal woke up in a dark cavern, not remembering going to sleep. A small fire, fueled by pieces of the collapsed bridge, lit the bare walls. Merrin lay on the ground near the fire, and BD-1 was clearly in rest mode beside her. Cal moved to get up and check on her before painfully remembering his injury. Even with regular infusions of stims, it would take a long time to heal, and in an environment like Dathomir it was a death sentence. Cal covered his face with his hands. How could he be so distracted? It was bad enough when he got himself into trouble, but Merrin too? And now she had to look after him, nurse him back to health, when he was supposed to be the one helping and protecting her! How dare he call himself a Jedi. How dare he call himself a man.

Cal then did something he hardly ever did. He started to cry. Master Tapal had told him that a Jedi must learn to control his emotions and keep from letting them overtake one enough to lead to tears. It was always “his” emotions, likely due to both him and Cal being male, but to Cal it had meant that a man must control his emotions. His loss of control in that moment was proof of his weakness in his mind.

Cal’s crying woke Merrin, who quickly came to kneel at her friend’s side. “Cal, are you in pain?” Cal felt even worse in that moment, as he realized how much of a burden he was on Merrin.

“I’m sorry, Merrin.” Cal choked on his words. “I’m sorry I got distracted. I’m sorry you have to deal with my mistake now. I’m sorry I’m not the Jedi you needed me to be.”

Merrin settled back to her heels. “I did not need a Jedi, Cal Kestis. I wanted you along because, in a way I cannot fully describe, I cannot be alone down here. Every time I came here alone after my sisters were gone, the magick in these caves would make my nightmares come to life.”

Cal swallowed the lump in his throat and nodded along with Merrin’s story. That sounded like what a dark side nexus could do. Is that why he’d slipped up? If so, why had it happened on other worlds far from Dathomir?

Merrin continued talking. “It has been a nice change, traveling with you. The other two are more cold to me but you have been very warm and inviting. Thank you, Cal. It is nice, having someone I can trust again.”

He smiled at her. “I’m really glad you feel that way, Merrin.” His smile melted and he broke eye contact. “But I haven’t earned your trust. In truth I’ve had some internal issues since you joined the group.”

Merrin was visibly perturbed by the admission, and Cal felt guilty for even bringing it up. “Did I do something wrong?”

Cal chuckled despite himself. “No, if anything it’s that you’ve done everything right. I’ve been feeling a weird sort of jealousy for you.”

His pale companion tilted her head slightly. “Jealous of my magick?”

Cal shook his head. “That’s why I’ve been confused. If I were jealous of that, I could get over it. But I’m jealous of the way you carry yourself, the way you move, the way you talk.” Cal paused a moment. “I’m jealous of how you talk about Ilyana too.”

Merrin’s face visibly darkened at the mention of her long-dead companion and Cal immediately regretted his words. “I apologize, Cal.”

Trying to fix his mistake, Cal started backtracking. “No it’s nothing you did, it’s just that everyone has always talked about me with these expectations of what I’m supposed to be. Hero, Master Jedi, a fine young man. But when you talk about her, it’s about who she was. Helpful, clever, beautiful, loyal, skilled. I guess I just wish people would say those things about me rather than talking about what I’m supposed to be.”

The Nightsister looked confused. “You wish... I would call you beautiful?”

The Jedi blushed until his cheeks matched his hair. “I don’t know, maybe? I wanted to take some time and meditate on all this, but you wanted me here and I couldn’t leave you alone on Dathomir. We’re survivors but if you’re anything like me I know alone in the place you were alone the longest is not where I would want to be.”

“Thank you, Cal Kestis.” Merrin bowed her head slightly. “You are helpful, loyal, clever, skilled,” she paused for a moment and looked at him. “And beautiful!”

Cal was the color of the Dathomirian foliage on the far away surface. After composing himself, he responded, “Thank you, Merrin. You’re the best friend a survivor could ask for.”

Merrin gave him a light hug, the first since he’d woken up after Nur. “Us survivors have to stick together, yes? I will help you until you are able to move again.”

The Maelstrom

He wasn't entirely sure of how long he and Merrin had been in these deep tunnels. A few days, at least. His comms were out of range, and they kept BD-1 in low power mode as much as possible. Regular stim infusions and rest meant Cal was slightly more mobile, and Merrin had brought him scraps from which he'd fashioned crude crutches. They had been subsisting off of what small creatures Merrin could find in the dark tunnels, and she seemed confident they were moving toward a connection with the main tunnel based on what was skittering in the dark.

