Visiting Shmi Skywalker’s Grave

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Summary

Darth Vader decides to visit his mother's grave one last time to finally get rid of all his attachments. Can he succeed when there is one more person visiting the tomb at the same time, this person being his own young son? Or will Anakin Skywalker resurface when meeting the boy?

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

_It had been ten years_, the half-man, half-machine realized one day as his mind unwillingly drifted to the memory of his mother. Darth Vader had long ago abandoned all unnecessary emotions – love in particular – as they had ultimately only brought sorrow to him. The only emotions he still welcomed were anger and hate – as those enhanced his power in the Dark Side of the Force. But just thinking of his mother now made him feel again – pangs of regret, loss and sorrow coursed his veins as the seemingly forgotten love for his mother invaded his frozen heart.

Darth Vader frowned behind his mask at the unwelcome feeling. Shmi Skywalker was dead as was her son, Anakin, the Hero of the Republic. All that remained was him, a shadow of the foolish boy who had once dreamed of being a Jedi and who had destroyed everything dear to him in his mad race to save the lives of his wife and the unborn child – only to choke Padmé himself and kill their child together with her. _No, Darth Vader thought, love did not bring anything good to Anakin Skywalker. The man was far better off with him as his alter ago. As Darth Vader he had power, he knew no sorrow, he did not need to regret anything. The silly emotion called love had no place in his life…_

And yet… Shmi Skywalker’s once dear face swam in front of his eyes as he squeezed them shut when he retired at night, her long forgotten caress was felt against his scarred face as he attempted to fall asleep, and he distantly felt her telling him: _‘I love you, Anakin.’ and ‘I am proud of you, Anakin.’_ as he dreamed.

_The weakling Anakin Skywalker is dead_, he wanted to shout at his long gone mother, _I am Darth Vader now and people fear me; I have all the respect I ever wanted to have! I have no need for love and I do not need anyone to be proud of me!_ And perhaps he even did shout those things aloud as his throat scratched and his mouth was parched when he woke up in the morning in his night chamber, the only place he was able to take his helmet off and breath freely – as the air contained more oxygen there than in the rest of the ship.

_I need a closure_, Darth Vader thought some days later when his – Anakin’s – mother’s face and words kept haunting him. _I need to get rid of the foolish boy still hidden somewhere deep inside of me. I will never be completely one with the Dark Side if I don’t manage that. The boy needs to finally say his good-bye and we will be done with that._ And like that he decided to pay a visit to his mother’s grave at Tatooine, blissfully unaware of the two people living on the desert planet of his childhood who would do anything in their power to get Anakin Skywalker back into their lives – and who would not hesitate a second to get rid of Darth Vader who, in their eyes, had murdered him.

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Luke was still too small to do much at the farm to help his aunt and uncle – although he assisted aunt Beru with the household duties. He helped with cooking – chopping, stirring and cleaning as needed (he preferred to cut things much to dismay of aunt Beru who feared he would cut himself – but for Luke the knife was a reminder of a lightsaber his father had fought with as a Jedi and thankfully the Force protected the boy against accidents); he would also help with washing up or drying, dusting and cleaning the house. And there was one more duty he took on himself as soon as he found out to whom the grave stone close to the farm belonged to – he visited his grandmother’s last resting place daily, keeping the sand at bay and even managing to grow a few cactus plants around the grave stone so that his grandmother had a nice green tomb.

Luke very much regretted that he could not do the same for his father and mother – but, as aunt Beru and uncle Owen had told him, they were buried far, far away, somewhere up in the stars he
wistfully gazed to at night. Luke knew he would travel to those planets one day to pay his respect to his parents’ graves too but for now his grandmother’s tomb was all he had – and he took the best possible care of it.

At times, he met Ben Kenobi at the grave, their neighbor who seemed very old to him but likely wasn’t as ancient as Luke thought, but they hardly ever spoke – aunt Beru and uncle Owen did not like Ben much and Luke tried to respect that. And anyway, Ben Kenobi seemed to be terrible saddened whenever he came to visit Shmi Skywalker’s grave and Luke, despite his tender age, was considerable enough to let him grieve for his grandmother or perhaps father – for Luke was not sure whom of the two Ben actually had known and his father seemed more likely for some reason. The boy seemed to vaguely recall aunt Beru and uncle Owen to talk about old Ben and his father and the Jedi. Perhaps Ben also used to be one? Luke thought he must ask the man the next time he would see him – but they hadn’t met for several weeks now and Luke did not even know if the man was presently at Tatooine or not.

Perhaps I could visit old Ben in his hut, Luke mused, as he walked towards Shmi Skywalker’s tomb one hot morning, once he had helped aunt Beru to clean after breakfast. He knows something, he was friends with father – I think he was – he could tell me about him and mother and what happened to them. And…

And Luke stopped dead in his steps and stared towards his grandmother’s tomb. A dark bulky figure he did not know knelt there, black cloak hanging from their back, black helmet set aside on the sand, and an almost bald head bowed respectfully towards the grave stone.

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It might have been a bad idea to come here alone, Darth Vader mused staring at Shmi Skywalker’s grave, should the Tuskens appear. But then he was no longer a learner; he had mastered the Dark Side and he would have no problems to defend himself. He only needed to stay in check as long as he was there.

Owen, his father or his fiancée – or more likely wife by now – grew a small cacti garden at the grave. What a waste of water, Darth Vader frowned, while his weaker part that had once been Anakin Skywalker rejoiced at the sight, happy that somebody took care of his mother’s last resting place when he couldn’t.

Ever practical and not sentimental at all – or so he thought – Darth Vader neared the grave stone and touched it. “Mother,” he said, attempting to sound neutral and failing, “I am here to say good-bye. I cannot think of you any longer. It hinders me from my duties.” He felt a tear – or two? – falling from his eyes, hidden by the helmet. Anakin Skywalker’s heart woke in his half-human, half-machine body, full of pain, regret and remorse. He shook his head to liberate himself of these thought – for they had no place in Darth Vader’s life.

Right then, let’s make this brief, Darth Vader thought. I – the boy – needs to pay his respect to his mother and then we are done and I can concentrate on my tasks again.

Feeling that it would be best to do this “face to face” and knowing that the climate at Tatooine was dry enough for him to have his helmet off for a short moment, Darth Vader took his helmet off and knelt in front of Shmi Skywalker’s grave stone, respectfully bowing his head and taking a moment for Anakin Skywalker to resurface and say his parting words to his mother.

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“Who are you and what are you doing at my grandmother’s grave?” Luke decided that he was old
enough to try and protect his grandmother’s tomb and so he now stood over the dark man, his small arms crossed over his tiny chest and his face as strict as aunt Beru’s when he did something wrong. Strangely, the man did not seem to notice him earlier – but then he had been likely deep in thought, Luke mused. “Who are you?” he repeated as the dark man’s bald and scarred head turned to him.

Darth Vader – or Anakin Skywalker – or whoever he was at that moment turned to the small blond boy. When he first heard him speaking (not particularly understanding how the boy was able to approach him without him noticing the child – but then perhaps he was simply too distracted), the man believed him to be Owen’s son. His step-brother’s offspring would refer to Shmi like that. But as he took the boy in, seeing his blond hair, blue eyes and noticing the shape of his head, the dark man froze. Could it be? He did not want to allow himself to hope… But the boy was an image of himself at that age… and Padmé had been pregnant when he had choked her… and Obi-Wan might have been able to save the child.

“Who are you?” he rasped back, repeating the boy’s question without answering it, overwhelmed with feelings he did not know he was capable of still – hope and longing and the half-forgotten love he once felt for the child growing in Padmé’s belly. “Who… are… you?” He said again, all those emotions making it hard for him to breath, to stay up, to hope. He hesitantly raised his durasteel hand, the metal thankfully hidden below a layer of black leather, and touched the boy’s pink cheek.

The boy was reluctant to answer at first, but as the stranger touched his face, he suddenly felt he had nothing to fear from him – the dark man seemed to like him for whatever reason, despite Luke was very sure they had never met. He decided he could answer him. “My name is Luke Skywalker,” he introduced himself. “My father was Anakin Skywalker. This is my grandmother’s grave. I planted the cacti and I take care of the grave. I will take care of the tomb of my father and mother too once I am old enough to travel to the stars. I miss them both very much…”

Listening to the small boy’s, his son’s words, left Darth Vader – or perhaps Anakin Skywalker? – speechless. He had a son, a beautiful, bright son with a big heart – who missed him and Padmé and who had to grow up at the makerforsaken Tatooine because his father had not been aware of his existence – because his father had choked his mother to death – because someone better than him, Obi-Wan most likely, had saved the baby from his dying or dead mother’s body – because Anakin Skywalker had turned into a monster and had not cared what happened to his wife or unborn child… not pass the point of what Sidious had told him…

And suddenly Darth Vader/Anakin Skywalker was crying, choking on his regret, wishing this was not happening – and at the same time overwhelming happy that it came to pass. The flood of emotions was too much for his weakened body, though, his breathing compromised all too quickly now and he blacking out, falling into the small and weak arms of his son, who caught him, unknowingly using the Force for the first time in his life, crying out: “Help! Help me, please!”

Obi-Wan Kenobi returned to Tatooine after three months he had spent with Master Yoda and the Organas. He had been reasonably sure that Luke would be safe in the time of his absence, but as the old proverb said – better safe than sorry – he had installed a small camera at the boy’s grandmother’s grave he knew Luke visited daily. Nothing remarkable happened during those visits in the long weeks he had been away – but today, on the day of his return to Tatooine, he had a very bad feeling that something might come to pass and unfortunately, the camera had stopped working properly after a sand storm four days ago. Today he was not able to connect to it at all.

Obi-Wan rushed towards his home and Owen Lars’ farm as fast as he could, worrying that he might
be late, that the Tusken would raid the farm, or the Imperial army come to retrieve the boy for the
Emperor or what remained of his father in Darth Vader’s suit. He was not aware he was already
coming too late – that his former student was at his mother’s grave by now, meeting his son for the
first time. What he however felt was a rip in the Force when something happened close to or at the
farm Luke was growing up, and it surprised him greatly when he realized the change was for good
rather than bad, the power of the light increasing and battling the dark.

Then he was already close enough to hear the boy, the son of his best friend, cry for help and he
sped towards the boy’s grandmother’s tomb where the cry for help came from. And he stopped in his
tracks when he took in the scene in front of him – Luke cushioning the helmless head of his father,
bald and pale and scarred, the man breathing only with difficulty, the dark helmet close by but
covered in sand and useless for now.

Luke saw him and his worried young face brightened with relief and joy: “Ben, Ben, you must help
him. He cannot breath!” Then the boy turned towards the dark man in his lap and said: “Ben is here
now, he will help you.” And, strangely, Obi-Wan knew he would do just that – despite he did not
know for sure if Anakin had truly returned to them.

There was time to find out, he supposed, as he bowed over his old pupil’s damaged body to help
steady the man’s breathing first of all. Start at the beginning, he mused and did just that, hoping with
all his heart for a miracle that had not been granted to him back on Mustafar.
Chapter 2

As Obi-Wan bent over the body of the man he had known as Darth Vader for the past several years, he could not help it but startle at the damage showing on the formerly handsome face of his once upon a time Padawan – a face he had not seen in several years. Anakin Skywalker used to have an ugly scar over one of his eyes, true, but nothing could have prepared Obi-Wan for the plentitude of crisscrossing scars and the almost bald top of head the half man-half machine usually hid below his dark helmet.

Obi-Wan had known the extent of the other damage – the severed limbs and compromised breathing, but somehow he had thought the rest of his wayward gone student’s body survived the encounter on Mustafar more or less intact. Now he saw he had been wrong – Darth Vader’s body rather faithfully mirrored the battered state of Obi-Wan’s own soul.

Obi-Wan did not even want to consider the damage to Anakin’s psyche – for he knew very well the harm degree must have been even higher there. But then Anakin had been gone, hadn’t he? The remaining parts of his brother had been consumed by Darth Vader… And yet, yet Obi-Wan had felt the change in the Force just a short time ago when he had rushed to young Luke’s help – and the Force signature he had sensed had been so much more Anakin than Darth Vader then. Now it was gone again – the dark-gone man unconscious in front of him and struggling for breath.

Musing this over, Obi-Wan gazed at Anakin’s kind hearted young son; the blond boy still supporting his father’s scarred head in his lap and whispering soothing words to him. To Obi-Wan’s best knowledge his former Padawan was a complete stranger to Luke – and yet, the small boy’s gentle touch and reassuring words seemed to have a strangely calming influence on his former friend – or what was remaining out of him.

Obi-Wan resolved to contemplate on it later – perhaps, if they were very lucky indeed, here came a salvation for them all. Maybe, just maybe, the old prophecy was right after all – and Anakin might still bring balance to the galaxy in fathering a Force-strong son, whose kindness and great heart could possibly save even his own father. Obi-Wan could not help it but become hopeful – wishing with all his heart to be right. He would need to meditate on it later – depending on what would happen in the nearest future and provided Darth Vader would not kill him first.

Right now it seemed the dark man might die first – his breathing was getting worse and Obi-Wan felt Luke’s fear increasing in the Force. The Jedi forced himself to concentrate on the task at hand – despite healing had never belonged to his strong skills. He also had to suppress a traitorous thought that it might be for the best to let Darth Vader simply die here and now – for letting the man die would simultaneously mean to lose Anakin forever and Obi-Wan was not prepared to let go if there was even a tiny bit of hope. I am as bad as he used to be…

Reaching into the Force to help stabilize the other man’s breathing before he could decide how to proceed next, Obi-Wan suddenly marveled that the suited man still lived. Picturing the lungs hidden behind the thick chest piece of the intimidating black suit in front of his inner eye, Obi-Wan shrugged over the extent of the injury. Logically, Anakin should be dead. But Darth Vader – or perhaps his Master – had clearly called upon the dark side of the Force to preserve his body – going against the nature and bringing as much harm as when twisting Anakin’s soul. Obi-Wan felt his help would be highly inadequate – provided the darkness in the man in front of him would even allow the light side in. But then healing was strong only on the light side of the Force – something Anakin must have forgotten all those years ago.

A bright, timid voice interrupted Obi-Wan thoughts. When he looked up from his old Padawan’s
body, his eyes met Luke’s trusting gaze.

“Ben, sir, he will be alright, won’t he? You can save him, can’t you?” the small boy asked, once again worried for the strange man’s health and life after seeing old Ben frowning over the man Luke believed might have been his long lost father’s friend.

