A Wound in Time

by WavesBlade

Summary

When Revan opened up to the Force as a whole to face the Sith Emperor, rather than unleash it, he channeled it. He foresaw many different futures, Scourge betraying them among them. Desperate, he uses the Force to try to spirit him and the Jedi Exile away. But, he did not know the Exile was a Wound in the Force. Her power disrupted him, and they are instead pulled through to a time far far away...

Notes

As a Note: The Book Revan is cannon to this story only in so much as it sets up Revan and The Exile (Meetra) to fight the Sith Emperor. As the book proceeded to pretty much dump all over KOTOR 2, I'm returning the favor to both it and The Old Republic MMO (TOR). It never sat well with me that KOTOR 2 pretty much ceased to exist post Revan/TOR except for the Exile being a throw away character in a Flashpoint.

For this book, KOTOR I & II will be held above the book and anything TOR. I will of course give a nod to what was done. The Light Side endings of both KOTOR I & II are considered cannon for this story, as is Reven's gender as male, the Exile's gender as Female, and her given name. However, that's it. You can imagine your own male Revan and Female Exile appearance wise for the story, I won't give them physical appearances.

I haven't delved into writing Star Wars fanfiction before, to be honest, its a real scary and daunting thing to even try, considering the MASSIVE amount of lore and characters one
needs to know about. But... this came to me as a random idea. KOTOR I & II were two of my favorite games, Revan and the Exile two of my favorite characters. I disliked what TOR: Revan did to them, and also disliked what happened in TOR. Considering I am a sucker for and a fan of time trival...

Well...

The idea randomly came to me and I went with it. IDK how frequently I'll update this, or whether or not it will sit on the backburner. I DO have a lot of story's I'm working on. I imagine writing up to the end of the 'Phantom Menace' would be fairly easy. However, after that IDK, I'll have to do a lot of research.

Anyway...

Our story begins as Revan confronts the Sith Emperor...
Chapter 1: Through a Wound in the Force.

Reven opened himself up to the force, letting both the light and the dark side flow through him like twin rushing rivers. He began to glow with energy. Instead of unleashing that energy to blast aside the Sith Emperor Vitiate, he focused on channeling it. What he had now was a state of the force he had never held before, wielding both light and dark at once, the sense of wholeness, of oneness with the Force was something he couldn't properly describe. He knew he would need all of his power, along with the aide of Meetra Surik and Scourge, to defeat the Vitiate.

Defeat the Emperor...

Time seemed to slow to a crawl and freeze. In that moment he saw so many different futures, different outcomes to this one battle. In some, the Emperor was no more. In others, the Emperor had won, killed the three of them, and transformed the entire galaxy into an empty wasteland devoid of life. He saw both his own triumph and defeat, played out in so many differing outcomes. One in particular, the most clear one and likely one if he had to guess, shined out like a beacon to him, but it wasn't an outcome he savored. He saw Scourge betray them, stabbing Meetra from behind and killing her, kneeling to the Emperor afterwards.

Time slowly started to move again Meetra and Scourge finished their battle with the Emperor's guards. He felt the Sith Emperor's pressure on his mind, trying to overcome the twin rivers of the Force and subjugate him. He glanced back at Meetra and Scourge as they strode forward, lightsabers ready. He could see Scourge's eyes flicker back and forth between Revan and the Emperor, trying to come to a decision.

But Revan already knew what decision the Sith would make.

It would be hard enough to defeat the Sith Emperor with all three of them. Him and Meetra against the Emperor and Scourge would be an impossible fight, they could not win it, especially if the guards trying to breech into the throne room managed to break in. They had to flee, but there was nowhere to flee to. If they lost here, and were killed, or worse, captured and subjugated by the Emperor's mental domination, it was over for the Jedi, and the galaxy.

There was nowhere and nothing to turn to.

Save for the Force.

"Meetra!" he called out, holding a glowing hand towards her.

She acted instantly. Even without knowing what he was doing or planning, she trusted in him. She always had. Whether it was following him into war, obeying his commands in the battlefield, or even igniting the horrors of the Mass Shadow Generator on Malachor V. Like a good soldier, she followed orders. She reached him, grabbed his hand, and poured her own force energy into him.

Yet something was wrong. The moment she connected to him and began feeding him energy, he was shocked to feel a Force Bond form nigh instantly between them. But what was worse was the nature of the energy she fed into him, the nature of what she was. It was something within Meetra herself, something he had failed to notice in her with the short time they had together after she had rescued him. He felt pain, he felt the emptiness within her, as if...
He understood instantly.

As if she were a Wound in the Force.

What had Malachor V done to her?

It was too late to stop what was happening. He had begun the moment she had grabbed his hand. To wield both Darkness and Light together like this was something he had never heard of before. Who knows what concepts and abilities were possible with the Force as a whole. He had intended to try something desperate, to try to move through the Force, Fold Space he believed the technique was called, to teleport them out of the Emperor's palace, or at least blow a hole in it big enough to flee through if that failed. Instead, the energy poured back through the Wound that was Meetra, broke a temporary hole in the fabric of the Force itself, and took the two of them through it.

Energy erupted around them in a massive explosion, critically wounding both the Sith Emperor, and Scourge. When it cleared, Revan and Meetra were nowhere to be found...

Meetra gave a startled cry, feeling like she was being turned inside out. For a split second, her vision turned pitch black, and then it was restored in a blinding flash of light. She felt a horrific disturbance ripple and pulsate through the Force, herself as the origin point. She found herself and Revan midair, and falling swiftly to the ground below, or rather, the sand below. She rolled as she landed, cushioning the fall and springing up, her lightsaber ready.

She winced as she heard a heavy thud, glancing aside her to see Revan face first in the sand. "Revan?"

Nothing.

She took a quick glance around, finding herself in some kind of sea of sand. Where in the world were they? She shook her head, deactivated her lightsaber, and walked over, kneeling down next to Revan and giving him a brief shake. No reaction whatsoever. Whatever he had done to get them out of the throne room had drained him immensely, she could barely feel his presence in the Force.

Yet, why had he fled to begin with? They had gone there to FIGHT the Emperor, not get cold feet at the last second. She sighed and ran a hand through her hair. She'd ask him later, for now, they needed to find civilization. She was starting to feel the heat of this desert world, Revan would be even worse in his cloak and face mask. Speaking of which...

She rolled him over, took it off, and slid it into the pocket of his robes to hide it. It would probably be for the best to not announce who they were for now unless they were in trusted company. Both she and Revan had enough baggage and bad history attached to them without needing to get harped at over it. She slung Revan over her shoulder and started walking.

"Force, Revan you're heavy," she muttered.

It shouldn't have been that hard to move around with him. Heck, she could recall having to carry Anton, Mical, or Visas onto the Ebon Hawk unconscious to be tended to with little to no difficulty...

Wait...

Wait a minute...

She froze, shocked and horrified. Even as she had gone in search of Revan, she had always felt her
connection, her force bonds, to her friends. Something to draw strength from in her time of need. She could feel NONE of them anymore. Impossible... how could they all have died, just like that, within the span of a few minutes? Or had whatever Revan done accidentally severed her bonds with her friends?

Either way, the end result was the same. She was without her bonds, without her friends and ties save for Revan, and he was in no state to lend her strength. Not that she really wanted to leach strength from him, especially without explaining to him exactly what was going on...

You are a cipher, forming bonds, leeching the life of others, siphoning their will and dominating them. It is the teaching of these new Sith, to feed on others, on other Force Sensitives.

Meetra closed her eyes and took a raged breath, the words of Master Vrook Lamar, of the Jedi Council so recently reformed and killed echoing in her head.

When you returned to us, we saw what had happened. You carry all of those deaths at Malachor within you, and it has left a hole, a hunger that cannot be filled.

All the death you've caused to get here. You feed on it, and you grow stronger. You're like Malachor... it's in you, it's what you are now. You must have noticed as you've fought across all these planets, killing hundreds - only to become more and more powerful. Why do you think that was?

She shook her head and opened her eyes. This was why she had focused on other tasks after... after Kreia had died, why she had dove into finding Revan. She used them as a way to distract herself, to keep her thoughts on other matters, not to dwell on the horror of what she was, and what had happened during the 'shadow war' against the Sith, against Darth Sion, Darth Nihilus... and Kreia, Darth Treya as she had called herself at the end...

She sighed once more and refocused on trudging through sand dune after sand done, until at last she came across something. A silvery shape ship off in the distance. She might have thought it a mirage if she couldn't feel the presence of people on and around it...

Including that of someone force sensitive, two actually, though one was moving away. She hurried towards it, sighting a number of people moving what looked like hyper-drive parts onto the ship. But what drew her attention, and surprised her, was a young man in jedi robes, attached to his belt was a lightsaber. So few Jedi had survived the Shadow Wars, she had been told that less than a hundred remained. The chances of meeting one of them here was rather shocking...

But, she doubted it was chance. The Force rarely left it to that.

She started towards them. "Hey!"

The Jedi whirled, hand going to his lightsaber, before registering her and Revan, glancing over the robes. He made a motion to his companions to stay where they were before moving to meet them.

He frowned, glancing them over, pausing on Meetra's lightsaber. "I wasn't aware the council knew where we were."

Meetra stared at him blankly. "Council...?"

The council was dead, Kreia had killed them, ripped the force away from them...

Let me show you - you who have forever seen the galaxy through the Force. See it through the eyes of the Exile.
She flinched a little at the words, to hear Kreia's voice again. She refocused on the Jedi. Had a new council been chosen from among the survivor's already? She could imagine Bastilla being on it, but had little clue as to the others. Maybe Visas and Mical? She supposed she'd figure it out soon enough.

The Jedi's eyebrows furrowed. "If you're not here for us, why are you here? What mission could the council possibly send Jedi to Tatooine for?"

Tatooine? Ugh... Hutt crawling sand trap. THIS was where Revan thought would be a good place to run too?

She shook her head. "I'm not here on business of the council. I was here to help a friend."

The Jedi's eyes flickered to Revan before nodding. "We'll, I'd never turn down a fellow Jedi in need, come, let's get him situated."

The Jedi spoke as they moved into the ship, "My name is Obi-Wan Kenobi, I am a padawan under Master Qui-Gon Jinn. We were on a diplomatic mission to Naboo to alleviate a Trade Federation Blockade. It... well, ended poorly."

Trade Federation?

She frowned. "Naboo is fairly far off from here if I recall, what brings you all the way to Tatooine?"

"Our ship was damaged during the escape, we're escorting the Queen of Naboo to Coruscant at the moment," Obi-Wan answered.

Obi-Wan led her to the med bay of the ship and helped her lay Revan out on a bed before studying him, a contemplative look on his face. "We will bring your friend to the temple to see the healers. I don't feel any physical damage, but he seems oddly drained."

Meetra nodded before pausing, "The temple?"

Obi-Wan glanced at her. "The Jedi Temple of course."

Had the surviving Jedi all moved to Coruscant? Huh... guess they wanted to position themselves at the core of the Republic as they regrew their numbers.

"I can't recall ever seeing you or you're friend before, what are your names?" asked Obi-Wan.

"Meetra Surik," she said, internally bracing herself for either rebuke or praise.

Obi-Wan blinked a few times. "Can't say I've heard of you, and your friend?"

Haven't heard of her? Was the Shadow Wars being hushed up or something? It was a lesson new padawans ought to be taught. Not that the man seemed to be a new padawan, he was old enough to be a senior one, soon to be knighted.

She shook her head, sighed quietly to herself, expecting to have to either defend Revan from the young man's accusations, or stop his hero worship while the man was unconscious. "Revan."

Obi-Wan frowned. "Can't say I've heard of either of you."

Wait... what?! How could someone NOT have heard of Revan? There was no way the Mandalorian Wars, and the war that happened after, could be hushed up or hidden. Something... was off here...
Obi-Wan was watching her thoughtfully, and carefully, a questioning look in his eye.

Well, she needed to give him something to go on. "I'm... an exile, I haven't exactly been a part of the order in years."

Obi-Wan paused at that, a bit surprised, before masking it. "I see. Exile status or not, its no reason to deny you and you're friend aid. Though I imagine the council might not be happy to see you still in robes or with a lightsaber."

Meetra brushed off his comment and moved to sit down on a chair next to Revan's bed, sighing quietly to herself. She watched as Obi-Wan checked Revan over, running a scanner of some sort to check his vitals. To be honest... she had no idea what type of scanner he was using. From what she had seen, this ship seemed very state of the art, it put the Ebon Hawk to shame. She didn't even know what model it was.

Seeming satisfied with Revan, Obi-Wan turned to her. "And you? Are you alright? You're presence feels... off, strange."

Meetra pursed her lips. "I'm fine."

She was not getting into a discussion as to what she was with a padawan.

Obi-Wan nodded and put the scanner away. "I was discussing it with my Master before he left to go back for the boy, but, did you by chance feel a disturbance in the Force a short time ago?"

Meetra frowned. "I... we... we're the disturbance I think."


"I'm not honestly sure what Revan did. One moment we were in a battle for our lives on another planet, the next, we end up here in Tatooine," admitted Meetra.

Obi-Wan's eyebrows shot up. "You're saying he teleported you here? I've never heard of the Force being able to do that."

"Neither have I," she replied.

"I'll have to discuss it with my Master I suppose. Such a thing I don't think is natural, I'm not sure you should have done it," said Obi-Wan.

"I wasn't expecting it to happen," she defended, "I don't know why he did it. We we're there to end it, not run."

Obi-Wan frowned at her. "End it...? I believe an exile is supposed to live their lives laying low, not drawing attention to themselves, or masquerading as a Jedi with the authority of the Order."

Meetra glared at him, anger bleeding into her voice, "I've been through enough hell the last few years without some uppity padawan giving me grief."

Obi-Wan scoffed. "If this is how you react to all your problems I can see why you were exiled."

Meetra's eyes narrowed. "Why I was exiled had little to do with my attitude, and more with the fact of what I am and that I alone returned for judgement when no one else did."

"Judgement on what...?" began Obi-Wan before shaking his head and starting to walk away, "Forget it, the decisions of the council are not mine to pry on. Your fate is for the council to
Right, because that had gone so well the last two times. First she had been exiled. Then the council betrayed her and tried to strip her of the force. Wonder what trial number three would bring... well, she did have knowledge of the Sith Empire growing in the unknown regions. That ought to placate them. Maybe that was why Revan had fled with her, to go get aid.

Who knows.

She closed her eyes and began to meditate. Relaxing herself and stretching out her senses for a time. She slowly became aware of two, no, three presences making their way towards the ship. One felt older, decently strong in the force, most likely Kenobi's Jedi Master. The second... the second felt young, however, he was like a beacon in the force, and it astounded her. Who in the world was this? She wasn't sure she had ever felt someone with so much potential before. If trained, the boy would rival herself, and even Revan. Perhaps with ease...

It was the third presence, swiftly coming for the other two, that drew her focus and alarm. She knew that sensation of darkness anywhere.

Sith.

Meetra's eyes flew upon and she bolted out of the med bay and through the ship. The presence wasn't close to as strong as Sion, Nihilus, or Treya, but he was not to be taken lightly. She bolted off the ship, sighting an older Jedi, out of robes and in a civilian clothing, leading a small blond haired boy towards the ship.

The older Jedi, who she assumed to be Qui-Gon, looked at Meetra with confusion, at least until the boy behind him spoke up, "Qui-Gon, sir, wait! I'm tired!"

She saw it as Qui-Gon turned, a speeder carrying a figure in a black cloak, rushing for them. "Anakin! Drop!"

The boy flattened to the ground in time to duck the speeder as the Sith leaped off the speeder and attacked Qui-Gon, red lightsaber with a long handle, probably a double-bladed one, half ignited and clashing against the Jedi's green one. "Go! Tell them to take off!"

Meetra and Anakin passed one another as they ran, Anakin towards the ship, Meetra towards the battle, igniting her lightsaber. The Sith saw her coming and ignited the other end of his lightsaber. If Qui-Gon was surprised to see another Jedi there helping him, he didn't show it. He re-positioned himself, allowing her into the fray and worked with her to drive the Sith back.

Whoever this Sith was, he was skilled with a lightsaber, but didn't feel particularly strong with the force. She aimed a hand towards him and Force Pushed, easily overpowered his defenses. The Sith was taken offguard and sent flying, landing on his back. They rushed him, only for him to push himself to his feet and leap overhead, swinging down at Meetra. She blocked and dove as he landed behind her and tried to skewer where she had been. Qui-Gon took the offensive, allowing her time to recover...

She paused, sighting the ship taking off and heading their way, it's hatch still open. Right, these Jedi were on an escort mission, they couldn't afford to stay here and get entangled with a Sith, especially if he had allies on the way. Meetra aimed a hand at the ground and thrust upward, using the Force to create a small sandstorm and sent it right at the Sith, sending him staggering back, trying to blow the sandstorm away.
"The ship!" she called out, rushing towards it.

Qui-Gon nodded and followed suit. They both leaped up onto the hatch and went into the ship as it closed. Meetra leaned against the walls as the ship repositioned itself and took off into space. Qui-Gon partially collapsed onto the floor, breathing in and out. If that small duel winded him, he must not have seen much action during the wars.

Anakin and Obi-Wan rushed into the boarding room, both kneeling down next to the man.

"Are you all right?" asked Anikan.

Qui-Gon nodded and motioned to Meetra. "Better than I would have been if not for our friend here."

Meetra gave a curt nod back, but said nothing.

"What was it?" asked Obi-Wan.

Qui-Gon's answer surprised Meetra. "I'm not sure, but it was well-trained in the Jedi arts. My guess is it was after the queen."

Was he really that blind? "It was a Sith."

Both Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon turned their heads to stare at her, hard.

Qui-Gon cleared his throat. "The thought had passed through my head, but what makes you so sure?"

Meetra scowled. "I've fought and killed enough of them to be sure."

They both stared at her blankly.

Qui-Gon slowly stood up and looked her over, confusion written all over his face and presence. "I don't believe we've been introduced."

"Meetra Surik," she answered, her voice thin and growing a little impatient.

Qui-Gon's face furrowed in thought. "Surik...? That name..."

"She said she was an Exile of the order," said Obi-Wan before turning to her, "And what do you mean you've 'fought and killed enough of them'? The Sith have been extinct for over a millennium."

Meetra stared at him in disbelief. "A millennium? Are you high on spice or something?"

Obi-Wan bristled and glared at her. "Excuse me?"

"Enough," ordered Qui-Gon, slightly raising his voice.

Qui-Gon looked at Meetra, a contemplative look on his face. "Meetra Surik... as in The Jedi Exile?"

She nodded. "Yes."

Qui-Gon said nothing else, his eyebrows furrowing. Meetra felt a wave of disbelief emanate from him, and then extreme cautiousness and unease.
"Master?" questioned Obi-Wan, "Do you know her?"

"Ignoring the impossibility of it, if she is who she claims to be, I know of her," said Qui-Gon quietly, "If you paid more attention to your own studies you might recall her from the History of the Jedi Order."

Obi-Wan looked at him, confused. "Master...?"

History of the order? Was she being written about now? Well... that was something.

"What about her friend, do you know a 'Revan'?" asked Obi-Wan.

That got a visible start out of Qui-Gon, and he sharply looked at Meetra. "Revan? As in Revan of the Mandalorian Wars, Darth Revan of the Jedi Civil War?"

Meetra scowled. "He redeemed himself in the end, lay off him."

Now both Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon were staring at her uneasily.

"Master... the disturbance we were talking about earlier. She said she and Revan were the cause of it, that they had 'teleported' here," said Obi-Wan quietly, "I might not know of her, but I do know of the Mandalorian Wars..."

Qui-Gon said nothing.

Meetra glanced back and forth between them. "What are you two going on about?"

"Meetra...," began Qui-Gon, "The Mandalorian Wars were almost four-thousand years ago."

Meetra stared at him blankly. "Four... thousand...?"

No.

No way.

Was he saying...?

That was impossible, even for Revan.

Yet...

It would explain why he bonds with her friends were gone. They would have died a long time ago...

Meetra turned and walked away from them, unable to bring herself to say anything, making for the med bay. She would not, could not handle what they were saying, even if the Force whispered to her that it was true, echoing through Revan and down to her. She sat down next to the still unconscious Revan and simply stared at him quietly.

"Revan... what have you done?" she whispered despairingly, "Our friends... all gone... and your family, your wife and child..."

She sat there, feeling the weight of it all crushing down on her. She and Revan were just footnotes in history now. It even appeared that they hadn't been needed to fight the Sith Empire, judging by the fact that the Jedi were still around and the Sith hadn't apparently been seen for the last thousand years. What in the world were they supposed to do? Where would they go?
"Umm, miss Meetra ma'am?" came a quiet voice.

She looked up to see the boy Anakin by the door, holding a cup of something hot. "I thought you could use this."

She gave him a weak smile and took the cup after he walked over. "Thank you."

The boy gave her a small smile. He moved back to the door, closed it, and leaned against it. His eyes swept back and forth between her and Revan. Meetra glanced down at the cup, figured it to be some kind of caffeine drink, and down it in one go. Wah... that sensation was something she had missed. Whatever it was, it was strong, at least by her standards, she certainly wasn't going to sleep for awhile.

"Are you really from the past?" asked Anakin.

Meetra frowned and set the cup down. "Your past is my present, but, if what Master Jinn says is true... then yes. I don't know how or why Revan did it though."

Anakin blinked a few times before glancing at the unconscious Revan. "He's the one who did it? Not you?"

Meetra gave him a confused look. "Why would you think I could do so?"

"I saw you and Qui-Gon fighting that Sith guy, it was awesome!" he said excitedly, "You gotta be really strong to keep up with a Jedi Master!"

Only a little boy could think crossing lightsabers with a Sith was 'awesome', and not terrifying. So little the young know of war and bloodshed. It was better that way she supposed.

As for the topic of strength. "Perhaps I was strong once."

At Malachor, before Kreia died, she might been strong enough to even surpass Revan. But that wasn't her own strength, it was strength leached off of others, fed off of the death she had sowed in the Shadow Wars. Once Kreia had died, Meetra had slowly started to lose the strength from their connection, better than dying as Kreia had led her to believe would happen when their bond was severed. She could still feel it, like a dripping faucet, her power slowly leaving her even now after being displaced into this time with the severance of her bonds to her friends.

Well...

Unless she stared making new bonds and fighting her way through another galactic war...

Honestly though... she was tired. Tired of fighting and death and being a parasite off of those she befriended and came to care for.

"Brr," said Anakin, rubbing his arms.

"Cold?" she asked, a little curious.

"A bit," he admitted sheepishly, "I don't know why, everyone else seems fine with it."

Meetra gut up and started rummaging through the cupboards around the med bay, coming away with a blanket. "Sit."

Anakin did so, and gave her a meek smile when she laid the blanket on him. "You come from a hot planet, it will take you time to get used to normal world temperature, and especially to cold of
Anakin thought it over before nodding. "Makes sense."

Meetra moved away and leaned against a nearby wall, sighing heavily and staring at Revan.

"You seem sad," said Anakin.

Meetra sat down and closed her eyes. "We... left them all behind. All of our friends are gone, and Revan's wife and child... he'll never be able to hold her again, never see his child grow up. Everything I ever knew is gone."

"I'm sorry," murmured Anakin.

Meetra shook her head. "It's nothing you need apologize for. Though, I am going to have a very long talk with Revan about what the hell he was thinking."

Anakin laughed a little. "I bet."

Meetra grew silent, feeling tired by the days events, and the weight of what had happened. She heard Anakin's breathing level off some time later, and figured the boy had drifted off. Perhaps it was best if she did the same...

Anakin floated in space, confused and baffled. In the distance, he could see stars blinking out, he could feel horrible screams rippling through him before being silenced all at once. One by one each star fell, leaving space as a dark void filled with nothing. He was suddenly pulled across space at an insane place until he came before a massive warship, though, it looked rather old and decrepit. He felt something awful on that ship. He started to float down to it and landed on the outside of the bridge, staring in.

He was surprised to see someone he instinctively knew as an older version of himself dressed in jedi robes walk into the bridge. At his side was two beings. One was a green gnome also in jedi robes, an ignited green lightsaber in his hand. The other was a man in a black cloak with an activated red lightsaber. He couldn't tell much about the man, but, judging by what Anakin could see of his chin, he seemed old. The green gnome felt light, pure and good. The old man felt dark, sinister and malicious. But what drew Anakin's attention as his older counterpart started walking was the crew.

They paid no attention to the three force wielders. They moved and did their duties aimlessly with lifeless eyes. They felt dead in the force...

Anakin shook his head and stared down the long bridge to the other end. Standing there, with her back turned to them, was...

"Meetra!" called out the older Anakin with a pained, remorseful voice, raising and igniting his blue lightsaber.

The woman turned, but she wasn't like how Anakin had started to know her. The sensation she gave off was awful. It was like she was a walking void, empty and hungering. Her eyes shined darkly with hunger, craving for the life in them. She was death itself.

"Anakin," she purred, "How good to see you again."

She glanced at his companions dismissively, "And you brought Master Yoda and Darth Sidious."
She grinned maliciously, licking her lips. "Such delicious APPETIZERS!

She raised a hand and two orange beams of energy shot out straight for 'Yoda' and 'Sideous'. They raised their hands to block the energy, but cringed at the impact. Anakin's eyes went wide as he felt their lives slowly start to drain and Meetra grow stronger. Meetra... she was feeding off them somehow?!

The older Anakin thrust a hand forward and pushed Meetra with an unseen energy, sending her staggering back and disrupting her attack. "Is this how you wanted it Meetra? All those lives... all those innocent people... all your friends... you killed everyone to sate your damn hunger!"

The woman just laughed, drawing and activating her lightsaber.

"Why?" screamed the older Anakin with such anguish Anakin felt his stomach churn, "Why didn't you let me help you? Why didn't you let me try to heal you?"

Meetra didn't respond, instead, she slowly started stalking forward. Within her, Anakin could feel the void spin and swirl, hungering for the trio that readied themselves to face off against her...

"Anakin," spoke a voice.

Anakin jumped a little, looking up to see a ghostly blue figure standing on the hull of the ship staring at him. It was Meetra's friend, Revan, though, he had an odd mask on his face. He was... dead?

"I wont be able to wake and help her in time to stop this. Please, save her from this fate," whispered Revan as darkness engulfed and consumed the ship, leaving not a single light in the galaxy...

Anakin gave a startled hiccup and awoke, scared and fearful for a moment. He glanced around nervously before he remembered where he was. He was in the med bay of a ship going to Coruscant. He had been freed, and was being taken to hopefully become a jedi...

But...

That dream...

He glanced over at the bed, at the unconscious Revan. Then, he glanced over at the wall, at a sleeping Meetra. She seemed... troubled in whatever dream she was having. He wasn't very good at 'feeling' things out, but, she didn't feel like that dream Meetra. She felt... oddly empty and pained, but, showed no visible signs of it.

He shook his head. It was just a dream, he didn't need to be worried about her being some crazy 'suck out your life' monster...

Yet...

Why did that dream feel so real? It had felt like no dream he had ever had before. It... it scared him, and the dream Revan's request...

Was something wrong with her?

He closed his eyes, feeling troubled, and tried to go back to sleep...
To the Temple

The rest of the trip to Coruscant was uneventful for Meetra. The two Jedi respectfully kept their distance, as did the Naboo personnel, though she couldn't say the same for Anakin. He seemed... oddly concerned for her, always checking in on her, asking if she was okay, or if she wanted to talk. He was very perceptive she supposed, she did have a lot on her mind. But, she hadn't said much to the little boy. She appreciated the gesture though.

To be frank, she wasn't really sure if she wanted to talk, period, to anyone, even Revan, aside from questioning him about his actions in taking them to this time. She would not burden a little boy as her outlet to the Shadow Wars. She might have talked to Kreia, sought out her aged if but cryptic wisdom, but...

She was dead and gone, and more than half of the damn problem to begin with.

*There must always be a Darth Treya. The galaxy needs its betrayers, especially in the times to come.*

Meetra clenched her fists in agitation and distress. "Dammit Kreia... why?"

"Whose Kreia?" came Anakin's voice.

Meetra started a little, sighting Anakin standing in the Med Bay doorway. "She's..."

What was she? A teacher? A manipulator? A enemy?

"...an old friend long gone," said Meetra quietly.

"I'm sorry," said Anakin for the umpteenth time in the last few days.

Meetra shook her head. "She was lost before this whole time travel thing."

Anakin shrugged. "Still doesn't mean I'm not sorry for your loss."

Meetra sighed. "You're a good kid Anakin."

Anakin gave a small smile. "Master Qui-Gon says we'll be landing shortly."

Meetra nodded. "Alright."

Anakin glanced at Revan. "He's still not waking up?"

Meetra frowned intently and shook her head. "No, and it worries me. He should be up by now."

The ship jostled as they entered the atmosphere, making Anakin stagger and clutch the doorway. "Woah..."

Meetra stood and walked over to steady him. "Planetary re-entry takes some getting used to if you're standing and not sitting."

She waited until the ship settled and landed before moving passed Anakin towards the hatch.

"What's Coruscant like?" asked Anakin as they walked.
"It's one giant city," said Meetra, "Though, I remember it in one word."

"What's that?" asked Anakin.

"Traffic," said Meetra dryly, "Trying to get through it is like a death race."

Anakin brightened. "A race? I just won the Bonta Eve Classic, sounds like my kind of place."

Meetra glanced back and raised an eyebrow. "A podrace?"

Anakin nodded, a huge grin on his face. "Yep! It's how we got the money to buy a new hyperdrive for the ship."

Meetra chuckled. "I see, but 'race' like that on Coruscant, and you'll have the peacekeepers all over you. We'll, unless you stick to the lower levels anyway."

"Lower levels?" asked Anakin.

"Uh... forget I said that," muttered Meetra as they entered the hatch.

The Jedi, the queen, and their guards were there and waiting for the docking ramp to lower, along with a very strange looking creature with a snout and long floppy ears... was that a gungan? Qui-Gon glanced at her briefly, looking like he was about to say something, before closing his mouth. The ramp lowered, and they descended it. Waiting for them were two elderly men and an honor guard dressed in black.

The Jedi took point, followed by Anakin and the gungan. Meetra decided to go after them, to keep Anakin in her sights. Boy could easily get lost and in trouble if unmonitored. The queen and her personnel followed suit. The Jedi walked up and bowed to the two men. The first was a man dressed in brown with a blue cloth belt. Aged and kindly looking, with light gray hair on his slowly balding head and just blue eyes. The other was another aging man, hair still brownish, with some gray showing, with blue eyes. He was dressed in an elegant set of light and dark blue collared clothes...

Yet...

There was something... off... about the second man. It was as if he were there, but not there, in the Force. It unsettingly reminded her of the Sith Assassins during the Shadow War, enough that she had to resist the urge to palm her lightsaber. Yet... the Jedi showed the man no ill will, so Meetra shook it off.

The Queen strode forth to meet the two men, the second smiled at her. "It is a great gift to see you alive your Majesty. With the communication's breakdown we were very concerned. I am anxious to here your report on the situation."

He turned his head to the other aged man. "May I present Supreme Chancellor Vallorum."

Oh.

Meetra straightened a little more at that.

Vallorum spoke to the queen. "Welcome your highness. It's an honor to finally meet you in person."

"Thank you Supreme Chancellor," said the Queen as the group began to move.
Anakin followed the Queen's group, but Meetra didn't, noting that the Jedi hung back to be at the end of the group. She stood behind them, a bit uncertain as to what to do. She wasn't exactly part of their mission. Vallorum hung back, noting the same thing she did.

Qui-Gon approached him. "I must speak with the Jedi Council immediately. The situation has become much more complicated."

Anakin glanced back at them, a bit lost on which group to go with. Meetra hesitated before motioning him back over. Qui-Gon shot her an annoyed look as the boy ran back to stand next to Meetra. Oops, guess he wanted Anakin to have gone with the Queen's group. Curious, wasn't the boy a Jedi matter? The way the Force sang around him suggested that he was.

Vallorum glanced at Meetra. "Has it? I only remember requesting two Jedi to be sent."

Qui-Gon hesitated. "They are... unrelated to what I am referring to. A report will be sent to your office after I go to the council."

Vallorum nodded. "Very well, let us not keep Master Yoda waiting."

Master Yoda huh? Sounded important by the way the chancellor singled him out.

"We will need a shuttle, a medical one, to transfer a wounded Jedi from the ship to the temple," said Qui-Gon.

Vallorum nodded before leaving. "I'll arrange it."

Within ten minutes they were flying to the Jedi Temple...

Sheev Palpatine, Darth Sideous, Dark Lord of the Sith, was for once, stumped.

He tilted his head towards Queen Amidala in fake attention as they flew to the Senate building. In truth, his entire focus was on the third 'Jedi' that had arrived with the queen. It had take every ounce of control he had to not wide eye stare at her when he had first laid eyes on her and felt her presence, and to not act when he detected her probing for him with her senses.

In regards to the first focus, he was well versed in knowledge of the Force, and the Dark side. He knew very well what a Wound in the Force was. Generally, it was a place where mass death had occurred so quickly and so colossal in scale the fabric of the Force was literally wounded. A place where death, pain, suffering, and terror echoed. He resisted the urge to smile at the notion that he may create such places himself one day.

However...

That woman, that Jedi...

She was a walking, living, breathing, Wound in the Force, echoing the destruction that had given her birth. He had not heard of such a thing since the ancient times when the Sith Emperor Vitiate had walked the Galaxy. The mere fact this woman existed was a blessing and a curse, a threat and an opportunity, the greatest challenge to his plans and yet the greatest threat to the Jedi as well. She was a literal threat to all life in the galaxy. That this person existed was making his head spin. How DID she exist? He had felt nothing that would have created her. There had been an unusual disturbance a few days ago, but, and while he still didn't understand what that disturbance had meant he knew it was not the kind that heralded the loss of life. He had every intention of soon killing his 'master', Darth Plagueis up until this point. Now, he may require his Master's wisdom a
short while longer and perhaps advice on what to do in regards to this bizarre change of events. This woman changed everything...

Not to mention the second thing that had alarmed him. Not once since he had first learned to cloak his presence in the force, had any Jedi ever detected anything from him. Yet this Jedi was suddenly probing for him on first contact? Giving off a brief feeling of wariness and anticipation before it faded away...

Did she know?

No.

If she had, he figured he would be battling three Jedi right now.

She had probably dismissed it as a fluke or an oddity. Foolishness of the Jedi. The one chance they might have had to sniff him out before he was ready, wasted. Yet... how did it even happen to begin with? How had she even came close to detecting him? Was it because of what she was? Did being a Wound give her some strange perception? Or did she have some other kind of ability or training or experience that would clash again his ability to hide his presence?

Either way, he would need to revisit his ability to hide his presence, for the first time in decades and improve upon it. For now, he needed to wear the mask of Sheev Palpatine and focus on manipulating the Queen into ousting the current Chancellor. Afterwards, he would, regrettably, go seek out the council of his Master...

Meetra waited patiently as Qui-Gon instructed Obi-Wan to call ahead to arrange for a group of healers for Revan before he began to tell Anakin that he should not run off in the temple, and be very respectful to those he encountered. They landed in the hanger a few minutes later, and left the ship. Meetra briefly paused at the end of the landing ramp as the Jedi descended. She could feel it...

She could feel the Force here so readily, feel the countless Jedi in the temple. It was a sensation, a number that she hadn't felt since before the Mandalorian Wars.

"As it should be," she said quietly.

"Something wrong?" asked Anakin, pausing a few steps in front of her to glance back.

"Tell me Anakin," said Meetra, "Can you feel it here?"

"It?" said Anakin.

"Close your eyes, calm your mind, and feel," said Meetra.

The two Jedi paused before turning to watch as the boy did so, a slight frown on his face. "I... there's... I dunno how to describe it. It's like there's little... I dunno... blips in radar is the best way I could describe it. There's people everywhere, and they feel... different. It's like I'm super aware of them or something."

Meetra smiled. "The presence of those who bear the Force within them. The presence of Force Sensitives, or in this case, Jedi."

Anakin's eyes opened and went wide. "They're ALL Jedi? That's so wizard!"
Meetra wasn't exactly familiar with the phrase, but got the jist of it and smiled. "I suppose it is."

She closed her eyes, her smile fading. "It's been... many years since I last felt anything like. I don't think I'll ever take the presence of so many Jedi for granted again."

So many people... so many friends... either killed in the war... or corrupted by the Sith...

She opened her eyes, and judging by the look Anakin gave her, she hadn't been able to keep the sadness out of her voice. "Feel it once more, and treasure it Anakin. You never know when it could be gone."

She walked passed him and joined the two Jedi as the four of them entered the temple, passing a group of healers on their way to the shuttle for Revan.

"I suppose I had forgotten the details," murmured Qui-Gon, "The time you are from was... a very dark time in the history of the Jedi."

Meetra nodded and spoke quietly, "It was. By the end of it all, before I left to go find Revan, less than a hundred Jedi remained."

Qui-Gon nodded solemnly. Obi-Wan had a ripple of unease at the notion rippling from him. She could imagine the elder padawan had quite a few friends throughout the order. The thought of them being gone was probably harrowing to him.

Anakin was just confused. "Why were there so few Jedi?"

"Three wars in a row with little time to recuperate thinned the Jedi ranks," said Meetra quietly.

Anakin frowned. "Wars...?"

"The Mandalorian Wars, the Jedi Civil War, and... well... I don't know if it had an official name, but I called the period after that the 'Shadow Wars'," said Meetra, shooting Qui-Gon a questioning look.

Qui-Gon looked uncomfortable. "In our history, we refer to it as the 'The Jedi Purge'. The only time in our history where the Jedi Order was truly threatened with extinction. Where we disbanded and hid to try to save ourselves from the unseen threat."

Meetra nodded, a troubled look on her face. "Sion and Nihilus were very thorough in what they did."

She saw Anakin shiver out of the corner of her eye. "I... I don't know why, but those names... make me cold. W-who were they?"

She noticed Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan also giving her curious looks.

"Darth Sion and Darth Nihilus were the two primarily responsible for the purge," said Meetra, images of her two former foes lacing through her mind, making her grimace.

Kreia... Darth Treya ought to be mentioned, but, she didn't know just how much Kreia had been involved with the purge itself. After all, her apprentices had betrayed at one point.

"Actual Sith Lords," muttered Obi-Wan uneasily.

Meetra frowned. "Sion and Nihilus were..."
Were they simply 'Sith Lords'?

No.

They were...

She slowly shook her head. "Something beyond most Sith."

Qui-Gon shot her a questioning look, but Meetra didn't answer it.

Sion... pain incarnate, able to keep himself alive off sheer will no matter how many times he was struck down. A being of darkness, rage, and pain. Yet... she had pitied him at the end, pitied the life he had lived.

_I am glad to leave this place... at last._

Not to mention the strange way he had shown her care...

_If you go before her, you will be broken. If killing you will spare you what lies ahead, then kill you I must..._

Nihilus on the other hand, the chill that rocketed down her spine at the thought of him...

"Meetra?" asked Anakin, tugging on the sleeve of her robe, "You feel... cold."

Meetra blinked a few times, noting that she had stopped walking and that her three companions were looking at her with concern.

She shook her head and resumed walking at a quickened pace, not saying anything. Not trusting herself to say anything.

She heard Anakin ask Qui-Gon quietly, "Did... I do something wrong?"

"No Anakin, it's not you, nor is it us," said Qui-Gon softly, "Facing the Dark Side as she has I imagine leaves scars."

"What's the Dark Side?" asked Anakin, confused.

"A topic for another time," said Qui-Gon, picking up his pace to catch up to Meetra, "We will take you and Anakin to our quarters while we go to speak to the council. I imagine they will want to speak to you afterwards."

"Of course," said Meetra before muttering, "Hopefully this council meeting goes better than my last two."

That got a twitch of amusement out of Qui-Gon, "I've been called a bit of a maverick myself."

"That's one way to put it Master," said Obi-Wan.

Qui-Gon reached over and playfully tugged on Obi-Wan's padawan braid. "Brat."

Meetra smiled softly at the antic before letting Qui-Gon take the lead and followed him through the temple. To see so many Jedi again, it brought back better days, before the Mandalorian Wars, back when she was a padawan and a young knight...

She studied the Jedi as she passed them in the hallways. It seemed in the last four-thousand years
the Jedi hadn't appeared to change much. Same type of robe, same way they held themselves, fairly certain the presence of a Jedi hadn't changed much either.

She supposed she could admire tradition that withheld the test of time.

Or wrinkle her nose at the stagnation.

For if the Jedi truly hadn't changed that much since her time, especially without open conflict against the Sith or some other threat to force their hand, she could already see herself butting heads with the Council. Not that she had to...

She was still an exile. She COULD just walk away and resume her aimless travels, four thousand years later. Might invite Revan to join her if he wanted to. Though, she wasn't sure the life of an exile would suite him.

Yet...

She sampled the air around Anakin with her senses. The way the Force sang around him drew her interest. It was similar, she supposed, to the sensation that had drawn her to follow Revan into the Mandalorian Wars. Though, even Revan didn't have this kind of presence in the Force, and the boy wasn't even trained yet. She wanted to stay to simply see what became of Anakin. He was one, like Revan, that would change the course of his generation of Jedi, if not the course of the Galaxy itself. She wondered how Revan would react to the boy when he woke up.

Qui-gon led her and Anakin into a rather spartan quarters. A small kitchen, living area with a low-to-the-ground table, and two bedrooms. Typical of the Jedi, having no personal affects. Just another thing that hadn't changed.

"Please, make yourselves at home. There is tea in the cupboards if you wish," said Qui-Gon.

Meetra nodded. "Alright, thank you."

With that, Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan gave her a curt nod before departing.

Meetra wordlessly moved for the cupboards. It had been ages since she had last had tea. When she was scrambling between worlds fighting the Sith and dealing with whatever crap befell the worlds she went to during the purge she hadn't had a lot of time for luxuries.

She smiled at the thought of tea being considered a 'luxury' before turning her head. "Would you like some Anakin?"

"Um... sure?" said Anakin.

Meetra took a few minutes familiarizing herself with the kitchen appliances in the dwelling. Technology had changed a bit, but, not so much she couldn't figure things out with a bit of experimenting. She had a pot of hot tea and two cups for them out and sat down at a table.

She took a sip of the tea and smiled. "Ah..."

Anakin took a sip of the tea and spewed it out, coughing and spilling the rest of his cup all over the table. "BLEH! It's so bitter!"

Meetra took one look at his face and gave a laugh. "The bitter the better."

"You're crazy," said Anakin, wiping his mouth on his sleeve.
Meetra took another sip of her tea before getting up and getting something to clean off the table. "Better not let Master Qui-Gon hear you complaining about his tea."

Anakin scowled a little, but helped out wiping the table down.

When Meetra finished, she put away the tea and sat a bit away from the table, motioning Anakin to join her. "Have you ever mediated before?"

Anakin shook his head. "No."

"Well, let me try and show you," she offered, patting the floor next to her, "You ought to try to be calm when you are brought before the council. It will make a better first impression."

Anakin hesitated before moving to sit down next to her. "So... what do I do first?"

"Well... first close your eyes, breath in, and breath out," began Meetra slowly...

"...it was well trained in the Jedi Arts, my only conclusion, and with an expert's offered opinion I might add, was that it was a Sith Lord," said Qui-Gon Jinn to the Jedi Council.

There was a shift in the council, disbelief emanating from some, skepticism by others, and patience by the rest.

"Impossible," said Master Ki-Adi-Mundi, "The Sith have been extinct for over a millennium."

"I do not believe the Sith could have returned without us knowing," said Master Mace Windu.

Qui-Gon waited patiently for them to catch onto what he had said, as a lead in towards Surik. The notion that the Sith had returned blinded their attention.

"Ah, hard to see the Dark Side is," said Master Yoda, turning towards Qui-Gon, "Good it is, that an expert opinion you had, hmm?"

The Council as a whole re-focused on Qui-Gon, curiosity aroused.

He cleared his throat, knowing full well how... well... unbelievable it would sound. "Several days ago, an unnatural disturbance in the force emanated from the planet Tatooine, where we were forced to land to find replacement parts for the queen's ship."

Yoda nodded. "Felt it, I did. Unlike anything I have felt before, it was."

That got a soft murmur from the Council. That Yoda did not have a clue about what it was concerned them.

"My Padawan was approached soon after by a Jedi Exile carrying a comatose companion of hers," said Qui-Gon.

Mace Windu's eyebrow's furrowed. "An exile?"

He could see the council wracking their brains at the thought of who it might be. "Yes. She admitted to believing that she and her companion were the disturbance itself."

Mace scowled. "An exile should know better than to be causing trouble. What was this Exile's name?"
"Her name was Meetra Surik," said Qui-Gon simply.

He could tell most of the Council didn't realize the significance of the name. Only Master Yoda, Yaddle, and and Ki-Adi-Mundi showed any recognition, going very still.

"That is... a rather interesting coincidence," said Ki-Adi-Mundi, "I was not aware we had an Exile named after an old figure from the Order's history."

Qui-Gon cleared his throat. "We don't. There was only one Meetra Surik, and she is here in the temple."

"That is impossible," said Ki-Adi-Mundi, "Meetra Surik lived almost four thousand years ago."

That got a reaction out of the Council.

Mace stared at Qui-Gon. "Qui-Gon, what is this?"

"The truth," said Qui-Gon, "And I imagine, the Will of the Force."

The Council erupted in such a scene of questions and disbelief that it took a lot out of Qui-Gon to not smile at it. Yoda called for silence with a raise of his hand.

"Bring her before us, you must," said Yoda simply.

Qui-Gon nodded. "I will, but, there is more."

Yoda waved a hand for him to continue.

He did so with hesitation. "Her companion... she said his name is Revan."

That got a shocked reaction from all the Council Members save for Yoda, who merely gazed expectantly at Qui-Gon.

"Revan? As in Darth Revan of the Jedi Civil War?" said Mace Windu with disbelief.

"Jedi, Sith, Savoir, conqueror, both was he," said Yoda simply, "Bring them both before us."

Qui-Gon shook his head. "As I said, Revan is comatose for the time being. He feels drained, weak in the Force. Whatever he did to take him and Meetra here affected him greatly. He is currently being looked over in the Halls of Healing."

"Hmm, visit him later I may, to offer help," said Yoda.

"For now, go retrieve this 'Meetra'," said Windu, "Afterwords, you and your Padawan should take some time to rest before the senate decides on what action to take towards the Naboo crisis. May the Force be with you."

While Obi-Wan might have started to leave, Qui-Gon stood still.

"Qui-Gon, you cannot have more to say at this point," said Windu, exasperated.

At this Qui-Gon did allow himself a small smile. "With your permission Master, I have encountered a vergence in the Force."

"A vergence you say?" said Yoda.
"Located around a person?" asked Windu with an increasing amount of disbelief.

"A boy. His cells have the highest concentration of midi-chlorians I have ever seen in a lifeform. It is possible he was conceived by midi-chlorians," explained Qui-Gon.

Windu placed his hands together. "You refer to the prophecy of the one who will bring balance to the Force? You believe it's this boy?"

"I don't presume to...," began Qui-Gon.

"But you do," said Yoda, "Revealed your opinion is."

"I request the boy be tested Master," said Qui-Gon.

"Oh, trained as a Jedi you request of him, hmm?" inquired Yoda.

"Finding him was the Will of the Force, considering what has happened in so short a time with the Sith, Meetra, and Revan, I have no doubt of that," said Qui-Gon, "To many things have happened in to short a time for it to be otherwise."

Windu sighed. "Bring him before us. We will deal with him and this 'Meetra' one after the other."

With that, Qui-Gon briefly bowed and left the Council Chamber...
Qui-Gon walked into his apartment in the Jedi Temple before pausing, slightly surprised. Seeing Meetra in meditation wasn't surprising, but seeing Anakin sitting next to her meditating as well, in what Qui-Gon imagined was his first meditation, was. He had figured the boy to excitable and inexperienced to properly meditate without quite a bit of coaching. Yet...

The sight of the boy sitting next to Meetra seemed... like it was right.

He rubbed his beard for a moment. He had been planning to train the boy himself, but, if the Council forbid him, a certain Exile might prove to be a valid option rather than leaving the Order in order to train him. If the boy truly was the Chosen One as he believed, and the Sith had returned, then there might be no one better to train him to confront this threat. Not to mention, he hadn't been blind to see how much Anakin had stuck to Meetra on the trip here. The boy was drawn to her for some reason, both fascinated by, and concerned for her.

Qui-Gon could admit, there was something off about Meetra's presence, something that the Force was quietly whispering about, urgently, with unease and fear. That the Force itself could seem afraid was a baffling notion to him, especially towards someone with her reputation. From what he had read, she and her disciples were almost single-handedly responsible for destroying the Sith at the end of the Jedi Purge and helping to restore the Republic after it had been ravaged by the Jedi Civil War.

He contemplated his musings for a moment longer before shaking his head and clearing his throat. "Meetra, Anakin, the Council will see you now."

Meetra's eyes snapped open, she got up, stretched, and nudged Anakin.

The boy stirred, blinking, a hazed look in his eyes. "Wha...?"

Meetra reached down and ruffled the boy's hair. "Time to go see the Council."

Anakin rubbed his eyes. "Oh... okay..."

Qui-Gon's lips twitched upward with amusement. "You'll have a chance to nap later young one."

Anakin blinked a few times before shaking his head, becoming fully aware, crossing his arms and scowling. "I'm not a little kid, I don't nap!"

Qui-Gon chuckled. "You'll change your tune when your training begins."

"He's right on that," said Meetra, making for the door, "Thanks for the tea by the way, it's good."

Qui-Gon tilted his head. "If you want, I can show you where I buy it sometime."

Meetra nodded. "I'd like that."

They walked through the temple towards the turbolift to the Council's chamber. Meetra couldn't help but notice this time around, Anakin was quiet, he asked no questions, did not look around at the temple they walked through, nor let his thoughts wander. Instead, she could feel his eyes boring into her back with an intensity that made her curious and slightly uneasy.
Time for a bit of subtle probing then. "So Anakin, how was your first meditation?"

Anakin didn't reply until they got in the turbolift, "It... was like my dreams."

"Your dreams?" said Qui-Gon.

Anakin hesitated. "I... saw things, images. It's been the same dream every night on the way here, and in the meditation. Only, it was different. In my dreams, I don't really have a chance to try to figure things out while I'm in them. When I was meditating, I could just... well..."

"Stand back and observe?" offered Meetra.

Anakin nodded. "Yeah, helps me not freak out, and to try to think."

Qui-Gon pulled on his beard briefly. "It's possible you're having Force Visions. Be mindful Anakin, the future is always in motion. It's better to focus on the here and now, dealing with the future as it comes. For, the more you obsess on a vision, the more you likely you will enable it if it's bad, or push it away if it's good. Ultimately Anakin, your focus determines your reality."

Anakin pondered his words for a moment before his eyes flickered to Meetra.

"Was this 'vision' about me?" guessed Meetra.

Anakin hesitated, a wave of unease emanating from the force around him. "Y-yes."

Hmm... dealing with visions was a pain. Judging by the intensity Anakin had been staring at her, and the concern he had shown towards her the last few days, she had a hunch what the vision was about. It didn't bother her too much, she had dealt with the possibility of dying anytime during the Jedi Purge, especially when she had fought Nihilus and Sion. But did she ask? Or did she not?

Ah, kriff it. "Do I die?"

Oddly for so young a boy, Anakin grew contemplative. "In a way, I think you're already dead in the dream."

That... was a baffling answer, but, something she'd have to drop as the turbolift reached it's destination. Qui-Gon bid them to wait while he went into the Council chamber, returning a moment later and motioning Meetra through. She was rather amused to see a Holocron playing a recording of Atris speaking to the council, detailing what was known about Meetra's life within the Jedi before the Mandalorian Wars. Hmph, so Atris had stopped playing with her Sith holocrons and made a Jedi one, about her of all things. She didn't know if she should be exasperated or touched. She waited patiently, at the entrance of the Council chambers, until Atris finished, and an image of Meetra herself cropped up. The eyes of the Council flickered to the image, before turning their eyes to Meetra, grim acceptance in their eyes.

With that, a small green Jedi, so similar to Master Vandar, waved a hand, turning the Holocron off, and levitating it to rest beside his seat. "Welcome Meetra Surik, good to have you here, it is."

A hint of a smile played across Meetra's face at his race's kind of wording.

"Amuse you, I do?" questioning the small green Jedi.

"You remind me of Master Vandar Tokare," she offered.

The small green Jedi's ears twitched. "Hmm. Read of him, I have. A good master, he was said to
Meetra nodded. "I can agree with that."

"Impolite it is, to not introduce ourselves," said the small green jedi, "Master Yoda, I am."


Meetra carefully, gently, and without any attempt to be deceitful about it, probed their force signatures. While she knew it wasn't something required of them, the Council allowed it, a slight lowering of their mental walls to allow Meetra to identify and gauge them. In turn, when she felt their probes, she slightly dropped her walls. She felt curiosity, and anticipation from some of the more newer council members if she had to guess. They wanted to know how and why she was here.

Mace leaned forward slightly, the palms of his hands touched and held outward. "I'm not one to waste time Master Surik, let's get down to business, how..."

Meetra cleared her throat and interrupted. "With due respect, I was never officially made a Master."

Mace seemed slightly annoyed with the interruption, but banished it. "Noted. Meetra, according to the archives, like Revan before you, you disappeared almost four thousand years ago. What happened, and how are you here?"

Meetra clasped her hands behind her back, and decided to give them a brief run down, she wasn't interested in being stuck here for hours. "I left the Republic in order to search out Revan. My search led me to discover an entire Sith Empire, and took me to their capital world of Dromund Kaas. I discovered and freed Revan, allying myself with a Sith known as Scourge in order to do so."

"You allied yourself with a Sith?" said Ki-Adi-Mundi harshly.

"An alliance of convenience, nothing more," said Meetra, "I needed his help and knowledge to find Revan and learn what we were really up against. Revan apparently had a previous encounter with the Sith Emperor who ruled there, part of the reason he was turned to the Dark Side in the Jedi Civil War. The three of us came to the decision to destroy the Sith Emperor and we moved to confront him."

Meetra frowned, recalling the foul presence she had felt days ago back in her own time. "I... had never encounter a presence so dark before, none of the Sith I faced during the purge compared to him. Scourge and I handled his guard while Revan moved to begin the initial confrontation with the Emperor..."

She trailed off momentarily, trying to wrap her mind around what Revan had done. "I'm not exactly sure what Revan did. I was kind of distracted until Scourge and I moved to help him. Revan was literally glowing with the Force, in-tune with it in a way I have never felt before. He called for me, holding out his hand. I figured he was preparing some kind of massive force attack to use against the Emperor, so I took his hand and started giving him my energy. There was an explosion of energy, in which my vision turned black and I felt like for a moment I had been turned inside out.
Afterwords, Revan and I reappeared on Tatooine."

She added dryly, "Apparently four thousand years later."

She reached up to pinch the bridge of her nose and sighed. "I don't know why or how he took us here. We were there to end it, to kill the Sith Emperor and end his threat before he could destroy the Republic and what remained of the Jedi. They weren't ready in the slightest, last I knew the Republic was in tatters and the Jedi hadn't even started on reforming yet. If we didn't stop him, I thought the Republic would be doomed."

She cleared her throat. "Which brings up the question of how exactly the Republic survived."

Eeth Koth leaned forward. "I've studied your time period a bit. The Sith Empire did not invade and start the Galactic War until a few hundred years after your disappearance. According to the information brought back to us from the strike team that eventually killed the Sith Emperor, he was gravely wounded in a confrontation between him and a 'pair of Jedi' a few hundred years ago. He took his time to recover and build up his forces before he invaded."

"So we bought the Republic and the Jedi time then," Meetra mused.

Yoda nodded. "Time needed, time well spent recovering, rebuilding, regrowing. Thankful the order is, for your and Revan's actions."

"Still, we ought to have won, fought and defeated him rather than just wounding him," said Meetra.

"Perhaps," said Mace, sitting straight in his chair, "But, would that have really been the best course of action?"

Meetra raised an eyebrow at him.

"Sith are power hungry. If you had killed the Emperor, another would have simply took his place," said Mace.

"And most likely launched an attack far earlier in retaliation, before the Republic and the Jedi were ready," offered Eeth.

Meetra contemplated it for a moment. "Possibly. I'd like to believe they would have destroyed themselves in the power vacuum for the throne, but we'll never know the answer to that."

"Lingering in the past, we are," said Yoda, "Discuss the present, we should."

Depa spoke up, "You are the only living Jedi with firsthand experience facing the Sith. We wish to ask you about the assailant you and Master Jinn fought on Tatooine. Was he truly a Sith? You alone are qualified to answer that for us."

"My first instinct is to say yes," said Meetra, "But there was something odd I noticed about him. He used the Dark Side to fuel himself, fed off it like a Sith, yes, but, he seemed lacking with ability in the Force itself. He held great hatred, but it was mostly focused towards amplifying his skills with a Lightsaber. I never saw him use an ability like Force Lightning or Drain Life or anything of that type."

"Force Lightning?" questioned Adi Gallia.

"Sith can launch lightning out of their fingertips at you," said Meetra.
Adi gave her a skeptical look.

"I'm not joking," said Meetra, "It hurts. If you aren't knowledgeable about what a Sith can do, you ought to read up in it."

Adi opened her mouth to say something but Mace cut her off. "Was this assailant a Sith, or was he not?"

Meetra was a bit off-put by his tone, but contemplated it for a moment before simply saying, "Yes."

There was a heavy silence in the room.

"Why is that so surprising?" asked Meetra.

"The Sith have been extinct for over a millennia," explained Ki-Adi-Mundi, "That they could have just suddenly returned without us knowing..."

Meetra crossed her arms. "You seem rather alarmed, it's just one Sith, one who seems more like an Assassin rather than a Lord."

"Always two there are, no more, no less," said Yoda, "A master, and an apprentice."

Meetra blanked for a moment. "Huh?"

"The Sith have changed from the expansive self-destructive orders you knew," said Mace, "Around a thousand years ago, the Jedi had learned that the Sith had changed, focusing all their knowledge and power on a single Master-Apprentice pair. We had thought this new order of Sith had been exterminated, but apparently not."

Meetra frowned intensely. "A single master and apprentice..."

A bad feeling formed in the pit of her stomach. This method of 'two' eliminated one of the Sith's most extreme weaknesses: Mass betrayal. Only two meant they would never have to worry about another Sith getting greedy and trying to backstab them for their position. The apprentice would not betray and kill the Master until he or she had learned all they needed to learn. Only being two would make it so much more difficult to track them down, or even discover they existed. They could so easily blend in and manipulate things, especially with the Jedi believing them to be wiped out. It meant that the Dark Side would solely be focused on and called by this single pair, not fought over and divided.

It was brilliant.

It was also completely terrifying.

And the Sith had apparently been doing this for roughly a thousand years.

Oh boy...

"That changes things then," said Meetra, her mind working in overdrive, "If they had been in hiding, biding their time this entire last millennia, the Sith wouldn't just show themselves for no reason."

"Why do you think they did?" asked Plo Koon, "Do you believe it had something to do with your appearance and the disturbance in the Force it caused?"
Meetra shook her head. "No. It wasn't that long after Revan and I appeared that the Sith came after the ship, a few hours at best. The Sith was already on the planet. They were already planning on revealing themselves."

"Again, why?" said Mace, "It makes no sense to just suddenly announce that they are here."

"Unless they are nearing their endgame," said Meetra, "The Sith have always wanted two things, ultimate power, and the death of the Jedi."

"Two against roughly ten thousand Jedi scattered through the galaxy seems like poor odds," stated Plo Koon.

"Only if you are able to actually track down and fight them with that overwhelming odds," countered Meetra, "But if they get to pick and choose their fights, and orchestrate things their way, then what good is that number if you can never fight them head on? Not to mention if I'd imagine they'd be willing to carpet bomb Coruscant if it meant killing the entire Jedi order."

"Point taken," said Mace, "You have experience against the Sith, what action would you suggest be taken?"

Meetra slowly shook her head. "I have experience against my Sith, not these new Sith. Though they may be similar to the Sith in the Purge that struck from the shadows, they are still far different. If they've had a thousand years to prepare themselves unchallenged, I couldn't begin to imagine how to deal with this."

Yoda shook his head. "Brought to this time for a reason, you were. Not a coincident it is of your return, the day the Sith reveal themselves."

