The room was dim, lit only by a single yellow light placed strategically behind his head. As the Togruta looked up through her swollen eyes at him, all she could see was his silhouette against its hazy light. The room must have been large as she couldn’t see the edges, nor sense them. Togruta could passively detect the vibrations of movement and sound using sensitive organs in their headtails but she could feel nothing. She felt like she was strapped to a table in a black void.

The ringing in Ashoka Tano’s head was nearly unbearable. It must have been the crack she took before collapsing. Had she not practiced these last forty years, her temper would have taken hold and her captor would have felt her wrath. She wasn’t a Dark Jedi however, merely an Apostate from the Order as it had been all those years ago. Before his fall. Before the Empire. To think that in some way, she could have been responsible for everything, that she might have been able to stop him. *Anakin*…

“Welcome to my work room, Jedi.”

His voice was like pond scum, floating gracefully upon tainted water. It was erudite and precise but menacing. She reached out with the Force, seeking to glean what information she could from this man. Her inquiry was shut down forcefully, like a wall of steel had crashed down upon her ability to sense and feel the Force. Had she been severed? That easily? She wasn’t so weak as to merely be removed from the gentle embrace of the life-source! No, she must have been shielded, her grasp temporarily removed. No matter, when she got it back she’d teach this—this— *Sith*.

“I implore you to behave yourself and not try anything rash. Perhaps with time I may restore your power to you but for now I must learn how far I can trust you.”

She spat at his outline, “You can trust me in this! I will end you, and all like you!”

She couldn’t see it but she suddenly had the strange suspicion the man was smiling. No… He was a Twi’lek she could see now from the Lekku shadowed against the light.

Vodo Biask circled around the far side of the table, moving slowly but deliberately. He appraised his prize carefully. Ashoka watched awkwardly, restrained with her wrists tied together over her head and her ankles held together at the other end of the table. It was as though she was stretched upon a rack, like in the ancient days of torture.

“I went through a great deal of effort to obtain you. It would be such a waste to kill you, but I’ve been practicing certain arts for some years now. Our time together need not be a bore. You tell me what I wish to know, enrich my knowledge of certain historical events, and I may reward you with some measure of freedom. Spit at me again however—“

It came without warning, the pain. He placed a hand delicately upon her outstretched palm and merely rested it there as bolts of electricity coursed up and down her nervous system. It lasted an eternity. She screamed, and convulsed, unable to wriggle free of his touch and end the suffering. When the pain finally ceased, she was breathing haggardly. The Twi’lek regarded his hand inquisitively, “I fear my control of that power is less than I would desire. I strive for finesse in all that I do but I suppose practice makes perfect. Now… What would you say to a parlay?”

Ashoka’s breath was still heavy and she was still dazed, unable to find the words to place in her lolling mouth. Vodo smiled warmly, as though he understood and nodded to himself, “As I suspected: too much. Okay. We’ll resume on the morrow. Remember; cooperation makes free.”

With that the light was extinguished and the Dark Jedi was gone.

He returned some time later. She could not say if it was a minute, an hour, a day, or a week but suddenly the light was back and so was his shadow. She had meditated for some time, seeking to find the peace within herself that would allow her to survive this ordeal. She was pushing 70 standard years by now. Aging by nearly any species’ standard but by no means was she elderly. Since leaving the Jedi Order all those years ago she had maintained her training. Physically she was as spry as a woman twenty years her junior and mentally as disciplined as old Master Jocasta Nu had been. Had Anakin slaughtered the librarian as well?

“Hello Ms. Tano.”

She said nothing and looked into the shade of his outline impassively, maintaining the serenity of her mediation. Vodo said nothing in response to the chilly reception and merely studied her for a long moment. When he finally spoke, it was in a language she did not understand. It was guttural, and sharp. Nothing happened at first but she slowly came to notice the glowing of strange symbols all around her. They radiated a faint amethyst light and reminded her of the shapes Darth Maul had tattooed all across his body. They must have been some sort of Sith rune.

She felt her skin begin to tingle, as though a gentle breeze was wafting over her but it soon grew into a sting of a thousand-thousand needles slowly pressing their way into her. She lost her calm as the pain began to mount. With what little she could lift her head she saw little pricks of blood began to well-up on her burnt-orange skin.

“What are you doing to me!? Stop it! You haven’t asked me anything!”

The welling continued until it appeared as though she’d sweated a thin sheen of blood through every pore on her body. The Dark Jedi slowly lifted his hands, both of them, and uttered another incantation. With that the blood lifted from her and coalesced into a liquid sphere that floated inches above her abdomen. Once it had gathered into a ball, no more than an inch across, it floated out of sight into the darkness and the runes faded to black.

“What did you just do to me?”

Vodo stepped around the table, again revealing his face to the light so she could see him. He wore a solemn mask, “Nothing you need concern yourself overly much. Now, I believe we haven’t been introduced.”

His calm and courtesy were unnerving in such a sadist, “You clearly know who I am. And what are you? Some sort of Sith wannabe?”