Obi-Wan forced a gentle smile on his face, an expression he used to reserve for Anakin when he had first come into his care – and which now belonged to Luke. “Yes, Luke, I believe he will live,” he confirmed that he expected the man-machine to most likely make it physically, leaving out all the unknowns from the equation – such as “…but I have no idea what his mental state would be…” or “…I am not sure if he wouldn’t attempt to kill both of us once he gains consciousness again.” He also left out that he did not know if he could suppress the darkness in Luke’s father to the extent it would allow for some healing – there was no need yet to crash the boy’s hopes.

Right then, Obi-Wan thought, he would have to try. If not for himself, then for the boy. Luke deserved to get know his father, his true, headstrong and overconfident, but still kind and gentle father – and if Obi-Wan was to save Anakin Skywalker’s soul – or try for that for the matter – he would need to start with healing Darth Vader’s body. Only time would show what else was possible – and if Obi-Wan was right or foolish to be hopeful…
Chapter 3

It was one thing to tell – *to promise* – to Luke that his so far unknown father would survive his latest foolishness. It was yet another to achieve that goal, Obi-Wan knew – all too well aware he was greatly risking himself and the small boy’s safety in the process.

The Jedi debated with himself if he should send Luke away before he made any attempt at improving his former Padawan’s breathing – or if it did not matter any longer as Anakin – or Darth Vader – or whoever the stranger in front of him was at that moment – already knew about the boy’s existence anyway.

Contemplating the possible danger, Obi-Wan reached into the Force to seek for advice. At present, he did not feel threatened any longer, nor did the Force prompt him to take Luke and run away as fast as he could. Briefly considering the matter, Obi-Wan came to the assumption that the Emperor had likely not been informed about the latest excursion of his apprentice or, perhaps even more probable, its exact destination – which would be frowned upon in the very least considering the emotional ties Anakin had to Tatooine. If Obi-Wan was right in this estimation, it was also rather unlikely that there would be other Emperor’s men on the planet – for which he would be eternally thankful.

And asking Luke to leave? Luke seemed to be just as stubborn as his father used to be. Obi-Wan doubted the boy would be willing to let go of the mysterious stranger whose head he was still cradling protectively in his lap. *No, as long as the man’s life was in danger, the boy believed it was his responsibility to look after this unknown person,* Obi-Wan realized with astonishment, strangely reminded of young Anakin, who had decided to help two stranded Jedi knights and a Queen in need on this very planet many, many years ago.

The realization helped Obi-Wan in his indecision, giving him the final prompt to assist the ill man currently left to his mercy. Yes, he would do his best to try and safe that boy of long past – provided the dark man the boy Anakin had grown into would allow for that.

"Luke," Obi-Wan smiled at the young boy reassuringly, "I am a hermit, not a doctor, but I have an idea how to help this man. It will not heal him, mind you, just improve his breathing a bit, so that he would not die on us. Once I have done my best for the moment, I will take the man with me to my hut - and perhaps there, I can do more."

Luke grinned happily and nodded. "Thank you, Ben, sir! I hope he can speak to me then – I want to know more about my mum and dad. He knew them, you know, I told him I was taking care of my grandmother’s grave – and he was happy. I hope he likes the cacti… It would be nicer if they bloomed, but it is really hard for them to come into flower, you see, and there is not much water. But maybe he stays a bit with you? Maybe he can see them blossom then…"

Obi-Wan had to marvel at Luke’s innocence again, the same innocence Anakin had shown all those years ago. The innocence that had gone lost in the turmoil of the war, through the mistrust the Jedi had demonstrated towards the boy and in the manipulations of the Emperor… Yes, a very fragile virtue indeed – but still a quality to be preserved and cherished. Obi-Wan regretted deeply that he had not done more to protect and build up Anakin’s purity – the Galaxy would have been a better place if he had done so. But Anakin’s good lived on in Luke – and Leia – and perhaps contact with his son might change the dark man’s destiny yet.

"I am sure he would like that," Obi-wan agreed with Luke. "People tend to like nice things and there are few more beautiful sights in this world than a flower in the midst of a desert. You have done a
great job in growing these plants here."

Luke gave him a wide, happy smile. "Thank you, Ben!" he said, pleased that someone knew to acknowledge his hard work – for his Aunt and Uncle did not understand why he spent so much time and wasted their water supplies taking care of a grave of someone he had never even met.

"You are welcome, young one." Obi-Wan said softly, his eyes on the boy’s unconscious father now. "Alright, Luke, we will help the man now. I will use a special type of energy on him – it is called the Force. You can feel it too, I think; your father was a strong user of it. I believe you will be one as well when you grow up. But remember that some people do not like the Force and their users. They would think that we are crazy wizards – or even worse bad sorcerers – who might endanger them. This is why we do not speak about the Force with people who cannot use it. Your Aunt and Uncle do not have the ability, nor does anyone living around here. Will you remember that, Luke, and keep this a secret?"

Luke was looking at him with wide eyes, already nodding eagerly. "I am good at keeping secrets, Ben, sir. I will not tell anyone. I have never told Aunt Beru that you are coming here, you know? She does not like you very much, sorry – and grandmother would be so alone if you would not be coming. You – and the man..." Luke too averted his eyes towards the dark figure in his lap. "He can use that energy too, can’t he? I felt him, I think – he was sad and surprised to see me… and happy that I took care of the grave and wanted to take care also of the graves of my parents when I was bigger… and he really liked me, you see. That’s why I want to speak to him, he knew my grandmother and my mum and dad… and I never met them. He needs to tell me all the stories!"

Obi-Wan did not know if he should laugh or weep. His former Padawan fathered a great son – and he wished with his whole heart that Anakin would come back to his senses to tell to his son all those stories the boy wished for so much. Provided he could speak at all without his helmet working properly…

"I am sure he will tell you all you want to know once he is feeling better." Obi-Wan promised, reaching for the boy’s small hands and placing them on each side of his father’s scarred head, so that Luke would touch him at the temples. "Keep your hands steady in this position. I do not think I will need you to help me, but if I do, you should touch the man there. You are still very weak in the Force, but it will channel the best in these places."

Luke nodded and straightened his posture, his hands in the requested position.

*Right then, Anakin, let us see what can be done,* Obi-Wan thought, placing his own hands over his former pupil’s chest once more, this time to attempt a healing rather than to examine the injury. He envisioned Anakin’s damaged lungs and willed them to breath with more ease, to become more whole again, to start to heal. It was a risk to treat someone so absorbed in the darkness with so much light, but Obi-Wan did not really have a choice. Just as he had told to Luke, he was no doctor and he was also no great mechanic to repair Darth Vader’s helmet and its breathing system. The man in question would need to do that himself, once he was on his feet again – if he needed the mask still by then. But that all depended on how much light Anakin would be able to find in himself…
Chapter 4

It was hours later when Anakin/Darth Vader came back to himself. It was dark outside and he was lying on a hard, narrow camp bed in a wooden shelter, probably some kind of a hut. A tiny flame was flickering on a nearby table, close to it a jug of water or some other liquid and a half-empty glass; his dark cloak and helmet lying on a chair next to it, another chair placed at the side of his cot, empty now but clearly occupied earlier.

He was surprised to find himself feeling no longer that terribly unwell as he had kneeling at his mother’s grave, once the boy, his son! – he at least very much hoped that he had not only imagined him – had revealed his identity. No wonder that his body had reacted as it did, overpowered by the endless happiness and great shock equally.

With a shudder, the man-machine recalled the suffocating feeling that had overwhelmed him before he had finally fainted. Strangely, his breathing seemed easier now, but his body ached all over and he was feeling greatly exhausted. He supposed that it somehow hanged together with him being out of the mask for so long. Frankly, he had not thought he could survive without it – the Emperor’s doctors had been quite adamant about that and he had had no reason to doubt them – up until now.

That brought him back to the mystery of where he was at that moment and what had happened to him since he had met with the boy. He did not feel strong enough to get up yet, so he looked around himself once again to try to determinate more about the place he had been brought to by whoever had felt fit to help him.

The place appeared very simple, with sparse robust wooden furniture, functional but most definitely not comfortable – as he was able to tell just from lying on his makeshift bed. It was not a place where one would expect a young child to live in – it would suit more to some recluse person, perhaps a hermit or a world-tired war veteran. Most likely this was not were the boy, Luke, lived then… but who else might have assisted him if not the Lars family? Did the Lars’ have neighbors who would care enough? And was he even still on Tatooine?

The man hesitated to touch the Force to find out. If he would reach for it, he knew it would be the dark side that would come to him first and he was afraid, scared even that he would harm the boy then, his so far unknown and yet already much beloved son. No, until he was sure the boy was in safe distance from him, he would not tempt the fate, if he could help it. It was more than enough that he had Padmé on his conscience – no need to add his son just because he could not keep his temper in check…

Obi-Wan stood outside of his home of the last several years, leaning against the wall of the hut and staring up at the stars he had travelled with Anakin so long ago, in another lifetime. He felt immensely tired after the long day. It was hard to believe that it had been the morning of the same day when he had taken his leave from the Organas and Luke’s little sister. It felt so much longer right now, with everything that had happened in the meantime. All too well, he remembered the great fear he had felt for Luke and his safety, the big shock when he had seen Darth Vader again – and the sudden hope that Anakin might be resurfacing in the dark creature at last.

The Jedi was not so sure about that now, unfortunately. When he had worked on stabilizing the younger man’s breathing, he had been once again overcome by the sheer darkness in Anakin’s core. It had taken all his skill to force the dark side in the man down enough to improve Anakin’s health to the degree his former friend needed to temporarily survive without Darth Vader’s mask. Truth be
told, Obi-Wan was rather doubtful that he would have been successful without Luke’s help – the small boy had assisted him, instinctively pushing his goodness onto his unknown father when Obi-Wan’s healing had started to fail. Only then Anakin’s breathing had improved enough.

His one-time pupil was resting in his hut now. Obi-Wan had carried his heavy armored body there with the help of the Force; Luke running behind him, helpfully carrying Darth Vader’s intimidating helmet in his small hands. It had been a rather strange sight to take in the innocent young boy and the dark mask that had embodied the evil of the Empire and its most faithful servant. But perhaps it was a preview, a promise of what might yet come to pass – the seemingly insignificant and yet great power of a child’s innocence defeating the foulness in his wayward gone parent.

They had put the boy’s father on Obi-Wan’s own bed and left him to rest there. Luke had run home then, well aware that his Aunt and Uncle would most likely already be looking for him and not particularly keen on getting into trouble. Before he had left, Obi-Wan had asked him to be cautious, so that his family would not grow suspicious. The boy had promised to be careful, but Obi-Wan suspected he would still be coming back in the next days. The Jedi had not found it in himself to forbid it to the boy – whose presence might be greatly helpful for Anakin, if there was any hope at all for the dark gone man.

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Obi-Wan felt it in the Force when Anakin/Darth Vader came back to himself, his Force signature for whatever reason dimmed. The Jedi found it worrisome that he was not able to predict in which state he would find the younger man. Still, Obi-Wan knew that it was useless to postpone the inevitable – and so he turned to enter the hut, his one-time safe haven, bracing himself for the expected hateful outburst of his former pupil, immensely glad that Luke was not there to witness this awkward first encounter between him and his father. Perhaps the meetings to follow might be less uncomfortable – but only time would tell…
Chapter 5

Luke was late for lunch and Beru Lars worried. She always worried for the boy, who was much too clever for his own good, and a caring, gentle soul – not well suited for the cruel outside world as she believed. He reminded her of his father as a young boy as she had heard about him from Shmi – and Beru worried even more because of that. The boy’s father had been equally smart and kind-hearted once – and look how he had ended!

Years ago, Beru had wanted to have children of her own, but then she had found out she could not get them. She and Owen were greatly saddened by the discovery, Beru slowly slipping into a crippling depression – until a ginger bearded stranger called on them and brought a baby boy with sandy hair and bright blue eyes to her and her husband, their half-nephew, to take care of, to pamper and to protect – and Beru overjoyed and would have been perfectly happy – if there would not be the shadow of the boy’s father and his Fall hanging over their little bubble of happiness. Beru still couldn’t quite believe what that single occurrence meant for the fate of the whole Galaxy – even though Tatooine had remained relatively safe.

The small boy was a spitting image of his father – and Beru was afraid, scared even that her adopted son might follow in his father’s steps one day. With this on mind, she forced herself to be strict with the boy, no matter how small he was – and requested the same from Owen. If the boy did not love them, but remained safe and on the side of good, Beru believed it would all be worth it.

But no matter how stern she was, there was one thing Luke stubbornly kept doing, although it was dangerous for him to run around their farm on his own – but the boy insisted that he could not leave his grandmother alone and he had to take care of her grave. Both Beru and Owen dreaded the day when the Tuskens would appear on their farm again – and possibly take the boy in an unguarded moment.

Despite her reservation towards the man who in her eyes was at fault for Anakin’s Fall, Beru asked Owen to visit Ben Kenobi and ask for his assistance in protecting the boy when he wandered off in the direction of Shmi Skywalker’s grave. And old Ben did just that – most of the time anyway. Now, she and Owen had not seen the Jedi for a number of days – and exactly at this time, Luke decided it was alright to be late for their midday meal. Beru shivered in anticipation of another disaster which might destroy her little family. Owen would not take the loss of the boy well – and neither would she.

Luke knew he was late for lunch – and he knew also that he was in for a big scolding. But he couldn’t help it and had had to help old Ben in saving the dark suited man who had fallen so ill after they had spoken. For whatever reason, Luke felt an odd responsibility for the strange man, despite he had never before met him – and honestly, he wouldn’t have left his side even if Ben would have told him to.

It had been really good too that he had stayed. Old Ben had not had enough of that strange energy, of the Force, to help the man on his own. It was likely through this very special energy too that Luke had felt Ben’s effort had not been enough. But the boy had not known what to do or how to help. And then, suddenly, this thing, this energy that had been all around them, this Force as he had believed, whispered to him and showed him a way – think of all good things, think about your mother and father and how you love them despite you have never met them, think about how much you want to really get to know this man, to speak with him, to learn about your father, about the great man he was… – and Luke had followed this advice, this hidden guidance, and he had thought
all those happy and at once sad thoughts and let his hope and love pour over into the unconscious man who was struggling for breath in his lap – and suddenly, slowly, the man had started to calm, started to breath with more ease, and Luke had felt a pang of relieved happiness from old Ben – and he had known all would be well, for now at least.