Meetra frowned and thought it over. "The only thing I can say right now is that Qui-Gon and I fought the apprentice, I'm sure of it. There's no way with that lack of Force power that he was the Master. This 'reveal' was a message, nothing more, nothing less. The Sith have announced their return, whether it's to say they are ready to fight, or just to rile the order up and cause panic and discord to cover their actions, who knows."

Mace nodded slowly. "I suppose we will have to see what happens then. Meetra, we suspect Queen Amidala's arrival on Coruscant will not end Naboo's ongoing struggle and plan to have Qui-Gon and his apprentice keep aiding her. We believe your assistance will help them manage this crisis and perhaps draw out the Sith. You will travel with them and face this Sith."

Meetra narrowed her eyes and found her mood souring instantly. She had been civil and respectful, but it seemed the Council was the same as ever. Orders orders order, it never changed. They could have asked and she would have readily accepted. Instead, they demanded, they ordered, and they had yet to earn her respect to make demands of her.

Meetra crossed her arms. "I do not answer to the Jedi Council."

There was a pause before the Council members eyed her warily, save for Yoda who seemed amused. "A Jedi, are you not? Unwilling to aid your fellows, are you?"

"In-case you didn't read your history books, I'm an Exile, not a Jedi," she countered bitingly, "The Jedi banished me, for doing what was right, for joining Revan to take a stand against the Mandalorians."

Mace sighed. "Meetra, what grievance you have with the Jedi of old should stay in the past. You are more than welcome to rejoin the Jedi Order."
Just like that? Blow off everything that had happened? What the Jedi Council of old had tried to do to her on Dantooine was still very fresh in her mind.

She closed her eyes, her lips tightly closed, her jaw set, before she slowly let her anger go into the Force. As much as she wanted to hold it against them... ultimately... the past was the past. These were not the Jedi who had turned on her, their heirs maybe, but the sins of the father shouldn't be laid on the sons. There was nothing she could do about it now. Besides... such thoughts were the way of the Dark Side.

No matter how good and righteous it felt to lash out.

Still... she wasn't going to just bow to the will of the Council. Ever again.

"I'll help the Jedi with this matter, as thanks for looking after Revan, and if only to make sure the Galaxy doesn't end up like it did during my time," said Meetra, opening her eyes "But, I will keep my Exile status and my independence from the Order, and the Council, and will reserve the right to refuse any mission I do not agree with."

There was a heavy silence in the room.

"You realize you wield a lightsaber and bear the robes of a Jedi," pointed out Ki-Adi-Mundi.

Meetra shrugged. "And? I built my saber myself, and bought my robes fair and square. Unless there is a law about owning a Lightsaber and robes, they're mine to keep and use."

Mace narrowed his eyes. "Very well. The Council... appreciates... your outside assistance. Spare quarters will be set up for you in the temple so long as you offer aid to the Order. You are dismissed."

Meetra briefly turned, not bothering to bow, before pausing, "What about the boy, Anakin?"

Mace frowned. "None of your concern, as it is a Jedi matter, Exile."

Meetra said nothing more, and walked out of the room, spotting Qui-Gon and Anakin waiting by the turbolift.

"How'd it go?" asked Anakin.

Meetra scoffed. "If you ask me, the Council hasn't changed in the last four thousand years."

A twitch went through Qui-Gon's face, an attempt to suppress a smile. "No, I suppose not."

"You don't like them?" asked Anakin, "Are they bad people?"

Meetra frowned before sighing. "No, they're not 'bad'. They just have a different outlook and expectations that I don't agree with. I am not some mindless Jedi that they can order around. Not anymore."

Anakin looked confused. "Mindless Jedi...?"

Meetra winced a little. "Okay, Jedi aren't mindless, but..."

"Most Jedi have a tendency to blindly follow the will of the Council and the code, rather than the Force," offered Qui-Gon.

Meetra nodded. "Agreed."
Anakin had a small frown on his face, trying to work it over.

"Don't worry about it to much Anakin, just focus on the Council's tests," said Meetra.

"Can you tell me what the tests will be?" asked Anakin.

Meetra wagged a finger. "That would be cheating."

Anakin scowled a little before crossing his arms. "Hmph."

Qui-Gon and Meetra chuckled a little before growing silent, waiting for the Council to summon Anakin in.

"Trust us, she does not," said Master Yoda, getting it out in the air right away.

"For what reason? That bitterness spoke of more than just 'banishment'," said Adi Gallia, "Master Windu offered her re-acceptance into the order and she brushed the offer off like it was nothing."

Eeth Koth spoke up, "Despite the Exile's disciples helping to rebuild the Jedi Order at the time, we know surprisingly little about the Exile's journey. There are records of course of major battles she participated in on various planets, but, her disciples did not leave much in the archives about the journey they shared with her itself. We know very little of what happened on Malachor V for instance, aside that the Exile single-handedly defeated the Sith there."

Even Peill nodded. "Agreed, there may have been encounters or altercations we are not aware of with the Jedi, not to mention a grudge left to churn for over a decade if I recall the duration of her exile correctly."

Oppo Rancisis spoke for the first time this session aside from introducing himself, "She may hold a grudge, but she bears the Jedi no direct ill will. She is not a threat to us. She merely shows a... disinterest in the will of the Council, an aversion to it I suppose. Not so different from Master Jinn and others."

Mace nodded, rubbing his eyes. "We already have enough Jedi like that without needing another of her reputation and power."

"Did anyone feel anything... odd... about her presence?" asked Yarael.

Yoda nodded. "Strange, she was. Off, her presence feels. Unlike anyone I have felt before, she is. Unsure I am, what this means."

"She felt... oddly empty," murmured Saesee, "But like Master Yoda said, I'm unsure what that means."

"It may be a scar left over from her conflict with the Sith," offered Mace.

The Council murmured in agreement and dropped that subject.

"Still, regardless of her unneeded defiance, her assistance will be good for dealing with the Sith," said Mace.

"Her and Revan," said Adi Gallia, "We didn't even touch on him with her."

"No need, there is, until awaken, Revan does," said Yoda.
Mace nodded. "Revan is a whole other matter that will bear careful consideration. He literally reshaped the course of the galaxy three times. Once in the Mandalorian Wars, and twice in the Jedi Civil War."

"Four times I suppose if you consider him wounding the Sith Emperor back in his time," offered Even cheekily, "Maye a fifth time by bringing himself and the Exile here."

Mace sighed. "For now, let's bring the boy in and get this over with."

"...a ship... a cup... a... ship... a podracer?" said Anakin distantly.

Mace tilted his head, a slight frown on his face. "Right until the last one. You're distracted boy."

Anakin winced a little. "Sorry sir."

"Hmm... how feel you?" questioned Yoda.

Anakin hesitated. His first instinct was to say dodge the question and say cold, it was after all cold here compared to Tatooine, but, he decided to be truthful. They were Jedi. Maybe they could help him help Meetra.

"Worried sir," he answered.

Yoda seemed pleased. "Honesty, good it is young one."

"Be mindful of your feelings, you have nothing to fear from us," said Mace.

"I'm not afraid of you guys," said Anakin, a bit bluntly, but truthfully.

That drew a slight chuckle from Even.

"Your thoughts dwell on... Meetra?" questioned Ki-Adi-Mundi, seeming slightly surprised.

Anakin hesitated. "I've... been seeing her in the same dream, over and over again ever since I met her."

Mace and Yoda exchanged glances.

"Mister Qui-Gon said it might be... 'Force Visions'?" said Anakin with uncertainty.

"Possibly," offered Mace.

"Offer wisdom, did Master Qui-Gon?" asked Yoda.

"He said to be mindful of the future, that it's always in motion," said Anakin.

"Wise words, they are," said Yoda, "But believe them, do you? Much worry I still feel in you. Afraid for her, are you?"

"What's that got to do with anything?" said Anakin skeptically.

"Everything," said Yoda, "Fear is the path to the Dark Side. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering."

Anakin stood still, his eyes going back and forth between Yoda and Mace Windu, both of them seeming the most intimidating out of the room. He didn't understand it exactly. Worrying for
somebody wasn't wrong, it showed that you cared. What was wrong with anger, especially if it was justified? Hating was bad sure, mom had always told him that, but in his experience, people didn't need hate to cause suffering. Slave owners did that just out of cruelty and greed.

Yoda slowly shook his head. "I sense much fear in you."

Anakin bit his lip, wanting to retort, but not wanting to be disrespectful to Jedi. He didn't understand it, Jedi were supposed to be heroes who wanted to help people. Didn't that mean they were supposed to be worried? To care for others? They weren't even asking what his dreams, his 'visions', were. He felt confused by this, and a little off putt...

He paused when he felt a slight nudging in his head. He instinctively turned to look at one of the Jedi, a big guy with horns on the side of his head, Saesee he thought?

"What of your mother child?" he questioned, "I'm surprised for someone your age to not be thinking of her."

Anakin blanked for a moment. He had been so distracted these last few days by his dreams he hadn't even thought about mom!

Poor mom... all alone back on Tatooine... what if Watto was mean to her? What if he sold her to a mean master? Oh how he wished he was a grown up Jedi right now so he could go back and help her. Maybe if he asked nicely, one of them would?

"And there it is," muttered Saesee with chagrin.

Anakin stared at him, baffled. He slowly turned his head around the room, growing more confused by the slight disappointment and dismissiveness in their eyes. He tried, but failed, to stop from growing a little angry. That they were using his care for his mom against him was really ticking him off. These people weren't what he thought Jedi were supposed to be like. Why weren't they like Qui-Gon and Meeta?

He noticed instantly a narrowing of eyes as if in response to his anger. Anakin closed his eyes, and tried that meditation thing Meeta showed him, trying to calm himself down before he had an outburst. It wouldn't do him any good to throw a temper tantrum in-front of the Council. When he opened his eyes, he noticed the demeanor of the Council had changed, yet again, with them now studying him curiously.

"Taught you, who did, to meditate and release your emotions into the force?" questioned Yoda.

"Um... miss Meeta had me try it out before coming here," answered Anakin.

"She ought to not be teaching the ways of the Jedi without approval," stated Mace.

Yoda chuckled. "A Jedi, she says she is not, our approval, she does not require."

Anakin looked at him in surprise. "She's... not a Jedi?"

Yoda leaned forward, studying Anakin closely. "An Exile, she was. Offered her to return to the Order, we did. Refusal, her response was."

At this point, Anakin was completely lost. An Exile was what he thought a Jedi should be, but these guys weren't...?

Yoda's ears twitched, an amused smile on his face. Anakin noticed however a number of the other
Council member suddenly seemed annoyed. It hit him a moment later as he recalled what Ki-Adi-Mundi had said earlier, about his thoughts dwelling.

"Reading somebodies mind without permission isn't nice," said Anakin sourly.

"This is a test young Skywalker," said Mace, "Do not forget that, and mind your words."

Anakin went silent, but he didn't apologize. Though, he did focus on trying to keep his mind clear so some busy-bodies couldn't find anything poking around.

Judging by the look he got from a number of Council members he probably shouldn't have thought that...

Oops.

Darth Sidious slowly walked into his Master's sanctum inside the Banking Clan's headquarters on Coruscant, kneeling down behind his Master in the center of the room. "Master."

Darth Plagueis said nothing.

Sidious's eyes flickered upward, noticing the Muun having his back turned, staring out of the window silently, seeming lost in thought over something. Sidious's lips curled in distaste. Oh how he wanted to dispose of this old fool, oh how he hated acting sub-servant to another, and oh how he hated to repeat the word he had just used.

"Master?" questioned Sidious again.

"Speak," said Plagueis.

"I have encountered an... oddity, earlier today," said Sidious.

Plagueis turned, walked to his desk, and hit a button. Sidious was surprised when a holo image of the Queen's arrival appeared, and it focused in on the third Jedi, the Wound in the Force. So his Master was already aware... interesting.

"Yes. She is what I was about to seek your wise council for," said Sidious, letting false praise slip through his tongue.

"Meetra Surik," said Plagueis simply.

Sidious frowned. "I'm not familiar with the name, though your tone almost suggests I should be."

"You are not mindful of your studies of ancient times my apprentice," said Plagueis, reaching into his desk to toss Sidious a datapad.

Sidious caught it and stood, turning it on and beginning to read. "The Mandalorian Wars...? That was almost four thousand years ago, what does..."

The moment the name Meetra Surik and a picture of her came up in the records, disbelief coated his face. "You cannot be serious. Flow Walking is one thing, but traveling through time itself is another."

"You felt the disturbance a few days ago, did you not?" questioned Plagueis, "It was unlike anything I have felt before. Within the Force, anything and everything is possible. Especially to a Wound in the Force, one who exists outside the rules we live by."
Sideous frowned intently as he read. "She might be more of a danger to the Grand Plan than I thought."

"She is responsible for the survival of the Jedi order in ancient times," warned Plagueis.

Sideous browsed the datapad, mulling over what he read, and started to take down mental notes. "She wasn't a factor until our ancestors drew her into the conflict. If they had simply let her waste away in exile, I doubt she would have been a problem. Our ancestors doomed themselves."

Plagueis scowled. "She is an old enemy who directly stopped the Sith from achieving victory against the Jedi, from wiping them out. She has slain powerful lords of the Sith, and countless of their apprentices and disciples. Beyond any Jedi that lives today, she is a threat. She must be destroyed, immediately."

Sideous's mind was however elsewhere, a scheme rapidly building. "There are ways she could be used..."

"She is to be terminated, do you question me my Apprentice?" demanded Plagueis.

"Of course not Master," lied Sideous reflexively.

"See to it that it is done," said Plagueis dismissively, turning back around, "Task your 'apprentice' with the deed."

"Your will shall be done," said Sideous, hiding his irritation as he took the datapad and left.

Unless he was willing to directly confront Plagueis and dispose of him, or somehow get him to lower his defenses and kill him, he couldn't countermand that order. He was loath to risk wasting the tool he had spent years shaping, especially since he doubted Maul could actually do the deed if what he was reading about Surik's skill was correct. Which ultimately, he supposed he could accept, after all...

Meetra Surik provided a very interesting opportunity. An Exile, a legendary figure, one who stood and acted in ways deviant of the Council and their code. That presented an opportunity to divide and fracture the Jedi order if played correctly. Considering also what she was as a Wound in the Force, her nature would eventually consume her, and drive her against the Jedi, causing what he could imagine would be a deliciously devastating confrontation that would turn the Jedi against themselves, and perhaps even public opinion, even before the planned wars began. The only problem was...

They had announced themselves to the Jedi. The Jedi would be looking for a Master and an Apprentice. With Surik's perception, that heavily risked Sideous's cover. He had been willing to accept and circumvent that scrutiny before Surik's arrival as part of the Grand Plan to strike fear into the Jedi, yet... he felt he would need more time to properly adjust his plans to incorporate her. The Sith needed to return to the Shadows, but unless the Jedi believed they had killed both the Apprentice and the Master...

He froze before a purely evil smile played across his face. "Yes... a Master and an Apprentice would need to die."

Darth Maul would be sacrificed, and Darth Plagueis could be 'revealed'. Sideous wouldn't even have to lift a finger to kill his Master, he could simply get the Jedi to do it for him, and when the deed was done, no suspicion would remain. None of that co-chancellor foolishness his Master desired. He would be free to act with impunity as the Chancellor of the Republic, all of the power...
being his to do as he saw fit.

Glorious.

Of course if Maul actually managed to kill Surik, then Sidous would simply pick back up where he left off with his original plans and find a way to kill Plagueis himself. Not to mention Maul might actually have proved himself to be a truly worthy apprentice by besting Surik.

Either way...

"I win," cackled Sideous, his dark laughter echoing down the halls...

Night had fallen by the time Meetra, Qui-Gon, and Anakin were called back to the Council chamber. Obi-Wan had rejoined them, apparently he had been resting and seeing his friends in the temple after the mission. Meetra found it curious that the Council allowed her into this meeting after saying Anakin wasn't her business, but she wasn't going to complain.

"The Force is strong with him," said Ki-Adi-Mundi, drawing Meetra's attention back to the meeting.

"He is to be trained then?" questioned Qui-Gon.

There was silence for a moment.

"The Council is divided," stated Adi Gallia.

"Divided?" questioned Qui-Gon, surprised.

"We have misgivings about the boy being trained, we believe he is to old," said Mace.

"He is the Chosen One, you must see it," said Qui-Gon, resting his hands on his belt.

Meetra blinked a few times, gazing at Qui-Gon curiously. The heck was the 'Chosen One'...?

Anakin saw her look and shrugged, not apparently knowing either.

Mace saw the interaction, pursing his lips. "He ought to be rejected and sent back to his home..."

Meetra frowned intently, we're they serious? If this boy was cut loose... what if the Sith found and trained him? He'd be an unstoppable force of the Dark Side, she didn't think she and Revan together could handle him when he reached the absolute peak of his power.

Meetra stepped forward. "If that is your decision, I'll train him myself."

Anakin was surprised, before shooting her a grateful smile.

"That's why we are split," said Mace, " IF he is the Chosen One, and IF he is to be trained, it should be as a Jedi dedicated to upholding the code, not as a rogue Force Wielder."

Meetra scowled. "A rogue am I?"

Yoda held up a hand. "Peace, no ill will, shall this meeting allow."

Qui-Gon cleared his throat and stepped forward. "Whether Meetra trains him, or I choose to take him on as an Padawn learner after Obi-Wan completes his trials, he will be trained."
"Oh?" said Yoda, "Forget Qui-Gon, you do, it is our own council that we will keep on who is ready to take the trials."

Qui-Gon countered back. "He's more than ready for it at this point, there is little more that he can learn from me."

Meetra felt a bit of apprehension and a slight twang of betrayal emanate from Obi-Wan, but the young man still stepped forward to aid his Master. "I am ready to face the trials."

Yoda sighed. "Listen to our words, you do not. Young Skywalker's fate will be decided later."

Mace leaned forward. "Now is not the time for this. The senate is voting for a new Supreme Chancellor and Queen Amidala is returning home, which will put pressure on the federation and could widen the confrontation."

"And draw out the Sith Apprentice," said Ki-Adi-Mundi.

"Go with the queen to Naboo and draw out this dark lord, Meetra has agreed to aid you in this," said Mace, "This is what we need to flush out the Sith and deal with them once and for all."

"May the force be with you," said Yoda, effectively ending the meeting.

As they walked out, Anakin glanced up at Qui-Gon. "What does..."

Qui-Gon shook his head. "Not now Anakin. We will talk when we rejoin the queen and get on her ship."

Meetra could feel the boys emotions swelling. He seemed so lost and confused, and a bit hurt by what the Council had said. Meetra repositioned herself to walk behind him, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder and squeezed. He tensed for a moment before relaxing and glancing back at her, a small smile on his face. They walked in silence to the hanger bay of the temple, and then to the Queen's shuttle. Anakin kept himself busy looking over a small astromech droid while the Jedi talked and the queen's personnel brought supplies on the ship and prepared it. Meetra stayed close to Anakin, watching from a distance as Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon argued about something, stretching out her senses, she could feel it was about Anakin.

What in the world was the big deal about it? Just train the boy and...

She paused as they drew closer and Obi-Wan spoke, "The boys dangerous, they all sense it, why can't you?"

Meetra stared at him in disbelief before glancing down worriedly at Anakin. The boy was staring down at the R2 unit silently, gripping it tightly, trying to keep himself in check. What in the nine Corellian hells was that fool thinking? The boy was RIGHT THERE!

She was at least pleased when Qui-Gon rebuked his Padawan. "His fate is uncertain, he's not dangerous. The Council will decide Anakin's future, that should be enough for you. Now get onboard."

Obi-Wan slowly turned and left.

Anakin fiddled with the R2 unit for a moment longer before bowing his head and saying, "I don't want to be a problem..."

Meetra reached over and placed a hand on his shoulder. "You're not, Anikan."
"Agreed," said Qui-Gon, kneeling down in front of the boy.

The boy stared at him with a sad expression that said 'Then what is all this commotion about?'

"I just... I don't understand...," said Anakin, "Why can't I be a Jedi?"

Qui-Gon sighed. "You will be Anakin, whether the Council agrees to allow your training and I become your teacher, or they refuse you and Meetra does. You will be a Jedi, I promise you."

That seemed to relieve Anakin a bit, but, a different concern seemed to go into his mind, glancing back and forth between Qui-Gon and Meetra. "Both of you can't teach me?"

"We can indirectly, but only one of us, regardless of the Council's will, can be declared your Master," said Qui-Gon.

There was a heavy frown on Anakin's face. "A Master..."

Qui-Gon softened. "Not like that Anakin, this isn't the slavery you come from. We refer to Master and Apprentice as a teacher and a learner."

Meetra started a bit and glanced at Anakin. He had been a slave?

"Oh," murmured Anakin, "I had been wondering about that."

"Regardless, there is much either of us could teach you about being a Jedi," said Qui-Gon.

"I'd... have to choose though? Between both of you?" asked Anakin a bit timidly, "Between who would train me to be a Jedi?"

Meetra resisted the urge to snort. There would be no choice of the Council got their way.

"Perhaps," was all Qui-Gon said.

Meetra stared at them silently for a moment, working a thought in her head. She wondered... if he was a former slave from Tatooine... what did he really know about being a Jedi? What would be required of him? Did he honestly understand what would be asked of him?

"Anakin, if you were to ask me to be your Master, I wouldn't train you to be a Jedi, I'd train you to be human," said Meetra.

Qui-Gon frowned at her and stood up, crossing his arms, but saying nothing.

"What do you mean?" said Anakin, "I don't understand. Jedi are human! Well, I mean, and other races to of course!"

"Anakin...," began Meetra with a sigh, "You really have no concept of what it means to be a Jedi. Tell me, what do you think the life of a Jedi entails?"

"Jedi are heroes," said Anakin, "They go out, do good, help people and save their lives, they're famous. A Jedi is someone I wanna be so I can do good, and when I'm strong and famous enough, I can go home, free all the slaves, and make my mom proud of me."

Qui-Gon closed his eyes, a soft sigh escaping his lips.

Meetra smiled softly. "That's a good desire Anakin, but, the second half is compleatly against what it mean's to be a Jedi that adhears to the code."
"Huh...?" said Anakin, looking utterly lost.

"As a Jedi, you must follow the rules of the Jedi, their code, obey the laws of each world you go to," began Meetra, "Take Tatooine for example, slavery, as awful as it is, is allowed there. Ignoring that the Republic doesn't even reach Tatooine, you wouldn't be allowed to just go there and start freeing slaves. Even if you were, how would you even do that? A Jedi isn't allowed personal affects or money that isn't allocated for a mission, you could never afford to buy and free them all. Using the Force or your Lightsaber to forcefully free them wouldn't be allowed either, in fact, it would be strictly against the Code."

"But... that's...," stumbled Anakin.

"Beyond even that Anakin, as a Jedi, attachments are forbidden. You would be forced to give up your attachment to your Mother, you'd never be allowed to go back and free her," said Meetra, "Beyond that, you're not even allowed to love."

Anakin visibly recoiled. "What?!

He turned to Qui-Gon. "That's... that's not true, is it?"

Qui-Gon was silent for a few moments before he opened his eyes and softly spoke, "It is."

Meetra flinched as the Force, as the song, disrupted around Anakin. A ripple, a distortion blew out of him as his emotions exploded in distress as she felt his dreams and desires literally shatter. She stared at him sadly. Anakin looked so utterly betrayed, he opened his mouth to speak a few times before closing it. Meetra found her stomach twisting at the sight of him, of the lost little boy.

Finally, he bowed his head and muttered miserably, "I never should have left Mom after you freed me."

"A Jedi's life is sacrifice Anakin," said Qui-Gon, "And while I personally don't follow the code to the letter, and view it as more of a guideline, the basic principles are the same regardless."

"I can't," said Anakin, "I can't be something that asks me to give up mom, I just can't."

Qui-Gon sighed and turned to frown at Meetra. "Meetra..."

She met his gaze, a hardened glint in her eye. "He deserved to understand what he was walking into. He's already formed an attachment to his mother, a deep one, one that got him through his early life as a slave. Discovering that he couldn't help her after the fact, asking him to give her up, he never would have been able to fully do that Qui-Gon. If she somehow died while he had the strength to save her, it would have destroyed him. It would lead him straight to the Dark Side."

She slowly shook her head. "Look at him Qui-Gon, stretch out your senses and feel. He loves and cares to readily and to freely to be a proper Jedi. It would just clash with who he is at heart and leave him unstable."

Qui-Gon sighed once more, turning his attention to study Anakin intently. "I suppose your right. He would clash with the Jedi so frequently and so readily I can imagine him being quite alienated in his classes and studies."

He glanced at Meetra. "I leave him to you then. Will you promise me that after this Naboo incident is over, that you will train him to be the best he can be? He has a destiny he must fulfill."

Meetra nodded. "I promise."
She frowned as his words fully hit her. "Though, only if he truly wants to. His training should not be forced or required simply because of some 'destiny'. Is that the only reason you even freed him?"

Anakin looked up at Qui-Gon sharply, hurt and betrayal in his eyes.

Qui-Gon frowned. "No, it's not the only reason, but it was a factor."

He didn't give another chance for questions as the Queen of Naboo arrived and made for her ship. He left and joined her, speaking quietly as they moved to the ship. It honestly felt like he kind of ran away.

"I thought he was nice," muttered Anakin, "I thought he cared, but Jedi aren't allowed to care."

He glanced at Meetra. "Why is it like that? Just because of some code thing?"

Meetra recalled something Kreia had once told her, and found herself paraphrasing it, "Anakin... the Jedi Code doesn't give all the answers. You can't blindly follow it, you can't stay true to a single ideal, especially one that tries to make you more of a machine than a human. It's a failing the Jedi have had for a long time. Though, Qui-Gon doesn't appear to be that crippled by it."

She moved to kneel down in front of him. "But don't mistake what he says. He does care in his own way, but being a Jedi limits the way he can show that care. He's not a bad person, none of the Jedi are."

Anakin tried to think on what she said, but he sagged and rubbed his eyes tiredly. "This is all so confusing."

She smiled and ruffled his hair. "I know it is. Come, let's get onboard and get you to bed. We'll talk in the morning."

"Weeesaaa goin home!" came a large shout from the gungan that made both of them jump.

"That guy is crazy," said Anakin with a small laugh.

Meetra chuckled. "I suppose he is."

They started walking towards the ship, but Meetra paused briefly when Anakin's hand slipped into hers and he clung to her. She contemplated breaking away, but didn't. While she didn't agree with the Jedi on many things, attachment could be dangerous. She had no problem with love and care and friendship so long as they did not become full-blown negative attachments. Being attached to his mother was something she would never hold against the boy. So long as it didn't rule his life and make him obsessed. And right now, he needed something, someone to lean on after the mess the Council made of this situation, leaving him lost in this confused world as he was.

So, instead of breaking away, she gently squeezed the boy's hand, gave him a small smile, and walked onto the ship with him...
It really should have been obvious far sooner that the Queen in the make-up wasn't the actual Queen of Naboo. So when the handmaiden Padme revealed herself to be the actual queen, kneeling before a mass of Gungans to ask for their help, Meetra mentally kicked herself for not realizing it right away. She slowly shook her head and waited patiently for the Gungans to make their decision, her thoughts drifting.

The last few days on the ship in Hyperspace had passed in a blur of preparations. Meetings with the Queen, meditation sessions to prepare herself, and sparring sessions with the other two Jedi. In her opinion, Qui-Gon Jinn was getting too old to be using Ataru form, Soresu would serve him much better for surviving and not burning through his energy in a fight. He had only been a *little* indignant when she had said that to his face, but he had accepted her offer to try and show him the beginnings of Form III. Both he and his Padawan had begun practicing it. Truth be told, she wanted them to use Soresu simply to survive in case the Sith jumped them and they were forced to fight him. On the note of the Padawan though, Obi-Wan had stumbled a bit on the first few sessions, but just before they landed she had started to see him adapting to Soresu extraordinarily well. It was just a hunch, a feeling, but if he kept up with Soresu he might outdo her one day.

There was one unfortunate loss to all this preparation. She hardly had any time for Anakin. She felt bad about it, and apologized once, but the boy *seemed* to understand. She wasn't sure she believed that though, he had been an emotional mess for the entire trip to Naboo, silent and brooding over what had happened with the Jedi. It was hard to get a good read on him at the moment. Even standing next to her in the mass of Gungans he seemed distant, focused on his own thoughts.

She blinked and refocused when the lead Gungan started laughing and then spoke, "Meesa like ideas. Maybe wesa bein friends."

Meetra stood when the others did and followed as they moved out. She did not participate in their preparations, merely standing back after they had relocated to woodlands to begin planning. She did catch one of the Queen's captains mentioning that the Federation's army was much larger and stronger than expected.

But that wasn't her concern to be honest. She moved to sit down next to a tree and closed her eyes, stilling her mind and focusing. She could feel him, feel the Sith. He was here, and he was her only concern.

"Meetra?" came Qui-Gon's voice.

She glanced up at him. "What is it?"

"Did you hear any of the plan?" he questioned, slightly amused.

She shrugged. "Something about the Viceroy, a droid control ship, and infiltrating the palace? It's not my concern, only the Sith is."

Qui-Gon's eyebrows furrowed. "So he is here?"

"Yes," was all she said.

"The three of us can handle him," said Qui-Gon.

Meetra shook her head. "You have a responsibility to the Queen. I will handle the Sith. It is my
sole part to play."

Qui-Gon frowned, but said nothing else before he walked away.

"Miss Meetra?" came a quiet voice.

She turned her head to see Anakin quietly standing next to the tree she was sitting in front of. "Yes Anakin?"

"Are you going to be okay fighting this Sith guy by yourself?" he asked worriedly.

She gave him a small smile. "I've been fighting Sith almost non-stop for awhile now Anakin. You could say Sith Lords are my specialty."

Anakin laughed a little, but the attempt to hide his concern didn't fool her. "I'll be alright Anakin, don't worry."

Anakin nodded, but said nothing else. His fear for her was still palpable. It also reinforced her opinion that he really wouldn't do well with the Jedi. He feared and cared too readily. It was a strength but also a weakness, depending on whether one's loved ones came to harm or fell in danger.

She had no time to alleviate his concerns as they moved out, hopping on speeders to get them to the capital city of Theed. She was NOT pleased when Anakin came with them. He shouldn't be anywhere close to the fighting. He ought to have been stuck with a few guards somewhere.

They broke off into small groups. She stayed with the Jedi and the Queen, keeping herself protectively in front of Anakin as the Queen fired a small blinking light at one of the other groups sneaking past the droid patrols in Theed.

Qui-Gon knelt down in front of Anakin and spoke softly, "Once we get inside, find a safe place to hide and stay there."

"Sure," answered Anakin FAR too quickly for Meetra's liking.

She was moderately amused when both her and Qui-Gon reinforced the command. "Stay there."

Then there was no more time for words as the distraction group opened fire, blowing up a Trade Federation tank and causing all hell to break loose. Three lightsabers ignited as they moved to the side entrance to the palace, deflecting blaster bolts and destroying any droid that came near that wasn't focused on the 'main' fight.

Meetra, Qui-Gon, and Obi-Wan led the group as they made their way into the palace hanger. They deflected a barrage of blaster bolts as they moved in.

"Anakin, cover, now!" shouted Meetra.

The boy dove away as the battle began and the Queen ordered her pilots to their ships.

Meetra flinched briefly as the deaths began. As Naboo's personnel died around them. She could feel the whispers in the air, begging for her. She shook it off and forced the sensation away. Ever since she became consciously aware of what she was, she tried to not feed off of death. She wasn't going to go down that path again.

The hanger was cleared in short order, the Naboo guard dealing with the last of the droids.
"Red group, blue group, everybody this way!" called out a Guard Captain.

"Hey! Wait for me!" came Anakin's voice.

Meetra rolled her eyes. Leave it to a nine year old boy to find this exciting and want to go along with them.

"Anakin stay where you are," ordered Qui-Gon as they moved for a set of blast doors, "You'll be safe there."

"But I...," began Anakin.

"Stay in that cockpit Anakin," reaffirmed Meetra, making the boy scowl a bit and...

Meetra came to a stop, holding out her hand behind her as she felt something. "Wait."

She felt it, she felt him, behind the blast door. "He's here."

As if on cue, the doors opened, and there stood the Sith apprentice, his burning yellow eyes boring into them.

Meetra steeled herself. "Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan, go with the Queen, I'll handle this."

Qui-Gon looked at her sharply. "Meetra..."

"Your mission is to protect the Queen, my mission is to deal with the Sith, I'm the only one alive qualified for it," she said simply.

The Sith Apprentice's lips curled into an eager, hungry grin. He reached up and pulled back his hood, revealing his horned head. Slowly, he took off his robes, revealing his black tunic underneath. Meetra gave the Sith the benefit of the doubt, tossing aside her brown outer robe. She hadn't fought any of these new Sith before, she couldn't underestimate them.

"Go Qui-Gon," Meetra ordered again.

Qui-Gon hesitated for a moment before nodding and turning to the Queen. "Is there another way?"

Padme nodded. "A longer route yes, follow me."

Meetra waited until they started to leave before she leveled her gaze on the Sith Apprentice. "Have you a name, Sith?"

A deep chuckle escaped his lips, eagerness and hunger for her death in his eyes. "Darth Maul."

With a snap-hiss their lightsabers activated and they stood at the ready, eyes locked.

"You won't touch the Queen," warned Meetra.

"You think I'm here for her, Exile?" mocked Maul.

Meetra paused. He knew? He knew who she was?

Maul grinned maliciously. "My Master wants you taken out of the equation. The Queen and this petty conflict don't matter anymore. An unfortunate setback, but still nothing more than a small bump in the Grand Plan."
He narrowed his eyes. "The Grand Plan you endanger merely by existence, Wound in the Force."

Meetra froze.

"That's right Exile, we know exactly what you are," mocked Maul, "And my Master has decreed your DEATH!"

Maul practically flew at her, flipping overhead and swinging down. Meetra ducked forward and swung her blade up, smashing his away before turning and swinging at him. He blocked and lashed out with his foot, kicking her stomach and thrusting a hand forward, a ripple in Force pushing* her towards a closed door. Meetra reached out with the Force and threw a broken battle-droid at the door's controls to open it, rather than slam into it and get a concussion. She sailed through just as it opened, skidding along on her back before flipping herself up. Maul was upon her in seconds, his double-bladed lightsaber screaming through the air back and forth.

Meetra could admit, she had vastly underestimated his skills with a lightsaber. He had been toying with her and Qui-Gon on Tatooine, testing them. He may not have their power in the Force, but he was easily more skilled with a blade than Sion or Nihilus were. Meetra found herself forced to an edge, the back part of her boot landing on thin air. She glanced behind herself, taking in the sight of some kind of power complex with a huge power core in the middle and many walkways on various levels.

She heard and felt Maul swinging at her while her head was turned. She intentionally fell backwards to dodge it and pushed off the ledge, leaping onto a walkway. Maul followed immediately, leaping after her and attacking relentlessly. She recognized his form as Form VII, Juyo. It was said to be the most viscous of the Lightsaber forms. Though, he definitely took viscous to a new level. She switched to Soresu, Form III, and stayed on the defensive, letting Maul force her back. She wasn't expecting to outlast Maul, no, he was young and full of energy, if it came down to a drawn out fight his ferocity would eventually find a way to breech her defenses. She was stalling, trying to study his style and determine how best to fight him.

Maul swung a heavy overhead attack and she raised her saber and blocked. She was forced to leap back as he spun and brought the other end up in an attempt to bisect her. He rushed to close the distance, his lightsaber spinning through the air. She swung at his side, was blocked, and then sidestepped and leaped to another walkway as he spun around swinging his lightsaber, trying to cut her in half.

She landed and staggered a bit. A scream in the Force was the only warning she got, enough of one to duck and roll in time as Maul leaped after her and swung. His blade slashed into the walkway, leaving a blazing orange cut in the metal. She staggered to her feet and turned as Maul spun and swung his blade. She blocked and staggered back as he lashed out with his boot and kicked her stomach. He spun and swung the other end of his blade at her midsection, cutting into her tunic and barely missing her skin. She hissed and lashed out with a hand, pushing him through Force as hard as she could and throwing him half way down the walkway away from her. She took a deep breath centering herself and tapped into her power, channeling the Force through her body, speeding its flow and herself with it. She blew down the walkway with inhuman speed away from Maul.

"Fleeing Exile?" came Maul's mocking taunt.

No, just trying to catch her damn breath.

She saw a series of shielding at the end of the walkway that was just turning off. She flew down them towards the end and then stopped as the shielding reactivated, cutting her off from Maul, who was at the far end. Meetra watched as Maul hesitated and swung his blade at the shielding, only for
it to bounce off. Satisfied, Meetra deactivated her lightsaber and knelt down to meditate and gather her strength. She played the fight thus far over in her head again. Maul was extremely aggressive, giving her little chance to actually fight back, he fought with flair, and did a lot of spinning type attacks, his lightsaber and body were always in motion, giving little openings. But... the openings were still there IF she was fast and precise enough...

Precision.

Waiting for the right moment.

Makashi.

Form II.

She nodded to herself and took another deep breath, calming herself and trying to get her racing heartbeat back under control. She waited in silence, the only sound the humming of the shields between her and Maul, and her opponents boots scuffing the floor as he paced impatiently. Minutes ticked by, and she stretched out her senses, trying to located Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan. They were much higher in the palace, nearing the throne room if she guessed right. One way or another, they would at least see their mission done. She turned her attention towards Anakin...

And was confused to feel he wasn't in the palace anymore. What the heck? Where did he go? Qui-Gon had told him to wait in the cockpit... of a starfighter.

Ah shit...

She stretched her senses as far as she could and faintly felt Anakin's presence out above Naboo. That kid was in so much trouble when she got her hands on him...

Meetra's thoughts fled and her eyes flew open as the shielding opened. She leaped to her feet and into a small circular room with a shaft in the middle of it. She glanced down it as Maul charged down the shielding pathway, sighting a damn near bottomless pit. She glanced around, noticing that there was no other way out of the room aside from the shielding pathway, and the bottomless pit.

Great, she had backed herself into a corner. She watched passively as Maul just barely made it past the last shielding. Now she was locked in this room for at least five minutes until the shielding went down. Maul saw her eyes flicker to the energy shielding, and a smug look crossed his face. He took his time closing towards her, eyeing her like she was simple prey ready for the feasting. She was tempted to play along, to give him some sense of false fear, to try and get him to overestimate himself and slip up, but she didn't. Because that shielding worked both ways. It wasn't just her trapped in here with him. He was trapped in here with her.

It was time to cut loose.

Meetra briefly closed her eyes and tapped into the Force as heavily as she could, to a level she had only gone three times in her life. Against Nihilus, Sion, and Traya. The Force rippled around her, and Maul's eyes went wide with surprise as her presence in the Force flared up drastically. She rushed at him, switching straight to Form II with elegant precise strikes. Maul immediately fell back as she slashed at him with masterful flurries, spinning and striking so fast he could barely keep up, a brief spike of fear showing across his face. They danced in a flurry of bladework around the hole, the blurs of their sabers screaming through the air, sparking in contact, leaving angry melted welts on the floor and the walls where they slashed and...
As he brought his lightsaber around to block a swipe at his chest, she locked blades and lashed out to kick his knee, causing him to stumble. She pulled her lightsaber down and cleaved clean through his, severing it in half, leaving him with only a single-bladed saber. She lashed out with a hand, grabbing him with the Force. He yelped and struggled as she lifted him midair and then threw him over the shaft and across the room, slamming him into the wall on the far side. She threw her Lightsaber and then leaped over the hole.

Maul barely managed to roll as her thrown lightsaber stabbed into the wall where he had just been. Meetra recalled it to her hands as she landed and rushed at Maul, starting to breathe a little heavily. Maul switched to Ataru style, no longer having the advantage of a second end to his lightsaber to try and overwhelm Meetra. He stepped back as he swung, aiming for her shoulder, she side-stepped and swung, slicing into the side of his torso, making him hiss in pain before she threw him across the room again with the Force, and then charging after him.

Unfortunately, Sith thrived on pain. He gave a roar and thrust a hand out after staggering to his feet, sending a powerful wave through the Force to launch her back. She was slammed into the wall and was momentarily disoriented. She recovered in time to see him charging, attempting to skewer her. She sidestepped and spun as he stabbed his lightsaber into the wall, attempting to swing and sever his arm from his body. Instead, he freed a hand and lashed out, grabbing her wrist and stopping her inches from hitting his arm. Meetra ground her teeth and tried to overpower him, funneling the Force down into her arm.

To her surprise, she couldn't push her blade forward. She was bewildered when instead, he slowly pushed her hand away. Sweat poured down her face, and her arm shook with effort as her breathing intensified. What the kriff?

Maul freed his lightsaber and shoved her away, his earlier fear long gone, a grin spreading across his face. "Impressive Exile, unfortunately, spending all your strength on one rush doesn't seem to have worked out."

All of her strength? As if. She had torn through Malacor V, the entire force of Sith there, fought both Sion and Traya, and barely been left winded by the end of it. This should be nothing...

Yet...

Her arms were shaking. Her palms were sweating, and she was breathing heavily. She felt the Force rapidly draining from her. Something was wrong...

Maul retook the offensive, driving her back with rapid heavy swings. Meetra tried to tap into the Force, to reach for it, but the source she had seemed to have just suddenly run dry. All she felt was her inner emptiness, and a growing desperate hunger... where had all of her strength gone?

It hit her as she backpedaled across the room. She was rudely reminded once again that she didn't have her friends anymore, her numerous Force Bonds. All she had was her connection to Revan, who was half way across the Galaxy, comatose, with hardly any power to spare. She had not personally killed anyone since before she had come back in time, had not fed off death since before she came to this time. Killing droids hardly counted, they had no life energy to give. And here she was heavily burning through what strength she had left after gifting power to Revan for his stunt to pull them through time.

For once, being a Wound in the Force was not helping her. It was limiting her, drastically. She had no inner reserves, only what she could leech off of others, and that power had run dry.
At that moment she felt fear.

And Maul smelt it, a malicious smile spreading across his face, his yellow eyes aglow. His attacks grew heavier and faster as her blocks became slower and weaker. She switched back to Soresu, trying to buy herself time. She needed to escape, live to fight another day. She locked blades, her arms starting to buckle, and glanced towards the shielded pathway. It was open. She desperately shoved Maul away and blitzed for it, only for the shielding to re-activate and shut in her face.

"Time to die Exile," mocked Maul.

She spun and swung, barely blocking in time as Maul swung down. She re-engaged, not even trying anything offensive, just trying to stay alive.

To little effect.

Maul locked blades with her and pressed close, noses almost touching. He pulled his head back and slammed it forward, stunning Meetra briefly. She screamed in agony as he took advantage, broke blade-lock, and drove his lightsaber straight through her stomach. Meetra glanced down at the blade embedded through her, her lightsaber deactivating as it left her numbing hands.

"My Master's will is done," hissed Maul before pulling his blade out and deactivating it.

Meetra fell to her knees, her vision blurring.

Thoughts grew fleeting.

Pain and emptiness filled her.

She felt her life ebbing, screaming for anything to save her...

Blackness tore into her sight...

_Thump thump..._

She reached out shakily with a hand, grasping Maul's tunic weakly. The Sith looked down at her smugly, savoring the sight of her dying in front of him on her knees.

She felt...

She felt _hunger_ for the life she was losing...

_Thump thump..._

Her grip tightened on his tunic, her fingers digging into it and gripping his stomach, and she felt her strength slowly coming back. Maul blinked a few times, confused.

She felt the _hunger_...

She felt the need to _sate_ it...

She looked up at him, her eyes changing to an empty blackness, an almost mad smile etched across her face. Maul tried to pull back, only to find his legs unable to move. He raised lightsaber, ready to swing it down and cut her in half, only for his arms to shake as his strength started to leave him rapidly. His lightsaber fell out of his hands and clattered to the ground as Meetra raised her other hand and dug it into his stomach as well, feeding on his lifeforce and draining him of it.
Hunger.

Hunger.

**HUNGER!**

**SHE HAD TO FEED IT!**

Maul collapsed to the ground, and Meetra scooted closer, leaning over him, staring down into his panic and fear filled eyes with her blackened and hungering ones.

"W-what... are... you...?" whispered Maul in fear, "Is this... what a Wound... in the Force... truly is...?"

Meetra merely laughed as she dug her hands into and through his tunic, blood seeping out as she pulled and pulled on his lifeforce, ripping it out of his body and feeding on it. She felt the hole through her stomach heal, and her power begin to restore itself. It felt *so good... so damn good*...

She watched as the life left his eyes, as she drained him of every last drop of life, as his face withered up like a prune. When she finished, she slowly pulled her bloody hands away and sat there, a satisfied smile on her face, a hazy look in her eyes.

Slowly, her eyes changed back from the black emptiness to her original color, and she stared down at Maul in a confused daze. She slowly looked down at the palms of her bloody hands, and then back at Maul, over and over again as her awareness began to return.

With a jolt, she leaped to her feet and stared down at Maul's corpse, horrified as the reality hit her. "What... what have I done?"

She had fed off him, drained him of life... just... just like...

"Just like Nihilus," whispered Meetra in terror.

If the shield pathway had been deactivated, she would have fled the room in fear and shame. Instead, she forced herself to take a deep breath and steady herself. Was this her fate? To become like that monster?

"N-no... it... it was a fluke... just because I was dying," stammered Meetra, "I... I'm not like him... I'm not..."

She gulped fearfully and knelt down, picking up her lightsaber. She shakily raised it, activated it, and decapitated Maul before shoving his body down the bottomless pit in the center of the room. Shamefully hiding what she had done...

If the Jedi ever found out what she had done...

If they ever found out just what she was...

They'd kill her, or strip her of the Force.

Just like the Jedi Council had tried to do on Dantooine.

She glanced around, her senses reaching out, and felt for the cameras in the room, shorting them out and destroying them with the Force.

No one must ever know the truth of what happened here.
With her head bowed, shame and depression running through her, she slowly left the room...
Something was wrong.

Anakin didn't know how, but knew that it had to do with Meetra. For a split second when flying, he had felt an immense pain, as if he had been stabbed through the chest by something, it had caused him to temporarily lose control and crash into the droid control ship's hanger.

Which was oddly fortunate since it let him blow it up.

Anakin flew back to Naboo afterwords, hearing the cheers of the other pilots, but paid them no mind. His eyebrows were furrowed, concentrating on the wrongness he felt. The pain was gone, but something was still off. He had to get back, and soon.

He didn't know why, it just... felt like there was something in the back of his head, murmuring softly, but urgently, for him to do so. To go back to Naboo, and find Meetra.

Quickly.

"Hurry it up R2!" said Anakin.

The droid whistled at him, and the fighter sped up. Anakin could feel a bit of pressure on his body, and figured the droid lowered the shields a bit to put more power into the engines. The moment they landed, Anakin was out and ran towards the door he had seen Meetra and the Sith go through. It was some kind of generator complex. Anakin looked around, utterly lost. There were so many ramps and walkways, he had no idea where to go...

Though, the molten scratch marks from lightsabers on the floor was a good indicator now that he stopped to think about it. Those only went a little ways, it looked like they might have leaped to another walkway. Could Jedi really jump like that?

Could he?

There was a small murmuring in the back of his head, a whisper of yes.

For a moment, he felt extremely uncertain. If he tried, and failed to jump like that. He'd fall and go SPLAT, just as bad as when a slave transmitter went off. Okay, maybe not as bad, but still, enough to really make him queasy.

Yet, that whisper, that feeling, it urged him to do so, to trust in it, in the sensation. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and put his faith in the feeling. He crouched, opened his eyes, and leaped. It felt for a moment like someone had blasted him into the air. He flew, high up, onto a large and long walkway, and landed on his feet, not even stumbling.

He stood there, stunned for a moment, before he grinned like a madman and squealed, "That's kriffing wizard!"

Oh man! Wait until he told Meetra about that!

Oh right.
Meetra.

Anakin glanced down the large walkway. He squinted his eyes, noting at the far end there was some kind of hallway of shields. Sitting outside the hallway against the wall, was Meetra. Anakin ran down the walkway and towards his friend.

"Meetra!" he called out.

The woman didn't react, she was merely staring at the floor. As Anakin drew closer and slowed down, he felt... guilt? Shame? Emptiness?

No.

That wasn't him. It was coming from... Meetra?

He closed the distance and stood in front of her. "Meetra?"

The woman started and glanced up. "Anakin?"

Anakin's eyes went wide with surprise. Meetra... her face...

It looked like she had suddenly shaved ten years off her life. Before, she had looked middle aged, a bit older than his mom, maybe in her early forties or late thirties, aged a bit more with more than a few wrinkles of stress and scars of conflict. Now, she looked at most to be in her late twenties, and was completely unblemished. To him, Meetra had come off as caring, wise, and honest. He could sheepishly admit, he was adding beautiful to the list as well. N-not that she hadn't been before! He remembered what he had said to Padm... er... the Queen of Naboo, calling her an Angel. He wondered awkwardly if he should say the same now and...

He froze. Her face might be younger, but her eyes seemed older, and more hollow. There was an emptiness to them, a dark tint that seemed unsettlingly similar to what he saw in his dreams every night since he had first met her.

"Anakin, what are you doing here?" asked Meetra.

"I... felt something was wrong," he said quietly, "That you were hurt..."

"You felt...?" she murmured before closing her eyes.

Anakin jumped a little, feeling like someone had nudged inside of his head. "Can you hear me Anakin?"

Meetra sighed heavily at his reaction. "Oh Force... I thought I had kept that subdued."

"Kept what subdued?" asked Anakin, "How'd you speak to me like that?"

Meetra rubbed her eyes tiredly. "Force Bonds. I have a... bad habit of forming them rather quickly. It's only a fledgling one, I can snuff it out. I think."

There was a murmur in the back of his mind at that, a negative reaction. "Why would you 'snuff it out'?"

"Because..." she began, hesitating briefly before going very quiet, "It's dangerous for others to be connected to me."

Anakin's eyebrows furrowed. "Dangerous how? You're a nice person."
"I wish that were true Anakin," she said softly, her eyes closed, bowing her head.

Anakin stared at her, baffled. What in the world was going on with her all the sudden? She had been all confident before the fight, now here she was, having won he was pretty sure, and yet she was acting like...

Well, he had seen a few slaves back at home who had just 'given up' and acted defeated, as if their lot in life was their fault when it was the cruelty of others that enslaved them. This wasn't to far off, and it really worried him. He wasn't sure what reason she could have to act like this. She seemed dangerously vulnerable when she should be grinning like a madman about beating that Sith guy the Jedi had been worried about.

He almost missed it, something she murmured so softly to herself he missed parts of it, "I'm a cipher... bonds... leeching life... dominating them..."

His eyes furrowed once more and he moved to sit down next to her. "Miss Meetra? What's wrong? What happened in the fight?"

Meetra said nothing for a few minutes before she shook her head. "Forget it Anakin. Let's just head back..."

Anakin frowned. "Meetra, my mom once told me the biggest problem in this universe is that no one helps each other. Please, let me help, what's wrong?"

"It's nothing you can help with," she said quietly.

"Please," was all Anakin could say in reply, putting as much meaning into the word as he could.

There was a heavy silence for a time.

Meetra sagged. "He ran me through Anakin. I should be dead."

Anakin stiffened in alarm before glancing at her stomach, going very still when he saw there was a hole through her tunic. "How did you survive?"

"I... I fed off him, I drained his life away," she said quietly, a tremor going through her voice, loathing and shame bleeding out so tangibly into the air, "No matter how much I want to deny or ignore it, I'm a parasite..."

Anakin went completely still, his eyes going wide. There was no longer any doubt in his mind. The dreams, the 'visions' as Qui-Gon had called them...

They were real.

This was the beginning.

She was eventually going to turn into that... that... empty hungering monster she had been in the vision...

No.

Not if he could help it.

But...

What could he do? He was just a nine year old boy. He didn't know how to use the Force, didn't
have any kind of medical knowledge besides wrapping a wound in a bandage. He didn't even fully understand what was wrong with Meetra. At least... he didn't for now. But, he'd learn, until then though... all he could do was be there for her, like mom had been for him.

He nestled against her arm. "It's okay."

Meetra turned her head and stared at him like he had grown a second head.

"You didn't want to, right?" he asked, "You only did it because you had to?"

"That doesn't excuse...," she started to counter.

"It does," said Anakin, "Sometimes good people have to do bad things even if they don't want to."

He thought of his mom, and the suffering she had to endure on his behalf when he was younger and owned to Gardula, or of helping to pick the most 'edible' food out of the trash to eat when not given rations. "And sometimes they just don't have a choice on what they have to do to survive."

Meetra frowned intently. "Anakin..."

She sighed and reached a hand over to ruffle his hair. "You are a good kid."

He gave her a smile. "So what's a Force Bond?"

"It's... a connection through the Force between two beings, usually only between two Force Sensitives. Under normal circumstances, they are rare outside of Master and Apprentice bonds with Jedi and Sith," explained Meetra, "Both sects tend to view any other use of them as attachment, thus taboo."

"Other uses?" he asked.

"Well, good friends can develop a bond if they're not careful. I've also heard of Marriage Bonds or Family Bonds. Both of those are considered to be more powerful than normal bonds," she explained, "But, since Jedi aren't supposed to marry, and Sith abhor love, they don't usually form even if a Jedi or Sith starts a family."

"As for me," she said with chagrin, "I have a bad habit of forming bonds effortlessly with anyone, Force Sensitive or not, that I befriend or travel a with. I never noticed it when I was younger as a padawan, but..."

She sighed. "It became difficult not to notice once the surviving Council in my time pointed it out to me, and impossible for me to deny when I looked back on my life."

"Well, what's wrong with that?" he asked, "I think it would be cool to have bonds with my friends! I could have talked with Kitster while I was bored tending to Watto's shop."

Meetra leveled an unimpressed gaze on him. "Bonds are dangerous because they can be abused, especially if you don't realize what you are doing. It's easy to bleed out your desires through a bond, unintentionally influencing others, even driving them to do things they would normally never do. It can also share pain between two individuals if they aren't shielding themselves correctly. With me... I... I leech strength from those I bond with, I can't help it."

"Friends shouldn't have a problem with giving you strength if you need it," said Anakin.

Meetra sighed again. "It is not a matter of need Anakin, you are not listening..."
"I AM listening," countered Anakin, "I'm saying I don't care."

Meetra stared at him helplessly. "You... are one stubborn child."

Anakin gave her a cheeky grin. "Yep!"

Meetra slowly shook her head and then stood up, offering her a hand. "Come. I think the fighting's all over, let's head back."

Anakin accepted the hand, but didn't let go or move. "Meetra, I mean it. I don't mind if you have a bond with me, if you ever need me, I'm willing to help."

They stared at each other silently. Anakin felt a tremor in the air, and watched as Meetra's eyes swirled, a flame of hunger hiding in their depths. Anakin showed no fear in the face of that craving, he challenged it. A slight shiver ran down Meetra's arm, he felt as if she didn't want to, she really didn't want to, as if she were trying to resist a great urging. But... he didn't let go of her hand. He didn't know why, but, he felt, he knew, he had to do this.

She knelt down, leaned forward, and pressed her forehead against his. "W-well, I'm going to be training you anyway. M-might as well. Though, I've never intentionally tried to make or empower a bond before, they just sort of naturally happen."

"I trust you," he said quietly, watching her close her eyes in concentration.

Anakin went still, very still. His heartbeat began to speed up, and his eyes went wide. An assortment of images flashed through his mind, of people and places. Three people stood out the most. He saw an old woman in a jedi cloak that Meetra talked and traveled with frequently. A man with a red lightsaber who looked like he slept with vibroblades, covered in so many wounds it was horrifying to even look at him. Then, the third...

A man.

Dressed in a full body black robe.

Who bore a white mask with two red lines going up from the eyes...

From him, from the memories, he felt a hunger so terrifying he wanted to scream, but couldn't. Only the hunger he had seen in the vision-Meetra's eyes could rival it. Anakin felt like he was drowning in the hunger, in the blackness starting to consume his vision, his entire world...

Then it was over.

They both gave a cry and staggered away from another.

"Kriffing Hutts, I swear I'm going to throttle Gardula if I ever meet her for half the crap she put that boy and his mother through."

Anakin blinked a few times and looked at her; He felt the emptiness recede slightly from her, and dim in her eyes, as if sated for the moment. "Yeah... I don't like her either."

Meetra snorted. "I don't blame you."

"What was that?" he asked, "I saw... people."

Meetra stared at him silently, not speaking aloud, but..., "Those who are bonded through the Force can speak without speaking, share thoughts, share memories."
"Oh," said Anakin, before growing sheepish, "So... you saw me and mom..."

Meetra merely nodded and started walking passed him. "Come."

Anakin felt awkward. His time as a young slave to Gardula was something he never wanted anyone to know about. Yet, aside from wanting to kill Gardula, there was no judgment in her gaze. No pity for their suffering, or condemnation for their status, or disgust on what they had to do to survive. Just grim acknowledgement and acceptance...

He paused his thoughts. Noting a weird sensation in the back of his head. It was like he could... could feel Meetra. He was aware of her without even seeing or hearing her.

"It's because of the bond, I'm going to need to teach you how to shield your mind, otherwise your going to constantly bleed thoughts and emotions to me," came Meetra's voice, "I'll respect your privacy and try to keep my end blocked until you learn."

"Okay, thanks," he said, following her down the walkway.

Meetra paused a way down the walkway. "Anakin. How did you get up here?"

He grinned. "I jumped!"

She turned to look at him, eyebrow raised. "You jumped?"

He nodded. "Ahuh, I had a... feeling that told me I could, like an urge, a whisper. I dunno what it was..."

Meetra raised an eyebrow. "It was the Force, Anakin. It whispers to us all, wraps us in its embrace, and guides us. When you trust in the Force, many things are possible."

She smiled softly. "It took me awhile to remember that when I first got it back."

"Got it back?" he asked.

"It's a long story," was all she said in response.

She diverted the subject and gave him a pointed look, "For your age and lack of training, taking such a leap of faith was risky."

He returned the look. "I thought you needed help."

She sighed and held out a hand. "I'll be doing the jumping for us both this time."

He walked over and she picked him up before leaping down to a walkway below before setting him down. "So Anakin... mind telling me why I felt your presence up in space earlier?"

"Erm... I accidentally activated the autopilot?" he answered sheepishly.

She gave him a not-so-impressed look.

"But it worked out in the end! I blew up the Droid Control Ship!" he said, grinning, "I crash... er... flew right into the hanger and fired my missiles! Barely made it out before the whole ship went."

Meetra paused briefly. "Not bad I suppose for a nine year old. Now all you need is to beat a Sith Lord with your bare hands and you'll color me impressed."
Anakin pouted. "Hey!"

Meetra laughed and shook her head, leading them back into the hanger full of fighter pilots returning from space. Before Anakin could blink he was swarmed and hoisted into the air by the survivors of the space battle, a cheer going through the room. Man, what a day. Sneak into the city, into a ship, blow up a few droids attacking Padme and the Jedi, blow up a space ship, come back to help Meetra, and now he was being tossed into the air and called a hero.

He couldn't help but laugh and grin.

Mom would be proud.

Meetra leaned against the wall near the door to the generator complex, a frown on her face. She didn't know what she had been thinking to confide somewhat in the boy. She had wanted at least an hour or so to calm and collect herself before seeing anyone. Anakin straight up marching to her like that had caught her off-guard in a bad moment. Yet, how he acted surprised her. Whenever she thought of what people would think if they knew what she was, she imagined it would be like the Jedi Council on Dantooine, trying to kill her, condemn her, or strip her of the Force. That fearlessness and act of kindness was... something she didn't have words to express.

She hadn't realized how badly she needed that.

To have confidence in someone who knew, somewhat, what she was, and not alienate her, or try to use her like Kreia did. Not to mention the bond. It had only been a short time since she came back in time, but it felt like forever since she had the active hum of a bond with another sentient being, with a friend, in the back of her mind. Revan, being comatose and drained at the moment, didn't fit the bill at all. To be frank, she could barely detect him.

But having a bond with Anakin settled her. It was a calming, soothing, sating thing that kept the hunger she had awoken against Maul at bay. Without this, she could imagine the hunger slowly growing within her. She wondered, was that how Nihilus fell? To have lost everything and everyone, left only to darkness and hunger? To be frank, she knew very little about the Lord of Hunger, absolutely nothing about his time before he was Sith. Then again, Visas had said he had been born of Malachor, as Meetra herself had been. Perhaps he had been a fallen Jedi, warped by the horror of what the Mass Shadow Generator had done. Honestly, she didn't know. That was the problem, as much as she absolutely dreaded her memories of him, of everyone he had warped with his mere presence, his fate would be hers if she was not careful and did not learn from his mistakes...