One of his hands slowly drew across his hairless scalp and hovered on the back of his head, gently cradling the base of one of his headtails, “I am no Sith, in truth. To the uninitiated I understand how there could be confusion but I assure you I’m not so dull as that. I am an Inquisitor of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood. You are my guest upon my Clan’s planet and within my Estate here upon Karufr.”

None of that had made much sense to her but she understood that this Twi’lek believed himself to be part of some larger organization of Dark Siders, “And your name?”

“I am Vodo Biask Taldrya. Former Consul of Taldryan, former Dark Councilor to the Grand Master, and Epis of the Order of the Krath.”

“You have many titles. Is grade-A prick among them? What about sadistic sonofa—“

The pain shot through her nervous system again, but only momentarily, “Now, Ashoka… I thought you understood the rules better than that. You will remain polite to me or I shall drop the pretense of courtesy to you.”

“Pretense?” she gasped

“Of course. I hold you under my power. You have no access to the Force because I have removed your ability to sense it. You remain bound here, in my facility, under constant guard because I have ordered it. You were brought here at great expense because I willed it. Do you believe I have any reason to treat you with kindness other than that it pleases me?”

“I don’t care what your reasons are. I’m tied here and from where I lay you’re still a—“

She was expecting the jolt of electrical pain again but instead found a new sort of pain firing through her nerves. This pain was localized to the palm of her right hand however and burned all the way up her arm and into her chest as it raced to report the damage to her brain. He had stabbed something through the soft of her hand and as she looked from the wound to his face she could see a wild look in his eye that had not been there previously. It was then she felt fear.

His breathing had become labored and ragged, as though his heart rate was responding to an extreme emotional reaction. She could see as the wild look receded and he regained his composure, he took a deep breath. He opened his eyes and removed whatever instrument he’d used to impale her hand, “I apologize. You must understand, I’ve waited a great deal of time for this meeting and I have certain… Expectations.”

Through gritted teeth she continued to stare at him, doing her best to center herself and forget the pain coursing through her arm. Vodo turned and rummaged through a drawer that apparently lay close by but out of her line of sight. It was several seconds before he turned back to her holding a Medical Hypospray, “I regret that this must be done, especially as I lost control and caused it myself. I do hope you can forgive me.”

“What?” she managed to gasp before he placed the hypospray on her neck and she drifted off into unconsciousness.

When she awoke she found herself in darkness still, and the dull throb of her hand still reminding her of the wound. The pain was different however. Whereas the Krath had stabbed the center of her palm, this pain began at her wrist. Began and ended, she realized with a start. She attempted to flex her fingers upon her right hand but found, rather terrifyingly, that she had no fingers in which to move!

Another great deal of time passed. When the light finally flickered on and she found herself staring at the Dark Jedi’s outline, painfully as even the dim light was too much for her dark-adjusted eyes, she did so through pink and swollen eyelids. There’d been no painkillers, nothing to dull the ache in her arm where her sword hand had been for seven decade save for the wrap of sanitary medical linens some sort of medi-droid had changed several times in the dark.

“Why?”, her voice was near sobbing, “why?”

Vodo moved closer to her. He leaned over the table and put his face very close to hers so that she could see the corruption of his flesh, wrought by years of use of the Dark Side. She could smell him too, his slight musk suggested he bathed regular. His hazel eyes peered into hers and she found herself unable to look away.

When he pulled away and strode out of sight temporarily she had the strange sensation of knowing exactly what he had done and why. The tool he’d stabbed through her hand had been poisoned, and had not been meant for her. The only way to have stopped the poison, a Dark Side poison, was to remove the damaged appendage. He felt remorse and guilt at the act. Not that it had violated any morality code, as far as she could tell. He was remorseful that he had lost his composure, had disappointed himself, and had damaged… damaged a piece of property. Property!? That all he thought of her?

“You… You’re sick. You’re sick in the head!”

From the darkness he responded, “No, not sick. I’ve seen things that would curdle your flesh and cause your screams to catch in your mouth. A mortal mind doesn’t comprehend these things without losing something of itself in the process. No, I’m not sick. I’m damaged.”

Vodo came back into the light holding something. He held it before her and allowed her to appraise it, “I had this made for you. A business associate sourced it from the same company that reconstructed Lord Vader after his accident. You are aware of what become of your Master?”

She turned her head away from the prosthetic hand he held over her face and looked into the dark, trying to forget what had become of her Master. Even now, all these many years later that memory was still too painful. It was too much to recall, especially now.

A gentle hand of flesh pushed her chin back so that she could look at the Twi’lek, “You know then. That is why I brought you here, Ashoka Tano. I want to learn. I want to know. I must know.”

“Know what?”

“Vader… Anakin Skywalker. I must know. Everything.”

Over several hours she shared everything she knew of the fallen Knight, the Chosen One, and her Master. She wasn’t certain why she shared with this man, her captor and torturer. It all came spilling forth and one she’d begun there was no way to stymie the flow. As she spoke, Vodo worked at attaching the prosthetic hand to her wrist and calibrated it. When she finished, she found that he too had completed his task.

“Did I leave anything out?” she asked, weary.

