After the End of the World

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Summary

There were some things Obi-Wan Kenobi could not do. She could not save Qui-Gon Jinn. She could not save Satine Kryze and she sure as hell could not kill Anakin Skywalker, no matter what Master Yoda said.

So what will she do? Where will she go after the birth of the Empire when the Jedi Order has fallen and no one needs High General Kenobi anymore?

Notes

A quick hello and small note! If you've read Copper and Gold, this work is not connected to it. Yes, Obi-Wan Kenobi is female but other than that everything in this story begins the same as it does in Revenge of the Sith, give or take my own particular interpretation of the characters.
A Wedding Present

“Tell me where he is, Padme.”

Obi-Wan Kenobi stood in the middle of Padme Amidala’s apartment, her arms folded over her chest and the line of her jaw hard and unyielding in spite of the sorrow in her eyes. She had come here, hoping against all rational hope and reason that the Senator would not know where Anakin was, that she would simply be what she had always claimed to be: a good, dear friend and not in any way romantically involved with him.

And then Obi-Wan saw that she was pregnant.

With twins.

Twins that glowed like binary stars about to go supernova.

There was no question as to the identity of the father.

She had prepared soft words for the Senator, gentle, pleading tones that would sway her to Obi-Wan’s side. They both loved Anakin and wanted what was best for him and surely Padme could agree that Obi-Wan finding him was a better alternative than more destruction and mayhem. More lives lost.

More slaughtered Jedi.

And yet, when the moment came, Obi-Wan could not find the sweet words of the Negotiator.

Not when Padme lied to her and told her she did not know where Anakin was.

“He is in danger,” Obi-Wan said, coming to Padme’s side, failing to plead her case.

“From the Sith?”

“From himself.”

What was she going to tell the Senator? That she had seen Anakin kneel before a Sith Lord? Slaughtering Jedi in the Temple? Was that how this conversation was going to transpire?

“I don’t know where he is,” Padme said, standing up and walking away from Obi-Wan in a swirl of blue fabric and anxiety. “He didn’t say where he was going.”

Obi-Wan did not need the Force to tell her that Padme was lying. She knew the Senator too well, knew her tells and the tics that gave her away. The morally upstanding Senator from Naboo was incapable of making eye contact when she lied, usually preferring a casual glance out the window or a distant gaze over her shoulder.

Lying directly to someone’s face was a skill the Senator never acquired.

“I need to find him, Padme,” Obi-Wan insisted, standing up to follow her, pressing her advantage. “This is bigger than the two of you, whatever it is you are to each other. He must be… found before it's too late.”

Padme whirled around, her brown eyes spitting fire, her posture the regal bearing of a former monarch. “Whatever we are to each other?! He is my husband, Obi-Wan. I will not betray his trust.”
Husband.

The word crashed like thunder in Obi-Wan’s soul but she could not think about it now. Later she would consider the word and let the edges of it rip open her spirit to bleed out on some forgotten planet far away, but for now all it was was another lie Anakin told her. Another piece of the puzzle that was cruelly spelling out how little she was wanted or needed in the galaxy she thought she had been a part of.

Anakin had married Padme.

Anakin had fathered children with Padme.

Had Obi-Wan ever really known him at all?

No matter. None of this mattered.

“Lie to me all you want but eventually he will come to you and when he does I will be waiting,” Obi-Wan said, her voice cold and pitiless. “Do not think for a moment you can protect him. You are carrying his children! Think sensibly, Padme! His actions have put even you at risk!”

She saw Padme flinch and felt sorry, but while she knew her words were harsh they were necessary. Someone has to make these two infants see reason.

“How... how did you know it was twins?” Padme whispered, looking back at Obi-Wan with shock and fear on her face as she smoothed a protective hand over her belly. “I haven't even told Anakin about them.”

Obi-Wan shrugged. “I am a Jedi.”

Perhaps the last one left.

“What has he done?” Padme whispered, staring out at the smoking ruins of the Jedi Temple. Obi-Wan could see that she already knew what Anakin had done but that didn't stop Padme from asking, from seeking confirmation.

“You already know.”

The Force swirled up around the two of them, a tempest of time and space, as if the next few moments would save or damn them all.

“Tell me where he is, Padme,” Obi-Wan commanded. “And I will bring him back to you.”

Padme closed her eyes and turned away from her reflection. “Mustafar. He's on Mustafar.”

“Go to Naboo,” Obi-Wan ordered as she walked towards the door. “Tell no one. Take your staff and go, today. As soon as I leave. I will bring Anakin to you on Naboo. I swear it.”

“Wait! Obi-Wan!” Padme cried out, hurrying after her as much as her heavy body would let her.

“What are you going to do?”

“What I must,” Obi-Wan answered, her voice low and hoarse and then she was gone, the noise of Coruscant filling her ears as she jumped into the aethersprite she took from the Temple and flew off into the breaking dawn.
Mustafar burned beneath Obi-Wan, almost as angry and hot as she felt deep beneath the fathoms of ice and cold she now kept her heart in. Once she had imagined her soul to be water, an ocean warmed by the sun with a blue sky above it, but the sky had fallen, only utter darkness and the painful searing burn of ice remaining.

But that didn’t matter. None of that mattered.

The astromech chirped that there was a free landing pad and asked for permission to set in a course. She agreed, not really caring where they landed.

She did not want to be here.

And yet here she was.

The landing cycle ran down quickly enough and the canopy jerked open, buffeted by the convection winds thrown up by the volcanic planet. Obi-Wan pushed herself out of her ship, instructing the astromech to keep the engine warm. She wasn’t sure if there was a passenger ship on this melted rock of a moon but if push came to shove, it was possible to fit two to an aethersprite.

Especially if the second passenger was knocked unconscious by a punch from their enraged former Jedi Master.

Obi-Wan took a moment to breathe, to let her rage and betrayal sink into the frigid waters, freezing in the blue ice where it would do no harm. It would do no good to feel those emotions, to let them make havoc of her heart and her mind. Those emotions would only lead to screaming, crying and possibly throwing up the contents of her stomach into the steaming lava rocks she walked past.

No. A Jedi did not feel what Obi-Wan was feeling.

Feelings did not matter.

Her boots clipped across the metal walkway as she marched towards the control installation, her outer robe billowing behind her. The shorter and looser strands of her hair broke free from the simple braid she wore it in and she was glad it had been done with her clumsy fingers and not a style Anakin had fretted over as a form of moving meditation.

There were no traces of what they had once been to each other.

No. What she had imagined they were to each other.

He had a secret wife and children.

She hadn’t mattered to him.

The door to the installation opened and Anakin stepped out into the red-gold hell world of Mustafar, his jaw set and his eyes blazing with rage. “How did you find me?”

“I asked your wife,” Obi-Wan bit each word out like they were covered in spines.

Anakin looked confused for a moment and then when realization dawned on him he took a step forward, a towering shadow of menace. “If you hurt her… I will kill you.”

“Your wife is quite well,” she sniffed, standing up tall, her chin raised in defiant spite. “I wish I could say the same for the Republic, but you never did care very much for it, did you?”

“I have brought peace to the galaxy, Obi-Wan!” Anakin insisted, gesturing wildly, feverishly. “I
have destroyed the Separatist threat! I am becoming the strongest Jedi that has ever lived! Stronger
than even the Emperor!”

Obi-Wan folded her arms over her chest and pursed her lips. Anakin had always been prone to
flights of fancy and daydreams but these were delusions of grandeur and lies. Whatever nonsense
Palpatine had fed him, he had swallowed it hook, line and sinker.

Her Anakin was gone, never to return.

Her boy was lost.

The horizon line was gone and all there would ever be inside Obi-Wan’s soul was black ice and
silence.

Not that it mattered.

“Yes, that’s all well and good but it’s time to go,” Obi-Wan sighed, suddenly very tired and bone
weary. Three years of almost constant fighting, bleeding and war seemed to settle on her shoulders
and she found her muscles trembling, threatening to rebel against the idea of an armed conflict
against Anakin of all people. It did not matter what Master Yoda said or wanted of her.

She could not kill Anakin.

She would not.

There were some things not even the Perfect Jedi could do.

*I loved you. Didn’t you notice? I loved and loved you so. I laughed for you. Smiled. I let you break
my heart and morals and bones because I loved you.*

*And you never even noticed me. Cast me off just as quickly as you did your braid.*

*I do not matter to you.*

*To anyone.*

“Go?” Anakin spoke again, his growl low but threaded with a hesitant sound almost like confusion.

“Go where? I am awaiting my master’s orders.”

“No,” Obi-Wan shook her head, scanning the area for a passenger ship and was surprised to see
Artoo trundling slowly toward them. “You are going to Naboo to be with your wife who is carrying
your children, Anakin.”

“What?” he gaped, shock washing over him, flooding the area around him in the Force. “Naboo?
Children? Have you gone mad, Obi-Wan?”

“Artoo?” Obi-Wan asked the astromech politely. “Is there a hyperdrive capable passenger ship in this
hellhole?”

The white and blue droid whistled in the affirmative, swiveling its blue dome to point out the location
of the ship, not all that far away.

Nodding, she turned back to Anakin, her hands on her hips. “Good. Let’s go. We’re leaving.”

“I am not leaving!” he protested, a ghost of a memory of arguments past shading his words. “You are
no longer my master! Darth Sidious is wise and powerful! He’s nothing like you, Jedi.”
Obi-Wan rolled her eyes and sent the droid off to commandeer the ship as she marched over to Anakin, grim determination in her eyes and a mulish stubbornness in her jaw. He took a step back as she stalked towards him, pulling out his saber in a warning but she smacked his hand away, jabbing a finger at his chest.

“I promised your *kriffing wife* that I would bring you to her on Naboo,” Obi-Wan glowered, a radiant tower of frozen anger and bitterness. “You left her alone, on Coruscant, where that twisted Sith bastard could leisurely take his time destroying her while you were off doing Force only knows what!”

Anakin blinked, stunned silent by this display of common sense.

He was suddenly very worried about Padme.

“But!” Obi-Wan continued, warming up to her topic. “Thankfully, your Naboo Queen saw reason and told me where you are. So now you are going to get on that ship and we are going to fly to Naboo and then you will have the great pleasure of explaining to Padme why you and Palpatine destroyed the very Republic she fought all her life to preserve.”

Anakin paled beneath his tan and opened his mouth to defend himself.

“No!” she snapped, jabbing him in the chest again. “You will have to explain to her why you turned against the Jedi! Why you knelt before that horrid nightmare of a man and called him Master! Why you will stand behind him as he dismantles democracy piece by piece! But most importantly, you will have to explain to Padme why you betrayed and murdered innocent people in cold blood!”

Anakin closed his mouth and said nothing.


There was a moment, tortured and still, as if the Force held its breath, unsure of which way the path of fate would unspool.

Obi-Wan closed her eyes for a moment and inhaled, preparing to bodily haul Anakin off if necessary.

It wasn’t.

Anakin turned towards the ship and started walking, his profile tall, remote and thunderous.

She let out a sigh of relief, thankful that it hadn’t come to blows between them. She commed the astromech in her small fighter to power down and followed after Anakin and Artoo, who let out a low whistle of greeting. Obi-Wan had never been the type to become attached to droids, not like Anakin and Ahsoka but she had to admit, it was nice to have at least one friendly face around.

“I’m sorry you’ve been dragged into this little one,” Obi-Wan said, patting the droid on the head. “Lets leave this hellish place. Please go plug in the coordinates to Naboo.”

Artoo whistled in the affirmative and Obi-Wan followed after the droid, her footsteps heavy as she walked into the ship.
The flight to Naboo was silent.

Anakin brooded in the co-pilot seat as Obi-Wan meditated in the pilot’s chair.

Well, she tried to meditate.

Naboo was surprisingly close to Mustafar and they spent roughly four hours in hyperspace before they jumped back into realspace in the Chommel sector. Naboo appeared before them, lush green and blues threaded with white clouds and Obi-Wan realized that she hated this planet, or rather, she hated everything the planet came to stand for her in her mind.

Naboo was where every good thing in Obi-Wan’s life came to die.

Technically that’s not true. Satine died on Mandalore.

Somehow that didn’t make her feel any better.

“Artoo? I trust you already know where we’re going?” Obi-Wan asked, politely acidic.

Artoo whistled a sad affirmative and she wondered for a moment if she hurt the little droid’s feelings. Why she was suddenly concerned about the droids feelings she couldn’t really say but it seemed important to her that the little astromech take her side on this.

That she wasn't alone in this insanity and chaos.

Anakin would have leapt to the defense of his little blue friend but the man next to her said nothing.

Perhaps it was time she started calling the man in Anakin’s clothing by his new name, Darth Vader.

If she could just pretend that Anakin was gone on a mission, just for a little bit longer, maybe it would all be okay. This stranger was just a person she needed to drop off on behalf of Senator Amidala and then she would fly back to the Temple and everyone would be there alive and whole. The war would be over and Ahsoka would be there and still wearing her Padawan beads over her montrals.

She could pretend for a little bit, couldn’t she?

Obi-Wan’s spirit accidentally brushed against the place where Anakin should have been, where the background glow of her Jedi brothers and sisters should have been, and their absence cut through her pathetic attempt to shield herself from the enormity of her loss.

The ice of her spirit cracked and splintered and for a brief moment she wondered if her heart was simply going to stop beating, if it was possible to die of a broken heart.

She wondered if Lord Vader would care and when she decided he probably wouldn’t, the pain nearly did her in.

Artoo whistled that they were coming in for a landing and that the autopilot would take over for the last hundred meters.

“Thank you, Artoo,” Obi-Wan murmured and barricaded her shields with the jagged, frozen pieces of her heart as she turned to Vader. She watched him frown out at the front cockpit window, his arms folded over his chest, his hands tucked in. His expression was stony and the line of his jaw was tense. She imagined he had not expected his triumphant ascension to the dark side would end like this, dragged from the mouth of hell to be deposited like so much baggage at the feet of his wife.
His wife. He married her.

*Oh, sweet Force, I was so blind and stupid.*

They had a few more minutes before the ship would land and she could already sense Padme and the unborn twins. This would be the last few minutes she ever intended to spend with Lord Vader and so she supposed she should say something to him.

“Why did you bring me here?” Vader asked, his eyes focused on the dashboard as the ship slowly descended. He did not move or change his tone but it was clear that he expected an answer.

Obi-Wan thought for a moment as the ship chimed through the proximity sensors. Her reasons were opaque, even to herself and what she did understand, she wasn’t going to tell a Sith Lord. She couldn’t really comprehend that these would be the last words she would ever say to Anakin, her Padawan, her partner, her best friend.

How could this possibly be the end of their time together?

She had always assumed that when she died he would be by her side.

And yet, even now, Anakin wasn’t really here.

Lord Vader sat in his place wearing his face and speaking with his voice.

“Consider it a wedding present,” Obi-Wan said, turning back to the cockpit window. “My last gift to the woman who married my friend. She still believes in him.”

Vader seemed to turn just a fraction towards her. “This is for Padme?”

Obi-Wan imagined the unspoken question hanging between them. *You are defying the will of destiny and fate for Padme? Out of loyalty to a friend? That is all?*

“Yes,” Obi-Wan nodded. “For Padme and Anakin’s children.”

“Children?” Vader echoed and she could tell that shocked him, that something had reached through whatever hate and fury he cloaked himself in to touch the raw and beating heart hidden under all of that dark armor.

He almost sounded like Anakin again.

“Twins,” Obi-Wan replied as the ship sighed and then the landing gear ground out from the bottom of vessel as they came to a stop in the lake district of Naboo, just outside of the Varykino estate owned by the Naberrie family. “If you hurt them in any way, Vader, I will find you and kill you. Do I make myself clear, *Darth*? Those children are to never be harmed for if you do, I will bring an end to you and your Sith line.”

This drew the Sith Lord’s attention and he looked up at her, his eyes round with surprise. He opened his mouth to say something and she turned away, her robe billowing behind her as she moved to the back of the ship to open the landing ramp.

She didn’t care anymore about what he had to say. She was ice and her shields were glaciers grown over the shattered pieces of her soul.

No matter what she might have felt as the door opened, she told herself that nothing happened.

Darth Vader stood up and walked over to stand at the top of the ramp as the old freighter’s
pneumatics groaned to a stop. He glanced over at Obi-Wan, who did not acknowledge his glance and merely held out her hand.

“Your wife is waiting for you, Lord Vader,” Obi-Wan said, throat raw from the finality of it all.

Darth Vader walked down the ramp and out into the midday sun of Naboo and over to Padme, who hurried to him and flung her arms around him. There were tears and reassuring words, confusion and kisses. Obi-Wan watched from the pneumatic strut that controlled the landing ramp, her hand over her mouth and her eyes itching with barely bottled up emotion.

_I should go now while they’re so wrapped up in each other._ Obi-Wan turned back up the ramp and started initiating the takeoff sequence. She flipped through the necessary switches and diagnostic run downs before she walked back down the ramp.

“She cried out as she re-emerged from the ship’s shadow. The former Queen hurried over to her and flung her arms around the exhausted Jedi Master. “Thank you! Thank you so much! You brought him back to me! I can never thank you enough. There are... there are no words. You are a true friend to us and I will forever be in your debt, Obi-Wan. Please, come stay with us here for a few days. You’ll be safe here, I promise.”

Obi-Wan nodded at Padme as she stepped back from her hug. She watched the pregnant woman return to Vader’s side and Obi-Wan took a breath before plastering a fake smile on her face. “I need to check a few things on the ship. Why don’t you two go on ahead?”

“Obi-Wan?” Vader’s voice contained a question and it sounded heart breakingly like Anakin’s.

But he wasn’t Anakin. Not as far as she was concerned.

“Please go inside. Padme should be resting and it has been a stressful day for all of us.” Obi-Wan bowed, her hands folded together as she bowed to the couple. “I’ll be right behind you as always, Anakin.”

There. That should get them to clear the take-off perimeter.

Padme glanced up at her husband, her eyes hopeful and her expression tremulous as they turned away from the ship. She wrapped her hands around his left hand and gently tugged the tall man away from the ship he had arrived in.

Obi-Wan waited for Vader to break eye contact before she turned back to the ship.

_Can this really be the last time I ever see Anakin?_

He looked back at her, his blue eyes asking questions she did not have the will or strength to parse out but it seemed even he sensed she was up to something. The glacial ice around her shields shifted but she did not.

She would not.

_Go. Go with the woman and children you destroyed the galaxy for._

Anakin turned away and squeezed Padme’s hand, helping her down the hill as they slowly sank down out of her view and that was the last Obi-Wan saw of either of them.

She closed her eyes and hurried back into the ship, pushing the button to pull up the landing ramp and cycling the engines for take off. The ramp was much quieter closing than opening and Obi-Wan
thanked the Force for its small mercies. She pulled off her cloak and flung it into the co-pilot’s chair, sliding into the pilot’s seat with boneless exhaustion.

Artoo whistled a greeting and Obi-Wan jumped in surprise. “What are you doing here? Anakin has already left with Padme.”

The blue and white droid twisted its blue dome back and forth and whistled something in binary. When Obi-Wan explained that she didn’t understand or have time, Artoo rolled himself over to a data port and plugged into the ship’s systems which helpfully translated for the Jedi.

If my service is acceptable, I will stay with Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi. I do not wish to serve Darth Vader.

Obi-Wan chuckled weakly as she leaned against the dashboard. “And why is that?”

Darth Vader is not Anakin Skywalker.

Shrugging, Obi-Wan turned back to the joystick and fired up the boosters. “Suit yourself, Artoo, but I can assure you that I will not be half the droid repairman that Anakin was.”

No one will be. The droid replied and for a moment Obi-Wan wondered if the little blue and white astromech felt just as betrayed as she did. “If you would be so kind, please initiate take off.”

Obi-Wan was too busy piloting to hear the storm trying to break through the glaciers covering her spirit in the Force and she did not listen when a distraught voice called out a last heartbroken question.

Obi-Wan! Where are you going? OBI-WAN!!

“Away,” she whispered as the ship jumped into the atmosphere and took off for the pitch blackness of space.

She didn’t allow herself to break down until they were in the safety of hyperspace and when she did, Obi-Wan cried herself into an exhausted slump over the dashboard and gladly welcomed unconsciousness when it came.
Chapter Summary

Obi-Wan Kenobi vanished into the galaxy after returning Anakin Skywalker, no, Darth Vader to his wife, Padme Amidala, on Naboo.

Three years later, Mina Kenobi, a mysterious "spinster witch" lives on the edge of the village of Three Rivers and serves as the local curiosity.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Three years later…

“Artoo? Would you be so kind as to bring me that bag of starters?”

The white and blue former astromech beeped in the affirmative and reached out with a grappling extension to pick up a small, burlap sack of purple Alderaanian tubers. The little droid dragged the bag over the fresh spring grass to deposit it at the side of Mina Kenobi, the “mysterious spinster” who lived at the edge of the small village of Three Rivers. She smiled in thanks at the droid, patting his metal body with affection, Artoo whistling cheerfully before retreating back under the protective shade of a tall, twisting burning oak tree.

Mina was working her way down the furrows of her garden when she sensed the approach of three visitors, who were trying very hard to be quiet as they attempted to sneak up on Miss Mina the Witch. It was the second time that day and the third time that week for this particular group of children and she found their dogged determination to surprise her almost charming.

“If you three are going to insist on interrupting my planting them I shall be obliged to put you three to work,” Mina said as she sat up and pushed her straw hat off of her forehead and glanced over at the place where the children were hidden, two crouching behind Artoo (that traitor) and one who had managed to haul himself halfway up into the burning oak. “Seraphina? Dromas? Tallus? What have I told you three about sneaking around my property?”

“Don’t get caught?” Dromas laughed from where he was stuck in the tree. “Could you help me down, Miss Mina?”

“Don’t look at me,” Mina snorted with a twinkle in her eye, returning to her tubers. “You got yourself up there and you can get yourself down. I have complete faith in your roguish capabilities.”

“But you have magic!” Seraphina insisted, her small hands clasped together over her heart. “I saw you! You can make things fly with magic!”

“And when did you see that?” Mina asked, as she finished off one row and started working her way down the next one. “Don’t stand there like a stormtrooper, Tallus. Help your little brother.”

Tallus reached up into the tree to grab Dromas and guide him back down to the ground. Dromas brushed himself off before he hurried past the astromech and Seraphina, his green eyes bright and his floppy hair dark like freshly tilled soil. “Miss Mina! Can you teach me magic? I want to learn how to
Mina Kenobi sat back on her heels and let out a resigned puff of air, her eyes shifting from child to child. “Who told you I do magic? Hmmm? Seraphina?”

“I saw you!” the little girl insisted, her hair a wild halo of dark curls around a cherubic face. “When I was sick and Mumma called you! You… you made stuff fly!”

“Did I?” Mina chuckled, handing out tuber starters to the children and instructing them how far apart to place them. “As I recall, you were sick with the scarlet fever. You’re hardly a reliable witness.”

Seraphina covered her tuber and frowned at Tallus, who had returned to Miss Mina for another tuber to plant. “What’s a ‘reliable witness’?”

“She means you were dreaming and you didn’t really see it,” Tallus shrugged, carefully marking the new spot for his plant.

“But you have an astromech!” Dromas protested, gesturing with a newly muddied hand at Artoo, who lazily turned its head towards the noise. “That’s an R series astromech from Industrial Atoma…atom… It’s a droid designed for starfighters!”

Mina sat up with a sigh. “I think that’s enough help for today. You three should go back home to your families.”

Dromas, perhaps sensing he had stumbled upon some secret vein of truth that Miss Mina wanted kept hidden, dug in his heels and balled up his fists. “No! I don’t want to go home! I want to see the starfighter and learn magic!”

Seraphina gasped, dropping her tuber in shock at her brother’s rudeness. “Dromas!”

Tallus rolled his moss green eyes and muttered. “Great. Now she’s going to curse us.”

Mina shook her head, waving one hand before her. “There is no starfighter.”

All three children found themselves tired and blinking as they repeated after Miss Mina the Witch. “There is no starfighter.”

“I do not have any magic,” she continued, her fingers making a slow and gentle circle in the air before her.

“You do not have any magic.”

The children came to, yawning and puzzled but happy to take their leave of Miss Mina and run back down the lane to the village where their parents were waiting. They waved their goodbyes and soon silence reigned over the little garden, Mina finishing off the last row before she stood up and let out a soft groan. “By the Force! Who knew gardening was so difficult?”

Artoo let out a whistle of concern and rolled over to her.

“I’m fine, Artoo.” Mina said, patting the blue dome of the droid before turning back to their house. “I’m just getting old is all.”

Chirping in disagreement, the droid followed her, dragging the bag of starters back to the storage crate. Mina pushed the lid up with the toe of her boot and the droid dropped it in.

“That’s very kind of you but I don’t think humans can be upgraded like that.”
Artoo let out a burble of disbelief but Mina simply chuckled and shook her head. “You flatter me, my old friend, but I assure you that I would make for a poor cyborg.”

“Mina” Kenobi came to the Alderaanian colony world of Arcadia just after the birth of the Empire. Her papers were impeccable and according to her immigration records she hailed from Alderaan, where she had served in the Royal Civil Service. Seeking a life of peace and tranquility, she retired to Arcadia where she purchased a homestead and served as the local mystery. She was just strange enough to be interesting but not so odd that she would stand out in an Imperial Census or pop up when an intelligence officer ran a search algorithm for hidden Jedi.

Lucky for her, Kenobis were a dime a dozen in the galaxy. There had been several Kenobis on Coruscant when she was a Jedi and on Arcadia there was a large family who lived two villages away who didn’t even come from her birth planet.

Obi-Wan Kenobi was content with her new identity and had every intention of living the rest of her life on her little patch of green, trading insults with Artoo and tricking nosy children into weeding her garden. She traveled to the village to trade for goods and food and once a season she and Artoo would take the landspeeder to distant Privon to purchase hardware and other items one could not acquire from the traveling merchants who came to the village of Three Rivers.

She had to give it to Bail Organa. When he promised her a safe haven and a quiet exile, he meant it.

“Are there any messages for me?” Obi-Wan asked Artoo as she put a small stainless steel kettle of water onto the warming hot plate.

Artoo warbled out that there was one message but there was no message on Mina’s comm unit.

“What?” Obi-Wan asked, puzzled, walking back over to the astromech and squatting in front of it. “What do you mean there is a message but it’s not on Mina’s comm?”

Snorting, Artoo spun its dome before pointing its large, round lens at the charging bays where two comms sat. Mina’s was charging while another one, older and more weathered than it had any right to be, rested. It was half-hidden under the sleeve of a loose brown shirt that had seen better days.

The droid whistled forlornly before backing up and rolling away.

Obi-Wan walked over to the charging station and gingerly plucked the General’s comm from its unintended hiding place. She ran a finger along the dial, waiting for the battery to cycle before the comm spit out the identifying code.

Frowning, she deleted the message unheard, tucking the comm back away again.

“Wrong number, Artoo. Nothing to worry about.”

The next few months passed in contented isolation. Obi-Wan tended to her garden, read her books, and meditated, sometimes in her home and sometimes she would wander deep into the forests her homestead sat on the edge of. She found a nice clearing with soft moss and grass where everything faded away, leaving her alone with the Force. She would stretch her spirit out reaching beyond her small island of peace to the rest of the galaxy, which writhed and seized with each new permutation of darkness inflicted upon it by the Empire.

The Force was wild, untamed and mad with grief at the loss of so many of its children by the hand of its favorite child. The aching void of light pulsed and throbbed if she concentrated on it for too long and so Obi-Wan settled for focusing on the essence of the planet she was exiled on.
Arcadia was full of life, of comings and goings, of love and laughter, heartbreak and loss. It was a microcosm of the galaxy at large and it was easier to contemplate the mysteries of the Force when it was smaller and more intimate.

But every few weeks, there would be a message on the General’s comm unit, from the same number and every time Obi-Wan would erase the message without listening. Artoo asked why she didn’t deactivate the unit one day and she explained, “I keep it in case someone needs my help. Someone I cannot refuse.”

Artoo asked if there was anyone in particular she was referring to.

“Artoooy, there are times when I wonder if you don’t possess a bit of Force sensitivity,” Obi-Wan chuckled, ending that line of conversation.

It was nearing the summer solstice when Obi-Wan decided to make a journey to Privon, to get a new generator for her home and to take Artoo to a proper maintenance mechanic. She piled the droid into the back of her landspeeder and dropped her bag into the passenger seat before she turned back to the trio of children who had failed yet again to surprise Miss Mina the Witch. “Now, can I rely on you three to protect my garden while I am gone?”

Tallus nodded, saluting in a smart, Imperial fashion. “Ma’am! Yes, ma’am!”

Mina smiled, her heart spasming with pain. “It’s ‘sir’, Tallus. You address your commanding officer as ‘sir’ no matter their gender.”

Tallus grinned, thinking he had discovered another piece of Mysterious Mina’s past as he repeated his salute with the proper sobriquet.

Dromas tried to match his elder brother’s stiff posture and seriousness but he was suffering from a bad case of allergies and broke down in a fit of sneezes. “Be... c-careful... Mi-miss ACHOO!”

Mina leaned down to ruffle Dromas’s hair, letting the Force unspool from behind her tightly meshed shields, encouraging the little boy’s body to relax and to stop fighting the allergens so vociferously. He might not notice the effect right away but she was certain he would start sleeping better that night. She was not the best of healers but it was better than nothing and the poor little thing looked exhausted.

“Of course you are in charge of these two hooligans,” Mina nodded to Seraphina, whose hair had been tamed with an artful arrangement of braids and brightly colored beads. “See to it that they do not let my garden die should the rains not fall before I return in two weeks’ time.”

“Yes, Miss Mina!” Seraphina giggled, darting over to her and throwing her arms around the older woman. “Will you bring us back a present from Privon?”

“Yes, Miss Mina!” Seraphina giggled, darting over to her and throwing her arms around the older woman. “Will you bring us back a present from Privon?”

“Will you be good, dutiful children while I am gone?” Mina asked, squatting down to be the same height as her young friends. “Or will I come home to find out that you have been terrible rapscallions and have driven your dear parents to madness?”

Tallus insisted that they would be good soldiers and saluted again, worrying Mina a bit. Dromas promised he would make sure the sheep and deer stayed out of the garden and Seraphina promised to...
boss both older boys around, showing great enthusiasm for the task.

Deciding that her garden was in good hands, also due to the fact she and Artoo had already set up a heavy duty perimeter system, Mina took her leave of the children, letting them pile into her landspeeder next to Artoo as she drove them down to the village.

Coming to a stop at the village square, Mina bid each child a fond farewell as they scampered off towards their home, promising to take care of her homestead while she was gone. Other villagers nodded greetings to her and more than one came over to ask her to pick up items on order for them at Privon. She was more than happy to be useful and left Artoo in the speeder to duck into the cantina to get herself something for the road.

The cantina was quiet as the owner and the server cleaned up after the midday rush. There was a holoscreen relaying the local system news, providing details about the upcoming Imperial Senate elections and illustrating the differences between the two candidates, of which there were depressingly few. She listened with half an ear, waiting for Fresta, the owner, to fix up her meal and then be on her way.

“Is it time for another trip to Privon already, Miss Mina?” Fresta asked, giving her a broad grin as he worked behind the counter. “Weren’t you just there three months ago?”

“Indeed,” she nodded, glancing back at the landspeeder where Artoo was burbling indignantly at another droid. “I don’t mind. I like to be useful and it’s much easier for me and Artoo to make the trip than someone like the Belks with their three children and a speeder that’s older than I am.”

“What will you do when you have your own husband and passel of children to worry about?” Fresta leaned over the bar to indicate with zero subtlety how much he would like to be said hypothetical husband.

Smiling politely, Mina demurred. “I do not think that is in the cards for me, Fresta. The man I loved was killed in the Clone Wars.”

“You could always find a new one,” the cantina owner suggested, giving it one last, good-natured shot. “You’re a beautiful woman, Mina. It seems a shame for you to waste away your life planting tatoes and running errands. Why not return to Alderaan and find yourself a rich noble to take care of you?”

Obi-Wan reminded herself that Fresta meant no harm. The people of Arcadia were more conservative than her upbringing on Coruscant and that “Mina” would not take offense at the idea of being “taken care of”.

“That part of my life is over, my friend,” she murmured, exchanging a few credits for the packed lunch. “Thank you, Fresta. Shall I pick anything up for you?”

“Just a smile, Mina,” Fresta replied, giving her his own charming grin. “You don’t smile enough.”

Obi-Wan forced a smile to Mina’s face and then turned, heading back out to her landspeeder and shooing more local children away from Artoo. “Oh honestly! Artoo is not a magical droid!”

Fresta shook his head, thinking it was a damn shame some young thing hadn’t come along to woo and wed her. Mina was the kind of woman who could take care of herself, who would make a man better by knowing her. She reminded him of Queen Breha and he hoped one day he would be able to convince her that he would make a fine Viceroy for his Spinster Queen.

“Hey! Turn up the holoscreen! The Empire’s making an announcement!”
The road to Privon had been cleared and in theory there were energy barriers that protected travellers but more often than not, the constant barrage of wildlife and improper maintenance left people unprotected. Obi-Wan enjoyed the challenge of making the journey without having to resort to using a blaster or, if all else failed, her lightsaber, seeing it as a challenge Satine would have approved of.

Satine would not have approved of this particular jaunt.

“Sith hells! Are these bloody armored nuisances migrating?” Obi-Wan scowled as she levitated another armored black deer over the fritzing barrier and clambered back into her landspeeder. “That’s the fourth one this trip.”

Artoo warbled a dry observation.

“What do you mean I was going too fast?” Obi-Wan huffed, turning the speeder engine back on. “I was proceeding at the designated speed limit! How could I possibly be going too fast for Anakin Skywalker’s astromech?”

Artoo retorted that Anakin Skywalker would have missed the last two deer and Obi-Wan rolled her eyes as they took off down the road. Artoo chirped that next time Obi-Wan should time their travel to avoid the migration patterns of armored black deer.

“Yes, I suppose that might be something to look up at the library when we get there,” Obi-Wan agreed as they sped off. “If we make it there, which we might not at this rate. Such a pity Anakin Skywalker’s astromech cannot pilot the landspeeder and get us there faster.”

Artoo let out a trill of laughter and conceded the argument.

They arrived in Privon a day later than they intended but their rooms were still available. Obi-Wan dropped Artoo off at his favorite mechanic and was told the little droid would be ready in a week’s time. She took his repair ticket and Artoo reminded her to research the migrating patterns of armored black deer before suggesting she get the General’s com repaired.

“Why would I do that?” Obi-Wan sniffed, her mouth pulled into a thin line. “It’s not broken.”

Artoo cooed in disagreement.

“Perhaps the sending comm is broken,” Obi-Wan shrugged, looking out at the hustle and bustle of Privon. “It does not matter. I did not bring it with me. Enjoy your repairs, my friend. I will see you in a week.”

Circling around to follow the mechanic back into the garage, Artoo warbled a good bye.

The next week was a pleasant diversion from homestead life. Obi-Wan purchased books and supplies, picked up items for the village and ate some off-world cuisine she had been craving since her last trip. She walked around the city, positively tiny compared to Core World standards but it was
charming and safe, with a minimum amount of Imperial presence. There were recruiters and the occasional stormtrooper security detail trailing after a visiting dignitary but for the most part Privon was too small to warrant the attention of the rest of the Empire.

Which didn’t mean Privon wasn’t interested in the Empire. The whole city was abuzz with rumors and whispers that were overheard on offworld travels, spread through the holonet like wildfire or confidentially shared from one person to the next. Obi-Wan gave them as much heed as she felt was prudent, taking note of large scale engagements against systems that refused to submit to the Empire and any rumors of traitorous Jedi.

In the early days of the Empire, there were scattered reports of Jedi fighting against the new regime, of small bands of them launching suicidal assaults on old Republic, now Imperial stations and ships. Each name and face flashing on a screen in a cafe or a cantina was another number added to Obi-Wan’s tally. Another life she had failed, had allowed to come to an unnatural end.

In the first bloody year, she carved nearly a hundred names into her spirit, reminding herself that if it were not for a moment of weakness and attachment, those Jedi might still be alive somewhere.

While there was no proof, and the Empire never really indicated who executed the traitorous Jedi, Obi-Wan knew who was behind those deaths.

Darth Vader.

Not that they called him that on the holonet.