And unlike last time...

There wasn't a counter Wound in the Force to fight her if she fell, if she became him. When Nihilus had tried to feed on her, it had devastated him. His greatest power, turned against him. The Galaxy would have nothing but Jedi to fight her, and like Nihilus before her, she would devour them, effortlessly.

She slowly shook her head, despising the morbid thoughts and banishing them. Instead, she focused on Anakin, and then followed his trail through the Force back to the ship he had flown. She walked closed the distance and looked it over. At some point, she was going to need to familiarize herself with this age's technology and ships. That particular learning curve was something that ought to be handled sooner rather than later and...

Her thoughts trailed off as she noticed her reflection on the Naboo Starfighter's shiny hull. She
stared at herself, stunned, and brought up a hand to touch her now much younger looking face.

"Oh kriffing hell," she whispered.

How was she going to explain THIS?

"No, there's no problem Master Yoda, I am now roughly a decade younger because I sucked the life out of a Sith, no big deal," she mocked herself darkly.

No, there was no way she could explain this away. Any lie they'd see right through, and considering that she severely doubted the Jedi's view on the Dark Side and all things and powers born of it, they'd finish what the Council on Dantooine had started. The only way she got out of this, was if she didn't see the Council. Or... if she did have to see them, her hood would have to be...

Oh kriff, where was her cloak?

She glanced around the hanger, before spotting it trampled on the floor, and called it to her with the Force. She put it on and immediately drew her hood up, hiding the sin she had committed. Though... she stole another glance at her face in the reflection on the starfighter hull, bringing up a hand to touch her cheek, her restored youth. Many people often lamented their younger days, of what they would give to have it back again. Here she was, body rejuvenated, youth restored, and all she had done was snuff out an evil to do so. Maybe draining criminals or Sith wouldn't be such a bad...

No.

Meetra forcibly ripped away from the starfighter, glowering at herself. If she hadn't fallen to the Dark Side during the Mandalorian Wars, during her exile, or during the Jedi Purge, she sure as hell wasn't going to do so for so trifle a thing as vanity and the thought of eternal youth. It may be within her power to do so, but such an action was a slippery slope, or rather a plummet off a cliff, that would lead her right into darkness and Sith. Damn, where had that thought even come from?

She banished her misgivings, steeled herself, and threw up her mental walls and masked her Force Signature as much as she could when the Jedi came into view. Along with Queen Amidala, they lead the Trade Federation's leadership at gunpoint into the hanger. She hadn't expected otherwise, a single Jedi could have handled that part of the mission with the Queen's aid. Against two? The Trade Federation's guards didn't stand a chance.

Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan walked over to her, the Master eyed her drawn hood curiously for a moment before he spoke, "The Sith has been dealt with?"

Meetra nodded. "He's dead."

Obi-Wan frowned. "Strange that the darkness around this place didn't change much. It has diminished a little, we thought perhaps you had knocked him out and captured him."

Perceptive. It hadn't changed much since she had committed an act so foul and dark. Not to mention, she had fed off Maul, his darkness still lingered inside of her, giving her energy and life.

"One does not simply capture a Lord of the Sith," said Meetra dryly, "Even if he was nothing more than a tool."

"Tools can be handled and managed," commented Qui-Gon.

"Not when they are sharpened to a point when they are dangerous for any hand but the one that
crafted them to wield," said Meetra before motioning to the hole in her tunic and lying, "It was far closer than it should have been. There was little choice in what had to be done, if I hadn't cut loose I'd be dead."

Qui-Gon frowned. "So he was stronger than you initially believed?"

"Stronger? No. More skilled? Yes," said Meetra, "Though... I will confess that being in this time has left me..."

She struggled to find the words. She couldn't outright say what the issue was. That she was cut off from all of her Force Bonds, hadn't fed off death since Malachor V, and was substantially weaker for it. She wasn't close to as strong than the history they knew about her made her out to be. She ought to have manhandled Maul, instead he nearly killed her. Would have killed her if not for her being a Wound in the Force.

"Unbalanced?" offered Qui-Gon.

Meetra nodded, taking the offered way out. "Yes. I was not in my top form for that fight, not even close."

She closed her eyes. "I doubt I will be for some time."

"Do you believe you could handle the Sith Master?" asked Obi-Wan cautiously.

"No," she answered immediately, "And that's without even knowing anything about this Lord. Each and every Dark Lord of the Sith is different, has their own strengths and weaknesses. Right now I... don't believe I'd survive long enough in a fight to figure them out."

Qui-Gon nodded slowly. "Wise to acknowledge your limitations. Well, we ought to comm the Council and..."

"I am in no mood and have no energy to deal with the Jedi Council at the moment," interrupted Meetra.

Obi-Wan gawked a little at her, Qui-Gon merely had a hint of a smile play across his face. "I'll handle them then. I'll see if the Queen would be willing to loan you a room to go get some rest."

Meetra gave him an appreciative smile. "Thanks."

Ten minutes later, Meetra was escorted to a guest room in the palace. She laid down on a bed, and sighed heavily, staring up at the ceiling before allowing herself to slip away into a trance...

Darth Sidious sat reading at his desk in his room on a starship currently bound for Naboo. Maul had failed as expected, leaving his Master furious. Foolishly, the task had been thrust on him to deal with the Exile. His Master had given him every scrap of knowledge on the Exile and the history surrounding her. He was rather delighted to learn she had been an acquaintance of Darth Revan, well, Jedi Revan at the time. He doubted she would have knowledge of the man when he was a Sith. A shame, to his knowledge, Darth Bane had been influenced by the teachings of Revan when he created the Rule of Two. He would have liked to have learned about such an important piece of Sith history from one who had encountered him.

At the moment, his interest was in what little writings survived of the one called Darth Treya, one who had traveled with the Exile. Oh yes, most of it was ramblings of a woman he took to be slightly mad. But even in madness, there was some ounce of truth.
It is said that the Force has a will, it had a destiny for us all. I wield it, but it uses us all, and that is abhorrent to me. Because I hate the Force. I hate that it seems to have a will, that it would control us to achieve some measure of balance, when countless lives are lost. But in her, in the Exile, I see the potential to see the Force die, to turn away from it's will. And that is what pleases me. She is beautiful to me. A dead spot in the Force, an emptiness in which it's will might be denied. In time, perhaps I will tell her this, when she comes for me at Malachor V.

Sideous slowly shook his head. Fool woman. The Force IS power. To throw that power away out of pure spite was folly. As for it's will... what did the Sith care for any will but their own? He would dominate and bend the Force to his will as so many Sith had done before him. Still, he did not turn past her words, he read the section again, contemplative. Was it actually possible for the Force in it's entirety to be destroyed? The Exile, having lived without it for a decade, proved that it could be possible to survive without the Force flowing through a person. Though, would it require all things everywhere to be turned into Wounds in the Force? The Force, and the lack of it, did not coexist. Non-Force Sensitives still had a tiny bit of the force within them after all.

Was that even possible without all life being exterminated? Or so much life that the Galaxy might as well be considered empty and barren?

Not that he honestly cared about life other than his own, but one could not rule a galaxy if there was nothing in it to rule.

He paused his musings when his holoterminal lit up. He pulled up his hood and slowly walked over, answering it.

He took one look at the sniveling worm at the other end, pathetic, and yet one of the best hackers in the Galaxy, and immediately demanded, "Is it done?"

"Y-yes Lord Sideous, t-the worm has been planted within Damask's systems," stammered the hacker.

Sideous nodded, pleased, but he did not show it. "If everything occurs as I have requested, you will be rewarded, as promised, with five percent of Demask's vast account."

Which was more than enough to let a sentient live in luxury for several lifetimes he mused. He should have only offered one percent, but the deal was made, and he'd rather not throw away a very useful resource simply for monetary gain.

The raw greed in the hacker's eyes was palpable. "You are most generous Lord Sideous."

Sideous waved a dismissive hand. "You will await further instructions, and keep your head down until I call on you, am I clear?"

The hacker bowed. "Yes my lord."

Sideous twitched a finger and the terminal shut off with the Force. Slowly, a malicious grin spread across his face. The worm that had been planted within his Master's personal isolated network would go through and eliminate all none-public records and contact between 'Palpatine' and 'Hugo Demask'. All files that mentioned 'Darth Sideous' would be replaced with 'Darth Maul'. It was a bit more complex than just a simple name change in that certain arrangements would need to be... reworded or made to disappear, but the result would still be the same. Effectively, Sideous was going to completely disappear, and when he allowed the Jedi to follow a crumb trail leading them to Darth Plagueis and they killed him, he would be left completely unchecked. They would believe the Sith extinct, and when the time came, they would be taken completely off-guard.
If he was lucky, his Master would also kill half the Jedi Council before he died.

He cackled to himself before returning to his readings. The Exile had been under the influence of this 'Darth Treya' for some time during her journey. He wondered where she stood in regards to the Jedi, what her own personal views were. He doubted she was loyal to the Jedi, but was most likely somewhat open to working with them. The bitterness of being exiled though... that in itself was a smudge of darkness on her soul that he could have used to start her path down the Dark Side...

If she weren't a Wound in the Force, he might have considered her as a potential future apprentice.

Unfortunately, she was what she was. Unless he wanted to risk seeing if the Galaxy could exist without the Force, she would eventually need to be disposed of. Not however before he used her as much as he could. It was a shame really, if he thought a Wound in the Force could be healed without death, he might try to get the Jedi to do it, and claim her for himself afterwords. Alas...

For now, he would watch and wait. Learn as much as he could of the Exile while she was still a sentient being, before the hunger took her. He had a few plans in motion, and if he could turn her, and then her eventual hunger against the Jedi before the onslaught of the wars he was planning were to begin...

They wouldn't stand a chance against the darkness to come.

Chapter End Notes

Meetra's Age: In Wookieepedia, it says Meetra was a Padawan at the start of the Mandalorian Wars. So, roughly age 13~ or so, maybe less. The Mandalorian Wars were sixteen years long, so, roughly 29 years old at the end. She wandered in exile for roughly a decade, so roughly 39~ years old when KOTOR 2 started. I'm not sure cannon-wise how long KOTOR 2 actually lasted, but it was I assume at least a year, leaving her at roughly 40 years old.
A New Start

Meetra kept mostly to herself for the next few days, even dodging the parade announcing peace between the Gungan's and the people of Naboo. To be frank, she had so little downtime since it all began at the Peragus Mining Facility. To be able to just lay down, or sit and relax, was a welcome thing. She usually only got brief snippets of rest during hyperspace travel between worlds on the Ebon Hawk. Oh how she missed that ship...

Of course, the downside of such rest, was that it left her little to do but think during that time. "What a mess my life's been..."

The Mandalorian Wars, her wandering and aimless exile, then the Jedi Purge, searching after Revan and finding a Sith Empire, and now traveling four-thousand years into the future where, lo and behold, there's still Sith she has to deal with. She rubbed her forehead tiredly and lazily laid in bed, staring up at the ceiling. It wasn't going to last much longer, at least not without imposing upon the Naboo, which she didn't want to do. She was expected by the Jedi sometime this morning, but really didn't feel like moving. She'd have to leave at some point, she had promised to train Anakin, and she wanted to see this 'new' Galaxy for herself, see what had changed since her time. Qui-Gon had thankfully dealt with the Council and gotten their 'approval' for Meetra to train Anakin. Though, having to come to somewhat know the maverick Jedi, it had probably been one heck of a stubborn argument on both sides.

A knock came at her door and Anakin's voice shouted in excitedly, "Meetra! Meetra! Come outside!"

She resisted the urge to groan. "What is it Anakin?"

"We got a ship!" exclaimed Anakin.

Meetra blinked a few times before getting up and going to the door, staring down at a hyper Anakin. "A ship?"

He nodded. "It's so wizard! The Jedi Council apparently got it for us out of the Archives or something."

Meetra's eyes furrowed. "The Archives...?"

He grabbed her arms and started tugging. "C'mon!"

She let the boy drag her along out of the palace, noticing the amused glances the staff shot them. Oh and weren't the handmaiden's the worst, giggling at them. Meetra at least managed to get her hood up in time as they ran into Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan standing outside the palace.

"There is our reclusive 'Sith Killer'," said Obi-Wan with good humor.

Meetra raised an eyebrow. "Sith Killer?"

Obi-Wan shrugged. "Apparently you are the talk of the temple from what I've heard from my friends. They keep calling and pestering me for information about you."

Meetra's eyes furrowed. "The temple as a whole knows of me?"

Qui-Gon stepped in. "They know that a Jedi slew a Sith, but they are not privileged to the details."
The Council thought it for the best that the truth of who you were was kept under wraps."

Meetra nodded. "My thanks. Now, what's this Anakin says about a ship out of the archives...?"

A small smile played across the Master's lips. "A gift from the temple some would say. Personally, I'd say it's simply giving back something that was yours, come."

That was a curious statement. She followed him through Theed and to it's spaceport, down into a hanger bay. She was rather surprised, and a little anxious, to see both Master Yoda, Master Windu, and even Queen Amidala along with an escort of handmaidens and guards waiting for them. But what truly took her breath away...

"Impossible," she whispered, her eyes going wide as she took in the ship before her.

It was the Ebon Hawk.

Master Yoda wobbled over, his glimmer stick thudding against the ground. "Said to have been recovered from Dromund Kaas at the end of the Great Galactic War, it was. Into the archives, it was placed. A relic of the Jedi, from ancient times."

Master Windu joined them. "We thought it appropriate to return your ship to you. It has been refurbished, it's technology and build updated to more recent specs."

Meetra didn't respond, still stunned at the sight of it. Truthfully, it hadn't been that long since she had last seen it with her own eyes. But the very idea that the Hawk had survived for four-thousand years...

"Thank you," was all she could whisper, "There's... so many memories with this ship..."

WINDU nodded. "It is the least we can do for your aid with the Sith..."

A slight frown played across his face. "...and you offering to take on young Skywalker."

A wry smile played across Meetra's face. Aww, he had done so well to play the diplomatic act, but there it was, the 'displeased Jedi Councilor look' she was so familiar with. She highly doubted this was what Mace Windu actually wanted to do. Oh well, she wouldn't call him out on it.

Qui-Gon spoke up, "We left a pair of training sabers along with a number of holo-programs to help with his lessons."

Meetra nodded at him. "It's appreciated."

Queen Amidala stepped forward. "We have supplied your ship with a few weeks worth of food, water, and fuel for wherever your journey takes you. We would not mind offering more, but, Master Windu says it's not the Jedi way to..."

"Master Windu is correct, it's not the Jedi way to accept rewards," said Meetra before giving him an amused look, "But I personally won't look a gift horse in the mouth."

A very displeased look crossed Windu's face. "Surik..."

Meetra crossed her arms. "With due respect Master Windu. I've been operating outside the Jedi Order and it's ways for awhile now. The real world outside of the confines of the temple does not allow for such selflessness. Especially since I will not be solely relying on the 'good will' of the Jedi and the temple in order to be able to function."
She narrowed her eyes. "I will help the Jedi, but I will not be bound to their rules in preventing me from doing what needs to be done, not again."

There was a heavy, awkward, and uncomfortable silence that filled the air.

"Well, such hostility between Jedi is certainly surprising," came an interested voice.

Meetra turned her head to see Senator Palpatine, and oddly an honor guard escorting him approaching them, "Senator."

"Chancellor actually," corrected Palpatine, "Vallorum was... ousted... by a vote of no confidence, making way for a new, stronger Chancellor."

Meetra was taken briefly by surprise before turning and giving a brief bow. "Chancellor."

Palpatine waved his hand, giving her a warm look. "You my dear never need bow or acknowledge me as such. While many here played an important part, you were the one who slew the Sith. I was reading up on what information is available of the history of the Sith on my way here, for you to have slew such a beast, you must be rather proud of yourself."

Anakin shot her a beaming proud look.

Meetra on the other hand was dismissive, "If you say so."

Palpatine was briefly taken aback. "You don't believe such an act is worthy of acknowledgement?"

Meetra frowned, wondering how to phrase this without giving herself away. "I've fought other dark side users before. While this 'Darth Maul' was skilled with a lightsaber, that's all he had to show. He was a tool more than he was a Sith. The only reason the fight was even half-way close was because of..."

She hesitated briefly, "A personal fault."

Palpatine gave her a curious look. "I see."

Palpatine smiled. "Well, since you actually have a human sense of modesty and realism rather that the abnormal selflessness of the Jedi, I'm certain Naboo would be willing to at least offer a bit of a credit and equipment reward."

He briefly turned to the Queen who nodded, before he turned back. "Do you have anything specific in mind? Don't be afraid to request whatever you need, you did help to save our entire planet, and since the Jedi as a whole request nothing, you may find more offerings are available to you."

Meetra was a bit taken back by the generosity, but she wasn't one to turn it down, "Medical supplies, tool and repair kits, some security spikes and tunnelers, a few spare sets of clothing, perhaps a few weapons like a blaster or Vibroblade for Anakin until I teach him to use a lightsaber or for others who may join me, grenades, oh, and some personal shields I suppose a long with any kind of available upgrades to the Hawk after I look her over."

Palpatine raised an eyebrow. "Well, you're certainly not afraid to ask, I can respect that. Though, with that list, are you looking to start a war with someone Master Jedi?"

Meetra's lips twitched in an attempt to suppress a smile, it wouldn't have been the first time. "Wouldn't dream of it Chancellor."
There were a few unimpressed looks from the Jedi, even Qui-Gon seemed a bit apprehensive, "That's a rather militaristic kind of request."

Meetra merely shrugged. She had been a general during the later half of the Mandalorian Wars and fought through the Jedi Purge, what did they expect?

"Well, personal shield generators is a rather odd request, such things haven't been commonplace within the Republic since before the Ruusan Reformation," said Palpatine curiously, "These days such things usually go into military grade battle droids of private companies. We most likely won't be able to get you any on Naboo."

Blast. Those things had been commonplace in her time. Guess she'd have to be a bit more careful in a fight without shields to fallback on.

"That's alright," she said.

"As for the rest, I'm sure we can have everything gathered within a few hours, the Trade Federation certainly left enough parts and weapons here from their droids," said Palpatine with a hint of disdain.

Meetra nodded to him, and then to the Queen. "I appreciate it."

Palpatine gave a curt nod back before turning to the Queen. "Shall we be on our way? There is much we need to discuss."

The Queen briefly turned to the Jedi. "Until we meet again Master Jedi."

"Indeed," said Palpatine, his eyes focusing on Meetra, "I intend to watch your career with great interest, if you find yourself in need of something or simply wish to talk, you can call my office or come see me."

With that Queen and the Chancellor left with their escorts a moment later, leaving the Jedi alone.

Meetra frowned, her eyes trailing the disappearing Chancellor. Her gratitude declined quickly and turned to wariness.

"First lesson Anakin," she said, "Never trust a politician. Any of them that are that kind, that willing to give away gifts, and want constant contact are out to use you."

"He seems like a nice guy," said Anakin with uncertainty.

"'Seems' being the appropriate word," she muttered.

Yoda eyed Meetra calmly. "So wary are you. Hmm? Anticipation of treachery, of strife and battles, you have?"

Meetra frowned. "I'd rather not have to worry about it but trouble has a habit of finding me no matter where I go, so I'd rather be prepared."

Yoda nodded slowly. "Better times than the time you came from, it is. Not as dark, but challenging still. Wish you the best of luck the Jedi do. If need of you we have, contact you we will."

She licked her lips. "Has... Revan woke up yet?"

Yoda shook his head. "No, a deep sleep he rests in. Gone to him I have, drained he is."
"Our healers have little effect, it's as if any energy we put into him is drained and drawn elsewhere," said Mace, "We're uncertain as to why."

Meetra frowned intently. Drained and drawn elsewhere? Was it because of her? The bond?

"He did stabilize at least shortly after you, Master Jinn, and Padawan Kenobi left to return to Naboo," offered Mace, "We can keep him alive while he is in the coma. We will keep you updated on if his status changes."

If he stabilized after she left, perhaps she should stay away from him, allow him to recover without being close enough to draw from him.

Meetra nodded. "Alright, thank you."

"Meetra," said Qui-Gon, stepping forward.

She turned to him. "Yes?"

"I have my own troubles and outlooks in regards to the Jedi Order," he began, "But, I still work with my fellows. Live within the moment, not the past. If you need our help, don't be afraid to ask. We will be more than willing to offer it. We've put the frequency of the Jedi Temple in the communications systems of your ship, and I've put my own comm code in if you need my advice on anything."

Meetra merely nodded, neither accepted nor denying the offer.

"Until next time then, may the Force be with you," offered Qui-Gon, followed by the other Jedi.

With that, the Jedi left, leaving Meetra and Anakin alone in the hanger.

"So this is your ship?" asked Anakin.

"Well, it was Revan's ship before it was mine, and before him I think a smuggler owned it," said Meetra.

"A smuggler ship? Wizard!" exclaimed Anakin, running for the ramp.

Meetra smiled softly. "Children..."

Her smile left her, and an intense frown formed when she entered the ship. It was the same, but not the same. She recognized the hallways, the structures, the rooms, but everything was different. The sheen of the metal that had coated the interior was replaced. It's rugged patchwork interior replaced with something sleek and new. The center room of the ship was both condensed and expanded. The holo-map was smaller, but sleeker. Where before there had been a few chairs scattered around, there was now a couch of all things, with a table and chairs on the other side of the room, liking a living area. The chamber where she had found originally found HK-47 had been changed into a small kitchen-like area with storage compartments. The two dormitory wings, retrofitted and expanded up, where before it was three beds to each room, now it was six. The medical room was a bit bigger, enough to fit two medical tables in instead of it's previous one. The engine room, she didn't recognize what the hell was installed there, it's drive so alien to what she used to know. The storage bay, where she had set up her swoop-bike, had been retrofitted with a number of containers full of preserved food and water, with more than enough room for other things, it's secret compartment long since removed to make for more space. The security room was smaller and more condensed, fewer consoles and screens than she remembered. The bridge was somewhat the same, the map of the Galaxy was condensed to one screen instead of many. There were a few more
seats in the bridge area than before, and the controls were utterly unfamiliar to her.

The outer hull of the Ebon Hawk was deceptive. It... it was like the heart and soul of the ship had been ripped out and replaced.. the one consistency she had back in her time, her home, gone...

"This ship is so wizard!" came Anakin's gleeful voice, running along the halls.

He slowed and came up behind her. "Meetra? Is something wrong?"

"It's... not as I remember it," she said softly.

She brushed past him and went for the left dormitory, in her minds eye, she could see Kreia sitting on the floor, as she always did. Saw her rise and turn to face her.

,Yes? Have you come with questions?

Her voice echoed in Meetra's mind, but, that's all it was, an echo. The image disappeared from her mind, and she felt... awfully empty...

"Meetra? You... feel cold," came Anakin's uncertain voice.

Meetra shook her head and cleared her throat. "Sorry, I should have been shielding myself."

Anakin crossed his arms. "What's wrong?"

"As I said earlier, this place has a lot of memories," she said softly, "Come, let's see if we can't figure this ship out. I'm about four-thousand years behind on technology."

Anakin frowned, and opened his mouth, as if to ask something before closing it and shaking his head. "Okay, I'll see if I can't figure it out for us. I was working in Watto's shop for awhile, even helped repair a few ships."

They spent the better part of the next few hours inspecting each console in the Ebon Hawk, and even getting someone from the spaceport to come in and help explain things to them. The equipment she requested was delivered, along with a surprise.

One of the Queen's handmaiden's came to the ship with a familiar looking blue droid. "The Queen considered that an astromech droid could serve you well, and this one seemed rather fond of your little companion.

"R2!" said Anakin with delight, rushing over to lay a hand on the droid, "You wanna come with us?"

The droid beeped and whistled, making Anakin grin. "All right!"

For a moment, in her mind, the droid changed to T3-M4. She closed her eyes, closed off her end of the bond with Anakin to keep the pain of loss from spilling through, and shook her head. She... she missed that droid. She had been secretly hoping it might have been on the Hawk, but no, T3 came with her and Revan to face the Emperor, the droid had probably been turned into scrap.

She opened her eyes and cleared her throat. "Welcome aboard R2. I could use a new little droid friend after my old one."

The droid turned it's dome and whistled.

"Yes, you have big shoes to fill," she offered.
The droid beeped and whistled.

"Perhaps I'll tell you about him another time," she answered.

"Oh wow, you understand binary too?" said Anakin.

Meetra smirked. "I understand a great deal of different languages."

Anakin hesitated before saying, "E chu ta."

Meetra's eyes went wide. "Anakin Skywalker!"

Anakin's face turned red. "I didn't mean it! Just wanted to see if..."

"You could get away with swearing in other languages?" she scolded. "Not going to happen mister."

"Aww," whined Anakin.

The handmaiden laughed before speaking, "Well, you are free to stay or leave at whim. You two will always be welcome on Naboo."

Meetra nodded. "I might take Naboo up on that offer from time to time, it's always nice to have a place to come back to to rest."

The handmaiden gave a brief smile before departing.

Meetra walked slowly to the center room. "Hmm."

"So... can we start that training stuff right away?" said Anakin, "Didn't mister Qui-Gon say something about training sabers!?"

"Slow down Anakin," she replied, "You are no where near ready for that yet."

"Aww," said Anakin, a pout playing across his face.

"We will start on training when we figure out where we are going to go," said Meetra, "Traveling in hyperspace is the perfect time to train."

She turned to R2. "Well, make yourself at home and familiarize yourself with the ship."

R2 whistled and took off.

"So, where to?" asked Anakin.

"I... honestly have no idea where to start," admitted Meetra, "It's a whole new Galaxy for me."

"Hmm," pondered Anakin, "Well, we can just fly around and look for people to help, right?"

Meetra snorted. "It's a bit tougher than just 'flying around'. I'm assuming things in this day and age work somewhat like they did back in my time before the Mandalorian Wars. Jedi don't just 'impose' their help on people, we cannot go where we are uninvited and force people to accept our aid."

Anakin gave her an incredulous look. "Force? Who wouldn't want the help of a Jedi?"

"You'd be surprised," she muttered.
"People in the Outer Rim would love a Jedi's help, most of us... well... me and my friends back on Tatooine dreamed about Jedi, coming to help and free us," admitted Anakin.

She gave him a sad smile. "They should have Anakin. Four thousand years in the future and slavery is still a problem. You'd think the Galaxy would have moved on from such a cruel and criminal thing."

Anakin merely shrugged and averted his eyes. Meetra caught a wave of anxiety from him.

Meetra stared at the boy, thinking. She remembered what Anakin had said before they left to return to Naboo...

"Jedi are heroes," said Anakin, "They go out, do good, help people and save their lives, they're famous. A Jedi is someone I wanna be so I can do good, and when I'm strong and famous enough, I can go home, free all the slaves, and make my mom proud of me."

Meetra did a light probe of his mind, searching only on the outer layer, not wanting to introduce to deep. Lo and behold, his thoughts were exactly on freeing slaves, wanting to broach the subject, but not wanting to beg or plead. Specifically though, his thoughts desperately remained on one person...

"Anakin... your mother is still a slave, isn't she?" asked Meetra softly.

Anakin nodded, biting his lips. "She is..."

Well, that wouldn't do. There was no way the boy could properly focus and balance himself with that kind of worry on his mind.

"How much does a slave cost in credits?" she asked.

There was a brief flicker of hope in his eyes before it was dashed. "Republic Credits aren't worth bantha poodoo in the Outer Rim, especially in Hutt Space."

Meetra frowned. "Well... that's certainly changed from my time. Might be a bit of a problem. Do you know of a place that exchanges credits for whatever currency is used in Hutt Space?"

Anakin scoffed. "Not at a ratio that isn't thievery."

"Of course not," muttered Meetra.

She crossed her arms in thought before a slight smile crossed her face, an idea forming. "Guess we will have to work for it then."

"Work?" he asked.

"I'm sure we can find the odd job here or there, bounty hunt or scavenge if need be," she said, "We work, we save up our money, and we can buy your mother's freedom probably in a few weeks to a month, depending on how long it takes us to find work."

Anakin's eyes went wide. "Y-you mean it?"

She nodded. "I do."

Anakin practically threw himself at her in a tight hug. "Thank you!"

She smiled down at him and ruffled his hair. "I'm more than happy to help your mother. I'd help all
the slaves if I could, but, that's beyond one person."

Anakin acted as if she hadn't said the last half. "Well, let's get going! We'll start with mom, soon, we'll have all of Tatooine freed!"

Her lips twitched with amusement. Kids, dreamt big and heard whatever they wanted to hear, tuning everything else out.

"I suppose," was all Meetra allowed, "I guess we'll start with somewhere I'm somewhat familiar with in the Outer Rim."

"Where?" asked Anakin.

"Nar Shaddaa," was her answer...
It was funny, in a way, that four thousand years later, Nar Shaddaa really hadn't changed. Sure she didn't recognize any one specific building, and the refugee sector probably didn't exist anymore, but... the aged structures were all the same. Remade and rebuilt at some point, only to be decaying once more. Like a miniature Coruscant, only smelling worse. Hell, she could probably find an aged Jedi Master hiding out here too if she had to guess. Hopefully the Exchange had died out at some point, though, some other criminal enterprise probably stepped in if they did.

Either way, she didn't want to be here long. Come in, pick up a job or two, and get out. To that end, she had switched out of her robes and into a more casual tunic the Naboo had placed within the ship's supplies. Her lightsaber hidden under a coat she wore over it all. She had learned long ago announcing aloud to all the world that one was a Jedi didn't always lead to favorable results.

She walked down the Ebon Hawk's ramp onto a junk filled landing pad with Anakin at her side. She could see a few of the docking authorities talking in the distance. While she waited for them to come...

She turned and knelt down. "Anakin. While we are on Nar Shaddaa, you are to stay at my side at all times. Crime was rampant here in my time, I severely doubt this has changed, and a child all by themselves..."

"Would probably get nabbed and resold into slavery or worse," said Anakin quietly.

She nodded solemnly. "As much as I don't want to say it, yes."

Anakin moved away and looked over the edge of the landing pad, down far below. "This place feels... weird."

"Weird?" asked Meetra, moving to stand beside him.

"I... couldn't really feel things like this before you had me do all that meditation stuff on the way here," he admitted, "But, I feel things around me, in the air. This place is... there's so much going on here. It's like everything is moving so fast, it feels so alive, but so tense and desperate and frantic at the same time."

Meetra stared at him silently. She remembered, so clearly, what Anakin now echoed.

She closed her eyes, called up a memory, a lesson Kreia had given her, and spoke, "What you feel is Nar Shaddaa itself, the true Nar Shaddaa. Strip away all the metal and machines, lay the currents of the Force bear, and what is left?"

Anakin thought for a moment. "The... people?"

Meetra tilted her head. "Perhaps, but, it is their struggle to live I refer to. Listen to it closer, and tell me what you feel."

Anakin sat down and let his legs dangle over the edge, closing his eyes, slowly, he raise a finger and began to point at different buildings in a distance. "Greed. Someone just scammed someone, badly. Pain, I think someone got mugged down there. Happiness, desperate happiness, someone had been riding on something panning out, a trade deal I think, and it did, it really just made their day."
He frowned. "Death... I think someone just got killed... but there was nothing... personal about it?"

"Probably a bounty hunter," she mused in response, "Keep on going."

And he did.

Slowly, as Anakin continued to pick one emotion or action off at a distance after another, Meetra found herself growing more and more astounded. How in the world could a nine year old boy, who had barely started his training, be able to delve into and maintain such a deep connection to the Force? She had expected it when he was trained, but... this was something else.

That he had the concentration to do this was perhaps one of the more surprising facts. She wouldn't have expected him to be able to sit still and focus on meditation nor communing with the Force. He wasn't any as a young boy should be. She had picked up on a change in him shortly after they had left Naboo, an inner peace and determination that he hadn't had before. Did his mother's upcoming freedom, following his dream to free slaves, really have such a huge effect on him?

"...and there's this weird feeling I really don't get in one of those upper rooms," said Anakin, pointing towards a skyscraper, "It kind of feels like love, only different, more urgent and..."

"Erm, that's enough observations," said Meetra, a bit embarrassed.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I'll explain when your older," said Meetra, "Or maybe your Mother will. Anyway, what does all of this tell you?"

Anakin frowned. "That I really wouldn't want to live here?"

Meetra laughed. "I don't think I would either, but still, not what I'm looking for."

Anakin looked a little frustrated. "I don't get it."

She sat down next to him. "Think Anakin. What does what you feel tell you about this world?"

"Oh. Um. That it's dangerous here?" he said.

Meetra nodded. "Go on."

"That... the way people struggle, it's kind of like Tatooine, only different," he said, "Back home, it was a slow kind of fight, where people struggled over time to make ends meet and slowly withered away. This? This is fast."

Meetra nodded. "In this place, lives can be made or lost in an instant."

"Yeah, it's a good warning I guess," said Anakin.

Meetra smiled and poked his nose with a finger. "And that was the lesson. To tap into the Force like that, find that feeling, it takes but a split second to take it in, and it can prepare you, warn you of what's to come. It lets you get a read on the place your walking into before anything even happens. So, feeling this sensation, what do you think we should do, or shouldn't do?"

"Umm... we should keep our heads down and not draw attention?" he guessed.

"You learn quickly," she complimented, "We're just two unknown people in a crime infested world. Trying to fight that and drawing attention to ourselves is by doing so is asking for trouble."
"But... shouldn't Jedi try to stop bad guys?" asked Anakin.

Meetra smiled sadly. "We'll, I'm not exactly a Jedi. Regardless, we can't fix everyone's problems Anakin, my... teacher... taught me that. Trying to do so can leave them weaker, or even get them hurt for all our efforts."

Anakin gave her a bewildered look. "How?"

Meetra smiled sadly and fished out a credit out of her pocket. "The first time I came here, a man down on his luck asked for a few credits from me. I gave it to him, and do you know what happened?"

"What?" asked Anakin.

"Just down the street, he was mugged and beaten for the few credits I gave him," said Meetra sadly.

"But... that's not your fault!" said Anakin.

"Isn't it?" she asked, "I gave him something for free, that he did not earn. I elevated him above others with such an act. I made him a target by doing so."

Anakin's eyes furrowed, a crease across his forehead, confusion mixed with disbelief and apprehension crossed his face. "I... never thought helping someone could hurt them..."

She held up a finger. "That's not to say that you shouldn't help people. If someone's about to get murdered in cold blood in front of me, you better believe I'll intervene. The point is, we can't focus on every little need people have, and sometimes, we can't even make big drastic changes with severe risk. Let's say we could wipe out whatever major crime group controls this moon, what would happen?"

Anakin crossed his arms. "I'm not even gonna guess, just tell me."

Meetra wagged a finger. "That's lazy Anakin. Think."

Anakin said nothing, tilting his head in thought.

Meetra glanced away briefly. "Docking authorities are heading this way. Think on it, after I get back from dealing with them, tell me what you come up with."

Meetra stood up and walked over, a bit amused to find that her second time on Nar Shaddaa she was once again greeted by a Toydarian. Though, unlike last time this one had a bodyguard, a Trandoshan.

The Todarian spoke in Huttese. "Hey! What's with landing on my busy pad all the sudden like this! You're not scheduled."

Meetra scoffed. "Right. I'm not unwilling to pay, but I'm not going to be swindled. This pad is a dump, worse than the last one I landed on coming here. I'm surprised you can afford enough to pay a bodyguard off income from the money you make here. I doubt you get more than a ship a week."
The Todarian stared at her for a moment before laughing and turning to his bodyguard. "Ah! I like this one eh? Actually got a spine unlike most of the deadbeats I have to deal with!"

The bodyguard grunted, eyes briefly sizing Meetra up, but said nothing.

The Todarian turned back to her. "Pad isn't my only income, I rent out a few houses. Tell you what, I got a few deadbeats who won't pay up this months rent..."

"I'm not roughing anyone up. I'm willing to pay in Republic Credits, or do some work on your pad, it needs it," she mused.

The Todarian considered it. "Eh, a bit of a sprucing up might make it more attractive I suppose. Yeah, clean the place up and I'll let your ship stay for a few days."

"Deal," said Meetra before changing the subject, "Do you know a place I could look for work for those few days? I'm looking to get out of Republic Credits."

The Todarian laughed. "Want to stay out of Republic space for awhile eh? Got some trouble following you?"

Meetra merely smiled. "Not quite."

"Eh, aside from the cleanup here, I have a few jobs you could do for some Wupiupi, you any good with repairs?" asked the Todarian.

"Possibly, what do you need?" she asked.

"Cameras are on the frits, think someone messed with them. I swear someone's been using my pad at night without paying," said the Todarian.

"I could take a look at them," said Meetra.

If she couldn't figure it out, she was sure Anakin might be able to.

"Have a few dysfunctional turrets too," said the Todarian, turning to point to two crusty looking turrets at the end of the pad, "Might as well be decorations at the moment."

"Could fix those," mused Meetra.

"Do that for me and I'll give you a good chunk of Druggat," said the Todarian, "Afterwards I suppose I could direct you to a few places that could get you work. The Bounty Hunter's guild if your looking for a thrill, the Black Sun crime syndicate is always looking for members if you're willing to get your hands dirty, or just a general employment office, people post odds and ends jobs all the time there."

"Third option would be good," said Meetra, storing the name 'Black Sun' away in the back of her mind as something to watch out for.

"Alright I'll check back in a few hours, make the place look nice for me, eh?" said the Todarian.

Meetra nodded, turned, and walked back over to Anakin. "So? What have you come up with?"

Anakin had an unhappy look on his face. "Well, I thought back to Tatooine. I always hated the Hutts, but, if you were to kill them all, it would be a mess. There would be all sorts of people trying to take over after them."
Meetra nodded. "Wipe out crime, and it merely creates a power vacuum. There will always be someone looking to move up and take control, and that someone who comes up after the Hutts could be far worse. Not to mention it would cause a huge disruption to the way of life on that particular planet, enough to potential cause some real harm to those merely trying to survive."

Anakin sighed. "But... it's all wrong... slavery, big crime, it's all bad."

"I'm not saying it isn't," said Meetra, "But changing such things takes more than brute force, more than raw power."

She worked over in her mind how to say it, thinking back to words Kreia had spoken to her long ago. "Changing a system like this would require heavy manipulation. Propelling selected events into motion. Through teaching, through example and conviction, showing a better path and convincing people of it. Beyond that, as my teacher once said to me, 'the greatest of victories are not manipulations at all, but simply awakening others to the truth of what you believe in.' Simply put, getting others to believe in what you believe in."

Anakin thought for a moment. "Well, slaves don't like being enslaved, they all believe it's wrong."

"But are they all willing to act on that belief?" she questioned.

Anakin glanced down. "No, most are happy just to survive. They don't want to risk dying. Having a slave chip activated is a horrible way to go."

Meetra nodded sadly. "Even beyond that, convincing the Hutts to change their way of life would be a colossal effort all in it's own."

"Are you saying it's hopeless?" asked Anakin quietly.

"No, just that it would be a lifelong commitment, and might even be a problem that you couldn't fix even in your lifespan," said Meetra, "But, clear the path for others to follow, make enough of a difference for people to want it, and other's may take up your mantle long after you're gone."

Anakin rubbed his forehead. "You're making my head hurt."

Meetra laughed and ruffled his hair. "Don't worry about it. It took me months of traveling with my teacher to get a grasp of what I'm saying now. Come on, I got us a few little jobs to do."

For the next few hours, the two of them worked on the landing pad. Clearing away junk, and at Anakin's suggestion taking any spare parts from the scrap that might be remotely useful onto the Ebon Hawk instead of throwing it away. The next part, Meetra became the learner, watching Anakin make a quick pass over the turrets and cameras. Meetra herself had skill in repairs and computer use, just a few thousand years out of date. She hoped by watching Anakin she could bridge the gap and bridge her experience into use. He fixed the first turret, she managed to fix the second following his example, and they both tackled the camera system. Unfortunately, while they could replace wires and parts, neither of them knew how to program, had to end up dragging R2-D2 out to apply the finishing touches.

Within the hour, the trio had their pay, locked the Hawk, and were off to the employment office. Meetra kept her eyes open as they moved, having both Anakin and R2 infront of her where she could keep her eyes on her. This place really hadn't changed, at all, in four thousand years. Spice dealers with twitching addicts craving their fixes. Prostitutes trying to lure in customers. She kept a hand firmly on Anakin's shoulder when they came across their first beat-down, a poor soul taking a baton to his knees for refusing to pay up a 'protection fee'. Had it been soon after Peragus, she
would have interfered without question, but Kreia's teachings, and that it was just a 'lesson' instead of a killing, held her back.

She could feel Anakin's frustration, anger, and a bit of fear at the sight, but she nudged him to keep on moving. The employment office wasn't as filled as she expected it. Then again, in a crime ridden moon, how many would actually work and made an honest living? She was half expecting people to try to scam them out of pay when they finished a job. She walked up to a board filled with sticky notes and browsed them briefly. She figured they'd stick to repair jobs, it was a safe bet. Deliveries risked delivering something illegal, or getting someone after them to steal a package. She wasn't interested in escort or bodyguard jobs. The objective was to make money and get out without causing a scene.

"Oh! There's a podracer fix and tuneup request," said Anakin with glee, "Look at that pay! We could free a few people with that pay alone! I built my own racer for the Bonta, so this should be easy."

"Looks fine," she said, a bit surprised to find that kind of payout this quickly.

Meetra fished out her comlink, tuned to the listed frequency, and picked up the job. They waited ten minutes for their contact to come, some alien in a breathing mask.

A garbled voice came out. "A woman and a kid? This a joke, you expect me to believe you can work a pod..."

The alien paused and took a closer look at Anakin. "Wait a sec, ain't you the kid that won the Boonta's Eve?"

Anakin grinned. "Yep!"

The alien nodded. "Huh, fancy meeting you here. Alright, let's go."

Meetra frowned, feeling a wave of greed emanating from the man. She followed silently into the man's speeder, not quite sure they should have taken the job, but confident she could keep things civil if something happened. She helped Anakin and R2 in, and they were off. They flew to their destination, a private garage, and were led to a racer lamenting over a pile of junk... er... a 'podracer'.

"Heya boss, got us the Boonta Eve kid to look over our pod," said the masked alien.

"Eh, that slave kid?" said the racer.

Anakin scowled at him. "I'm a person and my name is Anakin."

The racer rolled his eyes. "Don't care what your name is brat, ain't paying you for it, get to work."

Anakin shot him a dirty look before starting towards the pod.

"One sec Anakin," said Meetra before turning to the racer, "Half up front."

The racer glared at her. "Up front? What you think I'm a swindlin Hutt or somethin?"

Meetra simply crossed her arms, raised an eyebrow and waited. "I've had enough people try to back out after the fact over a job. Half up front or we leave."

The racer scowled and waved a hand at the masked alien. "Go get the pay."
Once Meetra had that pocketed, she, Anakin, and R2 moved over to the pod to inspect it.

"He crash this into a wall or something?" muttered Anakin, "This things a mess."

"Well, I assume that's why the pays good, it's going to take a bit of elbow grease," said Meetra.

"You have replacement parts here?" Anakin asked the racer.

"Yeah yeah yeah, tell me what you need and I'll have it here in a jiffy," said the racer.

With that, they got to work. The first hour was mostly inspecting the damage and removing anything broken. Then, they cleaned the bike up. Then, Meetra stood back and watched a nine-year-old master go to work on the bike. Hot-wiring different parts together, adjusting settings, modifying the engine and the thrusters, and doing half a dozen more things that Meetra had no clue about. She had raced a swoop bike once or twice, but a podracer was quite a bit different. Meetra half paid attention to a growing crowd of people watching them work, content to watch Anakin work his magic. After roughly four hours of work, Anakin was finished, oil, grease, and soot all over his clothes, a grin on his face, enjoyment radiating off him in the Force. The boy definitely had a love for all things mechanical.

"Alright should be good," said Anakin, "Take a look."

The racer and a few of his buddies walked over and inspected the podracer, whistling coming out of their mouths and impressed looks on their faces.

"Damn, looks better than she ever did before, earned your keep kid," said the racer.

The racer walked over to Meetra and paid her the other half. "Say lady, you willing to let us race your slave in the next circuit?"

Anakin stiffened and glared at the man, Meetra following suit, "The boy isn't a slave."

"What, you free him? Pah, whatever, doesn't matter, we still want to have him race," said the racer.

"We're not interested," she said, motioning Anakin over to her side.

"We insist," said the racer, followed by the sound of several cocking blasters.

Meetra blinked a few times and glanced around, annoyed to realize that the people who had gathered weren't just there to watch. Lovely, they were probably working on some gang-member's bike.

"Now, you can come willingly, let us race him a few times, and then be on your way, or we can fill you fill of bolts and just take him from you," said the racer greedily.

A wave of fear emanated from Anakin, and he scooted behind Meetra.

Meetra narrowed her eyes. "I suggest you rethink that offer and allow us to leave unharmed, this wont end well for you otherwise."

"Hah, there's ten of us, one of you," said the racer.

Meetra scoffed, drawing and igniting her lightsaber. "I've had worse odds."

Immediately the man and his lackeys backed off. "It's a kriffing Jedi!"
Meetra gripped her lightsaber tightly, ready to spring into action if need be. "Here's how this is going to go. You're going to peacefully let us go and give us a ride out of here on the speeder we came in on..."

She threw out a bluff. "...otherwise, this gets messy. Killing you all won't be hard, and taking and selling your speeder will fetch a nice profit afterwards."

"The hell kind of Jedi is this?" one of the men said fearfully.

The racer gave her an uneasy look. "Uh... yeah sure, you're free to go..."

He turned to the masked alien. "Get that kriffing Jedi the hell out of here!"

Meetra didn't deactivate her lightsaber until they were in the speeder and out of sight of the garage.

"Would you really have killed them all and taken the podracer?" Anakin asked quietly.

"I didn't care for it. Threaten their lives and their prized possession and they were more inclined to not take the risk," whispered Meetra, "I could have fought them, but, I don't think I would have been able to keep both you and R2 safe at the same time. That's a lesson, bluff, and bluff hard if need be. Either way, the moment we've landed, we're heading back to the Hawk and getting out of here. No need to risk them coming after us with more people."

Anakin nodded. "Y-yeah, I'm not interested in being enslaved again... how long do you think we have?"

"Hmm, about thirty minutes or so before they come after us if they are going to do so," she answered casually.

Anakin gulped. "Oh."

Ten minutes later, they were on the ground. Meetra picked Anakin up and swiftly walked through the streets, R2 wheeling after them as quickly as he could. They reached the landing pad, blew past the Todarian before he could say a word, and were on the Ebon Hawk. They both scrambled to the cockpit and took off without another word.

"So... that went okay," said Meetra.

Anakin grinned. "I can't wait for my own lasersword! I get to threaten the bad guys next time!"

Meetra rolled her eyes. "You Anakin, are not getting your own lightsaber until you are at least thirteen."

"Aww why not?" he whined.

"For that exact reason," she said pointedly, "We threaten if we need to, but we shouldn't look forward to it nor try to make a habit out of it. We're not brutes."

Anakin scowled. "That's no fun."

"Not to mention you're missing about five years of saber practice," she mused.

"Yeah I get it," he pouted.

"So... ready to go to Tatooine and free your mother?" she asked, diverting the subject
Anakin smiled a wide smile. "Yeah!"

Darth Sidious made himself comfortable in the chancellor's office, HIS office. He smiled smugly, looking over his new domain. It had taken time to finish entertaining the Queen and get back here, but now it was time to finally begin. From here, he would begin shaping the Republic into his Sith Empire. One bribe, one law or amendment, one manipulation, one assassination, at a time.

First though, it was time to leave the breadcrumb trail straight to his Master for the Jedi to pick up. Once Plagueis was dead, the Jedi would grow even more complacent then they already were.

He drew up a hood, used the desk, set it to a private frequency, and contacted his hired hacker, a hologram of him appearing above the desk. "It's time. Begin leaking the information."

The hacker didn't move or say anything in response.

Sidious narrowed his eyes. "Did you hear me?"

He frowned, noting a terrified look in the man's eyes, yet, Sidious did not feel it was directed at him, curious...

He froze when a lightsaber erupted through hacker's chest and dropped him to the ground out of the hologram. A moment later, Darth Plagueis stepped into the hologram and glared at him.

"You've overstepped your bounds apprentice," said Darth Plagueis ominously, "Did you not think I would not notice someone tampering with my files and accounts? How long have you been plotting behind my back?"

Oh... this could be a problem.

Sidious showed no panic nor fear. "Long enough."

Plagueis growled. "Foolish apprentice. I trusted in you, taught you everything I knew, shared my holocrons. I was willing to share the galaxy with you, to abolish the Rule of Two and rule forever with you, Master and apprentice. This treachery is how you return my favor?"

"Treachery IS the way of the Sith," mused Sidious nonchalantly.

"Do you think this is a game apprentice?" demanded Plagueis.

"Yes, yes it is," said Sidious, "It's a game you lost the very first day you chose to train me to rule by your side, or better still, under your thumb. I am no one's slave nor servant. You were my teacher yes, and for that I will be eternally grateful after I grind your skull under my boot, but my master? Never."

Plagueis clenched his fists tightly. "You fool, you would jeopardize the Grand Plan, jeopardize the Sith ruling the galaxy for your own lust for power?"

Sidious scoffed. "A true Sith does not share power. He takes it for their own, you taught me this, Plagueis. The Grand Plan will continue as scheduled, the Jedi will die, as will you, and I alone will rule the galaxy."

"We shall see then apprentice, who is more worthy of enacting the Grand Plan," said Plagueis before warning, "Reveal me to the Jedi, and I reveal you in turn."
With that, the hologram cut out.

Sideous made a bridge with his hands and placed them under his chin. "Hmm. An unforeseen and most unwanted complication. He was complacent, why did he even check his files?"

He pondered briefly before scowling. "Of course, the Exile. She made him grow alarmed and watchful. Tsk."

He should have kept his initial plan of personally killing his Plagueis. Damn. This was going to be a problem. He was going to be cut off from all of Plagueis's money, contacts, allies, and servants, along with having to outmaneuver Plagueis in a galactic power struggle. All of that on top of having to rule the Republic, begin working against the Jedi, and manipulate Surik. This was going to get complicated...
Despite what they had returned to Tatooine to do, Meetra was not looking forward to it. Especially since Anakin was basically instructing her to act like a Slave Owner.

"...and you have to look like your disinterested, inconvenienced," instructed Anakin, "Otherwise Watto is gonna try to raise the price through the roof."

Meetra frowned. "I'm not sure I can do this Anakin, acting like that..."

Anakin fidgeted on the couch. "But Meetra... you don't know Watto. He wasn't that bad of an owner, but he can be really spiteful, especially after losing me and his bets on the podrace. He might refuse to give up mom if you go in there acting like you want to free her, and he will refuse if I go in with you."

Meetra pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed. If Kreia were here, she'd be scolding her for her refusal. Acting as the situation dictated, manipulating the outcome, she'd do it in a heartbeat. She'd get an amused kick out of so easily playing Watto, while racking in debt on Anakin and his mother. Meetra though desired no debt, she did this because she cared, as much as Kreia would scold her for it. Maybe. Or Kreia would have played favorites again, dropping everything else for Anakin's sake, so similar to what she did for Meetra herself...

A Jedi might be able to put up the farce and act as a situation dictated, but she was an Exile, she had slowly drifted away from their values and adopted her own morals over her exile and the Shadow War. Yet, the pleading look Anakin gave her... could she stomach acting like the scum of the galaxy for a few short hours to one-hundred percent secure his mother's freedom? She had been planning on negotiating, or could always threaten if need be, she had little tolerance for slavers or people who purchased slaves.

"Please Meetra?" he whispered quietly, "Don't do anything risky. Go in, buy her, come back, go somewhere offplanet to get the slave chip removed."

Meetra sighed. "Fine..."

"Don't worry, mom will understand and forgive you when we get her on the ship," said Anakin sheepishly.

Meetra scowled. "Yeah, after the fact. I'm not looking forward to seeing the pain and resentment in her eyes directed at me."

Anakin bowed his head. "Sorry..."

She sighed once more, let go of her irritation, and reached over to ruffle his hair. "It's okay. I've had to put up with worse stuff than this I suppose."

Anakin gave her a brief smile before hesitation crossed his face, "If... if you still have enough money left over after freeing mom, can you... um... ask her to take you to my friend Kitster and see if you can free him too?"

"Give him an inch and he tries to take a mile," mused Meetra teasingly.
Anakin grinned. "See you when you get back!"

Meetra rolled her eyes before saying, "I'll lock the hawk, but, remember that if anyone who isn't me or your mother tries to get in, you know where the blasters are."

Anakin nodded. "Yep."

Meetra briefly stopped to switch her coat out for a simple cloak out of storage, wasn't as hot and it helped to both shield her from the sun and hide her lightsaber, before making her way to the landing ramp. She left the Hawk, exiting into the Mos Espa space port. She paid the docking fee and waded out into the sweltering heat. She had visited Tatooine once during her exile. Like Nar Shadaa, it really hadn't changed much. Same sand covered dwellings. Smugglers, slaves, their owners, slavers, and people struggling to survive, all scurrying about.

She followed Anakin's direction's to Watto's shop, and paused briefly in the doorway, eyebrow raise.

"Work faster!" shouted a blue Toydarian in Huttese, "I need those numbers now!"

A woman sitting at the shop's counter who matched Anakin's description of his mother, was scrambling to punch numbers into a small machine. Parts and droids were being loaded onto carts that other people were looking over. She recalled Anakin telling her that Watto had lost a lot on his podrace betting. Guess he was having to give up a lot of his stock to pay off the bets.

She returned her attention to Shmi Skywalker. Dark brown hair tied behind her head, dark brown eyes resting on a wrinkled and hardened, yet still kind face. There were heavy bags under her eyes, it didn't look like she had gotten a lot of sleep recently. She was dressed similarly to Anakin's sandy cloths, the difference being it's gray coloring instead of tan. There was a subtleness to her emotions, relief, and yet immense worry. She wasn't focused in the here and now, on the task Watto had given her. Meetra probed her thoughts, and wasn't surprised to find they dwelled on Anakin. The woman was relieved the boy had been freed, but missed him terribly and was afraid for his safety.

Meetra was briefly surprised when the woman gave a light start and glanced straight up at Meetra, eyes furrowed. Interesting. Meetra did a light probe this time, the woman felt Force Sensitive, but not in a normal way. It didn't feel like it emanated from her, but from... Anakin? Meetra probed deeper and was shocked.

It took all of her effort not stare and gape at the woman. It was a family bond, between Shmi and Anakin. She knew of them, had felt them before, but never one as strong as this one. Strong enough to leak the Force down into the woman, not enough to be a Jedi, but enough to feel certain things, to hear the whispers of the Force guiding her. Or feel someone probing her thoughts as evident.

Watto glanced over at Shmi, and then followed her gaze to Meetra. "Ah! A customer, welcome welcome! What can I do for you?"

Meetra walked forward and met the Toydarian half-way and began to follow the 'plan' Anakin had given her. "What do you have for ship parts?"

"What kind?" asked Watto rubbing his hands together, Meetra could feel his desire for a deal, for any source of money at the moment.

Meetra pulled out a datapad and showed a hologram of the Ebon Hawk.

Watto looked at it, confused. "Eh? Never seen a ship like that before."
"It's ancient, old republic era model," explained Meetra before lying, "I'm trying to find parts that can go into anything."

Watto rubbed his chin in thought. "Mmm, refurbishing eh? I might have a few pieces."

Meetra raised an eyebrow. "Might? Do you, or do you not, have parts that are adaptable?"

Watto scowled and turned to the counter. "Shmi! Get over here!"

The woman walked over. "Yes?"

"What out of this junk can be slapped onto anything?" demanded Watto.

Yep, just like Anakin had warned her. "Junk?"

Watto winced a little. "Ah... just a phrase, no worries eh? It's all good stock."

Meetra gave him a doubtful look and turned to Shmi. "What do you have?"

Piece by piece, Shmi went through and set aside parts that could be used for Meetra's fake-request. Meetra waited until the woman was finished before giving her an appraising look.

"You know you're parts I see," said Meetra, forcing an interested look into her eyes and into her tone, her hand briefly going to weigh a pouch of currency at her side.

Shmi hesitated, a wary look on her face. "Y-yes."

"Eh, she's not bad, nothing like her brat though," said Watto with a grumble, "You want her?"

Meetra reached a hand up to lightly grab Shmi's chin, turning her face back and forth, inspecting her. It turned her stomach to do this, to treat her like a peice of property to look over. She reminded herself it was for Anakin, and continued to look the woman over.

"Hmm, seems skilled, but she's middle-aged going old," murmured Meetra, dropping her hand and forcing disinterest into her tone, before she turned to Watto, "Is there a market nearby by chance? I could use a mechanic."

"Eh, you missed the post Boonta Eve slave sale by a few days," said Watto, "Could have gotten a deal if you had come earlier."

Meetra scowled, forcing irritation across her face. "Great."

"There's a market at the town's center, but I owned the two best mechanics in Mos Espa," said Watto, "You won't find anyone close unless you want to head to Mos Eisley or Anchorhead, and even then, mine were still the best!"

Meetra crossed her arms, grumbling and lying, "I don't have time for that, I've got a shipment to deliver once my ships ready to go."

Watto flew in front of her, trying to flaunt his slave's skill. "She's old yes, but skilled, in good health. Can cook and is good with numbers."

"Good health?" said Meetra flatly before pointing at the pile of parts set aside, "If that means she's as good as the half-broken or about to break junk you're trying to sell me then I'm doubtful."

Watto glared at her. "Not my fault most of my quality stock went to the Hutts to pay off a bet!"
Meetra raised an eyebrow. "Not your fault? You're the one who made the bet. As it stands, it looks like you're trying to pawn off a decrepit slave on me for a quick wupiupi."

Watto huffed. "Unless you want to miss your shipment's due date by flying around and looking for a slave, you deal with me, or you try to do your mechanics yourself."

Meetra grumbled under her breath, glared at him, and asked, "How much?"

They spent the next ten minutes haggling over Shmi's price. The entire time, Shmi stood there, head bowed, shoulder's slumped, despair radiating off her. It hurt Meetra to see it, to feel it. To be uplifted from what little stability and community the woman had, sold off like property, was a horrible thing for the woman to go through. She wanted nothing more to reveal the truth, but she couldn't, not with Watto there.

Finally, the price was met, currency exchanged, a few parts thrown in to 'sweeten the deal', and Meetra had Shmi's transmitter in her hands.

Watto was greedily counting currency. "Pleasure doing business with you. You come back this way and need anything, keep me in mind eh?"

Meetra merely nodded and glanced over at Shmi. "Come. If you have any personal affects, we can pick those up on the way to my ship. Lead the way."

"Yes Master," said Shmi quietly.

Meetra had to resist the urge to flinch. Those words weren't even close to the same to her as a Padawan addressing their teacher. She waited patiently, until they reached Shmi's quiet little abode and stepped inside, before Meetra sighed with relief.

"Finally," she muttered, shivering and shaking her shoulders and arms as if to let filth fall off of her.

Shmi glanced back at her. "Is something wrong Master?"

Meetra grimaced. "You don't have to call me that."

Shmi's eyes furrowed. "What would you like me to call you then?"

"Just Meetra," she answered before grinning and adjusting her cloak to reveal her lightsaber. "Anakin sent me to free you."

The woman froze for a moment, disbelief across her face, eyes on the lightsaber. "A-anakin? M-my little Ani? You... you're a Jedi?"

Meetra hesitated. "I'm his teacher. Sorry for putting you through that act, Anakin coached me on what to do to get Watto to sell you."

Shmi just stared at her, as if in a daze.

Meetra walked over and held out the slave transmitter. "Um, here. Do you know what button turns off your chip?"

Instead of answering, Shmi pressed her back against a wall and slid down to the floor, taking in a shaky breath. "You... I'm..."

Meetra took pity on her, walking over to kneel in front of her, taking her transmitter and pressing it
Shmi's hands shook as she gazed at the transmitter and then pressed a button. A brief beep filled the air before fading away. With that, Shmi threw the transmitter out of her hands as if it burned her. She closed her eyes, struggling not to cry.

"Thank you," whispered Shmi.

Meetra nodded, offering her a kind smile. "You're welcome. Do you by chance know of a 'Kitster'? Anakin wanted me to try and free him too."

Shmi nodded. "Yes. Let me pack my things and we can be on our way. Oh, and Ani will want C3PO as well."

