Pebble in a River

by kj_feybarn

Summary

He woke up.
And everything changed, but of course, that's what life does. It changes.
There are so many options, so many things that seem right. And yet each of those things also
feels wrong. Failure isn't an option, not again. But there is no outline for success, and he's
hardly the only one in the game. He's tired, and exhausted, and so very lonely.
But force help him, he's going to save as many people as he can.
Really, Force, he needs the help.

Notes

Time-Travel. I'm doing it. I'm going to try and do a time-travel story without completely
botching up everything. I can't believe I'm doing it. But I'm going to try... Really really hard,
not to fail this.
So wish me luck! And hopefully this story works!
Waking up, Obi-Wan reflected, hadn’t started to feel any less strange than it had that first day. He honestly couldn’t say which part was the strangest part. Waking up after having been dead for several years. Or the fact he was waking up as a 19-year old padawan.

It had been a very long two weeks since he’d woken up, panicked at the feeling of being encased in a body. He’d stared at his face in the mirror in horror long enough for Qui-Gon to ask whether Obi-Wan was trying to impress someone. Obi-Wan had stared at his master in shock, unable to stop himself from crying, the shock and surprise at seeing his old master alive and in the flesh. Qui-Gon had looked confused and somewhat uncomfortable, obviously unsure how to respond to what had probably seemed like a completely unexplainable emotional breakdown.

It was, he thought, as he silently sipped at his morning tea while watching his Master Qui-Gon, utterly perplexing. Despite the strangeness of the situation the past two weeks had been almost normal. Or at least, as normal as anything could be given the situation, which meant it was all mind-bogglingly strange.

While Obi-Wan hadn’t been a padawan in several decades, Obi-Wan found it was easy enough to slip his way through the day without causing too much of a problem. Obi-Wan had learned young how to be, or at least appear to be, what people wanted and needed him to be. If perhaps he meditated a good deal more than he had before, if he changed the lightsaber form he used while sparring for no discernible reason, if he had managed to become both quieter and more sarcastic recently, or was less accustomed to following another’s lead. Well, then while much of that might be counted as strange, it wasn’t necessarily unheard of, particularly not for a padawan trying to be seen as eligible to face their trials.

Some things were less easily explainable. His emotional breakdown that first day, the crushing, nearly desperate hugs he’d given Bant, Garen, Reeft, Quinlan, and Luminara, trying to see them as they were now, and not to remember them dead, or dying, or desperate. The way he flinched away from unexpected contact, so very unused to physical touch after twenty years of exile and several years with no body to speak of. The way his shields had strengthened to a level that he knew could rival that of masters of the order, shields he wasn't willing to weaken, even if that would make him seem more normal. The way he sometimes found himself frozen, staring at bodies no one else could see strewn over the ground. Years of separation from that loss hadn't prepared him for being here again. And then there was the way the bond with his master was suddenly so much weaker on Obi-Wan's side, there wasn't really a way for it not to be, Obi-Wan hadn't had a bond with Qui-Gon in decades, had felt the bond shatter in his mind when Qui-Gon died. In some ways Obi-Wan was surprised the bond was still there at all. Whether Qui-Gon realized how weakened the bond was, Obi-Wan wasn't sure. Qui-Gon had yet to say anything about it, but then Qui-Gon hadn't really said much of anything, although Obi-Wan could feel the man’s eyes on him, confused, and if Obi-Wan was honest, just the slightest bit suspicious.

Obi-Wan didn't completely blame him, he knew that he had changed, and to Qui-Gon it must seem sudden and unexplainable. It didn't mean that the suspicion didn't hurt.

But it wasn't something he was overly concerned with, or at least, it was something he wasn't allowing himself to be overly concerned with. There were bigger issues to worry about beyond Master Qui-Gon's suspicions, he was more concerned with other, more important, details. Like the
fact that he was alive. And the fact that in less than two decades the entire galaxy would descend into a galactic wide war that would result in the destruction of the Jedi, the subjugation of dozens of planets, and the creation of a Galactic Empire ruled by a Sith Lord. How was he supposed to stop the galaxy from tumbling into the madness and chaos he had been forced to live through?

There was a large part of Obi-Wan that wanted to say 'kriff this' and go find Palpatine, Sidious, whatever name he preferred to go by, and kill him. It wasn't very Jedi-like, but Obi-Wan had never been a good enough Jedi anyways. There was, however, the small matter of not knowing whether Palpatine's own master was still alive. To kill the man that had brought the galaxy to it's knees in submission, but leave his unknown master hiding in the wings seemed like folly of the highest sort. Better, perhaps, to wait until Obi-Wan was fairly certain the other Sith was dead before making a move. But that meant time, and Obi-Wan knew first hand how effective the Sith could be when given time. It was possible that Palpatine's master was already dead, given the rule of two and how proficient Maul had been on Naboo, logic said it was even probable. But there was a niggling in his mind that told him not to be too sure.

There was so much that Obi-Wan wasn't sure of, his own judgment high on that list. There was a part of him that desperately wanted to walk into the council chambers and tell the Jedi Council everything. It came from that part of him that still saw the temple as his home and the Jedi as his family. It took the weight of the future off his shoulders and put it on the collective wisdom of great men and women, men and women that he trusted. He knew they weren't perfect. He knew that those that had survived the purges, and even the galaxy at large, had wondered how the council hadn't foreseen what had happened, why they hadn't done more to protect the Jedi and the Republic. He knew that people blamed the Jedi, and he understood why. But while Obi-Wan personally held himself responsible for the mistakes he'd made, the way he'd failed Anakin, his friends, his people, his men. He found he couldn't blame the council. Maybe he should blame them, but when he looked back at that time he remembered men and women who had found themselves lost, who had struggled with themselves, with each other, with the Force, with the code, with the Republic and its demands, with their role in a war that swept through the entire galaxy. They had done their best, and no, it hadn't been enough, but they had tried, and tried, and tried, and failed, but Force, had they tried.

He knew it was unwise to believe that one person had all the answers, and to keep his return to the living and his knowledge of the future to himself seemed like the highest level of folly and pride. But he couldn't ignore the quiet whispering of the Force every time he thought about going to the council, a whisper that urged him to reconsider that path, that perhaps it wasn't the best path. It felt as though the Force was whispering silence.

Sometimes he wished the Force would manifest it so that he could strangle it, because if the Force had brought him here then the Force could do more than whisper quiet not-quite-there warnings. But then he remembered Mortis and the nightmares he still had due to everything that had happened, it was an experience he had no desire to repeat, the Force could keep all aspects of itself un-manifested.

Qui-Gon was watching him again; concerned, curious, somewhat suspicious. Obi-Wan had likely done something that he hadn't done two weeks ago, something just the slightest bit off. There was little he could do to really fix that, it wasn't like he remembered what mannerisms and tics he'd had when he was still a padawan. Obi-Wan could fix it, though, could clear up all of the confusion, could explain why everything had changed, why Obi-Wan was different, why he'd changed. He could explain that he was no longer the padawan he'd been, the padawan that Qui-Gon knew, that he was instead an old, cynical, formerly dead man who had done too much, and seen too much to be cowed by his Master's disapproving silences. He could ask for help. Because surely, if there was anyone Obi-Wan could turn to, it would be his Master.

He had seriously considered it. He loved his master. Trusted the man with his own life with no
hesitation. But... but... He wasn't sure that he trusted his Master to listen. Master Qui-Gon had never really listened to him, so intent on his own interpretation, his own view point. Master Qui-Gon was strong in the Force, but he tended to feel as through the Force spoke to him truer than it spoke to others, that he alone followed it's will. Any opinion that didn't align with Qui-Gon's own was marginalized and ignored. Contrasting views were good, they were healthy. But it only worked if both were willing to listen, and he didn't know that he trusted Qui-Gon to do that, despite Obi-Wan's change in age, experience, and ability. After all Qui-Gon often chose to completely disregard others who had experience that Qui-Gon lacked; and while Obi-Wan would never suggest that Yoda or Mace were always right, he did see the wisdom in taking their words into consideration. While his time on Tatooine and the visits Qui-Gon had paid him as a Force ghost had eased some of his frustration, he was honest enough to admit that while he would forever love his Master, there was a part of him that could never look at his master the way he once had, that could no longer trust in him the way he once had.

He was being harsh. But Obi-Wan had already acknowledged that he had grown cynical and tired in his old age. Although, perhaps that was misleading, he had grown cynical long before he'd gotten old. Especially considering that given normal circumstances he should have been easily able to reach over 100, rather than having become so infirm by 60.

So no, for now he had firmly discarded the idea of telling anyone what had happened.

There was a part of him, a larger part than he was necessarily comfortable with, that wanted to drink a bottle of Correllian brandy, and then take his lightsaber and shove it through his own heart. He couldn't do this. Force, he had barely managed to keep his sanity the first time around, and even that was debatable, and now the Force had sent him back, wanted him to go through everything again? He had failed. Over, and over, and over again. He had broken everything he'd ever touched. It would be better for him to cease to exist than for him to fail again and make everything worse. Because he would, he'd make everything worse. The precedent had been set, he failed those that he loved. But he couldn't do nothing.

Better then, to remove himself from the equation. If the Force really wanted this fixed, if the Force really wanted the galaxy to be saved, then it would send someone back to fix it who was actually capable of doing so. Not him.

Never him.

Obi-Wan broke everything he touched.

He shut his thoughts off, rising from his seat at the table with a smile for his master, taking his now empty cup and washing it. He gave his Master a small bow before leaving for class, this morning was an advanced culture class, followed by an advanced diplomacy class followed by an advanced saber class.

He shouldn't have been surprised that they were starting a section about Mandalorian culture, because Obi-Wan wasn't already stuck in his thoughts of the past enough. Mandalore made him think of the clones and the culture they'd made for themselves out of the heritage they'd been given, made him think of Satine and her desire to change an entire culture into something that she believed in, Mandalore made him think of things loved and things lost.

Master Nikalo was busy detailing the current situation on Mandalore and Obi-Wan wanted to stand and walk out, he saw Quinlan giving him a concerned looks. Obi-Wan hadn't talked to many people about Satine and what she had meant to him, but Quinlan had always understood that part of Obi-Wan better than most people.
The class ended with Master Nikalo flashing his fangs in a grin as he noted that it was unlikely that the Jedi would be involved on Mandalore in the near future, and here everyone looked at Obi-Wan because everyone knew about his year-long mission, even if almost none of them knew the details.

Quinlan caught up to him as he left the classroom, feeling tired and worn, he flinched slightly in surprise at the arm thrown over his shoulder but didn't shrug it off. "Want to skive off from Diplomacy?"

Obi-Wan rolled his eyes, "No, Quinlan."

"Come on, I'm leaving for a mission with Master Tholme this afternoon."

It was tempting, and really, Obi-Wan was more mature than this, but he felt heavy and tired and Quinlan was a breath of fresh air. But he also knew that he was on thin ice with Master Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan didn't have the energy to argue with him if Qui-Gon heard he'd skipped. "I can't."

Quinlan sighed long-sufferingly, but accepted it easily enough, and Obi-Wan remembered why he and Quinlan were friends despite their very different personalities. "Well, no point skipping by myself."

Obi-Wan snorted, because while his memory might not be perfect he was pretty sure that Quinlan had been known to skip by himself plenty. Quinlan just sent him a saucy grin and a wink and for a second Obi-Wan felt almost okay, because a Galaxy with people like Quinlan in it, was a Galaxy that was alive and worth fighting for.

He trailed after Quinlan into their diplomacy class, and here he found his thoughts once again shifting, it wasn’t that he thought that diplomacy wasn’t important. He still maintained that diplomacy was among the most important of all Jedi skills.

It wasn’t even that he remembered every little thing that he’d been taught, but he had learned it before, had used the skills they’d taught, and there was just more pressing issues on his mind than the proper bow to use when dealing with Fallen nobility.

His mind slid to his options again, telling, not telling, staying, leaving, running, killing, dying. It didn’t help, he’d gone through the list constantly since the moment he realized that this was real.

In the end it came down to two real options.

He could stay as he was, try and make a difference here in the temple, try to help the Jedi change and prepare for what might happen. Prepare for the day when he could do what was needed to take down the Sith. But he was a single padawan in a large order, and when it came down to it, he was fairly powerless and almost useless. What could he actually change?

Or he could leave. He wasn’t quite sure what he would do if he took that option. It was a large galaxy, and not necessarily a friendly one. Obi-Wan wasn’t Dooku, he had no family name to fall back on, no seat of power waiting for him. If he left the order he would be a penniless, homeless vagabond, with absolutely no power or influence to speak of.

But he could free Anakin from slavery, help him and his mother find a home in the Republic, where they’d be free and where the Jedi would be able to find them. He could find places and people who had caused destruction and try to move them on to a better path. He could try and bring peace where the Jedi could not, try to stem some of the anger and suspicion that had grown in regards to the order.
He’d be the equivalent of a pebble in a river, so small as to be almost insignificant. What good could he really do?

He felt as though he couldn’t breathe, and he had to clench his fists under the table even as he tried to bring his attention back to the diplomacy lesson. No one seemed to have noticed the turmoil that had gone on behind his shields, Garen and Quinlan were busy arguing with Master Hardin about the benefit of participating in festivals of a more lascivious nature in order to encourage relationships between Jedi Diplomats and the cultures they were working with.

Obi-Wan was reminded that neither Garen nor Quinlan often worked as diplomats, Quinlan would become an excellent shadow, and Garen an excellent pilot, and they were both already good fighters who would go on to become phenomenal fighters, but neither of them would ever enjoy the art of negotiating.

He took a deep breath. Focusing. He spoke up to contribute, agreeing with neither side because it was far more enjoyable and distracting to be devil’s advocate for both sides.

And Obi-Wan needed the distraction.

It was a relief to leave class and head towards the advanced saber class. Nothing seemed to clear his mind the way running through a kata with a saber in his hand did. Not even the extra scrutiny Master Drallig had been giving him could ruin the peace it brought him.

He’d avoided any serious sparring with anyone so far, and was grateful to continue that trend, instead he and Quinlan mostly sparred playfully. Not for the first time he wondered how much his age mates had noticed, while he hadn’t noticed them treating him differently, he also recognized that he very likely wouldn’t be able to tell.

The class ended, and Obi-Wan made himself scarce as the rest of them headed to the commissary for lunch. He wasn’t in the right mindset for chatting, and instead he wandered through the temple.

Why? He wondered, not for the first time. Why would the Force send him back? The Sith had been destroyed, the Empire broken, but balance had been found, Luke had succeeded where they had failed. What was a few decades to the Force? And if it was truly necessary to send someone back, why him? He could name dozens of individuals better suited to make things better, and not even just Jedi. He wasn’t the best suited, wasn’t the most powerful, wasn’t the most influential. Surely the Force had better servants than him.

Why? Why had the Force done this to him? He couldn’t do this.

Nothing felt right. Nothing seemed right. And the Force was so silent, only the quietest of hints, the smallest of warnings. But never in all of Obi-Wan’s meditations did it help him find a path, as though the Force honestly trusted him to do the right thing, to make the right choices, when it felt as though there was no right thing. Or perhaps they were all wrong things? Was there a difference? Between nothing being right and between everything being wrong?

Yes, he decided, there was. If everything was wrong, then that was it, no hope, no chance, no way to actually fix things. But if instead, it was more a case of nothing being right, than perhaps that was because all were viable options.

That was disgustingly optimistic of him.

He hesitated as he noticed where his path through the temple had led him. He closed his eyes as the vision of Knights and Masters piled in front of the doors hit him. It wasn’t here, they weren’t dead.
They hadn’t yet died trying to protect the babies and younglings hidden within the creche.

They hadn’t failed. Not yet.

He slid into the room, wandering through the cribs, the room was full of a type of peace that not even the Room of a Thousand Fountains could match. The babies filled the room with their beautiful force presences, all already distinct and individual but each beautiful and untainted. He could hear the giggling and laughter from the next room over where the toddlers were playing. He knew that the room beyond that had younglings preparing to become initiates, still full of life and joy, unhampered by worry and stress and fear.

His steps led him to an human girl, she was babbling quietly to herself, words indistinguishable baby chatter. He slid her from her crib, rocking her back and forth gently. She gave him a bright, gummy smile, and Obi-Wan felt his heart ache. She couldn’t be older than seven months, and her force presence was bright and radiant. He wondered where she’d be, fifteen years from now when the Clone Wars would be starting. Would she have been a padawan? Would she have left to join one of the Corps? And when the war ended, their ranks decimated, would she have been killed in the purges? Turned on by her own men, shot down before she even realized what was happening?

Would she have been in the temple that fateful night, when the men the Jedi had seen as friends, as allies had marched on the temple led by none other than Anakin Skywalker, the Hero with No Fear, the man that the padawans had looked up to, had admired. The man that would go on to become the greatest Jedi Killer in the Galaxy. Had she tried to fight to protect her home, only to be cut down by overwhelming numbers? Or had she been one of those sent to run, who had escaped the temple and into the streets only to be hunted down and killed in an alley?

Did it even matter how she’d died?

“Padawan Kenobi?” Obi-Wan blinked, looking up to see one of the creche workers giving him a concerned look. “Are you quite alright?”

There were tears streaming down his face, and his heart was aching. “Yes, yes. I’m quite alright.” He looked down at the girl in his arms, tried to determine whether knowing her name would give him insight into what had happened to her in his past. But then decided that he didn’t want to know.

That probably made him a coward.

But he couldn’t bring himself to care if this made him a coward. Why try and figure out how she had died specifically? Any child that had gone through the Jedi Order, whether they had been sent away, been made a padawan, or for some reason left of their own accord had been either killed or hunted and forced to hide for the rest of their, normally, short lives.

He nodded to the creche worker, giving the baby girl a light kiss on her forehead, leaning into the crib to lay her back down. “I can’t promise to save you.” He whispered, pulling the blankets up to cover her. “But I promise you, I will live the rest of my life trying to.” He closed his eyes, letting himself bask for a moment in the warmth of her Force presence, letting it swirl around his own presence, soothing the aching parts of his soul.

He didn’t know if he could succeed, didn’t feel as though he could.

But he had never let that stop him before.

He left the creche, making his way to the Room of a Thousand Fountains. It was peaceful here and Obi-Wan amused himself by trying to determine which plants came from which planet. He followed one of the paths that led to a lesser used area of the gardens. It was louder here, right beside one of
the waterfalls. It had taken him until he was 28 to be able to meditate here after what had happened with Xanatos and Bruck.

It hadn’t been the first time he’d seen someone die, but Bruck Chun’s death had been a painfully defining moment in Obi-Wan’s life.

He slipped to his knees in a meditative pose. He strengthened his shields, and then slowly sank into meditation. He could feel the temple pulsing around him, thousands of vibrant Force presences, alive and real, he pulled his senses in the Force closer, digging into the trees and plants and water around him. He pulled it even closer, sinking into himself and the waterfall right beside him. He let himself move within the Force, felt himself fall into it, just a particle in the waterfall.

Why? He asked.

What am I supposed to do? He pleaded.

Help me. He begged.

Please.

When he finally opened his eyes the afternoon and evening had slipped away and dawn was on it’s way. He walked slowly to the rooms he shared with Qui-Gon, his body felt heavy and tired, but his mind was heavier. The Force had been there, but answers were still desperately out of reach.

His sleep was disturbed, the same way it had been since the first time he’d woken up, nightmares and memories haunting him.

He heard Qui-Gon begin his morning meditation and used it as an excuse to pull himself out of bed and prepare for the day.

Joining Qui-Gon for the morning breakfast, or rather, the morning tea was a quiet affair. Qui-Gon was watching him again, eyes concerned.

“You were out late last night.” Qui-Gon said quietly.

Obi-Wan nodded, “I was meditating, I lost track of time.”

Qui-Gon hummed, “You seem tired, have you not been sleeping?”

No. Obi-Wan hadn’t, and even though their bond was weaker than it had been that was something Qui-Gon should already know. Obi-Wan hoped it was just Qui-Gon’s way of fishing for information and not true ignorance. “I’m afraid I haven’t really slept well the last few weeks.”

Qui-Gon nodded again and they fell silent. It was a reminder that Qui-Gon had always found it easier to work with the emotions of strangers, growing up Obi-Wan had always felt relegated to the background, less worthy of Qui-Gon’s attention and care. Eventually, Obi-Wan had realized that it was just the way Qui-Gon was, and that it wasn’t a sign that Qui-Gon didn’t care for him, or that Obi-Wan wasn’t worth caring for.

“I’m leaving the Order.”

Qui-Gon choked on the tea he was drinking, spitting it out, his face a picture of shock. “Excuse me?”

Obi-Wan looked down at the tea he was holding, it was a sweeter tea than he tended to actually enjoy, a tiny sign of how much he’d changed, a symbol showing that he wasn’t the person he’d once
been. “I’m leaving the Jedi Order.”

The room fell silent and Obi-Wan watched as Qui-Gon’s face went through an astonishing number of emotions. Shock, confusion, hurt, loss, anger, betrayal. He felt a deep pang of regret, how could he make this decision, how could he hurt Qui-Gon this way? His master, the man he had adored as a Padawan and sought to emulate even after his death?

He hadn’t intended to be cruel.

“You have been the greatest Master I could have hoped for. Your teachings and your trainings have been fundamental in making me the person that I am today. The temple is my home, and the Jedi my family.” He hesitated, “The idea of leaving the Jedi Order makes my mind scream in incomprehension. The life of a Jedi has been almost all I’ve ever known. Yet, I also know that my path now lies outside the Order.” He didn’t know if it meant a life outside of being a Jedi. He had been a Jedi outside the order once, but that had been out of necessity of their being no order. And in many ways it hadn’t been much of a life.

Qui-Gon was still staring at him, his eyes shocked even as a dark mask began to fall over his face. “I see.” He said, his voice was ice cold, his words sounded sharp enough to cut. “And what have you decided that you’re going to do? Perhaps you’ll go and subjugate a few planets? Maybe try and burn the temple to the ground?”

Obi-Wan flinched, he knew Qui-Gon was shocked and hurt, he recognized that the man was lashing out. He remembered, of course, the things that Xanatos had done. He remembered Bandomeer and Telos and the danger that the man had brought to the temple. But those weren’t the first things he remembered. Instead he remembered Anakin, Vader, burning the temple to the ground, mowing down younglings as though they were droids. He remembered feeling Alderaan being obliterated, the pain of millions of lives being wiped away in a single moment.

“I am not Xanatos.” And he wasn’t Vader, either. “I promised you six years ago, Qui-Gon, when you refused to train me, that I would not turn. I intend to keep that promise. I will not turn. I will not fall.” He met Qui-Gon’s eyes, trying to force his sincerity through, “I cannot promise that I will always do right, I cannot promise that you will always be proud. Because the galaxy is a dark place, and I doubt I will always know what is right, but Qui-Gon Jinn, I swear to you. I will not turn.”

Qui-Gon met his eyes and Obi-Wan could see the broken trust and hurt and knew that the man would not believe him. It hurt, for six years he had been at the side of this man, had done his best to make him proud, had tried his hardest to do what was right. But still, when it came to Obi-Wan, Qui-Gon found it so easy to doubt.

He understood, of course, that his sudden desire to leave the order didn’t help, that it was a hard blow for Qui-Gon to take. But the decades hadn’t changed the fact that Qui-Gon had been his master, and that Obi-Wan would always want his good opinion.

“I’m sorry, Master Qui-Gon.” He took his teacup to the sink, his steps measured and sure, and then moved to his room to pack his few belongings.

He had made his decision. He was leaving.

The Force hummed around him, and Obi-Wan thought it felt pleased, though he couldn’t be sure that wasn’t just his desperate interpretation.

Kriff, he had no idea what he was doing.
Chapter End Notes

This chapter has been changed and edited since it's original upload.
Finding Freedom

It took far longer to leave than he had thought. Qui-Gon had made one final plea to change his mind, Obi-Wan had tried to reassure him once again that this was not the man’s fault, and that he would not turn. The hurt look the man had sent his way the final time they had crossed paths did not reassure him in the slightest that Qui-Gon believed him. He sent a silent prayer to the force that someone would be able to keep his Master from turning into the cold man he had been when he had taken Obi-Wan as his padawan. But now there was no Obi-Wan, no Tahl, no Micah. It was on Qui-Gon to keep himself better.

He had also found himself in conversation with Master Yoda and Master Windu. He tried to tell himself that the disappointed hang to Master Yoda’s ears didn’t hurt, but he was honest enough to admit that it did. He had been looking up to Master Yoda, perhaps never literally, but always figuratively, for the 60 years he’d known the Jedi Master, he took no pleasure in disappointing him.

Master Windu’s face was blank, but Obi-Wan knew the man well enough to recognize it as his frustrated/angry blank face. He was no doubt remembering Melida/Daan and how the Jedi had given him a second chance… Only for Obi-Wan to throw it away for no apparent reason.

He had gone mad, he had no idea what it was he was doing. That didn’t stop him from doing it though.

When he did finally leave the temple he was alone, those who had wanted to convince him to change his mind having given it up for a lost cause.

He had a few credits, nothing that would amount to much in the long run, but enough to get him off Coruscant and out into the Galaxy. He still hadn’t decided what it was he was going to do, at least not long term. For now, though he began to make his way to Tatooine. At the very least he could free Shmi and Anakin. He’d need to earn a sizable amount of money acceptable to the Hutts between now and then, enough to not only free the two of them, but to give them money to set themselves up successfully. It would do no good to free them and then leave them to suffer in poverty, and it wasn’t as though he could just pull them around after him. For one, he had no clue where he was going or what he was doing, for the other, while he didn’t know what he was doing, he could be assured that it was more than likely going to be dangerous and stupid.

So he spent his trip playing sabaac and earning credits, taking short stops on different planets to find short term labor. He even once spent a week tracking down a dangerous fugitive for whom there was a price on his head from the local law enforcement. The fugitive, who had murdered the cousin of the King and threatened the King’s daughter, had never really stood a chance. Obi-Wan had taken his lightsaber with him when he’d left the order, but Obi-Wan hadn’t needed to use it. His old life had ensured that he was a dangerous man with or without a lightsaber.

By the time he made it to Tatooine a few months after he had left the Jedi he surprised himself by the sizable amount of money he had managed to earn. Once transferred from Republican Credits to Wupiupi (after paying the absolutely outrageous transaction fee, but that was to be expected on a Hutt run world) he still felt as though he had enough to free both Shmi and Anakin, and so long as he could bargain well enough there should be enough for the two of them to provide for themselves. It would do no good to free them from slavery only to leave them in poverty.

It was, he acknowledged to himself, going to be awkward. There was no good reason for a nineteen-year old boy, and he certainly felt like just a boy despite the fact that he had already lived 57 years, and then continued on for another few as a force ghost. It made him miss Yoda fiercely, he could just
imagine the older Jedi whacking his shins with his Gimer stick and telling him “When as old as I am you are, then look like a child all do.” He should have told Yoda. Yoda would have known what to do. Except, even Yoda was fallible, certainly less so than Obi-Wan himself, but fallible none-the-less.

Force, he had no idea what he was doing.

He cleared the thought from his mind as he approached the shop that he knew to belong to the owner of the Skywalker’s. He had barely entered when he heard the buzzing of wings, a Toydarian that Obi-Wan had never met, but nevertheless knew flew up. “What do you want?” He asked in Huttese.

“I come on business.” He answered in the same language. It was still an ugly language, he thought to himself, that was probably why it was so much more enjoyable to swear in Huttese than in basic. He could thank Anakin for being the one to teach him that.

“Business? What can I help you with?”

What indeed, if Watto knew where he could find his sanity that would be nice. He was a negotiator; he could easily do this. Words were his forte. “I want to buy your slaves.” Right, ignore your own advice. Just be blunt instead.

Watto’s nose scrunched and his wings began to beat more furiously together. “I just won those two from Gardulla, why would I want to part with them so soon?”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow. “The boy is a child, barely 4 years old. While I know he’s helpful, he takes more maintenance than he’s likely worth. Such a young child requires a great deal of work still from his mother, this takes away the time available to actually help you. While I have no doubt that they were good winnings, they are by no means irreplaceable.” Even saying the words made him feel like a monster. Talking about humans as though they were objects.

Watto scowled, “I could part with them for 100,000 wupiupi.”

Obi-Wan scoffed, partially because that was outrageous and partially because he only had 90,000 wupiupi. “Hardly, 50,000.”

It was Watto’s turn to scoff angrily, “Are you trying to rob me? 90,000.”

“For a child and his mother? 60,000.”

“He’d grow up to be very useful, he’s an investment. 80,000.”

“Yes, and she is hardly prime investment, she’s been a slave for so long that it’s wearing her down, she won’t last. 70,000.” The utter degrading of another person’s worth was despicable. At this point they both already knew what they were going to decide. It was easy to see at what point they were going to settle.

“75,000 and not a wupiupi less.”

Obi-Wan made sure to scowl. “Fine then, 75,000. I’ll bring them both by tomorrow. We’ll exchange their papers for the credits then. And I want there to be a scanner available, I want to know where their chips are.”

Watto snorted, “Tomorrow.”

Obi-Wan nodded his head in his first real gesture of civility and turned away. For the first time since
he’d arrived on the planet he allowed his mental shields to relax as he felt out in the force. The bright presence that he had felt in the force from almost the moment he’d arrived on the planet was practically a beacon and he followed it slowly as he moved quietly through the slave quarters.

It didn’t take long before he reached the small home of the Skywalker family. With a deep breath he knocked on the door.

It opened soon enough, a tired woman at the door a young child on her hip, his head resting on her shoulder, practically asleep. He felt his throat close on him. It really was Anakin. Right there. The boy he’d raised from the age of nine. The boy he’d taught and trained and loved, the boy he had fought to the death on the fiery banks of Mustafar. The boy whose son he had watched over for 20 years. The boy who had killed him. The boy that he had loved even after all that. Even after he had completely given up hope in him, he had still loved him. Anakin.

He blinked fiercely, keeping painful tears from forming through sheer force of will, trying to wipe the memories and the pain away. “Shmi Skywalker?” He asked quietly.

The woman nodded, “Yes, can I help you?”

He nodded, “Yes, Ma’am.” He didn’t take a deep breath, but only because he had been trained too well, and doing this for too long, to show that sign of anxiety. “I recently purchased you and your son from your owner Watto. I would like to discuss your future with you.”

The woman’s eyes widened even as her face paled. He saw a tired resignation in her eyes. He could not blame her.

“Certainly, sir.” She moved to let him in, and he noticed that she clutched Anakin a little tighter to her. She gestured him to a seat as she took her own. “What is it that you’ll be wanting from us?”

Obi-Wan sighed, “Madam Skywalker, if I might be frank, there is very little that you can do for me. I am afraid that this will make no real sense to you, at times it makes no sense to me. The reality is that I have bought you with my only intention being to free you. I am aware that this will put you in a difficult situation, I have just taken your means of living away. I have 15,000 wupiupi to help you begin your new life. If you wish to live it here, then I will be more than happy to help you find a new place to live. If you wish to leave Tatooine I will gladly help you move elsewhere. I have no demands of you, the future is entirely in your hands.”

The small house fell completely silent, Shmi stared at him with obvious surprise and no little suspicion. “Why?”

Obi-Wan frowned for a second, “Milady, if I might be honest, I don’t think you’d believe me if I told you.”

He could see that the title threw her even further off-balance. “And so you won’t even try to explain?” She asked.

Obi-Wan paused, unsure what to say. There was a soft noise and both he and Shmi paused to look at Anakin who was stirring awake from his place on his mother’s lap.

For a long moment Obi-Wan found himself staring into the blue eyes of a young Anakin. He could feel the young boy’s force presence reach out to his own. The force was infinite, past and present and future combined within it. Their force presences knew each other even though he was a stranger to the boy in front of him. Anakin wiggled and after a moment Shmi let him slip from her lap. The room stayed silent, except for the pattering of small feet as the small boy moved around the table and
lifted his arms to Obi-Wan in silent demand. Obi-Wan felt a small war inside himself, the desire to hold the boy close, to keep him safe, and the desire to keep away, because Obi-Wan had failed this boy once, he could not fail him again. Better to stay away.

But he had already brought himself here. Had already freed the boy. Had already, in some way, changed his future. And so he picked him up. The two of them commenced in another staring contest before the boy wrapped his arm around his neck, “Why you sad?”

Obi-Wan started in surprise, “I’m not sad, little one.”

“Yes you are. I feel it.” He moved away and touched Obi-Wan’s heart. “You’re crying in here.”

Obi-Wan stayed silent for a long moment before nodding, “There are some pains, little one, that hurt for a very long time. Some pains that never go away. I carry the sorrow here.” He tapped Anakin’s hand where it was still on his chest.

“You hurt?”

How did you answer that? For twenty years he had carried the death’s of his entire family, the betrayal of his brother, the loss of freedom and democracy. He had always done his best to let the pain and the hurt go, but some things had a tendency of never truly leaving. It didn’t matter that now the Jedi still lived, that Anakin didn’t even know him, hadn’t betrayed him, that the Republic was still alive and freedom more than an illusion. He had still lost it. “Yes, Anakin, it hurts. But I’m okay.” Because he had to be okay. Because there was never another option than being okay, because he’d had to keep going. And now even after death he still had to move forward. Keep going, he had to try and try and try.

Anakin’s face looked dubious, but he didn’t argue the point, instead he just curled up on his lap, head burrowed into his chest. Obi-Wan took a moment to close his eyes and center himself, reaching out to the force to find his balance. He opened his eyes and met the brown eyes of Shmi Skywalker. The suspicion had faded away.

“You came because of him.”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Yes.”

“What do you want from him?”

Obi-Wan frowned thoughtfully, “Milady, I expect and want nothing from you or your son. I hope only that he and you find happiness. I will not insert myself into your lives. Nor will I try and influence you in any way. I came only to free you and enable you to choose your own way in life.”

Shmi nodded. “I see.” She paused, “ Might I think on this?”

Obi-Wan nodded, “I’ll return tomorrow, we’ll need to go get the papers from Watto and have your chips removed. Take as long as you need to make a decision.”

He slowly moved Anakin from his lap and back into his mother’s and with a deep bow took his leave.

He had nowhere to stay, and nowhere to go, so as the first sun slipped past the horizon he stepped out of the city and into the desert. And he walked. The air cooled quickly as the second sun followed its brother past the horizon. And still he walked, until Mos Espa was far behind him, alone in the desert surrounded by nothing but sand and the memories that screamed at him.
He refused to let them take ahold of him. Unwilling to go back to the first time he had returned to Tatooine after the Purge. Of the hopelessness and helplessness and pain that had been his only companions. Instead he turned his face towards the sky and let the stars whisper to him.

They were bright here on Tatooine. With no lights to compete with, no pollution to overcome. They shone bright and true. Steady and unchanging. There was almost no difference between the sky he looked at now and the sky he had looked at his last night on Tatooine before he had left to save a princess and meet his death.

He reached out to the force, and for the first time since he had woken up he let himself fall into it completely. Mental shields completely gone allowing all of himself to slip into the force and for the force to slip into all of him. It was not meditation, because it was not truly peaceful. He could feel everything, Mos Espa behind him, a Tusken camp ahead of him, a bantha herd. Every emotion he could imagine or remember having felt was there. Anger, sorrow, greed, hurt, pain, love, happiness, hopelessness, fear, contentment, excitement, acceptance, resignation. It was bitter and cold while loving and warm and full while empty and it was everything but nothing. And for a moment he remembered being dead and being one with this, even while separated as himself, and he wanted. Even as the thought came to him the force practically screamed at him, that no, not yet, not now, again one day, but not now. He was alive and the force asked him to stay that way. So Obi-Wan drew himself apart, raised his shields enough that he no longer felt the temptation to let himself go completely. The want and longing didn’t disappear, but it faded so that it was again manageable.

He felt very alone.

But he could not dwell on that now. Instead he let the force whisper to him. He knelt on the sand all night, eyes on the stars, the force whispering into his heart and mind. It gave him no answers, no direction. But it was not silent.
So I meant to post this yesterday... Instead I went and watched Beauty and the Beast...
So... Yeah. It was a great movie. I absolutely adored it!

The next day passed quickly, if not a little strangely. He returned to Shmi and Anakin and took them to Watto’s, where he had their chips removed. Watto had snorted at him, but had not commented. After that he had returned Shmi to her home, once she had admitted she needed a little more time. She did not want to make any decisions in haste. Anakin had spent the entire morning chattering, and switching constantly from holding his mother’s hand to holding his. He didn’t know if Anakin really understood what was going on, but he seemed to know that it was good. Anakin of course didn’t know what it meant to be free, for him it was still just another word.

That part of the day had been as expected. But as he went off to find eventual transport off the planet the Force decided to give him a punch in the gut.

He literally ran into the man as he turned a corner and for a moment it was as if time itself froze, which frankly wouldn’t have been the strangest thing for time to do given that Obi-Wan had woken up decades in his own past.

He would recognize this face anywhere. It had been the face that had marched into battle with him, that had been at his side and his back when death screamed around him. It was the face of Cody and Rex and so many millions of others. It was the face that had marched the temple and helped kill the younglings. It was the face that he had trusted and cared for and been betrayed by. It was the face of Jango Fett.

The man gave him a short look over, face blank and impassive. He was not impressed. Obi-Wan’s own face was as carefully blank as ever. Cody would have still had some idea what he was thinking. But Cody had tried to kill him. Cody didn’t exist.

The force seemed to swirl around him, the tiniest of nudges, “Teach me to be a bounty hunter?” Obi-Wan blinked in utter surprise. Please, force, do not let that have been him that had said that. The man in front of him didn’t even blink in surprise, his face remained completely blank, but Obi-Wan still saw a shot of surprise ripple through his eyes.

The force giggled.

“No.” Alright, so he really had said that. Why did it seem like he kept saying things without remembering having decided to say it? Thank the force that was over now.

Obi-Wan nodded. “Alright then. Have a good day.” And he kept walking.

He could feel eyes watching him but Obi-Wan refused to turn and meet them again. The Force whispered in warning and Obi-Wan threw himself to the left and turned as a blaster bolt flew past him where he had been walking only moments prior. The blaster he had bought soon after he had left the temple was in his right hand and pointed at the bounty hunter. His hands itched for his lightsaber, but the force whispered no, and so he left it tucked in his belt and hidden by his tunic.
“You should have shot back.”

“I figured you were making a point. If you really wanted me dead you’d have done a lot more than shoot at my shoulder.” He threw himself at the wall as Fett sent another blaster bolt at him, this time sending his own shot at the man. Fett stepped smoothly out of the way and the shot went flying into the building behind him.

“You’d make an awful bounty hunter.” Obi-Wan remembered his time as Rako Hardeen a lifetime ago. The ruse had been a nightmare, the consequences devastating for many of his relationships. But still, there had been a part of him that had enjoyed it.

“Yes, well, I hardly see how that matters now.”

The two men stood there in silence, blasters aimed at each other. “No, I don’t suppose it does.” Fett replaced his blaster and Obi-Wan replaced his own. Obi-Wan took that as permission to leave this strange situation and began to move, “If you keep walking I’ll be tempted to shoot you again.”

“Shoot at me. You haven’t actually shot me yet.”

“Don’t tempt me.”

“I would never.” It was a fact of life that Obi-Wan didn’t always know how to stop antagonizing the people that threatened him.

“How did you recognize me?”

Obi-Wan actually laughed at that, because if there was one person Obi-Wan was fairly certain he would always recognize it was the man in front of him, that’s what happened when you’d been surrounded by that same face for over three years, “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

Obi-Wan got the distinct feeling that Fett was coming very close to shooting at him again. “That’s not an answer.”

“That doesn’t change the fact that you wouldn’t believe me. I almost don’t believe me and I’m insane enough for it.”

Fett seemed to consider that and nodded. It fell silent again and Obi-Wan found the temptation to leave growing, but the way Fett was eyeing him meant he’d still be in danger of getting shot at.

“Why would you want to be a bounty hunter?”

Obi-Wan tilted his head in thought, why had he asked Fett to teach him? While the words had come out unexpectedly there still had to have been some reason for it, the nudge from the force had pushed the words he’d already considered, even if only just.

Maybe because this was Fett, the man who, if Obi-Wan didn’t do anything to stop it, would become the template for the clones that Obi-Wan had known. The clones that would become the men that fought with him, and then fought against him and the rest of the Jedi. There was a part of him that wanted to stop that from happening… Even as the very thought hurt. Maybe it was because Obi-Wan needed a way to make money, not only for himself, but for the Skywalkers as well, and despite what Fett had said, Obi-Wan knew he was capable of being as ruthless and dangerous as any bounty hunter. Maybe because Obi-Wan was going to be ticking off a lot of important people, and it wouldn’t hurt to know the secrets of the men that would most likely be sent after him. Maybe it was because Obi-Wan was looking for something that was so far from his old life. Something that would help him keep this life separate from his past so he could keep his sanity. He said none of those
things.

“In the split second that the idea came to me before I voiced the thought it seemed like a good idea.”

Fett actually rolled his eyes. Good, Obi-Wan was grateful that his ability to be frustrating hadn’t disappeared.

“And now? Still seem like a good idea.”

“You just tried to shoot me twice.”

“Neither were lethal, and you avoided it both times. Answer the question.”

“I have continued to consider the benefits, yes.”

“Still not an answer.”

“It seems like an absolutely awful idea, nevertheless it’s one I’m likely to find a way to pursue.”

It was silent and Obi-Wan kept his head up, meeting Fett’s eyes. Fett was eying him, Obi-Wan wondered what it was he was seeing. Finally, Fett broke the silence. “How about this, then. I’ll give you ten minutes, you get to disappear, while staying here on Tatooine. If I don’t find you in four days, I’ll consider teaching you how to survive being a bounty hunter.”

“And if you do find me? Will you be shooting at me again?” He asked dryly.

“Possibly.” Obi-Wan had a feeling that meant probably.

“Couldn’t I get twenty minutes?”

“You get ten.”

Obi-Wan considered it. “Alright then. I suppose I’ll be seeing you here in four days then.”

Fett actually laughed, “We’ll see.”

Obi-Wan gave him a nod of his head. Because civility wasn’t dead, not yet. Before turning again and making his way down the street. He drew the force around him, shielding him, inlaying suggestions around his force presence to ‘ignore’, ‘look past’, ‘not notice’. He stopped quickly at the Skywalker’s and quietly informed Shmi that he’d be away for the next four days. Asked her quietly if there was anything she needed during that time. And then he took his leave.

Rational people did not walk into the desert in the heat of the day. Rational people did not do so without buying food and water. Rational people did not do so with every intention of staying away from civilization for the next several days.

Obi-Wan wasn’t quite a rational person. And so before the ten minutes were up he stepped out into the desert, his only concession was to remove his cloak from his pack. He wrapped it around himself, ignoring the extra heat, raising the hood up and over his head. He sunk within himself and when he opened his eyes again he almost felt as though he were 50 again, just Crazy Old Ben out on the Jundland Waste.

He could have stayed hidden within Mos Espa, he could have gone to another city on Tatooine entirely. Instead he went and found the Bantha herd. They weren’t his bantha herd. The one he had followed around during the more painful days of his isolation when the loneliness ate at his soul. But their warmth was similar and welcome. He kept his force sense up and alert for any one beside
himself and the banthas, and he planned.

He planned the best ways to make it back into Mos Espa without being seen coming in from the desert.

He planned on how to best help the Skywalkers, depending on the several different options that Shmi could take.

He planned on how to keep his lightsaber skills in decent shape. There were still Sith out there after all and he no longer had people with whom he could spar.

He planned on how to deal with the Sith he knew of, Maul, Dooku, Sidious, Sidious’ master, all of the many acolytes he’d seen and met. He wondered if there were any whose fall he could halt.

He planned on how to best help the Republic now that he was a man with no authority, no home, and no support.

He planned on ways to free the clones. Because he knew, somewhat guiltily that he had no intention of stopping their conception. Oh, he’d stop the war if he could, but by then they’d already be born.

He planned and back-up planned and ate the bitter plants with their little water right alongside the bantha. And when the planning became too much he would turn to the bantha and let their presence soothe him.

His problem, he decided, was that he had no power or influence, and that the Sith had a great deal of it.

It would have been far easier to remain a Jedi. Probably. Maybe. No, it would have still been a nightmare. Even now he knew that the plans of the Sith were in motion. In some ways it was better to let them continue. Palpatine hadn’t been a fool, he was sure he had plan within plan and back-up plans galore. Better then, to let this play out at least somewhat similarly to what had happened before so that he didn’t have to try and single-handedly fight against the unknown. Better perhaps to try and foil a plan he did somewhat understand then to try and foil a completely new one.

He left the bantha the night before his next meet-up with Fett, if the man were to be believed. It would be an annoying, but almost hilarious prank, to have sent him off in hiding with no intention of meeting up again. He almost hoped the man had. Because Obi-Wan still wasn’t sure what he had gotten himself into.

Where had the wisdom of age gone? Surely he hadn’t still been bungling things up this much by the time he’d died? Then again, maybe he had been. It wasn’t as though he had anyone around to tell him so. There were times when he felt as though he were truly 19 again. And then others when he recognized that he had far more patience than he ever had at this age.

Not that leaving the temple with no warning and asking a bounty hunter to teach him were great signs of patience or forethought.

It took little time to slip back into Mos Espa, and he entered just as the second sun rose. This next day would be the easiest opportunity for Fett to find him. So after wandering through the shadows of Mos Espa he went to a cantina for a drink. Slipping into a dark corner with his hood raised to sip at his drink for the next hour or so. He stayed there until the force whispered a warning and then slipped out the back into an alley. Although most of Tatooine seemed to be desert and alleys.

He moved and stopped, slipping through alleys with the force giggling in his ears. It reminded him of playing hide and seek as a child in the crèche. The force guiding them all playfully, as though
pleased by their simple joy. He longed for those days.

But at least the Force was getting some sort of fun out of the situation.

Finally, as the time to meet came he moved back to the same alley he had run into Fett in the first place. The force gave him a mischievous tug and Obi-Wan turned just as Fett stepped out from the shadows next to him. They were face to face, a scant few inches away from each other, just as they had been when Obi-Wan had run into him the first day.

For the longest moment they just stood there, in each other’s personal space, both of them watching the other. A hand came up and gripped his chin, tilting his head slightly.

“You’re practically a child, aren’t you?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “Nineteen. Hardly a child.”

Fett scoffed, “Age and experience make a man. You barely have age and I doubt a great deal of experience. What is a core-worlder like you doing here anyways?”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow, “You don’t already know?”

“Fine, why’d you come here just to free two slaves?”

“That would be another one of my spur of the moment decisions. I’ll be finding transport and helping them move to wherever they please, so soon as Shmi decides where she wants to go.”

Fett nodded slowly, hand still holding Obi-Wan’s chin. There was a strange tension echoing between them and through the force, but Obi-Wan found he wasn’t sure he could name what it was.

“When was the last time you ate?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I had a drink this morning, ate some scrag at some point.” The weeds of the desert really needed to be stewed to be truly edible, but it wasn’t the first time in his life Obi-Wan had eaten it straight from the ground. It was nasty and bad for his teeth, but Obi-Wan found he wasn’t particularly bothered by that.

Fett raised an eyebrow, “And when was the last time you slept?” Obi-Wan hesitated. To be honest he hadn’t slept since he’d arrived on Tatooine. And he slept rarely before that. Instead he meditated, allowed that to rejuvenate himself, even if it wasn’t truly enough. But he hated sleeping. He did it as rarely as possible. He’d been this way since part way through the war when all sleep brought was the memories of his men falling, torture on Rattatak, the death and decay of cities overrun by separatists. No, sleep had long ago become a burden to be born rather than any means of escape. Not even isolation had made sleep easier to find, Mustafar and Utapau to close to the surface to ever find real peace.

“About a week ago.”

The hand on his chin finally fell away, and for a moment Obi-Wan felt cold despite the desert heat. Human contact was so rare for him, that even that calculating hand had felt welcome. “That’s a long time to go without sleep.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I supplement myself with meditation.”

A hand reached behind him and Obi-Wan felt a brush along his back. His own hand came up and grasped the hand now holding his lightsaber, keeping it in between them. He wouldn’t just let his
lightsaber fall into anyone’s hands, particularly not into the hands of someone he knew hated the Jedi.

“Hmm, meditation, a lightsaber, that’d make you a Jedi, wouldn’t it?” Fett’s voice was completely calm but the force wavered in warning.

Jedi were hardly the only ones who meditated but Obi-Wan let it go, “It made me one, once. I left the order two months ago.”

“Why’d you leave?”

“My path lay elsewhere.”

“As a bounty hunter?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “Perhaps.”

“What do you know about Galidraan?”

Obi-Wan was quiet, “It was a slaughter. A mistake. A disaster. It was everything done wrong.”

Fett took a step closer, “It was you Jedi, killing my people on the word of a politician.” Fett spit, and the warning in the force sharpened. Things could very well get very bloody very soon.

“You were Manda’lore.”

“Yes.”

“Who do you hate more, the Jedi or yourself for falling into Death Watch’s trap.” It hadn’t been meant as a taunting question, although he realized belatedly that it probably sounded like one. He was curious. There were faint similarities between the destruction of the True Mandalorians and the Jedi, and Force knew that the only person Obi-Wan had hated more then Palpatine was himself for falling into his trap, for failing Anakin and the Jedi. Before he had died he had come to terms with his failure, but his return to this time had destroyed any serenity he had once had.

With a twist Obi-Wan found his back against a wall, one arm extended above his head where the two of them were still holding his lightsaber, an arm to his neck, a warning pressure. “I killed six of you Jedi with my bare hands. It would be nothing to kill you.” Fett’s voice came across even, as though Obi-Wan’s death was of no consequence.

“For what crime? For my parents choosing to give me to the Jedi? For loving the Jedi, when they are the only family I have ever had? Because all I wanted was to help people? What, then, Jango Fett, is the crime for which you’ll kill me?” Why had the younglings been killed, why had the initiates, why the padawans. What had been their crime? Being given up by their parents? Being raised by the Jedi when that was the only life they knew?

“The Jedi killed my family. My people.”

And your sons killed mine, Obi-Wan thought. But then, that had always been Fett’s intention, hadn’t it. It was grudge for grudge, blood for blood, hurt for hurt. “I was thirteen when the battle of Galidraan happened.”

“And you were sitting in your precious temple being told that as a Jedi you have the right to thoughtlessly kill good men when they don’t do what you think is right. Learning to be self-righteous and proud.”
Even now, so many years later, Obi-Wan remembered being thirteen, it had been a long and awful year full of so much pain, “You don’t know me Jango Fett. Don’t presume that you do. I was fighting my own battles. I was a temple reject with a collar set to explode around my neck. A boy left behind by my Master in a warzone watching as children were mowed down in a pointless civil war. I fought for my friend as she was chained to the bottom of a pool and ended the life of a fellow child who was just as hurt, lost and confused as I was in an attempt to save her life. I learned that life is cruel and ugly and the people are worse. I learned that sometimes you can’t save everyone. I learned that sometimes surviving is the better part of valor. I followed my heart and paid the consequences of doing so. So I am sorry for what you suffered, for what the Jedi cost you. But I was hardly in a position to do anything about that.”

The arm pressed into his throat didn’t move away, but the pressure decreased. “What’s your name, boy?”

“Obi-Wan Kenobi.”

The arm against his neck fell away completely. But he was still pressed against the wall by the bounty hunter’s body. “I’ll teach you to be a bounty hunter. Or at least how to survive. But understand, Kenobi, that that means nothing. For the right price, maybe someday I’ll kill you.”

Obi-Wan snorted, “Yes, of that much I am aware.” He kept the surprise from showing on his face or in his voice. The force whispered and giggled and prodded him delightedly. It was one of the first real signs that he was truly following the will of the force.

The hand holding his lightsaber shifted and Obi-Wan found the lightsaber in his hand and his hand alone. Before the body keeping him against the wall shifted away. That same chill from earlier encompassed him and Obi-Wan resisted the urge to curl his robe around him to ward it off.

They stood there silently before Fett waved a single hand imperiously “Well, don’t you have a woman and her child to help move? My offer isn’t going to last forever. The sooner you get them moved, the sooner we can start, the sooner we can end.”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow. “Yes, I suppose so. Would you like to exchange contact information; I could let you know when I’ve gotten them settled.”

Fett just raised an eyebrow and gestured again. “Perhaps later, for now, however, you’re stuck with me.”

Obi-Wan hesitated. But he had been the one to ask for Fett to teach him, (A sign of insanity he was sure), it wasn’t as though he could start making demands on how Fett should go about it.

His return to the Skywalker residence was quick with Fett a few steps behind him the entire way.

Shmi had a determined look to her eyes when she opened the door to him, Anakin stood behind her and upon seeing Obi-Wan he beamed and opened his arms demandingly. Obi-Wan capitulated and lifted the boy up.

Obi-Wan glanced around to see that the rooms had been spotlessly cleaned, with two bags packed, it was, he thought, sad, that between the three of them, they had only three mostly empty packs, they could probably fit all of their things into one pack easily.

Anakin was chattering, and Obi-Wan gave him half his ear, apparently Anakin was excited because his mother said they were going to go visit the stars. “Have you decided where you want to go?”

Shmi rounded her shoulders and sent him a determined look, for a brief moment Obi-Wan could see
her son standing that same way. It wasn’t a good sign, Anakin stood that way when he was about to say something he didn’t think that Obi-Wan would like. “I don’t care where we go, but I’ve decided that Anakin and I will stay with you.”

Obi-Wan gaped, “That’s a horrible idea.” Oh dear, he hadn’t quite meant to say that. Well, no, he had meant to say that, he just had meant to say it with a little more finesse.

Shmi raised an eyebrow, “Why’s that? You freed us, you may not know us, and I may not know you, but it’s obvious to me that you care enough about us to keep us safe.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Of course, and I’d do my best to do so no matter where you wanted to go. But you have to understand. I have no intention of finding a planet to call home.” He gestured towards where Fett stood behind him, “I went and asked a bounty hunter to teach me. That’s hardly safe. And after that I’ll be busy trying to free the slaves in the outer rim, and that’s not to mention the slaves in the mid-rim, and well, everywhere else, for that matter. Additionally I’m going to be haring off after spur of the moment impulses constantly. I’ll have no stability, no home, that isn’t something you could ever want for you or your son!”

The room fell silent, “You’re going to free the slaves on the outer rim?” Shmi asked, quietly, her voice soft and hopeful. “Do you realize how impossible that is, you’ll free one and two more will be captured.”

Obi-Wan shook his head, “I’m not going to go and buy and free every slave I come across. That would never work.”

“But you have a plan, something that would?” Obi-Wan didn’t do uncomfortable, but with Shmi staring at him with a mixture of hope and awe, with Fett looking at him as though he was downright insane (which he was), with even Anakin staring at him with wide eyes, even though Obi-Wan knew he didn’t completely understand, but he understood enough to realize that this was something.

Obi-Wan sighed, “It’s a work in progress. I just need to find a way to provide the outer rim territories that have slavery with something of greater value. It'll be a process; I’ll have to politick. But in the end I want to form a coalition of Mid-Rim worlds that have a yearly excess of water to exchange that water yearly to Tatooine, primarily with the hutts, with the condition that any planet practicing slavery in Hutt Space ceases to do so. Water is far more precious than what little gain the Hutts get from slavery, and they’d more than likely be willing to make the deal after the traditional power grab.”

Fett snorted, “It would never work, what exactly are these Mid-Rim worlds going to get out of this?”

Obi-Wan sighed, “Oh the people would likely be willing enough, and there are only three things that the majority of politicians and rulers are interested in. Money, Influence, and Power. This won’t get them money, but I can convince them that it will earn them both influence and power in relation to both the outer rim territories and in the galactic senate. After all it will. A senator or king that can say they helped outlaw slavery in the outer rim? That’s someone that looks powerful, and if they look powerful than people believe they have power, which then gives them power.”

Fett was giving him a strange look. “And what do you get out of this.”

Obi-Wan snorted, “A good night’s rest, if I’m lucky.”

Fett raised an eyebrow, that strange, considering look still on his face. Shmi cleared her throat. “Well that settles it, then. Anakin and I are definitely going to come with you now.”
Obi-Wan shook his head, “You need a home. Stability.”

Shmi shook her head, “You said you would support whatever I decided. This is my decision.”

Anakin tugged on his ear, “We coming with you?” He asked, innocently. “We going to see all the stars.”

Obi-Wan’s will power crumbled and he sighed and looked at Shmi who was just looking at him with fire and determination in her eyes. “Well, maybe not all the stars. But I daresay you’ll see quite a few of them.” He rubbed his face with one hand. “We’ll need to get transport off Tatooine, I’m going to have to go and find a good sturdy ship. And if you ever change your mind, I will of course respect and support such a decision.”

The look Shmi gave him told him that things wouldn’t be nearly that easy.
In the end it was Fett who took them off Tatooine, and Obi-Wan didn’t let himself think about the irony of a ship called Slave I being the ship to take Anakin and Shmi off planet. Fett’s face remained blank the entire time, but Obi-Wan could see a measure of amusement there. Apparently he found Obi-Wan ridiculous. It was also Fett who helped Obi-Wan find a ship that was small enough to not be overly expensive (and Obi-Wan had once again started playing an excessive amount of Sabaac to earn more funds) but large enough to provide room for Shmi, Anakin and himself. A little longer to set things up so that it was comfortable enough to be a home. Obi-Wan himself hadn’t felt a need for a great deal, but he’d wanted Shmi and Anakin to have some form of comfort. The two of them liked the ship, so he figured it had been a good choice. But then, Shmi wasn’t exactly picky and Anakin didn’t care as long as he was with his mom and seeing the stars flash past in the viewport.

Obi-Wan smiled at Shmi as she held out a hand to help him up. He took it gratefully, making sure to use his left arm given that his right shoulder was dislocated, “So how was your day on Cyrillia?” They were jumping from planet to planet, letting Shmi and Anakin explore while Fett did his best to run Obi-Wan ragged.

Shmi sighed, “It went well enough, although we’re going to have to be careful to check the ship before we leave.”

Obi-Wan blinked, tensing slightly, “Why?”

Shmi glanced at him, and he could tell that she could tell that he was worried, “You may not have noticed since you and Jango were so busy fighting each other, but Cyrillia has a rather large droid population.”