Anakin Skywalker was still the Hero with No Fear, the Last Jedi and a First Citizen of the Empire. He stalked through footage like a malevolent shadow, his eyes artificially blue and his posture just as tall and proud as always. From time to time, Obi-Wan would watch him stand behind Emperor Palpatine, watch them receive the supplication of new worlds, desperate to join the prosperous Empire. There were other videos, grainy and blurry where he would cut his way through swaths of enemies, securing more “peace” for a war-torn and fractured galaxy.

She never watched for very long.

This time Privon was abuzz over a rumor that Lord Skywalker, who had recently been given a title from one of the abandoned Great Houses, and his beautiful wife, the former Queen of Naboo, were expecting another child. The Empire was denying it, of course, but every reputable talk show was gossiping about what gender the new child would be and if it would take after its father or mother.

There were countless blurry and grainy photos of the happy couple, standing side by side, waving to the populace at parades or visiting new planets admitted into the Empire. The official Imperial press releases were aflutter with official pictures of the new home the family had moved into a year and a half ago.

Obi-Wan observed the Imperial propaganda without comment, doing her best to ignore whenever word of Lord and Lady Skywalker intruded on her quiet isolation. This worked, for the most part, until her last day in Privon, when a new rumor bubbled up from the gutters of the galaxy.

“A shocking development! Anakin Skywalker attends the Coruscant Opera Season Opening Gala without his beautiful wife Padme at his side! More after a word from our sponsors!”

Obi-Wan was sitting at a small cafe, reading one of her data pads as a clutch of young females of all colors and species burst into excited chatter as the newest gossip from the Core. They loudly declared the marriage a sham and insisted that there was no way the petite former Queen from Naboo
was ever going to hold onto Skywalker. Yes, their marriage had been a magical occasion, the highest rated live event on the holonet in two centuries, but now that Skywalker was free from the Jedi Order surely he was going to cut loose and have a little fun.

Gritting her teeth and pinching the bridge of her nose, Obi-Wan tried to ignore the chattering hens.

“My cousin saw him during a trip to Alderaan,” one of the girls boasted. “She said he was even more handsome in person, that his eyes were bluer than the sky overhead.”

“I stole his poster from my brother’s wall when he went away to university,” another girl giggled, as they all gasped in delight at her brazenness. “He still hasn’t noticed that I put him on the ceiling so he can watch over me while I sleep.”

Obi-Wan wanted to throw up, equal parts impressed and horrified with the effectiveness of the Imperial propaganda machine.

And then the gossip show turned from its break and the hosts started teasing a brief red carpet interview from the man of the hour. The young maidens clustered closer sighing at his picture and cooing over the tragic and romantic figure of The Last Jedi, betrayed by all he held dear. The last defender of the Republic.

*He is not a Jedi! He destroyed the Republic and the Order! He is the traitor and murderer!* 

A geyser of anger burst forth, out of Obi-Wan’s control, and she clenched her hand, using the Force to change the channel to a child’s program as the beautiful young women protested loudly and petulantly, demanding the control to the holoscreen but by the time they got their hands on it, the interview was over and the gossip mill was onto the next manufactured scandal.

The hole in her chest bled and Obi-Wan quietly stood up, gathered her data pad and paid for her tea before walking off to reclaim Artoo and return to Three Rivers.

*And even now, I love him still. I am no better than they are.*

The garden was in perfect health when Obi-Wan returned to find Tallus, Dromas and Seraphina in the middle of watering it. Artoo whistled a greeting as the children hurried over to the gate, clamoring for stories, candies and presents, two of which were immediately forthcoming.

“There is one for each of you,” she said, laughing as handed each child two packages, one wrapped in fabric and the other wrapped in foil. The foil wrapped packages contained their favorite sweets and the fabric packages were small items the children had expressed interest in at one time or another. “And do not eat all of it at once! That should last you at least a week.”

“Thank you, Miss Mina!” the children cried, full of joy before they began to detail each and every thing they had done while she was gone, a torrent of youthful delight and pride.

“We weeded the tatoes!”

“And we ran off an armor-back deer! He was gonna eat your beans!”

“How terrible!” Mina gasped, carrying her packages into the house as the children followed her,
each one helpfully carrying a small parcel. “Were you hurt?”

“No! We borrowed Papa’s sonic gun!”

“And we watered the tomatoes and chased away the redcapped birds!”

“And then we climbed all the way up the burning oak!”

Mina blinked in surprise, looking down at Dromas, who handed her a small box of first aid supplies.
“You climbed to the top of my tree? How courageous!”

Dromas beamed, proud of himself. “But I couldn’t find your starfighter.”

“That’s because she doesn’t have one,” Tallus grumbled, putting a small chest of clothing over by
the window. “Oh! Miss Mina? Your comm has a bunch of messages.”

Frowning, Obi-Wan realized that he was holding up the General’s comm, as Mina’s was tucked
safely in her pocket. “Thank you, Tallus. I will listen to them later.”

“This one’s pretty old,” the boy observed, turning it over in his hands. “Where’d you get it?”

“I used it during the Clone Wars,” she explained, marching over to reclaim the comm and ruffle
Tallus’s sun-bleached hair. “Viceroy Organa was very active in mercy missions and sometimes we
needed a way to contact him outside of standard lines of communication.”

“Like if he got caught by Separatists?” Dromas asked, Seraphina gasping at his side. “Will you tells
us? Please, Miss Mina? Please?”

“Perhaps another time,” Mina smiled, reminding herself that the children meant no offense. “Don’t
you have presents to unwrap and sweets to eat?”

Remembering their new largess, the trio ran out the door, waving back as they ran, letting out
whoops of delight once they thought they were out of earshot. Artoo rolled into the house once the
children were gone and let out a questioning note.

“Nothing my old friend,” she sighed, putting the comm back. “Let’s get the new generator set up
before dusk.”

Later that night, under the silver glow of triple moons, Obi-Wan deleted all seven messages from the
same identification number.

The latest flurry of messages brought the number of messages to nearly thirty in the span of six
months.

Obi-Wan did not sleep well that night. She dreamt of durasteel hands strangling her and golden eyes
crying. Just as she gasped her last, they were gone with a whispered plea she could not make out.

Chapter End Notes

Hello! Happy New Years! Here’s hoping 2017 brings you all you want and more!

I’m honestly surprised and floored by the reaction I’ve gotten from this fic. Your
comments have been so wonderful and I promise I will get through all of them.

I know this chapter is very much lacking in Vaderkin or any kind of Imperial antics but I promise Darth Vader will be back very very soon and he'll be his usual, unpleasant self.

You can follow my babbling at FireflyFish. Thank you for reading!
Harvest

Chapter Summary

Autumn comes to the peaceful planet of Arcadia, bringing with it a change of season and the painful realization that Obi-Wan cannot run from her past any longer. Especially when it shows up on her front door in a bad mood.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Spring and summer came and went.

Another set of Empire Day’s festivities took over the planet and the system like an epidemic of feverish cheer and then passed away just as quickly.

Fall came and the burning oak turned the color of Maul and Mustafar and dropped its acorns, which were poisonous and had to be picked up with gloves because they stained hands black. It had taken Obi-Wan nearly a month to get the color off her hands her first fall there.

The leaves changed and the wind grew cool and brisk, a delightful counter-balance to hot tea and a thick woolen robe that, if she closed her eyes, still smelled like home, of solder and carbon and the stillness of a place long gone.

The garden was ready to be harvested and that filled most of her days: she spent them pulling up tubers and beans, cutting off spouted vegetables and squashes as she worked methodically through the rows, Artoo quietly scanning the area for youthful intruders. Obi-Wan didn’t need its help but the droid would have been bored otherwise so she let it defend their small patch of land as if guarding the Temple itself.

She kept her lightsaber in Artoo, taking it out occasionally to clean it and cycle through the charge. If she wanted to practice forms, she carried a wooden stick into the forest and worked there. She stayed active, jogged along one of the rivers that fed into the village and tried to ignore the jittery, nervous fear that crawled along her nerves when something reminded her of the wars or the fall of the Order.

Mostly, she waited.

For what she didn’t know, but there was something tense and brittle about the Force that autumn and so she kept herself sharp and waited.

The day was bright and sunny and the Force was soft and lazy, flowing around her like the South River as she worked in the garden, pulling up the last batch of tubers and squash. Artoo was charging by the generator, leaving Obi-Wan alone with her thoughts, her lightsaber tucked away in a long, deep pocket, thumping at her side while she worked. It was going to leave a bruise but she didn’t particularly care. She had suffered far worse and come out with a smile.
It felt good to have the familiar weight on her hip, even if she was only pulling up purple tatoes.

There was one last row to take care of and Obi-Wan worked with zeal, relieved to have harvested the whole garden before a frost predicted to fall any day now. She was more than ready to be done with her patch of mud for the year and sat back on her heels to rub away a bead of sweat and smooth her hair back out of her face. She had never really mastered the complicated styles of fashionable Coruscanti women and now found no reason to yank her hair into complicated knots and braids and cascades of curls. General Kenobi had had help to do up her hair in a manner befitting a High General of great renown but she was no longer General Kenobi and was content to tie it back and let it be, even if it was constantly in her face and obscuring her vision.

Working on her hands and knees, tossing tatoes off to the side to pick up later, she looked up from one particularly stubborn plant and paused.

That’s odd. I don’t recall planting boots in my garden.

Obi-Wan frowned at the black boots, shined to near perfection and almost three feet away. They were planted firmly on the ground and she guessed them to be roughly hip distance apart and they were clearly masculine with a rounded toe and a square heel.

Imperial boots.

Slowly, not wanting to move too fast and blow her cover, Obi-Wan followed the line of boots up to black pants and a complicated layered black tunic that was partially covered by a rich black woolen cloak, draped over its owner’s shoulder.

She made eye contact and inhaled a quick, sharp gasp.

Darth Vader stared down at her, his hands behind his back as he watched her with baleful yellow eyes.

What in all the Sith hells is he doing here?! Obi-Wan’s mind reeled, wondering why she hadn’t sensed him, why Artoo hadn’t alerted her, and if he had come with reinforcements.

She didn’t wonder how he had found her.

Obi-Wan had always known that Vader would find her eventually and bring about her end in whatever manner he seemed to feel he was owed. She had hoped for a few more years, perhaps a chance to see Ahsoka again, if the girl was still out there, but if this was when the Force saw fit to dispose of Obi-Wan then she was at peace with its decision.

And in some small way, it would better to die at the hands of the man who wore the face of the man she had loved. A small selfish part of her was glad that Anakin would be there when she died.

As it was always meant to be.

Neither spoke as Obi-Wan stood up slowly, pulling off her gloves and untying her straw hat, the silence dragging on for far longer than she could ever remember Anakin being comfortable with.

Far longer than she was comfortable with.

“Lord Vader,” Obi-Wan said, her chin raised just an inch as she locked eyes with him.

Vader broke his gaze, turning away for a moment as if sad or lost before his eyes narrowed and returned to her, the yellow gleaming gold in the fall sun. “We meet again, Obi-Wan.”
“Indeed,” she replied, inhaling slowly as the Force caught fire around them and then tossed up a cold and bitter wind that tugged at Vader’s cloak and Obi-Wan’s hair. She was suddenly very aware of how she appeared, her muddy boots and her dirt covered hands, of how pristine and clean Vader was with his militarily precise boots and high collar, with the way his saber gleamed at his side, freshly polished.

Obi-Wan had once looked like that, neat and proper with sharp lines and harsh edges, slicing through enemies like the saber on her hip, only too conscious of said weapon humming with the Force in her pocket. She wondered if she had stayed sharp enough. If she had lost more than than she realized in her quiet bucolic exile.

No. Not exile. A stay of execution was a better term.

Vader appeared as if he intended to stand there all day, quietly glowering at her as the leather of his glove creaked from the fist he was making, hidden behind the cloak. She watched his eyes dance over her face and form, watched him take in the garden and the house, the burning oak and the generator shed where Artoo was charging. She wondered if that was what he was searching for: his stolen droid.

“You live like this?” Vader finally spoke, his voice dripping with not quite disgust but not quite approval either. He sounded strangled, like he was torn between finishing her off right there or dragging it out and enjoying her suffering. “Like some… peasant?”

Did he sound offended?

“The Force has a dark sense of humor,” Obi-Wan replied, resting her hands on her hips and casually shifting her weight so that it was better balanced and ready when the attack came.

Surely it would come. Any moment now.

“You live like this?” Vader finally spoke, his voice dripping with not quite disgust but not quite approval either. He sounded strangled, like he was torn between finishing her off right there or dragging it out and enjoying her suffering. “Like some… peasant?”

Offended, Obi-Wan inhaled sharply. “I would never sell Artoo! Unlike you, I take pride in my loyalty to my friends.”

Vader turned his sulphur gaze back to Obi-Wan, and the precise and purposeful slowness of his movements was far more terrifying than his silence. Someone had managed to teach her storm cloud how to be still, to tame the emotions that roiled within and channel them into pure, distilled power.

She would have been impressed if she didn’t know his master was Darth Sidious.

“You came to Mustafar to kill me. How is that loyal, my old Master?”

Obi-Wan arched an eyebrow at Vader. “As I recall, Darth Vader, I did nothing of the sort. In fact, I betrayed the Order and the galaxy to take you from that hellish place and bring you back to your wife. So, as you can see, I know a great deal about loyalty. But I suppose you are only concerned with loyalty as it pertains to you and what you want.”

Vader grit his teeth and turned away, a familiar, sullen pout appearing on that hard, cruel face. She watched as he took long, deep breaths, trying to still his rage, to center his anger. The Force throbbed with each brutal grasp for peace, each one feeling like a smack in the face. Slowly, methodically, Vader regained control over his fury and then turned back to glare down at Obi-Wan.
“You are right,” he said, his voice lower than she could ever remember it being, and the hole in her chest ached as she realized how much she had missed would miss if she survived this.

In another world, in another life, Ahsoka would have been knighted by now.

Anakin would have been a Jedi Master.

They would still be together at the Temple, a happy, motley family.

Scowling down at her like a vengeful spirit, Vader spoke. “I have need of you. You will collect my droid and come with me.”

“I will do no such thing!” Obi-Wan snapped, color rising to her cheeks and her anger crashing against the glaciers around her shields. “Nor will I give over my friend to someone it has chosen not to serve.”

“Artoo belongs to me!” Vader roared, leaning into Obi-Wan’s space. “You had no right to take Artoo with you when you abandoned me on Naboo!”

“Abandoned?!” Obi-Wan laughed, cold and bitter. “I returned you to your wife and your unborn children! I reunited you with your family! Your family, I would like to point out, that you chose to hide from me and the rest of the galaxy! So you will excuse me if I protest your choice of words, Darth!”

“You left me there without so much as a goodbye!” Vader snarled, his yellow eyes flashing. “Nor did you allow me to explain my actions! You simply assumed the worst and fled like a coward.”

“You murdered children!” Obi-Wan shouted, actually shouted, her soul spasming in her chest as tears gathered in the corners of her eyes. “And don’t you DARE try to tell me otherwise! I saw what you did! I saw the bodies in the Temple! I saw those lightsaber wounds and the room full of younglings! How precisely did you plan on explaining that?”

“I…” Vader inhaled and drew himself up to his full height, almost vibrating with anger, his hands curled into fists and the Force crackling like lighting around them. “I did what I had to do to keep Padme safe! I ended the Clone Wars. I saved the Republic and made it better, made it stronger!”

“You made nothing! Palpatine made all of this! This is his world and you are no better than his puppet!” Obi-Wan shot back, her own fury burning behind the ice of her shields, threatening to melt its protective blue-white bulk and allow her emotions to leak out into the Force, to touch a dormant bond that needed to, had to stay asleep. She could not touch that, could not let him see inside her spirit. There was darkness in him now, so much more than before, seductive and powerful, and she was not ready to face it. To truly acknowledge the monumentality of her failure with Anakin.

“I am a Lord of the Sith and you will respect my power, Obi-Wan!” Vader jabbed a finger at her. “I am more powerful than you, than any Jedi has ever been! And it is time for you to come serve me.”

“No!” Obi-Wan retorted, whirling around and marching away from Vader, a mulish show of pride. “I will not! If you’re so bloody powerful, why in all the Sith hells do you need me?”

Struggling again for control, Vader balled his hands to fists and followed after her, stalking through the empty rows of her garden, his large footprints like scars over the fresh ground. She flung the lid of the tuber box up and tossed her harvest in there, angrily shaking the bag out before whirling back around to confront the man who had destroyed her world once before and was now providing her with an encore performance.
Why are you here? Do you hate me that much? Do you want to cause me so much pain that you would do this to me? Where did I lose you? What did I do wrong?

“My children… they… They require supervision,” Vader finally spat out, almost trapping her against the wall of her home. “They are wild and unruly. They’ve scared off four nannies already.”

“What?” Obi-Wan gaped, her blue-grey eyes round with shock. “You want me to… what? Where is Padme? Why can’t she take care of them?”

Vader turned away and suddenly the Force was pain, in the air, under her feet and in her lungs. His pain was overwhelming, grief mixed with betrayal and confusion and loss, so much loss. But underneath it all was a greater pain, something she couldn’t really touch with her shields up but something mad and howling, locked away on a dead star in the cold black night above.

And a brief thought, no more than a faint impression of loss and sorrow, like a remembered dream.

“Padme left me,” Vader murmured, his eyes far away and he took a step back and then another. He closed his eyes and grit his teeth, repeating to himself, “She’s gone.”

“Oh.”

There was a long moment of awkward silence as Vader grieved. Obi-Wan watched at him, confused by his openness. It tugged at what remained of her heart as the part that still loved Anakin begged her to do something, anything, to make the pain stop. To find the mercy and compassion in herself that he lacked.

To remember that no matter what she wore or what she did, she would always be a Jedi Master and Anakin Skywalker, regardless of what he called himself, was her Padawan.

She took a breath and dug deep, trying to ignore the memories screaming *Traitor! It serves him right for what he did!* at her as she put together what she was going to say.

“I am very sorry to hear that,” Obi-Wan murmured, her hand hovering in the space between them, unsure of whether or not she dared place it on his shoulder.

She decided not to.

“Why?” Vader muttered, finding his way back to the safe harbor of anger. “Isn’t that what you wanted? Isn’t that what you told me on Mustafar? That I would have the great pleasure of explaining to Padme why I destroyed the Republic?”

Obi-Wan sniffed and did not deny the truth. “Is that why she left? Because you told her the truth?”

She had to give it to Lord Vader. She hadn’t thought he had it in him.

Vader looked away for a minute, his jaw clenching and then he nodded, curtly. “Yes. And now my children are motherless and it is your fault. You owe me, Obi-Wan.”

Already exhausted by this circling argument, Obi-Wan held her hand up as she pinched the bridge of her nose. “No. I do not. I owe you nothing. I spared your life when by all rights I should have killed you. I betrayed Yoda’s final command and dishonored the blood of my brother and sister Jedi to take you back to Naboo and I sought refuge and exile in a charming planet on the far reaches of Imperial space. I may be guilty of terrible things, Darth Vader, but I am in no way responsible for your failed marriage! Nor do I owe you one thin credit for the repercussions of your selfish actions!”
“Then you would leave my children to Sidious!” Vader accused her, his eyes bright and harsh again, his hand out in a savage gesture of anger. “Because it will only be a matter of time before he discovers them and their power! They need to be trained and they need to be cared for! I cannot do that! I need you, Obi-Wan! You have to help me!”

It may have been Vader’s voice and his garb but the words and the expression was all Anakin, peering out from twin seas of venomous yellow, selfishly assuming that because he was asking, Obi-Wan was just going to give up everything and obey, to trot after him like a well-trained puppy.

“I will do no such thing,” Obi-Wan said, tall, straight and proud as she pushed past him, her anger singing but the rest of her sensing that she had gone too far, that in her haste to protect herself and her ravaged soul, she had put something else, someone else in danger.

“If you do not come with me willingly, I will make you come with me,” Vader threatened, the Force surging like choppy black waves at night. “I will raze this village to the ground and your precious little friends with it. What are their names again? Tallus, Dromas and… what was the girl’s name again? The one with the faintest spark of the Force within her?”

“Seraphina,” Obi-Wan whispered, turning around to stare at Vader, horrified at his threat. “You… You can’t do that! These people are innocent! They’ve done nothing wrong! You cannot do this!”

Vader raised his chin and scowled down at her, using every inch of his height and presence to make her feel small, trapped and hemmed in. If she defied him again, others would pay the price for her pride.

If she ran for the light freighter hidden in the woods, he would destroy the village.

If they fought and she lost, he would destroy the village.

Oh gods. Oh Sweet Force please… please take me now. Please don’t make me do this.

This would break her.

“You know what I’m capable of, Obi-Wan,” Vader said, his voice flat, void of emotion or care. “Do not let others suffer for your pride.”

“Why?” Obi-Wan whirled around, tears on her cheeks. “Why me? Why now? Is this some sick joke? Do you take some kind of pleasure in this, in trying to break me?”

Vader folded his arms across his chest and watched her, his expression impassive.

“What?!” she screamed, pointing a finger at him. “Why me, Anakin? I’ve seen the names of slain Jedi on the holonet! You could have spared any one of them to be your… your… nanny! Why does it have to be me? WHY ME?”

Vader stepped forward, reaching out to take her arm in his gloved right hand and opened his mouth to speak.

“Miss Mina!” a bright, cherubic voice punctured the storm swirling around the two and Obi-Wan pulled away, hurrying over to the gate, terror threatening to overwhelm her mind, shouting Run! Run! Children you must run away now! Darth Vader is here and he will kill you!

Tallus, Dromas and Seraphina were running up the road, radiant faces and cheery waves as they galloped towards her small home. Obi-Wan gripped the fence, watching them with despair as they came within Vader’s sight, their fates, and hers, sealed.
“Good morning, sir!” Tallus grinned, giving her a smart salute. “Did I do it right that time, Miss Mina?”

“I read the book you gave me!” Dromas skidded to a stop behind his brother, panting a little. “It was really good but why did it stop? What happens to the little boy and his pet lothcat? Did they ever find the treasure of Count Dooku?”

“Hello Miss Mina!” Seraphina bounced to the front. “Who is that?”

Obi-Wan closed her eyes and exhaled, trying to think of how to explain who exactly Darth Vader was and how he came to be in her home when she sensed his presence directly behind her. She gazed down at his gloved hand resting on the gate, stunned and horrified that he was going to hurt the children right in front of her to prove a brutal point.

“Are these your friends… Mina?” Vader asked, his voice suddenly much warmer than it had been, a gross parody of Anakin’s voice. She could hear his disdain at her assumed name and inhaled, reminding herself that there was no emotion, there was peace and that fear was at the head of the path to the Dark Side.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan murmured, putting her best smile on for the children. “This is Tallus, Dromas and Seraphina Belk. They like to help me with the garden.”

“Wow!” Tallus gasped, his moss green eyes round with shock. “Are you…? Are you General Skywalker?”

By the Stars it got worse.

He nodded. “I am. You are very observant.”

Tallus blushed, pleased by his praise. “I want to be an Imperial pilot just like you when I grow up.”

Seraphina peered up at Vader, her blue-green eyes round and blinking. Obi-Wan didn’t know what the little girl saw but she hoped against hope that Vader had chosen to mask some of his malevolence in the Force from the small children. Surely he had to.

He was a father after all.

A father willing to kill these innocents to make sure his children have a Jedi for a nanny.

Obi-Wan felt the fissures in her shields freeze back up and a sense of cool clarity fall over her. She would be leaving this wonderful, peaceful place with Vader, damning herself to whatever living hell was waiting at the other end of that hyperspace tunnel.

This would be the last time she saw this little trio who believed in the magic witch who lived at the edge of their village.

At least they will be alive. Would that I could have given my freedom to spare the children at the Temple.

“Who is General Skywalker?” Dromas asked Tallus, curious about the tall, dark man standing behind Miss Mina with his hand on her shoulder like he knew her really well.

Tallus rolled his eyes at his little brother, gesturing at Vader. “General Anakin Skywalker? The Hero with No Fear? The Last Jedi and the First Citizen of the Empire? I have his poster on my wall in the bedroom.”
Obi-Wan looked at the ground in front of her, a faint smiling mask on her face as she seethed behind her shields. *He is NOT a Jedi! He is a Sith and a monster!*

“Oh!” Dromas nodded, peering back up at Vader, still confused. “Where is your laser sword? The man on the poster has a laser sword.”

Obi-Wan twitched as she heard the saber ignite behind her, felt the angry, hissing heat of the blade and saw the red glowing in the eyes of the children. She inhaled and willed herself to be still, to be at peace.

“That is so kriffing amazing!” Tallus cheered as Dromas let out a whoop and applauded. Seraphina frowned and stepped back, hiding behind her eldest brother. “Can it really cut through anything?”

“Yes,” Vader replied, banishing the blade. “It can.”

“Oh man! Devon and Max are going to be so mad they missed this!” Tallus practically vibrated with delight in the Force. “Miss Mina! Why didn’t you tell us you knew General Skywalker?”

“Yes, *Mina*,” Vader asked, his voice low, an almost sadistic purr of pleasure. “Why haven’t you told them about *me*?”

“You never came up,” she replied, not looking up at him. “Now children, General Skywalker is very tired from his journey from Coruscant. Why don’t you three run along and let him rest? All right?”

“He doesn’t look tired to me,” Dromas pouted, even as Tallus pulled him away, saluting to Vader with a wide smile. “Thank you for speaking with us today, sir! Have a good day, Miss Mina!”

Vader nodded to the departing boys, letting go of Obi-Wan and stepping away.

Relief washed through Obi-Wan and she realized Seraphina was still at the gate, watching her, worried. Risking a glance back at Vader, Obi-Wan decided to open the gate and step out, squatting down to speak to the little girl, whose blue-green eyes were full of concern. “Yes, my dear. What’s wrong?”

“He’s going to take you away, isn’t he?” Seraphina sniffled, reaching out to squeeze Obi-Wan’s hand in hers. “Isn’t he?”

Obi-Wan sighed, glancing at her hand in the little girl’s. She covered Seraphina’s hands in hers and nodded. “Yes, I’m afraid he is. But I will always remember you, my dear, sweet girl. You and your brothers will always have a place in my heart. I promise you.”

Seraphina nodded, not quite able to fully understand what Obi-Wan meant but she could understand the meaning behind the words. Miss Mina cared about her, was sad to leave her, and would always remember her. That was good, right?

“What will you ever come back?”

Obi-Wan shook her head. “No. I will not.”

Sniffling, Seraphina stepped back, rubbing at her eyes with her sleeve. “I… I’ll miss you, Miss Mina. Tell Artoo that I’ll miss him too.”

“I will,” Obi-Wan replied, rubbing at her own eyes with the heel of her hand. “Take care of your brothers for me, Seraphina. And trust your senses, my dear. You are special and they will serve you well.”
The little girl nodded, her face solemn. “Yes, Miss Mina. Be careful. I don’t like him.”

Obi-Wan looked back over her shoulder. “I will be careful. Now run along home and do not tell anyone. Not until tomorrow morning.”

Seraphina nodded and jumped as her brothers called out to her. She turned around and bolted down the road, only looking back once with round eyes before she cleared the hill, and then she was gone.

Obi-Wan let out a breath and stood up, walking back behind the gate and letting it slam shut behind her. Vader was lounging under the overhang of her home, his arms folded over his chest and his long legs crossed at the ankles. He gazed up at her, a smug light in his horrid eyes as she stormed past him towards the shed.

“Where are you going?” he asked, not bothering to follow her. He already knew he had her under his thumb.

“To wake up poor Artoo,” Obi-Wan snapped, pulling open the door to the shed with a grunt. She patted the droid on the head, leaning down around it to unplug it from the generator. Once that was done, she let the cord retract back into Artoo’s white body, flicking the droid on with a gentle hand. “Wake up, my little friend. It seems that destiny has come for us at last.”

Artoo warbled in confusion, following after Obi-Wan as she turned back in the direction of the house.

“I know you’re not fully charged but we’re going to be leaving shortly and sadly, your presence is mandatory,” she said, waiting for the astromech to catch up to her. “Forgive me, Artoo, but I had no choice.”

There was a low note, almost of dismay and fear.

“Yes, he found us,” Obi-Wan nodded as they came around the corner, united in their distrust of the man who wore the face of their old friend lounging against their formerly safe and cozy home. “If you will give me a few moments, I need to gather my things and then we can leave.”

“Things?” Vader asked, his eyebrow raised, as she breezed past him. “I thought Jedi did not have possessions.”

“I don’t see any Jedi here,” she retorted, grabbing a small rucksack and throwing in the few items she could not bear to be without: a datapad inscribed with her notes and journal, a few precious holocrons from the Temple, her brown woolen traveling robe and the Jedi robes she had cast off nearly four years ago, as well as the belt and pouches that went with them. After tossing in a few more small things, she sat down on her bed and pulled off the muddy work boots she had started the day in, changing into her old, comfortable combat boots left over from when she had served the Republic.

With a sigh, Obi-Wan Kenobi stood up and walked out of her home and into the harsh daylight, refusing to look back as the Force willed her journey along a new winding and twisting path.

“I’m ready,” she announced, glaring up at Vader, who seemed surprised by the mostly empty bag slung over her shoulder. “Where is your ship?”

“Is that all you’re bringing?” he asked, puzzled. “Do you need more time?”

“No, I do not,” Obi-Wan bristled, furious that he could threaten the lives of her dear friends in one breath and then show concern for her lack of personal effects. What did it matter to him? He saw her
as nothing more than a chess piece to put on the board to replace a wife who had finally seen him for what he truly was.

*A spoiled, terrified and lonely boy who grew up too fast with too much responsibility on his shoulders,* the hole in her heart whispered.

“Follow me,” Vader commanded and they left, only the whirring of Artoo’s servos disturbing the silence that fell in their wake.

Chapter End Notes

Hello!

As promised, over and over again, here is the next chapter! Vaderkin is back and he's doubling down on his evilness and bad behavior! Obi-Wan has valiantly sacrificed herself for the Belk children and the rest of the village of Three Rivers but what will happen to her now? Isn't she a wanted criminal, a traitor who was a part of a coup against the Republic? And more importantly, what does Artoo think of all of this? And where is Padme?

Thank you again for all your comments and kudos! I know I’ve been terrible replying to all of them but with Tano and Kenobi on a season break I will finally have time to get around to responding to all of them. I promise! ^_^

As always, if you'd like to exchange silly gifs with me you can find me on tumblr at FireflyFish where I have been known to answer a question or two about this fic and others with only minor spoilers getting out. ^_^b
Having recovered Obi-Wan Kenobi from Arcadia, Darth Vader returns home with his prize, convinced of the righteousness of his actions. Obi-Wan is introduced to Luke and Leia Skywalker and negotiates the terms of her service with Darth Vader.

Finally.

Obi-Wan Kenobi sat stiffly in the passenger’s seat behind and opposite from Anakin, her eyes closed as she attempted to meditate, the cabin slowly filling with a tumult of emotions that he could sense but not touch or divine. It was like something like flying through clouds. He knew there was something on the radar but he couldn’t accurately describe the model of the vessel.

But she was there.

Obi-Wan was there, alive and simmering and so full of light that she was hard to look at. Even with the faint haze of anger and pain swirling around her, she still glowed in the Force, still put his own paltry attempts at goodness to shame.

It would have made him angry if he wasn’t so… relieved.

Obi-Wan had not changed, she had not fallen or broken after Operation Knightfall and the creation of the Empire. Too many Jedi had been driven mad with grief, launching suicidal assaults or refusing to kneel and pledge their service to the galaxy. He had realized early on that these Jedi would never be able to adapt to the change that had taken place, the change necessary to save everyone.

Killing them was an act of mercy, giving the grieving warriors one last glorious battle with the Chosen One before sending them off to be one with the Force.

They would serve him in death if they would not serve in life.

But not Obi-Wan Kenobi. His old Master was the same as when she left for Utapau to destroy General Grievous four years ago. She was proud and composed, a pillar of quiet strength and pragmatism, capable of thinking clearly even in the depths of despair and rage. She still moved with the subtle grace of a warrior and carried herself as if she were still High General Kenobi.

Vader wanted to crush that pride and had nearly done so but Anakin needed her and so the Dragon retreated.

And he desperately needed Obi-Wan’s help.

Luke and Leia were distraught at the loss of their mother, throwing things in the nursery and terrifying the servants with their fits. Anakin could only take so much time away from his duties to the Empire and he needed someone who would care for them and could handle their Force-fueled tantrums. He needed someone who knew how to raise good, obedient Force-sensitives and mostly
importantly, he needed someone who would not be afraid of the sheer power contained within the twin suns of his children.

That left only Obi-Wan, who had raised him to manhood and rose to greatness and glory by his side. And if it hadn’t been for the lies of the Order, she would still be at his side, finally bringing the justice they had never truly been allowed to execute as Jedi. She was the only person in the galaxy capable of handling the twins of Anakin Skywalker and he was not about to let her pride and foolish notions of guilt and penance keep his children from the care and upbringing they were owed.

That she owed him.

Obi-Wan Kenobi was his old master and she was supposed to be with him, a part of his family. The time around the formation of the Empire was chaotic and hard to piece together, even for someone who had lived through it, but he remembered sitting on that ship with Obi-Wan, watching her plug the coordinates for Naboo into the hyperdrive and realizing that he hadn’t lost her, not yet, not fully. He was positive that she had been sent to kill him, to try to put an end to the Emperor’s reign in its infancy but she hadn’t.

Vader felt that made her weak but Anakin worked over that bit of information with something akin to hope. If she knew what he had done, if she knew and still cared enough about him to spare his life, to deliver him to his beloved Padme, then there was a chance to make it all work. To have his family whole and together, out from under the jealous auspices of the Council. They would all be together and that was what mattered.

Maybe if he could have found Ahsoka as well, he could even have convinced her to come back, to help rebuild the galaxy and the Order in a new and better way.

He had already been crafting what he would say to sway Obi-Wan to his side when they landed on Naboo, far closer to Padme’s family estate than he wanted. He had needed time alone with his former master to make her see the wisdom in what he had done, to explain that what happened at the Temple wasn’t his fault, not completely. Yes, he had killed some masters and knights but he had ordered them to surrender, to lay down their weapons and submit to the authority of the Senate.

They had refused and he couldn’t let them kill his men, couldn’t let them slaughter Commander Appo and his Legion! What kind of general would willingly lead his men to slaughter?

But the younglings, no, he had drawn a line there, refusing to murder innocent children when his wife was going to give birth any day now. Those children could have been raised as Sith, could have been taught how wrong the Temple was and how important their emotions were. He had assumed his new master would have seen the wisdom in an army of highly trained Sith warriors in the service of the Empire.

He had been wrong and had nearly thrown up when he saw the footage later.

But none of that mattered now.

Because Obi-Wan was his again and he was never going to let her go again. Weak and selfish Padme may have betrayed him but Obi-Wan would not. She would stay by his side and teach Luke and Leia everything she taught him. His children would be the shining lights of the new Empire, bright, sharp and powerful. Obi-Wan would teach them the ways of the light and he would teach them the dark and they would be perfectly balanced and when the time was right, Anakin would end Sidious’s reign of terror and his family would sit on the throne of power, benevolent and wise.

The way it was supposed to be.
Obi-Wan would understand the grand scope of his plan eventually. She would see that it was better to be the guiding hand on the reins of power than to waste away in some weed patch on a backwater planet. Anakin would give her everything she had deserved for her service to the Republic, and soon to his family. He would tell the galaxy the truth, that Obi-Wan Kenobi had killed Grievous, that it was her training and patience that made him what he was. That they owed just as much to her as they did to him.

Yes. This was going to work. It had to work.

He would make it work and nothing, not even Obi-Wan Kenobi, was going to stand in Anakin’s way.

“Where are we going?” Obi-Wan asked, letting out a sigh as she came out of her meditative trance. She rolled her head from side to side, stretching out the too-tight muscles of her neck before twisting in her seat until something popped back into place.

Vader watched her for a long, silent moment before turning back to the controls. “The Tellestria System on the Mid Rim. I… acquired a home there.”

Obi-Wan arched an eyebrow. “Indeed. And a title to go with it?”

“The title had been vacated,” Vader sniffed, raising his chin a bit. “The Great Houses were only too happy to grant it to me and… to me.”

“Well… I suppose congratulations are in order,” Obi-Wan stood up and walked out of the front cabin. “My Lord Skywalker.”

It occurred to Obi-Wan that Count Dooku would no doubt be spinning in his grave if his body hadn’t burnt up upon re-entry to Coruscant’s atmosphere all those years ago. In fact the mental image of the old Count making snide comments about Anakin’s manners and plebeian behavior just made the image funnier and Obi-Wan struggled in vein to smother her black humor lest she enrage Vader further.