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It was evening again and Beru Lars had just sent Luke to bed. Thankfully, the boy had come home unharmed, if late – and he clearly had been daydreaming about stars and ships, Jedi and lightsabers again, rather than attacked by the Sand People. But she had had enough by then, worried sick for the boy. This Jedi nonsense had to end – the boy would grow a moisture farmer and would stay with them, on the ground, safe and sound.

She had to speak to Owen about that, she thought and went to search for him – finding him outside the house, leaning on the wall of their kitchen. He too had been afraid for the boy earlier that day, she knew well, and she decided she would tell him right there and then what she thought.

“Owen, this cannot go on,” she said, leaning on him.

Owen half-embraced her and nodded into the dark. “I know,” he agreed. “But this place has never been safe. Neither for us, nor for the boy. And you know we do not have money to move somewhere else.”

“It wouldn’t be safer somewhere else.” Beru said sadly. “The galaxy has turned a danger place. And the boy’s father could find about him if we decided to travel.”

Owen sighed. “Yes, that is possible. They guard and spy everywhere now. Tatooine is still relatively safe from the Empire. But you are right that the Tusksens are a danger. We should forbid the boy to wander around on his own. He could start helping me with the vaporators, what do you think? Shmi said his father enjoyed to repair things a lot – even when he was a small boy.”

Beru smiled in relief. This was easier than she had hoped. “Yes,” she agreed. “I think he is old enough now. We will tell him tomorrow.”

“Yes, I will speak to him then,” Owen promised, knowing she wanted him to address the boy. Looking up at the stars, he added: “He is a good boy; he would be alright with that. You should not worry, Beru.”

Beru sighed. “I will still worry, Owen,” she admitted. “I am afraid that Luke’s father would appear here one day, taking the boy with him and destroying his goodness. I am scared the boy would follow in his footsteps one day, no matter what we would do to stop him. And right now I worry the most that once he comes between other children, he would start speaking of the Jedi and their lightsabers and one of the other kids would tell their parents – and they would speak about him and us with someone from the Empire. We have to start to be careful.”

Her husband gave a nod. “You are right, dear. We must be more cautious. We will stop speaking about the Jedi. The boy is young, he might forget still. I will speak about his father as a pilot, or perhaps a navigator – he was a great pilot anyway, it wouldn’t be exactly a lie, would it?”

“No, it wouldn’t, Owen.” Beru confirmed. “And it would keep the boy safe. Yes, we will do it like that. Let’s forget about the Jedi, their weapons, their betrayals. We are moisture farmers – and Luke shall be one as well. Thank you, Owen.”

“You are welcome, dear.” Owen bowed over her and kissed her softly. “Come to bed, it’s getting
late."

Beru let him take her hand and together they returned to the house.
Chapter 6

A person entered the hut and the dark man in the bed turned his head towards the threshold to find out who was his savior and protector – or perhaps, if he was no longer on Tatooine, keeper and jailor. His eyes widened by the sight of his former teacher – older and more worn-out, but still unmistakably Obi-Wan Kenobi.

“You,” he rasped with difficulty, finding out that speaking still hurt without the aid of his helmet and its speaking apparatus – however improved his breathing might have seemed. But then he had suspected that the respite he had enjoyed had likely only been temporary.

“Hello to you too,” Obi-Wan aimed for normality most likely, but his words hurt the younger man, cutting into the festering flesh of the unhealed wound. There was no place for normality between the two of them these days – and Obi-Wan had lost all hope for things to turn better in the moment when he had left Anakin Skywalker to burn to death on Mustafar.

“No… need… to… be… civil…, Master.” The dark man forced out a sarcastic reply, each word hurting and he realizing with certainty that he was presently in no shape for a verbal match – no matter a true lightsaber fight with his highly skilled (he would give him that) past instructor. The remaining question was what he was supposed to do and how to act – Obi-Wan had not killed him yet and likely had played with some misguided idea that he might be able to lead him back into the light. Unless – unless he carried some information so important for the Jedi and the rebels (for Darth Vader had not doubted Obi-Wan and the remaining Jedi had joined the opposition against the Empire) that it was important to keep him alive and help him survive even with a non-functional helmet. There was no reason to postpone the inevitable question, so he asked one more word, despite the discomfort – plain and yet significant enough: “Why?”

Obi-Wan stepped closer to him in the meantime, eyeing him cautiously, but no exactly seeming to feel threatened by him and his presence. Why also, Darth Vader thought, I am weak now, he could do whatever he pleased with me. He gave out a bitter laugh, once more hurting his vocal chords in the process – and here I thought laughing had no effect on them, he pondered.

Kenobi found a second glass by then, pouring some water from the jug on the table into it. “Here,” he said and handed it to him, standing now painfully close. “You need to drink a bit,” he added, when he saw him hesitating – and then he too laughed bitterly. “It is not poisoned, you do not need to worry,” he explained tiredly. “If I wanted you dead, I would not have helped you earlier – and you would have suffocated to death.”

The man-machine recalled the terrible feeling when he had struggled for breath hours ago and understood that Kenobi was right. He reached for the glass and greedily gulped down the soothing water, until the other man forced the glass from his lips. “Go slower,” Kenobi reprimanded and Darth Vader recalled the many occasions when Anakin Skywalker had gotten a lecture from his master in the long-distant past, his hate for the man reawaking. “Why?” he said again, his voice slightly stronger and his throat no longer so parched.

Obi-Wan eyed him for a while without replying, likely judging his mental state. And Darth Vader could fully understand why – for he had not felt quite himself since he had awoken here. But he also was not Anakin Skywalker, despite what the old man might like to think. “I am… not… him,” the dark man snapped finally, having had enough. “Anakin was… weak… and … he… is dead.”

Obi-Wan nodded. “Perhaps. Most likely. I would tend to agree with you, Vader. But I too need to ask a ‘why?’ Why am I not dead? Why are you not threatening me and the galaxy? Why were you
so foolish as to take your helmet off if you cannot survive without it? Why are you even here?” He trailed off here but apparently there were many more questions on his mind. “This is my ‘why’. And if you would think about it, it answers your ‘why’ too.”

The glass was empty now and Obi-Wan, finished with his speech, took it from the sick man’s fingers, carelessly turning his back towards the other man as he brought it back to the table. His companion could only stare at his back – not exactly understanding what was happening here and still owed an answer to his why.

“See,” Obi-Wan turned back from the table towards him and gave an irritating smile. “I am still unharmed – and you have not even attempted to change it. Why, Vader, do you know it even? Or should I call you Anakin again now?”

It was the last sentence, the required necessity to acknowledge that things had changed, that did it – Darth Vader took over in the conflicted younger man and snapped. Where the part of him that was still Anakin had forced the storm down previously, in his great desire not to harm his newly discovered son, his darker self, the faithful servant of the Empire and hunter of the Jedi and rebels alike, opened his way to the Force and reached for the darkness in it to deliver harm and revenge now, just as the man who had mutilated him had deserved – and Obi-Wan was hit with Force-lightening that might have been deadly for him if not for the weakened state of his counterpart. Like this, the sudden outburst of the dark was rather killing the man who created it.

“I… hate… you!” Darth Vader cried in sudden pain, before his voice gave out and his lungs again practically shut down from the exertion. Obi-Wan watched him worriedly from where he had fallen to the ground, afraid that his and Luke’s efforts earlier that day had been for naught – and that Anakin was truly lost. But once more, he could not bring himself to let the other man, his friend of long past, die on his watch if there was any hope at all – and so he painfully scrambled up to his feet, reaching the bed just before the dark man started to suffocate.

Bowing over the younger man, Obi-Wan pulled him up, so that he could breathe somewhat better – and then slapped his face, hard. Once, twice, three times. When finally the rage filled eyes turned in his direction, he commanded: “Snap out of it, Anakin, right now! Release the hate and anger into the Force. You will kill yourself if you don’t stop.” The words seemed to have no effect at all – aside of turning even more rage in his direction – until he decided to play his last and greatest trump. “You will kill the boy if you don’t stop!”

_Bow me, I have forgotten about the boy! No! He will not die by my hand!_ And Anakin Skywalker battled Darth Vader deep inside his soul and seemed to have won a round. Still struggling for breath, but feeling slightly better now and able to speak – or rasp – again, he stared at his former mentor and his eyes lost a bit of their brutal yellow. To Obi-Wan’s astonishment and great joy, the man he had once considered his best friend and brother overcame himself then and asked: “Help me… please.” The older man had hoped to hear these words on Mustafar, but they were even more welcome now – when just a few hours ago all hope had seemed to be lost. From his position straight above his wayward gone pupil, Obi-Wan nodded, surprising the other man with tears filling his normally calm eyes. “I will – if you let me.” He promised. And for that moment it was enough.
Obi-Wan busied himself with brewing tea in the corner of the hut and the dark gone man resting in his bed could not help but remember the happier times when the two of them had lived and fought together, side by side, all those years ago. It hurt to look back now, to recall all those good things that had gone forever lost – by their mutual mistakes.

Forcefully, he suppressed the memories of better times – and concentrated rather on his still labored breathing. He had to focus on the here and now, he knew – and then, perhaps, on things that might be salvaged yet. One could not change the past – no matter how much they regretted it.

The older man poured hot water over leaves in the prepared tea kettle in the meantime and the hut filled with a pleasant herbal fragrance. Waiting for the leaves to steep, Obi-Wan turned towards his former pupil once more. “How is your breathing?” he asked worriedly once he noticed how much his companion focused on the working of his lungs.

The Sith who once used to be his best friend simply shook his head, dismissing his worry – it was not well, but he still marveled over the simple fact that he could breath without his helmet at all – he had not dared to hope even for such small miracles. “How?” The dark man breathed quietly out, waving his mechanical hand over his chest.

Obi-Wan gave him a relieved smile, glad to see that with some effort on his own part Anakin – or whatever was left out of him in the sinister man known as Darth Vader – was able to maintain control over his health. “Your son,” the Jedi offered in the way of explanation then – and seeing his former friend to frown in disbelief, he laughed softly. “My friend, you should have some faith – after all the boy’s father has been one of the greatest Force users in history – and he too used to have a big heart once.”

“Which he… does… not have… now.” The ill man rasped with a frown, saying aloud what Obi-Wan had left out in this speech; forcing down another wave of blinding anger towards the other man – who was guilty of what Anakin Skywalker had become.

“No,” Obi-Wan agreed, glad that Anakin was able to keep his temper in check again. “But what has gone lost does not need to remain gone forever. You only need to wish for things to change – and mean it.”

The other man shrugged. “Can… not,” he stammered, biting his lower lip painfully to stop himself to speak on. He was afraid, scared even to wake his irritability again – and any lengthier discussion with his former Master would do just that, he was very sure.

Obi-Wan understood his denial all too well – and nodded in acceptance. It was still too early, he knew – but then he had to start somewhere. For now, he would help the other man to get better physically – and perhaps other things would follow. He smiled gently at his counterpart and said simply: “We will see. But now we shall take our tea – and then we should retire for the night; you are still unwell and I am tired.”

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The tea Obi-Wan had prepared tasted slightly bitter, but the herbs he had used for it clearly worked well on ill lungs – for Darth Vader could breathe easier once he started to sip on it and inhaled the aroma. Obi-Wan had to notice his relief, for his features softened again and he asked: “Better?”
His counterpart gave a slight nod, not in particular wishing to be grateful to Obi-Wan Kenobi for anything, but still willing to communicate that the mixture of herbs worked well for him and his hurting lungs.

“Good,” Obi-Wan nodded back, pleased that his limited stock of herbal remedies proved useful. “I don’t think I can help much more and neither can the boy being as young as he is. But once you get better, you can work on repairing your helmet – I will bring you the tools tomorrow morning. Or perhaps you could possibly help yourself a bit more on your own – have you ever tried?” Obi-Wan appeared genuinely curious when asking this question.

For some reason, the dark man in his bed seemed ashamed now. “I… have,” the Sith who used to be Anakin Skywalker admitted. “It did… not… work.”

Obi-Wan sighed. “No, the dark side would not work,” he agreed after a brief contemplation of the matter. The other man had obviously turned his back on the light side completely. Healing usually works well only on the light side of the Force,” he explained, possibly quite unnecessary.

His counterpart gave a soft, barely audible sigh. Yes, he knew that in theory – but the Emperor had promised him borderless power – and he had hoped that capacity for healing would be part of it, first for Padmé’s sake and later, once Obi-Wan had injured him as badly as he had, because of his own compromised health. “Yes… I know… now,” he confessed.

His past teacher nodded. “You can relearn to use the light side,” he offered, hoping for a positive reaction. Anakin must want this – otherwise it will not work, he was sure.

The other man’s reaction was quick now – and to Obi-Wan’s great regret dismissive. His wayward gone student shook his head vehemently. “Too… late,” he claimed and Obi-Wan could have sworn that he heard underlying sadness and resignation in his weak voice. “Only… need… to keep… temper… in check. … Not to… hurt… the boy,” the dark man explained – and looked up at Obi-Wan, clearly expecting a reprimand.

But Obi-Wan was not disappointed. The ill man in front of him had been a Sith Lord no less than 24 hours ago. He was perfectly willing to give him more time to come to terms with his new reality – their new reality. If there was one thing that Obi-Wan Kenobi did not lack these days, it was time – and he was more than prepared to offer as much of it as it was necessary for his miracle to happen.

“No, you will not hurt the boy,” the Jedi promised aloud, reassuringly. “We will take care of your temper, do not worry.”

He was rewarded with a grateful look from his former pupil – and a soft and unexpected: “Thank you.”
“You are welcome,” Obi-Wan said simply in reply and collected the tea supplies to clear them away. Anakin – no, not his Padawan, Darth Vader, the Sith! – thanked him and sounded genuine. It was a small thing per se, two words only – and yet it meant a great deal to him. In many ways it was a miracle that the two of them were able to talk more or less amiably to each other – he had thought they had been long past that.

The cups cleaned and safely stored away, Obi-Wan turned back to his former friend. The dark man was still awake and watched him warily himself. He seemed very much out of place – the damaged body hidden behind thick armor lying on a camp bed that would serve well only to a man as ascetic as Obi-Wan had become when he had adopted the identity of Ben Kenobi.

“Will you be able to sleep like that?” Obi-Wan asked, studying the other man worriedly. “Should I remove more of the armor?”

His counterpart replied with a negative shake of his head. “No sense… need… the suit… to survive.”