"Who?" asked Meetra.

"A protocol droid he was building to help me," answered Shmi, taking a moment to steady herself before standing up and leading Meetra into a side room.

"Still in the making I see," said Meetra, amused to see the lack of plating on the deactivated droid.

Shmi laughed softly. "Yes, but he was Ani's. It... was all I really had left of him after he left."

Meetra placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. "You'll see him again really soon, he's on my ship in the spaceport."

Shmi took in a shaky breath and reached over to activate the droid.

It's eyes lit up. "Oh! Hello Mistress Skywalker. How can I help you today?"

"We're leaving," said Shmi, "If you could help me pack, I would appreciate it."

"Of course," said the droid, starting to move before pausing at the sight of Meetra, "Oh good heavens, I didn't see you there, where are my manners? I am C3PO human-cyborg relations."

Meetra tilted her head. "Meetra Surik, pleasure to meet you. Shall we help her pack?"

The droid scuffled forward. "Oh! So polite. We would be grateful for any assistance you offer us Mistress Surik."

Meetra smiled faintly, slowly shook her head, and moved to help Shmi pack what few affects she had in the house.

"Carting around an unfinished protocol droid might not be the best idea on Tatooine," said Meetra after they were done, "I think I'll drop you both off with Anakin before going for Kitster, who owns him?"

"Gardulla the Hutt," said Shmi with chagrin.

Meetra narrowed her eyes and pursed her lips. Gardulla. She could recall the memories she had seen from Anakin when they had bonded. Hate and disgust welled in her gut at the thought of that overgrown slug.

"I see," was all she said, "You can give me directions as we walk.

Meetra stewed silently as they left and made for the spaceport, her anger and ire slowly simmering
to a boil. She pushed it down when she felt a questioning probe from Anakin come down their bond. She took a deep breath, let it out, and made for the Hawk. They arrived half an hour later, she unlocked the ramp, and they went inside.

Not even a few feet inside the ship Meetra nearly staggered as pure raw delight and happiness overwhelmingly burst down the bond she had with Anakin as a blur blew by her. "**MOM!**"

Shmi knelt down and spread out her arms as Anakin practically flew at her, hugging her tightly and crying into her chest. "Oh mom... I'm so glad you're free! I came back for you like I promised."

"Oh my little Ani," said Shmi, moving a hand through his hair gently.

Meetra smiled softly at the sight before turning down the ramp. "I'm going after Kitster, I'll be back in a bit."

The pair didn't acknowledge her, wrapped up in their reunion. She didn't mind. She closed the ramp, locked it, and left. The lingering happiness slowly started to fade as she walked down the sandy streets towards the dwellings of the Hutts. They normally had their own fortresses or 'palaces' scattered around and did their dealings through their underlings unless it was important. They had a temporary place for when they were in Mos Espa. The Hutt was however still in town after the Boonta, she wanted to deal with that filth personally.

Finally, she came to a heavily guarded building and approached one of the guards at the gate. "I'm here to purchase a slave from Gardulla the Hutt."

The guard, a Weequay in armor with a heavy repeating blaster in his hands, glanced at her in annoyance. "Go see the local slavemaster then. He deals with her slaves in Mos Espa."

Meetra narrowed her eyes and waved a hand. "You will take me to Gardulla."

The guard's eyes glazed over. "I will take you to Gardulla."

Meetra stalked through the halls, a whisper in the back of her mind voicing different ways she could make the Hutt suffer...

They reached their destination a few minutes later. A lavish audience chamber, filled with guards and a music band, with an outside balcony that two Hutts were on, overlooking Mos Espa. She recognized the first Hutt as Gardulla, she didn't know the second. She didn't really care about the other one, her attention was all on Gardulla. Her blood was boiling in a way it hadn't since the early part of the Jedi Purge. She had seen to much, far to much from Anakin's memories, of punishments levied on him, his mother, or other slaves.

Memories of whips...

Of cries of pain...

Food and water denied...

Trapped in isolated hot rooms for days on end...

Constantly yelled at...

The detonation of caught runaway slaves...

Treated like filth and property...
The whispers were louder in her head, demanding retribution. The thought simmered in her head, a coldness starting to coat her body despite the desert world's heat.

The guard motioned for Meetra to wait and moved to approach the Hutts. "You're excellencies, a prospective buyer for a slave."

Both Hutts turned, staring at the guard with utter disbelief and annoyance.

Gardulla spoke in disgruntled Huttesse. "You waste our time! Send whoever it is to the slavemaster before I have you both flogged!"

"I do not deal with underlings," Meetra spat out with pure venom, "Especially yours."

The temperature in the room plummeted from a heavy hot to a chilling cold in a matter of seconds. The guards all went stiff, and the Hutts both paused to turn to look at Meetra warily. They recognized the danger in the air.

"Meetra?" she heard Anakin chime worriedly down the bond, "You're cold..."

Meetra frowned briefly before clamping down on the bond. She didn't have time to deal with the boy at the moment.

"I do not believe we've met," offered the second Hutt cautiously, his hand making a sort of gesture to his side.

She noted the guards surrounding the room tense, and the music die down. Must have been a signal to be ready.

"I'm not here for you," she said dismissively, glaring at Gardulla instead.

The second Hutt looked furious. "You dare dismiss the great Jabba the Hutt?"

Meetra turned her head back to glare coldly at him. Whatever the Hutt saw in her eyes made him pause and go uneasily quiet.

"Why have you come stranger?" asked Gardulla cautiously.

"I'm here for a slave named Kitster, you will bring him to me, now," Meetra demanded.

"Me... tra... what's... oing on...?" she faintly heard Anakin try to force down the bond.

Gardulla seemed confused. "That little brat? You barge in here, confront the two mightiest and most influential Hutts alive, for him?"

She straightened suddenly, outrage on his face, seeming to have come to a conclusion. "I've been warning him to shape up! What did that little bastard boy do now? I'll have the slavemaster strip skin from his back with a whip!"

Meetra's eyes narrowed positively murderously, coldness running down her spine. How dare she... how dare this scum. She pursed her lips, thinking of a way to kill that fat slug without drawing attention. Maybe pinching off a vein in her brain, planting seeds of betrayal in her guards, maybe rupturing some of her veins inside of her fat body. Ugh, what a plump little thing it was... it... it was...

Such a full morsel...
"MEETRA!" screamed Anakin down the bond in a full on panic.

Meetra froze for a moment before closing her eyes painfully and reaching up to rub her forehead. She shook her head briefly, snapping out of her hate, and became aware of a ever so familiar cold sensation emanating from her body. She had fought it often enough, but it had been a long while, since she had struggled with what she wanted to be early on in the Jedi Purge, when she had last personally touched the Dark Side of the Force. She frowned, troubled, before refocusing on the situation at hand, she'd deal with whatever the hell just happened when she was back on the ship. She had created a situation by barging in here like this, she better handle it.

She put a stranglehold on her anger, not letting it rise anymore, but not letting it leave either, she needed to maintain her outward appearance at the moment, and then she lied through her teeth. "The boy knocked over and broke a number of parts I purchased for my ship. I caught one of his friends who ran and forced the boy's name from him."

Gardulla growled. "That little shit. I warned him if he kept screwing up I'd either detonate his chip or sell him."

"How much for the brat?" demanded Meetra, "I want to personally deal with him and have him work off what he owes me."

Gardulla slithered over, seeming eager to placate Meetra. "Ah, for you friend, a bargain as compensation for the lost goods."

Meetra accepted the Hutts initial offer without care and waited as patiently as she could for Kitster to be fetched. She couldn't afford to let her anger go yet, but it was extremely uncomfortable to allow it to affect her so much, the Dark Side was a chilling cloak she did not like wearing. Such a brief use of it wasn't to dangerous, but she couldn't let it hold her for long. She could also feel Anakin's panic and fear down the bond, he didn't understand what was going on. She was doing her best to keep it contained to herself, but she was more than aware she had lost control, and wouldn't fully gain it back until she had a chance to meditate for awhile.

Wrapped in darkness, she could feel someone's terror approaching quickly, and it became apparent who it was when a little human boy was dragged into the ground by his arm and thrown onto the floor before them and then kicked in his chest by the guard dragging him. Meetra tensed at the sight, resisting the rage to go and throttle the guard who had harmed a child. She instead redirected the anger at herself. It was her fault he was being subjugated to this. She owed the boy a heavy apology.

"I warned you boy," rumbled Gardulla, "Piss off an outlander and get her furious at me will you? You dug your own grave."

Kitster glanced at Meetra, terrified and confused. "W-what did I do?"

Meetra's darkness began to fade at the sight, guilt and shame eating away at her, she knew she couldn't keep this up for long, she turned to the guard and demanded. "His transmitter?"

The guard handed it over without a word and then practically ran back to get away from Meetra. She walked over and grabbed Kitster by his arm. "Get up."
"No! I didn't do anything! You can't...," began Kitster.

"Be quiet boy," she forced out, "I bought you I can do whatever I so please."

The boy's shoulder's slumped, and his eyes filled with despair so painful to her Force Sense it cut deeply. She was going to have nightmares about those eyes, she knew it. She turned briefly to nod at Gardulla before leaving, dragging to boy along behind her. The helpless resignation emanating from him was so bad, she longed to just pull him aside and tell him what was really going on. She didn't dare to here. She kept on going, out of the building, and onto the sandy streets.

"Do you have family here?" asked Meetra in a calm voice.

"N-no ma'am," said Kitster shakily, "M-my mother was sold last year and I haven't s-seen my f-father in years."

Meetra closed her eyes, pained. "I see."

She pulled him into the nearest alleyway and then practically collapsed against the wall, shuddering and forcing away her anger and darkness, latching onto her bond with Anakin and the light he had. She basked in it for a moment, allowing herself to relax and steady herself.

She cleared her throat. "I'm sorry about that act and that you were hurt, I had to put on a show for Gardulla."

The boy stared at her with mistrust and confusion.

She offered him a weak smile. "Anakin sent me to get you out of there..."

She then lied through her teeth, unable to admit she had caused him undue hardship. "The plan was that it was easier and cheaper if she was mad at you and afraid of me."

Kitster hesitated. "Y-you're not lying?"

Meetra handed him his slave transmitter. "Here, deactivate your chip."

The boy's eyes went wide with shock before he scrambled to grab it, punching a button. Relief played across his face.

Meetra pushed off the wall. "Come, lets get back to my ship, unless you have something you need to pick up from your home?"

Kitster shook his head. "I don't have anything of my own."

Meetra felt a pang of pity at that before banishing it, nodding, and walking out of the alleyway. They returned to the ship in silence, Kitster in barely repressed hopeful eagerness, Meetra in brooding shame. She unlocked the Hawk, and quietly ushered Kitster onboard. She was a little surprised Anakin wasn't ready to tackle hug the boy like he had his mother. She got her answer as to why a moment later when she entered the central room. The boy was sitting on the couch, shivering, clutching his head, his mother worriedly hovering at his side, at a loss of what to do.

"Anakin?" questioned Meetra.

The boy shakily raised his head, and Meetra stared in wide eye shock to see a slight flicker of yellow in the boys eyes, of the Dark Side. By the Force... had she done that to him? She cursed herself silently, why in the world had she let him talk her into forming a Bond with him? Her own
loss of control had hurt the boy.

She walked over and gently picked him up before turning to Shmi. "We need to meditate. Please get the ship ready to launch if you know how."

"What's wrong with him?!!" demanded Shmi, "He just suddenly cried out your name and started shivering like that!"

Meetra closed her eyes and turned away. "It's my fault."

"That doesn't explain what's wrong with Ani!" said Shmi.

"I'll explain later," offered Meetra, "I need to get him, and myself, situated first."

Shmi reluctantly backed down and watched, pained, as Meetra took Anakin from the room and into the left dormitory wing, set him down on a bed, and knelt down in front of him. "Anakin?"

"It's so cold Meetra," he whispered, clutching his arms to his chest.

"I know, I'm sorry," she said, resting a hand on his knee.

"W-what was that?" he asked quietly.

"It's the Dark Side of the Force," she answered honestly, "Not as much, but similar to what the Sith on Naboo used."

"T-that's... it's not the same," whispered Anakin, "He was... felt hot, angry, he burned. This... this was cold."

"Everyone's darkness is different," she said quietly, "White hot rage is violent and explosive, destructive to the extreme. Cold... cold is calculated, something to fear because it simmers quietly, unseen, until the time is right. If I had been the former, I might have killed Gardulla and everyone in that room."

"Why did you go cold?" asked Anakin quietly.

"I... lost control," she admitted, "It's not something that's happened to me for a long time."

"How?" he asked.

"I thought of what she did to you, to your mother, to others," admitted Meetra, "It made me so mad, but..."

But, she still shouldn't have lost control like that, nor should the Dark Side have flown to her just like that in an instant simply because she got angry. She had been tempted before, even given in and done some things she hadn't been proud of during the early part of the Jedi Purge after Peragus, but nothing like this. Not even Kreia's sudden betrayal had driven her to this. It concerned her, greatly. Something had changed, or she had done something different or wrong compared to her time during the Jedi Purge. Perhaps what she had done to Maul on Naboo had opened the door to the Dark Side. She didn't honestly know, it was the first time in awhile she found herself honestly scared of herself, rather than loathing what she was as a Wound in the Force. She was even more scared for Anakin, if she wasn't careful, she could effect him negatively through the bond and really mess the poor kid up. He didn't need to suffer her struggling with the Dark Side.

Not that she should have to struggle. She thought she had put that behind her some time ago...
She shook her head. "But I still shouldn't have let it overwhelm me like that. Thankfully I didn't actually DO anything. Small favors, right?"

Anakin gave a weak laugh. "Y-yeah, I guess..."

She patted the floor next to her. "Come, let's meditate. I think we both need it. Afterwords..."

She trailed off for a moment before picking it up again, "...I think I need to explain the Force more in depth to you, and the dangers of the Dark side..."

Anakin shakily moved to sit next to her, and with that, she helped guide him and herself into a deep meditation to center themselves...

Chapter End Notes

So, someone on one of the other sites I post this to said:

[Quote]"I think your plan of Revan just waking up and taking over a bunch of the story is doomed to failure. You already have an established protagonist (with Anakin serving as a secondary such character), and I expect any shift to be jarring and decidedly unpleasant.

Up to now, you've treated Revan as a comatose plot device; I suggest either rewriting the story to kill him off in the prologue, or drastically changing your outline such that he wakes near-immediately, if not revising things such that he woke post-naboo. Splitting the difference isn't gonna work out, not when you've tied the previous protagonist - and the focus of the antagonists - to your preferred KOTOR character already."[End Quote]

Do people agree with this? It wouldn't be hard to go back and write Revan out of the story, but, only if a great number of people agree with this. I think I could still play this story right with both of them in it, I have plans for them both, but I'll leave it up to the readers.
The Force

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Meetra slowly pulled herself and Anakin out of their meditation hours later. She felt... lighter, relieved. A weight off her shoulders, and by the look of it, Anakin felt better too.

"I don't think I'm ever going to complain about sitting and meditating again," said Anakin sheepishly.

Meetra gave him a wry smile. "I suppose not. Come, let's get something to eat and set a course before I sit down and try explain the Force."

"Try?" said Anakin.

Meetra slowly shook her head. "Trying to explain the Force with words is sorely inadequate when it's so much more than anyone could possibly understand."

She isn't surprised, when she opens the door to the dormitory wing, to see Shmi Skywalker waiting as patiently as she can outside for them. The woman's eyes instantly focus on Anakin, and then shined with relief.

"Hi mom, sorry I worried you," said Anakin, scratching his head.

Shmi merely gives him a smile. "It's alright Ani, why don't you go see Kitster? I had him chopping vegetables in the kitchen. You can help him prepare dinner."

"'Kay!" said Anakin cheerfully before rushing down the hall.

The moment Anakin left their sight, Shmi's eyes hardened and she turned to Meetra. "What Happened. To. My. Son."

The steel in the demand showed that even as a former slave, Shmi has a spine and a spirit. "We... have a Force Bond."

"A what?" asked Shmi.

"As his teacher, he and I have a bond through the Force," explained Meetra with hesitation, "It connects us to one another. Allows us to communicate, send thoughts and feelings and memories to one another."

Shmi pondered it for a moment before her eyes narrowed. "That's all well and good, but you're not saying something."

Meetra pursed her lips, this woman was perceptive. "Bonds are... an unfortunate specialty of mine, I make them far deeper and more intertwined than normal. What effects me effects Anakin, and what effects him effects me."

"And what exactly was it that affected you so much it sent my son into a state where almost all he could do was shiver and hold himself?" asked Shmi.

"The Dark Side of the Force, it wasn't by his will, but, it was his first brush with it as an unprepared and untrained nine-year old extremely Force Sensitive young boy," answered Meetra quietly, "I'm
going to explain it to Anakin after we eat. I think...

She made a decision. "I think I'd like you and Kitster to be there, to help you understand as well."

Shmi nodded slowly. "Agreed."

She again stared at Meetra. "This 'bond' is dangerous to him, to both of you, isn't it?"

Meetra nodded. "Yes."

Shmi sighed. "Please, try to not let it hurt him. I couldn't bear to lose him, to watch that happen to him again."

"I'll do my best," said Meetra softly, "But so must you."

"Excuse me?" said Shmi.

"While you are not Force Sensitive, you are bonded to him as well, a familial bond so deep it's unlike anything I've ever seen," admitted Meetra.

"Surely you've felt it," said Meetra, "Always aware of him somehow when you're close, know when something is amiss with him, can figure out his mood before he's said or done anything, know what's on his mind."

Shmi seemed taken aback. "That's... I thought..."

"That it was a mother's intuition?" said Meetra, humored, "Perhaps some of it is, but not all. It's probably been strange for you the last few days with him gone, like something's missing, a hole in your life where he used to fill, a presence in the back of your mind."

Shmi was silent for a moment, eyes furrowed in thought before giving one brief noiseless nod.

"You won't be able to share memories or communicate since you're not actually Force Sensitive, at least I think you won't," admitted Meetra, "You're bond IS on a level of strength I haven't seen before, so who knows."

"However," said Meetra, "There is a danger to it. As you are aware of him, he will especially be aware of you. Even at a great distance, if you were in trouble, he'd..."

"He'd know," interrupted Shmi softly. "He was always so concerned for me when he was younger, when Gardulla owned us. He always knew when I had been beaten or hurt. He'd always have that pained and worried expression that washed over his tiny face, always ready to throw himself at me to try and bring me comfort with his hugs and worries and tears."

Meetra felt her ire at Gardulla rise again, but quashed it immediately. "Yes, he'll always be aware of it in some way. Whether it's a feeling, visions, or a dream, he'll know. It..."

She hesitated. "It also concerns me almost as much as my bond with him does."

"Why?" asked Shmi, confused.

"Because of what might happen if such a bond broke," admitted Meetra, "You've been his whole world for most of his life. Perhaps had he spent years away with the Jedi it would have weakened over time. But, if the bond broke anytime soon, if you died, it would probably, if not kill him, then damage and destabilize him badly."
Shmi's face had paled considerably. "O...oh..."

"I don't want to worry you, just make you aware. I don't plan on letting you come to harm, but, do you know any self-defense?" asked Meetra, "Having you being able to defend yourself would be a good idea I think."

Shmi shook her head, her shoulder's slumping. "No, I don't know how to fight."

"Perhaps some Echani then," mused Meetra.

"Echani?" asked Shmi.

"Well, martial arts," corrected Meetra. "I had a brief exposure to the Echani's fighting style, sparred with a few of them once. Highly skilled, I think once we put some meat and muscle on your bones your body would be good for it. But that'll be later."

At the sound of a growl from Shmi's stomach Meetra laughed. "Speaking of food."

Shmi bowed her head, embarrassed. "Ah... yes. Perhaps I should help the boys along."

Meetra nodded. "Alright, I'll go launch the ship and set a course for our next destination. I'll meet you all in the center room after."

She walked slowly to the cockpit, trying to buy herself as much time as she could to figure out how she was going to explain things to Anakin. She never had a 'true' Padawan before. She had taught her companions, taught Atton, Mical, Visas, Bao-Dur, and Mira, but this... this was different. All of them were fully grown people, capable of taking care of themselves if need be. Their training wasn't indepth, more along the lines of how to use the Force to fight and survive. More on abilities rather than the philosophical. They were her disciples.

Anakin was going to be a true apprentice, one she was going to spend years training. Someone she was going to pass on all of her knowledge and experiences to. She cradled his life in her hands, she had to protect him, guide him, teach him, show him how to be a Jedi.

Or well...

Her kind of Jedi anyway. Regardless of her status as an exile, she had never been a normal Jedi, or even a normal padawan back during her youth, by any means. She bonded to easily, connected and attached with childish ease. From what she had seen and heard thus far, mainly from her and Anakin's experiences with the current council, the Jedi of this age had an even worse opinion of attachment than her own had.

It wasn't to say attachment couldn't be bad. The Jedi had many experiences, many falls to darkness, that proved the danger. It was, in her opinion, the refusal to let go that was the real problem. When attachment turned into obsession, that was where things went bad. That didn't mean she agreed with cutting attachments off completely. She remembered when Revan saw the holo of Bastilla and his child. The sensation that had emanated from him, that smile, that peace, contentedness, happiness...

A soft smile graced her face. That was what it should be.

Her smile faded. Oh Revan... he had no idea what he was going to wake up to. A world thousands of years in the future, his wife and child long dead...

She sighed, sat down in the cockpit, and flicked on the com. "Ebon Hawk to Mos Espa Space Port,
requesting permission for liftoff."

She waited patiently until a voice crackled through, "Ebon Hawk you are cleared for takeoff."

She wasted little time in rocketing out of the spaceport and Tatooine's atmosphere. She considered her next destination briefly before deciding she ought to see about getting the slave chips removed from Anakin, Shmi, and Kitster. She set a course for Naboo, figuring they'd be happy to help them out. Might even be able to get it done quickly there.

She left the cockpit and made for the center room, a hint of something spicy tickling her nose, and found the three of them setting the table. "Something smells good."

"Yep!" said Anakin, holding up green and red vegetable stained hands, "Me and Kitster loaded it with awesome stuff when mom left us to cook!"

So basically whatever they found in the kitchen. Oh boy... she was reversing her opinion on the good smell.

"Anakin, Kitster, go wash your hands," scolded Shmi.

The boys shared a grin and dashed off into the kitchen, leaving an amused Shmi shaking her head, the woman turned to Meetra, hesitation on her face and her earlier spine suddenly gone. "I um... hope it's to your liking madam Jedi."

"Just Meetra is fine," answered Meetra, "And don't worry about it, I've lived off military rations before, I'm certain whatever they've cooked up will be fine."

Of course, the moment they were all seated at the table, Meetra took one look at the mess of vegetables and meat loaded with spices and knew she was going to regret this when she was in the fresher later. She took one bite and started coughing. She wasn't the only one.

"Anakin," said Meetra between coughs, "That's a lot of spices."

Anakin blanched a bit after swallowing the first bite. "Oh, yeah."

Meetra noted an odd tension in Shmi, and a little in Kitster. They looked at her with slightly masked fear, as if... oh... she understood. If they were back at Tatooine, their Master probably would have exploded at them in a rage over this. She would hope they wouldn't associate that kind of behavior with her. Then again, they probably knew very little about Jedi outside of Outer Rim stories, especially in regards to sitting down and eating with one. Not that she was typical anyway. Ah well, they'd get used to her overtime. Well... if they chose to stay anyway.

She used a fork and began to scrape some of the spices off the food. "Little less next time, they should be used in smaller amounts."

"'Kay," said Anakin, following suit and digging back in.

Shmi and Kitster relaxed a little and did the same.

"So, we're heading to Naboo," said Meetra.

Anakin perked up. "Back to Naboo?"

Meetra nodded.

Anakin turned to his Mother, a huge smile on his face. "Naboo is awesome mom! It's... it's so
green! And there's so much water!"

Shmi blinked a few times. "Truly?"

Anakin nodded. "Yep!"

"You're pullin our legs!" said Kitster, reaching over to poke him.

Anakin scowled playfully. "Am not! Ask Meetra."

"He's right," said Meetra, "Have either of you ever been off Tatooine before?"

Kitster shrugged, growing a little bitter. "I was born in space, my dad was some pirate sleemo who
never came back for me and mom after we got captured and sold. Haven't seen anything else since
I was little."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Meetra softly.

Kitster shrugged and focused on his food.

Meetra glanced at Shmi, who seemed to grow uncomfortable. "I was born elsewhere, but... well...
it's... been a long time since I've seen anything but sand."

Meetra nodded at the vague answer, but didn't press. If the woman didn't want to share her past,
that was fine. It was her decision, and probably a rough topic.

"Well, Naboo will certainly be a new experience then. It's a beautiful world. I plan to stop there so
we can get all of your slave transmitters removed," explained Meetra, "Afterwords, you can decide
if you wish to settle and start a new life there or stay onboard as part of the Ebon Hawk's crew."

Kitster blinked a few times. "We... get a choice?"

Meetra tried to hold back her pity, but she was pretty sure both it and a bit of sadness leaked
through. "Of course you do."

Did they really think, even after being freed, they wouldn't?

"C'mon Kitster, she's a Jedi, like in the stories, she ain't going to be like that," scolded Anakin,
"Meetra's awesome! She beat a bad Jedi all by herself too!"

Shmi seemed taken aback. "Bad Jedi...?"

"Sith," murmured Meetra, and sighed when Shmi and Kitster both gave her blank looks, "I imagine
in this day and age, the Sith aren't widely known about. I'll explain it later when we begin
discussing the Force. Finish up eating, clean up, and we'll begin."

Ten minutes later, with the table cleared, dishes cleaned and put away, they regathered. Meetra sat
on the couch, Shmi on the other end with Anakin in her lap, and Kitster at the table. Meetra stared
at the center holoprojector silently for a few minutes, contemplating how and where to begin. It
had been... well... years since she had last really delved into philosophy and history, not since her
days as an initiate and padawan, she wasn't honestly sure how much she remembered. Should she
start on the history of the Jedi, or knowledge about the Force? That in itself brought up another
question: Just how badly out of date was she? How much had changed in the last four-thousand
years? At first glance, it didn't seem like much, but she knew better than to make such an
assumption. She needed some down time, maybe after she started Anakin on basic katas, to start
reading up on what she had missed.

Well... she supposed it would be a learning experience for both her and Anakin then, they'd learn as they went to add onto what Meetra knew. "The Force is... well... life itself. It is something that encompasses everything. All sentient life, whether they be human, Twi'lek, Togruta, Wookie, or other bear the Force. Even beyond those with higher thoughts, Animals, plants, water, even the planets themselves contain threads of the Force within them."

"What about droids?" asked Anakin.

"Hmm. Where is our little friend?" said Meetra, "R2?"

There was a beep from the corner of the room, she turned her head and spotted the droid watching quietly from a distance. "Come on over."

The Astromech gave another beep and whir before rolling over, when he bumped softly into the couch she gave him a smile and placed a hand on his dome. "Tell me Anakin, what do you feel?"

Anakin scooted a little off his mother's lap and reached a hand over, placing it next to Meetra's and closed his eyes. "I... there's a little spark of... something."

Meetra nodded. "What your feeling right now is his power source. Compared to sentients, it can be difficult to lock onto and sense a droid unless you are intently focusing, it can be damn near impossible in a crowd. However there is another way you can detect a droid. Tell me, compare him to Kitster, what do you feel?"

Anakin grew uncertain. "Umm... just the little spark in R2, and Kitster being well... Kitster."

"Hey! What's that supposed to mean?" asked Kitster.

Anakin hummed as a response, but didn't answer directly.

Meetra gave a soft smile and then explained, "Instead of feeling for the Force, try to feel the lack of it."

Anakin gave her a blank look. "Huh?"

"I want you to think about it. Do you have a tendency to avoid running or bumping into things? Even when your not focusing?" she asked.

Anakin looked confused, but Shmi nodded. "I've seen him walk around tables or parts in Watto's shop while working on a droid without really paying attention."

"You instinctively feel what's missing in these objects," explained Meetra, "The lack of the Force, the lack of the wind passing through it, or simply pressing your senses against it, you can realize that there is something there by any of these things."

Anakin gave her a skeptical look. "Wait, you can feel the wind in the Force?"

Meetra nodded. "For the same reason you can feel water, both have microscopic organisms living in their currents, carried high above, or down below. It's a small thing, and something you usually only sense for subconsciously, but if you focus, you can still feel it."

Anakin closed his eyes for a moment, and then a minute, before a frustrated look crossed his face. "I'm not sure how..."
"It's alright, it'll come in time," said Meetra.

Anakin pouted and huffed, before grumbling. "I wanna learn it now, I did the thing on Nar Shadaa pretty good..."

"Anakin," admonished Shmi gently, "Small steps. Like machinery, you have to understand each piece and fiddle with it before you can use it."

Anakin fidgeted a little before whispering sullenly. "Yeah... I guess."

"It's not a bad analogy," said Meetra, shooting Shmi and appreciative smile, "Because, there are many pieces and parts of the Force, depending on which view of it you choose to have. The Jedi generally view the Force in four parts. The Force itself, sometimes referred to as the 'Light Side of the Force'. The Dark Side of the Force. The Living Force, and the Unifying Force."

"That's a lot of forces," said Kitster, a cheeky grin spreading across his face.

Meetra turned her head to raise an eyebrow at the boy, which only made him giggle.

"I get light and dark, it's good and evil," said Anakin, "But what are the Living and Unifying Force?"

Meetra frowned briefly. "Light and Dark aren't as simple as good and evil Anakin, it comes in shades of neutral gray as well."

Anakin looked at her, baffled. "Huh?"

"You can use both Light and Dark to do both good and evil," she said softly, "Force knows the Jedi were guilty of it in my time."

"Your time?" questioned Shmi.

Meetra paused briefly and sighed. "I'll explain that later, I want to focus on the lesson for the moment."

"How could Jedi do bad things with the Force?" asked Anakin skeptically, "I mean, on Coruscant they weren't what I expected, with the stories I heard growing up, but they're not bad people."

"Using the Force against people without their consent is generally a misuse of the Force," said Meetra, "Back in my day, Jedi using mind tricks, reading someone's thoughts, anything that invades the privacy or controls the actions of innocent people is gray or bad in my opinion. Sometimes it can't be avoided, but relying on that kind of thing to often was something I frowned upon."

She frowned. "In addition, while it's not so much as a 'bad' thing, but, having the power to act, to protect, to help people, and doing nothing, might as well be."

That lit a gleam in Anakin's eye. "Yeah, what's the good of having laser swords and super powers and doing nothing with it?"

Meetra snorted. "It's a bit more than just swords and Force Powers, Anakin. Jedi should try to prevent conflict and resolve it peacefully when we can. Words can be just as powerful as a lightsaber, if not more in certain situations. Sometimes fighting is the wrong path, other times thought, if the situation demands it, you shouldn't be afraid to fight."

If the council had just acted back in her time... if they had agreed to aid the Republic earlier... so
much death could have been prevented in the Mandalorian Wars. Not to mention, who knows if Revan would have even had a chance to fall if the entire Order had come with him instead of ostracizing him and his followers. And speaking of the Council...

Meetra's eyes narrowed, her face and lips tightened, and her fists clenched. "And stripping someone of the Force, or even trying to, is an **unforgivable** sin."

Shmi and Kitster reflexively inched away from Meetra at the venom in her voice; Anakin however merely crawled along the couch, shifting from his Mother's lap into hers. "Did... they try to do that to you?"

"Kind of gave it away I suppose, didn't I?" mused Meetra, a sigh escaping her lips.

Anakin nodded, but said nothing, looking up at her.

"The Council in my time did try that, but they failed, a... a friend, my mentor, saved me," said Meetra with a bit of a shake to her voice.

"So that's why you don't like this council?" said Anakin, "Why you still want to be an Exile?"

Meetra hesitated. "Somewhat, to be honest, I enjoy the freedom such a status brings. I answer to myself, no one else."

"Wait, exile?" said Shmi, confused, "I don't wish to offend, but, why is my son being trained by an 'Jedi exile'?"

"Because he was to old," said Meetra, "They didn't want to take him into the Order. Only Qui-Gon and I championed his cause."

Shmi looked even more lost. "What does his age have to do with anything?"

"Jedi generally start their training very young," explained Meetra, "They are taught to not have attachments among other things."

"Attachments?" said Shmi, baffled.

"You," admitted Meetra bluntly.

Shmi looked affronted. "Excuse me? How is caring for me, his mother, something to be denied about?"

"They said it was because I was to afraid for you, among other things," said Anakin quietly, "I have to much fear."

Meetra rested her chin on the top of his head. "It's no crime to be afraid, so long as you do not let that fear rule you."

Shmi didn't look like she understood, but she remained silent, her lips pressed together tightly in irritation, frustration, and anger on her son's behalf.

"I believe we went a little offtopic," said Meetra, deciding to divert back to the lesson, "You were asking about the Living and Unifying Force."

Anakin nodded. "Yep."

"The Living Force deals with the energy of living things all around us," explained Meetra, "How
we are connected and intertwined within the Force. It's about living within the moment, the here and now. Those who are more attuned with the Living Force are more aware and focused of the events going on around them, though sometimes this comes at the expense of being mindful about the future and the impact one's actions can have down the road. They can be taken off-guard by the repercussions or consequences of things they were doing that they thought were right or important at the time."

"The Unifying Force on the other hand focuses on space and time, the past and the future," explained Meetra, "It is the more philosophical of the two, dwelling on the what may be and the what has come to pass. Those who are more attuned with the Unifying Force are more aware of the effect of their actions on the future, but tend to lose focus on the present, on the what is happening here and now, and can be taken offguard by unexpected happenings that those of the Living Force would have seen coming. Force Visions tend to be important to those that hold the Unifying force in high regard."

Anakin absorbed the information, eyes furrowed, a thoughtful, if but confused look on his face. "So... which one's better?"

Shmi, to Meetra's surprise, beat her to answering. "Neither if I understand correctly. Both seem important, and ignoring one over the other seems unwise."

Meetra gave her an appreciative smile. "Agreed, though, maintaining a balance between both is... difficult. I've followed both paths at times, leaning more towards the Living Force."

Charging off into the Mandalorian Wars at Revan's side certainly agreed with that.

"So... am I more 'unifyey'? asked Anakin, "With my dreams? The visions?"

"Actually Anakin," said Meetra, trying to suppress a laugh at his terminology, "Your visions are the only thing you have in common with the Unifying Force. You are a boy who lives in the moment to the extreme from what I've seen and heard thus far."

Anakin fidgeted in her lap. "I do?"

"Well lets see," said Meetra, holding up a hand to count fingers, "One, you told me about the Boonta Eve Podrace that you volunteered to help complete strangers with without a second thought."

Anakin blushed. "Y-yeah well..."

"Don't forget about Sabulba!" said Kitster, "That outlander guy you were with would have been bantha poodoo if you hadn't jumped in. I thought he was gonna paste you!"

Anakin gawked. "You saw that?"

Kitster just grinned. "Word spread pretty quick that you stood up to Sabulba like that."

"Okay, well that's two," said Meetra before lifting a third finger, "The next seems to happen a bit, but, you trust people based on your gut instinct and initial encounters."

Her voice grew soft. "You didn't know a thing about me, yet, when I was lost about coming to this time, you brought me a cup of caffeine and kept me company."

Anakin blushed a bit before deflecting, "Well, mom always taught me to be nice."
Shmi chuckled softly, staring warmly at her child. "He's a good child, my little Ani."

Anakin turned beat red. "Moooom!"

Meetra laughed and then held up a fourth finger. "And on Naboo..."

Anakin panicked, head going back and forth between Meetra and Shmi. "W-wait a sec Meetra!"

"He hid in a starfighter, went up into a space-battle, and blew up the droid control ship," said Meetra.

Anakin tried to shrink into Meetra as Shmi blinked once, blinked twice, and then leveled a slightly panicked and severe look on the boy. "Anakin Skywalker, you did what?"

"That's wizard Ani!" said Kitster with glee.

"In his defense, he saved the entire planet by blowing up the control ship," said Meetra, "Three Jedi or not, we wouldn't have been able to take on an entire droid army."

Shmi put her head in her hands and took in a shuddered breath, and let it out. "If I ever meet Qui-Gon Jinn again, we will have words. I expected my son to be safe, not put in danger!"

Anakin scrambled out of Meetra's lap and over to his Mother, giving her a hug. "I'm sorry mom, I didn't want to worry you, I'm okay, everything turned out okay."

Shmi sighed heavily and hugged him back. "I knew you were meant to go with the Jedi, meant to help them, to do great things, but... the danger you'll be in while doing it..."

"I'll keep him as safe as I possibly can," said Meetra softly.

Shmi nodded. "I know you will. Now, can... can you explain what happened earlier? The Dark Side of the Force you mentioned?"

Meetra frowned briefly before starting, "First though, we should start with what the Jedi use, the Force, or the 'Light Side' if you will. It focuses on compassion and mercy, honesty and integrity, protection and self-sacrifice. Positive things or emotions like that. Except well... the emotional part for the Jedi."

"Why?" asked Anakin, "Why isn't love, happiness, or joy seen as light? There's no way it isn't."

"It's because of the history of the Jedi," explained Meetra, "It's left them rather jaded. Emotions are seen as something to be acknowledged and then released into the Force, to dangerous to maintain."

"That doesn't answer the question," pointed out Kitster.

Meetra rolled her eyes. "I was getting to it. Emotions are... different for Force Sensitives. They can directly effect our power or control. And unfortunately, good emotions can turn into bad ones. Love for example can attract fear for a loved one or develop into an obsession over them. Both are can be gateways into the Dark Side if left to fester or become uncontrolled. When a Jedi goes dark... it can be a truly, terrible and terrifying thing."

Her thoughts briefly turned to Revan. "On more than one occasion, a single Jedi who fell to the Dark Side has drastically changed the course of the entire galaxy. Caused massive galaxy spanning wars, or committed acts so vile and destructive that the aftereffects would be felt for generations to come."
Anakin looked at her in disbelief. "Just one person can do all of that?"

Meetra grew quiet for a moment. "Anakin. I do not say this lightly, so listen carefully. The Dark Side of the Force is dangerous, it is a pathway to incredible, but dangerous, power. You saw some of my memories when we bonded, correct? Do you remember Darth Nihilus? The man with the white mask?"

Anakin paled a little. "Y-yes..."

"He completely wiped out an entire planet with the Force, consumed all life on it in an instant, everything died," said Meetra quietly.

Save for Visas, but, that went against the point she was trying to make.

Kitster stared at her in disbelief, Shmi had a look of utter sickness on her face, and the utter horror on Anakin's face was something Meetra darkly mused she might have nightmares about.

"That's... that's the Dark Side?" asked Anakin fearfully, "That's what I felt from you when you were angry at Gardulla?"

"It's the first time you've felt it," she commented, "Not with your senses, but inside of you."

"Y-yes," said Anakin.

"The Dark Side of the Force is...," she trailed off for a moment, thinking.

"It's evil, it's what the bad guys use?" asked Anakin quietly.

Meetra frowned, thinking of Kreia. "I told you earlier, yes and no. All who are Sith use the Dark Side to my knowledge, but not all who use it are evil."

Anakin gave her a baffled look.

How did she explain the Dark Side properly to a nine-year-old-boy? She could admit she was terrified she'd either screw this up and send him into darkness, or screw it up and make him fear it like the Jedi did. The Dark Side was dangerous, and could consume it's users, usually did, but it wasn't the end-all thing the Jedi made it out to be. People could walk away from it, there had been people who had done so.

Revan had come back from it, albeit memory loss might have had a heavy influence on that, he did however choose to remain light after figuring out who he was. Ulic Qel-Droma had come back, well, after he had the Force severed from him. Meetra smiled smugly at the though of Atris coming back after getting her ass handed to her. She was sure there had been many cases in the far past, and even in the four-thousand years she had 'vaulted' over. Though sheer strength of will, or so long as there was someone to help light the way, those who had fallen could return. Though coming back from being a Sith was far rarer than Dark Jedi or those who had only taken their first steps.

On the other hand, ignoring the 'fallen' aspect completely. Kreia had shown her, told her, it was merely another perspective. One that could be adopted and thrown away if needed, depending on what the situation required. Kreia had done it herself easily enough, being neutral and then adopting her old Sith mantle to fulfill a purpose. Though, that purpose pained Meetra, and would continue to do so until the day she died. She could admit however, she had no clue how Kreia could so easily toss aside or re-adopt her darkness like that, because Kreia had not felt dark at all, just gray, until she became Treya again.
She had heard of various sects that preached one thing or the other, or even a balance between them. The ancient precursor to the Jedi Order, the Je'daii, was a group said to have maintained a balance, at least until the Force Wars tore them apart. Unfortunately, she didn't know how they managed that feat of balance. The archives in the Dantooine conclave weren't very detailed in that regard, considered it all heresy or hearsay.

All in all, explaining this was going to be a mess.

"It's a temptation," she decided to say at last, leaning more on the safe side, "It's an offering of power at a cost, a price."

"A price?" asked Anakin.

"Anakin, the Dark Side can change you, deeply," said Meetra, "In the heat of the moment, fueled by its power, you can do things you would normally never do. Murder, betrayal, harming people you cared for, breaking your own morals. Sith are seen as cruel because they lose the ability to care about anyone but themselves or a select few people they obsess over."

Anakin looked mortified. "It takes away your ability to care about people?!"

"It depends," said Meetra, "First on the person, and then on the purpose."

"I don't... understand," said Anakin quietly.

Meetra closed her eyes and rubbed her forehead. "Anger, hate, fear, jealousy. Negative raw emotions empower and fuel the Dark Side of the Force. How one uses these emotions determine how and why one takes their first steps into the Dark Side. I believe Qui-Gon said that your focus determines your reality."

"So if I get really angry at all I...," began Anakin fearfully.

"No no, Force no Anakin!" said Meetra, knowing where he was going, "Just feeling those emotions isn't going to throw you down the dark path. Even acting on them isn't a condemnation. It's giving into them, letting those emotions rule your life, that sends you down that path."

She sighed. "I'll admit, I'm not sure I'm doing a good explaining this. I've never had a Padawan learner before. I think I'm scaring you more than warning or instructing you."

Anakin gave a small, weak smile, but didn't answer.

Meetra got up off the couch and walked over to kneel infront of him. "Anakin, someone like Nihilus, or Sion if you saw any memories of him, are people who completely plunge unrestricted into darkness. Dabbling here or there or giving into anger once isn't going to damn you to such a fate. Becoming like them is a conscious choice, to give themselves so deeply into the Dark Side that it warps them like that."

"Just don't let the darkness rule you," she said softly, "Anger, hate, and fear ARE path's to the Dark Side, but only if you let them be."

There was a quiet nod from him, but no other response. Meetra could feel his anxiety and nervousness, his fear, radiating down the bond. This was more than enough for today's lesson. Force, she had terrified the boy by telling him about what Nihilus had done. Why had she thought that was a good idea?

"Why don't you and Kitster see if there's any dessert in the kitchen?" suggested Meetra, "I think
we're done for now."

Anakin moved away without a word, Kitster following into the kitchen.

Meetra sighed and sat down on the floor against the couch. "Force I feel like a failure after that."

"Your trying," said Shmi softly, but tensely, "Anakin... he feels so readily, and so deeply, that he has to be made to understand if half of what you said about this 'Dark Side' is true."

"To my knowledge," said Meetra bleakly, "It's all true."

Shmi was silent for a moment. "An entire planet wiped out? When and where? Even as a slave, even on Tatooine, we would have heard of that."

"Katarr, four thousand years ago," said Meetra quietly.

Shmi went silent again for a minute this time before speaking, "You are implying you're from the past."

"I am," said Meetra, turning her head to stare into Shmi's eyes.

The woman met and held them for a time, until the two boys returned with a bunch of pastries that they set on plates on the table. They watched the two woman have a stare-down uneasily.

Finally, Shmi relented with a sigh. "The Jedi wouldn't have let you go with Anakin if you were insane. You are serious about when you are from?"

Meetra nodded again. "The Force is a gateway to power and abilities beyond most people's comprehension."

Shmi rubbed her face tiredly. "I suppose it is."

"Come, let's have dessert and then get ready for bed," suggested Meetra, "You three ought to be rested before we get to Naboo and get your transmitter's removed."

With that, the group moved away from discussions of the Force, into sweetness of treats, and then into the comfort of slumber...

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the feedback ya'll to last chapter's question. Revan will remain in the story, and will probably wake up a bit earlier than I initially intended when I first came up with this fic idea. Not just because of the feedback, but because it made me think and realize I forgot something:

Muscle Entropy. Revan's going to still be in a coma for years, it's going to weaken him, he's going to need to recover and regain his strength before the Clone Wars start. Not to mention certain character interactions that need time to happen as well.

Not to mention, I came up with an idea about Meetra that's going to need time to happen as well. I want to spoil it, but at the same time I don't. So I'll give you all a hint:
Meetra cut herself off from the Force, became a wound in it, and echoes/reflected the losses of Malachor, because she could not take the backlash and death that she caused by using the Shadow Mass Generators. So think on it, what would it actually mean for Meetra to be healed, to no longer be a Wound in the Force, and be able to truly and properly feel again? There are positives, and extreme negatives about this if it happens...

Which I think may or may not happen when Anakin hits 13 or so... (maybe 14-15? idk yet)
Poor Decisions

Beep - Beep - Beep

Qui-Gon Jinn sat in a chair in one of the rooms in the Halls of Healing. He had volunteered, mostly to give himself something to do, to watch over their comatose charge after a nasty episode not too long ago. He glanced over at the sleeping Revan tied to a horde of monitoring equipment. The man had settled back into his normal state, but the healers wanted someone with him at all times. Qui-Gon could admit, he understood why. He had felt it, the moment the Dark Side started rippling out of the man. It had been a sudden onslaught that had sent him into cardiac arrest and the healers scrambling to get him stable.

And they had no clue why.

Or at least, anyone who wasn't a little green troll didn't. Yoda had come during the episode, watched, muttered something about the darkness not being Revan's own, and left after he stabilized. Qui-Gon didn't know what to make of it. So here he sat, watching and waiting.

It wasn't like he had anything else to do anymore, not after...

His thoughts trailed off before he sighed and leaned down to put his head in his hands. "Oh Obi-Wan... how could I have been so foolish?"

Always so caught up within the moment, he didn't see the ramifications of his actions until it was too late, how much he had damaged their relationship, until the young man had finally exploded at him. He had practically abandoned Obi-Wan for Anakin. Even worse in Obi-Wan's mind was that he had then 'abandoned' Anakin to Meetra...

Do we truly mean nothing to you Qui-Gon? That you pick us up, your pathetic lifeforms, and then cast us aside when it's convenient to you? I could have handled it if you had taken him in, but to just cast him off, just like that, after all the effort you went through, after casting me off as well? It's deplorable, and to be honest, I'm glad he's gone, he doesn't have to suffer under your teachings!

Qui-Gon let out a ragged breath and sat up. "I'm an old fool, I truly am."

Now Obi-Wan was off purposefully alone preparing his trials, soon to be a Knight, one who would want nothing to do with his old master. And Qui-Gon? He remained here, alone.

"I never should have taken on another padawan," muttered Qui-Gon, "I always fail them."

"I question that my old padawan," came a stoic and dreadfully familiar voice, "Feemor has proven himself quite well since he became a knight, not that you would know having cast off the poor boy."

Qui-Gon stiffened and tensely looked to the door, sighting someone he really didn't want to deal with right now, or ever, standing in the doorway. "Master Dooku, to what do I owe the displeasure?"

His old Master took a moment to look him over before scowling. "You were in a mission that involved the Sith, can your old Master not express concern and check on his old Padawan?"

"I am fine," Qui-Gon stiffly answered.
Dooku slowly and dramatically raised an eyebrow. "Fine are you? Sitting here hiding in the Halls of Healing brooding about failing your Padawans? That is anything but fine. Force, I haven't seen you in such a pitiful state since Tahl passed."

Qui-Gon scowled right back at him. "Not that you were there for anything but a brief 'I'm sorry for your loss, but you should have known better', between your missions."

Dooku slowly shook his head. "Time and again I try to advise you Qui-Gon, but never does my words break through that thick skull of yours."

Force, it was like his apprenticeship all over again, and every time they met after. While he had always, and would always respect his former Master, it was difficult to deal with how apathetic he could be. That ever so eloquent cultured voice delivering harsh rebuke from an cold expressionless face. And his advice always left much to be desired...

Old advice, best left buried and forgotten, rang through Qui-Gon's mind: 'Betrayal is part of life, Qui-Gon, and we can't always see it coming.'

"Perhaps," began Qui-Gon, growing icy, "You should consider how you deliver your words."

Dooku had the audacity to look offended. "I always consider my words carefully, perhaps you should consider how you interpret them."

"I interpret them as cruel words from a callous old man who wants to make others as bitter as he is," spat Qui-Gon.

Dooku stiffened and went completely silent. He stared at Qui-Gon for a time, hurt displaying across his usually controlled face.

Finally, he offered a faint, "I see."

For a moment, Dooku seemed every inch his age, perhaps even double it, his voice brittle. "I will leave you to your troubles then, I won't bother you ever again."

For a brief moment, as Dooku turned to leave, Qui-Gon felt guilty. Despite their distance and shaky relationship, he hadn't needed to be cruel to a man who thought he was helping in his own way. However, Qui-Gon didn't voice an apology, and didn't stop Dooku from leaving. He had his own issues to deal with. He moved to sit back down before freezing as an unfamiliar Force Signature brushed against his mind.

Don't make the same mistake you did with your Padawan... bring him back... or lose your Master forever...

Qui-Gon blinked a few times, confused and bewildered. Whose signature was that? And how did they just communicate like that? It felt like it was everywhere and nowhere at once. He blinked again as he registered the words, and his face paled, aghast. Oh Force he had done it again, hadn't he? Driving away anyone who meant anything to him. Just like Feemor, just like Xanatos, just like Obi-Wan...

Would he ever learn?

Qui-Gon was a bit undignified as he scrambled out of the room and turned his head, spotting his Master a ways down the hall. His words froze in his mouth as he gazed on the old man. Force, he could feel the effect his words had on the old man. There was pain all over his signature, and threads of darkness weaving there way in, interweaving with what was already there. Did his
words, his opinion, really mean that much to Dooku to have hurt him so? It was just like Xanatos, he was driving his Master to darkness.

No.

Not again.

"Master Dooku," called out Qui-Gon rather loudly, drawing the eyes of a number of healers and passing Jedi.

The old man paused and half turned his head, bracing himself as if expected further and public rebuke.

"I... apologize," Qui-Gon managed to get out, shoving away his wounded pride over so public a declaration, "My words were brash, cruel, and without thought. I have been going through a difficult time and should not have taken it out on you. If you are willing, we could continue our conversation inside."

Dooku turned to full on stare at Qui-Gon, his face that stoic featureless mask he knew so well. Yet Qui-Gon could feel the man abruptly pull himself together in an instant, masking his leaking aura under his normal discipline. Dooku nodded curtly, and followed Qui-Gon back into Revan's ward. They sat down on opposing sides of the room, staring at each other awkwardly.

Dooku was a skilled word-weaver, however at times the man was not afraid to be heavily blunt. "Do you truly think that low of me Qui-Gon? Is that the Force damned honest way you think of me?"

Oh, the pain was gone, the anger had taken it's place. This was going to be a nightmare. Force he should have just let the man go.

"It's how you've come off for a long time," said Qui-Gon softly, "I know better, but sometimes, it's hard to remember that you do actually feel under that mask you wear on your face."

"A Jedi," said Dooku thinly, "Must keep a tight and careful control of their emotions. Beyond the dangers of the Dark Side, betraying any of what you feel may..."

"Lead to betrayal in turn," said Qui-Gon with a sigh, "I remember your lessons Master, as much as I disagree with them. Not everyone is Lorian Nod, nor should they be treated that way."

Dooku glared at him with a dangerous glint in his eyes that made most people wither and slink away offering panicked apologies.

Qui-Gon had learned to shrug off that glare when he was fourteen. "It's true and you know it."

Dooku slowly shook his head. "I would have thought you would have more tact then that my old padawan. Some subjects are best left buried."

"Even when they effect your every waking interaction with others and your entire thought process?" prodded Qui-Gon.

"Since when did you become a Mind Healer?" jabbed Dooku.

"Since I no longer resided in the padawan portion of the unit we used to live in," countered Qui-Gon, "Bringing that up when I was still your padawan would have been suicide."
"You will always be my padawan Qui-Gon Jinn," said Dooku, huffing slightly, "And it is still suicide."

The two men stared each other down before they both started chuckling softly, tension slowly leaking out of the room.

Dooku sighed and rubbed the back of his head. "Qui-Gon, what happened on the mission?"

Clever, to divert attention away from himself, but Qui-Gon would allow it. He had badly overstepped himself mere minutes ago. It was an easy story to tell, up until the end of their time on Tatooine. Then his voice trailed off, and he knew uncertainty was ringing from him in the Force judging from the look Dooku was giving him.

"What is it my old Padawan?" asked Dooku.

Qui-Gon hesitated. "Something the Council has given me express orders not to discuss."

A time traveling Jedi Exile and one of the few who could be called a redeemed Sith Lord were a tightly controlled secret.

There was a heavy, resigned sigh from his old Master. "I see."

Qui-Gon gave a self-depreciating chuckle. "It's not something you'd believe anyway. I can sometimes hardly believe it myself."

In hindsight, he should have known better than to open his mouth.

A calculating look crossed Dooku's face. "Judging by the timetable you've been giving me, does whatever the Council does not wish you to discuss coincide with that unusual disturbance in the Force that happened not so long ago?"

Damn, he forgot how quickly Dooku could piece things together with so little to go on and only coincidental timing to go by. "It might. I'm surprised you felt it."

"Qui-Gon, I don't think there is a single Force sensitive that didn't feel it," chided Dooku, before a glint entered his eye, "Now I won't press you to reveal what happened..."

"...but you wouldn't complain if I did," finished Qui-Gon.

There was a small smirk on Dooku's face. "No, I wouldn't, and not a soul would hear of it."

Force, he almost felt like his old Master was guilt tripping him into it. Not that he actually was, it was more Qui-Gon's own guilt nagging at him. He wanted to offer Dooku something, anything, more than a few words of apology that were not nearly enough for the corrosive bile he had flung his way. Something to get back into his good graces, something to give him someone to hold onto when he had driven everyone else away.

"Do you believe in time travel?" asked Qui-Gon.

Dooku's face went so utterly blank for a moment Qui-Gon had to resist the urge to laugh. "You're right, it's not something I would believe..."

Dooku licked his lips. "Yet, that disturbance, the feeling that something 'did not belong here'..."

Dooku crossed his arms. "Alright, I'm listing, as an neutral, impassive observer."
"Aren't you always?" questioned Qui-Gon, eyebrow half raised.

Dooku huffed. "Oh get on with it boy."

Qui-Gon sighed. "I trust you know your history. Two people were apparently flung here from roughly four thousand years in the past. One was the Jedi Exile Meetra Surik."

Dooku raised an eyebrow.

Qui-Gon turned his head to look at the comatose patient. "The other, him, was Revan."

Utter silence.

He turned his head back and watched his old Master silently. The man had a perfect Sabaac face, and Qui-Gon could feel a soft brush to his mental shields, which he dropped, allowing Dooku to sample for the truth. When he did, he watched all the air leave the older man's lungs.

"You are serious," he said, it was not a question.

"Yes," answered Qui-Gon.

"Force," whispered Dooku as he turned to look at Revan, "Of all the things for the disturbance had been... time travel? No, some random person discovering time travel would be an acceptable thing compared to those two specifically."

"Is something wrong with that?" asked Qui-Gon.

Dooku leveled a heavy stare that made Qui-Gon twitch uncomfortably. "My Padawan, you have no idea the ramifications of what this means. Not a clue. Those two warped the fate of the galaxy around them in their own time. For them to have been brought here? When the Sith have revealed their survival?"

Dooku reached a hand up to rub his forehead. "Force, what are we in for? Another galaxy wide war? Another schism? Another Jedi Purge?"

Qui-Gon's eyes went slightly wide at that. He had not given their purpose here much thought to be frank. Meetra had seemed like an excellent candidate for training the Chosen One, but he had not dwelt on why the Force might have brought them here otherwise. Always caught up in the moment, sometimes his affinity for the Living Force could be a blinding burden.

"That... hadn't crossed my mind," murmured Qui-Gon.

Dooku scoffed. "Obviously not."

The old man seemed his age again. "Force, this leaves me with much to dwell on..."

He made a motion with his hand. "Continue, what left you in here brooding about failing your padawan?"

Qui-Gon went silent for a moment, shame bleeding out of him, before he softly spoke of the council meeting, of being more than willing to brush off Obi-Wan for Anakin, and then passing the boy off to Meetra. Of his and Obi-Wan's angry encounter back in their quarters not so long ago. When he finished, he sat there, awaiting what he was sure to be a viscous and well deserved rebuke from his master.

Instead, Dooku sighed wearily. "We're both old fools aren't we? Doomed to alienate those we care
Qui-Gon chuckled without humor. "I suppose we are."

"We're a mess the both of us," mused Dooku, "Me and Komari, you and I, you and Xanatos, you and Obi-Wan."

They both grew quiet, united in their failures, until a chime of a comlink sounded; Dooku fished his out and scowled at it. "Right, I have a meeting with Damask."

Qui-Gon wrinkled his nose with distaste. "Him and Palpatine again?"

Dooku raised an eyebrow. "Why my old padawan, is that a dislike aimed towards our esteemed Chancellor?"

"Wouldn't dream of it," deflected Qui-Gon.

They both showed a hint of an amused smile before Dooku's broke off, a frown on his face. "Actually, it's been a rather curious development that's been going around the political circles. Palpatine and Damask used to be close friends, now? It's as if the moment Palpatine became Chancellor, their friendship eroded and broke. The barely restrained hostility between the two when they briefly met in the senate dome yesterday was... palpable."

"Curious," said Qui-Gon, tilting his head to hear a whisper of the Force.

This was important. He did not know why, but it was. But the choice was up to him. The Force did not urge him one way or another, to involve himself or not, with what was going on. Just that this upcoming meeting was going to leave a heavy impact on both Dooku and the Galaxy for decades, centuries, perhaps even millennium to come. Qui-Gon struggled with the decision for a moment before deciding he had cut enough people off. He would help his Master in whatever was to come.

"Perhaps we should investigate?" offered Qui-Gon.

Dooku was taken aback. "You would willingly involve yourself in a potential political debacle?"

"No, I would willingly help you involve yourself in it," said Qui-Gon, an amused smirk on his face.

There was a faint fondness in Dooku's eyes and voice. "Just like old times my old padawan."

"Like old times indeed," said Qui-Gon, rising to his feet.

With that, the two of them left the room. If Qui-Gon had turned around, he might have seen a faint blue outline, almost like a ghost, standing next to Revan's bed, a mirror image of the comatose man. He might have seen the uncertainty dwelling in those weakened ghostly eyes, wondering if directing Qui-Gon back to his old Master had been the right decision to make, or if he had just made things catastrophically worse...

Obi-Wan Kenobi was irritated. He had enough on his plate dealing with the aftermath of his Master's cruel stunt, preparing for the trials he personally did not feel ready to partake in. He did not need to get summoned into the Chancellor's office. If the man had wanted to thank him, he could have just sent a message. Damn politicians... probably wanted to make this into a PR stunt or something.

No, no, such thoughts were rude, and unbecoming of a Jedi.
He schooled his face, released his immense frustration into the Force, and walked into the Chancellor's office.

The older man looked up from his desk and gave him a warm smile. "Ah, welcome Master Kenobi, I was hoping you would have time to spare for an old man."

Obi-Wan gave him a brief forced smile. "A Jedi will always have time for the Chancellor, and Padawan Kenobi will do, I haven't even made knight yet."

Palpatine seemed amused. "Ah, the humbleness of the Jedi certainly isn't understated."

Obi-Wan gave the man a self-depreciating smile. "It's said to be a virtue."

"I suppose, but I do hope," began the Chancellor, "You would allow your humility to slide for a brief moment to accept my thanks for your heroic actions in helping to save my planet from the Trade Federation."

Obi-Wan couldn't help it, he sighed and allowed out a, "You're welcome, I was glad to be of service."

The Chancellor gave him a brief smile before curiously looking over the Padawan's shoulder. "Though, I was hoping to thank your Master as well, the invitation was for both of you."