“What is so funny, Obi-Wan?” Vader asked, swiveling in his chair and glowering at her, his face cast in the shadows by the swirling blue-white of hyperspace.

Obi-Wan bit her lip and shook her head, waving a hand in front of her, the stress and tension of the past day fraying her control to the breaking point. She wondered if this was the first sign of insanity, this sudden bubble of gallows humor. She had always been handy with a joke in the face of oblivion but there had always been a receptive audience and Darth Vader was hardly receptive.

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“Nothing,” she finally managed to get out, swallowing her possible break with a pleasant enough smile. “I was merely reminiscing about… my previous encounters with the Nobility.”

Knowing Dooku he would have fallen on his blade before he let Anakin take a title that was more prestigious than his.

Vader made a noise that sounded like a cross between a snort and a grunt and he returned to the dashboard, seeing fit to ignore Obi-Wan.
After a trip to the refresher, Obi-Wan set about locating Artoo and making sure Vader hadn’t abused her only friend while she was meditating. The refresher was situated between the front cabin, where Vader was, and the rear cabin, which seemed designed to carry personnel or perhaps some cargo from the loose webbing and straps tucked neatly away against the walls behind the chairs. There was a low bench that probably doubled for a bed for longer flights or for the injured.

And there, charging against the ship’s interface sat Artoo, who promptly let out a happy trill and spun its blue dome around.

“Yes, yes. The rumors of my death are greatly exaggerated,” Obi-Wan smiled, walking over to her tiny friend and patting its round head. “So… fully charged yet?”

Artoo replied that it was charged but it was also talking with the ship’s computer, which, according to the astromech, bore all the tell-tale signs of Anakin’s tinkering. It seemed to have developed a surly personality and a dislike for pilots who could not appreciate the fine modifications the Maker had installed over the years.

Obi-Wan rolled her eyes and sat down in a seat next to Artoo. “Well… I feel I should apologize. I had no idea this day would come so soon or that you would be dragged into this hell with me.”

Artoo detached from the ship’s computer and toddled around to face Obi-Wan and let out a chorus of bleeps and whistles that brought a smile to her face. “Thank you for your forgiveness, little one. But let’s not be presumptive.”

There was a soft question and Obi-Wan realized she hadn’t really explained what was happening to the droid. She took a deep breath and said that Vader had threatened to destroy the village of Three Rivers if Obi-Wan did not agree to come back to his home and take over the supervision of his young children after their mother, Padme Amidala, left their marriage.

Warbling in doubt, Artoo spun its head to look at the front of the ship where Vader was peering over a datapad.

“Agreed, my small friend,” Obi-Wan sighed, rubbing at her temples. “Padme does not strike me as the type to abandon her children. So we must do our best to ensure we do not dishonor her in this new task.”

Artoo’s next series of beeps and whistles almost sounded like a disbelieving laugh and Obi-Wan stood up, patting the droid affectionately. “Of course ‘we’. I am not doing this without you Artoo. I have come to truly appreciate your invaluable assistance.”

The last hoot from the astromech was difficult for Obi-Wan to translate out of binary and so she decided that it was the droid equivalent of an explicative or a laugh. She took her leave of Artoo and returned to the front cabin, pulling out a comb and a cord from her bag to tie her hair off when she was done braiding it.

Vader glanced back at her, an eyebrow raised as she took her seat opposite him and began the process of combing through the length of her hair. “You speak binary now?”

“It is only polite to learn a friend’s language if they are incapable of communicating in yours,” Obi-Wan replied, her head tilted so that Vader was talking to her hair as she worked. “It’s a pity I did not learn earlier. Artoo is quite the humorist.”

Vader arched an eyebrow at Obi-Wan in a surprising copy of his old master’s own mannerisms. She might have been flattered but as it was she was busy bringing the mass of pale copper hair into order.
Mina Kenobi might have felt free to run about with loose hair but Obi-Wan Kenobi needed her braid back if she was going to wade back into the galaxy.

She did not notice Vader’s hands curl into fists before he turned away. “There are droids for that.”

“The last time I let a droid braid my hair you had to cut me free of the blasted thing,” Obi-Wan said, finding it easier to address Vader when she was not looking at him, when she could pretend he was just Anakin being awkward and formal.

Vader was silent as she worked through the braid and tied it off, letting the rope of hair hang over one shoulder. Pleased with her work, she faced Vader and asked politely. “How soon until we land?”

“Tellestria is still two hours away,” he replied, his gaze locked firmly on the navicomputer. “If you would like to rest, there is a berth in the back with Artoo. You can conspire against me in peace.”

Obi-Wan rolled her eyes. “Hardly. Artoo is quite entertained talking to your ship’s hyperdrive. Apparently it is a foul-mouthed reprobate who finds the presence of lesser pilots intolerable. I do wonder where it learned that from?”

Vader inhaled sharply and shifted in his seat to glare at Obi-Wan. “You will keep a civil tongue in your head or I will not be responsible for my actions!”

“And how is that any different from before?” she smiled, her head held high. “As I recall, the one most often apologizing for your actions was me. I daresay it became something of a talent of mine, finding new ways to apologize for your behavior.”

Vader leaned forward, his yellow eyes sharp and his lips pulled into a sneer. “You forget yourself, my old Master. You are not the one in power here. I am.”

Obi-Wan bristled and went to open her mouth when he held up a hand and continued on, sharp and cruel.

“It would be a shame for Tallus to never realize his dream of applying for the Imperial Flight academy,” Vader said, his eyes darting over her face and searching for the hit he had just scored. “Such a lovely family. It’s a blessing they have no idea how the galaxy really works. Isn’t it, Obi-Wan?”

Her eyes widened momentarily and then she retreated back behind the permafrost of her shields, turning away from Vader and gazing out into the hypnotic void of hyperspace.

Tellestria was a beautiful planet, covered with a blue ocean and four continents. The smallest of the four was almost entirely consumed with the capital of the planet and the workings of the Noble House of the same name. White clouds swirled across the planet, indicating a climate that was not carefully monitored and controlled like Coruscant’s and they flew in through a particularly thick bank of clouds, breaking through into a thunderstorm that started Artoo and even gave Obi-Wan a shock.

Vader did not seem to notice the storms outside, his eyes focused on the controls and the readouts. Obi-Wan glanced at his profile and noted that his jaw was clenched and there was strain around his
eyes that she didn’t remember from before.

The ship maneuvered through the thunderstorm and quickly outpaced it, flying into a blue sunny day that looked a great deal like spring to Obi-Wan. There were blooming trees and the freshness about the leaves and the plant life that spoke of new growth. It was bizarrely lovely for a place she had been picturing in her mind as a living hell.

Vader’s residence was a stone mansion, built into the foothills of a nearby mountain range, with an excellent view of all possible approaches. There were two visible wings and quite possibly a third or an underground section based on what Obi-Wan knew of the abandoned House of Tellestria. This was not the official seat of the Marquisate but the summer home, a smaller affair designed to give the family a place to escape from the summer heat or a place to enjoy the snow during winter time. It was like an illustration from a children’s book and Obi-Wan could only imagine what this place would look like when the snows came.

*What an enchanted place to serve out a life’s sentence. How lucky for you your jail cell comes with a view, Obi-Wan.*

The only sign that a high ranking Imperial officer resided in this home was the brand new landing pad painted with the insignia of the Empire on the duracrete.

Their landing was flawless and once they touched down, Vader was up and walking towards the landing ramp, his cloak snapping behind him as he went. Obi-Wan stood up and gathered her rucksack, following at more sedate pace, Artoo on her heels. By the time they joined Vader at the head of the ramp, it was already open, the cool, sweet wind of spring rifling through his dark honey curls.

“Follow me,” Vader said and he was off, marching down the ramp at a speed Obi-Wan almost needed to jog to keep up with. She hurried after him, promising Artoo that she would find him later if they got lost.

The droid retorted that it would find her since she lacked the scanners to properly search for it.

Obi-Wan chuckled and agreed before she turned her gaze back to Vader’s figure, which she was in danger of losing if she didn’t speed up.

They hurried through the house, rushing past sitting rooms and studies, past something that might have been a formal dining hall and something that looked like an impressive library with actual books. They went up a flight of stairs and down another hallway and then they came into a large, bright and airy room where Anakin’s children were… well, there was really no other way to describe it.

The children were throwing a Force-fueled fit, throwing blocks at the deactivated nanny-droid and crying angrily at the poor human female cowering in the corner. They were red in the face as their pain and fury radiated in the Force like a great hurricane made of two smaller cyclones, each one feeding the other.

Vader stood out in the hallway, his expression absolutely torn at the sight of his children in such pain and Obi-Wan realized that his eyes had changed back to blue at some point, something she would have to meditate over whenever she was alone again. It was most likely a Sith trick but she wondered when he had managed to pull it off without her noticing.

“Please…,” Vader’s voice was strangled as he gestured. “Help them. They will be calm for me but I cannot be with them all the time. The Emperor and my duties will not allow it.”
Obi-Wan wanted to snap that he should have thought of that before he got Padme pregnant but the pain and anger of the children called out to her, nearly threatened to drown her with its intensity.

*And I thought Anakin had been a challenge.*

Obi-Wan took a deep breath and walked into the room, shooing the poor servant away before she closed the door and walked into the center of the nursery, waiting for the children to notice her, to sense that there was another presence in the small circle of their immediate world. She knelt down on the floor, feet tucked under her and waited.

The boy noticed her first, his heartbreakingly familiar blue eyes red from crying. He glared up at her like she was the enemy and he raised one chubby hand, levitating a mass of blocks and small toys into the air as he pulled back to let them fly.

“No.”

The boy blinked in shock, stunned to see his toys hovering in midair, held in place by something stronger than he was but unfamiliar. He peered up at the strange woman, taller than Mumma but glowing like Papa. She held one hand up and she looked down at him and then looked at him, his body tingling in all the warm places where the magic came from.

“No?” the boy asked, confused. Why was she telling him no? Only Mumma ever said that word or Papa when he was stormy. “No ‘no’! Mumma!”

The blocks and toys shivered in the air before him but they did not budge and the strange woman shook her head slowly. “No. That is quite enough for today.”

The boy gaped in awe as the blocks slowly sank back down onto the thick carpet. He glanced over at his sister, who was watching with wary eyes, and then turned back to the new lady. “Who… Who are you?”

The woman smiled and she was beautiful when she smiled, like a summer day on the beach with Mumma and Papa when they weren’t yelling. Like when he took a nap in a sunbeam with his sister. The lady was nice and warm and he liked her.

“My name is Obi-Wan Kenobi. I… I am a friend of your father’s. What’s your name, little one?”


“Well it’s nice to meet you, Luke,” the lady said, reaching out with her light to touch his and he started giggling, the light tickling like Mumma’s fingers.

Nodding, Obi-Wan shifted to face to the little girl and wiggled her fingers in greeting, surprised to feel a short, angry Force push against her hand. The little girl scowled up at her with Padme’s eyes and Anakin’s mouth, pulled into a familiar pout.

“No.” Obi-Wan shook her head. “No pushing.”

Luke turned his sister, his blue eyes wide, waiting to see if she would give in to the new lady. “Leia…”

Leia screwed her up her tiny, round face and gave Obi-Wan’s hand another good thwack in the Force.

*Oh so you’ve inherited Anakin’s temper.*
“No,” Obi-Wan repeated and when Leia tried for a third time, she found the magic gone, lost in a swirl of light and concern that felt like was she had imagined Mumma would have felt like. The strange lady was soft and bright and not nearly as scary as Papa. And there was something about her that was sad, too. Like Mumma but somehow deeper, older, like the snow on the mountains.

Leia gazed at Luke, who told her he liked the new lady in her mind and she frowned, reaching out to touch the soft, glowing lady, to see if she was good enough for Luke.

*Hello?*

*Hello, little one. No need to shout. I am right here.* The strange lady spoke in Leia’s head and she let out a shriek of surprise, scampering over to Luke. “She’s like Papa!”


“Bibi?” Leia suggested to her brother.

“It’s Obi-Wan but Bibi will work for now,” Obi-Wan said, a small smile on her face. She held out her hands, palms up and stretched out with the Force, encouraging the children to come closer. “Come here and let me take a look at you.”

The Twins turned to each other and Obi-Wan watched in shock as they carried on an entire conversation with each other in a language she did not recognize, half of it uttered and the other half through the Force. That was… new. She had never worked with twins before, let alone with power of such magnitude.

“Bibi?” Luke asked, taking a few steps forward. “Are you… where is…”

“Mumma!” Leia cried, stomping a foot. “We want Mumma!”

“You miss your mother?” Obi-Wan asked. “You know… I was a friend of your mother. We met when she was the Queen of Naboo. Has your father told you that story?”

Leia shook her head, her brown hair dancing around her face like a cloud. “No. Mumma was a queen?”

Luke watched Obi-Wan’s face with an intensity that was all Padme as she stood up and walked over to a table the twins had knocked over. She righted the furniture and then turned back to the children. “Before I tell you about your mother, we must clean up this mess. You are a prince and princess, of a sort, and this room is most unbecoming of Queen Padme Amidala.”

The Twins gasped in surprise, stunned that Bibi knew their mother’s secret name. Clearly this strange glowing woman knew more than they did and if they wanted to find out more about Mumma and maybe even Papa they needed to befriend her.

“Now I want each of you to pick a toy and put it away,” Obi-Wan said, walking over to an ornately carved wooden box, decorated in the floral symbol of the Monarchy of Naboo. “Not with your hands, Luke. Use the Force.”

Luke and Leia looked at each other and then back at Bibi. “Waszat?”

Obi-Wan chuckled and promptly lifted the lid of the toy box with a simple wave of her hand and the twins let out a happy gasp of recognition.
“Magic! It's magic!”

“Like Papa’s but nice and soft!”

Obi-Wan wondered what Mace Windu would think of the light side of the Force being called “nice and soft”.

“Yes. Now just one piece at a time and place it in this box.”

She dodged a stuffed Ewok and stopped it from knocking over a vase with ease. “Slowly. This is not a game of smashball.”

It took a while, perhaps a full half hour, before the playroom was mostly picked up and all evidence of the twin’s earlier temper tantrum was put away. Once Obi-Wan was confident that the children were too exhausted from utilizing their Force powers, she walked them over to a small sofa, letting each one climb up next to her and arrange themselves however they wanted before she began the tale of how Padme Amidala met Anakin Skywalker.

She was careful to leave herself out of the narrative. And when the servant from before appeared in the doorway, nervously wringing her hands, Obi-Wan quietly beckoned her in and helped the young girl carry the twins to their nursery and laid them both down for a well-deserved nap.

Vader was in his study, scowling at a data pad and the holo display of a planet when Obi-Wan walked in with her bag over her shoulder, mulishly refusing to knock. He did not look up but simply pulled over a chair with the Force, his gaze unfocused as the data scrolled.

Obi-Wan left her bag by the door, sat down in the indicated chair, and glanced at the planet. “Cato Nemoidia?”

Vader nodded. “You would think they would have learned their lesson by now.”

She sighed. “One would be foolish to hope for that.”

Vader’s eyes glanced up at her, still blue. She wondered once again how he did that, if it was some kind of Sith magic or if it meant something else entirely. Perhaps it was a barometer of sorts, providing insight on how to navigate the storms and squalls of Darth Vader.

*Something to ponder later when he is not here.*

“How are my children?” Vader asked, his voice low and concerned. “Are they napping?”

She nodded. “They are perfectly lovely children. They take after their mother quite a bit. Luke especially.”

Vader scowled and turned away, his hand curled into a fist.

“Leia has inherited your temper,” Obi-Wan observed. “She tried to hit me in the head with a stuffed animal.”

Vader chuckled, his expression soft. “She’s strong and ferocious. Padme… Her mother worried that she would end up like me.”
Obi-Wan gazed at the holo of Cato Nemoidia and reached out to set it spinning, watching the continents dance in the blue white light. “Four years old is a bit early to doom a child to the life of a Sith Lord. I’m sure Padme didn’t mean it.”

“She meant it,” Vader snarled, tossing the datapad onto the desk before his voice changed just slightly, an echo of hope in it. “So… you will stay?”

Obi-Wan looked up at Vader through the hologram. “Under a few conditions.”

“I do not negotiate with wanted criminals,” Vader replied, stopping the spin of the planet with a flick of his finger. “Do not forget yourself, Obi-Wan.”

“Do you want me here or not?”

Silence hovered between the two, tense and rigid.

“What are your conditions?” Vader queried, telling himself he was simply curious, that this was in no way a negotiation for Obi-Wan’s service, for the return of her presence in his life.

“The creche is my domain,” she said, counting off her requests on her fingers. “I am the master there and what I say goes. You have no experience raising Force sensitive children and having been raised by the Temple I am far more familiar with what needs to take place when and in what order to ensure they do not hurt themselves or others.”

Vader nodded, seeing the wisdom in Obi-Wan’s request. “Agreed.”

Obi-Wan blinked, a bit surprised at how easily Vader acquiesced. She shook it off and went to her second request. “Darth Vader is not allowed in this house.”

The Sith Lord’s eyes seemed to flash yellow and bright before the flare died back and the blue returned, but too bright and almost green. “Explain yourself.”

“Whatever you do out there, for the Emperor and your Empire,” Obi-Wan almost sneered but managed to keep her distaste on the proper side of polite, “that does not come home to your children. You will be Anakin Skywalker. You will be kind and caring. You will mind your temper and your emotions. You will be the father they deserve and you will not, under any circumstances, besmirch the name of their mother in their presence.”

Vader was starting to remember how annoying it was to have Obi-Wan’s logical pragmatism around, constantly reminding him of how little he knew, how much farther he had to go to become the most powerful Jedi, to best her at something, anything. He could not find much to argue with and waved his hand. “Fine. Is there anything else?”

Obi-Wan tried to think of anything else she should ask for before Vader’s patience and agreeability vanished into a cloud of fury. “Artoo stays here with the children and I.”

That seemed to rankle him and Vader’s jaw clenched but after a long moment he inhaled sharply and nodded. “Fine. He’s probably more capable than you are.”

“Undoubtedly,” Obi-Wan answered coolly. She folded her hands into her lap and nodded to Vader. “Those are my requests.”

“Good,” Vader smiled, a cruel shadow of his former life. “Now these are my demands, Negotiator.”

Obi-Wan flinched. Only the Separatists called her that.
“You will teach my children to use the Force,” Vader said, his voice low and simmering with rage. “You will not keep anything from them. You will not fill their heads with Jedi propaganda and you will not teach them the Code.”

Obi-Wan nodded. *It’s not like it did you any good.*

“You will oversee their education and upbringing in manner befitting their stations,” he narrowed his eyes at Obi-Wan, suspicious. “Luke and Leia will be heirs to the great Empire. They will need to be ready to lead when the time comes.”

*When the time comes?* Obi-Wan made a note of that, tucked away in the back of her mind for consideration later. “Of course. You must have great plans for them.”

Vader ignored her statement and continued on. “You will supervise this estate as Mina Kenobi, as your documents say.”

“What?” Obi-Wan blinked, startled at that. “Why would I continue to use an assumed name?”

“Obi-Wan Kenobi is a criminal and a traitor,” Vader replied, his mouth pulled into a sharp, cruel smile. “And Bail Organa did such a good job of creating your false identity that it seems a shame to leave it by the wayside.”

“And besides,” Vader murmured, leaning closer to Obi-Wan, his eyes boring into hers. “I liked how ‘Miss Mina’ sounded.”

Obi-Wan took a breath and nodded, sharp and curt, standing up to end this hideous conversation. “Agreed. Are we done here?”

“No,” Vader said, raising his chin a bit. “I want your saber and your robes.”

“What?” Obi-Wan gasped, actually shocked. “I am not giving you my saber! And what the hell do you want with my robes?”

“Mina Kenobi is not a Jedi,” Vader explained, coolly gazing off into the distance. “So if she is not a Jedi and has never been one, why would she have a Jedi’s lightsaber and robes?”

Obi-Wan’s eyes widened and she felt her hands curl into fists as she stared down at the relaxed and almost pleased expression on Vader’s face, at the way he lounged in his chair like a vine tiger toying with its kill. She felt a sudden and strong urge to punch him, to react in a childish and spiteful manner, to give a small vent to the fury drowned under the glacier of her spirit.

“Do you want my boots too?” she sneered, acid dripping from her tone. “They’re regulation Temple issued.”

“Yes,” Vader smiled, smug and amused. “All of it. The belt as well.”

“Fine!” Obi-Wan marched to her bag, which was sitting by the door, and yanked out her belt, her robes and tabards, tossing them onto a chair near Vader. She bent over to pull off her boots, leaving her barefoot on the cool hardwood floor as she set them on top of the tan pile of robes. After that she reached into her bag and pulled out her lightsaber, frowning down at it forlornly, as if she was bidding farewell to a friend, not knowing if she would ever see again the comforting reminder that she had done good in the galaxy once.

That she had been Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi, general and a hero of the Republic.
That once she had saved lives and brought peace.

That once… that once she had mattered.

Goodbye, my friend.

Obi-Wan looked away as she held out her saber hilt. “Take it.”

It flew out of her hand and landed in Vader’s with a sharp, cracking thwap! and the hole in her chest spasmed.

“Is that all?” Obi-Wan seethed.

Vader stood up, levitating her Jedi things into his grasp. He brushed past her, waving his hand with her saber in it. “Thank you for your service, Mina. I’ll have someone show you to your room.”

Vader breezed out of the room, triumphant, vanishing into the hallways of the house.

Obi-Wan stood there, barefoot, humiliated and furious. She tried to breathe, to recite the Code, to find some way to way back to peace and serenity.

There is no emotion. There is peace.

In and out. Inhale, exhale.

Shouldering her bag, Obi-Wan padded silently out of the room, her bare feet cold and shivering on the marble tile floors of the hallway outside.

She was about to find her way back to the front door of the house when she heard a cheerful greeting and saw Artoo rolling towards her. “Artoo! My friend! I am so glad to see you.”

Artoo spun in place before asking about what happened to her shoes.

“I… donated them,” Obi-Wan replied, patting the astromech’s dome. “I don’t suppose you know where my room is? Has it been entered into the building’s computer system?”

Hooting that it had, Artoo rolled off in the direction of her new room, letting her know everything it had been able to discover while she was with the children.

“Artoo,” Obi-Wan sighed softly as they stepped into an elevator and allowed it to whisk them upstairs. “I appreciate the recon but… would you be terribly offended if we waited until this evening for a debriefing?”

The droid let out soft note, turning its main lense to focus on her. Did he hurt you?

“No,” Obi-Wan murmured, touched at the droid’s concern. “No. He… He just… I forgot for a moment that he is not Anakin Skywalker.”

I miss Master Skywalker, Artoo cooed softly and Obi-Wan tried hard not to cry.

"Me too, Artoo. Me too.”
Hello everyone! Welcome to the next chapter of After the End of the World!

As promised there is more Anakin misbehavior and a great deal of restraint exhibited by Obi-Wan and Artoo. Luke and Leia are here and we'll be seeing much more of them in the coming chapters. And poor Cato Nemoidia. Somehow I doubt they've really earned what's coming for them but I don't think Vader gives a damn.

Thanks for reading and commenting! As always you can find me at FireflyFish
Tellestria

Chapter Summary

Obi-Wan and Artoo upack and go on a tour of their new home. Meanwhile, Darth Vader spends time with his children and spoils them rotten.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Obi-Wan’s room was not at all what she had been expecting.

Life in the Jedi Temple and then on one Republic battle cruiser after another had left Obi-Wan with a very spartan sense of what quarters should be and her new ones were as far removed from her berth on the Negotiator as Tatooine was from Naboo.

The bed was a large, four-postered affair, overstuffed with pillows and blankets. Her room looked out over the formal gardens and the mountains in the distance. They were tall and wreathed in clouds, framed by windows with long, white, gauzy curtains. There was a desk tucked up in a corner and a comfortable chair by another window.

Clearly Darth Vader had not been involved in the design of this room because Obi-Wan was certain he would have stuck her in some small dark closet and made some crack about how a Jedi did not value creature comforts.

No, this room was elegant, stately, and feminine. This was a room that bore all the hallmarks of his wife, Padme Amidala. Or was it Skywalker now?

The idea that Obi-Wan’s prison cell had been lovingly decorated by a dear friend now lost to her only seemed to twist the knife and Obi-Wan dropped her bag with a strangled sigh.

Artoo rolled into the room and let out a coo that signaled it was a bit surprised. The droid’s blue dome swiveled towards Obi-Wan.

“Well, for a prison cell, it is quite nice,” Obi-Wan finally said, tossing her small bag on the bed and rummaging around in it until she found what she searching for. “Artoo? Will you hold onto this?”

Obi-Wan held up the General’s comlink and the astromech whistled a question.

“I cannot abandon hope that Ahsoka survived the Purges,” she said, sitting on the bed. “But I cannot risk Vader finding it and trying to reach others through my name. I trust you with this, Artoo. Please, take it and hide it someplace safe.”

Artoo rolled around in a circle before holding out a pincer arm, taking the com and secreting it away within its housing. It let out a beep of accomplishment before rolling over to a window and popping up its scanner.

“What are you looking for?” Obi-Wan asked, rummaging around in her bag for something else. “I imagine Lord Vader has the area under a heavy guard, what with Luke and Leia here.”
Artoo whistled something that may or may not have been dismissive.

Laughing, Obi-Wan pulled out her intended item, leaving it on the bed. “Artoo! That’s positively filthy. You should mind your manners. I cannot imagine he’s completely lost his skill at understanding binary.”

There was a coo of curiosity as Obi-Wan started pulling open drawers in the desk. She stood up and shook her head turning to the closet.

“I will answer that once you’ve done a scan of this room for me,” she said, feeling around in the closet and along the joints in the wall. “I just want to make sure the room is not bugged or under surveillance.”

Artoo’s indignant whistle brought a smile to Obi-Wan’s face. “Thank you for your support, my little blue friend. Are we clear?”

The droid explained that there were no listening devices but there were outward facing cameras on the walls of the building, no doubt designed for intruders or perhaps escapees.

“But nothing inside this room?” Obi-Wan confirmed, sitting down at the desk and frowning at her terribly comfortable prison cell. “Good.”

And with that, she called Qui-Gon Jinn’s lightsaber to her hand from the bed and held it up. “Now we just need to find a place to hide this from Darth Vader. Any suggestions?”

Artoo let out a low whistle and Obi-Wan grinned. “Glad to know I’ve finally done something that impressed you, my friend. Come on. Help me find a place to stow this.”

After Obi-Wan unpacked her bag and found some shoes to cover her bare feet—*I liked those boots, dammit!*—she and Artoo headed out into the home, determined to get their bearings before Luke and Leia woke from their nap. The astromech plugged into a wall dataport and after a few minutes of complaining about Darth Vader’s shoddy programming abilities, the droid was able to pull up a three-dimensional schematic of the house, the attendant buildings, and properties.

The twins had their own wing of the house, where they spent most of their time. Obi-Wan’s room was in their wing but closer to the main area of the house and much closer to Vader’s study, which Artoo helpfully explained contained a second room behind a fake wall.

Vader had his own wing of the house but it didn't seem like it was used much. There was a large library that Artoo claimed had actual paper books instead of datapads or sheaths of digital holos one would read at a monitor station. When asked where they came from Artoo explained that they came with the house.

“That makes sense,” Obi-Wan murmured, chewing on a thumbnail. “I cannot see how turning to the dark side would suddenly turn Anakin into an aficionado of the printed word.”

Artoo snorted and whirled his dome.

“Now now, Artoo!” Obi-Wan shook her head as they made their way through the ground floor, past a large receiving room, a massive dining room and more smaller drawing rooms. They passed a few
quiet little pocket rooms that seemed to have no real purpose now that Vader and his small family had acquired the title and all that went with it. There were turbolifts here or there, added in after the construction of the house so they stood out starkly against the warm wood paneling on the walls and the silken Naboo wallpaper.

Another hallmark of Padme.

They stumbled across the kitchen and a very annoyed food service droid, who shooed them out with a loud screeching and flailing of limbs. Then they ventured onto the large stone balcony on the back of the house that looked out over a small formal garden and the land beyond that. There were window boxes lined with newly blooming flowers along the ground floor windows and in the distance a small ornamental pond where white feathered birds were paddling back and forth in lazy circles.

“If I didn’t know better I would swear we’re in Varykino,” Obi-Wan observed, gazing down at her friend. “What do you think?”

Artoo replied that Varykino had too many steps and water was overrated. Obi-Wan laughed as they stepped back inside the house and were greeted, or rather stopped, by an angry young man in a grey uniform.

“Freeze! Who are you and what are you doing here?” The young man barked, holding up what appeared to be some kind of stun gun or a taser.

Artoo whistled in confusion and Obi-Wan simply rolled her eyes in response. “Not now, my small friend. Hello there! My name is Mina and this is my droid R2-D2. We’ve just arrived with… General Skywalker.”

Now that Obi-Wan thought about it, she realized she had no idea how anyone referred to Darth Vader, or if they even knew of his secret name and Sith identity. On top of that, did his staff call him General? Marquis? Lord Skywalker? Did the Empire still officially call him a Jedi even after he had slaughtered dozens of them with his own hands?

Did it even matter here? Was he simply “the Master” and the staff left it at that, content to not question the proper mode of address?

The young man frowned at her but with some subtle encouragement from the Force he relaxed. He didn’t holster his gun but he did take a step back. “You came in with the General? Are you the new nanny?”

It took every bit of her training as a Jedi Master to not snap at the ignorant boy. He wasn’t Vader and besides, she would need all the friends she could get now that she had been dragged kicking and screaming back into the galaxy at large.

“Yes, I am,” Obi-Wan said with the kindest smile in her arsenal. “I was just exploring the grounds with my little friend here.”

Artoo retreated behind Obi-Wan with a wary tone.

“I'm Lieutenant Cid Andron and I am on the General’s personal staff,” the young man informed her, puffing out his chest and looking quite proud of himself. “I... I don’t think the General would like the idea of you wandering around unsupervised.”

_Smart boy._
“Of course, Lieutenant,” Obi-Wan gave him a gracious nod of her head. “I don’t suppose you could help navigate me back to the central area of the house? I seem to have gotten myself turned around.”

Artoo let out an affronted beep but Obi-Wan ignored the droid as the Lieutenant chewed on his lip, deep in thought. She was another minute away from giving him another subtle nudge with the Force when he finally nodded. “Of course. Please follow me. Have you had the proper introductions?”

“No, General Skywalker was most concerned with his children.”

Lieutenant Andron grimaced, letting out a heavy breath. “Yes. I imagine so. The incident with Lady Skywalker was very difficult for the General and the twins have not handled her absence well. Perfectly understandable, of course, given the circumstances.”

“I’m afraid I’m not overly familiar with what led to the dissolution of the General’s union,” Obi-Wan murmured as she followed, glancing down at Arooo before turning her gaze back to Lieutenant Andron.

“Ah… yes… well,” the young man seemed to trip up on that, glancing back at Obi-Wan. “I am not sure what I can tell you. I’ve really only heard rumors and even then, I’m not sure I believe them.”

“I’ve always found it prudent to take rumors with a great deal of circumspection,” Obi-Wan cut the lieutenant off, sensing his rising anxiety and worrying it might attract Vader’s unwanted attention. “Where is your assignment posting, Lieutenant?”

“I travel with the General,” he explained, pointing out a window to the landing pad she and Artoo had arrived on. “We’re currently here while he makes arrangements for his children.”

“How long are you scheduled to be here?” she asked.

“Just a ten-day. We’ve got four days left after today.”

*Four days?! He’s just going to leave the twins alone with me after four days?*

Once Obi-Wan and Artoo were back in the central foyer she gave Lieutenant Andron a grateful smile and a curtsy. “Thank you for the tour. I hope when next we meet I shall have a better sense of direction.”

“It was my pleasure, Miss… M-Mina? Is that it?” He stammered, a little shy as he returned her curtesy with a bow. He visibly brightened when she told him he was correct and she took her leave of the Lieutenant before Vader could storm along and ruin the moment.

Artoo whistled as they headed back to the children’s wing and Obi-Wan paused to think before answering. “As flattering as that might be, he’s not my type.”

The astromech sped ahead to the turbolift with a questioning tone.

“What exactly my type is is none of your business, thank you very much!” Obi-Wan retorted as they headed upstairs to explore the suites where the twins spent most of their days.

The Skywalker twins were very heavy sleepers, it seemed.
Obi-Wan had expected them to nap for possibly an hour, maybe ninety minutes but when two hours had passed, she decided to check in on them. She retraced her steps back to their room and went to open the door when she felt a familiar presence inside.

Vader was in there with Luke and Leia.

Obi-Wan frowned and debated whether or not she should go inside. On one hand, this was no doubt a private moment between a father and his children but on the other hand…

He was still Darth Vader and the idea of leaving him alone with children rankled the raw part of her spirit that could never forget the broken bodies she had seen strewn across the floor of the Temple. She wondered if there would ever come a day when the mere thought of that memory didn’t threaten to overwhelm her with tears and nausea.

The sound of laughter and Leia’s high pitched squeal of delight radiated through the door and through the Force, brightening the area as it was joined by Luke’s own radiant happiness.

“Papa! No fair! No tickles! Papaaa! Stoooop!”

Obi-Wan turned away from the door and walked back to her room, determined to meditate the rest of the afternoon, and her conflicting feelings, away.

That night dinner was delivered to her room via a droid and she thanked the Force for small mercies.

The next morning dawned bright and cheerful, sunlight streaming through the windows as Obi-Wan sat on the floor meditating. She focused on centering herself in the moment, on building her shields high and smooth, without a chink or a gap in her mental armor to let Vader in or a wayward feeling out. She focused on the Force and the gentle hum of life around the estate and of the people living and working on it. She focused on the distant sleeping stars of Luke and Leia, of how they glowed in the Force even as they dozed, unaware of her presence.

Once her meditation was done and Obi-Wan was settled back within the space of her own body, she got up and prepared for the day. She pulled on a comfortable outfit and then sat at the mirror, carefully threading her hair into a long plait that she curled up against the back of her head and pinned into place. Artoo informed her that Vader had left the premises and that the daytime staff had all checked in for work.

“Day-time staff?” Obi-Wan asked, confused. “Not droids?”

Artoo let out an arch wobble at her and she held up her hands. “Yes, yes. You are right, of course. I just… I never really took Vader as the type of person who would have staff.”

Artoo retorted that it didn't take Vader for the type to kidnap people and, clearly, they were both wrong.

“Artoo!” Obi-Wan gasped, her eyes wide. “You cannot say things like that! In spite of the similarities, Darth Vader is not Anakin Skywalker. And I cannot risk you popping off and losing my only friend.”

Letting out a low, sullen whistle Artoo agreed to mind its language and received a pat on the dome
for the offer.

“Thank you my, little friend,” Obi-Wan said as she stood up. “Now come along. It's time our younglings got up and we all had some sustenance.”

Like their father, Luke and Leia liked to sleep sprawled across their beds, covers kicked to the ground, sheets knotted around their legs and feet as they dreamt through the night. Pillows were pushed off the side of their beds and Obi-Wan had to levitate a few out of her path as she quietly tiptoed into their large, shared room.

Watching the twins sleep was a bit like taking a step back in time, remembering what Anakin had been like so long ago. Although he had been nearly ten at the time his face had been the same, soft flushed cheeks with tousled blonde hair that stuck to his forehead like lines of golden ink.

Walking over to the window, Obi-Wan slowly undimmed the nano screens that blocked out most of the light and the solar radiation before pulling away the decorative curtains. When Anakin had been younger, he was a heavy sleeper and Obi-Wan found that letting the sunlight in did far more to wake him up then insistently shaking or scolding him to wake up. She hoped that trait had been passed onto his children and smiled triumphantly when Luke rolled away from the light, the first stage in the Skywalker waking cycle.

“Where is Papa?” Leia’s voice piped up from her side of the room, nearly scaring Obi-Wan out of her skin.

“Sweet Force, Leia! You startled me,” Obi-Wan gasped, shaking her head as she walked over to the girl’s bed. “I didn’t realize you were awake.”

Leia shrugged, gazing up at her. “I heard you. And the droid.”

“His name is Artoo Detoo,” Obi-Wan replied, gesturing to her friend. “He is my dear friend and I hope he will be yours as well.”