Obi-Wan watched him somewhat skeptically. “I understand about the breathing and your speech,” he offered hesitantly, afraid to wake unwanted memories in the ill man. “And the limbs,” he added, even more quietly, feeling terribly guilty for causing those injuries – despite his wayward gone student had left him with no other choice back on Mustafar. “But – what else? I mean you are breathing and speaking on your own now – and with some care you should be alright for at least some time, as long as you can manage to keep the dark side at bay…”

The atmosphere in the hut got thicker again at those words, the dark side of the Force swirling around them once more. Obi-Wan coughed in caution, distracting his past pupil by his unexpected action. “You need to hold it at bay for your own sake,” the Jedi warned, anew adding to the rage rising in his companion. “And for Luke,” Obi-Wan added, finally safely interrupting the downward spiral the other man was about to take. He sighed in relief when he felt the Force calming down a few moments later. Good, Anakin, well done, he thought, not allowing himself to voice the praise aloud – suspecting that it would do more harm than good at this point.

For some time, silence overtook the hut. Then the man whose Force signature felt once more a bit more as Anakin than Darth Vader to his former teacher said hesitantly: “The droids… and Emperor’s doctors… they said… I needed it. … Had… no… reason… to think… otherwise.”

“No, indeed,” Obi-Wan whispered to himself, exasperated. Anakin had always been entirely too trusting towards people who had mattered to him – or who had great influence over him. And he had trusted Palpatine for all those years – even so much as to fall straight into the darkness once the Sith had decided the time had been right for him to step out into the open and overtake Coruscant and the galaxy.

“Some… damage… to… internal… organs… Digestive… tract.” The man trapped in the dark suit completed his explanation.

“I see,” Obi-Wan said aloud at that, doing his best to sound neutral. “But you can drink – and eat – somewhat normal, can you not?” It would be bad if he couldn’t – aside of the water that they had already tried earlier; Obi-Wan had not many resources at his disposal after all. He also rather doubted that he would be able to find the potentially necessary and likely rare and expensive supplies on Tatooine.
But his former pupil stopped his worries. “Yes… I can… eat. … Just… nothing… too… solid.”

“Good,” Obi-Wan said and felt thankful. One less obstacle on their path then. “Alright then. If you believe you can sleep in the suit, keep it on for the night. We can look into what all it really does for you tomorrow.”

The man who used to be Anakin Skywalker gave an affirmative nod – it was uncomfortable to sleep in the armor, but he could manage it if necessary. Tomorrow he would get the tools necessary to repair his helmet and then he would regain his strength – he only needed to keep the charade up a little bit longer. Although, Obi-Wan was making it increasingly more difficult for him to keep his rage towards his past teacher in check – but if the years with the Emperor had not taught him anything else, he now understood the importance of being patient and hide his feelings. He believed that both the hard gained abilities had saved his life several times by now.

But there was one thing he was perfectly sincere about – he wanted to get know his son properly and he knew he would need more than patience and ability to hide his emotions for that. If only he could keep his temper in check somewhat longer… Obi-Wan could indeed teach him several useful things. But how should he manage that?

Time, they lacked time – he would need to return soon enough for the Emperor to not grow suspicious of him. If there was one thing the dark turned man dreaded, it was the fate of his small and entirely too trusting and kindhearted son if the Emperor got his clutches on him. No, never that – even if he had to co-work with Obi-Wan in real again, he would save the boy from suffering his own fate. All the power of the Sith had no sense at all – if there was nobody to share it with.

“Obi-Wan,” he said finally and the long-time-not-spoken name burned on his tongue. “You… do not… need to… worry… about… that. … We… do not… have… enough time… anyway.”

Ever practical, Obi-Wan understood immediately and gave a single nod. “How long?” he inquired simply.

“A few… days… Ten… at most. … I have… made… some… precautions… but he… the Emperor… does… not… trust me… He… will… ask… questions… if… I am… not… in contact,” the younger man explained.

Obi-Wan nodded again. That was indeed not long – but perhaps it could be enough. He would simply need to keep a tight rein on Anakin – and make him see before it was too late. Hopefully, Luke would be able to help him in this quest. Anakin needed to find at least some light in himself to be able to fight and ultimately possibly defeat Darth Vader for good – the boy might even uncover it for him.

Obi-Wan felt the ongoing conflict in the man; he was well aware that they were still at the beginning. But he was hopeful – his former pupil had managed to combat his negative emotions well enough several times during the evening. With some effort and a bit of luck, they might get further in the next few days – and perhaps even win the battle for Anakin’s soul before the Emperor would start looking for his apprentice.
Very tired now, the man who used to be Anakin Skywalker and was known as Darth Vader these days, watched Obi-Wan Kenobi moving around the hut, getting ready to sleep. Obi-Wan was the man whom he had fiercely hated for the past several years – and yet it was also him who had unexpectedly saved Darth Vader’s life only a few hours ago, making his former pupil terribly confused as to what he should feel and how he should act from now on. Feeling increasingly conflicted, the dark man closed his eyes – and a moment later he was asleep, dreaming about the past and all that had gone wrong between him and the other man…

“Remember, Anakin, with great power comes a great responsibility. Should you not remember anything else from my teachings, keep this on mind,” Obi-Wan said, smiling fondly at his student. Anakin smiled back, thankful that the scolding he had received earlier for his fight with another Padawan had not turned into yet another long lecture his Master excelled at so much. It was also good to hear his Master to acknowledge his growing powers – the rest of the Jedi were more reserved and Anakin rather had a feeling that they might be growing jealous – or even afraid – of his skills and might in the Force.

“Well done, my boy, well done,” the Chancellor was speaking, his voice customary kind and his words benevolent, congratulating Anakin on one of his war accomplishments. Anakin himself had thought that he might have been a bit reckless – as he was sure Obi-Wan would not omit to reprimand him for once they had a chance to speak to each other. He would admonish him for his own good, Anakin knew deep down – but still his former Master’s well-meaning words annoyed him much more than they could make him more cautious and mature. The Chancellor continued praising him, interrupting his musings: “It is a true shame that the Jedi hold you back so much. You have such a great potential, my dear boy, it is unbelievable. And your power is still growing, I can see that. Your former Master trained you indeed well – my only regret is that he too seems to not be comfortable with how your powers are developing; he seems to me envious of you sometimes. I truly hope I am mistaken – I would so very much hate for you two to grow apart. You are the great team after all – and can do so much for the moral of the Republic in these difficult times.”

Sworn to his new Master now, Darth Sidious, Anakin led the clones into the Temple – thinking about how the Jedi, including his own past Master, stood all against him, condemning his mother and now even Padmé to death. Those hypocrites – pretending to care for the Galaxy and all living in it, feigning interest and illusion of protection, until… until it all fell apart. He forced his way through the Temple doors – and ignited his Lightsaber. Fighting to end this great lie, believing it to be for the greater good, he let his ‘saber hit his fellow Jedi – including the children who would grow into another generation of the Jedi hypocrites otherwise. The galaxy had no need for them any longer…

“You were my brother, I loved you!” Obi-Wan cried, his Lightsaber ignited and trained at his former pupil. Somewhere deep down Anakin – no, Darth Vader now, Anakin was dead – felt the desperation in his one-time teacher – but he did not care. Kenobi also had not cared enough when Anakin had needed him the most – and now he betrayed him again, turning Padmé against him and fighting him for death. So be it – they could be enemies if the other man wished for it. Darth Vader did not care any longer.

He hurt, in both mind and body – not believing he would survive. Someone was working on repairing his broken body, but the damage was too great – and the Force was not helping him at all, feeding on his despair, pain and anger – not allowing him to touch its soothing and healing part. Why? Why had everybody and everything have to leave him? Why couldn’t he keep even the Force? Obi-Wan stole it from him, as he almost killed him just a few hours ago – cutting off his limbs and
leaving him to burn in the lava field on Mustafar. He hated him, hated him so much – and then he
felt it, felt the Force returning, cold and dark but there – and he embraced it. When Sidious said
“Rise, Lord Vader.” a few hours or perhaps days later, he was whole again – the shards of the
weakling Anakin Skywalker bound together by the dark side of the Force, making him more
powerful than ever.

It was not just power what he had gained – but he became aware of the other things only much
later. He was alone – but better to feel lonely than betrayed. He had lost everything – but better to
have nothing than to fear for another great loss to come. He became as feared as the Emperor – and
did his best to be even more dreaded. He had power, so much power – nobody was holding him
back any longer, not the Jedi, not Obi-Wan, not Padmé, not even the Emperor. He enjoyed being so
powerful, so accomplished in the Force – and yet, yet something was amiss. But Darth Vader could
not be conflicted – he had to obey his Master until he became strong enough to perhaps overthrow
Sidious and become Emperor himself. But did he even wish to rule? His doubts grew again in his
very core – making him weak. But Darth Vader could not afford to be weak – and so he suppressed
his doubts and concentrated on his power and his front position in the Empire…

He stood alone, everyone fearing him and keeping safe distance, the Emperor benevolently nodding
at him. Yes, he was powerful, yes, he belonged here. He did not feel lonely, he did not feel regret.
And yet – yet, the Force felt suddenly so dark, cold and empty… He did not want to be like that any
longer, he did not want to suffer and make people hurt in return. … Out of nowhere, a small boy
with blond hair walked towards him and watched him with trusting, startlingly blue eyes. The boy
smiled and offered him his hand. “I want to get know my father,” he said quietly, his voice holding
so much hope, Darth Vader – no, not the dark man, Anakin Skywalker, the boy’s father – gasped for
breath. He ached all over again – but it was a good kind of pain. He stared at the boy, his son, for a
long while, looked at the small hand held so innocently towards his great evil – and then he reached
for it and grasped it. “So you will,” he promised and both he and the boy smiled in relief.

Obi-Wan, trying and failing to fall asleep on a makeshift cot made out of several of his spare blankets
in the corner of the hut opposite to his bed occupied by his former pupil, took in the shift in the Force
just before he fell asleep. He smiled in relief when he understood that Darth Vader was another step
closer to be defeated. They would work on it starting tomorrow morning. But for now they both
needed to rest. Trusting in the Force, he closed his eyes and slept.
The next morning found Obi-Wan and his former pupil still on speaking terms, much to the older man’s relief – although the speaking involved mostly of him greeting the other man and asking him a few questions concerning his breakfast choices.

Obi-Wan made them both herbal tea again and, keeping on mind what his companion had shared with him last night, he prepared thin gruel for breakfast. To his amazement, his past friend took the offered bowl from him with no protest and ate his food without uttering a hateful word or glaring at his one-time teacher in half-expected revulsion, in no way questioning Obi-Wan’s cooking or goals. The Jedi nearly turned suspicious of the younger man’s own intentions – but then he thought about the previous long and exhausting day and the time when his counterpart might have eaten for the last time and he calmed again. *No, they were still safe,* he thought, possibly greatly foolish in his hope.

“Do you need bathroom?” Obi-Wan asked some time later, once he had cleared the rests of the breakfast, fully prepared to help his unexpected guest to the small fresher at the back of the hut.

Surprisingly, the dark man shook his head negatively. He waved his hand over his suit in a way of reply, revealing one of the armor’s functionalities to the other man. Obi-Wan did his best to not frown in dismay at the wordless answer – he was getting more and more mistrustful as to why the young Sith was kept imprisoned in the life-support suit. But it was not yet time to question Darth Vader’s Master and his objectives.

If Anakin was to be saved, he had to realize some truths for himself first – Obi-Wan was painfully aware from all their years together that his former Padawan worked and adapted the best if he was left to find answers and solutions to problems he was facing by himself. If he was to succeed, the Jedi Master had to be patient with the younger man – and let him work things out himself, despite the greatly limited time they had.

If Obi-Wan was right in his assumptions concerning the suit and the Emperor’s treatment of his apprentice, he might win this battle easier than expected. The question remained if he truly understood things well and his deductions were right.

An hour later, the dark gone man known and celebrated years ago as Anakin Skywalker, the hero of the Clone Wars, was seated on Obi-Wan’s bed, his back supported by the older man’s thin pillow and his head bowed over the dark helmet that for many people in the Galaxy symbolized the Empire and its evil.

Obi-Wan behaved even more irrational than his student of long past had expected. After he had cleaned after breakfast, the Jedi went through his cupboards to gather together the tools the younger man might need to fix his helmet – and brought them to his counterpart. Next, he reached for the dark breathing mask and placed it on the other man’s lap.

“Here you go,” Obi-Wan said simply. “Fix it, clean the sand out of the breathing mechanism. I believe you will need it soon to support your breathing for a while at least – do not think I have not noticed that your breathing got worse again. You hardly even speak today. Once you are stronger, we may try a bit more healing, but I do not wish to overwhelm you with light Force at present, not until you are more stable. It could do you a lot of harm otherwise, I am afraid – and I have no way to treat you here then. It is a small miracle that you did not suffer any damage yesterday, but then you likely were protected by your son’s goodness. You should be proud of him.” Obi-Wan smiled fondly.
when he said those words, recalling Luke’s amazing ability in the Force.

Luke’s newly found father bit his lip, frowning. He would be happily proud of his son – but then he would need to know him, to be part of his life. Obi-Wan Kenobi was at fault that he had not had the chance to learn his boy prior to now – and he had one more reason why to hate the man.

Obi-Wan coughed at his side, likely sensing his brooding mood and pulled him out of his dark thoughts. “I will be outside; I need to meditate a bit,” he said. “Should you need me, call for me – or knock on the wall of the hut, if you have trouble speaking. I will make sure to be close by to hear you either way.”

With those words, Obi-Wan turned away from his former pupil and left the hut. His one-time student stared behind him, not understanding why he was given the means to become the feared Dark Lord of the Sith again. Despite he still hesitated to fully touch the Force, the light touch he had on it all the time whispered to him about Obi-Wan’s absurd hopes that things might change for the best. Foolish, irrational, ridiculous, indeed – and yet so very much Obi-Wan that it almost hurt.

Breathing pained him again and the dark man understood that his former teacher was right in his assumption that he would require the help of the life-support suit and breathing helmet once more soon. He sorted the tools provided to him – and started working on repairing his helmet. He would decide what to do next once he had a choice – and for that he needed the helmet to work again. He would decipher Obi-Wan’s plans then - there was no rush after all.
Chapter 11

Darth Vader’s black helmet stared at its owner with its empty red goggles. The dark man was supposed to be fixing the mask, but instead he glared back at the unforgiving armor piece, uncomfortably aware that once the mask was repaired, he would have the option to fully recover his strength and leave Kenobi, his hut and the makerforsaken planet of his birth. He would be able to take Luke from Owen and Beru’s home and could fight and kill Kenobi if he stood in his way – and possibly also if he did not oppose him, to finally get rid of the annoying old man, who for some or other unfathomable reason tended to believe in the impossible, such as his old Padawan’s redemption. As if anything like that would be probable!