Obi-Wan groaned, Anakin was only four, but that had not dampened his enthusiasm and love of droids. “Please don’t tell me Anakin is trying to adopt them all.” But on the bright side it wasn’t because he’d have to check the ship for assassins or Sith lords.

Shmi laughed, “Well, not all of them, but a fair number.”

Obi-Wan groaned again, partially in mostly-mock exasperation at Anakin and his droid antics, and partially because he had just managed to pop his shoulder back into place. Shmi frowned at that and glanced over to where Fett was reading through a message on his datapad, ignoring the two of them. “Where is Anakin right now?”

“He’s down for the night, he tired himself out today and he refused to go down for a nap earlier.”

Obi-Wan grinned, “That’s not a surprise.” He held back a yawn, he hadn’t been sleeping well lately
(or ever) and Fett had decided that since Shmi and Anakin were out enjoying Cyrillia it was as good a time as any to start physically training him. And by training, Obi-Wan mostly meant Fett doing his very best to beat Obi-Wan into the ground, and it left Obi-Wan feeling almost tired enough to sleep. “There’s a pod race tomorrow, do you think he would like to see it?”

Shmi laughed, “Do I think he would like it? Anakin would love it. We were able to watch the Boonta Eve race last year, I thought I was going to have to tie Anakin into his seat to stop him from running into the course. He was absolutely enthralled.” Obi-Wan grinned at the image, he wasn’t at all surprised that Anakin had loved pod-racing so young. He probably shouldn’t be encouraging it now, because it would only end up giving him a headache later, but he couldn’t quite help himself.

He turned to Fett, “I don’t suppose I could have the day off?”

Fett finally looked up from his datapad, running a critical eye over Obi-Wan’s slightly disheveled state. “You aren’t going to get better if you laze about.”

“I’m not going to get better if I let you beat me into an early grave either.”

Fett snorted, an almost smile twitching at his lips, one he doubted he would have caught if he weren’t so very attuned to this man’s different facial tics (one of these days he would actually smile and Obi-Wan would consider that a hard-won victory). “Do whatever you want, I need time away from you.”

Obi-Wan grinned, “And here I enjoy your surly presence so much I was going to invite you along.”

Fett rolled his eyes, “Go to bed, Kenobi, you haven’t been sleeping and you’re going to fall over.”

Obi-Wan ignored him and turned back to Shmi, “So, a pod-race tomorrow?”

She smiled softly, “That sounds good,” she nudged him with her elbow, “But, Jango’s right, go to bed. Anakin is going to have a lot of energy tomorrow and he’ll be excited to have you along, so you’ll be the one who has to deal with it.”

Obi-Wan sighed, “Everyone around here is so bossy.” But he figured Shmi had a point, it was not fun dealing with an overly energetic Anakin when tired. Although Fett had a point, he did feel tired enough to fall over. It was sort of nice, being tired enough that sleep didn’t seem quite as impossible as normal.

Tomorrow was going to be a good day.

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The next few months were mostly painful. With Fett doing his best to beat Obi-Wan into a pulp, to engrain the silent rules of bounty hunting, most of which consisted of looking out for yourself. Rules that were difficult for Obi-Wan to internalize. Obi-Wan knew he’d never be the type of Bounty Hunter that Fett was, it wasn’t that he lacked the skill, but they viewed the galaxy in very different ways. Still in the next few months he began to gather his own armor, nothing like the Mandalorian armor that Fett had (a painful echo of the armor his men had worn, armor he had worn himself, armor he couldn’t bear to consider wearing now), but more protective than the robes that had been his dress code for the majority of his life. Sturdy enough to give him protection, flexible enough that he could still employ the Ataru moves that had been his forte at this age. He also began to collect his own wide arrange of weapons. Blasters, vibroblades, knives, darts, he even started gathering the tools necessary to build a second lightsaber, it was, he knew, heavily frowned upon for a non-Jedi to have a lightsaber, but it wasn’t exactly illegal, and there was no way he was going to go around without a more civilized weapon (something he was careful to never say around Fett, he had a
feeling that would end with Fett showing him just how little he cared about being civilized), but Obi-Wan felt no connection to the blasters and blades he collected, there was no soul to them.

He followed Fett on a few hunts, and there was a thrill there, in the chase. He listened to the man that had become one of the deadliest Bounty Hunters in the galaxy before his death on Geonosis and learned. Not just how to be a bounty hunter, but how to protect himself as well as Shmi and Anakin from other bounty hunters.

For the first year since he’d left the Jedi he fought and practiced with Fett, he helped Shmi teach Anakin letters and math, while also helping him gain control over the force, something he spoke to Shmi about, telling her about his potential, but allowing her to decide whether to contact the Jedi or not. He did his best to only stay on planets that were safe for Shmi and Anakin to wander freely, made sure that they had whatever they needed. He watched Anakin grow and Shmi begin to lose the tightness in her shoulders that came from a constant fight to survive. He meditated often and slept little. He planned and back-up planned until he couldn’t think straight and was forced to move on. For a year he had constant bruises from his constant fights with Fett who took great pleasure in trying to smash him into the ground (a favor that Obi-Wan was growing to enjoy returning) and a constant headache because none of his plans were enough, because there was so much out of his control, because he didn’t know what to do.

Finally, after a year of off and on time with Fett’s training, Fett gave him a gruff “Well, you probably won’t die too easily.” before departing, with an acerbic, “Don’t get killed and make my efforts a waste.” Which Obi-Wan took to mean that Fett might actually be slightly saddened if he died, slightly, possibly. A definite improvement to the man who had held his arm to his neck and only just been convinced not to actually try and kill him.

Obi-Wan thought he might actually miss the man. He knew that Anakin would, he had enjoyed the times when Obi-Wan and Fett had joined Anakin and Shmi in their excursions, something that Obi-Wan had tried to do as often as he could.

In the months after Fett left Obi-Wan put himself to work on bringing his lightsaber skills back on track, he had one time been a Master of Soresu, and that was a skill he wanted to reacquire. This younger body didn’t have the muscle memory of Soresu, but he was as fighting fit as he’d ever been and he slowly regained his skill. He finally took the time to actually put together his second lightsaber, even traveling in secret to Illum. The blade was blue, just like his first one. He had never been a Master of Jar’Kai, but now was a good a time as any to make it his second form.

Shmi asked him if he intended to teach Anakin how to use a lightsaber and while he told her that he would heed her own desires he felt a thrill of fear because he had taught Anakin once and everything had gone wrong. Still he followed Shmi’s lead and taught Anakin about being good and kind and loving, about giving of himself. At night Obi-Wan would sit alone and whisper to himself a code he was no longer bound to follow and wonder if he should teach Anakin about Peace and Serenity while he taught him how to pilot their ship and provided him opportunities to tinker with droids.

As they neared the end of his second year since he’d left the Jedi he began to really delve into his research, determining which planets had the most excess waterfall yearly, which ones had politicians and leaders that would be willing to help either because they were genuinely good people who would want to help, or because it would increase their standing in galactic politics. Together with Shmi, who was eager to help him, they began to form together a list of possible planets. The only real bump came when Shmi didn’t understand why he refused to add Naboo to the list of planets to contact first. After all, Senator Palpatine had shown himself to be incredibly interested in the bettering of the galaxy and the Naboo had plenty of extra water with the bonus of being reasonably close to Tatooine.
Obi-Wan had no intention of doing anything that would draw Palpatine’s attention, especially while Anakin and Shmi were still with him.

Instead after a great deal of meditation he headed to Falleen.

It was a choice that Shmi didn’t understand after he had explained that the Falleen were a rather isolationist group who looked down upon the rest of the Galaxy. Falleen didn’t often get visitors and so it was with a strange mixture of disdain and interest that he earned a meeting with King Xintan.

He was well dressed in clothing that showed refinement but did not exude wealth. As he stood before the King and his excessively fine clothing he wondered if perhaps he should have found something finer.

Finally, after an extended silence meant to unnerve him the King cleared his throat.

“Obi-Wan Kenobi. For what purpose have you come to Falleen and requested a meeting with me.”

Obi-Wan gave a bow of his head, “King Xintan, it is well known that the Falleen are consider to be among the most civilized beings in the Republic. It is in part that reason that I come with a proposition. One that would further prove to the rest of the Republic of the superiority of your planet and people.” This, he thought, was one of the reasons he hated politics.

Another long silence fell over the room, the King remained still and composed as did his councilors. Obi-wan understood that they were trying to make him lose his composure, but Obi-Wan had faced far more frightening audiences and held his composure. Self-control, thankfully, was one of his fortes. The force sent a soft warning and Obi-Wan strengthened his shields, and set the force to work filtering the air around him, he would not allow himself to be caught in the thrall of the pheromes that the Falleen often exuded. He sensed that it was nothing too sinister, merely something meant to lower his guard.

“And what is this proposition?”

“I would propose that Falleen, as a part of a coalition of other planets, send a negotiator to Hutt-Space, in particular Tatooine and other outer-rim territories and offer some of their excess water, of which I’ve calculated you have several hundred tons of each year, in exchange for Tatooine and these other planets outlawing slavery.”

The Falleen’s king’s face didn’t change, but Obi-Wan could sense his mental scoff, “And what would Falleen receive in exchange?”

Obi-Wan tilted his head, “Nothing of great use in monetary terms, however, there can never be too much said for the prestige in being among those planets that helped to curtail the utter incivility of Slavery. Something that is Galactically looked upon as abhorrent, yet not even Coruscant, which is supposedly the civilized and cultural capital of the Galaxy, has made any real effort to bring the standards of civility up in those places where slavery is still a corruption.”

The Falleen King gave him a scrutinizing look, “You wish for us to exchange water for nothing.”

Obi-Wan gave an unconcerned shrug, “That is of course for you to decide, whether the influence and power this would bring you is of equal worth to the excess water your planet receives yearly.”

“And who would belong to this coalition of planets?”

“Falleen is the first planet that I have come to, as I said, you are known as being superior in civility. I had intentions to approach Rodia, Leritor, Mon Cala, and Melida/Daan as well as a few other
planets.”

“Why so many planets? Do you not think that Falleen is able to fulfill the need?”

Obi-Wan shook his head, “I would never suggest that Falleen is in any way incapable. However, this is a long term proposal, a contract between several planets set to last for years. In order to ensure that no planet that is so generously participating as part of the coalition is forced to offer water in consecutive years, rather alternating years with other planets according to a contract drawn up between all planets that join the coalition.”

The King gave him a superior look, “I see. In that case, Obi-Wan Kenobi, you may leave, I will discuss this with my nobility. Go, and see what other planets are willing to join in. In two months, if we are willing we will meet with them, and at that time we will see if we are willing to speak to the Hutts.” There was no missing the disdain in his voice at those words.

“Of course, your Majesty. I thank you for your gracious time.” It was not agreement, but Obi-Wan hadn’t expected agreement, it was however, consideration, which was frankly more than he’d expected so early in the game. Maybe the Force really was with him.
This chapter is going up in celebration of my Nephew being born today. Unfortunately my sister can’t decide what to name him, so he's still unnamed.
This is sort of a filler chapter, next time things get to the point where things will start to start happening. However I'm not sure when I'm going to get to it, crazy weeks up ahead... Hopefully I'll be able to get back to this before the term ends, but that's not a promise.
(However I should get Jango's Point of View up soon since I've got most of that done already, maybe I'll put it up when the Nephew gets his name... Which will hopefully be soon...)

The next few months were filled with utter chaos. Obi-Wan felt as though the only time he spent with Shmi and Anakin was the time in which he traveled from one planet to the next. Melida/Daan was the first to agree to be a part of his coalition. His reunion with Nield had begun tentatively, they had not parted on the best of terms six years ago, but Obi-Wan had a strong feeling that Melida/Daan would play an important role. So he had gone to Nield and they had gone together to the monument made for Cerasi and found peace with one another. Nield convinced the other two leaders of Melida/Daan that peace had been hard earned for them, and now that they finally had peace, they could not hold back in sharing that peace with others. Obi-Wan also asked Nield if Melida/Daan would be willing to take in those who desired to start over in some place not Tatooine, and help them get a new start. Nield had given him a wry smile, “If there is one thing Melida/Daan is good at, it’s starting over. The past few years have been nothing but starting over, and we still have plenty of opportunity for more to join us without putting stress on the employment situation here on Melida/Daan.” He had looked sad then, “We killed so many, perhaps fresh blood, neither Melida nor Daan is just what Melida/Daan needs.”

Mon Cala was equally quick to agree to joint his coalition (and quick, here, was a relative term). But in the end the King had laughed and had waved a hand out at the Oceanic Planet. “We have water in great supply, if a tiny portion of that water can be used to bring peace to others, then how could we say no?” It was more difficult than that, since they had to collect fresh water, but it was something that the Mon Cala had felt would be worth the effort.

Rodia had been slower to agree. Obi-Wan had spent day in and day out for an entire month with the ruling body as they threw ugly accusations at him. Until by some miracle of the force they too agreed.

The two months ended with a total of 8 planets come together, the hammering together of a contract for the group of them to offer to the Hutts. After several more months of negotiating amongst each other, and with Obi-Wan occasionally being sent out to test the waters for other possible participants, they had ended up with 10 total planets in their coalition, five of which were open to allowing their borders to be opened to those who wished to take in immigrants, the group had drawn up terms by which they would collect and supply Tatooine with water on an alternating schedule with several planets each year. It was something Obi-Wan had done in order to ensure that even if he still lost some of these planets to the Separatist movement, Tatooine would not lose their water supply and have a reason to break their word.
Finally, months after he started Obi-Wan was elected to take the proposal to the Hutts (and by elected, he meant that everyone had seemed to simply assume that he’d be the one to do it), and if the Hutts agreed to it several representatives would gather together to hammer out any further details.

And so it was over a year and a half since the last time he’d seen the man, that he ran into Jango Fett, once again literally. The man hardly reacted to Obi-Wan’s clumsiness. In fact, he hardly reacted at all, just the lightest of squeezes on his elbow as he helped him regain his balance, it felt a little bit like being wished luck.

The man had been wearing his helmet, but as Obi-Wan made his apologies and took his spot in front of Jabba’s platform (careful to ensure that he wasn’t above the trap door) he was fairly certain the man was smirking. But by the time the Hutt had called for their first break the man had disappeared. He pushed away the slight disappointment, it wasn’t as though they were friends, and there was no reason for Fett to have stayed around any longer than it took for him to collect the reward for his bounty.

So he was somewhat surprised when after a long day of appealing to the Hutt’s vanity and desire to be seen as powerful, and on a desert world like Tatooine water was powerful, he returned to his ship to find the Bounty Hunter waiting for him.

“So, you’re actually doing it, trying to free the slaves of Tatooine?”

Obi-Wan grunted, and threw himself onto a bench, “Shmi and Anakin here?”

“Visiting friends.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Right. Shmi mentioned that.” He yawned, “But, yes, I’m trying.”

Fett gave him a long look, “I’ll be honest, when I heard you say you’d do it, what two and half years ago now? I didn’t think you’d actually do it.”

Obi-Wan gave him a tired grin, “I’m an incredibly stubborn man.”

“Yes, that you are.” It was quiet for a long moment, “You should be more careful though, there was almost no security on your ship.”

Obi-Wan laughed, “What you call no security isn’t the actual equivalent of no security, but I’ll get on that after I convince the Hutts that they want to free their slaves and make the rest of Hutt-Space follow suit.” He paused, “I do hope that’s not your way of telling me you’ve been hired to kill me.”

“No, not yet.” Fett flashed him a sharp grin.

Obi-Wan nodded, “I didn’t think so, I haven’t ticked anyone off yet.” Well, not too severely at any rate, there was that gang he had stumbled into while he was on Rodia, and that one pompous Duke on Falleen, and there had been a small conspiracy on Leritor that he’d ruined… hmm, he had actually rocked a few boats the past few months. He didn’t think any of them wanted to kill him though, or at least, none were likely to be willing to spend money on killing him.

“You never did tell me what you were going to do that makes you so sure that someone is going to want to put a bounty on your head.”

Obi-Wan laughed again, “It falls under the whole ‘you wouldn’t believe me if I told you’ part of my life.”

Fett raised an eyebrow but allowed it to pass, “I’ll keep that in mind.” It fell silent and Obi-Wan
began to compartmentalize his arguments for his meeting with Gardulla the next day. He blinked when Fett stood above him, “When’s the last time you slept, kid?”

He raised an eyebrow, “I’m 21, not a kid.” And that was physically, mentally he was much older.

“Shmi tells me that if she weren’t around you’d forget to eat and sleep. Once you learn to take care of yourself I’ll consider considering you an actual adult.”

“You and Shmi talk?”

“She keeps me up to date,” Fett admitted.

Obi-Wan tried to figure out just what that meant exactly. Why would Fett be keeping tabs on him? Or was he keeping tabs on Anakin and Shmi? He had seemed rather fond of Anakin, and Shmi had a heart of gold that would make even Bounty Hunters soften towards her.

“You ignored the question, when was the last time you slept?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I’ve been busy. Meditation keeps me going.”

“That sounds like, ‘I’ll take an hour nap every few days.’”

Obi-Wan scoffed but didn’t deny the accusation, he got more sleep than an hour every few days, but not enough more to make it worth defending himself. He was rather tired, but then he was always tired. It was as much a part of his life as breathing was, take a breath, acknowledge exhaustion, take another breath. But when trying to bring freedom to an entire section of space by convincing a bunch of planets to donate surplus water… Well, it was more complicated than that and it was an exhausting procedure.

A hand grasped his shoulder and pulled him from his bench. “Come on, I promised Shmi I’d make you sleep.”

“I don’t know why you think I need a minder.” He protested.

“In the year I was training you, you only really slept after I beat you into submission and exhaustion. Hour long naps every few days don’t count.”

“I’m a fully functioning adult!” Fett ignored him and bodily moved him into his cabin. “Really, Fett, I have to make sure that Anakin and Shmi make it back alright, and I need to go over my arguments for Gardulla, and I’m not that tired.”

“I’m getting you in bed, pretty sure you can call me Jango.” Obi-Wan ignored the innuendo, and allowed Fett, Jango, to push him backwards. “And I’ll make sure that Shmi and Anakin get back alright, and I have a feeling that things will be fine with Gardulla, you managed Jabba fine, and Gardulla’s far easier to deal with.”

Obi-Wan reached out and grabbed the man’s hand, “Promise?”

“About Gardulla? Yeah, she’s easier.”

“No, promise that you’ll make sure that Anakin and Shmi are safe?”

Jango’s face actually softened, “Yes, Kenobi, I promise. Now sleep.”

Obi-Wan nodded. And if he hadn’t known better he would have sworn that Jango had used the force, he slid into sleep so easily. Maybe it was because, for some strange reason, he trusted Jango.
When he woke, not quite the next morning, but several hours later, it was to find Jango still in his ship poking around as though he owned it.

“You’ve been taking good care of her.” Jango admitted as he accepted the cup of tea that Obi-Wan offered him.

“Yeah, Anakin loves working on her, I spend a fair amount of time playing around in the engines with him.”

“He’s a bright kid.”

Obi-Wan grinned, “He really is.”

“What is he now? Six?”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Almost seven.”

“You going to train him?”

Obi-Wan glanced at the man surprised, “In what way?”

“To be a bounty hunter, hells, even to negotiate the way you do, if you ever did choose a home planet you could be an incredible politician.”

Obi-Wan grinned at that, “Anakin thinks talking is boring. Or so he tells me, although the way he chatters on tells me a slightly different story. Anyways, politicians are a nightmare I have no intention of dealing with.” Jango scoffed, Obi-Wan ignored him, “The rest of what he learns is up to Shmi, he’s her son, I’ll teach him what she decides she wants him to learn.”

Jango gave him a strange look, “You know she considers you just as fundamental a part of his parenting unit, right?”

Obi-Wan shook his head, “I promised when I freed her that I wouldn’t interfere in that. And I won’t.”

Jango hummed, but left it. “Shmi says you’ve been running ragged doing your whole politicking thing. You three good for money?”

Obi-Wan blinked in surprise, “Yes, I made sure to save up from the few bounties I took that year in advance. I didn’t think I’d have the time to actually do any work.”

Jango nodded, and returned to sipping his tea. Obi-Wan sent the man a puzzled look before it occurred to him that Jango really was checking up for Shmi and Anakin’s sake. The thought brought a small smile to his face.

The rest of the night slid past quietly, with Obi-Wan refreshing his mind on the different ways he was planning on approaching Gardulla, Jango next to him, silent but very much there.

Jango even joined them for breakfast the next morning before leaving, with a curt declaration for Obi-Wan to not die. Obi-Wan grinned at Shmi as Jango left, “And this coming from the man who threatens to kill me for the right amount of money.” Anakin laughed at that and Shmi gave Obi-Wan a reproving look and he managed an abashed look for her, although he doubted it was the worst thing Anakin had ever heard him say about the interactions between him and the bounty hunter.
Then Shmi shook her head and laughed softly, “I doubt you need to worry about him ever killing you.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “Well, I suppose when the bounty gets high enough we’ll see.” The thought made something in him ache, which he found strange because when it did happen it certainly wouldn’t be the first time someone put a bounty on him, nor would it be the first time someone he knew tried to kill him. This time at least he had forewarning, so it hardly even counted.

Shmi sent him a strange look, but then just smiled slightly to herself, “Go free the slaves.”

Obi-Wan gave her a small bow, “Of course, Milady.”
Phantoms and Specters

Chapter Summary

Things go right, things go wrong, Jango saves the day.

Chapter Notes

Sorry it's been so long since I've updated. Totally wasn't the plan. But things have been messy, but that's life I suppose.

It's 2 in the morning, I'm really not sure that I'm a good measure as to whether this should be posted or not. But 2 in the morning me thinks it's okay to put up, so hopefully 8 in the morning me doesn't regret this choice.

It took another two months for the Hutts to come to agreement on the different stipulations within the Water Treaty, they hadn't been fond of the set prices for which water could be sold, but Obi-Wan refused to give them the ability to sell the water for whatever price, since the majority of the water would be going straight to the Hutts. Soon after representatives from several of the planets came to visit Tatooine, and the first group of slaves who had been given their freedom made the move to Melida/Daan and Rodia.

By the end of his third year away from the temple and the Jedi, and two years after he’d started the venture, the slaves of Tatooine were beginning to be freed, and he could see signs that most of Hutt Space was doing as the Hutts had said and following suit, Nar Shaddaa being the major exception, although he was working on a fairly simple plan to deal with that particular problem. So he pushed the thought aside, it wasn’t quite the right time to act there yet.

When the first slave was freed Obi-Wan had cried as he held the seven-year old Anakin close, remembering an older Anakin who had looked at him and asked him who was going to free the slaves of Tatooine. That Obi-Wan hadn’t had an answer, it was a life and a death too late, but Obi-Wan had finally been able to do what he had failed to do before.

The success however, came with a cost. Obi-Wan’s name had begun to spread. Shmi had laughingly told him that he was being called the Slave Freer. Obi-Wan hadn’t found it nearly as amusing as she did. “Next they’ll be expecting me to lead a revolt on Nar Shaddaa!” The Hutts were quite busy pretending that they didn’t have any real power there, which was a lie, but a well fabricated one, the main players on Nar Shaddaa weren’t Hutts after all.

He remembered what had happened with Krayn and Siri at the beginning of Anakin’s apprenticeship. He thought of his plans again but once again pushed it aside, he needed to see how the slave trade changed and shifted after what the Hutts had done before he acted. He paid especial attention to the Senex Sector and Zygerria.

An unexpected development from his time working with the Water for Freedom Multi-Planetary Coalition was the occasional call from the planets he’d worked with to help them in some of their
own inner conflicts or conflicts with other planets, the first time it had happened it had been Nield who’d commed from Melida/Daan and he’d thought nothing of it due to his experience on Melida/Daan as a teenager and his friendship with Nield. But when the Rodians contacted him to help them work out a trade agreement he realized that something more was going on. By the fourth year he heard someone jokingly call him The Negotiator, it was only the one time but it sent a thrill of pain through him, and he’d gone back to his ship and set all of his training droids on their hardest setting, letting himself fall into the steady warmth of the force as his lightsaber whirled in the complex Soresu patterns he’d set himself to mastering once again. It hadn’t been enough so he found a difficult bounty that would require him chase a murderer into the filthiest parts of a planet. He let the man get a few hits in, needing the pain, before he took the man down. Anything to rid himself of the name he’d once again acquired. The name reminded him of a war he’d already fought and bled in. It reminded him of when he was a part of ‘The Team’. It reminded him of everything he had lost. It hurt.

Despite his new name Obi-Wan found that he was happy. Shmi and Anakin had truly become his family, Jango Fett would randomly fall into his life for a few days at a time, he’d renewed his friendship with Nield, he had found a strange mix of callings between hunting down the scum of the galaxy (although he had quickly decided it best to use Ben as his Alias, hoping that his Obi-Wan Kenobi and his Bounty Hunter aliases remained separate) and negotiating deals and treaty’s from everything between workers and their corporations to minor treaties between different planets when it was deemed too unimportant for the Jedi. He visited planets he knew would one day join the Confederacy of Independent Systems and tried to figure out what had caused each of their individual secessions, tried to see what he could do to help mitigate the impending disaster (and he could feel it, the darkness and chaos and unrest, it was already building and he was just one man). But he had a purpose and a plan. It was the most at peace he’d felt in over 25 years.

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He was an idiot for thinking that he could find peace. It was his fifth year in the past that Nield commed him and asked him to preside over a small abridgment to the treaty, there was an eleventh planet that wanted to join. Obi-Wan had agreed, but his heart had sunk when he learned that it was Naboo who wanted to join. His calm almost shattered when he learned that they had sent, not their elected royalty, but their senator to be their spokesman.

In both lives he and Anakin had developed a spontaneous force bond, and Obi-Wan found he was grateful for the strength of it as he used his bond with his young charge to shore up the strongest shields that he could around Anakin’s force presence. It was nowhere near enough to hide that he was force-sensitive, but he hoped it would ensure that Anakin didn’t shine like the beacon that he was.

It was easy enough to fit Naboo into the treaty, after all Senator Palpatine was a genial and easy going man, who only wanted what was best for the people of the Galaxy and was honored to be representing Naboo in these matters. “Freedom,” he said, “Truly the most valuable thing any sentient could have.”

Obi-Wan wanted to be sick, but he kept a diplomatic smile on his face and polite words dripping from his tongue. “And would that we could ensure that all sentient have it.”

It was with great displeasure though that he accepted Nield’s invitation to dinner, and of course, Shmi and Anakin were invited.

It was all he could do not to yell that no, he would not allow Anakin to even be in the presence of Palpatine.
He did however, refuse to let Anakin more than a few feet from him. A fact that didn’t escape Shmi’s notice. Anakin noticed too, or perhaps he could sense the raging worry inside of Obi-Wan or maybe he was having one of his rare moments where he was being exceptionally well-behaved. Either way Obi-Wan was infinitely grateful.

He sat a small piece of cake on Anakin’s chair, and then served Shmi a slightly larger piece. The cake was a delicious chocolate monstrosity, one that Obi-Wan usually loved. But he was still trying to choke down the small fruit pastry that Nield had brought over just for him. It looked delicious but it tasted like ashes.

“I don’t mean to pry,” Palpatine gave him a wry smile, “But I thought I heard young Nield say that the two of you met when you came to Melida/Daan as a Jedi Padawan?”

“It’s true, I was a new padawan, barely 13 at the time.”

“I see.” Palpatine was quiet for a long moment before turning back towards him, “Forgive my confusion, why would you have left the Jedi? You obviously care a great deal for the Galaxy.” He gestured towards the other politicians and leaders, “Just look what you’ve done! It’s miraculous!”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “Jedi believe that we must follow the will of the force. I feel that that is true, it just so happens that the Force led me away from the Jedi.”

Palpatine nodded, “That does make sense. That must have taken a great deal of conviction, to leave the only home you’ve ever known.”

“It was difficult.”

“The Jedi must be quite proud of everything that you’ve accomplished.”

“The Jedi have always been grateful for those who pursue peace.” He was fairly sure proud was not the word most Jedi would use when they thought of him, but he certainly wasn’t going to tell Palpatine that.

“May I ask, why slavery? Or at least why now? There are many ills out in the Galaxy, and this was a rather large one to try and heal so early in your attempts.”

Obi-Wan looked at the man, all thoughtful words and kind expressions, a krayt dragon hiding in a bantha’s skin. “I would fight a thousand fights and then fight a thousand more if that was what it took for all people to be free.” There was a layer of steel to his words, and he made no attempt to hide it. I’ll oppose you, he thought, I’ll give every moment of my life, and if necessary my death to ensure that you don’t steal freedom from this Galaxy. That you don’t declare peace and freedom and deliver oppression and tyranny.

Palpatine smiled at him, “You’re very passionate. I can already see that you’ll do many more great things.” He laid a hand on Obi-Wan’s arm, “I’ll be watching you with great interest.” A shiver ran down Obi-Wan’s spine, “And of course, if there is anything Naboo or I can do for you, let me know. You have my uttermost support.”

Obi-Wan returned the smile, “I can’t express what that means to me.”

“Now, please, tell me more about this charming family you’ve made for yourself. That’s another thing unusual to see from someone who so recently left the Jedi.”
The moment it was possible to leave without causing offense Obi-Wan excused the three of them. Unfortunately as soon as they returned to the ship the last of his tightly held control slipped away from him. He threw up everything he’d eaten, and then continued to dry heave after he’d rid himself of what little that was. When he finally got his body back under his control he was in the cockpit and setting coordinates for anywhere that wasn’t Melida/Daan.

For a short time, he thought that perhaps that was the end of it, a single unfortunate encounter. And then during one of their pit stops planet-side a man injected Anakin with a sedative and tried to make off with him.

He hadn’t made it far before Obi-Wan had the man flat against the wall with a vibroblade against his throat. The man didn’t know who it was that had hired him to try and kidnap Anakin, but Obi-Wan had a sinking feeling that he did know. After all, what were the odds that someone would want to kidnap Anakin so soon after running into a Sith Lord?

It took everything in Obi-Wan to stop himself from killing the man, there was a part of him that was angry and terrified that insisted that he end the man’s life immediately. A part of him that wanted to ensure that the man would never have a second chance to hurt the people that Obi-Wan cared for. Force, Obi-Wan wanted to end the man. And that terrified him. So instead he took him to the local law enforcement. It didn’t feel like enough to Obi-Wan, but it was all he could do.

The next few months were spent making sure that both Shmi and Anakin could protect themselves, fleeting pit-stops with hardly any time planet side, even then, he’d had to dispatch two more kidnappers, one that had gone straight for Anakin, and another that had foolishly thought it would be easier to take Obi-Wan out first before going for Anakin.

He found he was experiencing an extreme decrease in sleep and a distinct lack of appetite. He knew this was a problem, he hadn’t been eating or sleeping enough before this had happened, and even the force couldn’t help him if he kept this up for too long.

Everything he ate tasted like the ash of Mustafar and every time he fell asleep he found himself on that dratted planet facing a yellow-eyed Anakin trying to kill him, or in a burning temple with younglings dead around him. His mind supplying him with young Anakin’s voice asking why he hadn’t protected him better. Why he hadn’t saved him from this.

He knew he was worrying both Shmi and Anakin, but he didn’t know how to explain to them his fear. This was more than just someone trying to steal Anakin, this was someone trying to destroy the boy, to take everything good and wipe it away until all that was left was darkness. The boy he had loved in another life and sometimes thought he loved even more now (but how could he when he had loved Anakin with everything he had). He knew that Anakin was Shmi’s son, but sometimes it felt like Anakin was his as well. He had helped him learn his Aurebesh, he had been there to tuck him in, to guard him from his nightmares. There had been no lurking council to warn him of attachment and love, just a wonderful mother who had encouraged the relationship between her son and Obi-Wan.

It was with no little anxiety, carefully hidden behind tight shields, that Obi-Wan answered another summons to help with a treaty between the human colonists and the native Sauvax on Leritor. It was, he felt, a matter more in line with the Jedi, but the ruling factions of Leritor already knew him from when he’d convinced them to join the Water for Freedom Multi-Planetary Coalition. The negotiations themselves went well enough, both groups were fairly well-intentioned, just poor at communicating with one another. It did however leave him with a raging headache. His senses, which were on high alert around where Anakin and Shmi were perusing a local town fair indicated that all was well.
That didn’t stop him from pulling his blaster and moving his hand to where he had his lightsaber concealed when he entered his ship to find Jango Fett there.

“You know, it’s a good thing that Shmi told me you were a bit high strung or I might actually be offended.” The bounty hunter informed him.

“Give me your word, Jango Fett, that you aren’t here about the bounty on Anakin.”

Jango stood and stepped closer until Obi-Wan’s blaster touched his chest. “I’m not, Obi-Wan, I swear.” Both his eyes and the force told Obi-Wan that he was telling the truth. But Obi-Wan still hesitated before he lowered the blaster. There was a small moment where they stood facing each other before Jango grabbed his wrist and twisted until in a strange parody of their second meeting Obi-Wan had his back against the wall and an arm against his throat. The force hummed quietly, whispering that there was no real danger, that whispered safety and peace. Danger or not, his body seemed to ache from a thousand phantom pains. “Don’t go pointing that at me unless you plan on shooting me.”

Obi-Wan grunted, “Don’t let yourself into my ship when there’s a bounty out for Anakin’s capture.” Jango’s arm let off his throat, although his wrist was still caught in Jango’s hand. “And for the record, I let you do that.”

“I’m sure you did.” Jango sounded far too patronizing.

Obi-Wan realized that was probably because his voice didn’t come off nearly as strong as he’d have liked, what with Jango still keeping him pressed into the ship. But Obi-Wan was too tired to protest, there was something strangely comforting, with Jango standing between him and the world. It made him feel almost safe. It was, he knew, deceptive.

“Do I need to ask when you last slept?”

Obi-Wan shook his head, “I’m sure Shmi’s kept you up to date.” The pounding in his head sharpened.

“She has. She’s worried about you.” For a brief moment Obi-Wan thought he heard the unspoken message that Jango was worried about him too, but he shook the thought away. The very idea of that being the case was ludicrous. As though Jango would ever worry about him.

“It’s not for lack of trying, you know.”

Jango hummed thoughtfully. But said nothing. And Obi-Wan resisted the urge to press into the warmth and strength that was the bounty hunter. His mind, he rationalized, was growing rather fuzzy from exhaustion, because the idea was absolutely ridiculous. Fett would probably throw him into a wall. Except he was already against a wall, so maybe not. Force, he was tired. And he was having a hard time thinking as clearly as he’d like.

“He’s not safe. And I can’t keep him safe forever. I’m going to fail.” He ran his hands threw his hair and moved away, pushing past the bounty hunter. His hair was starting to get rather long, he noted absently. He’d have to do something about that. Maybe he should grow a beard. But that struck to close to the other life. He didn’t like keeping constant reminders around. You should, whispered the voice in the back of his head, the one that sounded suspiciously like his own, maybe if you always remembered you’d actually do what needs to be done, if you remembered who you became, what you caused, you’d fix it.

Shut up.
“What are you doing?”

Obi-Wan blinked and looked at Jango who was leaning against the wall of the ship where Obi-Wan had left him. “I’m going to go join Shmi and Anakin in the city.”

“You’re going to fall over, you’re exhausted.”

Obi-Wan snorted, “You severely underestimate how exhausted I have to be before keeling over.” He would know, he had pushed himself to that limit a few times in his other life, he wasn’t even close yet.

“I’d rather you not get to that point.” Yes, he’d rather that too.

“I know you’re looking out for Shmi and Anakin, Jango. But, I’m not going to let myself get to the point where I can’t keep them safe.” He couldn’t let it get to that point.

For a moment there was a strange look on Jango’s face. But it was gone as soon as Obi-Wan saw it.

“I don’t doubt that.”

Obi-Wan moved to his cabin, pulling off his negotiation shirt, which was of slightly finer quality than his normal clothing. That was something that he missed about being a Jedi. No one complained when a Jedi showed up in their tunics and robes. But if he showed up in such casual clothing nowadays he received incredibly scandalized looks.

He rustled through his clothing and found a more casual tunic which he pulled on. He returned to the cabin to find Jango muttering to himself as he stared at the ceiling.

“I take it you’re ignoring my advice and going out anyways?”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow. “Yes, that does appear to be what I’m doing.” He gestured to the landing ramp. “Are you staying in my ship?”

Jango snorted at him before striding down the landing ramp. Obi-Wan followed, closing the ship behind him. Obi-Wan started the journey to where he could feel Anakin’s force presence bubbling happily, Jango beside him. “So what have you been up to these days, Jango?”

“Oh this and that.”

“How incredibly informative. It sounds quite enjoyable.”

“I’d be more inclined to tell you if I thought you’d listen to me.”

“I always listen to you; I just don’t always do what you tell me to.”

“Yes, because that’s so much better.”

Obi-Wan shook his head, it was a strange role reversal, he remembered similar conversations with Anakin, except it had been Anakin who enjoyed not doing what he was told to do. The thought almost made him stop in his tracks. Were he and Jango actually friends? He looked at Jango out of the corner of his eye. The man strode along beside him as though he owned Leritor, there was a pure, dangerous confidence about the man. Probably, Obi-Wan conceded to himself, deserved. There was a reason that Count Dooku had chosen Fett to be the template for the clones. Or would choose him, at the moment Count Dooku was still Master Dooku. He hadn’t left the order until shortly after the Naboo debacle.
That made very little sense though, Obi-Wan realized. That he fell from Master Jedi to Sith Lord so quickly. For some reason Obi-Wan had always thought that Qui-Gon’s death had pushed him over the edge? Had Dooku already fallen? And if he had, had the order truly not noticed?

But then, he thought, Dooku had been a sentinel, a certain amount of shadow was to be expected. There were always shadows. Lately Obi-Wan felt as though he was jumping at shadows.

When would Dooku approach Jango? Obi-Wan hardly expected that Jango would tell him. Jango showed up when he pleased and left when he pleased and Obi-Wan never really knew what he was doing. Maybe he’d been too optimistic earlier, when he considered them possible friends. Infinite Sadness. The voice whispered.

He shook his head to clear the thoughts, it wasn’t as though it was truly important. Obi-Wan had realized a long time ago that he was meant for loneliness. Infinite Sadness, his voice echoed through his mind again, whether it was an echo from the past or his own voice he wasn’t sure, all you’re meant for is infinite sadness, that is why you can’t help but fail. Shut up he told himself. These few years with Shmi and Anakin had been wonderful, but there was a part of him that knew it wasn’t to last.

As if in response to his thoughts he heard a delighted yell, “Obi-Wan!” Obi-Wan responded on instinct, catching the boy who’d thrown himself at him in excitement. He really was getting rather too old for this, Obi-Wan thought as sharp elbows jabbed into him. Except he was only 24… Or was he 63? And how did one count the several years during which he’d been dead but still hanging around?

He brought himself back to the present, “Are you and your mother enjoying Leritor?” He asked the boy who was holding a small ball.

“Yes! Look what we found! There’s this cool little shop that made a ton of different things. Look here!” Obi-Wan took the globe and listened with half an ear as Anakin continued to rave about what he had seen. The small ball had a maze within it. It was in a strange configuration, a small pipe letting the water fall through like a waterfall, he watched as the water moved through the maze before falling into a pipe… that somehow moved the water back up to fall from the top. It was, he admitted, rather beautiful. The water sparkling where it moved, the wooden maze carved to look delicate, but Obi-Wan could see that it wouldn’t shatter the first time it was dropped.

Anakin was still chattering, “And I’m starving, but Mom said that we had to wait until you got here before we went to get food. Can we get food now?”

Obi-Wan laughed, “I’m sure we can manage that.” He gave Anakin a small prod, “Now before we do that,” he ignored the boy’s dramatic groan, “Shouldn’t you be polite and say hello to our guest?”

Anakin turned “Hello, Mr. Jango, sir!” He turned back, “Now, can we get food?”

Obi-Wan laughed. “Lead the way to your mother, you imp, and we’ll go get food.”

“Whoopee!” Anakin turned and ran back to where Obi-Wan could see Shmi looking over some of the local fruit.

Obi-Wan pushed himself to his feet with a small sigh, Anakin had far too much energy for him to keep up with. How had he ever managed as the boy’s master. You didn’t, a small voice whispered in his own voice, you never were what he needed.

He firmly told himself to shut up.
“Your boy has a lot of energy.” Jango commented, “I swear every time I show up he has more.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “It’s true. It’s getting to the point where I can’t keep him as occupied as he’d like. I’ve started holding mini training sessions just to get rid of his extra energy.”

“He any good?”

Obi-Wan gave his ribs a rub where Anakin had smashed his elbows, “Well, he has the elbows for it.” He glanced at Jango, “Do you want a child?”

Jango gave a small shrug, “I’d like a son.”

Obi-Wan remembered Boba, remembered Kamino, remembered Geonosis, remembered Mace and a fallen Hunter among fallen Jedi. He felt a cold chill. He’s dead. Your talking to a ghost. They’re all dead.

Shut up, he told his mind, stay on track, stop thinking. This is the present. Not the past. Not the future. He hadn't failed yet.

He couldn’t concentrate to save his life today. And if you can’t save yours how could you possibly save Anakin’s. Shut UP.

A hand on his shoulder pulled him out of his reverie. Jango was right beside him again. “You really don’t look well, Obi-Wan.”

Some small part of Obi-Wan wanted to laugh at that, but all he could hear was a pounding in his head and that voice whispering failure, failure, failure.

“I’m fine.”

The hand slid up his shoulder and onto the back of his neck. Jango’s hand was cold, Obi-Wan realized. That was rather nice. It was also rather steadying, having a hand on the back of his neck, it reminded him of being in the crèche, of being a padawan, of being young and ignorant. But not for long, no, ignorance hadn’t stayed long. It almost made him feel safe as though someone cared, as though someone would protect him. But Obi-Wan didn’t deserve protection.

His eyes were closed, he realized, and he opened them to find that Jango had invaded his personal space again. “You’re feverish.”

That, Obi-Wan thought, explained a lot. The pulsing headache, the way he couldn’t focus, that tiny voice that Obi-Wan couldn’t control, the way Obi-Wan wanted to melt into Jango’s hand. The way Obi-Wan suddenly found himself swaying slightly on his feet.

At that thought he tried to push it away, he couldn’t be weak. What was a little fever? He’d fought droid armies with far worse. Force, he’d handled worse as his time as a Padawan, what was a little fever?

“I’m fine.” He told Jango. But Jango paid him no attention, using the hand on his neck to steer him along to where Shmi and Anakin were waiting, smiling and laughing. “Jango, I’m fine.”

“Shut up, Kenobi.” Obi-Wan opened his mouth to argue but a sharp squeeze and a firm look startled him into silence. For a split second his sight was overlaid by another memory, “With all due respect, General, shut up.” With a frustrated Cody forcing him to rest, forcing him to the medic, forcing him to take care of himself, forcing him to let Cody take care of him. A burst of longing for his friend burst through him, nearly choking him with the ferocity of it. How was it that in all his past life it was those years of war and darkness that he remembered being most cared for?
By the time he had managed to force away the emotion, Jango was once again pulling him along, back up the path they’d come down. Shmi and Anakin following along. Shmi tutting in disapproval while Anakin held his hand and told him that Shmi was going to make them flatcakes for lunch, which were his favorite, and wasn’t it great that they were going back to their ship, and Obi-Wan gave up the fight.

A deep voice in his ear, “This is why you should just do what I tell you to.”

“I don’t do what anyone tells me to.”

“I know.” Obi-Wan really must be feverish, because Jango’s voice had sounded almost fond.

It was almost offensive how easily Jango opened the ship. Obi-Wan almost thought there was no reason to lock it up if everyone could just waltz right in. He really did need to tighten security (except security was tight, it had to be, there had to be something to keep Anakin safe when he couldn’t, when he wasn’t enough).

His compliance only lasted so long though, the moment Jango started moving him towards his cabin he started his protests. Surely being back in the ship was restful enough he didn’t want to actually sleep.

For a brief moment Obi-Wan felt as though Jango surrounded him. Hand to his neck, body close, mouth to his ear. “I’ve got watch, Kenobi. You can sleep.” But the next moment it was gone and Obi-Wan wasn’t sure if it had been real at all, or if it was another memory with another man who shared his face.

Either way something in him settled for the first time since the first attempt on Anakin and without his conscious permission he ended up on his bed, slipping to sleep.

His dreams were disturbed, visions of a burning temple, a battle-strewn field, a burning planet, sand and loneliness. Every time he woke up he was greeted by Jango or Shmi or Anakin, gently pushing him back to sleep. Only to return to droids firing on him and his men, to a cannon knocking him from a cliff, fighting his brother, his friend, fighting a monster more machine than man that Obi-Wan still loved. And he’d wake again just to have his body rebel, fever raging and he’d slip back into the restless sleep.

When he finally woke for real, it was to Anakin curled up into his side fast asleep. Anakin was nine now, he realized, the same age he’d been when Obi-Wan had first met him, and this position was similar to some of the nights at the beginning of his apprenticeship when the cold and the nightmares would push Anakin into his bed and the grief and the loneliness gave Obi-Wan the impetus to allow it. The force whispered softly, time’s coming. He worried what that meant.

“I understand why you don’t sleep if that’s what greets you.”

Obi-Wan jerked his head up to see Jango standing in the door to his cabin. He hadn’t noticed the bounty hunter when he’d first woken, nor had he noticed his approach, leaving Obi-Wan unsure how long he’d been there. Obi-Wan shrugged, “It’s not an agreeable experience.”

Jango nodded, “Are they memories or just nightmares?”

Obi-Wan just laughed and shrugged, and Jango nodded as though that explained everything. Which Obi-Wan supposed it might, he was sure that Jango had his own number of nasty dreams, what with his time as a warrior, the battle of Galidraan and his time as a slave.

“Who are Cody and Rex?”
Obi-Wan tried to hide his surprise but had the nasty feeling he’d failed. “Why do you ask?”

“You called me both while you had a fever.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “They were men that I trusted with my life. They look a bit like you, Cody more so than Rex. Rex had blonde hair. But a similar face.” As in the exact same face, just with different scars.

“You’ve never mentioned them.”

“Since when have either of us ever talked about our pasts? Why should Cody and Rex have been any different?”

“Then tell me about them. What happened to them?” Jango’s voice brooked no argument and Obi-Wan wondered what he’d said when he was feverish, there was something in the way Jango was asking.

Obi-Wan opened his mouth and then closed it. He had never lied to Jango, it felt like bad form to start now. They hadn’t died, but at this point they hadn’t even been born. They were so very real to him, but now, now they were a phantom, people that only existed in his mind. Men that had been his best friends. Men that he had trusted with his life. Men he had trusted with Anakin’s life. Men that had shot him down and killed his family, that he could for some reason not ever convince himself to hate for what they’d done to him (although for a time he had been close, when he’d entered the temple and seen dead younglings, when he’d had to go through the 501st to even get in… for a short time he had… but twenty years on Tatooine had stolen his hatred and then his anger until now he missed the men that he had called friends with a ferocity that had made him ache).

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

Jango’s eyes flashed at him from within the darkness and Obi-Wan felt a surge of anger in the force that quickly disappeared. “You could try me.”

Obi-Wan laughed, sharp and bitter, but he couldn’t stop the words from falling, “They don’t exist, not now, maybe not ever. But they did, and they might, but for now they’re phantoms in my mind. Specters that are a haunting of a past that’s gone.” He choked on another laugh, “I’m a crazy man, Jango.”

Jango was quiet for a long moment before he finally actually entered the room, he held a cup out. “You’re dehydrated. Drink.”

Obi-Wan accepted the close of the conversation gratefully, “How long was I sleeping?”

“On and off for approximately three days.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Thank you, for staying with them.”

“Of course.”
Obi-Wan wasn’t sure why Jango’s care had him so confused. Jango’s quiet insistence on joining the two Skywalkers and himself on Tatooine was… strange. But both Shmi and Anakin seemed grateful for it. And… well, Obi-Wan was grateful too. The fever had taken a toll on him and Obi-Wan found it easier to relax and restore his energy when Jango was around. There were few individuals who could get past Jango Fett. And that meant that Anakin and Shmi were safe for now.

“Yes, it’s just that you couldn’t just have someone else visit Tatooine.” Obi-Wan rolled his eyes. Well, they would be safer if Shmi hadn’t imperiously informed Obi-Wan that Jango would be accompanying him on his trip to check with the Hutts. It wasn’t Obi-Wan that needed protection. But… well, he could feel that Anakin and Shmi were safe. And he wasn’t entirely opposed to Jango’s presence. As unnecessary as it was.

“It’s my responsibility.”

“So? It’s called delegating.”

Obi-Wan snorted, “What would you know about delegating? Weren’t you the one to tell me that the only person you could trust to do a good job was yourself?”

Jango laughed quietly. “Something like that.”

Obi-Wan sighed and glanced over at the armored man as they left Jabba’s palace. “It’s part of the treaty, someone has to make sure that they’re keeping to their half of the bargain.”

Jango hummed thoughtfully. “So is that why you let Shmi and Anakin run around Tatooine without your protection?”
Obi-Wan glared at Jango, “I don’t let them do anything, they are free to do whatever they please.”

Shmi and Anakin were spending time in Mos Espa, visiting Watto, who still had a soft spot for the two of them, and Cliegg, who had met Shmi on one of Obi-Wan’s pit stops on Tatooine and who despite the changes between this life and the life before, had found a way to make his way into Shmi’s heart. It both comforted him, that love found a way despite everything, and worried him, because if this still ended up the same then what would stop the big things from staying the same too? He had the sinking suspicion that Cliegg had asked Shmi to marry him and only some misplaced sense of responsibility for Obi-Wan had stopped Shmi from accepting.

Jango raised a hand laughing, “I wasn’t suggesting that they weren’t. All I was saying is that you worry about them. But despite the fact that Tatooine is… what was it you called this place again? ‘A hive of scum and villainy’, you don’t worry about them as much as I would imagine.” Jango looked at him, or at least his helmet turned towards him. “But I suppose they would be better able to see whether all of the terms are being kept.”

Obi-Wan sighed. “I’m not using them as spies…”

“It was Shmi’s idea, wasn’t it?”

“She had a good point. They would see things I wouldn’t. They found things I didn’t. And the slaves they found, that we were able to free, they knew things we didn’t. Shmi and Anakin… without them, Tatooine wouldn’t really be free.” Obi-Wan thought about the things that had been done quietly, the slaves that weren't freed willingly.

Jango nodded as he boarded their speeder. “That does explain how Cliegg so easily made his way into Shmi’s heart.”

Obi-Wan paused as he was about to jump onto the speeder. It wasn’t exactly common knowledge that Cliegg had given Shmi information, had spent months collecting it in secret to tell her. “Yeah.” He gave the other man a hard look, but he couldn’t muster up the proper amount of suspicion. That was just Jango, terrifyingly knowledgable. “The day you decide to kill me is going to be a very ugly day.” With how much Jango knew... How much of Obi-Wan Jango knew. The only consolation was that it had happened before. Jango couldn't hurt him any more than he'd already been hurt.

Jango didn’t say anything, and Obi-Wan took that as silent agreement.

By the time they’d visited all of the Hutts, Obi-Wan could feel a sandstorm coming. A talent he’d picked up from his long years on Tatooine that served him well whenever they visited Tatooine. Obi-Wan frowned when they made it back to his ship to see that Anakin and Shmi were still not there. The wind was picking up and Obi-Wan could feel the worry that he kept constantly at bay coming back at him, stronger. He reached out with the force, he could feel that they were fine. But that only did so much to ease his worry. He commed Shmi to find that she was still with Cliegg, and that she’d stay the night with him, but he couldn’t get ahold of Anakin. If the boy had turned off his comlink again Obi-Wan was going to have to talk to Shmi about grounding him. Again.

“Obi-Wan!” Obi-Wan glanced up to see Anakin running towards him, hands up to protect his eyes from the sand starting to fly about. A group followed behind him. Obi-Wan saw Jango shift slightly from the half-relaxed stance he’d been in, to battle ready and Obi-Wan felt his body naturally shift with him, senses going on alert even as he recognized the individuals behind Anakin.

“Anakin.” He stepped forward and drew the boy into a hug, resting his hand on his shoulder to keep
him close, his body sheltering the boy from the worst of the wind. He quickly opened the ship, trying to ignore the knot of anxiety twisting within him. The Naboo Invasion. It was here. It had likely started about the same time he had gone down with fever. It had started and he wasn’t ready.

It was pure chance that he was here now. This was his first major hurdle since waking up in this time and Obi-Wan had failed. He heard Anakin call for the others to enter and had to fight the instincts that screamed for him not to let strangers into his home. He could feel Jango take up residence near the wall behind him, angled in such a way that he had clear view of the newcomers. Obi-Wan shut the ship ramp and took a deep breath as the wind and sand were shut away.

He turned to see that Anakin was bouncing around delightedly, “This is Obi-Wan! He’s the one I was telling you about, he’ll be able to help you for sure!”

Obi-Wan gave a small smile, “I’m sure I’ll do my best. What is it your promising I’ll be able to help with, Anakin?”

Anakin turned to him, a sheepish grin on his face. “This is Mister Qui-Gon and Padme! They were at Watto’s looking for a hyperdrive, except they don’t have the money to buy it and they need to fix their ship. But I just knew that this was really important and that they needed help, and you help everybody!”

Obi-Wan felt his smile strain as Qui-Gon gave him a clear look of distrust. “Is that so?”

“Well, I certainly try.” He gave the Jedi Master a small nod of his head, “It saddens me that we could not meet again in a better situation, Master Jinn.”

Anakin’s eyes went wide. “You know him? Is he a Jedi like you were? I knew it! I knew I saw his lightsaber!” He could feel Jango grow tense in the force and shifted slightly so that he was closer to the bounty hunter, he knew that while Jango had gotten used to him, he still felt a great deal of anger and hatred for the Jedi.

Obi-Wan gave Anakin a small smile, “Yes, he was my master before I left the Jedi.”

Anakin’s eyes went wide. And he turned to Qui-Gon with a bright smile. “You know Obi-Wan?”

Qui-Gon’s face had a smile on it even though his eyes were impossible to read. “I did, yes. Before he left.” Qui-Gon sent him a look that Obi-Wan didn’t even try to decipher. Instead he turned to the others on the ship.

“Forgive me my poor manners.” He gave Padme a bow, “My name is Obi-Wan Kenobi, you’ve already met Anakin Skywalker.” He hesitated for a moment trying to decide whether Jango would want to be introduced or not, he decided it would be better not to at this point. He didn't think Jango would want a Jedi to have his name. If Jango wanted to be introduced he could introduce himself. “It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

Padme sent him a bright smile, “I’m Padme Naberrie, this is Jar Jar Binks, and you’ve already met Master Jinn.” Obi-Wan nodded and then turned his head to the astromech. The sight of the little droid filled him with fondness.

This droid had accompanied him and Anakin to war. That had stood watch in the Antilles family for nearly two decades as Leia grew. That had traveled the unforgiving Tatooine deserts to try and find him. Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi, you are my only hope. He shook away the thoughts, and the voice of a girl not yet born from his mind.

“That’s a beautiful droid. May I ask it’s designation?” R2 whistled cheerfully at him, and Obi-Wan
was grateful that young Anakin had always been fascinated with droids, keeping Obi-Wan’s knowledge of binary at least somewhat up to date. “Well, I’m sure it’s a pleasure R2.”

R2 beeped and whistled again and Obi-Wan swallowed against the lump in his throat. He turned back to Padme. “Anakin said your ship needed a hyperdrive but you lacked the funds?”

Padme nodded, but their was a speculative look in her eyes. “Yes, our ship was damaged on our way to Coruscant on urgent business. We felt that the only way to safely get off of Tatooine was to fix the hyperdrive.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “I see. Well, I’m sure that we have enough Wupiupi that we might be able to help you purchase the hyperdrive. Do you have anyone capable of installing it once it’s purchased?”

Qui-Gon cleared his throat, “I am sure that we will be able to manage fine.”

Padme shook her head, “You are the Obi-Wan Kenobi that initiated the Water for Freedom Coalition?”

Obi-Wan blinked at the unexpected segue. “Yes…”

Padme took a deep breath, “Senator Palpatine spoke highly of you and of your devotion to freedom. Our planet has been invaded and our people put into detention centers, with the help of Master Jinn, the Queen and a few others were able to escape. We were on our way to Coruscant so that the Queen could plead our case to the senate, but our ship was damaged. We need to get to Coruscant, will you take us?”

Obi-Wan blinked in surprise, but then nodded. “Of course, we won’t be able to take off until the sandstorm has passed, and Anakin and I have to go and pick up his mother before we go and pick up the rest of your group. But, yes, we can certainly transport you.”

Padme nodded and Obi-Wan could see the relief in her eyes. “We thank you.”

Qui-Gon shifted, “Perhaps we should speak with the Queen before deciding on a course of action.”

Padme sent a dark look to Qui-Gon, clearly Padme and Qui-Gon had already had at least one disagreement on how to handle things since leaving the ship. Obi-Wan almost wanted to smile, but refrained. Neither Padme nor Qui-Gon were the type to follow others well. “I am sure the Queen will agree with me. She trusts my judgment.”

Qui-Gon’s face was blank, but Obi-Wan could still sense his frustration. Obi-Wan moved slightly, drawing both their eyes. “Well, we will have to wait until tomorrow in either case, the sandstorm will last until at least tomorrow morning.”

Padme nodded. “Thank you for your hospitality.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Of course, if you will pardon me, I can make us all something to eat.” He turned to Anakin, resting a hand on his shoulder, “Would you help our guests feel at home?”

Anakin nodded, beaming. “I can show them around!”

Obi-Wan smiled and gave another small bow to the group. He turned away and headed for the kitchen, and was only slightly surprised when Jango fell into step right beside him.

“I don’t like this.”
Obi-Wan glanced at him from the corner of his eye. “Which particular part don’t you like?”


“I am not uneasy.”

“Don’t lie to me.”

Obi-Wan sighed, but left it. He was right after all. “Do you have any preferences on the meal.”

A hand on his arm stopped him. “Obi-Wan.”

“Jango.” Jango was still wearing his helmet, but Obi-Wan could feel the man’s gaze, as piercing as it always was.