Artoo rolled over to Leia and let out a soft series of beeps, focusing its visual sensor on the girl, who frowned at back, suspicious. Obi-Wan watched their interaction for a moment before she leaned down to whisper in Leia’s ear. “He used to belong to your mother. He served the Queen of Naboo before he came to me.”

“Mumma?” Leia gasped and whirled around to look up at Obi-Wan. “Issat true? He was Mumma’s?”

Artoo let out a cheerful series of whistles that Obi-Wan translated for the young girl. “He says that he served Queen Amidala on her personal starship and that he is honored to be serving her daughter and son now.”

A grin broke out over Leia’s face and she crawled closer to Artoo on her bed, reaching out with small hands to pat the white and blue astromech, its little dome spinning happily. “Artoo!”

“Whazzat?” Luke yawned, rising up from his covers like a netherworld ghoul, his blond hair askew and his blue eyes bleary. “Leia? Droid?”
The twins exchanged a few words and a flow of the Force between each other in a manner that Obi-Wan hadn’t quite gotten used to. She waited patiently for information to be exchanged between the twins before turning her attention to Luke. “Good Morning, Luke. Did you sleep well?”

Luke yawned and gave Obi-Wan a wide, lazy grin as his stomach rumbled. “I’m hungry.”

“Indeed,” she noted with an arched eyebrow. “All right. Everyone up and make your beds.”


Leia slipped out of her bed and padded over to Luke’s bed and hopped into it, hugging her stuffed nexu to her chest. She peered up at Obi-Wan with wide brown eyes and for a moment, Obi-Wan imagined that tiny four year-old Padme Amidala was gazing up at her through time and space.

“Droids are a privilege, not a right,” Obi-Wan said, walking over to the twins. “Your father made his bed every morning.”

After I practically beat it into his thick skull, she mused to herself, casually levitating a pillow into her hands and placing it on the foot of Luke’s bed. “You wouldn’t want to disappoint your father now, would you?”

Luke and Leia gave each other a long, annoyed look before rolling their eyes and sliding out of Luke’s bed. The children did their best to grab their blankets and pillows and toss them on the bed, letting out a few sullen grumbles along the way. Obi-Wan quietly supervised as they shoved, dragged and flopped their pillows and covers into place.

Once they were done, Luke’s bed considerably neater than his sister’s, they came to stand in front of Obi-Wan with arms folded over their chests and Anakin’s glower on their faces.

Pretending to carefully examine each lump, wrinkle and bump in the two beds, Obi-Wan finally declared them made. Luke and Leia let out relieved sighs and made to climb back onto one of them when Obi-Wan held up her hand. “A moment please. I have not told you what we’re doing next.”

Luke rolled his eyes and Leia waited but Obi-Wan could sense she was on borrowed time.

“We shall have a race,” She declared. “Whoever can put on his or her clothes first will be the winner.”

The twins glanced at each other, their eyes bright. They liked competition because that meant winning and winning meant prizes and treats. They turned their lazer-sharp gaze back on Obi-Wan and asked in unison, “What do we get?”

Pursing her lips, she looked off to the side, doing her best to cover for her lack of a reward. “It’s a secret. I shan’t tell you until later.”

Deciding that a secret prize was still a prize, the children dashed off to their respective wardrobes and clothes promptly went flying through the air, which Obi-Wan took as an indication of poor planning on her part. She backed away from a maelstrom of leggings, dresses and shirts to stand at Artoo’s side.

“I think I have made a grave miscalculation, Artoo.”

Artoo whistled in agreement and informed Obi-Wan that she would have to pick up after the children because that was not in its programming.
“I’m sure I could change that,” Obi-Wan replied and waited for the children to dress themselves.

Luckily for Obi-Wan, Luke and Leia emerged from their closets at the same time, thus sparing her the onus of having to find a prize for the children. They complained that she had tricked them, but when a nearby datapad let out a chime, all was forgotten in the face of breakfast.

The little quartet made their way through the hallway, Luke insisting to Obi-Wan that he had really won the dressing race, even as he was pulling his shirt on the rest of the way. Leia rolled her eyes, her brunette hair flying in every direction as she raced around Obi-Wan and Artoo, making fighter noises as she went.

Obi-Wan let out a sigh and realized she had forgotten how much noise children made.

“We shall discuss that later, Luke,” Obi-Wan promised, keeping an eye on Leia’s flight path. “Now would you please tell me where you two usually take your morning meal?”


“And what about today?” Obi-Wan asked as kindly as she could manage, not wanting to scare the children with her sharp tongue. She had unintentionally wounded Anakin one too many times when he was younger and she did not wish to repeat her mistakes with his children.

Leia looked at Luke, who closed his eyes and rested his head against hers. Obi-Wan felt a raw wave of the Force radiate outward, like some kind of primitive sonar searching for their father. She was a bit surprised to realize there was no set schedule or location for breakfast but then again, the children had either been under Vader’s care or a series of different hired helpmates and that didn’t bode well for consistency or organization.

“Small sunny room,” Luke announced as the door to the turbolift opened with a chime. With a destination in mind they were off, Luke and Leia leading the procession, holding hands the whole way.

The “small sunny room” was small in the sense that it was not the massive formal dining room or the grand receiving hall but it was three times as large as Obi-Wan’s room. It might have been a solar or perhaps a drawing room that had been converted into a smaller eating space that was better designed for an intimate family meal.

Vader was already in the room, staring out the window when Obi-Wan and the twins arrived, their little feet slapping against the floor as they turned the corner and spotted him. They let out a chorus of happy shrieks as they ran towards him and flung themselves against him or onto his lap. “Papa! Good morning Papa!”

Obi-Wan was surprised to see Vader hold his arms open for his children, a joyous smile on his face and in his blue eyes. He let the children climb up onto his lap and kissed both their cheeks as they
proceeded to tell him in minute detail everything that had taken place that morning.

Stepping off to the side, Obi-Wan located a large table filled with an assortment of food, from scrambled eggs and nerf bacon to cooked Dantooine oats and dried fruit. It was Anakin’s dream breakfast with all the food he could ever possibly want to eat all in one place. Obi-Wan resisted sniffing in disdain at the waste and instead started to search around for some tea because she was damned if she was going to drink caf like some kind of Imperial.

Just as she had determined there was no tea to be had anywhere on the buffet, Vader spoke up with a warm smugness. “There’s no tea. There’s a fresh pot of caf if you’d like.”

Obi-Wan glared at the wall and reminded herself that she was in no place to argue with Vader about the contents of his pantry. She simply moved over to a carafe filled with citrus juice and poured herself a glass before turning back to the pile of Skywalkers happily giggling in the early morning sunlight.

For a moment, the sweet domesticity of the scene, of Vader happily accepting kisses from Luke and Leia as they clung to his shoulders, almost made her forget that she was an indentured servant, that she was not here of her own free will.

Almost.

“Luke? Leia? What do you usually eat for breakfast?” Obi-Wan asked, once there was a lull in the cuddling. The twins exchanged glances before looking up at their father.

“They eat whatever they want,” Vader replied, raising his chin just an inch. “My children will have whatever their hearts desire.”

Taking a breath, Obi-Wan took a step forward, preparing to enter the fray. “Yes, well, that’s all fine and good but that does not answer the more pressing question of what are they going to eat right now.”

Luke slipped out of Vader’s grasp and he hopped over to Obi-Wan and took her hand, smiling up at her. “I want cake!”

“For breakfast?” she replied, arching an eyebrow. “Is that what you usually eat around here? Cake?”

“Yes!” Leia cheered, clapping her hands together. “Right, Papa?”

Obi-Wan turned to give Vader a sweet, bland smile. “Is that true, my lord?”

Luke grinned back at Vader, his blue eyes alight with the possibility of getting cake for breakfast, at having successfully conned the new nanny.

Feeling a sense of petty satisfaction, Obi-Wan watched Vader’s desire to spoil his children war with his responsibilities as a father. Clearly visits from Vader were going to be a vacation from whatever schedule she and the children would come to follow. She would use this time to learn more about Luke and Leia, how they interacted with Vader and just what had happened to tear Padme away from her children.

But first, breakfast.

“Papaaaaaa!” Leia whined, tugging on Vader’s tunic with a familiar pout. “Cake! Plleeeeeease?”

“Obi-Wan…” Vader growled over his daughter’s shoulder, shooting Obi-Wan a look that said
Handle this or else.


“Yes, yes, one at a time!” Obi-Wan held out her hand to the twins, letting her own presence out past her shields to encourage the children to calm down a bit. “I shall leave no breakfast topping out. Now who is oldest?”


Luke beamed up at Obi-Wan, who realized she had miscalculated and would have to referee another squabble if she wasn’t careful and very clever.

“Thank you for being honest with me, Leia,” Obi-Wan said, leaning down to stroke the little girl’s hair. “Luke? Shall we let Leia go first since she is your little sister?”

Obi-Wan ignored the faintest whiff of mild amusement and curiosity come from Vader, who no doubt found it infinitely satisfying to watch the great and mighty General Kenobi reduced to negotiating a fight between his children.

“Why?” Luke whined, drawing out the word plaintively and Vader’s feeling of smug pleasure grew stronger, almost taunting her with its cheerfulness.

Obi-Wan took a breath and knelt down to be on the same level as Luke and Leia. “Because that is what your father would do for your mother. When you love someone very much, you make great sacrifices for them, like letting them order their waffle first.”

Vader’s brows drew into an angry line but her story had worked its magic on Luke, who cuddled up to Leia and pushed her towards the droid. “Little Sister first!”

Leia’s happy laugh was worth the scowl trying to burn a hole through the back of Obi-Wan’s head as she gamely ignored Vader’s anger. Breakfast sorted out, she drew her Force presence back behind her shields and she sealed out the rest of the world with a long exhale and a grin.

There. That will teach you, you bastard.
Hello everyone!

Welcome to a slight reprieve from Darth Vader: Major Unrepentant A$$hole! Obi-Wan and the twin are taking their first steps towards a working relationship and a mutual agreement that waffles make some of the best breakfast foods. Artoo has dialed his snark up to level nine and now we have poor sweet Imperial Lieutenant Cid Andron who is probably going to have the nightmare responsibility of being in one of those "I'm not talking to that person" conversations.

I don't think the Empire is going to be paying Cid enough to deal with what's headed down the pipe.

Anyway, this is probably the last update before Tano and Kenobi comes back on April 2nd. Once that's over, in about twelve weeks, we'll be back to the two week update schedule with The Eagle and the Wolf.

Thanks for reading y'all and have a wonderful day!
A Walking Tour

Chapter Summary

After learning more about Padme and Vader's life before the break-down of their marriage, Obi-Wan and the Twins go on a tour of the Vader's estate. Later, after lunch and a nap, Vader joins them in the nursery for some quality family time, whether Obi-Wan likes it or not.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Obi-Wan had forgotten just how messy children could be.

During a loud and boisterous breakfast with Luke and Leia, Obi-Wan was relieved to discover the twins could feed themselves. True, they left a mess of their plates, their clothes, and the table in front of them but she was thankful she didn’t have to feed them by hand. She hadn’t been looking forward to trying to figure out how to manage that without the assistance of their father or a helper droid.

“You two are a mess,” Vader decreed from his spot in the corner, sipping from his seemingly bottomless cup of caf. “I think Mina should go clean you up.”

Obi-Wan resisted the strong urge to make a snide comment and stood up from the table. “Of course, my lord. Is there anything else you require before we take our leave of you for the day?”

“For the day?” Vader looked puzzled. “I just got back. I want to spend time with my children. You aren’t going to keep them from me.”

Luke and Leia frowned, their discomfort radiating out into the Force. Obi-Wan watched them lean closer to each other and she wondered how much of their short, young lives had been punctuated by Padme and Vader fighting. The idea that they had grown up surrounded by the heightened emotions of a disintegrating marriage concerned her and Obi-Wan took a moment to breathe and remember that if she misbehaved, she wasn’t the one who would be punished.

I have to remember that Vader is not Anakin. He’ll hurt Serafina and her brothers if I make him too angry.

She couldn’t let anyone else suffer on her behalf.

“Of course!” Obi-Wan said, bright and cheerful. “Forgive my… assumption, my lord. When should I bring the children to you?”

She would kill Lord Vader with kindness if she couldn’t use her bitter sarcasm.

Blinking in surprise, as if he couldn’t believe he had won so easily, Vader looked down at his datapad, scrolling through his holo conferences for the day. “I am free from 1500 hours to 1700 hours.”

“Then we will be waiting for you in the nursery,” Obi-Wan replied, pulling Luke and Leia out from the table. “Come along, children. It’s time to clean you up.”

“Did I say ‘bath’?” Obi-Wan asked him, her tone firm but not hard.

“No. Bibi said ‘clean’,” Leia answered as she hopped off her chair and took Luke’s other hand, forming a chain as Obi-Wan guided them out. “Not ‘bath’.”

“Very good, Leia,” Obi-Wan smiled as they made it to the door. “Now say goodbye to your father. We’ll see him this afternoon.”

Luke and Leia glanced at Obi-Wan and then to their father, who nodded toward them, directing them to follow their new caregiver’s lead.


Leia was a bit more confident and she waved to Vader. “Bye, Papa! We love you!”

Then with a gentle tug, Obi-Wan and the children were out the door and into the hallway, Artoo rolling after them.

Vader stayed at the breakfast table for a long time, deep in thought and his mind far away from his upcoming meetings with the commanders of his fleet.

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After a good scrub down in the refresher and a new set of clothes, Obi-Wan sat Leia down in her lap while Luke sat opposite, watching her brush out his sister’s soft, brunette hair.

“What’s wrong Luke?” Obi-Wan asked, leaning around Leia’s little head. “Do you feel sad?”

Luke blinked, surprised to discover that Obi-Wan could sense his emotions so easily. “How does Bibi know?”

Smiling, Obi-Wan tied off a small bun on the right side of Leia’s head, remembering a hair style Padme had been fond of. It wasn’t a very neat bun but it would do for now. “I could sense it in the Force.”

“The magic?” Leia asked, her curiosity and excitement bubbling up into Obi-Wan’s awareness.

“Yes, the magic,” Obi-Wan answered with a nod. “And it feels sad. Are you sad, Luke?”

Leia looked down at her brother, worry on her face. “Luke?”

Frowning off to the side and curling in on himself, Luke managed to mumble, “Maybe? A little?”

“Why are you sad?” Obi-Wan queried as she continued to work on Leia’s hair.


“Ah,” Obi-Wan said, drawing the word out for a breath before she finished off Leia’s hair. “Your father is… busy. That’s why I’m here. I will take care of you when your father is busy or away.”
“Like Mumma?” Leia asked, confused.

“Not quite,” Obi-Wan chuckled and set Leia down on the ground. “Has your father told you that he was a Jedi?”

Luke and Leia both lit up at the mention of Jedi and immediately started swinging imaginary lightsabers around, their chubby cheeks puffing out as they made the familiar hum. Then they turned to each other and started a mock saber battle which was equal parts adorable and concerning.

“Yes, yes! I’m glad to see your father has explained the important art of saber combat,” Obi-Wan sighed, rubbing a hand up her forehead. “Did he explain to you how one becomes a Jedi?”

The twins shook their heads. “No.”

Taking a deep breath, Obi-Wan tried to explain what exactly a creche master was. “Well, I am your creche master. It’s my job to take care of you and teach you how to grow up to be good and strong little…”

You will not teach my children the Code or any of your Jedi propaganda!

She could say “servants of the Empire”. Or “Imperials”, “soldiers”, “warriors” and any other version of the world that implied the life ahead of them was destined for struggle, conflict and domination.

But Obi-Wan refused.

“It’s my job to teach you how to grow up to be good and strong little Jedi,” she repeated, beckoning Luke to sit on her lap so that she could tame his unruly blond locks. “Just like your father.”


Obi-Wan frowned and set aside the brush. She put Luke back on the ground and knelt in front of him and Leia, unsure of what she was going to say but trusting the Force and her own heart to not lead her down the wrong path.

“Your father and mother had a fight, didn’t they?” Obi-Wan asked, not expecting an answer but her heart twinging at Luke and Leia’s solemn nods. “Just one or several?”

Leia wrapped an arm around Luke and answered for them both. “A lot. When Papa came home.”

Obi-Wan nodded, closing her eyes, trying to remember that these children had no way of understanding the horror of what had taken place around them and because of them. They were the sweet, innocent, bright lights at the center of a murderous hurricane that had torn apart the world Obi-Wan knew and replaced it with a new one: cold, cruel and made of forged durasteel. Luke and Leia had no idea that they were the first generation of a harsh, new galaxy where subjugation was the norm and freedom was an elusive concept, forever slipping out of everyone’s grasp.

They had no idea their father was a Sith Lord, that their mother had once loved a man whose heart had burned like a newborn star for her.

That once he had simply been a man in love with a woman and terrified he would lose her, lose them.

A man who made all the wrong choices.

Not that Obi-Wan’s choices were any better. She had left him alone when she knew, she knew in her
gut she should have taken Anakin with her to Utapau. She knew she should have said something to Padme earlier, begged her to confirm that her suspicions weren’t true. She should have stopped the Council from sacrificing Ahsoka, for agreeing to the Hardeen deception, from even being on the Council.

There was so much Obi-Wan would have done differently had she known Darth Vader was what the galaxy was hurtling toward.

So much of this was her fault.

“Bibi?” Luke spoke up, scooting forward a bit to touch her knee. “Are you okay?”

Obi-Wan took a breath and gave the children an honest, sad smile. “No. But I will be, I hope, one day. Now where were we?”

“Mumma and Papa,” Leia explained. “And they fought, a lot.”

Nodding, Obi-Wan started her little speech. “When I was friends with your father and mother, they were happier. But sometimes… people change. They become someone different. Someone new. And sometimes, the person you love goes away and doesn’t ever come back.”

*Anakin… He will never come back. Will he?*

Obi-Wan paused to regain control of her emotions, chastising herself for letting her own feelings intrude on Luke and Leia’s problems.

“Did Mumma change?” Luke asked, snuggling up against Leia, as if he was worried his sister would go through a change like Obi-Wan was describing.

“I think they both changed,” she offered, trying to be as fair as her broken heart would allow. “And your parents realized they did not love each other anymore because they were different people. They… I don’t know about Padme but… Your father is not the man he was when I served with him in the Clone Wars.”

“Is that bad?” Leia mumbled, her brown eyes round.

Obi-Wan nearly let out a bark of bitter, broken laughter but she managed to control herself as she searched for the right answers to give a four year-old. “Change is neither bad nor good. It’s like rain. A storm can feed the flowers and the forest but too much rain can cause a flood and wash the flowers away.”

“And I… I miss my partner. I miss the Anakin I knew,” Obi-Wan sighed, looking up at his children. “But like your mother, I cannot change what happened. I can only accept it and move on. But I can still feel sad about it. Like you feel sad about your mother.”

Luke and Leia glanced at each other and then gave one another a tight hug, the Force growing in strength and radiance around them. Obi-Wan thought she heard whispers between the two and turned her attention away from the twins’ conversation, allowing them their privacy.


Smiling, Obi-Wan held out her hands, taking their hands in hers. “I’m glad to hear that because I like you too. I think you are very sweet.”
Luke frowned and wiggled closer to Obi-Wan, his big blue eyes gazing up at her in a wordless request for something. Leia followed his lead and Obi-Wan found herself a little puzzled. “Yes? What can I do for you?”


“Yes?” Leia echoed with a grin.

“Oh! A hug!” Obi-Wan made a short show of pondering the request for physical affection before quickly giving in and pulling both Skywalker twins into her arms. There was something about them that she could not resist: whether it was their resemblance to their father or their potency in the Force, Obi-Wan could already tell she was falling for these adorable children, Jedi Code bedamned.

It was the first hug Obi-Wan had received in years and she was in no rush to hurry its ending.

After a change of clothes for everyone, Obi-Wan instructed Artoo to find a holo map of the house and had him set it up on the small table in the nursery. Luke and Leia hurried to the edges of the round table and let out a happy cry at the sight of their home.

“Yes!” Obi-Wan agreed, rubbing Luke’s back as his dark mood finally started to lift. “This is your home. And since I am new here, I would like to request a tour of the grounds.”

“What?” Leia asked, sticking her hand into the hologram and giggling as it fuzzed out and Artoo made an irritated noise. “Funny droid!”

“I would like for you two to show me your favorite places,” Obi-Wan said, kneeling by the table. “I’ve never been here before and your father is too busy to show me around.”


Artoo helpfully explained to Obi-Wan that Luke was pointing to the ornamental gardens that were done in a style similar to the Royal Gardens of Naboo. Somehow she was not surprised.

“What did he say?” Leia asked, scooting closer to Obi-Wan as she tried to imitate Artoo’s binary whistles. “Is it bad?”

“He said the garden is like one your mother had when she was queen,” Obi-Wan explained, gesturing to Artoo to turn the holomap around. “We shall go see the gardens after lunch. Where should we go now?”

Luke and Leia proceeded to pick out almost every room or location Obi-Wan wanted to find. The kitchen was on the ground floor and located close to the landing pad, which, it turned out, opened, allowing ships and other vehicles larger than a landspeeder to be stored underground. There was a speeder bay and a garage that Luke seemed very interested in but Leia explained that it belonged to Papa and Father.

In fact, the more the twins talked to Obi-Wan, the stronger the sense she got that Papa was not the same as Father.

“What about this room?” Obi-Wan asked, pointing to Vader’s study, curious. “Can you go in here?”
Luke and Leia shook their heads, the boy answering. “No. That’s Papa’s room. Papa goes in. Father comes out.”

“Sometimes,” Leia tried to soften Luke’s stark pronouncement, “sometimes it’s just Papa but… sad Papa.”

“It’s secret,” Luke explained. “We can’t go in.”

Obi-Wan nodded and tucked that away for future perusal. She was going to have to get herself a datapad or a journal to keep track of all the things that needed further thought when the children and Vader weren’t blazing so brightly in her awareness.

“Right! Well then, let’s go on our tour, shall we?” Obi-Wan pushed herself upright and brushed off her skirt. “We have a lot of rooms to cover before lunch.”

Luke and Leia bounced upright, their faces sparkling with excitement. The idea that their house could be theirs again, that it could be fun and an adventure was the best thing they had heard in weeks. The other nannies had been scared of them, had been unwilling to let Luke and Leia roam free about their own home. They had run from their temper tantrums, had run from the way they talked to each other.

Luke and Leia understood on an intrinsic level that they scared others, that they were different. They were like Papa and Father and that meant they had to be extra nice, to shine and glow because people went away if they weren’t shiny and soft.

But Bibi wasn’t afraid of them. Bibi was like they were. She was bright, sparkling and warm, like the sun shining on the pond in Mumma’s garden. Bibi wasn’t afraid of Father and she knew their mother, knew their Papa from Before, a concept they had trouble articulating to adults but something they already knew.

Before had been better than Now.

Or at least, until Bibi had shown up.

“Come along, Luke and Leia!” Obi-Wan commanded, a cheerful tone in her voice as she held her hands out for each twin to grab hold of. “Artoo? Are you coming with us?”

Artoo let out a musical trill that informed Obi-Wan that of course it would be coming along because they were going to get lost and needed someone with the ability to navigate the massive mansion.

“Thank you for bravely volunteering your services,” Obi-Wan retorted with a smirk. “You poor robotic martyr. However did you manage living with Anakin?”

Artoo let out a hoot and Obi-Wan gasped. “Artoo Detoo! Not in front of the children!”

Which just earned a chorus of youthful giggles and a demand to know exactly what it was the funny droid had said.

“You did that on purpose,” Obi-Wan hissed at the droid as Luke and Leia chanted for a translation.

Artoo’s dome twirled before replying. **Affirmative.**
If Vader’s residence had seemed large before, strolling through the hallways with Luke and Leia somehow managed to bring the complex back down to size. True, they avoided a whole floor of what Obi-Wan had already labeled Vader’s Wing, but even so, she found it reassuring that Luke and Leia could move around with ease and confidence. If two four-year-olds could manage it there was no reason she could not.

After getting chased out of the kitchen by an irate serving droid, Luke and Leia lead Obi-Wan to the library where there were in fact paper books slotted between datapads and other things of interest. The children liked the room because of the fireplace and the large fur rug that was laid down on the floor in front of it. With a great shriek of laughter, both children scrambled over to the rug and began to run their hands through it, making back-combed patterns in it as she watched.

Instructing Artoo to keep an eye on the twins, Obi-Wan took a moment to stroll through the tomes on the wall, surprised to see a few old favorites and a few newer books that she hadn’t had a chance to get around to reading when she was flying from one end of the galaxy to the other trying to save the Republic.

For all the good it did her.

A black cloud threatened to overtake Obi-Wan and she firmly reminded herself that she was not in friendly territory anymore and to give into despair would be to give into the man who had trapped her here.

No. Obi-Wan would not give Vader the satisfaction of knowing just how much pain he was putting her through.

“Bibi?” Leia asked from the sofa behind Obi-Wan. “Bibi, okay?”

Obi-Wan turned around with a smile and nodded. “Yes, of course. Shall we continue? I thought you were going to show me the garage and the ships?”

This pleased Luke immensely as he leapt from the sofa and ran to grab Obi-Wan’s hand, practically vibrating with delight. Leia rolled her eyes and stomped after her brother, already done with the many different vehicles their father owned.

The landing pad was part of a complex elevator system that took small personal craft ships in and out of the garage that was stored underground. Currently the garage was holding the starcraft Obi-Wan and Artoo had arrived in a Lambda-class T-4a shuttle that Luke explained was the ship that “Father flies for the ‘mpire.”

“Can Bibi fly?” Luke asked curiously as Obi-Wan nodded in distracted confirmation as she peered at the schematics readout on the datapads embedded in the wall by the entrance into the garage. “Like Papa?! Bibi can fly like Papa?”

For one moment, Obi-Wan almost considered a petty lie, in the vain hope it would ruffle Vader’s feathers and perhaps wound his pride. But then she thought better of it, reminding herself that a Jedi would not stoop so low.

Oh but she wanted to.

“Well enough.” Surprised by her inability to purge her negative emotions into the Force, Obi-Wan made a mental note to ask Artoo if there was some sort of room that had been converted into a training area for lightsabers. If there was anything of Anakin still left in Vader, it would no doubt be
his preference for moving meditation in the face of sitting still and attempting to be empty.

Perhaps she could borrow the room while Vader was off wreaking havoc and destroying lives in the name of the Empire to work on her own negative emotions.

“Bibi?” Luke asked softly, tugging on Obi-Wan’s hand and she looked down at him, surprised at his sensitivity. That was unusual for children his age and it either spoke to his innate power as a Force-sensitive or Obi-Wan’s inability to properly shield her thoughts.

And as comforting as it would be to chalk it up to Anakin’s genetics breeding true, Obi-Wan knew that, as usual, she carried a large part of the blame.

“I’m sorry, Luke,” Obi-Wan sighed, squatting down to the boy’s eye level and reaching out to ruffle his hair, remembering how his father had enjoyed that before he seemed to sprout up into a lanky, sullen teenager overnight.

Luke laughed and blushed, drawing Leia’s attention, who demanded a hair ruffle before the tour continued up to the speeder bay and then to the front of the house.

The speeder bay was a long building tucked up against a cut face in the rock, covered with faux wood and decorated to match the house. There were several single seaters and a few two or four seaters and one large skiff that looked like it was used to carry a large group of people. They were all painted with the insignia of the Empire and in particular a strange kind of angular symbol, that she had never seen before. Running her finger over the design, Obi-Wan wondered what it meant.

“That’s Father’s,” Leia explained helpfully.

“Ah yes, of course,” Obi-Wan nodded as they moved on.

The tour ended back in the solar room they ate breakfast in but Vader was nowhere to be seen. Deciding to take this as a chance to gently assert a little authority over the children, Obi-Wan ordered a simple lunch of a thick and hearty stew native to the planet and some fresh bread and butter to go with it. Obi-Wan got a few sullen looks from her charges but eventually their hunger overpowered their desire to live off cake and spun sugar and the twins tucked into the meal.

After another messy display of poor table manners and youthful silliness that Obi-Wan found painfully familiar, the quartet marched to a nearby refresher once again for some cleaning up before it was time to take in the gardens.

The gardens were a lush ornamental wonderland, full of sculpted evergreen bushes and beautiful fountains with golden statues of handsome young men and women cavorting on their Eferite marble pedestals. There were a few main pathways that wound through the ornamental part of the gardens and another few gravel paths that turned off into the wilder parts of the garden and, Obi-Wan presumed, the rest of the estate’s lands.

As the foursome took the steps down to ground level, Luke took hold of Obi-Wan’s hand and let out a happy shout. “Follow me, Bibi!”

Leia darted ahead of her brother, running around bushes and statues as Luke tried to drag Obi-Wan in a run. “I will be right behind you, Luke. There is no need to yank my arm out of its socket.”
Artoo commented that it did not want to see what that kind of repair looked like as Obi-Wan shot the blue droid a withering glare.

Leia finally persuaded Luke to let go of Obi-Wan’s hand and they both sprinted ahead, running and gamboling down the gentle slope to the traditional hedges and plantings of a formal garden. There were tall laughing maples and firka pines that shivered in the breeze as they walked down the white stone paths that led to large, elegant fountain. There was a plaque on the western side that detailed when it had been placed there and by what ruler of the House of Tellestria but Obi-Wan paid it no mind as she drifted after Luke and Leia.

The children helpfully explained the names of each statue they passed by: a comely youth was Venta, a stately looking woman was Poche, a warrior was Papa and a particularly beautiful young maiden was Mumma. Obi-Wan gazed up at “Mumma” and sighed, wondering what Padme would think of that.

*I can’t imagine this is any easier on her than it is on them. What did you do, Vader?*

*Why isn’t Padme here with her children?*

“Bibi!” Leia’s shout pulled Obi-Wan out of her dark thoughts and she turned to gasp in mild horror.

“Leia Skywalker! Get out of that fountain right now!” Obi-Wan hurried over to pluck the soaking wet four-year-old from the basin of the fountain that contained “Papa”. She glared into mischief filled brown eyes, her lips quirked into a disapproving purse. “That was very dangerous of you. You could have slipped and hurt yourself.”

Leia responded in true Skywalker fashion, giggling sheepishly before pointing over Obi-Wan’s shoulder at Luke who was trying to lever himself into the fountain like his sister.

Shifting Leia immediately to her hip, Obi-Wan held up her left hand, the Force coiling in her grasp to yank Luke back to safety. “Don’t try it, young man.”

Luke promptly burst into a torrent of laughter and tumbled back to the soft earth beneath him, Leia’s giggles harmonizing with his. Rolling her eyes, Obi-Wan set Leia on the ground and let the twins run back to each other, Leia’s shoes squelching in wet protest as she tackled her brother to the ground in what looked like the first round of a tickle fight.

“Oh honestly!” Obi-Wan grumbled, slipping between the squirming ball of toddlers and the hard stone of the fountain. “Is that the only thing your father has taught you? How to fight and make lightsaber noises? One would think you would be podracing by now.”

Artoo trilled that Padme wouldn’t have approved of that, considering what she had said when they were on Tatooine all those years ago. Obi-Wan let out a little snicker. “Well, I can’t say I approved of Qui-Gon’s methods of acquiring that ship either, but what’s done is done. Now if you two are finished rolling about like feral lothcats, might we continue our tour?”

Luke blinked up at Obi-Wan and giggled shyly. “What’s a lothcat?”

“It’s a small, furry creature who lives on the planet Lothal on the Outer Rim,” Obi-Wan explained as she pulled Luke and Leia upright. She helped both children brush themselves off and then grudgingly accepted Leia’s soaked shoes and then Luke’s, who demanded to be allowed to run around barefoot if Leia was.

“I had no idea how hard creche masters worked,” Obi-Wan grumbled as she trailed after the children, who scampered ahead, pointing out a terraced ornamental pond carved into the side of a
hill. “I should have apologized to mine. I must have driven the poor Wookie mad.”

Artoo let out a tone of agreement as they followed Luke and Leia down the hill to a wide open and flat stretch of lawn that looked perfect for playing tag and all sorts of games children played when they were little. Obi-Wan wondered if Vader would allow his children to have friends over. Somehow, she doubted he would be inclined to share Luke and Leia with anyone.

*After all, he didn’t tell you about them when Padme was carrying them. And you’re only here because she left him.*

No, Obi-Wan did not think Vader was going to allow the local children to stay over.

While Luke and Leia ran around the sprawling lawn, laughing and giggling as Artoo spun its dome around for them, Obi-Wan noticed a gate and a wild fence that seemed molded out of bushes and underbrush along the edge of the forest that covered the rest of the estate’s land. Dark, verdant shadows from the midday sun hid most of the details from her sight but Obi-Wan could sense an opening through the Force there, a small hollow of life which indicated a clearing. An artificial one, at that.

“Luke? Leia? What is behind that gate?” Obi-Wan asked, turning Leia’s shoes over so that the sun could dry the other side.

The twins scampered back over to Bibi, peering along the line of her pointed finger, heads tucked together as they struggled to find a way to explain something they didn’t have the words for.

“It’s Papa’s,” Leia finally said and Luke shrugged. “We can’t go there.”

“Why not?” Obi-Wan asked, her head canted to the side. “Do you know what’s back there?”

Luke shook his head. “No. We can’t go. Papa said so.”

“Mumma said so too,” Leia explained as if that was the final word on the matter. “Tag! Bibi’s it!”

Obi-Wan blinked as Leia slapped her arm and then proceeded to dart off into the lawn. Luke let out a shriek and before Obi-Wan knew it, the strange gate and the hollow in the forest were forgotten.

After a nap, Luke, Leia, Obi-Wan and Artoo were in the nursery at 1500 on the nose, playing with blocks when Anakin arrived. He stood in the doorway, feeling tall and awkward until his children ran over to him, flinging their arms around him as he crouched down to catch them.

“Papa!” Luke gasped with delight. “We played tag!”

“And Bibi is fast!” Leia added, pointing back at Obi-Wan. “Too fast!”

“And Leia played in the pool!” Luke grinned, happily tucked under his father’s chin. “And Bibi got mad.”

Anakin took all of this in and tried to process it, based on what he had sensed in between interminable conferences over the holo viewer or while reading intelligence reports from the Imperial Security Bureau. The “pool” concerned him and he glanced over at Obi-Wan, who was gathering the last of the blocks back into their case and acting as if he weren’t even there.
“The ‘pool’ in question was one of the fountains,” Obi-Wan said to the wooden case in her hands, standing up to put the box away. “I’ve already explained that there will be no more splashing about.”

“Oh,” Anakin replied, looking back at Luke and Leia, who glowed with happiness as they smiled up at him. “Good. I… I’m glad to hear that.”

“Papa!” Leia groaned, collapsing against Anakin’s shoulder. “No fair! Why can’t I go in the pool?”

“A fountain is not a pool,” Anakin explained, standing upright and carrying his children with him as he walked over to a couch tucked up against the far wall. He sat down with Luke and Leia each under an arm, relieved beyond words that his children were taking to Obi-Wan so easily. They were calmer and much more settled and there wasn’t a hint of the red-faced sobbing of before, when their misery and longing for their mother grew too strong to be contained and they pulled him from his study to comfort them.

Anakin couldn’t remember the last time Luke and Leia had been this happy when he wasn’t directly responsible for the easing of their pain.

Bringing Obi-Wan to Tellestria had been the right choice after all.

She’ll realize I was right, eventually. Obi-Wan will give in. She always does.

“So tell me what you did today,” Anakin said, thrilled beyond words to be able to simply sit and talk with Luke and Leia, to simply be their father and spend time with them. This had been all he had ever wanted, he thought: to be a part of a family, to love and be loved in return.

Luke and Leia both spoke at once, each tripping over the other’s words, trying to get as much out as they could before the other beat them to the punch. Laughing, Anakin held up his hands. “Woah! One at a time, please. Leia? Why don’t you go first?”

Beaming at Luke, Leia began to detail their day to Anakin, telling him about how Obi-Wan let them pick out what to wear and then forced them to make their beds and how horrible that was. He smiled at the memory of his own mother reminding him to make his bed when he was their age. Anakin could barely remember her face anymore and the sound of her voice was a little more than a whisper in the back of his mind but he could still recall her gentle admonition to right his covers and fluff his pillow.

“And then what happened, Luke?” Anakin asked, looking over at his son, who was only too happy to continue the tale.

He was going to prod the children for more details when he caught movement out of the corner of his eye and looked up to see Obi-Wan walking out of the room. Anakin frowned and sat up a little, head tilting. “Where are you going?”