Slowly, hesitantly, the man started to work. Grains of sand had obstructed the breathing mechanism of the helmet – he attempted to free them and clear out the path for air, so that the filtering apparatus would become operative once more. The simple, mechanical labor, so familiar from the better past days of his childhood and youth, helped him to distract his mind.

He concentrated on the work of his hands only, something he had been confident in since long before Qui-Gon had discovered him on this very planet – and had tested the count of his Midichlorians. If Master Jinn had never done that, if he had never freed him, never brought him to Coruscant and the Jedi Temple – things would be different now.

Anakin Skywalker would have likely found a way to free himself and his Mom at some point, would have possibly started a workshop of his own – and perhaps he would have even become a space pilot. But he would not have turned a Jedi – and his simple life would not have led him into temptation of acquiring an almost unlimited power over the whole Galaxy. He would have been much better off like that… at the price of never meeting Padmé.

The thought of never knowing Padmé hurt – but then thinking of Padmé pained him all the time now, he himself being responsible for her loss. That their child had survived was a small miracle in itself – and the man cherished the fact, despite all the rest seemed infinitely gloomy – as dark as Darth Vader’s now again functioning helmet.

The man presently going under the dreaded name frowned at his faultless handiwork. He thought about how the helmet and the dark suit that accompanied it had not long ago embodied order and stability of the Galaxy to his eyes; how Darth Vader in his beginnings truly believed that in erasing the Jedi Order and dissolving the old Republic the war had been finally won and the Galaxy and its people were enabled to enjoy peace at last. *Had he really been so wrong?* No, he had not believed so previously – and yet, yet he would not wish for the Emperor to discover his son now. *Had he been that much mistaken?* he wondered again.

The repaired helmet in his hands meant that he had to choose, had to determinate if he still sided with the Empire – or if the path leading away from it and its law enforcement he had so excelled at was the way he wanted to take now, with his son at his side. His eyes trained on the helmet, he thought about the man who was forcing him to make this choice now – and if he was sure about one thing only, it was this: he hated Obi-Wan Kenobi for giving him the option to choose. How very much easier it had always been with the Emperor – or Chancellor prior to it! And what should a former slave, used to always have someone to make the decisions for him in these big, life-changing matters – or slowly but surely lead him to make them – do with this unexpected and unwanted great and dangerous freedom?

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Obi-Wan walked out of his hut, looking at the waste, seemingly endless desert surrounding his home and the two suns of Tatooine rising up in the skies above it. If he had miscalculated – and he might have very well done just that – today would be the last day to see any of them. He had never thought that Tatooine was beautiful – but the limited time he likely had to live still made even the dried out planet an appealing sight that caressed his deeply hurting soul.

If Yoda would be there, the old Jedi Grand Master would surely scowl him for his decision – claiming that Darth Vader had to be stopped at all costs as much as the Emperor, if either of them had the necessary strength and skill. And here Obi-Wan stood, a traitor to the Jedi Order and the Republic as much as Anakin himself – suffering the very same weakness as his former Padawan, attachment.

*But was it indeed foolish to be hopeful?* He kept asking himself. *Was it completely and utterly insane or simply just very brave to lay his fate – and the fate of countless others – in the unstable hands of a possibly reforming Sith?* Obi-Wan did not know. But he was tired of hiding, exhausted of the state the Galaxy was in – and of the greatly tainted way the Force had felt for so long. Things were very wrong and he sincerely doubted they could get any worse at this point.

Aside of killing Anakin – or what had survived of him in his unwilling guest – with his own hands, a defenseless man at his mercy, an act so terribly improper for anyone who was faithful to the Jedi code, Obi-Wan also did not see any other way out of this mess. Darth Vader had already met Luke, he knew where the boy lived – and that Obi-Wan guarded him. If they would run now, the young Sith would soon be behind them – sooner or later killing Obi-Wan and claiming Luke and raising him in his and the Emperor’s evil, corruptive way. *No,* Obi-Wan shuddered, *this was not an option.*

He had to trust in the Force, had to believe there was a reason why Darth Vader had felt the need to visit Anakin Skywalker’s mother’s grave at this exact moment in time. If he was right, the Galaxy might be saved yet – as much as his former friend. For once, Obi-Wan could not help it, but be selfish – wishing with all his heart that he had judged the situation accurate. If he was correct, he would get his brother back – and with it also a hope for better future. Should he gain faith again, the Obi-Wan of old might even return, with all the necessary and greatly missed confidence that might one day help to bring Sidious down.

*Yes,* Obi-Wan decided, settling on a worn-out matt just under the window of his hut, and sinking into meditation, *it was a right thing to do.* Soon he would know if his gamble paid off – but until then he might very well rest his body and soul in the never-ending current of the Force. If he should be killed soon, a meditation would prepare him to become one with the Force too…
Chapter 12

In his meditation, Obi-Wan searched for peace and guidance of the Force – he was rather unsure if his decisions of late were indeed sound and would not potentially damage the Galaxy much more that they had the potential to lead it back towards the deeply desired and greatly missed balance again.

The man would have liked to speak about what was happening to Yoda, or any other Jedi Master of old, just to clear his mind and turn more confident that his attachments and the acts born out of them were not about to hurt more than they could salvage. But, sadly, the Jedi Council and its wisdom did not exist anymore, the half-man half-machine currently working on repairing his breathing helmet in his hut largely responsible for that, and it was not wise to attempt any contact to Master Yoda at the present time, not with that dark presence hidden in his meager house; a menacing figure that would likely be able to follow his communications, no matter the distance he might walk away from the shelter he called home.

However high Obi-Wan’s hopes might have been for the future, Darth Vader was Darth Vader still and the man’s job was to hunt the surviving Jedi and either kill them or turn them to the Dark side. No need to give the Emperor’s right hand a lead to the wisest of them, in a miscalculated attempt to save an once-upon-a-time good man consumed by Vader’s dark presence, a man who was possibly beyond redemption anyway.

“And yet you believe that he might be saved,” a well-known and dearly beloved voice whispered to Obi-Wan from the midst of the Force stream.

“Qui-Gon,” Obi-Wan breathed back in a way of greeting, somewhat surprised – but greatly relieved at the same time that the Force was granting him the help he was in such a dire need of. “I have been attempting to contact you ever since I arrived to Tatooine, once Master Yoda told me it was possible to talk to you again. But so far you have never replied…” There was sadness and slight disappointment in his words, but also deep contentment to have finally achieved his goal.

“It was not yet time to contact you, my dear Padawan,” Qui-Gon’s voice replied out of the current of the Force. “You did not need me – not as much as you are in necessity of my consult now, I believe. The surviving Jedi and senators are well prepared to ponder and complain about the present state of the Galaxy and the cruelty of the Sith reigning over it. I have other goals in mind, looking further into the future – those leading to the balance we are still missing…” Qui-Gon trailed off, leaving Obi-Wan time to consider his words.

His former student listened to his words carefully – and gasped in surprise over the last sentence of his speech. “You believe that Anakin might turn back to the Light then? You still see him as the Chosen One?” There was incredulity – and at the same time great deal of hope – in his two short questions.

Qui-Gon’s Force presence felt as if the man would be smiling now. His next words confirmed Obi-Wan’s assumption. “Yes, Obi-Wan,” he said. “I believe it might be achieved. I have never lost my faith in either you or our little Ani. You both used to have a heart of gold once – help Anakin to find his way back and recover your own ability to care. I assure you it can be done.”

“But – how?” Obi-Wan asked, despairing for answers.

“The boy will help you both,” Qui-Gon’s voice replied. “Let him do it and do not worry about his fate. Neither Anakin, nor Darth Vader would harm him in earnest; he is too precious to both of them.
Luke will bring your Padawan back, although there might be some struggle yet. But you two must cooperate then, you need to work together with Anakin and aim for the same goals. Keep that on mind, Obi-Wan, and all will turn out well in the end. Remember that Anakin fell because he wanted to protect and save, not because he desired to bring harm and gain power – he needs to see it the same way now, should he truly turn back and rejoin the Light side. I promise you that deep down he sees the error of his ways and he regrets his decisions. But he does not believe he has a true choice still – and that’s why he even now so stubbornly follows the Emperor’s direction. It was very good of you to let him choose his next step now – his better future must be his decision, you cannot force the right choice on him. If he makes it, the Galaxy shall thrive and the Jedi will rise again.” Qui-Gon said confidently and his former student felt greatly relieved by his words.

“I very much hope you are right, Qui-Gon,” Obi-Wan said softly, embracing the hopeful feeling that had arisen in his chest during his Master’s speech.

“I usually am correct, my former Padawan. Have faith and trust in the Force! It will guide you.” Qui-Gon offered. “Now I have to leave you; I want to exchange a few words also with your guest. May the Force be with you both!” Qui-Gon finished and his presence disappeared, likely to talk to Anakin – or Vader – inside of the hut.

“May the Force be with you, too,” Obi-Wan repeated and with much lighter heart sank back into the living Force current to continue in his meditation. He would need all the strength he could gather – battling Darth Vader, no matter how much surer he was now about the possible positive outcome, would call for a big fight. He would need to be firm and strong-willed opposing him and fighting the Emperor's dark influence if Anakin was to be saved. Hopefully the Force would provide him with the necessary power and would grant him enough patience.
Chapter 13

When Obi-wan emerged from his meditation, he opened his eyes to the red blade of Darth Vader’s lightsaber aimed straight at his chest. Inwardly, the Jedi sighed – he miscalculated then, and badly. Darth Vader knew that Luke was his son now, he was aware where to find him and he was about to kill Obi-wan, the boy’s only protector at present, in a moment. There was no stopping that now, not when Obi-wan had so foolishly decided to play vabanque, to put everything at stake for the minor chance that his old friend still lived beneath the dark façade of the young Lord of the Sith. Darth Vader could have killed him already, truth to be told, he was not warding himself during his meditation – but then the man-machine likely preferred to wait for his old teacher to acknowledge him to have the full satisfaction of their last encounter…

“Do it then, Darth,” Obi-wan said quietly after a silent moment he had taken for the bitter reflection and self-recrimination, looking up at the dark helmet and its red merciless googles. “I am prepared.” In reality, he wasn’t – not at all. Rather, he felt a truly terrible guilt at failing again – but there was a reason the Jedi code had forbidden attachments. Sadly, both he and Anakin had not understood the real reasons for this until it was too late. But there was no need to let his dark gone former apprentice know how he felt.

Vader smirked. Or so Obi-wan believed judging by the strange noise that accompanied the Sith’s words transmitted by the vocoder. “No, you are not,” Vader said. “But that does not matter. I will kill you no matter your readiness. But before taking my revenge on you, you will tell me what you know about the other Jedi who are still on the loose. Such as Yoda…”

Now, Obi-wan got really upset. “I will not help you to locate anyone else. Torture me, kill me, I will keep quiet. I have done more than enough damage already.”

Vader started to laugh now, wildly, almost madly. “So self-reflective in your old age, Kenobi? Yes, I would know about a lot of damage you have caused.” The dark armored man waved a hand over himself. “Chopping off my limbs for example? Hiding my son from me? Rest assured I will take my revenge for these crimes today. But I would not be opposed to a bit of mental torture first – you have always underestimated my real strength after all…”

“Try it then, I am ready.” Obi-wan attempted to release his anxiety into the Force. Was it just an hour or so earlier when he was visited by Qui-gon’s ghost and became so hopeful for the possible brighter future? Funny how futile it all seemed now.

Vader chuckled again, apparently able to decipher Obi-wan’s latest thought. “Qui-gon? He is the one guilty of your sad predicament right now, Master! I was truly tempted to give you one more chance – but his brief visit reminded me of the many faults the Jedi and you had sported against me. I shall not forget again, I promise you.” Vader then waved with his free hand towards the door of Obi-wan’s hut. “Let’s go inside. No need for anyone to interrupt us here, as minor as the chance is. It will also spare me the need to clean up later after we have had our fun…”

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The chance that someone would wander in the direction of Obi-wan’s humble home deep in Tatooine’s Jundland Wastes was truly low most of the time, but not on that very day, not when young Luke Skywalker was still so worried for the dark man he had met at his grandmother’s grave the day before and who had almost died on him and Old Ben. The boy ran off from his aunt and uncle’s home as soon as he had a chance – looking forward to truly meet the mysterious stranger he had helped to save. The man had to tell him all he knew about his parents!
Running, Luke was nearing Old Ben’s home, when he felt it – suddenly, the hot air of Tatooine cooled rapidly down. It was as if a bucket of icy cold water got dumped over his head. Instantly, the boy became scared – for both Old Ben and the strange man he had left with him. He sped up – trusting his presence might make a difference.

Unexpectedly, he truly had the might of defeating the big evil – without needing any weapon at all.

When Luke reached Old Ben’s hut, he was almost out of breath. But the sight that met him in front of Ben’s meager home robbed him of the rest of air he had in his lungs. The dark stranger, now with the previously damaged helmet firmly back on his head, had some sort of a sword-like weapon aimed at Old Ben and apparently was threatening the other man, Luke’s neighbor ever since he could remember, a friend of sorts. And there Luke thought he had found a long lost friend of his parents in the dark man! This murderous stranger could not be one – his parents were genuinely good people and this man was bad, he was a traitor. Luke was sure and all of sudden hated the man with all his small heart.

Not thinking about any consequences for himself, Luke jumped between the dark man and his target, as reckless as his father had once been. “Leave him be, do you hear me?” He shouted, hitting the dark stranger with his small fists. “He saved your life and this is how you pay him back? You are ugly and mean and I hate you! I hate you, I hate you, I hate you…”

The small fists could not harm him at all. But the words accompanying them, once they truly registered in his brain, hurt – and hurt a lot. “I hate you, I hate you, I hate you,” the small boy cried and kept hitting him. And Darth Vader was once more defeated by the great power of innocence, relinquishing his lightsaber and forgetting all his hate at Obi-wan, the Jedi, and the world in whole. The only thing the man hidden behind the front of the Sith cared about was his young son – and how he wished the boy would tell him he liked or loved him, very much hoping not to hear the words he hated him ever again.

It was then that the air surrounding them warmed up again – and Luke stopped hitting the dark stranger. He understood the man was no longer a threat. Old Ben felt it too, Luke thought when he gazed up at him – for the old hermit looked greatly relieved and gave Luke a big, thankful smile.
Chapter 14

Obi-Wan was still smiling, when he bowed down to Luke and addressed the small boy in his customary kind way: “Hello, young Luke,” he said; breaking the icy, dangerous silence that had surrounded the three of them only moments earlier with those few simple words. “I trust you are well?”