Obi-Wan couldn't help but stiffen, the Force rippling around him. "Master Jinn is currently offering his services in the Halls of Healing last I heard."

Palpatine looked at him, a strange gleam in his eye. "Perhaps I overstep my bounds my boy, but is everything alright? You grew... tense... when I mentioned your master."

"Nothing to be concerned about," Obi-Wan forced out in a strained voice, "Just a... misunderstanding between the two of us."

The Chancellor leveled an unimpressed look at Obi-Wan and walked over, placing a hand on his shoulder. "My boy, I am a politician. I am, by design, excellent in picking up bodily cues. You, are giving off at least ten different hints of distress, extreme distress. This is alarming especially in considering you have the training of a Jedi."

Obi-Wan couldn't muster up the strength to argue, for some reason, he felt like all the strength to fight was leaving him. His legs even felt wobbly.

"Come," said the Chancellor in a strange soothing enticing voice as he directed Obi-Wan to a chair, "Sit."

The Chancellor walked around his desk and sat back down in his chair. "I will not let a champion of my people suffer so, what troubles you my boy?"

Obi-Wan's throat felt unusually dry. His head was pounding, whispers in his ear. He didn't understand it, how muddled he felt for a moment. He felt... a desire... a compulsion almost... to confess his deepest darkest fears to the man, one that had already come to pass. Wouldn't it be better to just get it out with? To someone on his side? Rather than a mind healer that he didn't want to see who would always poke and prod and remain so infuriatingly neutral? Wouldn't it be better to unburden himself on such a caring, wise old man?

He was momentarily shocked when it slipped out his lips. "Qui-Gon abandoned me."
There was a look of shock, and then sadness on the older man's face. "How? Why?"

And then any emotional control was gone. "In front of the entire Council, for a new potential padawan."

Palpatine looked mortified. "The entire Council?"

Obi-Wan nodded and then couldn't help but spit out, "He then proceeded to go an abandon the new potential padawn to another Jedi as well."

A hint of disgust showed on Palpatine's face. "Perhaps I have grossly misjudged Master Jinn."

"Maybe so did I," said Obi-Wan softly, wearily, painfully.

Sympathy bled across the old man's face. "My condolences my boy. I dare say you certainly will be a better Jedi than he was despite his teachings, and not repeat his mistakes."

"I would never abandon a padawan of mine," spat Obi-Wan viciously, "I know what it's like, to sit day in and day out, hoping and praying for a Master to take you and save you from being dismissed and sent to the Agricorps. Once you quench that fear, another one rises, of not being good enough for your master, of failing them and being renounced as a padawan. There are not words to describe what that moment was like. It was just a few words, so quickly forgotten when followed by the rest, but for me, it was a horrific eternity to wonder what I had done wrong."

"My boy," said the Chancellor in a tone that demanded his focus, "You. Did. Nothing. Wrong."

The man had such charisma and conviction in his voice, Obi-Wan couldn't help but relax a little and hope deep down it was true.

"You are not beholden to Master Jinn's mistakes," chided Palpatine, "If he was so foolish to cast aside a remarkable young man like you, then pox on him."

Obi-Wan couldn't help but gawk a little. He had exploded at Qui-Gon early, but that had been a brief lapse of control, an emotional response. Palpatine just flat out said it and meant it. He could feel it from the man, he thought Qui-Gon a fool for throwing him away.

"Though," said Palpatine with distaste, "I imagine he'll come crawling back at some point to offer honeyed words and a false apology."

A darkened look crossed Obi-Wan's face. He had... desperately hoped Qui-Gon would come back, would apologize... but was Palpatine right? Would it just be false words? Just to abate his own guilt or the accusations of others?

He tossed it away. "I don't think I'll accept. Once I pass my trials, I owe him nothing."

There was a glint of approval in Palpatine's eyes. "Good, good."

Palpatine slowly rose and stalked around the desk, if not for the friendly face he wore, Obi-Wan might have considered himself prey to a predator. "I'm glad we had a chance to speak my boy. It's good for you, to have someone to unburden on. I know it's not the Jedi way, but you are only human, it's only natural. I would be honored if you would consider me a friend enough to continue to do so if ever the burden becomes to much."

Obi-Wan stared at him, and then his hand as the Chancellor offered it. It was something he should refuse as a Jedi, he knew it. Yet... he felt an odd sincerity from the older man. He was telling the
truth in that he wanted Obi-Wan to come to him, and that he would be willing to listen. An unbiased third party, who wasn't a Jedi Mind Healer.

Force, the idea alone of not having to go into the Halls of Healing to deal with issues that he couldn't manage to release to the Force or bury was enough on its own to get him to shake.

The concept of someone outside the Order, not bound in the same ways as he, who wouldn't be afraid to privately call the Jedi out on things that made no sense, was what made him do so. "I would be thankful Chancellor, to have you as a friend."

The Chancellor smiled a kind, benevolent smile at him. "As am I Obi-Wan Kenobi, as am I..."
Anakin was practicing the first lightsaber form with a training saber. He had been excited, the first time he held it in his hands and started swinging it around. Now? It was... a little boring to keep swinging the lightsaber in the same motions, the 'kata' as Meetra called it. She said it was to create a 'muscle memory' so he could fight with Shii-Cho without thinking about his every move. He believed her, but how long did he have to stand there in one spot doing it? At least mom and Kitster got to move around practicing the martial arts Meetra had shown them. As for Meetra herself, she was sitting comfortably on the couch in the center room of the Ebon Hawk, all the furniture pushed up against the wall to give them all space to practice. She was reading the holo-net on a datapad, trying to 'catch up' on what she had missed out on over the last four-thousand years...

...and apparently whatever she was reading was causing stress. He could feel disbelief, confusion, and outrage leaking down the bond, growing steadily in size enough to distract him from the kata. He mentally started a countdown...

Finally she exploded. "What were they THINKING?!"

Anakin paused his motions. "What were who thinking?"

"The Jedi! The Republic," she sputtered out, "Why in the world... why... are they stupid?"

"What's up?" called over Kitster before he yelped as Shmi tripped him and took him to the floor.

"Don't take your eyes off your opponent," scolded Shmi with a mischievous smile that made Anakin oh so happy to see.

Mom really never had to much of a reason to smile before. He was so more than content that she had been doing it a lot on their way back to Naboo.

"The Ruusan Reformation," Meetra spat out with a mixture of outrage and horror, "The Republic has no standing army anymore!"

"Oh..." said Anakin before tilting his head, "Maybe that's why they never came to Tatooine to help?"

"If they wanted to do something about slavery, they could have done so back when both the Republic and the Jedi were militarized," shot down Meetra grumpily.

"Was trying to give them the benefit of the doubt," murmured Anakin.

Meetra stared down at her datapad, gripping it tightly, dismay on her face. "The Jedi have no military force anymore. I didn't... realize just how much had changed. Force, the Jedi answer the the Supreme Chancellor and the Senate now? What happened to being a separate entity?"

"Whats wrong with that?" asked Anakin.

"It means the Jedi answer to corrupt politicians," answered Meetra, "It means that they can drag around the Jedi on who-knows-what personally motivated missions or tasks. The Jedi in times of peace are supposed to be neutral peacekeepers."

She ran a hand through her hair as she kept reading, Anakin could feel shock and unease creeping down the bond. "An age restriction...? I... I mean, Jedi always tried to take initiates young, from
childhood. Anyone taken in older was always looked down upon or mistrusted until they proved themselves, but it wasn't exactly forbidden. I thought the Council was just being the Council and throwing a fit for the hell of it, but you were actually outside the new age limits. Which are absolutely insane if you ask me. Taking infants? No one would refuse a Jedi, those that tried would have a hard time denying their persuasive arguments. That kind of coercion, that's borderline baby-napping... Force, what the hell does the public think of that policy? That has to be a public relations nightmare..."

Shmi walked over and put her hands on Anakin's shoulder, squeezing them. "I love my son with everything that I am. I was willing to give him up to give him a better life, but I had always hoped to see him again. But... he's told me of the 'attachment' rule, for love to be taken from him... from other babies... it's wrong, I don't like it."

Anakin reached a hand up to squeeze his mother's, giving her a soft smile, before turning to look at Meetra as she spoke in a weary voice, "Jedi are encouraged to love and cherish all life, but, personal love, or selfish love as some would call it, is forbidden. Marriage in the Jedi Order actually used to be allowed a bit before I was born, before Exar Kun and his whole mess, after that, it started to change. Heck, one of the Masters I learned under in my youth was Vima Sunrider, daughter of Nomi Sunrider."

Meetra frowned. "I never did learn what happened to Vima... I hope she wasn't on Katarr..."

Anakin absorbed and then promptly discarded the names Meetra had given out, figuring she'd bring them up again if they were really important. "How old were you when you became a Jedi?"

Meetra tilted her head in thought. "That... was a long time ago. I was a child, maybe a little younger than you. I don't remember my parents well, just blurry images in my mind, but I remember the choice being presented to me, if I wanted to go or not. It was my choice, even if I really didn't know much about the Jedi."

She smiled softly at Anakin. "I think I had a lot of the same thoughts you did, about becoming a Jedi, a hero."

She frowned. "But regardless, even if I wasn't aware of the nitty gritty details, or really old enough to understand just what I was getting myself into, it was still my choice. An infant..."

"Has no choice," said Shmi softly.

Meetra nodded. "If you ask me, no offense Anakin, but no one under their race's age of maturity should become a Jedi, so they can think through and understand just what they would be giving up to become one."

Anakin huffed. "I'm plenty mature!"

Shmi ruffled his hair and leaned down to kiss his forehead, a teasing tone escaping her lips. "Of course you are."

Before anyone else could continue, R2-D2 rolled in from the cockpit, beeping and whistling, with a naked C3-PO following, "Oh goodness graces me, slow down!"

R2 spun his dome, blurbling out something that made Meetra raise her eyebrow in amusement, and made C3-PO sputter out, "I am not undignified! It's not my fault Master Anakin hasn't covered my circuits yet!"

Anakin grinned. "Don't worry 3PO, we picked up some scrap on Nar Shadaa that I might be able to
"I would most appreciate it," said C3-PO before turning to Meeta. "Mistress Surik, what my little companion was saying was that we're..."

"Going to arrive in ten minutes," interrupted Meeta.

"Oh, you can understand binary!" said C3-PO in a pleased tone, "A rather rare skill."

Anakin pouted. "I can understand a bit too!"

"Of course you can, you are the maker," said 3PO, mater of factually.

Anakin had a feeling 3PO wasn't really appreciative of that skill.

"Alright, R2 with me, we'll be in the cockpit to coordinate landing," said Meeta, standing up, "C3PO, if you'd help them clean up and put the room back to the way it was..."

"Oh, it would be my pleasure," said the droid, moving to lift a table.

The moment Meeta was gone, Shmi gave Anakin a mortified look. "You were on Nar Shadaa?"

"Well, we had to earn the money to free you and Kitster somehow," said Anakin sheepishly, "It wasn't that hard actually. I repaired a podracer and got us a lot. Though those sleemos wanted to take me from Meeta and make me a slave again to race for them..."

He winced briefly when he felt his mother's hands grip his shoulders tightly, feeling her concern and fear bleeding through the air. "What?"

He glanced up at her. "It's fine mom, Meeta showed off her saber and threatened them and they backed off."

He scowled darkly. "Though, people who would take slaves like that ought to be...

"Not antagonized otherwise more would come after you," said Shmi worriedly, "Stir the nest and all the sand wasps will come out. Baring her teeth and getting out was wise. Nar Shadaa, from what I've heard, is a hive of evil. Draw to much attention and even a Jedi would be overwhelmed."

"I guess," muttered Anakin.

"So, she got you both out of there without loss of life. I think that's what she meant, about words being as powerful as a lightsaber," said Shmi.

Anakin shrugged as the ship began to rattle in what he was beginning to recognize as planetary entry, repeating himself again. "I guess..."

Words were one thing, action was another. Words would never get all the slaves freed, any slave freed really, unless they were purchasing one, or the words were accompanied by a threat. He had fantasies, as a young child, of legions of Jedi storming Tatooine, cutting down slavers and freeing slaves. A child's foolish dream perhaps, but, he had held onto it for so long. He unfortunately knew better now. The Jedi wouldn't help the slaves.

Only he would.

Him and Meeta and mom and Kitster and anyone else who joined them.
Meetra has said it would take a lifetime, and even then, he might only be able to start a movement that would go on past his own lifespan. But he swore it wouldn't be like that. He would make a difference, he would see slavery ended in his lifetime. Heck, he had already made a difference, working to free mom and Kitster.

So when they descended the ramp into the Naboo spaceport, he viewed it simply as the next step in a long road of them. They needed their slave chips removed so they couldn't be accidentally detonated. Not to mention the pure relief of having them gone. So yeah, that was a good reason to come back here... along with simply seeing the beautiful planet and it's Queen again...

Not to mention the subtle nudge the whispers... er... the Force, seemed to be giving him. Something was going to happen here, something important. Not for himself, but for Meetra. So he'd watch and wait and try to understand.

Meetra seemed surprised when one of the Queen's handmaidens met them just outside the spaceport. "Welcome back to Naboo, the Queen is pleased to have you as guests again so soon."

Meetra nodded in greeting. "I see nothing slips passed the Queen's notice. We don't wish to impose upon the Naboo, but, we're here for a... personal mater. Perhaps you might be able to recommend a surgeon to..."

She lowered her voice and motioned to Anakin, his mother, and Kitster. "...to get their slave transmitter's removed?"

The handmaiden stiffened briefly, surprise, then outrage, then understanding briefly flashing across her face before she schooled it. "Of course. Please come this way, the Queen would be more than willing to offer the services of the palace's chief surgeon when he has a moment."

They followed in behind the handmaiden, with Meetra still talking, "He sounds busy."

The handmaiden nodded. "I fear we will be cleaning up the Trade Federation's occupation for some time. There is a shortage of doctors to tend to the wounded."

"We can wait," spoke up Shmi quietly, "We don't mean to..."

The handmaiden shook her head. "It's alright, all the most critical situations have already been dealt with. We'll be happy to help you out."

"I could offer my own assistance," said Meetra, "Force Healing is something I'm capable of doing."

That perked Anakin's interest. "Force Healing?"

"The Force can be used to accelerate the body's natural healing ability to a rapid degree," explained Meetra, "I'm not the most skilled at it, but it's saved my life and those of my comrades more than once. Perhaps I'll teach you that while we're here."

Wow... he could heal people with the Force? "That's wizard!"

And also troubling... there were so many people he could have helped if had known how to do that when he was younger...

Something must have bled through the bond, because Meetra turned and gave a soft, sad smile, before facing forward. They were led into the palace, Anakin was kind of amused to see piles of droids gathered and shoved into corners. A few weeks or so and they hadn't removed the droids,
though perhaps that was because there were more important things to do. Still, they weren't kidding, it was going to take a long time to clean up Naboo. They were ushered into a large waiting room. Anakin was a bit taken back by the number of people being tended to on makeshift bedding that were propped up all over the room. He wanted the slave chips out of them, but, he didn't want to cut in front of people who could actually use some help. The chips weren't going anywhere after all.

Meetra appeared to be thinking the same thing. "Perhaps while we wait our turn, Anakin and I could volunteer to help treat some of the lightly wounded?"

Anakin liked how she phrased it as a question, but made it sound like anything but. He lightly bit his lip to suppress a grin.

The handmaiden quirked an eyebrow before tilting her head in acknowledgement. "As you wish Master Jedi."

Anakin watched, a little curious, when she didn't dissuade the handmaiden of her status. Meetra went on and on about not being a Jedi, or being an Exile, but she didn't seem to point that out to people unless she had a reason to, he had seen it a few times up to this point. He wondered if that let her get away with things. Actually, now that he thought about it, merely activating her lightsaber back on Nar Shadaa had automatically made people think 'Jedi' and back off. Guess being an Exile, but letting people think she was a Jedi, had it's perks.

Though that ignored him thinking she was more of a Jedi then the Jedi were. He didn't see any Jedi in here offering to help out the wounded after all. A planet recovering after being invaded? That's something Jedi should have helped with. Well... to be fair there might be some elsewhere on the planet, but he didn't honestly know.

"Anakin, come," said Meetra started towards the nearest person waiting in a chair.

"Good evening sir," offered Meetra as Anakin fell in behind her, "Could you tell me where you're injured?"

A gruff man grunted and rolled up his sleeve, a nasty red cut that was scabbed over ran down his arm. "Damn droid fell off a balcony above me and gave me a good scrape, metal arms are a lot sharper than they look. Decided to finally get it looked at."

"Do you mind if I tend to it?" she offered.

The man gave her robes a second look before nodding. "Heard you Jedi can do something like that, go ahead."

"Watch carefully Anakin," instructed Meetra as she knelt down next to the man.

"In a dangerous situation, you can simply shove healing energy into a wound and hope for the best," explained Meetra, "But if you have time, it's best to probe the wound and asses it to better understand what's wrong and what you need to do."

Anakin nodded and watched as she closed her eyes. He could feel her reach out, poking and prodding with the Force. "The redness alone around the wound suggests irritation and perhaps the beginning of infection. Feel underneath it, sense what is there."

Anakin closed his eyes and focused. "Something... it's small, but icky."

Meetra chuckled. "Well, that's one way to describe it. Like I said, the start of an infection."
She gave the man a brief nod. "It's good you came to get this treated sooner rather than later, another week or so on it's own and it could have gotten a lot worse."

The man scowled. "Wife was harping to me about it."

Meetra's lips twitched in amusement. "Good woman."

"Now," said Meetra, holding a hand at the top of the cut, "Watch."

Anakin's eyes went wide to see a soft blue light emanate from Meetra's hand. He felt how the energy was shaped from a pure form, to something soothing. Redness fled the cut as she ran her hand slowly down it, the scabs not fully fading, but melding mostly back into normal skin. It wasn't fully healed, but it was well on it's way there.

"Wizard," breathed Anakin, "If you do it again, could it fully heal?"

"I could have fully healed it on the first go if I wanted to," said Meetra before motioning down the line of chairs, "But there are a lot of people to help, and it's best to conserve energy. The wound was tended to, the beginnings of an infection treated, and so long as he doesn't re-injure himself there, it'll be gone in a few weeks or so."

Anakin considered it before nodding. It made sense, she tended to the worst of it and left the rest to heal on it's own. He watched as she went down the line of sitting people, tending to one minor injury or discomfort after the other. He payed attention as much as he could while not gaping at injuries suddenly healing under that blue light. He summarized it in three steps: Gauging the damage, converting the Force into a healing energy, and applying it.

Finally, she asked the question he was so eager to hear, but nervous for as well. "Do you think you can do it Anakin?"

He briefly thought about acting confident and saying he could do it no problem, but... the bond and the fact that Meetra was pretty perceptive would make that pointless. "I can try."

"That's all anyone can ask," she said, leading him to a small girl a little younger than he was, a nasty bruise on her face.

The girl looked at him, curious, and so trusting, it made him feel guilty enough to ask beforehand, "I-I can't accidentally make it worse, can I?"

Meetra laughed. "No, not easily. You'd have to do something really wrong to turn a restorative technique into something harmful. Now, it helps for your first time to adopt a meditative state."

Anakin closed his eyes, took a breath, and slowly let it out. "Okay."

"Feel the injury, and then, feel the desire to mend, to help, to relieve those in pain," came Meetra's voice.

Anakin focused on the presence in-front of him, the smudge of throbbing pain echoing from her. It wasn't anything intense, but if he were her, it would be grating, not to mention causing one heck of a headache. He raised a hand slowly, palm out, inches from where the sensation was emanating from. He recalled the times his mother had tended to him. Wiping a cut clean, a kiss on it followed by a bandage and soothing words... a soft smile played across his face...

There was a flash of blue leaking through his eyelids before he suddenly felt all the strength leave his legs. "W-woah..."
He listed to the side before Meetra caught him. "Easy there Anakin, that was a bit... much."

He lazily opened his eyes. "Huh?"

His first sight was the girl he had been helping's completely healed face; she rubbed her jaw and exclaimed. "My tooth ache's even gone!"

Meetra handed Anakin off to Shmi who sat down on a chair with him on her lap. "Good for your first attempt, but way to much energy put into it."

"Oh," murmured Anakin, tired.

"Thanks mister," said the girl, walking forward and giving him a kiss on his cheek before rushing off to her waiting parents.

For a moment his tiredness faded, his mouth hung open like a fish, astonished, and then his face turned beat red.

Shmi laughed and ruffled her son's hair, kissing his forehead. "Proof you did good Ani."

Meetra laughed as well. "Alright, sit and rest for a bit. You'll have plenty of chances to practice during your apprenticeship."

Anakin huffed a little, but was more than content to lean back against his mom and close his eyes. His first attempt at healing someone was a success, a tired overdone one, but a success none-the-less. He briefly opened his eyes, locking onto Meetra as she knelt down in-front of the next person she began tending to. He wondered... how long would it be until he would be able to help her? Heal whatever was wrong with her?

Because he couldn't forget that. Wouldn't forget it. The dream haunted him every night, reminding him that Meetra needed help as well. He closed his eyes with a soft sigh and rested his head against his mother's collarbone. He'd get there one day...

Meetra turned her head when a familiar voice spoke up to her right, "Thank you for helping out."

It took her a moment to recognize who was speaking, and her eyebrows shot up in surprise to realize the Queen was here in normal, everyday garments, helping the staff tend to the injured populace. The Queen saw that, and raised her own eyebrow in mock challenge in return. An amused smile graced Meetra's lips, a soft chuckle escaping.

"It's not a problem, your majesty," said Meetra, returning to tending the sprained ankle she was working on, "It's the least we can do to help out and pay for their upcoming surgery."

The Queen slowly shook her head. "Padme is fine when were not in a formal function."

"As you wish, Padme," answered Meetra.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Padme frown in Shmi and Anakin's direction. "Yes, Sabe mentioned the reason for your return to me. It still makes my blood boil to think about people being enslaved like they are... were..."

Meetra sighed, removing her hand from the ankle. "You're free to go."

The man she had been tending to offered her a quick thanks and left.
Meetra rose to her feet, and took the chair he had been in before turning to the Queen. "Some things time never seems to change."

Padme's eyes briefly flickered to hers before returning to the arm she was bandaging. "Yes, I imagine that one would think a few thousand years would change things."

Meetra blanked for a moment before giving Padme a hard stare. That was a rather pointed statement, too pointed, how would she know?

The Queen merely smirked in response and guessed the question lingering on Meetra's lips. "You'd be surprised what you overhear on a starship when disguised as a handmaiden that no one pays attention to."

Meetra couldn't help but roll her eyes. "Fair enough."

The Queen finished tending to the person in front of her and rose to her feet, dusting herself off and turning to Meetra. "Might we have a word in private?"

Meetra nodded and followed the Queen out into a separate adjoining supply room. "I'm surprised you believe it."

"I didn't at first," admitted Padma, "Not until I had access to the holo-net to investigate when I had a chance."

The Queen slowly looked her over, head to toe. "You look pretty close to what I saw, and I read that cloning Force Sensitives doesn't really work out well. You are Meetra Surik, former Jedi General in the Mandalorian Wars. I'll admit, the old holos from that time make you out to be a lot more dramatic or imposing."

Meetra snorted. "I remember some of those. Revan had me go through a few publicity stunts to try and draw in more volunteers for the war effort."

Padme frowned heavily. "Him, Revan, I've been reading a lot of conflicting information on him."

"He's a former Jedi General turned Sith Lord turned Jedi turned whatever he is now," said Meetra, "So anything along those lines is probably true."

Padme raised an eyebrow. "Probably? You don't know exactly?"

Meetra shrugged. "I completely skipped over the Jedi Civil War during my exile. All I know is what I heard offhand."

"Is he dangerous?" asked Padme quiet, "From what I've read... he could change the entire Galaxy if he's..."

"He's not a Sith anymore," said Meetra firmly, "Even that wasn't fully his choice."

Her face darkened briefly, "Though, Revan was skirting the Dark Side during the war long before he encountered the Sith Emperor."

Padme had a briefly confused look on her face before masking it. "So he's not someone to worry about?"

"Worry about? Considering he's in a coma right now, no," said Meetra, "But even when he wakes up... I wouldn't worry about Revan. Be mindful of him and what he can do yes, but, that's it. So
long as you don't mess with him, or adopt a cause he feels compelled to crusade against, you're fine."

"I see," said Padme, a thoughtful look on her face, "Well, thank you for putting that concern to rest, and..."

She gave her a warm smile. "I should thank you for freeing Anakin's mother and his friend, they didn't deserve to be slaves."

"No one does," said Meetra offhand.

They drew into a silence for a minute, staring at one another. Padme's eyes briefly drifted to the door, her topic spent.

Meetra however had a question. "Do you mind if I ask you something?"

Padme's eyes flickered back. "Of course, go ahead."

"How versed are you in the history and politics of the Republic?" asked Meetra.

"I was part of the legislative Youth Program, so Naboo politics aside I have a respectable grasp of it," answered Padme, "And at bare minimum generally knowledge of the history of both Naboo and the Republic is a requirement for being the Queen of Naboo."

"Do you know about the Ruusan Reformation?" asked Meetra, hoping she had found someone who could explain that madness.

Padme nodded. "Of course, it was the signature event that reformed the Republic into it's current state."

Ah good. "What were they thinking?!"

Padme blanked. "Pardon?"

"Why would they disband the Republic's army?" Meetra asked in disbelief, "It's foolish!"

Padme's expressed schooled into a mask, a very unimpressed mask. "War is a barbaric thing, General Surik. Diplomacy should be the first, and hopefully only thing needed to resolve a conflict. Fighting, and especially war, should be last resorts, and even then..."

Oh. Oh. The Queen, of the planet that had just been invaded, was a peace lover. One of those diplomacy die-hards that thought talking it out could solve all the galaxy's problems. And Meetra had just asked her why the Republic disbanded their army, called it foolish straight to her face.

Ho boy...

Well, too late to back track. What was the saying? In for a credit, in for a pound? She was always good at digging herself into a hole. "If the Republic had a standing army, I doubt the Trade Federation would have..."

"If the Republic had a standing army, if the Ruusan Reformation never happened," cut off Padme, drawing herself fully upright in a regal manor, "I doubt I would recognize the Galaxy. From what I know of the Jedi, I'd have thought dwelling on the 'what ifs' would be something you wouldn't do."

Meetra snorted, scorn ripping from the lips. "I take it you've never met the Jedi Council. Even the current one has to do the same thing. Long several hour long sessions debating the merits or what
ifs of doing things, only to, at the end, sit on their collective hands and wait for some mysterious divine signal from the Force in order to act."

"And charging headfirst into a war is any better?" countered Padme, voice growing cold, "Or half the bloody battles you personally lead or participated in? I wasn't going to bring this up, after what you've done for Anakin, but you know what? What about some of the downright evil, monstrous, tactics you personally used?"

Meetra gave her an incredulous look. "Excuse me?"

"Malachor V," spat Padme with utter venom, "I read about the Shadow Mass Generators. How could you do that to those who served under you?"

Meetra froze, shock ripping through her body. "..."

Padme raised an extremely unimpressed eyebrow at her. "Has no one ever called you out on that before?"

Coldness flooded through Meetra so hard and fast she thought she might have been dipped in carbonite.

The bond with Anakin, formally drowsy and fading off into sleep, sprang to life instantly, slightly panicked. "Meetra?!"

"Well, what do you have to say for yourself?" demanded Padme, "How could you murder so many of your own men to win a battle?"

"Good soldiers follow orders," Meetra whispered, a weak, pathetic denial, barely above a whimper. "Meetra?! What's wrong?"

"Excuse me?" said Padme in disbelief.

"I had my orders," said Meetra, mouth and throat so dry, "From Revan, my direct superior officer, to use the generators if the situation..."

"No," said Padme, taking a step forward, her queenly manner fading into youthful anger, "You don't get to make that excuse. You should have told him to take those orders and karking shove it!"

Meetra reflexively stepped back. "I... we had to stop the Mandalorians..."

"Oh yes, the big bad Mandalorians," said Padme with a scoff, "They've come a long way since then, unlike you. You might do well to follow their example."

Meetra gave her a bewildered look, but didn't have a chance to ask what she was going on about before Anakin came barging into the room in a panic. "Meetra?!"

Meetra didn't look at him, her eyes briefly locked onto Padme's so righteously judgemental eyes, and found she had nothing she could say to really defend herself, and simply bowed her head. "..."

"I believe I will bid you good-day," said Padme thinly, "I thank you for your service to Naboo both during the occupation and today, and will gladly see to their slave chips being removed for free, but afterwords I believe it would be best if you were to leave Naboo for the time being. At least until you can admit what you did and not offer weak excuses for it."

Meetra flinched at her words, and took another step back, head bowing further. The Queen left not
a moment later, and for a split second, Meetra felt the oddest sensation from Anakin, intense conflicting anger, at the Queen, on Meetra's behalf. She didn't deserve it though, oh how Meetra felt she didn't. She wobbly made her way to the nearest wall and slid down it, hungering for some kind of stability to rest against.

Malachor V.

It always came back to that Sith damned place.

Her greatest sins, her greatest triumphs...

Her deepest loss.

Force... Padme was right... she was a monster...

Anakin practically ran over to her, standing in front of her, anxious, wanting to do something but helpless to know what to do. "Meetra, your giving off so much cold... what did she say to you, what did she do?"

"She reminded me that I'm not a good person," whispered Meetra, not able to look at the boy.

"What?" exclaimed Anakin, she could feel his anger at the Queen rocketing. "That's banthaapoodo! You beat that Sith guy, you took me as an apprentice no questions asked when the Jedi threw a fit, and helped free my mom and Kitster!"

Did that make up for what she had done? Not nearly, not even close. Not even her actions against Nihilus, Sion, and... and Treya made up for that. She caused a massive wound in the Force itself, both at Malachor V and within herself. Betrayed and killed so many of her fellow Jedi and soldiers to win that battle. All at Revan's orders, because she hadn't the nerve back then to refuse him, to turn her back on her idol and walk away. Nor had she the mind to realize what had happened to Revan, how dark he had gone at that point, that he had fallen. HK-47 had revealed that to her, how he used her at Malachor to cleanse his armies of the Jedi and troops that would not turn. He only allowed her to go back to the Jedi to receive her judgement because, as HK had told her, Revan said 'she was already dead'...

Judging by the way Anakin was trembling, and the fact that the room had gone cold enough to see their breath, this topic was shedding way to much negativity into the air. Kriffing hell, there was a reason she shoved the end of the Mandalorian Wars to the back of her mind and kept it locked there. She could not deal with this here and now with him present.

She began to start locking down her emotions and shoving them away, and grew evasive. "I've done terrible things in the past Anakin, truly terrible and awful things. It should be left at that."

Anakin frowned, studying her for a moment. "Do you regret them?"

Images of herself giving Bao-Dur the command to activate the Shadow Mass Generator, of herself being forced to mortally wound Kreia, flashed through her mind, and she spoke without hesitation. "Yes."

He hugged her, without reservation and judgement. "Then that's all that matters, trying to do better."

Meetra, once again, was taken completely by surprise by boy. The first time, when he had come to her after Maul, and again, here. What in the world had she done to deserve this loyalty in the face of all she had done in her life? She felt a burst of pride in the air, and turned her head to see Shmi
standing in the doorway, smiling softly at her son.

"Did your mother teach you that?" asked Meetra, deciding to divert the attention away from herself.

Anakin nodded into her shoulder.

Hmph. And the Jedi would think separating Anakin from such a positive influence in his life would lead to a good result.

"Wise woman," mused Meetra, shooting Shmi a wink.

The woman raised a hand to smother a smile and soft laughter.

Meetra picked herself and Anakin up, walking out of the room. "Come on, let's get you and the other's ready. Hopefully it won't take long for the chips to be removed."

She waited until finally the three former slaves were taken in to be looked at. Once they were put under for the 'hopefully' quick and painless surgery, Meetra relaxed her control over herself and sighed heavily, brooding quietly. She played Padme's righteous accusations at her over in her mind, almost like self-flagellation, before something odd jumped out at her...

"Oh yes, the big bad Mandalorians," said Padme with a scoff, "They've come a long way since then, unlike you. You might do well to follow their example."

What in the nine Corellian hells was that supposed to mean?

Meetra pulled a datapad out of her pocket, connected to the holo-net, and began punched in 'Mandalorians' as a general search, eyes going over the results, and a name that appeared frequently, "Wonder who this 'Duchess Kryze' is..."

Her eyes lingered on a specific line... what in the...

'New Mandalorians'?

**PACAFISM?! FROM MANDALORIANS?!**

What nonsensical text was she reading?

There was way to many disjointed and confusing information on the holo-net. This... this was something she had to investigate firsthand. Guess she had her next destination in mind after Naboo. This, she couldn't leave alone. She had to see it with her own eyes.

She leaned her head back against the wall with a soft thump and turned off the datapad, an amusing thought briefly filling her mind, "One thing was certain though, if Canderous was here, he'd have a stroke reading this."

She let a soft laugh escape her lips, and settled down to wait...
Perspective

Anakin couldn't help but flinch as the Ebon Hawk burst into Hyperspace. It was going to take him a bit to get used to that jolt. He pushed the thought aside, a grin splitting his face for the umpteenth time since waking up from surgery. He had already been freed, but the slave chip being gone... it really just hit home. He was free, his mom was free, Kitster was free, and more people would be free as time passed. He couldn't think of a word, in basic, Huttese, or the language of the slaves, to describe what he felt at the moment.

All he knew was that he wanted more slaves to be free, all of them, and for them all to feel what he felt.

There also wasn't words to describe how thankful he was to Meetra. He wanted to hug her and never let go. Would have made a good attempt at it to, except she had been distant and reclusive since Naboo, since Padme had hurt her. Angel's weren't supposed to hurt good people... it felt like a betrayal, to see her make Meetra feel so awful. The sensation was still coming down the bond, muted, but still tangible, like a sour taste in his mouth, it made him want to gag. He also didn't like thinking Meetra had done bad things, but she regretted it, whatever she had done, and that was important.

Mom said everyone made mistakes, it was learning from them and trying to do better that showed what kind of person they truly were at heart.

Perhaps it was better this way, it made her more real, than chasing an obvious illusion. He sighed and shook his head, moving to the storage room of the Hawk to grab his training saber. The sooner he learned how to really use a lightsaber, the sooner he could actually be useful and help out. Fixing that pod on Nar Shadaa was easy stuff, a quick albeit big credit. But if Meetra hadn't been there, those guys would have taken him, made him a slave again.

He had to learn how to defend himself, because no one was ever going to make him a slave again.

Not to mention he sure wasn't going to be able to free other slaves nor help people in danger if he had to hide behind Meetra. He wasn't a little boy anymore, he was nine! He should be able to protect himself, protect others, not need it himself. He briefly checked in on Mom and Kitster, she was trying to teach him how to read and write. Slavers usually didn't want their slaves knowing how to read or write. Anakin had been receiving them in secret from his mother for years, he could read a little bit of basic, and a good chunk of Huttese. Kitster unfortunately never had that chance. There was the slightest twinge of jealousy at someone else having his mother's attention, but he ruthlessly crushed the feeling. Kitster was his friend.

He moved to the center room, pushed back the furniture, and started his katas. He kept at it for a time, before he noticed Meetra was sitting on the couch at the far end of the room, a datapad in her hands that she was looking over. She noticed the moment he looked at her, motioning with a hand for him to come over without even looking. He deactivated the training saber and scurried over, plopping down next to her.

"I'm going to teach you another valuable skill Anakin," began Meetra, pointing at the datapad, "Research."

His eyebrows furrowed. "'Kay?"

She smiled at that. "Take our current destination for example. We're heading to Mandalore, it helps
to research our destination prior to arrival. Getting some hint of their people, their culture, their language, their rules and laws, can help prevent incidents and tension. Not to mention give you an edge. Though, always retain some level of skepticism of what you read on the Holo-Net, its not always true."

He nodded. "Okay, sounds like a good idea."

She handed him the datapad. "There not a right or wrong answer, all are important, but what do you think we should look up first?"

"Erm... maybe whose in charge over there?" he suggested, "Something you never did on Tatooine, was badmouth the Hutts in public. Wouldn't want to accidentally do that."

"Fair enough," said Meetra, "Go ahead, lets see who leads over there and a bit of their history."

Anakin awkwardly stared at the datapad, at the various symbols and letters, he knew some of them and hesitatingly tried to punch in 'who is the leader of Mandalore'?

"Umm, it's spelled L-E-A-D-E-R, not ledr... oh...," said Meetra, before smacking her own forehead and sighing, "You don't know how to read or write, do you?"

Anakin bowed his head and mumbled. "I know some words and symbols..."

"It's alright Anakin," said Meetra softly, "We will take the time to help you learn. Honestly, I should have thought of it before, you probably could use a good run of the basics. I can't imagine Tatooine gave you much of an education."

Anakin bowed his head further, shame burning his face.

"Wait wait, Anakin, why are you ashamed?" asked Meetra, "It's not your fault. I'm sorry if what I said came out wrong."

"I'm years, years, behind other people my age. All the padawans at the temple are probably way ahead of me," he muttered bitterly, "You'd probably have a better time with one of them."

Meetra sighed and wrapped her arms around him, pulling his back to her body. "Anakin, for one, I seriously doubt that. I've never been an orthodox Jedi, I'd probably drive any potential padawan up the wall with all the rules I'd break or bend or stretch. For two, I did not choose any of them, I chose you. I want to help, to teach, to guide you."

Anakin squirmed with a squeamish, but delighted roll in the pit of his stomach. HE was chosen by Meetra, no one else...

"You are a special little boy...," she began.

"Not little," he butted in.

She leaned her head forward to glance down over his head, her eyebrow raised. "...who needs a different type of teacher than normal. I don't want to offend, but you would not do well under the Jedi Code, with all their rules and structure and discipline. I understood this when I took you on. I'm going to have to wing a lot of your training, already started to to be honest. Under normal circumstances, yes, most initiates would already have years worth of learning by this point, but this isn't normal circumstances. If we need to cover something, to help you learn something, just ask or point it out. Don't feel ashamed about it. Alright?"
He nodded. "Okay."

"Now...," she said, gently taking the datapad from his hands, "Lets see if we can't find any good learning modules on the Holo-Net for Basic."

Meetra watched, carefully keeping her end of the bond shielded, as the boy's elation struggled to combat and banish the shame and inadequacy rocketing through his body. The sense of *not good enough*, followed by a sense of fear she didn't understand rolling off him in waves alarmed her considerably. Especially in the ways he threw himself into the lessons, trying to learn as quickly as he could despite how boring he found it, almost as if his life depended on it...

Oh.

Oh.

Oh...

She was blind, again. Slave, he had been a slave. Not being good enough resulted in punishment, being sold off, and who knows what else. Force, but why even think she would consider doing that to him? Or was it... something ingrained? A damage from growing up a slave?

The thought deeply disturbed, deeply upset her. She felt the rage from when she had confronted the Hutts beginning to boil in her gut once more. She forced it down and puzzled over what to do to help the boy. She severely felt out of her depth at the moment, she wasn't sure she knew how to help him with changing such an outlook. She could obviously say she would never do such a thing to him, but she doubted it would completely banish the fear or remove the thought process from his mind.

Oh.

Mind.

Mind Healer.

She felt a bit dumb for not having thought of that right away. The boy needed a Mind Healer, badly, to help him learn to accept, recover, and move on from his slavery. It would have to be one whose specialty was focused on dealing with slaves. This was more important than any current training she was or could give him, if left unchecked it would weaken him for the rest of his life. She wasn't a mind healer, she couldn't fathom fully how his slavery effected or would continue to effect him of left untreated. She imagined, off the top of her head, that it would inhibit his social capabilities, always leaving him not feeling good enough, or chasing after praise desperately, even if it came from someone unsavory, along with who knows what else.

After they were done on Mandalore, this was getting dealt with.

Only problem was, she had no clue where to go to find one. She could always try to search the Holo-Net, but she'd rather have someone's recommendation instead. To that end, after she was done giving Anakin a few hours worth of lessons on the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics, she sent him off to spend time with his mother and friend. After making sure they were all clustered in one of the dorm wings, she went back to the main room and checked the Holo-Projector's list of contacts. She remembered that the Jedi had per-programmed a few in there. Her eyes flickered back and forth before she found the one she wanted. Hopefully the man was there...

She waited patiently until the blue holo-form of Qui-Gon Jinn appeared above the projector.
"Surik, what is it?"

She paused briefly, taken off-guard by his stiff abruptness, and looked him over. Even being a simple projection, she could see lines of stress on the man's face. "Is everything alright?"

Qui-Gon merely shook his head. "Nothing for you to be concerned about. Why did you call?"

She frowned before dismissing her worry, if he didn't want to talk about whatever was bothering him, that was his choice. "I was wondering if you would be able to recommend any non-Jedi Mind Healers that I could take Anakin to."

Qui-Gon tensed. "It hasn't been that long since Naboo, what has happened?"

Meetra shook her head. "Nothing aside from me figuring out Anakin needs help working through his time as a slave."

Qui-Gon went silent, an utterly blank look on his face.

"Master Jinn?" asked Meetra, resisting the urge to childishly poke his hologram.

"I never even thought of that," muttered Qui-Gon, abashed, "I doubt the Order would have thought of it either, when it should have been a thought on our minds the moment he was taken in."

The man rubbed his eyes tiredly. "The more and more I see with my eyes open and my ears clear, I can't help but wonder: Are they right? Is the Order truly so out of touch with the Galaxy at large? More complacent than I ever imagined?"

There was a niggling at the back of Meetra's mind that she was missing something, that this was important, but she didn't know why. "Is who right?"

Qui-Gon slowly shook his head. "It doesn't matter. As for your question, give me an hour to go visit an old acquaintance of mine at his diner, I'll have you a list shortly."

With that, he abruptly ended the transmission, leaving Meetra standing there warily. Such a short conversation, yet... something had unbalanced the older Jedi Master. She supposed it wasn't really any of her business, no matter the nagging sensation in the back of her mind. A few hours later, there was a message on her comlink giving her a list of potential slavery-focused mind healers. She'd stew on which one to go to later. For the moment, she retreated to the cockpit and settled into the pilot's seat to lightly doze...

Something was off.

Meetra felt it the moment they dropped out of hyperspace near Mandalore. It felt nothing like her lingering memories of the very few times she had ever been here. Back then, there was a sense of wildness to the planet. Untamed, unmatched, and unpredictable like the warriors it bore. While certain parts had been settled, she distinctly remembered long green stretches of Veshok trees visible from space, tinted silvery with the tops of Galek trees. Home to predators like the Strill that only the Mandalorian's iron will and determination could tame. It had been a green world.

As she stared down at the now desolate white-desert world a small part of her voiced that what she was seeing now was karma, was deserved. For all the lives lost in the Mandalorian Wars, for the Genocide of the Cathar especially. Yet... no one, no species, should be so desolated, even the
Mandalorians. There had been life here, wild, but full of life. Now? Now the planet felt so empty compared to what she remembered. What in the world had happened?

It took a incoming signal from a docking authority to snap her out of her stupor. She went through the motions for arrival, and given instructions on where to go and land, and that all weapons were to remain onboard. She was... shocked, as the Ebon Hawk entered the atmosphere. There were what she could guess as domed-in cities every so often in the vast desert. Was THIS what the Mandalorians had been reduced to? Perhaps it was preferable to a warmongering genocidal crusading species... but... it was horrifyingly humbling to see. In a way, she was glad Canderous was long dead, so he didn't have to see his kind brought low...

Or well...

His kind's homeworld anyway. She knew the Mandalorians had a few other worlds in this sector. Though, odds were they might be in similar states.

"Is something wrong Meetra?" came Anakin's voice.

She turned her head to see the boy lingering just outside the doorway to the cockpit, sneaking a peak through. "Not exactly."

His eyebrows furrowed. "What's that mean?"

She gestured him forward and pointed out the cockpit. "What do you see?"

Anakin's face wrinkled with distaste. "Desert. So Mandalore's a desert world? Bleh, Tatooine was bad enough."

"That's just it," said Meetra softly, "This world was as green as Naboo in my time."

Anakin's eyes went wide. "What happened to it?!"

"I don't know," admitted Meetra, "I wish I had done more research on the way here."

"Sorry," mumbled Anakin, "I kinda ate up your time."

Meetra chuckled. "It's fine Anakin, we will find out."

The Hawk landed a few minutes later, and they met Kitster and Shmi in the middle room. Meetra frowned briefly, wondering if it was safe for them to come. Some of what she read, about pacifist, suggested so, yet... it was a world full of Mandalorians. She did however feel nothing in the Force that suggested danger about their upcoming visit, just a sense of discomfort.

Which made since, it was a world full of Mandalorians after all.

"Are we all ready?" she asked.

She got an excited bob from the heads of the two boys, eager to explore a new world; Shmi was more calm. "Yes, it will be interesting to walk on another world. It's been a long time since I last did."

"We were on Naboo," pointed out Anakin.

"We're we went from the space port to the palace and back," countered Shmi.

Anakin smiled sheepishly, "Yeah, your right. If we go back there again, you gotta see more of it."
He pouted. "Never even got to show you a lake..."

Shmi walked over and ruffled her son's hair, leaning down to kiss his forehead, making him squirm. "It's been some time, but I remember what lakes are like."

Meetra smiled a little before clearing her throat. "Just as a warning, don't mention anything about Jedi or the Force. Mandalorian's didn't like Force Users in my time, and I severely doubt that's changed."

Which was also why she kept her lightsaber hidden in her cloak instead of her belt.

She descended out of the Hawk, the former slaves at her heals, curiosity emanating from them, and was met by a male docking authority with two guards at his heel. "What brings you to Mandalore stranger?"

Meetra paused briefly, recalling her lessons on Mando'a. "Ni gupu jupaoa ti a Mando meg slanar de gai be Canderous. Kaysh pabida ni e'yarala o'r hibirar sto yirhaou Mando betyer bal ruyot."

The man was briefly caught offguard before answering, "Gar be'etr e'lyrea gar pirusti, gar Mando'a cuyir va dush."

Meetra tilted her head curtly. "Vor entye."

"What's she saying mom?" she heard Anakin whisper.

Shmi gently hushed him.

"Ah, I see your friends did not receive the same instructions you did," said the docking authority.

Meetra smiled. "I've only recently started traveling with my new companions."

Her smile trailed off. "Canderous... well, we parted ways a long time ago."

The Mandalorian looked curious, but didn't press. "Well, welcome to Mandalore. If you truly are interested in learning about our people and culture, the history museum would serve you well, assuming you can read our language as well as you can speak it."

Speaking and reading Mandalorian had been a very important part of the Mandalorian Wars, to know one's enemy. "Do you have directions?"

Five minutes later, their group was in an air-taxi on their way through the city. Anakin's eyes were glued to the windows, taking in the sight of the city before him, Kitster the same. Shmi merely sat in the back of the cab, watching her son with a soft smile on her face. Meetra's eyes were searching out the window as well. She wasn't studying the city, she was studying it's people, stretching out with the Force and feeling. Trying to compare them to the Mandalorians of her memories was... jarring.

To say the least.

Oh she still felt the strong pride of their race, an air of above average discipline compared to other species. But there was a heavy weariness on almost all the older Mandalorians. They were tired. It was a tiredness she associated with war veterans, or civilians who had lived in a war zone. Save for a few spots here and there, the level of aggression and competitiveness she always associated with them was heavily muted. There was hope for the next generation, emanating from each parent,
wishing for a better life for their children free of fear and struggle. There was also the fact that no one except peacekeepers had any weapons on them that also threw Meetra off.

Mandalorians were *always* armed.

Or at least they had been.

Padma had been right, the Mandalorians *DID* change; there we so few who felt remotely like the Mandalorians Meetra had dealt with in the past, and she didn't quite know how to feel about that. It hit home... just how out of place she was. An old Jedi General in a Galaxy so different from what existed in her time...

They were dropped off on a landing pad before a large, circular building. She noted almost immediately a larger number of guards present that anywhere else she had seen on the way here. A bit curious to have a museum so guarded, perhaps an important figure was present. Still, they weren't stopped when entering, so she figured it wasn't important.

"Woah...." said Anakin, eyes bulging, at what she imagined was the ancient sight of a Basilisk War Droid suspended from the ceiling.

It wasn't so ancient to her, and brought back some very uncomfortable memories of invasions she had fought against. Meetra put a bit more into her shields, as to not ruin the experience for the boy.

Anakin ran to a nearby panel in front of a statue of an armored Mandalorian. "Meetra Meetra! What's this say?"

Meetra spent the next few hours translating one plaque, panel, or holo-projection at a time for the boy, giving him a crash course on Mandalorian history. Shmi followed being quietly, her eyes observing the area around them, but mostly focused on watching her son enjoy himself. Kitster asked only a few questions, seeming intimidated, by a lot of the memorials and history she explained.

"There's a lot of fighting and war," Kitster commented quietly.

"The Mandalorian people are a culture of warriors," explained Meetra.

"Were," came a sharp voice.

Meetra took her eyes off the two boys for a moment, glancing over to see a regal dressed blonde woman leading a class of children through the museum, two guards flanking her. Blonde hair, blue eyes, her dress a mixture of blue and turquoise, her arms held a purple wrapping. She had an odd (at least to Meetra) headdress with what looked like a bunch of funnels or cones with something sticking out of them pointing out of her hair, blue silk rising to either side of her head. She figured this woman was probably the reason for all the guards.

Not looking to agitate the locals, or a Noble, Meetra fully turned and offered a quick apology, "Were. My apologies, I am... unfamiliar with the more recent changes to the Mandalorian and came here to learn of it."

The Mandalorian woman didn't immediately respond, her eyes furrowing as she looked Meetra over, a peculiar look in her eyes, before she slowly turned her head to the children. "What do you think class, shall we teach these off-worlders about our history, and why the New Mandalorians came about?"

There were a chorus and cheer of 'yes' from the children before the woman began moving, "Walk
"Meetra is fine," offered Meetra.

"Meetra," tasted the woman, that peculiar look in her eye sharpening.

Why all the sudden did Meetra have a... not a bad feeling, but an uneasy one?

The woman led them off to a section of the museum, a hole-projection of ships hovering over a model of the planet. "The New Mandalorians came about in the wake of the Mandalorian Excision, or as we call it, the Dral'Han."

Meetra's steps hiccuped for a moment after translating that in her head. "*The Annihilation*?"

"Ah, you know our language, impressive," commented the woman, "Yes, the Annihilation. In the time period before the event, our people have advanced both in technological and military prowess. The Republic and the Jedi, fearing a repeat of earlier wars and the threat we represented, preformed a 'preemptive strike', consisting of unprovoked attacks, and orbital bombardments that crippled many of our worlds to this day."

Meetra took a moment to process that. Again, as it had earlier, one part of her mind was pleased, an eye for an eye, the other was utterly horrified, and the woman looked a mixture of pleased and smug to see it on her face.

Shmi shared in that horror. "No people, no matter their past, deserve that done to their worlds and people."

The Mandalorian woman glanced over at her and tilted her head in acknowledgement. "I agree, and am glad you think so as well. I do not personally approve of our warrior history, but the Republic and Jedi's attack was unwarranted, and to this day, unapologized for."

Meetra broke out of her shocked stupor, and was livid. "*The Jedi* participated in such a thing?"

She had Revan had done things in the war she was not proud of, especially Malachor V, but Orbital Bombardment? That line she had *never* crossed.

"Oh yes, the so-called peacekeepers of the Republic led the charge, even after they had supposedly demilitarized after the Ruusan Reformation," answered the woman critically.

Meetra didn't respond, choosing go silent and brood. Back in her time the Jedi Council wouldn't get off their asses when the Republic was being invaded, then they start doing preemptive strikes on a horrific scale? What in the nine Corellian Hells had they been thinking?

"Our people adopted our current peaceful mindset to weather the storm and survive," continued the Mandalorian woman. "For the next several hundred years, our people began to change and adapt. Though it was not always a tranquil period. There were several incidents and struggles. More recently, the Mandalorian Civil War, which had..."

She trailed off briefly, uncomfortable, "...a very unfortunate and catastrophic toll on our population and worlds."

Which would explain the weariness emanating from so many of the Mandalorian people. "I'm sorry to hear that."

The woman made a non-committal hum before turning to the children. "I do believe it's time I took
you back to your teacher."

There was a collective whine, with one student calling out, "Narir mhi ganar at Dehi'r Kryze?"

Meetra paused at that. Duchess Kryze? As in Satine Kryze? Ugh... why did she always have the worst luck to bump into people she'd rather not? She didn't have any issues with this particular Mandalorian, but running into the current head of their race was not something she had wanted to do. Well... at least it wasn't a Mandalore on the battlefield.

"Elek, gar ganar at," answered Satine, shutting down the children's merry trek through the museum with their Duchess, before turning to Meetra, "Walk with me Surik, I wish to talk with you after."

Meetra paused once again. She hadn't given out a last name; she didn't need the Force to tell her this wasn't going to be pleasant. "As you wish."

Anakin picked up on her tension and drew closer, giving her an uncertain look. She ruffled his hair, sending a soothing wave down the bond, and merely followed in the Duchess's footsteps as she led the children back to their teachers. Then, without a word, Satine led them back into the museum, into a section they hadn't gotten to yet. Right into an exhibit on the Mandalorian wars...

...and a really old hologram of both Meetra and Revan, along with several other key figures of the war.

Oh.

Yeah, in hindsight, coming to Mandalore, in particular to the history museum, hadn't been a good idea if she wanted to keep her head down. Mandalorian's didn't forget, especially not those who defeated them. The Duchess had probably just come from there with the children.

"I was under the impression that cloning Force Sensitives didn't work," commented Satine.

Meetra gawked. "Someone tried to clone a Jedi?"

Satine gave her a dry look. "I feel you miss the question I was asking."

Meetra pursed her lips, might as well just get it over with. "Do you believe in time travel?"

Satine only blinked once. "Of course. Hyperdrive malfunctions have brought several people from their past into the future. Though, four thousand years is a new record I believe."

"Oh, well that's news to me," admitted Meetra. And apparently to the Jedi as well.

"You are Meetra Surik, Jedi Exile, former Jedi General of the Mandalorian Wars," stated Satine before her eyes narrowed, "And Butcher of Malachor V."

Meetra stiffened at that before narrowing her eyes back, temper flaring. "We do what we must in war when we are ordered to, and you are one to talk, Mandalorian. Or do I need to remind you of the Genocide of the Cathar? Not to mention how many worlds your people burned, entire cities your people wiped out, the billions they slaughtered!"

Then it was Satine's turn to stiffen. "Our people have paid for their foolishness time and again, and have learned the cruel lessons history has given us. What about you, Surik? Have you learned from yours?"

"I've carried my mistake inside of me since Malachor V," said Meetra icily, "I still bear the scars of
a war this Galaxy hasn't seen in over a thousand years, that this Galaxy couldn't even think to handle from what I've seen, read, and heard since I arrived in this time."

She stepped right up the Duchess, their hardened faces inches from one another as Meetra hissed out, "And if not for me, the Sith would have completely wiped out the Jedi and dominated the Galaxy, obliterating the Republic, and enslaving the rest, Mandalore included. That's IF there had been anything left of the Galaxy if no one could stop Darth Nihilus from consuming all life in it. So with due respect Duchess, you can shove your self-righteousness right up your ass."

Not caring to see her response, Meetra turned and stalked away, her voice echoing to her companions at a level that was not to be disobeyed. "We are leaving."

"Surik," came the Duchess's voice.

Meetra turned her head and glowered at the woman.

Satine showed not a hint of what she felt at Meetra's tirade, and asked a simple question. "Do you intend to be retaking your mantle as a General anytime soon?"

Meetra scoffed. "If I didn't have to participate in another war, I'd die content. So unless you Mandalorian's go off on another crusade, or another galaxy wide war starts, no, I don't."

Satine didn't reply, merely choosing to study her. With a shake of her head, Meetra turned and left, the Skywalkers and Kitster following quietly in her wake. One uncomfortably silent and tense taxi ride later, they were back at the spaceport, back on the Hawk, and leaving Mandalore. She felt bad about cutting the trip short for the others, they deserved to enjoy themselves, but she couldn't tolerate being there a moment longer. Meetra retreated into the cockpit to be alone and try to calm down, her fury still spiking.

"How dare that Mandalorian," she hissed, "Force, I hate most of their kind. I can respect them, but Canderous is the only one I've ever gone beyond 'tolerate' and befriended. Perhaps they have changed in some ways, but they're still as arrogant as ever. Peaceful arrogance, what a dreadful thing."

She rubbed her forehead, took several deep breaths and let them out, before fishing out her comlink and checking over the list of Mind Healers Qui-Gon had given her. She briefly looked them up, took a look at their credentials, before picking one and engaging the hyperdrive. She sat there for a time, watching the stars slip by, brooding.

"You were a... general?" came Shmi's quiet, hesitant voice from the entryway.

"Once, a long time ago," answered Meetra bitterly without turning to look at her, "The Mandalorian's needed to be stopped, but not the way we did it."

There was a soft pattering of feet, followed by a gentle hand on her shoulder. "We do what we must to survive, to protect those and that which we care for. I know that lesson well, and I think you do too, no matter how much it haunts you."

Shmi didn't understand, didn't fathom the damage that had been done by that one act. "I betrayed them Shmi. All of them. Each soldier and jedi that looked to me as their general, their leader. I sent them all into that battle knowing they would die. When the time came to give the order, to activate the superweapon, I hardly hesitated."

And that didn't even go over the fact she had tore a literal wound in the fabric of the Force open,
and created one in herself.

Shmi didn't immediately respond, mulling over her words and the new information. "Did it end this 'war' you spoke of?"

"Yes," answered Meetra.

Shmi asked softly, "If you hadn't done what you did, how much longer would the war have continued on? How many more lives would have been lost, worlds 'burned' as you said? How much more damage would have been done to the Galaxy?"

Meetra rubbed her eyes tiredly and deflated. "I don't know."

Shmi squeezed her shoulder and let go. "You did what you felt you had to, and learned from the trial. That is all anyone can do, or ask. It's in the past."

No, it wasn't. She carried the Wound in the Force inside of her; it wasn't in the past, it was right here with her. But she wasn't going to try to explain that to Shmi. As much as the Mandalorians had changed, to a degree, Meetra herself couldn't move on from it.

And that might destroy her one day.

But that day was hopefully a long way off. "We'll be arriving at our next destination in two days."

Taking the hint that the conversation was over, Shmi sighed and answered, "Alright, I'll let them know, and I'll tell Anakin to give you a bit of peace a quiet for awhile."

"Thanks," murmured Meetra, closing her eyes and leaning back in her seat with a sigh, her brooding resuming in earnest...
"An Obi-Wan Kenobi is here to see you Chancellor," came the voice of his secretary through the intercom.

Sidious paused his bored browsing of a humanitarian bill he’d rather shred and raised an eyebrow. Already? "Send him in."

He hadn't expected Kenobi to be back so soon. He figured it would have been a week or two at least as his words, manipulations, and subtle Force Suggestions wormed through the young man's head like poison. And oh hadn't it been easy to weave them in, with how much of a mess Kenobi had been, leaking emotions through his shields, distracted and distraught; it had been the simplest of things to plant suggestive thoughts and string him along. Any other time, and he wouldn't have been able to touch Kenobi, who was normally a cog of the light. But Jinn had made it oh so easy for Sidious to take the first steps, weaving more distrust between Kenobi and Jinn than there already was.

Eventually, it would go on to paint negative light on all Jinn's acquaintances, then the council, then the majority of the order, before finally turning him against his friends. Then, and only then, would Sidious have his new apprentice. Not that Kenobi had been his first choice. He had wanted Skywalker from the moment he had laid eyes on and felt his presence, knowing just who and what he was. Unfortunately, the Exile had taken the boy in, and was currently who knows where in the Galaxy. He would never get the chance to convert the boy; he was a lost opportunity.

The only saving grace was that Darth Plagueis wouldn't be able to get his hands on the boy either.

It meant that the Exile and Skywalker would be an incredibly dangerous wild card in the times to come with the potential to ruin everything, that is if the Exile's true nature didn't consume her and the boy first of course. It was a shame the Exile was a Wound in the Force, if she hadn't been... what a potential apprentice she might have made. He wasn't sure which he would have chosen in such a situation, the Exile or Skywalker, he supposed it didn't matter. Regardless, such musings were a matter for another time, as Kenobi was standing at the entrance of the office, waiting patiently for Sidious to finish 'reading' the bill in his hands.