He hadn’t meant his words to come out to accusatory or suspicious but the idea that Obi-Wan was just going to leave, that she wasn’t going to stay and spend time with them was wrong. She was supposed to stay and… and…

She was supposed to stay.

“I did not think my presence was necessary, my lord,” Obi-Wan replied, her voice smooth, polished and empty, as if every last emotion and feeling had been sucked out of an airlock. “Did you not ask for time alone with your children?”

Did he ask for that? Was that what he said in a fit of ire this morning?
Anakin frowned, stroking Leia’s side as she curled into him, looking from Obi-Wan to him and back. Luke frowned at the ground, fidgeting with the cuffs of his sleeves, only looking up at his father long enough to redirect his gaze back at his feet.

How could Obi-Wan be so selfish? Everything was going perfectly until she decided she had better things to be doing than spending time with him. And his children.


He was not going to be bullied by his former master in his own home. Obi-Wan may have won the battle at breakfast but he was going to win this war. He had all the cards in this game of sabacc and there was no way she was going to bluff her way to victory this time.

The sooner Obi-Wan realized that, the better it would be for everyone.

Once Anakin knew he could trust her again, once he was positive of her loyalty to him and to his children, he would give her anything her heart could ever desire. Books, holocrons from the Temple, all the tea on Gatalenta if that was what she wanted.

But first, he had to teach her how things worked now.

Anakin had to teach his former master that he was in charge now, not Obi-Wan.

Leia looked over at Luke and he could hear his children talking to each other through the Force in the private language they had created. There was a small, quick discussion and then Leia spoke up for both of them as she always seemed to do.

“Please stay, Bibi,” Leia asked, beckoning to Obi-Wan from Anakin’s side.

Anakin’s gazed shifted from Leia back to his old master, who refused to make eye contact with him, instead bowing her head to Leia with all the dignity of a Jedi master greeting a head of state. “Of course, Leia. As you wish.”

Obi-Wan glided over to a straight-backed chair that was placed perpendicular to the couch they were sitting on and sat down, her posture straight and rigid and her hands folded in her lap as she gave Leia a small smile before giving one to Luke as well.

She did not look at Anakin, nor did she allow a single emotion to slip past her shields, impeccably crafted constructs of light and willpower.

Anakin had always been jealous of the mental privacy Obi-Wan’s shielding afforded her. His own were far too porous and constructed more to keep the full might of his emotions under control than to protect whatever stray thoughts and emotions passed through his mind like small, dry clouds in a Tatooine sky.

Obi-Wan had always had the advantage of sensing his emotions while he was forced to blindly stumble about, randomly guessing as to what was going on behind that placid, grey-eyed mask she wore.

And apparently, that had not changed in the four years they had been apart.

“Papa?” Luke spoke up, tugging on his shirt. “It’s my turn.”

“What? Oh! Yes, sorry, Luke,” Anakin turned his attention back to his children, deciding that it was
better to let Obi-Wan have her Pyrrhic victory. She could give him the silent treatment all she liked. The important thing was that she was here.

The important thing was that Obi-Wan was finally home where she belonged, with Anakin and his children.

*Yes. She’s mine and this time, I’ll make things right. She’ll see.*

*Everything will be perfect.*

Chapter End Notes

Oh Anakin... what are you doing?

You can find me at [FireflyFish](http://www.FireflyFish.com) where I shout about Star Wars a lot. XD
Dreams and Memories

Chapter Summary

With his leave almost up, Darth Vader makes his displeasure with incompetent officers known. Luke and Leia begin their studies in the ways of the Force and Artoo has some choice words for Obi-Wan about her parentage.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The next day and the one after that were, for all intents and purposes, identical.

Obi-Wan rose slightly before dawn, pulled on a different combination of the same few pieces of clothing she possessed, meditated a bit, and braided up her hair before going with Artoo to wake Luke and Leia, who were starting to warm up to her.

Even if they found the idea of making their beds every morning to be a level of torture that had long since been banned in decent society.

Breakfast was taken in the Small Sunny Room with Vader, who spoiled his children with wild abandon, and then they were left to their own devices for the morning while he sat in endless meetings with his subordinates or other Imperial toadies who only seemed to annoy and infuriate the Sith Lord.

Obi-Wan allowed herself a moment of petty delight at his constant irritation.

Serves you right, you bastard. That's what you get for murdering every last capable general out there.

General Kenobi did not think highly of the newly raised leaders that were currently running the galaxy’s armed forces and felt that their tactics were brutish and unimaginative, wasting the valuable lives of their subordinates.

Aside from the occasional explosion of barely throttled rage that drew Obi-Wan’s eye to the direction of Vader’s study, things were peaceful over the next few days. Luke and Leia easily took to the games Obi-Wan had learned in the crèche, quickly mastering “How High” and “Grandmaster of the Temple”. Like their father before them, they delighted in finding ways to bend Obi-Wan’s rules just enough that they could get away with whatever mischief they had in mind.

Artoo did not help in the slightest and, if anything, seemed to take utter glee in providing the necessary logistical assistance. Neither child could understand his beeps and warbles but that didn’t stop them from including him in their escapades.

“Like father, like daughter, eh?’’ Obi-Wan commented to Leia as she sat with the girl in the refresher, slowly but surely picking out a veritable bird’s nest of garden detritus from her hair after a very rambunctious game of hide and go seek. “I hope all of this refuse means you won, at the very least.”

Leia pouted, folding her arms over her chest. “Luke cheated. He used the Force!”
“Oh did he?” Obi-Wan murmured, her eyebrows raised as she turned to look over at Luke, who was grinning like a very pleased lothcat. “Did you use the Force to find your sister, Luke?”

“Yup!” It was clear Luke was quite proud of his triumph. “But it was hard ‘cuz Father was loud.”

“Yes,” Obi-Wan nodded, setting aside a sticker covered branch that had been tangled up in Leia’s baby-fine hair. “He was quite cross this morning. I wonder what happened.”

Obi-Wan had done her best to ignore the volcano rumbling in the back of her mind, pretending she didn't hear florid clone-speak curses as she led Luke and Leia through their first few defensive forms the next day. But what she hadn't been able to block made it clear that Vader had run out of patience with a ship captain who had failed to get a former Separatist sovereign system to agree to kneel before the Empire.

General Kenobi found it terribly ironic that she was cheering for Separatists, but one had to find allies and good news wherever they found it.

It was probably best to ignore Vader’s temper tantrums and focus on Luke and Leia, Obi-Wan decided, returning her focus to correcting the twins’ posture as they worked their way through Shii-cho Seras-kal.

“We finished our forms,” Luke announced as Leia flopped over onto the ground, melodramatically panting. Artoo was trundling over, dragging a small crate filled with cold bottles of water. “Did we do good?”

Obi-Wan was going to reply automatically that, yes, of course they did well. They were Anakin’s children and he had never lacked for skill in the art of physical combat.

But she found she couldn’t actually remember watching the twins perform their forms, she had been so wrapped up in the blast radius of Vader’s fuming.

That was troubling.

*Focus, Obi-Wan. Put Vader and his Empire from your mind. Emotion, yet peace.*

Artoo rolled over to Obi-Wan and held out a bottle of water to her. *Hydrate, General Kenobi. Maybe it will lubricate your processing circuits.*

“Thank you for your concern about my processor, Artoo,” Obi-Wan frowned down at the little droid before cracking open the bottle and taking a long drink. “You both did quite well. Just like your father.”

“Really?” Leia’ shot up from her prone position on the grass, her eyes bright. “Just like Papa?”

Nodding, Obi-Wan offered her hand to Leia and helped her stand up. Guiding the children to the nearby shade of a large tree, Obi-Wan instructed the children to sit with their legs crossed, hands in their lap. She had a few questions she wanted to ask them.

“Does your father do this often?” Obi-Wan gestured back to the house, where Vader was still brooding but behind thicker shields that nonetheless only managed to muffle the worst of his rage.

Luke pursed his lips and glanced over at his sister, who gave the impression that she wasn’t sure how to answer the query.

“Father does, but Papa doesn't,” Leia finally explained, holding her hands out. “Well, mostly.”
“Papa is the best!” Luke insisted, his eyes brightening, eager to burnish his father’s image in Obi-Wan’s mind. “He takes us flying and buys us presents and he loves us!”

Obi-Wan nodded, her hand over her mouth as she took in this new information. “So ‘Father’ is very angry all the time and ‘Papa’ is not?”

Both twins nodded in unison.

“Why do you wanna know?” Leia asked, her eyes narrowed in suspicion and distrust. She looked so much like Anakin in that moment it made Obi-Wan’s heart ache.

“I’m curious,” Obi-Wan explained, trying to soothe away Leia’s fears. She sensed she had peered far enough into the complex workings of the Skywalker family and decided to pull back for now. There was nothing more to be gained for the day. “Has your father taught either of you how to meditate?”

The twins shook their heads but Luke spoke this time. “No. What’s that?”

“It’s when you are very still and quiet, and you can hear the Force whispering to you,” Obi-Wan explained, sitting up a little straighter as she placed the backs of her hands on her knees, fingers gently uncurling. “Would you like to listen to the Force?”

“The magic can talk?” Leia asked, her eyes round with surprise. “Really?”

“If you are very quiet,” Obi-Wan said, tapping her head. “Both here and-” She tapped her chest directly above her heart. “And here.”

“I can be quiet!” Luke announced, a proud grin on his face. “I can be more quieter than Leia!”

“Cannot!” Leia immediately fired back.

“Can too!”

“Cannot!”

Wanting to stop the squabbling before it went any further, Obi-Wan closed her eyes and settled into the Force, reaching out to feel her spirit wrap around Artoo and take the astromech in a solid grip. The children’s bickering was growing more and more heated, buffeting against her mental shielding but Obi-Wan paid it no mind, letting the momentary discord roll off her like water on a leaf. The Force was her ally in this lesson and she trusted it complicity.

Luke and Leia were another minute or two from bursting into tears when Artoo let out a startled shriek as it started floating into the air. The droid whirled its blue dome around, protesting loudly in binary that Obi-Wan had better put it down if she didn't want to be navigated into a black hole.

Luke and Leia were stunned into silence, their eyes round with shock and mouths hanging open as Artoo floated higher and higher, beeping and whistling in angry consternation.

“Such language, Artoo,” Obi-Wan teased, her eyes still closed as she held her hand out to guide and manipulate the hovering droid. “What would Lord Skywalker say if he caught you cursing in front of his children?”

Artoo did not dignify Obi-Wan with a response.

“Bibi?” Luke spoke, his voice almost a whisper. “Are you doing that? Is this the magic?”

“Yes, this is the Force,” Obi-Wan answered with a smile, opening her eyes to see Luke and Leia’s
delighted and mesmerized faces. “And if you are ready to be listen, I am ready to teach you.”

“We’re ready!” Leia said, sitting up straight as Luke did the same, the tempest of their earlier spat forgotten.

Obi-Wan nodded and carefully lowered Artoo to the ground. “Thank you, my little friend. I'll take it from here.”

Rolling away, Artoo responded with something Obi-Wan chose not to translate out of binary.

“What did he say?” Luke asked, watching the droid warble angrily to itself.

“Something about my parentage, no doubt,” Obi-Wan chuckled. “But now we’re going to practice listening to the Force. Are you ready?”

The children nodded, their excitement radiating outward like a cloud spun from pure light.

“Excellent,” Obi-Wan said. “First of all, sit up tall and straight like this fire maple behind us.”

Luke and Leia wiggled upright, trying to mimic Obi-Wan. She complimented their posture, which only made their aura glow brighter in her mind.

“Very good. Now we will start with a very short meditation today,” Obi-Wan explained as she instructed the twins to put their hands on their knees like she had. “How high can you count?”

“To five!”

“I can go to ten!”

“Ten will be just fine, thank you,” Obi-Wan interjected before further sibling rivalry could derail them. “I want you to count your breathing. Inhale-”

Obi-Wan took an exaggerated breath, inflating her chest and diaphragm before she held it a moment before continuing. “That's one, and then exhale.”

She let out a comically loud puff of air, earning a giggle from Luke.

“That's two. And we'll do that until we get to ten.”

“That's it?” Leia looked at Obi-Wan, skeptical. “That's the magic?”

“First you have to be able to hear the Force,” Obi-Wan said, refusing to rise to the young girl’s bait after years of practice with her father. “So, yes, that's it for today.”

Leia frowned, not nearly as impressed with meditation as she was with flying droids. “Okay.”

“I will count for the first few times and then, when you're ready, you can take over,” Obi-Wan continued, relaxing into her spot. “Are we ready?”

After a hesitant “yes” from the twins, Obi-Wan began a slow and easy rhythm with her breathing, inhaling for four counts and exhaling for the same amount. She made sure to model her pattern loud enough for Luke and Leia to notice but not so loud it was comical or distracting. She allowed the edges of her shields to go soft, letting part of her spirit drift out into the Force and wrap around the children.

Luke took to his meditation easily, his eyes drifting shut after a minute or two. Leia found it more
challenging, fidgeting and scratching at phantom itches that sprang up whenever she tried to settle her mind. Obi-Wan did not fault her for that, having worked Anakin through many an itchy meditation when he was younger.

It was hard to be quiet and still.

Thinking that Leia would do better with something to focus on, Obi-Wan instructed Leia to take over counting and almost immediately the girl progressed, her fidgeting subsided and her own presence in the Force relaxed.

As Leia counted, Obi-Wan could almost see the bond between the siblings growing stronger, the link between them glowing as the Force slowly inundated the area around them. There was something special about these two children, but whether it was due to their father or due to their own innate power was something Obi-Wan did not think she would ever know.

But as Leia counted, her voice soft and mumbled as Luke’s serenity washed over Leia, Obi-Wan found such mysteries fading away from the forefront of her mind. There would be time for pondering the will of the Force later.

Now she needed to be where she was, silently meditating with her new students, focusing only on them and the Force flowing around and through them.

As a soft wind gently tumbled through the leaves of the tree overhead, the trio sat in a silent harmony, breathing in time as their hearts beat as one. The Force grew stronger and more luminous around them with each whispered number that fell off Leia’s lips. Somehow, Luke and Leia had taken each other's hand in the midst of their counting and their presences seemed to blend together, bright and radiant light, happily meshing with the edges of Obi-Wan’s aura.

A realization flashed through Obi-Wan and she gasped, a ripple of shock that was smoothed away by the calm that enveloped them.

It feels like home. Like the Temple.

And in that moment, Obi-Wan knew that no matter what their father did, no matter how monstrous and beastly Vader was going to be to her for the foreseeable future, it would all be worth it for this.

For the hope personified in these two children who radiated life and light into the Force in the midst of the darkest shadow the galaxy had ever seen.

Anakin was seriously contemplating whether or not it was possible to Force choke someone through a holoprojector.

He considered the necessary mechanics of the act, of focusing his will and sending it outward, of wrapping it around the worthless captain’s neck and throttling the life out of him. If he ignored the distance between Tellestria on the Mid Rim and the ship orbiting far away on the Outer Rim near Raxxus and simply pretended the man was right in front of him then, in theory, it would be simple. He was a Sith Lord, after all, and the commander of the largest fleet of ships in the Empire. He was well within his right to enforce discipline however he saw fit.

He was Darth Vader, the man who had sacked the Jedi Temple and saved the Galaxy from their
treachery.

No one would bat an eye if he gave into his impulse to throttle the idiot who had cost him six months of preparation and even more intelligence because he wanted to take the glory of a first strike for himself and his ship, the ridiculously named *Imperious Might*.

The sounds of said captain gasping for air, his hands wrapped around his neck drew Anakin out of his dark thoughts as he realized that, yes, he could in fact strangle a man from halfway across the galaxy if he so desired.

“I don’t care about your excuses Captain Oolot,” Anakin snarled with satisfaction, his mechanical hand curling into a fist. “I wanted those shipyards brought under our control. Now, thanks to you, I will have to come out there and correct your incompetence myself.”

“F-for-g-give muh… muh…” The Captain in question was clawing at his neck, as his lieutenant watched him with round eyes filled with horror. Anakin watched the subordinate swallow nervously, unconsciously tugging at the high neck of his grey collar as he watched his superior’s life slowly strangled out of him.

For one long moment, Anakin toyed with the idea of letting the man asphyxiate just to send a message to everyone else in his fleet that he would not tolerate any further glory-seeking or grandstanding. They were servants of the Empire and the only glory they needed was that they gained in service to the Emperor and their superior officer, who was ultimately Anakin.

Any mistake, any cowardice or failure directly reflected on Anakin and his ability to achieve the goals laid out before him by his master.

*It would be so easy…*

A wave of delight and innocent joy washed through the Force, distracting Anakin from his anger at Captain Oolot. He recognized the feelings of his children, memories of their laughter and smiles floating across his mind and chasing the worst of his fury away.

For now at any rate.

Anakin relaxed his grip on the Captain’s throat, watching him collapse to the ground as he gasped for air, babbling apologies almost as soon as he could breathe again. “I-I’m sorry, G-General Skywalker! High General! Sir! For-g-give me! W-w-we shall aw-w-wait your arrival!”

Anakin locked eyes with the lieutenant who had only risked a glance down at his commanding officer before he turned his attention back to Anakin, his posture rigid and respectful.

“Lieutenant Needa, I want you to collect the data of your Captain’s failed attempt on the Hexal shipyards and the schematics of the structure and have them sent to my aide,” Anakin ordered, folding his arms over his chest. “If they are not prepared before I return from leave, I will not be so forgiving.”

With a sharp flick of his hands, the connection was cut and the blue-white light of the projector flickered out.

Letting out an angry groan, Anakin paced the length of his study, running his hands through his hair as he tried to focus his fury, to channel it into the reservoir of pain and darkness that gave him and every Sith their power. It was easy enough to do, one of the first lessons Sidious had ever taught him about the Dark and yet he found it far more difficult than he would have cared to admit. As he covered the width of his study in long, easy strides, he found himself unconsciously trying to exhale
his rage, to release it into the galaxy, into the welcoming embrace of the Force and the Light.

And even worse, it felt good.

It felt….

*Like the Temple.*

Almost against his will, Anakin found himself drawn out of his study and to the back of the house, where there was a large stone veranda that ran almost the length of the mansion and wide stairs that led down to the rolling grounds.

Momentarily blinded by the sunlight, Anakin closed his eyes and allowed the Force in through his shields, letting the teeming mass of sensations, presences, and energy from the surrounding area filter through his mind, a mass of white noise and pressure no other Force-sensitive in the galaxy had to deal with. The gentle whispers of planets and wildlife in the forest beyond his lands was easy enough to ignore, as was Andron, some of the servants, and a few distant neighbors, dull sparks that were of little importance.

That just left Obi-Wan and his children.

Glowing like Tatooine at midday, radiating peace and tranquillity like the sagest of masters.

Anakin opened his eyes and turned towards the tree they were sitting under, too far away to be noticed by Obi-Wan’s eagle eye. Luke and Leia sat in front of his old master, sitting very still and holding hands from the looks of things. The wind danced through the boughs of the tree above them as Anakin was able to listen in through the Force, hearing Leia’s faint whisper.

“Seven, eight… eight, no. I just did eight.”

“It’s all right, my dear. Just start over at one. This is how we practice and learn.”

Anakin felt, rather than heard, his daughter settle back into a meditation, Luke having never left his, still calmly counting to himself in the Force.

Jealousy, sharp and white-hot like a blaster bolt, knifed through Anakin’s spirit as he thought bitterly how unfair it was that something that had been next to impossible for him to master came to his children like it was nothing.

Shame and humiliation washed through him almost as quickly, as his own thoughts and feelings horrified him. He rested his hands on the carved stone railing of the veranda, staring down at the ground, berating himself for begrudging his children a happy, quiet moment with Obi-Wan.

*This is why you brought her here. To teach Luke and Leia how to… how to use the Force. They’re your children, for stars’ sake! What is wrong with you?!!*

Anakin took a deep breath and stood up straight, surprised to see that Obi-Wan and his children were ending their session.

He watched as Luke and Leia crouched down low before a shout from Obi-Wan sent them off running back towards the house, their faces bright with delight and laughter as they ran through a complex course that must have been dictated beforehand. The twins ran around the fountain topped by a statue of a maiden-widow and then around one that was made of a complex assemblage of fantastical animals before they hurried towards the stairs, not even noticing that Anakin was standing there.
“I’m gonna win!” Luke announced as he pulled just slightly ahead of his sister, the two moving like fleet-footed Alderaanian cloud lions over the manicured grass.

Leia took the approach of less talking and more running and pushed herself harder, the Force blooming behind her as she closed the distance between the two, meager as it was, and then surged ahead. Anakin felt a smile rise to his face as Leia turned her gaze towards the steps and up to the top, a brilliant and true gasp of joy appearing on her face. “Papa!! You’re here!”

And then both of his children were running up the marble steps to throw themselves at him as he sank down into a crouch to catch them both. “Yes, I’m here, Leia. Hello, Luke.”

“Papa!” Luke beamed, burrowing himself into Anakin’s shoulder. “We thought… you were gonna be Father today.’

Leia gave Anakin a kiss on his cheek and let out a happy sound that was a cross between a giggle and a squeal as he picked up both children, standing up to watch Obi-Wan’s slow, processional march back to the house.

“I came outside when I felt you meditating,” Anakin explained, returning Leia’s kiss with one on her forehead and a matching one on Luke’s. “Were you good for Mi… for Obi-Wan?”

Luke nodded with a wide, emphatic grin. “Yes, Papa! We did the shii-cho and the… uhm… shii-cho?”

Leia frowned as she tried to remember which one they had practiced. “Shii-cho one? The first one!”

“Shii-cho Seras-kal,” Obi-Wan explained at the foot of the stairs, gliding upwards with silent grace as she came to stand a good meter away from Anakin, as if she needed the space to flee in case he tried to attack her.

Anakin could remember a time before, when Obi-Wan was never more than an arm’s reach away, when it was normal for him to reach out and tuck a wayward lock of hair back behind her ear, like the one that had just fallen over her brow.

“Of course,” Anakin replied, letting Luke and Leia monopolize his attention as they explained with great delight the first few steps of the Seras-kal form.

He turned around, walking back into the house, hoping that Obi-Wan would follow them without an order. He didn’t want another awkward afternoon like their first one, with Obi-Wan sitting stiffly on a chair and speaking with a frigid politeness that bordered on hostile.

She had thawed out instantly whenever Luke or Leia spoke to her, a warm affection suffusing the room like a sunbeam breaking through the grey winter skies but the minute Anakin tried to talk to her, to draw her into the conversation beyond a “Yes, my lord,” or “No, my lord,” all color and light vanished from the Force around her.

Anakin had wanted to say something, to remind Obi-Wan than his children would notice her passive aggressive tantrums and comment on it but to his surprise, Luke and Leia hadn’t even noticed. Even now, as they happily explained forms he had learned so long ago he forgot how exactly the steps went, his children made no mention of Obi-Wan’s frosty presence or her clipped answers. Luke leaned back over his shoulder, emphatically waving to her, demanding Obi-Wan settle a minor squabble between the twins as if she were Yoda himself.

Maybe… maybe they’re not as powerful as I am. Maybe they can’t sense Obi-Wan the way I can.
Obi-Wan laughed softly at Luke’s imperious request for a ruling on whether one had to stand like a bantha or like a rancor for one of the poses. She had fallen into step behind Anakin and his children, still no closer than before but it eased the tension in his gut to see that Obi-Wan had overcome her pride and followed his lead.

“So what’s the answer?” Anakin asked, turning his head just enough so that it was clear he was speaking directly to Obi-Wan and neither of his children, purposefully choosing a question that required more than a yes or a no.

Obi-Wan was silent for a long, anxious moment as Luke and Leia stared back at her over Anakin’s shoulder, almost to the house now.

*Come on, Obi-Wan. Say something!*

“...Technically it is called the Bantha stance, Luke, but your father found that terribly unimaginative, so he renamed it the Rancor stance and I suppose the name stuck,” Obi-Wan finally answered, her voice soft and low, just loud enough to be heard. “So you are both right, in a manner of speaking.”

Leia let out a triumph “Hah!” that nearly deafened Anakin and Luke went limp in a sullen display of defeat. “Bibiiiii! I’m right! Papa! Tell Bibi I’m right.”

“I think that’s what she said,” Anakin said, coming to a full stop and glancing back at Obi-Wan, who also came to a halt, a polite and respectful distance behind him. Something in his chest twinged at that and he resisted the urge to examine the feeling further. “Isn’t that right, Obi-Wan?”

“Yes, my lord,” Obi-Wan answered, her eyes focused somewhere below his shoulders, her face expressionless. “If is not too much of an imposition, I should like to recover the detritus of our training from the back lawn whilst you and the children enjoy your usual break in the nursery.”

Luke and Leia blinked and turned to Anakin for a translation, who resisted the urge to give into an immature eye roll or let out an exasperated groan at Obi-Wan and her fancy words.

“Yes, yes, fine!” Anakin grumbled, turning away from Obi-Wan, feeling angry and churlish. “Go… do whatever to the *detritus* in the yard and come right back. All right?”

“Yes, my lord,” Obi-Wan answered, her gaze lowered to the ground in what he knew to be a passive-aggressive display of obedience no matter how graceful it might seem to others. “Pardon me.”

Anakin felt Obi-Wan’s departure as she spun around and hurried away from him, her spirit cool and growing fainter the further away she traveled. His patience at an end, Anakin found himself rolling his eyes before he was really aware of it and Leia looked over at him, touching his cheek, concerned.

“Papa?” Leia asked, a small pout on her face, an unspoken question there.

*Did Father come back?*

Shaking his head, Anakin put Obi-Wan to the back of his mind and focused on his children, who were happily snuggled up against him, full of light and love, their spirits warm and bright against his. “I’m hungry. Who wants a snack?”

“I do!” the twins chorused and Anakin felt immediately better at the sight of their smiles.

Anakin sent a silent thank you to the Force for his children and their unwavering loyalty and love.
Obi-Wan would come around eventually, he told himself as the children explained in enthusiastic
detail what they wanted to eat.

“Why is it everything you two want is made up of sugar and chocolate?” Anakin laughed as they
headed inside.

Has it only been a week? Obi-Wan wondered as she walked toward the farthest fountain from the
house, taking a circuitous route just to stretch out her privacy for as long as she could. It feels so
much longer.

Gathering up discarded water bottles and a few towels, Obi-Wan wandered over to another pile of
forgotten wooden practice blades and cast-off clothing layers from earlier in the day. She carried
everything back to a large crate she and Artoo had carried out that morning, dropping everything in
there with a sigh.

“That did not take nearly long enough,” Obi-Wan said, resting her hands on her hips as the wind
danced through the trees, rustling the leaves overhead.

The cool breeze tugged at the loose strands of her hair, attempting to draw her attention away from
the sad fact that she was far too conscientious in her tidying up and had already run out of reasons to
stay outside and far away from Vader.

Obi-Wan picked up the box of supplies, straightened her shoulders and marched back toward the
house, reminding herself that Vader was due to depart the next day. All she had to do was to make it
through the upcoming evening and then she and the children would be free.

For a little while anyway.

After a typically quiet and somber dinner, Vader insisted on helping Luke and Leia wash up for bed.
Obi-Wan was happy to stay out of the way, pulling out pajamas for the children and turning down
their beds while Vader and his children splashed around in the expansive refresher suite.

She listened with one ear open as Leia pleaded with her father to stay longer, Luke adding his voice
when Leia’s begging didn’t work.

“But Papa!” Luke cried, dragging the last vowel out as if that could convince Vader through sheer
force of whining. “Why? Why can’t you stay here? We want you to stay here! Please?”

“You know I can’t, Luke,” Vader replied, his voice soft as he spoke to his children. Obi-Wan could
feel his unhappiness, the emotion seeping out into the Force. “I have to go back and help the Empire.
If I don’t help then innocent people will get hurt.”

“Like Grandmother?” Leia asked, her words freezing Obi-Wan in place, guilt and remorse churning
in her gut.
Shmi…

She wondered what Shmi would make of the Empire, of her son holding an aristocratic title and standing at the right hand of the Emperor.

Somehow, Obi-Wan felt that Shmi would not approve. At least, not the woman described to her by Qui-Gon and later Anakin.

“Yes, like your Grandmother,” Vader said, an older sadness underlying the conversation. “I have to protect people like your grandmother and you from the bad people out there who want to hurt them.”

“Yes, like your Grandmother,” Vader said, an older sadness underlying the conversation. “I have to protect people like your grandmother and you from the bad people out there who want to hurt them.”

“Who?” Luke asked, but Anakin’s answer was drowned out by the sound of water pouring and some gratuitous splashing by the children. Obi-Wan took that as a sign that bath time was almost finished and hurried to finish picking up the children’s room before retreating to the far wall next to Artoo, who let out a low whistle.

“I don’t know. I should think at dawn but I have not asked him,” Obi-Wan replied, glancing down at her droid friend. “You are welcome to, if you feel up to it.”

Artoo’s snort made it clear there was very little in the galaxy that would persuade him to interrupt Darth Vader’s family time.

“Artoo!” Obi-Wan hissed, rapping the blue astromech on the dome with a knuckle as Vader and his children finished up in the refresher. “He could hear you! Do you want to be reformatted?”

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“Hear what?” Vader asked as he walked out with the twins in his arms, dropping Leia off on her bed first and then Luke on his. “Obi-Wan, help Leia with her pajamas.”

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“Yes, my lord,” Obi-Wan replied, shooting a glare back at Artoo, hoping there was enough self-preservation coded into its memory banks to keep the blue droid quiet. “Ready for bed, Leia?”

Once both Skywalker children were dressed and ready for bed, they both climbed onto Luke’s bed and curled up next to Vader, who sat against the headboard, his long legs stretched out almost over the edge of the bed. He smiled down at his children, who fussed around for a minute or two before finding a comfortable position to settle down.

Obi-Wan walked over to the far wall, where Artoo was standing, asking softly for access to his charging cable as Luke and Leia clamored for a story.

“A story?” Vader echoed, his voice warm in a way Obi-Wan had never heard from him before. There was love there and a gentleness she would not have believed a Sith Lord capable of retaining. “What story do you want to hear tonight?”

Luke and Leia rattled off a small list of fairytales and myths from prominent Inner Rim systems, Vader listening patiently.

“I can’t tell you all those stories. Maybe you should pick one. Something you both want to hear,” Vader suggested as Obi-Wan finished plugging Artoo into the charging unit and connecting his sensors to the house security system.

“Both?” Leia said, looking over at Luke, and in spite of the growing darkness as Obi-Wan lowered the blinds and the solar screens, the room grew brighter as the two children quickly discussed what story they wanted to hear through their connection in the Force.

Just as Obi-Wan finished her fussing and walked to the door, Luke announced what he and his sister
had chosen for a bedtime story.

“We wanna hear how Papa met Bibi.”

Obi-Wan froze in the doorway, her back to the darkened room. She turned her head ever so slightly, her expression carefully neutral as she waited to see how Vader would handle this request.

“Ah… you sure you want to hear that story?” Vader asked, hesitation in his voice and his presence in the Force slowly drawing back behind his shielding. “You don’t want to hear ‘The Hungry Little Rancor’?”

“Papa, you told us that story already,” Leia melodramatically groaned. “We wanna hear about Bibi and the magic!”

“The magic?” Vader repeated, confused until his memory provided him with the correct connection. “Oh! You mean the Force?”

Obi-Wan leaned against the doorway, arms crossed at her waist as she tried to unobtrusively listen in, curious to see what Vader was going to tell his children.

“Yes! The magic!” Luke said as a yawn snuck up on him.

“Hmmm…” Vader mused as he dropped a kiss on top both children’s heads. “I don’t know how exciting the story will be. But if that’s what you want…”

The twins loudly groaned that it was.

“All right, fine. Do you remember the story about the podrace?” Vader began, giving the children a very shallow and heavily edited version of what happened on Tatooine, with Qui-Gon playing the role of kindly and wise father figure to parallel his mother’s saintly sacrifice.

Obi-Wan thought it interesting how Padme had largely disappeared from the narrative, a hole in the story that neither child seemed to notice or care about. She supposed it was to make the telling of the story easier than having to dredge up the unhappy memories of their mother and her continued, unexplained absence in their life.

“After I said goodbye to your grandmother, Master Jinn and I left Mos Espa for his starship,” Vader said, warming to his tale as Luke and Leia listened with rapt attention. “Now Master Jinn was as tall as a mountain and I wasn’t much taller than you two, so I had to run to keep up with him. I was a going to be a Jedi and I didn’t want him to think I was slow and lazy.”

“As tall as a mountain?!” Leia gasped. “Really?”

“Really,” Vader grinned. “So we ran, Well I ran, and Master Jinn walked to his starship, a beautiful chromium-covered ship, like the one in our hangar bay.”

“Ooo!” Luke whispered, truly his father’s son and already half in love with ships and flying.

“And we almost made it when a monster attacked us!” Vader continued, aptly describing Darth Maul. “He was black and red, covered in horns and he attacked me.”

“No!” Leia and Luke chorused, horrified that there was anyone in the galaxy who could threaten their father.

“Yes!” Vader said, gesturing with one hand. “Master Jinn threw me to the ground, pulled out his
lightsaber, and attacked the monster!"

Obi-Wan allowed herself a small smile as she listened in the doorway, pleased to see at least one Jedi’s memory had made it out untarnished.


“Master Jinn fought the monster, telling me to ‘Run, Anakin! Run!’ And I did, as fast as I could, my heart pounding in my chest. I ran all the way to the shining starship and up the boarding ramp. And do you know who was on that starship?”

“Who?” Leia asked, utterly delighted by the story.

There was a long pregnant moment of silence, Obi-Wan staring at the ground as Vader put the climax of his story together.

“Obi-Wan was on that ship,” Vader continued to shocked gasps. “I told her, ‘Master Jinn is in danger!’ And she told me that we would rescue him together.”

Well that’s not entirely incorrect, Obi-Wan mused.

“Obi-Wan jumped in the pilot’s chair and flew the ship while I navigated us back to Master Jinn. We lowered the ramp and flew so low we could have touched the trees out back.”

This fact stunned the twins, although not as much as it would have before, Luke and Leia slowly tiring.

“Then, just as the monster was about to kill Master Jinn, we arrived, blasting him with our repulsorlifts and giving Master Jinn a chance to get away. Then we flew away to Coruscant.”


“I ran back to Master Jinn with Obi-Wan and he introduced us,” Vader finished as he picked up Leia and returned her to her bed. “He said, ‘This is Obi-Wan Kenobi, my padawan learner and your sister Jedi.’”

The corner of Obi-Wan’s mouth quirked at that, surprised Anakin recalled so many details of that stressful moment so long ago.

“Anakin Skywalker, meet Obi-Wan Kenobi,” her master said, trying to slow his breathing, gesturing with one large hand.

Obi-Wan looked over at the dusty, sun-bleached boy smiling at her, his eyes brighter than stars. He glowed at her side, the little boy from the desert, full of a churning storm of emotions as he spoke.

“Hi! You’re a Jedi too?”

There was a strange tension in the Force and Obi-Wan found her usual graces deserting her as she nodded, mute. Yes, she was, she hoped to be a knight soon.

“Nice to meet you!” The boy, Anakin, her master said his name was Anakin, stuck out his hand for a greeting. She took his small hand in hers, shaking it twice before reclaiming it, feeling as if she had just touched hands with a bonfire.

It all seemed so small then, unimportant. That brief greeting, a small exchange with no hint of how fundamentally their worlds were about to change.
Vader’s story, while neglecting large portions relating to Padme and her retainers, maintained the essential truths behind their meeting: Qui-Gon and Anakin’s flight from Darth Maul, Anakin’s frantic relay of her master’s message and their eventual flight from Tatooine.

His story was far more flattering to Obi-Wan that her own memories were, which largely consisted of a young padawan’s irritation at the sudden appearance of a young, untrained, and impertinent Force-sensitive child, and sullen confusion at her master’s obsession over said child. Qui-Gon had been convinced Anakin was the Chosen One, an unfair burden to place on him that had followed them throughout Anakin’s tutelage and later on in the Clone Wars.

A false destiny they could never escape.

A duty Anakin ultimately rejected.

“Good night, Luke. Good night, Leia,” Vader said gently, moving toward the door.

Obi-Wan hurried off to her room without a backward glance, her heart full of conflicting emotions and her head full of memories she had long thought buried.

Anakin finished saying goodnight to his children, promising to send them holos every day and to bring them presents from whatever planets he visited along the way. He was finally about to leave when Luke spoke up, his voice soft and fretful.

“Be careful, Papa,” Luke said, his eyes focused on his pillow. “Please come home soon.”