Cal continued to be awed by Merrin. Even under these circumstances, she was calm and effective. More than once, he'd admitted to her, he'd dreamed of waking up in her body and feeling at home, feeling like he could finally take on all the challenges of the galaxy. His admission had been met with a raised eyebrow. "You are not at home in your own body?"

"No, my body has always felt like just some crude matter I pilot around. Isn't that how most people feel?"

The witch looked at him with worried eyes. "No, Cal Kestis. Most people feel like their body is their own. Magick flows from the flesh and the blood as much as from the ichor."

Cal of course knew of the Living Force, of the energy between all living things. He had always pictured it as a rolling storm cloud in the sky, ever changing and ever moving. He'd also always pictured himself somehow stuck outside of it, especially since the death of his master. Despite all the progress he'd made, Cal still felt there was something holding him back from true connection between himself and the force.

Also more than once, Merrin had slipped up and called him "Ilyana" or "sister." He did not admit how that made him feel. He couldn't admit it. How would he describe it? Like when the Inquisitors first truly saw him as a Jedi, both scared and relieved to finally be seen. He wasn't entirely sure what to make of it, but it felt strangely right. He wouldn't admit that to Merrin, though. He felt ashamed by the idea of sharing that her mistakes and missteps were actually making him feel more at home in his skin than he had in years.

Instead of sharing his confusing feelings, Cal kept himself busy being helpful where he could. After a lesson in what was and wasn't edible in the depths of Dathomir, he had taken to foraging for cave fungi while Merrin scouted ahead. He would venture into the side caverns that his companion deemed unimportant in search of something to eat, and more often than not his search was only barely successful.

The day came that the pair decided to switch off BD-1 for the foreseeable future. Seeking distraction, Cal sidled his way through a crack into a side cavern, his path lit stark blue by the glow of his lightsaber. In there, he found a treasure trove: a pool of still, clear water ringed with edible fungi. The tranquil little space seemed like a perfect place for him to rest and meditate alone for a time. Though his leg was still bound up in bridge remnants and refused

to bend, Cal was able to find a comfortable enough position to extinguish his saber and drift toward the storm clouds.

Cal had always had a knack for seeing the past, but other than in the Bogano Vault he had never been blessed (or cursed, as Master Yoda would have claimed) with visions of the future. It was upon that singular vision that he focused now. He knew the possible future it foretold was long since avoided. Cordova's holocron was destroyed, the children of the Force were safe from the Inquisitors, and Greez's skill had kept them one step ahead of the Empire and the Brood. But Cal was not focusing on the children, and instead pondered the version of himself he saw in the vision. Master Cal Kestis, as much the stoic man as his own master had been, his face lined in a way that made him uncomfortable. Cal did not fear aging, it was the way of all living things and far better than the alternative, but aging like that felt wrong.

Cal let the memory fade and went back to the raging cyclone above and around him in the Force. Lightning in the distance occasionally threw into relief the roiling contours of the clouds, and one flash revealed to him a distant vortex in the clouds, a small area where light was coming through. And for the first time in his meditations, as far back as his first deep meditations while in the Jedi crèche, Cal willed himself into the clouds and through the small eye in the storm.

The instant he had crossed the threshold, the maelstrom closed in on him. He floated, no sense of the world beyond the surface of his skin, until he felt a floor beneath his feet. The clouds parted and a robed figure stood in the void before him.

“Cal Kestis.”

Cal winced. The voice was harsh, deepened by age and all too familiar. The figure tossed aside his black robes, revealing the man behind them. He was bald, and his immaculately shaped beard was well on its way from red to white. His face was as deeply lined. The human before him stood with arms outstretched. In his right hand was an all-too-familiar lightsaber.

“Who are you to deny your own self? To deny what you will become if you do not give up this desire?”

Cal grit his teeth. “I am denying nothing.”

The older man tilted his head forward slightly, as Master Tapal had when Cal gave unsatisfying answers. “You deny your jealousy. Your envy of the power of the witch. You deny your slow march towards selfishness and greed. You want power, strength, beyond what you have, beyond what you should want. You are going down a path you've been denying since you were a child. You deny your desire to become me, Cal Kestis.”

The elder Cal's lightsaber ignited with a snap, its blade casting a red sheen across the two. The younger Cal lit his in turn.

“I stopped down that path when I destroyed the holocron. You're not real and you never will be.”

The elder belted out a single laugh. “There are many paths to the Dark Side, Cal! But none more direct than a lust for power.”