It was quiet for a long moment before Jango sighed and let him go, “I saw some Corellian Tubers in your cooling unit. Not even you can ruin those.”

Obi-Wan blinked, slightly surprised, but then laughed. “That’s true. Even I can handle tubers. I think we might have some nerf patties as well.” He turned as quickly as he could and made his way to the small kitchen. Jango a few steps behind him.

Dinner was awkward. Jango had removed his helmet and eaten a few bites while in the kitchen, but then spent the meal leaning against the wall of the ship as a vaguely ominous armored figure. Obi-Wan could see that it made his guests uncomfortable but had long ago discovered that Jango would do what Jango would do. Even Qui-Gon seemed unnerved by Jango, which surprised Obi-Wan. He did not remember Qui-Gon Jinn being an easy man to unnerven. And if Obi-Wan was completely honest he mostly found Jango’s presence to be… calming. That others were so thrown by him was somewhat odd.

Padme had attempted at one point to engage Jango in conversation, but quickly realized it was a losing battle, when Jango didn’t even give his name, much less a greeting. At that point she had turned to Obi-Wan and spent the rest of the time questioning him about the Water for Freedom Coalition, while Qui-Gon told Anakin stories about the Jedi. Obi-Wan felt his heart sink with every heroic story told. He could feel Anakin’s desire, his joy. Anakin already knew a great deal about the Jedi. Obi-Wan had never hidden where he was from and what he had been. But Anakin had known Obi-Wan for more than half his life, and he didn’t really have many memories from before Obi-Wan. To Anakin, Obi-Wan was plain, old, boring Obi-Wan… Qui-Gon was a stranger, a larger than life figure… and he had so many stories… Obi-Wan was not surprised to see that Anakin was in awe of him.

“I am surprised that Obi-Wan did not bring you to the temple, you would make a magnificent Jedi.” Obi-Wan tensed at the pointed statement, he could hear the accusation behind it, and he had no doubt that while the accusation had flown over Anakin's head that Jango had noticed it too.

Obi-Wan turned towards where Qui-Gon was smiling at Anakin, but Anakin was looking at Obi-Wan, a somewhat impish grin on his face. “Obi-Wan says that Mom gets to make all the decisions.” Anakin laughed at that, “He says that Mom is a lot smarter than him.”

Obi-Wan smiled, “Well, it’s true.”

Anakin turned to Qui-Gon. “Did you know that Obi-Wan freed me and my Mom from slavery! I don’t really remember much of it. Mom says that’s good. But I do remember that we used to belong
to Gardulla… and that she was mean to my mom, and that Mom was kinda glad when Gardulla lost us to Watto. And then Obi-Wan came and Mom was so happy that she cried!”

Obi-Wan shook his head, even now he still felt disgusted with himself for having to buy Shmi and Anakin to free them. To think he had paid money for human life. It made his skin crawl. He could still remember the night that he’d gone to Shmi, and begged her to take Anakin and leave. That she owed him nothing. He couldn’t bear it if she thought she still belonged to him. That she was still a slave. She owed him nothing. She owed herself and Anakin the galaxy. Or rather the galaxy owed them.

Padme stirred him from his thoughts, “What you did with the Water for Freedom treaty, the people whose lives you helped, has always amazed me. I have always wondered why you didn’t try to take the Water for Freedom treaty to the senate. Surely with the senate the treaty would be stronger?”

Obi-Wan shrugged. “I have a great deal of respect for the Senate. But I did not want the treaty to be ripped apart by different politicians with different desires, I did not want to see it bogged down in committees and discussions. We did that enough amongst ourselves, we had our own small committees, we debated and argued and compromised among ourselves. I did not want to see it become something that politicians could twist around to make it about their gain.” He paused, “The Senate does a great deal of good, and our Republic needs it. Democracy is a beautiful thing, the treaty could not have come to pass without it. But it is full of sentients, and that makes it imperfect and slow.” He smiled sadly, “Such is the curse of sentience I suppose.”

Padme frowned, “What do you think will happen when the Queen addresses the Senate?”

Obi-Wan sighed. “If you are hoping for an instant call to action you are going to be terribly disappointed. There will be committees. The Trade Federation has backing in the Senate, and they will undoubtedly refute your claims. Chancellor Vallorum is a good man and he has already made it clear that he is on your side by sending the Jedi.” Qui-Gon sent him a look at that, and Obi-Wan pretended not to notice. It wasn’t impossible for him to have taken the information he had and come to the correct conclusion, unlikely perhaps, but not impossible. “I fear that your Queen will not have quick success. But it is still important that you voice your grievances, it will give you a better legal foundation should you have to take action.”

Padme gave him a searching look. “And you believe that the Queen may have to take action.”

Obi-Wan returned her gaze. She was so young. She had always been young. Had died while still… He shook his head, pushing away the thought. “I most certainly hope she doesn’t.” He paused, “But should she need to, I will offer what little aid I can.”

Padme looked thoughtful. “I will let the Queen know.”

Obi-Wan nodded and stood, gathering the plates. “Make yourself at home for the night.” He turned to Anakin, “Anakin, you can bunk with me tonight, if you’re alright with letting one of our guests take your room.”

Anakin nodded and quickly stood to help with the rest of the dishes. “Of course. And I bet Mom would be okay if Padme used her room.” He sent her a shy smile and Obi-Wan sighed mentally at the beginnings of a crush. He did not need that again. Couldn’t Anakin wait until he was older?

“I do believe you’re right. Why don’t you show them where they can make their rooms for the night.” He took the dishes to the kitchen and sighed as Jango once again followed him. “I normally leave the spare room for you.”
“I’m not sleeping with a Jedi on the ship.”

Obi-Wan sighed. “No, I don’t think I’ll sleep tonight either.”

Jango stepped up next to him, and took some of the dishes from his hands. Obi-Wan found his eyes focused on the juxtaposition of the armored hands carefully rinsing the dishes. “I can keep watch.”

Obi-Wan blinked and looked up. He had a sudden urge to see the man’s face, to see the look in his eyes. “I know you can.” He paused, “I… I am glad you’re here.”

Jango didn’t pause, but Obi-Wan thought he felt something like surprise from the man. Before Obi-Wan could say anything further Anakin came in with the rest of the dishes. There was a somber look on his face. “Padme’s afraid. And I think that Mister Jinn is angry.”

Obi-Wan sighed, “Padme’s people are in danger, and yet for now there is nothing she can do. It’s a painful and frightening situation.”

Anakin nodded, “But you said you’ll help her.”

“And I will.”

“And everything will be fine.”

Obi-wan blinked in surprise at that, and laughed a little, if somewhat bitterly. “It’s not quite that simple, Anakin.” As though anything Obi-Wan did would ever be enough. As though he could ever truly save anyone.

Anakin looked up at him, “You’ll help save her people. Just like you saved me and Mom and everybody else.”

Obi-Wan set the last plate in his hand down, and then knelt in front of Anakin, taking the plates and handing them to Jango’s waiting hands. “Did you know, Anakin, that between the time that I freed you and your mother and the time when the last slave on Tatooine was freed, hundreds of slaves died?”

Anakin frowned and shook his head. “No.”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Some of them were old, some of them were sick. Some of them were killed because their masters were cruel people who did cruel things. Some of them were killed so that they couldn’t be freed…” He sighed, “I did what I could, but it wasn’t quite enough. It’s one of the hardest thing I’ve ever had to learn in my life. That sometimes, we can give everything we have, we can do everything in our power. And we’ll still lose. That’s true for me. That’s true for you. That’s true for Jango.” Jango scoffed quietly but didn’t disagree, “It’s true for the Jedi and the Senate and for everyone.”

Anakin frowned and shook his head. “No.”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Some of them were old, some of them were sick. Some of them were killed because their masters were cruel people who did cruel things. Some of them were killed so that they couldn’t be freed…” He sighed, “I did what I could, but it wasn’t quite enough. It’s one of the hardest thing I’ve ever had to learn in my life. That sometimes, we can give everything we have, we can do everything in our power. And we’ll still lose. That’s true for me. That’s true for you. That’s true for Jango.” Jango scoffed quietly but didn’t disagree, “It’s true for the Jedi and the Senate and for everyone.”

Anakin frowned, “But you’re going to save them. I can feel it.”

Obi-Wan smiled, “I hope you are right. And I swear I will do everything in my power.” He put his hands on Anakin’s shoulders, “But I’m only human Anakin.”

Anakin frowned, but nodded. “But why is Mister Jinn angry? Is it because of the Naboo too? Cause it feels like he’s angry at you.”

Obi-Wan sighed. “That’s complicated.”
Anakin’s frown deepened, “Obi-Wan.” There was a seriousness to his voice that was almost surprising to hear from the nine-year old.

“You know that I was a Jedi, right?”

Anakin sent him a disapproving look. “Yes. You’ve told me about it loads of times.”

Obi-Wan laughed, “Yes. Well. He was my Master and it was very difficult for him when I left the Jedi. While I can’t claim to know exactly how he felt, I imagine he felt as though I was betraying him and the order.” Anakin protested at that and Obi-Wan had to laugh at how indignant the idea made Anakin.

“He keeps saying that I could be a Jedi.”

Obi-Wan didn’t stiffen, although it was a close thing. He could feel the tension in the room increase as Jango’s movements behind them went still. “You are very powerful in the Force. You know that, your mother and I have always been honest about your abilities, and I’ve always tried to teach you how to best use the Force, while your mother has always made sure you understand how important it is not to misuse your talents.”

“But could I be a Jedi?”

Obi-Wan felt his heart grow heavy. “That’s something that you and your mother will have to decide.” He could feel Qui-Gon’s presence in the hallway, and Jango’s presence behind him. There was a heavy layer of judgment in the air on both sides.

“What do you think?”

Obi-Wan stared at the boy that he loved more than his own life. “There are two things I want for you in your life Anakin. One, that you always remain the good and kind hearted person that you are, and two, that you are happy. Your path is yours to choose, Anakin. I will support whatever decision you and your mother make. And no matter what I will always love you.” *Even if you tear the galaxy apart… Even if I have to destroy you… I’ll still love you.*

Anakin stared at him. His frown slowly fading into a small smile. “I love you too, Obi-Wan.” Obi-Wan pulled the boy closer and hugged him tightly. *Please… please don’t tear the galaxy apart. Not again.*

“Now, go get ready for bed.”

Obi-Wan could tell that Jango was upset. He could tell that Jango wanted to discuss what Anakin had said and Obi-Wan’s answer. Obi-Wan found he was grateful that currently Jango hadn’t been given the opportunity. Although he wasn’t particularly happy with the current distraction of Qui-Gon trying to corner him on his own ship either. “How high is his Midichlorian count?”

Obi-Wan blinked as the man towered over him. There was a growl behind him that caused Qui-Gon to hesitate before taking a single step backward after sending a venomous glare at the bounty hunter. Obi-Wan wasn’t sure whether he should be grateful to Jango or not. He could handle an annoyed Jedi Master, he didn’t need Juego threatening the man. But… it was nice that he would care enough, or rather, dislike Qui-Gon Jinn enough, to do so. “I have never felt the need to test it. And you are certainly not permitted to do so. Not without permission from Shmi.”

“You’ve been deliberately keeping Anakin from the Jedi order.”
Obi-Wan shook his head. “I have informed Shmi of Anakin’s potential and let her make the decisions. He is her son.”

“And I assume you’ve been poisoning her against the Jedi the entire time.”

Obi-Wan wasn’t sure whether he was surprised by the anger in his former master. “I have done no such thing.”

“Because you’ve been a paragon of virtue, haven’t you. With your precious treaty.” Qui-Gon’s glare intensified. “Don’t forget I’ve seen how this works. You may have done it on a larger scale, but Xanatos already tried this route. I’m sure you remember Bandomeer.” Qui-Gon paused, “I stopped him then, and I will stop you.”

Obi-Wan sighed. “Well, you and I remember Bandomeer very differently I’m sure. I distinctly recall him selling me into slavery. Not freeing me from it.” He paused, with what he could admit was dramatic emphasis, before continuing. “Or perhaps you were referring to how he was pretending to help the miners when in reality he was planning on destroying the planet?” He shrugged. “I have no such aspirations.” Qui-Gon’s glare was glacier, and Obi-Wan felt something like regret, but he pushed it away. He had never truly been able to change Qui-Gon’s mind when the man had made it up. Not really. He did not think he’d be able to now. “Now if you’ll excuse me, the sandstorm will be raging for several hours still, and I need to make sure that Anakin gets the sleep he needs. His mother would be very disappointed in me otherwise.”

Qui-Gon didn’t move and so Obi-Wan pushed past him. A hand brushed his back and for a split second Obi-Wan almost stiffened before he recognized it as Jango’s. He felt Qui-Gon’s surprise and shock in the force and held back a laugh, Jango moved even closer and Obi-Wan allowed it. Qui-Gon already had his assumptions, why not let Jango stir the fire. He felt Qui-Gon’s surprise turn into disgust. He shifted slightly so that Jango’s hand was firmer on his back and Jango moved closer as they continued past Qui-Gon. He passed by Shmi’s room and checked that Padme was good for the remainder of the night, before checking on Jar Jar as well. R2 was in the main part of the ship and after a second’s hesitation he knelt next to the droid to bid it a goodnight. It was foolish and sentimental, and he could feel Jango’s ire momentarily turn to bemusement behind him. But this droid had been one of the most stalwart and faithful of his companions in his past life.

He sighed when he finally made it back to his own room, Anakin was sprawled across his bed, already asleep, and Obi-Wan felt a small smile tug at his lips. He gently pulled the blanket out from where Anakin was sleeping on it and covered the lightly snoring boy.

“Would you really let him join the Jedi?”

Obi-Wan sighed and turned to see that Jango had finally removed his helmet and was now sprawled in his only chair. “You know I’ve always let Shmi and Anakin make their own choices. This will be no different.”

Jango frowned, “You would let him go with that poison?” He gestured to the door and the hallway behind it, and Obi-Wan cringed.

“Qui-Gon Jinn hasn’t always been like that. My leaving the Jedi was perhaps harder on him than I had thought it would be. You saw that he was kind to Anakin.”

“I saw him trying to poison Anakin against you.”

Obi-Wan bowed his head, “Yes.”
“I know you let Shmi choose her path, but she has asked for your counsel in the past, and I’m certain she would do so now.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “And I will be honest with her.”

Jango snarled and Anakin stirred. Obi-Wan reached out quietly, weaving a bubble of calm and quiet around Anakin. He did not want either his or Jango’s emotions to wake him. Jango took a deep breath, but settled slightly. “You can’t hide from me, Obi-Wan. I can read you far too easily. You’re practically resigned to his leaving.”

Obi-Wan looked up in surprise, “I…” He shook his head. “No.” He wasn’t resigned to this was he? Surely not. “Am I?”

The look Jango gave him was almost pitying, if it weren’t for the fact that Jango didn’t do pity. “Why are you considering this? And none of that nonsense about it being ’the will of the force’.”

Obi-Wan bristled at that. “I hardly think that this involves…”

Jango moved so quickly it actually startled Obi-Wan. “Obi-Wan.” Jango’s armored hand found his neck and gently forced him to meet his eyes, he paused there and for a moment Obi-Wan found himself almost paralyzed by the intensity in Jango’s eyes. “Curse you Kenobi. You let me in. You trusted me with your life. You trusted me with theirs. You haven’t done that with anyone else in this galaxy. You let me in. So yes, I am involved.”

Obi-Wan took a deep breath. “Jango.” The hand on the back of his neck tightened, and Obi-Wan found himself stuttering slightly on his next words. “You… You have your own life. You leave. And I… One day I’m going to fail, and Anakin’s going to suffer for it. Someday the price on his head is going to be too high and they know where to find me. They won’t look for him with the Jedi. And the Jedi will keep him in the temple for several years, long enough for the bounty to disappear. He’ll… He’ll be safe.” And it was true. If Shmi decided to let Anakin join the Jedi, and something deep inside him knew that there was a high chance that she would. He would be safe. He knew that Palpatine would remove the bounty on Anakin.

Anakin would still be in danger. Obi-Wan knew that… He had ample evidence that Palpatine’s words could be more dangerous than a few bounty hunters. But… the force whispered for him to trust it.

Sometimes Obi-Wan really hated the force.

Jango sighed quietly. “I don’t like it.” There was an undercurrent of anger to the words, and Obi-Wan couldn’t help but understand. He knew, he knew what the Jedi had cost Jango.

Obi-Wan closed his eyes. “Neither do I.” Jango moved slowly back, returning to the chair. Obi-Wan reminded himself that Jango’s anger didn’t hurt, that his absence didn’t leave him feeling cold.

Obi-Wan was very good at pretending.

His meditation was troubled. The force whispered around him in a mixture of quiet foreboding and soft apology. Change, change, change. He wasn’t sure if it was saying that his life was going to change, or whether there would be a drastic change from his past. Fight, prepare, coming, coming. Change, change, change. How was he supposed to prepare? What was he supposed to do? It felt as though he had already failed. The force nudged him and he stretched his consciousness further, and further. The force nudged him again to look, and he stretched even further until he felt it. Death,
death, death. Cold, anger, hate, hate, hate. Death. For a brief moment he could feel the darkness sense him. Felt the anger increase into an inferno of rage, sharp and cold. The dark side thrust at him with malicious glee, like a dagger thrust between his ribs. Obi-Wan pulled himself back, jerking out of his meditation with a gasp as he fell backwards onto the floor. A choked cry stuck between his lips.

He felt disoriented, his mind reeled as the memories hit him. Qui-Gon, Satine, Mandalore burning, the deserts of Tatooine. Maul. A man with so much anger. So much malice. So much hate.

So much hurt.

“Obi-Wan!” Obi-Wan’s eyes jerked open to see Anakin’s worried face hovering above him. “What happened? Are you okay?”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Yes, of course. Just fine.” He inhaled deeply, trying to center himself.

Anakin’s nose scrunched, “You’re lying.”

“And poorly at that.”

Obi-Wan’s eyes flew to Jango, who was standing between the two of them and the door, blasters out, body tense as though searching for an unseen assailant. There was nothing for Jango to protect them from, Maul was miles away, but it was still strangely reassuring. “We’re being hunted, or rather our guests are. There is nothing we can do for now but wait for the storm to pass.” He turned to Anakin, “Then we will go and pick up your mother and the rest of our guests. The sooner we are off Tatooine the better.” He turned to Jango, “Your ship is near here isn’t it?”

Jango frowned but nodded, “I’ll be leaving as soon as the storm slows down.”

Obi-Wan nodded, he wasn’t surprised, Jango had stayed far longer than Obi-Wan had ever expected. But he was still somewhat disappointed. He was honest enough to admit to himself that he did not want Jango to leave. Not again. Not now when Jango was still angry with him. Not now when Obi-Wan felt so out of control.

But perhaps it was for the best. Obi-Wan had to remember that he couldn’t depend on anyone. He knew best that in the end everyone left.

And most of them never said goodbye.

When the storm slowed, Obi-Wan had gone to wake his guests, and returned to find that Jango had already departed for his own ship.

Obi-Wan did his best to not let it bother him as he took off to pick up Shmi from where she had stayed with the Lars. “I’m sorry for the rush, but we need to be moving as quickly as possible.”

Shmi gave him a look, “Is something wrong?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “Oh, not yet.”

Shmi pursed her lips, “That’s not nearly as reassuring as I want to hear this early in the morning.”

He returned to the cockpit, Anakin in the co-pilot’s chair as they followed Qui-Gon’s directions to where they had left the Naboo cruiser.
He landed his ship near the Naboo’s, moving quickly from the cockpit, quiet instructions for Shmi to make sure they were prepared for a quick take-off. The force was insistent that they hurry, and the way Maul’s presence was growing ever closer was a good indicator as to why.

He turned to Padme, “You must be quick, gather your people and get them boarded.” She looked at him somewhat surprised, “Now!”

The darkness was growing, anticipation edging along it and Obi-Wan raced from the ship. The Naboo Cruiser had opened and he could see a few of the handmaidens ready to disembark.

He raced past them into the desert. There was the hum of a speeder moving closer but it was quiet in comparison to the rage of the force, crashing around him. Obi-Wan took a deep breath, anchoring himself. The fear and anger and rage stormed around him, but did not effect him.

He could sense Qui-Gon’s shock and unease at the presence of a true darksider.

Obi-Wan could see Maul now as the speeder came racing towards them. He closed his eyes. He could feel the Sith’s intention to go right past him, straight for where the handmaidens and the decoy queen were disembarking. He launched himself, eyes still closed, as the speeder went past. Tangling with the Sith as they both went tumbling to the sand. He heard the speeder crash into the ground not far from them.

A boot to his stomach sent him flying backwards. He could hear muted yelling as he pulled his blasters, sending off his first few shots before he’d even hit the ground. He flipped and twisted himself to his feet. Maul’s lightsaber was out, deflecting the shots, a fierce grin on his face. There was the hum of a lightsaber next to him, as Qui-Gon joined them. Maul charged them, his lightsaber arching down towards Obi-Wan. He threw himself under the blade his hands landing on the burning sand as he whipped his feet, forcing the Zabrak to jump.

There was a crash of lightsabers as Qui-Gon engaged Maul. Obi-Wan pulled his own lightsaber out as Maul kicked Qui-Gon backwards, blue meeting red. The sight made something inside him grieve. It felt as though he was engaged in an eternal war. He felt Qui-Gon move to the side, ready to fight with him. The two of them continued to trade blows with the Sith. It had been a long time since Obi-Wan had fought someone else in a lightsaber battle. A long time since he had fought side by side with Qui-Gon. The force whispered that now was not the time to try and win. So instead he deflected and parried, watching Maul and how he fought, watching Qui-Gon and how he fought, melding himself so that he was what Qui-Gon needed.

He heard a ship take off, and watched as it stayed low to the ground, he pushed Maul faster, pushing him back long enough for Qui-Gon to jump back onto the ship. Obi-Wan sent the force out in a gentle push, only enough to make Maul stumble before he too leaped onto the extended landing ramp. The moment he landed Shmi hit the button for the ramp to close, a blaster out, sending a constant barrage of blaster bolts, to keep Maul distracted as the ramp closed. Obi-Wan watched through the closing gap as Maul stood there in the desert sand, lightsaber flashing as he blocked Shmi’s shots, darkness pulsing from him in warning and threat. They would meet again.

It made Obi-Wan mourn deeply.

He breathed in deeply, accepting the grief and letting it go to focus on the now, “Please tell me that it is not Anakin flying our ship.”

Shmi gave him a tired smile, “Co-piloting. Are you all right?”

Obi-Wan sighed. “I hate fighting in the desert. But I’m quite alright.” He turned to look at the group
of Naboo, “And you all? Are you all well?”

They all nodded just as Padme came running from the cockpit. “Are you alright?”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Quite.”

Qui-Gon made a noise of agreement. “We were fortunate. Unfortunately, I have no doubt that the assassin was after the Queen.” He glanced at where Sabe stood, in the Queen’s garb. “No doubt he knows where we are headed. We must remain cautious.”

The group all nodded, and Obi-Wan left them to communicate as he headed to the cockpit. A hand on his shoulder stopped him. “You knew that the assassin was coming. How?” Qui-Gon’s face was neutral, but Obi-Wan could sense suspicion. It did not take a mind-reader to see that Qui-Gon thought he was likely in cohorts with Maul. Which was almost funny, if Qui-Gon had even the slightest clue of how entangled Maul had become in Obi-Wan’s life, how much pain he’d caused Obi-Wan…

Obi-Wan just raised a single eyebrow. “You fought him, surely you felt the darkness that surrounded him? It was hardly inconspicuous.”

“You’ve been preparing for this all morning. How did you know?”

“I had a bad feeling.”

Qui-Gon pursed his lips and switched the subject, Obi-Wan wasn’t all that surprised, he never had been fond of Obi-Wan’s bad feelings, no matter how accurate they could be. “You kept your lightsaber.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Yes, it’s not illegal for a non-Jedi to have one.” Of course, the art of making lightsabers was for the most part a secret kept by the Jedi, so there had never really been a reason to make it into a law. He also thought it best not to mention that not only had he made it, but that he’d altered it to better fit how he fought now, and that he’d actually gone and made a second one as well.

Qui-Gon’s pursed lips told Obi-Wan exactly what Qui-Gon thought about that. “It’s not illegal no, but it is highly discouraged. It’s seen as a Jedi Knight’s weapon, when you use it, it reflects on the Jedi.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “I know, and you’ll find I don’t use it often.” He paused, “I may have left the order, Master Jinn, but I still have the greatest respect for all of the individuals who are a part of that order, I do my best to make sure that my actions would never impugn upon the Jedi Order.” They were still his family, and Obi-Wan still loved them all dearly.

It was quiet for a long moment, “You’re still quite skilled with your saber.” It was said neutrally and Obi-Wan wasn’t sure if that was a challenge to his statement that he didn’t use his saber often or if it was an actual compliment. He was inclined to think it was the former.

He bowed his head shallowly, “Thank you.”

“And Anakin, have you trained him to use a lightsaber?” Obi-Wan repressed a sigh, things always did seem to come back to Anakin. Obi-Wan would be lying if he said his former Master’s fixation on the boy he had once considered a brother and had now come to consider a son didn’t bother him. It bothered him a great deal, even more this time then it had the first time around, which was no easy feat, given that it had bothered him greatly then.

“Shmi wanted him to know how to protect himself so I made sure that he could do so in as many
ways as possible given his age, and that included to some degree with a lightsaber, not more than a few basic katas.”

Qui-Gon frowned, “And have you taught him to use the force?”

Obi-Wan opened his mouth to answer but there was a sharp clearing of a throat. He turned to see Shmi watching him and Qui-Gon, there was a hard look in her eyes and she moved to stand beside him, one hand softly touching his arm. “Master Jinn, I don’t believe we’ve really had the chance to meet. My name is Shmi Skywalker, Anakin’s mother.”

Qui-Gon gave her a small bow, “It is a pleasure to meet you, your son was kind enough to help us in our time of need, it is a pleasure to meet the person that raised him to be so kind.”

Shmi smiled, “He’s a good boy, he has a big heart, he cares for others with no thought for himself.” She paused meaningfully, “I imagine he learned it from Obi-Wan.”

Obi-Wan felt himself redden, “I think he learned it from his mother. He is without a doubt your son.”

Shmi smiled again and gave him a soft kiss on his cheek, “Thank you Obi-Wan.” She turned back to Qui-Gon, “However Obi-Wan was right in what he’s said, while he is the closest thing Anakin has to a father, and Anakin views him as such, Obi-Wan has always ensured that I knew that he would never try and teach Anakin something that I was not comfortable with him learning. Any questions in that regards would be better asked of me.”

Qui-Gon nodded and Obi-Wan felt a surge of gratitude for the woman that had just inserted herself between him and his former master. While he could easily handle a discussion on what he had taught Anakin, that undercurrent of judgment he could feel still weighed heavily on him. He knew that to some degree he deserved some mistrust, it was fairly rare for Jedi to leave, and they often fell. But often was not always, and he did not deserve to pay for Xanatos’ sins. Not Xanatos’, not anyone’s. Obi-Wan would not fall. He would not let himself.

“I had wondered, Madam Skywalker, if you would permit me to test Anakin’s midichlorian count, he’s incredibly strong in the force.”

Obi-Wan watched Shmi, her eyes were narrowed thoughtfully. “Obi-Wan has told me a little about the Jedi. I was under the impression that children were only taken while still quite young, far younger than Anakin.”

Qui-Gon nodded, “Normally, yes.” He paused, “I just can’t help but feel that the Force led me to your son.”

Shmi shrugged dismissively, “I wouldn’t be surprised if it had. After all it’s because of my son and Obi-Wan that you were able to so quickly make it off planet.”

Qui-Gon nodded, “That is true, but I feel that it is more than that.”

Shmi paused and Obi-Wan watched as she glanced at him. He gave her a soft smile, trying to reassure her that he would, as always, trust her judgment.

“I suppose, yes, that would be permissible.”

Qui-Gon nodded, “Thank you.” He gave Shmi a short bow and sent a small nod to Obi-Wan.

Shmi crossed her arms, hugging herself, and she turned to face Obi-Wan. For a short time they just stood there staring at each other. “It’s coming, isn’t it?”
Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow, “What’s coming?”

Shmi shrugged, “Ever since that day I told you that Anakin and I would be going with you I’ve felt as though we were on a countdown. Things are going to change, and there’s a part of me that wants to stop it, to make sure that nothing changes… but everything changes, we can no more stop that then we can stop the suns from setting.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “That’s true. Everything does change. But we do impact how things change.”

Shmi nodded. “Cliegg asked me to marry him.”

“I know.”

“I don’t want to leave you alone.”

“I know.”

Shmi leaned into him, her presence warm and steady against his side. “I think I might love him. Or at the least, I think I could easily grow to love him.”

“I know.”

An elbow dug into his side. “I’m going to let Anakin make the decision for himself.” She took a deep breath, her eyes sad, ”I’ve always felt that he was meant for something great. Either way… I think I’m going to tell Cliegg yes.”

Obi-Wan wrapped an arm around her shoulders. “I know.” That earned him another dig of Shmi’s elbow into his side. “All I want is for the two of you to be happy. I hope you know that Shmi.”

Shmi gave him a small smirk, “I know.”

Obi-Wan laughed softly and held her close, this woman who had accepted him into the life of her and her son with hardly any hesitation. This woman who had a heart of gold, who accepted everyone for who they were with compassion greater than half of the Jedi that Obi-Wan had known. He was going to miss her, he realized. He was going to miss them both.

His thoughts were interrupted by Anakin running towards them from the cockpit. “Mom! Mister Qui-Gon said that you said that he could test me to see if I can be a Jedi!”

Shmi hesitated, “I did tell him that he could test you, yes. But only if you want that Ani.”

Anakin beamed at them, “Yes, please!”

Qui-Gon entered the room behind him. “I do hope you know I wouldn’t lie to you Anakin.”

Anakin made a face. “I just wanted to be sure!”

Qui-Gon smiled at the boy, “It’ll be easier to check in the cockpit.”

Anakin took off running again. Obi-Wan laughed, “If I didn’t know better I would think he’s overindulged on sugar again.”

Shmi looked up at him, “And whose fault was that?”

Obi-Wan gave a mock offended huff, “I assure you it wasn’t mine!”
Shmi laughed, “You can claim innocence all you like, I won’t be fooled.”

“It was all Nield’s fault.”

“I’ll let him know how quick you were to place the blame on him.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I doubt it will come as too much of a surprise to him, he’s known me since I was thirteen after all.”

“I still think it’s a shame he has no holos of you at that age.”

“He was fifteen at the time, hardly at the age where he wanted to go around taking holos of other boys, particularly since we were in the middle of a civil war.”

Shmi shuddered. “Am I doing the right thing? Letting Qui-Gon test Anakin, allowing the Jedi to consider allowing him to join them? Is it the right thing to do?”

Obi-Wan opened his mouth to answer, and then closed it again, finally he took a deep breath, “I don’t know, Shmi.” Shmi sighed and the two of them fell silent. Force, I don’t know what I’m doing.
Quinlan and The Council

Chapter Summary

Qui-Gon is Qui-Gon, the Council is the Council, Quinlan makes a guest appearance in which he's mostly himself with a rare moment of being serious... And well, decisions are made, lives are changed, bonds are formed, and the foundations for the future are being set. (Although no one really realizes that quite yet...)

Chapter Notes

Okey dokes. Well, the past few weeks have been much fun. School is fantastic (please note the sarcasm, thanks). Thankfully I'd already had bits and pieces of this chapter done, so it was a lot of getting the pieces to go together... Hopefully I did that okay, I tried to keep it from being too chunky. It ended up... like 4,000 words over what I was expecting, but, oh well. Hopefully I got it to work okay.

Lots of things have happened... I'm very sad, because their little family is splitting up... But Anakin was very insistent that he wanted to try becoming a Jedi... So, we'll let him try.

Anyways, I hope you all enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Disembarking from his ship to see Palpatine smiling at him was not what Obi-Wan would consider a good way to start any venture. Nevertheless he gave a courteous bow to both Palpatine and Chancellor Valorum, giving his best approximation of a pleased smile when Palpatine smiled at him. He moved out of the way, gently bringing both Shmi and Anakin with him, as he felt the Naboo move to disembark, grateful for their presence so he didn’t need to do more than bow and smile.

He watched as the group moved off on their way to the 500 Republica where rooms had been made ready for the Naboo delegation.

He turned as Qui-Gon moved towards where he stood with the Skywalkers. “Are you ready?” Qui-Gon asked quietly. Obi-Wan turned his head so that he could watch Shmi and Anakin. They both exchanged looks and then turned to him where they all exchanged another round of looks. Obi-Wan felt his heart tighten painfully. The force seemed to whirl around him, whispering words he couldn’t understand.

The week long trip to Coruscant had been full of conversations, talking to Anakin about the option that Qui-Gon was presenting him with. Trying to explain what it meant to be a Jedi, trying to explain that even if Qui-Gon took him to the council that there was no guarantee that he would be accepted. Trying to explain that if he chose this path that Obi-Wan and Shmi would not be able to join him. Just desperately trying to explain.

Most of the things he told Anakin, Anakin already knew. Obi-Wan had done his best during their
years together to explain the Jedi way of life. But it was something Obi-Wan felt was hard to understand unless one tried to live it. To tell a person that a Jedi strove to not have attachments was far different than trying to live without attachments. There were some things that a person couldn’t understand until they tried to do it themselves. Anakin had never had to let go of the people he loved before. Not the way Obi-Wan had, not the way Shmi had.

Anakin nodded at Qui-Gon, suddenly quieter than he normally was. Obi-Wan gave him a small smile, taking one of his hands, Shmi took the other and together they boarded the transport that would take them to the temple.

It was painful, being back on Coruscant. Obi-Wan had so many memories here, so many that were beautiful, wonderful. Many that were painful. And that one memory seared into his very mind, painful and paralyzing.

Being here now Obi-Wan realized how important it had been for him to leave the Jedi. Those first two weeks after waking up had been confusing, and Obi-Wan had spent most of the time in a strange haze. Everything had seemed distorted then. Unreal. Almost like a fever dream.

Now, now that he had come to terms with the situation everything was so much more real. So much more painful. The transport turned the corner into another airway and Obi-Wan could see the temple straight in front of him. The pain was visceral. It had been so, so long. Over 25 years since he’d seen this temple on fire, seen the smoke rising from it. Found Masters curled over their padawans in a desperate attempt to protect them. Seen clones that he knew by name, had fought with and for, dead, some by his very own hand. Found hordes of Knights forming a barrier of bodies in front of the creche trying to protect the younglings.

No, the force had blessed him, had stopped everything from feeling real during those first two weeks in this time.

It felt very real now.

Qui-Gon’s eyes were on him. Condemning. Judging.

And suddenly Obi-Wan couldn’t find it in him to care what Qui-Gon thought of him. Obi-Wan was too old and too tired. And standing there staring at a temple that he couldn’t seem to stop seeing burn…

It was all the condemnation he needed.

Anakin’s hand tightened in his and Obi-Wan could feel his hesitation. “What do you think Anakin, do you like Coruscant better than all of the other places we’ve been?”

Anakin turned towards him, his brow scrunching in deep thought. “It is pretty wizard…but I think Cyrillia is still my favorite.”

Obi-Wan laughed, they had only visited Cyrillia twice, but between the podraces and the excessive number of droids it still remained Anakin’s favorite.

Anakin grinned at his laugh, but his frown came back quickly. “What if they don’t accept me?”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow. “Than I suppose you’ll be living on Tatooine with your Mom and Cliegg. You and Owen will get into all sorts of trouble together. Every now and then you’ll join me on my trips. Your life will continue and you’ll find that it has just as many adventures as it’s always had.”
Shmi laughed, “Maybe even more, since you’ll have a partner in crime.” She knelt next to her son a soft look on her face. “If the Jedi accept you, you will have a difficult life but you’ll be able to do so much good. And if they don’t accept you, then you will still have a difficult life but you’ll still be able to do so much good. Neither path is better than the other. Just different.”

Anakin nodded, and his fear calmed slightly. Obi-Wan could still feel his trepidation, but Obi-Wan didn’t blame him, change was frightening.

The transport pulled up to the temple and Obi-Wan took a deep breath before disembarking. He closed his eyes and reached out with the force. It was almost overwhelming being surrounded by so many force presences. It was warm and comforting and it was a little bit like coming home. It hurt.

Qui-Gon led them in, “I’ve already set a meeting with the council. Perhaps you could wait here while I take Anakin up.”

Shmi snorted, “Master Jinn, if I was going to sit back and wait I could have stayed in the ship. While I understand that Anakin may have to take the test himself, surely it’s permissible if we join him through the temple.”

Qui-Gon hesitated, but then nodded. “I suppose yes.” He sent a dark look at Obi-Wan, undoubtedly a warning not to do something terrible and dark, like try and blow up the temple.

Obi-Wan just raised an eyebrow.

Qui-Gon’s glare got even stronger, if that were possible, but he turned and started leading them through the temple. Shmi sent him a look that was part exasperation and part amusement, and Obi-Wan shrugged, how else was he supposed to respond to the constant suspicion?

The three of them followed Qui-Gon through the temple and Obi-Wan pointed to different things as they passed and told different stories. That was the stairwell where he’d tripped and almost landed on Master Yoda. And that was the way to the cafeteria where he and Quinlan Vos had one time incited a food fight. And that path led to the Room of a Thousand Fountains where he’d tried not to cause trouble, but hadn’t always succeeded. It was a good way of keeping himself distracted, even if it did feel him with painful nostalgia.

A few of the Jedi they passed stopped to watch them and Obi-Wan could feel their unshielded curiosity. Between their clothing, that clearly marked them as non-Jedi, Anakin’s bright force presence, and the fact that some of them recognized Obi-Wan from when he’d been with the Jedi, they were likely a goldmine for gossip.

They made their way further up the temple and Obi-Wan kept up his constant commentary, sharing stories from his youth, but keeping most of his stories to himself. He told the story about the time he and Garen had managed to sneak away from the creche, but had then gotten lost, while keeping the story about the time he and Anakin had challenged Quinlan and Aayla to a game of capture the tunic to himself. It was a somber thought, that that would not happen, could not happen. That someone else would train Anakin, would replace Obi-Wan in the boy’s life.

He let the thought go. This was the right course of action for Anakin. He had to remember that.

In almost no time they had made it to the council chambers. “If you will wait here while I speak to the council?” Qui-Gon didn’t wait for an answer before making his way into the chambers.

Shmi was staring out the window. “It’s beautiful.”
Obi-Wan joined her as Anakin ran to put his face right against the transparisteel, gaping at the busy city. “It’s certainly unique.” Obi-Wan agreed.

“This is so wizard! The view is amazing up here!”

“Better than Cyrillia?” Obi-Wan asked.

Anakin turned and made a face at him, “Do they have podraces here?”

Shmi laughed, “As far as you are concerned, no.”

Anakin pouted, but turned back to continue staring at the city.

The lift opened and Obi-Wan turned to as his name was called. “Obi-Wan Kenobi! I heard rumors that you were in the temple, but I didn’t believe them! What’s your ugly mug doing here?”

Obi-Wan laughed, “Quinlan Vos, as eloquent as always I see. I’ve been in the temple for less than an hour, how are there already rumors?”

The Kiffar laughed and Obi-Wan found himself caught in a large hug. “This is the temple, breeding ground of gossip that would turn your hair pink, surely you haven’t forgotten that?” Quinlan pulled back. “I can’t believe you had the gall to leave the order while I was on a mission! I come back and there are all sorts of scandalous rumors going around, and you didn’t even have the courtesy to let me know which rumors I should start!”

“How about none, Quinlan.”

The other man scoffed, “You obviously don’t know me very well. Don’t worry, my rumors are by far the best ones being spread.” He waggled his eyebrows at Anakin, “Although not all of them are appropriate to share around young ears.”

The boy was gaping at him, a mixture of delight and disgust. “You shouldn’t start rumors. That’s rude.”

Quinlan laughed. “Ah, but rumors are the lifeblood of the temple.”

Obi-Wan scoffed, “Maybe for you, Quinlan. But meet Shmi Skywalker and her son Anakin.” He smiled at Shmi who had a bemused look on her face. “Shmi, Anakin, meet Quinlan Vos, one of the worst scoundrels you’ll ever meet.”

Quinlan gave an exaggerated bow. “It’s certainly a pleasure to meet people as fine as you.” He winked at Shmi and Obi-Wan sighed.

Shmi just laughed, “You know, I do think it is actually a pleasure to meet you.” She smiled conspiringly, “It sounds like you’d be just the person to talk to if Anakin and I wanted to know about some of the things Obi-Wan got up to growing up.”

Quinlan beamed. “Oh, I could tell you all sorts of things.”

Obi-Wan closed his eyes. “Please keep it child appropriate, Quinlan.”

Quinlan sighed dramatically, “That takes out all the best stories!”

“Exactly.”

“Wait, I want to hear all the stories!” Anakin protested.
“Maybe when you’re older, Anakin.”

Anakin pouted, “That’s not fair!”

“Life’s not fair.”

Quinlan laughed, “Don’t worry, Anakin, I’ve still got plenty of great stories. For instance, when we were sixteen, the two of us and a few others were supposed to make our way to an Expo a few districts over, and then Obi-Wan had this brilliant idea…”

Obi-Wan groaned as Quinlan continued the story, adding far more dramatics than had actually occurred, but Anakin was obviously enthralled with the story, and Shmi looked as though she found it incredibly entertaining as well. He was never going to hear the end of this.

The council doors opened and Qui-Gon made his way into the room. “They’d like to speak with all three of you before they test Anakin.”

Quinlan’s story trailed off and he gave Obi-Wan a curious look. Anakin went a little pale, but then straightened his shoulders. Obi-Wan smiled at him encouragingly before turning to Quinlan, “It was good to see you, Quinlan, but it looks as though the council calls.”

Quinlan shrugged, “Oh, I’ll be waiting right out here. It’s been years, Obi-Wan, I have some questions.” Quinlan’s face went serious and Obi-Wan nodded.

He took Shmi’s arm to escort her and put a hand on Anakin’s shoulder in support and led the way into the council chambers.

The doors shut behind them and the lightheartedness that Quinlan had brought with him disappeared under the solemn stares of the council.

“It’s been a long time, Obi-Wan Kenobi.” Mace said solemnly.

“Five years, Masters.”

The room fell quiet again. “Brought us a youngling you have, tested you wish him to be?” Yoda asked.

Obi-Wan shook his head. “When Master Jinn crossed our path he felt strongly that Anakin would make a good Jedi and requested that he be brought to the Jedi. Anakin and his mother, Shmi, came to agree with him. I have no role to play other than that of support.”

“Tell you of his suspicions regarding the boy, did Master Jinn?” Master Yoda asked. Obi-Wan didn’t grind his teeth, but it was close. If Qui-Gon had already brought up his theories on Anakin’s status as the chosen one than Obi-Wan was going to be incredibly displeased.

“He has not.” He hesitated, “But I am aware of Master Jinn’s interest in certain lore, and I can guess what conclusions he has jumped to.”

“And do you agree?”

“I firmly believe that Anakin’s future is for him to create, and that he is capable of doing a great deal of good.” And it was true. Despite everything, Obi-Wan wasn’t sure he could ever fully believe that Anakin was the chosen one, not because he did not have respect for prophecy, or because he doubted Anakin’s skill or value. Merely because he had seen what the label had done to Anakin. Prophecy and destiny were heavy burdens to put on anyone, much less a child.
Shmi sent him a questioning look and he tilted his head to indicate that he would explain everything later.

He saw several of the councilors raise their eyebrows and exchange looks with each other. Mace however took the not so subtle hint. “Mrs. Skywalker, may I ask why you have brought your son to Coruscant now, and not when he was younger. Surely Obi-Wan has told you that he is far past the age we normally accept initiates.”

Shmi nodded. “I have known since Anakin was born that he was special. But given our circumstances there was nothing that I could do but protect him from those who would seek to use his gifts if they were to ever know. When Obi-Wan found us and freed us he was honest about what Anakin’s gifts meant.” She tilted her head, “He was of, what I’m sure you would consider, a more appropriate age. But we had just been freed from slavery, and I did not want to make a decision that could strip Anakin of his ability to make his own choices, not when that was all he’d ever known. Anakin is old enough now to have a better understanding of the consequences of his decisions.”

The council room was quiet for a long moment before Plo Koon spoke kindly, “And do you want to be a Jedi, Anakin?”

Anakin nodded fervently, “I really do. I want to help people.”

It went quiet again and Obi-Wan could sense that the councilors were communicating with each other through the force. “Then we will test you. Mrs. Skywalker, Obi-Wan, if you could leave Anakin with us?”

Shmi nodded, reaching over to squeeze Anakin’s shoulder gently before turning to make her way out. Obi-Wan gave Anakin his own encouraging squeeze before following her.

The doors closed behind them and Obi-Wan felt Anakin latch onto their bond nearly instantly. He sent a calming balm back, Anakin was more than capable of passing their tests.

Qui-Gon was out on one of the terraces when they made their way back to the waiting room, for which Obi-Wan was grateful. Still annoyed by his presumption in spouting prophecies and labels, and he had no desire to speak to the man right now. Quinlan however was still there, sitting quietly, a strangely serious look on the Kiffar’s face.

Obi-Wan hesitated only a second before moving to sit next to him, Shmi followed him, a comforting hand resting on his arm. “What do you want to know, Quinlan?” It was quiet for a moment before Obi-Wan felt Quinlan erect force shields around them to keep the conversation more private. This was going to be serious then.

Quinlan sighed, “You know, when you left, I was sure that you’d gone to Mandalore. That you’d decided that you loved that duchess of yours enough to leave the order.” Obi-Wan felt himself freeze at the mention of Mandalore and its Duchess. He could feel Shmi stiffen slightly in confusion. “And then I start hearing rumors of some guy going around figuring out how to free slaves.”

“What’s your question, Quinlan?”

Quinlan ignored his prodding, “After you left there were a bunch of whispers about how you’d broken down in the creche, that you stood there crying. The creche masters said they’d never felt such intense grief, yet somehow all you sent out to the babies was this pure, beautiful, nearly incomprehensible love. There were rumors that you’d gotten a woman pregnant and that you were leaving to raise your child.” He raised an eyebrow and gestured to the council chambers, “And those rumors are going to go through the roof now.”
“Anakin isn’t my son.”

Quinlan shrugged, “Oh, I know. You obviously love him, there’s no doubt about that, but the ages are all wrong. But not everyone uses their common sense around here.” Quinlan sighed. “We were worried about you, me, Luminara, Garen, Bant, all of us. One day you were fine, the next you’re mourning in the creche, and the next your gone.”

“I never intended to worry you.”

Quinlan nodded, “I know” He shrugged, “I don’t need to know why you left. I know you, Obi-Wan, you always have a reason, and I trust you completely. Why didn’t you reach out to us though? If something was wrong, why didn’t you ask for help?”

Obi-Wan looked away, staring out the windows at the bustling city. “I didn’t think anyone could help me.”

Quinlan was quiet for a long moment. “You know, I’ve met hundreds of people, I’ve fallen in love a dozen times. It’s the way I am. Yet I don’t think I would leave the order for any of them.”

“I didn’t leave for…”

Quinlan cut him off. “But you know? I might have left if you’d asked.”

Obi-Wan froze in shock. “You don’t mean that.”

Quinlan just raised an eyebrow. “I held your lightsaber after you came back from Melida/Daan. You threw it at me when I was teasing you. I’m not sure I’ve ever felt someone as determined to save people as I did then, holding your lightsaber. We grew up in the temple full of people whose life work it is to save people. But you at thirteen surpassed them all.”

“That’s hardly true, Quinlan.”

Quinlan sighed, “Will you let me hold something, Obi-Wan?”

Obi-Wan stared at the other man, surprised, Quinlan used his psychometry on missions when it was necessary, but he rarely used it for any other reason. What would Quinlan feel if he held something of Obi-Wan’s? What would he see?

Shmi squeezed his arm in silent support and after a moment Obi-Wan nodded. He slid his cloak off. It was the same cloak he’d brought with him when he left the temple. It was a familiar weight, one that helped him feel centered when he felt lost. Something that had followed him from the temple, to war, to the desert, back to the temple, and out of it. There was shelter in it’s weight and warmth.

Quinlan raised an eyebrow, perhaps surprised at the choice, but he slid it on and closed his eyes.

“What’s he doing?” Shmi asked quietly.

“Quinlan is skilled in Psychometry. He’s getting a glimpse of what I’ve done and what I’ve felt since I left the temple.”

Shmi raised an eyebrow curiously. “You trust him a great deal.”

Obi-Wan hesitated. He did. Despite everything that had happened with Quinlan. The way he’d fallen to the dark, the way he’d lied and betrayed the Jedi. Obi-Wan still remembered the way he’d looked at Obi-Wan with loss and confusion in his eyes. He remembered how Quinlan had tried so hard, and
fallen so far, all in an attempt to do what he felt had to be done to end the war, to stop Dooku. Obi- Wan still didn’t agree with Quinlan’s decisions, but he had, to a degree, understood them then, and he understood them now. Quinlan had been one of the few to survive Order 66, but had died several years before Obi-Wan had. Obi-Wan still remembered being on Tatooine and feeling his presence in the force disappear, just like all of the other Jedi. “I do.”

Quinlan opened his eyes and slid the robe off, handing it back to Obi-Wan quietly. “Will you ask me now?”

Obi-Wan stared at the other man, surprised and confused. How could Quinlan truly consider this? “You know they all think I’ve fallen.”

Quinlan snorted, “They already think I will.”

“Aayla’s already the right age to be taken as a padawan.”

“Master Tholme would teach her, if I left.”

It was a gift that Obi-Wan had never been given, having someone offer to leave a life they loved behind for him. But it was one he also knew he couldn’t accept. “You’ve known since you saved Aayla years ago, while you were still a padawan yourself, that you would take her as your padawan.”

Quinlan smiled sadly, understanding in his eyes, and then tapped the robe. “You wear your grief like a cloak, and your regret like a shield. For all your wisdom you’re still stumbling in the dark. I didn’t even see everything and I can already see things that you’re too blind to notice.”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow in question, and Quinlan’s smile shifted into a soft smirk. “What don’t I see?”

Quinlan’s smirk widened, “If you don’t know, I’m certainly not telling.

Shmi laughed quietly at that, “He’ll figure it out.”

Quinlan shrugged, “Maybe, but Obi-Wan’s always been a little obtuse. You’ll have to update me on how that situation is going when Obi-wan isn’t around.” The two of them shared a look and Obi-Wan sighed, partly in confusion, partly in exasperation. Quinlan smiled then, turning to Shmi, “He really does love you and your son.”

Shmi smiled, “I don’t need the force to know that.”

Quinlan turned back to Obi-Wan a thoughtful look on his face. “I never saw what caused the grief.”

It wasn’t a question, not even a request for information, but Quinlan had given him a gift he had never expected, and Obi-Wan found he wanted to repay it. “Sometimes, when I close my eyes I see the temple burn. The Jedi destroyed in a single moment. Younglings dead on the floor, their faces frozen in fear.”

Shmi gasped quietly but Quinlan met his eyes. “A vision?”

“A possibility. But one that I’ll never be able to unsee.”

Quinlan nodded, “I believe you.” He smirked, “I know there’s more to it, but I don’t need to know.” “I’ve never told anyone even that much.” After he had left the temple the idea of sharing anything
had never really occurred to him. Quinlan looked surprised at that, and Obi-Wan thought it served him right. Quinlan had surprised Obi-Wan, and turnabout was fair play.

“Well, I guess today is a day for firsts.” Quinlan stood, “I became a knight two years ago, you know. You missed my party.”

Obi-Wan laughed, “I’m sure you partyed enough for the both of us.”

Quinlan laughed, “Probably.” He stretched. “I suppose it’s time for me to go ask Aayla if she’ll be my padawan learner.”

Obi-Wan smiled, “She’ll be good for you.”

“I know. She’s terribly sensible, I don’t know how I’m going to survive it.”

Obi-Wan stood and gave the Kiffar a tight hug. “Thank you, Quinlan.”

Quinlan shrugged, “I’ll keep an eye out for Anakin, make sure he doesn’t get into too much trouble.”

“That’s not quite as reassuring as it could be, but thank you.”

Quinlan laughed, “I’ll have Aayla keep an eye out for him then.”

“That is far more reassuring, thank you.”

Quinlan nodded, still laughing, and gave another bow to Shmi. Obi-Wan watched him walk away to the lift. “Quinlan.” Quinlan turned, stepping back into the lift as it opened, an eyebrow raised, “If things ever get really bad, if you need me, give me a call.”

Quinlan cocked his head thoughtfully. “You gonna save me, Obi-Wan Kenobi?”

Obi-Wan hesitated, “If you let me.”

Quinlan laughed. “I’d let you.” And then the lift door closed and he was gone.

The grief hit Obi-Wan then. Almost overwhelming him, he fell bonelessly back onto the bench, suddenly exhausted. Shmi wrapped her arms around him, pulling him close. Obi-Wan took a deep breath, centering himself.

After a long while Obi-Wan slowly straightened, and Shmi loosened her grip, but kept him in a loose hug. “I apologize.” Obi-Wan said quietly, pushing the words past the lump in his throat, “I did not realize visiting the temple would effect me quite this much.”

Shmi smiled softly, but a little sadly. “It was your home for a very long time, of course it hurts being back here.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “It was my home. But you and Anakin gave me a new home.”

“We all gave each other a home. And while we may let our past go, we do not forget it.”

They fell silent and Obi-Wan stared out to where Qui-Gon was still on the terrace, looking past him to the chaos of the city. “Did you love him?”

Obi-Wan blinked and looked up, “Pardon?”

“Quinlan Vos, did you love him?”
Obi-Wan shook his head, bemused. “Not that way I think you’re talking about. It wasn’t like that between us.”

Shmi looked dubious but nodded, “And the duchess? Did you love her?”

Obi-Wan hesitated, he would have left the order if she asked. He had grieved when she had been killed. But then, what did he really know about love? “I…” he sighed, “I don’t know. I think so, but what do I know about love?”

Shmi smacked him lightly, “You know how to give it.”

Obi-Wan smiled at her. But sitting here in the temple that his former padawan had destroyed, he couldn’t quite bring himself to believe it. “Anakin’s doing fairly well in there. He’s gotten over most of his anxiety now.”

Shmi arched her eyebrow, “Good. Speaking of Anakin, are you going to explain what that exchange with the other Jedi meant?”

Obi-Wan sighed, “My former master, he was, or rather is, very fond of the ancient prophecies, the old Jedi lore. There was one prophecy in particular that he is quite fond of, that of the Chosen One. This prophecy states that there will be a vergence in the force, centered around a person who would bring balance to the force.” He sighed, “He searched for this child constantly, certain that that child would be born soon, would help bring the force back into balance. I’m fairly certain that he believes Anakin to be that child.”

Shmi was frowning, “You never spoke of this.”

Obi-Wan looked down, “Perhaps that was wrong of me. I won’t lie and say that the prophecy never occurred to me.” He smirked ironically at that, it was impossible for it to have not, given the situation. “But I couldn’t bring myself to speak of it.”

“How not?”

Obi-Wan hummed thoughtfully. “There’s a certain amount of irony in Master Jinn’s focus on this prophecy. Qui-Gon Jinn does not believe in prescience, and holds little stock in the unifying force and its whispers. It was a minor point of contention during my time as his padawan. You see, I am stronger in the unifying force than I am in the living force, although I’ve done my best to develop my strength in both, and I have a tendency towards prescience. Those bad feelings I mention every so often.”

Shmi scoffed at that, “All the time you mean. Bad luck follows you constantly.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, constantly was perhaps a stretch, but he had his fair share of poor luck. “But prophecies are rooted in the unifying force.”

“Then why is it that Master Jinn believes so strongly and yet you do not?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “Perhaps because he feels my feelings are so often proved wrong. He disregards that those feelings often led me to take actions that perhaps I would not have, making a path that led away from what could have happened.” He grinned wryly, “Of course, sometimes it just makes things worse. But I’ve learned that I can’t let the fear of making things worse stop me. I have to take the best course of action with what knowledge I have. I do not disregard my bad feelings, but neither do I let them control my choices.” He hummed, “Choices you see, make all the difference. A prophecy can come true a dozen different ways, it can also be averted. I can’t believe that things are set in stone.”
“So you don’t believe that Anakin is this chosen one?”

Obi-Wan looked up, “Frankly, I just don’t care. Anakin is Anakin. I want him to grow up, to be happy, to make this galaxy a better place. I want him to be the good person that you’ve raised him to be. And if along the way he fulfills a prophecy or two? Well, than that’s two mynocks with one blaster shot. But I would never wish for him to be labeled as some prophetic chosen one. To do that to a child would be beyond cruel. I wouldn’t wish it upon anyone.”

Shmi nodded, “I do wish you’d told me.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “It was unfair of me to keep it from you.”

“It was. But I forgive you, because you’re right. In the end it doesn’t really matter.” She smiled at him, “I admit, that I almost wish I didn’t know now. Knowledge can be it’s own form of slavery.”

Obi-Wan bowed his head, “I wouldn’t wish that on you.”

Shmi sighed quietly, and they sat there together in silence. Obi-Wan closed his eyes, feeling Anakin’s delight in his mind as he continued to pass the council’s tests.

“Did I ever tell you, what happened that day you came?” Obi-Wan blinked his eyes open and turned to look at Shmi, who was regarding him fondly.

Obi-Wan frowned, “I don’t think so.”

Shmi smiled, “Anakin had been excited for weeks, but he could never tell me why. And then the morning before you came, Ani woke up early. He kept babbling that his light was coming. It was so very odd, it was never 'the light', not even 'our light', it was always 'his light'. He had so much energy, was practically bouncing off the walls, just waiting for his light. By the time you arrived he’d been buzzing around for so long he’d actually fallen asleep again. Before you ever arrived, he knew you would come. It was one of the reasons I was able to trust you the way I did.”

Obi-Wan stared at her in surprise. “I didn’t know.” He grinned, "I had wondered though."

