

To Give Light (One Must First Burn)

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To Give Light (One Must First Burn)

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Summary

Count Dooku travels to Theed to meet with Padme Amidala.

Sideous has ordered his apprentice to kill the Independent Naboo queen under the guise of luring her to Dooku's confederacy, but Queen Amidala, First of Her Name, makes him a counteroffer he finds...tempting.

Notes

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

"You think I have not seen that peace is a lie," the Naboo queen purrs, shattering what should be a peaceful dinner. She does not expound on the ripped out piece of Sith philosophy, but her eyes sparkle in the most damning way.

Dooku stiffens in his chair, wine glass raised to his lips. But only for a moment. Fortunately, age has given him decorum. He keeps his face carefully blank, watches the Naboo royal that his master Sideous has instructed him to get rid of at all costs. She is a burr in his robes, an independent girl who dares to harm Sideous' grand ambitions.

Though not a girl any longer; she is in her twentieth year, he understands. But she has hardly lived as full a life as Dooku, as his master.

It's a pity Sideous wants her to die, because for that alone, Dooku likes her. She is the independent Queen of Naboo, last queen of the old order and first queen of the next. She defied the Republic for the betterment of her people; she has never shirked from her duties.

Including now, it seems.

It is admirable, and she is charming; there's an easy, languid grace to her. He sees why she is the first monarch of this new order, and in this, he cannot help but feel a kinship with her. He, too, is a firebrand, ushering in a new era.

But his is founded on far less charming philosophies than hers. His Confederacy is built on the back of Palpatine's hideous dreams; does this little Queen know, he wonders? She is no force-sensitive, true, but how much has Palpatine's tutelage shaped her?

He refuses to take the bait of her Sith philosophy jab, merely looking her way and placidly smiling. "Regrettably, there are many in the Republic who would think this is so," he says. *Including the Chancellor*, he doesn't say. "But the Separatist army is neither so vulgar nor so bloodthirsty, my queen."

"I am no queen of *yours*, Dooku," she says, eschewing his title. It's a slight, but a small one. He notices, though. "Do *not* presume to know my answer to a question you have not asked."

"Indeed," he says, smiling politely. It's an act, but not much of one. She is *sharp*, this woman, and he sees why Palpatine has held her as both a beloved confidant and hated enemy. "Your passion gives you credit," he says, a deliberate warning to her to be ready; *pret*, he all but whispers under his breath. *Prepare for a duel, little queen.*

Not that she would understand such things. She is not Sith; not even force sensitive enough to be considered applicable for the Jedi. Had she been so, he has no doubt his master would have taken her for an apprentice instead of him when Maul had become too much a danger to live; she is much younger than him, with a familiar banner to rally under. Palpatine likes such things; Dooku has made note of it, as it is a weakness.

Would she have found her hand on the saber clasped at Maul's throat? Would, she, too, have paid the price of admission to such forbidden knowledge with quick and brutal murder? He

had. He suspects, she, too, would draw the blade.

It is a pity; but for that quirk of genetics that has left her without an excess level of midichlorians, she would make a good duelist. She has the killer instinct.

"Passion is our strength here," she says; most monarchs would be ashamed of such revolutionary fervor and yet the monarch of the Naboo holds her head high. "We are few but we are willing to die for our beliefs, if need be."

"The Republic would like that," he says, a bit too glib - a lunge, one she's meant to circle around and riposte. Her reaction is well-masked but he sees her raw anger in her, for just one second. There's a spark in her eyes at that; oh yes, there is *fire* in those eyes. She *will* fight.

"And I suppose your people will save us from a quick and painful death?" She raises an eyebrow, delicate; a riposte, and a graceful one. He holds back a smile and leans forward, ostensibly delighted. He opens his mouth only for her to silence him by a wave of that one quick finger.

She says nothing at first, finishing the last few bites of the traditional Naboo meal she has had served at their meeting. It's a delicate meal - sea creatures of some sort, with a salad - but one that must be eaten carefully, in traditional steps. It describes their people well, he thinks. She does not speak again until one of her many colorfully robed handmaidens takes away her plate with a bow; he holds his tongue.

Sith are very good at biding their time. Jedi, too, know patience, and so Dooku acts, despite the raging river that runs through his ancient veins.