With that, he held out his hand. It was wreathed in green, the unmistakable mark of Nightsister magick, and the elder was chanting. The younger man was bombarded with blasts, beating them back with his lightsaber but unable to direct them back at the man claiming to be his future.

The barrage slowed, and the young Jedi was able to advance forward. Soon, his blade was locked with that of his foe, and their scrambling for a superior position put the two men close enough to feel the other’s breath. Cal stared into the identical eyes before him, eyes that lacked the spark of life that Merrin, Cere, Greez, and seemingly everyone else had. After one more deep breath, Cal stepped back. The stalemate broke in his elder’s favor but he had bought himself a moment to speak.

“I don’t desire Merrin’s power, and I won’t let you convince me I do. I’ll find out why I feel like this, but I’m not going to let confusion lead me back into the storm.”

A hiss marked his saber’s retreat into its hilt, and without breaking eye contact he lifted his chin to his dead-eyed, wizened double.

“I will never become you, Cal Kestis.”

The Jedi was cast into a bright light. A few moments passed before vision returned. The endless clouds were gone, replaced with a field of stars, the whole galaxy. With the glimmer of the stars and the Cosmic Force intermingling with the glow of the Living Force, the firmament was transformed into a tapestry of light and life. One star shimmered strangely, a red star. Moving to the sun of Dathomir, and down onto the living world bathing in its light, the Jedi was suddenly pulled into a new vision of the future, one completely different from that of the Vault.

A red haired human woman wearing a tattered poncho and poorly-fitting boots and a white haired Dathomirian woman walked out of the Nightsister Temple, their backs to the Jedi’s view. The pair held hands and strode calmly away from the stone edifice, as if nothing on the hazardous planet would dare deny them that moment. The Dathomirian dislodged her hand from that of her partner, bringing it up to lay on the other woman’s shoulder and gently turn her around. She then pulled the human into a kiss, leaving her poncho swept aside and her belt visible. Hanging from the human woman’s belt was an intimately familiar weapon to the survivor of Order 66. It was a lightsaber, refashioned from that of an old Lasat with a broken Kyber crystal. The weapon that had saved the Children of the Force.

It was her lightsaber.

The Jedi in the vision pushed aside her long hair, smiling at the pale woman before her, and she recognized her features, though they had been subtly reshaped, softer and smoother in a way that made her heart ache. It all made sense to her. Her jealousy of Merrin hadn’t been for power, or confidence, at least not in themselves. It had been her jealous wish that she could be a woman, a wish so strongly held but so deeply buried that it had survived unanswered through years of training, the war, and exile, only to come bursting to the surface under a few

hundred meters of rock. And now her wish was remembered, and she had seen a potential future in which it had even been fulfilled. In that moment, for the first time not herself and yet for the first time herself, she felt more alive than she could ever remember.

She woke up with tears in her eyes, not tears of sorrow or anger or fear, but for once they were tears of joy. The Jedi survivor had finally found herself.

Hide the Truth

The Jedi nervously poked at the meager fire she had constructed. Merrin said the inedible fungi could be used as fuel, but they burned neither brightly nor cleanly. Regardless, she tended to the fire as she waited for her companion's return.

She had spent some time in the cavern after her vision. While some of that was spent gathering fungi and water, more of it was spent quietly processing her revelation and its implications. She had never heard of another human changing their gender like it seemed she was destined to. She hugged the knee of her unbroken leg to her flat, muscular chest, as if to hide as much of herself from the world as possible. How would Cere react to this? It felt like such a selfish desire, to claim such dominion over one's body, and might even be directly antithetical to the Jedi code. Then again, the Jedi thought, if her ability to focus and help others was being impeded by the disconnect between her mind and body, shouldn't she do whatever she could to heal it? She thought next of Greez and smiled to herself. She figured if anyone would take it in stride, it would be Greez. For all his talk about the dangers beyond the *Mantis*'s boarding ramp, the pilot was always quick to find his footing when surprised and was better at talking about complex emotions than any Jedi she'd known.

Then, of course, there was Merrin. The Nightsister had played a prominent role in her vision, and she couldn't deny the tingle that rose within her when she thought of how tenderly Merrin had touched her in the vision. Or the warmth of Merrin's torso against hers the few times they had embraced. She shook her head as if to look away from the image replaying therein. Such romantic attachments were forbidden, a sure path to the Dark Side. After everything she went through with the Inquisitors, she could not let herself go down a dark path just because she sometimes couldn't tear herself from the earthy depths of Merrin's eyes. She was a Jedi. And besides, Merrin was a Nightsister. Her code might prevent her from ever accepting the Jedi as anything but a man. She might even see her companion's claim to a new gender as a threat to the balance of nature. A threat to be solved with violence.

