

Date with a Jedi

She went to University before technology arrived. Before mobile phones and iPods and laptops. Before Facebook and Twitter. Before people kept track of everyone they'd met, ever, and researched their likes and dislikes, their friends and their online social life before they met them a second time. That's how she ended up with Luke Skywalker.

She'd met him at a house party that she'd crashed with a friend. Stumbling between pubs the pair of late-teen girls had heard loud music and the unmistakable hubbub of other people having a better time than they were. The strains of INXS's "Suicidal Blonde" pierced the cool night air, the bass line sending shivers along the pavement and exuding a magnetic pull. Without a pause in their cheap-wine-induced chatter, the duo veered off their predictable pub-crawl path.

The door of the terrace flat stood open and laughter crashed along the hallway in waves, funneling into a crescendo as it spilled into the otherwise quiet street. A young man with pale blue eyes leant against the wall inside. He was a study in nonchalance, his mottled denim jeans and faux leather jacket the epitome of early 90's fashion. A cigarette butt, still lit, dangled from his plump lips. Raising one eyebrow he looked her in the eye and time stopped.

Her friend smirked, knowing they'd scored tickets to the party. "Who are you?" she asked him, rather stridently for an interloper. "Luke Skywalker," he retorted sarcastically and she rolled her eyes, immediately losing interest. She had no time for sarcasm.

Several cocktails later, she bumped into him in the kitchen. Surrounded by plastic cups dribbling beer along the bench-tops they tried again. He gave her his real name, which she promptly forgot. She tried to spark a philosophical debate. He mocked her, breaking through her fragile layer of composure. She frowned and walked away, hurt.

Three weeks later she went to a gig at the University. Leaning over the bar to attract the barman's attention with her cleavage before last orders, a deep voice muttered in her ear, "You look gorgeous." The puffs of breath tickled and she giggled, turning to face the disembodied voice. "It's you," she exclaimed, "Luke Skywalker." He nodded. "Hey..." they both started at the same time. "You go," she said. "Sorry for being an idiot the other night," he mumbled, staring at the floor. She waited until the silence became awkward and he looked up. "It's fine," she gently replied.

The crowd surged forward for the band's final song and she stumbled as someone rammed into her rugby-style. Catching her by the elbow, he yanked her to the safety-zone at his side. Seeming uncomfortable with the sudden proximity he blurted "Let's get out of here." "Just let me tell my friend where I'm going," she said, her curiosity piqued. "No, let's just go," he beseeched, tugging hard on her hand, dragging her towards the exit as if she were a reluctant bull. Tired of the jostling, she conceded and they stepped into the car park together.

"Come on," he said, opening the door of a blood-red truck and swinging into the driver's seat. She shrugged, yanking the passenger door open and breaking a fingernail in the process. She clambered inelegantly in, not stopping to think. "I know where we should go," he said and they lapsed into a comfortable silence. She spent the short journey surreptitiously studying his long lashes.

His choice of venue was unexpected. The Doghouse was renowned for being the roughest pub in town. She'd never been inside. She dropped behind him as they entered the cramped quarters, the second-hand smoke clinging to their hair. "What can I get you?" he asked, motioning towards the serving area, where several bleary-eyed, tattooed men slumped by the beers. "What's Mississippi Moonshine?" she asked, reading the label on a row of bottles supervising the bar. "It's good stuff," he confirmed, not really answering her question, but ordering two.

They sat on bar stools sipping on the brash spirit. Every drop attacked the lining of her throat, drawing an acidic line from her tongue to her intestines. He didn't have much to say and she wondered why he intimidated her. The band filled the void, although she wouldn't have called it music. The singer yelled into the microphone, the lyrics more muffled than a train announcement. The front-man hunched his shoulders and sporadically thrust his right hand into the air to give the heavy-metal sign. As the pair downed the dregs of Moonshine, the singer blew a plume of fire into the air, the edges of the flame licking the wooden rafters. "Let's go," Skywalker said, sliding from the stool and striding out the door leaving her to jog after him.

He seemed tense as he kicked the truck into gear, the wheels squealing as they rumbled away from the curb. She fidgeted, not sure how to carve the silence into manageable pieces. She didn't stop to question where they were going until the city receded.

"Where to?" she asked casually, realisation dawning that she was in a car with a stranger. "You'll see," he answered gruffly. "No, but really, where are we going?" she asked with a tinge of forced joviality. "You'll see!" he replied,

clearly exasperated. She stared straight ahead, searching for landmarks as a few spits of rain smeared the windscreen. She gave herself a solid mental kicking as she listed the facts in her head: she was in a car; she didn't know where she was; no-one else knew where she was; her date had probably had too much to drink; he seemed angry; and she didn't know his name. For all she knew, the Jedi knight was planning to kill her and dump her body. It could be days before she was found.

The adrenaline raised every hair on her arms as they pulled in to a clearing, clumps of trees surrounding a patch of bare earth where he slammed on the brakes, puffs of dust dancing past the windscreen like dirty ghosts. Without so much as a smile, he reached into the back seat, his grasping hand returning with a green backpack. All she could think was: "This is it. This is where he pulls a gun."

"Are you hungry?" he asked. She nodded in terror, too scared to contradict him. He delved into the bag and rummaged. She held her breath. He pulled out a notebook and threw it onto the back seat, diving back in. Next up was a baseball cap, company for the notebook. Then a plastic drink bottle. On the next try his search proved fruitful and he held up a foil-wrapped packet in triumph. He tucked the bag into his side and plucked at the silver wrapping, revealing a brown-bread sandwich. "Here," he said, offering her half.

She took the proffered snack, still anticipating her final moment. He took enormous bites, chewing with his mouth open while she nibbled on the crusts. Her mind registered that the sandwich was filled with roast beef and beetroot. She couldn't tell him she didn't like beetroot.

While she pecked she hatched a plan. "I need to go to the bathroom," she announced, yanking on the door handle and giving the heavy door an enthusiastic shove with her foot. "No worries. Meet me over there when you're done," he said, indicating vaguely towards a gap in the trees. She counted in her head to keep her paces steady as she walked to a patch of bushes, half expecting to be shot in the back. She squatted, hidden in the undergrowth, and heard the slam of the car door.

Exhaling, she felt her mind clear. She couldn't stay here. She had to see why he had brought her to this isolated spot. She moved in the shadows, circling the clearing anticlockwise so that she could approach the gap from an unexpected direction. Perhaps she could tackle him if she had the element of surprise. She walked on tiptoes, acutely aware of the functions of her body. Her heart beat out a techno tune and her mouth was so dry that her tongue felt alien as it roved its cavern, searching for spittle.

At exactly the moment she spotted his outline in the dark, a branch snapped under her foot and he turned to face her. "Look at this," he called, flinging his empty arms out wide like open wings. Past his shoulders lights twinkled below them. They were at a lookout, high above the city. "Surprise. Isn't it beautiful?" he said as she closed the gap. He pulled her to him in a gentle caress, draping his arm possessively over her shoulder.

She was speechless. She was not going to be a murder victim tonight. Instead, Luke Skywalker had given her the city. Sighing, she touched one hand to his cheek and whispered, "Can you take me home now?"