Shmi laughed, “Perhaps I should have told you, but that first little bit was still so tentative. By the time we were all comfortable it never occurred to me to say anything, because it was obvious to everyone that he loved you just as much as you loved him. You gave us light, Obi-Wan, you gave him light, when I feared he would be forced to grow up in darkness.” She tilted her head, “You worry sometimes, I think, that perhaps your motives were not always pure. That perhaps you’ve harmed us by trying to protect us. That your harming Anakin now by letting him join the Jedi.”

“Yes. Sometimes.”

“But your love is pure Obi-Wan. Are the decisions always right?” She shrugged, “Neither of us know, but it’s like you said before, we must make the decision that feels best with the knowledge we have.” She gripped his hand. “We will meet the consequences when they come. And married or not, on Tatooine or not, a Jedi or not. We will find a way to meet them together.”

Obi-Wan squeezed Shmi’s hand tightly. “I don’t know what I would do without you, Shmi.”

“You’d survive, I daresay, but it would certainly be much drearier.”

Obi-Wan imagined traveling the galaxy the way he had the past five years, but without her and Anakin. “Dreary would be a good word for it.” He tried not to think about what would happen now, with Shmi getting married and Anakin likely joining the Jedi.
Shmi hummed, “Now, about this Duchess.”

Obi-Wan felt his face turn scarlet. “You really shouldn’t listen to a word Quinlan says.”

“Having never met her, I can’t say whether or not I approve, I admit, she’s got some tough competition to beat to win my approval.”

Obi-Wan blinked, “Competition?”

Shmi laughed again, “It’s like Quinlan said, you can be strangely blind sometimes, but don’t worry, you’ll figure it out eventually.”

Obi-Wan spluttered, utterly perplexed. “I have no clue what you’re talking about.”

Shmi smiled, her eyes dancing with mischief. “I know. Once you’re ready to open your eyes, you will.” Obi-Wan opened his mouth to retort but Shmi continued, “But you were about to tell me about this duchess?”

Obi-Wan was saved by the door opening and Anakin coming out, a large, nervous smile on his face. “How do you feel?” Obi-Wan asked.

“A little nervous. But it was good. I stayed calm, just like you told me to, and did my best to do my best.”

Shmi smiled, “Well, than that’s all you can do.”

Anakin turned to Obi-Wan, his smile fading slightly, “They want to talk to you again.”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow at that. “Do they?”

Shmi’s eyes hardened. “You do know you aren’t a Jedi, if you don’t want to speak with them, you don’t have to.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “I know.” He hesitated, “But, I will.”

Shmi nodded, sighing quietly. “You’ve made the best choices you could with the knowledge you had.”

Obi-Wan wasn’t sure that was true, but he was grateful to hear it anyways.

He entered the council chambers calmly, striding to the center with an ease that belied the pain in his chest.

It was silent for a long time. The council appraising him with guarded eyes. Mace broke the silence first, “You should be aware that Qui-Gon Jinn has made accusations that you have fallen since leaving the order. That he suspects that you may have fallen in with the darksider that attacked the Naboo while you were on Tatooine.”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow. “And I suppose that’s why I put myself between the darksider and the Naboo?”

“Master Jinn suspects a ruse.”

“Not a particularly clever one.”

Mace leaned back, “Perhaps. How do you answer to these accusations. You are aware I’m sure, that
the Senate has long given the Jedi legal purview over those who’ve left the order.”

“I deny the accusation. I have not fallen, nor will I.”

Several of the councilors stirred at that. Master Yoda humphed, “Overconfidence you have. Tempting the darkside is.”

Obi-Wan frowned, “I was twelve years old the first time someone looked at me and told me that it was inevitable that I would fall. I was too old, too angry. I looked that man in the eyes and swore I wouldn’t.” He shrugged, “He didn’t believe me of course.” He crossed his arms behind his back and stared Yoda straight in the eye. “You are right, the darkside has its temptations. And it will always be there, poking and prodding, whispering promises. But it has no power that I do not give it. That is my choice. It has always been my choice, and will always be my choice. It is not overconfidence, Master Yoda. It is determination. I have seen what the darkness can do and it holds no temptation for me.” How could it? When he’d watched it destroy everyone he ever loved?

Several of the councilors muttered at that. Eeth Koth scoffed, “A few years out in the galaxy doesn’t make you wise, boy.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I don’t claim wisdom. All I claim is to know myself.”

Even Piell leaned forward, “Would you consent to a force scan? You must understand that this is highly irregular.”

Obi-Wan didn’t react, although he wanted to. It was incredibly improper for the council to request that of him, and they all had to know that. He may be under their legal jurisdiction if he were to step out of line, but they did not have the right to demand access to his innermost being when he had done nothing. It was a a nice simple trap though, if he were to refuse it would look as though he had something to hide. Which, given everything, he did, just not what they were assuming he had to hide. But to assent would be to allow them to peruse his inner being. They may not see his memories but they would still see things that they would not understand and that could very well lead them to demanding answers.

Plo Koon spoke up, “Surely that isn’t necessary. Obi-Wan has done nothing to warrant our suspicion. The Jedi way is not for everyone, there is no crime in leaving the Jedi. I have taken note of his actions since leaving the Jedi, and they have been exemplary.”

“Perhaps from your point of view, from another point of view his actions could easily be considered a power grab.” Piell countered.

Deep Billaba spoke quietly, “You are right Piell, he has, in his own way, amassed power, but he could not do what he’s done had he not. Are we suggesting that the freeing of slaves is dark?”

Even Piell shrugged, “I still believe that Kenobi should consent to a scan, his actions have been highly irregular, and I feel suspicious. Surely if he has not fallen to the dark side he has nothing to hide?”

“Would you consent to such a thing, Master Piell?” Obi-Wan asked quietly, “To allow a group of individuals put you on trial when you have done no wrong. The scan you speak of is meant for when a Jedi or former Jedi is brought to the council with criminal charges or evidence of falling.”

Eeth Koth frowned, “You have been brought before us on suspicion of falling.”

“Suspicion is not evidence.” Obi-Wan countered quietly.
Adi Gallia spoke, “And he came to us of his own free will, and for another matter entirely, he was not brought.”

“But consider,” Yarael Poof injected, “We’re considering taking a boy he’s raised into our home, into our order. Surely this requires that we be more cautious.”

Even Piell nodded, “Precisely.”

Mace finally spoke, “Obi-Wan is correct though, in that we have no reason to demand a scan, any scan done must be completely willing on his part.”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow, “And what price will Anakin pay if I refuse.”

Mace shook his head, “None. That should not have been insinuated.”

“Am I being asked by the council to submit to this scan?”

Mace sighed, “All those who wish for Obi-Wan Kenobi to submit to a scan from the council?” Masters Piell, Koth, and Poof raised their hands instantly, while Masters Rancisis, Mundi, and Tiin joined slower.

“And those who find it unnecessary?” Slowly the rest of the council raised their hands, all except Master Yoda.

The council waited as he humphed a bit, “Request a scan, I do not. But desire one, I do.”

Obi-Wan closed his eyes, because that didn't hurt him, it didn't. Even had the entire council desired a scan he was within his rights to refuse. He wanted to refuse. Part of it, he could admit, was pride. That they would take everything he had done and turn it into nothing but a scheme for power, it was an insult. And the entire council knew it. He discarded the thought, pride had no place here.

He turned to the force and let it fill him. He felt it soothe over the hurt being in the temple caused him. The pain speaking with Quinlan had pulled to the surface. The grief he felt at knowing that he would once again be alone, losing both Anakin and Shmi.

He didn’t open his eyes, “Is Anakin being accepted into the Jedi Order?”

It was silent for a long moment, “He is too old.” Mace said with a sigh in his voice, “But his foundation is sound. Should he choose to join, he may. There is a place for him with the initiates until a Master chooses him.”

Obi-Wan nodded. “I will not submit to a scan from the council.” He could feel the discontent from several councilors, but he couldn’t bring himself to care. “But I will submit to a scan by Master Koon and Master Billaba.”

Depa frowned, “You understand that you are not required to do this.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “I do. But if Anakin is joining the order than I do not want to leave room for doubt. What a person believes to be true can be just as dangerous as what is true, and rumors can be very damaging to a child. I request that if I pass this scan, that you will ensure that Anakin is not tainted by the beliefs of certain order members.”

There was muttering in the force from certain councilors but Depa nodded seriously.

Mace sighed, “We will watch over Anakin.” He frowned, “You realize that the sort of scan Master
Piell has requested can be uncomfortable?"

Obi-Wan nodded. “I am aware.”

“You are aware that you will have to let us through your shields, that we will not see your emotions or your memories, so much as we will see the core of who you are?” Plo clarified quietly.

Obi-Wan nodded. He had never participated in one of these during his time on the council, but he had read up on them once or twice.

The room was still for a moment before Plo rose from his seat, moving to stand next to him, Depa moved to join them. “Perhaps we could kneel, it would be far more comfortable for all of us, I believe.” Plo suggested calmly.

Obi-Wan smiled at that and knelt slowly with the other two, taking up a meditative pose. He slid slowly into meditation, he felt a gentle prod at his shields and recognized it as Plo. Carefully he reached out, tentatively brushing against the Kel Dor’s presence in the force. There was a gentle strength to Plo that always left Obi-Wan feeling humbled. Slowly Obi-Wan invited the other into his mind. Carefully shoring up his defenses around where Plo’s presence had entered. Plo’s presence shifted gently again his shields, adding his own layer of protection.

A second presence brushed against him, just as equally recognizable. There was a lightness to Depa, a bright passion that always left Obi-Wan feeling uplifted. He repeated the same process of gently inviting her into his mind and then shoring his shields back up.

Everything was still. Neither of the two councilors made any movement, adjusting themselves to his presence. There was a bright poke and Obi-Wan could feel amusement from Plo as Anakin poked again. Obi-Wan poked back softly with a gentle admonishment, Anakin’s response was an annoyed acknowledgment, and a quick complaint of hunger, before his presence retreated, Obi-Wan sent a wave of love after him.

There was the sense of gleeful laughter from Depa in his mind and Obi-Wan couldn’t help the way his own joy bubbled up.

Depa poked at him, and Obi-Wan instantly retaliated by poking back. Plo gave them both a nudge somewhere between tender amusement and quiet remonstration.

There was something strangely comfortable about the whole interaction, despite it taking place in his mind.

Slowly the other two slipped further into his mind. He tried to ease their way, but Obi-Wan had been building stronger and stronger fortifications around his mind since the first time it had been invaded when he was thirteen, and it went against all his instincts to allow anyone free perusal of his mind.

But the two Jedi were patient. Slowly Obi-Wan helped them slip through the first set of barriers, taking them a little deeper into his mind. It had been relatively easy to help the two Jedi through his shields, while they were a good defense, they were also flexible enough to allow him to build bonds, or share meditation with fellow Jedi, allowing them into the shallow recesses of his mind.

His barriers, on the other hand, weren’t meant for anyone to cross, and he had to fight himself to make way for the two Jedi to slip through. The two Jedi quietly slid through his mind, searching for darkness. He was surprised when Depa’s presence stopped at a fissure in his barriers, it reminded him of the way Shmi had run her hands through his hair while he was sick, the way her presence gently soothed over the shallow cracks.
Obi-Wan tried to keep his distance as the two Jedi explored this level of his mind, sinking into the force in an attempt at meditation. But even then, the two presences shining so brightly in his mind were distracting. He could feel a quiet hum through the force, and he sunk into it’s melody. He felt a soft brush against his inner barriers. Once again the two Jedi waited patiently as he endeavored to open himself enough to let them through again. His mind felt like it was screaming as the two Jedi slid through. He took the pain and released it into the force, but it kept building. He could feel Depa and Plo pause, and he ushered them on. They sped their search a little, and he could tell that they were trying to remain gentle. The next barrier was excruciating, and he could feel Plo and Depa’s hesitation, but Obi-Wan had to do this. He wouldn’t allow anyone on the council to take their suspicions of him out on Anakin.

As though summoned by his thoughts, Obi-Wan felt another prod in his mind from the bond they shared. This one far more tentative, as though Anakin were nervous. He reached out to Anakin and felt the boy cling to him tightly, confusion and anxiety waging a war inside him. Obi-Wan tried to calm him, sending soothing whispers through their bond. Anakin seemed to calm, but then poked at him, concern lacing the boy’s feelings. Obi-Wan tried to reassure him again, pushing the pain back to ensure that Anakin didn’t catch a whiff of it. Finally after a long moment Anakin retreated again.

Obi-Wan pulled himself back to where Plo and Depa waited patiently, Depa reached out to him, and Obi-Wan could feel her concern. Once again he felt her presence try to soothe him, helping to pull the pain away and release it to the force. He could feel her tentative question as to whether to continue and Obi-Wan pushed back with his determination. They came to the next barrier and Obi-Wan tried to repeat the process from earlier, tried to open himself to the two of them, Depa slipped through first and Obi-Wan felt the barrier crash back down. Obi-Wan tried not to scream as he pried his barriers open again, Plo slipped through and Obi-Wan let the barriers crash.

He fell into the force again, seeking a diversion from the pain of his mind being intruded.

The hum from early had strengthened and grown, and Obi-Wan could feel an actual melody now. He floated along in it, calmed by the steady beat and the flowing chords. After a moment he realized that the music felt familiar to him, although he didn’t think he’d ever heard such a song before. It was Plo and Depa. Obi-Wan felt the pain slip away as he focused on how within the force they each had their own melody, unique and perfect in itself, but equally capable of mixing and meshing with the melodies of others. He wondered what Depa’s would sound like if it was mixed with Mace’s. What Plo’s would sound like if played in harmony with Ahsoka’s. He followed the melody, distracted enough that he needed Plo to nudge him back when they reached the next barrier. The last barrier.

Obi-Wan woke up to a hand sifting through his hair. His head ached, his whole body felt sore and he felt distinctly disoriented. He reached out with the force carefully, to get a better grasp of where he was, he couldn’t sense any danger, but he could sense both Shmi and Anakin and they were both radiating concern and unease. He opened his eyes and groaned as the light assaulted them, “Obi-Wan?” Anakin’s voice reached him and Obi-Wan turned to him, ignoring the protest in his muscles. “Are you okay, Obi-Wan?”

Anakin’s anxiety was full blown, making it hard for Obi-Wan to think, or rather harder, the headache was doing a good job on its own. “Calm yourself, Anakin. I’m fine.”

There was a soft snort and Obi-Wan felt a brush of amusement in his mind, “I’m not quite sure you fully comprehend what fine means.” Plo’s voice rumbled quietly. Obi-Wan blinked and tried to reorient himself. He was still in the Council Chambers, Shmi and Anakin were kneeling on the floor beside him, Plo and Depa beside them, both of whom looked tired and drained. Mace was standing
behind Depa, a hand on her shoulder, his face was impassive, but Obi-Wan was familiar enough with the man to see that he had been concerned. Some of the councilors were still in their chairs, while a few were standing by the windows. There was a general layer of concern and a small amount of guilt permeating the room.

“We’ve sent for a healer, someone should be here soon.” Mace said quietly.

Obi-Wan grimaced and waved his hand in dismissal, “There is no need for that, I assure you, I’m quite fine.”

Depa laughed quietly. “If you can get to your feet before the healer arrives than we’ll believe you.” While it was said in challenge, Obi-Wan also recognized that she honestly thought he couldn’t do it, and was merely attempting to pacify him.

Obi-Wan pushed himself up, onto his elbows, preparing to move to his feet and Shmi pushed him back down, “Anakin, sit on Obi-Wan.” Obi-Wan groaned as Anakin obeyed his mother and sat on his stomach. There were a few chuckles from around the room at that but Obi-Wan was less amused.

“Really Shmi?”

“I sat in the waiting area for two hours, with no idea what was happening in here, and then suddenly Anakin is trying to tear down the doors and we come in to find you seizing on the ground. You are going to stay there until the healer says you’re fine.”

The look on her face made it clear that it wasn’t a suggestion and Obi-Wan knew better than to argue when a Skywalker had that particular look on their face.

“I really am fine.” He assured her. The flat look she gave him was answer enough.

“I was worried.” Anakin muttered, before shifting so instead of sitting on him, he was now laying on Obi-Wan, his face tucked into Obi-Wan’s shoulder. “You were in so much pain, and then you completely cut me off, and I couldn’t find you at all and I… I was scared.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “I’m sorry for scaring you. I didn’t mean to. I didn’t expect for things to get quite that painful.” No one moved, but there was the distinct feeling of people shifting guiltily. Shmi’s face went dark and her eyes went to Plo and Depa accusingly. Obi-Wan reached out and grasped her hand. “It wasn’t their fault.”

Shmi pursed her lips, “What were you doing exactly?”

“There was some concern that I had fallen, so I was reassuring them that that was not the case.” He glanced at Depa and Plo, “I do hope I passed.”

Plo and Depa exchanged looks, but both nodded, “Yes, you passed. We have reassured the council that you are still in the light.”

Obi-Wan nodded, and ran a hand down Anakin’s back. “Well, all is well that ends well, I suppose.”

Shmi snorted softly in obvious disagreement. There was a soft knock on the council doors before they opened and Obi-Wan held in a groan as none other than Vokara Che came in, the Twi’lek took one look at him and pursed her lips. “Obi-Wan Kenobi. Why am I not surprised.”

Anakin looked up, “Do you know everybody, Obi-Wan?”

Master Che snorted, “Unlikely, but Obi-Wan has found himself under my care far more often than
anyone with sense should.”

Obi-Wan wrinkled his nose at her. “I assure you, Master Che, it wasn’t by choice."

Shmi laughed at that, and Obi-Wan was grateful to see that the strained look in her eyes had faded a little, “Why does that not surprise me?”

Obi-Wan shifted Anakin so that he was no longer resting on top of him, but rather cuddled into his side. He had never once thought that he’d be sprawled out on the floor of the council chambers with Anakin cuddled with him. It made his sense of propriety protest, but he could ignore it for now.

Master Che knelt next to him and Obi-Wan could feel her bring the force around him softly to scan him. It was quiet for several minutes, Obi-Wan breathed out in relief as she brought a touch of force healing to his strained muscles. Finally Master Che sat back on her heels. She was frowning, but as far as Obi-Wan could remember that was her default expression when he was her patient. “Were you recently sick, Obi-Wan?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I was under the weather about a week ago.”

“He was consigned to his bed with a fever, he couldn’t keep anything down and had what appeared to be hallucinations.” Shmi told the healer.

“I don’t recall hallucinating.”

“You don’t recall much of anything that happened those few days.”

Obi-wan decided not to respond to that.

Master Che hummed, “I admit he’s in better physical condition then I expected.” She glanced at Shmi, “I’m assuming that’s your doing. He never showed any propensity for taking care of himself before he left. Hopefully, you’ve taught him some better habits.” Obi-Wan scowled at that. He could take care of himself just fine, thank you very much.

“I’m seeing some strained muscles, but Master Windu said there was seizing, and it looks as those should heal well enough, so long as you’re careful.”

Obi-Wan nodded at that, “Of course.”

“My biggest worry is that I’m seeing some very serious mental strain here. And by that, I mean you should be seeing a mind-healer.” She pursed her lips, “And given the way some of this strain has manifested itself, I suspect you also need a soul healer.”

Obi-Wan felt several people stiffen, “What did they do?” Shim’s voice had gone hard again, and Obi-Wan could feel both her and Anakin stiffen.

He reached out and grasped Shmi’s hand again, “Master Koon and Master Bilaba were very careful in my mind.”

Depa reached out to him, and rested her hand on both Shmi and Obi-Wan’s. “Plo and I both noticed some…” She hesitated, “Well, there was some very deep scarring.”

Obi-Wan shrugged. “I assure you, I’m fine.”

Shmi scowled. Anakin curled into him further. Depa and Plo exchanged disbelieving looks. Master Che scoffed.
Obi-Wan ignored them all.

“Have I passed your inspection, Master Che?”

She scowled. “Physically you do appear to be fine. While a force scan should not have caused you to collapse the way you did, it is not completely unheard of for those with strong barriers. You do however need rest, under no condition should you put your mind or body through any stress.”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Wonderful.”

Master Che sighed quietly, but stood, reaching out a hand to help Shmi up. Quickly the rest of them made it to their feet and Obi-Wan did his best to pretend that the movement didn’t make his head pound and the world spin dizzily. Thankfully, hiding discomfort was the sort of thing that you didn’t lose the talent for.

Vokara Che gave him a final look over and with another unhappy frown she bowed to the council and left.

The council had all taken their seats again, and the room went quiet as the council communed with each other in the force. Finally Mace shifted, resting his elbows on his knees as he leaned forward. “Anakin Skywalker, should you choose to accept, the council officially offers you a place as an initiate in the Jedi Order, under the understanding that there is no guarantee that you will find a master with whom you are compatible.”

Anakin went stiff under Obi-Wan’s hand and Obi-Wan could feel his emotions whirl through the entire spectrum, from anxious to excited, to scared, to delighted, and right back to anxious. He turned a little to look up at Shmi and Obi-Wan a hopeful look on his face.

Shmi smiled softly. “What do you think, Ani?”

Anakin nodded, but then bit his lip and looked at Obi-Wan, a question in his eyes. “It’s your choice, Anakin. You know your mother and I will support you.”

Anakin took a deep breath and looked at the ground for a long moment. Finally after a long moment he looked back up, “I, uh,” he looked at Obi-Wan again and screwed his face up in thought, “I thank the council for their, uh, consideration. And I… uh, I accept the offer you have all, uh, so kindly extended to me.”

Anakin glanced back up at him and Obi-Wan couldn’t help the smile that crossed his face at Anakin's careful mimicry of the way Obi-Wan often spoke.

Several of the councilors smiled as well, although their smiles disappeared quickly as they moved their focus to Obi-Wan. “Obi-Wan Kenobi, you have been cleared of suspicion of falling.”

Obi-Wan gave a short bow.

“We will give you all a short time to say your goodbyes before Anakin joins the initiates.”

Obi-Wan gave another bow, and Anakin awkwardly copied them. Shmi nodded her head respectfully, and together they moved out of the council chambers.

Obi-Wan found he was only slightly surprised to see that Qui-Gon was still there waiting. Surely he had had more to do in the past few hours than wait for them to be done.

Obi-Wan ignored him, kneeling to pull Anakin into his arms, Shmi immediately joined them. They
knelt there together, holding each other. “I love you, Anakin.” He whispered quietly into Anakin’s hair.

“I love you, Ani.” Shmi whispered.

“I love you, both.” Anakin’s arms tightened. “I’m gonna miss you.”

“We’ll miss you too.” Obi-Wan said quietly.

“Am I ever going to see you again?”

Shmi pulled back and looked at him. “What does your heart tell you?”

“I think so. I hope so.”

Shmi nodded, “Then we will.”

“Is this the right thing to do?” Anakin asked, nerves in his voice.

Obi-Wan paused, “Sometimes, we can’t know if the decisions we make are right when we make them. We can only make the best decision we can with what we know. We must trust ourselves, we cannot constantly second guess. And if this feels right, Anakin. Then do not doubt yourself.”

Anakin nodded. “It feels right.”

“Then trust that.”

“I’m going to miss you, Obi-Wan.”

“And I will miss you, Anakin.”

Anakin turned to his mom. “I’m going to miss you, Mom.”

“And I will miss you, Ani.”

The council doors opened and Mace, Plo and Depa came out. “Anakin, Master Windu and I can give you a tour of the temple and bring you to where you will stay with the initiates.”

Anakin nodded and then threw his arms around both Obi-wan and Shmi, pulling them into a hug.

Obi-Wan laughed as he and Shmi bumped heads. But returned the hug with equal ferocity.

“Be good, Anakin. Be happy.”

“I will.”

“We love you.”

Anakin nodded, “I love you, too.”

Obi-Wan pulled away and helped Shmi to her feet. Depa took a step forward and rested a hand on Anakin’s shoulder. “Come, Anakin. It’s time for Obi-Wan and Shmi to go.”

Anakin nodded and with one last quick hug followed Mace and Depa to the turbo lift. The four remaining in the room watched as the doors shut and the three of them disappeared. Almost immediately Shmi leaned against Obi-Wan, her arm wrapping around his waist.

Qui-Gon broke the silence first, turning to Plo, “I’m pleased to see that the council has accepted
Anakin into the Order.”

Plo nodded, “He is a good boy with a good heart. And he came with excellent recommendations.” Obi-Wan thought he saw Plo’s face twitch into a smile, but it was difficult to tell behind his mask. “If you could return to the rest of the council, Master Jinn, they wish to speak with you further in regards to the darksider you met on Tatooine.”

Qui-Gon glanced towards where Shmi and Obi-Wan stood but nodded, making his way past them and towards the chambers. Soon it was just Obi-Wan, Shmi and Plo in the waiting room.

“I thought, perhaps, that I could escort you out of the temple.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “We would appreciate your company, but if you are needed elsewhere, I assure you, I remember the way out.”

Plo laughed, “No, there are a few things of which I wish to speak.” He gestured towards the lift and the three of them made their way in. Obi-Wan was pleased to see that as soon as they began Plo turned to Shmi asking further about Anakin, and how they could best help him become comfortable. He could tell that Shmi appreciated it, and that it perhaps went a ways in helping her forgive Plo for his part in Obi-Wan’s earlier incident.

They made their way through the temple quickly, as Plo took them to where they could catch a transport back to their ship.

Plo turned to face both of them at the exit, “I want to assure you that the council will treat Anakin fairly, both in regards to certain councilors continued suspicion and the theory proposed by Master Jinn. You were correct in stating that his future is his alone to make.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Thank you, Master Koon.”

Shmi nodded, “Anakin is a good boy, he’ll be a blessing to your order.”

Plo nodded, “Of that I have no doubt.” He paused, “I will look out for him.”

Shmi smiled, “Thank you.”

The transport pulled up and the two of them made to board when Plo caught his attention. “And Obi-Wan, do be careful.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “May the force be with you, Master Koon.”

“May the force be with you, both.”

The transport door shut and took off back to the landing bays. A soft feeling brushed across him through the force and Obi-Wan froze, turning to look back towards the temple where Plo Koon was still standing, the illusion of fire still burning behind him. That feeling had not come across his shields the way a Jedi would normally brush against another, but through a bond.

Obi-Wan took a moment to look inward with the force, there were two new bonds. Kriff.

He sighed. He would deal with this later.

He put his arm around Shmi and turned his back to the temple. Anakin would be safe for now.

He hoped.
The force sang quietly, a lullaby of sorrow and comfort both. Yes, he hoped.

Chapter End Notes

So... That was the chapter... Dun dun dun... Except not, because that wasn't exactly an ominous ending, so the dun dun dun didn't quite fit. But I just kind of felt like putting it there. And who am I to deny myself a little harmless dramatic music?

Anyways, uh... If anyone wants to come say hi... I'm here on tumblr... https://feybarn.tumblr.com

ALSO, I think I've pretty much figured out who is going to be training Anakin... It was a relief to get that decided, although it won't come into play for a couple of chapters yet. But decisions are being made, the plot is moving forward... I don't know if you guys are at all excited, but I am... so yay!
Lives Colliding

Chapter Summary

It's time to go back to Naboo! Which means... Well, it means a lot of things. Fighting, mourning, hoping, growing... Changing.

Chapter Notes

So, I'm ahead of schedule as to when I thought this next chapter would be posted, and somehow I haven't fallen behind in school which is great (and thanks to those of you who have wished me luck in school, college may kill me, but it won't be this semester!). Mostly I'm ahead because the past week has been really stressful and writing this story has been really great stress relief.

Apparently making Obi-Wan feel stressed is a great way to help me feel less stressed. Strange that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“He’ll be okay.”

Obi-Wan glanced down at where Shmi was leaning against him. “I know.”

Shmi hummed, “You looked worried.”

“I look worried? You look worried.”

“I’m his mother. I’ll always worry about him.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “And to think you decided to adopt another son, apparently you needed more stress in your life.”

Shmi laughed, “I’m sure I’ll worry about Owen, but I can’t imagine him causing me more stress than you and Anakin.”

Obi-Wan snorted, “Me? Cause you stress. I will have you know, Shmi, that for no reason, should you ever have cause to worry about me.”

Shmi just laughed. “Yes, I’m sure you do think that.”

Obi-Wan rolled his eyes at her fondly, before noticing the stop they were coming to, “What do you say we take a quick side trip?”

Shmi’s eyes brightened at that, “I do want to see a little more of Coruscant.”

He led her off the transport and towards where there were speeders for rent. He quickly exchanged credits for one of the cheaper models, taking the chip for the speeder and giving Shmi a hand up and
into the speeder. “You’ll enjoy this, I’m sure.”

“Where are we going?”

“The best diner on this side of the Galaxy.”

Shmi raised an eyebrow, “That’s quite the claim.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I speak only truth.” He started the speeder and pulled it into air traffic, “Now, let me tell you a little bit about Dex.” He grinned at the thought of the Besalisk, and the two of them were off.

It had been years since Obi-Wan had seen Dex in this timeline. But despite that the Besalisk greeted him with the same delight he always did. Meaning Obi-Wan was greeted with a four armed spine crushing hug.

“Heard you left the Jedi, wasn’t sure I’d ever see your face in here again.”

“And miss you, Dex? I could never.”

The Besalisk grinned and ushered them into a booth. Dex turned towards Shmi, “Now, what’s a fine lady like you, doing with an absolute scoundrel like Obi-Wan.”

Shmi laughed delightedly, “Oh, he has his redeeming qualities.”

Dex laughed, “One or two, I suppose.” He turned back to Obi-Wan, “I’ve been hearing some interesting things about what you’ve gotten up to. I daresay the Galaxy wasn’t quite ready for you.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “They’ll adjust.”

Dex roared with laughter again. “I daresay they’ll have to. Or they’ll try to get rid of you.” He raised an eyebrow and leaned forwards. “Like I said, I’ve heard some interesting things about you. You best be careful. There are some nasty individuals out there.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Well, you aren’t wrong. Speaking of nasty individuals, I don’t suppose you have anything interesting to share about the going-ons of Nar Shaddaa?”

Dex shrugged, “All sorts of nasty things. I imagine you’d find it interesting to know that some of the Hutts there have shifted their slaves into a crime lord named Krayn’s slave compound. There’s no mistaking that most of the profit is still going to the Hutts, but it keeps the Hutt council happy, makes it look like they’re keeping their word to certain other parties.” Dex gave him a pointed look.

Obi-Wan hummed, “That’s pretty dangerous, putting all of the slaves in one place, people might get ideas.”

Dex shrugged, “Lots of guards, lots of beatings. Collars and chips have become standard to lower the chances of rebellion. You know how it goes.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Well, you know how those things can fail at the oddest of times.”

Dex nodded, “I’ll let you know if any other interesting tidbits come my way.”

“It’d be much appreciated. Something else that would be appreciated would be two of your specials. I’ve been telling Shmi here about how you have the best diner this side of the galaxy.”

Dex snorted, “I’ll have you know I have the best diner on any side of the galaxy.”
Their food was delayed by the Besalisk’s desire to see how much he could embarrass Obi-Wan by telling Shmi stories about him when he’d been younger before he’d left the Jedi. Shmi apparently felt as though it was her force-given duty to return the favor by telling Dex about any and every embarrassing thing he’d done since. Obi-Wan spent most of the time trying not to groan, “I don’t know why I like either of you.”

FLO chose that moment to roll up with their food, “That will be two Dex Specials. You have a good day Honeys.”

Dex laughed, “This is why we’re friends, there’s nothing better than a Dex Special.” He grinned, “On the house of course.”

Obi-Wan opened his mouth to protest but Dex just clapped one of his heavy arms on his shoulders and lumbered off.

Obi-Wan watched him go fondly. Dex was something special. He grinned at Shmi and the two of them dug into their nerfburgers. Obi-Wan grinned. Terrible, horrible, utterly unhealthy food, sometimes it was just what he needed.

Shmi hummed thoughtfully, “This should not be nearly as good as it is.”

“I know, it’s one of the great mysteries of life.”

They finished their meal and Obi-Wan waved to Dex who was back behind the counter. “What do you say we take the speeder for a spin around Coruscant before we go back?”

Shmi smiled, “Well, I certainly wouldn’t say no to that.”

They hadn’t made it far on their tour before Obi-Wan’s comlink chimed. He glanced at it, but didn’t recognize the com id, “Kenobi.”

“Obi-Wan Kenobi, this is Queen Amidala of the Naboo.”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow in surprise, “Your Highness, may I be of service?”

“My handmaiden, Padme, has informed me that you extended an offer of help, should I choose to return to Naboo, in the event that the Naboo did not receive aid from the senate.”

Obi-Wan felt his stomach clench, “I did indeed. The offer still stands.”

“We plan on returning at once, if we might continue with the same arrangement that brought us to Coruscant.”

“Of course, Your Highness. We will meet you on the landing pad.”

“Naboo thanks you for your aid, Obi-Wan Kenobi.”

The com call ended and Obi-Wan took a deep breath.

“What do you think they are going to do?”

Obi-Wan turned to Shmi as he directed the rented speeder back the way they’d come. “Something crazy.” Shmi arched an eyebrow and gestured for him to continue.

“While I can’t be certain, I imagine Theed is swarming with droids, now we’ll need to get into Theed in order to get to the leader of the Trade Federation, so that we can, ah, negotiate their retreat. So
we’ll probably have to host a large scale distraction outside of Theed to draw out the droids, while simultaneously sending a few pilots out to destroy the droid control ship to keep that distraction from being completely wiped out, while also sending a team in to infiltrate the palace and get to the leader.”

Shmi nodded, “I see.” She pursed her lips, “Given how few of us there are, I can see that being quite problematic.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “You know, I’m sure Dex could find you somewhere to stay until I return.”

“You’re not leaving me behind.”

“I volunteered my own services to the Queen, you have no obligation. It will be very dangerous.”

Shmi shrugged, “Then it’s a good thing you and Jango have made sure that I can take care of myself.”

“It’s…” He sighed, “It’s not the same. We taught you how to protect yourself, not how to run into danger. And this will be dangerous.”

“Are you asking me to do nothing when there are people that need help?”

Obi-Wan hesitated, “I am asking that you consider it, consider yourself, and Anakin, and Owen, and Cliegg. You’re engaged to be married, you’ve got a whole new chapter of your life opening for you, and I want you to live to experience that, and this will be a battle, and I can’t guarantee you that I’ll be able to keep you safe.”

Shmi was quiet for a long moment, “I can’t, Obi-Wan, I can’t sit here and do nothing.”

Obi-Wan sighed, “I know. But I had to ask.”

He pulled up to the speeder rental and returned the chip. They were quiet as they walked from the rental place to the landing pad where their ship was. “You know,” Shmi started, “You could ask for help.”

Obi-Wan blinked and glanced at her, “Help with what?”

“The situation on Naboo.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I think the Queen has already sent a request to the Jedi, which is far more likely to be met with success than if I were to request aid.”

Shmi rolled her eyes, “I wasn’t going to suggest the Jedi.”

“Oh,” Obi-Wan blinked in confusion, “Wait, who were you suggesting I ask for help, then?”

“Jango.” The way Shmi said it, suggested that Obi-Wan was ridiculous to not have come to that conclusion himself. But given the way the day had gone, Obi-Wan felt it was completely reasonable to still be thinking about the Jedi.

“I don’t know that this is really the sort of job that Jango takes anymore.” He snorted, “And I’m not sure that I can afford Jango’s rates.”

Shmi was quiet and Obi-Wan could tell she wasn’t pleased with his answer.

“It won’t hurt to ask.” She hesitated, “But, please, for the love of the force, don’t bring up payment
unless he brings it up first.”

“Generally when hiring bounty hunters…”

“I’m not talking about how you hire bounty hunters, I’m talking about you and Jango.”

Obi-Wan hesitated. “I, well, yes, I suppose I could ask him.”

Shmi nodded, “Good.”

Obi-Wan hoped that Shmi wouldn’t be too disappointed by the results of that conversation.

Obi-Wan walked down the ship’s ramp quickly, moving to where the Naboo entourage stood with Palpatine and Qui-Gon. “Your Highness. We’re ready to depart when you are.”

Sabe nodded her head regally, even as Palpatine shook his head. “Your Highness, I must beg you to reconsider, if you were to fall into the hands of the Trade Federation they would force you to sign their treaty.”

“I will sign no treaty.” There was a steel to her voice that no one could miss and Palpatine nodded, backing down.

“We will have to trust in your strength.”

What was the original plan, Obi-Wan wondered. How would the galaxy change if they failed on Naboo this time? Yes, Palpatine was still poised to benefit from the situation, because Padme had once again called for a vote of no confidence. But Obi-Wan was of the opinion that Palpatine never did anything unless it could benefit him in at least six different ways. How would the subjugation of Naboo benefit him?

Obi-Wan pushed the thought aside for later consideration. For now he would work on making sure that Naboo wasn’t permanently subjugated.

Sabe was tilting her head in acknowledgment and she and the handmaidens were moving towards Obi-Wan’s ship. Obi-Wan could see Shmi standing at the top of the ramp, quietly welcoming them on board.

Obi-Wan turned to follow them, but a hand touched his arm and Obi-Wan barely kept himself from jerking away violently. “Queen Amidala said that you were the reason that they were able to so quickly get off of Tatooine.” Palpatine said, that horribly sincere looking smile on his face, “I must thank you. You’ve done both Naboo and me a great service. I admit I feared the worst when we lost contact with Naboo.”

Obi-Wan bowed his head, “We must thank the force, I was merely in the right place at the right time.”

Palpatine laughed genially, even as the touch on his arm turned into a supposedly friendly hold, “The right place and time mean nothing if a person is not willing to do the right thing, and you were completely willing to do the right thing, we must not discard that.”

“You are too kind, Senator. Anyone would do the same.”

“But not anyone would offer to help take on a droid army.” Palpatine gave him a look full of worry
and concern. And where did that man learn how to act? He really was terrifyingly good at it. “To think that if this goes wrong… the coalition could very easily fall apart if we were to lose you.”

“Well, I shall endeavor to survive the experience.”

“See that you do. I fear that I will have no more luck in convincing you to rethink this, than I had the Queen.”

Obi-Wan shook his head, “No, I fear my mind is quite made up. But it appears that Shmi has readied the ship for departure, I would hate to keep her waiting.”

“Are you taking your family with you? Surely you can convince them to stay here on Coruscant, Naboo can’t be safe for them. I can find them a place to stay if that’s the worry.”

Obi-Wan smiled, even as the idea of leaving Shmi with Palpatine made him sick to his stomach. “Once again you are too kind. But Shmi has made her mind up, and I have been unable to change it.”

Palpatine sighed heavily. “I fear I will have no sleep until I hear word from Naboo. First the Queen, then you, and now your family.” He shook his head. “Do promise to be careful.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “I shall do my best to keep all those that are dear to us safe. The best of luck in the Senate.” He bowed a final time and pulled his arm out of Palpatine’s grip, turning to leave.

“May the Force be with you.” Palpatine called, and Obi-Wan held back a shiver, receiving that farewell from a Sith Lord was anything but comforting, it was quite the opposite actually. It felt like a warning. It felt like a threat.

Obi-Wan stirred from his meditation when Shmi entered the room. He opened his eyes to find her sitting on the edge of his bed. “I thought you’d gone to bed.” He said quietly.

Shmi shrugged, “I could feel how nervous the handmaidens were, I got them some tea, thought I’d see if you’d like some as well.”

Obi-Wan shook his head. “No, I’m quite fine.”

Shmi nodded and pushed herself back so that she was leaning against the wall of the ship. “That was an interesting meeting with the Queen.”

Obi-Wan pulled himself from the ground and sat next to her on the bed. “Which part?”

“Well, the tension between you and Master Jinn was interesting. The surprise Gungan army was a nice touch. The debate between Captain Panaka and Master Jinn was entertaining.”

Obi-Wan laughed, “Captain Panaka and Master Jinn don’t quite see things the same way.”

Shmi hummed, “Captain Panaka is worried for his people and he is worried for the Queen. What is Master Jinn worried about?”

“I’m sure he’s also worried for the people of Naboo. And he is charged with protecting the Queen.”

“But?”

“I suspect that the council sent Qui-Gon in the hopes that the Queen’s actions will draw out the
darksider that attacked us on Tatooine. It has been some time since someone so proficient with the lightsaber and so deeply immersed in the dark side of the force has shown their face.”

“So he is particularly dangerous.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “He could be. The council likely suspects that he is a Sith.”

Shmi nudged him, “And what does that mean, for those of us who don’t know Jedi lore and history.”

Obi-Wan closed his eyes, thinking about the Sith he’d met. “If you listen to a Sith talk about his beliefs… it’s incredibly logical. They believe in passion. They believe that passion gives them strength, that strength gives them power, that power will lead them to victory. And that through victory they will be free.”

“It sounds…” Shmi hesitated.

“It sound good, and logical, and desirable. What more could we want than freedom?”

“That’s… well, yes. That’s what I thought.”

“Do you remember when we were on Mon Cala?”

Shmi looked surprised and a little confused at the change of subject. “Yes. I don’t think I’d ever seen that much water in my whole life. I won’t forget that as long as I live.”

“Do you remember the storm?”

Shmi shuddered. “I thought we were going to die. The way the waves crashed. The sound.” She shook her head, “Those were the longest three days of my life, and I’ve lived through dozens of sandstorms.”

Obi-Wan smiled at that, “Let’s be honest, to a water dweller, sandstorms are equally terrifying. But you understand them, you know how to handle them, and so your fear has turned to caution. But imagine that storm on Mon Cala, remember how the whole world felt with that storm raging around us. That’s what the warrior on Tatooine felt like in the force. He felt like a force of nature. Foreign and terrifying and with enough power to destroy you without trying. That’s the sort of freedom the Sith are searching for. Not the freedom to live and love, but the freedom to destroy anything and everything around them, the power to do as they please, to become so strong and so powerful that nothing can stand against them.”

“Can we?”

“Stand against them?”

“Yes, how can we stand against a storm like that?”

Obi-Wan moved slowly, moving to sit next to Shmi on the bed.

The rage, the anger, that hate. He remembered it pounding down around him. *If you aren’t with me, than you are against me.* Hotter and more painful than the molten lava that surrounded them. *You turned her against me.* He remembered it pounding and beating into his mind, more painful than the kick to the chest that sent him flying. *Don’t make me kill you.* He remembered feeling like he was going to drown in the darkness. *You underestimate my power!* He remembered the anger, the hate, the rage. *I hate you!*
“The same way we stand against anything. We find our peace, we stand our ground and we face whatever it is with hope, and love, and the determination to persevere.”

“And if that’s not enough?”

He remembered desert storms, and Alderaan’s passing. He remembered standing on a death star, a farm boy, a princess, and a smuggler just across the way, a warped version of his brother before him. “Then we hope we can get in a few good hits before they take us down, we buy those we love as much time as we can, and we have faith that whoever we leave behind is stronger than we were.”

Shmi sighed and shifted until her head was on his shoulder. “There’s a storm coming.”

“There always is.”

He woke to his chrono beeping. He yawned as he moved as slowly as possible, trying not to wake Shmi. He headed to the cockpit, they were going to be dropping out of hyperspace soon, and Obi-Wan needed to calculate the next jump.

He passed a pacing Captain Panaka with a nod. The man nodded back but Obi-Wan could see that he was distracted, muttering to himself, eyebrows scrunched together in thought.

Obi-Wan wished he felt confident enough to reassure him. But he couldn’t, not in good conscience. There were too many small changes, and Obi-Wan had seen plans fail or succeed because of the smallest of things, he couldn’t depend on past victories.

He passed by R2 who gave him an enquiring beep as he passed and Obi-Wan waved his hand towards the cockpit in explanation.

He held in a laugh as he walked into the cockpit to find that Ric Olie had decided not to use Anakin’s room, but had instead found a blanket and was sleeping against the wall. Ric had offered to do the next jump, but Obi-Wan frankly preferred doing it himself.

That and he needed to make a com call before making the jump.

He made the calculations for the next jump into hyperspeed just as they came out of the first jump. Part of him was tempted to just make the jump, did he really need to have this conversation? But no, he had promised Shmi.

He hadn’t actually used his com to call Jango since Jango had spent that year helping him train. For a long moment after he commed he thought that Jango wouldn’t answer. He tried not to be too grateful for the excuse to delay this doomed conversation.

“What.”

Obi-Wan blinked in surprise at the curtness of the greeting. “I apologize, is this a bad time?”

Jango cursed quietly and Obi-Wan thought he heard the sound of blaster fire. “No, it’s fine.”

“Are you in the middle of a fight?”

Yes, that was definitely the sound of blaster fire in the background. “I said it was fine, Obi-Wan. What did you need.”

Obi-Wan hesitated, “No, I apologize, I shouldn’t have commed. It’s not important.”
“You wouldn’t have commed if it wasn’t important.” There was a grunt, before Jango barked out curtly, “If you aren’t going to use that blaster than get out of the way!” It took Obi-Wan a second to realize that Jango wasn’t talking to him.

“Yes, well, this really doesn’t seem to be a good time, and I really do need to make the jump to hyperspeed. I’m sorry for bothering you.”

Jango just grunted, “Where you headed?”

“Naboo.”

“I’ll comm you when I’m done with this bunch.”

“That’s not necessary. You seem to have…” Obi-Wan trailed off. The sound in the background, he could have sworn he heard… He felt dizzy, disoriented. “Good luck with your hunt, Jango.”

He ended the call without waiting for a response, turning immediately to the ship console. His hands were shaking. The stars blurred outside of the ship as they made the jump and Obi-Wan found his own eyesight blurring.

For a moment he had thought he’d heard droids. Not just any droids, but those blasted trade federation droids. But he couldn’t have. It was Jango’s voice. That was all it was. He had heard Jango’s voice, and blaster fire, and his mind had associated it with the wars. That was all it was.

He closed his eyes and collapsed into the pilot’s seat. ‘We’ll get rid of these seppies, General. Not to worry.’ There was an explosion and the blue image blurred and then shut off. Obi-Wan closed his eyes, the only mourning he was allowed as he felt Jumper’s life force cut out, along with half his squad. He whirled his saber and jumped back into the fray, Boil and Waxer at his back. Why were they even on this planet? The rumors that Grievous had been spotted here were just another trap that they’d had no choice but to walk into.

‘We can hold on until you get here, General.’ Obi-Wan felt sick to his stomach, because he knew just as well as Sass did that there was a high chance that he wouldn’t make it in time. Not without condemning the squad he was with. He could hear the droids over the comm, their awful voices and perfectly timed steps. There was blaster fire. Here and there and everywhere. His lightsaber whirled catching the bolts and sending them back, slashing through as many droids as he could. Cody was behind him, his voice strong as he directed their squad. And on the comm more blaster fire rained down, and he could hear Sass and Deadshot and Longface, until the moment the three of them were overwhelmed by the countless droids. Because there were always more droids, and Obi-Wan couldn’t keep his men safe.

And Cody’s hand was on his shoulder, and Obi-Wan wished his commander would stop comforting him. Cody kept losing brothers, yet somehow he still trusted Obi-Wan, and Obi-Wan knew he would fail him someday, the same way he seemed to fail all of these men.

There was blaster fire, and droids, and Obi-Wan could hear the voices of his men as they were cut off. He felt them die, each and every one of them, and he just wanted this war to end.

There was blaster fire, and droids voices, and a laughing voice as his Commander handed him his lightsaber. And then there was a cannon shooting him from a wall. His men felt different in the force, and everything felt wrong. He sunk down into the water and wished he could drown. He deserved this. For every man he hadn’t been able to save, for every man he had sent to their death.

He pulled himself from the water, crawling away, ‘No one could have survived that fall.’ He could
still hear blaster fire, the last of the droids were being destroyed, and he wished he had died. Since when had Cody ever left a stone unturned, when had any of his men ever believed he was easy to kill? His men had just tried to kill him, but he couldn’t help but wonder if they were letting him live. But did it even matter? He could hear his men, that weren’t his men anymore, he could hear blaster fire, and he could hear those blasted droids.

“Kenobi! Kenobi!”

Obi-Wan tried to open his eyes, but barely managed to squint. “What happened?” He was on his knees on the floor.

Ric Olie’s face came into focus in front of him. “I woke up when you fell off your chair. You were shaking pretty bad, and you didn’t hear me when I called. I was just about to go get help.”

Obi-Wan shook his head. “That’s not necessary.”

The pilot didn’t look convinced, “You don’t look very good.”

“Nothing a little sleep won’t fix.”

“What happened?”

Obi-Wan wasn’t sure, but he had his suspicions. “I went through a procedure while on Coruscant, I believe that was just a delayed after effect.”

“That was three days ago.”

“Yes, I imagine that was the end of it.”

Ric looked as though he wasn’t sure he believed him, so Obi-Wan pushed himself to his feet. He moved to the console and started checking their progress. The best way to convince a person that nothing was wrong, was to act as though nothing was wrong.

Sure enough, after a few moments he could feel the pilot relax. “How’s our progress?”

“We’ll be there within two days.”

Ric nodded, “The Queen will be pleased to hear that.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Yes, I imagine she will be.”

They spoke for a few more minutes before Obi-Wan excused himself. He wished he was wearing his cloak so he could hide his hands in his sleeves. He could feel them shaking still, and it had been force of will that had allowed him to keep it hidden from Ric.

He wished he was surprised that Qui-Gon was lurking in the passageway. “I sensed a disturbance in the force. What were you doing?”

Obi-Wan kept his face placid, “Nothing you need to worry about.”

Qui-Gon clenched his jaw. “I will not allow you to endanger the Queen or the Naboo.”

“I have not, and will not, endanger them. Your suspicions are baseless. Surely the council informed you that I have not fallen.”

For a second Qui-Gon seemed to consider that, “They did.” Obi-Wan almost breathed a sigh in
relief, but the relief was cut short when Qui-Gon’s face hardened, “But I must also trust my instincts. I felt a disturbance, and I have no doubt that you were the cause.”

Obi-Wan opened his mouth, unsure how to defend himself, but also understanding that if they were to work together on Naboo that there needed to be some level of trust. “I received a vision, of sorts.”

Qui-Gon looked like he didn’t believe him, and Obi-Wan prepared himself for the next round of interrogation. They were interrupted by a several sharp beeps and whistles and Obi-Wan turned to see R2-D2 trundling towards them. R2 kept beeping and Obi-Wan was tempted to chastise the droid, there was really no need for such vulgar language. And why had Obi-Wan allowed Anakin to convince him to learn binary? He had survived well enough last time around without binary. He blamed it on how adorable Anakin had looked when he’d been asking, with his bright blue eyes, and young eager face.

“Is something the matter, R2?” R2 whistled sharply again, and Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow. “Was that really necessary?” The astromech ignored this, bumping up against his leg. Obi-Wan moved to the side to let R2 pass, but the droid just insistently ran into him again. With a sigh, Obi-Wan allowed the droid to shepherd him down the hallway.

Qui-Gon stared after him in shock and Obi-Wan decided to take the escape that R2 was offering him. R2 kept pushing at him until they reached Obi-Wan’s rooms and Obi-Wan blinked down at the droid in bemusement. “Not that I’m not grateful. But was there a reason for that?” R2 whistled something incredibly uncomplimentary and Obi-Wan figured that was the best he was going to get. “Well, thank you.”

He opened the door to his room and R2 rolled in as though he owned it, Obi-Wan blinked in surprise when the droid immediately started scanning the room, before taking up position in the corner.

Obi-Wan tried to decide whether it was worth listening to the droid swear at him in binary again to ask what he was doing. “Are you going to be staying in here for the rest of the trip?” If R2 had eyes to roll, Obi-Wan was fairly sure he would have just rolled them as the droid beeped at him. “My hardware is not malfunctioning!”

R2’s reply was both sarcastic and indignant. Obi-Wan glanced down to see that, yes, R2 was right, his hands were still shaking with faint tremors.

“It’s nothing to worry about. I just…” What, had a small mental break? “I just need to meditate.” R2 whistled angrily. “I’m not tired.” Beeps. “Shouldn’t you be pestering the Queen and her handmaidens?” More swearing in binary. “I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself, thank you.”

“Are you arguing with a droid?” Obi-Wan turned to see Shmi pushing herself up onto her elbow, a bemused look on her face.

“No.”

A grin crossed her face, “Are you having an argument with a droid and losing?”

“No, I am not losing an argument with R2, because we aren’t arguing.”

R2 whistled angrily and Shmi laughed. Obi-Wan decided that he did not want to have to deal with the two of them ganging up on him.

“We’ve got a while longer before we get to Naboo, and we’re still in the middle of the night cycle. I’m going to try and get a little more sleep.”
R2’s whistle was unnecessarily smug.

He dreamt of men he trusted, blaster fire, and the mechanic sound of droids talking.

Obi-Wan wasn’t sure if he should be amused, grateful, or suspicious of the way R2 kept Qui-Gon away from him for the rest of the trip to Naboo.

Either way Obi-Wan decided to accept it without too many questions, he didn’t really want to discuss what had caused the disturbance with Qui-Gon. Partly because he didn’t completely understand it in the first place, and partly because even after all this time it still hurt. Instead he spent most of the next few days meditating.

Something had happened earlier. He still wasn’t sure if he’d really heard a battledroid over the comms. The trade federation hadn’t yet made the number of droids that they would, and Obi-Wan doubted the trade federation had them spread very far throughout the galaxy, what were the odds that Jango had run into some wherever he was.

No, Obi-Wan was tense, on edge, tired. He was hearing things, it was nothing more than that.

The way Obi-Wan had reacted, that was what worried him. He’d zoned out. He’d gotten lost in the memories. He’d spent the next several hours with hands that he almost couldn’t stop shaking. That hadn’t happened since his first year on Tatooine when he’d been so broken that it was amazing Vader hadn’t found him, with how much pain made it past his broken barriers.

He breathed deeply, searching for peace in the force.

His mind was in disarray. As much as it pained him to admit it, Master Che was right, his mind was messed up. If he was honest, it had been that way for a very long time, but he’d had it under control, reinforcing broken barriers, creating new ones when necessary. But the scan and the stress it put his barriers under… well, when Master Che said he needed to see a mind healer, she was right. She was probably also right about the soul healer, but neither of those were likely to happen. Some things just weren’t good ideas if you had traveled back in time.

He felt them come out of hyperspace and he readied himself to go back to the cockpit to take the ship down to Naboo.

Shmi dropped something in his lap and Obi-Wan glanced up and then back down at his lap, where his communicator now rested. “Jango tried to get ahold of you.”

Obi-Wan glanced down at the comlink, grabbing it as he stood to make his way to the cockpit. He wasn’t sure why Jango would be contacting him, particularly since Obi-Wan had ended the call rather abruptly. He pressed the button and blinked in surprise as Jango’s voice came over the comm, giving out a set of coordinates before ending the message.

Coordinates, why would Jango send him coordinates?

He reached for his holopad and quickly checked the coordinates, he frowned as he realized that they led to a relatively unpopulated portion of Naboo. He quickly pulled up a map of the area, it was relatively close to where he thought he remembered the Gungans having gone into hiding. Fairly close to where Padme had asked him to bring them down.

He closed his eyes, refusing to consider why Jango had sent him these coordinates. “I thought you said he was busy.” Shmi said quietly from behind him.
“He was.”

“You didn’t even ask him, did you?”

“He was being shot at, I wasn’t going to distract him.”

Shmi hummed, and Obi-Wan could feel her disappointment. “How close are we?”

Obi-Wan glanced at the coordinates again. “Within the hour. Would you tell our guests?”

Shmi rested a hand on his shoulder. “He’s not going to hurt you, you know.” Obi-Wan didn’t respond, not quite sure what she meant, and after a moment Shmi left.

There was a questioning beep and Obi-Wan wondered when R2 had snuck in. “No one, R2, she wasn’t talking about anyone.” R2 beeped again, and Obi-Wan couldn’t help the way his lips twitched up, “That’s very kind of you to offer, but there really isn’t anyone for you to electrocute.” R2 whistled, “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Obi-Wan wasn’t sure what he’d expected to find at the coordinates. But it wasn’t this. “You’ve been breaking into the camps.”

Jango leaned against the tree behind them, and Obi-Wan was positive that his helmet was hiding a smirk. “Figured the senate would be as useless as they always are. Thought I’d get the process started.”

“Well, you’ve certainly done that.”

Padme was approaching them, a small smile on her face. “I cannot thank you enough for what you’ve done for us.”

When Jango responded his voice had shifted from amused to cold and bored, “Don’t thank me, I’m just doing what I’m paid to do.”

Padme looked surprised at that and Obi-Wan barely kept his own surprise from his face. Who would have hired Jango? He tried to think of all of the different players in the galactic arena, but he couldn’t think of anyone that this would benefit. “I still thank you, would you be willing to give me the name of your employer so I can thank them as well?”

Jango tilted his head, “Would have thought that was fairly obvious, I’m reporting to him.”

Padme’s face grew even more surprised as she turned towards Obi-Wan. “You hired him? Why didn’t you tell the Queen?”

Well, mostly because he hadn’t been aware that he’d hired anyone. “We were unsure how well guarded the camps were, it was mostly for reconnaissance, with the understanding that if there were any openings they would be taken. I did not want to raise the Queen’s or your hopes should nothing have transpired.”

Padme nodded slowly, her eyes hurt, “We would have liked to know. They are our people.”

“Part of the conditions of my service was Obi-Wan’s secrecy and discretion.” Jango said, his voice still cold.

Padme hesitated, but nodded again. “Well, the Queen and I both thank you.”
Jango just shrugged. They were both quiet as Padme moved away. Obi-Wan waited until she was far enough away that she wouldn’t hear him before turning to Jango again. “I didn’t hire you.”

Jango snorted. “Trust me, I’m aware. You just happened to have a perfectly viable way to get help and you didn’t even think of using it.”

“I won’t use you.”

“It’s not using someone to ask for their help.”

Obi-Wan scoffed, “Don’t give me that, you’ve never asked for help in your life.”

Jango was quiet for a long time and Obi-Wan wondered if he’d hit a nerve. “I have before, with the Mandalorians. I trusted them.” It was both a concession and an accusation.

Obi-Wan wasn’t sure what to say. “It wasn’t because I don’t trust you. That wasn’t why I didn’t ask for help.”

“Then why didn’t you?”

Obi-Wan shrugged. It hadn’t really occurred to him. “How much do I owe you?”

“You didn’t hire me.”

“You’re telling people I did.”