She hugged her knee tighter. She couldn't act like she hadn't been fundamentally changed by her vision, and she couldn't hide the truth of who she was. Merrin had to know the truth, even if it meant the end of their friendship. Even if it meant having to fight her friend.

"Cal, you would not have to curl up like that if you kept the fire burning."

Hearing her name was like a bucket of cold water on the Jedi, and she snapped her head to face Merrin. The Nightsister carried with her some cave-dwelling creature, and she was already working to prepare it to be cooked. The Jedi snapped into action, quickly tossing more fungi on the smoldering coals left in the pit and stoking the embers back into flames.

"Sorry Merrin. Just... had a lot on my mind."

Merrin shoved the spit through the carcass in a single motion. Stars, she was strong. "Did something happen, Cal? That is a large pile of food you found, you should be proud."

That name again. “Oh, yeah. I found a cavern full of them. Took some time to meditate on everything that’s been bothering me.”

The Dathomirian set the food cooking before looking back to her friend, who had returned to her earlier curled posture. “Was it something bad? You look as shaken as when I found you and Malicos outside the tomb.”

The Jedi couldn’t make eye contact with Merrin without thinking again of the vision. This must be why Master Yoda said the future was best left to itself. “I never told you why I was so startled, did I?”

“You had broken your lightsaber. You were undefended on Dathomir. Any sane person would be beside themselves.”

In spite of herself, she managed a half smile at that. “Well, that was part of it. But mostly it was a vision I’d had inside. I lived through the Jedi Purge all over again, not like a dream or a memory but like I was really there. Then, when I returned, I had another vision just before I met you inside. That time, I saw my dead master and had to fight him.”

Merrin looked at her with eyebrows raised. “Dathomir has not treated you kindly, Cal Kestis.”

That blasted name. “Today I had another vision. But rather than facing my master it was... Myself. Older and more powerful and very much gone down the path of Malicos.”

“You defeated Malicos, and I buried him beneath the tomb.”

“Yes, but I think this is what I would have become if I hadn’t discovered why I had been feeling so untethered. When I denounced him, said I would never become him, I finally understood why I felt what I did. I was jealous of you.”

Merrin let the spit rest and folded her arms on her lap. “Jealous of what? My magick?”

The Jedi’s leg was starting to fall asleep from how tightly she held it. “No, but that’s what I thought it was. I really was jealous that you’re a woman.” She could feel her face was the color of her hair.

Merrin snapped her back upright as if she’d been shocked. “What do you mean by that?”

The Jedi worried she was stepping into dangerous territory, but she was too far along to stop. “What I’m saying is, I think I am a woman. Not on the outside, not yet at least, but I think I’m supposed to be. I saw a vision of the two of us walking out of the temple, and I was a woman in the vision and more at peace than I’ve ever been.” She left out what the two had been doing in the vision. One revelation was enough for today, she thought.

Merrin sat back and thought for a time. The Jedi was unsure whether it was a few seconds or a few hours of silence. Each passing moment made her more and more sure that her anxieties over telling Merrin were coming true. She was ready to reach for her lightsaber when Merrin

lunged over and embraced her, nearly knocking the Jedi into the wall. She held the hug longer than she had in the past before releasing the breathless woman.

Merrin smiled at her flustered friend. "I am glad to finally be meeting you as a sister."

The Jedi blinked in a futile attempt to stem the flow of tears. "Thank you, Merrin."

Merrin leaned back into a more comfortable position. "Thank you for telling me. I should have guessed it was something like this, people do not usually flinch when they hear their names. Do you have a new name for yourself?"

The Jedi hadn't thought about that part. Her old name was so connected to her past life, her life as a man on the run. She needed a name that suited her, that represented her new life. She thought about the stories she had read, the tales she had heard both in the Jedi Temple and from Master Tapal.

"Avar. She was a Jedi Master long ago. A hero to many worlds."

Merrin smiled at her friend before pulling her into another hug. "Avar Kestis, you honor her by choosing that name. It fits you well."

Avar and Merrin stayed in that hug for a bit longer than the Jedi Council would have thought permissible, but in that moment Avar could not care less about what the Order or the Code would have thought.

Tell You a Story

The pair were far from finding the ichor or a way out. BD-1 was still powered down, so it was just Avar and Merrin making their way through the tunnels. Avar missed her little buddy, but she was glad to have time to exist as herself, and she enjoyed spending time with just Merrin.

