

Seeing Clearly

A fiction written by Appius "Zappius" Wight.

Unknown location

Dandoran

39ABY

No matter how hard he tried, Ria'd couldn't move. Pain wracked every nerve in his body, and every part of him begged him to just lay upon the stone pedestal until it stopped. His head throbbed like a drumbeat that refused to stop. His throat was dry and craved the soothing relief of water. His arms and legs felt numb and his cheek...

Ria'd struggled to slowly raise his hand to his face, yet slowly but surely, his rough fingertips grazed upon the freshly scabbed burn. Even the lightest touch seared him, but it wasn't the physical pain that bothered him most, no, it was the emotional. Ria'd was little more than a prisoner of Scholae Palatinae when he was taken to Dandoran. He was captured and sentenced to death for little more than being a Jedi in a territory controlled by the Sith, and a remnant of the old Galactic Empire to boot. The conflict on Dandoran was a chance to help people again, even if only temporarily before he died. At least his life would have meant *something*. He would have died easing others' pain, and that, to him, was worth it all.

That was until Rasha Hawee...

Zyft Yadar was many things. She was intelligent, incredibly perceptive and a good leader, but she wasn't Rasha Hawee. No one was able to rally a group of ne'er do wells, thieves, and scum together and call themselves a faction like she did. Even through all the betrayals, Zyft knew the only one who could unite them was Rasha, their only hope of survival was Rasha.

Ria'd had helped, and he paid for it with a blaster bolt to the face. Was that what his life was worth? He helped people without any shred of expectation for anything in return, and the kindness he was shown in return was the same lack of empathy he saw across the entire galaxy. Was it worth all the pain and struggle? What would the Jedi do? No intervention saw them as hypocrites to their code, but committing to action was making Ria'd lose his faith in the universe. Was it even worth saving?

The Zabrak'd had enough of stewing in his own self-pity for the moment and decided to muster the energy needed to swing his legs over to the side. He slowly rocked himself, building up the momentum needed for this simplest of actions before going through with it. Ria'd forced himself to sit up and then immediately regretted his decision. He clenched his eyes shut as the blood rushed to his head. His stomach twisted and turned like a cargo at sea as the nauseous feeling rose from within. Suddenly, a frigid, cold sensation pressed against the Zabrak's forehead.

"Drink."

The word was muffled, but Ria'd was just able to make it out as something was forced into his hands. Whoever it was that put it there, helped him place it to his lips. They cupped the Jedi's hands to the cup and helped him maintain his grip as what felt like the sweet nectar of the Force trickled down his throat.

Never before had water tasted so good...

Ria'd begun to feel a tiny amount of his strength return to him and he forced himself to open his eyes. The light was immediately blinding, and he sealed his eyelids shut and recoiled from the burning in his retinas.

"Slowly."

There it was again, that strange voice. Ria'd didn't know if to trust it or not, but in his current state, he was in no position to defend himself even if he wanted to. So, he obeyed. Slowly, but surely, he opened his eyes again, blinking rapidly to allow his eyes to become adjusted to his surroundings. As the seconds passed, the blurriness began to fade until everything became crystal clear.

"Where..." Ria'd began to ask. His mind raced with question after question. His eyes darted around the inner chamber, the stone walls decorated with a series of inscriptions in a language the Zabradi Jedi could only assume was ancient and forgotten. Natural sunlight beamed in from the damaged roof above, illuminating everything in all its wonder and splendour.

"Dandoran," the strange voice answered, and now that Ria'd was somewhat aware of his surroundings, he could make out the feminine tone the word was laced with.

The Zabrad looked at the mysterious woman, pale as moonlight, her body incredibly aged and slim. Her snow-white hair extended down to her hips as strands stuck out, whilst her clothes were marred and dirt-ridden. A single piece of dark-green cloth covered her eyes, identifying her to Ria'd as a Miraluka, though neglect had taken its hold of her.

"Who are you?" Ria'd finally asked.

*"The question isn't who I am, dear, but who are **you**?"*

Ria'd stared at the woman with visible confusion written across his face, not to mention the fact he wasn't in the mood for any of the Miraluka's cryptic nonsense. Thank the Force she was blind and couldn't see his facial expression.

"I am Ria'd Stesca, a Jedi," the Zabrad finally answered with a heavy sigh.

"A Jedi, eh? And what does that mean to you?"