"I already know what you will say, Dooku. Your people will protect us; you personally will throw the wealth of Serrano at us should a crisis occur. But we have already been neglected by one master, one far wealthier than yourself; what will you do to prevent the Invasion of Naboo from coming to occur again?"

He knows well of the event of which she speaks. "That event was the very foundation of my cause," he says; the truth, and all the more tempting because of it. He lunges forward again, both figuratively and literally; he takes advantage of his height, leaning forward and looming over this small table, over this mere slip of a girl who holds an entire world between her fingers. "I left the Jedi when they refused to help you; seeing Chancellor Palpatine - Senator, then - begging for assistance to deaf ears...it was proof that the Republic itself no longer worked as it should. It was clear to me then - and no doubt to you now -"

"Do not assume to know my thoughts, *Jedi*," she says, waving a hand. He turns away to hide his surprise at that interruption; have the years she had spent learning at Palpatine's hand left her with a grudge against Jedi? Or perhaps the way her homeworld had withered under a year-long blockade has hardened her heart to such so-called saviors. Either way, it is something Dooku can work with and something he carefully notes.

"A figure of speech, my lady," he says, once he is sure his face has shifted back to the placid, calm demeanor he means to project. "As I was saying, it was clear to me then that the Republic wants us to claim fealty to her, but does not hold such fealty to us. They demand an

army for us, but - *who liberated the Naboo?*" That is a trap, and he announces it with a light stomp of his foot upon the floor. *Your move, your highness.*

"Naboo liberated *herself*," the diminutive woman says. Her expression suggests pride, but perhaps harsh memories too - the Naboo suffered for their pride, he knew. Without republic trade, their medical supplies were all but decimated within weeks, their food shortage all but immediate. Naboo was a careful planet, had had copious shares for a week or two but no preparations made for such a long and expanded siege on their way of life. It was rumored, Palpatine said, that people were hunting the gungans to eat in the later months of the siege - though no one knew for certain, as the gungans had not resurfaced in many years. It was possible, he supposed, that they were extinct now.

He had once debated going to Boss Nass - or whoever was in power now - to offer a settlement for their warriors, but he had found better allies elsewhere. Now, with Queen Amidala, he held the potential of a far more potent alliance - or would have, had his master not bid her destroyed.

But then again, who was he to owe anything to Palpatine? He has been a talented student in both his apprenticeships and surely he has earned the right to claim mastery. He is older, stronger, and certainly more of an idealist than Sideous. Perhaps ordering the death of the Naboo Queen has been the death rattle of Palpatine, who is overly hungry for power with little to show for it.

"Indeed it did, my lady," he says, reaching out one large hand to grasp her diminutive one. She allows her hand to be held, limply, but merely that; she is as passive as a Jedi. "You are a strong monarch, no matter what the republic says."

Her mask stays firmly in place, the white-chalk make-up resembling nothing so much as a skull. Her lips are red, a long line stretching down past her chin- the scar of remembrance, he knows. It is longer on her than most, thanks to her reigns, a sign of a potent and firm leadership in one so young. Sideous, he thinks, has made a critical error in offending this queen.

"Your flattery means nothing to me," she says, dismissing the friendly overtone outright. He bites back the urge to scowl as the dragon inside him roars, but then her hand clamps down on his and he twitches. "*Power* is all I need, my lord. The power of my people, and the power to defend ourselves against outside influences- " She squeezes his hand again - "including the Republican military, if it is so. Or the Separatist army, if it is so."

So - now they had gone to the heart of the matter, and they had done it on her terms. A hit, from the queen, a most powerful hit.

He cups her little hand in his; his hands are much bigger, he looms nearly a foot taller and yet the look in the queen's eye suggests nothing so much as evaluation; he can see the softness in her eyes, or what once could have been softness; the hard edges of a once-suffered starvation have honed her to a far sharper weapon.

"You wish me to tell you the Separatist army is not a threat to you?" He raises an eyebrow. "I cannot make that promise, madam. Should you stand against us, you will be the first

Republic planet outside of Separatist space... I will not deign to draw your conclusions, but -

" He sighs. "It is not the way I would prefer to greet this planet again. As I said, we do not wish for anything but peace but – my people will die for their homeworlds as much as yours would. Any war between us would be protracted, bloody; that, you must believe, is not my wish."

"If we were to join you," she says slowly, looking straight at him, those eyes little solar flares, nearly blinding him with the fire in them. "Then we would be on the edge of Republic space. You ask us to be slaughtered either way."