Anakin frowned, pain lancing through him as he watched his son’s somber face and his valiant attempt to be brave and strong.

It made leaving Luke and Leia all the more difficult.

Crossing back over to Luke, Anakin leaned over to press a kiss into his son’s hair, murmuring to him. “I will, Luke. And I promise I will come back before the season changes.”

“Papa?” Leia whispered in the dark, and Anakin made sure to give his daughter the same kiss and promise before he left, closing the door behind him. He felt better knowing Artoo was watching over his children and that Obi-Wan was nearby, no doubt settling in for her evening meditation before bed.

This was familiar. This was how it should have always been.

*Finally my family is back together.*

Anakin walked away from his children’s bedroom, quietly moving through the dark hallways of the cavernous house he had inherited when his master strong-armed the Noble Houses into granting him an aristocratic title. Anakin was under no illusions about how his title came to him and used it only as a source of income and a place to keep his family, far from the watchful eyes on Coruscant but close enough that he could be there within a day if he was needed.

It also served as an excellent place to escape to when he was on leave, the beautiful lands around his home serving as an excellent counterpoint to the endless grey, black, and chrome of battleships. He
didn’t really care much about the estate’s decor, content with the fact that it was comfortable and that Luke and Leia seemed to like it. Anakin didn’t know what Obi-Wan thought about her room but he had given her the room with the second best view of the mountains, after Luke and Leia’s bedroom. Surely she had to have noticed that fact after almost a week with them.

Lost in thought, he wandered back to his bedroom, located far enough away that his occasional bouts of insomnia wouldn’t wake up the children.

After a shower and a change into some sleeping pants, Anakin found himself flipping through a datapad, skimming through the data helpfully provided by Lieutenant Needa.

He made a few notes here and there but he was surprised to find himself yawning as the words started to swim in his vision. It had been quite a while since sleep naturally overcame him and he was only too happy to give into it.

His last thought as the darkness carried him away was how nice it was going to be to get a full night’s sleep.

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That night Anakin dreamed.

Of Mustafar and Naboo.

Of the cavernous hallways of the Jedi Temple and the too-tight confines of starships he was always a little too tall and broad for.

He dreamt of Ahsoka and Rex, of happier days at the beginning of the Clone Wars. He saw men he had lost and others who were still in his legion, loyal and true.

Strangely the dreams did not upset him as much as they might have before. His life during the Clone Wars had been infinitely simpler, full of deadlines, orders, and clear cut goals.

There was something soothing and familiar about these dreams. He felt at peace drifting from barracks to battlefields and back again in flashes of awareness and crystallized memories.

Anakin’s dreams took him from Christophis to Onderon, from the bridge of the Resolute to the halls of the Senate, walking with Ahsoka at his side.

He knew their quiet stroll through the Senate promenade level was a memory but he didn’t know which one at first. Ahsoka was telling him about something she had learned during an intensive sparring session with Yoda, and Anakin found himself only half listening as something in the distance caught his eye.

Obi-Wan was standing down the hallway, talking warmly with someone Anakin couldn’t quite make out. She smiled up at them, laughing a little at something they said and nodded in agreement. He could feel her in the Force, warm like the dawning sun after a frigid Tatooine night.

The light came in through the window over her shoulder, setting the copper in her hair aflame as it hung down her back in a complicated, but familiar, braid. She wore the brown robes of a Jedi with all the grace of a planetary ruler, shoulders back and head held high.
She stood out amongst the crowd of preening shallow politicians, all the more elegant for the simplicity of her dress and the aura of serene confidence radiating out of her.

*She’s beautiful,* Anakin found himself thinking as he watched his master tuck a stray lock of hair behind her ear, another wide grin lighting up her blue-grey eyes. There was something mesmerizing about Obi-Wan in that moment, something about the way her head moved and the expression on her face, something that Anakin had never noticed before, not consciously.

But then Obi-Wan was looking at him, turning that dazzling smile on him, making his heart stop and his gut tighten. Her gaze was bright and pure and she mouthed *Hello* to him as he stared at her.

*Obi-Wan is beautiful,* Anakin thought again, or remembered thinking, he wasn’t sure which one it was. His mind whirled as he tried to make sense of this fundamental altering of the makeup of his world, suddenly and painfully aware that his master was a beautiful woman and she was smiling at him and he wasn’t doing anything like a big, stupid, idiotic nerf-herder.

“Anakin?”

*Not now, Ahsoka.* Anakin thought at his padawan as Obi-Wan tilted her head a little, her brows furrowed with a whisper of worry. Had she always been this attractive and Anakin had never noticed it? Was it something about her outfit today? Maybe it was the sunlight coming in through the far window?

“Anakin!”

“In a minute, Snips,” he muttered, trying to wave off Ahsoka’s concerns. He needed to unravel the mystery of this new, attractive Obi-Wan, to understand what it meant and why he had never noticed before. He knew his master, former master, better than anyone and if she was hiding this from him, what else was she hiding?

And why hadn’t Anakin noticed it before? When did the change happen?

Obi-Wan caught Anakin’s eye again and she mouthed a *What’s wrong?* as he watched. Her gaze flickered from Anakin’s face to something behind him and she frowned, gesturing with a nod of her head to something she felt he needed to pay attention to.

“Anakin!”

Anakin let out a groan, rolling his eyes and turning back around to face Ahsoka and her questions. “Yes, Snips! What is it? What do you-“

Padme stood behind Anakin, her eyes shooting brown fire and her mouth curled into a furious sneer. She marched towards him, growing larger and larger as she did. “You monster! You murderer! Does she know what you’ve done? Who you’ve killed? Have you told her, Anakin? Tell her! Tell Obi-Wan what you’ve done, Darth Vader!”

Anakin awoke with a start, his skin cold and clammy and his heart pounding in his chest as he struggled to breathe.

*A nightmare.*

*Just a nightmare.*

Anakin took a deep breath and then another, telling himself over and over again that it was just a nightmare, that it wasn’t real. Padme was gone.
Anakin had saved the galaxy.

Obi-Wan would understand.

*She’ll understand. I know she will. Some day.*

*I hope.*

Chapter End Notes

*sneaks in*

¯\

*updates on a Monday?!?!*

^_____^

*sneaks back out*

Poor Obi-Wan. She can't even slack off properly. I could have turned that "cleaning up the detritus" into AT LEAST 45 minutes of blissfully Vader-free peace and quiet. Maybe even an hour if I was feeling really lazy. XD

As always, you can come shout at me at FireflyFish
Departure

Chapter Summary

Darth Vader picks a truly abominable time to return to his fleet. Obi-Wan reads up on the twins' education while Leia makes her unhappiness known in a most spectacular way.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Obi-Wan woke up in the middle of hell.

The ground beneath her was hard, metal, and warm. Distant sounds of heavy machinery and gears ground along over the base layer of a roaring blast furnace. Amidst the din, she could hear someone sobbing, followed by a discordant hissing snap of something she couldn’t quite place and yet terrifyingly familiar.

Obi-Wan opened her eyes and took a breath, filling her lungs and nose with hot, humid air wet with the stench of sweat, fear, and ashes. She sat up and felt the heavy weight of something on her... shoulders? Back? On her neck?

No. Not on her neck.

Around her neck.

A Zygerrian slave collar.

No! NO! Get it off! Get it OFF! I can’t breathe! I have to get this off of me!

Panic lanced through Obi-Wan, sharp and overpowering, blotting out everything except for a primal need to rip the slave collar off.

Clawing at her neck, Obi-Wan scrabbled in vain at the heavy, ominously humming monstrosity that kept her in bondage and cut her off from the Force.

Get this off me! I can’t! I CANNOT! I have to get out of here. Not again. I can’t do this again! Please!

“Kenobi?” A distant voice crowed, phlegmatic and malevolent. “Are you awake, Kenobi?”

Grievous? On Kadavo? That’s not possible!

“General Kenobi? Sir? Are you alright?” Another voice intruded into Obi-Wan’s awareness, low and urgent but with the polished accent of a professional soldier, a voice she knew very well.

“Rex?” Obi-Wan gasped, trying to breathe, trying to fight off the panic and the fear that threatened to overwhelm her. “Rex, is that you?”

For a moment the stench of hell and suffering was pierced by the clean smell of bacta and spice as
Obi-Wan felt two hands on her shoulders, gently shaking her. “General Kenobi, we’re getting out of here. Follow me. General Skywalker’s on his way.”

She watched Rex stand up, saw him turn around and run toward a tall, shadowy figure holding a red lightsaber.

“Wait! Rex! That’s not Anakin!”

Obi-Wan jerked back into the waking world, her heart pounding in her chest as she struggled to bring air into her lungs.

She pushed herself upright, wide eyes searching the shadows of her room for threats and thankfully finding none.

Alone in the dim silver light of the moon coming in through the window, Obi-Wan bowed her head down against the tops of her knees and tried to bring her frazzled emotions back under control, repeating two lines of the Jedi Code that she found comforting in the face of such a powerful nightmare.

*Emotion, yet peace.*

*Passion, yet serenity.*

As the white noise of her night terror receded, Obi-Wan sensed a presence at her door, nervous, exhausted, and knocking softly.

“How Mina? A-are you awake, ma’am?”

Frowning at the door, Obi-Wan slipped off her bed to pull on the light grey wool robe she had brought with her from Arcadia before answering the hesitant knocking. “Yes, Lieutenant Andron. What is it? It’s… Stars above! It’s almost four in the morning.”

Nodding anxiously, Lieutenant Andron looked back over his shoulder, as if someone was standing at the end of the hallway watching him. “Yes, ma’am. I know. And I’m sorry to wake you so early but General Skywalker is preparing to leave and he insisted that he speak with you before he departs.”

Perhaps it was the nightmare or the early hour but Obi-Wan couldn’t quite believe what she was hearing.

“He’s leaving now?! Can’t he wait until the children are awake? The sun hasn’t even risen,” Obi-Wan said, her exhaustion bleeding into her voice and robbing her of her usual polished manners.

“No, Miss Mina,” the lieutenant shook his head, his expression and manner apologetic but surprisingly firm. “He can’t. I really am sorry, Miss Mina, but General Skywalker wants to leave in the next thirty minutes and he says he has instructions he wants to give you before he departs.”

“Instructions?” Obi-Wan snorted, folding her arms over her chest. “Does he? And he couldn’t… Nevermind. I apologize for my lack of manners, Lieutenant Andron. Please inform General Skywalker that I will be down shortly.”

Relief washed through the young man, bleeding into the Force around him as he bowed to Obi-Wan and told her he would inform the General straight away. With a sharp turn, Lieutenant Andron was gone, marching down the hallway as Obi-Wan walked back into her room and to her closet.

A part of her wanted to simply march outside to the landing pad in her robe and pajamas, to really
drive home the ridiculousness of Vader’s demands. She let herself briefly imagine his furious reaction and Lieutenant Andron’s scandalized shock, taking pleasure in being petty and rebellious in the safe haven of her mind.

Letting out one last sigh, Obi-Wan turned her weary focus to the few clothes she possessed, finally deciding on a warm, shapeless dress with a heavy sweater worn over it to keep out the spring chill that still lurked in the dark of recent nights. After she slipped into her shoes, Obi-Wan headed into the hallway, relying on the Force to guide her in the direction of the dark storm cloud of Vader.

Vader’s ship was ready to depart when Obi-Wan finally made it to the landing pad.

She pulled her sweater tighter around her and wished she had kept her robe on as the cold night wind blew right through her. Walking across the grey duracrete, Obi-Wan waited for Vader to take notice of her presence, shivering on the edge of the harsh floodlights of the shuttle.

Vader was looking at a datapad held out by Lieutenant Andron, frowning as he scrolled through something before he nodded and gestured for Andron to board the ship. He did not turn around or acknowledge Obi-Wan’s presence until the lieutenant was aboard the ship and out of sight and earshot.

Once they were alone, Vader turned around and walked back to Obi-Wan, wearing the sharp black uniform with the heavy cape he had worn when he took her away from Arcadia not even five days ago.

“Lord Vader,” Obi-Wan said, making a token display of respect with a bowed head and the smallest curtsy she could manage. “Lieutenant Andron says you have instructions for me?”

“Yes,” Vader replied, his head canted to the side as he glanced over Obi-Wan for a moment. “Didn’t you wear that yesterday?”

“No, I wore my grey dress yesterday,” Obi-Wan sighed, a heavy, exhausted sound. “I assure you it’s perfectly serviceable for the situation at hand, my lord.”

“You really only have three dresses?” Vader asked, his brows furrowed in puzzlement.

It took a great deal of effort but Obi-Wan managed not to roll her eyebrows or let her annoyance slip past her shields. “Yes. And a pair of pants, a sweater, and two tunics. Your instructions, Lord Vader?”

*Sweet Force! Just spit it out already! I’m freezing!*

Vader slowly shook his head and held out a datapad to Obi-Wan, smaller than the one he had been going over with Andron. This was a personal one, emblazoned with what Obi-Wan could only assume was the seal of the House of Tellestria on the side. She accepted the item with a nod, watching the screen flare to life with a collection of entries before she glanced back up at Vader.

“What is this?”

“The information necessary for running my house. The names of the staff, ID codes for the droids, passcodes and access to the security mainframe. Everything you’ll need while I’m gone,” he answered with a studied nonchalance, his steady and intense gaze belying his air of indifference.
“There’s also Luke and Leia’s daily schedules and the lessons they were working on before… Before I brought you on.”

Obi-Wan’s brows quirked upward at Vader’s words as she quickly scanned through the codes she had been given. She access to almost everything, except any vehicle that could leave the planet’s atmosphere or was lightspeed capable.

Pursing her lips in a moment of ire, Obi-Wan willed the sharp words back from whence the came, deciding that it was better to hold her tongue and see Vader off as quickly as possible so she could get back to her warm bed and the promise of another few hours sleep before Luke and Leia woke up.

And in truth, Vader had given Obi-Wan control over the vast majority of his household. There were bank accounts, the medical records of the children, and files on the small staff that kept the house in working order. She even noted a map of the extended grounds as well as a schedule for the delivery of food and other goods. As near as she could tell in her half-frozen and bleary-eyed state, there would be very little she didn’t have direct control over. Just Vader’s room, his study, and the garage with ships she could use to flee with Luke and Leia.

The silence dragged on too long for Vader, who cleared this throat and gave her a look that indicated she was supposed to speak.

“How long will you be gone?” Obi-Wan asked, wondering what she was going to tell the children when they woke up.

“Two months,” Vader answered, glancing up at his shuttle. “Maybe more depending on how long the Separatists try to hold out. I’ve got two systems to clear out and then make a report to my m… the Emperor and then I’ll be back. I assume you’ll be fine while I’m gone? I don’t have time to referee Luke and Leia’s squabbling while I’m on campaign.”

Obi-Wan gave Vader an incredulous look, sleep deprivation and the cold fraying her temper. She inhaled slowly, letting the cold air fill her lungs and soothe the growing heat of her anger. “I assure you, Lord Vader, that neither I nor the children shall trouble you whilst you are away in the service of your great empire.”

Vader arched an eyebrow at this, folding his arms over his chest in what might have been an intimidating display to a warmer and well-rested subordinate, but it did not faze Obi-Wan. She instead managed a pale imitation of her Negotiator’s smile. “Is there anything else, my lord?”

Coming to the conclusion that subtlety was not getting his message across, Vader stalked over to Obi-Wan, his eyes narrowed and turning a sickly yellow-green. He pulled himself up to his full height and stared down at her, his physical presence and carefully controlled rage far more intimidating than she was comfortable admitting to. “Don’t think that because I’m leaving you in charge of my children and my house that I’ve somehow forgotten about the Belks and their pathetic little village. And don’t even think about teaching the twins your pathetic Jedi Code. All it ever did was get in the way of what needed to be done. All those years of following the Code, of preaching its wisdom, and what did it get you, Obi-Wan?”

Obi-Wan turned her gaze away from Vader, keeping herself, her spirit, as still as the deep fathoms of an ocean. Retreating behind her shields, falling deeper and deeper into the imagined cold blue, she tried to drown the passion of her fury, to weigh it down with the knowledge that others’ lives hung in the balance.

Any petty act of defiance on Obi-Wan’s part would be revisited upon innocents.
And I have been responsible for more than enough death in my life.

“What did it get you, Obi-Wan?” Vader repeated, his eyes darting over her face, looking for something, searching for a crack in her composure or a weakness he could exploit.

He took a step back when there was none, holding his head high as he sniffed, “Nothing. It got you nothing but a stolen droid and some mud. I’m offering you one last chance, Obi-Wan. Don’t make me regret it.”

It occurred to Obi-Wan that Vader expected some kind of thanks and that it would no doubt soothe his ego to hear it and so she spoke, manufacturing humility and serenity out of iced-over rage. “I do not intend to, Lord Vader. Safe travels.”

She did not meet his eyes or hear his reply, if there was one, and only knew Vader was on the ship when she saw the boarding ramp pulled up into the shuttle.

Once the engines hummed to life, Obi-Wan turned on her heel and marched back into the house, refusing to give Vader another moment’s thought save for a parting shot.

I hope those Separatists give you hell.

A few hours of warm sleep later, Obi-Wan was pulling on her solitary pair of pants when Artoo unceremoniously rolled into her room and demanded to know why she hadn’t called for it when Vader departed.

“Good morning to you too, Artoo,” Obi-Wan smirked, sitting down at the gilded and ornate vanity that faced the rather splendid view of the grounds. She pulled out a brush and a comb and started to work on pulling her hair into a braided bun. “I am sorry I didn’t wake you but Vader decided to depart at a truly inhumane hour of the night and I wasn’t awake enough to summon you. Besides, I thought you were supposed to be guarding the children?”

Artoo rolled to the side of the beautifully carved table, hooting displeasure at being left out before moving on to make a few cutting remarks about Vader’s behavior to Obi-Wan. She smiled down at her blue-and-white friend, stroking the droid’s shining blue dome before returning to her hair. “I appreciate the support, Artoo. I’m glad to know I’ve got you in my corner.”

There was a whirl of pride as the astromech rocked back and forth on its legs before asking about the datapad next to Obi-Wan’s hairbrush. She picked up the pad, admiring the engraving work on the item now that it was daytime and she wasn’t half-blind from exhaustion. “This? It’s the keys to the castle, so to speak. Well, not all of them. Vader didn’t give me access to the lightspeed-capable vessels.”

What about the landspeeders? Artoo asked, focusing its main lens on Obi-Wan. Possible escape that way?

Obi-Wan shook her head, taking up one of her hairpins and weaving into her hair. “Thank you, Artoo, but I don’t think escape is possible, at least, not right now. Vader has made it quite clear that any action of mine he finds objectionable will result in the annihilation of the Belk family and the village of Three Rivers on Arcadia.”
Artoo let out a low, mournful tone, swiveling its blue dome side to side in disbelief. **The Belk unit has children.**

Letting out a heavy sigh, Obi-Wan moved her last hairpin into place before standing up and walking to the door and her daily duties to Luke and Leia. “So did the Jedi Order.”

With a sad coo, Artoo rolled out into the hallway after Obi-Wan, lamenting the stranger who had reprogrammed former-Master Skywalker.

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Luke and Leia were not surprised to learn that their father had departed in the middle of the night to return to his responsibilities.

“That’s when Papa always leaves,” Luke explained over a bowl of fruit and cereal that he was eating with only a small amount of mess. “Cause that’s when Father wakes up.”

“Oh really?” Obi-Wan asked, smearing a dollop of jam onto Leia’s toast and handing it back to her. “Here you are, my dear. And what do we say?”

“Thank you!” Leia said, a wide and happy smile on her face as she bit into her toast with gusto. “And Papa waits until Father goes to come back.”

Still unclear on the subject but not willing to push it any further, Obi-Wan pulled out the datapad Vader had given her, pulling up the lessons Luke and Leia had been “studying” before her arrival. There were simple things like colors, shapes, letters, and numbers as well as a few more complex words, but nothing beyond that. There was a list of dated files from former caretakers of the twins and Obi-Wan picked one at random, not at all surprised to find a report on their development written in terse, polite language with an undercurrent of fear.

**While your children are truly remarkable, Lord Skywalker, their… unnatural talents are beyond my control.**

Another one briefly described a “meltdown” by Leia.

*Your daughter’s temper is... short and hair-trigger. It takes little to set her off and only your presence seems to soothe her. There is little I can do or say to change that.*

Then an observation about Luke.

*The boy is small and underdeveloped. He hides behind his sister and when he does speak, it is to cry for his mother or his father.*

*It is my professional opinion that they are too young to be left without a parent.*

Obi-Wan frowned, clicking her tongue as she perused a few more notes, each one shedding a tiny bit of insight into the chaotic and tumultuous Skywalker family home before she arrived. Based on the dates of the entries, Padme had been out of the house for at least a year and in that time Luke and Leia had only each other and their father to rely on for consistency and stability. She wasn’t at all surprised to discover that the closer the children grew to their father, as some of the latest notes dictated, their behaviour grew more and more volatile and emotional.
Their father was a Sith Lord, after all.

“Bibi?” Luke spoke up, interrupting Obi-Wan’s reading. “When is Papa coming back?”

“He said two months, assuming everything goes well,” Obi-Wan answered, turning off the datapad and setting it aside.

“Two months?!” the twins wailed in unison, Luke slumping backwards in his chair while Leia tossed her toast crusts onto her plate and scowled, folding her arms across her chest.

Sensing she had made a miscalculation in how much information the children could handle, Obi-Wan quickly course-corrected. “I think you’ll have mastered your first form by then. You can both show your father when he comes back. He will be very impressed.”

This had the desired effect on Luke, who immediately sat back up. “The whole Shii-cho?”

Obi-Wan nodded, taking a bite of her own piece of buttered and jam-covered toast. “Yes. The rancor form we’ve been working on.”

“Wow!” Luke gasped in delight, turning to Leia, who held onto her anger far more tightly than her brother did and was still glowering at the table. Her brother, sensing her displeasure, turned back to his cereal, trying not to further upset her.

“Two months is forever!” Leia finally said, gesturing with little fists. “Why can’t Papa stay? I want Papa!”

“Your papa will be back before you know it,” Obi-Wan said, reaching over to take one of Leia’s angry fists in her hand, trying to soothe her quickly fraying mood. “I know you are sad and angry, but I promise he will return as soon as he can.”

Leia looked at Obi-Wan, her brown eyes suspiciously glassy and her cheeks reddening as her temper snapped. “No! Not soon! Now! I want Papa now!”

With a pound of her free fists on the table, Leia lashed out with the Force, flinging plates and silverware into the air and crashing off the table. She let out another shout, calling for Vader and reaching out through the Force for him, a powerful wave that knocked Obi-Wan back a step as she stood up.

Luke looked over at Leia, a mixture of fear and shock on his face. His spirit was already reaching out for Leia, trying to placate his twin, to help her calm down and find peace despite the mess of her emotions. Obi-Wan could hear him faintly calling out to Leia as she wailed, sobbing for her father to come home, her cries sharp with the fear of being left alone, again, with another nanny, with another stranger she wasn’t certain of.

Another fake mother who was going to run away from her and Luke any minute now.

Another adult who was terrified of her.

“Leia!” Luke cried, tears of frustration rising to match hers as he tumbled out of his chair, trying to rush to his sister’s side. “Leia! Don’t cry! Don’t cry, Leia! I love you! Leia!”

Obi-Wan sprung into action, hurrying over to Luke and making sure he wasn’t hurt from his ungainly dismount.

Luke tried to push his way past Obi-Wan but found her arms and shoulders firm and unyielding.
Leia continued to wail, crying for Vader, crying for her lost mother and crying for the phantom echo of the bruise on his knee Luke was going to get.

“Bibi!” Luke sobbed, turning his face into Obi-Wan’s shoulder. “Bibi! Bring Papa back! Leia needs him! Please!”

Obi-Wan nodded, tucking Luke close as she stood up and stepped closer to Leia, who was starting to shake the windows and the broken dishes on the floor as her pain ricocheted through the Force around them.

Stunned, Obi-Wan watched small pieces of the delicate plates begin to shatter, unable to withstand the might of a heartbroken Skywalker.

*And she’s only four, sweet Force.* Obi-Wan focused and wrapped thick, soothing shields around her own mind and Luke’s, swaddling the poor boy in a blanket of warm affection and the memory of safety, of Obi-Wan being young and cuddled up in the arms of her Wookie creche master.

Luke responded immediately to the shielding, his own emotions settling, and as his sobs lessened, Obi-Wan saw her way through the storm of Leia’s unabated misery, guided subconsciously by Luke’s concern and worry for his little sister.

“Leia?” Obi-Wan said, both aloud and through the Force, trusting Luke to carry her words to his twin. “Leia? I need you to listen to me, little one.”

“No!” Leia shouted, fracturing a window pane in her rage. “Bibi’s not Mumma!”

Luke cringed a little, curling closer to Obi-Wan and the protection of her shielding. “Leia…”

“No, I’m not,” Obi-Wan continued, deciding it was better to set Luke down behind her as she moved another step closer to Leia. “And I am not your father but I am not going to leave you. I promise.”

“Yes, you will!” Leia sobbed, her face red and nose running as she tried to rub out the tears spilling down her cheeks. “Everybody does! They hate us!”

“No one hates you,” Obi-Wan said, taking another step forward, careful to make sure Leia saw her movements, lest the girl strike out in her fear and accidentally hurt Luke. “Nothing you do could make me leave you. I swear, little one. That is what a creche master does. I take care of you when your parents cannot.”

“But I want Papa!” Leia cried, dragging the last note out with a plaintive, gasping plea into the Force, the sound and fury dying when there was no response from Vader. “Why? Why can’t Papa stay with us? Why did Mumma leave? Why, Bibi? Why?”

With Luke clinging to her leg from behind, Obi-Wan reached Leia’s side and cautiously picked her up out of her chair, holding the girl tightly as she cried about the cruel realities of her childhood. Glancing down at Luke, Obi-Wan gestured with a nod for him to follow them as she carried Leia into the library down the hall.

Making her way a large sofa with plenty of room for Luke to sit next to them, Obi-Wan sat down with Leia, who was still crying but had thankfully retreated back within herself in the Force. There was no more shattered glass or broken porcelain all around and Luke was able to reach his sister, curling his spirit around her as he climbed into Obi-Wan’s lap next to Leia.

After a good five minutes of sobbing and the occasional offer of a tissue by Artoo, who had somehow found a box rolling from the dining room to the library, Leia started to calm down, her
tears slowing and her deep, gulping breathing evening out. Luke held onto a tissue, waiting for the right moment to give it to his sister as Obi-Wan simply held them both, the strong and unyielding seawall they could dash their anger and fear against until it was small enough they could hold it in their hands.

Eventually, Leia looked up at Obi-Wan with round eyes and mumbled, “Bibi? Are you mad at me?”

“How would I be mad at you, little one?” Obi-Wan asked with a soft, patient expression on her face. She reached around Luke to gently smooth away a few strands of sweaty hair from Leia’s face.

“Cause… ‘Cause I was… ‘Cause I was scary an’ I broke stuff,” Leia said, looking down at her hands. “An’ I cried an’ I was too loud.”

Obi-Wan made a sound of understanding and nodded, pursing her lips as if she was thinking. “And were your other nannies cross with you when you were ‘scary’ and ‘loud’?”

Leia nodded, solemn and ashamed. “Yeah.”

“I see,” Obi-Wan replied, moving Luke and Leia a little as she settled into the sofa. “And did your other nannies have the Force?”

“No,” Luke answered as Leia shook her head. “But they were scared. They don’t like us.”


Humming softly, Obi-Wan took a deep breath and tried to find a way to explain the way the galaxy was to Luke and Leia.

“I don’t know why your mother left,” Obi-Wan said, deciding honesty was the best policy. “I knew your mother and I am sure she loved you both very much. I am sure she loves you still.”

That much Obi-Wan knew was true, could feel it like the bedrock beneath the Telles mountains.

“Sometimes, people cannot be together and there is nothing you can do,” Obi-Wan continued, a flash of Qui-Gon’s face passing through her memories as he smiled proudly at her on Coruscant. “You love them and you want them to stay with you but that is not what the Force wills.”


Obi-Wan saw Satine’s face, saw her dying in her arms and felt her warmth flee into the Force. “I loved you always. I always will.”

“I don’t know, Luke,” she answered, resting her cheek against the top of his head. “But just because the people you love are gone, doesn’t mean you love them any less. Does it? Don’t you still love your mother?”


“Then hold onto that love,” Obi-Wan said, looking for Luke to Leia, wrapping them up with all the love she still had for Anakin in her spirit. They were all that was left of him now. They were the future she had to cling to, to guide toward the light and hope. “Even though your mother isn’t here and your father has to leave you for a long time, they still love you and you still love them. Time and space cannot dim the stars that live in your hearts.”
“It can’t?” Leia asked looking down at her own chest as if she could find Obi-Wan’s metaphorical stars glittering as they spoke.

Anakin called out to Ahsoka and Rex walking ahead of Obi-Wan, “Hey Snips! Wait up!”

He smiled back at her, eyes bluer than Tatooine at midday and his spirit bright and full of happiness. “C’mon Obi-Wan! You’ll miss all the excitement.”


“We keep their memories in our hearts and when they do come back, like your father, we tell them we love them and try not to take them for granted,” Obi-Wan answered with the truth of so many unspoken thoughts and feelings behind her words. “And in your case, you work very hard to become a strong and brave Jedi like your father.”

Was. Like Anakin was.


Obi-Wan laughed softly and hugged both twins tight. “Wild banthas could not pull me away from you two. I am your creche master and, like it or not, you two are stuck with me.”

Artoo let out a cheerful hoot from behind the sofa, making sure Obi-Wan understood that they were a package deal.

“And Artoo as well,” Obi-Wan added warmly. “You’re stuck with both of us. I hope you don’t mind too much.”

“No,” Leia shook her head, the last clouds of her sadness and fear lifting away. “I don’t.”

“I like Bibi and Artoo,” Luke said, peering over Obi-Wan’s shoulder at the blue astromech behind them. “You’re bright and nice and you aren’t scared of us.”

“No, I’m not,” Obi-Wan said as the three sat on the sofa, quiet and content for the moment.

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas! Happy Holidays! Happy Hanukkah! Happy New Years!

And let’s hope 2018 sees Vaderkin reining in his a$$hole ways!
Communication

Chapter Summary

Obi-Wan discovers that the more things change, the more they stay the same, especially when it comes to paperwork. Threepio laments the absence of Artoo Detoo and Darth Vader struggles to balance his responsibilities to his children and to his empire.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Naboo.

The sun was approximately an hour into its celestial arc when See Threepio, human and cyborg relations, awoke from his rest cycle. Like all protocol droids, Threepio prided himself on his usefulness to his mistress, former Naboo Monarch and Galactic Senator, Lady Padme Amidala Skywalker nee Naberrie and the first step in being a truly effective assistant to such an important personage as Mistress Padme was to rise before she did. Threepio hurried from his charging nook out into the dark hallways of the Naberrie estate in Varykino towards the service quarters where a small group of rather lazy droids were still charging, completely oblivious to the aesthetically pleasing day that was beginning. He stepped over what he considered a rather dangerous step down into the kitchens, activating the dozing food preparation droid by his presence.

“Oh, good morning, KP-23!” Threepio said, raising a hand in greeting. “I do hope you’ve had a good rest cycle. I am here to request Mistress Padme’s usual breakfast and to remind you that her family will be visiting later. I do hope Lady Sabe sent in the order last night. I wanted to remind her but she and the Mistress were discussing something terribly important and they felt it best I shut down for the evening.”

KP-23 vented some steam and started to spin to life, grinding through the first few minutes of its activation in a most discourteous way. Threepio lamented Master Ani’s absence, certain that if anyone could fix the abrasive service droid’s rotors it was his own Maker. He had crafted Threepio from virtually nothing, and look at what a fine and elegant job he had done!

After a loud belch of flame and the smoother whirring of a warmed-up engine, the serving droid informed Threepio that it had not, in fact, received an order from Lady Sabe, or anyone for that matter.

“Oh dear,” Threepio said, shaking his head. “I knew I should have put in the order before I retired. Humans can be so forgetful about these things. No matter! I shall ask our Mistress directly!”

Shuffling out of the kitchen, Threepio trailed behind the rest of the stirring droid fleet that cared for his mistress, her ladies-in-waiting, and the rest of the estate as he returned to the central area of the house.

While the Varykino estate was a lovely home, something his ocular sensors told him could be called “lavish” or “sumptuous” by poetically-inclined humans, Threepio found himself missing the far more elegant and refined former residence of his Mistress on Tellestria, which had several turbolifts available for mobility-restricted droids such as himself. He supposed he would just have to settle for
Taking the stairs very slowly.

Once he had cleared the steps, Threepio made his way to the his mistress’s suite, picking up an Imperial security drone that hovered behind him like an ominous black and grey cloud. Affronted, Threepio turned around and held up a hand, stopping the droid. “I beg your pardon, but I am about to enter Mistress Padme’s suite and I do not wish to alarm her with your presence. Do be kind enough to wait in the hallway while I retrieve her breakfast order.”

The security droid snorted in response and dashed around Threepio toward the doorway, fully intent on barging into her room without permission.

“You are not allowed in there! Come back here! I am in charge of the droids in this residence, no matter what the Empire says!” Threepio shouted, hurrying after the intruder. He was about to call out to his mistress when a door across the hallway opened, Lady Sabe striding out, her chin raised and a deactivator in one hand. “Oh Lady Sabe! I am ever so glad to see you.”

Sabe did not even look at Threepio as she raised the deactivator and fired at the security drone, which fell to the plush, carpeted floor with a thud.

“They’re not going to like that, Sabe,” Dorme yawned from the door just beyond Sabe’s, still in her night clothes and looking as if her rest cycle had not been as restorative as Threepio’s. “You know we’re not supposed to have deactivators. How are we going to explain it to the Investigator?”

“If you think I care about that jumped-up little toad then you don’t know me very well at all, Dorme,” Sabe spat, pocketing her deactivator before she marched over to the security droid and flipped it over, pushing the button that would send it back to its home base. She stood up and leveled her gaze on Threepio, who had always felt a tad intimidated by her. “What are you doing up here, Threepio? Our lady isn’t awake yet.”

“I am aware of that fact, Lady Sabe,” Threepio said, gesturing with one arm. “And I do apologize for all of this commotion but a breakfast order was not placed for Mistress Padme last night and I was on my way to inquire as to her desires for breakfast. It is a very important meal after all and I-”

“I’ll take some oatmeal and some fruit, Threepio,” an exhausted new voice said from behind him. “And thank you for your concern. We’ll remember to put an order in tonight.”

Threepio turned to see his mistress, her arms folded, wound up in a pale blue dressing gown and long brunette hair framing her aesthetically pleasing and almost perfectly symmetrical face. For all of the questionable choices Master Ani had made during the time Threepio had known his Maker, he could not disagree with his choice to engage in marriage with Padme Amidala Skywalker nee Naberrie.

“You are most welcome, Mistress Padme,” Threepio replied, puffed up with pride. “It is a core component of my programing to be of utmost assistance to you.”

“I know,” Padme replied, her voice low and soft as she nodded. “Please inform the kitchen of our order. Sabe? Dorme? Is there anything you would like?”

After taking orders from his mistress’s handmaidens, Threepio hurried back towards the stairs, carefully making his way back to the kitchen and KP-23. He wove his way between the finally awake cleaning and groundskeeping droids before entering the kitchen and delivering the message only to receive a question in reply.

“Yes, of course that is what she wants!” Threepio answered, affronted that a mere cooking unit
would question his ability to relay a simple order. “How dare you imply my auditory sensors are in less than perfect order?”

KP-23 swiveled in place to lock its ocular lens on Threepio and ground a series of beeps and hoots in binary that spelled out a troubling statement.

“I… I do not know,” Threepio answered truthfully, scouring his short term accessible memory for the information the droid requested. “Mistress Padme is under a great deal of stress, what with the charges against her and being so far away from Master Luke and Mistress Leia.”

The serving droid whirled back around to where it was chopping fruit and stewing some oats, letting out a whistle of worry.

“I am certain it has nothing to do with your cooking, KP-23. No one is going to disassemble you,” Threepio assured the nervous droid. “I shall bring your concerns to Lady Dorme. She will know how to proceed.”

His task completed, Threepio began the trek to the breakfast room on the first floor where Mistress Padme and her most trusted handmaidens took their morning meal.