Sidious placed the bill down and gave his most (fake) charming smile. "Ah Obi-Wan, you should have said something when you walked in. Do come and have a seat."

"I did not want to interrupt you anymore than I already am," offered Obi-Wan, unmoving.

Sidious hardly needed the Force to read the tension rolling off of the young Jedi. Something had happened to trigger this early visit, and ever the opportunist, Sidious was ready to pounce. "Nonesense my boy! Come, come."
Obi-Wan slowly, hesitantly, made his way over and sat down. "Thank you, Chancellor."

"Of course, now, something's troubling you my boy, isn't it" asked Sidious, deciding to cut straight to the point.

Obi-Wan grimaced. "How'd you know?"

"What did I say last time about your tells?" chided Sidious gently, "Simply by how rigid you look at the moment..."

Sidious trailed off and raised an eyebrow, waiting.

Obi-Wan sighed. "It's... something I never would have expected. Qui-Gon..."

"Oh, what has the man done now?" asked Sidious with (fake) sympathy, truthfully he was gleeful of any way Jinn would continue to drive his lightsaber into his own foot, "Did he come and offer a false apology? Pleading your forgiveness?"

The raw anger and disgruntled waves of emotion rippling off the boy was so appetizing. "No, he didn't even bother before he left!"

Left? "On another mission?"

"The Order," said Obi-Wan, his anger evaporating, and a lost look crossing his face, "He left the Order..."

Sidious stared at him blankly. Jinn did what now? "Come again?"

"Qui-Gon left the Jedi Order along with his Master, Dooku, earlier today," said Obi-Wan tiredly, "He didn't... he didn't even say goodbye."

Oh.

Oh.

That changed things, in a way Sidious hadn't anticipated. He had predicted Plagueis would go after Dooku, and Sidious was more than willing to let him. He needed a public target, an enemy, to fight against in the upcoming war to destroy the Jedi, and determine the one true Dark Lord of the Sith. Besides, Dooku was old, he would have been, at best, a temporary 'apprentice' to be thrown away for a new, younger, stronger, apprentice.

But Jinn leaving as well? That caught him off-guard. Jinn was unorthodox, a maverick, but he was not dark. He was firmly light, the shadow of his failure with Xanatos, and his loss of his 'beloved', had failed to make him fall. Not to mention his countless other screw ups throughout the years. What could Plagueis be thinking? He couldn't possibly hope to turn Jinn. There was always torturing Jinn into the Dark Side he supposed, but it wasn't as effective in creative an ideal apprentice. A temporary broken tool perhaps. Yet...

The Dark Side of the Force whispered into his ears something he already expected: Jinn is not one of our own, nor will he ever be.

Perhaps he was Dooku's sacrifice then? The one he would kill before pledging himself to the Sith. Sidious (before Plagueis had caught on) had planed on having Dooku kill the Bando Gora brat, his former apprentice Komari Vosa, as his sacrifice. But Jinn would do as well. Yet... he wasn't sure. Something about this set him ill at ease. If the two left together, then their relationship had to have
at least been somewhat repaired, making it even more difficult to turn Dooku against his former padawan. Was Plagueis setting himself up for failure? Overreaching? Or had his former master to not foreseen Jinn leaving either? Or was something else going on?

Sidious didn't know.

He didn't like not knowing.

Because not knowing about a wildcard like Qui-Gon Jinn, someone so deeply entrenched in the Living Force, was dangerous.

"Chancellor?" said Obi-Wan quietly.

Such musings would have to wait until later however. "Forgive me Obi-Wan, I was... surprised. Of all the things I would have expected of that man... that was not one of them."

"I don't understand why either," said Obi-Wan, "There was no reason given. They both just handed in their lightsabers and left."

Sidious nodded slowly, an idea to use against Kenobi forming. "Hmm... and so curious to in it's timing. Right as you are set to begin your trials."

Obi-Wan sagged against the back of his chair, taking the bait, bitterness in his voice. "Was he just waiting until he was done with me to leave? Had he been planning this for some time? Just needed his one last 'obligation' out of the way?"

"I don't with to presume...," began Sidious in a (fake) careful voice, as if he didn't want to upset the Jedi (but oh, yes he did).

"Oh no, do go on," said Obi-Wan bitterly, "An outside perspective, not blinded by my years with the man, can oh so easily see what I don't."

It took Sidious a moment to parse through that, trying to figure if Obi-Wan was actually irritated at him or not. Or perhaps... was he irritated with himself? "You're dry wit would give many politicians a run for their money."

Obi-Wan huffed. "I dislike politicians."

The young man paused. "No offense Chancellor."

Sidious chuckled. "It's fine my boy, I'm a politician and even I don't like my kind."

He was not lying. While he enjoyed watching them squirm and dance for his amusement, most politicians were annoying pathetic leeches without actual power scurrying around trying to fuel their selfish ignorant goals. Not that Sidious himself wasn't selfish, but his goal was so much more grander in design.

A Sith Empire under his rule.

The entire Jedi Order dead; Preferably at the hand of one of their own corrupted by him.

Obi-Wan cracked a smile at that before sighing and running a hand down his face. "I just... don't know what to think. He didn't even spare me a word before he went out the door. He was my master for over a decade, and he just-just..."

"What was it? Was I that poor of a padawan?" he said bitterly, "Was it my lack of loyalty? I left the
order once, would have left it a second time at one point if I had been asked. I questioned and argued with him on so many things instead of following his lead as a padawan should, gone against his orders on occasion... "

"Obi-Wan," interrupted Sidious calmly, with (fake) gentleness, "If you weren't so completely and utterly loyal to him, his departure and betrayal wouldn't hurt so much."

He leaned forward, meeting the lost young man's eyes with his own. "And make no mistake, it was a betrayal, on his end. He took your loyalty and trampled it, multiple times. Honestly, what kind of man doesn't even say goodbye to someone raised for years? That should be like a son to him, loved as one!"

Someone who got so wrapped up with the Living Force and what he was currently doing that blinded him to other important things. It was a weakness he had identified in the man. But he certainly wasn't going to mention that to Obi-Wan. The boy should realize it himself, but that's the funny thing about being so distraught, it clouded the mind and thought process, allowed for Sidious to weave his words right into the boys mind.

Obi-Wan looked visibly wounded. "I... it's... that's attachment, we're not..."

"My boy, it's not my place to critique the Order, but one of my many degrees is in Psychology," said Sidious, "You cannot be raised by someone, by a father figure, for so long, and be so reliant on them, without developing some kind of feelings or regard for them. Especially in humans, a race so reliant on their social bonds and interactions. It is literally ingrained in us."

And oh, wasn't it so each to use such bonds to his advantage.

"As a Jedi, I am supposed to find a way beyond such things," muttered Obi-Wan, "But... you are right, I cannot be ignorant or ignore it. I... I cared for him. Perhaps I'm not as good of a Jedi as I should be, that I can't just move on and let go."

Sidious was starting to see a pattern, between this meeting and the last, with how Obi-Wan constantly seemed to doubt or degrade his own worth. The boy was his own worst enemy and critic, and it would make it so easy to keep weaseling his way in. He would be the voice of confidence the young man subconsciously desired, the confident he would go to. He would build a rapport with the young man, a trust, and it would gain him all that he desired and more.

"Forgive me if I'm wrong, but is compassion not the way of the Jedi?" asked Sidious.

Obi-Wan blinked a few times. "Yes?"

"Then you are an exemplary Jedi," praised Sidious, "You have such compassion for a man who doesn't deserve it that you keep trying to fault yourself instead of faulting him. I said it the last time we met, and I will say it again: You did nothing wrong to deserve Master Jinn's actions. What you feel is completely natural and nothing to be ashamed of."

Obi-Wan bowed his head a little sheepishly. "You're to kind Chancellor."

"Come now friend, you can call me Palpatine," said Sidious.

Obi-Wan hesitated before nodding. "You are to kind, Palpatine."

Sidious gave him his most charming (fake) smile. Because one day, he wouldn't be just Palpatine to the boy.
He would be *Master*...

Qui-Gon Jinn gave a pained grunt as he was lifted up, gripped tyrannically by the Force, and slammed into a pillar in the grand meeting room on Geonosis. His replacement lightsaber (and just *why* did Dooku have a spare copy of his kind of lightsaber hidden away?) slipped out of his hands on impact and he slid down to the ground in a daze. He wearily watched Dooku throw everything he had into facing off against the Sith, his blade buzzing through the air faster than ever before, his Makashi at it's finest. Yet... the Sith was largely unphased.

This... was not what he had expected when he and Dooku had left the Order and came with Demask to discuss their future. For the Muun to reveal himself as a *kriфф* Sith Lord, and then attempt to recruit them. Rather than listen to the poison that he began to spew out his mouth, they had of course answered as any Jedi would, with their lightsabers. And ever since, they had proceeded to get their sabers handed to them on a platter. Nothing they were doing was making a difference. The Muun was faster than them, stronger than them, both physically and in the Force.

They had even rekindled and reconnected their old severed training bond mid-fight (mid-fight!) to try to give them an edge, but it did *nothing*. The Muun even had the audacity to complement them on the idea and application of it, said it would bear studying. This... this was a darkness they could not match. The only time they could even hold their own was when they were both fighting together, but the moment they started to gain an edge, they were blasted out of the fight with a push of energy or a blast of lightning or an object thrown at them. And speaking of the room, it was completely trashed. Overturned or severed tables. Lightsaber burns, scorch marks from lightning, objects strewn about, everywhere.

Qui-Gon took a heavy breath and lurched back to his feet, calling his saber back to his hand, and rushed to aid his old Master.

Demask-no-Plagueis eyed him with a predatory gleam. "Slow on the recovery that time Master Jinn. Your strength wanes, the both of you."

Qui-Gon didn't bother wasting precious breath responding, swinging his blade high while at the same time Dooku swung low to try and sever a leg. Darth Plagueis moved in inhuman ways, ducking the high blade while kicking off the ground and spinning through the air right between the two blades, his boot connecting squarely with Qui-Gon's chin. He saw stars and staggered back, his jaw snapping up. He didn't have time to recover before lightning washed over him, bringing him to the ground crying out in agony.

The lightning stopped at the sound of lightsabers heavily clashing. He waited for the room to stop spinning before he managed to look up and sight Dooku and Plagueis, their blades locked in a contest of strength—which the former Jedi Master was steadily losing.

"It's a shame," mused Darth Plagueis, "Age has taken much from you. In your youth and prime, even I would have been hard pressed to match your prowess with a lightsaber."

His eyes flashed. "I could change that, I could give you your youth back, it would be the simplest thing to do."

Dooku scoffed and broke off the clash, making several quick jabs that the Sith parried aside. "Vanity of all things will never tempt me."

Darth Plagueis seemed amused, taking the offensive and driving Dooku back with a string of deadly precise attacks that forced Dooku to back-peddle to survive. "You think of Eternal Youth as
vanity? Hmph. To each their own I suppose. But if that won't tempt you, I know what will."

Dooku leaped aside as Plagueis thrust a hand forward, unleashing a gust of Force energy that threw all the debris in its path away. "Oh, and what is that?"

"Legacy," said Plagueis simply, giving Dooku pause, before slowly turning to glance at Qui-Gon.

Dooku's expression was schooled, but the recently reformed bond signaled otherwise. The steady increase in alarm and fear—yes—fear, from the older Master surprised Qui-Gon. The man was scared for him, the level of protectiveness rising off him steadily increased as Dooku and the Sith circled one another, with Dooku not-so-subtly planting himself firmly between the downed Qui-Gon and Darth Plagueis.

"You will not touch my Padawan," warned Dooku in a deadly tone.

Where had this come from? If Dooku had truly cared so much, why had he stayed away during Obi-Wan's apprenticeship...

Qui-Gon could have slapped himself. Because he told Dooku to stay away! And the older master had respected him enough to obey.

"Whether I do or not resides solely on your actions," warned Plagueis right back, "He need not suffer nor die unless you force it to that point, all you have to do is give me what I want."

"And what is it that you want, Sith?" hissed Dooku.

"I want you to fall," said Plagueis simply, "I want you to become the first of a new kind of Sith."

Dooku narrowed his eyes. "You cannot be serious."

"Oh, but I am," answered the Sith calmly, smugly.

"Jedi or not, I am a servant of the light," said Dooku,

"Ah, light," mused the Sith, "How much it has dimmed, how blind most are to see it. But you know, don't you? You've seen the complacency, seen the dying of the light."

"The light has not died, not yet," said Dooku, gripping his lightsaber tightly.

"Foolish little Jedi," said Plagueis, shaking his head, "The light has already lost, the conflict to come is between the darkness, a battle for supremacy. Whether the light lives to see the other side of the coming war depends on which darkness wins."

Qui-Gon shakily rose to his feet, re-activating his lightsaber. "There is only one darkness, you, after your apprentice fell on Naboo."

Plagueis scoffed. "That tool was not my apprentice, he was the shadow assassin of my own traitorous apprentice, Darth Sidious..."

He grinned maliciously, "Otherwise known as Chancellor Palpatine."

Qui-Gons blood ran cold. He stretched out with his senses, feeling Dooku do the same in shock, searing for lies.

And finding none.
"A Sith is the Chancellor...," whispered Dooku in horror, "I considered him a friend, an ally..."

"Oh it is far worse than that," said Plagueis, reaching into his robes and pulling out a datapad, "As I
was trying to tell you before you so rudely attacked me, your precious Republic is mired in taint. Here,
look for yourselves, see the absolute truth in just how corrupt, how fallen the Republic is,
and how complacent your Order was to let it all happen, how badly they failed."

Dooku stared at the datapad silently for a moment before lowering his lightsaber and holding out a
hand, levitating it over. Qui-Gon took a weary step closer to his Master, and began to read over his
shoulder, one eye on the pad, one eye on the Sith who merely took a few steps back and watched
patiently. Slowly, with mounting horror, disgust, and anger, they read a list of utter depravity.
Every sin so many senators in the Republic had, all their dirty dealings, their debts, and their dark
secrets...

"That is over half the senate," muttered Qui-Gon after minutes of scrolling.

"And it is all true, none of it fabricated," taunted Plagueis.

Qui-Gon reflectively sensed for lies, but found only truth, his stomach plummeting. He had known
there was corruption rampant in the senate, but this... this was...

"Over half of the senate is in the pocket of a Sith Chancellor whether they know it or not," stated
Dooku, his voice grave, "Even if this 'Sidious' was removed from the equation, this information
would bring the Republic to it's knees. Riots and anarchy would burn it to the ground."

"And that, Master Dooku, is only the corruption in the senate," said Darth Plagueis, deactivating
his lightsaber, "That doesn't begin to touch the private sector, nor the Courts, nor darker avenues
you are not even aware of."

Dooku's lightsaber fell from his fingers, his shoulder's slumping, appearing to age a decade in an
instant. "The Republic is finished. Sith or no, the corruption will rot it from the inside out within
the century."

Qui-Gon wanted to argue against it mainly on instinct, but... he couldn't find a way to look past
this... taint... festering in the Republic he had once sworn to protect. He did not however drop his
lightsaber, he stepped past Dooku and stared at the Sith.

"Why tell us this?" demanded Qui-Gon, "Is this not to your advantage?"

Darth Plagueis scowled. "As I said earlier, Sidious is my treacherous former apprentice, he
attempted to betray me. We no longer see 'eye to eye', if you will."

"We could have had it all, could have ruled together forever," ranted Plagueis, "But no, Sidious
had to follow that barbaric and archaic Rule of Two. I raised that boy to be the Sith he is today and
THIS is how he repays me? No more. So far as I am concerned, the Rule of Two dies with him. I
will create a new Sith Order, superior to any that came before."

"And how exactly will you do that?" asked Dooku.

"I have given this much thought," said Darth Plagueis, "And have come up with the Rule of
Purpose."

Qui-Gon's eyebrows furrowed, and he tilted his head, hearing the Force urge him to listen, to
understand that what they were about to hear was going to change the Galaxy.
"The basis of the new order is that there shall be no more Sith than necessary to fulfill their purpose. Each Sith will be sole Lord of their chosen role, supreme before all others in the Order in that regard," explained Plagueis, "This eliminates both mass betrayal, and the covetousness that had plagued the Sith since our inception, since each Lord will hold power that no other will. There will be no overlap in duties, each Sith given their own powerful sphere of influence."

He leveled his gaze on Dooku. "You will be the figurehead of the New Order, the public face and speaker, wielding charisma that no other can hope to obtain, able to turn entire worlds to our cause with words alone."

Dooku glared at him. "I have not agreed, nor will I agree, to become Sith!"

"So you say," said Plagueis confidently, "For now."

"And what role, do tell," said Qui-Gon warily, "Do you intend for me."

Plagueis's eyebrows raised. "None."

Dooku's lightsaber was in his hands and activated again in a split second.

Plagueis scoffed. "That is not what I meant. I have no intention of turning Jinn to the Dark Side, no, I have other intentions for him."

"Which are?" said Qui-Gon carefully.

"Sidious will use the Jedi to his advantage," said Plagueis, "He will throw their lives away willingly and without hesitation in the coming conflict. I, will use the Jedi much more carefully."

"No Jedi will serve a Sith," said Qui-Gon, flexing his grip on his lightsaber.

Plagueis stared at him, amused. "Even if I offer you salvation? The Jedi Order is going to be destroyed, no matter who wins this conflict. If Sidious wins, they will be wiped out, if I win, I am willing to let a small percentage survive, to evolve and rebuild a new Jedi Order, one willing to work alongside the dark, with you at it's head. Grand Master Jinn has a certain ring to it, doesn't it?"

"Bribery is foolish to attempt on a Jedi," countered Qui-Gon.

The Sith gave him an unusually patient look. "You don't seem to understand, Qui-Gon Jinn. This is your only option, and only chance, for the Jedi Order to survive. **They. Will. Be. Decimated.** Sidious will slaughter them down to the last Youngling. The Revenge of the Sith will come to pass, but if you are willing to aid me, then the Jedi will survive to learn from their foolishness."

"And what's to stop us from revealing what we have learned and destroying both of you Sith?" countered Dooku.

"Neither of you will leave this room alive if you do not agree," said Darth Plagueis as if it were the simplest thing in the world.

"We are not beaten, not yet," said Dooku, taking a single step forward...

Pain.

Pain erupted everywhere.

Both Dooku and Qui-Gon fell to their knees, screaming in agony, as their bodies turned on them. It
felt like his innards were on fire, burning, ripping apart...

"I told you that were you in your prime, your skills with a lightsaber would trump mine," mused Plagueis, recalling his datapad to him with the Force, pocketing it, and slowly walking up to Dooku, "However, that still wouldn't save you from me. Midi-chlorian Manipulation is a skill I wield like none have ever done before me. I hold life and death in my hands, I could have snuffed either of you out in an instant."

The pain stopped, leaving both of them gasping and reeling from the brief blitz of agony. Qui-Gon shakily looked up at the Sith, horrified. The darksider had been toying with them the entire time...

"As much as I would like to do this the slow and methodical way, I have little time if I do not wish to lose the next two potential Sith Lords of my new Order," lamented Plagueis, glancing down at the two of them, "You two shall help me save and recruit them."

Dooku gritted his teeth and managed to get out a pained, "And why, do tell, would we help you?"

"Ignoring my threat of death? It's simple really," said the Sith, "The two in question are important to you, and both will die soon when Sidious gets around to eliminating them, one being in far more immediate peril than the other."

Dooku tensed. "Who?"

"Jedi Master Sifo-Dyas has already fallen into the vision-trap laid for him," explained Plagueis, "He has begun the creation of the army Sidious will use to try and gain control of the Galaxy. As such, he is now a loose end for Sidious, one that will be cut off all to soon."

"Sifo-Dyas?" said Dooku in disbelief.

Plagueis nodded. "Foresight is a power of mine, but if not for the Veil of the Darkside clouding the Jedi, he would trump me in it. I have seen potential futures where he becomes an asset like none other. One that lurks in shadow, his sight never here, but in the future. He shall be the Lord of Foresight, and that shall be his entire purpose, his every waking moment spent in the Force guiding us towards a future of our choosing."

Qui-Gon blinked a few times, trying to wrap his mind around the alarming idea of a Sith whose entire function was to scry the future. "The future is always in motion."

"That is true, but that does not mean we cannot use what is seen to our advantage," said Plagueis, "Knowledge is power, even if it may not come to pass."

"And the other?" demanded Dooku.

Plagueis's grin was sinister. "Your former apprentice, Komari Vosa."

Dooku staggered to his feet, staring at the Sith in disbelief. "Komari is dead!"

"Is that so?" mused the Sith, "I could have sworn she had been abducted by the Bando Gora and turned to the Dark Side."

Qui-Gon's mouth gaped open in horror. "The Bando Gora..."

Oh sweet Force... he knew of that cult. How they brainwashed and drugged their captives. That had happened to his sister Padawan?! He felt physically ill at the thought.
Dooku's face had gone a sheet of white Qui-Gon had never seen before. "Vosa..."

"Find Sifo-Dyas first, and he can aid you in retrieving Vosa," said Plagueis. "You will require my aid with my Midi-Chlorian Manipulation to undo much of what was done to her. I require my Sith to be more... mentally sound... than she currently is. She will become a formidable Sith Battlemaster one day, I have foreseen it, but not as she is now."

"You want me to deliver my former Padawan from one slavery to another?" hissed Dooku.

"The Dark Side is more freeing that you can imagine," said the Sith before cocking his head, "You also have a lot of nerve to say that to me when it is your rejection and banishment of her that led to her current enslavement."

Dooku recoiled as if struck, opening his mouth to say something, but couldn't find the words.

Darth Plagueis pulled a second datapad from his robes and held it out. "Inside you will find the details you need to track both of them down, but only if you accept my offer."

"I will not turn," said Dooku, but quieter this time than before.

Plagueis was patient. "For now all I require is your aid in retrieving these two, we will discuss other aspects of our... alliance... when you return with them. Do we have an accord?"

Qui-Gon wanted to reject it and fight the Sith to the bitter end, yet... three things made him stop to think it over.

The desire to at least save Vosa from her suffering, and Sifo-Dyas from death.

That if the Jedi Order truly faced extinction, then his actions here might be the only thing that allowed the Order to survive.

And The Will of the Force echoing in his mind, reminding him that he had chosen this path when he followed Dooku by leaving the Jedi Order.

And the surprise fourth being Dooku standing up and taking the datapad without hesitation. "We do, for now. I will not allow my Padawan to suffer for my mistakes."

Plagueis slowly grinned. "As I said, your legacy is your temptation."

Dooku scowled and pocketed the datapad, turning and striding as regal as he could from the room, his head held high despite the twitching of pain in his limbs. Qui-Gon stared after his master before turning to rest his weary gaze on the Sith. "Why would a Sith allow the Jedi to survive, let alone work with them?"

Plagueis crossed his arms into his robes. "I will not win by playing Sidious's game or by his rules. I must change, adapt, and evolve to best him. If you can reign in your idiotic lightsided tendency to kill or imprison darksiders on sight for your Order, I can learn to tolerate the survival of the Jedi once the Revenge of the Sith has been enacted. Besides..."

Something odd crossed his face. "What is more powerful than the Light or the Dark on their own?"

Qui-Gon didn't answer, waiting, feeling the weight of the Will of the Force on his mind.

"Both of them together," said Plagueis, "And that is not something Sidious's pride nor personality will allow him incorporate."
Balance, closer than before, yet not quite achieved.

Qui-Gon blinked a few times, hearing those words echoed in his mind. Balance. What the Force eternally sought, what the Chosen One was born to bring. Was this truly a path towards that goal? He didn't honestly know, but he would walk it, for now. With that, he deactivated his lightsaber, attached it to his belt, and strode from the room after his Master...

Of all the places Meetra could have expected a Mind Healer to be stationed, Corellia was not one of them. Back in her time, they tended to be a bunch of hard asses; great pilots, engineers, and fighters, but independent to an almost isolationist fault to their nine hells and back. Certainly not gentle and a people that expressed feelings openly, and she really didn't expect that to change. That someone could open up to a Corellian without getting laughed at... then again, she hadn't known any Corellian's in-depth, so who knows. Maybe she wasn't giving their people enough credit.

She hadn't given a reason to the Skywalkers and their friend why they had come here, as people generally didn't react well to having to go to Mind Healers, but the trio just seemed happy enough to take in a new world, especially the boys. She glanced once more at her datapad, pulling up directions as they left the spaceport. She was looking for 'Halcyon Therapeutics' run by a Scerra Halcyon. Meetra hadn't had to dig far to see a gigantic list of recommendations, not just from Jinn's friend, but many others that left them on the Holonet. So she was confident this person could help Anakin.

The building was located near dead center of Coronet City, the capital of the planet. Meetra also noted, to her interest, that she detected a great number of Force Sensitives in what looked like a temple off in the distance. Did the Jedi have a Praxeum on Corellia? She couldn't for the life of her remember if they did or not back in her time. She supposed it didn't matter, they weren't here to interact with the Jedi. Though, since she hadn't taught Anakin shielding yet, anyone with their senses open would probably have felt him already. Hopefully they'd mind their own business.

There was a small ding as Meetra opened the door and waved her companions through and into a waiting room with a desk at the far end and a door to either side. "Have a seat on one of the couches-please no jumping on them."

Anakin pouted a little, but complied, Kitster bounding after him. Shmi however didn't enter the shop right away, glancing up at the sign above the door eyebrows furrowed in thought. She glanced down at Meetra, head tilted, before slowly nodding. She walked past Meetra, sat down next to Anakin, and hugged him to her sadly while ignoring his questioning look. She definitely understood and agreed if she wasn't putting up a fight about it.

Meetra walked in, eyes flickering to the back as a voice called out, "Be with you in a moment!"

A blue-eyed brunette walked through a door, wearing a green set of silky dress pants and shirt with an outer vest. She took stock of the room, glancing at Meetra, then at the three former slaves who sat on the couch. She glanced back at Meetra before walking over to the desk and turning on a holoscreen.

"I wasn't expecting any patients until much later, how can I help you?" asked the woman after glancing over the screen.

Meetra approached the counter. "Are you Scerra?"

"Mhm," said the woman, putting a hand on her hip and waving a hand through the air, "The one and only."
"I was hoping you'd be willing to... help someone out," began Meetra hesitatingly.

The woman raised an eyebrow at her before glancing back at the couch's occupants. "Mmm... judging by those clothes, Tatooine? Former slaves if I had to guess?"

Meetra nodded, a bit surprised. "I've read that you've dealt with former slaves before."

Scerra frowned thoughtfully. "Hmm... three at once is quite the challenge, though, group therapy does have its merits."

Meetra opened her mouth to speak before closing it and cringing a little. She hadn't even thought of Shmi or Kitster in coming here. Just a tad short sighted. "Er... yes."

Scerra gave her a bemused look. "Or was that not your intention?"

"No, they could all probably use your services," admitted Meetra sheepishly, "But, I was most concerned for Anakin."

Scerra gave her an pitying look. "You have no idea what you are in for, do you?"

The woman didn't give Meetra a chance to respond. "Normally, I ask for people to call in ahead and schedule instead of just walking through the door, but I don't turn away children in need. Just so you understand, since people somehow adopt this fool notion, therapy is not a one-time thing. Especially in former slaves, it can take years to help them work through their slavery. And, as much as I wish I could, I don't work for free."

"I have some money...," began Meetra.

"Do you have a stable income? A home? A place to give them stability?" questioned Scerra pointedly, "Whatever you think you have isn't going to sustain you for years, especially on Corellia."

"Then I can find a job," said Meetra crossly, "I know he-they-need this. I'm willing to do what I have to in order to see them helped, and have plenty of skills to be of use."

Scerra studied her for a moment before nodded. "Good, after I begin their first session, you, can sit on the couch, fill out the paperwork required for this, and then start looking for a job and an apartment to live in. Now, since you singled him, could you call 'Anakin' over?"

Meetra glanced over. "Anakin! Could you come here please? I have someone I want you to meet."

The boy walked over, giving the lady a curious look. "Hi?"

In the span of an instant, the almost critical demeanor Scerra had bombarded Meetra with shifted into a gentle nature at the woman walked around the desk and knelt down a small ways in front of Anakin. "My name is Scerra Halcyon, I understand you were recently a slave-.

Anakin scowled. "I'm a person and my name is Anakin!"

Meetra winced a little at the hostility, but Scerra merely smiled, looking pleased. "I know you are, and I'm very happy you already recognize that. Many former slaves that come here for treatment have had to struggle for a long time to accept that."

Anakin's eyebrows furrowed. "Treatment?"

"I'm specialized in helping people work through trauma and difficult life situations," began Scerra,
"I help people learn to live with and accept their pasts."

Anakin gave her a confused look.

Meetra wondered why she was skirting around just saying it. "She's a mind healer."

Scerra shot her an irritated look.

Anakin however went very still, his eyes widening. He looked at Meetra in disbelief, shock, fear, betrayal, anger, panic, despair, and so much more radiated off him in such waves through the Force objects began to rattle around the room, and it took an immense effort not to gasp and shy away from the overwhelming sensation as he exclaimed, "I don't need help! I'm not crazy! I'm... I'm not defective! Meetra!"

Defective?! What in the...

He whispered so fearfully it took her breath away, "Please... you're not... you're not going to send me back to Watto, are you?"

Meetra was, to put it plainly, a bit stunned. Where in the hell had all of this come from? This... was worse than she had imagined, the fact that he'd even think that she would do that to him hurt. She sent as much comfort down the bond as she could before kneeling in front of him. "Anakin, this is exactly why I wanted to bring you here."

He gave her a lost look.

She rest her hands on her knees. "You shouldn't live with the constant fear that those who look after you are going to abandon you or send you away or sell you if you're not good enough. That fear, coupled with the ridiculous drive that you have to be the best to be worth anything... it's not healthy for you Anakin. It's an awful way to live. I brought you here for therapy to help you because I care about you."

His negative emotions and the rattling room soothed a bit. "Y-you promise?"

"I promise," she said, radiating her sincerity down the bond.

"Force Sensitive," murmured Scerra, standing up and glancing around the room, at a few things that had tipped over, "Well, this will be interesting."

She cleared her throat and not-so-subtly glared at Meetra. "From now on, please let me ease him into things instead of bumbling into them. There is a reason I try to do so."

Meetra winced. "Sorry."

Anakin however turned to glare at the Mind Healer, stepping in front of Meetra as if to protect her, one hand firmly grasping her sleeve. "Hey! Don't be mean to her!"

Meetra gave Anakin an amused glance. "It's fine Anakin, I kind of deserved it."

Anakin huffed. "Well if your not going to stick up for yourself then someones got to, your my teacher after-all."

Meetra snorted in amusement. What was this, her initiate years needing someone to stick up to a bully for her?

Scerra stared down at Anakin for a moment, thinking something over, before cautiously speaking.
"You are very protective of her."

"Well yeah, she's my teacher!" exclaimed Anakin as if it were the most reason in the world.

Scerra knelt down in front of Anakin once again, giving him a soft, sad look. "Yes, she is, but she is her own person before she is your teacher."

Considering how the Force recoiled around Anakin, and the disbelieving gasps from Shmi and Kitster, Meetra had a feeling she just missed something important in what was said.

The boy's eyes went wide with shock and horror. "That's! That's not what I meant!"

"Perhaps not," said Scerra, reaching over to put gentle hands on his shivering shoulder, "But its the way you think, the way so many freed slaves think. Having had so little to call their own during their enslavement, they so often feel extremely possessive of the people they come to care for and whatever objects come into their possession, fearing their loss. It's even worse as most of the time, the only authority figures a freed slave has is generally their owner, who only teaches how to covet and posses. How you interact with people; perhaps thinking that they need your protection and guidance regardless of what they think, or that they owe you something by knowing you, or that they are something to worship or adore and that you must impress them. In essence, as if they belong to you, or were objects."

Anakin bowed his head, sniffling, trying to choke back sobs and tears that came out of nowhere. "I-I'm n-not a s-slaver..."

Wait, what? How the hell did what she said call Anakin a...

My teacher.

As if they belong to you, or were objects.

Meetra blinked a few times, dumbfounded as it hit her, and reached up to rub her forehead. This right here is why she went for a mind healer. This... was way over her head on how to deal with and treat. She definitely agreed that Anakin did NOT mean it like that, but...

"I know you're not, she knows you're not," said Scerra softly, "It's obvious, young one, by how you react how much you care, but this way of thinking and acting isn't good for you or for those around you. It can twist that care into something foul."

A sad expression crossed her face. "Some former slaves learn to cope and adjust, others, I've seen become something no freed would want to ever become. Fewer still few find true healing from the abuse and suffering they went through. They'd rather bury it as deep into their minds as they can and forget about it, but such things can never be forgotten, and can come back to haunt and affect you at the worst of time."

She glanced at Meetra. "She wanted to find you help by coming, and I want to help you, but only you can choose if you want to be helped."

Her voice grew so soft and so gentle that Meetra had difficulty thinking of a time she heard anything like it. "Do you want to be helped?"

Anakin nodded timidly, but didn't say anything.

Scerra gave him a charming smile and slipped a hand into his. "It's a big step to come to that decision, now, can you introduce me to the others? Are they your family?"
"M-mom and my best friend Kitster," mumble Anakin in a shaky breath.

Scerra stood up and briefly glanced at Meetra, pointing with her free hand. "The required forms are on the bin on the desk."

With that, Meetra was forgotten as Anakin introduced the Mind Healer to his mother and friend, and was then led into a room into the back with them at his side, his mother giving him an encouraging smile. Meetra grabbed the forms and a pen (how archaic, she was so used to everything been done on the Holonet or a datapad, who still used flimsi even four thousand years later?), and sat down, glancing over the papers. She slowly ran a hand through her hair, realizing how ill prepared she was for this.

Place of residence? (The Ebon Hawk surely didn't count)

Vaccination dates? (Were slaves even vaccinated?)

Illnesses he suffered? (Would they even remember that?)

Details of trauma or abuse? (This one she unfortunately had some understanding of when she saw Anakin's memories)

The list went on and on, asking more and more questions she really didn't have a clue to. She realized how little she actually knew about the boy she was to care for and train and help Shmi raise. Force, was this what training a Padawan would have been like? To cradle another's life so deeply in her hands was a scary thing. Especially when she realized Scerra was right, this was going to take a long time, she was going to need to get a job and find a place to live here that wasn't on the Hawk. That in itself was also... not quite scary, but unsettling. When was the last time she had ever stayed in one place for longer than a few months? Ever since she had left to join Reven in the Mandalorian Wars, she had never been grounded. Always on the move, in the freedom of space and her ship(s). She was a drifter, and changing that... well, she wasn't sure how she felt about that.

But that was alright.

She meant what she said.

She'd do whatever it took to see this through, to see Anakin helped, healed, and reach his absolute full potential. Even if it took years to get through the first two steps...

And years it would take indeed...

Chapter End Notes

End of part one. Time skip incoming! (three to five years...?) IDK, how long do you guys think it would take for Anakin to at least somewhat mellow out and his therapy to really take effect? I want at least a four-year time-skip buffer between the end of part two and the beginning of part three (clone wars, Anakin being 19~ years old when this happens).
Five Years Later...

Meetra leaned against the wall in the hallway leading to the cockpit of the Ebon Hawk, her eyes drifting towards the sound of soft singing in the Tongue of the Slaves from her apprentice. She watched the fifteen year old teenage boy as he knelt of an elderly woman, Jira he had called her, his voice raspy from the heat and sand of Tatooine. Two other slaves knelt by her side and held her gently but firmly in place as Anakin cut with practiced precision with a heated knife, the Force stretching out from him to block and soothe as much of the old woman's pain as he could while he worked, his singing a helpful distraction for his patient.

In three minutes time, he gently levitated a small ball of flesh and wires and metal out of his carefully cut hole and held it out towards Meetra. She pulled an EMP Baton out of her belt and walked over, activating and waving it over the Slave Implant, shorting it out with the quick motion. Anakin's singing came to a close as he levitated it back and held it out for Jira to look at. The old woman stared at the implant for a moment, her eyes weary and old, but at the moment sparking with triumph and venom, before spitting on the device and throwing her head back to laugh.

Anakin grinned and spoke to her, the language he spoke to fluent and cheerful and victorious slipping through his lips. Sometimes, Meetra felt a bit jealous and left out, but never spoke of it. It was something Healer Halcyon had warned her about, to accept, but never press about. Meetra was not, and had never been, a slave. She had no right to their secrets and language and heritage. Besides, she could guess a lot of the meaning from Anakin's emotions when he spoke, sang, or acted in customs foreign to her. He was an open book, and almost never closed down the bond between them, as trying as that could be sometime, especially when...

Oh boy...

She braced herself as Anakin walked over to the center console, knelt, and pulled out a secret compartment they had installed, inside was filled with deactivated Slave Chips, mementos of past victories. Meetra could still remember the first one, aside from his own, his mother, and Kitsters, that he put in there. Not by the person helped, but what had ripped out from the boy. The sensation of -triumph-made a difference-happiness- had been so powerful it had forced Meetra to hug a wall for support lest she fall to her knees at the overwhelming feelings.

Anakin didn't need to be a 'real' Jedi, or a leader, or a general, or an important figure, or anything like that. So long as he could help people who truly needed it, he was happy, filled with such blinding light it gave her senses whiplash to look at him through the Force. She didn't think she had ever met someone so tied to the light as he was when he was like this.

She cringed as the sensation once again washed over her as he dropped the deactivated slave chip into the compartment and then closed it with a backwards kick. He shot Meetra an apologetic-but-not-really smile before walking back over to Jira and kneeling down next to her, reaching a glowing hand over to the hole he had made in her. The Force reached through him, knitting close and healing the incision with hardly any effort.

She was not jealous of the ability to heal like that.
Most definitely not.

Okay maybe a little, but it also filled her with a sense of pride to see him excel in any way shape or form. Even if the most she had to do was teach him the skill and then watch him take off with it. It honestly reminded her of the whispers about Revan when he had been a padawan, how he had learned things so quickly and mastered them just as rapidly. Anakin was going to outdo both her and Revan one day, she had no doubt of that.

She pulled back into her thoughts as Anakin started on the next soon-to-be-freed-slave, determined to get the next slave chip out. She thought about his 'apprenticeship', how different it had been to her own. There was no 'Master' and 'Padawan' in exact terms, she would never make him call her master, never force that kind of continued pain on him, never. She was his teacher. There was such a lack of rigid rules or guidelines that she followed at times it made her wonder what her old Masters would have thought. Though a lot of that had been because of Healer Halcyon's advice, Anakin needed freedom in what he did in order to help him heal, not be bogged down and bound in the ways a Jedi Padawan normally would have been. That woman had been a Forcesend in helping Meetra with Anakin.

She swore she had had as many sessions with Halycon learning how to understand her apprentice and not accidentally screw something up.

Their first year together had been a whole mess of her jobs and his therapy plus schooling to catch up on general education, with so little time for actually training her apprentice than she would have liked. But it had been for the best, to have him at a far better state than he was. A gradual change rather than a sudden shock, not that going from slave to a 'normal' childhood was any less jarring. Not to mention, she had desperately needed to experience in catching up with this time period's technology and advancements. She was now highly confident of her ability to slice, program, and repair things, though Anakin was better at repairing while she was better at slicing and programming. Both had been invaluable skills during the Jedi Purge, and more than paid the bills on Corellia. Shmi had started on as an assistant to Healer Halcyon, while Kitster had both attended therapy with Anakin and started an internship at CorSec, short for Corellian Security Force.

The second year had seen Anakin mellow out and become more at peace with his past. That had been when his training had really started. What she could remember of Force Theory, the basics of all the lightsaber forms, showing him various abilities she had learned during her life, same with various techniques she had learned to do with the Force. He absorbed them all almost effortlessly, save for Battle Mediation, he had trouble opening himself up to anyone he did not explicitly trust. She had a feeling he'd never master that ability on the level of say... Bastilla Shan who Meetra had once heard could warp the entire outcome of a fight with it. But a small tight knit group? There was great potential there.

Regardless, she held nothing back and hid no none-dark technique from him; though, she couldn't help but wonder what the Jedi would have thought of his abilities. Would they have encouraged such growth? Or feared and suppressed it to keep him humble? The Corellian Jedi didn't, or at least Nejaa Halycon didn't, most others kept their distance. The only reason he didn't was because of his supposedly secret wife, and hadn't that been a fun surprise encounter. Honestly, it was hardly a secret, she was fairly certain the entire Corellian Enclave knew, the only reason it wasn't touted more openly was because Neeja wanted to be on somewhat good terms with the main Jedi Order.

She discarded the thought and continued her recollection. The third year had marked the boys start of puberty, and his restlessness. He had started pressing about freeing slaves and going out and helping people. She wasn't against it, but was concerned with taking him out into that at so young an age. Twelve had been young even back in her time for Padawans who had been raised in the
...which had instead resulted in a run in with a slaver ship, a cargo of freed slaves, and horde of slaver ships after them with Anakin having a pure shit eating grin on his face the entire escape. The rest was history, there had been no holding the boy back after that, not that she had wanted to. Seeing him bound into his mothers arms when they returned home, crying with such happiness that he had fought slavers and freed slaves, had decided for her that it would continue from then on. Training took a backseat to missions, but considering his ability to learn at the rate he did, it evened out.

Her musing were cut short when she felt hostility at the edge of her senses heading their way. "Anakin."

The boy paused briefly, eyebrows furrowed, senses trailing down the bond and then following her own before he let a curse out in Huttese. "We can't take off yet. I have to get the last slave chip out and deactivated or it'll blow when we leave."

"We'll have to scramble when it's time to go, I doubt the docking authorities will take our side over the Hutts," said Meetra, dropping her EMP rod next to him, and making for the ramp, "I'll entertain our guests, let me know when you're finished."

"Have fun!" he cheekily called after her.

She rolled her eyes and left the Ebon Hawk, standing at the bottom of the ramp as an assortment of figures began to enter their part of the spaceport. She hid a frown as the number continued to grow, none approaching, but instead spreading out around the hanger and the ship. Smart to surround them, someone was probably leading the group. There were a number of people whose presence was more sharp and disciplined than the simple Hutt thugs around them; bounty hunters if she had to guess. When the number of assailants hit twenty, Meetra fingered her lightsaber gingerly underneath her clothes. No way she wouldn't be revealing her abilities here. This number of people after them at once was... odd, and a little alarming.

One of them took a step forward blaster raised threateningly. "So, thought you could steal what doen't belong to ya, offworlder?"

Meetra narrowed her eyes slightly, but didn't respond. "Stealin slaves from the Hutts or them who pay their dues to em ain't a smart choice lady," mocked the thug, " Took a few times to figure out who dun it, but we got ya this time. There be a nice bounty out for anyone involved with the thievery, a pretty penny indeed, especially if yer alive for the Hutts to flay. Who knows, they might make a slave out of ya to make up for some of the losses."

"I'd like to see you or them try," said Meetra thinly, gripping her lightsaber tightly, anger slowly building, "And for the record, you can't steal a slave, because life isn't something that can be bought and sold or stolen that way."

The thug let out a barking laugh, others following suit. "Oh, she dan't do it for profit, but from a bleedin heart. We got one of those ones boys."

Meetra spread her senses, trying to pick out the ones she'd have to deal with first. There was a level of tension in the Force and a growing sense of danger. They needed to leave now, the number of...
opponents was already way too high, and whatever happened here was only going to bring more thugs and bounty hunters down on their heads. She was strong, but several dozen coming at her in rapid succession was a bit much on her own. Hell, even this here was more than she had usually dealt with at once during the Jedi Purge, and that was with her allies at her side. The idea was to not draw attention to their slave freeing operations when possible. Had they really ticked off the Hutts that much to get all of this? Coming back to Tatooine in the Hawk from here on in was going to be difficult.

"Ya gonna come quietly lady, or do we have to put a hole in that pretty little bod of yours?" he leered.

Meetra hummed in response, not giving an answer, best to draw this out and give Anakin time to finish up and get them ready for takeoff.

He waved the blaster at her. "Well? What's it gonna be?"

She put a finger up to her lips. "Hmmm, let me think about it..."

**DANGER** flashed across her senses, she had her lightsaber out and activated, deflecting a shot from her side right into the throat of the lead thug, dropping him. "Guess that answers that. ANAKIN GET A MOVE ON!"

"JEDI!" roared a number of the thugs, some in fear, some in anger.

As the hanger bay began to light up with blaster fire and the first few shots began to nick or come way to close for comfort, she couldn't risk moving from the ramp and allowing any to climb aboard while Anakin was busy. Meetra sorely wished she had a personal energy shield. Why oh why had the galaxy stopped making those beautiful little things easily accessible? Soresu was great and all, but there came a point when there was too much blasterfire at once.

"Nade her!"

Meetra swore and leaped with the Force's support high into the air as someone chucked a little round object at her. She expected an explosion, instead there was a bright flash of light that disoriented her. Flashbang, karking hell. She crashed awkwardly to the ground, twisting her ankle, a hiss of pain escaping her lips as her vision blurred in the after effects. She closed her eyes and gave herself to the Force, letting it guide her as the thugs continued firing relentlessly. More were coming to replace those felled by reflected blasterfire, the Force was blaring for her to get the hell out of there, that something dangerous was coming. She could feel a darker presence coming her way, its interest in her presence more than apparent, it wasn't disciplined in the way a fully trained Force-Sensitive one, so not a Sith. Small favors.

Meetra had already been forced to move from the ramp, she would have readopted her position if not for the presence. She needed to clear the area. She moved with lethal precision, using the Force to enhance her speed as she moved from one thug or bounty hunter to the next. There was no mercy, she wasn't a Jedi, and she had no tolerance for slavers or those who willingly worked for them.

"Don't group up you morons! Spread out and wait for Sing!" roared one of them.

Sing?

"Meetra c'mon!" came Anakin's voice down the ramp, "Let's go, I'm starting up the Hawk!"
Finally! Guess the presence would have to wait for another time. As she felt Anakin run for the cockpit, Meetra leaped away from the thug she had been about to skewer and half-ran-half-limped for the ramp. She only got half way there before a dark cloud covered the Force around her, drowning out it's guidance. She had no warning then, when a high pitched whine filled the air, heat and pain erupted from her gut, a blast bolt blowing clean through her and impacting the ramp. Her eyes went wide, she fell to a knee and clutched her rapidly blooding gut, hissing in pain. She felt Anakin's shock and alarm from the cockpit as she turned her head to glare at her assailant.

At the entrance to the hanger, kneeling on the ground with a sniper rifle, unusually long fingers wrapped around its barrel, was a woman. Humanoid, but extremely pale, a hybrid of some kind. She had auburn hair tied up in a pony tail. She had purely sadistic and gleeful green eyes at the moment, so sure of her kill. An orange full body piece, brown boots, a light brown vest. The woman savagely grinned and reloaded, taking aim a second time and firing.

Meetra rose, turned, and swung her lightsaber, deflecting the bolt into one of the remaining thugs in one smooth motion, making the woman laugh and call out, "You got spirit Jedi, I have a feeling I'm going to enjoy this more than my usual Jedi kills."

Meetra narrowed her eyes, blocking out the pain as best she could. A Jedi Killer huh? She had dealt with plenty of those during the Jedi Purge, albeit most hadn't had the chance to get the drop on her like this one had. She deflected one high powered shot after another, switching to fight off the thugs as they continued to arrive and enter the fray. Each step, each act, was a rip of pain from her wound. She had no time for this, she had to get out of her, and get medical attention, fast. Anakin had never healed a wound this bad before, she didn't know if he could nor want to risk everything on it. It was time to fallback.

Another high pitched whine warned of another high power shot, she turned and deflected it, only from a shot from a thug to hit her side. She staggered and swore, vision swimming, before she sweep her hand in front of her and released a wave of energy from the Force, flattening everyone else in the hanger to the ground. She turned and limped towards the ramp.

*Whine*

Damn that blasted woman!

Meetra turned and deflected another sniper shot, and another and another, one slipping past to blow through her thigh, causing her to fall and land on her back with a cry, lightsaber skidding out of her hand. "Rush her!"

Meetra shoved the first thug off her with the Force, the next with her waning strength, before a sharp pain and blade spiked through her ribs. She gasped out, vision starting to blacken. Not... not like this...

She felt it then, something she hadn't felt in five years. The *hunger*. "W-wait! S-stop!"

"Little late to beg for mercy bitch!" snarled one of the thugs.

Idiots! She wasn't asking for mercy, she was trying to give it!

Another two thugs pinned down her arms as the main one straddled her stomach, raising his bloody vibroblade high into the air and bringing it down again, ripping a scream from her lips.

"MEETRA!" cried out Anakin from the ramp, the snap-hiss of his lightsaber a distant sound in her mind.
All she could hear, all she could feel, was the need for life. Her eyes faded into an empty blackness and she moved on instinct. She broke an arm free and lashed out with her hand, knocking everyone but the one straddling her stomach away from her was a darkened ripple of the Force through the air. Him she stabbed her fingers into, an almost mad smile on her face as his lifeforce bled down into her. Yet it was over to soon, it wasn't enough, he was weak compared to the last one. She needed more...

She felt the hunger...

She felt the need to sate it...

Hunger.

*Hunger.*

**HUNGER!**

**SHE HAD TO FEED IT!**

Meetra rose to her feet, shoving the decaying corpse off of her to the shock of the thugs. She raised a hand into the air, and orange streams of energy shot out, piercing into the chests of every thug and bounty hunter except for the one at the entrance that managed to ward off the attack. They didn't even have a chance to scream before she drained them, their lifeforces and what little Force energy they had streaming back into her.

Immediately the hunger abated, the pain faded away, and dark pleasure filled her. Oh... it felt *so damn good*...

She watched their faces shrivel up and their bodies drop collectively to the ground when she finished. She stared at the spectacle in a satisfied haze.

"Corellian hells, you're no Jedi," came a voice, "And no simple Fallen Jedi can do that."

Meetra slowly turned her head, staring at a pale orange haired woman staring at her at a distance fearfully, the sniper rifle in her arms shaking. "So they really have returned, kark this, I'm not screwing with a *Sith.*"

The woman bolted as if chased. Sith...? The term seemed... familiar to her.

"Meetra?" came a hesitant, terrified whisper.

She turned her head to see a teenage boy slowly, cautiously walking down a ship's ramp towards her. He sung so brightly with the Force, he had so much of it... surely he wouldn't mind if she helped herself...

She grinned greedily and aimed a hand towards him...

"**MEETRA!**" his voice roared in her head.

She jolted, and in an instant, came back to herself, the empty blackness leaving her eyes and restoring to their original color. "A-anakin?"

She lowered her hand, confused, and stared down at the bloody offending appendix, baffled. "What..."
She turned her head and froze, sighting a shriveled up corpse. She turned around and eyed the carnage around her as it all came back. The mission, taking a few slaves and helping them run away, getting found, the fight, the hunger...

Meetra's throat felt oh so dry. "Is the Hawk ready for takeoff?"

"Meetra?" Anakin questioned softly, worriedly.

"IS the ship ready for takeoff?" she said loudly, hoarsely.

"Y-yeah," he answered.

"Then get in the cockpit and get us out of here," she said, turning and walking past him into the Hawk without a further word.

She retreated to one of the side dormitories and locked herself in there, sitting on a bunk, her body trembling. "Force... oh Force... it happened again, even worse than with Maul. What's going on? I... it was never like this during the Jedi Purge. I never lost control like that..."

Was this a side effect of time travel?

A natural progression as a Wound in the Force?

A consequence of the first time she had nearly died and fed on Maul?

She held onto that thought, trying to logically push through her emotions. She had been in many intense and dangerous situations during the Jedi Purge, but had she ever been mortally wounded during that time after 'reconnecting' with the Force? Even if she had been, there was always one of her allies or friends nearby with a quick medkit or healing touch of the Force, along with far more than just her single bond with Anakin to rely on. Was this just a natural danger of being a Wound in the Force?

She didn't know, she knew so little about what she actually was...

"Corellian hells, you're no Jedi,"

"No simple Fallen Jedi can do that."

"So they really have returned, kark this, I'm not screwing with a Sith."

Meetra flinched as the unknown hunter's words echoed in her mind. She hung her head in shame. When she was like that, that statement wasn't to far off. But honestly... thinking of Darth Nihilus, she could be so much worse than a simple Sith. Calling Nihilus a Sith was... not accurate in Meetra's mind. He was something worse. Sith wanted to rule, to conquer, to fight. They thrived on it. Nihilus had cared for none of that, only what he could feed on next, and he would have bled the entire universe dry... as she could if she were not careful...

She gulped nervously as she remembered raising her hand towards Anakin, to feed, and felt beyond sick to her stomach. He... Force, he wasn't safe with her...

And she had absolutely no idea what to do about that...

Anakin's hands trembled slightly as he punched in the coordinates to return home to Corellia. Force, he had never... never seen it in person. He had seen it in his nightly dreams, been there for
the aftermath of Maul. But this... seeing it, truly feeling it, was so much worse. He figured it would have felt better if she had felt cold, cloaked in the dark side like she had been way back when on Tatooine dealing with the Hutts. When she had drained the slaver scum, she hadn't felt dark, she hadn't felt anything like the Meeta he knew, nor even the 'dream Meeta' who was like a swirling hungering void. No, she had felt like a giant gaping bleeding wound, screaming out in the Force that sent ripples out through it's fabric that seemed to strike fear into the Force itself.

It was the most awful thing he had ever felt in his life.

He desperately wanted to do something, figure out a way to fix whatever was wrong with Meeta, but he didn't know what the problem was. She never willingly spoke details about her past. What little digging he had done into public records of the time period she had come from didn't help in the slightest. The galaxy as a whole considered her a brief footnote in history, no one but a historian, and maybe some Mandalorians, would know anything more than her name if even that. Revan was the only one he could have asked, but last Anakin heard, the man was still in a coma. He had heard there had been talk about taking him off life support, but apparently the Force made itself heard in regards to what it thought of that particular decision.

Dammit... what was he supposed to do?

"To understand, you must go to where it all began, and see through the eyes of the Exile."

Anakin sprung from his seat and whirled, hand on his lightsaber, but there was no one there. He could have sworn he heard an elderly woman speaking for a moment. He frowned, stretching out his senses, and could have sworn he felt a presence there. For a brief moment, he thought he saw a transparent blue outline of an elderly cloaked woman, white hair flowing down to rest above her chest wrapped in golden ribbons. Then it was gone. He blinked a few times in confusion before shaking his head.

"You're losing it Skywalker," he muttered to himself before grinning, "Thought that mind healer stuff was supposed to make sure you didn't go crazy."

He let himself laugh at the small/bad joke and sighed, raking a hand through his hair. First things first, he needed to get Jira and the others to his mother to be spread out in the Freedom Trail. Their stop in Corellia was good for that. Then, he needed to try and get Meeta to open up. Not that he had shared more than she had witnessed when they first bonded. It was like a sharp vibroblade to the thigh to even talk about anything with Healer Halycon. But still, he hoped in a few years he might be able to pry enough out of her to figure out what was going on with her. He still had plenty of years between his age now and how old he was in the dream.

He shook his head and sat back down, leaning back in his chair. His fellow freed slaves were resting in the side dormitory opposite of Meeta, he ought to follow suite, it had been a trying day...

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Anakin, for the umpteenth time, found himself floating in space, stalked by the same endless dream. In the distance, he could see stars blinking out, he could feel horrible screams rippling through him before being silenced all at once. One by one each star fell, leaving space as a dark void filled with nothing. He was pulled across space to that same massive and decrepit warship, landing on the outside of the bridge and staring in.

He watched his older self walk in alongside Master Yoda and the mysterious Sith that Dream Meeta identified as Darth Sidious. The trio passed the lifeless crew with their dead eyes. Each of them dead spots in the force...
"Meetra!" called out the older Anakin with a pained, remorseful voice, raising and igniting his blue lightsaber.

She turned, the awful emptying hungering void she was in the Force swirled. Her eyes shined darkly with hunger, craving for the life in them. She was death itself.

"Anakin," she purred. "How good to see you again."

She glanced at his companions dismissively, "And you brought Master Yoda and Darth Sideous."

She grinned maliciously, licking her lips. "Such delicious APPETIZERS!"

She raised a hand and two orange beams of energy shot out straight for 'Yoda' and 'Sideous'. They raised their hands to block the energy, but cringed at the impact.

The older Anakin thrust a hand forward and pushed Meetra with the Force, sending her staggering back and disrupting her attack. "Is this how you wanted it Meetra? All those lives... all those innocent people... all your friends... you killed everyone to sate your damn hunger!"

The woman just laughed, drawing and activating her lightsaber.

"Why?" screamed the older Anakin with his anguish filled voice, "Why didn't you let me help you? Why didn't you let me try to heal you?"

Meetra didn't respond, instead, she slowly started stalking forward. Within her, the void spin and swirl, hungering for the trio that readied themselves to face off against her...

"Anakin," spoke a voice.

Anakin glanced up, sighting the ghostly form of Revan once more.

"I wont be able to wake and help her in time to stop this. Please, save her from this fate," whispered Revan as darkness began to engulf and consume the ship, determined to not leave a single light in the galaxy...

Then the vision changed, rather than ending, everything gained a sharpness above what his dreams normally had, as if it were solidifying.

The ghostly Revan reached out and gripped his shoulder just before the last light faded. "You're running out of time."

Anakin woke up in a cold sweat, heart thudding rapidly in his chest. Stupid. Stupid stupid stupid! It was so apparent now that he thought about it. That vision wasn't a beginning, it was an end, after everything had already passed and failed. There was no actual clue when things would go wrong. But if what the dream Revan said was true, he didn't have years, and he was really no closer to figuring out what to do now than he was when he was nine years old.

He stared out into the darkness of space through the cockpit window silently, lips pressed together tightly.

He did not go back to sleep.
he orange beam thing was Drain Life from KOTOR/KOTOR 2 for those of you who haven't played the game.

Not sure how I did with this chapter. I had thought about doing a single chapter with five different scenes, one for each year that passed, before continuing with the story, but I had that idea when I was already half way through this one, so I kept the brief overview Meetra gave.

'shrug'

Your verdict if you liked it or not.
Small Steps

Yan Dooku did not consider himself a vain man. Yet, as he stood in the fresher in his quarters on Geonosis, he couldn't help but admire what Plaguies had wrought. Gone were the majority of his wrinkles, his hair had returned to a fine dark brown, save for a bit of aged white at the roots, giving him an wise maturing look (ignoring that he was more mature than the majority of the Jedi Order in his own opinion). Gone were the aches in his joints, he could not help but bend and savor the fact that his knees did not creak anymore. On the outside, he looked roughly as old as Qui-Gon was, perhaps a little older. On the inside however, he felt like a strapping young lad again. It was blissful in a way he would never freely admit to Plaguies, especially since...

He frowned briefly, and called slightly on the Force, feeling the chill of the Dark Side answer.

...since the reversal of his age had been a 'reward' for finally accepting the offered position in Plaguies's New Sith Order, not to mention he had rebuffed the Sith over the promise of youth when he had first approached them. He admitted only to himself and Qui-Gon, that he had been afraid, of the Dark Side, of what it would do to him. He had held off for years on taking the plunge based off that fear. He had been taught that a Sith did not care, did not love, and existed only for power and betrayal. He feared, and this fear he kept to himself, that Qui-Gon, the man that was a son to him, would either abandon him in disgust, or Dooku would lose the capacity to care for him. Neither had happened as of yet, and Qui-Gon had even kept their bond intact, and open. It flabbergasted Dooku how Qui-Gon could put so much faith in him...

When he feared he wouldn't be worthy of it.

He had only just begun his tenure into the Dark Side; Plaguies had promised them that the New Sith Order would be different than the Line of Bane, from any incarnation of the Sith that had come before. But Dooku knew better than to trust that Muun blindly. He would watch, and he would learn, but he would be careful about what he incorporated, and he would seek his Padawan's advice whenever it was prompt to do so (as much as it wounded his pride), for he knew the Dark Side would cloud his judgement, so the judgement of his Padawan was what he would trust.

He nodded his head curtly at his reflection. It was a wise decision and plan. He was, after all, not some foolish neophyte diving head-first into the black pit off the side of a cliff. No, he was a careful explorer who had found the staircase and was taking each step one at a time into the darkness, watching where he was going...

knock knock knock

"Master, they're at it again," came Qui-Gon's exasperated voice through the door.

And thus were his musings broken by the tantrums of children. "Can I not leave Ventress and Vosa alone for an hour without them being at eachother's throats?"

Qui-Gon chuckled. "I'm afraid not Master, the woes of taking two students. Perhaps there was some wisdom in the choice for such limits within the Jedi."

