

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Sidious bounces back.

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Just as quickly as shock takes him, Sidious gets himself back under control. After all, he is a Sith Lord, the Master of a thousand year old Sith Dynasty hiding in the shadows. He is not prone to... overreactions. Of course, he's also Supreme Chancellor Palpatine, a seemingly fallible man.

So even as he keeps his real surprise off of his face, Sidious is letting fake surprised happiness spread across his features.

“Anakin! My boy, that's such great news! I can't help but be shocked... not because you don't deserve it, but because I never would have thought the Council would realize what a gem they had in you!”

In response, Anakin smiles bashfully, ducking his head.

“Ah, well... I suppose I was still rather caught off guard. I am still quite young for such a promotion Chancellor, let alone the appointment to the Council...”

Yes. He was. It was, quite frankly, utterly ridiculous that the Jedi High Council had made this decision. It was probably the biggest mistake they'd made yet and Sidious had made an entire career out of forcing them to make mistakes. The Battle of Geonosis for instance, where hundreds of Jedi died and the lie of Jedi Invincibility was laid bare, was one of his crowning moments really.

And yet... this right here, making someone as young as Anakin into a Jedi Master and then giving him a Council Seat... what in the universe were they thinking?

“I believe I would never have received this promotion or appointment this early without the war though. The loss of so many Masters and Council Members...

and my success on the battlefield. Those are the primary reasons they promoted me now, I imagine.”

Hm... yes...

“Ah yes. I think I heard something about that in a recent report. They say you employed a technique called Battle Meditation in the Battle of Malastare, yes. Is this a particularly advanced technique among the Jedi Order?”

Obviously, Sidious knew that it was. Furthermore, he knew that Anakin’s use of it to influence the space battle from the *surface* of the planet demonstrated an unprecedented amount of not just power but also control. He truly was the most spectacular apprentice that Sidious could have hoped for... though this most recent revelation certainly threatened those plans.

“Well... yes, I suppose it’s certainly not common. I’m sure most Jedi Masters with a martial bent could do it though.”

Hah, Anakin was being humble. Giving him a ‘pointed’ look, Sidious smiles grandfatherly.

“But could they do it from the surface of the planet, far from the space battle itself Anakin?”

Here, Anakin flushes and ducks his head again... but the smile on his face makes it clear he’s proud of his actions and proud of his accomplishments... and as they say, pride goeth before the fall.

“I suppose not, Chancellor.”

Seeing his opportunity, Sidious pounces.

“They were right to promote you, my boy. They were right to appoint you to the Council as well. Though I fear they did both things for the wrong reasons...”

That brings Anakin’s head back up, concern spreading across her face.

“The wrong reasons? I don’t understand, Chancellor.”

Leaning back in his chair, Sidious folds his hands over his chest.

“Well Anakin... as you’ve said, your youth would normally disqualify you from such things. In fact, I’m fairly certain you’ve probably just broken records, even if my history of Jedi Lore might be a little lacking. As such, I can’t help but wonder if they’ve only done this... out of fear.”

Thoughtful consternation twists Anakin’s features into a frown as he considers that. At the same time, Sidious reaches out carefully in the Force, needing to see for himself the state of the young man’s Force Presence. For over a decade now, Sidious has done all he could to cultivate the kernel of Darkness within Anakin Skywalker.

“... Fear...”

Even as the Jedi had raised him in the Light, Anakin’s past experiences had kept him from truly embracing the emotionless dogma of detachment that the Jedi preached. Even as his presence in the Force had blazed brighter and brighter, Sidious had always known that flipping him to the Dark Side would be as simple as arranging a handful of particularly bad days for the young man.

But what if he was wrong? What if Anakin had fully embraced the Light Side when he wasn’t looking? That’s what Sidious reaches out to check now, even as he continues on his conversation with Anakin.

“They’re afraid of losing you, my boy. Much like they lost Count Dooku, who as you know was a Jedi Master long before he became our enemy. In their fear, they grip all the tighter onto you... I just don’t wish to see them squeeze the life out of you, I suppose.”

Fortunately, when Sidious looks... he sees no signs that anything has changed. Anakin Skywalker might be a Jedi Master and member of the Jedi High Council now, but his presence in the Force is still deliciously, tumultuously unstable. All

of Sidious' hard work, all of his efforts... they won't be undone quite so easily simply by the Jedi giving Anakin more recognition than he truly deserved.

Feeling this, Sidious relaxes a bit more, knowing that all he has to do is maintain his current course and continue to sow doubt in the young man across from him until it's finally time to pull the trigger on the establishment of his new Empire.

"I... I'm sure that's not their intention, Chancellor."

He doesn't sound sure at all, which is exactly what Sidious needs. So of course, having gotten what he wants, Sidious pulls back.

"Of course, of course. I could be entirely wrong. In fact, I probably am... treat my words as the words of an old man who has seen far too much political maneuvering in my life. It taints my view, I suppose."

Then, he swiftly changes the subject.

"In other news, you'll be quite pleased to know that what we talked about the last time you came to my office has come to fruition."