Or at least he hoped they would be there. Without his little friend Artoo Detoo to scan for lifeforms, he would sometimes wander the hallways of the Varykino estate looking for his mistress. Master Ani had set up a house-wide system in his Tellestrian estate that allowed Threepio to easily locate any member of the Skywalker family so that he could be of better service. The system has served him in good stead on more than one occasion when he had engaged in a thrilling game of hide and go seek with Mistress Leia and Master Luke.

Oh, how he missed those children.

“I’ll tell them you thought it was an intruder but you have to be more careful next time, Sabe,” Padme’s voice crackled on the edge of Threepio’s sensors and he hurried outside, in the direction of his mistress. “We were barely able to convince the Judiciary to let me keep you two and how is it going to look if you keep shooting their surveillance droids?”

“You should at least be allowed to sleep in your own bed without those little grey monsters watching you while you sleep,” Sabe spat, her legs curled up in front of her as she sat in a wing chair out on the back veranda, glaring out at the distant stormtroopers patrolling the edge of the gardens. “It’s bad enough with them all over the place. It makes my skin crawl.”

“It was this or prison,” Padme murmured, taking a delicate sip of tea, her gaze focused on the table and not on the pleasing sight of her gardens in mid-spring bloom as Threepio came to stand at a polite distance from the group. “I’m surprised I got even this much. Accused traitors aren’t usually afforded such luxury, Sabe.”

“The only traitor here is that monster you married,” Sabe shot back, her voice sharp and her hands slamming against the arms of her chair. “Anyone with half a brain could tell you were being framed! Why that bastard sided with Palpatine of all people, I will never understand!”

“Sabe!” Dorme spoke up, her eyes round and her head canted in just a way that indicated to Threepio that she was trying to subtly chastise her fellow handmaiden. He found himself agreeing with her sentiment, not approving of Sabe’s words and the hurt they might cause his Mistress. “You’re not helping. And besides, they’re listening to every word we say.”

Glancing over at Padme, Dorme reached out and took her hand. “I think we had a bad start to the
morning. Why don’t we start over? Good morning, my lady. Did you sleep well?”

Padme let out a soft chuckle and rubbed her thumb along Dorme’s knuckles, sitting up a little before a weak smile broke out on her face. “I did, actually. The new prescription worked wonders. Remind me later, and I’ll write the doctor a thank you note.”

“Of course, my lady,” Dorme said, relief evident on her face. “I’m so glad to hear that.”

“Well at least we have some good news,” Sabe said, leaning forward to pour herself another cup of tea. “And in even better news, your parents have been approved for a visit. They’ll be up to visit later today.”

“Really?” Padme asked, Threepio noting the brighter tone of her voice. “Will Sola and her children come as well?”

Sabe grinned at Dorme and Padme, wiggling her eyebrows. “I can’t tell. It’s supposed to be a surprise.”

“You’re terrible!” Padme laughed, reaching out to gently slap her handmaiden’s hand. “How long have you known?”

“Your mother told me not to tell you,” Sabe laughed, glancing up as a bunny droid walked up to the table carrying the breakfast tray. “She didn’t want me to get your hopes up.”

“It will be so good to see them again,” Padme sighed, accepting her breakfast from Dorme, who had sprinkled sun syrup over the steaming bowl of oats. “I feel so cut off from everyone out here.”

“We did manage to get some mail through the ISB,” Dorme murmured, taking a bite of her own meal. “And there’s a letter from Breha and Bail Organa.”

“Oh?” Padme asked, taking a large bit of her breakfast, which cheered Threepio’s circuits to no end. “What does it say?”

“The usual,” Dorme answered, pulling out the handwritten note from her dressing robe and handing it to Padme. “Apparently Bail went back to Alderaan to attend the opening of the Aldera symphony with the queen. Breha is terribly worried about your health. They say Mon Mothma sends her love.”

Padme accepted the letter with a smile. “I am so lucky to have friends like Bail and Breha. And to have you both. I don’t know what I would have done without either of you during this terrible trial.”

Threepio watched as his mistress reached out to take both Sabe and Dorme’s hands, squeezing them as they all exchanged what his programming called a bonding moment. He turned to leave, fully intent on reporting to KP-23 that Mistress Padme was quite pleased with its food.

As he headed back into the house the last bit of conversation drifted along the edges of his audio sensors.

“What was Bail’s favorite song at the symphony?” Padme asked to the sounds of paper unfolding.

“Aurora,” Dorme answered. “He said he found it quite invigorating.”
The worst part about Obi-Wan’s indentured servitude was not the act itself. Caring for Luke and Leia, slowly bringing to order the needs of the house and ensuring that some kind of budget was being followed came easy to her, reawakening long dormant skills left over from the Clone Wars and her time as High General Kenobi.

No, the worst part was how easily everything slipped into a routine, a distressingly peaceful routine that almost felt familiar.

Obi-Wan hated that, chastising herself at night after the children had gone to bed and she found herself pouring over the books and notes from Vader’s small but loyal staff, responding to polite requests from Lord Skywalker about this, that, and the other in regards to the running of the aristocratic house he had been given. Her innate need to bring order to chaos, to right the listing ship Vader left behind warred with her very real desire to resist his demands and refusal to give into the pastoral serfdom Obi-Wan found herself in.

She was not at all surprised to find Vader’s affairs had been left in a state of benign neglect because she had done almost all of Anakin’s paperwork during the Clone Wars.

At the time, Obi-Wan had seen it as a small gift she could give her permanently exhausted and overworked best friend, giving him time to spend with Ahsoka or his men, or tinkering with his ship. Those were all activities she knew he found more restful than reading requisition lists and cross-checking them with supply amounts and delivery schedules, troop deployments, and --the hardest part of her job as a general-- the lists of the missing and killed in action. As hard as it was for Obi-Wan to scroll through the lists of the dead and gone, it was exponentially worse for Anakin, who grew so attached to his men so easily.

She had been particularly proud of him when Anakin had suggested dividing the 501st in half, leaving a large contingent with Ahsoka on Mandalore. Obi-Wan had hoped it was a sign that Anakin was learning, in a small way, to let go, to finally realize that it was the nature of life for there to be comings and goings.

In retrospect, Obi-Wan realized that Anakin leaving Captain Rex with Ahsoka was just another way of protecting his former padawan, of keeping her safe so that he wouldn’t lose her like he had before. Like he lost his mother.

Please… if you have any mercy, please don’t let Ahsoka have died at Rex’s hand, Obi-Wan quietly prayed to the Force as she ran a hand down her face. There were many things Obi-Wan could live through, obviously, but a world where Captain Rex killed Ahsoka was not one she wanted any part of.

It was nightmarish enough living with the memory of Utapau and Cody.

No. Ruminating on the past will not make the present any easier. Focus on the here and now. Obi-Wan told herself, memories of her former master’s words echoing in her head before she turned her attention back to the ledger in front of her.

“Bibi?” Luke called up from the floor where he and Leia were passing the time building complicated cityscapes out of a collection of rainbow-colored wooden blocks. “Has Papa sent a holo yet?”

Frowning, Obi-Wan glanced over at the holo projector resting on the short table in front of her. “No, Luke. He hasn’t. I’m sure it’s nothing serious, he merely forgot about the time difference.”

“But he never forgets,” Leia said, sitting up with a furrowed brow. “Papa always sends a holo!”
Obi-Wan was thinking of how to explain that their father was likely engaged in a battle to conquer a system, as the news presenters seemed to take peculiar delight in illustrating night after night. She had nearly finished her speech in her head when the light in the projector buzzed on, quickly shifting from yellow to green to blue.

“Papa!” the twins exclaimed in perfect tandem, scrambling upright to stand in front of the projector as Obi-Wan left her comfortable chair to dim the lights and lower the blinds.

The blue-white hologram of Vader fuzzed into focus, his head turned to the side and brows furrowed as if he were listening for something. Obi-Wan watched from a spot where the holoprojector wouldn’t pick her up, leaving Vader with the illusion of privacy if not the actual thing itself.

“Papa!” Leia cried, putting her hands on the table and leaning closer to the image of her father, joy in her voice and her spirit. “Can you see us?”

For a moment Vader didn’t move and Obi-Wan wondered if there was something wrong with the audio but then a change seems to wash over him as he turned his full attention back to his children, a weak smile on his face. “Hello, Leia, Luke. I can see you just fine. How are you?”

Obi-Wan watched Vader’s face as he listened to his children detail the particulars of their day. She saw how he stared at them with a kind of confused wonder, almost as if he couldn’t quite believe they were there. Slowly over the course of their conversation, the edge of worry and fear on his face gave way to something more warm and gentle. His words were strained at first but Luke and Leia soon drew out the kindness only they could find in Vader.

“And then, and then we had hotplate cakes and Bibi told us about Pengi!” Leia enthused, her eyes bright with happiness. “Papa, can I have a Pengi?”

“Pengi?” Vader echoed, a shadow of befuddlement on his brow. “I’m not sure. Speaking of Bibi, where is she?”


Artoo let out the softest warble, calibrated so that only Obi-Wan could hear and she gave it a dirty look as she marched alone into the view of the holoprojector. “Traitor.”

“Bibi!” Luke and Leia chorused to their father, who was smirking up at her with amusement and looking far too pleased with himself. “Say hello, Bibi!”

“Hello,” Obi-Wan responded politely, bowing her head as she let the children cling to her tighter than a mynock to a deep space freighter. “Lord Vader.”

There was the faintest hitch in Vader’s smile but it was quickly smoothed away. “Hello, Mina.”

There was an awkward pause as Obi-Wan and Vader stared each other down over the holo connection. Obi-Wan hadn’t wanted to be a part of Vader’s call to his children and it was clear that Vader hadn’t intended to actually talk to her while his children were watching.

Just as the silence seemed to stretch on too long, Vader spoke up in a strange mix of puzzlement and annoyance. “What is a Pengi and why does Leia want one?”

“Pengi! Pengi!” Leia chorused, Luke joining her as they enthusiastically hopped up and down next to Obi-Wan. “Please, Papa? Please can I have a Pengi?”
Obi-Wan was about to explain that Pengi was a “who” and not a “what” when Vader glanced down at his children and then back up at her, his befuddled expression so familiar, so Anakin, it nearly robbed her of speech.

“I… ehm… Pengi is a ‘who’,” Obi-Wan managed to spit out, turning to the twins and softly discouraging them from trying to yank her arms out of their sockets. They obliged immediately, only too happy to hear the story again. “I don’t suppose you remember her but we… er… you met her during a mission to Toorum V a long time ago.”

Vader continued to blink at Obi-Wan, having no apparent memory of the mission at all. He folded his arms over his chest, a sign of growing impatience as he waited for her to get to the point of the story. “I don’t remember a mission to the Toorum system. When was this?”

“Papa was a padawan!” Luke said, peeking out from behind Obi-Wan’s hip, giggling shyly. “Bibi said you crashed a ship.”

“I was a padawan and I crashed a ship?” Vader echoed, his expression growing stormy as his eyes darted from Luke to Obi-Wan and back, his mouth pulled into a thin line. “Are you lying to my children, Mina?”

Obi-Wan looked up at the ceiling, trying to think of the fastest way to remind Vader of the mission to Toorum V, when Padawan Learner Anakin Skywalker crashed their borrowed ship into a dense rainforest and Obi-Wan managed to befriend a grand pangalit and convince it to carry them back to civilization. She doubted he remembered much since he had come down with a fever during the journey and spent the vast majority of his time sleeping against her back or asking for greasy diner food.

“No, my lord,” she replied with only the slightest hint of sarcasm. “You may not recall this particular mission but you were the one who named her Pengi. You rode on her back for a week as she carried you back to Briska Central, where you discovered an exotic animal smuggling ring and brought it to justice.”

Vader turned his gaze from Luke and Leia to lock eyes with Obi-Wan, confusion on his face as he struggled to remember that mission. “I uncovered an exotic animal smuggling ring? When I was a padawan? I don’t… Oh. Oh. That Pengi.”

Nodding her head, Obi-Wan agreed. “Yes, that Pengi. She quite liked you, if you will recall.”

“She stunk like a bantha and he kept licking me,” Vader grumbled, rolling his eyes. “No, Leia, you cannot have a Pengi. Pengi lives in the rainforest and we don’t live near a rainforest.”

Leia let out a plaintive wail, her face and spirit curdling with the misery only a four year-old could manage. “But Papa! I want a Pengi! I want to ride Pengi!”

Vader shot a glance at Obi-Wan, his eyes narrowing even as he spoke gently with Leia. “Perhaps we can take you to visit a pangalit at a zoo, Leia. But Pengi is a wild animal and you can’t take wild animals from their homes and expect them to be happy.”

Obi-Wan wondered if that was supposed to be some kind of subtle insult to her and decided to ignore it since Vader was attempting to behave like a parent. She put her hand on Leia’s back as the girl pleaded in vain for permission to adopt a pangalit.

“Leia, I said no,” Vader finally said, with a hint of steel behind it. “Now we’ve spent enough time talking about this. Luke? What did you do today?”
Luke looked at his father and then at Obi-Wan before he said shyly, “I did Shii-cho and Bibi said I did good, like you.”

“Oh, really?” Vader smiled, relieved that he wasn’t going to have to convince Luke that he couldn’t adopt an ewok or something equally ridiculous. “Which one? Seras kai?”

Nodding proudly, Luke stepped around Obi-Wan to stare up at his father’s holo. “Do you want to see? I can show you!”

Luke dropped into the opening stance of Shii-cho Seras kai and was about to move through the form when there came a chime from Vader’s end of the connection. Someone was at the door to his private chamber.

Vader inhaled, turning to scowl back at the door, his jaw clenched. There was a moment of terse silence before he shook his head and turned back to Luke, the war between loving parent and ruthless Sith Lord evident on his face.

“Do you need to go?” Obi-Wan asked, trying to provide an easy exit for father and children.

“No,” Vader grumbled, shaking his head and trying to plaster a pleasant expression on his face. “What were we talking about?”


“Right, of course,” Vader replied, trying to relax back into the conversation when the door chimed again.

Obi-Wan could tell that whoever was interrupting their conversation had been given instructions not to and yet they had all the same, meaning that whatever they had to tell Vader could not wait. The twins’ time with their father was about to come to a hasty end.

“Can you show me tomorrow, Luke?” Vader said, looking at his son with an apologetic expression. “I really want to see it but I have to go now. The Empire needs my help.”

While Obi-Wan could sense Luke’s faint disappointment, she had to admit the boy did an admirable job of hiding it from his father. He stood up straight and bowed a little. “Okay, Papa. Don’t forget! You promised to watch my Shii-cho.”

Smiling, Vader held up a hand and made a great show of solemnly promising to watch Luke’s, and then Leia’s, Shii-cho. The twins huddled together in front of the projector, bidding goodbye to their father, blowing him kisses and telling him how much they loved him and missed him.

Obi-Wan stood behind them, looking off to the side. She didn’t want to intrude on Luke and Leia’s last moments with their father and she hoped that if she didn’t make eye contact with Vader he would simply kill the connection line and her day would be hers again.

“You two run along with Artoo,” Vader said after he finally managed to convince his children to stop saying goodbye and blowing him kisses. “I need to talk to Mina.”

“Okay, Papa!” the twin cheered and ran over to Artoo who whistled to Obi-Wan that they would be outside if she needed anything.

“Thank you, Artoo,” Vader said before Obi-Wan could and it took more restraint that she wanted to admit to not countermand his order and send the little trio off to the nursery. She had to play the long
game with Vader if there was ever to be any hope of escape or an ending that didn’t involve the murder of an entire village of innocent civilians.

Artoo let out a whistle as it rolled out of the room, Luke and Leia cheering as they went, asking Artoo if they could go get another snack and to the little droids credit, the answer was No. Your batteries are fully charged.

Once the door closed, Obi-Wan turned back to the blue-white figure of Vader, her arms wrapped around her waist. “Yes, my lord. What do you require?”

Vader glared up at her through the holo, his displeasure written across his face and in his posture. “I require you to never tell my children that story again. I hated that creature and you know it! Why would you tell them that?”

Exhaling softly, Obi-Wan picked a spot on the far wall and responded. “Your children want to know who you are. They want to know what their father was like when he was younger. It is a harmless memory that they found most endearing.”

“My children know who I am,” Vader retorted, muttering something in foul in clonespeak as the door behind him chimed for the third time. “I have to go. Oh… there will be packages arriving shortly, mostly for Luke and Leia. They cannot open them until I call.”

“Packages?” Obi-Wan echoed with a faint pulse of her eyebrows. “Is there a holiday coming up that I do not know about?”

“I don’t need a holiday to give my children gifts,” Vader growled, his mouth pulled into a frown as he gazed at Obi-Wan through the holo and she could almost feel the anger and frustration across the many light years between them. “But then again, you never seemed to understand the concept of gift giving unless it involved bribing a planetary official into doing what you wanted them to do.”

Moving her hand to the button that would disconnect the holo, Obi-Wan gave Vader her blandest and most vapid smile. “Will that be all, my lord?”

Obi-Wan made the mistake of catching Vader’s gaze and time seemed to stop as they stared at each other. Vader’s expression was serious but there was something else there, something Obi-Wan couldn’t identify, perhaps due to the faint blue-white fuzz of the holo. She wondered what he was seeing, wondered why he wasn’t saying anything when he had been overflowing with spiteful words only a moment ago.

What do you see when you look at me? Just a failed Jedi and a traitor? Do you even remember what life was like before? What you and I were like before all of this?

Turning away from Vader and the cipher of his presence, Obi-Wan focused her gaze on the holoprojector in front of her. “Is there anything else, Lord Vader?”

“No,” Vader answered and then cut the feed, his holo suddenly vanishing as if he had never been there, leaving Obi-Wan alone in the library with only her thoughts and painful memories of a time now lost to them all.

Anakin shut the holo projector down, watching the light die in the projector’s lens. Once it was gone,
he stormed over to the door to his suite, eyes narrowed and mouth pulled into an angry snarl. He had given the command crew specific instructions that he was not to be interrupted while he was speaking with his children. It was extremely difficult to get a secure channel to make the connection and then there was the time difference to take into account.

Was it too much to ask the imbeciles Palpatine saddled him with to do their jobs for the small amount of time it took him to talk to his children?

Were they incapable of even that?

He was being unfair. Anakin knew this and yet he couldn’t quite manage to control his anger, his frustration at having his time with his children cut short. He had picked out the men of his command crew and they were all capable and loyal. More importantly, they followed orders.

Anakin knew, somewhere beneath the rage and fury, that if someone came to his door when he had instructed not to be disturbed, to say nothing of ringing the bell three times, that whatever message they had for him was of the utmost importance.

I hope it’s a letter of surrender so I can leave this miserable corner of the galaxy and go back to my family.

With a slash of power in the Force, Anakin opened the door to reveal a startled Lieutenant Andron, about to ring the door chime again.

“General Skywalker!” Andron saluted, his face a mask of anxious fear. “I’m so sorry, sir! Please forgive me for interrupting your time with your family.”

Anakin folded his arms over his chest and arched an eyebrow, just barely holding on to whatever patience he had. “What is it, Lieutenant? You know better than to interrupt me.”

“Yes, sir,” Andron babbled, swallowing hard. “I know, sir, but I had to, sir, because… it’s just that…”

“Spit it out, Andron,” Anakin growled, wanting to get the stammering nonsense over with as quickly as possible.

“It’s the Emperor, sir. He wishes to speak with you. Right away.”

Chapter End Notes

My dear friends and readers, may I present to you Padme Amidala Skywalker nee Naberrie.

And here y'all thought Vaderkin killed her which he didn't but, in news that will surprise no one, he didn't exactly take home the "Best Husband of the Year" Award either. And before anyone asks, I PROMISE Ahsoka is alive out there, wandering the galaxy trying to do good and wondering what exactly happened between Mandalore and Empire Day. *coughcoughRevengeoftheSithcoughcough*

And for your reference, Pengi the Grand Pangalit is essentially a Space Pangolin the size of a two story house. She had a measure of Force Sensitivity and was very fond of Obi-Wan and Anakin, whom she took great delight in licking. Obi-Wan thought it was
adorable but as a teenage boy desperate to be as cool and awesome as his master, Anakin found it stinky and mortifying.

Thank you so much for reading and for all of your wonderful comments! I really appreciate all the time and effort you put into them! :D

Stay tuned for next time when we see what some other people in the galaxy have been up to and just what presents Vaderkin is sending back to his family. I hope he's sending Obi-Wan a massage chair so she can relax after an exhausting day of dealing with his $#@%.

As always, you can find me on tumblr at FireflyFish.
Unwanted Gifts

Chapter Summary

Luke and Leia Skywalker aren't the only ones to receive surprise gifts from their father, Darth Vader. Elsewhere in the galaxy, two loyal soldiers discuss their siblings over some steak and beer.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

CC-2224 signed out of the barracks at 1900 hours, nodding to the security officer as he headed out into the indigo twilight of Tysea. The 212th had just finished an inspection from Imperial Central Command and he was in serious need of a drink and real food, none of those nutritive milk shakes and fiber ration bars claimed to be better for the body. CC-2224 knew that there was nothing quite like a good nerf steak and some buttered, mashed Alderaanian tubers to make a trooper feel a little more like a person and less like a nameless and faceless clone in a sea of identical helmets.

As CC-2224 passed through the last gate out of Aurek Base and into civilian territory, he nodded to passing troopers, waving off salutes as he went. While the Empire had risen to replace the Republic, with the last batch of clones delivered from Kamino three years ago, CC-2224 kept on serving loyally, something of a legend among the increasingly natural-born troopers out on the Outer Rim.

CC-2224, the Field Marshall Commander of the 212th Attack battalion, that had killed Jedi High General Obi-Wan Kenobi.

Commander “Cody”.

Not that anyone called him that anymore, well, not on base and in front of superiors. Off base and after hours he might hear his name, might even smile in response to it. The further he walked from base and deeper into the city, the easier it was to forget loyal, upstanding Field Marshal Commander CC-2224 and just be Cody.

Few people paid Cody any mind once he passed into the town proper, his greys and blacks marking him as just another Imperial on leave. He meandered his way through the busy market place, trying not to notice how some of the locals hurried away from him. Most didn’t seem to pay him much mind and Cody focused on that as he walked into a local cantina.

After sliding into a booth, and ordering some real food, Cody pulled off his cap and let out a sigh. It wasn’t that Cody didn’t like his job. It was what he was bred for in the labs on Kamino, and he was one of the best to come out of that program.

But there were times when even the best got bored, stationed on a quiet planet as far from the front as one could get, patrolling civilian populations that didn’t care much who was running the show back on Coruscant as long as their lights stayed on and their kids were fed.

And Cody?

He was bored out of his mind.
The waitress swept by his table, handing over a tall, cold glass of Dantooine beer and an appreciative smile. Cody nodded in thanks and turned his attention to his drink, pretending not to notice the waitress. She was a pretty young thing, a petite Togruta with pale lavender striping and curling montrals, cheerful and spunky as she wove in and out of tables with a practiced ease. Cody gazed out the window, pretending not to see her. She reminded him of things he did not want to think about.

She reminded him of Ahsoka Tano, which reminded him of Rex.

It was hard to believe that it had been four years since he had last spoken to his brother, to CT-7567, Captain Rex of the 501st Leigon. In the mad aftermath of Operation Knightfall, after Empire day and the triumphant defeat of General Grievous on Utapau, Cody had lost track of Rex, not sure if his friend was on Coruscant with General Skywalker or on Mandalore with Ahsoka Tano. Cody had been busy mopping up the last of the droids on Utapau and by the time he had returned to base, he learned Rex had been reported killed in action, taken down by his former commander.

At first Cody had mourned the loss of his brother, assuming he had been struck down by Tano like so many other troopers on the horrible, maddening day of Order 66. They lost so many brothers taking the Jedi down, even with the advantage of surprise, and Rex was just another one of them. There were so few that had made it as long as Cody had in the war with the Separatists and their number grew ever fewer. Just as the number of people Cody could call “friend” grew ever fewer.

It wasn’t until Cody got a chance to check his own private com, after the turbulent birth of the Empire that the lie started to unravel.

There was a message from Rex waiting for Cody, a message he couldn’t understand.

“Cody, it’s Rex. When I get back from Mandalore, I’ve got something I need to tell you, in hardspace. It’s about that forty-five millimeter gun we lost. There was something wrong with the whole batch. I’ll tell you more when I get back. Take care, brother.”

It had taken Cody some time to figure out what it was that Rex was talking about. The 212 wasn’t missing a gun of that caliber. They didn’t even have a gun in that size and even if they had, Cody wasn’t the type to let one just vanish into the chaos of war. He’d spent a few days tracking down munition requests and inventories for both the 212th and the 501st, looking for discrepancies between the two and, as he suspected, there weren’t any.

People could say what they liked about General Kenobi being a traitor but Cody knew she was a meticulous organizer, with everything accounted for and all her paperwork in order.

After confirming there was no missing gun, Cody realized it had to be a coded message. He spent his down time puzzling through it, letting the message percolate in the back of his mind as the 212th moved through the Mid and Outer Rim, helping the Empire clear away the fragmented remains of the Separatists. It wasn’t until he was sharing a cup of burnt caf in the cantina with Boil and Trapper that the breakthrough happened.

They had been discussing a new batch of clones who had just shipped in, ones designed to fill up the holes in the battalion. One of them had the designation CT-73-4444 and Boil suggested they call him “Fours” to which Trapper replied, “Nah, mate. Too much like Fives and that’s a 501st name. And a bad luck one at that, being taken down by friendly fire and all.”

It hit Cody then what the “forty-five millimeter gun” was.

Four fives.
It wasn’t the most creative way to hide a message but Cody now knew what it meant, that Rex had wanted to talk about Fives when he got back from Mandalore. That he thought Fives and his whole batch was defective.

What was wrong with Fives? Was it limited to just his batch of brothers? Were there more? What if it was the whole army? Were they all defective? What did that mean for the Republic, now the Empire? Were there defective brothers in his battalion?

Was Cody defective too?

The idea that Cody was defective, that there was something deeply wrong with him kept him up during many a rest cycle.

In the end, Cody had reached out to the small network of clone commanders who were still active in the field and not likely to say much if CC-2224 gave them a call.

Commanders like Bly, who now walked into the bar, scanned the room for Cody and made his way to his booth with the martial precision all CCs were known for. He slid into the opposite side of the booth and placed his cap on the seat next to him before speaking.

“Evening, Cody,” Bly said as he caught the eye of the waitress and signaled for a beer of his own. “Boring little rock you’ve got here.”

Cody refused to dignify Bly’s keen observation with a response and instead took a long swig of beer before speaking. “How’s the Three Two Seven?”

“Fine,” Bly said as he scrubbed a hand over his buzzed scalp. “Happy to be of service, as always. Glad for the rest, to be honest.”

Nodding, Cody took another sip of beer, struggling to find the camaraderie with Bly that had always come so easy to him with Rex. “I heard you were involved with that mess out on Lahareh. Nasty stuff.”

“Tell me about it,” Bly muttered, shaking his head as he looked down at his hands for a long moment.

The waitress strolled over to their table, with a beer for Bly and Cody’s meal, smiling at Bly.

“I’ll have what he’s having,” Bly said before tapping the side of his beer. “And another one of these, thank you.”

“Are you two twins?” the waitress asked clearly oblivious.

Cody cut off Bly before he could answer. “Yes. I’m older by twenty minutes.”

Bly’s confused look was almost humorous as the perky little Togruta hurried off with Bly’s order giving the “twins” a wave as she went.

“The hell was that about?” Bly asked, folding his arms over his chest. “Any idiot can tell we’re clones. Why’d you lie to her?”

“Because, believe it or not, most civvies have forgotten what we look like or never cared enough to find out,” Cody replied as he cut into his nerf steak, admiring the perfectly cooked red-pink center.
“And I don’t feel like playing the part of a war hero tonight, do you?”

Bly shrugged, his elbows resting on the table. Bly had always been a little bigger than Cody, preferring heavier guns and packs when out in the field. A quirk of the cloning process, apparently, that hadn’t carried over to the CC batches after him. It gave the tattooed field Marshall commander of the 327th Star Corps a slightly more menacing air than Cody, which suited Cody just fine. He preferred to be underestimated.

It gave Cody an advantage over his enemies and played into his strengths, of creative and strategic thinking. That was what had made him such an asset to the Republic and the Empire after that. Cody may not have been one of the more intimidating clones on the field but he was one of the smartest and was better on his feet than just about anybody, save perhaps the General herself.

Who’s dead so maybe she wasn’t so smart after all. Cody told himself, stabbing a piece of his steak with more venom than was strictly necessary.

“So are we just here to shoot the kajj or do you want to hear what I found out?” Bly asked, interrupting Cody’s dark thoughts. “Because Fox finally got back to me.”

“Sorry,” Cody said, taking another drink. “Yeah, yeah, tell me what the lazy red bastard said.”

Bly grinned, a sharp expression of shared annoyance with their Coruscant-based brother. “He said you owe him fifty credits and one of those shiny new pistols they’re handing out like candy to Outer Rim officers.”

Cody rolled his eyes, letting out a dry laugh as he worked through his meal. “The hell I do. I won our last hand of sabacc. Don’t let him tell you otherwise. I learned how to play from the best.”

“Sure you did,” Bly chuckled and thanked the waitress when she slid his meal in front of him. “Anyway, he said he hasn’t received any other reports of defective ordinance but there’s some the Empire has… misplaced.”

“Misplaced?” Cody echoed. “How do you ‘misplace’ ordinance like that?”

Shrugging, Bly tucked into his meal. “Fox didn’t know. Just had a list of who’s missing and the last time anyone reported seeing them on base. Most of ‘em are small time, a CT here and a sergeant there. Nothing anyone would really notice or care about.”

“I’d notice if my sergeants went AWOL,” Cody snorted, finishing off his beer and calling for another one. “Speaking of sergeants, how’s Appo?”

Bly rolled his eyes at the mention of the new commander of the 501st. “Fine. I haven’t seen him or 501st since the changeover. Near as I can tell, Skywalker keeps ‘em busy. I heard he requisitioned the last squads from Kamino to fill up the gaps in his legion. Didn’t want to deal with Enlisted, can’t say as I blame him. They can’t aim for kajj.”

“They don’t train them long or hard enough,” Cody said, looking out at the civilians around them enjoying their meals, enjoying the peace and safety he and his brothers had paid for with their lives. Another group of diners walked in, laughing on their way to a booth.

*What will you do when the war is over, Cody?*

Nothing. The war would never be over. There was always going to be a new threat, a new target, a new enemy to destroy.
Kenobi had been naïve to think there would ever come a time in Cody’s life when he wouldn’t be a soldier, asked to give his life for someone who didn’t even care or know his name.

“I’ve got a squad in my corps,” Bly said, shaking his head. “I don’t know who’s training them on Kamino but they’re slacking off. General T… Ah, they wouldn’t have made it out of basic training with our brothers, is all I’m saying. How about you? You got many?”

“Not really,” Cody admitted, cleaning off his plate before pushing it to the side, enjoying the feeling of a belly full of real food. “We don’t see much action all the way out here. Not since the Second pacified this sector. We’re mostly a deterrent, making the tax-paying locals feel safe as they go about their business.”

“That must be nice,” Bly mumbled around a mouth full of food. “Nobody shooting at you or trying to kill you. I could do with a bit of deterring.”

Cody frowned, looking away from Bly to stare out the window, watching the golden lights of the buildings in the square flickering on, one after the other. It gave the place a charming and cozy feel and he could almost hear his general’s voice commenting on the scene.

*Such lovely little town, Cody. It seems a shame soldiers have to be here.*

Gritting his teeth, Cody told the voice in his head to be quiet. There was no war. Not anymore. His general was a traitor, a traitor he killed.

“Cody?” Bly asked, his brows furrowed, concerned about his brother’s behavior. “You alright?”

“The ordinance,” Cody grumbled, trying to drown the traitor’s voice with another order of beer. “Is that all Fox said? Small caliber types?”

Bly turned his attention back to his meal and took another bite of steak and mash, chewing thoughtfully as a small family walked past the window, the children begging for sweets. He finished chewing, taking another long swig. “Most of ‘em, yeah. But there were some that… well, Fox said they drew the attention of brass. You know how Fox just stands there in meetings and they babble on like he’s deaf?”

Cody nodded. They had all been in meetings like that, both before and after the war. For Cody it had mostly been after. He hated standing there while the general in charge of the 212th talked to admirals and other ranking officers as if Cody didn’t have valuable insights into the goals his men were supposed to achieve. He knew better than anyone what his men were capable of and the fact that he was so rarely consulted annoyed him to no end.

“When was the last time you heard from Wolffe?” Bly asked, seemingly out of nowhere.

Folding his arms over his chest, Cody tried to think. As far as he was aware, Wolffe had been reported killed in action roughly around the changeover from the Republic to the Empire. He had mourned his brother, as he had mourned so many others, consigning him to the past that he didn’t have time for.

“I thought he died over Cato Neimoidia,” Cody answered honestly. “Shot down by a viper droid, as I recall.”

“You really think there was a viper droid built that could shoot Wolffe down?” Bly snorted as he accepted his second beer. “Fox says that they were talking about unaccounted for ordinance at one of those requisition meetings they used to let us sit in on. And apparently they had a list of ‘high value items’ that no one had been able to track down in the past four years.”
“And Wolffe was on that list?”

Bly nodded, taking another bite of steak. “Yeah. And you know who else was on that list?”

*Don’t say it.*

“Rex was on there and one of your old commandos,” Bly said, pulling a small datastick out of his pocket and handing it over to Cody. “Here’s the list of men Fox remembered from the briefing. Most are small time, the typical deserters who just couldn’t hack it and shouldn’t have been let out of basic. A few of ‘em aren’t, like Wolffe, Rex and Gregor.”

“Gregor died during the war,” Cody said. “He had some kind of head trauma and went down fighting on some mission with a bunch of droids.”

Shrugging, Bly leaned back in the booth. “I don’t know, Cody. I’m just telling you what Fox told me. But if we’re defective, that list of brothers is where to start.”

“You think that’s what his message meant? That we’re defective?” Cody asked, surprised to hear Bly say something like that so out in the open.

“No,” Bly replied. “We do what they want us to do. We do it well and we don’t ask questions. Whatever happened with CT-5555-”

“Fives,” Cody interrupted, unwilling to let another brother take away even a traitor’s identity.

Bly held up his hands. “Whatever happened with Fives was a fluke. He was the last of his original squad and he’d lost a brother he was responsible for. It killed the momentum of the assault and they had to fall back. Maybe he felt guilty. Maybe he finally cracked. I don’t know what happened but if any of us was defective, it was Fives, not me and not you.”

The waitress came by and asked them if they needed anything else. Cody shook his head and she hurried off to another table, a group of young male cadets who were growing louder by the minute. They leered at the young woman even as she danced out of the way as she took their order.

“What was Rex talking about if it wasn’t the whole army?” Cody asked, instincts making him watch the group even as he tried to focus on the puzzle of his brother’s last message. “Was there a bad batch that got through? Is this something we need to worry about? There can’t be much left of the batch that Domino squad came from, right?”

Bly didn’t answer. He had turned his head just enough to watch the drunken idiots out of the corner of his eye. His hands were clasped tightly together on the table and a muscle in his jaw twitched.

*He’s angry,* Cody realized, as he glanced back over at the group hooting and hollering only a few tables away. *He’s furious. What’s gotten into him?*

“Bly!” Cody snapped, reaching out to shake his arm. “They’re not worth it.”

Bly’s eyes darted back to Cody and he took a few deep breaths, watching as the lavender Togruta waitress went back to the group. She wove around the table trying to hand over the drinks before the boys could grab her.

“That’s not right,” Bly growled, his eyes back on the table in front of him. “Don’t they teach your civvies any manners out here?”

“Do they ever teach cadets manners anywhere?” Cody replied as the waitress scurried away, calling
out to the bartender, an older Ithorian who offered to pay for their drinks if they would just leave the
restaurant.

As Cody expected, that didn’t go over well and the group remained. The two clone commanders
watched the young men get louder and drunker. The people sitting at tables around them began to
hastily pay for their meals and hurry out the door. Undeterred, they called out after one pair of
attractive young ladies, one green Twi’lek and the other Pantoran. One of the drunken brats stood up
to follow them, promising his friends he would bring them back.

Bly’s jaw worked as the courageous pursuer of terrified young women headed towards their table,
trying to cut his prey off from the exit. Cody’s gaze darted from Bly to the cadet crashing to the floor,
 tripping over something almost guaranteed to be Bly’s foot.