She stayed a few steps behind the Nightsister as they navigated the twisting depths. Avar had grown quite confident on her crutches and could more or less keep up with Merrin's pace, but the Nightsister insisted that she remain in the lead. "I let you fight my battle for me in the Tomb, let me fight these tunnels for you." Avar had tried to remind her that she had very much helped against Malicos, but Merrin accepted no help beyond the glow of a lightsaber.

Avar didn't enjoy being brushed off like that. It was indicative of a larger trend she had noticed—the pale-haired woman had shed even more of the hard façade she had first shown, and Avar was not sure why. Merrin was laughing at seemingly nothing, constantly looking back to Avar, and more than once Avar had spotted Merrin staring at her before quickly turning away. Avar had checked herself over several times. No, she had neither food on her face nor mud in her hair. Her lightsaber was always where she left it and her clothes were in as fine a condition as they could be in their situation. She could not figure why her Dathomirian companion was seemingly so entertained by her.

A few days after her name was chosen, though in the perpetual dark she was uncertain just how many, Avar finally built up the courage to get an answer. The fire was even smaller than on nights previous, casting the barest amount of warm glow onto the women's faces.

"Merrin?"

"Yes, Avar?"

"Is there something funny about me?"

Merrin pushed her hair from her face and squinted slightly at Avar. "If you are asking if I like your jokes, I still find them very unentertaining." She couldn't even get through her own joke without cracking a smile, losing any pretense of seriousness. "But really, Avar, what do you mean?"

Avar once again assumed her defensive knee-to-chest position. "You've become so much less serious around me, like you can't keep in your laughter about something. I've never seen you like this and I can't help but notice..." Avar's voice croaked slightly. "Is this about me being Avar?"

Merrin saw the moisture in Avar's eyes before the Jedi knew it was there. She reached out and gently pulled the hand from Avar's knee, holding it in hers as her smile faded and her eyes locked with those of her only company.

"May I tell you a story to explain, Avar?"

Avar nodded, worried if she said another word nothing but sobs would come out. Merrin closed her eyes and took one deep breath before speaking.

“I always thought I would spend the rest of my life with Ilyana. We were inseparable, and far more than friends. She was the only person I could be anything but a perfect, stoic, humorless Nightsister around. I wanted to have her with me always. Perhaps it would not have worked out, but I never got to know. She was taken from me and I was left alone. Many of the Nightbrothers offered themselves to me but none interested me. You were the first person I met after her death who put a spark back in my chest. The way you carried yourself was not like the men I had met, though you were no less a warrior than them. You moved like—and fought like—a Nightsister. All acrobatics, like a dance with your opponent. I watched you fight the Nightbrothers in awe, Avar. I watched you face my murdered sisters not with fear, not with malice, but with purpose and grace. I watched you navigate the twisting landscape of my world like it was a game, and I was confused by how much I wanted to join you, held back only by the poisoned words of Malicos. But he is dead, Avar Kestis, and there is nothing holding me back from you now. Nothing holding me back but myself. I thought I could never feel this way for a man, and in the end I was right. Because you are not a man, Avar, you never were. You are the most helpful, loyal, clever, skilled, and beautiful woman to ever come into my life.”

Avar choked on her tears, her lopsided smile wavering as she cried more than she could remember ever crying before. Her eyes darted between the embers of Merrin’s eyes and her dark lips before setting on the latter. Merrin did not notice, as her gaze was already fixated on Avar’s smile. The witch’s perfectly soft hands felt over the calluses on the Jedi’s; this string along the palm from years on Bracca, that knob on the first finger from her lightsaber. Every centimeter belonging to the woman she hadn’t known she would fall for.

“Avar Kestis, I would like to kiss you.”

“Nightsister Merrin, I would be honored.”

Avar had never kissed before. She had been separated from her peers at the start of her adolescence, and the years since the war had not been kind to her. Her inexperience was no hindrance in that moment, as Merrin immediately took command. A pale hand beneath her chin guided Avar’s face forward, and on instinct she positioned her left hand against the rocky floor, the other finding its way to Merrin’s side.

Merrin’s lips against hers nearly caused her to buckle. The icy-colored skin so near to her seemed paradoxically warm, driving out a phantom chill in Avar’s extremities. There was nothing forceful about the moment, only Merrin and Avar’s gentle exploration. Avar lost herself in the moment, like she did in the bright light of her vision, and felt inextricably entangled with Merrin. Not like an animal in a trap, like one elder Jedi had said of romantic attachment, but like the collision of two stars into something grander, more luminous, and altogether more beautiful.