Luke nodded, warily eyeing the dark stranger standing frozen next to Ben Kenobi and apparently staring back at him – if one could tell with the mask back on his head and the impenetrable red-tinted googles obscuring the man’s eyes. Luke remembered that one of the eyes was adorned with a large scar running over it from the day before – but he suddenly realized that he had absolutely no idea what color the strange man’s eyes might be… But was he still interested to learn more about the man? Be it his eyes’ color – or the relation he had had to his parents? Luke was not sure any longer if he wanted to know – the man was a traitor, who had almost killed Old Ben, after all. And Luke’s loyalty was with Ben, there was no denying that. The boy was quite sure he should hate the dark man instead of being interested in him and his history with the Skywalker family – but the feeling of hatred, despite his earlier harsh words, did not come easily to him. But he knew for sure he did not like the man any longer.

“Yes, that’s right, Luke,” Old Ben nodded, apparently able to decipher Luke’s feelings just from gazing at the boy – or perhaps through that strange energy he had described as the Force the previous day. “Let go of the hate. It’s alright to dislike my visitor for now, but don’t hate, please. Those of us, who can feel the Living Force and use it, need to beware of strong negative emotions. If we do not heed this, bad things can happen. Such as us turning to the Dark Side of the Force – and losing everything we had once held dear. Please, remember that all the time.” The man accompanied his words with a sorrowful gaze at the mysterious stranger – and Luke all of sudden knew that Ben was speaking from his own experience and the dark man was involved in some way.

Then it dawned on him. “Such as he did,” Luke said quietly, hesitantly looking at the still unmoving man/machine. That would explain the stranger’s earlier hostile behavior towards Ben – and the older man’s strangely accepting attitude when being threatened by his unexpected, but – if Luke was able to tell – not entirely unwelcomed guest.

“Yes, such as he did.” Obi-Wan nodded his affirmation after a moment of hesitation – he had to be careful to not reveal to the boy too much yet; not when his father was still so very much immersed in the Dark Side and all could turn out badly. Luke did not need to carry that burden yet – and perhaps, just perhaps, if they were lucky indeed he would never have to. Not in the same way as he would be forced to now, anyway.

“You are very perceptive, young Luke,” the Jedi hermit praised instead, eyeing the boy studiously. He was aware that Anakin/Vader – whoever his old apprentice could be described as at the given moment – would not harm him, right? Obi-Wan could feel it in the Force; he did not really need Qui-Gon’s earlier reassurance to understand that – although it had helped to calm his insecurity where the boy was involved. But Luke needed to be aware of that himself too, so that he would not change his mind about visiting them – not when his presence could change so much for the better… Obi-Wan therefore asked: “You can also tell he is not a threat to you, can’t you?”

Vader was still – and would likely remain for a long time – Obi-Wan’s own enemy, but he would never attack the boy, his newly discovered and already much beloved son. Obi-Wan was absolutely sure about that, able to tell the feelings his former apprentice harbored towards to boy. Seemingly, they developed entirely too quickly – but then one had to consider that Anakin Skywalker had once
known about Padmé’s pregnancy and apparently looked forward to the birth of his child, until all had gone so terribly wrong. No matter how much Vader refused to still be Anakin, the former Jedi knight Anakin Skywalker and the present Sith lord going by the name Darth Vader shared a common past – and Obi-Wan hoped to build upon it if the Force was favorable to them and the Emperor would leave them alone long enough.

Luke was more than perceptive. He was also straight and honest, when he felt he could afford it – and right now he believed he was on safe ground with Ben Kenobi being always so friendly with him – and the dark stranger feeling subdued for the time being. Yes, he would say it – the man had more than earned him being frank, especially when Old Ben hesitated to tell him off for what he had attempted to do to him before.

“Yes,” the boy said in reply to Ben’s question. “I know he will not harm me. I can tell through that energy, Ben, sir, right? … But I can also tell he still wants to hurt you. And –“ the boy looked straight at the masked face of their dangerous visitor, fearless, “- it would hurt me if he did something to you too, you know? I do not know many people, you see – but I like all my friends and I do not wish any of them to get hurt. You are my friend – and I do not want you to be killed or injured – or whatever he wanted to do to you!” There, he said it – and the strange man was not at all happy about it. The boy could tell again, although he did not understand exactly how he knew – must somehow be part of that mysterious Force business… As to the dark stranger and his hurt feelings; he had more than earned Luke being sincere with him, right? Someone had to when the adults were afraid to hurt one another’s feelings…

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Obi-Wan listened to the small boy’s heartfelt words – and could not stop himself to recall another young boy coming from Tatooine who had once also had a great heart and wanted to help people, just because he believed they were good and his friends. He felt tears filling up his eyes for the lost chances – and swore to himself once more to never let this Skywalker boy to feel the pain his father had to go through, not if it was in his might.

Apparently, he was not the only one affected by Luke’s words, however – for the massive bulk of Darth Vader turned away and the man’s large frame shook slightly, perhaps also recalling their shared past, perhaps with regret.

Then the Force felt lighter again and Obi-Wan was deeply thankful for his new miracle. The dark armor’s front turned back to them several moments later and the man in it took a few careful steps towards his young son. Cautiously, clearly not wanting to scare Luke in any way, the black armored man knelt in front of the boy, so that the dark, intimidating mask and the bright, innocent face of the small blond boy were more or less at the same height. Vader hold out his hand to the boy – and after a moment of hesitation, Luke reached out with his own arm. Vader took the small hand into his metallic limb and hold it gently. When he spoke, the voice transmitted by the Vocoder was soft as much as the devise allowed it to be – and his words felt sincere and resolved.

“I will not harm Obi-Wan Kenobi, if it means so much to you, Luke. I promise you.”

Luke knew once more that the man meant his words – and smiled at him brightly, thankfully and trustingly. And Darth Vader was lost.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sometime later, long after Darth Vader had removed his customary deadly red lightsaber from Luke’s innocent sight and another while after Obi-Wan Kenobi had somewhat carelessly disappeared inside of his hut to shortly after reappear holding a glass of blue milk and a plate of not exactly appetizing looking brownish cookies meant for their young guest, the three of them were sitting side by side on a wooden bench leaning on one of the hut’s walls.

Vader, seated at the outer side of the bench, which was supported by a massive stone that was more than able to bear the Sith’s and his black armor’s great weight, was strangely quiet, but to Obi-Wan it was clear that he eagerly listened to every single, under normal circumstances in no way significant word his son had to utter. In that Vader behaved as any other new parent would – fascinated by the new life he had helped to create.

Obi-Wan was engaged in a conversation with Luke, who was enjoying the cool milk and kept nibbling on the cookies set invitingly in front of him. Time to time the older man gazed at Vader – still very much surprised and greatly thankful to the Force – or any deity responsible for this miracle – that Luke had once again managed to reach Anakin behind the harsh front of the seemingly merciless Sith lord.

It remained to be seen if the dark man would keep his promise to not harm his old teacher also in the future – but Obi-Wan felt he did not need to worry about that just yet. At present, their odds were temporarily buried – if only for Luke’s sake.

Should someone see them, they would make a strange sight – a black armored giant, half man and half machine feared by the whole Galaxy – and yet sitting peaceful and not appearing dangerous at all here in the waste desert of his youth; a wise Jedi Master in his long beige robes, aged beyond years by the great guilt he carried on his shoulders and the harsh Tatooine climate; and a small boy with freckled face, blond hair and blue eyes - a picture of innocence.

They did not appear to fit – and yet they belonged to each other, bonded for life and death. For there was no choice for them now, they had to stick together, had to find a way how their unlikely and highly unexpected union might work. Otherwise they would all be lost – the Emperor did not treat those who opposed him kindly.

Obi-Wan Kenobi had firmly stood against him as one of the last surviving Jedi from the very start; Luke Skywalker, no matter his low age at the present time, had the potential to become the Emperor’s greatest rival – or perhaps his new apprentice, if Kenobi and the boy’s father were not careful enough; and Darth Vader, while currently still bound to Darth Sidious as his faithful servant, could not keep his place at his Sith master’s side, if he truly wanted to claim his son – unless he wanted to endanger the boy’s safety or perhaps even his life. He would be damned if he allowed that – not after what had happened to Padmé, not after she had died by his own hand – or in direct consequence of his unfortunate actions. Never again, he swore to himself – and went on listening to Luke’s enthusiastic babble, that – for some strange reason – made him temporarily feel at peace with both himself and the universe – and, miracles of miracles, also assisted him to keep his temper while sitting in such a close proximity to the man he once used to love with his whole heart as a parent and brother – and now hated with all passion.

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“Uncle Owen told me I am big enough now to help him,” Luke shared proudly; his mouth full of biscuits and his small hands covered with their crumbles. The boy smiled up at Obi-Wan and glanced timidly at his hermit neighbor’s dark visitor. “I can help him with the vaporators – he will take me with him tomorrow; one of the vaporators at the border of our grounds does not work properly. We earn money collecting and selling the water, you know. And our banthas drink it, too…” As if to underline his words, Luke took a sip of the blueish milk the banthas produced in return for the human care.

“I am really happy I can help now!” the boy went on enthusiastically then, drying his mouth with his long sleeve. “Aunt Beru and Uncle Owen are not my parents – they do not have to feed me and cloth me and they still do. I would like to repay them somehow. It was so nice of them to take me in when my parents died! Even if I would have preferred to stay with my parents if I could… Perhaps I would even have a brother or a sister. I would like to have one – or two… not to be all alone with the adults, you know…”

The boy sounded miserable now. But soon he charmed up another smile on his optimistic little face. “But I am not doing badly, really not; Aunt Beru and Uncle Owen like me well enough, I think. Just, you know, sometimes, at night, when I cannot sleep, I would really like to have my mum and dad with me. But I know they are gone. And I should be happy for them that they are together – somewhere up there.” Luke looked up at the clear Tatooine sky, his face suddenly greatly saddened. “I love you, mum, dad. I miss you both – so very much!” A few tears ran down the boy’s features – their sight almost breaking his long-lost father’s hardened heart.

And then the boy was suddenly cheerful again, as only small children can change their mood so swiftly. “The vaporators, they are really interesting machines, Ben, sir…”

Vader’s cheeks would have been wet now, if he could still cry. He could not listen to the boy any longer, not when it was bringing up so many unwanted painful memories of Padmé, so many bitter dreams of what could have been… He staggered up and away from the boy and his former mentor – he could not think of the happiness he had lost forever, especially not when it had been destroyed by his own hand.

Obi-Wan stared at his retreating back, worried for his former friend – while at the same time relieved his one-time pupil could still be affected so much by his son’s words. No matter how painful this might have been for him, the man needed to hear it. It was necessary for him to understand – so that he could avoid repeating his mistakes. Yes, this pain had a healing potential. Obi-Wan prayed the bitter pill would work and bring Anakin again a bit closer to him – and his son.

Chapter End Notes

Blue milk and Luke: http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-i9EIDg4z2TE/T0EN08N948I/AAAAAAAADd4/PXFSHJ_Jfco/s1600/tumblr_lyqi4fFPYr1qbwnul

Love the mustache. (-:
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

All too soon, Luke had to leave Obi-Wan’s home to help his aunt with some – as he claimed boring – house chores she required of him, excited about the next day when he would start learning how to work on the vaporators – which were not boring at all as it seemed, in the very least not to Anakin Skywalker’s son – that provided water to their small family and the herd of banthas they kept. Obi-Wan accompanied the boy up until Shmi’s grave – and from there on let him go alone. The Force felt perfectly calm – and Obi-Wan was reasonably sure that Luke would come to no harm crossing the small distance to the Larses’s homestead.

Once alone, the Jedi remained standing at the lonely grave stone, pensively staring at the words adorning it and the rare cacti Luke had grown at its foot. The grey-green cacti were all thorns and he could hardly imagine them in bloom now, but he had already seen them blossoming – and then they were spectacular indeed, bringing bright colors to the gloomy Tatooine desert.

The cacti actually reminded him of Anakin at present, of the good man lost somewhere behind the dark, merciless mask representing Darth Vader; buried beneath all the gruesomeness’ the Emperor somehow made Obi-Wan’s former Padawan do – and that at some point in time likely made at least some sense to Anakin, if not to the man who had raised him years ago. Obi-Wan doubted that Anakin/Vader still saw things the same way – not after Padmé had died through his actions, not after he had met his frankly amazing son…

One day at the fallen man’s side and Obi-Wan Kenobi already trusted his one-time pupil to want the best for his own son – no matter how dark Anakin himself still was and would possibly remain for who knew how long, if not eternally. It would be incredibly difficult to defeat Darth Vader, not unless he himself wished to change, wanted to be saved… if only for his son’s sake, possibly.

And even then, even if Anakin returned to him, to Luke – what would happen then? The Emperor would not let go easily of his apprentice, of that Obi-Wan was sure; they would need to run from him, live forever in hiding – or fight Sidious. And Obi-Wan frankly could not foretell what outcome such an encounter would have – he himself had not trained for years and Anakin would likely be not stable enough, not yet firmly footed in Light, to be able to defeat the other Sith, no matter how much Obi-Wan might be able to help him finding himself again and possibly aid with improving his health.

Obi-Wan sighed. No, the immediate future would likely not be bright. But they might get there some day, possibly many years from now in the very far future. Yet the first step was laying here, in helping Anakin return. If Obi-Wan would manage that, all was possible still.

With one last glance at Shmi’s name engraved in the granite, Obi-Wan left Owen Lars’s grounds. Luke was taken care of and well protected for the time being by his surrogate parents; he himself had a different – and frankly much more difficult – boy to worry about right now.

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When Obi-Wan returned to his hut, the menacing figure of Darth Vader was seated back on the bench leaning on the hut’s outer wall.

“You are back,” Vader hissed, his voice revealing all the hatred he still harbored towards Obi-Wan.
“Yes, I am back,” Kenobi confirmed cheerfully, somewhat mischievously. “Hello to you too. Good to see you again.” He reached the hut now and halted, standing just in front of his guest, the beige robe hugging his lean frame billowing slightly in the afternoon breeze.

“Make no mistake,” Vader continued in his cold speech. “No matter the promise to the boy, I still hate you. I will not fight you, that is what the promise was about. But I am not obliged to treat you nicely. If anything, you can help me to find a way how to keep the boy safe. I will let you live for his sake – you might yet prove useful. Although, frankly, I do not understand why you try to raise another misguided youth out of him, you and Owen Lars both. He would not survive in this world for long – the likes of him and his father in his young days are deemed to be destroyed sooner or later. Or become like you – a lonely desert hermit with nothing and nobody to live for.”