"My Lady, it is only through power that you can gain victory," he says; this bit of Sith wisdom grabs her interest, he can tell. "Serrano is in the Outer-Rim but we can cross to Naboo air-space within hours; Geonosis, our capital, is but a mere 30 parsecs from you. Coruscant has already ignored you once in your time of need; they will find it quite easy to do again."

"They are in need of our plasma," she says, stubbornly. He can see from the tilt of her jaw that he has scored a point, and he presses the attack once more, without mercy.

"They have found other planets capable of divining plasma, my lady; though you are closest to Coruscant, you are not the only one who can boast such resources anymore. But you would be by far one of the most bountiful worlds should you join us in the Confederacy - there is power in that."

She is silent for a long while. He allows himself to sit back down in his chair and waits for her response. He can afford to let her think about it. If her answer is the Republic, well - she will sign her death warrant there. He will go back to Sideous and note his success, bend the knee, and bide his time.

But should she see reason...

"Count Dooku," she says, finally, gripping both arms of the heavily ornate chair that she is seated upon. "You speak of the Republic's neglect of us and certainly that has been true. Should we remain independent, I have little doubt your people, along with the Chancellor's, would both attack us." A shadow crosses her face; there is no love lost between Palpatine and this queen, he sees. "However, I - as well as my people - would rather die free than become slaves."

"Of course," he says. There have been a great many bloody slave uprising in the galaxy as well, something that, should he separate from Palpatine, will play well to his advantage. Palpatine has pressed for mandatory conscription of non-humanoid races; a measure necessary to build the fanciful weapons like the Death Star but needless to say incredibly controversial throughout the Core Worlds.

He will reach out to some of those former slave warlords that now dot the outer rim, if she chooses him here: there is Skywalker on Tatooine, young but blooded; Ta'qui in Sibensko. Both, he suspects, would join his fight if he were to offer them a chance to fight against both the Republic and the Hutts. "I am not a proponent of slavery."

"If indeed not," she says, turning her head to him. "Then pledge *yourself* to me. You will stitch us a binding thread to weave our cultures together. If we join you, we will join you utterly; you will be as wedded to the Naboo as I will be to the people of Serrano, and the Confederacy, as a whole, will be our children."

He raises an eyebrow - he has not been expecting that. Still, it is a tempting offer - she is a gorgeous woman and he has no dependents and few years left. And certainly, if he shall cleave himself from Palpatine, he will need a talented, young disciple - and without the force, well, she can hardly usurp him as a Sith.

"I accept your offer," he says, downing what was left of his wine. There are no celebrations at his acceptance, not even a moment of relief; the Naboo queen does not love him, he knows. But he is strong and holds power, and is capable and crafty, and that will be enough. Perhaps in time, she will come to care for him; it mattered little, in the end, so long as she continues their work.

"I shall prepare for war then," she says, standing. She turns toward her handmaiden and they leave the dining area together, not even bothering to spare a glance toward her groom.

He knows when next he will see her, she will be wearing red. The regal bridal color of the Naboo, he thinks, is the same as a Sith bloodblade.

And how appropriate that is; she will not fit the white dresses of the common-folk of the Naboo. The queen is a flame, lighting the way of the other territories. He needs only follow in her wake.

He stands and another of the silent, odd women dressed in handmaiden's garb escorts him toward the door. He can feel Sideous none-too-gently probing at the mental shields he has erected, but Count Dooku ignores the calls, turning instead to the matter of his next move in this chess game.

He has allies to convince, and battles to be won.

End Notes

This fic is set in an Alternative Universe where the Jedi/the Senate never interfered in the blockade at Naboo, and thus the invasion of Naboo turned into a year-long siege, Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon never encountered Maul, and Anakin never was discovered. Palpatine still made it to becoming Chancellor, though it took him longer, and Padme never left Naboo to become a senator and instead worked, with Palpatine, to end the siege.

Because of the Republic's lack of interest in freeing the Naboo, Padme ran for her third and final election with a promise to make Naboo an independent nation. Palpatine, her former confidant, did not take kindly to her asking him to renounce his chancellorship and return home.

I could not find a canon location for Serrano but assumed it to be relatively close to Geonosis/etc. so that it will be near Naboo. If this turns out not to be true, please just accept it as part of the AU. ;)

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