"Or," said Dooku, opening the fresher door and striding out, "Those two in particular are a nuisance."

He could feel Qui-Gon smiling behind his back. "A credit to your teachings perhaps?"
Dooku's response was to let out a 'hrmph'.

He strode down the hall, to the training rooms...

"Arrogant bitch!"

"Drug addicted whore!"

"Backwater slave!"

"Karking weak failure of an apprentice!"

"Ladies!" said Dooku, voice raised as he walked into the room, "I don't believe Narec would have taught you such vulgarity Ventress, and I know I did not teach that to you Vosa."

He looked over his apprentices, a sigh escaping his lips, as they sprang away from one another like children caught stealing from a candy jar. Vosa, he had at least managed to get into a dark robe rather than the disdainful sexualized attire she wore while she had (shockingly) been the leader of the Bando Gora. He hair, an odd spiky white (why in the world had she dyed it white rather than leave it her natural blonde?). He faintly missed her original blue eyes, now tinted yellow by the years she spent drowning in the Dark Side within that cult. She still bore her two curved hilted lightsabers, their crystals broken and stained red far before she joined the new Sith Order as it's Battlemaster in training.

Asajj Ventress had been the first recruit found and chosen since recovering Vosa and Sifo-Dyas, a fruit born of his old friend's penchant for visions. Dooku had, regrettably, arrived to late on that backwater planet he had found her on to save her Master, Ky Narec. It was honestly a shame, he had known the man, been a part of the same youngling clan (though he had been in his final year of it when Narec had entered), and had thought well of him. He would have been a fine addition, the first addition, to Qui-Gon's new Jedi Order. Or would have been if Qui-Gon showed any active interest in starting it.

He refocused on his second student. After they had gotten her out of that filthy attire they had found her in, they had dressed in an initiate Sith robe as Plaguies had instructed someone of her station. She bore no hair, only tattoos on her head. He had asked once, what they meant, and she had gladly enlightened him. One mark for every warlord she had slain on that miserable excuse of a planet. Plaguies had approved with a dark laugh when she had said it; called them a reminder of why she had fallen and started on her path to true power. Her eyes had yet to turn yellow, still a pale blue. She, like Vosa, had taken well to Makashi, and bore two curved hilts. Though, they fought with their chosen forms far different that one another.

There was a reason Vosa would be a Battlemaster, and Adajj would be their Lord Assassin.

They would make a fine pair, and could aid in leading this fledgling Sith Order to greatness. Of course that was IF they didn't kill eachother first bickering over their petty little feud. It was tiring to have to peel them apart from one another time and time again, but at least this time he didn't have to leave them in a bacta tank for a week. He didn't think he'd have to do that anymore though, Plaguies had been most displeased to have almost lost his would be Battlemaster and Lord Assassin to infighting, the one thing the Muun absolutely and truly abhorred, and he had expressed that displeasure in a way that still had Dooku's mind shying away from even thinking about.

Betray others outside our order readily, but never one another, lest we follow the mistakes of our past incarnations and destroy ourselves from within.
It was a curious, yet wise, statement. Born of a bitter grudge against Sideous...

"My apologies Master," came Ventress's deference, head bowed.

Vosa merely grunted and crossed her arms. "Whatever."

"May I inquire as to what the issue is this time?" he asked, irritation intentionally thinly veiled.

"She is beyond disrespectful!" said Ventress, pointing a arcing finger at Vosa like a child, "To berate your name like that is..."

"Something I can deal with myself," said Dooku, "While I can appreciate you standing up for my honor, I can fight my own battles, and besides..."

He hesitated for only a split second, "Vosa has ample reason to be angry with me over how her previous apprenticeship ended."

Vosa glared at him. "Well well well, what do you know, the old bastard finally admits to a mistake. Miracles do happen."

There was a brief white hot flash of anger, the dark desire to lash out, to punish her, before Qui-Gon coughed, drawing Dooku's attention to his padawan who was trying to hide a smile. One look at his Padawan's amusement soothed the anger like water to a parched throat.

Dooku offered a token bit of mild-outrage. "I was not that bad! I readily admitted to any mistake I made and learned from them!"

In perfect Jedi replication, Qui-Gon slid his hands into his robes, put a plain pleasant smile on his face, and tilted his head, "Whatever you say my most wise Master."

Even Ventress had to stifle a laugh at that.

"I am surrounded by the insolent," said Dooku in mock-derision before waving a hand at the two young ladies, "Now, the both of you, back to practice."

Dooku settled down to watch from the entrance, Qui-Gon at his side, as his two apprentices started sparring again. He could not help the contentedness that washed over him, to have his old Padawan at his side, and two apprentices to guide and watch over...

Sifo-Dyas walked in the shadows of Geonosis; lights flickering, cameras turning the wrong way and failing to capture his movements, all done reflexively. It was something Plaguies had trained into him time and time again, that he was to never be seen. To be their hidden weapon, sight beyond sight, that no one can blind if they don't know he existed. The cloak of the Dark Side he wore was still uncomfortable to wear; for it was not the guiding friend he had remembered as a Jedi, but a servant, almost a slave, as a Sith. He still wondered, from time to time, how it had come to this. How had Dooku and Qui-Gon saving his life from a bounty hunter ambush lead to this?

He shook his head and let the musings fade away, he had a purpose here, a requirement of his station. He slipped through the winding hallways of the citadel, and into Plaguies's throne room, moving to reside in the shadowy corners of the room.

Yet, despite his training, the old Muun would still always know he was there, chair still swerved to stare outside into the night's sky. "What is it Darth Sibyl?"
Sifo-Dyas frowned briefly at the name. He still considered himself Sifo-Dyas, and did not quite understand why the Sith was so insistent that he adopt this new title. Though, he could admit it had a certain alluring ring to it. Plaguies had told him that Sibyl meant Oracle, someone who uttered the prophecies of a God in some religion or another, in this case the Sith. It was fairly accurate to his role in the Order.

He cleared his throat and refocused, it was best not to test Plaguies's patience. "Something is coming."

The chair slowly turned, and Plagueis turned his calculating yellow molten gaze on him. "Oh?"

"There are... preemptive ripples in the Force, heralds of a major shift about to happen," Sifo-Dyas elaborated.

"Strange, that I have not felt anything," mused Plagueis before slowly shaking his head, a pleased smile crossing his face, "A reminder of why you were recruited then."

The smile faded and his voice turned harsh. "What is it that you sense?"

"Surik and... Skywalker," he answered with hesitation, "I feel that they are the cause of the ripples. Something is soon to occur with them at the center.

Plagueis's eyes narrowed, leaning forward as a hiss escaped his lips. "Ventress is years away from being ready to assassinate the Exile; and no one here, not even I, can withstand her hunger if she succumbs to it."

"I'm not sure she's reached that point yet," said Sifo-Dyas, "We still have time."

Plagueis tilted his head in thought. "Then what is the nature of this... event to be?"

Sifo-Dyas shifted uncomfortably. "I'm not entirely sure. The Force whispers of hope, a chance for Surik to walk a different path. That Skywalker's actions will be what starts her down this path, whether it is the Path of Hunger, or something else."

Plagueis settled back into his chair, leaning back. "Hmm..."

"From what I have foreseen, Ventress is still our best chance of stopping her should the Exile succumb to her nature, slim chance as the assassin's success is," said Sifo-Dyas, "But... if we are lucky, and the Force is with Skywalker, there may be another way."

"We will wait and see then," said Plagueis, his chair slowly turning to face the window.

Taking the hint, Sifo-Dyas slipped out of the room, walking amongst the shadows back to his own...

Darth Sidious only half-listened, leaning back in his chair in his office giving off a grandfatherly smile as Obi-Wan began detailing his last solo-mission among the Jedi, waiting for a word or a cue for him to answer, but otherwise his mind was elsewhere. His spy had informed him of a relatively new recruit to Plaguies's new order, some Nightsister witch called Ventress. 'Relative' in that it was unknown exactly when she had joined them. The only spy he had been able to slip through his Master's net had been a hanger mechanic who could only rarely manage to send out a report, and even then Sidious was suspicious that his former Master had let the spy through intentionally to feed him false information.
Regardless, he felt that this news was true. Another addition to his old Master's order on top of Dooku and the Bando Gora brat had him... apprehensive. Plaguies would never waste his time with trash, only picking those he thought had potential. A third addition to his new Sith Order in less than a decade made Sidious apprehensive. He did not fear any one member of that order, but multiple of them coming for Sidious at once? That was an alarming prospect, one he was forced to make plans to circumvent. Then there was the Jedi. Sidious could not fathom why Qui-Gon Jinn was still alive, left to roam free, and not turned or tortured to the Dark Side; it boggled him as to what Plaguies could possibly be planning with him. With all this in mind... he needed an apprentice to act through, and soon. Kenobi wasn't there yet, not ready to take the plunge.

He needed to find a stand-in until Kenobi could be turned. But to what degree? He didn't have the time to fully train another apprentice; he was only now truly regretting Maul's demise, if only because Sidious needed a tool to carry out his will, and Maul had been useful. He was incredibly far behind on many different plans simply because he didn't have the time nor an apprentice. There was also the problem of finding the apprentice as well, he did not have even half the free time to forward his goals as a Chancellor than he did as a senator. He needed something quick, easy to break in, and use until his chosen apprentice was ready and then be thrown away, preferably as a test for his true apprentice.

He pursed his lips in thought until it came to him. Maul had been a gift of the Nightsisters, in a manner of speaking. Perhaps it was time to see if they had another such gift to give. Yes... yes, that could work, and he was 'due' for a vacation relatively soon. Yes, that is what he would do...

"...its frustrating, honestly," said Obi-Wan, recapturing Sidious's attention, "I salvaged the negotiations, saved both diplomats lives, yet all they could seem to do was ridicule me for disrupting their gathering and accusing one of their own of betrayal despite what I felt in the Force."

Sidious slowly shook his head. "The nerve of some people to spit in the face of their savior."

Obi-Wan's face grew a little red, always the bashful one. "I'd hardly call myself their savior, just a Jedi doing his duty."

He made a face. "And getting spit on for it."

As much as Sidious would enjoy an apprentice who was subservient to him, Kenobi he had been forced to subtly 'work over'. The man had always been so quick to pass off praise (still was to a degree), always fault himself before others, taking blame when it wasn't due, and the like. It had gotten to the point where merely talking with Kenobi aggrivated Sidious and gave him a headache. It was also a type of trait that would be useless for the apprentice he desired. He needed a public face that was to be feared, and the young Jedi certainly didn't fit the bill. At least not yet. The fact that Kenobi was now willing to call out and rebuke others was a blessing. He still had a ways to go, but it was slow and steady progress.

Damn Surik for taking away the Skywalker boy. From what little Sidious had sensed at the time, the child would have eventually made an excellent apprentice. Kenobi was tedious, but had great potential, though from what he had seen over the years, not in the way Sidious preferred. Sidious wanted a tool, a weapon, one to be his arm throughout the galaxy. Kenobi had the potential to be, but he also had the potential to be an actual replacement and threat to Sidious, which wouldn't be too tragic he supposed, but only if the boy truly earned the right. That innocent face and humble attitude hid a deft silver tongue and a cunning mind. The boy kept such passion held back behind his Jedi training, Sidious had caught glimpses of people in the boy's mind, driving forces, some he had a name for, the ruler of Mandalore Satine Kryze, another Jedi called Siri Tachi, some he didn't.
There was a young redheaded girl 'Cerasi', Sidious didn't know who she was, but the guilt and loss made him figure she was dead. Perhaps something he could use against the boy with more details of the situation.

\textbf{IF} he could ever get the blasted motion he was working on passed, to allow the Senate (and thus him) to unseal Jedi personnel records.

Obi-Wan sighed and shook his head, "Forgive my brooding Chancellor, I haven't even had the decency to ask how your day has been yet."

Sidious gave a grandfatherly smile. "As well as can be expected dealing with parasites and stagnant corruption."

"I don't envy having you having to try and clean up the senate," said Obi-Wan.

\textit{You would if you were the blade I used to scrape it clean and mold it into my will.}

Sidious's smile gained a sharp edge to it at the thought. "Yes well, they are certainly wedged in tightly. Have been for hundreds of years, molding the law to their liking, makes things difficult. Sometimes, as ill as it makes me to even consider, I can't help but wonder if it the government should be wiped clean, all the senators and laws reset to what they were at a designated time, and start over from the beginning."

Obi-Wan frowned. "You truly believe it's that bad?"

"In comparison to the days of the Old Republic? Absolutely," said Sidious, "I've done my reading. Even with the threat of Sith Empires and other dangers, the Republic was far better, and far purer in the olden days. Perhaps... even because of them. After all, one cannot become stagnant with an enemy to keep them on their toes."

Obi-Wan didn't immediately reply, and Sidious wondered if he had pressed the concept to far to quickly.

Finally, the boy scratched the back of his head and looked away, muttering, "The Jedi aren't all they were in the olden days either."

Oh ho ho! Now that was unexpected, was the boy further along than he expected? "Oh? I must profess, the history of the Jedi isn't that open to the public, how do you mean?"

He settled back, growing more satisfied by the moment, as Obi-Wan Kenobi proceeded to explain his interest in studying the Old Jedi Order after the arrival of the Jedi Exile. Comparing and contrasting strengths and weaknesses, policy changes, and the like over the last several thousand years, and his own personal opinion of them.

It was good to see that disgust for the Jedi slowly growing...
Meetra was still locked in the cockpit a few minutes after they landed on Corellia.

Anakin didn't particularly like her shutting herself away, but he understood she was still upset (really upset) about what had happened on Tatooine. Not that Healer Halcyon agreed with such a thing. She said that was a bad sign that he needed to be self-conscious of with himself. It was okay to have some alone time to think and process, but if it continued to the point of isolation and paranoia, it needed to stop. He had been ten when she'd had that conversation with him and his mother, it had embarrassed the heck out of him, especially since the Healer said his mother would need to keep watch of it even into adulthood.

Which, even years later, still made him want to groan. He could imagine it, as a thirty year old man, his mother barging into his room and telling him to stop sulking and go out and interact with people. A good reason to not shut people out to avoid the sheer embarrassment that would cause. The terror of mothers...

He smiled a little at the thought of his mom. It would be nice to see her again. They had been out for a few months this time, doing odds and ends things for Meetra's job, and getting ready for the next batch of slaves to whisk to freedom. He always loved seeing mom's face light up when he walked into the room for the first time in awhile. It made him feel all kinds of giddy. He had seen other teens around his age shy away from their parents, he'd never understand it. They didn't know what they had, didn't know having the fear of one day waking up to find their mother having been sold off without allowing so much as a goodbye. Didn't understand just how much a mother would give up for their own child, their own happiness, their own life if need be.

And speaking of happiness, he loved that mom was so much more happier here than she had been on Tatooine (big shocker there), but there were also things he didn't like. Mainly, his trouble with sharing (So really, no changes he didn't like). Mom was always there if he really needed her, but seeing her go out and make new friends, spend evenings at functions or just a 'moms night out' with other mothers made something ugly rear its head inside of him. She had always been there at almost every possible moment when a Master didn't have them working on separate tasks, or he wasn't with his friends (like she was with hers?) It spoke of jealousy, of mom being his. Then, without fail, his mind would always go back to his first interaction with Healer Halcyon, where she had pointed out how he thought about Meetra in those terms, then the shame would come crushing down on him and his thoughts would skitter away.

It was honestly frustrating. He knew it wasn't the right way to think, but there was a big big big difference between knowing of a problem and fixing it. He had been seeing Healer Halcyon for five kriffing years, he knew it was supposed to take a long time. But... how long would it take to make those ugly possessive (slaver-like!) thoughts go away? Sometimes he feared they never would, and it scared him, filled him with such self-hatred and loathing that the Force felt all weird around him and then Meetra would get worried and then he'd have to meditate for a few hours and-

Nope.

Not going there.

Meetra had enough to worry about without getting in a fit over him. And he had more important
things to do right now than get lost in his head, at the exit ramp, with a bunch of recently free
slaves staring at him and waiting for guidance on what to do.

Oops.

He turned and gave them a smile. "Gimi a sec, gotta get word from Kit to see if nows a good time."

"Ha, that brats here?" said Jira, good-natured.

"Yep," said Anakin, "Works in CorSec, Corellia's security force, makes slipping people through
real easy."

He tilted his head. "Not that we really need to, but it makes it a lot easier than to go through the
official hassle which can take weeks, if not months."

There was a collection of nervous chuckles before Anakin descended the ramp, finding Kitster
waiting for him with a tint of impatience. Man, he had been lost in his head way to long that time.

"So, how many this time?" asked Kitster.

"Six pallies," he answered (never say aloud one was transporting freed slaves, never knew who had
listening devices where, then he grinned, "One of em was a really old one, seemed good natured
though, meshed well with the other ones like an old woman giving advice."

It only took Kitster a moment to figure it out before he grinned to. "Sounds good. I'll take it from
here then and get the goods shipped out and distributed, welcome home Ani."

They briefly gave each other a tight hug (never knew if they would see each other again, freeing
slaves was dangerous), and then he was off. He briefly checked the time through a store window
before adjusting his path to Halcyon Therapeutics, mom would still be working now. Working in a
profession that he whole-heartedly approved of, even if it made him all twisty inside to be a patient
himself. Helping people like that, who really truly needed it, was a worthy calling, and his kind
mother was born to help people, thrived while doing so.

The door dinged and his mother looked up from the screen she was working at on the reception
desk, and like he had hoped, her face lit up. "Welcome back my little Ani."

He huffed a little as she circled the desk and embraced him in a fierce hug. "Not little."

He then leaned up to whisper into her ear. "We got Jira this time."

Shmi's delighted smile widened even further. "Good."

Then she frowned and tilted her head in thought. "But who will take her place and role then?"

Anakin shrugged. "Dunno, she said someone would be ready, but didn't tell me who. You know
how it is, can't be forced out of us if we don't know."

Mom grew a little abashed. "Yes. I've enjoyed myself to much here if I've allowed myself to forget
such basics."

He only smiled. "Not a bad thing to be moving on with your life mom, isn't that something..."

"Scerra says? Yes," said Shmi with a sigh, moving back to sit behind the reception desk.

"Speaking of Scerra...," said Anakin.
"On a bit of an extended lunch break with Master Halcyon," said Shmi.

Anakin masked a flinch, though as always, mom could see right through it, her voice softening, "It's not the same Ani, Scerra's been over it before."

He sat down in a chair infront of the desk and sighed. "I know mom, it's just..."

If it was one thing he had always been thankful for, it was that Meetra had never made or asked him to call her Master. He had gone into the Corellian Temple once, and only once. Just walking down the hallway and hearing 'yes master', 'thank you master', 'what do you think about that master', 'good morning master', 'good evening master', and the like, had made him extremely uncomfortable. He couldn't imagine having to do that for *years* had he gone to the Coruscant Jedi Temple. Neeja thankfully never commented on him calling him either by his first name, Mister Halcyon, or 'Jedi Master Halycon' (*his wife had probably set him straight on it*). Anakin knew it was nit picky and maybe a little silly or stupid, but calling a Jedi 'Jedi Master' rather than just 'Master' took away the churn in his stomach at calling anyone Master.

It was also one of the reasons he suspected the Jedi here never made an overt invitation for Anakin to return there, or met elsewhere if need be. He knew he would be welcome as a friend of the Halcyon family, but his 'venture' into the Corellian Temple had been before he had learned how to properly shield, and they obviously knew he was uncomfortable there.

He sighed and shook his head. "Nevermind, how have you been?"

She gave him a knowing look, but allowed him to divert the subject, talking loosely about her own patients (*when had she started getting her own? Last he knew she still did the co-op thing pairing with Scerra since she was still an apprentice? He needed to pay more attention*). They continued for awhile, until Scerra walked back in, hair ruffled and face slightly red in a way that screamed 'was doing something *else* rather than getting lunch'. He grinned at her, and she merely rolled her eyes and walked into the back to fix up her look...

But not before her voice called back, "It's good you're here Anakin, since you missed your last *three* appointments while offworld."

Anakin winced.

"Give me five minutes then get your but back here Skywalker," she singsonged.

"You knew that was coming," commented Shmi mildly.

"Yeah yeah," whined Anakin, "I know."

The one thing Anakin did like about going to see Scerra was that 'therapy chair' of hers. It was a red, plump chair that he could just sink into. The most comfortable thing he had ever sat in, ever. So, five minutes later, he walked in and plumped down, nestling in with a sigh. Scerra gave him an amused look before sitting down in her own chair.

"So, how have you been the last month?" asked Scerra.

Anakin launched into the tale. Most of it standard odds and ends jobs, a few slave freeing runs, and then he eventually trailed off uncomfortably as they got to the last incident.

Scerra, perceptive as always, noted the change. "I take it something went wrong?"

Anakin looked away for a moment, licking his lips and whispering, "Meetra almost died."
"Ah," said Scerra, eyes carefully watching him, "That had to be terrifying."

"Yeah," said Anakin quietly, "I felt her pain, right when she got a shot through her gut. It was like it had gone through me too."

"The... bond, right?" asked Scerra.

Anakin nodded.

"Sounds like quite the shock," she commented.

"I was terrified, I thought I was going to lose her," he admitted without prompting, "The pain just kept going as she took hit after hit, I wanted to go to her, but I had to get the ship ready first. When I did... they..."

He was shivering, lost in the memory, "She was covered in blood and blaster burns, one of the Hutt's enforcers had put a vibroblade through her ribs, that scream..."

"Sweet Force," whispered Scerra, "Is she alright? She's in a hospital, in bacta tank at the moment, right?"

Anakin closed his eyes for a moment. "No."

"Anakin," said Scerra sharply, "She's been treated, right?"

"Depends how you define 'treated'," he mumbled, "You... the dreams, that I told you about..."

Scerra nodded. "What about them?"

"Meetra, she... she drained her attackers," he said, feeling the horror of it all wash over him again, it was all he could do to keep his end of the bond firmly closed at the moment, "They shriveled up like prunes, I felt their lives be ripping from their bodies. When Meetra did it... it was like there was a deep gaping screaming hole in the Force where she was standing."

Scerra said nothing, looking at him with ill-ease.

"It... it was awful," he said, "And then she looked at me... her eyes were just... dead. She... I thought she was going to try and... and drain me. She didn't even look like she recognized me! I had to scream down the bond to snap her out of it."

"Anakin... I know how well you think of her," said Scerra carefully, "But is she safe for you to be around?"

Anakin's temper flared. "It's not her fault! She'd never willingly hurt me! I..."

He sagged. "I need to help her. I've been to caught up in my own wants, with freeing slaves. I've pushed it off for too long, and... and the dream changed. He told me I was running out of time. She took me in, freed mom and Kitster, trained me, brought me here for help, got us a home, has helped me rescue slaves, and I've done nothing for her in turn!"

He felt tears in his eyes. "I'm selfish... so stupidly selfish... she needs me so badly, but I'm just... just a fail..."

"Anakin," cut in Scerra sharply, "You are not a failure. You are still young, barely out of childhood..."
"Fifteen isn't 'barely out',' he mumbled.

"It's still young regardless," countered Scerra. "Taking on such a huge responsibility would be overwhelming for anyone."

"But I haven't even tried yet!" he rebutted, "I... I still know basically nothing about Meetra before she came to this time. I don't know what's wrong!"

"Then ask," said Scerra simply, "And research. I've done some of my own reading. She was a General in one of the most horrific wars this Galaxy has ever seen. To be honest, I wish she would let me drag her in here for her own therapy, but she's hypocritically stubborn like that."

Scerra looked distinctly uncomfortable. "Some of the battles I've read about..."

She shook her head. "That woman has a impressive strength of will to come out of that war intact. Especially with how it ended."

Anakin gave her a curious look, but she merely returned a flat one. "Research it yourself Anakin. I want her in here one day, and I'm not going to risk that by having been the one to blab."

He sighed. "Yeah... yeah... alright, I... I need to do this. I should have been trying already..."

"Anakin," said Scerra, "What exactly would you have been able to do as a nine year old boy without any training with many issues of your own to work through?"

Anakin hesitated.

"Exactly," she said calmly, "You needed to grow, and to help yourself first before you could help her."

"I know," he said softly, "I know. But I can't lose her. She means so much to me. Everything she's done. I wouldn't be where I am without her, so many that we've freed would still be slaves or dead without her. She's so smart, strong, skilled, charismatic, so caring and beautiful..."

Scerra gave him an amused look. "Beautiful?"

Anakin turned beat red. "I um... uh... not like..."

Scerra waved a hand. "You don't need to explain it Anakin. Attraction to your teacher is common throughout almost all species and genders, especially with what she's done for you. You care for her, love her for who she is," then she snickered, "Just remember that she's a few decades older than you."

"Doesn't look it," he muttered, earning a light kick to his knee from the Mind Healer.

"Alright you, go do your research," said Stcura, before going serious, "Just remember Anakin. If this starts to really get out of hand, go get help. You don't need to do this alone, the Corellian Jedi, and even the main Jedi Order on Coruscant, would not hesitate if you but asked."

"Okay," he said, "Okay, I'll remember to ask help from others."

Others being the Holonet of-course.

With that, he was off, out of the shop after giving his mom a kiss goodbye, and to their homely little apartment a few streets down. It was small, comparatively, to others in the area. But it was still far bigger than what they had back on Tatooine. Though, sometimes the Ebon Hawk felt more
like home then here. It had a kitchen, three bedrooms, and a living room. Kitster generally slept at
the CorSec barracks, but crashed on the couch every so often. Anakin slunk into his bedroom,
carefully skirting around piles of scraps and projects and parts and pieces, before he flopped onto
his bed, pulling out his datapad and keying in 'Meetra Surik.'

He was... actually kind of surprised how long it took him to find anything about her when that
search failed. The first hint of her was from a scholarly article about the 'Mandalorian Wars'.
Perhaps it would be easier search, that was apparently the war she had been a general in...

By the time he had finished reading, it wasn't because he had read everything there was to know, it
was because he couldn't stomach reading anything more. "Sweet Force..."

Animals, that's all he could think of the Mandalorians, their 'Neo-Crusaders'. The subjugation of
Althiri, the absolute slaughter of their fleets and so many of their people. Then, the massacre of the
Cathar, over ninety percent of their population butchered, slaughtered, ripped apart without a shred
of mercy. On and on it went, the Mandalorian's assault swept outer rim planet after outer rim planet
for near ten years.

And the Republic, the Jedi, did **NOTHING** to stop them!

What was **WRONG** with them?!

Entire worlds were being conquered, butchered, torched, enslaved!

And the Republics attitude was 'it's not our problem'?

It was outrageous! It left Anakin a furious, sputtering mess, pacing his room in agitation, running
his hand through his hair. "What were they thinking?"

"What were who thinking?"

Anakin jumped, seeing Meetra standing in the doorway to his room, arms crossed, watching him
curiously. "Uh... hi Meetra."

"What has you in a fit?" she poked with amusement, "I felt you from the Hawk."

"Sorry," he said sheepishly, "I'm um... doing research?"

"On what?" she asked.

He went silent, throat going dry. How... would she react to him digging into her past? She
seemed... okay for the moment, that brooding seemed to have left her for the moment, but...

"Anakin?" she asked.

"The Mandalorian Wars," he said quietly, watching as her face drained of color and she went
rigged.

"Why?" she asked, her voice shaken in a way he hadn't seen often, the lifedrain incident on
Tatooine, and Naboo.

"I... I um...," he stammered, before bowing his head and deciding to just get it out and over with,
"You never talk about your past, I wanted to learn more about you. I stumbled on the war..."

"Oh," she said quietly, just... standing there with equal awkwardness to what he felt.
"What was the Republic thinking?" he asked, honestly baffled, "Letting the Mandalorians roam free for nearly a decade, taking world after world before the war really began."

The awkwardness was gone, and he nearly jumped to see a fire light in her eyes and a fervorous rant break from her lips, "That's what so many of us were asking at the time Anakin! The Republic danced around the Mandalorian's progress for years, placing fleets to discourage them, but never confronting until they were actually forced to. Revan tried to get people to listen! Before the war truly began, he went around to various temples and sects trying to encourage them to take up arms and join him! But noo! They treated Revan and Alek with suspicion at every turn! The Council refused to listen to us! And the Mandalorian's spread and spread until they were ready and hit Vanquo."

"Hadn't gotten to that yet," said Anakin.

Meetra shook her head, and he could feel that fire in her spreading, old ire and anger licking the bond between them, like a wildfire that threatened to consume him, demanding he take up arms, yet the threat was long since gone. "Revan went in search of the truth, for proof to incite the masses. No one knew about Cathar yet, the Republic hushed it up. He found evidence alright, he took up that mask, that purpose, that crusade, when he did."

"Meanwhile," she said, her rage briefly spiking before it turned... cold and awful, her voice hushed, "I was on Serroco... I... I was there when the Mandalorians bombed it, raining down nuclear warheads, turning the planet into class craters, bombing their cities and population centers..."

He watched, ashen, as her eyes went distant, her Force presence screaming distress. "So many died... more would have if Karath hadn't had word sent to the cities to bunker down. It... it was felt galaxy wide, the death of so many people..."

She sat down on Anakin's bed, shaken. "It was a prelude to Malachor V, feeling the Force scream like that... I should have known better, I should have... it was the first strike, the first wound I felt, I experienced firsthand... I wonder... if it and the others left me vulnerable to what happened at the end... or maybe they prepared me for it... I don't know... I don't know...."

Anakin watched her shake, lost in her memory, and sat next to her, wrapping her in a tight hug. He could feel it, so close to her, the bond painfully open, the echoes, the deaths, the screams of so many people silenced in an instant. It was abhorrent, the Force swirled anxiously around them, disturbed at the very memory of the loss. He held her tight, and asked no more questions that day, merely pressing comfort and care and concern down the bond until she eventually settled and retreated to her room, brooding far worse than she had been earlier in the day...

And he went back to reading, morbidly lured in, growing more and more horrified as he did, struggling to control his shields as he read. It took the Jedi far too long to get involved, would have taken even longer without Revan, without Alek (Malak? The name seemed interchangeable, the text wasn't very clear), without Meetra. The Mandalorian Triumph, a period of onslaught that carved into the Republic, was only stopped by the trio's efforts, the Battle of Duro was one of the first brutal confrontations between the 'Revanchists' and the Mandalorians. Though...

He couldn't help but notice how much more spotlight Revan and Malak got than Meetra. She was often just a footnote, listed as a commanding officer under Revan. She was a bit younger than them at the time sure, but she led many battles to victory as he continued to read... and then... things went south. Anakin wasn't blind to the listed Republic strategies, how the Revanchists began to change, how they started to slowly be willing to sacrifice populations and key planets to win victories elsewhere. How they became as brutal as the Mandalorians themselves. As they adopted 'Victory at all Costs' as their policy for the war.
Mom came and went with dinner, giving him a worried look at the disturbed one on Anakin's face. He barely touched his food, not sure he could stomach it. He kept reading long into the night. The struggle to take Onderon and it's moon Dxun was particularly brutal, and one Meetra was listed as being the commander for. Hundreds of small-unit feints to probe defenses, all lost, yet Meetra still won in the end. The text said... said the Republic lost nearly ten soldiers for every Mandalorian killed. It was an absolute several month long slaughter.

It made him scared for Meetra.

Scerra had occasional mentioned other patients she treated, never by name of course for her patient-confidentiality, but she had treated veterans before. People from a few war torn worlds. The struggles they went through to cope with the horrors of war, nightmares, panic attacks, flashbacks, suicidal thoughts and tendencies... this was so much worse. He thought back to the last few years, the way she could handle the horrors of slavery they rescued people from without flinching, only getting angry at the injustice of it. It was because she was used to far worse. Wholesale slaughter was something she experienced on a monthly basis during the war. He wondered how many little things he might have missed, cues that would have told him if she was struggling or not. Did she just bury it? There was no way she had come to terms with it if what she had acted like earlier was any indication...

Then, he got to the end, to reading about Malachor V.

The final battle of the war...

How Meetra commanded the activation of a superweapon...

The Mass Shadow Generator, using gravity as a weapon...

The Mandalorians absolutely devastated...

But the Republic's own ships, used as bait, betrayed and caught in the vortex...

Tens of thousands dead in a moment, an entire world cracked and ruined...

And Anakin's whole world felt like it fell out from under him...

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay, got caught up in my other works.

So yeah, Anakin finally learns about the Mandalorian Wars, and the whole shebang. Not to mention Malachor V. That will be oodles of fun when they eventually discuss it.

Can someone help me find a reference to something? I can't remember where I read it, but at some point, Anakin and Mace Windu had a conversation about meditation, where Anakin said something along the lines of it hurting to meditate deeply, or that it was like staring into a sun, and that Mace was impressed by it. I can't find the reference again, not sure if I misread it or not, wanted to use that line, but don't want to add in something potentially untruthful.
Anakin felt like he and Meetra were orbiting one another, and not in a good way. Always circling, never coming together. Anakin had tried, read, tried, to keep his side of the bond tight and tied down the entire time he had been reading about the Mandalorian Wars, but hey, he wasn't good at shielding, okay? He figured something had to have bled through. Especially when he was reading about Malachor V. Its just... he didn't know what to think. It was awful, yeah, but the entire war had been pure awful to read. That kind of mass slaughter was insane.

He wanted to hear what she had to say about it, about Malachor, but whenever he came into the same room as her, she was already on her way out, or made some excuse to need to be elsewhere (okay, when she had to go to work he could understand, but leaving to work on a project at 8pm? That's being obvious). It had continued for several days until he decided just to be a brat about it. He invited Kitster over to crash on the couch, scattered spare parts all over his own bed and room (he had an order to his room, it wasn't naturally a mess, it wasn't!) so she couldn't just hijack his room in return, then he grabbed some junk food, a holopad, and crashed on Meetra's bed to watch a movie, getting crumbs all over the place and ruining her precisely made bed (military precise maybe?). He made no effort to hide himself in the Force, just radiating smug triumph in the air around him.

When she eventually walked in, a scowl on her face, he flashed a grin. "Hey Meetra, was just finishing watching a movie, want to watch another one with me?"

"Has you're mother ever told you you're insufferable sometimes?"

"I'm her precious baby boy."

"You're full of shit Skywalker."

"Owch."

"And you're cleaning all of that up."

"Maybe after another movie or two."

"Anakin," she began, exasperated, "I have work in the morning."

"On a weekend?"

"I can work weekends if I choose to."

"Well to bad, I want to watch a movie with my favorite teacher, when's the last time we did something that simple?"

There was a flash of guilt from her, and he regretted taking that route. "I mean, I know you've been busy with work and me with studying and us both with the freedom trail..."

She waved it off and moved to brush off crumbs from her bed, nudging him over. "No, no, it's... fine. What are we watching?"

"Uh... some cheesy Corellian romance drama?"

"Why...?"
"I grabbed mom's holopad instead of mine and that's like all she has on it, to lazy to go grab my own."

"Your mother is a hopeless romantic."

"Hey, that's my mom you're badmouthing!"

"I think it's an adorable trait, could use more people like that in the universe."

"I love my mom, but one of her is enough."

Meetra snorted. "Start the movie Anakin."

Anakin did so, and levitated the holopad above them, nestling against Meetra's arm and staring up at it. It really had been awhile since they last relaxed like this. The movie was of course full of sappy and cringe worthy moments, full of songs (who sing-songs a dramatic shootout?), outrageous acts, where the bad guy lost and they lived happily ever after at the end. So... completely unrealistic, but worth a few laughs, groans, and endless nit-picking.

"You guys ever sing like that in the war?"

Meetra snorted. "No. Jedi don't sing, or at least they didn't in my time. And I never spent a lot of time in the infantry quarters to know if they did or not."

"Were the Shadow Mass Generators really the best way to end the war?"

Meetra went very still for a moment before an exasperated, if but pained look crossed her face. "Anakin, that is not how you lead up to that kind of question."

"Well you've kind of been avoiding me for the last few days."

Meetra sighed and made to sit up and move away, but Anakin reached up and put a hand on her shoulder, pulling her back down. She turned her head to glare at him, and he merely raised an eyebrow at her. She was stronger than him, if she really wanted to, she could break away, not to mention boot him out of the room, but, he wanted to know. He wanted her to know he wanted to know. He opened the bond a bit and pressed that feeling down it.

Meetra closed her eyes and sighed. "I don't know Anakin. I try to think of the war as little as possible."

"Okay... but what about that specific battle?" he asked, "Was there no other way to do it? Couldn't the Mandalorian's have been lured in without costing the majority of your own fleet and..."

"Yes."

Anakin went silent at that, trying, trying so hard, not to judge yet. "Why didn't you then?"

"It wasn't my call to make," she said quietly, head turning to stare up at the ceiling, a loud dark mass of emotions churning behind her shields, "Revan handed down his orders, and I obeyed him. I didn't learn until much later the truth of it."

"The truth?"

There weren't words for the pain licking down the bond. "Revan used the battle of Malachor V to exterminate anyone in his own forces who he believed wouldn't follow him down the path he had chosen."
Anakin... just stopped thinking for a moment. His mind completely blanking at the horror, and the betrayal of that act. "He what?"

Meetra shook her head. "Revan was walking down the dark path long before he became a Sith."

Anakin swallowed. "And he's your friend whyyyyy?"

Meetra closed her eyes. "When I first met up with him again, I didn't know whether to punch him in the face or ask him why. I kept my silence and followed in behind him because of the situation at hand. I never really had the chance to confront him, we were in the middle of a Sith Empire and there was a Sith Emperor to fight, hashing out the past then and there wasn't a good idea. Our emotions would have broadcast our position for all to feel."

Anakin took a deep breath, and slowly let it out. "I vote that you deck him hard when he wakes up."

"I might," she said softly, "Revan... is a great man, but great doesn't necessarily mean good. All of that power, that intelligence, that skill, his tactical genius... it could be used for good or evil. What he did though, my teacher voted on it being pragmatic."

"Pragmatic," he said flatly.

"Even before he discovered the Sith Empire, he wanted to unite and bring order to the galaxy," she said, a harsh tint to her voice, "Wiping out a huge chunk of the opposition before he even began was a pragmatic, and tactical decision towards attaining that goal."

Anakin made a disgusted face, not shielding that feeling in the slightest.

She shook her head. "If Malak hadn't betrayed Revan... he would have taken over the galaxy. I have little doubt of that. He would have turned the Star Forge on the Sith Empire, and wiped them out. I imagine things would look vastly different in this day and age if he had won."

She sat up slowly, sighing. "If Revan ever wakes up... I'll have a long, very long, conversation with him. But that is between me and him, not anyone else."

"I'd still like to punch him," muttered Anakin, "He sounds like a complete and utter bastard."

He winced when she turned and grabbed his wrist, hard. "Anakin, listen, and listen well. Do not ever underestimate Revan. Do not confront him in any way, shape, or form unless you know full well what you are doing and are prepared for the consequences. I don't know what Revan's alignment or goals are anymore, considering he regained his memories shortly before we came forward in time, especially if he eventually wakes up and finds himself four thousand years in the future. I'd like to think that so long as he's not stirred up, he'd settle down and try to find peace for once in his life. But truthfully, I don't know. He could choose to be a Jedi, he could choose to be a Sith, he could go civilian, or he could be something else entirely."

She leveled a hard gaze at him. "I've implied otherwise to others, but make no mistake. If Revan wakes up, he will most likely be the most dangerous person in the galaxy, baring maybe the Sith Lord in the shadows. If you were to go at him at the peak of your power, which I'd think would probably double his, he could still win by brilliance alone. Do you understand?"

He scowled a little. "Yeah yeah."

She let go and moved to shift to the edge of the bed, sighing softly. "My past and my problems are mine alone Anakin, you should be involved with them as little as possible."
He sat up and scooted over to sit next to her. "Hey, you're my teacher. What's your problem is my problem."

She scoffed lightly. "Pretty sure the teacher is supposed to protect and shield the student, not the other way around."

"Well, you have said we're unorthodox," he teased.

"Brat," she said, shifting to knock her shoulder into his.

He grinned. "So, what are you up to tomorrow? Was work a fib or what?"

"Actually, no, I have a delivery to make," she said, "Offplanet."

"Great, when do we leave? In the morning?"

She gave him a look. "Shouldn't you spend some time with your mother rather than get dragged around being a delivery boy?"

He squinted at her. "You're still trying to ditch me."

"It's an honest question, not to mention how far behind you have to be with your studies, we were gone for awhile."

"Ugh, don't remind me," he whined, "I'll get back to that next week."

She slowly shook her head, exasperated. "Go to sleep Anakin, we're up early."

Anakin grinned, childishly victorious and bounding for the door. "Alright, see ya in the morning."

"Honestly, is he fifteen or is he still nine?" he heard her mutter fondly.

"I'll always be a child at heart," he called back cheekily before escaping her withering glare...

There was an... air of trepidation as they readied the Ebon Hawk for takeoff the following morning. Anakin couldn't quite place what it was. It was off in the distance, a subtle danger, a hint of something big. He didn't know if it was aimed at them, or someone else, just that something was coming. If Meetra felt it, there was no indication. They took off, blew into hyperspace, and settled into the main room.

"So... what are we delivering?" Anakin asked.

"A custom droid interface to Mulatan," she said, "Got the order a few days ago, been working on it steadily, it'll be a fairly nice payout.

There was a twang in the Force, the trepidation rising. "Isn't Mulatan a Hutt world?"

Meetra shrugged. "I don't like the Hutts either Anakin, but work is work, and ironically it goes to help us freeing their slaves more often than not."

Anakin frowned a little, half closing his eyes, trying to figure out what the Force was telling him. He just couldn't get a hand on it...

"Alright, if you're tagging along, we're going to be productive," said Meetra, sitting on the couch, "Practice levitating objects."
Anakin lost his train of thought and groaned. "Why do I still have to do that? It's simple stuff."

"The Force is like a muscle," she lectured, "The more you use it, the stronger you get with it and the quicker you can call it for aid."

Anakin sighed and sat down center again the holoterminal. "Alright, alright."

He closed his eyes and reached out, first the couch she was on, giving it a good shake, earning a mental swat as a rebuke down the bond from her. He smiled a bit and began levitating one object after another after another.

*whistle beep*

Anakin blinked and lost focus when an angry sputter of what sounded like binary cussing assaulted his poor ears. Meetra gave a yelp of "Anakin!" as everything crashed back to the floor. He winced a bit and turned to see Artoo land on his side, angrily beeping.

"Oops, sorry Artoo, I forgot you were there."

He reached out and righted the droid with the Force...

Only to duck and roll as Artoo started after him, extending a shock-arm. "Hey hey! I said I was sorry!"

Artoo blew a raspberry at him, did and about face, and rolled back to his corner, his dome swerving to 'glare' at him. Anakin grinned sheepishly, turning towards Meetra and seeing the couch on it's back, her legs hanging over the new top. "Uh..."

"Levitate everything back to its proper position if you would," said Meetra with an exasperated sigh.

Anakin blushed a bit before doing so.

"You are way to easily distracted," chided Meetra, "We need to work at that. So, you're going to practice levitating, and I'm going to obnoxiously distract you the entire time."

Anakin squinted at her. "Is this payback for getting crumbs all over your bed?"

"I haven't the faintest idea what you're insinuating about," answered Meetra innocently.

Anakin sighed and settled down for what was sure to be an absolute pain in the ass training session...

---

Anakin was fidgeting.

To be honest, he was always fidgeting, the boy had a hard time sitting still period.

Still... Meetra felt there was something off about him. She wondered if he was still... anxious... about the Mandalorian Wars. Force knows she would be till the day she died. He was off-kilter from just reading about it, there was nothing however, no retelling, no description, nothing, that could properly describe the War. She never wanted to, to be frank. Anakin just coming out and speaking about the War that day had... she swore it had stopped her heart for a second. It had both terrified her, and re-lit a fire that she had thought died out a long time ago. That fire that had consumed her, consumed so many young Jedi, and set them out to stop the Mandalorians.
That urge to go out and face evil head on, to protect the innocent, to do something rather than sit on their hands. Sure she still did that to a degree, but... Anakin had no idea how many memories his question about the Republic's actions towards the initial Mandalorian offensive brought up. How many similar questions had circled the padawans and young knights. That first speech she had heard Revan give that drew her into the Revanites...

She shook her head, and resumed packaging up the droid interface. It had been a quick and sudden request for a simple thing, an interface between a protocol droid and a translation pad. To be honest, she was surprised anyone wanted that custom built rather than just ordering a cheap one somewhere. Hutt's were lazy if but suspicious bastards, maybe they wanted a high quality one to know for certain what was being said rather than being translated to. Who knows, she really didn't care.

She had a nice little engineering shop, people made orders, she delivered. Extra cost for extra-planetary deliveries, but she was one of the few small but expert kind of shops that actually did that. People could pay for quality rather than getting mass produced garbage from the Techno Union or their own planetary counterparts (which were generally owned by the union anyway). She netted quite the bonus for delivery, an extra percentage of the production cost depending on the distance to deliver. It was a nice little job, with Anakin as her apprentice there (though he was just as good if not better at mechanics and engineering).

It also served as a cover for him being her apprentice in the Force as well.

Aside for the Corellian Jedi, and the main Jedi branch, Meetra made an effort to keep Anakin's Force abilities on the down low to the public around them. Force Sensitive's were always treated differently, and the boy deserved as normal a life as he could manage after his youth as a slave. Anakin was relatively indifferent, wanted to show off what he could do, but Scerra pointed out that was a 'trait' brought out by slavery, to show their worth, to not be seen as worthless. So with Shmi's affirmation, the boy, relatively, kept his power a secret from most people.

Relatively because he was still a pain in the ass who levitated tools across the workshop when they have physical customers.

Honestly, that boy...

She finished packing the interface and hefted the box. "Alright Anakin, get the lamp lowered and lets drop this off."

"Beep," he called out childishly.

The ship jolted a little as the ramp lowered, near the bottom, a pair of Hutt thugs waited for them. "You got da boss's package?"

Meetra tapped a finger on the box. "Right here."

"Open it," they said.

Meetra resisted the urge to roll her eyes at the paranoia, but did so, angling the box so they could see inside. "Satisfied?"

One of them nodded. "Alright, get moving."

"Could just have our payment ready for us to drop it off," Anakin muttered.

"Customer is always right Anakin," she scolded back playfully.
'Except when they're being stupid,' he sent down the bond.

Meetra smiled a bit and followed the pair of thugs from the landing pad into a hutt fortress. She felt Anakin's trepidation slowly escalating as they moved in, she was confused as to why though. They had done jobs for hutts before, as much as he hated it. It was a good way to scope out their bases, get an eye on how many slaves they might have, their defenses, anything for them to use or to pass onto others in the Freedom Trail. He knew that, they discussed it before... so what was this all about?

'Anakin, you okay?' she asked.

'I dunno... I got a bad feeling about this, had it since we took off from Corellia.'

Meetra's walk briefly hitched before she kept on going. 'And you didn't tell me this, why?'

'You didn't feel it?'

'The Force and I have a complicated relationship,' she sent dryly.

They were led into a large audience chamber before she could try to gauge what to do. Her eyes flickered around the room, at an above average amount of thugs and bounty hunters lining the room. Unlike most of these kind of rooms, there was no bands playing, no sycophants there waiting to speak to a hutt, no slaves serving anyone, and perhaps most importantly, no actual hutt there. Just a rather heavily armored bounty hunter waiting dead and center.

Well...

If it looked like a trap.

Smelled like a trap.

Felt like a trap.

Sounded like a trap.

It was probably a trap.

Not to mention the Force was finally deciding it wasn't repulsed enough by her to release a tone of subtle warning. Meetra stretched out her senses and felt way to many lifeforms in the hallways adjoining this room. This... was bad...

She kept up her appearance and approached the bounty hunter in the middle of the room. "One droid interface as ordered."

The man hummed and took the box, taking out the part and looking it over. "Not bad, not bad. You're pretty good with these kind of things. The Hutts will like that."

Meetra pursed her lips, body slowly tensing. "If they wish to do further business, they can contact me at my shop. Now, I'd like my payment..."

"You got sloppy on Tatooine," said the Bounty Hunter, slowly drawing a pistol, many others in the room doing the same.

Meetra sprang back, drawing her lightsaber from her sleeve, Anakin doing the same.

"Never checked your ship for a tracking beacon," mocked the Bounty Hunter, "Led us right to
Corellia, wasn't that much effort to find where you live, your shop, your family."

A fearful 'Mom!' ran down the bond.

Meetra glared at the Bounty Hunter, furious at them, at herself. "Touch a hair on Shmi's head, and you're dead."

"She'll make a nice slave once we're done with you two," said the man, fingering his gun lovingly, "My boys will be trashing your shop as we speak, and moving to get the bitch once she's back at that apartment of yours. But that's elsewhere, lets focus here. You two have cost the Hutts a lot of money, and they'll see that paid back out of your hides. They'd love a pair of Jedi slaves. Don't want to have to rough up their prize, but we saw what happened on Tatooine. They want you alive, but dead is acceptable."

He grinned nastily. "We've got a lot more people and guns ready this time. Now put down those fancy glowsticks and no one needs to get hurt."

The Force was blaring danger and doom: If they were caught here, they weren't getting free anytime soon. 'Years' whispered the Force.

Meetra bared her teeth. Over her dead body would they make a slave out of Anakin again. "Anakin, shield yourself, and don't you ever try this without my permission."

The light wouldn't give her what she needed to get out of this, so she reached for the Dark without hesitation. She might have chosen light at the end, but that didn't mean she hadn't practiced with the Dark Side under Kreia's tutelage. She raised her hand sharply into the air, fed off her hate of slavery and the Hutts, drawing in on Anakin's fearful and angry emotions of his own, and released a Force Storm. Lightning blew from her fingertips throughout the room, turning the area into a smoldering chamber of screams and cooking flesh.

Then she moved.

Her lightsaber buried right through the Bounty Hunter's armor.

Just a taste...

Meetra shivered as she and Anakin fought off thugs and bounty hunters spilling into the room. Worse than the tempting whispers of the Dark Side she was trying to dip into without falling in was the hungry craving for the life spilling out of its mortal chains. It chanted to her, begged for her to take it in to herself. As the death toll steadily climbed, it grew harder and harder to fight it off...

Just a small taste...

Meetra waved a hand, sending a group of thugs crashing into the wall before releasing a burst of lightning at them.

Just one taste...

There was so much death in the air. The Hutts had laid this trap well, there was already over three dozen dead, and many more coming. So much released life still hanging in the air, drawn to her...

A single morsel...

A blaster bolt singed her sleeve, and she ducked under another. A beep-beep-beep of a grenade
landed near her, and she threw it back towards its lobber with the Force, the explosion killing a large score of them, a huge wave of -death-release-life-FEED- let loose into the air that made her shudder...

There was a pained cry from Anakin, and she turned her head to see him stagger, clutching his thigh, the marks of a blaster bolt having torn through it. She could feel him pouring healing energy from the Force into the wound, but... he was still so young, for all his power he had no experience, this was his first open fight against overwhelming numbers, he wasn't ready for this, there were too many of them to get to him, to cover all sides...

*Just a taste...*

Anakin was in danger.

*Just a taste...*

She needed everything she had to protect him.

*Just a taste...*

Just a taste, she agreed.

She opened it up just a tad, nibbled on the death in the air, let that hunger out so she could...

...and a bottomless, howling abyss rose up in a great gaping black maw to try to eat her from the inside out...

Anakin felt it the moment it happened.

The Force itself shudders, reverberating through the entire universe. There is terror, not born from any one person, but as if from life itself. One second, his bond with Meetra was active, the next its like its getting sucked into a black hole and she's screaming, endlessly screaming down the bond. Its the most horrific sound he's ever heard, and it won't *stop*. The air's grown cold, his breath is visible, there is naked fear from everyone present even if they don't understand what's happening.

He staggers, clumsily evading blasterfire as he goes, bating a few bolts away with his lightsaber. He turns, just a glance, to steal at Meetra...

She's standing there, blaster bolts piercing through her, but she's not reacting.

She's smiling.

It's the most chilling thing he's ever seen.

And then the Force screams. He feels it, as she begins to move, her lightsaber cleaving through one thug or bounty hunter after another. Life, not being released into the Force, but being drawn into her. Fed off by her. There is none of her usual grace and control in how she moves now. It's like something else is wearing her skin, every blow lethal, every slash of her saber meant to kill. Sometimes she doesn't bother with her saber, reaching a hand towards someone at a distance, a stream of orange energy pulsing from her hands to siphon the life from their body and drawing to her. Each death feeds the black hole her Force Presence is rapidly becoming, and each death seals another wound in her body.

*Mending the flesh, killing the soul.*
It's like he's watching her die, and the Meetra out of his vision being born right in front of him. The Force is urging him to run away from what she's becoming, or to kill her to save her from it (as if he could). For the first time in his life since Meetra taught him to really hear it, he's absolutely disgusted with it's guidance. He refuses it, she's Meetra, and he won't abandon her.

"RUN!" Anakin screams, projecting it through the Force at everyone around him.

He doesn't care if he's saving slaver scum right now, Hutt boot-lickers and the like. Each one of them dying makes her worse. It's enough though, coupled with the horrific number of corpses in here, to make plenty turn tail and run, others doing the same when faced with their dwindling numbers against an unstoppable killing machine. When Meetra makes to pursue them, he grabs her with the Force and yanks her back, shivering at the mental touch as he does so.

She staggers backwards and turns to him, her eyes not their usual shade. There's no yellow like she warned him about if you went to deep into the Dark Side, no, its... vacant, a darkening that had nothing to do with the Force. It worse than the Dark Side. She eyes him, predatory, her tongue slowly rolling over her lips like he's the most appetizing thing she's ever seen. She aims a hand at him, an orange stream of energy surging forward...

She's attacking me...

There is bile in the back of his throat as he tenses, coats himself in the Force, shoving the attack away, shivering at the -chill-hunger-death- it's touch imparts on his Force Presence. "Meetra! Stop!"

The way she holds her lightsaber, down at an angle, like her normal Makashi initiation, but its rigid and tight, not loose and adaptable. He's seen the start enough times when she practices her katas to know its going to go for a upward slash, to sever through his arm, chest, then other arm. He might be more powerful in the Force than her (than anyone), but she's decades more experienced with both it and a lightsaber, and touching her with the Force sends icy spikes of -death- through him, disrupting his focus and concentration.

So he's backpedaling away, because if he actually fights her right now, he'll be dead in under a minute IF he's lucky to last that long. He levitates bodies with the Force and throws them at her, she bats them away, that hungry smile never leaving her face, it's face. He ought to be horrified that Meetra's coming after him like this, but he's not, because that's not Meetra.

"Meetra!" he calls out, aloud, down the bond into the black hole.

Where is she? Where is his teacher? Where is Meetra in that thing?

She doesn't react, and then she's moving faster with Force imbued speed, her lightsaber arcing through the air. Anakin raises his own, parrying away and diving away, scrambling and tripping over a corpse. There is a blur of heat overhead, her lightsaber barely missing and searing into the floor, the sparks making him flinch and close his eyes as he rolls. His chest is clenching tightly as she prowls after him, and he feels grief.

She would have killed him.

It hits him like a podracer crashing.

Is he already to late? Did he ruin everything by doing nothing these years as her apprentice? Never pursuing the dream?

One second they were fighting slavers together, now she's this hungering thing that wouldn't
hesitate to kill him?

He tries to reach the Force for guidance, but its still either -RUN- or -KILL-, flight or right, a light or a dark reaction. It doesn't help him...

What does your heart tell you?

Anakin pauses briefly as his mother's words echo in his mind, eyebrows furrowed...

...and deactivates his lightsaber, trusting what he feels; trust and faith in her. "I won't fight you."

Meetra only pauses for a second before she takes the invitation, grabbing him by his throat, lifting him up, and slamming him into the floor before straddling him. She drops her lightsaber in the scramble, hunger written all over her face, and raises her hand like a claw, jabbing it down into his chest. It's pain unlike anything he's ever felt before, its like she's trying to tear him out of his body. It feels like she's pulling him into the black hole she's becoming.

He takes a chance, and he lets loose the scream, the emotion he's been holding back, shouting in her face, through the Force, down the bond, and through the parts she's trying to rip away from him into her, "MEETRA!"

...Meetra takes in a ragged breath, blinking rapidly. Everything is a blur, everything both aches and feels so good. It's like she's coming off a high, a drug burning through her body leaving her wanting and craving for more no matter how much it hurts her. She feels like puking; she feels like moaning in ecstasy. It's a disturbing mixture ripping through her. She closes her eyes, shaking her head, trying to banish the haze...

"M-meetra?"

She opened her eyes, blinking again. She's sitting ontop of a fear stricken Anakin, her hand stabbing into his shirt, his chest, she pulls her hand away slowly, shakily, there is blood on it...

His blood...

Denial doesn't even get a chance to assert itself. She screams and scrambles off him, rising and turning to run, but tripping on a corpse. She staggers and bolts to a corner of the room and collapses, heaving everything in her stomach up.

She fed on him...

That sickly pleasure she feels is because she drained him...

And it feels so good...

Meetra chokes on bile, wanting to draw her lightsaber and run herself through, because she wants to do it again; she shakes uncontrollably, raising an arm to wipe vomit off her lips. It was never like this during the Jedi Purge, she never had the urge to feed on her allies. Hell, she never had the urge to feed period, it happened without her input or attention. Now its like she can't stop consciously wanting to. Anytime anyone dies near here, she feels it. Craves it. It begs for her...

She turned to it to try and protect Anakin...

Instead would have killed him.

He's not safe with her.
No one is safe with her.

"Meetra?" came Anakin's hesitant voice.

There is a wary hand on her back, but it slowly rubs circles there. She doesn't know why he's even still in the same room as her, let alone offering comfort. He should have fled, left her here. Done the smart thing...

There is a click of a comlink. "Artoo, get the Hawk ready to go, now."

He clicks it off. "Meetra, c'mon, we have to get out of here."

She closes her eyes, takes in a shaky breath, and seals her distress off. Just like in the War, close it all off. Focus on the objectives at hand.

First: Get Anakin safely out of here.

Second: Get him safely away from her.

Third: Go off on her own and figure out what the hell is going on. Either she finds a way to deal with this, or she kills herself.

Because she absolutely refuses to become Nihilus.

She rises to her feet and brushes past him without daring to look at his face. She closes down the bond as tight as she can as she walks, briefly pausing to feel out for her lightsaber in the pile of scattered corpses and call it to her, clipping it to her belt. Anakin falls in behind her, and they leave the audience chamber. Once she's away from all that death, she feels both better and worse. Better because she can't feel that desire, worse because now it's leaving a lasting ache in her for more. It's getting worse. No one tries to stop them as they leave, anyone who sights them flees in a panic. She's never wanted that king of terror directed at her...

As they board the Hawk, she manages to croak out. "Con... contact your mother. The... they implied she wasn't home yet. She has to be warned."

Anakin slips by, briefly turning his head to give her a deeply worried look, before rushing to the holoterminal and mashing his fingers down on the keys. "C'mon mom, c'mon..."

Anakin lets out a desperate sigh of relief when Shmi answers, and she's not in danger if she's bothering to scold him, "Anakin Skywalker! I hope you're not only realizing now that you forgot to say goodbye..."

"Wherever you are don't go home!" he blurts out, "The Hutts are onto us, they attacked us, said they were going after our shop and our apartment."

Shmi's face closes off after a brief shutter. "I'm at Scerra's, she was hosting a party."

"Then stay there, or better, stay in the Corellian Jedi Temple for a bit," he said.

Meetra walked away, letting him finish his conversation as she moved to the cockpit, strapping herself in, and taking off into the air. She punches in... punches in the coordinates for Coruscant and briefly takes a moment to send a quick message. The Jedi had left the door open if she ever needed help, so she'd take it. She presses a few buttons and seals the cockpit closed; she can't... she can't speak to Anakin right now, she can't. She leans her head forward and rests it on the controls, taking in deep desperate breaths.
The Jedi will take care of him where she cannot...

Anakin is... more than a little worried.

Meetra has stayed locked in that cockpit for days in their trip through hyperspace for wherever they are going. It's not Corellia, because they'd have been back by now. He's knocked on the door, and down the bond. He desperately wants to talk to her, they need to figure out what's wrong with her, but she refuses to speak to him. The grief and guilt and despair licking down what little he can feel from the bond gives him a reason as to why. When they finally jolt out of hyperspace, Anakin pauses, because he feels a humongous cluster of Force Sensitives on whatever planet they've arrived at. Trained ones, so Jedi. But it's not Corellia... so Coruscant? Why did Meetra take them here? He waits patiently in the center room on a couch until they touched down. Judging by their proximity to the Jedi, at their temple.