“It’s good for your reputation.”

Obi-Wan laughed, “My hiring bounty hunters is good for my reputation?”

“It shows that you are willing to pursue multiple avenues; it shows that you’re willing to do whatever it takes to keep people safe, no matter who they are or where they’re from; it shows that you’ll hire one of the most ruthless bounty hunters in the galaxy without flinching, and not for some political assassination that would have caused more problems than it would solve, but to get the innocents out of inhumane camps.”

Obi-Wan blinked and then turned to more fully look at the bounty hunter. His hand was shaking again and he wasn’t sure why. “Why?”

“Why, what?”

“You know what. Why would you come to Naboo, make people think that you’re only saving them because of me, endanger your life?”

“I endanger my life for most of my jobs. And I am only saving them because of you.”

“So this is just a job? You’re saying you don’t care.”

“I don’t.” Obi-Wan opened his mouth to argue, because why would Jango have come if he didn’t care about these people. Jango straightened from where he’d been leaning against the tree, “It’s not that I want them to die, or suffer. But I don’t particularly care if they do. They aren’t my people. It isn’t my cause. People die all the time, Obi-Wan. If I’m not being paid to care, then I can’t find it in me to be bothered.”

“Then why?”
“Because it’s your cause.” Jango shook his head, “It’s your cause, and you care, and I knew you were going to end up here.”

Obi-Wan didn’t have a response. It was quiet for a long moment before Jango leaned against the tree again, close enough that his armor brushed against Obi-Wan’s arm. Obi-Wan felt something in his throat close up, first Quinlan had offered to leave the Jedi Order if Obi-Wan asked, and now Jango was helping to liberate a planet he didn’t even care about because of Obi-Wan. “Thank you, Jango.” It felt completely inadequate, Quinlan, he knew, had felt his gratitude through the force, had known how much the offer had meant to Obi-Wan, but Obi-Wan didn’t know how to express the same thing to Jango. “Vor entye.”

Obi-Wan could feel Jango freeze for just a split second at the Mando’a, but then he relaxed again, and Obi-Wan could feel his pleasure brush up against his shields, bright and warm and sharp.

“I’m not saying I’ll help you with every idiotic plan you have.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to.”

They stood there for a long time before Jango sighed, and Obi-Wan could feel his pleasure slip away, “You let him go.”

Obi-Wan didn’t have to ask who he was talking about, “It was what he decided he wanted.”

“We don’t always want what’s best for us.” Jango said quietly.

“I know.” I have brought peace, justice, freedom, and security to my new empire! “Trust me, Jango, I know.”

“I suppose the poison is pleased.”

Obi-Wan choked on a laugh, that wasn’t funny, it really wasn’t. “Yes, I believe Master Jinn was pleased. Although he was less pleased when the council didn’t support him in his claims that I had fallen.”

Jango snorted, “That doesn’t surprise me.”

Obi-Wan hummed in response, “I could tell you he was planning on taking over the galaxy and you wouldn’t be surprised. You don’t like him.”

“I hope he does.”

Obi-Wan blinked and turned his head, “Does what? Try to take over the Galaxy? You want him, Qui-Gon Jinn, to take over the galaxy?”

“It would give me an excuse to kill him without you getting annoyed at me.”

Obi-Wan opened his mouth to respond, and then closed it again. “I have no response to that.” He shook his head, “Absolutely no response to that.” He thought of Palpatine, “But if I do by chance discover someone attempting to take over the galaxy, does this mean you’d help me destroy them? Or is that a Qui-Gon Jinn special?”

“I’d help you kill just about anybody.”

“I’m not sure if that makes me feel comforted or terrified. But then, I suppose for the right amount of money anybody could get a similar promise to kill just about anyone.” He flinched as he said it,
hoping that Jango didn’t take it as an insult. It was the nature of the other man’s life and profession.

“Not if it were you.”

Obi-Wan froze. Surely Jango didn’t mean… He wouldn’t…

“Obi-Wan!” Shmi was waving him over and Obi-Wan was grateful for the distraction, because a galaxy where Jango said he wouldn’t kill Obi-Wan for any amount of money didn’t make sense.

He headed over to where they were gathering around Jar Jar, Jango a step behind him. Jar Jar was busy explaining that the Gungans were no longer in their underwater cities.

“Do you think they’ve been taken to camps?” Panaka was asking quietly.

“There haven’t been any Gungans in any of the camps we’ve infiltrated. It’s possible they were wiped out.” Jango answered evenly.

Jar Jar shook his head, “When in trouble, Gungas go to sacred places. Mesa thinks we find them there.”

“Do you know where to find them?” Sabe asked.

Jar Jar nodded. “Wesa pretty close, mesa thinks.”

They quickly organized the group, leaving most of the civilians behind to finish packing up the tiny camp that had sprung up. The rest of them following Jar Jar farther into the swamps.

Obi-Wan slid his arm into Shmi’s as they walked, “Don’t you just love the swamp lands.” He teased her. Remembering their trip to Rodia when Shmi and Anakin had taken a fall into one of the many swamps there.

Shmi wrinkled her nose, probably remembering the same incident, “Well, I suppose they have their beauty.” She shrugged, “But they aren’t for me.”

“Why ever not? You wore the swamp so beautifully!”

Obi-Wan sent a grin at Shmi, before turning to Jango, “I don’t suppose Shmi told you about the time when Anakin fell into one of the swamps on Rodia and pulled Shmi down with him?”

Jango laughed, “Somehow that’s never been mentioned.”

Obi-Wan probably deserved the pinch to the side he got from Shmi. “Do you think the Gungans will help us.”

Obi-Wan glanced ahead to where Padme walked. “I imagine the Queen will be quite convincing.”

“I hope so. It will be difficult without their help.”

Obi-Wan nodded in agreement. “Perhaps, but we can find a way.”

They reached the Gungans’ Sacred place fairly quickly and Obi-Wan watched as things somehow managed to play out nearly the exact same way they had before.

Shmi gasped when Padme revealed herself and Obi-Wan tried to keep his smile from growing. He could hear R2 whistle smugly from a few feet away. “You knew.” Shmi hissed and Obi-Wan shrugged. Well, yes, he had. But then he’d figured it out the first time too.
Padme fell to her knees and Obi-Wan copied her. Slowly the others in the group followed suit, although he could feel Jango’s discontent at the action. Obi-Wan found his eyes flitting towards the man, he was on one knee, but his head was still high. He was a mixture of humility and pride and Obi-Wan found it difficult to pull his eyes away from the man. Boss Nass’s laugh finally pulled him out of the moment and he focused again on the matter at hand.

It was time to plan a battle.

“They already know we are assembling an army, there is no need to parade it out into the open.”

“What do you mean?” Padme asked, “Do you not believe that it will work?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “Oh, it would work, but the loss of life would be astronomical. We purposefully came down to Naboo in a way that would alert the Trade Federation to our presence. The droids are already coming for us, just because the battle is a distraction does not mean we should not give it the largest chance of success that we are able to.”

Jango nodded, “The Gungans know these swamps better than anyone, meet them on the edge of the swamps and then force the droids to follow you into them. Let the droids be dragged down by the mud, don’t give them a flat surface to fight on.”

Boss Nass was nodding, “Swamps are Gungas, dissa doeens’t liksa meehaneeks. The Swamps fight wissa us.”

Padme nodded, “Several of those that have been freed from the camps have offered to fight with you, if you will accept them.”

Boss Nass laughed, spit flying everywhere. “Wesa proud to fight with the Naboo.”

“The children and their guardians who are not fighting will stay deeper in the swamps, the droids should not be able to reach them.”

Obi-Wan glanced at Shmi, but she shook her head and Obi-Wan held back a sigh. Why were all Skywalkers so stubborn?

“The rest of us will be using the secret passageways to get into the palace. From there we will send pilots to take out the droid control ship.”

Obi-Wan felt something like dread twist inside him. Anakin wasn’t here. They had only succeeded last time because of Anakin. Obi-Wan could join them, he could probably help take out the droid ship, the Clone Wars had vastly improved his flying skills, and he knew how to fight this sort of ship. But he worried that Qui-Gon would be unable to handle Maul on his own, he hadn’t last time. His eyes went to Jango.

“I’ll join the pilots.” Jango said quietly, and Obi-Wan felt relief fill him. Jango was talented and creative and competent, and if anyone could get the droid ship down it was him.

Padme nodded in acceptance, “The rest of us will continue on into the palace to capture the Viceroy. Without him we cannot end this invasion.”

“He will be heavily guarded.” Qui-Gon warned quietly.

Padme raised an eyebrow, “And I suppose that’s too much like fighting a war, and not enough like
protecting me?"

Qui-Gon tilted his head in acknowledgment, a wry smile on his face. “I will be as proactive in your protection as I can.”

Jango snorted and several of the group looked at the bounty hunter askance, Obi-Wan just rolled his eyes, because of course Jango would feel the need to express his derision.

“Does everyone agree with the plan?” Padme asked. Everyone nodded, faces serious and tired. “Then everyone prepare to leave, the droids will be here soon, and those who are not fighting in this battle need to make it to Theed.”

The group departed and Obi-Wan moved back, apologizing when he almost ran into R2 who had snuck behind him sometime during the meeting, Jango and Shmi both joined him. “I don’t suppose I can convince you to stay with those that are hiding in the swamps?” He asked Shmi quietly.

“I’m going with you to Theed. I’ll be part of Padme’s,” Shmi frowned, “I mean, the Queen’s group. I’ve already spoken with her about it.”

“Shmi’s a good shot, probably better than most of the Naboo. She has a good head on her shoulders, won’t panic when there’s blaster fire everywhere.”

Shmi smiled at Jango. “Why thank you, Jango.” She turned back to Obi-Wan, a pointed look on her face, “See, Jango doesn’t have a problem with it.” Obi-Wan glared at both of them.

“To be fair,” Jango added, “I’d prefer it if you were wearing armor.”

Shmi shrugged, “Too late for that, but that’s a good plan for next time.”

“You’re going to give me gray hairs, Shmi.” Obi-Wan sighed, “When exactly are you expecting there to be a next time?”

Shmi raised an eyebrow, “With you? I’ve got a feeling it’s bound to happen.”

“What is that supposed to mean? This is the first time I’ve gotten us involved in a planetary dispute.”

Shmi snorted, “What do you call what happened on Rodia? Or that time on Falleen?”

“Those weren’t planetary disputes.”

Shmi just shook her head in obvious amusement.

Obi-Wan decided not to push it. “Will you be leaving from here?” He asked Jango. Jango titled his head in an indication to explain. “You said you’d join the pilots trying to take out the droid control ship. Your ship is here, will you be leaving from here.”

Jango shook his head, “No, I’ll be traveling with you to Theed. I’ll be using one of the Naboo’s ships.”

There was a beep and whistle before R2 was running into his leg, Obi-Wan had completely forgotten the droid was there. “Really?” He asked the droid. R2 whistled in the affirmative. “R2 says that he’ll be your astromech.”

Jango stared at the droid and Obi-Wan would swear that the two were competing in some sort of battle of wills. He wasn’t sure who won, but Jango eventually nodded. “Good.”
There was the sound of whistling and Obi-Wan turned to see that the groups were assembling. Civilians with blasters and boomas lining up with Gungan warriors, Qui-Gon stood with Padme and her handmaidens near the speeders, the pilots and resistance leaders were grouped by another speeder, while a group of civilians coming to create distractions within Theed gathered by a third. “Be careful.” He put an arm around Shmi, pulling her into a hug. “Both of you.” He looked to Jango, who stood there as strong and confident as ever.

“We will be.” Shmi whispered quietly.

“You watch yourself.”

The infiltration of Theed had gone off without a hitch up until this point. It was just as unnerving this time as it had been last time. And he had to congratulate Maul on his dramatic entrance, he could see the way it had unsettled nearly everyone in the group.

He heard guns from a ship take out the droids threatening Padme and Shmi’s group before the ship Jango was in disappeared out the hangar, R2 in the back. He could hear the second group disappearing down a second passage, Shmi with them. He didn’t turn to watch them go. Eyes on the Sith in front of him.

Maul’s eyes were gleaming, the force whirling chaotically around him. Maul sent the force twisting towards them in challenge and Obi-Wan knew instantly that something was about to go very wrong.

*Change,* the Force chanted, *change, change, change.*

His vision blurred.

Reality split.

Obi-Wan saw himself with a padawan braid lunge forward to attack the Sith in an arial attack, while simultaneously the Sith sprang forward to attack the real him. The sound of lightsabers crashing together echoed through his ears.

The fight moved quickly, and Obi-Wan felt despair as despite the differences, despite the fact that he fought using a completely different form than last time, their path somehow managed to follow that of his past.

He cursed to himself quietly, he and Qui-Gon were not on the same page, no longer used to fighting together, no longer as in sync as they’d once been, as they could have been had he stayed, if Qui-Gon was still willing to trust him.

It was not helped by the echoes of another fight pulsating in Obi-Wan’s vision.

He ducked a blow that wasn’t there, almost throwing himself into Maul’s actual blade, he stepped to the side to make way for Qui-Gon, only to realize that Qui-Gon was in a different position altogether.

He could not separate reality from this forced vision (he wasn’t sure if it was a vision, as his tunic was singed by something he had been almost certain was only in his mind) and it was going to get him killed. A foot and a blade both came at him, he couldn’t dodge both and he could no longer trust himself to know which one was a part of this reality.
The kick sent him flying off of the cat-walk they were on, he landed heavily, barely stopping himself from rolling off this catwalk and on to the catwalk even further below him. He closed his eyes and pulled the force towards him, it swirled around him, filling him with energy but no real clarity, it did not stop him from hearing more than two lightsabers crashing together. Change, change, change. You are the change. See the change.

He snarled quietly to himself, this was not the time for the force to be playing games with his mind, and ran along his catwalk until he was slightly ahead of the two men (five men) fighting above him. He pulled the force around him and jumped up, landing lightly on his feet, he whirled his lightsaber and started to run at Maul from behind. Maul was smiling viciously. And Obi-Wan could feel his fury, his delight.

The force danced around Maul tumultuously, dark, violent anger, and vicious glee.

Maul whirled, one blade striking out at Obi-Wan’s lightsaber, the other half of the blade catching Qui-Gon’s. Obi-Wan saw a leg branch out and strike at Qui-Gon, the other man was sent tumbling backwards and off the catwalk. And then it was Obi-Wan and Maul. And visions that weren’t.

Only a few seconds later the other Obi-Wan fell to not-Maul’s kick.

Maul should never have tried to fight him alone.

Obi-Wan dodged the non-existent Qui-Gon’s lunge, spun out of the way of both realities of Maul. He closed his eyes, and the force led his steps out of the way of all five sabers.

Slash. Dodge. Kick. He jumped up and over, away from not-there Qui-Gon and not-there Maul. The two of them continued on in their own fight. Obi-Wan stood his ground, not letting his and Maul’s fight move further.

Ahead of them red ray shields cycled through. The Obi-Wan he once was went rushing past, desperate to get to his master and the Sith.

Maul’s anger was vicious, his blows fast and angry.

Obi-Wan Kenobi had fought Maul more times that he would like. Had lost more to this man than he liked to remember.

He didn’t attack. He deflected and deflected, his lightsaber a whirl of blue as it shielded him.

He heard himself scream, as his master was struck down.

He caught one saber, twirled his own around to throw the other side of the double-saber off, and then his saber came crashing down the middle, cutting the blade in half and moving through flesh, striking two hearts with one blow.

Maul crumpled. His sabers powering down. Obi-Wan fell to his knees, a strange parody of a different time, on a different planet, he caught Maul before he hit the ground.

There was the sound of footsteps some distance away and he looked up to see Qui-Gon coming towards him, shock and surprise on his face. A part of Obi-Wan wondered what had taken him so long, perhaps he had fallen more catwalks than Obi-Wan had thought. Or perhaps he’d hoped Obi-Wan would be the one that fell.

Obi-Wan turned away from him to focus on the figure in his arms. He was breathing unevenly, trying to bring the force to bear. “You… You won.” It was disbelieving, shocked, angry… lost.
“I’m sorry.” Obi-Wan whispered. Sorry that he had not found some way to save Maul, that he had not acted sooner, that he had not acted wiser.

Maul hissed at him and Obi-Wan could feel his anger spark one last burst of energy, one clawed hand came up and struck at him, Obi-Wan turned his head to protect his eyes but allowed the claws to scratch into his cheek, he deserved this, he deserved to be hurt, deserved to bear the marks of not knowing how to fix this.

He could sense Maul losing strength quickly, he looked down at his old enemy, seeing desperation and fear and anger, “The force will be with you, Maul, always.” It was all he could offer right now.

Maul sighed, but Obi-Wan thought he saw a glimmer of understanding in his eyes before they went empty.

It was quiet except for the soft tread of Qui-Gon’s boots on the catwalk.

Two boots landed in front of him but Obi-Wan ignored them as he quietly closed the eyes of the Sith Apprentice. In another lifetime the Sith would live many more years, but they were hard, cold, bitter, lonely years. Obi-Wan was not sure if this was a kinder fate or not.

Qui-Gon crouched down next to him, “Did he say anything of importance before he died?”

Obi-Wan shook his head. “No.”

Qui-Gon frowned and Obi-Wan could read a mixture of apprehension and frustration. “You should not have killed him. We should have taken him in.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “Do you think you could have?” He shook his head, “He would never have allowed himself to be taken.”

“It was the will of the force, a way would have been provided.” Qui-Gon’s voice was sharp, disapproving, “You’ve forgotten how to follow the Force. It makes you rash, dangerous. You must realize this.”

Obi-Wan sighed and looked up at his former master, “Is now really the time for this?”

“You’ve just killed a man, perhaps the only one who could give us the answers we need, I think that it is past time for this.”

Obi-Wan climbed to his feet, shifting Maul so that he could carry him out, “I killed a man, yes, a man who intended to hurt the Queen and the people of Naboo, a man who wanted to cause destruction and pain. A man who was undoubtedly a Sith.” Qui-Gon opened his mouth to respond but Obi-Wan pushed on, “And yet, I am the only one here who mourns. The Force was with him as well as us, Master Jinn, and anyone can be poisoned by darkness.” He moved away from Qui-Gon. Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of another Obi-Wan cutting another Maul in half, the scene slipped away as the boy he’d once been ran to the person he had cared about most in the world. Something inside of him ached. He wasn’t sure why.

He could feel blood dripping from where Maul had cut him, his cheek burned. These would scar, he realized. It was much less than he deserved.

It was his negligence that had gotten them here, that had never found a way to save Maul, that hadn’t found a way to stop the Trade Federation from blockading and invading Naboo. The Naboo, the Gungans, Maul, their deaths were all his fault.
Everyone that Palpatine hurt, everything he did. It was all on Obi-Wan’s head. He had had five years, and what had he done? Traipsed around, healed a few separatist inclined tensions, freed a few slaves?

Nar Shaddaa was still standing, Zyggeria was still quietly rebuilding their slave infrastructure. Sidious was still out there, and most likely on his way to becoming Chancellor of the Republic, the man’s own master was still lurking unnamed in the shadows, the galaxy was still slowly descending into turmoil. What had Obi-Wan done?

Nothing.

The force whispered soothingly. But Obi-Wan couldn't find it in him to believe right now.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for reading!

And thanks for all of your absolutely lovely comments and feedback. The fact that so many of you are excited about what's going on only serves to make me more excited about writing it, which is an impressive feat, because I was already pretty excited about this.

Here's a quick preview for next chapter...

Shmi’s hand drifted up from his cheek, her fingertips brushing his hair away from his eyes. “I keep hoping that one day the shadows will disappear from your eyes. But they never do.” She sighed, “Obi-Wan, today we won.”

He nodded. “I know.”

“Then why do your eyes say we lost?”

Obi-Wan could only close his eyes.
They grieve, they celebrate. There's a little bit of death, but it's not permanent. There's a little bit of healing, which, yeah, is as permanent as healing can be. Some declarations are talked about in a round about way, while other declarations are made in a pretty permanent way.

Chapter Notes

Whoo, so, this has been a long time in coming, sorry for the massive delay... But it is here! At last! Uh... Well, one semester is over, the next term has just started. I really wish I wasn't going to school year round, but I am. Thankfully unlike last semester, this next one isn't nearly as crazy. I should have a little bit of breathing room. I've been doing much better this past week than I have been, so thank you for everyone who gave me advice and well wishes.

Now on to the chapter!

He left Maul's body in the hangar, moving to the throne room. Qui-Gon followed along behind him.

“You realize I'll be reporting this to the council.”

The words pushed Obi-Wan out of his thoughts as he tried to make sense of what Qui-Gon meant.

“What?”

“Your… familiarity with the Sith.” Qui-Gon shook his head, “You said yourself you mourned him.”

Obi-Wan whirled to face him. “You speak of following the will of the force, but that Zabrak was a child of the force, just as much as you and I are. I mourn because he was twisted and angry and dark. I mourn because life is precious. You were the one who taught me that. I mourn because this is what is, but surely it’s not what had to be.” He shook his head, he mourned because this was his fault, he had failed, “I’m not mourning him because of whatever secret partnership you seem to think I have with the Sith.”

Qui-Gon changed his attack, “The council has never said that that was a Sith. You seem very certain of that fact.”

“I felt him, Master Jinn, just the same as you did.” He shook his head, “But again, Master Jinn, is now really the time for this?”

They turned the next corner to find droids scattered across the floor. Apparently the others had come through this way. Obi-Wan sped his steps, moving unerringly towards where he could feel Shmi.

He found more droids on the next floor, but not all of them seemed to have been brought down by blaster fire. He felt relief fill him as he understood the implications. The pilots and Jango had taken
out the droid control ship.

Obi-Wan made it to the throne room doors, he could feel Shmi inside. He smiled slightly as the controls refused to open the doors. They must have shot out the controls on the other side, a fairly good sign that Padmé was the one who had control inside the room. He focused with the force and pulled the doors open.

Several men had blasters pointed at him as he walked in and Obi-Wan gave them all a smile. Padmé was sitting on her throne, her chin raised in defiance. Nute Gunray stood there, hunched in on himself, Obi-Wan could feel his fear wafting off of him. Obi-Wan had no pity for him.

“It appears that you had no need of our assistance after all, Your Highness.”

Padmé didn’t smile, but her eyes sparkled with happiness. “We were just discussing a new treaty.”

“How fortuitous that the Viceroy just so happens to be here.”

“You can’t do this.” The Viceroy protested, “The Senate won’t stand for this.”

Padmé’s face went cold and hard, “We shall see.”

Obi-Wan let Qui-Gon move forward, while he moved to the side where Shmi was standing, her blaster at her hip. “Are you okay?” He asked quietly.

“I’m fine, Obi-Wan. Not a scratch on me.” A hand came to his face, “Which is more than I can say for you.”

“It’s superficial.” Obi-Wan assured her.

“You should still get some bacta on it.”

Obi-Wan shook his head. “No, there are others who will need bacta far more than I will.”

Shmi frowned, but pulled a tissue from her belt, gently wiping the blood from his cheek. “Are you okay?” She asked quietly.

Obi-Wan smiled, “Yes, like I said. It’s only a scratch.”

Shmi shook her head, “That’s not what I meant.”

Obi-Wan cocked his head questioningly, “What do you mean?”

Shmi’s hand drifted up from his cheek, her fingertips brushing his hair away from his eyes. “I keep hoping that one day the shadows will disappear from your eyes. But they never do.” She sighed, “Obi-Wan, today we won.”

He nodded. “I know.”

“Then why do your eyes say we lost?”

Obi-Wan could only close his eyes. This was only the opening act, the first battle in a war that would last past his death. What real difference had he even made?

“Obi-Wan, would you be willing to join us as we discuss the treaty?” Padmé’s voice called out, “I would appreciate your input.”
Obi-Wan nodded, pulling away from Shmi, “It would be an honor, Your Highness.”

They all parted for sleep as soon as they had found a place for all those who had been displaced to sleep. Obi-Wan felt exhausted, deep in his bones as he followed one of the handmaidens to a set of rooms in the palace for him, Shmi, and Jango to use. R2 was following along behind them and Obi-Wan wondered what Jango had done to convince the droid to follow him around.

The set of rooms was split in two and Obi-Wan allowed Shmi to push him gently towards a bed. He gave her a small smile and muttered his gratitude before allowing himself to collapse onto the bed.

R2 whistled at him worriedly and Obi-Wan took a second to wonder why the droid had chosen this room rather than the one Jango was in, but then exhaustion pushed the question aside and he allowed himself to hide away in sleep.

The wave of darkness crashing over him was sudden and unexpected, it woke him up and left him gasping. He clawed at his throat, trying to breathe, but the pressure only grew. It was so cold; it felt as though the force itself was screaming. Darkness was all around him, threatening to pull him under and steal his sanity.

He could hear someone calling his name, but it was distant and impossibly far away. There were red sabers crashing together, lightning crackling through the air, the darkside clashing together in a battle for dominance. He was being ripped in two. There was no light around him, only darkness; he had to retreat, escape, or he’d be destroyed. This was the fall of the Jedi and the destruction of Alderaan, the anger of Mustafar and the chaos of the war, this was the greed of the Trade Federation and the corruption of the Senate.

It wanted him. It wanted him to die, it wanted him to give in, it wanted him to be torn apart, and it wanted him to submit. It wanted to twist him and turn him and use him.

And it hurt.

But Obi-Wan was used to hurting.

He was one with the force, the force was with him. He was one with the force, the force was with him.

It did not matter what was around him. The darkness had no hold on him, he trusted in the light.

There was no death, there was the force.

There was deep heavy breathing, a red lightsaber, Obi-Wan remembered raising his own lightsaber, a salute and a farewell. Death was coming for him, but it didn’t matter, he was one with the force, the force was with him. The darkness had no hold on him, for he trusted in the light. There was no death, there was the force.

He was one with the force. And oh, how he had missed this. The force was with him.

He was one with the force.

He was on the cusp of something, on the cusp of letting go. The force whispered in warning but Obi-Wan didn’t understand.

The force was with him.
He was one with the force.

There was no death, there was the force.

There was heavy pressure on his chest, up, down, up, down. “Breathe, ha’ar chak! Breathe!” The voice was familiar. Important. He was supposed to listen to that voice.

He wasn’t sure if he was crashing back into himself or being violently pulled from out of himself. Either way it left him reeling, coughing and gasping as air forced itself into his lungs.

There was more swearing, but the pressure disappeared from his chest.

There was a flurry of movement around him, hands on his neck and his chest. Hands running through his hair, cupping his face.

He blinked, trying to bring everything into focus, but everything was too bright and too much and he closed his eyes, suddenly nauseous.

There was a soft voice that felt of home, and a deeper voice that meant safety. He moved his hand up, catching the hand resting against his neck, intertwining their fingers. His other hand went to the hand on his chest, clutching it tightly. “I’m okay.”

Shmi made a sound somewhere between choked laughter and a cut off sob. “That… That was not okay.”

A shrill whistle sounded in agreement.

“Don’t be ridiculous R2. It’s not like I died.”

Silence greeted that statement. And then Jango was swearing viciously in Mando’a and Obi-Wan could feel him beginning to move. He dropped Shmi’s hand in panic, grasping urgently at where Jango’s voice was coming from, clutching the other man’s night shirt desperately.

“Don’t leave.”

Jango took a deep breath. “I’m not leaving. I… I won’t.”

Obi-Wan felt the panic lessen but it was followed almost immediately by embarrassment and shame. He shouldn’t have reacted that way. He let go of the other man’s shirt, and tried to do the same with the man’s hand, but Jango kept their hands firmly entwined.

“What happened?” Shmi asked quietly.

The scene slid through his mind again, shadows and lightning. “Someone just became a Sith Master.” He grimaced, “A very powerful Sith Master.”

“And why did that cause…”

Obi-Wan shrugged. “I don’t know.” It didn’t make any sense. He shouldn’t have felt Palpatine challenge his master, especially when he was fairly certain that it had happened on Coruscant. He certainly hadn’t felt it last time, he couldn’t be certain, but he was fairly sure that no one had. But then, it wasn’t like the council had had reason to tell him that sort of thing back then.

At least now he thought he knew why the force hadn’t wanted him to convince Padmé not to press for a vote of no-confidence. Tomorrow they were announcing the new Chancellor, and Obi-Wan had no doubt it would be Palpatine. Palpatine was probably equally as sure of that fact, and had
decided that he no longer needed a master looming over his shoulder.

Obi-Wan wondered if Palpatine was already aware of Maul’s death. If the man cared.

“It’s over though. I’ll… I’ll be fine.” He was suddenly tired though and he let his free hand drift back to Shmi. “I’m fine.” It didn’t make sense, but he was fine.

There was sudden panicked prodding in his mind, and it took the last of his energy to send reassurance down the bond. I’m okay. And then he was out.

He woke to more prodding. It wasn’t the same panicked prodding from before, but Obi-Wan could still feel the other’s anxiety. He sent what soothing reassurance he could, and he immediately felt Anakin relax. And that was enough to jerk him awake. Anakin was on Coruscant. There was no way he should be able to feel Anakin so strongly all the way from Naboo. Their bond was strong, that was for sure, but it wasn’t that strong. This was Anakin’s fault. He wasn’t sure how, but he was sure it was.

“Obi-Wan?”

Obi-Wan blinked his eyes open to see the ceiling above him, he was pleased to see that it didn’t take the effort it had taken earlier. “Shmi?”

There was a sigh and a hand ran through his hair. “How are you feeling?”

Obi-Wan tilted his head towards her voice and gave her his best smile. “I’m feeling fine.”

Shmi’s face looked distinctly unimpressed. “The same way you felt fine after your collapse in the council chambers?”

Obi-Wan had a distinct feeling there was no right answer to that. “There have been several extenuating circumstances as of late, but rest assured, I really am just fine.”

“Extenuating circumstances? You died.”

“I did not.”

“You did.” Jango’s voice came from behind him. “We watched you stop breathing. We felt your heart stop beating. You kriffin’ died.” There was anger lacing Jango’s words and Obi-Wan flinched. He didn’t remember dying. He just remembered feeling as though… Oh. Yes, he suppose he had died.

“I’m sorry.” He said quietly. “I didn’t mean to worry either of you.”

“It’s not your fault.” Shmi said quietly, “It was whatever happened last night.”

Except that wasn’t quite true. It was Obi-Wan’s fault. His shields and barriers were still strained. Vokara Che had warned him not to put either his mind or body through stress, but he’d elected to ignore her because he hadn’t seen another option. The flashbacks and the fight with Maul had only served to weaken his already strained barriers further. And then, when he’d felt like he was being attacked Obi-Wan had sought refuge, his barriers hadn’t been strong enough to protect him. But Obi-Wan knew how to protect himself, he knew how to let himself go, to become one with the force.

The force had warned him five years ago on Tatooine to be careful. To not push it that far. That it
wasn’t time for him to join the force again, no matter what he wanted.

“Regardless, I’m sorry.” He stared at Shmi, at the shadows under her eyes. “Have you slept?”

She shook her head, “No, I was too worried.”

Obi-Wan turned around to look at Jango, “And you?”

Jango didn’t answer immediately, searching his eyes for something. Finally he shook his head, “No.”

Obi-Wan pulled himself up, glancing at the chrono, it was very early morning. “The two of you should try to get some sleep now.”

With more gentleness that Obi-Wan would have expected Jango slowly pulled him back down. “Stay.” It was a quiet whisper, so quiet Obi-Wan wasn’t even sure he’d heard it. But Jango’s eyes were boring into him and he couldn’t help but obey.

The work was tiring, but Obi-Wan found it almost nice. During the war he had always been jumping from planet to planet, following the trail of destruction the Separatists left behind. Trying to stop it where they could, minimize the damage where they couldn’t. He had never really been allowed to stay and help those who had suffered, never been able to help them rebuild, always called to another battle.

It had taken him longer than he would have liked to convince Shmi that he was fine and that he could help the Naboo. But the act of helping to rebuild was a comfort.

“The western cities were hit hard.” Padmé said quietly from behind him, “They had more warning then the rest of us, they tried to fight. So many of the Naboo were killed.”

Obi-Wan stood up from where he’d been sitting on the ground, lifting some of the larger pieces of wood and stone up to the workers on the roof with the force, he waved at the other workers to indicate that he would be taking a break. He got a few waves back before he turned to look at Padmé, standing there in a simple handmaiden dress.

“It’s not your fault.”

Padmé looked at him and he saw how uncertain she looked behind the stoic face of the Queen. “They are my people.”

“And the Trade Federation invaded your planet, marched on your homes, killed your people. In no way, shape, or form is that your fault.”

“Then why do I feel so guilty?” The question sounded anguished, and Obi-Wan wished he could offer her more comfort.

“Because you survived.”

Padmé looked down and Obi-Wan could feel how much pain she was in. He knew how strong this woman was, remembered how strong she would prove herself to be. “Show me your favorite place, here in Theed.”

Padmé looked up in surprise, but then with a small smile she nodded. Obi-Wan walked alongside her as they made their way down the path. Slowing at times so Padmé could speak with her people as
they passed, finally they made it to what he was sure had been a beautiful garden, although much of it was now trampled and destroyed. Padmé’s smile dimmed somewhat, but she led him further into the garden. There was a small stream and they followed it to where it bubbled up from a crack in a rock. Padmé touched the tree beside it, it’s branches broken, blaster marks scoring it’s trunk. “I knew Sabe before she became my handmaiden and bodyguard, we would spend time here.” Her smile dropped, and her hand fell from the tree. “It’s normally so beautiful, especially when the trees are in blossom. But Sabe liked the stream best.”

Obi-Wan nodded, sitting down on the grass patting the spot next to him. Padmé sat down gracefully, her hands running down her skirt anxiously. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Padmé was quiet for a long moment, “There was a part of me that thought that if we could beat the Trade Federation then everything would go back to being right. That somehow everything would be fine.” She made a bitter face, “I suppose that was naive of me.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Perhaps a little.” He thought of the clone wars, when he’d held on to the hope of after the war. And then during his time on Tatooine, when he’d held on to the thought just until death comes. And then when he’d died he’d prayed just until Luke defeats the Emperor. And now he was here again, and he was holding on again, just until Palpatine is defeated. “But I find we need to have an ending in sight, if we lose that, it becomes so easy to lose hope. You beat the Trade Federation, now find a new ending to pursue.”

“I’m too young.” Padmé whispered, “How can I lead my people?”

Obi-Wan hesitated a moment, but then pulled Padmé in to his side, wrapping his arm around her. “You are young.” He agreed, so young, so very young. “And it is a heavy weight you bear. But you are strong, and you are capable, and most importantly, you are not alone.”

“I know, but I feel…” She paused, “I still feel alone.” And that was a sentiment that Obi-Wan understood entirely. “I’m sorry for burdening you with this. But Sabe already does so much. And…” She sighed, “And you looked like you could understand.”

He looked around them, at the broken trees and bushes, at the flowers that had been trampled by hundreds of mechanical feet. He really shouldn’t, lifting wood with the force was one thing, healing was another thing entirely. But Padmé looked so young and so tired, and Obi-Wan couldn’t help but see not just her, but both of her children. And for three people whom he loved dearly, he could find the energy for a little healing.

He put his hand to the ground, letting his own sense of self gently mix with the grass, and the dirt, let himself mix with the trees and the air and the water.

It felt a little bit like dying, and Obi-Wan hated how much he missed it. He blamed the thought on his recent foray into death, that one single moment when he wasn’t Obi-Wan Kenobi, but a part of something so much larger and greater. Individual, yes, but free.

He shook the thought off. He had mastered these thoughts before, and he would master them again.

Instead he focused on the world around him. On the aches and pains of the earth. He was soft, gently soothing the pains and grief. If people could feel how alive everything around them was, perhaps they would be kinder to it, appreciate it more. But then, people were quite happy to hurt other sentients, so perhaps not.

Padmé gasped softly and Obi-Wan opened his eyes. The tree she had touched earlier was slowly growing, where branches had broken new branches were just starting to reach out, small buds were
He felt his energy wane.

Obi-Wan let go of the force after one last gentle caress. “Naboo will flourish again. Her people will flourish again.” He gave Padmé’s hand a tight squeeze. “Your people trust you, and they’re right to do so.”

Padmé leaned against him, her head on his shoulder, “Thank you.”

“You are quite welcome.”

She shook her head, “Thank you for everything. Ever since Ani brought us to you on Tatooine you have been nothing but kind. You’ve done more for my people than I could have ever hoped. You had no duty to us, and yet without you Naboo would not have been liberated. Naboo will forever be in your debt.”

“You underestimate yourself, My Lady. You would have found a way.” He believed that full-heartedly. Padmé didn’t know how to not fight for what she believed. “You did find a way.”

“Perhaps, but you saved us time, you and Fett saved so many lives.”

“Should you ever have a need, My Lady, I hope to always be a friend to you and to the Naboo.”

“I shall not forget it.” She sighed, “And thank you, for allowing me this moment of weakness.”

“It is not weakness to mourn.” It was a lesson that had taken him a long time to learn.

They sat there for a long moment before another voice broke the silence. “Padmé!”

Padmé tilted her head where it was still resting on his shoulder and they both looked up to see Sabe hurrying towards them in her own handmaiden garb, Jango was following behind her. “Looks like I’ve been found.”

Obi-Wan laughed, “I wasn’t aware we were hiding.”

“Not hiding persay…”

Sabe reached them, “Padmé, did you…” She stopped and stared at the tree, but then she shook her head, slightly baffled, “Padmé, Our new Chancellor has just sent word. He and several Jedi are nearing Naboo, they’ll be here tomorrow, in preparation for the celebrations.”

Padmé blinked and then pushed herself to her feet. “Well, then we must prepare for them.”

Sabe nodded and then turned to Obi-Wan, “Oh, and this gentleman was looking for you.”

Obi-Wan nodded and raised an eyebrow at Jango, Jango met his eyes impassively. Obi-Wan turned to Padmé, “It was a pleasure, my lady. Good luck in your preparations.”

Padmé smiled at him, “Thank you.” She reached out and touched the tree, “Thank you.”

Padmé and Sabe hurried away and Obi-Wan turned to Jango. “Gentleman?”

Jango snorted and sat down next to him on the ground. “She’s never seen me outside of my armor, none of them have, I don’t think she made the connection.”
Obi-Wan tilted his head, “That’s convenient.”

“Most people don’t recognize me outside of my armor.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “That would make sense.” He nudged Jango with his shoulder, “Why were you looking for me?”

“Shmi’s still busy helping in the Med Center, I had just finished up helping with the last of the transports, she sent me to go find you, make sure you weren’t overexerting yourself.” He gestured to the tree pointedly, “Which I see you were.”

Obi-Wan considered arguing the statement, but decided it wasn’t worth it. “Shmi worries too much.”

“You don’t worry enough.”

Obi-Wan shrugged. That was a matter of opinion, and he thought he worried more than enough. He was still alive after all.

They sat there in silence for a long time. The sun was just beginning to set when Jango spoke again. “Shmi said you’ll be leaving soon.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “We’re staying for the celebrations the day after tomorrow, then we’ll leave for Tatooine, Shmi has a wedding to get to after all.”

“She asked me if I’d come.” Obi-Wan hadn’t known that, but he wasn’t surprised.

“Will you?”

Jango was quiet for a long moment. “Yes. I’ll probably leave after that.”

Obi-Wan ignored the disappointment that hit him at the thought. “Always another bounty.”

“Something like that.” Jango agreed, “What will you be doing?”

Red sabers flashed in and out of his vision. “There’s someone I need to go see.”

They fell quiet again, and Obi-Wan couldn’t help but think it was strangely nice. Companionable silence was difficult to find, and the way Jango didn’t seem to expect anything was comforting.

Jango was comforting. He closed his eyes, because he didn’t deserve Jango, didn’t deserve the comfort Jango’s presence gave him.

The sun was just starting to fall when Obi-Wan felt the urge to speak. “I never thanked you.”

Jango hummed, “You did.”

Obi-Wan shook his head, “I thanked you for coming to Naboo, for raiding the camps, for saving them.” He frowned, “That was easy. It was easy to thank you for protecting other people.”

“I didn’t do it for them.”

Obi-Wan shrugged at that. He didn’t know how much of that he believed, and he wasn’t entirely sure that it mattered, when the results had been the same. “I never expected to see you again, after we parted four years ago.” Or rather, he hadn’t expected to meet again with any sort of positive interaction. “But then you were there, and that was…” he hesitated, unsure exactly what it had been, that day he opened his ship to escape the dry Tatooine heat to find Jango sitting inside. “Good. It was
“I hadn’t completely planned to see you again, either.”

Obi-Wan smiled at that, at the idea that Jango had been there on a whim. He wasn’t sure why that made it better, but somehow it seemed to make him feel lighter, maybe it was the idea that there had been no manipulation, no alternative purpose. “And then you just kept coming back. It was comforting, in a way. The sun would rise and fall, people would complain and argue, negotiations would be tiring, and at some point, I’d come back to my ship and you’d be there, complaining about how my security was too lax.”

“It is. It’s entirely too lax.”

Obi-Wan refused to look at Jango, he could practically hear the smirk on his face, he didn’t need to actually see it. “I don’t know what we are.” The statement felt too much like an acknowledgement that Obi-Wan wasn’t ready for, but it also needed to be said. “But I think that maybe we’re something.” Friends, family... something. “I would trust you with my life.” Not his secrets, not yet, maybe not ever. “I would trust you with Anakin and Shmi’s lives.” So infinitely precious, much more so than his own. “Am I wrong to do that?”

Jango was quiet for a long moment. “No,” he was quiet for a moment, “In another life, maybe you would be. If you were another person, you would most definitely be. But no, you’re not wrong to trust me.”

Obi-Wan smiled slightly, because Jango didn’t realize how apt that was, in another life they had known each other for almost no time at all, and all they’d known were the lies and masks the other wore, and then Jango was gone, and Obi-Wan had only spared him the briefest of thoughts. He’d been the progenitor of the clones, and that was the sum of his importance in Obi-Wan’s life. Things were so very different now. “Will you come back?” He asked, “When your bounties get boring.”

Jango didn’t answer for a long moment, “Are you asking me to?”

It was a layered question. About what Obi-Wan wanted, about what he was willing to ask for. He thought about the fever, he thought about the raided camps, he thought about Jango putting himself between him and Qui-Gon, he thought about how his security would always be too lax. There were a lot of things that he knew he should think about. But Anakin was gone, and Shmi was leaving. Maul had been killed, there was a Sith Lord in power over the entirety of the Galactic Republic. Soon there’d be a bounty coming that Obi-Wan wouldn’t ask Jango not to take, and by doing so Obi-Wan might be dooming himself, and Jango, and a million unborn men. Thinking about Jango, thinking about all of the things that Jango did, and what they might mean. It felt selfish. “Yes. I am.”

“Then, I’ll keep coming back.” Jango said, as though it was the easiest thing in the galaxy. Obi-Wan wasn’t sure how Jango could do that, when to him it felt like the very foundation of his understanding was being shifted underneath him. No one ever promised to come back. No one ever thought Obi-Wan was important enough for that. No one ever chose Obi-Wan. But, for some reason Jango had, all Obi-Wan had to do was believe him.

“I don’t know what we are.” He repeated. Because he had to, because it was true. Because he wasn’t sure the entirety of what Jango wanted from him, and he wasn’t sure if it was something that he could give. Because the past he’d known was so altered from the present he lived, but the current of fate just kept pushing him along, and he wasn’t sure if the future he was building was what it needed to be.

“That’s fine.” Obi-Wan closed his eyes, grateful. Jango may have made his intentions fairly clear;
there were, after all, only a few ways in which Jango’s promises and declarations could be taken; but he wasn’t demanding that Obi-Wan state his own intentions. “You were right,” Jango added after a few moments, “When you said that I leave.” Obi-Wan searched his memory for that conversation and remembered Jango’s frustration and anger as Anakin slept a few feet away, Obi-Wan desperate to protect the boy and Jango unable to understand why Obi-Wan would ever choose the Jedi. “There are bounties to take, money to make. But for now, I’ll keep coming back.”

What came after the for now? Obi-Wan wasn’t sure, wasn’t sure if it was Jango giving him a deadline, a point in the future in which he’d stop waiting for Obi-Wan to figure out where he stood, to figure out what he wanted. But it was vague, and at some point that was not now, and so he let it go.

Instead he nodded and watched the sun finish making its decent.

Jango stood first, as the first stars started to come out, his hand stretched out to help Obi-Wan up. Obi-Wan didn’t even have to think about it before he let Jango pull him up. Jango entwined their fingers for a short second before he drew his hand away. “Come on, Shmi was probably expecting us back a while ago.”

Jango was right by his side as they started back to the palace and everything that waited for them there. Shmi and Qui-Gon, a Queen and her handmaidens. Tomorrow they would welcome a number of the Jedi Council and a Sith Lord hiding in plain view. But for today, for now, everything was okay.

“You helped save, Naboo. I can never express my thanks.” The hand on his shoulder and the genial smile on the other man’s face looked genuine. For all Obi-Wan knew, they were genuine. Maybe Palpatine really was grateful for Obi-Wan’s help in freeing his lovely planet from the grip of the Trade Federation. Sure, Palpatine was behind the invasion, but there was no reason to believe he’d meant for it to be a permanent situation. Just long enough, and at just the right time for Senator Palpatine to become Chancellor Palpatine. Or maybe Chancellor Palpatine was secretly fuming. Obi-Wan didn’t know.

He bowed his head, “I was merely another blaster, Your Excellency. The praise goes to your people and their Queen.”

Palpatine shook his head, “You are too humble by far. You’ll be staying for the celebrations?”

Obi-Wan nodded, “The Queen has requested that I remain that long.”

Palpatine nodded, “Excellent, than perhaps you’d be willing to dine with me tonight.”

Obi-Wan didn’t let the dismay he felt at the request show on either his face or through the force, “You’ve traveled a long way, Your Excellency, I would not want to impose.”

“You’ve traveled a long way, Your Excellency, I would not want to impose.”

“Nonsense, the Queen and I, you and your family, the Jedi that accompanied you to Naboo, perhaps your bounty hunter friend. I need to repay your kindness.”

It was not a request, and Obi-Wan wasn’t fool enough to be confused that it was. Instead he bowed his head, “We would be honored.”

Palpatine smiled again, before moving on to greet the next individual. Obi-Wan kept the smile on his face even as his head pounded with an incoming headache. He bowed again as Masters Yoda and
Windu moved towards him. “Pleased we are, that success you have found.”

“An emotion we share. The liberation of Naboo was a blessing from the force.”

Master Windu nodded, “We would speak with you about the dark warrior you faced.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Of course.” He gestured to the side to indicate that he would follow them, and Master Windu led them to the side. A few moments later Qui-Gon removed himself from his own place in the greeting party and joined them. His face was calm and serene and Obi-Wan felt his stomach sink. He did not want to deal with another interrogation.

Qui-Gon led them back into the palace, to an empty room that Obi-Wan remembered hearing Qui-Gon ask Padmé for permission to use.

They each settled quietly near the table in the room. “A recounting, we request.”

Three pairs of eyes settled on Obi-Wan and Obi-Wan resisted the urge to raise an eyebrow and make a sarcastic remark about how he wasn’t required to acquiesce to any of their requests, particularly since their last request had resulted with him unconscious on the floor of the council chambers.

“The Sith Lord was waiting for our group in the area beyond the hangar, Master Jinn and I remained to fight him while the rest of the group took the long way around to reach the Viceroy. We engaged in battle with the Sith, he was incredibly proficient in his use of his double-bladed saber. The Sith Lord was initially in control of the fight, leading us into the service walkways where it was difficult to fight with any sort of unity. Master Jinn was knocked out of the fight and the Sith and I continued the fight on our own. With the aid of the force I ended the fight with a saber through both of his hearts.”

He kept the summary short and to the point. Both masters were watching him with serious eyes.

“Master Jinn indicated that perhaps there was some familiarity between you and the warrior.”

“Only the familiarity that comes from fighting a man.” More times, perhaps, than any of them were aware. “If you are asking about my grief at his death, I assure you, there was no conspiracy nor friendship between us.”

“But you did mourn him.”

Obi-Wan turned his eyes towards Master Windu, but didn’t answer immediately. “As I told Master Jinn, I grieved that such a thing was necessary. I came face to face with hatred and anger more powerful than I have ever seen in this life. I mourn because at his death, that was all the Sith Lord had, his anger, his rage, his hatred. It seems a terrible fate, and one I would not wish on anyone.”

Master Windu nodded, “Would you permit us to see your memories of the fight? To ascertain whether it was truly a Sith Lord.”

Obi-Wan shook his head, “No.” He could see Qui-Gon straightening, probably to cast aspersions on his character for the refusal. “My mind has not completely healed from the last time members of the council ventured into my mind, and I do not think Shmi would be happy should I collapse again for allowing the same things to occur.” He nodded towards Qui-Gon, “Master Jinn is still a member of your order, if you desire memories of the fight, then surely he can provide them just as well as I.” That and he wasn’t exactly sure what his memories would show. Whether they would see the past versions that had haunted his steps was not something he wanted to put to the test.

Master Windu nodded. “That is understandable. But just to ascertain, you feel sure that the Zabrak
was a Sith Lord?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “Perhaps not a Sith Master, but certainly an apprentice.”

Yoda hummed at that, his droopy eyes on him. “An apprentice, you say?”

“I find it highly improbable that the first Sith seen in thousands of years is the master, nor that they would be so easily defeated. No, I believe the Sith to have been the apprentice.”

Master Yoda nodded and exchanged a glance with Master Windu. “Thank you for your time, Obi-Wan, if there is nothing else you wish to share, we won’t keep you any longer.”

Obi-Wan nodded and stood, “May I ask how Anakin has fared?”

Mace nodded, “He has settled well into the creche. Depa has taken it upon herself to ensure that he settles in well, and has reported that he is a bright presence and seems on his way to making friends.”

Obi-Wan felt relief at the thought that Depa was taking Anakin under her wing, “If you would pass my gratitude on to Master Billaba I would be most grateful.”

Mace gave a short nod to indicate he would and Obi-Wan took the opportunity to leave. He sighed quietly as the door shut behind him. He wondered if they had accepted his account, wondered what else Qui-Gon would say, or if he had come to terms with who Obi-Wan was now. Either way there was nothing more Obi-Wan could do about the matter, instead he returned to the rooms that Padmé had set aside for him, Shmi and Jango.

He knocked quietly on Jango’s door. The man opened it, once again dressed in his armor. “May I come in?” Jango nodded, and Obi-Wan slipped in. “The Chancellor has invited you to dinner.”

Jango paused for a moment, before taking off his helmet, he gave Obi-Wan a blank look. “Excuse you?”

Obi-Wan couldn’t help the grin that crossed his face at that. “You, Mr. Fett, have been cordially invited to dine with His Excellency, the Chancellor himself.”

Jango’s face went through several different emotions before it landed on amused. “Not every day that happens.”

Obi-Wan snorted, “Given your choice of occupation, I should think not. Normally, the law isn’t your biggest fan.”

Jango shrugged, “It’s not my fault I’m better at my job than the law is at theirs.” Obi-Wan rolled his eyes, “I’m assuming you are also invited.”

Obi-Wan felt his smile slip, “Yes, Shmi and I are both invited as well.” He didn’t like this. Didn’t want to have either Shmi or Jango exposed to the Chancellor. It wasn’t safe.

Jango eyed him carefully, but then turned to sprawl on the bed, his pose faux casual. Obi-Wan wondered how uncomfortable it was to do that in the armor, but didn’t ask. “Well, I suppose I’ll join you and Shmi then. Wouldn’t want to offend the new Chancellor over something as simple as dinner.”

Obi-Wan sat down gingerly on the edge of the bed. “No,” he said quietly, mostly to himself, “Wouldn’t want to do that.” Jango’s leg shifted until it was a firm line against Obi-Wan’s back.
“Dinner tonight, celebration tomorrow, then off to Shmi’s wedding?” Jango said quietly.

Obi-Wan nodded. Less than two days and then he could put space between him and the Sith Lord whose apprentice he’d just killed.

They arrived at dinner to see that they were the last to arrive. The Queen sat on one end, while the Chancellor sat at the other end. To the Queen’s left sat Qui-Gon, with Master Windu next to him and Master Yoda in the last chair, sitting to the right of the Chancellor. There were three empty chairs on the other side of the table and Obi-Wan smoothly escorted Shmi to the seat on Padmé’s right, farthest from the Chancellor, but also ensuring that Jango didn’t sit across from Qui-Gon. Jango took the seat across from Master Windu, who, in Obi-Wan’s opinion was probably the safest of the three Jedi for Jango to sit across from. Which was ironic given that Mace had been the one to kill Jango in his past. But Jango had a personal dislike of Qui-Gon, and was unlikely to appreciate Master Yoda’s position as Grandmaster of the order that Jango despised. It left Obi-Wan to sit to the left of the Chancellor, and while Obi-Wan wasn’t pleased with the arrangement, he preferred it be him than Shmi or Jango.

Padmé sent them all a warm smile, before calling for dinner to be served. The conversation stayed as genial as could be expected given the particular individuals that were present. Obi-Wan was reminded, that even though she was young, Padmé was excellent at handling the more complicated social mores, and between her smooth finagling, Obi-Wan’s own skill with such situations and the Chancellor’s own talents they managed to keep the conversation from going anywhere that would cause too much tension.

“You and young Kenobi seem rather familiar with each other, you must have met before this particular job?” The question was directed towards Jango and Obi-Wan watched as practically every one of the guests tuned in with interest, Obi-Wan was immediately wary.

“Yes, you were together on Tatooine.” Padmé noted, “I assume that was when Obi-Wan hired you.”

Jango nodded, “Obi-Wan and I met on Tatooine several years ago,” He glanced at Obi-Wan, “I gave him advice on how to handle the Hutts, I have a particular dislike of slavery, and had a vested interest in helping him succeed.” All true, if rather misleading, Obi-Wan noted amused, “He had another meeting with the Hutts just before he ran into you, I was there and provided feedback on how the Treaty was being implemented.” He shrugged, “At which point the sandstorm had me as trapped there as everyone else.” It made it sound completely professional. Not as though they had a friendship of sorts, or that Jango had just spent the week taking care of him while he was bedridden with fever.

Palpatine glanced between Jango and Obi-Wan, his face betraying nothing of his thoughts. “How fortunate for Naboo that the two of you met.”

Obi-Wan forced a laugh, “Oh, Anakin’s been offered a wonderful opportunity. Although, I’m not
sure it’s my place to speak of it, you’d have to ask his mother.”

Palpatine nodded, “I see, I thought I heard the lovely Shmi mention something about the Jedi Order?”

Obi-Wan wasn’t the slightest bit surprised that Palpatine already knew, but he had hoped. “You heard right.”

Palpatine seemed to take a moment to observe the Jedi, “You must have great trust in them, to allow Anakin to join an order you chose to leave.” The way he said it managed to seem both sincere and doubtful. As though he had the greatest faith in the Jedi Order, but would be completely understanding if Obi-Wan did not.

Obi-Wan took a bite of his muja tart, “I take Anakin’s safety and happiness very seriously.”

“It was very brave of you, then, to allow Anakin to go. Particularly since Jedi are meant to cut ties. No attachment, isn’t it?” He smiled sympathetically, “I imagine that was difficult.”

Master Yoda hummed, entering the conversation. “Follow the will of the Force, a Jedi must. Let go of what one fears to lose. Willing to let go, young Skywalker is, prepared to follow the will of the force. Great Jedi, he will become.”

He could hear Mace and Jango trading subtle barbs, he wished he could turn and join their conversation, far preferable to the one he was currently engaged in.

Palpatine nodded, “He did appear to have a great deal of potential when I met him.” Obi-Wan hated the way he said potential, “How fortuitous for him that the opportunity to join the Jedi arose.” He glanced back at Obi-Wan, “Just a shame, I suppose, that he had to leave his family behind. It seems almost cruel.” He hesitated for the barest of seconds, “But what do I know. I’m sure the Jedi have their reasons for what they do. I’ve always held the Jedi in such esteem.”

Obi-Wan just smiled, if he didn’t know he would never have guessed that this man had only a few days ago killed his own Sith Master. “As I’m sure they do you.” He took another bite of Muja tart, “I don’t suppose the kitchens would be willing to share their recipe, this Muja tart is delicious.”

“For one of the heroes of Naboo?” Palpatine asked with a laugh, “I’m sure they’d be honored.”

The moon was bright on Naboo. He ran his hand through the reflection in the water. After the dinner with the Sith Master, Obi-Wan had been unable to sleep, he’d retreated to the Palace gardens in hopes that he’d find some semblance of peace. Instead he found himself wondering how poorly it would go if he attempted to assassinate the Chancellor of the Republic.

Very poorly he assumed. He hadn’t been on Coruscant when the Chancellor had been discovered, but from what he and Yoda had been able to piece together, Palpatine had managed to kill Masters Kolar, Fisto, Tiin and Windu. Obi-Wan didn’t have a chance, and an attempt that failed would end in his death or imprisonment, and would no doubt cause Palpatine to kill Shmi and Jango both, in order to clear up loose ends. If he was lucky, Palpatine would be exposed, if he wasn’t he’d look like a maniac.

He felt helpless. A tiny pebble in a river, completely incapable of making any real change, just swept on in the current. What was one man against a thousand years of Sith planning?

He closed his eyes, reaching out to the force and letting it take his despair. Peace, it whispered, and
Obi-Wan clung to it tightly.

A soft beep drew him out of his thoughts and Obi-Wan slid his hand over R2’s dome. The little droid had followed him out of his room and Obi-Wan found himself grateful for its presence. “Your a good droid, R2.” R2 whirred softly, “The best there is.”

R2 beeped again softly, nudging against Obi-Wan’s leg. It was a strangely kind act, so different from what he would normally expect from R2. He and R2 had had a precarious relationship in his past. R2 had been firmly loyal to Anakin and Padmé. He remembered wanting to laugh when R2 had claimed to once belong to Obi-Wan when the droid had found him on Tatooine. That had never been true.

He wondered what he’d done to earn R2’s kindness now.

He felt the soft presence of Shmi within the force just before he heard her footsteps. She sat next to him on the edge of the waterfall but said nothing.

He turned to her and rested his head on her shoulder, her hand ran through his hair. He thought inanely that it was getting rather long and that he should probably cut it.