The eternal moment ended as Merrin pulled slightly back and took a deep breath, closing her eyes for an instant before looking back at the Jedi.

Avar blinked in an attempt to wipe away what must be an illusion. “I’ve never done that before.”

Merrin smiled brighter than Avar had seen in her before. “Would you like to do it again?”

Avar nodded, and another long moment passed between them as the barely-there coals went dark.

Rebirth

Avar giggled as Merrin helped her over a rise. Their relationship was still new to her, and every time Merrin's hand so much as brushed Avar's skin she felt as giddy as in the moment they first kissed. Avar caught herself on the top of the rise and pulled herself upright, using the wall as support as she picked up the crutches they had tossed ahead. She looked further down their path as Merrin hoisted herself up. She saw a familiar green smoke ahead, faint but definitely present. The unmistakable mark of Dathomir's ichor.

"Merrin! I see it!"

"Then help me up, Avar, and we will finally finish our quest."

Avar steadied herself against the rock and grabbed Merrin's hand, pulling her up to her position. The two held each other's hands for a moment longer, looking into each other's eyes as they caught their breath before pulling in for a kiss. Their time alone together was drawing to a close, and it had been well over a week of the two women spending nearly every moment together. Avar realized in that moment she didn't want it to end. Jedi weren't supposed to form connections like she had with Merrin, but then again the Jedi were all but gone. Avar could make her own way forward, and she wanted that way to be with Merrin at her side.

Merrin eventually broke away from the kiss. "Let us finish what we started, Avar." She waited a moment as Avar set herself on her crutches. The two then crossed the last stretch of rock between them and the pool.

The black water of the pool was only occasionally visible through the shifting luminous fog that filled the space. Merrin smiled at Avar. "Once I have collected enough, I can transport us out of here in no time. And heal your leg, I suppose." The Nightsister moved closer to the Jedi. "Not that I mind getting to carry you, Avar."

Avar's heart fluttered. She found a comfortable spot to rest as Merrin began collecting the vapors. Merrin held her hands out over the pool and began chanting in Dathomirian.

This chant was not as foreboding as the Chant of Resurrection, but was instead a calm, rhythmic sound that slowly coaxed the mist into forming into more tangible clouds. Avar watched as the clouds of Force energy flowed around the room. Merrin breathed in deeply, pulling the vapor into her lungs, and opened her eyes to reveal them glowing the same green. Tendrils of coalesced mist surrounded her as her chant continued, spiraling around her hands and depositing into her grasp as a solid crystal. Watching her work was unlike anything Avar had ever seen, unlike anything the Jedi would have shown her.

What would the Jedi think of her now? Being Avar, being attached to a future self that may not ever come to be, being attached to a witch of Dathomir... her breaches of the Jedi Code were likely numerous.

She looked at the beautiful Nightsister ritual in front of her, the last Nightsister performing her rites while in the company of a Jedi. A Nightsister using her magick to help the helpless,

to fight against tyrants rather than as a weapon of oppression and deceit. And if she was no less of a Nightsister for that, then Avar was no less of a Jedi.

With renewed confidence in her path, she watched as the crystal in Merrin's hands grew to its full size and as her eyes faded back to their usual brown. Merrin tucked the ichor crystal into her bag and walked around the pool to Avar.

"Well, Avar, let us heal that leg." She offered a hand to the Jedi.

Avar stood up with Merrin's assistance and moved to the edge of the pool. The ink-black pool reflected her face back to her, the same face she'd had when she came in. The face of the man she no longer was.

Would the Jedi allow her to change her appearance like she wanted to?

Should it matter what they would have wanted?

"Merrin?" Avar nearly choked on the words. "When you fix my leg, can you fix... something else?"

Merrin looked into the reflection alongside Avar. Her expression was enough for Avar to know Merrin understood what she wanted.

"Avar, you know I already think you are beautiful." She turned Avar towards her, and traced her thumb around the Jedi's face. "But if you do not see it, there may be a way to change your appearance. Not a permanent change, though I am sure such things exist in the galaxy."

Avar nodded. She wanted whatever she could get.

Merrin sat her down at the pool's edge. "Now, I will change your reflection, tell me when it is as you feel is right."

Merrin began a slow chant to change the face in the water. Slowly, the face looking back at Avar felt more and more like herself. After a few minutes, she stopped Merrin. Looking back at her from the water was the spitting image from her vision. That was her.

Merrin gestured to a shallow part of the pool. "Lay in the waters. I will heal your leg, then I will help you see your beauty."