Sidious has to hide his true smile behind another warm, grandfatherly grin as Anakin immediately straightens up, alert as can be.

"Oh?"

"Indeed! I've found a way to keep Senator Amidala from throwing herself into further danger. She will be forced to stay here on Coruscant for the foreseeable future... as she has officially been appointed as the next in line for the Chancellorship if anything is to befall me. If I am to become incapacitated or in the worst case, killed, she will become Acting Supreme Chancellor of the Republic."

It was, as far as Sidious was concerned, a Master Stroke. Not only did it score him points with Anakin by satisfying his fears regarding his secret wife, it also placated the growing discontent within the Senate. Unbeknownst to both Anakin

and those malcontents who would stop Sidious from forming his Galactic Empire, Padme was his agent through and through. Anakin had married the girl while the Senators had rallied around her and thought her to be one of her own... but in truth, she belonged to him.

For a Force Null like the young Nabooian woman, she had proven more useful to Sidious than many of his Force Sensitive tools if he was being completely honest. Such a shame that he would probably have to arrange her death before this was all through though. He wouldn't abide by divided loyalties within his future apprentice... and losing his wife would surely be exactly what was needed for Anakin to complete his fall to the Dark Side when the time came.

"That's... that's excellent news. Thank you, Chancellor, truly. You don't know how much this means to me."

On the contrary, Sidious knew exactly how much it meant to him. But rather than correct the younger man, he just smiles warmly.

"But of course, Anakin. I'm always happy to help. Now then... I suppose we should get back to your original purpose here. You said before that you'd offered to take over Master Windu's report to me?"

Anakin jolts up, having clearly forgotten for a moment.

"Oh! Yes Chancellor, of course! Sorry, I completely forgot!"

Sidious just chuckles and shakes his head.

"Think nothing of it, my boy. You can always count on me!"

Anakin nods, smiling right back before finally launching into the report from the Jedi Council. As the excited young man begins telling Sidious everything that had occurred in today's Council Meeting, Sidious quickly realizes that having Anakin report to him (and with the Jedi Council's full blessing no less) is actually quite the boon.

After all, Windu was naturally suspicious of Sidious and generally standoffish even at the best of times. The man did the bare minimum expected of him by telling the Supreme Chancellor what he thought Palpatine needed to know about what went on in the Council Chambers... but he certainly left out plenty all the same.

Anakin, on the other hand, was much too young to realize that Sidious' earlier words about politics potentially clouding his judgment were patently false for more reasons than one. In the end, the Jedi Order might pretend to be above such petty things as politics... but they weren't, not truly. And while the Council might like to keep certain things from reaching Sidious' ears, Anakin had no such filter.

As the young man talks and talks, Sidious just sits back and listens. While he might have been a bit perturbed by their decision making initially, he's quite pleased with this mistake now. The Jedi have effectively given him an open sieve into their affairs by appointing Anakin to the Council and promoting him to Master this early. The utter fools...

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Vader feels rather gross by the time he leaves Sidious in his office... but he also feels quite accomplished. He could tell, after all was said and done, that the other Sith Lord truly didn't suspect a thing. Which was good considering all of their plans hinged on Sidious remaining in the dark for a little while longer.

As much as a Fallen Jedi Order had thrown Vader for a loop and left him questioning things, not much had actually changed. The plan to kill Sidious and see Padme take his place as Supreme Chancellor remained. As did the plan to eventually have her become Empress of a new Galactic Empire.

The Republic needed to die... all that had really changed was whether the Jedi Order needed to die with it. Or... could the Jedi Order perhaps evolve into something new instead?

He was never going to destroy the entire Order as Sidious had done in the previous timeline. Killing the younglings all over again was not something Vader had even considered, especially when it was one of his greatest regrets. Murdering children did not make him stronger, nor did it truly enhance his connection to the Dark Side. And the real reason he'd done it, in order to save Padme from death... well, he hadn't even gotten that much.

No, the plan had always been to salvage the youngest of the Jedi Order for a new organization within his and Padme's Empire. However... now Vader was left wondering whether the oldest could also be salvaged. If, for instance, someone like Yoda could be convinced to see the beauty of the Dark Side and be trusted with teaching at a new Sith Academy... well, it would certainly free Vader up for other pursuits like the end of slavery in every corner of the galaxy.

He already knew he could control some of the Jedi Masters who had Fallen. The likes of Shaak Ti, Depa Billaba, and Aayla Secura for instance. But what if he could have ALL of them join him?

... It seemed like a bit of a pipe dream, admittedly. And Vader certainly wasn't going to sacrifice his plans just to try to make it happen. Still, he was willing to slow down for a moment to check on things such as Kenobi's status. If even Obi-Wan Kenobi had fallen to the Dark Side... well then, Vader wanted to know it.

In the morning he'll return to the Resolute and have the 501st make ready to head out to join the 212th and the 41st. In the meantime... Vader heads for the only place that makes sense, both to bring his wife up to speed on the day's surprises and revelations... and to enjoy this brief moment they'll have together before he has to leave again.

Admittedly, the look he can imagine on Padme's face when he tells her what he's discovered does make him smile quite broadly.

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!