The harsh words were to harm Obi-Wan – but there was nothing that could hurt more than Mustafar had. He smiled. “It might surprise you, Vader, but I like my life here just fine, circumstances allowing. The Clone Wars were not a nice business after all – we all were in a dire need of rest. If you – or if you insist that you are two different people still, Anakin Skywalker then – would not have fallen, if the Empire had not destroyed the Republic, I would be perfectly content living a simple life like this, believe it or not.”

Vader shook his masked head. “You have always been a fool, Kenobi,” he said in disbelief. “Do not tell me that there would not be something you would miss here in this Maker’s forsaken desert!”

Obi-Wan gave him another smile, light and gentle. “I would not have missed the war, the fights, the endless bloodshed. But you are right, there would be one thing, one person I would be missing here no matter what – someone I miss still as it is. I cannot be happy when you, when Anakin Skywalker, is not at my side. I have always hoped we would remain friends…” He trailed off, his voice sad now – his Force signature unmasked and allowing his companion to see his sincerity.

“Then you are indeed a fool!” Darth Vader raged. “The boy you keep missing was never such a good and great person as you envision him to be; for years he defied you and lied to you, he did not trust you, he broke your precious Code, he killed in cold blood, he murdered… Is that the person you are missing so much? Then explain to me why!”

Obi-Wan actually laughed now, the sound soft and strangely composed, despite it held also a bit of desperation in it. “I loved Anakin, I loved you, you misguided boy! Don’t you think that I had broken the Code myself by allowing myself to feel such emotions? And yet, yet I know it was right to feel them, to embrace them – and I cannot say how much I regret that I had never told you. I would have listened to you, I would have helped you, I would have stood by you. The only thing you needed to do was to come to me and speak to me. Which you never did…”

Kenobi’s voice was miserable now – but soon he recovered and went on. “Anakin killed in cold blood? Show me a person, a Jedi even, who fought in the war – and treated everyone, his enemies included, in compassion only. Anakin murdered? You mean Dooku, right? Then I am guilty of the very same crime – who do you think killed Darth Maul? If you believe I did it in a perfectly calm Jedi way then you are gravely mistaken. I was on the verge of falling myself back then – but I had a small boy I had to take care of then and it saved me from going dark. And he kept doing so for years to come. So you see, I have many good reasons to miss Anakin Skywalker – and to feel lonely without him at my side.”

Vader was quiet for a moment, likely pondering the words. They evidently hurt him, or what was remaining of Anakin Skywalker deep within him, for he decided to play his biggest trump yet. “You do not know what that precious golden boy of yours did on this very planet, Kenobi. You would never speak as you do if you knew that!”
Obi-Wan shook his head. No, he had indeed not known before the Republic fell. But he had lived on Tatooine ever since – with only a few short interruptions when he visited Bail Organa and his family or met Yoda – and he had been able to put the picture together in the meantime.

Resolutely and for some reason not afraid at all, the man crossed the few steps dividing him from his former pupil. Once there, he lowered himself on his knees, all the time starting straight at Darth Vader’s impassible mask. Finally, they were at the eye level. Obi-Wan could not see Vader’s obscured eyes – and frankly was not unhappy about it, as the harsh yellow in their depths kept disturbing his dreams and reality alike for long enough. He however felt that Anakin/Vader would take his words more to heart if he looked at where his eyes had to be while he spoke to him.

“Anakin Skywalker kept having dreams of his mother’s impending death while he was still my Padawan,” Kenobi said slowly, carefully, trying to feel the Force emanating of Vader sitting now frozen in front of him. “I was indeed a fool when I dismissed his worries – and a fool I remained for not asking him what had happened later on. I deeply regret that, you have to trust me. He and his future wife, Senator Amidala, arrived to Tatooine to find out that Shmi Skywalker, Anakin’s mother, was taken by the Tusken riders. Anakin was able to find her, but I am to understand that she died in his arms shortly after. In his grief, Anakin lost his mind and turned his Lightsaber against the Tusken. He killed them all – men, women, children. Only then he returned back to his stepfather’s homestead with his mother’s corpse in his arms and they buried her together, beneath the very stone young Luke takes care of now.”

Obi-Wan finished his speech, but kept staring at the eye sockets of Darth Vader’s helmet. The dark man was wordless for a very long time, apparently taken aback. Kenobi could not tell what the other man felt – but whatever the feelings, they were clearly not aimed at him, rather at the dark man himself. Finally, a long time later, the man who used to be Anakin Skywalker said, barely audible: “And yet you want him back.”

Obi-Wan nodded back and confirmed: “Yes, and yet I want him back. More than anything in this world.”

And again that sat and knelt opposite each other and the world seemed to have halted around them.

Chapter End Notes

Anakin's murder of the Tusken riders is one of the things not frequently reflected in the fandom - but as it was the beginning of his fall in my opinion, it should be addressed more often. I especially like the following pieces depicting the event and Obi-Wan's view of it:

"Simple Steps" (on Fanfiction) where the deed actually happens but Obi-Wan and Anakin do their best to avert its damaging effects on Anakin's psyché: https://www.fanfiction.net/s/6367822/1/Simple-Steps (in particular Chapter 17 and following, but I love the whole fic).

and

"Death, Yet The Force" (one-shot on Fanfiction) where Obi-Wan manages to stop Anakin just in time: https://www.fanfiction.net/s/11648264/1/Death-Yet-The-Force.
“So… what happens now?” The Dark Lord of the Sith asked his former Jedi master, who had just risen up from the by now uncomfortable kneeling position in front of his one-time friend and pupil, straightening his cracking joints in relief – he was not getting any younger.

“Honestly, I do not know,” the older man shrugged his shoulders, smiling sadly. “But I believe it is up to you rather than me. What do you want for yourself?” He wondered and then, when his companion did not react, added: “What do you wish for your son, Vader? Do you want him to turn to the Dark Side? Would you like for him to become a slave to Sidious as you did?”

The slave remark made the other man react. “The boy will be no slave, Kenobi, mark that!” Vader rose to his feet himself, hissing angrily at Obi-Wan. “He will join me – and together we will defeat the Emperor and rule over the Galaxy, side by side! I know he wishes to leave Tatooine – just as I desired to at his age. I will fulfill his dreams – and he will have a good life with me.” As Vader vowed this, for a moment considering Luke’s present needs and dreams rather than his own desires to overtake the rule – so typical for the Sith, Obi-Wan felt the sincerity of his words. He indeed loved the boy, no matter how short he had known him.

“But can you protect him long enough?” He prompted, trying to make the other man see – and not continue to be blinded by his own selfish needs and thirst for revenge. “Are you really so strong? Do you have that many allies you can trust to? The boy is not growing up overnight as you know well… It will be years until he can join you – provided he would ever even want to. Think about it, I urge you!” For a moment they stared at each other, blue-grey eyes against reddish goggles of the monstrous mask. Then, when he felt the truth of his words started to finally sink in, Obi-Wan turned and walked to the threshold of his hut. “I will be inside,” he let the other man know. “We need some dinner.”

For Vader’s liking, Kenobi was behaving far too casual – and was much too open with him, not considering how his words, no matter how truthful – or perhaps exactly because of them carrying the truth in them, can enrage him. They were no longer friends; he hated the man more than he had ever hated anyone, the Sand People who had killed his mother all those years ago included. It was Obi-Wan who had turned Padmé against him and caused her death; it was again his former Master who had maimed him and injured him so gravely that he had to live imprisoned in his suit. And yet – yet the man might be right – and Vader hated him even more for that.

If his association with the Emperor taught him something, it was to be patient and not react immediately – unless he wanted to teach his subordinates a lesson, in which case he reacted as unpredictably and strongly as possible – strictly punishing each and any failure, for treachery was not desired in the Empire.

No matter how he disliked the older Jedi, he had to think about what Kenobi had said. Vader had to be cautious – more careful than the weakling Anakin Skywalker the last time. He did not want to lose Luke as Anakin had lost Padmé. Not because of his own stupidity; not because he cared too much – or too little. But how should he make the right decision? He who apparently kept making the wrong choices all the time? So wrong that they killed his own wife whom he loved above all else? Force! What was he supposed to do?

And the Dark Lord of the Sith bowed to the will of the Force for the first time in almost a decade, instead of manipulating it to his will as he was so very used to from the recent years. And the Force, miracles or miracles, rewarded him with a response – possibly sounding a little bit like Qui-Gon Jinn’s voice when resounding in his head. “Trust. Trust your friends. Trust those who have earned it!
Trust!"

But whom he could trust? The Emperor lied to him about Padmé’s death; Ahsoka left him when he
needed her the most; Padmé stopped loving him; the Jedi did not want to train him in the first place
and later did not see him worth the Master’s title, despite all he had done for them. Trust! But to
whom? Was there anyone worth that? Once upon a time, he had his mother who had always been
sincere to him; then his master – no, don’t think about him; he fought you and practically killed you –
making you live this miserable half-life.

And yet, yet… Anakin, you were my brother. I loved you. – If I wanted you dead, I would not have
helped you earlier. – You can relearn to use the light side. – No, you will not hurt the boy. We will
take care of your temper, do not worry. – Yes, and yet I want him back. More than anything in this
world. Yes, as unlikely as it seemed, Kenobi did not lie – he indeed still cared. And, irony of ironies,
that made him the best candidate to guard Luke for him until he was old enough to join him. A good
thing he did not kill the man then – despite all the pain he had caused him.

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When the suited man finally reentered the hut, Obi-Wan was just laying out cutlery on the table. He
looked up at him, not worried at all as it seemed by his companion’s ongoing conflict, and smiled
friendly.

“I am making bantha stew for us. It shall be alright for you digestion, I hope; the meat is fresh and cut
in very small pieces as are the vegetables. There is also almost no seasoning and just a little bit of salt
– your digestive tract should handle that well, I think.”

Vader gave a nod. “Yes,” he voiced. “That will be alright.”

“Good.” Obi-Wan said and turned back to the stove. He kept himself busy with the stew for a
moment – and then he turned back to Vader. “It’s almost ready. You will need to remove the helmet
now, so that you can eat. Do you wish me to help you? It’s quite heavy, isn’t it?”

The dark man did not want his former master’s help – but his Force reserves were still deplenished
and the helmet was indeed heavy and usually was removed with the help of machinery on his ship.
Swallowing his pride, he nodded. “Yes, you can assist me.”

Obi-Wan had to turn away for a bit, hiding a grin. Leave it to Anakin – no Vader! – to turn a request
for help into an order. He removed the pot with the stew from the heat and approached his guest.
“Alright then,” he said, eyeing the helmet and studying the way it was connected to the rest of the
armor. “What do you want me to do?”

Vader did something to his armor – and the helmet’s connection to the rest of the suit got looser with
a small hiss of the machinery. “You can help me to take the helmet off now,” he said, waving his
mechanical hands towards the places he wanted Obi-Wan to put his hands to. He himself got hold of
the bottom of the helmet. Together they pulled the heavy thing off and Obi-Wan placed it on the bed.

When he turned back to the bald, ugly scarred man sitting at his table, he was shocked to find him
again struggling for breath – to the degree he was almost not breathing at all. Damn it, with all the
negativity the day had brought, the healing he and Luke had forced on the man the day before was
apparently gone. What now?

Not wasting any time, he hasted towards the table in a few strides that divided them and before he
could think about it, his hands were on both sides of Anakin’s – Vader’s – face. He forced the other
man’s gaze up – once more shocked by the yellow of the irises he had remembered bright blue. “Let
go of the negative, Anakin – Vader, whatever you want me to call you!” He admonished. “Release it
to the Force – the anger, the hatred, the fear you feel, get rid of them now! You have to think
something positive, let the light side in – it brings healing, no harm. Think about the boy, think about
your son, think about how he visited us today – no, not that part with you wanting to kill me! – think
about how Luke was sitting between me and you on the bench in front of my hut, how he nibbled on
the cookies, how he drank bantha milk and got a blue mustache, how he was excited to work on the
vaporators, how he misses you and loves you! You and Padmé, he loves both of you – and misses
you. You love him too, don’t you, Anakin? Feel it, let it out and into open – it’s just you and me here
and you do not have to hide anything, I promise. Do you love the boy? Then say it, do not be afraid.
Say it!”

For a long while, the other man was quiet, struggling for breath – although it got a little better once
Obi-Wan started to speak about Luke. And then finally, the dam broke and the man cried: “Yes,
damn it, I love the boy, I love him, I love my son!”

As Vader was admitting his love for Luke, his voice was getting stronger, his breathing improving –
until finally he was able to breath on his own again, if still with difficulties. “Yes, I love him,” he
whispered once more and bowed his head; if he could, he would be crying now, Obi-Wan knew.
Kenobi was relieved though, and not just because the man could breathe again – before they broke
their eye contact, he could see something in the depths of the Sith’s eyes, something that gave him
hope for the better future again – for blue strikes were reappearing between the sickly yellow.

Happy beyond belief, Obi-Wan unthinkingly bowed over Anakin’s/Vader’s head and kissed the
scarred forehead. “Yes, you love him, Anakin,” he whispered, more to himself than his companion,
though the other man heard him. “And it will be your salvation, if you let it.”
They ate then, the pot with the bantha stew sitting on the table between them and they each seemingly fully occupied with their meal. In reality both men were busy contemplating what their next steps might be – but unlike years before, when they used to share the training bond, none was the wiser about the thoughts of the other.

“A second helping?” Obi-Wan asked politely once Vader’s plate was empty.

The scarred man opposite to him, looking so different than the young idealistic youth he had once known, shook his head. Indeed, he was not really hungry – the food he had already consumed would sustain him well enough.

Obi-Wan nodded and started to clear the table. “Right then,” he said, his hands loaded with the dirty dishes and cutlery. “I will make us a tea and then we can talk a bit.”

Vader gave a reluctant nod. He did not want to talk to his old teacher – or be in any contact with him for that matter, unless he could fight him and finally run a lightsaber through his traitorous ageing body – but that was not an option at present. And they really needed to talk – and come to some, however fragile, truce, if at all possible. Luke and his continuous safety were far more important than Vader’s personal hatred towards the older Jedi.