“You could stay on Tatooine, you know.” Shmi said quietly, “You don’t have to keep running across the galaxy trying to save it, it won’t fall apart if you take time for yourself.”

Obi-Wan laughed, the sound a little closer to hysterical than he would prefer. “Can you picture me settling down on Tatooine?”

Shmi laughed, “Well, maybe not Tatooine, but the point still stands.”

“Maybe someday, Shmi.” He doubted it, the future he saw for himself didn’t seem to have space for settling down. His life would probably end in darkness and violence. But hopefully he’d have done enough that that same darkness and violence wouldn’t drown the galaxy. “Maybe someday.”

He really should have argued harder with Padmé about his position on the top of the steps. It had been the same last time, both him and Anakin at the top. She had said then, that it was to honor the sacrifices that he had made. The loss of Qui-Gon had been so sharp and painful that the mention of his loss had stolen Obi-Wan’s ability to argue.

This time he did not have the same weakness, but Padmé was just as vehement. “Please, Obi-Wan, you were there for me in my darkest hour. You and Mr. Fett were instrumental in the saving of my people. Please, allow us this small thing.”

He had conceded, but forced Jango and Shmi to stand with him. R2 had attached itself to him closely, whirling and beeping in what could be mistaken as cheerful if one didn’t speak binary, mostly R2 was cursing and insulting nearly everyone there. He, Shmi, and Padmé were the only ones who weren’t the recipients of the droids insults. Thankfully, no one but him and Shmi seemed to understand binary.

The procession was much like the one he remembered, with Naboo fighters flying in formation above, and the Gungans marching across the square. The Naboo had gathered, cheering bright and happy and free. The atmosphere was warm and bright and such a contrast to the way he had felt last night that it was hard to breathe.

This was why.
Boss Nass reached the top of the stairs and Padmé stepped forward taking the Globe of Peace and passing it to Boss Nass. The Gungan held it high above his head. “Peace! Peace!” The cheers from both the Gungans and the Naboo grew even louder.

Shmi’s hand clasped his and he smiled down at her. “Peace.” She agreed quietly.

He gave her a soft squeeze, letting his free hand rest on R2’s dome. He took a half a step back and felt Jango’s hand come to a rest on the small of his back.

It felt a little bit like peace.

“What are you doing?” Obi-Wan asked exasperatedly, “Get off my ship.”

R2 didn’t so much as budge.

“Seriously, R2, Shmi and I are headed back to Tatooine. You hate Tatooine.”

R2 started rolling, but instead of making his way off the ship he instead started poking around in the corners of the ship, managing to give off a very pointed ‘make me’ vibe.

Shmi was laughing, “Don’t tell me you’re losing yet another argument with a droid.”

Obi-Wan sent Shmi his most scathing look, “Do not encourage the droid, Shmi.”

Shmi shrugged, “Padmé said she’d come down to send us off, I’m sure R2 will see reason when she gets here.”

Obi-Wan sent a dubious look towards the droid. He found that hard to believe, but hope springs eternal, and all that.

“I should not be surprised that you’ve decided to be difficult.” He told the droid seriously, “You are one of the most difficult droids I’ve ever met.”

R2 gave an offended beep.

“I didn’t say I didn’t like you. You’re still my favorite. But that doesn’t change the fact that I swear you take an obscene amount of pleasure on being difficult.”

The following response was incredibly smug.

He felt Padmé’s presence near the ship and with a sigh he disembarked to say farewell. Shmi and Padmé were hugging each other and Obi-Wan fell back for a moment, allowing them to say their farewells.

Padmé pressed something into Shmi’s hands. “A wedding present. Cliegg is an incredibly lucky man.”

Shmi smiled softly, “Thank you. Should you ever need it, there’s a door open for you on Tatooine.”

“And there is always a place for you, here on Naboo.”

Shmi took a step backwards and Obi-Wan stepped forward, he gave Padmé a deep bow. When he straightened the woman smiled at him softly before pulling him into a hug. “There’s a place for you here as well.”
Obi-Wan hugged her tightly. Memorizing her force presence and how alive it was. “And should you ever need me, I will be there.” Padmé backed up, a soft smile on her face.

“I know.”

There was a sudden cacophony of beeping from within his ship and Obi-Wan sighed, “Your droid seems to think that he owns my ship.”

Padmé raised an amused eyebrow. “Oh, does he?”

“He refuses to leave. Would you mind convincing him to disembark?”

Padmé looked as though she was attempting to hide a smile, but quickly slid into his ship. Obi-Wan heard her say something softly to the droid. R2 beeped back in the affirmative.

After a few more moments Padmé came back, her smile now out in full force. “I think R2 is exactly where he wants to be.”

Obi-Wan gave her his best no nonsense look, but Padmé wasn’t phased. “Your Highness…”

“If it were not for R2, we would have never escaped the blockade, he is a hero of Naboo, he wants to go with you. He’s very determined to do so.” Obi-Wan opened his mouth to explain all of the reasons why he could not take her droid but Padmé shook her head. “It would lighten my heart to know that you had such a stalwart companion on your journeys.”

Obi-Wan sighed, but bowed, “Between you and R2, I fear this is a battle I won’t win.”

“No, I don’t think you will.”

Padmé retreated again, drawing herself up regally. For a split moment he saw her as she would become, powerful and unstoppable. And then it was gone and he saw a girl in handmaiden robes, every inch a queen. “Naboo thanks you. May you find peace and joy.”

Both he and Shmi bowed back. “May the suns shine on your path, while your feet walk in shadows.”

“May the Force be with you.”

There was something in the air that felt charged but R2 beeped loudly and the feeling disappeared. Obi-Wan stepped back, smiling. “Goodbye, Padmé.”

He slipped up the ramp and let Shmi and Padmé get their final farewells out of the way.

He looked at R2 who was still poking around the cabin. “You’re a menace.”

He wished Anakin was here. He and Owen set the blanket on the sand. It was blue and gold, and Obi-Wan felt a little as though fate was laughing at him, with Obi-Wan and Anakin’s colors resting there on the sand. He turned to the side of the blanket, squinting in the sun, there would be no hiding from the sun, out here in the desert. Owen quietly placed three stones on his side of the blanket, while Obi-Wan placed his three on the other side.

He noticed Owen glancing over, probably trying to see what inscriptions he’d chosen to paint onto the stones. He smiled at the boy, but shooed him away, “You know it’s unlucky to look at the stones
before the bride and groom.”

Owen made a face, but nodded. “How do you know so much about Tatooine marriage customs, anyways?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “Just knowledgable, I suppose.”

Anakin had actually told him, back when he was 15 and eager to tell Obi-Wan about how he and Padmé would get married under the suns. He wondered how they had ended up getting married, if they’d followed the Tatooine customs or the customs of the Naboo. He’d researched the customs further during his exile. Penance, perhaps, for not being what Anakin had needed him to be.

They were beautiful customs, if somewhat simple. Or perhaps it was that same simplicity that made them beautiful.

He placed his bowl, just right of center, while Owen placed his just to the left.

They both looked around and nodded, before moving quickly back to the small house.

The house was somewhat full, with Jango, R2, the Darklighters and the Whitesuns all conversing quietly. Shmi and Cliegg stood in the middle smiling softly at each other as they held hands. “We’re ready, dad!”

Cliegg smiled before turning to Shmi, “Last chance to back out. You sure you want to marry a crazy old man like me?”

Shmi’s smile was radiant. “Yes. Not a doubt in my mind.”

Cliegg turned back to Owen, “Will you bring the water?”

Owen beamed at the responsibility, moving to the cooling unit to bring out the small jar full of water. Benji Darklighter moved towards Cliegg, extending an arm out in escort. Obi-Wan did the same to Shmi.

Owen led the small procession out, Benji Darklighter and Cliegg followed after him, the rest of the Darklighters and the Whitesuns following as an escort.

“Are you ready?” Obi-Wan asked Shmi quietly.

She looked up at him, her hair down and her dress simple, but still one of the most beautiful woman Obi-Wan had ever seen, “I’m ready.”

He escorted her out the door, Jango and R2 following behind as their escorts.

Cliegg was waiting at the edge of the blanket and Obi-Wan passed Shmi’s hand to his. Together they crossed onto the blanket and Cliegg helped Shmi kneel, a bowl in front of her, before kneeling across from her behind his own bowl.

Owen was nearly shaking with nerves and excitement, but Obi-Wan noted that he was careful not to spill a single drop of precious water as he passed it to Cliegg.

Cliegg took the jar and with care poured half of it into Shmi’s bowl. He smiled at her as Shmi took the jar and poured the rest into the bowl in front of him.

Owen took the jar back and stepped back from the edge of the blanket.
Both Shmi and Cliegg picked up their bowls, holding them carefully. Cliegg spoke first, clearing his throat, “Shmi, I knew from the moment I saw you that you were someone that I would come to love. I saw your dedication, your love, your ferocity, and I was in awe. You’ve brought me a peace and a happiness that I thought I’d never have again. You’ve reminded me what it means to wake up smiling. The times when you were gone left me feeling empty, there is nothing I want more than to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Shmi’s smile was soft. “Cliegg, the day I left Tatooine was one of the best in my life, I told myself then, that there was nothing in this Galaxy that would convince me to come back here to stay. But then I met you and you created a place for you in my heart, and I realized that Tatooine could be more than my place of sorrow, that it could also become a place of joy. You’ve brought a steadiness to my life that I didn’t know I was missing. I’m so happy to have this opportunity to spend the rest of my days by your side.”

“May my water be your water.” Cliegg said quietly.

“And my life your life.” Shmi answered.

They each took a sip of water before carefully exchanging bowls.

“May I follow you as the suns rise.” Cliegg promised.

“May I follow you as the suns set.” Shmi promised back.

They took another sip of water from the others bowl, before setting them back down on the blanket.

Owen stepped forward and gave Cliegg the jar again, and carefully they put the rest of the water back into the jar.

Cliegg reached out and took Shmi’s hand, bringing it to his lips to kiss it.

“May my life be your life.”

Shmi kissed Cliegg's hand, “May my water be your water.”

They knelt there, across from each other for a long moment before Cliegg leaned forward and kissed Shmi. Obi-Wan could feel the force dance around them, their love and joy echoing around them.

Together they stood up, and the youngest Whitesun girl, Dama, stepped forward, reaching down and grabbing the first stone from Cliegg’s side, the stones that the Whitsuns, Darklighters, and Owen had engraved for the wedding. “May the life you build together be built with kindness.”

Cliegg took the stone with a smile, before placing it carefully in his belt.

Owen moved next, grabbing the middle stone, “May the life you build together be built with compassion.”

Shmi took the stone from him, placing it in her pocket.

Beru stepped forward to grab the last stone, “May the life you build together be built with love.”

Cliegg took the stone from her, placing it with the first stone.

He took Shmi’s hand again and crossed to the other side of the blanket, where the stones that Obi-Wan, R2, and Jango had engraved rested.
R2 trundled forward, carefully grasping the stone with a claw and lifting it for Shmi. He whistled lowly about respect and Shmi took the stone with a smile, placing it with her first stone.

Jango stepped forward and grabbed the middle stone on this side. “May the life you build together be built with patience.”

Cliegg took the stone placing it with the other two.

Obi-Wan took a deep breath before stepping forward to pick up the last stone. He clutched it tightly in his hand before giving it to Shmi, “May the life you build together be built with trust.”

He took a step back as Shmi placed the last stone in her pocket.

Shmi and Cliegg turned back to each other and for a long moment the two of them just stood together, staring at one another. Then Cliegg held out his arm, “Shall we, Mrs. Shmi Lars?”

“We shall.” She took his arm and then the two of them stepped off the blanket and back onto the sand. Dama, Beru, and Owen all cheered, while R2 whistled and beeped loudly. Obi-Wan clapped, his throat clenched together, making it impossible for him to join the children in their cheers. The group gathered around the newlyweds to give their congratulations, Shmi stepped forward and Obi-Wan pulled her into a hug. “I’m so happy for you, Shmi.”

Shmi smiled up at him, and then kissed him softly on his cheek. “Thank you for making this possible.”

“I think you and Cliegg would have always found a way.”

Shmi laughed, “That’s a surprisingly romantic thing to say. Your normally so practical.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “Must be the sun.”

Shmi pulled back. “Must be.”

Obi-Wan moved back and let Beru and Dama take his place, he moved over to Cliegg, pulling him in for a hug. “You’re a lucky man, Cliegg. I’m so happy for the two of you.”

Cliegg smiled at him, “The luckiest.” The other man met his eyes seriously, “I’ll treat her right.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “I know you will.”

He stepped back and watched as the rest of the group finished their congratulations. Jango was hugging Shmi, a genuine smile on his face. The man pulled back, before handing Shmi off to Benji Darklighter.

Jango stepped back and joined him. “How do you feel?”

Obi-Wan glanced at him, “I think your asking the wrong person, I’m not the one who just got married.”

Jango shrugged, “Shmi’s your family.”

Obi-Wan’s throat tightened again, “I’ll miss her.” He admitted, “But I’m happy for her. I think Cliegg will be good for her, and she deserves to have someone like that in her life.”

“She does.”
The rest of the group finished their congratulations and Shmi and Cliegg led the group back into the house. Mata Whitesun had taken some of the mushrooms that grew around the area and made Meringue Mushroom, which they all ate happily. Obi-Wan watched Shmi and Cliegg and Owen and felt another hint of sadness that Anakin was not here for this.

He closed his eyes, leaning against the wall as he reached out into the force. He took the memory of Shmi and Cliegg kneeling across from each other, bowls of water in hand and crystalized it, focusing on how happy and in love Shmi was. He sent it down his bond with Anakin. He knew that the message wouldn’t come across perfectly, would only be the faintest of impressions, but he still wanted Anakin to know.

There was a beep and then R2 was running into his leg. Obi-Wan opened his eyes and rolled his eyes at the droid. R2 just swore at him cheerfully and Obi-Wan couldn’t help the laugh that escaped. He accepted the message for what it was, and brought his focus back to the here and now, to the people around him. There were still celebrations to be had.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I hope it was at least somewhat enjoyable.
Jango's pov for SiaD is still being written, so it's still a few days out on being put up.
The next chapter for PiaR is also being written, but it will be updated after SiaD...

Question for those more knowledgable... For the place with characters... Since this is a WIP, should I have listed all the characters that will be involved? Or should I only update that once the characters actually become involved?
Undesirable Planets 1, 2, 3

Chapter Summary

Obi-Wan regrets the necessity of Maul's death... He should have been able to save him, but he didn't and now all he can do is make what amends he can. What sort of amend can a person make after killing a man, not once, but twice?

Chapter Notes

Okey dokey... So first a warning, the last little bit of this chapter was written while on an airplane, and it was edited in an airport... So... Yeah, hopefully it's fine. However, the next little while will have very little free time and not a whole lot of internet access, and I really wanted to get this chapter up before that happened.

Second, chapter one of this story has been re-written. It hopefully sounds a little better, not a whole lot has actually changed, so I don't feel like it has to be re-read or anything, but just so you know if you happen to read it and wonder whether you're going crazy because it isn't exactly what you remembered... You aren't crazy. Some of the other chapters will be slightly re-written as well, but... I didn't have time to get to those yet. Again, there shouldn't be any huge changes...

I think those are all the important notes... Onwards to the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He scowled as he lowered the ship onto the planet. He did not like this planet. The place had the ability to leave him feeling unsettled in a way that he did not enjoy feeling. He closed his eyes, his cheek stung where the scratches from Maul were already scabbing over and he remembered the weight of a dying man in his arms.

He had debated in his mind over and over again, whether he should come here. Any way he looked at it, it was a bad idea, but he couldn’t deny that if felt as though the force was urging him here.

He supposed it was a good thing that Anakin was with the Jedi and Shmi was now happily married to Cliegg on Tatooine; he would not have wanted to bring either of them here. R2D2 beeped at him, alarmed.

"Yes, R2. I meant to come here." R2 beeped dubiously and Obi-Wan shrugged, “Yes, well, I have my reasons.” R2 beeped again and Obi-Wan snorted, “I never said they were good reasons, R2.”

He moved out of the cockpit. “You can stay in the ship when I leave tomorrow. No reason for you to go outside.” He ignored R2s protests, moving quietly to his room. The ship felt empty in a way it hadn’t felt since he’d purchased it. Part of him wished he could have arrived on Dathomir earlier, so that he would have felt comfortable leaving the ship to escape the emptiness now that he didn’t have the distraction of piloting, no matter how small that distraction was while in hyperspace. But he wasn’t going to go out and bother a clan of Nightsisters at dusk. That was the one way to make this
bad idea worse.

R2 ran into his legs, beeping and whistling at him. Obi-Wan laughed, letting the small droid distract him. R2 was giving him a rundown of the different planets in the galaxy and why almost all of them were better than Dathomir. Obi-Wan was inclined to agree about most of them.

Dathomir was just plain unsettling.

With R2 creating noise, the silence was a little less painful and Obi-Wan settled down into meditation. The force was a little clouded here, although not in the same way the dark-side made things clouded, here it was more of a fine mist, making things hazy. From what he remembered of Dathomir it was fitting.

He settled into himself, waiting patiently for the force to fill him. He reached within his mind, letting his sense of self run over the bonds nestled within his mind. There was Anakin’s bubbly happiness, stronger and more vibrant than the other two bonds put together. He wrapped the bond with his love for the boy, nourishing the bond as best he could from the distance. Anakin seemed to notice because a moment later he could feel Anakin’s own love echoed back at him, it was weak due to the distance, and this time Anakin didn’t have the panic from having lost Obi-Wan’s presence in their bond to strengthen it. Obi-Wan sent a final wave of love and then a small admonishment, he had not intended to distract the boy from whatever he was doing.

He gave the thin bond that connected him to Shmi his attention, it had always amazed him, how despite Shmi’s relatively low force sensitivity, and her lack of desire to train her abilities in the force, how strong her bonds could be. Thin as it was, her bond had developed a strength reminiscent of kyber.

He shifted his attention to the other two bonds. They were weaker than they’d been initially, due to distance and Obi-Wan’s brief foray into joining the Force. Not strong enough to communicate more than that both Plo and Depa were alive.

He hesitated before nourishing the bonds, but in the end he spent a little time strengthening each of them. He still felt strongly that the bonds were Force blessed and instigated, and he would be delinquent in his duty to the Force if he did not do his part in strengthening the bonds. Whether Plo or Depa strengthened their side of the bonds was up to them.

Finally, he shifted his focus, looking to the force for guidance. The force was relatively quiet, there was the sense that he was following it’s will, but nothing more than quiet warning about how to proceed.

As though Obi-Wan didn’t know that he needed to be cautious moving forward.

This was Dathomir.

He slid out of meditation. He opened his eyes, and found R2 charging in the corner. He yawned as he stood, patting R2 on his dome as he moved to his bed.

It would be best if he could get some sleep tonight. Although he wasn’t holding out hope.

Sure enough, a few hours later he was awake again.

He sighed, allowing himself a few minutes to lay in bed staring at the ceiling of the ship before sitting up and pulling out his datapad. He scanned through his multiple outlines. Not for the first time he regretted that he’d been so distracted the first time around. The next few years were somewhat hazy in his memory, he’d had his hands full helping Anakin settle into the temple and becoming not just a
Knight, but a Master as well. Still, he could piece together parts of history based off what he did know.

His eyes landed on the short note he’d written, estimating that this was around the time that the clones had been ordered, although he was still unclear whether it was Sifo Dyas, Dooku, or someone else using Sifo Dyas’s name who had truly made the original order. His mind shifted to the man who had been the progenitor of the clones the first time around. He had possibly already been contacted, was possibly in the process of being contacted right now. Or maybe Obi-Wan had messed things up, maybe Jango’s presence on Naboo meant that Jango wouldn’t be contacted. Maybe they’d contact someone else, someone like Cad Bane, or Ventress, or Aurra Sing. Or maybe for some reason the plan had been scrapped completely and there would be no clone army at all.

He wondered if you could mourn someone who didn’t exist. He certainly seemed capable of doing so.


He closed his eyes. Took a deep breath in, then breathed out. It was a dangerous tendency of Obi-Wan’s, for his mind to spiral when he considered those for whom he mourned.

So many people he wanted to save from death, some people he just wanted to save from painful lives.

Choices. He reminded himself. Choices that weren’t just his to make. Other people had choices, and Obi-Wan couldn’t disregard their ability to make them.

His hand shifted to his comlink, and he held it tightly for a moment. He sighed and then released his grip on the comlink. There was no reason to contact Jango. He felt his lip twitch in dry amusement, who would have imagined there would be a day when he would want to contact Jango for no reason other than the man had become a friend of sorts, that his voice had become a comfort.

He shook his head.

He switched documents away from the timeline. Instead he started examining the slave trade system. Kessel, Nar Shaddaa, the Senex system. He considered Hutt Space, considered the Coalition, considered the Separatists, considered the Republic, considered the Jedi Order. He looked at plans he’d made, at the back up plans, at the document that had absolutely no plans written down on it, because sometimes Obi-Wan felt overwhelmed; the same way he had when he’d been the High General of the entire Third Systems Army, trying to run over half the war by himself (he missed Cody so much at times, the man had been his right hand for some of the craziest years of his life).

R2 beeped quietly, and Obi-Wan looked up to see that the droid had moved away from the corner. Obi-Wan shut off the datapad. “I’m fine, R2. Just thinking.” He tilted his head, considering one of his lists. “How do you feel about helping me with a project I had in mind?”

R2 beeped inquisitively and Obi-Wan smirked. “Oh, well, it’s still a work in progress, it’s important though. It will definitely stir things up.”

R2 beeped and Obi-Wan huffed, “Trust me, there’ll be subterfuge, fighting, and mayhem. It’ll be chaotic, you’ll love it.”

R2 didn’t deny the fact that his favorite plans were the chaotic ones.
Obi-Wan stood, lifting his arms above his head and stretching. The force nudged him and Obi-Wan straightened. “Oh, we have visitors.” He wasn’t expecting too much trouble, but he still made sure he had one of his lightsabers, a knife, and his blaster on him. He moved to exit the ship, “You stay here, R2.”

He wasn’t surprised when R2 completely ignored him, following him off the ship. He was on the edge of a forest, the entire area shrouded in mist making everything appear hazy. The Force and R2 both sent out a warning just before three individuals emerged out of the mist. Two of them were armed with bows, arrows notched and pointed straight at him. The third held tightly to her two blades. “Mother Talzin is expecting you.”

Obi-Wan inclined his head, “It would be rather rude of me to keep her waiting any longer.” He turned to R2, “Please, get back in the ship.” R2 whistled and Obi-Wan shook his head. “I know you can handle yourself, please R2.” After a few moments, with R2 rolling back and forth in both frustration and indecision the astromech rolled back up the landing ramp, closing the ship behind him. Obi-Wan sighed and then turned back to the Nightsisters.

The woman with the blades sneered at him, but Obi-Wan merely smiled back at her as pleasantly as possible. Her sneer grew more pronounced. She gestured for him to follow her, the two other women falling behind him, their arrows pointed unerringly at his back. It was not the most unpleasant escort he’d ever had, in fact he felt as though he was being surprisingly well received.

It was a short trek before they came into the Nightsisters domain. The women they passed on the path stopped to watch him pass, disdain clear in their eyes. His escorts led them past without a word, leading them further into the village towards the Nightsister Temple at the other edge of the village. The place practically pulsed with power and Obi-Wan repressed a shudder as he entered. The Force felt different here, still undeniably the Force, but different. He wouldn’t go so far as to say tainted, but there was something almost foreign about it. But then, he’d always recognized that the Force did not belong solely to the Jedi.

He hesitated at the start of a dark tunnel and felt the two women behind him bristle, he understood the warning for what it was and followed the first woman down the tunnel until he found himself in a room lit eerily by green lights, there was a pool to the side, also tinged green by that same strange light, altogether creating a somewhat eerie feel. In the center of the room an altar stood, carved with symbols he didn’t recognize, a woman stood before it, staring blankly forward. Although he had only ever met her briefly he still recognized her immediately, Mother Talzin.

The woman focused her silver eyes on him, appraising him with interest, he met her gaze evenly, keeping his own face placid. After a long moment the woman made a small gesture and his three escorts slipped out of the room, leaving him alone with the Dathomiran witch.

“What brings you here, Obi-Wan Kenobi.”

Obi-Wan didn’t answer immediately, pondering the question. He was here because he felt he had to be here. You… you won. Shock, confusion, the last vestiges of anger and rage. Life fading away to be replaced with emptiness. “I have come to tell you of the death of your son, Darth Maul.”

The woman laughed, dark and chilling, Obi-Wan felt the hair on his nape rise as the magic of the area stirred, but allowed himself no outward reaction. “And tell me, Obi-Wan Kenobi, how did he die, my son?”

“He died in battle, at my hand.”

The woman turned away from him and Obi-Wan could feel the force crackle dangerously around
her. “And yet you have the audacity to come here to tell me of his death. The death you caused.” The air was charged and the whispers of the Force strengthened in warning.

Obi-Wan tilted his head away from the woman, staring at the pool as it rippled despite having not been disturbed. He did not answer immediately, trying to find the words to express a feeling he couldn’t name. “Your son was vicious. Fierce.” He blinked and looked back at Mother Talzin. “He fought as though he had a thousand suns burning inside of him. He hated with a terrible passion. He didn’t die gently, he died fierce, angry, and except for the presence of a former Jedi, he died alone.” He paused, “He did not deserve to disappear, to die, remembered only as the Sith Apprentice who fell to a former Jedi. He deserved to have someone know, someone who would understand. His Sith Master wouldn’t, not after Maul failed. The Jedi wouldn’t, not after they knew what he was. The rest of the Galaxy could hardly care, they never do.” He thought, for a strange moment, of the clones, so many of them died, some of them without having even chosen a name, but their brothers carried them on, remembering their fallen brothers as well as they could. Maul deserved to have someone remember him, to allow him to live on, even if only in memory.

The Force around Talzin tempered, even if only slightly. “Tell me, was my son’s death more merciful than his life would have been?”

Obi-Wan froze at the question, surprised, “I’m not certain I can say.”

“But you can.” She turned back towards him, her eyes blazing, the room seemed almost electrified. “You know.”

Obi-Wan felt a thrill run down his spine, he tensed. The force suddenly went silent, as though waiting for him to choose. He forced himself to relax. “It is possible, that in another life, your son would spend ten years alone, lost in hatred and anger and pain, so much so that he would go insane. In that life, it could be that he would be brought to you and healed, that he would spend years searching for revenge against the person who had caused him that pain. It is possible that he would kill the woman that the man who hurt him loved.” His heart ached a little at the mention of Satine. “It is possible that he would help a planet fall into war until his old master decided to stop him in his tracks. And then, perhaps, years later he would once again go after the man who first caused his downfall.” He paused, “He would die at my hands, then as now.”

Mother Talzin didn’t respond for a long moment. “I had wondered if you would be truthful. If you would admit to killing my son, not once, but twice.”

Obi-Wan felt a strange mixture of fear and hope. “Were you also sent back? Pulled from the Force and put into this time?”

The woman stared at him consideringly. “You do not know?” Obi-Wan shook his head and Mother Talzin laughed. “The Force moves strangely around you.” She smiled, “You arrived last night and my dreams showed me many things. I saw choices, mistakes, portions of an entire life and even a death and things that lay beyond.” She shook her head, “Did we meet? In that other life?”

Obi-Wan felt his stomach clench, “Briefly.” Who else had dreamed? Surely it wasn’t every force sensitive, Anakin had never dreamed, and he was unaware of any of the Jedi having strange dreams before he left the temple. But then, he wouldn’t. Dreams were very personal, and too often disregarded as things that would pass by those in the Jedi Temple.

What if Palpatine had? His entire body seemed to freeze at the thought and he felt sick.

She hummed, and Obi-Wan forced himself to focus on the moment at hand. “I did not see that, it was likely not important enough, I saw only flashes. I did see my son, though. In pain, and angry, and
insane, just as you said. I did not know he died at your hand, although due to how he raved about his desire for revenge on you, I had guessed it possible. However, it must have occurred after I lost power on this plane.”

“Why you?” If he could figure out why her, perhaps he could figure out who else had dreamt.

Talzin smiled, “Who is to say? None of my children dreamt of a life beyond this time.” She observed him for a moment, “But I’m not the first to be affected, that I do know.”

Obi-Wan closed his eyes, felt the brief moment of panic surge and then recede. He would figure that out later. “I see. And do you know who else has been affected.”

Mother Talzin shrugged carelessly, “I do not know, and I do not think that I care either.” Her smile turned cruel, “What I do know is that you owe me penance, Obi-Wan Kenobi.” She paced the edge of the altar several times. “By your own admittance, you have killed my son, not once, but twice, and I demand repayment.”

“Would you ask for my death?” He asked quietly. The idea did not frighten him, it was still horrifyingly appealing in a way he strove desperately to distance himself from. He did not want to want to die, but he was so very tired, the weight of the galaxy pressing down on his shoulders. But even then, if she demanded his death he could not allow himself to simply acquiesce.

Talzin smiled, her eyes glittered dangerously, “Tempting.” She paused, “But no.”

“And what would you demand. I have very little left to offer.”

Talzin laughed, “You have a surprisingly great deal. My dreams were quite… illuminating.” How her dreams could tell her anything about him when she had already admitted to not having seen him in his dreams, he wasn’t sure, but didn’t think it worth debating. She laid both hands flat on the altar. “You have killed my son twice, and for that you will save two more. You caused my son years of anguish once, and so you will save another of my children from years of anguish.”

Obi-Wan blinked, trying to understand what she meant, “I am hardly a fit teacher, nor a fit guardian. Surely your glimpse into that future that might have been, and might still be, has shown you that. The galaxy fell into chaos, fell into darkness, because I failed in those roles.”

Mother Talzin waved her hand dismissively, but her eyes were dark and fierce. “What I saw was the death of my children, the death of my people. I felt my grief, even if it was only for a moment and in a flash. I will not make the same mistakes.” She straightened, “Do you refuse to make amends?”

Obi-Wan sighed, “No. If you truly wish for me to aid your children, I shall do what I can.”

“I do not wish for you to aid them, I wish for you to take them with you, to teach them, to protect them, to love them, to help them become strong. Strong enough to survive.”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow, “And then will they one day turn on me? I hear that was a specialty of yours, to use your children as pawns, to send them to your enemies in order to lull them into a sense of security and then have your children turn on them and kill them when the time was right.”

Mother Talzin scoffed, “No, not this time.” Her eyes narrowed, “I do not know the name of the man, I do remember he brought vengeance down on my people. I do not want to discover what form your vengeance would take.”

“His name was Count Dooku.”
She raised an eyebrow in interest, “Indeed? How interesting.” She shrugged, “But I do not need any more whispers of the future. I shall make my own path, I suggest you do the same.”

He was trying. Trying to create a path. He did not know how successful his attempts were though.

She rounded the altar, moving past him gracefully and entering the tunnel. “Come.”

Obi-Wan followed after her, his mind racing in a thousand different directions. Mother Talzin knew, so did any number of others. It was an unexpected discovery, and one that made him wary. He pushed the thought away, determined to meditate on it later. Instead he focused on the fact that Mother Talzin wanted him to take some of her children with him. He did not see how such a situation would end well. Yet, he also had the distinct feeling that to deny Mother Talzin would be to invite messy repercussions.

They stepped out of the temple and into the sun and Obi-Wan’s eyes fell on two Dathomirian males. He felt his feet falter as he recognized the larger boy. Not the gigantic monster of a Zabrak that he’d seen before, no this boy was just a child, but it was still quite obviously Savage Opress. His mind flashed to a burning planet, to Adi Gallia’s death, to a bystander watching as Satine died and a planet burned. He could feel Mother Talzin’s eyes on him and so he turned his focus to the other Zabrak boy. He was smaller than Savage, frailer, noticing where his attention was Savage shifted until he was slightly in front of the younger boy. It was a distinctly protective move, and helped Obi-Wan to push away the memories of fear, and pain, and death.

Mother Talzin stepped forward, “You will take them.”

Obi-Wan looked at the boys, and they were boys, Savage couldn’t be more than 16 and the other boy was quite certainly younger. He looked at the way the women around them looked at the boys with disdain, the way the younger was hunched into himself to hide away, the way the older looked as though he would fight teeth, and horns, and claws to protect him.

He glanced towards Talzin who was watching him, challenge in her eyes. He took a step forward, towards the two boys and watched as they both tensed, eyeing him warily. “What are your names?” He asked quietly.

Savage growled at him, a low sound from deep in his throat. But to Obi-Wan it sounded more like a cornered animal than it did a predator. Not that he would ever make the mistake of thinking a cornered animal wasn’t exceptionally dangerous. He had been the one cornered often enough to know how dangerous they could be. The younger boy answered first. “Feral.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Hello, Feral, my name is Obi-Wan.” He glanced at Savage but the boy only bared his teeth, not answering.

“His name is Savage.” Talzin told him, waving towards the boy. Savage ducked his head, obviously hearing the reproach in her words. She looked at the two boys, there was a distant compassion in her eyes. She loved them, Obi-Wan realized, but not in that consuming way that he often saw, it was more distant than that. “You’ll be going with Obi-Wan.” She told the boys, “You will obey and listen to him and he in turn will teach and protect you.”

Savage ducked his head. “Yes, Mother Talzin.”

Talzin waved towards the escorts from earlier who were still standing by, instructing them to guide Obi-Wan and his new charges back to his ship. Obi-Wan blinked slightly at the abrupt send-off, but after giving Mother Talzin a short bow he allowed himself to be led away, the two boys trailing after him.
He felt slightly overwhelmed.

They had not gone far when Mother Talzin called after him, “Remember Obi-Wan, there is a third child who you must save.”

Obi-Wan paused, turning back to the Nightsister, “Might I ask who that is?”

Mother Talzin smiled, “You already know.”

Obi-Wan stared at her for a long moment. This strange, angry, bitter woman. She was right, he did not need her to tell him who he needed to go and find. He gave her another short bow, and then followed the three Nightsisters back to his ship, Savage and Feral behind him.

The three Nightsisters stopped outside his ship and Obi-Wan gave them a final nod. The three Nightsisters watched, eyes narrowed as Obi-Wan opened the landing pad and gestured for the boys to enter, not leaving until Obi-Wan himself had entered and closed the ship behind him.

The two brothers huddled close to the wall of the ship and Obi-Wan felt a wave of exhaustion hit him. What was he supposed to do in this situation?

Several angry frantic beeps pierced the air and Obi-Wan sighed as he turned to R2, the droid had his electric prod extended, whistling threats at the two Nightbrothers. “Calm down, R2.” He stepped between the droid and the two brothers, Savage had pushed Feral against the wall and was standing teeth bared between the boy and the droid. “Savage and Feral are going to be joining us.”

R2’s response was extremely colorful, his dome swiveling back and forth between Obi-Wan and the Nightbrothers. Obi-Wan sighed, “Yes, I’m aware that they look like the warrior from Naboo, I’m aware he tried to kill me, I’m aware that they have the potential to be dangerous, but no, I have not lost my mind, all my circuits are still working just fine, thanks.”

Feral giggled and Obi-Wan turned towards the brothers. “Feral, Savage, meet R2-D2, the most stubborn droid to ever grace this galaxy. He can be a little bit protective.” He turned back to R2, “R2, meet Feral and Savage, Mother Talzin has asked that I…” He hesitated, “Well, that I help them.”

“What does that mean?” Feral asked quietly.

Obi-Wan turned back to the two boys, he hesitated, “I suppose it can mean whatever you want it to mean.” He shrugged, “So long as you are with me, I will do my best to ensure that you always have food and clothing and shelter. If you so desire I will teach you those things that I know. Should people try to hurt you, I will do my best to keep you from harm. If you want, I will be your friend, and if you don’t I will be your ally. Our relationship is for you to decide.”

“Why?” Savage’s voice was rough and Obi-Wan could feel his fear.

He was dreadfully young. “Your mother asked it of me.” He said, than thought of Maul and Obi-Wan’s regret at not being able to save him. “But more than that, you deserve to be safe, and you deserve what happiness I can give you.” R2 whistled dubiously and Obi-Wan ignored him.

Savage looked distrustful, but Feral seemed to accept it.

Obi-Wan sighed internally. “If you’d like, R2 can show you around. I don’t have a home outside this ship, so you can choose a room, either shared or separate. I’m going to take off and get us into hyperspace. I can make us something to eat after that if you’re hungry.” That was going to be a problem, Obi-Wan still had a hard time remembering to eat if he wasn’t reminded, but if he had two
teenage boys on his ship he would need to actually start remembering.

R2 whistled grudgingly and started trundling off, although Obi-Wan noted that the droid did not hide his electric prod. He rubbed his forehead, feeling a headache coming in. This was not going to end well.

He moved to the cockpit, taking off and moving the ship out of the atmosphere. He sighed, putting his new destination into his ships’ nav-computer. A noise behind him had him turning. Feral and Savage were peeking in, their eyes wide as they looked out the view port.

“I’ve never been off Dathomir before.” Feral said, awe in his voice. “It’s beautiful.”

Obi-Wan looked out the window, to the vast emptiness of space. “It can be.” He smiled. “Hold tight, I’m about to move us into hyperspeed, the jump can be a bit bumpy.”

Both boys scrambled into the room, jumping onto the seats and belting themselves in. R2 beeped grumpily before settling in the corner.

Obi-Wan switched them into hyperspeed, smiling softly to himself as the boys both gasped. For a moment he pondered the after effects of Naboo, the first time around he had ended up taking care of one boy traumatized by years of slavery, suffering from separation from his mother, while Obi-Wan himself was struggling with his own loss and pain. It was, he reflected, a miracle that both of them had survived those first few years.

Now, in the aftermath of Naboo, he found himself gaining custody of two traumatized boys, now separated from everything they knew. And he certainly felt as though he wasn’t in the right mental space to properly handle things.

He really hoped he did not ever end up back in time again, if the pattern held he would end up with three children, and he did not want to imagine trying to care for three traumatized children. That would be a disaster.

The force laughed and giggled around him. Obi-Wan didn’t think it was all that funny.

R2 beeped questioningly from his corner and Obi-Wan shrugged, “A planet called Rattatak.” R2 went silent before wheeling himself out of the cockpit. Obi-Wan flashed back to Anakin stomping away and slamming the door. He did not like the connotations that left him with.

“What’s on Rattatak?” Feral asked.

Obi-Wan hesitated, “Hopefully, one of the Nightsisters.”

Savage spoke up for the first time since entering the cockpit. “How do you know she’s there?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I don’t. Not for certain.” He had not known Ventress well, not really. He had fought both against her and with her. But Quinlan had known her in a way Obi-Wan never had, the other had been devastated by her death, what few nights that they had both not been on the war front had involved Obi-Wan trying to mend his broken heart.

“Then why are we going there?”

Why, indeed. “Because, it’s my best guess.” He sighed, “But it will be quite some time before we get there. He sent the boys a smile, hoping it didn’t look as strained as it felt. “Feel free to make yourselves comfortable.”
It was a long trip. Obi-Wan could make Kings, and Senators, and Ambassadors feel comfortable and at ease in his presence. And he was quite good with younglings, even if he did say so himself. He’d always enjoyed his time in the creche and with the initiates when he’d been at the temple. But teenagers, that was a different matter. Anakin and Ahsoka were the only two teens he’d spent any length of time around, and Anakin had been his padawan and Ahsoka his grand-padawan and Obi-Wan had been able to make it work.

This… this was not the same. He was fairly certain that he and the boys all felt supremely uncomfortable. R2 was the only one who didn’t appear to feel that way, Obi-Wan heard the droid make enough amused comments to understand that the droid thought it was hilarious, although not hilarious enough to stop considering the two boys as threats.

At least Obi-Wan hadn’t forgotten to feed them yet. Although he could admit that that was largely due to R2’s impeccable timing and insistence on reminding Obi-Wan to eat when he had gone too long without. But Obi-Wan was going to have to start taking more jobs again, because both boys ate voraciously. Teenagers. He smiled slightly as he imagined Anakin’s master, whoever it would be, trying to handle Anakin’s eating habits as a teen, that boy had eaten enough food to make Dex look surprised, and that wasn’t easy for a Besalisk like Dex.

He sighed, focusing himself again. The boys were both in their room, Anakin’s old room, having decided to share. And Obi-Wan was taking the time to get his daily katas in, as well as the routine that Jango had attempted to drill into his head. The exercise was calming, and far better than trying, and failing, to get some sleep.

He felt a stirring in the force and wasn’t surprised when a moment later Feral peeked into the room. Obi-Wan nodded to him, but didn’t stop in his katas. Feral disappeared and a few moments later Savage was also peeking into the room. R2 beeped at them in annoyance, but the two boys either ignored the droid completely, or took his beeps as an invitation to come in. Which it most definitely had not been.

Savage was watching intently and Obi-Wan noted that his feet and hands were shifting a little. He finished the Kata and turned to the two boys. “I thought the two of you were tired?”

Savage only frowned, “Will you teach us that?”

Obi-Wan tilted his head in consideration, “Do you both want to?”

Both boys nodded and Obi-Wan moved them into position, a few steps away from each other. He smiled as he remembered teaching Anakin these first katas, first in the Temple, and again, here in this very ship, Shmi laughing in the background. He slowly went through one of the first katas, explaining how to move one’s body, how when done right, it would feel as though the force was moving along in the same movement.

That led to an explanation of the force, and how it was both the same power the Nightsisters used, but how it was also more that just that. “I’m not familiar with the way the Nightsisters use the force, it was quite strange to me. But many force users use the force in different ways, I can only teach you what I personally know.”

They spent nearly an hour going over the first kata and explaining the force before Obi-Wan sent them to clean up in the fresher and head back to bed. R2 beeped something uncomplimentary and Obi-Wan ignored him. Turning back to the rest of his exercise routine. They would be at Rattatak tomorrow, but for right now Obi-Wan didn’t want to think, didn’t want to worry about what was
ahead. Didn’t want to think about all of the complications he was currently ignoring. So, for tonight he wouldn’t. He could worry about everything after he got Ventress off of Rattatak and somewhere safe.

He stared down at the planet through the view port. He closed his eyes reaching for the force, allowing it to guide his hands as he brought the ship down to the planet. The ship landed gently and he felt Savage and Feral coming towards him. He opened his eyes to find the ship had landed right outside a small city. The force nudge him, warning and advice all rolled together. “I need you two to stay here.”

Savage opened his mouth, and Obi-Wan had no doubt he was about to argue with him. Obi-Wan shook his head, “No. There’s some sort of fight going on.” He could feel it through the force, the anger, the pain, the excitement, the bloodlust, the greed, the violence. “And I’m not bringing you into the middle of a blaster fight within a week of meeting you.”

He hurried towards the landing ramp, stopping when he got to R2. “Don’t let anyone get on to the ship unless it’s me or they are with me.” R2 beeped in affirmative and then whistled questioningly. “Yes, please make sure they don’t do anything stupid or reckless.” R2 beeped a question, “No, don’t electrocute them.” He paused, “But also, please don’t let them steal my ship. I don’t want to be stranded here.” It was half joke and half serious request, he didn’t think that they would actually do so, and didn’t think either of the boys actually knew how to pilot his ship even if they wanted to. But it would also be perfectly in line with Obi-Wan’s luck for him to get stuck on Rattatak.

R2 whistled happily at that and Obi-Wan hoped that leaving the Nightbrothers with R2 wouldn’t come back to haunt him. But the force was urging him on and Obi-Wan didn’t think he had time to give R2 firmer instructions.

He left the ship at a run, and almost immediately he could hear the sound of blasters firing. He came to the city wall at a run, using the force to leap up it, he caught the top of the wall with his left hand and pulled himself up and over. There were a group of Weequay pirates along the walls and on the roofs, firing down at two individuals wielding green lightsabers.

Obi-Wan felt the force scream out, saw the sniper take his shot.

Obi-Wan ran, lighting his lightsaber as he went.

He caught the bolt on his saber, deflecting it back. He landed a few feet behind the two lightsaber wielders; he whirled his lightsaber, catching more bolts as the Weequays started yelling at his unexpected presence.

The two saber wielders turned to him, lightsabers raised warily. “Hello there,” Obi-Wan said, “Why exactly are a bunch of pirates shooting at us?”

The man blinked at him several times before taking his presence in stride. “Raiders, actually. They like to come around and cause problems. Did the order send you?”

Obi-Wan paused, “No, not quite. I’d be happy to bring you and your apprentice back to Coruscant though.”

The girl, and wasn’t that strange, Ventress looked as though she couldn’t be older than seventeen, looked back and forth in confusion. “Master Ky?”
The Weequay had gathered together again, reorganizing themselves, and the blaster bolts started raining down on them again. Obi-Wan bared his teeth in a grin. His blade whirling in the familiar pattern of Soresu. While Obi-Wan wouldn’t say he missed having people shoot at him, there was something satisfying about sinking into Soresu as more and more of the blaster fire was directed at him. He didn’t let a single bolt through.

The Weequay seemed to realize when they were outmatched, because those that were left soon fled. But then, he supposed Weequay, while often violent and fairly crazy, weren’t stupid. Or so his interactions with Hondo Ohnaka had led him to believe.

The master was the first to shut his lightsaber off, though Obi-Wan noted he did not put it away, keeping it ready and available should Obi-Wan prove to be a threat. Obi-Wan turned his own lightsaber off and hung it on his belt so as to not be threatening.

Ventress was the last to let her lightsaber shut off, a suspicious look on her face.

“Jedi Master Ky Narec, at your service. This is my apprentice, Padawan Asajj Ventress.”

Obi-Wan inclined his head respectfully, “It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance. “My name is Obi-Wan Kenobi.”

Ky Narec shifted, Obi-Wan saw his hand twitch on his lightsaber, “Not Jedi Knight Obi-Wan Kenobi?”

“No, I’m afraid I left the order while still a padawan.”

Ky looked suspicious, “Did you? And what brings you here to Rattatak?”

“Chance, the force, and a grieving mother.” He raised his hands diplomatically, “I intend you no harm. And as I said before, I would be more than willing to help you return to Coruscant.”

“What makes you think that we need help to return?”

Obi-Wan hesitated. “I know that Asajj has never been to the temple, that she was brought here as a slave, presumably you found her and trained her, but you never left, never brought her to the temple, presumably that is because you can’t. Rattatak is fairly separated from the galaxy, the only ships that come here are raiders and pirates.” He paused, “And presumably it once brought a Jedi Master whose ship was either stolen or destroyed.”

Ky Narec gave him a scrutinizing look. “The force dances around you.” He finally said, “It may have been quite some time since I stood near a Jedi, but even I can see that you are something more than just a former Jedi Padawan.”

Obi-Wan quirked his lips, “The force does not leave us if we leave the Jedi, does not forsake us if we seek to forge our own path. We are children of the force wherever we go. But if your worry is that I have forsaken the force, than I assure you, that is not the case. The force is with me.” The force was with him, he was one with the force. He stopped his thoughts. Concentrating on the matter at hand.

Ky Narec nodded, “Well spoken.” He clipped his lightsaber to his belt. “Ten years I’ve been on Rattatak, I had come to believe I would die here.”

He had, Obi-Wan knew, although he couldn’t be sure when. He had died here, leaving Ventress alone and scared and angry. Angry at the Jedi who had sent her master here and then forgotten about him.
“Master Ky?” Ventress spoke quietly, “What is happening?”

Ky turned and smiled at the girl, “You remember the stories I told you of the Jedi Temple? Of how someday I would take you there?”

Asajj hesitated, “He said something about a grieving mother? Are you giving me back to her?”

Ky looked stricken, as though the thought hadn’t occurred to him. “If that is what you want.” His voice shook, as though the thought hurt. “I would never keep you from your family if that is what you wanted.”

Asajj turned to Obi-Wan. “Is she looking for me?”

Obi-Wan hesitated. “Mother Talzin… is not strictly speaking your mother, rather she is the mother of the clan that you were born into. She remembered your fate, your sacrifice. She only wished to ensure that you were happy, whatever path that was.”

Asajj nodded, biting her lip and Obi-Wan once again mused at how young she looked. “Can I think about it?” She asked quietly.

Ky Narec turned to her, his hand landing on her shoulder, “Asajj, of course you can. You can take as long as you want. And you can change your mind at any time.”

Asajj smiled up at him and then moved forward to give the man a hug. Obi-Wan looked away, allowing them to have the moment to themselves.

Ky Narec turned back to him. “We have friends here on Rattatak, we would appreciate the opportunity to say goodbye.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Of course. Feel free to take your time.” He pointed the way he came, “My ship is that way, I will wait there until you are ready to depart.” He smiled, “However, I left two teenage boys on my ship, with only a droid for supervision, if I don’t return soon then I may not have a ship to return to.” Especially because R2 was the supervision. It still didn’t seem like the wisest course of action he had ever taken.

Ky Narec nodded solemnly before the two of them turned and started making their way towards the center of the city. Obi-Wan turned back the way he had come, jumping across rooftops until he reached the city wall again. He jumped down from the wall, using the force to ease the drop.

He landed gracefully. He could see his ship not far from where he’d dropped down, but he did not head to it immediately. Instead he leaned back against the wall, closing his eyes. He reached out with the force, tentative and unobtrusive. He could feel the presence of those living on Rattatak, but he narrowed his focus to the four he was most interested in. Two were already somewhat familiar from his trip to Rattatak. Feral and Savage were young and untrained in the force, though both had remarkable potential. There was anger there, both of them, more anger than the Jedi would ever be okay with seeing, but they weren’t what Obi-Wan would call dark, just a little murky. But their Clan Mother had just sent them away with a stranger after years of only showing them distant care, they were Nightbrothers after all, not Nightsisters.

They were disposable, and they knew it. No, Obi-Wan didn’t blame them for their anger. He hoped that he would somehow be able to alleviate it. Although he couldn’t say he was completely sure how. He had never had much success in helping others overcome their pain and hurt. If he had, the Galaxy would have been a much different place.

He sighed, tired. After taking Ky Narec and Asajj Ventress to Coruscant, if they chose to go, he
would have to go to Tatooine. Shmi would know what to do, would know how to help these boys in ways that were beyond Obi-Wan’s skill set.

With that decision in mind he turned his attention to the other two force signatures he was interested in. Ky Narec’s was a powerful signature. In a way it reminded Obi-Wan of his own former Master’s signature. There was a resilience to it, a stubbornness. It was also firmly entrenched in the light. Obi-Wan knew that there were many Jedi, that if they were to find themselves in Ky Narec’s position, would have allowed the perceived abandonment of the Jedi Order to turn them bitter and angry. But Ky Narec had none of that deep seated bitterness, or if he did, it was well hidden. No, Ky had taken his turn in fate and done his best to continue in his duty. Protecting the people of Rattatak as well as he could with the limited support he had.

Obi-Wan honestly wouldn’t have been surprised if Ky Narec had decided that it was his duty to remain and to protect the people of Rattatak, he suspected the largest reason he was not doing so was because he felt that Asajj would benefit from the teachings of the temple.

Obi-Wan hoped the man wasn’t wrong.

He turned his attention to the final signature. He recognized her signature, the same way he could somewhat recognize Savage’s. It was light though. Light in a way that Obi-Wan had never seen it. The anger and hatred she was capable of hadn’t yet become an intrinsic part of her being, although it was certainly capable of becoming so.

She was certainly not what the Jedi would consider an ideal Jedi. But remembering his earlier considerations on Ky Narec he imagined that the Jedi Council would be forced to concede to the intractable Jedi Master. If Ky Narec had his way then Asajj Ventress would be firmly accepted into the Jedi Order, would become first a Knight and then a Master.

It was a strange almost role reversal. Obi-Wan shook his head, pushing away the slight melancholy that came whenever he thought too much of could-be’s. Instead he straightened from his position against the wall and began to make his way back to his ship. He had left R2 and two teenage boys alone there, and Obi-Wan would prefer to cut short any possible shenanigans that they may have decided to engage in.

He made it to the ship and the landing ramp descended immediately, meaning someone had been keeping watch for his return. Feral was sitting crosslegged on the floor in front of the landing ramp. “Where are Savage and R2?” Obi-Wan asked as he closed the landing ramp behind him and sat next to Feral on the floor.

“Savage is mad at you, so he’s sulking in the cockpit. R2 keeps threatening him with electricity.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “I see. And what are you doing?”

“You said you were going to get into a fight.” He tilted his head, “You don’t look like you’ve been fighting.”

“It wasn’t a particularly difficult fight.”

“Then why couldn’t we come?”

Obi-Wan was reminded suddenly of when Anakin had been his padawan the first few times when Obi-Wan had been sent on missions without him. In fact so far Feral and Savage had shown both of Anakin’s main tactics. Sulking at being left behind or demanding to know why he hadn’t been allowed to come.
That was when he didn’t come back hurt or injured, then Anakin had a somewhat different reaction.

“Well, I hadn’t seen the fight yet, it could have been a very difficult fight.” Feral frowned at that and Obi-Wan continued, “However, I am also used to people shooting at me, which I assure you, did happen. I would hope that that is not something that you and Savage are familiar with.”

“Well, no.”

“As you can imagine, that was not something that I wanted to make you familiar with.”

Feral frowned. “But you’re going to.”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow, “Why do you say that?”

“Mother said you were going to teach us how to protect ourselves.”

Obi-Wan hesitated, “There are many different ways to protect oneself. I would not presume to force you into a life in which violence is the norm. Sometimes protecting yourself means staying away from danger.” He smiled gently, “If the life I lead is not the life you want to live than I won’t make you. I can teach you how to use your words to avoid fighting.” He grimaced, “At least most of the time. I can teach you how to disappear into the galaxy. How to become the type of person who no one would seek to hurt.”

Feral frowned, “But you’ve been teaching us those fighting moves.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Of course, you asked me to.”

Feral blinked at him several times. “Oh.”

“Now let’s go find your brother and R2.”

Feral nodded and stood up as Obi-Wan pushed himself to his feet. “Savage thinks you’re going to abandon us. He doesn’t think you want us.”

Obi-Wan blinked, “If I’m honest, I certainly didn’t expect for the past week to go the way it has. I did not go to Dathomir or meet with your mother with the intention of bringing you or your brother back with me.”

Feral looked disappointed, “So you don’t want us.”

“I did not say that.” He stopped and turned to Feral, “I said that I did not expect you, but that does not mean I do not appreciate your presence.”

“But do you want us?”

Obi-Wan didn’t answer immediately, well aware that any insincerity would be noticed and remembered, at least he had always been able to notice. He remembered being twelve and unwanted by every Knight and Master that saw him, the first few months with Qui-Gon where he knew he’d been taken out of guilt, the first years with Anakin when he knew he’d been the last resort, not the Master Anakin wanted, his time on Tatooine where all Jedi were unwanted, and Owen had wanted him as far away from Luke as possible. He had overcome these moments, but they had still hurt.

He remembered a nine year old Anakin who had felt unwanted by the entire Jedi council, who had worried his first years as an apprentice that he was a padawan of burden, and not of choice, who had ended up turning to a Sith Lord to fulfill his desperate desire to be wanted, who had found true
belonging in the unconditional love of a son he’d never known.

He remembered Ahsoka and her hurt at initially being unwanted by Anakin, who had found herself left to drift when her family decided that they wanted to keep the Senate happy more than they wanted to protect her, who had found a strength and confidence in herself while in the midst of the chaos of the galaxy, had found that whatever else, the force had always loved her and wanted her, a lesson that had taken Obi-Wan decades longer to learn.

Obi-Wan had seen any number of reactions to wanting to be wanted and not finding it.

It was a very real pain, to be unwanted. And a cruel pain, because of how unnecessary it often was. “I do, I do want you and Savage. You should know that neither of you are unwanted.” Because everyone deserved to be wanted, and if opening his heart for the two boys would allow them the security of being wanted than he could do that, no matter how dangerous that was to his heart should history repeat itself.

Feral looked at him, eyes narrowed. “You mean it.” He sounded surprised.

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I do try to mean what I say.”

Feral didn’t respond, face screwed in thought and Obi-Wan left him to his thoughts as they continued on to find Savage and R2.

They made it to the cockpit to find that the door had been shut, Obi-Wan sighed when it didn’t immediately open. “R2, have you locked the door?” He heard annoyed whistling faintly through the door and sighed, “Yes, thank you for making sure that you had complete control of the ship, I appreciate that you opened the landing ramp for me and that you didn’t leave without me. Now, please open the door.”

R2 made his disgruntlement clear, but the door opened. Obi-Wan tried not to laugh at the sight that met him. Savage was sitting in the pilot’s seat, glaring heavily at R2. R2 still had his electric prod out (although, he was, thankfully, not using it), but he had also connected himself into the nav computer and had taken control of the ship, apparently having decided that Savage was trying to fly away. When Obi-Wan had told R2 to not let them take his ship and leave him he had mostly been joking, he had a feeling that neither Savage or R2 had seen it as a joke.

He could feel the force laughing at him.

“Well, I suppose this is one way to get to know each other.”

R2’s response and Savage’s glare made it clear that neither appreciated his opinion.

Obi-Wan decided he wasn’t going to give either of them a response, and was, in fact, going to ignore the situation entirely, for the moment at least. “We will likely be having two guests, I was going to make food for all of us. Did anyone have something specific they would like?”

For a moment none of them answered, he could see Feral and Savage exchanging significant looks, although he pretended not to notice. Finally, Savage shrugged, “We liked those Correllian Tubers that you made.”

That had been the first food Obi-Wan had made for them, mostly because it was what he had on hand. (He would need to stop on a planet with more thoroughfare to really stock up on food, he hadn’t stocked up since running into the Naboo group on Tatooine, and hadn’t expected to need to stock up much after leaving Shmi with Cliegg on Tatooine. He was definitely being proved wrong.
He’d need to take another job sooner than he’d thought.

“Well, we can definitely do some Correllian Tubers, and maybe some roba meat.”

Both boys nodded and Obi-Wan shooed them out of the room. He gave R2 a raised eyebrow, but the droid ignored him, disconnecting from the ship and following the two boys out. “This is going to be interesting.” He rubbed his temples, he could once again feel a headache coming on, and if his past experience with teenage boys and R2 was any indication than it wouldn’t be going away any time soon.

He moved to the kitchenette and began to prepare a meal for the group. He could hear the soft murmur of the boys talking in the main area as he started frying the tubers.