The drunken young man pushed himself upright at the end of their table. His cheeks flushed as blood
ran down from his nose and split lip.

“You tripped me!” the young man accused, pointing a finger at Bly. “You karking tripped me! Who
the kajj do you think you are?”

“Someone who knows better than to manhandle young women,” Bly replied with a steady voice and
a gaze of pure, concentrated disgust. “I think it’s time you and your little buddies back there went
back to your parents and stopped ruining my meal.”

The young man turned a furious shade of red that couldn’t be healthy and howled for his buddies to
come over.

Bly looked over at Cody and nodded to indicate that his brother was welcome to join in any time he
wanted. Cody waved Bly off, hoping against hope that somehow the situation would deescalate and
those snot-nosed punks would walk away injury-free.

There was no way that was going to happen, but Cody could dream, right?

Cody groaned as one of the brats let a wild punch fly. “Are we really going to do this?”

“Yes, we are,” Bly grunted, easily catching the man’s arm and flinging the punk to the ground. “You
gonna help or are you just gonna sit there and let me have all the fun?”

Cody stood up with resignation as the others stood to run over. “I just wanted a nice quiet meal, you
know.”

“Oh come off it,” Bly laughed as he ducked under one of the charging attackers, flipping the guy
over one shoulder. “When was the last time you got your hands dirty with some real scrapping?”

“This,” Cody grunted as he sent one reeling into the others. “is not real scrapping. This is play
fighting.”

There were maybe six cadets in all and they clearly failing their hand-to-hand combat classes. Bly
and Cody took them down, one by one, with ruthless efficiency. Dragging the groaning cadets
outside, they returned to collect their hats, and leave their payment on the table. The bartender gave a
silent awed nod of thanks as they walked out into the cheerful darkness of the evening.

“You really know how to show a brother a good time, Cody,” Bly smirked as he put his cap back on
at the regulation perfect angle catching his breath. “Gree just wants to have bad Navakese curry and
cheap beer.”
“Gree is a simple man,” Cody chuckled as he frowned at his knuckles. “You know we’re gonna catch hell for this. They won’t like us beating civvies up over non-humans, no matter what they were doing.”

Bly scowled, glaring out into the night. “They got no right to treat women like that. It shouldn’t matter if they got hair or lekku. Real men don’t do that.”

Cody patted his brother on the shoulder. “C’mon, vod, let’s head back to base. The sooner you’re off planet, the better. You can’t get court martialed if they can’t find you.”

“They’re not going to court martial me,” Bly snorted. “They’d have to find someone else to work with General Vahalgren and let me tell you, no one wants to work with that sleamo. No one. I’m safe as houses, Cody.”

“Good to know, Bly,” Cody said, their earlier conversation about missing ordinance and the sudden disappearance of Wolfe forgotten for the moment.

On Tellestria spring slowly blossomed into early summer, with warm, heady days and cool, sweet nights. Luke and Leia’s progress with Shii-cho moved at a pace similar to their father’s, which did not surprise Obi-Wan at all. Anakin had been prodigiously talented at saber work and the fact that his children took after him seemed totally natural.

What did surprise Obi-Wan was just how little the staff of the estate house cared Luke and Leia were training in the ways of the Force with someone who was not their father. She had expected more suspicion from Vader’s staff, or at least a few pointed comments about where Lord Skywalker found his newest nanny but no one seemed all that concerned.

One of the gardeners, Larro, put it best when he said of Vader, “I don’t understand any of that Force magic of his and he pays me enough to leave it be.”

There was a consensus amongst the small staff, that none of them wanted to end up like the former Lady Skywalker, who they spoke of as little as possible.

One afternoon, the subject of Padme and her sudden disappearance came up while Obi-Wan was chatting with Sarahi, the woman who made the twice-weekly delivery of food and dry goods to the house.

Obi-Wan had been idly checking through the list of ordered goods, carrying on a conversation which had thus far been about the change in seasons when Sarahi mentioned she had children that were around Luke and Leia’s age.

“Perhaps next time you come to visit you could bring your children with you?” Obi-Wan asked, putting a case of dried rice atop the load lifter that would carry the goods into the house. “I’m sure Luke and Leia would love to have some playmates. I’m worried they’re lonely with just me and Artoo for company. Having someone their own age to play with would be good for them, if wouldn’t be too much of a burden for you.”

“You know, Lady Skywalker used to talk about that,” Sarahi smiled, leaning against the side of her landspeeder, looking fondly up at the house. “She was looking forward to the day when the twins would be old enough for guests. But Lord Skywalker kept telling her no, that the children weren’t
“Were’n’t ready?” Obi-Wan echoed, her gaze following Sarahi’s. “What did that mean?”

“I never found out,” Sarahi said, piling a few more cans into a crate on the load lifter. “Lady Skywalker was gone before I ever got an answer to that.”

Gone? What does that mean? Did Padme die? I thought Vader said she left him?

“The late Lady Skywalker seems to have been very kind,” Obi-Wan said, gently fishing for clues to the nature of Padme’s disappearance from Tellestria.

“Oh, she’s not dead, well, I don’t think she’s dead,” Sarahi said, motioning for Obi-Wan to help her with a heavy bag full of tropical fruits from distant Scarif. “Truth be told, no one really knows what happened to her. She was here one day and then gone the next. Larro, the head gardener, he was here the day it happened but he swears up and down that he didn’t see anything.”

Obi-Wan nodded, adding this new information to what she already knew of the schism between Vader and his wife. “I can’t imagine that was an easy time for anyone, least of all Luke and Leia.”

“I remember we got a message from that nice officer, Andron, I think it was?” Sarahi said as she activated the automatic door to the freight sledge that hovered behind her landspeeder, the heavy door creaking with a loud bang as it closed. “He cancelled the weekly delivery but paid us for it all the same. The whole damn house got a week off, as I recall. It must have been tough on those little ones, losing their mother overnight like that.”

“Yes, I imagine it was difficult for them to understand what happened,” Obi-Wan agreed, stepping to the side of the bright green landspeeder that was decorated with the shop’s insignia. “Thank you for telling me, Sarahi. I confess to knowing very little about Lady Skywalker’s time here.”

“It’s my pleasure, Miss Mina,” Sarahi grinned, clapping Obi-Wan warmly on the shoulder, her dark eyes shining with happiness. “I’m just glad Lord Skywalker finally found someone who cares about his children as much as their mother did. She may not have wanted to come here but when she’d talk about those twins? Her face would light up like the sun at dawn. It’s a pity what happened to this family.”

“Yes, indeed,” Obi-Wan said, looking away for a moment as she thought of poor Padme, separated from her children that she loved so dearly. Her heart ached for her old friend and Obi-Wan wished there was a way to tell her that Luke and Leia were all right, that they had not be left to the tender mercies of Darth Vader and the Sith.

There was at least one Jedi left in the galaxy and Obi-Wan was going to protect Padme’s children to the best of her abilities.

Waving goodbye to Sarahi, with a promise to bring her children next time to play with Luke and Leia, Obi-Wan wondered if Padme’s opinion of her might have changed after Anakin’s monstrous transformation into Darth Vader.

She might even hold me responsible for all of this. Force knows I do sometimes.

Shaking her head, Obi-Wan hurried back inside to make a cup of tea, and enjoy a moment of peace before Luke and Leia woke from their naps and demanded another exhausting go-round of tag and then a marathon session of How High.
Vader’s presents arrived right around the time summer and the heat started to overpower the delicate chill of spring. The gardens were awash with color and riotous blossoms while the distant Telles mountains were turning a rich shade of green even as snow clung tenaciously to the tops.

After that first live holo call with Vader, direct communication became more difficult as the demands of war kept him busy. Luke and Leia were unhappy at first, wanting to know why their father wasn’t there to listen to them illustrate every moment of their day.

Obi-Wan tried to explain the complicated nature of real time intersystem communication but ended up coming up with a compromise instead. If Vader couldn’t call Luke and Leia, then they would call him and leave a message instead. Obi-Wan wondered what Vader’s reaction was when he received their first message, which mostly consisted of Luke and Leia scolding him for not being available before explaining all the reasons why they did not need a nap and how Obi-Wan was wrong to make them take one.

She was relieved to discover that Vader seemed to enjoy the message, or did not find it offensive, and replied to the twins with one of his own, apologizing for not being there in person and explaining that naps were very important. Vader insisted that even he indulged in them while on campaign, which delighted the children and made nap time a much easier affair. There were always more messages going out than coming in but the creation of those missives distracted Luke and Leia from Vader’s absence when Obi-Wan would run out of ways to entertain the children.

On the day that a large crate arrived, Luke and Leia were deeply engrossed in a coloring book of Naboo animals of the cute and fuzzy variety. They had fought over it when it first arrived and Obi-Wan had ordered another one once she negotiated a temporary peace between the children.

Artoo, who had been given free rein to roam the house as it saw fit, rolled into the library where the children were working, relaying a cheerful message to Obi-Wan that there was a delivery downstairs.

“A delivery?” Obi-Wan arched a brow. “I’m not expecting anything today. Who is it from?”

**Vader, from Acromino**. Artoo replied with a low whistle. **It has the Imperial seal.**

“Ah. I see. Would you mind watching the children while I go examine it?”

“A delivery?” Luke asked, popping up on the other side of Obi-Wan’s desk, blue eyes shining and face haloed by golden hair. “Did Papa send us presents?”

“Presents?!” Leia echoed, appearing at her brother’s side, an equally excited smile on her face. “Can we come too?”

Obi-Wan sighed shooting Artoo a look before steeling herself for the unpleasant task of telling the children they would have to wait for a live holo call from their father, if the crate was indeed filled with gifts from Vader.

“You may come along but you may not touch anything,” Obi-Wan said, standing up and holding out her hands to the children, who happily took ahold of one each. “Your father wants to see you open
Luke and Leia had no problem agreeing to Obi-Wan’s commands until they opened the crate, which was in a back store room. The large box, perhaps a meter long by half a meter wide, was stuffed with colorful, wrapped packages with Luke and Leia’s names written on them.

“Can we open one?” Leia pleaded, hopping in place as she reached for a package in bright blue that had her name on it “Please, Bibi? Please?”

“Please, Bibi?” Luke added, insisting their father wouldn’t mind at all.

“I am afraid I have orders to keep these presents under lock and key until your father calls,” Obi-Wan said, already exhausted with the whole affair. She gently but firmly shooed the children away from the crate and closed it, changing the locking code and standing up. “And now it is time for your afternoon calisthenics. Let’s go get you changed.”

The groans and moans of protest were truly marvels of modern theater as Luke and Leia slumped their way back upstairs to change for practice. Obi-Wan followed behind, whispering to Artoo, “They sound so much like him, I sometimes forget he’s gone.”

Artoo let out a hoot of binary laughter and agreed.

One evening, as a lazy summer storm threatened to light up the night with jagged bolts of lighting, Vader sent word to Obi-Wan that he would be calling in an hour’s time and he expected his children to be there. The message was short to the point of being curt but Obi-Wan did her best to ignore the tone as she went about gathering up Luke and Leia, who were involved in a high stakes game of How Long that had kept them blissfully silent for almost fifteen minutes, a new household record.

After she hauled the storage crate up to the library, with more than a bit of help from the Force, Obi-Wan went to the parlor room where Luke and Leia were playing as Artoo watched over them. The twins were wholly focused on the small flimsiplast balls Obi-Wan had folded for them a day or two ago, making them hover in the air as best they could. Leia’s bright green ball was floating higher but Luke’s blue one was far more steady, as if it were placed on an invisible shelf only he could see. Leia’s bobbed and drifted in the air, like she had temporarily forgotten what she was doing only to scramble to push the ball back into place.

“Am I interrupting?” Obi-Wan asked Artoo, her voice soft as she leaned against the doorway, patting the blue astromech on the dome.

Artoo slowly spun its head around before focusing its ocular lens on her and letting out a low whistle. They are very engaged in this task. What do you need?

Obi-Wan chuckled quietly. “Their father is going to be calling soon and their presence is required. I was hoping you could set up the holo projector for us.”

Unplugging from the wall, Artoo let out an annoyed grunt before rolling in a circle around Obi-Wan and out into the hallway to prepare the holoreceiver in the library. She couldn’t be sure but Obi-Wan had the sneaking suspicion that the little astromech wasn’t in the mood to talk to Vader.

That makes two of us.
“Luke? Leia? I have some news you might want to hear,” Obi-Wan said, her voice soft and gentle, trying not to startle the children.

The twins turned toward her, blinking owlishly and a little puzzled as the Force receded. Leia was the first one to push herself upright, swaying a little but her presence growing sharper and more defined as she came to. “What news, Bibi?”

Leia walked over to Luke and helped pull him to his feet, his own connection with the Force a little harder to shake off than Leia’s had been. “Bibi? What is it?”

“Your father has informed me that he will be calling shortly and he wishes to see you both,” Obi-Wan said, brushing Luke’s hair out of his eyes before turning to Leia and smoothing her braids back over her shoulders. She gave them both a quick once-over and then nodded, holding out her hands. “Shall we?”

The twins’ joy was almost overpowering. They let out a delighted squeal and practically dragged her to the library where their promised reunion with their father was to take place. When Obi-Wan moved too slow, Luke wrenched his hand free and took off running, shouting as he hurried down the hallway. “Papa? Papa! I’m here, Papa!”

Deciding that there was no point in keeping Leia behind, Obi-Wan told her to run after her brother and she let out a whoop, one that sounded painfully like her father when he was younger.

*If only it was Anakin who was waiting on the other end of that connection,* Obi-Wan thought morosely as she followed at the children into the library where Artoo was spinning up the holo projector.

The children stared intently at the blue-white waiting symbol, resting their hands on the edge of the table the projector was resting on. Leia hopped up and down, anxiously chanting “Papa! Papa! Papa!”

Luke scampered over to Artoo, who was working through the encryption so it could unscramble the signal from Vader.

“How is Papa?” Luke asked, leaning around the blue droid and reaching out to touch the data panel. “Can I help?”

“That’s quite alright, Luke,” Obi-Wan said, pulling up chairs for the twins. “Artoo has it well in hand. Don’t you, my friend?”

*Their encryption is kajj,* Artoo commented, turning its ocular lens to Obi-Wan. *You could decrypt this signal. Luke could probably decrypt this if I gave him enough time.*

Obi-Wan arched an eyebrow at Artoo, her arms folded over her chest. “Yes, well, that’s none of our concern, now is it? The Empire’s data security or lack-thereof is for Lord Vader to worry about. Not us.”

Artoo let out a dismissive snort, making it clear it did not approve of the droids and systems that Lord Vader now employed. Obi-Wan was going to tell the droid to mind its manners for its own sake when the receiving light turned green and a blurry figure came into focus.

“Papa!” Luke and Leia chorused at the same time, immediately bounding out of their chairs and running to the projector, their faces alight with pure happiness.

From where Obi-Wan stood next to Artoo, she could see just how deeply the twins loved their
father, how much they came alive in his presence, even if it was just a holoform from the shoulders up. There was something so pure and vibrant about their emotions that it made them glow in the Force. Their love was so strong and the love returned was almost enough to make Obi-Wan forget that the father they so adored was a Sith Lord.

Almost.

“Look at you two!” Vader said, a wide smile on his face as he leaned closer to holo on his side of the connection. “I think you’re both taller than the last time I saw you.”

“Who is tallest?” Luke asked, standing on his tiptoes in an attempt to stretch over Leia, who tried to push him out of the way with her hip as she bounced up and down, eager for her father’s attention.

“Papa! We did the Shiicho! And I can do the alphabet and-“

“I can count to twenty an’ we saw a Corellian hawk and a moon bunny and a-“

Luke and Leia kept trying to talk over each other as Vader look at each of them in turn, his brows furrowed in confused love, his mouth pulled into a quirked smile. He held up his hands and managed to cut through the excited information dump. “There will be plenty of time to tell me later. I promise. But that’s not why I commed.”

The twins looked at each other and then at their father, suspicion written on their faces at not being allowed to tell him every little thing that had happened to them in the last 24 hours. Was he going to give them bad news? Was he going to tell them he wasn’t coming home when promised?

Luke glanced back at Obi-Wan, worry on his face, but she shook her head and told Luke to pay attention to his father. The young boy did so begrudgingly, already halfway into a pout.

“Why did you call?” Leia asked, two thirds of the way into a sulk and a pout.

“To watch you open your presents!” Vader beamed and the smile on his face felt like a taking a blaster bolt to the stomach to Obi-Wan, who turned away, unable to see the man who haunted her nightmares look so much like the young man she had fought back-to-back with for so long.

This is torture.

Artoo let out a low, comforting whistle and Obi-Wan placed her hand on the droid’s dome, thankful for the astromech’s sensitivity.

Their moment of quiet grief was interrupted when Luke and Leia started clamoring for their presents in a childishly innocent chant that promised to turn into a thunderous demand if their father’s gifts weren’t presented immediately.

“Artoo,” Obi-Wan murmured, trying desperately to compose herself before anyone noticed. “Please push the crate over for me? I… I can’t…”

If you replaced your ocular ports they wouldn’t leak so much, Artoo trilled and rolled over to the crate, pulling it into view of the holoprojector as Luke and Leia cheered.

“You can go one at a time,” Vader said, his voice soft and gentle. “And tell… Is that Artoo? Tell Artoo to lower the holocamera so I can see you better.”

Obi-Wan, still out of sight of Vader, reached out with one hand and used a flick of the Force to lower the holocamera with perhaps a bit more Force than she needed to.
“Artoo!” Vader groused, his brows knitted together. “Be careful. These are expensive.”

There was a low collection of grinding snorts from Artoo that one could only assume Vader chose not to respond to. Obi-Wan bowed her head in apology to her little astromech friend as it rolled back to her side. “You’re right. I shouldn’t have done that, Artoo.”

Luckily for everyone, Luke and Leia were largely oblivious to what was going on around them and drew all eyes back to them with some enthusiastic pounding on the crate.

“Oh sweet Force,” Obi-Wan sighed, unlocking and flicking the lid of the box up with the Force again, not really caring if she was abusing her powers. She wanted this painful nightmare to be over as soon as possible and if that meant using the Force for more pedestrian matters to stay out of Vader’s line of sight, she was more than willing to do so.

“Yay! Presents!” the twins chorused, smiling over at Obi-Wan, who tried to wave off their enthusiasm. “Thank you, Bibi!”

“Where is Bibi?” Vader asked, peering into the middle distance as if he could find out where Obi-Wan was hiding. “Ob… Mina? Where are you?”

Obi-Wan stepped into the view of the lens and bowed her head a fraction before standing up straight, her chin lifted. “Here. Is there a particular parcel you would like the children to start with?”

Obi-Wan refused to give Vader the conversational space to say whatever hurtful thing came to his mind. There was only so much her heart could take and it would not do to let Vader know how easy it was for him to get around her defenses.

“Uh… I don’t think so,” Vader replied, the faintest thread of something unhappy in his voice. “Just start with whatever is on top.”

“Of course, my lord,” Obi-Wan said, taking out two bright blue packages and handing each to their respective recipients. “Leia? Shall we let Luke go first?”

The look Leia gave Obi-Wan made it clear she didn’t want to but she also didn’t want to misbehave in front of her father. She nodded in a kind of sullen solemnity. “Okay, Bibi.”

“Thank you, Leia,” Vader said, turning in the holoprojector to smile at his daughter, his hand up to wave to her. “That was very mature of you. Go ahead, Luke, and tell your sister thank you.”

Obi-Wan stood between Luke and Leia, looking out the window for a moment, wondering when Sith Lords had started concerning themselves with things like manners. But then Luke was opening his present and letting out a delighted cry at the model of a ship that looked ridiculously under-shielded and difficult to fly.

“TIE fighter!” Luke shouted, holding it above his head, already imagining it in flight, swooping and swerving through the air, his blue eyes shining with happiness. “I love it! Thank you, Papa!”

“You’re welcome, Luke,” Vader said, nodding to himself as he leaned forward, running his hands through his hair as he turned his attention back to Leia. “Your turn, Leia.”

Leia wasted no time tearing into her package, shredding blue paper and pulling the top of the box off to reveal a set of little tactical binoculars sized down to fit a child’s hand.

When she didn’t know what to do with them, Obi-Wan held them up to her face and Leia let out an excited shout when the distant trees came into perfect focus. “Papa, I can see the trees! It’s magic!”
“It’s science, Leia,” Vader said, his eyes soft and filled with warmth for his children. “But do you like it? Can you see beyond the trees? O… Mina, help her.”

Obi-Wan leaned forward, gently explaining to Leia that she was going to change the magnification. “You should be able to see the mountains better now, my dear.”

“Can I see?” Luke asked, holding his TIE fighter in his lap.

“When Leia is done,” Obi-Wan answered, holding up another present for Luke. “Why don’t you open this one? It sounds quite stuffed.”

And so it went for what felt like forever to Obi-Wan, who did her best to smile and be compliant every time Vader gave her a pointless instruction to help Luke activate this toy drone or to show Leia how to load foam “blaster bolts” into her tiny dart blaster he gave her. Why Vader thought his daughter needed a toy blaster was beyond Obi-Wan but Leia adored it and had already shot the window, the holoprojector and Artoo, who was less than thrilled about the gift.

There were clothes amidst the toys, and books and candies. A new dress for Leia that seemed to be made of a pink cloud of tulle and a smart, little grey cap for Luke that looked like the one Lieutenant Andron was wearing before he departed with Vader. A tiny, ornate cape for Luke and a matching tiara for Leia that Vader said came from the ruling house of a system he had visited.

By the time they were done, Luke and Leia were almost swamped with gifts and treats, having handed more than a few off to Obi-Wan for safe keeping. Luke was wearing his cape and his officer’s cap, holding the model of the TIE fighter in his hand as he and Leia, wearing her own blue velvet robe and jeweled tiara, stood up on their tiptoes to blow kisses to their father.

“Thank you, Papa!” Leia said, giggling as Vader blew her a kiss from his side of the connection. She was clutching a stuffed tooka, her cheeks flushed with joy. “We love them!”

Luke nodded enthusiastically, bouncing up and down with the model TIE in his hand. “Thank you, Papa! Is this your ship?”

“I’m still working on my ship,” Vader explained with a chuckle, having sat back in his chair completely relaxed. “Is that everything? Did we forget anything?”

“Those are all the labeled gifts,” Obi-Wan said, looking down at the longer box at the bottom that took up the entire length and width of the crate.

“What’s this?” Luke asked, leaning over the side of the crate, almost falling in. Leia stood up in her chair and peered down over Obi-Wan’s shoulder. “It’s big, Bibi. Is it for me?”

“No fair!” Leia immediately protested, hitting Obi-Wan’s shoulder. “I want a big present!”

Artoo rolled out of the shadow he had been hiding from and reached out with a pincher to pull Luke upright and out of the crate as Obi-Wan carefully wiggled the box out of the container. She sat up, placing the heavy box over her lap and looked at Leia, one eyebrow arched at the girl’s raised hand over Obi-Wan’s arm.

Leia immediately flopped down into her seat, hands in her lap and looking suitably remorseful. “Sorry, Bibi. I just wanted to see it. Is it mine?”

Frowning at the package, Obi-Wan ran her hands along the edge, looking for some kind of label or a seal. “I don’t know. Perhaps your father will enlighten us as to whom this package is meant for.”
“Papa?” Luke asked, looking up at his father. “Is it mine?”

There was a long moment of tense silence as as the twins stared at their father, who in turn, was staring at Obi-Wan. She refused to make eye contact with Vader and instead looked from Leia to Luke, her hands folded over the box, wondering what was so damn special about the bloody thing.

Whatever it was, Vader seemed to want her to look at him and Obi-Wan wasn’t about to do that.

“Papa?” Leia asked as the strained silence went on too long.

“It’s for Mina,” Vader said, his voice cold and unreadable.

Damn you. Obi-Wan thought as her eyes, against her will, drifted up to meeting Vader’s. He was staring at her with an uncomfortable intensity and his gaze held her place, as sure as any tractor beam. Obi-Wan tilted her head to the side, just a bit, asking questions that she doubted he would acknowledge, let alone answer.

A present? Why did you send me a present?

And then another thought, this one harsh and cruel, hidden behind her best shields. Are Sith Lords often in the habit of buying presents for their indentured servants?

But there was no answer from Vader other than a curt “Open it”, as he broke eye contact and looked away.

“Luke? Leia? Will you help me open this?” Obi-Wan asked, relieved to see that her voice sounded normal.

The twins were only too happy to oblige, pulling open the top of the box as one and tearing through the tissue-flimsiplast that covered the contents.

“Oh, Bibi!” Leia gasped, her eyes round in wonder. “It’s pretty!”


It was a dress, a beautiful, ornately embroidered silk dress in a brilliant teal that looked far too tight and ostentatious for even a dinner party, let alone chases after Force-sensitive toddlers. There was stiff boning in the bodice, sleeves that were far too blousy, and cuffs that promised to spill over her wrists and hands, getting in the way of anything Obi-Wan would attempt to do.

The dress was gorgeous and completely impractical. There was simply no way Obi-Wan would ever wear it. It was like a piece of handcrafted art that was destined to appear in an archive one day in the future.

But the worst part was it was one of three dresses, all equally beautiful, all equally baroque.

These weren’t the dresses of someone who spent their day caring for children.

These were the dresses of a lady of the house, of someone who spent her days in idle pursuits while others oversaw the hard work of running the house.

These were dresses for someone like Padme.

“Do you like them?” Vader asked, his voice far away and his intention hidden from Obi-Wan in the Force.
Did she like them? How could he ask her that?

Was she supposed to like them?

_Oh Force! Am I supposed to wear these? When? Where? Outside when I’m pulling the twins out of a fountain or down from a tree?_

Luke and Leia spoke for Obi-Wan when she did not answer with immediate love for her gifts and silently thanked the twins.

“They’re beautiful, Papa!” Luke gushed, running his hand along the vivid green and charcoal silk of the second dress this one decorated with shining Akitan jet beadwork.

“Can I have one too?” Leia asked, running her hand up and down the indigo velvet trim of the third dress. “It’s so soft!”

“Of course, Leia,” Vader said, his gaze still on Obi-Wan, practically burning a hole through her as her hands drifted aimlessly over the confusing and seemingly important gifts from the man who had destroyed her world. “Well, Mina? What do you think?”

_I think you’ve lost your mind if you think to bribe me with pretty frocks, Lord Vader._

“These dresses are… exquisite, my lord,” Obi-Wan murmured, picking up the green dress with numb hands. “They are far too delicate and lavish for a mere governess. I am almost afraid to touch them lest I ruin them.”

Obi-Wan found, somewhat to her surprise, she was not lying. The dresses were almost intimidatingly ornate and formal and while there had been a few occasions when she had been forced to dress in civilian formal wear she had always managed to choose simpler, less ostentatious outfits. Ease of movement had always been a paramount concern for Obi-Wan and these dresses seemed to be designed for standing very still or possibly strolling through a party.

“If you don’t like them you can just send them back,” Vader growled, turning his gaze away. “Or keep them for when Leia’s older. I don’t care what you do with them.”

“Bibi, can I have them?!” Leia gasped in delight, hopping up and down at her side. “Please? I really like them.”

Obi-Wan looked from Leia to Vader and back to Leia. “If that’s what you would like, then I shall keep them in storage for you.”

“Good. That’s all, Mina,” Vader grunted and waved his hand, the conversation over and Obi-Wan callously dismissed. “Luke? Leia? I have some good news for you.”

“What is it?” the twins chorused as one, easily filling in the space where Obi-Wan had been as she stood up and stepped to the side, with the large heavy box. She set it down on a sideboard, pulling the lid down before stepping out of view next to Artoo.

“I’ll be coming home in two weeks,” Vader announced with a wide grin and was rewarded with the rapturous cries of his children who were beyond thrilled. “Maybe sooner if I get lucky. But when I get home, I want to see everything you’ve learned with Mina, all right?”

“Yes, Papa!” Luke and Leia said, sending waves of love and warmth out into the Force like tiny supernovas.
“I have to go now but I love you both so much,” Vader said, leaning forward as if he was going to kiss their foreheads. His eyes were bright with love and the smile on his face was truly genuine as he sat back, admiring his beautiful children. “I think about you both all the time and I can’t wait to see you.”

“We love you, Papa!” Luke beamed, waving enthusiastically.

Leia blew her father’s holofigure a kiss and smiled. “We miss you! Come home soon!”

“I will,” Vader promised, holding up a hand and waving a little. “I love you. I’ll see you soon. Good night, little ones!”

“Good night, Papa!”

And with a click, the connection was cut on the other end, leaving the last haunting image of Vader’s smiling face turning away, a face Obi-Wan knew better than her own. A face that had once belonged to a friend.

This is going to be so much harder than I realized. Obi-Wan thought to herself as she walked back over to Luke and Leia, who were positively buzzing with energy after their father’s call. They ran around the library, Luke flying his model TIE fighter and Leia shooting at whatever caught her fancy with her blaster.

It was going to take a small miracle to calm the children down in time for their bath and bedtimes and Obi-Wan wasn’t sure she had a miracle left in her after the call with Vader. All she really wanted to do was to pour herself a stiff drink and and take a long hot bath, but before she could do any of that, she had two hyperactive toddlers to bring to heel. She tried to think back on what her creche master had done when Obi-Wan was younger but her mind was drawing a blank.

Artoo rolled up to Obi-Wan’s side and beeped out a question.

“If you have a suggestion I’m all ears,” Obi-Wan sighed, her hands on her hips. “Short of running them around the gardens, nothing I say or do will calm them. And before you ask, we’re not going outside because of the storm.”

Artoo let out a snort and spun its dome around before focusing its lens on Obi-Wan. I am very fast, you know. I doubt they could catch me.

Obi-Wan arched an eyebrow at Artoo. “Are you now? And you would willingly volunteer for this mission?”

I would much rather accept this mission than be tasked with clean up, Artoo burbled, its shiny blue head swiveling from side to side as droid and Jedi took in the mess that was the library. Give me a two-minute head start.

“I thought you said you were faster than them,” Obi-Wan teased, gently nudging her droid companion. “But that’s a fair trade. I’ll clean up and you can run them ragged. Get your head start then, my little friend.”

Artoo rolled off with a cheerful salute, his exit unnoticed by Luke and Leia circling around to their pile of gifts and candies, eyes alight at all the wonders that were in store for them.

Obi-Wan quickly stepped in front of them and held up her hands. “Wait! Something terrible has happened and I am in need of your assistance!”
The twins paused, looked at each other and then up at Obi-Wan with clear disbelief in their eyes. “What happened?”

Sensing she had little time to sell the gambit, Obi-Wan threw all she had into her lie. “I’ve lost Artoo! He’s gone missing and I need you two to find him for me!”

Luke looked puzzled, even as Leia’s eyes seemed to light up at the thought of being given a task. “Like a mission?”

“Yes! Exactly!” Obi-Wan exclaimed, latching onto Leia’s idea and running with it. “This is a terribly important mission that only you two can undertake. Will you help me find Artoo?”

“Can’t we just—” Luke began but was immediately cut off by Leia’s enthusiastic response. “Yes! We will! C’mon, Luke!”

And with that, Leia dragged her brother out of the library, clutching her little blaster and promising Obi-Wan that they would find Artoo and bring him back safe and sound.

After a thorough hunt for Artoo that took a good forty-five minutes, Luke and Leia returned to the library exhausted and triumphant, surprised to discover that Obi-Wan had already put their new toys and goodies away.


“You can have a piece tomorrow after dinner,” Obi-Wan promised, accepting Leia’s cloak, tiara and blaster. “Now it’s time for bath and bed for our triumphant heroes. Come along.”

There were more loud complaints as they all marched off upstairs but those ceased when Obi-Wan asked how the twins found Artoo. They proceeded to launch into a truly epic tale that involved more than a few close calls and rivaled any one of the exciting stories Obi-Wan had spun of their father’s adventures out in the galaxy.

The story of Artoo’s disappearance, chase, and successful capture carried them through bathtime and into bed as Obi-Wan tucked the children in. She placed Luke’s new TIE fighter on the bedside table and he rolled onto his side to admire it.

Obi-Wan handed Leia her new stuffed tooka and pulled the covers up. “Thank you, brave Padawans, for finding and recovering my dear friend Artoo Detoo. He is always getting into mischief, you know.”

Look who’s talking, Artoo snorted, rolling over to its preferred charging spot.

“What did he say?” Luke asked as Obi-Wan closed the blinds and turned on the nanoscreen, cloaking the room in soothing darkness.

“Nothing of importance,” Obi-Wan replied, shooting her little droid friend a look. “Would you like the stars tonight?”

“Yes, please,” Leia yawned, already falling under the sway of clean sheets and a soft pillow. “Good night, Bibi.”
Obi-Wan replied as she activated a small night light that splashed the stars of the galaxy over head. The twinkling lights were soft and moved slowly across the ceiling, mimicking the night outside as a faint lullaby played in the background. “Good night, Luke.”


“G’night, Luke,” Leia echoed and Obi-Wan walked towards the door, pausing to see if Artoo needed her help plugging into a charging port.

**You’ll be in trouble when they learn binary**, Artoo coolly informed her once it was fully plugged in.

“I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it, my sarcastic little friend,” Obi-Wan chuckled, patting the astromech’s blue dome as she stood up to leave. “Pleasant dreams, Artoo. And thank you for your help this evening. Your assistance was invaluable.”

Artoo lowered its ocular display lens and cooed, **You’re welcome, Master Kenobi. Pleasant dreams.**

After her stiff drink and a long soak in her admittedly wonderful tub, Obi-Wan shuffled back into her room, exhausted and ready for bed. It had been a long day, made longer by Vader’s call and all she really wanted to do was to collapse into bed and the waiting arms of sleep.

But before Obi-Wan could do that, she had to deal with the box of dresses Vader had foisted on her.

Letting out an annoyed puff of air, Obi-Wan lifted the lid on the box, looking down at the elegant teal gown forlornly. “What a waste of a beautiful dress. I hope Leia will still like it when she’s old enough to wear it.”

Carefully gathering the dress up in her hands, Obi-Wan walked over to the closet and hung it back into a corner behind the clothes she wore daily. She did the same with the charcoal and green dress, admiring the delicate handmade beadwork before consigning it to the same fate as the teal gown and soon followed by the third, the slate and indigo velvet one.

With all three dresses put away and out of sight, Obi-Wan was more than ready to call an end to the day. She went back to the box, fully intent on leaving it outside for a cleaning droid to pick up, when she noticed something else wrapped up in white flimsiplast. Frowning, Obi-Wan pulled the item out, only to discover it was two matched items.

“What in the stars?” Obi-Wan murmured, unwrapping the items to discover that the last “gift” in her box was a pair of boots: soft, synthleather dove grey boots. She pulled them out, turning them over in her hands, her fingertips running along the fine, strong seams. The boots looked to be about knee high with a serviceable heel and soles with a good grip.

They were well-made shoes, soft to the touch but not so soft they would collapse if left on their own, but these were not meant for hosting parties. These were not boots designed to peep out under the edge of velvet-trimmed skirts or glide soundlessly over a marble tile floor.

These were boots meant for work, for a wide variety of terrain and seasons. These were the shoes of someone who did not sit around writing legislation and talking with politicians. They were clearly
meant for someone of action, someone who was on their feet all day.

These boots were meant for Obi-Wan, not Mina.

“They’re lovely,” Obi-Wan murmured, almost against her will, stunned at Anakin’s thoughtfulness. She wouldn’t have expected him to have such spare and elegant taste in clothing.

No! He’s not Anakin! Vader. Vader bought these.

This is a gift from a Sith Lord who stole your name and murdered your people!

Horrified with herself, Obi-Wan threw the boots back into the box, covering them with tissue-flimsi before slamming the lid shut. She grabbed the box and practically flung it into the closet, shutting the door with the Force.

Wrapping her arms around herself, Obi-Wan turned away from the closet and sat on the bed to stare blankly out the window.

She sat there for a long time, lost in a swirl of dark thoughts before exhaustion finally pulled her into bed and the soothing embrace of sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Hello my dears!

I would like to take this time to welcome Commander Cody and Commander Bly into the story. I'm absolutely positive that nothing bad will happen to them and they won't be at all haunted by what Palpatine made them do during Operation Knightfall on Utapau and Felucia, respectively.

Nooooope! Nothing bad is going to happen to those two charming cloned gentleman. Nothing at all. :D

And to whoever guessed that Vader was going to send Obi-Wan beautiful and impractical dresses? I owe you a beer or beverage of your choice should we ever meet in real life. ;D

Later my dears!

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