He hadn't been here since he was nine, that first time the council had rejected him. There was still a twinge of bitterness at that, but he was happy to have ended up with Meetra instead. He sits up when he hears the cockpit door open, his eyes trailing Meetra as she walks out.

"I'm having you looked over by trained Jedi Healers for any... lasting damage from... from what happened," she said quietly, not looking at him.

She's lying.

It hits him squarely in the chest. There is an air of truth in what she says is going to happen, but it's not why they're here. The Force is dangerously insistent on this, trepidation in the air, the future feeling like it is in terrible, unstoppable motion.

"Okay," he said slowly, "But after, we need to talk."

There is a strained smile on her face. "After."

They are met at the ramp by a dark skinned bald guy Anakin vaguely remembers as Windu, and another pair of Jedi.

Windu looks Anakin over briefly at a distance; he feels a slight inquisitive pass through the air, not invasive, but checking for pain and discomfort. The man's eyes crinkle confusion. "I don't feel anything off, but they will escort him to the Halls of Healing while we speak, Surik."

Meetra nodded. "Go with them Anakin. I'll... see you later."

Never, whispers the Force, *he will never see Meetra as he knows her again if she leaves without him.*

Anakin's breathing hitches. "Meetra?"

She's already leaving with Windu, not looking back at him, and he's nudged forward by the Jedi. He swallows back the urge to bolt after her, walking behind them. He keeps his focus in the Force on her though. He has a terrible suspicion forming, and if her presence so much as starts heading back for the Hawk rather than coming back to see him, he's taking off after her. He keeps a mental map as he's lead through the temple into a small waiting room that smells like disinfectant, making his nose crinkle. He's told to wait while their head healer finishes tending to other patients, and is left alone.

'Anakin...'}
He pauses, looking around.

'Anakin... come to me...'

He feels a soft, faint nudge in the Force, and he slowly rises to his feet. He makes his way through the Halls of Healing into a quiet little room, following the pull. Laying there on a bed is the comatose form of Revan. Anakin stares down at him with a frown. The voice he heard... it sounds just like the one that haunts his dreams every night, always there at the end of every nightmare.

"You're not asleep, or in a coma, are you?" asked Anakin quietly.

'No.'

"Good, cuz you know," said Anakin flatly, "I have a bone to pick with you."

'Later boy,' chided the voice, 'I've been conserving what energy I can for years for this moment.'

Anakin huffs and half-turns away. "I don't care for later. If you're going to just brush it off then..."

It felt like a hand had grabbed his shoulder. He was spun around and forced to look at the comatose Revan. For a moment, he thought he saw a blue outline of someone standing in front of him, both hands on his shoulder, and suddenly the voice isn't soft, it's shouting through the Force, strained:

"Listen to me boy! You are out of time. Her friends and allies kept the beast inside of her at bay in her original time. Now, you are the only active anchor she has because she is to foolish and afraid to form anymore bonds! She intends to leave you here because she is scared for you, and of herself. This is your last chance, if she walks away alone, the next time you see her, what makes her Meetra will be gone! She will become the empty hungering soulless beast you dream of. Go after her, either stop her from leaving or go with her!"

Anakin swallows the rising bile in his throat. "Yeah... okay, okay, I'm going. But... I don't know how to help her!"

The voice grew tired, exasperated. 'Be yourself boy, that's all you ever need be to help her, and to fulfill your destiny.'

He squinted, trying to make out that fading blue outline. "I still think you're an utter bastard."

'I've been called worse.'

Anakin turned and fled the room, tightening his Force Presence as much as he could. Most Jedi only gave him curious looks if they passed him on his way back to the Hawk. He snuck onboard and moved to the storage compartment, hiding behind a few boxes and closing his end of the bond off to keep his presence a secret from Meetra. He closed his eyes, pained, when the Hawk took off not even five minutes later.

She...

She really would have left him behind without so much as a goodbye.

He bit his lips and struggled to contain his emotions, not liking that sickly 'abandonment' that roiled his stomach. She was afraid for him, she thought she was protecting him from her by leaving him at the temple. She wasn't... wasn't meaning to leave him behind like that...

He waited a few hours until they were well on their way in hyperspace (or more like because his
legs were cramping a bit) before he got up and moved. He found Meetra sitting in the center room on the couch, head in her hands, shaking, distress bleeding into the air.

"I'm so sorry Anakin," she whispered to herself.

"I really ought to be mad you tried to ditch me like that, but since you did it out of fear for my safety, I'll forgive you," he said with a tight tone, making her jolt, jumping to her feet, hand going for her lightsaer.

"Anakin?!" she exclaimed.

He purses his lips, steels himself, stares her down, and speaks with a hard voice, "Meetra, we need to talk."
Anakin watched as a swirl of emotions played across Meetra's face before she steeled herself. "You should have stayed at the Temple Anakin, I'm turning us around and..."

"No, you're not," he countered, "I'm not leaving. I've been putting this off for to long Meetra. You need help, I want to help you."

"Anakin, you... y-you can't," she stuttered briefly, "Whats wrong with me isn't something you can help with. I'm dangerous to be around..."

"I know," he said softly, "I've known since I was nine years old Meetra, since I've been haunted by nightmares of what might happen to you."

She paused, uneasy, her eyebrows furrowing. "Nightmares?"

He moved to sit down in front of her, patting the floor for her to join him. She hesitated before doing so. "Every night since we've met, I've had the same nightmare, the same vision."

"Describe it," she said quietly.

He shook his head and closed his eyes, nudging the bond. 'Let me show it to you...'

Anakin floated in space, and Meetra floated next to him. wary and confused. In the distance, they could see stars blinking out, they could feel horrible screams rippling through them before being silenced all at once. One by one each star fell, leaving space as a dark void filled with nothing. They were suddenly pulled across space at an insane pace until they came before a massive warship, though, it looked rather old and decrepit. Meetra's presence distorted in panic at the sight of it, and for a moment, another decrepit ship was in its place, and a different awful presence was there before it faded. They started to float down to it and landed on the outside of the bridge, staring in.

Meetra stared down at an older version of Anakin dressed in jedi robes walking into the bridge. At his side was two beings. One was a Master Yoda, the green gnome also in jedi robes, an ignited green lightsaber in his hand. The other was a man in a black cloak with an activated red lightsaber. She looked him over, eyes narrowed, and Anakin could imagine a target being painted on his back. He could feel her probing their signatures through the vision. The green gnome felt light, pure and good. The old man felt dark, sinister and malicious. Eventually, her attention turned to the bridge crew. They paid no attention to the three force wielders. They moved and did their duties aimlessly with lifeless eyes. They felt dead in the force...

He felt Meetra's recognition and her desire to shy away, she had seen people like this before.

Then, her eyes trailed the trio of Force Sensitives down the long bridge to the other end. Standing there, with her back turned to them, was...

"Meetra!" called out the older Anakin with a pained, remorseful voice, raising and igniting his blue lightsaber.
The woman turned, and Meetra recoiled in pure and utter horror, despair and denial almost overwhelming the vision. The sensation the vision Meetra gave off was awful. It was like she was a walking void, empty and hungering. Her eyes shined darkly with hunger, craving for the life in them. She was death itself.

"Anakin," she purred, "How good to see you again."

She glanced at his companions dismissively, "And you brought Master Yoda and Darth Sideous."

She grinned maliciously, licking her lips. "Such delicious APPETIZERS!"

She raised a hand and two orange beams of energy shot out straight for Yoda and 'Sideous'. They raised their hands to block the energy. Meetra brought a hand up to her mouth, blocking a sob as the pair cringed at the impact, their lives slowly start to drain and the vision Meetra grow stronger, feeding off them.

The older Anakin thrust a hand forward and pushed vision Meetra with an unseen energy, sending her staggering back and disrupting her attack. "Is this how you wanted it Meetra? All those lives... all those innocent people... all your friends... you killed everyone to sate your damn hunger!"

The woman just laughed, drawing and activating her lightsaber.

"Why?" screamed the older Anakin with such anguish Meetra struggled to get away, tried to break out of the vision, but Anakin held her in. "Why didn't you let me help you? Why didn't you let me try to heal you?"

Vision Meetra didn't respond, instead, she slowly started stalking forward. Within her, Anakin could feel the void spin and swirl, hungering for the trio that readied themselves to face off against her...

"Anakin," spoke a voice.

Meetra jumped a little, looking up to see a ghostly blue figure standing on the hull of the ship staring at him. It was Revan, as always, with that mask on his face. A glowing dead specter.

"You finally brought her," said Revan, abruptly breaking the normal flow of the vision.

Anakin gave a start. "You're actually here."

"In a manner of speaking," said Revan quietly, his mask turning to Meetra, "I wont be able to wake and help you in time to stop this, Meetra. I can't fix what I've done, and make no mistake, it is my fault. You and Anakin are the only ones who can stop this from happening."

Darkness engulfed and consumed the ship, spreading to leave not a single light in the galaxy, "Please... I don't want this to be your fate..."

"I'm sorry..."

Anakin yelped as Meetra shoved him away, a pained wail escaping her lips. "NO!"

His eyes went wide as she took her lightsaber off her belt, raising it to her neck...

He dove forward and tackled her, the lightsaber fumbling out of her hands. "Meetra stop!"

"I can't!" she yelled, struggling against him, "I won't become that thing!"
He clutch his arms around her, trying to pin her in place. "Then stop and listen Meetra! Didn't you hear the older me? Didn't you hear Revan? You didn't let me help in the vision, so please, please, let me help you."

She turned her head away from him, taking deep, ragged breaths. "There's nothing you can do Anakin."

"How would you know?" he jabbed, "You won't even tell me what's wrong so I can try."

She went silent.

"You know what mom says," he said softly, "The biggest problem with this universe...?"

"Is that no one helps each other," she finished quietly.

"That includes people not wanting to accept help from others," he added in before begging, "Please Meetra."

Meetra sighed, running a hand through her hair. "...fine."

Anakin hesitantly let go of her, but positioned himself between her and her lightsaber as she stood and made for the couch, sinking down into it and scrubbing her face with her hands. "I'm a Wound in the Force."

Anakin blinked. "A what?"

She looked away for a long moment. "The Force is life Anakin. It can only exist where there is life or energy of some kind that it can flow through. To wound the Force is... to extinguish life, not just a little, not just a lot, but a massive event that wipes out an incredibly large number of lives in a very short amount of time, or all at once."

Anakin stared at her, connecting the dots. "Malachor V, the Mass Shadow Generators."

Meetra swallowed. "Yes."

She closed her eyes. "I survived Malachor... and delayed becoming what I am, by cutting myself off from the Force, severing my connection."

Anakin gave a start. "That's possible?"

She gave a strained smile. "I didn't realize I had that ability at the time, or that I had done it to myself, I thought the Jedi Council had done it to me. It... is perhaps the most devastating, and cruel, act possible through the light side of the Force. It is a terrible thing to do to someone, even if they are a completely evil and unrepentant Sith Lord. Even after I learned the truth, I never tried to experiment with the technique."

She swallowed again. "I used it subconsciously to survive the psychic backlash of all that death. I... still don't know if it was the super weapon itself, the act of severing myself from the Force in the sudden and abrupt manner I apparently did, or some mixture, that created what I am. I..."

"I'm an echo," she whispered, a broken edge to her voice, a fragility he never saw from her before, "An echo of all the suffering and death of that battle, and perhaps more, of the war itself. A continued projection of it..."

She bowed her head, taking in a shaking breath, looking up, there were tears she was struggling to
keep back in her eyes. "During my exile, I kept mostly to myself. I was... trying to find solace, come to terms with the war, with myself, without the Jedi, without the Force. But... when I got dragged into the Jedi Purge, against the Sith... I was exposed to large scale death again. That death began to feed me, reawaken my connection to the Force, but not as it was..."

"Never as it was," she whispered, "It was like it came from a great distance. Not from myself, never from myself. Just what I could feel from others, or from the life I unknowingly fed on. I am an echo, what I feel is but an echo of the Force, distorted and warped by what I am. The Wound, the echoes, grow stronger and stronger, I grow stronger, the more death I'm exposed to, or, the more bonds I have to feed off my allies and enemies."

Anakin frowned uneasily, trying to wrap his mind around what she was saying. "And you can't just... heal it?"

Meetra barked out a sharp, bitter laugh. "No. It's not a physical wound Anakin. It's a wound in the Force itself, in my soul. Revan... I was told Revan let me walk away from Malachor V, didn't have me killed, because he thought me a Jedi who was already dead. I'm a dead thing in a living body..."

"You're not a thing," he snapped, "You're a person and your name is Meetra. We'll figure this out, I promise."

She just shook her head. "I haven't the faintest idea where we'd even begin looking for an answer."

Anakin gnawed a little on his lips, thinking.

*To understand, you must go to where it all began, and see through the eyes of the Exile...*

He blinked, as those whispers of words went through his ears. He had heard that before... after the incident on Tatooine...

"Malachor V," he said, "We'll start there."

Meetra's eyes flew open, gaping at him in abject horror. "No. There is nothing there anymore. I blew that planet apart when I went back."

"You what?" he asked.

"There is nothing left of Malachor V but ghosts and echoes," she spat.

He pursed his lips, he reached out for the Force in guidance, but it was still useless in regards to Meetra. "You say you're an echo Meetra, so maybe with ghosts and echoes is where we should go look. It's where this began, perhaps we can find a clue there."

Her jaw set tightly, there was blazing anger in her eyes. She rose to her feet and glared at him. "Fine, go where you want then."

"Do you know the coordinates to it?" he asked, unflinching.

"I could never forget them," she spat before rattling them off and storming out of the room.

"Shesh, and I'm apparently the one with temper issues?" he muttered, glancing over at R2-D2 in the corner, "You caught that Artoo?"

The droid beeped an affirmative.

"Then lets go punch it in," he said, making for the cockpit, Artoo on his heels.
He dropped them out of hyperspace and punched in the coordinates for Malachor V, sending them on their way. He sat there in the cockpit for a long time. Playing her words over in his mind. Trying to understand. Academically, he could process her words, but... he just couldn't imagine what it would actually be like to be cut off from the Force. To be wounded to it. To feel it wounded.

Then again...

He had felt Meetra for those moments, when she was lost in it...

He bit his lips worriedly. How was he supposed to help against this?

He turned his head, feeling a brief burst of agitation down the bond. She was really in a fit... well... Malachor V was the source of so many problem for her life. It wouldn't be pleasant for her to go back there. He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. What was he supposed to do? She was right in that it wasn't physical, it wasn't mental either. How did one heal a soul? Heal damage to the Force itself? It was a notion that blindsided him.

How do you defeat death?

It was a question that haunted him as hours passed. She wasn't dying per say, she said she was already dead in a way. How does... how does that even work? He struggles with it, not a single idea coming up in his mind. He finally got fed up and went in search of Meetra, finding her sitting on a bunk in the Hawk's left dormitory. "Hey."

She tilted her head slightly. "Hey."

"What... is it like being a Wound?" he asked, not sure he was phrasing it right, "What does it feel like? Can you figure out what's wrong from your end?"

She sighed. "Anakin... before I came forward in time, I didn't even feel that anything was wrong with me. I felt a little different, the Force never felt quite right, but... it was never to this extent that it is now."

It had never been a problem because of her bonds... Revan had said that.

So theoretically, if she bonded with a bunch of people...

No.

That wasn't what he was aiming for. That would only stop the symptoms at best, make her go back to the way she had been during the Jedi Purge if they were lucky. He didn't want to sweep it under the rug and forget about it. He wanted to FIX it. He wanted to heal her, seal the wound. He didn't want her to ever have the risk of becoming that... that hungering monster. Making new bonds would only delay the problem, maybe it could be done over and over until she died of old age, but...

That wasn't what he wanted for her.

He wanted her to be whole, healed. To move on. To be free. Because there was more than one way to be a slave, and being a slave to that monster inside of her was an awful, awful thing.

"And now?" he asked, "What does it feel like now?"

She shivered. "Hunger. It feels like hunger. Like I ache, and there's only one way to make that ache
go away. The...

Her arms shook as she clutched them to her. "The ache was recent. Only after this last time. Each incident, Maul, Tatooine, Mulatan, has made it steadily worse. I... when it happened at Mulatan, I... I thought I was being eaten alive..."

Anakin decided he really didn't like scared being written all over her face like that. "So, realistically... we need to figure it out before it happens again. Because I don't know if I could pull you out of that state a second time, especially if its worse than what it was. If it feeds off death, then... then we stop working with the freedom trail."

Meetra's head whipped towards him, shocked and astonished. "Anakin! That's..."

He gave a tight, sad smile. "My dream? Yeah. But I..."

He squirmed a little. "I'd give it up to keep you safe from becoming that monster, Meetra."

She looked grieved. "I don't deserve that kind of sacrifice, Anakin."

"That's not for you to decide," he bit back, a little peeved, "Working the trail is dangerous, it will involve death, especially since the Hutts know about us now. So... we keep a low profile. Or spend time in either of the Jedi Temples."

"You don't like being in either of them."

He shrugged. "I'd deal with it for you."

She looked away, silent.

"Is there anything else you can think of Meetra?" he asked, "Any thought that might help?"

She let a bitter chuckle escape her lips. "Anakin... it's never even occurred to me that a Wound in the Force can be healed, I'm not sure it's possible outside of..."

She closed her eyes. "Outside of killing it. That's how Nihilus was... well... stopped being a Wound."

"We're not killing you," he snarled before he caught up with what she said. "He was a Wound in the Force as well?"

She smiled grimly. "We were both born out of Malachor. I don't know which one he was out of the thousands of Jedi there, but he had to be a Jedi before he became a Wound."

She sighed wearily. "Anakin... if it comes down to it... I would prefer death to becoming like him. I've lived my life..."

"You're what, thirty or forty something?" he asked, eyebrow raised, "There is plenty of time left, especially since you barely look twenty anymore."

She gave him a dark look and snarled, "Only because I stole life to replenish my own. This isn't natural, isn't right."

He shrugged. "Taking from scumbags isn't something I particularly care about."

A pained look crossed her face. "It starts out like that Anakin, then it slowly spreads to lesser criminals, then people in your way, then innocents, then good people. The slippery slope argument
isn't just for show."

He looked away for a moment, she wasn't wrong, but that wasn't where he was going with that thought. he just... wasn't good with words. "Meetra... when have you ever had the chance to live for yourself?"

She hesitated. "These last few years..."

"You've been helping me," he said quietly, "Everything you've done has been to train me, or help me with the freedom trail. You were a Jedi, then you were a lost exile, then you were drawn into the Jedi Purge, now you're here. I want you to have the chance to really live for yourself for once."

He held up a finger. "And no, fiddling around for a few hours a day on some project in the shop doesn't count."

She huffed. "So you say."

He stared at her, waiting, but she said nothing. No agreement, no counter. There wasn't any real hope in her eyes. He licked his lips; he didn't have a clue what to do, but he wouldn't give up. "We'll be at Malachor in a few days. Lets get something to eat, you haven't had anything in days."

She pursed her lips and muttered, "Because I haven't needed to, apparently eating people's lifeforce is an equivalent."

Anakin's stomach clenched. "I... see."

He took his leave after that, moving to sit in the center room and wait...

Roughly a day and a half later, Anakin's legs suddenly buckled while he was pacing the center room, a sickly sensation washing over him. It left him gasping for air, his vision blurring, the Force feeling so distant.

"Anakin!"

He looked up to see Meetra sprinting into the room, she looked oddly energized. "What's wrong?"

"I... dunno... Force feel's faint," he whispered.

She frowned for a moment, and he could feel her probing the bond, him, and herself. "It's not me."

She hesitated. "You said it feels... faint?"

"Distant," he said, struggling to his feet, moving to sit on the couch, panting a little. "Like its sluggish. A little raw... and getting rawer by the second."

It felt like there was sludge being rubbed all over his insides. He looked at Meetra. "What do you feel?"

She looked uneasy. "I... it's... its like when I would come back from a mission when I was a padawan. A spring in my step to get back to my friends, the enclave, the feeling of coming home. It doesn't make any sense."

"Could it be Malachor?" he asked.

She shook her head. "It can't be, we're still at least a few hours out... except..."
She half closed her eyes. "It's like..."

Her eyes went wide and she rushed towards the cockpit, leaving Anakin sitting there confused. The ship jolted out of hyperspace, and Anakin hissed as the sensation he felt from the Force felt even worse. When she walked back into the room, her face was ashen.

"I can feel it, that same sensation when I came back, it *is* Malachor," she whispered, "Its the Wound from Malachor V."

She swallowed. "I... I thought destroying the planet would destroy the Wound, but it's still there. It's... in the last four thousand years... it's spread out from Malachor."

All of the sudden, Anakin felt like the entire weight of the Force just decided to drop onto his shoulders as it screamed 'Truth truth truth!' in his ears. The sensation of millennia of pain, of pestilence, of a sickly spreading disease slowly bleeding the Force dry slammed into him, leaving him winded. It was worse, so much worse than he imagined. This wasn't *just* about Meetra.

"It's connected to me," she whispered, swallowing continuously, "It beckons me, I... I feel drawn to it..."

She closed her eyes for a moment, concentrating, and when she opened them, there was a hint of vacancy to them. "It's a part of me, as I'm a part of it. We were born of eachother..."

Anakin had his fill of creeped out for the day right then and there. "Just... get us back into hyperspace."

She pursed her lips. "Anakin, its most likely going to be worse when we get there."

"I... know," he said.

She sighed. "I'll be in the cockpit if you need me."

He bit his lip thinking after she had left. "It doesn't make sense. I'd think a Wound would be centered around where it was caused. It can grow, a Wound feeds off death, yeah, but, if the planet is gone, no one would even bother going there, so it couldn't grow from that..."

*beep whistle*

Anakin turned. "You think you understand whats going on?"

Artoo whined mournfully.

Anakin's jaw dropped in horror. "That can't be right."

Artoo's dome swerved, beeping dejectedly.

Anakin swallowed as the ship jolted back into hyperspace. "Don't... don't tell her that, okay?"

Artoo chirped a sad affirmative.

Anakin sorely hoped the droid was wrong. Artoo thought it sounded like a feedback loop. One Wound feeding the other. Or perhaps a restraint, and Meetra had been physically absent for the last four or so thousand years, and was now struggling herself. He didn't truly know, but... the implications, the massive implications, were terrifying.

Meetra if she turned into that hungering monster would kill the people of the galaxy.
Malachor on the other hand would kill the Force itself eventually if allowed to continue to grow. Not in his lifetime, perhaps not for millions of years, but eventually it would...

"There is no death, there is the Force."

Anakin froze.

"It is a line, from the Jedi Code. Some may see it as a guideline, but if you look deeper, there are hidden truths, that none save those who wrote, or experienced it would understand."

Anakin slowly turned around, and standing there, at the entrance to the hallway of the left dormitory wing, was the glowing blue figure of an elderly woman. Like the Revan in his visions, she was translucent. She had white hair flowing down to rest above her chest wrapped in golden ribbons. She was garbed in a Jedi robe, the hood drawn down over her eyes. She had only a single hand, the other missing. She had a severe face, an almost permanent frown etched onto it.

Anakin swallowed, jaw hanging a bit. "Uh..."

"Close your mouth, lest a bug fly in," she scolded.

He closed it with a snap.

The ghost slowly approached. "Malachor, the Exile, Nihilus, they are not the first Wounds in the Force to have been born, nor will they be the last. Though, perhaps the latter two may be the last Wounds that walk. To have a wound born inside of a person, is of a most rare nature, and the knowledge of how to etch a Wound into a person intentionally was lost a long time ago. The Exile saw to it that the Sith that went down that path were destroyed, as was the Trayus Academy on Malachor."

"Why would anyone even want to?" he asked quietly.

She smiled, seeming please with the question. "Why indeed. Why would someone create and nurture a power that could harm the Force itself?"

Anakin hesitated.

The smile faded. "The why of it is perhaps a topic for another time, should we speak again."

"Who are you?"

"I am Kreia, an... old companion of the Exile during the last year of my life," she said carefully, "The last teacher she had."

Anakin nodded slowly. "Any reason you're appearing now, rather than before?"

She regarded him. "Because, I am bound to where I died, and to her, though she is deafened to me as she is. Only by you entering the Wound in Malachor was I able to fully manifest here, rather than simply whisper to you from her."

"And you've just been... hanging around here for the last four thousand years?" he asked, skeptical.

Her nose wrinkled. "Though I would not wish to, I cannot properly pass on into the Force."

"Why?"

"Because of her," said Kreia quietly, "None of us who were bound to her can pass on, nor can those
she fed upon."

Anakin swallowed. "Oh."

That's... bad.

"What... were you talking about, with the Jedi Code?" he asked.

Kreia spoke slowly, choosing her words with thought, "The Force will naturally, over time, seal a Wound so long as it is not festering. There are ways that the Jedi would encourage this. If it is a physical place, seeding it with life can be used to slowly heal the damage. If it is a location that can not properly sustain life however, it requires something else. To the Jedi, the only way to accomplish this is to encompass the Wound entirety with the Force, the focus and efforts of countless Jedi. It is a great and massive undertaking, requiring coordination and effort beyond what the Jedi Order in public history has ever shown."

"I wonder if the Jedi have that knowledge, or understanding anymore," she mused before shaking her head, "They kept such knowledge hidden in the past because of the danger in understanding that the Force can be wounded, and, under the most impossible and extreme of circumstances..."

"Killed," said Anakin quietly.

"Perhaps it would be equivalent to death, I was once fervent enough to believe so," disagreed Kreia, "But not quite. To truly kill the Force, one would have to wipe out all life, down to a microscopic level. But, to deafen all life to it's will? That is a much simpler task. Had the Exile died upon Malachor and Malachor alone, an echo screaming out within an echo, bonded to so many both dead and alive, the reverberations of it may have done just that."

Was it just Anakin, or did she sound both fond of that possibility and yet saddened by it at the same time?

Kreia refocused. "A Wound bound to a person is however another matter, different from a stationary one, for they still live while they are Wounded. They will echo it within them, reflecting that Wound, weakening and draining the Force wherever they go. Those that a Wound kills, will not return to the Force so long as the Wound lives. As such, the Force is weakened as the Wound grows. The only way to heal a soul so grievously wounded, is to return it to the folds of Force. Thus..."

"There is no death, there is the Force," she echoed again.

Anakin glared at her. "I'm not killing Meetra!"

"I do not wish you to," agreed Kreia, "But you must understand, Child of the Force, that the Exile is not one or the other, she is both. So long as she lives, so to will Malachor, and that place has grown beyond the Jedi's ability to deal with."

Anakin's eyebrows furrowed. "Child of the Force?"

Her lips curled a bit. "You are abhorrent to me, young one, simply because of what you are. But the Exile is fond of you, and her will often spreads to those she is bound to, intentionally or otherwise."

Anakin frowned at her. Was she loony?

"I suppose you do grow on people, like a fungus," she mused, earning a glare from him.
"You are perhaps the only one that may save her," she said with a sigh, "The Force would have her die, to rejoin it, become one with it again, to wash away the Wound she became, and welcome it's lost child back into the fold, and in doing so, put Malachor to rest. The irony that one born of the Force such as you would deny it's will without turning away from it as the Exile did is not lost on me, and stirs my interest. Still, you treasure her, as I did, that alone earns you my respect."

"You are one that life has tested since the day you first understood what it meant to be property," she said, the eyes under her hood upon him as he flinched, "You have grown since then, and while she has not pressed nor trained you as I would have, you're life has not been static. Through interactions with her, with others, through decision and choice, through confrontation, physical or mental, you have grown. Each challenge has shaped who you are. You're power is not only because you were born with it, had you never been taught how to hear the Force, you would have lived unassuming for the rest of your life after all."

She... was either a well thought out teacher, or really liked to hear herself talk. Anakin wasn't sure which.

She regarded him wearily. "I would never wish for one to take up a challenge in the Exile's stead, robing her of the experience and strength to draw from such a task, but she cannot do this herself, because of what she is, what was done to her, what she did to herself; it falls upon you to do so."

"Alright... if the only known way to heal a person who is a Wound to kill them, what else could I try?" he asked.

Kreia turned her head, staring towards the cockpit. "I do not know. All that I can do is make you understand what she is, what happened to her, and from there, you must make a choice."

"A choice?" he asked uneasily.

"Find another way to save her, or kill her at Malachor's grave and finish what was begun so long ago," she answered, "And make her death the most meaningful one that ever was, make her death the one that reshapes the galaxy."

"Or I could choose neither," he said flatly, "You seem to think I can snap my fingers and just insta-fix it. Even I know things take time to figure it out."

"Apathy is death," spat the woman, "I wished you to come here for a reason. Malachor will consume her within minutes when she arrives at its corpse if nothing is done, and she will wipe out all life in the galaxy in the years to follow. Your hand is forced."

Anakin stared at her in horror. "You're insane. Why would you bring us here then? I thought cared for her!"

"I would have killed the galaxy to preserve her," snapped Kreia, "I would still let it die if need be, because I hate the Force, I hate that it seems to have a will, that it would control us to achieve some measure of balance, when countless lives are lost; that it would create you to seek out that balance, regardless of the consequences and sufferings you would go through, or that you may inflict upon others. All to be meaningless and washed away when you or they die and become one with it. As if our lives are meaningless to it."

He opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out as he felt a presence clamp down on his throat.

"You do not understand, but you will; there is no truth in the Force, but there is truth in the Exile,
in the unique choice she made. You are still as much of a slave as the day you were born, to the Force rather than a person, as is everyone one else who bears it," Her steady voice grew heated and passionate. "The Exile is the only one who is truly free. The only one able to turn away from strength not her own. So let me show you, you who has only ever seen the galaxy through the Force and its will, how to see it through the eyes of the Exile."

His eyes went wide as a beam of orange energy blew out of her ghostly hand and hit him before he could react...

Anakin found himself on the bridge of a ship. All around him were men and woman in what looked like a Republic uniform at various stations. But standing at the front of the viewport, was Meetra herself, older than she appeared now, eyes narrowed as she watched destruction outside of the ship. Anakin stared at her in a gentle wonder, feeling her, truly feeling her, in the Force. Not as she was now, but as she used to be. Whole, unmarred, unwounded. She was a bright beacon, a massive branching tree that stretched through the Force, connecting to those around her, her roots and branches going off out of the ship and into space. There were tarnishes to that tree, darkened spots, withered roots and dying branches, but it was still alive, still pulsing with life.

And oh how the Force loved her, treasured how life flowed through her, connected through her to so many people, making it flourish...

He flinched as he both saw and felt ships full of people, of Jedi, burn and die out in space. Meetra was grim, her fists tightening. There was anger, and grief. She pursed her lips, closing her eyes briefly before she turned to someone. It was a male Zabrak in an engineer's uniform. Meetra stared at him in silent, for such an unbelievably long time. There was a haunted look on her face, grim acceptance, grieving anticipation, before she nodded at him.

The man pressed a few buttons on his terminal...

Anakin screamed.

He screamed and screamed and screamed as everything around them died. Flashes and explosions let loose blinding green light through the viewport, Meetra collapsed to the floor of the bridge, writhing in pain. There was so much pain and backlash in the air. The tree that she had been was dying, so many of its branches and roots burnt away in the span of an instant, bleeding into and killing the whole. Tears rolled down her face, blood out her nose, as she curled into a ball. Then, without any conscious effort, the Force swirled under her instinctual command...

And ripped the tree away.

Anakin gagged as she became a dead spot to the Force, as the Force recoiled from her in shock and horror. There was nothing there, not even what he felt from her now. He buckled to his knees as the pain, the horror, the death, continued to echo around them. It embedded in Meetra, but she did not react to it further. Instead, she softly echoed that pain and death around her, but was immune to it.

As the crescendo of death came to a close, the Force around them wept, it sobbed in pain and suffering, at the horrible loss of life as it bled out of the area, the echo of death driving it away...

There was nothing left but echoes...

Echoes of what life had once been...

Just echoes...
"Anakin? Anakin!"

Anakin took a rasping breath, biting back a scream. Judging by how hoarse his throat was, he had been screaming for awhile now, his vision tinted with pain. "Hurts... it hurts... hurts hurts hurts..."

Meetra was kneeling next to him, shaking him, fear radiating from her. "Why? Whats wrong Anakin?"

He closed his eyes, a pitched whine escaping his lips. The Force was screaming around him, wailing and struggling. He felt so strangely disconnected from himself. His entire body ached, his mind ached, his soul ache, the Force ached, like someone had tried to rip it out of him...

She had...

She tried...

Kriea tried to make him see like Meetra did...

She tried to make him a Wound. Make him another echo of Malachor...

"Did I?" came Kreia's sharp tone, " Or were you simply not listening what I was trying to teach?"

He ground his teeth, opening his eyes and struggling against the pain. What she saw as truth he saw as a lie. The absence of the Force was not freedom, it was death.

"Then how do you counter death?" said Kreia pointedly, looming over Meetra's oblivious shoulder, staring down at him.

Anakin forced himself away from how that insane old bat made no sense, to look at Meetra, to see her as what she had been, and what she had become.

*How do you counter death?*

Anakin could barely form words. He couldn't warn her, couldn't tell her to turn the ship around. He had no idea how long he had been trapped in that vision, how much time they had left until they arrived.

*How do you counter death?*

She had been magnificent before she was wounded, she still was in a way.

*How do you counter death?*

She had connected to so many people, and the Force had loved her, loved how life...

*How do you counter death?*

How life...

*How do you counter death?*

Anakin's eyes widened. "With life."

Meetra blinked. "What?"

Anakin reached up and grabbed her, pulling himself up and wrapping his arms around her, pressing
himself against her as he threw the bond they had completely and utterly open in every way he could, and poured himself down it. Poured his life into her. She gasped and spasmed. "A-anakin! What..."

He felt the hunger in her reach greedily for him, but he barreled past its touch, into her presence, into her wound, into that abyss, and poured himself into it. He poured his life down into that hole...

And watched in horror as it never seemed to reach the bottom.

He mentally ground his teeth, eyeing the Wound, seeing it encompass the core of her soul. It was like a massive jagged stab into her depths. He didn't understand, he should be able to fix this, to heal her Wound...

Wait...

It wasn't...

He cursed himself.

It wasn't just her Wound.

It was Malachor too.

It was every single person that had died there in that battle.

Anakin was powerful, he knew that, but he wasn't equal to that sheer number of people, the massive scope of space that had been Wounded.

He couldn't heal the Wound.

Failure hung over him for a moment, the sole condolence that he wouldn't live through this once he finished pouring himself into her, because the hunger wasn't going to let him go now that he was there. He couldn't heal the Wound, he couldn't seal...

Seal.

He refocused with desperate intent, not on the depths of the wound, but its shape, the way it collapsed her soul into that maw. He struggled to shift how he poured his power, his life into her. Rather than dump it into the abyss, he built it over the Wound instead, closing it off, sealing it shut even if he couldn't heal what lay underneath that stopgap. He bound that seal to himself, connected and instinctively strung it into their bond. They were connected to each other as deeply and as equally as she was connected to Malachor. And so long as he lived, that connection would never break.

He pulled out of her presence, her soul, and was left gasping. He felt... he felt so weak... so diminished, not what he had been before, like he had been cut in half. Meetra collapsed onto him, her face buried into his stomach, taking deep shuddering breaths. Her Force Presence shifted and changed, no longer hungering, stabilizing, a reflection of Anakin rather than an echo of death.

"You made a... strange choice," whispered Kreia in a gentle sort of wonder, "A unique one, and not what I expected. It would appear that you are her apprentice in all ways that truly matter. But know this, all choices have consequences, and you will not like the consequences of this one, neither of you will. Yet perhaps... it is for the best, that the two of you confront this challenge together."

Anakin eyed the ghost as she slowly faded away, before glancing down at Meetra. "You... okay?"
She shakily raised her head, giving him a weak smile. "Anakin... what did... what did you do? I don't... I don't feel it anymore, the hunger's gone... and I..."

Her voice turned awed with so much hope and happiness and wonder. "I can hear the Force, not from a distance, but like its a part of me again."

He smiled a little, even if it didn't reach his eyes. She didn't seem to notice that. Nor realize that he hadn't really succeeded. But perhaps it was enough. So long as he lived, she'd never suffer that hunger again.

Meetra's eyes twinkled with a spark of life he didn't think he had ever seen before, one that made him swell with happiness, and something else he didn't quite understand. "I... I... thank you Anakin... thank..."

She froze up for a moment, a confused and befuddled expression crossing her face. Then that spark of life went out, and her eyes went wide as agony ripped across her face, and she rolled away, clutching her head and screamed in pain. Anakin's head burned a moment later as horrific searing pain rushed down their bond. He curled on the floor screaming as well.

Images of people he had never met before began flashing before his mind so rapidly before they were abruptly ripped away. Each one was a spike of unimaginable festering pain. Each face, each person, each interaction was sucked away into the mental image of the Shadow Mass Generators being activated.

As black spots began dancing across Anakin's sight he understood, he understood the awfulness of what was happening. Force he had been so blind. She had cut herself off from the Force to survive not just the death, the Wound, but to survive all those bonds she had with those dying being snapped at once, all that death. She still had all the severed festering bonds in her head, she had simply been unable to feel that death, the destruction and pain lurking behind the Wound in the Force she had become. By sealing the Wound, he had reopened her, opened both of them, to that pain.

He struggled against the unconsciousness clawing at him. If he passed out, he knew it was over. They'd either die, go insane, or maybe if they were lucky for an even somewhat acceptable outcome, go Dark to cope. He shakily uncurled and reached a hand forward to pull himself, crawling towards Holoterminal between spikes of all consuming pain...

There was a panicked beep and whistle from Artoo, and Anakin hazily looked up to see the droid rolling over to them. "T...turn the Holoterminal... on."

The droid paused before swerving to do so.

One clawed hand pulling Anakin forward, one scream of pain, one struggle with passing out at a time, he crawled to the terminal. "C...contact... Coruscant Jedi Temple... M...mace W...Windu..."

Artoo beeped an affirmative.

Connecting played across the screen in front of him for a few agonizing moments before Mace Windu's irritated face appeared on the holoscreen. "Surik, you're apprentice is missing and..."

Windu paused, glancing down and sighting Anakin shaking uncontrollably in pain. "Or not. Skywalker, what is going on? Are you alright?"

"M...Malachor... V...," he gasped out, shaking and pulling himself up against the terminal, "Artoo can... guide you... please... help... us..."
That was all he managed before he pitched forward, slammed into the holoterminal and then hitting the floor, passing out into darkness and pain...

Chapter End Notes

OOM, got this one out in record time for this story me thinks.

And the Wound in the Force portion of this story is done.

At least until Mortis.

:D

Let me know how I did on Kreia. I did a mix of interpretation, reinterpretation, and taking some of her quotes from the game.

Anakin will have one more section next chapter, then we shift to Revan and others for awhile.
When Anakin awoke there was to a soft soothing light trying to ease his pain. His eyes hazily opened to see a Jedi staring down at him, a palm on his forehead.

"Where...," he croaked out.

"Hush," said the Jedi, "You are in the Halls of Healing at the Jedi Temple."

Before he could ask anything else, a spike of pain ripped down the bond followed by a blood curdling scream from across the room. He looked over in alarm, seeing Meetra struggling and writhing on a bed with a team of Jedi Healers trying to restrain and help her. Anakin tried to get up and go over, but the Jedi attending him forced him to lay back down. He glanced wearily around, sighting Jedi Masters Windu and Yoda standing a few feet into the room near the door, watching the sight grimly.

One of the Jedi struggling with Meetra, a Mon Calamari, placed a hand on her head and then flinched away, gasping and falling to a knee, clutching her own head. "So much... so much pain. So many broken bonds, allowed to fester for so long. How is she still alive?"

"Bant, focus!" called one of the other Healers, "We'll do it together."

The Mon Calamari, Bant, shakily rose to her head and together, with several other Healers, placed their hands on Meetra's head. Pain flashed across each Jedi's faces, followed by a look that screamed that they had tasted something sour. Meetra's screaming weakened into a painful whimpering with sobs escaping her lips and tears staining her face, her writhing into an uncontrollable shaking.

The pain spiking down the bond weakened, enough for Anakin to realize that even the initial pain was far less than it had been back on the Hawk. Any hopes of it being because of the Jedi helping Meetra faded however when he realized it was Meetra trying to lock down their bond and keep the pain to herself.

"Meetra," he forced down the bond, "Let me help, let me bear some of the pain."

She shied away from him, trying to clamp down on the bond. Anakin closed his eyes, irritated, and focused down the thread connecting them. He paused at first; something was different. It wasn't a thread, it was like a huge tunnel now, bigger, deeper, bound them more tightly than ever before. What's more, Meetra couldn't properly close it. In fact... he reached through and opened it. In hindsight, he should have braced himself, because he couldn't bite back the scream that escaped his lips from the sudden burst of mental anguish down the bond.

He hissed, his entire body feeling like it was burning alive. Like before, images of people long dead, that Meetra had once known, ripped through his mind. This time though, rather than being whole, each person looked like they were rotting, withering, screaming alongside him and Meetra.
They begged for release, begged for severance, hundreds, perhaps over a thousand voices all echoing for salvation. Anakin felt like throwing up, the pain etched with sickly hues. It was wrong, this was all wrong...

There was an audible thump, and Anakin turned his head, sighting one of the Jedi healers having slumped to the floor near Meetra's bed, passed out. The other healers already looked absolutely exhausted despite only mere minutes passing, gutted, and like they were going to lose consciousness any second now. Dread filled him. There was too much pain, too much devastation that the Wound in the Force had covered and let rot for so long. They couldn't handle it.

Then a voice spoke, one that jolted Anakin, hearing it aloud instead of in his dreams. "Get her to the depths of the Temple."

Anakin's head whipped towards the door, going wide to see the ghost of his dreams, seeing Revan, leaning warily on the door frame, awake but tired. The man eyed Windu. "I assume the Temple still has it's Force Suppressant Cells?"

Windu stiffened briefly. "I suppose I shouldn't be surprised you are aware of them, but you want us to put her in one of them, why?"

"The Force is what is doing this at the moment," said Revan, pausing to take a breath, "Her Force Bonds to be precise. Take her away from the Force, or this will drive her insane or dark. Her threshold is high, but even this will surpass it eventually. If you use the cell to keep the Force suppressed around her, you can take her out in sessions, giving the healers a chance to recover and slowly heal the damage over time and..."

"YOU."

The room froze as a chill filled the air.

Anakin turned his head, looking at Meetra half sat up despite the healers trying to pull her back down, teeth gritted against the agony in her head, eyes half-mad with pain as she glared at Revan. "THIS IS YOUR FAULT!"

Revan's face didn't shift in the slightest. "I'm aware."

He shifted back to Windu. "Are you just going to stand there? I'm not in a condition to lift her myself. I can barely stand at the moment."

Windu nodded briefly, and turned to the few healers still up and trying to help Meetra. "Get her on a stretcher, now!"

Anakin didn't hesitate. "Take... take me there too."

Windu glanced over at him, eyes furrowed. "I was informed that she was the source of this pain, why would you..."

"I'm not leaving her all alone in some kriffing prison cell for who knows how long while she deals with this," Anakin said through gritted teeth.

Windu, thankfully, didn't argue further, merely moved to help Anakin stand as the Jedi loaded a writhing Meetra onto a stretcher and quickly moved out of the room and down the hallways. They moved into an elevator, and descended down into the Jedi Temple. Anakin put a hand on Meetra's shoulder as she shook, her teary eyes going in and out of painful focus, hisses, cries, or screams escaping her lips at random intervals as the pain of one festering bond flared after another. Finally,
they arrived at a floor lined with force-field doors, moving for the closest one as the Jedi fiddled with the controls and then led them inside and...

Anakin's vision turned red with a different kind of pain as he suddenly lost the ability to feel the Force. He collapsed to his knees, gasping for breath and struggling with the horrible absence that seemed to fill his body. Soreness coated his insides, like his body was having to put in double the effort to function. He was sluggish, not able to move well, but Windu seemed to get this and helped move him towards the bed in the cell, sitting him against it.

Windu looked him over briefly. "If Jinn was right, then it would figure as the Chosen One that having the Force suppressed around you would be more... unpleasant than normal."

Anakin still didn't know what that meant, and still didn't really care. "Yeah... sure..."

He watched tiredly as the Jedi hefted Meetra out her stretcher and placed her on the bed. Her cries had shifted into soft whimpers and shaky breaths, writhing into twitching and light shaking as the aftershocks of being exposed to that pain. Anakin reached up and grabbed her hand, squeezing it. She squeezed back in acknowledgement, but did nothing else aside from lay there.

Windu cleared his throat. "We will have food and clothing delivered regularly, and will touch base with you once our healers are rested and recovered to plan a schedule for dealing with this."

The Jedi had a brief look of pity on his face as he looked over Meetra. "We will attempt to help you recover from this as best as we can. Though we would appreciate, at some point when you've had a chance to sleep, a briefing on what exactly happened."

"I can explain," said Revan from the doorway warily, "Leave them to their rest."

Windu tilted his head. "How would you be aware of..."

"As I said, I'll explain," said Revan firmly, "Let them be."

Windu nodded slowly, eyeing Revan warily, before turning to Anakin. "We will leave a guard by the door at all times, if you require anything, ask."

Anakin waits until they leave the room before turning slowly, reaching over, and dragging Meetra closer to the edge of the bed, hugging her tightly, his face buried in her stomach, mumbling, "Msorry Meetra... Msosorry..."

"Not your fault," she rasped back, hand shakily going through his hair, "Just... my own... and Revan's..."

Neither of them would move from their positions for a long, long time...

Revan sighed quietly.

Years of being physically comatose, spiritually bound to his body or dragged around the Universe by Meetra, and one of the first things he's treated to is an old friend screaming bloody murder at him. He suppose he shouldn't be surprised. He's had worse anyway. Malak dropping the truth on him when he was wearing the Jedi's fake persona ranked high up there, along with getting mentally dominated by a Sith Emperor. Not to mention half of the battles or genocides during the Mandalorian Wars. Yet... seeing the aftereffects of Malachor V, of what he ordered her to do, seeing the potential future and sending it as a vision to Skywalker over the years... it hits him worse than most of the other instances.
She trusted him, and he'd basically had her gut her own soul.

He watches Skywalker bury his face into Surik's stomach through the cell's force field door, both of them still struck with the aftereffects of pain, and turns away. They'd help each other, his part to play was over, and should be involved as little as possible. If Meetra's outburst is any indication, underneath her control is an immense build up of anger and resentment towards him. She needed peace and quiet, not to hash out an old grievance. Though he was sure they'd have their moment eventually. He owed it to her.

He walks with the Jedi to the elevator, eyes briefly looking them over. He dismisses the healers outright, and focuses on the dark skinned humanoid first. Some type of human, the complexion similar to some he's seen before. Fairly strong in the Force. Serious and solemn as any Jedi is. Revan's awareness from Meetra's perspective varied from time to time, so he's not quite sure on the man's name. M-something. The little green gnome of Master Vandar's race he could recall being Yoda. Powerful in the Force, old, radiating patience and serenity. Walked along with a small stick, and set the pace the group moved at.

"Would you be able to stand before the Council after they've been gathered, or would you prefer a chance to rest?" inquired the human Jedi.

Revan gave a strained smile. "I don't particularly feel up for anything more than resting in a bed for the foreseeable future."

"Hmph, sleep for years he does, yet go back to sleep, he wants to," came Yoda's amused voice.

"A difference between being comatose, and being actually asleep," said Revan tiredly, "Not to mention finally not being Force Drained anymore."

He tried to not resent Meetra for that, he really did, but he's not sure on how successful he is on that matter. It wasn't as if she had been actively controlling it. It was a good thing she had not been actively controlling it, had no idea how to do so. Meetra knowing how to control her powers as a Wound would only have been a slightly better outcome than her succumbing to it. Or perhaps even worse. It was hard to tell, he'd rather not muse on the particular horrors of that possibility.

Yoda frowned. "Mmm. Curious I am, the source of this drain. Know that, do you?"

Revan sighed. "It's complicated. I can give you a brief rundown on the way back to my room in the halls of healing."

"I am also curious," said one of the healers, eyeing Revan, "How you are suddenly awake, right at the moment they came back, after years of being comatose."

Revan gave a strained smile. "It's related, miss...?"

"Vokara Che, chief healer of the Jedi Temple."

Revan revised his earlier dismissal and pressed the Twi'lek woman to memory. It was never a good idea to disrespect or get on the foul side of the healer who ran things. They could make one's life miserable. He could remember being confined to 'needed' bed-rest for a light injury once in his younger padawan years for running afoul the Dantooine one. There was nothing more boring than being held back from missions or training. Well, in his younger years anyway. The chance to rest was... a much needed break considering how hectic his life had been since he had first left the Enclave.

He took his time in considering how to tell them. He maintains a solid distrust of Jedi, council Jedi
anyway, individual Jedi like Jolee or Bastila when she wasn't acting like she had a stick up her ass were okay. That trust of the Order not something he'll ever truly gain back, one does not ever forget that their mind was wiped (or attempted to be), even if he had been a Sith Lord at the time. Especially when the lie of his mind being 'broken' and being rebuilt being the 'only option' became more than apparent. The moment Meetra had returned his mask to him, he recovered everything.

He loved Bastila, he truly did, but he's not sure he could have ever forgave her if they had met again.

On the more calculated side though, he had to hand it to the Jedi, to take their destroyer and convert him into their savior, then continue to lie through their teeth to cover their asses.

He swallows down the brief pang of loss at the thought of his wife, and then his son, but he's had nothing to do in the past few years but come to terms with his loss and his past trapped in that state as he was. He was a Jedi, he was a Sith, and now... frankly... he's just tired man. He closes his eyes for a long moment, letting out a soft breath, before opening them and refocusing.

Brutal honesty it is. "Do any of you have an understanding of what a Wound in the Force is?"

The human's eyes furrow, but he doesn't respond, no recognition in his eyes. Yoda goes still, eyeing Revan warily.

The Healers all looks affronted, Master Che speaking for them, "It is, at its basic definition, a catastrophic event of mass death that damages the fabric of the Force around a location."

"An academic answer," says Revan mildly, "For when a Wound is centered in an area at least. But when it exists within a person, it is far more complicated, and far more dangerous."

"A person?" echoed Master Che, incredulous, "How could a person be a Wound in the Force?"

Revan doesn't answer for a long time, not until the elevator opens back to the ground floor, and he takes a stiff step out the door. "Look up the Battle of Malachor V, and you will have your answer. Meetra became a Wound, and it has haunted her ever since. I was... unwittingly connected and my power continually drained into her. I've watched as Meetra slowly started losing herself to the Wound, and then Skywalker..."

Revan shook his head. "I have no idea how the boy did what he did. He closed off the Wound for now, but it came at a cost."

"A cost?" asked Windu.

"You didn't feel it?" Revan asked, "How weaker he feels now? It's not temporary, he... I don't even know, put half of himself in her somehow?"

There is a shocked sound from Master Che. "He did what?!!"

"Hmmm," mused Yoda as they walked, not seeming shocked, but solemn, "A great sacrifice that is."

Che harrumphed. "I'm going to need to take a much closer look at the boy when we bring them out of the cell for more healing. The both of them honestly. Treating Surik's festering bonds is going to be a struggle all unto it's own. Looking into whatever the boy did and any potential side effects is going to be another."

Revan gave a strained smile as they entered the Halls of Healing. "I wish you the best of luck then,
Master Che. I, have a date with my bed."

Master Che gave him an appraising look before hooking an arm under his own. "You look like you need it."

"I'm fine," he bit out, "I can walk to my own..."

"You look like you are on the verge of passing out."

"I got down there and back just fine!"

"Because you are a stubborn nerf, don't think I didn't read up on you, Revan, I have all the notes your Enclave's healer took about you when you were a padawan."

Revan didn't hold back a groan. "That was four thousand years ago! How in the Force did any of that survive?!"

"We healers have our ways," said Master Che, non-committal.

"Which, brings up a curiosity," said Windu, "How exactly were you aware of anything that was happening while you were comatose?"

The group came to a stop outside the room Revan had been 'comatose' in for the last few years. "Because I wasn't. My soul had the unfortunate issue of being dragged around the Galaxy bound to Meetra, and bouncing back to hover around my body."

He steps into the door way, and gives Windu an haggard look. "Trust me, it was unpleasant."

He doesn't pay attention to their reactions, turning into his room and making for the bed. He waves a hand and uses the Force to dim the lights, which makes him wince and his vision blur a bit. Far to early to be using the Force against after just coming off being perpetually drained. He faintly hears one of the Jedi at the doorway mutter about frivolous uses of the Force but doesn't give a damn. He lays on the bed, and for the first time since he came forward in time, since his soul was dislocated from his body, he actually slept.

Darth Plagueis sat on his throne at the top of a spire in Geonosis, staring up out a large window into the night's sky, eyes furrowed in thought, probing the Force for answers. Something had drastically changed, sending ripples through the Force that distorted all his own visions of the future. It was not exactly an unwelcome change, as the future had been in a sense, bleak. It had all hinged on whether or not they could kill Skywalker and Surik, if not, the Jedi Exile would succumb to her condition and become a devouring beast worse than Darth Nihilus.

Something had warped that requirement for the future.

He could still faintly feel that ending as a possibility, but the chances for it had been greatly diminished.

There was a soft pattering of feet entering the room; Darth Sibyl (a name that was a sort of private joke for Plagueis since the younger Sith didn't apparently know a Sibyl tended to be a woman) was a soft-spoken and shadowy Sith. Formerly Jedi Master Sifo-Dyas, he had taken to his new role rather well in Plagueis's opinion. He clung to the darkness, hiding himself so well that even Plagueis had trouble locating the man when he wanted to be alone. Of course that was something Plagueis desired, Sibyl was the New Sith Order's ace in the hole. No one was to know of his existence outside of their Order, to know of the Dark Seer of the Sith, Lord of Foresight.
"What has changed?" asked Plagueis bluntly.

"The Exile and Skywalker," answered the younger Sith, "From what it can scry or pry from the Force, the boy somehow masked the Wound in the Force within the Exile. At a cost however."

Plagueis pressed a button on his chair and slowly had it turn to face Darth Sibyl. "Oh?"

"Can you not feel it from here?" asked Sibyl carefully, "How diminished the boy is?"

Plagueis frowned. "I was assuming whatever had happened had temporarily drained the boy."

"No, Skywalker is... weakened," said Sibyl, "His potential cut in half."

Plagueis blinked, his only visible reaction. "Half?"

Sibyl nodded. "Transferred to the Exile."

Plagueis stared at Sibyl, mind slowly connecting the dots in his head from his own experiments with Midiclorian manipulation. "The only way to defeat death of that kind, is with life."

The younger Sith tilted his head, waiting for him to continue.

Plagueis slowly grinned. "I wonder if the boy realizes just what he did. That he has an aptitude for Midiclorian Manipulation. He must have transferred half of his life-force, his Midiclorians, to the Exile."

Sibyl's eyebrows raised. "I did not think such a thing were possible."

"Anything is possible within the Force," chided Plagueis before scoffing, "I thought that was a creed taught by the Jedi?"

A wry smile crossed Sibyl's lips, tilting his head in acknowledgement. "I suppose it is."

Plagueis slowly shook his head. "The Jedi... so weak in imagination and creativity. They haven't a clue of the true strength of the Force, especially in regards to my specialty. So many Jedi that I have experimented on refuse to believe my power, even when I can destroy their Midiclorian's before their very eyes."

He watched as Sibyl's expression carefully went blank. Ah... the young Sith still had troubles adapting to every aspect of being a Sith.

"I was under the impression that had stopped, per your agreement with Qui-Gon," said Sibyl in a careful tone.

"It did," waved off Plagueis irritably, "I was talking about past experiments."

He smiled savagely at Sibyl. "It was so easy to make Jedi disappear, and the Jedi Council barely investigated if a half-way believable excuse was given. Did you know, Sibyl, that there used to be an underground Darksider fighting ring that we would pitch captured Jedi into?"

Sibyl scowled. "I did not."

"And that's only the beginning of the Jedi's carelessness with their own," said Plagueis, hungering for the flickers of turmoil in the turned Jedi.

Oh how he had enjoyed breaking the Jedi of their illusions about their oh so grand order.
Surprisingly, even if the man was not a Sith, Qui-Gon had been the easiest to finally convert to their new alliance, easier than Dooku, than Tyrannus. Once pointed out how the Sith had been running circles around the Jedi for the last thousand years, how they had steadily weakened the Republic and the Jedi, it was laughably easy to get him to agree.

That and the fact that by simply limiting the money given to Jedi Acquisitions from the Senate through a bill introduced so many years ago, they had cut the numbers of the Jedi Order in half over the course of time. The Order was roughly ten-thousand strong. It should be double that, easily. But through that bill, and so many other hidden strikes over the last millennium, the Order was crippled, and they didn't even know it.

Qui-Gon, frankly, had pitched a fit.

But that was gleeful memories for another time; he shifted his focus. "Sibyl, what have you seen with this change?"

Sibyl slowly walked forward, drawing his hood up, and stood next to Plagueis, staring up into the night's sky. "I've seen much, Lord Plagueis. There are so many new potential futures that it had been... difficult... to grasp at what leads to which outcome."

He turned his hooded face to Plagueis. "But make no mistake, while there are many players in the Great Game between you and Sidious, it is the fates of the Exile and Skywalker that will still determine that outcome for the rest of the Galaxy. Whether it be damnation, salvation, or somewhere in-between."

Plagueis narrowed his eyes. "Still them?"

Sibyl nodded. "Yes, but... there are other players now than there were before. Revan is no longer out of the equation, and has awoken. Aside from yourself, Sidious, Skywalker, and the Exile, he is perhaps the next greatest influence."

Plagueis's eyes sharpened. "And how does that change things? Can he be brought to our cause?"

Sibyl slowly shook his head. "From what I've seen? Not without alienating the Exile and Skywalker. They are who we should focus on."

Plagueis was caught offguard. "Them?"

Sibyl's lips slowly parted into a toothy grin. "Yes, them, you may want to rescind Ventress's study and preparation to assassinate the Exile. Surik will be of great use to our Order if she can be brought into the fold, or at least persuaded to join Jinn's new Jedi Order."

"Hmm... she is powerful," mused Plagueis.

Sibyl shook her head. "It is not her martial prowess or tactical skills that should be our focus."

"Then what is?" asked Plagueis, "What have you seen?"

"You," said Sibyl, "I've seen a vision of you explaining to our Order that the Exile and her bonding ability will be our salvation."

Plagueis stared at him blankly for a moment. "How?"

Sibyl shook his head. "I know naught, I was... interrupted mid-vision when you summoned me here."
Plagueis closed his eyes, irritated. "I see."

He did not ask for anymore on that vision. Not because he wasn't curious, but because he ought to figure it out himself. He could not afford to become complacent, as he did with Sidious, as the Jedi had over the last thousand years. Yet... what use would a bonding ability be for the Sith Order? Force Bonds had their uses, but were mostly a Jedi thing outside of a master/apprentice and parasite bond. Hmm...

It was something to dwell on, he dismissed Sibyl with a wave of his hand, and pressed a button to slowly turn his chair around to stair out into the night sky...

Darth Sidious taps his fingers idly on his desk in the Senate building. It takes an immense amount of willpower to not comm Kenobi and try to wrangle out of him if there is anything going on in the Jedi Temple at the moment. It would make Kenobi suspicious of him, the Jedi trusted him, but he wasn't stupid, that kind of coincidence would be alarming and could undo so much of Sidious's efforts on the boy. Something massive had happened, to upend every single future he had foreseen up until this point. It had happened elsewhere, but the source of the ripples surging through the Force was now on Coruscant.

It was the strangest thing as well. The source of it, now closer, felt vaguely familiar. The Skywalker boy? Yes, him, the boy he had met several years ago for those brief moments. Yet the oddity of it was, that for a brief time it felt like there were two of him. At least, until it had cut away not long ago. Perplexing, and something that demanded an answer. There had already been so much on the line, so much in the works, without yet another disruption to his plans.

But he was patient.

He would bide his time.

He would pry at the future again (when he had time away from these insufferable chancellor duties).

He would give Kenobi time to figure out what was going on on his own, the chances of him immediately knowing were after all small.

He would, in all good nature, inquire how the Jedi had been the next time they met, if anything exciting or new had happened at the temple or with the Jedi.

He would gather information, and he would adjust as he always did.

He would come out on top.

And the Galaxy would be his...

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