He had just finished the tubers and was seasoning the roba meat when he felt the presence of Master Ky Narec and Asajj Ventress outside the ship. “Would you let our guests in?” He called out.

A moment later he heard the landing pad open and then after a few moments close again.

The force rang out in warning and Obi-Wan turned towards the main area just as Ventress shrieked, Savage and Feral yelled, and R2 whistled and beeped in what Obi-Wan could only describe as a war cry.

Obi-Wan darted down the passage as quickly as he could, entering in time to see Ky Narec standing in front of Asajj Ventress, lightsaber drawn, as R2 went after her, electricity and fire and pinchers all out. Feral and Savage were both staring in shock. It made the way R2 had greeted them look positively angelic.

“R2!” His voice was sharp as he slid between R2 and Ky Narec, he gritted his teeth as R2 jabbed him and with the electric prod. He ignored it though, he reached out and placed his hands on the droid. He expected some pushback, but the droid came to a stop.

The whole room seemed to freeze as he stared at the droid. R2 whistled plaintively and Obi-Wan felt his mind stutter to a stop. How? How would R2 know that? He remembered what Mother Talzin had said, but that made no sense. R2 was a droid, a resourceful, clever, skilled droid, but he wasn’t force sensitive.

But how else would R2 have known that Ventress was dangerous. He tried to reflect back on their interactions. R2 had protected him after his flashback on the ship, showing a familiarity and care for Obi-Wan that should have made Obi-Wan suspicious. He had helped Jango to take down the droid ship in a way very similar to how Anakin had taken it down with R2’s help once before. R2 had reacted negatively to Savage and Feral, at first Obi-Wan had thought it was because they were similar to Maul, now he knew that was undoubtedly true, but also because Savage had been dangerous as well, if not so much for Anakin, and thus not as much for R2.

But Ventress. Ventress had been a threat that R2 was more familiar with.

“Oh, R2.” He ran his hand over R2’s dome. “I understand, I do.”

R2 beeped softly, not apologetically, that wasn’t R2’s style, but it was an offer of a truce.

“We’ll talk, later. Okay?” He stood and turned to Ky Narec who was watching him with a suspicious look on his face.

“That was a highly unexpected welcome.”
Obi-Wan nodded, “R2 has had some unfortunate experiences with Nightsisters, I was unaware it was going to be triggering for him.” He rested his hand on R2’s dome again, “He may not like the situation, and he’ll keep his distance from Padawan Ventress, but he won’t attack her again.”

R2 beeped and Ventress glared at the droid. Ky Narec gave him a long look. “I had not expected for us to be attacked upon entering your ship.”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow, shifting his face into a soft, amused expression. “I can’t say I expected it either. A lesson, I’m sure, about any number of important lessons on expectations and vigilance.”

Ventress snorted, but her glare had receded somewhat and she seemed to have decided that she was no longer upset. Ky Narec glanced back at her, and Obi-Wan watched as the Master determined that Ventress really had pushed her upset away and that his Padawan was completely uninjured. He could see the moment Ky Narec decided that he would put the moment behind him, if perhaps he was slightly more on guard than before, well, Obi-Wan certainly couldn’t blame him.

He smiled, “Well, if you’re hungry. I’ve prepared food.”

All three teenagers beamed.

Savage and Feral were in Anakin’s old room, Ventress was in Shmi’s old room, and Ky Narec was in the guest room that was normally only inhabited by Jango. They were off Rattatak, and Obi-Wan couldn’t be more pleased with that, and on their way to Coruscant, which Obi-Wan was slightly less pleased with.

He didn’t particularly want to return to Coruscant. Certainly not so soon after his last visit there.

It didn’t help that he missed Anakin terribly, seeing him again, only to leave him behind would only hurt.

But promises were promises.

He entered his own room to find R2 charging in the corner.

The moment he entered R2 powered back up fully and rolled to the center of the room, beeping pointedly.

Obi-Wan sighed and took a seat on the bed. “So.” He stopped, sighed again. Then started again, “I’m an accidental time traveler.”

R2 beeped, and Obi-Wan shook his head. “No, it was definitely an accident.” He paused, “Or rather, I suppose it could have been purposeful, but I had nothing to do with it, one moment I was a part of the force.” And here he pushed through the longing, “And then I was waking up in my nineteen year old, padawan body.” He smiled, if he was honest, somewhat bitterly.

R2 beeped and whistled and Obi-Wan nodded. Everything R2 said lined up with what Mother Talzin had said. Nothing had been different for R2 until he’d run into Obi-Wan. R2 had charged himself that first night on Obi-Wan’s ship, which was apparently close enough to sleeping to count, and had powered up the next day with random, unexplained data packets stashed in his memory banks. It had taken him several days to organize the data in any way that made sense.

“You didn’t have to come with me, you know. I know you like Padme.”
R2 whistled, and Obi-Wan had to agree, R2 would be terribly bored on a planet as peaceful as Naboo often was. He was also somewhat touched that the droid would go so far as to say that he liked Obi-Wan, even if Obi-Wan was somewhat dubious of the truthfulness of that statement. The droid liked adventure was probably more accurate.

“So what data did you get?”

R2 started explaining, but he hadn’t gotten far before Obi-Wan felt a pang of remorse. “I’m so sorry, R2.” R2 beeped in question and Obi-Wan closed his eyes. “C-3PO.” He hesitated, “He doesn’t exist. Anakin never created him.”

R2 didn’t respond for a long moment before his electric prod popped out. Obi-Wan allowed the droid to shock him. The mournful whistle tore at Obi-Wan’s heart.

“I freed Anakin and Shmi when Anakin was four. We were only ever on Tatooine for short amounts of time, and most of the time we were traveling.” He paused, “I’m sorry, R2. I know he was your friend.”

R2 beeped again, and Obi-Wan moved back as the droid wheeled back to his corner, letting R2 mourn the way he needed to.

“If you need me,” he told the droid, “I’ll help any way I can.”

The droid ignored him.

Obi-Wan hesitated a few moments, but sensing that R2 wanted time he busied himself. He could use some meditation. He slid into meditation carefully, the force greeted him warmly and he let himself enjoy it’s embrace.

While he had meditated since his conversation with Mother Talzin he hadn’t yet truly turned to the force for answers, but now, knowing that R2 had also been affected… It was terrifying. Mother Talzin, R2, who knew how many others. If Mother Talzin hadn’t said anything he may have never realized.

How many planets had Obi-Wan traveled to and spent the night. How many people were having strange dreams of their futures, some accurate and some altered.

Obi-Wan had been at the Jedi Temple for several weeks when he’d first woken up. And that wasn’t just the Jedi, that was the entirety of Coruscant.

And if by chance he’d missed Palpatine then, Palpatine had been on Naboo.

He reached for the force, looking for answers. As always when he asked for reasons, for explanations, the force was silent. Who else, he wondered, who else knows?

The force didn’t answer. It never did. All he got was the calm assurance that the Force was still there.

He sighed and opened his eyes. R2 was still in the corner, and Obi-Wan didn’t want to disturb the droid. He understood mourning things that never were.

He left his room and walked the ship. Everyone was sleeping, and he wondered, a little bitterly and a little exhaustedly if any of them were dreaming about a future he’d changed.

He found himself in the pilot’s seat, hyperspace around him. He’d spent longer meditating and wandering his ship than he had intended; they were coming close to coming out of their first
hyperspace jump.

He twisted his comm in his hand.

Once upon a time he had lived twenty years in isolation, his only companionship the banthas in the desert and the rare trips into civilization.

But that had been out of necessity, and, in a way, penance.

Obi-Wan didn’t like being alone. He never had.

Technically his ship was full, but it was different.

The ship came out of hyperspace and Obi-Wan calculated the next jump, and then recalculated it because he couldn’t quite convince himself to make the jump. But also couldn’t quite convince himself to reach out.

He knew Shmi wouldn’t mind.

But… Shmi worried about him, and Shmi was adjusting to a new life once again, enjoying her honeymoon period, and there was a large part of him that wanted to call someone that wasn’t Shmi.

He knew he shouldn’t.

He commed.

For a long moment he thought there would be no answer.

“Fett.” Jango’s voice came clear across the comm.

“Jango.” His voice didn’t shake, but there was an almost tremor to his voice. With how busy Jango was, there was always a large chance he would have missed the other man. Between the hunts and the travel…

“Obi-Wan.” Jango’s voice was warm and Obi-Wan closed his eyes. “Is anything wrong?”

Obi-Wan winced, because it made sense. Obi-Wan had only ever called once, and that was when Naboo was being invaded, and while Obi-Wan hadn’t ended up asking for help, Jango was intelligent enough to realize that Obi-Wan had intended to ask for help.

“No.” He laughed, “Things are fine.”

“I wish that was more reassuring, but given that it’s you saying it, you’ll have to forgive me my hesitancy to take that at face value.”

Obi-Wan felt his lips tug into a reluctant smile. “I don’t suppose there’s a way for me to reassure you?”

“Probably not, no. You know I prefer seeing things with my own eyes.”

“That may be difficult at the moment.” He sighed, “I’m headed back to Coruscant at present.”

“You’re timing is awful. I just left there.”

“Is it an interesting bounty you’re chasing?”
Jango hesitated, “I don’t know that you’d approve.”

That narrowed it down. “A Jedi?”

“Former Jedi.”

“Not me, I hope.”

Jango didn’t respond instantly, but when he did there was a hint of reproach in his voice. “Not you, never you, you should know that.”

Sometimes he thought he actually believed it. “Not many Jedi leave the order.”

“Well, she did. And she’s got a pretty hefty bounty on her.” Jango paused, “I’d probably go after her even if it weren’t such a large bounty though.”

“Because she’s a Former Jedi?”

“She was on Galidraan.” It was said easily, as though Galidraan and the Jedi’s involvement there wasn’t a land mine between them.

Obi-Wan inhaled sharply, felt a phantom pressure against his throat. “I understand.” He cleared his throat, he didn’t know which Jedi had been on Galidraan, much less which Jedi had left the order afterwards, so he couldn’t guess who Jango was chasing, although he had no doubt they were dangerous. He wondered if this was a bounty that Jango had taken the first time around. “After.” He hesitated, “We should meet up after your bounty.” He wondered what that meant about him, what choosing Jango meant.

But then he’d been walking this path since the Tatooine alley, even if he had never expected the path to twist and turn the way it had.

“I look forward to it.” Jango’s voice was soft, warm, confident. Because as always Jango heard things that Obi-Wan didn’t say. “Why are you headed to Coruscant? Not stealing Anakin back, are you?”

Obi-Wan laughed, “Don’t tempt me.”

“No, no. I should definitely tempt you.” There was laughter in Jango’s voice, but Obi-Wan didn’t doubt he was serious.

“I am not going to steal Anakin back.” No matter how much he missed his boy, “I picked up a Jedi Master and his padawan, they’d been stranded, I’m bringing them back to Coruscant.”

“The Jedi asked you to pick up their stranded members?” And there was the annoyance.

Obi-Wan hesitated, “Not quite.”

Jango was quiet for a moment before he scoffed, “The Jedi don’t even know. Don’t even remember.” Obi-Wan preferred the annoyance to the derision.

“I’m sure Master Narec would be touched by your offense on his behalf.”

Jango snorted, “I’m sure.” Jango sighed, “How did that happen, anyways? The odds of stumbling across a stranded Jedi is small, even for you.”

Obi-Wan wasn’t sure whether he should take offense to that or not. And he wasn’t quite sure how to
answer either. Because finding Ky Narec had been about finding Asajj Ventress, which went back to Mother Talzin and her dreams of her old future, which went back to the fact that Obi-Wan was a time traveler, and that was glossing over half the situation. “It’s somewhat complicated.” He hesitated and shifted the conversation, “I’ve also sort of adopted two boys.”

Jango’s laughter filled the cockpit and Obi-Wan leaned back in his chair feeling pleased. “I can’t say I’m surprised, because it’s you, Obi-Wan. But, you realize it hasn’t even been a month.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Jango just laughed again and Obi-Wan wondered how he could miss someone who hadn’t ever been around consistently. But Obi-Wan did, he did miss Jango.

“Was there a reason why you commed?” Jango asked once he’d stopped laughing.

“No.” Obi-Wan admitted, “Not really.”

Jango didn’t respond immediately, “Well, I can’t switch to hyperspace for another few parsecs.”

Obi-Wan didn’t say thank you, wasn’t quite sure how to thank him, wasn’t even completely sure what he would be thanking Jango for.

Jango told him about being attacked by a borhek and dangling a senator from his own balcony. Obi-Wan wished he could sound disapproving of that, but Obi-Wan had been forced to play nice with far too many senators who he would have preferred to hang off a balcony.

It was nearly an hour later that R2 found him in the cockpit, still listening to Jango’s voice drown out the loneliness.

R2 was quiet for a moment before he suddenly started whistling angrily. Obi-Wan frowned, trying to understand R2’s sudden vehemence. “I need to go.” He told Jango, somewhat unhappily. “But comm me,” he asked quietly, “After your hunt is over.”

“Of course.” Jango responded, “Go handle whatever R2 is screeching about.”

He ended the call and quickly pushed the ship into hyperspace before turning towards R2. “I thought you liked Jango.”

R2 whistled angrily, but Obi-Wan felt as though part of the problem was that R2 was confused, confused about all of the information he’d received, but also because he didn’t understand why Obi-Wan was doing what he was doing. And as he listened to the droid whistle he could feel himself go pale.

R2 didn’t dream, not the way a living creature did. He had data packets, and that had likely made it so much more real to R2 than it would be to someone who had just seen it in a dream.

But R2 didn’t have any context for some of what was in his memory banks. R2 saw Jango, but he also saw thousands of almost-not-quite Jango’s storming the Jedi temple with a broken, dark Anakin leading them. He saw destruction and pain and the birth of an empire.

“That wasn’t him.” R2 whirred and Obi-Wan shook his head, “It wasn’t him. It wasn’t them.”

Except it was them.

“It’s complicated, R2.” R2 didn’t sound even remotely convinced, not about Jango, and not about
nearly anything Obi-Wan had done since. “It’s all complicated. Ventress hasn’t turned to the darkside, Savage hasn’t. We have to give them a chance.”

R2 let him know exactly what he thought of that. “If I condemn Ventress and Savage, then I have to condemn all of the clones, as well. I have to condemn Anakin.” That seemed to make R2 stop short. “Should I have condemned Anakin, because Anakin did more damage than Ventress ever did, more damage than Savage ever did.” He took a deep breath, “So tell me R2, should I condemn them all?”

R2 was quiet for a long moment. Finally the droid started whistling and beeping again, completely ignoring the question, which Obi-Wan took as agreement. Instead he started explaining the different data he’d received in his memory banks. Most of it wasn’t a surprise, there were large gaps, which was reassuring if anyone else was dreaming. R2 had known enough to have realized that something was different, and R2 had also known enough to realize that the changes had stemmed from Obi-Wan, and that was worrisome.

There were things that R2 told him about that Obi-Wan had never known, but then R2 had spent twenty years on Alderaan and with the rebellion while Obi-Wan had stood vigil on Tatooine.

“Right, so we’re going to stop the Empire from ever rising. Or at least that’s the plan.” He sighed as R2 beeped, “I have half a dozen plans. We’re talking about a Sith who managed to take over the galaxy, it’s not going to be easy.” R2 beeped and Obi-Wan rolled his eyes, “Because, yes, Palpatine is the villain, the master manipulator, but he is not, by any means, the only thing wrong with the Galaxy, and assassinating him is only fixing part of the issue, and frankly, I’m not sure that I could assassinate him.” He shook his head, “He killed some of the most skilled Jedi Masters we had.” R2 whistled, and Obi-Wan laughed, “You’re very kind, but no, I am by no means more skilled than them.” R2 sounded dubious but the conversation was ended by the sound of someone coming towards the cockpit.

Master Ky Narec appeared in the doorway and Obi-Wan gave him a smile. “Did you sleep well?”

“It’s been over a decade since I’ve traveled in space. It’s colder than I remember.”

“Rattatak is a warm planet.”

“Yes, that probably doesn’t help.” The older man gave him a scrutinizing look, “It doesn’t look as though you slept.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “No. Sleep was rather elusive last night.”

Ky nodded in understanding, “I was wondering if I could contact the temple the next time we’ve come out of hyperspace.” He smiled, “I never was able to turn in my last report.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “It will be another few hours, but I will let you know when we come out.”

“I would be very grateful.” The Jedi Master made his way back down the hall and Obi-Wan watched him go.

He turned to R2, “We’ll talk more later, just don’t go attacking any of our guests.” R2 made a disgruntled sound but Obi-Wan trusted the droid to leave the teens be.
asked.

Obi-Wan shook his head, moving fluidly into the next kata, “Of course not.” Ky Narec moved next to him and after a moment fell into the kata with him.

“Of course not.” Ky Narec moved next to him and after a moment fell into the kata with him.

“It has been a long time since I’ve done this kata routine. I’ve mostly focused on Djem So and Ataru with Asajj.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “I can see how those would be forms that Asajj would excel in. I wouldn’t have guessed that Ataru was your form of choice.”

Ky laughed, “It’s not. I’m a little on the large side for Ataru. But it was important to find a form that Asajj would be comfortable with.”

“My former Master has a similar build to you, I think that was the precise reason why he chose Ataru. It kept people surprised.”

Ky laughed, “That is one way to go about it. It surprises me that you would turn to Soresu if your master preferred Ataru, I presume that is what he taught you, after all.” Obi-Wan finished his kata and turned back to Savage, showing him the next kata in Shii-Cho and making sure he had the footing down, before moving on to his next kata.

He returned to his conversation with the Jedi Master. “I learned Soresu after having parted with my Master.”

“Useful, I suppose for being out in the galaxy, it’s a useful defense against blasters. Not so much against an opponent with a saber.”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “I suppose not.” Although, Obi-Wan had personally used it to great effect against other saber wielders, he understood that most Jedi considered it subpar for dueling.

It probably said something rather uncomplimentary about him that he had always enjoyed proving those Jedi wrong.

“So Soresu and Ataru.” Ky nodded to himself, “I would be interested in seeing those in action.” The invitation was obvious.

“A ship is somewhat tight quarters for a duel.” Savage looked up, interest obvious in his eyes.

“We don’t always get to choose our environment.” Master Narec smiled, “And I must admit, I would enjoy a duel that is not purely for training purposes.”

Obi-Wan laughed, moving into the last kata. “If you truly desire. I suggest we warn Asajj and Feral first, I do not think they would react well if they came in and saw us fighting.”

Ky didn’t respond immediately, but Obi-Wan was fairly certain that they were both thinking about the situation with R2. While Asajj had seemed to have gotten over it, the droid still stayed far away from pretty much everyone that wasn’t Obi-Wan.

“I can go tell them.” Savage offered. “I think Feral would enjoy watching.” That was a tendency Obi-Wan had noticed with Savage, he never said that he would like something, only that he thought Feral would.

Obi-Wan hummed, “Wait for them to wake up, and then once you’ve all eaten breakfast, if Master Narec still wants to duel, than I suppose we could do so.”
They continued going through katas, Ky Narec seemed somewhat surprised when after finishing the Soresu kata routine Obi-Wan shifted not to Ataru but to Makashi. It was, without a doubt, his weakest form, except for perhaps Vaapad, which he had, unfortunately, never had opportunity to learn.

Shii-Cho was the form he learned in the creche, and the foundation the other forms were built on, he learned Ataru as a padawan at Master Qui-Gon’s side. He learned Soresu during his time as Anakin’s master and only improved during the war. Anakin had preferred Djem So, so he had made sure that he was skilled enough to teach Anakin. Niman, and it’s tendency to use the force while fighting, was another form that the war had helped him incorporate into his fighting style.

But Dooku had bested him multiple times with his skill in Makashi, and if Obi-Wan had to face him again then he felt it best to have perfected at least the basics and incorporated it into his form. Plus, he had no doubt that Palpatine was far superior with a blade, and the more forms he was comfortable with, the better off Obi-Wan would be.

He focused closely on the small movements, Makashi was all about precision and finesse, which fortunately was a feature it shared with Soresu.

By the end of the katas he was sweating heavily, but he moved on to Djem So. He once again earn a bemused look from the other Master, but he continued on. Djem So would never be his favorite, too aggressive for his taste, he’d leave the aggression for fighters like Anakin and Jango.

Ky Narec laughed when he shifted from the last of the Djem So katas into Jar’Kai. “You don’t skimp on your katas.”

Obi-Wan sent him a smile, “I go through at least the basic katas for each of the seven forms, and then go through them again using Jar’Kai techniques.” And that was after having done the exercises Jango had taught him, it was important to not be dependent on either the force or his lightsaber.

“So is this the result of boredom, paranoia, or enjoyment?”

He wasn’t sure it was fair to call it paranoia if he had very good reason to believe that there would be people out to get him. “Traveling across the galaxy is enjoyable, but it means spending a lot of time on my ship, and staring at hyperspace isn’t the most entertaining of activities.”

“Fair enough.” Ky was quiet as they shifted forms again. “You don’t move like a padawan that just left the order.”

Obi-Wan hummed, “I left five years ago. And I’ve kept up on my training.”

“The Jedi Council seemed somewhat…” Ky hesitated, “Divided on how they felt when I reached out to them. Pleased you’d found me and Asajj and were bringing us back, but also somewhat suspicious. Added to that, some of them seemed to think that you were in danger of becoming Sith incarnate, while others seemed to trust you completely.” Obi-Wan wondered how exactly that conversation had gone for Ky to have gleaned quite that much about Obi-Wan’s position with the council. “And my own opinions of you are equally confused. You claim to have left the Jedi as a padawan, and yet you carry yourself with the confidence of a Knight, and shield yourself with the skill of a Master.”

“And what have you decided?”

Ky shrugged, “I haven’t quite made a decision yet.”

Obi-Wan figured that was fair enough.
Savage, Feral, and Asajj all entered the main cabin, all three looking excited. “Did you all eat breakfast?” Obi-Wan asked.

All three nodded and Ky smiled, “You are all far more eager for this than I would have expected.”

Ventress smiled, “I want to see you win!”

Ky laughed, “It’s been quite some time since I’ve fought anyone that wasn’t raiders or you, perhaps I’ve gotten rusty.”

Ventress shook her head. “No. You’re definitely the best.”

Obi-Wan hid a smile, he remembered thinking the same thing about Qui-Gon once upon a time. Even knowing how talented other Masters were, it had been impossible for him to conceive of them actually being better than his Master.

Ky gave him a broad smile, “Well, we’ve attracted an audience, and hopefully you’ve sufficiently tired yourself out. I think now is as good a time as any.”

“Lightsabers at their lowest setting. I’d rather we not put holes in my ship.”

Ky nodded and Obi-Wan switched both lightsabers to the lowest setting, lighting one while placing the other on his belt.

The three teenagers all lined up against the wall and Obi-Wan made a mental note to avoid that part of the cabin. Sparring in a ship cabin was such a bad idea. But Master Narec wasn’t wrong, you didn’t always have the luxury of choosing where a fight was going to happen.

Master Narec shifted into the Djem So opening stance and Obi-Wan slid into a Soresu salute.

For a moment neither moved and then Master Narec jumped forward, his blade a flurry of heavy attacks. Obi-Wan stayed on the defense, deflecting the strikes to the side. He allowed Ky Narec to push him backwards, although he made sure to shift his steps so that he never ended up against the wall.

Other than his fights with Maul, Obi-Wan hadn’t fought anyone with a lightsaber in years, and while the atmosphere of the spar was serious Obi-Wan couldn’t help the grin that crossed his face. While fighting for his life always made him feel alive, it was missing the inherent joy that came with crossing blades with someone without risk of death or dismemberment.

He let the fight continue as it was for several minutes, noting the places where Master Narec’s guard tended to slip. He took advantage of the next slip in guard and the other man had to twist awkwardly to stop Obi-Wan from getting a hit. Obi-Wan didn’t take advantage, instead slipping back into defense. Ky gave him a thoughtful look as he readjusted his stance. “How long can you keep that up?”

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow, deflecting the next several flurries. “Keep what up?”

The look on the other man’s face showed that he knew that Obi-Wan knew exactly what he meant. In theory, if Obi-Wan could stop the other fighter from getting a hit when Obi-Wan only used Soresu he could outlast most other fighters, letting their heavier offense tire them out until he could take advantage of their mistakes.

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Obi-Wan smiled at the other man before suddenly springing forward into several Ataru-styled strikes. From there Obi-Wan didn’t stay in any one form for longer than a few parries. Most Jedi stuck to one
or possibly two forms, and for good reason. More forms didn’t necessarily make you a better fighter, and most Jedi chose to perfect the few forms they did use. It was a practice Obi-Wan agreed with, but he also wanted to test his boundaries, to see just what he could accomplish.

Master Narec launched a particularly vicious defense and Obi-Wan slid back into Soresu to defend against it, this time when Obi-Wan saw a gap in the other man’s defense he took it completely. The other man’s lightsaber flew out of his hand and Obi-Wan finished the parry with his lightsaber to the other man’s heart.

Ky held his hands up, his breath heavy. “Solah.” Obi-Wan held it for a moment before lowering his lightsaber. The other man smiled, “That was an excellent duel. You’re quite accomplished.” The other man turned towards the wall where the three teens were standing, their eyes wide and their mouths slightly agape. “Wouldn’t you say, Asajj?”

“That was…” she paused, searching for words, “Amazing.” She looked down at her own lightsaber, “Is that what you’ll be able to teach me at the temple?”

“Of course.”

She smiled up at Ky, her eyes bright, “I still think you’re better. Obi-Wan just got lucky.”

Obi-Wan gave her a bow, “Your master really is quite talented.”

“Is that what you’re going to teach us?” Savage asked quietly. His eyes were still wide in amazement and he looked achingly young.

“If you want to learn.”

Feral tilted his head to the side, “I liked the way you fought at the beginning best.”

Obi-Wan smiled, not completely surprised that Feral would favor a more defensive form, “That would be Soresu, it’s mainly defensive.”

Master Narec nodded, “And in the hands of someone who truly knows how to use Soresu, it can be incredibly effective.” The man gave him a considering look before turning back to Feral. “And I daresay Obi-Wan knows how to use Soresu.”

The man rested a hand on Obi-Wan’s shoulder, “Tomorrow we should see how you do with Jar’Kai.”

Obi-Wan gave him a small bow, “It would be my pleasure.”

It wasn’t until the three teens had left again that Master Narec turned to him, “You could have won that fight while only using Soresu, why the other forms?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “To figure out whether I can.”

Master Narec stared at him. “I daresay you probably can.” He hesitated, “But I’d be wary of that thought process. There are many things that one can do that one shouldn’t.” Another considering look, “And I have the feeling that there is a great deal of things that a man like you is capable of.”

Obi-Wan accepted the warning for what it was and in the spirit it was meant. It was far kinder than most warnings Obi-Wan had received of late, and it came with the implied belief that Obi-Wan hadn’t pressed pass acceptable limits. Which was a belief that Master Narec was probably in the minority in having.
The rest of the trip passed fairly uneventfully. R2 was still keeping his distance from everyone that wasn’t Obi-Wan. Asajj seemed to get along with both boys well enough, which was a relief to Obi-Wan who had worried that their might be some engrained bias between the Nightsister and Nightbrothers. Master Narec seemed to have decided to ignore anything he found odd about Obi-Wan. Obi-Wan was frankly surprised he was the first Jedi to mention how mismatched Obi-Wan’s skill set and force presence were in comparison to where they probably should be.

He sighed as they entered Coruscanti space, almost instantly he felt Anakin’s excitement course through their bond, the slightest hint of questioning following along with it.

Obi-Wan felt the beginning of a smile tug at his lip. It hadn’t been long, barely more than a month, but he had already missed Anakin dearly.

He felt a presence behind him and turned to see Master Narec standing behind him, his eyes wide. Obi-Wan could see the look of wonderment on his face, “I had given up hope that I would ever see Coruscant again.” The man admitted quietly. “The thought of walking the halls of the Temple again had become nothing more than painful and empty dream.”

Obi-Wan gave the Master a long look. “They’ll be pleased to have you walk their halls again.”

Master Narec nodded, sitting in the co-pilot seat. “A lost son, returned to the temple.” He hesitated, “I worry for Asajj. She’s still so young, but despite the fact that I’ve trained her since she was young, they’ll still look at her as too old, too…” Here he hesitated, “Too volatile.”

Obi-Wan understood the situation very well. “There will be those who feel that way. And they’ll likely hold it against her long after she’s proved herself.” Obi-Wan shrugged, “And there will be those who are far more understanding and welcoming.” He grinned, “I’d suggest making friends with the latter.”

“Any suggestions?”

Obi-Wan shrugged, “It’s been some time since I was a Jedi.”

Master Narec just lifted a single eyebrow and Obi-Wan found himself once again thinking that the man had a great deal in common with Qui-Gon. “Any, possibly outdated, suggestions?”

“Master Koon, Master Dillaba, Master Tholme, Knight Vos, Knight Muln, Knight Fisto.” He hesitated, “Master Windu… Will be hard, demanding.” He cracked a grin, “But he’s actually that way with nearly everyone.”

“Out of idle curiosity, was your own Master on that list?”

Obi-Wan blinked, “I’d like to believe that Master Jinn would be nothing but kind to you and Asajj.” He hesitated, “But I do not know how your association with me, minimal as it is, will taint his viewpoint.”

“You were his padawan, surely you leaving the Order doesn’t truly change that? Asajj choosing a different path may disappoint me, at least for a short time, but I would love her regardless, and be happy for her happiness.”

Obi-Wan suddenly found his focus was desperately needed on maneuvering to the landing pad reserved for the Temple residents and visitors. “I was not his first padawan. The one before me, he fell. Master Jinn believes that I have followed in the same path.”

“You don’t feel fallen.” Master Narec said quietly.
“Not all darkness is easy to see.” Obi-Wan warned.

“Have you fallen?”

Obi-Wan blinked, sparing the other man a look. “No. And I won’t either.” He sighed, “I will not turn.” They were the same words he’d told Qui-Gon, first when he was twelve and desperate and then again when he had found himself in his 19 year old body and an entirely different sort of desperate.

They were quiet as they finished their journey. Obi-Wan brought them down to the landing space the Jedi had reserved for him to drop Master Narec off in.

The other man stood, heading for the hallway, he paused at the doorway, “For what it’s worth, I believe you.”

Obi-Wan didn’t respond. Couldn’t respond. He closed his eyes, wishing that Master Narec hadn’t reminded him so much of Master Qui-Gon. He heard the other man leave, calling out for Asajj.

He took a deep breath. He could hear the excited sounds of the teenagers, there was a quiet beep behind him and he choked out a laugh. “I’m fine, R2. Just not overly fond of Coruscant these days.”

R2 whistled angrily and Obi-Wan laughed, “Yes, well his presence here does put quite the damper on the situation.” The following curses upon Palpatine’s existence were somewhat heartening. “Well, if we’ve got any sort of luck, we’ll have no need to cross paths with him this time around.” He could feel the unmistakable feel of several Jedi Masters and another, brighter, warmer force presence headed their way. “Come on, R2. I think our welcome party has arrived.”

He left the cockpit, heading towards the landing ramp. Feral and Savage were both fidgeting anxiously on one side, while Master Narec was giving soft encouragement to Asajj on the other. “You’re not getting rid of us, are you?” Feral asked abruptly, his eyes wide, the darker lines on his face standing out starkly from where his skin had gone paler than normal.

Obi-Wan blinked, pausing before opening the ship. “No, of course not.” He winced inwardly, he’d been distracted the last part of the trip to Coruscant, and beyond ensuring that they ate and allowing them to join his morning exercises he hadn’t interacted with either boy as much as he should have, content to let them form a friendship with Asajj and listen to Master Narec’s stories. He was mostly surprised that they weren’t begging to be able to join the two of them on Coruscant. “You’ll always have a place with me.”

Both boys looked relieved and Obi-Wan reminded himself once again that they were both still young, and that they’d already lost everything that was familiar to them once. He supposed that even a broken relic like him looked appealing when it was the only form of stability they had been offered. He had to be better. He stepped closer to both boys, “I’m sorry if I’ve been distant during our time together.” He grimaced, only imagining what the situation must feel like for them.

Savage shrugged, almost as though he was trying to seem nonchalant, and not as though he’d been worried. “It’s fine. You’re fine. You make everything feel warm and comfortable.” Feral nodded his head in agreement. It was a strange thing to say, Dathomir was a fairly warm planet, and his ship, while in good shape, was hardly lavish enough to change the fact that space was cold.

Obi-Wan nodded though, content to leave it for the time being. “So long as you understand.” He gestured towards the landing pad, “Are you ready to see Coruscant?”

Both boys nodded and Asajj cheered from behind him. Obi-Wan turned and saw her trying to
discreetly wipe her eyes, still huddling close to her Master. Master Narec had a hand on her shoulder, and Obi-Wan knew it would serve to be a comfort to Asajj during what could only be a frightening experience for the girl. For a moment it was hard to look at Asajj and see the woman who would become Ventress, the Sith Acolyte, or Ventres the Bounty Hunter.

R2 whistled and Obi-Wan chuckled, “Sorry R2, I know how much you hate having to wait.”

Patient, the droid was not.

Obi-Wan opened the landing ramp, gesturing for Master Narec and Asajj to descend first. Master Narec only hesitated a short moment and Obi-Wan watched as his shoulders squared in preparation. “Come, Asajj, let’s get you your first introduction to the Jedi.”

The two descended the ramp and Obi-Wan followed after, the two Nightbrothers and the droid following behind him.

“Obi-Wan!” A blur of motion and the loud yell were the only warning Obi-Wan got before he had an armful of delighted 9 year old.

“Anakin.” He returned the hug just as tightly. He dropped to his knee, pulling away a little so he could better examine the boy. He looked both healthy and happy, and Obi-Wan felt relief fill him at the sight. While he had hoped that Anakin would be alright, it was reassuring to see that so far that was the case. “It’s very good to see you, Anakin.”

Anakin nodded, smiling brightly, “I don’t think Master Yoda wanted to let me come, but then Master Quinlan went and talked to Master Windu about how I’d probably just sneak out again, and that it would be easier for him and Master Plo if they didn’t have to follow me through Coruscant again while I tried to find you.”

Obi-Wan closed his eyes, “Please tell me I misheard you, Anakin, and you didn’t just say that you snuck out of the temple.”

Anakin looked up at him, his eyes wide and guileless, and if Obi-Wan hadn’t been a part of raising him twice, he might have been convinced that they were innocent. “I thought you were on Coruscant.” The boy’s eyes widened further, “I missed you.”

“I missed you too, Anakin.” The boy beamed, “But that doesn’t mean you should sneak out of the temple.” He paused, “Why did you think I was on Coruscant?”

Anakin pouted a little, “Because Mr. Jango was here. I hoped maybe he’d come back and you were with him again.”

Obi-Wan closed his eyes, because he knew very well what part of Coruscant Jango had been in. “Did you happen to find Jango?”

Anakin nodded, smiling delightedly, “I did it just like you taught me! I felt him in the Force and let the Force lead me to him!”

Obi-Wan tried to decide what it meant that Anakin had been able to notice Jango’s presence out of the million of people on Coruscant, and then what it meant that Anakin had gone into the parts of Coruscant that Jango had been in. He was a little annoyed that Jango hadn’t mentioned Anakin’s little adventure to him when they’d talked.

“And you said Quinlan and Master Koon found you?”

Anakin nodded, “Uh huh. Me and Mr. Jango got breakfast, and then Master Koon took me back to
the temple, while Master Vos stayed to talk with Mr. Jango.”

“Remind me that I need to kill both Quinlan and Jango. And you, Anakin, are grounded.”

Anakin pouted, “But Master Koon already made me help in the kitchens for a week.”

“Well, while I certainly can’t enforce anything, I highly suggest you go to Master Koon and say that you’d like to work in the kitchens for another week, just to make sure that the point got across.”

Anakin sighed, long sufferingly, “Are you going to tell Mom?”

“Most definitely.”

“She’s going to say that I learned it from you.”

“I certainly hope you didn’t.” Finally he grinned, “If you’d learned it from me, Quinlan would have never caught you.”

Anakin beamed. “I knew you weren’t upset!”

Obi-Wan snorted, “Oh, I’m upset. And, again, I highly suggest you talk to Master Koon about kitchen duty. But I’m grateful you’re okay.” And he was the tiniest bit proud. When Anakin had been his padawan it had taken him over a year to figure out how to sneak out of the temple, and even then, it had taken another year before Obi-Wan had had any difficulties tracking him down. The fact that Anakin had figured out how to sneak out of the temple and had managed to stay ahead of Quinlan and Plo long enough to find Jango, that was impressive.

Anakin suddenly frowned, “Who are they?”

Obi-Wan hid his wince, he had gotten distracted by Anakin’s story and had forgotten to introduce Anakin to Feral and Savage. He stood up and gestured for Feral and Savage to step closer. Both boys had stayed close, although he could see them staring around at Coruscant in awe. “Anakin, this is Feral and Savage. Feral, Savage, this is Anakin.”

Anakin suddenly had a firm grip on Obi-Wan’s hand. “Why are they with you?”

Obi-Wan sent a soothing wave through their bond, making sure the boy could feel how much he loved him. “Their Clan Mother asked me to take them in.”

“Who’s he?” Feral asked, and Obi-Wan hoped that that wasn’t jealousy he detected in the teen’s voice.

“Anakin traveled with me for several years with his Mother before he decided he wanted to join the Jedi.”

For a long moment none of the boys spoke, Anakin was still glaring at the two Nightbrothers while the two Nightbrothers had their own disgruntled faces on.

“Obi-Wan!” Obi-Wan turned to see Quinlan moving away from where Master Narec and Asajj were talking with Master Windu, Master Piell, and Master Poof.

“Quinlan. I didn’t notice you’d joined the Welcoming Committee.”

Quinlan smiled widely, “Technically I didn’t, I’m actually on babysitting duty.”

Anakin’s scowl depend. “I don’t need babysitting.”
Quinlan laughed, “Master Windu might just disagree with you about that.”

“Yeah, well Master Windu…”

Obi-Wan cut Anakin off before Anakin could finish that sentence, “Was kind enough to let you join the group in saying hello.” He put a hand on Anakin’s shoulder, “You know, most initiates aren’t allowed to have any contact with their pasts.”

Anakin looked down at that.

Quinlan just grinned, “What can I say, I’m just that convincing.”

“Or just that infuriating. Master Windu probably agreed just so you’d leave him alone.”

Quinlan’s laugh was bright and happy, “Don’t go giving away my secrets, Obi-Wan, little Ani here actually thought I was the coolest Jedi ever for getting Master Windu to agree.”

Obi-Wan just shook his head. “What’s this I hear about you having to track Anakin through the lower levels of Coruscant?”

Quinlan raised his eyebrows at Anakin, “I thought we said we weren’t going to be telling Obi-Wan about how sneaky you are until I’d extracted a promise from him not to murder me in my sleep.”

Obi-Wan snorted, “Who says I’d wait for you to sleep?”

“I bet Obi-Wan could take you.” The mutter was somewhat sullen, and Obi-Wan was surprised to hear it come from Savage.

Quinlan sighed dramatically, “No one believes in me these days.” He turned more serious, “Anakin was fine, Obi-Wan. I wouldn’t have let anything happen to him.”

Obi-Wan bit back an acerbic remark, because he did trust Quinlan. “Alright.” He gestured to Feral and Savage, “Quinlan, meet Feral and Savage. Feral, Savage, this is Quinlan Vos, he’s an old friend of mine.”

Quinlan nodded at them, “What’d you do to get stuck with Obi-Wan?” He waggled his eyebrows at Obi-Wan playfully.

Feral and Anakin both seemed to miss the joking tone. “We’re not stuck with him.” Feral muttered.

Anakin’s voice was angrier. “Obi-Wan’s the best.”

Quinlan exchanged a glance with Obi-Wan, a hint of surprise on his face.

Obi-Wan just shrugged helplessly.

There was the sound of a throat clearing, and Obi-Wan turned, Master Narec and Asajj were standing there, Master Windu, Master Piell, and Master Poof still further back. “We just wanted to thank you one last time for bringing us to Coruscant.” Master Narec’s voice was rough and emotional. “Master Windu will be escorting us to the temple.”

Obi-Wan nodded, “Of course.” He gave the two of them a respectful bow, “May the Force be with you both.”

“And May the Force be with you.”
The two turned away and Obi-Wan watched them move back to join the three council members before heading towards where a speeder was waiting. He turned back to Quinlan and Anakin, “I suppose that means it’s time for you to leave?”

Quinlan just grinned, “I brought a spare speeder, I figured we could all go out for lunch. Anakin happened to find a pretty spectacular diner.” His eyes twinkled. “I’m sure you’d just love it there.”

Obi-Wan wouldn’t have been inclined to say no, spending more time with both Anakin and Quinlan sounded rather nice, but between the wide, begging eyes of Anakin, Feral, and Savage even if he had been inclined to say no, he probably would have caved. “I imagine that some food cooked by someone other than me would be a welcome respite for Feral and Savage. I’m sure we can make the time.”

Chapter End Notes

Wowsers... Sometimes it takes forever to get everything up. So hopefully I got everything looks good, because the boarding process for my next flight is about to start, and while I have literally the cheapest tickets possible... It's a small plane, so it shouldn't take long.

However, I'm about to spend the next little bit taking care of my sister's four kids while she and her husband go figure out a job in Minnesota... (Spoiler, neither her nor I live anywhere close to Minnesota...)

Anyways, uh... Nope, can't think of what I was about to say... So have a good week!

(Jango wasn't in this chapter much... but next chapter should have more Jango in it!)

Also... does anyone have any advice on figuring out Mando’a?
Coruscant

Chapter Summary

Obi-Wan promised Anakin, Savage, and Feral a meal, so that's what they're going to do. Which of course means Dex makes a brief appearance as the best Diner Owner on any side of the galaxy.

Life happens as it will. Obi-Wan gives good hugs, receives a rightly deserved apology, and is invited to dinner.

The long awaited comm call occurs and Savage and Feral are introduced to the only person in the galaxy with any sense.

Chapter Notes

I LIVE! (I know, you all probably had your doubts.)

Anyways, another chapter. That's always good news, right? Well, it's news at least.

I say it every time, and every time it's true, I've been really busy. And life wins out most of the time. I will admit that I probably could have written more for my stories this summer (between two jobs and school), but I focused most of that effort for my Novel, and while I feel a little guilty for that, I also don't??? Guys, I don't know how anyone writes... I'm over 150k words into the story and I still have no clue what I'm doing?

But this chapter is going up in celebration of something wonderful! Today I get all of my hours for the Internship I need to graduate! (I don't get to quit yet, I still have two more weeks, but still, I am VERY happy about this fact.) I am SO tired and quitting one of my jobs will probably help with that, you know? And I can finally feel like I can see the light at the end of this particular tunnel.

Anyways, I've rambled enough. Enjoy the Story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"If it isn't Obi-Wan Kenobi!"

Obi-Wan couldn't help the smile that followed the loud greeting. "It's nice to see you again, Dex." He looked down at Anakin who was gaping in surprise, "I heard you've already met Anakin, I know I introduced you to Quinlan back when we were teenagers," he gestured at Feral and Savage, "and these two are Feral and Savage. Apparently we're all hungry."

Dex gave the group a considering look. "Why don't you all take a seat." A heavy arm landed on Obi-Wan's shoulders, "Give me a moment to catch up with Obi-Wan here before I bring out some food."
Obi-Wan nodded to Feral and Savage to follow Quinlan, his friend gave him a raised eyebrow, but didn't look overly concerned as he led the boys to an empty table.

"Everything all right, Dex?"

The Besalisk nodded, "Business is booming, I even had some senatorial aide come in boasting about how the Chancellor himself had sent him to get him my Nerf Burgers." Obi-Wan made a face at the mention of the Chancellor and Dex laughed, it was no secret that Obi-Wan wasn't a fan of politicians, and it was an opinion that Dex approved of. "No, just wanted to clarify a few things with you, thought it best not to do so in front of younger ears."

"Of course, that's very much appreciated." Dex was good with information, some of which Obi-Wan was in no hurry for any of his charges to overhear.

"I managed to collect some very interesting information about Nar Shaddaa for you, I'll bring by the datachip with your food."

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow, "Really?" He nodded to himself, "That's good. Thank you, Dex."

Dex nodded, "Now I know you too well to suggest that you not do anything stupid with that information, just make sure you make it back to try my new recipe."

"Of course, Dex. I'll be very careful."

Dex snorted, "I'll believe that when I see it, I remember how we met."

Obi-Wan smiled at that, because Dex had a point. Their meeting had been… interesting to say the least. Qui-Gon had not been impressed when Obi-Wan had emerged from an unexpected altercation covered in mud, with blaster holes in his robes, a broken lightsaber, and followed by a boisterous Dex. And that had been only the first fifteen minutes of an adventure that would last almost a week. But it had formed a lasting relationship between Obi-Wan and the weapons dealer that hadn't diminished in the years since, despite both of them drastically changing their career paths.

"I always survive though."

"That you do." Dex frowned. "So, your relationship with the youngest, Anakin, how do the two of you know each other?"

"Anakin is Shmi's son, you remember I introduced you to her." Dex better remember, given the number of stories the two had shared. "He traveled with me from the time he was four until just before I visited you a month ago when he decided to join the Jedi."

"So, he's your son." Obi-Wan opened his mouth to further clarify the situation but Dex waved him off. "You said you heard we'd met, which is true, but I wasn't sure if you were aware that he came in with Jango Fett."

Obi-Wan sighed. "Oh, I heard."

Dex gave him an interested look. "The past month has provided some interesting rumors about what went down on Naboo."

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow at that. "What sort of rumors?"

"The majority of the galaxy might not know who Jango Fett is, but in certain circles his actions can hold quite a bit of weight."
Obi-Wan tilted his head curiously. "Jango takes a fair number of jobs, I highly doubt that anyone takes note of each one."

Dex shrugged his two top arms. "I knew Fett, back when I was a prospector, but I knew him well enough to know that Fett takes the jobs that bring him money. And you, my friend, have a very tight pocket book, I doubt you could afford him." Obi-Wan didn't deny it. "I'm just saying, Fett might not have said much, but at the same time, the statements he is making are very clear."

Obi-Wan wasn't sure how to respond, he remembered what Jango said about how Obi-Wan hiring Jango had been good for Obi-Wan's reputation, he had thought at the time that Jango had meant within the sphere of politics that Obi-Wan was working, and from what Jango had said, that conclusion made sense. He hadn't considered what Jango's actions would mean within Jango's own sphere. Though he should have. "How exactly are his actions being construed?"

Dexter gave him a heavy pat on his shoulders. "Nothing concrete, not yet. Like I said, it's mostly rumor still. But I suggest you talk to him about it." He pointed Obi-Wan to where Quinlan was trying to keep the boys amused at the table. "Now go sit, I'll bring by some food and that datachip." Obi-Wan nodded, accepting that Dexter wouldn't say anything more concrete than he had. "But Obi-Wan, from personal experience, Jango Fett doesn't take just take any job pro bono, or at whatever discount he offered you, he doesn't just take anybody's kids out for breakfast, and not just anybody can go around calling him Jango." Dexter made his way back into the kitchen with a wink and a wave and Obi-Wan frowned slightly. He trusted Dex and his assessment of the situation, he just wasn't sure exactly what to make of that information.

He slid into the empty seat next to Quinlan and found himself face to face with three scowls. "Is Quinlan boring you?" He asked.

Quinlan made an affronted sound, "I'm the farthest thing from boring there is. They're just in the middle of a silly argument."

"Savage said that you're teaching them katas," Anakin said scowling. "You didn't teach me katas for years!"

Obi-Wan kept his face straight. "Anakin, you were four when I met you, I was busy teaching you how to write and taking you to pod races."

"You haven't taken us to pod races."

"We've only been together for a short time." He eyed Savage. "Do you actually want to go to one?"

Savage shrugged, his face flushing slightly. "No."

Obi-Wan nodded, unsurprised. "We'll figure out what you and Feral would like to do, the same way Anakin and I figured out what he enjoyed." Well, perhaps not exactly the same way, Obi-Wan had already had some hint of what Anakin would enjoy, while all he knew of Savage was that he was very loyal to his family and that he had the potential to be very dangerous with a lightsaber.

Quinlan threw his arm around Obi-Wan's shoulders. "Told you, Obi-Wan likes all of you, but he likes me best."

All three boys glared at Quinlan and Obi-Wan couldn't help but laugh. "Quinlan is pretty great."

Now he had three glares directed at him, at least they were already on the same page there, hopefully it wouldn't be hard to get them to find a few other mutual interests. "But how about the three of you tell each other about what you've been up to? Anakin has never been to Dathomir, and neither of you
have ever been to the Jedi Temple."

The three boys eyed each other but then seemed to figure that this was acceptable because Anakin immediately launched into a story about how he'd reprogrammed a droid, but somehow ended up causing it to chase one of the knights who had come to take him and the other initiates his age to the Room of a Thousand Fountains for meditation. The Knight had apparently not been happy, but the other initiates had thought it was hilarious.

Having been in a similar situation when it came to Anakin's antics in both timelines Obi-Wan could commiserate with the poor knight.

Quinlan snorted. "Oh, yeah. But Knight Orlo deserved it, always been a stick in the mud, that one."

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow at Quinlan. "Isn't that what you say about me?"

Quinlan grinned, unrepentant. "And you would have totally deserved to be chased around by a droid spraying you with hot water."

"I hate you."

"You love me."

Obi-Wan snorted, listening as Feral explained a harmless prank he and Savage had played on another Nightbrother. "That's highly debatable." He told Quinlan.

Quinlan didn't look bothered and Obi-Wan figured it was because Quinlan was confident that Obi-Wan did, indeed, love him.

The other man wasn't wrong. He was probably one of the best friends Obi-Wan had ever had.

"You had very good timing." Quinlan said casually.

Savage was busy explaining why Nightsisters were not to be trusted, although he conceded that Asajj was probably okay. "Good timing with what?" Obi-Wan asked only paying half attention.

"With bringing Ky Narec back to the temple," Quinlan answered. "A lot of the younger Knights are feeling pretty shaken by what's happening with Master Dooku, having an experienced Master returning after ten years away might alleviate the tension that Master Dooku leaving the order is causing."

Obi-Wan's eyes jerked away from watching the boys to look at Quinlan, who now had the entirety of his attention. "What?" His voice was sharper than he had intended it to be and all three boys looked at him and Quinlan, eyes curious. Obi-Wan sent them an apologetic look. "Sorry, Quinlan just said something that surprised me." After a moment they continued their conversation and Obi-Wan looked back at Quinlan. "Dooku left?"

He'd hoped, perhaps foolishly, that Qui-Gon not dying would have been enough to keep Master Dooku in the order.

Quinlan nodded, "Left, is leaving, somewhere in that process. It was a pretty big shock. And as no surprise to anyone, he had to make a grand production of it." Quinlan shrugged. "Of course, it doesn't help that Dooku keeps traipsing in and out of the temple for meetings with the High Council. Once he's off Coruscant, things will probably calm down." Quinlan sent him a contrite look. "Your former Master hasn't taken it well."
Obi-Wan took a sharp breath. Oh, no. Qui-Gon wouldn't have taken that well at all. It was, without a
doubt, a terrible betrayal in Qui-Gon's mind and Obi-Wan felt a painful wave of guilt. He knew that
in Qui-Gon's mind this would only exacerbate Obi-Wan's own betrayal.

"It's not your fault." Quinlan said quietly and Obi-Wan wished that Quinlan didn't have such an easy
time reading him. "You did what was right for you. That's not something shameful, and no matter
what Qui-Gon may have said, it isn't a betrayal. Master Tholme would have supported me, and I
would support Aayla if she decided she needed to walk a different path."

Dex came out with their meals, and the boys practically jumped on the food. Dex slid a data chip to
him with his own plate. Obi-Wan tried to hand Dex some credits to pay for the meal and was waved
off with another laugh and a wink. Obi-Wan just left the credits on the table, Bo would pick them up
when they left.

Obi-Wan took the break in conversation as a way to switch the conversation, he'd look at the Dooku
situation later. "How is Aayla? What's it like being a Master?"

"Tiring." Quinlan grinned. "Aayla has a lot of energy, and I know for a fact that she's one of the
calmer students in her age group, I don't know how the other Masters deal with their Padawans." He
smiled, and it was one of Quinlan's rare, soft smiles. "I love her. Wouldn't trade her for the galaxy,
best Padawan a Master could ask for."

"That's wonderful." Obi-Wan said quietly, he remembered the feeling from his own time as a Master,
no matter how exhausted Anakin left him at the end of the day, Obi-Wan had loved him dearly. "I'm
very happy for you."

"As you should be."

"Hopefully she keeps you on your toes."

"Oh she will." Quinlan smirked. "Same way I'm sure your two charges will keep you on yours."

"No rest for the wicked, I suppose."

The three boys were now whispering together, and while he very much wanted them to get along, he
hoped they weren't corrupting each other. They had potential to cause enough mischief separately, he
did not need them to combine ideas.

"I talked to your bounty hunter friend." Quinlan's tone was completely even, his face blase.

Obi-Wan eyed him for a moment, but Quinlan didn't give anything away. "The way you say that
does not fill me with confidence."

"We were both on our best behavior." Quinlan defended himself.

"Even less reassured."

Quinlan smirked. "I'm hurt, Obi-Wan. I'm the most trustworthy individual you know."

Obi-Wan closed his eyes, considered what he knew about both Jango and Quinlan and then asked
the obvious question. "So who threatened the other first?"

Quinlan's eyes were sparkling with delight and for a single second Obi-Wan regretted every single
one of his life decisions. "He got the first threat in, but I think mine was more creative."
"Delightful."

"I thought so." Quinlan shrugged. "Probably not my favorite person to ever exist, but not half bad, I guess."

"Yes, I'm sure he'll be heartened to hear you think so much of him."

Quinlan snorted. "We both know that he couldn't care less what I think of him, but I wasn't doing it for him."

Obi-Wan shifted the subject quickly. "How long was Anakin alone in the lower levels of Coruscant before you found him?"

Quinlan shook his head. "Not even for a second. I caught up to him before he'd made it very far from the temple, Aayla had noticed him being shifty and so I went to find him. I followed him until he found Fett and then followed the both of them. Then when Fett and Anakin came here for food I contacted Master Koon and he came to pick up Anakin and take him back to the Temple while I spoke with Fett."

Obi-Wan frowned. "If you found him so early, why didn't you just bring him back?"

Quinlan gave him a raised eyebrow. "You do remember that he's your kid, right? I figured that he had probably inherited your stubborn attitude, figured it would be easier to see what he was up to, then have to catch him again." Quinlan shook his head. "He was in danger for a few seconds, maximum."

"Do I want to know?"

"Fett didn't recognize him instantly, Anakin was hiding in the robe he stole from you."

He knew Jango well enough that he was pretty sure he knew how that confrontation had gone, he closed his eyes, instead focusing on the fact that at least now he knew where his favorite cloak had gone. "I didn't want to know."

"He's okay, Obi-Wan."

Obi-Wan nodded, but there was a slither of fear tugging at him.

He checked to make sure that the boys were all still busy talking to each other in hushed whispers. He lowered his voice. "There was a bounty out for Anakin's capture." He admitted, "I had to stop several kidnapping attempts. It was one of the reasons I was so okay with Anakin joining the Jedi, I hoped that he'd be safer in the Temple."

Quinlan frowned, "And you trusted Fett? A bounty hunter?" He sounded like he couldn't emphasize that very obvious point enough.

"He wouldn't hurt Anakin." Obi-Wan protested. Sure, when Jango had first shown up on Leritor Obi-Wan had accused him of being there with less than honorable intentions, but he'd had a fever and he had very good reasons to be paranoid. But when it came down to it, he honestly believed that Jango wouldn't hurt Anakin.

When had he come to that conclusion? He wondered. When had Jango so effectively slid his way into Obi-Wan's trust?

"He's a bounty hunter." Quinlan said, as though he couldn't emphasize that very obvious point
"Who wouldn't hurt Anakin."

Quinlan closed his eyes. "Any other bounties I need to worry about?"

Obi-Wan didn't shift an inch, and he knew that his poker face was nearly impenetrable. Quinlan didn't buy it for a second and sighed. "One on you, too?"

"Yes." He admitted. It had taken him getting actual sleep to realize that some of the attacks had been aimed at him as well as Anakin, and he was still expending a fair amount of effort to not worry about what it meant that Palpatine wanted him captured alive.

"Once again, you realize Fett is a bounty hunter, and that you are trusting him? I would have been a lot more clear with my threats if I'd known you were being this ridiculous."

"I don't think he'd hurt me." His defense came out quieter then he'd intended it to. It was true, he didn't think Jango would hurt him. Jango had outright told Obi-Wan that he wouldn't.

But still…

Obi-Wan didn't know if his heart was capable of dealing with another betrayal.

At the same time, some part of him recognized that it didn't matter what he said, Obi-Wan had trusted Jango with Anakin and Shmi. Say what he would, equivocate as much as he liked, if Jango did turn on him then Obi-Wan's heart was going to break, shatter.

Quinlan put his head in his hands for a second before looking back up at Obi-Wan, there was a hint of stress showing through his normally carefree eyes. "Do you know who put the bounty out on the two of you?"

Obi-Wan considered prevaricating, but in the end decided that it might be better to be honest. If Quinlan thought had had it in hand, then Quinlan wouldn't feel the need to get involved. "I have suspicions, but nothing certain."

"Anything you can do about it?"

"Not at the moment."

"Anything I can do about it?"

"No." The word came out sharp. But the idea of Quinlan confronting Palpatine was horrifying.

Quinlan paused, his face thoughtful. "Anything Fett could do about it?"

Obi-Wan blinked at Quinlan, somehow surprised. "Did you really just suggest I try to hire Jango to take care of this for me?"

"If it works?" Quinlan shrugged. "I don't see why not. It can't be a particularly wholesome person if they're trying to kidnap you and Anakin."

"No. I doubt this individual left enough information behind for Jango to track them, and while I'm sure he knows about the bounty out for me, neither he nor I have mentioned it, and I'm fine with that." More than fine with that really. If neither of them acknowledged it, than Obi-Wan could pretend it wasn't a real issue.
"But you said you thought you knew who had placed the bounty."