Vodo patted her head gently, almost endearingly, “No. You did well. I have what I need now.”

“Need?”

Vodo looked at her, the wild look had returned. It was like a dangerous gleam in the back of his eyes, as though another was looking through his eyes on the other end, “Oh yes. I know what I must do now.”

He waved his hands and her restraints disappeared. Cautiously, unbelieving, she sat up and flexed her sore arms and legs. Ashoka examined her new hand. It was metal, and skeletal but highly articulate and reported sensation back to her nervous system. Vodo walked toward the light and disappeared behind it without a word. She used her new hand to shield her eyes from the dim source of yellow light and walked towards it, following the direction he’d gone. She walked slowly, her whole body felt weak from its ordeal.

When she passed the light she emerged, incredibly, into a scene from her childhood. Master Plo Koon knelt before her youngerself, a few meters away. They were surrounded by other Togruta, her family, clan, and the Chieftain. Master Plo took her hand and with that she became a Youngling of the Jedi Order. The scene flashed white and changed. She now watched herself as she had been at 11, training with the others of the Bantha Class. Again the scene changed. Her heart fluttered and for a moment she forgot to breath. There he was, in the fullness of his youth. He was just as she remembered him; Tall, handsome, powerfully built and cocksure.

Anakin Skywalker was just a Knight when she was apprenticed to him by Master Yoda, and there first months together had been tumultuous. She had been headstrong, stubborn, and too smart for her own good. He had been headstrong, stubborn, and too talented for his own good. Together they’d made a hell of a team once they’d found the respect for one another Yoda had been so sure they’d develop. Ashoka, as she was now, wiped a tear from him cheek. Even now, five decades later, she still felt the stirrings of the youthful crush she’d had for her mentor.

“I can take you back. I can take you to that day when you walked away.”

Vodo was standing beside her. He looked tired, “I don’t know how you’re doing this, but I don’t believe you. No one can change the past. No one can go back.”

“I can. I can take you back to that day.”

The scene flashed and there they were. Outside the Jedi Temple. She was fifteen or sixteen and had just been acquitted at her trial for sedition. Skywalker ran out to stop her and placed a hand on her shoulder and asked her to reconsider, to stay with the Jedi Order and finish the war. Both Ashoka’s choked as their words were caught in their throat. Everything paused there.

“How can you possibly know anything about any of this? You wouldn’t have even been born when I left the Jedi Order that day. Where are we? How are you doing this?”

Vodo walked up to the frozen figures, Anakin Skywalker as he had been and Ashoka as she had been, “I know all of this because of you. We are in your memories. Everything I’ve done to you, that you’ve said to me, and that we’ve seen has been in your head. Look to your hand…”

She went wide-eyed at the dark red hand that she examined before her face, where only minutes earlier she’d seen the new prosthetic, “But, how? Why?”

“If you could change this moment, Ashoka, would you? Would everything have changed if you’d stayed with him? His secret marriage was on the rocks, the Chancellor was whispering dark tidings in his ear, and the Jedi Council did not trust him. Could you have changed that if you had stayed with him?”

She was older now and had given that many years of thought. Where her younger self would have answered yes, she now knew that the past was just that: passed.

“No.”

Vodo nodded slowly, “Then you are wiser than I. But you can still serve me in one more way”.

Ashoka awoke in her own bed, in her spacious apartment in Coronet, Corellia. Her sheets were tangled about her legs like she’d kicked and slept fitfully. In truth, she was still tired. What a strange dream that had been. It was then she noticed the dampness all about her. She wiped her brow and drew back her hand to find it covered in a small spattering of blood. Indeed, her entire bed and all her sheets were plastered with the crimson stain of it. Her heart rate exploded as she panicked and jumped out of bed. Her small clothes were painted red and where she had laid was a small dried pool of it.

“I thank you, Ashoka Tano”, a familiar voice said behind her.

She whirled, calling her long hidden light saber to hand from its place in the bureau along the wall. Her outstretched arm was severed by a meter long flash of silver and her saber hilt crashed into her ribcage without a hand to clasp it. Grunting in pain she glared with malice into the hazel eyes of Vodo Biask who stood nearly 2.5 meters tall directly behind her. She’d never seen it before but his entire lower body was mechanical, reverse jointed like Darth Maul’s had been. She had not seen those in her dreams. Had he changed his appearance?

Vodo grasped a strange lightsaber in his hand, a meter long in the hilt and a meter again in the blade so that it reached nearly his whole height from top to bottom. He drew the blade through her neck and watched impassively as head and body collapsed to the ground. He studied the two momentarily before turning his attention on the blood-stained sheets and bed. He lifted a hand and the stain lifted and coalesced into a sphere that hovered in the air. With a small beckoning the sphere, no more than an inch across, drifted toward him and into a waiting vial in his free hand.

The Krath left the apartment. His guard detail would clean up the scene and make sure that all the vital evidence was erased. It would be clear she had been decapitated by a light saber but the death of the Apostate Ashoka Tano would remain a mystery for years to come. Vodo meanwhile had more piece in his puzzle to changing the past.