Avar lowered herself into the water. She expected it to be warm with all the mists around, but it was ice cold. Once she was immersed in the water, Merrin first said a short chant to heal her leg. There was a sickening crunching sound as the hastily-aligned bones moved to their proper places and healed in a single painful instant. Avar gritted her teeth, both against the cold and the pain, but as soon as it began it ended.

"That wasn't so bad!"

Merrin chuckled. "That was the easy part."

Merrin began a second chant, and rather than freezing it was like Avar's whole body was on fire.

“ Jjasa mux nyb-agar-ztilb-edre. ”

Avar closed her eyes and took a deep breath and left the pain behind, picturing herself not in a pool of black water but floating among the stars, like in her vision.

“ Nyb agar ztilb-edre nyb-agar-ztilb-edre. ”

She once again flew through the void between the stars to the red world of Dathomir.

“ Jjasa muz loks nyb ssav nak ssieg. ”

She flew through the atmosphere more gracefully than even the *Mantis* could manage, and flew down into the ruined temple.

“ Agar egol dulb kam erip nak ssieg. ”

She followed the tunnels she and Merrin had left behind with their fall, going towards the pool much faster than the several days it had taken them.

“ Ztilb bo girik kam fwel nak ssieg. ”

She looked down at herself. Her whole body was glowing, her features inscrutable in the light. But she trusted Merrin, trusted her with her life. Merrin's chant reached a crescendo and she reached out to her body in the pool below.

“ Niets bo nedrah kam edre nak ssieg. ”

Avar sat upright in the pool, gasping for breath. She felt a new weight on her chest as it heaved, a new weight of wet hair dripping down her back. She pulled herself from the water and looked back into the pool.

As the water calmed down from her hasty exit, she saw her face. She saw herself. She turned to Merrin, tears streaming down her face, and pulled the Nightsister into a kiss. She felt Merrin's hand tracing along the curve of her waist, coming to rest on the small of her back.

Merrin pulled back first from the kiss.

“You are beautiful, Avar Kestis.”

“But now I feel it too.”

“And you may never be a Nightsister, Avar, but with your rebirth here today, I can count you as a true Daughter of Dathomir.”

They hugged for a while longer before Merrin spoke again.

“Avar?”

“Yes Merrin?”

“Is it not against your Jedi Code to form romantic attachments?”

“It is, and I’m not exactly supposed to spend so much time with a Nightsister either. But the Jedi Council are all gone, and I think survivors like me deserve the chance to make our own paths.”

“I am honored you would break your code for me, Avar.”

The two continued to hold each other in silence by the pool until Merrin finally said, “I suppose your friends must be worried about us.”

Avar had all but forgotten the world beyond the Nightsister’s arms, and the reminder that Cere and Greez had no idea where they were snapped her back to the real world. She quickly switched on BD-1, who gave a confused whistle at Avar.

“Uh, hi BD. I’m Avar Kestis now. Hope we can still be friends.”

The small droid climbed up to his master’s shoulder as if nothing had changed. Avar smiled and turned to Merrin. “Let’s get on our way, then.” She held out her hand to the witch and the two embraced as Merrin magicked them back to the surface, the green mist swirling around them as they disappeared.

Attachment

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Avar and Merrin rematerialized in the entrance hall of the temple, still holding one another. They looked at the archway before them, blinking in the bright late-afternoon sun after days of nothing but darkness.

Avar looked at BD-1, perched on her shoulder as always. “Ready to see Cere and Greez again buddy?” BD-1 trilled affirmatively.

Avar turned to Merrin. “He says he’s ready.”

Merrin raised an eyebrow. “Are you?”

Avar hadn’t thought about confronting Cere and Greez with everything that had transpired in the caves. Cere would know better than her how many times she had violated the Jedi Code. As far as she knew, she and Cere were all that were left of the Jedi, and the woman was the closest she had to family. On the other hand, she was not going to undo all the progress she made just for Cere’s discomfort.

“I can’t control how they’ll feel, but they need to know. It’s not like there’s much we could do to avoid it at this point.”

Merrin smiled. “Regardless of what happens, I will be by your side, Avar Kestis.”

BD-1 made sure she knew that he would be on her side rather than by it.

The pair held hands and strode calmly away from the stone edifice, as if nothing on the hazardous planet would dare deny them that moment. The Dathomirian dislodged her hand from that of her partner, brought it up to lay on Avars’s shoulder and gently turned her around. She then pulled the human into a kiss, and after pulling away Avar nervously pushed aside her new longer hair.

“There’s something I haven’t told you about my vision. All of that just now? I saw that.”

Merrin feigned being scandalized. “Avar Kestis, you kept secrets from me?”