"It means..." Ria'd paused for a moment. "It means that no matter where I am, I am duty-bound to help those in need, regardless of my own desires. I am selfless, and the Force is with me." The Jedi finished his speech, but somehow those words weighed heavy on his soul, like they were being drowned by tar.

"*You are one with the Force, the Force is with you,*" the mysterious woman chanted.

"Excuse me?" Ria'd asked, causing the Miraluka to smirk.

"*Tell me, young man. Do you know anything of this temple?*"

The Zabrak shook his head.

"*Of course not. The Empire made sure any trace of **The Guardians of the Whills** were wiped away from the face of the galaxy,*" the old woman explained solemnly, the smirk on her face disappearing entirely.

"I'm sorry, the who?" Ria'd questioned.

"*Perhaps it would be better if I showed you...*"

The Miraluka raised her arms above her head as the temple faded out of existence. Ria'd staggered to his feet, alarmed as sweat dripped down his brow. Suddenly, the visage of several people appeared before him. Various species lived in harmony with one another. Men, women and children lived for one another, some meditating in the far corners of the room, some perfecting their martial prowess whilst others constructed lightbows as part of their rituals. Food grown in the outside sunlight was brought in, the sweet, juicy fruit shared among their brethren. There was no greed, no mistrust. It was Ria'd's ideal universe. Twi'Leks, Duros, Rothians and Humans were just a small number that presented themselves. One Itochi was about to charge through the Jedi, but as the Zabrak braced himself for impact, the horned being faded through him like he was made of smoke.

"***The Guardians of the Whills** were a religious sect that worshipped the Force. They believed that every living organism had a place in the galaxy, and that place was given to us all by the Force itself,*" the Miraluka woman explained, and Ria'd couldn't help but be amazed at the splendour before him.

"*However...*"

Just as everything was light, caring, and full of hope, everything shifted. The sky above was marred red like it had become tainted with blood. The fire raged down the adjacent corridors as screams echoed from distant rooms in the temple. Troops, clad in white and indistinguishable from one another, invaded the temple. With blaster rifles in hand, they gunned down the temple inhabitants like they were little more than target practice. At first, the Guardians attempted to fight back. The warriors among them equipped with their trademark lightbows proved to be an ample resistance against the invading force, and for a fleeting moment, it appeared they would gain the upper hand.

That was until the distinct *snap-hiss* of a lightsaber drew Ria'd's attention behind him. A crimson glow emanated from the plasma blade, the wielder of which was clad in full black, including a mechanical helmet. His breathing was eerily raspy, each breath penetrating the sound of the battle like an omen of death. The Zabrak Jedi had heard the stories. Who in the kriffing galaxy hadn't!? But to see him in front of his eyes sent fear racing down his spine.

All attention focused on the arrival of the Dark Lord of the Sith, and every single lightbow was primed and unloaded every shot they could muster at the black-clad Juggernaut.

The Sith's visage was frightening enough, but his power was even more so. The Dark Lord effortlessly deflected the bolts of plasma aside like they had come from training droids. The first of the Guardians rushed the Sith, hoping to take the Dark Lord by surprise, but was instead impaled through the abdomen by the Sith's weapon. It cleaved through the Guardian, who was discarded like a piece of bantha dung. The second tried to attack, to take vengeance for their fallen comrade, but was held captive in the air, the dark sider holding him by his throat via the Force. The Guardian squirmed and clutched at his throat. The black-clad Sith didn't bother with his lightsaber and simply tightened his grip with the Force until a life-ending *crack* could be heard. Just like with the first Guardian, the Sith discarded him like he was little more than a waste of space. A Third attempted to rush in, tears streaming down the Twi'Lek woman's face until with a single swipe, her head was cleaved from her shoulders. It landed on the ground in front of Ria'd, frozen in a single moment of fear and despair.

The room was cleared with the utmost lack of care for life or those within it. The Sith Lord was methodical in his approach, yet left a trail of corpses and devastation behind him. Finally, the only sound that could be heard was the ominous hum of his lightsaber. The Dark Lord turned to face Ria'd, his breathing still mechanical and raspy as he uttered a single sentence that chilled the Jedi to his core.

"I know you are there."

The Jedi had never before felt such helplessness, such weakness in himself. It felt like he was little more than a child compared to the behemoth that approached him. The Dark Lord raised his saber to strike the Jedi down, and all Ria'd could do was grit his teeth and raise his arms in a feeble attempt to defend himself. The Zabrak released the breath he didn't realise he was holding when the crimson blade slid through his skull and through his torso, yet did no damage. Instead, behind him was the final Guardian in the Sith's path, cut down in their prime, the Human dropped lifelessly to the ground besides Ria'd, who stared in horror, eyes wide and at a loss for words.