Nevertheless, the casual way Kenobi served the tea a few minutes later – so very similar to the days of Anakin Skywalker’s apprenticeship to the man – annoyed Vader again. His metal fingers encircled the offered cup – and their angered pressure cracked it, spilling the sweet-smelling tea all over Obi-Wan’s table. The older man’s reaction was likely not entirely unexpected, but it still surprised Vader somewhat – for the Jedi hermit simply smiled patiently, like he used to when Darth Vader had still been the young and clumsy Padawan Anakin Skywalker, dried the split and carefully took the shards of the cup from Vader’s prosthetic metal fingers. He brought the shards to the dustbin in the corner of the room and – giving his companion a careful smile – offered him a new cup, filled with fresh tea. “Try to not destroy this one; I do not have many spares. It’s the same herbal mixture as yesterday – it should ease your breathing, if you give it a chance this time,” Kenobi said calmly, once more taking a seat across the table from Vader.

“So,” Obi-Wan went on evenly, once he took a sip of the hot tea. “What do you want to happen now?”

And that was the thing – Vader did not know. He could reply – I want you dead. But that would not exactly play in his favor, right? Or he could say: I want the Emperor gone and be free again. But he was not strong enough – or perhaps not brave enough – for that, sadly. Finally, he decided to concentrate on the essential: “I want Luke safe,” he proclaimed, as loud as his damaged vocal cords allowed.

Obi-Wan had hoped for a similar reply – for once they had a common ground, things would be much easier – or so he hoped. He offered a little smile and said: “My old friend, in that case we seem to have a common goal, don’t we?”

The scarred man who used to be Obi-Wan’s closest and dearest companion once upon a time, in another lifetime, was quiet for a very long time, blankly staring at the wall just behind Obi-Wan’s greying head, visibly battling his dark emotions. Finally, he seemed to have won his inner fight – for he looked straight at Obi-Wan and, taking a deep, cleansing breath, he agreed: “Yes, indeed.” And then he went on, suggesting: “I shall not kill you and you will help me to protect the boy against the
Emperor until he is old and accomplished enough to defend himself on his own.”

Obi-Wan was seriously tempted to ask ‘And what if I don’t agree? Will you kill me and take the boy with you, running and hiding from Sidious until he grows up – or more likely losing the boy to the Emperor and the Dark Side once he and the Inquisitors discover you?’ But he resisted the temptation. Anakin’s son’s safety was more important than their grudge.

He joined his eyes with the yellow glare of the young Sith and gave an affirmative nod. “You will not attempt to fight or kill me and in return I will assist you to keep Anakin Skywalker’s son safe and sound until he is mature and skilled enough to look after himself. Honestly, I would do it anyway for the sake of my past friendship with the boy’s father – but I am not opposed to the idea of cooperating with you to reach our common desired end. We have always worked better together as allies rather than enemies in any case.” He did not mention that their final goals might be considerably different at present; both men were perfectly aware of that. But so much could happen in a decade – and if they were working together, things might certainly only improve. Suddenly, Kenobi grinned and offered his hand: “Should we take a handshake on it to seal the truce?”

The armored man opposite to him hesitated, the uncovered scarred face again mirroring the drama boiling on the inside. He bit his lips, considering – and finally he resolutely outstretched his right metal hand, the one that replaced the limb he had lost to Dooku years ago, when he was still Obi-Wan’s pupil – and the very same prosthetic that had crushed the tea cup earlier. “Deal,” he said and their hands joined, the metal closing around flesh, purposely hurting it in the powerful squeeze. “But mark that this does not change things between the two of us, old man. We are still enemies – and shall continue to be so. I will gladly postpone my revenge for a few years. It will taste the sweater then.”

Obi-Wan merely smiled. “As long as you keep on mind that the future is always in motion, my former Padawan, I shall be perfectly satisfied with that.”
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

The future was indeed constantly in motion – not letting them to spend any more time together at that instant in time. If it was for better or worse, Obi-Wan Kenobi was not sure – but they had not killed or even really harmed each other during their involuntarily time together and that had to count for something, he mused, as he watched the bulky form known as Darth Vader to the Galaxy – and whom he himself considered Anakin Skywalker in his thoughts once again now – mount into his ship hidden in the rocks close to Lars’s homestead – and up until a few minutes ago protected by a powerful invisible shield.

The young Dark Lord of the Sith had received a coded message from his fleet the night before, short after the two of them had agreed to jointly protect Luke, prompting him to return to his men straight away. Obi-Wan was not privy to the contains of the message as he politely stepped out of his hut when Anakin – Vader – listened to it, but apparently, there was a rebellion building up on one of the planets the Empire used as source of material for building on whatever secret project Anakin opted not to mention.

His only words to Obi-Wan were: “I will need to leave the first thing in the morning. If I would not, the Emperor will know something is amiss.”

Obi-Wan gave an affirmative nod, perfectly understanding what precarious situation they all were in with the Empire. Funny to consider the second most powerful person of the Empire as part of the opposition now – but the ways of the Force were mysterious and not always easy to explain. The main thing was that Anakin was no longer so emerged in the Darkness as he had been back on Mustafar and in the years that followed. Kenobi had to trust that the push his former Padawan had received back to the Light Side of the Force when meeting his son and making peace – however temporarily – with him would make all the difference in the long run. And no, he was old and experienced enough to not expect miracles happening overnight. Many things had gone wrong in a long span of time – it would take time to start repairing them, if the mending was even possible still.

“I trust you to remain here on Tatooine with the boy – he might need your protection sooner rather than later,” the man who used to be Anakin continued, a frown building up on his scarred face. “I hope this is no deception, but it may as well be – better be prepared than sorry. If things go well, we will have the mining facility under control in a few days – and I shall have time to consider the best course of action as to how to keep in touch and visit with the boy then. It will need to be scarce enough, so that the Emperor won’t suspect anything.” He sighed, clearly not happy about the prospect of not seeing Luke in a long time to come.

Obi-Wan could not see a different path either. If they were to protect Luke – a thing Anakin thankfully saw equally important as his former Jedi Master – there was no other way. Not until the boy was older and the Rebellion against the Empire stronger – or the boy’s father more firmly footed back in the Light again. Kenobi was optimistic they would reach their desired ends in all the three points now – but those things needed a lot of time and effort, both of which they were lacking at present. He opted not to mention any of this aloud, however, and instead voiced a simple promise: “Yes, I will stay here. I will be here for the boy – to watch over him and protect him if necessary – and for you if you are able to come back at some point. There are still many things I would like to speak to you about – and we do not have enough time for them all tonight. You also need your sleep if you are to leave early tomorrow morning – if you do not mind, I would call it a night then.”
The dark man nodded: “Agreed,” he said and looked towards the single bed he had slept on the night before. “You can have your bed back tonight, Kenobi. I can take the cot,” he offered after a moment of consideration – it was after all Obi-Wan’s house, not his.

Kenobi shook his head, denying the offer. “You are still not entirely well – and I do not see you to take a time off to have some rest any time soon. You take the bed and have a good sleep tonight. And before you say it – I know you cannot be fully healed and one night of good rest won’t likely change much, but humor me, please. If you agree –“ and here Kenobi hesitated in his speech “– I could also look at your lungs again and push a bit more healing on them. It might be beneficial for you, should your helmet get damaged again at some point.”

Vader – no Anakin – stared at him for a long time – as if mistrustful of his offer. But then, probably seeing a reason behind the suggestion and his acceptance of it, he gave a nod. “Yes, that would be alright.”

They spent another hour in close proximity – the armored man stretched out on his back on Obi-Wan’s narrow bed and his one-time teacher carefully bent over him, hands spread over his damaged chest and the healing Force being poured from his fingertips into the hurt lungs below. The owner of those lungs was not opposing his efforts this time, eager for all the help he could be given – an assistance he was unlikely to receive from his current Master.

“There,” Obi-Wan said finally, sitting back and carefully eyeing his companion’s pale face, “this is it for tonight. You will see how well it sits with you in the next days – but, Anakin, remember that anytime you use the Dark Side you will ruin the healing a bit. Do not rely on it to hold for more than a few days if you are planning to Force choke all those poor miners you are to pacify in the next days.”

The other man was looking back at him strangely, not even getting upset when he heard his old name – for he could well feel the improvement of his breathing now that he was conscious during the procedure. Damn Sidious for hiding this from him – he might have been better off if not for his doctors’ disastrous attempts at healing. He could it see now – and it was paining him; Obi-Wan was his true master, a man who could overlook his many flaws – and his plentiful crimes against what he had believed in – and still offer him his companionship and a cure, selfless and not expecting any payment back – so unlike Sidious.

Deeply ashamed of himself – if not willing to voice it yet, Anakin said a genuinely grateful: “Thank you.” Privately he thought: ‘I am sorry, Master.’

Obi-Wan nodded: “You are welcome. Sleep well, my friend.” And with that he left his side to get his own rest on his cot.

Chapter End Notes

Happy new year, everybody! (-:

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Btw, a bit of self-promotion - unless you have discovered it on your own, there is a new SW story written by me, "Padawan Luke", published here on AO3. It will have 2 chapters. Enjoy!
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Vader was not sure – and he did not even know if he did care – what Kenobi would think about the name of the planet he had been summoned to by Sidious to stop the local protests. He called the mutinying men miners when speaking to Kenobi, but they hardly were just that – much of what they were sent to dig for lay in other places than mines.

The project the Emperor was so passionate about, no matter how long it might take to finish it, required a huge amount of Kyber crystals. And while the Jedi – or even the Sith – in the past centuries simply only took one single crystal when they needed to build their lightsabers – Sidious was unstoppable now.

The caves of Ilum as well as all the known places the Jedi or the Sith – or the other Force wielders for that matter – had inhabited in the past, were being raided and the crystals harvested in the quantities nobody had ever heard about. In a sense the crystals were all being bent to the will of the Sith, all bled – and corrupted if one used the Jedi point of view and their vocabulary. Vader believed that if the superweapon the Emperor was so keen about would be indeed completed at some point – at the moment he still rather doubted that, although he would never admit it to his Dark Master – it would produce a massive red laser blade. Not so much different than his and the Emperor’s saber in color – just much, much bigger and a lot stronger. Able to destroy the entire planets.

Such as Jedha he found himself currently on – or Tatooine his young son lived on under the careful guard of his old, and perhaps no longer so very hated, teacher. Vader had actually wanted Tatooine to be the first target of the Emperor’s greatest creation – but that was before. Now that he knew who lived on that planet and how protected they were by living just there, he knew he would never allow his Master to destroy the place, no matter how much he himself hated the ball of sand. Luke was the really important person for him, but he had found out that he could tolerate Kenobi if he continued to serve his purposes. Damn it, he would have tolerated the man even all those years ago, when the encounter on Mustafar happened, if only he could see the reason in his ways!

But was there a reason? Had he really made a good choice? Vader mused, marching along with his Stormtroopers. After what Obi-Wan did for him the other night, showing him so clearly his selflessness and the Emperor’s many flaws, Vader knew no more. And it troubled him greatly.

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Obi-Wan Kenobi was conflicted – very much so. Vader, Anakin – whoever the man was right now – had left the planet biding him and Luke to remain on Tatooine. But the former Jedi Master did not know if it was safe any longer. Vader had not come to look for them, true, it was a mere coincidence, but the Emperor or his cohorts might think it strange if they found out the Empire’s Enforcer had spent a few days here – and they would turn even more suspicious if the younger Sith Lord would keep returning here.

No, it was most likely not wise to remain on Tatooine, Obi-Wan worried – but he also knew he would ultimately do just that. He had two main reasons – for he indeed did not enjoy the climate – Luke was at home here and Anakin would come back here sooner or later. And sentimental or not, Obi-Wan had felt the conflict in the dark man – and could not stop to be hopeful following that. No matter what Bail Organa, Mon Mothma or indeed Master Yoda would say if they knew…
“You wanted to speak to me, Bail?” the radio croaked in the royal chambers of Alderaan. No visual, so they were not in a place that would enable a good connection. Likely hiding somewhere in a shadow of a deserted moon or an unmapped asteroid, Bail Organa thought as he sat down to the engine and replied.

“Yes, indeed,” he confirmed. “Is the line secure?” He checked, just to be sure.

“Aye. The frequency is clear,” the female voice on the other end confirmed and its owner sent in the security codes his question asked for.

“Excellent. Then I have a task for you. I need you to check on a friend of mine. He visited a few days ago and ever since there was a radio silence on his side.” Organa requested.

“He might have been abducted, you think?” She asked.

“I am afraid so. I will send you the coordinates of the place he should stay at. If he is there, do not disturb him. But should he not be in his residence, alert me immediately. He has a crucial task – safeguarding something very important to our future. I shall not mention that he is also a dear friend of mine – and indeed perhaps yours too. Good luck and may the Force be with you!”

“I will be in touch. May the Force be with you too!”

Obi-Wan refused to ponder it any longer. He had made his decision the moment he had found the unconscious Anakin – Vader – at his mother’s grave struggling for every breath in his young son’s weak and yet perfectly stable arms. He had not killed his one-time pupil then, allowing himself to hope for the first time in almost a decade. He could not lose the hope now, not when he had seen the bit of light in his dark companion during the previous few days – days that were fast becoming precious to him as any other memory of the man who once used to be his brother. Well, aside of that Temple security holo and the hell that Mustafar had been, he thought resolutely.

The decision made, he turned his thoughts back to the more practical matters – such as him omitting to report to Bail that he had returned back to Tatooine safely and everything was alright here on the planet.

As he reached for the transmitter, Kenobi startled – the engine was cracked and unusable. What the hell? he thought and then his thoughts returned to the past few days. He had let a man stay in his house, a man whose dark powers were unmatched in the Galaxy – being rivalled only by the Emperor’s own strength in the Dark Side. And that man, at least at one instant during his sojourn here had become so angry that he had drawn a lightsaber at him – he should actually be happy that the only thing he had broken was his radio, Obi-Wan mused. And truth be told, he was indeed glad – because this meant hope indeed, no matter how it looked like. If Anakin, Vader, was indeed as dark as he pretended – he would not have been stopped those few days ago, not by Obi-Wan and neither by Luke. A broken radio was well worth that hope.

Chapter End Notes

There are two new short fics written and published by me here on AO3, both in the Star
Wars universe - "After Malachor" and "Doubt." Enjoy, if you have not yet read them! (-: 

End Notes

If you like stories like this, with Darth Vader meeting young Luke and Obi-Wan, you might try three fics that inspired me to work on this piece:
- here on AO3: "We are all in the gutter" by arcticapple
- on fanfiction.net: "Qui Gon's Heirs" by Wuff (in particular I enjoy Part 2 - Chapters 24-47 where small Luke Skywalker plays a major role)
- also on fanfiction.net: "World Come Undone" by crazyundeadfairy (unfinished, but worth reading anyway)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!