Before Avar could respond, she was shut up by another kiss before the two continued on towards the still-stationary *Mantis* .

The two climbed the boarding ramp, and a hoot from BD-1 announced their arrival.

“Thank the Force, you’re finally back.”

“Cere was worried sick, but I told her, ‘those kids are probably up to some kinda...’” Greez’s voice trailed off as he turned to see Avar standing in the entryway, her hand still clasped by

Merrin.

Merrin squeezed her hand more tightly.

“Uh, hi Cere. Hi Greez. We fell into some trouble and had to take a long way around but we got the ichor and we’re ready to get going wherever’s next.”

Cere stood in front of the two younger women with her arms crossed, not speaking. Avar was relieved when Greez spoke first.

“So, uh, you two an item now or something?”

Merrin looked at Avar and smiled. “Yes, Avar Kestis and I are much more than the friends we were when we entered the caves.”

Greez chuckled. “Can’t say I didn’t see that coming, woulda put money on it but I don’t wanna risk it again with the Brood. Hey, kid—uh, Avar, you still take your Scaaz steaks medium rare?”

Avar smiled and nodded at the pilot, who promptly started towards the ship’s kitchen. “Alright, Scaaz steaks for dinner then! To celebrate the happy couple and getting to meet Avar!”

Cere still hadn’t spoken, and was just looking Avar up and down.

Finally she spoke, and Avar wished she hadn’t. “It’s against the Code.”

Merrin squeezed Avar’s hand almost too tight, and she spoke with a tone Avar hadn’t heard since the death of Malicos. “What is against your code, Cere?”

“Attachment, Avar. Don’t worry, there’s nothing wrong with being yourself—Jedi of all people should understand that outside appearances and first impressions are never the whole story. But becoming too attached to a single person holds a Jedi back from what they need to do. From the tough choices they need to be able to make.”

Avar had heard this speech before, just not from Cere. She took a deep breath, let it out, and with that breath she did her best to release the pain from this conversation.

“I am ready to do what must be done. Part of my... feelings for Merrin hinge on knowing that she can more than fend for herself. If it comes to saving her or the galaxy, I can trust her to save herself.”

“It’s about more than that, Avar. Attachments like this will constantly distract you, pull you from what you need to be doing...”

“If it’s a mistake, let me make my own mistakes, Cere.”

Merrin gave Avar’s hand a small congratulatory squeeze.

Cere sighed. “Fine, but I won’t help you fix them either.”

“Thank you, Cere.”

“Don’t mention it.” Cere started back towards the comms array. “And Saw contacted us. Needs a supply run done, low-profile.”

Merrin looked at Avar and smiled. “Not exactly your style.”

Cere chuckled as she sat down. “No, not at all. If there’s anywhere you need to be, now would be a good time for us to separate a while. I know we just reunited and all but Greez and I can handle this on our own. Just like old times, right?”

The Latero didn’t even look up from his cooking to respond. “As long as it’s not like that time on Garel, sure.”

Merrin pulled Avar over to the holoprojector. “I seem to recall you promising me a tour of the Origin Tree, Avar Kestis.”

“Imperial activity around there has slowed down since the Ninth Sister failed to return.” Cere looked at Merrin. “You keep her safe and don’t let her draw too much attention.”

Merrin smiled and held out a hand to Avar’s shoulder. Taking the hint, BD-1 crawled across her arm to sit on her shoulder. “Do not worry Cere, we will keep her safe.”

Cere stood up. “Alright then, Saw knows we’re on our way. As soon as we’ve eaten and caught up, we’ll make for Kashyyyk. What trouble did you run into that took you over a week to handle?”

Avar gestured to BD-1, and the droid projected an image of the rope bridge prior to its collapse. Avar smiled and began her story.

Chapter End Notes

That's it for now! I have several things in the tubes for here so if there's any that you'd prefer first I'd love to know.

Obviously, I will be continuing *Bad Batch: Crosswired*. It isn't gonna be as long or polished as this one was but that idea has been in my head since the show's finale so I'm glad to be finally putting it to words.

I'm also working on a High Republic story, specifically about Lula Talisola and Zeen Mrala. It already seems like it's going to be a longer-form story than this one which I am excited to try out! My girls deserve more than two books and a smattering of comics.

And since I can't get Avar (Kestis, not Kriss) and Merrin out of my head, I already have several ideas for future stories about them. Of course this will start with a fluffier story about their trip to the Origin Tree.

Holy heck, 1000 hits at time of posting! Thanks for reading <3

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!