"I'm not telling Jango who it is."

"Why not?" Quinlan asked, sounding perplexed. "He's a bounty hunter, I doubt it would bother him."

"Because he'll die." Obi-Wan snapped, remembering how it felt to realize that Palpatine had killed Kit and Agen and Saesee and Mace, that Palpatine had defeated Yoda. "He won't die because of me and he won't die for me."

Quinlan eyes widened in surprise at the vehemence. "Who's after you, Obi-Wan?"

Obi-Wan closed his eyes again, and then checked to make sure that the boys were still enthralled in their conversation. "You don't need to worry about it."

"I don't need to worry about it?" Quinlan's voice grew dark and Obi-Wan was reminded that for all that Quinlan maintained a carefree attitude, he was still very dangerous. Obi-Wan had never been afraid of him, didn't think he ever would be, but he was sometimes afraid of what Quinlan would do, what lines he would cross to protect the people he cared about. "I know Fett's reputation, he isn't exactly easy to kill."

Obi-Wan just gritted his teeth. "You would think, wouldn't you?" The man who had killed Jedi after Jedi with his bare hands. The man who had been considered one of the fiercest and most dangerous bounty hunters in the galaxy. The man who had been chosen to be the progenitor of an entire army. The man who Obi-Wan knew from personal experience was mortal. He'd seen him die, once before. Jango hadn't meant anything to him then.

But now he had become an important part of Obi-Wan's life.

Obi-Wan couldn't bear the thought of Jango dying, much less dying because of Obi-Wan.

Quinlan was observing him, eyes assessing. "So whoever is after you is honestly that dangerous."

"I could be wrong," Obi-Wan shrugged, not quite meeting Quinlan's eyes. Quinlan, when the mood suited him, could be dangerously observant and Obi-Wan had already given up too much. "I have no proof." He sighed, "But Anakin will be safe with the Jedi, at least for now, as long as he actually stays in the Temple and out of the seedier parts of Coruscant." He gave Quinlan a pleading look and Quinlan nodded to show he understood.

"And you? Who will help you stay safe?"

"I can take care of myself, Quinlan."

Quinlan just shook his head. "I cannot believe you. Actually, no, that's a lie, I very much believe this of you, but I still don't approve." Quinlan sighed. "I'll keep an eye out for Anakin, and I'll make sure to have a word with whoever takes Anakin as their padawan."

"Thank you, Quinlan."

Quinlan snorted, "Not a problem, just remember to tell me how Fett reacts when he learns that you knew who was after you and you didn't do anything about it."

"He won't find out. And I didn't say I wasn't going to do anything about it, I just said I couldn't right
now.” And he did plan on ridding the Galaxy of Palpatine eventually, so really, he would do something about it.

Quinlan just looked exasperated. "You remember those days when you were the responsible one and I was the reckless one? I think I preferred it when it was that way."

Obi-Wan found himself smiling at that. "Well, I had to get payback for those years somehow."

By the time they finished their meal Anakin, Savage, and Feral seemed to have struck up a friendship, it was something of a relief to Obi-Wan, even if he found he was worried what sort of mischief they would get up to. Although at least Anakin's mischief wouldn't be Obi-Wan's problem. It would probably be an exercise in patience, compassion, and forgiveness for the Jedi, but then, the Jedi probably needed a few exercises in all of those things.

Really, he was doing them a favor. He held in a smile at the thought.

"I'll drop Anakin off at the temple and then take you back to your ship." Quinlan told him quietly as they moved back to the speeder. "I'll try to keep your charges distracted for the ride."

Obi-Wan nodded, and gestured for Feral and Savage to climb in the front seat so that he could sit in the back with Anakin.

Anakin sat right next to him, and Obi-Wan put his arm around his shoulders and pulled him close.

"How are you doing, Anakin?" He asked quietly.

For a second, Anakin didn't answer, but then he turned and buried his face into Obi-Wan's chest. His small body trembled in Obi-Wan's arms. Obi-Wan tightened his hold and ran a hand through his messy blonde hair. "It's okay, Anakin. It's okay."

Anakin's arms wrapped around him, and all of the glee and joy that Obi-Wan had seen so far seemed a distant memory at the grief he could feel from the boy in his arms.

"I didn't think it would be this hard." Anakin admitted quietly. "I thought—" Anakin shrugged. "I don't know what I thought, but I miss you, and I miss Mom, and everything's so different, I'm too different. I hate it."

Obi-Wan didn't tell Anakin that both he and Shmi had warned Anakin that it would be difficult, he had no doubt that Anakin was well aware of that. The problem was he wasn't sure what he was supposed to say. Shmi would have known what to say.

"I'm sorry." He said quietly. "I'm sorry that you're struggling." He paused there, trying to decide on the right words. "Is this still something you want?"

Anakin hesitated, and he looked up from where he had buried his face in Obi-Wan's tunic to meet his eyes, and Obi-Wan could see the heavy conflict in Anakin's eyes.

"There's no right answer, Anakin; there isn't a wrong answer, either."

“I… I think so." Anakin shrugged, "I think I want this. But I don't know if I can do it. They keep telling me that I need to let go of you and Mom, and I can't do that."

Obi-Wan hid a grimace. "You're allowed to love us. You're allowed to miss us. What the Jedi don't
want you to do is to constantly dwell on us."

"But I'm not! I'm trying to make things work, I am!"

"I believe you. I do." He sighed. "They have very strict expectations of you, and that's not entirely fair."

"It's not." Anakin pouted. "It's osik is what it is."

Obi-Wan choked down a laugh, Anakin had definitely not learned that particular piece of vocabulary from either him or Shmi. "It's unfortunate."

"I can't tell you what to do, Anakin. The decision to stay has to be yours to make, this is your life, and you deserve to have the right to choose how you're going to live it." Anakin was nine. In most ways far too young to be making a decision this large. But still, Obi-Wan didn't take it back. "Do you want to talk through the decision again, weigh the different options?"

Anakin looked thoughtful, but then shook his head. "No, we did that, and I know why I chose what I did." He straightened his shoulders. "I still feel like this is what I'm supposed to be doing." Anakin looked down again, and his shoulders slumped as his conviction slipped.

"What do you need, Anakin?" He asked quietly. "What can I do to help you?"

Anakin didn't answer immediately but then he looked up at Obi-Wan almost embarrassed. "Just…" He hesitated. "Can you just hug me really tight for a while?"

"Of course." He shifted away for a second, pulling his robe out so that it could wrap around Anakin, and then pulled Anakin close, letting the boy burrow his way into Obi-Wan's side.

He watched as Quinlan took a wrong turn, leading them further from the temple. Gesturing to the side to point out random, inconsequential things to Feral and Savage.

He focused back on Anakin, taking the Force and wrapping it around Anakin, imbuing the gesture with all of the love he had for Anakin. His complete confidence in Anakin. His fervent desire that Anakin be happy.

Bending just a little he placed his forehead on Anakin's hair. "I am always going to love you, Anakin."

Anakin nodded a little and clung tighter. "I know." He thought he felt a few tears drip their way through his tunic and Obi-Wan knew that his own eyes were probably a little wet.

Finally after several long minutes Anakin drew back. "Thank you."

Obi-Wan just smiled at him, keeping his arm around Anakin's shoulders. "You are more than welcome, Anakin."

Anakin straightened again, setting his shoulders determinedly. "I can do this."

"Of course you can." Obi-Wan told him quietly. "But do you want to?"

Anakin hesitated but then nodded. "This is the right path. I know it is."

Obi-Wan smiled at him. "I'm glad. You will be a great Jedi, Anakin." He ruffled the boy's hair. "Just
try and be a good student as well. Don’t go running off all the time."

Anakin winced guiltily, but nodded. "I won’t."

Obi-Wan gave him a serious look. "Promise me, Anakin. It’s dangerous, and people have already tried to hurt you. Don’t give them further opportunity to do so."

Anakin’s eyes widened, but then he nodded again. "Mr. Jango wouldn’t hurt me, though."

That was beside the point, and he was fairly certain that Anakin knew it. "You passed a lot of people between the temple and finding Jango." He lessened the weight in his voice. "But no, Jango wouldn’t hurt you."

Anakin nodded, eyes serious. "I promise I won’t sneak out." He shifted the subject and Obi-Wan allowed it. "Are you going to see him again? He said he was on Naboo with you."

"I think so, yes."

Anakin nodded again and Obi-Wan watched as Quinlan shifted the direction so they were once again headed in the right direction to reach the temple. "He said he'd look out for you. If you let him."

"Jango?"

Anakin nodded. "You’ll let him, right?"

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow at Anakin who looked sincerely concerned about his answer. "You don’t think I can look after myself?"

Anakin made a face at that. "Of course you can!" He hesitated. "Sort of." He frowned, and Obi-Wan tried not to laugh as Anakin added more contradictions. "Except when it comes to food. You weren’t very good at that. Or sleep."

"I don’t think Jango will be much help in either of those situations."

Anakin looked dubious at that. "You slept almost every single time he visited us."

Obi-Wan blinked, running through the different visits. Had he really? How odd.

Anakin continued explaining. "I asked Mom about it, she was always trying to make sure that Jango didn’t leave after you fell asleep, because the first time he left you woke up almost immediately. I don’t think she had to try very hard though. I think Mr. Jango just liked taking care of you long before he actually realized that he liked taking care of you."

"Pardon?" When had Anakin gotten so observant? He didn't remember Anakin noticing things like this last time around.

Anakin nodded, smiling. "Yep. I don’t think he realized until recently. The last time I asked him to take care of you he didn’t promise he would. But he did this time."

Obi-Wan closed his eyes. "Right." He shook his head. "You do know, Anakin, that Jango and I can work this out ourselves, right? You don’t need to make Jango promise anything." He opened his eyes and gave Anakin a pointed look. "Nor do you need to try and push me into accepting his help. Or anything else that came along with Jango being a part of his life."

Anakin looked dubious. "Mom says that sometimes you’re emotionally stunted."
Shmi would say something like that. Shmi was always very blunt, though kind, about those sort of things. What was it she'd told him? ‘You can figure out how to help negotiate a peace treaty between two groups that hate each other and refuse to even speak Basic to each other, but you can't see that Anakin and I love you with all our hearts. You should really work on that.’

“That may be true. But rest assured, Anakin, this is not a situation you need to get involved in.”

Obi-Wan already found the situation confusing enough without other people adding their two credits. He and Jango would figure things out or they wouldn't. It was really that simple.

"If you say so."

"I do say so." They turned a corner and the Temple loomed above them. He pulled Anakin close again for a final hug. "I love you, Anakin."

Anakin hugged him back. "I love you, too."

Quinlan slowed as they reached the front steps of the temple. "It looks like Yoda came to say hello." Quinlan paused. "Or I suppose he's getting one last argument in and then saying goodbye."

Obi-Wan glanced over to see what Quinlan was looking at and did his best not to stiffen. It was Dooku.

"I thought you said he left."

Quinlan shrugged. "I told you he keeps traipsing around for meetings with the High Council. Apparently he couldn't fit all of the reasons he thought the Jedi Order was Falling into a single meeting."

Dooku did enjoy his talking.

"Right."

He turned away and helped Anakin out of the speeder. Anakin glanced at the temple for a long moment and then gave Obi-Wan a final hug. "Will I see you again?"

Obi-Wan smiled at Anakin, and he knew it was a little wistful. "I don't know, Anakin. It can be a very small Galaxy at times. But either way, it won't change my love for you."

Nothing could.

Anakin nodded, and then sighed somewhat dramatically, before turning and confidently making his way up the stairs.

Obi-Wan slid back into the speeder and Quinlan gave him a searching look. "You good?"

He considered the question and then nodded. "Yes, thank you. I know it would have been easier for you to drop us off first."

Quinlan made a face. "Not really, I'm avoiding Master Nu. Supposedly, I damaged a datapad when I returned it to the Archives and she's on the war path."

"You really do need to learn to be careful with those."

"It wasn't me! I am always careful with those stupid things. Ever since the first time when Master Nu tried to kill me with two months of Archive duty so that I would learn proper respect for the noble art
of learning."

"I seem to recall you trying to convince me to take over for you whenever Master Nu wasn't watching."

Quinlan smirked. "No one can prove that."

Obi-Wan rolled his eyes. "Of course not, and you aren't purposefully delaying your return by engaging in this argument?"

Quinlan rolled his eyes and turned back to the front of the speeder as Feral crawled over the seat to the back. "Did you really do part of his punishment for him?"

Obi-Wan hesitated. "Well, I didn't so much do it for him as we—"

He cut off as a shadow paused over them. "Young Kenobi. What a surprise to see you here."

Obi-Wan looked up and forced a pleasant smile. "Master Dooku."

Dooku gave him a once over. "I suppose you wouldn't be up to date on news from the Temple. But I'm afraid I've left the Order now and have taken my place in the courts of Serenno." He tilted his head in a nod. "The appropriate title would be Count."

Obi-Wan nodded his head back. "I see. My apologies, Count Dooku." It took more than control than it should have to not let any derision slip into his tone at the title, but thankfully the word came out evenly.

Dooku was eyeing him, his look dark and searching. "How long will you be on Coruscant?"

"It was a short stop, I'm afraid. I'll be leaving shortly."

Count Dooku nodded. "Of course. But perhaps you could delay your departure. I would dearly like to have a meal with my Grandpadawan. Such ties are not so easily cut by something as simple as both of us having chosen to leave the Order."

"I'm not sure that now would be the best time."

"Nonsense. The chances of us finding another opportunity are slim." He glanced at Savage and Feral. "Your… charges are of course welcome to join us." He gave Feral a smile, much, Obi-Wan thought, like the smile Dooku had given as he'd watched the Jedi be cut down on Geonosis. "Would you like that?"

Obi-Wan glanced at Feral who was biting his lip, looking both nervous and curious. "Could we?"

Obi-Wan didn't allow his smile to grow strained as he tilted his head in acquiescence. "I'm afraid we just ate. Perhaps we could have a meal this evening."

Dooku looked pleased. "Dinner would be excellent. If you give me your comm id I can send you our reservation information."

Obi-Wan hesitated, but since he'd already agreed he might as well make the process as easy as possible.

As soon as he'd gotten Obi-Wan's comm designation, Dooku whisked away, leaving behind a tired looking grandmaster. "Good to see you, it is." Yoda said quietly, though the droop in his ears conveyed a very different emotion. Though that was likely more to do with Dooku than Obi-Wan for.
once.

"It is good to see you as well, Master Yoda."

Master Yoda stared at him for a long moment, his eyes sharp and searching. "Good for you, this path has been. Happy for you, I am. Tell you that, I have not." Yoda tapped his timer stick a few times. "Sorry I am, for what pain I did cause."

The apology took Obi-Wan off guard. "There is nothing to be forgiven, Master Yoda."

Yoda harrumphed, shaking his head. "Good, you are. Humble, you are." Master Yoda turned a little to watch the traffic. "Different, your actions were. But not changed, have your motivations. No, not changed have they since very young you were. To do good, you seek. To protect." Yoda sighed. "Forget that, I did. Overlook it. No. No. Much to be forgiven there was."

Obi-Wan swallowed hard. "Then you're forgiven, Master Yoda." He paused. "Thank you." It wasn't that he needed the validation. No, Obi-Wan had made his choices and done what he felt was right, and he'd done it even if it meant going against those he respected.

But that didn't mean he didn't appreciate that Yoda had finally extended the support that Obi-Wan had wanted from the beginning.

Yoda nodded. "Yes. Yes." Yoda met his eyes again, and there was a heavy sorrow in them. "Not changed have your motivations. Much changed have you. Happier, are you?"

Happy? The question took Obi-Wan aback. Happiness wasn't really a part of the equation. Fixing things. That was what was important. That was all that was important.

But despite that.

"I am, yes." Not always. Not when the grief was too much and the galaxy too big and too heavy to carry on his shoulders. But he was. He had a family, Shmi and Anakin, even if they had taken different paths as of late. He had a purpose, and that wasn't counting his attempts to stop the Sith, he had Feral and Savage now, and there was a galaxy that they were counting on him to prepare them for. He had friends. Dex, R2, Nield, Quinlan. And Jango, somewhere intermixed in purpose and family and friends. "Things aren't perfect. But I'm happy."

Yoda nodded. "Glad I am." He looked out again, into the traffic and it hit Obi-Wan that Yoda was watching the direction that Dooku had left in, almost as though he hoped his former Padawan would return. "Yes. Yes. Glad." Yoda turned back, and the droop in his ears was still there. "See you again, I will. But for now, goodbye, yes?"

Obi-Wan nodded. "Yes. For now, this is goodbye. May the Force be with you, Master Yoda."

"And with you, Young Obi-Wan. May it be with you."

Yoda turned and slowly hobbled off and Obi-Wan watched, unable to help his concern. He had known, of course, that Dooku's departure had hurt Master Yoda, but still, seeing it again was sobering.

"He seems really old." The comment from Feral pulled Obi-Wan from his thoughts and he turned back to his young charges to see them watching Yoda hobble away.

"Nearly 800, last I checked."
Feral's eyes went wide. "I didn't realize that anyone could get that old." The words were whispered in absolute awe and the boy craned his neck to watch Yoda as long as he could.

Obi-Wan chuckled and settled into his seat. "Yoda is from a long-lived race."

Quinlan snorted as he started the speeder again. "That's what he says anyways. No one actually knows where Yoda and Yaddle are from. I suspect that they're actually keeping themselves alive because they're both too stubborn to die."

Savage looked skeptical. "That's not actually something people can do."

Quinlan raised an eyebrow at that, turning to look at Savage, a teasing glint in his eye. "Well, actually—"

Obi-Wan took hold of the side of the speeder and nudged his friend. "Eyes on the airways, please. And none of your lies."

Quinlan pouted, but turned back to watch where he was flying. "I wasn't going to lie. I was only going to share my theory that Yoda and Yaddle are cosmic entities that subsist off chaos and mischief. Why else do you think they both spend so much time in the creche, which is without a doubt the most chaotic place in the temple; talk in a way that causes more confusion than clarity—don't tell me they don't know standard grammar patterns, they know them, they just don't use them—and, both constantly troll the Knights and Masters?"

"There are plenty of reasons. And you're forgetting that they don't subsist off mischief, no, if they did there would be no reason for those terrible stews of theirs."

Quinlan scrunched his nose in distaste. "I actually think that's more evidence that they're trolling all of us. Those stews are barely edible, I'm fairly certain they make those stews purely to take pleasure in watching people try to pretend to enjoy them."

That, Obi-Wan thought, might actually have a hint of truth to it. Not that he'd admit that to Quinlan. "Hmm, if you say so." He made sure his voice had just the right amount of sarcasm lining it, and as he expected Quinlan sent him a look of fake offense.

"See if I share my theories with you again."

"It didn't seem like a very good theory." Savage noted, quietly.

"I kind of liked it." Feral disagreed. "I think it would be really neat to meet a cosmic entity of chaos."

Obi-Wan scrunched his nose. While he didn't think Mortis and the Force entities he met there quite counted as cosmic entities—or who knows, maybe they did, he was still a little unclear on the whole thing—it was probably as close as most people got. It was definitely not something he would advise anyone do. Ever.

Quinlan pulled to a stop outside the landing platforms. "Well, here we are." He turned back to look at Obi-Wan. "Try and stay out of trouble this time. Don't go getting any more bounties on your head, stay out of planetary invasions."

Obi-Wan snorted. "I'll make sure to strike those from my schedule."

Quinlan grinned a little and pulled him into a powerful hug. "You need me, you comm me. I've been itching for a reason to show Aayla how to go against the council with the right amount of sincerity and impudence."
"How about I not, and you don't show Aayla anything of the sort." He smiled softly, because while it had been a joke, he also knew Quinlan was serious, and that if Obi-Wan ever needed him, Quinlan would be there. "As it is, if you need me, you comm."

Quinlan nodded. "You know I will." He gave Obi-Wan a crooked grin. "You know I'm not the type to need saving. But if I ever did, Obi-Wan, I'd let you."

The call back to Quinlan's farewell the last time Obi-Wan had seen him, caused something to get stuck in his throat. He gave Quinlan another quick hug farewell and climbed out of the speeder, Savage and Feral climbing out after him.

They all watched as Quinlan sped away, going far faster than the speed limit, and swerving in and out of traffic much more than was either sane or reasonable.

Obi-Wan sighed a little, shaking his head. "Please, you two, never drive like him."

Savage shrugged. "Okay." He paused. "It looks kind of fun though."

Obi-Wan winced. "Please, please, don't say things like that."

Savage and Feral just exchanged smiles. Despite Obi-Wan's very fervent desire to not have to deal with that sort of driving, he didn't say anything more. It was good that Savage and Feral were smiling and opening up. It hadn't been very long that they'd known each other, not really.

"All right, you two. Let's go find a way to spend the rest of the day before our new dinner appointment." He smiled as genuinely as he could. "I'll show you around Coruscant, if you'd like."

Both Savage and Feral beamed at the idea.

Skysitter Restaurant. How had Dooku managed get reservations for the Skysitter Restaurant? Particularly so late notice?

Deciding he didn't want to know Obi-Wan sighed as he took in his and the clothes the boys were wearing. He considered the options. Buying clothes a little more suitable for such an establishment was a hassle he didn't want to deal with. But there was also a part of him that grated at the fact that it was something of a power play, putting Obi-Wan in a position where he was obviously underdressed, and thus unwelcome. It would put Obi-Wan on the defense. Obi-Wan trusted in his diplomatic abilities, it was a situation he knew he could handle. But he also knew which battles he should pick.

He sighed. "How do the two of you feel about getting a few new clothes?"

To be fair, and here Obi-Wan grimaced a little at himself, he should be getting them new clothes anyways. They hadn't brought much with the and it was a terrible sign of negligence that Obi-Wan hadn't considered the matter earlier.

"Well, we need slightly nicer clothes for the restaurant the Count has chosen. And then the two of
you need some clothes to put in your closet. We should have done that earlier, I apologize for it only just now occurring to me."

Savage furrowed his brow. "Okay." He looked down at what he was wearing. "If you say so."

Obi-Wan hesitated, but then nodded, more to himself than to the boys, trying to prepare himself for a shopping trip. "I am." He smiled a little. "It'll be an adventure."

Both boys looked dubious about the idea of clothes being much of an adventure, but they agreed easily enough. Obi-Wan sighed, they didn't know what they were in for. Not yet.

Obi-Wan gave his politest smile to the waiter as the man led he, Feral, and Savage to their table. Savage and Feral both looked as though they felt extremely uncomfortable in the glamor of the restaurant and Obi-Wan quietly cursed himself. Of course Feral and Savage hadn't really understood what they were agreeing to, and Obi-Wan should have done more to prepare them. Not that he'd had all that much time to do so. They'd been rather busy, clothes shopping had been an experience, to say the least.

More for Obi-Wan, who missed his robes and the easy simplicity of them, than Savage and Feral, who had handled it all well. They had liked being able to buy things to put in their closet, and Obi-Wan winced at the neglect he'd shown at not providing them the opportunity to make the ship their home earlier. He missed Shmi. She would have handled this far better than Obi-Wan.

Feral tripped a little, paying more attention to his surroundings than to where his feet were going. Obi-Wan rested a hand on Feral's shoulder, steadying him, and gave Savage a small, genuine smile.

They reached their table, settled next to a window where they were provided a rather fantastic view of Coruscant.

Dooku was already seated, dressed in dark but fine clothing. It was remarkable, Dooku had only just left the Order, but he had apparently shifted from the simple robes of the Jedi to the finery of a Count with exceptional ease and speed.

Of course, if Dooku had been planning on leaving the Order for quite some time he would have had all of his affairs in order. Dooku was not the type of man to be unprepared.

Again, Obi-Wan wondered how things were playing out. Obi-Wan had been under the impression that Dooku had left the Order because of Qui-Gon's death. But Qui-Gon had not died this time.

Why had Dooku left the Order? Had there been a way to save him?

Obi-Wan paused at the thought and stopped himself. Yes, in the past Dooku had left the Order and joined the Sith. But Obi-Wan didn't know for sure that Dooku had joined the Sith this time.

Qui-Gon was alive, perhaps that was enough to keep Dooku from joining the Sith.

It would be a poor idea to jump to conclusions. And he knew very well that leaving the Jedi Order didn't mean that a person had Fallen. Wasn't that the attitude that he silently railed against when it came to Qui-Gon's assumptions about him?

Keeping that in mind he took a seat at the table, gesturing for Feral and Savage to both sit as well.
He glanced at the extra seat at the table. "Are we expecting someone else?"

Dooku tilted his head minutely. "Yes. I thought it would be pleasant to have more of our lineage present."

Obi-Wan glanced at the empty chair again. "And did Qui-Gon accept your invitation?"

Dooku made a dismissive sound. "Only Qui-Gon knows what Qui-Gon is going to do at any given moment, and sometimes even he is caught by surprise. Though I suspect his desire to interrogate me on my life choices will be enough to convince him to make an appearance."

Obi-Wan nodded. "I see. I imagine we will wait a while longer before beginning, then?"

"Of course." He gave Obi-Wan an assessing look. "It really is quite fortunate that our paths managed to cross. Today was my last day on Coruscant."

"Oh, are you returning to Serenno then?"

"Eventually." He waved his hand in an encompassing gesture. "There is no urgency for me to return and present myself officially and the Galaxy is a large place. Perhaps the Force will lead my steps elsewhere first. I'm sure you can understand."

Obi-Wan tilted his head in acknowledgment. "In that case I wish you luck, the Force often has a sense of humor, you may find yourself in the strangest of situations."

"Like finding a long missing Jedi Master and his Padawan?" Dooku shook his head in a way that seemed to express humor at the situation. "That truly was remarkable."

Obi-Wan gave a small shrug. "The Force is indeed remarkable." He paused. "I wasn't aware that news of Master Narec's return had already spread so far. He has not been at the Temple even a day, yet."

Dooku laughed. "You should know that the Council, for all that they may present themselves as formidable, are in actuality terrible gossips. Half the Temple knew before Master Narec had even stepped foot on Coruscant." He paused. "Though the alacrity of the news being spread was probably partly due to my own actions, replacing one revered Master with another, so to speak."

Obi-Wan suspected that Dooku was correct. Narec would have made his first transmission to the Temple at nearly the same time Dooku had announced his departure and the Council would have been quick to use Narec's return as a way to calm the worries that a Master becoming the most recent of the Lost Twenty would cause.

Dooku looked up suddenly, and his face drew into a somewhat disapproving look. Obi-Wan turned to look in the direction Dooku was frowning and noted that Qui-Gon had indeed decided to show up.

"Was it too much to ask that you at least polish your boots, Qui-Gon?" Dooku shook his head. "You weren't raised in the Outer Rim."

Qui-Gon rolled his eyes and Obi-Wan glanced to see that Qui-Gon was wearing a slightly muddy pair of boots. In fact, Obi-Wan suspected that Qui-Gon had chosen his dirtiest pair of boots to wear to this event if the raised eyebrow Qui-Gon gave Dooku was any indication. "I'd be more than happy to leave if my footwear is too poor for your oh-so-refined tastes."
Obi-Wan noticed both Savage and Feral shift their feet to better look at their own shoes and he gave them a wink and a smile. Whatever else Qui-Gon did tonight, he had successfully made Feral and Savage feel as though they weren't the most out of place patrons tonight.

Dooku gave a long suffering sigh. "Sit, Qui-Gon. I've known you far too long for a pair of muddy boots to be any surprise to me."

Qui-Gon sat, giving Obi-Wan a narrowed eyed look. "I wasn't aware that you had invited my former Padawan, Yan."

"Yes, and he was unaware that I had invited you. I do hope that you are still capable of adapting to a situation you weren't prepared for."

Obi-Wan pointedly glanced away while the two men engaged in a staring contest.

In one of the strangest moments of his life Obi-Wan watched as Qui-Gon was the one who backed down first, Qui-Gon never backed down first. "Of course."

Dooku smiled pleasantly. "Excellent." He made a small gesture and a moment later a waiter appeared, menus in his hand. "We'll have a fine Alderaanian Wine to start off." He glanced at Feral and Savage. "And of course, something for the children."

The waiter nodded and left the menus as he whisked off.

Dooku quickly passed the menus around, looking over his own menu swiftly before nodding. "The meal is on me of course. Do feel free to order anything."

Feral sent Obi-Wan a panicked look, and Obi-Wan diverted his attention to him, while quickly skimming the menu. "I would suggest trying the Mandalorian Timpets." He said, keeping his voice low. "The portions won't be big, but it would probably be more to your tastes than most things on the menu."

Feral nodded and put the menu down, his eyes drifting to the window and the revolving city scape.

Obi-Wan turned to Savage on the other side and Savage shrugged before pointing to something on the menu with a questioning look. Obi-Wan nodded. "It's fairly good. You would probably enjoy it."

He looked up to see Qui-Gon watching him, eyes darting from him to Savage and Feral, a narrow-eyed suspicious look.

It only took Obi-Wan a moment to figure out what Qui-Gon was assuming.

"Have you chosen?" Dooku asked, voice pleasant even as his own eyes shifted from Qui-Gon to Obi-Wan, obviously aware that a situation was brewing.

"Yes," Obi-Wan responded and Qui-Gon nodded sharply.

The waiter returned and they all quickly placed their orders. "You never introduced your companions, Obi-Wan." Qui-Gon's voice was conversational, but there was a dark tone beneath it.

Obi-Wan sighed internally. "Savage, Feral. This is Qui-Gon Jinn. Master Jinn, this is Feral and Savage."

Qui-Gon smiled and turned to Savage. "How did you meet Obi-Wan?"

Savage straightened, looking somewhat surprised at being addressed. "The Mother sent us with
him."

"Oh?" Qui-Gon looked interested. "And how did Obi-Wan meet the Mother?"

Savage shrugged. "I didn't ask." He sent a questioning look towards Obi-Wan as though unsure how to answer the question or why he was being asked it in the first place.

Qui-Gon turned to face Obi-Wan. "I find it quite intriguing that you found these particular companions so soon after recent events. A coincidence, I'm sure."

"Not in the slightest." Obi-Wan gave Qui-Gon a sharp smile. "They are from the same clan as the Sith we met on Naboo."

"And here I thought that you were unfamiliar with the Sith."

Obi-Wan gave Qui-Gon an unimpressed look. "It did not take exceptional skill to notice that Maul was not an Iridonian Zabrak, it was not hard to conclude that he must then be Dathomirian, it was simple then to find his origins."

Qui-Gon and Dooku both sent him intrigued looks. "Did you discover any ties to the Sith?" Dooku asked.

Obi-Wan tilted his head thoughtfully, trying to determine what was safe to share. "Only that she has no intention of working with them further. With the death of Maul she has decided to remain out of the any future conflicts and forge her own path."

"Maul?" Qui-Gon asked. "Was that his name?"

Obi-Wan nodded. "It was."

Qui-Gon frowned, eyes slipping back to Feral and Savage. "And she's aware of the role you played in Maul's death?"

"Are you asking if I told her that I killed him?" Obi-Wan asked. "While this is perhaps not the best conversation to have at dinner, yes. I made her aware."

"And she trusted you with her sons?" Dooku asked, sounding intrigued. "An interesting choice."

Feral snorted and they all looked at him in surprise. Feral hunched over a little, obviously not having intended to make that noise aloud. Savage spoke up, obviously intending to take the pressure off of Feral. "Mother Talzin doesn't need to explain her reasoning."

"How do you feel about this?" Qui-Gon asked the teenager, and Obi-Wan felt part of himself thaw. There was actual genuine concern in that question.

"She gave us the best life she could." Feral said quietly. "We weren't Nightsisters, so she couldn't really love us. But she cared enough to want to help us." He gave Obi-Wan a shy smile.

Qui-Gon looked at both of the boys and then after a moment nodded. "I see."

And that was enough for Obi-Wan to realize that whatever Qui-Gon personally thought about the situation, and whatever suspicions he still harbored, he wasn't going to push that particular subject any further. At least not while the two boys were around.

The waiter arrived with their meals and Obi-Wan watched as both Feral and Savage took in the size of the portions with unimpressed looks on their faces. Dooku seemed to notice too, because he
actually looked somewhat amused. "Perhaps the next time we cross paths the two of you can choose the establishment."

Obi-Wan smiled a little at the offer even as he mentally cringed at the idea of crossing paths with Dooku on anything resembling a regular basis, even if he hadn't Fallen.

Qui-Gon's face went dark. "What are you doing, Yan?"

Dooku looked down at his plate as though considering it. "I'm enjoying dinner with my former Padawan and my former Padawan's former Padawan. You refused to allow our lineage an opportunity to interact while you could, so I took matters into my own hands."

Qui-Gon made a face and waved his hand dismissively. "Not this. Why are you leaving the Order?"

Dooku raised an eyebrow at that, managing to look both condescending and concerned. "Qui-Gon." He shook his head, looking tired. "The past years have made it clear to me that the Jedi have stagnated, lost their way. Surely you have seen this?"

Qui-Gon pursed his lips, Obi-Wan knew that it was, after all, an issue that Qui-Gon felt fairly strongly about, and Qui-Gon was probably trying to decide whether he wanted to agree or argue.

Dooku took that as agreement and turned to Obi-Wan. "You understand this of course."

Obi-Wan tilted his head. "I'm not sure that I completely agree."

Both Qui-Gon and Dooku looked surprised at that. "Was this not why you left?" Dooku asked.

Obi-Wan shrugged, trying to remain blase about the question. "No. Not when it came down to it." He took a bite of his food, noting absently that it really was quite good. And it should be, with how many credits Dooku was going to have to spend on it. "I'll never claim to fully and unquestioningly agree with the choices of the Order or individual members. But I do believe that the Council and the Order are doing their best to follow the Force."

"Then why did you leave?" Dooku hadn't started eating yet, eyes focused on Obi-Wan with a disquieting focus.

Obi-Wan looked down at his food, frowning a little. He'd explained before, to Qui-Gon, to the Council, to Shmi and Anakin, to Quinlan. While some had believed him more easily than others, he wasn't sure that any of them had really understood. "The Force needed me somewhere else." Obi-Wan said finally, looking up at his Grandmaster. "And so I did my best to go where the Force wanted me."

Dooku leaned back in his chair, lips pursed thoughtfully. "I see." He picked up his fork and knife, the simple gesture graceful in his hands. "That took bravery. A credit to our lineage."

Obi-Wan found himself surprised at the compliment from Dooku of all people. "Thank you."

Dooku merely gave him the faint impression of a smile as he started eating his food, turning his sharp eyes to Qui-Gon whose face had taken on a distinctly disgruntled look. "You must have been so proud, Qui-Gon." Obi-Wan had the distinct impression that Dooku knew exactly what Qui-Gon had thought of Obi-Wan's choice to leave the Order and was trying to poke at the wound. "You always did feel very strongly about following the will of the Force, no matter where it might take you."

Qui-Gon's face shifted from disgruntlement, to annoyance, and then to sheer bull-headed stubbornness. "Oh, I do." His smile was almost saccharine as he looked at Obi-Wan. "But I've
noticed that there are some who like to use the Force as an excuse to do as they would please, and then expect to be pardoned from their foolishness. Saying something doesn't make it so."

Obi-Wan made no attempt to hide the roll of his eyes. It was too late now, he suspected, for him and Qui-Gon to ever truly come to terms with one another. Qui-Gon had made up his mind, and had held to his beliefs for too long to even consider changing them.

And while Obi-Wan might forgive Qui-Gon his point of view, and the words and actions that came along with it, any trust and chance was rather irrevocably destroyed. Forgiveness did not mean that he would be eager to invite more disdain.

Dooku snorted. "You would know, wouldn't you, about excuses."

Qui-Gon's eyes flared, and he turned from Obi-Wan to look at Dooku. "I would never—"

Dooku held a hand up. "Spare me your certainties, Qui-Gon. I heard them quite enough when you were my Padawan, and the rumors that left the Council chamber have made it clear that you feel the same now as you did then." Dooku actually smiled a little. "I may not always agree with your certainties, Qui-Gon. But I respect your right to them."

Qui-Gon pursed his lips, obviously not pleased, but to press his point would only make him look foolish, and Qui-Gon, for all his maverick eccentricities, had always been a good diplomat. "Yes, well, I'm certainly not the only one with their certainties. You never did explain why you were leaving."

Dooku didn't answer immediately, taking another bite of his meal and chewing slowly. "I told you that I felt the Jedi had stagnated." He shook his head, and his posture was the perfect picture of resigned weariness, the slightest hunch to his perfect posture. "I've seen the way the Jedi have become nothing more than messengers for the Senate." Dooku shook his head. "The Jedi are meant to be forces of change. They are not meant to sit idly in their temple and move only at the whims of the Senate."

Obi-Wan wondered if it would be overly hypocritical of him to talk about jurisdiction. Probably. What Obi-Wan did skirted the lines very carefully. But there were no rules or laws that he broke by asking different planets to work together.

Now, of course, he wasn't so close to skirting the edge of acting without jurisdiction. He was an official representative of the coalition, and when he acted as a negotiator for different parties it was always after having been officially requested into that role.

Any other actions he'd taken, the situation on Rodia came to mind, was almost always to keep himself alive after having accidentally stumbled into something he shouldn't have. Even his jobs as a Bounty Hunter were legal, if heavily frowned upon, since he was registered with the Hunter’s Guild.

He didn't go looking to find wrongs to right, and in a galaxy like this one, it would be easy. He had quite enough of that on his plate all ready.

Surprisingly enough, Qui-Gon voiced some of his thoughts. "You're talking about imposing our will on others. The Senate gives the Jedi the legal right to act. Otherwise we are nothing more than tyrants trying to have our way." An ironic stance for Qui-Gon to take, Obi-Wan thought, considering some of the things that had happened during their time together as Master and Padawan.

Dooku waved it off. "I'm surprised at such a narrow-minded view from you of all people, Qui-Gon. I thought for sure you would understand the truth." Dooku turned to look at Obi-Wan, though his
words were directed at Qui-Gon. "Your former Padawan, for instance, saw his lack of power and jurisdiction and leveraged himself into a place where he had jurisdiction. There was nothing of tyranny to what young Obi-Wan did. No, he succeeded with wits, a fine understanding of the political games that govern the galaxy we live in, and pure determination to see good being done." Dooku's voice took on a strangely soft quality. "I can't say how proud I was, to see action like that from a member of my lineage."

Obi-Wan almost dropped his fork in shock. "Well—" Obi-Wan wasn't quite sure what to say. "The Force was undoubtedly with me. And a fair bit of luck as well."

Dooku shook his head. "You inspired me, Obi-Wan. You gave me the impetus to look at my life and wonder if I was doing what I needed to be doing. It's quite possible I wouldn't be here if not for you. You should be very proud of yourself."

Obi-Wan felt as though he'd just been dunked in ice, any bit of warmth he might have gotten from Dooku's praise wiped away with that simple statement.

Obi-Wan was the reason that Dooku was leaving the Order? If Dooku was a Sith... If he still chose that path. Obi-Wan held back a shudder. If that was true, then it would all be Obi-Wan's fault.

Feral and Savage both seemed tired when they finally made it back to the ship after dinner, and then dessert, was finally over. "I'm confused."

"I'm confused."

"I mean," Feral frowned. "You just showed up, and then the Mother gave us to you, and then we just went and found Asajj and her Jedi, and then we came here and people either love you or kind of hate you, and you're friends with weird people like the Besalisk in the Diner, but you play political games, and you're not a Jedi, but you used to be. And it's all weird and confusing." Feral looked like he'd hit some sort of breaking point. "You said we could stay with you, and you'd protect us, and teach us how to protect ourselves. And I just..." Feral stopped talking. "What do you do? Where do we fit?"

Obi-Wan froze, mind suddenly blank. He'd thought that he'd reassured Feral. But, he realized a little belatedly, that he'd probably only given himself a little time. Coruscant had been, well, a lot. Feral and Savage had seemed to like Anakin, but it had probably given Feral and Savage some doubts. Quinlan and Dex were colorful characters and Dooku and Qui-Gon were, well, very much the opposite of them.

Obi-Wan opened the ship, trying to buy himself some time.

Savage and Feral slipped in and Obi-Wan followed them, closing the door and locking the ship up behind him. "First, I want to make it clear, that, Mother Talzin—" he hesitated. "She gave you to me, yes. And I want you." He looked both boys in the eye. "I want you, and I'm grateful for your presence. You are welcome here, with me, for as long as you want to be. But I want you to know, that more than what Mother Talzin said, more than what I want, the most important thing, is that you know you have choices." He frowned. "You are both still underage, at least according to most of the galaxy, so that, well, rather limits the options you do have available. But I will give you whatever opportunities I can."

Both boys exchanged looks, a wealth of communication in the single moment. "We want to stay
with you." Savage said.

Obi-Wan thought that they were honest, but he also thought that was because they didn't really feel like they had any other options. He bit his lip a little and decided that perhaps they wouldn't need to go straight to Tatooine, it might help if Obi-Wan let them see a little more of the galaxy, let them see different things. Places they might like. People they might trust. Options.

"As for what I do—" again, he hesitated, and then laughed. "Well, I suppose I do whatever I need to. I've worked as a negotiator, a bounty hunter on the side, I played a small role in bringing the Coalition together. The main goal, right now, is to help eliminate slavery in the galaxy. So much as we can, of course."

It was a small step in a much bigger game.

It was also, Obi-Wan admitted wryly to himself, that it was also the only step he'd really figured out.

"But where do we fit?"

"I don't know." He said honestly. "But, between the three of us," somewhere deeper in the ship, R2 beeped angrily. "The four of us," he corrected himself. "We can figure it out."

Feral actually laughed a little, turning a little to see if he could find R2, Savage just frowned. Well, at least one of them was warming up to the cantankerous droid.

Feral furrowed his brows, but then nodded. "Okay." He looked down, and the yellow of his skin turned a little pale in the Zabrakian version of a blush.

Obi-Wan gave him a smile. "Feral," he started quietly. "Never be afraid to ask those questions. That took bravery." Feral blushed again, but somehow Savage looked even more pleased at the compliment then Feral did.

"Now, both of you should probably get to bed. It's late, and I'm going to get this ship up and into hyperspace."

"Where are we going?" Savage asked as he headed to their room.

Obi-Wan shrugged. "Haven't figured that out yet. We'll see if anyone wants us around."

Both boys accepted it easily and went to bed. Obi-Wan let out a deep breath and watched them go before making his own way to the cockpit.

R2 was already there and was quick to beep a complaint.

Obi-Wan raised an eyebrow. "I would have thought you were more than capable of spending an afternoon alone." R2's whistle made it clear what he thought of that. Obi-Wan snorted, the smallest bit offended. "I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself for a single afternoon." The following whistle and beeps were somehow the most condescending sound Obi-Wan had heard in a long time. "You are ridiculous, R2." But with a sigh he acceded. "We can talk about you joining us next time."

Obi-Wan ignored whatever R2 said next as he got clearance to take-off.

When he finally made it to clear space he turned back to R2. "Am I right to assume you've been watching my communications?" R2 acknowledged the breach of privacy with only the slightest hint of embarrassment. "Any interesting requests?"

Obi-Wan listened as R2 went through all of the requests that Obi-Wan had received since just before
Naboo. Obi-Wan had done his best to let everyone know that he wasn't available at the moment, but still, he was a little surprised by just how many requests there had been. "Melida-Daan?" He leaned back in his chair. Nield was a good first stop, an easier introduction into the galaxy than Coruscant had been. And the negotiation was less a negotiation and more Obi-Wan standing in as an outside presence to stand as witness.

Plus, it wouldn't hurt to visit Nield and reassure him after Obi-Wan's rather hasty exit the last time he'd visited to negotiate Naboo's entry into the Coalition. Looking back at the experience, so many months ago now, he felt a bit ashamed. He had let Palpatine unsettle him, let Palpatine send him running. And Obi-Wan had kept running until the fear had turned to fever and Jango and Shmi had put a stop to it.

Perhaps it was the rational response to the most powerful individual in the galaxy, that didn't mean Obi-Wan had to give into it.

Which reminded him, he'd have to send a message to Padme, it hadn't occurred to him, what with all of the other, minor issues at hand, like the subjugation of her planet, but Naboo would need time to restore itself before it could turn its gaze to the rest of the Galaxy.

But that could wait. For now he put the next set of coordinates in, sending them in the direction of Melida-Daan and leant back in his seat.

R2 whistled, about as gently as R2 could, and Obi-Wan smiled a little. "You're right, of course." R2 was more than smug at his response. "Don't rub it in, and don't expect it to be a regular thing." He warned, but still, he pushed himself up from his seat watching the haze of hyperspace pass by the ship. Sleep would do him good, if he could manage it.

He smiled down at the loyal little astromech. "I'll leave you in charge for the night, then. Please don't blow us up."

He laughed as he left the cockpit, R2's enraged response echoing behind him.

Melida-Daan, he decided, had been a good idea.

Nield had been confused at his new tag-a-long's, and Obi-Wan had seen genuine concern at Shmi and Anakin's absence. He'd been happy for Shmi, declaring that she deserved the stability Obi-Wan had never seen fit to give her, and a little less happy for Anakin. Nield's opinion of the Jedi was still the slightest bit on the negative side.

"Still," Nield had said, voice a little wry. "You turned out all right, I suppose."

"You're too kind." Obi-Wan had responded. "And Anakin is far more capable than I ever was. He'll be just fine." He didn't tell Nield about Anakin's concerns, or Obi-Wan's concerns for Anakin, those he would save for Shmi's ears alone, and perhaps, he admitted to himself, Jango's as well.

But Nield had responded to the difference easily, and had treated both Savage and Feral with kindness and respect. Not all planets were like Naboo, with their young royalty, but Melida-Daan understood, in ways even Naboo didn't, that the young were powerful. While Dooku and Qui-Gon had looked at Savage and Feral and seen children, despite the fact that they were teenagers, Nield saw people who deserved his respect.

To Savage and Feral, this was astoundingly different from how they'd been treated on Dathomir.
While their fellow Nightbrothers had cared for them, Mother Talzin and the Nightsisters had seen no reason to treat them with the respect any fellow sentient deserved.

Seeing how much Savage and Feral were enjoying Melida-Daan, Obi-Wan took a little extra time. Taking care of what coalition business he could while he was here.

But still, it seemed prudent to move on eventually, particularly after the most recent, poorly thought out attempt, by what Obi-Wan suspected was a bounty hunter new to the game, to take Obi-Wan out.

"We'll be back, you know." Obi-Wan reassured the boys as they trudged onto the ship with a disappointed trudge to their steps. "Melida-Daan is a fairly common stop for me." He smiled a little. "And I want you to meet Shmi, she's my family and you are very important to me, I'd like you to meet."

That did seem to encourage the boys. The two had grown comfortable with asking questions, and Obi-Wan had answered as well as he could. Shmi and Anakin, of course, featured very prominently in any stories Obi-Wan told.

They were within a day of Tatooine, Obi-Wan in the cockpit having just ended a comm call with one of his contacts in Leritor, when he received a comm call.

"Kenobi." He answered, distracted by the notes he was taking down on his data pad.

"Hello, Obi-Wan."

Obi-Wan jerked up, datapad slipping from his hand and to his lap, in surprise at hearing Jango's voice. "Jango." He couldn't help the pleasure in his voice, nor the slight flush that touched his cheeks when he recognized that the pleasure was probably easily noticeable to Jango's keen ears. "Did you finish your hunt?"

"Can you teach me how to keep kriffin' force users out of my head?" There was a note in Jango's voice that Obi-Wan didn't think he'd ever heard before, at least not from Jango.

Obi-Wan thought he would do almost anything to ensure that that particular brand of angry helplessness never entered Jango's voice again. Obi-Wan had never gotten the name of the bounty Jango was going after, but Obi-Wan thought he'd be perfectly willing to strangle her, no matter who she was. "What did she do?"

"She didn't manage anything." Jango reassured him, though the attempt was somewhat ruined by the hiss of pain that followed the statement, edged with static as it made its way through Obi-Wan's comm. "She did nothing."

Obi-Wan clenched his comm in his fist, but with a deep breath expelled his worry and fear. That wasn't what Jango needed from him, not right now. And with a bit of shock he realized that Jango, did, in fact, need him. It was a little terrifying. "Are you all right, Jango?"

"I told you," and there was a familiar hint of no-nonsense in Jango's voice now, "she didn't manage anything."

Obi-Wan knew first hand that that wasn't always the same thing as everything being okay. "That wasn't what I asked."

Jango didn't answer immediately, but when he did, Obi-Wan could hear the honesty. "I'm all right. But can you teach me?"
Obi-Wan considered the request. It wouldn't be the first time Obi-Wan had taught a non-Force sensitive how to protect their mind from the Force. It wouldn't even be the first time he'd taught someone with Jango's genetic sequence. Cody had been a fast learner, dedicated, organized, and a little desperate after seeing the damage Ventress had done to the 501st, and particularly Rex, with her mind tricks. Cody hadn't been the only one of the 212th, or the 501st, that Obi-Wan had tried to teach. But not all of the clones had managed with quite the same success as Cody.

Jango, Obi-Wan hoped, would have the same success as Obi-Wan's former Commander. But it was far from a guarantee. "I'll certainly try."

"Are you done on Coruscant?" Jango asked, and there was a little less tension in Jango's voice now. Probably eased by the start of a plan of defense. It was something Obi-Wan could relate to.

"I am, I'm actually headed to Tatooine right now. I want to introduce Feral and Savage to Shmi." He wondered if it would be overly-presumptuous to ask Jango if Obi-Wan could introduce Feral and Savage to him as well. Jango was, well, maybe not family, but maybe also yes, family. Obi-Wan still wasn't quite certain. But whatever Jango was, Jango was, well, important. And Obi-Wan wanted Jango to know Feral and Savage, wanted Savage and Feral to know Jango.

He bit his lip though, the request dying somewhere in his throat.

"How long will you be there? There's something I need to take care of, but I'd be able to drop by after."

Obi-Wan felt a rush of joyous relief at the easy way Jango simply assumed his presence welcome. But then, Obi-Wan had told Jango as much, when he'd asked Jango to keep coming back. When Jango had said that he would.

"Probably a little while." He answered quickly. "There's a project I want to work on, and I can do it as easily from Tatooine as anywhere else." He thought of the chip of information that Dex had given him, and the rumors he'd been quietly gathering on the side.

"Oh? What project?"

Obi-Wan hummed, suddenly sharply aware that Jango would not approve of his project. He already knew Shmi wouldn't. It was something Obi-Wan wouldn't have considered before, with Shmi and Anakin still dependent on him. He bit his lip, acutely aware of Feral and Savage sleeping in their room. It was unfair of him to consider it now. He needed to give it further consideration. "I'm not sure it will work yet, ask me again when I've figured out more details."

Hopefully Jango would forget, and then whether Obi-Wan decided to go through with his plan or not, he wouldn't end up on the end of the lecture he just knew Jango would give him.

The silence stretched on for a long moment, before Jango spoke again, the tiniest hint of a plea in his voice. "Talk to me."

Obi-Wan's mind immediately went blank, empty of anything that might be of any worth to talk about. "About what?"

"Anything." Jango responded, immediately. "Right now I just need—" Jango was quiet for a moment. "Anything will do, even the growth patterns of Alderaanian moss would work at the moment."

Obi-Wan felt his lips curl in amusement. "Why would I know the growth patterns of Alderaanian moss?" He wasn't sure what he was supposed to think of Jango assuming that Obi-Wan would know
"Don't you?"

"No." Obi-Wan told him, firmly. Though he made a mental note to look into the matter. Now that Jango had mentioned it, the growth patterns of Alderaanian moss were probably actually very fascinating. But, still, if that was the sort of conversation Jango was looking for, then perhaps Obi-Wan did have a few things he could share. He tapped at his chin.

"However," he continued, "I could regale you with the very interesting history behind the traditional Jedi robes." Though admittedly, Jango would find that less interesting than Obi-Wan. "The Krayt dragons' hunting and mating patterns." Some of which information Obi-Wan had gathered somewhat more first hand then he would ever admit to Jango. "Or the current theory on how the Crystal Canyons of Chandrila were created." Obi-Wan made a mental note to visit Chandrila, he'd never actually seen the Crystal Canyons in person in his last life, but he was sure that he'd be able to find a bit of time this time around.

"Tell me about Krayt Dragons." Jango's voice was soft and fond, and Obi-Wan flushed again as he straightened a little, organizing his thoughts.

Most people found Obi-Wan's interests ridiculous, though most people were kind enough not to say so to his face. Obi-Wan had long ago gotten used to that. But Jango sound so genuinely fond at the thought of listening to Obi-Wan. And sure, it was primarily, Obi-Wan guessed, to distract Jango from his own thoughts, but still.

"Of course." He took a deep breath, before diving into the basic background for Krayt dragons, a necessity before he slipped into some of the more complex intricacies. "You see, while there is no substantial evidence to support the theory, many people believe that the Krayt dragons are descended from the Duinuogwuin, or as they are more commonly known, the Star Dragons. I myself believe this theory to be fairly sound, there's an incredible power to be felt in a Krayt dragon's presence that seems reminiscent of the ancient power held with the Star Dragons."

He closed his eyes, remembering the first time he’d stood in a Krayt Dragon's presence. It had been as awe-inspiring as it had been terrifying, and had shocked Obi-Wan into his first emotion that wasn't overwhelming despair or mind-chilling numbness. It wasn't until much later that Obi-Wan had realized he'd survived not just an encounter with a canyon Krayt dragon, but the more legendary Great Krayt.

He missed her.

But back to business. "Now, this theory is important when considering the Krayt dragon's hunting patterns, which differ from what one might originally expect from a distant relation to the Kell Dragon."

He continued talking, his thoughts rambling from topic to topic. He really would have appreciated a little more time to prepare his thoughts before starting, and he worried he wasn't doing the topic justice. But Jango never said anything to indicate that he was annoyed by Obi-Wan's disorganization.

R2 wheeled in at one point, and spent a few minutes listening to him, before rolling back out. Obi-Wan suspected that R2 knew exactly who Obi-Wan was talking to. Considering that R2 was still firmly convinced that Jango was bad news, the droid's silence was about as supportive as Obi-Wan could expect.

Finally he ran out of things to say, or rather, his throat started getting hoarse and unwilling to let Obi-
Wan continue, and trailed off. "Yes, well, that's Krayt Dragons for you."

"I think I'd like to see one, someday." Jango's voice was tired, almost as though he was on the edge of sleep.

"Maybe I'll introduce you." Obi-Wan said quietly, more to himself than to Jango. After he re-introduced himself, of course. "You should get some rest, Jango."

Jango didn't answer immediately. "You're probably right." He didn't sound happy about it. "I don't know how long this next little project will take."

Obi-Wan debated asking, but in the end held his tongue. "Well, you're always welcome, no matter when." He cleared his throat, pushing past the ridiculousness of his last statement. "But really, Jango. Go sleep."

Jango laughed a little. "I will. Thank you, Obi-Wan."

Obi-Wan frowned, uncomfortable. Compared to everything Jango had done for Obi-Wan, it seemed ridiculous for Jango to thank Obi-Wan for talking about something that no one else would want to listen to Obi-Wan talk about anyway. "I didn't do anything." Nothing that Jango hadn't done for Obi-Wan first.

"I know." Jango agreed, but somehow Obi-Wan thought that Jango was agreeing with something quite different than what Obi-Wan had meant. For some reason that made things even worse.

"You sleep. I need to check on the boys." They were probably still asleep, but Jango didn't know that. Probably.

Jango laughed again, and Obi-Wan would be annoyed at the other man finding humor at Obi-Wan's expense if it weren't for the way that Jango sounded so much more at ease than he had when he'd first commed.

Shmi stood there with her hand on her hips, her lips pursed.

Obi-Wan smiled at her sheepishly.

"Hello Shmi."

"Obi-Wan Kenobi, would it kill you to pick up a comm?"

Obi-Wan hesitated, there really wasn't a right answer to that. "No, of course not."

Shmi raised an eyebrow, her eyes sharp, a hint of a smile lurking around her lips. "So?"

"I'll be better."

"Yes," Shmi agreed. "You will be." She relaxed, and a warm smile crossed her lips. "I've missed you."

Obi-Wan finished making his way down the landing ramp and stepped into Shmi's hug. "I've missed you, too."

He stepped back. "There were a few people I wanted to introduce you to."
"Oh?"

He turned back to the ship. "Savage, Feral?" Both boys appeared at the top of the landing ramp, and Obi-Wan felt bad for how nervous they were. "Shmi, I want you to meet Savage and Feral. Savage, Feral meet Shmi."

Shmi moved forward, smile warm and bright. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

Feral smiled at her a little shyly. "It's nice to meet you. Obi-Wan talks about you a lot."

She smiled. "Well, I can return the favor if you like. I know quite a bit about Obi-Wan." She nudged Obi-Wan, her smile turning teasing. "How about you all come in for some breakfast. If you've been with Obi-Wan for very long you're probably starving."

"I fed them!" Obi-Wan protested. He was ignored.

"Owen's already up, he just went out to help Cliegg with the water vaparators." She told the boys, as she led them into her house. "But they'll be back in soon, and we can all have breakfast together."

Obi-Wan watched as Shmi led the two boys away, rolling his eyes he turned back to the ship. "You coming R2, it looks like we're going to have a family breakfast."

From inside the ship R2 whistled. "Yes that includes you." Obi-Wan rolled his eyes at the next inquisitive beep. "Yes, I'll find you some oil." R2 whistled cheerfully and trundled down the landing ramp. Obi-Wan shut it down behind them. "Spoiled."

R2 ignored him, rolling after Shmi, Savage, and Feral.

"No respect." Obi-Wan muttered. R2 stopped and beeped at him, obviously impatient. "I'm coming, I'm coming."

Chapter End Notes

So, that was a chapter. I apologize, it was a little shorter than some of the more recent chapters for this particular series, but better a shorter chapter than no chapter? Right?

Anyways, I don't actually know that anyone is still reading this, it has been awhile. But for those that are still here, I hope you enjoyed this chapter! I can't tell you how much I appreciate your continued existence and engagement with the story!

Have a wonderful day everyone!!! May it be an enjoyable one.

May the Force be with you!

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