Suddenly, a platoon of white armoured troopers filed into the room, dragging along with them a collection of prisoners. Men, women, and children of the temple were forced to kneel before the Dark Lord of the Sith. One Trooper stepped forward to address the Sith, the Imperial insignia on their white armor displayed their higher rank compared to the other soldiers.

"Lord Vader," the Trooper said, bowing his head slightly to the towering Sith. "These are the last of the inhabitants of the temple. We've taken them prisoner. How do you wish for us to proceed?"

Darth Vader paused for a moment, and Ria'd watched as the Emperor's right hand held the position of judge, jury, and executioner over his quarry.

"Kill them all. Leave no survivors," Vader answered. The squadron of troopers all prepped their blasters and pointed them at the temple inhabitants.

"NO!" Ria'd screamed. Children! There were kriffing children among them! The Zabrak launched himself at the troopers, blood pumping and adrenaline coursing through his veins. Yet, as soon as he reached them, everything faded and vanished from thin air. Perturbed and shell shocked, the Jedi spun and discovered he was alone again with the Miralukan woman.

"As you can clearly see, the dark side of the Force is a parasite that must be stopped," the old woman explained soberly.

"It... can't be stopped," the Jedi lamented. "The Force exists in two halves. Light and dark. There must be balance or else..."

"Or else what?" The Miraluka questioned. "More innocents die at the hands of Sith? There's already plenty of that, and it's all the dark side's fault. Corruption, greed, bloodlust, cravings for power and immortality... think about it, my dear Jedi. How many people have you helped in your lifetime? How many have truly returned the favour? Or become better people as a result?"

Ria'd hung his head low, and the more he thought about it, the more he realised she was right. What had his help done for the majority of those he gave it to?

"The dark side has spread its influence into the hearts and minds of the galaxy. The only way left to stop it is to destroy it at its source. The Sith and those who wield the dark side must be destroyed," the old woman stated, and Ria'd could feel the righteousness in her voice.

"There has to be another way..." the Zabrak said lowly, shaking his head slightly. "I'm not a murderer."

"You will not be a murderer!" The old woman affirmed, suddenly closing the gap between them as she placed her long, boney fingers on the Jedi's scalp. "You will be doing the will of the Force, cleansing the galaxy and making everything right again! I can teach you. I saved you from death because you have a well of power built up inside you, waiting to do what's right."

Ria'd dropped to his knees, head now hanging low.

"Yes..." Ria'd relented. "I will do it. I will accept this mission, this goal. But tell me, what should I call you?"

The old woman smiled sweetly.

"I go by many names, but you can call me... Master." The Master said, taking in the moment as Ria'd kneeled before her.

Dathomir

Three Months Later...

There is no emotion, there is peace.

The brilliant blue of the Jedi's lightsaber shone intensely against the red, desolate landscape of the Nightsister tribe homeworld.

There is no ignorance, there is knowledge.

A single Nightbrother, little more than a slave to his masters, roared and attacked, only for the lightsaber to pierce through his heart and end his life.

There is no passion, there is serenity.

Several tried to flee, though the Jedi was astute in his resolve. The dark side would be destroyed. The fire raged around them, the dry, rotting vines of the planet providing an ample source of devastation.

There is no chaos, there is harmony.

There was no escape, and nowhere to run from the Jedi. Screams echoed from men, women, and children, and then were silenced by the ominous swings of the lightsaber blade. Not even their sorcery could save them now.

There is no death, there is the Force.

The fire crackled around the Jedi, a sea of bodies lay in his wake. It would take years for Dathomir to recover from their influence, but maybe, just maybe... old wounds could start to heal.

The Zabrak sheathed his weapon, the blade of his lightsaber retracting back into the hilt. Ria'd placed his weapon back on his belt and retrieved his communicator, the visage of a frail, old-looking Miraluka appearing before him.

"It is done, Master," the Jedi stated.

"Excellent," the Miraluka praised. "You have done well, Ria'd. Your actions here have stopped the spread of the dark side upon further innocence. Return to me at once, and we shall continue your training."

The image of the old woman vanished, and Ria'd left through the fire and brimstone of the Nightsister settlement. He put up his hood, knowing he had done right and yet... a single tear dripped down his face, staining it.

There is no death, there is the Force... and the Force is with me.

Yet, amidst the inferno, why did he feel so cold?

The End